



# Our Dark Winter Wish (The Crimson Covenant #3)

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**Category:** Dark Erotica

**Description:** A not so silent night

Deep in the heart of an uninhabited island, covered in ancient forests and coated in inches of snow, my three lovers and I are getting ready for Christmas.

But what do you get a Dream Walker, Shadow Master and Wolf Shifter for the festive season? Especially when all they seem to want is to own my mind, body and soul in their entirety.

I'm excited to find out.

This place was once home to Archie's pack before they were all slaughtered by the blood witches many years ago. Now, we've claimed it as our own. Far from civilisation, it's a sanctuary where we can heal and learn to live a life without fighting for survival. Christmas was big with the wolves. And Archie is excited to share his favourite holiday with us all.

But the lasting scars of the brutal battles that led us all here are still raw. Trauma and terror haunt each and every one of us. And perhaps the world is not quite as ready to forget us as we hoped.

It becomes very clear that the only thing that will heal our pain is each other.

But can monsters like us ever truly heal? Or are we destined to drown in blood forever.

**Total Pages (Source):** 10

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Archie

I add more wood to the roaring flames in our fireplace. The fire spits and hisses at me, and the smell of smoke and roasting chestnuts fills my nostrils.

It's a large fireplace with soot-covered stone slabs from the constant heat. We haven't let the fire die for weeks. Especially since the snow started to fall. Above, dark green vines climb the walls, and purple flowers bloom all year round. But around the hearth, sprigs of Fir and Pine twist and wind in a beautiful arch. Bright red berries and holly grow beside great golden leaves that shimmer in the firelight, and a constant dusting of fresh snow covers it all, never melting, no matter how high the flames in the fire grow.

Pix. That wonderful little witch of ours. She's made this place a winter paradise.

I wipe away the thin layer of sweat building on my brow, take a moment to roll the muscles in my neck, and enjoy a deep swig of whiskey that pleasantly burns my throat.

Four red stockings hang from the branches coming out of the walls. Each one is filled with trinkets and treats we think each other will enjoy. Red and green candles flicker all around the room, exuding the scent of cinnamon and spiced apples.

It's just how it used to be when I was a pup and lived here with my pack all those years ago. When the winter solstice celebrations ruled our village and consumed our

lives.

It was my favourite time of year, and now, I am getting to celebrate it with my new family.

Lazily, I stoke the flames with a poker and take another sip of whiskey before sliding my hand into my pocket.

I take a deep and content breath, feeling warm inside and out, failing to remember the last time I was this happy for this long. This settled and safe.

Fuck. The whiskey is good, too. I'm so glad I had the forethought to fill the ship with spirits before we sailed.

This cottage has been our home for almost a year. It lies deep in the forests of my ancestral pack, with trees so old that I swear they move on their own. And plants that have long since been forgotten are thriving here.

Pix loves it. She claims she feels a primal connection to this land. One of mystery and incredible strength. I feel it, too. In a wolfy way. And I love that we share this connection.

The foundations of our cottage were my parent's home. This chimney was theirs. The floors beneath my feet belonged to them. I took my first steps on these very slabs.

I have looked for any signs of a surviving pack for months, but there's no one here. Either they were all killed by the blood witches, or the survivors fled. There comes a point when too much blood has been spilt for a place ever to be called home.

Luckily, I've grown indifferent to the thought and smell of blood. I do not need to consume it anymore. It has no power over me.

I place the whiskey bottle on the mantle above the fire and turn, admiring the home she built using her earth magic.

Our home.

The walls of my family home were destroyed long ago. Pix rebuilt them from three ancient trees that she bent and twisted into shape to form solid walls. Branches bend into arches for doorways. The stairs are knotted roots leading up to a first-floor bedroom, and the ceilings are beautifully crooked and covered in leaves and vines. The walls are living bark that shift and groan, reacting to her moods. Her presence. Her earth magic.

The floors are a mix of stone, moss and clover. And sometimes red daisies bloom in the lounge when she dreams.

But when she's angry, oh shit... when she's angry, thorns and thistles emerge all around us. Inches long and as sharp as a sword.

But now, it's perfection.

I sigh, utterly content.

And look down at my very reason for living.

Pix is a naked and quivering mess, kneeling before me with her hands bound behind her back and my belt buckled loosely around her neck. Her breasts are beaded with sweat as they rise and fall with each shuddering gasp.

She's blindfolded. Her damp silver hair falls in dishevelled curls down her bare back. Her lips are swollen and parted, and the sweet scent of her arousal mixes perfectly with the earthy aroma of our little palace of wood and stone.

Perfection.

I step towards her, and her head shoots in my direction, keen to find out where I am and what I plan on doing next.

Between her legs, the end of a smooth wooden cock protrudes. Several inches of it lie inside her. Warm and coated in the three orgasms I have already given her.

My cock pulses as I stroke myself slowly. The corners of her lips pull up as I close the gap a little more.

Filling my mouth with whiskey, I take another step closer and look at my kneeling goddess.

My finger rests under her chin, and I tilt it upwards.

‘Open ,’ I tell her, speaking to her through our mate bond.

She obeys, parting those full lips wide.

I slowly release the whiskey into her waiting mouth. Most of it slips past her chin and coats her breasts.

‘Fuck...’ I whisper, watching it glide down her peaked nipple and land on her thighs. ‘When I thought you couldn’t get any tastier.’

My fingers knot in her hair, and she releases a devilish little chuckle.

‘Open your fucking mouth, Pix.’

She does, even sticking her tongue out for me. I run my cock the length of it and

don't stop until I meet the very back of her throat. Her stomach clenches as she gags on me. And I fucking love to make her gag.

I gently rest my palm a hair's breadth from her throat. I would love nothing more than to wrap my fingers around her tightly. To feel her pulse and steal her air.

But she still suffers from her nightmares and can't bear to be touched there. No way I risk her having a panic attack now. Not when I'm filling her mouth so perfectly. The belt hangs there at her request. An attempt to try and get used to the feel of something touching her throat.

She's determined to overcome it all. To rid herself of the nightmares and flashbacks.

It was my torture that caused this trauma in her. My killing of her mother. My forcing her to perform the resurrection spell. When she has flashbacks, it's me she sees hanging her. It's my face she sees smile, and my laugh she hears as she is strangled to death.

'I can feel your concern,' she says through our bond. 'And your guilt. We'll overcome this together. Put your hand on me.'

She moves closer, sensing my open palm somehow, and stopping when my hand rests on her flushed flesh. I pull my cock free of her mouth.

'Be gentle,' she says in a soft whisper. 'It will be okay.'

'Gentle isn't exactly my speciality, Pix,' I groan back in reply.

'Go hard with your cock. Be a gentleman as you choke me.' She grins and tilts her head back, showing more of her throat.

I tighten my hold a little.

She shudders beneath my grip, and a pained crease forms on her brow.

I hate every second of it.

‘You okay?’ I ask through our bond.

Her head tilts back, and her pretty little mouth opens up once more.

‘I will not be controlled by fear.’

I slowly ease in, settling deep in her mouth. I pull out. She takes in some gasps before I thrust into her again. Deeper this time, relishing in how her throat constricts around me.

Out once more.

Then back in.

Deeper.

‘I can feel my cock in your fucking throat, Pix.’

Beneath my palm, her throat is swollen and deliciously full. Every inch of her is clenched as she’s filled not only by me but by the specially carved cock wedged inside her pussy.

I offer slow but painfully deep thrusts, keeping myself down her pipe as I fuck her.

Tears spill out from behind the blindfold, and thick saliva falls down her chin. When

I pull out, her tongue circles my dripping cock as if she's a starving little whore, desperate for every drop.

I chuckle, filled with pride at how well she takes me.

Sliding both my hands into her hair, I abandon her throat, and make her take me again, holding her head as I fuck her hard and without mercy. Grunts and moans seep out whenever my cock isn't filling her up, and even when she is desperate for relief, she doesn't pull away but waits for more.

Pants for more.

Grinds herself back and forth against the ground so her birthday gift fucks her in time with me.

'You like that, my Goddess?' I ask. 'You certainly look like you do. Fuck. Your mouth is as wide open as your sweet pussy is.'

With a grunt, I shove myself back down her throat and fuck her as she deserves, and when I'm buried as far as I can go, I spill into her, my release pulsing straight down her throat, making her choke and gag in my grip. As soon as I'm done, I kick her down into the soft earth and grip the wooden cock.

And I fuck her hard. I fuck her without mercy. I fuck her as my goddess deserves.

My Mate. My woman.

I snatch off her blindfold, and she blinks me into focus. Her gaze lands on me, and I know I'm all there is for her now.

She is mine, and I am hers.



‘I love you,’ I tell her.

Her back arches and her pleasure-filled screams make the ground tremble and the bark around us groan.

I like to think my words pushed her over the edge. But I think it's more likely it was the two fingers I surprised her tight little arse hole with that may be the true culprit.

I watch her and the effect she has on the house with wonder, and I know I will never tire of watching her convulse and twist in pleasure and pain, nor miss the uncertainty of if she'll one day bring the cottage down on our heads when she cums.

My perfect woman.

My Goddess.

My Mate.

I flip her over so she's face down on the fur rug. My cock is still hard and ready for round two.

Oh, the perks of being a wolf.

I pull out the wooden cock, hoist up her hips and spread her arse cheeks.

‘Feel free to scream, Pix,’ I grin, resting it at her waiting little hole. The tip of my cock teases her pussy as I begin the task of stretching her arse with the wooden cock. ‘You’re about to get really full.’

I ease both in at the same time.

‘That’s a good girl.’

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:07 am*

2

Dorian

Y eah. This is about right. Here I am. A living death god who collects souls and uses them as weapons... or at least... I did once.

Now I'm out in the depths of an ancient forest, wading through inches of snow, looking for fucking bugs.

Great.

I shudder and readjust my cock, which started to get hard a few moments ago in response to my Poppet Doll having a great time with the mutt.

Archie is at home fucking her senseless, and Shaw and me?

Well. We get snow. Bugs. And trees that I am sure keep moving when I'm not looking.

How do I let Archie talk me into this shit? I'm glad I'm not the only fool roped into this. Shaw is out here, too.

The snow is still falling hard, and I can see my breath in the air. Not that I'm cold. I don't feel such irrelevant things now I have returned to my full power. If you can call it that.

I no longer collect souls, so I'm not as powerful as I once was.

But I am a creature of shadow, with the power to control and manipulate the bodies of others, with great wings and the strength of a demon.

When I'm not shoved into this skin suit, that is.

The only reason I keep this casing is because my girl is so very fond of it.

But this body I inhabit has goosebumps, and I can't help but shiver a little as snow lands on my neck.

'Are you good?' Shaw asks, tossing aside a fallen log and searching the undergrowth with a sweep of his foot.

He looks up as I move my erection to one side.

'Looks like you're very good,' he smirks.

'It's not me. It's her. I can feel her pleasure.' I grunt as the connection continues. 'She's having orgasm after orgasm, and I'm out here hunting for critters,' I complain.

I slap a bug that was stupid enough to land on my cheek and wipe it off in disgust.

'Got one!' Shaw declares, reaching down and triumphantly holding a caterpillar in his hand. He sneers before adding it to the jar of a dozen others. 'And it's red. We're done.'

The red one wriggles around with the others, all a mix of green, red and gold. They're the strangest of things, and I have no idea what Archie wants them for.

I stop beside Shaw, and we both peer into the jar.

‘Why the fuck do you think he wants these?’ he asks me, giving it a little shake.

We both flinch and recoil when they start to hiss and glow.

We look at one another.

‘I have no idea. But it better not be anything dangerous or kinky. I’m not digging these things out of her arse.’

Shaw snorts in laughter at my words and their severity. I mean it. I’m really not.

‘Ask Poppy. She’ll know if they’re safe.’

I lift my hand and peer up my sleeve.

‘Come on then. Do your job. Are these things dangerous?’ I ask.

I hold out my hand towards the jar. A shiny red and black head with beady little eyes appears from my cuff. A snake. The most deadly snake to ever exist. One bite from a Kedar delivers death in a matter of seconds, with your insides turning to liquid and seeping out your eyes, nose and mouth.

I hated her when she first appeared. Snakes have always made me uncomfortable. It’s the eyes. And the scales. And the slimy feeling even though they’re not slimy.

But I have become rather attached to this little snake. I think she knew I didn’t like her as much as the others did, so she was determined to win me over. Or make me as uncomfortable as humanly possible.

It's hard to say.

Poppy. Poppet's familiar. Her spiritual guide and protector.

She has taken to hiding up my sleeves and coiling around my neck when I sleep.

Her tongue darts out as she inspects the jar for herself but offers no signs that these things are in any way a danger. Not that I thought for a second they would be. Never mind Archie being just as obsessed with Ashe as we are, I highly doubt something like a colourful caterpillar could do much to harm the new earth goddess.

Shaw stashes the jar in his coat pocket and runs his finger down Poppy's nose.

'I'm glad you're growing fond of her,' he says, smiling down at the serpent. 'Although watching you recoil every time you saw her was amusing, this is much better. She likes you.'

'First of all. I never recoiled,' I state in no uncertain terms. 'And second, the only reason she keeps clinging to me like this is because Poppet wants her to annoy me.'

She slithers back under my cuff, returning to the warmth as she wraps herself around my wrist.

Will I admit that I am, in fact, honoured that she has taken to me more than the others?

No. I will not. Never.

But I will always welcome her on my wrist and act as if it's the biggest imposition of my life.

We start heading back towards the cottage. That strange little house made of nature filled with four creatures that have known nothing but blood, violence and death for decades.

But not anymore.

Our days are filled with peace and laughter. Our nights with passion and rest.

Sometimes, I have no idea if the sun is up or not, but I'm making her squirm nonetheless.

'Has she spoken to you about her flashbacks?' Shaw asks me after a few minutes. He watches me cautiously.

'Briefly. Why?'

'She cornered me earlier today and asked me to do something I'm unsure about doing.'

'The whole recovery by exposure plan?' I reply. He nods with a solemn expression. 'Yeah. She's mentioned it to me, too.'

'Thoughts?'

'Well, my initial thoughts are no. She has a panic attack if she feels too much weight on her and gets flashbacks. I don't want to experiment with putting my entire body weight on her so she gets past the trauma of her experiences. I've had enough of hearing her scream. Enough to last a lifetime.' I watch Shaw as he walks. 'She spoke to Archie too. About him choking her until she doesn't panic anymore.'

Shaw looks at the ground. Of all the deaths she endured, I know his was the worst.

His killing of Neve was long and excruciating. It's the execution all witches fear most.

Death by three hundred cuts.

Ashe sees a blade, and I instantly feel the panic through our link.

'She wants me to cut her.' His words come out quiet and full of shame.

My response is far less gentle.

'I don't fucking think so!' I scoff.

Not quite as supportive as I could be. Granted. But I've seen her bleed quite enough, and now I'm not drinking her blood, it's far less attractive than it once was.

'That's what I said,' he agrees, as if that's obvious. 'But that is what she asked me. If I would cut her.'

We share a sideways glance before I need to readjust yet again.

'They still at it?' he asks.

'Yes. She was a little anxious before, so I'm assuming Archie has given into her request to be choked.'

Idiot. He's always giving in to her requests. Even when we tell him not to. There's not much we'd deny her, but we're just getting settled and finally discovering some kind of peace.

Now she's all "Choke me. Cut me. Crush me!"



The smell of the smoke coming from the cottage chimney welcomes us home. We stop before we reach the stone path that leads to our front door and take shelter in the woodshed Shaw made. We settle on some chopped logs, and I pull out a flask of whiskey. The two of us share it as Archie and Ashe get their alone time. Something we all decided was a good thing to implement in our relationship.

Relationship. Us.

That statement makes me chuckle.

‘You sorted your gifts yet?’ I ask.

‘Nope,’ he replies. ‘Usually, if I wanted to get you something, I’d get you a couple of whores and a carriage of cigars and liquor.’

‘Yeah. Not sure that’s such a good idea,’ I sigh, sipping from the flask. ‘She may not like a whore being gifted to one of us. She may just cut your dick off if you did. Plus, there are no other people living here, so it's not entirely feasible.’

‘And I am very fond of my dick, so I guess I’ll keep thinking.’

He takes the flask and drinks. From the cottage, we hear her scream in pleasure as the trees around the cottage groan.

‘What about her? You decided on her gift?’ I ask.

‘Not yet. What did you get her?’

‘I’m not telling you that,’ I snort. ‘Come up with your own gift. It took me ages to come up with mine.’

He returns the flask.

‘Has Archie said what he’s got her?’ I ask.

‘Nope. But he grins like an idiot when I mention the gifts. I imagine it can’t be any worse than that wooden cock he carved for her birthday. The girl has three very willing dicks whenever she pleases. Four if you include your shadow form. Why the fuck he felt the need to add another into the mix is beyond me.’

The cottage settles, and my body relaxes.

‘I think we’re good to go back in,’ I tell him.

We scoop up some wood and head up the path. The windows glow a beautiful orange from the fire inside, and as we pass the overhanging branches, they sweep down to brush our shoulders as if welcoming us home.

