

yule tied



a monstrous ménage holiday romance novella

CARA BRYANT

YULE TIED

A MONSTROUS HOLIDAY MÉNAGE
ROMANCE

CARA BRYANT

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CONTENT NOTE

Yule Tied is intended for mature audiences only. It features sexual situations, including: spanking, pegging, male/male and male/male/female scenes, bondage, light domination, toys, demonic sex magic, and tails doing inappropriate things. All sexual situations are consensual.

Also features mature language, magical violence, a few too many “rocks in her boobs” jokes and more Star Wars references than you can shake a lightsaber at.

Please don't go around shaking lightsabers. You might lop off a boob.

CHAPTER 1

LUCY

This is fine. It's fine. It's only a spooky tomb hidden in a long-forgotten burial mound in the Welsh countryside. It's definitely not booby trapped and cursed.

Definitely not. Fuck, it's my sixth tomb of the year, and knowing the way my luck has been going, it's probably a thousand curses strung together with a trip wire, waiting to turn me into a poisoned-dart pincushion.

I groan and look up toward the gray sky. It hangs low over the countryside, blotting out the light of the waning moon, heavy with rain, snow, or a shitty mix of the two that'll make driving back into town on mud and gravel roads a real bitch. If I survive the spooky tomb, that is.

Okay, big girl panties. Big. Girl. Panties. In my career as a treasure liberator, I've scoured dozens of spooky tombs from top to bottom and I've only nearly died like eight times.

Eight. Hm. Balls, maybe I'm some kind of cat shifter fae creature? Am I on my ninth life, about to get a spear through the chest and shuffle off this mortal coil for good? Hah, would that make me a *cat* burglar? I crack myself up.

Either way, I don't relish the thought of my imminent demise.

No one knows where kin go when we die, but I'm guessing there's some special hell slipped in among the seven realms for me. I can only imagine kin hells are like the bottom of the ocean. We could explore it. We really could. Only, have you seen the eldritch horrors that lurk down there? No fucking thank you. Hard pass. I'm a magical being with a propensity

for daring my way into danger, and even I have no interest in plumbing the proverbial depths of the shadow realm's ocean floor.

Unease churns in my gut, sourness burning at the back of my throat. The shadow realm hasn't always been so shrouded in darkness. It's not the fire-and-brimstone hellscape humans imagine when they think of where demons and other creatures that go bump in the night might come from—or at least, it didn't use to be. For the longest time, it was a realm like any other. In perfect cosmic balance or whatever woo-woo nonsense. Without darkness, there is no light and vicey-versey. That kind of Jedi-Sith ish. Anakin was the chosen one, damn it, the one who was supposed to bring balance to the force, not lead it to darkness.

The shadow realm, like the force, got Anakin Skywalker.

Now, evil festers where the light that once cast the shadows no longer reaches. Wickedness breeds in the darkness. So says my grumpy demon foster dad of sorts. He escaped the shadow realm and only goes back to rescue orphans like the absolute baller he is. If there's a kin heaven, he sure as shit has a first-class ticket to it.

You're doing this for Aronael and Shadow House, I remind myself. Half a billion dollars can save a whole bunch of orphaned kin, just the way Aron and Shadow House saved me. But if I'm being honest (and I try to be, occasionally), keeping the kin orphanage slash community shelter standing is how I justified taking a job I already wanted. Aron's always said I never think before I leap. Or was it never think at all?

Yeah, Aron can *never* know the kind of shit I've gotten myself into this time.

Because someone with scads of money and magic as unidentifiable as mine is trying to find me so he can dig ancient arcane relics out of my chest, by any means necessary, and I know they're going to be really *mean* means.

About that.

Scary mother trucker Khadyr Blackmore dangled the dollars in front of me and I almost didn't bite. I've always found jobs and the associated treasure-in-need-of-liberation easily enough. I could have found quicker and easier jobs to save up the scratch for Shadow House, but then he showed me an old drawing on a withered scrap of vellum and, hells bells, I would have taken the job for free. I would imagine that it's hard to make an ink drawing on goat skin look *shiny*, but fuck me if that sun shard didn't downright glow on the page.

I've always been powerless to resist the call of shinies.

Truthfully, I didn't put too much energy into resisting the half bil either, and so I signed a contract in blood (gross, ill advised, do not recommend) and now a mysterious freak of nature is trying to find me. Because I *did* find the sun shard for him. I liberated it from two demonkin after a lot of hard work and oh-so much play. Did I play myself in the process? Yeah. I leapt. Didn't look. Fell in love. But I did the job as it had to be done. I got as close to the demon and incubus as lips to skin, snatched the shard and scrambled. I mean, shit, I would have done the job just for the existence-shaking orgasms they gave me.

I almost couldn't bring myself to steal the shard from them after the months I spent in their bed, but it was shiny, and I needed the dough for Shadow House before some evil robber baron bought up the land or whatever.

And I *really* needed Khadyr Blackmore to not rip my spine out and wear it as the oh-so-fashionable belt to a jacket made from my skin. I rub at the spot where said spine meets my skull, cold sweat making the fine, small hairs at the back of my neck icy against my skin. Khadyr isn't someone you fuck with if you like your skin where it is, and I do. Okay, maybe the skin coat thing is an exaggeration, but it's only because no one knows a fucking *thing* about the man other than he earned his reputation for ruthlessness in blood.

He's kin-magical-like I am, but no species of kin anyone recognizes. Just like me. Not faekin, not earthkin, and not demonkin. He's *other*. Unknown. I hate that I have that in common with him. No one knows the nature or the extent of

his powers, but I'm damn sure I don't want to personally find out when I don't find him another sun shard.

Because the one I so skillfully procured in between having my mind blown by two very sexy demonkin?

Yeah, um, it sunk itself into my chest and magically lodged itself behind my breastbone. Shittiest surprise ever. I visited fae healers, shamans, even a bog witch (0/10, do not recommend, had to burn my stinky boots with faefire afterwards, will probably have nightmares for the rest of eternity) trying to find a way to get it out. No luck.

No luck with the other four liberated shards I've earned myself, either.

See, this isn't my first Tomb Raider cosplay (if Lara Croft wore snow boots, a pom-pom hat and the puffiest puffy coat ever) of this job. In fact, this is Tomb Number Five of this job, and I'm really running out of tomb opportunities for magical trial and error at this point.

I know I've got an excellent rack, but I'm starting to resent just how attracted to it the shards are.

I tried tongs in the first crypt, thinking I'd be safe from being chest-sharded if I didn't actually touch the thing. You can guess how that went. I became the pod to two arcane relic peas.

I tried bespelled gloves (which were, admittedly, very *fun* to liberate) in the second, and in the third, I even brought in a vampire associate of mine, armed with a warded chest, for the grab and stash. The shard never made it into the chest. Well, it made it into *my* chest. Wrong chest. In desperation, I tried wearing a shadow-steel breastplate I borrowed from the rightful owner of the last tomb I raided. No dice. The shard sucked itself right through the armor and into me.

This time, I've warded *myself*. No magicked armor or containment vessels. I'm the problem here, so I've covered myself in wards. The shiny shit I had to fence to pay for these wards... I sigh. But they'll be well worth it if they work because I've already got about five too many shiny magical

artifacts lodged between my heart and lungs and no way to get them out.

But Khadyr? He'd slit my throat and then loot my still-warm corpse without a second's hesitation. And he wouldn't even apologize. Because he's ruthless. I may be a thief, but at least I have a code I stick to. If I'm going to loot a corpse, well, it has to have been a corpse for at least a few decades, not mere minutes. Though really, if I had my way, I'd avoid corpses entirely.

I don't know exactly how old the corpse in the crypt is, but if he's like the rest of the shard guards, I'm guessing he's been under this mound for at least a thousand years and change. It wasn't easy to find—even for me. We're talking layers and layers of glamours. High-fae glamours, too. Shit, this mound is covered in so much magic that even ground penetrating radar wouldn't be able to find anything suspicious beneath the surface. I do admire humans and all the things they manage to do without magic. Radar? That penetrates the ground? Genius. Truly, human ingenuity knows no bounds. Well, okay. Some bounds.

I huddle against the damp stone slab sealing the horrors within the tomb away from the world, and stamp my feet, trying to warm myself. But it's no use. There's no banishing the chill that's settled into my bones. Not with the approaching storm. Not with the oncoming horrors.

I'm stalling. Of fucking course I'm stalling. If you're going to cover a tomb in this many glamours, you're going to protect it with all kinds of wards and magic booby traps. I can *feel* the magic radiating off the burial mound. It buzzes, charges the air like high-tension powerlines. It skitters across my skin like spiders. All this power... the veritable shit-stew of curses, hexes, and all kinds of unimaginable torment weighs on me until my breath is thready in my throat.

Fuck, all the other tombs I've raided this year have been literal nightmare fodder. And I've got a sneaky suspicion this is going to be the worst yet.

Did I save the best (worst) for last? Of fucking course I did. I may be an excellent treasure liberator of many unique and varied skills, but I sure as shit didn't want to put every last skill to the test if I didn't have to. Spoiler alert: I got to raid a few more tombs just to be stuck having to run the last one on hard mode.

I consider my options. I can die trying to get another shard for Khadyr in some kind of bad-ass way (and fingers crossed it takes him a ton of effort and frustration to find my speared-through-the-chest or poison-dart-pin-cushioned corpse, because fuck that guy. For real.) or I can die at Khadyr's hands and have my looted corpse dropped on Shadow House's doorstep for Aron or one of the kids to find.

Okay, so I'm doing this. For the children of Shadow House.

There are nine switches hidden in the stone slab, set so seamlessly into the rest of the stone that they're invisible to the naked eye. But I yank off my pilling wool gloves and find them easily with the pads of my fingers because, apparently, finding is my superpower. If anyone else *could* see them, they'd assume the switches form a circle, but I know better. I found the truth in an old demon myth transcribed by a druid a millennium ago. I dig a stick of chalk from my backpack and draw lines between the switches, scrubbing out mistakes with the cuff of my coat sleeve until the nine-pointed star that makes up the Light Bearer's crown emerges. Nothing to it but to do it.

I tap out the switches in the order ordained in the old myth with the very tip of my pointer finger, leaning as far away from the entrance to the tomb as I can, braced and ready to bolt. But just as before, the switches sink into the stone with little clicks. I let out a thin breath and slump against the stone, all the adrenaline flooding from my body, when I'm not immediately struck down by magic lightning.

Stone grinds against stone and just like that, the adrenaline is replaced by excitement. It thrums in my blood until I'm practically vibrating with it. Or, shit, maybe that's all the magic. But, seriously. I freaking *love* the sound of spooky

doors with treasure behind them opening through some magical mechanism. Because as deadly as treasure liberation often is... I kind of love the thrill of it.

My skill of finding shards, particularly in tombs, is aided by a fun new development: the shards give me the warm fuzzies when another is nearby. It's like tomb-penetrating radar, built into my chest. Freaky? Absolutely. It's useful enough, but I really wish they'd do something a *bit* more useful. Like, glow. Turn me into a meat flashlight. It would really save me on batteries. But alas. The shards just chill out behind my ribs, not glowing like the little shits they are.

“Sorry, little buddies,” I say, tapping at my chest. Because, yeah, I talk to them. You try not talking to your growing collection of fuzzy-feeling-giving rack rocks and tell me how long *you* last.

Still definitely stalling. Still trying to banish the feeling of dread that makes me want to upchuck fish and chips into the snow with humor like this isn't the scariest fucking thing I've ever done.

Big. Girl. Panties.

I dig out my flashlight and switch it on, giving it a good slap when it flickers.

The tunnel under the mound immediately curves and I know I've got nine layers of nightmare labyrinth to navigate before I get to the goods.

The shards warm in my chest, and, okay, I don't hate it. It feels kind of like getting a hug from the inside out.

“You feel that, little dudes? We're getting closer to your brother or sister. You guys probably don't have genders. I mean, you're rocks. Glowy, shiny as fuuuck rocks, but rocks. So, your non-gender specific sibling. Can you do me a solid and not help suck it into my chest? I really need this one on the outside, okay?”

They don't often seem to listen to me, though what do I know about the listening habits of magical crystals?

“Can you little rock stars help keep me from getting speared, darted, flamed, spiked, or squashed?” So far, these tombs have challenged even my elite skills, and I’m guessing this particular tomb will get extra points for creativity. Prepare for the worst (getting simultaneously stabbed and squashed when one spiked wall and one rock wall close in on me), hope for the best.

I steel myself and start into the labyrinth. If it’s anything like the others—and I expect it will be—it’s not a maze. The tunnel will snake around the tomb, lead me around and around the crypt at its heart, trip me up with switchback turns, but eventually the tunnel will end at the tomb’s center. All within the freaky realm of normal I’ve come to expect.

But this tomb? It isn’t filled with trip wires or loose stones that make the floor fall away from me.

