



One Night with Her Grumpy Orc (Toothsome Monster Romance #3)

Author: *Jilli Waters*

Category: Fantasy

Description: One sunshine librarian.

One grumpy, closed-off orc.

One way to keep warm.

A late season blizzard has surprised our small town, Moonfang Haven. When the snowplow truck loses control and crashes into the library, Grev, the grumpy orc patron, saves me.

Now were trapped in the library during a blizzard with no heat.

Theres only one way to keep warm.

But can one night of passion and necessity stand strong in the warmth of a new day?

One Night with her Grumpy Orc is a steamy, cozy, forced proximity, lets snuggle for warmth, small-town romance.

It is the third in the Toothsome Monster Romance series of stand-alone, sweet spicy, cozy monster romance novellas. Guaranteed to have an HEA, intended for mature audiences.

Total Pages (Source): 17

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A hundred years ago , there was a monster migration, many went west, but a few felt the call of the wild northeast and headed to the cozy, quaint island of Wolf's Ridge, named after the formidable mountains on the island, and founded the town of Moonfang Haven. Perhaps the island felt reminiscent of simpler, more magical times—lush, deep forests, craggy cliffs, a glittering unspoilt ocean teeming with life, and a protected valley perfect for a town. Or perhaps the blazing western sun wasn't something the Cragbeard, Suthorn, Fangst, Havet families and others were interested in.

I was here when they arrived. Watched as they set up a new life for themselves amongst the small human population already carving out a living, mostly by fishing, on my beloved island. They've integrated peacefully, minus a few hiccups. I think the wild goats of the mountains still resent the surprisingly nimble orcs invading their mountain.

Don't worry, magic still exists, though it's been diminished. My granny told me the formula once...time multiplied by disbelief divided by the square root of love...maybe? I don't remember. Math was never my strong suit.

Who am I? My story is of less importance right now, but I will say I was banished to Wolf's Ridge a long time ago. My magic has been reduced mostly to simple potions. One day, I'll have my comeback tour and everyone will remember my name. But until then, I'll be mixing macchiatos at Moonlit Grounds Café and Bakery.

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Betty

“Good morning, Betty. Staying warm?” Ravena shivers as she enters the library, snowflakes flying off her wild black hair. Snow stomped off her boots onto the rug, she walks through the main room to my desk.

“Grev,” she says as way of greeting as the towering orc walks across the main aisle to disappear into the nonfiction stacks, a funny smile on her face. He doesn’t answer, as usual.

“Just barely,” I smile at her, determined not to let my teeth chatter. I’m wearing my warmest cardigan, fingerless mittens, and my wool socks, and it’s barely enough. “This late season blizzard surprised me. I already took the extra insulation off the windows and packed away my snow coat.” Ravena tuts and hands me a hot cup of tea, sets her books on the counter for me to check back in—all pirate romances—then leans on the counter and gives me her mischievous smile.

“It’s best not to assume too much when it comes to the comings and goings of Moonfang Haven...weather included. Now, tell me when I can set you up with my neighbor? The other one.” The owner of Moonlit Grounds wags her eyebrows at me. She’s been asking about setting me up with folks since I moved here a year ago to run and revive the library. Sometimes it’s a friend, sometimes it’s a cousin three-times removed. The woman has no end of people to set me up with.

What she doesn’t understand is that part of moving here and setting up my new life also involves healing from a horrible relationship. And eighteen months later, I’m still not ready to jump back into dating. All those emotions are still so close to the

surface, divulging them at work would be a recipe for a disaster.

Instead of obliging her, I take a long sip of the herbal tea she brought me. “Oh, a new flavor! What is it?” I love it when Ravena makes new tea blends. They’re all so unique. I’ve heard her whisper to others about the magical properties of certain blends she makes. But she’s never admitted it to me. I’m hoping one day she’ll divulge her secrets. I’ve always wanted to be friends with a witch.

“Oh, you know, ginger, rosehips, and a little of this, a little of that. Proprietary. Now, about my neighbor...he’s out of town, but he’ll be back next week.” There’s no diminishing the twinkle in her eye.

A quick glance around, the teenagers working on their science project seem completely absorbed. Though I bet they don’t last much longer as the wind whips in through any gaps between the windows and walls in this old building. I half expect the whole town will shut down soon. The only other patron here is Grev, the youngest but largest of the Cragbeard brothers. Luckily, he’s hiding in his research somewhere in the stacks.

“Ravena, I can’t. No offense to your second cousin three-times removed and your other neighbor. I’m just...not ready.” She huffs out, but nods and smiles at me. “Now, there’s a new tentacled pirate romance I thought you might want to check out.” Now it’s my turn to wag my eyebrows at her.

She squeals, slaps her hand over her mouth when I give her my best librarian look, then whispers, “I don’t know. Might make me think of Gordon the wrong way when he comes in for coffee after a day of fishing.” More eyebrow wagging, and it takes everything I’ve got not to burst into giggles with her.

THE SNOW OUTSIDE IS no longer mesmerizing. Big flakes swirl and spin around the parking lot, which is empty of all cars except mine and Grev's. And if the snowplow doesn't come by soon, I may be stuck here. My trusty Civic is buried in the snow. Just thinking about digging it out to get home makes my toes curl in anticipation of the cold. Heavy white clouds shield Wolf Ridge Mountain from view. I imagine most of the town is tucked in at home, too.

The last of the straggling teenagers leave as the power flickers. Their howls of laughter as they jump into the snow delight me. Looking up at our antiquated lighting system, I send up a prayer, begging for the power to stay on long enough for Grev, the last patron, to leave.

Grev has a routine. He's here Tuesday and Saturday evenings after work, and always stays until closing. He rotates through a variety of non-fiction topics—astronomy, blacksmithing, gardening. But once a week, he checks out one novel. A mystery. He's read all of Agatha Christie. At my recommendation, he picked up the first Louise Penny book, and he seems to be hooked.

But he hates it whenever things don't go as planned. We stayed open late for Christmas carolers, and he wrote a letter to the library's superintendent about how un-library-like it was to be open for people to sing. Loudly. When I was late opening, due to a flat tire, he was out front pacing and growling when I finally pulled up. It seems unfair that the sexiest orc in town is also the grumpiest and most particular.

Not willing to have him grump at me just yet, I straighten my desk and put the reference materials away the teens were using for their science project. A flash of yellow catches my eye, and I walk to the window to see my salvation—the snowplow truck entering the library parking lot. Good. Now I need to get Grev to leave while the road is freshly plowed.

Picking up a few more items the teens left in the corner, the squealing brakes of the

plow truck scare me, and I bump my head on a shelf as I jump up. Screeching sounds and icy wind and books blast me all at once as I'm flung into the stacks and everything goes dark.

When I open my eyes, it's to the grip of powerful hands holding me close, keeping me warm. Reaching over, I pull Grev's olive green face to mine. "I've been waiting a year for this." And then I kiss him.

His lips are warm, soft. He smells like leather and caramel. As he moves over me, his weight is a welcome heat. My leg wraps around his, and a groan escapes from his chest that vibrates through me. There's no denying the thick bulge pressed against me, and all I can think is more.

Hands tangle in each other's hair. We move with urgency. This is the stuff my dreams are made of. Having a crush on my patron has been stifling, especially when he's such a quiet grump. Knowing he feels the same way is an electric shock that sends me soaring high above the Earth.

"Betty," he moans my name as he trails kisses down my cheek and jaw to my neck. Pulling my sweater aside just enough to kiss my collarbone, my breath hitches.

"Betty," he says again. This time there's an urgency in his voice that I recognize. I feel it, too.

That's when the room begins to shake.

And I wake up. Again.

My body is goosepimply from the frigid arctic air whipping through the missing window in the library.

There's a heat in my thighs that I can't deny.

I can't move.

There's a muffled yelling coming from somewhere outside.

Books are everywhere, splayed open, covered in...snow? It's a devastating sight. I'm certain the tears pricking the corners of my eyes are due to the bookish devastation all around me, and not at mortification at having a sex dream at work.

It's dark, but there's enough snow filtered light to see what's pinning me to the ground.

Or rather, who .

It's a muscled orc blanket named Grev. And he's staring at me.

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Grev

O f all the fucking bonkers things to have happened to me. Today. It had to be this. A runaway snowplow truck hitting my favorite place in town. Threatening to take out my favorite person in town.

I've never even shaken hands with Betty Pallson, and now I'm on top of her, protecting her from the avalanche of books and wall that rained down on her.

Her body is so soft, and I'm close enough that her vanilla and pear scent permeate down to the depths of my soul. Gods, her glasses are crooked on her straight nose, and the temptation to straighten them almost gets me, but my giant hand in her face might scare her.

What used to be the front window of the library is now a giant gash of emptiness and shambles. There is no blizzard. No parking lot. No adorable town. Just the weird blue-grey light that comes from giant piles of snow blocking us in. Icy air floods into the library from the missing window, extinguishing any heat that was here. But there's no way out.

The snowplow truck revs outside, the tires spinning in the slick snow. Stuck. Against the main entrance to the library. There's pounding on the door. I assume it's the plow driver.

It takes several tries to get Betty to wake up. Her breath is shallow, almost a pant. It concerns me—maybe I crushed her when I pulled her out of the way? Eventually, after almost yelling her name and shaking her, Betty groans and her eyes flutter open.

Thank the gods she's awake.

"Let me help you up," I say as I grunt and stand, crunching part of the wall and a children's fairytale book under my boots.

Reaching out a hand, she grasps mine, and I marvel at how small and delicate it is, and I pull her up. Wobbly on her legs, I guide her to her desk so she can sit, dusting off her shoulders and pulling bits of debris out of her hair. Her cheeks are a deep rosy color that trails down her neck. She must be colder than I thought she was.

The pounding continues. A muffled "Hello?" comes through the door. I shout back and leave her to talk to the door.

"My truck is good and stuck. Everyone okay in there?" I recognize Matt's voice. He sounds shaken.

"Yeah. Betty and Grev. The power's out. Can you call for help?"

"Cell tower is down. I'll see what I can do." I wait for more information, but he's gone. I suppose he's even colder out in the weather than we are in here.

Before I turn my attention to Betty, who I want to inspect for injuries and wrap her up in the thickest blankets in front of a fire, I assess our reality. Blizzard conditions outside. Power is out, as are cell phones. And it's just the two of us in this building with a gaping hole.

"Grev, did the snowplow run through the library?" Betty asks, shivering. Her teeth chatter, the sound making my own hurt. I bring her my coat off the rack and set it over her shoulders. I don't see hers. No wall in the library is a big problem. Bending down, I pick up the books and make stacks of them on the other side of the room, away from the snow.

“It did. Matt is hopefully going for help. Can you try the landline to see if we can call for help? How do you feel?” When she doesn’t answer me, I pause and turn to look at her. Betty stares at me, her eyes wide behind her still crooked glasses, her pink mouth in a small o shape.

“That was a lot of words,” she finally says. Maybe she hit her head harder than I thought.

“The books will be okay,” I reassure her. Clear my throat to get rid of the grumble that I always get in the cold.

“Not the books. You. You said a lot of words.” Other than her cheeks, that are still red with more than just the cold, she seems to be fine. I go back to stacking books and contemplating how to cover the hole so the snow doesn’t continue to come in.

After sliding two bookshelves through the debris and standing them in front of what used to be the window, I make my way back to Betty, who is shivering under her coat and hat. There’s a steady whistling as the wind makes its way through the bookshelves. Snow streaks across the carpet, piling up a bit where the bookshelves meet. Maybe it will pile high enough to block the wind.

“Any luck with the phone?” I ask as I clap my hands together to rid them of dust and walk back to check on her.

She shakes her head no.

“Are you injured?” I kneel before her and take her petite hands in mine. They’re ice cubes.

“No, I don’t think so. Just cold and surprised.” Her eyes shine, even in the barely there light. Deep brown pools full of knowledge. Sniffing, I don’t smell blood.

“What about your back door?” Why didn’t I think of this before? Betty blushes deeper. Coughing, I clear my throat again from the grumble. I jump up and make my way to the emergency exit of the library. The knob turns, but it doesn’t open. Throwing my weight against it, it doesn’t budge.

“Windward side,” Betty’s voice is small behind me. There’s a scent of fear on her that wasn’t there a minute ago.

“What do you mean?”

“The blizzard is coming from the east. This is the east side of the building. The snow is packed against the door and windows on this side.”

“Oh.” I guess that explains the scent of fear. We might be stuck here. “Are there any other exits?” I feel like I know every inch of this building. But I can’t say I’ve actually paid attention to which windows are exits.

Betty shakes her head no, the green pompom on her hat bobbing back and forth. “The building is old, as you know. There’s a very long maintenance list that includes things like installing windows that open, but that is pretty far down on the list. I think the only windows that open are on the east side. The others are painted shut.”

“Fascinating.” Somehow, I knew she was going to say the windows were on the east side. Irony. “Is the furnace gas, at least?” Or oil? Or wood? Anything other than electric.

“Electric. I applied for a grant for an energy efficiency upgrade. It works great, except in blizzards.”

