



# My Minotaur Daddy (Tales from the Tarot)

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**Category:** Dark Erotica

**Description:** What do you do when a beautiful hot mess walks into your bar?

Recently separated from his two-timing ex and hell-bent on self-destruction, the fae-born Skylar Larkspur decides to drown his sorrows at Church, a local borderlands bar and known hotspot for rough-and-tumble halfings. Having abandoned his posh apartment and with his coin purse sadly lacking, Skylar needs the extra cash that pickpocketing drunk patrons can afford him. He doesn't expect to be caught red-handed by the bar's hot-as-hellfire leather daddy owner.

As the minotaur offspring of a bull and a maiden, Hierophant "Hiero" Wolfsbane has always had a hard time fitting in. Even as the owner of a prosperous bar for magical misfits and rogues, his lovers tend to fixate on his larger-than-average \*horns\* before deciding to hit it and quit it. Then he meets the lovely but damaged fae who needs a Daddy in the worst way.

Skylar thinks Hiero is the perfect rebound to help him leave his ex behind, while Hiero wants to build a life with the elusive fae. Is it true that the best way to get over someone is to get under someone else? Will Skylar steal Hiero's heart, along with his coin purse?

**Total Pages (Source):** 25

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:23 am*

## Chapter one

### Skylar

Breaking up is hard to do. The humans were right about that one simple fact.

I'd skipped the ice cream binge and rom-com stage of grieving and gone directly to day drinking at a pay-by-day motel high up in the Dragonback Mountains. As if breaking up with my cheating ex weren't enough, I'd also fled our realm.

When I'd stumbled upon this nameless borderlands town two nights ago, it seemed like the perfect place to drown my sorrows and nurse my broken heart. With only a knapsack of my favorite clothing and the wings on my back, I'd left behind everything and everyone I'd known in Emrallt Valley. The feeling of suffocating was as visceral as sinking in sorghum, and the only way to avoid the rising, unrelenting tide was to get out of there as fast as I could.

I loved too hard; it was what my best friend Monica always told me. I didn't mean to fall in love with Prince Cedrych, the second-born son to our fae sovereign, and I should have known we'd never have a future together, but a fae boy can dream, can't he?

Of course, his mother absolutely despised me. "A guildless, unremarkable bit of fae trash" were Queen Gwyneth's exact words regarding my character, but Cedrych had always been quick to reassure me that my low station and checkered past didn't bother him, that with time the queen would accept his unorthodox choice of romantic partner.

Spoiler: she didn't.

Then Cedrych had gone and gotten himself betrothed to an elvish lord. Worse yet, he hadn't told me of the engagement himself. I'd had to read about it in the Daily Scrolls and hear it announced from the ramparts of the Crystal Castle by the heralds of the royal family. I'd been so humiliated and disgraced. Queen Gwyneth had marked me as a gold-digging harlot from the start, and perhaps I was in the beginning, but foolishly, I'd invested my heart.

When I confronted Cedrych, the very last time we'd spoken, the slug first tried to convince me that his betrothal was in my best interest, then told me not to worry because until his fiancé came to collect him at the summer solstice, nothing needed to change.

Let's just say, I got a bit hysterical.

Kitchenware was thrown, tears were shed, and the royal guard were forced to intervene. I'd always suspected I was a lark for Cedrych, a convenient plaything for him to visit when the carnal urge compelled him, but hearing the confirmation from his own callous lips forced me to take a hard look at my life and say, Goddess divine, I deserved more.

And so, as I lined my eyes with a shimmering emerald kohl, a color reserved for fae royalty and banned for common use in Emrallt Valley, I pretended the tears in my eyes were only the result of my makeup and reminded myself that I, Skylar Larkspur, was no stranger to heartbreak or adversity. I would simply have to remake myself once more. Just as the siren Gloria Gaynor had once belted out to audiences realmwide, I will survive.

But to do that, I'd need coin. Because, in addition to my dignity, I'd left behind anything of value I might have used to sell or trade, including the few fine trinkets

and jewels Cedrych had given me. Perhaps it was my stubborn pride. I wanted him to visit the opulent rooms he'd rented for me only to find me vanished without a trace, to know those gifts held no value to me, sentimental or otherwise.

There was a bar nearby which would serve nicely as my hunting grounds. Drunk patrons made for easy marks. I wouldn't take too much, just enough to pay the motel manager my nightly rate and keep up my stock of spirits I'd purchased from The Magic Shop down the street. Maybe I'd find some handsome shifter to spend a few moments of stolen passion with before the sun rose again on my subpar circumstance.

My cock hardened in my silk pants as I imagined the sweaty press of limbs, the heat of another body grinding against mine, clumsily fumbling to remove just enough clothing to get at what most needed relief, releasing all the toxicity inside of me in a flood of ecstasy.

Finding myself could wait. Tonight, I was getting lost in the arms of a stranger.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:23 am*

### Chapter two

#### Hiero

It was Horns and Hooves night at Church, the biker bar I owned and operated with the help of my shifter clan, which meant that any beast with either attribute got their cover charge waived and two free drinks. A few patrons wore horns that were clearly synthetic versions of the real thing, but I didn't split hairs. Judging by the overall intoxication of the crowd, they were likely paying customers by now.

It had been my sister Enid's idea to introduce themed nights at Church to draw in bigger crowds. The hooved and horny had showed out, and the mass of bodies bumping and grinding on the dance floor was evidence of my sister's superior business acumen.

I stood behind the bar, my fortress, flanked on either side by two of my lycanthropic kin. To my left was Enid, the mastermind behind tonight's event and alpha of the Wolfsbane Clan, and to my right was my cousin and best friend, Fridolf, whom we called Frito. Both were helping me tend bar and would serve as backup in case the crowd got too rowdy.

I'd been raised by wolves, quite literally, after being abandoned first by my birth mother, and then second, by a monk named Aberthol who'd sheltered me from infancy. The latter hadn't chosen to leave me though, he'd simply passed on to join our Father in Heaven.

As the bastard son of a maiden and a bull, I knew what it felt like to not fit in, and it

wasn't until the Wolfsbane Clan adopted me in my adolescence that I'd understood what family meant. Now my pack were my business partners and best friends, the source of my fondest memories and my co-conspirators in our quest for ever-thrilling adventures.

It was within my monk and former patron's holy sanctuary that I surveyed the crowd. I'd turned the remote mountainside monastery into a place of refuge for the rogues and misfits of the many enchanted realms that made up the Arcane Isles. We offered our own version of communion, the chance to mingle with fellow patrons without fear or judgment. At Church every bastard, orphan, and outcast was welcome, provided they left their grudges at the door.

Around my bar, a small but thriving parish had emerged, which now included a general store, a smattering of lodgings and diners, a motorcycle repair shop owned by my cousin Gareth, and most recently, a magic shop operated by a curious fellow known simply as The Owner. We townsfolk looked out for each other and worked together to run the town under the direction of the Wolfsbane Clan. It also meant keeping an eye out for any unsavory characters intent on violence, which sometimes included petty thieves, such as the one currently making his rounds on the dance floor. It was Enid, my flame-haired sister, who pointed out the sticky-fingered fae.

“Gadai, three o' clock,” she said, arresting him with her piercing gaze. Thief.

I clocked the svelte figure: long raven hair, dramatically drawn eyes, and fair skin that was draped in the finest silk, the sort of fabric that only the fae could produce. The translucent clothing clung to his form like a wet tissue, leaving nothing of his shape to the imagination. His wings appeared to be neatly tucked at the small of his back, and he was currently acting as the meat in the middle of an ogre sandwich, working his lithe body against their nether regions whilst relieving them of the silver in their pockets.

“He’s good,” Enid remarked as we watched the fae reach up to caress the bald head of one partner while deftly removing the gold band from his ear.

“He’s trouble,” I said, trying and failing to drag my eyes away from the fae’s round ass as it gyrated against an ogre’s deerskin-clad bulge, two plump cheeks that would be the perfect cushion for my balls as I bred him.

Do not go there, Hiero.

“Well, what're you goin' to do about him?” Enid asked, arching one eyebrow in the shape of a question. Beautiful, troublesome men were my weakness, and Enid knew my type—a little on the wild side, looked good riding bitch on my bike, and liked to be bossed around in bed. This pretty young thing ticked some of the boxes, and despite my own sense of self-preservation, I was curious to know if he might tick them all.

“I’m going to approach him,” I said, tossing my dish towel on the bar top while leaving the particulars deliberately vague. I turned to my cousin Frito. “Meet me out back in five, would you?”

“Careful, cuz,” Frito said ominously. “The fae are a slippery sort.”

I’d never tangled with one myself, and they rarely came into the bar, preferring their high-falutin watering holes down in Emrallt Valley. When the fae did deign to make an appearance, they tended to stick with their own kind, always ordering some complicated cocktail no one had ever heard of before, then turning up their noses at our presumed ignorance. Imperious and cold, I could appreciate their ethereal aesthetic, but none had ever revved my engine.

But this little scoundrel working the floor was something else altogether. He had none of the snobby airs that typified his kind, nor did he seem to find it at all uncouth to be groped and manhandled by two brutes at once. In fact, he seemed to revel in the

attention. Pornographic visions of the delicate fae being spit-roasted by the ham-handed ogres flooded my mind.

May the Lord protect me from this troublesome fae .

I crossed myself and kissed the pewter cross slung round my neck, a gift from my beloved monk. Then I strode over to the threesome and tapped each of the ogres on their shoulders. Growling and inebriated, they turned their heavily hooded brows my way. Possibly they were brothers or some such relation. The only obvious distinction between them was that one must have recently broken a tusk because the end of it was jagged and looked sharp.

“May I cut in?” I asked. Knowing that I had the power to ban them for life, the grumbling duo stepped aside. In the ever-shifting half-light of the strobes, I noticed the many intricate tattoos decorating the fae’s body. The silvery shadows, only a shade darker than his skin, seemed to pulsate in time with the music. Some sort of fae sorcery, I presumed.

The fae himself was lost in the heavy downbeat of bass and likely tipsy as well, if judging by the flush of color in his cheeks and the looseness of his limbs. He glanced up and seemed not at all annoyed that I’d replaced his dance partners. A mischievous grin split his handsome face, revealing a row of slightly pointed teeth and a dimple in one cheek. He appraised me with pleasure-drunk lavender eyes and said to me in a voice as smooth as barrel-aged bourbon, “Hey there, stud. I’ve been waiting for you.”



## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:23 am*

### Chapter three

#### Skylar

The beast of a man who stood before me was like none other I'd seen before. Two deep-set brown eyes framed by long, dark lashes blinked at me with confusion. From there I followed the slope of his nose, slightly snubbed at the end with a thick, gold hoop pierced through his septum. He had a wide mouth and a square jaw that even his short beard couldn't disguise. The black tank underneath his chainmail vest strained to contain the massive expanse of his chest. I spied a curly thatch of chest hair just below his collarbone and predicted the fur led all the way down to his cock. The bulge in question was impressive, outlined by tight-as-sin black leather pants that flowed down the length of his massive thighs like hot oil.

Did I mention he had horns? Two gleaming white horns protruded from his temples, angled forward as if perpetually ready to charge. Olé! My hands twitched to grab hold of those suckers and ride this beast of a man cowgirl style, but that would probably be rude, especially considering he was clearly part bull. Absently, I wondered if his cock more closely resembled that of a man or a bovine, and my mouth flooded with saliva thanks to my sudden and intense craving for dick.

"Where have you been all my life, sexy?" I purred in Arcanic, the shared language of the many realms that made up the Arcane Isles. My voice was even deeper than usual thanks to having to shout above the music.

"I've been right here waiting for you, sweet thing." He grabbed hold of my hand and twirled me in time with the beat, then guided my backside into the cradle of his groin.

Bass notes throbbed in my veins as we moved, pulsing against my skin like a lover's heartbeat, the rhythm to which we were all temporarily enslaved.

"You new in town?" he rumbled in my ear, sending a wave of heat and desire to my cock, which was already rebelling against my finely spun gossamer pants.

"Just got in yesterday," I said.

"Take in any of the sights yet?"

"Only the mountain of a man behind me." I hoped I was correct in assuming that he was at least part man. I reached my free hand upward to card my fingers through his luscious locks of wavy chestnut hair, dragging a fingertip along the base of one horn and along his ear, then farther down his bearded face. No jewelry, except for the gold ring in his nose and that one would be difficult to remove. My finger met with the corner of his lips, and he turned, drawing my digit into the wet heat of his mouth. I shivered despite the fiery blaze of our bodies. I hoped he wouldn't make me come right there on the dance floor. These pants took forever to clean.

"You're a good dancer," he said as his massive arms reached around to lock me in a proprietary embrace. His bulge was firm against my backside, his breath hot on my neck. He smelled of sweetgrass, leather, and raw male musk, and I decided right then he could have me any which way he wanted. The baser part of me wished to be casually used and discarded, even prayed to the Goddess he might. Turning my head, I whispered my filthy, fantastic desires to him in my native tongue.

"I don't understand fae," he said in a deep, growly voice.

"Put me on my knees, stud," I said again, this time in Arcanic.

"You're a bit of a cockslut, aren't you?" he remarked, not sounding at all upset by it.

“Yes, I am.” I shivered at the idea that he might be exactly what I was looking for.

“Come with me,” he commanded. With one hand at the small of my back, just beneath where my wings were folded, he guided me off the dance floor, past the bar and the gorgeous stained-glass windows that paneled the back of the stone building, down a short hallway meant for staff, directly to a door marked Exit. I would suck this stranger’s cock in a back alley, I thought to myself with supreme satisfaction. I hoped my snobby, entitled princeling might even catch wind of it somehow, that his whoring, unremarkable ex had been spied down on his knees behind a seedy borderlands bar, being used as a convenient cum dump for one of its studly patrons.

Once outside in the misty mountain air, my handsome dance partner released me, and without further ado, I dropped to my knees on the hard and unforgiving cobblestones. The bull of a man huffed a loud breath through his nostrils, fogging up the air as he gripped my chin. His dark eyes flared with desire as he forced me to look up at him.

“You’re the sort of fetching that infects a man’s mind,” he said. The sternness in his voice sent ripples of pleasure all the way to my toes as my eyes landed on his behemoth of a cock stretching his tight leather pants, a prodigious mound of flesh that begged to be worshiped by yours truly. I suspected this halfling liked to get down and dirty in bed. Challenge accepted.

“I’ve been accused of a lot of things,” I said to him and licked my lips lewdly. His soulful eyes caught on my mouth, and I parted my lips to give him a glimpse of what was in store for him, should he choose to take advantage. “You can call me names if you’d like,” I tempted while tweaking one of my exposed nipples. “I can be your whore, your cum-sucking slut, your baddest bitch. You can use me however you want, stud, and discard me when you’re finished.”

He blinked, then made a strangled noise at the back of his throat. Shaking his head abruptly, he said, “The fae are said to bewitch their conquests with spells and charms.

Is it true? ”

“Are you charmed by me, Daddy?” I teased as I cupped my aching crotch. He looked like a Daddy with his leather and muscles and hirsute body. And as he stared at me, stone-faced and suspicious, I wondered what type of Daddy he might be—tough and demanding or soft and cuddly? It’d be foolish to get my hopes up either way, but if he wanted to be my Daddy for the night, Goddess knows, I’d be a very good boy.

“You’re a thief,” he said plainly. “Though a very pretty one. You’ll cause trouble where it need not be, so I’m banning you from Church. You may not return here for any reason, fae. I’ll make my staff aware of it.”

I frowned, partly from the flat-out rejection but also the loss of income. I’d identified this den of sin as my best hunting grounds. The minotaur, for I’d decided by this point to consider him as such, lifted one hand, and I braced myself to be struck, but he only held it out for me to take. Placing my hand in his, an electric zing shot through my arm, widening my eyes and sharpening my senses. Surely, he felt it too? Drunk on elixir and carnal lust, I managed to say to him, “You think I’m pretty?”

“Devastatingly so.”

“A dead-sexy brute who is also a gentleman?” I bowed, camping it up. “Please, my gallant sir, won’t you at least tell me your name?”

A flash of something like reluctance crossed his face. “Hierophant Wolfsbane. Around here I’m known as Hiero. ”

“Skylar Larkspur,” I said and drew his hand to my lips so that I might kiss his knuckles. There was a thick gold band on one finger, and I resisted the urge to take it.

He drew his hand away slowly, came nearer as if to kiss me, then nodded to a man

who emerged from the shadows. The minotaur then said with an authority that made my knees weak, “This is Fridolf, my cousin. He’ll see to it that you get home safely.”

He spun me around to his equally broad-shouldered cousin, though that was where the resemblance ended. I called to him over one shoulder, “A pleasure to meet you, Mr. Wolfsbane. I do hope our paths cross again.”

He only grunted in response, but his eyes remained fixed on mine as if a binding spell had been cast. Blame it on the alcohol, but I liked to think he might feel the same.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:23 am*

### Chapter four

#### Hiero

I kicked the fetching fae out of my bar, but I couldn't seem to scrub him from my mind.

Visions of Skylar Larkspur invaded my dreams that night, naked in all his glory with his pale limbs spread in unlikely contortions, long hair disheveled from being tumbled, and pink lips parted to reveal the edges of his pointed teeth. From there, I fell even deeper, into the sanguine red of a hot, wet mouth.

I fucked the fae in my dreams, his mouth and his hole. His body molded to my will while his deep voice urged me on with his every little whimper and moan. Phantoms of his bruised and creamy thighs, elegant cock and balls, and wet, swollen hole swam in my head as the dream sex transformed from a fiery need to something slower and sweeter. A sticky heat poured over me like molasses as I was finally roused to wakefulness by the late morning sun .

My body ached with a bone-deep yearning, my cock painfully tight in its velvet sheath and dribbling at the tip. A minute more and I might have come in my sleep like a sex-starved youth. I took myself in hand, appreciating the slide of my sheath and the steady drip of fluid, as I jerked myself roughly, attempting to imagine anyone but him. Impossible. Skylar Larkspur, naked again, was climbing onto my lap and seating his tight little body on my cock, using me like a toy to get himself off. His pretty tattoos shimmered as he bounced with enthusiasm, holding onto my neck and shouting, "Harder, Daddy," until his voice broke in a wail of ecstasy. That was the

moment my dick unloaded, spitting its seed like a venomous cobra all over my hairy chest.

May the Lord have mercy on my soul.

It was one of the best orgasms of my life, and I'd achieved it with only my hand. Well, that and fantasies of the fae, who I was becoming more and more convinced had bewitched me. Hadn't he been muttering in a foreign tongue while we danced? Some sort of sexual incantation perhaps?

He'd called me Daddy in the alleyway, and my subconscious had repeated it in my dream, surely the product of a repressed desire on my part, to have a boy of my own. The few boys I'd had in the past hadn't stuck around for very long, which had caused such a crisis of confidence that I'd stopped trying to satisfy that part of me, but there was no harm in pretending.

Except that Skylar Larkspur had trouble written all over him. The exact definition of a very bad idea .

After a hot shower and stern talking to in front of the fogged mirror of my bathroom, I went downstairs to my office to review the bar's monthly income and expense report, then took inventory in the wine cellar. It was early still, but I made myself a kale salad and poured a glass of iced tea only to find that our ice maker was on the fritz again, as evidenced by the empty bin and the suspicious sputtering noise coming from the compressor. I called on my cousin O'Rien who dabbled in mechanical sorcery, but he was out on a job on the other side of the mountain and wouldn't get to it until tomorrow.

Nobody liked lukewarm drinks.

After hitting up the local diner and one of the nearby lodges only to find them having

the same trouble as me, I suspected something more nefarious was afoot. I tried not to make too many assumptions about a person's character, but there were only two newcomers in town as of late, the fae and the mysterious Owner of The Magic Shop down the street. Since I didn't know where the fae was staying, and I'd rather cut out my own tongue than ask Frito (he'd tease me relentlessly), I decided to pay The Owner a visit.

There were no hours posted outside the shop, but the glass door gave way easily when I pushed it open, and a bell attached to the inside announced my arrival. The inside was dimly lit compared to the brightness outside, and it smelled of herbs and old copper pots. The Owner himself was stationed behind the counter, tall and thin with a slight hunch to his back, which might explain the cane he was carrying. His short black hair was arranged in an artful pompadour and his face was freshly shaven. His eyes were dark—nearly black—and his pupils were rimmed with a flickering red ring. Despite his slightly stooped posture and old-fashioned clothing, his appearance seemed somewhat ageless. Human, and yet... not. Was he a vampire? Demon? It was considered impolite to ask, and besides, if I tried to classify every type of creature who resided in the Arcane Isles, I'd never get anything done.

"May I help you?" he asked in a strangely accented voice. I set my two empty buckets on the floor, which was covered, somewhat haphazardly, in ornate area rugs.

"It seems the ice machines around town are all broken," I said.

"Is that so?" He motioned with an elegant turn of his wrist to a stainless-steel appliance humming with industry. "Mine seems to be working just fine."

Why a magic shop would even have an ice maker was a head-scratcher, but perhaps it was to chill the many potions and elixirs he sold. I went over and slotted one bucket under the spout. I checked out the price, which was handily listed on the machine, and raised my brow.



“That’s a lot of coin for ice,” I remarked.

“I should warn you, that’s not your average ice. It’s enchanted.”

“How so?”

“It doesn’t melt. ”

“Really?” I said and drew back my bucket. I’d rather serve tepid drinks than accidentally poison my patrons.

“It’s not harmful,” he said, noting my hesitation.

“What am I going to do with a bunch of dirty ice that won’t melt?”

“It’ll melt eventually, and if you apply cold to it, then by some strange alchemy, it will reform again.” He made a swishing gesture with his hand as if casting a spell.

“So, it’s water?” I concluded.

“Water blessed by an elemental sorceress from the Northern Realm and therefore, enchanted.”

I really didn’t have time for this nonsense, especially since I suspected he was just trying to price gouge me. I didn’t have a prejudice against magic, per se, but I’d seen a lot of spells go wrong, and since I had no casting abilities myself, I always felt like I was at a disadvantage when dealing with these slick wizarding types.

I was considering turning tail and leaving when the bell on the glass door jingled and in walked my other vexation, one Skylar Larkspur wearing scandalously short cut-offs and a sleeveless crop top that said, “Fae boys do it better.” It goes without saying

that I wished to test the validity of that claim.

He propped his heart-shaped sunglasses on top of his head and blew a bubble nearly the size of his face before sucking it back into his mouth, sweeping his wet tongue across his pink lips in a salacious way. And as he performed these lingual gymnastics, he steadily eyed me up and down, taking his time with it, not bothering to hide his interest. He was a bold one. His makeup from last night was smeared, giving his eyes a smoky quality that I thought rather fetching, though quite honestly, he could be wearing a feed sack over his head and I'd still find him attractive.

"Daddy," he purred, flashing me that cheeky, dimpled grin. "We meet again?"

"Hiero," I reminded him. "Hiero Wolfsbane."

"Mr. Wolfsbane," he said with a formal bow, clearly mocking me. "What brings you to The Magic Shop this fine morning?"

It was closer to afternoon than morning, but I didn't remark on it. "I need ice," I said, and then to The Owner, "The old-fashioned kind. Not this enchanted stuff."

Skylar strolled over to the ice machine and pressed the button, collecting a few cubes in his hand and pressing them to his forehead, his cheeks, and then to his lips. "Tastes like normal ice to me, though perhaps a little sweeter."

"Blessed by the sorceress," The Owner said with a flourish.

Needing something to do with my hands, I thrust one bucket under the spout and pressed the button. The machine belched up ice until the bucket was full. I popped one of the cubes into my mouth, thinking it did have a mild sweetness to it. Meanwhile, Skylar had turned his attention to The Owner.

“I’d like three prickly pears and five mallow fruits, a dozen of those saffron sticks if you’ve got them, and three honey cakes but only if they’re fresh.” He placed a bit of gold on the counter, the same earring that had belonged to the ogre from last night. “And a six-pack of Mind Eraser, if you please?”

“That’s a strong drink,” I said. We had a one-bottle-per-customer rule at Church due to its potency.

“I have a lot of memories that need erasing,” he said, looking somewhat melancholy. “And since someone forbade me from entering their bar...”

I nodded at the evidence of his thievery. “There’s your reason right there.”

“You can’t prove that I stole it,” he said tartly. “It might have been a gift for all you know. You assume that just because I’m a guildless fae that I would resort to theft?”

I didn’t know what he meant by “guildless fae,” as much of their customs were a mystery to me, though I did know he was a smooth talker.

“What might’ve happened if one of those ogres realized what you’d done and decided to take it out on your pretty face?” I asked.

“I would have simply offered up something else to soothe their anger,” Skylar said.

Lust rose within me, savage and sharp-toothed, as my fantasies from the morning played out behind my eyes—Skylar spread eagle, fingering his hole for my pleasure; Skylar bent over my bar, getting plowed from behind; Skylar wearing a cock cage with tears in his eyes, begging me to take it off and allow him to come .

My carnal thoughts were interrupted by the thunk of a six-pack on the counter and a paper bag containing the various vittles he’d ordered. The Owner held the gold band

up to a watery beam of light that suddenly sliced through the shop, then bit on it to determine its authenticity. Nodding, he disappeared the trinket from sight.

“Listen,” Skylar said, turning toward me again. “I know I didn’t make the best first impression, but if you’ll give me another chance, I promise not to accept any more gifts from strangers.”

“That’s what we’re calling it now?” I asked tightly.

“I’d like to earn my keep around here, Mr. Wolfsbane, if you’ll let me?” He batted his long eyelashes and pouted his pretty lips, looking younger and more vulnerable than he had last night. I wondered at his age, for the fae were said to live a long time and their faces rarely reflected their true years.

“And how would you do that?” I asked, trying to maintain some semblance of self-control.

“I saw you were having a wet t-shirt contest tonight. I’d like to enter.”

“You’d have to pay your way in or get sponsored.”

“Shouldn’t be a problem,” he said with a flirtatious arrogance. There was power in knowing you were a fine piece of ass, and Skyler Larkspur clearly knew it. “Maybe I could even convince you to sponsor me? I promise to show you something you’ve never seen before.” His voice was low and sultry as he placed one finger against my sternum, teasing me again. Everything felt like foreplay with this vexing fae.

“I’ve seen it all, pretty boy,” I assured him. Running a bar that catered to all manner of beasts and magical creatures made it so.

He shot me a wink. “We’ll see about that.”

Grabbing the six-pack of spirits and grocery bag, he sashayed his way toward the door, giving me a saucy look on his way out. My cock was raging all over again, a fiery hot brand in my pants. The Owner pointed to my two buckets of freshly minted ice and said discreetly, “Ice baths are good for cooling one’s passions.”

I grunted and shot him a dirty look before laying my coin on the counter. “If my mechanic finds anything suspicious when he looks at my ice maker tomorrow, I’ll be coming back here to pay you a visit.”

The man gave me a toothsome smile as he collected his coin. “I’ll look forward to it, Mr. Wolfsbane. I hope you have a most enchanting afternoon.”

### Chapter five

#### Skylar

I could hardly say I was living my best life. Thriving? Not a chance. After my excursion to The Magic Shop, I took to lazing around in a lawn chair by the motel's over-chlorinated pool, nursing a Mind Eraser from the bottle while all up in my feelings. As usual when I found myself in these situations, I started to reflect, going over all my mistakes, all the times I'd excused my ex's bad behavior and convinced myself that his jealousy and controlling tendencies had only meant that the intensity of our love made him insecure.

Needing some reassurances of both my decision to leave him and my sex appeal, I decided to summon my best friend Monica, which I could now do, thanks to the enchanted vintage compact I'd "borrowed" from The Owner of The Magic Shop earlier that day, unbeknownst to him or the handsome but infuriating minotaur. Despite Hiero's bad opinion of me, running into the stern-faced leather daddy from last night had been a sweet little bonus, evidence that the Goddess above favored me.

About damn time.

I popped open the pewter contraption and looked past my reflection in the mirror, imagining my best friend's full-lipped, heart-shaped face while murmuring her name until she finally answered.

"Skylar," she said, her brown eyes widening with surprise. "I've been looking all over for you. He's been looking all over for you."

“Cedrych?” I asked, altogether too hopeful and too flattered.

“He came by my place yesterday with the royal guard and practically interrogated me.”

“What did you say?”

“I said that if you’d left, it was probably because of him. That he’s been treating you like garbage for as long as you’ve known him and you deserve better.”

Goddess bless my best friend, Monica. If only I’d listened.

"So, where are you?" she asked.

“I’m in the Dragonback Mountains, holed up in a place called the Purple Pegasus.”

“Why would you go there?” she asked with a look of horror. According to what we’d been taught, the shifter clans were wild and lawless with their own brand of justice that involved bare-knuckle brawling and feats of strength, not my forte exactly. But everyone I’d met so far had been perfectly pleasant. Even the minotaur who’d tempted then rejected me hadn’t laid a hand on me in harm, though the blow to my ego had smarted aplenty.

“It called to me,” I said. I’d also not had enough coin to go much farther in my journey, and the Pegasus’s proprietor said she’d take my first payment at the end of the week. “I’m safe for now, but I need some reminders,” I said to Monica because my flesh was weak and the urge to take Cedrych back was strong. It wasn’t that I missed him, exactly, but I missed knowing what to expect, the routine he provided, and the occasional comforts he gave me that I guarded like a dog with a bone.

“Well, aside from the most recent disgrace, getting betrothed to someone else ,

remember the time he forgot your birthday?"

Both times he'd forgotten actually, which had been hurtful, yes, especially since I'd reminded him. "The first time we'd only just met, and he made up for it the second time with that expensive sapphire bangle," I said.

"That's how he always makes up for it, Skylar, by giving you pretty trinkets that cost him nothing. He probably doesn't even pick them out himself, simply has one of his minions do it for him."

Cedrych had looked surprised when I'd opened some of his gifts, as if he were also seeing them for the first time.

"Remember that time he came back with a hickey from some skank in the elvish territories?" Monica painfully reminded me. We didn't actually know if the elf in question was indeed a "skank," only assumed.

"It was a diplomatic mission. Queen Gwyneth wanted a treaty." We'd broken up for a spell because of it. Then and now, Cedrych's excuse had seemed flimsy.

"Remember that time we went down to the Bristol Falls, and he got all pissy about you sunbathing in the nude and made you cover up the entire time you weren't in the water?"

"He hadn't thought it befitting for a royal suitor to show so much skin."

"It's your skin to show or not, Skylar, and my sweet baby boy, real talk now, you were never a suitor to him. Not really. You were a beautiful distraction from his boring daily life at court. He never treated you as an equal, as a partner. He never invited you to royal functions or did the things you wanted to do. He kept you like a doll on the shelf, and you were stuck waiting for him to decide when to play with



you.”

She wasn't wrong, and she also wasn't saying it to be mean. But I'd also had power over Cedrych, knowing that even when we were in a fight, he wouldn't be able to stay away for long. He'd come crawling back eventually with a half-assed apology and something glittery to get back into my good graces. What a toxic relationship we had. Mind games and jealousy and (if I was being honest) mediocre sex that always concluded with a peck on the cheek and some tight expression of gratitude from His Royal Highness. Rarely did Cedrych even undress fully, blaming the complexity of royal clothing as the reason. I forgave him his repression. It was to be expected, having been birthed from the steel-trap cunt of Queen Gwyneth, may the Goddess keep her.

It was the way he'd treated me outside of sex that made me feel worthless.

“He made your world smaller, sweet pea,” Monica continued. “And the world is so very large. You deserve someone who can give you adventure and thrills, who makes you feel special and adored. Not someone who only pays attention to you when it's convenient for him.”

“I'm having a hard time here, Mon. I know he was shitty to me. I know I should be grateful he did something so unforgivable that I can't go running back to him this time, but I'm so tempted. I've built my whole life around him these past two years, and when I think about walking away, it seems like I'm cutting out a part of myself too.”

“Maybe that part of you needs to be cut out, Skybear. Cedrych was a huge pimple on your otherwise flawless face that needed to be popped. Exfoliate that mess of a man from your life and move on. You are a treasure, my angel, and you need to start valuing yourself as such.”

I nodded as a wave of gratitude enveloped me. Monica had been my one constant since I was a fledgling. Both my parents were ether addicts, and I'd never been registered with a labor guild, which meant that due to the draconian laws of Emrallt Valley, I'd had to get creative when it came to feeding myself. I'd met Monica while pickpocketing the upper echelon in Templeton Square. (It was also where I'd met Prince Cedrych a few years later.) Monica and I had hated each other at first, having to compete for marks and turf, and then we'd gotten smart and banded together, making twice as much coin while watching each other's backs.

Nowadays, Monica no longer had to steal to survive. She'd found a tattoo artist to take her on as an apprentice, and I'd let Monica use my skin as her canvas while she was learning the trade. Her work was incredible, and she now owned her own tattoo parlor as one of the most sought-after skin artists in Emrallt Valley. And I'd found Cedrych, who had elevated me, temporarily it seemed, from my life of petty crime.

"I'm right back where I started," I said, recalling last night when I'd been banned from the local biker bar for pickpocketing.

"You're wiser now, Skylar. You know what you want, someone who values and appreciates you. You have so many skills, and outside of Emrallt Valley, you can work a normal job without having to go through the Guild. Do you need money? A place to stay? You know you can always come back here and sleep on my futon."

Monica would take me in if I hit rock bottom, but I wanted to try and make it on my own for once. Tonight's wet t-shirt contest was a start. Maybe I could convince the hot leather daddy to give me more permanent employment. I could tend the bar or wait tables or even wash dishes if that's what was needed. I wasn't fussy about the work so long as I wasn't mistreated.

"I'm going to stay away a little longer, Mon, until the worst of my cravings pass. I'm afraid if I return too soon, I'll let Cedrych convince me to take him back."

“I think that’s a good idea. Hey, have you seen any hot shifters up in the mountains? I swear, every time I hear them howling on a full moon, my panties get wet.”

I laughed at her bawdiness. “Not yet, but I did meet a fine leather daddy last night who has a couple of massive... horns.”

“Horns? Sounds kinky. Did he have a tail too?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t get a good look at his ass. He caught me stealing from a couple of ogres and kicked me out of his bar. But I think I convinced him to give me a second chance.”

“If anyone deserves it, it’s you, sweet pea. You know what they say about bad breakups, don’t you?”

“What’s that?”

“The best way to get over someone is to get under someone else.”

Goddess bless Monica and her very practical advice. We said our goodbyes, and I lay back in my lawn chair soaking up the sun’s warmth. Closing my eyes, I imagined myself again in that alleyway behind the bar with my stomach flattened against the stone wall and Hiero right behind me, panting in my ear while rearranging my insides, telling me to take it all, slut in his stern Daddy voice. His rough hand on my cock would chafe in just the right way as he used me for his pleasure. My nipples hardened, my wings tingled, and my dick jumped in my skimpy swimsuit.

What might it take to make my fantasy a reality?

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:23 am*

### Chapter six

#### Hiero

There were two ways to enter the wet t-shirt contest at Church, buy your own way in or “arouse” the interest of a sponsor. Those wishing to be staked were given a number and lined up on stage to make their appeal to the crowd. The trick was to tempt a buyer without giving away the goods, to tease what your wet clothing might soon reveal. In the three years we’d been hosting the wet t-shirt contest, not once had a fae put themselves up for backing.

Until now.

Skylar Larkspur stood in the lineup with his long raven hair pulled back in a complicated braid. The sides of his head were shorn, highlighting the many pieces of jewelry that decorated his delicate, pointed ears. His heavily lined lavender eyes sparkled with excitement, and he wore a blue silk robe and not much else. No shoes either, which was worrisome. Delicate fae feet had no business being bare in a place where hooves and boots went clomping around .

He smiled and waved at the gathering crowd, and when a few patrons hooted and hollered in his direction, he teasingly flashed a little thigh as well. Was he nude underneath? My fingertips burned with the urge to glide across that porcelain skin. If the crowd’s enthusiasm was any indication, the fae’s prospects were promising.

Frito was acting as emcee, going down the line and asking each contestant why their “assets” were worthy of the common laborer’s hard-earned coin. One of the ogre

brothers from the previous night touted the size of his cock, “the biggest you’ve ever seen,” though I was fairly sure we’d all seen it before. A dwarf made a similar boast, though he called it his “diamond sword” whilst pumping his hips. A banshee promised to wail as a sign of impending doom (no takers), and a goblin swore to reveal a map to his treasure—also not chosen because goblins were notorious tricksters. Finally, it was Skylar’s turn to tout his wares, and when Frito asked him what he had to offer, he dipped his head and said quite coquettishly, “Have you ever seen a pair of fae wings unfurled and in the flesh?”

I’d never seen a fae’s wings, since their prudishness was legendary. It was rumored to be a sex thing, a fae only unfurled their wings while in the throes of passion, but that was probably a lie, because many of them could fly, and they’d need to unfurl their wings to do so.

“Will you let me touch ‘em?” an ogre called, the brother of the one on stage.

“If you’re very careful,” Skylar said in his best bedroom voice. “You’re so big and strong. I wouldn’t want you to hurt me.”

At that his violet gaze swung in my direction, and I nearly choked on my own spit.

“I’ll stake him,” I said before the ogre had the chance to commit. If anyone was touching those wings, it was going to be me. Skylar went up on his toes, clapping his hands and beaming with triumph as if he’d planned it all along. I knew I’d been had, but it wasn’t the first time and it likely wouldn’t be the last.

“Pony up then,” Frito called brazenly, also annoyingly smug. I loosened the leather purse at my hip and tossed a few silver coins into the community tankard. If Skylar won, I’d get half the pot. If he lost, I’d lose my coin as well, but it was no skin off my back. He’d be supplying me with masturbation fodder for the next several months. And besides, when was the next time a fae as... liberated as this one might make an

appearance at my bar? Likely never.

