



The Orc Who Hated Christmas (An MM Monster Christmas #1)

Author: *Gigi Rivers*

Category: LGBT+

Description: A grumpy orc who hates Christmas. A Christmas-obsessed pixie. Can these opposites find love together?

Graal is an orc who hates Christmas. Every year, he spends the day alone in his crappy rented room, haunted by memories of a family who never loved him. He just wishes Christmas and everyone who celebrates it would leave him alone.

Cas is a pixie who loves Christmas. He dresses up in sparkly outfits, calls himself the Christmas pixie, and spreads holiday cheer and pixie dust in the bakery where he works. But this year, his partner cheated on him and then left him. Still, Cas won't let a broken heart ruin his favourite time of the year.

When Graal steps into Cas's bakery, Cas is determined that the grumpy orc will enjoy the holiday. Graal is reluctant, but it's hard to resist the pixie's charms. As Cas shows Graal the magic of the season, something lingers in the air between them. And it isn't just pixie dust.

But can a pretty Christmas pixie really love a grumpy orc? And can Cas open his heart again so soon after being betrayed? Or will Graal celebrate another Christmas alone?

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CHAPTER 1

“ I ’m the Christmas pixie.” Casimir lifted his arms and flew into the air, wings fluttering as shimmering pixie dust rained down around him.

Cas’s brother Jack looked away from the balls of dough he rolled to glance at Cas. “I thought it was elves who were all about Christmas.”

“Fuck elves!” Cas raised his chin. “Christmas is mine!”

Cas stood in the bakery’s back area with several of his siblings. They laughed as Cas ran his fingers along one of the silver bauble earrings that hung from his earlobe.

I look magnificent. I look festive. And if I keep smiling and sparkling, no one will know that my heart is fractured and bleeding inside my chest.

“You’re so shiny, Cas,” Trent said.

Lacy laughed as she removed star-shaped cookies from a baking tray. “Cas? I can’t see Cas anywhere. All I see is a garish Christmas tree.”

“Garish!” Cas bristled. “How fucking dare you?”

More laughter and giggles filled the back room of the bakery. Cas might be an adopted pixie in a family of hearth and kitchen witches, but they’d always loved and accepted him.

Today, Cas dressed from head to toe entirely in silver. The colour matched his translucent blue wings and white hair with streaks of pale blue. His top and trousers had been sewn together from scraps of a material that had been magicked to sparkle. He'd gotten the material on sale, as they'd been offcuts.

He'd painted his eyelids, lips, and nails in silver. Small baubles hung from a white sash draped around his slender waist.

"I'll have you know I spent quite a bit of time making this outfit." Of course, having been recently dumped by the incubus he'd loved for three years meant Cas suddenly had a lot more free time.

But that was fine. He'd just embrace the joy of Christmas to distract himself from the festering wounds of his heart. He'd throw himself into the frivolity, shine, and prettiness of the season. He needed it more this year than he usually did.

"Is it even the Christmas season yet?" Jack asked with a quirk of his lips.

"Bah!" Cas waved a hand. "It is the first of the month. The Christmas season has officially begun."

"I agree with Cas," Lacy said. "We are selling Christmas baked goods. The Christmas markets open today. The season has begun!"

Cas flapped his wings and nodded. "And just wait until you see my other outfits!"

"I love all your looks." Lacy placed the last of the cookies in a tray. "Even if you blind my eyes with how bright you are."

Cas reached out and snagged one of Lacy's cookies, taking a bite of the buttery sweet treat with a hint of cinnamon. "Mmmm. Perfect." He licked the sugary crumbs from

his lips.

“Stop eating the product, Cas,” Grady scolded as he kneaded dough.

“I’m just testing for quality.” Cas took a second bite. “We wouldn’t want to serve subpar cookies to our customers, would we? Not at Christmas! That would be pure evil, Grady! And we’re not an evil bakery, are we?” He batted his eyelashes.

Grady gave him a look. But Cas couldn’t be fooled. He could see the amusement lurking in his big brother’s serious grey eyes.

“No! We are the Magic Bakery!” Cas proclaimed. “And we will bring joy and spread Christmas cheer to all our patrons.” He popped the last of the cookie into his mouth and smiled.

“You’re so frivolous and shallow. Why don’t you ever take anything seriously, Casimir?” The memory of Xavier’s words smashed into Cas like an ice-pick to the sternum.

The cookie soured in his mouth. But he kept the smile frozen on his face as he swallowed.

I’m going to enjoy Christmas if it fucking kills me. I’m not going to let Xavier cheating on me and dumping me a week ago ruin my favourite time of year. I won’t!

“And what does Xavier think of your pretty outfit?” Lacy asked as if Cas’s thoughts had somehow compelled Lacy to ask about the incubus.

Cas dropped his gaze. He fingered the sash around his waist. “We ended things.”

“Oh.” Lacy glanced at her brothers. “Oh. I’m sorry. I didn’t know.”

Cas could feel his siblings' stares.

Cas shrugged and laughed. "It was a mutual decision." The lie rolled off his lips.

He'd begged Xavi. He'd pleaded. "Are you really just going to throw us, throw me away after three wonderful years together?" Cas's pathetic voice still rang in his ears. Tears had streamed down his face.

Xavi had stood naked in front of Cas. The dryad Xavi had just fucked got dressed behind him, casting Cas guilty glances. The memory of their groans and moans and their bodies slapping together still kept Cas awake at night.

"Surely we can work this out?" Cas had asked even whilst the scent of Xavi fucking someone else lingered in the air.

Fuck, I'm pathetic. Desperate and pathetic.

"There were no hard feelings or anything like that." Cas smiled. "Our relationship had just run its natural course. You know how it is."

Lacy didn't, of course. She was nineteen, and her longest relationship had been less than a month.

Lacy studied him. They all studied him.

Cas rolled his eyes. "You're all being so dramatic, which is my job! He really was just too serious and dull for me." Cas picked up another cookie and took a bite.

This time, Grady didn't say a word.

The bell tinkled. A customer came into the bakery.

Thank fucking Christmas carols!

“Well, this Christmas pixie needs to go spread some holiday cheer.” Cas flew to the counter in the front of the bakery. He smiled at the young man approaching.

“Merry Christmas! Welcome to the Magic Bakery. I’m the Christmas pixie, and I’ll be serving you today.” His cheeks ached as his smile stretched. “What can I get for you?”

“Wow! You look incredible!” The man gushed at the sight of Cas.

Cas preened, letting the compliment brighten his mood. He would not let Xavi casting him aside and cheating on him ruin the season.

For a brief second, an image of the dryad on his back, legs spread, Xavi ploughing into him, flashed before his mind. “Xavi,” the dryad had cried out.

But Cas’s face didn’t betray him. He nodded and grinned as the customer continued to compliment him.

“You’re just not who I want, Casimir,” Xavi had said as he cupped Cas’s tear-stained cheek. “I’m sorry. But that’s the truth.”

Cas swallowed and forced his smile wider.

He would be the brightest, most fucking festive Christmas pixie the world had ever seen. He would be full of holiday fucking cheer if it fucking killed him.

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CHAPTER 2

G raal trudged through the snow. Thick fat flakes fell onto his shoulders, hair, and face. He huffed, warm breath clouding the air before him.

Fucking snow. Fucking darkness. Fucking winter.

He just wanted to be home and out of this bloody never-ending cold. His arms and legs ached from hauling rocks all day. Stone dust clung to his skin and clothes. Graal was done. He just wanted to wash, eat, and be in his apartment.

Not that his apartment was warm or comfortable, just a dank and crappy rented room. But it was better than being outside in this snow and darkness. Of course, he didn't notice the lack of daylight in the room he rented. He didn't have a fucking window.

Graal plodded along the streets to the Magic Bakery. He shoved the door open. A wave of warmth washed over him accompanied by the scent of freshly baked bread and warm sugar. Graal took in the Christmas tree, shiny baubles, garlands, and all the other festive decorations around the room.

Shit. Christmas. Was it Christmas already ?

Graal thought for a second. December first. He supposed that meant Christmas. Graal's lip curled. All the frivolity, nonsense, and unnecessary cheer just annoyed him. This was the coldest, darkest, and most unpleasant time of the year. What was there to celebrate?

Several customers sat at tables, drinking hot chocolate, tea, or coffee and eating festive little treats. Graal never ate in here. Graal, so big and hulking, had never felt comfortable in such a cosy, pretty space.

He got in line. One customer stood in front of him. Graal glanced around the bakery. One of the customers ate a cookie shaped like a star with little swirls of white icing. Graal's nose wrinkled. What was the point of spending so much time decorating cookies that would be eaten and gone in mere seconds? Frivolous festive bullshit. That was all it was.

Today, the pixie served alone at the counter. Graal thought he'd heard the others call the pixie Cas.

"Do you like my outfit? I'm the Christmas pixie," Cas said with a flutter of his translucent wings.

Graal rolled his eyes. What was this bloody obsession with Christmas?

Fuck Christmas. It has never done me a spit of good.

"Your clothes are so beautiful," the customer said, leaning close. "You are such a lovely Christmas pixie."

Cas fluttered his eyelashes and smiled. "Thank you. You're so kind!"

Was the customer going to order? Or would he stay there holding up the line? Graal just wanted to get some food so he could go home and fill his belly. Was it too much to ask that the servers actually serve instead of seeking compliments?

Graal looked at the pixie. His wings fluttered as he spoke. His long white and pale-blue hair had been woven into an elaborate array of twisted strands interspersed with

ribbons of silver. His pixie aura shone around him.

Silvery makeup accentuated the delicate features of his pale face. His silver outfit showed off his slender frame. His tunic hung open halfway down his hairless, lithe chest, which gave Graal a glimpse of the shiny blue patterns that marked Cas's skin.

The first time Graal had seen those types of markings on a pixie, he'd thought them magic tattoos. But no, pixies were just born with decorative marks.

Graal looked away. Of course this pretty pixie loved Christmas. It suited him. Frivolous and shiny.

Christmas wasn't meant for orcs. Graal was technically only a half-orc, but he was still thuggish, massive, and ugly. No one made pretty clothes or sparkling accessories for orcs. They'd never suit someone like him.

Graal sneered. No. Christmas didn't belong to monsters like him.

Cas leaned forward and said something too low for Graal to hear. The customer laughed, and sparkly dust floated in the air around the pixie.

He even makes the world sparkle and glow.

Graal crossed his arms over his chest as his annoyance continued to build. Several of the other bakers lingered out back. Why couldn't one of them come and serve him, since this Christmas pixie seemed keener on chatting than serving?

Finally, the customer finished fawning over the pixie, took his package of baked goods, and left.

"Merry Christmas." Cas smiled at Graal. "I'm the Christmas pixie, as you can tell."

He waved a hand over himself.

Graal approached the counter. He glanced at the pixie. Then looked away. The pixie was blindingly beautiful, especially up close. Graal hunched his shoulders. Every time the pixie served him, it just reminded Graal of his own grotesque appearance.

“What can I get you today?” Cas asked. “We have many Christmas treats.”

“Four loaves of brick bread,” Graal grumbled.

Miner’s bread, known commonly as brick bread, was thick, tough, dense, filling, and brick-like. Hence the name.

It would keep you going, keep you full, and last for a week before going off. Although, he usually got through four loaves in a day or two. It wasn’t the easiest to chew, especially the second day after buying them. But it was edible.

It was also cheap. Nothing frivolous or fancy for Graal. He just needed to fill his belly so he could work tomorrow. And the day after. And the day after that. And so on until he dropped dead.

Cas grabbed the loaves and wrapped them. “Maybe you want to try the sugar cookies as well. I iced them to look like Christmas baubles. I spent all morning on them.” He gestured to the delicate things. “They’re delicious. Since I made them, I know.” He laughed, a light melodic sound.

Graal shook his head. “Just brick bread.” Graal, ugly hulking brute that he was, would look ridiculous eating something so dainty.

“What about these?” Cas pointed behind the counter, perfect white teeth flashing. “Jam-filled cookies. They are scrumptious! Jasper and Leo made those. And we also

have some nice cranberry tarts,” Cas prattled on. “And this is?—”

“Brick bread. Four loaves,” Graal interrupted.

Cas froze. His smile disappeared in an instant.

“Of course.” Cas’s throat bobbed, and he placed the loaves on the counter. “Sorry.” His wings drooped, and he landed on the floor. “I just like Christmas. I get carried away.” He gave a weak laugh. “I didn’t mean to push. ”

Guilt gnawed at Graal’s gut as he counted out his coins for the loaves and placed them on the counter. He hadn’t meant to make the pixie feel bad. Graal just didn’t want all that other fancy, frivolous stuff. That sort of stuff wasn’t for orcs like him. Couldn’t the pixie tell?

Cas gazed out the window and smiled. “The snow is so pretty, don’t you think? It’s really coming down now.”

“Pretty? Snow’s shit!” Graal huffed. “It’s fine if you get to work inside. But it is not so nice if you have to work in it every day.” Graal took the loaves.

“Oh.” Cas frowned. “Right. I’m sorry. I hadn’t thought of that.” Somehow his wings drooped ever further. No pixie dust would burst forth from Cas anytime soon. Not when he was in Graal’s gloomy presence.

Graal wanted to take the words back. He wanted to say something to take away the pixie’s frown. Graal held in a sigh. Turned out Graal could ruin the Christmas pixie’s day without even trying.

But Graal had been working all day! He just wanted to go home with his brick bread and be left alone.

Cas gave him a strained smile. “Merry Christmas,” Cas said, but his tone sounded deflated.

“You too,” Graal mumbled.

And as Graal walked to the door, regret at causing the bright Christmas pixie to lose his sparkle ate at him.

Fuck, I’m an asshole. Why am I such a grumpy asshole?

CHAPTER 3

Cas sighed as he watched the orc leave the bakery, broad shoulders so wide they almost brushed the sides of the doorway. The four loaves of brick bread were tucked under the orc's arm.

Cas's nose wrinkled.

Brick bread! Disgusting stuff.

Cas could never understand why anyone bought that horrid bread. The Magic Bakery sold some very nice loaves, so why would anyone buy that unpleasant stuff?

Cas had tried it. Once. His father had given him some when he'd been a tiny little pixie fluttering around the bakery. His father had laughed at the expression on Cas's face as he'd chewed the thick, dense bread.

"Why do we make this?" Cas had asked after he spat it out. "It's yucky."

His father had chuckled. "Because some of our customers want it. And it is our calling to provide and nourish our customers the best we can. That is what being a hearth and kitchen witch is about."

Cas supposed he understood that. But why would the orc not try something nicer? An onion and tomato loaf, a garlic loaf, or even just a plain white loaf? All were better than brick bread.

Of course, Cas had a sweet tooth, and he preferred cookies, cakes, and truffles rather than any bread. That was what he loved to make. He liked to see children's eyes widen with joy as they ate the treats he'd made by hand.

Cas stared out the window into the snow. The snow the orc had made very clear to Cas was not pretty if you had to work in it all day. He flushed with embarrassment. He'd just been trying to cheer the orc up, maybe make him smile a little.

"Don't let him get to you, Cas," Jack said from the back. "He only ever orders brick bread."

"Yep. He gets the same thing every day." Lacy came out front and leaned against the counter.

"I know," Cas said. "But surely he needs some variety. Or something with sugar. That would definitely brighten his day! After all, it's Christmas!" And the orc had seemed so unhappy. No one should be unhappy at Christmas.

What would it take to make the orc smile? Cas wanted to see him smile, especially with those tusks.

"You can't make everyone love Christmas like you do." Grady packed cookies, tarts, and other treats into crates to take to the Christmas markets.

Cas pouted. He did not like that at all. "But it's the time of year for happiness, belonging, and cheer," Cas protested.

"Not for everyone, Cas." As the eldest of the siblings, Grady had taken over as the unofficial head of the family when their parents died. "For some, it can be a hard time, especially if they don't have family or friends. And some people don't have good memories of Christmas. For a lot of people, Christmas is painful."

Cas hated the notion that this time of year would be sad for some. After all, Christmas was when Cas had found the Berry family. But not everyone was as lucky as Cas. “I guess that’s true.”

“And it isn’t your job to cheer up everyone at Christmas.” Grady placed a large cloth over the crate and began packing another one.

Cas definitely wanted to protest that. As the self-proclaimed Christmas pixie, he felt it his job to spread the holiday spirit to those in need, including the grumpy orc.

But if they didn’t want the Christmas spirit being shoved down their throat, he should respect that. Even if he had to do so begrudgingly.

He stared at the Christmas tree, garlands hanging around the bakery, candles on the tables and windowsills, and the shiny baubles,

The baubles were old now. They’d been old when he’d seen them for the first time hanging in the bakery windows all those years ago. He’d been standing in the cold dark alley out back of the bakery, a lost, lonely orphan. He saw the glittering balls, so shiny and beautiful. They’d beckoned to him.

It had turned out to be the best day of his life. And every Christmas when he looked at the baubles, he was reminded of the day he’d found a family of hearth and kitchen witches who would become his forever family and give him his first true home.

Even after their parents had passed, he still remained a part of this family.

So why was the orc so sad? Did he have no one to celebrate the holiday with? No friends or family to sit with at night and eat, drink, and be merry? Cas imagined the orc on Christmas Day sitting at a table, alone in an empty room bare of decorations, a loaf of brick bread on the table. His chest constricted at the thought.

Or perhaps, the orc had thought he'd found someone to love forever, someone to complete him and make him happy for the rest of his life. Then maybe he'd had that snatched away in the blink of an eye. And now all he was left with was pain, loss, and the knowledge he wasn't enough for the incubus he loved.

Cas rubbed at his chest, blinking rapidly.

"Lacy, can you serve if anyone comes in?" Cas flew around to the back of the bakery. "I want to make some Christmas spiced jam to go with the scones for tomorrow."

"Of course." Lacy glanced at the front area. "It's getting close to closing time. I doubt we'll have many more customers."

"And after closing, we need to head over to the Christmas markets to take over from the others," Grady said, referring to their siblings who'd been running the stall. "It's the first day of the Christmas markets. It could be busy tonight."

"I'll be finished before we need to go." Cas flew to the cupboard and began to pull out ingredients whilst trying not to think of Xavi.

This is your favourite time of year. You love Christmas. Just because you'd planned to ask Xavi to bond with you on Christmas Day doesn't mean you should let it ruin Christmas.

"You all right, Cas?" Grady asked.

Cas flashed him a smile. "Of course. It's Christmas. What could possibly be wrong? Everything is perfect."

Grady stared at him for several moments. Finally, he nodded and resumed packing.

“And I can’t wait to work at the Christmas markets tonight,” Cas gushed. “I love all the stalls, decorations, smells, and food. I know I’m working, but it doesn’t feel like it!”

A memory of a previous Christmas market flittered through his mind, Xavi holding his hand as they wove through the crowds, drinking hot chocolate. He remembered Xavi stopping at a stall and selecting a crystal snowflake pendant hanging from a silver necklace. He’d bought it for Cas.

“It suits you,” Xavi had said. “It’s beautiful like you.”

The breath stuttered in Cas’s lungs. Would Xavi be at the Christmas markets this year? Tonight?

Cas’s hand tightened on the jar of ground cinnamon. He let out a breath. Surely Xavi would avoid the Christmas markets. He knew Cas worked there. He couldn’t be so cruel as to come.

Taking a deep breath, Cas continued to pull out the ingredients to make the jam. He loved making Christmas jam. Everyone always complimented how the spices reminded them of Christmas. Sometimes he even sold jars of it to the customers. They always sold out immediately.

Cas took a deep breath. This was what he needed to do, focus on enjoying Christmas and spreading Christmas cheer. He just wished he could stop thinking of Xavi.

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CHAPTER 4

G raal walked down the dank hallway on the basement floor of the apartment building. A single lantern hung from the roof, casting a faint brownish glow.

“You don’t need proper lighting down here,” Fernos the vampire landlord had told Graal when he’d shown him to his room. “Orcs and all you cave-dwelling beasts don’t need that sort of thing.”

At the time, Graal had ducked his head and let the insult hit him. He’d been fourteen and living on the streets for weeks. A darkish room was better than nothing.

And he couldn’t deny the comment held some truth. Graal couldn’t speak for other races, but orcs could see pretty well in low levels of light. Still, that didn’t mean they preferred it.

Snippets of Orcish, Troll, and Goblin conversations reached him from behind the half-dozen doors he passed. Several families and couples rented rooms down here on the basement floor. He was one of the few single occupants .

A door opened, and two orcs came out. They glanced at Graal as they passed him.

They grunted in greeting. Graal grunted back.

He knew other orcs found him odd. Whilst half-orcs weren’t rare, that he couldn’t speak the language made him an outsider.

Raised by his human mother and her human husband, Jordan, Graal had just never learnt the orc tongue. He'd rarely even heard the language growing up. When he'd first moved into the apartment building and seen the other orcs, he hoped to get to know them. But orcs tended to be a closed community, suspicious of those they didn't know. And that he didn't know the language did not help matters.

He reached his door at the end of the corridor, unlocked it, and stepped in. He lit the lantern and placed the loaves of brick bread, along with some smoked sausages and hard cheese he'd bought, on the table in the middle of the room. After going over to the basin of water on the side table, he undressed and placed his clothes into a sack.

He grimaced at the sight of the cloudy water in the basin. It hadn't been changed today. The agreement with the landlord was that the water would be changed daily.

Sadly, Graal wasn't even slightly surprised. This was not the first time it had been left dirty. But Graal knew better than to complain. It got him nowhere.

"You can find somewhere else to live if this place doesn't suit your standards." Fernos had sniffed.

Graal's small room contained only a side table with a basin, a cupboard, a bed, and a table with two chairs. No mirror to help him wash. He didn't need a mirror apparently.

"Why would you want to see a hideous face like yours every day?" Fernos had said with a laugh as he'd shown Graal the room .

Graal hadn't even asked about a mirror. Fernos had just wanted to get the insult in.

At best, Graal was ugly. At worst, he was a horrifying monster no mother could ever love.

Still, the agreement was that the landlord would ensure the cleaning water was changed daily and his clothes would be washed. Not that Fernos saw to those chores himself. He hired others to do the dirty work for him. Despite that, it still hadn't been done.

With a sigh, Graal washed using the dirty water. He put on cleaner clothes. Not clean clothes, since his laundry always came back poorly washed.

Still, he felt better after washing and changing. Then he sat at his table and grabbed the serrated knife. He sawed into the brick bread before biting into the hard slice. He chewed and chewed and continued chewing as he stared at a dark stain on the otherwise blank wall.

What did the pixie's room look like? He couldn't imagine Cas in a room like this with its stained blank walls, worn brown furniture, and faded linen. Not a scrap of colour or pattern brightened his room.

Cas's room would be pretty. A pretty room for a pretty pixie. The room would be decorated with brightly coloured trinkets and fabrics. His wall would hold painted pictures, maybe even magicked or enchanted to sparkle and glow like Cas.

And of course, there'd be Christmas decorations. Christmas decorations for the Christmas pixie. Maybe silver baubles like the ones he wore from his ears today. No doubt there'd be a mirror so Cas could look at himself and see how lovely he was.

But this room suited someone like Graal. Basic, simple, plain, and ugly. He didn't need pretty. He just needed a room to sleep and eat in. And he definitely didn't need any of that Christmas nonsense. After all, he'd never had it. Why would he need it now?

At Christmas, his home had been bare when he'd been a child.

“Are we going to have a tree and presents?” Graal had asked his mother once as he put more wood on the fire.

He had overheard the other children in the street talking about them.

Jordan sneered at Graal and looked at Graal’s mother. “Don’t you dare buy a single present for that half-blood monster with my hard-earned money.”

Graal stared at the flames as they flickered. He shouldn’t have asked. He knew he shouldn’t have brought it up. But he’d heard the other children talking. He had gotten his hopes up.

“If you want to get him presents, go find his father in whichever cave you fucked him in,” Jordan spat. “Tell that orc to provide for his bastard son. And he can take the boy too whilst he’s at it.”

“You don’t need to work yourself into a huff!” Graal’s mother snapped. “I never said we’d be getting him presents. And we won’t be.”

Graal glanced at his mother. She sat looking at her husband before turning her gaze to the fire.

Despite the fact Graal was beside it, she hadn’t even spared Graal a glance.

Graal didn’t really know how his human mother and orc father had met. But he knew he’d already been born when Jordan and his mother met. For a while, he’d wondered if she’d been assaulted by his father, but from the snippets he’d picked up on, she’d run off with his father. A few months later, she’d returned to the city pregnant.

Jordan had hated Graal. Not that Graal’s mother had given two shits about him either. She’d taught him how to do chores around the house. But other than that, she hadn’t

wanted anything to do with him. Honestly, he'd never known why he'd not been dumped at a foundling home or kicked out onto the streets. Perhaps he'd been cheaper than a servant.

Graal swallowed the bread he'd been chewing. The chunk slid down his throat and landed heavily in his stomach like it always did. But brick bread was filling and cheap, and it would keep him going. Orcs like him didn't need lovely sugar cookies or delicate baked goods.

They'd be wasted on him. Graal lifted his massive hand. He'd probably accidentally crush the cookies on the way home. And no doubt the little cookie would look ridiculous in his big ugly paw.

Graal took a bite of the sausage and swallowed it down. Then he bit into the cheese.

Growing up, Graal's mother had barely looked at him, even when talking directly to him. "Mop the floor," "Clean out the fireplace," and "Wash the dishes." She had told him what chores needed to be done, but she'd never looked him in the eyes. It was like she couldn't ever bear to look at him.