“And when the power is out.”

“That, too.” When she huffs out a breath, I see a cloud. I cringe at how cold it is already.

“You wouldn’t happen to have a surplus of blankets lying around, would you?” It’s a long shot, I know, but I need to get her warm, and fast. Who knows how long it will take someone to get us out of here.

Betty snorts a laugh, and the sound shocks me in the best way. She’s always so professional and put together. Between the snort and her loose hair fallen from her ever-present bun, she seems wilder. My cock twitches at the thought of a wild Betty. Chill out.

There’s no denying that my main reason for frequenting the library is to see Betty. To hear her kindness when she speaks to patrons. To take in her pear and vanilla scent as if she were mine. Now, with her wavy hair cascading around her, I can’t help but think of her and her hair wrapped around me, despite the urgency of our situation.

“Oh, Grev. Of course I don’t. It’s a library, not a hostel. Even if we made our way out of here, my Civic is buried in the snow. Maybe your truck would work, but my guess is it wouldn’t get far, seeing as the town’s one snowplow is now stuck at the library.” Her voice rises in pitch as she speaks, eyes grow wide. She’s reached her limit.

Two steps and I’m in her space, my arms wrap tightly around her. I want to give her all my warmth. “We’re going to hang out and stay warm.” And with that declaration, I scoop her up into my arms and carry her through the library, as if it were our wedding day and the bookshelves were our guests celebrating us.

I take her to the back corner, farthest away from the busted window, and set her gently on her feet. Move a couple of bookshelves to create a closed off corner for us, trying to provide as much insulation as possible. The sun has set, or the storm has grown even more severe, but either way—it’s dark. It’s quieter here, away from the

wind whistling its way through the gaps of the temporary wall I made. Settling myself on the floor, as comfortable as I can be, I sigh at the irony of being trapped with thousands of books and not being able to read any because of the darkness.

Though I can't see, I can smell Betty. Not only her pear and vanilla, but her slight nervousness and arousal. Focus Grev, on anything but her scent. Or the feel of her in my arms. Her closeness. Or the little breathy gasp she made when I picked her up.

I'm completely screwed.

"That was quite a sigh," Betty says, teeth chattering between each word.

"Come here. We are going to huddle for warmth." At that statement, she snorts out a laugh again. It takes a few seconds of quiet for her to shuffle over to me. She trips over my foot and lands on top of me with an oof.

"Sorry, I'm not very graceful when I'm frozen and can't see."

"Understandable." I position her sideways on my lap and wrap my arms around her again.

We sit together like that in the dark silence. It's a comfortable silence, even though the feel and scent of her is driving me crazy.

"Do you think we'll be here all night?" There's a slight quiver in her voice.

"Yes," is all I say, because there's nothing else to say. It's dark. The snowplow is stuck and abandoned. We're safe as we are—I'll keep her safe.

It takes a while, but she finally relaxes enough to put her head on my shoulder. "That's a good girl," I say without thinking, enjoying the weight of her against me

and the scent of her tickling my nose.

“Grev, I’ve never heard you say this many words. Ever. And I’ve been working here for a year. Now I’m sitting in your lap and you’re calling me a good girl. I don’t even know what to think.” She huffs half a laugh, but her head stays where it is, against my chest. I will my heart to stay steady.

“Betty, you’re the reason I love books. You’re the sun to my moody gray sky. I come to the library because of you. To be in the same room as you.”

“I’ve read a lot of romances in my day. Those are kissing words.”

And with that, she kisses me, her cold lips sizzle on my warm lips. So soft despite the cold. Her fingers grip at the sides of my shirt, holding us together as her mouth opens ever so slightly, letting me inhale her even more.

This is what I dream about at night. Not being stranded in a freezing library. But Betty. Being with Betty. With her as absorbed with me as I am with her. The entire world shut out, only us revolving around each other like stars in orbit.

When her tongue darts into my mouth, tentative and bold at the same time, fireworks erupt in my brain. A moan comes out of me and my hands grip her side and hip through her many layers of clothes, pulling her into me. She tastes like summer sunshine.

“Grev, I want this. Want you. Tell me you do, too.” Her voice rasps in the most delightful way.

“I’ve always wanted you.”

And those words are the key. Betty pulls away just enough to turn and straddle me,

her thighs splayed wide around me. Then she attacks me again with another kiss. Her chest pressed against mine. Heart to heart. This time, all bold. Deep and passionate.

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Betty

It takes several minutes of kisses, breathlessness, and a thick hardness pressed against my thigh for me to pause just long enough and pinch myself.

Ouch. Good.

I'm not sure what I would do if I realized I was dreaming again, especially after waking up embarrassingly hot and bothered in Grev's arms after he saved me from the collapsing wall of the library. Probably cry and be a slobbering mess.

But joy of joys, this is real. He is real—all his grumbles and hard muscles and giant hands caressing me. And his declaration that he wants me, too, makes me dizzy with delight.

My chilled hands roam over his warm, thick shoulders and back, needing more, moving south. When my hands find the skin of his rippled muscled stomach, he flinches and freezes.

“What's wrong?”

“Your hands are still freezing. I don't want to make you colder.”

“Good thing your skin is hot,” I say, grinning in the dark, as I flip my hands back and forth against his skin, like I'm flipping meat on the grill. The darkness makes me bold—I'm not Betty the librarian right now, I'm Betty the heroine trapped in an icy cave with her barbarian orc lover—and I let all my inhibitions fall away. He grunts in

what I think is approval. Besides, my insides are on fire with wanting him, with getting him, finally.

Fingers warmed and nimble, I unbutton the top of his pants, reaching between us to feel the bulge that I've been pressing myself against. Yes, I think to myself, mouth watering at the silkiness and thick size. I finally get to experience for myself what all my monster romance books have been talking about.

His hand stills mine, his breathing heavy. Without being able to see him, the his breath against my cheek is a gentle caress. His heart pounds against mine, telling me a story of how we go together. I swallow hard, enjoying the taste of him on my tongue.

“What’s wrong?”

Grev shifts under me, ever so slightly, but stays quiet. All the same, it feels like the Earth dropping out from under me. The rhythm of my heart shifts from desire to panic. “Look, if you’re going to change your mind, that’s fine. But I need to hear the words from your lips. Your soft, delicious lips.”

Another shift. His bulge, still in my hand, twitches forcefully, and I smile a little at the power I feel, even though I think I’m getting dumped before we get started.

“I just—I want to make sure you stay warm.” He kisses me gently on the lips, his hands sliding inside the waistband of my pants. “Stand, quick.” His deep, quiet voice is a hot summer night, full of promise. Molten heat runs through me to my core.

I obey, standing, still straddling his legs. He pulls my pants and panties down to my knees; that’s all the stretch they’ve got. Resting one hand on his shoulder, I lift one leg, then the other, and he pulls them all the way off, folds them, and places them to one side of his thigh, right where my knee was.

With a swiftness that surprises me, he lifts his hips and slides his pants off, folds them, and places them on the other side of him. His ass has to be freezing against the cold library floor.

“Sit, facing away from me.” I sit. His thighs are just as hot as his stomach, and while my legs are warm, my frontside is quickly chilled. I still have my shirt and coat on, which is extremely unsexy. But necessary.

“Is the carpet going to chafe your backside?”

“Worth it. Now, relax.” He removes his shirt and drapes it over my stomach and legs. It’s better than nothing. I press my back against his front, longing to soak into his skin, and also trying to absorb all the heat radiating off of him. His cock rests along my spine. It’s the thick bulge I’ve been dreaming of. Then, magic happens. Finally.

One hand cups my breast, the other moves down my stomach to my mound, further down, rubbing my clit, slipping between my already slick folds.

The growl that comes out of him when he discovers how wet I already am is delicious. His body vibrates against me in the best way possible.

Grev nips at my ear, his tucks scraping against the tender skin of my neck, and shivers roll down my spine. “You’re so soft. So wet.” His words are hot against my neck as his thumb rubs my clit. One meaty finger slides inside me, making me gasp.

I’ve lost all feeling of cold. I’m a raging fire, looking to consume us both. His erection is hard against my ass and spine. There’s wetness against my back, I assume it’s precum. The thought of licking it off him makes my hips buck against his hand harder. It doesn’t take long for my breath to come faster. “More.” My voice is a whimper, which would normally embarrass me with my neediness. But there’s no embarrassment. No inhibition. Only want and pleasure.

One more scrape of tusk against my neck, and I'm done. Waves of hot pleasure roll off me. My fingers dig into his thighs.

When I still enough to blink my eyes open—still dark—and regain my senses, I have enough presence of mind to turn around, resting my knees on our pants, and sit on his erection. His shirt now a cape against my back.

“You're so beautiful. So strong.” Grev tucks my hair behind my ear. My hair must be so disheveled. “Go slow,” he says.

I feel like I'm incredibly needy, greedy, gobbling his giant cock with my pussy. It stretches me, and it's satisfaction. Arching my back, I focus on breath and the sensation of him, while he has one hand on my ass cheek, guiding me, while the other slides under my shirt to cup my breast.

His giant hands make me feel petite, something I haven't felt in ages. His grunts and huffs are the music my whole body wants to dance to.

Grev's rhythm picks up speed. It's almost too much sensation. My brain overloads with pleasure, something I didn't think was possible. It certainly wasn't in any of the romances I've read. When I say his name, it's a voice I don't recognize. But he does. And he pushes harder. Faster. Until we both come undone.

When he stops twitching inside of me, I fall against him, ear to his chest, listening to his pounding heart.

“Can you hear it?” he asks. “It's saying your name.”

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Grev

Once Sheriff Draugr takes our statements and photographs the area, Bjorn and Koru arrive and unload supplies. “What do you call frozen books?” Bjorn asks Koru, as they set a sheet of plywood down inside the library.

Koru groans. The grin on Bjorn’s face says it all, and I wince in anticipation of his idiocy.

“Elsa’s library! Get it?”

“You need a life,” Koru grumbles at him.

“I have one. August likes my jokes,” Bjorn huffs as he heads outside to get more supplies. Koru just rolls his eyes. I head out into the bright sun to help Bjorn. It takes all my self-control not to carry Betty wherever I go, never letting her out of my sight. But since we woke up this morning to the sound of the Sheriff shouting and banging to get inside, Betty splayed against me, nice and warm. She hasn’t made eye contact with me.

Her scent is all over me; I never want to change clothes. My brothers haven’t said anything yet, so I’m hoping they chalk it up to the idea of huddling for warmth. They don’t need to know anything else.

Sheriff Draugr’s red skin shines against the snowy backdrop as he asks Betty if she is able to drive. We nail another plywood sheet across the wall missing the window. My ears perk at her name on his demonic lips. My nostrils flare when his red hand rests

on her shoulder. She shakes her head no and gives half a smile at him. “I need to stay until the library is secure.” Her voice quavers. Emotion? Cold? Maybe both.

“I’m sure these guys can handle it,” he jerks a thumb over at us. I nod. Bjorn whips a hammer around like it’s a sword.

“This isn’t playtime,” I snap at him. All I get in response is a shrug. Bjorn takes forever. I want to be next to Betty, keeping her warm, comforting her, scaring Sheriff Draugr Busybody away from her. He looks way too close and cozy. Not a brilliant look for a demon.

I’m not sure what else she says, but “my job,” is part of it. Though it isn’t my place, my chest puffs with pride at Betty and her strength.

“Grev, do you think this accident counts as mass bookstruction?” Bjorn laughs at his own joke. Koru and I shake our heads and keep pounding nails to get the plywood in place. The difference is instantaneous—once the plywood covers the missing window and wall completely, the wind no longer whipping snow through the space—it’s quiet and less cold. Relief ripples through me. I hear her pleased sigh—just like the one last night.

Betty appears at my side, shivering enough that I can tell through her layers of sweaters and coat and hat. Instinctively, I put an arm around her, pull her softness into me, and gaze down into her dazzling green eyes. She stiffens for a beat, eyes darting back and forth to see if anyone is watching. They’re not, and with a sigh, she relaxes into me. The weight of her against me is the best feeling in the world.

“Th-thank y-you,” her teeth chatter as she struggles to get the words out. Setting down the hammer in my hand, I wrap my other arm around her into a big hug to warm her up.

“I didn’t realize you were so cold.” She looks up at me again, that same confused expression on her face from earlier.

“It’s not your responsibility,” she says, waving a mittened hand in the air dismissively.

Before I can argue her statement, Sheriff Draugr hustles over, big stupid smile on his red horned face. She stiffens and pulls away from me. A slight movement, but I feel it just the same—she doesn’t want the sheriff to see us. “Betty! I’ve got the power company on the way to restore power. And I got a message to the library superintendent. These orc boys have everything under control. Jake should be here any minute to take you home so you can warm up and rest.”

Sheriff Draugr puts his hand on her arm, a friendly gesture; a familiar one. It takes all my self-control not to punch his ugly, smiling face. Betty’s spine straightens even more as she pushes her glasses up her adorable nose.