I admit, I was unsure when Archie explained his pack's strange winter ritual. A day of celebration to mark the shortest day of the year. One where you would exchange gifts and decorate your home with bizarre ornaments. One of which apparently requires coloured caterpillars.

But he described it so beautifully that we could not resist saying yes.

I open the door for Shaw, who kicks the snow off his boots before walking inside. I follow suit and shut the door behind us.

The warmth hits us. So does the smell of sex and sweat.

‘Fuck sake, Arch...’ Shaw sighs. ‘What are you doing to that poor girl?’

I stop at Shaw's side and look down at them both. He's still balls deep as she lies borderline unconscious and face down on the fur rug before the fire. Her hands are bound behind her back, and her legs spread wide. But it's the massive wooden cock he has well and truly up her backside that has my brow raised. That and how he's placed a glass of whiskey on her back and a handful of roasted chestnuts. Like her raised backside is the most convenient little table, and he's just tucking in and leaving the husks on her lower back.

Shaw drops the logs by the fireplace and walks towards them both.

I feel Poppy slither out from my sleeve onto the table.

She always makes a quick exit when any kind of fucking gets going. She's a rather prude creature.

I step closer and lower my head so I can see her face. She has a blissful little smile under the mess of her hair.

'You good, Poppet?'

She giggles and nods before Archie smacks her backside.

'Oh. She's fan-fucking-tastic.'

'He's knotted in you again, hasn't he?'

'Yep,' she grins.

I raise my brow as I look at Arch, grinning ear to ear, eating another chestnut.

'Is that cock up her arse... stuck up her arse?'

Laughing, he nods.

‘And how long will your knot be blocking its exit?’

‘Ten minutes or so.’

He gives it a little wiggle, and she moans with a mixture of pleasure and pain.

I sweep her hair from her face and kneel beside her.

She kisses my palm as it passes her lips, and her eyes flutter closed.

Shaw slumps down on the lounge chair with a tired groan.

‘You find my caterpillars?’ Archie asks.

Shaw places the jar on the table.

‘Thanks, man.’

Arch finishes his snacks and finally eases himself and the wooden cock out of her. I lift her up and drape a blanket around her shoulders.

The girl is in a sex coma. Utterly lost to satisfaction and exhaustion. She really is a doll as I lift her and carry her to the chair, where I sit her in my arms by the fire.

She’s fast asleep.

‘How did it go?’ I ask Arch. ‘I felt some anxiety, so I’m guessing you said yes to her request.’

‘Like I’ve ever said no to her or ever will. I draped a loose belt around her throat and put my hand on her. That’s all.’ He takes a deep inhale. ‘And her heart rate went through the roof. I could smell fear seeping from her pores, and she let out this scared little whimper. So I didn’t keep it there long. It was just a gentle touch, but it had a big reaction. I didn’t want her to have a flashback, so I knotted, made her cum until she couldn’t see to distract her, and then ate some chestnuts.’

We all look at her in my arms.

‘She seems determined to overcome it,’ Archie says.

‘She doesn’t need to,’ I state firmly. ‘No one will choke, crush or cut her again.’

We all sit back, a silent acknowledgement that no statement has ever been truer.’

‘So. How are the gifts coming?’ Archie asks in a blatant attempt to change the subject. ‘I’m all done.’ His words drip with smugness.

‘I’m done,’ I shrug.

We both look at Shaw.

‘Fuck off,’ he grumbles.

We both chuckle.

As the fire spits and hisses, I watch her sleep in my arms. My entire reason for living. She saved me from Hel. From servitude to the blood goddess.

I get a thump to my head and see the wooden cock land beside me on the chair. I lift my gaze to see Archie sniggering.

‘Throw that thing at me again, and I’ll shove it up your arse. See how you like it.’

‘I think I would like that very much.’ He winks and gets up, strutting across the room stark naked. As he passes me, he partially shifts so only his tail appears. And he swipes me right across the face with it.

A low growl rumbles from my chest.

‘You guys want some rum?’ he asks as he heads into the kitchen.

Thankfully, when he returns, he’s wearing some trousers.

‘So, this day of celebration,’ Shaw asks, taking a shot of rum. ‘Your Christmas. It was a big deal?’

‘It was for me. I loved it. The winter was boring and dark, so we would celebrate with heat and colour. We would gather around the fire the evening before Christmas day and sing until the moon was high. We would exchange gifts with our loved ones on Christmas morning and then prepare food. As it was cooking, we would find a Fir tree to cut down, bring into our homes and decorate. It would stay there until the start of the new year. We would eat, play games, and the adults would get unbelievably drunk and fuck. A lot. The Alphas were usually very stern and serious, but on these days, they were nothing but joyous and generous. A sense of goodwill hung thick in the air, and the smell of food was constant.’ He sinks back into the seat, a sad sort of happiness lingering in his eyes. ‘All you could hear was laughter and excitement. It felt good inside and out.’

His eyes begin to tear up as he recalls his lost family. I suspect he bought us here hoping to find some of his pack still alive. Maybe he believed a few escaped and managed to hide from the blood coven. But there is no one else here. No more shifters.

A fact I am very grateful for. We need time to heal. To regroup. To learn not to be at war. I have no idea how his pack would react to the three of us turning up with Archie.

‘We’ll make it just as you remember, Archie,’ I tell him. ‘It sounds like fun and we’ll do your traditions proud.’

He looks at her, still sleeping in my arms.

‘My family would have loved her. A real wild one. Feral.’ He wipes away a tear with his shoulder and distracts himself by downing several sips of rum. ‘They wouldn’t have liked my being Mated to her, though. My father especially.’

‘Because she’s not a wolf?’ I ask.

He nods.

‘My father was the alpha of our pack. As his eldest son, I would have been next inline to lead. I would have needed a strong female wolf to be my main bitch and give me lots and lots of pups.’

‘Your main bitch?’ Shaw asks.

‘As Alpha, I would have full access to any woman. As long as she was willing, of course. But I could only father kids with one. They were fierce women. All bite. No bark.’ He raises his brow as he looks at her. ‘Sounds like Pix, to be fair. Maybe he would have approved.’

I run my fingers through her hair as she takes slow breaths.

‘Do you think we can have kids?’ he asks, looking at her wistfully.

‘After the blood curse, who the hell knows,’ Shaw shrugs. ‘I’m not even sure creatures like us can.’ He nods at me. ‘And I’m pretty sure that with all the fucking we’ve been doing, she would be pregnant by now if it was a possibility.’ He actually smiles, seemingly keen on the idea. ‘Imagine some mini versions of us running around.’

I think of that image. That impossible life that we could have.

Shaw and I are as far from mortal as could be. And Archie is a wolf. We’re not compatible that way.

And we’re all so broken, we would make terrible parents.

But maybe. One day. Who knows.

Archie leans forwards.

‘There is another Christmas tradition of my pack,’ he says, scooping up a roasted chestnut and tossing it high before catching it. ‘One, I think, may be extremely fun to try.’



## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:07 am*

3

Pixie

I shiver, the cold running the length of my back as a breeze travels over my skin.

But the warmth of the bed beneath me and the blissful way my body is utterly relaxed has me reluctant to move. And when I feel the soft touch of lips slowly trailing kisses up my spine I smile into my pillow. A warm tongue glides its way back down.

I roll over, sleepy and excited to see which one of my beautiful monsters is waking me up.

But when I open my eyes, the monster I see is not one of mine.

Not one I wish to keep, anyway.

Cole looks down at me with a twisted and deformed grin, his mouth three times too big and the corners curling inwards.

I scream. But nothing comes out. Not a single sound. My voice is gone, and no matter how hard I try, my body won't move. It won't cooperate with me at all!

A nightmare. It's just a nightmare.

I lie beneath him, frozen in terror and revulsion as he pulls out a knife from his pocket.

I watch the blade slowly move closer and closer, my unblinking eyes unable to look away as he rests it over my collarbone.

And then he cuts.

I feel it carve into the bone.

It hits me.

I'm not fucking dreaming!

He counts.

'One.'

My skin burns, and blood slides down past my neck.

Cut.

'Two.'

The flashbacks begin. My mind fights against the tug of those vivid and agonising memories of my mother's execution. One of the three deaths I was forced to live through as if they were my own.

The door explodes, and a great black form crashes into the room.

He has to crouch to fit, but that doesn't stop him from soaring towards us. His wings are enormous at his back, and his long, taloned fingers are outstretched.

Dorian has come in his shadow form.

But his fingers go through Cole as if he's made of nothing but light and smoke.

He tries again. Nothing. But Cole has hold of me. His grip is unbearable and will likely leave bruises.

Dorian looks over his shoulder.

Shaw is sitting in a chair by the window. An open book on his lap and his makeshift bookmark consisting of a piece of cloth resting on its pages.

He's asleep. Judging from the empty bottle of spirits beside him, more like drunk as fuck and passed out.

But his eyes are open and swirling with a pale grey.

He's dream walking.

Archie runs in, his eyes wide as he looks at Cole.

'I killed you,' he growls. 'You're fucking dead!'

Cole continues his torture as though no one is here but us.

Cut. Cut. Cut.

No matter how hard they try to get a hold of him, the only one who seems able to feel him is me. And the more he cuts, the harder it is for my mind to stay here. To remain mine and not Neve's.

'Six,' Cole breathes, slowly slicing me again.

The bedroom starts to bleed. From the ceiling. The walls. From the fucking floorboards. Blood, thick and hot, quickly begins to cover us all, falling like heavy rain from above and pooling all around us. It lands on my face, burning my eyes.

‘Seven,’ Cole laughs, his blade trailing across my cheek.

Dorian looks at Shaw sitting in his chair, still as stone except for the heavy pants that make his shoulders rise and fall.

From the blood, we hear a female begin to laugh. Her giggle is a dark and seductive promise of pain and revenge. The blood swirls and morphs upwards. Into the form of a woman.

Neve. My mother.

Cole places the blade between my legs.

No. Not again. I can’t go through this again!

‘Eight.’

‘WAKE HIM!’ Dorian yells. ‘NOW!’

Archie runs to Shaw and delivers a firm punch to his face, sending him crashing to the floor. He lands face down and in inches of hot blood.

Cole and his blade fade into nothing, and the form of the blood queen and the inches of blood disappear.

It remains on our skin, hot and putrid, proof that it was real.

My voice becomes my own, as does my body, and I release the scream I had in my chest from the moment I saw Cole.

I throw myself into Dorian's waiting arms, shaking and gasping for air.

'You're safe,' Dorian promises me, holding me close as I try to get myself to calm the fuck down. I cling to his black robes and almost disappear in his Shadow Master form. 'It's over, Poppet.'

Slowly, Shaw pushes himself up to his knees. His head remains low as the blood drips from his clothes and hair. We all watch him as he refuses to meet our gaze.

'I'm sorry,' he whispers, his head still low and a tremble in his words. 'I am so fucking sorry.'

'It's not your fault, mate,' Archie tries. As soon as his hand rests on Shaw's shoulder, he shrugs him off, stands, and storms out without looking at a single one of us.

This isn't the first time he's fallen asleep and lost control of his nightmares. It happened once before, and I woke to much the same as I just did.

Cole, Neve, and blood.

So much blood.

Shaw's powers are his once more. But his soul, whatever he has of one, is just as broken as mine. And when a dream walker's nightmares come to life, they can be unbearably realistic.

'Are you okay?' Archie asks me, his eyes wide. 'You're bleeding.'

Dorian sweeps my hair from my face to get a better look at the cuts.

‘Does it hurt?’ Dorian asks.

I hear Shaw’s feet thunder down the stairs, and when I hear the front door hurtle open, I panic and get to my feet to follow.

He can’t leave. I need him. We all need him!

The others don’t bother trying to stop me and let me go without the slightest bit of complaint.

‘Shaw!’ I call after him, following the bloody footprints down the stairs and through the hall.

The front door is wide open, and the bloody trail leads outside. I throw on a pair of boots and Archie’s coat left over the back of a chair and follow.

‘SHAW!’ I call loudly. ‘Please, don’t go!’

The sun is up, but only barely. And the snow is falling hard and fast now, whiting out the trees and any sign of the dream walker fleeing our home.

‘Gods damn it.’ I wrap the jacket tight around my bare body and run after him, following the imprints in the snow.

I’m pretty sure I can’t die of cold. But as the earth goddess, I don’t exactly thrive in the barren lands of winter.

The snow is a good twelve inches deep and a struggle to wade through. But I have a dream walker trying to escape, so I push through

I brush my fingers against the bark of each tree I run past, and they share where he has gone with me. They speak as if they are half asleep. I can almost feel them yawn as they rest in the winter season. I feel his steps through them, like a message passed on just for me.

It doesn't take me long to find him.

Through the snowfall, I spot his silhouette. He's sat on a boulder with his face buried in his hands. I approach slowly, but he knows I'm here. He always knows.

My hand rests on his shoulder as I stop before him, and with a wave of my hand, the thick root I had wrapped around his foot releases him. I caught him like a rabbit in a snare. He could have snapped it and walked on. But he didn't.

My hand moves to his cheek.

I kneel and find his eyeline. But still, he refuses to look at me. So I rest my forehead against his.

'You didn't mean it,' I say softly, my thumb going back and forth across his cheek. 'And it wasn't real.'

His fingertips run the length of the cut across my collarbone.

'It was real. I made it real.'

I know that it's not only guilt inside him. But fear. His fear of Neve somehow returning to this world. Of the blood curses reclaiming us all. Of Cole coming back to brutalise the woman he loves.

These are his nightmares. Not mine. But it's us who gets the brunt of it. His last

nightmare left Archie unconscious for an entire day when a version of Sethick, the baby-eating demon, appeared.

His hand falls, and he tries to turn away. I climb atop him, straddling him in the snow, and I take his face in both my hands to make him look at me.

His eyes shimmer with the threat of tears. An image I have seen only twice before.

When I died. And when I returned to life.

But it breaks my heart as I watch it now. As it is his pain. His trauma literally bleeding through the wall.

‘Please look at me,’ I say softly.

With a long blink, his gaze finally meets mine.

‘I love you,’ I tell him. ‘And I’m here for you. Don’t walk away when you’re in pain. Come to me, and I will suffer with you. I will share it all, just as you do with me. Our pain. Our nightmares. Our fears.’ I lean down, my forehead meeting his. ‘You’re safe.’

‘You’re not. My nightmare almost killed you.’

‘I’ll take a lifetime of your nightmares, Dream Walker. Rather than suffer a moment of peace without you.’

A tear slides past his cheek, and I lean in to lap it up with my tongue. He releases a beautifully sad little laugh as he pulls me closer to him so our fronts meet.

‘You’re a strange little witch to love a monster like me.’



‘You’re my monster, and I am yours. We’re made for each other.’ I run my thumb across his lower lip. ‘Neve is not coming back.’

He shudders at the mention of her name.

‘The curse of blood magic is gone.’

He swallows painfully and closes his eyes. I jolt his face so he reopens them.

‘And Cole is rotting with his organs around his throat and a hacked-off arm up his arse hole.’

I chuckle, recalling the very descriptive ending Archie delivered to him.

Shaw’s body un-tenses as he smiles.

I lean in and kiss his lips. He meets them gently and unsure, the shame of what just happened still too fresh to feel like he has any right to kiss me.

‘You’re going to get through this,’ I assure him. ‘We all are.’

‘What if the next time I have a nightmare I can not control, you... or Archie... or Dorian... what if you get seriously hurt? I’m not safe to be around. You should just let me go.’

‘None of us are safe to be around. None of us are stable or well-adjusted. None of us can be trusted around others. Why do you think we live on a deserted island? We’re in a place where we can be dangerous as we heal.’ My hold on him tightens. ‘But we heal together. We bleed together, and we scream together. We always have. And we always will. We have seen darkness no one else has seen. Hell, we’ve been the darkness that everyone else fears. But we are that darkness together. Not alone. Never

alone. My Lord .’

My fingers run through his hair as I lean into his lips again.

‘I love you,’ I breathe against his lips. The snow falls all around us as I slide further onto him. His cold belt meets my exposed flesh. ‘I said I love you. And you give me silence?’

‘I love you, too,’ he replies in a hush.

I move my mouth to his ear.

‘I didn’t hear you. My Lord .’

With my free hand, I let my jacket fall open, showing him that I’m completely naked beneath. My teeth clamp down on his ear.

‘Speak to your goddess as she deserves, Dream Walker. Say it like you mean it.’

His hand twists in my hair as he pulls my head back to look deep into my eyes. The shimmering tears have quickly faded, replaced instead with a fierce look of devotion and desire.

‘I said I fucking love the very bones of you, my goddess.’

‘Show me.’

His teeth grind together.

He pulls me close by my hair, and our lips clash in a desperate embrace. Tongues and teeth meet in a violent need that has our breath mixing. His fingers tighten in my hair

as his other slides beneath the coat and rests on my backside to pull me closer still. His cock is hard and pressing against his trousers as I grind against him. My shoulders fall back, and the coat slips down, leaving me exposed to the elements. Snowflakes land on my skin and melt. Each one feels like a spark of fire, meeting my flesh in the most sensual way I could imagine. I'm still learning about this new body. This form is filled with so much power.