Graal had been fourteen when Sam, Graal's half-brother, had been born just a few months before Christmas. They'd kicked Graal out of his room. Sam had needed it, so Graal slept on the floor in the kitchen, which Jordan had said suited him, since Graal did all the chores.

Then one day, soon after Sam was born, Graal had been carrying armfuls of firewood to their home.

He spotted his parents in the street, talking to several neighbours.

"You haven't met our son yet, have you?" Jordan held Sam in his arms, beaming

down. “Isn’t he a good-looking boy?”

The neighbours cooed .

“We are so blessed to finally have a son,” his mother said with a smile as she gazed down at Sam.

Graal’s world tipped. She looked up then. His mother’s eyes landed on Graal. Her smile dropped. Then she looked away, back to her newborn son. Her smile returned, and she resumed doting on the son she wanted.

Numb, Graal entered their home.

His footsteps stuttered as he spotted a Christmas tree in the main room. His mother and Jordan must have set it up whilst he was out. Shiny tinsel and baubles decorated the green branches. His throat clenched.

Pretty little presents wrapped in brown paper lay beneath the tree. Graal didn’t need to ask. He knew none were for him.

These were for Sam. This Christmas, this tree, these decorations—it was all for Sam.

Graal put down the firewood. He walked to the window and stared out at his mother with the family she wanted. In the reflection of the window, he could just make out his own features: his tusks, his pointed ears, his big green, ugly face. No wonder his mother despised him. Graal was hideous. A monster.

He returned to the kitchen and grabbed his few possessions. He left his home without a word.

He doubted his mother had cared.

After that, he'd lived on the streets for a couple of weeks until he found a job at the quarry. It had taken him a little longer to find a room. The first few places he'd gone wouldn't even take an orc tenant.

He took another bite of the bread and chewed. His thoughts drifted to Cas. The pixie had been so excited and happy, showing off all the baked goods, trying to get Graal to buy something.

But then Graal had made his smile drop .

Just like the sight of his repulsive face had made his mother's smile drop all those years ago.

Graal stopped chewing. He let out a breath.

He never knew why his own mother had always hated him so much. Was it because he reminded her of his father? Graal didn't know. He chewed.

He wished he hadn't ruined Cas's mood. Guilt churned inside him, making the bread sit heavier in his stomach than it normally did. He might not like Christmas, but the pixie clearly did.

Why hadn't he tried the cookies? Then the pixie wouldn't have stopped smiling.

Maybe...maybe Graal could order something tomorrow. Maybe he could buy one of the dainty cookies. He might look silly doing it. They would be wasted on him. But it could make the pixie happy.

And Graal would like to be the cause of someone's happiness for once. He'd like to cause someone to smile, rather than be the reason they stopped.

CHAPTER 5

“Will there be anything else?” Cas asked the bird shifter.

A line of customers stood at the counter. Cas, Lacy, and Jack served. No seats remained free at the tables crowded around the bakery. The bell tinkled every few moments as the door opened and more customers came in.

“That’s everything,” the bird shifter replied. “Merry Christmas.”

“Merry Christmas.” Cas turned to the next customer, a gnome carrying his small child in his arms.

They worked through the afternoon, serving a steady stream of patrons, many of whom were on their way home from work.

“You look so beautiful,” an older witch said as she took the fruit and nut loaf from Cas. “A perfect Christmas pixie.”

“Thank you!” Cas beamed. “I try my best.” Today he dressed in a green outfit with red-and-gold accessories. The colours didn’t really match his blue wings. Not like the silver. But he liked to embrace all the Christmas colours .

“I’m going to go start packing stuff for the Christmas markets,” Jack said once the number of customers dwindled.

“Sounds good,” Cas said before turning to greet a centaur at the counter. “Merry

Christmas!”

He took the centaur’s order. The bell tinkled. Cas glanced up.

The orc entered the bakery and joined Cas’s line. Snow rested on his large brown coat, but he didn’t brush it away. He shoved his hands in his pockets. His dark-black hair had been pulled back from his face. Small gold hoops and studs lined his pointed ears. An air of sadness clung to him.

Cas’s chest tightened with the need to bring a smile to the orc’s face.

It’s not your job to make people happy or like Christmas. You can’t reach everyone.

“Anything else?” Cas asked the centaur. “How about some sugar cookies I made earlier today?” He gestured to them sitting behind the glass.

The centaur smiled. “They look delicious,” she said. “I’ll take six. My foals will love them!”

Cas smiled and boxed the cookies. As he served the next couple of customers, Cas continued to glance at the orc, who kept his gaze down on the floor.

“Do you think I make a good Christmas pixie?” Cas asked a faun.

The faun of course agreed.

Finally, after Cas had served two more patrons, the orc stood in front of him.

“Brick bread, please,” the orc said in his deep, gruff voice. “Four.” He glanced quickly at Cas before dropping his gaze.

Did he ever smile? Or did he always look this downtrodden?

Cas thought of what Grady had said. Perhaps the orc did have a sad past? Maybe he'd been an orphan like Cas. But maybe, unlike Cas, he'd never found a family. Maybe he'd spent years living on the street in the cold, never knowing love or care or the joy of a family who accepted you.

Cas swallowed as pain tried to choke him. His hands clenched.

He wanted to make the orc smile. He wanted to show him that good and kindness existed in the world, like his own family had shown him. Cas wanted to offer him cookies and scones and suggest he try the Christmas jam Cas made the day before.

Cas was a pixie, but he'd been raised as a hearth and kitchen witch. And hearth and kitchen witches provided nourishment and care through their food to those who entered their home, or for them, their bakery. Cas had taken the lessons he'd learnt from his adoptive parents to heart. And he wanted to spread joy and cheer and happiness with his food.

But still, it would be rude to push. Even if he wanted to. So he gave the orc a smile and packaged the bread. "Of course. Here you are. Will there be anything else?"

The orc took the package. He frowned. "I'll..." He hesitated. He looked side to side, still not meeting Cas's gaze. "I'll have some of the sugar cookies you mentioned yesterday." He paused. "If that's not a hassle."

Cas's wings fluttered. Pixie dust sparkled around them. The orc looked up, eyes widening.

"Of course, you can have some sugar cookies. It's not a hassle at all!" Cas smiled brightly.

And then the orc smiled! It was only a small smile. A slight lifting of the corners of his lips. But it was still a smile. Cas had made the grumpy orc smile. More pixie dust burst around him.

Lacy glanced at him, but Cas ignored her.

“You won’t regret it. Sugar cookies are my favourite! And I am excellent at baking them. I use vanilla and ground almonds in them, and they are sweet. I have such a sweet tooth!” He laughed. “I only make sweet treats. Cakes, cookies, tarts, and truffles. Those are my speciality. I even made a Christmas jam yesterday.”

The orc stared as Cas rambled.

“How many sugar cookies did you want?” Cas asked, trying to focus.

“Ahhh...” The orc looked down at the cookies. His brows furrowed. “Just the one, please.” So softly spoken in his rumbling voice.

“Only one?” At least it was more than none. Still... “You don’t want two? Then you could try the pink and blue ones. I think they look lovely together. Don’t you?”

The orc’s mouth moved for a few seconds before any sound emerged. “Ah. Yes...they look lovely.”

“So you’ll take them both?”

“Ah... Okay.”

Cas took out the cookies and paused. “And you should try a cinnamon star cookie too.” He grabbed one. “And try a vanilla crescent cookie. They’re divine. And this jam sandwich cookie!”

The orc stared at him.

“Don’t worry! They’re on me.” Cas packed the cookies into a small box. Then he grabbed a bit of ribbon, tied it around the box, and handed it to the orc.

“You don’t have to do that.”

“No, please,” Cas insisted, still holding the box out. “I think you’ll like them. And it makes me happy that you want to try them.”

The orc blinked. He hesitated. Finally, he took the box. He stared down at them like he didn’t quite know what to make of them. “Thank you.” The orc reached into his pouch, pulled out several coins to cover the cost of the brick bread, and handed them over to Cas.

Cas gave him his change. “I’m Cas, by the way. I’m a Christmas pixie. I spread Christmas cheer to everyone.” His wings fluttered.

“I know. I mean, I know your name is Cas.” The orc’s lips pressed together. “Graal. That is my name.”

“Well, it’s lovely to finally know your name, Graal,” Cas said.

Graal nodded. “Thanks.” He gestured to the box of cookies. “And a... Have a good evening.”

“You too,” Cas said as Graal walked away. “And Merry Christmas!”

Graal looked back. “Merry Christmas.” The bell tinkled as he left.

Cas sighed. He glanced around. Lacy served the remaining customer at the counter.

“Are you giving away cookies again?” Grady asked.

Cas jumped. Grady leaned on the table separating the back and front areas.

“He needed it! And I will pay for it!” Cas flew towards him. “He smiled, Grady! Graal actually smiled!”

Grady chuckled. “It’s fine, Cas. It’s not like before when the bakery was struggling and you kept giving away food to everyone.” He gave a lopsided smile. “And it’s nice to see you bringing a little joy to his life. He always did seem pretty sad.” Grady tilted his head, gaze studying Cas.

“What?” Cas asked. He touched a hand to his cheek. “Is there something on my face?”

Grady shook his head. “Nah. You just remind me of Mother.”

Cas clasped his hands together. “Really?” There was no greater compliment in the world to Cas .

Grady nodded. “You spread joy and cheer just like she did.”

Cas bit his lip as he watched Grady turn and return to helping Jack pack for the Christmas markets.

Lacy, now finished serving, sidled up next to Cas. “Do you have a little crush on the big grumpy orc?” she asked in a sing-song voice.

“What? No!” Cas hadn’t even considered it.

“If I were into men and if I weren’t seeing someone, I’d be into him. He’s so big!”

Lacy lifted her hands wide.

Cas chuckled. “You definitely have a type.” Every past girlfriend of Lacy’s tended to be almost twice her size.

“I just like to feel tiny and protected.” She grinned. “My girlfriend, Orim, she is a troll. You should see her swing her club. And she can lift me like I weigh nothing!” She made an appreciative hum. She glanced at Cas’s wings. “Although, I suppose with wings you don’t really need to be carried.”

“I don’t think anyone needs to be carried.” Cas laughed. “I think it’s a preference.”

Lacy smiled. “I suppose that’s true.”

But Cas could see the appeal. He could imagine Graal with his massive hands on Cas’s waist, lifting him into the air.

“Huh.” Cas frowned. “You know, I don’t think I’ve really looked at anyone in a while. After all, I was with Xavi for three years.”

“You never looked in all that time?” she asked in disbelief.

“I appreciated, of course. I noticed.” Cas pursed his lips. “But I didn’t really look. Not really.”

“Well, you’re single now, and I think the orc is very attractive! Those big hands. Big forearms.” Her eyes sparkled. “Do you think he is big all over? You like that sort of thing, right?” She nudged him.

“Lacy!” Cas protested but then burst out laughing .

She giggled. “I’m just saying! Don’t you want to see his club?” She waggled her eyebrows. “Maybe you could have some fun with him. It could help you move on from Xavier.”

Still laughing, Cas shook his head. But he couldn’t get her words out of his head. Now that he thought about it, he did find Graal rather attractive, in a big, tough, gruff kind of way.

He looked strong. No doubt he could lift Cas very easily. Just the thought sent a wave of heat to his groin. And that smile! That one brief shy smile had made his wings flutter.

Cas glanced at the front door to the bakery. Maybe he should consider seeking out distractions other than the joy of Christmas.

CHAPTER 6

S now fell in a never-ending blur as Graal followed the cobblestone lane around the back of the apartment building where he lived. Glowing lights filled the windows he passed, and he paused, glancing in.

He spotted his landlord sitting at a table, wearing fine clothes and surrounded by his tenants. Well, some of his tenants.

From here he spotted a faun, a human sorcerer, a djinn, and a pixie eating at the dining table. Red candles lined the patterned white-and-gold tablecloth. Garlands of greenery hung from the ceiling. A large Christmas tree stood against the wall. Glass baubles and shining tinsel decorated the branches. Bulbous earthenware dishes sat on the table.

All the tenants in this building paid the same rent. But the attractive beings got more for what they paid. The attractive beings got the above ground rooms. They got food provided as part of their rent. They got to eat at the vampire's dining table and use the drawing room with the harp and piano. They got their own entrance at the front of the building .

If Cas rented a room, he'd be an upstairs tenant.

Graal turned away and continued to the back door. Many in the city didn't like orcs and what were often considered the violent and monstrous races. That also included ogres, trolls, minotaurs, and goblins. That was why those races tended to live outside the cities. They worked on farms, mines, quarries, and the like. Or so Graal had

heard.

Graal had considered leaving. He could even potentially work for the same company he currently did. He worked for a quarry, hauling stones from carts to building sites when the carts couldn't get directly to those sites. But he could work at the actual quarry outside the city.

But he'd only ever known the city and its dirty streets, dark alleys, and crowded lanes. It would be a move into the unknown.

He doubted the work would be easier. But maybe he wouldn't be looked down upon. Maybe he wouldn't feel like such an outsider. Then again, he'd hoped to find community here in this apartment building, living with orcs. That hope had come to nothing.

Graal walked down the corridor. He passed no one tonight.

Reaching his room, he let himself in. He lit the lantern and placed the brick bread, links of sausages, block of cheese, and box of cookies onto the table.

After cleaning himself up, he sat at the table. He stared at the box of cookies. He lifted his hand and touched the ribbon, a pretty vibrant red. He'd seen other customers with packages with dainty red ribbon. But he'd never gotten any before. Ribbon wasn't for brick bread.

However, today he'd bought cookies, and Cas had wrapped his box in this bright-red ribbon and tied it into a little bow at the top .

Graal swallowed. It didn't mean anything, of course. That was what Cas used to wrap the small boxes in. It was just what he did for customers.

But Cas had seemed so happy when Graal asked for the sugar cookies. Pixie dust had sparkled around him. And around Graal too. As it had rained down around him, he couldn't help but marvel to be included in the shining beauty that belonged to Cas.

He'd had an impulse to lick his lips and taste the dust. He wondered if it tasted sweet. It should taste sweet. That would suit Cas, the pretty pixie with a sweet tooth who made the world around him shine and glow.

Graal reached out and lifted the box. He placed it on the palm of his hand. He tugged the bow loose and grimaced at the sight of his thick, clumsy green fingers handling the ribbon. But it couldn't be helped. He couldn't change his hands.

He laid the ribbon out on the table. He ran his fingers along the silky strand. He'd keep this. A little bit of brightness in his otherwise drab world.

Graal turned his attention to the small box and opened it. He took several moments to admire the dainty cookies snuggled inside the box. He'd bought a couple, but Cas had gifted him the rest, like a Christmas gift.

Graal had never had a Christmas gift before.

Graal shook his head at himself. It wasn't a Christmas gift. Cas had just been being nice, and Graal was being ridiculous, finding bigger meaning in Cas's actions.

He reached into the box with two large fingers and picked out a cookie, so careful not to break it with his thick fingers. Dark-blue icing covered the circular cookie, with swirls of pale blue and little white dots on top.

Graal could never make something like this. He lacked the dexterity. Cas had been proud of his creation. And he should be. He'd brought beauty into the world. And he'd shared a little of that beauty with Graal.

He pressed his lips together. The previous day, he'd been judgemental of the customer eating the pretty star cookie. He'd thought the cookie to be frivolous festive bullshit. But now all he could do was marvel at the lovely little cookie.

Graal stared for several moments. He didn't get nice things like this. He didn't get dainty cookies just like he didn't get rooms above ground, tables decorated with candles, fresh washing water, Christmas presents, or a mother who actually loved him.

Those sorts of nice things had always been beyond Graal.

And now he was reluctant to bite into the cookie. Because then it would be gone from his world and this little bit of light would disappear forever.

But Cas had wanted Graal to try them. So he lifted the cookie to his lips and bit.

Bliss exploded on his tongue. Layers of flavours—sugar, spices, and butter—swirled over his taste-buds. He groaned and closed his eyes, savouring the delicate balance.

In his mind, he could almost see Cas smiling at him, his glowing aura, and the pixie dust floating in the air.

Graal took another bite. This was so much better than brick bread. So much better than anything he'd ever had in his life.

And in that moment, Graal let himself enjoy something nice. He popped the rest into his mouth and ate the cookie, thinking of the Christmas pixie.

Cas was the most beautiful man he'd ever seen. Of course, someone like Cas was only nice to Graal because he was a customer. And maybe because Cas was kind and caring and giving.

But in the darkness of his dank little room when he sat all alone, he let himself think of what it would be like for Cas to look at Graal as someone more than a customer. He wondered what it would be like to be with someone like Cas, to talk to him, to hold his hand, to hear that bubbly laugh, and see that smile and know it was for him.

Graal swallowed the last of the cookie and let out a breath, savouring the lingering taste on his tongue.

A loud knock banged on the door. Startling, Graal sat up and wiped his hands on his trousers. He opened the door.

Loral stood on the other side. “Washing’s done.” The imp servant held out a sack containing Graal’s clothes.

Graal took the bag of clothes. “Are they properly cleaned?” Graal would bet money that the upstairs tenants always had properly laundered clothing.

“It’ll be good enough for you.” She wrinkled her nose. “Stinks down here. Needs to be aired.”

Graal’s hand tightened around the sack. “It’s not like I can air the room. There are no windows. And my water isn’t being changed daily.”

“What do you need clean water for?” Loral barked.

Graal’s jaw clenched. “The agreement was that the water would be changed daily. It’s what I pay for.” Graal didn’t know why he bothered complaining. It never did any good.

In the social pecking order, imps weren’t that high up. But they were higher than orcs. Some, like Loral, wanted to make sure orcs knew that.

“You can complain to sir if you want,” Loral said.

Graal only ever saw the vampire landlord when he collected rent. Otherwise, he was always too busy to deal with Graal and his complaints.

Loral turned to leave, and she mumbled as she walked away, “It’s not like you need clean water. You won’t wash properly anyway, you stinking tusk-faced half-breed.”

Graal clenched his teeth and slammed the door shut behind her. He stared at the wood, breathing heavily .

He should be used to the insults. He’d heard the same and worse from Jordan growing up; half-blood, green-skinned brute, bastard, mongrel, and monster had been just a few of his favourites.

Graal should really be used to it. But still, the words always cut him deep.

CHAPTER 7

“How were the cookies?” Cas asked as Graal approached the counter in the bakery.

“They were delicious,” Graal said in his low, gravelly voice.

Cas smiled as pleasure filled him. “You liked them? I knew you would if you gave them a chance.”

Graal reached for his pouch. “I’d...a...I’d like to buy some more.”

Cas’s wings flapped as he rose above the floor. “That’s wonderful. Which would you like?”

Graal looked along the line of different-shaped and -coloured cookies behind the glass. He scratched his beard. “Ah. Maybe you could choose.”

“I’d be happy to.” Cas picked up a box.

“And could I have the ones you made?” Graal added softly.

Cas opened his mouth. Graal wanted cookies made by him. It felt...strangely intimate. Which was silly. Everyone ate Cas’s cookies all the time. Still, to ask specifically for them ...

“All right.” Cas thought back to Lacy’s suggestion of having some fun with Graal. He glanced at the giant orc. He imagined placing his hands on those broad shoulders,

stroking those thick arms, and feeling all those muscles.

And those tusks! Cas had never kissed anyone with tusks before.

Cas bit his lip. Of course, Cas wasn't ready for anything serious. His heart still lay a fractured and crushed mess in his chest. But some sexy times with this orc would be something he'd definitely be interested in.

"Only if it's not too much trouble," Graal rushed out.

"No. No trouble." Cas shook his head and reached for the cookies. "No trouble at all." He carefully selected the cookies, packaged them in the box, and wrapped them with the red ribbon. "I hope you enjoy them." Cas slid the box across the counter.

Cas leaned forward, giving a slow smile. "Anything else?" he asked, lowering his voice to something more seductive. He batted his lashes.

"Brick bread," Graal said. "Four loaves."

Cas let out a breath. He nodded and reached for the horrid loaves. He wasn't disappointed. Graal was eating his cookies. And he had enjoyed them yesterday. Still, the orc needed sustenance. And apparently, he needed the sustenance to be the worst bread they made.

"Unless..." Graal trailed off.

Cas's hand froze. He raised his eyebrows. "Unless?"

Graal licked his lips. "Maybe different loaves. They need to be filling. But if you think something else might be—" He paused, gesturing with his hand. "—nicer." The last word came out uncertain.

“Oh! Yes!” Cas could easily find nicer loaves than brick bread. “We have so many different types. Some of which are so delicious, unlike the brick bread. We have this nut-and- seed loaf, very filling and hearty.” Cas pointed to a dark loaf. “And it tastes quite yummy.

“This onion and basil is nice. I don’t make any of these. Bread isn’t my speciality. Not sweet enough for me.” Cas laughed. “But I enjoy them sometimes. And this cranberry-and-walnut bread is yummy. It’s a little sweet.”

“I’ll take two of each,” Graal said.

Smiling, Cas took the loaves and wrapped them. “I’m so excited you’re trying these. I don’t like brick bread a lot.”

“It’s not the tastiest.” Graal smiled. “Not like your cookies.”

Cas laughed, pleased to see Graal smile again. “That’s an...” Movement by the large glass window at the front of the bakery caught Cas’s eye.

A trim figure walked past. He had horns, hair of jet black with streaks of gold, dark wings tucked back, and a tail that swayed casually behind him. Cas would recognise the incubus anywhere.

Xavier.

Hope flared inside his chest. Xavi had returned. He’d returned to Cas!

His mind started to spin. Would Xavi come into the shop? Apologise to Cas for everything? Would he say he’d made a terrible mistake, beg Cas’s forgiveness, tell Cas he still loved him, and ask him back?

Cas's stomach fluttered along with his wings.

Then Cas saw who was walking beside Xavi. The dryad. The dryad who'd had his legs spread as Xavi shoved his cock into him. The dryad's cries of pleasure in between calling out "Xavi" still rang in Cas's ears.

No one else called Xavier "Xavi." It had been Cas's thing. Xavier had specifically asked Cas to call him that. It had made Cas feel special, loved. Had Xavier asked the dryad to call him that too ?

Hope darkened and crumbled into nothingness inside Cas.

Xavi would not come back to Cas. He would not tell Cas he still loved him. Because Xavi clearly didn't.

And in that wretched moment, Cas could not deny the truth. If Xavi had apologised and asked him back, even after all he'd done, Cas would have taken him back.

It was pathetic. It was beyond pitiful. Cas should be done with Xavi. And until that moment, Cas could have lied to himself and believed he didn't want the cheating incubus back. But for that split second, when he'd thought Xavi still wanted him, he knew he would have forgiven Xavi everything.

Fuck. I still love him.

"Are you all right?"

Graal's words pulled Cas back.

Cas tore his gaze from the window. He couldn't even see the two anymore. How long had he been staring at the empty window?

Cas shook his head. "I'm all right. Never better." He let out a weak laugh. "It's just...the incubus is my partner. I mean, was my partner," he corrected. He blinked rapidly, eyes stinging. "The dryad and he are together now, I guess."

Cas licked his dry lips. "It was mutual," Cas lied, not meeting Graal's eyes. "Together for three years, and then our relationship just ran its natural course. You know how it is." Cas shrugged, trying to pretend his heart wasn't convulsing with pain in his chest.

He glanced at Graal. Graal frowned at him, clearly not fooled.

"Sorry. It's just seeing him again." Cas lifted his chin, trying to appear composed. "But I'm not going to let it ruin my Christmas. I'm the Christmas pixie, after all!" His lips spasmed as he tried to smile .

"At least I'm working at the Christmas markets tonight. It'll be a good distraction. We run a stall there. We have an oven, and we bake our bread fresh at the markets. But we bring cookies, tarts, truffles, and other goods from here. I love the Christmas markets so much that it doesn't even feel like work." Thankfully, Cas's voice sounded cheery and not like he wanted to cry.

"My favourite things are all the giant decorated Christmas trees. Also, the magicked globes that glow. And the food. And the drink. Actually, everything is my favourite." If Cas could just focus on the Christmas markets, then maybe he could get through the next few minutes without breaking down into sobs. "What's your favourite thing about the markets?"

"Umm." Graal scratched his beard. "I've never been to the markets."

"What? Never! You've never been to the Christmas markets?"

Graal shook his head. “Never.”

“Well, you have to come! Tonight! You have to!” Cas’s voice sounded too loud to his own ears.

Graal shook his head. “I don’t think so. Not my sort of thing. And I don’t really have anyone to go with.”

Cas jumped on the opportunity. “Come to the stall! I’ll take a break, and we can wander around together. I can show you everything I love about the markets! You’ll see how wonderful it all is.”

“You don’t have to do that,” Graal said.

“I want to do it!” Cas reached out and gripped Graal’s hand. “Please! I could use a distraction. It will be so much fun.” It would get his mind off Xavi, and Cas would introduce Graal to the wonder of the Christmas markets. It sounded like a perfect distraction .

And if he and the orc could have some fun times, it would be perfect.

Graal stared at Cas’s hand resting on his. “All right.”

Cas squeezed Graal’s hands. “You won’t regret it! We’ll have fun. I promise.” Cas leaned even closer.

I’m being too intense.

Cas pulled back and dropped Graal’s hand. He was acting unhinged.

“I’ll see you tonight, then,” Cas said. “And we’ll have a great time together!”

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:18 am

CHAPTER 8

The smell of freshly baked bread lingered in the air, mixing with roasted chestnuts, warm sugar, mulled wine, and hot chocolate.