“You called Jake?” Her voice is even, like when she asks if you’ve enjoyed the book you’ve checked out and are now returning to the library. But there’s a twinge of something there—panic. The sheriff must sense it, too, because our eyes meet for a flash. He pastes his sheriffy smile back on his face.

“I know he’s the closest thing you have to family here on the island. He’s been waiting rather impatiently for me to call him and give him the okay.” As if saying Jake’s name has conjured him into being, another police officer stumbles through the rubble, concern written all over his face.

Betty’s lips thin and pale, her eyebrows crease. The same studious expression she gets when she’s solving a book problem. But this isn’t a book. Her scent has changed, not quite panic. The Sheriff walks toward Jake to fill him in. Betty turns to me, one hand gently on my chest, eyes soft, almost sad, and she whispers, “I’m sorry.”

Turns her back to me and walks toward her...what? Friend? Not-family?

So many people, all working to help Betty, but they're preventing us from talking. Koru walks up to speak to Betty while Jake hugs her, then inspects her for injuries. She waves him off while answering Koru. My body trembles. I want to rip him away from her, throw him against the broken wall. But I realize those actions will only land me in jail.

"A week? Well, that will have to be okay, won't it? Extended due dates for all!" She laughs, but there isn't any mirth. This is Betty's pride and joy. Every inch of me wants to scoop her up and promise her it will be okay, but Jake is there, arm over her shoulder, escorting her out through the rubble hole to the outside world.

She doesn't turn back to me.

I guess last night was a one-time thing—survival and necessity.

Except I'm not a one-time-type-of-orc. Not when that's my fated mate walking out the door.

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Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 5:25 am

Betty

Heater—on. All the lights—on. Candles in the bathroom—lit. Hot water—running.

These are a few of my favorite things. The only thing missing is the powerful green orc who kept me alive, warm, and sane last night.

Sinking into the water, the heat is silky smooth on my skin. The soreness between my thighs from last night melts away, and it takes all my willpower not to relive the sensations of his thick cock stretching me, his possessive hands holding me tight, and his whispered words of how good I felt making me smile and blush in the bath.

Get it together, Betty. My helpful brain conjures Jake entering my broken library, seeing Grev and me standing close. Too close. While Jake works with the monsters in town and has a great rapport, neither of my parents does. And if there's one thing I learned growing up next door to him, it's that Jake Cowper cannot keep a secret. In fact, once he calls my parents to tell them of my disastrous, delicious night, I'll know within minutes. Because that's all it will take for Mom to hang up with him and call me—a shrill panic in her voice. He's always had an overbearing-protective-older brother thing and felt it necessary to intrude by keeping my parents up to date on my life.

When I got in a car wreck in college, mom knew before I even had the thought to call her. When I got this job, mom called distraught as she was hoping I'd work at our hometown library—with a less diverse population. Oh, and that one time I had emergency dental surgery for a broken tooth. Did she arrive on my doorstep to help with food, or just to check on me? Nope.

But did she call, multiple times, and let me know all her opinions on what I was doing wrong? Yep, every time. My secret theory is that they pay him every time he blathers to them about me. He's like their own personal spy.

Scrubbing my skin until it's pink, I feel slightly better and set up my book tray across the tub. Hand toweled off, I open the book.

Then slam it shut.

Reading about the lonely beekeeper and the minotaur who's about to rock her world with his horns and giant cock is definitely not what I should read right now. Let myself sink down into the water. Close my eyes. Muffle all sound with the water. It appears my mind is giving me two options: sadness over the state of my beloved library and how much work it's going to take to get it back and open for our community. Or, sadness over the orc I've secretly loved for the past year, that I've now tasted and want more of, but that I'll never hear the end of if I actually have a relationship with him.

What would my beekeeper heroine do? Would she let her stuffy family impede her dreams and heart and pulsing pussy? No. She would not. And I am nothing if not a dutiful student of literature.

Sitting up, I look from the flickering candles on the counter to my wrinkled hands in the water. If I want to have a relationship with Grev, I can do that. I'm a grown ass woman. Besides, my parents are on the mainland and would never willingly ferry over to the island to visit. It's always my job to go visit them.

And eventually, if things work out with Grev—gods, I hope they do, because I could lose myself in his serious eyes and ride his cock every night—then, well, I'll figure it out. We'll deal with my folks when the time comes.

Decision made, I pull the plug. Exhausted but now energized with the thought of being with Grev, making every dream I've had of him come to fruition, I need to journal, and make hot cocoa and a plan.

The doorbell shakes me out of my excited planning. Hopefully, it's a pixie here to deliver hot food and then be on their way. A girl can hope.

Robe on, hair in a towel, I tiptoe across the cold floor, leaving a trail of water behind me, and open the door.

And see my mother standing on my doorstep, tears running down her face. My father behind her, hands in his pockets, staring off into the distance like always.

"My girl! We came as soon as we heard! The ferry was awful and the lady at the bakery acted like I was out of line for cutting in front of some green creature. But I'm here, darling. I'm here!" She throws her arms around me.

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Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 5:25 am

Grev

“D on’t put that there !” Bjorn has a stack of lumber on his shoulder as he yells at me.

Shhh , I almost say out of habit. Completely unnecessary. The sacred library is now a construction zone. Saws, drills, hammering. A cacophony of noise and dust that would blanch the toughest of librarians. There’s a crew of a dozen volunteers here helping. After the superintendent declared that our little Moonfang Haven Library was low on the priority to fix, I offered my construction crew incentive to help, then went around town and asked for more volunteers and supplies.

I regret asking Bjorn, as usual.

“Don’t tell me what to do,” I snap back as I set the boxes of screws down with the rest of the fasteners. This is why I hate working with my brothers. They’re annoying, smelly, and bossy. “Don’t you have someone to save?” Please save me by going to rescue someone off the mountain.

“You. I’m saving you by making sure you don’t make a fool of yourself in front of your lady friend.”

His words stop me. There’s no mirror in the library, so I can only imagine that my face is a pale whitish-green. How does he know?

“It’s obvious. You’re always mooning over here. I mean, why else would you be here all the time? Besides, I saw you stare at her. And smelled the longing between you both. It was almost grotesque.” Bjorn winks at me. I just shake my head and grunt an

obscurity at his general direction before setting the boards in place for the new wall inside.

Each zip with the screw gun, I see her face in my mind. Happy with me. Pleased with all the work we've done. And wanting. Wanting to be held by me again. Wanting to be kept warm all night with me, preferably in a proper bed. Though I'll huddle for warmth all damn day and night if that's what she likes.

Pear and vanilla wafts around me, drowning out the scent of sawdust and sweaty dudes. And there she is, dark hair in a bun, chin quivering but lifted high, thick black-framed glasses partway down her nose as she surveys the construction of her small kingdom.

Steady, I walk toward her, unwilling to make a show by running to scoop her up. My heartbeat thumps in my ears, pushing me forward. Our eyes meet from across the room and her face lights up at the sight of me. My heart does a double-thump in happiness. Two people I've never seen before appear on either side of her. There is some similarity between them and her; must be her parents. My heart swells at the thought of her parents braving the half-frozen sea to make it out here and help their daughter.

But then I watch their scowls and narrowed eyes as they take in the scene before them. The woman's eyes land on Gordon, who is mudding over the screw holes on the drywall, and when one tentacle applies the mud, and another scrapes it smooth, her mouth drops open, and she wavers on her feet like she's going to faint.

These can't possibly be Betty's parents. Can they?

Betty puts her arm around the woman, whispering to her as she guides her over to the chair at Betty's desk. The man follows behind them, eyes shifting from each worker in the room, as if someone might attack him. Nobody pays them any attention.

“Betty. How are you today?” I ask when I find my feet.

“Oh Grev. I’m as well as can be expected, I suppose. It’s incredibly heartening to see everyone unite to help put the library back together. The outside looks almost as good as new, minus the paint.” Her eyes crinkle in delight behind her glasses. I love that look. I love the way she notices all the details.

“Too cold to paint outside yet. We’ll get it once it thaws.”

“Betty, is this island cursed? Is that why it’s still so bloody cold?” The man, her father, I assume, asks. I try very hard not to roll my eyes. Thankfully, Betty rolls hers.

“No, Dad. It’s just an Arctic blast. And you know, climate change. Late season storms happen everywhere. You know that. Remember when I was a kid and our melon patch died in the late June frost?” She gives her dad her pointed librarian look from over the tops of her glasses and I melt. That’s my girl.

Except, she isn’t my girl.

“Grev, I’d like to introduce my parents, Debby and Ted. Mom, Dad, this is Grev. He’s the one who rescued me from being crushed by the debris.” Betty gives me a big smile. Her hand comes up to my bicep, her touch a satisfying sultry heat, but her mom squeaks in protest and Betty’s hand drops to her side, lips rolled in.

“Nice to meet you both. Your daughter has been such an asset to our community and library.” I hold my hand out to shake theirs. They both stare at my hand, disgust written plainly on their faces, as if my hand contained some horrible plague for them to contract.

Breath steady, I lower my hand to my side and turn to face Betty and block them from my sight. “I was going to check on you, but I thought some rest might be best.”

“That’s sweet. I’m okay. They showed up and they’ve been helping around the house yesterday and today. But I needed to put my hands on the library myself.” There’s a wistful look on her face, a longing for something, probably books. “I can’t just sit at home and not do anything. This is mine, ya know?” She shrugs those sweet shoulders. There’s a loose strand of hair, I tuck it behind her ear, enjoying the spark of electricity that runs from her to my finger. Her skin is silky and delicate and warm. Bliss.

“Of course. I think everyone would be happy for you to be a part of the crew. Gorden and Flint are going to box out where the window will go. It’s on order. Tomorrow the drywall will be ready to paint. Wear your paint clothes.” I wink at her, enjoying the rush of blush traveling up her neck.

There’s a tsk behind me. She tries to peek around me at her parents, but I move, just slightly, to block her sight. “You are beautiful today,” I say loud enough for only her to hear. “Would you like to get dinner tomorrow together?”

Her face lights up like a beacon in the night, then fades away just as fast. She clears her throat and pushes her glasses up her nose. She’s transformed into a professional librarian in an instant. “That sounds lovely, thank you.”

Turning to go back to work, I nod at her parents, who turn away from me without acknowledgment, and wonder how someone so kind and open to everyone could have such small-minded parents. Her dad, Ted, echoes throughout the library as he asks her if she feels safe working here amongst all these monsters.

Most of us are used to this type of thought and behavior, though Moonfang Haven is exactly that—a haven. It’s hard to have such toxic people here in our town. Thankfully, everyone else is busy helping our library and ignores her parents.

Heading outside to throw debris in the dumpster, I overhear Debby declare that she’s

inviting Jake over for dinner tonight. Dropping the pile of wood scraps from my arms, I march over to the trio. Fairly certain smoke is physically coming out of my ears. That punk Jake will not have dinner with my mate in her house. Fuck no.

Bjorn moves in front of me, an ugly green wall I'm prepared to bulldoze. He puts a hand on my shoulder, and it takes all my self-control not to rip his fingers from me.

"You're going to regret going all Hulk on her parents. Take your own advice and do better."

I hate his words and his ugly beat up face. But they give me pause.

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Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 5:25 am

Betty

What a disaster this week has been. First, my favorite place on Earth is destroyed in a snowstorm. Then I sleep with my secret crush. Not entirely a bad thing, but Awkward, with a capital A. Thanks to Jake, my meddlesome bigoted parents are here to 'help' me.

And now? Now they've completely embarrassed me in front of the very nice townsfolk who are volunteering to fix my favorite place. They insulted my secret crush. And they're preparing dinner in my kitchen for Jake and me, making the loudest racket and biggest mess while they do it.

I need a nap.

"Betty! Where's the aluminum foil?" Mom shouts down the hallway to my room where I'm hiding, trying to finish my book. I try to read the endings of my books when I won't be interrupted. There's nothing worse than being interrupted in the middle of the couple declaring their forever love for each other, and kissing madly, deeply. Talk about a total dopamine killer.

Sighing, I get up and pad down the cold hallway to the kitchen. I can't stand the way my parents have always yelled at each other and me. Nothing is ever said in a normal tone of voice. Jake sits at the table, surprising me. "Hi, I didn't hear you arrive." I wipe my eyes, then clean my lenses on the edge of my shirt. It's later than I thought.

"I was trying to be quiet. I thought you were napping." He smiles that goofy grin. Sighing, I find the foil in the cabinet, hand Mom the foil, grab a cup of water and sit

across from Jake. Dad is trying to mash potatoes, and Mom is telling him he's doing it wrong. Distracted, good.

"I cannot believe you called them!" I lean in, whisper-shouting at Jake. He just rolls his eyes at me.

"What was I supposed to do? Debby still hasn't forgiven me for not calling when you locked yourself out of your own home at ten at night and you slept in the library."

"And whose fault is that? They would have never known if you hadn't told them." I sigh and sip my water, wishing it were something stronger as my dad sends mashed potatoes flying through the kitchen. "Jake, you have to stop informing them about my life. I moved here to have some freedom from them. And I have plans that I would not like them involved in."