The music began. My cousin Bronwyn, our DJ, played something with a sultry downbeat so the contestants could shake their money-makers while building suspense for the crowd. Skylar moved with subtle sensuality, as if he were in his bedroom and dancing for his gratification alone, or perhaps that of an intimate partner (me, obviously.) His robe parted to reveal a pair of ruby red panties that outlined his cock rather spectacularly. Then the silky material slipped further from his shoulders, baring more of those curious tattoos that glimmered and shifted across his skin like a lover's sweet caress. I could hardly be pressed to notice the dwarf swinging his dick around like a garden hose or the ogre plucking at his own pierced nipples like harp strings. I didn't even bother with the succubus grinding on the stripper pole. My eyes were only for Skylar Larkspur.

As the music reached its crescendo, he turned around and abandoned the robe altogether like a butterfly shedding its chrysalis. The beat dropped and the fae did as well, showing off his athleticism as he squatted low to the ground before rising again, ass cheeks jiggling with seismic vibrations. The boy had an ass that was made to be plowed. And squeezed. And smacked. Visions of my red handprints on that round, succulent flesh flashed behind my eyes. Perhaps fae boys really did do it better? Then, as rhythmic as a snake, Skylar extended both tattooed arms on either side and unfurled his wings.

More than a simple curiosity, they were a majesty to behold. Translucent in some places, opaque in others, they resembled the silky fabrics he so favored. They shimmered in an iridescent rainbow of colors for which I had no name, for as soon as I thought to identify one, the hue had changed. Their structure was fascinating as well; they looked light as a feather yet surely must be tensile enough to propel a body into flight. Perhaps the fae had hollow bones? His wings seemed to operate of their own accord, shivering the way a body might in the final throes of ecstasy, pulsating and throbbing in time with the beat .

Skylar glanced over his shoulder and caught my expression, which must have been that of open-mouthed lust. He flashed me a devastating smile. I'd forgotten to signal for the "wet" part of the t-shirt contest, so it was a surprise even to me when the sprinklers came on, dousing the participants in a shower of rain. Skylar laughed and twirled with his impish face angled heavenward, mouth open to catch the water droplets on his tongue. His wings refracted light from every direction, and I was captivated by his every move.

Time blurred then, for my attention was solely focused on the boy on the stage, and I had a premonition of all the ways in which I would make him smile and laugh, watch him move in both joy and in ecstasy. Even beyond having him as a bedfellow, there was an urge to know what made him tick—his dreams, his fears, the secret desires he told to no one else. As if trapped in some lucid dream, visions of the two of us unspooled like a ball of yarn leading me to a path where our futures intertwined.

"We won," Sklyar shouted, his face electric and his body suddenly in my arms. Somehow I'd missed the announcement and was yet distracted by Skylar's wet skin against mine, so much of it that I didn't know where to place my hands without accidentally molesting him. His wings fluttered about like a chimney swift. On instinct, I reached out to protect him from injury, then drew back sharply. Was that a sex thing too?

"You can touch them," he said with his arms slung casually around my neck, mouth so close to my ear that I felt the vibrations of his husky voice over the din of music. I stroked along the edge of his wing, smooth as silk and cool to the touch. The appendage shivered, seemingly aroused, and lust bloomed in Skylar's gemstone eyes.

"Does that feel good?" I asked as I caressed him again, garnering the same reaction with an added shoulder roll.

"That feels wonderful, " he said with a deep, satisfied purr.

“I want to touch you everywhere, fae.” I confessed, emboldened by his arousal and succumbing to the desires within me.

“I’m yours for the night, stud. Bought and paid for. You can do whatever you want with me.”

“You earned that money outright,” I said, not wanting to blur the lines of consent.

“Let me have my little fantasy. I’m a very willing boy who’s oh-so-eager to please. Tell me what you want... Daddy .” His words were whispered like a dulcet lullaby, and the use of that endearment stirred the dominant craving within me. Did he know, or at least, suspect?

“I want to be inside you,” I told him.

“Then what are we waiting for?”

We were surrounded on all sides by a mass of writhing bodies, saturated with sweat and amped up on sexual fervor. The bathrooms were likely crowded as well. I wanted more than a quick and dirty encounter with the fae. I wanted to explore this wondrous body and show Skylar Larkspur what a borderlands halfling could do. Make him shiver and moan and cry for his Daddy as he climaxed in my arms .

“Come with me.” I grabbed hold of his hand. The air around us shifted and a light mist dusted my skin as Skylar shook out his wings then shuttered them closed. With his wings now tucked, we moved urgently toward the back of the bar, down a hallway and through a warded threshold where I punched in a security code to unlock the entry to my private quarters. The heavy double doors opened to reveal a winding stone stairwell led to my second-story apartment.

We made it as far as the hallway outside my door before I had him pinned against the



wall with one hand in his braided hair and my pelvis grinding against his. The angles of his body were sharp, his muscle tone lean, but his skin was so very soft and luscious. I nibbled and tugged at his delicate pierced earlobe with my teeth. Skylar moaned and bared his throat for me to taste him—cinnamon and orange zest and something sinfully sweet. With a splash of bourbon, he'd be the most delicious cocktail I'd ever sampled.

"I want you badly, fae," I told him. I could no longer deny it, but to utter his name would only weaken me to his every whim.

"I want you too, stud. Take me to your lair and fuck me like you own me."

"Say please," I growled.

"Pretty please, Daddy?"

I spun him around and trapped his long, tapered fingers against the wall, then licked a stripe along his spine, from the join of his vibrating wings all the way to the nape of his neck where the stray hairs had come loose from his braid. I wanted his scent all over my bed sheets and saturating my skin. My groin punched against his ass and he arched back, presenting for me like a proper slut.

"You want Daddy to take control of your pleasure tonight, boy?" I asked, my voice deepening as my dominant instincts took over.

"Yes, sir. Tell me what to do. I only want to please you."

"What do you like?" I asked, having my suspicions already.

"I like fat cocks drilling my insides so deep I can barely breathe. And when I tell you I can't take anymore, I want you to hold me down and make me."

“Safeword?” I asked before we got in too deep.

“Succotash.”

“I’m bigger than average,” I warned.

“I’m counting on it. Fill me up, Daddy. I’ll make room.”

“You gotta let me know if I’m being too rough.”

“I’m a tough cookie. I can take it.”

I reached over and used my clan’s signet ring to unlock the door to my apartment, still with Skylar trapped against the wall. The fire within me was by now a blazing inferno, but my sense of self-preservation finally kicked in. I’d made a habit of fucking frivolous, emotionally unavailable men. Men who were attracted to my physical oddities or my bulk, and after a few rounds of athletic sex, left me high and dry. The worst was when we’d spend a fantastic night together only for me to discover the next morning that they’d disappeared without a trace. It left me with a hollowness inside that was becoming harder and harder to bear.

I had a hunch this fae was a runner, so before crossing the threshold of whatever this was, I spun him around and took hold of his chin to level his heated gaze with mine. “Daddy has a condition. We’ll call it rule number one.”

He blinked at me, wide-eyed and waiting.

“I’m going to take you apart all night long, baby boy, and if you’re very good, I’ll allow you to come. But when I wake up tomorrow morning, I want to find you still rumped in my bed sheets. Is that understood?”

He nodded, gave a small smile, and said oh-so-sweetly, “Yes, Daddy.”

Music to my ears.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:23 am*

Chapter seven

Skylar

Yes, Daddy.

I'd said it and I'd meant it, at least for the night, and with a deep, shuddering breath I crossed the entrance into Hiero's darkened apartment. The ceilings were high and sloped with exposed wooden beams from which an ornate candelabra hung, and the walls were made of the same stone masonry as the bar below. Lit by only the moonlight filtering in through the stained-glass windows, the centerpiece of the space was a very impressive, minotaur-sized bed. I found myself liking the openness of the space, as if my minotaur had nothing to hide.

Hiero appeared to live simply, but the space was homey, decorated with artifacts from the natural world and a few house plants growing in pots. His furniture was worn but seemed to have been chosen with comfort in mind. There was a fireplace too with an animal-skin rug and cozy-looking recliner, and I imagined curling up in front of the fire on cold, winter nights while the snow was falling outside.

But winter was still many moons from now and who knew where I'd be then?

Do not get attached.

"I like your place," I said. The bass of the music reverberated through the stone floor, but the sound was muted by the many carpets, making the sudden quiet even more noticeable.

“Thank you. It’s the monastery where I grew up.”

That explained the name of the bar and the large pewter cross around his neck. And his name too, I supposed. Wasn’t the Hierophant a religious figure in some human cultures? I hadn’t done all that well in my studies, not with hunger always snapping at my heels like a vicious dog, but I’d paid attention in the classes that dealt with cultures and belief systems. You could learn a lot about a person according to whom or what they worshiped.

“Was he good to you? The monk?” I asked while hoping he had been. It couldn’t have been easy growing up as a halfling.

“Aberthol was a very good man,” Hiero said with genuine warmth. “And I have the Wolfsbane Clan now, who’ve adopted me as one of their own.”

I was glad he’d fallen in with a good crowd. It was harder to find kinship in Emrallt Valley, as our society was much more rigid with the various guilds controlling our labor and associations. Hiero would likely have ended up guildless in Emrallt Valley, much as I had. But here he’d become a prosperous business owner with a community to call his own. It was admirable all that he’d achieved. Perhaps I should have struck out from my homeland years ago, but it was all that I’d known and for all their faults, the fae were my people.

“Would you like a drink?” he asked, turning me toward him as if we were slow dancing.

“Yes, please. Something without spirits?”

“Sweet or sour?”

“Sweet, generally.”

He went over to the bar to prepare my drink while I sized up the massive iron-framed bed with a generous helping of pillows that looked as if it had been custom-built to fit Hiero as well as a few lovers. I couldn't help but notice the sturdy bed posts too, one at each corner with metal rings welded on, which would make it easy to restrain a lover, if Hiero was into that sort of thing. (I hoped he was into that sort of thing.) The mattress was at the perfect height for being bent over, and I suspected that being in his line of work and looking the way he did, Hiero had never suffered a drought of attractive bedmates. I would be just one of many, I thought to myself with some ruefulness, but then, hadn't I wanted the same from him? A night of pleasure to dull the heartache of my recent past?

As he mixed our drinks, I admired his broad shoulders and tapered waist, the impressive mounds of his ass. His bovine tail flicked behind him like a whip, the end of it with a bushy tip the same color as the hair on his head that looked soft to the touch. He had nice, meaty thighs and thick calves too, a wide stance that was probably necessary to accommodate what hung between his legs. Mmm... I couldn't wait to see more of him.

Play it cool, Skylar.

He pivoted slightly and caught me staring, then smiled and offered me the drink. I took a few sips—blackberry with basil and something sweet, maple syrup perhaps?

"It's delicious," I said.

"Glad you like it. Can I get you anything else?"

I shook my head. It had been a while since I'd seduced a near-stranger and never a man of his kind. I didn't know the proper protocol here in the Dragonback Mountains. We fae wooed our conquests with gifts and jewels and lavish food. It was how Cedrych had persuaded me to bed him, not that it had taken much convincing on

his part. But a quick scan of Hiero's apartment told me that offering up some silly trinket simply would not do.

I suspected this minotaur liked to meet things head-on, so I took a more direct approach. "How do you want me?" I asked. With my shoulders back and chin up, I held myself still for his slow perusal. His nostrils flared and his lips parted as he looked me over with careful consideration.

"I want you every which way, fae." Coming nearer, he grabbed hold of the back of my neck and kissed me deeply. His tongue explored my mouth with a sort of proprietary thoroughness that left me weak-kneed and breathless. A taste of the dominance to come, it said, you're mine now and you'd better behave. Only once he'd had his fill, did he pull back and say, "Lose the robe, sweet thing."

I let the silk slip from my arms, not bothering to see where it landed, as my eyes followed his every move. He kissed along my collar bone, then tongued the divot at the base of my throat. The warmth of his breath against my skin sent shivers up and down my spine and a rash of desire across my skin. My ache to be touched by him was a tangible thing, stronger than any craving for food or drink. My wings quivered in anticipation, sending pulses of arousal to my lower half. I reached down to discard my underwear too, but he stopped me with his larger hands on mine.

"Let me." Dropping to his knees, he licked along the edge of my silk panties, then nuzzled my cock and balls with his snout-like nose. My prick strained upward along the meridian of my navel with my testicles tucked up high and tight. I was considered well-endowed for my kind, but I suspected my minotaur was packing an altogether different unit. He mouthed along my shaft, dampening the fabric with this tongue and eliciting a rumble of satisfaction from deep within my chest.

"This is pretty," he said, stroking over the silk with a sure hand. "But I bet your cock is even nicer than the packaging."

“One way to find out,” I said, practically panting.

He smirked and gently tugged on my panties with his teeth until they were clinging to my thighs. “Mmmmm, that is nice,” he murmured and went back to nosing along my groin as if to scent me. I spread my legs wider and relished the soft, warm touches, my arousal warring with my impatience. Waiting had never been my strong suit.

“I wondered if you were bare down here too,” he said, drawing his hand along my length and tugging on my sac as if testing its elasticity.

“Not all of us are.” There was a line of fae descended from higher up in the mountains who were hairier than the rest, but my family hailed from the south, where the temperatures were mild. My body hair was sparse and near translucent.

“I want to put a ring on this,” he said and for a second, I thought he’d meant my finger, but his eyes were still intently focused on my cock.

“Yes, Daddy,” I said as my anticipation kicked up another notch.

He went over to his bedside table and pulled out a few things, none of which I could see because his broad back blocked my view. “Get this wet for me, boy.” Turning toward me again, he placed a soft, doubled-over rubber ring in my mouth. My saliva coated the instrument thoroughly, as instructed.

“How will you—” I began to say.

He dug into his discarded glass for an ice cube and started skating it along my shaft. Goosebumps rippled across my skin, a nice counterpart to the feverish heat, and I felt my prick wilting from the icy chill. “Good boy,” he murmured as my cock curled up like a fiddlehead. My embarrassment at going soft was a small humiliation, one that amped up my arousal even more. Daddy making his boy soft for him, Daddy yoking



his boy's cock with a ring, Daddy deciding when to take it off....

I stood there patiently as Daddy maneuvered my cock and scrotum through each of the double loops. It fit snugly, as if made for me, and I wondered if there was some enchantment involved.

“Looks good on you, baby boy,” he said.

“Thank you, Daddy.”

“Now let’s see if I can get you hard again.”

He took hold of my shaft, his firm grip stroking me with surety until I was fully aroused and straining against the black rubber ring. It felt both better and worse. Better because I was completely under his control, worse because I’d have to trust him to know what I needed. He watched me struggle, a slow sweep of his eyes up and down my naked body, assessing both my torment and my pleasure.

“Atta boy. Now sit on the edge of my bed and hold yourself open for me. I want to see what your hole tastes like.”

My, this minotaur was direct. I found myself blushing, even though I’d been in more compromising positions before. His gaze stayed steadily focused on me as I complied. Blame it on my abandonment issues, but being wanted by this man was a turn-on that fed some deeper need inside me. I sat on the edge of his mattress with my legs raised and spread wide, gripping both my knees to make myself more accessible to him. It was whorish and wanton and I loved it .

“I dreamed about you like this,” he said, cupping himself through his leathers, then using the heel of his hand to force down his erection, which was... sizable.

“Did you?” I was flattered that he’d thought of me at all.

“Yeah. Only your hole was dripping with my seed and your hair...” His eyes passed briefly over my head. “Your hair was a mess too.”

“I can take it down if you’d like.” I reached up to undo my braid.

“No, leave it.” He stayed my hand. “How do you feel about me pulling your hair, just a little?”

“I’d like that.” I shivered from the crown of my head to the tips of my toes. “You can be rough with me, Daddy, if that’s how you like it.”

“How do you like it, boy?”

I blinked in confusion at his sincere question. No one had ever asked me that before, had always just assumed I was theirs for the taking, or perhaps that was what I’d always conveyed. “I don’t know,” I said, at a loss for words.

“Then we’ll have to figure it out together, won’t we?” He leaned down to kiss my forehead, and I nodded, feeling younger than my years. His tenderness made me feel like a fledgling all over again. “This is going to be a tight fit,” he said, sounding not at all displeased as he placed both his thumbs at my entrance and gently massaged. “I’m going to have to give this pretty little hole a lot of attention. ”

The touch-starved part of me delighted in that. Cedrych—I really shouldn’t have been thinking about him right then—but Cedrych seldom gave his affection freely, nor did he entertain much foreplay during our lovemaking. He was rigid and methodical and executed our intimate encounters as if they were a military drill. Even when we were alone, he was stingy with his affection. I was discovering more and more that physical intimacy was something I craved.

“I like having your attention,” I blurted out, feeling even more exposed than my nakedness.

Hiero caught my eye, and perhaps he saw something there, because he said with intention, “I’m going to tend to you all night, Skylar, even after we both come. You’re going to be so wrapped up in my arms that we’ll still smell like each other in the morning.”

I nodded, eyes stinging, and gave a tentative smile. He smoothed one rough hand over my thigh like gentling a horse and motioned for me to lie back. Then, after securing himself a footstool to sit on, he dragged my ass to the edge of the bed and placed a gentle kiss against my pucker.

"Ready?" he asked.

"Yes, Daddy."

I moaned—it was impossible not to—as he proceeded to lick my hole like it was a rare delicacy. His tongue was longer than most and teased the walls of my channel with alarming dexterity. It curled and writhed inside me like a serpent and my thoughts blurred to indistinct shapes and colors. I quivered under his ministrations like a taut bow string as a fine sheen of sweat broke out all over my skin. Thankfully my wings were already tucked away, lest they be damaged by the wanton grinding I was doing against his face.

“Daddy,” I moaned, caught up in the sensation.

“You taste good, baby boy,” he hummed with contentment. "Sweet like candy."

He dragged me closer and ate me out with such fervor that I was practically sitting on his face. It was deliciously filthy, especially the wet, smacking noises he made, and I

moaned as if my night's wages depended on it. His horns rested against the juncture of my upper thighs on either side, trapping me in place, and I liked that I couldn't so easily escape his hold.

"You can't keep doing this to me or I'll explode," I protested, near delirium. Even with the ring around my cock, it throbbed as if on the cusp of climax.

"Like honeysuckle and springtime. I can't get enough of you, fae."

"I may faint," I warned, not even exaggerating, for the pleasure coiling in my balls and tripping up my spine was simply too much.

"I'm going to plug you to train you up for a bit while I explore the rest of this beautiful body."

"Okay," I said shakily, not because I was fearful but because he'd already given me so much. Most of my previous lovers hadn't even bothered with prep. This sort of treatment felt lavish and indulgent, dangerous because I didn't want to get used to it. And the way he spoke to me, like I was a treasure, was novel too. So often my lovers had acted as if my body was a debt that I owed them in exchange for their coin or meager attention.

Because you're a guildless, unremarkable bit of fae trash.

I banished the queen's cruel words from my mind. Even if it was only tonight, I was special to this man, my Daddy, and I wasn't foolish enough to try and convince him otherwise. His appreciation made me want to fulfill his every fantasy, so while he retrieved more toys, I spread my legs wider and fingered myself for the sheer pleasure of it. Daddy liked me this way, slutty and shameless and begging for his cock. I didn't have to be respectable or fit his vision of what a proper suitor might be.

I could finally be myself.

“Skylar,” he said, temporarily dumbstruck as I licked my fingers and plunged them back inside. A low groan escaped me. I loved playing with my hole, loved the buildup to being stuffed so full, even if it was only with one of my toys. I liked the sensation of being filled with a lover's cum too, a reminder that for a short period of time, I'd owned them—their pleasure, at least. For every man who'd fucked me also left a piece of themselves behind.

“Do you like me like this, Daddy?” I asked.

“Yeah, I like watching you stretch your pretty little hole for me. You're a slutty thing, aren't you, boy?”

“Yes, always have been. What's that you've got there? ”

“I had a mineral sorcerer fashion this for me.” He showed me a plug that appeared to be made of rose quartz. “It'll expand as you relax. I don't want you to tear.”

“I wouldn't complain,” I said, not because he might hurt me but because it wasn't in my nature to do so. He reached for a bottle of oil, and I held him off. “I don't need it. I produce my own lubrication. That flavor that you tasted, it's my natural serum.”

“How do you...” he began.

“We eliminate our waste through urine and sweat. This area is only for pleasure. And birth.” Speaking of fae anatomy... “At the end of this channel is my womb. All fae have them in case you were wondering.”

“But you have a cock, a rather impressive one,” he said.

I smiled at his compliment. “The distinction between genders is more fluid with our kind. I present as male, but my body can produce eggs or sperm.”

“Has it always been this way with the fae?”

“It’s more common in younger generations. We choose our mature gender as fledglings, or we choose not to be gendered at all. The Goddess blessed us with this adaptation to prevent our kind from going extinct. The birth of a fae child is a rare and much celebrated occasion.” The only exception being my own birth, I thought bitterly. I tried to let go of my resentment towards my parents, but it still cropped up on occasion .

That information made him pause, his thick eyebrows pulling together on his forehead. “Could we...” He cleared his throat and began again. “Could we... reproduce?”

“Perhaps, but I’m on a form of contraceptive that will last until I have it removed.” It was Queen Gwyneth’s stipulation. She’d even insisted on witnessing the procedure with her royal physician to make sure the deed was done, which had been a miserable experience, especially because Cedrych couldn’t be bothered to attend, so it was just the queen staring coldly at me while the doctor implanted the neutralizer in my womb. Goddess forbid Prince Cedrych be a father to a common bastard.

“I wonder what our pup would look like,” he mused. “If it’d have wings, or horns?” He smiled absently, which endeared me to him even more. Cedrych had not once entertained the possibility of us having children. Legitimate or not, I would have loved them with all my heart. Could I help that I was charmed that this near stranger was considering what our child might look like?

“Looks like you want to be a Daddy in more ways than one,” I teased and poked him with one painted toe.

He smiled bashfully and shrugged. “Big families are a blessing.”

“I agree.” I reached up to stroke his jaw with tenderness. The moment was weighted with something far more profound than a one-night stand. I needed a distraction from these uncomfortable emotions. “So, how long will it take for your enchanted butt plug to work?”

He chuckled and got back down to business, slowly inserting the smooth stone inside of me. It was a stretch, even at its current diameter. The surface was warmed quickly by my body heat as it pressed against my inner walls. I whimpered at the first expansion, a wonderful ache.

“Does it hurt?” he asked with concern.

“No, I like that you’re taking the time.” To make me yours .

“No need to rush.” He brushed the hairs from my sweat-dampened forehead. “And I like you like this. Strung out and needy. You’re beautiful to watch.”

“Are you going to undress?” I asked, lest his gentleness trigger my tears. “I want to see the size of this mystical cock I’m going to take. You’ve certainly built it up enough.”

He laughed and got to his feet, making a show of lifting off his chainmail vest and setting it aside. His tank came off next to reveal the full expanse of his furred chest. He was definitely built like a bull with two pierced nipples poking through his chest hair, a sweet surprise. I couldn’t wait to wrap my tongue around them and drive him wild. Another line of fur arched down his abdomen, and I wanted to lick that too, follow the trail right to my prize.

He removed his heavy leather belt next and peeled off his tight pants. His cock was

every bit as impressive as he'd claimed: long and thick with a foreskin that resembled the velvety texture of deer's antlers. His cockhead alone was the length of my pinky finger, slightly rounded at the tip and a wet reddish hue. His balls were heavy and large where they swung like a pendulum beneath his turgid member.

"You weren't exaggerating." I licked my lips, seeing both the bull and the man reflected in his sex organs. I couldn't wait to ride him.

"Too much for you?"

"You insult me. Just don't bruise my lungs."

With a grin, he climbed onto the bed and proceeded to devour every inch of me with his curious gaze. "I like your tattoos. Are they ink?"

"It's a dye made from a flower that only blooms by the light of a full moon."

"I love the way they shimmer."

I hadn't realized they'd started shimmering again. They'd dulled over the past year or so, probably a result of my declining mental health. Perhaps it meant that I was on the right path after all.

"You can touch them if you want," I said, because he seemed hesitant. "I promise they won't hurt you."

Hiero gently traced a design of an intricate knot on my shoulder. It was the first tattoo Monica had given me, a loop without end, a symbol of our eternal friendship and loyalty to each other.

"You are so beautiful," he murmured, pressing his warm lips to my skin. It was too



much, the way he touched me with such reverence .

“May I worship you?” I asked.

“You may.” He lay back with both hands behind his head, inviting me to explore.

“Your skin is a lovely shade of brown,” I remarked.

“I never met my sire, but I suspect he was Red Angus. There are herds of them in the highlands.”

“It’s beautiful and so soft,” I said as I ran my hand over the rich umber skin of his shoulder and upper arm, feeling the muscles ripple and flex underneath my fingers.

“I have four stomachs too,” he said with a grin. “Well, one stomach with four compartments to be exact. I’m a very picky eater.”

“Me too. I only like sweet things.”

“So, I’ve noticed. How do you not get cavities with all the sweets that you eat?” he asked.

“Our saliva is highly acidic to break down the sugars.”

“Fascinating. Keep doing that. Your lips feel good on my skin.”

I continued to map the contours of his body with my hands and my mouth, lingering on his pierced nipples to flick them with my tongue and watch them pebble to a dark, reddish-brown hue. Going by the groans of pleasure he made, Daddy definitely liked that, something to note for later, if there was a later. No need to get my hopes up.

Get out of your head, Skylar, and enjoy the prize of a man underneath you .

I licked down the trail of hair on his abdomen, tasting the salt of his skin and taking in the scent of freshly plowed earth. His tail wound around my leg and the soft switch tickled my inner thigh whenever it brushed against me. He had a few jagged scars across his stomach that I traced with my fingertips.

“What’s this from?” I asked.

“Broken bottle. Back in my brawling days.”

“Is that why you wear chainmail?”

He nodded. “Doesn’t hurt to have a little added protection.”

I reached lower to stroke his heavy cock and found that his foreskin had a soft downy fur. I raised my fingers to my mouth and sampled the fluid that dribbled from his slit, viscous and tangy but not bitter.

“You’re not put off by it?” he asked, watching me closely.

“Put off by a huge, savory dick? No, not at all. You know some human cultures worship bovine creatures? The species is considered to be an earthly manifestation of the divine.”

Smiling, he touched my hair. “I like it when you worship me, fae.”

I sunk lower on his expansive bed so that I might nurse his beautiful dick, taking care to keep my pointy teeth behind my lips. The head of it was like licking the inside of a mouth, wet and slick with fluid. His length slid easily across my palate and tickled the back of my throat like a second tongue.

“That’s good, boy,” he said in appreciation as his hips flexed upward. I hummed, delighted to be praised. He rocked into me gently and I relaxed my jaw to take him deeper. My first sexual partner had trained away my gag reflex when I was still a fledgling. I’d thought we were lovers, but he was really just a pimp, preparing me for resale. The memory of it was bitter but the result now was rather sweet, especially when the tip of Daddy’s long cock tickled my esophagus. I swallowed around his girth, eliciting a deep purr of satisfaction from deep within him.

“How’d you get so good at this?” he asked when I’d come up for air and was flicking the slit of his cock with my tongue.

“The fae used to have to suck their nectar directly from the blossoms, and some of the flower tubes were rather long,” I told him. It wasn’t a lie, though the real reason was that men wouldn’t pay as much coin if you gagged on their dicks or cried every time they choked you. Aside from the rare exception, most wanted you to enjoy it. Lucky for me, I considered sucking cock an artform and took great pride in my skills. When it was a man like Hiero, the praise made me positively bloom.

“You make it look easy, pretty boy.”

“Thank you, Daddy.”

As I continued my worship, the stone kept expanding, causing my channel to ache with the need to be filled, a desire that was almost painful in its intensity. I wanted Hiero inside me with a mounting desperation, but I wanted to be good for my Daddy, show him I could be patient and earn my orgasm without complaint, so I continued to worship his cock, relishing all the wonderful noises he made, his deep huffs of pleasure and the spontaneous buck of his hips, as if he couldn’t control his body’s reactions. Finally, Daddy’s big hands took hold of the back of my head, and he began stroking in deep to set the pace for his pleasure.

He was rough but not mean, the penetration deep but not painful. I lost sense of time and place, focusing only on the rhythmic sensations of being used by a Dominant in the very best way. When he seemed on the verge of climax, he pulled me off gently and wiped my messy mouth with his thumb.

“You’re perfect,” he said, taking a moment to admire me. “You ready to ride this mystical cock now, boy?”

“Yes, Daddy,” I said, gazing back at him with a quiet yearning.

“Climb on top, gorgeous. I want to see if fae boys really can do it better.”

I smiled but was determined to prove my silly claim. I straddled his lap with my long legs on either side of him and placed my hands against his chest, awaiting his next instruction.

“You are something else, aren’t you?” he remarked, eyes shining softly. He held onto my waist with one hand while his other hand reached underneath to pump the smooth crystal in and out of my hole, causing me to shudder and groan atop his strapping, masculine form. I gripped the ladder of his ribcage to brace myself while he worked me over. The sensation was a terrible tease, filling me but not deep enough, tormenting me with this shallow pleasure. When he finally eased it out, I was surprised to see it had nearly doubled in size. Goddess bless the elasticity of fae bodies that allowed us to take bull-sized dicks.

“Don’t take more than you can handle. No need to impress me by injuring yourself,” he said and held up his thick cock for me to mount. His flesh was primed and waiting, standing so tall it looked like it was reaching for me.

I perched on his bruising colossus and began my slow descent. My slick hole sucked in the first few inches easily. Hiero hissed through his teeth while gripping my ass

cheeks, holding me up so that I wouldn't accidentally slip and impale myself. Beads of sweat broke out on my forehead and across my chest as I hovered there, my thighs burning with effort.

"Atta boy," he coached. "You feel so good, Skylar. So hot and tight and wet."

"Tell me I'm a good boy," I said, hanging on his every word.

"You are such a good boy," he said, one hand stroking along my thigh. "A beautiful, sweet boy who takes cock like a champion."

The stretch was intense, the burn was exquisite, but I didn't stop until his entire shaft was encased by the warmth of my body. Twitching and moaning, I'd never been so full before, never felt like my body was a sheath for a cock and nothing more.

I loved it.

"Skylar," he said in a ragged voice. "I don't think I've ever been so deep inside another person."

"I'm going to take care of you now, Daddy," I promised and unfurled my wings so they might aid my momentum. The air around us shifted and the scent of our mingled sweat and sex spurred me on. "You only have to show me how you want it."

"God, yes," he said with a deep, satisfied sigh.

With one hand on my waist and the other cupping my ass cheek, Hiero fucked into me from below with slow, sinuous rolls of his hips. I rode him like the ocean waves. My wings were open and receptive, humming from the influx of sensations. The tip of his cock swept against the opening of my womb on every upstroke, and my prostate pulsed in time with my heartbeat, feeling as if it had swollen to the size of a

robin's egg. Each slide of his shaft rendered the pleasure more exquisite. I let out a sudden wail of catharsis and found that it didn't end there. It was simply too much to bear, being taken care of in this way. My defenses fell away until only a raw nerve remained and I started to sob.

"Skylar," he soothed, swiping at my cheeks with his thumb.

"Don't stop," I begged, because I needed this so badly.

"I won't. I've got you, baby. Let it all out."

I inhaled a shuddering breath and with a renewed determination, continued to ride him as he stroked upward. We moved in perfect synchronicity as he remade me from the inside. Like a blacksmith taking a hunk of metal and reshaping it into something new, I wasn't Cedrych's anymore, not his lover, his whore, or his shameful secret. I was my own master, and I'd chosen to submit to a Daddy with kind eyes and a strong, steady disposition. I wanted to purge every toxic feeling that had been clogging my spirit for the past two years. Mounted atop my beautiful minotaur, I soared above the swamp of insecurity and doubt, and for the first time in a long while, I felt beautiful and free.

"You are a vision, Skylar Larkspur, and such a good boy. Now, come for me, sweetheart. Make Daddy proud." He slipped the ring from my cock, and that slight brush of his hand against my swollen shaft triggered my climax. My spirit soared, my body high on endorphins as I rode him to ecstasy. My channel tightened around him as I spit thick plumes of cum all over his hairy chest. He didn't pull away or chide me for the mess; he simply lay there underneath a pile of my spend and pumped his hips gently. He'd come as well during my orgasmic flight but was still fucking into me with languor as if wishing to secure his seed. Briefly, I too wondered what a child of our passions might produce, but just as quickly, I dashed the thought away. This was one night of lust-infused carnal passion, and that was all it was meant to be.

“Come down here so I can hold you,” he said, rolling with me so that he could wrap me up in his big arms, still with his slightly softened cock nestled deep inside me and my legs wrapped around his waist. I tucked my wings to be closer to him. “Keep my cock warm for as long as you can,” he said, a gentle command.

“Yes, Daddy.” I tightened up to hold him inside me. I kissed his bearded cheek and buried my nose in his neck so that I might hide away for a bit. The scent of him was familiar now, and it calmed me.

“We’re going to rest for a spell,” he said, “and then I’m going to make you come again and again, until these sheets are saturated with our seed and our sex is all you can smell. You’ll have to tell me when you’ve had enough, baby boy, because I’m sure I won’t tire of watching you unravel.”

“Until morning,” I said, for it was what we’d agreed upon.

“Until morning.”

He kissed the part in my hair, then rested his chin there. With both of us on the edge of slumber, he murmured, “You are something I’d like to come home to.”

I smiled to myself. Even if it was only the sex talking, he’d made me feel special nonetheless, so I clung to that sense of belonging like a lifeline, hoping it might sustain me in the lonely days to come.

## Page 8

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### Chapter eight

#### Hiero

As Skylar studied me over his steaming cup of hibiscus tea, twitchy as a sinner on Sunday, it was painfully obvious that both of us were struggling to make morning-after small talk. It probably didn't help that we'd slept very little the night before. I'd kept my promise and made him come three times during our lovemaking, until we'd both passed out from exhaustion. I'd woken late in the morning to find his pale body stretched across my bed sheets, ass streaked with my spend and thighs bruised from where I'd manhandled him the night before.

Pretty as a picture.

I'd thought about rolling him over and sucking him off to wring one more orgasm from him, but his expression upon waking looked startled and somewhat disoriented, which made me question if he'd been drunk on more than lust the night before .

We showered separately. Skylar had repossessed his silk robe from the bedroom floor while I wore loose trousers. I made us both tea with honey, wearing a ridiculous grin on my face the entire time, waiting for my handsome fae to emerge from the bathroom. When he did, he approached me with the timidity of a church mouse, causing me to have doubts of my own. Was he regretting his decision to bed me last night? To call me his Daddy? I sincerely hoped not.

As for me, there were several things I wanted to say, ranging from, when can we do that again to move in with me. But I wasn't sure how my advances would be



received, so I studied him from across the table and concentrated on not saying the wrong thing.

“So, what do you have going on for today?” I asked, trying to sound casual about it when I was anything but. Our bodies had known each other intimately under the cloak of darkness, but in the bald light of morning, it seemed we were strangers again.

He ran one hand over his hair, which was still braided, though mussed with damp wisps sticking out here and there. I found it adorable but didn’t say so, not wanting to come on too strong.

“I might take a stroll around town. Collect some of the flowers I saw blooming on the mountainside,” he said absently. I liked the picture he painted, my beautiful fae boy getting lost in a patch of wildflowers .

“You want company?” I asked, hoping I’d struck the right balance between interested and nonchalant.

“Oh no, that’s okay. I’m sure you’re busy here. Besides, I don’t mind being alone.”

I nodded, not sure if that was an outright rejection, or if he was refusing me simply to be polite. “I’ll probably need to do some laundry,” I said with a teasing grin.

“I’m so sorry,” he said, looking alarmed.

I squeezed his hand. “I’d do laundry three times a day if it meant having you in my bed.”

“Oh, okay then,” he said but still wore a sheepish expression, which made me question if I was being too forward with him. He seemed to enjoy it enough last

night?

“So, how long do you plan on being in town?” I asked, trying out a different tack.

He swallowed and stared at me with a grave expression. “I won’t be a problem.”

“What do you mean?”

“I only meant that...” His gaze flitted away. “I won’t be a bother to you. At the bar or elsewhere. No one has to know. I understand what this was.”

That was news to me because I was still trying to wrap my head around it. “What was it?” I asked carefully.

“You know, a fae and a minotaur walk into a bar. There’s a wet t-shirt contest and they decide to make a night of it.” He gave a weak, if not bitter, chuckle .

I nodded. Clearly, he’d meant for this to be a one-and-done sort of deal. Well, I was used to that, wasn’t I? At least he was being honest. There didn’t need to be any hard feelings between us.

“I had fun,” I said, and it must have been the wrong thing to say, because he jumped out of his chair faster than a frog on a stinging nettle and started searching the room.

“You’re right. I should be going. It seems I misplaced my underthings.” He gripped his silk robe tighter.

“I’m not trying to rush you out the door.” I stood slowly, a steady counterbalance to his agitation. What had I done to spook him?

“I’ve taken up too much of your time already. I’ll just...” He glanced again at his

skimpy clothing.

“Would you like to borrow something of mine?” I offered. That was one way to possibly see him again.

“Yes, that would be very kind of you.”

He was so oddly formal today. Gone was the smooth-talking seducer who’d batted his pretty bedroom eyes and flaunted his goods for all to see. This version of Skylar seemed painfully young and even... scared. Was he afraid of me?

“Here you go.” I handed him an old t-shirt and a pair of sweats that were a little small on me but would probably swamp him nonetheless. “That’s one of my favorite shirts so make sure you return it.” He glanced down at the old ratty thing that had “Wolfsbane” scrawled in jagged, red lettering across the front. “It’s a rock band me and a couple of my pack formed a few years back.”

“You play an instrument?” he asked with renewed interest brightening his eyes.

“Guitar and bass. Some drums too. We play out at Church sometimes.”

“Oh, that’s wonderful.”

“Do you play?” I asked.

“No, not really. I’m not part of the Music Guild, but I used to sing in the town square from time to time.”

He’d spoken of this guild business before, and it made me curious. “Do you have to be part of a guild to learn to play?”

“Yes, only Music Guild members are allowed access to instruments.”

“That seems... wrong. Music shouldn’t belong to any one group. It’s for everyone to enjoy.”

