



CURSED
KINGDOM OF

THE COMPLETE
SERIES

DRAGONS
& ROSES

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

MEG XUEMEI X

CURSED KINGDOM OF DRAGONS AND ROSES

MEG XUEMEI X

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My heart leaped with joy when I detected spaceships piercing through the murky sky of Pandemonium.

The Archangel had succeeded in sending my suitors here, though he'd been mightily pissed at me for my neglecting to mention that he wouldn't be able to fuck his mate until he delivered my message.

If my true loves were on the ships, my nine centuries of suffering would be over.

My name is Daisy Danaenyth. But every alien on this planet called me the Furies. I was cursed to serve Akem, a bad-tempered elemental entity. To mock my misery, the hex transformed me into three mutant beast forms and made me wear a human face to mismatch my taloned wings, bulky body, and spiked tail.

I was a freak of nature.

The only bright spot in my life was one hour a day when I was allowed to be in my true Fae form.

I desperately wanted to be rid of this curse, but there was only one way to lift it—a kiss from my three true loves.

To gain one love in any part of the broken universe was near impossible. How was I going to get three?

For centuries, I'd held onto hope. It was all that got me up in the morning. I'd prevailed, and now I had my reward—not one, but three ships had

come for me!

My face brightened and with a heartfelt shriek, three Furies—all me—surged skywards to welcome my rescuers, with the main me in the center.

The ship on the left opened fire, three rockets sailing toward us.

Warships! Granted, they were lightweight, but still equipped to take down enemies.

We shrieked, turned sharply as one, and fled toward the only place that could withstand any blunt hit—the Vampire Tower.

The giddiness in my heart dissipated like ash in the wind, and rage clouded my mind.

Instead of sending me suitors with my true loves among them, my royal dragon lineage had sent hunters. How could the Dragon King do this to his own granddaughter? Before the curse had dragged me here, I was the Dragon Princess, the last of his line.

It wasn't like I'd disappeared on him out of spite, even though we'd always had our differences when it came to how to rule the Danaenyth dynasty.

A rocket hit the ground, adding further damage to the destruction of the City of Nine. Then energy beams shot out from the ship on the right and blasted the other two rockets into a puddle of melted metal.

The ships turned on each other, having momentarily forgotten about me.

Realization dawned on me. They had come together, but they weren't friends.

Not all of them wanted me dead.

A glimmer of hope rose within me. Perhaps my true loves were on the ship that had destroyed the rockets. But for now, I had to be smart and get out of the crossfire.

I fled as fast as I could until all three of my beast forms crouched behind the Vampire Tower. Once my breath evened out, I peeked out from behind the black skyscraper.

The ships had ceased fire and seemed to have reached a temporary truce, which meant they were competitors and had come for the same thing.

They'd come to hunt me. The ship wouldn't have fired upon me so eagerly at first sight if that weren't the case.

Ice encased my heart.

I'd made a strategic mistake in helping the Archangel get rid of Akem. When he'd ruled Pandemonium, ships crashed onto the planet instead of

landing, and the advanced weapons ceased working on impact.

I'd thought with Akem gone, my life would be less stressful, even though I was still cursed with the beast forms and trapped on this planet. But without the formidable entity guarding the planet and all his creatures, I had to keep myself out of the sight of the hunters and their weapons that could kill me.

I had never fled from any alien before, but now I had reason to fear for my life.

White-hot rage burning through me, I watched *Falling Star*, the warship that had sent rockets after me, land on the old gladiator arena. *New Hope*, the battleship that had shot down two rockets, settled down on the jagged beach between the gray sea and my jungle, and *Mistress*, the middle ship, parked near the Witch Tower.

If the Wickedest Witch had still been on Pandemonium, she wouldn't have taken kindly to anyone trespassing on her territory. But she had left with her coven and the wolf pack.

My eyes spat black fire, my three bodies taking up a battle stance, but we wouldn't charge into the frontline where we couldn't win.

Restraining myself from shrieking, I flew toward my jungle, staying as low as I could to avoid attracting attention, and my two alter egos followed suit.

I was no one's prey. These hunters would soon see who the ultimate predator was.

I trod through the jungle of eternal shade in my naked Fae form, my bare feet padding on pine needles.

Birds chirped, and the beasts yowled. Others might find it frightening and unsettling, but not me. None of aliens in the City of Nine dared enter the dark forest, even after Akem was gone.

Upon his leaving, I became the queen of the jungle and took charge of his former nightmare creatures. While he no longer enslaved me, my curse still bound me to this forsaken planet. Only when my true loves freed me would I be able to go wherever I wanted and choose to shift to my dragon form or stay in my Fae shape.

A two-headed hellhound darted toward me through the red trees, his onyx eyes flashing a hungry look. I arched an eyebrow, but I didn't halt my stride for his sake. He slowed down and rubbed his shining black fur against my leg.

"That's enough, Henry," I said. "I'm not in the mood to play today."

He stopped and raised his two heads, both pairs of fierce eyes gazing at me in adoration.

Sybil—a flying lizard with an owl's face, and my messenger—managed to land on Henry's back, tucking in her lone wing. The Archangel had cleaved off her other wing in a fight against Akem. When it came to defending his witch mate, the Angel was a number one asshole toward his

enemies.

Following Henry, two giant Lamashtus—Akem’s former henchmen—huffed and puffed as they stopped in front of me, awaiting my orders.

These creatures wouldn’t harm me. They knew that even in my weaker Fae form, I could cut down any one of them, and no one ran faster than a Fae like me. Besides, I could change to three Furies in a split second if I had to battle more formidable foes.

I’d summoned the four of them with my mind, as we were linked by my bonding magic. I chose my Fae form to talk to them since I could think better in that form than I could when I was the three Furies. Three heads weren’t better than one.

“I have need of you,” I told them. “The invaders have come. They’ll enter our jungle to do me harm.”

Henry bared his fangs and snarled, Sybil blinked at me, and a Lamashtu punched a branch and broke it.

“Ridiculous, I know,” I said. “Divide them if they come as a group, but don’t eat any of them yet. Three of the hunters among them might be the tool to get us out of here. Herd them to me one by one, and I shall kiss each one of them. You can have those who don’t pass the test.”

Henry’s fangs dripped with spittle, and the Lamashtus laughed mercilessly.

“Akem betrayed us and left us behind,” I continued. “I am not like him. I vow to take all of you with me when I leave. I won’t abandon any of you.”

We’ll go with you, Sybil answered in my head.

“Now go,” I said. “Spread the word to others and stay on high alert. Don’t forget to send out all the birds to spy on the new ships for me.”

Our rodents are good at spying, too, Sybil said. *I’ve been training them.*

I nodded. “Then use them.”

Sybil tilted her head, flapped her wing, and took off west to deliver my message. Henry followed her, running beneath her wing, and the Lamashtus raced in the opposite direction.

I rubbed at my temples. If my true loves were among the hunters, why would they want to hurt me? If they had the intention to harm me, how could they be my true loves? Of course, they hadn’t seen my Fae form yet, so there was still hope.

I’d restrained my monsters from killing anyone who ventured into my jungle, because if my true loves died, I’d be doomed forever.

Rage still coursed through my veins at the ugly reality that they'd come to hunt me with ships and high-powered weapons that could bring me down from the sky.

The hunting game had started in my backyard.

I flew high above the gray mist and trained my gaze down on the landing ships. Each of my Furies could go spy on a ship, but I was reluctant to separate myself over such a long distance. I didn't know what would happen to me if the hunters destroyed one of my forms.

It was best to stick together.

Sybil was already on the move, leading the birds to collect intel on the invaders. Though I wouldn't completely rely on them, I wouldn't need to do all the legwork.

An idea formulated in my head.

Before my monsters sorted out the hunters and herded them toward me, I could speed up the process by sifting the wheat from the chaff.

The hunters with their big guns would soon learn what kind of place they'd come to. They had yet to meet the vampires and Kruid cannibals.

On Pandemonium, every second was about survival. It was a small victory just to breathe through the next day—even for me, one of the most terrifying monsters here.

My eyes darted from ship to ship as I decided which one to approach first. My gaze narrowed on the faint symbol of a dragon on the ship parked on the rough beach near the west entrance of my jungle.

My heart skipped a beat.

My kin! If the dragons had come, it was most possible that my true loves

were among them.

Hadn't that ship shot down the two rockets aimed at me when I'd first approached them?

Stifling a shriek, I dove toward the dragon ship. I alighted stealthily atop it just as part of the front of the ship slid down to the ground and a door whooshed open.

If they so much as glanced up, they would see my vast Fury forms perched on the roof of their ship. I had to change.

Instantly, my three beast forms morphed into my naked Fae form. Pinpricks of pain exploded in me, like each time I was forced to change because of the curse. It was more agonizing to return to my Fury form and split myself into three.

I swallowed a cry as I collapsed flat on my stomach.

Two giant, armored warriors stormed down the ramp, longswords strapped on their backs. Their armor fit them like a second skin, leaving their muscled biceps exposed. For a second, I imagined myself squeezing and testing the firmness of their arms.

Each man held a blast gun in front of their chests. They both carried an air of aggressiveness and cocky confidence, as if they owned the piece of land they stood on.

I almost snorted. *Men!* They'd soon learn to respect my authority.

They wheeled around, and I blinked when I set sight upon their faces.

Their hotness was undeniable, and they both exuded sex. To my disappointment, masks covered half of their faces.

The ember-eyed and fair blond wore a mask carrying the symbol of a dragon holding the sun and fire in its mouth.

The sapphire-eyed man with cropped brown hair looked more brooding and serious. His strong face bore a mask of lightning and thunder.

Was it a new custom I hadn't heard about while being stuck on this backwoods planet?

They came to hunt instead of attending a masquerade party, right?

My heart pounded and every muscle in my body tensed as the sapphire-eyed giant sniffed the air, as if trying to detect a scent.

A squad of warriors poured out from the ship, wheeling their big weapons around and scanning their surroundings on high alert.

None of them wore a mask.

So, wearing a mask wasn't a fashion statement, nor was it an obligation.

It was a choice, I believed.

From the reverent way the group looked at the musketeers, it was obvious they were their superiors.

A whiff of wind from the gray ocean sent their scent of fire and ash to me. I inhaled deeply through my nose to make sure. I'd been right. *Dragons.* They were my kin.

I wanted to leap down, reveal myself, and kiss all of them so I could find my true loves, drop the curse, and return to the home that I'd missed for centuries.

But I controlled myself and remained motionless.

Not all dragons were friendly. In my old realm, there were quite a few nasty, violent dragons.

Why weren't they shifting into their dragon forms?

They'd come to a hostile planet. Some of them should take advantage of their formidable forms and patrol the air.

It didn't sit right with me that they all stayed in their human forms and relied on their legs and those big guns and swords. They were making a mistake by not putting their elemental forces into use.

"Your Highness," a warrior with a pierced nose called, and both masked warriors turned to him.

So, I was dealing with two dragon princelings. Even if the two hotties weren't my true loves, I would still kiss them.

My gaze roamed over their muscled chests to their narrow hips, then down to their long, strong legs. I involuntarily licked my lips.

Get a grip of yourself! my own voice warned me. *Drooling over them like that could get you killed.*

I swallowed and defended myself. *I haven't had a man in centuries. I wasn't really drooling. I have my dignity. I was merely checking—*

"Are the three beasts we saw earlier our targets?" the nose-ringed warrior asked, and I wondered if he held any rank to address the princes in that manner. Perhaps he was a lieutenant.

"Fits the profile," said the prince with the lightning mask.

Since he answered first, I was certain he outranked the other prince.

"The beasts are probably hiding in the jungle," the nose-ringed lieutenant said. "We can venture in tonight, slay them, then leave this damned place."

Another wave of anger surged in me. I took offense to being called beasts, and I definitely did not appreciate that they wanted to murder me.

“This planet doesn’t feel right,” said the prince with the fire mask. “I don’t like it here. We should act fast. If the other bounty hunters collect the three heads of the beasts, we lose all bets. I’m sure they’re already on the move, given how eager they were to shoot the beasts down from the air. They violated the ground-hunting rules. Brother, let’s go in the jungle now. We’ll cut off the beasts’ heads before our opponents can even blink, go right back to the old king, and claim the biggest dragon realm!” His eyes sparked golden fire at the prospect of a great hunt.

The men cheered, and I had to swallow down my anger lest I lose control and reveal my position.

True love, my ass! And I’d considered kissing him and everyone here. I was passing on this mean lot. *Right, sweetheart, come to my jungle to seek me out on a date and see what happens!*

“It’s good to keep your eyes on the prize, Blaze,” the lightning prince said. “And you did extremely well when you reacted faster than anyone else and shot down the rockets.”

Earlier, I’d been grateful, assuming one of the ships had wanted to preserve me, but this prince had only saved me, so he could behead me himself.

“Those jackals tried to cheat,” he said furiously. “Ground-hunt means we only hunt once we’ve landed. Fortunately, the warlock’s ship agreed with us, otherwise we’d have had to fight against two ships.”

Hmm, so the ship that had landed near the Witch Tower belonged to a sorcerer? My heart fluttered. Could he know about my curse?

“The *Mistress* isn’t really the warlock’s ship,” a rich and deep, yet cold voice sounded beneath me. Another giant warrior in hunting gear strolled down the ramp, his gait elegant and composed. His silver hair flowed down to his shoulders.

“It’s nice of you to finally wake up and grace us with your presence, Iokul,” Blaze, the fire prince, said with a bite of irony.

Iokul ignored Blaze. “My intel says Elvey brought an entire ship of demons—the foulest beings—with him. We needn’t worry about the ship sent by the old Dragon King. The bounty hunters are from different regions and have nothing in common but greed and bloodlust. They might be killing each other inside their ship as we speak. Elvey and his demon army should be our primary concern. They came with a single purpose—to cut the three heads off the Furies and take over the Dragon Realm. They’ll erase anyone in

their way in the most brutal manner.”

“Aren’t we all killers, brother?” Blaze said. “We can be unforgiving as well.”

So, this Iokul was another prince. I wondered if he too wore a mask.

“Don’t underestimate Elvey,” Iokul said condescendingly. “I’ve heard of his reputation. He’s a formidable magic user, and his demons outnumber us.”

Blaze snorted. “I do not fear them as you do.”

It was good to have the information handed to me like this. While their little quarrel benefitted me, it meant I would have to come up with different strategies against each group of the hunters.

“Since your intel seems more updated, what do you know about this planet?” asked the prince, who wore the mask of lightning and thunder. He seemed to be the leader of them all. Was he the crown prince? “What’s your opinion of us sweeping the jungle tonight?”

“Not here,” Iokul said, glancing at his brothers. He was the only one who didn’t carry a blast gun, though he also had a narrow longsword strapped over his broad left shoulder.

He had a well-proportioned, beautiful body that was more graceful than those honed in the battlefield.

My appreciative gaze dipped to his nice ass, then his strong legs.

How would it feel to writhe beneath him?

I chewed my inner cheek. *Stop it, Daisy Danaenyth. They came to take your heads, and you’re fantasizing about fucking the one when you haven’t even seen his face. Really?*

But I haven’t touched a man for centuries, my carnal need whimpered.

Shut up! the better part of me said.

If I didn’t keep a cool head, I would soon lose it... them, all three of them.

“It’s unnecessary to hold back information, Iokul,” Blaze snapped. “We discussed combining our forces before this trip. We can settle the score between us after we get the heads. If we don’t watch each other’s backs, none of us will win in this hunt. We’re pitted against the toughest hunters in the galaxy and a demon army. I might not know more about Elvey, but everyone knows what the son of a bitch can do. And no one knows much about this planet other than it being worse than a death trap. And this time, we should not fight each other. After all, we are brothers! Despite having different mothers, we were all sired by His Majesty King Oriel.”

Sibling rivalry was always interesting. It seemed that their competition was age-old and quite open. The other men averted their eyes, evidently not wanting to get between the brothers.

But I saw an opening. Maybe I should use my Fae wiles to drive them against each other to suit my own plan of defeating every hunter? But first, I needed a better entrance than dropping naked among them.

“Of course our term stands,” Iokul said coldly.

“We’ll all honor our end of the bargain,” the lightning prince said. “In the meanwhile, we must proceed with caution. Since everyone is eager to get the job done fast and go home, let’s go scout before we hunt. We’ll divide into three teams.” He looked up. “Is the sky always this overcast?” He returned his sapphire gaze to his brothers and the group of warriors. “Alpha Team A, go check the perimeter of the jungle, under the leadership of Prince Blaze. I’ll lead Team B and push into the jungle from south. Alpha Team C will stay at the base with Prince Iokul. Be ready to back us up when needed.”

“Yes, Your Highness,” the warriors answered as one, except for Blaze and Iokul, who didn’t seem keen on taking orders from the other prince.

Iokul turned in my direction with a yawn. “I’ll just go back to my nap then.”

When he took his hand away and I looked at his face, my breath caught in my throat.

I couldn’t blame myself for fantasizing about fucking him half a minute ago. He was a winter prince, but he was just as attractive as his brothers.

His silver eyes were like ice, colder and more piercing than anything I had ever seen. But I knew not to be fooled. Ice could burn hotter than fire. I was certain that beneath the white metal mask etched with the symbol of an ice dragon, I’d find a face so gloriously beautiful that it would rival perfection.

Clearly, the masks were an indication of the princes’ status, since only the three of them wore them. Was that practical? Wouldn’t they be more comfortable without the masks?

But who was I to judge their fetishes?

The ocean breeze washed over me as the wind changed direction. Iokul suddenly stopped in his tracks, his shoulders stiffening.

No, no, no! Damn it.

Dragons, even in their human form, had a superior sense of smell. He’d probably caught a whiff of my scent, even though I’d disguised myself with

the jungle's scent—the benefit of having been on this planet for a very long time. Maybe he'd caught scent of my arousal?

The ice prince sniffed again, his nostrils flaring.

To my dismay, he trained his eyes in my direction and held my gaze.

Surprise rippled across his masked face, a spark of fire leaping in his icy eyes. He smiled.

I didn't care how stunning his smile was. He would warn his companions, and I wasn't going to find out what would happen to me next.

I bolted upright.

All the men wheeled in my direction, staring at me in confusion and astonishment. If I were in my Fury forms, they would have opened fire and blasted all three of my bodies full of holes.

But facing a naked, young woman, they were slow to react. And I wasn't planning on giving them time to recover.

I made sure to send all three princes a sultry glance, beckoning them to come seek me out if they liked what they saw, then I stood gracefully, ensuring they all got a good look at my nakedness.

That way, they were less inclined to shoot me on the spot.

The nameless dragon prince blinked hard, as if he'd never seen anything quite like me. Blaze laughed, and Iokul grinned.

I broke into a run, like a blur with my Fae speed, toward the head of the ship that was closest to my jungle. My bountiful breasts bounced on my chest, the brush of the wind causing my nipples to harden.

“Wait, lass!” the lightning prince called and ran after me. His men followed in his wake.

“Don't shoot the girl!” That sounded like Blaze.

I appreciated that, but I wasn't a girl. I was an immortal woman.

“A beautiful, naked girl! Holy goddess!” someone added, and threatening growls followed the man's words.

I jumped from the ship and landed in a crouch, the force of the landing causing my muscles to ripple through my long, lithe legs. The dragon men were far behind me but kept giving chase. I glanced at them over my shoulder. They looked genuinely stunned at my amazing speed. I prayed they wouldn't shift to their dragons to pursue me. If they did, they would catch up to me.

“Fuck!” someone grunted under his breath just before I shot into my jungle. “If we could shift, we'd have caught her by now instead of running

like a bunch of old ladies who can't roam the sky.”

My heart skipped a beat.

A group of dragons couldn't shift? How had that happened?

And I'd thought I was the only cursed one.

I dashed into the dark jungle—my long-adopted home and prison—as the familiar scent of bitter blossoms wafted toward me.

I snatched a silky robe dangling from a nearby branch and wrapped it around myself.

I'd raided the Wickedest Witch's wardrobe the day she'd left Pandemonium, taking everything that had appealed to me. Now my clothes hung from a myriad of trees just in case I needed them. My scent was all over them to warn my monsters to stay away from my possessions.

A sprawling vine of cannibal plant extended toward me, not to ensnare but to caress.

Holding a breath, I commanded the plant to open its path for me, and the sentient plant obeyed the new queen of the jungle. Its vast leaves unfolded to let me step inside, where it usually trapped and then ate the victims.

I didn't enter its lair without caution. My mind could perceive its intent, and it knew I was strong enough to put it in its place if the cannibal plant attempted to consume me.

As soon as I settled inside, the leaves closed around me, leaving a crack for me to peek through.

The dragon men had chased me to where I had disappeared into the rainforest and halted at the edge. Even though they couldn't shift, with their animal instinct, they sensed the malice of the jungle. Every inch of this land

was alien and hostile.

Artificial light pierced through the shade of the forest, flooding the floor. Shadows danced all around as the strong beams from the dragon soldiers' visors moved in all directions.

What had happened to their natural night vision? Had the dragons in this era become so weak? They couldn't shift. They couldn't see well in the dark.

If my true loves were among them, I was doomed.

"We lost her scent here." The voice sounded like the lightning prince's. "But she seems to have lingered." He sniffed. "We should go west. There's a faint scent in that direction."

I'd hung another piece of my clothing on a branch a mile away from here. He must have scented that while my cannibal plant concealed me.

They were lucky that there were barely any cannibal plants on the side of the jungle near the gray ocean.

The footsteps moved further away from me.

My beasts hadn't attacked any invaders. They were lurking in the deep shadow, blending into the bushes and trees. Through our bond, I had held them in place.

That was one of my Fae magic I'd brought to this place—the bonding magic. If I concentrated hard, I could even slip into their minds and see what they saw. I usually didn't do that since it always gave me headaches and made me feel hangover.

As the dragon men chased after my scent, I debated whether I should sneak back to the dragon ship and gather more intel. The ice dragon seemed to have more information than the others. He could be brainstorming with his warriors now, even though he'd claimed to return to his nap.

Other than my bonding magic, I could also phase. I'd once phased in and out of the Vampire Tower and the Witch Tower. A ship's hull shouldn't stop me.

I commanded the cannibal plant to lower its leaves, and it obeyed. Just as I stepped one foot out, I heard the approach of quiet feet padding on the forest floor. I pricked my pointed ears and smirked a predatory smile. Someone was trying to be sneaky, and it was a lone person—just what I needed.

I would grab him for interrogation first, no matter if he intended to seek me out or that he was lost.

"Girl?" a deep, beautiful male voice called. "Girl?"

It was Blaze's voice, and he sounded as if he were coaxing a scared, runaway kitten.

Except I wasn't scared, I was the scary Furies.

The fire dragon peeked in at the entrance of the jungle, his ember eyes scanning the bushes. His golden hair held a hint of red and was tied in a bun.

"Here," I called out, and waved at him, then realized it would be to my advantage to appear less eager and more reluctant and fearful. A damsel in distress always wormed her way into a guy's heart or pants, especially if he had an inferiority complex or superior superhero complex, like the Archangel I'd tricked.

Blaze grinned, his confident eyes brightening. He'd expected to find me. This one—despite that he'd been a warrior for a while—must have lived a pampered life and always gotten what he wanted.

Good luck getting your way in my jungle and my world.

He had no idea how dangerous it was to enter the jungle. It was even perilous for an army to trespass into the jungle. I was more than giddy that I'd caught him first.

"I didn't want to scare you away," he said as he jogged toward me, his voice now rich with honey, yet concealing the fire that was his essence. "I left unnoticed and came alone."

Right, you got me.

He'd gambled that I would hide nearby.

"Aren't you clever?" I purred.

Desire floated to his eyes, darkening its golden shade.

Footsteps some distance away pounded in our direction.

"Shush," I said, darting my eyes around as I considered my next step.

"It's dangerous here," he said. "Come with me to my ship and I'll protect you."

Well, he was quick to promise me. I eyed him suspiciously, as any fragile woman would, though I was the most dangerous monster in the jungle, except for the Phantom. It was ironic that as a full-blood dragon, Blaze had no idea how deadly I could be.

"I won't hurt you," he said. "I've never met anyone like you. To encounter an untamed beauty on this godforsaken place is awesome. What's your name?" He stopped suddenly, as if realizing he was babbling.

I tilted my head. "Thinking of taming me?"

He laughed. "I'm usually very smooth with women."

The footsteps neared, a few artificial beams of light cast our way.

If we continued talking in the open, we'd soon draw the party to us and ruin my chance to be alone with Blaze.

I grabbed his hand and yanked him toward me. I was utterly taken aback by my eagerness. I wasn't acting like a lady at all.

Staying in the monster forms for too long had affected my Fae manner.

But the prince didn't seem to mind as he grinned at me with amusement. "Easy, girl."

"Inside," I said, and pulled him into the embrace of the cannibal plant.

The plant shivered in excitement, ready to turn the thorns around the other side of the leaves and pierce the dragon prince's skin.

He's with me, I rebuked. Find your next snack when we're out of here. There'll be plenty of them for you.

The plant silently closed its smooth leaves around us, leaving a small crack for us to breathe.

Blaze looked around, eyes wide in amazement.

The footsteps approached the cannibal plant and paused in front of us.

"I heard someone talking around here," a man said.

"Shush!" another man hushed him, and they listened for a few seconds.

The jungle beasts yowled threateningly not too far away, and the men hurried off.

It was then that I noticed Blaze wasn't paying attention to the outside world, but instead focusing on me.

"You haven't given me your name," he purred.

"Who are *you*?"

"Right, my manners. I'm Blaze," he said, waiting for me to reciprocate.

I didn't give him mine but pulled him closer.

Our breath mingled, but neither of us seemed to mind that. He was so distracted he forgot to ask my name again. His scent, pure male, fire, and sandalwood, twirled around me. He was definitely a dragon, and he smelled just like home—the home I hadn't seen for nine centuries.

Longing rose in me, so intense I forgot everything else but leaned forward and crushed my mouth to his.

His lips were soft, firm, and sensual. As soon as I touched him, their temperature rose from warm to hot. The fire dragon couldn't help it. His fire caressed my skin, igniting the lust inside me. It couldn't burn me, for I was half-dragon.

He pulled me tightly against him, his hand wrapping around my waist possessively, his other hand threading in my lush hair.

I sank into the kiss, not caring that I could barely breathe as he deepened it.

A low, hoarse groan rumbled from his chest. Blaze urged my lips open, and when I eagerly cooperated, he thrust his tongue into my mouth. My tongue boldly met his, dancing with it as he thrust in a mating fashion.

Heat pulsed between my thighs, liquid fire licking my tender flesh. An ache formed deep inside; a need like no other I had ever felt clawed at me. An image of the Archangel fucking his witch flashed through my mind, heating my blood.

I stretched myself against Blaze, closing the mere breath of space there had been between us. His huge erection pushed up against my belly. His large hand left my hair and slipped into my robe, his fingers brushing over my skin. The heaviness of my breast had finally found an anchor. I arched my back, wanting, needing more.

He cupped my breast, squeezed it gently, and massaged it before his thumb kneaded my taut nipple. I moaned.

He chuckled, but his lust was thicker than his amusement. “You’re so ripe, babe.”

More than he knew.

The fire between my thighs leaped. I needed him. I needed his cock to fill me now. I wouldn’t be denied. I’d have my pleasure after centuries of forced celibacy. In my mind’s eye, I could see him thrusting into me. The thrill of anticipation made me shiver.

My hand squeezed into his trousers and grasped the steel rod. It was silky and hard, its heat burning my palm.

His fire would expel the coldness and age-old fury in me, and ignite the flame that had been dormant in me for far too long.

He gasped at my touch and cursed. “Sorry, lass, didn’t mean that. It’s just... you make me feel like no one else could ever make me feel. You smell so fine and familiar, but I’ve never met you.” He dipped his head and assaulted my mouth again before he wrenched his lips from mine. “My wild beauty.”

His rough, powerful hand moved down and palmed my slick pussy.

“You’re so ready for me, babe,” he gasped, his voice approving and slurring with lust.

His thumb brushed over my sensitive nub teasingly, then without warning, he thrust a finger into the heat of my core. A deep moan vibrated through my throat as my mind clouded over with sex and my body melted into him.

The scent of our mixed arousal was like a divine song singing in our blood. The cannibal plant provided such a perfect place for mating.

I needed his cock inside me now, and desperately, I gave it a few hard pumps.

A beastly sound grumbled in his chest. His dragon wanted to play.

Why couldn't he shift? I would get to it after I sated my burning lust.

But first ...

"Would you mind taking off your mask?" I asked.

It had been alluring to kiss a masked man, but now the metal mask was in the way. I wanted to see his entire face before I fucked him.

"I-I can't," he said, sharp torment replacing the sweetness in his voice.

I hadn't expected that the sunny, golden dragon boy had so much grief.

I frowned. "What do you mean you can't?"

He hesitated as if suddenly realizing I was a stranger he couldn't trust. To solve the dilemma, he slanted his mouth over mine again and let the heat between us take care of everything.

Fine, I could manage a fuck first. I needed it desperately, more than he did.

Just then, I felt a scale appear on my left ankle.

Damn it, I was running out of time.

The scales would cover me within a minute, and then I'd turn into the three Furies.

But lust wouldn't release its grip on me as aching need pulsed in my depth. My pussy was wet. Blaze's tongue lashing against mine only added fuel to my fire. While the unquenchable desire addled my head, I still had an ounce of self-preservation left.

I couldn't let him see me change. I couldn't let him find out about my identity, or else I'd have to eliminate him.

Panic rose to my throat, scorching it dry. I commanded the cannibal plant to open up. It was glad to let me leave but reluctant to let Blaze go. It wanted to retain him.

This one's mine, I ordered sternly. *Don't touch him*.

By my sheer will, I broke the hot kiss, and pushed the prince out of plant

with force. The strong dragon didn't stumble, but he stared at me, deep sexual frustration in his amber-fire eyes that mirrored my own.

"Don't come near this cannibal plant when I'm not around." I stepped out of the plant after him in a hurry, feeling another scale showing up beneath my belly-button.

"I have to go."

I bolted.

"Is it because of the mask?" he shouted behind me. "Is that it? I didn't mean to turn you off. I have no choice!"

I kept running as fast as I could.

He gave chase. "Wait! Don't leave. Let's talk about it."

My two-headed hound cut between us with snarls.

"You haven't given me your name!" Blaze's complaint was lost in the space as he fended Henry off.

"Don't hurt my hound!" I called as I disappeared behind a tree.

My jungle came alive with the bellows of the beasts and eerie chirpings of the birds.

Under my order, Henry wouldn't maul Blaze. While the dragon prince was distracted, I'd stayed thirty or so yards ahead of him, merging into the shadows.

I could no longer hold back my change. Scales covered my body, and a beast burst from me. My bones cracked as two more Furies burst through me, and searing agony shattered me.

Three of me surged up and broke through the thick canopy with shrieks, away from the subject of my lust—the first man I'd been close to fucking after nine centuries of celibacy.

Unfulfilled lust burned in my veins and cursed rage fogged my beast heads.

As I lost the control of my monsters, hell broke loose in my jungle.

Beneath me, shouts, howls, and screams broke out amid the sounds of machine guns and blasters.

And all I could do was flee higher into the sky, an utter failure in my trembling.

I wasn't a coward, but I wouldn't fight with my Furies' brutal force in the frontline while my heads were the prize. The slayers had advanced weapons, so I wouldn't face them head-on unless it was absolutely necessary.

But I could fight dirty.

Right now, my monsters were fighting the war for me and defending the jungle.

I peeked into Sybil's mind, who dashed between trees with one wing and ducked light beams and bullets. Two groups opened fire blindly on each other. One group was the dragon men, and the other was from the other ship I had yet to find out about.

My monsters focused on attacking the other party, partly because I'd restrained them from assaulting the dragons; partly because they could sense the beast inside the dragons and somehow felt kinship. The other team, unfortunately, was utterly alien to them, and thus they considered them to be prey and meat.

Sybil went for details with fascination. Through her eyes, I saw a string of bullets pop out of a machine gun and tear into a dragon soldier. He crashed into a thorny bush at the impact and didn't get up again.

A masked warrior—the lightning prince—roared and tossed a dagger toward the gun man, and the blade pierced the man's chest.

Blood sent my monsters into a frenzy and they charged whoever was in their range now.

Worry spiked in me. What if my true loves were among the warriors and being cut down?

I sighed dishearteningly. If that was my bitter fate, there was nothing I could do. I could only do what I could control. With my head cooled and the war raging in the jungle to distract all parties, I should go spy on the other two ships and gather more information.

I slipped out of Sybil's mind, slowed down my sail as dizziness rushed through my head—which always happened when I got into any of my subjects' minds through our magical bond.

I turned my gaze toward the half-burned City of Nine beneath me.

Looking down from a bird's eye in the air, one wouldn't find the skyscraper Witch Tower as tall as when you stared up at it from the ground, but still it dwarfed the surrounding buildings from the high sky.

A squad of fully-armored, horned beings patrolled the perimeter of the ship *Mistress* near the tower. They were of the same species, except for a hornless tall man among them. He wore a gray cloak instead of armor. He had such stillness that emitted power and grace. He would stand out in any crowd without any effort.

He had to be the warlock the dragon princes had mentioned in an unflattering manner, which meant his horned companions must be his demon army.

They stared in the direction of the far jungle, unfazed and unconcerned by the raging war inside. While I had checked the battle through Sybil's eyes, I hadn't spotted a single demon in the war zone.

As I studied them quietly, I had a foreboding sense that they were my worst enemy. They hadn't rushed to act, unlike the hunters from the other ships.

This lot held back and waited, and I knew when they struck, it would be lethal.

Why had the Dragon King sent not only one, but three ships full of hunters of all kinds of species to slay me? If I hadn't the mind to preserve my true loves for my own good, I'd dive down and consume all the hunters with my black fire. Perhaps I'd rip one or two of the prey apart first.

I pricked my ears, trying to catch their conversation, but the demon group remained silent.

“Lord Elvey—” the biggest, armored demon—he was probably eight feet tall—finally opened his mouth, confirming what I’d suspected. That outstanding man was indeed the warlock.

The big, green-skinned demon looked like the ringleader of the demons, judging from how he posed himself arrogantly, but I was certain he didn’t outrank the warlock.

Elvey raised his hand and silenced the demon leader.

“What?” the demon leader demanded after allowing his companion a few seconds of silence.

Elvey tore his gaze away from the direction of the jungle, shrugged, and strolled back into the ship. The demon leader gave Elvey’s retreating figure a furious look, waved irritatingly at the demons around him, and followed the warlock into *Mistress*.

The demon patrol team spread further.

I switched my gaze toward the *Falling Star*, the dark silver ship that had first fired on me.

It rested in the clearing of the old grandiose coliseum, next to a spaceship *Virgin*, now a piece of junk, just like hundreds of other wrecked spaceships and expedited shuttles that lay there. The arena had been built by the first race on Pandemonium. They were long gone now. All that were left were exiled aliens and criminals from different galaxies, cannibals, vampires, and me, who had nowhere to escape. Few of us held hope for the future.

But today, neither the vampires nor any of the other clans had come to the arena to claim the new ship.

The thugs had seen *Falling Star* sending rockets my way. They knew they wouldn’t be able to overcome the newcomers, who had advanced weapons, but it didn’t mean they wouldn’t bide their time to assimilate the hunters or destroy them.

To my surprise, there were no guards outside the *Falling Star*. I narrowed my eyes. Probably most of its hunters were battling the dragon shifters and my monsters inside the jungle.

I took a sharp breath, muffling a shriek, and swooped down.

All three my beast forms alighted atop the ship near the open door, stealthily and quietly.

“Captain, the men in the jungle are requesting reinforcement,” a man’s booming voice drifted out of the door. “They said they were under fire. Should we go?”

A radio buzzed, and a man shouted over it frantically, “The fucking dragons opened fire on us! There’re many monsters in this goddamned place, and we haven’t even seen the Furies!” The radio sound cut out in the middle of the man’s cursing.

“Captain?” the crew member asked.

“They’re on their own, as is every bounty hunter on the ship,” the captain said. “My job is to fly the *Falling Star*. As my crew member, you’ll only mind the ship’s business, unless you want a piece of the old Dragon Realm, like those fools. Declare it, and you’ll be dismissed from my service.”

“I’m not a fool, Captain,” the crew member said. “They’ll fight until the last man stands with the Furies’ big, fat heads. I’m turning off all the communication devices. If they return and ask, I’ll say all radio is malfunctioning.”

“Good excuse,” said the captain.

They weren’t a united front. I could play them against each other by using their divisions and the competition between them. I just need to come up with a good strategy and put it to use.

Since the slayers on this ship had no reliable backup and weren’t working with each other, I labeled it as the least threatening, though I wouldn’t underestimate any of my foes, who carried rockets and other high-powered weapons.

An impulsive thought slammed into my skull.

I would turn defense into offense and throw the hornets to my most formidable enemies.

I surged back up into the desolate sky, aimed the angle, and dove toward the demon soldiers.

Though scaled, I wore a beautiful human face. When I attacked, it instantly transformed to a monster’s façade with vast mouth, hard jaws, and jagged lethal fangs.

Two of my forms swatted away the weapons in the soldier’s hands and our mighty claws grabbed two demons before any of them could react and fire.

We shot toward the Vampire Tower like three red flashes with victorious, vicious shrieks. We wanted our enemies to realize exactly where we were heading.

A blast of bullets and beams whooshed by us, missing their targets.

Over my shoulder, I spotted Elvey sprinting down the ramp of the ship,

the giant demon leader on his heel.

“Cease fire!” The wind sent the warlock’s shout, even as it grew faint in the distance.

We shrieked in laughter.

An urban wasteland, half in ruin, blurred beneath us as we dove and twirled through columns of smoke in the mid-city.

Goons poured out of the *Falling Star*, weapons trained on me, and watched where I headed, just as I’d planned.

The black Vampire Tower loomed ahead.

I was misleading my enemies. It was best if they thought the tower was my lair.

The Vampire Tower didn’t just look formidable; it was a supernatural prison to non-vampires. Once anyone stepped in, they never got out. Except me, of course.

The Wickedest Witch and her Archangel were probably the only ones who had ever fled the tower, though the credit should go to her former guard Kaara Nightshades, the Wolf Queen. Kaara had bled every drop of her blood to purchase freedom for all of them.

Anyway, now that my enemies knew where I was going, they were welcome to chase me into the forever prison.

One of me, who held a demon’s midriff between her teeth, touched down before the gate of the tower and eyed the red-eyed vampire guards warily as they snarled at her.

They were smart enough to keep a wide berth and not initiate an attack. But there was no need for that—Vampire Lord Desdemona and I had no feud with each other.

The double-door to the tower flung open, but before any house vampires charged out, my Fury pulled the demon out of her mouth with her claws and tossed him into the foyer through the door. The demon crashed into a vampire, and they both flew further inside hall.

“Your snack, courtesy of the gracious Furies,” my Fury said.

The demon soldier jumped up, posing in a battle stance. The vampire, who had been entangled with him, also shot up and lunged at the demon with blade-like claws.

The demon rammed his horns into the vampire’s chest, and then dozens more vampires appeared, swarming around their newest food.

My Fury didn’t linger to watch the end of the fight. She leaped up and

joined the rest of us as I smashed into the window to Vampire Princess Jasmine's old suite, dragging my captive with me.

I dropped the demon at my feet.

The shattered glass returned to its place, and the window became whole again.

The green-faced demon widened his black eyes, his horn darkening in fear, bouncing against the white marble floor.

While my other Furies remained hard-jawed, my face morphed back to the human one.

I grabbed the demon with my claws and yanked him closer, my scaled lips pressing to his black, rough, hard mouth, in order to root out the true love.

Repulsion crawled up my skin. Demons really weren't my type.

I was glad to have this guarantee that there was no way my mate could ever be among the demon species.

He cringed in disgust. Evidently, I wasn't his type either.

Just before he could thrust his horn into me with the nasty purpose of maiming me, I jumped back swiftly. Then my two other Furies lunged and pinned him down.

I flashed him a diabolical smile that fit well with my beast form, and an inhuman, hoarse voice came out of my Fury mouth. "Talk, demon, and you'll probably live."

Thorny trees surrounded us. Their large, black flowers billowed in the wind, welcoming my return.

I'd left the demon I'd interrogated to the device of the vampires.

He was a low-ranking demon soldier, who knew nothing about his master's dark scheme.

"We came to get rid of the freaks like you. That's all," he'd said.

Even a green demon with ugly horns thought I was a freak.

In the end, after I had spat black fire toward his sensitive horns, all I got was the name of the warlock, Elvey, and the demon captain, Fomorian. When I'd demanded to know if the Dragon King had sent him on this hunt, he'd raged at the insult.

The demons despised dragons.

But who had sent the demons for my heads if my grandfather hadn't commissioned them?

I should have gotten more information from Blaze, but my mind had been too addled by lust to concentrate on anything else. I'd for sure gather more intel first the next time I saw him—if there was a next time—before we went further.

My lips still tingled from his delicious kiss.

I needed to find a way to bring him to me. I hoped my last kiss was hot enough to make him crave more and drive him to come to me again, alone.

We flew through the jungle in a straight file, careful not to bump into any trees or get stuck in the bushes. Thanks to my former master, Akem, there were expansive spaces between all the large, tall trees, which afforded me enough room to maneuver my Fury forms through.

The jungle was noisy and alive with the yowls of wild animals, the excited chirps of birds, and groans of pain from the prisoners.

The war had ceased a while ago.

Most of the dragons, who had entered, had fought out—a free pass I'd allowed. My army had not insisted on pursuing them. However, there were casualties, despite my orders that the invaders be kept alive. I couldn't blame them, though. In the heat of battle, all you got was mess and chaos.

And there was one kind of monster among them I could barely control. The Phantom. He was half-beast and half-elemental—in essence, a creature born out of nightmares. I'd been surprised that he hadn't challenged my position when I'd taken over the jungle as the new queen, but then, he preferred to keep to himself and had no interest in ruling.

He liked cleaning up any carnage, which was useful to me and scary sometimes, considering what he would and could do.

For now, other than the dead and the escaped shifters, my beast army had rounded up the prisoners, waiting for me to enact judgment, justice, or punishment.

But all I wanted was to return to my chamber and take a nap to recharge. I would conduct the business tomorrow.



DAWN ARRIVED. Though it didn't matter much if it was day or night; the jungle was in perpetual shade.

I awoke in my high chamber of white stone in the depth of the jungle. No aliens had ever ventured this far to reach my haunt, so it lent me a feeling of safety. The chamber had a vast natural pool of spring water under the skylight.

The civilization that had once built this chamber for the royal's recreation had long since gone. Akem had eaten them away.

Comfy cushions scattered on the marble floor doubled as my beds. My Fae form preferred a real bed with four poles, but my Fury beasts wouldn't

even mind the hard, cold ground. But since I only had an hour a day as a Fae, comfort and luxury didn't concern me.

I wanted a bath, but I had no time for it. Henry and Sybil both kept flashing pictures in my head, so I had better first check on the prisoners my monsters had rounded up for me.

I jogged to the closet and selected a red velvet gown.

It hugged my shape and flowed at my feet as I glided forward.

Sybil perched on a beam, watching me. She was one of the most curious creatures I'd ever met.

Henry, my hellhound, paced outside. He'd be my ride today since I hadn't taken my Fury form. I could outrun him in my Fae form as well, but today I had a regal image to keep as the queen of the jungle.

As soon as I settled on his back and grabbed two of his small horns, he burst forward like black wind and took me right to the captives.

Eight survivors, battered, bloody, and reeking of fear, were gathered around a large tree in a circle, their back against the trunk.

My beast army surrounded them. They were hungry, but they wouldn't snack on the alien hunters until I gave the order. They sat on their haunches, their jaws dripping with saliva, and snarled now and then.

In the City of Nine, the only rule was to kill or to be killed; and in the jungle, it was eat or be eaten. There were different ranks of predators in my jungle, but when they faced outsiders, they always worked together.

As soon as the hunters saw me, their mean faces filled with hope.

"Mistress, have mercy!" one of them begged.

Henry snarled, and the other beasts echoed his call, but I silenced them with a mental leash.

I slid off my hound and approached the prisoners.

My red gown flowed around me, its low neck exposing the swell my breasts. As I walked around the men, every one of them stared at my face with awe before dipping their gazes down at my breasts, their eyes instantly filled with lust.

It was a test. I needed to see their reactions toward me. This bunch was a mean, sorry lot, and I would be damned if any happened to be my true love.

But I wouldn't pass a chance for the unfortunate possibility. I also pushed back the dark thought that one, or all of my true loves—if they'd come—might be dead already.

I had to prowl on and hope for the best.

I scanned every one of them coldly.

“Who’s your leader?” I asked. “And who is with which group?”

It turned out they were all on their own, except for a big, bearded man who had two henchmen with him.

“Kneel,” I ordered.

All the men immediately knelt without resistance.

I stopped before the bearded man, held my breath so I didn’t need to inhale his unpleasant smell, then I bent and pressed my mouth against his thick, blood-encrusted lips.

Yuck! It felt like I’d just kissed an eel.

He opened his mouth, more than eager to give me his tongue.

I pulled back and slapped him, wiping the smug smile off his stupid face.

My mongers growled behind me, and the bearded man widened his eyes in terror and huddled himself lower onto the ground.

“I’ll kiss each one of you in turn,” I said, “and you’ll not kiss me back, unless I order you to. Either that or I’ll have my beasts feed on you.”

All the prisoners dropped their gazes.

They’d regarded me either their salvation or prize. There was no such thing here. They were all new on Pandemonium, and for that they would learn a hard lesson.

I kissed those cold, dried lips one by one. It was no different than kissing toads.

It was distasteful and disappointing.

My mind drifted to the delicious, fiery kiss I’d shared with Blaze.

Did it mean he was my true love? I couldn’t be sure. Maybe a fire dragon could make any female feel the spark. Jealousy stabbed me at the center of my chest, puzzling me.

It was the first time I’d felt so possessive toward a man.

I’d visit the dragon camp soon and kiss every dragon man or entice them to my lair one by one.

“I’m going to release three of you,” I said. “Each one of you will deliver my message to a different ship as I assign you. Tell the hunters if any of them enter my jungle alone, he’ll be granted a safe path and an audience with the Queen of Pandemonium. But should they come in groups to hunt any of my beasts, including the Furies, they’ll surely be the spicy meat between my monsters’ teeth. If you fail to send my words as I intended, my beasts will hunt you down to hell, and you’ll wish you never formed in your mother’s

womb. Now, who's volunteering?"

All of them thrust up their hands and started punching each other to show their strength to be selected as my messengers.

A bellow rose behind me.

Here comes another one for a kiss, Queen Fury. Sybil snickered. *He doesn't look like he can be your king either.*

I turned.

Two giant Lamashtus shoved a limp dragon shifter my way, and the warrior snarled back. I raised a hand to stop the Lamashtus from getting more abusive. We used to have seven Lamashtus, but the Archangel and his wolf shifter friends had eliminated five of them.

I repeated what I'd said to the new captive about the kissing rule, and then I kissed him. I scented that he had a dragon inside, just like Blaze. It wasn't as bad as when I'd kissed the other hunters. However, the kiss with this dragon shifter was nowhere near as impressive as the kiss I had shared with Blaze. It was blander than stale water. There was no spark or connection, and I had no desire to kiss him again.

I sent him back to the dragon camp with my message, and two other lucky men to the other two ships after they swore a blood oath.

I interrogated the rest of the captives, until I was certain they had told me all they knew.

There wasn't much I hadn't gotten from spying on the dragon ship the other day. As soon as the Lamashtus led the remaining prisoners out of my sight, I changed to the Furies.

I still had over half an hour left in my Fae form. I needed to save the minutes for the day just in case any new hunter stumbled into my lair alone.

One of my Furies traveled in the sky, watching the ground. The other perched atop the skylight of my chamber. And I napped on a cushion at the edge of the pool, sweeping my red-scaled tail into the spring water to ease the pain.

Morphing between my cursed form and Fae form was nowhere near as easy as shifting between my Fae self and my natural dragon form. The change not only caused unbearable, tearing pain, it consumed my energy and weakened me. But every day I took pains to go through it and stay a Fae as long as I could, so I could remember who I was and not be swallowed by the cursed beasts. Pain also keeps the madness at bay.

One coming! A shriek warned in my head, then two of my alter egos plunged toward me from the open skylight just as I opened an eye from my half sleep.

I cried out in agony and changed.

The pain was so great I lost my balance and fell into the pool.

“Are you all right, lass?” a cool voice asked.

My heart pounded in near panic despite the concern in his voice.

My messengers hadn’t reached the ships I had assigned them to. How had this one gotten here so soon? How had he passed my monster guards unnoticed and found my secret chamber deep in the jungle?

If he intended to hurt me before I could change back to Furies and defend

myself—

The next instant, he was at the bank, his silver eyes gazing down at me, a mask with the symbol of an ice dragon infused to half of his face. Fortunately, it left his sculpted, sensual lips alone.

How would it feel to kiss those lips? My tongue darted out to wet my lips. I could give it a try in my Fae form. I needed some good, sweet lips to kiss to erase the horrid kisses I had endured today.

And from his warm gaze, I knew he liked what he saw about me.

My lips parted, my eyes widened, and I cringed further into the water.

“I won’t hurt you. I’ll never hurt you,” he said. “On my honor. I’m Iokul.”

Iokul had been the one who had sniffed me out and exposed me from my perch atop the *New Hope*.

He looked stunned to see me, as if he hadn’t expected to find me so easily or under such circumstances. I bet seeing an innocent, naked young woman in the forest full of deadly monsters would have that kind of effect on any man.

“Do you understand speech?” he asked.

I didn’t answer him, but my eyes never left him. I smelled ice magic in him. It was light, but enough to cover up his scent.

No wonder my monsters hadn’t discerned him. It was quite impressive that he could get past my guards and reach my chamber in such stealthy fashion. I would need to enhance the security of my chamber.

“I’ve been looking for you,” he said. “I came alone so you wouldn’t be scared.”

His brother, the fire Dragon Prince, had said the same thing.

“It’s not safe for you to be alone in the jungle,” he continued, his voice gentle and calm, yet it held an undertone of seduction. My pulse spiked. “In fact, everywhere on this planet screams danger. I’m bringing you to my ship, and you’ll be safer there.”

Then I’d be their prisoner? Not a chance.

I needed to kiss him. And to get what I wanted, I needed to get him into the water with me. I pondered what to do, still staring at him intently.

I stumbled, as if in fear, and dropped on my ass, but not before I let out a helpless whimper. I sank down until the water completely covered my head.

A huge splash hit near me as Iokul dove into the water. His strong hands hooked under my armpits and he lifted me out of the water.

We broke the surface of the water, and I gasped for air.

I clasped my hands around his neck as he carried me to the shallow part of the pool.

“You’re safe now, lass,” he said. “You’re with me. I’ll guard you.”

I gazed back at him, our faces so close that our breaths intermingled. He didn’t let me go. Instead, his arm slid around my waist possessively.

His male scent, harsh and noble at the same time, ice blended with pine, wafted toward me. He smelled like a distant home that had faded from my memory so long ago.

He inhaled my scent, too, as if he hadn’t smelled anything quite like it and couldn’t get enough of me. A sense of awe glinted in his eyes, and fire ignited behind that glacial wall.

I’d brought out the hidden flame from the ice dragon.

What does it mean? I swallowed. *Can he be the one?*

“I can hardly believe that I found you,” he said, his whisper a caress. “It’s like I’ve been looking for you forever.”

Fire slithered up, not into my eyes but between my thighs, flames of lust licking at my core.

“Who are you?” I asked. “How did you even find this place? And what’s your true purpose here?”

He smiled disarmingly. I hadn’t expected the icy dragon to smile like that—all sexy and smooth. Wasn’t he supposed to be all frosty, cold, and stiff? That smile just melted me. My heart fluttered, my blood heated, and my skin turned hot.

It would end badly for me if my knees went so weak just because I was naked in a gorgeous man’s arms. But then I hadn’t been in the arms of any man who was so hot and smelled so enticing that it addled my mind, for centuries.

No, that was incorrect. I’d been entangled in his brother’s arms, our bodies practically melded together.

“So, you do speak,” he said, broadening his enchanting smile.

“Of course, I can speak,” I said, my voice husky and hoarse.

I couldn’t help it. I wished I could purr softly like the knockout witch, or even the pretty vampire princess, but I hadn’t practiced. I hadn’t spoken physically to anyone for a very long time, and when I’d first talked to the Archangel and proposed an alliance against Akem, the insensitive Archangel had arched his eyebrows at my voice.

Iokul was much kinder. He didn't seem to be put off by my rough voice. He seemed only happy that I was talking to him.

"Now you must answer my questions," I said, trying to sound firm, before I completely lost my head to the carnal need I could barely control.

Nine centuries of celibacy was a bitch, and it had hit me even harder when I'd watched part of the Archangel and his mate's scorching hot coupling. The Archangel had thrust his large cock so forcefully, yet tenderly into his mate. It'd had me full of envy and enraged for days.

"My name is Iokul, as I first introduced myself. I'm one of the three dragon princes who came on this trip. You saw my brothers when you slept atop of our ship. How long were you there, watching us? I was disappointed in my brothers that they didn't even scent you while you smelled so good. What's your second question, lass?"

I tilted my head to look at him. He was shamelessly flirting with me. He gave me another playful smile and wrapped an arm around me tighter, as if afraid that I would run away again.

I had no intention to run, at least not yet.

My naked body pressed against his armored one. Neither of us seemed to pay much attention to anything except each other and our mingled breath. Neither of us wanted to move one inch away from each other. While the pull tugged me to him more aggressively, I resisted it, despite my body rebelling against my will. I needed to get some answers now, or I would never get them.

Pushing down the desire that assaulted me like fire hail was one of the hardest things I had to do, but if I didn't take the hard path, there wouldn't be a path for me.

He inhaled my scent again and I could tell how badly he wanted to bury his masked face in my shoulder to get more. I brushed the diamond stud in his earlobe and he shivered in pleasure.

"More answers?" I breathed out.

"Right, you asked me how I got here," he said, his voice deep and flirty, which made my skin tingle with desire. "I remembered your scent and traced it here, but it wasn't easy. It took me a while. At some point, I lost your scent, but I managed it in the end. I was lucky."

Luck didn't exist on Pandemonium, neither did coincidence.

"You have ice magic. You disguised your scent," I said.

Fleeting astonishment flashed in his eyes, and through the reflection of

my eyes in his, I spotted a small teasing and defiant fire dancing in my eyes, which said, *I'm not all that naïve and defenseless, so do not lie or play games with me.*

"I'm an ice dragon," he said. "Ice is my magic, but I have access to only the iceberg of my magic."

"Why?" I demanded. "I'd like you to take off your mask. I can't accompany a stranger to his ship."

I was testing Iokul. The fire Dragon Prince had said he couldn't remove the mask. I wanted to know if any of them lied to me.

His smile dropped. His eyes darkened to gunmetal gray, fury and despair brewing in them.

"I can't," he said. "We—all my brothers—were cursed with wearing it."

Something about him—his curse and his honesty—hammered into my chest, and my heart bled for him.

He hadn't tried to deceive me. He'd revealed his name, his dragon nature, and his curse. He wasn't an inexperienced, adolescent dragon. I'd seen how he'd interacted with his brothers and the dragon guards, and how they'd reacted to him. He actually seemed to be the most untouched, complex warrior in his team. Yet he chose to trust me, as if he already knew about me.

I felt the unseen tie between us, like magic.

I kept my cool gaze on him, though I bet he saw my white-hot passion boiling beneath.

He studied me. "I'm contradictory," he said, "but I've never acted like this before, throwing caution to the wind and showing you my belly when I barely know you. If I hadn't scented you and known who you are, I'd have thought you bewitched me and would take certain actions against you."

I narrowed my eyes. "Scent me? What scent?" My heart raced like the wild wind. Had he realized who I was?

"You smell like home and sky," he murmured, his eyes returning to silver and filling with pure male desire.

The liquid fire that had been licking between my legs ravished my tender, aching flesh.

I didn't know who made the first move, but our lips crashed so hard that I hit his teeth. He immediately adjusted and softened the impact.

His lips, formerly cold, probably as the ice dragon should have been, warmed up instantly. His mouth enveloped me, and he devoured me as if he had the luxury of all the time in the world. He didn't push. He didn't rush, but

savored me, and at the same time showed me pleasure as if I deserved it all.

I heard a magical bell chiming in the distance and the cursed inner scales in me fell off me one by one.

Had I just found one of my true loves? This felt like true love, though I had no reference to that or any experience. Blaze could also be my true love—his kiss had scorched my soul.

Then the scales stopped peeling off me, leaving me feeling incomplete.

I still had more scales than I could count.

If all the scales dropped, the hex would leave me, and I would be free.

I needed to be patient for a little while longer. If I had kissed two true loves, I needed one more. If I could kiss the last masked prince, then probably the curse would be lifted.

A new worry rose in my mind. If the dragon brothers all proved to be my true loves, would they agree to share? They didn't seem to get along. Would I have to choose only one of them? I didn't know how I felt about that.

Iokul laced his fingers into my hair, the heel of his palm anchoring at the base of my skull and deepened his kiss. He was done playing the gentleman. But that suited me just fine. I didn't need a gentleman at this moment.

The weight of his kiss carried such passion that I moaned against his lips, my hands clutching at his broad shoulders.

A rumble sounded in his chest—the sound of his dragon.

At his urging, I parted my lips.

Iokul's tongue claimed my mouth with raw hunger, and I tasted the purest ice from the glacier of ages ago. His ice, rich and exotic, didn't freeze me and never would. It only made the fire inside me burn brighter.

With the promise, his ice magic weaved the fire into my heated channel.

I wanted to have him completely.

I wanted him to fill me with his ice-kissed fire.

I rasped for breath, my hands fumbling on him, tugging at his clothing. I wanted his skin on my skin. Suddenly, I realized I didn't have enough time. I didn't have the luxury to enjoy him elegantly and sensually, as much as I wanted it. I needed a quickie to release the throbbing pressure between my thighs. The heat inside my sheath had become unbearable.

If I didn't get his cock inside me within the next second, I would erupt.

Iokul sensed what I needed. His heavy-lidded eyes betrayed what he needed most. More than cooperative, he pressed a device on his left waist, and his armor released him, floating in the air and dropping on the bank,

along with his longsword that was specially designed to slay beasts, which was his true purpose for being here—cutting my three heads.

At the sight of his sword, the concept of true lovers flew out of my mind into the ether. But my lust hadn't quenched.

Right now, he didn't know that the beasts and I were one, and I could still deceive him and get what I wanted.

Iokul stood in front of me with only his boxers on, his huge bulge distorting the fabric. I pulled his cock free, and he shoved his boxers down.

We faced each other, both gloriously naked.

I licked my lips, and my breath caught in my throat as my gaze dipped to his cock.

It was straight, proud, and beautiful; its crown plummy and heavy, its skin silky.

And it was so large. I had to use a hand and a half to fully wrap around it.

For a moment, I hesitated. Could my body even accommodate it?

The flames of lust licking my moist mound answered for me, and the fiery need in me expanded to my every fiber.

His aggressive cock jerked forward.

Iokul's lust-filled eyes darted between my face and my pussy.

"I've never seen anything lovelier," he said.

His fists clenched on his sides to control his harsh male need. I read it as if it were mine. He wanted more than anything to pin me down and thrust his dick into me wildly, yet he let me make the first move.

My breath grew heavy as I reached for his heavy erection, wrapping my fingers around it, then pumped it up and down.

He hissed in pleasure, frost breathing out of his lips. His silver eyes burned icy fire.

"Take me," I said, leaning on the stream bank and bending a knee on the stairs to give him access. The fire in my eyes burned equally as dark as his.

He groaned roughly. "I've never done this to any random woman, because that's not who I am."

No more words.

"Now or never, dragon."

Iokul didn't move; only a trail of coldness from his ice magic touched my skin.

A sinking feeling swelled in me.

All of this would be for nothing. He would leave me cold here while fire

consumed my insides.

But the next second, Iokul pressed his rock-hard body against me, his hardness pushing up on my belly. “But you’re not some random woman, even though you haven’t realized who you are to me.”

His mouth slanted over mine, and that heady rush of desire pulsed through me again.

He braced his legs wide to lower his height. Aiming his hard shaft at my slick entrance, he drove deep into my moist heat with one powerful, smooth thrust.

I cried out at the pleasure, the loud sound tearing at my throat.

Finally.

The air rippled and I stilled as he thrust into me hard again and again, his silent roar ringing in my ears—*Mine! Mine!*

To claim me.

He thought I was his. That was why he’d said he didn’t do a random woman.

But I wouldn’t... couldn’t be tied down. Not now. Not until I found all three of my true loves. Not until I was free of my curse.

He thrust and thrust, faster and harder, each stroke more forceful than the previous.

Pleasure burst in me, hitting my every cell like high-pitched musical notes in fire. I threw my head back, wanting to roar, but then my monsters would interfere.

He gazed at me with possessive fire, the icy, detached prince that I’d first met long gone. Heated desire twisted his beautiful, masculine mouth and jaw that weren’t concealed by his mask.

My hand draped over his shoulder, my other hand touched his mask. I craved to see his face without it. “What kind of curse?” I asked. “How can you get it off?”

He drove into my depth with abandon. “Only when I behead the Furies will my curse be lifted.”

He was not my true love but my enemy.

My heart iced over even as dark lust and pleasure pumped fuel into my core. I couldn’t stop this coupling. I had to finish it, and then I’d have to kill him before he had a chance to decapitate me.

But I was running out of time. I swallowed back the bile rising to my throat. The scales would cover me soon, and I would turn into the three

beasts Iokul had come to slay.

He found my mouth again, his tongue sweeping over mine, mating with mine, in sync with his thrusts. His cock swelled in me, harder than granite.

His thrusts became frantic and erratic, and I knew we would both reach our peaks soon.

I needed this release, but I'd turn into Furies while I was in the throes of my orgasm.

And then I'd lose my three heads.

I broke the kiss that threatened to imprint my soul, shoved him away with an explosive force, and leaped onto the top of the bank. His sculpted lips parted in surprise, his eyes darkened to storm gray with unfulfilled, burning lust, and his body trembled.

It was cruel to leave him like that. My heart ached, but I had no choice.

"You'd better leave now," I said in a hurry. "The monsters are coming. Don't ever come back here. And don't ever think of beheading the Furies, because you will make an enemy of me."

"Is this about the Furies?" he asked darkly.

"They're my guardians!"

The first scale appeared on my ankle. Iokul's eyes were glued to my face, so he didn't notice it. But the next scale might appear on my nose. I sprang out of my chamber before he could jump out of the pool and chase me.

I made it ten yards away from my chamber before the Furies took me over. Further agony tore through me as one beast split into three. I put all the strength I had into muffling my cry of searing pain.

My three beasts surged up, breaking the canopy, just as Iokul dashed out with a sword in his hand.

He narrowly missed me.

I perched on Jasmine's pink bed, nursing my misery. I had taken this chamber as my second lair after Desdemona kicked his sister out for her failure to trap the Wickedest Witch as his bride.

The flame still licked inside me, screaming for a release, yet I had no means. Pleasuring myself wouldn't do. I shouldn't have wasted time talking to the ice dragon. I should have just fucked him and kept my mouth shut.

I was rusty when it came to this dating thing. I frowned. Who'd said anything about dating?

This had nothing to do with dating, and I couldn't afford to dream of courting, either. I needed to get my mind back on track and focus on collecting as many kisses as I could to rid myself of this curse. Then I would break the shackles and go home.

And I would shift to my true dragon form whenever I wanted instead of being forced to change to the twisted Furies and stay that way for twenty-three hours a day.

It certainly would be nice to get to know the dragon princes and date them properly, but I wasn't a free woman. I dragged my mind back after it drifted to a scene of dancing and music and courting in the splendid ballroom of my old kingdom.

It was time to shatter my stupid delusion of love.

The dragon shifters who had come here weren't my kin. They were my

foes.

Iokul had spelled it out for me. They came to slay me to have their curse removed. It was the only reason they were here.

I needed a kiss from all three true loves to lift the hex, and they needed my three heads to get rid of their curse. There seemed to be a connection.

The air in the Vampire Tower suddenly crackled with menace, but I didn't bother opening an eye. The tower wasn't like any place. It was alive. No one—except a vampire who was bound to the Vampire Lord Desdemona's will, and me—could leave here once entered.

Since I had to wait for Iokul to leave my chamber, this was a temporary shelter for me.

The Vampire Tower was more of a skyscraper constructed out of steel, marble, and glass. It was the only intact structure left by the old civilization. This spacious bedchamber at the high floor suited my taste—silky curtains, a diamond chandelier hanging from the arched high ceiling, an ivory vanity at a corner, and a luxury rug with silver lilies on the black-and-white marble floor. Jasmine had even managed to get a grand piano and many romance books on her shelves.

Here was an old world of grandeur, in contrast to the harsh reality of fire and smoke rising from the horizon outside the tower.

However, despite the lavish look, this tower had been built on the foundation of foul magic. The tower's every brick, stone, and swath of fabric had eyes and ears. Everything about this tower carried sinister intent. I didn't mind its menace. I was the monster of monsters in my Fury forms.

A sinister presence loomed so close I had to open an eye.

The Vampire Lord stood at the doorway, glaring at me, but his eyes didn't flash hungry crimson—he didn't want my blood.

I almost chuckled. It would cost him to have my cursed blood, and he knew it.

Abyssal, dark power rolled off him and darted toward me, but I shrugged and brushed it off my glistening red scales.

“Hello,” I said hoarsely. I hadn't been offended by his waves of power—it had no effect on me whatsoever.

My other Fury forms napping on the rug snapped open their eyes, regarding the vampire warily but with disinterest.

To be fair, Desdemona was gorgeous with his tall masculine body and pale skin that contrasted starkly with his raven-black hair and brooding,

bedroom eyes.

He looked more brooding and less sexy now after Fiammetta, the Wickedest Witch, had escaped right from under his roof while he'd thought she was a fly caught by his old honey.

Desdemona, never a gentleman, growled, "What are you doing here?"

Unlike Fiammetta, I didn't mind a man's attitude. Her Archangel wasn't much of a gentleman either. Neither were the hunters—including the dragon princes—who had come to murder me.

Gentlemen were extinct.

"Napping," I said good-naturedly.

He frowned at my voice. "Why don't you nap in your own place?"

"I like it here. It has style."

"It wasn't built for you!"

"Your sister isn't here," I said meekly, though my voice didn't sound that soft. I knew nothing good would come of it if I riled him up in his unstable state. The old vampire was extremely touchy these days. "Why waste the space?"

"Have you seen Jasmine?" he demanded.

"Here and there. Sometimes she sleeps in the Witch Tower, and sometimes in my jungle."

His expression morphed to one of regrets.

I didn't want him to invite her back. I liked her chamber, and especially now, I needed this haven while the hunters were hot on my tails.

"She really enjoys her new life," I added. "You know—running around wild and all the freedom she finally has."

"It's not safe out there!"

"She's a big girl. She's a survivor. She's blossoming."

I wouldn't tell him how miserable Jasmine was now that she'd been banished. I needed her room. It was selfish, I knew, but on Pandemonium, everyone watched out for their own interests. It was either that, being taken advantage of, or perishing.

Desdemona sneered. "I know why you're here."

I tried to arch an eyebrow in mockery but couldn't manage it with my freak face. I resorted to flailing my tail twice.

"The bounty hunters from those three ships came to take your heads," he said, then over my indignant look, he laughed merrily. "What have you done to make yourself so popular?"

“I’ve done nothing. How do you know that they’re hot for me?”

“My spies are as capable as yours, and even more so.”

“What else do you know other than that the hunters are attracted to me?”

“I won’t sell valuable information for nothing.”

“Keep it to yourself then,” I said, ready to dismiss him and continue with my nap. The unfulfilled sexual frustration was still boiling in me. I wanted to doze off and forget about it. I couldn’t return home while Iokul had yet to leave my jungle.

“You’ll not close your eyes while I speak to you!” Desdemona yelled.

Again, he wasn’t a gentleman. But I also knew it’d be a bad move to piss him off while I needed his tower for my own use, so I opened an eye and regarded him coolly before he demanded I look at him with respect again.

“There’s no need to shout, Lord Desdemona,” I said mildly, hoping he would relax.

“I haven’t repaid you for aiding the Wicked Witch and her male whore!”

“Come on, Desdemona,” I said. “It’s been three months. We should put that behind us.”

“Why should I?”

“It benefits us both to be allies rather than enemies,” I said in a reasonable, yet threatening voice. I had let him have his tantrum, but I needed to remind him that I was the new queen in the jungle. “Even though you tossed Jasmine out, you still care about her. She’s your only flesh and blood now, so I’ve been protecting her for your sake. I can revoke the order I put on my monsters to leave her alone.”

“So, you think you have the right to use my tower as your lair? I don’t do charity.”

The old vampire was really annoying. No wonder the Wickedest Witch rejected him.

I stared at him, my meekness vanishing. “Your sister uses my jungle, so I use her room. If you have trouble with that, go talk to her. And again, making me your enemy won’t do you any good.”

He glared at me for a long moment, and I glared back.

“You still need to pay for the use of this room,” he said.

“Didn’t I bring you snacks the other day? The demons can’t taste too bad.”

“They didn’t taste good, either!”

“Stop being difficult, Desdemona. My patience is wearing thin.”

He gave me another sour look.

“You’ll let my subjects have access to your jungle,” he said.

“Only at the edge, and as long as your vampires don’t upset my monsters. I’d hate to tell you that although Akem left, Phantom has risen. He’s not as benign and forgiving as I, and he’s almost as powerful as Akem.”

“And you’re only telling me now?”

“Didn’t you say your spies are top-notch?”

He glowered.

“As scary as my Henry. Do you mind me going back to my nap now?”

He pulled his lips back to reveal his fangs. “You entrusted the punk Archangel to bring you some lovers, but he sent three ships of bounty hunters to your door.”

“He can’t help being a jerk,” I said as I shut my eyes. “I was hoping you’re a better man.”

He stormed off.

I waited in my high chamber for three days after I'd sent out the message to the ships, but not a single bounty hunter or a group had ventured into my domain.

Maybe the war in my jungle had made the hunters second guess the wisdom of coming to seek my audience. By now, all the hunters must have known the queen of the jungle ruled here.

The dragon princes whom I'd kissed also hadn't visited again.

Before I'd run away from Iokul, I'd warned him not to return and not to touch the Furies. I was certain that the shifters must have put their heads together with a new strategy.

Despite my efforts not to dwell on Iokul and Blaze, I missed them both.

By the end of the third day, I grew more antsy.

Patience had never been my strong suit, especially not when my life and freedom were at stake. I needed to act to get rid of this restlessness, and I needed my opponents to act as well. I had no intention of scaring them away—my true loves might be among them. It'd be my loss if any of them turned on their heels and went home.

While I had everything to lose, I struck first.

I had kissed a demon, which was repulsive. I doubted I'd like to kiss more of them. There was no way my true loves could be among their rank. They stunk.

I should start with the men from the *Falling Star* since they were a variety of groups. I'd sneak up to the ship, phasing in and changing to Fae before anyone detected me. The hunters were rough, dangerous men, but I doubted they'd be too eager to shoot a naked, young woman right away.

I'd then run through the whole ship as fast as I could and grab everyone for a kiss. As soon as I was done, I'd phase out, change back to the Furies, and take flight.

If I got lucky enough to acquire all three kisses I needed, this curse would fall off me right away. Then I could join the dragons in the *New Hope* and hitch a ride home, and they would have no need to slay the Furies since the beasts would be no more.

If my mates weren't among the *Falling Star*, I'd turn my interest toward the dragon shifters. I should press my lips first on that dragon prince that I hadn't kissed.

I had no idea if the two princes I'd kissed were my true loves or not, but I was definitely hot for them. And if the last prince was supposed to be the third, then boom—it would all work out, nice and easy.

Pleased with the solid plan, my Fury forms soared high into the sky, then swooped down toward the *Falling Star*. It was a welcome sight that no hunter was patrolling the ship.

Suddenly, part of the ship's top flapped open, and a stream of robot drones, shaped like crossed blades, flew out toward us.

We spewed out black fire toward the nasty things, but only a few drones halted, and the rest dashed up toward us.

With furious shrieks, we pulled up, the flying blade following us. A drone cut into the left side of my tail. I shook it off, made an abrupt turn, and flew toward the Vampire Tower at maximum speed.

Dozens of drones turned and gave a chase.

They were following my heat signature. I turned my head and shot out a wave of fire at the drones. Still, over a dozen survived my fire and stayed on their course of pursuit.

My two alter egos didn't fare better as the drones cut through their flesh. One had blood pouring from her shoulder, and one had a wound in her belly.

I felt the cut as well, pain slicing into me all over, slowing me down.

The black Vampire Tower loomed, and relief washed over me. I would go through a window, fly around, wait for all the drones inside, then come out the other window.

The tower would trap the drones.

All three of me smashed into the tower through the full window in the ballroom, which doubled as the vampires' feeding room.

The vampires, probably eight of them, who were feeding on their blood slaves, turned to us with shocked, angry expressions. Their Lord Desdemona was alone at the high platform, drinking from the veins of a middle-aged woman. I bet that when he'd acquired her, she was younger.

The vampires, with their super reflexes, threw their slaves to the ground, and dodged as the drones flew into the room.

Desdemona lifted his fangs from the woman and snarled. "What is this farce?"

"They're unfriendly drones," I murmured hoarsely and shot toward a side window at the end of the grand hall.

As I swung my head and looked over my shoulder, I noticed that two of the drones had beheaded a vampire.

I phased out of the window and heaved out a heavy breath.

Surprisingly, a dozen drones dashed right out of window behind me, not giving up their target.

Of course, I sighed in dismay. The tower would trap only flesh and blood.

The hunters from the *Falling Star* meant business. The drones wouldn't stop until I lost my heads to them.

With that, I declared everyone inside the ship my enemies. There were no true loves inside!

I understood that the dragons wanted my heads to lay off their hex. The hunters in the *Falling Star* only wanted my heads for their own greed. But then, what opportunists wouldn't want to trade my three heads to a dragon realm? The reward was just too great. Thanks, evil grandpa! If I survived this and got off this planet, I would be having a talk with him. And losing his crown would be the least of his concerns!

I let out a gust of ironic laughter that sounded more like a shriek.

I might not survive the damn drones, and here I was, issuing an imaginary threat.

My black fire and claws couldn't do much to the flying blades custom-made to cut through my flesh. In my great desperation, I flew toward the dragons' ship by the gray sea.

The dragon shifters had once shot the missiles that had meant to blast me to oblivion. Maybe they'd do the same for me again, just to slay me

themselves. It was better to die by their hands than to be slaughtered by the meat cutters.

We were losing blood, and the bleeding was slowing us down significantly.

Three drones caught up with me and sliced through my left wing along the ridge.

Shrieking in pain and rage and fear, we plunged toward the ground at the verge of the jungle some distance from the dragons' ship. When my blurred vision noticed another camp of hunters down there, it was already too late.

We had no strength to pull up.

We were done.

We crashed to the ground, waiting for the coming drones to mutilate us, or the hunters to behead us neatly if the drones didn't complete the job.

My last sight was a pair of piercing sapphire eyes staring at me.

"Shoot down the fucking drones!" the owner of those gorgeous eyes shouted.

A blast of light streaked by me. I felt its white-hot heat, yet it didn't singe me.

I collapsed right in front of the prince who wore the mask of a symbol of a lightning and thunder dragon.

The drones tumbled to the ground, followed by sharp sound of explosions. Then it was deathly quiet except for my labored breathing.

The lightning prince handed a man a blast gun that still sparked the remnant of light and fire after it had destroyed the drones. He stalked toward me with measured steps, a fine black blade in his left armored hand, a shield in his right that was meant to block my black fire if I still had any left.

Four of his warriors took the same stance as him, flanking him in purpose.

Right, they were going to cut my three heads together.

Should I go down with pride?

Yet, there was no pride or honor in death, was there?

"Don't hurt them," the prince said. "Not yet."

He stopped a foot before me.

Pain drenched me, but I regarded him coolly, silently.

The giant warrior had a powerful body and long legs. His skin was delicious light brown. His dark brown hair spiked up in a military fashion but with style.

He was staggeringly hot, like his two brothers. This prince was neither ice nor fire but carried a storm. He was the lightning striking deep water and the thunder rolling across the mountains. My metaphors didn't make sense even to me, but I was dying.

I would never have a chance to kiss this one. I was going to die at his hand.

I let out a pained huff at my misfortune and the hurt all over my damaged body.

Gathering my calm thoughts, I trained my focus on him again.

Wasn't he the luckiest man? He didn't even need to lift a finger. His prize had fallen right in front of him from the sky.

"The lucky star has finally shone upon us, Prince Rai!" a nose-ringed warrior I'd met earlier voiced my exact thought.

"His Highness has foresight," said another man excitedly. "We camped at the right place and the Fury beasts fell at our feet! Among all the people, our prince will return with the Furies' heads and inherit the Dragon Realm!"

The men cheered, their shouting hurting my skull.

"Prince Rai is the oldest, and thus all inheritance is rightfully his!"

"Prince," said a warrior closest to Rai, his broad sword tight in his scarred hand.

I believed he would thrust the blade into my heart if I so much as moved. He would make sure I had no chance of escaping.

The wind blew past me, ruffling my dulled scales in mockery.

Rai sniffed, a surprised look flitting through his stunning eyes. He frowned at me.

I stared at him like staring into the face of death. I would not close my eyes when he slew me, and I waited for him to raise his blade and hack it down on my neck.

His blade was sharp, and it would be quick.

One strike, and centuries of torment would be over.

It was better not to have hope than have it crushed.

He inched toward me.

"Your Highness!"

"I'll be fine. She's too wounded to fight me," said Rai.

Never be so sure, dragon. My eyes warned him. A wounded beast can be the most lethal.

He sniffed at me again, and the color of his eyes shifted, a ring of fire

forming inside.

“It can’t be,” he murmured. “She smells of dragon and something more, like home.”

“She can’t be a dragon,” the scar-handed man said. “She’s but a freak, a beast. Prince, you need to behead all three beasts now, and our curse will fall, and our race will rise, and we’ll all be able to shift again.”

Great, not only were the princes’ masks tied to the claiming of my three heads, but also their shifting ability. Who would place such a heavy curse on me? What had I done to deserve such deep hatred?

I didn’t know who my true enemy was, and I would die a senseless death before I did.

Maybe not so senseless to the dragons. They’d all benefit greatly from my demise.

“No,” Rai suddenly decided. “We’ll learn more about her—they. She smells like she’s *mine*.”

His men looked at him as if he had a sudden fever.

“Your pet, Your Highness?” one of them asked. “We can get more exotic and even dangerous pets for you.”

“No!” Rai said fiercely. “She’s *mine*. No one hurts her and her companions.”

He tossed the shield away and inserted his sword back into its sheath.

I blinked.

He wouldn’t kill me, at least he’d decided not now.

Hope returned to me.

Live another day for the fight.

Live another day to catch the kiss.

He placed a hand on my scaled nose, and his intoxicating male scent blending with an autumn storm caressed me, carrying a distant memory of home.

My heart stuttered. I reacted to him just as strongly as I’d reacted to the ice and fire princes, even in my current beast form. And my beastly heart had never pounded with such enchanted desire.

Could the three princes be the ones for me? The kisses I’d collected from both princes felt right and more than amazing. And if I could just kiss Rai—

I battered my scaled eyelashes, which wasn’t as pretty as I wanted. If I could be in my Fae form—

“I don’t know if you can understand me,” he said, “But I won’t hurt you.

Nor will my men. Stay still.” He gently patted my head. “I know it hurts. You’re cut badly. I’ll need to stop your bleeding first.”

“I don’t think the beast understands you,” the one who had a scarred hand said, his shield tight in his hand. “We need to tie her down, so she won’t attack us when we least expect it. Even a wounded beast—”

Rai snarled at the man, but his fascinated gaze stayed on me.

“Prince Rai, this is a big mistake,” the scarred hand continued. He seemed to be closer to him than others, as he constantly spoke boldly. “We’re an inch close to lifting our curse. If you’re softhearted toward her, I’ll get the job done.” There was desperation in his gruff voice. “We need their three heads more than anything. Once we miss this opportunity, we might never get another one.”

“The dragon in me won’t allow me to harm her,” Rai said. “No more words, Quintrell. Go get the serum.”

A man, who looked meeker than the rest of the warriors, came to us with a medical box. He opened it and snatched up a syringe filled with clear liquid.

“I’ll take care of her, Chiron,” Rai said.

Chiron handed the syringe to Rai.

Fear roared in my eyes, and I stumbled back.

“Shush,” Rai said. “I said I wouldn’t hurt you. A dragon’s word is binding.”

I quieted, and he stroked my face to soothe me.

Despite my pain, I purred. I’d hoped it would be gentle, but it was loud.

Rai smiled, his sapphire eyes brightening, and I felt sunlight basking on me.

“Can you understand me?” he whispered. “They call you Furies. Is that your true name?”

“She’s a beast,” said Quintrell. “She isn’t a sentient being.”

Rai growled at him, and Quintrell threw up his hands and stepped back with a sigh.

“I’m going to inject the syringe into you, so you can heal faster,” Rai told me.

When he pushed up my scales on my neck to find a space, I struggled a little. When his warriors rushed to come to bind me, he pulled his lips back and snarled at them, his eyes turning dark blue like midnight seas, until they all backed off.

“Shush.” Rai turned to me, his voice deep and soft. “You’re a brave girl, aren’t you?”

I stilled, gazing at him with gratitude, and Rai found the place he wanted his syringe to stick into.

A needle pierced my skin, and I felt the liquid entering my veins.

I prayed that I hadn’t trusted the wrong man, but he could have easily cleaved off my head. I trusted my instincts. I hadn’t felt this safe for so long.

He pulled out the syringe and turned to his men. “Take care of the other Furies.”

Chiron carried the medic kit and moved toward my alter egos.

Rai touched my scaled face, and I almost purred again. His warm touch comforted me like no other, and it also stoked the fire of desire in me.

It satisfied me more than anything that the lightning prince wasn’t scared or disgusted with my Fury form. I pressed my scaled nose toward him to inhale his scent.

His men administered the serum into my two other Furies, and the effect was immediate. In the next few seconds, I already felt my wounds closing and my wing knitting back together.

“The serum also worked on the beasts!” Chiron declared in gleeful surprise.

A comprehension dawned on me. The serum was meant to help a dragon heal, since I was also a dragon of natural quick-healing ability, and with the boost of the serum, strength returned to me like waves.

Rai smiled. “Of course. I told you she’s a dragon.” He peeked into my eyes to search my deepest secret. “I heard of a legend that’s more like a myth. If you’re who I think you are—” He paused, his knuckles continuing to caress my face, and pleasure washed over me, suppressing the remnant of the pain.

With that and the return of the strength, I flapped my wings and surged up into the sky before anyone could react.

My two alter egos lifted into the air right after me with shrieks of freedom.

“Rai!” I cried his name, soaring into the distant sky.

A glimmer of lightning flashed right below my belly.

I lay on my cushion in my chamber, my chin on my claws. My other Furies dozed near me. My monsters guarded us outside, growling intermittently. They all knew I was hurt, yet none of them took advantage of my vulnerability to attack me.

Once I was their queen, they showed me their loyalty, and that would be rewarded one day.

I was mostly recovered, but I was in low spirits after the blows and disappointments I had suffered since the arrival of the ships that were supposed to be my hope but turned out to be the death of me. Today, I didn't intend to change to Fae or even take a bath. I decided to stay in my Fury forms the whole day.

A chime rang in my head.

Magic! I could smell it in the air.

Someone was approaching, and he was alone.

I immediately summoned my other Furies, and they merged with me instantly. I stumbled before the impact faded. I rushed to snag a long shirt on the bench, shrugged it on, and inserted my feet into a pair of hunting boots that concealed a blade.

The shirt's length came down above my knees as I straightened. It wasn't the best outfit, but it was convenient.

Just as I wondered why my vigilant Henry and Sybil hadn't flashed

pictures in my head and informed me of a visitor or an invader, the air whipped with power. My monsters couldn't fight or catch magic.

I clenched my fists, pondering if it was wise for me to change to Fae, when a man appeared in a flash of light. He alighted a few yards in front of me with a lopsided, charming smile.

Lord Elvey, the immortal warlock.

He wasn't exactly what I had expected or remembered. When I'd spied on him, he'd seemed grim and older. This time, he looked to be only a few years my senior, but I knew he was of infinite age. I hadn't gotten other details right about him either when I'd checked him out from the sky.

He was tall and broad shouldered. He had muscles, but not that of a warrior. He was way more graceful. He wasn't clad in a cloak—a sorcerer's conventional outfit. He didn't put on armor either, which showed his cocky confidence in coming here. Well, if he could pop out of thin air, he could take the same exit in a blink.

His half-length, lavender hair curled in a tousled fashion, as if the wind got into it and made a nest. Which only made him harmlessly cute. His eyes, the color of the blue star with transparent fire in them, sparkled with a teasing laughter.

My shoulders relaxed.

Wait. I stiffened them again. Had he bewitched me to make me put down my guard? Had he put on glamour? But I hadn't sensed more magic except when he'd made his entry. Or was his magic so subtle and sublime it skipped my Fae nose?

Even cursed, I still had some magic up my sleeves—I could sense magic, I could see through glamour, and I could slip in the minds of those who were bonded to me. I ran faster than anything in my Fae form, and I spit black fire as Furies.

Elvey focused on me, as if I were the only thing mattered in the universe, as if he'd been looking for me for a long time and finally found me in this corner of the universe. And he seemed to want me to register the significance of the moment as he let the silence stretch between us. My heart fluttered as if it had wings, except I didn't get the truth of his purposeful, intense gaze.

“What?” I asked, my voice hoarse from lack of speech. I'd only started speaking before the Archangel and his witch finally found the portal to leave Pandemonium.

Something I couldn't make out flashed by his eyes—sympathy, anger,

hope, delight and more. If I hadn't known better, I would have thought he knew who I really was.

"What are you doing here?" I demanded, my pose defensive.

I was facing a powerful warlock who led a horde of demon army to hunt me.

"To get a kiss," he said, his eyebrow arched elegantly. "Like everyone else."

I blinked.

"The messenger sent by the queen of the jungle..." He paused. "You're the queen, right? I don't want to get the wrong girl. You fit the profile—sunset-red hair, porcelain skin, pink lips, and deep blue eyes that can shift colors. The rogue messenger mentioned you also possess a beautiful, feminine figure with powerful legs, and I think his description doesn't do you the slightest justice." His smile warmed the starlight in his eyes.

I flushed. I hadn't heard such flattery for centuries. Everyone always called me the beasts of nightmare. Even the dragon princes I'd kissed hadn't bothered to shower me with compliments, though their actions implied they thought I was attractive enough.

Did I actually crave such sweet words?

"The messenger said everyone will get a kiss if he comes to you," he continued, "And the kiss he received was like a blessing from a goddess. That's the prize I'm seeking now, even at the risk of the heat and the danger of the jungle."

My gaze involuntarily fell on his sculpted lips.

He was even more sensual than the dragon princes. They were royalty, but they hadn't honed what the warlock had honed. I didn't know his true age, but I could sense that he was definitely much older than me and had seen all and done all.

The dragon princes, however, felt younger than me.

I was nearly a thousand years old, but I wouldn't call myself experienced in life. The curse had teleported me here when I was only fifteen. For nine centuries after that, I'd been a slave, a killer, and a freak show, bound to Akem and his jungle.

But I'd watched the aliens in the City of Nine closely, especially after the Archangel had arrived and tangled with his witch mate, so I knew what wild passion was.

The warlock in front of me carried an air of noble elegance, more than

anyone I'd seen, but appearances could always be misleading. My gaze flicked away before returning to his enticing lips again.

How would it feel to kiss such a dangerous man?

I studied him warily.

I set out to kiss every man to weed out the toads, but when one man had come alone and so eagerly for a kiss, it threw me off balance. I knew he didn't just come for a kiss. It wasn't that simple. This man—no, this powerful warlock in front of me—could turn to a killer in an instant and snap my neck while I collected the kiss.

By demanding a kiss from me in such fashion, though he'd done it charmingly, he took the reins that I should be holding. Suddenly I felt I wasn't in his league, and that humbled and infuriated me at once.

"Did I tease you too much, milady?" he asked. "If I did, I apologize. I meant well. I hurried here for a spectacular kiss as soon as I could."

"I don't know you!" I blurted out.

His both eyebrows climbed up. "That didn't stop you from kissing all the other strangers. You even lined them up around a huge tree and graced their uncouth mouths with your queenly one." His gaze dropped to my lips with heat in it, and I involuntarily parted mine.

Encouraged, he stalked toward me, his immense power, ancient and new at once, rippled in the air. And his magic drew me in, like wild, delicious danger and aged fine wine.

Both the Fury beasts and the sleeping dragon beast in me liked it, wanting to be tamed.

My pulse raced; my blood heated up.

Could he be one of the true loves to me? My body responded to him, as strongly as it had reacted to the dragon princes, though in a different way.

I had kissed two princes and had encountered the third. If Elvey was also my true love, then the lightning prince would be out of the picture.

A shame. Rai had saved me, and he'd smelled like home and storms, which I fancied.

Elvey headed straight toward me with a confident gait, coming to claim the kiss.

"Stay where you are, Lord Elvey," I said, putting up a hand in front of me.

He halted, a half smile dancing like dark stars in his eyes.

How could he get my emotions all riled up like this at first sight?

“So, you’ve checked me out,” he said, his easy smile lingering.

“Your demons talk too much.”

“First, they’re actually a quiet, boring lot, compared to the other hunters from the other ships. Second, they aren’t my demons. Captain Fomorian is their boss, though he does listen to my counsel when he chooses.”

I welcomed the new piece of information.

“You all are hunters,” I said. “Who did you come to hunt?”

I was expecting him to say, “*How about I tell you all about it after a kiss?*”

He’d been flirting with me, and a bad boy usually came up with that kind of line.

Bad boy? Why did I put Elvey in that category?

But Elvey didn’t say the line. He stood where he was, shoulders relaxed, shifting his weight from one foot to the other. His hand ran through his thick, curly lavender hair. The gesture was so youthful and enticing, and I almost let my guard down and forgot how deep and ancient his eyes looked.

He’s quite contradictory. Will his kiss be a paradox? That’ll be very interesting to find out.

I snapped out of my reverie and put a leash on myself to stop my body from moving toward him like to a magnet and kissing him long and deep.

Well, I would kiss him, but on my own time and when I had more control. This was my territory. This was my show.

“It looks like I’m not going to get a kiss as easily as those lucky bastards.” He sighed.

My heart jumped. Had he known about my kisses with the dragons as well? He was a warlock, so he could have the means to know more than he let on, which made him even more dangerous. My instinct warned me about him, yet it only excited me more.

I should put him last on my to-kiss list.

“You got my message mixed-up,” I said. “I did not send the messengers out to summon every hunter here for a kiss. Kissing is never on the plate.”

“It’s not?” he asked, a teasing disappointment in his eyes. “I risked a lot coming here for that.”

I rolled my eyes. “You barely risked anything. You just popped out from thin air with the aid of your magic, and you can leave just as soon.”

I regretted my last sentence. I didn’t want him to leave.

“So, you don’t like my grand entrance? I thought the queen of the jungle

would appreciate a bit of theatrics. Would you prefer me to venture into the hazardous jungle by foot, fight all the scary monsters, and finally reach your chamber, like a hero in the old age? I think I can deliver that fancily if that's what you want."

I waved a hand at him in irritation. "I don't like being blindsided," I said. "I summoned everyone because all of you entered my realm and treated it as a hunting ground."

"Oh, it's the hunting that ticked you off."

"You haven't answered my question. Why have you come to Pandemonium? Who did you come to hunt?"

"They all came to hunt, except me," he said, peeking into my eyes meekly, as if trying to disarm me.

"Hunt who?"

"Furies," he said. "Whoever gets the three heads of the Furies will inherit a dragon realm on a faraway planet. I heard that the rogue hunters from the ship *Falling Star* almost got the three Furies with their drones." There was concern in his voice. He was the first one who didn't call my other forms *the beasts*. "There'll be more bloodshed on this planet, and the one who will first take the heads won't be the last one to stand and leave here." There was undisguised menace at the end of his conclusion.

"If you don't want the beasts' heads, why did you come here?"

"I can't tell you all my secrets, can I? What if you hurt me after I answer all your questions, since you'll have no need for me anymore? I have to protect myself."

I snickered. "I don't go around hurting those who don't try to do me harm."

"But you're a powerful queen, and all the monsters obey you, which is impressive. I'm sure it takes more than beauty and kindness to rein them in." His blatant gaze roved over me, its weight caressing me and making me self-conscious. "Where are your Furies? I can aid them with their healing if they are wounded." His blue eyes examined me, as if I was the one who had been hurt.

And I was.

A warning flashed in my head. Did he know the Furies were me?

"My guardians are fine," I said in a clipped tone. I didn't trust the warlock, yet part of me tried to persuade me to let down my guard and let him in.

Could he manipulate a mind? But I hadn't felt a nudge to the shield of my mind, and my head wasn't foggy, either.

All I felt was a buzzing thrill coursing in my blood that had nothing to do with magic, but everything to do with Elvey's presence and the purr of his voice.

While the dragon princes could stoke my lust like no other, Elvey electrified my every cell.

No matter how he made me feel, he wouldn't reveal his true agenda, and there was no point in beating a dead horse. I should probably kiss him and see how it would turn out. If it didn't turn out good, I'd just send him away.

"I'll give you a kiss as I gave everyone else, as a form of blessing," I lied.

He grinned, his eyes brightening up. "Really?"

Before he strode toward me, I said, "Stop!"

He spread his arms apart to show that he was unarmed and harmless. I swallowed a scold. Elvey didn't need a weapon to harm me. Was he unaware that I knew he was a powerful warlock?

"You said you were going to kiss me," he said. "Was that a tease?"

"No," I said. "You don't come to me. I come to you. And you'll close your eyes when I kiss you. It won't hurt, and it'll be quick."

He laughed, as if he actually looked forward to being hurt by my kiss. His laughter was richly sensual, which made me want to pull him to me and kiss him hard.

But I gave him a chiding look. "And you don't kiss me back unless I order you to."

"The direction is clear," he whispered. "Elvey Fionn at your service."

I'd heard the demons calling him Lord Elvey, and when he threw his full name easily at me like that, I was once again off balance.

Elvey Fionn was a Fae name, but he was a sorcerer.

"Close your eyes," I demanded, "put your hands behind your back, and don't try anything stupid." If he did, I'd knee him in the groin. As a half-Fae, I possessed superior speed and he wouldn't see it coming.

"I wouldn't want that," he said, as if reading my menacing intention. But if he was a mind reader, I'd have felt a brush in my head.

He shut his eyes, his lips stretching with lingering amused laughter.

Gingerly, I moved toward him, but stopped half a foot from him.

His thick lashes nearly touched the hollows under his eyes. His nose marked his highborn breed. He was not one who rose from the poor and

gathered his power from scratch, like the sorcerers I'd heard of before I'd been banished. His features were so elegant, yet they weren't lacking masculine beauty.

I sucked in a breath, my hand reaching toward him. I wanted to trace my fingers over the contour of his long, dark eyebrow, down to his high cheekbone, then his sculpted lips that seemed to be molded to perfection, before I kissed him.

I wanted it to be slow and sensual and take my time to thoroughly enjoy it. It wasn't just for lifting the curse, and it wasn't even because of hidden passion and lust. It was something more that I couldn't put into words.

His lips parted, waiting with eagerness and promise—a promise unknown to me yet would be there.

Like love's true kiss, a voice whispered in my head.

Even if it wasn't true love, I wanted to taste this and embrace his seduction.

I traced my thumb over his cheek.

He became very still, not at the growls my monster guards made outside the door, but at my touch.

I sighed inwardly. It had taken them this long to find out I was receiving a guest who'd slipped past them? But I couldn't blame them when the one who'd slipped past was a powerful warlock. There was a reason he was called Lord Elvey.

Elvey shivered as my fingers traced along his strong jaw line. It was only a nanosecond, then he stilled again. Only his breath rasped.

His scent, unmasked by his magic now, wafted toward me. It was faint, but it was enough for me to scent Fae in him, though not a full-blood one.

That discovery punched me in the stomach and drove the air out of me.

I knew I was half-Fae, but I'd never got to learn anything about my mother's side. It was forbidden. Dragons and Fae didn't mix. I'd been wondering for years if that was somehow tied to my curse.

And now both Fae and dragons had come to my small world on Pandemonium, and both species smelled of distant home and forest sun and shadow, which pumped such longing in my blood.

I leaned toward him.

One kiss, and I would find more about him.

And he wouldn't be able to hide who he was from me.

A furious roar stopped me in my tracks.

Blaze, the fire dragon prince, charged in, a shield in his left hand, and a longsword in his right. Henry lunged at him, but Blaze slammed him back with his shield. At least, he didn't use the sword to cut down my hound. If he had, he would suffer my wrath, no matter how amazing his kiss had been.

Henry hadn't really wanted to eat the fire dragon, either, since I'd ordered my monsters not to kill, but to herd any hunters toward me. Their fight was due to an obvious misunderstanding, since the dragon prince didn't appear to be one who appreciated being herded or escorted.

Two giant Lamashtus also dashed in as Henry's backup.

Sybil landed on Henry's rear, waiting for me to issue orders.

I waved for all of them to leave. *They aren't invaders.* I flashed a few images in their heads. *They're my guests.*

Henry snarled at Blaze once more, then stared at Elvey with menace.

Elvey flicked his gaze from the dragon prince to Henry and arched an eyebrow at the hellhound. Henry half-snarled and half-whimpered, cringed, then bolted out. His peers followed him out without any further contest.

Blaze glared daggers at Elvey, then looked at me with jealous rage. "You! Girl! Are you just going to kiss everyone?"

A corner of Elvey's lips tugged up in a half-smile and the warlock slanted a lazy glance at the dragon prince, not so much worried about the sword in his opponent's hand. Elvey graced me with a sly, full smile, as if the fun had just begun.

I'd never expected that I'd get myself tangled in a situation where men would fight over me.

"You don't own me, Blaze," I said. "All we shared was a kiss."

"It wasn't just a kiss!" he said, temper flaring. "It was the kiss of the century, and you don't get it just with anyone."

"Some kisses are good, some bad," I said mildly like a good liar. "I just have to take it all. As queen of the jungle, it's a custom for me to kiss every alien who comes to visit my realm. That's why I sent out the messengers. I thought you were quite satisfied with my kiss, so why are you complaining?"

Elvey chuckled.

"They aren't alien visitors." Blaze raised his voice. "They're all hunters, including the sleazy one you were going to kiss. They all came to slay your beasts!"

I narrowed my eyes. "And you didn't?"

His jaws tightened. "I considered aborting my former effort to hunt your

guardians after that kiss. Don't tell me you didn't feel a special link between us. You ran away before I could get to know you more and offer you my protection. I've been tracking you ever since, but I ran into a few demons and had to take time removing them from my path." He sent another threatening glare at Elvey before focusing his longing gaze on me. "As soon as I took care of them, the damned cannibal plants trapped me and tried to eat me."

He unconsciously touched his chin. It was still raw from the contact with the cannibal plants, as was his forehead where it wasn't covered by his mask.

"That's quite impressive, Prince Blaze," Elvey said with a mocking admiration. "You even fought off the friendly plants. I've learned to deal with them. All you need to say is one magical word—please—to get them to loosen their eager embrace."

His golden eyes glowing with rage, Blaze strode toward us. "Get away from her!"

One kiss inside the cannibal tree had made him so possessive? What if he knew I must collect a kiss from each supposed three true loves?

"I'm afraid I can't oblige you, Prince Blaze," Elvey said. "The queen hasn't graced me the kiss I've risked so much to come for."

"What did you risk?" Blaze demanded.

"Well, first," Elvey said, "the demons won't be happy with me if they find out my purpose for coming to meet the lovely queen of the jungle. Who knows what those brutes will do when they get really upset. They're a horde and I'm only one man."

"I thought you were their ringleader," Blaze spat out.

"Appearances can be deceiving," Elvey said.

"So, you're not their Lord Elvey?" Blaze sneered.

It seemed the hunters had all done research and knew who they were competing with to get my heads. And I doubted that the first one who possessed my heads would be the last one standing.

"I am above them, but I'm not their leader," Elvey drawled. "The demons aren't my concern. However, my life can be forfeited if someone else knows what I came here to do."

I didn't hear a lie in his words. He was half-Fae after all, and Fae couldn't lie.

But I could. I was also a half-dragon. Dragons lied a lot.

I narrowed my eyes at Elvey.

He would risk so much just to get a kiss? He didn't seem cursed. So, a

kiss for him was for pleasure. Unlike me. My future was at stake if I didn't kiss my true loves.

But I was beginning to think this was all a cruel joke. I doubted true love even existed.

"Who is that someone else who can forfeit your life?" I demanded, not expecting my sudden protectiveness.

Blaze gave me a sharp look before glared at Elvey. "Bad news for you," he said. "I don't care how much risk you took. You won't get the kiss."

Oh, really?

"I'd love to see how you can achieve that?" Elvey said. "No one can stop me from kissing the kind, beautiful queen except the queen herself."

I glared at Blaze. Elvey was right. It was my pleasure to decide who I kissed.

The dragon prince didn't meet my stare. He was still puffing with jealous rage, his armored chest heaving up and down. Maybe I should get rid of him, since he would only cause me further inconvenience, but the idea of removing him from my sight stabbed pain in my chest.

That was unexpected as well.

Blaze raised his sword vertically, a gesture to invite a duel to death.

Elvey sighed. "That I can indulge."

A sword appeared in his hand. I hadn't even seen him draw it.

This would be a mess, and I didn't have a lot of time left in my Fae form.

"Stop!" I shouted.

They ignored me, and I didn't have strong offensive magic to teach them both a lesson. If I were in my Fury forms, I could huff and puff and spit black fire to separate them.

Blades crossed each other, white flashing against black, the sharp sound hitting on my nerves. And I was surprised to realize that I was worried about them both. I didn't want either of them hurt. This protective instinct over both men wasn't exactly what I expected.

My monsters snarled outside, obviously smelling the bloodlust in my chamber and wanting to join. But they would not enter without my permission.

"Will you two stop, please?" I ordered, but I couldn't get between them. They were locked with each other fiercely. If I distracted either one, the other one could get killed.

They lunged, withdrew, and charged again.

Slashing, ducking, and thrusting all in fluid fashion, yet every strike was lethal.

Both were excellent swordsmen, which made the situation even more dismaying, not to them but to me.

I had learned some sword skills back when I was the Dragon Princess. My childhood friend and protector Adrian had taught me. As a strategic and formidable warrior, he'd have been my general if I had taken the throne instead of being dragged here by some unseen dark force right in front of him.

I swallowed the bile. Had my grandfather the Dragon King punished Adrian? Had he survived? If he had, had he forgotten about me in the long march of time? He would have believed it was entirely his fault—that was how he was. I hoped I could have had a chance to tell him it hadn't been his fault.

I heard a tear and snapped my attention back to the current fight.

The tip of Elvey's black sword cut open the armor covering Blaze's chest, but it didn't do more damage than that.

I sucked in a cold breath. I wouldn't let this keep going.

The dragon prince hissed, "Foul sorcery!" and swung his sword in an arc toward Elvey's neck.

No! I almost cried out.

Elvey bent backwards, and the white sword sliced down and cleaved his left sleeve.

The duo crashed into each other in a blur of motion, unbelievably fast, their blades meeting in the air with clangs and sparks again. I knew they wouldn't stop until one was worn out and perished.

"Enough!" I said, shocked at the sudden power pouring out of me. I had more power than I'd thought. Was it some kind of Fae magic in me that I hadn't discovered? The impact of my power word hit them both.

The duelists halted and jumped away from each other, turning to look at me with a near-identical dumbfounded expression.

"This is my court," I said. "And you'll behave, or I'll throw both of you out."

My court? Where had that come from?

As if having perceived my paradox, Elvey's eyes sparkled with amusement and delightful anticipation. But Blaze looked confused for a second and glanced around.

Right, all of my subjects were monsters.

Queen of the beasts. That was who I was now.

Elvey pointed the tip of his sword toward the ground, but he couldn't fool me. I knew how fast he could lift it and hack at his opponent.

Blaze, however, held his white sword at an angle, aiming the tip at Elvey. His nostrils flared. It would take a great deal for the fire dragon to calm down, even though he wasn't in his dragon form.

Since they'd ceased fighting, at least temporarily, I swiftly stepped between them, just in case they decided to pick up a fight again. I needed to dismiss them both before I changed.

"I'm sorry I offended you by fighting in your court without asking first," Elvey said carelessly. "I corrected it as soon as I saw my error. I'll abide to all the rules of your court, as it is proper. Queen—?"

My heart skipped a beat. Other than the Archangel and his mate, no one had even bothered to ask my name for centuries. But I wasn't going to tell Elvey my real name.

Blaze stared at me intently as well. He'd pursued my name before I'd run away from him.

"Faya," I said, using the Wickedest Witch's family name. It seemed fitting. And Elvey was half-Fae like me. I heard it was a dangerous business to let a Fae know your true name and give them power over you.

Blaze blinked. "Faya?"

"A lovely name," Elvey pondered, "but I preferred a more feminine one, something like Rose, Lilac, or Daisy."

My heart pounded. He knew me!

"Who gives a fuck what you prefer?" Blaze snorted. "Faya sounds just perfect!" He bowed slightly to me to show his respect. "Queen Faya, Blaze at your service."

Elvey laughed.

I whipped a glare at both my suitors. I didn't have time for this banter.

"I need you two to get out of my court right now!" I said sternly. "And don't come back until tomorrow."

"But why?" Blaze asked, very much unwilling to leave me. "I just got here, and it took me two days to track you down. I can't just—"

Dragons were the most infuriating at taking orders and didn't know how to take no for an answer.

"I have other court business to attend to," I cut in sharply. Why did I even

need to explain to him? Wasn't I the jungle queen? Anxiety reigned in me as I felt the first scale coming. How had the hour run out so fast? I couldn't have been in my Fae form for an hour. "Now go! Go! Make an appointment for tomorrow."

"With who?" Blaze asked politely, ember eyes staring at me in longing.

Elvey watched me with half-hearted sympathy, yet he wasn't moving an inch, either.

I could no longer afford to wait for these men to depart. I had to get out now before disaster happened. And I could no longer have the luxury to care if they'd stab at each other again in my absence.

A scale formed on the back of my left foot.

I broke into a run toward the exit. With my Fae speed, I would be able to dash far enough and blend into the forest to change into my Fury forms.

Before I reached the arched exit, a flash cut in in front of me, blocking my way out. My stalker was faster than I, faster than anyone had the right to be.

A hand lashed out and grabbed my wrist before I could fend it off.

Elvey braced himself in front of me, regarding me, untouched at my furious, frantic glare. His face was solemn and serious for the first time. My eyes burned with rage at his interference. If I were in my Fury forms right now, I'd have picked him up between my fangs.

"I know," he said. "And I'm sorry for inconveniencing you, but—"

I would hear no argument, not while I couldn't afford to.

I resorted to going for the blade in my boot. I was incredibly fast, too, and in an instant, my dagger appeared in my hand and drove toward Elvey to get him to release me.

His hand moved with a blur and he caught my other wrist.

Blaze reached us. He was at Elvey's back, his sword ready.

Elvey was between us, between two blades. But he didn't flinch.

"Let her go," Blaze demanded, having just proved that he wasn't the type who could stab anyone in the back.