"Grev?" he wags his eyebrows up and down at me, smirking. But it isn't the playful smile I'm used to him wearing. There's a glint of jealousy behind his eyes. It takes me by surprise, and I sit up straight, away from him as if I've been stung.

"What are you talking about?" I aim for nonchalance, but I know I've failed.

"Dinner's ready!" Mom announces as she marches a tray of food to the table.

"I saw you two the morning after the storm. There's no way your night together was catalogued under children's stories." I gasp, but quickly wipe the shock from my face as Mom sets the food down in front of us and smiles. She sits next to Jake as Dad walks over with half as many mashed potatoes as should be in the bowl.

Do not say anything, I mouth to Jake, my heel digging into his socked feet under the table to emphasize my point. He gives me a curt nod. We turn our attention to the parents and pretend that I do not have an apparently obvious-like-a-neon-sign crush

on the orc who kept me warm the other night.

It isn't until later, once the dishes have been washed and put away, Jake has left, and I'm scrubbing half-dried mashed potatoes off the cabinets and ceilings, that the doorbell rings. Mom, who is organizing the books on my shelf by color like a photo she saw in a magazine, gets the door. Not knowing who could be there, I stay put on my stepstool and try to ignore my mom's fluttery fake laugh.

When I hear his grumbly voice, my heart stops, just as a smashed potato chunk falls on my face from the ceiling. Scrambling to get off of the stepstool with my sponge, I trip over my own feet and fall. Luckily for me, it's all of two feet. I'm not hurt, but I am embarrassed as I sit up to see my mom and Grev in the doorway to the kitchen.

Mom's face is flushed; I file that fact away for later. But before I can even attempt to say hello to Grev, he is next to me, holding my hand, asking if I'm okay.

"Just klutzy." I shrug, trying to get up without giving away that my ass hurts from landing on it.

One heavy hand stays on me, my arm, my back, as I walk to the sink to wash the potato gunk off my hands and face. "You've got something—" Grev says as one finger swipes across my forehead. I have never hated mashed potatoes; they are one of my favorite staples from childhood. But right now, I hate them.

"There was a bit of an explosion while making dinner," I smile and try to will the blood out of my face. "Can I do something for you?" I ask once I've dried my hands.

Mom is still standing, now in the middle of the kitchen, hands twisting together as she stares at us. Or at him. Grev looks at her with the same straight face he uses for everybody at the library. It's a studious vibe—I'm never quite sure if he's looking for the best way to kill someone or just figuring out why they are standing in the same

vicinity as him. Either way, it's really hard not to burst out laughing at Grev and my mom staring at each other.

"I wanted to let you know that we got a lot of work done today, and the library looks really good. Estimates are we can open back up before next weekend."

I squeal and clap my hands. It's childish, but I don't care. The library is my home and my happy place. Arms out, I step toward him to hug him. There's a light in his eyes. Yes, he wants this too. The giddiness inside me is effervescent.

Just as I get close enough to soak in the heat rippling off his swarthy body, Mom coughs loudly behind me. A hyperventilating, panicky kind of sound. She stands up, tapping her chest and fake hacking. Oh yes, I can tell she's faking.

Grev is at her side, his hand on her back, his face close to hers to inspect her for...something, she turns beet red. It's a shade I've never seen Mom wear. "All better, dears. I'd better go find your dad. It's getting late." At that last sentence, she gives me a pointed look. I nod in return.

"I'll just finish up with Grev. Goodnight, Mom." I kiss her still red cheek and she scurries away, no doubt to tell my father that an orc touched her. Sigh.

"So you want to get dinner tomorrow? We can go to my brother's brewery, or we can go to the new Pixie place."

"I—I would love to. I've heard good things about the Pixie Pi." The effervescence is back, and I want to bounce up and down on my toes with excitement, but I don't want to appear too eager.

There's a noise from Mom. She's back, rifling through a stack of papers on the side table next to my reading chair. I can't tell if it's a moan from indigestion, or

disapproval at me going out to dinner with Grev. But I'm determined to ignore her. "How are the books you checked out last week? What were they on...poisonous mosses?"

Grev laughs and leans back against the kitchen counter, ankles crossed, the most natural action in the world. He looks perfect here. Right at home. He'd be able to reach my ceiling without a stepstool. And the top cabinet above the stove where I keep my holiday dishes. My heart tries to burst with happiness at the potential, but I try to keep it toned down.

"Just mosses. The poisonous plants were several weeks ago. Mosses are really fascinating. Did you know that they can reproduce asexually and sexually?" His eyes are dark and intense, the slight rise of his lip into a barely there smile tugs at something low in my belly. Grev, an orc of few words and fewer smiles, is seriously messing with all my feelings and emotions right now.

"Is that so?" The squeak that erupts out of me is a dead giveaway that he is having his desired effect on me.

"Would you like to sit and have a cup of tea?" I gesture, trying to smoothly ignore the squeak that came out of me.

"I'd love to," he says, with a little too much emphasis on love .

"Mom, you or Dad want some?" I ask as I fill my yellow tea kettle at the sink.

"Oh, no. I was just looking for something to read. The romance novel you left for me is not working. I'm looking for a mystery. Also, I still can't find your father." Mom wanders around the kitchen and living room, rambling, looking out the windows, then under the pillows on the sofa, as if Dad might have shrunk himself and be playing hide and seek under the cushions.

“I think he went to hide so he didn’t have to wash up.” I say pointedly as I set up our mugs. She wanders away down the hall, book in hand. Finally. “Mint okay with you? Or I have this orange spice?”

“I’ll have whatever you’re having.” Again, with that growly voice of his that makes me weak in the knees. And unfortunately, now, I don’t have a desk to hide my wobbly knees behind.

Seated at the kitchen table, Grev’s chair creaks under his weight, but it holds. The blue mug looks petite in his massive green hands, as if I served him tea in an espresso cup. “Thank you. Do your parents visit often?” He is surprisingly polite considering their actions of earlier.

“Not if I can help it. It’s normally up to me to go to them. But Jake was an idiot and called them to tell them about the library and me. So now they’re here.”

“It’s good of them to check on you.” It’s a simple statement, but it means a lot to me. That he cares that I’m taken care of, loved.

“I guess you’re right. We just don’t see eye to eye on a lot of things. I like being on an island with the sea between us,” I say as I blow gently on my tea. When I gaze up at him, he’s staring intently at my lips. My cheeks flush against my will. Tea drinking has never been this sensual before.

“Are you and Jake in a relationship?” His words are even and slow, but they bowl me over like a tornado whipping through the room.

“Jake? Gods, no. We were neighbors and friends growing up. He’s the one who told me about Moonfang Haven. But no, I could never be anything with him. My interests lie elsewhere.” I keep him pinned with my eyes, chin pointed up, making sure he gets what I’m saying. His curt nod tells me he understands.

“Well, I mostly wanted to check on you and settle on tomorrow’s plan. I didn’t mean to scare your mom. Well, not entirely.” Grev doesn’t smile, but he winks. His dark eyelashes brush against his cheek as he does so, and I’m struck by his beauty and regalness. It’s not a word I typically think of when I think of the residents of Moonfang Haven, whom I love dearly, but it matches Grev’s stature and demeanor perfectly. I’m glad I’m sitting down as I clench my thighs.

I reach my hand across the table toward Grev, hoping he’ll take it. Hoping that this thing between us is as real for him as it is for me. His eyes never leave mine as he reaches out and grasps my hand in his. Calloused and thick, his hands feel like home.

We sit like that, sipping mint tea and holding hands, and it’s the best thing ever. Or, the second best thing, after the night at the library.

There’s a loud thump behind me. Twisting to look, both my parents are in the doorway. Dad with his arms crossed across his chest. Mom clutches at his shoulders, like she’s holding him back. The ugly scowl on Dad’s face chills me. All the hatred in his eyes is directed at Grev.

“Dad,” I say, standing, trying to block Grev from my parents so he can’t see the hate in my father’s eyes. Of course, Grev stands up, towering behind me. So much for me thinking I could protect him. “You need to calm down—”

“I will not. I refuse to stand by while monsters invade my daughter’s home.”

“He was invited inside. By Mom .” It’s hard to keep my voice level. “I’m a grown woman. This is my choice to make.”

“It may be. But it doesn’t mean it’s smart. Or that I can support it. Or you.”

“The last ferry has run for the night. But the first one leaves at seven a.m. I suggest

you and mom are on it.” The tremor in my voice embarrasses me, but not as much as my Dad’s hatred of anyone who doesn’t look like him or like the same things as him.

Dad opens his mouth, finger pointing at me, but nothing comes out of his mouth because Grev makes a noise behind me. I think it’s an actual growl. Menacing enough that Dad just nods and turns to go down the hall to the guest room they are staying in, hollering for Mom to come along.

It takes a minute, or ten, for my breath to return to normal enough for me to turn around and face Grev. The apology is on the tip of my tongue, but the words don’t come out before his. “Betty, I don’t want to come between you and your parents. I’ll leave now. I’ll be working at the library tomorrow.”

He takes one step around me, but I leap at him, wrapping my arms around his middle. My hands can’t reach each other, so they grip his shirt hard, not caring if I rip his shirt. “Grev, I’m so sorry. I will absolutely see you tomorrow.”

Carefully but firmly, he unwraps my clinging arms from himself. Looking deep into my eyes, there’s a resignation in his that puts a pit in my stomach. With a grunted goodbye, he leaves.

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Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 5:25 am

Grev

This is a mistake. A big, ugly, sweat-stained shirt mistake.

I asked August and Poppy to help me find something nice to wear for dinner tonight. A decision I regret very much. My brothers' girlfriends showed up at the library and pulled me away from working on fixing things to trying on shirts at Gretta's Emporium. And it's awful. They whisper and giggle, clearly thoroughly enjoying themselves as they hand me jeans, khakis, and shirts galore to try on.

Standing before them in the eighth shirt they've handed me, I realize they have popcorn. Yes, I am their entertainment for the afternoon. Gods help them, and my brothers.

"I look and feel like an idiot. This can't possibly be good." It's taking every effort not to run out the door half-dressed to get away from them. They're like two old ladies cackling at me in a green plaid shirt. I don't even know why I put it on. "It's like I'm trying to camouflage myself at a rodeo." And with that, I stomp back into the dressing room before I rip it off and have to pay for it.

"Oh Grev, I was just curious! But you're right, it isn't the right color for you." August tries really hard not to laugh as she shouts the words at me. But Poppy has no such self-control. I'm confident her belly laughs can be heard on the mainland.

Of the eight shirts, the charcoal grey one I like the best. There, decision made. A better one than asking these yo-hoos for help.

Now all I need is enough courage to make it through dinner.

The sight of Betty takes my breath away. Doesn't matter that she's wrapped up in her heavy woolen coat, mittens, and a hat with a pompom. Her lips shimmer under her porch light, and her eyes are bright and joyful behind her glasses. "You look lovely," I say, clearing my throat as it's too raspy.

"Thanks. You look nice too."

In my truck, it's a short drive to Pixie Pi. It's a place of curiosity more than anything else. They don't have a set menu. They make whatever pizza strikes their fancy when they wake up in the morning, I guess. What a strange way to operate.

The patio space is empty at the restaurant, but it's lit up with a million twinkly lights. A big maple tree near the edge of the patio is wrapped in lights and lanterns to the point of excess. I'm sure in summer it's exquisite, but here in the dead of not-quite-spring, I have to squint from the brightness.

Betty looks up at the lights and gasps in delight. One hand reaches up to her chest, right where her heart sits. The other mittened hand grabs mine and squeezes. Now all I want is to string lights up at the library so she can feel this way every day at work.

"They're beautiful. With the snow on the branches? It's a fairyland," she says, her voice breathy.

"No, it's a pixie land!" a pixie wearing a stain splattered apron, one hand on their hip, the other holding a wooden spatula.

"Oh, sorry. Of course." Betty smiles at the pixie, and the thorny hair on their head settles a bit. Betty's smile has that effect on everyone she encounters. She's pure magic.

“Well, come in if you’re coming in. Food’s hot!” the pixie says, then buzzes inside. We follow, not wishing to attract the ire of our chef.

Dinner is a bizarre affair. Or would be if I dared to speak anything but glowing positive reviews of Pixie Pi. We had fermented maple water for a beverage, sauteed moss with a fruit cream drizzle for a starter, and the weirdest pizza I’ve ever seen for our main course. The crust seemed typical enough, but the toppings were a mix of rock-hard acorns, roasted reeds, and snow drop blossoms.

I make the mistake of trying to joke with our server, a different pixie. “You have these imported?” I ask regarding the snow drops.

The tray in the pixie’s hand slams to the ground—not an accident, and in their high-pitched voice said, “No, orc. We source everything ourselves. If you want imported, go to your brother’s establishment! None of his beer grains are grown here!”

Hands up in a calming gesture, I snort out an apology. Betty, however, takes hold of the irate pixie’s hand and praises their efforts in local foraging and agriculture. Again, the pixie’s defenses drop like magic, and they proceed to discuss local plants for ten minutes while I attempt to swallow the roasted reed pizza.