“I’m the Christmas pixie,” Cas said over and over as he served the stream of those wanting Christmas treats and freshly baked bread straight from the oven. The customers laughed and stared at him in wonder as he showed off his sparkly gold outfit.

All around, the markets glistened in the light of the candles and magicked globes. The Christmas trees stood tall and proud towering over them, decorated with tinsel, baubles, and lights. The various stalls selling wares, food, and drinks glowed with warmth.

A crowd of visitors moved amongst the stalls, chatting, yelling, and laughing as they got lost in the festivities.

But the joy didn’t reach Cas as it normally would.

Today he didn’t revel in the holiday spirit even as he worked right in the middle of the Christmas markets. Even the compliments didn’t cheer him up like they normally would .

Still, Cas grinned and laughed and served. But in the back of his mind, he kept seeing Xavi walking past the bakery with the dryad.

How serious are the two? Does Xavi love the dryad? And what does the dryad have that I don't?

Cas tried to shove the questions aside as several children approached the stall. "Hello, little ones. I'm the Christmas pixie." He flapped his wings. "I'll be serving you tonight. What can I get you?"

They giggled as Cas packaged up the treats they asked for. He slipped in a few extra chocolate and peppermint truffles, and they walked away buzzing with happiness.

Cas should be buzzing with happiness too. He usually did at the markets. In fact, it was the excitement of the season that usually meant he didn't mind working such long days. Often, he volunteered to work longer hours because he loved Christmas so much. But no matter how he tried, he just felt deflated and like he wanted to curl up in bed until spring.

Why doesn't Xavi love me? I gave him everything I had. Why wasn't it enough?

Cas swallowed, trying to get a hold of himself. He was the fucking Christmas pixie, and he was in his fucking element. He loved Christmas! Every year, he looked forward to it. He just had to remember that.

And he'd been so doing well until he saw Xavi. He'd been able to focus on Christmas. Maybe he hadn't been exactly happy. But he'd been doing okay. Now he couldn't muster the holiday spirit that he so desperately needed.

A tall, broad figure moved towards their stall. His black hair and flashes of green skin were visible over the crowd.

Graal.

Cas could focus on Graal. On this meet-up. Which could also be seen as kind of a date. Not one that would lead to a relationship. Cas wasn't ready for that. Not with his feelings for Xavi like an open wound, still raw, bleeding, and possibly becoming infected.

But he and Graal would spend some time together. He could help Graal see how wonderful Christmas could be, and perhaps it would cheer himself up. And maybe, if Graal was also interested, they could have some sexy, fun times together. That would be a good distraction and would help him get over the cheating incubus he still pathetically loved.

He thought from the way Graal looked at Cas that the orc might be attracted to him.

"Look who is here!" Lacy whispered loudly in his ear.

Cas jumped. "Shitting spells, Lacy! Don't do that."

She laughed. "Sorry." Lacy didn't look the least bit sorry.

"You want to take your break now? Take as long as you need. Jack, Grady, and I can handle the stall." She gestured to their brothers. Jack served, and Grady placed the dough into the piping-hot oven. "The crowds have died down."

Cas glanced at Graal, who seemed to hesitate a few steps away from their stall. He had his shoulders hunched, brows furrowed, as he glanced around the Christmas markets.

"Thanks. I'll be back in a little while." Cas took off his apron.

"Take the whole night off if you want!" She smiled. "And don't do anything I wouldn't do." She paused. "But considering Orim and I met up last night and had a

lot of fun behind some of the stalls, that's not saying much." She pointed. "If you walk to the edge of the markets and go behind the stalls, you'll get all the privacy you need."

"Lacy!" Cas protested.

"What? I'm nineteen! I know what I'm about." Lacy grinned.

Cas narrowed his gaze. Should he say something or give advice? After all, he was several years older than her.

Then again, he couldn't blame her for fooling around at the Christmas markets. Lacy and Cas shared a room in the family apartment. He definitely preferred Lacy and Orim having fun somewhere he couldn't see them. And he definitely didn't want to bring Graal back to his room, where his younger sister would be.

Maybe she was onto something.

"I'll be back soon," he said and left.

CHAPTER 9

Cas flew towards him, a sparkling vision of gold. His slinky gold tunic hugged his torso. Gold trousers encased his slender legs. Gold painted his lips, cheeks, and eyelids. He even wore long gold dangly earrings with little glass baubles on the end. He cast a pale, shining aura around him, brighter now that it was night.

Graal had no words for the beauty that was Cas.

And as Cas flew towards Graal, he smiled at Graal as if Graal weren't some hideous monster.

Graal took a breath and smiled back as best he could. He wasn't used to smiling. He couldn't fathom why Cas would be happy to spend time with him.

"You made it! I so hoped you would." Cas reached out and gripped Graal's hands.

His hands felt so small compared to Graal's. And Cas seemed genuinely pleased Graal had come. Graal had thought Cas might forget he'd invited him or hadn't really meant the invitation. He'd thought maybe Cas was just being polite.

Graal thought about not coming. Over and over he'd debated with himself. He didn't want to turn up and see the shock on Cas's face if Cas hadn't actually meant the invitation.

But it turned out he had.

Graal had been uncertain about coming to a place that would be filled with mirth and pretty decorations. Honestly, Graal felt out of place. But looking at Cas's smile, he couldn't think of anywhere else he'd rather be.

Graal was glad he'd come. Especially because Cas had seemed so off after seeing the incubus. He'd tried to put on a brave face. But Graal could see through it to the hurt. It almost made Graal want to follow the striking incubus down the street and beat him into the snow.

And then Cas had asked him to come to the markets and had touched his hand.

Of course Graal had said yes. How could he not?

Cas tilted his head. Half of Cas's hair had been woven into an elaborate hairstyle. The rest hung loose, and the white and pale-blue hair slid across the gold material he wore. "Let me show you the markets." Cas linked his arm with Graal's as if touching Graal was the most natural thing in the world.

Graal felt so aware of Cas beside him, so close. Cas flew above the ground as they moved through the markets. With their height difference, this brought their heads to about the same level. Graal kept glancing down at their joined arms.

"I want you to really enjoy the Christmas markets tonight!"

"I'll try my best." Graal had to admit that the markets overwhelmed him. Everywhere he looked seemed to shine and erupt with over-the-top exuberance and festive nonsense. Music floated through the air. People laughed and yelled and carried on. Children darted around.

This was not his thing .

Graal belonged in his dark and dank room alone. Not amongst this merriment and frivolity. But Cas really wanted him to enjoy tonight. So Graal would try.

Cas tugged on his arm. “Oh! Chestnuts! Come on, let’s try some. I haven’t had any this year.”

Graal noticed several people glancing at Cas in appreciation as they moved through the crowd. Then they frowned at Graal as if confused as to why the two would be together.

Graal could understand the confusion. He wanted to tell them they weren’t actually together. Cas was just being kind.

“Mommy! A troll!” The whispered words came from a siren child who cowered behind her mother. “Is he going to eat me?”

Graal hunched his shoulders and looked away as the mother scooped the child up and whispered to her.

Graal wasn’t a troll. But some couldn’t tell the difference. Some didn’t care to learn. For many, they were all the same—big, ugly, hideous monsters.

Trolls didn’t eat children, of course. But he’d heard the sorts of fairy tales parents told their children. Behave or the troll, ogre, or orc would sneak into their room and eat them whilst they slept.

Graal’s lip curled. Thankfully, Cas hadn’t heard the child’s comment, and he led Graal to the stand where a man sold chestnuts from a large hot metal drum.

“We’ll take a bag, please.” Cas dropped Graal’s arm to count out his coins.

“I can get them.” Graal reached for his coin-purse.

“Shhh. It’s on me.” Cas waved his hand. “I invited you, and it was kind of you to come out.”

Cas took the paper bag of chestnuts from the vendor. They moved to the side so they weren’t blocking the crowds. Cas held out the paper bag to Graal.

Graal reached out and took one of the nuts. He peeled the warm hard shell from the pale flesh and popped it into his mouth. He chewed the buttery sweet, soft nut. “They’re good.”

Cas tucked the bag into the crook of his arm and reached for a nut.

“Here, I can hold the bag for you.” Graal reached out and took it.

Cas smiled and began to peel a chestnut. “Chestnuts always remind me of sitting with my family in the winter. We’d often put a pan into the open fire with a couple of handfuls of chestnuts. We’d roast them before passing them around.”

Cas popped the nut into his mouth and let out a groan, a groan that caused heat to curl in Graal’s gut and the orc to think things he shouldn’t. Like did Cas sound similar when he experienced pleasure at the touch of a lover’s hand?

Graal cleared his throat. “Your family are witches, human witches.”

Cas laughed. “And I’m a pixie.” Cas reached into the paper bag. It crinkled as he pulled out another chestnut and peeled it. “I’m adopted. I’m not sure what happened to my birth parents. Not sure if they died or gave me up or what, but I spent the first few years of my life in a foundling home. It wasn’t nice.”

Cas grimaced, and Graal couldn't help but feel how wrong the expression looked on Cas's lovely face. Graal wanted Cas to smile, and he wanted to see Cas's sky-blue eyes sparkle with mirth. Sadness didn't suit Cas.

"Then I flew away. I lived on the streets for a while. It was horrible there too. Winter came, and it was worse. The snow never stopped. The cold reached down to my bones, and I just wanted to get warm." Cas kept his gaze on the chestnut. "Pixies are less susceptible to the cold compared to humans. Still, it's unpleasant."

Graal nodded. It was similar for orcs.

"So I was walking down this alley, and then I saw these candles and baubles through a window. They were so beautiful." Cas smiled. "It was like the inside glowed with light, and I could almost feel the warmth." Cas met Graal's gaze. Cas held up the peeled chestnut. "Open up."

"What?" Graal frowned.

Cas held the chestnut to Graal's lips. "Open up."

Graal opened his mouth, surprised when Cas placed the chestnut on his tongue, fingers brushing Graal's lips before retreating. Cas's gaze lingered on him.

"Then I heard her sing." And Cas began to sing,

"Trim and decorate the tree,

Come and be merry with me,

The fire will keep the cold away,

We'll have a merry Christmas Day."

Cas peeled another nut and held it out to Graal. Graal obediently opened his lips and let Cas place it into his mouth, fingers once against brushing Graal's lips.

"It was like a siren song, calling me in." Cas laughed. "I flew up to the window and gazed in. A witch stood, singing alone in the bakery, stirring the cauldron on the stove. No one had ever shown me much kindness until that point in my life. Yet somehow, I knew she would. I flew down and opened the door. In I crept. She kept singing. I came up beside her and sat, just watching her, wanting to be near her."

"Then what happened?" Graal asked.

"She saw me and screamed." Cas shook his head, a fond smile on his lips. "But then she recovered. She picked me up, cooing over me and saying how cold I must be and how thin and small I was. She made me cookies and hot chocolate, and I never left. They already had so many children. So lots of mouths to feed. They weren't wealthy. But they took me in and cared for me. And that's how I became a pixie witch. "

Cas's smile dimmed. "They died about thirteen years ago, my mother and father. I think of them every single day. I miss them."

Cas gazed at one of the Christmas trees. Light from the candles and globes reflected off his face, causing the gold paint to shimmer. "Whenever I see Christmas baubles and hear Christmas music, it reminds me of that first Christmas when I came in out of the cold and found my true family."

Graal's throat tightened. "I see why you love Christmas so much."

"I think that's why I want to spread Christmas cheer, because that's what my mother, my father, and my family did for me," Cas said, voice soft. "I want to give that to

others.”

Graal nodded.

Cas flew on, and Graal walked beside him. They walked close, arms knocking together.

It didn't mean anything. Cas feeding Graal nuts, the casual touches, it couldn't mean anything. How could it? How could someone like Cas want someone like Graal?

But every time Cas leaned in close, heat flooded Graal's body. He stammered and flushed and dropped his gaze.

If this were another orc, or a troll or ogre, he'd have assumed they were interested.

But Cas couldn't want Graal. He could have anyone. And he'd seen the captivating incubus who had been Cas's partner. Graal couldn't even compare to someone like that.

But as they walked and Cas showed him the markets, he kept casually touching Graal, a hand to his shoulder, arm, or wrist. Cas kept leaning in close, gaze locking with Graal's and lingering.

And Graal could almost believe Cas desired him. Almost.

CHAPTER 10

Cas couldn't tell if Graal wanted him or not. The way his yellow eyes filled with hunger, as he stared at Cas, suggested he did. But every time Cas leaned in or pressed his body close, Graal tensed, looked away, or grew flustered.

Maybe he found Cas attractive but just didn't want to fuck him. It was a bitter tea to swallow, and Cas despised anything bitter, but he would just have to gracefully accept that Graal didn't want him.

Well, he'd probably sulk at home and eat his weight in cookies in bed. But he would never push Graal.

"Where do you work?" Cas asked.

"I work for a quarry," Graal said. "Rocks are transported from the quarry to the city to construct buildings. My job is to unload them from the cart and haul them through the narrow streets to wherever I'm told to take them." Graal shrugged. "It's not interesting. It's hard work. But it's a suitable job for a strong half-orc like me."

"You're a half-orc?"

Graal nodded .

"I hadn't realised. To be honest I don't know that much about orcs." Cas hadn't seen that many orcs in the city. He'd served a few in the bakery. But the few he'd met tended to keep to themselves. "Is it your mother or father who is an orc?"

Graal didn't speak for several seconds. Perhaps this was not a pleasant topic for Graal. Perhaps he shouldn't have asked.

"My father was an orc." Graal shrugged. "But I've never met him."

"Oh." Cas wanted to ask more questions. But the tightness in Graal's shoulders caused him to hold his tongue.

For several moments, they walked silently as the markets buzzed around them. A brass band played a Christmas melody. Cas cast for a new topic.

But Graal spoke first. "Growing up, I lived with my mother and her husband, Jordan. I was born before they met and married." Graal's voice remained steady, eyes forward, gait constant. "Jordan and my mother had a son together. I don't see them anymore."

Cas heard the tension vibrating beneath the words. Graal left out a lot of details, but Cas would bet they contained a wealth of suffering.

Cas's chest clenched at the unsaid words. He wanted to comfort Graal and tell him that he did not deserve to be treated poorly by his family. But Graal hadn't told him he had been.

So instead, Cas reached out and slid his hand into Graal's, his slender fingers interlacing with Graal's thick ones. Cas squeezed in what he hoped was a comforting manner.

Graal turned to him. His throat bobbed.

They wandered through the markets, hands entwined. Cas pointed out what the different stores sold. They didn't buy anything. Cas had spent all his money on

materials to make his Christmas outfits. And Graal, although curious, didn't seem keen to buy anything. So they just walked, taking in the ambience.

He kept glancing at Graal, admiring him, his thick body, his soft-looking black hair, and his pointed ears. Cas wanted to tease the tip of his ear between his teeth.

What sound would that elicit from the orc?

Cas jerked his gaze away. "That man is a master woodworker, and he makes wooden Christmas figures. But they are pretty expensive. We have a few figures that have been passed down through the family. They sit on the mantel in our apartment."

As they moved through the crowds, bodies brushing together, the arousal steadily built inside Cas. His gaze flirted with the sizeable bulge in Graal's pants.

He bit his lip. It definitely looked like Graal was big all over. His arsehole clenched and his mouth watered at the thought of getting his hands or lips on Graal's dick. He wanted to beg Graal to slip away with him behind a stall and have his way with Cas.

Cas blew out a breath. He had always appreciated a large cock. It was by no means necessary for enjoyable sex. He'd experienced many cocks of varying sizes. He himself would no doubt be significantly smaller than Graal. Still, the fantasies kept spinning in his head, and heat thrummed through Cas's blood.

Keep calm. Just enjoy the pretty glittery Christmas markets rather than focus on what Graal packs in his trousers.

How long would his dick be? How thick? Would Cas gag as he tried to swallow the wide girth? Would Graal's dick stretch his hole to that delicious point where pain and pleasure blurred? Would Graal tease his puckered hole with the tip of his cock that might be bigger than any Cas had ever known ?

Fuck me dead now!

Cas blew out a breath, trying to get a hold of himself. The two of them were just enjoying a festive stroll. No need to be a perverted creep with his mind in the gutter.

“And there is the master glass blower, selling his different decorations.” This is what Cas should be doing, showing Graal the glass baubles.

He spotted several dangling green balls.

How big were Graal’s green balls? Would they be heavy? Filled with so much seed that Cas wouldn’t be able to swallow it all? Would it dribble from Cas’s mouth, spilling over his throat and chest? Or would his semen fill Cas’s belly before pouring out of his hole and sliding thickly down his inner thighs?

Cas shivered.

Sweet fucking Christmas tree! Where is my head? Why can’t I think of nothing but Graal fucking me?

“Are you cold?” Graal asked.

“What?”

“You shivered. Are you cold? Here, take my coat.” Graal took off his coat. Then he paused, glancing at Cas’s wings. “Oh. Your wings.”

Without thinking, Cas folded his wings down against his back.

Graal draped the coat over Cas’s shoulders, patting it into place. His brows furrowed. “Sorry it’s not as nice as your clothes.”

“It’s perfect. Thank you,” Cas whispered, wrapping the oversized coat around him. It came down to below his knees. Two of Cas could fit in here.

And now Graal’s musky scent encompassed him. Cas hadn’t actually been cold. But he wouldn’t turn down the pleasure of being wrapped in Graal’s warm coat that smelled deliciously of the orc. He pulled the coat closed and took deep breaths of Graal’s scent. His cock grew thicker and heavier. Thankfully, the coat hid his burgeoning erection.

“But aren’t you cold now?” Cas sounded rather breathless.

“No. Orcs are less susceptible to cold than humans. Maybe like pixies. We still feel it. Still dislike it. But it isn’t too bad right now,” Graal said. “And I want you to be nice and warm even if you don’t feel the cold too badly.”

Snow drifted from the sky. Cas tilted his head back, letting the cold flakes land on his flushed skin.

“I know you said snow is shit,” Cas said. “And I get that. I imagine working all day in it whilst hauling rocks around the city can be pretty miserable.” The white flakes danced in the air, catching the light of candles and magicked globes. “But I still think it’s beautiful.”

Cas looked at Graal. Graal’s yellow gaze fixed on Cas, his mouth slightly open.

That’s desire on his face. He wants me. Graal wants me.

“I think the snow can look very beautiful.” Graal paused. “Especially on you.”

Someone knocked into Cas from behind. He stumbled forward, and suddenly Graal’s hands gripped his waist, lifting him from the ground and placing him with his back to

the wall of one of the stalls. Graal shielded him from the people, crowding him.

Cas reached out and gripped a massive bicep. He sucked in a breath as his cock throbbed. Graal had lifted Cas so easily. His large hands pressed firmly against Cas's waist. How easy would it be for Graal to lift him, shove him against the stall, and fuck him?

Cas whimpered, and pixie dust burst forth.

Graal's eyes widened as the dust glittered around them. They stared at each other. Then Graal's tongue slid out, and he licked the dust from his lips, tasting Cas's essence.

"Fuck me," Cas whispered .

Graal froze.

Cas didn't know if he'd just been swearing or if it was a plea. It didn't matter; he wanted Graal to fuck him. Cas tilted his neck back, staring up into Graal's eyes, trying to convey all his need and desire that pulsed inside him.

Graal's pupils dilated until only a small rim of yellow could be seen. Cas slid his hand up Graal's arm. A rumble escaped Graal's throat.

"I want you," Cas whispered. "I want you to fuck me." Cas took a deep breath. He had to say the next bit. It was important. "But I'm not looking for anything serious. I can't do that right now. But I'd love to have your big cock fucking into my tight hole. Tonight." He licked his lips. "If you want me, that is."

People flowed around them. Several glanced at them before walking past. But Cas didn't care. All he cared about was the orc staring down at him and what his answer

would be.

Graal's gaze roamed Cas's face and body, causing Cas to flush. He wanted to beg and plead, but he needed Graal to come to his decision on his own.

Graal leaned forward as if about to kiss him. Then he froze and looked around. "Where?"

Cas took Graal's hand and led him through the crowds to the edge of the market, to the final row of stalls. He led them behind. It was the edge of the town square, completely dark except for Cas's pixie aura, which cast a pale glow around him.

"Here. No one is around. No one should come by." Cas turned and faced Graal. He surged forward and kissed him.

Their lips pressed together, Graal's mouth larger than his. Graal groaned into the kiss, hands clutching at Cas's shoulders.

Cas pulled back slightly, licking along Graal's tusk that had captured his attention earlier. Then he fused their mouths again. Cas's tongue pressed forward, requesting entry. Graal let him in, tongue entwining with Cas's. Graal's hands pressed against Cas's lower back, holding him in place.

But it wasn't enough. Cas needed to touch skin. He pulled back and tore Graal's jacket from his own body. He took a step back and fumbled with his tunic. He kicked off his shoes and reached for his trousers. Graal's large hands joined in, pulling at the fabric and discarding it on the snow until he stood naked before Graal.

CHAPTER 11

“Y ou’re magnificent,” Graal whispered in awe. “So magnificent.”

Graal couldn’t believe this was happening. He couldn’t believe Cas wanted him. Him! Graal!

Snow fell around Cas, who stood naked before Graal. A light wind blew. The loose parts of Cas’s long white and pale-blue hair hung free and caressed his skin. Blue swirling patterns started around Cas’s collarbone and ran down his arms, almost like jewellery. They shimmered as he moved.

Cas’s translucent wings, a mix of various dark blues, flapped slowly behind him. Cas’s hard cock rested amongst his curls.

Graal’s hands twitched with an urge to touch and reach for Cas. But before he could, Cas flew towards him and kissed Graal fiercely. His fingers reached for the ties of Graal’s tunic. He undid them swiftly, pushing the fabric aside.

Cas ran his hands over Graal’s hairy chest. Gasping into the hungry kisses, Graal clutched at Cas’s shoulders. His wings brushed Graal’s fingers. Cas reached for the hem of Graal’s trousers, undoing them and shoving them down.

“Oh.” Cas wrapped his fingers around Graal’s girth.

Graal moaned.

Pulling back, Cas stared down at Graal's cock. "I knew you'd be big." Cas fell to his knees in the snow. His wings beat rapidly. "Fuck, you're massive."

Cas stared wide-eyed at Graal's length. One hand wrapped around the base, and the other held the head as if weighing it.

Graal bit his lip, trying to control himself as Cas touched his cock. "You don't... It's fine if it's too big... You don't have to..." Graal didn't exactly know how to finish that sentence, but he didn't want Cas to do something he didn't want to do.

Graal had only fucked orcs, a troll, and an ogre, creatures used to this type of girth and size.

Not a petite pixie.

Did Cas think his cock uncouth? Vulgar? Crude?

"Sorry it's so large," Graal stammered.

Cas made a choked noise. "Large. It is definitely large." He glanced at Graal's face before looking back at Graal's dick. "But I never said it is too large. Although, it definitely poses a challenge." Cas licked his lips and stroked.

Graal's dick jerked in Cas's hand. Pre-cum spurted, hitting Cas on the cheek. Cas startled, and Graal's heavy scent filled the air.

"Sorry. I should tell you, orc's spill a lot of pre-cum." Graal's face heated. "And cum."

Cas ran a finger down the side of his own cheek, collecting the thick fluid. He lifted his hand before his face, rubbing his fingers and the liquid together.

“And I’ve been told that our scent is pretty strong because it’s used to attract mates.” Graal had this explained to him by an orc he’d fucked once. All in all, they hadn’t talked much. But he’d learnt a little about orc anatomy from him. “I’m sorry. I know it can be a lot and— Oh.” Words died on his lips.

Cas licked his fingers, like a cat cleaning itself. Then he sucked them and Graal’s pre-cum into his mouth. He groaned. “You taste good.” Cas narrowed his eyes, staring up at Graal. “Like really good. Amazingly good.”

Graal’s mouth fell open. Cas leaned forward and lapped at the pre-cum that drizzled from the tip of Graal’s cock.

“Fuck,” Graal cried out, hands clutching at Cas’s shoulders.

Cas moaned as he ran his tongue around the head before tonguing the slit to catch the pre-cum at the source. “And no more apologising. You shouldn’t be.” Cas’s voice sounded husky.

“It’s incredible. Your smell. Your taste.” Cas let out a breath. “I want this. I want you.” He smiled. “But I might need some practice. I’ve never been with anyone as big as you.” His eyes twinkled. “Sorry if I fumble a bit.”

And before Graal could parse what Cas had said and come to terms with the fact that Cas was turned on by Graal’s size, scent, and pre-cum, Cas leaned forward and ran his tongue along Graal’s length. His hand squeezed the base of Graal’s cock, causing more pre-cum to leak from the tip.

Graal’s chest heaved. He wouldn’t blink. He wouldn’t close his eyes. He didn’t want to miss a second of Cas on his knees before him, pleasuring him.

Cas sucked the tip of Graal’s cock into his warm, wet mouth.

“Fuck!” Graal cried out.

Cas’s cheeks hollowed as he sucked, drawing more of Graal between his stretched lips. Cas couldn’t take all of him. But his hand jerked what he couldn’t fit into his mouth. Cas’s eyelids drooped as he bobbed his head up and down, pulling off just enough to swirl his tongue around the flared head. Then he took more of Graal into his mouth.

Graal’s toes curled in his boots. “Cas! Oh, Cas! It’s oh—” He couldn’t form words. Couldn’t form thoughts as Cas sucked and jerked him.

Cas gagged and pulled back. His eyes glistened. He swayed a little. “The smell of your arousal is so strong,” Cas whispered. He licked Graal’s cock and then sucked the tip again. “Your taste is so strong too. So potent.”