By the second turn in the tunnel, I understand why.

I underestimated the violent creativity of this tomb’s traps. Because there are dark hollows carved into the stone walls, each big enough for one very broad, very tall, very, very *dead*, armor-clad, armed-to-the-teeth, very much waking-up-at-my-intrusion demonkin.

Holy fuck, demon draugrs?

That wasn’t on my Bullshit Booby Tomb Traps bingo card. They draw their swords in what sounds like a symphonic car crash and cross them with their buddy across the way until all I see is unending exes of swords. I didn’t show up *wholly* unprepared. I’m decked out in all manner of stabby and shiny (my favorite combination) things: iron and silver daggers for fae and shifters respectively, and a recently-liberated gold stiletto knife. I even have a few spelled water balloons filled with salt water in case I need to as-salt any demonkin. So I’m prepared for demonkin, but *dead* demonkin?

I slip a water balloon out of my bag, squinch one eye shut and lob it at the nearest draugr. It strikes him right in the face (score one for the Lucemiester) and drips down his neck and chest. No telltale sizzle of salt doing its work. Damn. The

undead demon cocks his head and I swear, if he still had eyelids left, he'd be blinking at me in bemusement.

I cringe and am about to turn tail and run when my little bust buddies do their warm fuzzy thing in my chest. And the draugrs... just lower their swords? And step back into their resting places?

And then they bow. To me. Fuck, as if this whole past year hasn't been freaky enough.

"Once more into the breach," I mutter to myself, and take a step forward. And then another. I pass by the guardian draugrs, my shoulders pinched tight as I wait for the ominous ring of steel against steel, but they make no move to straighten, remaining in their low respectful bows.

Fucking creepy.

I take the draugr-filled turns of the labyrinth faster than I ever have before, careening around the sharp switchbacks as I plunge past the undead soldiers. They line both sides of the tunnel as it winds its way around the heart of the tomb, layer after labyrinthine layer. I gulp in desperate breaths of air that smells and tastes like death and decay, rot and ash on my tongue, trying to ignore the stinging stitch in my side and I sprint. My booted steps pound out a frantic tattoo, the *pat-pat-pat-pat* so close to the jack-rabbit kicking of my heart that the noises crash together in a cacophony.

Who needs a spooky soundtrack when I can make my own?

I finally burst into the center of the last guardian's tomb, my breath sawing in and out of my lungs.

Whoever this guy was, he must have been important. None of the other shard guards had any freaking *draugrs*, let alone a few hundred of them. He's a massive demon, even bigger than my demon ex-lover and he was strapping (and packing a hell of a... well, you know). He stands at the head of the crypt, held up by magic I don't understand and don't want to. His membranous wings are spread, nearly spanning the whole

width of the center of the tomb, lofting high over his horned head to make him look menacing.

It works. It really does. In any other circumstances, I'd be shaking in my snow boots. But even if this demon comes to life like his crypt crew did, he still wouldn't be as scary as Khadyr.

The shard glows faintly beneath the demon's armor and leathery skin turned translucent by the slow passage of time. Kind of like a freaky skin lamp. Like the one Khadyr could turn me into if he doesn't fancy wearing me as a coat.

"Sorry, buddy." I pull out my iron dagger and tug my scarf up over my mouth and nose. Not doing so is a mistake you only make once. And one you *never* forget.

I slice through the laces on his jerkin, the leather flaking away beneath my blade, and push it aside. This guy may have been a big deal when he roamed the realms, but now he's just another dead demon chest I need to crack open. I whisper a quick demonic prayer for forgiveness that Aron taught me and jam the dagger between the dead demon's ribs and his sternum. I yank the blade upward, severing what sinew still holds his crumbling ribs to his breastbone. Chalky bits of bone fall away, revealing my prize. Every facet of the shard's crystalline structure catches the light of my flashlight and shines brightly.

So shiny. So wonderfully, beautifully shiny.

So potentially about to be in my chest if these wards I'm wearing don't work.

I take a steadying breath. After all, what's the worst that can happen? I get another chest rock and then Khadyr brutally kills me and digs them out. My violent death (and Khadyr getting six times the agreed-upon treasure, the asshole) is the worst possible outcome.

I pick up the stone and my stomach flip flops and my insides pinch like I might just be pulled apart. A tug as the shard slips straight past the very expensive warding, a yank somewhere behind my belly button as the tomb disappears

around me, as a Brooklyn Heights loft I am all too familiar with replaces damp stone and cobwebs.

I thought Khadyr playing slice-and-dice with my bedazzled corpse was as bad as it could get.

Wouldn't you know it? I was wrong.

Reality is worse. It's *so* much worse.

Fuck.

“You, thief!”

Fucking fuck fuck *fuck*.

CHAPTER 2

REZNIK

Dark gods, the woman who stole one of the Light Bearer's shards is back in the loft I share with my only fellow remaining member of her Light Guard, all the careful wards we've set be damned. She crashes down on our sofa, snow flaking off her obscenely puffy winter coat.

No, not snow. Definitely not snow. She's cloaked in death, in the remains of one of my fallen brethren. I would know the feeling of Iradil's magic anywhere, even centuries after his death. Does this thief hold nothing sacred? She stole not one, but two of our most sacred relics, pieces of the Light Bearer's crown, defiling the resting dead for the second. What she did to me and Yaelyn pales in comparison. She tricked us, used us, made us love her though we hated ourselves for it. I didn't think she could do worse. But Iradil, he was the best of us. The Light Bearer's protector and captain of her Light Guard. Our brother, her last defense. And this betrayer carved him up to steal another shard of Lux's crown.

She clutches her iron dagger tighter, staring up at me with an impudent glare curving her full, kissable lips. I shake my head, but I can't banish the draw I feel toward her, even now. I loathe it, and her.

She peers over her shoulder and Yaelyn raises a hand in a confused sort of wave.

“Fucking fuck fuck fuck’ is right, defiler,” I growl, lunging for her.

She jumps deftly out of the way, as nimble as ever, and sprints for the door, tripping when Yaelyn lassos her ankle

with the tip of his tail as she darts past him. She whirls out of his hold and bolts, but falls to her knees just steps from the door, letting out an anguished cry. That doesn't stop her. She crawls, a weak, pathetic thing, clutching at her chest with one hand as she tries to steady herself with the other.

How could I have ever loved this despicable creature? Why must I fight the compulsion to sweep her up in my arms and kiss some sense into her, even now?

She crawls just a foot before Yaelyn grabs her, but not before pain rips around the sun shard embedded in my chest. It is like no pain I've ever known, and I've known torments beyond imagining. I have battled armies, taken down hordes, have been felled by blades coated with salt that sent agony singing through my veins. I have had my trust betrayed and my heart broken by the only woman beside the Light Bearer I have ever loved.

But this, this is all of that and more. This is the bitter sting of salt and acid; this is hellfire burning from within me. The excruciating torment of a gash freshly cleaved open; the inescapable ache of an old wound, long healed. Every pain I have ever felt, all at once, ripping through my ribcage.

I sink down into a leather armchair, clutching my chest just as Lucy did.

The pain only eases when Yaelyn scoops her up into his arms and deposits her, kicking and screaming, into the chair across from mine. He binds her wrists with his tail, glaring down at her.

"I have so many fucking questions for you," he says, his voice hard. He can't even look at her. Yaelyn was faster to fall for Lucy, faster to turn his back on our oath, and I know the guilt gnawed away at him, even if this small, slip of a woman brought him more joy than he'd experienced in centuries. She broke him when she left, one of the sacred sun shards in her pocket. To see the incubus I love brought so low, destroyed so thoroughly... and now the woman who rained down this hell upon us is sitting in our loft and swearing up a storm.

“What did you do to me?” she demands. “I was in *Wales*. And now I’m in New York? The fuck did you do?”

“So you *were* defiling the body of my fallen brother.” I surge up from the chair and stalk over to her, letting my wings fan out behind me, blocking the late morning sun streaming in through the windows and throwing her into shadow.

“I needed another shard,” she mutters, looking abashed. A pretty blush paints her cheeks a red almost as bold as that of her hair, her spiky auburn lashes fanning against them as she ducks her head and peers up at me through glassy blue eyes. I have always thought of her as the battle between fire and ice, her beauty a brutal thing that once brought me to my knees. But now she is soft, curled in on herself in the oversized armchair, vulnerable and weak. Or she pretends to be with the demure way she looks at her lap where she wrings her slender hands.

I know this trickster better than that.

Greedy, loathsome woman. She took everything from us, then found even more to take. Yaelyn and I spent centuries mourning our brothers of the Light Guard, sending them to their eternal rest, fortifying their tombs with glamours and spells. Securing their crypts from the ignoble few that would dare rob them.

“To sell?”

Lucy turns away from me, but I won’t let this thief escape my wrath. I grab her chin and force her to look up into my eyes. It’s a mistake, and a grave one. I had forgotten just how blue her eyes are. But there’s something new in her gaze that wasn’t there before.

Fear.

I look to Yaelyn and the incubus nods. He’s picking up on the emotion, too.

“Are you afraid of us, little thief?”

She laughs. The intolerable *menace* actually laughs. “Of you? Don’t flatter yourself.”

“But you *are* afraid,” Yaelyn muses, coming to stand beside me, yanking her forward in the chair by her bound wrists. “Of what, I wonder?”

“None of your fucking business is what,” she bites out. And there she is, behind all the witty quips and bravado, the spitfire Yaelyn and I fell in love with. The spitfire forever fighting for something just out of reach, the spitfire with the dirtiest, filthiest, most sinful mouth. Dark gods, the things she can do with that mouth.

“Why did you need another shard?” I press, looming over, hoping to intimidate her. I know how monstrous I am, a demon of savage strength and bitter brutality. If she isn’t afraid of me, she should be.

Beside me, Yaelyn coughs awkwardly and cuts a look at me. “Not helping. The absolute opposite of helping. You’re not scaring her, you’re—”

Heat rises in my cheeks and I thank every god I can think of that she won’t be able to see the flush against my shadow-dark skin. Fuck, I’m turning the little thief on? Why does that make me want to loom over her even more?

She laughs anxiously. “Uh, hey, big guy. Why don’t you tell Yaelyn to let me go and we can work this out like grown-ups? Or he can leave me bound...” she trails off and wets her lips with the tip of her tongue. I have to fight back a groan as she drags her gaze up my body. There’s no doubting the intent behind her words as she drinks me in like a woman dying of thirst. Yaelyn has her bound tightly, but not so tightly that she can’t press her shoulders back, arch her back, present her luscious breasts to me.

What the fuck is *wrong* with this woman? And what the fuck is wrong with *me*?

“No,” I grit out, because I can tell Yaelyn is considering it. She’s either unhinged or this is more of her trickery, drawing us in with her body, making me want to take her over my knee and... “No. Absolutely not. Answers, Lucy. Why did you need a shard and what the fuck are you doing back here?”

“Do you think I willingly flung myself back into this pit of vipers? While I may make some questionable decisions, returning to the scene of a crime isn’t one of them. I’m not that much of an idiot.” She glares up at me, all fire and fury. Regrettably, it stirs something in me. “I *was* after a shard. I owe on a contract. Nothing personal, boys.”

“What happened to the other one?” I demand, looming again.

“Rez,” Yaelyn moans. “You need to stop. She’s getting all...” He tugs at the collar of his shirt. I don’t envy his incubus nature. A woman he loved is turned on and it’s hitting him with the force of a tsunami.

I let out an exasperated growl and stalk away from her. “What happened to the last shard you stole from us?” If she’s pillaging tombs, it means she either doesn’t know about the three shards still in mine and Yaelyn’s possession or has determined them not worth the work.

“Th–um, it’s safe,” she finally says. “Just not safe in a way that I can hand it over to Khadyr.”

“You’re working for Khadyr Blackmore?” I roar, wings flicking to their full span behind me. All this time and my little thief, my spark, has been working for that monster? Fuck, it’s no wonder she’s scared. “What does he want with the shard?”

“I didn’t ask, and he didn’t elaborate on his intentions.”

What a fine fucking mess this is. I rub at the base of one of my curling horns in frustration. “Setting aside the supposed safe keeping of the first shard you stole from us and the fact that you’re working with Khadyr fucking Blackmore, and not even considering what his intentions with such a powerful magic object might be... why are you here, Lucy?”

She slumps in the chair and shoots me a churlish glare. “Like I said, it wasn’t intentional. I grabbed the shard and poof, here I am. Believe me when I say I would rather be literally anywhere else.”

“Lie,” Yaelyn lets me know in that silky, lulling voice of his.

“Hyperbole,” Lucy growls, scowling up at the incubus. “Look, I didn’t see a portal. I don’t know how I got here. There were a few disorienting seconds of darkness and then—” She shrugs her shoulders.

Yaelyn regards her thoughtfully. “Shadow walking?” he suggests.