"Stay, Daisy Danaenyth," Elvey said, and my blood iced over.

What else did he know about me?

Had he come to kiss me, kill me, or humiliate me?

"You need to let the dragons see who you are," he said, his voice soft and pained, "so they can decide for themselves what to do with you. It has to be that way. Fate has looked the other way. You can no longer hide."

“If you don’t release her the next second,” Blaze gritted, “you’ll suffer—” Then he stopped cold, his threats swallowed.

The red scales had covered my nose and now layered my forehead rapidly.

“You’re beautiful and deadly in whatever form,” Elvey said, letting go with his hands that gripped my wrists. “I know you’ll hate me for this. But for it to work, they all have to accept your two forms.”

There was no mockery in his tone, but still I sent him an enraged, withering glare before I could cool down and question what he knew about my curse.

Blaze widened his eyes, their beautiful golden color darkening to dusty bronze. I switched my gaze from Elvey to him, waiting for disgust appearing in his eyes.

To my surprise, there wasn’t any.

The dragon prince only cursed, “Star shit!”

The inevitable was happening right in front of two gorgeous guys, thanks to the half-Fae mage. Yet he didn’t seem to take pleasure in my dilemma, or humiliation. He didn’t show much sympathy either. There was only cold fury and steel in his darkened blue eyes, not at me, or Blaze.

I had no mind to figure out the true object of his wrath as shards of agony rammed into me. My bones started bending and reshaping, my spine snapping and spiraling out, my skin and muscles and tissue stretching from my Fae form to a vast, beastly body.

I shrieked from the terrible pain, tears forming in my bulged eyes. Unlike when I could shift to a dragon painlessly and instantly before I’d been cursed, my every cell was filled with excruciating pain. Even after centuries, the agony never lessened during each change.

Yet I knew the worst was yet to come.

“Don’t fight the pain, Daisy,” Elvey whispered.

That was fucking easy for him to say. My slender fingers thickened and extended to become claws. Maybe I should swat him with them and maul his perfect, handsome face, then he would know how not to fight the pain.

“That’s lousy advice!” Blaze said through his clenched teeth, as if my pain was his. “How can anyone not fight pain? She’s suffering greatly!”

“Let pain take over,” Elvey said, his cool hand touching my face. “Let it walk through you. You must have gone through it thousands of times and more. What else could it do to you? Sneer at it if you have to. Welcome it

with mockery, but don't give it an inch."

I had never tried his ridiculous method, but then I had never been a stubborn person. Besides, I believed his touch took some of my pain into him, since his face distorted for a second.

I let the remnant of pain pass through me, and the blinding pain receded, until two other Furies tore through me with the force to cleave my soul.

I screamed at the tearing pain, then it was over.

Panting, three of us crouched between Elvey and Blaze.

A new scent wafted toward me, and I noticed that I had more guests.

Iokul, the ice dragon, and Rai, the lightning dragon, stepped in. They'd watched my change while I'd been distracted by my blinding pain.

They stared at me, their swords tightening in their hands, as I, in my Fury form now, stared back.

Elvey watched them, his pose relaxed, his sword nowhere in sight. But that couldn't fool me, as I smelled the thick scent of his magic tighter than a whip.

He would defend me if the dragons attacked.

Blaze moved and stepped before three of us Furies and glared at his brothers. "You'll not harm her—they."

Both ice and lightning dragons growled. "Why do you think we would harm her?"

Blaze's gaze fell on their swords.

Rai immediately sheathed his blade across his shoulder.

"What about him?" Iokul pointed his sword at Elvey.

Elvey pulled his lips back with an inviting grin.

"We fought already," Blaze said. "It's a tie. Don't mind him. He enjoys annoying people. Let's pretend he doesn't exist."

Elvey arched an eyebrow. "But I do exist."

"Isn't he the lord of the demons?" Iokul demanded.

"There it goes again," Elvey sighed. "I really hate having to introduce myself repeatedly."

And I really didn't like having to face everyone with my Fury forms. Perhaps I could sneak away while they argued.

Elvey turned to me, completely ignoring the dragon princes, who still glared at him with menace.

"I have to go, Daisy. I won't spoil your pleasant reunion," he said, his knuckles tracing across my scaled face, and pleasure burst in me.

I blinked once. How could I feel this way toward him even in my beastly forms?

All the princes growled and stepped toward us threateningly.

I tried not to shriek with so many dominant males lounging around me.

But Elvey ignored everyone except me. Hope and sudden sadness in his star-blue eyes told me he wasn't willing to take off, as if it was tearing him up inside to leave me.

"I'll do more harm if I stay." He blew out a ragged breath. "I should have better control than this."

Elvey vanished in a flash of light.

An ache rose in my chest and settled in my heart at his absence. I hadn't even kissed him, yet my heart ached for him.

When I turned my gaze on the three dragon princes, it was as if my wound started sealing itself.

A new question rose: what would they do with me?

The piercing pain from the change had left me, yet I still trembled. I didn't take flight and escaped into the gray sky, as I usually did, as I wanted to.

All three princes stared at me, then everyone started talking at once.

"What the hell is going on?" Iokul demanded an answer from Blaze, but his icy gaze stayed on me.

I stared back, my scaled eyelashes heavy. The memory of him thrusting into me in the shallow of the pool played in my head. We hadn't been able to finish due to my change, and the pleasure I had felt was still raw. I didn't know if the other princes knew about our coupling and how they would react if they found out.

Blaze had thrown a jealous fit when he'd caught me trying to kiss Elvey, so I assumed none of them would take too kindly at knowing I had fucked one of them and kissed another.

I tried to rub my temple, only to remember that I had no fingers but claws, and my temples were all covered in red scales.

"Just give me a fucking minute!" Blaze barked back. "It's too much to process."

"What the hell did the warlock want?" Rai asked, not giving his half-brother a break.

"He wants what I want—her," Blaze said. When he gave a quick glance

at his brothers, his eyes narrowed with a displeased realization. “You all want her, too?”

Rai ignored Blaze and approached the main me. He knew which was the one who took charge among us.

“Hello again,” he said, his piercing sapphire eyes gazing at me. “You ran away last time.”

“It seems to be her main trait,” Iokul said drily. He stayed near the entrance on guard, his hand on the hilt of his sword.

“I didn’t hurt you last time,” Rai said. “And I don’t intend on hurting you now. I won’t let anyone hurt you, either.”

What about my three heads you want? I asked him, my eyes softening.

He shook his head, and his thumb traced my scaled face. He was the kindest. I thrust my nose onto his palm and purred.

He chuckled. “That’s a good girl. I’m glad that you’ve recovered.”

His brothers watched our interaction unhappily.

“Who hurt her?” Blaze asked, rage in his voice.

“The hunters’ drones,” Rai said. “They nearly killed her.”

Blaze cursed, and Iokul roved his examining eyes over me to see if I was still wounded.

“I didn’t know who you are before,” Rai said to me. “But I think I know now.”

“Know what?” Blaze asked hoarsely, moving closer to me, so Rai wouldn’t be the one to have my sole attention.

“I heard of the legend long ago,” Rai said. “Centuries before we were even born, a half-dragon, half-Fae princess vanished from the Dragon Realm without a trace. The whole realm searched for her, but to no avail. Even now, some dragons are still looking for her. They say the princess was cursed to be taken. Her name was Daisy Danaenyth.”

I could feel my eyes moistening, yet in my beastly form, I didn’t have tears.

Blaze sucked in a sharp breath. “The half-bred warlock called her Daisy Danaenyth. He knew about the princess, and he tried to bewitch her.”

“Over my dead body will I let Elvey have her,” Iokul hissed icy steam.

I snapped my head in his direction. He’d been quieter than the others.

We’d had hot sex, but we hadn’t finished it. His silver eyes had burned with controlled, cold rage even since he’d stepped in the chamber. I sensed his hurt and anger at my betrayal, as he had now guessed that I was also

involved with all his brothers.

But I had never promised any of them anything. All I wanted was a kiss. Well, maybe more.

“What do we do now that we’ve discovered her true identity?” Blaze asked.

If Elvey hadn’t meddled, the dragon princes wouldn’t have discovered my secret. But Elvey had said I needed to work this out with them, which left another puzzle for me.

“Three Furies, one woman,” Rai said thoughtfully. “That’s probably her curse.”

“The old bastard King Daghdha lied about who she was before he sent us here,” Blaze said. “He promised whoever takes the Furies’ heads will inherit Danaenyth dynasty. If we had known—”

“We know now,” Rai said. “She’s one of us, a dragon, and we’ll never slay our kin.”

Blaze scanned three of me and sighed. “Three Furies, one woman, as you said. I’d have hoped that there are three women instead, but there aren’t. I intend to court Daisy. If you two back down right now, I’d appreciate it.”

“Unfortunately, I won’t, brother,” Rai said. “When I first scented her, I already marked her as mine. She smelled like my mate as she smells now, and she’ll be my mate.”

“You smelled her wrong, Rai,” Blaze said fiercely. “She should be mine. When I first kissed her, my dragon recognized her as my mate.”

“Maybe the curse confused your sense of smell,” Rai retorted.

“You have the same curse, Rai,” Blaze barked back. “Maybe your nose misguided you.”

How long were they going to talk like this as if I weren’t even present? But since I needed to gather more information from them, I kept quiet. I could picture how they’d rivaled each other since they were children.

Both Rai and Blaze turned to Iokul now, waiting for him to announce he would bow out. One less competitor is better than nothing.

“Not a chance,” Iokul said, staying where he was to guard the door. “I might be ice-cold, but not with her. She made my blood run hotter than any fire, and no other woman could even stir anything in me before.”

His brothers gave him a scathing look.

I was dazed. They were fighting over me. A few days ago, they’d been competing to get to me to take off my heads.

“How did we even come to this?” Rai shook his head, his voice spitting disgust. “When did we become so pathetic? We’re brothers. We should have bonded with each other, but all we’ve done for nearly a century is to try to pull the rug out from under each other to gain more political power. We almost killed each other on several occasions. And now we’re going to fight over the same woman on a hostile planet, with an army of monsters, ruthless hunters, and demons breathing down our necks. We’ll finish ourselves soon before our enemies do it for us.”

A shamed look flitted by Blaze’s golden eyes, but Iokul remained icy, untouched.

The benefit of having three forms and three pairs of eyes was that I didn’t miss any details.

“Then why don’t you set a good example and back off, Rai?” Blaze said. “Feel free to leave Iokul and me in the game. And I believe I’ll beat him this time. Fire burns ice. It’s not the other way around. Fire gets a woman hot, and ice will only turn her off.”

Iokul sneered with enough disdain, but he did not comment. Likely, the ice prince was more of a strategist than the red-blooded fire dragon.

“I’ll leave the ring if it were any other woman,” Rai said, “but not with Daisy, not after I got her scent in my blood. And as the oldest among you, I’m entitled to the first pick.”

Thank you all for treating me like a lovely bone! One of my Furies snickered.

“You’re only older by a minute and a half,” Blaze said. “That doesn’t count for much. Even our father refused to name which one of us should be the heir, since we were all born on the same day.”

“The old argument bores me,” Iokul chimed in. “That’s the exact thing that has pitted us against each other for a century.”

They were indeed younger for me. Nine hundred years old wasn’t really old, but one hundred was young for a dragon. I wondered how old Elvey was—he scented both ancient and young. Everything about him was a puzzle. And he knew more about me than I did. I bet he knew everything about my curse.

I needed to get hold of him, the sooner the better, once these three were done with their debate.

“I’m tired of this argument as well,” Rai said.

“You brought it up,” Blaze said.

“Let’s quit fighting each other for once,” Rai said in exasperation. “It hasn’t worked in the past. It’s only wounded us all. This time we’ll win the most-desired woman in a civilized way. We protect her. We take out the hunters. And then, we’ll revisit winning her heart, and may the best man win.”

“No cheating in the process,” Blaze said.

“Agreed,” Rai said.

When they didn’t hear from the ice dragon on the collective decision, Rai raised both eyebrows. “Iokul? You’re more than welcome to withdraw.”

“Hell no!” Iokul said. “But in the end, it’s not up to us. Daisy has to choose.”

That was the first sensible thing they’d said since they’d entered my chamber.

The three dragons turned to gaze at me intently, as if expecting I would—even in my beastly form—give them my judgment or cede to their plan.

But I’d finally had enough. I wasn’t a prize for anyone to win.

It was time to put these young, alpha dragons in their places.

“Thank you for treating me like a bone a horde of dogs are fighting over, boys,” I said, my voice sounding hoarse even in my ear, but I didn’t see any of the princes frown at me, though they did look a bit taken aback at my sudden verbal opinion.

Clearly, they’d thought I wouldn’t be able to talk in my beastly form.

“I didn’t mean that, Daisy,” Rai said.

“I would never disrespect you, Princess Daisy Danaenyth,” Blaze said, his voice overlapping his brothers.

I didn’t want to get into another debate, so I said it sharply, “I won’t choose.”

“What do you mean you won’t choose?” All three voices demanded at the same time, and three pairs of eager eyes all focused on me. Iokul had left his post and joined his brothers, as if everyone’s life was at stake.

Rai’s sapphire eyes caressed me without touch, intending to make me change my mind and pick him.

Blaze narrowed his fiery eyes, not in a threatening way, but in curiosity.

Iokul had the fire burning equally hot behind his glacial wall.

All of them were staggering-hot with powerful bodies.

Their masks, infused to cover half of their faces because of the hex, made my heart ache for their suffering.

I had never known I had such strong protective traits until I met them.

“I’ve been cursed with my beastly forms as Akem’s slave for nine centuries,” I said.

“Where’s this *Akem*?” Blaze snarled, looking around to seek him, as did the other enraged princes, who drew their swords.

“We’ll finish him,” Iokul said with steel and ice in his voice. “No one enslaves you.”

“The elemental entity was gone before you arrived. The Wickedest Witch in the universe trapped him,” I said with a sigh. *Must they always interrupt me?* They seemed to have a habit of disrupting each other.

“Lucky he got away,” Rai said, pulling his sensual lips back in a half snarl.

“You all got lucky,” I said matter-of-factly. “If he were still around, your ship wouldn’t have landed. It would have crashed. And none of your advanced weaponry would have worked. Akem didn’t just absorb spaceships’ energy. He fed on all aliens. We were all his prey when he was here. He owned this planet.”

I’d thought I’d have all the freedom by sending the elemental away, only to find that anyone with a big gun could come hunt me now.

“It doesn’t matter that he’s gone,” I said sadly. “I didn’t gain my freedom. I’m still trapped here and will forever be shackled until my curse is lifted. My dragon is caged. I have an hour every day in my Fae form. The rest of the day I have to stay in my mutant Fury forms. That’s about it.”

“Then let’s get rid of this curse of yours,” Rai said.

Blaze gave his brother an annoyed look, as if blaming him for stealing his line.

“How can we remove the nasty curse, Daisy?” Blaze asked softly, my name sounding like a caress from his lips.

I shivered in pleasure. And I was grateful to them all that my hideous form didn’t make them cringe. They still wanted to help me.

“I’ll walk over a sea of burning coals for you,” Blaze continued.

“Really?” Rai sneered. He was usually the gentlest and level-headed. “You’re a fire dragon. Fire won’t touch you. You do know how to pick the easiest task.”

“It’s a figure of speech!” Blaze said.

“The first words coming out always speak the volume,” Iokul said.

Blaze glared at his two half-brothers with dark suspicion in his molten-

gold eyes, as if he believed the two were joining forces to take him out.

If I let their jealousy and possessiveness keep getting the better of them, we'd never get anything done. "No more such banter," I said. "Whoever stays petty and catty will be out of my favor."

All three of them quieted immediately.

"The reason I can't choose any one of you is that I'll need a kiss from all three true loves to lift the curse," I said.

Their jaws all dropped. Their eyes darkened.

I sighed. I knew it.

Love was difficult. True love? It was like myth. Who knew if it even existed.

However, the princes' dismayed look disheartened me to no measure.

Was I deemed to be doomed?

Nine centuries of misery and dim hope. And then it came to this. I wanted to bury my face in my hands and weep a little, but I couldn't do that in my Fury forms. All I had were fangs and claws and scales.

I composed myself.

"The term of true love is probably a metaphor," I said, adding a bit steel to my voice, "or a children's bedtime story. The point is three is the required number. So, you see, I can't choose."

The three brothers traded a look.

Rai blew out a breath. "We have to be completely honest with you, Daisy. I think your curse is connected to ours. We were cursed in our young twenties. We don't know by whom, how, or why."

"We have powerful enemies," Blaze said.

Rai grunted. "Overnight, we were unable to shift to dragons, and it affected all the dragons, except the oldest Dragon King, Daghdha Danaenyth, your grandfather."

I narrowed my eyes in rage. "You think Daghdha had something to do with the curse?"

It could be. I'd come of age and become the threat to his throne, so he'd whisked me away with a curse. Without knowing that, when I'd finally had means sending him a message calling for help through an Archangel, he immediately sent three spaceships of bounty hunters after my ass.

What a nasty old bastard! He would pay if I ever got out of this.

"We investigated," Iokul said, watching me carefully. "He has nothing to do with our curse. I don't think he hexed you either. My intelligence says it

might be the dark Fae, but we can't find any proof."

My enemy could be Fae since I was half-Fae. Dragons and Fae had been at war with each other for a long time.

Rai nodded. "Fae is malicious." He gave me a look. "Especially dark Fae."

Was I on the dark side?

"I don't know any more about my Fae heritage than you do," I said. "Fae was a forbidden topic in the dragon realm where I grew up."

"That's fine, Daisy," Blaze said, giving me a small smile. "Don't worry about it."

"The three of us have been burdened with a second curse as well," Rai said. "We've been wearing this mask for close to a century."

"When the curse first hit us," Blaze said, "we all heard a menacing voice in our heads: 'Only when you cut the three heads of the Fury beasts will your curse fall off.' And we've been searching for the Furies in all the realms ever since. It was fruitless, even though we collected a lot of beast heads. And when we heard King Daghdha's announcement, we came here right away. He specifically pronounced the name Furies, and we thought that our misery would finally come to an end."

The fire prince gazed at me apologetically. "I didn't know you were cursed to be Furies. I almost killed you."

"You're the one who shot down the rockets that almost got me," I said softly, yet my voice still sounding grumpy and croaky. "Iokul ordered the men not to fire upon me. And Rai disabled the drones, healed me, and saved me."

"You called my name," Rai whispered. "I thought I was mistaken."

I smiled at him. If I were in my Fae form, my grin would look better.

Blaze coughed. "Let's stay on topic, shall we?"

"We have a conflict of interest," I said, giving all three of them an equal measure of look. "I need a kiss from three loves to get rid of my curse, and I'm not sure if the three of you are the ones I've been looking for. And you'll have to cut the three heads of the Furies—my heads—to remove your curses."

"Our interest actually merges," Rai said. "I haven't finished the tale of the second part. The first voice demanded we claim your heads, but then a second, different voice followed the first vicious one."

"And it said, 'Or make the Fury Queen fall in love with all three of you,'"

Iokul chimed in, icy silver eyes sparking with fire, even at the sight of my hideous beast form. I remembered how his icy fire had burned for me when we'd first met. Like his brothers, my Furies didn't turn him off.

All three of them had seen me beyond the forms I took.

"But we, the shallow, arrogant dragon royals laughed at the concept of gaining the heart of the beast queen," Iokul said.

"We aren't laughing now," Blaze said. "At least I'm not laughing. I'm only happy we haven't hurt Daisy."

All cards were on the table now.

"So, our curses have to be connected to yours," Rai said.

"All we need is to gain Daisy's heart instead of cutting off her heads," Blaze said cheerfully.

"And you think that's easier?" Iokul retorted.

They flicked their gazes between the three of my beast forms, evidently pondering how to gain my heart when every day I had only an hour as a Fae, and there were three of them.

"Daisy has refused to choose between us," Rai said. "She can't. She needs three mates, and all of us need to win her heart, which means we'll have to share her love. If we prove ourselves worthy, then she'll have all three of us."

Blaze sighed, not too happily. "Maybe this is meant to be. Maybe the curses happened for a good reason. To chide us for our pettiness, arrogance, and menace."

Rai clasped Blaze's shoulder, then Iokul's. "We're brothers, flesh and blood, but we've fought each other for nearly a century. If we all agree to forge our bond and give our devotion to the same mate, we'll never be divided by anyone or any force again."

"And we'll rule the same kingdom by our mate's side," Iokul whispered.

Rai pulled out his sword from the sheath in his shoulder. I stepped back involuntarily. He gave me an assured, gentle look. "Never harm you, Daisy," he said fiercely. "Don't be afraid of us." He turned the blade toward his palm and sliced across it.

Blaze and Iokul immediately followed suit and cut their palms.

Three palms joined, and their brotherly blood meshed. Following that, three swords dripping with red blood crossed against each other in unison to declare they were one.

I was touched by their pledge to me, though not comforted much by their

rush to action. What if they weren't my true loves? Elvey's image popped into my head. I'd felt strongly toward him just as I had toward the princes. So, who knew who my true loves were? And what if I gave the three dragons my love and their curses got lifted, yet mine remained since one of them, or all of them, were the false suitors?

When my future and freedom were at stake, how could I throw my lot in with them and make such a big commitment?

As a rule, I had to look after my own interest first, just as everyone did on Pandemonium.

"Well," I said. "This is a good development. However, I reserve the right to kiss other men if you aren't the ones I'm looking for."

"Are you using the excuse so you can kiss the warlock when you have the chance to do so again?" Blaze demanded.

"She won't get another chance," Iokul said frostily. "We'll take care of Elvey first."

I hissed a stream of black fire, and the princes leaped back, not expecting that I also had a temper.

"You see what you're doing?" Rai, the nicest dragon, snarled at them. "You aren't helping to win Daisy over. You're alienating her. Why should she tie to us before we prove ourselves to be worthy of her love?"

Blaze and Iokul dropped their gazes for a second and glared at each other.

"From this day forward, we need to think before we open our mouths," Rai continued, his voice soft and lethal. "If we sabotage our relationship with Daisy, we'll never get rid of our curses."

Unless they reversed to slaying me, but I wouldn't plant the ideas in their heads.

Blaze eyed me warily. "Relationships are hard. I know how to charge into battle and how to protect a lady, but this slow burn and sharing will take a lot out of me. I've never done this before. What if I screw up?"

"Then don't screw up," Rai said.

"Easy for you to say," Blaze grunted, giving Rai a rueful glance. "Besides, I'll have to work cordially with you and Iokul. I can stomach you once in a while, but Iokul and I are ice and fire."

Iokul shrugged.

Rai ignored them and fixed his sole attention on me as if I was the only one that ever mattered, even though he'd just sworn a blood oath with his brothers. "Have you kissed all of my brothers, Daisy?"

Under all three pairs of scrutinizing eyes, I was suddenly shy, even in my current forms.

“Yes,” I said. “And I kissed a fair share of the hunters and a few of your men, just to be sure.”

They visibly repressed their growls.

“It’s understandable,” Rai sighed at last. “You have to do what’s needed to be done.”

My eager gaze darted to his lips. “But I haven’t kissed you, Prince Rai.”

He smiled, his gaze falling on my parted lips as well. “Call me Rai.” His thumb traced my scaled lips, and I gasped in pleasure.

Blaze scowled at Rai.

Iokul narrowed his eyes, his fingers on the hilt of his sword.

“Behave yourselves!” Rai snarled to remind them.

Blaze eased his frown, and Iokul stepped back to recollect himself.

“I’m only trying to get to the technical part of getting rid of the curse,” Rai told them, while his gaze stayed on me. Then he asked me, “Did you feel any difference between kissing my brothers and the men who came to hunt you?”

I didn’t like talking about my private feelings in front of everyone, but I knew Rai was trying to help me sort out things, and they’d all been honest with me.

“I didn’t like the other men,” I said.

“But you liked my brothers’ kisses?” Rai asked.

“She made my blood heat like no other,” Blaze said. “It was the best kiss I’ve ever had.”

“And her lips burned me hotter than icy fire,” Iokul said. “She’s my match.”

Rai shook his head exasperatedly. “I didn’t ask you two your opinions.”

“Just like they described,” I offered.

Blaze grinned immediately, but when he found that Iokul also smirked smugly, he looked daggers at his brother.

“I’m the only one you haven’t kissed,” Rai said.

We could solve it right now.

He smiled in amusement as I nudged closer to him.

“But we’ll have to wait until you’re in your Fae form.”

Never before had I wished tomorrow would come sooner.

If they were my true loves, I’d even forgive the enemy who cursed me.

I woke up at dawn to find Blaze and Iokul sprawled around me on the cushions, asleep and looking utterly adorable. They didn't know it was morning yet, since it was always dim on Pandemonium. Unlike me, I had centuries of experience to feel when the day had started.

Plus, when Akem had been here, he hadn't allowed me to be idle.

The dragon princes were guarding me on the clock, though I'd told them that my monsters were watching the chamber.

Before we'd settled down last night, the princes had checked in with their warriors in the ship through their dragon mind link. As a cursed half-dragon, I hadn't been able to get on their channel. I was still an outsider.

"Not every dragon can communicate telepathically with each other," Rai had explained. "We have implants that make the communication easier. I can only reach my men and not my brothers' men. We don't share the same channel since we've always been rivals until now. However, after our blood oath, Blaze, Iokul, and I can now vaguely perceive each other's thoughts and emotions."

He had then informed me that his warriors would stay in the ship for the night. I'd nodded in appreciation. I didn't want too many aliens in my jungle since my monster subjects would go berserk. They already weren't happy that there were three dragons in my chamber, when for centuries I had always been alone.

Rai was now patrolling outside the chamber.

My gaze fell on the sleeping princes as I thought of our reversed roles—they were the Beauties and I the Beast.

I couldn't tell much difference between the fire and ice dragon when they closed their eyes, the mask covering half of their faces. In their sleep, they seemed to have taken their fire or ice into their sweet dream land.

Only their masks were left to remind them they'd eventually return to the harsh reality.

I desperately wanted to remove their masks and trace my fingers along their cheeks.

My heart ached for them not having been able to take their masks off for nearly a century. How terrible it must be to have to wear that thing day and night.

If and when I got out of there, I'd find the ones who cursed us and make them pay tenfold.

I heaved out a sigh.

Even if the dragon princes weren't my true loves, I'd help them remove their curses. I knew it wasn't for me to decide, but I was more than willing.

They would have to win my heart. I couldn't force myself to be in love with anyone.

As I regarded the princes, Rai strode in and flashed me a quick smile, and the mask clad tightly on his face failed to reduce the potent effect on me.

I could get used to that—waking up first thing in the morning and seeing him beam like the warm sunshine that was lacking on this planet.

I wanted to shift to Fae and join him, but somehow my instinct told me to wait.

Patience!

I spread my wings in a morning yawn, and Blaze and Iokul, who had been sound asleep a second ago, bolted up, swords in their hands.

"Daisy?" they called.

My three Fury forms turned to them in sync.

"She's safe," Rai said, holding back a growl. "I'm with her."

He had been having a great moment with me before his brothers drew my attention to them.

My gaze darted between them.

Even one overbearing alpha male was handful, and now I had three. Did I have it in me to manage this?

“Did you have a good night’s sleep, Daisy?” Blaze asked, turning up the voltage of his most charming smile. I bet he’d used that on a lot of women and it probably had a lethal effect on them. When he saw my beastly forms weren’t impressed in the slightest, he dropped his grin. “It’s strange talking to all three of you at once.”

“I have no problem with that,” Rai said. “I’m perfectly fine with either of her forms. The dragon in her smells the same to me and calls to me.” He reached me and scratched my scaled neck.

I tilted my head to one side to give him more room to work. No one had done that for me before, and it felt damn good.

Blaze watched us with envy, seemingly infuriated with himself for not having thought to do the same. He jumped up from the cushion, stalking toward me with the intent to stroke the other side of my neck.

Rai pressed a kiss on my scaled lips before turning to his bothers casually. “We need to map out our next steps.”

Iokul, who had been watching us with a detached manner, arched an eyebrow. “I bet your plan today involves kissing Daisy, since you’re the only one who hasn’t kissed her Fae lips.”

“Yes, that’s the first step,” Rai said challengingly.

Blaze looked resigned. “Fine. Just get it over with. The sooner it’s handled, the sooner the curse will be lifted off our Daisy.”

“Would you mind changing to your Fae form, Daisy?” Rai asked gently. “I know it’s painful to change and it’s too much to ask, but we need to get this curse off you as soon as possible.”

“It’ll be a quick kiss,” Blaze decided. “That’s all. Remember, this isn’t a ritual. Daisy just needs one last kiss to get it done.”

He didn’t want me to savor the promised kiss with Rai. I could do a fast kiss, but I didn’t like his tone. Before I told him what was on my mind, Rai beat me to it.

“Don’t dictate her,” Rai said. “Daisy will do whatever she wants and however she wants.”

Iokul folded his arms across his broad chest and chuckled. “We’re a hopeless lot.”

These men would drive me insane one day. Which moron had said three’s the charm?

To stop their bickering, I summoned my other alter egos.

With a shriek, they slammed into me.

I didn't want the princes to think less of me, so I tried my best to muffle a cry of pain, but the impact still made me tremble.

And then there I was—a naked Fae.

I blinked away the tears that came out of their own accord. As my vision cleared, I found I was in the arms of—

Wait a minute! I didn't know in which dragon prince's arms I was exactly, since all three of them had their limbs around me.

We'd somehow ended up in a group hug—me naked and them clad in armor that was like their second skin. Only Blaze's armor was short a piece on his chest. Elvey had cut open his armor, and I didn't think Elvey had meant to kill Blaze.

"Feeling better?" they all asked, hoping to take my pain away.

I shook them off and hissed. "Give me some space."

A lot of women might find three men competing to shower them with attention flattering, but I was going from not being touched for nine centuries to all of a sudden being pampered by three blazing-hot men who dripped sexiness with their every muscle, every move, and every breath. I was overwhelmed.

I was sure they would defend me with their lives from now on, which I appreciated. But with them paying such intense attention to my every move, ready to tend to my every need, my mind sort of just short-circuited. Which was bad for me, since I needed my head to be cool enough to function, so I wouldn't literally lose my heads. We still had two ships of hunters to deal with. And those demons weren't a piece of cake.

"Give Daisy some room!" Rai snarled at his overeager brothers, though he refused to back away from me, either.

I rubbed my temples with my fingers.

"Headache?" Blaze asked. "I'll give you a massage."

"We're crowding her," Iokul said. "We're giving her headache."

Rai, who had a cloak, untied it swiftly and wrapped it around me.

"I just need a little room," I said honestly.

My senses were overloaded. Their body heat—dragons were very hot—emitted to me, their hard, perfect torsos made me flush, and their scent, all male, dominant, mint and pine and home, kicked my desire into hyperdrive.

No man had looked at me as a woman for centuries, and now all of sudden this—three of the hottest, gorgeous dragons all desired me, and I wanted all of them.

But I didn't know where to start.

They looked bashful at my request for room to breathe. Collectively, they stepped back half a foot, and no more than that. They didn't want to make me uncomfortable, but they had no intention of withdrawing further from me, either.

The warriors, who had no problem charging into the battlefield and cutting down their foes, stared at me and didn't know what to do.

I gave them a small smile. I didn't want to hurt their feelings if I could help it. "I just need to get used to this, to all of you," I said softly.

Blaze grinned first. "At least we're honest with each other and communicating. That's good, right?"

Rai gazed at me hopefully with a dotting smile. "Communication is the key to any good relationship."

"Like you're now all relationship experts," Iokul snickered. "Neither of you could maintain a normal relationship for a month."

Blaze glared at the ice dragon, obviously not liking that his brother revealed his weakness in front of me. "Like you're any better? You don't even have any relationship history to contribute and offer opinions."

"I have standards, unlike you," Iokul said. "And now I know why I didn't do relationships. I've been reserving it for Daisy."

Would it always be like this? How were we going to get things done if they kept at it like that? I'd told them not to banter, but none of them seemed to be able to drop their century of habits and rivalry.

I ruled the most lethal monsters in the jungle, yet I couldn't get these three dragons in line, not while their masked handsome faces, their super-hot bodies, and their delicious male scent made me lose all coherent thoughts.

I needed to rein myself in first or find a way to resist their magnetic pull.

Rai caught my helpless look. "Enough!" he said. "Debasing each other won't win you any points with Daisy. We've sworn the blood oath to share and respect the same mate if she'll have us. Can you at least pretend—"

"Pretend?" I asked, displeasure laced in my voice.

Rai ran his large hand through his clean-cut, gold-tinted brown hair. "Well, I meant they should pretend to be good at working with each other or liking each other. I think that's the only solution for all three of us to share the same space without killing each other."

"That will be difficult, but for Daisy's sake, I can pretend to liking you dudes," Blaze grunted.

Iokul didn't sneer this time. I bet he was thinking the same from his brooding look.

Rai appeared happy at the solution. "Now, will you gentlemen leave the scene and go back to the ship?"

"Why?" Blaze asked. "And what made you our leader to give us orders?"

"And since when have you appointed yourself that role?" Iokul demanded.

"Haven't I said 'pretend'?" Rai asked exasperatedly.

"I can surely pretend, but I'm not leaving Daisy defenseless here," Blaze said. "I'll never leave my woman unguarded."

I was hardly unguarded. I had been on my own for a long time and knew exactly how to take care of myself. And I wasn't really his woman. But if I got into this argument with him, then I might just fall into the trap of siding with one dragon and disheartening the others. As the three of them seemed unable to agree on anything, I wasn't going to get involved in their quarrel.

Iokul braced his legs apart and planted his feet firmly on where he was, which just told everyone that he wasn't going anywhere either.

"I'm not going to steal Daisy from any of you," Rai sighed. "She kissed you both except me, so it's my turn to kiss her and end this curse of hers. This will benefit all of us."

"Then kiss Daisy now," said Blaze. "It takes a second to peck on her lips."

"Only if Daisy agrees to participate and let you kiss her," Iokul said, flashing me an icy smile.

"I'm not just going to peck on her lips," Rai said. "That's discourteous. Daisy isn't some random woman. She's the mate I choose. Our first kiss must be memorable and remarkable. And it'll be the most significant if my kiss proves to be the last kiss of her true loves." He gazed at me, suddenly uncertain. Then he shook his head, trying to shake off the shadow of doubts. "Anyway, I need to get into the mood."

"If you aren't in the mood to kiss the most desirable woman," Blaze said, "then you're not *it*. I'm in the mood to kiss Daisy any second of the day. I'm like an arrow on nock, ready to go. I can hold her in my arms and kiss her all day long."

My heart fluttered, my face flushed, and my eyes brightened at the promise. Blaze was full of fire and passion. I'd learned that from his kiss.

Iokul inched toward me as well, either ready to hug me, or shove his

brother away. Ice was ready to take on fire in every way. “I can pleasure Daisy like no other,” he purred.

My face flamed hotter, remembering how he had fucked me in the spring pool. It had felt more than amazing when his cock thrust deep inside me with an ice dragon’s power.

He gave me a meaningful, lopsided smile, sharing a private moment with me.

“Stop!” Rai roared. “Do not twist my words. What I meant by getting in the mood was that I needed some privacy with Daisy. I’m going to take my time and relish kissing Daisy. It can’t be rushed.”

“Too bad, brother,” Iokul said before Blaze could also come up with an objection. “When you got us to swear the blood oath, you sealed your fate. Our fated mate doesn’t belong to you only. She belongs to all of us.”

Were they so sure that I was their fated mate? They’d said that they’d scented that I was the one. I didn’t smell them the way they had smelled me, but then I’d reacted to all of them like my body was on fire.

And why had I also responded to Elvey equally strongly if three true loves were all that was required?

“Well said, Iokul.” Blaze nodded in approval, and Iokul sent him an appreciative look. I had an inkling that it might be the first time the two had ever agreed. “You want to do this, Rai, you do it in front of all of us. Privacy among us isn’t a privilege anymore.”

Caught in his own net, Rai sighed in resignation. “Damn you! At least back off a few steps and give us some space.”

Blaze and Iokul folded their arms across their chests and retreated two steps exactly, keeping their attention on me.

Rai heaved a sigh again and gazed at me with tenderness. “Daisy, may I kiss you?”

At this point, my patience had grown thin. It wasn’t like I could stay a Fae as long as I wanted. I was running out of time. If he didn’t act in the next minute, I’d just grab him and kiss him to get it over with.

I stepped toward him, and his tempting sapphire eyes brightened.

Rai pulled me into his arms and crushed me against his hard, warm chest. I let out a hitched breath at the sensation of being embraced by such a strong warrior. His minty breath made my skin tinkle with desire, and without another word, he slanted his mouth over mine.

It was gentle and light before it become heavy, deep, and demanding.

At his dominant urging, I parted my lips to receive him, and he thrust his tongue into my mouth, at first leisurely, then growing more possessive.

My tongue met his, and they entwined. Pleasure buzzed in my bloodstream.

I tasted lightning and thunder in him. I wanted to join him and fly high into his storm. He pressed me tighter against him even though there was no extra space between us, his fingers lacing into my hair and the heel of his palm anchoring the base of my skull.

Tiny shocks of pleasure rippled through me until heat rose in my belly and spread all over.

I forgot the whole world, except Rai, as I drank in his scent. He was the home I hadn't visited for centuries.

I curved my arms around his neck, kissing him back with abandon.

We soared together, and the liquid fire twirled around the tender flesh between my thighs.

I moaned at the pleasure and whimpered at an urgent need—my pussy needed to be filled with his cock.

A low, hoarse grunt rumbled in Rai's chest. I could sense the stir of his dragon, yet he couldn't release it yet, not while we were all cursed.

But his dragon had awoken and wanted to be freed. It fought to come out to play.

I heard more growls and half-opened an eye.

There were two other dragons in the room, their nostrils flaring and their eyes filling with primal lust.

My pheromones had affected them, and they all wanted me desperately right this second.

Rai's sapphire eyes glowed, and the next instant, he removed the cloak wrapped around my body, his hand cupping my heavy breast.

I arched my back, my breasts pressing hard into him, and I ground against his hard bulge. I didn't catch how he had moved us while the unbridled lust rode me in full force—the next second, I was in the stream with him.

All the better, he was as naked as I.

A tattoo of a storm-gray dragon spitting lightning spread on his body. It was magnificent and beautiful. I was certain it was his dragon form.

I traced the dragon on his broad, muscled chest all the way to his hard abs with appreciation, and Rai let out a low, sexy groan.

"It reminds me of who I used to be," he said, "so I'll keep fighting until I

dig out my enemy and get this curse off me.”

The easiest way for the dragon princes to rid of their curses and return to their glorious dragon form was to slay me, yet they’d all refused to take that route. Instead of being my hunters, they’d become my protectors.

I pressed against him, and his cock dug into my belly.

Would he fuck me in front of his brothers?

I hadn’t expected to go this far with all of them, but it had gotten out of control. Our lust was thick in every corner of the room, whipping through the air that we breathed in and out.

The mating frenzy had taken over all of us and raced in our bloodstream.

I moaned, my hand finding his hard cock. It was so big I believed I would need two hands. I half-wrapped his shaft and pumped its length up and down. My thumb flicked over the slit on its crown at every pass.

Rai groaned that harsh, male sound, his dark sapphire eyes heavy-lidded.

“Daisy, sweetheart,” Rai whispered against my lips. “Even if I’m proved unworthy to be one of your true loves, I’ll still guard you with my last breath.”

Then I noticed a second dragon dropped into the pool with us.

Blaze trod toward us in the water, hard muscles flexing on his broad chest and powerful legs.

His cock was even larger than Rai’s, though slightly shorter and straighter. Rai’s cock was long and slightly arched.

Both strong, beautiful cocks jerked aggressively. They both wanted to penetrate me desperately. Part of me was giddy with lustful drunkenness, yet the other part spiked with anxiety.

How would I handle two cocks? And what if the ice dragon also joined us?

As I raised my head and scanned my surroundings, I found Iokul at the entrance, guarding us. His eyes burned with intense lust, his knuckles turning white on the hilt of his sword to remind him of his duty. At least one of us kept a cool head, and it had to be him, the dragon who still had ice in his veins.

But his icy exterior couldn’t fool me.

I felt his need even from the distance. I felt how much he wanted to come to me, sticking his cock into my pussy, and finishing what we’d started last time. But he held his ground. While I was having such carnal pleasure entangled with his brothers, he needed to keep me safe.

As both Rai and Blaze pressed against me—one from the front, one rubbing his cock on my butt cheek—I was suddenly shocked to realize that it seemed that Iokul and I suddenly had a mental link, as I could feel his need, longing, and ache.

I wanted to go to him and have him in my embrace.

If he wasn't my mate, there was no way we could have this connection.

Blaze's pre-cum wetting my butt and Rai's fingers kneading my taut pink nipple brought me back to them.

It had been agreed that we would do this together.

Rai and Blaze had their hands all over me, exploring me, but they didn't fight for dominance between them anymore.

I wheeled around to face Blaze, parting my legs wider for Rai.

Without missing a beat, Rai moved forward. His hands on my hips, he lifted me up as if I weighed like a feather. The next, his cock pushed between my folds and all the way through.

Just like that, I had a large, hard cock buried deep inside me.

Before a sweet moan of pleasure escaped my lips, Blaze enveloped them with his mouth. He kissed me sensually, slowly, in order to savor me, unlike how he had kissed me before. His lips tasted like honeysuckle, and I couldn't get enough of his addictive taste.

My hands landed on his massive shoulders as he supported part of my weight.

A force drove into me from behind as Rai thrust hard into my depth.

I cried out against Blaze's lips as Rai pumped in and out of my pussy repeatedly, his shaft filling me and stretching me. I could feel the muscles of my walls clenching hard around his cock.

Rai groaned, not of complaint but of intense pleasure.

"Your pussy is so hot and tight, sweetheart," he whispered in my ear, his cock driving back into my core, harder and faster.

Blaze's lips left mine, and I protested.

"You'll have your share, babe," he said roughly. His molten-gold eyes stared at me with the hottest fire of lust. He wanted to penetrate me this moment as well, but his brother had taken the spot.

My body trembled at the rapid rhythms of Rai's thrusts, pleasure spreading from the depth of my narrow passage to every part of my body. I gasped hoarsely when Blaze lowered his mouth to my tender breast and suckled. His hands skimmed over my slim waist, one slipping down to circle

my sensitive nub with delicate strokes, the other moving up to cup my unattended breast and knead on the flesh. He pinched my nipple between his thumb and his forefinger at the same time his teeth pierced into my other breast. His strokes over my clit increased, as did Rai's relentless pounding into my wet heat. With every stroke of his cock, he hit that sweet spot inside me, bringing me closer and closer to climax. The pleasure these two men lavished me drove me to the brink of mindless ecstasy.

What would it be like if the ice prince joined us?

But I doubted my body would be able to withstand more pleasure. I sucked in a breath and threw my head back. My peripheral vision caught Iokul pacing restlessly around the pool, like a caged dragon in lust.

His icy eyes glowed with burning desire. His hand held his longsword, ready for any nasty surprises that might charge into the chamber; his other hand rubbed the huge bulge under his armor.

Through our link, I knew he understood he couldn't join us while he was on guard duty, while we were on a perilous planet, and while his brothers and I were mating on borrowed time. Knowing was one thing, his emotions was something entirely different. My mating with his brother was driving Iokul to the brink of insanity.

Why did I have the link with only him but not the other two princes who were pleasuring me so intensely? Did my heart go to Iokul because he was the one who suffered now?

Another wave of pleasure rippled through me as Rai slammed his cock to my heated core.

I needed to lie down to better process the overwhelming sensations, but the two men held me captive at their mercy.

I cried out at waves of pleasure, and Rai's cock grew only harder in me.

His silky, thick manhood pounded between my thighs relentlessly, its every inch hitting my slick center, as he plunged through my heat with his dragon's vigor.

He was lightning and thunder, and I felt the power in my depth as he pushed through to it again and again to claim me.

Heat flowed in me like burning lava, yet it didn't burn me, for I was a dragon as well.

My dragon stirred in me, wanting more than anything to break the curse that had sent her into the cage for centuries. She wanted to roam the sky again.

But she couldn't come out while she was still shackled by black magic.

Rai put my feet down on the stream bed, somehow knowing that was what I needed, his cock never missing a beat as he thrust smoothly into me. His legs bent to fit my length, and when he propelled forward, his taut balls slammed into my flesh.

My tears burst out at the layers of pleasure. It was too much, too intense, yet I wanted more. Maybe if I pushed the limits, my dragon would break through.

As Rai delivered more powerful thrusts that rendered me boneless, I moaned and sobbed. "It's so good, Rai. More! Please."

"I'll give you more, woman!" Rai said. "I'll give you all I have!"

Rai thrust into me with blinding speed and savage need, his breath heaving out of him in heavy gasps.

I moaned breathlessly. I was going to come soon, but I didn't want this to end.

Blaze dropped to one knee before me, his hands gripping my thighs, while Rai's fingers moved to knead my nipple.

Blaze's head was now under the water, and his tongue flicked at my swollen clit, licking, and twirling around it. I let out a cry and my leg jerked at the intense sensation when he closed his lips around my clit and sucked.

I could no longer hold back. When Rai pumped ferocious, short thrusts blending with powerful long ones, the latch in me broke open. My pussy clenched Rai's cock mercilessly, pulsing and convulsing and milking.

He roared as he emptied himself in me, lightning and thunder flashing across the room.

My monster howled outside, and Iokul was at the entrance instantly. I immediately sent the pictures to my guards to assure them I was safe and ordered them to keep safeguarding the door to my chamber.

My orgasm lingered longer than I thought it could be, and Rai pulled me back against him, his cock remaining hard in me.

Blaze broke through the surface of the water and claimed my mouth once more before the lightning faded off.

I moaned as Blaze's touch thrilled my blood.

Reluctantly, Rai pulled out of me and kissed my temple before he left the pool. He jumped up to the bank and started to put his armor back on to replace Iokul to guard us. Lust still burned in his eyes. He was satisfied yet now sated. He wanted fuck me again until we were both hoarse, but he'd call

it a day for his brothers' sake.

Blaze scooped me up into his arms and carried me out of the pool. In the grip of lust, he gently laid me down on a cushion that was farther away from his brothers.

Spreading my legs wide, he mounted me, lust twisting his sensual lips and perfect jaw. His hips rose and fell, and his cock glided into my willing, heated channel.

We both gasped at the joining and the incredible pleasure.

Blaze gazed at me with passion and devotion. "Honeybee, you're mine—ours!"

With that, he thrust into my secret, sweet depth, again and again.

I moaned from the pleasure, appreciating his fierceness and great gentleness at once. He wanted to make love to me as much as he wanted to fuck me.

Then I felt the coming of the change. "No!"

Blaze pulled back and slammed to the hilt, his cock stretching my pussy deliciously.

"Blaze," I whimpered. "You'll have to stop. My time is running out."

A scale appeared on my forehead.

He stiffened, looking down at me, not distracted by my scales that were covering my face at rapid speed, but at something else.

"*New Hope*—our ship—is under attack!" he said and cursed, pulling out of me, rage burning in his eyes.

His men had reached him through their mind talk.

Rai and Iokul rushed to us. Rai was holding the cloak, but I didn't need it anymore.

While they conversed about the battleship *Falling Star* joining forces with the demons' *Mistress* and assaulting the dragons' ship, I went through the painful process of changing to the Furies.

"Those jackals hated the demons as much as us. How come they joined the demons?"

"Elvey must have told everyone about us having Daisy in our possession, so we became the target as well. They know they need to get through us to get to our mate."

Their mate?

I'd mated with Rai and half-mated with both Blaze and Iokul. But were they my true loves? I had felt part of the chain drop off me, yet not

completely. I couldn't really recall the moment I'd felt that since I was completely overwhelmed with intense pleasure when Rai had fucked me from behind and Blaze had suckled my clit.

Now wasn't the time to dwell on that, not while we had a war waging outside my jungle.

My three Furies stood in front of them, our wings flapping restlessly.

We wanted a battle.

"Blaze, you stay here to guard Daisy," Rai said. "We're heading back to the ship."

Blaze looked at me and nodded before turning to his brothers. "Be careful."

"I'm not defenseless," I said through my Fury's lips. "Look at my form. I'm the scariest monster on this planet. I'll lead my monster army and we'll fight together."

Panic arose in all three dragons' eyes.

"No!" Rai said. "They want your heads. We can't fight when we have to worry about you."

"And your army is most useful in the jungle," Iokul said. "In the open space, they'll be sitting ducks to the assault of advanced weapons."

"After we drive away the enemies, we'll come back for you with the ship and take you out of there," Rai said. "In the meanwhile, don't let anyone other than our men get into your jungle."

Sending me a torn, caring glance, Rai and Iokul dashed out of my chamber.

His golden body still dripping with water, Blaze put on his armor. I sent pictures to my monster subjects and had them guard the entrances of the jungle. This time I gave them the license to kill if anyone invaded my domain, except for the dragon men.

This was war now, and the line had been drawn.

What if your true loves are among the hunters from the Falling Sky? My stone-cold logic questioned.

Let true loves be damned, I said. I'd given everyone three days to seek audience with me, and the hunters had sent only the drones that almost had gotten me killed.

Then another cold question lingered my mind. I had kissed all three princes. If they were my true loves, then why was I still in my Fury forms?

I hadn't felt the burden of the curse leaving me, except that lust and pleasure had filled my body and my mind when the lightning prince made me come. When he'd roared and spilled his seed in me, I'd felt the same joy he'd experienced, yet I hadn't felt the relief of being free of my curse.

Even so, I'd felt bonded to all three of them, more to Rai since we had completed the mating. I also had a link to Iokul.

If the three princes weren't my true loves, then why had I felt so drawn to them like no other?

True lust. Not true love. The words echoed in my skull.

Perhaps I didn't know the difference?

Blaze moved toward the main me, shaking water out of his pale-golden hair, and a few drops landed on his mask that was etched with the symbol of dragon fire.

His muscles flexed under his armor. I stared at his hard chest, regretting that he'd put on the armor so soon and fast, but in my Fury form, I could do nothing but ogle him, which only tortured me more.

I needed to focus on the war right outside the jungle. I believed it would soon spread here.

It was the worst time to have a lust-addled mind.

But when you were in lust, you were in lust. The mating call prevailed, fueling the fire in me. It had no care that destruction bore down on us.

"Daisy, babe," Blaze said, stroking the scales on my head, his amber eyes gazing into mine. "How do you feel?"

I knew he was asking if I felt any different after I'd kissed them all.

The cursed should have dropped to the ground louder than a pin, right? Only it hadn't.

I didn't point it out, not wanting to dishearten him.

All the dragon princes had tried their best.

"I think we should go join your brothers and fight off the enemies," my Fury said hoarsely.

"No, it's safer here than outside the jungle," Blaze said. "Your safety is more important than anything. You're the true target. The demons are trying to remove us to get to you or draw you out. It's not going to happen either way."

"I don't like hiding," I said. "I want to help."

"I know you do. You're not hiding. This is about a war strategy." He touched my face. "Are you hungry, honeybee?"

How many people would call a monster honeybee?

I tried to grin while answering him, but my voice still came out like a snarl. "No, I'm not hungry. The only benefit of being magically cursed is that I don't need to feed like the others."

That just reminded him that I was still cursed.

"Maybe we should do more to remove your curse?" asked Blaze.

"All I know is that a kiss from three true loves will lift the curse."

"How did you know it's the only way?"

"The words echoed in my head when I'd first come here, just as the

voices sounded in your heard when your mask took place on your face.”

Blaze’s eyes darkened, his jaw tightening.

My curse still clinging to me only meant one thing—one of the dragon princes, or all of them, wasn’t my true love.

My Fury’s super hearing could hear Blaze’s pounding heartbeats, and I read his wild emotion. He was afraid that he might not be the one for me.

“There might be an additional condition?” he said. “Or we might have done it wrong. We’ll start over and try again when my brothers return.”

“We can try again,” I said, not wanting him to dwell on the same heaviness I’d felt. On the other hand, despite that the curse still leeches on me, I’d never felt so great for centuries. I was happy.

“Do you have more siblings other than the three of you?” I asked to distract him, and I also wanted to know more about the dragon princes who had all kissed me and vowed to protect me.

“Just the three of us,” he said, giving me a rueful look. “As you’ve heard from our quarrels, we’re half-brothers with different mothers, who are equal mates to King Oriel. Unfortunately, we were all born on the same day, though Rai’s mother contested that her son was born a minute and a half earlier. The king refused to announce his heir, which only pitted us against each other since we were children.

We should have bonded like we are now, but we had our mothers, the court, our supporters, and enemies to consider when we were back home. None of us wanted to show weakness to beg for brotherhood or friendship. So, we kept fighting, trying to eliminate each other.”

A smile floated to his lips. “Actually, I had two encounters with Rai and he could have killed me, but he pretended not to see me and distracted his men to turn in the opposite direction. And once, I had an arrow aiming right at Iokul’s back, but I somehow forgot to release it.

Many of our people in the realm have been worried that if the king perishes, we’ll get into a civil war and divide the realm into three. So, when I heard the old Dragon King announce the contest, I took the chance, so I didn’t need to fight my brothers again over the inheritance of Oslan Dominion.”

“And you all ended up coming here,” I said.

He grinned. “The two suckers thought the same and followed suit, only to realize that fate brought us together to have a chance to rid of our curses. We’d been searching for the Furies for the longest time when we weren’t

fighting each other in the realm. We decided to share a ship and watch each other's back against other hunters before we settled the score among us, but old habits die hard, as we kept competing against each other on this savage planet, until we all met you and you refused to choose among us."

I blinked. Did he mean it was my fault that I broke apart their fight?

"For the first time, we united as one, as brothers should," he said in satisfaction. "We're all fed up with the politics and power-play that tear us apart. And now with one mate who bonds us all, we won't divide the kingdom. We won't bring war to the realm, and we won't kill each other. For once, we can be brothers as we're supposed to be."

"So, I'm the means to your brotherhood, a united kingdom, and your curses," I said drily. They had also said they would need to gain the heart of the Fury Queen or have her heads to be rid of their curses.

I was falling halfway for all of them. What if they won my love, but they weren't my true loves, and their curses were lifted, but mine remained forever?

Could they accept that I had only an hour in my Fae form every day? So, one of them, or all of them could only have me one hour a day, while the rest of the day I stayed as three beasts?

They wouldn't settle for that. No man would.

Besides, without breaking off my curse, I could never leave Pandemonium.

They called this planet a godforsaken place. The dragon princelings were used to riches, luxury, and power.

I wouldn't want them to sacrifice for me, either.

After Akem left, the planet didn't have as many meteor showers as before, which bought us more time and survival space, but Pandemonium, as damaged as it was, wouldn't last forever.

When the three ships arrived, I'd thought fate was kind to me at last.

I puffed a half-breath and half-laugh in irony.

But at least, it had led to me the dragon princes, who brought me the last joy and pleasure.

I would value every precious moment with them, which was all I had, instead of thinking of tomorrow.

"I'm glad I can be of use," I said.

He shook his head fiercely, his hand running through his damp hair. "No, love, that isn't what I meant. I'm not as good as Rai with words and not as

sharp as Iokul in thinking. But my heart is in the right place for you. Only after the three of us swore the blood oath did we realize the full benefit of having you as our one and only mate. In the beginning, all of us just wanted you and would have killed each other to claim you.”

“Look at me,” I said. “I’m Furies.”

Even I had no illusion toward my beastly form, and I had three of them.

He smiled, warmer than sunlight that I’d missed and craved for centuries.

“What are you talking about, Daisy? You’re beautiful, honeybee.”

“My hideous beasts? Are you blind?”

“We all smelled the dragon in you—and that’s enough for us. Your three Furies don’t turn us off. I’ve spent only a short time with you, but I already know that you have a fierce and tender heart, and a dragon treasures that quality more than anything. And just so you know, when I was in my dragon form, I looked like a terrifying monster to other species. And we three brothers are the largest dragons, except for our father, in the Oslan Dominion.”

I pulled my lips to smile at him. I knew it didn’t have the effect I wanted since it was basically a monster’s grin, but Blaze only gazed back at me with tenderness and adoration.

All the dragon princes had seen me beneath my skin.

“And you said you weren’t good at words?” I asked in a teasing tone, yet it still sounded harsh in my ear. I wished to the stars that I could have a few minutes now in my Fae form, so he would hold my hands and kiss me tenderly and passionately.

“I know it’s hard for you,” he said. “I can’t even image how hard it’s been for you, having been shipped away from home, from your own kind, and suffered for centuries. You won’t be alone again. We’ve come. We’re here for you.”

I opened my mouth, about to say, “Thank you,” but my gratitude went beyond that.

I perched on the cushion, and Blaze came to sit beside me, a gentle hand stroking my neck. I swallowed a purr, afraid my un-feminine sound would put him off.

My other two Furies flapped their wings and surged toward the skylight. They’d fly above the jungle to keep watching. They knew how to stay unseen and merge into the canopy. If there was anything, they would warn us.

As I slipped my mind into Henry’s and Sybil’s, I knew that my monsters

were patrolling the jungle vigilantly.

Blaze's expression became distant, and I realized that he was mind-talking with his warriors to get updates.

I liked his thoughtful look since most of the time I saw was his fierce and playful ones.

Blaze turned to me, showing me an apologetic smile, for not paying me full attention. The dragon warriors weren't brutes like the folklore said. They were mostly respectful and overprotective, especially when it came to a lady, though there were many nasty, out of control ones as well, just like in any species.

I believed that Blaze and his brothers were dragon knights, and that was one of the reasons that they couldn't slaughter each other to become the crown prince, no matter how much pressure they'd been under from the realm, their peers, and their supporters.

Blaze pressed his forehead against my scaled face, careful not to let his mask scratch me, before he asked, "I saw hundreds of abandoned junk spaceships in the arena. What happened?"

"Akem, the entity that enslaved me, made the ships fall," I said. "He has the power of Time Vortex. He ate all ships' powers. In his reign, no one could leave Pandemonium and we were all trapped in the past, until the Wickedest Witch took Akem out and used him to power up her mate's space shuttle, so they could leave through the portal she created."

Blaze blinked. "That's why no one could find you."

"If you had come earlier, you'd have been trapped here with the rest of the nine clans, fighting for the limited food sources. This whole planet is swarming with all sorts of monsters and criminals from all over the galaxies. The witch's coven and the wolf clan escaped this place a few months ago, leaving behind vampires, cannibal Kruids, and a band of militias. They haven't attacked your ships, since you have advanced weapons, but they've been lurking in the shadows for an opening. They'll wait for the newcomers to kill one another before taking down the weakened victors. They'll shed anyone's blood to show that the City of Nine is theirs."

Sybil had been watching them all. The band of the militants had snatched a few straying hunters and took their high-beam weapons. The vampires lurking in the shades also picked some new soldiers to feed upon. The cannibal Kruids, who were big, clumsy, and cursed with bad luck, didn't get any snacks.

The demons suffered the least loss, since they had rigid discipline, or maybe Elvey's magic shielded them. I dragged my thoughts away from Elvey.

Blaze nodded, leaning against me. Even my Fury form liked his body heat, and I purred pleasantly.

"I can see that," he said. "When I saw the urban wasteland under the desolate sky before we landed, I thought we might have come to the wrong place. As for food resources, we have plenty on the ship. Don't you worry, honeybee. I'll take care of you. Once we settle the fight with the demons, we'll get you out of here."

He forgot that I couldn't leave while the curse attached to me. And I hadn't told the princes that my monster subjects would go wherever I go. I doubted they'd be happy with the most dangerous monsters tagging along.

"Ash and fire in the city doesn't bother me," I said. "I'm a dragon, after all. We create fire and ash."

He laughed. "We dragons love fire and ash. But we've also learned not to repeat our past mistakes and destroy our land. We're a more civilized dragon society now."

"That's good to hear," I said. I wanted to know more about his realm. I liked hearing him talk about himself and his brothers. I'd ask him about my old home—the Danaenyth dynasty.

"Have you tried to figure out who cursed you?" he asked.

"Every day. I won't be merciful when I find my foe."

"I'll be less merciful when we find your foes and ours." He paused to snarl before his voice softened toward me. "How and what happened, Daisy?"

"I'd wanted to see the Forbidden Forest since I was a child," I said.

"The charmed forest separating the Dragon Realm from the Fae Realm? But no one can really see the forest or find the entrance. It's hidden by Fae glamour."

"Not to me. I found it when I was seven, but my guards were always with me, especially Adrian."

"Who's Adrian?" he asked, and I detected a hint of jealousy in his casual tone.

Dragons were protective of their females, they were also notoriously possessive. It was beyond a miracle that the three dragon princes had agreed to share me instead of killing each other. I hadn't wanted to choose of course,

and they had their reasons—with me being their sole mate, they'd be united.

“Adrian would have been my general if I'd had the chance to take the crown.”

A dark thought twirled in my mind. Adrian had been my first crush. He might have perished—most likely killed by my grandfather. Otherwise, he'd for sure be in that ship sent by the king, and he would never allow anyone to singe my hair.

I'd always been precious to him.

I'd been his heart. He'd never said it, but I'd seen it in his hazel eyes when he'd thought I wasn't looking. He had never known, in my Fae form, I had the cunning gift of knowing hearts.

Even after nine centuries, I still missed him.

I half-closed my eyes, my voice softening a notch with grief. “King Daghdha forbade anyone from entering the Forbidden Forest. I wasn't happy with his many prohibitions for years and decided to defy him one day. I desired to know the other part of my heritage, which was also a taboo in the realm. I'd heard rumors here and there, but I couldn't catch its true meaning. I knew my mother was Fae, and my dragon father died for her. More than anything, I wanted to see her, even just once. Even just from the distance.

On my fifteenth birthday, I woke up and found that my Fae magic had awoken in me, and it was powerful. So, I guessed that my mother must be one of the high Fae. I tried my glamour spell on my guards and snuck out. Adrian was the first who shook off my spell. When he tracked me down, I already stood in front of the Forbidden Forest.

It was the most beautiful, enchanting forest I'd ever seen. It was exactly like what I had dreamt about. As it called for me, I strode toward it.

‘No, Daisy! Stop!’ Adrian had shouted. ‘Princess Daisy Danaenyth, stop!’

But I couldn't stop. Its call was in my blood.

‘It's not dangerous, Adrian,’ I'd said. ‘The forest told me that my father met my mother in it and fell in love. If I walk into it, I'll meet my mother.’

‘Your mother was dead right after she gave you life!’ Adrian had called and shifted to his black dragon form. ‘Now stop where you are!’

I was shocked at hearing the news of my mother, then rage burst in me.

And I was mad at Adrian for keeping me in the dark. I thought he'd betrayed me. That was how a fifteen-year-old girl would react.

‘She isn't dead!’ I'd said as I dashed into the forest before Adrian could

get me.

And the forest turned into this one—home to the monsters, poison fog, and cannibal plants. The last words I heard was Adrian’s scream, ‘Daisy, they cursed you! You can’t enter—’ There was no way home, and I became the freak creature of nightmares.”

My heart ached at the memories, yet no tears could come to my human eyes etched on the Fury’s face.

Blaze traced his knuckles over my scaled cheeks to comfort me.

“I heard the tale,” he said. “But after centuries, it lost all of the truth. Some said the half-dragon princess was born a monster and was tossed out of the Dragon Realm. As for the Forbidden Forest, no one has ever seen it again.” He studied me. “And here you are.” Slowly, cold rage burned in his fiery ember eyes. “Your enemy robbed you of everything. When I find them, I won’t just tear them apart. I’ll—”

He stiffened and cursed profusely.

At the same time, rampages of images flooded my mind, sent by my alter egos through our linked minds.

The demons’ ship *Mistress* and the hunters’ *Falling Star* both fired on *New Hope* from opposite directions. *New Hope* returned fire but was at a disadvantage as the enemy ships sandwiched it.

Beams of red, blue, and purple flashed across the sky like a net of lightning, striking ships. All the battleships trembled and some parts of them burst into fire with thick smoke.

Every ship was taking damage, yet the dragons’ ship took the heaviest hits.

“Tell *New Hope* to run!” I shouted at Blaze.

“There’s nowhere to run. They’ve locked on my ship,” he said gloomily. “The demons’ ship is better equipped, double-shielded by the warlock’s magic.”

Deep guilt coated his eyes. He blamed himself.

The three of them had left their ships, venturing into the jungle to seek me out. While they had all gathered here, vying for my affection, Elvey had conveniently vanished. And when the princes had spent the night with me, the demons had planned the perfect attack.

Had Elvey had a hand in this?

My heart ached at the possibility, and rage fogged my mind. I’d sensed his protectiveness for me, but it was all a ruse.

A belt of vast dark rings shot out from *Mistress* toward *New Hope*, circling the dragons' ship and bounding it.

The stench of black magic filled the air—it was so thick that my alter egos shrieked.

I snapped my head toward Blaze. “Jump! Order the crew to abandon the ship!”

Blaze's eyes lit with pure gold. He'd sensed the peril and he shouted at them through the link.

But it was too late.

The black rings cut into the ship. *New Hope* broke in two. But it didn't go down alone. *New Hope* rammed into *Falling Sky* that was closest to it, before plunging toward the junk spaceships in the arena on fire and pluming smoke.

The battle happened and ended very fast.

My two Furies watched it all.

Deafening sounds of ships colliding, breaking, and exploding sent shockwaves all over the City of Nine, rocking the Vampire and the Witch Towers. At the same time, the waves hit my jungle. I felt my ears bleeding.

My monsters bellowed.

My chamber quaked and rumbled.

A stab of pain pierced my chest.

If Iokul and Rai were both in the ship, they would have perished.

They had called me their mate and sworn to protect me, and I'd just gotten to know them.

I shrieked in fear, rage, and pain, until Blaze put his forehead against mine to calm me.

“My brothers haven't reached the ship,” Blaze said, looking both relieved and grief-stricken. “Your cannibal plants delayed them. But the others—”

He didn't need to spell it out. I understood his anguish. With destruction like that, his men, at least most of them, wouldn't make it.

“Call your other Furies back, Daisy, please,” he said. “We can't afford to lose you. Without my ship distracting them now, they'll see you.”

I didn't argue, and my Furies dove through the skylight and alighted beside me.

“The jungle is now our only shelter,” he said. “We need to learn how to survive here and defend it.”

“Leave it to me,” I said.

Blaze turned to focus on finding the survivors and instruct them to retreat

into the jungle through his mind-link. I ordered my monsters to escort the dragon men to my chamber—the only shelter in the depth of jungle that was spacious enough to host a small army of soldiers.

I would use my glamour spell to conceal my place after the princes' team got here. I had let it drop in the past few days in order to make it easier for my “true loves” to find me.

Then a dark comprehension hit me.

My glamour wouldn't stop Elvey from finding my chamber. He hadn't bothered to use the entrance last time.

He hadn't wanted to harm me, but why had he destroyed the dragons' ship? He could have cut Blaze in their last duel, and he hadn't done that either. Furthermore, he'd hinted that he and the demons weren't really on the same side.

Was I trying to make excuse for him?

An hour later, when Sybil flashed a few pictures of Rai and Iokul and their dragon men stumbling toward the edge of the jungle, Blaze told me, “They've reached the forest.” Worry deepened the creases of his brows.

It would take hours for them to reach my chamber, and my jungle was another perilous place.

“I've ordered my monsters not to eat your men,” I said. “Let's see what else I can do.”

And so, I did what I usually wouldn't do and summoned Phantom, the half-beast, half-elemental creature.

He could also shift the jungle, just like Akem. I'd seen Akem's essence—a living black hole, but I had never seen Phantom's. But when he passed, I could feel the chill slicing up my spine and it wouldn't go away for a long time.

I had no idea if Phantom would help me out since he was the only one in the jungle whom I couldn't control.

But the next minute, Blaze turned to me with amazement. “They're here, right outside. You can teleport people as well?”

“No,” I said. “The Guardian of the Nightmares did it for me as a favor.”

I believed that Phantom helped me because I'd helped get rid of Akem; the asshole entity had been starving Phantom for as long as I knew.

Blaze blinked. He must have thought my three Furies were the Guardians of the Nightmares.

I winked. “The jungle is full of surprises.”

Sybil flew in and landed on a high beam before Iokul charged in. The ice dragon's silver eyes found me first, and a light of relief flashed by as he saw I was safe. Then his icy gaze swept over Blaze.

"The warriors are coming in," Iokul said grimly. "Only a handful of our men survived, and we lost three full-blood dragons."

So, not all his men were dragon shifters, but I knew all the men had more or less dragon blood in them. I'd smelled that.

Blaze swallowed, his fists clenching. "They'll pay. They'll all pay."

Rai stumbled in with two wounded soldiers leaning on either side of him, meeting my gaze as he entered. Blaze rushed toward them to help. The princes brought in all of the surviving warriors.

Rai's advisor, Quintrell, was among them. He limped into my chamber and gave me a wearied look. He'd once urged Rai to cut my heads and deliver them to my grandfather to claim the inheritance of the Dragon Realm all by himself.

Probably suffering from the trauma, the rest of the warriors didn't pay much attention to my three forms. They had a fair share of seeing all sorts of monsters during their short stay on Pandemonium.

The wounded were more than eager to crash onto the scattered cushions with pained grunts.

Rai focused on helping Chiron tend to the soldiers. The healer had been the one who had brought the medic kit to Rai and tended to my two other Furies when the drones had wounded us.

Henry, my hellhound, trotted in. He rubbed against my side with affection, then went straight to harass the wounded dragon men, snarling and stalking around them.

The warriors, who were relatively in better shape, trained their weapons toward my hound.

Akem used to have three hellhounds. Archangel Gabriel killed one, and the wolf shifter King Marrok killed the other. Gabriel's angelblade, the most fatal sword, had gutted Henry in the war against Akem as well, but my hellhound survived.

"Hurt my hound, and you'll be sorry," I said matter-of-factly, scanning the dragon men and fixing my piercing gaze on Quintrell, who had every intention of shooting Henry.

Quintrell flinched, and the men all hesitated.

"Do not harm any jungle creature!" Rai snapped, then turned to me.

“Daisy?”

I knew what he was asking and nodded.

The blood on the dragon men was sending Henry into a frenzy.

Henry, I ordered sternly. *Go play somewhere else.*

He whimpered but obeyed me. Like a black arrow, he shot out of my chamber, most likely to go hunt some smaller beasts.

In my jungle, it was always either kill or being eaten.

I could no more change the rules and the nature of the beasts than Akem.

Sybil stayed, her one wing fluttering. Of all the beasts and monsters, she and Henry were the only two who were allowed to enter my chamber. Sometimes I might close my eyes and let Lamashtus wander in for a little while.

Rai left the wounded to the care of the medics and came to me, joining his brothers on the fringe of the pool. He pressed his forehead against mine, regardless of my scales, inhaling my scent for comfort. Even in my Fury forms, I scented like a dragon, according to the princes. Maybe that was why they could all see me beyond my freakish beastly forms.

Blaze gave his brother the center spot, knowing Rai needed it.

Iokul stayed close to us, but he didn't touch me. The ice dragon had only lost his control when we'd made out.

“The demons destroyed our ship,” Rai said, his usually beautiful voice hoarse and devastating. “The pilot and the captain were both killed.”

“I saw it,” I said, sorrow filling my eyes.

“We took down *Falling Star*,” Blaze said, eyes burning with hatred. “We'll kill all the demons.”

“The captain of the *Falling Star* remained neutral,” Rai said. “He didn't join the hunt. He only piloted the ship. Quintrell said the captain slipped a warning to us before the attack. They had him at gunpoint. The demon captain Fomorian promised the hunters Daisy's heads. The demons have no interest in the Dragon Realm. Their sole purpose is to kill Daisy. The hunters decided to eliminate us—their biggest threat.”

“That's what I suspected all along. The demons didn't answer King Daghdha's bounty poster,” Iokul said. “They were sent by someone else.”

“Someone who cursed you doesn't want you to return,” Blaze said as a realization hit him, his jaw tightening in rage. “They want to make sure our Daisy is dead.”

I hesitated before I ground out, “Elvey seems to know something about

my curse.”

Blaze pulled his lips back in a snarl. “He may be the one who hexed you, and he led the demons to attack us. I’ll cut him to pieces when I catch him.”

“I don’t think he’s one who cursed me,” I said. For some reason, I didn’t want them to hurt Elvey. I felt kin toward him. But if he was the one who had issued that attack and caused the many deaths of the dragon men—

No, I didn’t believe Elvey was the villain. His hands must have been tied when the attack had happened.

“But I have a hunch he might know who,” I added.

“Do you have feelings for him, Daisy?” Iokul asked coolly, yet ice coated his eyes. “You’re defending him.”

I hissed out a stream of black fire, and the princes leaped back half a foot in alarm. “How could I have feelings for him when I’ve only known him less than an hour?”

You can’t dictate feelings, a voice said in my head. One can fall in love at first sight, and not love another even after spending a lifetime with him.

I didn’t fall in love with Elvey! I snarled at the voice.

“I wasn’t defending him,” I said, my voice stiff. “I was trying to tell you if you kill him before I know the truth about my curse, I might never find out who did it.”

“Shush,” Rai said and touched my nose to calm me. “Iokul is always the most suspicious one among us. He doesn’t trust anyone. He’s been that way since he was a child. He didn’t mean to upset you, but today we suffered a great loss.”

Iokul looked away from me, the ice in his silver eyes not melting.

“I don’t blame him.” I sighed as I scanned the wounded warriors in the room.

We were down to eighteen men.

The much grimmer thing was that even if our curses were lifted, we were still stuck here. We didn’t have a ship to leave Pandemonium.

“**A**bsolutely not!” Rai, Blaze, and Iokul almost objected at the same time. “It’s my decision as well,” I said, my Fury voice still hoarse. “Look at me, I’m not exactly a defenseless damsel, and we’re in this together now.”

If Rai hadn’t rescued me from the drones, and if the princes hadn’t ventured to my chamber to try to win me, their ship wouldn’t have suffered such a fate and many of their kin would have been alive.

“You’ll need to treat me as an equal, who not only share your joy but your burden, danger, and grief, if you ever want me to be your mate,” I continued. “Plus, what I proposed is the best way to reduce the enemies’ numbers—we are twenty-two against over a hundred demons and the hunters combined, unless you have a better idea.”

I planned to lure the demons, and the hunters who had survived the ship crash, into the Vampire Tower, before they could all come down upon us, which they would do soon. We could hold on for a while in the jungle, but the casualties on our side would be grave.

I had told the princes and their men about the Vampire Tower—any non-vampires who entered it would never get out, except for me. The tower was indestructible due to its ancient dark magic. Too bad the dragons too would be trapped if they entered the tower, or we could use it as our headquarters.

At my mentioning of “mate,” every dragon man snapped their attention

toward me, especially Quintrell, who had wanted Rai to decapitate me instead of making me his mate.

Blaze grinned, despite all the disaster today and the grave situation ahead. “So, you agree to be our mate?”

Rai gazed at me with hopeful look, and Iokul’s ice expression melted a little.

The princes’ men widened their eyes. Even the wounded stopped their groaning. Quintrell sighed audibly, as if this was even more unfortunate than the destruction of the ship.

Evidently, no one, except the three dragon princes, could perceive how a Fury beast could be their princes’ mate.

But I knew in my beastly heart what they all meant to me.

They’d saved me, risked for me, and accepted me for who I was, no matter what form I took.

They might not be my true loves since the curse still leeches on me as I still wasn’t able to shift to a dragon or stay as Fae as long as I wanted.

But true loves be damned.

I’d decided to throw my lot in with the dragon princes when they’d all kissed my beastly form. Wait, Iokul hadn’t kissed my Fury form.

I blinked. Was that why my curse hadn’t fallen off?

Would that be the requirement to lift off the curse—not just a kiss from three true loves, but a kiss from three true loves on my hideous beastly form instead of my Fae form? No one had a problem with kissing a beauty, but it would take great, blind love to behold the ugly as the beauty and kiss her, right?

I’d have to test the theory and get Iokul to kiss my scaled Fury lip, soon.

“We can talk about the mate thing after we have victory over our enemies,” I said.

Quintrell nodded in approval. “That’s sensible.”

All three princes glared at him for his interference, until he murmured an apology and stepped back.

Before I mapped out what we needed to do to get the demons and the hunters into the Vampire Tower, the men threw tons of questions about the vampires’ diet and why the tower was a permanent, supernatural prison for non-vampires.

The dragons were a curious bunch. Even the wounded had forgotten their pain and joined to question me. I wasn’t in the mood for a Q&A, particularly

when I was in my Fury form. I tended to think better and was less hot-tempered as a Fae.

I puffed out a few streams of black fire.

But instead of quieting them, they got curious about my fire. “If she’s a dragon, why isn’t her fire red or orange?”

In the end, Rai put an end to their questions and ordered them to be quiet.

“Daisy is tired,” he told them.

After another round of discussion, Rai, Blaze, and Iokul reluctantly agreed that drawing the enemies into the Vampire Tower was by far a workable strategy.

All they had to do was hide under the canopy and shoot down any missile or the drone that chased me.

As soon as the men were in position, my three Furies soared toward the skylight of my chamber and sailed away from the jungle.

We flew in a triangular formation toward the Vampire Tower. My mates' worries for me were so intense they were tangible on my wings. Somehow, as I put distance between us, I could feel the link between us all, though faint and hazy.

I made sure the hunters saw me.

They shouted excitedly at the sight of the three Furies. Arrows and beams passed us by and they chased after us down below.

As soon as we approached the Vampire Tower, we swooped and touched down.

The vampires guarding the tower tensed in fear, but they'd fight me if their lord ordered them to.

"I'm bringing you flesh blood," I told them.

Comprehension hit their marble-cold faces.

The vampires immediately cooperated and darted into their black tower, ready for a good ambush.

The guards at the gate gave me a wide berth.

We waited until the hunters could see us and flew through the door.

With their weapons thrust before them, the hunters boldly charged into the tower. The vampires didn't stop them. While a few meaner hunters turned the guns toward the vampires, the bloodsuckers, who could duck faster than bullets with their preternatural speed, snatched the weapons out of the hunters

and dragged their prey into the tower.

The vampires were smart not to sink their teeth into the hunters' necks and drain them right on spot. They wouldn't want to discourage the rest of the hunters from entering their lair.

My enemies kept charging into the death trap to hunt me. I let out a satisfied sigh as three of us flew up toward the high floors.

The tower was a vast skyscraper left by an old civilization. There was plenty of room for three of my Furies to fly around and up.

The hunters on the ground raised their weapons to shoot either me or the vampires—mostly me—but my hosts were fast enough to drag their victims into the maze of different rooms to consume them.

Angry snarls from struggling and fighting, delightful hisses from feeding, and screams of pain filled the Vampire Tower.

It sounded like a fun party.

The Vampire Lord stood at the high railing, watching while I alighted behind him on the black-and-white marble floor under a diamond chandelier.

The strikingly handsome Vampire Lord looked bored and bleak.

He hadn't recovered from the blow delivered by the Wickedest Witch. If there was any consolation, Akem, my former boss, had suffered worse fate at her hands.

But if I'd thought for a second that Desdemona was tired of life, I was mistaken.

His eyes turned crimson with hunger.

"Secure the food resources," he ordered sternly, his voice echoing in every corner of the tower, powered by his vampire magic. "Do not drain them. Our livestock are running low. Time to replenish them."

As I watched the vampires subdue the hunters, I wondered why there wasn't a single demon entering the tower. Then it dawned on me.

They must know that the Vampire Tower was a trap.

How could they know?

I recalled that I'd tossed two demons into the tower a few days ago. Were the demons hive-minded, so the two demons could have warned the rest of their kind? Too bad my scheme fell apart due to my limited demonology knowledge.

Or Elvey could have warned his demon army. As a powerful Fae mage, he would have smelled of the foul, dark magic that dwelled in the Vampire Tower.

I still had no idea if he was a foe or a friend, but whenever I thought of him, my heartbeat always picked up and my skin heated at the same time. That was disturbing since my mind shouldn't have wandered to him while I already had three smoking-hot and devoted dragon princes.

Desdemona wheeled toward me, leered at me with interest. "So, tell me, Fury, or Daisy, who are you really?"

"Who I am has nothing to do with you, Desdemona," I said in a hoarse, unpleasant voice that I didn't bother to smooth over.

"Since you're in my tower, you need to show me the same courtesy you showed the dragons and even the despicable Archangel," he said.

I arched an eyebrow.

"Show me your other form," he said, gesturing at me. "I heard you're actually quite a beauty, and as the Lord of Vampires, I do not appreciate these three hideous beasts."

"No wonder you never get the girl, Desdemona," I said.

I flapped my wings, lifted myself up, and flew toward the window.

While the Vampire Lord would live alone forever, I had three princes to go to.

I phased out of the tower, my two other selves following me with shrieks.

My two Furies slammed into me at my summoning as I dove down the open skylight in my chamber. I landed in the center of the spring pool in my naked Fae form. When I broke out of the water, Rai, Blaze, and Iokul all surrounded me.

The dragon soldiers averted their gazes, at the order of their princes.

Iokul had a robe ready in his hands and wrapped it around me. I was a bit surprised, since usually it was Rai's role to take care of me more than the others.

But both Blaze and Rai held a towel. I got it. The three of them had rushed to pick up a robe and towels the moment they saw me change in the air.

Iokul must have thought he'd had an upper hand by selecting a robe and had the satisfaction when he'd put them around me. But now when Rai wiped my face and neck dry with the towel and Blaze worked on getting the water out of my hair, Iokul gave them a baleful look.

Blaze sent him a smug grin and nudged him away from me. "Excuse me, Iokul. Would you mind stepping aside, so I can dry Daisy's hair nicely? We don't want her to catch a cold." Until he noticed Rai's towel lingering on the swell of my exposed breasts.

"It's time to dry her feet, Rai!" Blaze snapped.

"Indeed," Iokul said. "Let me get her out of the water."

Rai hurried to scoop me up before Iokul cut in. He carried me out of the pool to a corner farthest from everyone. Then he dropped to one knee, had me sit on his lap, and wrapped the towel around my feet.

Blaze and Iokul were at either side of me. Iokul tried to get the towel from Blaze, but Blaze refused, so while Blaze massaged my head, Iokul patted my face.

“Daisy isn’t a cat, Iokul,” Blaze said, annoyed.

“She likes the way I touch her.” Iokul then asked me gently, “Don’t you, honey?”

I wasn’t going to take sides.

They were all great warriors. I’d seen how lithe and powerful they were when they’d wielded their swords. But regretfully, I had to admit they were all a bit clumsy to get me dry and settle down. I bet they’d never served anyone before.

Even so, pleasure zinged on my skin wherever they touched. I had to fight hard not to purr and moan, especially when I heard hushed whispers from the men away from us. My super Fae hearing didn’t miss anything.

“She must be a dragon tamer, or a formidable witch,” Quintrell said to his companions. “My prince has never acted like that before. It’s like some frenzy seized him. I don’t even know how to rescue him anymore.”

“She might just be the one who will lift our curses,” Chiron said.

“Don’t get your hopes up yet,” someone else said. “We’ve failed for a century.”

My interest drifted away from them and their gossiping since the princes’ potent presence demanded all my attention. Their pure male scent—home and fire and storm and snow and faint pine—blanketed me like a safety net.

I inhaled a lungful of their scent and let it settle in my bloodstream.

Iokul gave his brothers an unhappy look as they took care of me, then a spark glinted in his eyes, as if he’d just had a brilliant idea.

He managed to find a spot in front of me, dropped to one knee, and gazed into my eyes with all the tenderness in the world. “You did a fabulous job today, love.” He made his voice purr. “You led twenty-one hunters into the Vampire Tower, and they never came out.”

He now turned the situation around as if Blaze and Rai were my servants, but he was the gentle lover, who knew how to get to my heart. Blaze and Rai soon caught up with Iokul’s intention and gave him a harsh glare.

“My—our Daisy—is brave and witty,” Rai said with a smile, turned my

face, and planted a hot kiss on my lips. He took over just like that.

“I think Daisy will feel more comfortable resting on the cushion than on a leg,” Blaze said, trying to pull me up from Rai’s lap.

Just then, Sybil flew in with two wings.

I blinked.

That pumped sheer will back into my addled head and some strength into my legs, so I was able to jump up from Rai’s lap and struggle free of the embraces of all the dragon princes.

“My messenger is here,” I said. “I need to talk to her.”

I stumbled toward her since it wasn’t as easy as I’d thought to untangle myself from three incredibly hot, possessive dragons.

I stretched my hand and Sybil landed on my arm.

What happened, Sybil? I asked.

Sybil chirped sharply and happily. *Elvey is what happened.*

She proudly spread her wings to the full for me to inspect.

I’m glad. But how?

Magic, Daisy!

I know it’s magic at work. I need details.

Sybil flashed a series of pictures with sounds in my head.

She was talented and intelligent. Akem had used her as his messenger. The mean, formidable elemental was now all alone, locked inside the Wickedest Witch’s ship and served as a quantum battery. He would miss Sybil.

She could also phase through solid walls, like me. But unlike me, she had no problem staying inconspicuous. That was why she was the best spy one could dream of.

After I sorted out Sybil’s information in a linear order, the images flowed with good sound effects.

Sybil had followed Elvey, who was exploring the Witch Tower.

He reached the top marble floor and stood outside the chamber where the Wickedest Witch had resided. Elvey recited a few words of Power. A visible wave hit a thin curtain of fire and darkness that guarded the door. I recognized it as the ward that had kept me out in the past.

Even though Fiammetta had left, the residual of her ward was still in place. I wondered if Elvey could have disabled her ward when it had been the most potent. Even Akem had failed to breach it after she’d ingrained her most powerful magic, the TimeFire, into it.

“A formidable witch,” Elvey murmured in appreciation and strolled into the chamber.

He scanned the room before treading to the window and glancing at the partially-broken terrace. A post-apocalyptic city sprawled beneath. Residual fire burned in some sections with trails of smoke drifting into the air like black poem.

“Interesting,” he said.

I had no idea if he’d meant it, or if he’d been sarcastic.

As if on cue, a comet blazed through the dim sky. The rock hit the wolf clan’s old compound, now taken by a band of criminals and exiles.

Elvey watched the fire and smoke surge into the sky with an untouched expression.

The meteorite hits were scarcer after Akem had left, so we weren’t in impending danger now. However, Pandemonium would still go up in flames one day.

The sonic blast rocked the tower, but Elvey remained unfazed.

Then a second character entered the scene. Sybil, who hid herself above a broad beam, gave the new one a full scan for my benefit before focusing on his jet-black horns that had to be three feet long. She seemed fascinated by his horns.

I recognized him as the demon captain Fomorian. He was a giant species with green skin. He approached Elvey with the very intention of towering over him, especially with his horns, but Elvey didn’t even turn.

It was obvious who dominated the room.

Through Sybil, I could feel power rolling off Elvey.

“I’ve been wondering where you have been, Lord Elvey,” Fomorian drawled. “You’ve done a lot of sightseeing, engaged in some unusual activities, and refused to share information.”

My bitter curiosity rose. What had he been up to since he’d vanished from my chamber in a flash of light? I hated to admit that I craved to know more about him.

“What do you want to know, Fomorian?” Elvey said. There wasn’t the slightest emotion in his richly masculine voice. “By the way, I brought down the ward in the tower, or you wouldn’t be able to enter. A very powerful witch used to live here. Her magical imprint still lingers.”

There was regret in his voice, as if he longed to meet her. Sharp jealousy suddenly stabbed me and made my throat dry and tight.

What was that for? I didn't own him. I had only known him for less than an hour without even a kiss, and for fifteen minutes of that one hour, he'd been engaged in a swordfight and verbal spars with Blaze. So, why was I so possessive of him, especially since I already had three princes?

If they knew, they'd be hurt. I darted an ashamed glance at them. The princes watched me attentively but didn't disturb me while I retrieved information from Sybil.

To my selfish relief, I could shield my mind from them if I desired, though we seemed to have links between us now.

"Thank you, Lord Elvey, for kindly lowering the ward," the demon captain said in a sarcastic tone, his purple lips pulling back to show a mouthful of jagged teeth. "I just owe you another favor. Oh, right, never owe a Fae a favor. But I don't know if it really counts, since you're only a half-blood."

I'd been right then when I'd guessed he was a half-Fae like me.

"Why are you here, Fomorian?" Elvey still didn't turn to face his companion, as if the smoke twirling into the gloomy sky in the distance was more intriguing. "I thought you couldn't stand the sight of me."

"Did I have a choice when Queen Tianna paired us up on this trip?" Fomorian spat. "And I have to listen to your lame orders while you have no care for this mission to be successful."

Was Queen Tianna a Fae queen, a demon queen, or something else? I held my breath as I worked my way through Sybil's memories.

"That's where you're mistaken," Elvey said coldly and casually. "I very much intend for this mission to be successful. I have a personal interest in it."

"I know where your interest lies!"

Elvey turned around and regarded his companion with a pitiful look.

"The half-blood Fae girl, like you, tried to trick us into the black tower," Fomorian said, obviously trying to further goad his opponent.

My heat skipped a beat. His calling me half-blood Fae had just revealed that the demons knew exactly who I was. He knew my three Fury forms were a ruse.

He was a true enemy who had come to hunt me, sent by his queen.

So, Queen Tianna could be the one who had something to do with my curse. But how had I offended her? I hadn't even met her. I'd never done any harm to anyone before I'd been teleported to this doomed planet as a monster slave.

Elvey chuckled. “Isn’t she clever? If she’d known that your species is hive-minded, she would have used a different strategy. If she hadn’t tossed two of your minions into the tower, you wouldn’t have known the Vampire Tower can trap your kind.”

“But you know! You smelled the ensnaring magic in the black tower.” Fomorian glowered. “But you didn’t tell me anything about it. I could have gotten myself into the tower and be trapped forever. That’s exactly what you want, isn’t it?”

“Even if you got into that tower, you’d wiggle your way out,” Elvey said in a bored tone. “Probably after a few centuries.”

“Do not underestimate me, Elvey.” Fomorian’s voice was laced with the promise of black revenge. “I’m not that easy to get rid of, unlike others you eliminated. You’ll need to watch your back this time.”

“Oh, I can watch my back just fine,” Elvey said, a cold smile tugging the corner of his sensual mouth, his magic tensing like a whip.

Sybil had almost flapped her one wing and escaped the witch’s room, but good Sybil had held still.

The demon wasn’t immune to the rippling power in the room and stepped back, a surprised, angry look crossing his dark-green face. “If you think I’m afraid of you, you’re truly mistaken, Lord Elvey. I didn’t come on this trip unprepared when I was informed who I’d end up with. The queen gave me a spell that’s lethal enough to subdue your power. Consider yourself warned and learn to behave in front of me.”

If I were him, I would never reveal that. It was best to let your opponent underestimate you. But it seemed that the demon captain couldn’t help himself, which meant Elvey had always had the upper hand in their past dealings. And the demon captain didn’t want to give up any chance to threaten his adversary.

I should take advantage of their dislike of each other. Fomorian for sure wanted my heads, but Elvey wanted something else.

What did Elvey want? How could I get hold of him and pry more information out of him?

Of all the hunters, Elvey and Fomorian seemed to be the only two who had known my true identity before they had headed here. And they hadn’t been sent by my crazy grandfather.

“Blame yourself for being out of the queen’s favor,” Fomorian continued. “Quit your little, pathetic rebellion acts, and you might get your spot back,

though it won't be easy."

Elvey yawned. "How long will you be content to be her lap dog?"

Anger flashed in the demon captain's charcoal eyes. "You aren't above me, Elvey. You just don't realize it yet." He then guffawed, as if suddenly he got it. "Oh, you realize it. You hate every minute of it that you're as much her slave bonded by blood as I am."

Elvey swallowed, and for the first time, rage, colder than glaciers, burned in his eyes.

Knowing he had finally hit a nerve, the demon captain chortled heartily. "You don't want her favor. You want freedom. I see. You've tried as subtly as you can for centuries to be free of her, but you failed repeatedly and pathetically. The queen will never release you, not until she breaks you completely."

An ache expanded in my chest. What power did the nasty queen possess to enslave the formidable Fae mage? My thoughts drifted to Akem for a second. Could she be more powerful than the entity? Elvey didn't want to return to her, but if the blood bond required it, he would have no choice.

Just like I was shackled here by a curse.

A hatred I'd never known toward the dark queen filled in my heart.

"Wait," Fomorian continued to gloat, as if this was his time to shine. "If Queen Tianna learns that you let go of the half-dragon, half-Fae bitch when you had the chance to disconnect her head from her neck, she'll shatter your bones until they heal and shatter them again when we return. She's probably learned as much as she needs through our blood bond." He regarded Elvey with a predatory interest. "You can't really block her through your shield, can you?"

Elvey regained his composure with a careless, yet cruel smile, as if nothing in the world ever mattered to him, not the sky falling, and not his dire fate.

"Leave me, Captain Fomorian," Elvey said formally, menace exuding from his icy cold voice, going with it was his power that thinned the air.

Fomorian panted, face darkening to purple for a second as if he struggled breathing. He seemed to want to throw something at Elvey to stop the mage's power, but instead he stepped back. "If we don't have the Furies' heads, the queen will have ours," he sneered. "Keep that in mind." Then he turned and stormed off.

Elvey flicked a finger, and the door shut behind the demon captain.

He returned to gaze out the window.

Sybil carefully preened her feathers, waiting for Elvey to step away from the window, so she could phase out of it. She was eager to return to me before she forgot things.

Elvey turned and looked up at Sybil, who perched on the broad beam, with a grin. “Hello, Sybil.”

“How—how do you know my name?” she demanded furiously.

“Your thoughts are loud enough for anyone to hear,” Elvey said with a deep, coaxing voice.

I narrowed my eyes. Was he trying to charm my favorite spy?

“Not that loud,” Sybil protested.

“Fine, but you’ve been following me all this time, haven’t you? Did Daisy send you to spy on me?”

I felt my face flame.

“I’m not telling you,” Sybil said.

“You’re very protective of her. That’s good,” Elvey said with approval. “You’re loyal and honorable. Those are rare and fine qualities.”

Sybil almost lost balance with her one wing. She moved to a lower beam but nodded solemnly. “I’m loyal and honorable. My former master abandoned me, but Queen Fury will never desert me. She gave her word! She’s honorable, too.”

“It takes one to know one.”

Sybil chirped happily in agreement.

No one could easily spot her presence without her showing herself to them, and no one had ever spoken to her and treated her with fondness, except I, and now Elvey.

She obviously appreciated his flattery.

“Come here, Sybil. Let me take a look at your wing. I might fix you.”

“I’m not going to trust a stranger,” Sybil said.

Elvey laughed his rich, silver laughter. “I’m hardly a stranger. I was with Daisy the other day. If it wasn’t for the rude dragons, who have a penchant of spoiling everything, she would have graced me with a kiss.”

Sybil giggled. “The dragons don’t know they’re rude.”

I blinked. I didn’t know that she could giggle.

Elvey sighed. “Maybe you’ll teach them manners?”

Sybil pondered. “I probably will.”

I smelled trouble.

“Now come here, Sybil,” Elvey said.

Sybil flapped her wing, dove, and landed on Elvey’s strong arm. While she tilted her head to study him, he stroked the stump of her broken wing gently.

“Who did this to you?” Anger laced in his voice.

“Archangel Gabriel. I used to be Akem’s mouthpiece. The Archangel didn’t like what I said about his witch mate, so he hurt me.”

“Son of a bitch! When I meet him—”

“He left to the stars. They say there are lots of stars in another part of the universe. When Queen Fury leaves, she’ll take me and all her monsters with her.”

“How about I help her leave?”

“You will do that?”

Elvey smiled at Sybil, and she was stunned by his even, white teeth.

A light, the color of peach, glowed around Sybil’s wing stump. Like a miracle, her wing grew back with the light until it reached full length.

I pulled out of her memories.

She now waited for me to absorb the information and pecked my arm with her beak before turning to preen her shiny, white feathers.

This Elvey is a very nice man, she insisted as she gazed at me meaningfully. And super-hot. I hope you don’t hurt him.

I’m not going to eat him.

You know what I mean, Sybil said. And he requested your audience, Queen Daisy Fury.

It took me a while to convince my mates to let me go meet Elvey. I could just sneak out to see Elvey, but I didn't want to go around them in secret.

We had a relationship now, all of us, and for this to work, there should be no lies between us.

"It's necessary to meet with Elvey," I told the princes. "We need to find out the demons' next move. Second, we have no ship. And third, I believe Elvey knows about my curse." I didn't offer my final reason—I craved to see him.

Elvey's condition for the meeting was that I came alone.

The dragon princes then counter-proposed that he came to my high chamber alone.

Elvey refused.

The dragon princes were firm that I would not meet the warlock anywhere outside the jungle.

Sybil flew back and forth between Elvey and me as our messenger, more than happy to test the strength of her new wing.

In the end, we settled the meeting place at the north fringe of the forest that was opposite of the demons' ship. I could fly there in less than fifteen minutes at high speed, or have Phantom shift me, and distance was not a concern for Elvey, since he could teleport.

But I didn't want to ask Phantom for a second favor.

When I flew across the forest to the north boundary, Elvey was already there, standing under the blossoms of a row of black trees.

On Pandemonium, there wasn't a change of seasons. It was like autumn here all year long. Leaves didn't fall heavily, and the black blossoms stayed on the black trees forever. It was like we were in a darkly twisted magical land.

Even standing in the shade of the forest, Elvey looked stunning.

He wore a white shirt that stretched over his hard-muscled chest and a pair of black pants. I suddenly wondered how he would look in his nakedness before I scolded myself immediately. I had three of the hottest men devoted to me already. Why did I keep pining for Elvey? Was it because he was unattainable?

I frowned at myself.

I'd scouted this place the night before and left a white flowery robe on a high branch. As I changed to my Fae form in the air, I grabbed the robe, shrugged it on swiftly, and landed several yards before Elvey.

I took a moment to swallow the pain of my change, and Elvey gave me the moment.

"Daisy, you came," he said softly, smiling at me. His eyes, both young and ancient, shone with delight at the sight of me.

As his gaze traveled up my body, I felt as giddy as a drunk, as if my every lungful of air was filled with the most delectable wine. My heart stuttered. Had he enchanted me?

I stopped inhaling for a few seconds, but the wine was already in my bloodstream.

He held out a hand toward me, and I strode eagerly toward him, wanting to touch him more than anything. The wind tousled his lavender curls, and he looked so fetching and harmless. His sexual appeal was harshly dangerous yet irresistible.

I realized just how much I wanted him, the air thick with my desire.

I believed that he knew it, too, since a smile danced like caressing fire in his bedroom eyes.

I stopped myself halfway as a faint warning chimed in my head. *Once I took his hand, I might not have my own mind left.*

How could I forget that I was facing a formidably powerful sorcerer, who might have made a career out of seducing females of all ranks?

And I remembered how his light touch had felt on my skin. Ever since

he'd exited dramatically from my chamber, I'd been dreaming of having his kiss, even though I'd kissed all the princes and all their kisses were like they'd imprinted me.

Why did I always crave more?

It was like I had unwisely persuaded myself to overcompensate myself for the depravity of all those centuries.

Daisy, I warned myself sternly, don't let your eyes wander. Don't let your heart desire what's not supposed to be yours. Do what you came here to do—get the information and get out.

"What do you want, Elvey?" I asked.

His smirk departed as quickly as the last winter sunlight, and I regretted my unkind tone. His face became serious, yet starlight still twirled in his eyes.

I could not crush this man's spirit.

"You," he said.

I blinked.

"*You* are all I want," he added fiercely. "Nothing else and no one else. I've been looking for you for a very long time, longer than you'll believe."

I was so taken aback that I was speechless, and heat rose to my skin, tingling all over. This time it was no different—there was unmistakable, thick chemistry between us.

"Why?" I demanded. "Why have you been looking for me? And for how long?"

"From the day you disappeared," he said.

"Did you have something to do with that? Were you in the Forbidden Forest that day? I caught a figure in the shadow before I was suddenly in this jungle!"

"Slow down, Daisy darling." He muffled an amused chuckle. "I don't even know where to begin with you throwing so many questions at me so forcefully at the same time."

Anger swept into me. There was nothing to be amused about when centuries of my life had been spent as a slave and trapped in the Furies' bodies.

"Why don't you start with the basics?" I sneered. "Do you have anything to do with my curse? Do not lie. I'll know if you do."

"No, Daisy," he said, his beautiful, rich, masculine voice a caress, but this time I brushed it off. "I've been looking for you as long as I could, ever since

the first time you disappeared when you were a baby. You were hidden from our sight.”

“Our? Who else have been looking for me?”

It wasn't my mother, who had died after she gave birth to me. Had my birth killed her, or had someone else killed her?

“The ones who would be loyal to you until death,” he said.

That seemed to be a long, complicated story. Elvey seemed to read my mind. “And I don't have time to answer all the questions right now. I'm not a free man, and I'm constantly watched.”

“Are you being watched now?” I narrowed my eyes. “And by who? The queen?”

“I see,” he said drily. “Sybil reported everything without editing, against my warning.”

The next instant, I was in his arms, crashing against his hard chest.

I registered what he would do next. As if no words could express how he'd felt, he had to kiss me.

His hand threaded in my hair, tilting my head back slightly, as he bent down and enveloped my lips with his.

Instantly, sunlight burst on my skin, so warm and delicious that I almost cried. I hadn't seen sun and hadn't felt its ray for nine hundred years. I couldn't even conjure it in my fading memories, but now it was on my eyelashes, my face, and my lips.

I brought up my hands and pressed them to the sides of Elvey's face, so I could have more of the sunshine.

He kissed me tenderly and slowly, as if he had all the time in the world. But I was less patient. His scent of sunlight and sandalwood and sprinkles of spring rain drove me of my mind. I wanted all. I wanted them to belong to me, for they'd been lacking in my existence for too long.

I parted my lips, the tip of my tongue striking out and licking his sensual, warm lips. They tasted like faint honey. I wanted more of his taste and his scent.

At my demand, Elvey gasped, and I took the opportunity to thrust my tongue into his mouth. What other mystery and secrets did he hold? I needed to unveil them.

His tongue met mine, dancing a languorous dance. As I slammed mine to his hard palate, he lost his casualness. He was no longer that man who had no care of the world. He took control, wrapping his tongue around mine and

mating mine, more aggressive and possessive with each stroke.

Mine, also mine! I heard his voice roar, though he hadn't really spoken.

Then it happened.

Fire erupted in my veins—the dragon fire—and joy coursed in my bloodstream. My dragon had finally awoken.

True love. Elvey was my true love! I'd sensed it. I'd felt such connection to him when I had first met him. Now, I was sure of it. The knowledge and the magic of knowing were in my blood, bones, and soul.

Then my heart sank a little. That meant one of the dragon princes wasn't mine.

The exhilaration of finding Elvey and the bitterness at realizing that I'd have to let go of a dragon prince and break his heart blended into a twisted, conflicted emotion that I didn't want to deal with now. I felt such happiness and sadness at the same time.

Elvey seemed not to want me to get distracted, and he wanted my complete attention. He thrust his tongue into me again, wildly, possessively, and demandingly.

Hotness burned right through me.

Fire traced the tender flesh between my thighs before leaping higher and hotter.

Urgent need echoed deep inside me.

It was the mating need—not just sex, but mating.

A moan tore through my throat.

My hips bucked toward Elvey, grinding against his huge bulge. I felt the heat on his skin and lips—a man's desire, a Fae's passion, and a demigod's magical fire.

I knew who he was now, by tasting him and connecting to him, by him waking me up.

I had known him since the beginning, even before I was born. Elvey was a half-elemental Fae born so long ago that he was close to a primordial. And the ancients had once worshipped him as a god, like his father.

Elvey was the only of his kind left.

And he was my fated mate.

Heat, charged with mating fever, flooded my blood.

My nipples were so taut they ached, until Elvey's hand, male and powerful, slipped into my robe to cup my breast and knead my flesh, one then the other, to release some pressure.

The heaviest pressure was inside my heated passage and only his cock could release it.

My clit had never been so heavy, full, and throbbing in need. My folds were wet and swollen.

I wanted, *needed*, his cock inside my pussy now.

“Elvey, I want—”

“Shush,” he murmured, his velvet voice thick with lust. “I know what you want. I want it more than you, more than the world, but it isn’t time.”

The jungle spun around me.

Was it shifting now? Did Phantom choose this time to play the prank with me? Akem loved nasty jokes, but Phantom was usually too somber for any joke.

I opened my eyes, and I wasn’t in the jungle anymore.

I glided in an open great hall of marble tiles, pillars of emerald, and arching ceilings that let the light shine in. Part of hall was modern and luxury, the other part merged seamlessly with a silvery forest.

The scent of faint blossoms and spring and sunlight floated to me.

Elvey wrapped his strong arms around me, dancing with me in the center of the hall without an audience. There wasn’t music in the room, but I heard flowing violins in my head.

Weren’t we kissing?

But I wasn’t disappointed in dancing either. I hadn’t danced for a long time. Yet I couldn’t remember why. Then I realized that I couldn’t remember anything from the past beyond this point. I shook my head. It didn’t matter—the past or the future mattered no more—as long as I had such a powerful, gorgeous man holding me, desiring me.

I was only worried that I hadn’t danced for a while, though I didn’t recall for how long. I was rusty. I’d embarrass myself if I stumbled or stepped on his toe, but I found that concern was unnecessary. Elvey was more than an exceptional dancer, and he made sure I’d never slip.

I waltzed with him gracefully, completely in sync with the music that only we could hear. The hem of my gown twirled and flowed.

Then I noticed I was wearing a low-cut, elegant pale green gown that showed one-third of my full creamy breasts. It was a lovely dress. Had I picked it? It went well with my sunset-red curls. My head felt a bit heavy. Then through the mirror-like glass, I spotted a diamond and silver crown atop my head.

Why was I wearing a crown? And it wasn't a dragon crown.

When Elvey, smiling at me so gorgeously and generously, spun me next in his arms, I saw the throne of gold and rubies on a raised dais at the far end of the hall.

Not the hall of my Dragon Realm.

It was a dream. I was in a dream.

"It's not a dream, my dearest," Elvey whispered in my ear. His minty breath and rich, dominant male scent made me hard to think straight. "It's the future, if you want it."

I wanted it, and I wanted Elvey more.

I needed to kiss him, as we'd done before the dance.

I traced my thumb over his lower lip before I felt a sudden chill slicing up my spine. I got this horrible feeling whenever Akem was around. Akem? Who was he?

My mind felt foggy, yet tiny hairs on the back of my neck all stood up as an invading, sinister force creeping up on us.

Something was wrong.

There was evil here, lurking in the shadows, watching Elvey and me. It was worse than Akem—a concept of horror in my psyche, though I couldn't recall much.

No, I needed to remember. I refused to wrap myself inside the bubble. I had to fight whatever evil was here before it devoured us.

At my struggle, a dim light shed through my consciousness.

I'd been enslaved by the eater of life-force for centuries.

My name is Daisy Danaenyth, and I was cursed.

And this hall of fairy tale, no matter how glamorous it looked, was wrong.

Tightness filled my chest, until my breath halted in my lungs.

The great evil here, unlike anything I'd encountered, was concealed by glamour.

Glamour.

That was it. The black magic swathed me, trying to drown me with it or bind me.

I had to break it if I wanted to come out in one piece.

But how?

Sweat beaded on my skin. I didn't know how.

My own glamour magic that I used to conceal my chamber was different

to this. I was naturally born with it. I didn't exactly know how to break other powerful glamour, since I had no training in any Fae magic.

In my panic, a light floated up from my depth. I hadn't known that I had the light, but I was about to lose myself and everything to the dark, alien glamour, and somehow the light in me wouldn't allow it.

Face your pain, a voice chimed in my head.