He bit his lip and seemed to not want to talk about it. I turned away so he could dress in private. When I turned back around, he was wearing my clothing with the silk robe over the top of it, blending our fashions.

“You look cute,” I said and gave him a friendly peck on his forehead.

“Thank you,” he said as a shy smile spread across his face. “You know what happens when you lend clothing to a fae, don’t you?”

“No, what? ”

“You become a slave to their desires.” He stared at me, stone cold sober, then broke into a wide grin. “I’m kidding, Hiero. Goddess above, you should have seen your face.”

I took advantage of the light mood to pull him closer to me. “I wouldn’t mind being a slave to your desires.” I brushed my nose against his ear. “You going to come by the bar later to see me?”

“I thought I was banned,” he said with a petulant little pout.

“Ban officially lifted.”

“Would you want me to come by?” he asked and rubbed his cheek against my shoulder, a sweet, soft gesture.

“Yes, I would. I’m going to make a drink that tastes like you, to keep my cravings at bay until I can have you again.”

There, at least I’d made it known that I wanted to do this, whatever it was, again.

“Am I really so addictive?” he asked.

“Yes, baby boy. I’m afraid that you are.”

He stared up at me as if trying to determine if I was being sincere, then said soberly, “Thank you for last night, Hiero. I had a lot of fun too. It was just what I needed.” His smile was a little bit sad as he withdrew from my arms.

“Me too, Skylar. I really enjoyed your company.”

Lord have mercy, that was an understatement.

He gave me one last, searching look before heading for the door. It wasn’t exactly the send-off I’d hoped for, and for a long while after, I picked apart our entire morning, wondering where it was that I’d gone wrong.

“So, did you bed him?” Enid asked me a few hours later as we were restocking the bar in preparation for the night ahead. It was impossible to keep my love life to myself, especially since most of my lovers traveled from the bar to my upstairs apartment and back again. Even if that weren’t the case, this town was small and gossip spread like wildfire.

“I might have,” I said, trying to maintain some semblance of privacy.

“Mmm hmm, and?”

She wasn't asking for all the sordid details. Enid tended to concern herself more with matters of the heart.

"And it was... good." Good didn't begin to cover it. Exceptional, extraordinary, transformative even, as if the fates had finally aligned to deliver me this one very special boy. Our chemistry was undeniable, but it was his openness and vulnerability that compelled me to want more than just a casual fling. He awakened the protector and nurturer within me.

"He say how long he'd be in town?" Enid asked.

"I get the sense he hasn't decided. Seems like he may be running from something or someone. "

"Goddess, Hiero, you sure know how to pick 'em. He's probably some fae fugitive of the law, about to bring a heap of trouble to our quiet little town."

Our town was small, but it definitely wasn't quiet. And even if that were true, it wouldn't be the first time we'd had to deal with some law enforcement type from one of the many realms trying to extradite a fugitive. We rarely made it easy for them, and sometimes we made it downright impossible.

"Maybe that's what it was," I said, still pondering the particulars of our conversation. "But this morning, it seemed like he was in pain."

"Physical pain?" she said and made a lewd gesture.

"Emotional pain," I corrected.

"Getting over a broken heart?"

“Maybe,” I said.

“Listen, Hiero, he’s an attractive bloke, but you can’t force a relationship with someone who doesn’t want one. That fancy footloose fae is probably just looking for someone to get his rocks off with, so don’t go getting invested until you know what he’s all about.”

Too late, I thought ruefully.

“He’s special,” I said.

“Maybe so, but you’ve got too good a heart for some playboy to go messing with it. I don’t care how easy he is on the eyes.”

Skylar certainly made it easy. “He said he’d stop by the bar tonight.”

He’d called me his Daddy .

Enid nodded, still with a motherly look of concern on her face. “Well, let’s see if he shows, and then maybe you can get him sorted.”

It was good advice, and I looked forward to doing just that. Sorting him out and making him mine. For the rest of the night, my gaze passed over the entrance to the bar again and again, waiting for the handsome fae to make good on his promise, but the hours slowly slipped by and Skylar never showed.

Days passed and I’d not seen hair nor hide of Skylar Larkspur. I was tempted to ask around town to find out if anyone else had seen him around, maybe even check in on The Owner at The Magic Shop down the street, but that felt too much like showing my belly.

My irritation slowly morphed into concern. And then I thought about the sad look in his eyes when we'd parted ways and started to worry that whatever trouble he'd been trying to escape may have caught up with him. After three long days of pining, I finally swallowed my pride and asked my cousin Frito where he was staying .

"The Purple Pegasus," Frito said as if he'd been expecting me to ask. "Room 205."

I nodded and left him to supervise the bar while I walked a few blocks over to the motel. I scanned the pool and courtyard surrounding it but didn't see him there.

Perhaps he was out picking flowers.

Rustling up my courage, I climbed the stairs to room 205 and gave the door a hearty knock. It took another moment for a muffled voice to respond, "I'll bring you your coin later."

Did he say coin ? Did Skylar owe someone money, some bad actor intent on exacting retribution? Was that why he'd been pick-pocketing at my bar? I knocked again. A few minutes later, the door swung open, and there stood a heartbreaking version of my sweet, soulful boy. His hair was rumpled as if he'd been lying down and it was now sticking up every which way, and he still wore the clothes I'd lent him days ago. It appeared as if he'd not showered since the morning he'd stayed over. Not only that, he'd also been crying. A lot.

"It's you," he said, sounding hopeful. Then his face fell as if tears were imminent.

"Sweetheart, are you okay?" I laid a hand on his shoulder. He nodded, then shook his head, the dam broke, and he started to bawl. "Skylar, can I come in?"

He stepped aside so that I might enter. The place looked almost as wrecked as him with dirty clothes strewn about and old fruit pits and food wrappers scattered



everywhere. Several empty bottles of Mind Eraser littered his dresser, and there was an overall mood of loneliness and despair.

“Baby,” I said, tugging him gently into my arms. “When’s the last time you left your room?”

“I don’t know,” he said, glancing around helplessly. “What day is it?”

Clearly, this poor boy was going through it. I sat on the bed and pulled him onto my lap, stroking along his back and taking care not to disturb his wings. I let him cry on my shoulder for a good long while and waited until he had somewhat recovered.

“I’m not normally like this,” he said, dabbing at his eyes with the hem of his (my) t-shirt.

“You’re hurting, huh?” I asked. He nodded, lower lip quivering and ducked his head again as if embarrassed. “How about you take a quick shower and then we’ll take a little walk?”

“Outside?” he asked, squinting at the closed curtains.

“A short walk, just to get some fresh air.”

“Okay.” He nodded and I helped him stand, steering him in the direction of the bathroom.

“I’m not usually this messy,” he said, glancing at the various makeup and hair products that covered the bathroom vanity.

“It’s okay if you are. I don’t mind a little mess.”

His wet, sparkling eyes glanced back at me, and he gave a watery smile. “I’m a whole lot of mess, Hiero.”

I nodded because I believed it. “But I’d bet you’re worth it. ”

He sighed pitifully and turned back toward the shower. I closed the door behind him to give him some privacy and went about cleaning up the room, bagging the trash to be dealt with later and gathering up his clothes in a pile to be laundered. Some of his things looked quite... delicate, and I couldn’t resist simply brushing the silky fabric with my fingertips. But other than clothes and toiletries, there wasn’t much of Skylar in the room—no photographs or personal items at all, which made me wonder if the contents of the room were all that he had.

I found something that looked relatively clean and laid it out for him on the bed, then took the bag of trash outside to the dumpster nearby.

By the time I’d returned, Skylar was just coming out of the bathroom with his damp hair wrapped in a towel, wearing the same robe he'd worn when he left my apartment.

“I haven’t done laundry,” he said with a frown.

“This looked clean enough.” I motioned to the bed where I’d laid out his clothing. “I can borrow some things that fit you better while you get your clothes laundered.”

“Oh. Oh dear,” he said and pressed the heels of his hands to his eyes.

“Cry if you need to. It’s never benefitted me holding it in.”

“You cry?” he asked as if stunned by my admission.

“Everyone cries, don’t they? I prefer to do it in the shower. Already wet. ”

He nodded, took a moment to compose himself, then went back to the bathroom with his clean set of clothing. A few minutes later he emerged, looking a bit more refreshed.

“Thank you for cleaning my room. I don’t usually...” he drifted off with another long, miserable sigh.

“It’s fine, baby. I’m happy to do it. Now how about that walk?”

## Page 9

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### Chapter nine

Skylar

“ I knew from the beginning we weren’t right for each other, but I kept making excuses,” I told Hiero regarding my relationship with Cedrych. “We even broke up once because he went on a ‘diplomatic mission,’ which was just an excuse to get some elvish ass. But he always managed to win me back with extravagant gifts or gestures. It helped that he paid for pretty much everything, and breaking up with him meant that I’d be out on the streets again, which I can assure you, is less than ideal...”

We were walking at a fast clip through a mountain trail, burning off some of my nervous energy as I rambled on about my shitty taste in men. It was springtime in the Dragonback Mountains and the daffodils and bluebells were in full bloom. They’d make a lovely arrangement, I decided, pausing to pick some from the trail’s edge. It occurred to me that Hiero probably didn’t want to hear the details of my failed relationship, though he had asked for the story. “I’m sorry. I’m doing that thing where I talk about my ex,” I said to him as an afterthought.

“I work at a bar. I’ve heard it all. Please, continue.”

I tucked away the flowers and said, “Well, the last straw was when he got betrothed. He didn’t even tell me himself. I had to hear about it from the Daily Scrolls –”

“Wait a minute, this fucker got betrothed... to someone else? After being with you for two years?” Hiero asked with incredulity.

“His fiancé is probably a much better match than me,” I said, though I hated to admit it. The betrothed in question was an elvish lord of some renown, and from the unsmiling portrait I’d seen in the Daily Scrolls , he gave off the same cold detachment as the queen herself. The write-up said he was a metal sorcerer too, which probably came in handy when fashioning enchanted weapons for the royal guard, which Cedrych captained. Their pairing made sense, even to me, and if Cedrych had been honest with me about his intentions, we could have parted ways without such acrimony. Instead, he’d treated me like I was completely disposable.

I could just imagine Queen Gwyneth’s delight in finally wresting her precious son away from my filthy clutches. Well played, Your Majesty.

“That’s fucked up,” Hiero said. “Like, really fucked up. Why wouldn’t he just ask you to marry him? ”

I glanced over to see if he was teasing me, but he seemed completely sincere. I supposed it was because he didn’t know much about fae customs.

“Because I’m just a guildless, unremarkable bit of fae trash,” I said. I hated that I’d internalized the queen’s cruel words, but no part of it was untrue.

“He said that to you?” Hiero asked. His massive shoulders tensed as if preparing to fight him. He was wearing a loose tank top, and I was slightly distracted by the way his biceps bunched and flexed, and the snatches of armpit hair I could see when he gesticulated with his hands.

“No, it was his mother, actually, but she wasn’t wrong.”

He stopped and turned me around to face him. “I don’t know about the whole guild thing or who this guy thought he was, but you are quite remarkable, Skylar Larkspur.” He brushed my cheek with his thumb, and I couldn’t help the fluttery

feeling in my stomach.

“That’s sweet of you to say,” I said, turning bashful.

“It’s true.”

We resumed our walk, but for a few moments I glowed with the quiet knowledge that Hiero thought I was remarkable.

“So, this guy sounds like an entitled ass,” Hiero said. “Rich or not, he didn’t appreciate you all that much, so it seems to me like you’re better off without him.”

“I know I am. I’m just a bit weak-willed when it comes to him. He can be very convincing, and I’ve forgiven him so many times already. I was afraid that if I stayed in Emrallt Valley, I might be tempted to do so again.”

“Then it’s a good thing you came here,” he said, and I was glad he thought I’d made the right decision.

“Yes, but now I’m getting day-drunk by the pool and wallowing in my own self-pity.” I sighed. “It’s pretty unattractive. I need to get a job. A real one. Not my... former occupation.”

“Have you always been a thief?” he asked, seemingly without any judgment.

“Both my parents are... free spirits,” I said, electing not to unpack all of my trauma right then, “and they never bothered to register me with a guild. It’s a process to say the least. They never bothered with me much at all, and by the time I was a fledgling, it was too late. The guildless are the outcasts of fae society. We can take on some odd jobs here and there, but nothing long-term or secure. And there are no protections on how we’re treated or how much we’re paid. So, to answer your question, yes, I’ve

always been a thief.”

The other occupation most common for the guildless was sex work. I’d dabbled in that as well (I must have “lost” my virginity a half-dozen times or more), and even when I thought objectively about my relationship with Cedrych, it was pretty much a sex-for-pay arrangement. What might Hiero think of me if he knew I was a whore too?

“Well, you’ve had to survive,” Hiero said, rousing me from my thoughts. “But you’re not in Emrallt Valley anymore. ”

“Old habits die hard, I suppose.”

“But there’s nothing stopping you from getting a job, say, at Church?”

I looked over at him cautiously and wondered if he was only being hypothetical. “I was going to ask you if you might need help around the bar, but then we went and...” I bit my lip. The sharpness of my teeth made it easy to draw blood. The metallic tang of it was familiar.

“That doesn’t have to change anything. I can keep my hands off you, if that’s what you want.”

Was it what I wanted? Not really. I wanted his hands all over me all the time, but I was in no state to enter into anything serious with the handsome minotaur, and something told me he was husband material. My honesty was all I could afford to give him.

“The problem is, I don’t know what I want. I enjoyed being with you, and I want to do it again, but I don’t want to ruin a potential friendship either. I don’t trust myself right now to make good decisions, so you probably shouldn’t trust me either.”

With a decisive nod, he said, “That settles it. You’ll come work at Church and hang out here in the mountains until you’re sure you’ve gotten your ex out of your system. What do you think of that plan?”

“It’s a good plan,” I said, grateful for his generosity and his guidance, for the simple fact that he’d come to my aid and roused me from my bout of depression. He’d treated me with care and kindness, both of which I knew were in short supply, regardless of the realm.

“Friends?” he asked and held out one large hand.

“Friends,” I said and took it.

I started that very same night at Church as a server, taking orders from the bar’s patrons and delivering them their drinks. The customers tipped well, especially the drunk ones, and I ended my shift with a purse full of coin that would pay for my room for at least another week. Once the last customer had departed, it was just the three of us left to close—Frito, Hiero, and me. I was stacking the chairs on the tabletops while Frito swept the floor and Hiero counted up the money at the register.

While Hiero was distracted, I took a moment to admire his muscular shoulders, strong arms, and capable hands. His hands were possibly my favorite feature. Thick digits with trimmed nails and hairy knuckles. The sort of hands that had known hard labor and could make an elegant cocktail as easily as repair a broken pipe. Hands that built things and fixed things and were surprisingly nimble despite their size .

I recalled our lovemaking a few nights ago, the way he’d caressed my body and made me feel so precious and adored. He’d said that he wanted to take care of me, and I suspected he meant more than just sex. Wasn’t that all that I’d ever wanted, someone to love and cherish, someone who would guide and protect me and help me make the right decisions?



I'd thought I'd had it with Cedrych, but I was wrong. Who's to say I wouldn't be wrong again?

"Did you make out okay?" Hiero asked me, startling me from my reverie.

"Yes, the customers were very generous."

"You going to buy some more food with that coin?"

I smirked. He was such a Daddy. "Are you implying that I need to ingest something other than Mind Eraser?"

"I assume you fae don't live on sunshine and moonbeams alone. Besides, it'd be a shame to erase such a beautiful mind." He winked at me and went back to his work, oblivious to the fact that I had melted into a puddle on the floor.

My parents had never given much thought to my needs. Usually only after crash landing from a cloud of euphoria would they take stock in their surroundings and remember they had a child who must be fed and watered. Then they might work a couple odd jobs to buy more ether and, if I was lucky, enough food to last the duration of their next high. It was feast or famine in our household, and I'd learned to hoard (or steal) what I'd need to make it through the lean times. I supposed that was why his concern for my well-being affected me so.

"When we finish up here, I'll walk you home," Hiero said, clearly mistaking my lingering gaze for something else.

"I don't mind walking alone."

"Not on my watch."

Twenty minutes later, we'd said goodbye to Frito, locked up the bar, and were strolling along the cobblestone street back to my motel. The fog lay heavy in the air and clung to my cheeks and eyelashes. The days were warming up but the nights were still cool with enough of a chill to give me goosebumps.

"You're cold," Hiero said, glancing around as if a jacket might materialize from thin air.

"I'm fine. Feels good after being in the bar. Are all the streets here made of cobblestone?"

"Yes, to prevent erosion. Aberthol laid many of the stones himself, with the help of the other monks, of course. That was before my time. The monks valued manual labor and prayer in equal measure."

"What happened to them all?"

"Most of the clergy fled with the other humans during the war. Aberthol stayed, but he passed away many years ago. Heart failure."

"I'm sorry," I said, for the loss must have affected him deeply.

"He was like a father to me, but I've had time to grieve. "

I turned my attention back to the cobblestone path laid out before us with such care. "That must have required a lot of patience to place every bit of stone just so," I remarked.

"It did, but that's what you do when building a foundation. The road was meant to last many, many years, and it has. It's worth spending time on the things you love." He caught my eye and smiled, but it was dangerous to read too much into his words.

“If you’re thinking about staying, I know some people in town who could rent you a place for a good price.”

“Thanks. I might take you up on that.”

I was still deciding my next moves, content for now to see how my future might pan out here in the mountains. I didn’t need much. Being without a guild or a stable family meant that I never knew which way the wind might blow me. Perhaps that was why I’d latched onto Cedrych with such ferocity. In a lot of ways, he’d brought order and stability to my life, even if the sum of my existence was to please him.

Still, some part of me was looking for another person to act as the unmovable center to my chaotic orbit, someone deserving of my love and devotion. It had taken me too long to realize Cedrych wasn’t it, but that didn’t mean I didn’t crave it. Perhaps that made me weak, the fact that I didn’t want to be alone, but I had been so lonely throughout my childhood, shunned by my peers and largely ignored by my parents. Until I met Monica, I hadn’t even known what true friendship was.

“I do want a place to belong,” I said to Hiero .

“Belonging is important,” he agreed, and it sounded like it came from experience. “You could belong here, Skylar.”

To you? I wondered, but I didn’t say it, only nodded in response to the sincerity shining in his eyes. We were quiet after that, but the silence was comfortable. Hiero had a peaceful aura about him. Monica, a true empath, could see auras. She’d once told me that Cedrych had a murky, pea-green aura, which indicated a restless, dissatisfied spirit. I figured she’d just told me that because she didn’t like him. I wondered about Hiero’s aura. What would Monica say if she met him? Would she like him? I hoped so.

Our arms were close enough to brush against each other as we walked. I really wanted to hold his hand, but I didn't want to send mixed messages. I liked him a lot , but I was a flaming hot mess right now, and I didn't want to toy with his heart. I suspected it was good and true.

"I wish I'd met you before," I said with more than a little longing when we finally reached my door.

"Before what?" he asked, staring at me with his kind, brown eyes.

"Before I became what I am now. Back when I was... better." When I was spirited and bold, when I could have given him all of me, instead of just the broken bits.

"You're hurting now, but you'll heal," he said with more confidence than I felt. "And besides, some of us have to learn things the hard way. "

I snorted bitterly. "Sounds like something to be etched on my gravestone."

"On the bright side, maybe now you'll know what to look for in a partner and who to avoid. All that glitters is not gold, pretty fae."

He tugged on the tail of my braid, and I gazed up at him, wanting to kiss him so badly, knowing it would be a mistake.

"Well," I said, caught up in my feelings yet again.

"Well," he said with an upward tick of his lips. "I guess this is goodnight."

"Thank you for walking me home."

"Any time. I'll see you tomorrow?"

“Yes, see you tomorrow.”

How easy it would have been to call him Daddy , but I bit my tongue, turned the handle, and went inside my room, shutting the door softly behind me. I listened to him breathe on the other side, wanting to tear down the physical barrier between us, wrap my arms around him and never let go. I waited until I heard his footsteps retreating, echoing a sense of loss in the pit of my stomach. There was a bottle of Mind Eraser in the chiller, but I ignored it in favor of a long, hot shower.

I'd wallowed enough. It was time for me to get my shit together.

### Chapter ten

#### Hiero

“Y ou thought it was a good idea to hire your fuck buddy?” Enid asked the next time she was at Church during one of Skylar’s shifts. It was Tusks and Tails night, and Enid was tending bar alongside me, not because she needed the money but because she wanted to get out of the house. Two mates and a litter of pups in addition to her clan responsibilities meant that tending bar at Church was more like a night off.

I cringed at her question. My sister had never been one to mince words. “We’re not fucking. Not anymore,” I informed her.

“Not for the last five days, huh?” she snarked.

I shot her a withering look and said, “We’re friends.”

“Uh huh. I always stare at my friends like I want to throw them over my shoulder and carry them back to my den. ”

Apparently, the attention I’d been paying to the handsome fae hadn’t gone unnoticed. Having Skylar at the bar was definitely a distraction, though not an unwelcome one.

“Am I that obvious?” I asked.

“You couldn’t be more obvious, Hiero.”

We might not be fucking, but my fascination with Skylar hadn't diminished in the slightest, especially after he'd opened up to me about his past. His upbringing had been rough, and he didn't have many people down in Emrallt Valley he could count on, only his tattoo artist friend Monica and his ex, the latter being a useless piece of shit as far as I could tell.

I also knew he had an eye for fashion and enjoyed dressing up for the occasion. One of his indulgences were the silk garments he wore, the creations of a fae designer with the singular name Oleander. The only way to launder his fine silks was to hang them up outside overnight and allow the morning dew to cleanse the delicate fabric while spiders restitched the webbing, using the sticky threads to trap their prey. Skylar told me that if you weren't diligent in offering the spiders their blood meals upon parting, they would shred the clothing to bits.

He was wearing one of those garments tonight, a skin-tight number that matched his eyes. The shimmering singlet showed off his bare shoulders and plunged to his waist in the back, allowing his wings the space to breathe, though he kept them folded up while he was working. Across his chest, the points of his nipples pushed against the fabric, a tantalizing tease. I'd made the mistake earlier of asking how he was meant to use the bathroom, and he'd told me there were hidden slits for that purpose and "other things too." The last bit he'd said with a saucy wink. Now, it was all I could think about, tugging the luxurious fabric aside to get at his shell-pink hole, licking him like he was a field of sweet clover and sinking into that silken heat.

He'd look good with a collar, I thought absently, something lightweight and elegant, to highlight the long line of his neck, with a drop pendant jewel that matched his eyes. Amethyst, perhaps? But that was the sort of gift reserved for a much deeper commitment, and Skylar and I were just friends .

"We should make a wager," Enid was saying. I'd somehow forgotten we were in the middle of a sibling heart-to-heart, Enid's version of it anyway.

“Oh yeah, what’s that?” I asked.

“I’ll bet you a night of babysitting that you don’t last another week before you bed him again.”

“A whole week, huh?” I chewed on that for a spell. “How many of your pups are we talking about here?”

“All of them.”

Enid and her mates had a half-dozen pups, all of them wonderful and wild in their own way.

“And what do I get outta this?” I asked.

“I won’t bug you about your questionable taste in men for the next six moons.”

“It’s not my fault none of these cads want to settle down,” I lamented .

She laughed and held out her hand so we could shake on it. Having to confess my weakness to Enid might improve my willpower.

“Hiero,” she admonished a moment later. “You can’t even look away from him for the duration of this conversation. I feel bad taking advantage.”

I doubted she felt bad about it at all, more like smug.

“I’m just making sure no one bothers him. Folks around here like to get handsy.” I’d noticed a few patrons letting their hands linger a little too long on his bare shoulder or the small of his back. If I caught someone touching his wings...



“You’re playing with fire, little brother. What do you always tell us about having our significant others at the bar?” she said.

“It’s a headache nobody wants.”

“Exactly. Ahem,” Enid said and nodded to a waiting customer.

I took their order, and while mixing their drink, I thought about the cocktail I might prepare for Skylar at the end of the night. He liked clear spirits with herbal infusions and fruit spritzes. He had a sweet tooth too, and nabbed cherries when he thought no one was looking. But beyond garnishes, he hadn’t stolen anything from the bar. In fact, he was a hard worker with a good memory for drink orders, and I hadn’t had anyone complain about him yet. Of course, it didn’t hurt that he was nice to look at. A lot could be forgiven with looks and charms such as his .

It was nearing closing time when I noticed Skylar hadn’t visited the bar lately. I scanned the room and saw him trying to make his way through the dance floor with a tray of empty glasses. The bar was less crowded than before, but the patrons were well past tipsy and bordering on sloppy. It seemed the ogre brothers had detained him. Skylar was trying graciously to refuse their advances, but they weren’t getting it through their thick skulls.

I circled the bar and made my way over in five seconds flat. “Is there a problem here?” I growled.

“No problem,” Skylar said, pushing one of them aside to join me where I stood.

“Skylar, go help Frito,” I said tersely.

He shot me a worried glance but obeyed while I looked the ogres up and down. “The fae is an employee now, not a patron.”

“Still as slutty as ever,” the one-tusked brother said with an obnoxious guffaw.

I gripped his arm roughly. “You will treat him with respect, or you will find another watering hole to frequent.”

“Or I’ll fuck him if I feel like it,” the ogre boasted. “I heard the fae are flexible down there. He can probably take us both at once, eh brother?”

My grip on the ogre tightened as I attempted to quell the gathering mist of red. My horns pointed downward, poised to skewer the bastard’s rib cage. His brother interceded, carefully unshackling my fingers from the offender’s mossy green bicep .

“Now, now, bull, no need to charge. Just tell us he’s your bitch, and we’ll keep our hands off him.”

“Your hands, maybe,” the other one said.

“He’s not anyone’s anything, but you will respect him as you would your own mother,” I snapped.

“Ma didn’t have an ass like that,” the one-tusked ogre practically shouted, then said with a lascivious grin, “Have you bedded him yet? I’d bet his hole is tighter than the fae queen’s girdle. I’d pay good money to see that puppy whine. Might even let him come if he begged for it hard enough.”

The ogre’s fantasies hit a little too close to home, making me feel like an absolute brute myself. Had I taken advantage of Skylar’s precarious situation?

“I think it’s time for you boys to go home,” I said. I grabbed them both by their upper arms and steered them to the door so Frito could take it from there. “Have a good night, gentlemen, and remember, you lay hands on my staff, I’ll break your fingers.”

“Cucked already,” one of them muttered as they stumbled off into the night. The rest of the patrons filed out soon after and then it was just Skylar and me cleaning up. I’d told him before that he didn’t have to stay for closing, but truthfully, I liked having him around, and I didn’t want him to walk home alone. He was still a stranger in town. Messing with me meant calling down the entire Wolfsbane Clan, and until I could offer him the same protection—as a friend, of course—I wanted to keep him close .

I dragged the couple of chairs from outside into the bar and locked the front door. When I turned back around, Skyler was dancing with his mop to a song that was a little sad and a little bit sweet too. It reminded me of the fae himself. When he saw me watching, he grinned sheepishly. “Monica and I used to sing this one whenever we were feeling some kind of way.”

“I might make for a better dance partner than your mop.”

He set the mop aside and held out his arms. I went over and embraced him, feeling strangely settled in my spirit and grateful to Enid for the dance lessons she’d given me years ago so that I wouldn’t embarrass her at her wedding.

We swayed to the music, and I was nervous at first, palms sweaty, heart racing, but then we sort of sighed into the movements. He felt natural and right in my arms, so willing to be led. Skylar drew nearer and rested his head on my shoulder, his soft hair brushing against my cheek. One of my hands migrated to the small of his back while the other held his hand. We danced through the end of that song and the next one too. Was it foolish to imagine a time when we might dance like this at our own wedding?

“Thank you,” he said, when he pulled away at last. “I miss being held.”

I nodded and cleared my throat while thinking there was nothing I wanted to do more. “It’s not a hardship,” I said.

“You’re a good man, aren’t you, Hierophant Wolfsbane?”

I shrugged. I tried to be, though Lord knows, I’d done my share of sinning, especially when my temper got the best of me. The simple fact was, I liked this fae... a lot. And I wanted to get to know him better. It was a full moon tomorrow night, which meant the bar was closed so that my kin could run with the other shifters and conduct clan business. I planned to go riding in the daytime, but it might be nice to have some company.

“You want to go riding with me tomorrow?” I asked before I could overthink it.

Merriment danced in his eyes. “What will we ride, my good sir?”

Heat crawled up the back of my neck at his innuendo. “My motorcycle.”

“Ah.” His head tilted in a sprightly way. “I’ve never ridden a motorcycle before.”

“I’m a good driver. We can take it over the mountains and down to the coast, have a picnic by the beach.”

“I haven’t seen the water in so long,” he said wistfully.

“So, you’ll come?”

“It’s a date,” he said, then quickly corrected himself. “A date between friends.”

“Friends,” I said softly, though I’d be lying if I said I didn’t want more.

### Chapter eleven

#### Skylar

My nerves at going for a ride with Hiero were only in part due to the fact I'd never been on a motorcycle before. They were banned in Emrallt Valley, for the Guild had deemed them too noisy and disruptive for polite society, not to mention they were altogether too human. Most human inventions, even those that were allowed, were considered low-class by my kind.

Still, human artifacts were coveted by some and collected by others. Monica and I had done a good trade in human goods on the black market before the Guild started cracking down on smuggling. Summoners were almost banned in Emrallt Valley because of their access to the internet, Goddess forbid it!

But outside Emrallt Valley, it seemed there were fewer rules on noise and decorum. I could probably run naked down the street here and no one would even bat an eye. It was as freeing as it was frightening, for where were the boundaries in this lawless shifter realm ?

And in addition to my nerves, there was also the constant buzz of arousal I experienced whenever Hiero was near. My wings hummed with anticipation, which was distracting and slightly embarrassing. It didn't help that the minotaur wore his tight leather pants and a black tank top stretched across his broad chest. His reflective sunglasses combatted the sun's glare and his helmet had cut-outs for his horns. He was a leather daddy in all his glory with a beast of a machine thrumming between his thick, tree-trunk thighs. I hadn't been so rattled by the presence of a man since I'd

been a fledgling first experiencing sexual attraction.

Not that Hiero noticed, thank the Goddess. He seemed blissfully unaware of my half-hard cock and vibrating wings as he fit me with a spare helmet. He mounted his bike the same way I imagined him straddling my face and kick-started the engine. The smell of leather, spice, and oil struck me dizzy, and a snake of desire wound through me as he revved his engine (and mine as well). Such sweet torment.

“Hop on, gorgeous,” he said with a wide grin.

Hop on I did, making sure to tuck my wings tightly so they’d not catch the wind. I wrapped both my arms around him, drinking in his potent scent. He had bulk and brawn in all the right places, a nice, meaty man to cozy up to on cold, winter nights. Yes, Daddy, I thought when the bike first accelerated, then immediately scolded myself. He was my boss now, for Goddess’s sake. I’d never had a real job before, but I was pretty sure that banging your boss was a big no-no. Which was why I had to be careful not to sit with my groin rubbing up against him or else my throbbing erection would surely give me away.

Think of something else, Skylar. Literally anything else.

The weather! The weather was beautiful today, mid-spring with a slight breeze and the bugs merrily going about their business. The bees were out in abundance, which was always reassuring, since honey was the main food source for my people. They buzzed among fields of wildflowers, the air fresh and sweet as we climbed higher into the Dragonback Mountains.

There were no longer dragons here, as far as I knew, but the mountain peaks resembled the sharp points of a dragon’s spine, and it was rumored that they’d once built their nests on the craggy cliffs that overlooked the sea. The humans had hunted the dragons to extinction, polluted the land, and made trouble for magical creatures

besides, which was the reason their kind were run off from the Arcane Isles in the War of the Realms many years ago. The war ended before I was born, but my mother said it was a bloody time indeed. And after the humans were forced to flee, elemental sorcerers magicked wards to hide our isles from humankind so that none would return.

There were still a few humans remaining here and there, mostly halflings like Hiero, but they were spread out amongst the isles and did not cause trouble.

I hung on for dear life during some of the hairpin turns and switchbacks, laughing with adrenaline and a bit of fear too. Hiero handled his bike exceptionally well, never giving me cause to truly worry, and he whooped it up along with me as if experiencing the thrill for the first time. My thighs brushed against his leather and reminded me of a few nights ago when he'd laid me out on his four-poster bed and told me exactly what he wanted from me in his deep, dominant voice.

But he was my boss now and my friend, not my Daddy.

At the top of the mountain, we pulled over to look out over the expanse of the lands surrounding us. To the east was Emrallt Valley where the rich forest lands gave way to the emerald green pastures of our territory and the reason for the name. I could just make out the glittering spires and battlements of Queen Gwyenth's Crystal Castle and wondered if Cedrych had been sparring with his guardsmen lately to help deal with his stress. That and sex were how he managed the pressures of the court. Sometimes he drank too much and picked fights with strangers. Or he'd start an argument with me, which usually ended up with us hurling insults at one another until it devolved into rough sex.

Truthfully, I hadn't liked the person I was with Cedrych. Even when we weren't fighting, we didn't bring out the best in each other. And though the circumstances of our breakup wounded me deeply, it needed to happen. Which meant that Cedrych's

wellbeing was no longer my concern.

Beyond the valley were the Eastern Highlands, an agrarian extension of Queen Gwyneth's kingdom where we grew food and tended to the many apiaries that nourished our people, and just beyond that were the Lunar Straits which separated fae lands from elvish.

"It is said that the fae and the elvish were once kin," I told Hiero. I'd learned this bit of lore from my mother who'd tended Goddess Imogen's temple before falling in love with my father, a musician of some renown. By the time I was walking and talking, my father had sold off most of his instruments and rarely performed, but my mother had retained much of our oral history and shared it with me in her rare moments of lucidity. "The Goddess Imogen is protector of the Arcane Isles, and it is said the two big islands were once connected." I pointed to the Cysgodion Cliffs in the distance, so named because of their silver shimmer. The way the sunlight reflected off the rock face blinded sailors and cast long, treacherous shadows on the water, which made them dangerous to navigate in the daytime.

"But there was a civil war, so Imogen created the Lunar Straits to split the island in two. The folk on this side of the channel became known as the fae and those on the other, the elvish. The elvish didn't have access to the sweet nectars of the valley, which caused their young to be born without wings. And the fae didn't have access to the eternal flame which powers elvish innovation. Imogen did this to make both sides suffer until a compromise could be met."

"And was a compromise met?" Hiero asked.

"There is still much prejudice and distrust on both sides, one of the reasons Queen Gwyneth keeps both elvish and fae in her court and sends her sons on regular emissary trips to elvish territory."



As a mother-in-law, Queen Gwyneth would have been an absolute nightmare, but as a ruler, she was savvy and strategic. There had been peace in Emrallt Valley for as long as I'd been alive, a recent development.

"I admit I do not know much about your people," Hiero said humbly.

"Then it's good you have me to act as your ambassador."

A mountain breeze lifted one of Hiero's forelocks and I had a vision of us many moons from now, standing in this very same place and making sacred vows to one another. Such a silly daydream.

"The Goddess blesses us," I said, turning my face toward the wind.

He glanced around with bemusement. "And how do you know?"

"Just a feeling. But what about your god, Hiero? What do you believe?"

Hiero told me of his own sacred rights—daily prayers and reflection, trying to be a good, charitable Christian. Hiero said that he tried to follow the path of their savior by welcoming every patron into Church, regardless of their ancestry or their past.

"I like that teaching," I said. It was one of the reasons I'd felt so comfortable being myself around him. He didn't judge or seek to exclude others because of who they were, the one exception being their own bad behavior.

"Aberthol offered shelter and safety to worshippers of every kind at the monastery, even those who had no god," Hiero said.

"Was Aberthol both a pagan and a Christian?" I asked.

Hiero tilted his head in a contemplative way. “Yes and no. Aberthol believed in the existence of many gods but prayed only to his one God. Faith is complicated.”

“I agree with you on that.”

The breeze turned chilly and we both gazed east to where a storm was brewing over elvish lands. “We’d better continue on before the weather turns,” Hiero said.

The trip down the mountain felt like when I was first learning to fly. The sharp bends and turns gave me a swooping feeling in my stomach, but I loved the rush of the wind in my face, being forced to hold onto Hiero so tightly. At one point, he started howling, and I heard the answering calls from what I assumed were the various shifter clans. I didn’t know how they’d come to inhabit Dragonback Mountains, but in Emrallt Valley, we were taught to give them a wide berth.

We also passed by grassy plateaus where humans had once raised cattle and sheep but had since abandoned their flocks. The animals now roamed freely, their only natural predators being the wolves and the occasional vampyre, if the rumors were true. We beat the rain to the coast and found shelter from the storm in a covered cove where Hiero proceeded to lay out a blanket and picnic with all my favorite foods.

“How did you know I liked these?” I asked, popping a mallow fruit into my mouth and savoring its sweet, sticky flavor.

“I paid The Owner of The Magic Shop a visit this morning,” he said shyly.

“That was very thoughtful of you. Try this.” I gave him a bite of my saffron stick. He chewed it for a moment, then went wide-eyed.

“Spicy,” he said.

“Yes, the kick comes later. What sorts of foods do you eat?”

“Greens mostly. Grasses, legumes, alfalfa, clover, and hay in the winter if I can't get fresh grass. Some other fruits and vegetables are fine, but I can't eat too many processed foods. I have a sensitive stomach.”

“And may I ask you a personal question?” I said and he nodded for me to continue. “I noticed you wear a lot of leather.”

He smiled. “I don't eat meat or dairy, but I have a cousin who works in leather. It's made from the hides of the animals my shifter kin have hunted and killed. It's best to use all parts.”

“And do you know anything about your birth parents?” I asked.

“I was a foundling when I was left on the monastery doorsteps by a woman with long, dark hair. That was all Aberthol was able to tell me. Most of the humans have since perished or fled, so I wouldn't even know where to look.”

Both of us had been abandoned. Hiero's was a physical abandonment while mine was an emotional one, always wanting more from parents who were unable or unwilling to give it. But Hiero had found his people, his tribe, while I was still searching.