I'm cold. But in the most perfect way.

He tugs on my hair so my head falls back, and his lips seal around my peaked nipple. The warmth of his tongue is a stark contrast to the air. He nips and sucks on one and then the other before gently blowing on them both to make them as hard as glass.

He watches the snow fall on my breasts with wonder.

'Have you ever been fucked in the snow, Pixie?'

I shake my head, and his delicious grin widens.

He grips my jacket and drops it to the floor, leaving me naked and straddling him.

'Lean back. Let me see you.'

I do, and his thumb quickly finds my clit. He circles it slowly, watching my breasts rise and fall with each desperate breath. I moan and bite down on my lip when his thumb glides from my clit and sinks inside my pussy, finding its way in with ease as I'm slick with need. He returns it, wet and warm, to my clit.

'I want you,' I breathe, my need unbearable as that deep ache in my core builds and builds.

‘My thumb not good enough for you?’ he teases, running it over my entrance but not inside me.

‘I want you !’

‘Say it properly, Pixie. I want to hear you beg for what you want.’

‘I want your cock, My Lord. Please.’

‘Then take it.’ He leans back a little.

My trembling hands go for his trousers, and I fumble with cold and lust as I release him in all his glory. His erection springs free, and I quickly wrap my fingers around him. I work him slowly at first, just enough to get that beautiful growl I love to hear him make. I run my fingers across my pussy and use my arousal as I work him.

His hand slides from my backside down. Between my legs and inside me. Two fingers at first, massaging my walls as I stroke his length. Our deep breaths lie heavy in the cold air, and our intense gaze never falters.

He is my world. And I am his.

I hold him firmly and rest his length at my pussy. He moves his fingers from there and instead rests them at my arse. As I lower myself onto him, his fingers push inside my second entrance. I stop when he’s in as deep as he can go, and we both just watch one another.

The silence of the snow-covered forests broken only by our heavy breaths.

‘Are you going to fuck me, Pixie?’

‘I’m going to love you. For the rest of time. And yes. I’m going to fuck you.’

‘Good.’

I ride him hard and deep, driving him into me with slow and steady movements. His fingers fuck my arse with the same speed as his other hand sweeps through my hair and down to rest over my heart. The tips of his fingers stop below the first cut his nightmare made.

It’s already healed thanks to my earth magic channelling the power from below us, but he knows precisely where it was. He still sees it.

He reaches up, plucks a holly sprig from the great branch above us, and places it against my skin, right where I was cut.

‘What are you doing?’ I ask. My movements slow, but he drives his fingers harder inside my rear entrance.

‘I didn’t tell you to stop. Keep fucking me, Pixie.’

He looks down at the holly with deep concentration and presses it into my skin.

‘Shit...’ I whisper, watching the bead of blood trickle down my skin.

I never look away as he drags it downwards. It feels like a blade, but the comfort of earth magic accompanies the pain.

‘Eyes on me, Pixie,’ he warns.

My eyes flick up, and I see him watching me closely.

The comfort of his eyes keeps me grounded, chasing away the threat of flashbacks.

‘I’ll be your nightmare,’ he says, easing in a third finger as I continue riding him.  
‘And I’ll be a far greater nightmare to anyone or anything that threatens your peace.’

He takes the holly and presses it into the second place I was cut. The old mark is gone, but the one he creates replaces it, hot and comforting as he drags it over my skin. The threat of flashbacks bites at me again, but he simply holds me closer, looking up at me with nothing but devotion and a promise.

That he is mine, and I am his.

And in our darkness, we are safe.

‘Count, Pixie.’

He cuts a third time.

‘Three,’ I whisper.

The snow falls. My blood trickles into the blanket of white.

He stops when he gets to seven. That’s the number Cole got up to. He’ll go no further.

He drops the holly so he can pin me to his body. Both his arms engulf me as I ride him. He thrusts upwards and slams me down onto him. The pain cuts right through me and has me shouting.

But my gods... the pain is perfect, and it’s all I want.

His tongue runs along the cuts, and he moans in response to its taste.

‘You taste so fucking good,’ he says, sealing his lips around the wound and sucking.

They do not need my blood, and only Shaw seems to enjoy the taste of it still. A fact he has kept to himself. He only indulges in that need when it’s just us, and I haven’t said a word to anyone about it.

I would willingly open any vein for him.

His pace quickens, and with his fingers still buried deep inside, as well as his throbbing cock, I feel him tense.

He grunts and swears as he spills himself inside me. And I am almost crying as I find my release, too.

Panting, I look down at him. Our breath is still visible in the air, and as we smile at one another, I lean in to kiss him.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:07 am*

4

Shaw

I cling to her, holding her naked body as close to me as I possibly can. Our kiss is slow but deep. Her lips move with mine, and it's not the cold air and snow landing on my skin that has it rippling into goosebumps.

It's her. It's always her and always will be.

My arms encase her, and she shivers in the cold. Reaching down, I scoop up her long coat and wrap it around her.

I am amazed at the sheer amount of forgiveness she can offer. I would have slaughtered me the first night we met if I were her. And I would have slaughtered us all a hundred times over by now, for sure.

Not her. Part blood witch. Now a goddess of the earth.

And with the heart of an angel.

'It won't happen again,' I tell her. 'I'll get the nightmares under control. I promise.'

I can't see her scream like that again. I can't, and I won't. I rest my head on her chest and hold her closer still.

'It probably will happen again,' she replies, caressing my cheek and offering me a



sympathetic smile. 'And that's okay. We're just a little broken right now, but it will pass.'

'I made the walls bleed.' I shudder. 'I made Cole almost-'

'You didn't do it on purpose. We'll get there. It will be okay. I'm here to help in any way I can.'

'I'm supposed to be the strong one helping you.'

'Oh, Dream Walker. I'm like a tree. Cut me down, and I just grow back stronger.'

I wince at her words, my body tensing without instruction from me.

'What?' she asks, peering down at me with a slight frown. 'What is it?'

'Don't... Don't call me Dream Walker, Pixie.'

She scoffs out a little laugh but soon sees I'm serious.

'Sorry. I didn't mean to upset you.'

She starts to pull away, but I firm my arms around her, keeping her in place.

'That's what you called me when you were mad at me. When you were so full of hatred that you couldn't even bring yourself to speak our names. I don't call you Ashe because you told me that that was the name they gave you. Your coven. Cole. The man who raised you as though he hated you. You don't call me Dream Walker. I don't call you Ashe.'

Her features soften, and I get a lingering kiss on my forehead.

‘Deal. Now, let’s go home. Before my tits freeze and fall off.’

We stand, and I take her hand in mine as we make our way back to the cottage.

When we walk inside, Dorian is back inside his mortal form, and Archie is tending to the fire in the hearth. Their clothes are still bloody from the manifestation of the nightmare, and it’s clear they’ve just been sitting here waiting for us to return.

Dorian simply rests a hand on my shoulder. His forgiveness offered without a sound. Archie throws his arms around me.

‘You had us worried, mate.’ His forehead meets mine, and he looks into my eyes.

He grounds me. Assures me I’m not alone. That it’s not only our Pixie who understands and accepts our combined violence and damage. We’re all broken. She’s right about that. And we’re all ready to fix the others. No matter how dangerous we have all become.

Archie’s eyes flick past me to her. She nods as he speaks to her through the Mate Bond they share.

I long to hear her thoughts. To feel what she feels. To share something that’s just ours.

Just mine.

‘I’m going to clean up,’ she says.

I look again at her bloody body and matted hair. Her skin is so pale, and her hair is so ashen, blood stands out in a frightening way against her.

‘Want some company?’ Arch asks hopefully. ‘I could scrub your back?’

‘I’m good,’ she replies with an eye roll.

‘Too full of Shaw’s juices to play with me? You know I don’t mind sharing.’

‘Never, ever, ever call it that again, Archie,’ she sneers. ‘It’s up there with the words moist, flesh rod, my weeping pussy, kitty cat, minge or foo foo, cum catcher and ribbed little cave of forbidden treasure.’

‘The list of words I’m not allowed to say is growing every day,’ Archie sighs with a massive grin. ‘You wash up, Pix. We’ve got a treat planned today.’

‘What treat?’ she asks.

They both look at me. Today is my idea.

And I’m determined to make amends for this morning’s horror show.

‘Dress warm, Pix,’ I tell her. ‘You’ll love it. Trust me.’

‘Oh,’ she sighs happily, gripping my hand as we face the frozen pond. ‘This is beautiful!’

The pond isn’t too deep, and thanks to its stillness and the constant snow fall, it has completely frozen over.

Archie puts the picnic down and pulls his coat around his neck, shivering against the cold. Despite his red nose and slightly blue lips, he beams as he always does, packed to the brim with excitement.

I open my satchel.

‘These are for you,’ I tell her, pulling out my surprise.

Pixie takes the two bones with strips of leather attached and looks at me as though I have gone mad.

‘Oh. They’re lovely,’ she says. She has no idea what the hell they are and is keen not to cause me offence. To be fair, it is an odd thing to be given without any context. ‘Are they the bones of my enemies or something?’

She doesn’t want to touch them. The last time she saw a load of bones wasn’t exactly a pleasant experience.

‘They’re animal. The shin bone of a cow, Pixie.’ I take them from her and kneel, taking her foot in my hand and getting to work.

The two others are busy attaching theirs, and I admit I enjoy the nervous little glimmer in her eyes as she looks from me to the pond.

She wobbles as I stand and grip her hands, helping her to balance.

‘She good?’ Dorian asks.

‘I think so.’ I let her go, and she stares at her feet, where two bones are attached to the soles of her boots. ‘She’s got pretty good balance-’

She yelps and falls flat on her backside, hitting the snow with a thud.

We’re all quick to help her back up, and none of us let her go this time.

‘Is this a new form of torture I’m unaware of?’ she laughs, gripping my arm as she slips and slides between us.

‘It’s ice skating,’ I reply. ‘Not torture. Just fun.’

‘I like fun.’

I grip her hands, and the two others step back. We watch them make their way to the ice.

Dorian and Archie glide onto its surface. They’re both uneasy at first. Archie is soon off, circling the pond with grace. Dorian takes a couple of strides... and falls flat on his arse.

The ice holds, so I know it will withstand anything.

Pixie laughs so hard that she loses her balance. I catch her before she falls and start to make our way to the pond.

‘Don’t let me fall,’ she says, watching my feet meet the ice.

‘I will never let you fall,’ I assure her.

She steps out, trusting my words. Trusting me. She slips, but I have her.

‘Keep your eyes up. Look ahead. Not down or behind you.’

‘Never truer words have been said,’ she retorts.

‘Now is not the time for deep and meaningfuls, Pixie,’ I smile. ‘Focus on staying on your feet.’

‘I thought you preferred me on my back.’

‘Or on all fours!’ Archie calls over just as he does an impressive spin on one foot.

How the fuck has he managed to be so good so quickly?

We get a few feet onto the ice and stop. She grips me tightly, still looking at her feet.

I rest my finger under her chin and lift.

‘I said head up, Pixie.’

‘Yes, My Lord .’

I lead her further onto the ice and give her all the tips and pointers I can think of.

‘Bend your knees. Keep low. Glide each foot outwards and away from your other foot. Slide, Pixie. Gentle and sure.’

‘Gentle and sure...’ she whispers, biting her lower lip nervously as she nods.

She starts to move, giggling and yelping at every bit of movement. But I have her. She’s safe.

‘You do this often?’ she asks.

‘Not of late. No. But I did many years ago.’

‘Tell me.’

She stumbles. I keep her up.

‘I watched a young girl skate once. A very long time ago. It was in her dreams but so vivid. She enjoyed it so much. Then, when I was trapped in this witch’s body all those years ago, I thought I would give it a go. I went to a lake, attached some bones to my shoes, and off I went.’

‘Were you good?’

‘No,’ I laugh, shaking my head. ‘I was awful. Never mind the fact that I was new to being shoved and sealed inside a serial killer’s skin suit, ice skating is tricky.’

Dorian slides past us on his front, face down and swearing as Archie glides past us going backwards.

Show off.

Pixie is looking up at me with a sweet little smile.

‘What?’

‘It amazes me that one of the first things you did when you were made human was to try out something that made a little girl so happy in her dreams.’

She certainly did enjoy to skate. It was her ultimate happy place.

‘How come you watched her dreams?’ she asks.

‘I watched hundreds. Thousands of people’s dreams. Even more of their nightmares. It’s all I did for a long time. Before...’

‘Neve,’ she finishes. Her gaze falls. ‘My mother. Who trapped you and the others.’

‘An act that led us to you, Pixie.’

‘A poor consolation prize for all the pain her actions caused.’

The pain we caused because of her is what she means. The witches we slaughtered. The blood and devastation we left in our wake.

None of which I particularly care about. Those aren’t the things that keep me up at night or fuel my nightmares. The witches I killed barely register to me. Their faces aren’t even worthy of being a blur. But Neve’s face does. The way she stole my freedom. How she manipulated and controlled me in a way I could never comprehend.

How she and her sisters made Archie and Dorian suffer so much.

How she almost destroyed our wild little witch.

I may not care about the death we brought into this world nor the copious amount of blood we devoured or shed.

But Pixie does. And that bothers me more than I wish it did.

I’ve never cared about the opinions of others.

But hers is all I think about.

I can be a monster. A villain. A killer. A soulless beast.

But not to her. Never again. She saw that side of me and loves me still.

Archie passes us again, one leg in the air and his arms outstretched.



Pixie laughs and nods as he speaks to her in his mind.

‘What did he say?’ I ask.

‘He asked if I was having a good time.’

I pull her further along, encouraging her to brave the ice a little more. She does, letting go with one hand so she can give it a go.

‘I’m sorry,’ she says.

‘For what? You’re not that bad.’

‘Archie and I have our Mate Bond. Dorian and I share a bit of our souls. They feel a bit of me that you can’t. I would carve out something for you to keep if it would make things fair.’

‘No carving, thank you,’ I reply. But I don’t argue that I resent the fact that they own parts of her I can’t touch.

‘I love you,’ she says.

I look down at her as she peers up at me.

‘I know.’

‘You better. And by the way. If you ever try to leave me again, I will bury you alive and keep you forever in a cave where you’ll never be able to escape.’

‘Is that so?’

‘Yep.’

‘I may like that. Sealed away. Having you all to myself. Deep underground where no one can hear you scream.’

‘Well. I already have your Christmas gift organised. But your birthday is just around the corner. Perhaps we could organise something.’

‘My birthday? I don’t have a birthday.’

‘I think January is a good month to have a birthday, don’t you think? Seeing as you don’t actually know when your birthday is. Dorian’s birthday will be when the first bud blooms without my intervention, and Archie’s birthday will be when the first leaf falls.’

Only she would think it’s worthwhile to give us birthdays. I have no intention of marking off my years. Especially as we have no idea yet how or if a creature like her ages.

‘What have you got me for Christmas?’ I ask.

‘You’ll have to wait and see. But I think you’ll like it.’ She rests her hand softly over my crotch and stands on her tiptoes. ‘Very. Very much.’

She grips me. I lose my balance. And we fall onto the ice in a heap, her body landing on mine as she lets out a beautiful giggle.

We skate for hours and eat our picnic under snowfall. When the sun starts to set, we head back home and gather around the fire to warm ourselves.

Dorian reads in his armchair. Archie is in his wolf form on the floor by the fire,

curled around Pixie. The pair are fast asleep. Her face is lost in the length of his fur, and her head rises and falls as he breathes.

My pencil sweeps across the parchment, and it's peaceful in every sense of the word.

Until the walls start to groan.

Dorian and I both look up at the ceiling. The vines that cover it slowly turn black. The leaves rot and die, replaced with protruding thorns growing inches in length.

We slowly look to Pixie. Her eyes dance behind her lids, and her breathing has become jagged and sharp.

The house shifts, and the wall of bark cracks.

We're both up and on our feet in a second.

'Shaw...'

'I'm on it,' I reply.

With an exhale, I slip into the dream world, finding her nightmares quickly.

Blood. There's nothing but a sea of blood and black mountains. The endless ocean holds endless souls, all clawing at it in desperation, trying hard to reach the shore.

Pixie stands at the shoreline, her feet in the wash as blood laps on the black sand.

She reaches out to those souls. To the damned.

Chains shoot up from beneath her and wrap around her body. Her screams as they

start to drag her into the sea are filled with terror.

I run towards her as she claws at the sand. She sees me and screams for me.

‘SHAW!’ she cries as those chains pull her into the sea. ‘SHAW HELP ME!’

I leap to reach her, but she slips through my fingers and is dragged into the sea of blood.

Seconds later, before I have even stood up, the sea explodes and out comes a giant form of my Pixie. There is a chain around her throat and manacles around her wrists as she screams in rage and fear.

The souls come for her.

For their new blood goddess here in hell, trapped and confined to be used by blood witches for her power.