I've faced it for centuries, I sneered.

Then use it.

I tried to change to the Furies, but I forgot how. So, I bit my inner lip to conjure pain until it throbbed in my mouth, and my tongue tasted rich, rustic blood.

The sting cleared my mind for a moment. My potent blood rang with magic, prying away the glamour that clenched my consciousness like iron claws.

I threw my hands up and flung my light at the essence of evil where it was the darkest and thickest. Though I couldn't see it, I could feel it. I didn't know if it would work, but I prayed it would.

My light rippled out like a ring of fire.

The evil withdrew from the hall, faster than the arrow of shadow before my light crushed it.

It was gone.

My past, my suffering, and my hope rushed back to me.

I remembered everything.

I'd come to meet Elvey in my jungle, and then we'd kissed. I'd burned with lust for him. That was when he brought me to this realm that I didn't even know if it was real. But he'd said it was our future.

I thought I could trust him, but he'd enthralled me.

I looked around the magnificent hall, while pain and rage coursed through me, diminishing the lust in my veins and the fog in my head.

Violin rose again, flowing in the air.

It was just Elvey and me in the hall half-enclosed by an enchanting forest.

Elvey spun me with a triple-twirl. "Everything is fine now," he whispered in my ear. "We can stay here forever. We never need to go back. Your misery is in the past; the curse can't touch you here. You can stay in this lovely form of yours forever, and this realm will be yours. You can have me for eternity, and I you. From this day on, I give you my fealty, and my existence is to cherish you and pleasure you beyond measure."

I could hear the rest of his promises.

It would be like I'd never been cursed. It would be like I'd never suffered centuries of misery and scars. I could wipe them all clean by staying here with Elvey, and he'd give me everything I ever wanted.

But what about Rai, Blaze, and Iokul? They'd be stuck on Pandemonium. And what about Sybil, Henry, and the rest of my monsters, who I'd vowed never to abandon?

"They'll understand," Elvey coaxed, his voice velvet rich. "You need to take care of yourself first. And let me take care of you."

Rage battered me. "Who do you think I am? I, Daisy Danaenyth, don't take the coward's way out! I do not erase my past, either, no matter how painful it was. And I'll never leave behind those who I care about."

As soon as I shoved Elvey away, I broke our connection.

I was instantly back in the jungle, exactly where I had been before. I hadn't moved an inch, and Elvey had never come to me.

He stood a good seven yards away.

The whole scene of kissing him and dancing with him had happened only in my mind, but it had felt more real than anything. His delicious taste, intoxicating scent, and the scorching feel of his touch still lingered.

I licked my lips—they were full and aching.

He'd bewitched me, and if I hadn't broken the spell, I'd have been his mindless slave. I had been a slave long enough, and I would be no one's bitch again.

I'd shown my enemy my vulnerability.

I stared at Elvey, fire and ice storming in my eyes, and snarled, "How dare you!"

It would take time for me to change to my three Furies to toast him with my black fire and then bite him in two. I lunged at him and slammed my hands onto his chest with all I had. I might not have my Fury beast's monstrous force, but my Fae strength was strong enough to break and kill an ordinary man.

I'd expected Elvey to block me, but he didn't.

I was incredibly fast. Even if I wanted to withdraw or lessen the impact of my hit, it was already too late.

My force sent Elvey flying several yards backwards until he crashed onto the vast trunk of a black tree and slumped to the ground, the black blossoms dangling above with shivers.

I only got angrier that he hadn't defended himself.

A trail of blood dripped from the corner of his mouth, and my heart jerked achingly at the sight of him being hurt. After all he'd done to me, after he'd almost enslaved me, why did I still care for him?

Beasts howled nearby at the scent of fresh blood, and I put a mental leash on them and warned them away.

"You did well, Daisy," he said, giving me a small smile that held no grudge. He sat straight against the tree, pulled out a silk handkerchief, and wiped the blood from the corner of his mouth before he put the handkerchief back in his pocket.

All I wanted was to go to him and soothe his hurt.

But I stood where I was, trembling.

"I'm not hurt much," he said, giving me another guileless smile. "And I deserved it." Weariness left his star-blue eyes as a light of hope and pride glistened in their depth. "You passed the test without any training. No one has ever seen through my glamour before as you did."

That didn't appease me. He looked like he wanted to jump up and come to me and take me in his arms, but he didn't move. His hands balled into fists before he released them as he restrained himself.

"You felt the great evil in the hall, didn't you?" he asked softly.

"What is it?" I demanded.

The light dimmed in his eyes and cold rage flashed by. An instant later, he smiled at me again. "You rejected my comfort and an easy way out of this. You chose to stay here to fight for those who you care about."

I narrowed my eyes. At some point, I'd stopped trembling. Somehow, his smile seemed to have that effect on me. Elvey was ancient, and he was also sunshine.

"You took me there just to test me?"

"That was only part of it," he said. "That was just the beginning. There'll be trials of fire in your path. If you think your life of slavery here is hard, think again. You won't be any safer after you leave this shelter, neither are those who accompany you."

My heart skipped a beat. He talked as if I would for sure break off the curse and leave this planet. But it hadn't dropped off me, despite having kissed all three dragon princes. I didn't feel any lighter, nor did I feel free. That was how I was supposed to feel when the curse left me, right?

A stray thought brushed across my awareness to contradict me. I'd felt

my dragon stirring inside me, when Elvey had kissed me. No, he hadn't really kissed me. Or had he?

"Is that why you showed me all the lies and illusions?"

Something dark flashed in his eyes. He knew what I meant.

Damn it. Where did this obsession with him come from? And this time I knew I couldn't blame him for my own actions.

Was it because that glamour kiss had been too good to pass by? It had made my dragon surface for a moment, and I'd been so convinced that he was my true love.

What would it be like to really kiss him?

I bit my inner cheek again and let the sting take my mind off the carnal thoughts.

"Glamour, yes," he said lazily, trying to defuse the sexual tension between us, yet he still studied me with interest. "But it was no lie. None of what we felt and feel is a lie."

Had he just read my mind? But I knew he hadn't invaded my head. Maybe my face told him everything.

"I don't believe you," I hissed. "You toyed with me. You abused my trust."

"Which was necessary," he said. "But you got your revenge. You got some strength in your punch, my darling Daisy."

I didn't want to hit him again. "Then don't make an enemy out of me, darling Elvey."

He laughed, running his hand over his curly, lavender hair, which looked more bluish under the dim light. That gesture carried innocent charm, mixing with sexiness. My heart jerked.

His grin was gone when he spoke again. "I'll never be your enemy, Daisy. You can trust my words on that. But when you meet your real enemies, do what you did when you broke my glamour. You have the magic of light deep inside you. It's your most lethal weapon. Learn to find it again. Learn to find a way to let it out, or you might not survive what you'll be facing next time. You have enemies, who are more powerful than I."

"Are they the ones who cursed me? Give me the names of my enemies."

"It's not the time to attract their attention to you before you're ready, Daisy dearest."

I knew he wouldn't reveal anything if he didn't feel like it, no matter how hard I tried. I glared at him.

“And I have every reason for you to live,” he said softly.

I snickered. “Your own selfish reason?”

“Yes, my own selfish reason,” he said, intense hunger darkening his vivid blue eyes. Then his gaze dipped to my lips.

He wanted me, but I didn’t plan on kissing him or inviting him to, not after what he’d showed me, not after how he’d kissed me and tasted me with an illusion.

Yet my lips zinged with want, and my body vibrated with need.

As if responding to my desire, Elvey rose to his feet and came toward me.

I threw a hand in the air, palm facing him. “Stay where you are, Elvey. I don’t want to hurt you again.”

I didn’t really stand a chance if he defended himself.

The dragon princes made my blood heat and my heart beat for them, but none of them riled me up like Elvey did. Rai, Blaze, and Iokul gave me a great sense of peace and solidity while they stoked my lust. But when Elvey showed up, he shook things up and kicked the wheel to run faster than I could pursue. And he made me chase it.

Elvey brought changes and chaos.

Not exactly a bad thing, a voice said in my head.

Elvey toned down his expression as mildly as he could, as if he was trying to calm a feisty feline that had been pushed to the corner.

I had the urge to change to my Furies and watch how he tried to tame this kitty.

He sighed and leaned back against the tree. “I might be dangerous, even cruel and lethal, but never to you.”

“Why does it matter to you whether or not I live?” I asked harshly.

“My own existence and my worth are tied to your survival.”

I didn’t hear lie in his voice, but I snickered, which was part of my defense mechanism. I couldn’t afford to let him take advantage of my vulnerability again.

“I would never hurt you, at least not intentionally,” he said.

“Did you get into my head again?”

“I don’t need to do that, and I won’t do that to you. You wear everything on your sleeve, even though you try to keep your face blank. I’m good at detecting any hidden emotions. I’ve had centuries of practices.”

“How is your existence tied to me? It seems you’ve lived well and long enough without me.”

He laughed without merit, but he did not retort. “Okay, what if I say my future is tied to you?”

Despite my cold exterior, my pulse picked up.

Was he my true mate?

He met my gaze. There was such fierce longing in his eyes that I forgave him instantly for the stunt he’d pulled. He might have done that with good intentions—he wanted me to be prepared for whatever dangers ahead of me.

“Is your Queen Tianna the one who cursed me?”

A sudden harshness swept away the pining in his eyes like violent wind.

“Do not say her name,” he snarled. “Do not draw her attention to you.”

I felt a chill climbing up my spine, but I didn’t let it show on my face as I narrowed my eyes on him. “So, she terrifies even you?”

“I do not worry about myself,” he said coldly, morphing into another person who was utterly alien to me. “Do not whisper her name to give her power,” he warned further.

“Then tell me about Who-Should-Not-Be-Whispered. How is she connected to me? Is she my enemy?”

His face turned ashen.

“Your time of staying Fae is limited, as is mine,” he said, his voice hard yet controlled. “I have no intention of letting any third party look into our conversation.”

He was telling me he wasn’t free.

Blood tie. He was enslaved by his blood tie to Queen Tianna.

He didn’t want me to say her name, for fear the queen would hear me. Was she the evil that had crept up on me in the great hall?

Was she listening through Elvey now?

Icy rage like no other coursed in my bloodstreams, as if in my soul, I knew someone took what was mine.

Mine.

“My true purpose to seeking your audience today, Queen Fury,” Elvey said blankly as if someone was indeed watching him, but I could not tell, other than that he shivered for a second. “Is to issue a challenge of a duel.”

“You want to duel me?”

“In my counsel, captain Fomorian will duel any of the champions you choose, or yourself, for that matter, in the old arena of the City of Nine of Pandemonium. The winner takes all. If your champion wins, no hunter here will go after you again, and you’ll also win my ship *Mistress*. But if

Fomorian wins, he'll take your heads—all three of them.”

“What if we refuse?” I said, my voice filling with steely ice.

“My ship will bomb and burn your jungle to rubble with everyone inside, until nothing remains,” he said, his voice inhuman and merciless. “Your best move is to accept the challenge.”

“You and your demons can easily ambush us in the arena,” I said.

“I'll make sure no one cheats,” he said. Even his former smile of sunshine turned to blade now.

“How can I trust your word that it will be a fair game?” I said to my enemy.

“You can't trust anyone,” he said. “But the duel is your only way out of here. Win or die.”

A flash of light blurred in front of me, and Elvey vanished with it.

I flew back toward my chamber, my two Furies following me in a straight line. The jungle was spacious, but still didn't have enough room for three of us to fly next to each other with our massive wings.

My mind wandered between Elvey and the dragon princes. It wasn't like I had to choose between them. Elvey had played me for a fool before he'd delivered the ultimatum. He'd chosen to make an enemy out of me.

Then why did I feel like my heart was bleeding when I tore our connection off? I needed to harden my heart, so when I met him on the battlefield, I'd do what I had to do. Elvey had made it clear it was me against him and his demons.

I caught a blur of movement beneath me. As I looked, Rai, Blaze, and Iokul rushed toward me. They'd refused to wait in the chamber for me and tracked me down there.

My Fury forms landed before them, and the dragon princes were swift to brake themselves on our collision course.

Relief flashed by their eyes as they saw all of me was unharmed.

Iokul reached me first. The ice dragon hugged me to him. I was surprised. He had been the one who had mostly stayed behind and let his brothers get to me first. He was ice that had only burned when we'd fucked in the pool. Yet when he looked at me from afar and thought I wasn't watching, I could always spot the smoldering heat in his eyes.

Blaze had mentioned casually that Iokul didn't like people touching him, except for me.

He must have been really worried for me that he didn't mind melting a little.

Iokul pressed his forehead on mine, and then he kissed my scaled lips, sending tiny tingling of pleasure over my skin.

His glacier burned just as hot as fire.

So far, all three dragon princes had kissed both of my Fury and Fae forms, yet I was still the Fury beasts.

The curse remained in me.

I closed my eyes as the comprehension shook me. When I had wrapped myself in Elvey's illusion of kiss, my instinct had roared that he was my true mate. Even now I still felt the impact of that glamour kiss—haunting, deliciously addictive, and setting me on edge.

Part of me knew how the real kiss between us would be—it would be the death of fire. It would make me the moth throwing herself at the fatal flame to burn herself to dust.

The dragon princes' kisses—no matter if they came from ice, fire, or thunder and lightning—had no disguise, but solidity and beautiful lust.

At the moment, I'd made my decision.

True loves or not—let them be damned.

I had no care if the dragon princes could break my curse or not.

Our bond had been forged, and that was what mattered.

If they would have me as what I was now—one hour a day in Fae form, the rest in my beastly forms—I'd be theirs.

“Hop on,” I told them.

They hesitated.

I rolled my eyes. “Come on,” I said. “We'll reach my chamber faster. Plus, you don't want me to travel alone.”

Hardly alone, actually, since I was three.

“But—”

“We're already in an unconventional relationship,” I said. “Riding on me isn't going to make it better or worse. If you still object to it, that's fine. I'll just—”

Before I finished my words and flapped my wings to take off, Blaze mounted onto my back with a lithe leap, showing off his great skill. He pecked a kiss on my head.

Iokul sent him a withering look since he'd been the closest to me, but his brother had acted fast and had the main me to himself.

Rai and Iokul strode toward my alter egos.

We resumed our course. I'd never let anyone ride me before, and dragon princes were big and heavy. But we managed just fine and arrived at my chamber in less than a half hour.

"The demon captain Fomorian has issued a challenge," I said, as soon as they were off my back, "a death duel between him and any of us in the old gladiator arena. The winner takes all. If we win, we'll also take their ship."

Rai nodded. "The only ship left that can take us off this planet. And if we lose, we'll lose it all."

"If we lose, they'll want my head," I said. "They want only my heads—all three of them. You and your men still have a chance to live."

"Over my dead body will I let them have you," Blaze said.

Iokul's hand went for the hilt of his sword. "They'll have to go through us to get to you."

"It could be a trap," Rai said. "Elvey and the demons are the worst kind. What if we refuse the duel and fight them with all we have?"

"Elvey threatened to bomb and level my jungle with everyone inside," I said, and Blaze snarled in rage.

"They have the means to do just that as they have one of the most powerful battleships," Rai said gravely.

New Hope had been destroyed, though it had taken down *Falling Star*.

"I thought Elvey would have volunteered for the duel," Blaze said. He was still angry that Elvey had cut a piece of his armor last time. He wanted to duel with Elvey.

Elvey was much older than all of us. I figured he'd spent lots of time either on the battlefield or in the bedroom. A sour feeling rose in me at the idea that he'd had been with many different females. That was why he was such an excellent kisser, even though that kiss hadn't been real. I shook off the images of him entangled with a woman in bed.

I had seen how he fought. It was better none of us dueled with him.

"Elvey nominated himself as a judge," I said.

Blaze sneered. "No one will accept his position."

"We've never fought Fomorian in person," Rai said, "but we battled his minions. We don't know how good the demon captain is." He was always the most considerate one and liked to think things through from all angles.

“It doesn’t matter,” Iokul said. “I’ll duel him.”

“Not a chance,” Blaze said. “I’ll face him in the arena.”

“Then the three of us should fight it out and the winner will fight Fomorian,” said Rai.

Iokul sighed. “We’ve done this before. We all know when it comes to sword fighting I’m the best in the realm. This isn’t about vanity or bravery. Daisy’s life is on the line. I’ll duel Fomorian.”

Blaze and Rai silenced for a few seconds and nodded.

“Maybe I should duel him myself,” I said.

“Absolutely not,” all three princes yelled at the same time.

“Elvey didn’t say exactly what the rule is,” I said. “Three of my Furies can take one demon captain.”

“It’s the Old Country rule when it comes to dueling,” Rai said. “He doesn’t need to specify. And you’ll be nowhere near that arena when the duel occurs.”

There was no chance of that happening, but I didn’t intend to argue with them now.

“We’ll split our team,” Rai said. “Half will stay here to guard Daisy, and the other half will go to the arena.”

“Did Elvey set the time?” Iokul asked.

“High noon tomorrow,” I said.

“I’ll be ready,” said Iokul.

My throat tightened, and my lungs constricted. I turned my face away from the dragon princes, so they wouldn’t see the wretched fear in my eyes.

What if I lost him? What if I lost all of them?

“Daisy,” Iokul said. “I won’t lose. I’ve never lost in a swordfight. It’s the best solution for us. Winner takes it all, and we’ll take the ship and leave.”

Even so, I couldn’t leave. The curse bound me here. But at least they could leave. And I wanted them to leave me and the doomed planet behind.

However, I wanted to give them one last gift before they departed if we won.

“About my curse,” I started.

They shared a look. Pain and bitterness filled every dragon prince’s eyes.

“We know we aren’t your true loves, since the curse still binds you to your Fury forms,” Rai said. “We failed you.”

“No,” I said, my voice croaking.

“It doesn’t mean we don’t love you, Daisy,” Blaze said. “We’ve all fallen

for you, no matter what form you take, but by fate, we aren't destined for you."

"Fate means nothing," I said. "Fate doesn't get to decide what true love is. For some reason, my curse stays with me, but it doesn't mean you have to carry yours."

They looked at me in bewilderment.

The term to lift their curses was that they either cut off my heads or make me fall in love with them.

I knew they'd never agree to cut my three heads.

"All of you are in my heart," I said. "But you still can't shift."

I needed to let them have this knowledge that they were more than worthy of my love. Maybe all that was needed was to believe, and then their curses would fall off.

"Your curses should be gone by now," I continued. "Have you tried to shift?"

Blaze shook his head with a wishful smile. "Just like you, we don't feel the curses leaving us either."

"Maybe we've done it wrong?" I said. "Maybe there's something else we need to do?"

The princes' masked faces lit up as they saw another hope.

"We'll figure it out," Rai said. "No matter what, we'll always stay by your side, until your true loves come along. And as long as you'll have us, we won't go away."

"Never," Blaze said.

They must have spoken about this while I had been with Elvey.

"I don't have much to offer," I said. "I have only an hour in my Fae form. And when it comes to the intimacy you desire...." I flushed.

"You have everything to offer," Iokul said quietly. "We're happy with whatever form you take, as Rai said."

The brothers shared another agreeable look.

"We just hate seeing you suffer when you change," Blaze said.

And fate had decided what we had wasn't true love?

The first light came too soon, yet it was indistinguishable due to the dim light on Pandemonium. Rai had left with half of the men to scout the arena to prevent a possible ambush.

I paced in the chamber as anxiety rained down on me. It wasn't that I didn't trust Iokul's skill with the sword. All the dragons in the room had told me that no one had ever defeated the ice dragon in a duel, but I still had a dreadful feeling about this.

The demon captain must have known that none of the dragon princes could have their formidable full strength since they couldn't shift. Elvey obviously knew about me and my companions more than we knew about him and his demons. Thus, Fomorian challenged us to a duel when we were at disadvantage.

The demons didn't perceive such a thing as honor.

Last night, we had brainstormed about Fomorian's possible weaknesses and his strengths, but all of those speculations were only guesswork.

Iokul wasn't around, and I constantly looked at the entrance.

Elvey had posed himself as my enemy, but he was right about dueling being our best opportunity to have a chance at surviving and escaping the planet.

"He'll be fine." Blaze came up to me after he polished his blade. "Iokul always needs some meditating time when he faces a formidable opponent."

Just then, Iokul stalked in with a confident smile.

He walked directly to me and brushed a kiss over my scaled lips. “Wish me luck, honey.”

“Cross my heart,” I said. “And may all our strength be yours.”

I did not stay behind in the chamber as the princes had insisted. It didn’t matter.

The duel was only a prelude to an all-out war.

My monsters marched with me to the arena. We no longer had great numbers after the war with the Archangel Gabriel, his witch, and the wolves. The conflict with the demons and the hunters had also reduced some of our numbers.

When we arrived at the destination, I noticed that all of the remaining clans of the City of Nine had come. We used to have nine clans. After the Wickedest Witch’s coven and the wolf shifters left, the dominant ones were vampires and a gang of mixed species, who were former criminals and militants.

I swept my gaze over the vampires on the south side of the spectator seats covered by green moss. Desdemona and Jasmine were missing in their rank. The Vampire Lord could never leave his tower, and the Vampire Princess was nowhere to be found.

Kruid cannibals snarled on the eastern edge of the arena. They had no allies, though they’d served Akem when he’d been around. To Kruids, everyone was meat.

So far, no clan charged the other clan or the new aliens.

They’d wait until the duel was over.

They gave me a wary look, not expecting me to mingle with the dragon men. I usually minded my own business in the jungle while the clans fought over the territory in the City of Nine.

The hunters from the *Fallen Star*—only seven of them left now—stared at me with hunger and anger. Hunger because they still wanted to bring my heads to my grandfather to claim the inheritance to Danaenyth dynasty; anger because the demons had stripped their right to duel.

I was sure they’d strike at the end of the combat.

Those hunters never gave up their prey, and they had for sure marked me as one.

The demon horde also fixed their glare on me with hatred, as if it was personal. Somehow, I had a feeling that some force from another place and

another time was seeing through the demons' black eyes.

We joined Rai and his scouts and took the corner of the spectator seats opposite to Elvey and his demon army.

Elvey wore black armor, yet he looked more like a playboy with his tousled lavender hair than a warrior. His gaze landed on my Furies as soon as we entered. Involuntarily, he smiled at me, and I stared back with ice and steel.

My chilly, wintry expression didn't faze him even a little bit.

I averted my gaze, not wanting to acknowledge him, and scanned the rest of the arena for lurking threats. I needed to focus only on Elvey and the demons, since my two other egos were already patrolling the air.

From their perspective, the sight of the wrecked spaceships clustering and overlaying one another was an eyesore. I returned my attention to the demons.

Elvey leaped into the clearing in the center of the grandiose coliseum, as lithe and predatory as a panther.

"Friends and enemies and scavengers," he said, his richly masculine voice booming over the field. "We won't need any more words for a duel like this, so I give you Dragon Prince Iokul and Demon Captain Fomorian. They'll fight to death for the rights to claim the Fury Queen's heads and *Mistress*. Winner takes it all, and loser loses his head and more."

No one cheered, but sneers and snarls echoed in the wind.

As soon as Elvey withdrew, Fomorian entered the ring, carrying only a broad sword. He braced his feet apart, ready and eager to cut down anyone in his path.

Bloodlust clouded his onyx eyes.

His demon minions cheered and blew a war horn.

Iokul tossed aside his gold-bronze shield and stalked toward the ring, his narrow sword flashing white light.

The dragon men roared his name, drowning out the cheers from the opponent's side.

Both duelers wore armor that fit them like a second skin.

While I'd been trapped on this backwoods planet, technology and magic had upgraded in other worlds.

My gaze followed Iokul. He was a giant of a man, all muscles and fearsome strength, but the demon captain, who was at least eight feet tall, towered over him, especially with his long, black horns.

As they advanced toward each other, promising death, and nothing else, my heart pounded in my tightening Fury throat, and my claws were slick with sweat.

I hadn't said a prayer to the universal God ever since I'd been whisked to this planet, but now I was saying it, *God, wherever you are, preserve Iokul, and I won't whimper about carrying my curse to eternity again. I'll pay any price.*

In the ring, Iokul and Fomorian didn't exchange any words. They charged each other with their swords striking out, white blade against black.

The blades crossed each other, the sound piercing and ringing.

Both duelers had great footing and were equally fast.

They tore apart and lunged toward each other like two crashing waves. Fomorian sliced his black sword toward Iokul, intent on beheading Iokul with one swift swipe.

My claws sank into my thick palms. Blaze and Rai, on either side of me, tensed like a whip.

Iokul bent his head just as the enemy's blade passed an inch from his neck. While he tumbled away, his sword whirled through the air, slashing through the demon's armor and opening a gash on his leg.

Fomorian bellowed in rage as his black blood streamed out, his charcoal eyes turning blood red.

The dragon warriors around me roared their cheers, but the demons on the opposite of the arena shouted their insults at Iokul.

Fomorian lunged at Iokul with a sequence of combined jabs and hacks from different angles, faster than anything I had seen. Iokul was on the defensive now with the rapid attacks. He parried and ducked swiftly.

Fomorian brought down his dark blade toward Iokul, taking advantage of his towering height. Iokul spun away, but Fomorian had anticipated his move and chased to the spot where Iokul would be. The tip of the demon's sword pierced through Iokul's chest armor, but before the blade went further in, Iokul flew back and avoided the fatal strike. If he had been any slower, he'd have been impaled.

Only an extremely powerful dragon shifter could have that move, even though his dragon was caged.

Fomorian was broader and taller in size, but Iokul was more agile.

Just as I thought Iokul could use more evasive maneuvers and keep cutting the demon captain here and there to weaken him, Fomorian was

already regenerating. He was healing faster than a dragon could.

Blaze cursed profusely.

Iokul had realized it. That was why he didn't go for the small cuts. He was circling his opponent with all sorts of tests to find the demon's weakness to deliver a fatal thrust toward our enemy.

Iokul lunged and withdrew, thrust and jabbed, as if poking a big bug.

Then he focused on dodging Fomorian's sword overhead and kept attacking the demon below his waist. Slashing and slicing. It was as if his very intention was to cut Fomorian's leg to disable him.

They jabbed and blocked. Lunged and withdrew. Their eyes, silver against red, never left each other's. Iokul fought silently, but Fomorian snarled like a wild animal.

Iokul whistled and whirled his sword in the air to insult and lure the demon captain to come to him. Just when Fomorian reached his side in a flash, his black sword swinging sideways to cut Iokul in half from the chest, Iokul leveled his sword and pushed it forward to show his might instead of sliding aside.

The white steel clashed against the black sword, and both blades vibrated.

If I had foreseen that my mate would duel a demon today, I would have demanded the Archangel leave his angelblade as an extra payment to me. The angelblade was the most lethal sword in the whole universe, and the Archangel would have given me the sword since he'd do anything to get his mate out of this planet.

The duelers broke apart, but not before Iokul kicked Fomorian on the knee with a breaking force.

Fomorian staggered half a step back, and Iokul spun in the air, his sword swinging toward his foe's neck. Fomorian lowered his head and blocked the blade with his horns, sparks of fire bouncing off them before a trail of smoke emitted from them.

The smoke wafted toward Iokul's face faster than the wind.

"Foul magic!" I shrieked.

At the same time, Fomorian thrust his sword toward Iokul. My mate twisted away, but not quick enough as the demon magic trapped him.

Fomorian's black sword pierced into the Iokul's rib cage through his side.

I rose fully from the stone seat and shrieked in rage, and many eyes from the spectator seats fell on me in panic. I sneered and shrieked. There was no need to fear me going berserk. Everyone here was a monster.

My other Furies patrolling in the high sky screeched, as my fear and wrath reached them.

Blaze and Rai rose on either side of me, drawing swords, ready to charge into the ring.

Iokul pulled himself out of the black sword. He'd been wounded badly. He wouldn't last long. Blood poured out from his side.

I wouldn't let the demon captain slay my dragon prince, my mate.

Who gave a fuck about the duel rules?

I was ready to shoot into the arena and bite off Fomorian's head.

But Iokul leaped high and spun ninety degrees in the air, his sword plunging toward Fomorian while the demon was still laughing. The white blade with red runes glowing on its razor edge thrust into Fomorian's armored chest, piercing flesh and tissues, and right into the center of his fucking heart.

Fomorian looked utterly shocked. Iokul had concealed how fast he could move, even in the grip of the demon's dark magic. Iokul pushed his sword further into Fomorian's chest with a victorious roar.

Blaze and Rai joined his warrior's roar, "We won the day!"

All the dragons around roared in triumph.

We would carry Iokul off the battlefield and fix him soon.

Tears of joy and pride wet my scaled eyelashes, and I thought my Fury form had no liquid.

My eyes found Elvey. He shook his head, staring at me intensely and expectantly, as if he was waiting for me to do something more significant than shrieking and crying.

The demon cheerleaders' shouts of anger and curses suddenly turned to cheers.

On our side, Rai cursed profusely, as did Blaze and the rest of the dragon warriors.

I snapped my attention back to the ring.

A wave of black smoke poured out of Fomorian and slammed into Iokul like a black train. It sent him colliding to the ground and pinned him down.

I hadn't expected that. It couldn't be. We'd all seen Iokul impale the demon captain. Fomorian should have stayed down. He was dead.

Fomorian dragged out the sword buried deep in his chest while Iokul struggled against the foul smoke. Fomorian stalked toward Iokul, the white blade dripping black blood.

He towered over Iokul. “Fool,” he pronounced. “I have no heart. My queen took it a long time ago. While I belong to her, I can never die.”

Iokul had pierced the demon’s heart, yet he still lived, which only meant either he had no physical heart, or he didn’t need his heart to live.

Spitting, he raised his black sword and Iokul’s white sword over Iokul’s chest. “Now die, dragon!”

Howling in rage, Blaze and Rai tossed their daggers at Fomorian and charged toward the ring. The daggers dropped in midair. Fomorian raised a hand, and streams of black smoke rammed into the two princes, holding them to the ground.

Fomorian would kill them all.

And I’d lose all my three mates.

My dragon, who had been bound by the curse for nine centuries, roared in rage; it was a terrible thing to watch as she fully awoke, rose to power, and shattered the cage.

The shift was instant, and it was glorious.

My scales of blue and scarlet glimmered under the gloomy sky, my tail swept mightily, and my wings spread to their full-length magnificently.

I opened my jaw, my fangs sharp and my fire hot.

Fire poured out of me making its way toward Fomorian. Dragon fire was hotter than anything, hotter and more potent than my Furies’ black fire. It should have melted the demon captain to wax, but thick, black smoke twirled around him like moving walls, shielding him.

My dragon fire dissipated against the attacking waves of smoke.

Fomorian turned his red gaze toward me. Fear and rage gripped me at the same time. It wasn’t the demon captain looking at me, but someone who had the scent of the great evil I’d encountered in the great hall in Elvey’s illusion.

It hadn’t been an illusion at all.

“It can’t be,” the evil incarnation peering through Fomorian screamed with pure hatred and madness. “You can’t break the curse. You must die!”

Black smoke gushed out of his eyes and shot toward me like black lightning just as I lunged at him from the air.

My two Furies, who hadn’t returned to me when I’d shifted, dove in front of me with shrieks and blocked the smoke. The waves hit them, turning them to dust immediately.

I roared in grief and pain and wrath.

Yet my dragon remained unharmed.

A flash of light blasted in front of me.

“You’ll not touch her!” Elvey roared, and swung his sword with lightning speed, the blade with glowing arcane symbols piercing the demon’s shield of smoke.

Fomorian’s head lopped off. It tumbled to the ground and rolled to face up toward me, his three-foot-long, black horns dulling.

The evil withdrew from the demon’s eyes as it lost holding to its host, who was truly dead this time.

“Fomorian had no heart,” Elvey said to Iokul as the black smoke of magic left the ice dragon prince. “The only way to kill him was to behead him.”

Iokul looked at Elvey warily, went to pick up his sword, and staggered toward me to defend me.

I hovered above Elvey with a hiss in my dragon form, and he looked up and smiled at me.

“Hello Daisy,” he said slyly. “Sorry to disappoint you. I know it’s anticlimactic. A hero usually makes a great speech before he puts down the bad guy, but Fomorian carried a spell that could render me useless. I didn’t want to give him the upper hand and put myself at disadvantage, so I had to go with a sneak attack.”

“I’m not going to blame you for being sneaky,” I said, pulling my lips back in half a snarl. “But you could have killed Fomorian before he hurt Iokul!”

“What big teeth you have, Daisy dearest!” Elvey called, pretending to cringe from me. “And your breath is hot with fire.”

I closed my mouth, my jaw clenched at the insult.

If it wasn’t because he’d saved Iokul, I might have let him taste just how hot my breath was! Then I felt my dragon’s cheeks flaming. No, I wasn’t talking about kissing. I was referring to my dragon fire singeing his—

No, I didn’t want to ruin his masculine beautiful face, but I could burn away the curls at the top of his lavender hair. It would grow back.

“And I’ve always had a thing for a fierce, formidable woman who possesses fire,” he said, an amused smile dancing in his vivid blue eyes. “Anyway, if I’d killed Fomorian sooner, your dragon might not have showed up.”

I had a hunch that he was using this duel to push me to the edge to set my dragon free. He was playing with fire.

“Iokul could have died!” I said.

“I was willing to take the risk,” he said.

I narrowed my eyes. “At the risk of my mate’s life?”

He looked at me darkly. “And my own life. If you hadn’t broken the clutch of the curse today, you might never have been free. We only had one shot, and I wouldn’t let it be wasted.”

When I’d thought he could be my friend or more, he’d shown me an enemy face. And when I’d nailed him solidly as one, he’d turned out to be an ally.

I sighed inwardly. Elvey would always be unpredictable, dangerous, and mysterious, a man with his own vendetta.

Before I could further question him about my curse and its origin, the demon horde bellowed and jumped from the spectator seat into the arena. “Traitor!”

At the same time, the dragon warriors ran from the other side and charged toward them, swords and spears ready, led by their roaring princes.

And then everyone, including the clans of the City of Nine, threw themselves into the fray. “Kill the horned ones—the demons!” I shouted to my monster army.

Henry howled, bloodthirsty and hungry, and darted toward the demons after the dragon warriors.

The arena rumbled with yells, snarls, the sounds of crossing blades, laser beams hitting flesh, bullets bursting out of guns, and screams of pain.

The carnage had begun.

The vampires also jumped in. They had no interest in fighting me or anyone else. They only had one purpose—replenishing their livestock. They snatched all seven of the hunters and several demons and zoomed away. But they’d be back to get more.

“Here they come,” Elvey said casually and delightfully. “Time to defend milady.”

I did not look like a milady.

I was the Dragon Princess Daisy Danaenyth and the Fury Queen.

I roared the battle cry of the dragon, calling for all the dragons, my fire shooting out toward a wave of the demon horde.

The dragons responded with their roars.

In front of me, wings took shape, scales flashed, and tails swept into the enemies.

The princes shifted to dragons first, and all their men who were full-

dragons followed suit.

Rai was the biggest dragon with gray scales, decorated with blue. Blue meant a royal dragon. Thunder shuddered across the horizon at his roar, and lightning flashed across the desolate sky.

Blaze had orange-red scales like fire, some blue scales spotted on his head and along the spine. He poured out a stream of fire in satisfaction. Fire was Blaze's element.

Iokul was a silver dragon with blue scales on one side of his tail. While Blaze melted part of the demon army with molten fire and Rai impaled some with his bolts of lightning, Iokul sought out the rest and turned them into ice chunks.

My dragon flame lit the entire grandiose coliseum like the wildfire.

On *Mistress's* bridge, we peeked out the view window. Smoke twirled into the gloomy sky; dragon fire sparked here and there across the City of Nine.

Blaze, Rai, and Iokul, all in their man form, stared hard at Elvey, demanding answers, as did I.

I was in my Fae form; my three Fury forms had become the thing of the past.

Only my jungle monsters missed having their Fury Queen.

My monsters had chosen to stay in Pandemonium's jungle instead of leaving with me to the new world—all except Henry and Sybil.

“So?” Blaze gestured at Elvey impatiently.

“Congratulations,” Elvey said. “When you all were near extinction, Daisy's instinct to protect her mates activated the link between you. As soon as the tether became alive and was strong enough, it gave her the magical strength she needed to break the curse.

That's why the duel was necessary. Now all of you can shift, and Daisy can stay in her lovely Fae form as long as she wants.”

“We got that part,” Rai said. “But—”

“Oh, you're worried why the masks haven't come off your pretty faces,” Elvey said with a satisfied smile, his bright blue eyes dashing from one masked prince to the other. “Even though you are able to shift, your curse is

only half-lifted. It's something to ponder on, isn't it?"

"We're not worried about that," Iokul said coolly. "We'll work on being worthy of our mate. Until then—" He paused, his icy gaze on Elvey. "Why did you aid us?"

"That's a very good question," Elvey said. "But I never had the intention of helping you. Daisy, on the other hand, needed a gentle nudge to be free from her Fury forms."

I narrowed my eyes. *Gentle nudge?*

"And she knows that I have my own selfish reason for that." He turned to me, his face serious and mournful. "This is only the beginning of a perilous path, Daisy Danaenyth. If I can spare you, I do not wish you to walk through it. It'll be a very long time until you see light ahead again if you leave this planet. You'll meet evil in all veils, and I'm certain you'll choose to battle them all. You were born a protector of your mates, your people, and your realm."

"Can you be more specific?" I asked, "Instead of giving me the doom and gloom?"

The dragon princes glared at him, but he ignored them and focused only on me.

"I won't say more, as I don't want it to come true," he said, shaking his head. "I want you to enjoy as many bright days as you can. But when the days come, when darkness finds you, and when I become your enemy not by my will, you'll need to end me. Do not hesitate when I'm no longer useful."

From Sybil's spying, I'd learned that both he and the demon captain were bonded to their queen by blood. They were her slaves and weapons.

"I won't hurt you, Elvey," I said. "No matter what."

He smiled, a little bright and a little sad. The smile tugged my heart. An old doubt haunted my mind. My curse had fallen off, though it hadn't lifted right away, because it mattered that my heart had to catch up with the truth that all the dragon princes were indeed my true loves.

I had kissed all of them. I loved all three my true loves. But why was I still so hung up on Elvey?

What was he to me?

"Of course, you don't want to harm me, but it won't be your choice in the end," he said, his hands in the pockets of his trousers as he tried to be as careless as possible. "One last thing. I won't escort you home on this journey, but you'll never be alone with your brave dragon knights by your side." He

gave me another lethal smile. “Princess Danaenyth, the ship is now yours to command.”

Then Elvey vanished in a mist of light.

An empty ache throbbed and expanded in my chest, until my dragon mates pulled me into their solid, warm arms.

The crew was in position. The course was set, and *Mistress* was ready to take off. There was nothing to worry about for the moment.

All four of us—Rai, Blaze, Iokul, and I—settled down in the captain cabin.

Blaze glanced at the vast bed and grinned at me.

“It can fit us all,” he said, his golden eyes lighting with delight and lust.

Iokul gazed at me with heat, and my pulse raced at the prospect of what my dragon princes would do to me.

Rai chuckled and winked at me wickedly. “We’ll do all sorts of things, but you’ll like it.”

Ever since we’d all shifted, we were more connected, and we could sense each other’s need and emotions if we didn’t intentionally put on a mental shield.

Rai scooped me into his arms, my hands pressing against his muscled broad chest. His heartbeat pounded against my palms, in sync with my mine.

I gazed into his gorgeous sapphire eyes and lost myself in them, as he carried me toward the bed.

Not missing a beat, Iokul strolled along beside Rai, his hand anchoring at the base of my skull, and planted a hot kiss on my lips. Pleasure tingled on my skin, and I parted my lips and met his silver eyes, silently pleading for more.

Iokul smiled in satisfaction. I believed that he hadn't realized when his icy demeanor had melted along the way. But his ice had burned as hot as fire for me, and it was still burning.

Blaze walked along to my right. He caressed my cheek with his knuckles before placing a hand on Rai's arm. And I wanted more of the fire dragon's touch as well.

"Why don't we bathe our mate first?" Blaze said. "Daisy will like it."

Rai stopped. He was halfway between the bed and the bath chamber. He gazed down at me, consulting me silently.

While all three sexy-as-hell, gorgeous-as-heavens dragon princes fixed their attention on me, their body heat basking me and their raging need to fuck me, the fire licking between my thighs grew unbearable.

"Bathing sounds good," I breathed out.

Rai inclined his head toward his two brothers with a soft growl. "What are you waiting for? Go get the water running. Daisy doesn't like waiting!"

Blaze growled back at Rai before rushing toward the bath chamber ahead of us. Iokul heaved a sighed and followed him.

Flashing me a doting smile that was full of heat, Rai crushed his mouth on mine and kissed me indulgently, not eager to get me into the bath chamber. He wanted to keep me to himself as long as he could.

And zealously I tasted him—dominant male with minty breath and the scent of rainstorm. He was every bit a thunder and lightning dragon. I had seen his glorious and terrifying lightning in the arena. It had pierced the demons.

Right now, when it was sexy time, his dragon watched with interest, instead of striking down anyone.

Rai's kiss grew impatient with a primal male need.

The tip of his tongue pushed my lips apart and invaded my mouth. When my tongue received his, he let out a short, rough groan.

I moaned, throbbing with wild desire.

I wanted his cock inside me now. I didn't want to wait.

A beastly sound rumbled in Rai's chest. He pulled me up and I wrapped my legs around his waist. His big hands gripped my ass cheeks.

My breasts pressed against his rock-hard body, my bottom rubbing against his thick shaft. He groaned, the erotic sound sending heat sizzling through my body.

"I must fuck you now, sweetheart," he said roughly.

“Water’s ready!” Blaze shouted, menace—not aimed at me but at Rai—lacing his voice. He must have heard what Rai declared about taking me now.

Iokul ducked his head out of the bath chamber in order to execute their decision to have a collective bath. Rai sighed and brought me into the chamber.

“Let me help Daisy into the tub. It’s slippery,” Blaze said, and nearly ripped me from Rai’s chest.

“Be gentle with Daisy!” Rai snarled.

“We’ve talked about this,” Iokul said. “We need to be civilized and share fairly. We’re brothers and we have the same lovely mate. We’ll never fight among us again but defend our only mate with our every breath.”

That line used to be Rai’s.

Rai nodded, annoyed, and Blaze looked a bit ashamed.

I was glad they’d decided not to fight.

I kept silent, not wanting to take sides.

The three of them worked together to undress me. Blaze swiftly removed my top, and Rai cupped my breasts from behind as soon as the gown dropped to my waist. Blaze sent him a chiding look but did not growl. Iokul stared at my flimsy panties before he slowly pulled them down with a gasp that was full of lust and awe.

My heart pounded violently against my rib cage at the thrilling anticipation.

Despite the heat coursing through my blood, I shivered, not at the cold, but at their raging need that mirrored mine.

For a second, I had trouble shifting gear, not knowing which one I should focus on, but then a joyful realization sliced through my mind. I didn’t have to single out one of the dragon princes. They were all mine.

I was completely naked in front of my mates.

I was at my most vulnerable, yet I offered myself to them.

They stared at my body in amazement, suddenly not knowing what to do.

“Are you just going to stare at my nakedness the whole day?” I asked, half-amused, half-lustful.

And then they were all on me.

One hot mouth claimed mine, two hands cupped my breasts, and a tongue licked my clit.

I arched my back and moaned, overwhelmed by the sensation.

“Let’s bathe Daisy first!” Rai had the sense to protest for me. “She likes

bathing. It's why she has a pool in her chamber."

They lowered me into the water. I knew I was in good hands, so I let them do whatever they wanted. Rai lathered the soap on me and their large hands ran over me, touching me everywhere at once.

Heat sizzled through my body into my toes.

When Iokul thrust his finger into my pussy, I almost came from the contact.

Rai pulled at me until I was standing, and wrapped around me from behind possessively, his thick erection pricking against the small of my back, burning my skin.

I let out a breath. It was hot here—a dragon was so much hotter than an ordinary man, and I had three.

Blaze's hand palmed my pussy, unbridled lust ablaze in his golden eyes. He was the only one who hadn't come inside me, though he'd penetrated me when we'd been in my jungle. So, I guessed the brothers had a silent agreement that he should fuck me first in this group fun.

"Daisy, our mate," Rai murmured and lifted me up, my back against his solid chest. His large palm held one of my butt cheeks, and Iokul helped to spread my legs wider.

The ice dragon melted once again, liquid fire glowing in his silver eyes as he stared at my bare, pink pussy. His body shuddered with primal male desire, and his long-lashed eyelids half closed. His fingers grazed my breast and kneaded it eagerly.

Blaze moved between my thighs, his hand on top of my leg, the other holding his cock, letting the thick head of his shaft rub my sensitive bud back and forth.

I moaned as waves of pleasure spread through me.

Blaze's lustful eyes burned brighter.

"Do you want my cock, honeybee?" Blaze asked roughly.

"Please," I whimpered.

His steel rod brushed my folds open and pushed into my narrow passage. One inch, then another, and then all the way in.

I gasped, my mouth open. His cock was the largest among all his brothers.

My inner walls molded to his shape and adjusted to his size.

Blaze cursed. "Our mate has the hottest and tightest pussy ever!"

He started to thrust, the weight of his hard rod delicious inside me, his

scent intoxicating.

Pleasure burst in me and I moaned.

Blaze thrust in me in steady rhythm, as if he had all the time in the world to savor me. Every stroke sent pleasure to my every cell.

I propelled my ass toward him, wanting to take him as deeply as possible.

“Is that so? You want more?” Blaze asked, his voice hoarse.

He pounded between my thighs with a dragon’s strength, moving in harder and faster.

In and out. He slammed to the hilt and paused, his cock buried deep within me, then he thrust again at a ravaging speed.

I cried out from the pleasure it ignited within me.

My back rammed into Rai’s rock-solid chest as Blaze fucked me relentlessly, but Rai held me just fine. The lightning dragon gently brushed my hair to the side and traced his hot, hungry lips along the column of my neck. There were a lot of sensitive spots there, and he knew all of them, his teeth grazing them one by one.

All my mates were experienced lovers, and now they were all mine, and mine alone.

Iokul’s large, powerful hand cupped my breast, massaging it as his other hand pumped his cock. The three dragons had different skin tones. Blaze was golden-bronze, as was his cock. Rai was sun-kissed light brown. Iokul had pale skin that matched his silver eyes and hair. And the ice dragon’s cock was also pale and silky.

Iokul’s pumping quickened as he watched Blaze’s cock thrust in and out of my pussy in savage rhythm.

My moans were cut short as Rai turned my face to the side and bent down to claim my mouth. His tongue thrust against mine, mating me as Blaze fucked me vehemently.

“I want to fuck you, too, Daisy, right now,” Iokul said, his voice slurring, his eyes heavy-lidded. “My cock hurts without getting inside you.”

Rai broke the kiss and whispered. “I also need to fuck you and bury my cock so deep inside you so you moan my name.”

Blaze grabbed both my legs, as if afraid that his brothers would take me away from him.

“This pussy is mine!” Blaze declared as he thrust in me wildly.

“And ours!” Rai said, his hands squeezing my butt cheeks.

“And mine!” Iokul said, rubbing his pre-cum dripping on my round butt

cheek.

“Let’s move Daisy to the bed,” Rai said firmly, “so all of us can have our mate at the same time, and everyone will get a fair share.”

How could I have three cocks at the same time?

“We’ll show you,” Iokul said.

“Only after I give Daisy an orgasm first,” Blaze insisted as he drove into me hard. “This is the best fuck I’ve ever had!”

Blaze’s powerful, long thrusts hit my molten core over and over.

“Come for me, Daisy,” he commanded.

At his words, the floodgate opened.

I sobbed and moaned as waves of orgasms crashed over me.

“Mine!” Blaze roared and rammed through my clenched inner walls around his cock, until he pumped his bountiful seed into me.

He dropped his head onto my shoulder and kissed my skin, breathing hard in satisfaction.

And then I was in the water with them.

Before the pleasure ended, it started again. While my head was still hazy from sensory overloading, I found myself in the center of the bed, with three of the hottest dragon shifters around me.

I was a half-dragon myself and a half-Fae. I was stronger than most species, yet the three wildest, sexy dragons weakened my knees. Just as I thought I couldn’t handle all of them, they’d whisked through me like a breeze.

All three of them were dedicated to me, devoted to only me, and wanted only me. It was intoxicating to know they lusted after and loved me more than anything. They did not care for the dragon kingdom—they wanted me.

And I enjoyed each one of them so much, equally, yet differently.

My body quivered in need for all of them

I closed my eyes, not knowing whose lips seared mine, whose hands fondled my breasts before a hot mouth suckled my needy breast.

Large, powerful hands ran all over my body, exploring and loving and savoring, and every touch drove me to the brink of insanity, yet I wanted more.

There weren’t just the hands, tongue and teeth joined the feast as well.

They teased, tested, and grew urgent.

My skin was hot and tingling all over. Pleasure rocked me like tidal waves from every direction. I was drowning in this sensation, and my every

cell was basked in lust.

My eyes fluttered, my face flushing with heat.

“I need—”

“We know what you need, sweetheart,” Rai said roughly.

And the next second, I was on top of him. He glided me down his hard, long length. My pussy gloved him perfectly. I started riding him, faster and harder, slamming down to his base with an erotic sound.

“That’s my girl,” he groaned in approval.

Iokul got behind me and pushed at my butt cheeks. He inserted a finger into my other hole, thrusting in and out, slowly, giving me time to adjust. Then two of his fingers were inside me, in sync with Rai’s hard thrust.

My body was on fire. Pleasure lit me like a beacon.

Then Iokul’s cock nudged at my back entrance. Carefully, he pushed in. My muscles were relaxed because of the pleasure bursting in every part of me.

Iokul started thrusting in me, slowly, torturously, after I’d adjusted to his size.

Rai’s thrust in my pussy grew frantically.

I was completely filled with two huge cocks pounding into me, stretching me and offering me great pleasure.

Just as I thought I could take no more cock, Blaze turned my face to an angle and nudged my lips to open to take his golden cock.

I pressed a hand on Rai’s chest to anchor me; my other hand held the base of Blaze’s shaft as he thrust his cock into my mouth, the head of it bumping the back of my throat.

The tip of my tongue licked Blaze’s cock when he paused for a second. I loved the taste of his cock and its silky, hard feel.

As one, they thrust into me, demanding and possessive.

For the first time, the age-old ache and hollow feeling no longer pulsed deep inside me, and the chill in my bones since I’d been cursed dissipated, burned by the dragon fire the princes offered me.

Their strength poured into me, as they gave me their fire, ice, and lightning freely. Something so deep awoke in me—the white light, the magic I’d used once to expel the evil when I’d danced with Elvey in the great hall.

Elvey had wanted me to find and dig it out, and I hadn’t known I truly possessed it, because it was a myth. Now the white light told me it was mine.

Yet it did not fully arise but stayed at the bottom of my depth and

watched the dragons offer me everything they had.

Another light ignited like starlight—the mating bond between me and all three of them.

Rai, Blaze, and Iokul watched in awe, but they didn't slow their thrusts.

Their mighty cocks drove into me relentlessly, and pleasure bombarded me like a rainstorm, drenching me. I felt like a tea leaf in the center of it, but it didn't sweep me away. It cared for me.

They kept fucking me from three directions, wild, gentle, and in desperate need.

And when the three dragons unmade me with maddening pleasure, I erupted and screamed.

My white light bathed them for a second before disappearing, and my orgasms rippled through me with no end and no beginning.

Rai, Blaze, and Iokul came in unison roars of victory and great satisfaction. They'd all claimed me, as I claimed them as mine.

Our scent blended. We were one.

We sprawled across the bed, limbs still tangled. My dragon mates gazed at me with passionately tender feelings. I peeked into Blaze's gorgeous golden eyes, my fingers tracing his mask of a dragon holding sun and fire. Then I turned to Iokul's icy silver eyes and touched his white mask of an ice dragon dancing in snow. At last, I held Rai's piercing sapphire gaze above his mask, and heat pulsed between my thighs again.

Rai brought down my hand to his lips and kissed my knuckles.

My heart ached. They could shift to dragons now, but the masks stayed with them. "Only half of the curse lifted off you," I said. "We need to figure out why, and what we can do so you are completely rid of the curse."

I didn't mind their masks, but I wanted to see their full faces.

"We're fine," Blaze said. "We have you, and we can shift. The masks don't bother us much."

That was a kind lie.

I knew how much they hated their masks and how insufferable it was to wear them for nearly a century.

"Maybe the warlock has something to do with it," Blaze said thoughtfully. My mates had developed a habit of blaming Elvey for everything that wasn't working.

"Elvey has a reputation of playing pranks," Iokul added. "And he seems to know about our curses more than anyone. Last time, he even made fun of

our masks. Our inconvenience delights him.”

I planned to pay a visit to Elvey soon, but not for my mates’ masks.

“Elvey might know something about why your masks haven’t come off and doesn’t want to share information,” I said. “But I don’t think he made them stick.”

Rai nodded an agreement. “Maybe it means we still need to earn your love, so we won’t take you for granted. There are still tests and trials ahead. And our masks are a good reminder.”

“We can handle any trial,” Blaze said. “We’ll walk over hot coals for you, honeybee.”

“You are dragons,” I said, arching an eyebrow to tease them. “Hot coals are the easiest for you.”

Blaze ran his hand through his golden hair that had a hint of red. “What I meant is—”

I sat up and kissed his lips hard under his mask. When I pulled away, I saw the glint in my whiskey brown eyes through the reflection in Iokul’s silver ones, as he leaned over for a kiss as well.

Rai pulled me to him, his hard cock pushing up against my thigh.

Heat flooded my core all over again.

Mistress would be leaving in the next hour, but I had unfinished business with Elvey. He wouldn't be leaving with us, and I'd failed to persuade him to. I knew his reasoning, even though he didn't say it. He could say no more, for fear of her or her hunters finding me sooner than I was ready. He believed that he'd keep me safe by staying away with me.

He was bound to his queen by blood, and I'd marked her as my enemy.

I knew exactly where he was now. Somehow, there was a faint tether between us, even though he wasn't my lover.

He was brooding alone.

I had to say farewell to him, and my princes, who all wanted me more than anything and devoted themselves to me, understood and respected my need to have a private moment with Elvey.

Rai stood at the entrance of the spaceship, watching me, yet did not follow me, as I strode toward the Witch Tower. They would only rush to my rescue if I was in danger.

The gray tower was a skyscraper that was in better shape than the surrounding buildings amid the ruins, despite a quarter of its top having been sheared off, probably by a meteorite hit.

The Wickedest Witch in the universe had once dwelled here. With my help, she'd escaped Pandemonium with her Archangel mate and the wolf shifters.

The Archangel had fulfilled his vow to me and delivered my message to the old Dragon King, my grandfather. And the king had sent bounty hunters to collect heads of my three Furies. Only among them were my true loves, who decided to win my heart instead of beheading me when they met me.

They would all accompany me home and to our new journey, rain or shine. While I was comforted by their unconditional devotion to me, my heart was broken that Elvey wouldn't join us.

I climbed the marble stairs all the way until I reached the witch's old throne room. Just as I'd expected, Elvey stood by a majestic window, staring outside.

His lavender hair was an inch longer than the last time I'd seen him. It was still half-wild, which gave him a seemingly harmless, sexy appeal, but I knew better.

He wore a simple, black shirt and dark trousers—a scholarly disguise.

I padded past the pillars of red marble and moved toward him.

In my Fae form, I could be fast, quiet, and stealthy.

He didn't turn, though he'd registered my presence before I'd entered the room.

He was waiting for me. He'd known I would come.

We stood silently while our gazes met through our reflections in the tinted glass window. His eyes were the color of the stars that held ancient mystery and new promises. They held my deep blue ones intently, and I wished the light in them would never burn out.

Finally, he turned to face me, offering me a guileless smile.

“Daisy, darling,” he purred, my name seductive on his lips.

My heart fluttered, and my pulse spiked.

I thought I'd settled down with my three mates, yet he still affected me.

My eyes roved from his god-like face to his broad shoulders, to his hard chest that couldn't be concealed by his shirt, and to his long, powerful legs.

A lithe, lethal panther! That was what I thought of him every time.

He was large, but his perfect proportion often gave a viewer a false impression, until one found him towering.

I raised my gaze up back to his face. I wasn't ogling him. I told myself. I was only committing his features to my memories, since this might be the last time I saw him.

At that note, my throat tightened again. I darted my eyes away toward the window to cover my tight emotions.

The city wasn't burning as badly as before. If it weren't for the trail of smoke still twirling into the overcast sky, it would have looked almost peaceful.

"Last chance, Elvey," I said, pulling my gaze back and looking at him. "Come with me."

"I like it here."

I snorted. "So you can party with the vampires, cannibals, and a band of criminals?"

"Why not? They're colorful characters, especially the vampires. I might even invite myself into the black tower and see if I can get myself out."

"You don't want to do that, Elvey," I said. "The only one who ever got out is the Wickedest Witch in the universe, and that's only because she had a blood bond with her Captain of Guards. Kaara bled every drop of her blood to free her mistress."

"Good to know. All I need is to find someone who's willing to sacrifice for me," he said, as if that was the easiest thing to do. Then he sighed. "If I'd come to this planet earlier, I'd have met the witch."

Fiammetta was all ice, steel, and darkness, yet she was gorgeous. Jealousy punctured my heart. I widened my eyes. That was uncalled for. I'd told myself repeatedly that Elvey didn't belong to me, and would never, unlike my dragon princes.

"Fiammetta has a mate," I said. "Her Archangel is the most possessive and brutal male I've met. He slew half of my jungle monsters for his witch."

The corner of Elvey's lips tugged up in amusement. "My interest in her is merely magical. Her ward intrigues me. I've never seen anything like that. Even after she left, her residual magic is still powerful. If I could borrow her ingredients or spells, I might be able to guard you better one day." His eyes grew distant and predatory for a second. "I need to guard you well."

My breath hitched, and a slim hope rose in me. So, he didn't plan on being a permanent citizen here. He would join me in the future.

"She warded her tower with TimeFire. She can open a door to any part of the universe in any time period, and that was how she trapped Akem, the elemental who once ruled this planet and enslaved me."

"Interesting," he said, his pale blue eyes sparkling wickedly as a dark scheme obviously wheeled in his head. "What you can't kill, you contain."

"Why don't you keep scheming about containing whatever power you want in your ship *Mistress*?" I asked. "No one will bother you other than to

bring you three meals a day, if that's what you want." But his stubborn look told me that my persuasion had fallen on a deaf ear.

"It might be years before another ship comes along, or never," I reminded him.

"I'll take the chance."

My temper flared. "What can be so bad about leaving with me?"

"Do you have a room for one more?" he asked quietly.

I opened my mouth, but no words came out. He'd caught me off guard. I had to admit that I felt connected to him and I was still hot for him. But I already had three mates. It had taken a while for them to even agree to share, and they were brothers. While the four of us had just established this relationship, Elvey joining us would destroy the balance, especially when the dragon princes still held some hostility toward him, though they didn't regard him as an enemy any more.

And Elvey would constantly set me on edge when he chose to.

He laughed in dark amusement with a tinge of sadness. "That's what I thought. If I go with you on that ship, I'll only do more harm than good. I won't be of much use for the moment."

"You aren't just an ally. You're a friend," I said. "I do not value you by your usefulness."

He must have seen the open hurt in my eyes.

I had nine centuries' share of wretchedness, so I didn't find the need or merit to disguise my feelings. I did not play games. I told everyone what I wanted straightforwardly and expected the same courtesy.

My female instinct knew that Elvey wanted me just as much as the dragon princes, except he hadn't showed an ounce of jealousy toward my mates or any possessiveness toward me.

My face was an open book, and Elvey had seen it.

He drew a ragged breath. "You have no idea, Daisy," he said, his eyes darkening to the color of nighttime ocean, and there was deep hunger and heat in them. "You make my knees weak like no other. I've never felt for anyone as I felt for you. I want you more than anything. I want to keep you to myself, but I know better than to fight fate. Thus, I settle for what's best for you. And that'll be good enough for me."

I swallowed. "That's your selfish reason for keeping me alive?"

"Not exactly. You're promised to us," he said. "You have a destiny—light, dark, and powerful. I'll make sure you get there. Sometimes, I'll have

to step back to do it.”

“Who is ‘us’?” I asked, not concealing my irritation. “And what exactly is this destiny you mentioned? I understand you won’t tell me certain things no matter how hard I try, but I’d appreciate it if you didn’t always talk in riddles and make my head spin.”

Just then, the sky reddened as a burning comet blazed a path through the heavens, before hitting the gray sea on the other side of the jungle.

When the shockwave reached us, the tower swayed, and the red marble floor trembled under my feet. I stumbled, not because of the impact, but at a glimpse of all possible futures in front of me.

I heard my dragon mates’ shouts outside the tower as they came for me.

Elvey pulled me into his arms to stabilize me, crushing me against his hard chest. His wild scent of male musk, forest sun, and home blanketed me. While I drew all of it into my lungs, wanting to keep it forever, he kissed me hard and hotly.

It scorched my soul.

Dazed and needing more, I brought my hands up to hold him to me, only to meet empty air.

Elvey had vanished into the mist of light.

Only his velvet laugh resonated in the air before fading. “May we meet again, Daisy dearest.”

I took turns riding my three mates with unrestrained savagery before *Mistress* touched down.

Their delicious tastes lingered in my mouth, the memory of their big cocks thrusting inside me heated my blood, and my Fae body hummed with the remnants of my wild orgasms.

But the world around me stopped and my blood turned ice from the sight.

The sky burned red.

I sprang down the ramp of the warship following Rai, Iokul, and Blaze.

My mates and their warriors all looked stunned at what was left of the Dragon Realm, their mouths agape as they stared at the destruction all around us.

The ash-laden air smelled of spice and coal.

I wasn't unfamiliar with the smell of dragon fire. I'd burned the arena in the City of Nine and torched the demons with my fire. But this wasn't what I remembered of the home I had missed for nine centuries.

"What the fuck happened?" Blaze demanded. "There were green grass and trees the last time we came to answer the Dragon King's bounty call."

Acres of scorched barren land stretching before us and a pillar of dark flames here and there were the only answer.

My gaze swept to the stone castle. Black streaks charred its ivory stone walls.

I swallowed. The castle had been built to sustain the fire of all dragons except that of royalty, which meant my grandfather had set the castle on fire.

The only unblemished sight was a ridge of white mountains far in the background.

I grabbed a handful of scorched soil, my fist clenching around it. I took a deep breath and stalked toward my blazing home, my princes falling in step beside me.

The guards thrust their weapons against their shoulders, ready to engage in battle. We could all shift to dragons, but we didn't want anyone to know who we were and that I'd returned. At least, not yet.

I'd known my old home wouldn't be a safe haven when my own grandfather sent the hunters to take my Fury heads. Except, I'd disappointed him. I'd eliminated them with the aid of my mates, my monsters, and Elvey.

I'd come home free from my curse and with my three true loves, but the scorched landscape diminished my victorious feeling.

An amber-and-green dragon loomed in the distant sky. My princes tensed beside me, though we weren't threatened by a lone dragon. The warriors trained their weapons on the newcomer. He would bring his own demise if he foolishly initiated an attack.

"Don't harm him unless he breathes fire at us," I said.

The dragon could be someone I knew, though I didn't recognize him. The king might have turned on me, but I refused to believe that the entire realm wanted me dead.

Instead of coming toward us, the dragon twirled around the castle's pinnacle, his eyes never leaving us.

He was making it clear that he wasn't a threat to us.

Rai nodded at me. "I'll go meet him and see what he has to say." He then shifted into his dragon form.

The storm and lightning dragon with grey and midnight-blue scales sailed toward the apex of the castle to meet the lone dragon, a spear of lightning flashing around him in warning.

I watched him, pride and admiration swelling in my chest.

Rai was magnificent and huge in his dragon form, and the other dragon seemed to shrink in contrast. The two dragons circled each other.

We continued our march toward the castle.

"Their dance is taking too long," Blaze said. He seared my lips with a kiss, then shifted as well.

His orange-red scales sparkled like flames in the light. The blue scales that adorned his head, spine, and one side of the tail shone even brighter. I drew a sharp breath at his powerful beauty.

The lone dragon looked wary at the approach of another dragon.

While they conversed in their telepathic dragon tongue, we walked through the half-open iron gate. I couldn't hear their dragon talk unless I was also in my dragon form and channeled in.

I stopped in the center of the enormous, pebble-paved courtyard and surveyed the damage: charred benches, blackened façades from abandoned stores and chapels, and withered ivy vines between shattered windows.

There were no voices, no activities, and no people inside the once thriving castle.

My heart sank further, sadness washing over me. I had come back to a home that was an empty shell.

“How can this be?” Iokul asked. “It's only been three months since we departed.”

“Destruction only takes a minute,” I said.

The three dragons stopped circling one another above the peak and swooped down one by one. They shifted before they touched down on the ground, and my eyes flicked over their human forms. The stranger must have convinced my mate that he wasn't a threat, or they would never allow him to come near me.

The new dragon stared at me, his gaze raking over my face before he went down on one knee, his fist on his heart. “Princess Danaenyth, Your Highness. Is that really you?” Emotion thickened his voice.

He'd detected my scent, even though we were disguised as travelers.

His face was so scarred and his nose so crooked that I didn't recognize him at first glance. But I registered his scent as a faint memory swirled back. He was one of my grandfather's elite guards.

“Jarrod?” I called.

The day I'd gone missing, Jarrod had followed Adrian and me. He'd seen me sprint into the Forbidden Forest. Both Adrian and Jarrod had screamed my name and tried to charge into the enchanted forest after me. I'd ended up in Akem's jungle alone in the blink of an eye.

Nine centuries had passed between that moment and this one.

My heart pounded hopefully, and my throat grew dry. If Jarrod was here, then perhaps Adrian was, too.

“Welcome home, Your Highness,” Jarrod said, tears welling in his eyes. “We’ve been looking forward to your return for too long, and our hope failed us, until this blessed day.”

I tried to relax my stiff shoulders. I needed to ask about Adrian, though I dreaded the answer, dreaded that he hadn’t survived.

I gestured for Jarrod to rise.

“Where’s Adrian?” I asked as coolly as I could manage, but my face was tight as a whip.

Jarrod stood up and drew a ragged breath. “I haven’t heard from him for half a century.”

“Do you know where he is now?” I asked. “Do you have any means to reach him?”

I needed Adrian. I’d always relied on him. I needed my old team back.

“The day—” Jarrod paused to recollect himself, “—the day you entered the Forbidden Forest, Adrian charged after you, and I followed, but the forest just disappeared with you. We dug into the land. We stomped on fifty acres around where you vanished. Adrian turned every stone over to find you, but you were just gone. When he was sure that you weren’t in the realm anymore, he searched other realms to find you. Sometimes he was gone for a few years, and decades, sometimes a century. He used every contact he had. He tried everything. He came back to the realm only to check if fate had sent you home, and then he was off to chase you again. No one knows where he is now. He can be in any corner of the universe. He’s never given up on you. Others did centuries ago, but he never did. My lady, he is not the same Adrian you knew back then.”

My heart jerked in pain. “What do you mean he isn’t the Adrian I knew?”

“You know what you meant to him.” Jarrod sighed. “Adrian is half mad after chasing you and unable to find you for centuries, just like King Daghdha. It almost destroyed them.”

I’d done this to Adrian and myself. If I hadn’t been so obsessed with searching for the other half of my heritage, he would have been fine and sane, and the curse might not even have touched me.

I was suddenly angry at him for throwing his life away for me.

“He should have gone on with his life instead of wasting it,” I said in a clipped tone. “He saw how I disappeared. He should have known no one could find me.”

“You’re his charge,” Jarrod said quietly. “You’re his future queen.”

While I took a moment to calm myself, Iokul asked Jarrod, “Why is the realm abandoned?”

Jarrod darted a glance between me and my three princes. I knew he had a lot of questions, but it wasn’t his place to ask the realm’s princess. I was still the heir to the crown.

“This is Prince Rai, Prince Iokul, and Prince Blaze,” I said.

“I know, they’re the princes from the Oslan Dominion,” Jarrod said, bowing to each in turn.

“They’re my mates,” I added. “The rest of our companions are my mates’ warriors.”

Jarrod tried not to widen his eyes at my casual mentioning of three mates, but he couldn’t stop his irises expanding. “Consort—Your Highnesses, welcome to the Dragon Realm.”

I sighed inwardly. I’d gotten used to having all three brave, gorgeous princes as my mates, in fact, I reveled and loved every minute of having them, but the realm would need time to get used to it.

However, there was no kingdom without people.

“Everyone fled after King Daghdha went crazy and half-destroyed his own palace and the castle,” Jarrod said grimly.

I had suspected that the demolition might be my grandfather’s imprint. The castle was magically warded, and only the royal dragons—my grandfather and I—could do great damage.

A huff of breath left me. “So, our people live. There are survivors?”

Jarrod nodded. “Most of them survived.”

“Where is the king now?” I asked.

“He left,” Jarrod said. “I haven’t seen him ever since. His elite guards departed with him. It was like a dragon exodus. They might have gone to the mountains.”

I looked up at the distant ring of the snow-capped mountains.

Dragons usually went to the mountains to wait for the Fade.

“Last we saw, King Daghdha was still sound,” Rai said thoughtfully. “Though he was difficult and vicious.”

“He turned mad two weeks ago,” Jarrod said.

I swallowed. The day I broke the curse. I wondered if there was any connection to it.

I continued on the stairs, wanting to see the overall damage, my mind reeling.

The scouts went ahead of me. Henry, my two-headed, black hellhound went with them. He was eager for a new adventure, and to my delight, he had behaved incredibly well during this trip and hadn't been mean overall. I believed it had to do with the dragon shifters feeding him well.

Sybil, a flying lizard with an owl's face and white wings, chirped and flew ahead, but returned to perch on Iokul's armored shoulder, preferring him among all of my mates, because his ice cooled her.

My mates lounged around me, their shields in one hand; their swords in the other. Jarrod stayed at the front of our formation, serving as a guide, and at the same time answered humbly whatever questions the princes threw at him.

Now and then, he'd look back at me over his shoulder, as if wanting to convince himself that I was truly back. That small gesture offered me some comfort—the realm might still need me, especially after my grandfather's destructive action.

As we made our way up the castle, I saw most of the windows were shattered, the doors and walls charred. Those could all be fixed and replaced. The worst damage, however, wasn't inside the castle. The plants, trees, and grass were all singed and burnt beyond simple repair.

"It'll take a few weeks to fix all of this, before we can move our people back in," I said.

Jarrod hesitated, worries creasing his brows.

"If King Daghdha returns and has a problem with that, I'll take care of him," I said. "He won't cause any more trouble."

"It's not that," Jarrod said. "An elite guard, a former friend of mine, told me that His Majesty was hexed. There's a dark force dwelling in the palace."

Alarm flashed across the princes' faces.

"Have you checked it?" Iokul asked.

"One of the guards said he saw a smoke-like entity circle the throne," Jarrod said. "The castle is no longer safe. There's wrongness about it, especially in the palace. I've come here a few times after everyone left, but I can't pinpoint what's wrong."

I paused midway on the partially-chipped away stone stairs. Was the smoke-like entity the same as the one that possessed the demon captain? The demon had used his filthy smoke to pin down Iokul and almost killed my mate in Pandemonium's arena.

Had the evil followed us back? How had it infiltrated my old home?

Elvey had warned me that danger would follow me every step of the way once I left that savage planet behind.

I leaped up into the air and shifted, anxious to reach the palace sitting atop the castle.

Wings fluttered around me, and the wind ruffled at the movement. Every dragon accompanying me shifted as well. Clever Sybil landed on Iokul's scaled back to hitch a ride as the dragons surged toward the king's palace.

I alighted in front of the main entrance of the golden palace. Its surrounding rose garden was withering. My grandfather had set the beloved garden of my memories ablaze.

I would get to the bottom of whatever caused his madness.

The doors—all made of crystals—were blackened, and some shattered. Three granite sculptures of the dragons between the doors stayed intact, just as I remembered, but the fourth statue had lost half of its head, and the fifth one was sheared of its left wing.

Those statues represented the guardians of the five elements.

It was a blow that even our symbols hadn't avoided the demolition.

I shifted back to my Fae form. Jarrod shifted after me, though some of the warriors, including Blaze, remained as dragons.

If the smoke entity was still inside, Blaze would be the first one to burn it to oblivion.

The scouts, who had gone before us, had shifted at the same time as I had. They'd all joined us but left my hellhound behind. I could hear his whimpers of complaints somewhere down the castle. I wasn't worried about him. Henry was a survivor.

Jarrod insisted on entering the palace first, as did Quintrell, Rai's right-hand man. Quintrell had urged Rai to cut off my three Fury heads on our first encounter. He'd been awkward with me after I became Rai's mate, assuming

I held a grudge against him.

“Clear,” both Jarrod and Quintrell called.

I sighed. My days as the wild Furies were over. Apart from my mates guarding me as if I were a priceless treasure and frail glass, guards would always be around me.

I strode into the palace, my mates by my side, the warriors flanking us.

Henry shot into the palace like a black arrow. He squeezed between Rai and me and rubbed his shiny fur against my leg in affection. Rai scowled down at him, but restrained himself from scolding the beast. He knew Henry and Sybil were dear to me.

When Henry spotted the scouts who had abandoned him, he opened his jaw and snarled at them.

I rubbed the fur on his side, and he stopped snarling. “I know, Henry,” I said. “They aren’t very considerate and quite rude. You must forgive them. They fed you in the ship, didn’t they? They’ll take you to hunt when we all settle in.”

Rai laughed.

Henry turned one of his heads, his long tongue licking the back of my hand, then he gave Rai a somber look and trotted toward Jarrod’s group to make the path safe for me.

“How can any man argue with a beast,” Rai murmured, “especially a cute, tender one such as Henry?”

Only a dragon would think Henry was tender. I sent Rai a smile, and Iokul kissed the top of my head to remind me of his existence. I turned to beam at him.

Rai and Iokul held my hands, and together we walked through many turns in the halls, chapels, and spiral staircases.

The interior of the palace had a red and gold theme, except for the paintings on the wall. They depicted the dragons’ brutal hunt and our glorious past when humans and other sub-species had worshiped our kind as their gods. Those paintings had been crafted by humans. As a warrior race, dragons didn’t make much art.

Iokul looked up at Blaze’s dragon hovering near the domed ceilings.

The castle was built to accommodate a dragon’s need. There were either high windows or skylights in every chapel and chamber, an escape route when needed.

I wasn’t sure if other royal palaces were designed the same. My

grandfather had never allowed me to stray far from the palace, let alone travel to other realms. If I fought him on his prohibition, he'd punished my guards.

We strode into the throne room. Jarrod stood in the center of a mosaic of red marble with golden patterns, staring at the throne of gold and blue gems.

Blue was the color of royalty. I had blue scales, and all my mates had the same midnight-blue scales on their dragon forms. No other dragons had blue scales.

"The dark force, the smoke entity, was here last time," Jarrod murmured.

"We won't miss it if it's no longer here," I said. "We'll soon get everyone moved back."

If my grandfather had abandoned the realm, I needed to step in right away and rebuild the kingdom. My people would be depending on me in this dire time.

A roar rose, disrupting my train of thoughts, then a dark-green dragon barged in from the back entrance—the passage for only the king and his attendants. His red glare fixed on me in hatred, and he opened his mouth and shot fire toward me.

Blaze bellowed furiously, cutting between us in a flash, and spewed his own lava-hot fire. The two fires twisted and locked. Thick sulfur and spice permeated the air.

Ancient wards protected the palace, but the dragon fire was too hot. The throne room wouldn't collapse, but if their fight continued, some priceless paintings on the walls would melt.

"Segomo, how dare you! Step down! You're attacking Princess Daisy, the heir to the throne! Back the fuck off if you want your fucking head to stay on your stupid neck!" Jarrod bellowed in rage.

But the dark-green dragon wasn't listening—his eyes flashed with a killing light. He knew exactly who I was. He was here to kill me.

Segomo spat out another stream of fire, more powerful than the previous one, and Blaze tried to hold his ground. It wasn't that Blaze was any less powerful, but Segomo had something else in his fire.

The scent of dark magic slammed into my nostrils, choking me.

Black magic had altered Segomo. No wonder he smelled wrong.

The guards urged me to leave the room, but I hissed at them. I'd been the monster of nightmares for centuries. I was not a defenseless damsel. I wouldn't run from a mere rebellious dragon. If I wanted to establish my rule, my first day home wouldn't be marked by cowardice.

It would be marked by victory.

At Iokul's and Rai's pleading looks, I sighed and retreated to the back of the hall to give my mates some peace of mind and the dragons more fighting room. That was the best I could do for them.

My two mates guarded me, and two other dragons hovered in the air in front of me to shield me.

Segomo noticed my withdrawal and snarled. He broke the fire match with Blaze, turned direction, and pounced at me.

Blaze slammed into Segomo, blocking his path, and tearing into him in rage.

The fire dragon wouldn't allow anyone to get between him and his mate.

Rai raised his blast gun and fired at Segomo, but a wave of smoke emitted out of Segomo, shielding him.

It was exactly the same foul magic the demon captain had possessed.

"Foul demon magic! Take him down!" Rai snarled.

All of the guards opened fire on Segomo, but no bullets or beams could break through his smoke shield.

Iokul shifted. His silver scales reflected off the fire. The ice dragon shot strong icy currents at Segomo. The ice reduced the heat of the enemy dragon's fire, but it couldn't breach the shield of darkness, either.

Two dragon guards rammed into Segomo, trying to throw him to the ground, and Quintrell waited to tear into him. But Segomo's shield of smoke blasted them all away, and they crashed into the walls, ceiling, and the ground.

Rai snarled in rage.

The hellhound echoed the snarl and leaped into the air to bite the enemy dragon, but he merely spun in the air and tumbled down, unable to reach the height. He tried again. When it came to defending me, Henry was fierce.

Rai threw his hands up, lightning bolts darting toward Segomo but the smoke walls around Segomo diffused all the bolts.

Realizing what his smoke could do, Segomo tossed it at Blaze. My prince's fire dwindled as the dark force pinned him to the ceiling.

Rai and Iokul threw all they had at Segomo, but to no avail. The smoke was a living evil, its power binding everyone, and it was coming to me.

"Daisy, run!" my mates screamed at me.

There wasn't enough time, and under no circumstances would I leave my mates behind.

The green dragon stalked toward me with measured steps, his crimson gaze staring down at me, marking me as his prey.

Fear became a tangible thing inside me, and I believed Segomo smelled it, because he cocked his head and grinned.

Elvey had warned me. *“You won’t be any safer after you leave this shelter. Neither will those who accompany you.”*

I was scarcely home, yet my enemy had already sent me this welcome gift. But I was a predator, more so than this thing. When I’d had the Fury curse upon me, I’d been the biggest, meanest predator on Pandemonium. Now that I was both dragon and Fae, the predator in me was no less savage.

I wouldn’t let this foul thing hurt my mates and warriors again.

White Light was my most lethal weapon. I’d once deployed it to expel the pure evil when I’d danced with Elvey in the great hall. And when I’d mated with all my three mates, the Light had awoken in me.

I hadn’t mastered it or practiced enough since I’d spent a lot of time in bed with my mates.

It wasn’t that I’d tried to overcompensate for nine centuries of forced celibacy. But who could resist the three hottest, insanely gorgeous dragon men, who all offered all sorts of mind-blowing pleasure in every imaginable way?

All three of them desired me with an intensity that matched my own and devoted themselves to me.

I’d tried to summon my White Light while my mates had battled Segomo, but it had merely fizzled and died out. It occurred to me that my power needed stimulation. The Light had come to me when I’d danced with Elvey and it’d surfaced again when my mates and I roared out our wild orgasms.

Rai roared, lightning exuding out of him and breaking through the binding of the dark smoke.

He wouldn’t let that thing get to me, his mate. In a flash, he stood between Segomo and me. “Get out of here, Daisy,” he ordered.

I stepped up to him and placed my hand on his arm. “Strike me with your lightning. Pour it into me.”

He glared at me, his eyes flashing. “I won’t hurt you. I need you to get the hell out now! Please.” That last word was a plea.

“Trust me,” I urged, my eyes starting to glow as they fixed on Segomo with determination. “Just trust me, Rai.”

The smoke-possessed dragon had marked me as his prey. He thought I

had nowhere to run.

Rai sent a trail of lightning into me, and I felt his energy buzz within me. “More!” I demanded.

As soon as he saw his lightning boosted me instead of hurting me, he poured all he had into me. I threw my hands into the air. A burst of White Light and lightning surged out of me and slammed into Segomo, just as his combined fire and foul smoke dashed toward me.

As soon as my White Light ate away the smoke and neutralized the fire, all the warriors were freed from the binding.

Rai’s bolts of lightning impaled Segomo’s scales, and Blaze wasted no time sending his fire toward the green dragon and burned him to a charred heap, which unfortunately dropped onto the throne.

Quintrell lifted the dead dragon and hurled him off of the throne. He gave me a meaningful glance, as if wanting me to appreciate him keeping the throne clean for me.

Jarrold shifted to his human form and stared at Segomo, sorrow clouding his face. “He was a good dragon. The smoke corrupted him.”

“I don’t give a fuck if he was a saint,” Blaze said, still in rage. “He tried to hurt my mate. Anyone who wants to harm a hair on my mate’s head deserves worse than being burned to charred meat. The fucker died too easily.”

I’d have preferred to spare him and interrogate him. Segomo had been a mere tool. My true enemy had known that I’d returned, but I still didn’t know who my enemy was. I had no proof that it was the dark Fae Queen.

I’d come back to a broken kingdom where danger lurked everywhere, and my grandfather had gone mad and missing, and burned his own home.

“How many dragons are affected by the filthy smoke, Jarrod?” Blaze asked.

It’d taken all of us to take down one smoke-possessed dragon. If there were many more of them—

“I don’t know,” Jarrod said grimly. “I hope he’s the only one.”

“Your realm isn’t safe, Daisy,” Blaze said.

My mates wanted us to withdraw to the Oslan Dominion and put me in a high tower where they could bar the doors and windows to keep me safe.

I’d talked to them about their overprotectiveness, and they’d agreed to back off. But whenever danger headed my way, they returned to their former stance.

“We need to investigate this further,” I said, turning to Jarrod. “I didn’t recognize Segomo. Was he one of the royal guards while I was in the realm?”

“He was a new dragon,” Jarrod said. “He rose to the rank of Captain of the Guard last year. When His Majesty abandoned the realm, Segomo disappeared as well. He didn’t follow the king but lurked here to waylay you.”

“What happened to my grandfather’s old captain?” I asked.

“Captain Skylark Faded,” Jarrod said, sorrow in his eyes.

Although dragons were immortals, we could Fade. Time could wear us out and make us tired of living. I hoped Jarrod didn’t follow in his captain’s footsteps. His friends had parted from him, including Adrian. My heart ached at the thought of Adrian. I prayed he wouldn’t Fade somewhere. I’d prevailed after nine centuries of misery; he should, too.

My thoughts returned to Jarrod. “What happened to your face, Jarrod?” I asked, my fists forming. “Who hurt you?”

“It’s a long story, Your Highness,” Jarrod said. “I’ll tell you some other time. Now, if you have a moment, I’d like to give you a quick overview of the realm and the court as I best can. Things have changed a lot during the centuries you were gone.”

I nodded in appreciation.

On our trip home, Rai, Blaze, and Iokul—mostly Iokul—tried to fill me in with the current state of the two dragon realms, two Fae realms, and human-dominated legions.

I had so many questions, especially when it came to my own realm.

I glanced to where Segomo’s corpse had been. My mates’ men had removed it, but the room still reeked with the stench of foul magic and a dragon’s death.

“Let’s get some fresh air,” I said, and shifted to my dragon form.

My mates gazed at me with admiration before shifting themselves. They loved my both forms. When I was a dragon, they adored the shimmering scarlet and midnight blue of my scales.

I surged toward the ceiling to see if the skylight would recognize my magical signatures after centuries of my absence.

It whooshed open as I neared, and I flew into the sky.

Some of the guards also shifted and followed my mates and me into the air, while the rest stayed to search for threats. Henry whimpered down below, and Chiron, the dragon healer, grabbed him and flew up. Chiron had been

taking good care of Henry, so the hellhound didn't struggle, trusting the dragon not to drop him.

We landed at the back exit of the golden palace.

I inhaled a lungful of crisp air as I regarded a patch of greens that had escaped my grandfather's madness.

I pondered. "It'll take a while to rebuild."

Jarrood smiled. "You'll lead us to rebuild the realm, Your Highness."

"Who else knew Princess Daisy had returned?" Iokul asked. He was the most cautious and suspicious one among my mates. "We didn't broadcast it, and we cloaked our spaceship."

Jarrood shook his head. "I didn't know. I came to check the castle once a day after all the dragons left. I hadn't expected to see Her Highness."

"Someone obviously knew about our return," Rai said.

Jarrood nodded gravely. "There're enemies in the realm."

I turned to gaze upon the sparkling town under the hill in the distance. Near it, pillars of flames gathered at the bank of the vast lake.

Jarrood followed my line of sight. "The king left the towns alone."

My heart pained. "Who suffered the most losses?"

"The humans who had the least dragon blood," Jarrood said, averting his gaze. "They didn't fare well with dragon fire."

Humans who only had trace amounts of dragon blood had always been looked down on by the dragon community. Not by me, though. The injustice in all the worlds saddened me.

"Jarrood, I need you to summon what's left of the court," I said. "From this day on, you'll act as my Captain of the Guard."

"I'll be honored to hold the position, Your Highness," Jarrood said, bowing. "Until Adrian returns." After a pause, he continued in a grave voice. "And I have to inform you about Lady Lysandra. King Daghdha took her as his consort three months ago."

My grandfather had married right before he sent the hunters after me.

"She's called for a High Council meeting of all six cities from her new home in the City of Amethyst. I believe she wants to officially ascend the throne as the realm's new queen."

Our unofficial honeymoon ended the moment our ship had touched down on the Dragon Realm.

The more I learned about my realm, the more dismayed I became, and the more desperate my mates were to whisk me off to their kingdom.

“The castle was burned. Danger is everywhere,” Blaze said. “Jarrod doesn’t even know how many infected, psychopathic dragons are out there. In the Oslan Dominion, no one would dare lay a finger on you, and we can protect you better.”

Iokul, who usually disagreed with Blaze on everything, nodded. “*Mistress* will get us to our kingdom in a few hours.”

That they wanted to leave so soon disappointed me. I knew it would take a lot of effort to rebuild my realm, but this was my home. They needed to regard it as theirs as well. They were my mates, and we’d promised each other we were all in this together.

“So, we’ll just dump ourselves in your kingdom like this?” I asked, trying to keep my voice even.

“It might take a while for our people to get used to the idea of all three of us having one mate,” Rai said carefully. “But they’ll get over it. It’s our choice. The king will have to accept it as well.”

“And with this union,” said Iokul, “none of the political parties or our mothers can divide us again.”

“You’ll be Oslan’s princess and future queen,” Blaze said. “The people will adore you.”

I wasn’t worried about whether the Oslanians would accept me or not. We’d wade through court politics when we finally visited the Oslan Dominion.

“I understand it’ll be a lot easier and safer to go to your homeland,” I said. “But I never promised that we’d be safe here. My grandfather sent two ships of hunters to take my heads. We expected there’d be difficulties in my realm.”

Jarrold stared at me. “The king regards you as the apple of his eye. He’d never harm you. I believe he was being influenced by another.”

“Influenced or not,” Blaze said. “We were attacked. I say we leave for Oslan, set up headquarters, and operate from there. We need to have our backs covered. Here, arrows fly from every direction, and who knows which ones will get you.”

I tightened my lips into a thin line. “It won’t work that way. If I can’t stand with my people through thick and thin, then I don’t deserve to rule them.”

Frustration flashed through Blaze’s golden eyes. He had a notorious temper. Mating with me hadn’t changed that. “You can’t rule anyone if you’re dead,” he snapped.

Rai gave Blaze a warning look.

His biting tone humiliated me, though I understood why he was borderline paranoid. “I survived just fine before all of you came along, and I am older than any of you!”

“Is it so bad that we want you to be safe and survive even longer?” Blaze bit out.

We were all still new in this relationship and none of us were experts. I’d been naïve when I’d thought we would have no quarrels after we mated.

I’d thought after what we’d gone through—breaking each other’s curses, fighting the demons and hunters, and winning the battle to come home—there was nothing we couldn’t overcome.

Yet here we were. We couldn’t rise above our own opinions and disagreements.

“Let’s all take a step back before any of us says anything hurtful,” Rai said.

“Four of us are equal in this bonded relationship,” Iokul said, siding with

Blaze. “It isn’t just one person’s opinion that counts. If we have a disagreement, we vote on it.”

The three of them would vote for me to leave the realm. If I rejected it, would they leave without me? If they stayed, would they resent me? Was our mating bond strong enough to survive everything? And was I a bitch for insisting on having my way?

Insecurity swept over me, and I suppressed a wave of panic.

I couldn’t picture a future without them.

I turned to Jarrod, purposely ignoring my mates, so I wouldn’t spit something out that would aggravate the situation.

Jarrod tried his best not to dart his nervous, yet curious glances between us.

“If Lady Lysandra is determined to rule, why doesn’t she do it from the throne here?” I asked. I knew nothing about this consort. “The Dragon Realm is the center of the Danaenyth dynasty, and she can easily fix the damage in the castle.”

When my ancestors established the Danaenyth dynasty, we named the castle and the towns under the hills the Dragon Realm, where old magic prevailed. Dragons, half-dragons, and humans who had thick dragon blood flowing through their veins, mostly lived in the realm, unable to resist the call of the potent magic in the soil.

Outside the Dragon Realm, there were six cities where the humans who had diluted dragon blood lived. Over the centuries, the cities had also accepted and assimilated pure humans from other parts of the world.

Magic didn’t exactly extend to those cities where technology now dominated.

The six cities were always part of the Danaenyth dynasty, despite my grandfather allowing the humans to govern themselves. They paid tributes and tithes to King Daghdha every quarter to acknowledge Danaenyth royal house as sovereign.

At Jarrod’s uncertain look, I asked, “Has something transpired while I was away?”

“It’s important to the humans that Lady Lysandra chooses to have her new throne in the City of Amethyst instead of in the Dragon Realm,” Jarrod said. “It signifies the shift of new power and human dominance. She wants to establish herself as the leader of the new age, which puts humans first and above all.

“All six cities back her up, and the humans have the numbers we don’t. King Daghda hasn’t tended to the realm for a long while. The humans regard him as a relic and menace that needs to be replaced. They’ve wanted one of their own to sit on the throne for a few centuries now. They hold the belief that this world belongs to the humans. They want the end of the dragons.”

My mates growled in distaste.

“King Daghda burning the castle and deserting the Dragon Realm played right into their hands,” Jarrod said.

“Except, they hadn’t expected the return of the heir to the throne,” Rai said.

Jarrod nodded. “This is a great day for the realm. For all of us.”

I nodded my appreciation. “Lady Lysandra sounds like an ambitious type. I want to know more about her. Is she pure human?”

Jarrod shook his head. “No one knows much about her. One second, she was just there. Then, all of a sudden, the king announced her as his consort. But she isn’t a dragon.”

“She might be the one who sent the assassin,” Blaze said, “if she’s gotten wind of our mate’s return.”

“But no one was supposed to know,” Iokul said.

“Someone obviously knew,” Blaze said. “An assassin ambushed us in the palace, and he was targeting Daisy. Elvey—”

“—stayed behind on Pandemonium,” I said. “He had nothing to do with the assassination.”

I wasn’t happy with his snide tone from earlier, and I wasn’t going to give him a break when he constantly blamed Elvey for everything that went wrong.

Blaze slanted me a sharp look.

Rai gave Blaze’s shoulder a nudge to remind him to tone it down. The lightning dragon had noticed the tension between his brother and me. Iokul seemed to be glad of it, even though he’d taken Blaze’s side when it concerned my safety.

There would always be sibling rivalry between them. They’d competed against each other for nearly a century. After we mated, they wanted my attention and affection even more, though they wouldn’t stab each other in the back. They knew where the bottom line was.

“We’ll find out who learned about Daisy’s return and how,” Rai said. “Since we’re going to stay here for a while, we’ll have a lot of work to do.”

He'd backed me up on the issue of staying in my realm. So, it was two against two, which meant I could outvote them, because this concerned my dynasty.

I sent Rai a grateful glance, and he smiled, his sapphire eyes warm.

"How many pure-blooded dragon knights do we have, Jarrod?" I asked.

"Twelve, including Adrian and me."

My chest heaved up and down at the news. We'd had over two hundred pure-blooded dragons in my time.

My mates had informed me of the decline of the dragon race in their realm. The Oslan Dominion was less populated than the Danaenyth dynasty, but they had over fifty dragons.

"Our glorious days have long passed us," Jarrod said, seeing the grief in my eyes. "Most of us Faded in time, from lack of purpose or being fed up with living."

"Then the dragons need to find a purpose again," I said. One of my new missions would be to increase the dragon population. We needed to reproduce more, and faster.

My mates seemed to read what was in my mind and grinned at me, heat in their eyes.

I blinked, and my face flamed. They expected me to set an example.

"Where are the other ten dragons?" I asked. "Have they all left with my grandfather?"

Jarrod nodded. "If they hadn't, they might have ended up like Segomo."

"You didn't leave with the rest of the dragons," Iokul said, his icy silver eyes narrowing on Jarrod, "and the smoke-entity didn't possess you, either."

"Jarrod isn't our person of interest, Iokul," I said. "He proved his loyalty to me centuries ago. He doesn't need to prove it again."

Jarrod stared into the distance. "The day after you ran into the Forbidden Forest and we failed to get you back, Your Highness, we should have been punished to death, but the king exiled us instead. Adrian took off to look for you, but he made me vow to stay in the realm to wait for you. I've been alone for a long time. I didn't Fade because I promised the general. I stay out of sight of the others, but I've been keeping watch."

And he'd found me.

"You did well, Jarrod," I said.

His throat bobbed up and down with emotion.

My gaze swept over the sprawling town down the hills.

Could I make the realm my home again? Or should I make my mates happy by taking the easy way out, going to their kingdom, and living happily ever after in a new home with them?

Rai wrapped an arm around my shoulder, feeling my need for comfort through our mating bond. Iokul kissed the top of my hair. Blaze didn't come to me, though I felt a spark of regret from him for losing his temper at me.

I did not want distance from any of them. I did not want to alienate any of my mates.

We hadn't gotten enough time to know each other since our insatiable sexual need for each other topped everything, and emotionally, we became more vulnerable. The slightest friction between us could bruise us easily.

“It isn’t just fate pushing us together,” I told my mates. “I chose you because you are warriors in your hearts and in every aspect of your lives.” Of course, the fact they were smoking-hot had helped a lot. “I appreciate that you’re protective of me, but you also promised to respect me as your equal partner. You said you’d try not to be overprotective. I’m asking you to try now.”

“But you also need to respect our opinions,” Blaze said. “They should count, too. If you want to play the equality card, then you should be fair.”

“Of course,” I said. “We have even votes. Rai is on my side, because he knows we don’t run from a fight.”

“We run when we see no chance of winning,” Blaze said. “Or when the odds are stacked against us. Being a great warrior means one accepts a strategic retreat.”

“I agree,” I said. “But can we at least find out our chances before we withdraw?”

Iokul and Rai crossed their muscled arms over their chest, remaining silent to let Blaze and I work it out.

Blaze sighed. “Fine, let’s investigate first.”

I smiled at him.

We returned to our cloaked ship soon after, not wanting anyone to know I’d returned, though it might be too late for that since our enemy already

knew I was here.

Jarrold came with us, and we made a plan to visit the City of Amethyst.

I needed to find out what my people wanted and learn more about this new consort.

“We can’t just all barge into the human’s city,” I said. “We’ll bring too much unwanted attention.”

“Not all of us,” Blaze said. “Just the three of us. Of course, Jarrod will be our guide, so you will have four escorts.”

I eyed my mates. All of them were striking, even with their masks. “If all three of you go with me, all the ladies’ eyes will be upon you.”

They grinned at my flattery.

“But we don’t want that,” I added.

They frowned in unison.

I could use glamour to disguise us, but my instincts warned me against it. The human cities were uncharted territory to us. My enemies’ spies could be everywhere, or the cities could be in my enemies’ iron claws.

“We can stay inconspicuous,” Blaze said.

“Impossible,” Jarrod said, staring at his mask, but he had the good sense not to point it out. “You are giants of men, compared to the humans. One giant man can probably get by, but three of you?”

“Then I should be the only one to accompany Daisy,” Iokul said. “Spying is my specialty. My ice magic can shield me and make me unnoticeable. I guarantee you that no one will pay any attention to my mask.”

“Then you can use your ice magic to cover us all,” Blaze said.

“That’ll be too much work on my side,” Iokul said. “My purpose should be to help our mate get the information she needs, not focusing on shielding the two of you.”

Blaze glared at Iokul, who smirked at him.

Rai intervened before the two of them could snipe at each other. In the end, we decided to divide into several teams and enter all six cities. We needed to know if all the humans were supporting the consort and to what degree.

Since the consort had taken residence in the tallest skyscraper in the City of Amethyst, that would be our main focus. Jarrod would get Rai into an upper-class costume party tonight, and Iokul and I would attend a grand event with the theme of Humans Superior and First, hosted by the human liberals.

Blaze would stay in the ship with the backup team and watch over the

Dragon Realm.

“Why must I always stay in the base?” Blaze growled.

“I stayed in the base last time,” Iokul said.

“You were sleeping!”

“Maybe you deserve a punishment?” Iokul offered.

“For what?” Blaze snarled at his brother but gave me a wary glance.

“For being rude,” Iokul said coldly.

“Don’t goad him, Iokul,” Rai warned. “Blaze is frustrated already, and you’ve secured the spot beside Daisy. Stop kicking the dog when he’s down.”

“I can go to the costume party with Rai,” Blaze said. “I don’t even need to get a mask.”

I knew how much they hated the masks that concealed half of their faces. Once I got the realm’s situation under control, the first thing I would do was find a way to completely break my mates’ curse.

“Someone might recognize us if we both show up,” Rai said. “We need you to stay here to supervise the operation. I’ll trust no one more than my own brothers to watch my back.”

Blaze accepted his role grudgingly. He and Iokul exchanged a few more snide comments. In the past, I would have rubbed my temples at their banter. Now I could mostly block them out if they didn’t directly involve me.

Jarrod sent me a sympathetic glance. I knew he was wondering if my three mates always parried like this.

“Peace is possible,” I told him. “And we’ll get there, eventually.”

“Always look on the bright side, Your Highness. That’s the spirit,” he said with a smile, but I knew he didn’t envy me.

I gave all my mates a once-over and decided I would take on any trouble for these magnificent, hot men on any single day. My mind drifted to how they worshipped me in bed, my body tingling at the thought of their lips and hands on me.

A buzz ran through the conference room, shattering my reverie.

“Highnesses,” a crew member’s voice sounded timidly through the intercom. “His Majesty wants an audience.”

Blaze, Rai, and Iokul traded a quick look and grunted. They turned to me, their agitation clear on their faces.

Blaze ran one of his large hands through his golden hair. “How did Father even find us?”

“We can have the crew tell him we aren’t available at the moment,” Iokul

said.

But before I could reply, a holographic image landed with a whoosh in the center of the room. A giant male wearing a heavy golden crown glared at us. He had blue eyes, rich brown hair, and sun-kissed skin. The handsome, formidable man had to be King Oriel of the Oslan Dominion.

“Uh, Father,” Rai murmured. “What a surprise.”

The king narrowed his eyes. His son’s lukewarm welcome clearly didn’t please him.

A second later, three female figures popped out around him. Their images flickered before they solidified. I blinked when the image of three stunningly beautiful women became clear. One was dark-haired, the other a redhead, and the last a blonde. They all wore silver crowns.

The three queens had to be my mate’s mothers. The women’s gazes shifted from dotting to frowning, back and forth, depending on who they looked at. I could easily pinpoint which of my mates was which queen’s son from the expressions on the queens’ faces.

“This is going to be messy,” Iokul whispered.

“Leave us,” King Oriel told the warriors in the room. “I’ll have a word with my sons, alone.”

The warriors bowed and filed out. I made to follow, but Rai grabbed my waist and pulled me to him.

“My mate stays,” Rai said. “Whatever you have to say, you can say in front of her.”

The king’s eyes bulged. “Your mate? When did that happen?”

“When we headed to Pandemonium to seek the Furies,” said Rai.

“Rai, my son!” the dark-haired queen moved a step closer to us. “That’s wonderful! You’ve finally found a mate.” Her gaze swept over Iokul and Blaze haughtily as if to condemn them for being unable to find their mates. She gave the other two queens a sidelong sneer before fixing her attention on me.

The other queens glared at me as if it was my fault for being Rai’s mate.

The dark-haired queen took her time sizing me up. “She’s lovely, Rai. Which noble house does she belong to?”

“She might not come from any noble house,” the blonde queen said. “The girl has a sultry look. Your son might have picked her up from some backwoods street.”

Rai growled.

“Really, that’s what you think?” I frowned at the blonde.

“When you talk to my mate, you’ll show respect, Mother,” Iokul said.

The blonde queen blinked. “What?”

“Daisy is my mate, as well,” Blaze offered. “She belongs to all of us, as we all belong to her. We’ve chosen one mate together and we’re devoted to her.”

And hell broke loose.

The queens yelled at each other, then at the princes. It was really hard to make sense of what they said as their raised voices overlapped each other.

My princes looked baffled, then Iokul stepped to my other side, his arm sliding around my waist. Blaze moved to behind me since his brothers had taken the spot on either side of me. The fire-dragon prince placed a possessive hand on my shoulder to lay his claim.

“Do not yell around me,” the king thundered. “Quiet! With all of you going off like that, I can’t even think straight. I need to sort this mess out. Silence!”

The queens stopped talking but still glared at each other, then at the sons of the other queens. Then all the glares shot my way.

I tried to smile to the best of my ability and controlled my urge to shift to my dragon and flee from the room. *Stop being a coward!* I scolded myself.

“Oh, hi, hello, everyone, good king and queens,” I said, my voice husky.

Apart from staring hard at me, they ignored me, and my mates scowled at their snubs.

“What do you mean she’s mated to all of you?” King Oriel demanded.

“She’s mated to all of us,” Rai said proudly. “She chose us all as her true loves.”

King Oriel punched his palm with a big fist before holding up a finger. “Let me get this straight. The three of you rushed to answer King Daghdá’s bounty call in order to take the three heads of the Fury beasts, so you could inherit his kingdom. Instead of acting as the mighty warriors you were born to be, you played lovers. And instead of cutting off the beast’s heads and bringing the biggest dragon kingdom to me, you married an unknown maiden secretly because she’s pretty. You’ve always made messes, but you’ve never fucked up to this magnitude. This is unthinkable! And the three of you hotheaded idiots, who have never agreed on anything, agreed to share one woman?”

“It’s not what it looks like, Father,” Blaze protested.

“It’s exactly what it looks like!” the king spat out.

“Let me put it this way,” said Blaze. “It’s not because Daisy is so pretty that we want her. She is the most beautiful woman I’ve ever laid eyes on. But it’s not because of that. She’s my true mate. My dragon recognized her as such at first sight.”

“And there was no time to ask your permission, Father,” Rai chimed in. “We were under attack on Pandemonium from hunters, monsters, and demons. There are even blood-drinking vampires on that planet.”

“If I asked your permission, Rai and Iokul would have taken my mate and left me in the cold.”

“And should I have asked your permission first,” Iokul said, “I’d have lost my mate forever. There was a point when Blaze and Rai worked together to force me out of the game.”

“So, this was a game?” the king asked.

“No!” my three mates shouted in unison.

“All our dragons, all three of us, knew she’s our mate,” Rai said, trying to be patient.

“This is utterly ridiculous! I’ve never heard of such a thing—my three sons bonded to one woman. This is unorthodox. The Oslan Dominion won’t accept this union. The unauthorized marriage is annulled, as I speak.”

The queens all nodded. I’d bet my life that they’d never agreed on anything before.

“Father, don’t forget you have three mates as well,” Iokul said. “How could you have such double standards?”

“Watch who you’re speaking to, son!” the king warned.

“The mating between us is sacred, and we’re bonded to Daisy for eternity,” Blaze said. “No one and nothing can sever our mating bond, not even our ancestral gods and goddesses.”

The queens gasped.

“How dare you defy your king?” King Oriel roared, and the queens cowered at his loudness.

“Think of it this way, Father,” Iokul said. “With all three of us bonded to one mate, you’ll never need to worry about a civil war breaking out between us. We brothers will never be divided, and no domestic or foreign forces could cut between us ever again. We’re now true brothers, like we should have been all these years, despite Blaze still being annoying and rude.”

Both Blaze and the redheaded queen glared at Iokul.

“That’s something to think about,” the king pondered. “I’ve been so fed up with you three constantly fighting each other. If being bonded to one female can make you grow up and stop killing each other, I might just let you enjoy the same woman.”

All the queens protested.

“Your Majesty, you can’t just let them be,” the blonde queen said, turning to her husband. “The girl must have bewitched Iokul and the other two idiots.”

The other queens hissed at her.

The pompous blonde queen ignored them but batted her golden eyelashes at the king, and he gave her a considering look. “Beloved husband, perhaps we should dispose of the girl, and then the lust spell she cast on my son will disappear. Iokul has never acted like he’s having a fever before. For her, he even bared his teeth at his own mother.”

I could feel my mates vibrating with fury around me, and low growls rumbled in their throats.

“Over my dead body will I let you lay a hand on my mate, Queen Cordelia!” Rai said, pulling his lips back in a full snarl.

“You shouldn’t have said such a vicious thing against my mate, Mother,” Iokul said. “I love her!”

“Calm down, boys!” the king’s gruff voice broke into their bickering.

“Princess Daisy Danaenyth is not some witch,” Blaze boomed. “She’s the rightful heir to the Danaenyth dynasty. We’re all proud to be her chosen mates to rule by her side. Anyone who speaks to her should do so with respect.”

“What?” The king blinked. “That cannot be. The heir to the Danaenyth Dragon Realm went missing nine centuries ago. Everyone thought she was dead. King Daghdha lost hope a long time ago.” He turned to me with a deadly glare. “Who are you really, girl?”

“I am not a girl,” I hissed. “I’m close to ten centuries old. I’m Princess Daisy Danaenyth, the one and only heir to the Danaenyth dynasty. I’ve returned to my Dragon Realm.”

King Oriel narrowed his eyes. “You do look like the princess in the portrait. For centuries, many imposters came forward and claimed to be the lost princess. If you aren’t her, your punishment will be severe. Think of the inhuman torture, girl. If you’re smart, you will tell me the truth. I might be able to spare you from an unthinkable, horrific fate, for my sons’ sake. They

all seem to be smitten with you.”

“Daisy broke our curse,” Rai said. “After she kissed us, we could all shift to dragons. I bet all the dragons in our dominion can shift now, can’t they?”

King Oriel nodded, his blue eyes widening. “How?”

“Daisy’s curse was tied to ours,” Iokul said. “Love’s true kisses conquered all and lifted both our curses. Our mate freed us, Father. Only the rightful dragon heir can do that. And you still have doubts about who she is? Every dragon owes her a life debt.”

“Don’t you dare raise your voice at me, Iokul. I can easily put you in your place.”

“Your Majesty, please,” the blonde queen whimpered. “Our son is only too eager to please you.”

“But if she’s truly Princess Danaenyth...” the king said, a devious, delighted light dancing in his blue eyes. “Bring her to my kingdom and we’ll plan the next move. We need to secure her first, my sons.”