“She’s not vomiting on herself right now. Unless she walks the shadow realm frequently, she’d be sick to her stomach.”

She audibly swallows. “Actually, now that you mention it...”

“Oh fuck,” Yaelyn mutters. “She’s gonna spew.” He releases her quickly, pointing in the direction of the bathroom, though she already knows where it is. She bolts, but not toward the bathroom.

I don’t know how she managed to trick him into thinking she truly *was* feeling ill, but she succeeded. I snarl out a curse and slip through the shadow realm then back into this realm, cutting her off at the door. I catch the smirk on her full, pink lips before I catch the glint of the dagger in her hand. We collide and she jams the blade into my thigh. It plunges through scar, sinew, and muscle and, perversely, one fleeting thought registers before the pain does: she keeps her blades sharp, just like I taught her to.

Sense returns and the wound stings, yet she’s the one who howls in anguish, letting go of the knife and dropping to the floor. She curls in on herself as pitiable little sobs escape her, pain wracking through her body.

I pluck the knife out of my thigh and toss it into the little tray on the hall table where Yaelyn and I keep our keys, then kneel down beside her, because while her sickness was a trick, I can tell this isn’t.

I should leave her weeping on the hallway floor. She’s a liar and a thief, and yet... “Fuck,” I mutter, then pull her into my arms. She looks up at me through her tears and if she’s deceiving me right now, fuck, I’ll let her. I gather her close until she’s curled up against me, soaking my shirt with her

tears. I steadfastly ignore just how good she feels in my arms, small yet so strong. My spark, the barest flicker of light in the dark.

“I have a theory,” Yaelyn says quietly as he crouches beside us. “But it’s going to be a real bitch to test.” He reaches out a tentative hand and at my nod and Lucy’s hiccupping sob, he strokes her rust-red hair away from her tear-stained face. She settles at his touch, and he sighs. “I think we’re caught in some kind of curse. My guess is that it’s something you picked up in Iradil’s tomb. It was so long ago that we set the spells and wards... Whatever it is, it’s bound you to us. It’s why we can’t part without the pain you and Reznik experienced. I think it means we’re unable to harm each other without that same pain as well.”

She looks up at him and rolls her lower lip between her teeth, then slowly gives Yaelyn her hand. He plucks the dagger off the table with a grimace. “Just a little prick, Mischief.”

“Said no one ever with you two in the room,” she jokes weakly. “Make it quick. Also said no one ever when it comes to you two.”

I shake my head, but I feel like I can finally breathe again. “You’re feeling better, menace.”

She nods. “A little. Yae, get it over with, please?”

He braces himself, squinching one eye shut and then pricks the tip of her index finger with the dagger. Blood wells from her wound and he drops to the floor, hands over his heart like it’s trying to rip its way out of his chest.

“I. Fucking. Hate. Being. Right,” he grits out between sharp hisses of pain. Lucy crawls out of my arms and over to our incubus, fitting her body around his, spooning him. She jerks her head in my direction, and I take Yaelyn’s other side. I cup my lover’s face in one hand, stroking his cheek with the pad of my thumb, taking care to keep my claws from scratching him.

“Helps,” he breathes out. “More? Need you, Luce.”

“Always,” she murmurs, pressing a kiss to his neck. She rubs her hand soothingly down his arm from his shoulder to his elbow, then back up, and nuzzles into him while I kiss every inch of his handsome face. He stills between us after a few minutes. Fuck, Lucy didn’t hesitate. She saw him in agony and immediately did as she used to when we’d soothe him after his night terrors.

“I think Yaelyn got it worse, and he did far less damage to you than you did to me,” I say.

She meets my eyes over the incubus’ shoulder. “Sorry I stabbed you. I panicked. Is your leg okay?”

“Spark, that was barely a bee sting to me. It’s healed over already. Still taking all your weapons away.”

“You can’t, Rez. I can’t stay here. I’m sorry, but I... I can’t. Fuck, now I have to find *another* shard for Khadyr. He’ll kill me if I don’t. You know his reputation.”

“What happened to the shard you *literally* just stole?”

“It’s safe,” she hedges.

“But not in a way you can give it to Khadyr.”

“Bingo. The world’s shittiest game of Bingo ever.”

CHAPTER 3

LUCY

“We’ll fix this, Lucy,” Reznik rumbles. “We’ll find a way to deal with Khadyr. How much time do you have left on your contract?”

“A little over a week,” I whisper, my voice hoarse. I can’t even good-news-bad-news this situation because it’s too fucking much. I’m magically tethered to the demonkin I fucked then fucked *over*, but we can’t hurt each other. So much for incapacitating them and making a run for it. I’ve got a-fucking-nother shard to find or Khadyr’s going to carve me up like a Christmas ham. Never mind that I’m out of toms, out of ideas, and nearly out of time.

Yaelyn leans back, head on my shoulder, and nuzzles my neck, sending flutters into my belly. “Thanks, Mischief,” he says, his usually smooth voice rough, ragged and... wanting.

“I hate seeing you suffer,” I say quietly into his dark, silky hair.

Rez snorts and looks up sharply. “That’s rich, after what you did.”

“She’s telling the truth, you ogre. You can’t see into her heart the way I can.” Yaelyn pokes Rez in the gut and winds his tail around my calf in a gesture that’s so familiar, so comforting, that I snuggle closer to the incubus.

I swallow hard. Yaelyn can see the snarl of pain and doubt inside me, my fear. The tumult of emotions churning in my gut. He’ll know that holding him like this is the rightest I’ve felt in months, that I finally feel like I’m back where I’m meant to be—and how that makes guilt eat away at me. I

thought betraying these demonkin would be easy. It *was* easy to wedge my way into their lives and fall into bed with them. Too easy to fall in love. I brush the hair away from his face and kiss his cheek softly.

He squirms, his tail wrapping more tightly around my leg, the tip drifting higher, stroking the inside of my thigh just above my knee.

“Yae,” I protest. They can’t welcome me back into the bed, their arms, not after what I did.

“Shut up, Mischief,” he pleads. “I want you and you want us.”

“I’ll only hurt you again.”

Reznik huffs. “For once, she’s honest.”

“Maybe,” Yaelyn concedes, ignoring Rez’s barb. “But until then, I want you bare and bound in our bed.”

I groan as desire floods through me at his words. The draw between us is even stronger than before, and when the incubus’ deft tail flicks over my slit through my jeans, I’m gone.

“Settle this like grown-ups?” I ask again, gasping when Yaelyn’s hold on me tightens. I look up into Reznik’s dark, oil-slick eyes. He has to want this as much as we do. We won’t do this without him. And fuck, he does. He grits his teeth, trying to deny the draw, the desire.

“If we’re settling this like grown-ups,” he purrs, that rumbling burr in his deep voice sending a jolt of need through me, “then you’re taking your punishment like a grown-up. And you’re giving me the answers I want.”

Fuck, what kind of answers can I give him? That I’m sure I’m going to meet my end at the hands of the most sadistic bastard on the eastern seaboard? That I’ve got a literal chest full of priceless artifacts, which are just a little bit stolen? Fuck, they only know about two of them. But if they’ll just touch me, extinguish this unquenchable need inside of me, I’d tell him anything he wants to hear. This is a dangerous fucking game, and they know it. They know how easily they’ll reduce

me to a squirming mess of need, desperate for their hands, their mouths, their thick cocks working into me.

Then Yaelyn flips me onto my back and wedges his thigh between mine, grinding into me. His storm-cloud gray eyes glint, and his dark lips quirk with a faint smirk. “What’s it going to be, Luce?” He shifts, rubbing against me in a way that sends electric desire pooling into my belly.

I’ve always been a goner for these men. Since they first moment I set eyes on them. “Yes,” I beg.

Yaelyn’s lips find my neck and I throw my head back to give him better access. “We’ll never give you more than you can take,” he says, his voice as smooth as silk. “But we’ll give you more than you *think* you can stand. You’ll be begging us to stop, begging us for *more*. And you’ll give us everything.” He licks up the hollow of my throat and I whimper beneath him. “Every scream. Every fucking ounce of pleasure we demand. You’ll give us your mouth if we want it. Your tight, sweet cunt.” He strokes his tail along the back seam of my jeans, a touch so light I imagine it as much as I feel lit. “Your ass.” He nips at me, and I can feel his grin against my skin. “Rez is going to turn it the prettiest shade of pink.”

I tilt my head just enough to look into the demon’s eyes. He watches me intently, hunger in his gaze.

“How many times do you think she needs to be spanked, Rez?” Yaelyn asks lightly, rubbing his knee against my sex through my jeans.

“Um, guys,” I pant, shifting against Yaelyn, desperate for his touch. “Are we sure that’s even, you know, feasible? Yae couldn’t even prick my finger without repercussions.”

“The difference, Spark,” Rez says, stroking up my thigh with one massive hand, “is that you didn’t want your finger pricked. But this? You’re wet just thinking about it.” He looks me over, that smug, lazy smile I’ve always loved curving his lips. That smile that promises pleasure beyond even what my filthy imagination can dream up. “How many times do you need me to spank you, Lucy?”

“T-ten times?” I venture.

“Fifteen it is,” he says, dark and dangerous and impossible to resist. “Go, little thief. I want you naked in our bed and ready to accept your punishment by the time we get in there.”

Yaelyn rolls off of me and I stumble to my feet, sprinting toward the bedroom. They follow me at a more leisurely pace, talking in low tones about what they plan to do to me, and I nearly trip trying to yank my pants off. By the time they step into the bedroom, my clothes are in a haphazard pile on the floor, and I’m on the bed, spread for them.

“Beautiful,” Yaelyn murmurs, eyes roving down my body to my wet, swollen sex. “Need a taste.”

“No,” Rez rumbles. “There will be time for that.” He sits at the edge of the bed and beckons me toward him.

I crawl over to him, but a flutter of apprehension in my gut slows me. This *is* meant to be a punishment and Reznik is pure, brutal strength. If he *can* spank me, he could hurt me.

“Spark,” he chides. But he must see the flicker of worry in my eyes, because he twists on the bed and cups my chin in one big, clawed hand. He presses his forehead to mine and nuzzles his nose against mine. “Never more than you can stand, Lucy. That’s not the type of men we are. Yellow, we slow down. Red, we stop. Like always.”

Always. Selfish creature that I am, I want always and forever with these demonkin and wish, not for the first time, that we’d met under far different circumstances. After what I’ve done and with the suffocating knowledge of what Khadyr will do to me, I know I’ll never have that with them. Not always. Just this time. Not forever. Just tonight.

If all I get is tonight, they’ll get me as they always should have: wholly me, no doubts, no hesitation.

I swallow around the hard knot in my throat and nod. He stands and scoops me up into his strong arms. I’m confused for a moment until he sits down on the low ottoman, turns me so my back is pressed against his chest, and wraps my legs around his hips.

Yaelyn takes us in with darkened eyes before he steps forward, captures my mouth in a consuming kiss, then lowers me to the floor. I brace on my forearms and tense when I hear a crack. But that definitely wasn't Reznik's hand on my ass. And then a thick finger thrusts inside my soaking core and I buck against him. Clawless. He bit his claw off so he wouldn't hurt me.

"I thought—"

"Shush, Spark. And take the punishment I give you," he says, soft but stern, as he pumps his finger inside me. He kneads one of the globes of my ass, letting me feel the points of his claws with every squeeze.

"Fuck," Yaelyn groans, watching us.

"In the chair where she can see you," Rez commands. "Work yourself. Show her the cock she's going to have to earn with good behavior." He gives my ass another squeeze and plunges his finger inside me, making me cry out. "You're going to be a good girl for us, aren't you, little thief?"

"Y-yes!" I gasp.

"Good. Now count."

The hand that was massaging my ass comes down hard on my skin with a sharp crack. My cunt clenches around his finger and I moan. Fuck, my ass *stings*, but I love it.

"Lucy," Reznik warns, but his voice is even, not pained from harming me. Because he hasn't, not truly. Not in a way I didn't want.

"O-one," I stammer.

"Dark fucking gods," Yaelyn grits out, fisting himself. "Mischief, you have no idea how hot you two look. You like his finger in your cunt while he spanks you?"

I look up at my incubus. He sprawls before me in all his glory, like a lazy, lustful god, rubbing his thumb through the pearly precum at the crown of his cock. I manage a shaky grin. "Don't know. I think I need to feel it again to be sure."

“Menace,” Rez mutters, his hand coming down hard and fast, pinking one side of my ass, then the other with four stinging swats that make my cunt squeeze him even harder. He isn’t using more than the smallest fraction of his strength, just enough for the most delicious ache to set in.

“Two-three-four-five,” I pant.

“Answer Yaelyn, Lucy. Do you like my finger in your cunt while I spank you?” He curls that finger inside me, stroking against the spot that makes me squirm and whimper in his lap. He’s hard beneath me and I writhe against him, trying to find the friction I so desperately need. “Lucy, I asked you a question.”