Graal almost apologised, but he remembered Cas had told him not to.

Cas teased the wiry black hair around the base of Graal’s cock with his teeth. Then pressed his face against the skin and curls, nuzzling. Cas’s warm breath brushed against him. Graal shivered and spread his legs as best he could with his trousers down around his knees, trying to give Cas better access.

Cas licked and nipped, moaning and groaning as he moved down to Graal’s balls. Graal cried out. No one had explored this part of him before. Cas licked and sucked, making small slurping noises.

“Fuck, Graal. Your fucking smell.” Cas’s hands spasming on Graal’s thighs. He shivered, and his wings fluttered. Pixie dust filled the air, and Graal licked his lips, wanting to taste more of the sweet, citrusy pixie dust Cas produced. Graal knew Cas would taste sweet.

“I think your pre-cum and scent is a fucking aphrodisiac.” Cas pulled back, taking deep heaving breaths. “I could spill from just smelling and tasting you.” Then he dived back in, licking at skin, balls, hair, and cock. “I’ve had aphrodisiacs before. Yours is easily the strongest.”

What? Graal knew orc pre-cum had special properties. But he’d never heard it or his scent referred to as an aphrodisiac .

Making gasping, moaning sounds, Cas stroked Graal’s cock, nuzzling the side of it. More pre-cum dripped from the tip, and Cas reached out with his hand. He caught the drops before bringing the liquid to his mouth. Then he sucked Graal’s cock back into his mouth.

He bobbed his head, as if desperate to take as much of Graal as he could. Graal groaned, lost in the incredible sensation of Cas sucking him. Cas’s blue eyes stared up at him.

Fuck. He looks drunk on arousal. Could my seed really be an aphrodisiac?

Cas’s eyes watered as he took more and more of Graal into his mouth and throat as if fighting his gag reflex. Graal reached out and traced Cas’s stretched lips. Cas groaned, eyes fluttering shut. Tears streamed down his cheeks.

Fuck, he’s beautiful.

Cas gagged and pulled back, coughing.

“Shit. I’m sorry.” Graal knew he’d been told not to apologise. But what else was he meant to do?

Cas blinked up at him. “You have to fuck me, Graal,” Cas pleaded. “Now. Please, I

need it.” His wings trembled, and bursts of pixie dust sparkled around him. He gazed up at Graal, eyes dazed and unfocused. “I’ve never felt this aroused before.”

Turned on beyond belief and also slightly alarmed, Graal hauled Cas to his feet. Cas stumbled and leaned against him.

Graal searched Cas’s face. “Do you mean it?” Did his pre-cum really have this effect on Cas? Could it truly be an aphrodisiac?

Cas pressed his body against Graal’s. He thrust, rubbing his hard cock against Graal’s thigh. He whimpered. “Yes. I want you to fuck me with this massive cock.” He wrapped a hand around Graal’s cock and stroked. More pre-cum spurted forth .

Graal groaned and let out a breath. “I meant about my scent and pre-cum being an aphrodisiac.”

Cas gave a lazy smile. “Yep. I’m pretty certain. It’s powerful. I wanted you to fuck me before. Now I need it.”

“And are you sure you’re all right?” Graal stroked Cas’s cheek. Graal felt slightly concerned for Cas. Perhaps this thing was a cross-race effect. “You don’t need anything?”

“I need your cock inside me.” Cas kissed him, biting at his lips.

Graal groaned.

“Now bury your fingers in me, stretch me, and then fuck me, orc.”

CHAPTER 12

Tucked away behind the stalls at the edge of the Christmas markets, Graal reached down to his cock and slid his fingers through the copious amount of pre-cum that trickled from the tip.

He reached behind Cas and found his entrance. Cas whimpered. He wrapped his arms over Graal's shoulders and leaned his head against Graal's chest. He pushed his arse back and spread his legs as he rested his weight on Graal.

"Oh! I forgot about oil." Cas gasped. "Fuck. You don't even need oil. You produce your own lubricant."

Cas trembled as Graal's slippery fingers pressed against the tight puckered ring of muscle.

"Ready for my fingers?" Graal nudged his fingers against Cas's entrance, still unable to comprehend how this was happening. How could Cas actually want Graal to fuck him?

Cas pushed back, urging Graal on. "I'm so ready." Cas's breath brushed Graal's nipple, causing them both to peak. "Please, Graal. I need this. I need you."

Graal slid a finger inside Cas's tight, hot channel .

"Yes," Cas hissed. He bit at the skin of Graal's chest, causing him to growl.

Then Cas began rocking back and forth on the digit inside him. Cas's cock swung with the motion, and it bumped against Graal's thigh. His wings began a slow flap, in time with the movements of his body.

"More?" Graal's cock pulsed with the need to fuck Cas. But he had to wait. He needed Cas to be ready. He didn't want to hurt the small pixie.

"Yes!" Cas begged.

Graal added a second finger, sliding it in alongside the first. He stretched them apart. "I should tell you, orc pre-cum relaxes the body and will help you stretch to accommodate me."

"What?" Cas lifted his head, blinking up at Graal whilst Graal continued to slide his fingers in and out of Cas.

"I've never heard about the aphrodisiac thing," Graal said. "But our pre-cum helps relax and stretch the body to accommodate our size. Because we have very big cocks."

"Oh." Cas shuddered, and his eyes slid closed. "And your pre-cum feels amazing inside me. Different. I've never felt anything like it before." Goosebumps spread on Cas's skin. "It's like it's lighting me up from the inside. I feel so sensitive. So open. So needy."

Cas groaned, fingers digging into Graal's arms. "Fuck! Graal! Hurry up." He fucked himself back onto Graal's fingers, shoving the fingers deep. "I need your cock inside me. I want your balls spilling all that wonderful magic seed into me."

Graal's cock jerked. Honestly, when Cas had mentioned wanting to be fucked by Graal, Graal had serious doubts Cas would be able to take his dick.

Cas, and pixies in general, were petite. Graal was not .

But Cas opened to him so beautifully. Graal couldn't wait to sink his cock into this tight, hot, eager hole.

He added a third finger. Cas's body clenched tight around the digits.

"Oh!" Cas squeezed his eyes shut as Graal continued to slide them in and out, stretching them. "Oh! Fuck. Shit. Fuck. Holy fucking Christmas carols!" Babbling and broken words spilled from Cas's mouth.

Graal reached deep, aiming for that spot inside Cas. When he hit it, Cas's mouth fell open. "Graal!" He cried out.

Graal rubbed his fingertips insistently against Cas's prostate. Cas let out a wail, throwing his head back.

His wings spasmed, then held in place, trembling as Cas's entire body tensed. Pixie dust erupted in erratic bursts, filling the air around them. Ecstasy transformed Cas's face.

Hot spend shot from Cas's cock and landed on Graal's thigh. Cas sobbed as Graal milked that pleasure spot deep inside. Tremors wracked Cas's body as his orgasm rolled through him.

Graal watched in awe.

I did that. I made him come. I brought him pleasure.

After several moments, Cas slumped forward, his wings drooping slowly. "Oh. That was... I've never..." Cas panted, rubbing his face against Graal's chest. "Fuck." He

shivered. “Fuck. Graal.” He shivered again.

Graal wrapped his arms around Cas beneath his wings. He lifted Cas off the ground and cradled him against his chest. Cas looped his arms around Graal’s neck and wrapped his legs around Graal’s waist. Murmuring, Cas buried his face in Graal’s throat, snuggling close.

Graal’s own cock ached with need. But it could wait. He could take care of it later. At the moment, despite his burning arousal, he really just wanted to hold Cas and look after him. Watching Cas orgasm had been incredible, and getting to hold him now, to have Cas trust him and be so vulnerable with Graal, cracked something open inside Graal.

He squeezed Cas against him, trying to treasure this blindingly bright moment of joy in his otherwise dark and lonely world.

Cas lifted his head and met Graal’s gaze. Cas’s cheeks were flushed. The gold paint smeared around his eyes and lips. Sweat glistened on his skin, mixed with several strands of Graal’s seed. Cas licked his gold lips, all swollen and bruised from sucking Graal’s dick.

Graal’s cock throbbed.

Cas placed a hand on Graal’s hairy chest. “Ready to fuck me now?”

CHAPTER 13

“W hat?” Graal’s eyes widened. “I thought you were done.”

Cas shook his head. The arousal still buzzed through him. He’d spent. But he wanted more. No. He needed more.

“Pixies are famous for multiple orgasms. Didn’t you know?” Cas took a deep breath, trying to get some much-needed air back in his aching lungs so he could go again. He slid his hand through Graal’s hairy chest. “But I’ve never had an orgasm that amazing before. That intense.” Cas closed his eyes. He let out a laugh. “I think I can only manage one more.”

Normally, he could manage at least three. Usually more. But not today. Not after that first orgasm. He leaned forward and kissed Graal.

Fuck. Graal was so intoxicating. Cas couldn’t get enough of him.

And he liked this position. Being held up in Graal’s big, muscular arms. Cas rocked forwards, pressing his still-hard cock against Graal’s stomach. Cas’s legs squeezed around Graal’s waist, giving his dick even more delicious friction .

Graal carried him so easily. In fact, this was the perfect position.

Freeing his hand from between them, Cas reached to the side and then down. He wrapped his hand around Graal’s thick cock, still hard and leaking.

Graal shuddered and groaned as Cas stroked him. Cas hummed. This cock would feel so amazing inside him.

Cas tried to manoeuvre Graal's cock so it faced upwards towards his hole. Cas wiggled against Graal, trying to move down slightly.

"What are you doing?" Graal's deep voice rumbled.

"I think you can fuck in this position. I just need to move and line your cock up with my hole. Then you can grip my waist and fuck up into me."

Graal growled. His whole body vibrated. "Let me help." He changed his hold and held Cas's waist. He lifted Cas slightly. Cas's wings flapped, legs tightening around Graal, and his hands landed on Graal's shoulders as he reoriented himself.

Holding Cas with just one hand, Graal reached for his cock and positioned it at Cas's rim.

Cas rocked against the big tip, and he bit his lip as sweet anticipation swirled through him. Then, with one hand still on Cas's waist, Graal began to exude a gentle steady pressure, pushing Cas down onto his cock.

"Oh!" Cas cried as the swollen head stretched him.

Graal groaned low in his throat as Cas slid slowly down Graal's cock, taking him bit by bit. Cas's thighs and calves clenched around Graal's waist. His fingers tore at Graal's shoulders.

Graal stretched him so wide.

It burned. It stung. But Cas could feel the pleasure dancing at the edges.

Fuck, Cas wanted this. He'd never wanted a cock inside him so much in his life. Cas paused, hunching forward, taking deep breaths. He didn't know how much of Graal was inside him. But he knew it definitely wasn't all of him.

"You all right?" Graal asked, voice tight.

"Yeah. Yeah." Cas squeezed his eyes shut, taking gasping breaths as he willed himself to relax. "You're just so big."

"This might help." Then Graal's arm began to move.

"What?" Cas tried to see what Graal was doing.

Then he felt it. A warm tingly sensation, spread inside, soothing his channel, relaxing the muscles. Graal was jerking himself and spilling more of his pre-cum inside Cas.

Cas whimpered as his hole relaxed and softened in increments. But not just that; ripples of pleasure moved through him, starting from his arse and spreading through his body all the way to his fingers and his toes.

Cas gasped. He needed more. He needed more of that sweet orc nectar filling him. He needed his hole and belly stuffed full of Graal's dripping seed. And he needed Graal's cock buried deep inside him, deeper than anyone had ever been before.

Cas choked. He clenched around the part of Graal's dick buried inside him. Graal grunted, and Cas felt more of the liquid spilling forth. Cas couldn't think straight. He just knew he needed Graal to fuck him and spend inside him now.

Leaning back, hands still on Graal's shoulders, Cas flapped his wings, letting them take a bit of his weight. His wings lifted him ever so slightly, so Graal's dick slid from his hole. Still, the thick tip remained firmly inside Cas.

Graal reached out so both his hands held Cas's waist. For a second, Cas remained still, wings flapping slowly, the head of Graal's dick inside him. Then he stilled his wings, tightened his legs, and slammed down, taking all Graal's cock in one swift movement .

Cas and Graal cried out as Graal's cock filled him completely.

Graal's fingers dug into Cas's skin hard enough to leave bruises. Their cries could surely be heard by those in the Christmas markets.

But Cas did not care. All he cared about was them and their pleasure and Graal fucking him deep.

He flapped his wings, lifting, letting part of Graal's cock slide from his body. Then Graal yanked him down, fucking Cas onto his cock. The air punched from Cas's lungs. His body felt so full, so stretched, so complete.

"Yes!" Cas flapped his wings, and Graal's cock slid from his body again.

And again Graal pulled him back down on his cock.

"Fuck!" Cas screamed to the night sky as snow fell on his naked skin.

Over and over, he flew several inches up. Over and over, Graal yanked him back down onto his dick.

Growls and groans escaped Graal as he fucked Cas. Their bodies slapped together. Cas's fingers gripped Graal's shoulders as Graal's dick pummelled into him. Cas shifted the angle of his hips, and the next time Graal's cock buried deep into him, it hit his prostate.

Cas keened. Their rhythm grew erratic, and Cas's control over his wings and flight became difficult. But still, Graal held him where he needed to be and pounded up into his arse, nailing that spot inside him over and over. The veins in Graal's neck stood out. Cas's whole body tingled.

Then Graal threw his head back and roared as he slammed into Cas, holding him in place, hitting the bundle of nerves inside Cas dead-on.

Cas's vision turned white as Graal's hot seed flooded his insides.

Cas's whole body convulsed, limbs quivering as his wings snapped uncontrollably. His own dick jerked as he shot thick ropes of cum. Pleasure like he'd never known swam through his body until nothing existed but the ecstasy burning inside him.

"Graal!" Then Cas collapsed.

Graal's strong arms caught him.

CHAPTER 14

G raal cleaned them up as best he could with a handkerchief that he kept in his pocket. Cas did not help much. His body sagged, a dazed smile on his face as he watched Graal right them.

“I can still feel you buried inside me.” Cas wiggled his hips.

“I didn’t hurt you, did I?” Graal asked.

“No.” Cas paused. “A little. But it’s the good kind of hurt.”

Graal shook his head, huffing a laugh. “Here, let’s get you dressed and warm. And maybe get you something to eat and drink.” Cas looked like he needed it.

I did that to him. I’m the reason he looks completely fucked and satisfied.

Graal helped Cas with his tunic. It had a large hole at the back for his wings. It was a little difficult to put on, especially since Cas didn’t really help. Cas stumbled, but Graal held him up. Then Graal pulled Cas’s trousers on. Cas seemed content to just let Graal dress him. And to be honest, Graal enjoyed caring for Cas .

Cas sighed contentedly. “I can easily say they were the two best orgasms I’ve ever experienced in my life.”

“Really? I mean, it was incredible for me. The best I’ve had. But I didn’t realise you felt the same.” Graal knelt before Cas and put on the pixie’s boots.

He'd not realised they could fuck in the position they had. He'd never done anything like that before. But Cas was very light, and his wings helped.

"Mmmm." Cas closed his eyes. "And you should consider bottling up your seed and selling it. I will recommend it to everyone."

Graal choked. Then he rose, draping his coat around Cas's shoulders. He liked Cas in his coat. "Let's get you something to eat and drink."

Cas linked his arm with Graal's as they walked back to the markets.

"You're very good at looking after me." Cas leaned against him.

"I like looking after you," Graal admitted, glancing down at Cas.

Cas looked like he'd been thoroughly and roughly fucked. His hair resembled a haystack of white and pale blue. His shining clothing needed to be cleaned. Red marks, caused by Graal's beard, fingers, teeth, or mouth—he didn't know—marred Cas's pale skin. And of course, his makeup was a mess. But at least he looked like he'd enjoyed every single minute of being fucked.

Shit. Is that my seed on his cheek and chin?

Graal reached out and wiped it away. Cas leaned into the touch.

Chuckling, Graal took him to a stand and ordered them some fried dough with honey and cinnamon sprinkled on top. They had savoury toppings, but he knew Cas preferred sweet foods. He also got Cas some hot chocolate .

"Thank you." Cas took a bite of the dough and moaned. Then he took a sip from the mug. "This is so good."

They ate in silence except for the small moans of pleasure and appreciation Cas made.

After they finished eating, Cas pursed his lips. "I should probably get back to the stall. I've been gone a very long time. They will wonder what I've been doing." Cas paused. "Actually they have probably worked out what I have been doing. And with whom." He grinned. "But I think I can still help them pack up."

Around them, the crowds had diminished, and it looked like several of the stalls had started to close.

"And are you feeling all right?" At Cas's questioning look, Graal added, "You seemed a little out of it for a bit." He thought of Cas's unfocused, desire-filled gaze.

Cas laughed. "I'm exhausted, but I'll be fine. I think the aphrodisiac effect of your spunk has worn off."

"That's good." Although, Graal was still coming to grips with the idea that he produced an aphrodisiac. He glanced at Cas. "And... I should probably mention..." Graal trailed off.

"What?" Cas asked.

"It's pretty obvious what you and I got up to earlier." Graal gestured to Cas's hair, face, and clothes.

Cas stared at him for a second and then burst out laughing. Cas touched his smudged and swollen gold lips. "Yes. I imagine it is. But that's fine. I'll just tell them I had the best fuck of my life and they can be jealous." His blue eyes danced.

Graal's whole body heated.

Cas touched his arm. “Thanks for tonight.”

“You don’t need to thank me. It was amazing for me.”

“I do.” Cas paused. “I’ve been feeling a bit down. I’m usually happier at Christmas. But with Xavier and I breaking up recently...” Cas trailed off .

“Truth is, it wasn’t mutual. I was very much in love with him, and still am if I’m honest. I’d planned to ask him to bond with me on Christmas.”

A surge of jealousy welled up inside Graal.

“He’s an incubus, and they do a bonding ritual when they want to be with someone forever. I thought we had a forever sort of love. Guess not.” Cas’s shoulders drooped. “When I saw him today, I’d hoped he was going to say he made a mistake and that he wanted me back.”

Cas gave him a smile. “So showing you the Christmas markets, spending time with you, and then the sex!” He laughed. “It’s been a wonderful night. The perfect distraction I needed. So thank you.” Cas squeezed Graal’s arm.

“You’re welcome,” Graal said, wishing he had the chance to treasure Cas forever.

Graal spotted the stall belonging to Cas and his family ahead. Graal’s throat tightened. Their night was over. Tomorrow, they’d go back to just seeing each other at the bakery where Cas served him.

He shouldn’t be sad. He’d gotten to spend a night with Cas. He’d gotten to know this wonderful pixie. He’d gotten to fuck him. Everything had been beyond magical.

And now Christmas would always remind him of Cas the Christmas pixie.

“Do you want to do something again sometime?” Cas asked.

Graal startled, blinking down at Cas.

“Like I said, I’m not looking for anything serious. My heart’s a little too broken for that.” Cas gave a harsh laugh. “But I like you. I’d like to spend more time with you as friends. And maybe we could fuck again too.” Cas stepped in close, pressing their bodies together and gazing up into Graal’s eyes. “I mean if you drop by at the bakery or here at the Christmas markets, I’m sure I can manage a break sometimes.”

Graal’s chest lightened. “I’d like that.”

Their time wasn’t over yet. He’d get to spend time with Cas. For a little while more, at least.

CHAPTER 15

Cas's fingers scrambled against the brick wall, trying to find something to grip onto as Graal thrust into him. Cas cried out, the sound muffled by the large hand over his mouth. His cock jerked and twitched as he spilled, cum splattering against the wall in front of him.

Graal grunted in his ear, thrusting into him once more. He shuddered as his seed filled Cas's willing hole. Cas groaned as Graal pulled out. His cum trickled from Cas's hole and slid down his inner thighs. Graal's hand released his mouth.

Cas licked his bruised lips. Graal's hand caressed the sensitive skin between Cas's wings, and Cas shivered.

A moment later, Cas felt a cloth cleaning between his thighs. Graal had started bringing them when he visited. Cas closed his eyes, resting his head against the wall as his breathing returned to normal.

After having righted his own clothes, Graal pulled up Cas's trousers, tucked away his cock, and buttoned him up. He turned Cas around. A lazy smile stretched Cas's cheeks.

Graal slid his fingers through Cas's hair, trying to tidy him up. Cas should tell him not to bother. His siblings knew what he got up to. Lacy had spotted them briefly the other day when Cas had sucked Graal's cock during one of his breaks.

But Cas just leaned into the touch. He liked Graal's fingers smoothing his hair down.

For such a gruff, grumpy orc, he was ridiculously sweet.

“I have to get back to work.” Thankfully, the aphrodisiac effect of Graal’s seed seemed to fade once Cas spent. Like magic!

“I know. At least you don’t look too thoroughly fucked today.” Graal chuckled.

Cas’s smile widened. “You’ll have to do better next time, then.” Cas straightened and kissed Graal, wrapping his arms around Graal’s broad shoulders.

This was just a temporary fling, something to help him get over Xavi. And it was working. He thought of Xavier a lot less these days. Apparently, being stuffed full of magical orc semen could do that.

Still, Cas wished he had more time to explore Graal’s body rather than these small moments. And he wished they could fuck in an actual bed too. But he shared a room with Lacy. Thus, inviting Graal to spend the night did not seem like a good idea.

“I need to go back to work.” Cas kissed Graal again.

“I know.” Graal’s hands pressed against the small of Cas’s back as he lowered his head for another kiss.

Damnations. He couldn’t get enough of this orc. It had been like this for a week, meeting up in snippets, fucking, sucking, or whatever they had time for in the side alley near the bakery. Usually, Graal came by on the way home from work. Thankfully it wasn’t a busy time of day, so Cas could usually slip out for a few minutes for some quick fun.

Then he’d return and deal with his siblings’ teasing before finishing up in the bakery and then heading to the Christmas markets. Sometimes Graal would visit there too.

Unfortunately, Cas didn't often have the time to properly sneak away at the markets. But on those days, Graal would just buy food and stand at the counter, watching Cas as he ate. His gaze sent shivers down Cas's spine, especially when Cas could still feel the stretch of Graal's cock deep inside his body.

With a groan, Cas pulled back. "I really have to get back to work." With iron willpower, he disentangled himself from the orc. "I keep getting teased by my siblings and put on extra duties because of my long breaks."

Cas stepped out from behind the stacked wooden crates and began to walk down the side alley, Graal falling into step with him. Since Lacy had spotted him and Graal, Cas had found and piled some crates on top of each other. That was where Cas and Graal fucked. That way, if any of his siblings walked past the alley entrance, they wouldn't see him and Graal.

Graal frowned. "I hadn't realised I was causing you trouble."

"It's fine. Well worth it." Cas nudged Graal with his shoulder. "And I don't mind extra duties."

Still, Graal frowned. "I don't like thinking of all the extra work you have to do. You already work in the bakery during the day and then at the markets during the night. They're long days. You need rest."

"It's only for a month each year. The Christmas season is always intense. It is good business for the bakery. And I don't start at the bakery too early." Cas paused. "But I am looking forward to having my nights back once Christmas is over."

"Oh! And I have tonight off!" He didn't get many nights off during the Christmas season.

They reached the bakery door. Still, Cas had so much more he wanted to say to Graal. He wanted to ask Graal about how his work had been today. Or how he was in general. He enjoyed the fucking, but he also enjoyed talking to Graal. Even if this was just a fling, he liked Graal as a friend.

Sometimes, Cas wondered, if they'd met at another time, a time when Cas didn't pine for his ex, then maybe something could have happened between them. But he wasn't ready to risk his heart again, especially when the crushed organ in his chest still beat for Xavi.

An idea popped into Cas's head. "What are you doing tonight?"

CHAPTER 16

G raal pressed his lips together. “I’m just going home after I buy some bread and cookies. Why?”

“Well...if you wanted, you could hang around whilst I packed up. We’re only open a little longer today. If you don’t mind waiting, you can sit for a bit until we close. I’ll even bring you some cookies and hot chocolate. On me.” Cas’s wings fluttered, and he lifted off the ground.

“Then, once we close, you could come around the back and you could sit whilst I clean and pack up. I’m on closing duty tonight. Then we could go back to your place.” Cas gestured to the apartment above. “I’d invite you upstairs. But no doubt several of my siblings will be around, so we won’t get much privacy.” And Cas wanted to see where Graal lived.

“But only if you want. I understand if you don’t want to spend an evening sitting around and watching me clean.” Cas held his breath.

“That sounds nice.” Graal smiled. He smiled more these days.

“Then come on in.” Cas opened the door and entered .

Jack, Grady, and Lacy worked away in the back.

“How long exactly does it take to get your arse rail—” Lacy cut off her words as she raised her head and saw Graal enter behind Cas. “Oh!” Her eyes widened. “Hi.” She

recovered quickly and smiled. “I’m Lacy, Cas’s sister. And you must be Graal.” She came forward, wiping her hands on her apron before offering him her hand.

Graal shook her hand. “Nice to meet you.”

“And these are Grady and Jack, my brothers,” Cas introduced.

Graal nodded in greeting as Cas’s brothers said hello.

“Graal will be around for a bit,” Cas said.

“Well, it’s nice to finally properly meet you, Graal,” Jack said.

“You too,” Graal mumbled.

Deciding that was enough of an introduction, Cas led Graal to a table in the front of the bakery. At this time of day, they usually weren’t too busy. But surprisingly, there were no customers at all.

Graal sat gingerly on the chair as if worried the wood would struggle under his weight. Which was fair, since Cas didn’t know how old the chair was. He was reasonably sure it had been here when Cas joined the family. “I’ll go get you some hot chocolate and cookies.”