If I wanted to eat reeds, I would take a survival course, not live in town.

“Did your parents make it home okay?” I ask, once the pixie has left our table.

“They did,” she says, looking up at me from removing the acorns from the pizza. She doesn’t smile. “I’m so sorry they treated you like that. They’re very close-minded. I am a bit of a disappointment to them that I live here in Moonfang Haven, rather than in our hometown on the mainland, which has none of the quirky charm of here.”

“It must be hard to reconcile the pieces of your life when there is such a stark

division,” I say. At that statement, she puts her knife and fork down on her plate to give me her full attention.

“Grev, their approval doesn’t matter to me. It hasn’t since I was about ten years old. When they signed me up for softball and all I did was sit in the bleachers and read my books. They’ve never understood me. Or cared about my interests. We had a big falling out when I took this job, but I did it anyway. I’m here, living in Moonfang Haven, working and befriending all its residents. And I’m here, with you, despite the hysterical crying of my mom before heading to the ferry.” She sighs and sips at her maple water. I do the same.

I invited her here. I’ve loved her since I met her on her first day of work at the library. There isn’t anyone else I want to spend time with, eat moss with, or touch and love. But I don’t do drama.

“What will you tell your parents about our date?” It’s a dumb question, but really, it’s a dare.

“Oh, absolutely nothing.” Betty’s lips purse together in finality. We stare at each other. “Well, other than it was a perfectly delightful time.” She breaks into a smile, and it’s as if she is the warmth of the sun embodied on Earth.

“Would you like dessert?” The pixie rudely interrupts our moment of connection. But Betty turns to them and asks, “Do you have anything green?” her face alight in a mischievous smile.

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Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 5:25 am

Betty

The ride home takes forever. Grev keeps one hand possessively on my thigh, and it's the most luxurious feeling ever. The occasional squeeze shoots straight to my lower belly, awakening all the butterflies that have been hibernating since the morning after the blizzard.

Parked in my driveway, I pull Grev's thick neck toward me, eager to get my lips on his. He tastes delicious, a mix of something sweet and mint. Probably the after dinner tea they served us in a demitasse cup that looked like an acorn in Grev's massive hand.

There's no resistance from him and it takes no time for him to pull me onto his lap, though we have to pause for him to slide his seat back as far as it goes after my ass honks the horn. He runs his fingers through my hair and chill bumps erupt everywhere, under all my layers. As his hands run down my side and back, his callouses snag on my coat.

"Take it off," I whisper into his mouth, too busy tangling my own fingers in his hair to bother with my buttons.

With each button undone, he kisses a different spot on my neck. His lips are soft, and his tusks scrape gently at the tender skin. The juxtaposition is perfect. I'm halfway out of my coat when he pulls away, his hands on my shoulders to stop me from chasing his lips. I catch myself pouting. Not sure I've done that since I was eight and couldn't have a second piece of dessert.

“Are you expecting company?” Grev asks, a rasp in his voice. It shakes me out of my reverie of how good it is to be this close to him. To feel his neediness for me, just as I need him.

There, in front of my house, is a patrol car. My stomach drops and a groan escapes from me. I crawl out of his lap and straighten up, re-button my coat. Run my fingers through my hair as if nothing earth-shattering was happening.

“It’s Jake,” I say, mad at having my date crashed. Grev’s grunt sounds like disappointment. I’m sure it is. “Thank you for a lovely night. I enjoyed every minute of it.”

My lips sting slightly, raw, from our kissing session. Damn winter skin. A deep breath in and I untangle myself from his lap and crawl out of his truck, sliding down to the hard, cold ground of my driveway, where Jake glares at us as he leans against the side of his patrol car.

“What are you doing here?” I ask, my voice sharper than I want it to be. How long was he watching us? Could he see us in Grev’s truck? Looking over my shoulder, the windows are steamy, but still see-through. Grev lumbers over and stands beside me, arm around me, keeping me close and warm.

“Hey, Betty. Just wanted to check on you. You didn’t answer your phone.” There’s a weird pause. I wait, lips twitching. The desire to tap my foot like an angry schoolteacher is strong, but I resist. He isn’t wearing a winter coat. Neither does he have a massive warm orc body to huddle against. His breath is visible from the porch lights. “Okay, your mom called, and she was almost hysterical. How could you do this to her? To them? To me? I thought you knew better.”

He takes two steps toward me, as if he’s going to berate me more, but a low rumble emanates from Grev, and Jake stops, hands in his pockets. “I’m not going to hurt her.

She's my friend. We've been together since childhood. I just need her to understand that her behavior is unacceptable."

"And which behavior is that?" I ask, annoyed at him and the quiver in my voice. How dare he show up on my doorstep at night, interrupt my date, and chastise me like I'm a little girl? "And what do you mean, 'we've been together'? We're friends, yes. But we've never been together. Do you really think I want someone who goes yapping to my parents every time I do something or make a mistake?"

The silence envelopes us all. It strikes me hard that my words might be misconstrued. "And this—Grev and me—we are not a mistake." Grev's hand squeezes my arm, then shifts me to the side, just enough to step slightly in front of me—separating Jake from me.

"Seems to me that you've got quite the double standard, considering the fling you and Cercy, the wood nymph, are having." Grev says it simply, this little bomb dropped into Jake's lap. I see the flash of surprised horror on Jake's face. Slowly, I turn around to gape at Grev—quiet, hates to talk or socialize Grev—and realize that there's a lot more to him than I thought. His eyes glance down at mine, and he gives me a half-shrug, like it isn't a big deal that he just spilled the juiciest tea on the man who is trying to stake some sort of claim on me.

"How?" Jake asks. It's a question I'd like to know the answer to as well.

"I listen. Maybe you should try it." Grev runs his hands up and down my arm to warm me up when I shiver. "You should go inside," he murmurs in my ear.

"I'm not going anywhere."

"Betty, it means nothing. It's just a fling, like Grev said. I just got so tired and lonely waiting for you to finally look at me the way I want you to. But we're done. Say the

word and I'll never see her again."

"Jake, that's awful. No. I don't want anything to do with you. I thought we were friends," hating how small my voice sounds to my ears. I truly believed we looked out for each other because we were friends. Was he really using my parents as a way to control me? To force me into a relationship with him? I can't even breathe the same air as him right now.

"Her parents are adults. You are an adult. Betty is an adult. If her parents decide to keep their heads up their asses, then that's their fault. But you don't get to come here and be all mightier than thou and make her feel small, or like she's done something wrong. Betty doesn't answer to you. She doesn't belong to you." Grev's chest huffs as he speaks. His deep voice, though angry, is soothing to me.

Hmmm, that might be the most words I've ever heard Grev speak to someone else. And I love every single one. Jake flounders a bit, his hands and mouth both moving, but no action taking place. It's weird. Until now, I would have said Jake was one of my closest friends, no questions asked. But now I have to view at our history through this new lens of what was his real motivation. And that he called my parents to get me in trouble for being close to Grev? How dare he?

He turns away from us to walk back to his car, but Grev stops him with one sentence. "You need to apologize."

Shoulders sag at those words. Jake knows Grev is right, and he also knows I would never have demanded an apology. He turns around to look me in the eyes and says, "Betty, I'm sorry."

"Thank you," I say, as there's nothing else to say.

I stand there, Grev still keeping me warm—except for my toes—as Jake gets in his

car and drives away.

“You really should get inside before your lips turn blue,” Grev says softly. There’s something incredibly sexy about his soft, raspy voice.

“Will you join me?” I turn away from Jake’s taillights to search Grev’s dark, brooding eyes.

“If you want. I wasn’t sure if I overstepped.”

“Really? I thought it was perfect. I had no idea he felt that way. All this time. I’m an idiot.”

“No, you aren’t. But it helps when people are direct and clear with you. Let’s get you inside,” he says, but I can hear the amusement in his voice. Leaning close, his tusk scrapes gently against my cheek as he gives me a quick kiss.

“What do you mean? Are you saying I’m oblivious? Or that I miss subtlety?”

“You know, I have found a new appreciation for the culinary pursuits of Pixies. Tonight was quite spectacular.” Grev says as I unlock the door. I groan as I step through and into the warm house.

“Don’t say that. I never want to eat there again.” I laugh at him and hang up my coat and kick off my boots. “And don’t think I missed that you changed the subject. See? I notice things.”

That’s as far as I get before Grev spins me around, pulling me into him, then pushing me up against the wall to kiss me. A deep, ravenous kiss. When he pauses so we can breathe, he asks, “Did you notice this?”

“Mmhmm.”

“Good. I’d like to pick-up where we left off in my truck.”

“I’d love that,” I pant before he kisses me again.

Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 5:25 am

Grev

Every luscious curve is a dream. Every pant and gasp of pleasure from Betty is a firestorm straight to my heart. And my cock. I like her here, pressed up against the wall, but since our first time was on the floor of a frozen library, maybe tonight should be more comfortable.

“Bed?” I ask, meaning, which way. I could throw her over my shoulder and wander around, but I’d rather not waste time. Her arm points behind my head. Behind it is. Lift her up, her legs wrap around my waist, her arms around my neck, like we’ve practiced this before, and I carry her down the hall to the room that smells like Betty.

If there were an award for the most stereotypical bedroom based on outside perceptions, I think Betty would win. Her room is mostly tidy. Simple, clean lines. A floral blanket on the bed that isn’t ostentatious. Lots of peaceful blues and deep greens. A splash of pink, like her lips.

But the thing that tells me for sure that this is Betty’s room is the leaning tower of books by her bed. On the wall is a bookshelf full of books. Next to her bed, there’s a petite lamp, a lotion jar, and a stack of books. The top one is upside down to hold its place. Surprising.

On the floor in front of the bedside table? More books. Almost as tall as the nightstand itself. I don’t eyeball the titles right now; I have more important things to do. But it is very hard not to trip over the third stack that’s at the foot of her bed.

“Careful!” Betty squeaks when my foot kicks the books. Falling forward, we land on

the bed together, me squishing her. Loving the thickness of her under me.

“Lot of books,” I grunt as I push off her to relieve her of her pants.

“Comes with the territory,” she says as she pulls her sweater off, revealing a black bra and panties.

Her voluptuous curves that I want to map and study for the rest of my life. I can feel the rumble through my body, like tremor of the Earth’s surface. I want to roar my possession of her, that she’s mine. My cock tries to leap free, and I’m inclined to let it be the boss.

“Come here. I want you,” she whispers, her hands out in a grabby motion. Crawling up to her, I take my time, letting my tongue trail along one thigh, then the other, pausing long enough at her clit to tease her through the flimsy fabric. Making my way north to her lips, there’s a slight deflation when I leave her apex.

“I’ve been imagining this for a long time,” I say, nipping at the fabric at her breasts. They’re so full, so delicious. Her nipple pebbles through the fabric, and I run the smooth edge of my tusk against it, enjoying the whimper of pleasure that comes from her. Her hands are still grabby, pulling me against her, pushing my hips into hers.

I hover, my cock hanging, resting against her clit, but providing no friction. Her desperation as she wraps her legs around me, digging her heels into my ass to lower myself onto her, is adorable. “You’re persistent. I like it,” I say, almost chuckling.

“Please, Grev, I need you against me. Inside me.” At her please, my cock thumps harder. The word on her lips is honey to me, dripping slowly down to my heart.

“You want this?” I ask, lowering, pressing my cock against her clit and lower part of her stomach. Precum leaking onto both of us. She nods frantically as she moves her

hips.

I lift myself back up. “Say the words,” I say, then kiss her.

“Grev,” she pants, pushing on my shoulders to get space between our lips. “I need you inside of me. Now.” Her growl is delightful.

Leaning back, I grab her panties with both hands and rip, letting the fabric fall away, like the wrapping showcasing my present. A grunt of satisfaction as I notch my cock at her entrance, then a sigh of satisfaction at her wet, hungry heat.

I push into her. Betty’s back arches, her eyes shut, breath a quick pant. She is a thing of beauty to behold. “Take more of me, my good girl,” I say, pulling out and pushing in again, a thumb pressing on her clit.

The whimper that escapes her is magic. Her nails digging into my arms and shoulders are a spell. Kisses along her jawline up to her ear. Then back the other way. My tusks drag gently along her cheeks. She arches her neck at me, attacking my lips with her own plump, sweet ones.

Her trembling thighs widen more, her welcoming hips moving in rhythm. Another thrust. I’m in, all the way. “Gods, you feel so good, so right.”

There’s a magic that happened that night in the library. And it’s repeated here. Whole pieces of me come alive with excitement, potential, pure joy at the moment and at Betty. That she would ever entertain being with an orc like me. It’s proof miracles happen.

We move together, sweating despite the frozen night outside, and find our bliss together. When she brings a leg up between us, pinning it between herself and my shoulder, I shudder in wonder at her flexibility and in an attempt not to finish before

her.

Shifting, I bring my hand up to her nipple, twisting it between my fingers. “One day, our orcling will suckle here,” I say with amazement in my voice.