“Yes!” I cry out.

“Good girl,” he murmurs, massaging my ass once more. The next five spanks come fast and my skin heats, each swat stinging more than the last. Tears spring to my eyes and spill down my cheeks, not from the pain but from... from release? I’m not absolved of my crimes, not by these men and not by myself, but as I squirm in Reznik’s lap, I feel lighter, like some of my sins have been cleansed away.

I count out the spanks, my voice watery.

I feel Reznik pause, feel the slide of his finger as he draws it out of me. “Spark?”

Yaelyn meets my eyes, a peaceful smile on his face. “She’s okay, Rez. She’s stronger than she looks.”

The demon rubs slow circles on my back. “Need to hear it from you, Lucy.”

How do I put into words how I feel? Like a weight has been lifted from my shoulders, that each sharp crack and answering cry is a form of catharsis I didn’t know I needed? But they did. My demonkin knew. This isn’t a punishment, not by a longshot. This is a homecoming.

“More,” I breathe.

“Five more, little thief.”

Rez slicks his finger through my folds, brushing my clit, and I jolt against him. When the next spank comes, I buck hard against his hand and pleasure spirals through me.

“Eleven,” I pant as he circles my clit with the rough, calloused pad of his finger. He knows my body so well, knows the way to touch me until I’m writhing against his hand.

His other hand cracks against my ass, harder than before, as he strokes my pussy, and I cry out. Pain and need twist inside me.

“Twelve!”

“Rez, she’s going to come if you keep that up,” Yaelyn warns, moaning as he squeezes himself, bucking up into his hand.

“She’s allowed one for free,” Reznik says gruffly. “The rest she earns.” He draws his hand from my soaked pussy, and I cry out in protest only to hear that telltale snap. Fuck, *yes*.

“You need to grow your claws just so you can bite them off,” Yaelyn grunts. “She nearly came from that alone.”

Rez plunges his thumb into my cunt and works my clit until I’m bucking against him, crying out an endless stream of senseless pleas.

When the thirteenth spank stings my ass, I come apart with a scream, pulsing around Rez. Pleasure tears through me and I don’t know how I ever walked away from these men. My demon doesn’t let me come down. He strokes me through my orgasm, and just as I’m approaching my second peak, he spanks me twice more, quick, sharp strikes, and I’m close, so fucking *close*, but he releases me, slipping his hand from my drenched sex.

He kneads my pinkened cheeks, soothing away some of the pain. I groan in frustration, trying to squeeze my legs together, desperate to fall over the edge he brought me to.

“No, Lucy. You earn the rest.” He gathers me up into his arms and rubs my stiff shoulders as he holds me close. Yaelyn joins us, kneeling beside the ottoman and stroking my hair.

Rez's chest rises and falls with his steady breath, and I'm lulled, soothed by the embrace I've missed so much.

The rest of my catharsis comes in the messy, ragged sobs that follow, spilling out of me as they hold me. All the pain and doubt flood from me with my tears. "I'm sorry," I weep.

"I know," Rez murmurs, rocking me in his arms. "And Yaelyn already knew. You know he's the brains of this outfit."

A watery laugh escapes me. "I don't know..." I muse. "Your noggin's pretty good for a few things."

Rez barks out a surprised laugh. "You just like holding my horns while you're riding my face."

"You don't hate that either," Yaelyn says, wryly. "But I'm afraid I'll have to deny you. I'll be the one licking that sweet pussy until she screams. On that note, hold her open for me." He considers the demon for a moment and then shakes his head. "Actually, undress first. I want to see her dripping all over your cock."

Reznik laughs again and Yaelyn's answering smile could light up even the darkest places. Has Rez's laughter become such a rare occurrence that hearing him laugh brings the incubus that much joy? Reznik has always been terse and getting him to laugh at my stupid quirks took time and dedication, but...

"Tell me where you want me, beloved." Rez stands with me in his arms and drops me unceremoniously onto the bed. I bounce and giggle, feeling lighter than I've ever felt.

Reznik unbuttons his shirt and then shrugs it off his shoulders and my mouth goes dry. Yaelyn and Reznik are a study in contrasts: where Yaelyn is all lean, carved muscle, Reznik is broad, his hard body sculpted from pure, powerful strength. Where Yaelyn's horns are short and curve upward, Rez's are thick, looping around his ears like a ram's horns. Both are gray-skinned, as many demonkin are, but Yaelyn's complexion is that of a rainy day, Reznik's that of a thundercloud. Together, they're the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.

Rez drops his pants, and his cock springs forth, thick, hard, and ready to take me.

I crawl to the edge of the bed once more, intent on taking him into my mouth, but Yaelyn gives my tender buttock a squeeze that makes me yelp—and then moan.

“We can do this the easy way or the hard way, Mischief,” Yaelyn says, reasonably. “But we’re getting the answers we need out of you.”

I’ve never done things by half measures, and I want these demonkin more than anything, more than I ever wanted the shard when I first laid eyes on it.

I pick the hard way.

CHAPTER 4

LUCY

Reznik sits down in the armchair where Yaelyn just watched him spank my ass pink. He crooks a finger and beckons me forward, then settles me into his lap. My sore ass rubs against his hard cock, and I whimper out a needy cry.

He drapes each of my legs over his, then spreads his knees wide, opening me up for Yaelyn. I'm forced to lean back against the demon's hard chest, but I feel something in his arms that I haven't felt in months: safe.

"Loop your arms behind my neck, Spark," he rumbles. "And don't you dare move them until I say you can."

I obey immediately and then melt into him. We haven't pulled out the restraints yet, but I still find myself immobilized, spread for my incubus. Bound in a way I've longed to be for so long. All the tension drains from my body, and I slip into that space where there's only the three of us. As it should be.

"Your body knows what your mind does not, Lucy," Reznik murmurs in my ear. "This is where you belong."

Yaelyn ties his hair back from his face and horns, grins down at me, then drops to his knees between my splayed legs. He idly strokes up my thighs with both hands, then separates the folds of my pussy with his thumbs.

"Gonna make you scream, Mischief," he promises.

And then he devours me. No prelude, no warm up, just that long, clever tongue of his delving through my folds, flicking

against my clit. He lays into me, hard passes of his tongue that wind the delicious knot of desire in my belly even tighter. Pleasure surges through me until I'm just as high as I was when Reznik denied me.

“Why did you steal the shard, little thief?” Reznik asks, his voice low and serious.

“Wh-what?” I'm having my pussy eaten by a man starved for it and he asks me that *now*?

Yaelyn backs off, sitting on his heels. His face shines with my arousal, but his expression is stern.

I try to wriggle back against Reznik, move my aching ass against his hard length, but I'm too well immobilized. I let out a pathetic cry of frustration, but Yaelyn doesn't stay away for long. He thrusts a finger into my cunt so slowly I feel every knuckle. I moan, thinking he's going to give me what I need, but he pumps in and out of me in unhurried, lazy strokes that make me simmer with need. He watches my face intently, though I know he doesn't need to. His incubus senses will know when I reach my peak. He holds me away from it, fucking his finger into me until I'm shaking. Fuck, I want so much more of him, another finger, his mouth, his cock.

“Please, Yae...”

He dips his head between my thighs, licks me from my cunt to my clit and teases light strokes over the sensitive nub.

Then Reznik's hand is at my breast, squeezing and massaging. “You have to earn it, Spark.” He rolls my nipple between his fingers, lets me feel the tip of his claw. Sharp, sweet sensation surges down my body into my clenching core, and I flutter around Yaelyn's finger. “Why did you steal the shard, Lucy?”

I groan as Yaelyn flattens his tongue against my clit, but he's too far away to give me the pressure I need. And he knows it. He keeps me right at the crest of orgasm until I'm thrashing desperately in Reznik's hold, until I want to release my arms from around Reznik's neck, take the incubus' horns in my hands and force him to where I want him.

He rocks back on his heels again. “Do that, Mischief, and this all ends right now. You said you would behave.”

“Please, please make me come, Yae,” I whimper. “Need you so badly.”

He circles my clit with his thumb as he looks up at me. “Then answer Rez’s question. Why did you steal the shard? Answer and I’ll devour you until you explode.”

“I like stealing!” I confess. “The challenge, the thrill. I love it all. Please, please, please. Yaelyn...”

“Not the whole truth,” he sighs. “But we’ve got time for that. I can make you come—or keep you from coming—all night, love. What you said, it’s a start, and I’m proud of you for admitting it.”

“Our good little thief,” Reznik growls, tweaking my nipple in a way that makes me shriek.

Yaelyn grins that wicked, mischievous grin of his, surges forward and sucks my clit into his mouth, lashing it with his tongue until I explode, coming so hard I buck like a wild thing in my demon’s arms. He pumps his finger in my cunt, fucking me through my orgasm, through the little aftershocks that make my sex pulse.

“Beautiful,” he murmurs. “You come so beautifully for us, Luce.”

My eyelids flutter shut. “Give me your seed tonight, Yae?” There’s no aphrodisiac more potent than an incubus’ seed and if Yaelyn spills inside me, I’ll give myself over to his control, to his magic working through my body.

He chuckles. “Soon, Luce. You’ll have to be very good if you want that. I don’t suppose you’ll tell me the other reason you stole the shard from us?”

And deny myself more of what he just gave me? Not in any of the seven realms.

I crack my eyes open and give him a crooked smile.

“Mischief,” he growls, all the silk gone from his voice. He delves between my thighs again, sucks my clit into his mouth,

and rolls it between his lips. He brings me to the edge with brutal efficiency, but he doesn't let me fall. He pulls back just a second too soon and I snarl out my frustration.

But this is their game and I know the rules. I know what they're capable of. I know how long they'll toy with me.

"Fuck her slit while I suck you, Rez," the incubus says lightly.

The demon growls out a curse and shifts until his hot length slides through my folds. Fuck, he's so big that I feel him *everywhere*. Long enough that there's still plenty for Yaelyn to work with. He grabs my hips and rocks me against his hardness, and I want him. I'm desperate for him. And Yaelyn knows it.

"If you want him to split you open, you'll need my seed, Mischief. And I told you you'd have to behave for that."

I groan as Rez moves me over his cock, but it's nothing compared to the way he bucks into Yaelyn's mouth when the incubus seals his lips around the thick head of his cock. The demon fucks through my folds, short strokes as Yaelyn takes him. I stare down at the incubus between my legs, his cheeks hollowed out as he sucks and licks the cock rubbing against my sensitive sex. How did I ever betray these two?

"Fuck," Rez rumbles in my ear. "And you could have that mouth on you again, if only you'd behaved."

But I'm glad I didn't, because being shared between them like this is a bliss greater than any orgasm.

Then Yaelyn wraps his long tongue around Reznik's length and flicks my clit with the very tip. My cunt squeezes, hot arousal flooding from me, as I fight to buck up against Yaelyn's sinful mouth.

"Fuck, please," I pant.

Yaelyn ignores me, takes his tongue away and sucks Reznik back into his mouth, working him until the demon is panting and groaning beneath me. Just before he comes, Yaelyn lets him go with an audible pop. Reznik fucks through my slit once, twice more, dragging against my clit in a way

that makes me moan, and then comes with a shout, spraying me with his hot seed.

The incubus smiles smugly. "I'll lick every last drop of him from your pussy if you tell me why you stole from us."

"And if I don't?"

"We tie you down and leave you here, Reznik's cum dripping down your thighs, no way for you to find relief on your own."

A desperate, needy cry escapes me. "No, please."

Yaelyn slowly massages some of Reznik's seed into my cunt, curling his fingers inside me. "Mischief."

"Okay! Fuck. My buyer showed me a picture of the sun shard."

"Good," Yaelyn murmurs, kissing my mound softly before slipping his tongue between my folds.

"Continue," Reznik says.

"I was drawn to it." Yaelyn flicks his tongue hard against my clit and I cry out. "I-I've always been drawn to shiny things." Yaelyn hums thoughtfully, the vibrations reverberating through me, little spikes of pleasure snapping like sparks against my skin. "I told myself I'd give it to him, if only I could hold it first. I couldn't stop thinking about it. I *needed* it."

"Why? How is it different than any other shiny trinket?"

Yaelyn rolls my clit between his lips again and I let out another desperate cry.

"I don't know! It became a compulsion. An obsession. Everything but you two felt all wrong until I could hold it."

The demon's hands go to my breasts, and he pinches both of my nipples at once.

I keen, babbling and begging. "That's it! That's the truth! Please, Yaelyn. Rez. Please."

Yaelyn draws his finger from my cunt then thrusts back in with a second, stretching me open. When he lashes his tongue against my clit, I shatter. Ecstasy explodes from me, white-hot, and I swear I leave my body. I must scream, but my pulse pounds in my ears so loudly I can't hear it. I float at the peak of pleasure, my whole body trembling, and they hold and stroke me through it. My perfect demonkin.