“Your teeth are rather sharp,” he said. “Do you eat meat?”

“We can drink blood for nutrition if we must, but it has some negative side effects. Most fae prefer flower nectar, fruits, and honey.” The result of a blood binge was a days-long lethargy that could easily slide into depression.

“You are like the vampyre in that way,” he said.

“And the elvish, though it’s considered an act of desperation. Only the poorest among us will resort to it.”

I’d drank my fair share of rat blood alongside Monica when times were lean. I recalled the two of us sharing a bare mattress on the floor with our bellies bloated, our lips smeared with blood, and dead carcasses all around us. It hadn’t been pretty but we’d survived. It made me cherish the simple pleasure of a picnic even more.

I didn’t want to sour our date with my morbid thoughts, so I picked up a jar of pickled prickly pear and offered some to Hiero. He was amenable to my suggestion, which I appreciated. I liked a man who was open to new experiences. Finally, with our taste buds singing and our appetites sated, we laid ourselves out on the blanket to watch the steady patter of rain outside our dry little nest.

“Tell me your dreams, Hierophant Wolfsbane,” I said, for I suspected a man like him must have some.

“I’d like to have a family one day,” he said, sounding wistful. “A loving partner who wants to build a life with me, a few little ones running around the yard.”

A simple dream, but also so profound.

“You haven’t found them already?” I said with disbelief. “I’m surprised no one has scooped you up.”

“None of the men I’ve dated seem to want to stick around.”

He sounded so hurt when he said it. My heart twisted at the yearning in his voice. Clearly, those men were fools. “Have you had a boy before?”

“I’ve tried a few times to keep a boy, but they always end up getting bored up here in

the mountains and acting out. Or maybe it's just me that's tiresome. I like routine and order. I can be set in my ways. Some partners find that stifling."

I'd seen him dig in his heels and be stern, especially when it came to my safety or that of his kin, but I didn't find it stifling.

"I can't imagine you being all that tough. You seem rather soft to me," I teased.

Smiling, he said, "I can be persuaded with sweet talk, but I do believe in rules and discipline."

Rules sounded like a comfort to me, and discipline... that was an area I'd yet to explore .

"What about someone from one of the shifter clans?" I asked.

"I've dated a few, but there's a special connection that shifters share with their own kind. When they shift together, it's a level of intimacy I can't offer."

I rolled onto my side so I could take hold of his hand. "You'll find him. Someone who appreciates your compassion and loyalty, who thrives under your steady hand and wants to help raise your children. I know that person is out there."

Hiero nodded, his eyes a little misty. "I hope so. My nights up in these mountains sure do get lonely sometimes. Whenever I hear the cry of a lone wolf, I know exactly how they feel." He sighed and rubbed his face. "How about you, Skylar Larkspur of the fae? What do you want from this life?"

I tried to imagine my future, but it was all so fragmented and chaotic at the moment. In my formative years, I'd been too focused on keeping my wings off the chopping block to really contemplate anything else. Even as Cedrych's kept boy, I was

constantly worried my luck wouldn't last. I'd lived in the moment, never really planning for my future, never investing in myself. I supposed I was like my parents in that way.

"The one thing I know for certain is that I don't want what I had before, to be bought with gifts or money." I risked a glance at him, wondering if he'd be put off by my past, but he only nodded for me to continue. "But I like being here with you, listening to your hopes and dreams. You seem to have it all figured out. "

"Not even close," he said with a good-natured grin. "But I like being here with you too." He squeezed my hand, then brought my fingers to his lips where they lingered. Our eyes caught, and I wasn't sure who moved first, but like a flame to dry tinder I was suddenly in his lap with my mouth on his, tasting the sweetness of the pear and the spice from the saffron stick we'd shared. His hand was on my back and his fingers brushed against my wings ever so gently.

"I like it when you touch me," I confessed, my arousal flowing through me like sap from a tree on a warm spring day.

"I like touching you, baby boy."

It was on the tip of my tongue to call him Daddy , but I didn't want to make any assumptions. It had been sexy and fun our first night together, but I was starting to believe I wanted it to mean something more. Something longer-term. And yet, the last thing I wanted was to break his heart the way mine had been broken.

"I know that we're just friends," I said in a rush of nerves and adrenaline, "and you're my boss, and this is probably a terrible idea, but would you make love to me, Hiero? Will you be my Daddy for as long as the rain lasts, right here, right now?"

Hiero's smile was a blessing from the Goddess above.

“Skylar, sweetheart, I want nothing more.”

### Chapter twelve

Hiero

I t wasn't my intention to seduce Skylar when I'd asked him on this outing, but now he was calling me Daddy and begging me to make love to him. He stirred up all of my protective instincts, my dominant ones too; Skylar was a Daddy's boy through and through.

What else could I do but oblige?

"Have you ever had a Daddy before?" I asked as he straddled my lap and I dropped kisses on his neck, collarbone, and shoulder, savoring his sweet, honeyed skin.

"None who have lasted," he said.

"You're ex didn't want that?"

"Not unless you count the fact that he paid all my bills. He didn't want the responsibility. He didn't think it was... appropriate."

Fuck what was appropriate, what felt good to Skylar? What did my boy need?

"What do you need from your Daddy?" I asked .

"Constant reassurance and validation," he said with a self-deprecating grin. "I wish I was kidding."



“Okay. What else?”

“Structure, stability, someone to tell me when I’m making a bad decision and correct me when I’m wrong. Someone to hold me when I’m sad...” He drifted off, seeming to remember a time when he was denied that simple comfort.

“And you want me to provide it?” I asked, tugging on his hair so I could see his face.

“If you’re willing. When I saw you in the bar with your horns and your leather, I thought, there’s a Daddy right there. My Daddy.” He glanced away shyly. “At least for the night.”

I wanted him for more than one night, more than just one tryst in a cave, but I didn’t want to pressure him into anything. My desire was strong, but I had to show restraint.

“What does having a Daddy mean to you?” I asked as my hands moved of their own accord, caressing his firm buttocks and molding to the curve of his lower back. His helpless whimpers only egged me on.

“Someone who will take care of me? Someone to belong to? A strong, caring man who will guide me. I don’t know if that means discipline or punishment, but it might.”

I nodded in encouragement while kissing his neck. “What else, baby boy?”

“Someone safe, someone who I can just... let go with.”

“You’re safe with me, Skylar. ”

I reached into the slit in his pants, two fingers pressed against his wet hole. Musical moans filled the quiet cave as he arched back. I’d need to get him some leather for his

protection if he kept riding with me, but for now, I appreciated the easy access of his whimsical clothing.

“And what do you need here?” I asked as I eased one digit inside him.

“I need...” he said brokenly.

“Skylar,” I growled, thoroughly enjoying his torment, “answer the question, boy.”

“I need to be told what to do, in bed. I like to be.... hmmm.” He gasped when I nudged his sweet spot.

“You like to be what?” I coaxed, nibbling at his lower lip, sweet and plump as a ripe fig.

“I like to be used. Called names. I like it rough sometimes, Daddy. To be treated like an object, but then I liked to be cuddled afterwards too.”

I could do all of that easily. Gladly.

“You told me your safeword was succotash. That will be mine too. We can talk about our other kinks and hard limits later, but for now, I want you lying on your back.”

He hustled to follow my order, spreading himself on the picnic blanket like a feast, hair pooling around his face like spilled ink. “That’s it,” I said with appreciation. “Spread those sweet cheeks for Daddy. Show me your greedy little hole.”

Reaching down with both hands, he opened the gap in his pants, exposing his silken treasure. With the barest brush of my fingertip, his tight bud awakened. Beads of fluid glistened on his pink flesh like morning dew, and I put some to my lips, tasting his honeysuckle flavor.

“Your hole looks hungry,” I said.

He nodded fervently, so I pushed two fingers inside him, his supple flesh giving way easily, seducing me with its soft, velvety texture. His cock was outlined in all its glory by his tight pants, and I wondered if he’d ever topped with that beautiful beast. I’d rarely bottomed myself, mostly because it took a lot of trust on my part to allow it, and the men I’d dated weren’t shit.

“Take out your cock. Nutsack too. I want to see it all,” I commanded.

He tugged on the material until he was fully exposed, skin so pale that I could see his branching blue veins underneath his skin. I cupped his balls in my hand like twin plums, tugging slightly. What might they look like after a little sensual torture? I squeezed them tighter and Skylar moaned, tearing at his hair. He looked like a proper slut, bare chested with his legs spread wide and his sex on display. I reached up to twist his nipples until they were tight, red raspberries. Judging from the gasps of pleasure he made, a pair of nipple clamps were in his near future.

“Daddy,” Skylar purred like a house cat. He’d not made any demands, just soaked up my ravenous gaze and attention. Why his ex hadn’t locked him down was a mystery to me. Some men couldn’t recognize a masterpiece when they were looking right at it .

“Undo my pants and take out my cock,” I said to him, and he leaned up on one elbow to follow my instruction, still with his bottom skewered by my two thick fingers. It was a feat for him to unzip my pants and peel away the leather far enough to uncage the beast. He hadn’t complained the last time about my size, but I’d need to go easy.

“Suck me now, Skylar,” I said, testing his obedience. His violet eyes flared with arousal before he folded himself forward to comply.

I gripped the back of his head with my free hand. Silken strands of onyx slipped through my fingers as I slowly rocked into his mouth. My hips flexed and my ass cheeks tightened on every forward thrust as my tail wrapped around his neck, not enough to choke him but to feel the sensation of his throat working me down. He should be gagging, even retching, but my length didn't seem to faze him. He took me to the root with my ponderous balls slapping against his chin.

"Yeah, baby," I cooed as he swallowed around me, throat tightening like a slipknot. "You're so good at this. Pretty little cocksucker. Play with my nuts too. Let's see how well you can multitask."

He fondled me with one clever hand, pinching and squeezing. His fingernails scraped along my pebbled skin, pleasure edged with pain. He was folded up like a contortionist, and I remembered the comment the ogre had made about a fae's flexibility "down there." Was that the reason he'd adapted so easily to my size? Could he take my fist too?

"Christ almighty," I said on a sharp exhale. "You'd better stop before I come."

He didn't though. He gave me a few more long, leisurely pulls with his cocoon-like throat, as if trying to coax the cum from my nuts until I finally managed to pull him off me. His mischievous smile told me he was a bit of a brat too, which only enticed me further. Cherry-red lips were glazed with spit and his luminous eyes pooled with tears as he awaited his next instruction. It was a heady intoxication to be looked upon in that way. And a sobering responsibility too. I dropped down to kiss his sinfully sloppy mouth, tasting my own sweat and musk on his lips and beneath it, the sweetness I'd come to associate with his skin. One of his sharp teeth grazed my lower lip and I pulled back.

"I'm sorry," he said, eyes wide as if I might hurt him.

“I don’t mind.” I licked the blood from the puncture in my lip. As far as pain went, I was more concerned about the hard floor. The bedrock was going to be hell on my knees, but at least I had my thick leathers to protect me. “Lay back now. I got to get you ready for my cock.”

“I can take it,” he said, almost urgently. “I want to feel you, all of you at once. Please, Daddy?”

“You’re going to have to get back on my bike after this, and I don’t want you in pain the whole ride home. Trust Daddy to know what’s best.”

He nodded and I worked three fingers inside him, stretching his tight ring of muscle with a mounting urgency. “You want to take this off?” I asked regarding his pants, but he only reached down and tugged at the slit until it ripped wide open. With his gaping, wet cherry exposed, he looked thoroughly debauched.

I’d never been hungrier in my life.

Wordlessly, in grunts and moans, my baser instincts took over. I pushed back on his thighs to mount him at the best angle, then fed my girthy member into his slick hole. Like dipping my dick into a vat of warm honey, I didn’t know where he fit all that cock, but I’d swear I could see my shaft moving under the tautness of his abdomen.

“Ohhhhh,” Skylar said, his expression dissolving into a serrated groan. Eager and a little impatient too, he started rocking on my pole to get me deeper, so I grabbed his wrists and pinned them above his head.

“Settle down,” I commanded, and he obeyed—just barely—his body twitching and squirming beneath me like a soul possessed. I nipped at his neck to remind him who was in charge here. “You are a wild one,” I said with appreciation. Gone was the timid fae who was too shy to ask for a break during work, who deferred to me and

customers alike. Here was my hellion.

“But I want you, Daddy,” he said plaintively. I scooped him up into my arms so that I might kiss his beautiful lips and head off his impatience. Kneeling there on the blanket, I held him to me with his channel milking my cock and his head lolling around like he was drunk. “Goddess, no one has ever filled me the way you do,” he said.

“A perfect fit,” I agreed. I rolled my hips slowly, watching him move on top of me. He moaned in concert with my thrusts, long neck bared as an offering. My pleasure was second only to the connection we shared, the way he responded on instinct to my every subtle shift and wordless command. His body was an instrument I was still learning to play, but I sure liked the sound of it.

“Is that good for you, baby boy?” I asked. “Am I giving you what you need?”

“Yes, Daddy, I can feel you brushing against my womb.”

“I want to put a pup in you so bad,” I whispered into his hair. His eyes flashed open to meet mine, and he bit his lower lip with his sharp teeth, drawing blood. I kissed his bloody lips. “Don’t worry, baby. You said yourself, it can’t happen.”

“I know,” he said softly.

“But I do want to breed you. That’s my kink. Coating your insides with my seed and then plugging your hole. Your mouth warming my cock until I’m ready to go again. Dumping load after load in your sweet cunt and watching you struggle to keep it inside you.”

“Oh, Daddy,” he said, a little breathless.

“You want to be Daddy’s little cumslut?”

“Yes. As much as you want to give me, I’ll take it. I’m a greedy boy, Daddy. ”

With my dick now meeting no resistance, I rewarded his patience by bottoming out inside him. He gasped and cried out so prettily.

“Goddess above,” he said, eyelids fluttering.

“You like that?”

“Love that, Daddy. Do it again.”

I pulled back and slid in deep, holding him there while I nudged the opening of his womb. It fluttered against my cockhead, as delicate as butterfly wings. He keened like a wolf pup and shivered from the sensation.

“Has anyone touched you there before?” I asked.

“No, you’re the first.”

The prideful part of me liked that, but I knew the danger in it too. My dick alone wasn’t enough to keep him—I’d learned that lesson the hard way. Tugging on his hair, I forced his face to the side and sucked a berry-red bruise on his pale neck, marking my territory for everyone at the bar to see. As much as I liked seeing the shape of my mouth there, I wanted something more permanent, to brand him, collar him, tattoo my name on his ass.

“Your skin tastes so sweet, so smooth and soft, decorated like a work of art,” I murmured while thrusting into him again. My balls slapped against his backside, his pert cheeks pillowing his descent. “I like your warm sticky hole too, so tight around

my cock. Flex for me baby, show Daddy what you can do.” He tightened up around me, sucking me in deeper. “Yeah, I want you to do that when I come, Skylar. Suck my seed into your womb where it belongs. Be my little breeder.”

“Yes, Daddy.”

“Atta boy. What are greedy little holes like yours good for?” I asked, giving him a few short pumps to make him bounce.

“They’re good for taking Daddy’s dick and draining the cum from his big, hairy balls.”

I smiled. “That’s right, and I’m going to be soaking your insides soon enough.”

“I want it,” he said.

I stretched my neck and ground out my lust. Reaching around to his backside, I felt where my cock was slipping in and out of him, such an erotic slide of flesh. His tattoos shimmered and shifted like heat waves, and I watched them, momentarily dazed, while we fucked like animals in the enchanted cave.

“Can I hold onto your horns?” he asked.

I tilted my head as an invitation and his fingers wrapped around their base. I shivered from the sensitivity. It was rare for me to allow anyone to touch my horns, but I liked giving Skylar that measure of control. I rearranged our positioning so that I was sitting on my ass to give my knees a break and let him take over for a spell. Gripping my horns, he rode me at his leisure, body undulating like a ribbon, violet eyes blown out with lust, and his red mouth open and panting. Watching him grind on my dick was enough to make me come undone, but I held it together, wanting to stretch out this exquisite pleasure a little longer .



“You’re going to have to ride home with that rip in your pants and my cum leaking out of your backside,” I mused, liking the sound of it. “You’re going to make a mess of my bike, just like I’m making a mess of you.”

“Daddy, I’m so close. I’m ready for your load,” he said while bouncing on my dick, flush-faced and glowing.

“Not yet, baby boy,” I murmured with a little too much affection as my hands latched onto his ass cheeks to slow him down.

“Please, Daddy,” he begged, his voice ragged, the hair at his temples damp with sweat.

“Wait until I give you permission. Can you do that for me, Skylar?”

“I can try.”

I laid him back down on the blanket and concentrated on fucking the sense out of us both in a race to the finish. My tail coiled around his swollen shaft, pumping him in time with my strokes. He held onto my horns for dear life as I steamrolled his slender body, slamming into him with heady abandon. When my balls started to throb with my oncoming release, I said sharply, “Come for me, boy.”

His channel squeezed my cock like a fist and he wailed, spurting sweet cream all over his smooth, dewy stomach. Grabbing his thighs, I yanked him closer for my final few thrusts. Suspended in a state of bliss, my own orgasm thundered through me and shook me to my core. I unleashed a flood, glazing his insides with my seed while his womb pulsed around the head of my cock as if lapping it up.

How we must look, a horned, half-bull beast fucking a delicate fae on the hard ground. The erotic picture it painted had me plumping up again, pushing against the

walls of his channel. I gazed down on my blissed-out boy while he hummed and smiled, his eyelids drooping lazily in his post-coital daze. “Daddy,” he rumbled in his deep, throaty timbre.

I kissed him all over, his forehead, both cheeks, his pointed ears and his chin. When my cock finally snaked out of him, I pushed back on his knees to see the evidence of our passions, a steady stream of my thick, white spunk dripping from his twitching hole, my own fantasy made real. The spiders were going to have a hell of a time cleaning up this mess.

“How long will it take you to tighten up?” I asked, swiping his swollen rim with my thumb and pushing some of my seed back inside. His bud sucked on my digit like a hungry mouth.

“An hour or so,” he said lazily. “But you don’t have to wait if you don’t want to. I’m ready to go again.”

Tempting.

“Was I too rough?” I asked.

He gazed at his own splash of cum drying on his stomach while absently stroking his nipples with the back of his hand. His cock listed to one side, half-hard again, and I wondered if I might have met my match. “Just right,” he said.

“I can be gentle too. I have range.”

“That was perfect. Just what I wanted.”

The rain had stopped coming down and rays of sunlight filtered into our quiet cave, highlighting the mess I’d made of him, though truthfully, I was just as wrecked. I

recalled some of the things I'd said, particularly the bit about putting a pup in him, and found that I did not regret it.

"I like the way you look at me," he said as I lay down beside him to bask in the sweet afterglow.

"Yeah, how's that?"

He shrugged, shy again. "Like you might want to keep me around for a while."

I shook my head and kissed his temple. "I can't understand what sort of fool would ever let you go."

"You say the sweetest things," he said with a smile. "Careful or I might start believing them."

"You are a treasure, Skylar Larkspur, and any man who can't recognize that is a waste of your time or attention." I lifted his chin and stared into his arresting eyes. "I know we're still figuring this out, and you haven't planned out your next moves yet, but for as long as you're here, I'd like to take care of you, to have you as a lover and as my boy. If you'll let me?"

His lower lip trembled as his tender vulnerability shined through. "I'll let you."

### Chapter thirteen

#### Skylar

We packed up our picnic and brought the blanket down to the shore, warming up in the sand before venturing into the water. We swam nude in the crystalline waters of the Summerlin Sea, mindful to be on the lookout for any selkie mischief, for it is said that when they come ashore looking to seduce a lover, they will often end up drowning them as well.

Thankfully, I had my strong bull of a man to protect me. My Daddy , who'd promised to take care of me for as long as I intended to stay– how long did I intend to stay? I didn't know the answer to that question or what it truly meant to be his boy outside of mind-melting sex, but I was looking forward to finding out.

Actions speak louder than words, came the voice of reason, aka Monica Merriweather. Only time would tell if my minotaur could be trusted with my heart but perhaps foolishly, I had hope .

I splashed Hiero with water, and he chased me through the shallows, his big, barrel chest parting the waves easily. At one point he plucked me up like I weighed nothing and told me I was the prettiest fish he'd ever caught. Then he tossed me into the waves, and I came up sputtering, quite gracelessly.

Late in the afternoon we packed up our stuff and headed back over the mountains towards home. I wasn't necessarily looking forward to the long night ahead, alone in my motel room with just me and my thoughts. It was a silly daydream of mine, but

I'd always wanted a lover who would tuck me into bed at night. My parents never had, and whenever I fantasized about my ultimate dream man, he'd be someone who'd use me roughly and then treat me gently.

Once back at the Purple Pegasus, I was gearing up to bid him farewell when Hiero said, "Hey, you want to go to a family barbecue with me?"

I smirked. "What does a vegetarian eat at a barbecue?"

"Salad mostly. Although Frito makes a pretty good bean dip."

"I'd love to," I said, glad that we'd not have to say goodbye just yet, for I wanted to hold onto the magic of the day for as long as I could. "Just let me grab a quick shower."

Hiero waited outside by the pool while I made myself ready. My pants would take several nights to repair (if the spiders blessed me) but I regretted nothing. I came downstairs wearing his t-shirt knotted high in the front so that my wings were unencumbered in the back and a pair of stone-washed jean shorts I'd bought (not stolen) at a thrift store in town. Hiero's eyes lit up when he saw me. "You're wearing my shirt."

"I thought it was fitting, yes. I haven't decided yet if I'm going to give it back."

"Keep it. Looks better on you anyway. You seem to have a thing for midriffs and bodysuits."

I'd caught him looking at my legs and ass as well, but I didn't mention it. "I like showing off my wings."

"Well, you look dead sexy whatever you wear."

I smiled, playing coy. “I’m glad you think so, Daddy. Should I wear something more modest to your family barbecue?”

“Absolutely not. You wear whatever you want, or nothing at all if the mood suits you.” He shot me a rakish grin and patted the back of his bike. I climbed onto his saddle, a seasoned passenger by now, and we took a few winding turns to where his sister Enid lived, tucked into the woods with her two husbands and their children. Pups, the shifters called them, which I supposed made sense. Hiero wanted to put a pup in me, or so he’d said, but it was probably just something that slipped out in the heat of the moment. Silly of me to even imagine it.

There were several shifters I recognized from the bar and around town, as well as a dozen more I did not. To those who didn’t already know me, Hiero introduced me as his boy, and there were enough winks and nods to know they’d received the message. It seemed that I was officially the property of Hierophant Wolfsbane. Pride bloomed within me whenever I thought of it. To belong to someone as honorable and caring as Hiero was a true gift from the Goddess.

You’d better not screw it up.

I ignored that negative voice in my head as we hit up the spread of food, hungry from the ride. Then Hiero showed me how to play horseshoes. We competed against Frito and his younger brother Frankie who sometimes acted as a bouncer at the bar. I had a bit of beginners’ luck to help us win the game. One of Hiero’s younger cousins challenged him to a wrestling match. I soon learned shifters were fond of wrestling, and Hiero was a formidable opponent. Bare chested and slick with sweat, Hiero slowly maneuvered his opponent into a winning pin. My attention was far more focused on the way his leather pants pulled taut across his muscular ass and the occasional crack of his whip-like tail. What might it feel like to be the recipient of that lashing?

“You’ll have to teach me some of your moves,” I said after he’d cleaned off and rejoined me as a spectator.

“I’d be delighted, though with you, I’d insist we be naked.”

My grin was positively giddy when Enid came around with a baby in her arms. Hiero told her he owed her some babysitting, winking as he did, and I wondered if he might invite me along too. I offered to hold the wee child while Enid made herself a plate of food. I’d only held a baby a handful of times in Emrallt Valley, but the sense of contentment I got from their pure, innocent souls was immense. Baby Caris was happy to observe the various games and matches taking place while sucking on her fist. Hiero watched us with a soft smile on his face.

“What?” I asked, suddenly worried. “Am I doing it wrong?”

“No, you’re doing it exactly right. Can I help that I like seeing you with a pup in your arms?”

“Any old pup will do, huh?” I teased.

He only shrugged, smiling sheepishly, and I could hardly look at him after that.

After a half hour or so, Enid returned to collect the baby and invited me inside for a cup of tea. I marveled at the inside of their cabin, which reminded me of a rabbit’s warren with endless hallways and nooks, the rooms littered with children’s toys and knick knacks in every corner. The wooden plank walls and massive stone fireplace gave the interior a warm, homey feeling. I could imagine mealtimes and games of chase and children running around barefoot and carefree.

“You come from a big family?” Enid asked me.

“No, it was just my parents and me. I always wanted a sibling, but fae children are difficult to conceive. A family this size is a rarity in Emrallt Valley, a true blessing.” It was probably why there were so many rumors about the fae stealing human children. It happened on occasion, but more often we were blamed for human negligence or misconduct.

“We’ve got big families all around,” Enid said with pride, bringing me back to the conversation at hand. “We shifters need our space too though. The general rule of thumb around here is one clan per mountain. ”

“I’m sure the children keep you busy. Hiero wants a big family.”

“He told you that?” Enid asked.

“Is it a secret?”

“Not to us. Just didn’t think he’d lead with it. It can be intimidating, you know, coming here, seeing all this.”

It was controlled chaos, much like the bar and town itself, but I loved the excitement and energy and sense of community the shifter clans provided, like one big extended family.

“I think it’s wonderful. Hiero will be a great father. And whoever he decides to start a family with should consider it a blessing every day that they were chosen.”

Enid nodded, eyebrows dipping briefly, before going back to rocking Caris. After she’d laid the sleeping baby carefully in her crib, I followed Enid to the kitchen where she went about preparing our tea. I inhaled the scents of lavender and lemon, watching her work while taking in the children’s artwork on the refrigerator and the many framed pictures hanging on the walls. Their entire house spoke of happy



memories, family, and connection. What must that be like?

“Are you happy?” I asked Enid, a strangely intimate question.

Enid turned and gave me a contemplative look. “I’m busy and sometimes stressed, but yes, I’m happy.”

“That’s wonderful,” I said with more than a little longing and some envy too .

“It is wonderful. I’m lucky to have the right mates. Choosing the right person, or people, makes all the difference.” She handed me a steaming cup of tea. “You know, Skylar, my brother fancies you a great deal.”

I let the fragrant steam waft over me and chose my next words with care, “I fancy him too.”

“But?” she asked, perhaps sensing there was one without me having to say it.

“I’m just getting out of a bad breakup, and I’m a bit of a mess. We’re... figuring things out.” She didn’t need to know my biggest fear, one that I didn’t even like to face myself, that maybe I just wasn’t worthy of love.

“The important thing is that you communicate, something I tell my mates all the time,” Enid said.

“How do you keep up with two men?” I asked. One man was more than enough for me.

She smiled and said haughtily, “More like, how do they keep up with me?”

I blushed at her insinuation. No wonder they had six pups already. “I’m surprised he

doesn't have a partner," I said, shifting the conversation back to Hiero. "Is there something I should know? Any secrets you'd like to share?"

She laughed heartily. "If you're not of shifter blood, the Dragonback Mountains can be a hard adjustment for an outsider. We're a tight-knit community but we are pretty isolated out here. We don't have a lot of the diversions of the other realms, but if you like being outdoors and you can make your own fun, then this could be the right place for you."

"You all certainly seem to be good at that."

"We try. You don't know how many times I've had to stitch up Hiero or one of my other kin on account of their shenanigans. Falling off a dirtbike or out of a tree or starting trouble with a rival pack."

I recalled the scars on Hiero's stomach.

"Hiero said he'd been a bit of a brawler in his younger years."

"He was, but he's settled down some. Now you'll only see it on occasion when he's provoked. He's a protector, which comes in handy around here."

I nodded. It was something I'd admired about him as well. While we sipped our tea, I asked a few questions about their clan customs. Enid said they shifted pretty regularly but a full moon was when the urge was strongest, a time when the packs ran together.

"Many a pup has been conceived under the light of a full moon," she said with a wink.

After finishing, we went back outside, and I caught sight of Hiero across the yard throwing axes with a few of the younger shifters. Something about a man with a tool

in his hand really turned me on, and when he smiled at me, my heart surely skipped a beat. Was it strange to see a future path laid out so plainly before me? A simple life with the sexy minotaur, raising pups if the Goddess blessed us, having outdoor adventures and great sex. Being the boy of a strong, caring Daddy. Was there really anything more to life than that?

After the sun had set and the moon had risen, one of Enid's mates whistled to get everyone's attention. As the Wolfsbane alpha, Enid started baying and the rest of the pack soon joined in until it was a crescendo of howling voices. Their non-shifter wolf brethren joined the call from the mountains so that it became a cannon echoing all the way down to the valley below. I wondered if Monica was listening. I couldn't wait to tell her what I'd witnessed, especially when the shifters started stripping off their clothing.

"Looks like we're on clean-up duty," Hiero said to me good-naturedly.

All around us, bodies started transforming: limbs bent, skin sprouted hair, noses became muzzles, ears grew pointed and long, spines bowed, and muscles quivered from the shift. A few minutes later, we were surrounded by three dozen wolves, sniffing the ground or each other in preparation for their run. Enid, now with a brassy red coat and pointed ears, lifted her head and howled at the moon. The others soon followed. Then their sleek bodies bounded off into the night, joining the chorus in the distance until it was just Hiero and me and a few other non-shifter relations, some of whom went inside to tend to the little ones like Caris who were too young to shift. We drank a little more and snacked on the trays of food before storing it away for when they returned in the morning, hungry and exhausted .

"So, this was your life growing up?" I asked, fascinated by it all.

"Pretty much. One minute we'd be having a conversation. The next minute they'd be off chasing a rabbit through the forest."

“Frito told me about the time you tried to join them,” I said. It had been a few nights ago during closing when Frito had regaled me with that story. “How you got lost in the woods.”

“I was terrified, wolves all around me, and I couldn’t tell which were my kin and which were wild animals. Thankfully, I spotted Enid in the mix, and she led me home. They made so much fun of me for months after.” Hiero shook his head and beneath his humor, I could see why he felt slightly separate from the pack—excluded, even if it wasn’t intentional. Perhaps that was something we recognized in each other, that loneliness and longing.

“How do the shifters get along with the wild wolves?” I asked.

“Wolves by nature are territorial, but the Wolfsbane Clan respects the wild ones as their ancestors and offers them the leavings of their hunts. The wolves, in turn, offer their protection. Once you’ve lived here for a while, they’ll pick up your scent and recognize you as one of their own, which also helps when defending our territory against intruders.”

“Helps when you get lost in the woods too,” I teased.

“Yes, it does. Enid told me later that I’d never been in any real danger, but at the time, all I could see were their teeth. ”

Eventually we said goodbye to the rest of the partygoers and headed home. Hiero took the long way so we could enjoy the ride. Most fae could fly, but it was more like a slow-moving hover that had evolved to enable us to collect the fruits and flower nectar from high up in the trees. It took a lot of energy to travel any significant distance. But being on the back of a motorcycle was like soaring through the sky. Plus, there was the added bonus of clinging to my Daddy while doing it.

Once at my motel, Hiero walked me up to my room again, and I considered inviting him inside, but then I recalled my conversation with Enid and all the things Hiero wanted. I needed time to process, to consider what I might be able to offer him in return.

“Thank you. I had a really lovely time today,” I said.

“Me too. I hate to say goodbye.” He leaned forward and gave me a friendly peck on the cheek. “Get some rest. I’ll see you tomorrow at work and afterwards, we can talk more about our arrangement.”

“Yes, boss,” I said, and he gave me a stern look. “Yes, Daddy,” I corrected.

“Good boy.”

I shivered from head to toe. No one could have prepared me for the power of those two words when my minotaur Daddy said them.

### Chapter fourteen

#### Hiero

The pointy ears were my first clue.

As I've mentioned before, the fae rarely made an appearance at Church and the elvish were even rarer. Both were known to have a peak to their ears, like the stranger sitting at the bar presently. This fella was alone too, wearing a long black cloak that could hide any manner of weaponry, including a sword or a crossbow, both of which were banned inside Church. But surely Frankie had patted him down outside the entrance. It was what I paid him for after all.

Possibly, he was a wizard, though their sort tended to be more somber and generally had a wizened air about them. This bloke was slugging back ale like it was his job. And most concerning, his eyes kept swinging toward Skylar, tracking his every move. Thus, I concluded this character was either Skylar's ex or a spy sent to report back on his whereabouts. Either way he was about to get his ass bounced right back to Emrallt Valley .

"So, where you from, stranger?" I asked as I set down his third pint of ale, a classic opener that no one could dispute as being too nosy, unless they had something to hide.

The man stiffened and glanced over at me before clearing his throat. Suspiciously, I might add.

“Nowhere in particular,” he said.

“You look fae,” I remarked.

“Is that a problem?”

“Only if you make it my problem.” I narrowed my eyes and he glared back. We were off to a great start.

“How long has the fae been working here?” He jerked his thumb to where Skylar was balancing a tray of shots while winding his way through the crowd.

“What’s it to you?” I asked.

“Fae living outside of Emrallt Valley must register their absence with the Guild.”

“How do you know he hasn’t?”

That stumped him for a moment. Then he doubled down, puffing up his chest like he had some authority. Well-muscled and broad-shouldered, he had a build that suggested soldiering. His dark golden ringlets and blue eyes made him handsome enough to dislike even more. His straight nose looked primed for breaking, especially if I was correct in assuming this was the asshole ex who’d broken Skylar’s heart.

“Anyone caught trafficking in fae will be prosecuted by the Guild’s Enforcement Division,” he said .

“They gonna come down here and arrest me? For what crime exactly? Offering a job to a man trying to make a living? From what I understand, your kind don’t take care of your own very well.”

Something like guilt flashed in the fae's stormy expression, and he went back to drinking his ale, draining it to the bottom before ordering another. I thunked a full tankard in front of him and said, "That's your last one. Finish up here and leave."

With a thunderous look, he grabbed hold of the pint, nursing it slowly this time. Even while serving other customers, I kept him in my periphery.

But the crafty fae must have been waiting for me to turn my back, because a moment later, I found the mug empty and the man swaggering across the floor to where Skylar was taking a four-top's order. Skylar's expression was stunned—clearly he recognized the man—then my boy was making hurried conversation to his customers and steering the stranger forcefully toward the front door.

Had Skylar been fearful that the man might make a scene? Would he become violent or try kidnapping him? Fuck if I was going to let some wet-behind-the-ears pompous ass hurt my precious boy.

"Mind the bar," I told Frito, then grabbed a baseball bat from where it was kept underneath the counter, a relic from when humans had inhabited the Arcane Isles. We'd organized an inner-clan softball league a few years back and still played from time to time, but more often the bat came in handy for dealing with rowdier types.

I didn't see the pair of them when I walked out front, so I looked to Frankie, who jerked his thumb to the side of the building. "Be prepared to back me up," I said.

"You got it, boss," was his reply.

Stalking around the corner, I found the two of them in the middle of a heated argument. Rather than interrupt, I hung back and listened in for a spell. Skylar was trying to keep his voice down, but my hearing was exceptional. He had every right to have it out with this jerk, and I wasn't going to interfere unless the other man got



nasty.

“...I told you before, Cedrych, it’s over between us. You’re going to be married soon, and I don’t want to be your piece on the side. I’m worth more than that,” Skylar said.

“You’re overreacting, Sky, as usual. It’s a diplomatic arrangement that my mother is forcing upon me. I doubt I’ll even be fucking him, and if I do, I definitely won’t enjoy it. The only person I want to be fucking is you.”

“Exactly! That’s all it ever was between us. You, wanting a convenient place to park your dick when the mood suited you. I want more out of life than to be your paid whore. I want someone I can build a life with. Maybe even start a family.”

That last bit got me right in my feelings.

“Start a family? You? Since when?” Cedrych scoffed, sounding appalled. Lord, did I want to knock his block off .

“Since now. The fact that you never even considered it is proof enough that you were never really serious about me. I want a man who’s going to take care of me long-term, not just for as long as I keep his dick wet.”

“But, but... I’m a prince,” Cedrych spluttered, clearly stupefied by the rejection.

Hold up, did he just say...

“I don’t care who you are. That’s not going to work this time,” Skylar said tartly.

“And I never treated you like a whore, Skylar. I always respected you, despite your past.”

“Despite being a guildless, unremarkable bit of fae trash?” Skylar hissed.

“I never said that. My mother is... my mother. I always defended you to her.”

“Did you, Cedrych? Or did you hide me away like your dirty little secret? You never invited me to any formal events at the palace, never introduced me to your friends. Goddess knows, when we’d pass each other in the square, you’d act as if you didn’t even know me. Do you know how hurtful that was? To watch you walk by without even a greeting, then have you come to my apartment right after and demand everything of me.”

The pain in Skylar’s voice made me want to soothe him, and I knew just the man to give him what he needed. (It was me. I was that man. )

“What else could I do?” the prince simpered. “It was a scandal even being seen with you. The Daily Scrolls were all over it. My mother was constantly haranguing me about you.”

“You could have made me legitimate,” Skylar said, practically pleading with him now. “You could have announced to society that we were together, but you chose not to. For two long years you made promises, and you never kept them.”

Huffing, the prince countered, “I put you up in that nice apartment. Bought you all those expensive clothes and jewelry—”

“You used money to control me, Cedrych, which is why I left all of that behind. I owe you nothing . You can give those gifts to your next lover or burn them for all I care. I don’t want them. I’m done with you and your mother.”

Good for you, I silently cheered. Kick that pompous prince straight to the curb.

“What do you think the Guild is going to do when I tell them you’ve run off with the prince’s property?” Cedrych said in a low, threatening voice.

“What property could you possibly mean?” Skylar asked.

“My heart, Skylar,” he wailed. Good Lord, this man was a manipulative shit. I peeked around the corner to see if the theatrics were working on Skylar, but he seemed just as pissed off as before .

“You are so full of shit, Cedrych. And you’d better not threaten me or anyone here. You never loved me. I don’t think you’re even capable of it.”

“Are you fucking someone else?” Cedrych asked.

“That is none of your business.”