Betty freezes her movements. Her eyes open, staring at me. “Grev,” she whispers as she shifts, her leg coming down so she can prop herself up on her elbows. “Orcling?” Her eyebrow does that arched thing it does when someone at the library makes excuses for why their books are late. It’s sexy as hell, and my cock twitches to tell her so. Rightly, she ignores it.

“I didn’t know you want babies. Are you making a promise to me?”

“Only if you want me to. I’m sorry, I got caught up in the moment.” I stroke gently up and down her arm, trying to gauge how seriously I’ve just fucked up. She hasn’t completely pulled away—there’s hope.

“Of course I want you to make that promise to me. But seriously, we need to work on your verbal bomb dropping timeliness.” My hand stops as I’m trying to process what she is saying to me. Is she saying that she wants to have my orc babies? “Put your lips on me instead of gawking at me, and kiss me, you big green fool.”

Shaken out of my stupidity, I do exactly as she instructs. Putting all my passion into the kiss. Nipping her bottom lip. Savoring the silkiness of her lips against mine. I keep my lower half still, as excruciatingly hard as it is, until her hips pump, a little at first, trying to find a new rhythm.

We get there, me sucking and kissing her nipples. Her hands in my hair and groaning with each tug of her nipples. I never want her to stop making these noises.

Her thrusts match mine, quickening faster, harder. “Grev,” she says my name again,

this time with a twinge of urgency. “Fill me up. Please.”

The ‘please’ is all it takes for me to unleash my own inhibition. I match her pace, roaring in pleasure as she milks me, squeezing my cock as she comes.

Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 5:25 am

Betty

Painting a library that's full of monster volunteers was not on my bingo card for this year. Of course, neither was sleeping with my quiet, grumpy orc crush. Or becoming an adult rebel with my parents. Sigh.

I thought Grev would laugh at me when I stumbled into the kitchen this morning in my old black yoga pants, pink sports bra peeking out from under my Beyonce off the shoulder sweatshirt, and my hair in a long braid down my back, instead of its usual bun.

But he quite literally has to pull his jaw off the floor as his eyes roam up and down my body. "You can't paint the library in that." It takes several tries for words to actually come out of his mouth as he opens and shuts it.

"And why is that?" I ask as I pour myself a cup of coffee. I notice he has tea in his mug. Make a mental note to ask Ravena for a quality black tea for him.

"Because everyone will stare. No one will get any work done."

"You mean you won't get any work done?" I smirk at him over my coffee.

"Well yeah, but also, I guarantee it will be hard for everyone else, too." And just to make his point, he loops his arms around me and pulls me into a luscious kiss. His hardness, very apparent, pressed against my body.

We are late to the library.

But no one says anything about my outfit. Or the scent of Grev all over me. Though I caught Skerr and Flint giving each other looks, pointing from Grev to me. I ignore them and my burning cheeks and get to work.

Whether by accident or on purpose, Grev works at the other end of the wall from me. The tray of paint rests in the middle between us. The fresh white paint brightens the whole space and makes me want to repaint the rest of the library. But I'm guessing by the superintendent's casual response to this disaster, it may take me years to get funding for that project. Besides, new books are more important.

I find my groove edging the corner between the wall and ceiling, stopping only to refill my little bucket of paint from the paint tray. Grev bumps into me when I've got both the tray and the bucket in my hands. Two things happen.

He reaches out to grab me, steadying me before I fall over. His hot hand rests against my hip, sending a jolt of heat to other parts of me.

And I spill paint everywhere. Over me. My shoes. Grev. The library floor.

As I stare down at my mess, a piece of my brain screams at me—the mess! The floor! Ugh!

But the rest of my brain finds it hilarious. I give in and laugh. Grev's quiet, "Oops," is enough to make me bend over, dropping the tray and bucket to rest my hands on my knees because I can't breathe; I'm laughing too hard.

When he moves his hand to help me stand, he smears more paint across the back of my sweatshirt and skin. Then, of all the nincompoop things to do...He pulls me into him and kisses me. Paint and all.

Somebody wolf whistles, but my embarrassment isn't enough for me to let go of him.

“Let’s keep this PG, folks!” Skerr yells as he walks past, but neither of us cares much. We’re a painted, sticky, sexy mess, and for once in my life, I am reveling in all the imperfections of the moment. We hadn’t discussed announcing our new relationship publicly, but I guess this is as good as any official announcement.

“Hey boss!” Those words stop me mid-kiss. Pulling away from Grev just enough to turn to see over my shoulder at August, my assistant, who is standing there, hammer in hand, with a wicked grin on her face.

“Oh hey, August. How are you?” I ask, clearing my throat and moving Grev’s hands off my ass and to somewhere more ‘PG’ appropriate.

“I’m good. Just finishing up some repairs by the door. I’m looking forward to re-opening! It looks so good. But, uh, I have a question.” She pauses dramatically, still looking mischievous.

“Uh, I thought we were thanking the volunteers with muffins from Ravena, not personally making out with all of them. Is making out the new plan?” August tries to keep her face serious, but she can’t, and breaks into a giant grin as she continues. “Because, well, I don’t think Bjorn will be down for that. And I’m definitely going to get you more lip balm if you’re going to kiss all these guys.” She waves an arm around the library, gesturing at everyone.

My cheeks flame, but I can’t help but laugh with her. I feel rather than hear the rumble build in Grev’s chest at August’s suggestion. Quickly, I pat his arm, assuring him that my lips are his alone.

“Well, you know, I think Ravena’s muffins are a great idea for a thank you. I think it’s best we stick to non-physical thank you gifts, don’t you? I’ll swing by later to ask her. But lip balm is a good idea! But only for Grev.” I wink at her. She winks back.

“I’m going to vacuum the other end of the room.” But I hear her as she walks away, “Wait until I tell Bjorn.”

“Cat’s out of the bag,” I say, smiling up at Grev.

“No kissing anyone else,” he grumbles.

“Promise. You’re the only one. Always.” I kiss his nose. “But we need to clean this up before our feet are permanently painted to the floor.”

When I bend down to pick up my supplies, Grev laughs. Have I ever heard Grev laugh? I’m not sure.

Standing, I give him a quizzical look. “Your ass,” is all he says.

Twisting, I can make out a white handprint against my black yoga pants. Twisting the other way, there’s a matching one. “Oh, Grev.” It’s half a whine. “I guess no one can wonder who I belong to.”

“My scent is all over you. No one wonders anymore.” He whispers in my ear, his tusk cold against my cheek, and those words, that sensation, make all sorts of tingle happen in my nether regions.

“Shh! Someone might hear you!” I whisper yell back at him.

“They’ve already smelled you. And seen you kiss me. The sheriff knew the day after the blizzard.” He winks at me, my jaw drops. I’ve never seen Grev Cragbeard show such emotion. Well, in public...in bed is another story.

Slowly, I look around. Yep, there are people glancing at us, and looking away when our eyes meet. Well, shit-damn. Has this compromised my professional position as

librarian?

“Shh,” he says, raking his hands up and down my arms. “I see you trying to panic. You and I are going to be just fine. It’s a small town. Secrets never last long.” I swallow hard at his words. In my mind, I know he’s right. But having everyone in town talking about my business scares me. Just a little.

“How about we clean up? The wall isn’t going to paint itself,” I say. My smile feels false. I can’t help it.

“How about I finish and clean up the mess, and you go clean up you,” Grev answers.

August appears at my side as I put my brush in the little bucket and pass it off to Grev. He’s faster anyway, he doesn’t need to use the ladder, and his arms reach so much farther.

“Hi, Boss lady. I need your help,” she whispers, but being August, she’s never really quiet. “And nice ass prints. Don’t worry, I already got photographic evidence.”

I groan, and she ignores me, wrapping her arm over my shoulders and walking me away from my hunky painting orc.

Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 5:25 am

Grev

“B ettt-tyyyy!” August squeals as we enter Stone Barrel Brewery, my brother’s fine establishment. The fire crackles in the stone hearth. A few folks—mostly friends from the library this afternoon—are already here drinking and eating the dinner special. Bjorn, August, and Poppy all sit around a big wooden table by the bar, food piled everywhere.

At the squealy greeting, Betty blushes. I love it when her cheeks flush like that. But she quickly shakes off that moment of surprise or embarrassment and jumps right into the chaos that is my family. She pulls up a chair next to Poppy, waves at Koru at the bar who is filling steins, and laughs when Bjorn says something that I’m sure I won’t like.

Slowly, I hang our coats up, grab beers from Koru, and watch the scene before me unfold. Not too long ago, we had dinner here, with our reclusive older brother, Urk, and his mate, Anne. I was the odd orc out. I didn’t feel like I was lacking or missing what my brothers had, but the constant niggling at the bottom of my heart that I needed more was there. And being shoved forcefully down all the time.

Watching Betty shine is like watching the sun rise. It’s awe-inspiring and brings about a certain joy I don’t normally feel.

“Hey. Yoo-hoo! Space cadet, are you going to join us? And bring me a beer.” Bjorn waves a hand at me, snapping me out of my reverie. After I make a gesture at him, I bring Betty’s beer to her, and hand my lukewarm one to Bjorn. Before I can go back to the bar for another beer, Betty grabs my hand to stop me. She’s listening to Poppy

tell a story about a phone call with her sister, but her thumb is making small circles on the soft spot between my thumb and forefinger and it's making it hard for me to concentrate on anything. How is it that she has this power over me?

"You look like you've seen a ghost," Bjorn says. I shake my head and use my other hand to take a sip of beer. "Or you're bored." He turns to Betty. "Tell us straight. Is that why he loves the library so much? Because he's getting remedial help??"

I don't know if I've ever seen Betty's eyes so big. She snatches her hand away from me to push her glasses up on her face, then holds her cheek. If I didn't see that twitch of her lip into a slight smirk, I'd think she was angry. "No. And you will not be spreading that rumor or suspicion around like you do about poor Ravena. I never knew orcs were so meddlesome!"

Elbows on the table, she leans forward conspiratorially and mock whispers to Bjorn, "I think the reason he likes to hang out at the library is because he likes books and reading." She gives him a big wink.

Bjorn snorts loudly, and beer sprays out of his nose. August gets the brunt of it, and she squeals (again) and slaps him on the shoulder.

Once the table and August are cleaned up and Bjorn gets another beer, Koru sits with us and we all drink and eat. It's strangely relaxing. Everyone is loud and talking over each other. Koru gets up to refill customers' beers twice. On the third time, Poppy jumps up to do it for him and trips over his chair. Bjorn can't have a serious conversation to save his life. Gordon chats for a bit, refusing to sit down, and picks at the casserole Poppy made from over my shoulder.

And through it all, Betty laughs and enjoys herself. Her shoulders are relaxed, except when trying hard not to laugh at Bjorn and his dumb questions. She jumps into the conversation whenever she can. In between bites of food, her hand rests on my

knee—grounding me and reminding me just how good I’ve got it.

“Grev, I’m so glad you brought my boss to dinner!” August says as she passes out the cupcakes she made for dessert.

My hand freezes as it reaches for a pink cupcake with sprinkles on top. “I didn’t consider your work relationship,” I say as I slowly bring my fisted hand down. Shit. How did I not think about the fact that they work together? Today I even saw August talking to Betty, all paint splattered. They huddled at Betty’s desk looking over a pile of ancient looking books. I couldn’t stop staring at my painted handprint on her ass. It isn’t a bite, but it’s still a mark I’m proud of.

Betty’s eyes are wide as she looks at me. It takes me a minute to notice her smirk. August has the same smirk. When the realization hits me that August is pranking me, she giggles.

“Give me a cupcake,” I say, holding my hand out, palm up to receive an injection of sugar.

“She had you! Admit it! What were you going to do? Pick up Betty and hoist her out of here?” Bjorn says, now somehow covered in frosting. I don’t know what August sees in his messy ass.

“Excuse me! Nobody is hoisting me anywhere!” Betty’s infuriated librarian look is now my favorite, especially as she pointedly glares at Bjorn. He has the decency to act properly abashed as he shoves a second cupcake in his mouth.

“It’s a small town. I think it’s safe to say there’s no hiding from your boss, so you might as well get over it.” Koru’s words land as flippant, and judging by the stare August gives him, she agrees with him.

I sink my teeth into my cupcake without answering anybody. My eyes stay glued to Betty as she savors hers. Eyes roll back in her head as she licks the frosting off her lips. It's indecent and I have to shift my pants to give my cock some room. Feeling my stare, she looks at me, smiling. Reaching over, she wipes some frosting off my tusk and licks it off her finger. Her eyes never leave mine.

Instinct to grab her and splay her out on the table and lick her like she licked her finger wars within me. She knows it, too. I can see it in the way her eyes light up behind her glasses. One big tease. I clear my throat.

"This was actually more fun than I thought it would be. But it's late and I have an early morning tomorrow. I'll do the dishes next time." I'm up, hand out for Betty to take it before I've finished speaking.

Laughing, she takes my hand and stands. Her eyes snag on the lump in my pants and I don't bother to hide it. My brothers already know—I can tell by their stupid grins. Only Poppy and August sqint, slightly confused. But I don't have to answer to them.