Her gaze lands on me. And there is such malice in them. My Pixie isn’t in there. None of the goodness. The kindness. The forgiveness.

She is evil incarnate.

Her hand reaches out for me, ready to crush and kill me.

I wave my hand, taking control of this nightmare of hers.

Hell fades. A beach replaces it. A wintery shore of snow and ice with a sky full of silver stars that shimmer and shine. The moon is full, and the air is warm.

She enjoys the snow. But she likes the warm, too. The great thing about controlling

her dreams is that I can give her the impossible.

Pixie falls to the floor and screams, clutching her heart as she expels it all into the world I have given her.

I stand here, still and silent, watching her raw and violent release.

When she looks up at me through tears, I swallow dryly. Her hand reaches out for me. I go to her. I will always go to her.

In my arms, she cries until she can't anymore. When she's expelled all she can, we just sit in silence for the longest while on our snow-covered beach, gazing at the stars I made.

'You're wrong, you know,' she says finally.

'Am I? About what?'

'You do have a part of me that they don't.'

I peer down at her as she looks back at me.

'You have my dreams. Something they will never see. Something they will never understand. But you do. Here, we're in our own world. Just us. A place and part of me that no one will ever see but us. A pain only you can save me from.'

I kiss her warm neck and hold her tightly. She's right, I suppose. I have her dreams. I have her nightmares. I could keep her here for all eternity if I wanted and never let her go. We walk for hours here, and I see parts of her that no one else has ever witnessed.

It's a shame so many of the horrors I save her from are all our fucking fault.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:07 am*

5

Pixie

I wake on the sofa by the fire. A blanket has been laid over me, and the smell of a cooked breakfast has my mouth salivating. Archie and Dorian are talking in hushed tones in the kitchen, a tone of unease clear in their voices. Rolling over and stretching, I groan, realising why they're speaking in such a melancholy way.

Deep cracks have been carved into the ceiling, and huge thorns have become overgrown on our walls.

'Ohhhh...' I groan. 'That's not good.'

'Morning, Pixie.'

I look over to see Shaw rolling up a piece of parchment and tying it up with a bow.

'My nightmare must have been pretty bad then.'

'It was a tad prickly.'

He winks, thinking his play on words is very clever indeed. I roll over and press my fingers into the earth below. The cracks heal. The thorns shrivel up, and the gold leaves, holly and berries return.

Shaw watches me momentarily and is about to say something when Archie and

Dorian walk in. They each have two plates and offer one to me and Shaw.

‘So what’s on the agenda today, Arch?’ Dorian asks as I tear into some toast. ‘Tomorrow is Christmas day. I’m sure you have something else you want to get done.’

‘Yep. Today, Dorian. We’re catching a turkey.’

‘Catching a what?’ Dorian asks.

‘A turkey. You know. A big bird that loves to gobble gobble almost as much as Pix does.’

I tut and throw him a warning look.

‘It’s the main meat for the dinner tomorrow. I saw some a couple of miles away in a wooded pasture.’ He claps his hands together in excitement. ‘They taste bloody amazing.’

I shudder as he starts mimicking snapping the bird’s neck.

‘We’ll all head out and find one. Slaughter it. Prep it and cook it tomorrow for dinner.’ He shoves some cooked meat into his mouth with a grin as I grimace at the imagery he’s conjured.

‘Of all people, I am still amazed at how squeamish you are around blood and dead animals.’

‘Just because I like to eat the meat doesn’t mean I want to see it slaughtered. Besides. I still have nightmares about those rats you stuck my hand in.’ I actually wretch at the memory



‘Pop your comfy boots on, Pix. We’ll be walking for a while today.’

‘As enticing an offer it is, you know, to walk for miles in the snow simply to find a bird to slaughter, perhaps the catching of the turkey should be a male tradition. I’ll stay here, keep the fire going, read a book and maybe knit a scarf. That can be my tradition.’

‘You don’t know how to knit for shit,’ Dorian scoffs. ‘And last time you tried, you got angry, bent your knitting needles into knots and tossed the lot in the fire because your hat looked like a napkin.’

‘Well then, I’ll knit a napkin. Maybe I’ll manage three so you can have one each.’ I stand and kiss them each on the cheek. ‘Have fun, my loves. I’ll be thinking of you as I relax by the fire.’

I turn away and head up the stairs.

Closing the door, or what’s left of it after the shadow form of Dorian exploded through it, I enjoy listening to the three of them happily discuss the plan. Archie mentions some spices he wants to find to make something called mulled wine, and every effort is made to put what happened with Shaw and me behind us. The house still stands. We all do. That’s a win in my book.

I open the window and take a deep inhale of that icy air, relishing the smell of pine and moss dancing in the breeze. My connection to the magic in the earth has continued to grow and bloom. Each day that passes fills me with strength, power, and a deeper understanding of its vast possibilities.

The tips of my fingers rest over the first cut Shaw pressed into my skin. The wound is almost healed and I wonder at the fact that I mend so quickly without the need for blood magic or the blood from their veins.

I'm powerful in my own right. And it feels fantastic not to depend on others for strength.

As I continue looking out of the window, a tiny robin lands on the ledge. Its bright red chest starkly contrasts the pure white that continues to fall outside.

'Hello,' I whisper, slowly reaching out my hand. The bird slowly hops closer before perching on my finger. I lift her and admire her beautiful feathers, lightly dusted with snow.

She chirps and tilts her head, making me smile at her obvious curiosity. Her focus shifts suddenly, and when I feel the familiar slither of scales on my other wrist, she takes off for the forest beyond.

I lift my hand to see Poppy. She curls around me as she so often does, and I lift her to be level with my face.

'Morning,' I greet. 'And a warm Christmas Eve to you, Poppy.'

She reaches up, and I meet her. A feeling of completion grows at her touch. A spark of connection, not just to her but to her heart. Her intelligence. Her deep need to be with me and keep me safe. And, of course, to help me channel my access to the ancient magics of this place. Our noses touch, and a wave of love ripples between us.

And a question. Not spoken. But felt.

Are you okay?

'I think so,' I reply. 'It was so real. Like Cole was really back.'

She nuzzles my face again in comfort. I close my eyes and soak it up.

There is a bowl of steamy water ready for me to wash. But the outside is just too tempting.

‘Want to go practice?’ I whisper, keen to leave this room where Cole was about to shove a dagger between my legs.

She nods, and I swear she is grinning at the idea.

I put on a light blue dress and high boots before throwing on a fur-lined cloak and climbing through the window.

The guys are busy. So we will be, too.

As much as they have encouraged my earth magic, I can’t help but notice their unease when I push myself or try something new.

And I know they don’t like me wandering around alone.

But I’m not alone. I have Poppy.

Besides, this island is empty.

So I swing my legs over the ledge, and I jump.

A branch sways into my path, and I grip it to ease my fall. My feet land in the snow, and with a bubble of excitement in my chest, I run into the forest.

The branches part as I run. Poppy has repositioned herself at my neck to enjoy the falling snow to its full effect. I laugh as I leap from protruding roots that lift to give me more height. I relish in the freedom as branches reach out for me so they can carry me over great ravines. Vines wrap around my outstretched hands so I can swing over

great walls of wild brambles. The snow crunches underfoot, and I taste it as it falls from the sky. The hem of my skirt is soaked, and my hair is a mess as it falls down my back.

But fuck... this is freedom. This is real magic. Living in the wild and the wild loving you. No coven rules. No orders from elders. No expectations or limits on what I can or can't do.

The trees know I pass. The buds on sleeping bushels bloom. And the canopy above sways as if in a slow dance.

I finally stop when I reach a secluded pool of water fed by a rushing waterfall.

Oh. I do love a waterfall. The sound of the rushing water reminds me of Archie taking my virginity.

Now... that was a good day.

I strip and place my dress over an oak branch, which lowers to take it for me.

'Thank you,' I tell it, my hand resting against the bark. It groans in response. 'Off you get, Poppy. You won't enjoy the cold.'

She slithers off me and settles on a rock.

Naked, I stand on the edge of the pool. Its edges are covered in a sheet of thin ice. I break it easily and step into the water.

'Oh shit!' I laugh, feeling the iciness explode in every cell.

The spray of water from the waterfall is painfully cold. But beautifully fresh. Each

droplet is a reminder that I'm alive. That I'm here and free to feel. To exist in my own skin. To control it as I wish. I want to be cold. It takes me far from the heat of blood. Of Hel and her prison realm. When she took control of my body, I was burning. When my coven owned me, I was stifled and trapped.

Go here. Do this. Say nothing. Feel what we tell you to feel. Be fucked by who we tell you to be fucked by.

Marry your abuser and shut your mouth.

If they could see me now, naked and owning the earth magic they so coveted, they would no doubt take great pleasure in cutting off my head.

And if they tried, I would love what would happen to them if they did. Not only my retribution, but my familiar and my lovers would not be so kind as to offer them a swift death.

I take a deep breath, my lungs filling with icy air, and dive in.

My body hits the water, and it fills my ears. It fills all my senses, and when I emerge, I let out a blissfully shocked scream followed swiftly by a fierce bout of laughter.

'FUCK!' I laugh loudly. 'That is fucking COLD!' My words echo all around me, as do my continued giggles.

But wow. I feel so fucking alive! The water continues to cascade over the jutting rocks above. The snow continues to fall. And my breath lingers with every tight gasp I produce.

I swim, gliding through the water with stiff limbs and a trembling body.

And then I float, facing the grey sky above that weeps flakes of white.

I hope the guys are having fun together chasing a turkey. The idea has me smiling to myself. But then I see Cole coming at me and the look of self-hatred on Shaw's face when he realised what he had done.

It's not only my past that haunts us. All of our pasts do.

But my greatest pain still remains them. Their faces as my heart broke in that circle of blood and bones. Their betrayal when they forced me to bring Neve and her sisters back. Their faces as I suffered the executions of my mother and aunts.

I know that they are sorry. I know it haunts them, too.

This is why I need to replace those images with others which don't fill me with fear.

I want to be brave when I see a knife.

I want to feel trust when their hands are at my throat, controlling my breath and blood flow.

I want to feel safe when they lie atop me.

But that all seems so far out of reach.

I take a deep breath and sink beneath the water's surface, hiding from the fact that I may never achieve this.

Because greater than all of that, I never want them to look at me with pity and as though I'm some delicate creature to be coddled and protected.

As I lie beneath the water's surface, I see the unmistakable silhouette of a dark shadow with great wings sneakily swoop over my head.

Slowly, I return to the surface, the top of my head poking out of the water, just in time to see the edges of his robes disappear behind the largest of the trees surrounding us.

I swim out of the water as silently as I can. He's so fixated on the water, waiting for me to reappear, that he doesn't notice me sneaking up behind him. His great fingers grip the broad trunk as he slowly risks a peek around it.

I reach up on tiptoes to tap him on his shoulder, and the great beast goes rigid before slowly turning to find me smugly smiling behind him with my hands cupped behind my back.

'You know, you're a giant creature of shadow with huge wings. The forest is a blanket of white. If you wanted to sneak around and watch me, it's probably best you stayed in your other form. And even then...' I pick out a twig from his cloak. 'You're hard to miss, Dorian.'

He turns to face me fully. My head tilts right back so I can hold his gaze, and the tips of my wet hair go past my bare backside. And all the while, I cannot stop smirking.

'Aren't you supposed to be catching a turkey for our Christmas dinner?'

'And aren't you supposed to be knitting me a napkin? Why are you running around out here on your own without telling us?'

'I just wanted some air,' I reply.

'Then come with us to catch the turkey. That's plenty air enough.'

‘I wanted some air alone, Dorian,’ I correct, making it clear.

‘Are we such bad company?’

‘No. Of course not!’ I insist. ‘I just want to catch my breath and organise my thoughts. That’s all.’

‘What thoughts?’

I raise my brow.

‘I already have Archie hearing my thoughts, Shaw in my dreams, and you feeling my every feeling. Sometimes, I like to just be on my own. Did you seriously think I wouldn’t see you?’ I laugh.

‘You hadn’t before,’ he replies, his voice an ethereal darkness that rumbles from his chest. He lowers his hooded head slowly, revealing his ancient form beneath. ‘I’m very sneaky when I want to be.’

I reach up and rest my palm on his cheek. His skin shimmers like oils on water, and I will never tire of it. He is so fucking beautiful.

Even though most others would scream in terror at his presence, I find him something worthy of worship.

He leans into my touch, lowering his head a little so I don’t have to stretch so far.

‘Do you follow me often?’ I ask.

‘Can I lie to spare my dignity?’



‘No lies. You know the rules.’

‘Yes. I follow you often. Whenever you think you have run alone, I have been right behind you. Watching.’ He sweeps the hair from my face with his elongated finger.

‘Every time?’ My smile falters. ‘You have followed me every time?’

He nods. I pull back a little. ‘That’s not fair.’

He catches my wrist, refusing to allow me another inch of distance.

‘I cannot stand the idea of anything happening to you,’ he says. ‘I confess. It takes all I have not to bind you to the bed and lock the doors. Seal the windows. And never leave you alone for a second.’

‘Dorian. That’s not okay.’

‘I assure you I will not. I have settled for watching over you instead.’

Like that’s a perfectly reasonable compromise and stealing any privacy or moment alone is just something that I have to get used to and accept.

‘Stalking me. Following me.’ He releases my hand, and I walk past him back to the pool, where I retake my dress and slide it on. He follows but keeps his distance. ‘I’m safe, Dorian. And even if I were in trouble, you would know. You would feel it. I’m entitled to be alone sometimes.’ Dressed, I turn to face him. ‘Do you understand that? That you following me and spying on me is unacceptable?’

I can’t see his face beneath his hood. He stands there silently. I reach down so Poppy can return to the warmth of my cloak.

‘I’m going for a walk. Alone. Please. Don’t follow me.’

I start to leave, pulling the cloak around me and attempting to ignore the annoyance he’s brought with him. Every walk. Every piece of solitude. He’s been there for all of them, lurking out of sight.

My body stops as if trapped in stone, and I can’t move a muscle.

Dorian stops in front of me, my poppet doll in his grip. Ever the control freak. Even now, he has to have command over my actions. I can’t even storm off in peace.

I wait for his words. For his explanation. Or for him to tell me why he’s right and I’m wrong.

‘Don’t leave.’

His words are barely a whisper. They seep from beneath that hood and seem to travel the length of my spine straight to my heart. It’s a quiet but desperate plea, and coming from a monster like him, it’s unsettling. Similar to a lion meowing like a frightened kitten.

I don’t respond. I don’t say anything at all but wait for him to explain.

‘I saw you die,’ he says as if he’s confessing some shameful secret. ‘I felt it. A life without you. The hole you left behind. And then I got you back, but I still felt it. I still do. I thought death was something to fear. I believed the goddess Hel was the worst thing to happen to me. But neither compared to the moments I thought I had lost you. When I faced not seeing you ever again. When Cole took you, and I knew he was hurting you, that was still not as crushing as those moments when you were gone, and I know that if you die again, I will never get you back. And I will have nothing to live for.’

I rest my hand on his cheek, my heart and resolve to be pissed off softened by his confession. But I sense such anger ripple between us, not at me, but at the world.

‘If I lost you...’ His long fingers curl around my wrist. ‘My beautiful, wild little witch. I would have nothing left to live for.’

‘You’re not going to lose me, Dorian. And even if you did, you would survive it.’

‘Perhaps. But nothing else would survive my loss of you.’

His words feel like a threat. They come out through gritted teeth and a tense jaw as his eyes burn with a dark promise. As if he holds it against me. That I would be to blame for whatever darkness he would spread.

‘What are you saying?’ I whisper.

‘I would give into the shadows if I lost you.’

‘No. Don’t say that.’

‘I would gladly become the monster I was. Worse than the monster I was because I would gladly fall into that darkness again and drown in the pull of vengeance and pain. Because then it wouldn’t be my pain I was feeling. It would belong to the souls I stole. And I would be gone. And I would destroy everything because all I loved was taken from me.’

His words make my insides cold because every one of them is his painful truth. And I’m given a terrifying realisation that I am all that stands between this monster and the world.

‘So I will follow you. And I will watch you. And I will feel everything you feel even

though you asked me not to. I will be your shadow for the rest of time. Because I have finally found peace, and I will not lose it. I will either be your shadow master. Or I will be their end. There is no in-between. There is no other choice.'

I should be angry at his confession. At his decree that I will never know a moment of solitude again because his darkness is my responsibility.

But I'm not. I should be, but I'm just... not.

I'm honoured and desired. Protected and coveted. All the things I never had before these three crazy beings came into my life. And as I look up at him, my darkness incarnate, death encased in such a beautiful form, I know.

He is mine. All fucking mine.

The ground beneath me swells and rises me up so my forehead can meet with his. He looks into my eyes with a ferocious intensity. I used to think it was threatening. That it was a sign of imminent violence.

Now, I see it as a desperate plea to be heard. To be accepted. To be loved.

'I accept your shadows. Your darkness. And I will take responsibility for your sanity.' I raise my brow. 'If you accept responsibility for mine.'