The prince grabbed Skylar’s arm roughly, and by then, I’d had just about enough of his bullshit. I rounded the corner of the building, bat in hand, and slammed it against the stone wall beside Cedrych’s head. The prince startled and pivoted away, drawing his sword with the ease of a trained soldier. I’d need to have a talk with Frankie about somehow missing the huge hunk of steel stashed under the prince’s cloak.

We squared off in the alley, weapons drawn, dancing on the balls of our feet. I was itching for a fight, and I suspected the prince wanted one too.

“So, this is your new man?” the prince asked, eyes flashing. “Talk about a downgrade. I shouldn’t be so surprised to find you slumming it here in... oh wait, I forgot, this worthless town doesn’t even have a name.”

“This is my boss, Hierophant Wolfsbane,” Skylar said with stiff formality, stepping between us. “Trust me, Hiero, he is not worth the trouble.”

“There doesn’t have to be any trouble if you come back with me to Emrallt Valley,” Cedrych said. A quick glance at Skylar told me he was considering it. Keeping one eye on the prince, I reached out and pulled Skylar behind me. Over my dead body was Skylar going anywhere with this prick .

“He’s all bluster,” I told Skylar. “I know his type. Men like him like to puff themselves up like roosters because they’re cowards on the inside.”

“Who are you calling a coward, halfling?” The prince made a half-hearted jab with his sword. If he were any other mongrel off the street, I’d beat his ass black and blue, but this was a royal. Kicking his ass would have repercussions for me and my kin, so instead of taking a swing, I let out a long, loud whistle. Within a minute I was flanked on either side by a dozen of my shifter clan and a few wild wolves as well.

“Oh, so this is how you’re going to play it?” Cedrych asked, standing up straighter.

“You’re on my turf now, fae. You came to my no-name town and started some shit with one of my people. Now put away your sword and go on back to where you came from. Leave Skylar alone, forever. ”

“Do you know who I am?” the prince asked haughtily.

“Prince of Pain in My Ass?”

“Skylar, are you going to let him speak to me this way?” the prince demanded.

A flash of hesitation crossed Skylar’s face before he squared his shoulders and said, “Leave, Cedrych. Go back to your mother and your fiancé and your posh life in the palace. To your tea parties and fancy court dinners. I don’t love you anymore, and I doubt you ever truly loved me either.”

Cedrych blew out his cheeks like a tantruming child and sheathed his sword. The scrape of metal reminded me to unclench my jaw. Then he strolled right up to me and pointed his finger in my face. “This isn’t over, Minotaur.”

“I welcome the opportunity to break your royal nose, Your Highness,” I said with sincerity and gave a courtly bow for good measure.

“Your apartment is waiting for you, should you choose to come home,” he said to Skylar.

“I won’t,” Skylar replied coolly, and I was proud of him for refusing the prince’s empty promises.

The prince turned and stomped off into the night, cloak rippling behind him. I didn’t know how he’d arrived here, but I turned to Frankie and Frito. “Follow the fae prince to the edge of town and make sure he doesn’t cause any more trouble.” They nodded, stripped out of their clothing before shifting to make haste in their pursuit. The crowd dispersed and I embraced Skylar who was clearly upset but trying very hard to maintain his composure.

“I’m so sorry, Hiero. I have no idea how he found me,” he said, blinking up at me with wet, sparkling eyes.

“Word gets around. Hopefully he won’t be coming back,” I said as I rubbed his back.

“I’m afraid he will, though. Cedrych hates backing down from a fight. And he won’t be alone next time. He’ll bring his guards with him.”

“I’ve got backup,” I reminded him, wondering just how good the fae prince was at swordplay. The fight wouldn’t be fair, for there was only so much damage I could inflict on a royal without placing my neck in the hangman’s noose. The encounter

also begged the question as to what Skylar had seen in that shallow, pompous brat in the first place. A meal ticket, maybe.

“You know what the worst thing is?” Skylar said bitterly. “I don’t think he ever wanted me. He just liked the way I made him feel. Even now, he doesn’t miss me, he just misses having me around. You know what I mean?”

“I do know what you mean,” I said because I’d been similarly used by past lovers. They didn’t see me. They saw a big dick and a set of horns and only wanted to give the freak minotaur a ride before moving on. “How did the two of you meet?”

Guilt flashed in his eyes, and I suspected he was thinking about lying to me.

“Tell Daddy the truth,” I said, touching his chin while invoking our tenuous bond.

He sighed with misery and said, “Monica and I were working at Templeton Square when he and his retinue passed through. I didn’t realize he was royalty, just saw that he had a fat coin purse hanging off his hip.”

“You pickpocketed him?” I asked, grinning at his fearlessness.

“I was relieving him of a small portion of his wealth, yes,” Skylar said primly.

“And then what?”

“He caught me red-handed and gave me the choice. Go before the Guild or...” Skylar hesitated. “Join him for dinner.”

I inferred that the dinner proposal was a euphemism for sex, but I didn’t press it. “What would going before the Guild have meant?” I asked.

“They might have put me in a labor camp or cut off my wings.”

“That’s barbaric,” I said, aghast at the thought of such beautiful appendages being harmed for a few stolen coins.

“They’d grow back eventually, but never quite the same. It’s a very painful and humbling experience, to have your wings clipped.”

“So, it was that or date him?” Didn’t sound like much of a choice to me.

“He made me an offer that at the time seemed more than generous. And that’s why I didn’t mention to you that he was royalty, because then you would know that I was nothing but a gold digger and a prince’s whore. And I care what you think of me, Hiero.”

I took hold of his jaw and tilted his face toward mine. “I don’t care about the terms of your relationship with your ex. It’s none of my business. I’m only asking because I want to protect you should he come back. That’s what a good Daddy does for his boy, right?”

His lower lip protruded, tempting as a jewel, as he nodded.

“I want you to finish out your shift, and then you’re staying with me tonight where I can keep an eye on you in case he comes back. I can sleep on the couch. ”

“Or you could sleep in the bed with me? Just to keep me safe?” he said with a sly grin.

I shook my head at his very tempting offer and brushed a stray wisp of raven hair from his upturned face. “You’re irresistible to me, Skylar, you should know that by now, but I don’t want you to feel pressured the way you were with him. Sex isn’t a

condition of my friendship or my protection.”

He swallowed tightly, pretty eyes brimming with unshed tears. “Thank you, Hiero.”

I nodded and tried to tame the wild beat of my heart. “You’re welcome.”



### Chapter fifteen

#### Skylar

After the bar closed, we headed up to Hiero's apartment. He gave me one of his t-shirts to borrow and provided me with my own toothbrush. I insisted we share his bed, since there was more than enough room for two, though he was right about me needing the rest. I was tired from being on my feet all night, and my encounter with Cedrych had left me emotionally drained as well. I felt like a big, empty house—the ghosts of my former self had come back to haunt me.

Despite my exhaustion, my body was tense with unspent adrenaline, my mind still reeling. How had Cedrych even found me? And what if he came back? What if he made trouble for Hiero and the Wolfsbane Clan? Not to mention Cedrych had completely dismissed my feelings and made excuses for his behavior. Nothing had changed, no lessons had been learned. He was the same old self-absorbed ass. And I'd put up with his bullshit for two long years .

What a fool I'd been.

On and on my thoughts chased their tails. Meanwhile Hiero lay on his back beside me with both arms stretched behind his head, breathing evenly but not yet asleep, as if waiting for me to break the silence.

"Thank you for coming to my rescue back there," I said to him in the darkness.

"Of course," he said roughly. "I'd do the same for any of my people."

My people. The fact that he considered me one of his own gave me a sense of quiet contentment. He'd offered me a job and invited me to his family barbecue. He'd risked his own safety and that of his kin to defend me against my ex. He was everything a man should be. "Even before that," I said. "The way you've welcomed me into your community."

"It's the neighborly thing to do," he said humbly. "We love having you here, Skylar. You fit right in. You're not thinking about going back, are you?" He glanced over at me with a worried pinch to his brow.

"No, just feeling a little embarrassed. I really didn't want you to see all that."

"I've seen worse," he chuckled. "Hell, I've been through worse."

"Have you?" I asked tentatively.

"Oh yeah, one of my exes got falling-down drunk and picked a fight with me while I was working, chased me around the bar with a wooden broom handle, then shifted into a wolf and tried to bite me. Enid chased him off and I never saw him again."

"That's terrible. What was the fight about?"

"He didn't like that I was serving other people drinks."

"But that's your job."

"Yeah, it's hard to reason with a highly intoxicated person. He was a friend of a friend from the other side of the mountain. Jealous type. Controlling too. I knew it wouldn't last, but hey, you have to kiss a few frogs."

I smiled at his analogy. Too many frogs to count. My most recent one had already

been a prince, so I must really be doing something wrong.

“I can’t help feeling that it’s my fault,” I confessed to him. “If not for choosing him, then for staying with him for so long.”

“Love is a powerful drug.”

“I’m not even sure that I loved him,” I admitted. “I think I just enjoyed the lifestyle he provided and the occasional scraps of attention he gave me. Somehow that makes it worse.”

“Whatever it was, you definitely had feelings for him, and that’s okay. Maybe it took you a while to shake the spell, but eventually you did. And here you are now, with us. I’m glad you didn’t decide to go back with him.”

“Never,” I said vehemently. Just that short interaction had put me right back in my downward spiral of doubt and self-loathing. No thank you.

“Glad to hear it. Not to toot my own horn, but I give a pretty good back rub, if you think it might help you relax.”

“Even if it doesn’t, I like having your hands on me.”

“Don’t tempt me, pretty fae. We still need to have that talk.”

“A talk,” I murmured. “Should I be nervous?”

“I promise I’ll go easy on you. Now turn over.”

I rolled onto my stomach and Hiero knelt with his knees on either side of my waist. His strong, capable fingers dug into the tight muscles at the center of my back and

just below my wings, gently loosening the knots of tension and turning my body into mush.

“How could anyone leave you?” I marveled at the fools who’d passed up this sexy minotaur in pursuit of greener pastures.

“Trust me, I’m as surprised as you,” he said.

I smiled into my pillow. “Tell me more about your crazy exes. It’ll make me feel better about my own poor choices.”

Hiero told me a few more horror stories, which included a jilted elemental sorcerer who’d conjured a storm cloud to follow him around town and rain only on him, as well as an incubus who was so fixated on the size of his dick, Hiero became worried for his anatomical safety. And as he regaled me with his tales, each one more absurd than the last, I was comforted to know I wasn’t the only one with questionable taste in lovers. Their loss was surely my gain, especially here and now under Hiero’s capable hands as he slowly drained the tension from my body and I drifted off into a deep, dreamless sleep.

By morning, my mind was clearer, my body refreshed, and Hiero’s morning wood was pitched taller than an elvish tower. I couldn’t help but lean over and have a little taste. (Blame it on my poor impulse control.) And by the time I’d really gotten going, my strapping minotaur was in no position to refuse.

“Good morning to you too,” he said after I’d drained him of his seed and left him shuddering and spent on his bedsheets. He raised his head to flash me a sleepy, satisfied smile. “That was a pleasant way to wake up. How are you feeling this morning?”

“Much better,” I replied, licking his remains from my lips. “You?”

“Fantastic. Come here and let’s cuddle.”

I happily climbed into his big arms so he could cradle me to his chest. But my cock was a bit of a distraction, now rather large and insistent between us, so Hiero wrapped his big fist around my shaft and instructed me on how to get myself off. His deep voice telling me exactly how to move was a turn-on like nothing else. Then we both needed to wash up. He gave me a clean t-shirt to wear and we made tea together, hardly able to keep our hands off each other while waiting for the water to boil. Only with the tea kettle screaming in the background did we finally break away from each other. I couldn’t recall ever feeling an attraction this magnetic before, as exhilarating as it was scary.

“This reminds me of our first morning after,” I said when we were sitting across from each other at his cozy dining room table, each with a steaming cup of hibiscus tea in hand. I grinned at how awkward we’d both been.

“You couldn’t wait to get out the door,” he said.

“I thought you were anxious to be rid of me.”

“Never in a million years.” He took my hand. “And I still want to be your Daddy, if you still want that too?” he said with caution.

“I do want that,” I affirmed, hoping my run-in with Cedrych hadn’t ruined our fledgling romance. “Nothing has changed, not from my end at least.”

“I’m happy to hear it.” He sat up straighter and adopted a more serious air. “Now, as your Daddy, I’d like to make some rules for you to help you with your day-to-day routines and hold you accountable, but in order to do that, I have to know what your needs are first.” Even though his voice was stern, his soft brown eyes radiated compassion and concern.

Where to begin?

“I’m not very good with money,” I admitted, avoiding his thoughtful gaze.

“A lot of people struggle with that. No need to be ashamed.”

We discussed my finances (or lack thereof), my impulsive spending habits, and my inability to hold down a steady job ( only partially my fault). Hiero helped me map out a budget and a plan to save some of my earnings every week for when I might need them.

“You never know when there might be an emergency. Financial freedom is the goal for everyone, even a resourceful boy like you.”

We also discussed some rules to keep me safe. No walking around late at night and to alert him the moment I catch sight of Cedrych or his guards.

“And if you break one of my rules, you need to tell Daddy, so I can punish you for it.”

“How would you punish me?” I asked, my wings trembling and not necessarily with fear.

Hiero laid out some potential punishments, chores such as weeding in the garden or repairing the weathered cobblestone around the bar or sitting quietly if I needed time to reflect on my behavior. “I might spank your ass if you’re very willful,” he said, which sounded more like a treat than a consequence. His eyes narrowed as if hearing my thoughts and he said, “But maybe that’d be a reward for you.”

“Maybe it would,” I said with an innocent shrug. The possibility of a spanking by his hand made my cock twitch with interest.

“Have you ever been spanked before? By a lover?” he asked.

“Once.”

His nostrils flared, and I couldn't tell if he was excited or jealous. “Tell me about it,” he said .

“I was at a nightclub that catered to that sort of thing. A man came up to me and told me I looked like I could use a good spanking, so I decided to give it a try.”

“And did you like it?” he asked, his voice dropping to a deep, sexy timbre.

“Yeah, it was... arousing. He made me cry.” The experience had been both erotic and cathartic, a total purge of emotions and a soothing caress afterward. “Could you make me cry?”

“Is that what you want? To cry for Daddy?”

My parents had never bothered to discipline me, another one of the ways they'd never shown they cared. Monica said it was probably why I had terrible boundaries with men. But it was something I craved, to be corrected, to even be hurt a little and then soothed afterward. I trusted Hiero to do it right.

“Yes, I think I would.”

“We'll give it a try then. After I've used you extensively, when you're so wrung out you feel you have nothing left to give. I'll spank you till your ass is red and smarting, and we'll see if I can make you cry.”

I shivered in anticipation, and then, because this seemed like such a one-sided arrangement, I asked, “What can I offer you?”

“Your loyalty and your trust. I want you to consult me on big decisions and let me guide you when you’re having troubles. You’ve been alone for most of your life, but having a Daddy means you don’t have to do everything by yourself anymore.”

“I’d like that,” I said. It was a risk to trust someone else with my problems—Monica had been the only person I could ever really rely on—but I wanted so badly to believe him.

“And, if you’re comfortable and willing, I want your body too,” he continued.

“That’s much easier for me to give.”

“Not like it was before. Not because you have to, but because you want to. I want you to want to please me, Skylar, to follow my rules and to make me proud.”

“I do want that,” I said sincerely.

“And I want to take care of you. For nothing more than the satisfaction it gives me to know that you are safe and thriving under my protection. That it’s my honor and pleasure to do it.”

“You make it sound so nice,” I said, my chest growing tight. “Not like a transaction.”

“It shouldn’t feel transactional. It’s a willing exchange of power, one that should benefit us both, but it requires communication and trust on both sides. And if at any point your needs or desires change, you have to let me know.”

“I will, I promise,” I swore to him.

“Now, I have a proposal for you. Would you like to stay here with me for a couple of days and see what it’s like to be my boy full-time? I don’t want to rush you into



anything, and I'm happy to wait until you're ready."

"What about work?" I asked.

"I'll get our shifts covered. Perks of being the boss. "

I wanted to stay with all my heart, but what if Hiero decided he didn't want me anymore? What if I wasn't good enough or worthy of his care? But if that were the case, I'd rather know early on, before I got any deeper into my feelings for him. And even though I'd been lied to and manipulated by my parents and Cedrych and countless other lovers, I couldn't help but be hopeful that this time would be different.

"I do want that, Daddy."

He smiled, clearly pleased with my answer. "Then let's rustle up some breakfast. I'm starving."

We made smoothies—greens for him and fruit and honey for me—then Hiero played a few songs on his guitar while I sang for him. His praise seemed genuine, and it reminded me of my first passion, music, and how I might be able to pursue it here in the mountains, even if it was just singing and playing for the bar's patrons. I wasn't interested in chasing fame and fortune like my father, I just wanted to perform for others on occasion.

After our impromptu music session, we got comfortable on the couch. Hiero had a bootleg summoner that could stream human channels, so I was able to catch up on all my shows. We took breaks in between to make out like fledglings, both of us sweaty and panting and just at the edge of release. Over and over he took me almost to the peak. It seemed Daddy was testing my obedience, but I was not a very patient boy.

“Aren’t you ever going to let me finish?” I asked him as sweetly as possible .

“Later, sweet thing,” he said with a wicked grin, which was the theme of the day, until it was much, much later when he had me in his bed again and torturously brought me to the precipice of climax before finally, finally , carrying me over.

As I lay in his big bed in a nest of fluffy pillows with my seed cooling on my belly and his release secured deep inside me, I watched him cross the room for a basin and wash rag and considered chaining myself to the bed so that I’d never have to leave his apartment. But that would make me just another of his crazy exes, wouldn't it?

In the shower on the morning of day two, after washing away the sweat and spend leftover from our lovemaking the night before, Daddy told me to get down on my knees for him. He was no longer hesitant with his commands, as we were both settling into the easy give-and-take between us.

With the warm spray of water at my back, Daddy made use of my mouth. His long, velvety tail wrapped around my throat and his fingers tugged on my wet hair as he rocked into me with a smooth and easy rhythm. I grabbed onto his veiny, rock-hard thighs while his cock worked in and out of my throat, and my big bull of a man made noises that were somewhere between a bellow and a roar.

Thighs trembling, he shuddered his release into my mouth, and I drank him down, his warm cum coating the raw tissues of my throat like a soothing balm. He tasted like lemongrass and rosehips, a surprisingly floral flavor. I laid my head against his softening groin and recovered my breath while he stroked my cheek tenderly.

“That mouth is a marvel. I don’t know how you do it,” he said.

I could tell him that practice makes perfect, but I didn’t really want to highlight all the cocks I’d sucked prior to his, so I merely smiled and shrugged. A little mystery

was good, wasn't it?

After shutting off the water, he helped me to my feet, then dried me off with a fluffy towel and asked to comb out my hair. While it was still damp, I showed him how to braid my hair so it wouldn't get knotted up from our lovemaking, as I anticipated we'd be spending the next few hours in bed. Both of us were scheduled to work that night, and we couldn't hold off the real world forever.

With extreme care and patience, Daddy copied the pattern of one of my more complex plaits, his clever fingers massaging my scalp and sending tingles of pleasure to my extremities. It was such a simple task, but no one had ever done that for me before, not since my mother, and her periods of sobriety had been pretty rare. It made my eyes water, made me want to say something important to him, but I didn't have the words, so I merely sighed and stared at the two of us in the mirror.

"All dolled up for Daddy," he murmured into my ear, admiration and lust threaded through his husky voice.

Instead of answering I turned and invited his tongue into my mouth, making love to him slowly. I wondered briefly if this was what my parents experienced, chasing their next high the way I was chasing my Daddy's tender loving care. My cravings were stronger than that of food or rest, and it was only at his insistence that we'd done either. I was an addict, and like an addict, I wanted more.

"Breakfast now, boy," he said, a little breathless when we finally parted. He tried to sound stern, but I could feel the affection in his voice whenever he spoke to me, like a hug wrapping me in its warm embrace. In the kitchen I sliced peaches while Daddy mixed the batter for homemade honey cakes. We worked easily alongside each other as if we'd been doing it forever.

"Where'd you learn to make these?" I asked because I'd once told them they were my

favorite.

“I asked Enid for a recipe.”

“For me?”

He winked. “For you, baby boy. I was hoping to have you over for breakfast sometime to prove I’m competent in the kitchen. I know fae food is sometimes hard to find around here.”

“You are more than competent in so many ways,” I said, not even trying to make it sound sexual, though he was phenomenal in that department as well.

He hummed merrily while flipping the cakes. The smile on my face was ridiculous, and with a slow bloom of awareness, I realized I was truly happy .

“What now, Daddy?” I asked after we’d eaten, licking the sticky-sweet syrup from my fingers.

“I think you know what I want,” he said, his blazing hot gaze turning my flesh into putty.

“Tell me,” I purred, matching his energy with my own.

“Get on the bed on all fours, ass in the air. I want to breed you.”

My bull had a breeding kink, and as I’d recently discovered, I did too, at least when it came to him. I’d never craved a lover’s seed the way I did his. Wanted it in my hole, in my mouth, smeared all over my skin like a primal claim. I wanted to smell like his sweat and musk, proof that I was his boy to breed.

As I positioned myself for his bidding, I considered how I'd never felt so debased and desired as I did with my Daddy's scorching hot gaze upon me. But unlike so many other times, I didn't feel used or degraded in my service to him. I wanted it, all of it—the commands and the lessons on patience and the eventual rewards. This was my choice.

“What a good boy,” he murmured, standing close enough that I could taste him on my tongue—lemongrass and musk and the lingering scent of leather. Yesterday he'd let me lick his horns, then told me to do the same to his testicles. I'd relished the task. Now, he was stroking his big bull dick while eyeing me with anticipation. “Spread those sweet cheeks nice and wide for me, Skylar,” he rumbled. “Let me get a good look at my pretty little flower. ”

Dropping my shoulders to the bedding, I reached back and pulled apart my cheeks so he could see my shivering, covetous hole. Would he tire of me? Of this? Goddess, it would crush me if he did.

“I'm not sure you've got one more in you, sweet thing,” he said as if daring me to prove myself.

“But look how wet I am.” I reached between my legs and scooped up some of what was dripping from me, both mine and his, then had a little taste to further entice him.

Daddy placed his thumb over my entrance, gently massaging, then dipped his thick digit inside. “You've got to be sore by now, boy. You look swollen down there.”

“I don't care. I like it.”

“You sure about that? This dick doesn't have an expiration date.”

“One more time before we have to go back to work? I need to feel you moving inside

me again. Pretty please, Daddy?" I wasn't too proud to beg.

"I think it's time for these sweet cheeks to get swatted." He smoothed a rough hand over my rump. "I want to mark this perfect skin. What do you think? Are you ready for your spanking?"

I'd been anticipating this spanking since learning it was a possibility, wondering when my dominant Daddy might deliver.

"Yes, Daddy. I deserve it. "

His hand on my ass stilled and I glanced back to find him studying me closely. "Why do you deserve it?" he asked.

"Because I'm bad."

He frowned. "I don't think that's true."

"Then it's for all the bad things I've done." Way too many to count.

"What have you done, gorgeous?"

"I'm a thief," I reminded him.

"Not anymore."

If he only knew all of the items I'd stolen from him: a couple of his t-shirts, a pair of his briefs, the used tea bag from our first morning after when I thought I'd never get to spend the night with him again, and my latest, a few strands of his hair that I'd plucked from his comb and tidied away. I'd built an altar to Goddess Imogen, to pray for our continued happiness, and if that didn't work, there were spells and charms that

might do the trick. But the truth was, I'd wanted those little keepsakes, and the idea that he might say no to me was too risky, so I took them.

"I'm still a thief. I'll always fall back on it, if I must. It's part of who I am."

I'd decided already that I wasn't going to do what I'd done with previous lovers and present only the "nicest" parts of me. I was going to show Hiero everything—all my damage and my battle scars too—and then let him decide if he still wanted me. It was terrifying to be so transparent, but I wanted him to know me, warts and all.

"I can accept that," he said. "We all have our vices. Mine is my temper. No matter how hard I try to control it, it still flares up from time to time."

"I'm sure you have your reasons," I said.

"Yes, but that doesn't excuse it. If you find yourself stealing something, the rule is that you tell Daddy, so I can decide what to do about it. Now, what else?" he asked, massaging my cheeks, warming them up for the sting to come.

"I'm a whore for attention," I admitted, finding it easier to confess my sins with my ass bared to him than if we were sitting face-to-face. "I like it when men look at me, when they desire me. I flirt with customers for bigger tips, especially if I think you might be watching."

There was no greater thrill than finding Hiero's eyes on me, lusting and proprietary, like I was one wrong move away from him hurdling over the bar to break up whatever was going on between me and a customer. His possessiveness cemented something inside me that was lacking, some sort of proof that I was wanted.

"I'm always watching," he said.

“I like to make you jealous. That’s my toxic trait.”

“You are a bit of a cocktease.”

I nodded. “I’m reckless and impulsive and I can be mean and spiteful when I don’t get my way.” Most of my fights with Cedrych were regarding my bad behavior, as reported by the Daily Scrolls . I was painted exactly as the queen had characterized me, the guildless fae trash that Prince Cedrych had been caught slumming it with. “I need to be reminded who I belong to. Whenever I’m acting up, I need a strong man to keep me in line. When Gunther and Dorth lay their hands on me—”

“Who are they?” Daddy interrupted with a sudden heat in his voice.

“Those two big, green ogres. One has a broken tusk.”

“I didn’t realize you were on a first-name basis with those two,” he said, somewhere between teasing and a growl.

I glanced back and wiggled my ass. “See, Daddy, that’s what I mean. I need to be punished for my bad behavior.”

“This is discipline, darling, to remind you that you’re mine, and I’m invested in your success. Punishment is much worse. Safeword?” he said as he squeezed my ass, making my skin tingle with anticipation.

“Succotash.”

“Succotash,” he repeated. “Say it and I’ll stop. Now, what were you saying about Gunther and Dorth?”

“They say the nastiest things to me, Daddy. Things that I know would make you very



angry.” A night hadn’t gone by without them whispering all manner of depraved fantasies to me. I’d found it flattering, and how fucked up was that?

“What things?” Daddy asked.

“They want to shove both their cocks in me at once,” I said, for that seemed to be the overarching theme. I’d been with their type before, especially when I was younger and discovered I could make some decent coin by selling my body to rougher types, even more if I acted inexperienced and afraid. If they thought they’d hurt me, I could usually convince them to pay me extra just to soothe their guilt. But the problem with men like Gunther and Dorth, was that they loved to take, but they didn’t care enough to give anything back in return.

“Sounds like it might hurt,” he said as if imagining it.

“It does hurt. I’ve done it before.”

“Is that so?” he asked.

“Yes, Daddy.”

Thwack. Daddy’s palm made contact with my ass cheek, centering my attention. The sting and resulting heat only fanned the flames of my desire. To be hurt, to be used, to have to earn the privilege of an orgasm by satisfying him first. Daddy’s pleasure before mine. I needed that purpose. With my cock now standing at attention, I hummed and pushed my ass out for more.

“What else?” he said in his deep disciplinary voice.

“They asked me to come home with them,” I said and was rewarded with another solid thwack to my other cheek. My body sang, my blood flowed like a rushing river,

and every hair on my body stood on end.

“And did you?”

“No, but I accidentally brushed up against Gunther’s erection the other night.”

Daddy smacked me twice more, lighting the apples of my ass cheeks on fire.

“Was it really an accident?” he asked .

I shrugged. “It’s hard to avoid it when the dance floor gets crowded. You remember that first night you saw me.”

He groaned, long and loud. “You were the prettiest, filthiest thing I’d ever seen.”

I preened at his praise. “I wanted to suck you off in the alleyway.”

“Yes, you made that pretty clear.”

“Why didn’t you let me?” I asked, feeling an echo of the rejection I’d felt then.

“Because you were drunk, and I knew you were trouble.”

He smacked me again and the hot sting only made me bolder. Every admission served to rid me of the clutter of my past. He was giving me the chance to confess and helping me restore balance to my spirit.

“I’d do it again,” I said. I had no regrets about the first impression I’d made on him because look where we were now. “The reason I’m so good at sucking cock is because I used to do it for a living.” At his sudden hesitation, I said, “Please, don’t stop.”

He spanked me again, lighting up my every nerve, allowing the words to spill out of me, uncensored. “The first man I let fuck me paid me enough coin to feed myself for an entire moon cycle. He told me it wouldn’t hurt, but he lied.” That had been a sobering experience, my first lesson on the promises men will make just to have their piece of flesh.

Daddy spanked me again, and I wailed, not from the pain. “What else?” he asked. His deep voice was soothing, which contrasted sharply to his hard, unforgiving hand. “You don’t need to keep secrets from Daddy.”

“I can’t even remember how many men I’ve let fuck me. And not even for money but for a warm bed or a hot meal or just to have their arms around me. I’m a whore, Daddy. If it weren’t for Monica, I’d probably still be selling myself down in Torfell Alley.”

Instead of a slap, his hand was in my hair, gently petting, enough to unravel me completely as he said, “I’m sorry you had to sell your body when it wasn’t your choice, Skylar, that your parents didn’t provide for you, and your people shunned you. Those men took advantage of your situation and treated you poorly. I wish I could punish everyone who’s hurt you. But I don’t judge you for it. You did what you had to, to survive. And I’m going to take care of you from now on, for as long as you’ll let me.”

I nodded, the sting in my eyes echoing the burn in my backside. All I managed to choke out was a quiet, “Okay.”

He smoothed a hand over my flaming ass cheeks and said, “I can see my handprints on your skin. Patterns of pink and red like a field of poppies. Does it hurt?”

“Yes, but I like it. I want more.”

“How much more do you want?”

“Until you think I’ve had enough.”

“Take a few deep breaths for me then, sweetheart.”

I did as he instructed, letting the air flow through me, centering my spirit and preparing myself for the next round .

“Tell me your fantasies, Skylar,” he said. Such an easy command. I trusted him enough to tell him the truth.

“The other night when I was alone in my motel room, I watched a summoning of a giant fisting a dwarf, and I masturbated to fantasies of you doing it to me.”

“Have you ever done that before?” he asked.

“No, you’d be my first.”

Thwack. I groaned and shuddered from the impact, my body hot and tingling all over.

“We’d have to work up to it. My fist is a lot bigger than my cock, probably bigger than two cocks, even.”

“Does it turn you on? Thinking about having your whole hand inside of me?”

“Yes, it does. And we’re going to have a much longer discussion about whether you’re allowed to pleasure yourself without Daddy’s permission.”

A frisson of excitement tripped up my spine. The idea of not being allowed to do something appealed to me, because it meant Daddy would have to pay attention and

punish me if I disobeyed. Would I break his rule on purpose just to test him? Probably. My mind swam with the possibilities while Hiero rubbed his hand tenderly over my welts.

“Are all fae boys shameless little sluts like you?” he asked without any recrimination whatsoever.

“No, I’m very bad. A walking scandal. Or so they say down in Emrallt Valley. I have a terrible reputation.”

“What do they say about you? ”

“I’m the tarnish on the royal crown.” That was one of the more damning headlines, when Cedrych and I first got together and he still allowed himself to be seen with me. We’d been photographed out at a club where I’d ended up giving him a lap dance, free of charge.

“You’re not in Emrallt Valley anymore,” Daddy said with compassion. My heart squeezed almost painfully, and then he smacked me again, two sharp stings on either side that made my ass cheeks jiggle. “What else do you like?”

“I like being watched... by strangers too.” I recalled the wet t-shirt contest where I’d all but stripped naked for the crowd. My exhibitionist streak was a perversion, according to Cedrych, probably because so much of what he did had to be kept out of the public eye. I was far too much of a degenerate to ever be considered a royal suitor, a truth I should have known all along. I’d had to be two people with him, a buttoned-up respectable type in public and his dirty whore in private.

Well, not anymore.

“You want me to fuck you in front of my friends?” Daddy asked, then punctuated his

question with a sharp slap to my balls. A fresh wave of arousal flowed through me, a pleasurable elixir, a wonderful high. A glob of my serum mixed with his seed from our last go-round dripped down my crack. I pushed my ass out and tried to suck it back in. Daddy let out a low groan, sliding his fingers through the mess, following the line of my crack and pushing two digits roughly inside me .

“I’d let them watch if you wanted,” I said, worried this might be a trick. Cedrych would sometimes pose scenarios only to throw them in my face later as proof of my infidelity, though I was true to him until the bitter end. I still couldn’t shake his voice in my head, telling me my desires weren’t appropriate , but I wasn’t with him anymore. I was with my Daddy, who liked this side of me, who wanted to explore all facets of my sexuality.

“My question was whether you’d like it,” he said, pushing his fingers so deep that it stole my breath away.

“I’d like it,” I said quietly.

He removed his fingers and smacked my upper thighs, grazing my tightened sac. Goddess, it hurt like hell and I loved it. “Because you’re a dirty little slut who likes attention,” he said, and his lack of judgment gave me the surge of confidence I needed to admit it.

“Yes, Daddy.”

“Say it,” he commanded, squeezing my balls in his bruising grip.

“I’m a dirty little slut and a terribly needful thing and I like the attention.” It was something I’d never dared to say out loud before. Too real, too raw.

“Yes, you are,” he rumbled with his body stretched over me and his mouth at my ear.

“And, baby boy, here’s my confession, I like it.”

It took me a moment to register how casually he’d accepted my past, my kinks, and my desire to be fisted and fucked in front of his friends, to be bred by his big, bull dick. Of course, it was the heat of the moment, and things might change once we came to our senses, but for now, his encouragement was like a lungful of fresh, mountain air.

“Thank you,” I said, voice shaky, ass on fire, and my entire body thrumming with adrenaline.

“You’re welcome. You’re very sloppy down here, aren’t you, sweetheart?” He smeared my syrupy slick all over my tender ass cheeks.

“Yes, Daddy. Ced—” I stopped myself from saying his name. “My ex thought it was gross.”

“He’s an idiot. And he probably loved it, but hated himself for loving it because, no offense to you, gorgeous, but your ex was a condescending prick.”

“He was,” I said, not wanting to think about the Royal Ass while offering my sloppy hole to Daddy, but dammit, he was.

“Take another deep breath now,” Daddy said, then spanked me with a series of thuds that rattled my bones and lit my ass on fire. I arched back and hissed through my teeth. Something about his praise and the impact was crossing my wires in all the right ways. His brand of discipline felt a lot like love, a dangerous idea to entertain.

“Daddy,” I whimpered.

“You do this to me, baby boy. You make me want to do terribly naughty things to

you. You're like a drug, the perfect cocktail of sweet and slutty. You're going to make Daddy come in his pants. "

"I'm good for that," I said.

"You're good for more than that. You're also kind and clever."

I shook my head, dropping it between my shoulders. This tenderness was too much. How could he not know that?

"I want you to say it, Skylar," he said.

"I can't," I protested weakly.

He yanked my balls roughly and I whimpered.

"Say it, sweetheart," he urged, more gently this time.

"I'm kind and clever."

"And you're worthy of being cherished."

I wanted it to be true. So badly. My eyes stung and a sob broke free from somewhere deep within me. I tried to muffle my cries with a pillow, but that only made it worse. The insecurities and doubts that I carried around bubbled up and poured out. The smell of my sweat and pheromones filled the air, and I imagined the toxins floating away on a cloud. I wanted to be new again for my Daddy, to experience sex and pleasure like a flower in full bloom.

As I sobbed, his calloused hands grabbed hold of my hips and hauled me backwards to meet with his hot, sweaty groin. His hard cock slotted between my flaming cheeks



as he dragged my ass up and down to smear my fluid around his shaft, but belying his rough actions were sweet words of comfort.

“I will worship you, Skylar.” He smoothed his rough hands over my raw welts. I turned back to see him spit onto my hole. Briefly, I hoped he might spit on me elsewhere too. “I know I can’t erase those other men who took you for granted, but you’re mine now, and I know just how special you are.”

“But I’m not,” I argued, for the queen’s words and Cedrych’s casual disregard had done more to damage me than the men who’d paid me outright for sex.

“Yes, you are. You’re my pretty little fae darling with a filthy mouth and a sloppy hole and all I want is to take care of you and give you what you need.”

“That’s all I want too,” I said, feeling even more shattered for having voiced that secret desire.

“Can you be faithful, Skylar?”

“Yes, Daddy.”

“Can you be a cocktease with other men and still be loyal to me?”

“I may steal, but I don’t cheat,” I swore to him.

“That’s good because I want to be the only one to pleasure this gorgeous body,” he said with a look of tenderness radiating from his softened expression.

“I’m yours,” I promised with a slight hiccup.

“Brace yourself now. You’re going to feel all of me against your tender backside.”

“I want it,” I said.

With one hand between my shoulder blades, he pushed me down to the bedding to tilt my ass higher, then fed his cock into my throbbing, empty hole. My ring of muscle was well-trained by now and opened easily, but I still ached and throbbed when he stretched me so wide. His cock was a monster, but just like my cocksucking skills, I prided myself on my ability to take it.

Daddy grabbed a pillow and brought it to my face. “Bite this instead of those pretty lips,” he said, and I hadn’t even realized I’d made myself bleed. “I’m going to dress you in tight leather pants and get you a crop top that says ‘Property of Hierophant Wolfsbane’ so that everyone in town knows you’re mine. And when you’re out there shaking your ass for tips, they’ll know I’m the only man spreading these sweet cheeks.”

“Only you,” I said. My wings shivered, then unfurled with a slick rasp as Daddy sank all the way inside me, seating himself like a king to his mount and tugging on my braid like a rein. It reminded me of how he rode a motorcycle, with complete mastery over his machine.

“Fuck, you feel like Heaven every time,” he murmured.

Then he started to move, driving into me with deep, sure strokes. I spread my legs wider and dropped my chest lower to make room for him. My hole was numb, but my gland throbbed with every penetration. His balls slapped against mine as he bred me, forcing me deeper into the bedding with every thrust.