“Adeola and Cordelia have accused the lovely princess of bewitching the princes,” the redheaded queen said. “Why don’t we assign her as Blaze’s only mate?”

I eyed her. She wanted to manhandle me as well. But I wouldn’t make an enemy out of any of them, not because they were queens, but because they were my mates’ mothers.

I turned my head and regarded each of my mates. Iokul and Rai stared at the redheaded queen with open hostility. Blaze scratched his head with an agreeable grin. I frowned. I sensed he would go along with it if that was the arrangement all parties agreed on, even though he had insisted that we were all in this together.

“Always the conniving one, Octavia,” the dark-haired queen said in a biting tone.

King Oriel sighed. “Don’t mind your mothers. But if the girl truly is the heir to the Danaenyth dynasty, I won’t tear any of you away from her. Just bring her home. Set the ship on the course to the Oslan Dominion. We’re ready to receive you all.”

“No,” I said.

The king narrowed his eyes at me again. “What do you mean, ‘no’? There’ll be feasts to welcome you.”

I arched an eyebrow at him. “Do I look like I’m starving?” And shouldn’t he extend the same courtesy of one sovereign to the other, even though I

hadn't taken my crown?

"The situation in the Danaenyth Dragon Realm is a bit complicated right now," Iokul said. "Maybe you should check the news, Father? We need to help our mate get the realm back."

"If we'll have to fight the war to reclaim our mate's dynasty, Father," Rai said, "we'll need your army."

"Wait a second!" the king called.

"We need to go and protect our mate," Blaze chimed in. "Sorry, Father, Your Majesty. Nice chatting to you. And good to see you, Mother." He inclined his head at the other two queens. "We'll call you when we need you to ship the army here."

"Shut down communication." Rai punched a device on his chest armor, and the hologram whirled off, while the king and queens inside shouted their protests.

Iokul nodded at Rai. "Good move."

They turned to me. "How are you feeling, Daisy?"

Jarrold brought me proper clothing for the current era in the human cities. Iokul wore a gray shirt with leather loafers, trousers, and shiny leather shoes. I wore a deep-blue silk shirt, dress pants, and a pair of patent-leather flats.

Rai, Blaze, and Iokul stared at me with desire. They'd never seen me in modern attire. There was so much about the era that I needed to learn and try to catch up with.

My face flushed under their gazes. Through our mating bond, I sensed how badly they wanted to have their hands all over me. They flashed images in my mind of their hands all over me, tearing the clothing from my body and ravaging me with their mouths, their hands, and their cocks.

I was thankful that Jarrod wasn't privy to the silent messages between me and my mates, and that he ignored the sexual tension crackling in the air between the four of us.

The feverish mating call wouldn't give us a break just because we were in public. I tried not to gaze back at my mates. Nothing good would come from lighting a match in a room full of fuel.

Jarrold furrowed his brows as he inspected us.

"You two still look too dazzling even with the simplest clothes I brought you," he complained.

"What's wrong with that?" Blaze retorted. "My mate is the most stunning

woman in the universe.”

“Our mate,” Iokul corrected him.

“You’re not supposed to draw any attention,” Jarrod said exasperatedly. “How am I going to make you two look as plain as possible?” Then his brown eyes seemed to brighten on his scarred face. “Your Highness, I have an idea.”

All four of us snapped our heads toward him since we all carried that title.

“Princess Daisy,” Jarrod said with a sigh. “You’re taller than most human men and women.”

“I’m wearing flats,” I said, trying to be helpful. “I’m not complaining.” I hoped that he wasn’t going to criticize my curvy figure next. If he did, my mates would probably attack him to defend my honor.

“We need to do something about your flaming hair,” Jarrod said.

“She looks perfect as she is,” Iokul said. “I won’t have my mate change a thing.”

Jarrod put his thumb under his chin. “Maybe a hat? I should bring Your Highness a hat.”

“I can make us inconspicuous,” Iokul said. “Her lovely hair and my mask won’t be a concern.”

Upon Jarrod’s insistence for a demonstration, Iokul let his ice magic flow out. I didn’t feel any difference, except that the air grew a bit cooler and Iokul’s hand offered me a sensational touch, but Jarrod widened his eyes.

I eyed Iokul. He looked as stunning as ever. Silver hair flowed to his elegant chin. His pale gray eyes shone like glaciers. His mask—the symbol of ice dragon—glittered, hinting at a man of masculine beauty beneath.

My breath hitched, and my lips parted, and the ice prince winked at me.

Blaze looked like he wanted to get between Iokul and me, and Rai seemed to want to kiss me right now and bring my attention to him.

“Maybe I should leave the room and come back later,” Jarrod said.

“We don’t have time for this,” I said, my voice chiding. It was not aimed at Jarrod, but at my mates. “We’ll need to leave soon.” I turned to Jarrod. “What do you see when you look at us?”

“You two look just like anyone else now. You will blend in,” Jarrod said with satisfaction. “I can’t remember how you exactly look even as I stare at you.”

“That’s good, right?” I asked.

“That’s what we want,” Iokul smiled at me. “But you still look striking to

me.”

“Business first, flirting later,” Rai admonished.



IOKUL and I flew to the location as a pair of dragons and shifted in an empty dark alley. No one spotted us. It helped that Iokul’s ice magic shielded us. My mates told me that their powers had become stronger after mating with me.

We emerged just as how Jarrod had seen us. One of the benefits to being a dragon shifter was that when we changed to our other forms, we remained dressed. Unlike when I’d been the Furies.

We trotted toward an upscale hotel in the city’s popular district. Its façade was sophisticated and refined, lit by subtle blue light inside.

We filed in after an older couple, my hand on Iokul’s forearm. He’d been very happy to spend some alone time with me.

We followed the sign, glided through the floral walkways, and stopped outside an admission hall. Iokul gave our names to the guard and the receptionist outside the door, and they checked the list on a flashy interface.

They smiled at us in a fake, polished manner, oblivious to Iokul’s white, metal mask, and pressed a button that emitted a faint buzz.

A second later, an escort, dressed in a dark business suit, came out of the room. “Mr. and Mrs. Johnson, welcome,” she said.

We nodded our acknowledgement and followed the woman. We didn’t strike a conversation as she led us to a table at the back corner. We weren’t at the front—those seats were reserved for VIPs.

The corner table suited us just fine.

Jarrod’s contact had done a good job. I took a mental note to remember that. In this new age, we would need as many friends, supporters, and allies as we could get.

We took our seats and thanked the escort before she went away. The room was mostly filled, only the VIP table at the front near the podium was still vacant.

The hall had modern comforts and luxuries. While I’d lived in the jungle as three beasts, serving a volatile elemental and terrorizing the aliens in the post-apocalyptic planet, my own dynasty had evolved, and the human cities

had prospered.

The City of Amethyst, like the other five cities, didn't need the dragons to rule them. The people no longer needed fire or magic. They had electricity, science, and technology that could probably make magic seem like child's play.

And yet, my prince's ice magic still shielded us and none of the humans recognized who we really were.

The escort came back again and brought a middle-aged business man and his wife—or mistress—to our table. Their clothing informed me that they were wealthy. I'd bet they had more money than political power. That was why they were seated with us.

Two women, possibly a mother and a daughter, who looked like they came from old money, also joined us. The mother took a look at Iokul and fanned her cheeks. She thought Iokul was attractive. I contained an amused smile. My ice dragon burned hotter than fire.

"I'm so thrilled." The woman picked the seat next to Iokul, pulled it closer to him, and leaned toward him in a whisper. She looked like she wanted to climb onto his lap. I didn't need to stop her. He wouldn't allow her.

"Did you know Queen Lysandra will make an appearance tonight?" she asked Iokul with a flirty smile. "It's supposed to be a secret."

My heart skipped a beat.

But Iokul didn't miss a beat. He frowned and narrowed his eyes in displeasure. "Why haven't I heard about it?"

"Oh, sweetie," she purred. Still, she didn't see his mask. "Only the queen's inner circle knows about it. The queen decided to grace us with her divine presence at the last minute. I'm Daphne, by the way."

"Lady Lysandra isn't queen yet, is she?" I whispered like an experienced gossip. "She's the consort, last I checked. The Dragon King wouldn't establish any of his concubines as the queen, unless she's also a dragon. Then she might have a chance to share his throne. It's the dragons' ancient law."

Daphne looked at me with disdain. "You seem too young to understand politics."

"Intelligence has nothing to do with age, Mother," the younger woman said, and Daphne gave her daughter an annoyed look, but her daughter only smirked at spoiling her mother's plan to ogle my mate.

"Our beloved queen is young, but she shattered the dragons' chains on

us,” the daughter said, intending to educate me. “Queen Lysandra is the force of revolution. She doesn’t need an old man to put a crown on her head. She’ll soon sit on her new throne of enlightenment in her Empire Tower. Queen Lysandra ushers in a brand-new era and a brave new world.”

Jarrold had informed us that Lysandra dwelled in the skyscraper of glass and steel, which seemed to be part of the enlightenment in this new age.

I blinked at the young woman. “Lady Lysandra seems like a role model.”

“That’s why we’re here to support her,” the young woman said. “This is all about Humans Superior and First.” She glared at me. “Aren’t you in this, too?”

“Of course, we are,” Iokul said coolly. “Otherwise, why would we even be here?”

The young woman gave him a long look. My pulse spiked until I realized she couldn’t see his mask, either. She smirked sweetly at him, confident that she’d have a better chance with him than her mother. “Hi, I’m Toni.”

Iokul had shielded his mask but not his attractiveness. Hadn’t Jarrod said we shouldn’t draw any attention? But then, I couldn’t really blame him.

One had to be dead not to notice how hot my mate was. I shoved aside the urge to grab him to show all the women to whom he really belonged.

I had an important mission today.

Daphne sank back to her seat, sulking, as her daughter became the center of the party in our small circle, but she obviously wasn’t the type who would stand being ignored. She leaned toward the businessman and whispered something in his ear.

“It’s our humans’ right to rule this planet.” The businessman nodded firmly. “This is our land, our cities, and our laws. The dragons are no longer the ruling class. Thanks to our queen, she told them to fuck off, including the old Dragon King.”

A chuckle rose around the table.

“What about the other Dragon Realm?” Iokul smiled like a shark, flashing his gorgeous even teeth. The women blinked and flushed, completely under his spell. Had he always flirted like that? Blaze had said Iokul didn’t do flirting. If anyone loved to flirt, it was Blaze. My thoughts went to my fire-dragon mate for a second. He was the first one among my mates to pick a fight with me. We weren’t mad at each other anymore, but there was still tension between us.

I understood that Iokul had to use his charm to make people talk,

especially the women, but it didn't mean I was happy with the women wanting to put their hands on him, thinking they could take him from me.

I'm yours, always yours, Iokul said quietly in my head.

Of course. I eased back against the soft chair and watched Iokul work the room.

"The Danaenyth dynasty isn't the only Dragon Realm," Iokul said casually, inviting a debate. "The Oslan Dominion is also ruled by the dragons on the other side of the continent. Other than the two dragon realms, there's a hidden dimension, controlled by the Fae. So, how can we humans take over the whole planet?"

"Good question," a few of them said at the same time, but Toni was a faster speaker, so she took the rein again.

"It'll start with the Danaenyth Republic," Toni said. "The Humans Superior and First movement will catch fire and spread all over the Planet of Inanna, and maybe other planets."

They'd even changed the name of my dynasty!

"We're a force that can't be stopped," Toni continued. "We'll sweep away all the other species and drop them in dumpsters. Queen Lysandra promised us that."

I picked up a few conversations from the other tables with my Fae hearing. Everyone was a zealot supporter of the consort, and they marked the day that my grandfather had half-burned the castle where his throne stood and fled as a great victory to humans, and Lysandra's reign as the new birth of the nation of Danaenyth Republic and the harbinger of a great era.

Iokul didn't take his eyes off the group, but he said in my head, *It's only been three months and the wildfire of Lysandra's human movement has spread everywhere.*

The room hushed as a handsome man in his thirties strode toward the podium and introduced himself as Victor, the new mayor of the City of Amethyst. He received cheers and applause with a big smile. He then delivered a speech, stressing the theme of humans' superiority and their destined rule on this planet, and also their future mission of colonizing the universe.

We dragons were an old race, and humans were young. The young were daunting, yet often foolish. May they never cross the path with the true predators of the universe.

The mortals wanted domination, and they wanted our extinction.

“Queen Lysandra has opened the true path for humans’ future!” Victor exclaimed.

The attendees applauded again. Iokul and I joined in reluctantly to keep up our ruse.

When the new mayor presented Lysandra, everyone stood up with passionate shouts and vehement applause. Iokul and I also got to our feet, though we didn’t join in the cheering.

Victor bowed and withdrew, giving the limelight to Lysandra.

Lysandra stood a few steps behind the podium, a radiant smile on her soft lips. The audience gasped, stunned by her beauty.

I’d expected her to be young and beautiful—my grandfather wouldn’t have taken a consort with average features—but I hadn’t expected her to be regal. She indeed looked like a queen. No wonder the humans had thrown their lots in with her.

Her short, raven hair had golden stripes and cascaded under her earlobes; her thick bangs hung above her long, narrow eyebrows. Was her hairstyle that accentuated her porcelain skin also the vanguard of the new era for humans?

She wore a lavender vintage tunic with artful embroidery and a pair of dark purple pants, which was the color of the City of Amethyst. Quite clever. From what I’d seen so far, the women of this period had abandoned wearing gowns associated with feminine beauty.

A blue gem nesting against her exposed cleavage caught my eye. I recognized it immediately. The Dragon Gem belonged to the heir to the throne. It was supposed to be mine on my sixteenth birthday, only I hadn’t had the chance to receive it since I’d been teleported to another planet on my fifteenth birthday.

Had King Daghdha given all that were mine to his mistress? My eyes went cold at his profound betrayal, and rage coursed through my veins.

Iokul’s hand touched the small of my back, its coolness and solidness comforting me. When I sat down along with the other attendees, I’d managed to get my trembling under control. My mate placed his hand on my knee to reassure me of his presence.

My stare never left the consort.

Her eyes were pale blue and held no innocence, only greed. When she opened her mouth, power—dark and potent—poured out with her words. Thin smoke twirled around the room, brushing against every member of the

audience. But no one else could see it except me.

I wasn't sure if Iokul's ice magic could shield us from the foul smoke, but I wasn't willing to take a chance. Instantly, I brought out my glamour and erected a shield around us.

I glanced at Iokul, and he nodded subtly, his eyes glacially cold. He'd sensed her power. The consort could enthrall and control minds.

Blind devotion etched on every face in the room. Only Iokul and I were immune to her power.

Lysandra snapped her head, scanning the room, a chilly smile ghosting on her suddenly cruel face. Her eyes widened and sharpened as she found me. She stared straight at me, then at Iokul.

I knew she'd seen through my glamour and Iokul's ice shield. She'd seen his mask and knew exactly who he was—the Dragon Ice Prince of the Oslan Dominion.

As for me—we had never met. Could she know who I was? Was she the one who had sent the possessed dragon to kill me, or was she also a pawn?

From the vicious, knowing look in her eyes, I believed that we were made.

I held her gaze, let my magic stretch out, and brushed over her to get a reading. Her smoke hissed at my magic and pushed it back.

But I'd gotten what I wanted. I had no need to further probe her. I'd seen her for what she was.

Lysandra was as old as my mates, yet she was still a mortal.

The consort was a black witch.

King Daghdha was ancient and powerful, yet the witch had gotten him and driven him mad.

I wouldn't underestimate her.

Lysandra's eyes fixed on me like a blade bleeding with hate and jealousy, and I hadn't even taken back my throne from her yet.

Of course, she'd take out the threat at the first chance.

The smoke left the humans, gathering and redirecting their attack toward me.

Instinctively, I threw up a hand, but no shield of light came out of me.

Iokul grabbed me and threw me out of the way just before the smoke smashed onto the spot where we'd formerly sat.

In front of our eyes, our table companions—Toni, Daphne, the businessman, and his wife—turned to clay statues before shattering to a pile

of dirt.

Nausea swirled in my belly, even though the potency of the foul magic hadn't hit me directly.

None of the other humans paid any attention to what had just happened to us, or if they did, they probably didn't care much.

"We have to go," Iokul said tightly. "There's nothing you can do for them now."

The smoke hissed like a rattlesnake, ready to strike again.

A ribbon of blue fire rammed into the smoke, slamming it into the carbon monoxide alarms attached on the ceiling. Immediately, the artificial ceiling light flashed red and loud buzzing ricocheted off the hall.

"Fire!" someone called, but no one moved.

The attendees were all enthralled. Even if there was fire, they would stay. They'd die for the witch, unable to recognize who she really was. And if she ordered them to assault me, every one of them would try to tear me to pieces.

Iokul seemed to realize that and pulled me further away from the humans.

"Fire! Burn! Escape! Run for your life!" a rich, masculine voice shouted, carrying power, which jerked the humans awake.

Elvey. My throat tightened as my heart clenched, and joy sliced into my chest. *Elvey's here.*

But how? We'd left him in the Witch Tower on Pandemonium, light years away from here. How had he managed to beat us here?

Where is he? I darted my wild eyes around, but I didn't find him. He wasn't in the room physically, yet his power had come through.

The panicked humans rushed toward the exit like a horde of locusts.

Iokul grabbed my hand, and we rushed toward the flow of the crowd and blended into them.

A flicker of thought pulsed in my mind. Perhaps we should use this chance to end the witch and save ourselves future trouble.

But I also knew how reckless the action was. Even if I could kill her, the Humans Superior and First movement would make her a martyr and use it to drive the dragons into extinction.

They would paint me as a cold-blooded murderer, and my people would never accept me.

Besides, I wasn't that confident that I could overpower her, even without an army of guards around her.

"Find the man wearing a mask and the redheaded woman with him and

bring them to me,” my Fae ears caught her order. “Kill them if they resist. They’re terrorists.”

Iokul was taller and bigger than anyone. He pushed through the crowd as the guards darted toward us. The witch’s magic had broken our disguise, and now everyone could see us as we were.

A scent of magic, familiar and warm, tugged at me. Then a strong hand grabbed my elbow and dragged me from the side of the floral walkway.

Iokul snarled.

“It’s Elvey,” I whispered before Iokul touched the bracelet—a disguised weapon—that coiled on his left wrist.

I came face-to-face with Elvey and stopped in front of a nondescript door that hadn’t been there before. He uttered an ancient Fae word, and the door opened. It closed as soon as we stepped inside.

“Humans don’t have the sight to see the door,” Elvey said with a grin.

Floating blue fire—the same mage fire that had fended off the smoke and caused the alarm to go off—illuminated the empty room.

My gaze lingered on Elvey. He’d had a haircut. His once-tousled curly hair was now spiky lavender and raven-blue.

He was clad in a dark shirt that strained against his muscled chest, and his expensively tailored trousers showed every line of his powerful legs as he moved.

A lithe, lethal panther he was. Again, the image popped up in my head.

His eyes, blue stars in deep space, held my gaze and roved over me with hunger and longing.

If Iokul weren’t here, I’d probably throw myself into Elvey’s arms and cling to him to make sure he was as real as the air that I breathed in.

Iokul growled, not happy at how Elvey stared at me.

Elvey arched an eyebrow elegantly and shifted his glance to Iokul. “Nice mask, princeling.”

“What are you doing here, warlock?” Iokul asked flatly.

“Saving your butts again?”

“We don’t need your saving,” Iokul said tightly. “We had it under control. We were going to follow the crowd out, shift, and fly away.”

“That’s a good plan,” Elvey said, “except the witch’s minions are watching the whole city, including the air, for dragons.”

Iokul snorted. “They can’t stop us.”

Before the two could delve further into a pissing contest, I cut in. “Elvey,

thank you.” I had so many questions for him, but it wasn’t the time for any, except the most urgent one. “Should we hole up here and catch up,” I eyed the open archway at the end of the room leading down into a dark staircase, “or should we go down there and leave?”

“We’re not going into any unknown territory without investigating it first,” Iokul said.

“The unknown territory is our only safe path for now,” Elvey said. “The tunnel was built by witches and mages centuries ago to prevent attacks from dragons. They’d never have thought two fugitive dragons would find a good use of it in the future to escape a witch’s attack.”

While Elvey chuckled at the irony, a blunt force rammed into the door near us. I jumped, and Iokul shoved me behind him. In an instant, he uncoiled the band on his wrist and straightened it into a weapon.

A web of dark vines formed on the doorframe.

“The witch has found us.” Elvey gestured toward the archway that led to the stairs. “Shall we go?”

“Can the three of us take her down?” I asked. “You can glamour me, and I can shift to a dragon and burn the witch.”

“Or let me ice her,” Iokul said eagerly.

“Lysandra has a strong shield,” Elvey said. “Not even a royal dragon’s power can penetrate it.”

From the way he said her name, it sounded as if he knew her well, I thought drily.

“I only found out about her lately,” Elvey said in a clipped tone. “I have no affiliation to her.”

He always knew what was in my head without reading my mind.

Iokul watched him carefully. “But you know who she affiliates with.”

Elvey didn’t answer.

“I have White Light, you know,” I said, peeking into his eyes. “It destroyed a smoke-possessed dragon earlier.”

“But you couldn’t summon it today in the hall when she attacked you,” Elvey said.

I bit my lip. He’d seen my failed effort.

“You’re not ready,” Elvey said, a brutal honesty in his voice. “And she brought her coven. Their spells are dreadful and strong. Today isn’t the day we fight her.” He turned to Iokul. “I’ll lead. Daisy stays in the middle, and you bring up the rear.”

Iokul nodded, holding tightly on the bar-weapon.

A spark of blue light floated ahead of us.

We followed it into the endless tunnel.

We ran for a while until I heard a tight whooshing sound behind us. I turned just in time to see a flying sword sail toward us ahead of the enemy guards.

The witch and her minions had broken through the hidden door.

“Iokul,” I screamed my warning, and threw out a hand toward the sword, hoping some of my magic would block it.

Again, my White Light didn’t come to aid us.

Iokul roared, streams of ice pouring out of him, instantly forming a solid ice wall behind us. The ice kept extending toward our pursuers, until I heard muffled screams. My mate’s ice had trapped our enemies and their sword inside.

His ice sealed nearly half a mile of the tunnel, ensuring the enemies couldn’t reach us.

It wasn’t without a cost.

Iokul stumbled as his magic exhausted him. Before he fell, Elvey and I caught him.

With each of us on either side of him, we half-carried and half-dragged Iokul forward.

An hour or so later, we’d finally emerged out of the tunnel into the shadow of the street in the City of Amethyst.

We came out of the tunnel and stepped into a phone booth. Elvey and I still supported Iokul as we left the booth where a notice of “Out of Order” was posted on its door.

“What if the humans find out it isn’t a phone booth?” I asked.

“Even if they enter, the mortals can’t see the tunnel,” Elvey said.

“How do you know so much about my realm?” I demanded.

Elvey winked at me. “I’m a man of layers.”

Right, I often forgot who Elvey was. When I’d been away from the civilization as three Fury beasts, the demigod had been roaming my realm and who knew where else.

Iokul snorted at Elvey’s self-proclamation of being a man of layers and tried to shrug him off. “I can walk on my own.”

“You will when you have a chance to sit down first,” Elvey said, not letting go of Iokul.

Elvey was right.

Iokul’s strength was slowly returning. He would need food, drink, and rest before he was strong enough to fly back to the ship. I knew he was anxious to return to *Mistress*, thinking that I’d be safer there.

While we’d fled from Lysandra’s minions, he’d used his communication device implanted in him to warn his brothers and the teams about the witch’s people hunting us all over the city.

“It was overkill to use that amount of ice in the tunnel,” Elvey added, “though I appreciate your zealousness in protecting our Daisy.”

Our Daisy? Did he just say that?

Iokul growled, but he didn’t have the energy to give Elvey grief. “Where are we going?” he asked.

“Howling Fun,” Elvey said, half-hurling Iokul through the dark alley.

Iokul arched an eyebrow suspiciously.

“It’s a bar two blocks away,” Elvey said.

“Wouldn’t the witch’s people look for us there as well?” I asked.

“We’ll be fine for the moment,” Elvey said.

We came to the back entrance of a bar at the end of the alley, a purple neon sign on an amber brick wall flashing *Howling At Your Peril*.

The bar’s metal door was closed.

I frowned. “Should we go around to the front?”

Elvey pressed his palm on the center of the reinforced door. A dark blue light radiated from beneath his hand. A click sounded, and the door unlocked.

“Can you manage to walk by yourself for a short distance?” Elvey asked Iokul.

Iokul nodded.

Elvey turned to me. “Stick with me, Daisy darling. Don’t flirt with a stranger.”

I glared at him. “I’m not the flirting type.”

“Good to know,” he said, and pulled open the heavy door.

A wave of loud music blasted my ears, the kind of music I’d never heard in my lifetime. The drumbeats and the singer’s moaning and unintelligible shouting were quite painful to my Fae ears.

Elvey called this howling fun? He and I had very different tastes.

Iokul and I filed behind Elvey through a dim passageway. Elvey appeared relaxed, even dancing a little to the coarse music, but Iokul tensed like a whip. His ice magic reached out to shield me.

“Stop it,” I hissed. “You’re already spent.”

“Protecting you is always my privilege, love,” Iokul said.

“But you forget that I can protect you back,” I said.

At the next turn, a half bar broadened in front of us. The other half was concealed from the main entrance and from many other angles.

The bar was crowded, dimly lit with amber light.

Human patrons lined up on the red bar chairs, their drinks on the glowing

glass. A woman, who looked like she'd just broken up with a lover, studied a large painting of a naked, horned huntress who nocked an arrow.

Two men and a young woman served behind the bar, whizzing left and right, mixing drinks, taking orders, never getting in each other's way.

A few patrons stood in the center space, waiting for the next vacant seats, holding their drinks, and chatting—shouting—over the music.

"It's a popular bar," I murmured.

Under the ceiling of a glowing chart of constellations, all the tables were taken, except for the half-mooned one with a vintage sofa at the far corner.

Elvey strode directly toward the table.

Spotting the Fae, the three bartenders froze for a second before pretending that he wasn't there and drawing the patrons' attention back to them with professional flirting.

Suddenly, I was thankful that as powerful as Elvey was, he was my ally and not my enemy. I couldn't imagine what would happen if he turned on me.

We settled around the curved sofa, our backs to the wall. The amber light was too weak to reveal our faces.

While humans couldn't see us clearly, the three of us had no problem seeing in the dark.

I sat between Elvey and Iokul, with Elvey near the open space.

"We're hiding in plain sight," Elvey said.

The ear-pounding music stopped bombarding us as soon as Elvey put a sound barrier around our table. No one could eavesdrop on our conversation unless they were invited.

"Better?" he asked me with a grin. I bet the music hurt his Fae ears as well.

"So, you know the owner," I said. "Or are you the owner?"

"He could dream," a bright female voice purred as a gorgeous woman appeared at our table. From how fast she moved, I'd bet she wasn't human.

The blonde had high cheekbones and forest green eyes. Her hair was tied in a sleek ponytail. She was tall, her high-heeled boots hugging her stretch leather pants. Her dark, red blouse added edge to her chic style.

I drew in a breath to distinguish her scent. She was more Fae than Elvey and I. She was the first full-blooded Fae I'd met.

My gaze sharpened as her elegant hand landed on Elvey's shoulder as if she owned him. I balled my fists under the table, controlling an urge to shove

her off him.

Mine! He's mine! A furious voice echoed in me, shocking me for a second.

Elvey wasn't mine. I already had three mates. Why did I have such possessiveness toward him? Must I have every man? I scolded my greed.

And didn't Elvey deserve someone to care for him?

Despite my stone-cold logic, my face turned icy.

Elvey watched me, but he didn't seem to feel the need to brush off the woman's possessive hand on his shoulder. The female Fae gave Iokul a glance and complimented, "Nice mask," before fixing her scrutinizing gaze on me again. Then she winked at me and bent down to kiss Elvey on the cheek.

All I wanted was to pry her away from him and punch her in the face.

Elvey pushed her away gently and firmly. "I might be half-Fae, but I was done playing games a long time ago. You should have known better, Rosa. Despite being a full Fae, you still enjoy playing. What you regard as fun isn't always fun for others."

She laughed. "A girl has to try."

"This is Rosalinda, the owner of the *Howling At Your Peril*," Elvey said. "Rosa, meet Daisy and Iokul, my friends."

Rosalinda sniffed, her nostrils flaring.

"Can you not be so obvious, Rosa?" Elvey sighed.

"Princess Daisy Danaenyth?" Rosalinda said, tears suddenly moistening her eyes. "It's truly you! We've been waiting for you for a very long time."

Elvey had told me that he and others had been looking for me. When I'd demanded to know who they were, he hadn't given me any names but had only said, "*The ones who will be loyal to you to death.*"

Rosalinda's burst of emotion hinted that she was one of them. She knew who I was without Elvey telling her.

"Are you Fae, Rosalinda?" I asked just to confirm.

"She's a pure-blooded Fae," Iokul said in a low voice.

"And far less powerful than the two half-bred Fae here," Rosalinda said.

She meant Elvey and me.

I'd gleaned a conversation between the demon captain and Elvey. Full-blooded Fae often looked down at half-bred, just as old, pure-blooded dragons often sneered at half-breeds or humans who had less dragon blood in their veins.

“I’ve been stationed in the human world for ages,” she continued. Her voice sounded forlorn, as if she missed a home that she couldn’t return to.

“We have Fae blending into the human society in every nation,” Elvey said, glancing at Iokul, who still looked paler than usual, before returning his gaze to Rosalinda. “Will you be a dear and bring us what you have today, Rosa? Iokul needs meat, and our Daisy needs a drink for what I’m going to tell her.”

More bad news? I chinned up, though my heart sank.

“I’ll be a dear.” Rosalinda chuckled. “Lord Elvey’s . . . friends are always mine as well. What kind of drink do you prefer, Daisy?”

I had no idea why, all of a sudden, she dropped our titles and acted like she’d never known who we were. But my icy demeanor had melted toward her. “Uh, what do you have?”

I couldn’t even name a drink. How much life and fun had I missed out on?

“Cocktails are most popular here. The house special is Sinful Breeze,” Rosalinda said, still studying me. “Humans also like the local beer.”

“I’m not a human,” I said. “And dragons don’t favor booze too much.”

“We have fairy brew,” she said, a spark in her eyes. “No human can take it, but you’re half-Fae.”

“No fairy brew,” Iokul said firmly. “I don’t want my mate getting drunk, though I don’t mind carrying her home.”

Rosalinda laughed. “I doubt Daisy has ever tried her original homeland wine. She can handle it. Don’t underestimate her. She’s returned, and my money is on that she’ll take back what’s hers.”

There was a pun intended.

“If you have any information that can help us,” Iokul said coolly, “we’d appreciate it if you share with us. We’ll also purchase any useful intel. However, we dragons are straight shooters. We don’t fancy playing any games.”

“You’re having too much fun, Rosa,” Elvey said. “Daisy had a rough day. And now all of us are poor refugees.”

“Sorry, I’m beside myself,” Rosalinda said fiercely. “For the first time in centuries, I see hope. I see that I’ll go home one day. As for you, Elvey, my dear old friend, there’s more hope for you.” She glanced between the three of us, squeezed Elvey’s shoulder, bowed at me, and exited.

When she returned shortly after, she carried a large tray of honeyed

wings, onion rings, scrambled eggs with bread, cheese, fruits, and three mugs of beers. She was Fae, so we didn't thank her. We wouldn't want to be indebted to her. But we all nodded our appreciation.

The only Fae I would ever thank was Elvey.

I pushed the basket of wings in front of Iokul. While my mate dug in eagerly, I took a swig of the beer.

It cooled my parched throat.

Elvey waited until Iokul was halfway through his food and said, "You should have known better than parade her around, Iokul."

"We might not have thought it through," Iokul said. "But what Daisy wants Daisy gets. You know that as well as I do."

"We can't just let her get what she wants. We'll let her have what's best for her," Elvey said.

"Like you know what's best for me?" I snorted. "Stop treating me like a little girl. I'm not that careless and spoiled brat I was before I got whisked away to the jungle. I know exactly what's at stake, and I'll do what I must do. I have duties and responsibilities, not just to my mates, but to the realm and my people."

Elvey raised an eyebrow. "Feisty much?"

"Try not to get on her nerves, if you can help it," Iokul suggested.

I glared at Iokul before turning to Elvey. I had so many questions for him that I didn't even know where to begin. "When we invited you to come home with us, you turned the offer down. How did you get here sooner than us?"

"I wasn't free, as I told you," he said, sending a glance at Iokul and deciding to be more transparent. "I was bound to the dark Fae Queen—let's not say her name to bring her attention to us. If I'd come aboard *Mistress* and returned with it, she would have received my magical signature tied to that ship. She would have demanded I return and bring her your heads. She'd have found you before you're ready."

Iokul stopped eating, looking a bit shocked at knowing the depth of the relationship between Elvey and his queen. Then cold rage emitted from him like an icy stream.

"The dark Fae Queen sent the demons to come after my mate? I thought it was the consort witch who wanted Daisy's throne and sent a smoke-possessed dragon to waylay her."

"That too," Elvey said, leaning back, not bothering to conceal his exhaustion. "Lysandra is the Fae Queen's tool." He picked up his beer and

took a swig to compose himself. When he put the mug down, his gaze landed on me. “I wanted you to have a few good weeks when you returned home. You parted with it for centuries.” Cold rage and fear clouded his star-blue eyes. “I didn’t expect her to deploy a dangerous, manic puppet. Arianrhod, your ancestors’ goddess, banned the Fae from entering the Dragon Realm, ever since your father was killed. So, the Fae Queen used a black witch to take the realm from you, after she learned you broke the curse.”

“You said you were bound. Are you no longer bound to the dark Fae Queen?” I asked hopefully.

He smiled ruefully. “For now. I did something to my blood to block her. That’s why I decided it was safe to return.”

“How?” I asked. “Why don’t you duplicate what you did and cleave your bond to her permanently?”

“There’s no duplication of what I did,” he said. “I injected vampire venom into my bloodstream.”

I blinked. “What? Are you insane? Vampire venom is pure poison!”

“He’s always the wild, fearless one,” Rosalinda said with affection as she brought us another round of drinks.

“Join us, Rosa,” Elvey said.

Rosalinda looked at me.

“Please,” I said. If Elvey could trust her, then I would, too.

She perched beside Elvey, and I didn’t like that she squeezed too close to him.

“I tried everything in order to break the blood bond to her, but failed for centuries,” Elvey said. “I could never reject her. I could never disobey her.”

“That’s not true,” Rosalinda said, sending a quick, cautious glance my way, as if she believed that there was a connection between Elvey and me.

Was it so palpable that even an outsider could tell? I constantly felt the strong pull between us. And when Elvey wasn’t around, I often felt like something was missing, yet I could still feel the thread between us pulsing intermittently.

I didn’t know what it was exactly, or why I acted this way toward Elvey, but I knew I didn’t want to hurt my mates’ feelings.

“You turned her down, Elvey,” Rosalinda said proudly. “You refused to warm her bed.”

“That was two centuries after I vowed I’d be no one’s whore,” Elvey said emotionlessly, as if something had died inside him.

Icy rage sliced at my heart and it filled with white-hot hatred. This was the first time I learned that the Fae bitch had tried to make Elvey her sex slave. She would pay for it.

I would never let her touch him again.

“I’ll have to follow her orders in her presence,” Elvey warned. “Her will is my command and my wish, as the blood bond goes.”

“Then you’ll never return to her,” I said fiercely. “If the vampire venom can thin the bond, we can use it as a temporary solution before we handle her. We’ll go back to Pandemonium to capture a few more vampires and bring them here for you.”

Elvey smiled at me, and that smile nearly broke my heart. He’d do anything for me but asked nothing in return.

“It’s only a one-time thing,” he said. “The venom is contagious. It nearly turned me. If my blood weren’t stronger, it would never purge the vampire venom.”

“We’ll figure out a way,” I said. “We will. We broke our curses, and we’ll break yours.” I glanced at Iokul’s mask. We hadn’t completely broken my mates’ curse.

Iokul reached over, grabbed my hand, and gave it a gentle squeeze. “How did you beat us and return earlier, Elvey?” he asked. “We traveled at warp speed.”

“I found a portal in the jungle,” Elvey said.

“Fiammetta the Wickedest Witch’s portal?” I asked.

“It didn’t completely close,” Elvey said. “I tweaked it. Phantom, who could shift the landscape, helped me stabilize it before it crashed. He liked you, Daisy, which is why he did me this one favor. I came through the portal and came back three days before you did.”

“Welcome back,” Rosalinda whispered.

She didn’t say welcome home. Elvey had no home and wouldn’t have one until the day he was free. And I’d make sure it happened.

Elvey grinned at her.

I didn’t like him smiling at other women, but there was no heat, no tease, and no flirt in that smile, unlike how he smiled at me.

“You can’t live in the palace yet, Daisy,” Elvey said, his smile gone. “I know you want to go home more than anything, but it’s not safe. The Dragon Realm will never be yours, nor will all six human cities, not until you can prove you actually own the Danaenyth dynasty.”

Elvey was always brutally honest with me, except for the things he couldn't reveal, or if something involved himself.

"She doesn't need to prove a thing," Iokul snapped. "She's the rightful heir to the throne. The witch consort is a fraud and a usurper."

"The humans don't think so," Elvey said. "And they have great numbers. They've become the majority."

I rubbed my temples. "I heard what they want. They want to put a human like them on the throne. They don't want me, especially a half-dragon, half-Fae who has been absent for centuries. And I know so little about this era and its people."

"You'll pick it up," Rosalinda said. "You'll learn. You'll adapt."

"If I hadn't seen for myself what the consort is," I said, "and if she was indeed as good as the humans believe and was suitable to rule, I might have just let go of all the human cities."

"It doesn't matter what the humans want," Iokul said. "The Danaenyth dynasty is yours."

I sighed. "We've seen how the Humans Superior and First movement spread like a virus. If I take the realm back by force, there'll be war."

"Then war it is," Iokul said. "My father will send an army."

"The humans' movement might have spread to your kingdom as well," I said. "Even if we win the war, it might not be worth it. And I have no intention to be a dictator and rule over a people who don't want me."

"Don't you love your home, Daisy Danaenyth?" Elvey asked.

I narrowed my eyes at him. "With all my heart," I said.

I'd prevailed over nine centuries of misery and overcome my insanity, only because I'd held the hope that one day I could go home. Though some of my friends had Faded and my grandfather had abandoned the realm and Adrian had gone away, the Dragon Realm would always be my home. I would rebuild it for myself, my mates, and all who wanted peace.

Adrian would come home one day, as would the other dragons.

I didn't say it, but my eyes spelled it all out.

"The human cities—Amethyst, Turquoise, Jasper, Heliotrope, Sodalite, and Chrysocolla—have been part of the Danaenyth dynasty since ancient times," Elvey said. "The land has always been tied to your bloodline by the sacred blood vow sealed by Goddess Arianrhod. If you abandon them, the magic in the land will catch up and leave the cities as a barren wasteland, and no technology can save it."

I blinked. I'd never heard of the link between the realm and my bloodline.

"I thought it was a legend that Goddess Arianrhod appointed Danaenyth royal house as the guardian of the Dragon Realm and the six cities." Iokul said.

"You thought Daisy's ancestors fabricated the tale?" Rosalinda said with amusement.

"Arianrhod hasn't spoken to any dragon or Fae for an eon," Iokul said. "The immortal races on Inanna are declining."

"Arianrhod always watches." Elvey gazed at me and asked, "When you first stepped on the Dragon Realm again, did you feel a magical tug, like the land was calling to you?"

I nodded, tears stinging my eyes. "I felt home immediately. I felt a familiar magic reaching toward me and brushing me with its warmth as if welcoming me home. I felt a new bond that's different from my bond to my mates."

"What do you think that is?" Elvey asked.

"I haven't had a chance to think about it. I was distracted by the burning of the realm and the damage my grandfather caused." I narrowed my eyes. "How do you know about the link between the Dragon Realm and me? You are not even a dragon."

Iokul also narrowed his eyes. "Yes, Elvey, how the heck do you know all about this? This is the dragons' secret and affair."

Elvey ignored Iokul but smirked at me. "You know what I am."

Iokul glanced between Elvey and me suspiciously, and I flushed.

I knew what Elvey was. I'd sampled him through a kiss.

"The realm knows that you've returned, Daisy," Elvey said. "It now awaits you. You need to officially be its Keeper. Will you watch, guard, and protect the land that's yours and the people on it who don't know you?"

"It's my duty and honor," I said. I'd known that in my bones even as a child, even though my grandfather hadn't taken the time to prepare me for my future responsibilities as the crown princess. Had he simply waited for the curse to take me away and finally kill me? "But I'm also trying to be reasonable. I want to give the people what they want."

"The problem is the majority of humans don't know what's best for them or what they really want," Elvey said. "For eons, I've been watching how they destroy each other in games and bloody wars. Kingdoms rose and fell, and many civilizations were wiped out before new ones formed above their

ash and bones. Lives were lost and weren't valued. Now they choose a witch who reeks of black magic and evil. She's polluting the land."

"The humans don't know Lysandra is a black witch and that she works for the dark Fae Queen," Rosalinda said. "They don't know she's been using mind control on them. I believe she has eliminated the ones who could resist her power. Among the six cities, two mayors who are loyal to the Dragon King are missing. Lysandra nominated two new mayors, both her minions, to replace them. There aren't any dissentients in the High Council anymore. She controls all of them now. She promotes those who call the dragons the monsters."

Iokul snorted. "Some dragons might be monsters, but humans always forget to look at themselves. Humans can be the cruelest monsters. They do evil, twisted things that no real monsters can match up to."

"What about the Fae race?" I chimed in.

Dragons and Fae were immortal enemies. The feud probably started at the beginning of time. And here I was—I had two Fae allies, and according to Elvey, there were many more, who were loyal to me. I wondered why; I was only half-Fae after all.

"Rosalinda is one of my intelligence agents in the human cities," Elvey said. "It's hard for Fae to stay among humans. They Fade quicker and eventually lose their Fae magic, but I can't let her go yet."

"As long as that bitch queen rules us in terror, I have no home to return to," Rosalinda said, eyes dimming. "I have to make the human realm my dwelling place now. It's not on you, Elvey. It's never on you."

Elvey's eyes darkened as if he'd carried all the burdens for too long. He looked at me. "Will you let the black witch have your dynasty and your people? Won't you protect your own?"

"The witch has become their idea, their symbol." I sighed. "Humans—"

"Some humans are redeemable," said Elvey. "You'll open their eyes, unveil the witch's true colors, and shatter the false symbol. You'll force them to see the hard truth. And if they still decide they don't want you, then let whatever befall them be their fate."

I laughed mirthlessly. "Elvey, how am I going to do that? I was a spoiled, ignorant teenager when I was in the realm, and then I was three beasts in a savage jungle for nine centuries. I just got rid of my curse and came back to a broken home. I had no idea that the world had evolved so quickly. It has become completely alien to me. I'm not as powerful or useful as you think,

and you're looking for some savior who isn't there."

"So, you're just going to give up?" Rosalinda demanded.

"No." I sighed. "I'm trying to think what I can do, but we all need to be realistic."

"You're what I've been looking for, Daisy Danaenyth," Elvey said. "Even though you don't see it. All I'm asking is whether you're willing to fight the evil, defend your realm, and protect your future people."

I swallowed. "Anything. I'll do anything, but I don't even know where to start."

"You have us," Rosalinda said. "You have Elvey." She gave Iokul a glance. "You have your three dragon princes and their powerful forces. You have many more supporters whom you don't know in the Dragon Realm, in human cities, and in the Fae realm."

Iokul grabbed my hand and pressed it against his heart, and Elvey watched us. I didn't see jealousy in his eyes but longing, as if he wanted to belong to me as well.

"You have me, love," Iokul said. "You have my brothers, our warriors, and the Oslanian army."

My heart warmed, and I fought back the tears stinging my eyes.

What had I done to deserve such loyalty, even from the friends and allies I hadn't met?

"It's not what you did, but what you'll do," Elvey said softly.

And again, I was an open book to him, and to them all.

"I think I'll have an idea where you can start," Elvey added with a smile. "It won't be easy."

"Bring it on," I said, returning his smile.

I didn't care how tough the tasks would be. I wouldn't let down those who depended on me.

And I was glad that Elvey was going to be around for a while.

Once Iokul regained his strength, we flew back to our base in *Mistress*. At our approach, the castle loomed in like a white aspiration with smudges under two crescent moons. The stains were the burn marks of King Daghdha's fire.

I landed in a small garden at the east wing, surprised that the dragon fire hadn't touched this part when it had swept over the main garden and scorched everything in it.

Had my grandfather spared the jasmine because he knew it was my favorite flower? The jasmine garden had access to the side of my old chamber.

Tiny white jasmines shone like small stars, their fragrance bringing back fond memories. It made me feel like I was a stupid, fun fifteen-year-old again.

I shifted to my Fae form, plucked a blossom, and inserted it behind my ear.

The silver dragon unfolded his massive wings, his bright silvery-blue scales glittering in the moonlight. He scanned the golden palace, ensuring no threat lurked in the shadow at the moment, before he fixed on me and shifted beside me.

I smiled at him, held his hand, and led him down a path. "Come and see my old room."

Iokul kissed my lips softly. He placed himself slightly ahead of me, his free hand twitching, ready to defend me with his ice magic.

I'd seen how he'd turned his ice to blade and impaled the demons in the arena on Pandemonium.

"We'll have this place all to ourselves tonight," I said.

I hadn't had a chance to visit my old chamber after Segomo's attack. I wanted to see if it still existed.

The wood and glass door slid open automatically at my magical signature. At least that hadn't changed.

We entered the room.

My breath caught. It was just as I'd remembered—ivory white bed with blue quilt, fluffy chairs, polished floor with a rug of scarlet and blue mosaic, like the colors of my scales in a dragon form.

It was exactly the way it had been, as if I'd never left.

Someone had gone through a great deal of effort to keep it that way. Someone had wanted me home badly. A thin layer of dust on the chestnut vanity seemed recent, which meant the caretaker had only left after the king's dragon fire had forced everyone to abandon the castle.

It meant the king, or someone, had clung to the hope that I would return one day, and that nearly brought tears to my eyes.

I let go of Iokul's hand, moved to my bed, and climbed onto it.

As I lay on my back, the thick, soft quilt sank and reformed around my shape.

I stared at the high ceiling adorned with blue gemstones, and a tear escaped my eyes.

I was home. I was truly back, free from my curse.

Iokul lay beside me, his cool mouth tracing on the column of my neck, his ice magic caressing me. Shivers of pleasure ran down to my toes, and liquid fire pooled between my thighs.

Ice was Iokul's element. It could cool or burn.

His one hand threaded into my hair; his other hand unbuttoned my shirt, slowly and sensually, until my breasts were fully exposed. He cupped my breast, and a deep moan rumbled in my throat. Maybe it was because of that small noise of mine that prompted Iokul, who usually preferred a slow burn, to fondle and knead my heavy breast in urgent need.

When his mouth crashed against mine, I unbuttoned his shirt and traced my palms over his cool, smooth, hard chest.

The tight muscles on his massive shoulders flexed as he shifted to press against me. His hand moved from my breast, trailing down to the apex between my thighs, leaving a shiver in its wake.

He deepened the kiss, his tongue sweeping over my hard palate.

I whimpered in need as his large hand slipped into my pants, and palmed the tender flesh between my thighs, his deft fingers slipping between my folds and rubbing at the wet heat my sex produced.

My skin burned.

My blood heated.

He broke the kiss and stared down at me, lust dancing in his eyes. He always liked seeing my reactions when he played with me, and I liked to see his, too. Pure, male lust twisted his masked face. Fire and ice merged in him and I gasped against his lips as a fiery need coiled in my belly.

“Iokul,” I whispered his name, my breath rasping.

I needed him.

I wanted him.

His hand left my pussy. Before I could protest, he stripped me of my pants. When they hit on the floor, he’d undressed himself.

His large cock, silky and hard, shot upward as he stood beside the bed.

“I’d have savored you inch by inch and for hours if we were in the ship,” he said. “But here, I’ll have to fuck you fast and hard.”

My mind didn’t land on the fast but the hard part that my mate promised.

“Fuck me hard,” I breathed out. “I’m yours.”

He gripped my thighs and dragged me to the edge of the bed, his silver eyes flaring on my bare pussy. A groan—so erotic, so filled with need—rumbled in his chest. His dragon was more than excited.

My own dragon purred, daring and enticing him to come and play.

Iokul held my legs apart and pulled them over his shoulders.

My hips lifted, my back flat on the bed, and I wiggled my ass with eagerness.

My mate’s lips curled up with a hint of sensual amusement, and he took a moment to appreciate my naked body, his eyes roving over every inch of me.

But his dragon wasn’t as patient as he was. It urged him to fuck me now.

He obliged and positioned his hard cock at my slick entrance. I moaned, needing him inside me. With a wicked grin, he licked his fingers, then brought them down to my clit, circling my pulsing nub with slow, torturous movements. I wasn’t sure whether it was his cock jutting at my entrance or

his fingers flicking at my clit that elicited more moans and shivers from me.

I lifted my hips, urging him to enter me. I was crazy with need, my chest heaving from my heavy breaths.

With one smooth thrust, his cock drove deep into my core.

Fire coursed through my veins, but his ice soothed me.

The ice dragon pulled back and rammed into me, repeating the strokes until I screamed, every move expected and unexpected at the same time, sending intense pleasure to my nerve endings.

His mighty cock slid in and out of my wet pussy, every thrust igniting more heat in me.

His eyes were full of desire that threatened to combust me.

“This sweet pink flesh is for me to fuck,” he announced and picked up speed, hunger and possessiveness in every hard thrust.

His cock plunged into me, filling me and seeking my depth. I would give him anything he wanted.

I tried to move against him. Tried to grind against him, but he pinned me there, dominating and uncompromising, and pounded between my thighs relentlessly and savagely.

Pleasure rocked my every fiber as he slammed into me again and again.

I moaned deeply and hoarsely. My hands grappled the satin quilt beneath me, my hair damp on my forehead.

I wanted more.

He growled, his silver eyes darkening to gunmetal gray, his unbridled lust bursting alive.

Mine! his inner dragon roared.

Mine! my dragon echoed.

While my mate plunged into me with rapid thrusts, I was glad that our coupling wasn't as quick as he'd originally stated. I didn't want this to end.

I wanted him to fuck me this hard until the end of time.

The pleasure prolonged and amplified. This was what I needed, especially after learning that my nightmare accorded to what I'd learned about Arianrhod. The dream was still vivid in my mind.

I'd seen the realm burning under the red sky in that dream before it'd happened in reality, and before I'd woken up in a cold sweat, a menacing voice warned me that if I ever dared seek the goddess, I'd lose my three mates.

I clung to Iokul, my nails digging into his muscled legs.

He pressed me tightly against him, needing me as much as I needed him. It was a trying day for him as well, and my realm's future seemed bleak.

His next sequence of thrusts into my heated channel dragged me back from my thoughts, and I was completely with him. And stayed with him.

Flesh slapped against flesh, fast and hard. My lustful moans and Iokul's rough groans ricocheted off the otherwise deadly quiet night.

Carnal bliss washed over me as his cock kept thrusting into my pussy.

My breathless moans pumped more fuel into his thrusting. My fingernails raked across his thighs when his next thrust brought me to the edge.

He chuckled in amusement.

Iokul's usual self was more conserved than his brothers', but not at this moment. Blaze had said Iokul hadn't liked touching anyone, but from the day he'd met me, he'd wanted to touch me everywhere, all the time. The ice dragon often restrained himself, but the heat was always in his eyes, burning through his ice.

He often lost the battle. Just like now.

Peering deep into my eyes, he thrust into me deeply and stayed there for a second.

"Iokul," I moaned as I exhaled, which only spurred him to plunge into me savagely.

Right now, it was just him and me, and we had all night and the whole world for us.

"I want this to last forever, just you and me," he growled as he rocked his hips against me. "Just me fucking you."

His large cock grew harder and bigger, filling me, stretching me, molding me around him.

The pressure building inside me was unbearable, yet it kept building as his rapid thrusts became erratic. He could no more control himself than I did.

At his next brutal plunge, tidal waves took me under, and my pussy clenched his cock and milked him violently.

He opened his mouth, wanting to roar, but shut it with rough groans and clamped a hand over my mouth as a scream tore through me.

We had to be relatively quiet since we weren't exactly safe here.

He pulled my ankles from his shoulders and wrapped my legs around his waist while he thrust through my orgasm hard and fast.

His large hands held my buttocks, his thrusts not halting. After a few more powerful pumps, he found his own release, his hot cum spurring into

my womb and inducing another wave of my orgasm.

My head lopped on his shoulder, my lips licking his cool skin as I bit into his neck.

He shuddered and held me against him.

“I want to fuck you like this every night,” he murmured.

He dressed me and put on his own clothes, while I lay there, grinning at him like an idiot, boneless from the orgasmic pleasure he had taunted out of me.

Laughter sparkled in his beautiful eyes that were no longer icy.

“Come.” He led me to the garden where the bushes of jasmine shone under the crescent moons.

“Should we go back to the ship now?” I asked, though I wanted to stay here a little longer.

He only pulled me against his chest and led me into a slow dance.

Something cold and fluffy fell on my lips. I looked up. Snowflakes cascaded down, not on the whole castle, but on the garden.

The world above us was pure white and beautiful beyond measure.

My ice-dragon mate was giving me the flowing snow as a gift and danced me to love.

I gazed at him with adoration, but I was also worried.

“You were spent earlier, Iokul. Shouldn’t you reserve your energy?”

“I’ll reserve nothing for you, love.”

We swayed in rhythm, my head on his shoulder, my hands sliding around his waist.

“Will your snow hurt my jasmines?” I asked.

He chuckled. “It won’t snow the whole night.” He tucked my head back under his chin.

“This feels nice, Iokul.”

“I thought I would always be the unfeeling ice,” he whispered, “but you melt my ice. You make my ice burn for you. The world starts to have colors when I can feel. I’ll never let you go. Even if you drive me away, I won’t go. And I’ll always come back to you, no matter what.”

“And why do you think that I’ll ever drive you away? Why do you think I’ll ever let you get away?”

The wind stormed around us. The snow twirled violently. Wings flapped in the air. When they tucked away, a deep growl rose from the edge of the garden.

My other mates had come.

Iokul and I were so indulged in each other that we'd forgotten the whole world.

The ice dragon snapped his head at the indignant noises and rolled his eyes.

Blaze glared at him. "You should have known better, Iokul. This is a dangerous time, and Daisy is no safer than before. What if the enemies snuck up and hurt her when you let your guard down like this? Have you forgotten your duties and responsibilities to our mate? She isn't only your mate!"

Lately, Blaze was all about lecturing others and me. Knowing I'd had sex with his brother before his arrival hadn't improved his mood. Even Rai, the reasonable, level-headed one among us all, stared hard at Iokul.

Iokul, for the first time, looked chastened and didn't retort.

I also felt guilty for stealing precious moments with Iokul, though I shouldn't be ashamed spending time alone with any of them.

I knew my mates were all alpha dragons and they couldn't help being dominant, though they'd all tried to tone down their dominance when they'd first courted me.

Now that we'd mated, I wondered if they believed they'd secured me so that they wouldn't need to work on our relationship.

I loved them all, but I wouldn't allow myself to be taken for granted or being lectured like this.

Not all of them act like that, part of me reminded myself.

Right, only the fire dragon was at odds with me. Maybe I needed to snuff out the spark before it became wildfire, before all his brothers started acting the same.

But where did my insecurity come from?

I avoided looking at Blaze but gazed at Rai. He held my eyes, and the anger in his stunning sapphire eyes dissipated. He reciprocated the same longing and hunger. He read how much I wanted him, too. I craved to go into his arms, to feel his powerful heartbeat and taste his masculine lips.

A smile ghosted his mouth, and heat rose in his eyes, as I showed him my open desire through our mating bond. I wanted him to push me against the wall and screw me slow and hard.

Iokul pulled back the drifting snow.

But Blaze was still unable to let go. "Quit fooling around, Iokul," he snapped. "Let's get back to the ship now!"

I bet if I were dancing with him, he wouldn't say we were fooling around.

"I'll always be in danger as the heir to the throne," I said. "But that doesn't mean I should hole up in a dark corner and be miserable. I'd like to celebrate my every free breath when I can. If you can't take it, you don't have to join me."

Blaze's golden eyes immediately darkened, as if my words stabbed him in the heart. It was the first time I'd been so harsh toward him, when he was only concerned about my safety. A slice of guilt jabbed me, especially since my curse had been completely broken while my mates still had half their curse upon them.

"Blaze meant well, though it came off as overbearing," Rai said, wrapping an arm around my waist. "He was—we both were—extremely worried when we lost you for a few hours in Amethyst. None of us could locate you, not even through our mating bond."

That was when Iokul and I had been running in the tunnel. And later on, Elvey must have cloaked us.

Iokul stepped back as Rai pulled me against his chest. I held onto him, taking comfort from his warmth and solidity, inhaling his scent of autumn and rainstorms. From the moment he saved me from the drones while I was in my Fury form, Rai had always been my rock, and he knew it.

My face rubbed against Rai's chin with deep affection, and the corner of my eyes caught Blaze brooding alone in front of a jasmine bush and staring at me with both regret and hunger.

"Dragons don't always dwell in the past," I said softly, mostly to Blaze. "We can live in the moment as well, like the mortals."

"But if we don't learn from history, we won't have a future," Blaze said. "And our present will be cut short. If we lose you—"

I left Rai's embrace and went to him. I gripped his chin between my thumb and forefinger and planted a hard kiss on his mouth. "You won't lose me."

He grabbed me and kissed me back, fire burning our lips.

Fortunately, we were both dragons.

"Now, can we return to the ship?" Blaze asked, still not wanting me to be exposed to the uncertain night.

I turned to regard my mates, glad they were all here with me. "Fine. And we need to talk."

"Yes, we do," Rai said.

We shifted and took off into the deep night sky.

Henry shot toward me, howling in joy as soon as I entered the ship. Sybil landed on my arm, tilting her head to gaze up at me, chirping, and throwing tons of questions at me.

As we walked down the hallway toward the bridge, Henry rubbed against my leg, refusing to give the spot to Blaze. The fire dragon gave the two-headed hellhound a glare and fell behind me with Iokul.

“If it were a man, I’d impale him,” Blaze grated.

Rai chuckled, his strong arm snaking around my waist. “I think Henry is cute.”

I didn’t point out that he’d been pissed, too, when Henry had brushed him from my side the other day.

As the men all gathered, we shared what we’d seen, heard, and discovered. Iokul debriefed everyone about our encounter with Lysandra, and I told them about Elvey’s warning.

Blaze narrowed his eyes in displeasure. “The dude returned so soon?”

“He couldn’t stay on Pandemonium forever,” I said.

“Why the hell not?” Blaze said. “That savage planet suits him well.”

Iokul had been cool with Elvey, but Blaze didn’t accept anyone easily. I used to think Iokul was the most stubborn, distant, and suspicious among all my mates, but it turned out Blaze was the one.

The fire dragon burned brightly and passionately, but he was slower to

accept change. He didn't like change, which was quite contradictory to his fire nature.

"Elvey came back to help Daisy and us," Iokul said.

"Out of the kindness of his pure heart?" Blaze huffed.

"So, in the end, he and his friends will have a home to return to," I said, and thought of Rosalinda. I cleared my throat to launch into a speech, and Henry barked once to warn everyone to be quiet. He knew me well. "As you all know, King Daghdha lost control of the Danaenyth dynasty. Lysandra has the support of all the humans."

My mates and our guards, who had returned from the other cities, all nodded grimly. Sybil flew to land on Iokul's shoulder, preening her feathers as she listened on.

"Let's take war to her door and see how the humans handle it." Quintrell punched his scarred fist into the air. He'd become as loyal to me as to his lightning prince.

"We've gone over that angle," I said, using Elvey's script as my own. "If we want to win this war, we need to win smart. It's better to stab the consort in the back when she least expects it."

The black witch had pulled the rug right from under me, and I'd like to return the favor.

"We assassinate her?" Jarrod asked.

The warriors looked eager, and all volunteered.

"No, we aren't going to kill her that way," Iokul said. "First, it'll be hard to do because of her powerful magic. She has a large coven to boost her power. Her elite guards are around her all the time. If we fail, it'll be a complete political disaster. She and the humans will use that to call for an open war to try to wipe us out."

"Let them try," Blaze snarled. "Our Oslanian army will meet them in full force."

The warriors shouted their support and agreement. Dragons were all hotheads.

"Even if we win, the humans won't accept Daisy's rule," Iokul said. "Rebels will rise over and over again."

"Then we repress them over and over again," Blaze said. "We might just wipe them all out. And I don't give a fuck if the humans accept our mate or not. The Danaenyth dynasty is Daisy's by every right, and we'll make sure she gets it back. I won't stand by as the consort bitch and her human pets

think they're entitled to rob my mate of her birthright and drive her out. To war we'll go."

Rai hadn't offered any opinion. He always pondered before he pounced. And when he pounced, it was lethal.

"Daisy doesn't want war," Iokul said. "She wants to win over the humans in the six cities while teaching them a lesson, of course, so they'll never cross the line again."

Iokul had listened to Elvey's plan and agreed with it.

"Win over the humans?" A few warriors asked incredulously, and even Rai looked doubtful.

"Arianrhod, the goddess of the land and sky and rebirth, bequeathed my ancestors as the Keeper of the Dragon Realm and the six cities," I said. "My bloodline can draw magic from the land. We have the power to welcome anyone we want and evict those we don't."

Rai gave me a careful look. "It's a legend."

"You think so, my thunder and lightning mate?" I asked with an arched brow. "You're the one who once believed the legend about me and first recognized me for who I was."

I pulled out a knife and cut across my palm. My hand balled to a fist as my blood dripped to the carpeted ground. "Goddess Arianrhod, your maiden Daisy Danaenyth has returned. I vow to resume my duty to be the protector of the realm."

Then I shouted, "Show me a sign. Let the land rock!"

It was an impulsive move. If nothing happened, I'd look like a complete idiot and lose all my credibility.

Sweat formed under my armpits as the silence stretched on.

No one laughed at me though.

Then a rumble sounded before the ground beneath *Mistress* quaked. The ship tilted and trembled from the impact. Alarmed shouts came from the warriors as they lost their footing and some of the crew tumbled from their seats. Those who remained standing grabbed at any solid surface to keep themselves upright.

"Cease," I called, and the tremor stopped right away. *Mistress* stilled.

Every head turned to me, eyes wide, mouths agape, awed and disbelieving.

I grinned.

"You've got this, Princess Danaenyth!" Jarrod shouted, as if the victory

was his. “What are we waiting for? We go evict the consort and her humans right now.”

“Evicting the black witch and her minions is what I’ll do,” I said. “But the people will be my people. We just need to show them the way.”

“You can show them what you showed us, Daisy,” Blaze said, “if you don’t want bloodshed. The humans will fall under your feet and beg for forgiveness when they see your awesome demonstration.”

“I know what I showed you is amazing,” I said. “But my connection to the land won’t be as strong in the six cities as in the Dragon Realm.” Elvey had warned that I would never take back my dynasty without Arianrhod’s endorsement. “I can’t show the humans what I showed you. At least, not yet. The link between my bloodline and the land was broken when King Daghdha neglected his duties and deserted the realm. The human governments have chosen to go with Lysandra. They’re happy to be in her pocket and will try their best to deny my rule, unless I renew my vow of fealty to Arianrhod and truly become the Keeper of the Dragon Realm and the six cities.”

“Then you vow it, Daisy,” Rai said.

“I hope it’s that simple.” I sighed heavily.

“What do you need to do? What do you need us to do? We’re here,” Rai said.

I had to tell them the prophecy, good or bad, so I told them about the nightmare, how I might lose them if we went on a quest to seek the goddess’ blessing.

“I’ve been trying to come up with many different solutions,” Iokul said. “In the end, Elvey’s is the only one that makes sense. It’s the only one that will work in every way.”

“I think we should go around it,” I said, uncertainty and fear in my voice. “If I lose any of you, I won’t survive.”

“You won’t lose us, honeybee,” Blaze said fiercely. “It’s the enemy’s voice in your head, trying to stop you from fulfilling your great destiny.”

“But the first part of the dream came true,” I said. “Look how my realm burned.”

“It’s the fear talking, sweetheart,” Rai said, kissing the top of my head to expel my anxiety. “The enemy always delivers mixed messages. We won’t let them stop us. We’ll proceed and go seek the goddess.”

I bit my lip. No matter which direction we turned, there was danger lurking at every corner. “We can try. We’ll need to find my grandfather first.

Hopefully, he can point us in a direction that will lead to Arianrhod.”

“Let’s set out tomorrow,” Rai said.

The warriors stood to attention and nodded. They had no fear of war or qualms about a quest to seek out the goddess. They just needed something to do, needed to know where to go and when to hit.

None of them were concerned about my nightmare. I was the only fearful one.

“We have the fastest ship,” Quintrell said, rubbing his hands excitedly. “We can take it to the end of Inanna and any part of the world.”

“That’s the thing. There are conditions,” I said. “We can’t take the ship. We’ll have to make the journey on foot. Neither can we shift to our dragon forms before we meet the goddess.”

“That’s going to take a long time,” Blaze said.

“That’s why it’s called the Arianrhod’s quest,” Iokul said.

“How do you know about the Arianrhod’s quest all of a sudden?” Blaze challenged.

“I have my resources,” Iokul snapped.

“I bet your resource is Elvey Fionn,” Blaze sneered. “I don’t trust that warlock.”

“Then I have some good news for you, Blaze,” Iokul said. “Daisy can take only six companions. Two spots have been reserved for Elvey and his lady friend Rosalinda. On our side, there are only four positions available. Rai and I are going, and we’ll pick two others.”

Raucous roars deafened me as every warrior made their voices heard in an attempt to be chosen.

“Shut up,” Blaze roared, and momentary stillness descended on the crowd. “There’s no fucking way that I’m not going. You can’t stop me, Iokul. I’ll drag you down.”

“Then why must you always whine?” Iokul said. “You give Daisy headaches.”

“I didn’t whine,” Blaze said. “I just want to protect my mate.”

“Our mate,” Iokul said.

I shook my head with a sigh. Would they never tire of reminding each other that I was all of theirs?

“Exactly! Then how dare you deny my rights to guard our mate since she isn’t only yours?” Blaze demanded.

The warriors snapped their heads between the two princes as they

quarreled.

“This is tiresome,” Rai spat. “I can’t imagine how our mate puts up with you two. She’s too kind.”

“Daisy has a fierce and tender heart,” Iokul said.

“And she’s most gorgeous.” Blaze smiled in reverence. “And ferocious.”

“We need to pick one more warrior to go with us,” Rai said.

Sybil turned to Henry and chirped sharply at him, and Henry growled at me. Sybil flew to me, landing on my arm and voicing her demand.

I scratched Henry behind his ear and said to Sybil with a sigh, “Fine, you two can come. You aren’t dragons, so the number doesn’t include you.”

And I’ll get to see Elvey again. Sybil flashed Elvey’s image, which she believed was hot, in my head, before she flew in a rapid circle around the dragon warriors with giddiness. She made their heads spin, but none dared to criticize her, knowing how much I indulged Sybil.

In the mist, the charred castle floated in the clouds, the distant mountains in the backdrop a silvery wave. I circled the peak of the castle in my dragon form, ready to say goodbye.

Three dragons, silver, gray, and fire-orange patrolled the air.

My mates weren't allowing me to wallow in self-pity or dismay. Since I'd mated with them, solitude was no longer an option. They'd always be with me and around me. I would never be alone again.

I shifted to my Fae form in the jasmine garden.

Before I went to find King Daghdha, I needed to perform the ritual Elvey required me to perform. No Fae could enter the Dragon Realm, just as no dragons were allowed to step into the dark Fae realm. But as part of the royal bloodline of the Danaenyth house, I could grant Elvey and his companions access to my realm.

I pulled out a dagger from my hunting boot and sliced across the heel of my palm. My mates swooped up and down in the air above me, watching me attentively.

"I, Daisy Danaenyth, the last of the bloodline of the Danaenyth royal dragon house, grant Elvey Fionn, Rosalinda Whifflethorn, and their friends who will be my allies, access to this realm. The land will accept them and not harm them."

My blood dropped to the rich soil beneath my feet. I waited, wondering if

the land would answer me again. After what felt like an eternity, faint magic brushed against me.

The land tugged at me. I let out a sigh of relief.

A single plant sprouted where the soil had absorbed my blood. A jasmine with seven white petals blossomed right in front of my eyes.

An offering from the land.

An acceptance.

I plucked the flower with a grateful smile and tucked it in my hair behind my ear.

My journey started now. I wouldn't shift into my dragon form until I had completed the quest.

I sheathed my dagger and bandaged my palm. From this moment on until we met Arianrhod, I couldn't use my magic, either. Which also meant there would be no quick healing for me and my companions if we were wounded.

I gazed up at the three dragons circling above me and called them to me.

They came to me. Blaze landed first and crouched in front of me, his massive wings spread out.

I held onto his thick dragon neck and climbed onto his solid back. His fire-orange scales under my butt were a bit wet because of the mist. As soon as I settled, he lifted off, following his brothers, and took me to our travel companions, who were waiting at the gate of the castle.

When I slid off Blaze's back and thanked him, he shifted to his human form, as did Iokul and Rai.

Our companions were Chiron, Henry, and Sybil.

Sybil perched on Chiron's shoulder, preening her feathers. Ever since Elvey had given back her other wing, she'd been taking extreme care of her wings.

Henry paced impatiently as he glanced up at her.

Chiron, the meekest-looking dragon shifter with brown-gray eyes, grinned from ear to ear, as if he'd won the lottery.

All the warriors had fought to be the chosen one to come with us. Jarrod and Quintrell had been most unhappy when the princes picked Chiron.

Quintrell had insisted that we take him with us to make use of his great sword skills.

"Sure," I'd said. "You also insisted that Prince Rai use your great sword to cut off my three heads on Pandemonium."

"How do you still remember that?" Quintrell had said, looking so hurt.

Blaze and Iokul had glared at him and growled.

“I dare you to come near my mate again,” Blaze had threatened.

Quintrell had spread his arms apart, his face reddening with shame. “How was I supposed to know the beasts—the Furies—were actually Princess Daisy? No one could have ever put the two together.”

“Rai did,” I’d said. And my lightning dragon looked proud. “But you’re forgiven, Quintrell, if you stay quiet now.”

He’d heaved a sigh.

Jarrold didn’t know where the king had gone other than that he’d gone to the mountains, so he couldn’t serve as our guide. And we needed him here with the Oslanian warriors to provide local support.

“Base operations are very important,” Rai had tried to console the rest of his men. “During the trip, we aren’t allowed to shift or use magic. We’ll need a healer. And for your information, it won’t be a great adventure. The path will be full of treacherous peril.”

“We like treacherous peril,” the warriors had grunted.

So, off we went from the castle.

My mates and Chiron carried heavy bags packed with all sorts of supplies, and they insisted I carry the lightest one. They weren’t so kind to Henry, though, and they somehow managed to tie a few bedrolls on the hellhound’s massive back, as if he was a horse.

For my sake, Henry didn’t resist, but he wasn’t happy. He barked at Blaze when he tried to load a whole box of bottled water on his neck.

Blaze ignored the hound’s protest but grated, “The Fae mage and his *lady friend* are late!”

“With Elvey, one can never know when or where he’ll pop out,” I said with a hint of irritation. “We’re not waiting for them. I’ve given him access, and it’s up to him as to how to use it.”

“We’re giving him too much leverage by allowing him to enter the Dragon Realm,” Blaze said.

“Where are we going then? Which direction?” Chiron asked eagerly, looking around the ridge mountains. He carried most of the medical supplies.

“We don’t know yet,” Rai said. “Just one of the mountains. If we have to search all of them to find King Daghdha, so be it.”

My four companions and I, plus a hellhound and a flying lizard, set off toward the center of the snowy mountains.

Sybil flew ahead, twirled in circles, then flew back to us, chirping excitedly.

Henry slanted an unimpressed look at her as he trotted beside Chiron.

Are we there yet, Daisy? Sybil asked.

Not yet, I said.

We prowled forward with a steady pace, and the narrow road ahead became more difficult to tread since few had ever passed through the path before. Dragons did not walk. But none of us were allowed to shift. If we did, we would fail the quest.

After half a day's trek on a dirt road without a break, even Henry was panting. We couldn't afford to take many breaks. The longer we were on the road, the sooner Lysandra would have my realm in her claws.

We passed a lake, woods, and a small patch of swamp, yet the mountains didn't appear to be any closer.

I'd never missed flying more than I did now.

Sybil grew impatient and restless and flew ahead of us. When an hour passed, and she hadn't returned, I started to worry. I stretched my consciousness and searched for her but couldn't locate her.

My mind-searching required magic. Elvey had said that no magic would work as soon as I started the pilgrimage, except the magic directly connected

to the land. Fortunately, I could still mind-talk to Sybil, not by magic, but through our bond.

Sybil! I called and got no answer.

“Sybil is missing,” I told my mates, anxiety stabbing me.

“Do you want us to go search for her?” Iokul asked.

Henry barked skywards vehemently.

“No need,” I said. “She’s coming. He can feel her more than I can from a distance.”

Chiron glanced between Henry and me. He was fascinated with the bond between my hound, my hybrid bird, and me more than the bond between my mates and me.

“I saw an abandoned temple on a side road,” Rai said. “Let’s take a break and wait for your bird there.”

All my mates had a hard time categorizing Sybil. In the end, they just called her a bird instead of a flying lizard, believing that was politer.

Blaze and Iokul went ahead to scout the temple, and the rest of us reached the surrounding broken pillars before they signaled that it was safe.

Green moss covered the stone temple.

A vast old tree that was split through the middle concealed the entrance with its twisted trunks.

“It’s empty and dusty,” Blaze said.

“It must have been built long ago devoted to one of the gods or goddesses,” I said, a bit ashamed that I didn’t know my own realm’s history. But I had been a mere teenager when the curse befell me.

“Maybe it’s Arianrhod’s shrine,” Iokul said.

“Gods and goddesses are forgotten in this era of science, technology, and human uprising,” Rai said regretfully. “As are myths and legends.”

“Even so, magic is still a force that can’t be reckoned with,” I said, suddenly remembering Elvey’s line. “When nature gets its revenge, no one can resist its wrath. Humans will learn the lesson the hard way if they don’t back off.”

Just then, a vast shadow cast on the ground. We snapped our heads up, and Rai nocked his arrow skywards. The shadow flitted by. At an eye blink, it was gone.

“Something was spying on us,” Iokul said. “It’s too high to make out what it is.”

“One of us will always stand guard,” Rai said. “We’ll take a half hour

break. Daisy needs food and drink.”

While Rai chose the first shift, Blaze and Iokul found a large flat rock and covered it with a sheet. They pulled out dried meat, fruits, bread, and bottles of water from the bags and set the picnic on the rock.

Chiron fed Henry before he strode to take over the guard duty from Rai. As was proper, he would let his prince eat first.

“Go eat, Chiron,” Rai said, and the healer nodded. Rai’s every word to him was an order. Chiron inserted a slice of dried beef and cheese between his bread and took a huge bite.

I sat down on an even rock. Blaze and Iokul brought me my share of food and drink before they prepared theirs. Ever since we’d mated, they always made sure I was taken care of first.

Iokul sat across from me and Blaze perched beside me, so they could both shield me in case of attack. I leaned over to give Iokul an appreciative kiss, then turned to kiss Blaze on the cheek. But he turned his lips to me, signaling that I should kiss his mouth. I brushed my lips over his, then tore a piece of bread and popped it in my mouth.

My mates gazed at me intently, desire in their eyes.

Rai swallowed and tore his eyes away from me. He needed to stay alert for any threats.

It didn’t matter where we were. We’d always want each other. The mating call was forever eager. Maybe tonight when we set up the tent, we could warm our bed.

Skin to skin. The image made me blush and hope for the night to descend earlier.

As we ate, Sybil shot toward us, her wings fluttering rapidly.

Corns, Daisy! Corns ahead! she called. *I ate lots of sweet corns.*

I relayed Sybil’s information to the rest of my group.

We soon set out again and climbed over a hill. Standing on top of the hill, I surveyed acres of cornfields in the valley.

At the end of the golden cornfields was a vast green plain with silver trees. The white mountains weren’t far from there.

“We’re finally close,” Rai grinned and grabbed me for a kiss. I hadn’t bestowed him with a kiss during our break.

Henry charged ahead of us toward the cornfields, and Sybil flew over him, chirping, before alighting on the shoulder between his heads. She was hitching a ride after her long hours of flying.

We traversed through the large path dividing the columns of corn, joking with one another. Our hearts lightened. We'd soon reach the mountains. But when we exited the cornfields, we didn't see the green plain and silver trees. We'd returned to the barren hill where we'd started.

We cursed, puzzled, and tried again. We ended up at the hill again.

"What the fuck?" Blaze said. "It isn't even a maze. Who's fucking with us?"

We tried another route and another. Over and over, we were sent to the starting point at the hill.

We detoured, avoiding the acres of the cornfields, and in the end, we still stood at the base of the hill.

"It's like some force keeps shifting us back," I said. "And we can't see how it was done."

Even Henry panted, his tongues hanging out and looking at me for answers.

Sybil chirped furiously.

We sent Sybil out to fly across the cornfields and see if she could find the path out, but even she found no path.

Whatever lay before us wouldn't let us pass.

We put our heads together, discussing and debating and cursing, and we were out of ideas. Iokul and Blaze spat insults at each other, every word growing increasingly offensive. At this point, I had accepted that when my three mates were together, it was impossible for them to have complete silence and peace. It was against their nature.

So, I trained myself to block out their arguing if the subject matter didn't require my input. At least, I took comfort that they weren't stabbing each other in the back. And I was certain if and when danger came upon us, all my dragon mates would watch each other's backs and defend me. Perhaps that should be enough.

I took a deep breath, remembering how the land had responded to my blood. With a determined sigh, I pulled out a dagger from the sheath in my boot and cut my palm again, my former wound still fresh.

My dragon blood dripped to the rocky soil beneath my feet.

"I'm Daisy Danaenyth, the last of the bloodline of the Danaenyth dragon royal house," I said. "I'm seeking a safe path for my companions and me in order to continue on Goddess Arianrhod's quest. You shall not keep us here and anger the goddess."

A breeze whizzed through my mind, then the awareness of the land seeped into my entire being. I was getting better at reading and responding to the elemental magic. As its power traversed in me, I probed further to see what force was stopping us from reaching our destination.

As I pushed forward, I sensed moving lines, forms, colors, and all life forms pulsing in an abstract fashion, and they were all connected. The magic of the realm vibrated beneath me and in the air. As I kept calling for it, a giant beast rose from the land.

It sat in front of us, blocking the entrance of the cornfields.

The nine-foot-tall creature had a man's face, a lion's haunches, and a dragon's wings.

And it was sightless.

As one, my mates and Chiron stepped between the freak of the beast and me with battle growls, their lethal swords raised.

Henry barked in fear and rage.

Sybil withdrew and landed on my shoulder, her claws clinging to my outfit.

"Don't fight him," I said, pushing between Rai and Iokul. "I summoned him."

The creature sniffed and laughed in delight.

"Who are you?" I demanded.

"You are Daisy Danaenyth, the dragon heir to the throne of the Danaenyth dynasty," he said, "but you aren't the Keeper of the Dragon Realm yet."

"I intend to be," I said. "I'm on my way to earn the privilege, and you're in my path."

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm Sphinx."

"Sphinx?" Rai cried in outrage. Among all of us, he was the expert on all myths, legends, and folklore. "Sphinx is a mythical guardian humans made up. The humans named Sphinx the beast of riddles."

Sphinx smirked, turning his head to look at Rai. He didn't need sight to see my mate.

"This isn't your true form," I said. "Sphinx isn't your true name."

"I call myself whatever I want and take whatever form I fancy," he said. "For you, I borrowed a concept from a human legend about a ruthless magical guardian. You see, I guard the path. If you want to pass, you'll have to answer my riddle correctly. According to the mythological stories, those

who can't come up with the correct answer to the riddle suffer a horrific fate—being eaten by a ravenous monster, and that will be me.”

“Sphinx is said to be treacherous and merciless,” Rai whispered in my ear.

“Hmm, delicious,” Sphinx said, as if Rai had flattered him. He scanned us hungrily, like he couldn't decide which one of us he'd eat first.

“You didn't exactly get the shape right,” Rai said. “The human face and the lion body maybe so, but the sphinx has no dragon wings. So, your claim of being the guardian of the path is invalid. If I were you, I would move away this instant and let us pass.”

“What's wrong with being creative?” Sphinx said. “I made some modifications. What's the big deal? I like dragon wings. It's nice to treat myself. Anyway, you all have passed back and forth and ended up where you are now, haven't you? My moving away isn't going to change that.”

“So, you're just toying with us?” Blaze hissed, pointing his sword at Sphinx.

Sphinx arched an eyebrow. It was a disturbing sight since he had no eyes on his flat, broad face. “You want a fight, boy? That's marvelous! I haven't had a duel for an eon. No one challenges me. I'm desperate for some fun after being woken up by your girlfriend.”

“She's my mate!” Blaze said.

“Not yours only,” Sphinx said.

It would be a disaster if Blaze got into a duel with Sphinx.

“Not a chance,” I said. “We won't fight Goddess Arianrhod's gatekeeper.” I had recognized who he was now. I turned to give my mates a quick, warning glance. “Unless we want to be doomed.”

“The females always spoil the fun,” Sphinx said.

Iokul growled.

Henry snarled but stopped at the creature's glare and hunched down on his rear paws with a whimper.

“What's the price to get to the other side without being returned here?” I asked.

“The usual—answer my riddle correctly,” Sphinx said.

My heart sank. Must the goddess make the journey so difficult? I had never been good at riddles. I hated spelling, riddles, and the like, even as a little girl. Adrian had often made fun of me for my aversion to all sorts of games.

“Anyone good at riddles?” I asked hopefully.

My mates and the healer looked back at me blankly.

Okay, we didn’t have a riddle expert here. That was bad.

Only Sybil chirped cheerfully, *I like riddles.*

I darted my eyes wildly around. Where was Elvey? It would be the perfect time for him to show up. I’d bet that he could take on this task better than any of us. He himself was a riddle.

The air didn’t crackle, and there was no flashing light to indicate his arrival.

I sighed. Just when I thought I could rely on him, I found out he wasn’t all that reliable.

“We can try,” Rai said coolly, as if it was no big deal.

Sphinx snorted. “You can try? Do you understand the consequences if you fail?”

Judging from the determined expressions on my mates’ masked faces, I believed that they’d decided to fight our way through if we couldn’t solve Sphinx’s riddle.

“The test is magically bound,” Sphinx said. “If you can’t answer the riddle, I’ll have the rights to eat you all. I’ve been hungry for a long time.”

I bit my lip. There was no way out of this.

Blaze snorted. “You can try!”

Iokul wielded his sword with deadly swiftness.

“How did you bump into these three clueless, pompous asses, Daisy?” Sphinx asked. “Who assigned you the true loves? Fate? Then Fate’s an asshole. The dragon boys are good-looking, I’m sure, but true loves should be more, right? I know you have doubts. You aren’t one to lurk in someone else’s shadow.”

The dragon princes and I all glared at Sphinx.

My mates seldom showed fear. When they did, it was fear for my safety.

“Who are you to challenge Fate’s choice?” I asked sharply. “I have no doubts about any of my mates.”

“Really?” Sphinx sent me an equally sharp look. “Since you scolded me, little dragon, I’ll show you what Fate’s choice is. Because of your snide comments, I just crossed out an easy, old riddle that would have played in your favor. I’m going to give you a new one, and it’s going to sting.”

“What’s the riddle?” I asked. The longer we tangled with him, the worse it would be for us.

“Spill it, Sphinx, and let’s get it over with,” Blaze said.

Sphinx opened his mouth, and his words poured out.

“The first one becomes the last, and the last ones stole the first kisses of blessing and curse.

The first is robbed of everything that’s his.

Heart doesn’t know. Heart betrays. Heart breaks. Heart divides. Heart deceives. But the blind has to see, then the heart reveals.”

Suddenly a pair of piercing eyes, one purple and one red, appeared and glowed under Sphinx’s bushy eyebrows. He was telling me that he was no longer blind, and as such, I shouldn’t be either.

“It’s not one, not two, and not three,” Sphinx said. *“Only when you find the missing piece of what the heart desires will you finally find your way home.”*

My heart pounded. I wasn’t good at riddles, but I instantly knew the answer to this one. It was as if Sphinx speared me in my heart to show me what it was.

I didn’t want to say the answer.

“Let’s get to work and solve it,” Rai ordered, and the three of my mates and Chiron started to put their heads together.

One got an answer, then another man found a flaw and denied it. And on and on they went.

Sphinx put his head on his paws and snorted at the shifters’ debates.

The wind swirled around us. The sun was going to set before they could find the answer. No one could get this riddle, except me.

“Four,” I whispered to Sphinx, my throat dry as the word scratched against it.

His snort stopped, and he opened an eye.

“Four,” I said in a low voice. Why must he make me repeat myself? “Four is the real number.”

My mates stopped arguing with each other and trained their attention on us. Tension crackled in the air.

“Uh, magic number,” Sphinx said. “You’ll have to say the whole answer.”

He was tormenting me. He knew my curse, my history, and everything related to me. And he wanted to torment my mates more because they’d offended him.

Merciless and treacherous creature!

“It’s not three true loves, but four,” I ground out, clenching my jaw with every word.

A deadly silence from my mates stretched, hurting me more than any loud objections, for I’d hurt them. How I hated myself for that.

Sphinx gave me a satisfied smile. “The path ahead is long, merciless, and treacherous, Daisy Danaenyth, who wants to be the new protector of the Dragon Realm and your mates and the people who don’t want you.”

“Will you step aside and let us pass now?” I grated.

“I have something else for you to muse in your spare time, Keeper-to-be,” he said. His sightless eyes reflected the dark stars and their terrible secrets.

Gain the first and lose the last. Keep the last, and the first will be shattered bones. Heart doesn’t know. Heart betrays. Heart breaks. Heart divides. Heart deceives. Only the greatest sacrifice and boldest move wins the wickedest game. Sphinx sank into the ground, yet his words didn’t disappear; they echoed in the chamber of my pounding head.

That dark promise, like the nightmare I had, dragged my heart into the deep, damp ground with him.

Sybil chirped, *We won! We won!*

She flew ahead of us toward the cornfields. Henry chased after her as if she were a butterfly.

I averted my gaze from my mates. I’d rather my heart to be the only one broken, but I seemed to be the one who was going to break a lot of hearts.

“Go on,” I said, and followed Sybil’s trail.

We prowled through the path. My mates’ hurt devastated me. Blaze’s, and even Rai’s silent accusation of “Aren’t we enough for you?” in their wounded eyes haunted me. They thought I had something going on with Elvey behind their backs.

I understood their perception of my betrayal, and right now I could barely face them. My own shame wouldn’t leave me alone.

I had no intention of adding one more man to the mix and making the situation even more complicated. I’d just gotten used to the pattern and rhythm with my three alpha dragon princes. They were, for sure, more than enough for me. They were my anchor and my world, and they were always there for me.

But how could I tell them that? Would they even believe me when I did?

I loved them with all of my heart. But still, another man outside their circle tugged at my selfish heart. If I could choose not to have feelings for

Elvey, I would.

I wanted to turn to my mates and tell them how sorry I was, but it wouldn't mend their hurt feelings while my heart also had one more spot for another man.

I didn't want to lie to any of my mates.

I walked ahead of them in heavy silence.

In the middle of the path between rows of corn, I gave them a backward glance, and all three of them stared back at me. Just then, a shadow of wings flitted by overhead.

“Protect our mate!” With a shout, Blaze lunged at me to shield me.

Rai raised his longbow, an arrow with an iron shaft was nocked and flying through the air before I could even draw a breath. There were over two dozen arrows inside his hip quiver. Rai was said to be one of the best archers in the Oslan Dominion.

Elvey had laid out the conditions he knew about Arianrhod's quest: no more than seven companions, no magic except the magic I could draw from the land, no shifting, and no technological weapons.

Iokul's eyes darted, seeking threats around the cornfields and leaving the sky to Rai.

Rai's arrow didn't find the target.

“It's not a dragon,” Rai said. “It's something else. It intentionally keeps out of our sight.”

“Maybe it's another test?” Blaze asked.

I stepped back from Blaze's shielding, my twin daggers in my hands. I wasn't going to be in his shadow or anyone else's. “I can fight. I'm also a dragon.”

Who would have thought there would be a day the retired three Furies—the very definition of nightmare—would be regarded as a damsel?

“Let's get the hell out of the cornfields,” Iokul said.

We burst along the rest of the path with Rai and Blaze leading and Iokul and Chiron bringing up the rear.

As we approached the last rows of the cornfields, I swore to the goddess that if we returned to the hill again, I would kill Sphinx, no matter what shape he fancied next time.

Rai charged out and bellowed, “What the fuck is this?”

Henry was right at his heel, spinning, his heads raising skywards.

Sybil woke up with a jerk of her head, then started preening her feathers.

I stared ahead warily. I really needed to murder the Sphinx for toying with us.

The moment I stepped outside the cornfields, cold, soft snowflakes cascaded on my skin.

It wasn't the silver trees on the evergreen plain we'd expected. It was an endless land of snow and the howling wind.

The only cheerful sight was that the ring of silver mountains wasn't too far away.

We treaded through the thick snow for a few miles before deciding to camp for the night.

The passing shadow that had twice spied on us unnerved us. There was no need to exhaust ourselves. We needed to be in our best fighting shape when the foes came upon us.

Sybil's and Henry's excitement at seeing the first snow had died down, and they started to complain about the cold and wetness. The wind that hadn't stopped howling made them less than happy.

We shivered from the cold. We'd fare better if we were in our dragon forms.

The dragon shifters found a higher patch on the plain, cleared away the snow, and set up tents. My mates and I shared the big tent. Chiron shared one with Henry and Sybil. But Sybil would most likely come to our tent later. I'd told her several times it would be polite for her to be absent while I had intimacy with my mates, but she never heeded my request for privacy.

One time, she had watched in fascination as Rai fucked me.

For a moment, my mind drifted to Elvey again.

He hadn't shown up. Maybe he'd never intended to come with us, and I wasn't surprised. On the other hand, I was both relieved and disappointed.

I was relieved, because like right now while two of my mates and I tangled inside the tent, I wouldn't want Elvey to hear my moans. Strangely, I

didn't mind Iokul and Chiron hearing that.

Rai suckled at my nipple ravenously, his hand fondling my other breast, his fingers tweaking my nipple.

Every inch of my skin burst with pleasure.

Their hurt still haunted me. I wanted to make it up to them. I wanted to give them all of me—my passion, my body, heart, and soul.

“I want you every day, sweetheart.” Rai broke away from my breast, his face brushing my breast playfully, before his lips found my taut nipple again.

Blaze traced his sinful lips up my inner thighs, slowly and torturously. When his mouth reached the aching flesh between them and licked it, a small scream left my throat.

The sensation was undoing me, and here I was—thinking I was making it up to them.

Blaze's thumb trailed a small circle on the peak of my sensitive bud, sending a shiver all over me. I had to grab a fistful of Rai's hair to anchor myself. Rai's dark brown hair had been cropped when I'd first met him. It'd grown to half-length since then.

“Babe, I need to fuck you now,” Blaze murmured. “I can't hold back any longer.”

He knelt before me, spread my legs wide, and aimed his large cock at my slick entrance.

I was waiting for him to thrust in, deep and hard, but he just stared at my bare pussy, as if he still couldn't believe he had a pussy in front of him, free for him to screw.

I wiggled my hips and whimpered with impatience. I needed his hard cock inside me, filling me and stretching me, pounding and slamming into me.

An amused chuckle filled with lust left Blaze's lips. With one powerful thrust, he drove into me, seating deep inside me.

I sucked in a breath, my fist tightening in Rai's hair. Poor Rai, while his brother was fucking me, I used him as my sexual punch bag.

Blaze drove his hips forward, again and again, his cock coated in my slick heat.

“Hottest pussy ever,” he groaned, and his need for me overwhelmed me.

I threw my head back as waves of pleasure crashed over me. Heat rippled inside me and my legs quivered as orgasm broke. I arched my back, begging Blaze with my body to fuck me harder and faster.

Blaze and I hadn't been on the best terms lately, and now as we united in such passionate coupling, all I wanted was to mend every friction between us.

He drew his hips back and thrust forward, slamming up to the hilt with a dragon's savage strength and brutal speed.

I moaned breathlessly.

His lust-filled gaze flicked between my face and my pussy as he quickened his thrusts.

I rocked my hips, feeling myself reach the edge again, and needed more.

Blaze let out a low growl, pounding between my thighs so hard I screamed his name again.

The carnal pleasure sent me to another plane of existence and I needed to find something solid to hold on to. Only then did I realize that Rai had broken free of my grip while I'd moaned Blaze's name.

Rai's mouth had left my breast. He shifted position. His beautiful, masculine torso displayed before me. His skin was so smooth and tan, and his hard muscles flexing at his every movement was every woman's wet dream. My trembling fingers traced a tattoo of a storm-gray dragon spitting lightning on his body with appreciation. I could admire his beauty forever.

I wanted to lick the lightning dragon as well.

Then his large and gorgeous cock was above my face. It looked as hard as granite, its thick head pulsing.

"You like my cock, don't you, sweetheart?" Rai asked roughly.

"Yes." I breathed out.

I wanted it now, but I had another cock thrusting wildly into my pussy.

Rai lowed himself and pressed his silky, hard shaft on my cheek, its heat scorching me. Thunder and lightning and storm were his essence—so different than Blaze's flame.

I had them all.

"Oh Rai," I moaned. "Please."

His cock traced from my cheek to my jawline, marking me as his. The intense, sensual hunger in his sapphire eyes only made me desire him more.

A drop of clear moisture appeared on the slit of his cock, and he pushed the head of his cock against the corner of my mouth before he traced it along my bottom lip.

His intoxicating male scent wrapped around me. It made me feel home.

My tongue darted out, licking his crown and sweeping over the thick ring underneath it. Rai groaned in his throat. "Yes, sweetheart, suck my cock."

Suck it.”

Fuck! He tasted damn good.

Blaze bent down to suckle my tit and slammed deeper into my pussy, unraveling me with never-ending pleasure. My eyes rolled to the back of my head, and I moaned like a feline in heat.

“Come for me, babe,” he commanded as he thrust into me with abandon.

Crashing waves tossed me high to the apex. While I thought I would never come down, it dragged me under. I trembled as my inner muscles convulsed around Blaze’s cock, milking him for every drop he had inside him.

He shuddered and roared. My fire-dragon mate climaxed with such force that a third orgasm hit me before my second faded off.

Outside the tent, the snow twirled in wild dances.

Blaze remained hard in me and wouldn’t leave me.

“It’s my turn to fuck Daisy,” Rai said. “It’s been forever since I had her pussy.”

Blaze gave his brother a withering look and pulled out of me, but he took time to kiss me gently before finally giving up the space to his bother.

My heated gaze flicked to Rai. Lust darkened his sapphire eyes under the metal mask etched with the symbol of a lightning dragon.

My lips parted in wanton desire.

Blaze had given me multiple, mind-numbing orgasms. A regular woman would have been content and snuggled in next to her lover as their breaths returned to normal, but I craved more because they would always give me more. I wanted Rai. I wanted every one of my mates. I kept wanting each and every one of them.

Would the mating fever ever fade in time?

Rai grabbed my hips and flipped me over roughly, until I was on all fours. He splayed a hand over my back and pushed me down, my breasts crushing against the makeshift bed my mates had laid out earlier. I turned my head and rested it on the pillow, my breaths coming out in shallow gasps as he stroked over my ass, his fingers kneading and squeezing. His hands stilled, and he drew in a shaky breath. I knew he was feasting on my pussy with his eyes. His fingers trailed down to the slickness between my folds, and he opened me with his thumb and forefinger.

I moaned, and he rubbed the thick head of his cock over my cleft.

“I’m going to fuck you really hard,” he growled.

“Yes,” I cried out on a sigh. “I want you to fuck me hard.”

“You won’t beg for mercy?”

“Will you grant it?”

“No,” he said, and with one smooth, hard thrust, he drove into me.

I sucked in a breath as his naked skin connected with mine.

Blaze’s steel rod was huge and straight. When he fucked me with blunt strength, his dragon fire often surfaced to caress me. Rai’s shaft was the longest among his brothers and slightly arched. Rai was usually the gentler among the three, but not tonight.

Tonight, he promised something else and he was delivering.

Rai pumped into me, brutally hard, intense pleasure striking my every fiber like lightning. He pulled back before my next breath and shoved his hips back between my thighs, his cock penetrating me over and over.

It was a hard fuck, but I could take it. He knew I preferred it tonight.

I was a dragon, too.

His long thrusts slammed into me, shoving my shoulders to the bedrolls, the sound of flesh slapping flesh adding a coarse chorus to the howling wind outside.

In such rigid, harsh weather, Iokul, Chiron, and Henry should get into the tent instead of standing guard and suffering the cold. No friends or foes would be interested in attacking us at such stormy night.

I’d tell them to take it easy after Rai and I finished fucking.

Rai adapted to short, rapid thrusts, letting the head of his shaft rub at the edge of my wet entrance. The teasing was driving me half-mad. I slammed my ass back toward him, wanting to take him deeper into me, but his hands gripped my hips and pinned me there.

His dominant alpha trait, which he hadn’t shown often in consideration for me, had come to the forefront. Tonight, he wanted to fuck me however he wanted, and he showed me just that.

He was in total control of me, and I gave him whatever he wanted.

I had hurt him and my other mates with the revelation of the fourth mate. They didn’t like the prospect that I might add another mate into my harem.

Rai plunged into me vehemently, again and again, not to punish, but to reclaim me.

Sphinx’s riddle and my answer had made my mates insecure, but they didn’t have to feel that way, not if they knew how my heart belonged to them.

His next assault of powerful thrusts had me burying my face into the

pillow, muffling my scream of pleasure. My breasts bounced up and down from the force of his relentless pounding.

Rai wrapped his muscled arm around my breasts and yanked me up. He didn't want me to stifle my screams. He wanted me to moan and scream his name, and I obliged him.

We now both knelt, my back against his hard, warm chest, my legs planting wide on the blanket while he drove hard and fast into me from behind.

He was showing me what it was like to be fucked by a thunder and lightning dragon and demanded I surrender to him.

My fingernails raked across his muscle-rippled legs, drawing blood.

He groaned roughly, liking it. His large hand squeezed my breast, making the fire between my thighs burn hotter.

He bent forward, his hot lips tracing from my earlobe down to the column of my sensitive neck, licking away my glistening sweat. By taking a moment to show me his tender feelings, he intended for me to know that he wasn't merely fucking me.

No matter how hard and wildly he fucked me, he couldn't change his caring nature.

And I forever felt cherished.

He resumed his savage strength and bruising speed, driving into me, the slapping of flesh against flesh filling my ears.

"Yes, Rai! Fuck me! Harder," I cried, my head rolling back against his massive shoulder.

Warmth, security, need, and pleasure blended, threading into me and swaying me.

That was all I ever wanted.

Thunder rumbled from the mountains, and Rai roared through the night as my climax shattered me.

"Rai," I whispered when he stopped roaring.

"Sweetheart," he answered, holding me tightly as we both shuddered in carnal joy.

Then Blaze joined us, pressing against me from the front, his huge erection heating my skin. He slanted his mouth over mine, and I rested my hands on his hard, muscled shoulders.

A gorgeous head poked in between the tent flaps. Iokul gazed at me, his icy-silver eyes glowing with white-hot heat above his white metal mask.

“Tokul.” I beckoned him.

Then a sense of urgency pierced my lust-addled mind.

The realm’s magic yanked at me. *Danger! Violence! Black death!*

And the land pulsed.

My mind clicked into the link to the land, and my consciousness expanded. The realm and I should be one since I was the last of the bloodline of the Danaenyth royal house. I was supposed to be the Keeper. With that thought, I pulled the land's magic to me, and it allowed me to use a trickle. I sent it out to explore and spy.

On the brink of my consciousness, I detected over forty invaders on the ground and three in the sky.

"Sweetheart, honey, babe," my mates all called me at once, pulling me into their arms. "What's wrong? Your eyes turned glassy."

"Enemies," I hissed. "Over forty demons and beasts are coming."

Iokul and Chiron had kept watch, but they couldn't see too far without being in their dragon forms. I learned of the coming of an army of assassins because of the warning of the land.

Iokul ducked out of the tent, sword drawn and shield ready.

Blaze and Rai shoved on their armor with military efficiency, and I put on the new armor Iokul had prepared for me.

Sybil chirped sharply from somewhere and flew out of the tent. She must have been hiding somewhere and watching us fuck the entire time.

Outside the tent, Henry howled in fury.

"Blaze," Rai said. "Escort our mate and leave for the mountains. Iokul, Chiron, and I will hold the enemies back."

Blaze nodded grimly, knowing his brothers wouldn't survive this.

"Daisy. Let's go," Blaze said softly.

"No," I said. "We live and die together."

"Daisy, your safety is the most important!" Rai bit out. "Now isn't the time to be stubborn."

"I'm being practical," I said. "They'll catch me and slay me sooner if I run. We'll have a better chance surviving if we stick together."

"But Daisy—" Rai said, a torn emotion in his sapphire eyes. Then he sighed, his jaw remaining tight. He knew I was right.

"Thick and thin. Remember that. That's how we are," I said. "Let's not argue anymore and get ready."

Rai's eyes burned furiously, but fear for me still lurked beneath. "Blaze, stay close to our mate. I'll fight at the front."

Blaze wanted to protest since he wanted to fight at the frontline, but when he glanced at me, he swallowed it.

It didn't matter where we fought. It was five of us plus Henry against an army of over forty demons. We were greatly outnumbered.

"We might have to shift to dragons in the heat of the battle if we want to survive the fight," Blaze said.

"I don't think the land will allow us to," I said. "I've tested my offensive magic, but it became dormant the moment we started the journey. By Goddess Arianrhod's will, all sorts of magic, except my feeble connection to the land, has been nullified."

Blaze flexed his hands to transform them to claws, but nothing happened.

"It'll be our brutal force against our enemies'," Rai said, and nocked an arrow. "Let them come."

There wasn't any place to take cover except for a few scattered trees on the endless snow-covered plain.

A horde of demons appeared ahead, charging toward us like a black wave. The snow didn't slow them much.

Three mutant demons that had massive spiked wings flew ahead of them. Snow twirled around their black horns, and it didn't seem to bother them the slightest.

How could we defeat such a force without shifting to our dragon forms and without the aid of our magic? My heart pounded in fear and rage, and my blood iced over even as adrenaline coursed through my veins and pumped up my courage.

We'd probably die here, and the snow would cover our corpses, but we would slay as many enemies as we could. It would be regretful if we perished before we could bring down our true and final enemy.

It would also be regretful if I didn't have more days and years with my mates.

But even if we didn't win this battle, I'd still be united in the afterlife with my beloved mates. I had to believe that.

We shared a look, the mating bond between us snapping in tension.

We formed a nearly enclosed ring, Iokul and Chiron raised their shields. Iokul had his longsword ready, and Chiron raised his iron spear. I had a wicked-looking dagger in my left hand, and in my right hand a curved one ready to devour any two-legged or four-legged foes.

Iokul was the best dragon swordsman, Rai excelled at bows, and Blaze was a champion in fistfighting. I'd been training with my warrior mates when we weren't in bed.

Henry snarled beside me, his jaws wide open.

Stay with me, Henry, I ordered. Don't leave the group. Don't try to be a hero.

If he charged alone ahead, he'd be slaughtered. It wasn't his time to die yet, no matter how eagerly he wanted to defend me.

"Now!" Rai roared.

Both he and Blaze released their arrows toward the three flying demons that were in range. The mutant demons were well trained. They either ducked or swiped away the arrows, but Rai's third arrow pierced through the one in the center. The demon plunged to the ground, his black blood tainting the snow.

The other two mutant demons breached our defense with their great speed, swatting at us with their claws and spiked tails, their mouths open with long, jagged teeth.

We thrust our swords, daggers, and spears up, hacking and slashing at the monsters in the air. Too bad we couldn't shift. We really had picked a bad time to seek the goddess's blessing. But then, the enemies from all directions would be upon us any day, and Lysandra was going to take over my dynasty if we didn't act sooner.

Chiron spat out a curse as a flying demon's horns rammed into his shoulder. Henry shot toward the demon and slammed into him before the enemy could bite down on Chiron's head. My hound's two jaws locked onto

the mutant demon's massive muzzle.

I lunged. While my hound held the demon firmly despite its claws slashing onto his side, I buried a dagger into the demon's heart and the other into his gut with my Fae strength.

The mutant demon dropped in a heap, and I pulled my daggers free from the corpse.

Blaze and Iokul fought together against a giant mutant overhead. Rai focused on releasing arrows toward the foot soldiers at the vanguard. A few dropped while the rest charged us. Those things didn't understand fear.

Chiron, Henry, and I rejoined my mates' rank just as the first wave of the demon horde bore down on us.

We formed a circle, facing the enemies that surrounded us. Rai had abandoned his bows and flashed his broadsword.

In the distance, a horse's bray sounded, joined by an uproar of another warhorse.

Two stallions crashed into the demons' rank, their riders bellowing a battle cry.

Elvey and Rosalinda had come!

My thundering heart warmed as I watched Elvey's lavender hair and Rosalinda's long blonde hair flying wildly in the wind and snow. They were both a sight to behold. The horses were no ordinary horses. They were fearless, and they maneuvered swiftly, even though they were completely surrounded by the brutal enemy force.

The demons hadn't expected two Fae to cut into their rank. In their outrage and disorientation, Elvey effectively beheaded two demons. I'd never seen anyone move that fast. The day he fought Blaze, I'd seen his formidable side. Now, he redefined the word. As he fought against a dozen demons at once, he taught the brutes what brutal and lethal really meant. I was only glad he was on my side.

If I didn't have to fight my share, I could watch him in action all day long. Rosalinda, unsurprisingly, fought well beside Elvey. Envy pierced into me. Their coordination was seamless, as if they fought shoulder to shoulder all the time.

With renewed strength, I closed my daggers in on the neck of a demon, who tried to jam his horns into me.

Rai thrust his blade into a giant demon's chest from the side while Iokul and Blaze wounded the flying demon and forced him to flee.

My three mates were equally magnificent. Their fast swords never missed. While they fought, they pivoted around me, determined not to allow more demons to break through their defenses to reach me, but we were still gravely outnumbered, even with Elvey and Rosalinda's aid.

The two fought toward us. They were covered in red and black blood. The black blood was the demons', and the red must be their own.

My mates and I had cuts here and there as well.

I lost track of time. I wasn't sure how long we had been fighting. It could be seconds, yet it felt like a century as my arms grew heavier and my legs were full of lead.

I refused to give in to my exhausted body. I held my daggers tightly, cutting and thrusting into any foes in my way.

Blaze cursed and roared in pain and rage. Four demons surrounded him. One of them must have gotten him. It broke my heart that I couldn't go aid him, as I was fighting a giant demon myself. I wielded my daggers aggressively toward the demon's middle section, anxious to finish him to reach Blaze. The demon brought up his two hammers and crashed onto my daggers.

He was double my size. The impact made my palms bleed.

I didn't let go of my blades but broke their contact with the demon's hammers with a furious roar.