Reznik eases my arms from around his neck and I let him, boneless and spent. Yaelyn picks me up from the demon's arms and carries me to the bed, setting me gently in its center.

He caresses my face and draws me into his arms, tucking me beneath his chin. Reznik clicks off the lights and joins us on the bed, curling around me, spooning me the way I spooned Yaelyn through his pain. He slings an arm over my hip so he can touch Yaelyn too. The demon presses a soft kiss to my temple and shifts until I'm held perfectly between them. Safe. Content.

"There was one more reason," I murmur.

"What's that, little thief?" Rez asks softly.

"Money."

"Lucy!"

"Not for me," I say around a yawn. "For Shadow House. It's where I grew up and it's in trouble. My sort-of-dad wouldn't say why, but I dunno, something about zoning or arrears or liens? I wouldn't have survived on the streets. Aron saved me. And those kids, all those displaced kin that call it home..."

"How much is your contract?"

"Five hundred million dollars. I know you can't put a price on something like a sun shard, but Khadyr did. That kind of money has to be enough to save Shadow House."

"Oh, Spark," Rez sighs, pulling me closer. "We didn't know. About where you grew up. About what you were facing."

They were never meant to, because I was only supposed to get close enough to steal from them. The truth of those dark days twinges inside me like an old scar. But now, safe in their arms, I let the words come like I'm stripping away my armor: slow, stalling words that I've never said to anyone but Aronael before.

"I lived on the streets before Aron found me. Having compulsively and chronically sticky fingers helped me make—steal—enough to eat. There were a few shelters but I'm not..."

"Human."

"Yeah, and the human shelters could sense something was wrong with me. Most didn't let me stay for long. I don't know what would have happened to me if not for Aron."

"But he found you."

"He did," I yawn. It was the first time I remember feeling safe, but that relief, a warm bed and food in my belly, pales to what I feel now.

"You're safe now, too," Yaelyn promises, speaking for the first time since I started my tale of woe. When I open my mouth to protest, he tilts my head up and silences me with a kiss. "We'll protect you. I swear it."

"You're too good to a criminal like me," I mumble, dropping my head back down, snuggling into him until I can hear his heartbeat, strong and steady.

"One more question, Luce."

"Anything."

"Did you love us the way we loved you?"

"More," I whisper. More than I was supposed to, more than I ever thought possible. More than I'll ever be able to come back from.

Yaelyn brushes the sweetest kiss across my lips and says just a single word before sleep claims me. "Impossible."

CHAPTER 5

YAELYN

I don't sleep. Instead, I soak in the contentment radiating from the two halves of my heart. Because that's what Lucy has become to me, the half of my heart I've been missing. I fought it for the longest time, guilt-ridden over my feelings for her. I was never supposed to love another woman after we lost Lux, but loving Lucy just came so easily. Being with her always felt right in a way that used to make me feel ashamed. But Lucy gave me plenty of time to think when she left us—and the ache of her absence was familiar.

It was like losing Lux all over again. Though the thief betrayed us, used us in the worst way, I longed for her as I had only ever longed for Lux.

I questioned it until Lucy was back in our arms, screaming out her pleasure. Despite her flaws, I'm not wrong to love this woman. Fate or some ancient curse has brought us together again and it feels far too right for me to question it any longer.

She may be a thief who makes questionable decisions, but she's *our* thief. There's something special about her, something that draws us to her like moths to a flame, something I don't believe she's aware of or understands, but I mean to figure it out.

Reznik's breathing evens out as the demon falls to sleep, and his joy is like sunshine for my soul. It's been so long since I've seen him happy—truly happy.

But that's not the only sunshine shining upon us.

I ease away from Lucy just enough to see the faint glow radiating from her chest, just above her bare breasts. The

unmistakable glow of a sun shard.

Ten people in the entirety of my lifetime have been able to hold a sun shard within them, and I'm starting to suspect just who Lucy might be.



I DREAM WALKED OFTEN after Lucy left us, slipping into Rez's dreams, seeking out comfort in our sleeping minds. It was unintentional, my wounded soul reaching out for solace. But this... this is different. I fell asleep more at peace than I've been in months, and there's no fear, no panic driving this dream.

Only pure, hot desire, Lucy on her knees before me, her hands held over her head in one of mine. I slip the tip of my tail into her slit and thrust slowly into her tight cunt. She takes me into her mouth and moans around me as I work my tail into her, as I tighten my hold on her wrists, forcing her breasts out and up for my appraisal. I stroke her cheek with my other hand. "Is this your doing, Mischief?"

She smiles around my cock and winks. I have no idea when she learned to do *this*, to walk into my dreams the way I used to walk into hers. Cheeky, precious, perfect thief. There's a plea in those sparkling blue eyes, a yearning for me to take my pleasure from her, to fuck her perfect mouth until I find completion. To dominate her.

I groan as her lips tighten around me, as she takes me to the root, but I know what she wants. I cup her jaw in my hand, draw back and then thrust hard into her mouth, plunging my tail into her at the same time. She whimpers around my cock as her cunt squeezes me. Tears well in the corners of her eyes, but she blinks once, slowly. Our wordless *yes*.

I fuck her mouth with abandon, quick, deep strokes, sliding over her tongue into her throat, the wet heat of her mouth a bliss I've yearned for for so long.

Then she lets out a keening cry and vanishes from my dream, anguish on her beautiful face.



I WAKE with her mouth on my cock, Rez lazily stroking up my side.

“I woke her. I’m sorry. I didn’t realize you were dreaming together.”

“She started it,” I gasp out as she swirls her tongue around the head of my cock and laves my sensitive opening.

“Clever Spark,” he says fondly, reaching out and caressing her cheek. “Is this what you want, Lucy? Or do you want Yaelyn to fuck your face while I eat your cunt?”

Her desire spikes, sweet and potent, always so responsive.

And what a pretty picture she is, on her back, her legs hitched over Reznik’s shoulders, her head hanging off the side of the bed as I plunge between her plump lips.

Her arousal fills the room and all my senses, drugging me, filling me up in a way I haven’t experienced since she left us. She gives me all of her pleasure, lets me feed on every soft cry, every tremble of her thighs as my demon holds her open, his tongue driving between her folds.

We come together, her longing and devotion flooding through me, filling in all of the cracks she left behind.

When we’re cuddled up in a boneless heap afterward, her phone rings from the pocket of her jeans, and Rez slips from the bed to fish it from her pile of hastily discarded clothes.

She answers the phone, and her expression grows serious for a moment. “Aron, what is it? Fuck, are you crying? Aron, it’s okay. I’ll be there in an hour and—” Tears well in the corners of her eyes and she looks at me, her lower lip trembling. Then all the fear floods from her emotions and she lets out a bright, watery laugh and cuts her gaze sharply to Reznik, mouthing a very clear, *What the fuck did you do?*

Rez grins, his oil-slick eyes shining with... with love.

“Oh, Aron. That’s great news. No, I have no idea who it could have been,” she lies. “Tonight? Um, can I bring, um, my guys?”

I hear her demon foster-father’s exclamation and she ducks her head, but she can’t keep from smiling. “Oh my god, Aron. Stop. I’ll ask them, I promise. Yeah, I want to see the kids. Can we bring anything? No fae fire whiskey? You’re no fun. Yes, I’m bringing a flask. All right, love you, Pops.”

She tosses the phone onto the covers and squirms down between us, hiding her face. She tries to sock Rez gently on the shoulder, but with her eyes hidden, she misses and punches him straight in the pec. She grunts in pain and shakes out her hand, but joy and relief shine out of her, as bright and warm as sunlight.

Dark gods, sometime when we were sleeping, my grouchy-on-the-outside-gooey-on-the-inside demon saved her beloved Shadow House.

Rez peppers her with kisses, every inch of her he can reach, and when she finally looks up, tears shining in her eyes, he captures her mouth in a single, solemn kiss that he pours all of his love into. I’ve never felt anything more beautiful until her joy and love answer his. “Happy Yule, Spark,” he murmurs. She kisses him and he smiles against her lips. “You wanted to ask us something?”

Lucy cringes, squinching her eyes shut. Her request comes out in a nervous rush. “Um, do you want to go to a Christmas party tonight at Shadow House and, um, meet my dad? He was so overjoyed about the whole anonymous donation thing and Aron *loves* Christmas, and there’s no stopping him when he’s made his mind up and—”

I loop my arms around her waist and pull her close, dropping a kiss on her bare shoulder. “We’d love to, sunshine.”

“Demons are supposed to celebrate Yule,” Rez grumbles, but there’s affection in his low, gravely words.

“Don’t tell that to my dad if you want to keep your wings. He drank the Christmas Kool-Aid the moment he came to this realm. Don’t be surprised if he dresses up as Santa for the little ones. He goes *hard* this time of year.”

“Fine, fine,” my demon relents, but I can feel the grin in his voice. “But first, we’re celebrating Yule. The proper way.”



FOR THE PAST FEW CENTURIES, Reznik and I have spent the blessed Yule deep in solemn prayer and reflection, beseeching the old gods for the Light Bearer’s return. We’ve told stories before the fire, as is Yule tradition, but we’ve been together for so long that we know all of each other’s stories, but they’re not old comforts: they’re scars. Stories of the Light Bearer we served who never returned.

Until now, I think, as the three of us tumble into the shower.

“So how do we celebrate Yule?” she asks, stepping beneath the hot spray, hissing when it stings her still-pink ass.

Rez gives her bottom a rough squeeze that makes her squeal, then lathers shampoo into her fox-fur red hair, the tips of his claws dragging lightly over her scalp in a way that makes her shiver.

“We’re going to be celebrating in the bedroom if you don’t stop working her up,” I chide Rez, but without any real censure. Lucy’s pleasure is too beautiful, too pure and soothing to my battered soul for me to ever deny her, and Rez, dark gods, after nearly a millennium, he’s happier than I’ve been able to make him on my own. I don’t mourn for the happiness I haven’t been able to give him. We love each other and we’ve done our best, but part of our soul was stolen from us the day the Light Bearer fell. I will never begrudge the man I love a moment of the happiness he finds with Lucy. Not ever.

He growls, capturing her mouth in a kiss, kneading her sore ass in a way that makes her moan. “There will be time

enough for that. It's the Longest Night tonight and I'm tying you up like a present, Spark, and in Yule tradition, we'll *feast* the night away."

She wraps a leg around his and grinds against him, her pleasure so potent I go hard instantly. "If that's how you celebrate Yule, count me the fuck in. Let's start now."

He gives her ass a light smack. "Later, beloved."

She looks up at him, eyes shining with fondness and finally nods. "Later. What else?"

"We'll go find a Yule tree and you and Rez will decorate it while I start the baking. A Yule log, some raisin-studded saffron buns or boar-cake would be traditional, but there's this panadería a few blocks over that makes the best marranitos and I *may* have sweet talked the baker into giving up her recipe. Pig cookies, boar-cake, close enough. "

"Yae! You're not supposed to use your magic on humans," she protests as she rinses off.

"Who said anything about magic?" I ask, slyly. I can tell when she realizes that I flirted my way into getting the recipe when jealousy spikes in her emotions. "Envious little Mischief," I tease. "You'll forgive me when you taste one. Do you want to make Christmas cookies to take to Shadow House tonight?"

She perks up. "The chocolate crinkly ones?"

"Anything you want, sunshine." I kiss the tip of her nose and reach behind her to shut off the water.

I meet Rez's eyes and we smirk. "And then there's the matter of the shinies..." I say.

She looks up sharply, a beaming grin on her face. "Shinies, you say?"

"But you're not allowed to steal them. Rez and I haven't decorated a tree in... many years. We'll need new ornaments. Are you up for picking them out for us?"

"Um, yes, duh."

“Pretty magpie,” Rez rumbles, blotting her long red hair dry. *Magpie*, the name he used to call Lux who, just like Lucy, was drawn to anything shiny or sparkly. Does Rez suspect the same thing I do? That the Light Bearer *has* been reborn in our perfect, snarky, utterly oblivious little thief?

Lux was never specific in how she’d return. If I’m right, does Lucy have her memories? A piece of her soul, or only the light within?

If we tell her stories of the Light Bearer that came before her, will it surface buried memories?

But Lucy asks for stories of the Light Bearer before I can even pick one to start with.

As we pile into the pick-up truck, Lucy snuggled between us on the bench seat, she leans her head on my shoulder, sweet as can be, and asks me to tell her about the Light Bearer.

CHAPTER 6

LUCY

So, I woke up glowing last night, and not in the freshly-fucked, can't-stop-smiling-like-an-idiot kind of way. Straight up glowing like I had a flashlight under my skin. A flesh light if you will. Did I snicker when I came up with that? Yes, yes I did. But humor has always been a way for me to dodge all the scary shit in my life. Humor and taking unnecessary risks, stealing, stabbing, anything to get my adrenaline pumping.