'It seems like an unfair exchange.'

'You're right. It is. You saw what an angry earth god was capable of, after all. Me, as a wrathful god, kinda made you look like a pussy cat. I'd say you have the shittier end of the stick if you ask me.'

His lips curl into a smile, as do mine. Our two souls are laid bare. Our inner fears are

given to the other to protect and keep safe. Our monsters are guarded by each other.

‘I’ll accept. My wild little witch.’

‘Goddess.’

His smile widens.

‘Don’t push it. You will always be my poppet doll.’

My fingers curl around his. My doll rests in his grip. And when he feels my continued pressure, his eyes narrow.

‘Not today,’ he says, pulling the doll from my reach and slipping it beneath the ethereal robes covering his body. ‘I know you want me to crush you so you can get past the nightmares and flashbacks, but I’m not ready to.’

‘When will you be ready to?’ I ask.

He steps back and turns away.

‘Carry on with your exploration, Poppet. I’ll stay out of sight.’

A ridiculous sentiment, considering his sheer size and the darkness he embodies.

He stops suddenly when he feels the snowball I toss hit him in the back of the head.

He turns with intentional slowness to find me whistling and looking around with about as much nonchalance as if I were holding a written sign, confessing I was the one who threw it.

A snowball hits me in the shoulder far softer than I threw mine.

I stare at him, mouth open, before all hell breaks loose and we're hurling snowballs at one another with a passion. His laughter, although a deep, low and demonic rumble, warms my heart and fills me with sheer joy.

I throw myself behind a tree to take cover, narrowly missing one to the face.

My fingers caress the bark, and the tree shudders, raining down chunks of snow from the branches above and dumping it all on his head.

'That's cheating!'

'Natural advantage,' I correct.

I peek out from the trunk. He's not there. Not a trace. I stand and step out, searching for him.

'Dorian?'

Poppy darts out from my cloak and disappears into the bushes.

'Where are you going?'

I see him too late as he swoops from the sky and ploughs into me.

Oh. That's why she slithered away.

Dorian's arms wrap around my waist, and my feet leave the floor. I yelp as he takes flight, soaring upwards into the sky. His black wings beat steadily yet hardly at all as I cling to him and the cold air forces its way down my throat.

I love to fly. It's my absolute favourite thing to do and he often pulls it out as a distraction technique. He stays just above the treetops, and I snuggle into his robes, seeking out a barrier from the wind howling past me and the falling snow as he glides us through the air.

I watch him as he looks below, taking in the canopy of white. His enjoyment is an honour to watch.

I kiss his neck, my lips meeting his skin and staying there as I trail more delicate kisses up to his jaw.

My hands go between his legs, and he looks down at me with a dark look.

He doesn't even blink as I take him in my hand and start to work him. His length in this form is... extreme. It's unmanageable, in truth, by several excessive inches. But I can't help but want him. All of him.

He's a beautiful monster.

'You want to play?' I whisper, my thumb softly gliding over the tip of his ever-growing cock.

'Poppet. I want to make it hard for you to walk for several days.' He grips my hips. 'Lift your skirt.'

Ever the good girl, I obey, hoisting it up around my waist. I grip his shoulders and take a deep breath.

'Let's see how much you can take this time before you beg me to stop.'

It's not just the length, but his girth that fills me with a mixture of terror and

determination.

My legs wrap around him, and I take a readying breath as he rests himself at my already soaking pussy.

‘Don’t drop me.’

‘I will never let you go.’ His grip on my waist tightens. ‘I will never, not now nor in the many years to come, let you leave me.’

‘That sounded more of a threat than a promise,’ I grin. ‘Shadow Daddy.’

A low growl rumbles from his chest as I use that name for him. It’s a firm favourite and always guarantees a reaction.

‘Damn right it was, Poppet. Now shut the fuck up and scream as I fill you up.’

He lowers me down, impaling me slowly with his intense size.

I don’t hold back and give him what he wants. My screams. My fingernails dig into his shoulders as I struggle to take him in. As I stretch, my flesh burns at the intrusion.

‘Louder,’ he hisses, watching as my mouth falls open and my eyes widen. The shock his cock creates drives the lust in his eyes wild, and a glimmer of the dark monster inside shines through. He goes in another inch or so, and tears brim in my eyes.

But I refuse to say stop.

‘A bit more, I think,’ he growls, lowering me onto him with a firm tug.

I scream out, and the tears seep past my eyes.



‘Beg me to stop.’

He stills and searches my eyes, wondering if I’m at my limit.

‘Never, Shadow Daddy.’

I clamp my thighs down, and with a determined moan, I lower myself down further.

His long fingers slide to my lower stomach and press against my abdomen.

‘A little more. You can do it, Poppet Doll. Take me in a little deeper.’

I swallow and nod, letting him slide me further down his length.

I moan his name in a plea. I want him. Need him. But I don’t know if I can take much more.

My fingers slip beneath his hood to feel the inky shimmering of his cheek. And with my other hand, I press his fingertips further into my stomach.

‘Dorian...’ I moan again, my desperation and need dripping through every syllable. ‘I want to feel you on the outside. Do it.’

His eyes dart left to right, the uncontrollable beast longing to drive himself in as far as possible. And the man beneath who never wants to cause me an ounce of suffering.

I rest my nose against his.

‘You can love and protect me. But I sometimes want you to fuck me like you hate me.’ His eyes shine at my words. ‘I love it when you make me your whore.’

He grips me tightly and pulls me down. Further and further. He never looks away as my mouth falls open in a hollow and silent scream.

I could say stop.

I don't want to.

I never want to say it again.

And when I finally feel his skin meet mine, I fill with triumphant pride.

That, and giant shadow daddy dick.

He blinks up at me, and we share a moment of disbelief.

I did it! I took him in his entirety!

'I'm all the way inside you,' he whispers.

It is the hottest fucking thing in this entire world.

He lets out a breath, and another growl ripples from his chest.

'Fuck me,' he commands.

As he flies above my forests, I ease myself up and down his cock. The snow continues to fall, and the air is bitter. But my body is alight with pleasure and pain. It hums with need and sways to the submission I have handed over.

My body is his to own. To ruin. To ravish. To fill up and fuck until I buckle and break. And so is my heart. My dear shadow daddy. My demon of death. My heart and

soul. I love him completely, and he loves me just as violently in return.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:07 am*

6

Archie

‘Now what?’ Shaw asks me.

He folds his arms across his chest as we both look down at the slaughtered turkey slumped across our kitchen table.

‘You pluck it,’ I reply, my hands sliding into my pockets.

He scrunches up his face before turning to face me.

‘I’m not fucking plucking it.’

‘I tracked, caught and killed it. You can pluck and gut it.’

His brow raises, almost disappearing into his hairline.

‘I’m not disembowelling anything, Arch.’ His hands go up as he steps back. ‘That was never discussed. If it were, I would have caught and killed it so you could pluck and scoop out its insides.’

I can’t help but laugh at him, still backing away and looking at the creature as though it were some hideous monster.

‘You’ve done worse,’ I remind him. ‘And to living things. Not a dead bird.’

‘I did worse to people or things that deserved it. Besides, you’re the weird one who likes tearing things open to see their insides. You do it.’

The bout of laughter that comes from me is deep and from my belly. But I roll my eyes and start plucking the thing, carefully separating some of the feathers that will be useful for fishing flies or stuffing pillows.

Beyond the kitchen, Dorian’s human male form sits in an armchair. His eyes are closed, and his head is slumped over.

He’s dead. Again.

But the body will remain as it is, awaiting its host to return.

‘Dorian is still stalking Pixie, then?’ Shaw asks, pulling out a bottle of rum and a couple of glasses. ‘The fact she hasn’t noticed his skulking every time she thinks she’s being sneaky and climbing out of the window is impressive on his part. He’s not exactly inconspicuous.’

‘Oh. She’s aware he’s there now. From the emotions I felt through the mate bond, I’m inclined to think she finally managed to fuck him completely in his shadow form.’

‘How the fuck could you know that?’

‘Well. She was angry for a bit. So I’m guessing that was when she found out he was a huge stalker. Then she was all soppy. So, I’m assuming they had a bit of a heart-to-heart. Then there was a lot of... well... anxiety, lust, shock, pain, and then some very happy sensations. Followed by extreme pride. So either she finally managed to fit his cock, or she took a massive shit and was very relieved it was out.’

‘She’ll be walking wonky for days.’

‘Nah. She’s built for us. That girl can take anything.’

Feathers fill the air as I continue to pluck, and soon, the beast is naked. I work quickly, keen not to have her walk into the sight of me pulling guts out of tomorrow’s dinner.

‘So you feel her emotions even more these days?’ Shaw asks. ‘The Mate Bond is really evolving, I take it.’

His words are nice enough. But the undertone drips with displeasure. And something I’ve never really heard before.

I think it’s jealousy, but I can’t be sure. Shaw has felt many things. Rage. Hatred. Possessiveness. Indifference. And lately, joy, happiness and peace. Jealousy has never been something I have seen Shaw exhibit. He’s never cared about anything or anyone enough ever to be bothered about jealousy. But he is now, and that makes me nervous. A bloodthirsty man like him. A warrior with nothing to fight except his feelings and thoughts. Who knows what may happen if he allows jealousy to get the better of him.

‘It’s changing as time passes,’ I reply, shrugging and focusing on the bird. ‘It’s different for everyone. For now, I can feel her emotions. In a year, I might not. For a while, I may be able to speak to her in her mind, even if we’re miles and miles apart. Then that may fade, and instead, she’ll be able to feel my emotions. It changes over time.’

Despite being beyond proud and delighted with how our bond is developing, I attempt to sound as though it’s nothing. I love feeling her emotions. Dorian loves it, too. He’ll be able to feel it forever, though. Unlike me. It may be gone tomorrow.

But Shaw can't feel her. He has no Bond or link with her, which drives him mad.

I look up at him as he stares at the ground with a deep furrow on his brow.

'I'll fetch some firewood,' Shaw declares. 'Pixie has no doubt been to the lake again and then running around in the snow. She'll be freezing and soaked through.'

'And yet she doesn't get sick,' I reply, my blade cutting through the bird so I can hollow it out. 'Perks of being a goddess, I guess.'

'Never mind being the earth goddess. She's too bloody stubborn to get sick. A fever wouldn't even bother trying to take her down. I'll be back in a minute.'

'I'll come with you. Hang on a sec.'

'Your hand is up a dead animal's arse. Just carry on. I'll fetch it so the fire's roaring when they come home.'

He leaves, the front door closing behind him as he goes to fetch more wood.

And I stand in the kitchen alone.

The sound of squelching as my hand emerges from the turkey makes me grimace. But I need to get outside. I need to find Shaw. When I pull my hand free, the turkey's guts slip through my fingers and land on the floor with a disgusting splat.

A cold finger trails down my neck, and soft lips settle on my cheek.

'Hello, Puppy,' a soft whisper coos in my ear.

My heart starts to hammer so hard it hurts, and everything spins wildly around me.

Before I can register it, I'm on my hands and knees, crawling towards the front door. Beyond the sound of my blood pounding in my ears, Sinthia's whispers continue as if coming from inside my skull.

'Do you remember when I gutted your family and friends, Puppy? When their entrails slithered to the floor? Do you remember how we made love as we slipped and slid around their mess?'

I crawl, my throat all but closed as I fail to take in any air. My eyes remain focused on the front door. I need to get to Shaw!

I'm going to die. I'm going to die, and she's waiting for me. I'll be trapped with her forever with no escape. She's clawing at me from beyond the grave and will never let me go.

The edges of my vision start to blur as I suffocate. And my heart thumps so hard I expect to see it explode through my ribcage any second and land on the floor with a hollow thud to join the rest of the entrails scattered about me.

The door opens, and Shaw steps inside. He sees me and drops the pile of logs he has cradled in his arms. In a second, he's on his knees and lifting me up, panic clear on his face as he grips my head.

'Archie, breathe! You gotta focus on your breathing!'

I can't! There's no airway. No space in my lungs. She's stolen it all and filled it with the nothingness she created in me. The blackness and emptiness.

'I shouldn't have left. I'm sorry. I wasn't thinking. I'm right here, brother. And so are you. Sinthia isn't here. It's in your head.' Shaw rests his forehead on mine as I try with all I have to get my shit back under control.



My head knows she's not here. But try telling the rest of me!

'Breathe with me, Arch,' he says softly, resting his palm over my heart. He feels its ferocity and blinks. 'Breathe with me,' he repeats in a slow calm.

We kneel facing one another, surrounded by guts, and I try to regain control.

All of me is trembling and tears are falling freely down my cheeks.

'I've got you, Arch. I'm right here, and Pix and Dorian will be here soon, too. And we can tell them how we caught the turkey. Tell them how we found a beehive full of honey and a patch of wild parsnips.'

My chest eases as I stare into his eyes as though my very life depends on it. And he never falters. He doesn't blink or let me go. He stays precisely where he is, holding me and helping me. I claw at his shirt and plead with him.

Help me! Help me!

He looks on helplessly as I suffer another attack of this unyielding panic and pain. I'm lost to an avalanche of dread and sheer terror. Because now I have something I won't survive losing. I have love and peace. What if I lose it? What if I'm left alone? What if I have to suffer the agony of watching them die? Again!

Their bodies fell all at once, and I was left alone.

That's when I hear her. That's when she comes, with her soft touches and sweet whispers. My tormentor. The killer of all I have ever held dear. The woman who slaughtered my pack and used me as she wanted.

The woman who-

Shaw slams his lips onto mine, landing me with a determined kiss right on the mouth.

I blink in shock as he holds my head in place so I can't move or react, and when he lets go, he makes a huge smacking sound, dramatising it so it makes as much noise as possible. It echoes off the stone and wood, repeating over and over.

'Bet you didn't see that coming, did ya?' he says, chuckling warily as he looks at the hand he has rested over my heart. 'I hope that worked because I'm not kissing anything else.'

I take a shuddering breath that ends in a hiccup.

'Take a deep breath for me, Arch. Say something.'

Another inhale before I speak.

'When did you eat cranberries?' I ask, picking at my teeth. He slaps me on my shoulder and shakes his head. 'Try some tongue next time. Poor Pix, if that's what she gets from you.'

He lands another kiss on the top of my head and sighs. His entire body relaxes, hearing my teasing.

'I love you, ya crazy fucking hairball.'

Shaw returns to his feet and hoists me up, too, before collecting the wood he dropped.

I swallow a sob and swiftly dry my eyes.

That's the second time that's happened. Both times, it's when I've found myself alone. An empty room is not my friend. Solitude brings horrors from a past I long to

forget.

Sinthia isn't here. She is not a spirit.

That's what I choose to tell myself. That's what we all choose. Pix saw countless spirits when she was a blood witch. Her necromancy made them visible to her. Those damaged slithers of a soul lingering in the world of the living. Gripping onto their pain and suffering, making it impossible for that part of them to find peace. The spirits she saw were not whole but the broken parts of a person, left behind so the rest of them could find their rest.

Or, in the case of blood witches, eternal damnation in the sea of blood in hell.

But that's all gone now. No Hel. No sea of blood. No blood witch bitches.

And I have never felt more terror than I do now that they have gone. Because I have nothing left to fear except losing the peace I have finally won. I have never feared losing something as much as I have feared losing her. Of losing them all. And when I'm alone, that's all I can think about. Rationality abandons me, and it becomes a physical reaction. My body is not my own. It belongs to panic.

I understand why Pix used to hide under the bed. If she felt like that, I don't blame her for seeking out the warm and the dark. For seeking out a place to hide.

Shaw glances at me as I straighten my clothes and pick up the guts from the floor.

And then I hear a wonderful sound.

Looking out of the window, Pix comes running towards the cottage. She has a blinding smile and giggles almost maniacally as she glances back.

Dorian lands with an eerie silence, his wings tucking in and his black shadowy form swirling all around him as his eyes glow from beneath his hood. All he needs is a scythe, and he would make the Grim Reaper look like a puppy dog.

If it were anyone else running from the shadow master in his true form, they would be screaming for their fucking life or falling dead in fright.

Not her, though. She's so excited and joyful that she can barely run straight as he readies a snowball to throw at her.

Hel's personal pet is having a snowball fight with a witch.

It's not something you see every day.

Shaw stops beside me, curious to see what I'm laughing at.

Pix ducks, and the snowball flies through the open window and slams straight into my face. Freezing cold and surprisingly hard. It slips down, and I open my eyes. Pix has her lips sealed together, trying hard not to laugh as I shake my hair off and scowl at Dorian.

'Perfect aim!' Dorian chuckles.

'Oh. I'll show you perfect aim.' I scoop up a load of snow from the sill and toss it hard.

He moves an inch to the left, and it glides past him.

I'm out the window in a flash, Shaw hot on my heels, and we're all tossing snowballs at one another. Pix leaps on my back and shoves a handful of snow down my neck, making me scream in an embarrassingly high squeal.

Shaw defends me and returns the favour, shoving a handful down the front of her dress.

A series of fierce expletives come from her pretty little mouth. The names she calls us have me almost speechless.