Graal nodded, clasping his massive green, work-roughened hands and resting them on the white crocheted tablecloth. Graal’s bulking form dwarfed the table.

With a start, Cas realised he’d never seen Graal sit at one of the tables. He always took his food and left. But despite the contrast, Cas liked the look of Graal sitting at the table in the bakery. Smiling, Cas returned to the back.

Lacy stood on her toes, watching Graal eagerly.

“You two are getting pretty close,” Jack observed. “You’ve been together what, a week now? ”

“You spend every free moment with him.” Lacy kept her gaze on Graal, seemingly having forgotten she was in the middle of packing a tray of cookies for the markets. “Is it getting serious?”

Cas gave a quick shake of his head. “I don’t think it would be a good idea. Not this close after breaking up with Xavi. We’re just having some fun. We’re friends, and Graal is nice.”

Lacy scoffed. “He’s a lot nicer than Xavier!”

Cas swivelled towards her. His brows furrowed. “You...you didn’t like Xavier?”

“Well...” She looked to Jack and Grady as if seeking help.

“Xavier’s fine,” Jack said. “Just a bit...”

“Arrogant and condescending,” Grady finished the sentence in a matter-of-fact tone.

“What?” Cas’s mouth fell open. “You never said anything! Do you all think that?”

His siblings shared another look.

“You all didn’t like him?”

“He wasn’t the worst,” Jack said slowly.

“But he just wasn’t that nice to be around.” Lacy made a face. “Sorry, Cas. He just always seemed to look down on us and our little bakery , as he always said.”

“And I did try and say something early on. I think several of us did. But I don’t think you really heard us,” Grady said. “You were smitten from the start. And honestly, despite Xavier being a bit of a cockhead, you seemed happy and he treated you well. We didn’t want to get in the way of that.”

“But Graal seems nice.” Lacy smiled.

“It’s just a fling,” Cas said absently. How had Cas not known his siblings didn’t like Xavi? That they thought Xavi arrogant and condescending? He didn’t remember Grady trying to talk to him. Or any of the others. But he had been lost in lust and love with Xavi so quickly.

His brows furrowed as he thought back to their relationship. He glanced down, staring at the green outfit he wore. He thought of the first time Cas had shown Xavi the outfit.

“You’re going to wear that out?” Xavi had asked.

“Of course. It suits me.” Cas had laughed. “And we can’t all wear expensive clothes made by the best tailors in the city.”

“You’re lucky you’re pretty or I wouldn’t be seen dead with you in public in that outfit.” He had reached for Cas and tugged him down, hands sliding beneath the clothes.

Cas rubbed his hand against the soft fabric, Xavi’s words spinning in his head. At the time, he’d not thought much about it. After all, Xavi had called him pretty. And he’d loved Cas.

Couples had different personalities. Opposites attracted and all that.

Until they didn't.

"We just don't suit," Xavi had said as he broke up with Cas. "We have such different interests and ways of being. I'm into culture, the arts, and philosophy. You're only into baking, making shiny outfits, and Christmas." He'd shaken his head. "You're so frivolous and shallow. Why don't you ever take anything seriously, Casimir?"

Cas's stomach had tightened. For a moment, he couldn't speak.

At the time, all Cas could think of was how he hadn't been enough for Xavi. Cas swallowed and pushed the memories away, trying not to think of how he'd pleaded and tried to convince Xavi how he did like other things that weren't frivolous and shallow.

Arrogant and condescending. That was what his family thought of Xavi.

And apparently, Xavi had always looked down on Cas's siblings and their little bakery. How had Cas not noticed? Somehow, the idea that Xavi looked down on his family and bakery stung worse than Xavi looking down on Cas. Cas didn't want to think about why.

"I...need to make some hot chocolate for Graal. He's waiting." Without looking at his siblings, Cas went to the stove. He could feel their gazes on him.

CHAPTER 17

“Here you go.” Cas held out the teacup. “It’s made with moon water, chamomile, lemon, and honey. All the tea I make has honey in it.” Cas laughed. “But my mother would have told you that honey has strong healing properties. So it’s fine.”

Graal took the dainty green, gold, and white porcelain teacup and saucer, careful as he balanced the saucer on the palm of his left hand. He held the tiny handle with his right thumb and pointer finger. The lovely teacup looked ridiculous in his massive hands.

But today he found himself unbothered by the idea.

“Are you sure you don’t need help?” Graal asked Cas for the third time.

“No. You sit and drink your tea.” Cas waved a hand at him. “It’s just nice to have your company.”

Graal smiled at Cas’s words.

After the bakery had closed and Cas’s siblings had left, Cas had come into the front area. He’d brought Graal more hot chocolate and cookies. He’d smiled and chatted a little to Graal as he’d gone about his tasks, but Graal could sense strain in his voice and movements.

He’d asked if Cas had changed his mind and wanted him to leave. But Cas had insisted he wanted Graal there. After a little while, Cas seemed to relax. Once Cas

finished in the front area, they moved to the back, and Cas cleaned out the cauldron and giant oven.

Jars of honey, dried spices, herbs, and fruits lined the many wooden shelves that stood against one wall. Bunches of dried herbs and flowers, tied with ribbon, hung from the ceiling.

“And honestly, cleaning the bakery is my family’s duty, and it should be done by someone who knows what they are doing.” Cas smiled. “But I could explain the process, and you can observe. Then if you want to help next time, you could.”

Next time. Cas thought there might be a next time.

Graal nodded, throat tight. “All right.”

“Actually you should watch Lachlan when he comes in before dawn to prepare for the day. He is the strongest witch in the family, and he has such an affinity for the hearth and kitchen.” Cas laughed. “The door will open when he approaches, the lanterns will light, the broom will jump to be in his hand.”

Cas held out his hand to the broom. Nothing happened. Laughing, Cas picked it up and began to sweep.

“Witches have affinities?” Graal only had vague ideas about witches.

Cas nodded as he continued sweeping. “We do. We’re all hearth and kitchen witches, but some of us have different strengths. Grady’s affinity is protection, which fits, as he is always looking after us. He also does the protection charms for the bakery and apartment. And us.”

Cas pulled back his sleeve, revealing a woven band Graal had noticed before. “A lot

of his baking is about protecting those who consume what he makes. Ordellia's affinity is health, so her baking and cooking have the strongest healing abilities. But not everyone has an affinity."

"I see." Graal considered what Cas said. "I always thought witchcraft was about cauldrons, spells, and potions."

"You're right on both counts. We do use cauldrons." Cas gestured to the now clean cauldron on the stove. "Lachlan will set up a simmer pot tomorrow morning, and we'll keep that going throughout the day. It sends out positive energy. We also use cauldrons to make teas, stews, and other concoctions."

"And our teas and the food we make could be seen as potions. We mix ingredients, and we give an intent to how we want them to affect our patrons. Also, the rituals we perform and the focus behind those actions can also be seen as spells."

The broom swept rhythmically against the floor. "So right now, I am sweeping. But I'm doing so with a certain intent." Cas paused. "I am sending out waves of gratitude to the space, thanking the floor for taking our weight all day, for bearing our feet, for supporting us as we work to provide for the community."

Cas grabbed a small dustpan. He swept up a small pile of debris he'd collected. Then he returned to using the broom.

Graal took a sip of his hot tea, startling a little at the sweetness. Cas really did like his tea sweet. Surprisingly, Graal liked it. The lemon perfectly balanced the sweetness. And the chamomile gave a lovely floral note. He didn't know what moon water was. That was one more question to add to the list.

"The home and all the places within are magic. Mother taught me that everything is magic if you give your heart to it." Cas smiled fondly, as he often did when talking

about his mother. “Most witches work in villages, not cities.” Cas paused.

“In fact, some witches believe that city witches aren’t real witches, as we don’t have a specific community we care for.” Cas made a face. “They think we can’t know all those who visit our bakery and thus can’t care for them properly.” Cas gave a sharp shake of his head. “But that just isn’t true!” His voice grew strong and sharp. “Not at all!”

Graal’s ears twitched, the orc taken slightly aback by Cas’s intensity.

“We might not know every customer and their specific needs, but we still provide for them and care for them with our food.” The straw broom swept back and forth with more force. “We feed many. We care for many.” Cas frowned, seeming almost lost in thought. “And in a city, so many are uncared for and unloved. We care and provide love when no one else does.”

Graal held his breath as Cas’s words cut straight to Graal’s core.

Because no one had ever cared for Graal. No one until Cas.

“Do you have an affinity?” Graal asked, voice hoarse.

“What?” Cas looked up, surprised as if he’d gotten lost in thought. He let out a breath and smiled. “Isn’t my affinity obvious?” He laughed. “It’s spreading happiness and joy. That’s what my baking does. I don’t provide much basic nourishment. That’s more Jack’s thing. But my baking is sweet treats. I lift people’s moods and show love and affection by spreading cheer.”

Graal stared at Cas, unable to speak.

When he’d first come into the bakery, he’d seen the sugar cookies Cas had made and

thought them frivolous. Pretty and nice but unnecessary.

And completely unsuitable for Graal .

He'd bought brick bread. It filled him and fuelled his body. But that was it. He'd believed the stuff Cas made was not for him. But maybe that was because, deep down, he'd always known the truth of what those pretty sweet treats meant.

They meant happiness, joy, love, and affection, things that had never been part of Graal's life. Things he'd learnt not to expect.

And suddenly, Graal felt like he was fourteen again, staring at a Christmas tree and the presents beneath, knowing in his soul that these things were an expression of his mother's love and affection. And knowing she had not given them to her mongrel son.

Graal's eyes stung, and he dropped his gaze so Cas wouldn't see.

When Graal had eaten Cas's cookies, he'd felt the joy and happiness Cas had intended him to feel.

And for some reason, it all just hurt.

It felt like he was holding his hands to the warmth of a fire after being out in the freezing snow for so long. It stung and throbbed as the heat seeped into his skin. Graal let out a breath, staring down at the special tea with lots of honey that Cas had made just for him.

It was too much. It was all too much. Because he wanted this to last. He wanted Cas and his warmth and happiness and affection. He didn't want to go back to his solitary life without the glittering brightness of Cas.

He didn't want to be back in the cold all alone.

Graal blinked. But he knew this would all disappear soon. Cas was still getting over his ex-lover. He was just with Graal as a distraction. Cas had been honest with him from the start.

And of course, if Cas actually wanted someone to have a relationship with, it wouldn't be with a half-breed monster like him.

Still, he couldn't regret this fling. He'd had something he'd never had before. He'd experienced affection and happiness in a way he'd never known. And once Cas had left his life, Graal would cherish the memory of their time together for the rest of his sad life.

"Graal, are you all right?"

CHAPTER 18

Cas frowned at Graal.

“I’m fine.” Graal took a sip of his tea.

“Are you sure?”

Graal nodded but didn’t meet Cas’s gaze.

“Is the tea too sweet?” Cas took a step towards him.

Something definitely was off with Graal. It seemed to have happened within a split second. One moment, they’d been chatting comfortably about witchcraft and affinities, the next, Graal had withdrawn.

Had Cas said or done something? Was it because of his affinity?

“I’m sorry if the tea is too sweet. Like I said, I’m about spreading happiness and cheer. But I know some see that as frivolous and shallow.” Cas swallowed as his own words echoed Xavi’s from when they’d broken up. “I can make you a new cup of tea, something like Jack or Grady would make.”

He hadn’t thought Graal thought him shallow or frivolous. But he hadn’t realised Xavi had either. Not until Xavi had been breaking Cas’s heart .

“No.” Graal shook his head, taking another sip. “The tea is lovely. Perfect. The

sweetness is balanced by the lemon and chamomile.”

Cas let out a breath. So what was wrong, then?

“But what is moon water?” Graal asked, seemingly having shaken off the dark mood.

Had Cas just imagined the shift? “We put water in a jar and leave it out so it can be charged by the moon.”

There were other steps involved—choosing a phase of the moon and whispering intentions—but he wanted to keep his explanations simple. He didn’t want to overwhelm Graal with information.

“Your parents taught you a lot.”

Cas nodded but kept an eye on Graal. He finished packing up the bakery. Before he left, he went to the altar. Cas placed his hands together, over his heart, and bowed his head. “My hearth, my home, my heart. Thank you for today.”

Then he blew out the black beeswax candle. He cleaned around the altar and got out a new incense stick, ready for Lachlan in the morning. Then they left the bakery.

“Thank you for showing me all that,” Graal said softly. The low mood seemed completely gone. “And thank you for explaining your witchcraft to me.”

“It was nice having you with me.” Cas linked his arm with Graal. “So should we go to your place?” Snowflakes fell from the sky.

“Are you sure?” Graal scratched at his beard. “My place isn’t that nice.”

“I want to see where you live,” Cas said. “I suppose we could go upstairs to my

apartment. But I think Lachlan, Briar, and the twins will probably all be home.”

Lacy wouldn't be there yet, so his room would be free. But she'd come back at some point, and Cas wanted to have more time in private with Graal than just a few hours. In fact, he kind of hoped Graal would invite him to stay the night. Then they could fuck for hours and hours.

Cas hoped he'd be unable to walk tomorrow. Luckily, he could fly.

“But if you don't want me to come over, that's fine too. I know I kind of invited myself.” And Cas didn't want to force his presence on Graal.

Graal shrugged. “It's fine. Just don't expect too much.”

They walked about twenty minutes before Graal gestured ahead of them. “This is the building.”

Cas's eyes widened. The apartment building looked lovely, recently painted with big windows. Garlands and tinsel decorated the downstairs windows. All in all, this seemed much nicer than his own home. What had Graal been talking about? Clearly, he didn't realise how cramped and rundown their apartment was.

But they didn't walk up the steps to the large front door. Cas frowned as they walked around the back. They approached a worn door down some stairs that seemed to lead to the basement.

Graal pulled out a key, unlocked the door, and entered. “There are above ground tenants. But orcs, trolls, ogres, and similar races get rooms on the basement floor.”

Cas's skin prickled. That didn't sound right. Why would certain races be put on a different floor? Cas bit his tongue as he followed Graal inside. But maybe they

preferred it. Cas didn't know a lot about other races. Actually, because he'd been raised by human witches, there was a lot about pixies he'd never really learnt.

Only a single lantern lit the space. Cas's own aura cast more light than the lantern down the dark hallway. The air smelled of musk and damp. Cobwebs and dust lined the walls. Voices in languages he didn't recognise could be heard behind the doors they passed.

Finally, they reached the end of the hallway. "This is me." Graal unlocked the door and stepped in. "It's not nice. I wasn't exaggerating."

Cas looked around the room.

It wasn't...terrible. But Graal wasn't wrong either. It wasn't nice. It lacked a window. The walls remained bare, and everything in the room seemed basic and served a functional purpose. It didn't feel like a home, like a space anyone would actually want to be in.

"It's not so bad." Cas flapped his wings, rising above the floor. "I mean, it could use a pixie's touch. Just a little brightening up maybe. A bright rug or some bed-linen. Some candles." He ran his hand over the worn table. "A tablecloth and maybe some paintings for the wall. A plant or two might be nice."

Cas bit his lip. "Although, I guess you need a window for that so the plants can get some sunlight. But you could bring in some dried flowers. And maybe some dried herbs with a nice smell. I can bring you some!"

Graal grimaced. "The landlord doesn't like us to bring our own stuff to decorate."

"What? That's absurd!" Cas frowned. "Why not?"

Graal didn't speak for a second. "He said that orcs stink. He doesn't want us to bring in our stuff and stink up the place."

Ice slid down Cas's spine. "He said that?" His wings beat faster. "Does he say things like that often?"

Graal ducked his head. "Yeah."

"Like what?" Cas's heart rate picked up.

Graal's shoulders hunched. A muscle in Graal's cheek twitched. "Part of what we pay for is to get water changed daily so we can wash." He gestured to the basin. "But it often isn't changed. When I brought it up, he just said it doesn't matter, as it's not like orcs wash properly. And our clothes are cleaned poorly because apparently orcs don't need clean clothes," Graal said, voice tight.

With each word Graal spoke, Cas could feel the tension and anger rise in his body. "Why don't you leave?"

"I've looked around. But it seems like that is a pretty common treatment for orcs. A lot of places won't even accept us as tenants." Graal pointed to the ceiling. "But the upstairs people, I bet they're cleaning water is changed every day. I bet their clothes are immaculately washed. Their rent includes good food plus use of the dining and drawing room." His lips curled into a sneer. "And of course, they have actual windows so they can see outside."

Cas had known that some looked down on orcs and other races. But he hadn't realised how bad it could be and how pervasive it was throughout the city. "Who are the upstairs people?"

"Well, the landlord is a vampire," Graal said. "And there is a human sorcerer, a djinn,

a pixie, a family of fauns, a sprite, a unicorn, and I think a few others.”

“I’m so sorry.” Cas’s words felt inadequate.

“It’s not your fault.” Graal shook his head. “And you’ve never treated me badly. I’m just sorry you had to come here and see this. I should have told you before, but honestly, I didn’t want to say anything.”

“Why not?”

“I’m embarrassed,” Graal said it like it should be obvious.

Cas flew to him, gripping Graal’s shoulders in his hands. “You have nothing to be ashamed of. You’ve done nothing wrong. Your fucking landlord should be ashamed. Everyone who treats you like this should be ashamed.”

Too angry to stay in one place, Cas released Graal and began to fly around the room, back and forth, from wall to wall, trying to deal with his anger. “I can’t believe someone would treat you like this! You deserve so much better!”

A knock sounded on the door. Cas dropped to the floor and turned towards it. He was standing behind the door when it swung open, and a vampire and imp walked in.

CHAPTER 19

G raal watched Cas pacing, or not pacing really. He flew back and forth, clearly annoyed. Graal watched him, surprised that the way Graal was being treated would affect Cas so strongly, that he would be this angry on Graal's behalf.

A knock sounded on the door, and a second later it opened. Fernos, his vampire landlord, and Loral, his servant, strode in.

Loral turned and stared at Cas. Cas glared back, hands on his hips and rage in his blue eyes. Fernos hadn't noticed Cas. He stared coolly at Graal.

Graal's skin crawled. He wished Cas weren't here to see how Fernos spoke to him.

"Your rent is due," Fernos said. "It's a day late."

It wasn't. Not really. Graal could only pay when his landlord deigned to visit the basement floor. And he'd not come down the day the rent was due, so Graal had not been able to pay.

"And you're not allowed to have visitors, orc." Loral scowled at him .

Fernos spun and stared at Cas.

Cas bared his teeth and flew right up to them, wings beating loudly. "Not allowed to have visitors. Not allowed to decorate. Not given fresh water to clean. Laundry not washed properly. What sort of fucking place is this? What sort of shitty landlord are

you?”

Fernos sneered, seemingly unperturbed to have an angry pixie flying up in his face. “He’s an orc. And if his kind wants to be treated better, then they should learn to behave like something other than dirty, cave-dwelling monsters.”

Cas’s hands clenched. “Go fuck yourself, you stinking cockhead!”

Fernos stared up at Cas. “How much is he paying for you?”

“What?”

“Obviously he’s paying for you and your companionship . That’s the only reason a pretty, fiery little thing like you would be with an orc in this stinky room,” Fernos said. “So how much? Maybe I should up his rent if he can afford a mouth like yours?”

Graal’s hands clenched.

Fernos tilted his head, gaze raking over Cas. “Or maybe I could make you an offer and save you from having to be down here with this orc. Then I could make use of your sweet mouth.” Then Fernos reached out and touched Cas’s lips.

“Don’t touch him,” Graal growled as he stepped forward.

But Cas didn’t need defending. He slapped Fernos’s hand away so hard Fernos cried out, gripped his hand, and stumbled back. Suddenly Cas’s aura turned from its usual pale light to a brilliant red. Loral and Fernos stepped back, eyes widening.

Black pixie dust spewed forth from Cas. A faint smell of smoke filled the air. Graal frowned. Cas’s pixie dust didn’t normally smell or look anything like that. Then

again, he didn't normally glow red. Fuck! Were his eyes red too?

Fernos and Loral bent over. They began to cough and choke. But Graal didn't feel the need. The pixie dust didn't smell pleasant, but their reactions seemed so over the top.

"There is no amount of money you could pay to compel me to put my mouth on any part of your body. I'd rather shove a spiky pine cone up my arse," Cas spat at Fernos. "But Graal can have my sweet mouth anytime he wants." More pixie dust burst forth. "Graal's wonderful. He's amazing. He deserves to be treated with respect and decency."

Tears streamed down Fernos's and Loral's cheeks as they covered their mouths and kept coughing.

"There are those who make the world better. There are those who make the world worse. You make this world worse." Cas lifted his chin. "You disgust me. You should be ashamed. Now fuck off and get out." Cas pointed to the door. "Graal will not be staying here anymore. He will not pay you another single coin ever again!"

Fernos and Loral stumbled from the room and down the hall, still coughing and sounding like they were about to bring up their lungs.

Cas looked at Graal with his glowing red eyes. "Pack a bag, Graal. You're moving in with me."

CHAPTER 20

“I ’m so sorry, Graal! I just got carried away. I was so angry. But I shouldn’t have lost my temper and told him you were leaving. That wasn’t my call to make.” Cas frowned. “Now you’re going to have to live in our apartment.”

Cas’s eyes and aura had returned to their normal colour. “There are nine of us and only five bedrooms. So it’s pretty tight.”

“It’s fine.” Graal hiked his rucksack that contained all his few belongings onto his back. And truthfully, it was fine. He’d lived there for over ten years. But he didn’t like it. It had never felt like home. Nowhere had.

So he’d leave, accept Cas’s offer, and stay with him and his family for a few days. But he refused to live off their charity. He’d need to find a new place. In the end, he might end up paying more and being treated the same as he had been.

But he’d happily go through the struggle of finding a new home to have heard Cas defend him and proclaim Graal to be wonderful and amazing. And to top it all off, Cas had called Fernos a shitty landlord and a stinking cockhead. Then told him to fuck off. Cas had done all that on Graal’s behalf. The memory would keep Graal warm for years to come.

Graal chuckled as he remembered Loral and Fernos, eyes watering, coughing, and stumbling from the room. “Thank you for standing up for me.”

“Of course.” Cas reached out and gripped his forearm. “He shouldn’t treat you like

that. No one should treat you like that.”

Graal smiled. “And are you sure it is all right if I stay with you? It’ll only be for a few days until I find somewhere new. But I know it is already pretty cramped. I can find an inn.”

“It will be fine.” Cas waved his hand. “I promise.”

“If you’re sure.”

They continued to walk down the darkened streets. Several lanterns cast their golden light.

“And what happened back there?” Graal asked. “You glowed red, and your pixie dust changed.”

Cas laughed. “It’s a pixie defence. It’s meant to frighten off attackers. It can be pretty useful at times.”

“Well, it definitely worked.” Graal chuckled. “But why didn’t I start coughing?”

“It’s a targeted attack,” Cas said. “My pixie dust becomes mildly unpleasant to everyone but absolutely wretched to those whom I am feeling a strong negative emotion towards. I have learnt to control it and hold it back when I want to.”

Cas shook his head. “The first time it happened, it was because my twin brothers, Jasper and Leo, stole a cookie from me.” His laughter rang down the street.

“I was still just a little pixie. But there I was flying in the air, glowing red, pixie dust spewing everywhere, and yelling at them. They were coughing and bent over, their eyes and nose running.” Cas wiped at his eyes. “They never stole a cookie from me

again. ”

“I bet.” Graal grinned, shaking his head as he chuckled. “I imagine it would have been quite a shock to your family.”

“And after that incident, father started finding every book he could on pixies. He said they needed to learn more if they were raising one. We’ve got quite a few books now. Although, I’ll be honest, I haven’t read most of them. Briar is the reader in the family.”

Soon they reached the apartment. They walked up the stairs, and Cas entered before him.

“Graal will be staying with us for a few days,” Cas announced even before Graal had fully entered the room. “Oh.” Cas paused. “Hello.”

Grady sat on a chair before the fire. A gargoyle sat opposite him.

“This is Uzoth,” Grady introduced. “Uzoth, this is Graal and my brother Cas.”

The gargoyle inclined his head an inch in greeting. Graal nodded back. Graal realised he’d seen the gargoyle in the area before. But he had never seen the gargoyle anywhere but on rooftops.

“Nice to meet you, Uzoth.” Cas tilted his head, gazing at Uzoth.

Meanwhile, Grady looked between Cas and Graal. “We don’t have a lot of room.”

“It’ll just be a few days,” Cas said, attention back on Grady. “And if you had heard his knobhead landlord, you’d be so angry!” Cas’s wings flapped, and he flew to Grady. “He has tenants who live in the rooms above ground. But then he makes the

orcs and certain other races live in the basement. They have a separate entrance, they're not allowed to have visitors or decorate, and he called Graal the most awful words!" Cas's hands clenched.

"I did my whole angry pixie thing. I yelled at the landlord and told him to fuck off. And I said other things. But I was so angry, so I don't remember most of it." His words rushed together. "But I know I said Graal wouldn't be living there anymore. So he has nowhere to live because of me, and so we have to let him stay here! Please, Grady. I promised!"

Grady lifted a hand. "All right, Cas. All right. He can stay." He looked to Graal. "I'm sorry you were treated like that."

"It's all right," Graal said. "I'm used to it. Thank you?—"

Cas flew straight at Graal, grabbing his arms with an iron grip. "You shouldn't be used to it! You deserve so much better, Graal. How dare anyone treat you like that!"