After my demonkin fell asleep, I slipped into the ensuite and studied myself in the mirror in the dark bathroom. Glowing like a goddamn beacon. I rubbed at my chest, and because I've always talked to the shards—usually to amuse myself—I whispered to them. I questioned them for the first time, feeling like a lunatic, until they pulsed in my chest: dimming and then flaring once for yes, dimming and staying dim for no. It was like playing the weirdest game of “Hot and Cold” ever, but I learned a few things.

It's not a curse binding us together, not some souvenir I took from Iradil's tomb. It's the shards themselves. They brought me to Rez and Yaelyn to keep me safe, and both of the demonkin have shards of their own, embedded somewhere behind their breastbones. Because they once guarded the Light Bearer. Now they guard the shards themselves, waiting for the Light Bearer to return.

And they loved her. More than they'll ever be able to love me.

I didn't have to ask the shards if Reznik and Yaelyn love me, though, because I already knew: despite my many, many flaws, my demon and incubus love me.

But as I finally got the shards to dim (who knew 'pretty please, with a cherry on top' was enough to make the snarl of Christmas lights in my ribcage go out?) and snuck back into bed, I realized how much bigger than me this all was. Bigger than a thieving contract with one of the scariest men in existence. I've got the Light Bearer's fancy arcane rocks glowing in my chest. I need to know more about her if I'm to unwind the mystery I've bumbled into. And maybe get my collection of glow-in-the-dark rocks out of my chest in a way that doesn't involve Khadyr reaching into my chest and giving my heart a little tickle while he's at it.

So I asked them about her while sipping from the thermos of half coffee, half hot chocolate Yaelyn made me for the drive.

"She was always meant to return," Yaelyn explains. "And reclaim the crown the nine sun shards make up. We pray for it every Yuletide. She's the only thing that can bring balance to the shadow realm."

"Like bringing balance to the force? For every Jedi, a Sith Lord?" Damn, was I actually spot-on in my anxious inner ramblings as I stalled outside Iradil's tomb?

Reznik frowns at me. "I have no idea what you're talking about, Lucy."

I squawk out a protest. "You know, like in Star Wars? Do you live under a rock? Luke Skywalker? Darth Vader force choking a bitch?" I hold my hand in the force-choke pose and pretend to choke myself.

"If you wanted to be choked, Spark, all you had to do was ask."

I swat at Reznik. "You know, light sabers? Byzzoom, byzzzt, clchsssss." I wave my hand around like I'm wielding one but Reznik only shrugs.

“I am half tempted to spend the Longest Night doing a movie marathon,” I mutter.

“Liar,” Yaelyn teases. “Rez, what she means is, light and darkness cannot exist without the other. Is that about right, Mischief?”

“Basically,” I say with a pout.

Rez pulls onto the highway and then cuts a look in my direction. “What you say makes some sense. There’s no shadow without light, only darkness. In the Light Bearer’s absence, the shadow realm is being consumed by darkness, and the darkness breeds war and violence. If the Light Bearer doesn’t return soon, the shadow realm will be overtaken entirely. And we will have failed. Yaelyn and I are all that remain of her guard. Iradil was Captain of the Light Guard, and I was his second. When it became clear that Lux would fall and the guard with her, Yaelyn and I were sent off with the sun shards to protect them. We returned when the smoke on the battlefield had cleared, and we put those of our brethren we could find to rest with their shards, sealing them away with ancient magic.”

“We thought they’d be safer in this realm than in the shadow realm. Here, they could be forgotten. We hid them far and wide, to keep the shards from being found. But we took other precautions.”

“Oh, I know. I almost got speared in the heart. And almost crushed, while simultaneously being almost stabbed.”

“But the draugrs... how did you get past the draugrs?”

I can’t lie to him. He’ll see right through me. “I’m honestly not sure. I tried the old ‘salt water in a water balloon’ trick and the draugr I hit didn’t even flinch. But then they backed off. Honestly, it was pretty freaky.” I skip the part where the dead Captain of the Light Guard’s undead platoon all bowed to me, but fuck, this is all too heavy.

I want to quip my way out of the crushing feeling pressing down on my chest, but I can’t bring myself to. It’s even clearer now how much Reznik and Yaelyn loved this mythical Lux,

whoever she was back then. They dedicated their life to her legacy, to the potential of her rebirth. Then I came along, made them catch feelings, and bounced with one of their most sacred relics. I slide down in on the bench, stewing. I can't give any of these shards to Khadyr. Physically or morally. Fuck.

But if he gets me, he gets the shards.

If he gets the shards, it's game over for the shadow realm.

Holy tits. Maybe the reason no one has figured out what the fuck Khadyr could possibly be is because he's an agent of the darkness? Could that be why he wants the stones? To destroy them or turn them to some dark purpose? And if Khadyr is an agent of the darkness, what does that make me, besides a thief whose main ability seems to be supernatural sleuthing skills? Could I be an agent of light? Is that why the draugrs backed off, why the shards decided to make a dollhouse out of my ribcage? Fuck, what does it even mean to be an agent of light, if that's what I even am? Might explain the glowing...

"You're thinking awfully hard about something, love," Yaelyn murmurs.

I shake my head, trying to clear it, but my mind is a tangle of questions. Worries. "Did you love her?" Because I need to hear them say it, even if it'll cut me to the bone. Even if it means bleeding out on the bench seat of their truck.

"Very much," Rez murmurs.

"I didn't think I could love anyone but Reznik after she died," Yaelyn says quietly, squeezing my knee. "Then some maniac thief barreled into our lives and turned them upside down."

"You were the first spark of light after centuries of darkness."

The air whooshes from my lungs. That's why Rez calls me "Spark"? I mean that much to him? I snuggle into his side.

"Found your gooey center, big guy."

He rolls his eyes, but he's smiling. Trying to hide it, but smiling still.

Fuck, feelings. I need to lighten the mood, so I do it the only way I know how. "So, um, did the Light Bearer get freaky with all nine of you? Because I can't decide if that sounds amazing or exhausting."

The demon huffs out a laugh. "The Light Guard was made of diverse demonkin, not all of whom 'got freaky' as you so romantically put it. We all loved and served her in our own ways."

"So, like, seven of you? Five of you? Come on, I need the deets."

Yaelyn ruffles my hair. "She wasn't insatiable like you, Mischief, didn't like the things you like. The things Rez and I like to do to you..."

Good. "What was she like?"

"Polar opposite of you," Rez snorts, pulling off the highway. "Timid. Sweet. But she had a spine of steel, just like you."

I glow at the compliment—though thankfully not, you know, *glow* glow.

"She'd never stab someone in the leg, like someone I know."

"You called it a bee sting! It healed in like ten seconds!"

"Spark, I like you stabby. I like that half the shinies in your collection are weapons. Don't ever change."

He really does say the sweetest things.



I DON'T KNOW how (or when) Rez found this Christmas—sorry, *Yule*—tree farm, but it's *perfect*. In that "small town Christmas tree farm a Hallmark movie hero would be trying to save while teaching some big-city corporate bad bitch the meaning of

Christmas and true love” way. That kind of perfect. Fuck, it even snows a little while we’re there. Just enough to make it magical. We walk through the snow-dusted aisles, hand-in-hand, one of my demonkin on each side of me. They donned their glamours the moment we stepped out of the loft, so I’m the only one who gets to enjoy just how ludicrous it looks for two horned demonkin to be judging trees like they’re snotty judges on a cooking show.

They’re so picky! And truly, I want to do this every year with them until I’m old and gray. I want to listen to them squabble about whether a tall tree is better than a full one, whether a Douglas or Fraser Fir will look better in the loft. It’s special in how mundane it is, how domestic, and I can’t wait to decorate whatever tree they pick out. It feels me up with sunshine, just like that hug-from-the-inside the shards do.

If the tree farm was out of a Christmas movie, the little kin Yule Market in northern Pennsylvania must have been plucked from my imagination. It’s loud and colorful, full of bright twinkling lights and the tinkling of sleigh bells. Spice scents the snow-crisp air, like pomanders and warm mulled wine and gingerbread fresh out of the oven. Banners, paper chains, and fairy lights are strung between stalls and it’s... it’s Christmas and Yule and everything perfect in the world right now.

And it’s full of every type of kin imaginable. Shifters cooking skewers of meat over bonfires, witches in pointed black hats serving mulled wine and cider, trolls selling hand-carved wooden toys.

“Kin town,” Yaelyn explains as Rez parks the pickup. “Some pretty strong magic keeps the humans away, so kin can be themselves, no glamours. This time of year, they cater to the multitude of winter traditions of various tribes, clans, packs, covens, et cetera.”

He helps me down from the pickup and that’s when I see a distant stall, glittering like a disco ball.

I can’t help it. I sprint through the parking lot, until pain cracks in my chest like it’s trying to break me open. A howl of

pain rips from my throat and I collapse to my knees, sharp gravel cutting through my jeans.

Rez rushes over to me, propelling himself with his wings, and scoops me up into his arms.

“Fu-uccck,” I mutter. Can these damn shards give me a break? I wasn’t trying to run away from either of my demonkin protectors. The pain drains from me slowly as they soothe me, but I stay close to them as we make our way through the crowd of kin to the little ornament stall. I feel more drained than I did the last time I tried to get away from them. One thing’s for sure. The first moment alone I get, I’m talking some sense into those stubborn stones.

To make me feel better, or perhaps to keep me from pocketing some of the blown and cut-glass creations, Reznik buys me every single shiny ornament I coo over, even though it’s enough for at least two Yule trees. I don’t miss the sun catchers he sneaks the cashier with a murmur and a fistful of cash, either. Was he this sweet to Lux? Sweet, timid Lux who probably didn’t swear like a sailor or make sex toy jokes about arcane artifacts. Fuck, I need to stop thinking about her.

“Yule food?” I suggest.

We split a piece of fruit cake (foul, the worst), some roasted meat (delicious), and down orc mead that makes me feel light and fuzzy. Yaelyn picks up a *bûche de Noël* to take to the party tonight—though the moment we step away from the brownie’s stall, he swears it won’t be as good as his. Reznik insists on picking up toys for the children at Shadow House and if my heart wasn’t already full to the brim, it’d grow three sizes as we carefully fill the back of the pickup with boxes. Rez hoists the tree over one shoulder (show off) while they snap the tonneau cover over the boxes full of toys, ornaments, and trinkets, and then the troll who sold us the toys helps him tie the tree back down on top of the cover.

It’s a scene out of the weirdest, most perfect, beautiful Christmas/Yule card ever, and I am endlessly grateful that I’m the maniac thief that barreled into their lives.

CHAPTER 7

LUCY

We quickly learn that I should NOT have been put in charge of trimming the Yule tree. Though, when Rez moves an ornament and I fuss at him, we learn that there really was no other option.

“You really are like a little magpie,” he teases. “But I’m going to insist on putting on the star myself.”

“We didn’t get one!” I realize with a pout.

The demon just shakes his head and goes to a wall safe hidden behind a painting in the hall. These guys are so damn bougie. I love it. But the moment the safe door is cracked, I know what’s inside it: the third sun shard in their possession.

“Trust me not to steal it?” I goad.

“You’d have to steal me and Yaelyn along with it, and I trust that, while you’re a brilliant thief, that’s a bit beyond your capabilities.

It stings a bit that he doesn’t wholly trust me, but he shouldn’t. Because given the chance, I probably *would* steal the shard. There’s still Khadyr to be dealt with, after all.

Naturally, Rez doesn’t need a step stool to reach the top of the tree. The shard glows in his hands like he’s captured the world’s brightest firefly, then floats to the very top of the tree. It’s perfect, its brilliant light shining down on the ornaments and catching every facet and bauble until the whole thing is just so... “Shiny,” I breathe.

Rez comes over to survey our work then tucks me under his arm, holding me to his side. He takes in the tree, but when

he murmurs the word “beautiful,” it’s me he’s looking at.

“Lick the spoon, Mischief?” Yae asks from the kitchen, then shakes his head when he senses where my thoughts went. “How the hell did you take that as innuendo?”

“Talent?”

“You *are* pretty talented with that mouth of yours. Now come help me roll this dough in powdered sugar.”

While we bake, Reznik wraps every single toy we bought from the troll toymaker, humming while he works. In the whole time I’ve known him, I’ve never heard him do something so mundane as hum.

“You make us happy, Mischief,” Yaelyn murmurs. “This is the happiest Yule Rez has had in a millennium. Just do yourself a favor and don’t ask him to sing any traditional Yule songs. I love that man, but his singing voice is like—”

“A tuba getting caught in a trash compactor with a very angry goose?”

Yaelyn pauses, then grins. “That’s surprisingly apt. Want to try the best marranito you’ve ever had and forgive me for flirting with a baker?”



I’M SURPRISINGLY nervous when we pull up to Shadow House, but Yaelyn picks up on it, and wraps an arm around me.