What a filthy and perfect little mouth. I still can't believe she was raised in an earth coven. Not with a foul mouth like that!

The three of us laugh as she dances and shuffles, trying to shimmy the snow from her dress. And when she stops and slowly turns, we all fall silent at the devious look in her eye.

There's a groan. We all look up. And the trees dump all their snow on top of our heads, burying us up to our necks.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:07 am*

7

Shaw

The fire is roaring, and the room is beautifully warm. I'm on one end of the sofa with Pixie's head in my lap. Archie is curled up on the other end. His eyes are closed, and his hands rest on her ankles.

Dorian sits in his favourite armchair, watching the flames as he sips from a glass of amber liquid.

As she sleeps, I run my fingers through the long curls of pure silver, and I read one of the many books we brought with us.

Pixie twitches. I look down at her, and she releases a little whimper.

'Nightmare,' I sigh, my hand resting on her head. I feel it. Her mind ripples with misery, and it tastes foul.

My poor girl.

'Again,' Dorian groans, his eyes narrowing as she twitches more violently. 'I would have thought they would at least ease up. But it's almost every night.'

'No...' she mumbles. 'No. Please... no!'

'Shaw,' Dorian encourages.

‘I’ve got it.’ I rest my hand on her head, ready to steal her terrors. The same as I do every night. Over and over again before the house trembles and the ground churns, threatening to bury us all alive.

I fall into her nightmares and pluck her from the grip of her many horrors. Instead, she finds herself in an endless field of white. The hills roll on and on, coated in a thick blanket of pristine snow. Straight ahead is a great fir tree towering over us. One so big, I can’t see the top. Her head tilts back as she takes it in, and she relaxes as a robin flies past her. I make the bird circle her head a few times until she giggles. And when my arms wrap around her from behind, she sinks into me. Her hands grip me tightly as she holds me close.

‘Hello, you,’ she says with a heavy sigh of relief.

‘Hello,’ I reply, kissing her cheek.

We face the great fir tree. Archie described what a Christmas tree looks like, so I decide to give her my impression of one.

I make candles appear on the branches. Their flames flicker a beautiful orange. More and more swirl into existence, circling around and around until they reach the very top. Golden ivy swirls around it, and coloured pinecones grow in the branches.

‘It’s beautiful,’ she says softly. ‘I can’t wait to decorate one of our own tomorrow.’

I begin to hum and sway. My memory of a song I heard played in the king’s court starts to play all around us as if a harpist were at our side.

Tomorrow is Christmas day, and I find myself excited. All of it will be something new and different. The finding of the tree. The sharing of gifts. All cooking the meal together.

And we get to share it all with one another.

I dance with my witch beneath our great festive tree, feeling the snow land on our skin and our ears filled with the sound of music.

I don't have nightmares when I walk with her. She keeps my mind on a peaceful path. And often, a naked one.

I spent the night dancing, walking and fucking. A perfect way to pass the time.

I wake to her in my arms, still lying on the sofa. She's atop me, her entire form so small compared to mine.

Her lips turn into a smile.

'Good morning,' she says happily, wriggling a little so her legs settle comfortably between mine. 'Oh. A verrrry good morning, I see.'

Her stomach nuzzles into my erection as I stretch myself out to rid my limbs of the clicks and stiffness.

Her wriggling does nothing to ease the stiffness in my cock. And when her hand slides beneath my trousers, I have zero complaints. I rest my hands behind my head as she opens my trousers and shimmies down.

'Seeing as you spared me a night of horror, maybe I can give you a morning of pleasure.'

Her sly little smirk disappears between my legs, and she takes my cock into her mouth. Her tongue swirls as she sucks and moans. I watch her head bob up and down and resist the urge to grip her hair and fuck her throat.



But she has a sensitive gag reflex in the morning, so it's best to let her lead the way and take control. Behind her, in the doorway, Archie suddenly stops to watch. I reach over, grip her skirt and lift it around her hips, nodding to her raised backside.

He doesn't need to be told more than that. He never does.

She jumps and yelps when he grips her hips and thrusts his tongue inside her pussy.

Her moans get deeper as he works her, and I fill with the need to watch her. I scoop up her hair and look as she sucks my cock.

Her eyes widen in surprise as Archie starts to chuckle. The way her body has clenched, I'm guessing something has gone up her arse. A finger or a tongue, most likely, but with Arch doing as he pleases down there, who the fuck knows.

'Oh yeah,' Dorian grumbles as he stalks past us. 'You three just relax and get laid. I'll get this fucking bird cooked, shall I?'

I laugh as he carries the plucked and prepared bird into the kitchen, ready to put over the fire.

She yelps again and lunges forward.

'What the hell are you doing down there?' I hiss, gripping her hair firmer when she goes to look back at him. I will not lose the feel of her mouth on me for a second, so she's staying fucking put.

'What I am doing to her is of no concern to you,' Archie replies. 'You just focus on your end. I'll focus on mine.'

He disappears with a grin. Moments later, her fists clench as she grips onto my shirt

before screaming her release around me.

I cum hard, filling her mouth as she writhes and climaxes between us. I yank on her hair, lifting her head.

‘Open wide. Let me see,’ I order.

The little minx not only opens her mouth, revealing what I left in there, but lets it spill back onto my cock. Her gaze is firm on mine as my cum seeps past her chin and hits me with warm little splats.

‘You’re making a mess, Pixie,’ I warn. ‘You better be willing to clean it up.’

With a devilishly devastating smirk, she laps up every last drop. Her tongue runs the length of me, and she moans in delight as she swallows every bit.

Her head falls forward, and she lets out a deep moan. Sitting, I see Archie with his face buried between her legs still. And he has three fingers in her backside. He sees me looking and wags his eyebrows.

I lean over and spit, giving her some more lubrication, and watch his fingers ease in and out of her.

She has the cutest little fucking arse. And it’s so much more beautiful when full of fingers, cock or tongue.

I can’t resist and start to play, adding three fingers of my own, and together we fuck her hole.

He circles her clit with his free hand, and her muscles clench around us, trapping us inside her as she cums again.

‘I could use some help in here!’ Dorian complains.

Archie stands, slaps her backside, and goes into the kitchen.

‘No, Dorian! You don’t put it in the oven like that like, you fucking heathen! It will taste like arse if you don’t season it properly.’ He glances back at Pixie and winks. ‘Not yours, of course.’

‘You better wash your fucking hands before you touch my bird, Arch,’ Dorian warns.

‘Yeah, yeah. Alright.’

She slumps face down on the sofa with a very satisfied little grin, and I sit on the floor beside her to sweep the hair from her face.

‘Merry Christmas, Pixie,’ I say.

Her hand rests on my cheek, and I lean into it.

‘Merry Christmas.’

There’s a crash, and Dorian swears as Archie laughs.

‘That tray is for the fire, Dorian. Not the floor.’

‘One more word, I’ll prepare you and put you on the fire.’

‘I might let you. The way your hand is up that turkey's arse makes me think that I might enjoy it immensely.’

‘I’m stuffing it like you told me to!’

‘Well, you look like a mighty fine stuffer, Dorian. No wonder Pix was walking with a limp last night.’

‘You better go and make sure they don’t try putting each other on the spit instead of the turkey,’ Pixie says as she sweeps the hair from my face. Her finger trails along my lower lip, and I kiss it as it passes.

‘We’re getting the tree in a bit, so when you get dressed, wear something warm,’ I tell her.

‘Yes, My Lord,’ she coos.

In the kitchen, Dorian is doing unholy things to the rear end of the turkey as he stuffs it with herbs. Archie is gathering the vegetables on the table, ready to peel.

‘Where’s she gone?’

‘To wash and dress,’ I tell Dorian. He looks upwards, and a flicker of fear washes across his face. The same as every time there’s the slightest possibility that she’ll wander off alone.

‘She’s not going anywhere today, Dorian,’ Archie assures him. ‘No need to shrug off your mortal flesh suit and go into stalking mode.’

We work as a team and swiftly get everything organised. The bird is cooking. The veg is prepared for boiling or roasting, and the smell it all makes is an absolute delight.

I don’t need to eat. Neither does Dorian. But we can, and we do. Archie has the cooking skills. His pack taught him how to use everything in the forests, and he hasn’t forgotten a thing. He made the oven with stone and slate, and we eat well and

often.

Mainly, I just enjoy watching Pixie eat. She was a half-starved little thing when we first found her. It's good to see some curves on her now.

Soon, we're all set. The food is cooking, and everything is tidied away, so we prepare ourselves for the day.

Pix is ready and waiting for us at the front door, wearing a stunning deep red woollen dress. She puts on her black gloves and slides on her cloak, watching us join her.

'So where to?' she asks.

'It's a few miles away,' Archie says, opening the door and stepping through. He swiftly starts stripping and tosses his clothes at me. He shifts with a leap and a flourish, landing before us in his great wolf form. Pixie promptly climbs atop him, and he leads the way.

She's still the only one he allows to ride him. Shame. It was enjoyable when he let me that one time.

There's a soft thud. I look back to see Dorian in his shadow master form, his body discarded on the armchair.

The floors groan beneath his weight, and he has to duck at the waist to fit through the front door.

We walk together.

A great wolf being ridden by the earth witch goddess.

A gigantic black monster made of solid shadow.

And me. A man of nightmares.

A strange sight, I'm sure.

A constant ambience of chatter and laughter surrounds us as we travel through the forests to a patch where pine trees grow. Dorian makes light work of hacking the tree Pixie and Archie declare their favourite, and we make the trek back, the tree tossed over Dorian's shoulder.

Now, I understand his need to be in his larger form. He makes the tree look like a walking cane resting on his shoulder.

When we reach the cottage, it smells incredible and all our mouths water. Inside, I help Archie get the tree in position. We place it in the corner of the lounge and decorate it together.

This is by far one of the strangest customs I have been a part of.

But yet, the most enjoyable.

We place candles on the branches and sprigs of holly and berries around it in garlands. There's a rustle and a squeal. Tentatively, I look inside the branches and grimace.

'What is it?' Pix asks me.

'Poppy found her dinner,' I tell her. 'A squirrel.'

She scrunches up her face and steps back.

And then we see what Archie wanted the coloured caterpillars for. He returns from outside with a macabre piece of twine. Attached to it are chunks of chopped-up caterpillar. He places it around the tree and steps back, looking proud of himself.

Dorian and I share a look.

Dorian shrugs, clearly no deeper in the know than I am.

Then, slowly, those little chunks of coloured caterpillars start to fucking glow.

‘When they’re warm, they shine,’ Archie says, watching them with a sad smile. ‘My sister and I would hunt them for days before Christmas and make meters and metres of these. Our house was smothered. The walls. The door frames. The tree.’

Tears glisten in his eyes as he remembers celebrating this day with the family he lost.

‘What do you think, Pix?’ he asks, his voice dry and unsteady.

She takes his hand in hers and grips it tightly.

‘I think it’s the best thing I’ve ever seen.’ Her arms wrap around his middle, and we all take a moment to enjoy the beauty of our hard work.

‘Let’s do gifts before food,’ Archie says, clearing his throat and swiftly wiping his eyes. He looks down at Pixie, cupping her face in his hands and beaming ear to ear. ‘I can’t wait to see your face when I give you mine.’

‘If it’s any bigger than what you got her for her birthday, I think she may pass out,’ I scoff.

‘Ahh,’ he dismisses, waving his hand through the air as he starts towards the stairs.

‘She’s had Dorian’s trouser snake in its entirety. She can handle anything.’

Pixie slowly turns to look at me, a pleading look on her face.

‘It’s a spiked dildo or something, isn’t it...’

Laughing, I shrug.

‘I’m going to get my gifts.’ She heads to the front door.

‘Where are you going?’ Dorian starts.

‘I had to hide them outside. Archie kept trying to find them.’

She leaves, and Dorian looks ready to crash through the wall after her.

‘Get your gifts, Dorian. She’ll be fine.’ I head to the kitchen, where I stashed my rather shitty present up on the highest shelf. We never use those shelves because Pixie can’t reach them, so they’re always empty.

I swallow my nerves as I return to the lounge.

Archie is placing his gifts beneath the tree, so I follow suit, placing mine beside his.

‘Just one?’ he asks.

‘Yes. Problem?’

Archie shakes his head.

Dorian tosses his gifts under as he storms towards the door, determined to find Pixie.



She rushes in, shakes off the snow, and is beaming as she places her gifts under the tree.

And we sit.

‘Now what?’ I ask.

‘Hats.’ From inside his jacket, Archie pulls out four bright red hats with white trim and hands us each one.

When he puts his on his head, Pixie stifles a snigger. It’s a floppy, pointed hat complete with a white tuft at its tip. Like a rabbit's tail.

I look at mine.

It is a rabbit's tail. And the trim is rabbit fur.

‘It’s part of the tradition,’ Archie insists. ‘We have to wear them.’

Pixie puts hers on first, swishing the bobble around her head with a grin.

Dorian puts his on and looks at Archie like he wants nothing more than to shove it down his throat.

Pix shuffles over to me and puts mine on my head, taking time to place the tip and bobble to the side.

‘We all look ridiculous,’ Dorian grumbles.

‘Ridiculous but festive,’ Archie smirks, very happy that we’re all here looking like prized idiots. ‘Gifts!’

Archie pulls out his and hands one to me. Another to Dorian. And a third to Pixie.

‘Merry Christmas, guys,’ he says.

We open them up.

Dorian and I each have a bottle of some purple liquid that shimmers when it moves. I open it and sniff, catching the scent of honey and liquorice.

‘It’s a little like whiskey,’ Archie says. ‘My pack used to make it. But it has the same effect as that leaf we smoked once a few years back. Do you remember that? When we got the giggles for hours. I started making it when we got here. Takes months to get it right.’

I take a sip, and surprisingly, it’s absolutely delicious. It makes my body tingle, and ease settles over me when it hits my stomach.

‘Shit,’ I moan, admiring the bottle. ‘That is incredible, Archie! I have never tasted anything like it.’

Dorian looks just as surprised as he sips his. And Archie is beaming.

‘You really like it?’

I offer it to Pixie, who takes a sip. Her cheeks flush pink, and her eyes widen.

‘That’s strong,’ she says, her voice straining against its heat.

She opens her gift.

‘Oh my...’ She whispers. ‘Archie... is this...’

She lifts up a necklace. On the end hangs a single pearl and a wolf fang.

‘Is this yours?’ she asks.

‘It is. Taken from the back, so it won’t affect my bite too much. Don’t worry.’

I love how he knows to settle her fears straight away. Probably a Mate thing. He heard her or something. That bubble of jealousy pops up again, and I wish I could hear her as he does. That I could feel her. He takes the necklace and places it around her neck. ‘It’s a custom in my pack. We give one to our Mate as a gift. It’s a promise that I will always be there to defend, protect and adore you. You will carry me with you everywhere, and I will be with you always.’

The fang settles between her breasts, and she looks ready to cry.

‘You pulled out one of your fangs for me?’

‘It’s also poisonous,’ he adds.

That makes me feel exceptionally uneasy. I’m not too keen on having something that could kill her dangling around her neck.

‘Not to you. You’re immune from it because you’re my Mate. But if the need arises, you can use it to scratch or pierce your enemies’ skin, and it will paralyse them for an hour or so.’

‘What, because a lethal snake, a dream walker, shadow master and a wolf isn’t enough protection?’ Dorian laughs. ‘Never mind the fact that she’s a powerful earth witch?’

‘She can never be too protected,’ Archie shrugs.

Very true.

‘I love it, Archie. Thank you.’ She throws her arms around him and kisses him over and over.

He’s beaming.

Dorian hands out his next. I get an oak bookmark hand-carved with an incredible night sky design. Archie receives a pouch with an adjustable string so he can carry his clothes on his leg when he shifts. And Pix gets a hairclip.

She examines it, admiring the detail he’s added. And then she pulls out a hidden spike-looking thing. A tiny weapon hidden in the beauty.

‘You made her a hidden dagger in a hair clip?’ I ask, almost too amused at his overbearing protectiveness.

‘You just teased me because I gave her a poisonous fang!’ Archie scoffs indignantly.

‘It’s mainly a hair clip,’ Dorian shrugs, sitting back and enjoying another sip of his gift. ‘But if she gets in a tight spot, she can also jab it in someone’s eye.’

‘I love it, Dorian,’ she smiles, allowing him to offer yet another form of protection. She sees his need to control and keep her close, so she scoops up her silver curls and secures it all in the clip. She then swiftly pulls out that silver needle and rests it at Dorian’s throat.

He grins up at her, utterly brimming with pride.

‘See? A secret weapon,’ he says. ‘Much like you.’

She leans down to kiss him before sitting between his legs.

‘Your turn,’ Archie says, holding out his hands expectantly in my direction.

I have been dreading this. I’m utterly shit at gifts.

‘I made one gift for all of you,’ I reply, hating that I feel myself start to redden under their gaze. I nod at the rolled-up piece of parchment under the tree.

Archie pulls it out and opens it up.

I wait for the teasing. For the mocking.