Graal's breath caught as he stared into Cas's intense pale-blue eyes. His throat tightened. No one had ever cared about him like Cas did.

Grady cleared his throat. "I think Lacy said something about a party tonight with Orim. So she should be gone for a little bit, probably even the whole night," Grady said. "And I'm sure she wouldn't mind sleeping on the couch if she does come home. Tomorrow we can organise sleeping arrangements for the next few days."

"I don't want to put you out. I can sleep on the floor in here." Graal gestured. "Or I can just go to an inn. Really, it's no trouble."

"No," Grady said, voice firm. "You need a place to stay for a few days. So you will stay here. We will look after you." It seemed like once Grady made a decision, he

stuck to it. “We’ll work something out properly tomorrow. But for now, you two can go and get some rest. Sounds like you had a big day.”

CHAPTER 21

With a grunt, Graal hefted the massive stone onto his back. Gripping the ends of the rope that wrapped around the base of the rock, he began to trek the cobblestone streets. The carts from the quarry had trouble navigating the narrow, uneven streets of the city. So the carts stopped on the outskirts. Workers, like Graal, then lugged the large carved stones to the building sites.

Graal squinted as he walked. Big fat snowflakes blurred his vision.

Fuck. Would this snow never end? Still, as pissed as he was, he couldn't quite hate the snow with the vehemence he once had.

He remembered Cas staring up at the sky at the Christmas markets, watching the snow fall. He could see Cas, bent over, hands pressed against the brick wall of the alley as he took Graal's cock, snowflakes falling onto his wings and back. He could imagine Cas now in the bakery, watching the snow through the window with a smile on his beautiful face. And as those images circled through his head, the rock didn't feel quite so heavy .

Finally, he reached the site.

"Put it over there," a goblin yelled at him.

Graal dropped the rock on top of the others. He rolled his shoulders, trying to work out the tension.

“Come on, back to the carts. No lazing around,” the goblin grouched.

Graal trekked back. Two trolls walked ahead of him, their low voices grumbling. Soon he could barely see them through the thick snow. He wondered how much longer he had to work. It was difficult to measure the passing of time in this wretched weather.

For the past two nights, Graal had been staying with Cas. Lacy had not come home the first night. She’d been with her troll girlfriend. And when Cas told her Graal would be staying with them for a little while, she’d happily said she’d stay with Orim as long as Graal needed to stay with them.

Cas said he’d never seen Lacy so enamoured. Apparently, most of her relationships did not last long. And Lacy was enamoured with a troll. Trolls, orcs, ogres, and several other races tended to be lumped together, often called monsters.

Sometimes, there were those who treated “monsters” well enough. And some even liked the idea of fucking a monster with a massive dick. But often, these people did not wish for an actual relationship with them. Graal had come to expect that most would not want to be seen holding hands with a terrifying monster like himself. Why would anyone?

But Lacy didn’t seem to mind. And no one in her family batted an eye at Lacy being in a relationship with a troll. They teased her, as this was her longest relationship. But not because she dated a troll.

Graal wiped at the snow that fell onto his face.

Would Cas have been interested in Graal if he’d not been so recently heartbroken? Would Graal have stood a chance? Before, he’d assumed Cas would never be in a relationship with a half-orc. But maybe he’d been wrong. After all, Cas had never had

a problem being seen in public with him or being affectionate where others could see.

The thought played on his mind as he went back and forth, hauling stone.

Graal had yet to meet Orim. But Lacy said she lived in a building owned by trolls on the edge of the city. Most tenants were trolls. But an orc, a minotaur, and a family of goblins also lived there. It was right near a forest. Apparently, the building was decent and the tenants were treated well. They all had above ground rooms.

Unfortunately, they didn't have any vacancies at present.

Graal's arms, legs, and back ached with the strain of the work. The snow fell heavier and faster. As time passed, the streets emptied of people. He didn't blame them. Who'd want to be out in this miserable weather?

Still, they worked. Still, the snow continued to come down harder and faster. The streets became more difficult to navigate. The snow slowed him down as his boots caught in the snow.

The next time Graal arrived at the site and dropped his rock, the goblin turned to him.

"That will have to do for the day. Some of you idiots keep getting lost in this snow." The goblin sneered and waved a hand at the snow as if trying to make it disappear.

"All right." Graal didn't need to hear any more. He trudged away, keeping his head down and hunching his shoulders against the snow.

But with each heavy footstep, his heart lightened. He'd get to see Cas soon.

When he approached the bakery, he noticed no light coming from inside. Graal frowned. It should still be open. Walking around the back, he glanced into the

windows but could see no movement. Yet he spotted light in the windows in the apartment above. He walked up the stairs and knocked.

A moment later, the door opened, and there Cas stood. "Gaal! The snow is coming down so thick." He flew into Gaal's arms and hugged him tight. "Are you okay? I kept thinking about poor you, working in all this snow."

Gaal hugged Cas back, smiling at the thought that Cas cared for him enough to worry. "It's fine. I saw the bakery is closed."

Cas nodded. "We closed early. Jack is packing up."

Gaal shook his head. "I didn't see anyone downstairs."

Cas frowned. Then with a flap of his wings, he flew down to the bakery door and opened it. Gaal leaned over the rails. A second later, Cas appeared, carrying a note. He flew up.

Cas grabbed Gaal's hand and led him inside. "Come on."

Gaal closed the door behind them.

"He's gone to Avery's to deliver scones Ordellia made for him." Cas stared down at the note.

Cas had told him Jack had recently started seeing a dragon named Avery. Gaal didn't know a lot of the details, but he was pretty sure it had ended. Jack had looked so dejected and miserable. Cas and the other siblings had rallied, providing Jack with an absurd number of baked goods and tea.

"Jack has gone out in this snow?" Lachlan sat before the fire. Kit, his cat familiar, lay

curled up on his lap whilst Lachlan stroked him.

“I hope he’ll be all right.” Briar sat on another chair, book open on his lap. His pigeon familiar perched on the back of the chair, preening Briar’s hair. Briar glanced at the window. And beside Briar sat Wulfric.

Cas had told Graal all about him. Briar had been in the forest, apparently caring for an injured dog. Turned out the dog was a werewolf. And also Briar’s mate. Wulfric wrapped his arm around Briar and squeezed him in a comforting gesture.

Cas bit his lip, staring at the note. “I’m sure he’ll be fine. Hopefully, the snow will let up soon.” He stepped towards the window. A blur of white moved beyond. “Maybe we should ask Grady.” Cas flew to the door of Grady’s room.

He knocked.

“One second,” came Grady’s voice.

Several moments later, the door opened.

“What is it?” Grady asked. Behind him stood Uzoth.

“Jack has gone to Avery’s to give him scones.” Cas held out the note.

Grady took it. His brows furrowed as he read.

“Should we do anything?” Lachlan called out.

After a second, Grady shook his head. “He should be all right. He should be able to get there, at least. He can stay until the snow stops. And even if they’ve ended things, Avery doesn’t seem like the sort of twat who would force Jack out into this snow.”

He grimaced. “And it isn’t like we can do anything other than wait and see. We don’t know where Avery lives.”

Cas wrung his hands.

Grady lifted his gaze. He stared at his brothers, who all bore concerned expressions. “Jack isn’t an idiot. He will get cold, but he should be fine.” He handed the note to Cas. “I wouldn’t worry.”

The tension in the room dropped immediately at Grady’s words.

“You’re right.” Cas smiled. “Jack can handle some snow.”

Grady nodded. He gave a tight smile and closed the door.

Cas turned and faced Graal. He smiled, reaching for Graal’s hand. “Well, the bakery is shut, and there are no Christmas markets tonight. ”

Graal glanced at the others, but they weren’t paying Graal and Cas any attention.

Cas tugged Graal’s hand towards his bedroom, placing the note onto a cabinet he passed. “Lacy is staying with Orim.” He closed the door once they’d entered. “Which means we have the whole night to ourselves.” Cas’s eyes sparkled. “Whatever will we do?”

Cas’s slender hand reached for the bulge in Graal’s trousers and squeezed. Graal groaned as Cas massaged him through the fabric.

“I’m sure we can think of something,” Graal said huskily.

Then he reached out and began to strip Cas of his clothes.

CHAPTER 22

G raal's hands roughly tugged at Cas's clothes, throwing them on the floor. Cas laughed, stumbling, lifting his arms and legs, trying to assist Graal. Then, once naked, Graal gripped Cas's hips, lifted him, and tossed him onto the beds they'd pushed together.

Cas bounced. He laughed and gazed up at the orc towering over him. "Aren't you going to get naked too?"

Graal divested himself with the same urgency he'd rid Cas of his clothes. Cas licked his lips as he stared at Graal in all his green muscular glory.

Everything about Graal was big. Big forearms, big chest, big shoulders, big thighs, and of course, big dick. And already, liquid dripped from the tip. Cas's mouth salivated as he imagined tasting and drinking Graal's magic seed.

Cas sucked in a breath, and the addicting scent of Graal's arousal caused Cas to shiver and his cock to fill. Graal smirked, reaching down and stroking his massive erection. More pre-cum drizzled from the tip.

"Fuck me," Cas whispered in awe.

Graal released his cock. "Soon." The bed creaked under Graal's weight as he knelt on the mattress. "But first I will ravish you."

Then Graal reached out, gripped Cas's waist, and turned him over. Cas yelped, and

his wings fluttered in surprise. Graal's massive hands gripped Cas's arse cheeks. He kneaded them and yanked them apart.

A second later, Graal's warm breath whispered against Cas's entrance. Pixie dust burst into the air. Anticipation thrummed through Cas as he waited to see what Graal did next.

Then Graal's wet tongue pressed against his rim.

"Fuck!" Cas shouted.

Cas's hands pressed against the sheets as he shoved back against the tongue circling his entrance. Then Graal's tongue wiggled, pressing inside.

Fuck!

Graal really was big all over, and that included his tongue. His thick, long tongue invaded him, slipping deep and opening him up. Breathing heavily, Cas dropped his head to the bed. His wings flapped. He whimpered.

The tongue withdrew.

"Fuck, you taste good," Graal growled.

Then he kissed, nipped, and licked at Cas's hole before driving his tongue inwards and wiggling it inside. Cas panted, dizzy with lust and the scent of Graal's potent arousal filling his nostrils.

One hand gripped Cas's hip. Then Graal's tongue withdrew. Two thick fingers pressed inside him. Cas keened, rocking his hips as Graal worked the digits inwards. They tingled. Graal must have coated them in his pre-cum. The pleasure spread

through his body in waves. He undulated on the fingers, fucking himself on them as they stretched him.

“Graal! Graal!” Cas cried out.

“You have a fucking beautiful asshole, pixie.” Graal stretched his fingers wide. “Look at how it opens so magnificently for me. You’re so desperate for my cock. So needy for my seed to fill your belly.”

“Yes!”

A third finger pressed inside Cas.

Cas gasped. His hands spasmed in the sheets. “Oh!”

The fingers withdrew. But Cas didn’t have time to process. Graal’s tongue returned, sliding inside, licking into him, making dirty slurpy noises as spit and pre-cum mixed together around Cas’s hole and dripped down his thighs.

Cas panted and groaned. In the back of his mind, he realised his siblings would definitely hear. But that didn’t matter. Nothing fucking mattered beyond the haze of ecstasy he existed in.

Graal continued to fuck him with fingers, tongue, and pre-cum. Cas bit at the bed, his hands scrabbling. The air around him shivered as pixie dust burst unendingly from him.

He tried to gain control of his quivering body. He could find no words. No thoughts. Only pleasure and Graal making love to his hole existed for Cas.

Graal’s fingers pressed deep, seeking and searching. They hit their target. Cas’s

wings trembled and his back arched as Graal's fingers nudged insistently at his prostate.

Cas cried out. His whole body spasmed and his wings jerked as his orgasm wrenched through him. His dick erupted, and seed splattered on the bed. All the while Graal milked the pleasure nub inside him.

Cas whimpered, body sagging as his orgasm ebbed. After several seconds, Graal's fingers relented and withdrew. Cas took deep gulping breaths as he collapsed onto the sheets.

Then Graal's hands gripped Cas's waist and flipped him onto his back. Cas blinked up at Graal. Graal wiped the back of his hand against his mouth, a smug grin on his face. His enormous dick hung hard, heavy, and leaking.

Cas shivered at the sight of his massive balls filled with the seed that drove Cas wild.

"That was incredible," Cas whispered.

Graal's smug grin widened. "I'm not done ravishing you yet, pixie."

Then he lowered his head and took Cas's whole cock into his mouth and throat.

Cas screamed.

CHAPTER 23

Cas thrust up into the warm, wet suction of Graal's mouth and throat. Graal bobbed his head, cheeks hollowing. Faint with arousal and with the pleasure from his first orgasm still lingering in his body, Cas watched wide-eyed as his cock slid between Graal's dark-green lips.

Graal was always so careful with his tusks. Still, the sides grazed Cas's dick, creating a delicious contrast with the soft suction of his mouth.

Graal's hand clasped Cas's hip, lifting him from the bed as he sucked Cas. Cas's wings fluttered uselessly against the sheets. The air shone with pixie dust. Cas moaned as the delicious sensations swam through him.

Despite his recent orgasm, already the tension built in his groin and balls. His eyes slid closed as Graal took him deep, throat swallowing around Cas's cock. Graal's other hand cradled Cas's balls, tugging gently.

Cas whimpered as he rode waves of bliss and sensation. Graal massaged Cas's balls. Then Graal released them. A second later, Cas felt thick, slicked fingers at his entrance. They slid easily inside. Cas opened his eyes, breath coming short and fast.

"Graal. Oh... I... Fuck... I...can't..." The tingling pleasure moved through him as Graal fucked him with his fingers and pre-cum. "Graal! I... I...need..."

Cas didn't know what he was trying to say. He just wanted to express to Graal that the pleasure had never been like this before. That sex had never been this bone-

breakingly incredible in his entire life.

But he couldn't find the words, so he let his eyes fall shut and just relished the feel of Graal's digits fucking him and his mouth sucking him. Graal's fingers pressed against his prostate once again, insistently rubbing against him. Cas's toes curled against the mattress. He jerked forward, thrusting into Graal's mouth as the heat built to a crescendo in his gut.

His body arched, limbs going rigid. His mouth fell open on a silent scream. Graal fucked his fingers into Cas's body, stabbing his prostate each time.

Cas's body held on the precipice for several long seconds. He couldn't breathe, body taut as every nerve in his body howled in rapture. Then he cried out, cock spurting inside Graal's mouth and throat as the pleasure crashed through him.

Sobbing, Cas lost complete control of his body as his limbs and wings convulsed.

But as Cas spent and collapsed, Graal took care of him, drinking every drop of his seed, holding him up, and then lowering him gently to the bed when Cas's orgasm began to release him from its powerful grip.

Cas lay back on the sheets, eyes closed. Graal stroked his thighs, calves, and stomach with warm, rough hands. Graal whispered kisses against Cas's sweaty skin. Cas let out an exhausted sigh as he enjoyed the soothing caresses and touch .

Then Graal's hand wrapped around Cas's cock and squeezed. Hard.

Cas's eyes flew open as a cry tore from his throat. Graal stroked Cas's hypersensitive cock again, pumping him until Cas mewled.

"I'm not done with you yet, pixie." Graal's yellow eyes glinted. "I reckon I can wring

one more orgasm from this cock.”

Cas shook his head. He wasn't sure if that was true. He felt spent, depleted, thoroughly used and frayed. He didn't know if his oversensitive cock and hole could handle any more. But before he could say anything, Graal flipped him over again, and Cas's body lay flat against the bed.

Cas cried out as Graal's heavy body pressed him into the sheets. He knew it couldn't be all Graal's weight. All of Graal would crush him.

A meaty hand gripped Cas's arse cheek and pulled him open. Then the head of Graal's thick cock kissed his rim. Graal's giant dick slid straight inside Cas, stretching and filling him completely. Cas moaned as he was split open on Graal's massive cock.

Immediately, Graal thrust into him, grunting and groaning as he rode Cas's arse. Graal didn't fuck around anymore. He nailed Cas's prostate with each and every hard thrust.

With each snap of Graal's hips, Cas's cock rubbed against the sheets, creating a magnificent friction. Cas took shallow, shaky breaths, trying to get enough air into his lungs. And with each breath, Graal's potent arousal filled him, making his head swim. More and more of Graal's magic pre-cum spilled inside Cas, making him dazed and confused, as the pleasure rose higher and higher inside him.

“Graal!” Tears streamed down Cas's cheeks. It was too much. Everything was too much! He couldn't take any more .

Graal's fingers gripped Cas's hips as he fucked him savagely. Graal's massive cock rubbed insistently against his prostate.

“Come for me, pixie,” Graal growled.

“I can’t,” Cas sobbed. It was too soon. He had no seed left inside him. His body was too sensitive. Too raw and wrung out. “Please, Graal. I can’t.” Cas shook his head, tears streamed down his cheeks, and he rubbed his face against the sheets.

“You can.” Graal pounded into Cas. “You want me to spill my seed inside you, filling your hole and belly?”

“Yes!” Cas pleaded.

“Then come,” Graal grunted. “I want to feel your tight hole flexing around my massive cock as I spill inside you. I want to find my pleasure with your body convulsing around me.” Graal pistoned his hips in a punishing, powerful rhythm. “Now come, pixie.”

Cas keened as his third and most powerful orgasm erupted inside him. His vision exploded. He sobbed, body convulsing and twitching as he came.

Behind him, Graal roared, and Cas felt his hot seed flooding inside him.

Still, the pleasure kept barrelling through him as Graal kept fucking his arse, filling him unendingly with his cum.

Finally, Graal shuddered and slumped forward. Cas grunted as more of Graal’s weight pressed him into the mattress.

After a second, Graal withdrew his cock from Cas’s hole. Cas whined. Graal rolled and lay heavily beside him. No one spoke for several moments. Cas could feel the hot seed dribbling from his hole and onto the bed. In a haze, he thought he should wash all the sheets and the mattress before Lacy returned .

Graal placed a heavy hand on Cas's arse. He squeezed.

"I hope this snow lasts forever," Cas mumbled, throat sore from crying out and screaming.

Graal's deep chuckle filled the room.

CHAPTER 24

Cas nuzzled his face against Graal's hairy chest, inhaling his musky scent. Graal's arm rested on Cas's lower back, just below his wings. Within the embrace of Graal's arms, Cas felt so small and protected.

In these early hours of the morning, when they were naked and wrapped up in each other, it felt like only the two of them existed. Outside, the snow continued to fall and rustle against the windowpane. So far it had been falling for two days without much pause.

The first day, Graal had opened the door and stared out into the whiteness beyond.

"Surely they won't make you work in this weather. It's worse than yesterday," Cas had said.

After some thought, Graal had agreed. And they'd gone back to bed.

Graal and Cas had fucked more times than Cas could count. Graal seemed to relish pulling as many orgasms from Cas as he could. Cas's body and limbs ached. He felt wrung out with use, but he also felt deeply sated.

He hoped the snowstorm would last at least a few more days. Snow piled on the windowsills, in front of the apartment door, and on the stairs. They could still get down to the bakery. Which was useful, since they only had the fireplace upstairs and they used the bakery to actually cook.

And with all of them snowed in together, they definitely went through a lot of food. Uzoth had gone to check on Jack, Lacy, Trent, Ordellia, and her family. Which meant everyone could relax knowing they were all safe.

Something was going on between Grady and the gargoyle. Cas had realised with shock that he had never seen Grady with a partner or lover before. Considering Grady was the oldest and thirty years old, that seemed a little odd. But Grady had always been so responsible. Cas was glad to see him with someone for once.

Voices and movement stirred in the main room as people rose for the day. Still, Graal and Cas stayed tucked away, cosied up together.

“You awake?” Graal asked.

“Yeah.”

Graal pressed a kiss to Cas’s forehead. Cas smiled. Neither spoke for several minutes. Graal stroked Cas’s lower back before running his fingers along the edge of Cas’s wings.

“Your wings are surprisingly strong,” Graal said, voice low and deep, sending shivers down Cas’s spine. “I thought they’d be really delicate.” He caressed the fine membrane of Cas’s wing, then splayed his hand against it.

“You’re only realising that now?” Cas lifted his head so he could look up into Graal’s face. “We’ve been fucking for almost two weeks.”

“I’ve noticed the last couple of days. Before that, I was worried I’d accidentally break them or hurt you.” Graal gave a rueful smile.

Cas pressed his face against Graal’s sternum, smiling. “No. Pixies may look small

and delicate, but we're tough and fierce."

"I've come to realise that." Graal's hand wrapped around the bottom of a wing. He gave a little tug. "Actually, these seem strong enough for me to be able to hold onto when I fuck you." He tugged again.

The movement jolted Cas, and he whimpered. His cock plumped against Graal's thigh.

Graal chuckled, low and mischievous. Then, with a quick movement, he rolled Cas onto his back.

Graal knelt above him, gazing down at him with glinting yellow eyes that promised all manner of pleasure. His half-hard dick hung heavy. Already Cas could smell the arousal wafting off him.

Breath hitching, Cas spread his legs like the wanton slut he was for Graal. Graal was like some sort of sex god, and Cas wanted to worship on his knees before him.

Graal's eyebrow rose. "I'll take that as an invitation."

Graal managed to wring two orgasms from Cas before letting Cas suck him to completion. Cas still couldn't get most of Graal's cock into his mouth. But one had to have goals to aspire to.

It was probably closer to noon when Graal and Cas stumbled from his room. Although, one couldn't tell the time of day from looking out the window.

"I'm hungry," Cas announced as he strolled into the main room.

"I wonder why?" Jasper said.

Leo, a mirror image of his twin, snorted. “You’ve been holed up in your room, fucking for two days straight. I’m surprised you can stand.”

Cas smirked. He didn’t point out that with each step he took, he could feel a twinge inside his body where Graal had stretched him and fucked him deep .

“There is stew. We also have some dried berry and cinnamon rolls here.” Briar gestured to the plate of rolls.

Wulfric sat beside him. He reached forward and took a roll.

“Lachlan baked them, and they should be eaten today before they get stale,” Briar said.

Kit, who’d turned out to be a cat shifter, perked up at the sound of Lachlan’s name. It had come as quite a surprise to realise the cat Lachlan had taken in as his familiar was in fact a cat shifter . He’d shifted the first night during the snowstorm into his human form. No one had been more surprised than Lachlan.

Now Lachlan didn’t seem to know what to do with Kit. Although, Cas could have sworn he’d heard moans coming from their room last night.

“How are you doing this morning, Kit?” Cas asked as he grabbed a couple of rolls and handed one to Graal.

“How long do you think Lachlan will be in the bakery? Should I go down and help?” Kit leaned forward as if ready to run out of the room after Lachlan. Even in his human form, Kit wanted to follow Lachlan around. Unfortunately, Lachlan seemed to be avoiding Kit.

“I think he is fine on his own.” Briar scratched Archimedes’s head. “He’s with

Grady. So he probably doesn't need help."

Kit's whole body slumped, his gaze dropping.

"You should eat, Kit." Briar lifted the plate and held it out to him. "You haven't eaten much the last couple of days."

"I'm not hungry." Kit's voice was barely over a whisper.

Briar frowned and looked at Cas.

Hopefully, whatever was going on between Lachlan and Kit would resolve soon. Cas ate his roll and grabbed another. Beside him, Graal devoured several .

"What should we do today?" Briar gazed out the window, watching the snow.

"We should make Christmas decorations!" Cas declared. The room held a Christmas tree and quite a few decorations already. But more was always better.

"Oh!" Briar perked up. "I collected pine cones in the forest a little while ago. I thought you might want to use them for your decorations."

Cas's wings fluttered. "And we have dried oranges and lemons downstairs. And I always have a huge supply of ribbons. And we can make paper stars too. I bought a stack of paper just for this purpose."

Cas paused. "Well, not this exact purpose. I didn't know we'd be snowed in together." He laughed. "But it will be fun." Cas turned to Graal.

Cas froze. Graal watched him with a strange expression. Had Cas said something wrong?

“But only if everyone wants to do that?” Cas’s gaze lingered on Graal before glancing around the room.

“I want to.” Briar glanced at Wulfric.

“I would like to learn how to make Christmas decorations.” Wulfric smiled.

“I’m in too,” Leo said.

Kit didn’t say anything. But he didn’t protest. And Cas thought Kit might benefit from some sort of activity that distracted him from pining after Lachlan.

“Great!” Cas looked to Graal. “What do you think?”

Graal nodded. “Sounds fun.”

Cas frowned at him. Something was wrong.

Jasper rose. “I’m going to have a nap. All the lovers are out of bed. So hopefully I can get a few hours of peaceful sleep without being awoken by groans and creaking beds.” He looked straight at Cas .

Cas laughed. “Sorry.” But he couldn’t even pretend to look guilty. Cas regretted nothing.

Jasper shook his head but smiled and went to his and Leo’s room.

“I’ll go gather the stuff from my room.” Cas moved towards his bedroom.

“And we’ll get the pine cones and stuff from the bakery.” Briar rose. Wulfric followed.

“We should have hot chocolate and cookies,” Cas said. “Leo, that’s your job!”

They spent the next little while making Christmas decorations. Cas made garlands by threading dried lemon and oranges onto a string. Cas showed Graal how to do the same. Still, Graal stayed quiet as he followed Cas’s instructions.

Usually, Graal remained pretty low key around Cas’s family. Which Cas understood. There were lots of them, and together they could be pretty loud. But today, Graal seemed even more introspective than usual. He would pause often and look around, gazing at the decorations they made, and then stare at the Christmas tree.