Snarling, Henry leapt onto my opponent and bit deep into his leg. Sybil shot out from nowhere, screaming in fury, and poked her beak into our foe's eyeball.

While the bulky demon swatted Sybil away and hammered down toward Henry, I leapt, my blade sweeping across his thick neck.

His head tumbled down and sank into the snow.

Sybil steadied herself in the air—the new wing Elvey had restored for her gave her enhanced strength—and shrieked in victory.

We might still lose. The demons' numbers were just too great.

Then my peripheral vision caught a group of new riders emerging from the white mountains and charging toward us. Fuck! This was bad. How could we fight another horde?

Cursing, I snapped my head toward the new enemies and widened my eyes as I recognized the leading rider. With ferocious battle cries, he led a dozen dragon shifters on horses and rammed into the demons as if entering a no-man's-land.

He fought like the fierce wind, just as I remembered.

“Adrian!” I screamed, joyful tears bursting from my eyes.

My fearsome general had finally returned after nine centuries and just in time!

With the new reinforcements, we stood a fighting chance.

We would live.

A shadow dove from the high sky, faster than lightning—the last mutant demon had returned with revenge. This time, he carried a machine bow.

A cluster of arrows rained down toward me.

I heard my name shouted from all directions.

My allies and friends raced toward me. My mates acted as one to block the arrows.

But for all their effort, one or two pierced through my flesh and I dropped to the icy ground.

Henry howled.

Sybil screeched in fear. *Daisy Queen, don't die!*

My mates, Elvey, and Adrian all roared my name, but I could not answer them.

I stared at the gray sky where snow kept falling, feeling a rush of hot liquid flowing from the corner of my mouth. I couldn't stop it. I couldn't move. The snow under me had never felt so cold, even my hot blood beneath my back turned to ice.

I couldn't even finish a prayer. *Preserve my mates and friends, Arianrhod, goddess of Inann*

Coldness, desolation, and pain swarmed my consciousness. One moment I thought I was free and that I found my fated mates; the next all appeared to be a hopeless dream and my curse lingered.

Three Furies with scaled human faces, beastly bodies, and massive red wings circled the jungle on the savage planet, shrieking in rage and despair. Our screeches hurt even our ears, but we couldn't stop them.

No, it was the past. My true loves had come and freed me.

They'd claimed me and fucked me every night, showering me with their passion, fire, ice and storm.

Heart deceives.

I was all alone in the dark. If I had mates, where were they?

My mind traveled between past and present, until it settled on the recent battle against the demons in the endless plane of snow.

Elvey had come. Adrian had come.

What happened to my mates?

I had died, but I didn't want them to join me. They still had many good things going for them. I only regretted that I hadn't had a chance to say goodbye and tell them how much I loved and cherished them.

I also needed them to take care of Henry and Sybil.

Your fight is not over, an immortal, queenly woman stood in front of me.

She had a willowy figure, cream skin, and golden hair with streaks like

the sunset. Her blue eyes shifted colors just like mine, and she gazed at me with such tremendous love and tenderness.

Like lightning striking me, instantly I knew who she was.

“Mom?” I bolted up from the snow, and it hurt so much as I moved. Damn it, why did it hurt even in death?

“I can only meet you this once while you linger between life and death, my daughter,” she said, her voice sounding like music under the clearest sky. “I hoped I could watch over you, but I couldn’t, as such was my fate. But before my youngest sister killed me, I modified the curse she threw at you, so you could survive and finally find your true loves and be free. You’re going to see your grandfather, and he’ll tell you the truth he knows. It’s time. Daisy Danaenyth, my beloved child, you aren’t just the heir to the throne of the Dragon Realm. You’re also the rightful queen to Sihde, the Fae realm. You aunt usurped your place. Fight this, daughter. Fight for life. Call the realm’s magic to heal you, and it will. It must. All you need to do is ask.”

Her image flickered, fading.

“Mom, don’t go!” I choked out. “Please, don’t leave me. Stay. Stay with me.”

“I’m sorry, child. I’d give everything to be with you longer, but it’s not allowed.”

My mother dissipated in the mist of fog and snow.

“Mom!” I screamed.

I would not fade. I had to live, live to avenge my mother, live to take back my two realms and the six cities, and live to be with my mates.

I couldn’t leave them. I couldn’t abandon them.

And Elvey and Adrian had come back.

I reached out to the realm with my last flickering consciousness. *The old Dragon King won’t return for you. I’m the last of the Danaenyth bloodline. Heal me. Heal your future Keeper, and I’ll guard you as my ancestors once watched and guarded you faithfully.*

We’ve been waiting for you to ask, Daisy Danaenyth, echoed the multiple voices that seemed to come from the sky, from under the water, from everywhere.

Light sprang out from the soil beneath me, grasping me like ivy vines, crawling all over me. As the mesh of light sank into me, warmth coursed through me. The magic purged the poison in my blood, patched up my chest and back wounds, and knitted my tissues back together.

I heard my mates calling my name, their voices less panicked now. I still couldn't open my eyes. My eyelids were too heavy, and my energy sapped, even with the aid of the realm's magic.

"The land has healed her," Elvey said, relief in his strained voice.

I heard Rai cry. It'd been hell for him thinking I was passing to the other side.

"We need to get out of here," someone said.

Was the war over? The battle sounds seemed to have ceased. Only my mates' begging for me to keep fighting for life filled my ears along with the howling wind.

We'd won.

"We need to go to the mountains." It was Adrian's worried voice.

A growl followed by louder growls.

"I don't care that you're my mate's general!" Blaze snapped. "I'm carrying her."

"She'll ride in our arms, where she belongs," Rai said.

They had to fight over me when I couldn't even move? I'd never seen anyone else more possessive than my three dragon mates. In my weak state, I couldn't even roll my eyes.

Thankfully, no one argued with them, but I believed that Adrian snarled before he backed off.

Vaguely, I felt that they carried me with strong arms and let me lean against a solid, warm chest that smelled like Rai and autumn and home.

As I bumped up and down against him, hearing the howling wind rushing by me, I knew I was on a horse with my mate.

We were racing to the mountains, to find the mad king.

The mating bond sent me a wave of warmth, love, and anxiety, but at least it was no longer dominated by fear, rage, and panic. I flexed my fingers. The bone-chilling coldness had left me. I wasn't alone as caring voices caressed me.

I forced my eyes to open.

I was in a soft bed, surrounded by my mates. Iokul lay by my side, hugging me to him, lending me his heat and strength. Rai and Blaze perched on the other side of the bed, one holding my hand, the other combing my hair gently with his fingers.

They would all get into bed with me if it were big enough.

“Daisy? Love? Honeybee? Sweetheart?” they all called me.

“Huh?” I answered them all, my gaze sweeping over them.

They were bandaged here and there. They'd been wounded, and Rai seemed to have taken the heaviest hit, his arm in a sling. My heart ached for them. Their pain was mine. But I was also relieved that they were in one piece, which was quite a victory, considering our small numbers against the demon army. Even after Elvey's and Adrian's forces joined us, the demons had still outnumbered us nearly three to one.

Dragons could regenerate quickly, but while the realm didn't allow us to use magic or shift, we had to heal naturally. The realm's magic only made an exception to heal me because of my position as future Keeper.

Rai placed a kiss on my lips. As soon as his lips parted from mine, Blaze moved in to scorch my lips with his.

“Love,” Iokul whispered beside me, inhaling my scent deeply as his trembling, hot lips traced the column of my neck. “We thought we lost you. We wouldn’t survive if you died.”

My eyelids fluttered. Before I could say anything, a male voice beat me to it.

“No wonder Princess Daisy is overwhelmed,” Adrian grunted from the door. “Who wouldn’t be?”

I turned my aching head and my eyes landed on Adrian leaning against the wall.

Mostly, he was how I remembered him—dark-skinned, handsome, a giant of a man made of muscles and built like a warrior. He had honey-brown eyes that had once been full of laughter, light, and loyalty, and now only loyalty remained intact. The laugh had diminished long ago, but the light was coming back, gradually. He’d found me at last.

Thick bandages covered his left arm, the side of his ribs, and his leg. I said a silent thanks to the goddess. If I’d lost Adrian when I’d just gotten him back, it would have scarred me forever.

Adrian stalked toward me, his auburn hair waving at his measured movements, and all three princes growled at him.

“What?” Adrian frowned. “I’m not going to take the princess away from you.”

The princes traded an uncertain look. Right, Sphinx had forced me to spill the answer to his riddle and now my mates knew there would be four true loves for me instead of three. They’d thought it would be Elvey. But now with Adrian having suddenly returned, they weren’t sure which one would be the final mate.

“I served Princess Daisy centuries ago,” Adrian continued. “I’ll continue to serve and guard her until the end of time. Even as her mates, none of you can or shall stand in the way.”

Blaze glared at the tattoo of the daisy flower on Adrian’s left temple. Rai glanced at the tattoo with displeasure as well. Only Iokul seemed to be fine with it. I tried not to stare at it, though my breath caught at the sight of it—it was beautiful.

Adrian had been my first crush, and we’d stolen a few kisses. I’d been only fifteen then. Now, with centuries passing by and between us, and t I

already having three mates, I didn't know how I felt about him. I still loved Adrian, and I always would, but I no longer felt the spark between us. I no longer had the gut-punching feeling whenever I'd been in his presence. All I felt for him now was warmth, trust, and friendship.

Adrian caught our gazes fixing on the tattoo on his temple.

"I etched it the day Princess Daisy disappeared." Adrian heaved a heavy breath. "It served as a reminder every time I looked in the mirror. It reminded me never to give up on my future queen until I found her and brought her home."

"I'm glad you returned, and that we are united again, Adrian," I said, tears moistening my eyelids. "It'll cause me great pain if I have to hunt down my general in every corner of the universe when I need him to lead my army." I held his gaze, which was filled with centuries of grief, guilt, and resolve. "What happened to me centuries ago was never your fault. The curse was already set upon me. Get rid of your guilt. It'll only wear you down. War found me before I sought it out. I need your focus on our enemies."

The light returned to his eyes, and with that, the steel will and determination to eradicate our enemies. "Yes, my queen."

I wasn't a queen yet, but I would be.

I nodded. As I stretched out and probed my feelings toward him, I knew I was no longer in love with him. And I knew he understood that I wouldn't have a place for him in a romantic relationship.

Falling in love could happen in an instant and falling out of love was also a flick of decision. As I'd bonded with my three mates, I had no room anymore for any other man.

What about Elvey? A voice insisted.

I blinked as a moment of confusion fogged my mind.

Before I'd left Pandemonium, Elvey had asked me the same, "*Do you have room for one more?*"

I hadn't been able to answer him back then.

And I didn't know how to answer it now, even though I'd pined for him, and my heart ached at his absence.

That reminded me. Where were Elvey and the others?

My anxiety spiked, and fear coursed through me. Had I lost him? Had we lost more men?

I struggled to sit up, and a cry escaped my lips at the movement, painful and pitiful. My mates fought to help me and bumped into each other with

growls and snaps.

Adrian shook his head, sympathy and amusement wheeling in his eyes, which had grown cold and hard over the centuries and had just started to warm up.

I leaned against Iokul's cool chest. "Where's everyone?" I asked. "Did we all make it?"

Rai dropped his gaze as grief brewed in his eyes. "Chiron was killed protecting you."

Tears stung my eyes. I really liked the healer. And Henry loved that dragon shifter. My hound must be devastated.

I touched Rai's face. "I'm sorry."

He grabbed my hand and leaned into it. I wanted to give all my strength to him and comfort him.

"I lost three dragons as well," Adrian said darkly. "The rest were wounded. They're recovering in the great hall."

"I'll visit them soon," I said, swallowing hard. As war bore down on us, we were going to lose more men.

I closed my eyes for a second. When I'd lived in the jungle with my curse, no one had to die for me. Life had been miserable but simple. Now, it was just like Elvey had said—danger and death lurked at every corner. I thought that had been meant only for me, only now did I realize it meant for my mates, my friends, and my warriors because of me.

Yet I couldn't go backwards, no matter how dark the path ahead.

To walk on that path, I had to become steel, though not without feelings.

Rai pulled me into his arms, seeing the turmoil inside me.

A second later, I pulled away. No one had mentioned about Elvey and his companion.

"Where're Elvey and Rosalinda?" I asked, my heart stuttering.

"Elvey is with Rosalinda," Blaze said, watching me.

My breath came in short bursts. I shouldn't be jealous. If Elvey had feelings for Rosalinda, I should bless their togetherness and be happy for him. He and the Fae woman looked good together. They'd known each other for a long time and they fought well as a team.

He didn't owe me anything. He'd done so much more for me than I could ever ask.

I, on the other hand, owed him a life debt.

But why did my heart still feel heavy and bleeding at the idea of Elvey

with Rosalinda?

I kept my face neutral. "Are they okay?"

"The demons cleaved Rosalinda's arm," Adrian said. "She also has two cracked ribs. The Fae female is one of the best, toughest fighters I've ever met." The admiration was unmistakable in his gruff voice. "The Fae mage is a formidable warrior as well. I'm happy you've garnered their support. I need to go check on Rosalinda and relieve Elvey. He's been tending to her ever since the battle died down." He looked at me. "None of us can regenerate while the magic is stripped off us."

"While we're still on the quest," I said, defeated.

"Let's find this goddess as soon as possible," Blaze said. "This slow healing like a regular human is fucking killing us."

"We'll be on the road again only after our mate and the men recover," Iokul said.

"Is Elvey also wounded?" I asked, worry clawing at my heart.

"He has a small slash on his jaw and lost a section of his left pinkie that's less than one inch long," Blaze spat. "I don't understand why he keeps whining about it. It'll grow back once the magic returns to the realm. Everyone has suffered more than him."

Adrian nodded. "He does like to constantly complain and nag. He finds some twisted delight in it, but I'm still glad he and Rosalinda are our allies. I'll go see if they need anything."

I had a feeling he was eager to visit Rosalinda, and I fully supported him on that.

"Give them my gratitude, Adrian," I said. "And give them whatever they need."

Adrian nodded, came to me, and kissed me on the forehead. "I'll see you later, Princess."

My mates repressed a snarl. But if Adrian's kiss lingered, I believed my mates would throw him off.

They'd now seen that there was nothing romantic between Adrian and me. He was my loyal general and friend.

Adrian sauntered toward the door and exited.

I took a brief moment to scan my surroundings.

We were inside a modernized room converted from a vast cave, the kind dragons loved. Starlight poured from the high ceiling and windows. The walls were crafted to have both primitive and modern features.

“A cave?” I asked.

“Your royal family’s haven,” Rai said, “according to Adrian.”

How did my general know more about the realm and even my curse than I? How much had my grandfather kept from me? He’d either thought me a threat to his throne, or he’d tried to keep me locked in the tower to keep me safe.

Rai gave me a look. “I know you want answers, sweetheart.”

“You were out for a day after the land magic healed you,” Iokul said, kissing the top of my head. “Elvey recognized the magic and told us so.”

“We slew all the demons,” Blaze said, “including the flying one who shot you. I had hoped we could torture him before we killed him.”

“Henry and Sybil?” I asked.

“Elvey had to give your hound a sedative to put him to sleep,” Rai said, “so he could calm down and heal faster in the process.”

My breathing evened out. I’d feared that Henry was lost to me.

“Your pet bird is with Elvey and his female companion,” Blaze said.

He kept referring to Rosalinda as Elvey’s female companion, mostly for my sake, I thought sourly.

“Her name is Rosalinda,” I offered.

“Your bird is a bit mad at us,” Rai said. “Somehow she got offended and threatened to teach us dragons some manners.”

I gave a wan smile. She must have gotten the idea from Elvey.

Iokul laughed. “She really threatened us.”

I stared back at where Adrian had stood. I’d meant to ask him how he’d gotten back and how he had known that we’d been under attack.

Rai brushed a strand of my hair behind my ear gently.

“Adrian returned to the realm just when King Daghda went crazy,” he said. “He then followed the king and his elite guards to the mountains.”

I gave him an appreciative nod. My mates always got to the bottom of things.

“Elvey, on the other hand, had been tracking the demons and us,” Iokul chimed in to show that he was equally informative. Among all my mates, Iokul was on better terms with Elvey. He respected Elvey more and evaluated him with cool logic. “When he spotted the army of the demons, he went straight to the mountains to solicit Adrian’s help before he rushed to our aid. The mage is resourceful.”

Blaze shrugged. “I wonder what his agenda is.”

I didn't intend for them to get into an argument over Elvey.

"I'm thirsty," I murmured. "Can anyone get me some water, please?"

Blaze banged his forehead with the heel of his palm. "What kind of mates are we? This is not the way we treat our mate."

Rai also looked ashamed and shot to his feet.

I couldn't see Iokul's expression since my back leaned against his chest, my head on his shoulder, but he tensed behind me.

"Sorry, honey," he said. "Blaze, while Rai goes to fetch the water, you'd better run to bring food for Daisy. She has to be hungry."

Blaze gave Iokul a hard glance before rushing out of the room.

Both Blaze and Rai returned with water, bread, cheese, and a pot of stew.

Now they all looked hungry.

I figured that none of them had paid attention to their stomachs while I was unconscious.

I took a big swig of the cool water and let it soothe my parched throat before I handed it to Iokul.

"No, you drink more first, love," Iokul said.

I sighed and took another gulp before I gave it to him. He drained half of it before passing it to Rai. Rai drank his fill and left the rest for Blaze.

"Let's sit at the table and eat properly," I said, and my mates helped me settle on a chair. The four of us were like a big happy family around the table.

I bit into the bread topped with cheese that Iokul had prepared for me. My mates looked content as I ate and then they started attacking their plates of food.

They were famished.

I waited until they were half done with their food before I asked, "Has anyone heard anything about my crazy grandfather?"

Just then, a commotion stirred outside the door. We snapped our heads toward the window.

My princes shot to their feet as one, drawing their swords.

The door swung open, and King Daghdha stood at the doorway, blocking light and shadow. His dragon guards, the ones who had aided me in the battle against the demons, braced their feet behind him in a guard stance, even though they were all wounded.

Unlike mortals assumed, time wasn't any kinder to immortals. My grandfather appeared no more than a few years older than me, but he had a worn-out, desolate look in his amber eyes.

His skin had a grayish tone, in contrast to the healthy tan I remembered, which indicated that he'd been sick. Immortals didn't get sick unless they were wounded or poisoned.

Despite all, my grandfather was still the most regal being I'd ever seen.

It wasn't just that he towered everyone. Ancient power rolled off him easily.

My mates froze and bowed to him. They did not need to kneel because they were also royals. "Your Majesty," they greeted.

The king's gaze still had a hint of lingering madness as it fixed on me, a mosaic of joy, grief, guilt, rage, and something else brewing in his eyes like a morning storm. He swallowed to compose himself, then swept his now calmer gaze over my mates. "Princes, I see you've brought my granddaughter back and are now cozy with her."

"You should have told us the Furies were Daisy, King Daghdha," Blaze grated. "We almost killed her!"

At the reminder, my joy at the sight of my grandfather receded, rage replacing it.

King Daghdha arched a golden eyebrow at Blaze before fixing his attention on me again. "We can discuss that another day, Princes. Now, if you'll excuse us, I need to speak to my heir alone."

I swallowed a choke and pushed out the air from my tight throat.

"Where I stay, my mates stay," I said, keeping my face blank, though I could feel muscles twisting across my face at the burst of anger. "If you have any explanation, my mates are here to listen as well."

He narrowed his eyes at my defiance. The old king was still intimidating, but we stood our ground and stared back at him, not friendly.

"We stay where Princess Daisy stays," Rai said simply. "We won't go anywhere without our mate."

King Daghdha snorted. "Already mated, I see. And to three? When was the wedding? Why wasn't I invited?"

This was how he welcomed me back—giving me attitude after his hunters had failed to take my heads? Well, I wouldn't have the stomach to take his head, no matter what he'd done to me, unless he came to harm my mates. However, that didn't mean I wouldn't take the crown from him. He no longer deserved it. Not only had he tried to eliminate me when I hadn't done anything to deserve it, but he'd abandoned the realm and his people.

"We'll have the ceremony when our mate is truly safe," Iokul said coldly.

He'd just hinted that I wasn't safe with my grandfather.

All my mates were as tense as whips ready to snap and attack. Their eyes never left the king, their hands close to their swords.

King Daghdá snorted at our defensive poses.

Adrian chose the moment to push through the guards. I wondered if his loyalty would lie with the old king or with me, but I knew he would never harm me, no matter what.

Daghdá gave all of us another sweeping, thoughtful glance and suddenly laughed. "This is exactly what I wished for," he said.

“Wished for what, *Grandfather*, my head?” I asked, my voice bitingly cold.

“You came back with your three true loves,” King Daghdha said.

“You achieved that by sending three ships of hunters to take my head,” I said.

“Two ships,” he said. “I came up with the brilliant idea as soon as the Archangel delivered your message and gave me the coordinates. You have no idea what it meant to me to finally know you were alive.” He paused to recollect himself. King Daghdha hadn’t been one who had needed to compose himself. He’d been an ancient mountain that couldn’t be touched or moved. Or that was what I’d thought.

The next second, the storm left his burning amber eyes.

“We have ancient enemies, very powerful ones,” he said, “and they aren’t just dark Fae.”

I knew Fae and dragons had been in war for eons, but the war had stopped when I was born. A veil had been put up to separate the two realms where no Fae could cross over to the Dragon Realm, and the dragons couldn’t trespass on the Fae territory, either.

King Daghdha stepped into the room, and his guard immediately brought him a chair, which meant this wouldn’t be a short visit.

The king sat and gestured for us to take a seat. I perched on the edge of

the hard chair across from him, Rai, Iokul, and Blaze stood behind me, just like the royal guards lined up behind my grandfather.

“I was being watched,” King Daghdha said. “There are spies all over the realm, and I couldn’t purge them. I hadn’t been the same since your father died defending your mother. I neglected my duties as the king, driven by grief. When you were born, and I learned about your curse . . . Not a day passed that I wasn’t terrified it would come to pass. I sent my most trusted men to the corner of the universe to find the cure for the curse, but most of them never returned. They perished. That was how far and deep our enemies—the Fae, the demons, and witch covens—could reach. Only a handful of my trusted council knew about the curse you carried, and I intended to keep it that way. I forbade any of them to let you know anything about it or your half-Fae heritage, hoping for the best that if you didn’t know it, then the curse wouldn’t be real.”

That was why my grandfather had forbidden so many things in the realm and limited where I could go or what I could do.

“You almost locked me up in the palace tower during my childhood,” I accused. “You were reluctant to let me roam free even inside the castle. After I constantly fought you, you let me only have freedom in the Dragon Realm. In my first fifteen years, you never permitted me to go to the six cities, even though the humans were my subjects, too.”

“The Fae, our most lethal enemies, couldn’t come to the Dragon Realm,” the king said. “But they infiltrated the human cities. I couldn’t risk you.”

The only Fae who were allowed to enter were Elvey and Rosalinda after I’d offered them the path to the Dragon Realm through my blood ritual.

“The dark Fae Queen cursed you,” King Daghdha said. “I tried but failed again and again to take her out.”

“Queen Tianna?” I asked.

My grandfather’s nostrils flared, and his amber eyes burned with such hatred I’d never seen before.

“How did you hear the name?” he asked. “That foul name is forbidden to say in the realm.”

“She spied on me and heard the queen’s demon captain and me arguing about the Fae Queen,” a rich, masculine voice sounded at the door, and my heart jerked.

Elvey leaned against the doorframe, his arms folding against his broad chest and his foot crossing over his other ankle. His lavender hair was a hot

mess, and his sensual lips looked as kissable as ever. He indeed had a small slash on his jaw, which was healing. A bandage wrapped around his left pinkie.

I dragged my gaze away from him after our eyes met for a second. I couldn't ogle him, not when my mates were here. And if I kept looking at him, I might never be able to look away. Still, the unseen thread tethering us together was palpable. I could feel Blaze tensing behind me, as if he wanted very much to attack Elvey.

The fire-dragon prince had always felt Elvey was a threat to our relationship, and he might be right, especially after what Sphinx had revealed in my mind.

Gain the first and lose the last. Keep the last, and the first will be shattered bones. Heart doesn't know. Heart betrays. Heart breaks. Heart divides. Heart deceives.

I didn't want to choose Elvey over my mates. I couldn't bear losing them. But if I only kept my dragon princes, Elvey might die. That seemed to be what the cruel, twisted Sphinx had told me.

No, I didn't want to dwell on it.

I swallowed the bile in my throat, suppressed the dread spreading in my stomach, and fixed my eyes on my grandfather.

King Daghda didn't glance back at Elvey, though his back stiffened at the Fae mage's voice. The king seemed to tolerate Elvey since he was my ally. And without him calling my grandfather's guards to ride to my aid, my mates and I wouldn't have made it here.

Elvey had saved us countless times. This time, his friend Rosalinda had lost an arm defending us.

He hadn't wanted to say the dark Fae Queen's name, either, even on another planet, afraid of giving her power or drawing her focus to us. But now that we were in the Dragon Realm, and all Fae, except those I invited, couldn't enter, he seemed to be more relaxed. The dark queen knew about my return already. Saying her name wouldn't do worse.

Did my grandfather know that Elvey was bound to the Fae Queen by blood?

"I've been kept in the dark about the other half of my heritage all these centuries," I said, giving the king a withering look. "Today, I want full disclosure. I won't be denied anymore."

Rai squeezed my shoulder in a show of support.

“It broke me when the curse came true at your fifteenth birthday and you were taken from me,” said the king. “I would have given up everything, including the realm, to find you and get you back. We tried everything until all hope died.”

“I traveled to the other realms to find you,” Adrian said. “In the end, I heard that the curse had probably dragged you to the past, and then I searched for a time machine.”

“I was pulled to the past on Pandemonium,” I said, “until the Wickedest Witch in the universe came and took with her the elemental entity who enslaved me. After he was gone, the planet bounced back to the present time. I don’t know how it worked, but both Akem and the witch could manipulate time. Without them holding Pandemonium in time-space, time could no longer veil the planet.”

“After you were gone, my state of mind weakened me, and I neglected the realm,” King Daghdha continued. “Which resulted in the realm cutting its ties to me. When the enemies swarmed the realm, I could no longer do much to stop them. I was a broken king in a broken kingdom. The humans who had lesser dragon blood joined the pure humans and moved against me. Then, a few months ago, a witch, Lysandra, came and enthralled me. I couldn’t resist her power without the land’s magic.” His voice turned bitter. “Our ancestors’ goddess abandoned me. I blamed her for the tragedy that had befallen our house. Where was she when the enemies killed my only son? Where was she when the curse took you away?”

“Grandfather,” I said, my hand grasping his. “Don’t beat yourself up about it.” My resentment toward him had vanished. “I’ve come back, and we’re going to fix this.”

His hand clasped mine. “My beloved granddaughter, you’ve indeed returned.” He breathed out, his hands no longer trembling. “I’m sorry I put you through such hardship. When the Archangel delivered your message, I was in no position to fend off the enemies surrounding me, and my mind couldn’t tell which were loyal to me and which weren’t. I became suspicious of everyone. But it wasn’t without a reason. The witch corrupted some of the dragons.”

My mind drifted to Segomo, the dragon who’d been possessed by the smoke-entity.

“Only when I heard your message did I realize that the cure to lift your curse was a kiss from your three true loves,” he said. “If I’d known, I’d have

rounded up all the men in the whole planet to kiss you when you were but a child.”

My mates growled behind me.

I flushed. “That’s ridiculous, Grandfather. That would be child molesting. You might have just scarred me for life. And there was no guarantee that it would have worked that way.”

“Anything would have been better than having my only heir taken away from me for centuries without even knowing if you were alive,” he said, steel in his voice.

I bit my lip. The king remained the same—either his way or the highway.

Immortals weren’t adept to adapting. The more ancient they were, the less they could change. But the world didn’t care for our tendencies. It constantly evolved at rapid speed, and time affected everyone, including us.

However, Elvey adapted easily.

I slanted a glance at him. I had tried not to meet his gaze the entire time, but I could feel its heat on me. Blaze growled twice, though he hadn’t wanted to interrupt Daghda’s narrating.

Elvey didn’t seem to care. If he wanted to flirt with me, he didn’t care about the occasion or the audience. That was just how he was.

“King Daghda hid the true message and called for every man he could reach in every realm,” Elvey said, the corner of his lips tugging up in a faint smile. “He never mentioned the part about the true loves but issued that whoever had the heads of the three Furies would inherit his kingdom. He knew your true loves would never behead you and gambled they’d protect you and bring you home.”

“You should have just summoned the three of us in secret and we’d have hurried to meet our mate and get the job done,” Blaze said, then added, “Your Majesty, instead of sending all hunters after her. Those nasty hunters almost got her, and we almost lost our mate!”

The king rolled his eyes. “How could I know you three brats were her true mates? Was I supposed to be a prophet? If I were, my granddaughter wouldn’t have been taken!”

Not three, but four, a voice chimed in my head.

Elvey cleared his throat. “It was the only and best move King Daghda could make, while the dark Fae Queen’s spies are everywhere. If she’d learned that the Dragon King had found our Daisy on another planet, she’d have done more damage.”

Blaze growled at Elvey again. He didn't like him calling me "our Daisy." He'd agreed to share me with his brothers, but believed I was off-limits to other males, especially to Elvey.

"The Fae bitch has done enough," Rai hissed. "She sent a ship full of demons to eliminate my mate."

"She sent a ship packed with only over a hundred demons," Elvey said, "and with me on board. If King Daghdha called for a rescue mission, the Fae Queen would have led an army herself, and I'd be rendered useless when it came to helping Daisy in any way."

"She's that powerful?" Iokul's worry laced his voice.

"She's one of the most powerful beings on Inanna," the king drawled, black hatred dripping from his voice. "She became that way after she murdered my son and her own sisters and siphoned their powers. She's gathered dark, evil forces around her and emerged herself in all sorts of foul, forbidden practices. The horror stories about her have no end, and none dared even whisper her name. The rumor says that she can't be killed. I do not fear the Fae bitch, but since it's said that saying her name would grant her more power, I forbade the realm to say her true Fae name."

I remembered how Elvey's face had paled when I'd pressed him to tell me about the dark Fae Queen. And I remembered the evil presence in the great hall, which was but a part of the queen's phantom self. She was indeed powerful.

Elvey had been reluctant to bring her name to his lips, for fear she'd find me. But now we'd passed that phase. And no matter whether I was ready or not, he could no longer buy me more time. She'd sent her pawn—the black witch—to poison my grandfather and take my dynasty.

Twice she'd sent armies of demons to hunt me, and this time, in my own realm.

"For those fifteen years while I was in the realm, you treated me like a delicate flower," I said. "You shouldn't have done that, Grandfather. I was half-dragon. I was also half-Fae. You should have let me know the truth. I was not a defenseless damsel. If you'd ever seen my beastly forms—" I swallowed the bile. There was no need to bring up my past misery. I should just leave it behind me in that jungle. I needed to secure and protect my future with my mates and the future of the realm.

"What happened to my parents?" I asked. "Is the dark Fae Queen my aunt?"

My thoughts played over the time I had spent wandering between the twilight land of the living and the dead, when my mother had broken through the veil and visited me. She couldn't linger, and that was the only time she could ever come to me. She'd revealed to me the relationship between her and the dark Fae Queen, but she hadn't had enough time to break down the details on how she'd been murdered.

I demanded to know the whole truth today.

"Your mother Zuzana was the crown princess of the Unseelie Sihde court," the king said. "She had two sisters: Aine and Tianna. Zuzana was wild and passionate. Aine was next in line and the sweetest. She loved and worshipped your mother. Tianna, the youngest, was the coldest, cruelest, and most calculating.

The feud between the dark Fae and the dragons can be traced to an eon ago. The war between our two immortal races went on and off. Unfortunately, for both the dragon court and the Fae court, Fate let my son meet your mother. They fell in love at first sight, and their forbidden affair started. When Tianna and her spies found out about the Fae heir's affair, she exposed her sister. Princess Zuzana couldn't hide it anymore as she was several months pregnant with you. Zuzana fled the Sihde, knowing her father, the Fae King, wouldn't just strip her of her title, but punish her to death for tainting the Fae royal bloodline, despite that she was the heir."

The king paused for a second, his look darkening as the storm whirled in his eyes again. "My son hid her, afraid of the same punishment from me, afraid my hatred for the Fae would take his beloved mate from him. Tianna and her minions discovered their hideout and besieged them. Even though your mother was already banished, Tianna still regarded the former crown princess as a threat. And she coveted your mother's power. Zuzana went into labor and was about to give birth to you. She was one of the most powerful dark Fae, but when she was pregnant with you, she lost her magic, as it went to you, according to the tale. My son refused to flee for his life, but he alone couldn't fight off a whole army. They overpowered him and beheaded him while he was in his dragon form defending his mate and their unborn child."

King Daghdha stared ahead into nothingness, as if he couldn't bear to relive the nightmare. The muscles of his jaw jumped. He still felt the pain even now, even after nine centuries. I wasn't the only one who had suffered.

"When Aine heard about the news and arrived with her guards, it was already too late," Elvey said softly. "Tianna had poisoned your mother,

leaving her to a slow, painful death, but you were without harm. The poison didn't touch you. Your mother begged for your life, and Tianna taunted her. The dark Fae Queen thrived on others' pain and fed on it. She didn't take your life immediately but cursed you in front of your mother to make her suffer more, and your mother added her blessing with the last trace of her blood to modify the curse. However, your mother wasn't strong enough after giving birth to you and being poisoned, so Aine joined her. By doing so, Aine took the slow and painful death curse that was meant for you into herself. And then with all the magic she had, she teleported you out of your birth place and sent you to the Dragon Realm. That day, your parents, your aunt Aine and her guards, all gave their lives for you."

A horrific realization hit me. "You were there," I said, looking at Elvey, rage, grief, and hate ready to slam into him. But I clenched my fists, remembering how I had mistaken him and hurt him once. I remembered how the blood had dripped down from the corner of his mouth when I'd hit him in the chest after he'd taken me to the great hall and I'd broken his glamour.

He hadn't defended himself.

My mates pushed closer to me, two hands on my shoulders and one hand on my arm. Their warmth and devotion washed over me through our mating bond. If we were alone, they would carry me to the bed, take me into their arms, and bury deep inside me.

Elvey didn't look away from me, though I felt a piece of him die as he continued the story. "I couldn't do anything to save you or your mother. I was blood-bonded to Tianna. I couldn't disobey her." A muscle twisted in his jaw as he told his shame. I knew he would never admit it, but for me, he tore it open in front of everyone, and let me judge him.

"Did you kill my parents?" I asked softly. "Did you play a part in their deaths? Did you shed their blood?"

"No," he said. "The queen forced me to watch. Despite my blood-bond to her, it was beyond me to hurt you and your parents."

"Why is that?" I asked.

"You know why," he said softly.

The truth hit me, and my heart raced. He knew that I knew that he was my fated mate.

He could never hurt his mate, and no force of the universe could make him.

"I managed to send the message to Aine," he said in a regretful, defeated

tone. “But it was too late.”

“Princess Aine teleported you here—the royal dragons’ sanctuary—with an attached magical message.” King Daghdha was now composed enough to resume his account. “That was her last kind deed. I begged Goddess Arianrhod to seal the pass between the Sihde and the Dragon Realm. No Fae could ever reach my realm to take you away. But in the end, the curse still took you from me. I was robbed of your radiant smile for nine centuries, and you lived in the godforsaken place as three Fury beasts.”

“I have one piece of good news,” Elvey said, a cruel smile waltzing in his star-blue eyes. “There is this prophecy that no one knows about but the dark Fae Queen and her inner circle. It foretold that a hybrid heir of the royal dragon and royal Fae will bring with her the White Light the world has never seen. She’ll trump the darkness, free all who are in bondage and slavery, and lead us to the era of true enlightenment.” His gaze on me was so tender that my heart melted for him, and my pulse beat rapidly for him.

But I sat straight and tight, fighting the urge to go to him, embrace him, and vow to him that I’d shatter his shackles.

Elvey laughed to himself. “Tianna fears Daisy more than anyone because of the prophecy. When King Daghdha’s men searched for her, Tianna’s minions had been hunting her as well. I’d also been seeking her. No one could find her. And here you are, Princess Daisy, the rightful heir to the Danaenyth dynasty and Queen to the Sihde Realm.”

I swallowed. Queen to the Sihde Realm?

There was no way I could carry all the burdens.

Elvey’s eyes, unfathomable as the deep space, pierced me, and his need and hunger for me slammed into my soul.

I wouldn’t abandon him. Right now, he could still resist the evil queen’s pull because of the vampire venom that weakened his connection to the bitch. But what would happen once the venom thinned in his bloodstream? She would eventually find him. And when she did, she’d take him back and bend him to her will.

The demon captain’s cruel words echoed in my mind. “*You’ve tried for centuries to be free of her, but you failed repeatedly and pathetically. The queen will never release you, not until she breaks you completely.*”

I wouldn’t allow it. No more would I allow myself to abandon my mother’s people, even though I didn’t know them. No, I knew some of them now. Rosalinda’s face flashed before me. And there were many others like

her who would like to have a home to go to.

I'd have to take the Sihde Realm from Tianna. I had no issues with that. And I very much intended to avenge my parents and myself.

I held Elvey's gaze with a promise, and he smiled.

That smile tugged my heart.

"One step at a time," I said. "First, we'll need to take down Lysandra."

"That fucking bitch," King Daghda grated, his formidable dragon glaring out of his golden eyes. "I'll tear her apart with my bare hands."

I cleared my throat and looked at King Daghda blankly. "Grandfather, do you know my true purpose of coming to you?"

"I failed my son," he said. "And I failed you."

"You did not fail us. I didn't blame you," I said as gently as I could. "But you failed the realm because of your grief, and because of our enemies' design. I've come to take the realm, the crown, and the burden from you."

"I've been waiting for this day for a very long time, Granddaughter," he said, his burnt amber eyes glowing. "The land's power has left me and chosen you." He paused for a second, then his voice boomed regally. "Make me proud, Queen Daisy Danaenyth."

Daghda had never met Arianrhod, the goddess of the land and sky and rebirth, even though he'd ruled the Dragon Realm for millennia. She'd only come to him twice in a vision, and the second time had been after my father was slain. At my grandfather's request, Arianrhod had sealed the path between the Sihde and Dragon Realm to protect me. But in the end, the curse had still stolen me.

"So, the tie between the goddess and our bloodline isn't as strong as the myth said," I said.

But the land's magic had responded to me when I'd called upon it. I wanted it to be stronger—at least strong enough to aid me to take down the black witch.

"With Arianrhod's quest, you present your case," Daghdha said with a wishful sigh. "And she either shows herself or she doesn't. We used to have a temple in the realm for the people to worship her and pray to her." That must have been the abandoned. I remembered the temple covered by moss. "I neglected my services to the goddess as well."

"So, we just wait for her to show up?" Blaze asked in displeasure.

"Goddess Arianrhod can't be pushed or rushed," Daghdha said. "She doesn't answer to a mortal or an immortal's whim. She chooses her own time, place, and fashion—if she ever shows."

"We don't have time," Iokul said. "Lysandra is taking over the realm. The

longer we stay here, the harder it'll be to get the cities back, if we haven't lost them already. The Humans Superior and First movement is going global, and we need to snuff it out before it turns to wildfire."

"I'll return to the realm to confront Lysandra," Daghdha said. "It's my mess. I'll fix it. I'll announce the return of my heir and crown her."

"It won't work," Elvey said. "No offense, Your Majesty, but you've lost to the humans. It's in their every bone to fight and crush you. Your consort has made sure of it. All six cities have declared to support her."

"What about the humans with more potent dragon blood?" Daghdha thundered.

"They've kept silent so far," Elvey said.

Daghdha glared at Elvey, but Elvey merely raised an eyebrow at that. "Daisy, however, is fresh blood. People thought she was lost, but now she's returned. The legend about her vanishing fascinated the humans. We could use that. We can make them fascinated with her. She's a young, gorgeous immortal. If we present her right, they'll fall for her."

I narrowed my eyes. *Present me?*

My mates' hands on my shoulders tensed. They didn't like other males flattering me. I was theirs to flatter.

"She won't just be the face, of course," Elvey flashed me a disarming smile before I could hiss at him. "There's a lot of work to do to counter the black witch's every move, and none of them will be easy."

"Problem is, we don't have time for all the legwork to counter the witch," Rai said.

Elvey nodded. "True, but it doesn't mean we shouldn't work on them. And most important, Daisy still needs the power of the land to convince or terrify the humans that the Danaenyth dynasty is hers. With that display, she'll settle the score with Lysandra in public."

"But the king just said Goddess Arianrhod doesn't answer to a mortal or even an immortal's whim," Adrian said.

Elvey flashed a coy smile. "She'll show. She has to. If you want, we can place a bet. The losers will do three tasks I ask them to do."

None of us felt as confident as him, but I also knew there was something he hadn't told us and wouldn't tell us. It was as if he knew Arianrhod personally.

"So, we just wait in the mountains and do nothing?" Blaze repeated.

"There're plenty of things to do here," Elvey said. "I myself intend to

explore this marvelous extension of the Dragon Realm that no Fae has ever done before. I like snowy mountains. I want my solitude. I've always been around annoying people. As for you, Highnesses, you might want to work diligently with the dragon knights to secure this haven and protect your mate effectively. The demons have attacked us on multiple occasions, all the way from Pandemonium to Inanna. They won't just stop. The enemies might send something worse and bigger."

"Let them come," Daghdha said viciously.

"Let them come," Rai echoed fiercely.

Daghdha rose to his full height. "I'll guard this fortress for my granddaughter. No one will take her from me again." He turned to the guards. "She's now queen to you all."

As one, everyone dropped to one knee and bowed their head, except Elvey and my princes.

"Long live Queen Danaenyth!" they chanted.

"For your formal coronation, we'll have to wait until we take the witch trash out," Daghdha said, leaving the room.

All guards stayed except the two who had been with my grandfather since his rule.

I called for the guards to stand up, and they obeyed. They were my royal guards now.

My mates ordered the guards to wait in the grand hall for a security debriefing. War and security were their forte.

Elvey cleared his throat for attention, and Blaze stared at him in a flash of annoyance. "What now, Elvey? Are you going to join us for guarding duty or go sightseeing?"

"Neither," Elvey said. "All I want is to be with Daisy alone."

"How dare you?" Blaze hissed, ready to attack.

I put my hand on his arm.

"Well, I need to have a talk with Queen Daisy in private," Elvey said. "I don't think she answers to you."

"She's my mate," Blaze said. "Everything you have to say to her, you say in front of us."

I'd used the line to get my grandfather to back off, and now Blaze was quoting me. Though I didn't like to be spoken for, I let it go. I needed to have the image in public that we were a united front, but I'd talk to my mates about this overstepping when we were alone.

I wouldn't put up with it next time.

We'd vowed to rule together, but we didn't have any experience or practice on how we should carry on. I didn't want a power struggle between us to drive us apart.

"Actually, this doesn't really need a private hearing," Elvey said with a sardonic smile. He'd spotted a dark dash of exasperation in my eyes at Blaze, and he didn't want to cause trouble between the fire dragon and me.

His face turned serious. "You'll need to grasp your Fae magic, Daisy," he said. "The black witch is only a powerful tool. She's nothing compared to what's coming to you. You'll train with me during your stay in the mountain without any of your mates around. It's non-negotiable."

Growls rumbled from my mates.

"Come find me when you're ready," he said, and left.

My mates, Adrian, and the guards, watched the mountains and the sky for the enemies.

Two days passed. The enemies didn't come, nor did the goddess.

I grew restless.

I hadn't seen Elvey, either. Wasn't he supposed to train me on Fae magic? Or was he all bark and no bite?

Then his words rang through me. "*Come find me when you're ready.*"

He wanted me to go to him. Even with everything at stake, he still wanted me to choose my own action.

Now was the best opportunity to seek him out since all of my princes had gone to patrol the mountains. A hint of shame hit me at that thought.

Ever since I'd left Elvey behind on the savage planet, I'd tried to push him out of my mind. I wouldn't want to hurt the feelings of my three mates, who meant everything to me. But now with him back in my life again and so close, I just couldn't help myself.

Well, I mentally defended myself that I needed to work with him anyway. I needed the magic training no one else could help me with except him. And I needed to talk to him about the bond between him and the dark Fae Queen.

My heart pounded with thrilling anticipation at the thought of seeing him.

Sybil flew ahead, zealous to be a guide. She knew exactly where he was. Henry trotted beside me.

I was about to knock on the door just as Sybil flew through the window and Henry howled an announcement. Elvey pulled open the door and stood, facing me.

He was half a head taller than me and much broader. Power, both ancient and new, rolled off him, caressing me.

“Daisy, darling,” he said, his blue eyes brightening. “Finally made your decision?”

“Elvey, may I come in?” I asked drily, peeking into the room.

Rosalinda was in bed. Her left arm was now a stump, wrapped in thick bandages. Her face was gray, and her green eyes were no longer vivid. She was still in a lot of pain and would stay that way until I got a nod from Arianrhod.

It really sucked that we had to heal like mortals.

Rosalinda struggled to sit up. A bowl of half-eaten stew sat on the table. Elvey had been feeding her and tending to her.

“Please don’t get up, Rosalinda,” I called. “Sorry I couldn’t come by earlier.”

“Rest, Rosa,” Elvey growled softly. “You don’t need to be all formal and that. You’re injured.”

“Oh, stop being a menace, El,” Rosalinda said.

They endeared each other. She was much closer to him than I ever was. They’d been friends, or more than friends, for centuries, and I could count the hours I had spent with him. I knew it was illogical to be jealous of their relationship and their familiarity with each other, but I was always emotional around Elvey.

“How often does one get a visit from the queen to both the Danaenyth dynasty and Sihde Realm?” Rosalinda asked.

I blinked. She’d accepted me as her queen already and so easily?

Elvey ushered me into the room, and Sybil immediately landed on Elvey’s arm, spreading her beautiful white-feathered wings to the full for him. Elvey stroked her head with affection. Henry went to rub against Elvey’s leg.

Really, my hound, too?

The only ones Elvey couldn’t charm were my mates.

I intended to ask Elvey how to break the blood bond between Tianna and him, but I didn’t want to breach the topic in front of Rosalinda, even though she probably knew everything already.

I chatted with Rosalinda while Elvey leaned against the backside of a tall chair, regarding me. Though I pretended not to notice him much, my self-awareness centered on him. Something inside me tethered me to him. The connection and attraction between us was so palpable that Rosalinda kept darting her gaze between us involuntarily. In the end, she yawned, excusing herself and pretending to fall asleep, insisting I stay.

It was just Elvey and I now, gazing at each other, with Sybil, Henry, and a “sleeping” patient as an audience.

“Hello,” he said with a smile, his eyes warm and seductive.

“Hello.”

And then we fell silent. It seemed a thousand words transpired between us when we looked at each other like this. We had no need for words.

He was my mate, my fourth mate, who should have been the first.

Did he know it? He’d hinted at it, but we’d never talked about it.

And he’d once asked me in a playful way if I had room for one more.

Sphinx’s riddle had spelled it for me that with four mates, I’d find a way home.

I could no longer deceive my heart.

Elvey hadn’t just helped me find a way back to the Dragon Realm; he’d helped me find a way with my dragon princes when he’d forced me to show my Fury forms in front of them. He’d said that they’d need to accept my both forms for the curse to fall off.

He waltzed into my world whenever I needed him the most and drifted away when the problem was solved and my mates’ warm chests surrounded me.

He kept giving, yet never asked anything back.

He never asked me for anything.

He didn’t even ask me to break the blood bond between him and his evil queen, which he wanted more than anything. And that blood slavery had been his curse for centuries.

He was one of the most powerful beings I knew, yet he had no freedom.

He never whined about it, either. Whenever he faced me and looked at me, he was all teasing smiles and harmless flirting.

He gave me sunshine while he hadn’t gotten any.

“Elvey,” I whispered, stalking toward him.

He straightened, his body tensing in anticipation, dark stars wheeling in his heated eyes.

A shadow cast into the room through the half window, and Sybil chirped in warning.

Blaze stormed in, glaring at Elvey, then at me.

I stopped in my tracks, my lips parting in surprise. Only then did I realize what I'd almost done. I'd forgotten the whole world. My eyes had only seen Elvey. Unable to resist his magnetic pull, I'd been about to throw myself into his arms.

This time, I couldn't blame Elvey for having enchanted me. It was all me and this urgent need for him. He was the last missing piece in my soul, and I needed to gather him. Only when he was also with me would I feel complete.

It wasn't that my princes weren't enough or lacking. They were more than I asked for.

But Elvey was also a part of me.

The more I resisted him, the bigger the hole expanded in me.

The hunger and longing in his eyes also called me to him. I wanted to touch him more than anything. I wanted him with my every fiber.

But when Blaze suddenly appeared, my mood shifted immediately. I turned to him, feeling a sudden stab of guilt, as if I had gone behind my mates' backs to cheat with Elvey.

I'd picked a time when they weren't around, even though there was a guard outside the door to Elvey and Rosalinda's room. As the future queen to the Danaenyth dynasty, I would always have guards around me, except in my bedroom when I was with my mates.

Elvey's sensual lips twisted to a bemused smirk. "Look who's here, our Prince Charming."

"Shove it, Elvey. I didn't come for you," Blaze snapped, turning to me, his eyes remaining hard and cold.

He'd never looked at me like that. Even when we argued, and his temper flared, he was never this cold toward me.

The silent accusation in his burning golden eyes made my shoulders stiffen, but it also brought defiance. I stared at him, swallowing any excuse of why I'd come to see Elvey.

"I was wondering where you were, Daisy," Blaze said, any emotion stripped from him. "I've been looking for you everywhere."

"Your Majesty," Rosalinda said from the bed. I wasn't sure when she'd dropped her pretense of being asleep. "When Elvey instructs you in magic, I'd be honored to be there. I might have a couple of tricks up my sleeves that

El doesn't know about."

Blaze darted his eyes toward Rosalinda and the stump of her arm. He was still in the grip of jealousy that he couldn't even ask about her wellbeing. I needed to lead him out of the room before Elvey goaded or scolded him. I didn't want to see another senseless duel between them while the enemy army could get here anytime.

"That's a date then," I said, and immediately regretted it. I shouldn't have said the word *date*, but it had slipped off my tongue so easily.

Blaze's jaw tightened.

"See you two after noon," I quickly added.

"See you soon, Daisy darling," Elvey purred.

My heart fluttered and my skin flushed heat. His purr still had the same effect on me, no matter where we were.

Blaze growled.

"We'll have at least three good days together," Elvey added in a pleasant voice. "And I look forward to every minute of it."

Blaze's armored chest puffed in anger.

I placed a hand on his arm, and the touch sent tingling pleasure up my arm. It was always like that with any of my mates. It never waned. My body buzzed with want. Blaze's eyes softened. He felt the same need.

"It's good you're looking for me," I said. "I have some new ideas I want to talk to all of you about."

I interlaced my fingers with his, and he allowed it.

I led my jealous mate down the corridor, with a guard, a hellhound, and a flying lizard-bird trailing behind carefully.



BLAZE DIDN'T TALK to me on the way to our suite, his anger returning and sizzling.

He'd let go of my hand, despite him wanting to hold me and touch me.

Iokul and Rai, both in their armor, jogged toward us from the other direction. They were probably off duty and taking a break. They smiled at me, eyes sparkling and heated, until they saw the boiling tension between their brother and me.

Blaze stormed into our room, and I followed quietly. Rai and Iokul

entered after us, and Iokul closed the door behind him.

Rai frowned. “What’s wrong?”

Blaze and I kept quiet. The mask-free parts of his face were red with jealous rage, and mine was probably more than defiant and a bit cold—an attempt to cover my guilt.

I’d been caught, but why should I feel ashamed? Elvey, after all, was also my mate!

“What happened?” Iokul asked.

“Daisy and Elvey were eye-fucking each other when I bumped into them,” Blaze spat. “If I didn’t stop them, who knew what would have come of it! She might just cheat on us with him.”

My face reddened in anger and humiliation.

Rai narrowed his eyes on Blaze. “Take care when you talk to our mate. Some words once said can never be unsaid. If you wronged her—”

Blaze snorted. “If you choose to be so blind, so be it. Ask her yourself.”

I clenched my fists at my sides, but I didn’t utter a word.

“Daisy?” Rai asked, his tone soft and lethal.

Was this going to turn into an interrogation? I didn’t owe them any explanations.

Rai sighed in resignation, and his hurt got me.

“I sought out Elvey,” I said. “I wanted to check on him and Rosalinda.”

“Our Daisy is good at finding excuses,” Blaze said.

My face burned hot, and I wanted to punch his masked face. For the first time, I didn’t feel sorry for him having to wear the mask every day.

I held back my anger. I didn’t want to say or do anything I might regret later. And I hated this friction between us. It bruised me.

“That’s enough, Blaze,” Iokul warned.

“Aren’t we enough for you, Daisy?” Blaze kept at it. “You already have three mates, and we each get only one. We don’t seek other women for pleasure. We were all devoted to you.”

He used the past tense. Had I lost him already? My heart tore.

“How many men do you want?” he demanded, his voice lashing out at me like a slash of a blade. “I understood when you couldn’t choose between us because of your curse. Now your curse is gone, and you still pine for another man.”

I shut my eyes as pain rammed into me.

I shouldn’t want Elvey. I shouldn’t make my mates unhappy. They all

wanted me and cherished me, and they met my every need.

But Elvey—my heart yearned for him. I'd tried to fight his pull, but if I didn't have him, I would never feel complete.

He drew me in just as equally strong as my other mates.

Before Sphinx confirmed that Elvey was also my fated mate, I'd thought it was my fault that I wanted him. I'd scolded and berated myself whenever Elvey slipped into my mind.

I didn't feel this kind of attraction toward any other male, just for my three mates and Elvey.

When Adrian, who had been my first crush, had returned, my mate had been tense since they'd heard about Sphinx's riddle and had speculated that Adrian could be my final mate.

I'd missed Adrian for centuries and loved him fiercely. But when I saw him again, I hadn't been drawn to him in a romantic way. Not anymore. My feelings toward Adrian became that of a dear friend, and I trusted him with my life as he was my Captain of the Guard.

The one last spot I had in my heart was reserved for Elvey.

All three pairs of eyes that belonged to my smoking hot, gorgeous mates stared at me, pain, hurt, and confusion in each pair.

Their pain hurt me, but I also had to be honest with myself and come clean with them. Then I'd wait for them to decide what to do with me and accept the consequences.

I licked my lips, my throat dry, and my heart drumming. "I do have feelings for Elvey," I said.

Devastation clouded their eyes.

Rai looked like I had truly betrayed him, and he didn't want to believe it. Blaze lifted his lips in a silent snarl. Iokul looked distant, as if he couldn't care less and wouldn't care any longer.

"It's as strongly as I feel for you, all of you," I continued. "I didn't and don't want to feel for him, but I can't help it. Elvey is also my destined mate, just like you are."

"I've had enough of this bullshit," Blaze shouted. "You have three of us loving you. We try to satisfy you in every way possible. Yet it's never enough. We're never enough."

"That's not true," I said, tears in my eyes.

"I don't believe you," Blaze said, his jaw set. There was so much hurt in his eyes that I could no longer defend myself.

As the silence extended, Iokul said, “Daisy is trying to be as truthful to us as to herself. We all heard of the Sphinx beast’s riddle. Fate arranged for her to have four mates instead of three.”

Rai drew a sharp breath and sighed. “The Fae can be tied to her as much as we to her. Sphinx announced, *‘It’s not one, not two, and not three. Only when you find the missing piece of what heart desires will you finally find your way home.’* If that’s what Fate wants for our mate, I don’t think we can fight it.”

“I won’t accept it,” Blaze said. “It’s him or us. Choose, Daisy.”

My face grew hard. “Don’t make me choose. I won’t go to him, but if he comes to me, I can’t deny him. I won’t. He’s part of my soul, just as you all are.”

“Then you’ll have to let me go,” he said.

Blaze stormed off, pulling the door open and slamming it shut. It hammered my heart harder than anything.

My throat burned from unshed tears.

Blaze threatened to break the bond with me. If I accepted Elvey, would Rai and Iokul also break up with me?

Sphinx's riddle about the consequence of choosing between Elvey and my three dragon mates echoed in my mind.

I wouldn't choose, just as I'd refused to choose between my three mates on Pandemonium. My heart bled at the prospect of losing them. But what if Elvey pushed the matter and came to me? How could I choose my three mates over him?

But how could I not accept him?

So far, Elvey hadn't made a move, but the pull between us grew stronger every minute and would keep growing until the day I caved in. The mating fever between us had made me forget myself and every danger in the world. If Blaze hadn't stopped me, I would have thrown myself into Elvey's arms and kissed him fiercely.

I'd have gone further than that.

Perhaps I should stay away from Elvey, but the mere thought burned my stomach.

Elvey was stronger than anyone, I told myself. He knew how to take care of himself without me. He hadn't had me for an eon. Yet, a stone-cold voice said, *If he's that good at taking care of himself, why did he become a blood slave to the dark Fae Queen?*

I'd had a glimpse of his vulnerability that he wouldn't show to anyone. My heart ached for him so much, and I couldn't even comfort him.

I had never comforted him.

All I'd ever given him was a dance and a kiss in a glamoured virtual reality.

In the back of my mind, I realized it might not be up to me to choose or not to choose. Fate wouldn't let me keep this balance forever. Hadn't Sphinx said that if I refused Elvey, his bones would be shattered?

No, don't let me go there.

Right now, I needed to find Blaze. I wouldn't leave our quarrel like that. I couldn't let him be hurt like that. I couldn't let him go. But what if he'd made up his mind and was done with me?

My heart plunged into icy water.

I tracked the fire dragon, following the thread of our bond. My heart pounded in gratitude that it was still there, that it hadn't broken.

Rai and Iokul trailed after me to guard me, in respectful distance. For the first time, they didn't push the matter or crowd me with their alpha male presence or demands but gave me space.

What if it wasn't space but the distance growing between us?

The snow had stopped falling, yet the chill was in my bones. I trekked on the path of ice and snow until I found Blaze standing behind the rail at the guards' post, staring into the distance. His gray cloak flapped in the wind.

I stalked toward him.

I wanted to say sorry—not sorry for wanting Elvey, but for hurting him.

But I couldn't get the words out. Instead, I listened to the harsh sound of the wind.

I invaded his space, got into his cloak, and slid an arm around his firm waist.

Blaze didn't move. Didn't say anything. A half minute passed, which felt like an eternity, before he sighed and wrapped his cloak around me to shelter me from the wind and coldness.

He pulled me against his chest tightly and tucked my head under his chin.

I clasped my hands behind his neck. "Blaze," I whispered, gazing up at his masked face.

His eyes burned with pain and desire for me. As his gaze dipped to my mouth, I stared at his sensual lips. They parted, full of need for me. I freed a hand and brushed my thumb over his bottom lip.

Despite the frigid weather, his lips remained warm. That was the benefit of being a fire dragon. And my Blaze was the hottest one.

My hand moved to trace his mask. I could picture how beautiful, how perfect his face was under the mask.

How badly I wanted to get rid of the mask carved on his face and to see him completely naked, from head to toe. We'd talked extensively about the remaining half-curse on my mates. I would turn every corner over and search the cure for them after we secure our dynasty and home. But they insisted they would need to keep proving that they were my worthy mates for the masks to drop off.

They thought this trial would help them to prove themselves.

They were wrong. They'd already proved they were worthy of me in every aspect. But was I worthy of them?

Blaze grabbed my hand and moved it away from his mask. Without a word, he crashed his mouth onto mine.

The kiss was so fierce and hungry it burned me all the way to my toes, and fiery lust rose to meet its demand. I clung to him. I couldn't get enough of him. His tongue thrust into my open mouth, teasing my teeth and challenging my fangs to appear before sweeping over my hard palate.

A moan escaped from the depth of my throat, but his deep kiss stifled it. His tongue thrust against my tongue, mating with it.

My pussy became slick with need and want.

I broke the kiss and whispered against his hot lips. "I won't choose, Blaze. I won't choose Elvey over you."

From the corner of my eye, I caught a shadowy figure pulling away from under a white tree and fading off into the mist.

Elvey.

His pain rippled to me. He didn't know it magnified ten times in my heart.

Blaze pulled me against him, leaving no space between us. His huge, hard bulge strained against my belly through the fabric.

The liquid fire that pooled between my thighs licked my tender flesh. It needed to be sated.

He sniffed, his nostrils flaring, and his eyes brightening. He scented my arousal.

"You want me, too, honeybee," he said.

"Yes, very much. I always want you," I said.

He ground his hips against me, his cock granite hard.

“I need to fuck you, babe,” he said. “Right here. Right now.”

His eagerness made my blood race faster.

“Not here,” I said breathlessly. “We don’t want to cause a scene. But I know a place.”

A slice of memory flooded into my mind. Unlike humans, we dragons could trace our memories to even infancy.

I believed that when the second Fae princess Aine had teleported me out of Tianna’s grip, she hadn’t shifted me to the palace but here. Very few people had known this place that was guarded by a handful of selected Dragon Guardians.

I’d been raised here until I was four, when King Daghdha had deemed it safe for me to be moved back to the Dragon Realm and to be introduced to our people.

By faint memory, I led Blaze toward my childhood chamber.

Iokul and Rai were no longer in sight. They were giving me time alone with their brother. I remembered how they’d fought against each other and competed for me a month ago.

It wasn’t that they wanted me any less, but my mates had learned to support each other and share better.

Our relationship had evolved, even in such a short time.

We would have been content and enjoyed our equilibrium if Elvey hadn’t reemerged.

As we moved some distance away from the guards’ post, I felt a tug of my bond from the other princes. I threw a backward glance and saw that both Rai and Iokul had taken over the post to stay guard. I smiled at them in gratitude.

We made a few turns in the hallway and stopped before a golden and blue door.

I pushed the door open, but Blaze strolled in first. He wanted to make sure there was no ambush. When it came to protecting me, my mates were borderline paranoid. I’d given up fighting them or reminding them that I was also a lethal warrior.

Now I just let them, and the guards, do their job and be happy.

I stepped into my old chamber after Blaze and watched through the crystal door. The snowflakes started whirling again in the garden, the sky silent and pure white.

I returned my gaze to the interior of the room.

Cushions littered the floor around the bed. There weren't any toys, because dragons didn't believe in raising cubs with toys.

Blaze also took in the surroundings, the lust in his eyes never wavering.

"So, this is where you were raised?" he asked.

I gazed up at him through my thick eyelashes, my heart pounding in anticipation.

When we walked all the way here, ice and snow crunching under our feet and the chilly wind slamming into our face, the thick lust flowing in our veins had never lessened.

We were alone now.

Blaze stared at the rocking chair in the center of the room, and I knew what was in his mind. He wanted to bend me down on it and fuck me.

Silently, he started to undress. He untied the cloak first and tossed it to the ground without care.

His heavy-lidded eyes never left mine.

When his black armor dropped off, he still had a shirt on and his pants hanging low on his hips. A trail of golden hair trailed down below the waistline.

My breath stilled in my throat. My blood heated.

He unbuttoned his shirt with no hurry, yet the hunger in his beautiful golden eyes only grew hotter.

My gaze roved over him, from his smooth chest to his sexy six-pack, caressing every thick cord of muscle. He flexed his biceps for my benefit, his eyes sparkling at my devouring look.

Flashing me a wicked smirk, he whipped off his pants and stood completely naked in front of me. His huge cock jerked forward aggressively.

Yet he didn't come to me.

"Your turn," he said roughly, his voice husky and dominant.

Usually undressing me was my mates' job, and the three of them worked together efficiently.

But this time, Blaze wanted to see me strip.

I bit down on my lower lips. My face flushed at his intense gaze. I didn't know why I suddenly felt shy. He'd explored every inch of my skin with all of his brothers.

This was something new for us. It was incredibly intimate to watch each other undress.

I dropped my clothing slowly, one item after the other, until I was only left standing in flimsy red panties. I stood in front of him, feeling vulnerable for leaving myself at his mercy.

Like a flash of wind, he was in front of me.

“You’re mine,” he said.

“Yes, I’m yours,” I whispered.

“Mine to fuck.”

I swallowed. “Always.”

“And I want to fuck you very hard now,” he said. “I want to bury my cock deep inside you and make you scream my name over and over.” The lust in his eyes burned hotter than his dragon fire, and my pussy grew slicker.

I swayed my hips and breathed. “Fuck me as hard as you want.”

“But I have to relish you first.”

He dropped to one knee and put his face against my crotch, rubbing my sex and my panties, and sniffing my scent.

“You smell so good, babe,” he murmured. “I can smell how ripe you are for me.”

I moaned. “Then what are you waiting for?”

“I want to spend the time alone with you as long as I can,” he said.

Meaning, he wanted to take it really slow and torture me out of my mind.

“You can fuck me first, and then we’ll cuddle,” I offered a solution.

He looked up at me with a wicked, dark smile. “That’s not what I have in mind.” He slipped a hand into my panties. His rough hand palmed my pussy, rubbing it, his finger grazing over my folds.

His touch made my skin burn, and his hungry gaze promised to devour me and do all sort of wicked, dirty things to me. It heated my blood like no other.

With every stroke of his fingers, more wet heat pooled in my sex.

“Please,” I moaned.

“Please what?” he asked hoarsely.

“Please fuck me now, Blaze.”

“Not yet,” he murmured, and pulled my panties down roughly—not all the way down as I wanted, it still covered half of my mound.

He stared at my pussy, lust filling his eyes. “It’s lovely. Who does it belong to, Daisy?”

“It belongs to you.”

“Say it again and say my name.”

I swayed my hips impatiently. I needed his cock inside me, needed his thickness and length to fill me.

“My pussy belongs to you, Blaze. Please fuck me.”

“I’ll fuck you soon and hard. I’ll fuck you harder than you can take. That’s a promise I won’t break. But as I said, I’ll take my time with you today, my lusty mate.”

He had my folds between his knuckles and pulled, not so gently, and pain and pleasure shot to my nerve endings.

“More, Blaze!” I moaned. “More.”

“I like when you moan my name,” he said. “Soon, you’ll scream my name and beg me not to fuck you so hard, but I won’t stop. Consider yourself warned.”

I gasped at the promise.

His thumb moved to circle my clit, and I propelled my groin toward his hand. Before I knew, he had two fingers inside of me, thrusting in and out.

“Your pussy is so tight and hot, my favorite pussy,” he said.

I moaned as I rode his fingers, reveling in the pleasure he ignited in me.

As his hand moved, his fingers thrusting in me, the heel of his palm stretched my panties.

Pressure built up in me. My orgasm would wash over me soon.

Sensing my urgent need for a release, Blaze withdrew his fingers.

“No, please,” I protested.

“Not yet, my feisty mate.”

“Please, Blaze,” I groaned. “Give it to me.”

“You’ll come when I say you can come, and not a second sooner.”

He was torturing me.

He gripped my ass, securing my body.

He regarded my pussy, then tore my panties off, the rip of the fabric echoing through the room.

Just as the cold air hit my skin, his hot mouth pressed against my bare sex. His tongue lapped at my swollen flesh, his teeth nipping it. Pleasure rocked me wave after wave, rendering me mindless. When he had my sensitive nub between his teeth, I jerked and moaned his name like a feline in heat.

He cursed, the vibration of the word sending tingles through my slick pussy. I looked down at him and his eyes burned with scorching lust.

I trembled as he feasted upon my pussy.

His ravishing me only made me crave more. I wanted all of him.

A long, wailing moan ripped from my throat.

“You want my cock badly, babe,” he said, his voice slurring. “You want me to fuck you so terribly. Tell me what you want.”

I moaned. “I want your cock.”

“Beg harder.”

I begged shamelessly, rocking my hips against his face.

“I love the noises you make, babe.”

In a flash, my back and ass landed on the cushion on the floor. Blaze bent my legs to my shoulders and squatted above me, his powerful, muscled legs on either side of my body.

With one strike, he plunged into me skillfully, seating deep inside me. I cried out at the sensation of being so full.

“Fuck,” he cursed. “You’re so tight and perfect.”

He pulled out before driving back into me. His cock slammed into my depth. There was no other sound in the room except the sweet torturing and erotic slapping.

His steel rod went in and out of my sheath faster and harder, and my pussy gloved it tightly and kept sucking it back in when he pulled away.

For a long moment, we didn’t say anything, just fucked each other in savage hunger.

When his speed became blinding and his force slammed to my core, my head rolled back. My fire dragon was making me all mushy and boneless.

He pounded into me violently, with harsh male demand, until my world could have no one else but him. He drilled into me, one hard thrust after another, until nothing else mattered, but the need to be fucked.

“You’re made for me, mate,” he groaned.

And I was made for my other mates as well, but I didn’t voice it out. I wouldn’t spoil the mood. Right now, I belonged to Blaze, and I would give him all I had.

“This hot, tight pussy is mine,” he said. “And mine alone for today.”

His cock grew larger and harder, as if he’d just released his inner dragon beast. He plunged into my depth, reaching my molten core, stretching me to the limit.

He’d never fucked me this wildly. His fire dragon desired to devour me, consume me, and brand me, as his cock pounded into me again and again.

My moans became breathless, and then my own dragon surfaced to meet

him. Even though we couldn't shift, our beasts had joined in the ferocious mating.

"Come for me," he commanded. "Come fast and hard for me."

My heat exploded around his cock.

"That's my fucking girl."

He roared as his hips moved forward in feverish pitch and he pumped his seed into me. It lasted for a long while, as if he had endless supply of it. While he kept at it, my second and third orgasm erupted.

"I'll never let you go," he thundered. "I'll fuck you forever!"

His mouth crashed onto mine, kissing me with hunger and fire that couldn't be denied.

He wasn't done with me.

Neither was I done with him.

He flipped me over and carried a boneless me to the rocking chair for another bout of fucking.

My mate heaved up my ass, parted my legs wide, and thrust his still hard cock from behind me. "I love your smell of jasmine and arousal," he groaned huskily. "Your pussy is all soaked for me."

He buried his cock in my core. From this position, his cock went even deeper inside me, filling my every inch. Without giving me a break, he pounded into me, and I bit down on my hand to muffle my screams.

A knock sounded at the door.

We both froze, then we laughed. We ignored it as Blaze kept thrusting into me with his savage strength and blinding speed. The chair creaked and rocked with us.

"Daisy, Blaze," Rai called. "Get dressed. It's urgent."

Blaze looked back at me, and I sighed and nodded. "Another time?"

"Another time," he promised. "I'll fuck you even harder."

It felt like we were actually dating. We had all skipped that step and gone straight to mating.

I gave him a shy smile as we both rushed to pick up our clothes and shove them on.

Fully dressed, Blaze and I followed Rai into the meeting hall.

Everyone was present except for the guards on patrol duty. Daghdha, Elvey, Rosalinda, Iokul, and Adrian sat around the oval table, with the elite guards standing against the opposite walls.

My eyes fell on Jarrod.

We'd left him at the base with my mates' guards. He wasn't supposed to be our companion on the quest. If he'd tracked us to come here, it meant it was indeed an emergency.

Elvey watched me silently and perceptively, and I flushed. Why did I feel like I was cheating on him when we weren't even together? He tore his gaze from me and turned to whisper to Rosalinda next to him, as if he needed a distraction.

"Queen Danaenyth," Jarrod said. "I bring grave news."

And with the news, the harsh reality rushed back to me while I was still relishing the feel of Blaze's cock inside me.

Lysandra's coronation had been set in two days, and the humans planned to level the Dragon Realm after she ascended to the throne in the skyscraper of glass and steel in the City of Amethyst, where she would rule.

By destroying the Dragon Realm, they would shatter the symbol of the dragons, short-circuiting the magic in the land, and ending the era of the Danaenyth dynasty. That was what her puppet master, the dark Fae Queen Tianna, had dreamed of for centuries.

The enemies not only wanted to take the realm from me, they wanted the dragon race to be extinct.

"I thought we had more time," I said. "Why all of a sudden move up the schedule?"

"It's simple," Elvey said. "You spoiled the black witch's fun at the Human Superior and First gala, so she decided to strike before you can. Once she takes the crown, it'll be hell for you to dethrone her without risking a war. With the whole human population throwing their lot with her, and you still not having Arianrhod's endorsement, the odds are against us winning either the election or this war."

"We need to put the humans in their place," Adrian said. "The king let them roam freely for too long, and now they think they're the masters. The land they live on doesn't belong to them. They only rent it with the king's

permission. Daisy can evict them at any time.”

“The humans have grown too entitled,” Blaze said. “I say we get rid of those assholes!”

“The Oslanian army is ready,” Rai said, looking at me. “Whenever you need it.”

“Not all humans are our enemies,” I said. “Most of them are brainwashed by the Humans Superior and First cult and under Lysandra’s spell. If they can see her true colors, they won’t support her.”

I wasn’t sure I wanted to go to war with the humans and force them to accept my rule. A civil war in my realm might just be what my evil aunt wanted.

“We only have two days,” Iokul said. “And Arianrhod is nowhere to be found. What’s urgent and important to us doesn’t seem to be the same to the goddess.”

“The land is still connected to me, though weakly,” I said. “We’ll have to go with what we have. We don’t have more time to look for Arianrhod. I say we abort the quest. We’ll shift back to dragons and return to the ship at first light tomorrow.”

Rai nodded. “Then we’ll crash the witch’s coronation and end her.”

“I’ll go with you and set things straight,” Daghdha offered. “I’ll divorce and denounce her in public. I’ll cite the ancient dragons’ laws.”

“It might not be an excellent idea, Grandfather,” I said. The humans resented his rule, and Lysandra had succeeded in painting him a villain and a tyrant that needed to be removed. “I know it’s hard, but I need you to stay in the background this time. Let me corner the witch. Let me bring her down.”

Daghdha sighed in contained anger and sadness. “As you wish, Daisy Danaenyth. You’re the queen now. I left you a mess to inherit.”

I placed my hand on his. “We’ll fix it together.”

“Actually, Your Majesty,” a guard named Sorrel, chimed in, and we both snapped our heads at him. He looked at Daghdha. “You can’t leave this sanctuary. The black witch’s spell can’t cross the ward and reach you here, but as soon as you leave the mountain, the madness will take you over again.”

It was another long story how his elite guards had managed to get him here from the castle when Lysandra hexed him.

“We have nothing that we can use to expose the black witch for what she is,” Jarrod said. “And the humans, who aren’t dragon haters, are also

enthralled by her.”

Everyone looked grimmer.

“My spies have been digging up dirt on Lysandra,” Elvey said. “They’ve been tracking the two missing mayors, who are the dragon royalists. Lysandra might have killed them. But if my team can find them alive, we’ll nail the witch. We have less than two days. I’ll leave tonight. I thought we could push Arianrhod’s hand, but she’s been difficult.”

“Walk me through Fae magic before you leave, Elvey,” I said. “Hopefully whatever magic I have can all come out and take on Lysandra when the time comes.”

“Right now,” Elvey said.

I nodded, and Elvey and I rose at the same time.

Rai and Blaze shot to their feet as well. Iokul, however, sat tight and watched us.

“This session is one-on-one, by invitation only,” Elvey said.

Rai and Blaze growled.

Daghda chuckled. Had he already forgotten he’d just apologized for the mess he’d left so soon? I glared at my grandfather and rolled my eyes at my dragon princes.

“We go where our mate goes,” Blaze said, ignoring my attitude.

“Not this time,” Elvey said coldly. “This doesn’t concern you. If you’re worried about Daisy’s safety, you don’t need to. She’ll always be safe with me.”

“Not from you,” Blaze ground out.

I narrowed my eyes on Blaze, then Rai. “Really? I’m bonded to you, not chained to you. This competition has to end. If we don’t learn how to work together, we don’t need the enemies to finish us off, we can do it ourselves!”

“Relax, brothers,” Iokul said coolly. “Elvey won’t let anyone or himself hurt a hair on Daisy’s head.”

Blaze still glared at Elvey with distrust.

“Fine,” Rai said, and sat down. “We need to further discuss the strategies anyway while Daisy practices her magic.”



ELVEY LED me to the pinnacle of the mountain. It was vast, ancient, and

untouched. I inhaled the cold, crispy air, wanting to dance a little in this white world of purest beauty that any dragon would love, even though the world was about to collapse on me.

Elvey watched me, a contained heat and sparkle in his star-blue eyes. He looked beyond gorgeous and sexy even in this deceptively peaceful settling. For a second, I was dying to know what he looked like in his true demigod form, if he had one.

Which god had sired him? What was his life story? Would he ever share it with me? Would he ever open to me?

Elvey arched an elegant brow. “May we bring your fascinating, wandering mind back?”

“Whatever you say,” I said.

“Show me all the magic you have, Daisy.”

“Can’t you sense them and lay it out for me since you’re the master?”

“I want you to sort them out, Daisy. Do the inventory yourself.”

He wasn’t a very nice mentor.

“I could phase when I was in my Fury form. I can no longer do it after I returned to my dragon form. Phasing would come in handy if I still possessed the power.”

“Focus on what you have,” he said.

“I can always sense and trace magic. I can see through glamour, which you already know since I shattered your charm in the great hall you took me to.”

A smile ghosted his lips. “You did, didn’t you? And I thought I finally had you all for myself.”

My heart stuttered.

“Did you like the dance?” he asked softly.

My skin burned hot.

“Did you bring me here to flirt with me or to teach me?”

“Why can’t we do both, Daisy darling? It’ll make the magical lesson easier and more interesting.”

“I’m not afraid of a hard lesson, and I can take boring anytime.”

He arched an eyebrow, knowing exactly how sexy he looked by doing just that. I tried not to lick my lips.

“What else have you got, my darling?”

“As a dragon, I have fire at my command, of course.”

“Of course, and so you’ll practice merging your dragon magic into your

Fae magic.”

“How?”

He smirked. “That’s why I’m here.”

Oh, that killer smile!

I should not get distracted. What I’d learn might decide if I could finally take down Lysandra. Elvey could multitask, but I had never been good at that. I was more of a one channel, one-step-at-a-time kind of girl.

I hesitated for a second, then blurted out another secret. “I have bonding magic from the Fae side.”

He looked at me with increased interest. “What does it do?”

“I once used it to bond the beasts and monsters to me when I lived in the jungle on Pandemonium. If I concentrate hard, I can also slip into the minds of my bonded subjects and see what they see. I don’t like doing that much since it always gives me pounding headaches afterwards.”

“Magic comes with a price. Pain and euphoria go hand in hand when you use powerful magic,” he said. “The bonding magic is your Fae royal heritage. Tianna has it as well, but she mixes it with dark magic and uses it to control minds. You, on the contrary, draw hearts with your compassion. When you face her eventually, she’ll try to bind you. And once you’re hers, all will be lost. You can never allow her to slip into your mind and control you. You need to be stronger than her, and the only way you can push her back is to surround yourself with your White Light. Even if Arianrhod reconnects you to the realm and gives you the land’s power, it won’t be enough to fight Tianna in her territory. Yes, Sihde Realm is yours by all your birthright, but you’ll need to earn it back before you can have the realm’s loyalty. It’ll give you a chance because of your bloodline. Sihde is withering and has been corrupted for centuries. It’s crying out to you even when you aren’t available. But even so, it won’t devote to you before you prove your worthiness. Just as you need to reclaim the Dragon Realm.”

I eyed him. “You always deliver light news, don’t you?”

“I’m the rainbow,” he said, a glint in his eyes. “And you’re my firestorm. You’re one of a kind, Daisy Danaenyth. You’re the only hybrid of Fae and dragon. A forbidden power dwells in you. When you were cursed, you couldn’t access that power, but now you can. Call it to you, like you own it. From now on, you’ll live and breathe your magic any second of the day instead of having any sexy time. We won’t have much time when the enemies beat down our door.”

My breath caught, and my face flamed.

I was wondering what Elvey really thought of my sexy time with my dragon princes. I hadn't seen him being overly jealous, unlike my mates. But now he wanted my celibacy? Hadn't he known how impossible it was to do that since I was mated, and the mating fever hadn't taken it easy on my mates and me?

"Your White Light is the only magic that can overcome the dark Fae Queen's black magic. If she takes your Light and corrupts it, we'll all be done for. But I place my bet on you."

"You do?"

"Always have. And always will, Daisy dearest."

"Ever since the day I expelled the pure evil with my White Light, my light hasn't really manifested," I said in frustration. Another time it had made a short appearance was when my mates and I had formed the mating bond. "It wasn't like I haven't tried to call it to me."

"Come here," he said softly.

I gave him a doubtful look.

He laughed. "Come on, you're the dragon who has big teeth, not me."

I flushed. To show that I was actually fearless, I strode toward him but stopped a foot from him. Before I could react, he seized me, spun me, and pulled my back against his hard chest.

His warmth enveloped me, his scent—harsh, elegant, and powerful at once—blanketed me. And in a world full of ice, snow, and wind, he still smelled of the forest sunlight.

I drew in a lungful of his scent. I couldn't get enough of it.

"Elvey," I breathed. "We shouldn't—"

"Shush, we're only training."

"But—" I protested weakly.

His hardness pressed against the small of my back. It was massive and hard as steel, even though there was fabrics between us.

Instantly, my panties were soaked, and all I wanted was to fuck him, to have his big cock inside me. I clenched my fists to my sides to stop myself from reaching him and grabbing his manhood.

The mating call grew more urgent, and it was merciless, because he was also my destined mate—the only one who hadn't mated with me.

"I can't help it," he said roughly in my ear. "My cock is always hard when you're around. You'll just have to learn to ignore it, as I do."

How could I ignore it when fire licked heavily and hotly at the tender, aching flesh between my thighs? How could I not pay attention to it when lust burst in my veins?

“Focus,” Elvey said harshly. “We need to finish this session. Have you felt the warmth here?”

His arm wrapped around my waist, and his free hand landed on my belly.

Heat pulsed under my bellybutton. I nodded, my mind still lingering on the feel of his cock pushing up against my back.

I wanted to feel his naked skin.

“That’s where you draw your White Light,” he said, his jaw pressing against my temple.

His every touch sent fire and pleasure to my every cell, lighting it like star fire, but I needed to concentrate.

“Do you feel the Light, Daisy?”

“Huh?” I breathed out. “Oh, no. I felt only heat.”

And I blushed again.

His warm breath trickled my skin, and his male scent mixing with faint pine, so intoxicating and delicious, assaulted me. I wanted to melt to him.

“Concentrate, darling,” he murmured, lust lacing in his voice.

“I’m trying.”

The next second, heat, light, and Elvey had all left me.

Endless darkness surrounded me. It swept over me and closed in me, its unbearable weight choking me. Air departed from my lungs. The worst coldness sank into my bones, threatening to turn them to ice and shatter me to pieces.

I bent over while my last breath turned to a scream. “Elvey!”

He didn’t answer. He’d abandoned me.

He couldn’t just leave me here, alone and choking to death.

But he’d done just that.

The Fae mage could be cruel and heartless when he chose to be. He’d told the demon captain so.

The darkness became the foul smoke. It wanted to possess me and turn me into a mindless, rabid beast. And then it would send me to go after my mates and hurt them.

You’ll not have me! I hissed. I won’t let you near them.

A flicker of light and fire rose from my belly.

Don’t let it snuff out.

I pictured it expanding. I commanded it to grow.

It leaped up a little higher.

The tiny light kept the foul smoke at bay for the moment, yet the darkness still penetrated me, and icy coldness traveled in my veins as if it owned me.

I was a dragon. I wouldn't allow it! But I wasn't powerful enough to drive the darkness and smoke away.

I heard groans of pain. The next I smelled a familiar scent and realized my mates were here. Fear for them drenched me. I clenched my teeth and pulled my light with great effort. It lit like candlelight, illuminating what was in front of me.

Iron chains pierced Rai, Blaze, and Iokul and spread-eagled them in the air.

"No!" I screamed in rage and terror.

They stared at me without recognizing me. The torture and darkness had shattered their minds. They only struggled once in a while, and the heavy chains clanged and clanged.

I lunged toward them, but the alien darkness pushed me back, pinning me against the cold, damp wall.

As I watched life slipping away from my mates' once-stunning eyes above their masks that were also tainted by blood, something broke in me.

I wouldn't allow them to die. I wouldn't allow anyone to hurt them again.

Light from the heavens and hell burst in me.

It ripped out of me like a ring of fire.

The White Light with dragon fire penetrated the darkness, purging it, until the room was full of blinding light. At the same time, my light melted the chains binding my mates, turning the iron to dust.

"Remember it," Elvey's voice whispered in my ear. "Remember where to draw your power. If you fail, your mates' fate will be worse than that. Tianna loves cruel games more than anything, and she's absolutely psychotic and pitiless."

I wanted to hit him for conjuring up the image of my mates being tormented, but then he could be right. If I didn't get my shit together, I wouldn't just lose my mates.

I would condemn them to the worst fate, because my evil aunt knew where to hurt me the most.

I turned to him. "I'll remember you as well, Elvey," I said, my voice inhumanly harsh. "I won't forget shattering your chains."

He no longer held me, the coldness and distance between us a regretful thing.

Then, I noticed that my dragon princes stood several yards away, staring at me in awe.

They had tried, I knew. But in the end, they just couldn't leave me alone with Elvey. They had to come for me, and just in time to see me glow in the snow.

“The lesson is over for today,” Elvey said in a tired voice, his eyes dark and fathomless, as if stars had fallen in them and kept falling.

I did not want him to fall.

He was gone before I could say a word.

Not long after Elvey's departure, I called out the White Light, and once again it refused to surface. My Light magic seemed to emerge only when he was around, but there would be times I'd have to face my enemies without him.

I'd given up hope of obtaining Arianrhod's support. I wouldn't be able to show the humans that the realm was mine without the cooperation of the land's magic. My White Light magic was my only bet to go against Lysandra when her coronation took place, which was two days away.

There was no way I could muster my lethal magic in two days. And even if I took out the witch that way, I doubted the humans would go along with my plan and side with me.

There might still be war—dragons versus humans.

But I couldn't let Lysandra take the realm.

I would just face whatever consequences after my final showdown with Lysandra.

I'd once been the Fury beast. I could still be ruthless.

I had to be honest with myself. My chance of stomping Lysandra was slim with such fickle magic in me. She was a very powerful witch who had probably practiced her dark magic when she was a toddler. And I was really rusty.

Anxiety flooded me.

Beads of sweat turned cold on my forehead as I failed again and again to bring out the White Light. It didn't cause a wrinkle, not even when my mates aided me with their magic of ice, fire, and lightning, despite that it had worked once when I vanquished Segomo.

My frustration poured out of my every pore, and my mates watched me cautiously.

The day had receded, and the night came.

I saw stars in front of me while there were no stars in the sky but endless, pale grey.

When I stumbled in the next bout, my mates insisted that I take a break.

Summoning such a great, terrible magic was consuming. Elvey had warned me not to exhaust myself. If I pushed myself over my limit, I could even kill myself.

"Make it your second nature," he'd said merrily.

When he'd seen that I wanted to smack him just for saying that, he'd smirked. "I don't blame you, Daisy darling. You've been rusty for centuries. It won't come to you like a snap of the fingers, but you still need to make it do. You need to let it know you own it."

Own it my butt.

"That's enough practice for today." Rai ended my protest and scooped me into his arms and carried me to our room.

While I lay on them in bed, my head on Rai's chest and my ankles on Blaze as he massaged my sore feet, they debriefed me on the plan of our final strike on Lysandra. We'd make our entrance before she could vow her oath as the new queen.

"We must time it right," Iokul said, kissing my lips softly.

Their affection and comfort sent me to a sweet dreamland until a voice, softer than a snowflake, called me in my mind.

I fluttered open my eyes, still sprawled on my mates' bodies. They had all fallen asleep, worried, yet content smiles on their lips.

Come, Daisy, the voice urged. This is for you alone. I put your mates to sleep for now.

My heart thrummed restlessly, and I rose, careful not to wake my mates.

Who are you? I demanded, even though I knew who was talking to me.

Aren't you looking for me? I'm here now.

I'd never heard a voice that musical, lovely, and powerful beyond measure.

Unable to resist it, I followed its tug and traced it to the garden outside my childhood chamber where Blaze and I had fucked passionately earlier.

I met no guards. Goddess Arianrhod had put all of them to sleep.

I stood in the center of the white garden. "Where are you?" I asked.

The goddess materialized, and she was the most beautiful, perfect being I'd ever seen.

Her hair was whiter than the snow, flowing all the way down to her lovely bare feet. Her skin was glowing amber, and her eyes were the purest sky blue. Her pink lips were so soft and sensual they could ensnare any man's heart.

She was dressed in a glowing white gown that barely covered her curves.

Looking at her, I didn't want my mates to ever meet her.

She laughed mesmerizingly. She must have heard my inner thoughts. Who was I kidding? In front of me was Goddess Arianrhod of Inanna.

"What do you want from me, daughter?" she asked.

"You know what I want, Arianrhod," I said. "I need to be the new Keeper of the Dragon Realm. I need to protect the land. I need to preserve the dragon race—your children."

"Why do you think you can do the job? Your grandfather failed."

"I'll fix it. My grandfather was stricken by inconsolable grief after he lost his son and me."

"What if you lose your mates? Will you still be a good Keeper? Will you fail me?"

My heart was immediately torn at the prospect, and pain wrenched at my heart. I wouldn't survive if they perished. "I'll make sure my mates are safe," I said stiffly.

She snorted. "You can't keep all of them safe, especially the one mate, the one you haven't claimed and might never be yours."

It was a cruel thing to say, but she was also honest by laying out the brutal reality before me.

"I'll keep him safe as well," I said with determination. "I'll break his shackles, at any cost."

"You can't be that ruthless," Arianrhod said. "You don't have it in you. It's either your three mates or him. Choose."

"No, I'll never choose." I narrowed my eyes. "Did you send Sphinx to mess with my head?"

"You know he didn't need to mess up your head or heart," she said.

“Daisy Danaenyth, you do have a pure, courageous heart. I’ll grant you your wish and let the power of the realm infuse you and aide you to take down your enemy. But I’ll need one thing from you.”

“Name it.”

“Give me Elvey Fionn, the demigod.”

My heart stopped.

“Why do you want him?” I tried to conceal my sudden hostility toward the goddess.

She narrowed her eyes at me in displeasure. “He’s pretty. Do I really need a reason?”

Could a goddess be petty, menacing, and lustful?

“There are many pretty men out there. You can have any man you set your sights on.”

“But not Elvey.” The goddess sighed. “He’s bonded to you, even though you haven’t mated. If you’re willing to transfer him to me, the bond between you will break, and I’ll have him in every way. The demigod is part of my kin. He intrigues me like no other men or gods can. Offer him to me, and you can have what you want.”

“No.”

She frowned at me. “No?”

Her power lashed out at me, but I held my ground, despite the tearing of my insides.

“I won’t sell him like a whore,” I said with great effort, anger lacing in my bitter voice. “He’s Elvey Fionn, and he means a great deal to me.”

I’d tasted him when he first kissed me in the Witch Tower. The taste was still in my cherished memory. I knew who he was. He was the man who woke me up. He was the man I’d known since the beginning, even before I was born.

He’d watched over me.

He was my fated mate.

“Does he mean as much to you as your other mates?”

“Yes. They all mean equally and strongly to me.”

“You haven’t mated Elvey in truth. You shouldn’t feel so attached to him. Daughter, you need to be practical. On one scale, it’s the future of your kingdom and your mates and everything, on the other scale, it’s only Elvey. Will you choose him and lose the realm and your mates?”

“I don’t choose.”

“You’ll have to choose, and the choice is now. If you deny what I want, I’ll walk away, and you’ll be left with a broken realm.”

“Then you don’t deserve to be the goddess of the realm,” I said with all of the venom I could muster. “No wonder your temple was abandoned. I saw it when I came to the mountains. I thought of rebuilding it for you, but it’s no longer a plan. And when we’re all gone, who do you have? Who will worship you? The humans won’t remember you. Even as the goddess, you’ll eventually fade and be forgotten.”

Her eyes flashed with terrible anger. I knew if she struck me now, her power would reduce me to nothingness, but I didn’t care.

The ruthless Fury beast seemed to be back.

“Don’t you know the black witch is corrupting your land?” I asked furiously. “Can you stand watching evil prowl on your territory and treating you like nothing and nobody? Don’t you know the dark Fae Queen plans to eventually diminish you when her power reaches the level of godhood? At the very least, she’ll try. I understand you cannot interfere directly in the affairs of mortals and immortals, but I can be your envoy. I can put a stop to the evil and let your land flourish. If my line is gone, who will help you purge the evil deep in your soil? You’re bonded to the realm and the dragons, as we’re bonded to you.”

The goddess’s anger receded, her eyes—a moment ago a terrifying dark storm—now the deepest shade of blue. “You know, if you give Elvey to me, you’ll be doing him a favor. He isn’t free, but I can break his blood tie to the despicable Fae Queen.”

“Then, please break it.”

“Not until you offer him to me.”

“So he can be transferred from one slavery to another? No! I myself intend to break his chains in the near future.”

Arianrhod leered. “Who said I want him as a slave? He’ll enjoy what I’ll offer.”

“No is no! Elvey is mine!” I almost screamed and was shocked at my insane possessiveness. I quieted the next second.

“You’re so stubborn, child,” Arianrhod chided. “And you’re already too late. Elvey, my beloved, why don’t you join us?”

I wheeled around. Elvey leaned against a pillar, folding his arms across his broad chest. His trench coat flapped in the wind. He was stunningly, otherworldly beautiful. I could see why the goddess wanted him so much. My

heart ached when I saw that he actually looked good with the goddess.

How long had he been there? Had he listened to everything said between Arianrhod and me? His eyes fixed on the goddess, his expression unreadable, and jealousy pierced me.

Who was I to compete with the goddess?

And why must I have Elvey when I already had three mates?

Elvey was a piece of my soul.

“Why wasn’t he sleeping?” I demanded of Arianrhod, my face flaming. Elvey wasn’t supposed to hear my outburst. “You put everyone else to sleep.”

“What do you think, Daisy? He’s a demigod. He can resist my power. That’s one of the reasons I want him, plus he’s sexy and fun and wild.” The corner of the goddess’s sensual lips tilted up. “He made a deal with me when he summoned me for you. He’ll be my companion when the time comes, when I require. The demigod will sacrifice everything for you, including his personal happiness.”

I glared at Elvey in rage as he trod toward me. He no longer looked at Arianrhod. He was immune to her beauty and power.

“Why did you do that?” I shouted at him, tears streaming down my face. “Why did you have to transfer yourself from one slavery to another? Haven’t you had enough? You said you had faith in me. Why don’t you trust me that one day I’ll shatter your chains as you shattered mine? Why couldn’t you just give me more time? I’d never abandon you!”

I brushed furiously at the tears streaking my cheeks.

The next second, I was in his solid arms. “Shush, Daisy dearest. Don’t you cry for me. I’m not worth it. It’s the only way. You need the help. You need Arianrhod’s alliance.”

“I need you!”

“You have me.”

“No, I don’t. You sold yourself. And don’t call me darling or dearest after all this!”

“You should not touch what’s mine, daughter,” Arianrhod said with a deep frown.

“Undo it,” I told the goddess. “Release him.”

Arianrhod tilted her beautiful head. “I can’t and won’t.”

“I’ll pay any price.”

“Will you pay the price of giving up your other mates?” She circled to the

old topic.

“I’ve said I won’t choose between them.”

“Then you don’t have anything I want,” said the cruel goddess. “However, I’ll still lend Elvey to aid you until the day I come to collect him. Elvey got into his first slavery for you. If he hadn’t, you wouldn’t be here alive. Not even your mother’s and Aine’s combined powers could have saved you the day when you were born. He never told you the whole truth, did he? He wouldn’t have been so messed up if he hadn’t been so desperate to ensure your safety. That’s an epic, tragic story that should be told another time, if he ever wishes to tell you.”

My heart bled, and my every breath turned to searing pain. What had he done to himself?

I had caused all his misery.

I should not be the cause of my mate’s doom. I should be the reason for his happiness.

“Let’s get this ritual over with, daughter,” the goddess said, ignoring my resentment and broken heart. “And you can be on your way to fulfill your destiny.”

“Please free him, Goddess Arianrhod,” I pleaded.

She shook her head. “Your princes are here,” she said softly, “as are everyone else. They are to witness the sacred rite. Are you ready, Daisy Danaenyth?”

The men widened their eyes at the sight of the goddess. Then they dropped to their knees as one as they felt her immense power. My grandfather set his gaze on Arianrhod, looking more bitter at her than proud of me, before he knelt on the ice.

Snow started falling again.

“It’s time to renew and strengthen the blood bond between the realm and the last bloodline of the Danaenyth royal house,” the goddess announced, her beautiful, clear voice puncturing the air. “Now, the land requires a sacrifice.”

My back instantly stiffened. Nothing good would come out of anything that required sacrifice. She’d already taken Elvey. I’d have to figure out a way to get him back. I’d break every chain that bound him.

“Relax, daughter,” Arianrhod said with a sardonic smile. “I’m not as bad and sadistic as you think, but even a goddess has a need.” She winked at Elvey with affection before turning back to a sizzling me. “The sacrifice requires your blood.”

“We’ll bleed for our mate,” Rai said, raising his head and standing up from the ice ground.

Iokul and Blaze echoed the same.

“Shush,” Arianrhod said, waving a hand in annoyance. “It’s not your blood the realm wants. Bind your tongue now, boys.”

Blaze opened his mouth to protest, but no words came out. I believed that the goddess had bound my mates’ tongues.

Arianrhod produced a dagger with sacred runes on its silver blade and handed it to me.

With one sweep, I sliced the blade across my palm and tried not to wince at the searing pain.

My blood dripped to the land in a stream. It tainted the snow bright red and sank into the soil.

“Daisy Danaenyth,” the goddess asked, her voice vibrating with a divine power, “will you guard and protect the land to your best ability?”

“Yes,” I said, my blood still flowing freely.

“Will you put the realm’s need above your own?”

“Yes, I will.”

She raised her voice and there was charged anger in it. “Will you purge the enemies who have harmed the realm?”

“Without hesitation.” I pulled my lips back with a snarl.

“Then repeat after me: I pledge you to accept my blood. Accept me as your Keeper, your watcher, and your forever protector. From this day forward, you’re mine and I’m yours. Heed my call.”

I repeated the vow solemnly and brightly.

The bleeding in my palm stopped.

“The realm has accepted your oath,” the goddess said with a smile.

I waited, but nothing happened. I stared at Arianrhod with questioning eyes. “How do I know the land has admitted me? I don’t feel—”

A ripple moved across the ground beneath me; a warm wave pushed through the wind.

Then, a red, thorny rose sprouted out from where my blood had spilled in the snow.

The dragons let out an awed cry and praised the goddess.

No one thanked me, and I was the one who had spilled blood to make it happen.

Arianrhod arched her thin eyebrow at me. “Do you want more proof,

daughter of little faith?”

“Maybe a little more?” I dared ask. “I need to feel a real connection to the land, not see some parlor tricks. I need to be sure the land will aide me in my time of need, as I’ll protect the realm with my life when it calls me.”

“Ask the land,” Arianrhod said with a shrug.

And I asked.

A violent wind with spectrums of bright colors sprang from the ground and shot into me. I threw my head back and spread my arms as its unbelievably great magic traveled in me, making me drunk with the power of the whole planet.

A vine of fire and light crawled up my arms, expanding all over me. They whispered to me. The realm became alive with its needs, wants, and secrets.

A change of seasons swirled, aligning with the movements of the stars, moons, and the sun. They wove together in order and chaos at once. A new magic from ancient eternity threaded through me and bonded to me. It imprinted in my cells, telling me that I was wanted, needed, and trusted.

I bowed in humility and pride and awe. I vowed to never breach its trust.

I’d become the realm. It was mine.

My gaze swept over my mates, who gazed back at me with love, pride, and adoration. Elvey smiled. The dragon guards were just wide-eyed and stunned, still kneeling in the snow.

My grandfather had excused himself quietly and made his exit some time ago.

I looked down at myself. I beamed like the midnight sun.

“Go, Daisy Danaenyth,” Arianrhod said formidably. “Purge the evil off the land. The black witch is only the first wave of evil invading the realm. Many more will come. You don’t want the war, but to war you must go.”

The goddess started shimmering and fading.

“Wait!” I cried. “I need to ask you about my mates’ masks. Do you know how to lift their curse completely?”

A musical laugh. *They need to accept . . . A wild game is coming.*

“Accept what?” I shouted. “And what game?” I really didn’t like the sound of the wild game.

Arianrhod vanished without a trace.

“She isn’t what you expected, is she?” Elvey whispered beside me. He was the only one, beside me, who hadn’t knelt to her.

“I’m not done with you, Elvey,” I said harshly. “She won’t take you.”

I shifted to my dragon form and flashed my fangs as Elvey smirked at me.
All the dragons shifted after me.

We flew toward the City of Amethyst. My mates—a silver dragon, a fire-orange dragon, and a storm-gray dragon—flanked me, two on each side of me and one above me in a guarding position.

It was a bright day.

The sunlight glinted off the skyscraper of glass and steel. Lysandra's coronation had just started on the rooftop of the Empire Tower, outside a glass hall.

A live hologram played on the tinted glass wall for all citizens of the six cities to watch.

The elite crowd sat in their cushioned seats, waiting and chatting excitedly, while the security guards milled about.

I didn't know any of them, who all rooted for their soon-to-be new queen.

Anxiety sliced up my spine.

But I had to do this.

We hovered above them as dragons, cloaked by magic, but it wouldn't last long.

When the ceremony music stopped, Lysandra, wearing a violet gown in golden vertical lines and weaved with diamonds, glided out from the glass hall toward the front stage. Her coven trailed after her.

The six mayors from the six cities, all looking cocky with great self-

importance, lined up along the glass façade like the witch's henchmen. A gray-haired priest and his male assistant posed beside a crystal stand, on which a crown of gold and rubies rested.

The crowd stood to their feet and erupted in cheers and applause at the appearance of Lysandra. They started chanting, "Humans Superior and First! Long live Queen Lysandra!"

Lysandra smiled regally and brilliantly and waved at the mass. She knew how to work the camera, for sure. The live hologram recording showed how graceful and queenly she was. She stepped up to the podium, ready to make a short speech before she accepted the crown.

She raised a hand, and the conclave hushed and sat back down. "My fellow citizens of Danaenyth Republic—"

I dove toward the space between Lysandra and the audience in my dragon form. I looked glorious, my wings carrying the wind, my scarlet and blue scales reflecting in the sunlight. But the gathering didn't seem to appreciate it.

They let out terrified cries, shouts, and curses.

I shifted to my Fae form before anyone could react and shoot me down. I stood tall, pushing my shoulders back in a regal manner.

My mates and the other dragons hovered nearby, still cloaked with Elvey's spell. He and Rosalinda hadn't come with us. They'd left the mountains before us, and I had no idea where he'd gone. I'd like to have his support, even just morally, but I hadn't had a chance to talk to him after I'd performed my blood oath and landed the deal with the realm and the goddess.

My three mates, Adrian, and I, had talked about my entrance. I'd come up with this style—to confront Lysandra alone at first.

One dragon wouldn't pose a threat, but a group of dragons crashing the coronation would cause a great conflict before I could challenge the witch.

Fear would make humans do rash, stupid things.

I raised my hands in the air, adrenaline pumping in my bloodstream.

"I'm Princess Daisy Danaenyth," I pronounced loudly for all to hear. "And I'm not armed."

They wouldn't shoot an innocent, unarmed woman, would they?

The mass gasped, and a camera turned and focused on me. I could see my own image on the glass façade.

Opposed to Lysandra's diamond dress, I dressed in a glowing white gown that flowed down to my feet. On my head, I already had a crown of gold,

diamond, and emeralds with the crest of a royal dragon carved on the surface.

I outclassed the witch by the design.

“Lysandra, unfortunately, I can’t allow you to keep doing this,” I said. “You cannot legitimately take the crown, and you never will be.”

“Seize her!” Lysandra screamed, forgetting she needed to keep a graceful public image. “Seize the assassin!”

“I’m unarmed, and I’m far from an assassin,” I said in dark amusement. “Think you can’t handle one opponent? If you want to be the queen to my realm, you’ll need to up your game.”

“You aren’t allowed to be here,” she hissed.

“Why is that?” I asked. “Afraid my presence will prove that you’re the fraud?”

“Kill her!” Lysandra screamed at the guards. “She’s a threat to the crown.”

“My crown, you mean?” I asked. “It’s appalling that you’re so desperate to take what’s mine and eliminate me before the people get to know me.”

“It can’t be her!” one of the mayors whispered. “The lost princess—”

The guards rushed toward me, and at the same time, the witch’s coven tossed their spells at me.

Fire poured out from above. Blaze and a few other dragons spat fire at the spells before they could reach me. The dragons removed their magical cloak and revealed themselves, their shimmering scales carrying the sunlight.

A gray-storm dragon’s thunder rolled across the sky, and lightning struck. That was Rai’s signature. Then Iokul shifted to his human form, a current of icy wind pouring from him, pushing the human guards back.

The audience screamed, jumped from their seats, and scurried for cover.

“The dragons are with me,” my voice boomed as I scanned the panicked crowd. “They won’t harm you if you don’t try to shoot them.”

A black dragon that was Adrian roared before shifting. Then the rest of the dragons shifted to their human shapes and formed a ring around me.

Someone recognized Adrian and shouted, “The general, the black dragon, has returned!”

“Yes, I’ve returned,” Adrian called to the mass, “for my legitimate queen Daisy Danaenyth. The lost Dragon Princess, the true heir to the throne and now Queen of the Danaenyth dynasty, has broken the curse placed by the dark Fae Queen. She’s returned home to reclaim what’s hers. No one shall harm her!”

“We don’t want her!” one of the witch’s minions screamed. “We don’t want any dragon to rule us! The dragons’ reign is over. Humans Superior and First!”

Damn, that minion was good.

She was calling for the mob to echo her. And before I could stop it from happening, the entire audience booed me and erupted with cries of, “Humans Superior and First!”

They didn’t want me. They didn’t want me to rule over them.

They didn’t care that I’d returned. I was a stranger to them. They didn’t know me. And there was no time for them to learn anything about me.

The dragon shifters growled. They fanned around me, ready for violence and taking out any threat coming my way.

There was no need.

This was my territory.

I drew power from the realm. Instantly, the land rumbled, and the Empire Tower swayed.

The crowd shrieked, but there was nowhere to run when the skyscraper trembled in rage.

I flicked my wrist and the building stabilized.

“I do not need you to verify my rule,” I told the crowd. “The land is mine. The realm has belonged to my lineage since ancient time. Only the royal dragons are its Keepers. I now exact my right to evict any of you who want to harm the dragons and want us extinct.”

“You can’t do that!” Lysandra said, a vicious, victorious smile floating to her lips. “Danaenyth Republic is mine now.”

“Then call the goddess of the land and see if she endorses you,” I said. “Call the realm and see if it responds to you.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Lysandra said. “The people have spoken. They don’t want you. They denied you. They’ve chosen me as their queen. We’re just going to finish the ritual.”

“Those who want the dragons to disappear aren’t my people,” I said. “They live on the land that’s not theirs but the dragons’. I was about to offer them self-reign, so all may live in peace. But if peace is not what they want, they can’t stay in my land. I won’t tolerate any racial discrimination, violence, and dark practices. That starts with you, witch. Get out of my land!”

The dragons roared in support.

I spread my arms, and colorful currents of light surged from the earth,

reaching me. No building's floors could stop them. The light of a rainbow licked my skin, twirling around me.

"My goddess!" A member of the recording crew clamped her hand over her mouth. "I've never seen anything like that. It's true magic. Shit. It's real."