"Thank you for inviting me. This was fun." Betty smiles and waves as I hand over her coat.

"Bye, Boss Lady! I'll see you tomorrow!" August shouts, calling attention to us from the other end of the bar.

Out the door, the air is a breath of coolness instead of the arctic blast of just a few days ago. It's soothing to the heat that runs through me at the thought of Betty licking other things with her pink tongue.

"Boss lady. I like it," I growl into her ear as I open the truck door for her. Her giggle lights me on fire.

Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 5:25 am

Betty

Before work, Grev and I visit Moonlit Grounds. In part because I'm craving the cinnamon caramel latte she made me a month ago. And partly, because I have questions that need answered. I planned on leaving him asleep in bed, but he stirred when I got up and dressed. "Go back to sleep. Just going to Moonlit Grounds."

His groan sounded like the sort of groan that happens when you find out you there's a test at school that day. "You don't have to come," I said, kissing his warm cheek and savoring the scent of him—sleep and wood-smoke and leather.

I thought he went back to sleep, but showed up, dressed, and the closest to smiling as he normally gets as I grabbed my keys off the table by the front door.

It's quiet in the café. The lights are on, but we are the only customer car in the lot. The air is still, and a hint of spring is in the air. As the morning streak of color gets earlier and earlier each day, I see the dark silhouettes of geese overhead. They bring a smile to my face.

"Good morning, dears! It's lovely to see you so early...and together." Her eyebrows dance at me.

"Good morning," I say, ignoring her eyebrows. I love Ravena, she was my first friend when I moved to Moonfang Haven. But I don't enjoy her attempts at matchmaking. Maybe now she'll be satisfied. I know I am.

She busies herself behind the counter, prepping the espresso machine to pull shots. "I

imagine that blizzard had something to do with it.” She winks at me and pushes the button on the machine.

I ignore her wink and insinuations.

“How’s the library, dear?” Ravena asks as she sprinkles cinnamon on top of the latte’s foam.

“It’s coming along nicely. We painted yesterday. I think another week and it should be ready to reopen. Need to finish the outside and rebuild shelves. Then clean.” Deep breath. “But you’ll never guess what August found while clearing out old boxes yesterday!”

“August has been such an excellent addition to the library, hasn’t she?” Ravena’s eyes sparkle—a glint like she knows already. Then she turns to make Grev’s tea.

“She found these ancient books. Leather bound. Gold lettering. They’re exquisite. I think they are journals.” Ravena’s hands still as she listens to me. “Judging by the little bit I read—”

That does it. Her head snaps up, and the fierceness on her face is angry, and a little sad. “You shouldn’t read them. No good will come from them.”

“Do you want them back?” I ask, voice just a whisper. I don’t want to be on her bad side. Not after what I read.

“It’s better if they stay with the library. Or burned. But I don’t have the heart to do it myself. Did you pick out a pastry?”

“That cranberry orange muffin, please.” They remind me of my grandma. And the tang is the perfect balance to the overly sweet coffee I’m about to drink.

“You always have great taste, Betty. Books, flavor combinations, and now grumpy orcs. You are a great connoisseur. I admire the way you put things together.”

“Thanks.” Her comment takes me aback. I wasn’t expecting such a compliment.

“Now, come sit and enjoy breakfast with your sweetie pie. And if you could—please keep those books to yourself. I’ll trust you’ll find the right bonfire for them.” She winks as she picks up our tray and carries it to where Grev is sitting with his eyes closed, expecting me to follow.

We eat in small silences. It’s delicious and perfect. Grev talks about his plans for spring. I tell him about the new books releasing this quarter that I’m excited about. At some point, Ravena’s crow flies in, swooping past us, then resting on its perch in the front corner where it can keep an eye on everyone. Grev eyes the crow with suspicion, then reaches out for my hand and caresses it while we finish our beverages.

Ravena is quiet in the back. Occasionally I hear pans clang together, reminding us that she’s here, baking. But she doesn’t check on us, which is fine by me. I do not speak to him about my conversation with Ravena. I don’t know how much he heard, nor do I want to betray whatever delicate trust lies between her and me.

Eventually, other people arrive for their morning jolt of caffeine, and Ravena comes alive with chit chat as the café bustles. It’s as if the café’s energy mimics her own, or possibly the other way around.

“Do you think the superintendent will support a re-opening party for the library?” Grev asks. The question takes me by surprise. Silent, crowd-avoiding Grev wants to have a party? At the library?

“I doubt it, but I’ll be sure to tell you so you can stay home.”

“Why would I stay home?” The crease between his eyebrows deepens more than normal.

“You were upset when we stayed open for carolers. You’ve never been one to enjoy festivities at the library.” I smile, reminding him that I have paid attention to him this past year.

“Oh. No, I had plans. I was going to ask you to go to the choir concert. But it was the same night.”

“You were going to a concert? And you wrote a letter to my boss!” I have my doubts. But then the words hit new. “You were going to ask me to go with you? Like, on a date?”

“Sorry about that. I needed an outlet for my annoyance.” He has the good grace to look ashamed at that. “We’re dating now, aren’t we?” He winks.

“I know we are dating now. But it took being half-frozen together in the library for it to happen! You never expressed any interest before.”

“Betty, I told you. I’ve always been interested. But my life is boring. I don’t scale mountains and risk my life to rescue people. I don’t make amazing food and drinks and create an atmosphere where people want to belong. Hell, I don’t make amazing art. I’m just...me. I build useful things, but that’s about it.”

“Grev,” I cup his cheek with my hand and lean in close to him, “that’s why I love you. Because you’re you. I don’t need danger or prestige or entrepreneurship to be happy or interested or intrigued. I’ve never wanted those things. That’s why I have books.”

“If you want to go to a concert, I’d love to take you. Also, I think you should have a

party to celebrate the re-opening of the library. The town needs the library. It needs you.”

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Grev

Two Weeks Later

Pride doesn't begin to describe the sensation in my chest when I see Betty walking around the library, chatting and laughing with everyone who's here to celebrate the re-opening. She's built something special, a refuge and a community.

Everyone who helped fix the library is here. Even Matt, our mechanic and snowplow driver, who could be cursed as the reason the library was damaged. Or praised as the catalyst for bringing Betty and me together, finally. Matt stands at the window, hand resting on the wooden frame, smiling, as if he is the proud father of the new window. Here only because his truck crashed into it.

"Good turnout," Koru says to me, pulling my attention away from the angry words I'm dreaming about saying to Matt. "I can't remember the last time I visited the library to actually look around. Had to be when I was in Ms. Turner's class. Remember the essays she made us write? Know how many essays I've written since then?" He holds his fat hand up, fingers in a zero shape.

"Betty has transformed this place over the last year. New books. New activities for the kids. She's worked hard to make this a safe place. It makes me happy to see people celebrating it, and her." Koru looks at me with that thoughtful big brother smugness that I hate. Like he's seeing me for the first time.

"Betty has also had a transformation on you, brother. And it gladdens my heart." He slaps a hand on my back, and for a brief moment, I forget that I've kept my longing

and need for Betty a secret. That I hadn't trusted my brothers with who I really am.

"Yo! Great shindig! August sent me over here. She said I wasn't allowed to rearrange the books on the shelves anymore." A quick glance shows August with an enormous stack of books on the floor at her feet, trying to re-alphabetize them. And this is my reminder of why I haven't opened up to my brothers.

"If you haven't been in the library since Ms. Turner's class, how long has it been since this buffoon has been here?" I ask, pointing a thumb at our idiot brother who stands with the cockiest grin on his face.

"What are you talking about? I come in here all the time when August is working."

"I've never seen you," I say.

"Well, I wait until you're not here. I don't need your quiet judgment hovering over me while I'm trying to flirt and be sweet to August. I certainly don't need you overhearing me quote poetry to her."

My jaw is on the floor, and I'm not sure how to get it back up to the rest of my face. "Poetry? What are we talkin'? Dr. Suess?"

"See, this is exactly what I'm talking about. In fact, we've been working through a book of poems based on Taylor Swift songs." His voice is almost a whisper as he confides in us. The words poems, and Taylor Swift, coming out of his mouth in the same sentence causes both Koru and me to snort. Loudly in disbelief.

The perfect zinger is on my lips when two things happen. I see the honesty in Bjorn's eyes, and it pulls me up short. I didn't know my brother had any depth to him, let alone a single romantic bone. It's weird to think the power that August has over him, has changed him. And I find new respect for her.

And at the other end of the library, I hear Betty's squeak. The same one from the blizzard—shock and fear. My head whips around to find her standing face to face with her parents, who are standing in the entryway with grimaces on their faces.

Pushing past my brothers, I make my way over to Betty. There's no way I'm letting her face them alone. When I rest my hand on her back, her rigid spine softens into me. Exactly, I'm here for you. I can smell her spike of anxiety.

"This looks so good," Betty's mom says. Then she looks me in the eyes and says, "Grev, you look good today. Thank you for helping to restore the library." Her lips are still tight. There's no smile, but the words are sincere. Betty's dad nods, silent but in agreement.

The background noise of folks chatting is still present. August's put on a playlist quietly, which makes this really feel like a party rather than a library. But none of that matters as Betty trembles slightly. Her parents showed themselves to be complete asses the last time they were here. Intolerant and small-minded. This community Betty has created is filled with humans and monsters from all over town and the island. It's vibrant and full of laughter and love.

"You're welcome to hang out and look around. But only if you can be civil and kind to everyone ." Betty's voice is firm and low. If I thought my heart preened at her success earlier, that was nothing compared to the pride I feel now.

"Oh Betty, we're sorry. Both of us. I was caught up in a fantasy of you and Jake, childhood friends, and I didn't respond right to discovering you and Grev had feelings for each other."

Oh, is that it? I must make a sound because Betty puts her hand on me to steady me.

"Really, Mom? How many times have I told you nothing could ever happen between

us? Why can't you trust that I know what's best for me?"

"I'm sorry," Debby's eyes fill with tears.

"Dad? What about you? You were awful to Grev and me." Betty looks at him with the fury of a thousand suns. I make a mental note to stay on her good side. Our children are going to have to learn not to make her mad.

Betty stares at him, that I'm waiting look of a librarian on her face, arms crossed for a minute, then she has to push her glasses back into position on the bridge of her adorable nose. Sigh. I love this woman.

Ted is sweating, his eyes darting back and forth between his daughter and his wife. Watching him panic is satisfying, and I let him panic a decent amount of time before stepping in to save him from Betty's wrath.

"Betty, sweetheart, Ted and I had a good conversation yesterday. Everything is water under the bridge. Or, ice in the bay? Or?" I shrug, unable to make any more horrible metaphors. Especially with the squinty-eyed, confused look she's giving me.

"You—talked to Ted? Ted my dad? And everything is—good?" She speaks slowly, with lots of pauses and question marks. "And, you didn't tell me?" I'm pretty sure her eyebrows are about to erupt off her beautiful face. I nod, hoping that she'll find the humor in this situation soon. Like, now.

Betty throws her hands up in the air with a grunt of frustration and stomps away into the fray of the non-library-standard-quiet party. Nope. Not finding the funny yet.

Looking back at Ted and Debby, he thrusts his hand out toward me for a handshake. I stare at his hand, then at him.

“I see that you are taking care of my Betty, and I want to thank you for that. Despite the insulting behavior of her family, you have stood beside her, protected her, and helped her. Thank you. You’re a good man.” I grasp his hand and we shake. If I believed in Bjorn’s theories of Ravena being a witch, I would swear I could feel a vine binding us together. Not in love, but in partnership—in caring for Betty.

“My only focus is Betty. Loving her and taking care of her. If you and Debby fit into that, then you’re welcome to be a part of what we are building. But if not, I have no hesitation in helping her block you out of her life.”

“I would expect nothing less from someone like you.” Ted smiles, then winces as his words register in his mind. “I mean, someone with your strength and core. Not...you know,” he waves a hand in my general direction, then over at Gordon, Skerr, and Koru, who are chatting off to the side.

“Understood. Let’s start by not waving your hand at all of us. Let me introduce you to my brothers.” And with that, I usher them to meet Koru, then track down Bjorn, who is sure to embarrass them.

LATER, WHEN THE CELEbrATION has calmed down and most folks have left, I stand in line with a book at the front desk where August is checking in a few books that someone dropped off today. It only takes one glance at me for her to get Betty from the back office with some lame excuse, then walks away, leaving Betty and me together at the desk.

“Are you checking out books? You know we aren’t really open,” she says quietly, a slight exasperation in her voice. There’s also the hint of a smile behind her stern librarian face.

“Your parents had a good time,” I say, setting the book on the desk. She eyes it but doesn’t pick it up.

“So they said as they left. Then again when they called from the ferry. They seem quite smitten with you.” She adjusts her glasses again, tucks a loose strand of hair behind her ears. “I know I shouldn’t be mad. You were helping, and it is sweet. It just caught me off guard, and I hate feeling like I’m left in the dark.”