“Are you worried your dad won’t like us, sunshine?”

I shrug. I’m not sure what gnaws away at me, aside from the obvious shards in my chest and the as-of-yet unresolved psychopath-maybe-agent-of-darkness Khadyr thing hanging over my head. Perhaps it’s the feeling of waiting for the other shoe to dropkick me in the ass. Today has been too *good*. There’s no way this lasts, not with the tangle of trouble I’ve found myself in. Not while knowing I’ll never live up to the woman they loved, even if they swear they love me too. Not

while knowing I'll have to make an impossible choice before Yuletide's end.

Fuck it. I need to make this night the best of my life, because it may be one of the last I get with my demonkin.

“Nah, worried my dad's going to tell you all sorts of embarrassing stories about me. I was a bratty little shit as a kid.”

“And a bratty little menace now,” Reznik rumbles with affection.

“You like it.”

“Make no mistake, Spark. I adore it. Now, come on before I chuck these presents on the doorstep, and we take you back to the loft to ravish you.”

Yaelyn helps me down from the pick-up, then slings an arm around my shoulder, boxes of cookies tucked under his other arm, and leads me up the steps.

I pause when my hand closes around the doorknob, take a deep breath, and then open the door and step into my childhood home.

That is to say: into utter chaos.



WE FIND A FRAZZLED ARON, dressed as Santa, just as I had guessed he would be, tucking a meager stack of presents beneath the tree. Reznik's donation will easily save Shadow House, but Aron's been operating on a tight budget for years now. So when he sees Reznik laden down with presents and Yaelyn with cookies? He gives me a nod and a thumbs up.

“You passed the test,” I whisper to my demonkin.

“I am not above bribing with cookies,” Yaelyn says with a grin.

Shrieking children run around the cafeteria Aron converted into a great room, already hyped up on too much sugar and

Christmas cheer. And Yaelyn only feeds them more sugar before Reznik lets them ride on his broad shoulders. Shoulders I had my legs thrown over this very morning. I turn away with a blush as Aron comes up behind me.

“Where have you been hiding those two, kiddo?”

“We were on the outs until recently. But things are going really well now. And if they survive one of your Christmas parties, I’ll know they’re keepers.”

He nods to Rez who’s doing bicep curls as a little troll girl clings to his arm, giggling every time he lifts her. “I think they’ll do just fine.” The demon I’ve known for most of my life considers me for a moment. “You deserve to be happy, Lucy. If they make you happy, I won’t do my overprotective dad schtick.”

I gasp dramatically. “It’s physically possible for you to refrain?”

“With you? Yes. With some of your younger sisters and the idiots they bring home? Shadow realm save me. Some of those boys...”

“Have you been back to the shadow realm lately?” Aron has been rescuing orphans from the realm for years now, and he comes back looking more haggard every time. I should have known something was wrong...

He nods, solemn now. “I’ve gotten as many kids out as I could, but the realm is crumbling into chaos.”

Fuck. What will happen to any kids trapped there when darkness overtakes it completely?

“But tonight’s for Christmas cheer. Go find some mistletoe with your men. But keep it PG, all right?”



I FIND some mistletoe with Reznik and Yaelyn, but I manage to find some Christmas cheer, too. Still, it’s a relief when the

party winds down. I can tell Yaelyn was getting overstimulated by the sheer amount of emotion in the room.

We're quiet as we walk back to the truck, hand in hand. Darkness settles between us, engulfing me, stealing me away from them. The world around me stops, everything from Reznik to Yaelyn to the shadows in the streets frozen in time.

I bang at the darkness, desperate to get back to my demonkin, but it doesn't give. I'm stuck and they're frozen. Panic rises inside me, but I push it down, preparing for an unknown threat. Wishing I had snagged my steel stiletto off the hall table as we headed out, despite Reznik's reproachful *"Lucy, for hell's sake, you can't have that around the little ones."*

And then I hear a voice that sends fear coiling in my gut. So much for not panicking. I swallow, composing myself before I face the villain of my nightmares.

"Times almost up, Lucille." Khadyr Blackmore steps out of the shadows into the small cage of darkness, looming over me. I stare up into his dark eyes defiantly and realize... they truly are dark. If he has irises at all, they're just as black as his pupils.

"What do you even want the useless stone for? You know I could boost fae diamonds for you." I try to play it off nonchalantly, hoping he won't see beyond my bravado.

"I have my plans, little light."

I startle. Fuck, does he know? His smile is a cruel thing, a twist of his lips that sends dread pooling into my gut.

"You have nine days. If you even consider reneging on your end of our contract, imagine what I'll do to you, and know that the reality will be so much worse. Know that whatever I do to you, I'll do it to your demonkin tenfold. You're a bright girl. I trust you'll make the right decision."

The darkness is sucked away from me, and I stumble as the world starts moving again. Yaelyn catches me around the waist with his tail.

"Love, what's wrong?"

I don't try to lie. I don't speak at all. I throw myself into his arms and steal a kiss, and then another, and another until he finally winds his arms around me, and my shaking subsides.

"Lucy?" Rez asks, coming to close me in against Yaelyn. Between their two hard, hot bodies, I find some small amount of peace. But not enough.

My impossible choice still lies before me, more impossible than before.

Because Khadyr knows my greatest weakness now.

"Take me home," I beg, because the loft used to be my home as much as my magpie's nest studio, filled to the brim with all things sharp, shiny, and glittery. Because it may be the last night I get to pass in their arms. "Please, I need you."



YAELYN CAN SEE MY TURMOIL, but when I launch myself at him the moment we step back into the loft, he doesn't protest. He kisses me, slow and sweet, sweeping his tongue against mine in a way that banishes the dark thoughts to the edges of my mind, those dark corners where wickedness grows. I knew I'd never get always and forever with my demonkin, but I thought I'd have more time.

"No games tonight," the incubus whispers against the shell of my ear because he knows, he understands that what I need is to connect with them, body, heart, and soul.

"No games," I agree, letting out a breathy sigh when Reznik comes up behind me. I wish I had his strength, but all I can do is steal it for the night, be strong as I love them, be stronger as I leave them. He hooks the tip of a claw into the zipper on my coat and drags it down until he can strip me of it. Then Yaelyn's on his knees, carefully undoing the laces on my snow boots. They undress me slowly, their hands roving over my body to banish the chill in the apartment, Yaelyn's hands on my thighs as he drags my panties down, his tail around my waist, Reznik's hands finding my breasts when my bra drops to the floor.

“Want you both,” I plead.

“You’ll have us, Spark. However you want us.” He lifts me up and I wrap my legs around the taper of his hips. His clawed hands are tight on my sore ass. It’s enough to turn the flame of desire inside me into a blaze and I moan, tipping my head back. His mouth descends onto my neck, trailing hot, open-mouthed kisses along the column of my throat until I’m mewling and grinding against him. He carries me into the bedroom and sets me down on the bed carefully, gazing at me in wonder, oil-slick eyes soft.

Yaelyn comes up beside him, a faint smile on his full lips. “You’ll need my seed if you want to take Rez. It’s been too long and you’re so tight.” It’s so like how I first took the demon’s thick length inside me, Yaelyn’s incubus seed easing the way, relaxing my channel until I could take Rez without pain.

“I trust you,” I whisper, my voice hoarse. An incubus’ seed can do so much more than help the receiver relax; it gives control of the receiver’s body over to the incubus, allowing them total mastery of their lover’s body. We’ve had fun with it before, but tonight I don’t want fun. I want the ease to have them both, but I’ll submit to whatever Yaelyn desires if it means I get to be with them.

“No games,” he reminds me, slipping out of his clothes and joining me on the bed. “I just want to see you in ecstasy as Rez makes love to you.” He captures my lips in a kiss I feel all the way down in my soul, pure sweetness. Love.

Reznik joins us on the bed, fitting himself in behind me. He strokes my hair, murmurs soft praise, lips moving against my skin.

Yaelyn draws a finger through my folds, groaning when he feels how wet for them I already am. He rubs my clit in slow circles, and I try to push his hand away, needing to feel him inside me, but he captures my lips in a kiss. He presses his forehead to mine, kisses the tip of my nose. “Let me worship you, Mischief.”

I come apart in their arms, Yaelyn drawing every ounce of pleasure possible from me. It's too much, yet not enough, as I try to capture every sensation, burn every second of this into my memories. Yaelyn rolls onto his back, pulling me with him. I grind down against his hard length, needing to feel him inside me, and he doesn't make me wait. Not this time.

He guides himself to my opening, eyes on mine as he pushes up into me.

I moan as he enters me. He's not as long or thick as Reznik, but still he stretches me in the most sublime way. I sink down, eyes fluttering shut as I open around him. I shudder when he's fully sheathed inside me, the slight pinch of pain vanishing when he finds my clit and rubs me while I rock against him.

Then my demon is behind me, one hand at my breast, the other on my hip. He guides me down over Yaelyn again and again as he rolls my nipple between his claws. And this, this is the bliss I'll remember when I steal away from them in the night. The perfect way I fit between them, the way each of their touches light me up: the calloused roughness of Reznik's fingertips on my breast, the snap of Yaelyn's hip against my thighs as we approach our peak.

I come with a cry, shaking in Rez's arms, my cunt pulsing around Yaelyn's hard cock. My orgasm triggers his, and he releases inside me with a shout, his seed coating my inner walls. Another orgasm quakes through me, making my toes curl.

"That's it, Spark," Reznik praises.

Yaelyn pulls me down and into his arms, claiming my mouth in a hot kiss that only winds the desire in my belly tighter. He slips from me, but I'm not empty for long. Rez thrusts a finger inside me, massaging Yaelyn's seed into my tight cunt, loosening me.

Every thrust has me moaning into Yaelyn's mouth until I break our kiss, pleading and whimpering for Reznik.

"I don't want to hurt you, beloved."

“You won’t, and Yaelyn will help.” His seed has my toes curling, but he hasn’t manipulated my body, not yet. No games.

Yaelyn rolls me onto my back, kissing me once more as Reznik kneels between my spread thighs. He drags his thumb through my folds, lighting a path of pleasure straight to my cunt.

“Wings out,” I beg, and he obliges me, his dark wings fanning out behind him. His wing membranes are the same oil-slick color of his eyes and I’ve always found his wings beautiful. I brace myself on one elbow just enough to stroke the leathery membrane and he groans, squeezing his eyes shut as he tries to master himself.

That’s one more thing I’ll regret: I’ll never get the chance to make him lose his mind just from me touching his wings.

He drags the thick head of his cock through my wet pussy, and I groan.

“Don’t tease,” I pant.

He doesn’t. He slots himself at my entrance and I raise my hips to meet him. He pushes into me and fuck, I’d forgotten how big he really is. It was different when he was fucking through my folds as Yaelyn took him in his mouth.

I grimace and he freezes instantly. “Spark?”

I rock against him until the pain turns to pleasure. “More.” I grab for Yaelyn’s hand, and the incubus gives mine a reassuring squeeze. I feel his magic flood through me, but it’s not the sharp, desperate desire I’m used to. The sweetest pleasure tingles through me and my cunt flutters around Rez, making me moan. My body relaxes around the demon, and I sigh as he slides in another inch.

He works into me slowly, stilling whenever my breath hitches. When he bottoms out inside me, he still feels just a bit too big, but in a way I can take. In a way that has me clawing at the sheets with my free hand and desperately rocking my hips up, needing Reznik to *move*.

He draws out slowly, then drives back into my cunt in a demanding thrust, striking that spot inside me that ignites the spark of ecstasy into flames. I arch off the bed, keening, driving my hips against his.

“Yae,” Reznik grits out. “Play with her nipples. Want to feel her clenching around me.”

The incubus drops his head to my breast, sucking my hardened nipple into his mouth. He wraps his long tongue around the stiff peak just as Reznik drives into me. They worship me, offer themselves at my altar. Yaelyn amplifies the pleasure of every thrust of Reznik’s cock with his magic until I’m a being of pure sensation, floating in a sea of white-hot ecstasy. Every nerve fires, bringing me higher and higher until I fall. My demon falls with me, swearing an oath of love as he drives into me. My orgasm builds and when I come, I break.

I explode apart like a supernova, all the light, the divine pleasure of their heated touches, rippling out of me.

I give them everything I have, my pleasure, my love, the sweetest joy of knowing that, for a few precious moments, they were mine and I was theirs. I give them everything I have until only the cold of reality of what I must do remains.

This isn’t the catharsis I experienced in their arms last night, but a rebirth.

A goodbye.

CHAPTER 8

LUCY

I stay with my demonkin as long as I can bear to, but I know what has to be done. Well, I don't *know* know, but I can't stay here and wait for Khadyr to come and kill us. Because he'll make me watch. He'll tear the men I love to pieces before he lays into me.