He holds it up for Dorian and Pixie to see, and they both lean forward to get a better look.

I seriously dislike their furrowed brows. They hate it. It was a stupid, last-minute idea. Then they all look up at me.

‘Did you draw this?’ Pixie asks.

I nod and offer a shrug.

‘It’s shit, but I couldn’t think of anything else. So there you go. Merry Christmas.’

Pixie takes the parchment, walks to the wall, and presses it against it. Branches emerge from the thick bark and twist, knot and swirl around the image, framing it perfectly. She steps back and admires it. Tears are in her eyes when she turns back to face me.

‘I love it,’ she says. ‘It’s the one thing I always wanted.’

‘It’s just a picture.’

‘A picture of us,’ she replies, turning to look at the picture I created once more.

It’s of all four of us. I think I captured our faces quite well. Ashe is smiling sweetly. Archie has a troublesome grin. Dorian is a sultry kind of happy. And I’m looking at her. Content and proud.

‘It’s a picture of something I have never had and always wanted,’ she continues, her hands clasped together and resting over her heart. ‘A family of my own. Proof that I am loved. That I belong. That we all belong.’

They all look at me now. Sappy fucking lot.

‘I just drew a portrait,’ I reply. Damn, my blushing! I’m a living nightmare. Not a schoolboy.

She’s in my lap and hugging me in a second.

‘I love it.’

I hug her back as the two others admire the picture some more.

Perhaps I’m not as bad as I thought at this gifting shit.

She sits up and claps her hands together.

‘My turn!’

I’ve never seen her scurry across the floor so quickly. She gives Archie his. He’s bouncing on his knees like a kid. She gives Dorian his, which he holds as though it’s

the most fragile thing he's ever held.

They're two little parcels that fit in the palm of their hands. Then she turns to me and stands.

'Up!' she orders. I take her extended hand, and she pulls me to my feet before positioning me by the fire.

We stand facing one another as she looks up at me nervously.

The two others aren't opening their gifts yet but instead watching us.

'My gift is kinda, especially for you,' she says. 'I spoke to them about it, and they agreed.'

Archie and Dorian are watching with grins.

'What is it?'

Slowly, she kneels.

'Oh. Okay then.' I go to undo my flies. I'm good for her to suck my cock again if she likes.

But she slaps my hand away and tuts before pulling out my gift. It's the same size and shape as theirs.

I open it.

Sitting in the leaf wrapping is a ring made of deep gold wood. In the band is glowing amber, swirling like waves washing upon the shore.

I look from the ring to her. On one knee.

All I do is frown down at her. That's all I can think of to do.

Because... I'm confused.

She takes a deep and readying breath. 'I share a link with Dorian. Part of me lives in him, and it always will. He feels my emotions, and we're connected in a deeply spiritual way. I'm Archie's Mate. We can speak with our minds, and we'll need one another until the day one of us dies.' She takes the ring from my palm. 'In my coven, there is a way to share magics. To create an eternal connection with another. To belong to a person. A wiccan vow slightly differs from the one the king would have made us do. It's less a legality and more of a connection. You would be able to feel the earth a little like I do and tap into it a fraction. Not as much as me, but a little. There's also a way to remove the pain from the other if you want. It was supposed to help share the burden of childbirth,' she giggles. 'But that's not exactly a problem we need to worry about. So I wondered if maybe...'

I swallow dryly as she finds her words.

'Maybe, what?' I ask.

'Will you marry me?'

'Pixie... I...'

'I know the first time we were engaged, it wasn't ideal. I didn't want to marry you, and you didn't want to marry me. We were being forced to by the king and you had no intentions of going through with it. I had a crazy ex, and you were secretly planning to kill me or whatever.'



‘Pixie...’

‘But now all I can think about is being connected to all three of you in every way possible. So, although I love all three of you, I want you to be my husband.’ She rests the ring on my finger. ‘Will you marry me?’

Of all times, now is the moment I lose the ability to fucking speak. Now is the time I forget to breathe. To move. To tell my face that I’m not about to slaughter a threat.

She looks up at me, growing upset as I glare at her.

Silently. Like a psychopath.

‘You can say no. I just thought...’ She gets up, and I continue staring at her, frozen in time. ‘I’ll give you a blow job if you prefer. It was a stupid idea.’

She goes to take the ring back. I grip her wrist in a quick motion that startles her and hold it so tightly that it would have snapped if she were human.

‘I’m sorry,’ she whispers, the hurt in her voice making it tremble. ‘It was a terrible idea.’

‘If you take that ring back, Pixie, I will break your fucking hand.’

A strange and unsuitably violent statement to make to the woman who is asking you to be her husband, but that’s what comes out. And I mean every word. I will tear her arm off rather than allow her to rescind her offer. But she’s my Pixie through and through, and she smiles at my violent threat.

‘Put that ring on me right fucking now, Pixie. You’re my wife in every way but this anyway, so make it official. You’re not leaving this spot until you do.’

I ease up on my grip and her smile blossoms.

‘And I want the lot. I want to take your pain. To tap into your magic so I understand how you feel. You don’t have a choice now you’ve asked. I’m a “Give me everything I want, or I’ll take it anyway” kinda monster.’

And I know that she’s delighted that I’ve made that perfectly clear.

She places the ring on my finger and mutters some words in her witchy dialect. A deep purple light begins to glow between our palms and travels up our arms, shimmering in our veins. Dark lines spread around her eyes, and their blacks glow a vivid purple.

It reminds me of Athir. An unsettling thought, considering that the last time a powerful witch like this existed, he was captured and trapped by a coven so they could steal his magic. And he went mad and swore to destroy everyone.

But she lifts her gaze, and anything from Athir is gone. Sure, she’s still glowing and veiny, but she’s mine.

‘Do you accept me as your eternally bound wife?’

‘Always.’

She waits, her brow raised.

‘You need to ask her, Shaw,’ Archie adds.

‘Oh. Right. Do you accept me as your eternally bound husband?’

‘Always,’ she replies.

When our hands part, the glow fades. But the power lingers like pins and needles under my skin. Pix takes my hand and rests it on the wall of our home. She waits, looking at me expectantly.

Then I feel it. Warm and tingling. Like a force or movement under my skin.

I look at the bark, and tiny buds start to grow around my hand.

Now I understand why she loves her earth magic so much. I am envious if this is what she feels every time she connects to it, and this is just a fraction of what she feels.

‘How does it feel?’ Dorian asks.

‘Like life.’ I lean into her, my forehead resting against hers. Finally, I own a piece of her no one else can touch.

She is my wife.

Mine.

Dorian and Archie open their small gifts. They, too, have wedding bands.

‘We’re official side pieces,’ Archie says, showing me his. ‘Look. She carved a little wolf into mine. And a giant shadow dick into Dorian’s.’

‘I carved wings into his,’ she scoffs. ‘Maybe I should have done a dick.’

‘I’m good with wings, Poppet. Thanks,’ Dorian grunts back.

‘And on that note, I think it’s time to eat.’ Archie heads into the kitchen. Dorian

follows.

And I kiss my wife by the fire, standing beneath the picture of our family, with our Christmas tree glimmering with hacked-up caterpillars just off to the side.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:07 am*

8

Pixie

The food is fucking divine. And I eat until I'm fit to explode. The turkey. The vegetables. The wine and liquor. It's all perfection.

Holy shit... I never knew food could taste like this. We sit around our table and share stories, laughs and jokes. We drink, and they pull me onto their laps, taking their turn at having me in their arms. I sink into them all. Into their strong arms. Their broad chests. Their solid embraces.

And I am so fucking happy I could cry.

Archie tells stories that his pack used to tell on Christmas. Dorian does his best to manipulate his shadow to cast shapes on the wall to accompany the tales. And Shaw and I do our best at adding sound effects.

But when Archie tells the tale of a lost star that fell to earth on Christmas and finally found a family when she met a wolf, we're all absorbed in the likeness of our own trial to find our pack.

But we did.

And what a strange little pack we are.

The sun has set when we finish telling stories and singing songs. I peer out of the

window. The snow has reached the window now. I'm pretty sure we're snowed in.

I admit I have no issues with being trapped in our cottage. Just us and nothing to do and nowhere to go.

I pick up the plates and am ready to start tidying. But Shaw holds my hands in place and shakes his head.

'I think it's time for dessert.'

Archie lets out a low chuckle, and when I peer back at him, I see a look I know well.

'Shaw. What do you say we lay your wife down on the table and fuck her until she can't walk?' he asks.

'I think that's a fantastic idea, Archie. I think my wife would love that very much.'

I'm thrown onto the table, and they slowly stand around me. My insides swirl with excitement as they all look down at me.

They are my predators. I am their prey.

Their Pixie.

'You have a beautiful wife, Shaw,' Dorian admires.

'I certainly do,' he agrees. 'Tie her down.'

Dorian takes my wrists and secures them above my head to the legs of the table. Archie grips my ankles and pulls them down until my backside meets the edge of the wood and then secures them in place.

My heart rages in my chest, and my mouth becomes unbearably dry.

‘Look at you,’ Shaw sighs, looking me up and down. He grips my dress and tears it off me, leaving me naked and stretched out before them. ‘Yet again, you’re our little pixie, tied up and ready to be torn apart for our desires. But you will never beg for death again, my wonderful wife. This time, you will beg for more. And then you will beg for mercy.’

‘Trust us?’ Archie asks.

‘Completely,’ I reply, my voice already trembling.

Shaw reaches into my hair and pulls free the clip Dorian gave me. My hair falls free, and he removes the hidden needle. I watch its sharpened edge as it goes down to rest on my arm.

‘Another Christmas gift for you,’ he says. ‘If you want us to stop, say stop. Understood?’

I nod.

‘Count, Pixie. I want you to count.’

He cuts. Not deep and not for long, but just a little and enough to draw a few beads of blood.

Images flash behind my eyes as they always do. He grips my cheek and forces me to look at him.

‘Look at me and count.’

‘O-one,’ I manage.

He cuts again. Just the same as before. Not deep. More a scratch.

‘Two.’

Dorian’s mouth seals around my clit as Shaw cuts again.

‘Three,’ I whisper. Tears build in my eyes as Shaw caresses my cheek and looks deep into my eyes.

His eyes shimmer with green specks, and the pain I feel lessens.

He’s invoked the marriage union to claim half the pain.

Dorian’s tongue swirls between my legs, and I writhe against him.

Cut.

‘Four.’

Archie’s palm caresses my breasts. His touch is firm and demanding as he pinches and rolls my nipples in his fingers.

Cut.

I steady my breathing, allowing the pleasure of Dorian’s tongue and Archie’s touch to distract me from the flashbacks. And the intense, unyielding gaze Shaw offers as he cuts me tells me one thing.

I am not alone. And I will never be alone again.



‘Five.’

Dorian eases in two fingers and slowly fucks me as his mouth works me.

I shudder as the pleasure builds and mixes with the pain I share with Shaw.

‘Keep your eyes on me,’ Shaw whispers.

Cut.

‘Six.’

Archie’s fingernails glide down my abdomen, leaving a trail of goosebumps in their wake, before leaning down and taking my nipple into his mouth.

Cut.

‘Seven.’

‘Good girl.’

Cut.

Dorian adds another finger and sucks harder.

‘Eight,’ I moan, my body trembling with need and heat.

Cut.

I can’t form words as I look desperately into Shaws eyes, seeking out his comfort.  
His assurance.

He nods.

‘Nine!’ I cry out, and as I cum, he cuts again.

I pant, letting the pleasure wash through me.

‘Ten,’ Shaw completes, smiling as he watches me ride out my orgasm. ‘A few months of that should help the flashbacks, hmm?’

I start to cry, overwhelmed by everything. I know he didn’t want to do that. But he did because I asked him to.

I loved putting my trust in him. My safety. My consent.

It’s a huge relief.

He kisses me and stands, watching as the shallow cuts already begin to heal.

Dorian leans over me and eases his cock into me. I blink up at him, adjusting to him as he enters me up to his hilt.

His front meets mine.

‘Eyes on me, Poppet. Ready?’

I nod, and he lowers himself on top of me, resting a huge amount of his weight on my frame. His hands grip the table's edge above my head so hard the wood creaks.

Images of him standing over me, placing those crushing stones on my body, flicker behind my eyes.

‘I love you,’ he whispers in a firm promise as he starts to move slowly. ‘I love you, Poppet. Trust me. Let me show you that you have nothing to fear from me. I will never hurt you again.’

He replaces those flashbacks. Him, now. Not him, then. His eyes are filled with life and love. Passion and possession. Compared to the eyes I see when he’s placing those stones on me, which are full of hatred and disgust.

No, I tell myself. Not me. He didn’t put those stones on me but on Dhalia.

It was her death I relived. He did those things to her . Not me.

I focus on his eyes, and I return entirely.

To our home. To my Shadow Master.

To his weight on me as he fucks me on our table.

He lifts himself a little so I can fully fill my lungs. As I do, I continue to cry, a strange sense of relief and despair swelling inside me and bursting out through all the cracks I just can’t fix.

‘Again?’ he asks.

I can’t speak, so I nod, and he gently lowers himself back down onto me and fucks me deeply. The table groans below us, and the whole house shifts as I spill out the raw emotions through gasping sobs.

Dorian pushes himself up and stands, keeping himself buried inside me and continuing his hard thrusts, slamming into me relentlessly.

Archie slowly walks up to my head and looks down at me. He removes his belt and lets it dangle at his side.

‘Lift your head, Pix.’

I do, and he slides the belt underneath. I peer up at him, and just like the two others, he never breaks eye contact with me. Not even as he loops his belt around my neck.

‘I love you,’ he says. ‘Eyes on me.’

Again, I nod. And he tightens the belt.

I’m swinging. Hanging at the end of a rope. It creaks above me as I go wide, my feet dangling meters above the ground.

And when I swing back, I land in Archie’s waiting arms. The rope loose around my neck. I blink, and I’m back home. His forehead is on mine. His eyes bore into mine. His breath mingled with mine.

The belt is loose. I don’t think it stayed tight for even a second.

‘I’m right here,’ he says. ‘You’re not Sinthia. That was her death. Not yours.’

Dorian is still fucking me, and Shaw is holding my hand.

‘Not the belt,’ I manage, my voice hoarse and desperate. ‘Archie, I can’t.’

It’s off before I’ve even finished saying his name and his lips replace the feel of leather. He kisses every part of my throat it touched.

Shaw starts to untie my hands.

‘Don’t!’ I look up at him. ‘Don’t stop. Just... no belt.’

‘His hand?’ Shaw asks. ‘Could you manage his hand?’

I nod, and Shaw rests Archie’s fingers at my throat.

Gently, he clenches. Flickers of the flashbacks start, but Archie kisses my mouth, and I return. He loosens his grip briefly before tightening it again.

Three times he does this before he lets go entirely and lands me with a possessive and desperate kiss. The kind of kiss shared between two bound souls who have been parted for too long.

He lets out a little whine like a sad puppy, clearly upset that I struggled.

‘I’m sorry,’ I cry. ‘I won’t ask you to do it again.’

His fingers wrap around my throat.

‘You need this. I’ll do it. No matter how much I hate to see you suffer.’ He smiles a little. ‘I’ll be gentle. Ish. Open your mouth, Pix.’

My lips are trembling as they part. He holds me in place as he releases his erection and fills my mouth.

He just rests his hands on me. He doesn’t squeeze again and I grow accustomed to the feel of his fist.

I can take this time to enjoy my men.

Archie looks down between my legs.

‘Your wife has a hole in need of filling, Shaw. Dorian has her pussy. I have her mouth. But her poor little arse is ever so empty. You can’t deprive her, can you? Not at Christmas.’

‘No. I can’t.’

Shaw stands beside Dorian and they work together to both penetrate me. Shaw in one hole. Dorian in my other.

I grunt as I adjust around them, my moans being strangled and stolen as Archie fucks my mouth.

Dorian reaches over and grabs something.

He hands one to Archie. One to Shaw. And keeps one for himself.

I watch as he admires the peeled chestnut between his fingers. And with a dark look at me, he pulls out of my pussy, and pushes it... inside !

I lie there stunned, eyes wide and utterly shocked that the shadow master just put a fucking chestnut inside my vagina.

And when Shaw takes his and slowly eases it inside, too, I go to ask what the actual fuck they think they’re doing?!

But Archie holds me in place, silencing me with cock, and leans over.

Yep. I end up with three chestnuts up there. They’re all smiling, and part of me knows that this is something they spoke about beforehand.

Dorian resumes fucking me. They all do. And when Dorian climaxes, he grunts and

growls his release. When he pulls out, he comes to my head and takes possession of my mouth.

‘Clean me up, Poppet.’

Archie takes Dorian’s place between my legs, slamming into me hard as he plays mercilessly with my clit. Shaw is still in my arse, and I’m climaxing hard in a matter of minutes.

And so is Archie, pumping himself to completion with deep and long thrusts.

When he slows, Shaw removes himself and empties a jug of water over his cock, cleaning himself off. Archie comes to me to be cleaned, and Shaw takes his place between my legs.