Cas touched Graal throughout, rubbing his thigh, placing his hand on his shoulder, or squeezing his hand. Each time, Graal would give him a quick smile. But still, something felt off. And Cas couldn’t work out what.

“Now let’s hang them up!” Cas stood and tugged Graal to his feet. They went to a window and hung the garlands of orange and yellow in front of it. Cas smiled and glanced at Graal.

“It’s really pretty.” Graal reached out as if to touch one of the lemons and then paused. After a few seconds, he rubbed his finger against it. His Adam’s apple bobbed.

Cas stared at Graal. “Are you all right, Graal?”

Graal nodded but didn’t say anything else .

“Hey, Christmas pixie! What did you say about paper stars?” Leo asked, pulling Cas’s attention. He held up several ornaments he’d made. “I’m done making decorations from pine cones and ribbons. I want to make something else!”

CHAPTER 25

The next little while, they made origami stars and attached string to them. Graal struggled with his fingers. They were too thick to fold the paper crisply. He frowned.

Thankfully, Cas saw his struggle and simply said, “Why don’t you hang them up as we make them?”

“Are you sure?” Graal glanced around the decorated room. “I don’t know where they should go.”

The adorned Christmas tree in the corner had already been there when Graal arrived, as well as the wooden figures above the fireplace. The ornaments and garlands they’d already made today had been strung up. The beauty of it all took Graal’s breath away. But Graal had not been in charge of any of that.

When he’d contributed, Graal had just listened to Cas and done what he was told. Graal couldn’t decide where things should go. He didn’t want to mess up Cas’s resplendent Christmas. He’d hate to disappoint the Christmas pixie.

“Just put them up where you think.” Cas kissed him on the cheek .

Graal’s body heated.

“You’ll do wonderfully,” Cas said.

Taking a deep breath, Graal lifted a star Cas made and stood. He hung the red star by

its string from a shelf holding several books. He glanced at Cas, worried this spot was wrong.

But Cas beamed. “That’s perfect, Graal.”

Graal let out a breath. The tension in his chest released. Then he continued to hang up the stars.

“They look great, Graal,” Leo said.

Graal smiled as the last of his self-consciousness melted away like snow.

Cas began to hum. Then he began to sing, “Bells are ringing, bells are ringing.”

Several of the others joined in. Graal knew the song. He had heard the Christmas carol sung by children in the streets when he’d been a child.

Taking a deep breath, Graal began to sing along, “Snow is falling, snow is falling.” Graal glanced around, worried someone would think him foolish for joining in. But only Cas looked at him. Cas just smiled, blue eyes twinkling.

Graal let out a shaky breath. He looked around at all the lovely decorations, some of which he’d made and hung.

Graal was a part of this. He was really a part of this. For the first time in his life, he was a part of a family’s Christmas festivities. It wasn’t Graal’s family, of course. And this wouldn’t last. But today he belonged here.

He thought of himself as a small orc, asking his mother about trees and presents. He thought of his yearning and disappointment for something like this. And now here he was. He took a deep, shaky breath.

Years from now, he would look back and think how blessed he was to have been included in celebrating Christmas with Cas and the Berry family, even if it was only once. He doubted he'd get a second Christmas with them.

Realistically, how much time did Cas and Graal have left?

Cas didn't seem tired of him. Not yet. But he'd been clear from the start that he wasn't ready for anything serious. Graal could still remember the hurt on Cas's face when Cas saw his ex-lover walk past the bakery window. And it wasn't even a month since they'd broken up.

But Graal had this Christmas. And that was more than Graal ever thought he'd get.

Throughout the afternoon, those taking part in decorating changed. Kit and Lachlan retired to their room. Jasper returned to the group and wanted to make stars from twigs and sticks. Leo decided to take a nap. Briar and Wulfric remained, but after a while, they stopped creating decorations. Briar read a book, *Mating and Different Races*, whilst Wulfric crocheted.

At some point, Grady and Uzoth joined them in the main room after being down in the bakery.

"We've got hot chocolate, meat pies, and cookies!" Grady announced as he came into the room carrying a basket of cookies and a tray of pies.

Following him, Uzoth carried a tray of steaming hot chocolate.

"Thank you," Graal said as he took a couple of cookies and some hot chocolate.

"You're welcome," Uzoth said.

“If we eat enough cookies, we won’t have to worry about meals.” Cas came over and took a mug and several cookies. He ignored the pies.

“You should still eat proper food, Cas,” Grady said.

But Cas didn’t respond, just smiled as he stuffed his mouth.

Grady rolled his eyes .

Graal drank his hot chocolate. He looked around, trying to capture the feeling of being here, trying to memorise it so he would remember years from now when he sat alone in some crappy room on a cold Christmas Day.

“I’m feeling a bit tired. I might have a nap.” Cas looked to Graal expectantly. “You coming?”

“If you’re going to fuck, can you at least muffle him, Graal? Cas screams like a banshee,” Jasper said.

“You’re just jealous that you don’t have someone to fuck.” Cas flew towards the bedroom.

Jasper didn’t speak immediately. “Well, you aren’t wrong.” Jasper and everyone laughed.

Graal entered the bedroom. Shaking his head, Cas closed the door. He lit the lantern. Then he faced Graal, his smile dropping.

“Graal, what’s wrong? I can tell something is wrong.”

CHAPTER 26

“Nothing’s wrong.” Graal went to the window.

Cas didn’t speak for several seconds. “You’ve just seemed a little off today.”

Graal touched his fingers to the icy glass.

“Is it something I said? Or something my family did? I know we can be a lot, and I know they—well, me—can get carried away with Christmas.” Cas laughed nervously. “So if?—”

“You were all wonderful.” Graal dropped his hand.

Cas didn’t speak for a second. “Then what?”

“It’s a lot for me.” Graal took a deep breath. “I’ve never celebrated Christmas before. And then you and your family include me in decorating, drinking hot chocolate, eating Christmas cookies, and singing carols.” Graal’s chest tightened. “It feels like that sort of stuff shouldn’t happen to me.”

Cas flew towards him. “Why not?”

Graal stared at the glass, his ugly face reflected back. He dropped his gaze, unable to stare at himself a moment longer. “My upbringing wasn’t good. I told you my father is an orc whom I’ve never met. So I lived with my mother and her husband, Jordan.”

Graal swallowed. “Honestly, I’m not sure why they didn’t dump me on the steps of a foundling home. They clearly didn’t want me.”

Cas sucked in a breath.

“Jordan despised me. He liked to get creative mixing up the insults, tusk-faced savage, green-skinned bastard, ugly half-blood monster.”

Cas gasped. His hand touched Graal’s shoulder and squeezed.

Graal turned to face Cas. “I remember Christmas. The other kids in the street talked of it. They were so excited. So I asked my mother about it.”

“And?”

Graal shrugged. “No Christmas tree. No presents. Not for me. On Christmas Day, she wasn’t even home. She’d spend the day with Jordan and his family. So I just stayed home alone doing chores. Sometimes there wasn’t even any food.”

“Why didn’t they bring you?” Cas asked.

Graal shook his head. “I never met any of Jordan’s family. They never visited. And I’m pretty sure they told everyone I was just a servant.”

“Your mother too?” Cas asked in shock.

Graal’s throat tightened painfully. “She didn’t care about me.” His tone came out harsh.

Cas made a noise. He wrapped his arms around Graal’s stomach. He gazed up into Graal’s eyes. “I’m so sorry.”

Eyes stinging, Graal blinked, trying to get his emotions under control. “Don’t be sorry. Not you, Cas. Not when you’ve given me so much. You’re so kind and caring. No one has ever shown me any affection until you. And you included me in your family’s Christmas festivities.”

Graal gave a tight smile. “I got to experience it all because of you.” Graal cupped Cas’s cheek. “So thank you.” Graal stroked Cas’s skin and pressed a kiss to his pale hair. “Thank you for being so wonderful.”

Cas hugged him tightly. “What happened with your mother?”

“She had a son with Jordan. A son she actually wanted. They named him Sam.” Graal gave a harsh laugh. “He was born a bit before Christmas. That year, they put up a Christmas tree with presents underneath. He was too young to even properly appreciate it, but they’d still done it for him.” Graal licked his lips.

“I always thought that maybe my mother wasn’t capable of love. She’d never really been that affectionate to Jordan either.” Graal took a deep breath. “That Christmas, I realised she was capable of love. She just wasn’t capable of loving me.” Tears slid down his cheeks.

“After that, I left. I was fourteen. I got a job and rented a room from Fernos. Funny. I didn’t realise how badly he treated me for a long time. Probably because he didn’t treat me much worse than my own mother. And if your own mother can’t love you—” Graal broke off as more tears slid down his cheeks.

“Fuck, Graal. I’m so sorry.” Cas lifted a hand and wiped at Graal’s tears.

Graal let out a shaky breath. “And I really can’t blame my mother. Who’d want an ugly monster like me for a son?”

“Graal! No!” Tears shone in Cas’s eyes. “Why would you say that?”

“It’s fine. I know it’s true.” Graal’s voice trembled. “I came to terms with it a long time ago. It’s what everyone has said to me my whole life. It’s what Jordan said. What Fernos and Loral said. Fuck. It’s what strangers and kids on the streets say.”

Cas’s mouth fell open .

“It’s true. Children see me in the street and point. They’re terrified of me and are worried the hideous monster will eat them.” Graal shook his head. “Honestly, I don’t understand why you can bear to be seen with me.”

Cas gripped Graal’s arms, wings fluttering as he lifted to eye level with Graal. “Because you’re not a monster! You’re beautiful, Graal!”

Graal choked and gave a jerky shake of his head.

“You are!” Cas leaned in close. “Maybe not everyone sees it. But I do. I think you’re beautiful.”

“It’s all right, Cas.” Graal struggled to draw breath. Everything hurt. “I know I’m not nice to look at.”

“Well, I like to look at you!” Cas practically yelled at him.

Graal growled.

“Graal, you know it to be true. I’m not fucking you out of some weird sense of charity. I’m fucking you because I’m attracted to you and I want all that attractiveness over and in me! You’re so damn sexy I don’t know what to do with myself. And you deserve to feel beautiful!”

Cas reached out and stroked his fingers through Graal's hair. "Let me make you feel beautiful, Graal." Then, Cas leaned forward and kissed him.

CHAPTER 27

Cas kissed Graal, slow and soft, mouths dancing together. He slid his fingers through Graal's loose black hair.

"You're beautiful," Cas whispered against Graal's lips.

He felt Graal shake his head.

But that was all right. Graal had spent a lifetime believing himself to be ugly. It would take more than a few words from Cas to prove he wasn't. But Cas hoped that tonight he could start to prove to Graal that he was so much more than what he'd been taught to believe.

"You're sexy and attractive, and I desire you." Without the usual urgency, Cas undid the ties of Graal's tunic.

He wanted to take his time, making sweet, gentle love to Graal. He pushed Graal's tunic from his shoulders, letting it fall to the floor. Cas stepped back. He ran a hand down Graal's hairy chest. "I like this, your dark hair over your broad chest."

Graal huffed. "I look very different from you."

Cas raised an eyebrow. "You do." Cas dragged his nails through the black hair. He began to walk in a circle around Graal, running his hand along his muscular shoulders. He paused, gazing at the large mounds of Graal's arse. "I'm thin and petite. Pixies are very pretty. Everyone says so."

“You are.”

Cas smiled. “But this.” Cas slid his hand down the nubs of Graal’s spine, causing the big orc to shiver. “All this green skin and broad muscles...” Cas let out a breath. “You’re absolutely breathtaking.”

Graal looked back at him. He opened his mouth, as if about to protest. But Cas reached out and pinched Graal’s arse cheek. Graal jumped.

“And this delectable arse. I really have to apologise, Graal. I haven’t given it nearly enough attention. I’ve been too distracted by your incredible dick.” Cas smacked it. “I really should spend hours worshipping, kissing, and eating it. Fuck, this a nice arse.” He slapped it again and watched the wobble.

A burst of laughter escaped Graal. He shook his head as if still not quite believing what Cas had said. But the smile that appeared on Graal’s face as Cas took Graal’s hand and tugged him towards the bed made Cas think maybe he was getting through to the orc.

Cas undressed Graal the rest of the way and then himself. And when Graal tried to reach for him, Cas stepped back.

“Nuh-uh.” Cas waved a finger at him. “I know you’re normally in charge, throwing me around, flipping me over, putting me in whichever position you want to fuck, suck, or rim me, but tonight I’m in charge.” He placed his hands on his hips and gave a dramatic flap of his wings, rising from the floor.

“Sorry.” Graal frowned. “I don’t mean to be so controlling all the time.”

“Yes, you do!” Cas laughed and kissed him on the lips. “And come on. You know I fucking love it.”

Graal chuckled, and Cas's spirit soared. Cas grabbed Graal's waist and guided him to the bed, getting him to lie on his back. Cas crawled on top of him and straddled his waist. For several seconds, he stared into Graal's yellow eyes.

"I love looking at you." Cas lifted a hand and began to swirl patterns onto Graal's torso. "Perhaps you think I like having sex with you because of your magic seed and scent or because I have a thing for massive dicks."

Cas paused. "And I definitely appreciate the aphrodisiac effect of your semen and scent, and I adore your big cock." Cas paused, leaning close. "But there is also a lot more about you that I like."

Graal let out a shaky breath, hanging on Cas's words as he studied Cas's face.

Cas leaned forward, hands finding purchase on Graal's chest. He kissed Graal again, tongue delving in and entwining with Graal's. He threaded his fingers through Graal's hair and then caressed Graal's pointed ear.

After several minutes, Cas pulled back. Graal stared up at him, yellow eyes wide, expression strangely vulnerable.

"I like your face." Cas caressed his cheek.

Graal trembled beneath his touch.

"I love these lips." Cas pecked him on the lips. "And these tusks." He touched one of the tusks with his finger. Then he licked along it to the tip.

Graal gasped.

"And your thick, prominent brows too." Cas stroked them. "You're gorgeous, Graal."

Graal tensed as if fighting the urge to argue.

“You are. No matter what you think.” Cas stroked his fingers along Graal’s nose, lips, and throat. “And since we both know I am a better judge of aesthetics, you’ll have to just trust me on that.”

Graal huffed.

If Graal didn’t entirely believe him yet, that was fine. Cas could keep repeating how beautiful Graal was until he believed it. Taking a deep breath, Cas kissed along Graal’s bearded chin. Graal shuddered beneath him, and Cas smelled Graal’s arousal.

Cas did his best to ignore it and the effect it had on him. He needed to keep his wits so he could keep complimenting Graal.

“You know, pixies can’t grow beards,” Cas whispered as his teeth teased the dark strands.

“I hadn’t really thought about it.” Graal sounded breathless.

“I’ve always found them very fascinating and very sexy,” Cas whispered. Cas sat back. “And so far, I’ve only covered your face.” His gaze roamed Graal’s chest, shoulders, and arms. “There is so much of you that is sexy! I mean, look at all of you!”

Graal laughed, and Cas smiled at him. Then Cas reached for Graal’s hand and lifted it to his lips. “I love these hands. They were one of the first things I noticed about you. I imagined they could lift me so easily.” Cas sucked a thick finger into his mouth, swirling his tongue around the tip.

Graal groaned, eyelids drooping. Cas felt light-headed like he floated on Graal’s

scent. His own cock throbbed in time with the beating of his heart.

“The sight of you drives me wild, Graal. It makes me crazy with need.” Cas leaned forward towards Graal’s hairy chest. He tongued a nipple before biting it. “And these wide, flat nipples.”

Graal gasped.

Cas moved lower, kissing, nipping, and licking as he went whilst his hands roamed all the delicious skin he could find. “And this belly button.” Cas nuzzled the belly button in question .

Graal let out a harsh breath, abdomen clenching. “Careful. I’m ticklish.”

Cas looked up at Graal. “Good to know.” Cas moved on. “And I love this trail of hair that leads down to your cock.” Cas’s fingers followed it but paused at the sight of Graal’s impressive erect member.

He glanced up at Graal, who watched him intently. Cas grinned before skipping Graal’s cock. “And these thighs!” Cas squeezed one of the meaty thighs. His hand didn’t even make it a quarter of the way around. “Fuck, these thighs are magnificent. I could spend from just rubbing my cock against those tree-trunks you have for legs.”

Graal smiled. “I’d like to see you do this.”

“I bet you would. And your balls!” Cas cradled one in his hand, squeezing gently.

Graal gasped.

“I’ve never seen balls this big and full.” Cas kissed one. His head swam with the potent scent. Cas shook his head, trying to clear the fog. He tongued at Graal’s ball,

sucking one before moving on to the other.

Graal's hand threaded through Cas's hair. "Fuck, Cas!"

Cas moved upwards. The scent was too strong to ignore. It beckoned and called to him. His blood sang with the need for Graal to fuck him and spill his seed inside him.

He felt dazed as he mouthed at Graal's cock. Pre-cum slid down the side and into his mouth. Graal cried out, and Cas moaned as he licked it up.

Cas tongued the slit of Graal's cock, tasting the magic straight from the source. He suckled the head, moaning all the while. as he growled low in his throat, Graal's hips tensed against the bed.

With a pop, Cas released him. Panting, he gazed up at Graal.

"You're so beautiful," Cas whispered. "So damn, fucking sexy." Limbs shaking, he moved up to straddle Graal's thighs. He wrapped his hand around Graal's dick and pumped.

Graal's mouth fell open, face twisting with pleasure as he cried out.

"And now I need your cock inside me. I can't wait anymore, Graal."

CHAPTER 28

Cas slid his hand up Graal's cock, collecting the pre-cum before reaching behind himself. His fingers eased into his eager hole, and he moaned. "You are the sexiest fucker I have ever seen, and I can't get enough of you." He groaned as Graal's pre-cum slicked his channel.

Pleasure spread through him. "Fuck," Cas breathed. "Fuck!" Yanking his fingers free, Cas gripped Graal's cock and positioned it at his entrance. "And I know I've told you this many times before, but I really love your cock."

The tip kissed Cas's entrance. Cas gasped as he lowered himself, inch by inch, letting it stretch, letting it burn until Graal's enormous dick was seated deep inside him. "Fuck!" Cas whined.

Graal groaned, hands clutching at Cas's hips.

Cas tilted his head back, taking deep gulping breaths. Even after all the times he'd taken Graal's cock, it still took him a few moments to adapt. He closed his eyes, breathing deeply as the pain shifted to pleasure and to that delicious feeling of perfect fullness.

Large hands gripped his thighs. Cas opened his eyes. He looked into Graal's face. Graal's cheeks had flushed. His eyes filled with hunger and desire.

Graal cupped Cas's cheek. "I don't know what I ever did to deserve these moments with you, Cas."

“You are just you. That is enough.” Cas turned and kissed Graal’s palm. “And you might pretend to be all grumpy and gruff. But I know that’s just a hard exterior. I’ve seen the sweetness, the kindness, and the gentleness beneath. You’re beautiful. Inside and out.”

Slowly, Cas undulated on Graal’s cock. “Oh!” Graal’s cock dragged inside him. “Oh!” spurts of hot pre-cum filled him, setting him on fire within. “Graal!”

Then Cas leaned forward, positioning his hands on Graal’s chest. Graal gripped his hips. Cas’s wings trembled. His cock throbbed with need, leaking onto Graal’s stomach.

Cas stared into Graal’s eyes as he lifted himself, letting Graal’s cock slide from his body several inches, before lowering himself and taking Graal back inside him.

Grunting, Graal tightened his hands on Cas’s hips as he guided Cas in a smooth, slow rhythm. Moans and groans fell from their lips.

Everything about this was slower, less rough, and less desperate than usual. But somehow it felt deeper, more intense, and more intimate as Cas stared into Graal’s eyes.

“You’re so beautiful, Graal,” Cas whispered as he rode Graal’s cock. “So fucking beautiful. Every fucking inch of you.” He’d keep calling Graal beautiful until the orc believed it.

Groaning, Graal thrust his hips up, burying himself deeper into Cas.

Cas cried out, and pixie dust burst from him. Cas’s long pale-blue and white hair swung with his movement, and the tips brushed Graal’s torso .

Cas's fingers tightened in the dark curls of Graal's chest as he moved quicker.

"Oh. Yes." Cas panted. Cas angled his hips.

Graal's cock nudged that pleasure spot inside him.

"Ah! Fuck." Cas rose and fell quicker. But he didn't close his eyes. He didn't want to break eye contact as Graal's cock smashed into his prostate over and over.

"Fuck, you feel so good." Graal wrapped a hand around Cas's cock, stroking him in time with Cas's rhythm.

Cas was gone. His cock jerked in Graal's hand. He keened, wings spasming, and his body arched as waves of pleasure spiralled through him.

A split second later, Graal growled. His fingers dug into Cas's hips as he thrust up, spilling inside Cas in thick spurts of cum that just kept filling Cas.

After a moment, Cas slumped forward. Graal's cock slid from his body. Graal wrapped his arms around Cas and pulled him down onto his chest.

But Cas needed more. Lifting his head, Cas kissed Graal's lips, wanting to pour all his affection into it. Graal held Cas close, making him feel so safe and cared for.

This couldn't be just a rebound. Could it? This couldn't just be amazing sex. The depth of Cas's feelings for Graal were far too strong.

I don't want this to end. I don't want this to be a fling.

He never wanted to say goodbye to Graal. He wanted a relationship with this stunning half-orc. And he wanted it to last forever.

But fear lingered inside him and stopped him from speaking. Because he'd wanted the same with Xavi, and Xavi had betrayed him.

Was Cas really ready to trust and open himself up so soon? Just the idea of telling Graal that he wanted more caused terror to rear up inside him .

Because what if Graal betrayed him like Xavi did? Cas didn't think Graal would. Graal wasn't Xavi. But Cas had not thought Xavi would betray him either. How could Cas trust his instincts when they'd been so horribly wrong before?

The kiss broke, and Cas let out a deep breath. He rested his head on Graal's chest.

"Thank you, Cas," Graal said. "No one has ever made me feel...like you make me feel."

Cas reached out and entwined his hand with Graal's. "I know how you feel." And he did. No one had ever made Cas feel as adored and special as Graal.

Maybe...maybe they did have a future. Maybe he and Graal could last forever. He wanted it.

But did Graal? After all, Graal had only agreed to a fling. What if Cas opened himself up only to be rejected? Cas closed his eyes.

Why is this all so hard?

But maybe Cas would just have to do it, just have to open himself and be vulnerable for the chance of a future with Graal. He thought maybe he could do that. For Graal.

But not today. Cas wasn't ready today. But soon. Soon he'd be ready.

CHAPTER 29

The snowstorm passed after five days of bliss. Graal had spent the time with Cas and his family, hidden away from the world beneath the snow. But the snowstorm had had to pass eventually.

Cas told Graal he could stay with them longer. But Graal needed to find his own apartment. He couldn't live off the kindness of Cas and his siblings forever. And the place really couldn't fit Graal, especially not if Lacy came back. Although, at the moment, she still seemed keen to stay with Orim.

So yesterday, after Graal had returned to work and finished hauling rocks for the day, Graal had gone around and checked apartments that would accept an orc tenant. Cas had wanted to join him and make sure they treated Graal well. But Cas needed to work.

Graal had not had much luck. Or more specifically, he hadn't had much luck finding a place where he would receive better treatment than what he'd gotten from Fernos. Graal pursed his lips.

He'd visited four residences yesterday. Every single landlord looked down at Graal. One had even covered her mouth and nose with a handkerchief as if Graal carried some infectious disease.

Once upon a time, Graal would have just accepted that as his lot. But after the way Cas and his family had treated him, it felt wrong to go back and accept the way he'd been treated before.

Graal deserved better than that. Cas had shown him that.

Graal sighed as he trudged through the snow to the bakery. He'd head out again tonight, once he'd changed and washed the day's work from his body. He figured he had a better chance of being treated half-decently if he did.

Graal's shoulders drooped. Perhaps he should move out of the city. Find a village where orcs weren't treated like shit.

Graal had met Orim, Lacy's girlfriend, the previous night. She'd told Graal about the place she originally came from. It was a mining village run by trolls, but orcs lived there too. She'd looked Graal up and down and said, "A strong orc who works hard would have no trouble getting work."

She'd even given him some details on how to get there. It would take a few days of walking. But it wasn't too far.

Graal should consider it. But that would mean leaving the city. And Cas.

Graal knew he and Cas had no future. No matter how spectacular their time together had been, no matter how special and surprisingly beautiful Cas had made Graal feel, Graal couldn't forget that Cas had never wanted a proper relationship with him.

And that was fine. Graal had agreed to that. But every time he thought of Cas no longer in his life, his chest throbbed with pain.

Maybe once he's finished with me, I'll leave. Maybe I'll just find somewhere crappy to stay whilst we have this brief fling. Then once Cas is done, I'll leave the city for good.

Graal kept his head down as he walked .

A boy barrelled into Graal, bouncing off his legs. “Ow!” The child tumbled onto his back.

“You all right?” Graal stepped towards him.

The boy laughed. “Yeah.” The boy scrambled to his feet. Then he looked up at Graal. His eyes widened in terror. He fell back. “Father! Mother!” he screamed. “A monster!”

Graal took several steps back. Nothing he said in this situation would put the boy at ease. Best to just walk away. Then he paused. He looked at the couple of humans running towards the boy.

Graal’s heart sank.

Mother. And Jordan. That meant...

Graal looked at the boy. At Sam. This was Sam, Graal’s half-brother. He looked to be around the right age. It must have been twelve or thirteen years ago that Graal had left them.

Graal couldn’t move. Couldn’t breathe. Couldn’t do anything but stare in horror.