“You were made for this,” Daddy murmured in between lusty grunts. “Such a good little hole for breeding. I’ll put ten pups in you, keep you barefoot and pregnant for as long as I can. ”

“Would you still want to fuck me if I was pregnant?” I asked, deliriously agreeable about the number of times he wanted to knock me up.

“Every single day. Gotta keep you nice and limber so the pups just tumble out. Keep this hole hungry for Daddy’s dick. You gonna let me cream these sweet cheeks whenever I feel like it?”

“Yes, Daddy. You don’t even have to ask.”

My muscles had liquified, my brain had similarly melted, and I relished that sweet oblivion as I rode the high of his body colliding with mine, a wondrous friction. My balls ached with the need to come, and my swollen cock hung heavy between my spread legs, untouched except for the soft rasp of the bedsheets, which I tried to avoid because I wanted to be good, so good for him. I was an animal on my knees, a receptacle for my Daddy’s seed, and his boy to breed.

“Have you earned this one, boy?”

“Goddess, I hope so.”

“I think you have. I’m getting close now. Come with me, Skylar.” He smacked my thigh and rode me hard and fast until my mind blitzed out and my channel seized around his thick cock. Shudders wracked my body, and a sudden flash of heat razed my skin.

“There you go,” he encouraged, then grabbed my dick and tugged. It was the perfect catalyst as I dumped thick ropes of cum onto his bed sheets. Fireworks went off inside my mind as my wings buzzed with a sweet euphoria. Daddy’s grip in my hair tightened as he focused on his own spectacular finish.

I floated in those few blissful moments, grateful to the Goddess above for this

pleasure and my bodily vessel, which allowed me to serve another. Behind me, Daddy shuddered magnificently and groaned, bathing the walls of my channel with his release.

“Feel that?” Daddy said as the opening of my womb fluttered around his cock like a hummingbird to a flower, the delicate folds tugging him deeper inside.

“Yes.”

“Feels good, doesn’t it?” he said with warm satisfaction.

“Feels amazing.”

“That’s your body yielding to mine. That’s what I’m after, baby boy. Your submission is so sweet and so lovely.”

I had a vision of us making love face-to-face while I was swollen with our child, Hiero rocking into my body when I was so big I could barely move, staring into my eyes while pinching my sore nipples until sweet nectar seeped out. Riding me while lapping up the tiny beads of fluid as if starved for another taste. My nipples tightened and my body shuddered with the aftershocks of pleasure.

“I’m going to keep you forever,” Hiero said, echoing my own secret desires as he collapsed on the bed beside me and dragged me into his arms, his cock still throbbing inside me like a second heartbeat .

I wanted to tell him that he could keep me—if he kept his promise to cherish me, I’d happily be his—but I held my tongue. His infatuation with me would fade, just as it had with every other lover I’d had before him. What started out as exciting eventually turned into “too much.”

But for now, at least, I could indulge in the fantasy.

“Where would we put all those pups?” I said loftily while glancing around his one-room apartment. It would soon be overrun.

“I have land. I’ll build you a house with a big bedroom and a balcony overlooking the mountains where you can sip your morning tea. A big yard where our pups can run wild and a garden to grow all your favorite foods.”

“And fields of clover,” I said because that was my sweet minotaur’s favorite food.

“Green pastures as far as you can see and a cold-water creek for skipping stones and cooling off in the summertime and trees for climbing and the stars above to gaze at while we make love.” He pushed my braid aside and kissed the back of my neck. “How does that sound to you, my darling?”

“Sounds like a dream.” My eyes burned with a fresh round of tears, afraid to admit just how much I wanted it. A home filled with the sounds of laughter, the chance to give to our children the love and affection my parents were unable to give to me, and my strong, capable minotaur taking care of me. “Would you still be my Daddy?”

“Absolutely, and if your needs change, I’ll do my best to adapt.”

It sounded like the promises of a clear-headed man, but we were still in post-coital bliss, and hadn’t past lovers promised me things as well? Commitment and fidelity, a house we could call our own?

What would it look like to be truly committed to Hierophant Wolfsbane? I’d never have to return to Emrallt Valley, for one, or pretend to be someone I wasn’t. I could stay here as an honorary member of the Wolfsbane clan, help Hiero run his business. We could start a family together...

“Think about it,” Daddy said at my prolonged silence. “Now roll over and let me see the damage.”

I turned onto my stomach and stuck out my rear-end. My nerves were still humming, though my ass cheeks ached as my hole expelled his cum in fits and spurts. My lip was torn and bleeding, thanks to my own doing, and there were bruises and hickeys all over my body. The hair he’d so carefully plaited was now completely undone.

“Gorgeous,” he said at last.

A small smile formed on my lips because this was exactly what I’d always wanted but could never have, and I wasn’t going to worry about how long it might take for him to tire of me but enjoy it for as long as it lasted. The greedy part of me would gladly take it. Just when I was in danger of saying something heartfelt, we were interrupted by a loud banging on his apartment door .

“That’d be Frito,” Daddy said. “Do you want to cover up or would you like him to see you like this?”

The bed was the centerpiece of the large room with no screens to shield it from the apartment’s entrance. The bed sheets were wet with cum and sticking to me in places with more of it smeared across my body. Did I want Frito to see me freshly fucked and fully wrecked?

“Would he mind?” I asked.

“He’s one of the friends who’d like to watch,” Daddy said.

I nodded, waiting to see if he might actually follow through. My minotaur strutted naked to his front door, and I admired the muscles in his buttocks and thighs, flexing with every step. Meaty calves, wide, solid feet, hairy legs that made him more manly

in my eyes. His whip-like tail swished with what I now knew to be satisfaction, and his broad, muscular back and rounded shoulders flowed into two strong arms with thick, bulging biceps. His belly was muscled but round, and his cock, mostly flaccid, made my mouth water and my hole ache.

And this man had offered to build me a house?

Hiero opened the door and allowed Frito to step inside before closing it behind him. The shifter's eyes slid past his cousin's nakedness and landed on me, eyes flickering over me like a serpent's tongue.

"Thought I heard wailing," Frito said, not so slyly adjusting his dick, his dark eyes never leaving my body. "Enid wants you both to come down. It's human night and the bar is packed with customers talking about tax write-offs and chiropractors."

"We'll be down after I get Skylar cleaned up." Daddy turned to watch me as well, a satisfied smirk tugging at his lips, a look of pride on his face. He didn't make any excuses for the state I was in, but seemed to revel in his conquest, which was as freeing as it was arousing. "Ass up," Hiero said, so I got on my hands and knees and spread my wings so Frito could see Daddy's handprints on my pale skin and his seed streaked across my thighs.

"Good boy," Daddy said, and I shivered from the praise.

"Fuck, Hiero, that's obscene," Frito said. "You need to bring him to our next VIP Night and lock that shit down."

Hiero chuckled. "Don't I know it."

Warmth fluttered in my stomach and my cock tingled with arousal. Licking his lips, Frito nodded once more at me before heading back downstairs. After closing the door

and locking it, Daddy rejoined me in the bed.

“Did you like that?” he asked, stroking his hand along the base of my wings, a highly sensitive place that required a lot of trust on my part to allow.

That little scene would have been a scandal where I was from, maybe even a crime. “Yeah, I liked that. He didn’t seem phased at all, nor did you.”

“Shifters are known for their group mating rituals, aka VIP Nights. Pack mentality and all that. ”

“You participate in those?” I asked while imagining a pack of shifters lining up to present themselves for my Daddy's attention. Not on my watch . I wanted to snarl and spit at my imaginary competition.

“We host them here at the bar, invite only, during breeding season. I’m not into sharing, but I don’t mind if others watch.” He touched my chin, probably because I was still reeling from my recent exhibition.

“I don’t think I could share you either. I have too many abandonment issues already.”

“Hard limit for us both, then,” he said, seeming satisfied by it.

“And all that stuff about Gunther and Dorth, I wouldn’t act on it. And my past...”

“Is your past. I don’t care how many men you’ve fucked, just as long as I’m the only one fucking you now.”

“You are,” I assured him.

“And if something changes, just tell me. I’m a big boy, and I can handle it. I don’t



want to be lied to or made a fool of.”

“I wouldn’t do that to you. I know how it feels.”

He nodded, and I was glad we were setting these boundaries and expectations. I’d never been this open with past lovers. It was never a negotiation, and the rules were never clear until I did something to anger them, and by then, it was too late.

“Let’s get some ointment on your backside. How are you feeling back here?” Daddy asked as he grabbed some lotion from the bedside table .

“Sore but good overall.”

“Want to take the night off? Soak in the tub?”

“No, I want to go downstairs and work the floor with your cum still inside me. And after we close for the night, I want to blow you in the alleyway.”

“That can be arranged,” he said throatily. “Listen, Skylar...”

He grew so quiet that I turned to him and said, “Yes, Hiero?”

He brushed his fingers against my jaw, then traced the shape of my lips with solemn reverence. He gave me a rueful smile, then shook his head and said with a heavy sigh, “I may be part bull, but remember, pretty fae, my heart is only human.”

I took his tender words and cradled them gently in the palms of my hands.

“I’ll remember.”

### Chapter sixteen

Hiero

I needed to lock that shit down.

Frito's advice played on repeat over the next few days, every time I caught Skylar smiling at me from across the bar, every time I sank deep into the sanctuary of his body.

My boy hadn't said anything more to me about his future plans, despite my gentle probing, and he hadn't taken me up on my offer to find him a spot in town or the several hints that he simply move in with me. He had been spending most nights at my place, and I'd cleared out a couple of drawers for his belongings. His makeup and hair products were slowly taking over the bathroom as well, which made me think he'd need his own vanity when I built our home.

And there I went again. Making long-term plans without any sort of commitment. If making me jealous was Skylar's toxic trait, then mine must be planning an entire future without getting my partner's buy-in .

I was desperate for a sign, which was the reason for me heading over to The Magic Shop one afternoon with two empty buckets. The bar's patrons had become accustomed to the enchanted ice, and it did make our drinks taste better, not to mention I could store some of it in my bedside table to torment my boy. Skylar was spending the day preparing for an upcoming visit from his friend Monica, which meant that I could investigate the possibility of giving him a little nudge in my

direction. It was only research after all.

At the tinkling of the bell, The Owner materialized behind the counter in a cloud of vapor, or perhaps it was only a trick of the lighting. He did, in fact, have a pipe in his hand. “Hierophant Wolfsbane,” he said with a light touch to the brim of his black top hat. “Back for some more of my enchanted ice?”

“It would seem that way,” I said, but instead of heading directly toward the machine, I lingered over the many elixirs and potions lined up on a shelf. The sunlight shone through the vials in a kaleidoscope of color, reminding me of the stained-glass windows of Church and the way the light played on Skylar’s wings when we were making love.

“Does something ail you, Mr. Wolfsbane?” The Owner asked. Something was ailing me alright, but I didn’t exactly want to admit my condition to the man.

“I’m looking for a potion,” I said.

“Yes, I gathered as much since you are perusing my ‘potions’ section,” he snarked. “May I ask, what are your symptoms? ”

“Heart palpitations, clammy palms, an infatuation that borders on obsession.”

“I see. Sounds serious.”

“Feels pretty dire to me.”

“And may I ask, are your affections returned?”

Over the past few weeks, Skylar and I had gone from strangers to lovers to Daddy and boy. Objectively speaking, it had been a fast progression, but he’d told me he

wanted it at every turn. Surely, my imagination wasn't so rich as to invent an entire one-sided relationship?

"I think so," I said at last.

"Well, that is a promising start," The Owner said.

Skylar enjoyed my company and was thriving under my direction, but I worried it wasn't enough to keep him from the many allures of Emrallt Valley. All-night raves and gourmet eateries, rooftop bars, theater and concerts—he'd said he liked music. About the only diversion I could offer him here was our annual battle of the bands and our tawdry themed nights at Church. His best friend lived there too, and of course, there was the surly, spoiled prince to contend with. Even if he was an entitled asshole, who was I when compared with royalty?

I'd entertained the idea of joining him in the fae realm (not that he'd asked me, mind you), but my kin were here, my business was here, and my land was here too. I didn't want to start all over as an outcast in a foreign realm. I supposed that I was just a bit set in my ways .

"So, what seems to be the problem?" The Owner asked, startling me from my mental tangent.

"I need this one to stick," I said, now knowing how else to characterize it. "A binding enchantment, perhaps?"

"Those typically work better when both parties are consenting," The Owner said tactfully.

Obviously, I didn't want to coerce Skylar into staying. I only wanted to open his mind to the possibilities of how sweet our lives could be, a quiet but meaningful

existence spent together in the mountains with my shifter clan.

“Do you have anything less potent? A scent I might spray on myself to make me more attractive to my partner?”

“I don’t think attraction is what you are seeking,” The Owner said.

I exhaled a long-suffering sigh, for he was right.

“Though I do have some colognes imported from the elvish territories. They smell like emotional unavailability and money. Very popular right now.”

“No thanks,” I said, stuffing a bucket under the ice machine and pressing the button. I watched it fill in fits and spurts, frowning all the while.

“There is one thing I might prescribe you, Mr. Wolfsbane, to get your lover to stay,” The Owner said once I’d set my buckets aside.

“I’m listening,” I replied, for it seemed he was stalling just to build suspense .

“Patience.”

After the initial letdown of a remedy so common, I nodded at his wisdom. Skylar would grow to love and trust me, and that might be enough to keep him. Or he’d become restless as so many had before him and leave. And there was nothing I could do to speed up the process or sway him to my side. I could merely demonstrate that I was a safe haven, a place where he might want to put down roots and build a home.

“Love can be painful at times,” The Owner said, not unkindly. “But it also heals. Two good hearts deserve one another, wouldn’t you say, Mr. Wolfsbane?”

I nodded and paid him his coin, then traversed the short walk back to the bar, resolved to be patient and wait for my handsome fae to come around.

I was restocking glasses when Skylar made his entrance at Church later that evening. The fading afternoon light blessed his fair skin, tattoos glowing in a prismatic shimmer. My mood brightened. It was hard to be broody in my boy's presence.

"Hello, Daddy," he said and planted himself on one of the barstools. Despite all the things we'd not addressed, we had solidified this aspect of our relationship at least—what he needed as my boy and what I could provide. But there wasn't much for me to correct. Beyond making sure he was taking care of himself and spending his money wisely, my boy was perfect.

Tonight, he was wearing very high boots with very short shorts and a silver tank top that played peek-a-boo with his nipples. His long hair was tied up in a high ponytail that accentuated the sharp angles of his face, and if it weren't for the obvious bulge in his pants, I might mistake him for a woman. Hotter than sin and sweeter than summer rain, Skylar Larkspur was a rare find indeed.

"Hi, baby, did you get everything done that you wanted?" I asked, handing him a lime and mint spritzer with a few cherries to top it off.

"Yes, and I got here early in case you were missing me?"

"I'm always missing you, sweet thing."

"Then come over here and show me, Daddy," he said with a little pout.

I rounded the bar and swiveled his stool toward me. He wrapped his long legs around my waist as I smoothed my hands along his tattooed thighs and gently squeezed the curve of his ass. I couldn't wait until later that night when I'd have him back in my

bed.

“I heard it’s karaoke night tonight,” he said.

“Yep.”

“And after the bar closes, all of the staff has to sing?”

“It’s tradition.”

“I practiced a song for you. ”

I was bewitched by him, body, mind, and soul, and I got lost for a moment in his violet eyes and long black lashes, the mischievous quirk of his mouth, his pointed ears and chin, and the many rings and bangles he wore that chimed like silver bells whenever he moved.

“I can’t wait to hear it,” I said, leaning down for a kiss. He slung his arms around my neck, and I drank deeply from his mouth. My tongue parried with his, a perpetual thirst I could not quench.

“You taste like strawberries,” I said, licking the sweetness from my lips.

“I had to sample them to make sure they were ripe. I picked up some things for when Monica visits.”

“She’s arriving tomorrow?”

“Yes. I miss her so much.” His gaze became wistful, and I worried at what that sentiment might portend.

“And you’re staying over tonight?” I asked while wishing I could demand more.

“Yes, I’m wearing new lace panties and the plug you gave me. Do you want to see?”

With my throat suddenly dry and my cock steadily expanding, I nodded. Skylar scooted off the bar stool and landed delicately on his high-heeled boots. Bending over, he pulled down his shorts to show me his periwinkle blue panties with a yawning split down the middle. The plug was familiar, black with a flared base and a ring to tug on it. I’d always favored black myself, but for Skylar, I’d need to invest in toys with color and jewels because my boy liked a little sparkle. I’d told him to wear my plug during his shift, as a reminder of who he belonged to.

“Where did you get these?” I asked as my fingers skirted the lace hem.

“From The Magic Shop.”

My eyes widened. “I must have missed the bottomless panties section.”

“The Owner keeps them behind a curtain. It’s called the Boom Boom Room.”

I wasn’t sure how I felt about Skylar being alone in the Boom Boom Room with the wily Owner, but I also didn’t want to overreact.

“So, this is what you’ve been spending your money on?” I asked as I pulled apart the lace to inspect his smooth cheeks. The bruises from my spanking had healed, leaving only milky white skin behind. I didn’t necessarily need the flashy adornments, though I certainly appreciated them.

“I wanted to look sexy for my Daddy.”

“And you do.” I rearranged his panties, tracing the edges where they artfully framed



his plugged hole, then tugged a little on the ring. Skylar whimpered and juttled out his ass for more. “But what did I tell you about saving your money?” I said.

“I paid myself first, just like you told me.”

“That’s a good boy. You’d let Daddy fuck you right here over this barstool if I felt like it, wouldn’t you, Skylar?”

“Yes,” he said with a full-body shiver. Lord knows, I was tempted, but I didn’t want my sister to walk in on us. Or the Ministry of Health. It was bad enough I let him blow me most nights in the alleyway behind the bar where anyone might happen upon us. Skylar got off on the thrill of being caught. I got off on him.

His hole pulsed around the base of the plug, pink as a rosebud, and my cock twitched in my pants, wanting desperately to reunite with its new best friend. “I could keep you plugged and ready for me all the time,” I mused. He’d told me before, fae holes were for pleasure and breeding.

“You wouldn’t even need to prep me.”

My head was doing that thing again, getting distracted by his bendy body and his willingness to submit, but I wanted our relationship to be about more than just sex.

“Straighten up for Daddy,” I told him gruffly, and when he did, I grabbed him around his slender waist and pulled him close to me, holding onto one of his hands as if we were slow dancing. “You know that I like you for more than just your looks and your sexy body and the way you turn me on so shamelessly.”

He ducked his head and glanced away. “I know.”

“Do you?” I asked and lifted his chin.

He nodded, eyes going soft and wide. “This is new for me, being wanted for more than just sex.”

“It might take some time for you to get used to it, but it’s true. ”

He smiled while biting his lower lip. I placed one fingertip against his plush pout. “What have I told you about this?”

“You’re going to gag me, so I don’t bloody my lip.”

My cock twitched from the visual of a tearful Skylar on his knees, gagged and bound and completely under my control. “That’s right. Now, where did you get those boots?”

“Enid let me borrow them. Do you like them?” He bent one leg in a demure pose, and I recalled my sister rocking those bad boys back in the day. She was a real hellion when we were coming up, still was to be honest.

“They’re very sexy and your legs look amazing, but are you going to be able to work the floor all night in them?”

“I’m light on my feet,” he said with a wink.

My hand had somehow migrated to the cleft of his ass, digging inside his panties so that my finger hooked through the ring. Skylar melted in my arms, cooing softly as I manipulated the toy in and out, right up until the back door flung open and Frankie called out a greeting. I made us both presentable as Frankie and Frito rounded the corner, but our dueling erections gave us away. I told Skylar to go get his apron and tried to maintain a more professional mindset.

“Sup, cuz,” Frito said, eyes directed toward the bulge in my pants. “Sup, Skylar.”

“Hey, Frito,” Skylar called while on his way to the back. When he returned, the little black apron he wore was longer than his shorts, which made it look like he wasn’t wearing anything underneath. Gunther and Dorth were going to love that.

“Cute fit,” Frito said with an appraising look. “Boss is going to be messing up drinks all night.”

Skylar grinned and started helping Frankie take down the chairs, teetering on his platform boots and bending over in a way that had me thinking about his plugged hole and how quickly I could be inside him.

“So, how’s things?” Frito asked when Skylar was out of earshot.

“Well, I went looking for a love potion today.”

Frito’s loud guffaw caught Skylar’s attention and he glanced over, smiling at our exchange.

“You know we have a rule against slipping potions in people’s drinks,” Frito reminded me.

“Yeah, I quickly realized it was a terrible idea, so I’m switching to the old-fashioned method.”

“Which is?” Frito asked.

“Pining.”

Still chuckling, he slapped my back. “Just keep giving him that daily dose of vitamin D, cuz, and you’ll be right as rain.”

“I want this to be about more than sex,” I said to my cousin, just as I’d said to Skylar. I wanted everything from the fae. Wanted to put a ring on his finger and a bun in his oven, have him call me his husband in addition to his Daddy. But the last thing I wanted was to scare him off.

“You’ll get there. But good sex is a great place to start. ”

Was it? Should I have tried dating Skylar before falling into bed with him? Courted him properly? Had we gone about this in the wrong way?

I kept my eye on my naughty boy throughout the rest of our shift and ended up having to give away more than a few wrong cocktails. At the end of the night when it was just the staff left at the bar with the karaoke machine still going, Skylar took the stage. As promised, he dedicated his song to me then sang a sweet, melancholy ballad about wild ponies running free in his deep, husky baritone, glancing over at me from time to time with a shy smile. He had an incredible talent that had been wasted in his hometown due to all those ridiculous rules about who could do what. Skylar shined on stage, practically incandescent at being allowed to sing from his soul. The fact that he was singing for me...

The heart palpitations started up again, and I wasn’t sure I would survive it.

“He is either the best thing to happen to you or the worst,” Frito said at my side.

I nodded, lovesick to my core. “Either way, it will have been worth it.”

### Chapter seventeen

#### Skylar

“M onica Merriweather,” I shouted with glee as soon as I saw her fabulous self emerge from a horse-drawn covered coach. She wore stiletto ankle boots and dark sunglasses with a lavish faux-fur overcoat. Her kinky black hair was done up in braids that wove around her scalp like serpents, and her many piercings glinted in the afternoon sun as she flashed me a brilliant smile.

“Skylar Larkspur,” she shouted, matching my exuberance and throwing herself into my arms. We twirled together, wings alight and buzzing with affection, as a few locals stopped to stare at our happy reunion.

“You packed a lot of shit,” I said as I took one handle of the very large trunk the valet had unloaded. With his help, we hauled it onto the luggage trolley, compliments of the Purple Pegasus Motel .

“Just my entire closet and my shoes and my tattoo kit and all my makeup and hair products, and my special pillow and blanket and silk bonnet. You know, the essentials.”

“Are you going to give me a tattoo?” I asked, thrilled at the prospect.

“I’ve got this new ink that only shows up in the dark. Very sexy. I thought you might like to give it a whirl.”

“I’d love to,” I said, hugging her again. “Goddess, I’m so glad you’re here.”

“Me too. I’ve missed you so much, Skybear. You look great, by the way. Have you changed up your skincare routine?”

“Not unless you count cum facials,” I said with a wink.

“You fucking slut,” she squealed and jabbed me in the gut. “Oh my Goddess, you don’t even know.”

“Know what?”

“Cedrych has been all over the Daily Scrolls , getting drunk and starting fights in taverns across Emrallt Valley. The rumor is that the queen has checked him into rehab.”

“He’s probably just restricted to his rooms in the palace,” I said, feeling a little bad for him, despite all the trouble he’d caused. “But Cedrych isn’t my problem anymore.”

“And thank the Goddess for that.” Linking her arm with mine, we dragged the trolley behind us as she caught me up on all the Valley gossip during our short walk to my motel room.

I’d taken on a second job of cleaning the other rooms in exchange for free rent. It was easy enough to do, and I rather liked making everything neat and tidy. I hadn’t told Hiero about my side hustle because I didn’t want him to worry I was working too hard, but I was building my savings, just as he’d instructed. I’d thought more than once about his offer to have me move in with him, but I wanted to work on myself for a bit, make sure I could be responsible without my Daddy having to clean up all of my messes.

“What have you done with my friend Skylar?” Monica asked when she saw my living quarters, cleaner than I’d ever kept a room before.

“It’s the new me,” I said, spreading my arms.

“Clearly,” she said and peeled back the duvet cover of the second bed to find a red thong I’d somehow forgotten.

“That’s just my bathing suit,” I said, snatching it from her.

“Great idea, let’s hit up the pool.”

Twenty minutes later, Monica was in her teeny bikini, and I was wearing my thong while we sipped rum drinks by the pool. Clementine, the motel owner, passed by and waved, thanking us for doing our duty to draw in more customers. I laughed gaily and told her to join us, but she said she had too much paperwork to do.

“So, tell me about him,” Monica said, her berry red lips sucking booze from the straw like it was a flower blossom. Her bejeweled sunglasses hid her eyes, but I could imagine they were brimming with curiosity.

“What do you want to know?”

“Don’t be cagey with me, young man. I want to know everything , obviously. ”

I smiled, feeling rather smug. “Well, I told you already he’s a minotaur.”

“Hot, yes.”

“And he owns the bar where I work.”

“And you met him when you were pickpocketing?”

“Yes, and I tried to blow him but he refused because he’s a gentleman.”

“Until you corrupted him, you hussy.”

I laughed and sipped my strawberry daiquiri. My nipples were tingling again, which was strange because Hiero wasn’t even in the vicinity. Just thinking about him must be causing the sensation.

“And now he’s my Daddy,” I said, for that bit of information was news to her.

“Really?” she asked, and I nodded. “So, this is a for-real thing then?”

I shrugged. “I want it to be. He said he wants to breed me and build me a house.”

“He what ?” she squawked, letting her sunglasses drop.

“I don’t know if we could have children, but I kind of like the idea.”

“Skylar Larkspur,” she said, loud enough for anyone to hear. “Are you telling me you left Emrallt Valley and less than a moon cycle later you’ve convinced a hot minotaur Daddy to knock you up? Are you planning to get cozy up here in the mountains? ”

I smiled sheepishly. “Maybe, but it’s probably just the sex talking, right? Men will say anything to get you in bed.” That had been my experience, though I hoped Hiero was the exception.

“Okay, but does he say these things before or after he comes?” she asked as if it was hard science.



I tried to recall the timeline, but our lovemaking was always a haze of mind-blowing pleasure and dizzying orgasms. There was something in the way he touched me though, that was unlike any lover I'd had before. He was careful and almost... reverent. I didn't know how to describe it to Monica and it felt too personal besides.

"Both?" I answered. "When we're alone together, he's very open about his desires. At the bar, he's a little more reserved, but he has to be. He's the boss."

"How big is his dick?" she asked.

"Monica," I protested.

"Come on, give me a clue." She held up her arm and tapped her wrist.

"Bigger," I said, and she moved her finger closer to her elbow but not far enough. "Big enough and that's all you need to know."

"Your poor hole. You'd better be doing your exercises to keep it tight."

I laughed because she wasn't wrong.

"So," she prompted, "you obviously feel some kind of way about him?"

"I really like him." More than like him, but I couldn't admit it just yet, even to Monica. "He's very sweet to me. Stern but kind, and I don't want to do anything to hurt him or betray his trust."

"Anything other than flaunting that fine ass in a thong where anyone can see."

"He's okay with that. He likes for me to express my sensuality, encourages it even. The words 'proper' and 'appropriate' haven't even come up."

“Well, that’s a relief. Any bitchy future in-laws to deal with?”

“He’s part of the Wolfsbane Clan, mostly cousins and his sister Enid. They’ve all been very nice to me. They have a big family. Hiero wants a lot of kids.”

My fingers drifted absently over my abdomen, where my skin would stretch and swell if we were ever to be successful at conceiving.

“Goddess above, you want to have this bull’s babies.”

I rolled over and buried my face in the crook of my arm, embarrassed by my own desires. She nudged my ribs. “You totally do, you hungry little breeder. He gave you baby fever and now it’s all you can think about.”

“Is not,” I protested, but my fantasies said otherwise. “It’s just, he makes me feel safe. I can finally imagine having a child without coming up with a hundred reasons why not.”

“It’s nothing to be ashamed of. It’s biological. But don’t you have an implant? ”

“Yes. I was thinking about having it removed.” I dared a glance at her, and she smiled wide.

“I think that’s a spectacular idea. Get him to knock you up and that house in the mountains is yours.”

“Not like that, Monica,” I said with a huff. “He’s not a mark or a john. He’s a good man and he deserves someone who can make him happy.”

“I’ll be the judge of that. And I only meant that a baby is a good way to catch a man.”

“Catch one maybe, but not to keep one, especially if he doesn’t want it. I always said I’d only have kids if I was with a loving partner in a loving home. I don’t want to do to some innocent child what my parents did to me.”

She reached out and pet my hair, and it reminded me of so many long nights where we’d huddled together in our drafty, rat-infested apartment and dreamed of something better for us both.

“You’ll be a great father, Skylar, whether you do it alone or with someone else. Now, I think we should drink to you finally getting rid of that no-good, two-timing prince and his bitchy-ass mother. Congrats for coming out here and really taking the bull by the horns.”

I shook my head at her terrible pun.

“Seriously, babe, you hit the bullseye with this one,” she continued. “You’ve proven there’s more than one way to be full of bull. ”

“Monica, enough,” I protested as we both dissolved into giggles.

We drank a little more, then took a break from the sun. I put away Monica’s many belongings while she set up her tattoo kit. When we were both mostly sober, I laid out on my belly on my second bed and Monica sat beside me and worked her magic. I shivered and sweated under the slow burn of her tattoo gun as it passed over my spine and the muscles of my lower back. When she’d finished, we closed the curtains and she angled her mirror so I could see my newest tattoo glowing in the dark: two bullhorns just beneath the base of my wings where Hiero might see them when he bred me from behind. My wings quivered, anticipating the next time my Daddy gave me the “ass-up” order. Would he like it? Was it too much?

“You finally got your tramp stamp,” Monica said, satisfied with her work. “If that

doesn't say, 'I'm into you,' I don't know what does."

"I love it," I said, turning this way and that to admire it.

"I bet you do, you little slut. Now, no more stalling. It's time for me to meet this minotaur with a cock of mythic proportions who has captured your tender heart. Let's talk outfits..."

### Chapter eighteen

#### Hiero

I t was Goth Night at the bar, and Skylar and his friend Monica made quite the entrance wearing matching fishnet stockings that ended at their high-cut leather thongs. Monica wore a black conical bra-thing while Skylar wore a leather harness across his toned chest, his exposed nipples like two targets drawing me in. His eyes were dramatically drawn, with pale powder on his face and ruby red lips. His raven hair was pulled back in a single tight braid that trailed down his back and with the sides of his head recently shaved, he looked both hot and edgy. He was sex on a stick, and my blood flowed mightily southward, all of my senses attuned to my slutty, gorgeous boy.

“Hi, Daddy,” he said, a little breathlessly as he leaned over the bar to give me a peck on the lips.

“Hi, baby, you are looking fine as ever.”

“Thank you,” he said with a cautious smile. “This is my friend, Monica.”

Monica daintily extended her hand and I shook it.

“Nice to meet you, Monica. Welcome to Church. Drinks are on me tonight.”

“You are a gentleman,” she purred. She was tattooed all over, everywhere but her face. Where Skylar’s tattoos were a light silvery color and mostly patterns and

designs, hers were of flora and fauna, inked in all the colors of the rainbow and decorating every inch of her caramel-colored skin.

“What’d you guys do today?” I asked.

“Hung out by the pool. Monica gave me a new tattoo,” Skylar said.

“Oh yeah? Can I see it?”

“You’ll have to find it first,” he teased, stirring my pot even more. It had been almost twenty-four hours since I’d last had him, and it would be at least that many more before I’d have him again. I needed to pace myself and give him some room to breathe. I’d already decided to do just that when Skylar’s gaze caught mine, and he must have seen my lust blooming because he said very intentionally, “Do you need me in the back for a few minutes, Daddy?”

The double entendre did not go unnoticed by Monica, who only raised one artfully shaped eyebrow in my direction.

“I don’t want to hog your attention,” I said, nodding pointedly at his friend.

“Go ahead,” she said with a wave of her hand. “I’ll flirt with the handsome bartender.”

Frito appeared at my side to make her a drink as Skylar ducked under the bar toward me. An ambush. I pulled him into my arms and dragged him into the tiny office crammed with filing cabinets and an old, sturdy desk. I pushed a stack of papers aside and set him down on the wooden desktop. My mouth was on him in a flash, tasting his neck, lips, tongue...

“Breed me, Daddy,” came his breathless pant when we finally came up for air. My

hands moved of their own volition, grabbing his leather thong and yanking it down roughly, along with his fishnets. He was stuffed already with a butt plug I'd purchased a few days ago from The Owner of The Magic Shop. The base of it was bejeweled, and I tugged on it lightly while Skylar mewled and squirmed in my grasp.

"My nipples. Pinch, them Daddy. Please," he begged.

I twisted them savagely, watching them swell and darken under my rough treatment. He leaned back on his elbows and brought his knees up to his ears, making an offering of himself. There was little more that needed to be said, so I tugged on the plug until it popped free. "Open your mouth," I commanded and stuck the plug between his lips for him to suck like a pacifier. "That should keep you from biting your lip."

He nodded, eyes wide, and attempted to grab for my belt. I helped him along, letting the buckle clank and fall away. He ran his hands under my shirt, raking his fingernails through my chest hair and tweaking my pierced nipples as I unbuttoned and unzipped my pants. I pulled out my cock and Skylar's eyes widened .

"You like what you see," I asked, and he nodded furiously. "Is your greedy, little hole ready for it?" He nodded again and made a grabby motion with his hand.

I pinned his folded up body between me and the desk. The plug had opened him a little, but my cock was always a stretch for him to take. "Easy does it," I reminded him before his patience wore out. I wound the end of his braid around my fist, forcing his head backward so I could see all of his throat. My tail wrapped around his thigh to hold him in place as I slowly increased the pressure on his already-slick hole. My sweet little breeder.

"That's a good boy, Skylar, stay nice and quiet for Daddy."

He mewled around the plug in his mouth and arched back. His nipples were ripe for torment, so I drew one tiny bud into my mouth and sucked hard. There was a sweetness there I'd not tasted before, and I thought I knew all the flavors of his body already. He bucked up like a restless stallion, impatient as ever, so I drove into him steadily, all the way, until his hole was stuffed full and his eyes rolled back.

"Give me your neck," I commanded.

He turned his head, and I anchored my dull teeth against his tendon with enough pressure to mark him without breaking the skin. I thought briefly about him returning to the bar and his best friend with evidence of my claim all over his body and it aroused me even more. I picked up the pace, whispering sweet nothings as I hammered into him. "You're a hungry little cumslut waltzing into the bar dressed like that, making Daddy hard as a rock, knowing I'd have to watch you all night in that tiny thong while I'm stuck behind the bar mixing drinks, bending over for all the realms to see. Was that your plan, Skylar? To tease your Daddy?"

He nodded furiously while gripping my shoulders for dear life.

"You think I should reward your naughty behavior?"

His words were muffled by the plug but I recognized his begging tone. I briefly considered denying him, but seeing him hard all night in his leather thong would be an additional torment to me.

"Did you choose that slutty outfit just for me?" He moaned his assent, so I asked, "Does Monica know how desperate you are for a good fucking?" He nodded, giving me another helpless little whimper, so I licked along the shell of his ear and tugging on the lobe with my teeth while I pumped into him in nice, even strokes. I loved watching him unravel.



“Do you think everyone in the bar knows how easily you spread your legs for Daddy, how shameless and slutty you are when I have you underneath me?” He nodded again, his hole pulsing around my cock as a warning. I grabbed hold of his dick and squeezed him tight.

“Not yet, sweetheart. You gotta work that tight ass a little more. Milk me now, boy.”

The look on his face became focused and determined as he tightened up around me, squeezing my cock and drawing me in deeper. Thrusting became an exercise in willpower because all I wanted was to stay locked up inside him.

My entire body shook as I fucked him, my nervous system attuned to the mounting pleasure. He let out a noise that sounded like, please, Daddy, and I nearly lost control. With my mouth against his ear, I whispered, “Come for me, slutty boy, so I can dump a load inside you and get back to work.”

He shivered and rolled beneath me, clamping down on my dick as the orgasm seared through him and he spurted all over his heaving chest, long ropes of milky white sap that drove me wild because I’d done that to him. My nostrils flared at the sweet tang in the air as I let loose on him. The desk knocked up against the wall as a tankard of pens fell to the floor. Papers went flying. I swallowed a thunderous roar as I unloaded, cock twitching, balls humming, my carnal lust sated... for now.

“Good boy,” I said, satisfied now that my seed was coating his insides. “I swear, baby, you wreck me every time. Now hold it in.” Skylar tightened up as much as he could while I slipped out. I grabbed the plug from his mouth and shoved it back into his hole.

“Thank you, Daddy,” he said with a deep purr of satisfaction, smiling up at me. “That felt so good. I love what you do to me.”

The praise went straight to my head, and I wished we were up in my apartment so that I could cuddle him properly rather than having to rush back out to the bar. “You’re welcome, baby. You’re too tempting, strutting into the bar looking the way you do. I’m finding it hard to deny you.”

“I like it when you give in.” He glanced down at the string of pearls decorating his stomach like a work of art. I drew my thumb through his cum puddle and put it to my mouth, sweet and creamy just like him.

“One of these days I’m going to cage that pretty cock of yours and make you earn the right to come,” I told him.

“How would I do that?”

“By doing exactly what I tell you.”

“Yes, Daddy,” he said with a zealous look in his eyes.

As I buttoned up my pants and buckled my belt, I took a mental picture of him splayed out on my desk, smug as a cat. He watched me, quiet and content as I tended to him, wiping him down with some tissues, pulling up his thong and tucking his cock and balls back inside, rearranging his fishnets. I rubbed the bite mark I’d left on his neck and fixed his smudged makeup. His mouth looked like he’d been sucking on a cock, but there wasn’t much I could do about that. Anyone with eyes knew we were fucking and that he was mine. When he was mostly put back together, I offered him my hand.