"Kill her, now!" Lysandra shrieked, not wanting everyone to see how the land's magic responded to me. "Kill the dragon bitch and all the dragons. Humans Superior and First!"

"Humans Superior and First!" The mob roared and rushed toward me in waves.

They wanted me dead. They wanted to tear me apart. And they wanted to terminate the existence of my mates and all the other dragons.

A blast of bullets ripped through the air toward us.

I threw my hands up, but I was a little too late. I'd been focusing too much on Lysandra and playing with the land's magic. Bullets tore into the dragon warriors, including my mates. A bullet or two grazed over my left shoulder and arm, even with the walls of the dragon guards shielding me.

Roaring with pain and fury, my mates and our guards shifted back to dragons despite their wounds.

The war with the humans was about to start right here.

"No, not yet!" I called, ignoring the blood dripping from my shoulder and tainting my white gown. "Stay in the sky. I'm handling this. Goddess Arianrhod wants all to see."

The light of rainbows moved like waves, throwing off the attackers at the vanguard and pushing them back. The rainbow light spread out, melting every bullet along with the guns.

The enemy guards yelled in pain and curses.

My magic lunged at them, probing their minds and hearts. Those who had been following orders but had no malicious intention toward me and my dragons were spared. But the land's magic had its own judgment. It tossed those who wanted the dragons dead from the roof.

The land wanted to set a few examples.

If they wanted violence, violence would find them.

Before my mates and Adrian had agreed to my method of entrance, they'd warned me of the violent history of the humans. They'd told me humans always set out to destroy other species in order to dominate the planet. And then they tore each other apart.

Bloodthirstiness was in their nature.

I hadn't thought they would attack us in the open when we'd only wanted to show them who I was and reason with them.

They didn't want reason or peace. They wanted our blood. They craved havoc and destruction.

They injured my mates and my warriors.

Fire, frost, and lightning flared out of the dragons' nostrils, and the murderous fury in their eyes told of their intention to kill every human here.

The same rage coursed in me. I could kill them all, every one of the humans.

But I did not want to plunge into the carnage. It would be what Lysandra wanted, and more to the point, it was what Tianna wanted.

Luckily for the humans, I still had an ounce of mercy.

I restrained the dragons from burning the humans on the rooftop.

But if one of my mates or the warriors had died under the attack, I wouldn't have spared any human here. I'd slaughter them myself, all of them.

The realm would agree with me. It was less mercy than I would have granted them.

While the light of rainbows held the mobs at bay, I pulled the magic from the land again.

It filled me with power, giving me full support.

I had been worried the link between the land and me in the city would be weak. I had been wrong. The whole realm, including all six cities, was mine. I was its rightful Keeper.

My ancestors hadn't bothered to extend their powers outside the Dragon Realm, but here I was, claiming the cities back and showing the humans who owned the land.

They'd think twice if they still wanted to eradicate the dragons. I'd make sure they would not forget so quickly after today.

I threw up my hands in the air and commanded the land, and it gladly obliged.

The City of Amethyst quaked. Buildings swayed. Rifts opened on the streets, and some empty buildings toppled down. Tremors spread throughout the land.

Screams rose all over. Yet I hadn't destroyed a life that hadn't threatened a dragon. I held the land's magic in rein and didn't allow it to touch the humans in all six cities.

"Call the other five cities and see if Turquoise, Jasper, Heliotrope,

Sodalite, and Chrysocolla are all having an earthquake at the same time,” I ordered the reporters from the news media team, and one of them flipped open a communication device.

The crowd—the rich, entitled class—on the rooftop held onto their lives, fear and hate on their faces. The realm’s colorful light bound them and shielded us. A few dragons flew around them, puffing fire, to further remind them to behave.

A reporter called back loudly, “All six cities are having an earthquake. There have been no deaths, except for those on this rooftop.”

At the same time, a live feed of the other cities’ earthquakes swirled on the glass façade. A camera flicked to a cloud of dust and smoke rising into the air as a building on an abandoned block collapsed.

“There’ll be enough death if the Humans Superior and First movement make another move,” I said. “The land is mine. Stop being dense, humans! You want a war, you’ll have it, and you’ll lose. Only fucking morons pick a fight they can’t win.”

I flicked a wrist, and all the quakes stopped in sync.

The camera lens returned to me as I glowed like the goddess of war in wrath, blood on my white gown. “I’m Daisy Danaenyth, the legitimate queen to the Dragon Realm, to the cities Amethyst, Turquoise, Jasper, Heliotrope, Sodalite, and Chrysocolla. I’ve returned to reclaim what’s mine. You don’t need to like it. You’re welcome to leave my land and you won’t take anything that belongs to my land. Those who mean the dragons harm will have three days to leave the cities. Should you stay, the land will purge you without mercy. It’s sentient, as I’ve showed you. It recognizes any hostile force.

For those who are allowed to stay, keep this in mind: don’t abuse the land. Don’t treat it as your servant and do whatever you like with it without considering that it’s also living and breathing. Respect it. I’ve come back to this planet to guard it. Those who want peace are welcome to stay and live a life of freedom and prosperity. The land won’t harm you. Humans Superior and First is unacceptable as Dragons Superior and First.”

As I looked around, the crowd—most of them—only snarled and hissed. My words couldn’t get through their thick skulls.

“Pretty speech,” Lysandra laughed coldly and victoriously. “They’re mine, through and through. It took a lot of work, but it didn’t go to waste. No matter what you say or do, soon-to-be-no-more-queen Daisy Danaenyth. All I

need to do is eliminate you, and you'll be gone just like before, without leaving a trace or a wrinkle in time."

Thick smoke twirled around her to shield her, while a part of it darted to me like black arrows pushed by high waves.

My land magic could rumble the earth and buildings, but it couldn't counter the foul magic which had made it sick. My White Light could expel the living smoke, as it had done before, but it was fickle and unstable. I'd been summoning it since I'd landed on the rooftop, and it hadn't bothered to show, despite that I'd clenched my teeth and hissed at it where it circulated like a ribbon of light and fire at the bottom of my magical well.

My mates spewed their fire and lightning at Lysandra, but the dragon magic couldn't penetrate the walls of the smoke and darkness. It was just like what had happened in the golden palace in the castle.

All the dragons instantly landed before me, forming walls around me, knowing the smoke would pierce their scales and erode their flesh.

Lysandra laughed with chilling menace. "Now die with all of the dragons, Princess Daisy Danaenyth, as it is the will of *the* queen."

The black witch was referring to the Fae Queen—my evil aunt—who wanted me dead more than anything.

A spectrum of dark blue light flared before me, shoving back the hissing smoke.

“I wouldn’t bet on that, black witch,” a beautiful, masculine voice purred before Elvey materialized.

Another flash, and Rosalinda landed beside him. She held a bloody, battered man. The middle-aged man buckled on his knees, seemingly unable to support his weight, but Rosalinda hurled him up and let him lean against her.

“Just a little longer,” she told him, and the man nodded, gray eyes burning with rage and exhaustion.

I blinked. Elvey always appeared when one least expected him, but I was more than happy to see him and appreciated his aide.

The dark blue light besieged the smoke entity, forming a force field to trap Lysandra. The smoke snarled in madness and kept attacking the blue light. The two kinds of magic wrestled fiercely and brutally against each other.

“I can’t hold her forever, Daisy darling, but I can buy you a little time,” Elvey said, eyeing me with delight, even though his face strained from the effort of containing the enemy’s magic. “You look good in a dragon crown.”

My princes growled at him, not at the crown part, but at his endearment of me.

I arched an eyebrow. Really? Now?

“You!” Lysandra threw a string of curses at Elvey. I hadn’t known the queen-wannabe had such a foul mouth.

Elvey smirked. “Me. I know. I have that kind of effect on people. Can’t help being likable. I’m a friendly guy.” His eyes didn’t leave the witch as he kept battling her, but he addressed me. “Now is the time to send out your White Light, Daisy dearest. They’re under the influence of her spell. Your Light, the best weapon against any mind manipulation, will break her hold on the crowd of the human sheep and wolves alike.”

“I’ve been practicing it nonstop, but it’s not as easy as you think—” I said just as my White Light trailed out. I sighed. Maybe the Fae magic just needed my Fae mate to be around.

The Light speared out like waves, touching every mind on the rooftop. I watched dark veils drop before the crowd’s eyes like filthy, shredded sheets and the black claws gripping their minds dissipated.

The crowd gasped, as if just awaking, and for the first time, could think for themselves. They staggered when they were suddenly free. Evidently, they’d been in the witch’s grasp for a long time. But not everyone was used to, or appreciated, having freedom.

Some of them slumbered back into their seats, looking sad, angry, and lost.

A great deal of them still hated the dragons just the same.

Lysandra screamed at Elvey. “You’ve just dug your own fucking grave, Lord Elvey! The queen will see to it and drag you to hell.”

“Been there and back,” Elvey said mildly. “But I’m on vacation now, witch.”

“It won’t last! Today is your last fucking vacation, you dick!” Lysandra shouted.

My heart pounded painfully at the threat. It wasn’t an empty one.

Elvey smiled merrily and coldly at the same time. “Then I’m going to enjoy every minute of it.”

“What’s going on?” the crowd asked each other in confusion, some pointing at the beat-up man Rosalinda had brought in. “Isn’t that Mr. Kerry Clifford, the former mayor? He disappeared one evening. What happened to him? Who tortured him?”

The man struggled from Rosalinda's hold and straightened himself in dignity. "I'm Kerry Clifford, the mayor of the City of Amethyst." He stabbed a finger at Lysandra. "The black witch tortured me for two months! She tormented and killed many others who were strong enough to resist her spells and disagreed with her rule. Those who were killed included Alex Harte, the mayor of the City of Chrysocola. We do not accept the bullshit that any race is superior than any other races. So, the witch Lysandra and her Humans Superior and First cult marked us as the dragon lovers and regarded us as a threat to her reign. She and her minions kidnapped us. While she tortured us inhumanly, from our pain, she gleaned more power for her dark magic."

A few gasps sounded from the middle of the crowd.

Yet the others shouted, "You have no proof!"

Rosalinda looked at Elvey, and he nodded at her, still locked in the battle of will and magic against Lysandra. The Fae female's wounded arm had grown back—after I made the pact with the goddess and the land, we'd all healed and regenerated.

"May I access your memory and pull it out for all to see, Mr. Mayor Clifford?" Rosalinda asked.

"By all means!" Kerry hissed, his intense eyes fixing on Lysandra with loathing and hatred. "They need to see. Those entitled fools need to open their eyes!"

Rosalinda pressed her fingers against Kerry's temples, and a trail of violet light emitted from the mayor's skin. As it expanded, a hologram, unlike the one that was recording, played in front of everyone.

The media crew looked uncertain, but Kerry ordered them, "Keep recording it. Let all six cities see the truth."

Through the memory thread, we watched Lysandra's minions—a few of them were present—shove the kidnapped mayor to an underground room.

Following Kerry's terrified and furious eyes, we saw the morbid sight inside the witch's torture chamber—blood sprayed over the walls; dead bodies, partial limbs, and bones scattered and piled on the damp ground.

Red candles lit around the walls in circles, which only added to the horror.

One of Lysandra's guards pushed Kerry to a chair and chained him as he struggled and threatened. A woman helping the guard patted Kerry's face. "My queen isn't so pleased with you, Mayor Clifford. You should never have supported the Dragon King."

Lysandra glided into the room in an ivory gown tainted with patches of blood on her chest and sleeves.

“Lysandra, you’ll regret this!” Kerry shouted.

“Will I?” she asked, cocking her head to the side. “Before I regret it, I’m going to reward you for all the trouble you’ve caused me. No one should cross me. I’m the absolute power in this realm. Your inferior human species worship the ground I walk on.”

“Who are you then, if you’re not a human?” Kerry demanded.

To the mayor’s credit, though he was terrified in his every bone, he tried to conjure up his courage and didn’t cave in.

“I’m a goddess to your kind,” she said. “All of you are my slaves. And soon I’ll be an immortal, my compensation for wrecking the Dragon Realm. Do you know your lost Dragon Princess is returning?”

Kerry widened his eyes, hope rising in them.

Lysandra laughed in cruel amusement. “I’m waiting for Daisy Danaenyth right here. The spoiled, royal bitch somehow managed to break her curse. But she won’t be prepared for what she’ll receive. After I have her flesh peeling off her bones, I’ll finally have the elixir promised to me.”

“You’re sick,” Kerry said in repulsion and dread. “You need help.”

“Now shut up, Mayor Clifford. We have a job to do,” Lysandra snapped. “I need you to feel excruciating pain and scream for me. In order to achieve that, I’ll have to maim you and break you before I sacrifice you on the altar. Your pain will fuel my magic and energize me. You’re a powerful man, Clifford. Very few could resist my spell and keep such a clear mind, and for that, you’ll get what you’re destined for. I like to play with powerful men and women, like a great lioness playing with its prey before the kill.”

She took time picking a proper tool and used it to pull out Kerry’s nails one by one. As she promised, he screamed and struggled to his best ability, but the heavy chains bound him tightly, making rattling sounds.

Lysandra inhaled his agony with a sweet, satisfied smile before slashing a surgical knife across his lips. Her eyes glowed crimson red, feeding on his pain.

As the mayor’s memory continued, some people in the audience had to turn their eyes away, not having the stomach to watch further. Yet some people watched in delight and fascination.

The ones with violence in their hearts wouldn’t be allowed to stay in my realm. I’d make sure of it, and the land agreed.

The media crew kept recording, their eyes narrowing and widening in horror.

Kerry screamed and screamed as Lysandra sliced every inch of skin on his chest.

“I’ll stop now, Mayor Clifford,” Rosalinda said softly. “That’s enough for them to see.”

Kerry nodded. He was barely hanging on; only rage and adrenaline kept him going. My respect for him grew. He looked half-dead from the torture, yet he wasn’t broken. At least, not completely broken.

“Lies!” Lysandra sizzled, while Elvey kept her busy. She shoved his blue light back with a sudden burst of strength, her coven forming a pentacle shape and chanting behind her.

Elvey staggered, surprise and strain marring his face.

Lysandra was gaining. The witch was strong, her black magic potent, and her coven large. Soon she would break out. What if my White Light winked out when I needed it to subdue the witch?

Cold sweat dotted my nose.

“They’re not lies but facts, black witch!” Kerry shouted, raising his left hand where three fingers were missing. He turned to face the crowd, his eyes emitting cold disdain. “Is this evil incarnation the queen you want, the fraud you choose to rule you? You don’t know what kind of fate you’ve assigned yourselves to. Fucking fools! We who support the dragons are cautious and wise enough to know the realm and all six cities belong to the royal dragon house.” He gave me a weary look and bowed. “And the one who stands in front of you is the one and true queen. The realm is Queen Daisy Danaenyth’s. You only rent it at her permission. You think you can get rid of the dragons? Think again. Anger the goddess, and the land will spit your bones out. Be grateful. Beg Queen Danaenyth to allow you to live on her land after what you’ve tried to do to her.”

“Heresy! Kill them all! Remove our enemies!” Lysandra ordered the crowd. “Humans Superior—” she stopped.

This time, no one moved, not even those who bore the dragon race ill intent.

“We bear witness to Mayor Kerry Clifford’s memories,” someone in the audience called out. “The consort Lysandra is not our queen! She distorted the truth and brainwashed us. She’s a black witch.”

For the first time, part of the crowd went against Lysandra.

“We demand to know who you work for!” someone else shouted. “Who’s your boss? You mentioned *the* queen! Which queen?!”

That was a very good question.

“The dark Fae Queen, obviously,” Elvey said lazily, playing pull-and-push with Lysandra’s black magic.

The audience gasped. No one in the Dragon Realm was allowed to throw my aunt’s name around, but the humans in the six cities had heard how formidably powerful she was.

“Lysandra is the Fae Queen’s spy,” Elvey continued. “Fae aren’t allowed in the Dragon Realm, so the Fae Queen used her pawn. They struck a bargain. Lysandra will be rewarded the Fae elixir and gain immortality after she overthrows the dragons and kills the last dragon of the royal bloodline—your true queen Daisy Danaenyth. The witch almost succeeded with your help, and that would be genocide on your part. However, I think your gracious new queen will probably pardon you, considering you were brainwashed by the terrible witch Lysandra.”

“You bastard!” Lysandra cursed.

Elvey arched an eyebrow. “I might be a bastard, but I’m also a demigod. I know things. It feels good to expose you, bad witch. Didn’t expect I’d pop out to spoil your bloody fun, did you?” He tried to appear at ease, but beads of sweat coated his forehead, and his lavender hair was wild and tousled. “Don’t be so put out, bad witch. It’ll be all over for you soon.”

Lysandra roared, enraged. “Fuck you!”

“No, thanks. I have a particular taste, and you’re not it,” Elvey said, slanting a glance at me. He looked so hot saying that, heat swimming in his star-blue eyes.

I heard many women’s soft sighs from the audience.

A few dragons chuckled, but not my mates.

The living smoke suddenly blasted with brutal strength and pierced through Elvey’s shield of blue light. Elvey stumbled back and cursed.

“Not your type?” Lysandra sneered. “Let’s see how your type takes this.”

The smoke pushed toward me in sharp waves. At the same time, the entire façade of glass shattered. Shards of glass, thousands of them, didn’t drop but rose to the air and sailed toward me, toward my mates, our guards, and the mass behind us.

Black wind surrounded us.

The humans screamed and fell backwards, but there was nowhere to run

from this attitude of attack.

The dragons formed walls of flesh around Kerry, Rosalinda, and me. Dragon fire poured out to melt the glass, lightning shot toward the witch, and ice battled the smoke and darkness.

Elvey roared and lunged toward us to shield me, and at the same time shot out his brilliant blue light again.

“The Fae Queen is boosting the witch through their link,” he shouted in warning.

Lysandra’s eyes turned black. My ancient lethal enemy—the pure evil—glared at me with hatred through them.

But I was ready this time, ready to vanquish the foul smoke, ready to defend my mates, my warriors, and my people.

I threw my hands up. A shield formed around all those I intended to protect.

White Light burst out of me like the sun storm.

“This is my land,” I declared. “This is my realm. You have no place here. You have no power here. I quench your foul magic and darkness! Be gone!”

Thousands of shards of glass froze in the air. I pushed it back and returned them to the façade of the glass door and windows, except for one long, jagged piece.

“Have a taste of my fire and light, Tianna!” I roared.

Wrapped in my White Light, the long, jagged glass shot toward Lysandra, piercing flesh and bones, and impaling the witch’s black heart.

The White Light kept pushing and spreading, diminishing the witch’s coven to piles of dust. They didn’t even have time to scream.

Lysandra’s corpse jerked, as if it wanted to resurrect, but my mates’ fire and lightning struck it until it had nothing left.

The last trace of the smoke evaporated, and the brilliant sunlight glinted off the glass wall.

It was a bright day once again.

I smiled at my mates, tears clouding my vision.

When I turned my head to seek Elvey, he was no longer there. He should have stayed and celebrated with us. He should have seen this through. I didn’t want him to appear only in dangerous times.

Thick and thin, we should go through it together, to the end.

Amid the joy of victory, a dull ache pulsed in me.

We moved back to the castle. All the dragons had returned, except my grandfather, a few of his royal attendants, and a couple of royal guards who chose to stay with him in the mountains. They were the new Dragon Guardians.

I used the land's magic to make the castle new again, and gradually, thousands of humans who had dragon blood in their veins came to live in the castle or the towns in the Dragon Realm. Now that the realm was healing and healthy again, they couldn't resist the magical pull of the land.

Green returned to the realm. A variety of trees blossomed. My favorite jasmines covered the entire garden behind my chamber.

The six cities had all sworn fealty to me. We eradicated those who formerly supported Lysandra and reestablished those who were loyal to my throne and friendly to the dragons.

We seemed to have achieved peace, but I knew better. Evil still lurked in the shadows. My ancient enemy was seeking another opening to take me down. I could sense darkness still surrounding my dynasty in a siege, and some evil lived among us.

While I stayed alert, I'd been trying to catch up with the modern human society and their technology after nine centuries of living in the jungle as three beasts. I didn't believe my magic was threatened by science and technology. They could coexist. I made sure no matter how advanced the

technology was, humans would learn to respect the land and nature, because my magic, infused by the land, was strong enough to wipe them out.

If they crossed the line to hurt the land, I'd strike.

My mates stood by me, helping me deal with the everyday trials and challenges. They had been fending off their father King Oriel's demands of taking me to the Oslan Dominion. Their queen mothers also constantly pleaded with them to return home, which made me feel like an ass for keeping their sons here with me.

I needed my mates more than they did, I told myself.

I also hinted to King Oriel during one of our holographic conferences that he should give up any idea of controlling me through his three sons. The Danaenyth dynasty, which belonged to my mates, my people, and me, wouldn't be merged into his Oslan Dominion.

Having ambition was good but being too ambitious was not good. It was more than dangerous. It could be destructive.

"When we're ready, we'll bring our queen and mate to visit," Rai told the king. "But not now, Father! Things are still boiling here."

I also learned to cope with a new beast—the human media.

Somehow the human media was fascinated with me. I'd accepted a few live interviews on national broadcast for all six cities to see, which my grandfather had never done before. I wanted to know my people as much as they wanted to know me. However, to my surprise and dismay, the humans were less interested in my new policies than what I wore every day.

When I held court, I was often clad in a gown, and when I had a meeting with humans or travelled to the six cities, I dressed in suits and pants.

My mates only chuckled in amusement at my discovery. "Humans are weird when they're harmless." That was their conclusion.

The humans were most interested in my relationship with my mates. Two bold producers even approached me and pleaded for me to do a reality show. They said the ratings would break the historical record. As if I cared.

"Fuckers! Mind your own fucking business!" Blaze told them. He was kind enough not to blow fire into their faces.

Iokul shook his head, disgust in his icy silver eyes. "They think we dragons are monkeys."

Rai banned them from ever entering the Dragon Realm.

Though my mates weren't shy about showering me with affections in public, we were still private people. Our matehood wasn't for show.

“Ready for bed, babe?” Blaze nuzzled my neck before I rose from the chair behind the desk.

We had a new rule among us. We did not fuck in the throne room or my office or their offices, no matter how much we wanted to. If we did, other dragons could smell it. As a new queen, I needed to keep a good public image. Because of my stubbornness in following through the rule, my mates and I constantly suffered when our lust burned brightly and darkly.

The urgent mating call wasn't something to reckon with, and it never stopped.

I let Blaze lead me out of the office. He seemed to want to carry me to our bedroom at the speed of a blink of an eye. Rai also came to pick me up, his heated eyes roving over me and fixing on my cleavage with raw hunger.

We stayed in my old chamber. My staff had modified it to the queen's suite. My mates all had their own suites should they need some space, but every night, all of them stayed in my bed.

My grandfather's suite remained the same. It was always his. But he had only come once when I'd been crowned in my coronation. The media had gone into frenzy covering the event. In the past, pure humans were limited in the six cities. The realm hadn't welcomed them. But I'd removed the barrier.

No bullshit such as “Dragons Superior” or “Humans Superior” was allowed in my reign.

Blaze eyed the vast, soft bed with longing, his golden eyes heavily lidded.

My thunder and lightning dragon was so horny he didn't even bother with foreplay. As soon as we entered the queen's suite, he stripped me and himself in a hurry. Hooking my leg into his arm, he thrust his massive erection into my needy pussy.

I threw my head back and moaned as a shard of pleasure shot into me. I didn't blame him for wanting a hasty fuck, for I could barely hold back. My panties had been soaked for most of the day.

Rai groaned like a beast and drove into me with bruising force that made my knees weak. His other arm wrapped around me to anchor me.

“After I have a quick fuck,” he said, pure lust filling his sapphire eyes, “I'll bathe you and take time tasting your pussy. And then I'll fuck you again.”

I rocked my hips against him, moving with him. “Sounds good,” I whimpered.

“This sweet pussy is mine,” he groaned, and slanted his mouth over mine,

his tongue slipping through my parted lips, lapping over my teeth, hard palate, and tongue.

I received his invasion with equal hunger.

He tasted like pure male and rainstorms, and beneath them, sky fire that was different than Blaze's. Rai adjusted his position slightly and drove into me with rapid speed, pounding his need and want and lust into me.

Blissful pleasure rippled through me like waves.

"You want my cock as well, don't you?" Blaze joined us, his husky voice sounding beside my ear. His hard chest pressed against my skin. A massive cock pushed up against the small of my back, its heat burning me. "You like to be fucked by all of us, my lustful mate."

Yes, I want all of you. All of your cocks are my treat. And I love indulging in our carnal lust. But I couldn't answer him since Rai still sealed my mouth.

"How about this?" Blaze demanded. "You like this?" He rubbed his steel rod over my ass, its pre-cum painting my butt-cheeks.

I wiggled to show him just how much I wanted it.

He chuckled darkly, his voice full of wild lust, and he spanked me with the length of his shaft.

I cried out against Rai's lips, as light pain brought another kind of pleasure.

"I'm gonna fuck your little, tight ass," Blaze said. "I'm going to take you like no one has taken you before."

His steel rod poked into me from behind, one inch, then another inch, until it seated deeply.

I broke free from Rai's kiss and moaned harshly, savoring how the fire dragon stretched my tight ass with his invasion.

"Mine!" Blaze growled.

While he gave me time to adjust to his size, he dipped his head to trace up my neck with his hungry lips, until he had my earlobe between his teeth and nipped me.

I moaned. "Fuck me."

Blaze started to move slowly, in contrast to Rai's rapid pounding between my thighs.

Rai rammed into me, shards of pleasure rocking me with his every mighty thrust.

I writhed as they both pressed closer against me.

We were skin to skin with nothing between us but uninhibited lust.

Lust was such a real, delicious thing.

Rai's dark sapphire eyes burned with fiery desire, promising to fuck me senseless. His cock slammed in and out of my heat with a blinding speed and a dragon's strength.

My fingernails raked through his muscled back as his next sequence of thrusts drove to the depth of my molten core over and over.

He was going to undo me. They were all going to unmake me in this unrelenting and endless and wonderful pleasure.

Rai kept pumping into me, harsh and hard. He wouldn't stop even if the world ended now.

"Sweetheart, take all I have for you," he said. "I'm fucking you to eternity."

I melted, and he thrust into me like fucking me was all he needed to live.

Blaze's rough hands cupped my perky breasts as he picked up speed driving into my ass, his breath heavy with unending desire.

I moaned, "More, please, more!" knowing my body would hurt tomorrow, but I couldn't resist wanting all of them. Both men encased me, slamming in and out of me vehemently, one in my pussy, and one in my ass.

I was completely filled. I was being fucked and cherished and wanted and desired.

Our mating bond grew brightly as fever burned through our dragon veins.

They held me and pinned me between them as they fucked me. My mates had perfect control over me, and I surrendered to them.

A new bout of powerful thrusts from my front and back pushed me to the edge of my release. The pressure of my muscles kept building and soaring, and to my disbelief, pleasure still escalated and expanded in me while I felt like I was already at the peak of it. My mind could register nothing but their cocks. Pleasure sent me to the brink of my existence before pulling me back, then sent me to the brink again.

Until a thousand fireworks exploded in me.

I sobbed as both my mates roared at our joined carnal joy and explosive releases.

While we were lost in the haze of heat and rolling waves of sensation, I caught sight of a silver dragon swooping up and down outside the full glass door, watching our mating.

His silver and blue scales glistened, and his massive wings carried moonlight and wild wind. That was my ice dragon mate.

He would join us soon. That I knew from seeing the fire leaping beneath his ice. I wondered how he was going to fuck me. Just as my mind wondered, he shifted right outside the garden, pressed his palm on the scanner, slid the door open, and strode in.

He started to undress himself while Blaze and Rai still pinned me between them. I waited for another moment and untangled from them, and they allowed it.

I stalked toward Iokul. He dropped his pants to the floor, his pale cock springing free.

“In bed, Iokul,” I demanded. “They fucked me so hard. Now it’s time for me to fuck you hard.”

Blaze and Rai chuckled, watching me with interest, their cocks still hard and jutting against their bellies.

Yet they let me play.

Iokul obeyed and rolled to the center of the bed. I followed him like a predator, with an easy, confident gait.

I crawled onto the high bed, pinning down Iokul, my submission gone completely. “I’m going to fuck you so hard you’ll beg for mercy.”

“Don’t spare me, honey,” Iokul said, his eyes flashing with incredible need for me. “Ride me like the wild dragon you are.”

Without another word, I placed the crown of his shaft at my slick entrance and slid down with an explosive strength.

He gasped. I heaved up and slammed down again.

I wasn’t gentle.

I quickened pace, fucking him harder and harder, barely sparing him time to catch his breath. I was half-Fae, half-dragon, my strength formidable, and I fucked him.

My ass slammed onto his tightened balls.

His icy silver eyes went wild before glowing. His one hand grabbed my breast, fondling it, and his other hand flicked my throbbing, swollen clit.

All we had for each other at the moment was raw need and brutal lust.

I rocked against his hard length as lustful gasps escaped my throat. The parts of his face that was uncovered by the mask twisted in ecstasy.

A beastly sound tore from his chest. The dragon in him peeked out at me with approval and boiling lust. His dragon liked being fucked this way very much.

“You’re killing me, little mate,” he said. “Your moist heat gloves my

cock and your pussy clenches it so hard.”

“Yeah?” I sank down to the base of his shaft, my pussy swallowing his length completely.

“Like that,” he hissed in pleasure. “Night and morning, I’ll bury my dick deep in your hot, tight pussy.”

“Is that what you want?” I asked roughly. “Think you can take it?”

“You’re mine,” he challenged me. “I’ll take you however I want.”

With every plunge, I rode him harder and faster, and my mate groaned in satisfaction, until we both erupted. He roared, his seed spilling in me, and I exploded around his cock.

I kept riding him, driving him to the brink of insanity to meet me there.

“Don’t stop yet, my queen,” Blaze said, moving to the bed.

Rai followed. “We’ll never let you leave.”

Rai’s arched cock jerked forward in demand and need, and Blaze’s straight large cock throbbed aggressively.

All mine! Fuck!

My magnificent mates pleased and satisfied me, and they sated both the fiery Fae and the dragon in me. Their fire, ice, thunderstorm, and passion should be all I ever wanted. I was the luckiest woman alive in the whole universe to have them, and my nine centuries of being three beasts to wait for them was all worth it.

Yet, there was still a constant ache pulsing in my soul while a piece was missing.

My mates felt the echo of my ache, and it affected them.

The next day, they told me, “Let’s pay Elvey a visit. It’s about time.”

Rosalinda stiffened as soon as we entered the *Howling At Your Peril*. We came before the bar opened. My mates, who flanked me, gave her a polite nod.

Adrian also strode into the bar with us, while the other guards spread around the perimeter. He smiled at her. The black dragon had taken a liking to the Fae warrior. She didn't return his smile or any of ours.

She bowed to me slightly, her green eyes cold and her voice colder. "Your Majesty."

She wore a black silky shirt and black pants, as if she was mourning someone.

"Sorry to drop on you like this, Rosalinda," I said. "We haven't thanked you properly. My mates and I would like to invite you and Elvey to dine at the palace tonight."

Her face was as hard as the icy marble. "I'm sorry I can't accept it."

I blinked.

She hadn't come to my coronation, either, though I'd sent her an invitation, which included Elvey. I had let the matter drop, thinking that they might not want to be seen with the dragons. But on the Empire Tower's rooftop when I'd faced off Lysandra, everyone had seen both Elvey and Rosalinda support me.

My mates stared at her, frowning, surprised at her sudden change of

attitude toward us when formerly she'd almost given her life defending me.

Now, she didn't even offer us a seat or a drink.

Where did this hostility and coldness come from?

"Are you all right, Rosalinda?" Adrian asked.

She bit her lip, not looking at any of us.

"What's wrong, Rosa?" I asked softly. I had a horrible feeling about what she held back.

"Nothing's wrong," she snarled and glared at me.

My mates would have snarled back on other occasions, but they had a great deal of respect for this Fae warrior. They'd fought together.

"Where's Elvey, Rosa?" I prodded.

She didn't answer, and tears welled in her eyes. The uneasiness grew in me, and wrongness filled my mind.

"Where can I find him?" I asked.

She shook her head again, and I shoved aside a sudden jealousy. I knew she could always get hold of him, yet I'd never been able to know where he'd gone.

"I looked for him when we killed the black witch, but he was already gone," I said. "I haven't seen him ever since. I know he has a penchant for the dramatic and likes to disappear on people. But I'd appreciate it if he'll drop by once in a while to say hello."

"He can't," she hissed, trying to conceal her distress. Tears still welled in her eyes and she fought them back.

"What do you mean he can't?" Iokul demanded. "When you get to know the Fae mage, he isn't really that arrogant and insufferable." He was closer to him than my other two mates.

Rosalinda turned to me, her expression softening a little as the resentment in her lessened. "I promised him I wouldn't tell you."

"If he's in any trouble, I need to know," I hissed. "He means more to me than you can ever imagine. Talk, Rosalinda."

Rosalinda slumped onto a bar stool and gestured for us to sit.

"He didn't want you to know this," she said, burying her face in her hands. "He didn't want you to go after him. He wanted to buy you more time. He made me promise that. It's hopeless. He knew what would happen to him when he exposed the witch in public like that. He knew what kind of punishment he would face. Yet he still helped you, never once thinking of himself. I'd once had to watch the queen shatter every bone in his body when

he disobeyed her. It's worse than death for him to be in that place, to be beside her. He ordered me to keep aiding you in any way possible if anything happened to him, but I am crippled, knowing he suffers in hell and I can do nothing about it. I can do nothing to help my friend who once saved me and bought my freedom." Her voice broke, and Adrian moved to her side and held her to comfort her.

Blood drained from my face, and ice filled my veins.

My mates embraced me to lend their strength and unconditional support.

"How did it happen?" I swallowed, my voice inhumanly cold and merciless and miserable. "He was in my realm. I thought she couldn't reach him here. She should not be able to touch him here."

Rosalinda raised her head, tears gone from her eyes, while her face was wet. "The blood bond does the trick. She can reach him anywhere, and he can't resist her."

"But he did," I cried. "He injected himself with the vampire venom, and it thinned the blood bond between them. He told me so."

"How long do you think that venom could stay in his veins as powerful and primordial as he is?" Rosalinda asked. "There was only a trace left in his bloodstream the day he trapped Lysandra on the rooftop to buy you time. The venom isn't as good as you think. It was hurting him and limiting his abilities. While your magic killed the black witch, Tianna used the opening to grab Elvey and drag him right to her hell in chains."

She'd taken him right from under my nose, and I hadn't even known. I'd secretly blamed him for vanishing on me again.

Sphinx's last warning echoed painfully in the chamber of my head. "*Gain the first and lose the last. Keep the last, and the first will be shattered bones. Heart doesn't know. Heart betrays.*"

He was my first mate. He'd known it before I was born. All he'd done for centuries was to protect me. He'd never asked anything back, not my affection, not my commitment, and not my love. And I'd never given him anything, except danger.

I'd let him down.

I'd let my mate be taken and tortured in the hell of the Sihde Realm.

A tear dropped from the corner of my eye and rolled down my face.

"Blood tear," Rosalinda whispered. "Your Majesty."

"I'll break his chains at all cost," I said as I rose.

My mates rose with me.

“As will we,” Adrian swore. “Right?”

His hand stayed on Rosalinda’s shoulder, and she didn’t shrug him off, only a ray of bright hope pierced the shadow and shame on her face. “I thought your consorts didn’t care or were even gleeful that their competition was gone. I thought you’d forgotten about him after you got all you wanted. I’m sorry, Queen Danaenyth. I was mistaken.”

“He’s one of us,” Rai said, not looking at Rosalinda but fixing his attention on me as he gently wiped the blood tear off my face. “We won’t let that bitch have him. Never.”

I snapped my head toward my mates, my quivering lips parting in surprise, my heart warming like no other.

“If I can tolerate these two,” Blaze said, jerking a thumb toward his brothers, “I can make room for him.”

I could never love all of them more than I did in this moment. They were my sun, my moons, my stars, and my whole world.

“Are we ready to enter Sihde and get him back?” Iokul asked softly, lethally.

At all cost.

My mind reeled in outrage. She'd captured him. The dark Fae queen had found Elvey and dragged him back to her hell.

He'd known that if he exposed the black witch, he would also expose himself. Yet he'd gone ahead and done it anyway, so I could take back my Dragon Realm. Elvey had been willing to put a chain on himself to give me, my mates, and our people, a future.

Rosalinda had said that it was worse than hell to be with the dark queen.

Elvey being caught had shattered me, but I'd picked up the pieces before I broke again. I couldn't afford to be weak now. I wouldn't rest until I got Elvey out of Sihde.

I closed my eyes for a second. I'd shed blood tears for him, which was rare for both dragon and Fae.

It wasn't just that Elvey was my final fated mate, it was also that I owed him for everything—for finding my mates, for helping me be free of the curse, and for getting my dynasty back.

My dragon mates and I now had all we wanted, but Elvey had *lost* everything in the process.

And I had to hand it to my mates. They could have demanded I focus on them and move on, but they were warriors at heart and were never selfish. My wants, needs, safety, and happiness came first for them.

Of course, they'd been jealous, and angry, and devastated when they found out I also had feelings for Elvey. But they'd gotten past that and accepted that Elvey was also my destined mate, the last of the four true loves of my life.

"He's one of us," Rai had said, gently wiping the blood tear from my cheek. "We won't let that bitch have him."

"If I can tolerate these two," Blaze had also said, jerking a thumb toward his brothers, "I can make room for the demigod."

Iokul, ever the strategist, had immediately started working on a plan to get into Sihde and free Elvey.

Together, we would break his chains, just as he had once helped break ours.

"No matter the cost," my mates had vowed. "We'll free him."

Not even Sphinx's last warning could stop us.

I summoned all the dragons in the realm and they all answered my call. Adrian gathered an army out of the people who had dragon blood and were loyal to us.

King Oriel sent an army from the Oslan Dominion, in full support of his sons. The king had wanted to lead the battle in person, but my mates fiercely objected to that notion. Their father had another agenda, but we needed his force. Everything else, we'd deal with afterwards.

Rosalinda brought the dark Fae rebel warriors, and they all swore fealty to me. Their pure numbers unsettled me. I was glad they had escaped Tianna, but my heart bled that Elvey, their secret leader, hadn't.

Much to my surprise, the human governments from the six cities of the Danaenyth dynasty also sent a troop to go to war with me.

We were set to march into Sihde the next day.

Rai, my lightning and thunder dragon, paced restlessly in front of the full window, where moonlight bled through. I drank in the sight of him—hard muscles flexed on his wide shoulders, taut ass, and powerful legs.

My gaze traced to the inked tattoo of a storm-gray dragon spitting lightning on his smooth, tanned chest, its mighty tail coiling on his left leg.

My lightning dragon was as magnificent as ever.

I licked my lips as my eyes fell on his massive manhood. It jerked forward with impatience and pride, jutting against his stomach with every step he took. It wanted to be buried inside me, right now.

I locked eyes with Rai, then looked back down to the muscled chest my

hands were splayed on.

I was fucking Blaze, who half-leaned against the edge of the high bed, his legs wide open, his lustful ember eyes glued to our locked flesh.

I shifted my hips slightly as Iokul pounded savagely into my ass. A cry escaped me, and I rode Blaze harder. The fire dragon muttered a curse, his eyes rolling to the back of his head at the sensation of my assault.

My body trembled, a loud moan tearing from the back of my throat as both cocks filled me, stretching me oh so deliciously.

I half-closed my eyes, reveling in the rapture my mates bestowed on me.

Our flesh slapped together, our sweat mingled, and our moans reverberated through the room like music to my ears.

My eyes snapped open at a beastly growl in the room. Rai watched us, struggling to contain himself. He pumped the length of his shaft with one hand, but he found no satisfaction in that. He wanted to be inside me, to feel my heat clench around him.

My lips parted, my glassy gaze holding his above his metal mask. His exasperated thoughts came through our mating bond. *How long does it take to fuck? Why were Iokul and Blaze taking so long? Don't they realize it it's my turn to fuck my woman?*

The hand that wasn't pumping his cock balled into a fist. He was obviously trying to rein himself in, so he didn't shove his brothers away.

Blaze and Iokul were oblivious to Rai's dark mood. Either that, or they just didn't care. They were completely focused on me, thrusting in and out of me at a pace that sent fire into my veins. Fiery lust blended us together, uniting us.

Rai moved closer and watched me grind against Blaze, thick desire and envy burning in his sapphire eyes. He was picturing me screwing him instead of Blaze as he pumped his heavy cock. I wondered if he would come by pleasuring himself. From my experience, my mates liked to come inside me.

Rai stalked closer and rubbed the head of his cock against my thigh. The bead of pre-cum on its slit moistened my skin.

"I need to fuck you so badly, sweetheart," he croaked. "I need to get inside you, need to be soaked in your heat, wetness, your silkiness."

Blaze and Iokul ignored his presence, intent on pleasuring me and finding their own release. Iokul's fingers dug into my hips, his thrusts hard and rapid. Blaze, no longer satisfied with me simply riding him, shifted position, planting his hands on the bed, and his foot on the edge. He drove into my

depth, every stroke harder than before.

“Such a hot pussy! So hot! Fuck!” Blaze groaned, his inner dragon purring, his movements blurring with his speed.

My breath hitched, a series of moans tearing through my throat.

“And tight,” Iokul hissed. “My mate is so tight!”

I reached behind me, sinking my nails into Iokul’s hard thighs.

Rai turned my face to the side and slanted his mouth on mine, stifling my moans and feeding on my carnal need and bliss. His tongue mated with mine, like never-ending lust at night. His pure male taste, rough and fine and full of storm, was as addictive as a drug.

My eyelids fluttered, the sensation of two large cocks fucking me too glorious. They kept hitting my core, one receding, the other moving in. Relentless and brutal. And the third cock burned my skin with its bruising rubbing, promising a new sort of pleasure, ready to fill me as well.

My mates were my whole world.

For a second, my mind drifted to Elvey, thinking how he would fit into this picture and how he would fuck me. But my dragons dragged my thoughts back to them with the strength they pounded into me.

Blaze fucked me so hard and fast I nearly saw stars before my eyes.

I was a dragon. I could take anything my mates threw at me. We had no limit when it came to uninhibited sex.

When Blaze’s next thrust hit my depth, his dragon fire licking me inside, I exploded around his cock, my pussy milking him with brutality until he erupted and roared. The waves hit Iokul violently, and he roared, letting out a string of curses as he came in me.

Contentment caused me to slumber into a sweet, deep space, until Rai brought me back.

He lowered me onto my back on the marble floor, its coldness unable to quench the fire leaping inside me.

My lightning dragon entered me in one swift slam, pounding mercilessly between my thighs.

Renewed carnal pleasure washed over me.

“I’ll fuck you like this till morning,” Rai said. “I’ll fuck you in every possible way.”

Iokul and Blaze growled as they watched Rai dominate me alone.

“We might need to catch a few hours’ sleep,” I said between breathless moans. “We have an army to lead.”

I wanted to indulge my mates and let them fuck me the entire night because after tomorrow, we might not have a chance to do this for a while. After all, we were bringing the war to Sihde, to the door of my evil aunt.

Rai drilled into me with force, and my legs wrapped around his waist to let him penetrate me deeper. He pulled out and slammed back in, and we both watched my pink, plump sex engulf his beautiful, tanned cock.

“Your pussy keeps sucking me in, never wanting me to leave,” Rai groaned in approval.

“Are you just gonna talk or are you gonna finish fucking our mate?” Blaze muttered irritably, lust lacing his voice. “I’m waiting to fuck Daisy again!”

“Just wait until I tell you to hurry up next time, prick,” Rai snarled before slamming into me with brute force, driving me closer to my peak.

Blaze quieted. He wouldn’t want that, would he? Payback could be a bitch.

I untangled my legs from Rai’s waist, planted my feet on the floor, bent my knees, and bucked my hips up to meet his plunges, the need to climax so strong that I had to move.

Our rapid rhythms merged into one.

I moaned and he groaned.

“You like being fucked hard, don’t you, little mate?” Rai asked hoarsely. “Fortunately, I’m here to please you.”

My eyes rolled to the back of my head as his brutal thrusts sent me right to the edge, and my orgasm broke over me in waves.

Rai roared with his release before he lowered his lips to mine in a gentle kiss filled with gratitude.

“Move our mate to the bed,” Blaze said. “I don’t want her to catch a cold.”

Rai pinned him with a withering glare, as if blaming his brother for making him look like an inconsiderate jerk. He pulled out of me, gathered me into his lap, and held me against his warm chest.

“I don’t want to go to bed yet,” I said. “I want a bath, and then dinner.”



I AWOKE at the break of dawn with my mates hovering over me, adoration in

their eyes. They'd all put on their armor, ready to lead the war.

"You should have woken me up earlier," I said.

Rai brushed my hair out of my face. "We still have time, sweetheart."

I jumped up, rushed to refresh myself, and swiftly put on the armor Iokul had prepared for me.

A knock tapped on the door outside our suite—the queen's suite.

One of our elite royal guards, which consisted of part of my old dragon guards and part of my mates' guards, called, "Your Majesties, the army is ready to march."

"We're ready," Rai answered.

I scanned my mates, stunned by their masculine beauty.

They were my sun, my stars, and my whole world. I did not intend to lose any of them during our mission to free Elvey.

"You won't, honey," Iokul said, his sensual lips brushing over my temple, the icy stream cooling my skin. "We're with you, and always will be."

As one, we strode through the door.

The army went down on one knee like a vast wave at the presence of me and my mates. I ordered them to rise and told them that they needn't follow the formality for the duration of the war.

Rosalinda and Zembyr led a small Fae army at the front, with my mates and me in the middle. Only the Fae warriors would accompany me into Sihde since neither the dragons flying above us nor the human troops could cross into the Fae realm.

Fortunately, my mates could enter Sihde because of our mating bond.

Rosalinda had explained it to us.

She'd also spent days in my palace to educate me on Sihde, the dark Fae and their queen. When she missed something, the other Fae—now my informal court—chimed in, eager to shove all the knowledge down my throat.

Rosalinda wore full black armor, her blonde ponytail waving in the wind. Zembyr wore gray armor with golden stripes.

Zembyr shared Rosalinda's blonde hair, his dark brows furrowed in a frown that never seemed to leave his face. His hazel eyes looked so steely that I doubted he ever smiled.

He had once been my mother's elite guard. When Rosalinda had first brought the giant warrior before me, he'd knelt, grabbed me, and buried his face on my feet in hot tears. It had been a wonder that my mates hadn't dragged him away from me. They didn't like anyone to touch me, even in

pure worship.

Zembyr had carried centuries of guilt and shame for not being able to defend my mother. But my mother—the crown princess of the dark Fae—had fled without her maids and guards when she was pregnant with me. He hadn't reached my mother in time. If he had, he'd have been slaughtered.

I'd told Zembyr that it wasn't his fault, yet he deeply and desperately wanted redemption, and he found it in me.

Adrian led the Danaenyth dynasty's fine soldiers behind us, and the Oslanian force brought up the rear.

We reached the valley between the Fae realm and the Dragon Realm. The army could no longer push forward because of the sealed veil between the two realms. Only Fae could enter. I was half Fae and the true heir to the throne of Sihde, so I could get in any time I wanted. My mates were bonded to me, so they should have no problem following me into the Fae realm.

That would soon be tested.

Henry trotted ahead and Sybil flew above him. I wondered if they would be able to pass the veil. It would be handy if they could since Sybil was an excellent spy and messenger. And I liked keeping my hellhound close if I needed to track anyone.

The army camped in the center of the valley.

Human technology had no use from this point on, because Sihde would cancel out all technology, unlike my Dragon Realm. Dragons were more tolerant when it came to other species and machinery. We weren't purists and elitists, and I would make sure to keep it that way in my reign.

A black dragon caught up with us and shifted.

Adrian strode toward us, clad in his armor. He gave me a concerned look and pressed his fist on his heart. I nodded. We didn't need to exchange more words. He looked at my consorts and bowed his head, then turned to the rest of the Fae warriors.

"Protect my queen," he said.

"Our queen," Rosalinda said, her green eyes flashing. "I'll defend our queen with my very essence."

"I'll shed the last drop of my blood for my queen," Zembyr thundered.

The rest of the Fae warriors pressed their hands tightly on the hilt of their swords, their eyes flashing fiercely. They were loyal beyond all doubt.

Rai nodded to Adrian. "We have it all covered."

Adrian's gaze lingered on Rosalinda for a second longer. "You be careful,

too.” He shifted back to his dragon form and flew back toward his rank, his black scales sparkling in the faint sunlight.

Our small group prowled on. Everyone was tense, their hands on their weapons. We could be meeting a large enemy army on the other side. I was both nervous and thrilled at the anticipation of battle and bloodshed, my fingers flexing, ready to throw my White Light at any second, and praying it would come at my summoning.

Zembyr raised a hand, and every one halted.

“Here it is,” Rosalinda said, turning to me as she took a deep breath.

Blaze frowned. “I don’t see any difference. We’re still at the top of the valley, and I don’t see the barrier you mentioned.”

I let my magic roll off me, and it hit the invisible ward.

A shimmer of endless wall appeared in front of us.

My mates blinked.

Zembyr and the other warriors gasped.

“The royal glamour is with our queen!” Rosalinda said. “With it, she’ll see through the imposter’s tricks.”

“Get hold of yourself, Rosa,” Zembyr said. “We do not broadcast what our queen can do.”

Rosalinda stared hard at Zembyr, and he held her gaze firmly. It seemed they both commanded our small Fae army, and neither outranked the other. I might have to decide who should lead in the end. Rosalinda was brilliant and impulsive, but Zembyr was a solid rock.

“This is a stealth mission,” Iokul agreed. My ice dragon was all for sneaking up on our foes and striking them by surprise.

“The imposter queen knows that we’re coming,” Rosalinda said, thinning her lips.

“Shall we pass through?” I asked, keeping my face neutral, though my heart pounded so hard. I would soon face off with my ancient enemy, who was said to be powerful beyond measure, who enslaved a demigod.

What if I couldn’t overcome her but instead brought demise to everyone on my side? And what if I was already too late to save Elvey?

“Scouts!” Zembyr called, and one third of the Fae warriors gathered around him.

“We’ve waited centuries for this,” Zembyr said. “Let’s clear the path for our rightful queen!”

His inspiration speech was the shortest I’d ever heard.

Zembyr raised his longsword, dove into the shimmer, and disappeared from view.

The scouts charged after him and also vanished beyond the shimmer.

Henry growled and shot forward, and he was gone, too. Sybil chirped and flew around me, her wings beating rapidly.

I heard no sound from the other side. It was as if they had all fallen into a deep pond like a tiny rock, not causing a ripple.

Henry! I called, my heart jerking in anxiety.

He didn't respond, but Sybil chirped furiously.

"What will happen to those who aren't allowed to enter the Fae realm?" I asked.

"They die instantly on the other side," said Rosalinda.

My eyes flashed darkly. "My hellhound just crossed," I said. "He didn't answer my call."

I shouldn't have let Henry come.

"Beasts belong to nature," Rosalinda said softly. "He'll be fine."

I turned to gaze at my mates. They were dragons. Even though they'd mated to me and bonded to me, there was a chance that they could die on the other side. I wouldn't survive if that happened. I wouldn't sacrifice them.

Blood rushed in my ears as an unquenchable fear seized me.

My mates held my gaze steadily. They read my thoughts and dread.

"Not a chance," Blaze said. "We go where you go. Not even death can stop us."

I bit my lip. "I can't risk this—"

"We're risking it together," Iokul said. "Trust us."

Rai leaned in and kissed me with warm assurance.

I trembled, then I grabbed Iokul's left hand and Rai's right one. Blaze put his hand on my shoulder. I'd be using my bond to them to shield them.

Sybil, I called, and she landed on my forearm, her claws sinking into my skin.

We pushed through the shimmer together.

I felt a light resistance, as if the ward wanted to spit out my mates. It wouldn't stop me, because it recognized me—the true ruler to Sihde.

They're with me. They're my mates. I ordered, my confidence and Fae magic suddenly filling my entire being. *Let them through and let no harm come to them.*

And then we were on the other side, all in one piece.

Zembyr and two warriors were waiting for us at the edge of the forest. The rest of the scouts spread further and cut deeper into the realm.

At the sight of me and my mates, Zembyr's face immediately softened, the knotted muscles on his arms smoothing.

Henry rushed to me, rubbing my leg to greet me before trotting ahead. Sybil chased him, scolding him, before she landed on his stout back and preened his shiny, black fur.

"Told you, honeybee," Blaze said with a sexy grin. "There's nothing to worry about."

I glanced over my shoulder. Our main army and the valley behind us had all vanished from sight. We'd entered another dimension—the most-guarded fairy realm.

A second later, Rosalinda and our rear force popped up behind us.

However, it didn't bring me the slightest relief.

I recognized the forest ahead—the Forbidden Forest that was tied to the nightmares I still had every now and then.

It had stolen me from the Dragon Realm, from my family and friends. It'd whisked me away to an alien planet where I'd been cursed to spend my days as three Fury beasts for nine centuries.

My breath shortened, and my blood iced over as panic suddenly washed over me.

I couldn't go into it again. I wouldn't. I knew I was being a coward, but I couldn't overcome this fear. What if the same curse swept over me again and took me away from my mates?

I stumbled back.

"This is the forest that once stole you, isn't it?" Iokul said softly, eyes burning with cold fury.

The Fae warriors eyed me with the same fear and rage.

Rosalinda had told me when the curse hit me, all the dark Fae had felt it. They'd felt a piece being torn from them, because I was supposed to be their next queen, but I'd been taken captive, and none of them could find me.

I couldn't help but shudder.

I hadn't thought this kind of fear could get to me again.

I had thought I was fearless after having been Furies for centuries. What worse could fate and my enemies do to me?

But here I was, trembling in fear.

I hadn't had much to lose when I'd been the beasts, but now I had

everything to lose.

Rai and Blaze wrapped me in their arms.

“We’re right here with you,” Rai whispered in my ear.

Blaze’s dragon fire poured into me, igniting mine and burning away the dark fear. Warmth, vigor, and courage surged into my being through my bond with my mates.

The icy coldness in my bones dissipated.

I was not alone. I would never be alone.

My consort kings were my anchors and steel. When I was at my weakest, they became my strength. They cherished my vulnerability and protected it.

I straightened my spine. I couldn’t afford to show weakness like this again. I would soon face the dark Fae queen and the hostile forces against me.

I moved out of my mates’ arms, stood tall, and became every bit the true Fae queen I was meant to be.

They said, fake it until you make it. But I didn’t need to fake it. Not anymore.

I nodded to my companions. “Let’s go.”

And we headed into the Forbidden Forest.

The forest was a fairy world of blue and silver, leaves and blossoms from the trees glowing like little stars in the deep night. But I knew how lethal this dreamy forest could be.

It'd stolen centuries from me.

We didn't curse you and steal you away, multiple voices said, musical yet tired. We were cursed as well, and we've been waiting for your return.

My feet padded on the dead leaves, and I swept my gaze around, searching for the voices.

"Did you hear that?" I asked my companions.

The warriors tensed up, but none of them seemed to have heard the whispers.

My mates moved closer to me, fingers curving around the hilts of their swords, ready to eliminate any threat.

"The Forbidden Forest has never given me the creeps as it is now," Rosalinda said, darting her eyes around wildly.

"It's changed. Something happened to it," Zembyr said grimly.

They'd just articulated what I'd felt. Something was wrong here. The forest was full of wrongness.

I opened my senses and probed.

A faint magic—dark and depraved—tapped me. It was both strange and familiar. My heart skipped a beat when I realized that Sihde was

communicating with me.

However, when I cautiously opened myself to it telepathically, it withdrew.

It was holding back the truth about itself.

It was ashamed.

I sent out a wave of magic, stretching out and ripping off any glamour.

The dreamy blue silver and the blossoms all faded, revealing what the real Forbidden Forest was.

It was blackened, withered, and dying.

It was desolate.

Everyone saw the forest's true form and gagged at its acid scent of decay.

“What the fuck is that?” Blaze called.

“Tianna poisoned and glamoured it,” Rosalinda hissed. “And our true queen has shown us what's left of the forest.”

The multiple voices I'd heard before wailed. It didn't take long for the wailing to turn bitter and menacing.

Before I could react to the forest's sudden change of mood, mutant ivy vines burst from the ground. Within seconds, the vines were everywhere, shooting out in every direction and surging toward us in attacking waves. Their edges were razor sharp and toxic, similar to the cannibal plants from Pandemonium.

The warriors gave a yell and slashed their swords through the air, hacking at the plants in front of them, jumping up to avoid the vines' ensnarement, and cutting the branches beneath their feet in frantic movements.

My mates shifted, fending off the poison ivy with fire, lightning, and ice.

The vines trapped a few warriors, wrapping around their legs, and dragging them away. As soon as the warriors cut off the assaulting vines, new vines gripped them.

“Protect the queen!” Zembyr snarled as he fought toward me, slicing the plants with all his might.

The vines clasped the warriors' faces and tried to puncture their armor. The warriors cursed profusely as the ivy turned their faces into patches of rashes.

Rosalinda bent her head and yelped as a branch wrapped around her ponytail. Blaze opened his mouth, ready to spit fire to help her.

“No, no! No fire. My hair!” Rosalinda cried in panic.

And I'd thought a fierce warrior such as her was above being vain.

Henry bit into the vine connected to her hair and freed Rosalinda. My hellhound had a lot of experience with nasty plants.

“Good beast!” Rosalinda praised him, and when the next vines came for my hellhound in revenge, Rosalinda returned the favor.

Sybil swooped between the trees, chirping, calling a warning or two and constantly giving instructions. For some reasons the ivy left Sybil alone, and Henry gave Sybil an evil eye.

Iokul growled as several vines worked together from the ground and air and tied around his midriff.

No matter how angry the forest was, the plants didn’t dare attack me.

I stomped on the forest floor and hissed. “Enough!”

The power from my Fae side that I’d once used to bond the beasts on Pandemonium to me rolled off me with a punishing force, a violent wind with teeth and claws slammed into the badly behaved ivy.

My bonding magic could also chastise and bind all subjects to my will. Though I wouldn’t use it unless it was necessary—I didn’t believe in slavery.

“When you go to the fairy land, your Fae powers will awake and enhance,” Elvey had told me.

Sihde was sick and twisted now, but it was still my land and my realm.

“Stop!” I commanded, and the ivy vines retreated as one, mortified at my harsh reproach.

We weren’t like this, the multiple voices whimpered in protest.

“Who are you?” I asked, my voice filled with authority.

We’re the guardians of the Forbidden Forest. Some call us the forest spirits. The forest was beautiful once, though also lethal.

I’d stripped the glamour the evil queen had cast upon it.

Had Tianna glamoured the Forbidden Forest, so her court wouldn’t know she’d made the realm ill? Why had she poisoned Sihde as the current sovereign?

“I didn’t expect it to be so bad,” Rosalinda said, wiping at the tears falling from her eyes. “That bitch destroyed our home.”

My mates shifted back to their human forms and gathered around me.

Everyone had rashes on their skin, except me.

The dark queen ordered us to attack, one of the spirits’ voices rose again, *but since you’re here now, she’s no longer our queen.*

We’ve come to warn you, another spirit said.

Then the third voice murmured, *We waited and waited for you to come*

home to heal us, but you never came.

Somehow, I could differentiate between the voices.

It's been so long, our queen, the first spirit's voice started again.

"I've come," I said. "I'll make Sihde right again. I'll purge the evil from the realm and make you wholesome again. My words are binding."

I heard a satisfied, collective sigh. *You'll have our alliance, true queen. Be aware of the double faces and two foulest entities in one. Only when you and your mates find her darkest secret will you overcome the dark power and free us all. Be aware of the betrayals; not all are who they appear to be.*

Was this another riddle? Puzzles made my head spin.

"Who will betray us?" Rosalinda asked.

This time, everyone had heard the spirits' words.

The warriors stared at hard at each other, as if wanting to nail the traitor right now to the tree. The forest spirits' message was clear—there were moles among us.

"Who will betray my mate?" Iokul pursued the question in a soft, lethal voice. "Who?"

The ones closest to the queen, the spirits said.

My brow furrowed. My mates were the closest to me. The other warriors sent a glance their way before quickly darting away their gaze at my glare.

My mates would never betray me. They'd rather eat their own hearts before they hurt me.

"Clarify!" Rai demanded. "We need names!"

But the spirits had withdrawn into the depth of the forest, completely silent.

A shadow fell on everyone's face.

"We shall not let dissent grow among us," I said, scanning the warriors. "We need to be a united front. Innocent until proven guilty, no matter what the spirits say."

"We'll not be divided," Zembyr said, approval and respect shining in his eyes before steel returned to them. "But if anyone betrays our queen, I'll play with their intestines. Their death won't be quick."

That was a bit graphic.

"Anyone betrays my mate, including me and my brothers," Blaze said. "I'll skin him and roast him."

The forest turned deathly quiet.

It revealed the path to its other side and led us to the dark Fae high court,

where the evil queen dwelled and ruled.

Blood-red trees lined several arches we walked through. We kept our eyes peeled for any enemies.

The surrounding was eerily quiet, except for our footsteps on the grass.

My warriors were tense, their knuckles white on the hilts of their swords. Zembyr and fifty or so Fae marched at the front, my mates and Rosalinda guarding me in the middle, and over a hundred rebel Fae warriors brought up the rear.

Our main army remained just outside the Fae realm. Only once Sihde and I had a pact could I break down the veil and summon my army inside. I needed to form a bond with this realm, but I didn't know how.

It was a great risk to bring little than a hundred Fae warriors into the enemy's territory, but it was the only option. I wasn't planning on killing any other Fae, except Tianna and her true supporters. Bringing a small army deep into the enemy's heart would also send a message to the other Fae under her thumb—that I did not fear Tianna and I came to claim what was mine without causing carnage.

We prowled on, ready for an attack. Though we were a small number, every warrior I brought was lethal.

“The enemy army must be camped near,” Zembyr said in a low and menacing voice.

The assault we expected never arrived. Nor were there any enemy guards in sight.

What kind of game was Tianna playing?

I quit my speculating, because it might be her plan to unnerve me. But I knew she was waiting for me, like the queen spider waiting for a fly.

“I don’t like this,” Rai said from beside me.

A red palace of ivory, wood, and glass loomed ahead in the midst of an ocean that looked like dark, glinting glass. At a second glance, I’d seen through the ocean as a glamour. There was never an ocean, but a vast citadel melding into a forest.

My mates narrowed their eyes.

The assembly kept their soldiers’ faces. They couldn’t see through the illusion.

As one, we stopped at the edge of the lapping waves of the dark sea.

The wrongness I’d felt about Sihde since I’d entered the Forbidden Forest was thicker here. The forest was tainted, and here, pure evil dwelled beneath.

Unease and cold rage slithered up my spine.

Tianna’s dark rule would be over! I vowed.

“It’s a glamour,” I said. “We can pass.”

Zembyr and two Fae warriors stepped forward, but a wave repelled them and sent them flying back. They crashed into the wall of warriors.

Iokul moved to the front, his ice magic probing but met no resistance from the ward. He stepped forward and passed through. It looked like he was riding a wave.

Rosalinda followed him, and again, the ocean wave rose and tossed her out.

“What the actual fuck?” Blaze cursed. “Iokul, return!”

Iokul rushed to the edge of the wave toward us, but the wave swept him further toward the palace entrance. In a blink, he disappeared from our sight into the Red Palace.

“Iokul!” I cried, but he didn’t answer.

My blood turned cold as fear for my mate gripped me.

“Iokul, answer us!” Blaze and Rai shouted.

We traded a grim, anxious look.

“We won’t lose him,” Blaze said.

“Let’s go after him.” Rai said exactly what was in my mind.

“First let us try again, my queen,” a Fae soldier said.

One by one, the Fae warriors tried to cross, but none of them could get through, and Iokul couldn't return to us.

I'd seen through the glamour, but I had missed the ward.

The power that warded the palace was ancient and alien. I was out of my depth.

"The message is clear," I said. "It looks like only me and my mates can pass."

"We go together," Blaze said, grabbing my hand just as I reached for Rai's.

"What if we all hold hands and you bring us through?" Rosalinda suggested.

I nodded, and our entire force gripped hands and stepped onto the water.

Violent, dark wind rose and tore my mates and me apart from the army.

Sybil and Henry couldn't pass, either.

The warriors charged the ocean again, only to be thrown out. Blood poured from their noses, and I knew that if they kept trying, they would die.

"Stop!" I ordered the soldiers. "Wait here until I return. Find a way to survive in Sihde, and my mates and I will do the same."

"My queen, we'll wait right here for your safe return," Rosalinda said, tears in her eyes. "No matter how long."

"We'll figure out a way to bring down the ward," Zembyr said, as he slashed at the waves to no avail. Fear and steel burned in his dark-green eyes. He was remembering the day my mother had been slaughtered.

"We'll return," I said.

Henry howled, and Sybil chirped frantically.

Calm, I told them, and wait for me.

Red vines twined around the black pillars. It seemed that red and black was Tianna's theme—they represented violence and death.

The high ceiling was etched with Fae porn in graphic detail. It disturbed me as I noticed some of the images depicted rape and sadism.

Iokul had also seen it, disgust and rage twisting his masked face.

I'd thrown myself into his arms when we'd reunited. He'd pulled me so tightly against his chest while his brothers clasped him in the shoulders in comfort.

We'd broken apart quickly, for this wasn't time and place to get emotional. Rai and Blaze scanned the area for any immediate threats while Iokul and I tried to get hold of ourselves.

I averted my gaze from the ceiling and vowed that if this was all dark Fae was about, I'd change it. I'd tear their culture apart. I'd expel every evil from this land as well, as I'd done for my dynasty.

I would start with Tianna.

I strode toward the throne hall, my mates flanking me, their hands close to their weapons. Two of them would shift to dragons as soon as an attack came, as we had planned.

No one announced our entry as we stepped into the throne room.

The hall was a different version from what Elvey had once showed me

when he'd taken me to the world of glamour. We'd danced on the marble floor amid pillars of emeralds. We'd looked out at the silver forest through the windows; the light had shone through the golden ceiling.

In that world, Elvey had picked a pale green gown for me with a low cut that showed off the tops of my creamy breasts. He'd also put a diamond and silver crown atop my head. I hadn't known then that I was the true heir to Sihde.

I'd forgotten my curse and the whole universe when I'd waltzed in his arms.

Where is Elvey?

My heart rammed into my rib cage at my fear that something had happened to him, and my throat scorched with the dread.

Rai held my hand, lending me his strength. "Whatever happens, we're all in this together," he whispered in my ear, his warm breath feathering my skin. I curled my fingers around his.

Dark blossoms draped down through high windows, scenting the air with gardenia, hyacinth, lime, and rose.

Blaze sniffed. *It smells too sweet*, he said in my head with a frown in his voice.

It smells rotten, like blood and corpses, I said. *Dark magic is at full play here.*

I only smell a sickly sweet scent. Iokul offered his insight.

Rai nodded gravely.

The deeper we pushed into the dark queen's high court, the stronger the smell of decay became.

Tianna used the sweet scent to glamour the putridity beneath, but my mates couldn't discern it, just as they hadn't seen through the glamour of the Forbidden Forest and the black sea. It worried me. What if Tianna used glamour on them when we faced her? How could I protect my mates from her?

I could see through glamour, but not only because I had royal Fae magic. Sihde couldn't hide from me—its true queen—what it hid from others.

As we were halfway into the hall, the dark, oppressive magic made me gag. Yet I felt it wasn't completely dark Fae magic. Could there be foul demon magic in the mix? Tianna had close ties to the demons. The demon captain we'd killed back on Pandemonium had called her his queen, and twice she had sent a demon army instead of a Fae army to assassinate me.

My grandfather had said that Tianna had gathered dark, evil forces around her and engaged herself in all sorts of foul, forbidden practices.

The court—all of them dark Fae—stood on either side of the hall and murmured to each other as they watched us. The men wore armor and swords; the women, all willowy and beautiful, dressed in elegant gowns. Yet, according to the rumor, their queen was the most striking and no other being could surpass her beauty.

Perhaps she had killed those who were more beautiful than her.

I felt the heavy gaze of the crowd crawling along my skin, their eyes evaluating and appraising. I didn't send my magic out to probe them since they weren't my target. But I knew they pondered what I could do for them, what it meant for them that I'd come, and how long I would survive.

Some sneered at my mates and me.

We ignored them, not caring if it offended them.

We were here for two things only: to kill Tianna and rescue Elvey.

As for how to kill Tianna, no one really knew.

Many said that she couldn't be killed.

But we would get close to her, observe her, and find her weakness.

Anyone could be killed with the right tools. Even the gods and goddess faded.

I masked my face with disinterested iciness. Cold, cruel, calculating, vengeful, and power-hungry were all dark Fae were, as Rosalinda had kept reminding me. She'd also informed me about the Fae's brief history.

The two Fae races—dark and light Fae—were in constant competition, yet they couldn't erase the other altogether because of the required balance in the Fae realm. Light Fae were more benign. They didn't hate dragons and humans that much. Nevertheless, all Fae loved to manipulate and play games.

My eyes found a raised dais with a gold throne adorned with black diamonds at the far end of the hall. And Tianna—my immortal enemy—sat on it.

That was the woman who had orphaned me, cursed me, and tried to kill me for nine centuries. I'd done nothing to wrong her, but it didn't matter to the evil incarnation. My birth and continuance were the bane of her existence.

I saw red at the sight of my enemy. Her golden hair cascaded to floor of the gold dais, swaying like snakes, and my heart pounded so wildly it could barely contain the violence inside.

A black veil concealed her face, and her red, low-cut gown flaunted half

of her bone-white breasts. The black stripes twirling from her left breast on her gown to her right thigh highlighted her slim waist and curvy figure.

A chained charm nestled between her deep cleavage, and I figured it contained a potent spell.

Eight males—probably her guards, playthings, Fae nobles, or a mix—surrounded her on the dais, gazing upon her with devotion and lust.

Her perfume of rose and death drifted toward me. The closer we approached her, the stronger the stench. It added to the air of bloodthirst, decay, and foul hunger not of this realm, as if there was something else—alien and terrible—living inside her.

Blaze sniffed, his nostrils flaring.

What do you smell? I asked in his mind.

Rose and night and sky, Blaze said.

It smells nicer here. Rai agreed.

Better than that sweet scent from earlier, said Iokul with appreciation.

I felt a rush wave of disappointment that they couldn't discern the horrible odor, but then Fae had glamour magic that dragons weren't familiar with. Even other Fae couldn't distinguish the dark Fae queen's twisted glamour. Only Elvey and I could.

Elvey's first lesson for me on Pandemonium had been to make out the dark queen's glamour.

And where was he? If he were here, I would feel him.

My mates and I kept marching, my focus glued to the dark queen, while my mates took in the whole court, looking for threats.

We were nearly close enough to Tianna to attack her.

Should I make a move and kill her by surprise? My fingers twitched as I tested my White Light. One fatal strike and I might be able to end her.

But what if my magic didn't come out and I only gave my enemy an excuse to execute me for my act of genocide? I had no idea how powerful she was, and if I made a wrong move, not only my life would be forfeit, but my mates' as well. And Elvey and the others who depended on me would never be free.

Kill her name before you kill her, a voice seemed to speak to me. Just like how I had handled her pawn—the black witch Lysandra.

When we were ten yards away from the usurper's throne, three guards in red armor stepped toward us, blocking our path. They looked alike. Each of them had shoulder-length blond hair and cold, lime-green eyes.

The one in the center raised his sword, sharp tip skyward before turning to us. “Advance no further, dragons.”

Their faces were expressionless, but I could tell these men enjoyed extinguishing lives. Their every muscle spelled cruelty and violence. Their hands gripped the hilts of their swords that jutted out of the sheath at their waists. I’d bet that they’d very much prefer it if my mates challenged them.

We didn’t take the bait but stopped in our tracks. There was no point in getting in a fight with some pawns, though I had no intention of following their court etiquettes.

I could feel the dark queen’s eyes boring into me from behind her veil, the same pair of piercing eyes that had peeked out at me through those of the demon captain and the black witch.

It was the eyes of death and destruction.

A chill sliced up my spine. The hair on my neck stood up.

My mates pressed closer to me, shielding me.

I held the queen’s stare.

“Kneel before Her Majesty, dragons,” the lead guard ordered haughtily.

Rai glowered, Blaze’s nostrils flared with sparks of fire, and icy steam emitted from behind Iokul’s white metal mask. They didn’t even look at the lead guard, as if he was but an annoying bug. Their murderous stares focused on the usurper queen, just as mine did.

“I’m Daisy Danaenyth,” I announced with a clear voice to ascertain that every Fae in the court heard. “Daughter to Zuzana, and the rightful queen to Sihde and the Danaenyth dynasty. I reclaimed the Dragon Realm, and I’ve come to take back Sihde.”

The court gasped, and Tianna’s guards snarled.

“I and my consorts,” I continued without missing a beat, “King Rai, King Blaze, and King Iokul to the Danaenyth dynasty, heirs to the Oslan Dominion, also the rightful kings to Sihde, bow and kneel to no one. And you shall all bow and kneel to us.”

More rasped gasps came from the court. For centuries, no one had ever challenged the dark Fae queen, except my grandfather, who had sent a few assassins to Sihde to kill her. But he had failed.

“As our queen mate said, we fucking bow and kneel to no one,” Rai said.

“We come to take back what belongs to the true queen of Sihde—Queen Daisy Danaenyth,” Iokul pronounced.

“And to remove the usurper Tianna from the fucking throne that’s not

hers!” Blaze shouted, a trail of fire emitting out of his nostrils.

We were nearly at attacking range. We had a chance to take Tianna out. And we’d just publicly renounced her.

“Not even bow to me?” asked a familiar, musical, and warm voice.

Tianna lifted her veil.

I froze as I stared at the brilliant blue eyes that shifted colors like mine on the lovely face.

My mother’s face smiled at me with dotting love.

The court dared not breathe this time. They’d all known my mother, the heir who should have been the queen.

My mates narrowed their eyes, not understanding everyone’s reactions. They thought that everyone was surprised at the resemblance between the dark queen and me. They didn’t know Tianna was wearing my mother’s face to taunt me until a whisper rose in the court. “The crown princess Zuzana.”

“Come to me, my beloved child,” my mother’s voice beckoned.

For a second, she was my mother, and I almost believed her. I ached to go to her, to sit down at her feet, and lean my head on her knee.

Elvey’s warning sliced through my head, piercing the hovering dark fog. *“Bonding magic is your royal Fae heritage. Tianna has it as well. She mixes it with dark magic and uses it to control minds. When you face her eventually, she’ll try to bind you. You can never allow her to slip into your mind and control you.”*

My shield went up and extended to my mates, my White Light twirling around it. To my relief, it’d come to my aid without my summoning. For the first time, it was like my second skin. The fog dissipated from my mind.

“Stop it, Tianna,” I said. “Your tricks don’t work on me. The game is over. You’re not worthy to wear my mother’s face. You don’t deserve to lick the dirt from the bottom of her shoes.”

“The bitch is pretending to be your mother?” Blaze growled, and the court hissed at us.

The red-armored guards stepped toward us, and Rai raised his sword, his lightning passing along the blade. At the same time, Iokul and Blaze shifted to dragons, roaring.

The guards stepped back, uncertain now, and waited for their queen’s order. The noble Fae pulled back and scattered further to give the dragons a wide berth.

One wrong move from the enemies, and we’d counterattack and burn the

Red Palace down.

I fixed my stare on my true enemy, ready to push my White Light toward her and reduce her to ashes.

Tianna laughed. “Leave them be for now. The fun has just started. We don’t want it to be over so soon, do we?”

Her guards bowed to her and withdrew.

Blaze and Iokul didn’t shift back but hovered in the air.

Tianna’s face dissolved to her true form.

Her eyes shone darkly on her beautiful, creamy face. Tiny black crystals dusted her long golden lashes. Her sharp teeth flashed as she parted her bloodred lips. Her long nails, lethal as blades, tapped the armrests of her throne.

Her beauty was stunning yet so cruel and malicious and arrogant. There wasn’t the slightest humanity in her.

Immeasurable power and evil boiled under her skin.

The court gazed at her merciless beauty, completely enthralled.

Then I heard Rai suck in a breath involuntarily. Blaze and Iokul also focused their dragon eyes on her, stricken by her glamoured splendor.

They had assumed she was a crone, evil and ugly, since all they’d heard about was her horrific deeds. They hadn’t expected her to be so exquisite that no words could describe her loveliness. Her beauty beyond this world threw them off balance.

The dark queen saw it and knew it. A whimsical smile and lewd desire flared up in her cat-like green eyes.

I saw malice and rot in her true form, but the others saw only power and beauty.

My mates’ reactions to my enemy hurt me like a hot iron running through my heart.

They were under her spell. I was the only one who could see through her glamour. I’d never felt so utterly alone.

I grabbed Rai’s hand, and he squeezed mine, yet his attention stayed on the dark queen as she tilted her head and beamed at him. I doubted I could ever form up that kind of sickening sweet and sultry look.

Righteous fire burned in my eyes as I pictured mauling her face. I allowed no one to touch my men.

Only an ounce of sheer will kept me where I stood.

Rai’s nostrils flared at the queen’s scent

My heart pounded so painfully I was certain it would shatter into several pieces any second. Had Tianna evoked lust in my mates? I would tear her throat out for enthralling them.

But I didn't smell arousal in the air. No, that wasn't completely true. Arousal was thick in the room, but it didn't come from my mates. Their arousal had a distinct male musky scent.

I glanced around. Indeed. The Fae males all around gazed at their queen with lust. They couldn't detect the rot, death, and violence beneath her glamoured beauty and rose perfume.

Maybe our mating bond prevented my mates from lusting after Tianna for now, but I couldn't deny that she also drew them in like attracting moths to a dark, lethal flame.

And dragons all liked flames.

I hadn't expected she would play this kind of game. No wonder she was so conceited when she said that the fun had just begun. She was bewitching my mates to hurt me, and my magic hadn't been able to shield them.

Acid flooded my stomach.

"Stop it, Tianna!" I said. "This sick game of yours is over."

"Stop what?" Tianna purred, her voice sexy, enchanting. Her bloodred lips tugged up in a sadistic smile.

"You want me to stop this?" She snapped her fingers, and a figure materialized and tumbled from the air.

Elvey crouched at her feet in iron chains.

Elvey raised his blue eyes, a swirl of falling stars burning to ashes in them as his gaze met mine.

He looked ragged, bruised, and disheveled, bound by the heavy chains. The wounds on his wrists and ankles were both old and new. Dried blood coated his skin, his gray shirt, and dark pants.

Once a proud demigod, now he was chained like a rabid animal.

How long had he been tortured?

“Daisy,” he hissed, his lavender hair a mess. “Take your mates and get out of here. Now! It’s a trap.”

You’re my mate, too, I thought.

“Go! Take her and leave!” he snarled at the two dragons hovering above us.

Even shackled, Elvey still had no concerns for himself. He didn’t think of his own freedom, only of my safety.

He hadn’t thought we’d come for him.

He never required it.

Words choked in my throat, and hot rage coursed in my cold blood.

Rai snarled, his masked face turning red with fury. Blaze puffed fire and Iokul hissed an icy stream, murder in their fiery dragon eyes. They hadn’t expected to see Elvey like this. Before we’d set out toward Sihde, they’d accepted him as one of them.

Now that they were seeing Elvey in this condition, they were able to shrug off whatever the dark Fae queen's spell did to them and blinked back to reality.

They were with me again, and their rage boiled like mine.

Tianna let out a girlish giggle. Her eyes, like endless pits, swept over us.

Even with the dragons in the air, she didn't seem bothered in the least, which meant she must have a ward around her.

"I've been looking for the traitor in my court for a long time," Tianna said, "but I never thought Elvey had the audacity to betray me. The foxy demigod has been trying to undermine me for centuries in order to aid you. Now his eternal torture starts. He'll wish to burn in hell rather than in here."

The sound of bones cracking filled the air, and Elvey bit his lip so he wouldn't scream.

His left fingers twisted at sickening angles. The dark queen had just broken all the fingers on his left hand with a mere thought.

"Stop!" I yelled.

"Leave, Daisy! You're not ready yet," Elvey shouted after he sucked in a breath of pain, fuming. "What the fuck are you waiting for? You idiot dragons, take your mate away from this filthy pit. Now!" He tried to rise and come to shove me away himself from the court, but he collapsed to the ground, dropped to his knees, and landed on his heels.

A sick snapping sound told me that Tianna had just broken his knees.

Sweat dotted his forehead.

Elvey couldn't fight her because he was bound by his blood bond to her.

His agony and helplessness hammered into my heart.

I lost it.

I saw red and nothing else.

"Fucking bitch!" I screamed, and threw everything I had at Tianna.

My White Light speared toward her in wrath. At the same time, Rai tossed bolts of lightning at the evil queen.

A billow of smoke poured out of Tianna. Just as my Light ate away the smoke, more smoke bred. A surge of dark purple light formed another layer of shield round her.

My White Light had killed two of her powerful minions that had the protection of the smoke magic, but my Light, even enhanced by my mate's lightning, couldn't penetrate her new shield.

What the fuck?

Tianna thrust her fingernails in my direction. “Kill the dragon-hybrid abomination!”

At the same time, her smoke and purple light merged and slammed into my shield that covered my mates, Elvey, and me. She failed to breach my ward, but she could still get to Elvey because of their blood bond.

While Tianna and I were at an impasse, my mates charged at her guards.

Blaze spat fire at the dark Fae guards as they surged toward us, and Iokul tossed ice spears toward their armored chests. Rai fought beside me to keep anyone from getting near me.

My consorts were formidable warriors, but the enemy’s numbers were countless. Our small Fae army was blocked outside the Red Palace, and our main army still outside the Fae realm.

Our battle raged on, and neither side could gain the upper hand.

Tianna seemed surprised that I could hold my own.

She shouted out a stream of foul spells, and her bonding magic pierced the defense of my White Light and reached my mind.

We were both from the dark Fae royal line with the same bonding magic, so my White Light didn’t recognize Tianna’s bonding magic as hostile.

But my own bonding magic rose and met hers in full force.

“You’ll never have me, you fucking bitch,” I said, the veins in my temples jumping at my effort.

I grabbed her bonding magic, tore it from my head like it was a worm, and tossed it back at her face.

Elvey crawled toward me, but Tianna broke more of his bones, until he could no longer move. I couldn’t shield him like I could shield my dragon mates.

Until I broke the bond between them, Tianna could always get to him.

“Don’t you touch him again!” I sent another surge of White Light toward the bitch, but her shield enhanced.

She laughed. “You’ll never take me down, niece. It seems we have reached an impasse. However, I have another idea. Why don’t we play a new game to decide the winner?”

“Go fuck yourself.”

I yanked up my magic from my depth and threw it at her. I had to destroy this vermin.

But her dark magic was immense, and she’d had millennia of practice.

Soon, I would exhaust my magic, and my mates couldn’t fight the endless

army pouring in.

Our former plan of coming in, overcoming Tianna, and grabbing Elvey hadn't gone well. I hadn't known my enemy's true power. I'd underestimated my evil aunt. I thought I could have killed her the way I'd vanquished Lysandra. I'd thought my White Light was all I would need to kill her.

"You already have three gorgeous mates, niece," Tianna said, winking at Rai. "Yet you want one more. Do you just open your legs for everyone?"

"Shut your filthy hole, you hell bitch," I said.

I didn't intend to have a conversation with her.

I wanted her dead.

But no matter how hard I pushed my magic to destroy her, her dark magic just matched up to mine and more.

"Would you like to know how I trapped Elvey, niece?" she asked sweetly, but her voice dripped with venom. "He had this prophetic dream about his destined mate and it led him to me. He was seeking you before you were even born. I tricked him into a blood bond to me. He did it in order to prevent your death. When he found out what a mistake he'd made, it was already too late for him. He's been hating me for robbing him of a life with his true mate for centuries, yet there is nothing he could do but serve me. Did you know your mate used to warm my bed? Are you sure you still want my leftovers?"

"He rejected you," I hissed. "He turned you down. Tied by the blood bond, no one could refuse you, but he did it again and again. No matter how hard you've been trying to get him to your bed, he still rejects you time and again. Just like he and I can always see right through your glamour. I'm so proud of him, and you're but an ugly crone who possesses nothing but evil."

I couldn't be prouder of Elvey. For centuries, the dark queen had been trying to crush his spirit, but she failed. While he didn't get any sunshine, he still gave sunshine to others. He'd secretly helped many Fae escape Tianna and promised them that one day the true queen would return. He had no hope for himself, yet he constantly inspired hope in others. Only a pure soul could do that.

Tianna snapped her fingers, and another of Elvey's bones cracked.

"Still proud?" Her bloodred lips bit out the words.

It felt like my own rib cage had just been shattered.

"You bitch! Stop!" I shrieked as I sent another wave of White Light to attack her, yet I couldn't take her down. All I succeeded in doing was

exhausting my own reservoir of magic. “Stop!”

My two dragon mates roared. Blaze spewed streams of fire at the dark queen, Iokul flung dozens of ice spears at her, and Rai sent bolts of lightning to crash on her.

But her shield diminished every assault.

“Boys, behave,” Tianna purred sweetly, and Elvey’s right hand distorted to a grotesque angle.

He didn’t even groan, but beads of sweat coated his face, and his star-blue eyes twitched from the pain.

“Cease the attack,” I told my three mates before turning to Tianna. “Please, don’t do that. Just leave him alone, please.” I breathed with difficulty.

I restrained myself from tossing another barrage of White Light at her. She would only turn to torture Elvey. She had found my weakness—all of my mates were my most vulnerable weakness.

Why couldn’t my White Light take the bitch out? Elvey had said it was the only weapon that could kill her. His intel wasn’t correct.

“Now you beg, niece,” Tianna said. “But you should not blame me. This is all Elvey’s fault, or maybe it’s yours. He’s done ton of dirty work behind my back in order to overthrow me. I only found out about it when you returned. He could hide on other planets where I couldn’t easily reach him through the blood bond, but he just couldn’t resist you. He couldn’t stay away from you, so he had to return, and now he has to endure this.”

She broke another bone.

I heard snickers from the court and snapped my head in that direction.

Some Fae turned their faces away, not having the stomach to continue to watch. Yet some of them held delight in watching Elvey’s suffering. I’d remember them, and none of them would walk out of here alive when all this ended.

“Stop!” I cried. “What do you want?”

“Are you ready to meet my challenge, Daisy Danaenyth, daughter to my dear sister Zuzana?” Tianna asked.

“Do not bargain with her!” Elvey hissed, pain lacing his voice, though he tried to contain it. “Get out and leave me here. I’m a dead man. Don’t waste your time on—”

He swallowed the rest of the words.

She’d broken his windpipe.

I couldn't leave without him.

"I'm ready to bargain, aunt," I snarled.

"Withdraw your magic now," she ordered.

I pulled my White Light back, but still shielded my mates, including Elvey, though my shield hadn't protected him.

Tianna let out an inaudible breath of relief, and I realized that she hadn't known whether my magic could take her down eventually. She didn't know my strength and the depth of my magic, and she didn't intend to find out.

She wasn't familiar with my kind of magic, but she feared it.

"You want Elvey, don't you?" Tianna asked.

"Sever the blood bond between the two of you," I said in a tight voice.

Elvey watched us, his expression unreadable, though pain carved deep lines on his face.

"Will you pay the price?" asked the evil queen.

I narrowed my burning eyes. "I'll pay any price."

"Any price, you say?" she purred, and a repulsed shiver crawled over my skin.

I stared at her blankly, not wanting to show any more emotion than I could help. Even the slightest hatred in my eyes would give her satisfaction.

"I want your three dragon consorts," she said, lust sparkling in her cat-green eyes.

Wrath rained down in me. I'd slice open the bitch and slowly cut her heart to pieces.

Sphinx's warning rang through my head. "*Gain the first and lose the last. Keep the last, and the first will be shattered bones.*"

It always came to this—my choice, but I wouldn't choose.

How could I trade my three mates for Elvey? If I didn't, Tianna would shatter every bone in his body. I was trapped in a nightmare I couldn't escape.

Elvey's gaze was full of agony. He had no voice, but he managed to shake his head. He didn't want me to choose him over my mates. He'd rather endure every ounce of pain she inflicted on him.

"Your beloved Elvey can't even die," Tianna said. "He's tried to break the blood bond to me for a millennium, but all he's gotten has been pain. You can end his suffering. All you need to do is to play a final game, answer to my challenge, and offer me your dragons. You've already fucked them, so they're no longer novelty to you. But you haven't fucked Elvey. He was mind-blowing in bed, even though he imagined I was you."

"Watch your mouth, bitch!" Rai snarled.

Blaze and Iokul shifted to their human forms and gathered around me.

Tianna was ready to snap a finger and break another bone in Elvey.

"What's the game, Tianna?" Iokul asked with interest.

He wanted to play? I sent Iokul a sharp look, as did his brothers.

“It doesn’t matter what the game is,” Blaze spat. “The cunt will never have us.”

“Boys, you’re rude, but I love it when you talk dirty,” Tianna said. “What if I tell you that if you agree to play, I’ll lift the last piece of your curse and you no longer need to wear that dreadful mask on your handsome faces anymore?”

A stunned silence rippled across the room. My three mates exchanged a look, excluding me.

They weren’t seriously considering it, were they?

My heart sank to my stomach.

My hand lifted in the air and trained on Tianna, ready for another round of attack. My other hand grabbed Rai’s, Iokul’s, and Blaze’s hand in turn. I needed reassurance that they were with me. Only Blaze squeezed my hand back.

“I want to hear the game as well,” Rai said softly.

“We will only play if she can hold up her end of the bargain and remove our masks,” Iokul said.

Tianna laughed softly, her adorned eyelashes fluttering.

A wave of revulsion twisted my stomach, especially when I saw that all three of my mates regarded my immortal enemy with interest they hadn’t shown before. Moments ago, they’d been outraged and had called her cunt.

My bonding magic brushed over them and probed.

No, her spell wasn’t leeching on them. Then why had they changed their attitude all of a sudden? Realization hit me. Tianna promised them something I hadn’t been able to give them—removing the other half of the curse. They’d hidden their bitterness and disappointment that I wasn’t able to help them lift the final curse. They wanted more than anything to be rid of the masks.

But shouldn’t they give me a bit more time? From the moment we’d set foot in the Dragon Realm, we had been in constant crisis, but as soon as I took Elvey with us, I planned on finding a way to remove their curse completely.

But when the opportunity presented itself, it seemed they couldn’t wait.

I’d thought I had them, but perhaps I had been wrong.

Now they wanted to play Tianna’s game. They wanted to see what my parents’ murderer could offer them. My heart bled.

Elvey struggled with his chains, trying to make enough noise, still

attempting to stop us.

Tianna snapped her head toward him.

“Hurt him again, and I’ll never take your fucking challenge,” I said.

“Oh, you will,” Tianna said. “But he isn’t my concern at the moment.” She winked at me with a taunting smirk. “Don’t pout, Daisy. The game actually works in your favor. Let me lay out the terms and rules. They’re quite simple.” She licked her lips, her cat-like eyes roving over my three consorts as if they were a delicious dessert. “Right, boys?”

I wanted to stand in front of them and shield them from the sex predator. But it proved to be futile since my giant dragon mates stood out in any crowd.

“I’ll borrow the dragon princes only for a month,” the evil queen continued, her lustful gaze never leaving my mates’ hot bodies. She was fucking their every inch with her eyes.

Rage sizzled in me, yet I contained it. If I provoked her, she would only break Elvey’s bones to punish me.

“Within a month,” Tianna said, “if the dragon princes choose me, they’ll be mine. If they reject me, then they can return to you. While the challenge is on, we’ll have truce. We can be civilized and you’ll live in my palace. The princes, however, will live in my chamber with me, never with you. Whether they warm my bed or not will be their choice. If you agree to the Challenge, I’ll break Elvey’s blood bond to me.”

Wrath surged in my heart even as ice pumped through my veins.

How could I whore my three mates out in exchange for my fourth mate’s freedom? But if I refused to play, she would shatter every single bone in Elvey’s body. And once he healed, the bitch would do it again and again.

I didn’t see any way out of this, but I still couldn’t sacrifice my dragon mates.

I swallowed. I wanted to reduce Tianna to dirt. “No,” I said. “You filthy bitch, you can’t have my mates!”

Tianna’s cat-green eyes sharpened in displeasure, and she raised her fingers, ready to snap. Ready to break Elvey’s bones again.

“No, you won’t hurt him again!” I shouted, throwing up my hands, ready to attack her with my White Light and everything I had.

“Do that and I’ll break every bone in him,” she said flatly.

“Break one more bone,” I said viciously. “And I’ll kill every one of your subjects here, and you’ll have no one to rule.”

A collective gasp of fear rippled through the court. Some of her subjects started moving toward the exit.

Tianna laughed cruelly. “You think I care about any of them?”

I was the one who had bluffed. Some of the Fae could be my mother’s people.

“We accept Queen Tianna’s Challenge,” Iokul called. “We’ll play.”

My heart stilled for a moment, and when it started beating again, every inch of me hurt.

I wheeled toward Iokul, my eyes wild with disbelief. Just as I yelled at him, a chime vibrated in the air and the ripple spread and hit all of us.

Magic had sealed the bargain.

“What have you done?” I asked, bile rising up to my throat, tears flowing down my face. “How could you do this to me?”

“As I told you before, Daisy, you aren’t the only one who makes decisions for us,” Blaze said. “And this time, we outvoted you.”

They’d talked among themselves in telepathic dragon tongue while I’d focused on battling Tianna. They’d made the decision without me. I knew they weren’t happy that my voice was louder than theirs on some issues, but I hadn’t expected that their resentment ran that deep.

I’d thought we were one.

“If this is the only way we can get rid of our masks,” Rai said, “we aren’t going to pass it up, not even for you, Daisy.”

The three of them tried to avoid eye contact with me as fury blazed in my eyes.

“Excellent,” Tianna said. “This went better than I thought.”

“Maybe you should break the bastard demigod’s blood bond to you, Your Majesty,” Iokul said. “He’s insufferable. We brothers are heading in a new direction, and we don’t want him to hang around and cling to you like a nasty bulldog puppy.”

“Possessive, aren’t you, my ice dragon prince?” Tianna smiled on a sigh.

“H *ear*t doesn't know. *Heart betrays. Heart breaks. Heart divides. Heart deceives. Only the boldest move wins the wicked game.*”

Sphinx's words rattled in my aching skull, mocking the doom of me and my consorts.

My mates had made the fatal decision and forced me to seal the deal.

Maybe they knew better?

Maybe it was the bold move that would win the wicked game?

I shook my head. I didn't think so.

My heart bled as I watched them distance themselves from me.

The Challenge had started.

My mates moved halfway away from me and toward Tianna. I stretched my hands toward them, but they ignored my gesture.

I dropped my hands in defeat.

I was to be shattered into a thousand pieces.

No, I wouldn't. I couldn't allow myself to break. Elvey needed me.

He gazed up at me, his eyes full of regret and pain, and that pain was for me.

“Break his blood bond to you, Tianna. Now!” I said, steel and venom in my voice. “I've accepted the Challenge.”

“I'm tired of him anyway,” the dark queen said. “He's of no use to me other than a constant menace. He diluted his blood with the vampire venom,

and he made a pact with a goddess.” She regarded me, a malicious smile distorting her bloodred lips. “He will soon belong to her even if I don’t break the blood bond. Either way, you won’t have him long, even though he was supposed to be your first mate centuries ago.”

I knew about his pact with Goddess Arianrhod. Tianna was just trying to add insult to injury. I would deal with Arianrhod after I handled my evil aunt.

“Release him from your fucking bond,” I hissed.

“I don’t like your tone, Daisy Danaenyth,” Tianna said. “I might not—”

“Just give him to her and let her take him, Your Majesty,” Iokul said with an exasperated sigh. “The demigod has always been a sore sight. I want him out of our way. Let her suffer him.”

A shard of glass stuck in my throat. Their attitude toward her had changed from calling her cunt to Your Majesty. Tianna saw my bitter expression, despite that I’d tried to cover up my emotions. She giggled in delight.

“A sore sight indeed,” Tianna said, eye-fucking Blaze, Iokul, and Rai one by one, and they turned up the voltage of their pure male sexy smiles.

They fucking grinned while my heart dripped with blood.

“Fine,” said Tianna.

She raised her hand, her fingernails slashing across her wrist. Her blood, half-black and half- red, leaked from the gush. The evil queen chanted a series of ancient spells.

Primal, dark, and foul power crackled the air, and the whole court staggered back at its impact.

A wave of black light burst out of Elvey. He clenched his teeth, and two trails of blood, half-black and half- red, trickled from his blue eyes.

“You fucking—” I roared, throwing my White Light at Tianna, but pulled it back just in time. If I attacked her first during the Challenge, I might forfeit my chance of winning back my three mates. “I asked you to break the fucking blood bond,” I thundered, “not to hurt him again.”

“Let the demigod tell you if he’s released,” Tianna said in disdain, and waved a hand dismissively.

Elvey’s throat bobbed up and down. “Daisy,” he said hoarsely. Tianna had just fixed his windpipe.

I knelt beside him, cradling him in my arms.

“It’s done,” Elvey said, smiling at me. “You freed me.”

Joy lit me up. But when I raised my head and my eyes found my dragon

mates, pain sliced through me again.

Iokul, Rai, and Blaze watched Elvey and me without emotion. All I saw were their cold, gorgeous faces under the masks—the masks they wanted to be rid of more than anything.

In order to remove their masks a bit earlier, they chose my enemy over me.

I trembled more violently than my injured Elvey.

Then, the next second, I lost Elvey in my embrace and also the sight of my consorts.

I stood on the glassy surface of the dark ocean, facing my ultimate enemy alone.

Realization dawned on me. Tianna had dragged me to this world of her illusion while my shield was weakened because of my inner turmoil. I pushed my magic at her, only to find that she merely wanted a private dialogue between us.

I enhanced my shield. I would allow her to have a brief conversation, for now.

Tianna regarded me with twisted amusement and interest. “It’s my obligation to tell you the truth of the Challenge,” she drawled. “If any of your mates betrays you in any fashion, you’ll lose. As soon as they’re intimate with me, the curse will return to you. This time it’ll be permanent and unbreakable. You’ll return to be the beasts of Furies for eternity. You won’t shift to Fae for even a second. And no one—not any man, your mates, or Elvey—will ever be able to save you. I planned your mother’s death, your curse, and this final backup Challenge for a millennium. How satisfying it is for me to see that your mother’s and Aine’s blood sacrifices for you were for nothing. That’s why I even allowed you to enter Sihde with such a bad attitude.”

Bile rose up to the back of my throat, and raw fear closed its tight passage.

If I returned to be the beast again and forever, I wouldn’t make it. The bitch didn’t even need to kill me. My mind would shatter, and I’d never pick up the pieces. Madness would claim me completely. And no one could ever reverse it.

Tianna knew exactly just that.

She giggled as she watched fear coat every inch of my skin.

With every ounce of sheer will that I possessed, I yanked the terror from

invading every cell in my body, tossed it at my feet, and stomped on it.

I wouldn't allow it to paralyze me.

I couldn't afford to let my one true enemy get into my head, not just for my sake, but for my mates', my warriors', and my people's—Fae, dragons, and humans alike.

“Why tell me this?” I asked with a stony face.

“First, the rule of the Challenge requires it. Second, I want you to suffer like no one has ever suffered. I want you to live in terror every second while you constantly ponder when your dragon consorts will betray you, and when they'll be so eager to let me fuck them.” Her devious smile grew wider, and it was the most evil smile I'd seen. “You'll scream and fight for a way out. But this time, there's no way out. And you can't tell anyone the true nature of the Challenge. You can't demand your former mates quit the game. Once you do, you'll fail the Challenge and return to be Furies immediately. The magic of the Challenge bonds all of us. You might want to research what happens to a Fae who breaks her promise.”

I already knew that. A Fae breaking a promise became a soulless creature, neither living nor dead, and never had a moment of relief. It was one of the worst fates.

I swallowed. My mind burned with one single determined thought.

I might not get out of this hell, but I'd make sure to drag her down with me, so she would never lay her claws on anyone else.

“You still have a month to remain in your lovely, queenly Fae form, niece. Enjoy every second while you can. Oh, you probably won't be able to, not even when you fuck Elvey, because your mind will keep wandering to when Blaze, Rai, and Iokul will pound between my thighs. I'll fuck them one at a time, then all of them. I can't wait to have their massive cocks.”

“Shut the fuck up, you disgusting worm,” I said.

My bonding magic flared up, and I shattered her glamoured world.

Tianna jerked on her throne of gold and black diamonds, outrage marring her deceptively beautiful face. She hadn't expected my strength. She hadn't expected that I could crash the bubbles of her illusion.

She wasn't done with me. She wanted to continue to toy with me out of boredom and nastiness, but I was done with her, for now.

Right now, she wasn't my concern, but Elvey was.

I held him in my arms, and my trembling ceased. "I'll never let anyone touch you again," I said, my gentle fingers tracing his jaw to comfort him, to assure him.

Even being tortured like this, Elvey was still gorgeous beyond words.

"And I won't let anyone touch you, beloved," he said fiercely.

I forced back my tears. Without him watching out for me, I'd have been dead several lifetimes over.

"Shush." I pulled him closer, knowing how painful it was for him to even talk.

Elvey passed out in my arms as his body finally relaxed.

"Healer!" I called. "I need a healer!"

No one approached us. No one dared.

Blaze, Iokul, and Rai watched us. They seemed to want to approach me, and I pleaded with them with my eyes, but they stopped halfway. All I got was unreadable expressions on their masked, hard faces.

My heart constricted.

Sphinx had said I would find a way home with four loves. He'd meant this fairy land was my home, the home that I'd never known.

I'd come back, freed my last mate as we'd set out to do, only to lose my other three mates.

Would I really lose them, or had I already lost them?

My agonized gaze traced them.

Couldn't they see that I was a mess? Wouldn't they come to pick me up like they'd done before?

A flicker of emotion flashed by their eyes, but that was all they had for me.

Tianna laughed. "Let's go, boys."

She rose from her throne, swaying her hips. She was every bit a seductress, sultry beauty in her every move.

Blaze, Rai, and Iokul snapped their heads toward her, enthralled again. They'd seen a fair share of gorgeous women in their lives and they hadn't been touched, until now.

They'd devoted themselves only to me, until now.

I wanted to lunge at them, drag them back with me, and make them stay with me. I wanted to bleed Tianna, so she could never bewitch my mates. But I could do nothing before the Challenge was over.

Cold logic told me that she didn't bespell my dragon consorts. She didn't need to. They were willing to go with her.

The dark Fae queen glided toward the exit in her red gown, her golden hair that didn't cover her fully exposed creamy back flowing at her feet. Blaze, Iokul, and Rai fought to walk on either side of her, just as they used to compete to win my affection.

They started bantering when Rai didn't get the coveted spot beside Tianna.

"Oh, you three, stop that." Tianna giggled, but not for my benefit this time. She thoroughly enjoyed their rivalry for her attention.

They left the room together, the usurper's sickening flirtatious laughter and the princes' growling at each other finally fading off.

My former consorts turned completely heartless toward me as soon as Tianna promised to lift the final piece of their curse.

My pain was too great it numbed me.

But I couldn't let it numb me. I needed to be functional.

I called for the healers again, but when I darted my wild gaze around, the whole court had vacated.

Everyone had left.

Out of fear of Tianna, no one came forward to help Elvey and me.

Rage, panic, and helplessness burned through me. One day, I'd level this court to nothingness.

"You'll be fine," I whispered in Elvey's ear. "I'll take care of you."

In my loneliest and most helpless state, a voice reached me. *When Tianna challenged you, she didn't know she'd made a mistake. According to the ancient royal Fae laws, only the heir can challenge the queen. While challenging you as a current ruler, she actually put herself in the position of the heir and endorsed you as her queen. And as the true queen, it's also in your position to denounce her ever to become your heir.*

It was the voice of the forest spirits I'd encountered, and it kept filling me with the details of the Challenging laws.

A ray of light pierced my clouded thoughts. As the rightful queen of Sihde, I could invite anyone into the realm. The barrier and ward could no longer stop my army should I summon my warriors.

My consciousness stretched far and searched outside the Red Palace. I called for my Fae warriors with my bonding magic, and my White Light crashed the illusion of the black sea and broke down the ward on the palace.

I waited until my small Fae army charged into the empty court, where I cradled a broken Elvey in my arms.

Rosalinda and Zembyr sprang toward me at the vanguard.

"Elvey needs a healer!" I said.

Rosalinda looked around, squatted beside me, and laid a hand on Elvey's forehead. "Where are you mates?" she asked.

A blood tear dropped from the corner my eye.

"Tianna took them?" Zembyr snarled, his knuckles white on the hilt of his broadsword.

"No, they chose to go with her," I said.

Rai, Blaze, and Iokul had left with Tianna without a backward glance at me, as if I was nothing to them.

I had no tears to spare, except for the one drop of blood that rolled down my cheek.

Zembyr's eyes burned with rage, but he didn't say anything. He'd seen enough betrayal in his lifetime. Quietly, he, Rosalinda, and another warrior lifted Elvey from the ground.

We carried Elvey to my suite in the vacant east wing of the palace.

According to the rules of Challenge, I'd have to live in the palace and attend court for the duration of the game.

Half of the Fae warriors settled in the east wing with me; the other half of the army would camp outside, so we wouldn't be trapped in one place if any conflict broke out.

Ginger, the healer we brought with the army, tended to Elvey and mended his bones, and Rosalinda assisted her. She had some healing magic. I was useless. I could contribute nothing other than wiping the sweat off Elvey's forehead.

"The bitch must have hexed your consort kings," Rosalinda said, clenching her fists. "We'll help you get them back. They're dragons. They might not be able to resist her Fae glamour. The only one who can resist her is Elvey, so she broke his bones." She gave me a look of sorrow and pride.

“You can oppose her as well, my true queen. You broke down her ward.”

I’d done that, but I couldn’t protect my mates from her.

“My mates didn’t know her true face,” I said numbly.

I couldn’t tell anyone the truth of the Challenge. I couldn’t tell her that the moment my consorts truly betrayed me, the curse would return to me and render me to the Fury beasts again and forever.

“They should have known Tianna is the ultimate evil that needs to be purged from this planet,” Zembyr said, his voice hard and unforgiving.

“Tianna can glamour and manipulate minds,” Rosalinda said. “She’s also a seductress and deceiver. She ensnares men’s bodies, hearts, and souls all the time. Elvey was her first failure, but then she blood bonded him.”

The unspoken words were clear. My court was worried that my dragon consorts wouldn’t be able to resist Tianna.

I swallowed the bile on my tongue. “They think she could lift their final curse,” I said dully, “and they’d no longer have to wear their masks by the end of the Challenge. I’m not giving them up. I’ll help them see who she really is. Afterwards, they can choose whom they really want.”

If they still wanted her—

I wouldn’t go there. I’d melt down if I went there. I’d figure this out later.

“Your Majesty,” Ginger raised her gaze from Elvey after hours working on him. “Tianna didn’t just break Lord Elvey’s bones. She cast a spell that prohibits him from healing. I can’t counter her spell. I could only straighten his bones. Lord Elvey will have to heal on his own.”

Rosalinda looked both worried and outraged. “In the past, it usually took a month for him to heal. Once his strength half-returned, he could eventually counter her spell.”

I shut my eyes for a second. He’d endured this kind of torture for centuries. I couldn’t accept that he would be bedridden for a month. Elvey had once mentioned that I would bring my White Light to the world and it would trump the darkness and set free all who were in bondage and slavery.