He runs his fingers up my core and slides them, warm and dripping, into my mouth. I lap it up hungrily before returning to Archie with my tongue, licking him slowly up and down.

Shaw eases into me. Cum seeps out around him, and he moans in pleasure at the feel of it.

‘So fucking full already, wife. Dripping two other men’s cum as I fuck you. Perfection.’

‘You really enjoy calling me your wife, don’t you?’ I laugh.

‘Amongst other things.’

He starts to fuck me, his hands gripping my thighs as he ruts into me.

‘My whore.’

Thrust.

‘My Pixie.’

Thrust.

‘My goddess.’

Thrust.

‘My witch.’

Thrust.

‘My. Fucking. Wife.’

He goes hard, making me pull against the restraints as he screws me.

The door to the cottage is suddenly thrown open. We all turn, and to my horror, I watch five men storm inside.

The one up front bellows loudly. ‘We demand the earth witch! Give her to us and...’  
He looks at us all in turn. ‘What the...’

I don’t know who is more startled. Us, at the sight of actual people on our island. Or them, bursting in to see me, naked, tied up and being well and truly fucked on one end and sucking cum and arousal of two cocks at my other.

Either way, we’re all silent as we stare at each other.



And to make it even more ridiculous, we're all still in matching red hats.

'Shaw. Finish with Pix.' Archie stands tall and faces the intruders, all in raggedy green robes, identifying them as members of an earth coven.

They have no magic. Not now I'm the earth goddess.

So they're armed with swords and daggers instead. They're even dressed in steel armour.

Dorian steps away from me and faces them, too.

Both are utterly naked, and their opponents are not only armed but protected by metal.

And I know without a doubt.

These witches don't stand a chance.

All hell breaks out. Swords fly. Bodies slam into one another. Bones break. And my cottage gets trashed as Dorian and Archie hurl these idiots around like they're ragdolls.

'Untie me!' I demand, pulling at my bindings.

'No fucking chance,' Shaw laughs. 'I'm not finished yet, and neither are you.'

He continues fucking me.

I watch on as Archie shifts only his claws and, with a vicious swipe, slices the man's throat. Blood sprays absolutely everywhere. Clearly, the attacking earth witch's heart

was racing as the spray even reaches me. Warm droplets land on my stretched-out torso, and I glare at Archie.

‘Do you fucking mind?!’

‘Sorry, my love,’ he chuckles, clearly not sorry at all as he resumes slashing at the dying man, not stopping until he lands in a heap, cut to ribbons. And then he moves on to the next.

Dorian holds his own form of elegance, especially when he slams his fist into one man's chest and wriggles his fingers as it emerges through the other side. Dorian steps back and watches as the man looks down at the gaping hole in his chest, blinks at it, and then looks back at Dorian with a quizzical brow.

Thud.

He falls down. And stays down.

‘Hey!’ Shaw gives me a sharp little slap, returning my attention to him. He grips my face, refusing to let me see anything but him. ‘You watch me when I’m fucking you, Pixie.’

I hear the death and carnage that invades our home, and I realise that the guys are enjoying themselves immensely. That perhaps their years slaughtering witches may have left them with a lust for it, and that being here with me may have been missing the violence that they have become accustomed to.

More grunts and yells of pain. The unmistakable sound of tearing flesh and squelching of blood.

Shaw runs his fingers up my stomach, smearing the droplets of blood left there,

making a morbid finger painting on my flesh.

There's such a darkness in his eyes as he does. As he smears a dead man's blood on me and fucks me to a chorus of screams and slaughter.

And I relish in that darkness. I find another slice of the peace they bring. More than the cottage. The comfort. The sex.

But a home for the darkest part of me.

The part that climaxes as I watch him draw on my skin in blood and hear my two other men devastate those who came to claim me for their own.

He watches me scream in pleasure, and such excitement and hunger fills his gaze.

He cums, grunting and spilling into me.

He slows and turns to look at the small battle coming to a gory end. He moves my head, making me look, too.

Dorian crushes the head of the last man standing.

And under Archie's foot is the last man left alive, struggling to breathe as Archie presses his foot down on his neck.

His fate will be the worst because the only reason they would keep him alive is for information.

And my men don't ask their questions gently.

'You cum in her yet?' Archie asks, still grinning even as blood drips from him and

the witch under his foot struggles to earn his freedom.

‘Yes.’

Shaw breaks my bindings and eases me up. On my feet, he kicks my legs apart and rests his hand between them.

‘I’ll be needing those chestnuts back now, wife.’

‘W-what?’

I sway and he steadies me.

‘We want those chestnuts we put in your cunt back. Now, do as you’re told. Push.’

I push and feel cum seep down my thighs. After a few tries, the first chestnut comes out. He looks at it and hands it to Dorian.

‘This one is yours.’

Dorian takes it. There’s a D scored into it. He presses it to my lips.

‘Eat,’ he orders.

‘Excuse me?’

‘Eat it. Now.’

His command is firm and without compromise.

My lips part, and I do as commanded.

I eat it.

Shaw flicks my clit, pulling me out of the shocked state I find myself in.

‘Next one, please.’ He nods to his waiting hand.

The second one comes out. He looks at it and hands it to Archie. Dorian takes his place, holding down the witch so he can claim it. Archie holds it to my lips, and I don’t wait to be asked.

I eat it.

The third one falls into Shaw’s waiting hand, and he offers it to me.

‘That’s a very good girl,’ he whispers when I do what I know he wants me to do.

He kisses my forehead and faces the last remaining witch.

‘Now then. I have some questions for you,’ he says, menace dripping from every word.

‘F-fuck you!’ the witch spits back, still struggling under Dorian’s foot.

‘Take him to the woodshed, Dorian. I don’t want to spill any more blood here.’

‘Any more?’ I look around with a raised brow. There are body parts, blood and entrails covering the walls, floors and even the ceiling! ‘You’ve ruined the cottage,’ I complain. ‘Look at the mess!’

‘We’ll sort it, Poppet,’ Dorian grunts, hauling the witch to his feet and gripping him by the back of his neck. ‘It will be good as new in no time.’

He leaves through the still-open and splintered door. Peering out, I see two more dead outside with bloody foam and bile spilling from their mouths.

My familiar slithers in past Dorian.

‘She only got two,’ he says. ‘You losing your touch, little snake?’

‘She left the rest for you,’ I correct him, feeling the indignity of the accusation from her. ‘Her Christmas gift to you.’

‘Such a generous little thing you are.’ Archie reaches down, and she slithers up his arm. ‘Good snakey. And we didn’t get you anything for Christmas.’ He looks at me and smirks. ‘But we may very well have given your mistress something a little extra. We’ll get started on the witch outside.’

He leaves, taking Poppy with him, and I look at Shaw pulling on his coat.

‘I feel like that chestnut thing had a purpose. Was it Archie’s idea?’ I ask.

‘Of course it was Archie’s idea.’ He sweeps my hair from my face. ‘It’s a pack thing he wanted to do.’

‘And when do you eat a chestnut covered in cum?’

He simply laughs.

‘What was the purpose, Shaw?’

He rests his hand on my stomach, where blood is slowly drying.

‘It’s an offering. A promise.’

‘Of what?’ I ask.

‘That when the time is right, you’ll have our child.’

I step back and laugh nervously. ‘I can’t. Technically, you and Dorian aren’t even human, and Archie can only mate with another wolf.’

‘Hence the chestnuts. Who knows if it will work, Pixie. But it’s fun to try, huh?’

‘Do I get a say in this?’ I argue.

Dorian returns.

‘He’s ready for you. I’ll stay with her.’

‘Of course, you will,’ Shaw laughs.

‘We’re not done here!’ I snap.

He leaves, patting Dorian on the shoulder as he passes.

‘You can start cleaning up as I torture this one for information. A very merry Christmas indeed.’

Dorian turns to look at me as I fold my arms and glare.

‘Don’t look at me like that. It was Archie’s idea. I just wanted to see you eat them. It was very fucking sexy.’ He shrugs. ‘It won’t work, Poppet. Don’t worry.’

‘It better not. Or you’ll find yourselves single dads with a witch-shaped hole in our front door.’

‘Hmm. We’ll see. Are you going to help me clean this up?’

He sees my frown.

‘Fair enough. I guess I’ll get to it by myself.’



## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:07 am*

9

Pixie

The blood and guts are cleared by the time Shaw and Archie return. I'm sat on the same table they had me tied down on, in Dorian's shirt, eating some leftovers that weren't destroyed or made bloody by the fight.

I used my earth magic to bury most of the mess and enjoyed watching Dorian scrub away the rest. It's the least he can do after that chestnut trick.

'Well?' I ask. 'Why were they here?'

Shaw and Archie both share a look and don't say anything for a moment.

'If we're going back to the whole thing of keeping me in the dark, I promise none of you will enjoy the outcome.'

'Ahhh. I've missed being threatened by you,' Archie teases. He comes over and taps me on my nose.

It's then I see the sheer amount of blood coating his skin. Fresh and dripping.

Onto my clean fucking floors.

I look at the little splats he's left behind, and with a cheeky grin, he covers them with his foot as if I won't notice.

I look at my husband instead, hoping to get some answers.

‘They were from an earth coven.’ He starts washing the blood off in the sink as the pit in my stomach doubles. ‘We found a ship anchored east of the island with five more witches onboard. All except one was Earth. There was a water witch with them.’

That pit becomes a knot.

‘We killed them all. The water witch was young and inexperienced, so it wasn’t a challenge.’

‘You killed them all?’ I repeat. ‘Was that entirely necessary?’

‘They had chains. Torture devices. All sorts of rudimentary magic binding methods. And they were here for you, Pixie. Not us.’ Shaw glares at me, daring me to argue with the need to slaughter them. I stay silent. ‘They wouldn’t have got to you. Never mind manage to contain you. You’re far too powerful for what they had planned, but still. We saw the shackles and gags. We saw the knives and saws. And we knew what they had planned, so we killed them for their stupidity.’

He abandons the water and starts to dry his hands.

‘Oh,’ I reply.

‘Yeah. Oh.’

‘How did they find us?’

‘The witch said they had some kind of amulet that located you on an ancient map.’

‘Amulet? What amulet?’

He glances at Archie.

‘Pix,’ Archie says, flicking off a finger from a turkey leg before he takes a bite. ‘We have some bad news.’

‘Of course you do.’

‘A boat had left the ship before we got there. According to those we asked very politely and with no violence whatsoever-’ Shaw scoffs at that. ‘Three others had left so they could report your location.’

‘To who? Shaw killed everyone who might want me dead.’

‘A queen from the West.’

‘A queen? What queen?’

‘One who we do not want finding you. She commissioned the search. She wants you. And she’s someone who should never get anywhere near you.’

‘Why? I can handle a human queen.’

Now, they all look at Dorian.

‘What?’ he asks. ‘Why are you looking at me like that?’

Shaw clears his throat and takes a step closer to Dorian. The way he approaches, like he’s preparing to tame a wild beast, has the pit in my stomach turning into a swarm of wasps.

‘It’s Lilith, Dorian. She’s the queen in the west.’

The house shudders, and Dorian’s eyes darken. I can taste the hatred suddenly filling the air.

‘Lilith is dead,’ Dorian insists. ‘She was murdered. Slaughtered.’

Shaw holds out his hand. Hanging in his grip is an emerald green pendant. It glows.

‘That’s impossible. It’s fucking impossible!’

He charges forward and snatches the charm, looking at it with an unreadable expression. There’s anger there, for sure. But also pain. Grief, too, I think.

‘We need to know your allegiance, Dorian. Right now,’ Shaw says firmly.

The two stare at one another.

‘How can you even ask me that?’

‘Because Lilith is after Ashe. And you know as well as I do that she won’t give up. And she won’t be gentle when she does get her.’

‘She won’t get her.’

‘The ships are reporting back to Lilith and her armies as we speak. They have a days advantage on us.’

Dorian crushes the pendant, letting it fall to the floor as dust.

‘We have to leave.’ Dorian takes a shuddering breath. ‘We have to leave right now.’

‘Agreed,’ Shaw says sadly. ‘It was nice whilst it lasted, but we were foolish to think they would stop looking for her.’

‘I’m sorry,’ I say. ‘But who the fuck is Lilith?’

They all stare at Dorian.

‘I’m not leaving our home without a damn good reason why.’

Dorian clears his throat and faces me. ‘Lilith is a shadow master. Like me, but more powerful. Unbound by any curses, she relishes the stealing of souls. She masterfully commands them. A way in which I never could. I was always fighting the darkness of the shadows. They often controlled me. Lilith does not have that problem. She controls them, and they worship her. They are souls sacrificed to her willingly, so they hold no hatred for her. Only love and blind obedience.’

Another shadow master? I knew they existed long ago but assumed he was the last.

‘And why would she want me?’

‘You’re a powerful earth goddess, Poppet. Half the world wants you.’

‘Do you think she wants to trap me like they did Athir?’ I ask. ‘And steal my magic?’

It’s something I have thought about often. I have no idea how they trapped the witch gods. But they did. They could do it again. Especially now they know I exist.

‘We would never let that happen,’ Dorian promises me. ‘We need to pack and get going.’

He leaves the room, charging upstairs to do precisely that.

I look at Archie and Shaw.

‘Now tell me who she really is,’ I say. ‘To him. And why would you question his loyalty?’

Shaw walks towards me. His palm rests on my cheek.

‘Pixie. She’s his wife.’

All the air leaves my lungs.

‘Like... forced to marry kinda wife?’ I ask.

‘No. Like loved and adored. Married. And then watched as she was killed, kinda wife. Except now she’s not dead. She’s very much alive. It’s possible she returned after Hel’s death.’

Great. I save the world and bring my lover’s wife back from the dead.

‘She wants me?’

He nods, brushing the hair from my face.

‘We can’t be sure what she wants with you, but I know it won’t be good. I’m sorry. But we have to go.’

‘This is our home. I won’t run.’

‘Home isn’t a place, Pixie,’ he says. ‘You should know that by now. It’s this.’ He places his hand over my heart and my hand over his. ‘It’s us. You. Me. Dorian and Archie. This place is just shelter. It’s not home. We are home. And if we stay here,

Lilith will come and take you. Take Dorian. And we will no longer be home. Do you understand me?’

I swallow the urge to cry, and I nod.

‘We leave. Now.’

‘Can’t you just dream walk her or something? Make her sleep and never wake up like you did the others?’

‘She’s too powerful. But when we’re safe, I’ll walk and find out as much as possible. But right now, we need to pack. We need to run.’

He waits for me to argue. I don’t, so he joins Dorian in packing. I look at Archie, who is tearing into a turkey leg and watching me closely.

‘Are we ever going to be able to stop running and fighting?’ I ask.

‘I haven’t yet, Pix,’ he sighs.

‘That chestnut thing was sly, Archie. And gross.’

‘It’s not a guarantee of anything,’ he shrugs. ‘But it would be nice to hear the padding of little paws someday. A mini you would be super adorable.’

‘Oh yeah.’ I look at him, covered in blood and still wearing that stupid hat. ‘Because what child wouldn’t want to grow up in a house where severed limbs and organs decorate their Christmas tree?’ I pick out a chunk of intestine and toss it at him over my shoulder. ‘Merry bloody Christmas.’ I pull down the picture Shaw drew and roll it up before heading up to help the others pack.

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*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:07 am*

I watch my little witch sit at the very front of the ship, her nose stuck in a book as we charge through the waves. She's hardly been able to look at me since we boarded and left the island.

She blames me. I know she does. We gave her a home. Promised to keep her safe. And we failed to deliver on that promise.

I failed.

Lilith .

I loved her entirely once. I worshipped her. Protected her. She devoured me in every way a woman can. All the best ways.

And then she died.

And Ashe came into my life. My heart. And I love her just as fiercely.

I don't know what Lilith wants with her. But it won't be good.

I swore to protect Lilith for the rest of my life. A bond made in marriage.

But I will tear that bond to shreds if she dares lay a finger on my Poppet Doll.

No matter the cost.

Poppet looks back at me, knowing I am watching her. The snow is still falling. It



coats the ship's deck and shrouds us in deep grey clouds. It settles beautifully on her cloak and disappears entirely in her silver hair. I love her completely. I will do anything to keep her safe. To keep her mine.

If I had to, I would kill her and claim her soul if the alternative was to lose her forever.

She smiles at me. A warm and forgiving smile. And she shuffles over a little, inviting me to join her. I do. I always will. She settles into my arms with a sigh, and I hold her close.

‘I had a wonderful Christmas with you all,’ she says. ‘Those months on the island were the best of my life.’

‘Mine too.’

‘We’ll get it again,’ she assures me, saying the words with utter conviction. ‘If we have to fight for a little bit of peace, then we will.’ She looks up at me with a soft smile. ‘Together. Right?’

‘Of course.’ I kiss her lips. They’re cold from the chill in the air, but her breath is warm and full of life. ‘Together. Always.’

And I pray that this time, I’m not lying.

‘Merry Christmas, Dorian.’

‘Merry Christmas, my wonderful and wild witch. And here’s to the many more yet to come.’

The end.

For now.