“Can you stand?” I asked. He got to his feet gingerly, his long legs balancing on his platform boots. “Are you going to behave tonight?” I asked, kissing his temple and breathing in his sweet musk. “Or am I going to have to spank you later?”

“You’re going to have to spank me,” he said with a shit-eating grin. “Or whip me with your tail?”

I swallowed, surprised yet again by his ability to up the ante. “You’d like that?”

“I’d love that.”

He leaned up to give my cheek a peck, and I drew him back into my arms, so I could kiss him properly and claim his mouth just as I’d claimed his ass. I could spend a whole day just doing this. I drew my hands down his back, then pressed two fingers against the strap of leather wedged between his ass cheeks. “This plug stays in until you get back to your room tonight.”

“Yes, Daddy.”

“Now go back out there and have fun with your friend. Don’t leave without saying goodnight. I want to make sure someone walks you home.” I squeezed his ass once more for good luck. “And remember who this belongs to.”

“All yours, Daddy, I swear.”

I opened the door and led him back out to the bar, watching him struggle to walk straight. Monica teased him about it and when Skylar wasn’t looking, she shot me a look of warning. I nodded, message received. I mixed drinks for them both throughout my shift while they enjoyed themselves on the dance floor, bumping and grinding with each other and our motley crew of patrons. I resisted the urge to piss on Skylar’s leg to mark him as my own, though I did aim a couple death glares at Gunther and Dorth. At the end of the night, I told Frito to walk them home while I closed up the bar, and when my cousin returned, I asked for a report .

“They were drinking by the pool,” he said dutifully. I nodded, thinking I might stop

by later, just to check in on him. I was behind the register, counting up the till when my summoner hummed in my back pocket. I pulled it out and flipped it open to see Skylar's face materialize in the antique mirror. He was grinning, eyes glassy, clearly drunk.

"Hi, Daddy."

"Hey, baby, have you had enough to drink yet?"

"Yes," he said, still smiling. "I'm done now. We ran out."

Thank God for small blessings. We might need to make a new rule about drinking in moderation.

"Did you have fun tonight with Monica?" I asked.

"Yes, did you see us?"

"Couldn't tear my eyes away," I said with more than a little longing.

"I've been thinking..." he said while dragging his sharp teeth across his plush lower lip without biting down, proving that even while intoxicated, Daddy's rules still applied.

"What have you been thinking, gorgeous?" I asked because he seemed to have lost his train of thought.

"Ten pups is a lot."

I grinned. So, this was what he thought about when his inhibitions were lowered? "Is ten too many?"

“I’m afraid my pelvic floor will give out. Ten is a lot for one womb to carry.”

The thought of him tottering around with a big belly and swollen, leaky tits was making me hard. “Do fae produce milk?”

“More like nectar. It’s thick and sweet. Babies feed on that until they’re old enough for honey.”

“Sweet, just like the rest of you.” In my mind he was already round with our pup, his chest tender and his nipples big and puffy. I wondered if fae were similar to other mammals, if stimulating his nipples might get the nectar flowing. I’d certainly enjoy exercising his hole to prepare him for birth, stretching him slowly in a nest of pillows until he was flush and tingling all over, his body primed for labor.

But only if he wanted that too.

“How will we take care of them all?” Skylar asked, still stuck on the logistics.

I grinned, delighted that he was even considering it. Ten was probably too many. I didn’t want to wear him out, physically or emotionally.

“How about we start with one and see how it goes?” I suggested.

“But what if I can’t have children? What if we can’t?”

So, this was what was bothering him?

“Then we can adopt, or we can just be really great uncles to my sister’s litter.”

“But you want kids.”

“I want a loving partner more than I want kids. And regardless of whether we can conceive, I’ll still want to breed you, baby boy.” At his soft, dewy-eyed expression, I asked, “Still with me?”

“Yes, Daddy.”

“Where’s Monica?”

“Passed the fuck out. It’s so dark out here.”

“Where are you?”

“By the pool.”

I deposited the night’s earnings in a safe and made my way to the door. I’d make sure he got up to his room at the very least.

“I don’t think I’d be a good father,” Skylar was saying.

“Why not?”

“I’m barely an adult myself. I can’t pay my bills on time, and I don’t eat enough dark leafy greens.”

I chuckled at his reasons. If he were sober, I might try to convince him otherwise, but these were the musings of a highly inebriated boy. “That’s why you have me. Daddy can help you with those things.”

“I’ve never had a good role model. And what if I screw up? I don’t want to fuck up someone else’s life too.”

“Everybody makes mistakes, darling. And we learn.”

He sighed and his gaze drifted upward, probably looking at the stars. “I like you,” he said softly, achingly.

“I like you too, baby.”

“We could be good together.”

“We are good together.”

“It’s not just the sex. At least not for me. ”

I nodded as a pleasant warmth unfurled inside me. “No, not for me either.”

His summoner shifted then. He must have laid it on his stomach because I could only see the point of his chin and his face tilted upward. His soft regular breaths indicated that he may have fallen asleep. I hustled over to the Purple Pegasus and found him sleeping in a lawn chair, barefoot and in his pajamas. Monica must have already gone to bed.

“Up we go,” I said as I scooped him into my arms.

“You’re here? Or am I dreaming?”

“Daddy’s here, and I’m taking you up to your room now.”

“Will you tuck me in?”

I nodded and carried him upstairs. After placing him gently in bed, I glanced over to see that Monica was asleep on top of the covers, so I turned down one side of the

blankets for her to use in case she got cold during the night. Then I tended to Skylar, rearranging him so that I could pull back the bedding and tuck him underneath.

“Stay with me till I fall asleep,” he said sleepily.

I lay down beside him while he drifted off again. Long, black lashes fanned across his cheeks, and his delicate features were even softer when relaxed. “Good night, Daddy,” he murmured. “Thanks for taking care of me.”

“You're welcome. Good night, baby boy.”

As I watched him sleep, a calm sense of certainty stole over me. I was absolutely smitten with this sweet fae angel, and come hell or high water, I was going to do everything in my power to prove to Skylar Larkspur that I was worthy of his love and loyalty.

Not just for now, but forever.



### Chapter nineteen

Skylar

I woke up with a hangover from hell and barely made it to the bathroom before vomiting everything I'd ingested the night before into the toilet. I tried to recall all that I'd drank: a daiquiri by the pool, a couple cocktails at the bar, and a nightcap when we'd arrived back at the motel, which was only about a third of what Monica had, and I'd been eating steadily and hydrating throughout the day. Surely, it wasn't enough to make me feel this miserable?

My head throbbed and my mouth tasted mossy as I stared down at my chest. Why were my nipples so puffy?

"You all right, boo?" Monica asked, peeling the loose hair from my sweaty neck a little too late. "Did you get any on you?"

"Do these look swollen to you?" I asked, pointing at my chest.

"I don't know. Does this hurt?" she asked and twisted my nipple savagely .

"Ow, meanie." I rubbed my poor nipple and a surge of... sensation rippled through me. "Something's wrong," I told her, assessing myself in the mirror. This was more than a hangover. My skin felt strangely tender all over and my stomach wasn't right either.

"Shit, let me see your face." Monica gripped my chin and scrutinized me closer. "No

blemishes, a faint sparkling glow, flushed and rosy cheeks.” She studied me head to toe. “Skylar, are you sure you’re not pregnant?”

“What?” I exploded. I turned back toward the mirror and frantically inspected my abdomen—still flat, not that it mattered. “No way, Mon. That’s not even a little bit funny. Stop fucking with me like that.”

She smiled wickedly. “Calm down, Skylar, it’s not good for the baby.”

“Monica Rose Merriweather,” I growled.

Still laughing, she said, “What? You said you wanted him to breed you. Well, it looks like he has.”

I shook my head. “This cannot be happening to me. I have a neutralizing implant.”

“Sure, but aren’t those designed to neutralize fae sperm? You’re not fucking a fae, baby cakes.”

My eyes widened. Fuck, I hadn’t even thought of that. “How could I be so stupid?” I wailed.

“You weren’t stupid, Skybear, you were just dick-matized. It happens to the best of us.”

“What the fuck am I going to do now? ”

“Definitely not drinking.”

“Monica,” I whimpered, tears springing to my eyes. Not the hormones already! I’d finally found a nice man who wanted to take care of me, and I was going to shackle

him with this responsibility? Nothing made a man run for the hills faster than an unplanned pregnancy, nor did I want him to feel obligated to me. Hiero said he wanted kids, but there was no way he'd want them with some messy bitch like me.

"Breeding kink... is a... fantasy... not... reality," I said through my hiccupping sobs.

She drew me into her arms and patted my messy, puke-stained hair. "I know, sweetheart. It's a lot to take in, but it'll be okay, I promise. Whatever happens, you have me, don't forget. And besides, until you take a test, we don't know for sure. It might just be a hangover."

I nodded and tried to pull myself together, praying to the Goddess Imogen that my best friend was right.

We ate breakfast down by the pool, but my stomach was so upset that I could only manage a few nibbles. Then we made a trip to The Magic Shop, the closest thing to an apothecary in Dragonback Mountains .

"I don't even know if they have doctors here," I said as I perused The Owner's selection of at-home pregnancy tests, trying to find one that was made specifically for fae.

"They must. Midwives at least. There are children everywhere."

She was right about that. The shifter's young ran wild in good weather, seemingly with very little supervision, but there was usually an adult pack member nearby. Would the Wolfsbane Clan accept a half-fae, half-minotaur child into their community, or would they be ostracized from society as I'd been?

"Get out of your head," Monica said. "You might not even be pregnant."

“Are congratulations in order?” The Owner asked as I paid him his coin.

“No,” Monica and I both snapped at him as I scooped up the box and stuffed it in my bag.

Twenty minutes later, we had our answer.

“Definitely preggers,” Monica said, not at all trying to hide her delight.

“What are you so excited about? This is a disaster,” I said glumly, staring at the pee stick where the two bright lines sealed my fate.

“Skylar, do you know how lucky you are? What are the chances you’d ever conceive with another fae, much less a minotaur? That’s like, unheard of. Your child will be a marvel. ”

“But what if they don’t fit in? What if the other kids bully them for being different?”

“Well, you know I have a soft spot for those too.”

By now it was late afternoon and Church would be opening soon. I had the night off to spend with Monica, and all I really wanted to do was eat junk food, lie in bed, and wallow, but if I was going to tell Hiero, I needed to do it soon. I didn’t want to blindside him while he was at work.

“I should tell him,” I said, trying to psych myself up for it.

“Are you sure you don’t want to sit with it for a little while? You’re under no obligation to tell him until you’re ready.”

“Not telling him would feel too much like lying. And if he doesn’t want it...” If

Hiero didn't want it, and I carried on with the pregnancy, then I'd have to raise the child alone. My parents would be no help whatsoever, and though Monica was a great friend, she had her own life to live.

I dragged myself out of bed, braided my hair, and fixed my face, wanting to look presentable for when I told him, trying to think about the best possible way to break the news, praying that this wouldn't be the end of us.

### Chapter twenty

#### Hiero

I was just finishing up an early dinner when there was a knock on my door. Only a few people had the security code to my private quarters and, expecting it to be Frito, I was pleasantly surprised to see Skylar standing on the other side wearing a midriff bejeweled with Diva and a pair of cutoffs that showed off his long, toned limbs.

“Frito let me in,” he said quietly. “I hope that’s okay?”

“Of course, it’s okay. Did you forget the code?”

“I did. I’m sorry. I’ve been a bit out of it today.”

His face was paler than usual, and he looked a little queasy too. “How are you feeling? A little under the weather?” I asked.

“Yes, I think so.”

“Want something to eat?”

“No, thank you. I ate already.”

“Care to join me then? ”

He nodded, so I led him over to the wooden table and two chairs. Gripping his

stomach, he looked like he was going to be ill.

“Let me get you some ginger ale. Maybe that will help settle your stomach.”

“Thank you... Daddy ,” he said with a strange timidity. Why had he hesitated?

I poured some ginger ale over enchanted ice and served it to him with a twist of lime. I grabbed some crackers too in case he changed his mind about being hungry.

“I didn’t mean to disturb you, if you’d like to finish your meal.” He gestured toward my plate.

“I don’t mind. I’m always happy to see you.”

He fiddled with the end of his loose braid, looking everywhere but at me, so I reached for his hand and squeezed. “Hey, sweetheart, want to tell me what’s on your mind?”

He swallowed, eyes welling up with tears, then let out a tiny, helpless whimper before the waterworks began. I immediately scooped him into my arms and led him to the couch where I could set him on my lap. With his arms wrapped around my neck, he buried his face in my shoulder and quietly sobbed. I rubbed slow circles onto his back and waited for the tempest to pass, then gently wiped his face with the hem of my shirt. I’d need to stock up on tissues for my sensitive boy.

“You having a day?” I asked and he nodded, pressing his lips tightly together so he’d not be tempted to chew. “Want to talk about it?” I’d assumed that was why he came over, but maybe he just needed to be held.

“I don’t want to trap you,” he said, which was an odd thing to say. Of all my concerns about our relationship, that was probably the farthest from my mind. Trap me, please, I wanted to tell him, but I wasn’t so sure how he’d take it in his current state of mind.

“Is this about our conversation last night?” I asked, and he blinked as if just remembering that we’d spoken.

“I summoned you?” he said and then with more certainty, “I summoned you.”

“Yup.”

“You tucked me in,” he said as a fresh round of tears flooded his pretty eyes.

“Yes, I did. I could do that for you every night if you moved in here with me.”

Was it bold of me to suggest it outright? Too soon? We’d been together for a little over a month, but I honestly didn’t care if anyone (mainly my sister) thought we were moving too fast. For me, it wasn’t fast enough. I wanted him with me all the time, in my bed and at my table. He was my lover and my boy, and he belonged with his Daddy.

Skylar glanced around my apartment as if seeing it for the first time.

“I can go through my stuff and get rid of some things to make room for you,” I offered. “You can decorate the place however you want. ”

“That’s not...” He paused to gather himself. “That’s very generous of you, Hiero, but that’s not what this is about. Not exactly.”

“Okay. So, what is it about?”

“There’s something I need to tell you, and I’m not really sure how you’ll take it, but I think it’s important for you to know—”

The door to my apartment swung open and Frito barged in without even bothering to



knock.

“What the fuck, Frito?” I asked, hackles raised, because my privacy was important to me, and Skylar’s too, especially when he was so clearly upset.

“Sorry to interrupt you, boss, but we’ve got a situation downstairs.”

“What kind of situation?” I growled.

“The fae prince is back and he’s brought reinforcements.”

The bar was still closed to the public, a small blessing, but that hadn’t stopped the prince and a dozen of his guards from strolling inside and cluttering up the place with their boots and their weapons. I assessed the potential damage to life and property. Before I could stop him, Skylar rushed around me to hammer the prince with some choice words .

“What the fuck are you doing here, Cedrych? Why can’t you stay in Emrallt Valley where you belong?”

“This is none of your concern, Skylar,” the prince said as he drew his steel. “And I’m not here for you anyway. I’m here for the minotaur.”

“The fuck you are. You can march your sorry ass right out of this bar before you get your butt kicked all the way back to Crystal Castle. And I’ll make sure the Daily Scrolls know all about it. I can just see the headlines now: Prince Cedrych Gets His Nose Broken at Borderlands Shifter Bar. Your family portraits will never look the same again.”

That headline sounded pretty accurate to me, and I appreciated my boy’s sass, but seeing the prince’s sword so near to my beloved rattled my nerves, so I grabbed hold

of Skylar's shoulders and steered him toward the bar where Monica was already on guard.

"Stay back here," I told them both. "No matter what."

"This is ridiculous," Skylar said, climbing onto the bar to shout at the prince from across the room. "Do you really want to make an enemy of the Wolfsbane Clan, Cedrych? What will Mommie Dearest say when she finds out you've been causing trouble in the shifter realm? She'll ship you off to the icy tundra of the Northern Realm where you'll freeze your nuts off, and your dick will never get hard again."

I had to hold back a chuckle at that colorful description .

"Actually, she'll be shipping me off to elvish territory at the summer solstice, so it hardly matters to me anymore," was the prince's retort.

"You foolish, spoiled, selfish man. I seriously can't believe I ever—" Skylar was interrupted when Monica clamped her hand over his mouth and forced him down from the bar. I nodded in appreciation. However true his words may be, I didn't want the prince to take his ire out on Skylar.

"You've clearly come here for a reason," I said to the prince. "What do you want?"

"I've come here to fight you, Minotaur, for the honor of the fae."

Royals were known to be blowhards from time to time, but this seemed a tad ridiculous. "Fighting me will bring honor to your people?" I asked dubiously while scanning the faces of the guards and trying to gauge my own odds of success.

"You besmirched my good name during our last encounter, and I've come to settle the score."

“Good name, huh?” I said with a deep sigh of resignation. The prince was spoiling for a fight, and I doubted diplomacy would dissuade him. Blades would only lead to one or both of our deaths, not to mention the dozen or more of my shifter kin who’d slowly filtered into the bar and were now hovering on the sidelines, waiting to see which way this thing went. My clan were not known for their restraint when it came to bar fights, not to mention the few wild wolves among us, and the fae were now in our territory. The guards positioned themselves around their prince in a loose semicircle, hands on their swords while glancing around nervously. If they got involved, then things were going to get real ugly, real quick.

“Let’s make this a fair fight, Your Highness,” I said while stretching out my arms and rolling my shoulders. I was getting on in years and the last thing I needed was to throw out my back. “Hand-to-hand combat, no swords or blades, just a good old-fashioned boxing match.”

“What about your horns?” he said, eyeing them with trepidation.

“I’ll keep my horns out of it, if you’ll call off your men.”

Cedrych glanced around and, seeing himself outnumbered, nodded tersely. With a flourish that he surely must have practiced in front of a mirror, he removed his emerald cloak and handed it off to one of his lackeys then did the same with his sword belt. I had no doubt this soldier would offer the blade right back to him at a moment’s notice, but I had to take whatever advantages I could get.

“I’m ready,” Cedrych said and raised his fists. “Come at me, Minotaur.”

I advanced on him slowly, noting his stance and posture. His form was good, and he seemed well-seasoned in combat. Hadn’t Skylar mentioned he liked to start fights? He must have won at least some of them with skill alone.

We circled the center, each of us testing the others' reflexes with a few short jabs. The prince was agile and light on his feet, surely an advantage of the fae. I was slower, more ponderous, but I knew when to strike and when to pivot. After trading a few more light punches, my fist glanced his chin. The prince stumbled and was slow to regain his footing.

I gave him a beat to recover, dodging a vicious left-hook that came out of nowhere before socking him solidly in the solar plexus. A woosh of air escaped him and he staggered backward, arm raised to block my next blow. I wasn't interested in humiliating the prince, only putting him in his place, which was far, far away from here.

"Had enough?" I asked with a sideways stance while still balancing on the balls of my feet.

"Not quite," the prince said, and then he drew an ornate dagger from his deerskin boot. Fucking royals, I thought bitterly. Leading with the blade, he slashed through the air like lightning as he strode toward me.

My kin erupted at the sight of the prince's steel. The sounds of bottles being broken and the scrape of swords being drawn echoed in the cavernous room. Distantly, I heard Skylar calling the prince every bad name in the book. The boy's vocabulary was impressive.

I dodged the prince's blade as he sliced the air to ribbons, hoping he'd hurry up and tire himself out. I may have been bigger and slower, but I was well-versed in defending myself. It was a matter of survival.

The chaos surrounding us shook the very foundation of the bar, but I kept my eyes trained on the prince's movements, trying to anticipate his next move. Feinting to one side, I knocked his wrist heartily, trying to dislodge the dagger from his hand, but he

pivoted lightly and jabbed again, aiming for my mid-section. I swiveled away, but the sudden searing pain just above my hip told me his blade had made contact.

Then he caught me with that vicious left-hook, which sent me reeling to one side. I steadied myself on the bar top, knocking over a few upturned chairs in the process. I put a barstool between us, pretending to be more stunned than I was, and as Cedrych approached with his dagger drawn, I lowered my horns.

“Hiero, look out,” Skylar called, but I’d already seen it coming. Not only was the prince an asshole, but he was a dirty fighter too, more than willing to stab someone in the back. Cedrych’s blade swung in a wide arc, his attempt to land a killing blow, but I ducked his attack and countered with a mighty headbutt. My horns collided with Cedrych’s rib cage, hard enough to lift him off his feet and hopefully bruise a few of his ribs in the process. The prince fell back on his ass, gasping for breath, and his knife went skittering across the ground. His guards began to circle us, closing in on me with weapons drawn, when Skylar suddenly landed in the fray, plucked up the dagger, and placed the cutting edge of it against the prince’s throat.

“Stay back,” Skylar shouted while dragging Cedrych to his knees by his hair. The brawl in progress halted as all eyes turned toward the two of them. Though I hated that he’d put himself in danger, Skylar appeared to me then as an avenging angel, bathed in the prismatic colors of the stained-glass windows, absolutely breathtaking.

“I demand you stop this madness before the prince gets hurt, because I will hurt him,” Skylar warned with a mad glint in his eyes. He looked pretty convincing to me. “Tell your guards to back off,” he commanded the prince.

Still clutching his ribs and gasping for air, the prince held up one hand, signaling for his guardsmen to fall back. I gave my own clan a similar order and the warring factions slowly separated from each other.

“Enough of this, Cedrych,” Skylar said and rounded the prince’s kneeling form so they were facing each other, still with the knife at his throat. “Your fight is not with me or these people. It’s your mother who’s been manipulating you your entire life. You let her treat me like garbage, and you lied to me and cheated on me. You broke my heart and caused me so much pain that I had to flee my only home. I found sanctuary here and acceptance, and now you’ve chased me here to punish me further. Why, Cedrych? Why would you do this to me? After all we’ve been through?”

Skylar started crying. The prince reached out, perhaps to comfort him, and I swiftly placed myself between them. Carefully, I pried the jeweled dagger from Skylar’s fingers and passed it off to one of my kin, not trusting the prince nor his men to possess it. In the meantime, my clan had made quick work of surrounding the guards and forcing them back toward the exit .

“Skylar,” the prince said, clamoring up to stand, but he had no other words of comfort to offer. I waited for him to apologize, but none was forthcoming, so I intervened.

“You’ve upset him, Your Highness. Again. And I won’t stand for it. If you come back here again looking for trouble, it will mean your death. I don’t care if I hang for it.”

His stormy blue eyes met mine long enough for me to see that his thunderous rage had subsided. Shamefaced, he nodded tightly and then, with one last longing glance toward Skylar, he turned tail and stalked out of the bar. Thankfully, his guards followed suit. A few of my kin shifted in order to trail behind to ensure they’d not start any more trouble. It was at that point the burning pain in my side let itself be known. My shirt was stuck to the bloody wound so I stripped it off to get a better look at the damage. The gash was just above my hip bone on the right side. I had no chest pain or shortness of breath, which meant my lungs were probably fine, but the cut was deep and still bleeding.

“He cut you?” Skylar said with a gasp. “I’ll kill him.” My feisty fae made a motion to chase after the prince, but I grabbed him round the waist and pulled him back.

“I need you here with me, boy. Let the prince go on now, and you tend to your Daddy. That’s an order.”

He blew out his breath in a whoosh of ire. Wet eyes glanced up at me and he nodded contritely. “I’m sorry, Hiero. All I ever do is cause trouble. ”

“Good thing I like trouble,” I said, rubbing his cheek. “Now how about you get me some hot water and clean cloth, and we’ll see what can be done about this cut?”

“Yes, you sit.” He steered me toward one of the few chairs still standing, and I collapsed onto it. Glancing around, I took stock in my surroundings. Broken chairs and broken bottles. One of the wooden barrels had been split open, and there was a swamp of ale all over the floor. Several of my cousins and friends were battered and bruised, but none seemed injured too badly. Members of my clan came over to congratulate me on kicking the prince’s ass, and I thanked them for the back up.

“Don’t act so surprised, Hiero,” my second cousin Daylen said to me. “That’s what family is for.”

### Chapter twenty-one

Skylar

“What if it’s his baby?” I said to Monica, on the verge of a panic attack. My hands shook and I could hardly catch my breath as I filled a bowl with hot water to clean Hiero’s wound.

“Whose baby?” she said.

“Cedrych’s baby,” I hissed. Monica’s eyes went wide and this time, she wasn’t smiling. “He’ll never let me go, Mon, if only to torment me. And what if Queen Gwyneth lays a claim?”

To have my own flesh and blood ripped out of arms and raised by the palace staff under that heartless woman’s command. Goddess only knows how she’d punish my child to get back at me.

“Goddess forbid it, Skylar, I hadn’t thought of that.”

“I need to go back to Emrallt Valley,” I said in hushed tones so no one would overhear us. “I need to have a paternity spell cast to determine the baby’s sire.”

“We’ll go together. We can collect some of your belongings from your apartment as well.”

“What if Hiero doesn’t want me anymore?” I said as a sense of despondency rose



within me like a moon tide. Damn these hormones.

“Why wouldn’t he want you?” Monica asked.

“I’ve already complicated his life so much. It would be a relief for him to have me gone, even if he doesn’t think so now.”

“I wouldn’t start making his decisions for him. Let’s take this one step at a time.” She placed one hand on my arm. “First, you’re going to go out there and tend to your man. Then, you’re going to tell him that you need to wrap up some things back home. That will give you some time to figure out where to go from there. And Skylar?” She waited until I was giving her my full attention. “No one can force you to continue this pregnancy if you don’t want to. It’s your body and no one else’s. There’s no shame in taking care of yourself.”

I nodded, trying to take comfort in her words. A renewed sense of agency dawned as I took a deep breath and schooled my expression before returning to the bar where Hiero was waiting. A few more of the Wolfsbane Clan had set to righting tables and chairs, but there were still broken bottles and ale everywhere. If the bar couldn’t open that night, it meant a day of lost profits, all thanks to me and my messy ex.

“Let’s clean you up,” I said to Hiero as I gently swabbed the area surrounding his cut. The gash was deep and still seeping blood .

“It’s not that bad,” he said, even while wincing.

“It’s going to need stitches.” I called Frito over. “We need a doctor.”

Frito glanced at Hiero’s bloody side and said, “Enid should be able to patch that up.”

“Isn’t there a proper doctor in this town?” I asked, pissy, because I didn’t want to

chance an infection, not to mention Enid shouldn't have to play nursemaid to the entire clan.

"There is," Hiero said slowly. "It's our great aunt Mabel, but she's not very gentle and her bedside manner isn't the best either."

"She likes to fuss," Frito added.

"A little fuss would be worth not getting sepsis," I said to them both. "Can you fetch her?" I asked Frito.

"I'm on it," he said and ducked out before Hiero could argue.

"I am so sorry for this," I said to Hiero as I used the warm cloth to apply pressure to his wound.

"There was nothing you could have done to avoid it," he said.

"I should have never gotten involved with him. I should have just gone before the Guild and let them cut my wings. I had it coming anyway."

"Hey," he said sharply and grabbed hold of my arm. "Listen to me now, Skylar, whatever happened here today, Cedrych is to blame. Not you. You can't take responsibility for his bad behavior. I won't allow it. Understand?"

"Yes, Daddy." I nodded sheepishly, feeling absolutely wretched because he didn't even know what was to come. Goddess, the trouble I'd put this man through. Quietly, I ministered to his wound while Monica poured him a glass of ale. He thanked her and took a long swig. Soon enough, Frito returned with an older woman with graying hair and a dour expression. She was toting a medical kit and, upon seeing Hiero, immediately set to scolding him.

“I told you before this is what happens when you can’t control your temper, Hierophant Wolfsbane. One of these days you’re going to get a punctured lung or lose a kidney, mark my words. Trouble always comes knocking at your door.”

“It wasn’t his fault,” I said.

“And who might you be?” the woman demanded.

“This is Skylar Larkspur, my sweet fae darling,” Hiero said with the sort of pride that made me feel like pond scum. He tugged me to his good side, and I tried to smile, but it probably looked more like a grimace, considering I was the lying, thieving fae who’d brought this calamity upon their town. Aunt Mabel nodded and proceeded to poke and prod at the muscle surrounding Hiero’s wound. He shifted in discomfort and tried very hard to be brave.

“It’s not the first time the claim has been made that it wasn’t his fault, but how many times am I to believe it?” she continued while threading a needle. “You know what happens when you poke a unicorn, don’t you? ”

“You get to make a wish?” I said, not having had much experience with the elusive species, myself.

“You get its horn,” she said and made the sign of a single spear.

“I understand. And that’s good advice to consider. Thank you for patching him up,” I said.

“Isn’t the first time, probably won’t be the last,” she grumbled, then tugged the stitches tighter than seemed necessary. Hiero winced at the rough treatment but bore it well.

“A healing salve,” she said when she was finished and handed him a jar. She took away his tankard of ale too. “No drinking and no strenuous activity for two weeks. That means no cardio either,” she said, glancing my way.

“Yes, ma’am,” I said dutifully.

“And there is no way you’re working tonight,” she added.

“We’re going to need to close the bar for the night, boss,” Frankie said, still trying to mop up the flood of spirits on the floor.

“I needed an excuse to take the night off anyway,” Hiero said affably. “Free drinks for the clean-up crew. Now, who wants to help me upstairs?”

Frito and Frankie came over and helped him stand, then draped his big arms over their shoulders. I pulled Monica aside. “I’m going to stay with him tonight and we’ll leave first thing in the morning.”

“Are you going to tell him that you’re... you know?” Her eyes darted toward my midsection.

I glanced over at my wounded minotaur, struggling with each step up the stairs. I wasn’t going to burden him with this knowledge until I knew for certain who the sire was, and maybe not even then.

“No, I’m not.”

### Chapter twenty-two

Hiero

“ I still can’t believe you held a knife to the prince’s throat,” I marveled to my little hellion. I was laid up in bed, my head resting in Skylar’s lap as he slowly massaged my scalp, his nimble fingers dragging through my locks of hair and sending tingles of pleasure all the way to my toes, helping me to ignore the lingering throb in my side. “That’s gotta be a crime in Emrallt Valley.”

“Yes, it would have been a death sentence. Might still be,” he said, sounding distracted.

“Are you serious?” I glanced up at him, astonished by both the threat to his safety and his utter nonchalance.

“Yes, but we’re in shifter territory, so it would be harder to prosecute. Most of Queen Gwyneth’s treaties with the neighboring realms are built on neutrality. Cedrych coming here with his royal guard and instigating that fight could be seen as an act of war. ”

“And they’d have to arrest you, which won’t be happening so long as you stay here,” I said. Skylar looked absolutely wretched, so I placed a hand on his thigh. “What is it, baby?”

“I have to go back.”

A sense of dread descended. I knew this was coming, didn't I? Had he grown bored already? Had I clipped his proverbial wings too much?

"Why's that?" I asked as I braced myself for his reason.

"I need to sort out a few things and visit a few people."

"You're being awfully vague, boy. Are you in trouble?"

His hesitation was brief, but it was there. "Not in any criminal trouble."

"Did Cedrych threaten you with something?" I asked because if he had...

"No, and I don't plan on seeing him at all if I can help it."

Well, that was a relief. I'd like him to stay the hell away from the royal family altogether. "Remember my rule about not having to do things on your own?" I reminded him.

He sighed and glanced down at me, a soft smile tugging on his lips. "Yes, Daddy."

"Do you want me to go with you?" It wouldn't be easy but I could arrange some time off.

"No, you need to stay here and heal. Besides, this is something I have to do alone." He sounded resolved about it, but unhappy, nonetheless.

"Can you tell me what's wrong, sweetheart? I'd like to help you if I can." I really didn't like the idea of him going off on his own, especially not with the threat of the prince's retribution hanging over his head.

Smiling faintly, he said, "I'll tell you when it's over. I promise."

"You're coming back then?" I said, daring to hope.

His eyes widened in surprise and his expression dimmed. "I mean... only if you want me to."

I grabbed onto his hand and held it with both my own. "I want you to, Skylar. I want you here with me every single day." For the rest of my life, I would have said but not knowing the shape of his heart, I kept it to myself. "How long will you be gone?"

"A half-moon at the most."

"I want you to check in when you arrive to let me know that you're safe. And summon me every day."

"I will."

"And I know you said you'd stay away, but please don't start a fight with the prince. My heart couldn't take it if something bad happened to you."

With an unbearably sad look, he said softly, "I'll be good for you, Daddy. I promise."

It had been less than a day since Skylar left for Emrallt Valley and already I was in a funk. It didn't help that it was Sunday and Church was closed, giving me more time to mope. After seeing him and Monica off at the town center, I said my devotionals in the tiny prayer room that had been used by the monks for private prayer, then set to polishing my silverware because I couldn't do anything too strenuous and I needed to keep my hands busy.

Now, it was nearing sunset and I was staring hopelessly out the window like a maiden

in a tower. I'd been ignoring the summons from my cousins all day, and I didn't plan to go to Enid's place for family dinner either. My plan was to brood, something of an art form for me.

A brisk knock at my door interrupted my gloom. It was Frito, and I could tell by his demeanor that he wasn't taking no for an answer.

"I don't feel like going anywhere tonight," I told him, now at the height of my melancholy.

"Skylar left just this morning and you've already got this jilted lover thing perfected?" he scoffed.

"I'm having a quiet night in, Frito. You don't need to poke." I'd already made myself a cup of tea and was sitting in my recliner with my favorite blanket thrown over me. It still smelled of Skylar, but it wouldn't for much longer.

"It's a clear night, cuz. We're headed to the top of the mountain on our bikes for a bonfire and some beers. And I need you there. "

"And why is that?" I asked pissily. I wouldn't put it past Frito to manufacture some crisis just to get me out of my comfy chair.

"Frankie and the pups have been bugging me to set off the fireworks we bought from The Magic Shop, and I need backup to make sure no one blows themselves up."

My kin were wonderful people, but not the best at following proper safety protocol. Still, I hesitated. "Can't you see I'm not in the mood, Frito? Just let a man be."

"Nope. You're coming with me, boss. Moping around here isn't going to bring him back any sooner, and I know how much you like blowing shit up."



Well, he wasn't wrong.

Up there on the mountaintop, watching fireworks light up the night sky, I couldn't help but wonder where Skylar was at that moment. Had he made it safely down to the valley? Were members of the guard waiting there to arrest him? Whose ass was I gonna have to kick next? At least he had Monica in his corner. She seemed like a woman who could raise some hell.

"Russell, be careful with that wick. It's a short fuse. Back up. Back up," I shouted at one of Enid's brood. She'd elected to stay home tonight with her husbands and cash in on her babysitting chip, warning me that if any of her litter came back with fewer fingers or toes, there'd be hell to pay.

Injury was avoided as the boy threw the firecracker high into the air and ran away screaming. The thing exploded like a comet, streaking across the night sky before fizzling into embers. The noise was so loud that I almost missed the buzz in my back pocket. I opened the summoner to see Skylar's lovely face.

"Hi, Daddy, I just wanted to let you know that we arrived safely, and I'm here at Monica's for the night."

"Thanks for calling me, baby. How was the trip?"

"Long, but I survived. Monica kept me entertained as always."

"And how are you?" I asked because he looked a little peaked and his features seemed sharper than usual. I couldn't wait for him to come home so I could feed him honey cakes and fruit cobbles and all the treats that he liked so much.

"I'm fine," he said with a weary smile. "Just a little tired from our travels."

A sudden explosion from behind made me jump.

“Five minutes,” I called to the crowd, searching for some peace and privacy on the rocky mountain top.

“What are you up to?” Skylar asked.

“I’m out here with Frito and Frankie and Enid’s pups, setting off fireworks. ”

“You’re not straining yourself are you?” he asked in a warning tone.

Another explosion rattled the ground beneath me. “Goddamnit, Frankie, what did I say?”

“Sorry, cuz,” he called back.

“I’m taking it easy,” I assured him. “Just supervising the chaos.”

“Sounds like fun. Goddess, I miss being there already,” Skylar said longingly.

“Do you?”

“Yes, and I miss you too, Daddy. All I want is to crawl under the covers and have you hold me right now.” He wrapped an arm around himself, a poor substitute for my own.

“I want that too, sweetheart. I can’t wait for you to come home.” His smile was a little sad, so I tried coaxing him to open up. “You can tell me, you know? Whatever it is that’s troubling you. If it’s punishment you’re worried about—”

“I’m not,” he said quickly.

“Then what is it?”

“I’m just... afraid,” he said softly, and just when I thought he might confide in me, another firecracker went off, so close that my nuts crawled up into my gut. “Goddamn you kids,” I hollered to a smattering of giggles.

“I’ll let you get back to it,” Skylar said. “Make sure you don’t tear your stitches. I’ll call you tomorrow morning? ”

As disappointed as I was, I knew we couldn’t have this conversation right then. I was distracted and he was reluctant to share, but I vowed to get it out of him sooner or later.

“Anytime, sweetheart. I’m always available.”

He gave me another tentative smile, “Goodnight, Daddy.”

“Goodnight, baby boy.”

### Chapter twenty-three

Skylar

Monica found me a sorcerer who wasn't registered with the Medical Guild, so that I could have a paternity spell cast without the results being recorded and potentially alerting the queen. I made an appointment for that very same week. I'd brought with me a lock of Hiero's hair, but I'd need something of Cedrych as well for the spell to work. Outside of seeing him myself, I decided the easiest way to go about getting it would be to visit my old apartment.

Passing through the gilded entryway, I nodded at the doorkeeper, who was new but eyed me with suspicion nonetheless, and with that one critical glance, my old life suddenly came rushing back to me. I'd always felt like a thief in my own home, especially because I suspect Cedrych had paid off the concierge and doorkeepers to keep tabs on me. How often I'd be summoned here at a moment's notice by Cedrych for a quick fuck while he was between engagements, a duty which prevented me from holding down any sort of job because the expectation was that my first obligation was always to him.

Meanwhile, Cedrych's guards would be stationed just outside my bedroom door, sending me scornful looks while waiting to ferry him to his next appointment. How Cedrych would button up and say something trite like, "well done," before reattaching his sword belt and continuing on his way. I'd had to drop everything for him, be at his beck and call, and if I made any sort of demand on his time, I was being unreasonable because he was a prince and I was... well, you know.