It hadn’t trumped the darkness. I hadn’t vanquished the evil queen. All I’d managed to do was lose three of my mates to her.

No, not yet. There’s still hope, a voice insisted in my mind. *You haven’t lost them yet.*

Elvey stirred, and my attention snapped back to him. I watched his long, lush eyelashes flutter, casting shadows under the hollow of his eyes. My mate was beautiful and in great pain, and he was struggling to regain

consciousness.

“Elvey!” my companions called his name to guide him back to us. “Lord Elvey!”

I was not a healer, but if it was the spell that bound him, I would free him from it. I wouldn’t let anything of the evil bitch stay in him.

My probing magic rolled off me and sank into Elvey. Instantly, I saw a fog of darkness hover over his broken bones like vultures. That was Tianna’s spell.

My rage howled, and I poured my White Light into Elvey. He was my fated mate, so my magic—all I had—would never hurt him.

But I forgot to warn the others.

A wave of light tossed everyone away from Elvey, sending them crashing into the walls. Rosalinda, Zembyr, and Ginger yelped in shock. Fortunately, my magic didn’t mark them as the enemies, so they would only have a few bruises.

My light burned away every trace of the dark fog inside Elvey, exorcising Tianna’s spell. Elvey’s bones and tissues weaved together.

He opened his blue eyes and smiled at me. I bent and kissed him gently on the lips.

“More,” he whispered, his eyes sparkling with starlight.

I strode into the throne hall, with Elvey beside me as my equal. Zembyr, Rosalinda, and three of my royal guards flanked us.

The court was full, kneeling in front of Tianna. As soon as they caught the sight of Elvey, they uttered murmurs of surprises. They hadn't expected him to recover in a day's time after their evil queen shattered his bones.

I would always remember that none of them had helped him. As my cold gaze skimmed them, Elvey flashed them a devilish grin, as if he wanted to show them his fangs. But he didn't have fangs, unlike my other three mates when they were in their dragon forms.

My stomach twisted. Were they still my mates?

My gaze sharpened and fixated on Blaze, Rai, and Iokul, who stood behind the black diamond throne where Tianna perched. They stared back at me. For a second, I believed that I saw intense longing for me in their eyes of different shades. Blaze's throat bobbed. He was less adept at disguising his emotions.

Were they regretting what they had done?

When I blinked and looked at them again, the pining wasn't there anymore. I might have just imagined it because I wanted to see that they still cared and wanted me.

The days when they fought to get me into their arms were long gone. They now looked at me as if they had never had a relationship with me. How

could one just wipe away love, tenderness, and memories overnight? Never in a million years had I believed that they would be so heartless and detached toward me.

Their uninterested gaze left me but stayed on Elvey, and hate formed in their eyes.

At least, Elvey could still get a reaction from them by grinning at them in that wicked way of his.

Had they already served Tianna in bed? The way they had gazed at her yesterday, regarding her as the most exquisite being they had ever set eyes on, still made my stomach turn. And when they had chosen to go with her, I knew the hole they punctured in my heart would never close.

If Elvey hadn't needed my care, I'd have fallen into pieces right in front of them and Tianna.

Now they wouldn't even look at me. They couldn't stand the sight of me, as if I sickened them. But I couldn't tear my eyes away from them, and kept drinking them in.

I wanted to trace their eyes—fiery golden, warm sapphire, and icy silver—that had always captivated me and still mesmerized me. I wanted to trace their cold masks with my fingers.

My heart jerked in pain. It was their masks that had undone our relationship. Tianna had said that I wasn't the one for them, but she was, and that only she could lift their curse if they stayed with her.

And they trusted her words instead of giving me more time to find a way to remove their masks. I doubted she'd do that, but even if she could, they wouldn't know that their last freedom would be at the cost of mine. Tianna was determined to send me back to the jungle as Furies again, knowing it would be worse than death for me, knowing it would finally break me.

My pitiful thoughts kept drifting, wondering if my mates had shared her bed, then a click of relief echoed in the chamber of my mind. No, they hadn't. If they'd done that, I would have been condemned to be Furies already.

At least, I still had hope. I could still fight for them.

They wouldn't have jumped into her bed so soon. They had never been cold-blooded bastards before. They wouldn't start now.

But the way they had treated me yesterday...

I wasn't so sure about anything anymore.

I'd never been so tormented.

The dragon princes might be able to kill love overnight, but I couldn't.

My love for them, for all of them, including Elvey, was stitched into the fabric of my soul.

Tianna studied me with a taunting interest in her cruel, green eyes. No matter how she flouted her beauty, she could never get rid of the foulness, malice, and death beneath it.

But only Elvey and I could see through her glamour.

The evil queen on the throne wore a red, nude fishtail gown of pure silk. Artfully embroidered pieces glimmered around her half-exposed breasts and her groin, drawing all eyes to those parts.

The shameless bitch was aiming for bold and exquisite sexiness. Judging from the lust coated in the eyes of many Fae males, she had achieved that.

A master at seduction, she would use every trick she'd cultivated for ages to lead my dragon mates away from me and doom me to eternity.

She won't doom you. I startled as I heard Elvey's fierce words in my head. *I won't allow it.*

He could project thoughts in my mind, now that he was no longer blood bonded to Tianna. Had he also heard the dialogue between her and me when she dragged me into her glamoured world?

I doubted she could have blocked him, but he had been in the grips of agony as she cracked his bones.

You're not alone, Daisy darling. And never will be. Elvey's voice caressed me, offering me courage and comfort. His hand reached for me and held mine.

I darted my gaze to Blaze, Rai, and Iokul again, wanting to know how they took in Tianna's glamoured sensuality. To my relief, they didn't seem to notice her uncovered skin too much or that her breasts half-popped out of her flimsy gown. They were busy glaring at Elvey as their stares flicked to our interlaced fingers.

Elvey flashed them a grin, and the fire of hatred leapt higher in their eyes.

Maybe we shouldn't rile them up, Elvey, I gently reminded him, yet I had no intention of extracting my hand from his. I needed his strength, and he had a plentiful supply of it, as he always had. *They aren't our target, in case you forgot.*

I don't forget, said Elvey. *But they have no idea what they're missing out on.*

Now only Elvey thought I was still a treasure.

The dragon princes tore their gazes from Elvey and cast on me.

I was clad in a black armor that accentuated my figure in all the right places. Their eyes roved over the two cups on my chest that left one-third of my breasts exposed, before tracing on my thighs that weren't concealed as well.

Knee-high boots hugged my long, toned legs like a second skin, and a wicked dagger was strapped on the sheath of my boots.

A white cape draped over my shoulders all the way down to the floor gave me a regal look.

I was showing them that I was a warrior queen. I didn't come for a tea party or to play Tianna's court games. I came to war, in court, in battlefield, and in bed, where I intended to win back my mates.

All the princes lingered their gazes on my breasts a second longer before they tore their eyes away. Iokul's gaze stayed with me longer than the others. Ice melted first, or at least it thawed a little. I hoped this image of mine would make them remember how we'd once battled our enemies together and how we'd once entangled with each other in bed, drenched in lust and sweat.

Game on, bitch!

They still drool over you, Daisy darling, Elvey said lazily in my mind.

I glanced at him, momentarily distracted by his taut muscles stretching under his classic, black shirt. His trousers were tailored to show off the powerful lines of his legs. He dressed more in the modern human fashion than in a Fae costume.

Fae males liked to wear either armor or tunics. Females usually chose an elegant gown. My dragon princes also had their armor on, as did all my royal guards.

My dragon princes? Were they still mine?

They frowned at me, noticing my brief ogling of Elvey, then averted their gazes. They hadn't been able to stay away from me before, and whenever they'd looked at me, I'd been sure that their world started with and ended with me.

It had been intoxicating to know I'd meant that much to them, and now I no longer owned it.

Tianna noticed how my eyes drew to the dragons and how hard I tried to hide the devastation in my eyes. She didn't miss a beat. I knew that even if I disguised it well she would still detect it.

She suddenly turned her head to check on them, a gloating smile ghosting her lips as she spotted the lack of affection for me on their masked, hard

faces.

Tianna switched her gaze toward me, her despicable smile widening, as if she had already won the first round of the game. She had three smolderingly hot dragons, who had once been mine, lounging around her, defending her behind her throne.

She'd taken everything that was mine.

I'd only gotten Elvey back. I would get the rest back.

I would leave her with nothing but death.

Three of Tianna's royal guards, who had stopped me from getting near the dais before, cut in before us.

"Go no further, Danaenyth and her escorts," the lead guard in red armor said, drawing his sword.

The gesture was for show and completely pointless. Bloodshed was prohibited from either side during the Challenge, unless it was self-defense. Whoever drew the first blood would suffer the wrath of the unseen force that governed the Challenge.

Duel magic was as binding as a Fae's promise.

"Know your fucking place, Jax," Elvey hissed. "You're addressing the true queen of Sihde."

"How dare you blaspheme, Elvey?" Tianna snarled from her throne.

But her power couldn't touch him now. I could see how she regretted breaking the blood bond between them.

"The dragon hybrid will never be my queen," Jax said. "I've served the one and true queen—Her Majesty Tianna—since the beginning."

He must have had a part in murdering my parents then—a blood debt he'd pay eventually.

Elvey ignored Tianna's sizzling anger with a cold, lazy smile. He flicked his wrist, and a violent current shoved Jax and his sidekicks aside, sending them colliding and kissing the marble floor. Some other guards tried to move in and charge us, but halted as Elvey snapped his merciless gaze at them.

A chime rose in the air.

A new throne, made of gold, white diamonds, and emeralds, materialized on a new, raised dais, on the left of Tianna.

The splendid throne had the emblem of a dragon carved on the left armrest and a crest of a shield with stars inside—the symbol of Sihde—etched on the right.

It was a throne for the queen of both the Dragon Realm and Sihde.

Tianna opened her red-painted mouth in an utter shock and rage. “Elvey, you’re dead!” But bound by the rules of the Challenge, she couldn’t attack my companions and me.

“I’m more alive than ever,” Elvey purred with a satisfied, ruthless smirk. “For the first time in a millennium, I’m finally living. Unfortunately for you, Tianna, you didn’t do your homework, but I don’t blame you. You were never rightfully, legally crowned when you usurped the throne, so the spirits and guardians of Sihde, who only pledge to the true queen, have never bothered to inform you one of the ancient royal Fae laws.

“When you challenged Queen Daisy Danaenyth, you put yourself at the position as the heir of Sihde royal house instead of its queen, which you were never truly were and will never be. And when you issued the Challenge, you helped establish Queen Daisy Danaenyth as the true and returned queen. That’s why she could break your ward and summon her court and army.

“That throne is her rightful place. Pitifully, before the end of the Challenge, she won’t kick you out from your fake throne, but eventually, she’ll send it to the fireplace where it can find its true use. And you’ll stand trial in front of all and get what you deserve.”

The court gasped, yet none of them or Tianna’s guards dared to object or stop me from striding toward the throne. Elvey never broke from our interlaced fingers.

Zembyr, Rosalinda and my royal guards moved behind us, their heads held high and shoulders squared straight.

I sat on the throne Elvey’s magic had conjured for me. To my surprise, it wasn’t that comfortable. But thrones probably weren’t built for comfort.

Elvey chuckled at my thoughts, as he leaned against my throne.

Was he playing a prank, at a time and place like this?

He only flashed me an innocent yet damn hot grin. With Elvey, one never knew what would come next. The next second, his handsome face grew solemn and fierce. Formidable power—both ancient and new—rippled off him.

Rosalinda, who stood with my other guards near my dais, stepped forward.

“Behold your true queen to Sihde and the Dragon Realm, Her Majesty Queen Daisy Danaenyth,” she announced, her voice loud, clear, and musical. “Pledge your loyalty!”

Had they rehearsed this behind my back?

The Fae in the court darted their uncertain gazes between Tianna and me. They knew I was what Rosalinda had declared to be, and they'd seen my display of power, which was terrifying, even though I hadn't been able to overthrow Tianna.

Some of them sent Elvey a resentful look for forcing them to choose and make a stand. Elvey grinned like the devil, loving the sight of Tianna's court squirming. I'd learned that part of Elvey was quite cruel and unforgiving.

I wanted to see who had been loyal to my mother and would be to me. I wanted no traitors or cowards in my court. Looking at the terror in everyone's eyes, I could tell that they feared Tianna much more than me. It would be a big gamble to throw their lot in with me.

If I lost the Challenge, they'd all lose their heads.

I could see some of them had made the decision, and some of them in the gray area were obviously struggling—mostly they wanted to go with Tianna, but what if I won? I wasn't as cruel as Tianna, but whoever chose her would have no part in my realm if I took back the crown.

"Choose," Elvey said again.

"Who are you to demand this of us?" someone shouted. "You're but the Dragon Queen's new plaything."

"Have some respect if you want your tongue intact after this is over," I said coldly. "Elvey Fionn is my rightful mate. He was destined to be my mate right from the beginning, but Tianna tricked him into a blood bond and cursed me. Now my mate and I have finally united. He's my consort and king to both the Danaenyth dynasty and Sihde."

I sensed Elvey tensing beside me. He hadn't expected that I'd declare him as mine in public. I probably should have consulted him first to see if he was willing.

But we didn't have time to get everything right.

Murmurs and whispers rose and fell, but I didn't care for the court's reactions. I turned my head slightly and glanced at Blaze, Rai, and Iokul. They stared ahead, bearing no expressions. Their masks helped to cover their feelings, but I had detected the muscles twisting on their jaws.

"What about your other three mates?" someone sneered.

"That's none of your business," I said. "But if you're so concerned, you can see that they're pretty much occupied with my old aunt."

The veins jumped on their temples. They could cover up their expressions, but they couldn't hide that.

It felt good to know I could still hurt them a little. But did I really want to hurt them? Yes, yes I did. Rage and resentment had started to uncoil in me at their betrayal after the initial shock had gradually faded.

No, they hadn't really done it, or I would have been turned to beasts by now.

What kind of game were they playing?

"Long live Queen Daisy and King Elvey!" Rosalinda shouted, and my royal guards echoed the words in a fierce roar.

They were the only few shouting in the entire court, which sounded pitiful despite their enthusiasm. If I had predicted this, I would have brought my army in to get more cheers and chants.

Tianna's cat-green eyes marked my team with a death threat. If I lost, she'd torture my companions before killing them.

"Enjoy your short-lived grandeur, niece, since it'll be more fleeting than you think," Tianna said, venom brimming in her voice. She turned to her court. "Where's your loyalty? The traitor Elvey demanded you choose. Show him where your allegiance lies."

She wanted me to see how she had her court under her thumb and what a short leash she held on them. She wanted to show me I was but a self-proclaimed lone queen no one wanted.

All the Fae started moving. Most of them moved to her side, but surprisingly, one third of the Fae moved to the left side—my side. They stood with me, despite being terrified of Tianna.

"We pledge our allegiance to Queen Daisy and King Elvey," a female Fae declared after taking a deep breath. Her violet eyes glued to me with determination, fear lurking beneath. "We serve the true queen Daisy Danaenyth, daughter to the crown princess Zuzana."

A few voices joined her pronouncement, then as one, they dropped to their knees.

As my magic probed them, it validated their sincerity. Some of them were my mother's old supporters and had survived Tianna's purge. Even as a dark Fae, my mother had always been kind. She would have ruled Sihde differently. She would never have ruled with terror and manipulation.

All Fae knew that Tianna had coveted the throne from the beginning. In order to ascend to power, she'd gotten rid of every royal family member standing in her way, including her own parents—the former king and queen.

Now I was the only one standing in her way. If it hadn't been for the

sacrifices of my mother, my aunt Aine, and their loyal guards, I wouldn't have been here.

I'd avenge them all.

"Traitors shall be punished to death!" Tianna shouted, and her smoke and purple light blasted toward the Fae on my side. If her magic touched them, they would all die.

"You won't!" I roared.

Elvey's blue light lashed out to shield our people.

My White Light had become an extension of my will and surged to intercept the purple light that smelled so foul. It couldn't be Fae magic.

The purple light bounced back when it met Elvey's blue light and my White Light.

"They're my court now," I said. "I claim them as my people. I protect what's mine. Attack them again at your own peril, Tianna."

Zembyr and my guards drew their swords as one, as did my court.

They were ready to fight.

I raised a hand to stop them. "During the Challenge, you will not shed blood, unless it's in self-defense. When I attend the court, you'll join me. Other times, you'll stay with my army camped in the realm."

"Long live Queen Daisy and King Elvey," they chanted, pounding their fists on their hearts.

"Long live Her Majesty Queen Tianna!" The other side roared, and they made more noise because of their larger numbers. If they weren't loud enough, they might suffer Tianna's punishment.

I dared to slip a glance at my dragon princes. My court had denounced them and elevated Elvey as their king.

My heart still ached and pined for my former mates, even though they had chosen to throw their lot in with my immortal enemy, even though they hadn't helped when Tianna had shattered Elvey's bones, even though they hadn't cared or defended us when Tianna tried to hurt my people.

I held a slim hope that was fading every second. But I still waited for them to join me, join us. We could move past the wrong decision they'd made, and I would eventually find a way to lift the last piece of their curse and remove their masks. They didn't have to stick with Tianna.

She was pure evil. She wouldn't do good for them, and in the end, she'd only enslave them, like she was doing now.

But the dragon princes kept their stoic faces the entire time, not even

bothering to spare me a glance.
My heart shattered all over again.

Elvey warded our side of the wing in the Red Palace and examined it daily. Rosalinda and Zembyr had the guards on the clock. We were living among the enemy, and every cautionary step was necessary. My magic would also alert me if any hostile force invaded our territory.

The night grew deep. In Elvey's old chamber, it was just him and me.

I took in the room that was devoid of any personality. It had scarce furniture: a desk, a closet, and a bed that seemed no one had slept on for a while. Elvey had never seen Sihde as his home. He resented this place, having been a blood slave for centuries.

But now he was free, and he was with me.

Should I have a chance to rule in Sihde, I'd make sure to level the Red Palace. I would choose another high court and would make both Sihde and the Dragon Realm a home for him and for many others.

You're my home, he said in my head. Yet he still didn't come to me as I perched on the edge of the bed. His hot gaze locked with mine.

"You claimed me in your court," he said, heat and tenderness in his blue eyes that were full of the mystery of the stars. I was falling into them.

I'd fallen into them a long time ago.

My heart fluttered, and I was afraid the tiny wings inside would carry it out of my body.

I raised an eyebrow, trying to maintain a cool manner. "You didn't

object,” I said. “You want to object now?”

A slow, sexy smile spread across his masculine beautiful face.

“You’d better make it in truth then,” he said, his voice rough with desire.

Fire sparked in my belly, spreading lower until it licked between my thighs.

Being with Elvey had a cost. He was a complicated man loaded with complications. But he saw me when no one else did. He’d seen me when I’d been the Fury beasts, when I was a dragon, and when I was Fae.

He’d been looking for me before I was even born.

I’d wanted him from the moment I’d set my sight on him. Now I would have him, but at a steely price—my other three mates.

No, it wasn’t because of Elvey that they’d chosen to leave me.

I shook my head. My heart was still broken, but—

Before I blinked, Elvey was on me in a flash. He pulled me up, crushing me against his hard chest, and his lips slanted onto mine.

He was gentle, and then he wasn’t. He’d been hungry for me for a millennium but had been denied every chance to be with me. And now his passion unleashed with a vengeance.

Its force was staggering. The demigod’s immense power infused into me. Powerful hybrid dragon and Fae or not, I wouldn’t have been able to take it if I weren’t his mate.

Already, my lips felt swollen, but I wouldn’t let him go.

My lips parted for him, and his tongue thrust in with pure male dominance and demand. Oh, Elvey knew how to demand and dominate.

But he didn’t just take as he ravished me; he let me taste a dream, burning stars and beyond. His scent of forest sunlight and faint pine covered me, trapping me in his blend of splendid illusion and harsh reality forever.

A mere kiss from him could undo me.

As I moaned, craving more, wanting more of him, all of him, he broke the kiss.

We panted hard with burning lust.

I stared at him, his eyes bright.

“Undress for me, woman,” he ordered.

He wanted to play slow and sensual when he’d kissed me like that?

I smirked, but I found that I wanted to undress for him. If he wanted slow burn, I would give him that, and we’d see who would burn up first.

I took time to remove my cape, tossing it to the floor. Then I bent forward

to remove my boots, very slowly, wiggling my ass at Elvey. At some point, I believed that I swayed my hips like a horny maiden.

Cold air touched my bare skin before I reached for my other boot.

Every piece of my armor was gone—he'd used magic to strip me off in a blink of an eye— while I was still bent, my rear toward him.

I straightened and wheeled toward him, my face flaming.

Dark lust and amusement sparkled in his eyes. He trailed his intense gaze all over me, caressing every inch of my body without touching.

"It's unfair," I said. "You asked me to take off my clothes, and you just stripped me without warning. And you're still fully dressed."

"What about I let you strip me?" he said with a corporeal smile. "Will you still complain?"

I pouted. "I don't know how to use magic to undress."

"I'll teach you. For now, you can probably help me with your hands. I like your hands."

I stalked toward him, until we were mere inches apart. I pressed a hand on his chest through the fabric, his powerful heart beating rhythmically under my palm.

And my heart beat equally loud.

I started unbuttoning his shirt as I controlled my urge to rip it apart, so we could be skin to skin. I pulled it off his broad shoulders and pressed my palms against his hot, bare torso.

He sucked in a sharp breath, and I could feel his pleasure.

My fingers traced his muscled chest down to the hard plane of his stomach, and all the way down to his waist.

He watched my every move, the heat in his eyes fueling my fire and my desire.

Swiftly, I unbuckled his belt and yanked open his fly.

I stretched myself against him, my mouth finding his as my hand slipped into his trousers and half wrapped around his hard cock.

Gods, it was so big that I might need two hands.

I had always thought Elvey was the patient one, for he'd waited for me for a millennium and endured things no one else could. But at this moment, he wasn't patient. He didn't wait for me to completely undress him.

A breeze passed by us, and then his clothes were all gone.

Our bare skin pressed against each other, mine soft and supple, his hard and muscled.

I moved my naked body against him, and my nipples hardened at the contact, shivering in want.

Elvey pulled away from my lips, lowering his mouth to my breast and capturing my nipple between his teeth. He started to suckle me greedily. A low moan escaped my throat, and I threw my head back as pleasure rippled through me. He sucked my tit so hard—almost brutally—I had to lace my hand in his hair to ground myself.

“My rosebuds. Mine,” he murmured as he suckled my other tit before tracing his lips down my body until they found my heated core.

He kissed it deeply, his tongue lapping and flicking my clit.

A hiss escaped me at the sensation. I jerked and moaned, my knees buckling as my fingers twisted his hair.

I begged for mercy. “Elvey!”

Here I was, bared before him, with not just my body, but my soul and my heart.

Take me, I said. I wasn’t patient anymore. I didn’t want slow burn or low burn. I wanted him to get his big cock inside me, penetrating me and filling me.

I wanted him to fuck me senseless.

But he pulled away again.

What was he waiting for? After all these centuries, he should no longer want to wait.

He gazed up at me, and I saw tears in his eyes.

“I never imagined I would have you and could be with you,” he said. “But you came for me and gave me back my freedom, my beloved.”

Emotion choked in my throat, and I couldn’t even utter a word. If only I could have come to him earlier.

Elvey’s mouth enveloped my pussy again, lapping at me like a starving man.

I shivered in pleasure and with burning need for him.

Elvey rose, swept me into his arms as if I were feather light, and carried me to the bed.

He laid me on the center of the sheet, and I watched him, waiting for his next move.

His gaze was full of desire and dark promise as it roved from my face all the way down, lingering on my breasts and my pussy the longest, then to my toes, inch by inch, before tracing back and staying at my pussy. I could feel it

was slick and swollen with urgent want.

He placed his hands on my knees and parted my legs wide before he settled between my thighs.

“I won’t be gentle,” he warned. “I won’t stop. I have to fuck you hard. I’ve wanted to fuck you for ages. I’ve pictured this thousands of times. I’ve been desperately searching for you for centuries. Now you’ve finally returned to me. And you’re in my bed.”

He was my first destined mate.

He should have been mine centuries ago. We’d been robbed of our union for nearly a millennium because my evil aunt had done this to us. I wouldn’t allow her to take anything from us again.

“Take me. Fuck me hard,” I said. “Make up for the time we lost.”

“I’ll fuck you until you’re sore. Until you bear my mark.”

He intended to claim me.

I held my breath in anticipation, wondering how he would fuck me and how his first stoke would make me feel.

I brought my knees up, flaunting my bare pussy before him.

He could no longer hold it back, his gaze on me so intense as if he wanted to devour me.

His nostrils flared as the scent of my arousal hit his senses. His thumb swept my sensitive nub before it brushed open my folds. His fingers dipped at my slick entrance, and then plunged into me, stroking swiftly once, twice, before he pulled his hand away.

I gasped at the loss, but before the protest had completely left my mouth, he plunged his cock into me with a single powerful thrust. He didn’t pause for a second but increased his pace, slamming into me quicker and harder.

He drove into me, pulled out to the tip, then plunged in even deeper.

I propelled my hips up to meet his every thrust, my breasts bouncing from the movement. I brought one of my hands up to tweak my nipple, the other gripping onto his well-muscled butt cheek, my nails digging into him.

He growled in approval, his passion burning brighter.

For a while, we fucked silently, our needs—raw, intense, brutal—overpowering everything and driving our thoughts out of our minds. His massive hard cock slid in and out of my slick and silky pussy, my walls clenching him with every thrust. He leaned his weight on his elbows, raised his torso, and watched himself fuck me.

I also watched his cock thrust in and out of me with such mighty force.

My greedy, possessive pussy kept pulling him in. It never wanted to let him go. It would never let him escape. The visual added more excitement, and the sound of flesh slapping flesh mercilessly only stoked our fire to sky high.

Intense pleasure ignited my every cell. I'd never felt so alive.

He quickened pace, his thrusting speed blinding. He was claiming me.

Male carnal need twisted his handsome features.

Pure ecstasy swept over me.

I longed for him to claim me. I was his from the beginning.

I wrapped my legs tightly around his waist. If I could trap him, I would trap him forever, so he would never leave.

"You never need to worry about that," he said. "I'll never leave. Even if I have to for some reasons, I'll always come back to you. I'll come back and fuck this tight, hot pussy until it's a hot mess. I want no other, only you."

I bucked up my hips to answer him, my brutal strength matching his.

A beastly sound rumbled through his chest. I'd thought between us only I had a dragon beast inside me. It turned out he had his own wild beast lurking in him. It was primordial and beyond powerful, and it approved of our mating.

For a second, I wondered which beast would be more formidable, his or my dragon, if they ever encountered each other on the battlefield.

Elvey chuckled. "Mine is not as aggressive as your dragon. It doesn't want to fight you. It only wants to fuck you into oblivion."

And they say war doesn't come to the bedroom?

It seemed our beasts also joined the fucking. Elvey's thrust became more feverish, and I rolled my eyes back as pleasure rained down in me like fire from the sky. Mating frenzy burned through my veins. Only Elvey's thrusting could relinquish the fever, but then it stoked the fire only higher and hotter.

His demigod magic came to play. It was rough and gentle at once as it slithered up my naked flesh. It licked and kissed me everywhere before focusing on brushing my plump clit.

I was in hell and heaven, and his magical fire engulfed me. I was ash and snowflake and star. I was free falling, drawn in by its gravity.

He continued pounding into me and I became weightless.

Raw, beautiful truth that had once hidden in his eyes opened up to me, and I read the wonder he would show me and me alone.

Even when the galaxies turned to dust, he would still be mine, and I his.

We'd be like this forever, with him claiming me, with his enormous hard

cock thrusting into me in this glorious pace.

My pussy clenched his shaft in great need, relishing the feel of him filling and stretching me.

My orgasm was within reach, but Elvey used his magic to keep my climax at bay. Damn the demigod for taunting me like this.

He was set to torment me and to make me peak at the iceberg of what he'd endured for all centuries.

I didn't exactly enjoy myself as Furies—a creature of nightmares.

“Please, Elvey,” I begged, breathless with my pending orgasm. It nearly reached its peak, but Elvey crushed the waves and made it tumble down, because he desired to prolong it. I let out a sequence of unintelligible words to show him how badly I need a release.

“End the torture,” I demanded.

“I endured a millennium of this torture,” he said, thrusting into my molten core and unleashing everything.

My heat and wetness exploded around his cock, and I arched my back off the bed as the waves of my orgasm tore through me. My body vibrated with the release, my skin heating, scorching under Elvey's touch.

Elvey pumped his bountiful seed into my womb and roared in joy.

Our mating bond snapped in place, a thread linking us, glowing as brilliantly as starlight. Our eyes widened as we saw it. Elvey lowered his lips to mine, our kiss gentle and burning with awe. “We're bonded for eternity, beloved.”

I threaded my fingers with his as he settled next to me, our bodies slick with sweat as I turned to rest my head on his broad chest.

The world's troubles and burdens and war were no longer in my head. How light I felt! Elvey held me tightly to him, a silence promise that he would never let me go. I shut my eyes, a stupid, satisfied grin spreading on my lips.

Just then I felt a sharp tug.

It was the mating bond that tied me to my three other mates. Their raw need for me crashed into me like a dark ocean wave. My heart jerked, and I traced the bond all the way while it stayed open.

Blaze, Iokul, and Rai surrounded Tianna in her vast chamber. Rai brought a glass of wine to her red lips, Blaze fed her a string of grapes, and Iokul dedicated himself to her by painting her toenails.

The three of them competed to compliment her, just as they'd once done

to me. Except with her, it was overkill. They acted as if she was their oxygen, and without her, they wouldn't know how to fucking breathe.

In her flimsy nightgown, Tianna was all smiling and seductive as she encouraged the three dragon princes to continue fighting for her affection.

Evidently, they were engrossed with her. They had no need of me. But if that were true, why had my mating bond shown their desperate need for me and led me to them?

It didn't do me any good. The sight of them with Tianna cleaved another slice from my tattered heart.

And then I saw Iokul raised his head, his icy silver eyes darkening to gun-metal grey. Blaze narrowed his tiger-golden eyes, and Rai flicked his sapphire gaze to the right, then left, the hand holding Tianna's wineglass trembling before stabilizing.

As if they'd all sensed me.

Tianna sat up straight, closing her legs, her arms crossing over her bone-white breasts. The three dragon princes all seemed to snap out of their trance and returned attention to her.

I couldn't bear to watch any longer, but I also couldn't stop.

A blast of wind shoved into my face, icy and violent. The princes had shut the mating bond like slamming a door in my face.

My insides twisted, and a wave of nausea swarmed into me.

I rolled off Elvey and rushed to the bathroom, bile rushing up into my throat. I'd barely made it to the toilet before I expelled the contents of my stomach into the bowl.

Elvey rushed after me, pulling my hair back and patting my back.

I flushed the toilet, and Elvey pulled me onto his lap and rocked me in his arms.

"We'll get them back," he said, "at all cost."

My three other mates had said the same thing about getting Elvey back, and look how that had turned out.

"I won't get them back if it takes you away," I said as unfamiliar cold dread invaded me.

"I don't matter," he said roughly. "You matter, and they matter."

"Don't you dare say something like that again! You matter just as much," I exclaimed, angry tears spilling from my eyes.

If he hadn't had that kind of idiotic belief, he wouldn't have been tricked by the evil queen in the first place.

“We’ll get them back, my heart. I promise,” he said confidently.

“Don’t promise,” I said, sobbing into him. “Promises are meant to be broken.”

My three former mates had promised to love me and devote to only me forever. And how soon they’d forgotten all about it.

“Shush, love. I’ll make sure mine stands.”

“They’ve betrayed me, Elvey,” I said, clinging to him. He was all I had now. But with certainty, I knew Elvey would never abandon me. He had proved it for a millennium.

“Things might not be what they appear,” he said carefully.

“I saw them. Iokul was painting her toenails.”

“Yet in the middle of it, they still called you. They might not know, but their souls called out for you.”

“How do you know?”

“We all share the mating bond. We’re all bonded. But it seems I’m the only one who knows how this works.” He pushed my hair away from my face and brushed his lips over the tip of my nose. “Your mating bond to them is still whole. It hasn’t broken. If they’d truly betrayed you, it’d have been cleaved, and you’d have felt the pain as if a force tore your soul apart.”

I had been feeling the soul-tearing pain, but I wouldn’t tell Elvey of it and add it to his pain.

“What do you mean?” I asked pathetically.

He smiled. “It appears that the Challenge between you and Tianna has its own definition of betrayal and its own arbitrary rules. No matter, cheer up now, my queen. Leave tomorrow’s trouble for tomorrow. I’ve just claimed you, and I want you to sleep peacefully in my arms. I’m a free man for the first time. And we’ll come up with a plan to get them back.”

I studied him, and when I spoke, my voice was uneasy. “Why aren’t you jealous?”

My other three mates had been constantly jealous of him and of each other. Jealousy was normal in a romantic and sexual relationship, right? Unless Elvey didn’t want me that much.

“You’re the only thing I’ve ever wanted in the universe, Daisy Danaenyth,” he said, cupping my face. “For centuries, I never stopped longing for you. I learned to accept my fate of only being one of your mates—if you’d want me—a long time ago. I had centuries of practice to get rid of any jealousy I might feel. However, love, I did envy the dragons when they

had you and I could only watch from afar.”

“I love you,” I said, and suddenly realized that I had never told other mates that I loved them, though I had loved them, and I still did, despite my bleeding heart.

His eyes burned with the star fire, and he kissed me again.

He fondled my breasts, and I moaned against him, needing him more than anything.

Elvey rolled me to my stomach. My heart pounded at the thrill anticipation as he moved on top of my back. With a swift, hungry, and powerful thrust, he drove into my wet heat again.

The next morning, when Elvey and I arrived at the throne room, my court was waiting outside for me.

The Challenge was between Tianna and me. We were forbidden to murder each other during the truce. She wasn't allowed to order a direct hit on my court, and neither could I. However, our subjects still had the free will of forgoing the rules, discarding the consequences, and slaughtering each other.

The dark Fae who belonged to my court trailed after me along with part of my army.

I didn't know what to expect today, but I was certain it wouldn't be pleasant. I actually dreaded seeing Tianna. It was extremely stressful to face my enemy every day and restrain myself from ending her.

I craved to see my former mates, but I dreaded facing them as well, especially after what I'd seen through our mating bond last night.

Gathering my courage, I advanced toward the dais and sucked in a sharp breath at the sight of what had become of my throne.

It was completely shredded.

Rosalinda hissed in rage, and Zembyr snarled. "Who dared?"

My court behind me roared in disbelief and anger.

The rule stated that bloodshed was prohibited during the Challenge, but it didn't say vandalism wasn't allowed.

Tianna perched on her throne of gold and diamonds and regarded us with a sadistic smile. Blaze, Rai, and Iokul stood behind her throne, guarding her as if she was their shiniest treasure.

My chest tightened as I held their stoic gazes.

Did I mean so little to them?

I turned to look at Elvey, but he only smiled lazily and tauntingly, which wasn't meant for me.

"Leave it to me, my queen," he said, planting a soft kiss on my lips.

Elvey had never cared what situation we were in. If he wanted to show me affection or flirt with me, he would even do it at the entrance of hell or in the heat of it.

My breath shortened when his sensual lips left mine. The bright light in my eyes dimmed when I met the princes' glares across the space. A flash of rage and disgust dominated Blaze's golden eyes. Bitterness flitted by Rai's. And Iokul's eyes were all ice and cold marble.

I averted my gaze. I could barely take the hatred in them, but my anger also sizzled as last night's memory of them pampering my enemy rushed back.

Elvey clasped his hands, and my throne became whole again.

Tianna pulled her red lips into a thin line, looking surprised and incensed at the same time. A sudden realization hit me. For centuries, Elvey had hidden his powers and talent from her while he had been blood bonded to her. He'd been smart enough not to let her see his tricks, so she couldn't use him much.

Tianna was a great manipulator, but Elvey also managed to deceive her.

Elvey didn't even spare her a glance. All his attention was on me, but I knew he was paying attention to everything, particularly the threat.

"Your throne, my beloved queen," he said, leading me to my throne, then standing beside me.

One day, I'd make him a throne beside me. My heart skipped a beat at the idea. I'd thought of only one throne instead of four. Did I subconsciously believe I'd already lost my other three mates?

Rosalinda, Zembyr, and my guards stood with the rest of my court. I waved for them to come near me. If it was an open court, we'd better get it started, so I could hear the issues that needed to be solved.

"Your throne won't last long, niece," Tianna said.

"Oh, it's going to last longer than yours," Elvey said with a whistle.

She looked at him with all the venom she could gather, yet she couldn't strike him. And when he trained his merciless gaze on her, she actually flinched. She forgot that he couldn't have countered her before because of their blood bond. Despite that Elvey hadn't had the chance to assail her, as a demigod, his power was formidable.

"You think you have her, Elvey?" Tianna said. "Wait till the end."

"You bore me a great deal, Tianna, as usual," Elvey said.

The court was completely quiet. I was glad Elvey could finally ridicule the evil queen and lash out at her after centuries, and I was happy to leave him to rile her up. I'd never had his talent for doing that. I was too straightforward and never good at playing games.

"You fucked her, didn't you, Elvey?" Tianna asked.

Elvey didn't even bother answering her but taunted the dragon princes with a grin. "Hey buddies."

The princes tightened their jaws.

I wanted to stop Elvey from goading them, but I was afraid it would only make things worse. Currently, I wasn't my former mates' favorite person, especially since they'd always been extremely jealous of Elvey. Even though they didn't care for me now—judging from the cold expressions on their masked faces—whatever I said or did would only irk them more.

Tianna, however, wouldn't let the opportunity to stir up more trouble pass by. She glanced over her shoulder at the dragon princes. "Oh, did you know he screwed the former whore you shared?"

"Stop it!" Blaze snapped, his eyes burning.

Iokul squeezed his shoulder but Blaze shrugged him off.

Tianna frowned in great displeasure.

"How was your night last night, princelings?" Elvey wouldn't let it go, either. He winked at them. "Mine was fabulous, to be honest."

"Shut your fucking hole, Elvey," Rai said. "Shove your fucking gloating where the sun doesn't shine."

What a jerk he turned to be.

How could one's personality shift overnight? Had their tenderness and adoration toward me all been lies? They were colder than the cursed masks on their perfect marble faces.

Were all lovers so fickle?

But as long as they hadn't slept with that viper, I might still be able to fight for them.

“I used to have higher hopes for you three, princelings,” Elvey said. “I thought at least you’d try to act like gentlemen when you were around Her Majesty Queen Daisy. Only one day with the fraudulent queen, and you’re already being corrupted.” He clicked his tongue. “What a shame. But it’s not too late to repent and beg the forgiveness of the true queen. Stay on the wrong side like those idiots and cowards,” he gestured toward the Fae on Tianna’s side in disdain, “and you’ll suffer the same demise.”

“Careful, Elvey,” Tianna said. “After I deal with my arrogant niece, I’ll deal with you.”

“I dare you to try, Tianna,” Elvey said coldly. “For centuries, you shackled me, but you never truly owned me for even a single day. You’re a failure and a fraud.”

Tianna’s nostrils flared with smoke. “When I come after you again,” she promised venomously, “you won’t have a bone left. I’ll peel your flesh off and feed them to the wild dogs.”

“Touch a hair on my mate’s head, you’ll suffer a worse fate, aunt,” I snarled. “Even death will be too good for you. You’ll beg for it, but filth like you won’t get it.”

“That was a very good and effective promise, my beloved queen,” Elvey said, and then grinned at my former consorts again. “So, did you boys have fun last night? You haven’t really answered me. What did you do anyway?”

“It’s none of your business,” Blaze said. “Just fuck off.”

Elvey tilted his head. “And if I don’t?”

“Then we’ll teach you some manners,” Iokul said. “You and your whore should not talk to us. Don’t even look at us.”

Tianna snickered.

Before we’d come to rescue Elvey, the ice dragon had been Elvey’s strongest sponsor. He’d accepted Elvey first and easiest among his brothers.

And he’d just called me a whore.

“You three are deplorable dicks,” Elvey hissed. “You don’t deserve her. Daisy is better off without you.”

Rai moved like a flash and punched Elvey in the face. Not expecting that, Elvey staggered back.

“No!” I called in horror and rose from the throne.

I didn’t want any of them hurt, even though all of my former mates deserved it.

“Stop it!” I shouted. “Whoever sheds the blood will be punished by the

force of the Challenge.”

“Oh, don’t worry about them, little niece.” Tianna laughed merrily. She wanted them to fight. She wanted the dragon princes to kill Elvey. “We can’t brawl like them, but the four of them are the variation in the Challenge, a loophole and a catalyst. My princes can kill Elvey and suffer no consequences.”

I didn’t trust her.

Elvey hit Rai back, and then in the next instant, they tangled together on the floor. Blaze and Iokul jumped in and the four of them rolled off the dais, wrestling with each other on the floor, throwing kicks and punches at each other.

Tianna leaned forward, giggling as she watched the fight.

I rushed toward them.

“Will you all stop?” I screamed.

None of them listened to me.

Blaze, Rai, and Iokul pinned Elvey down. For a second, I thought I saw a bond connect the four of them. But it couldn’t be. I must have imagined it, because the next second, the dragon princes’ fists rammed into Elvey from all directions, blow after blow landing on his face and his ribs.

They could use their magic to hurt each other worse, but for some reason, they seemed to prefer to brawl like barbarians.

I threw myself at Rai, trying to get him off Elvey, and he drove his elbow back and slammed into my face. I let out a painful yelp at the unexpected force, which threw me a few yards across the floor.

Suddenly, their fighting ceased. All four of them turned to me, silent shock on their faces. Rai, Blaze, and Iokul seemed to want to rush to me, but they just rose and stood there, watching me instead of coming toward me.

I swallowed back my tears as I felt a part of me die inside. The burning love they had once showed me had dissipated in a mere two days. All they had left for me was coldness and cruelty.

My court snarled in rage. They clutched their swords, ready to fight, ready to cut down my dragon princes.

I raised a hand at them while I was still on the floor. “No! Do not fight them,” I ordered. “Only the four of them can draw blood from each other.”

I rose to my feet just as Elvey delivered a blow to Rai’s jaw. “Touch my mate again, I’ll gut you, you fucker!”

Blood dripped from Rai’s nose, and that sight hurt me. Elvey had broken

the lightning dragon's nose. I clenched my fists to my sides to prevent myself from running to Rai to comfort him. Maybe he hadn't meant to hurt me. Maybe it'd been an accident.

Rai, for once, didn't punch back but snarled at Elvey.

"Elvey," I called.

He reached me in no time, quickly inspected me, and pulled me into his arms. "I'm sorry, my queen." It hurt him more than anything to see me in pain.

My shaking receded, and I touched the bruises under his eyes.

The dragon princes turned their faces away from us.

Rosalinda spat at them. "Motherfuckers! Traitors!"

"You're dead, dragon assholes." Zembyr pointed the tip of his sword at them. "Once the Challenge is over, you're all dead. No one who harms Her Majesty deserves to breathe!"

It seemed the Fae on my side wanted to throw something at my former mates.

"Don't," I said, not looking at the three of them.

"Yeah? Come and get us then," Blaze barked back.

"Ignore them," I said coldly. "They aren't worth it." I turned around in Elvey's arms and faced my people. "The court is adjourned for today."

I couldn't stand being in the same space with my former mates anymore.

"Princes," Tianna purred as the three of them jogged toward her throne to guard her again. "I thought the three of you would bleed the demigod like a pig."

"The bastard cheated," Iokul said. "He blocked us with his foul magic."

I knew Iokul was lying. If Elvey had used magic, I would have sensed it. Why was he lying? Maybe he wanted to look good in front of the evil queen he was so smitten with?

I shrugged and led my court toward the exit, leaving Tianna's victorious giggles behind.

I didn't look back.

"Don't act like you're a saint, Daisy Danaenyth," Blaze shouted behind me. "You're not. When we were with you, you constantly thought of him. You wanted to fuck him from the moment you saw him. You're the one who has never been truthful."

"Is he a good fuck?" Iokul called after me, his voice as icy as his cold heart. "I hope he's worth it."

Rai chuckled. I had never thought he was capable of cruelty. He'd once been the gentlest soul. And now he'd turned into a number one asshole. They had all become more than assholes.

My heart hardened.

When they crossed me and Elvey again, I would show them that my fangs and claws could also leave trails of blood.

"I'll run my blade through their fucking guts when the game is over," Rosalinda said.

"Add my sword," Zembyr said.

"And ours," the rest of my court echoed as one, following us out of the throne hall.

Elvey hadn't said anything, his strong arm sliding around my waist, offering whatever comfort, strength, and warmth I needed.

When we were alone in our suite, Elvey said quietly, "They still have feelings for you, Daisy."

I looked at him in horror and dismay. "How could you still speak for them?"

"If they don't, if they've truly been with that bitch, you wouldn't be here right now. You'd have returned to being Furies."

"I don't want their affection anymore," I said.

But both Elvey and I knew I was lying.

Once you loved someone with the depth of your soul, you'd have to tear your soul apart to root them out.

Elvey didn't expose my lie. He simply gathered me onto his lap, his erection hard beneath my butt. We tore at each other's clothes, shedding them as fast as our fingers would allow. He didn't use magic to rid us of our clothing this time.

"I'm going to unmake you with my eons of pent-up lust," he said hoarsely.

He lifted my hips and drove into my heat.

He thrust and thrust, my pussy gloving his cock greedily, tightly, and I threw my head back against his shoulder.

Every stroke hit my molten core until all I registered was our lust—hotter than hellfire—and pleasure that was not of this world. When I slammed down to his base again and again with an equally violent force, he called me his home, and it spilled my orgasm over the edge.

I collapsed against him, but I knew we were not done.

Elvey was intent on fucking me the entire night, intent on drawing orgasm after orgasm out of me.

I didn't want the morning to come so soon, yet the dawn arrived nevertheless.

I decided not to attend the court today. It would only sicken me to watch my former mates fight to worship my fatal enemy.

I'd dreaded my dragon princes' final betrayal, but now I was prepared for it. I was only waiting for the final blow to be delivered to me. My heart was a bloody mess, but I struggled to hold myself together. I had responsibilities to Elvey, my kingdoms, and my people. As a ruler, personal happiness wasn't above all.

Watching where things were heading to, I realized I had to come up with a backup plan. I needed to find a priestess and marry Elvey properly. I had to establish him as my king officially, so that when I was gone, he could take care of our people. I had no doubt that he would make a good king.

You also trusted the dragon princes completely and look how that turned out, A cold voice rose to the back of my head, but I shoved it away.

All I needed was to convince Elvey and make him vow to me that he would let me go once I returned to being Furies. Knowing him, it wouldn't be easy. He wouldn't put anything or anyone, including himself, above me. He wouldn't sacrifice me for the world. Instead, he would burn the world for me. I'd realized that much when I'd once glimpsed into his soul.

I'd have to trick him into an oath, so he would protect the two realms and

have a life himself. Otherwise, he'd follow me to the end of the world, to the doomed planet Pandemonium, and watch me live out eternity as Furies.

He would never leave me, not even after madness claimed me and I no longer recognized him, and attacked him constantly as the cursed beast of nightmare.

I'd never let him suffer through that.

I also needed to make him vow to rescue the dragon princes from Tianna's bewitching power and deception and return them to the Oslan Dominion. They wouldn't end up well if they remained with the viper.

"Scheming so early in the morning?" Elvey's rich, masculine voice purred in my ear.

He'd been awake, yet he didn't stir, wanting to hold me in his arms as long as he could.

I turned my head on his solid, muscled chest. How I loved to wake up with him, having his warmth and intoxicating pure male scent basking over me.

My fingers traced from his chest to the hard plane of his stomach, circling his belly button before sliding down further.

He sucked in a breath with anticipation, his eyes brightening.

My palm glided across his silky pubic hair and found what I was looking for.

Gods, his manhood was hard as granite and ready for me. My heart pounded in delight at his potent lust for me.

He'd mentioned that his cock was always hard around me.

As if perceiving my thoughts, he shifted his position to cup my breast. Pleasure washed over me, making me hunger for more.

"I've dreamt about this thousands of times," he said roughly, "believing the day would never come for me. But here you are—in my arms—ready, ripe, and wanting. And it's way better than any of my fantasies."

With that, he crashed his mouth onto mine.

I couldn't even imagine how hard it had been for him to know that I'd been fucking the dragon princes every night when he couldn't get any.

And he'd never come to demand me take him in but gave me my free will and left me to make my own choices. He'd never asked anything of me and never asked anything for himself, even when he'd been so desperate to shake free of Tianna and his slavery to her.

Tianna had tricked him, had brought a proud demigod down to his knees,

yet he hadn't broken.

And now, I was in front of him, raw and naked, giving myself to him without reservation.

All I desired was to make it up to him, for his loss, for his endurance, for his eons of misery, and for the love he had for me that had never waned.

Our lips moved together in hunger. I'd been hungry for him for centuries as the beast of nightmare, even though I didn't know I'd been hungering for him.

As he kneaded my nipple, I stroked his cock and pumped it up and down along its impressive length. I squeezed his shaft, wanting to cover more of his skin, since my hand could only wrap around half of his girth.

He groaned, approving of my fire within, and thrust his tongue into my open mouth. The tip of his tongue swept over my teeth, as if looking for my fangs, not forgetting that I was a dragon.

His tongue lapped at me, sparking wanton need and fire to boil in my blood.

His own beast stirred inside him, and I just knew how much it wanted me.

Few beings had the capacity of containing vast, profound, and deep emotions and feelings, but Elvey never had issue with that, not just because he was a primordial demigod. He was a male of strength, courage, and honor.

I was lucky to finally have him.

The pleasure is mine, Daisy darling, he said in my head.

His tongue mated to mine, claiming me again as he tasted every inch of my mouth.

It was the infinite kiss of a burning universe. It lit my every cell, making me more alive than ever.

Lust engulfed me.

I moved atop him, my breasts brushing against him, and I yearned to touch more of his skin.

I lifted my hips, rubbing my wet heat over his cock, then shifted slightly until it was positioned right at my entrance and between my swollen folds. I sank down on him, my pussy swallowing his cock.

I'd never tried this angle before, and it hit spots inside me I'd never known existed.

I glided along his hard length, my nipples rubbing against his chest, sending tingles of pleasure all through my body.

In this position, it was impossible to have his entire length inside me, but

the intimacy of it was spectacularly erotic.

A low groan rumbled in his chest. He could no longer sustain it. He thought I was teasing him, when I only wanted more of him.

Dark lust coated his star-blue eyes and twisted his perfect, masculine features. He almost looked beastly as his inner beast peeked out. With a growl, he pulled me up, rolled me over, and dragged me to the edge of the bed.

Planting his feet firmly on the floor, he flipped me over, my stomach pressing against the sheet, my crotch grinding on the edge of the bed. He palmed my pussy from behind, coating my swollen lips in my slick arousal. His fingers rolled over my aching nub before he pinched it between his thumb and forefinger.

Lust seared me, and pleasure hit my every nerve ending. Just when I was about to come, Elvey withdrew his hand, lifted my legs, and spread them wide.

He slid between my thighs, his hands gripping my ankles.

My bare pussy was completely exposed to him. My folds opened in invitation, but my passage clenched with aching need. His crown brushed my inner thighs and nudged at my entrance.

Without warning, he thrust into me, penetrating me. He was so big and hard I could feel his every inch. His cock grew even bigger inside me, stretching my inner structure to the limit.

He knew I could take him since he was my mate.

He pushed further until he was seated deep inside me and let out a low growl of satisfaction.

“Now I’m really going to fuck you,” he said hoarsely.

I sucked in a breath as he pulled out to the tip, then slammed back into me like a savage, repeating that movement in quick strokes.

He was no longer gentle. His fingers dug into my hip, the other kneading my butt cheek as he poured his eons of starving hunger and longing into me.

Power rolled off him and submerged into me, and my every dormant cell came roaring alive.

He thrust into me, long and hard and raw. A breathless moan left me, which only excited him more. He accelerated his speed until it was blinding. His strength, speed, power, and more made stars dance in front of my eyelids.

My vision blurred at the hyper pleasure. If I weren’t a hybrid of dragon and Fae, I would faint from this raw fucking that seemed to have no end in

sight.

But I knew my demigod mate needed it.

He lifted my hips higher to suit his thrusts. It was as if his beast had awoken and he could no longer hold a leash of its brutal lust and primal need. I swore I heard its snarls when the demigod fucked me with inhuman force.

I wasn't afraid. No matter how formidable and powerful he was, I was his mate in every way. I was made for him, as he was made for me, though my curse and time had separated us from each other for centuries.

Our union was meant to be like this.

"I'm fucking you, woman! I'm finally fucking you," he hissed. "This hot pussy finally belongs to me. I'll never stop fucking it. Hell, this is way better than I pictured. This is way better than any of my fantasies."

I breathed out. "Did you fantasize about other females?"

He pounded between my thighs without slowing down. "No, only you. Only this pussy."

I was unmade piece by piece by my demigod, until I erupted with the dragon fire.

My fire couldn't burn my mate, and he roared with me, pumping his seed into my lava.

The orgasms lasted for a while, until he let my feet down on the ground, and his delicious weight collapsed on my back. Sweat glistened over my entire body, but he didn't let me go. His hands came around to cup my breasts. His cock stayed hard in me, and his lips traced along my neck, cherishing me.

The gentleness contrasted so starkly with his nearly brutal fuck that it almost made me cry. I saw both sides of him, and I wanted all of him.

"You're mine, beloved," he said. "And my every breath is yours."

He pulled out of me and flipped me over. He let me lie on my back when he thrust into my pussy just as my orgasm started fading. The demigod Fae was insatiable.

"I want to see your face when you scream my name," he said, and thrust deeper into my wet heat.

"Let's fuck the whole day. I'm not going to the court today."

"I like the sound of that." He smiled wickedly, and lust was a living thing in his bright eyes. "I promise I'll make you produce all kind of lovely noises until you scream my name."

He resumed his hard, unceasing thrusts, until he broke me then mended

me and broke me again, just to show me I was his through and through.



LIGHT SIFTED through the magically warded window, filtering ember hues on Elvey's lavender hair. His lush lashes carrying the light fluttered, lust still thick in his blue eyes. His desire for me would never fade, as he'd told me. And my pulse would forever race for him.

It had been like that since we'd first met.

And here, we lay together, my head on his chest, my hands threading through his tousled hair. It almost felt peaceful, but I knew danger lurked in every shadow, surrounding us.

This wasn't our home, though I intended to make Sihde a home for all the Fae if I beat Tianna in a month. The prospect looked grim, and a sudden feeling of defeat swarmed over me.

I couldn't forget the callous, uncaring looks the dragon princes had cast my way yesterday. It seared my heart with pain, which had been even worse than when Rai had backhanded me. Among the three of them, he had been the sweetest. And now he was the cruelest.

A knock sounded at the door.

Elvey and I traded a grin. We'd been lazing about in bed for too long. My guards had been trying to give us as much time as possible, but we weren't on vacation. We were in enemy territory.

"Just a second," Elvey called, and brushed a kiss over my lips. "We need to get up, my queen, before they all rush in and see us like this. I don't care if they admire my nudity, but I don't want any eyes on my mate."

I slanted him a look. "I have no intention of letting anyone get an eyeful of you, either."

He chuckled, and we headed to the closet to pick out our outfits.

When we were fully dressed, Elvey opened the door.

Rosalinda peeked her blonde head in, teasing laughter dancing in her forest green eyes, as if she was exceptionally happy that her friend got laid.

Zembyr followed her in, and he was subtler than Rosalinda. He kept his warrior's face intact, but a small smile sparkled in his eyes. He'd seen how my former mates treated me, and he was comforted that his rescuer had hooked up with me, mending my broken heart.

“I’m so sorry for interrupting, Your Majesties,” Rosalinda said. “But your people have been waiting for a while. They want to know when you’ll be holding the court today and are eager to serve you. Tianna also sent her guards to demand you attend the court.”

“That bitch must have a new game plan,” I said. “She can go fuck herself. I’m not holding court today.”

“The rule requires you to be at the court,” Elvey said. “However, it doesn’t say when.”

“Then I’ll only show up for a brief moment before sundown,” I said, smiling at Elvey. His knowledge was handy, and he always found clever loopholes for me to work around.

As he kissed the crown of my head in affection, I turned to Rosalinda. “Find me a priestess as soon as possible please.”

Rosalinda blinked.

“I intend to formalize my marriage to Elvey and crown him the king to the two realms,” I said. “Under the circumstances, the ceremony has to be simple and quick.”

A smile broke across Rosalinda’s lips. “On it,” she said, and went to hug Elvey.

I didn’t like her holding him so tightly. Just before I stalked to them to pull her away, despite a sparkle of tears in her eyes, Elvey gently extricated himself, as if knowing how insanely possessive I’d become.

He flashed me a sly smile, but in an instant, it was gone. Rage and fierceness hardened his handsome face. “You’re mad if you think I’ll go with your final plan, Daisy. The bitch won’t win. You won’t be reduced to a beast. I won’t abandon you for anyone or the whole world. The universe can burn and rot for all I care. And I promise you, we’ll get them back.”

Elvey had insisted that my former mates were still redeemable and still had feelings for me. I had no hope or faith left in them, but he held it for me, just like he’d always had.

I swallowed and laid my hand on his arm.

“Even so, I still want to marry you properly,” I said. “Will you deny your queen?”

“How can I deny you anything?”

But the silver-tongued demigod would, when he saw it was the right thing to do or suited his needs.

“I’ll go hunt down the priestess now,” Rosalinda said.

“In secret,” I said.

“Of course, Your Majesty,” she said. “Secrecy is what His Majesty Elvey and I are best at.”

Laughter glinted in her eyes as she rushed off.

Rosalinda and Zembyr were more than competent. In the past two days, they’d incorporated those of Tianna’s former court, who had chosen me, into their rank seamlessly. They’d also managed to communicate to our army outside Sihde.

But I had another problem to concern myself with. When the final war broke out, where would the Oslanian army stand, if their princes turned against me? Maybe we should dismiss them right now.

As my dark gaze found Elvey, he only shook his head. “Not yet.”

We had positioned the Oslanian army at the rear. If they turned, Tianna’s dark Fae army and the Oslanian dragon army would sandwich us and slaughter us.

“We’ll have a use for them,” Elvey insisted. “We’ll turn the tide. Trust me.”

I trusted Elvey, but I no longer trusted my former mates.

I turned to Zembyr. “Summon Adrian and Jarrod to the Forbidden Forest in secret. Don’t let any of the princes’ men know about it.”

Zembyr blinked. “But the dragons can’t cross the veil to Sihde.”

“The ones permitted by Queen Daisy can cross now,” Elvey said with a brilliant white smile. “The Challenge she accepted granted her the rights.”

Zembyr’s eyes lightened. “So, our main army can come to Sihde and fight?”

“Yes, Zembyr,” I said, a smile also dancing in my eyes. “But I’m not summoning the army now. That’ll be one of our secret weapons. Anyway, I’ll need Adrian and Jarrod, from the Dragon Realm side, to bear witness to the ceremony of my marriage to Elvey.”

Zembyr’s face darkened as he realized that I was making arrangements for the future in case I didn’t make it.

Elvey squeezed my shoulder. “I want to marry you more than anything, my heart, but it won’t come to that. With my blood, I won’t allow it.”

I swallowed. Elvey didn’t care to be the king. But I needed him to take care of our people instead of me. First, I needed to have the rite done, so no realms could deny his rule in my absence.

This was the first time I went behind my former consorts’ back and

treated them as my enemies. I'd never expected for us to be divided like this, and I hated it more than anything that it had come to this, but reality had reared its ugly head, and all I could do was to prevent another nightmare and protect Elvey and my people's interests.

In the end, if I lost, I wouldn't even need to do the final deed and cleave my former mates out of my heart. My Fury beasts wouldn't remember them. Nor would they remember Elvey.

Zembyr nodded gravely and exited the room.

I shoved down the desolation swirling inside me and kissed Elvey.

My court and my small Fae army entered the Forbidden Forest—the forest that had once whisked me away because of my curse, the forest that had been poisoned by Tianna, the forest that remembered me and had waited for my return.

It had accepted me as the true queen of Sihde and begged me to heal it.

It would be my eyes and ears, and the spirits wouldn't allow Tianna's spies to enter.

The Fae who had pledged their allegiance to me in Tianna's throne room gagged at what they'd seen in front of them. I had ripped off the evil queen's glamour, so the forest now bore no illusion of endless blue, silver, and glowing blossoms. I wanted them to see what the Forbidden Forest had become.

It was blackened, dried, and bleak, but it was no longer dying after I returned. It'd drawn some life force from me—its queen—at my permission. The smell of death and decay was also fading.

My court raged at seeing the reality of their beloved land.

Faint magic tugged at me, like last time, but it was no longer starving.

"You're getting better, forest," I said.

Thanks to you, our queen, a forest spirit said. We're recovering faster since you removed the poisonous glamour.

You must win the Challenge, so we can heal properly and continue to

exist, another voice said.

They'd foreseen Tianna's game before we left here last time. They'd warned me, "*Be aware of the betrayals, yet not all are what they appear to be.*"

The dragon princes had demanded to have the traitor's names and vowed to gut him. The irony was that they had turned out to be the turncoats.

The rest of the forest spirits' words chimed in my head. "*Be aware of the double faces and two foulest entities in one. Only when your mates and you find her darkest secret will you free us all.*"

If my former consorts were the traitors, the forest spirits wouldn't have used the plural when they predicted. "*Only when your mates and you find her darkest secret...*"

I hadn't turned into Furies. I was still here, though I was running out of time.

Could my three other mates be double agents?

But could the hardened, heartless looks they'd cast my way and the cruelty they'd shown me all be a ruse?

I no longer knew anything anymore.

It's an honor you bestow on us to have your bonding ceremony in our forest, our queen, the spirits sighed with satisfaction. *We're guarding the entrances. No enemies can enter.*

I nodded. Elvey and I would be formally wed here.

The Forbidden Forest wasn't as glorious as before. The blossoms had faded, the trees blackened, and the soil dried. It wasn't exactly a romantic setting for a wedding ceremony, but it was practical.

Under my current dire condition, safety was most important, and I needed to get this done quickly. The forest would keep watch while we carried on our affairs, and its ivy vines with razor sharp edges would keep the enemies out.

"Thank you," I said to the forest.

Hello, Elvey Fionn, finally, the spirits greeted, turning their interest on Elvey.

He flashed a feral grin at the spirits only he could see. Somehow, I had a hunch their history wasn't completely pleasant.

While Elvey and the spirits engaged in their now coded, silent-to-others conversation, I found the priestess standing beside Rosalinda amid my court.

She wore a white gown, and I was clad in armor, ready for battle. Her

violet eyes never left me. As soon as I was done talking to the spirits, she glided toward me. From her expression, I could tell that she'd heard every word of the conversation between the spirits and me. Evidently, she was deeply rooted in the spiritual world. She was a priestess, after all.

And if the Forbidden Forest had allowed her in, it meant she wasn't in Tianna's pocket.

The dried leaves and twigs weren't obstacles to her graceful gait. The priestess paused in front of me.

"Your Majesty," she said, bowing her head an inch.

"Lady Odelia, thank you for coming," I said. I hadn't had time to learn much about her other than her name.

Her piercing eyes softened with glistening tears. "I once crowned Princess Zuzana when she was named heir to the throne. I'm glad you returned."

The mention of my mother made my throat constrict, but I didn't show the sentiment in front of everyone else.

"Shall we get this ceremony going?" I asked.

She smiled, her tears gone. "That's why I came."

I looked around at my court and a small army gathered behind me, Adrian and Jarrod among them.

Murderous rage burned in Adrian's eyes. Zembyr must have briefed him about the dragon princes' treachery. And even so, I wouldn't let anyone lay a hand on them or exact revenge on them. They were still mine. Even when they became the thorny issue, they were mine to deal with. I would soon remind the Fae before anyone tried to do something foolish like assassinate Blaze, Rai, and Iokul.

Under an ancient gray tree, Elvey and I took a simple vow before Priestess Odelia.

"I loved you before I met you, Daisy Danaenyth," Elvey said, "and I'll love you even after the world ends, after all the stars turn to dust. I'll guard you and cherish you until my very last breath, and even then, my spirit will protect you from all harm."

"I loved you at first sight, though I didn't know it back then," I said. "My heart, soul, and body all belong to you, every piece of me, utterly and completely and deeply. I vow to the God of the universe, I'll allow no one and nothing to take you away from me again."

Tears glinted in Elvey's eyes. He pulled me to him and kissed me before

the priestess even asked him to kiss his bride. The kiss burned me and imprinted on my soul, and heat roared in my blood.

Odelia sent Elvey an annoyed yet amused look.

“As all have witnessed,” Odelia said on a sigh, “I now announce you husband and wife. But King Elvey, you might want to break up the kiss. We need to finish the ritual with the final blood bond.”

Elvey kissed me deeply for a few more seconds, then reluctantly left my lips. I could feel my lips were already swollen and heard a few chuckles in the crowd. But I couldn't blame Elvey. He'd hungered for me for an eon.

Odelia handed Elvey a sacred dagger with glowing runes on the blade. He sliced along the center of his palm and handed me the dagger. I followed suit and swiftly sliced the length of my palm, then we grasped each other's hands and our blood merged.

We tightened our grip on each other, and tiny droplets of our mixed blood dripped to the forest floor.

A matching bonding rune appeared on our arms at the same time, radiating before etching permanently on our skin.

We were bonded for eternity.

“It is done!” Odelia announced proudly.

“Long live Queen Daisy and King Elvey!” those gathered around us chanted and cheered.

I heard a satisfied, collective sigh from the forest spirits. Above us, blue and silver blossoms bloomed and glowed like little stars.

Sihde had taken in our magical blood and made a small miracle with its own magic to bless our union.

Elvey grabbed me for another kiss.

I kissed him back vehemently, giving him all I had, but my heart still ached. My three dragon princes were no longer with me. The four of us were supposed to be a completed picture. While I'd finally gotten back the last piece in my soul, I'd lost the other three pieces.

Elvey's kiss turned to sunlight, its warmth and brightness dulling the pain radiating from my heart.

The court approached us. Rosalinda, Adrian, and Zembyr all came to clasp Elvey's shoulders to congratulate him before we broke our kiss.

Adrian was less cheerful than the others. Zembyr must have told him about the Challenge. And he knew why I'd rushed the wedding. I wanted them all to witness this, so they'd accept Elvey's rule and assist him.

Tianna's spies were at the boundary of the forest, the spirits said. We've kept them out long enough, but their evil queen is coming, and she'll use her foul magic to force entry and hurt us.

I called for the court to dismiss at the spirits' warning, and the forest showed them the quickest exit to avoid Tianna's spies.

"I should wait out here for Tianna," I said to the forest spirits, "and battle her if she dares to harm you."

We'll be more useful to you if she doesn't perceive our alliance to you, our queen, said the spirits. And there's something important we've wanted to show you. Now it's time. Only you, your mate, and your most trusted companions shall go there and see the truth.

"What is it?" I asked.

The power that makes our enemy invincible, the spirits said. The power that allowed her to defeat and kill your mother, the sweetest Fae princess Aine, and their loyal sentinels.

Go now!

Elvey teleported Rosalinda, Adrian, Zembyr, and me to the mapped location the forest spirits had shown him. Jarrod had returned to the Dragon Realm to coordinate our army's move.

As my dizziness from the teleportation faded, I noticed that we had landed in the ruins of half wilderness and half grassy land.

"This is the closest my teleportation can take us," Elvey whispered beside me, his arm sneaking around my waist protectively. "Dark magic wards the place, and we're right outside its barrier."

The wind didn't stir here, and the stillness of the air was eerie. The air smelled putrid, and I sensed great evil moving beneath the soil and rocks.

My companions all tensed as tight as the strings on a bow. They had also felt the malevolence. Each of them drew their swords.

Elvey glanced at them and nodded. "Ready for battle."

Zembyr darted his stern eyes wildly.

"You won't need to look further." Elvey said with a smirk, as if we were going to a festival. "They'll show, and soon."

"What is this place?" I asked quietly.

"The Breath of the Wild," Elvey said. "I have been trying to find it for a while, but it's been concealed. Without the help of the forest guardians, we would never have found it."

I raised my gaze toward a gray, stone temple in the distance. That should

be our destination since it was the only structure in the wilderness. It was where the spirits wanted us to dig out Tianna's secrets.

"Let's move," I said.

Zembyr charged ahead, and something slammed into him, sending him flying several yards backward. The giant warrior sprawled on the rocky ground on his back. He groaned in outrage and cursed as he sat up.

"As I said, it is warded," Elvey said.

Without a word, I threw my hands up and flung my White Light at the unseen ward.

A black net materialized and flashed dots at the assault of my Light. And that was that.

"Interesting," Elvey pondered. "The ward shouldn't have withstood my wife's attack since she's the queen of the realm. And yet—"

My heart fluttered in wings. I loved hearing the word "wife" come from his lips. And officially, I'd only been his wife for a few minutes.

He narrowed his eyes. "It's made of a mix of Fae and demonic magic."

A light hit home. That was where the tainted foul odor was coming from. That was why the Forbidden Forest was sick. Tianna had infested the land with her black magic that had demonic elements in it. She associated with the demons. She'd sent a demon army after me twice.

No, it was more than associating. Her smoke magic came from demon's heritage. My grandfather had warned me that Tianna practiced all sorts of forbidden dark magic. And the forest spirits' warning rang in my ear. "*Be aware of the double faces and two foulest entities in one.*"

Which meant Tianna was an agent of both Fae and demon. Could she be possessed by a powerful demon?

"Little wife," Elvey said, "we need to combine our forces. We aren't just mate bonded. We've been blood bonded in a sacred rite. What's mine is yours, as what's yours is mine."

He spun me around, my back against his chest, our fingers linked.

"Try now," he said.

His primal power—it could level a city but wouldn't hurt his mate—poured into me, and my body buzzed with heat as if it was drunk on the delicious high voltage.

At the peak of the high, I let my White Light out. It crashed into the dark net, which resisted for a heartbeat before it fizzled out.

It was down.

When we lowered our joined hands, Elvey nodded at Rosalinda, and she walked through the opening, Adrian at her side. Elvey and I walked in the middle, and Zembyr brought up the rear.

We treaded carefully for a mile or so. The foulness and omnificence only grew worse as we approached the stone temple. There were hundreds of ancient stone stairs leading up to it. Before we climbed the staircase, a dozen or so horned demons appeared at the top of the stairs.

We had fewer numbers, but we were all lethal.

A slice of regret washed over me. How I missed having my dragon princes at my side. But they'd chosen to be at my enemy's side.

We moved up and crashed into the demons in a wave of steel.

They tossed dark smoke at us, and my White Light lashed out to meet it.

Zembyr roared and tossed his axe out. It buried into the chest of a demon closest to him. A longsword showed up next in his calloused hand and thrust into the next demon. A third demon darted to his side, ramming its horn into his shoulder while Zembyr swung his blade to meet his main opponent's.

Rosalinda moved like a flash beside Zembyr and cut the demon down before his horn could injure Zembyr. They fought side by side. The female Fae warrior's sword found a new target, but a giant, green-horned demon cleaved a gash into her thigh. Rosalinda didn't flinch. She simply slashed back at him.

Seven demons surrounded Elvey and me. I was the sole target. Elvey and I pressed our backs together. He hacked and swung his sword like it was an extension of his arm. The demigod's speed was blinding and his strength formidable. Where he went and touched, flesh dropped to a heap and death arrived promptly. I was thankful that my husband fought at my side.

Husband. I rolled the word over my tongue. I could get used to it.

I wielded my twin daggers and lunged at my opponents. Ignoring my frown of displeasure, Elvey constantly shifted our positions, so he would always face the heavy traffic.

Adrian shifted to his black dragon, streams of fire pouring from his mouth at the demons, his sharp talons tearing into their stinky flesh.

The battle ended fast, with the demons' corpses littering the stairs. My companions bore minor injuries.

We didn't spare the corpses a second glance, instead rushing forward to the vast temple.

The slant-roofed structure seemed to have been built in a time when

blood sacrifice had been common. Something unmistakably sinister leaked from its every brick and stone, as if souls were trapped inside and crying out in all forms of nightmares.

I could feel my fearless companions shuddering around me. They'd felt the same vibe from the tomb-like construction.

Elvey rubbed my arms where my tiny hairs all stood up. He kissed the top of my head. "I'm with you, my love."

A trail of blue light dashed out from his palm and into the temple, pulsing in the dark and illuminating it for us.

Rosalinda stalked in, but Elvey warned her. "I'll enter first. My wife will be positioned in the middle." He gave the black dragon a look. "You'll stay at the entrance and stand guard."

The dragon lifted to the air and perched atop the roof. In his beast form, Adrian would be able to see far around us.

As Elvey moved to the front, I strode beside him. "Where you go, I go," I said.

He hesitated for a heartbeat, then nodded. We might need to combine our magic again to fight the evil force ahead. Elvey was as protective as the dragon princes, but he also never held me back. He was as confident in me as he was in himself.

Together, we stepped cautiously into the lair, my magic probing ahead. I believed that Elvey was doing the same.

Rosalinda and Zembyr flanked us, their eyes darting around wildly, actively seeking hidden threats.

A demon lunged at us from a dark corner, but Zembyr was fast enough to grab the demon's horn and jab his sword into its chest.

We prowled on again, following Elvey's blue light.

Further in, the stench of foul magic, rotten flesh, rusty blood, and something else made me gag. I covered my nose and breathed in and out through my mouth. Rosalinda bent over and heaved out a vomit.

The walls were smeared with blood, both dried and fresh, dripping down the walls.

My magic detected terrifying evil pulsing underground, and that was where we needed to go, though all my instincts roared at me to run, to get away from this place, and never to return.

Elvey's hand squeezed mine. "I'm with you, my queen."

We continued on the stone path, which was also tainted with blood, our

footsteps echoing eerily in the dark chamber, our shadows dancing around as Elvey's blue light leapt erratically.

At the second turn, another demon jumped from the ceiling, missing me by inches. Elvey pierced his sword into the demon without casting a backward glance while Rosalinda decapitated the fallen creature.

My companions grew even tenser, expecting to be waylaid at every turn.

At the fourth turn, I sensed something dashing toward us in the air. It was so fast I didn't have a chance to call out a warning. A wave of blue light blasted out from Elvey and pushed forward before us. At the same time, my White Light followed and enhanced the defense of my husband's light.

Numerous darts dropped before us and turned to dirt.

Elvey cursed. "They're one of the nastiest spells. We were lucky we blocked them before any of them hit us."

"What kind of spells are they?" Rosalinda asked.

"Death and soul-catching spells," Elvey said.

Zembyr cursed profusely. "Nasty things! We need to kill Tianna as soon as possible."

A dark figure in a cloak ran across the space, away from us, but Rosalinda's knife aimed true and fast. It sailed toward the figure and buried into the back of the fugitive's skull. The enemy dropped in a heap.

Zembyr sprang ahead of us. When we reached the fallen enemy, Zembyr turned her around to see her face, blood pooling under her head.

"One of Tianna's black witches," Elvey said coldly. "They were guarding this place for her."

The witch must have tossed the spells at us.

Not far from her, steep stone stairs led down into gloomy dimness. That was the entrance point of the evil power I'd felt. My magic pricked, and chills ran down my spine.

Zembyr handed the dagger he'd extracted to Rosalinda. We shared a look and descended the stairs, my White Light shielding us.

The stairs twined left then right. At the bottom of the stairs, a vast underground chamber sprawled before us.

In the center was a black crystal container, enchanted and warded by dark magic. As we moved closer and looked through the sealed lid, we saw a dark heart suspended in it, pulsing like it was living. Hundreds of veins spread out from it, connecting to the standing glass coffins lined up against the walls.

To my horror, there was a living being—either Fae, human, or some other

species—fastened to the cords that led to the black heart in each transparent coffin. A terrifying comprehension hit me. They were feeding the heart. Their energy flowed to that living heart as if charging a battery.

“Soul charge,” Elvey whispered under his breath.

He stepped next to me as I went to inspect the unfortunate prisoners trapped inside the coffin. I even saw a white tiger and a dragon in chains among the Fae and humans.

“She’s been using their souls to charge the black heart, and the heart gives her power,” Elvey said. “I’d heard the rumors but never imagined this.”

“We must free them,” I said, wrath roaring in my bloodstream. I knew Tianna was pure evil, but the degree of her horror was just too great. “And then we’ll burn this place down.”

Before I threw out my White Light to break all the glass coffins, Elvey grabbed my wrist. “Not yet, darling.”

Zembyr gasped and cursed. He had gone to check the coffins on the opposite side of the room while Rosalinda stood guard.

He dropped to his knees before a coffin, tears streaming down his face in rivulets.

“Your Majesties,” he murmured, staring up at the coffin.

My heart skipped a beat. What was he saying?

Elvey and I hurried toward him, and I looking at a feeble male Fae and a female Fae who seemed to be his wife. The male Fae had my mother’s eyes, and thus mine, and the female Fae had my mother’s platinum hair color and soft lips.

Elvey sucked in a breath. “They’re your grandparents, King Elrond and Queen Phoebe.”

The king and the queen snapped their attention at me. They were barely alive, hanging onto the last thread of their life.

I clasped my hand over my mouth. Tianna had ruled for nine centuries, which meant they’d been supplying the dark heart with energy in this living hell for all this time.

Recognition bore into their eyes, and at the same time, grief, regret, and soul-weariness swirled in them. In the very depths of their eyes, I spotted a small inkling of hope.

“Daughter to Zuzana, our daughter?” the king asked weakly.

“I’m Daisy Danaenyth,” I said, my voice choked with emotion. “And yes, Zuzana was my mother.” I knew they’d stripped my mother of her title and

exiled her, and that they were part of the reason that my mother had been murdered. But looking at the twisted pain and insanity in their eyes, I could no longer hold them accountable.

“We wronged our daughter Zuzana,” the queen said, her glassy blue eyes glazing over as she struggled to get the words out. “We’re paying for our sins. My granddaughter, you’ve come for us. We didn’t know you survived.”

They were the last of my Fae family.

My throat closed up, but I managed to squeeze the words out. “How do we save them, Elvey? How do we free them?”

“You can’t,” the king said. “It’s too late for us. What’s left of us is but one last breath and one last sliver of our souls. We’re already drained. It’ll be the ultimate kindness to kill us. However, parts of our souls are trapped inside the black heart. Only when Tianna dies, and you kill the heart, will our souls and all the other tens and thousands of souls trapped in the black heart be set free. We’ve been here the longest since our powers were greater than any others and she wanted us to suffer. Others came and went. When they expired, she brought new ones to replenish the harvested souls to fuel the heart.”

Zembyr had gotten to his feet, looking shell-shocked. Rosalinda moved closer to us but didn’t forget her guard duties.

“What does the heart do?” Elvey asked, but I figured he already knew the answer. He just wanted a confirmation.

“It is linked to her,” my grandmother said. “It gives my youngest daughter tremendous power. The more souls the heart consumes, the more powerful she is.”

“That’s why there are rumors that she can’t be killed,” Elvey murmured, his thumb tracing his bottom lip. He did that sometimes when he was thinking. “We’ll have to kill the heart to kill her, so she won’t be able to resurrect.”

I turned on my heel. “Let’s destroy the black heart now!”

“No, granddaughter,” the queen called. “It’ll be a mistake.”

Elvey grabbed my wrist and pulled me back to him.

“The heart can’t be killed by normal methods, love,” he said.

“The demigod is right,” the king said, regarding him, though talking seemed to be growing more and more difficult for him and the queen. They were bone-tired and dying. “Tianna once gloated to us about her secret, believing we’d never be free. She wanted you more than anyone because

your power comes from the stars. But she failed to take your soul, so she managed to blood bond you.”

Rage coursed in my bones. The bitch had tried to harvest my mate’s soul.

“My husband is no longer blood bonded to Tianna,” I said, my dragon fire sparking in my eyes.

The old queen looked at us with satisfaction. “Our vengeance has finally come. We’ll soon rest, my king.”

She revealed more of Tianna’s secrets. “Tianna isn’t all herself. She merged with the demon king. Two foul entities cohabit in her body. When she stays in Sihde, she wears her Fae face. And when she travels to the demon realm, the demon king takes over. The portal to the Hell Region is here somewhere. Don’t let the abomination escape to the demon realm.”

Now the warning of the forest spirits finally made sense. “*Be aware of the double faces and two foulest entities in one.*”

No wonder Tianna’s magic was so powerful she could trick and ensnare a demigod.

No wonder my White Light couldn’t take her down.

The old king and queen knew all about their evil daughter’s dark secrets, except for the most crucial one—how to destroy her and the heart.

That was what we had to find out next, but I knew that secret didn’t lie in this chamber. Then where?

As if reading my thoughts, the queen said quietly, “You’ve found us. You now know part of your evil aunt’s secrets. Now go and find the way to destroy her. Make us proud.”

“I can end your suffering now, grandparents,” I said, tears flowing down my face, “if that’s what you want.” They wouldn’t make it even if I finish off Tianna.

A sorrowful smile ghosted the queen’s pale face and dull blue eyes. “You’ll only alert her. You need to have a plan to kill her before thinking of freeing us, child. Strategy matters. We can hang in here a little longer. We’ll wait for you.”

“I’ll return for you,” I vowed.

“And for your dragon father,” the old queen said. “He’s trapped inside the black heart, unable to reunite with your mother.”

Her words seared my heart like a hot iron brand. My lips trembled at the near-physical pain.

“We need to go now, love,” Elvey said. “Tianna’s spies must be tracking

us. We can't afford to alert her with what we've unveiled."

As we hurried by the glass coffins, the prisoners inside begged, "Free us, please."

"Kill us," others cried.

"Save us," more pleaded with us.

My heart fractured for all of them.

I'd thought being cursed and losing my three mates was a horrible burden to bear, until I encountered these tens of thousands of souls and had to carry their burden, misery, and curses.

Elvey pulled me into his fierce and gentle embrace. *You won't carry anything alone. I'm always with you.*

"We'll return and set you free, I promise," I told the trapped beings. "But you need to hold on a little longer."

Some of them who had more strength than others cursed me while my companions and I left them behind.

Even though Elvey wanted us to take off as soon as possible, he checked every coffin, eyeing the unfortunate occupant inside, his muscles twitching in his clenched jaw. Some of them must have been his old friends.

He stopped at the last coffin the longest, his star-blue eyes filling with agony.

Inside the glass was a Fae. She looked different than any dark Fae. Her silver hair had lost its shine. She was alive, though it seemed there was no life in her. She stared at Elvey, recognition sparking in her ice blue eyes—eyes that must have looked like the clearest sky before her capture. She opened her pale lips, wanting to tell him something, but no words came out. She was too weak.

"Who is she?" I asked.

Her gaze swirled slowly to me.

"Light Fae Princess Nerida." Elvey swallowed hard, as if there was a shard of glass stuck in his throat.

They knew each other. Had they been lovers?

I felt so sorry for them.

Elvey snapped his head to me. "It's not what you think." He turned back to gaze at her with tenderness.

Her lips moved, and I marked out the words. *Don't leave me, Elvey, please.*

In this state, she couldn't even shed tears.

“I’ll come back for you, Nerida,” Elvey said hoarsely. “I promise. I’ll never abandon you. I won’t leave you like this. I’ve finally found you.”

He raised his hand toward the coffin that trapped her, and a wall of transparent bubbles formed a shield around her.

“What’s that?” I asked.

“A shield that will keep her life force from flowing to the black heart,” Elvey said.

“Then shield all of them,” I said. “And shield my grandparents until we come back for them all.”

A look of grief darkened Elvey’s eyes. “I’m sorry I won’t be able to help others. My magic can shield only one person and link her to my essence to preserve her. Even if I can shield them all, it’ll alarm Tianna as soon as the black heart is deprived of the regular energy feeding. Plus, most of them are beyond saving, including your grandparents. All we can do is free their souls when we return.”

I knew he was telling the truth.

“But Nerida is in worse shape than my grandparents,” I said.

The veins in his temples jumped. “I’ve been looking for her for centuries,” he said, pain slicking in his eyes again, “just as I’d been searching for you. I can’t bear to see her hurt like that.”

She was so important to him that he was feeding her with his own life force. Was she more important to him than I was? It was horrid of me to even think of that and to feel jealousy when she was like that. I banished the green monster to the dark recess of my head.

“We have to go, until we come back.” I urged him.

Unable to bear to look at the princess again, Elvey pulled me to run with him, as if he wanted to run from his own past and all of darkness and nightmares in the world.

I broke free of Elvey’s hand, halted by the black crystal vessel, and stared through the lid at the black heart pulsing powerfully, greedily, and menacingly. There were tens of thousands of innocent souls, including my father’s, trapped in its great evil net.

I raised my twin daggers, my feet ready to kick off the lid, and plunged my blades into the black heart.

“Not yet,” Elvey said, pulling me away with his demigod’s strength.

Then he used his magic to make the corpses of the demons and the witch disappear and put on glamour to make the temple look the way it had been.

Tianna wouldn't discover the ruse unless she came in person and investigated in depth.

I would bet that while she was engaged in the Challenge with me, she wouldn't go anywhere, especially since she had the hot-as-fuck dragon princes adoring her and fighting for her affection.

As we ran out of the temple and down the stone stairs, with the black dragon flying ahead of us, all I thought of was the need to get to my former consorts and save them from Tianna.

The demon king/dark Fae queen had consumed tens of thousands of souls. She wouldn't spare the dragon princes once she was tired of them. She'd covet the dragon souls' immense energy.

It didn't matter that they'd turned on me in order to lift the final piece of their curse. I wouldn't want them to suffer that horrific fate at Tianna's hands. I wouldn't want anyone to suffer that fate.

It was time for them to see my adversary's true colors.

Elvey, Rosalinda, Zembyr, and I returned to the Red Palace. Adrian returned to our main army outside Sihde. He needed to lead them. Before he took off, he kissed Rosalinda, and the Fae warrior returned his kiss fiercely, instead of pushing him away like I thought she would.

When we entered the throne room, the court session was almost over. Tianna and the dragon princes had left. One of Tianna's servants told me that the dark queen was in the Lotus Lounge with the dragon princes. It seemed that the servants weren't all that loyal to their dark queen, either.

According to them, the princes had insisted on entertaining Tianna after I hadn't responded to her summons. Apparently, she had been furious beyond belief at my ignoring her.

I was more queen than she could ever be. The throne was mine. It always had been. And it would be mine. She had stolen it from me.

Elvey and I headed to the Lotus Lounge, with Rosalinda and Zembyr trailing behind us.

The lounge had a grand foyer that opened into what looked like an outdoor garden.

Jax—Tianna's captain—and a few guards in red armor blocked the entrance.

"You don't have permission to enter," Jax said haughtily.

"Careful when you speak to Her Majesty, Jax," Elvey drawled. "I'll only

say this once. Queen Daisy doesn't need permission to walk in her realm. Move or I'll remove you."

Jax spat. "I serve only one queen, and it is not the dragon bitch."

Rosalinda and Zembyr stepped forward, ready to strike Jax down. The enemy captain and his five guards moved toward us, more than eager to spill blood.

Tianna's supporters were bloodthirsty and loved destruction more than anything, but for Tianna not to forfeit the Challenge, they couldn't spill blood unless it was to defend themselves. If my warriors struck them first, they'd all fall under the blade of the punishing power of the unseen force.

I raised a hand to stop them.

Jax's lime-colored eyes flashed with evil delight. He spat again, "Dragon mongrel, you'll never be my queen, just like your whore mother, who didn't deserve to be the queen. She opened her legs for a filthy dragon and—"

Elvey moved, inhumanly fast, his hand closing over Jax's throat to choke his words and lifted Jax's body into the air.

"Let him go, please, Elvey," I said, quiet authority in my voice.

Elvey turned to me with a raised eyebrow, then acquiesced and dropped Jax.

Before the guard could get up from the ground, my bonding magic lashed out on its own. My magic seized his sick mind and twisted.

"Love?" Elvey asked, a questioning look on his face. "Maybe we should take it easy?" His worry that I would violate the rules of the challenge radiated toward me.

"No worries, my king," I said with a syrupy smile. "I didn't shed blood. I was only playing with his mind a little." Wasn't that another nice loophole? "And I won't kill him. At least, not yet." My voice took on a menacing tone.

Jax grasped his head with his hands and collapsed on the ground. I didn't offer him the gift of death, and he wouldn't die easily. He was living in his own nightmares. His face twisted grotesquely, and his mouth opened to scream, but no sound could come out.

I could be just as cruel as my evil bitch of an aunt.

The other guards behind him all paled and stepped back, leaving the entrance unguarded.

Flashing a dark smile, Elvey threaded his fingers with mine, and we treaded through the garden.

Zembyr and Rosalinda guarded the entrance.

I paused at the archway as moans of pleasures from Tianna and flirty laughter from my former consorts hit my ear. I was so familiar with the sounds the lightning dragon, the ice dragon, and the fire dragon made. Sounds only I had ever elicited from their mouths. I froze, sharp shards of ice piercing into my heart and clogging my throat.

Clusters of plants and blossoms blocked my sight, but Tianna's continuing moans of lust led me toward them. Elvey's fingers tightened around mine, offering me comfort and strength, but for the first time, he failed.

I unraveled my fingers from Elvey's and sprinted toward the sounds, as if I could stop something bad from happening, or reverse time to stop it from ever happening.

My heart pounded in icy box, my blood roaring in my ears as I raced until I saw what was in front of me.

White lilies floated on the pond and a pink lotus rose elegantly from the water. The air smelled of sweet blossoms.

Tianna lay half-naked on her stomach on a cushioned spa table at the head of the pond.

To my utter mortification, Iokul was using some sort of magic to massage her, caressing her everywhere, and making her moan. Even though he wasn't really touching her, the magical massage was intimate enough.

I hadn't known he had that kind of magic, since he had never applied it to me. I had only experienced it when Elvey was intimate with me, but Iokul couldn't have Elvey's magic.

My heart turned to ice, and before it fractured. I averted my eyes from tightly engaged Tianna and Iokul and flicked my gaze to my two other former mates, hoping they would do something sensible and stop Iokul.

They glanced at their ice dragon brother with envy.

Blaze and Rai stood on either side of the Fae/demon bitch, flirting with her and laughing. They praised her unmatched beauty and confessed their affection and loyalty to her. As I listened on, something died inside me.

They pleaded with her to confide her innermost secret to them.

"The day you earn it, boys, you'll know everything I know," Tianna said with amusement between her moans as Iokul's intimate magic fondled her pleasure spots.

"Haven't we shown enough affection and loyalty?" Blaze asked, pouting. He acted like a pussy, and he'd never been a pussy before.

“You know how much we adore you and worship you,” Rai said. “We’re all devoted to you, as we’ve never been devoted to any other.”

I half-closed my eyes as searing pain stabbed my guts. My insides twisted up. I controlled myself, willing the bile pushing its way up into my throat to settle back in my stomach. They’d all said the same thing to me a few days ago. And now I’d been completely replaced. They only had eyes for the viper, my fatal enemy.

How had this happened?

I couldn’t clearly see their facial expressions since they were covered by their masks. But their eyes showed fierce loyalty and adoration toward the evil queen.

I tasted acid and rusted metal in my throat. I was almost certain I was going to vomit blood. It took every ounce of my will to swallow it back.

“You’ll have everything I have when you bring me the dragon whore’s heart,” Tianna said.

“We would if we could,” Rai said bitterly. “But the rules of the Challenge forbid it.”

“Find a loophole!”

“Of course, lovely queen,” they murmured in unison.

They were seeking my demise. There was no deeper betrayal than that.

Elvey stepped up to me, his hand sliding around my waist to support my weight as my knees buckled.

A new wave of magic tossed out from Iokul, stroking Tianna and making her moan deeply with maddening pleasure. Then the intimate magic held back to tease her.

“More, please!” Tianna begged. “I need more, Iokul, my beautiful dragon prince.”

A rasped breath escaped my scorched throat, and hatred arose in me, riding every ounce of my being. I’d thought no matter what Blaze, Iokul, and Rai had done, I’d always be able to forgive them and love them.

I’d firmly believed that my love for them would never die. I was wrong. It took only an instant for love to turn to hate, and often the line between the two kinds of emotions was surprisingly thin and exceptionally easy to cross.

Tianna and my ex-consorts snapped their heads toward me. A sadistic, awful smile spread across Tianna’s face. She’d seen my expression. She’d seen part of my soul withering. She’d also seen the pure hatred I had for them all.

The dragon princes stared at me, shock flitting over their masked faces. For a second, I believed that they appeared ashamed and wrecked, but I must have imagined it. Their faces were stony the next second. There wasn't even the slightest hint of warmth, tenderness, or remorse in their eyes. There was nothing there but callousness.

I would not suffer them. I would not suffer this. I broke free of Elvey with a burst of strength. I didn't care about the rules of the Challenge anymore. I didn't care that Tianna couldn't die by my design. I wanted to take her death. I wanted to bleed her. If I had to be damned now rather than later, so be it.

All I could see was red.

The bitch needed to pay for every blood debt she owed.

I charged, faster than an arrow, wicked twin-daggers in my hands, and I plunged my blades toward the bitch's fucking golden head.

A flash of white dashed by, then a blade, no, two swords, blocked my daggers.

I'd forgotten how fast the dragon princes could move. They were as fast as Elvey.

Rai and Blaze blocked me, and Elvey locked his blade with Iokul's.

"You'll not harm Her Majesty Queen Tianna, impure hybrid," Rai spat. "We're her shields now. We're her second skin. If it weren't for the rules of the Challenge, we'd end your pathetic life, right here, right now."

He might as well have just driven his blade straight into my heart.

Tianna turned on her spa table, not even bothering to sit up. She lay sideways, maintaining her sexy, seductive, and revealing posture, as she watched us.

The bitch had the audacity to giggle.

Blaze pushed his sword forward against mine, the impact sending me staggering back.

"Get the fuck out of here, Danaenyth," Blaze said, disgust dripping from his voice that had once sounded like a lover's rich honey in my ear.

A dagger in heart, I tried my last attempt to kick some sense or conscience into them, my voice trembling. "How could you do this to me?" My words sounded broken and distorted. "Where's your vow to me now?"

"How could we do this to you?" Blaze sneered. "Ask your fucking self, Danaenyth. You broke your vow first. While you were fucking us, all you wanted was the demigod's big cock."

As if he knew how big Elvey's cock was!

“How dare you insult me?” I screeched, a wave of red rage spurring me on.

“Now you know how we felt when you pined for Elvey,” Blaze continued. “We want you to feel the same pain and humiliation.”

Elvey and Iokul kept crossing blades near the pond.

“So, this is your version of revenge?” I asked, icy rage dripping off every word.

“No, we found someone better,” Rai said. “We mistook you as the one true mate for us, but you aren’t her. You’ll never be able to give us what we’ve wanted for centuries—to get rid of the damned mask on our faces, but Queen Tianna can. She offered us an opening, because she’s the real deal. She’s more of a woman than you can ever be. Give it up already, Danaenyth.”

I’d thought I couldn’t bleed any deeper, that the pain they’d inflicted on me couldn’t get worse, but a thousand needles punctured my heart, and blood oozed in rivers from the wounds.

Tianna giggled like a little girl with her high-pitched, gleeful voice.

“You don’t know who the fuck you’ve associated yourselves with,” I said vehemently and venomously. “You don’t know to who you’ve given your loyalty and souls. You have no idea who she really is. No greater evil than this bitch has ever existed.”

I’d planned to tell them the truth about Tianna and what I’d seen in her temple, but Elvey had talked me out of it. I couldn’t reveal the truth to the princes while the Challenge was under way. There was no way around it. I had to keep the princes in the dark. And Elvey had made me promise not to violate the rules and fail him and the rest of our people.

“Daisy!” Elvey warned, his sword meeting Iokul’s again with a sharp clang, and then he kicked the ice dragon prince into the pond.

Water and dirt splashed all over us.

Rai and Blaze cursed Elvey and wiped at their masks, their icy, intense gazes still on me.

A cold smile coated Rai’s eyes. “You fucked him,” he said. “Was he worth it?”

“Bastards,” I said, swaying back.

If I stayed in their presence a second longer, I’d throw all the lethal magic I had and incinerate them.

Elvey was at my side in an instant. He grabbed my hand. “Let’s get out of

here. This place fucking stinks.” He pulled me away with him and I leaned my weight on him, allowing him to drag me out of the Lotus Lounge.

He was my first mate and my last.

I’d lost my three other mates in the game of fate.

I had no idea how I’d gotten to our suite in the Red Palace. My mind was a blur after my confrontation with the dragon princes.

I must have looked like the dead. Rosalinda and Zembyr hadn’t asked anything but silently stood guard outside our chamber as if they felt my pain.

I curled into a ball on the bed, my mind unable to wrap around what had really gone down.

But I’d underestimated Tianna.

My immortal enemy was way more devious, powerful, and evil.

She couldn’t put me down, so she stole my princes away. A master at seduction, she used every trick she had cultivated for ages to seduce them, and they failed to see the rotten core of her glamourous beauty. She deceived them by offering what they wanted the most—being completely free of their curse and making them believe she was their one true mate.

No matter how I tried to win back my ex-consorts, she always had an effortless, counter move. And worse, even though my exes might see how evil she was, they still chose to stand by her.

Elvey pulled my back to his hard chest, holding me as I silently wept, his fingers circling my stomach in comfort. With him, I could be all raw emotion and vulnerability.

“Don’t lose hope, beloved,” he said quietly against my ear. “You’re still here aren’t you?”

I jerked to full awareness. Something chimed in me.

Elvey was right. Why was I still here instead of being reduced to Furies if my exes had betrayed me?

I probed inside me. My mating bond to the three dragon princes—though faint—still pulsed there.

Which meant, they didn’t truly belong to the evil queen, despite what had appeared to be and what I’d believed.

How could it be? I didn’t understand. I’d seen with my own eyes how much they adored Tianna and how they worshiped her. They’d raised their swords against me to defend her!

I didn’t understand anything anymore, my mind a muddy mess. I turned in Elvey’s arms to face him and touch his face. Without him, I’d be utterly

lost.

My hand traveled from his beautiful nose to his square jaw, along his neck to his chest. He let me explore him slowly and sensually.

My need turned urgent, and fire burned in his star-blue eyes. He rolled me over, pressed me flat on the satin sheet, his mouth finding mine hungrily.

Our passion accelerated, lust a frenzied heat that pulled us together.

He lifted his hips and drove down between my thighs. When his massive hard cock buried deep inside me, my heart didn't ache much anymore.

He moved inside me, faster and harder, the sensation all-consuming.

His cock plunged into my wet pussy with abandon.

Pleasure rippled through me as I wrapped my legs around his gorgeous-as-sin ass, spurring him on to fuck me harder, to fuck me until I forgot the pain of the day.

Elvey was mending my heart as he fucked me, but I couldn't stop the tears leaking from the corners of my eyes, and I couldn't stop the shattered pieces of my heart that wouldn't quite fit in place.

Deep down I knew I'd never be the same. I would never feel complete without all my mates by my side.

At some point, I drifted to sleep in Elvey's solid, warm arms. Suddenly, a blast of icy wind hit my face. I found myself standing by the window, looking into the shadows of the deep menacing night. We were surrounded by evil and our enemies. I needed to guard my brothers. *Guard my brothers?* I blinked. I had no brothers. I was an only child. Where was I? Why wasn't Elvey by my side? I wasn't in bed. Was I dreaming? *My need for her is insufferable. My heart aches for her so much—* That wasn't my thought. *Who's her?* Why did I ache for—? "Princeling," Tianna's voice purred from the doorway. I wheeled around, my gazing falling on Rai and Blaze sprawling on the cushions. They barely slept. Tonight, I forced them to rest. I was my brothers' keeper. I blinked into the reality. Gods, I was in Iokul's head! Somehow our bond had opened and I had traced it all the way here. Now I was seeing everything through his eyes. It was the first time I'd unconsciously slipped into the mind of one of my mates' mind. Maybe my soul still longed for them deeply, even though they'd broken my heart and my trust. My bonding magic could grant me access to those who were bonded to

me. While I was on Pandemonium, I could easily slip into Sybil's mind and spy on the aliens in the City of Nine. But I hadn't thought I could also get into the heads of my mates through our bond.

I'd thought the bond had been severed, but it was still intact.

"Your Majesty," Iokul said, turning to face Tianna. "The night is deep. You should be resting. I'm here to guard you. No harm will come to you."

Oh, how considerate! How fucking sweet! But I couldn't sneer in his mind. I could only watch and sizzle in anger and in silence.

"Instead of guarding me, you can share my bed," Tianna said.

The fucking bitch was wearing nothing. Her big tits were taut with lust and her lady bits were dripping with arousal.

How disgusting! I clenched my fists, yet I wasn't able to punch her to death.

Iokul gave her nudity an appreciative look. But I didn't feel heat from him. The heat that he'd had for me had always burned through his ice.

"All three of you can share my bed," Tianna added, swaying her hips.

Oh gods, I was going to puke.

Don't do it, I begged in Iokul's mind. Please, Iokul. You're the last defense. You're always a glacier of ice and steel. You're the reason and logic. You don't like touching anyone except me. Don't touch the viper. Not for my sake, but for yours and your brothers'. She'll consume you.

But Iokul couldn't hear me. Or could he? I was in his head only. I was but an observer who couldn't interfere.

"You won't regret it," Tianna said. "I'll give you pleasure beyond this world, beyond your wildest fantasy, and the three of you will sate me like no other ever has or could."

Iokul's eyes flicked to his brothers' sleeping forms. Rai and Blaze seemed to tense for a heartbeat, but they remained still.

Tianna moved to Iokul, rubbing herself against his armored body. A wave of nausea twisted my insides and moved up my throat. Iokul stepped back, sucking in a breath, which made me wonder if he was aroused or repulsed.

"We want this more than anything. You're a sex goddess," he said.

Oh really? Now I wanted to punch his teeth out, just so he would shut up.

"But we can't share your bed, Tianna," he continued. "Not yet. And you know that."

Confusion and displeasure at being rejected danced in Tianna's dark, horny eyes. "I know what?" she demanded.

“I thought you knew,” Iokul sighed as if pained. “We can’t fuck you because Danaenyth still grabs the other end of our mating bond and refuses to release us. It’s the same as how you once held captive the demigod. The bond won’t allow us to truly touch you until we break it. Danaenyth is nasty, possessive, and violent. But you know that already.”

“That little bitch! I’ll strangle her,” Tianna hissed.

“I want to do that more than you, believe me,” said Iokul. “My brothers and I want to be free of her more than anything. None of us can share your bed while we’re chained to her. Only you can help free us, Tianna. Just as you promised you’ll break our last piece of curse and remove this damn mask.”

“Cut off her head, and you’ll get rid of your mask.”

“The thing is, Tianna, we still won’t be able to fuck you. You don’t understand this mating bond. Even Danaenyth’s death won’t break it since our bond was forged in a blood ritual.”

But our mating bond hadn’t been forged that way. It had snapped alive when the three of them claimed me. There had never been a blood ritual, unlike what Elvey and I had gone through.

“Unless—” Iokul pondered.

“Unless what?” Tianna asked, her red lips parting in thick desire.

“Unless we can find the one woman who can truly replace her.”

“But you have the woman right in front of you,” Tianna said, her cat-like eyes growing predatory.

Iokul traced his bottom lip with his thumb, a trail of icy air streaming out of his mouth. I could tell that Tianna was most enthralled with the ice dragon among the three of them.

Her eyes glued to his sensual lips.

“You don’t trust us,” Iokul said. “That’s why our intimacy with you isn’t progressing as we desire. Until you trust us with your deepest secret, we’re going nowhere. Only your ultimate trust will break our mating bond to Daisy Danaenyth. We want to sever it more than anything, but the hybrid bitch is more relentless than we expected. She wants every man devoted to her, even though she’s fucking Elvey. She won’t let us go. Only you can defeat her and free us once and for all, so we can fuck you hoarse and sore. Give us your secret, and you won’t regret the carnal pleasure unlike anything the three of us will bring to you.”

I blinked in confusion. The mating bond was almost like a mythical thing.

But I didn't think our mating bond could prevent the dragon princes from cheating on me if they really wanted to. Iokul seemed to have it backwards. He could break the bond permanently by truly choosing another female.

Why was he twisting the truth?

Tianna bit her bloodred lip, brooding. When she released her teeth from her bottom lip, her eyes gleamed with demonic lust. "How about a goodnight kiss then?" she purred.

The bond between the princes and me slammed down, and I was thrown back into my own head. I let out rasped breaths at the disorientation and vertigo until I found myself still sleeping in Elvey's warm arms.

Feeling me stir, Elvey pulled me tightly against his chest, his sleep-laced voice cooing at me.

I didn't understand what had really happened between my evil aunt and the dragon princes. All I had was a glimpse of a scene out of context. I needed to see more of the true relationship between them.

Heart pounding, blood rushing in my ears, I launched myself and grabbed my mating bond to them, but this time, it was sealed. I couldn't reach them.

I was shut out.

Elvey's warmth seeped into me, expelling the chill in my bones.

I clung to him, his erection pricking against my rear. Even in his sleep, he lusted after me. I threw a hand back and swirled a finger over the head of his cock. My hand half-wrapped around its hard length, and I started to stroke, pumping up and down. I squeezed his crown, gathering the bead of moisture from the tip and spreading it over his shaft.

Elvey groaned, thrusting his hips toward me. Before I had a chance to slam my hand down to the base of his shaft again, he pried my fingers off his cock. Lifting my leg and hooking it in the crook of his arm, he exposed my naked pussy to him.

Without warning, he thrust into my heated channel, filling me, stretching me until it was seated deep inside me, hitting the sensitive ball of nerves at just the right spot. I moaned at the sensation, drowning in the glorious frenzy that rained down on me.

A beastly groan escaped from the depth of Elvey's throat. "Only you can make me crazy with lust like this, woman," he purred.

He pulled out and plunged back in, his free hand sneaking to my front to cup my breast, tweaking my nipple between his thumb and his forefinger. He thrust into my molten depth again and again, his lips burrowing into my neck,

his warm breath sending shivers all over my flesh. His tongue flicked out to lick the crook of my neck, his teeth grazing ever so gently over my delicate skin.

Every thrust was a play of the force of nature, bringing me closer and closer to the edge. I was soon lost in the burning lake of lust.

I moaned, needing a quick release, but Elvey refused to give it to me. He paused as soon as I was on the edge; my shameless begging and pleading failing to touch him. He was showing me I could only come on his terms.

I fought against him. I tried to ride along his length. Tried to slam back into his base and rock against his heavy balls. But he was too strong. He pinned me tightly against him, preventing me from dominating.

Then, when I just fell from the peak, he pounded between my thighs again, each stroke more relentless and merciless than the last, building me up to the peak. Elvey was demanding I surrender and hand him the reins.

But I didn't want to surrender. I had a storm inside me that roared to be released.

"Allow me to channel your storm," he whispered. "Let it be mine, darling."

He released my breast and dipped his fingers between my folds, gathering my slick arousal before spreading it around my clit, his thumb circling the nub in a torturous pace even as he pumped into me harder and faster. My pussy clenched his cock with no remorse, milking everything out of him.

He growled. "You'll make me lose control. You're so fucking hot and wet. You're drowning me. Best. Pussy. Ever."