His mother leaned down and wrapped her arms around Sam. Finally, she looked at Graal. For a split second, their gazes met. Her mouth fell open as recognition hit her.

Graal’s chest tightened.

Then she turned away from Graal. She kissed Sam on the cheek and ushered him away. “My poor, sweet boy,” she whispered.

She strode down the street in the opposite direction, whispering words of comfort to her son, who'd been scared by a monster.

Something shattered inside Graal as he watched them walk away.

"Be gone, you filthy half-blood orc," Jordan sneered.

Graal turned towards Jordan. He looked down at the man who'd verbally abused him for years for nothing but having orc blood. He seemed so much smaller than Graal remembered. But then again, Graal had grown a lot in the years since he'd last seen this man.

And as Graal stared down at this cruel man, an image of Cas, of the pretty Christmas pixie, filled his mind. Because Cas cared for Graal. Cas thought Graal worthy of affection. He even called Graal beautiful. And Graal believed Cas.

"Did you hear me, you stinking mongrel? Get away!" Jordan made a shooing motion.

For the first time in his life, Graal thought he deserved better than his mother's neglect. He thought he deserved better than Jordan's abuse.

Graal decided he had taken enough of this man. He pulled himself up to his full height. He bared his teeth. Jordan's eyes went wide.

"It's not wise to insult an orc," Graal growled low in his throat. He took a step towards Jordan.

Jordan faltered and fell, mouth dropping open.

Graal took another slow, deliberate step towards him. "You're a bully and a brute, Jordan. Did you enjoy picking on someone so much smaller than you for years?"

Graal leaned over Jordan. Graal smiled. “But I’m not smaller than you anymore. Am I?”

Jordan trembled, shrinking in on himself.

“Now apologise for how you treated me,” Graal said.

“What?”

“Apologise to me for how you treated me.” Graal kept his voice level and cold as the snow around them.

“I’m sorry!” Jordan stuttered. “I’m sorry!” Jordan raised his hands in front of his face.

“Good.” Graal took a step back. “In the future, best watch who you insult. You never know, they might grow up to be able to snap you in half like a twig.” Graal pointed in the direction his mother and half-brother had gone. “Now run, you fucking pathetic worm. ”

Floundering to his feet and kicking up snow, Jordan sprinted down the street, falling a couple of times.

Graal watched. He should feel satisfied. He’d just stood up to the man who’d been a big part of making his childhood a nightmare. But Graal just felt strangely numb. Because if Graal had ever had a family, that was them.

Graal turned and walked away. He needed the comfort of Cas’s arms. But as he walked, Graal smiled.

Cas would be proud of him for standing up to Jordan. Cas would laugh and tell him

the asshole deserved it. Graal would never have actually hurt Jordan. But perhaps it had been good to remind Jordan to not go around being a dick. There could be consequences for being a colossal asshole.

His footsteps sped up as he approached the bakery, eager to see Cas. He strode past the front window. He paused and stepped back, looking in.

Cas didn't stand behind the counter. He stood in front of it, talking to someone with horns, a tail, and dark wings. Xavier. Cas's ex-lover, who Cas still loved.

Graal's stomach convulsed. His hands clenched. Why was Xavier here? Why was he talking to Cas?

Then the incubus stepped in close, wrapped his arm around Cas's waist, and kissed him. Graal flinched away from the window as if burned. He glanced back and saw them still entwined. Graal looked away, and this time, he didn't look back. He couldn't see the pixie he loved kissing someone else.

Because Graal knew with startling clarity that he loved Cas with all his heart.

Graal closed his eyes. He wanted to beat his chest and howl with agony. Instead, body shaking, Graal stumbled around to the back of the bakery. He raced up the stairs and knocked on the door .

Jack opened it. "Gaal." He frowned. "Everything all right?"

"Yes. Fine." Graal brushed past Jack. "I've decided to take a job out of the city, in the mining village Orim mentioned." Graal strode to Cas's room and threw the door open. It banged, but Graal didn't pay it any attention. He shoved his things together as quick as he could.

“Does Cas know?”

“I’ll send him a letter explaining.” Graal stood and strode past Jack, not meeting his eyes. “But I have to go now.”

He couldn’t face Cas. Not now. It might be cowardly. It might be rude after everything that had happened between them and after everything Cas had done for him. But he couldn’t look at Cas, not now that Cas was with someone else.

“Well, Cas is just downstairs in the bakery. You can talk to him now,” Jack pressed.

Graal opened the door. “All right,” he called out as he stamped down the stairs.

But he didn’t even glance towards the bakery as he fled. His heart would crumble entirely if he saw Cas gazing into Xavier’s eyes with the love he didn’t feel for Graal.

CHAPTER 30

“Merry Christmas! And next time you come in, let me know what you think of the snowflake sugar cookies.” Cas waved at the family of dwarves.

The kids waved back, smiling and giggling. The bell tinkled as they left. Cas ducked beneath the counter to tidy up the cookies so they’d be perfectly displayed behind the glass when the next customer entered.

The bell tinkled again. A smile stretched Cas’s cheeks as he rose and prepared to serve.

Cas sucked in a breath. The smile dropped from Cas’s face.

“Xavi?”

“Cas.” Xavi sauntered towards him, tail swaying behind him in time with the movement of his hips. “I was hoping you’d be working.”

Cas frowned, coming around the counter towards the incubus. He took in Xavi, dressed in a sleek black coat that showed off his trim, tall figure. Long jet-black hair with streaks of gold had been pulled back into a tight ponytail, showing off his impressive horns. His dark wings were tucked behind him.

“It’s good to see you, Cas.” Xavi placed a hand on Cas’s arm.

Cas stepped back, away from the touch. “What are you doing here?” Cas glanced

from side to side, as if expecting an explanation lurking around.

“Cas, look at me,” Xavi said.

Cas looked at Xavi.

“I know you’re upset, which is entirely appropriate considering how things ended between us,” Xavi said, voice smooth. “But I’ve been doing some thinking, and I’ve come to realise that I was wrong for breaking off our relationship without considering all the variables.”

Xavi chuckled, shaking his head. “And you know I don’t admit I’m wrong often.” He gave an affectionate smile. “But I’ve missed you, Cas. I love you. And I want to be together. I’d like us to bond and be together forever.”

Cas tried and failed to comprehend what was going on and what Xavi was telling him.

Then, as if everything weren’t confusing enough, Xavi wrapped his arms around Cas’s, lowered his head, and kissed Cas.

Every cell of Cas’s body froze in shock.

Just a few weeks ago, Cas’s heart would have sung at Xavi’s return.

But now, with Xavi’s lips pressed against his, all Cas could think of was how wrong this all felt. Xavi smelled wrong. His arms felt too thin. His body wasn’t big enough. And Cas didn’t feel safe and protected in Xavi’s arms. After all, this incubus had betrayed him.

Cas didn’t want Xavi. He wanted Graal.

Recovering from the shock, Cas shoved Xavi away with all his pixie might. He wiped a hand across his lips. “No,” Cas whispered, shaking his head.

“What?” Xavi’s eyes narrowed.

“I don’t want you.” Cas straightened.

Xavi held out a placating hand. “Cas, I know you are upset. I know I hurt you. I know how things ended between us wasn’t ideal. But you need to calm down and think clearly.” Xavi smiled, and Cas could see the condescension dripping from it.

How did I not see it before? And how dare he tell me to calm down and think clearly?

“Fuck you, Xavi. Just fuck you and fuck off!” Cas’s voice echoed in the bakery.

Xavi’s eyes widened in shock. “Cas, keep your voice down and don’t use such vulgar language towards me.”

“Fuck you!” Cas yelled. “Don’t you dare tell me how to behave.”

Cas’s wings flapped rapidly, and he rose into the air. His aura glowed red around him. But with all his might, he stopped his harmful pixie dust from bursting forward. He had things he wanted to say to Xavi.

“You cheated on me.” Cas flew towards him. “And then, when I caught you in the process of dipping your dick into someone else, you broke up with me. You didn’t even bother to apologise or put on clothes. Then you made me feel like you betraying me and ending our relationship was my fault.” Cas’s voice cracked.

“Now you just waltz in, not even apologising for treating me like garbage, you tell me what to do, and you just expect me to take you back?” Cas sneered. “You really

are an arrogant prick.” Cas looked Xavi up and down. “I don’t know what I ever saw in you.”

“Cas! What has gotten into you?” Xavi asked.

And Cas knew the answer. “I just met someone who treats me like I deserve. Someone wonderful. Someone perfect. Someone so much better than you.”

“You met someone?” Xavi asked, voice incredulous as if he’d imagined Cas would wait around for him forever.

“Yes. I met an orc named Graal.” And as Graal’s image came to mind, the truth hit Cas. He’d held back from that knowledge, thinking himself not over Xavi, thinking it all too soon, thinking himself not ready to risk his heart again. But deep down, it was all so clear to Cas. “And I am in love with him.”

Xavi’s nose wrinkled. “You’d choose an orc over me? Cas, have you lost your mind?”

“I think I just found it.” Cas’s shoulders straightened. “He is far better than you’ll ever be. And he and I have the best sex I’ve ever had.” It was the truth, but it would also be the biggest insult to an incubus.

Because although Xavi might be a sex demon, Graal was Cas’s sex god. “And did you know orc cum is an aphrodisiac? I am addicted to it.”

Xavi took a breath as if trying to collect himself. “You know what Cas, I think?—”

“I don’t care what you think,” Cas interrupted. “I don’t care what you think ever again. And I don’t care about you. Get out and don’t come back. We’re done. I’ve wasted enough of my life on you.”

Then Cas turned his back on Xavi. He flew behind the counter and began wiping it down, completely focused on work as he ignored Xavi.

Although, in reality, Cas was very aware of Xavi staring at him in shock. But after a second, from the corner of his eye, Cas saw Xavi turn and stride to the door. The bell tinkled as he left.

Cas let out a breath, sagging against the counter as he gave up any pretence of giving a shit about cleaning the counter.

Applause broke out from the back of the bakery.

Cas turned. Grady, Lacy, Ordellia, Briar, Trent, and Jack all clapped and whooped.

“Cas! You were incredible,” Ordellia said, bouncing Ruthie, her baby, in her arms.

“Bloody amazing!” Trent cheered.

Cas smiled and straightened. “I’m shaking with adrenaline.” He held out a trembling hand.

Grady came around from the back and clasped Cas on the shoulder. “You did good, little brother.” Then he frowned. “But I never realised he cheated on you. You never said. What an absolute twat!”

“I can’t believe—” Lacy began.

“I hate to interrupt after Cas’s amazing performance,” Jack said. “But Graal just left.”

“What?” Cas looked around as if expecting to see Graal.

“He came up into the apartment,” Jack explained. “He looked upset and said he was leaving the city to work at some mining village. I asked if you knew, and he said he’d write you a letter. Then he just took off. He looked pretty distressed.”

Cas frowned.

“I came down to talk to you because I could tell something was wrong and saw you yelling at Xavier. I assume Graal saw Xavier too and took off.” Jack pointed out back.

“What? Why would he run off?” Cas flew towards the back door.

“Maybe he saw Xavier kiss you,” Lacy said.

“I have to go after him.” Cas pulled the door open.

“Cas.” Briar followed him. “You should know something.”

Cas turned to Briar. “Briar, I don’t have time?—”

“Graal is your mate!” Briar proclaimed .

Cas’s wings stuttered, and he dropped to the floor. “What?”

“I was reading a book about mating, and it talked about how mating differs between races.” Briar pushed his glasses up his nose. “With orcs, they can tell who their mate is, as their scent and semen act like an aphrodisiac to them. That would make you Graal’s mate if what you said is true.”

“But that’s insane,” Cas whispered. And very weird.

“Pixies can tell who their mate is by?—”

“Briar, this is all very interesting, and I want to talk more about it later, but I need to go find Graal.” Cas lifted into the air.

“Oh. Of course,” Briar said as Cas flew out the door.

CHAPTER 31

G raal hunched his shoulders as his heavy boots crunched in the snow. He didn't know where he was headed. Graal just had to get away from the bakery and Cas and the incubus Cas loved.

At some point, he'd need to find an inn where he'd stay the night. Then he could set out for the mining village tomorrow.

The image of Cas kissing the attractive incubus stayed frozen in place in his mind. Even with his horns, wings, and tail, Xavier did not look monstrous at all. Not even a little bit. He was exactly the sort of being Graal could picture with Cas. Graal couldn't even begin to compete with someone like that.

And Cas loved the incubus. He'd said so at the Christmas markets. Cas said he'd hoped Xavier would come back, tell Cas he'd made a mistake, and ask Cas back. Seemed like he'd done that. It had just taken the incubus a few weeks.

Graal's throat tightened. Perhaps Cas could still ask Xavier to bond. And just in time for Christmas too. That would be perfect for Cas the Christmas pixie. He'd be so happy.

Graal closed his eyes as pain lanced through him.

And Graal would be alone for Christmas. Like every Christmas before.

He'd need to write a letter to Cas, telling Cas where he'd gone. He could do that from

the inn. He sighed, guilt eating him. He'd behaved terribly not even saying goodbye and thanking Cas after everything. But he just couldn't face him. Not now. So a letter would have to do.

Cas might not even care. He might be too absorbed with being in love and being blissfully happy to care that Graal had left without a word. Maybe Graal was even making it easier for Cas. Now Cas didn't have to deal with ending things awkwardly with Graal or any uncomfortableness that might arise from Graal meeting Xavier.

Graal continued to drag his feet through the snow.

"Graal!" an angry voice yelled.

Graal turned and frowned. "Cas? What are you doing here?" He glanced around, but he could see no sight of the handsome incubus Cas had been with minutes before.

Cas hovered in front of him, eyes narrowed, wings fluttering rapidly. "I came to find you!"

"How did you find me?" Graal asked.

Cas gestured to the ground with an angry jerk of his arm. "I followed your footprints." His aura took on a red tinge. "What the fuck are you playing at, Graal? Jack said you were going to the mining village. That you were leaving and not going to say anything to me."

Cas paused, breathing heavily, staring at Graal with so much hurt in his pale-blue gaze that Graal had to drop his own. "How could you leave me without even saying goodbye? Do I mean that little to you?"

"I'm sorry." Graal stared at Cas's legs hovering above the snow. "I saw you with

Xavier. I saw you kissing.” Graal took in a lungful of freezing air. “I know you still love him.” The words were like bile burning his throat.

“And now you have everything you want.” Graal gave a painful smile. “I couldn’t stick around. I couldn’t bear to see you with him. Not when I—” Graal cut off.

Slowly, Cas lowered to the ground. His wings stopped flapping. His red aura returned to the normal pale glow. The anger and pain left his face, replaced by a pensive expression. “Finish the sentence, Graal. When you what?”

Graal shook his head. He shouldn’t have to say it. He shouldn’t have to say that he loved Cas. Not when Cas loved Xavier.

Cas stepped close. He reached out and cupped Graal’s jaw, stroking his cheek, forcing Graal to lock eyes with him. “Gaal, why can’t you see me with him?”

Even if there was no hope for him and Cas, even if it wouldn’t change anything, Graal could do nothing but answer truthfully. If Cas asked him a question, Graal would answer. “Because I love you, Cas. And I know you don’t feel the same way, but?—”

Pixie dust burst in the air, and Cas’s lips crashed into his, cutting off Graal’s words. And despite his small stature, the force of his petite body launching at Graal’s caused Graal to step back.

“Why are you kissing me?” Graal asked, breaking the kiss.

“Because I love you too.” Cas laughed, a joyful lilting noise. “And I’m sorry it took me so long to work it out. I was in denial and still so confused and thrown off after everything with Xavier. But this isn’t a fling for me. It hasn’t been for a while. I love you, Graal, with all my heart.”

“No.” Graal shook his head. “That’s not possible. No. Are you sure?”

“Graal!” Cas beamed. “Yes, I’m sure. I love you. ”

“But what about the incubus?”

“Xavi.” Cas made a face. “The asshole came to the bakery. He told me he made a mistake, that he still loves me, and that he wanted me back.”

“And you didn’t want that?” Graal didn’t understand. “You don’t want him back?”

Cas gave him a lopsided smile. “A few weeks ago, I would have. But today, when he told me he’d made a mistake and when he kissed me. It all just felt wrong. Everything about him was wrong. All I wanted was to be kissing you. I love you, Graal. You. So I pushed him away and told him to fuck off!” Cas laughed.

But then the laughter seemed to drain away from Cas’s face. Cas dropped his gaze. “Honestly, he treated me badly when we were together. I didn’t tell you this, I didn’t tell anyone this, but he cheated on me. I walked in on him fucking someone else.” Cas gave a harsh laugh. “Then he broke up with me and acted like everything was my fault.” He frowned. “And somehow I believed him.”

Graal growled low in his throat. “You deserve better.”

The sadness disappeared from Cas’s face, and he smiled at Graal. “Being with you made me realise that. You treat me so well. I feel safe with you. And you make me feel like I’m always enough. You make me feel loved.”

“That’s because I love you,” Graal said, matter of fact.

“And I love you.” More pixie dust glittered around them. “And you know what else is

wonderful?”

“What?” Graal could not imagine anything better than the knowledge that Cas loved him. Which he still struggled to believe.

“We’re mates!”

Graal blinked at him. “Mates?”

Cas nodded. “Briar told me. I was in a rush to find you, so I didn’t really listen, but he read that an orc’s scent and semen are an aphrodisiac to their mate. Did you know that?”

Graal shook his head. “No. But I wasn’t raised by orcs.” He paused, brows furrowing. “I have been told that an orc’s scent attracts mates. But I just thought they meant mates as in someone to fuck. Not like an actual mate or anything like that.” Graal needed to ask Briar more questions. And perhaps Graal should read up on orcs too.

“Well, yours is an aphrodisiac for me. So that makes us mates.” Cas laughed. “And that’s so weird, Graal. Why would semen tell you who your mate is?” Cas shook his head. “But I don’t care, because it means we’re mates! You and me.”

Graal couldn’t speak. He couldn’t fathom that Cas wanted and loved him, and on top of that, they were mates too. So Graal wrapped his arms around Cas and kissed him, never wanting to let his pixie, his lover, his mate go.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:19 am

Graal carried a table across the room.

“Hey! Stop that, you two,” Cas yelled from the back of the bakery.

Graal paused and turned. He spotted Cas pointing at Jasper and Leo, who were bent over howling with laughter.

Today, Cas dressed in a silver outfit with matching makeup and nails. He wore a white sash draped with baubles. And to top it off, little silver bauble earrings dangled from his ears. Graal’s mate looked stunning. He took Graal’s breath away. As always.

Cas wore the exact same thing he’d been wearing the first day Graal had heard Cas refer to himself as the Christmas pixie. That day, Graal would never have believed he and Cas would end up together. He smiled, watching the pretty pixie he loved more than anything in the world.

“Don’t fuck with me,” Cas snapped at Jasper and Leo. “Not today. It’s Christmas, and I’m the fucking Christmas pixie!”

Graal heard either Jasper or Leo say something, but he couldn’t make out the words .

Then everyone, including Cas, burst out laughing. Pixie dust shimmered in the air. Chuckling, Graal returned to moving the tables the customers usually ate at together. Whilst the bakery had been open for a few hours that morning, they’d closed for the day and now prepared for the family’s Christmas Day festivities.

Once Graal had made one giant table out of small tables, he moved the chairs into

place around it. Then he laid out the tablecloths. The Berry family didn't have one giant tablecloth. So Graal had been instructed to just overlap the ones they normally used.

After that, Graal took out red candles and set them up on the table, lighting each one. Finally, he grabbed the basket of baubles Cas had given him and placed them in small clusters on the mismatched tablecloths of different shades of white and cream.

The scent of food drifted in from the back area, and Graal's mouth watered. Almost everyone was out back preparing for the feast. Voices and laughter bounced off the walls. He set out plates, bowls, glasses, and cutlery.

Graal had been worried about how to help today, as he didn't know how to cook or bake. And he worried with his size and clumsy fingers he might just end up getting in the way in the crowded back.

"If you like, you can be in charge of setting up the table," Cas had said with a smile.

Graal had been surprised at being given such a big responsibility, even though he knew he could move the tables into place. But then Cas had mentioned decorations. Graal wasn't sure about decorations. He worried he would screw that up. And he didn't want to screw up Christmas.

But Cas had smiled at him and merely said, "You're the mate of the Christmas pixie. You'll do an excellent job."

Graal surveyed his work. He had to admit it looked nice. Not as nice as if Cas had been the one to set it up. But still nice. And very Christmassy. He took a deep breath, pride filling his chest with the knowledge he'd contributed to the family's Christmas Day.

Glancing out the window, he watched snowflakes drift down. It looked pretty.

The sounds of wings beating caused Graal to turn. Cas flew into Graal, wrapping his arms around his chest. “You finished already? I was going to come and help. But you didn’t need me at all.” Cas looked around. “It looks beautiful, Graal!”

Graal flushed with the praise. “It does, doesn’t it?”

Cas nodded. “Perfect for Christmas.”

Graal stroked Cas’s hair, admiring the room, including the table, the decked-out Christmas tree, the hanging garlands and baubles, and the stunning pixie in his arms. He had everything he needed for a magical Christmas.

So many Christmases, Graal had sat alone in an empty place with no decorations or anyone who loved him. Today was different.

“Are you all right?”

Graal cleared his throat. “Just thinking. For years, I’ve been an orc who hated Christmas. This time of year has always reminded me of how unloved and alone I am. But today, I don’t hate Christmas. All I can think of is how lucky I am to be celebrating this day with you.”

Cas’s expression softened. He slipped his hand into Graal’s. “I look forward to celebrating many more Christmases together. I love you, Graal.”

“I love you too.”

Then Cas pulled Graal in for a kiss.

After a few seconds, Cas pulled back. “And I have something for you too.” Cas reached into his pocket. He pulled out a tiny box .

Graal frowned. “I thought everyone was doing presents after lunch.” Graal had been nervous and excited when Cas mentioned exchanging gifts with the family.

Cas had a lot of family, and Graal had never bought presents for anyone, and at the time, there had been two days until Christmas. But Cas had laughed and said they could make chocolate truffles and that could be Graal’s gift for the family this year. Next year, though, Graal wanted to buy gifts. He’d probably need Cas’s help. But he looked forward to it.

“We are. But I wanted to give you your first ever official Christmas present now. I thought you should wear them during lunch.” Cas held out the white box to Graal. “Come on. Open it! I want to see what you think.”

Graal took the box containing his first ever Christmas present. Holding his breath, he lifted the lid.

“I know you only wear gold hoops and studs, so these aren’t your style. But I thought?—”

“We’ll be matching,” Graal cut him off.

His heart leapt in his chest. He reached into the box. He lifted out the pair of earrings. They looked so tiny in his hand. Little gold Christmas baubles dangled on thin gold chains attached to hooks that would go into his ears. A perfect match to Cas’s silver ones.

Cas beamed. “Exactly.”

“They’re perfect. Thank you.” Graal kissed Cas on the forehead. “Will you put them on me?”

Cas took out a stud from each of Graal’s ears and replaced them with the bauble

earrings.

“There.” Cas surveyed the look. “Now you are the perfect Christmas orc.”

Graal chuckled and lifted Cas into his arms. Then he kissed Cas with all the joy and happiness he had bubbling inside him .

Pixie dust filled the air. Pixie dust, which tasted sweet and citrusy. But only to him. Because regular pixie dust didn't have a taste. Unless you were the pixie's mate.

Briar had had to explain to both Cas and Graal what mates actually were. They'd both only had a vague idea. It didn't help that the concept of a mate differed widely between races.

But generally, it was understood that a mate was someone with whom you were destined to be highly compatible. How many mates an individual had was believed to vary between races.

Werewolves only had one. Both orcs and pixies were believed to have several. Dragons used the term slightly differently because whilst dragons could sense when someone would be a suitable mate, ultimately their mate was chosen.

Briar had then told them there had been a lot of debate amongst different groups about the accuracy of some of these claims. Graal had started to tune out after a while. He understood the important part: Cas was his mate. Maybe he had more potential mates out there. But that didn't matter. He just wanted Cas.

Graal squeezed his mate tightly against him.

“All right, lovebirds. You going to help us lay out food?” Lacy laughed.

Graal broke the kiss. “Sorry. Let me help you, Lacy.” Graal took the plates she

carried and laid them on the table.

“I’m not sorry.” Cas smirked. “But I will still help carry out the food.” And he disappeared into the kitchen.

Back and forth, everyone carried the plates and bowls and placed them on the table. Graal’s mouth watered as he surveyed the various pies, meats, and vegetables. He knew the desserts were still waiting out back. Cas would be looking forward to that far more than these savoury dishes .

As Grady brought out the last two plates, he yelled, “Come on everyone. Food is ready!”

Cas came over next to Graal and clasped his hand. Everyone took a seat.

“Let’s have a toast.” Cas lifted his glass and wrapped his arm around Graal.

Grady raised his glass. “Welcome,” Grady said as he looked around the table. “Here’s to family, both old and new, and to being together today. Merry Christmas.”

Calls of “Merry Christmas!” and the clinking of glasses sounded around the table.

“Hear that. You’re one of us now!” Cas said. “You’re part of the family.”

Graal looked around at the crowded table, taking in Cas’s words. He let out a shaky breath, feeling his eyes prickle.

“Now let’s eat,” Grady announced.

Everyone around began reaching for food.

“Merry Christmas, my love.” Cas leaned against Graal.

Graal kissed Cas on the cheek. “Merry Christmas, my Christmas pixie.”