At the entrance to my suite, I noticed with some alarm that the door was unlocked, and as I eased it open, I heard a quiet rustling coming from my bedroom. Perhaps it was one of Cedrych's retinue, here to clear out the place?

"Hello?" I called.

"Skylar?" a familiar voice called back.

"Mom?"

She appeared in the door to my bedroom, her long silver hair pulled back in a messy knot, her eyes sunken and her skin a sickly pallor. I'd seen her and my father briefly before fleeing Emrallt Valley, just long enough to say goodbye. I hadn't told them where I was going, for I didn't know at the time and besides that, they hadn't asked.

"What are you doing here?" I said, having my suspicions already.

"If it isn't my clever Skylarker," Mom said in her airy way, her nickname for me since I was a youngling. "How are you, dear? Back from your grand adventure so soon?"

"I'm fine, and my visit here is only temporary. What are you doing in my apartment? I didn't give you a key."

"You don't need a key when you have hands like these." She held up her slender fingers, her joints like wooden knobs, and I recognized two of the rings she was wearing.

"You're stealing my things," I said, wishing I were more surprised by it.

"Repurposing, yes. Your prince was certainly generous. Shame that didn't work out

in your favor. He was a bit stuffy though.”

My parents had met Cedrych only once. In the beginning of our arrangement when I foolishly thought that we were a couple, doing couple things. Cedrych had pitied me and told me afterward that my allowance was not to be shared with them.

“How much do you think this one will fetch?” she asked, holding up a gold bangle inlaid with sapphires.

“I hardly know.”

“Too bad. You were never very good with money, sweetheart.”

“And you were?” I nearly spat.

“I know the price of things.”

“You know how much ether you can buy with it, you mean,” I bit out, not in the mood for her nonsense .

“Your dad and I need our medicine.”

“What you have is an addiction.”

She waved one hand, dismissing me. “Why have you returned? Have you and the prince reconciled?”

“No, we have not. And it’s really none of your concern why I’m here, since this is, in fact, my apartment you’re looting.”

“Only ghosts live here now,” she said, drifting over to my nightstand to open the

drawer and rummage through it. “You won’t mind if I rehome some of your possessions,” she said, not a request.

“Mom, can I ask you something?” I moved toward the bed to sit down. My stomach was iffy and my head was spinning. I should probably start carrying pouches of honey around with me for when my nausea subsided and my hunger returned.

“Anything, dear.”

“Why did you have me?”

She glanced over at me, looking perplexed. “Why wouldn’t I? Fae children are a rare blessing.”

“Well, it’s pretty obvious you didn’t want me.”

She made a sour face. “Of course, I wanted you. Your father and I both. My, you’re in a strange mood today.”

Strange because I’d never questioned her so directly before, but I had nothing left to lose, did I? “But you never really took care of me, unless you were sober and that never lasted for very long.”

She sighed and dragged one hand through her long silver hair. “We’re sick people, Skylar. Medicine helps us function. You shouldn’t hold that against us, and besides you turned out well enough, so we must have done something right. Tell me, is this vanadium?” She held up a silver-white chain and locket, a trinket from the elvish territories Cedrych had given to me on our first anniversary, after I’d prepared a special dinner and he’d not bothered to show up, had forgotten the significance of the day entirely. He wasn’t all that different from my parents. Paying me attention when it suited him, giving me shiny baubles to make up for some bad behavior. That I’d

mistaken his gifts for love was my fault, wasn't it?

"Yes, it's vanadium," I said after she'd already tucked it into her dress pocket.

"That will fetch a pretty price from the jeweler. Could be melted down to make five rings at least."

"Do you feel bad at all about scavenging through my things?" I asked. I shouldn't be so surprised, and yet...

She turned and smiled at me, cupping my cheek with her skeletal fingers. "Look at you, Skylar, as beautiful as the dawn. It won't be long before you've caught another admirer's attention. Maybe not a prince, but certainly a lord is not too far out of reach. And what would you do with all of these trinkets then? For surely your future beloved will not want you to wear the trappings of a former lover."

I shook my head and wondered why I'd bothered bringing it up at all. My mother always had a reason, an excuse, or a larger plan that I was never privy to .

"You know that I used to sell myself for money, don't you? Or food because our pantry was always empty." As fruitless as it was, I wanted some acknowledgement of how their neglect had shaped me.

"The Larkspurs are resourceful, dear. We always find a way."

"You don't feel bad that I had to sell my innocence on the black market for common staples? That your own negligence prevented me from joining a guild and having choices about how I earned my coin."

"There is no honest living to be had, Skylar. Not when coin is involved. We all must sacrifice some part of ourselves to survive."



“And what have you had to sacrifice?” I asked, my temper flaring.

“My dignity. My mind. My beauty and my youth. I chose wrong,” she said softly, the closest she’d ever come to admitting any mistake on her part. “Poor choices are the biggest expense of all, so don’t choose wrong.”

She gave me a pointed look, one of rare clarity, then returned to sifting through my things. As I watched her, I vowed to never be in a situation where I couldn’t leave, as I’d nearly been with Cedrych, as my mother was with my father, even more so because of her addiction. That was the real tragedy here. But here I was potentially trapping Hiero into a situation he didn’t want and hadn’t asked for. Perhaps I was no different from my parents after all .

But I would be truthful. There would be no coercion or manipulation. Hiero would have a choice in the matter, and I would have to accept his decision, whatever it might be.

“I’m leaving Emrallt Valley,” I told her. “I’ve got a job as a server at a bar in the Dragonback Mountains, and I won’t be coming back, except maybe to visit on occasion.”

The faraway look in her eyes returned. “You should visit. Your father has been working on some new songs. You’ve always had such a lovely voice. Remember when you and he would perform in Templeton Square?”

She grew wistful, smiling as if it were a pleasant memory, but it only served to highlight my father’s failings. He could have made me a legitimate apprentice when I was a fledgling, but he hadn’t, and soon after he was expelled from the Music Guild anyway. They’d only valued my voice as part of their con, to act as a distraction while my mother thieved from passersby. Foolishly, I’d thought they believed I had talent.

“I’m done being a thief too,” I said.

“No need to make it sound ugly, Skylar. It’s an artform after all, just like weaving or pottery. The Larkspurs have perfected it.”

She was a first-rate thief, I’d give her that, and perhaps I had been too, once. But not anymore. Not if I could help it. There was little else to say, so I went to the bathroom and found a hairbrush that still contained a few of Cedrych’s golden hairs. I grabbed his toothbrush as well, just in case .

“Are you attached to any of these?” my mother asked, opening a small wooden chest where I’d kept my ear cuffs and other small baubles.

“No, you can have them. Will you at least buy some food with your coin?”

She approached and laid a fragile hand on my cheek. She was mere skin and bones, but her smile reminded me of when I was younger, when I thought the sun shone from her eyes, before her glamor dimmed and the truth of my situation became apparent. “The Goddess blesses those with beautiful hearts, Skylar. I wish you all the best as you seek your fortune.”

I nodded, not wishing to dwell here any longer, for it was my past, and it was painful. I stuffed a bag full of clothing and a few pictures, and then I left my gilded apartment behind forever with my mother still rattling around like a ghost.

I’d been calling Hiero every morning to check in and say hello, but I’d still not told him of my true reason for the visit. He was a bright spot in my long days of idleness and worry, and I missed him more each day. In my free time, I helped out Monica in her tattoo studio, which was situated below her apartment, sorting through her clutter and tidying up the place. And I offered up my own skin as a living advertisement for her talents.

“You’re starting a trend,” she said after her third client had gone with the glow-in-the-dark ink. “You know you could stay here and learn the trade, become my apprentice. It isn’t hard to do hearts and stars and rainbows. That’s the majority of what people want. I could teach you the business side of things as well.”

“Thanks, Mon. I may take you up on it, if things don’t work out with Hiero.”

“Ah, but I think that they will, Skybear, and when they do, you’d better not try to keep Tiny Toes from Auntie Mon.”

I shook my head at her silly nickname and sipped my effervescent water, hoping it might settle my stomach. I missed Hiero’s creative fruit spritzers, a different one every night for he was always trying to surprise and delight me.

“Did the sorcerer say anything about your implant?” Monica asked. I’d had the paternity spell cast a few days prior and was now awaiting the results.

“Only that it was no longer there. It must have come loose during sex.”

She smiled wickedly. “Sounds like the sex with your minotaur was inspired.”

“Best I’ve ever had,” I said ruefully.

“Then really, Skylar, what’s there to worry about?”

So many things. Would Hiero still want me if he wasn’t the child’s sire? Or even if he was? And if he didn’t, how would I support the both of us? Was I dooming my child to a life such as mine, guildless and cast off by society? That didn’t even begin to cover my fears about the queen’s wrath.

“My biggest fear is that the child will belong to Cedrych, in which case, I might lose

both Hiero and the child completely.”

“Cedrych might not want to claim it,” she said. “He said himself that he’ll be traveling to elvish territories with his betrothed soon enough.”

“But the queen will know.” I tried to think as a strategist such as herself might. “The Guild records all fae births, and the queen would see the danger of a bastard child, a potential threat to her chosen heir. She may come after the child with malice in her heart or insist they be raised at the palace under her direction.”

“You are thinking too far ahead, Skylar, as usual. Let’s play this game one move at a time, shall we?”

“But by then I’ve already lost,” I told her, for the queen was always three moves ahead.

“Come here,” she said and drew me into her arms. I rested my head against her shoulder, and tried to soak up her comfort, but it was all I could think about, how to protect my unborn child from the queen’s machinations. Even knowing her resources were limitless, she could not give them love—I truly did not believe she was capable—and that was something I would give freely.

There was a knock on the tattoo parlor door, unusual since most clients just walked right in. When I went to answer it, a courier asked for my name, then handed me a letter sealed with the sorcerer’s wax emblem. I thanked them for the delivery and carried it back inside as if it were a hornets’ nest about to burst wide open.

“Aren’t you going to open it?” Monica asked.

Suddenly, I didn’t want to know. The child didn’t belong to Cedrych or the queen as far as I was concerned. It belonged to me, and possibly Hiero if that’s what he

wanted.

“I’ll open it with Hiero when I tell him,” I said to Monica, now resolved.

“How can you stand the suspense?”

“He told me before that I wasn’t alone anymore, and the decision of whether to raise it together is one that I’d like to make with him. Whether he wants it or not, the child is mine.”

“You’re going to keep it then?” she asked.

“I am,” I said, nervous and nauseous and not from the pregnancy this time.

“And if he doesn’t want it?”

“Then I’ll find a way.” As my mother said, we Larkspurs were resourceful. Even if I was a guildless, unremarkable bit of fae trash, I still had a lot of love to give. “I’ll be heading back tomorrow,” I told her.

“Everything will be fine, Skybear,” she assured me with a gentle squeeze.

Everything would be fine. And if not, I would simply pick up the pieces of my broken heart and carry on.

### Chapter twenty-four

Hiero

S kylar was playing with his hair again, his nervous tell, and other than a heartfelt hug, he seemed distant since returning from his trip to Emrallt Valley a short while ago. From behind the bar, I made him a fruity, non-alcoholic drink and passed it over to him, but he only sipped it distractedly with his head down and his eyes averted. The boy had secrets and it was high time he started spilling.

“There was something you wanted to tell me?” I prodded. Regardless of what he had to say, I didn’t want him to suffer for it.

“You should probably sit down for this,” he said, so I rounded the bar and took up the stool right beside him. I grabbed one of his hands and pressed it to my lips, waiting anxiously for him to tell me his “very important news.” I only hoped it didn’t involve my heart getting broken.

“How was your trip?” I asked, since he didn’t seem inclined to start the conversation .

“It was fine,” he said with a long face.

“And did you get done what you needed to do?” I asked, trying to coax him along.

“Yes, I suppose I did.” He gave me another anguished look, then sighed heavily and slid a cream-colored envelope my way. “Perhaps you should just open it.”

I picked up the envelope and examined the fancy fae scroll and wax seal. “This looks very official,” I remarked.

“This sorcerer came highly recommended. You can trust the results.”

“Results? Did you take some sort of test?”

“Something like that,” he murmured, still not meeting my eyes.

“Then shouldn’t you be the one to open it?” I tried handing it back to him, but he pushed it my way.

“You should know that these past few moons have been the best of my life. You are so kind and caring, and you’ve been a wonderful Daddy, and I pity the men in your life who’ve passed you by, because they are clearly idiots who don’t know a good thing when they find it.”

I laid my hand over his—he was shaking—and said, “I’m afraid you’re only making me more nervous, darling. And what did I tell you about this?” I touched his swollen lower lip. He’d been abusing it in my absence.

He gestured toward the envelope again, his intent made clear. Was it a royal summons? A meeting with the fae magistrate? A fucking forced betrothal to that asshole prince? I picked up the envelope again and slid my finger under the paper flap, but just as I was about to break the seal, the sound of a trumpet echoed from outside.

“The royal guard,” Skylar said and snatched the envelope right out of my hand, stuffing it down the front of his pants to hide it. “They must have followed me here.”

“Stay inside,” I told him, then let out a long whistle to signal my kin.

“No, I’m going to face them, Hiero. There’s nothing more you can do.”

Before I could grab hold of him, he’d taken flight and was out the front door. I’d punish him for his disobedience later—if I had the opportunity. Damn him for not listening to me.

I grabbed my bat from behind the bar and chased after Skylar. Outside, the late afternoon sun nearly blinded me, and when my vision returned, I found myself staring at what looked like the entire fae court, all of them wearing ridiculously fancy clothing despite the heat and standing stiffly at attention in my modest cobblestone courtyard. I recognized only a few of their party, but the queen was there, as well as her princeling brat, who, in addition to sporting a freshly blackened eye, was being collared by the scruff of his neck by a tall, imposing figure with pointed ears and a somber expression. He didn’t appear to have wings though, which I supposed meant he was elvish, not fae. The prince hardly looked our way, so cowed was he by the other man’s command .

The royal-looking stranger held a long metal staff and wore a military uniform in what was commonly known as elvish blue. His heavily embroidered cloak had a hood that shielded his crown from the sun while throwing his face into shadow, which puzzled me even more. Only the vampyre hid from the sun.

“Hierophant Wolfsbane, I presume,” the stranger said coolly and without any inflection whatsoever.

“Aye,” I remarked and dragged Skylar behind me, making sure to keep hold of him this time. The boy needed a leash.

“I am Lord Mercier Vasil, ruler of the elvish territories and Prince Cedrych’s betrothed.” He held out one hand and I shook it. At his slight grimace, I wondered in hindsight if I was supposed to kiss his royal knuckles instead. Slim chance of that



happening.

“Well, you know who I am already, so what’s this about?” I said, never one for long, drawn-out formalities.

“It seems we owe you and your clan an apology for the incident my fiancé incited at your bar recently.” He withdrew a hefty coin purse from within his cloak and held it out to me.

“I don’t want your money,” I sneered. Damn these royals for thinking they could buy their way out of their misdeeds, as if we “commoners” didn’t also have our pride.

“I see.” He tucked the coin purse away. “Then tell me, how may I make amends for my betrothed’s very bad behavior?”

“Skylar?” I asked .

He’d calmed down a bit, though his wings were still unfurled and humming as if ready to take flight. I gave him some room, but touched his shoulder so he’d know I was here to support him.

“I want an apology,” he said with his head held high. When Cedrych opened his mouth, Skylar interrupted him. “Not from you, Cedrych, from the queen.”

Skylar directed his hot glare towards the fae sovereign as eyebrows rose all around, including those of the queen herself.

“An apology?” she asked with an icy chill to her voice. “Whatever for?”

“You know what for,” Skylar said, squaring his shoulders. “But I’ll give you a hint. It’s something along the lines of ‘guildless, unremarkable bit of fae trash.’”

She blinked slowly and said with a stubborn lift to her chin, “I simply spoke the truth.”

“Your Majesty,” Vasil said with a deferential dip of his head, and the man must have some sway because the queen, visibly perturbed, frowned in response.

“My apologies to you, Skylar Larkspur, for pointing out your deficiencies to my son, who was clearly bewitched by your puzzling allure, a condition which has taken altogether too many moons to remedy.” She waved her hand as if pardoning a subject. It was a shit apology, and everyone knew it, but you couldn’t exactly call out the queen for her passive aggression without some repercussions.

“And I want any present or future claims on me or my offspring formally renounced,” Skylar said.

The queen’s eyes narrowed slightly, and after a quick recovery, she practically spat out, “Gladly. Consider you and your progeny officially and eternally renounced.” She pivoted toward the elvish lord and said loud enough for all present to hear, “Lord Vasil, the air here reeks of wet dog, and I have a severe allergy to fleas. May we depart?”

“Say your goodbyes, Cedrych,” Vasil said to the shamefaced prince.

The prince stepped forward, bowed deeply to Skylar and said, “I’m sorry, Sky, for hurting you and mistreating you. I hope one day you might be able to forgive me.”

“I’ll consider it,” Skylar said without any further assurances. He shot the imposing Lord Vasil a nervous glance then said to Cedrych. “Did he give you that?” Skylar asked, motioning to Cedrych’s black eye.

“No, that was my own doing. Starting fights with the wrong person again.”

“You do have a habit of doing that,” I said.

“Indeed,” was the prince's clipped response.

“Well, good luck in the elvish territories,” Skylar offered.

“I’m sure going to need it,” the prince said with a rakish grin.

“Now, back to the castle, you cur, before you cause any more trouble,” Lord Vasil said to Cedrych right before cuffing the prince’s neck with his free hand and marching him back toward their palanquin. I could only speculate as to what the prince’s future with his betrothed might hold. We watched as they filed into their litters, draped with emerald curtains and embellished with jewels of every kind, which seemed counterintuitive to flight, as well as tempting for any rogue gang of bandits, but their safety was not my concern.

Their caravan took to the air soon after on the shoulders of their fae attendants and Skylar sagged into me as if about to collapse. I thanked my kin for showing up yet again and led Skylar back into the cool shade of the bar.

“That was unexpected,” I said.

“Yes,” he said faintly, plucking up a bar napkin to blot the shimmer of sweat on his face and neck. Seated beside me again, he slid the envelope back toward me. I reflected on our conversation and the demands he’d made of the queen. Strange for him to want her to renounce all claims, unless...

I studied my boy a little closer. Bouts of nausea and fatigue with a slight flush to his cheeks. A test with results that might make me, according to him, feel trapped. All of this cloak and dagger business with a secret sorcerer. Could it be that my fae was with child?

“Skylar, are you pregnant?” I asked.

He glanced up in wide-eyed surprise, blinked rapidly, then slowly nodded. “Yes, Hiero, I am. I only found out recently, and that was why I had to go back to Emrallt Valley, to have a spell cast. This envelope will give you the answer you’re looking for.”

“What answer might that be?” I asked .

“The identity of the child’s sire, of course.”

The answers I was looking for couldn’t be cast by a sorcerer’s spell or written on a fancy piece of paper. The answers I was seeking had to come from the heart—Skylar’s heart. I held up the envelope and studied the fancy wax seal and looping fae scrawl, remnants of the life Skylar had left behind when he journeyed here with only the clothes on his back. I considered his bravery at striking out on his own to preserve his dignity and his trust in allowing another man to care for him, even after all the hurt he’d endured. All that he’d overcome in his traumatic childhood that had wounded his spirit and yet, despite all of that, he was still the kindest, most thoughtful man I’d ever known. He was my sweet, beloved fae darling, and he needed a man to love and take care of him. Not just any man, he needed a Daddy. He needed me.

“Do you want this child?” I asked him.

He blinked once, then nodded, eyes shining.

“And do you want me?” I asked, praying that our answers aligned.

“Desperately,” he said solemnly.

“Then there’s only one thing I need to know, Skylar Larkspur of the fae. Are you

mine?”

He stared up at me with wide, trusting eyes. “I’d like to be yours, Hiero, if you’ll have me?”

“I’ll have you a hundred times over, baby boy. And if you’re mine, then the child is ours. I don’t need this piece of paper to tell me what my heart already knows. Do you?”

He swallowed and shook his head slowly. “No, I suppose not.”

I grabbed a packet of matches from behind the bar and lit one, setting the envelope aflame and burning it down to nothing but the wax seal, which I tossed into the sink.

“Dramatic,” he said with a small smile.

“You know I like a little drama. Now, come here, my darling.”

He came to me willingly, softly, and melted into my arms. I dipped my nose into his raven hair and breathed him in, smelling honeysuckle and springtime.

“Goddess, I missed you,” he said, which reminded me there was still another matter we must discuss.

“Why did you think you had to run from me?” I asked. Hadn’t I made it known at every turn that I wanted to be his safe haven? His partner and his lifeline? Had I failed him in that way?

“It all happened so fast and I wasn’t sure what you would say. And I’ve made such a terrible mess of your life already.”

“Not a mess. Not at all. The day I met you, my life changed for the better. I’m no longer lonely or searching for my other half. You’re exactly what I’ve always wanted, in a boy and in a partner. I’ve finally found you and what a blessing it is.”

He pulled back to give me a sobering look. “You say that now, but I’ll be moody and irritable and I’ll probably cry all the time. ”

“Is that much different from how you already are?” I teased and this at least won me a dimpled smile. “But you have to confide in me, Skylar. Don’t hide or run away from me because you’re scared of how I might react. I’m here to help you, always.”

“I’m going to make your life messy, Daddy.”

“Bring it.”

“And you’ll have to correct me at every turn.”

“I look forward to doing so. Come now, sweetheart, did you miss the part where I told you that you were my dream come true?”

“I’ll need many, many reminders,” he said, turning coy. “And I still want you to use me for your pleasure. Even with child, I still crave your touch.”

“Aunt Mabel said I was cleared for strenuous activity. Is sucking my cock going to make you gag now that you’re in the throes of morning sickness?”

Skylar smiled and said with a twinkle in his eyes, “How about we go to the alleyway and find out?”

“There’s my sweet, slutty boy.”

### Chapter twenty-five

#### Skylar

I soon learned that Hierophant Wolfsbane was a man of his word. Unlike my parents and previous lovers, on every single promise my minotaur Daddy made to me, he delivered.

Within a week of my return to the Dragonback Mountains, Hiero proposed to me in a field of wildflowers on the same mountain's peak where we'd stop to gaze out upon all the realms during our very first date.

"In all my years of searching, I've never found a heart as true as yours," he told me, then he got down on one knee and presented me with a smaller, more elegant version of his clan's signet ring. "Skylar Larkspur, will you spend the rest of your life with me?"

"I absolutely will," I said with tears in my eyes.

"Forever my fae darling," he said, then gathered me in his strong arms and kissed me deeply. Soon after we were joined by friends and family who toasted our engagement with sparkling cider. We celebrated late into the night with fireworks and food, Hiero's kin regaling me with their shared memories and playing music around a bonfire until dawn. I sang my heart out and when I grew tired, fell asleep on a blanket by the fire with my betrothed steadfast by my side.

The wedding was a simple but beautiful affair, held on that same mountaintop a few

weeks later with the entirety of the Wolfsbane Clan present. There was much singing and dancing and revelry all round. I wore a crown of flowers and white gossamer pants with a matching peasant blouse because my baby bump was now starting to show. Hiero wore his leather pants, motorcycle boots, a black dress shirt, and the silver chain I'd given him as a token of my affection. It was easily the happiest day of my life.

My only guest was Monica, as my parents never showed or even bothered to respond to my invitation, but my bitterness was soon replaced by gratitude for the shifter clan that had adopted me as their own. They became more of a family to me with each passing day.

Soon after the wedding, Hiero and I spent a magical week down by the coast in a little beachside shack where we made love everyday to the sounds of the waves caressing the sand. That was also where I learned my Daddy had a bondage kink, and through extensive experimentation, he even figured out a way to bind my wings.

When we arrived back home, I discovered much to my surprise that a stone mason had already begun work on the foundation of what was to be our new family home. Hiero let me help design the interior, making sure the master bedroom had ample closet space for my growing collection of Oleander originals as well as a bathroom large enough to accommodate my various beautification rituals. Monica had gasped, eyes bugging, when she saw it, but even more so when I showed her her room for when she visited, which had a bathroom almost as big as mine.

And I got my balcony, too.

It was on that balcony, next to a trellis of moonflowers, where I sat sipping my hibiscus tea while looking out over the pastures of clover just starting to push up through the ground. It had been almost a year since I'd arrived here in the Dragonback Mountains and found refuge in my minotaur Daddy's loving embrace. Now it was spring again and everything was in bloom, including myself. I was due to



give birth any day, the exact date being hard to pin down because fae pregnancies varied, and I wasn't altogether sure of my conception date either. We didn't know the baby's gender or exact species, but I looked forward to welcoming Tiny Toes into our family, one that was safe and loving and built on all the values that Hiero and I held dear.

I glanced back to our behemoth of a bed where my minotaur Daddy was just starting to stir. He blinked open his sleepy eyes and saw me out on the balcony.

"Come here, gorgeous," he called in a rough voice. I set my tea on the table and waddled my way back to bed. "What are you doing up so early?" he asked, kissing my hair and my neck, scenting me as he'd had a habit of doing whenever we'd been apart for even a few hours. I'd asked him about it once, and he told me the smell of my skin soothed him. I supposed it was the same for me.

"I couldn't sleep," I said. I'd been uncomfortable lying down lately despite the many pillows Hiero insisted I have to bolster my growing body. "And I have a million things to do today. The nursery still needs to be organized, and there are some meals I'd like to prepare, and I think there are weeds growing in the garden beds out front."

"Nope," he said, still half-asleep.

"What do you mean, nope?" I asked.

"You're not doing any of that today."

"I'm not?"

"It's all being taken care of."

"By who?"

“Our friends and family are taking care of it. Frito and Frankie are coming over to weed the garden. Enid wants to work on the nursery. And Aunt Mabel is making meals.”

Aunt Mabel had certainly come around, congratulating me at our wedding for making an “honest man” out of her nephew.

“I like the way you say ‘our friends and family,’” I confessed.

“They’re yours now too, for better or worse.”

“Then what am I going to do?”

“Be my boy. ”

A delicious thrill coursed through me. Suddenly, none of the tasks I’d planned for the day seemed nearly as important as being good for my Daddy.

“I’m your boy every day,” I reminded him.

“Then be my boy, naked,” he said and tugged on the thin, silk robe I’d been wearing to ward off the morning chill. I let it fall freely from my shoulders, the crisp spring air sending a rash of goosebumps across my chest and tightening my nipples. Hiero had researched midwives in the area who were experienced with delivering fae, and after choosing Callista for the important task, he’d asked a lot of questions about safe practices during sex. Our midwife probably knew more about our kinks than Monica. It meant that I trusted him to use me without causing harm to me or our growing child.

“Pretty fae,” Daddy said, rubbing one callused finger over the tightened nub of my nipple, then pinching just beneath the bud until it secreted a sticky golden substance. My chest was slightly swollen and my areolas were as big as silver coins. My nipples

were tender all the time. When Daddy teased them like this, it nearly drove me wild.

“The midwife said this means you’re close,” he murmured as he lapped at the nectar with his long tongue, which sent an erotic thrill through me, to be sharing my body with both our child and my Daddy. I moaned without meaning to, and his hand moved to my hard cock, softly stroking .

“Yes, I feel it coming. Any day now,” I said. My body was a seed pod ready to burst open. I was nervous about the labor part of it, but I couldn’t wait to meet our child.

“Remember VIP night?” Daddy said.

“How could I forget?” I purred, recalling the night of utter debauchery a few moon-cycles ago.

“You were so sexy, dressed all in red, wrapped like a ribbon around that pole, and then around my cock.”

“My favorite place to be,” I said, slipping deeper into a state of sultry arousal my minotaur never failed to inspire.

His sticky fingers drifted to my swollen belly where he gently caressed, then he gripped my hardened shaft again and squeezed. “Open up for Daddy,” he said, so I spread my legs wide so he could see what he’d done to me. I was slick already, my hole aching to be filled.

“You’re wet,” he said, pleased by it.

“Your fault,” I said, not a complaint.

“Your body is a wonder. Every time I think I’ve mastered it, I find another surprise waiting for me.”

“I’m yours to discover, Daddy.”

He covered me with his body, careful not to put too much weight on my abdomen, and arranged the pillows so that I was propped up like a doll in our little sex nest. Then he took one of my feet in his big hands and started to gently massage. I groaned from the utter relief.

“You spoil me too much,” I said, making no attempt to stop him.

“You deserve it. You do so much for me, even when I tell you not to.”

“Not so much anymore,” I said. He’d insisted I stop working the floor of Church when my belly got so big that customers would knock into me accidentally. Instead, he’d taught me how to mix drinks, so I could work behind the bar with him. He kept a big comfy chair for me back there too, and made me sit down more often than I needed. I was also keeping the books, ever since we’d discovered I had a talent for sums, and I handled the contracts with vendors too, since some of them were worse than common thieves. Takes one to know one, I guess.

“You do plenty for me, baby boy, not to mention you’re growing our child. That’s a heavy lift all on its own.”

“I like doing things for you, Daddy. Sexy things too.” My voice was low and heavy as I played with my nipples, making them ooze more of the glistening ambrosia. My cock needed attention too, but it was too far out of reach. And besides, that was Daddy’s domain now.

“Are you seducing me, pretty fae,” he said, nostrils flaring.

“Is it working?” I asked, pressing my fingers to my lips.

Instead of answering, he directed his gaze downward. “Looks awfully swollen down

here. That pup's going to come any day now."

"Better get in while you can," I said.

"Darling, I intend to. Hands on the headboard now. "

I reached up to grip the wrought iron bars, wondering if he planned to blindfold me and truss me up in silks, then torment me endlessly until I begged him for release, a cruel but delicious game.

"Like this?" I asked and raised both legs as far as I could, putting myself in the best position for breeding.

"Need some more pillows?" he asked, stuffing a few more to support my legs.

"No need to be so careful. I won't break."

"I'm not taking any chances with you." Lying on his stomach, he positioned my bottom so that he could get at my hole with his tongue, eating me out with the same zeal that he devoured his sweet clover salads.

Eyes closed, I didn't see him moving until his hot mouth was anchored to one of my nipples while his fingers pinched the other. He sucked hard and the unexpected sensation made me orgasm instantly, splashing ropes of cum across my swollen belly.

"Messy as always," he remarked with a devious grin. "And Daddy didn't give you permission." He swatted one of my thighs with his tail.

"But you made me," I protested, feeling bad for breaking his rule, even unintentionally. "Goddess what if that happens when the baby comes?"

He shrugged. "Then the baby's not going to be the only one needing a nappy. "

“Hierophant Wolfsbane,” I protested as he snickered at my misfortune.

“Skylar Wolfsbane,” he teased me back.

“Are you going to punish me?”

“Yep. Ten swats as a reminder.”

“Only ten?” I asked, for that was just a warm up.

“Ten, you greedy thing. You don’t want your backside to be sore when you go into labor, but if you keep misbehaving, I’ll make you do something truly terrible like put your feet up and read a book.”

Daddy knew how much I detested taking it easy, unless it was for the pursuit of pleasure. He cleaned up my mess with his tongue, and I rolled onto my stomach to position myself on all fours, my belly resting against the soft bedding underneath me and my cock and balls hanging out there in the open, vulnerable to his discipline too. Everything was swollen and sensitive and oozing like sap.

“Ready, boy?”

“Yes, Daddy.”

He swatted me with his tail, counting out the lashes out in his stern Daddy voice. The impact was far less than his hand but still had a pleasant bite that made the surface of my skin sizzle and burn.

“Daddy,” I cried out, near tears already from the influx of sensation, especially after just coming so unexpectedly. “You’re going to make me break your rule again.”

“Better not,” he warned and taking mercy on me, rearranged the pillows to support

my weight fully in order to mount me from behind. His rough fingers traced where Monica had tattooed his horns on my back. Even though there was too much daylight to see them, he'd memorized their shape and touched me there whenever he could. At the bar, I kept the tattoo covered up, so that only my Daddy could see it, our little secret.

"Baby boy," he hummed with contentment, "Take a deep breath now." Without any further preparation, he started stretching me open by slow, torturous degrees, leaving me breathless and begging for more. The head of his cock popped inside, and he paused there, waiting for my body to catch up to my ambition. My channel throbbed around him and I wanted nothing more than to feel the whole of him inside me.

"God, you're beautiful," he murmured. "So sweet and ripe and ready to pop. Come up here with me now. I want to hold you in my arms while I make love to you."

I boosted myself up, and with one big arm wrapped across my chest and the other cradling my belly, my minotaur made himself at home. But he was going far too slow and being too careful besides. "Daddy, I won't break," I said, impatient for the main event to begin.

"Don't sass me, sweet thing. You've already broken one rule today. I'll figure out a way to put you over my knee if I must."

You must, I thought with anticipation, tempted to press my luck, but I was soon distracted by the intense pressure that was building in my bottom as I savored the sweet ache of penetration. He pulled out nearly all the way, then drove back in deep, holding me up so that I was weightless in his arms.

"Moan for me, Skylar," he whispered, his breath hot in my ear. "I want to hear all your pretty noises, little breeder."

I gave him what he wanted, all of my earthy groans and whimpers of pleasure, while

trying to not let the influx of sensation overwhelm me.

“Such a good boy,” he murmured, so I milked his cock then to show him just how good I could be. Growling, he finally gave into his baser instincts and started fucking me in earnest. Goddess, there was nothing like being hollowed out by Daddy’s big dick. I couldn’t reach my own cock, and besides that, I wasn’t allowed, so I reached up and grabbed onto Daddy’s horns, pushing my ass out for more.

“Beg for it, boy,” he rasped as my musical moans filled the air. “Let me hear my songbird sing.”

“Daddy please, right there. Goddess, it feels so good. Don’t stop. Don’t ever stop.”

“I’m going to have to soundproof these walls. Don’t want our lovemaking to wake the baby.”

“Yes, Daddy, yes. I’m going to... Please, Daddy, may I?” I wailed.

“Please what, Skylar?” he said because he loved to torture me.

“Please, Daddy, may I come? ”

“With me,” he grunted and didn’t even bother with my cock as he continued thrusting. My dick slapped against my stomach, and I took everything he gave me, waiting until I felt him twitch and seize inside me before I finally let go.

We came in tandem, each of our climaxes triggering the other, just as he’d trained me to do. I soared above the physical realm for a precious few moments in a cloud of euphoria only to land a little while later and find myself sweaty and breathless and sticky all over. Daddy still held me close to him, kissing my cheek and my hair, whispering that I was precious and adored. I let his sweet words go straight to my head. Funny enough, I believed him.



“God, how I love you,” he murmured as if confessing it to a higher power.

Words were not enough to convey my feelings for him, they never were, but Goddess, I tried. “I love you too. You're everything I've ever wanted in a lover and a husband.”

“And I love seeing you this way,” Daddy said softly and pushed the sweaty tendrils of hair from my forehead.

“Bloated?” I teased.

“Round, Skylar, not bloated. Pregnant and vulnerable and craving my touch. I love fucking you while knowing our child is inside you, growing stronger every day. I told you before, your body is a marvel, and to watch you blossom like this...” He dropped his gaze before meeting my eyes again. “I’m so grateful you’ve chosen to share this with me.”

“Are you trying to make me cry?” I said, for it took only the slightest nudge these days to get me going, and I could only blame the hormones for so much.

“You’re safe with me, Skylar, and so is our child, I want you to know that,” he said earnestly.

I nodded, my throat tight and my eyes blinking rapidly to ward off tears. “I do know that. You’ve proven it to me every day. I love our little family. Come lay with me now before I fall apart. It’s my turn to care for you.”

He relaxed beside me, and I held his head to my chest so I could stroke his hair, careful to mind his horns.

“Any day now,” he murmured, rubbing my stomach. “Are you ready?”

“Yes.”

“Are you nervous?”

“I have every confidence that Callisto will help us through.”

He glanced up at me. “Yes, but are you nervous, darling?”

“A little,” I admitted. Childbirth was shrouded in secrecy in Emrallt Valley, and generally involved having a sorcerer on hand, which made it all the more mystical, and not in a good way. Shifters were more open about birth, but there were still a lot of unknowns as to what I could expect, especially if the child was part bull. Hopefully the flexibility of the fae would serve me well.

“I’ll be with you every step of the way,” he reassured me. “I won’t let anything bad happen to you. ”

“Like always?” I asked and he nodded. “There’s a full moon tomorrow night. Perhaps then.”

“I can’t wait to meet him. Or her.”

Or they, I thought, for the fae were fluid.

“I hope she has your eyes,” he said and gazed up at me as if I’d given him the world.

“I hope he has your horns and your stubborn attitude.”

He chuckled. “Me, stubborn? I hope she has your sass and your cheeky sense of humor.”

I smiled back at him. I never had to censor my feelings or tone myself down for

Hiero. He loved my brattiness and my dramatic flair, and when I was overwrought with emotion, Daddy had the ability to soothe me and make me feel safe in his steady, loving care.

“Whoever they are or turn out to be, I know they’ll be perfect for us,” I said.

I dwelled in my happy daydream of hugs and cuddles and games of chase through fields of clover. Of Hiero boosting our child onto his broad shoulders and skipping stones at the creek behind our house. Of picnics at the beach and birthday parties and tending to the many hurts of childhood. I couldn’t wait to experience all of that with Hiero, the opportunity to give our child a happy home.

“You’ve made me the happiest fae alive, Hierophant Wolfsbane,” I said to my lover, my husband, and my wonderful minotaur Daddy .

“You’ve made me a proud Daddy twice over, pretty fae. Ever since that night you waltzed into my bar and offered to blow me, you’ve changed my life forever.”

“I was a messy bitch,” I admitted.

“Still are at times,” he teased and I gave him a little shove. “But I like a little mess.” He grinned. “Now, are you going to be a good boy for me today and do exactly as I tell you and let me pamper and spoil you as much as I wish?”

There were really only two words I needed to say to convey my trust, love, and devotion to the man who loved and cherished me, messiness and all.

“Yes, Daddy.”