He pulled back and drove into my molten core, still continuing the slow pace on my clit. The contrast of the sensation—hard and fast inside me, soft and slow on my most sensitive spot—made me cry out his name in pleasure, and I reached up to tug at my nipple, needing and wanting more pleasure. I didn't want the sensation to end. My leg jerked at the erotic onslaught, every muscle clenching and releasing and trembling.

His pounding rhythms quickened as his primal male need took over. "After I've fucked you this way, I'll bend you over, enter you from behind, and fuck you until you can't scream anymore."

That only excited me more. I moaned and screamed his name over and over as his next sequence of thrusts hit all the right spots and sent me to the delicious brink.

My body throbbed, my need for him desperate, as he drove into my pussy

again and again with his demigod's strength and demand.

His power poured in me like the night storm, and my storm became his.

I exploded around his cock at his next mighty thrusts. My body vibrated, and my pussy gripped his cock so hard and mercilessly, demanding he give me everything he had.

Elvey cursed but obliged, pouring his seed, his lust, and his forever need for me into me. He continued to pump his cock into my pussy even when the last wave of my orgasm faded.

While I still panted, my eyes bright, he flipped me over. Before I settled down on all fours, he thrust into me from behind, just as he'd promised.

He fucked me until the cold emptiness no longer had its claws in me. Until I knew that despite my broken heart, I could keep going and fighting.

And I'd pick up all the shattered pieces.

“I want you to meet someone, my queen,” Elvey said, leaning against the door to our chamber and watching as Spring, my new lady-in-waiting, braided my hair.

The court had insisted on me having the standard queen treatment—ladies-in-waiting, royal guards, and servants.

Some of Tianna’s former servants also threw their lot in with me, gambling on a better fate and gambling with their lives. While they swore fealty to me, they were under my protection. At least before the Challenge was over, Tianna couldn’t touch them.

Rosalinda had warned me that there might be spies amid the converted court and the servants. She kept a watchful eye on everyone. Only those who were approved by her could enter my chamber. In the end, she approved only Spring, the granddaughter to my mother’s former lady-in-waiting.

“Who is the someone, Elvey?” I asked.

Spring pinned my braids on top of my crown. She knew all sorts of styles in season. I nodded at her in thanks and dismissed her. She bowed to me, then to a grinning Elvey, and exited.

“You’ll see,” he said.

“An old friend?” I asked, arching an eyebrow. “Or a fiend?”

He didn’t answer

My demigod mate liked to surprise me. Even though he’d warded our

suite, he was still cautious, not wanting anyone to catch a sliver of our secrets.

He strode toward me with his casual, graceful gait.

His every move radiated primal power. His muscles spoke the sexiest language he was well-versed in. My heart fluttered, and my breath became shallow with excitement. I could never get enough of him.

An amused laughter blended with bright lust in his star-blue eyes. He must have seen the heated pink on my face and knew how much I wanted him.

“Later,” he said roughly. “We’ll hump like rabbits when we come back.”

“What’s the dress code?” I asked.

I was clad in my usual armor with a cape. I was forever prepared for a battle, but I wasn’t sure if this outfit was suitable since I had no idea whom he was going to take me to see.

He wore a classic gray shirt and trousers, hotness in his every hard line, which meant there probably wouldn’t be a battle involved. However, if anyone thought Elvey wasn’t lethal without armor, they were fools. My mate didn’t need to carry a weapon to be dangerous. On several occasions, I watched a blade appear in his hand out of the mist.

“Maybe I should change to a gown?” I asked.

“No, this is perfect,” he said. “I want him to see you for who you are—the warrior queen.”

At least I knew I’d only be meeting one person, and it was a male.

“Ready?” he asked, his strong arm around my waist.

His touch was forever addictive. I could never get enough—

When the blackness of the night, stars, and vertigo that came with teleporting left me, I found that I stood with Elvey on a lovely beach street paved by rainbows of granite, his arm still clasped around me possessively. His lavender hair waved in the ocean breeze.

On either side of the street, beautiful shops and cafés merged seamlessly with a dream-like forest. At the end of the street, the waves of an ocean as blue as a vast gem lapped the golden shore.

“Where are we?” I asked in amazement, looking around and inhaling the pure, fresh air.

Sihde should be like this place.

“It’s The Flowing Isle,” a bright, rich male voice spoke from behind me.

The light Fae realm?

I wheeled toward the voice. A stunningly handsome male grinned at me, his shining silver hair flowing down to his broad shoulders.

He'd also teleported here, like us.

He had the same blue eyes as Elvey, only my mate's were stormy and held the fallen stars. They also shared other similar features, including the same height. He wore a white shirt and trousers, a dagger strapped to the sheath of his hunting boots.

He clasped Elvey's arm as Elvey grabbed his, and then they gave each other a manly hug. When they broke apart, glistening tears sparkled in the man's eyes. The next second, his tears vanished.

"Daisy Danaenyth, Elvey's mate, and the queen to both Sihde and Dragon Realm," he said.

He didn't bow to me, even though he'd acknowledged my rank.

I arched an eyebrow. "How is it fair that you know me, but I have no idea who you are?" I said good-naturedly. "But my husband's friends always do well by me, if they behave."

Elvey laughed. "It's rude of me not to introduce you, love. This is my cousin, the light Fae king, His Majesty Finrod. You can just call him Finrod, as he'll call you Daisy."

I narrowed my eyes. "Cousin?"

Wasn't Elvey half dark Fae?

I felt bad that I didn't even know my husband's true origins, but I'd never pried. I'd been waiting for him to tell me all about it.

Finrod chuckled. "Elvey's mother and my father were siblings. He was never a dark Fae. The bastard fooled every dark Fae, though he couldn't cover up his demigod heritage."

My eyes flashed with anger. He'd also deceived me—his mate, his wife.

Elvey pulled me into his arms to charm me. "Forgive me, my love. I never meant to. There was never a good time to tell you."

Though he had all the good time to fuck me all through the night.

"No more secrets from now on," I said, my voice clipped.

He kissed me, and the kiss was so hot that I melted and forgave him on the spot. He always had a way with me. I sent him a chastising look, which warned him that I might not let him get his way next time.

Finrod cleared his throat twice. Elvey ignored him and gave me another full, hot kiss before breaking off and grinning. "I was kissing my wife," he said.

“Never thought there would be a day you’d fall so hard for a woman,” Finrod said. Then he turned to me, giving my armor an appreciative look. “I hope my cousin didn’t bring you here to battle me. I don’t like fighting beautiful women. You’re the first dark Fae who ever stepped on my land since that bitch Tianna took the throne.”

“No dark Fae can enter your realm?” I asked.

“Not without my invitation, except for you,” Finrod said. “You’re Elvey’s mate and my sister-in-law.” His look turned dark, his jaw tightened, and his eyes flashed with cold rage. The former playful king was gone in an instant. “We warded our entrance with the strongest magic we could muster to stop Tianna’s invasion, but she still poisoned half of our hand.” He gestured at our surroundings. “Only this city remains uncorrupted.”

I nodded. I had felt the purity of this place when I’d landed with Elvey.

“Her pollution is still expanding,” Finrod continued. “If we don’t stop her, my realm will be wasteland at the end of this century.”

“Why didn’t you go to war against her?” I asked. “You have the light Fae army and magic.”

“Would you like some Fae tea or coffee?” Finrod asked. “We’ll continue the conversation at the table. Otherwise, I’ll never live it down if my demanding cousin calls me a bad host.”

I grinned. “My husband can be demanding at times. And before I try, what’s the difference between human coffee and Fae coffee?”

“You’ll see,” Elvey said with a lopsided smile, and my heart fluttered.

Finrod led us to a fancy café. We entered like it was no-man’s land and sat on the soft white chairs on the patio that faced the ocean. The endless sea was pure blue, like a liquid gem, and the waves lapping the golden beach were pure white.

This was paradise.

“Where is everyone?” I asked, looking around.

“I vacated this section for us,” King Finrod said. “And left only this café open. My elite guards will serve us. Elvey picked this location. He wanted you to see his favorite spot, and his suspicious and paranoid nature insisted that there might be some of Tianna’s spies even in my court.”

“One can never fault discretion,” Elvey said.

I gazed up at Elvey through my lashes. He always knew what I wanted. I’d love it here a hundred times more than meeting the light Fae King in his court.

“If you keep looking at my brother like that,” Finrod reminded, “we might not be able to continue the conversation.”

My face flamed, and I gave him a hard stare. “It’s not your business how I look at my mate, Finrod!”

He laughed, and a proud, self-indulgent smile tugged at the corner of Elvey’s lips.

“My mate is half-dragon,” Elvey said. “She breathes the hottest fire. Be careful, cousin. Try not to provoke her.”

Finrod chortled. “I’m surprised you’re still in one piece, considering the not-provoking part you mentioned. You always had a talent for riling up anyone to your best ability, even when you were a brat.” His expression darkened the next second as grief filled his blue eyes. “I’m sorry, cousin, that I couldn’t get to you. I tried everything to find a way to free you from your blood bond to that bitch and failed.”

Elvey laid his hand on Finrod’s shoulder. “You did all you could. Don’t let guilt eat you up. You’re a king. You have enough burdens to carry. I’m free now. My beloved set me free.”

King Finrod found my hand, brought it to his lips, and kissed my knuckles in gratitude.

“Thank you, Daisy,” he said. “I owe you a debt.”

“That’s enough, Finrod,” Elvey said. “You don’t linger a kiss on my mate’s lovely hand.”

Finrod let go of me, shook his head, and laughed.

Elvey hadn’t been jealous with my former three mates, but he would defend my honor against any other males. That was interesting to know. I wondered why.

The wind blew by cozily, the ocean wave made lovers’ sounds, and the sunlight baked on our faces.

Our mood was both light and heavy.

Three elite guards brought out our drinks and exquisite refreshments.

I took a sip of the coffee, and my eyes almost rolled to the back of my head as my taste buds exploded. I trained my eyes on Elvey. It felt like the Fae coffee could give you a minor orgasm, but I wouldn’t tell Elvey while the king of the light Fae sat across from us and watched.

“I know,” Elvey said, light laughter and mischief dancing in his eyes.

Finrod let out a belly laugh.

“Welcome to The Flowing Isle, Queen Daisy,” he said. “And my home is

yours—”

“This is my home as well, as it’s my mate’s.” Elvey said. “I actually own quite a few luxury properties and some businesses here. I’m not as rich as Finrod, but I’m rich enough. And I hope he’s keeping my mansions dust free and my interests rolling. When the war is over, I’ll return to collect. Daisy and I will come here for vacation whenever she wants.”

Finrod rolled his eyes. “I haven’t finished my grand speech.”

“Shove it, then,” Elvey said. “You know we can’t linger here longer to listen to your long-winded, fancy monologue. Get to the point, Finrod.”

“Always the joy killer,” Finrod said, turning to me. “To answer your former question about the war against the usurper Tianna, we fought against her army before and suffered terrible casualties. We couldn’t get past her dark magic. I think the rumors that she can’t be killed are true.”

“She can be killed,” I said. “I’m working on it, and I’ll end her.”

Finrod stared at me for a long moment before glancing at Elvey. “Is the prophecy true then?”

“It is,” Elvey said. “My beloved has returned, and she has the White Magic.”

“Can I see it?” Finrod asked quietly.

I let my magic roll, and a ring of White Light twirled around us with blue fire chasing it. The blue fire was my new touch, which I impulsively borrowed from Elvey through our mating bond. He wouldn’t object to it. Hadn’t he said that whatever was his was mine?

“Nice,” he said, his hand squeezing my thigh teasingly.

Finrod studied my White Light in amazement. He couldn’t help but touch it. The White Light hissed, hit his face, and threw him out of his seat.

His guards rushed out, weapons drawn, and Elvey laughed so hard he had to wipe tears from his eyes.

Finrod climbed up with a grin on his face. “That wasn’t nice.”

I smirked.

“My wife wasn’t born nice, cousin,” Elvey said. “But I like her this way.”

Finrod shook his head and waved his guards back. “No one has thrown me off my seat for centuries. I won’t be pissed as long as you can use the Light to kill Tianna.”

“We need more than my mate’s White Light to kill that bitch,” Elvey said. “The demon king also lives in her.”

“That filth!” Finrod hissed.

There was no love lost between demons and Fae. Dragons hated demons as well. They weren't from this world, but when they came, they polluted this planet.

"We found the black heart—the power source to Tianna and the demon king," Elvey said. "If we kill the black heart, we'll kill both two entities."

"Then what are we waiting for?" Finrod said.

"We need the right tool, and we can't rush it," Elvey said. "We can't touch her while my mate is engaged in the Challenge with her. By the end of the month when the game is over, there'll be an all-out war, no matter the result."

"My army is at your command, cousin," Finrod said. "Anytime. Anywhere."

"The demons will come," Elvey said. "I'll need you to fight the demonic army. The dragon army will battle the dark Fae."

"Let's rid the world of the filth together," Finrod said, his eyes fiery with Fae fire.

"Finrod," Elvey said, pausing before he continued again. "I've found Princess Nerida. Tianna has been using her soul energy to feed the black heart. I couldn't free her yet, but I put the ward around her to stop the feeding. She'll be safe for the time being."

A terrifying storm appeared, twirling in Finrod's glowing eyes. Violent wind came out of nowhere and whooshed around us, sucking in tables, chairs, plants, and fences and shattering them. All things outside Elvey's shield started flying and breaking.

My White Light enhanced my mate's shield, yet I still felt the biting wind grazing my face.

"Calm, cousin!" Elvey said, grasping Finrod's shoulder. His power slammed into Finrod to cancel the magic that threatened to destroy everything in its path. "I'll save your betrothed, your future queen. I promise! Just give me a couple more weeks. Now, chill out, Finrod."

The forming twister overhead gradually vanished.

Finrod's face turned ashen, his lips thinning and paling, carved out in agony.

"You'd better, Elvey," he said hoarsely, tears in his stormy blue eyes.

"We'll save her," I said. "We'll drag Tianna's skeleton to hell where she belongs."

Elvey rose. "We have to go now. I'll send word, cousin. Do not rush to

action and screw up my plan. You've waited for centuries. You can wait two more weeks."

Finrod nodded and grabbed Elvey for a fierce hug. "Thank goddess, you're free."

"Goddess has nothing to do with it," Elvey said. "My mate did it."

And Finrod grabbed me for a tough hug as well.

"I'll get the army ready in a week," he said, pulling his lips back in a snarl. "I'll personally cut the foul demon bitch's heart out."

"You'll have to get in line," I said with a sweet smile.

He glared at me. "You think so?"

"Until we meet again, cousin," Elvey said. "And don't look at my wife wrong."

Finrod bowed his head. "My brother and my sister, I'll see you soon."

Elvey and I strode toward the throne room in the Red Palace. Rosalinda, Zembyr, and our royal guards trailed after us. My court waited for us on the left side of the hall where my throne was positioned.

Tianna no longer bothered to vandalize my throne. Elvey would just conjure a newer, shinier one for me. Another reason she left my throne alone was that she knew how much I hated to sit beside her.

I noticed that more Fae joined my side. They'd all thrown their lot in with me. Many of them had seen what Sihde had become after I'd stripped it of Tianna's glamour and opened their eyes. It was no longer about which ruler they rooted for. They were angry at Tianna for poisoning the land. Many of them wanted to fight for their home and their future and were ready to give their lives for their beloved realm.

Tianna sizzled on her throne. Her spies had tried to track me but had failed yet again.

I settled down on my throne, unease and anxiety slithering up my spine. I always felt this way when I perched on the throne because nothing felt right in this place. Elvey stood beside me, partly shielding me from Tianna. He placed his hand gently on my shoulder, and his body heat and solidity drove away the evil wind coming my way and calmed my nerves.

"Where have you been, niece?" Tianna demanded. "You should have been at the court earlier. I summoned you, but you failed to appear."

“Shove your summons up your bony ass, Tianna,” I said. “You aren’t the true queen of Sihde. You aren’t my heir and you never will be. I denounced you. You’re but a usurper, temporarily sitting on a throne you stole.”

“Bluff all you want and enjoy your short stay here,” she sneered. “You’re every bit as nasty as your exes said. You’re losing it because your ex-consorts are no longer yours. They’ve chosen me over you. By the way, your eyes are still a little red and puffy, and no amount of makeup can cover that. Did you cry yourself to sleep last night after my dragon princes turned you down and treated you like the trash you are?”

I’d been hardening my heart, but it still felt like a dagger plunging into my heart to hear her calling my former mates her princes.

“They’re *mine* now,” Tianna continued to gloat. “You’re the one who won’t be warming that throne by the end of the month. While you cried your eyes out last night, my princes, who shall soon be my consorts, were confessing their undying love to me.”

I had tried my best not to spare a glance in their direction from the moment I’d entered the throne room. I’d pretended that Blaze, Rai, and Iokul didn’t stand behind Tianna like three massive puppies, afraid that if I looked at them I’d melt down again.

Tianna had noticed that, knowing how much their presence still affected me and their changing of allegiance hurt me like iron nails in my flesh. As such, she kept hammering the nails deep into my body, wanting to see me bleed over and over.

Their cruelty toward me rushed back to me at her mention, and the scene of Tianna seducing Iokul swirled alive in front of me. I’d been shut out on the other side of the mating bond, so I’d never had the chance to see it through. Had she succeeded?

Probably not in truth since I was still here.

But had she gotten that sultry goodnight kiss from Iokul?

My heart seared in pain, a feverish wave of fury rolling off me. All of my fault in the relationship to them was that I hadn’t been able to lift the last piece of their curse, but I was going to try everything in my power to remove their masks. All I’d asked was a little more time, but they’d turned on me at the first chance. They turned against me and spat in my face when they spotted a better candidate.

I’d loved them more than anything, but I was ready to scratch that love from my bones. I hated them, and the hate burned hotly and brightly, despite

Elvey's efforts to stop it from consuming me.

I wanted to hurt them as much as they'd hurt me.

"What do you gain by bragging of having my leftovers, Tianna?" I said in a bored voice. Through my faint mating bond to the princes that cracked open just a little, I sensed how tense, shocked, and seething they were on the other side of the bond.

So, my words still had an effect on them. At least, it could still hurt their huge male egos. Good. Now that I had their attention, I was going to pierce their apathetic, pathetic walls.

"I've been long since fed up with them," I said in an amused, cruel tone. "Those three pretty faces are good for nothing. Their constant bickering and competing only gave me headaches. I should probably thank you for picking up my scraps and saving me the trouble of taking out the trash."

The black hatred in Tianna's eyes wanted to cut a bloody trail to me, yet she could do nothing about it, not while she was also trapped in our Challenge.

A ring of fire puffed out of Blaze's nostrils, and a flash of lightning struck across the wall, leaving black marks in its wake. Despite Tianna's magic ward, the room's temperature abruptly dropped. Even the ice dragon couldn't keep his cool.

The court turned deathly quiet, waiting for a fight to break out.

Elvey's heady chuckles rose amid the silence that threatened violence. He stopped for a heartbeat and laughed again, wiping tears from the corner of his eyes.

Tianna turned to glare at him, her venom dripping from her every pore.

"Don't you enjoy that, Tianna?" he said. "This is the best fun I've ever had in your twisted, fake court for centuries."

He had become the insufferable thorn in her side. Yet there was nothing she could do to pluck it out. I could see how she regretted her impulsive decision to release him from her blood bond—the only way she could control him.

"Come laugh when the day comes and your whore turns to three beasts, just like before," Tianna said. "And this time it'll be forever."

"As long as I breathe, the curse will never come upon my queen and my wife again," said Elvey.

Blaze, Rai, and Iokul snapped their heads toward Elvey at his mentioning of wife, their sudden, enormous pain slamming into me through our mating

bond. Did Tianna know what our bond could do? It was a private channel. As long as the princes didn't broadcast to her, she wouldn't find out about it.

Why did they keep secrets from her? They were devoted to her. They'd vowed to her that they'd been actively seeking to break our mating bond.

I turned to smile at Elvey sweetly. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the princes clenching their fists in rage. Their veins jumped violently on their temples.

Gotcha, bitches! I sneered coldly. *I can be as cruel as you. And more brutal.*

I was done taking punches from them. I was done being bruised by them. And I was done crying for them and myself.

"You get what I dumped, old aunt, and you think you get the hidden gem." I smirked at Tianna. "Look what I have here—a demigod, powerful in every aspect." Including in bed. I'd bet my former mates could hear the blatant hint.

For a few seconds, their rampaged emotions rammed into me through the bond like destructive tidal waves, but then all of a sudden, the bond shut down. Their rage and their other emotions were sealed on the other side.

Elvey intertwined his fingers with mine, brought my hand up, and brushed a kiss over my knuckles. The dragon princes tracked his every action, death threats in their eyes and in their every line of muscles.

They didn't want me, but they couldn't stand Elvey having me.

"It won't be long, Danaenyth," Iokul said, bone-chilling glacier in his voice. "This will be over soon."

Was that a threat or a promise?

"Threaten my wife again," Elvey said, "And I'll destroy you. I won't care that she once cared for you."

"Bring it on," Blaze said, stabbing a finger at Elvey, his nostrils still flaring fire. "You're dead, Elvey. You'll be charred meat before the end of this."

"I'm interested in seeing how you plan to achieve that, dragon boys," Elvey said. "You couldn't even stop me when you had Daisy. Now she's all mine."

A taut muscle twitched on Blaze's clenched jaw.

"Don't take his bait," Rai said, a trace of lightning sparkling beneath his mask of storm dragon. Even his lightning couldn't help to remove that metal mask of his. But at the moment, I had no sympathy or warmth toward him, or

any of them. “Let’s wait for the final day, then revenge will only be sweeter.”

They would deliver the last blow and completely betray me on the last day. That was their threat and promise. Despite that I’d warded my heart against them, the impact of their blazing hatred for me still rammed into our closed bond and made me stagger.

Tianna snickered sadistically, reveling in her vicious puppies’ cutting words.

“The full-blooded dragons don’t even know how to threaten,” I purred, leaning toward Elvey on my throne. “Maybe we should teach them a thing or two, my king?”

“Keep calling the demigod bastard king, you whore, like he was born of some noble,” Tianna said, her every word dripping with venom. “He doesn’t even know his own origins.”

I wanted to punch her and reveal the foul demon king in her in front of the entire court, but that would screw up my plan. However, I could let her lose face and feel the bite of new humiliation.

On our way back from The Flowing Isle, Elvey had told me more about his heritage. Even if he were born base, I wouldn’t have minded it at all. He deserved me in every way.

“You know my clever husband fooled you for centuries,” I said. “King Elvey was never a dark Fae. He’s the direct descendant of God of Night and Sky, Caelus, and light Fae Princess Levana.”

Elvey’s mother had died in labor because of the complications and difficulties for any mortals and immortals to give birth to a powerful demigod. It was forbidden for a god to mate with flesh, but Caelus couldn’t fight his lust for Princess Levana.

Elvey had never forgiven his father and himself for his mother’s death. After Levana faded, the Sky God left for another universe and never returned.

Elvey’s ability to open the portal and teleport among others must have come from his father’s side.

“You’re lying,” Tianna hissed.

Elvey dropped his glamour and glowed in glory. Two pairs of black wings whooshed out of his back and extended to full length. They were different than the dragon wings, but no less magnificent.

Pride swelled in my heart.

“Behold your king!” I said.

Tianna’s eyes bulged out, her extreme jealousy and madness whipping

through the air. In all those centuries, she'd never seen his true power and his true form. If she'd seen, she would never have let him go. But then, if it weren't for his desperation of finding me and the damned prophetic dream misleading him, she would never have been able to trick him into the blood bond in the first place.

"I've had enough of this batshit! That bastard always loves showing off!" Blaze spat out.

Elvey gave him a cold, taunting smirk and folded back his wings.

The whole court still gazed at him, mesmerized.

"Asshole number one," Iokul murmured.

I ignored the immature dragons and turned my attention back to my court.

"Anything you want to report?"

Many of them stepped forward to reveal what they had seen and condemned Tianna for polluting the realm. The whole realm was sick, and my court wanted the usurper's blood.

Tianna only laughed during the hearing, as if we'd just paid her a compliment.

"You do know when your hybrid abomination 'queen' goes down," Tianna said, gesturing for her lady-in-waiting, a noble-born Fae, to come polish her nails, "which will be very soon, you all will be flushed down the toilet with her, don't you?"

My court glared at her in rage, and I raised a hand to stop any of them from attacking her.

Tianna shook with laughter.

All of us—friends and enemies—were waiting for the final strike toward each other.

Rai

We—our three brothers—wanted our queen and mate more than anything. Every second we saw her, we wanted her. We longed to touch her, but we clenched our fists at our sides instead of going to her, so we could save her.

Every minute was pure fucking hell when we couldn't be with her. Our blood boiled with unbearable angst, especially so when we peeked through our mating bond and saw her entangled with our rival in bed. We were jealous, but we had accepted the demigod. He was taking care of our mate for us.

We wanted to join them. We wanted to bury deep inside her as well. My cock grew so hard at the glimpse of Elvey fucking her. The bastard had the best end of the deal.

During this new ordeal, the bond between me and my brothers only became stronger, considering how we had fought and tried to eliminate each other for nearly a century.

Iokul sacrificed more than any of us. He took lead to play with the bitch queen, because he carried ice in his bloodstream and was better than us at deception and staying emotionless. He also wanted to spare us the trial as

much as he could, like how he pretended to kiss Tianna and massage the slut with his new glamour magic, which he borrowed from Elvey.

Daisy didn't know that Elvey had connected to us through our common mating bond. The demigod had more knowledge about how it worked and was taking full advantage of it, but we kept our mate in the dark on the other side.

She couldn't know about it, and so she didn't.

We'd had to go with Tianna. That was the only way to save Elvey—Daisy's fourth mate—and prevent the curse to ever touch our true mate again.

Her love for us had turned to hate, and it burned white-hot, searing our souls to charred pieces.

How could we blame her, given how fucking cruel we had been toward her since the start of the Challenge? I'd backhanded her and thrown her to the ground in the throne room in front of everyone while Tianna's coarse laughter pierced my ears. The utterly shocked and heartbreaking expression on my mate's face had been like a blade twisting in my heart.

Yet I couldn't back down. We had to keep hurting her in front of Tianna. I could see that something in her died every time she suffered our brutality. We had slandered her with vicious words and threatened her very life.

All that we had done haunted us like unending nightmares, but we had to live through it every minute, so in the end our mate would come out unharmed and victorious.

I knew she'd been in our heads twice, peeking through our bond at the fucked-up scenarios where we pampered her fatal enemy and showed our devotion and affection to the usurper. We forced the heat into our eyes while we served Tianna, though repulsion pulsed in our every fiber. Fortunately, Tianna wasn't a dragon, so she couldn't tell whether the heat was from rage or from lust.

In her great distress, Daisy couldn't tell the difference, either.

She'd been so convinced that we'd consorted with her worst enemy and would deliver a final blow to her. She'd believed our fake betrayal.

Only Elvey knew the truth. That fucking demigod, who got to hold and fuck our mate day and night, was a good actor. Maybe too good for his own good. And through the mating bond that linked us all, he taught us how to keep Daisy out. He also opened to us completely and lent us his magic to deal with Tianna. The most useful one was glamour, and it was state of the art. Tianna had never suspected us because she believed that dragons had no

glamour magic. It worked to our advantage that she didn't take the three of us too seriously other than that we were pretty faces and her playthings.

Our mate name calling us as such also helped our cause, though it humiliated and hurt us a great deal.

With Elvey's superior glamour, we planted the illusion in Tianna's mind to make her think we were enamored with her. She believed that we were fondling her while it was only the glamour at work.

We hated to admit it, but we knew we wouldn't be able to pull it off without Elvey's aid, given the aversion we felt toward the fake dark queen. And we weren't natural actors like Elvey. We dragons were a straightforward species. We didn't like faking. We hated games.

But we now played it like some fucking professionals to protect our mate.

We let her see a little of the game but not too much, so she could act out on her hate toward us and make it more plausible. When it got too much, we shut down the bond, with Elvey's assistance on the other side.

I wondered if that bastard enjoyed this, enjoyed that our mate hated us but relied solely on him and gave him all her love and attention.

What would become of us when this was over?

We needed to end this before we went bat-shit crazy.

Our mate and us had once vowed to each other that there was nothing we couldn't get past, but I doubted she would get past this. Even in the end, after she knew the truth, our relationship had been damaged beyond salvation.

How could we win her back when her love for us had withered, and there wasn't even a piece of memory left to pick it up?

Especially now that she had Elvey, who could fulfill her every need?

My brothers shared the same thought as I when we'd learned about her marriage to him. They'd held the bonding ceremony consecrated in a blood ritual.

They had matching bonding runes etched on their forearms.

They would be husband and wife forever.

What about us? What would be left for us? Left of us?

A thousand daggers piercing through our souls would be more welcome than knowing our mate had chosen another over us.

She'd given up on us. She'd abandoned us.

We'd been replaced, just as she'd announced it loud and clear in front of everyone in court.

We have work to do, brothers, Iokul said in our heads, dragging me from

wallowing in my misery. His expression was as grim and stormy as mine.

Blaze only stared into an empty space. *Time is running out*, he murmured. It was completely bleak for us.

Without her, without touching her, without her in our arms, we were drowning in desolation.

The world was devoid of hope and color and warmth. Maybe it wasn't worth saving anymore?

Let's do this, I agreed.

This would be our final act.

We would not give up fighting for her.

I'd hurt Rai, Blaze, and Iokul badly in court. I'd been impressed that I could still hurt them, partly because of their male pride. I'd been merciless at rubbing salt on their wounds, letting them know blatantly that I'd been more than glad to let them go and that I'd chosen Elvey over them.

They'd hurt me worse. I'd thought hurting them would offer me some satisfaction, but it only brought me empty aching and hollowness.

When I curled in Elvey's warm arms in deep night, my fingers in his thick lavender hair, I felt a spark on the other side of my mating bond, like the last ember of burning coal.

I grabbed at it before it shut down.

I shouldn't be obsessed with my exes, who were set to destroy me, yet I couldn't resist spying on them. On a few occasions, I'd tried to use my bonding magic to slip into their heads, but somehow, they'd all learned how to shove me out with a brutal, vengeful force.

How could that be? It was like someone had been mentoring them.

The scene suddenly wheeled and changed, and I wasn't clinging to Elvey anymore. I was with my evil aunt in her vast, red bed.

I sat at the foot of the bed, looking down at the bitch's naked thighs. Blaze and Rai perched on either side of her, staring at her nude body.

Their masks blocked their facial expressions, but there was heat in their eyes.

Immediately, I knew I was in Iokul's head again. Somehow it was easier for me to slide into his head than into Rai's or Blaze's. Iokul was more reserved among his brothers, but he was also the most open when it came to accepting change.

A wave of nausea flooded my stomach at the unpleasant scent coming from Tianna's open legs. I steadied myself, wondering if the nausea came from me or from Iokul. I somehow sensed turmoil in him.

Stirring in his dream, Elvey drew me tighter against his chest, pulling me out to now and here. I remained motionlessly, not wanting to awake him.

As soon as he settled, I dove through the mating bond again and latched on in Iokul's head.

"I'm tired of this game," Rai said. "It's time to end it. Time to end that little bitch."

I was that little bitch he referred to. I swallowed the bile at the back of my parched throat. I couldn't bear to continue to watch, but I couldn't tear my eyes away, either.

"We don't want to see her pathetic face in your court again." Blaze spat. "The sight of her sickens me. Really sickens me."

"She wounded you, didn't she?" Tianna studied them with cruel interest. "She displayed her man whore like he was some godsend."

"No more than we wounded her." A cold laugh flew out of Iokul's mouth. "Have you seen the way she's looked ever since we dumped her?"

"Her eyes have been puffy and bloodshot," Rai said with a smug smirk. "She must be weeping every night. She can't even hide it. How pathetic! Worthless little slut."

I clenched my fists, trembling with heartache and rage.

Blaze shook his head in disgust. "How did we even pick her as our mate in the first place?"

"We were deceived," Rai said. "We thought she was the one. We thought she could give us the Dragon Realm and break our curses. And she kept wiggling her ass and tits to keep us in her black spider's web."

Fury coursed through my veins. I'd never done the things they accused me of. I'd never wanted to ensnare them. They'd always had their free will and could walk away from me at any time. In the end, they'd done just that. As for wiggling my ass, it was always because they'd started it. How twisted they'd become.

I bit my inner cheek until I tasted the metallic tang of blood.

Keep stabbing me in the back, assholes. Your end won't be pretty if you stick with the foul demon bitch. Eventually, she'll be fed up with you, swallow your souls, and chew out your bones!

“You want to do this or not, Tianna?” Rai said. “Let’s end that nasty, controlling little twig tonight before she even knows what shit hit her, and before her insufferable male whore finishes fucking her.”

They were quite clumsy and corny at name-calling, these dragons!

Tianna’s eyes grew intense, black light swirling in them, then they glazed over with unbridled lust when Blaze’s hands roughly cupped her breasts.

I’d prepared myself for this, yet it still felt like a hot iron poker impaling my heart.

Tianna threw her head back and moaned the dragons’ names.

“Decide, Queen Tianna, the unmatched beauty in the universe,” Iokul said. “Lay down your guard just this one time. Let us into your most inner secret and break our bond to that hybrid bitch Danaenyth. Rid us of our final piece of the curse, and we’ll be yours forever.”

“Be mine first,” Tianna said. “When you’re inside me, I’ll tell you.”

“All three of us will fuck you,” Blaze said hoarsely. “Can you take it?”

“I love it when you talk dirty, princelings,” Tianna purred, cat-green eyes glowing red as deep evil lurked beneath.

“Let’s get it done then,” Blaze said. “We’ve wanted to screw the gorgeous goddess queen from the day we laid our eyes on her. All three of us.”

“Our ex-mate’s mating bond will still prevent us from fucking you,” Iokul said. “You’ll have to start talking when I enter you.”

“Get ready, boys,” Tianna said, lust emitting from her every unholy pore.

All three dragon princes started to undress themselves. They fucking meant business! Fucking assholes and man whores! Fucking—

Tears flowed down my eyes. I didn’t have much time.

They were going to deliver the final blow.

In a heartbeat, they were all naked, their hard erections huge and ready.

They were going to fuck my fatal enemy and send me to be Furies.

Iokul spread Tianna’s legs wider and knelt between her thighs.

A swirl of wind tore through Iokul, and I felt its rage and violence. It was as if Iokul had just conjured some terrifying power, yet I didn’t recall him having that kind of alien magic.

It felt familiar somehow. It felt like Elvey’s magic, and he’d once used

the glamour on me when we had been in Pandemonium.

But Iokul, who had potent ice magic, couldn't have Elvey's power.

Tianna raised her torso, looking around alertly, but lay back down with a moan of pleasure as Blaze's hands squeezed her nipples brutally and Rai palmed her swollen sex with unnecessary force.

But the bitch seemed to like raw and rough.

She turned her face left, then right, gazing at Rai's and Blaze's cocks with greed, as if she wanted to swallow them.

She lashed out her hand to grab Rai's massive cock, but Rai caught her wrist.

Anger flashed in Tianna's eyes. I'd bet no one, except Elvey, had ever turned her down.

"The rule is that we fuck you tonight," Rai said. "You can't touch, but you'll watch and enjoy."

Tianna looked intrigued, and the fury left her eyes.

"You'd better deliver," she said haughtily. "I have high expectations, and I've waited too long for this."

Iokul flashed his white teeth. "You won't be disappointed. My brothers and I have never disappointed any women we shared."

Right, the assholes put me in the rank of their conquests.

"Talk now, Tianna," Iokul said, placing the tip of his cock at the bitch's dripping wet entrance.

I closed my eyes and jerked back to my own mind.

I didn't have the stomach to continue watching my former mates fucking another woman, especially the woman who was my most fatal, immortal enemy, the woman who had murdered my parents, cursed me, tried everything to send me back to being beasts, and destroyed so many innocent lives.

I wept in Elvey's arms.

I'd hoped that we'd have more time, but time was running out. I needed to wake Elvey and say goodbye.

He would have to stay here and continue to fight. He would take care of our people as their king.

As I waited for the scales to appear on my body, dreading the excruciating pain that was about to tear through me, I pressed my palm against Elvey's face. His stubble pricked against the heel of my palm. The delicious sensation only made my heart burst with grief and regret.

Elvey leaned to my touch, opened his eyes, and smiled at me.

“Elvey,” I choked out.

The dragon princes had betrayed me. They’d lost to me completely. They were fucking my enemy now, but I still needed to do one more thing. I needed to stop them from finishing it, not for my sake, but for theirs.

Once they finished the deed, they’d belong to her. She’d enslave them. It’d be worse than their masks clinging to their faces. They’d never be free.

I would be turned to three mindless Fury beasts. I would even lose my soul to stop the Challenge before the game was over. So be it. At least their souls would be spared. There was no need for them to go down with me, even though they had been the ones to deliver the final blow.

“I’m sorry, my love.” I brushed a kiss on my husband’s lips. “I need you to be strong. I need you to live well and continue on without me. Promise me.”

He had to lose me again, and forever this time.

“I’ll never go on without you,” he said quietly. “The whole universe can rot and burn for all I care. I’ll live and perish with you. But I promise you, I’ll keep you safe.”

“They’re fucking her.” I sobbed as I rushed off bed, grabbed my robe and pulled it on. “I need to stop them. They’re naïve to think that bonding to her will benefit them. They need to know who she is and what will become of them if they give themselves to her. I’m ending the Challenge now.”

And I would suffer any dire consequences.

Elvey grabbed my arm and stopped my running. “Let them play it out. Give them a bit more time.”

I widened my eyes. “Elvey, you don’t understand. They’re heading to the worst fate ever, and I’m running out of time.”

I shrugged him off with a burst of strength and charged out of the suite.

“Your Majesties, what’s happening?” Zembyr called as he chased after me.

Elvey caught up with me first while our royal guards followed in a tight formation, their swords drawn.

“Daisy, stop!” Elvey pulled me into his arms tightly despite my struggling and whispered in my ear. “I know exactly what’s happening. This has been our plan—mine and your other mates’—all along. We planned it behind your back. Now we need to return to our chamber and wait. We can’t ruin the last and most important step.”

My eyes burned with confusion and rage. “But they’re screwing her.”
Elvey only smiled down at me. “I know. And that’s beauty of it.”

What?

Fury coursed through my veins, and Elvey slanted his mouth over mine.
“Trust me, beloved,” he said against my lips before pulling away.

Blaze

We got her. We got that fucking viper!
When Iokul thrust into her between her thighs, Tianna rolled her eyes to the back and moaned in pleasure, which was disgusting and disturbing at the same time.

But in reality, we never touched her.

I didn't massage her breasts, Rai didn't palm her sex, and Iokul didn't fuck her,

Everything that seemed to be happening occurred only in her mind.

It was all layers upon layers of illusions. Our nudity, hard-ons, the heat in our eyes, the touching, and the fucking were all a glamour we'd artfully and masterfully planted in Tianna's mind. Yet to our enemy, it felt every bit as real as her own lust.

Elvey's glamour was top-notch, and he let us borrow it freely through our mating bond. He himself also chimed in and refined it when possible. For all those centuries, he'd never let Tianna know how really powerful he was. He'd never showed her his true magic. And it paid off and gave us the upper hand against the bitch.

We'd been comparing notes through the bond that we all shared with the

same woman. And through our link to our mate, we could use each other's powers.

And the combination of Elvey's shield and Iokul's ice magic had kept us from Tianna's mind probe. As a master deceiver, the usurper queen had never thought we could grasp the art of deception. It was incomprehensible to her that we three "simpletons" with pretty masked faces would outmaneuver her.

We weren't just a bunch of amateurs, and now she was paying the price for hunting our beloved mate.

As soon as Iokul entered her in her mind, she believed that she had us all and the curse would return to Daisy.

"Talk, Tianna," Iokul said, pausing his thrust in the glamoured alternative reality. "So I can finish fucking you, and then my bothers can fuck both your holes."

Tianna panted and moaned in pleasure. She really loved his vulgarity and roughness.

"My deepest secret," she said, licking her bloodred lips, "is how to truly kill me."

I held my breath, my heart slamming painfully against my rib cage.

Don't screw up, I warned myself.

My brothers stilled like rocks. They were also terrified of fucking up at this most crucial moment.

"Oh yeah," Iokul said carelessly and casually. "Afraid we'll spill your secrets?" He grabbed Tianna's thighs and pumped into her disgusting heat brutally, which again, only happened in her mind.

Elvey was enhancing his glamour on the other side.

Rai glared at Iokul while he fondled Tianna's breasts—also a fake act, which solicited more moans from Tianna like a cat in heat.

"How dare you provoke the woman we chose, Iokul?" Rai said. "We'll live and die with our queen's secrets. For such a trust, we'll be hers, forever." He was good at theater, too.

I played my role by rubbing at her swollen clit, as Elvey instructed me to do. It wasn't really happening, but that demigod was a twisted fuck.

I spat. "I'll run my blade through the gut of anyone who betrays our woman, our incomparable queen."

Tianna giggled, her mind addled by thick lust. "You already became mine when one of you entered me, my darling boys. You won't be able to spill my secrets even if you wanted to."

“We would never dream of hurting a hair on your gorgeous head, lovely queen,” Iokul said in a velvet voice. “We need to hear your deepest secret now, so I can keep fucking you. My brothers are waiting to fuck your ass and mouth. Look how taut their dicks are. They’re less patient than I am.”

In her haze of lust, the dark queen gave their cocks a heated look and licked her lips.

“To kill me, Danaenyth will need all of her four mates’ undying faithfulness, love, and combined blood vows, but she already lost you since you’re with me, fucking me,” she said. “Five of them must be one. Only when her White Light magic draws from the combined, undivided blood power can it kill the black heart—my true heart and power.” She paused for a moment to savor our mate’s defeat in advance. “Now give all of yourselves to me, boys. Fuck me as hard as you’ve never fucked before.”

I recoiled. We desired no other women other than our mate.

You got this, Elvey? Iokul yelled through our bond to the other side.

Withdraw. Now! Elvey hissed. *Once she spills the secrets, the illusion bubble will burst and she’ll see through it all. The Challenge has ended. Find us on the east wing. Our mate is devastated. She needs you. She needs all of us now.*

My chest tightened with overwhelming emotion, knowing our mate still wanted us.

Through our bond, I saw Daisy peek in. Our bond had opened to her. Now she knew about our entire covert operation.

Get them back, Elvey, she called. *Tianna is too dangerous. I can’t lose any one of them.*

You won’t lose us, honey, Iokul answered her.

It was divine to hear her caring voice. I pushed my choked emotion to the edge. We needed to get to Elvey and Daisy and deliver the final strike to Tianna with our combined force.

We retreated, hoping the illusion still held the evil queen.

Tianna snapped her head at us and bellowed like a beast, her features distorting hideously in wrath, as if the two entities in her were fighting to show the true monster face.

Elvey had warned us about both the demon king and the dark Fae fused in Tianna, and we had just seen it with our own eyes.

Tianna bolted up, smoke jetting out of her, and purple light lashing toward us.

“Shit! Run!” Rai shouted.

We threw our fire, lightning, and ice magic at her, knowing it would only slow her down a little. That was all we needed for the moment. We bolted out of the room as if our asses were on fire.

Her purple light hit the door behind us and turned it to dust.

We shared an alarmed look, kept running for our lives and toward our mate.

We needed to find her and Elvey and use Tianna’s secret recipe to end the bitch. Yeah, we were so going to toast that bitch.

Tianna chased us out of the room, glamoured in a purple gown instead her nakedness. She shouted for her guards to intercept us.

I felt a shock wave rush toward us. Just as I looked over my shoulder, waves of smoke and purple light were inches away from us. I could feel the terrible power ready to swallow me.

We were screwed.

A blend of white and blue light burst out of Iokul, smashing into the purple light.

Our mate and her fourth mate had come to our aid with their combined magic through our bond.

Elvey and I ran toward Rai, Blaze, and Iokul just as they dashed toward us in the hallway.

“Go! Go! Turn around. Run!” Rai screamed at us.

“I need to know what’s going on!” I yelled.

“The bitch is coming after us,” Blaze called.

“We never betrayed you,” Iokul also shouted, reaching me in a blink of an eye. “We need to get the hell out of here.”

“We know how to kill her,” Rai said, running on my other side, “but we need time to prepare and regroup.”

“Kill them!” Tianna appeared at the next turn behind us, shrieking in inconsolable rage. “Kill them all!”

Her guards pursued us.

“But I saw you—I saw all of you naked with her and—” I couldn’t finish the painful thought.

“Hasn’t Elvey explained the whole thing to you?” Blaze asked and snarled at Elvey.

“We were too busy,” Elvey said lazily.

Elvey had explained a little, and in the end, he’d let me see how his glamour worked on Tianna. But everything just happened so fast. One minute it was an illusion, then the next it was all twisted reality.

My emotions, still raw and dark, had overridden my logic ever since my

former mates—no, they were still my mates—had chosen my immortal enemy over me. No, they hadn't really picked her side.

My head spun, and my confused mind still tried to sort things out.

And now with Tianna and her guards all coming at us with the promise of murder and violence, I needed to pull my shit together.

"I told you we shouldn't have trusted that bastard," Blaze grated. "He just wants to have our mate all for himself. In the past weeks, he's been trying to turn her against us."

"Don't blame me," Elvey said. "I was going along with the ride. You only played the role too well. Now, I'm wondering why that is."

"Oh really, you four are still bickering while we're being chased and in mortal danger?" I rolled my eyes.

As we spoke, the smoke and purple light rammed into my White Light shield again.

I felt a tremendous pressure against my magic. Soon, Tianna's dark power might break through as she drew a blast of energy from the black heart.

"Daisy is right," Elvey said. "Let's settle this between us later, boys. We have a duo demon king and dark Fae bitch hot on our tails."

"Our mate is always right, gentle, and reasonable," Rai said, and I was a little taken aback by his soft tone versus the harshness he'd used since the start of the Challenge. He'd been the nastiest toward me during the game. Just recalling it made my heart ache.

My mates must have felt my pain radiating through our bond.

"You thought we didn't know what Tianna really is," Blaze said in agony. "We peeled through her glamour at first sight, but we couldn't let her know. She smells worse than a rotten egg."

Rai agreed. "All the time."

Blaze glared at Rai for interrupting his narration while we ran from our pursuing enemies. "My brothers and I had to breathe through our mouths in order not to be gagged to death."

Regular humans might not be able to talk effortlessly during racing, but we were dragons and Fae and it came easily to us.

"We used her game to play her," Iokul said, pride and confidence in his voice. "Our glamour, borrowed from Elvey, beat hers."

"The four of you talked through the mating bond but shut me out?" I asked, my voice flat, nearly cold.

“You wear your emotions on your sleeves, sweetheart,” Rai said in the same tone one would use to soothe a cornered, feral kitten. “If you’d realized what was really happening, the usurper would have known. We couldn’t chance it. We had to hurt you. We had to make it believable before we could retrieve her secret. We’re sorry we hurt you.” His voice turned worried and fierce at the same time. “We’ll make up to you. We’ll do anything to get you back.”

“Hurting you was like carving pieces of our hearts out,” Blaze said. “But we told ourselves that it’d be over soon, that we could hang in there a little longer. You once said there was nothing we couldn’t get past, so we’ve been holding on to your promise. We know you never go back on your word.”

Wait a second, was he manipulating me by using my former vow against me? He was turning the table, for fear I’d leave him for good. Though I wasn’t happy about how he’d turned things around, I could relate to his panic.

They were now all gentle and adoring again, but this quarrel wasn’t over between us. They should have trusted me and let me in instead of shutting me out. These weeks had been hell for me. And I hadn’t come back from it yet. Not even close.

“Will you forgive us, honeybee?” Blaze’s words were light, tender, and desperate, and both Rai and Iokul held their breath.

The old endearment almost made me choke. For a heartbeat, I wondered if I really had them back. The hurt still pulsed in my heart like a living thing. I wasn’t exactly the vindictive type, but the part of me that hated them had let them go. I would forgive them. But I wasn’t sure about taking them back now while my emotions were still so raw and messy.

Sphinx’s last warning picked this time to reverberate in the chamber of my head. *Heart doesn’t know. Heart betrays. Heart breaks. Heart divides. Heart deceives. Only the greatest sacrifice and boldest move wins the wickedest game.*

We’d won the wicked game, and Tianna was fighting her last struggle.

“I can’t deal with this right now,” I said.

“Daisy is right, we need to take care of the enemies first,” Elvey said.

Behind us, Tianna bellowed in rage.

She’d heard our conversation from the distance.

“Kill them!” She kept screaming. Maybe I should tell her to enlarge her vocabulary instead of shouting the same murderous words over and over

again. She would probably be too mad to listen.

A battle cry rose ahead. A new group of Tianna's sentinels showed up at the head of the passage, sandwiching us.

My princes decided not to shift to dragons since there wasn't enough space. Blaze and Iokul charged ahead with furious roars, swinging their swords swiftly toward the sentries. Blades crossed against each other, sharp clangs echoing off the walls, followed by the terrible sound of steel piercing flesh and bones and screams of pain and curses.

Elvey and Iokul brought up the rear, facing Tianna and her royal guards.

All of my mates insisted on positioning me in the middle. It was beyond annoying. But then, there wasn't enough space for me to fight in the front or rear.

Elvey pushed his blue light behind my White Light to reinforce it, holding against the onslaught of the filth smoke and purple light. The smoke traversed along our defensive line, seeking any crack or fissure. The pressure was immense since Tianna kept drawing power from the black heart, and she was getting stronger every second.

Beads of sweat dotted my forehead.

Two sentinels lunged at us just as Tianna and I both dropped the duel, needing a break. Elvey slashed his sword and beheaded a guard. Iokul raised his hand, and ice spears shot toward Tianna and his minions.

"Don't use up your reserve, Iokul," I called. "I'll need your magic later."

"I know, honey," he answered, and a few sentinels dropped in front of him, ice spears buried in their chests, necks, and foreheads.

It was a bloody sight.

"Stand down," Elvey shouted at the enemy guards. "And you'll live. Choose the right side and serve the true queen."

A guard started to withdraw, but Tianna's smoke grabbed him by the throat and choked the life out of him.

The shouting increased. Footsteps stomped everywhere, echoing all around us.

Zembyr and my royal guards had arrived at the scene with roars and charged the enemies who sandwiched us. Their swords rose and fell. Around me, enemies dropped in defeat, but some of my warriors fell as well.

We pushed forward and fought our way out of the Red Palace.

The black lake, once glamoured in place by Tianna, no longer lapped at the palace.

We stood on the blackened soil in the middle of the wilderness, the Red Palace now behind us.

I looked all around me, my eyes wide in fear.

A horde of thousands of dark Fae, who had sworn fealty to the evil queen, closed in us from all sides.

Tianna's army in red armor raised their sword and charged. Elvey could teleport us out of here, but he couldn't teleport so many people. If I left with my mates, the rest of our warriors and our new court would all be slaughtered.

My subjects were mine to protect.

While we fought, Elvey and I had to focus on combining our powers to keep Tianna's dark magic at bay. My other mates and our guards formed a battle formation around us.

Then the third wave of the red army breached our defense line.

Rai and Blaze shifted to dragons. Blaze's fire blew toward the enemy soldiers, and Rai's lightning bolts speared the ones at the vanguard.

The dark Fae soldiers put shields over their heads and their persons whenever Rai and Blaze blasted them with either lightning or fire. Fuck, I forgot that the Fae had been fighting dragons for an eon. They knew how to defend against dragons.

Rai and Blaze couldn't cause mass destruction as they were eager to do, but their powerful magic still caused destruction and chaos among the enemy soldiers, which gave much opening and advantage for our small army of warriors.

Rai and Blaze roared another furious dragon cry and tore into the enemies' rank after their slew of fire and lightning, pushing our foes back.

Arrows rained down upon my dragons.

Iokul, who stayed with us, threw the ice shield in front of his brothers. Most of the arrows dropped when they hit the shield. Blaze's fire burned some of them, and Rai's lightning bolts kept finding targets in the middle of the enemy rank and solicited a lot of curses.

A few arrows pierced through Blaze's scales. I swallowed hard. Rage burned within me as pain shot through our mating bond, but an instant later the bond shut down. My mates wouldn't want me to experience any pain.

The shield Elvey and I conjured still held Tianna's smoke and purple light at bay, so at least she couldn't massacre our warriors. However, we wouldn't last long. Tianna was growing more powerful while we were being drained of our magic.

Iokul's ice magic also shielded us all. Rosalinda and Zembyr fought side by side. Our royal guards formed a ring around me, while the rest of the warriors regrouped and formed a defensive line.

They slashed and hacked at enemy soldiers, endeavoring to cut a way out. But the enemies were too many. They kept coming, fearing no death or pain. I knew that the majority of them had been under Tianna's spell for too long, and her spell was much more powerful than Lysandra's. There was nothing I could do to free their minds at the moment. I had to fend off Tianna, and I was losing.

My guards started falling all around me under the savage assault.

We couldn't keep at it like this.

"Elvey!" I called.

If we couldn't break through the siege soon, we'd all be slain. We all needed to get out of here, go to the temple, and cut the black heart to pieces with the power of five.

Shouts broke out at the far north side of the enemies' line. The other half of our small army had come along with the Fae newly added to my court. But our numbers were still pitiful compared to Tianna's army.

Rosalinda had gone to summon our main army, but it would be a while before they crossed into the Fae realm.

A beast howled in the distance. Henry was approaching!

Fear for him surged in me.

Withdraw, Henry! I called. *And wait for—*

I'm not alone, Fury Queen. Henry flashed a picture in my head. He was leading an army of beasts—my former monster subjects from

Pandemonium's jungle—and charging toward the red army.

My monsters roared their bloodthirsty battle bellows.

How had they even gotten here? They were light years away.

Elvey sent me a sly smirk, beads of sweat coating his forehead as we both struggled to hold back Tianna's power that was boosted by thousands of souls.

"How?" I asked Elvey through labored breaths.

"I brought them with me when I left Pandemonium through the portal. I hid them in Sihde. I've been preparing for this battle every second, my love."

"And you didn't find it in your conscience to let me in a little?" I asked in exasperation.

I'd have a word with him after this was over.

"I like surprising you, Daisy darling," he said.

He'd constantly done just that.

"You're a drama king, you know?" I said.

All of my mates were drama kings, but I loved them wholeheartedly. In fact, I was certain their dramatic behavior was what made me love them more every day.

I tossed a dagger at a dark Fae soldier, who tried to stab Zembyr in the side while he was busy fighting two others.

I kept sending waves of White Light against Tianna's purple one.

Her dark magic pushed back. The thick smoke leeches to Elvey's blue light, trying to tear it open. I gritted my teeth from exertion.

"Just a little longer, beloved," Elvey said, his face pale with effort.

Our monster army crashed into our foes. Curses, shouts, and screams of pain broke out from the red army, and the battle pressure against our side relieved a notch.

Henry howled in joy. Then I noticed that in the far sky a black dragon led a battalion of dragons our way.

Adrian! Jarrod and Quintrell, the green and dark green dragons, flanked him and roared thunderously.

They got here faster than I'd expected.

"I moved the main army and had them camp in the Forbidden Forest three days ago," Elvey said. "The forest hid their trail."

My demigod mate always thought ten steps ahead. I appreciated it, but I'd have appreciated it more if he had given me a heads up.

A battle horn sounded from all sides. My army from my six cities and my

mates' Oslanian army were right behind the dragons.

The red army faltered at the attack from all sides.

As the dragon army joined us and the monsters fought though and reached my circle, I called for Blaze and Rai, and they shifted to their human form beside me.

Henry grinned at the sight of me, showing me his fangs.

Good job, Henry, I said. I'll see you in a little bit.

My hellhound leaped onto an enemy, his long fangs a terrifying sight.

Our army could hold on now, and our warriors pushed back briskly.

"We need to go," Elvey said.

He grabbed my hand, and my three other mates either clasped my shoulder, wrapped an arm around my waist, or grasped my other hand.

In a flash of shadow and light, Elvey teleported us out of the battlefield outside the Red Palace.

We didn't land in the grassy ruins this time, and there wasn't a black net ward stopping us from entering the Breath of the Wild. Elvey and I had taken it down, and it stayed down.

We stood right outside the gray-stoned temple with hundreds of ancient stone stairs beneath us. My dragon princes were positioned on my left, taking in the view. Elvey guarded my right, his arm sneaking around my waist.

Blaze snapped his attention to Elvey's arm on me, ready to snarl, then dropped it and shook his head.

"I know," Rai said grimly. "It takes some getting used to. I'm afraid from now on, he'll always be around our mate." Then, as if wanting to make up to himself, he grabbed my hand into his large one.

The wind stirred, foretelling the coming peril, sending the odor of decay and foulness our way. The evil lurked beneath the soil. My grandparents had warned me that the portal to the demon realm was somewhere in the Breath of the Wild.

The tip of a banner appeared on the horizon, then many banners emerged from the hills. Beneath the banners was an army in white armor, their longswords glistening under the overcast sky.

Our eyes widened. Another army would be very inconvenient for us.

"What the fuck?" Blaze called in alarm, ready to shift to his dragon form.

"It's the light Fae army, our allies," Elvey said with a grin. "It's my style

to have some escorts.”

“You also arranged that in secret?” I asked, half pleased, half scolding. For sure, I would need to have a word with him. As his wife, I did not like being kept in the dark again and again. But since he was new to this relationship, he might not know that matehood was all about sharing.

I also needed to have a word with my dragon mates.

We were going to have a long therapy session when all of this was over.

“Finrod broke the veil between the light Fae and dark Fae realms for this war,” Elvey said, as if he thought all I concerned about was the technical issues. “His army poured into this wilderness yesterday, waiting for our arrival. The demon army will come, and our light Fae brothers will remove the obstacles for us.”

“Is that so, cousin?” a voice purred, then a squad of light Fae royal guards dropped from the roof of the temple.

I’d been so distracted that I hadn’t even noticed the invisible glamour Finrod had cast over himself and his warriors.

Elvey and Finrod clasped forearms in greeting, and all the warriors behind their king bowed at Elvey. “Prince.”

“He’s king now, the dark Fae king,” Finrod laughed. “The guy got married. The three dragon kings are also married to the same beautiful woman, the queen to Sihde and Danaenyth of Dragon Realm and six human cities. I envy each one of them, yet Daisy won’t allow me to join her harem.”

I rolled my eyes, and Finrod nodded at my dragon consort kings, who returned the light Fae king’s greeting with friendly nods of acknowledgement.

“Your Majesties.” The elite light Fae guards bowed again to all of us.

Elvey had mentioned that court etiquettes for a light Fae was important. He hadn’t been exaggerating.

“Shall we go in?” I said, arching an eyebrow.

It was best we got in the temple and stabbed the black heart with my mates’ secret recipe before my evil aunt turned up to disrupt us.

A stench of the foulest magic wafted toward us. A plume of grimy smoke twirled in the air. Tianna materialized on top of the stairs with her elite sentries. Then, at the base of the stone staircase, the earth opened, and horned demons poured out like a large horde of locusts.

That was the portal to the demon realm.

The first wave of the demons rushed up the stairs toward us to fight for

their demon king. The rest of the demon army turned and crashed onto the light Fae army approaching at lightning speed.

The cries of the battle horns pierced the air, echoing in the bleak plain and ruins.

Steel crossed each other and impaled flesh and bones without mercy.

Red and black blood spilled everywhere.

Arrows shot from the light Fae army into the sky toward a square of the flying demons.

The light Fae warriors had great prowess and skills, and the demons were well-trained and fearless. Some banners dropped, being trodden by the boots, as many Fae warriors fell. Then the ones after their fallen brethren picked up the banners, wielded their swords, and thrust into the enemies.

They stepped on the demonic corpses and met the next waves of assault.

It was the most brutal battle I'd ever seen, and the sky seemed tainted with red and black.

My blood sang with thrill. My heart pounded with battle frenzy.

I wondered how my dragon and human army fared on the other side of the battlefield, but there was no time for updates and worries.

"Tear them to pieces!" Tianna screamed, her face contorting in pure hatred and black rage.

My four mates had humiliated her as no other ever had. Together, they'd deceived the greatest deceiver.

Elvey sent his blue light into the darkness of the temple, and we bolted into the lair, my mates flanking me, two in front and two behind. I didn't protest as I shielded us with my White Light.

The pungent odor of rotten flesh, rusty blood, and evil magic plumed in the air. Rai and a few light Fae gagged. Rai had a more sensitive nose than his brothers.

Blaze cursed as he glanced at the blood-tainted walls around us. He moved closer to me, as if wanting to shield me from the sight. But I'd seen all the first time I'd been here.

"Evil pulses beneath," Finrod said, cold rage in his righteous voice.

And again, my instinct roared at me to run from this place with my mates and never to return, but I ran headfirst with them into the depth of Tianna's torture temple.

Three flying demons caught up with us, Tianna riding on top of the center one.

Blaze, Rai, and Iokul were about to shift to dragons.

“Let us handle them,” Finrod said. “You go do your thing and make it quick.”

Elvey must have briefed him. He seemed to be able to talk to his cousin telepathically as well. That was one of the reasons that Finrod hadn’t rushed into the temple to free his betrothed but had waited for us to arrive. It had taken sheer will and great discipline for the light Fae king to do that.

“Light Fae King Finrod, how delightful it is to see you,” Tianna giggled. “You’re going to die here today, and I’ll harvest your soul just like I’m using and draining your lovely Nerida. She’s been here for centuries, trapped in a coffin, and you had no idea I took her.”

Finrod roared and threw up his hand, an ivory light tearing through the air and blasting toward Tianna and her demons. Her demon ride tumbled down at the force, but Tianna landed without a scratch. She tossed a wind of smoke at Finrod, but it bounced off the White Light shield I’d cast on all my companions.

A large group of demons moved in and charged us.

The light Fae warriors met them with blades.

“Go!” Finrod said. “Free my future queen!”

Elvey led us down the last stairs and into the vast underground chamber.

As we ran, Elvey let his magic roll, and it disarmed the ward around the black crystal vessel that contained the living black heart.

The air crackled like a slashing whip, and the ward dropped.

Iokul threw his ice current out and tossed away the lid.

My dragon mates stared at the dark heart pulsing inside, their eyes widening in horror as they traced the hundreds of stretching veins from the heart to the beings encased in the standing glass coffins lined against the walls.

“Holy shit!” Blaze said. “That bitch did all this to them?”

“She’s using their souls as batteries to power her up through the heart,” Elvey said.

“Let’s cut the black heart and destroy it now,” Iokul snarled, his ice spears floating in the air, ready to impale the heart. “The usurper revealed that when we kill the black heart, we can kill her. Let’s end the depraved bitch once and for all!”

An inhuman, demonic laugh rose from behind us.

Tianna levitated at the entrance, smoke and purple light twirling around

her with the festering scent of death. They sailed toward us like thousands of arrows. I threw up my hands, and at the same time, all my mates tossed their magic at her—lightning, fire, ice, and blue light. But our magic all crashed at the onslaught of her enhanced purple light.

Her power was the most potent when she was near the black heart.

The foul force sent us flying away from the black heart and pinned us against the glass coffins where the prisoners writhed inside.

The smoke hovered over us, hissing, ready to invade us.

Cold fear iced over my blood. If the smoke got into us, it'd be the end of us all.

We'd come so close. We'd gained the secret to kill Tianna, but in the depths of her lair, she was unbelievably powerful and unmatchable, with her prevailing dark Fae and demonic magic.

I'd underestimated her.

I sent another shot of White Light to shield my mates and me in desperation, but Tianna's purple light grew even stronger at my resistance. It kept tearing open my walls.

Cold sweat formed under my armpits. I was nearly spent while Tianna simply recharged her power.

Elvey, Rai, Blaze, and Iokul struggled to break free of the dark power to reach me. They called my name in fear and panic.

"I'm okay," I croaked, trying to comfort them with a lie.

Ivory light rippled toward Tianna from her back, breaking her concentration. At the same time, Finrod flung his dagger at her.

Two demons lunged at Finrod from behind. Before I had a chance to shout a warning, Finrod thrust his longsword backward without looking, his blade burying into the demon's chest. Another Fae warrior appeared and stalked the other demon.

Tianna turned from us and threw her purple light at Finrod with demonic hisses. It smashed into Finrod's ivory light and broke the Fae king's magic.

Finrod collapsed to the ground, the purple light trapping him in its net, and smoke hovering above him.

Tianna laughed, her voice dripping with hatred and disdain. "You're mine now, King Finrod. I never thought I could have you. It's your ultimate mistake to break the veil between our realms and come to aid my stupid niece and her four whores. Now you'll join your beloved Nerida as my food."

Finrod screamed as the smoke entered through his eyes.

His warriors roared and came to aid, but the smoke invaded them all, possessing them.

But Finrod's interruption had bought us the time we needed.

We'd all shaken off the bind of Tianna's dark magic. In an instant, my four mates had reached me. Iokul's ice spears materialized in the air and sliced our palms at the same time. Every second lost would be life and death.

The five of us held hands in a ring, our blood merging, our bond stronger than ever.

Nothing and no one could break us apart again.

My mates poured their powers into me. The powers brimmed with their absolute devotion and unconditional, undying love.

A new magic bled into my veins. It collected, cherished, mated, and mutated. It surged up my spine and whirled inside my body like a tornado.

I could no longer hold it back. It craved for battle. It desired the glory of destruction.

A ring of White Light formed, circling us. Elvey's blue light joined it, then Blaze's fire, Rai's lightning, and Iokul's icy stream.

The combined magic was the most glorious and terrifying thing I'd ever seen.

The ring straightened, turning to a spear of light and fire, sailing through the air.

"No! No! No! You're cheating, whores!" Tianna screamed. "This is not happening. I forbid it!"

Her cat-green eyes turned completely black, the stench of her fear filling the chamber.

Her smoke and purple light, so thick it was malleable, rolled toward us like tidal waves, but the ring of my White Light that had infused with my mates' powers crashed into her foul magic.

The spear forged by our powers pierced the dark force like a knife cutting through butter with sizzling heat.

Lightning flashed across the chamber while thunder roared outside. A firestorm raged with the lightning. Ice frosted the ceilings.

Our ultimate weapon flew toward the pounding black heart. The spear severed all the veins connecting to the heart, cutting off its supply of energy from those souls.

A dense, dark mass moved out of the heart to counter our spear, but the spear of light and fire and lightning didn't withdraw. It lifted high then

plunged into the center of the heart.

The shockwave threw Tianna back and pinned her to the ceiling.

She writhed and screamed along with the black heart.

The horrific sound pumped blood in my ears, hurting my eardrums. I wanted to throw my hands up to cover my ears to stop the horrible shrieks. My mates also clenched their teeth, but we didn't break our link.

As she struggled, Tianna somehow managed to toss her weakened dark magic at us, but our ring of fire and light slammed it back.

The temple quaked as the black heart fought to eject the spear of light and fire, but our powers held on. The spear lifted again and plunged back into the very depth of the black heart.

The glass coffins shattered into pieces. The occupants dropped to the ground, writhing, and crawling on the floor.

A terrible tearing sound filled the air. It was as if the earth had opened.

Our spear of light and fire and lightning cleaved the black heart in half. The heart vomited more of its dark mass, its stench gagging me. I turned my face to the side and heaved to vomit, but my mates grabbed me, not letting me go.

We held onto our connection, our combined magic infusing into our spear.

We were one. And no one and no force would ever separate us.

As the spear sank to the bottom of the black heart, carrying the full force of our power and wrath, brilliant light erupted, brightening the entire chamber. Tianna covered her eyes with her hands and shrieked.

My White Light pushed toward Finrod and his infected Fae warriors, purging the smoke in them. The light Fae king dropped to one knee, gasping as he resurfaced from the black abyss, and raised his head to stare at us. Awe and delight sparked in his star-blue eyes that were so much like Elvey's.

The black heart gave a last blood-curdling screech, and those who had fallen from the glass coffins whimpered, too weak to cover their ears to protect themselves from the hellish shrieks.

Silence fell on the chamber after the horrific scream, then the black heart spewed black lava. Along with it, souls, in the forms of glowing orbs, drifted out of the abyss of the open black heart.

Tens of thousands of them filled the space like a horde of fireflies.

They flew toward me, halting outside my shield as they recognized my mates and me as the ones who freed them. I could feel their gratitude singing

in the air.

“Go,” I shouted. “You’re free. Go in peace.”

They were free, but I doubted if they would ever truly find peace after what they had endured. I prayed that they would.

The glowing souls flew toward the ceiling, piercing through it, vanishing in the wind of light.

Tianna freed herself and fled toward the stairs while we were distracted by the army of souls.

In a flash, Elvey reached her. He grabbed her by the throat and lifted her up, his lips twisting up into a cold, cruel smile.

She thrashed against him, her cursing and screaming stuck in her throat. She tried to throw her foul magic at him in a final attempt, but Elvey pinned her right there.

“Hello, Tianna,” he purred. “Payback’s a bitch, isn’t it?”

I wanted to tear her throat out, but I’d let my mate have his sweet revenge first.

“We beat you, utterly and absolutely,” Elvey continued. “Like the ugly fool you are. And now you die.”

“Please, don’t,” Tianna begged. “I have something you want. I have another secret that concerns you—”

“I don’t care, you miserable bitch,” Elvey said mercilessly. “I’ve wanted to kill you for every second of the day for centuries. Thanks to my beloved mate who made it happen.” His free hand thrust toward her chest to yank out her heart.

A shadow shifting between shape and shapeless cut in between Elvey and Tianna.

What the fuck?

It was my old scary pal Phantom from Pandemonium. Had he also gone through the portal to our world with the army of my monsters? And what was he doing here?

It was bad news he was here!

“No!” Phantom said.

Elvey snapped his head at the true creature of nightmare.

“We had a deal, demigod,” Phantom said.

Elvey gave him a long look, then he smiled. “The scavenger of the living and the dead, her foul body and soul are yours.”

Phantom’s shadow form rippled, and the nightmare smiled.

Chills sliced up my spine.

“The evil and darkness of the two entities inside her will be the most delicious breakfast,” Phantom said, pondering. “I think they can be dinner, too. I usually skip lunch.”

Tianna screamed in terror. I had never seen her so scared. Her face distorted into a grotesque shape, the bones rearranging. A screech caught in her throat just as another being tore through her. The demon king inside her emerged and shed the former dark Fae queen’s skin like the Fae vessel was nothing but dirty clothes.

That was her end of the bargain with a powerful demon.

The demon king took advantage of everyone’s shock and shoved Elvey away, tearing a gap in the air before my mate sent blue light to go after him, before my other mates and I sent my reinforced magic.

The demon king could open a portal anywhere in his true form.

He laughed. It sounded coarse, inhuman, and full of evil. Like a dark flash, the horned nine-foot-tall demon king dashed into the shimmering black portal.

Before the shimmer closed up, a shapeless shadow shot through the crack. Elvey grinned vindictively. “Have fun, my friend.”

My demigod mate had made friends with Phantom.

Most of Tianna's former captives were at the brink of death. But they were free now. My White Light had severed their links to the black heart.

That one bitch could cause so much hurt and damage still enraged me.

More light Fae warriors poured into the chamber, shock and rage bleeding through their expressions at the horrific sight of the misery of Tianna's victims.

Finrod knelt before a glass coffin, holding Princess Nerida, his betrothed, tears streaming silently down his cheeks. She opened her mouth, trying to say his name but shut it.

"Healer!" Finrod roared. "I need a fucking healer!"

A squad of light Fae in white armor rushed to him and their future queen.

Rosalinda, Adrian, and a few dragons also marched in, blood all over their black armor.

"Our army defeated Tianna's, Your Majesties," Adrian said, approaching me. "Half of the dark Fae surrendered. We flew here as fast as we could."

I nodded. "King Finrod's light Fae army crushed the demon hordes."

Elvey smiled. "We saved the day."

Accompanied by my four mates, I headed toward my grandparents' coffins. Their glassy coffins, however, hadn't fracture. I stood before them. Elvey's magic lashed out and unsealed the coffins.

The former dark Fae king and queen were holding on to the last thread of their breaths because they were waiting to say goodbye to me.

Hot tears rolled down my face at their suffering. They were the last of my Fae family, and soon they'd be gone.

"Grandparents," I said. "Go in peace. I've avenged you and my parents."

"We're so proud, granddaughter. And thank you, queen to Sihde and the Dragon Realm and her four mates," they said with a satisfied smile, and ceased breathing.

Two bright orbs formed from their no-longer-beating hearts and rose to the air. The orbs whirled around me, touching either side of my cheeks with such tenderness and warmth. And then they were gone.

My mates pulled me into their solid, muscled arms—all four pairs of them—to comfort me and lend me their love and support. None of them fought each other for my affection and attention. And all of them had a piece of me. All I had belonged to them. I was theirs.

"We won the war on all sides," Iokul said. "We vanquished our enemies. Anyone who wants to harm a hair on our mate's head will think again."

"Enemies will never be of short supply," Elvey said. "And such is life. But we'll always have the privilege of defending our mate. I think our Daisy darling also likes some continuing challenge and uneventful adventure."

"Not too uneventful," I said wearily.

Elvey chuckled.

"We'll never leave you again, sweetheart," Rai whispered.

"And I'll even learn to get along with the annoying light Fae demigod," Blaze said.

Elvey arched an eyebrow. "I might still be a handful for you."

Blaze grunted and then sneered. "Nothing I can't handle."

Then, I felt a strong tug in my soul, pulling me—

Something or someone was calling me outside the temple, and it was family.

I had a hunch. I had wondered if I could meet his soul again when I freed all souls from the black heart.

"I need fresh air," I told my mates.

I couldn't stand another second in this house of horrors.

Finrod's warriors were taking care of Tianna's former prisoners and survivors.

I untangled from my mates and raced out of the temple, with Elvey and

Iokul leading and Blaze and Rai bringing up the rear. I sighed. From now on, they'd always form a protective formation around me, and it would be hell to fight four of them.

The stench lingered in the air even outside the temple, but the sun and moons had pierced through the gray clouds and fogs.

Things would be changing now. The sparkling blue would return to the ocean, the white sand would be as pure and hot as the beach in The Flowing Isle, and the healthy colors would once again blanket the forests in Sihde.

I would work with Finrod and my four mates to seal the portal to the demon realm. As for Phantom, I hoped he got what he'd come for and wouldn't return to our world.

I overlooked the piles of demon corpses on the plain under the stairs. We'd won the war on all sides, but we'd also lost a lot of worthy warriors.

Victory always came with grief, sacrifice, and loss.

Finrod and his elite guards appeared at the entrance, Nerida limp in his massive arms.

"Is she okay?" Elvey asked, stalking toward them.

"She will be," Finrod said, his jaw tight from rage, fear for her lurking in his darkened blue eyes. "I'll allow no one to ever hurt her again."

Elvey held Nerida's hand in his gently, then he kissed her forehead.

"We'll visit, King Finrod," I said. "We're allies now. Our courts will be open to each other."

"We're family, Daisy," Finrod said.

And then he and his warriors vanished.

A horn rose in the air, long, sorrowful, and triumph. The light Fae army was calling retreat. They'd gathered their dead.

"Burn the temple to the ground," I told Adrian as he stood guard with other dragons. "And burn every inch of the Breath of the Wild with the dragon fire."

"Yes, Your Majesty. We'll purge the evil in the land," Adrian said and shifted.

A black dragon led his kind to take off and set the land ablaze.

I felt the familiar magical tug in my soul again, and I looked up.

A glowing orb, the last soul that had lingered, drifted toward me.

I recognized whose soul it was, and tears streamed down my face.

"Father," I said, my voice thick with emotion.

Light expanded from the orb, and a giant of man of light stood in front of

me. He had a strong, regal, and handsome face, golden skin, and rich-brown hair.

“My daughter,” he said. “You’ve grown into a beautiful woman. You’ve claimed your birthright and become what you were born to be—the just and fair queen to Sihde, the Dragon Realm, and the six human cities. I’m more than proud.”

He moved toward me, and all my mates immediately stepped in front of me to block him.

“He’s my father!” I snarled.

“One can never fault caution,” Blaze said. “We don’t know who he really is. He might not be who he claims to be.”

“I recognize my own father!”

My father chuckled in amusement. “I like that they’re protective of you.” He scanned my mates. “I’m Raven Danaenyth, Daisy’s father.”

My mates stepped back.

“These are my overbearing, bonded mates,” I said, gesturing to each of my mates as I introduced them to my father. “Rai, Elvey, Blaze, and Iokul.”

“Guard my daughter well but try not to step on her toes, boys,” Raven said. “Or you’ll have me to answer to.”

I didn’t know how that would work since he was nothing but a spirit now.

My father seemed to realize it and shook his head with a wishful sigh. “I have to go now, Daisy. I’ve used up my time. I needed to say goodbye and tell you I couldn’t have hoped for a better daughter. All my suffering was worth it just to see you today. I must go find my beloved wife, your mother.”

“Go, Father,” I said, tears still glinting in my eyes. “Go find her.”

“We love you. We always will,” he said, his feather-light fingertips touching my cheek.

He shifted to a massive red dragon basking in light, and then he was gone.

I buried my face on my mate’s shoulder. It seemed to be Rai’s because the scent of storm and autumn wrapped me in its protective and powerful embrace.

When the last sob left me, I raised my head and gazed up at my mates. And joy burst in my soul.

The mask dissolved from Rai’s face. When my eyes searched for Blaze and Iokul, who also pressed around me, their masks were also gone. It was as if their masks had never been there before.

They'd passed the trial. The final piece of the curse had lifted off them.

They grinned at me. For the first time, in centuries, their skin breathed free air.

Their faces were as masculine and gorgeous as I'd pictured.

Blaze's ember eyes sparked with liquid heat, his skin golden. His curvy lips looked even more sensual without the metal mask above it. I'd kissed those lips hundreds of times and still couldn't get enough of them.

My face flamed as I thought how he would soon ravish me with those lips. He winked at me, obviously sharing the same thoughts.

Iokul cleared his throat, reminding me of his turn. The wind ruffled his flowing silvery hair down to his shoulders.

My gaze fixed on his icy silver eyes. No mask would ever cover half of his face again. His skin was paler than his brothers, his nose straight and noble. My ice consort king was both masculine and elegant. When we returned, I would taste his sculpted lips that burned hotter than fire.

Then I returned to Rai, my most level-headed mate, who had played a role of being the nastiest bastard toward me during the Challenge. It'd hurt him more than it'd hurt me.

My fingers traced his sun-kissed strong face, like I'd always fantasized doing.

He shuddered at my touch, the first touch on his face after nearly a century.

I peeked into his heated sapphire eyes and was lost into them.

Finally, my gaze found Elvey, who watched us with fallen stars wheeling in his hooded eyes.

"This has been wicked fun," he said. "But let's get out of here, shall we?"

He grabbed me, and I seized my other mates just in time.

And we teleported in a spark of light and shadow.

Sihde was healing, like the Dragon Realm.

The magical barrier between the two realms had been removed. However, Sihde was still forbidden to the humans, and I didn't want to break the tradition that had been forged since Fae came to existence, for good reasons.

I might be a revolutionary, but I was also pragmatic.

Who knew what the humans would do? Someone would get greedy. Someone would trap a Fae and experiment on their immortal DNA since Fae were more like humans than dragons were.

We brought almost every exiled dark Fae back to Sihde. After centuries, they finally had a safe home. That was the least I could do for my mother and our people.

To the dragons and humans, I was the Dragon Queen. To dark Fae, I was the Fae Queen. And to my monsters that Elvey had brought from Pandemonium to aid our war, I was still their Fury Queen. The monsters and beasts now live in the rainforest between the Fae and the dragon realms. They were forbidden to hunt outside the rainforest.

My mates and I divided our time between the two realms. Our new thrones in Sihde were set in the gemstone-adorned palace in the Forbidden Forest, which had returned to be one of the most beautiful, dreamy places on the planet.

The blossoms shone like little stars and never faded, the magic beneath the soil was potent like the choicest wine, and the music flowing with leaves, wind, and spirits made every heart full of joy and poetically melancholy at once.

A pure magical stream sparkled at the back of my palace.

Yet we didn't live idly.

The world wheeled by, life went on, and the potential enemies schemed and lurked in the shadow.

King Finrod and Queen Nerida visited us often. Nerida loved the shine of twilight in the Forbidden Forest.

And if we craved for Fae coffee, we would visit them.

Finrod refused to share the recipe, just to entice us into the Flowing Isle.

My four mates still bickered and kept competing against each other, and now with Elvey joining us, it got messy sometimes. Elvey still loved to rile up everyone. Often, it was Elvey and Iokul against Blaze and Rai. But whenever we faced outside force, we were a united front.

They said happily ever after is supposed to be a fairytale. I'd come from a dark fairytale that turned out to be so bright. My four mates wanted me more than anything in the universe and cherished me every second of the day. I believed in true love, but I also believed that you had to keep fighting for love and never take each other for granted.

But to be honest, sometimes I did wonder if it were but a dream that I had four hot mates who tasted sinfully divine. And sometimes I had nightmares that convinced me that I was still the three Fury beasts shrieking above the jungle with unbearable loneliness and unquenchable rage. Whenever I had those bad dreams, one of my mates would wake me up, cradle me in his arms, and then bury his massive cock deep inside me to persuade me that he was real, and they were all real.

My dragon princes also suffered nightmares every now and then.

"Fuck," Iokul said. "I dreamed about painting the demon bitch's toes again. It was the most disgusting thing I've ever done. Fuck."

"You took the blunt hit for us, brother," Rai said, giving Iokul an appreciative look. "We did what we had to do. We'll do it again if we must to keep our mate safe."

"Next time, one of you will do the toes," Iokul said. "Because I'm done with them."

"What about our mate's toes?" Elvey asked with a smirk. "Will you deny

Daisy the pleasure? If you could paint other woman's toes—”

I gave Elvey a scolding glare, but he intentionally avoided my eyes.

“Well, in that case—” Iokul sighed.

“No more toe-painting on anyone,” I said firmly. “Not now, not ever.”

All of my dragon mates looked relieved.

“I don't mind painting your lovely toes, dearest,” Elvey said. “And I'll even suckle them to make you feel really good.”

My toes curled, and I suppressed a moan.

Blaze and Rai glared at Elvey. Even Iokul, his best pal now, sent him a look of disapproval.

“Since you all mentioned it,” I asked. “Why did you have to do it physically, Iokul, when you could have used the glamour you borrowed from Elvey?”

“The damned demigod forbade us to use his glamour for ‘trivial things.’ Those were his words,” Blaze explained for Iokul, since his brother didn't want to sell Elvey out. “We didn't want to mess it up and have the demon bitch finding out about the glamour. So, we used it only when absolutely necessary, like in the end.”

In the end, when Tianna had thought all of my dragon kings had betrayed me and were fucking her, they'd only fucked with her mind.

Still, the memory of that fake act haunted me like a lasting bad taste. I wasn't beyond pettiness.

“Do you know how hard it was to restrain ourselves from touching you,” Iokul whispered under his breath, his silver eyes flashing with torment, “when all we ever wanted was to touch you and hold you.”

“We had to fight so hard not to come to you, so we wouldn't ruin the plan,” Blaze said, his golden eyes turning molten in anguish. “The nights were most difficult. We got used to holding you in sleep. We pined for your soft, warm body curling around us.”

“I was the one who truly hurt you,” Rai said, shadow of guilt, shame, and anger coating his sapphire eyes. “I laid my hands on you.”

The memory of him backhanding me by accident and sending me across the ground flashed before my eyelids. It'd hurt him more than it'd hurt me. He still couldn't forgive himself for that.

“If you never want me again, I—I don't know what to do,” he said, his voice breaking, his eyes pleading.

I'd denounced all three of them in Tianna's former court. I'd struck back

harder at them in double revenge. And I'd learned that both Iokul and Blaze had punched Rai and broken his nose for that mishap, and Rai had begged them not to stop.

I touched Rai's masculine beautiful face. His skin felt so warm and smooth without a mask. "It was an accident," I said. "And you—all of you—did what you had to do to save me. I can't even imagine what you'd gone through. So, no more guilt. No more sacrifice. And no more keeping me in the fucking dark. I'm serious. I'm far from over it. You'll have to learn to trust me and earn my trust again."

"We promise, love," Iokul said, "as long as you give us a second chance."

Elvey leaned against the wall, watching us.

We sprawled on the vast bed in the Golden Palace in the Dragon Realm, resting. My dragon mates stroked me with their hands. Our dynamic interested him. I met his gaze and smiled invitingly, beckoning him to come to us.

Yet he did not join us.

I didn't want him to feel left out, but I'd give him time and space and let him get used to this first.

He was one of us, no matter if he realized it or not. He would eventually. We had all the time in the world, and I was learning to be patient.

We would leave instant gratification to the mortals.

"It infuriated us more than anything to watch Elvey have his uncouth hands all over you," Blaze said. "It was the worst torture ever. I wanted so much to punch his face, but my cold logic kept telling us to back off while he was protecting you."

Elvey's hands were anything but uncouth, but I wouldn't point it out. I didn't want to take a side, even though I had almost rolled my eyes at Blaze's comments.

"As I said, the demigod got the best deal," Rai grunted. "While we had to breathe through our mouths subtly, so the demon bitch wouldn't know how her stench put us off, while we had to constantly come up with clever excuses to fend off her unwanted advances and harassment, Elvey was enjoying and fucking our mate every night."

"Not just every night," Elvey said with a grin of challenge. "The mornings were just as fantastic."

"Why don't we just punch him now?" Rai hissed.

"Bring it on, bitches," Elvey said with a lopsided grin.

“Hey! Hey!” I shouted sternly before anyone could move to deliver a blow. “What did we say about being civilized? Can’t you boys keep the promise for even two days?” My voice turned to whimper. “Can’t I even have peace for the evening?”

My mates all looked sheepish before they glared at each other.

My manipulation worked for only a second.

“You put up with a shitload from us, honeybee,” Blaze said. “I’m so sorry.”

“I apologize as well,” Rai said.

Only Elvey chuckled, but he became solemn the next second.

“I haven’t properly thanked the three of you,” he said sincerely. “Though, if you hadn’t watched Tianna break my bones, you’d probably never have taken the deal. Anyway, I still owe you a big one, brothers.”

My dragon kings silenced for a second. Then Blaze waved his hand to show his generosity.

“We’re even,” the fire dragon said. “Without your elaborate plan, we might never have been able to kill that snake. Together, we are unstoppable. Look how we united two realms and the human cities and healed the land.”

“I think it’s time to reward ourselves,” Iokul decided, gazing at me, fire of desire burning through his layers of ice.

My heart fluttered, and heat rose on my skin.

“Every night, when you weren’t around, I dreamed of burying myself deep inside you,” Rai said, his eyes searing with such heat it caressed the aching flesh between my thighs. “I need to hear you moaning my name, mate.”

“I’m all yours,” I breathed out.

Blaze’s nostrils flared. My mates loved the scent of my arousal.

Then, six hands worked on undressing me effectively while stripping themselves. In no time, I was nearly bare before them.

Blaze’s large hand palmed my pussy, lust ablaze in his liquid amber eyes, before Iokul pulled my black lacy panties down over my knees.

I gasped at the sensation and rocked my hips.

Iokul gave the fire dragon an annoyed look. He had been planning to claim the flesh between my thighs first. That was why he’d chosen to yank off my pants. But Iokul adapted fast. He spread my legs wide and traced his lips up toward my inner thigh.

Rai, who leaned against piles of pillows with my back against his chest,

moved his head toward me. He turned my face to the side and slanted his mouth against mine before Blaze could lean in to take it.

Blaze snapped his head back and settled on stroking my pussy with one hand, his other hand fondling my breast.

Rai took my other breast, his fingers kneading my taut nipple.

I arched my back, pleasure rippled through me in shockwaves.

My dragon consorts' touch was forever fire in my veins.

Rai's large erection poked my back, which only made my heart race faster. And mercilessly, he started to thrust his tongue in my mouth in possessive mating fashion.

Elvey still watched us, though his eyes had grown hooded.

I could feel his lust—dark and urgent. I could smell its tang of passion.

His gaze followed Blaze's fingers rubbing my clit in small circles. I cried out and moaned against Rai's sensual lips. Then Blaze's fingers thrust into my moistened heat.

In and out and in, he thrust slowly, teasing and torturing, then his fingers dove in faster. His other hand left my breasts all to Rai and worked skillfully on my clit. My pussy clenched, needing to find that first release.

"Not yet, babe," Blaze said, his voice rough and husky.

Rai broke away from my lips. "We need to coordinate better than this," he said, his dark sapphire eyes flashing. "Daisy can ride me first."

"I'm working on her pussy," Blaze said. "She's so ripe. I can mount her from the front."

"I'm about to kiss her all the way up to her sweet core," Iokul said. "I haven't tasted her yet. I need to have her sweet juices on my tongue."

No, this wasn't happening again. I needed to stop it before my dragon mates ended up fighting. Two weeks apart, and they'd forgotten how we used to play.

"I'll ride Rai first," I said. "He's already beneath me, ready and eager. One of you can fuck me from behind at the same time. And I also have two hands and a mouth."

Before I even finished voicing the arrangement, Rai lifted me effortlessly, flipped me over, and I straddled him.

My ass swayed, rubbing against his massive erection, my arousal coating his shaft.

He let out a short rough groan as he heaved my ass up, brushed my plump folds open with the crown of his shaft, and aimed his thick head at my slick

entrance.

He plunged me down his length, his cock pushing into my narrow passage, inch by glorious inch, until my pussy swallowed his length and held it captive.

I threw my head back and moaned at the carnal pleasure.

He allowed me to adjust to his size for a second before thrusting up, and my inner walls molded round his cock. The feel of his weight and hardness inside me was fucking delicious.

I pushed him down, my hands splaying on his hard chest as I reveled in the feel of him beneath me.

I should be the one riding him. He got my message, and his lips pulled back in a sensual grin.

Heat racing in my veins, I moved up and down his length, fucking him faster and harder. Our flesh slapped together, spurring me on, making me wilder. I'd missed the feel of my dragons on me, in me. I twirled, rocked, and pumped my hips atop Rai, my ass slamming down to his heavy balls again and again. The dragon in him growled and purred.

“This lovely pussy is mine to fuck,” he hissed.

But I was fucking him.

“Her exquisite pussy is ours, and we'll fuck it with care,” Iokul said, moving behind me.

My body shuddered in need for him as well, for all of them.

Blaze wrapped around my waist, his face between my breasts, his mouth finding my nipple and suckling. Another kind of carnal pleasure rocked me as the fire dragon's teeth grazed over my sensitive skin.

Iokul's hands gripped my ass. My skin tingled at the touch.

He spread my butt cheeks, aiming his cock at my back entrance and slowly gliding in.

I gasped as his cock inched inside me, my muscles tensing momentarily, before giving way to the carnal lust that ached to be sated.

Rai took the control back, bucking up his hips and thrust into my heat.

Iokul moved inside me gently while Rai fucked me vehemently.

I threw my head back as the pleasure speared into me at both ends, my body igniting with dragon fire.

Two cocks pounded in me, making me feel so filled and wanted.

Blaze removed his lips from my breast. He knelt on my side and started to pump his large cock up and down. The fire dragon had the largest cock

among his brothers, but then, my last mate hadn't joined us.

My lips parted, breathless moans escaping the depth of my throat. My eyes glowed with need for all my mates. I turned my head in Elvey's direction.

He was no longer composed. There was such savage hunger on his face, that for a heartbeat, I was afraid he'd devour me. Dark stars twirled in his eyes—they were all falling. The next instant, the demigod shrugged off his shirt, trousers, and boots.

He stalked toward me, his cock jerking proudly and aggressively, full of forbidden desire. He got into the bed on the other side of me. Turning my face to the side, he traced my bottom lip with the head of his cock.

I'd never used my mouth to fuck Elvey, but I was going to now.

My tongue flickered out, licking the drop of the pre-cum on the slit of his cock. It tasted like him—sunlight on ocean and forest. Elvey sucked in a sharp breath, and a sultry smile spread on my lips.

Feeling good, right, baby? I asked in his head.

Blaze watched us darkly, still pumping his cock, a bit too hard. He could have taken my mouth with his cock, but he was giving Elvey the first-time privilege.

Elvey cupped my cheeks, and my mouth opened voluntarily. Hesitating for a mere second, he shoved his cock between my lips.

It was too big. I could only take a couple inches of his shaft.

My hand half-wrapped around the base of his manhood as I suckled his cock, swirling my tongue around his crown. When we warmed up a little, I could take more of his length.

Elvey thrust in deeper, the head of his cock bumping at the back of my throat. I took him all the way in, my tongue flat against his thick dick. My mate growled in pleasure.

Now I had three cocks thrusting in me, all possessive and mighty.

Rai gripped my thighs and thrust into my pussy at a savage speed. In and out. His action blurred. Pleasure lit up my entire being.

Iokul pounded behind me with an ice dragon's strength, then he moved faster and harder, my ass slamming back into his pelvis, my breast bouncing with abandon.

Blaze pressed his steel rod on my tit and played with it before he placed his cock between my deep cleavage and thrust.

Every inch of my skin was on fire. Pleasure rocked me from all sides,

through all my senses. Every ounce of my being was consumed by mates, the overwhelming sensation threatening to drown me, to undo me. My every cell was more alive than it had ever been.

I'd never felt so content, so cherished, and so beautiful.

My four mate's strength kept pouring into me, offering me their fire, ice, storm, and light unconditionally.

Their mighty cocks drilled into me with reckless abandon, and I was a leaf in the center of a whirlwind.

I was being fucked in every way imaginable, and all of them desired me above anything else. I was their most valued treasure, and they were mine.

Their thrusts were wild, savage, and caring at the same time. Their need for me was great and flattering, and mine for them. Every stroke drove me to the edge of insanity and then brought me back just to drive me to the brink again.

I moaned their names in turn, begging them to stop, then begging them to never stop.

A hand—I wasn't sure whose—pinched my clit, and I felt the first wave of my orgasm brush over me, but it wouldn't break, not yet. Not until I'd reached the borderline of insanity.

All of my mates became the storm of lust with me twisting and screaming in pleasure inside it. Their powers kept pouring into me, knowing I could take them all.

When they delivered their next sequences of powerful thrusts, our mating bond glowed like starlight weaving into the sunlight, yet none of my mates slowed their pace.

Waves of maddening pleasure pushed me to the peak, finally crashing and breaking over me. I erupted and let out a roar of carnal delight.

Thunders rolled across the night sky, and lightning flashed outside the window. Rai thrust up and shuddered inside me as he roared his release.

Iokul roared after Rai and stilled in me, snow drifting down from the ceiling, settling on my lashes.

Blaze pumped his cock between my breasts, and I watched a stream of his hot seed shoot out all over my breasts. His dragon fire traveled all over me, licking my skin.

Elvey gave one last, forceful thrust with a low growl, his seed filling my throat.

"I've never done that before, beloved," he whispered in amazement as if

he couldn't believe what had just happened.

His power of air and sky lashed out. The violent current lifted all of us, suspending us in the air, his blue light forming a ring around us.

My White Light joined his blue light, as did Blaze's fire, Iokul's ice, and Rai's lightning.

It was order, chaos, and magnificence.

Flowing music, lovelier than any sound in the universe, sang in our veins.

We were one, now and forever.

A lucky woman might meet one great love in her life, and I had four true loves. My centuries of loneliness, slavery, and being a nightmarish creature had all been worth it, since all led me to my mates. And for them, for any one of them, I'd go through any kind of burning hell again and again.

I knew, no matter what, in the end, I'd come back to be with them.

While we floated in the air, still locked and entangled with each other, my mind already drifted to the prospect of round two of the lust feast.

I wanted to have them again and again, until I fucked them hoarse, or they fucked me hoarse.

My mates chuckled, perceiving my dark thoughts and rainstorm of lust through our mating bond. Their eyes, all different shades and colors, scorched me with adoration, thick desire, and wicked promises.

"I'll fuck all of you until you beg," I said. "And even then, I won't stop."

Elvey tensed beside me and let out a string of ancient Fae curses. I arched an eyebrow.

"How cruel," purred a beautiful female voice, musical and powerful beyond measure.

We dropped back onto the vast bed, still tangled in each other.

Arianrhod, the Goddess of Inanna, materialized a few feet from our bed in a mist of light.

My three dragon mates immediately covered me with their hands and bodies. The thing is, I'd rather Arianrhod not see my mates' nudity. I struggled to throw them off, fumbling for a blanket.

Arianrhod laughed lightly, fully entertained.

I wasn't amused. I knew whom she had come for, and I'd rather never see her again. We'd quarreled over Elvey, and we'd been at odds even after she granted me the guardianship of the Dragon Realm.

My throat closed up, and my heart beat painfully. I took up an attack stance. I didn't care that she was a goddess. Elvey was mine!

Elvey flicked a wrist, and all of us were fully dressed in an instant.

Rai wore pajamas with cartoon images of bunnies on it, and Blaze wore a woman's silky flowery robe that covered the top of his thighs.

Both Rai and Blaze looked down at their outfit and then glared at Elvey.

Iokul smirked in appreciation. He had a black shirt with trousers on, just like Elvey.

And my demigod mate dressed me in a glowing white gown.

Arianrhod's sky-blue eyes roved over every one of my mates. "You're a bad boy, Elvey. So protective of even your mate's other mates. I'd rather you did not clothe them."

I narrowed my eyes, furious rage simmering inside me, threatening to boil over.

The goddess looked as impeccable as the last time I'd seen her. Only this time, her hair was raven-black instead of snow-white, flowing all the way to her lovely bare feet. Her skin was translucent ivory and no longer amber. Her soft, full lips held all the mystery of sensuality.

Her flimsy, light-blue gown barely covered her enticing curves, and she wasn't wearing underwear. Basically, I could see her lady bits clearly. And that only made me pricklier. All I wanted was to blindfold my mates, so they wouldn't see her half-nakedness.

I quickly glanced at them, and their gazes glued to only her face, but I could tell her appearance was distracting. The goddess emitted sexiness like she owned it.

Elvey leaned against the side of the headboard, his muscled arms folding across his broad chest. "Why are you here, Arianrhod?" he asked in a bored tone. "If you came for tea, you should visit when we aren't this busy."

"I was thinking of joining the party," the goddess said, her eyes brightening even more. "You're having such great fun. I shouldn't be left out."

Every hair on my body stood up on end as I prepared for attack.

"I'm not sharing," I said coldly, my hand raising, ready to throw her out of the window with my White Light, though I might not match up against the goddess.

Arianrhod arched an eyebrow, and I hated her for doing that.

"Yet they all share you," she said, swaying her hips.

My anger sizzled. I'd allow no one to seduce my men, and the slutty goddess was doing it right in front of me.

A pink, thick robe covered her completely. Elvey had just dressed the goddess.

She rolled her eyes. “Really, Elvey?”

Elvey shrugged. “Daisy’s roof, Daisy’s rules.”

Oh, I couldn’t love him more for that.

“If you came for Elvey, you can’t have him,” I said. “We didn’t go through all our battles just so you can steal him.”

“Elvey is one of us,” Blaze said, not afraid of the goddess. “We’ll fight anyone in any place at any time for him.”

Rai grabbed the helm of his pajamas and clenched a fist while sending Elvey a withering look. “We guard what’s ours.”

Iokul nodded his agreement, icy steam hissing out of his mouth.

Arianrhod blinked. “Will you all fight me—your goddess—for your rival? You didn’t even like him much.”

“We like him just fine,” Blaze said. “Not often, though. But he’s our brother now. We just have to tolerate him.”

“It’s not in our heart to fight you, great goddess,” Rai said. “Please don’t take our brother. Don’t make us go to another war when we just ended one.”

“It will break our mate’s heart if you take one of hers,” Iokul said. “We vowed to never let her heart break again at any cost.”

“A bargain is a bargain,” Arianrhod said, very displeased, yet her voice remained lovely and seductive.

“I don’t care,” I said. “Null it. We’re not going to fulfill it.”

“The deal is between Elvey and me,” Arianrhod said. “I need him as I need no other.”

Cold rage filled me like an electric charge. Violence was going to break out any second.

Elvey moved like a flash and stepped in front of me to shield me. “Daisy, beloved, calm down. Arianrhod doesn’t plan to take me. At least not today.”

“Not ever,” I said through my gritted teeth.

I was at the edge of shifting to a dragon. My fangs prolonged.

Arianrhod laughed viciously. “There are consequences to defying the divinity.”

“My father is returning, isn’t he?” Elvey asked warily.

Could he also read a goddess?

Elvey was born from the union of the God of Night and Sky and light Fae Princess Levana. His father hadn’t been able to look at his infant son after his

Fae consort died in a child birth. He'd taken off to another universe right after that and abandoned Elvey in his grief. Elvey hadn't forgiven his father.

Why would the god return now?

"Did you feel him?" Arianrhod asked.

"No," Elvey said. "My connection to him is faint, but I feel your fear."

An unpleasant thought sliced through my mind. Did my mate have a bond to the goddess so he could feel her?

"I came to warn you in person," Arianrhod sighed, dark light of uneasiness shading her once bright eyes. "He's coming for you. After millennia, he finally regretted leaving you. He's determined to take you with him to Zathos—the legendary planet of the gods, and he won't take no for an answer."

"He won't have my mate," I said, fire searing my words.

"Caelus is more powerful than any god and goddess in Inanna," Arianrhod said. "He plays by no one's rules except his, and he isn't only the God of Night and Sky. He's also the God of Ruin. He leaves chaos, destruction, and death in his wake when he chooses."

"We're quite familiar with chaos, destruction, and death," Iokul said. "Let him come, and we'll make sure he leaves our brother alone."

My mates formed around me protectively, forgetting it wasn't me but Elvey who needed their protection.

Arianrhod smirked mischievously and enigmatically. "I'll again put my deal with Elvey on hold, for now. Good luck."

The goddess vanished in a flash of light.

We traded glances at the grave news.

Didn't we deserve a break? I bit my bottom lip. I'd thought this happily ever after was a sure thing.

Blaze eyed Elvey, as if he were the source of all our misfortune.

"What now?" the fire dragon asked gruffly.

Elvey turned to me, his gaze heating as it traced my body, and just like that, liquid fire leapt between my thighs.

"I say we pick up where we left off," Elvey said and whistled a command.

Instantly, we were all naked again.

Lust rained down in me, and the aching need for all my mates became unbearable. They felt my want, and their hunger for me was storm, fire, ice, and the power from the stars.

We wouldn't let a new impending war, a fickle goddess, or an asshole god ruin our good times. As immortals, we'd learned from the mortals about seizing the moment.

My mates' hands roamed all over me, cherishing and exploring.

When they buried deep inside me, I was home.

We were five, and we were one. We would face everything together. We'd allow no one and no force to tear us apart.

When the God of Night and Sky and Ruin came, we'd be waiting.

Right here.

The End -

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SNIPPET OF SHIFTER GOD

“Shifter City is the opposite of the vampire lairs in Washington State, which is all rain and cold,” Shade said. “We picked the sunny state for a reason. No vampires like to venture into Nevada. Only a few very powerful vampires can survive the brilliant sun in our mountainous region.”

My heart stuttered. “What about the Vampire God? Can he come here? He’s powerful, right?”

“As I said, he’s more like a myth,” Shade said. “No one has seen him on this continent for a century. Though rumors say he was sighted in North America recently.” He lowered his voice to a hushed whisper. “Even if he’s hunting you, he won’t get to you. We’ll make sure of it.”

“We’re home,” the driver, who was a bear in his animal form, announced happily.

A fenced city with high-rise buildings loomed ahead. Sparks jumped from barbed wire fences at its top, and a legion of shifter soldiers patrolled the walls.

“Are those watch towers?” I asked, pointing at one of the towers inside the gate. Four armed soldiers stood on the top platform beside a mounted machine gun.

“We have eight of those towers in the city,” Shade said with pride. “We now have to rely on old-fashioned watch towers since the satellite era was over a century ago.”

When War, the second horseman, had come to Earth, I wondered what

had happened to him. Had he died, retired to his Heavenly home, or simply disappeared?

A chorus of howls from the city jerked me out of my trance. The shifter soldiers were acknowledging the return of their Alpha Heir and his team.

The leading jeep braked before the gate, as did the rest of the fleet. Sideburns jumped off the second vehicle and strode toward us. The strange thing was I hadn't missed him one bit, but as soon as he was in close proximity, my core tightened, needing him and wanting him in a shameful way.

From the sudden heat rising in his hard gray eyes, I could tell he felt exactly the same and he didn't like it either.

The Alpha Heir tilted his chin toward the two other shifters sharing the jeep with Shade and me. The shifters bowed to him, left our jeep, and filed into a black van.

My heart pounded erratically, and my hand reached out to grab Shade's sleeve. The younger prince had convinced me that his older brother had promised not to put me in the retaining center, but what if the Alpha Heir changed his mind?

Sideburns glanced at my hand as it landed on Shade's arm, and his face darkened.

"I'll escort Pip to the Academy and make sure she settles in," Shade offered, his eyes on his brother.

"That's where I'm going too," Sideburns said. "You drive."

Shade flashed me a comforting smile before he moved behind the wheel. Sideburns slid into the jeep and took the seat beside me. I wanted to scoot away and put some distance between us, but I didn't want to be that obvious and get further on his bad side. Who knew how he would take it? It wasn't exactly a smart move to give him the wrong impression or even let him know about his effect on me. He'd warned his inner circle not to reveal that I was his fated mate, and I was more than happy to pretend I was ignorant about it after how he'd treated me.

I might have nothing, but I wore my dignity like armor.

The fleet rolled forward and entered the city through the vast, heavy gate. Soldiers saluted their princes, and some curious eyes lingered on me. I regretted not putting the ball cap back on. My lilac-blue hair stood out from the others with us. Other than that, I didn't even know how I looked or how old I was.

As we drove, I sat quietly beside Sideburns. Neither he nor Shade talked to each other. I was also glad Sideburns hadn't interrogated me again after that night. The silence was heavy and awkward between us, yet the heat and desire that radiated off the Alpha Heir was thick and undeniable.

He might have decided that I wasn't good enough for him, but the mating call harassed him just the same. It would almost have been fun to watch him execute his self-control by balling his fists at his sides so he wouldn't reach for me, if the mating heat didn't get a rise out of me as well.

I'd stay far away from him as soon as the next opportunity came. As I tried to take my mind off him, I worried about my unknown new life in a city full of strangers.

What if everyone hated me?

I had only one friend, but Shade wouldn't be around all the time, and I shouldn't demand he babysit me. I was so nervous, all things considered, that I was no longer in the mood to observe the broad streets, the buildings, and the people strolling down the alleys.

If Shade and I were alone in the car, I might be more relaxed. I might have enjoyed the rest of the ride. I had so many questions regarding the new school and Shifter City.

"Uh, revered Alpha Heir," I said, turning to him but lowering my gaze, as I'd learned that looking into the eyes of the shifter was usually considered a challenge or defiance. I had no need to rile him up now. "You really don't need to accompany a humble newbie like me to the Shifters Academy. I bet Canary can guarantee my safety and even make me behave."

Shade didn't comment back, but I could tell he was trying not to laugh.

"I'm not escorting you," Sideburns said in a scathing tone. "As you said, you aren't important enough to be worth my effort."

Oh, burn.

"I am going to visit Princess Viviane, my intended," he said, reining in his temper. I had no idea why he was even angry. "Princess Viviane is a well-respected senior student in the Academy. She's supposed to graduate early next year."

"Cool," I said. "So you two will get married and have children soon? Sorry, I meant pups."

"That's none of your business," he grated.

Wow, where did this sudden hostility come from?

"No pups then?" I asked. "You aren't shooting blanks, are you, Your

Highness?”

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Meg Xuemei X is a USA Today and Amazon Charts bestselling author of paranormal and fantasy romance. She loves writing badass heroines and hot psycho alphaholes.