Stepping around the desk so there’s nothing in our way, I say, “I wasn’t leaving you in the dark. It was a surprise.” Her lips twitch into a smile, her cheeks redden. She’s so irresistible, even when she’s fighting a losing battle. Reaching forward, I cup her cheek, brushing my thumb against her sweet, soft skin. “I didn’t know surprises were on the ‘fuck off’ list.”

“Fuck off list?” There, a chuckle. I’ll take it.

“Yeah, the list of things that make you say ‘fuck off.’ Right now your list includes bigotry, Pixie made food, and surprises.”

“Yes, that’s accurate. What’s on your ‘fuck off’ list?” Betty asks, her hand resting over mine now. My other hand is itching to pull her hips into me and hold her tight, but I resist.

“Well, anything Bjorn says. Also, bigotry. Litter. Busybodies. And anything that keeps me from you.” The stare she gives me is molten desire.

“I like your list.” Her voice has that low, quiet sound of a summer night that drives me crazy. I pull her into me, both arms wrapped around her, and kiss along her jawline. Her pear and vanilla scent mixes with her arousal and her breath hitches, her breasts pressed against me. When I reach her ear, I run my tusk along the outside edge. Up and down, then repeat my kisses along her jawline to the other ear.

“Grev? Take me home.” Her voice is barely there.

“I thought you’d never ask,” I say as I scoop her into my arms. Her squeal of laughter is pure joy to my heart.

“Keep it down out there!” August yells from the back office, which causes Betty to giggle and blush again as she wraps her arms around my neck.

“Auggie? Are you ready to go home? I’m ready to lock up.”

“Give me ten!” August yells.

“Now, August,” I say, trying to keep my voice light. Judging by Betty’s high-rise eyebrows and August popping her head out of the office to squint at me, I didn’t succeed. “I mean, please.” I pull my lips into a smile, again a failure as August makes a scrunched-up face at me like she smells something rotten.

Eventually, after I’m forced to set down Betty, they get the library properly shut down and locked up for the night. Outside, the construction dumpster will get picked up tomorrow, and at the edge of the parking lot is one pile of snow—all that’s left from the blizzard. The first of the Spring Peepers sound their appearance, and I breathe deeper.

“Take me home, hot stuff,” Betty says, tucking her hand into mine.

“As you wish, my love.”

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2 nd Epilogue

Brann

“G ood rescue today, crew,” I say as I leave my search and rescue crew to cleanup and put away our gear. Everyone mumbles their agreement, but they’re all focused on getting out of here. We all love Search and Rescue, but sometimes, on the first sunny day we’ve had in what feels like months, folks just want to hang out and fire up the grill rather than traverse half the island to save the dumb teenagers who got themselves lost.

It’s too beautiful out to do paperwork, so I leave it in a neat stack on my desk for tomorrow and head out. Tomorrow is perfect for paperwork. There’s a new employee starting in the morning, so I’ll have lots of downtime. I need to buy oil for my motorcycle and get it cleaned up after a long winter of storage. But first, coffee.

Moonlit Grounds Café and Bakery bustles. Ravena has umbrellas set up on the patio, and every table is full. Everyone is soaking up the good spring weather.

Standing in line, there’s a pigtailed little girl weaving in and out of the line, giggling every time someone makes eye contact with her. I purposefully avoid eye contact. Though she doesn’t seem afraid of various orcs, trolls, and the demon sheriff Draugr in front of me, I am certain that when she looks at me, she’ll burst into tears. And I have no interest in apologizing for my orcness.

However, that doesn’t stop her from using my legs as part of her obstacle course, zig zagging around me like I’m a lamp post. She smells like little kid—innocence, sugar,

and vanilla. Or maybe that's just the café around me.

A voice sings out, "Lucy, lemonade!" and the girl squeaks in delight and runs off. It's a little early for tourists. Not that I know every kid in town, but I'm pretty sure I would remember the black curly hair and chubby cheeks of the kid...Lucy. I don't like kids, but she fits the definition of adorable.

"Brann! Out for a rescue today?" Ravena asks, welcoming me, eyes twinkling in delight like she's missed me. Before I can order, she's listed it for me. "Double Americano and a slice of chocolate cake." She doesn't ask. I nod, grunting my thanks.

I squish myself into the smallest table in the back, away from the overly friendly people and the group of teenagers that walked in behind me. I've had enough teenagers to last me the year. The group we rescued acted like we were stomping on their parade, even though they were cold, hungry, thirsty, and decidedly scared at anything moving in the forest (squirrels are particularly fierce here).

The first sip of coffee is perfection. Bitter and hot. There's a hint of spice there, I can't quite place it. I'm halfway through my slice of cake and coffee when I see the most scrumptious creature I've ever seen. Black curly hair that frames her smiling face and bright eyes. Curves and muscles that speak of a strength that moves beyond the physical. She's got curvy hips, and thighs I'd love to sink myself into.

It's like waking after a long sleep, opening my eyes to a vision sent from heaven. I take another sip of coffee, trying to distract myself from the funny feeling in my chest. Must be the spice in the coffee. I'll have to tell Ravena not to add it again. The woman has to be a tourist, I've never seen her before. She's young, too young for someone my age.

Unlike most of my kind, I'm not here for love. I love my job. I love my freedom. I

have no inclination to “settle down,” or be chained to someone, unable to do what I want when I want. The myth of fated mates is just that—a myth.

I’m on my feet before I can really think through what I’m going to say. Halfway to her, I freeze. She spins toward me, something heavy in her strong arms. The little girl with the pigtails.

They both laugh, clearly at some shared joke or moment. Then the woman puts the little girl on her hip and kisses her cheek. The little girl gives the biggest grin to her and sets her chubby hand on the woman’s chest, on the sweet spot where her two breasts come together.

It takes my breath away—the unfettered joy between them, the openness they share. The love. They have to be mother and daughter.

Gods damnit. I got myself psyched up for a good time and now I’m circling back to my table. Scoop up my plate and cup and take it back to Ravena’s counter. There’s a sour feeling in my stomach.

“Ravena, I think your milk’s turned. Something isn’t right.” The look Ravena gives me as I set my dishes down is one of anger but also amusement.

“Is that so? I’m sorry to hear that. Especially since you didn’t have any dairy in your coffee.” There’s a slight smirk to her face as she froths milk for some other schmuck. “Maybe it’s something intrinsic to you.” The words are pointed. They hit hard. There’s a rumble of anger in my chest that threatens to come out. But I’m not interested in fighting with Ravena, and therefore the entirety of the town who adore her.

“Thanks. See you later,” is all I say as I walk out of the café.

Beyond all the noise of people chatting, the laughter of Lucy and her beautiful mom follows me outside and down the sidewalk.

Chapter 1

Brann

First ride around the island this year, bike rumbling between my thighs, is a glorious, freeing feeling. And a great way to shake off the image of the woman from the coffee shop earlier. I hate the way I'm pulled toward her, like she's my fated mate, even though she has a kid and I don't like kids. And I don't believe in fated mates, unlike the rest of Moonfang Haven.

Passing the trailhead for one of my favorite hikes, I turn the bike around and head back. It's late afternoon. If I'm fast, I can make it to the top by sunset. A no-brainer decision. One other car in the parking lot. Perfect. I'm in no mood for chit chat or tourists.

Heart thumping from sprinting straight up the trail, I'm sweaty and feeling exhilarated. That on-top-of-the-world idea is literally me right now. And I'm cheesy enough to own it, at least on the inside, as I breathe deep. There's an intoxicating scent in the air; I try as hard as possible to ignore it.

Rocks crunch underfoot, pulling me from my reverie as I take in the scene of our small-town harbor below us, bathed in golden light. Apparently, I was so caught up in myself, I didn't hear or sense anyone else around.

Turning around is the wrong move. So wrong, that upon seeing the other person, I spin back around to the scenery.

Gods damnit.

“Hello, pretty view, isn’t it.” Her voice is a melody entrancing me. I grunt a nod without looking at her. “I’ve never seen a sunset like this. I’m just blown away by how gorgeous this place is.” There’s something about the breathlessness of her voice that pulls my eyes back to her. That funny feeling in my chest is back from earlier today, the one that threatens to overpower me. She steps closer to where I am, heatwaves radiating off her, enveloping me in her fire.

“I am very lucky to live here.” Neutral, I tell myself. I maintain neutrality to avoid all the things in life I dislike. Mainly—neediness and children. The sunset of pinks and oranges is nothing compared to her. Walk away. Turn around. Move, you big oaf.

My body betrays me in every way. I can’t look away from her. My eyes drink her in like she’s water after a trek across the desert. The way her muscles flex and her curves beckon. The way her shirt is tied at her waist, showing a sliver of skin. It’s the type of thing that would topple an entire empire. And her scent—her scent beckons to me. Sunshine, fresh berries, vanilla. It’s an elixir that has my soul yearning for her.

A step forward. She matches my step with her own. Again. Again. We’re almost toe to toe, and the near proximity is painful. Flex my fingers at my side in order to give my hands something to do that isn’t touching her. Her dark eyes track the motion, then soak me in, ending with a fiery look in her eyes as she says, “I don’t ever do this. It’s like I’m under a spell. I don’t know what this is, but yes.”

There are no more thoughts in my mind as I set my hands on her waist and drag her into me. I know what this is, and I hate it and love it at the same time. The same song of fated mates singing in my blood has drawn her to me. A confirmation that if I continue, I’m going to regret this. Her hands make their way to my arms, burning my skin with her touch.

I could say no. Walk away. Nothing has ever felt as good as her touch, right now. Try

to remind myself why I scoff at fated mates. Why I'm still single after all this time. Her, my heart sings. I growl at my heart, and she takes it personally, digging her nails into my biceps—clinging on. Pick her up, she wraps her legs around my waist, squeezing with her thighs, making me grunt in approval.

Standing there at the cliff, overlooking the southeastern edge of our island, the sky deepens to purple, I kiss the woman whose legs are wrapped around me like a viper. She tastes like she smells—sunshine and strawberries, and I lose my mind trying to hold her up and touch all of her at the same time.

“You feel like perfection,” I mumble against her skin as I scrape my tusk up her neck. Mine.

“Less talking,” she says, untying the knot at her waist, pulling her shirt up and over her head and throwing it to the ground. Her black sports bra is the sexiest clothing I've ever seen. When she puts my hand on her breast, I feel magic envelop us and I stumble. “Bench,” she says into my mouth as she kisses me again.

Somehow, we make it to the lookout bench. I sit and she straddles me, pushing against me for friction. The desperation in her touch makes my cock ache harder. Her breath quickens as she finds a rhythm, coming apart in my arms from humping against me. Gods, this woman is everything. I want to roar in delight. She stills, whimpering, “Please.”

The please shoots through me like an arrow, touching some piece of me that lay dormant. Who knew one word would make me want to upend the entire world for one person? Every fiber in my being wants to please her, take care of her any way she wants.

Grasping the top of my pants, she fumbles with the button and zipper. Hands on her hands to still them, I grunt, and she moves off me enough to let me pull my pants down to my ankles. The greedy look in her eyes as she gazes at my cock makes it

twitch. Makes me preen like a peacock on display. She licks her lips and I swear my pride puffs up even more.

Her eyes lock onto mine, the question in them. I nod, ignoring the way my lips want to curl into a smile. It's enough communication that she straddles me again, sinking onto my cock. I fully expect the heavens to erupt into angelic singing.

"So tight. So good," I rasp, tucking a loose strand of hair behind her ear as she gasps at being so full. We're slow. Excruciatingly slow, but we find a rhythm as she slowly consumes my cock with her pussy. It's embarrassing that just the act of being full hilt inside her makes me want to blow. But I hold tight, letting her wet little pussy slide up and down my shaft.

When the pace picks up, that's all it takes. I pinch at her breasts under her bra and she cries out. It's a chain reaction. Her cry sends me over the edge. My orgasm triggers her second. And we roar together at the moon and the first star visible tonight. My seed overflows from her onto my thighs.

There's no talking after. She climbs off of me, her hair swinging into my face as she navigates my legs, the mess, and sheer relaxation she feels. Her mouth makes sounds that sound like pure contentment. They make me want to pull her back into me and pet and stroke her until she's fully come down from the high.

Instead, she pulls up her leggings and I let her, watching by the light of the moon. Her body sways a little as she puts her shoes on and walks over to grab her shirt, shakes it out and puts it on. When she checks her watch and curses, that dumb feeling of wanting to solve her problems is back. I ignore it.

Once I'm buttoned up, I walk after her as she starts down the trail at a jog. I have to bite my lip not to shout out about being careful. Would hate to end this evening with a trip to the hospital for a broken ankle.

The moon shines down on our vehicles in the lot. She beelines straight for hers. My fucking body wants to follow her like a pathetic puppy, wanting to know her name, wanting to follow her delicious scent home. And I let myself. She's mine and I can't let her go. Need drives me closer.

Until she opens the car door, and the interior light illuminates her car—including the booster seat for a kid in the back. I am rocked back to my senses. Shit-fuck.

I let her get in and drive away without another word. She's just a tourist. I'll never see her again. Doesn't matter if my heart says she's important, the one. Because that's never going to happen.

Claim One Forbidden Night with Her Orc Boss now!