And if he gets the shards... I shudder as I ease out of bed, careful not to wake them. I pull on Yaelyn's robe and pad softly out into the great room. The shard over the Yule tree still shines down on all the ornaments and baubles I picked out, but the Yule Market seems like it was a lifetime ago, not hours. Our Yule tree truly is a thing of beauty and I settle myself in Rez's favorite armchair to gaze at it. Just for a minute.

I know I'm stalling. Hoping that one of my demonkin will wake and notice my absence, that they'll come find me and draw me back into the safety of their arms. I want Yaelyn to drag my confession out of me, to make all the harebrained details of my haphazard plan come spilling free. Fuck, I want them to tell me there's another way.

But there isn't.

Khadyr can't have the shards, which means he can't have me. I have to trust that Khadyr will seek me out, search for me the world over. That he doesn't know the secrets my demonkin hold beside their beating hearts. That Rez and Yae will be able to get away before he finds them.

With a sigh, I ease the collar of Yaelyn's robe away and tap at my chest. "You in there, little buddies?" I whisper.

My chest glows in response. “Real talk, shards. There’s a really bad man that wants you. I don’t know what he plans to do with you, but it’s not good, all right? I think he’s an agent of the darkness or something.”

The shards dim and I nod.

“Yeah, I know. He’s bad news. He’ll hurt our guys to get to us, and I can’t let that happen. Look, I’ve done a lot of stupid shit in my life. I’m not a saint. I’ve hurt people. Fuck, I’ve hurt your guardians. But I want to do the right thing for once. I want to save you little shinies for your Light Bearer for when she returns.”

The shards pulse, glowing brighter.

“See? You get it. But there’s only one way I can do that. Only one way I can buy Rez and Yaelyn some time. I need you to break the tie keeping me near them. I need you to let me go.”

My chest goes dim, like there aren’t six sun shards inside me at all. But then the lights inside me pulse once more, strong and steady. Yes.

It’s decided, then.

I’ll betray them and break their hearts again, and I’ll save their lives, their realm. The realms beyond.

I scrawl out a quick note to my demonkin and turn back to the Yule tree. I breathe in a steadying breath and then reach out to the shard at the top, really hoping to avoid a there-rose-such-a-clatter incident trying to climb the furniture to grab it. I feel it instantly, its call singing in my blood. The moment I touch it, it vanishes inside me, plunging the room around me into darkness. I dress in the dark, quietly pulling on the clothes we left strewn around the entryway.

And then I slip from their loft, from their lives.

The selfish part of me hopes the shards will ache in my chest and keep me from taking another step away from them, but they don’t.

And I do, darkness hanging heavy around my broken heart.



I KNOW one high fae in all of New York City and while Vhalar isn't high on my farewell tour list, he's the only one who can help me. As a buyer, he's paid me to liberate all sorts of fae relics for him, and I know him well enough to know he'll do me a solid, especially if I let him empty my bank account. He'll portal me to Iradil's resting place.

It's the best move I've got.

It's guarded by a metric fuckton of draugrs and I'm hoping they'll be enough to stop Khadyr.

So I order a rideshare to the club owned by the Immortal Kings. The club itself is dark this late at night, but I don't need the club. I find the glamoured service elevator only a few people know about and take it to the top level. This high up in the building, it's just the elevator and the door to their penthouse, so I steel myself and knock.

And knock.

Fucking hell. I'm just about to knock again when the door is yanked open by a stunning redheaded fae wearing... a very sexy and very short elf costume. Not the kin kind of elf, either. The Santa's workshop kind of elf.

My mouth falls open, and she cocks her head, taking me in like I'm the surprising one in this scenario.

"Odd time to visit," she says.

"Umm... I'm an associate of Vhalar's? I was hoping I could talk to him?"

She whirls on one foot, the bells on the curled tips of her elven slippers jingling, the ruffled hem of her skirt slipping up and revealing a pink handprint on her pale ass.

"Christmas spanking," she explains. "I'm sure you understand."

I'm *really* glad she's already disappearing into the penthouse in front of me so she can't see my blush.

She calls after me to follow, and I nearly trip over my snow boots hurrying after her. A half-naked vampire and a kin man with dark eyes that make a chill creep up my spine stumble out of what must be their bedroom.

The elf cocks her head at me. "Business with Vhal."

The dark-eyed kin studies me intently, his gaze never leaving me while the vampire disappears back into the bedroom. I squirm under his appraisal and am so relieved when Vhal appears that I could hug the surly fae man. I don't.

He drops a kiss on the elf's head. She gives me a little wave, then disappears back into the bedroom, taking the other two kin with her.

"Something's different about her, Viv. Odd little kin," the kin man who had scrutinized me mutters.

"Takes one to know one," Viv teases with a shrug, snapping the door shut behind them.

"Well, what's so urgent that you came here at—" he glances at the clock over the microwave "—three-thirty in the morning?"

I shift from foot to foot. "Um, you know, end of the world shit. I could use a lift. I'll pay. Whatever's in my bank account is yours."

The fae cocks his head and studies me, midnight blue eyes narrowed. "You're in trouble."

"Trouble doesn't even begin to cover it. I'm about to renege on a deal with Khadyr Blackmore because I can't let what I stole for him fall into his hands."

"You're working for Khadyr fucking Blackmore?" he demands.

"Spare me the lecture. I already got it from the two demonkin I had to leave behind."

He sighs heavily. “Where are you headed?”

“Burial mound in Wales.” I dig out my phone and show him the location of Iradil’s tomb on the GPS. “Is that good enough for your portal magic?” I wiggle my fingers meaningfully.

“Sufficient.”

He draws a few arcane symbols in the air and then a rip appears before me in their penthouse, the familiar Welsh countryside sprawling as far as I can see inside it.

“I’m not taking your money for a simple portal, Lucy.”

I shrug. “Donate it then. Shadow House would be my pick.” Because where I’m going, money doesn’t matter. Hells and elven bells, the money never mattered beyond what it could do for Aron and the kids. Just one more piece of a life I never cherished quite enough about to be left behind.

“You’re not coming back.”

“No,” I confirm, and step through the portal.



I STUMBLE out of Vhalar’s portal into a world of light. The ground around the mound is covered in a thin layer of icy snow, and the morning sun catches every flake, making the countryside sparkle. My breath puffs in the chill air as I take it in. Everything glitters as far as I can see. It’s the perfect last sight of a world I’m not ready to leave behind.

I duck into the shadows inside Iradil’s tomb, and the stone covering seals behind me, casting me into total darkness. The seven shards in my chest shine from me like a beacon, lighting my way through the labyrinth.

The draugrs stir from their slumber and bow to me just as they had before. Do they sense I’m an agent of light, that I’m doing what I can to protect the sun shards for their Light Bearer’s return? I don’t know if the undead demonkin are even capable of higher thought, but I bow my head to them as I

pass. They cross their swords across the tunnel behind me, my last line of defense. Just as they were the last defense between Lux, Iradil, and the armies of darkness.

Iradil's towering form is spookier in the light of the shards, but I can see why he was Lux's captain, her most trusted guard. I wonder what he was like and regret that I never got to ask Yaelyn and Reznik.

I sweep some cobwebs away from a stone altar and hoist myself up onto it.

And I wait for my death.

It's the only way I know how to protect the stones. To die with them in this tomb, away from Khadyr and his devious plans.



I'M TALKING to my rack rocks like a certified loon (because I underestimated just how on edge waiting for my death would make me) when a sinister voice whispers through the darkest shadows in Iradil's tomb.

I jerk my head up to the demon captain, but he's as still as ever.

"Hello, Light Bearer," the voice says, more distinct now. More familiar.

No, it can't be.

Khadyr.

My heart gives a painful squeeze and I realize that tearing myself away from Reznik and Yaelyn's side didn't save the shards, and if Khadyr is going for the whole set, it didn't save them either. Regret hollows me out, leaving me gutted and raw.

I told the shards I would keep them safe, like there was anything I could truly do to stop the scariest kin I've ever encountered. Like I was more than the thief who stole them and carried them with me as they turned me into the world's

most fucked-up flashlight. Like I could ever be even a sliver of what the Light Bearer once was.

Wait, what? Did spooky scary Khadyr just call *me* the Light Bearer? What the actual ever-loving fuck? “Pretty sure you’ve got the wrong girl,” I hedge.

He materializes in the shadows, his form ghostlike, a specter of shadow as he walks the circumference of the round room at the tomb’s center. “Then why do you glow?”

I mean, that’s a fair point. But I would *know* if I were the Light Bearer reborn... wouldn’t I? Shit, it’s not like the shards came with a Light Bearer instruction manual. But no, I can’t be.

Can I?

Wouldn’t Reznik and Yaelyn have noticed?

Unless they did and didn’t think I was fit to wear Lux’s crown. The thought shouldn’t hurt as much the possibility of losing the stones and the realms along with them. And maybe that’s why the demonkin I love found me unfit, wanting. Nothing compared to their Lux.

“They are creatures of shadow,” Khadyr says in disgust. “Neither light nor dark. They don’t know you like I do.”

Just when I didn’t think a creepy tomb could get creepier.

“So you’re the darkness?”

He slinks around me in the shadows. “A scrap,” he says. “Who escaped my realm and grows and devours. Soon all this world will know is darkness. I will extinguish your light once and for all, Light Bearer. A shame you will not witness the fall of all realms, but your death is necessary.”

Okay, not how I expected to die at Khadyr’s hands.

But if he’s going to bad guy monologue, maybe I can pull some kind of crazy plan out of my ass. I just need to keep him talking long enough. So I pull up my big-girl bravado undies, unpick the crazy plan wedgie, and shrug my shoulders carelessly. “Fine, you caught me. How long have you known?”

“I had my suspicions. And then I showed you that scrap of vellum and you lit up.” He laughs, cold and cruel. “There are only three who could have found the shards, but you were the only one I could bend to my will. A shame you don’t have all nine shards. Your guardians could have given you theirs, you know. You could be wearing your crown even as we speak.”

“They didn’t know. I was testing them, determining if they were worthy before revealing myself,” I lie.

“Ah, but your incubus figured it out. I saw the truth of it in his heart. Such a dark place,” he says. “So much pain.”

I try to keep my alarm from showing on my face. Yaelyn knew and didn’t tell me? So they did take my measure and find me unworthy. I tell myself it’s for the best that they didn’t give me their shards, that they didn’t find me worthy enough to wear the Light Bearer’s crown. Because I am going to die, but at least they’ll have a fighting chance at protecting the Light Bearer’s legacy. The *real* Light Bearer, that is.

There are no big girl panties in the world big enough to bolster my waning bravado, but I forge on anyway.

“I may not have my guardians or all my shards, but I’m not Lux. You would do well to remember that, dark one.” Fuck, I sure hope he buys my bullshit. Buy one, get one. No coupon needed. I still have no plan to speak of. “She was timid. Weak. No match for the armies of darkness. But, ah, it appears you’ve left your armies behind? That’s a rather egregious oversight on your part, seeing as I still have mine.”

“A dead army.”

“Undead,” I correct. “But no less fierce.” And they *would* be fierce, if I had the first idea about how to command them.

Khadyr waves a shadowy hand in dismissal. “The fight is between us, Light Bearer.”

I force the haughtiest laugh I can. “Are you scared of me? You should be.”

“Oh, little Light Bearer. You are nothing. I am inevitable. Worlds collapse into darkness. And this one will fall because

of you. Because you were weak, unworthy of your crown.”

He stretches out a hand swathed in swirls of shadow. I do the only thing I can think to do.

I flash Khadyr fucking Blackmore.

I throw my winter coat open and beg my little buddies to light beam the bastard. Blinding white light bursts free, and my eyes snap shut against the overwhelming glare. Euphoria rushes through my veins as the light pours out of me.

But it isn't enough to reach the dark corners of the tomb. It's not enough and I'm not enough.

Unworthy.

“You're so much weaker than Lux was, and she had guardians and a platoon of warriors protecting her. Do you truly think you can stand up to me?”

My heart stutters in my chest as darkness bands around my ribcage, constricting like a vice. My light dims as the darkness meets it, just enough for Khadyr to plunge a shadowy hand into my chest.

CHAPTER 9

REZNIK

I wake with a warm arm slung over my hip and a tail curled around my calf and sigh, content for the first time in centuries. I was remade in Lucy's arms last night and as I crack my eyes open to take in the morning sunlight, I leave all the darkness, the doubts and the misgivings behind in the Longest Night. It's a new day, a truly Blessed Yule.

But the arm slung over my hip isn't Lucy's. It's Yaelyn's. Curious. I remember falling asleep with Lucy nestled between us. Perhaps she couldn't sleep or slipped to the bathroom. Perhaps she's sneaking Yule cookies in the kitchen as we speak. I rub at my chest with a frown. There's a twinge of pain, but nothing like what happens when we're separated from her.

Yaelyn mumbles out her name, only half awake. I brush his gunmetal hair away from his face and press a kiss to his forehead. He curls into my arms, snuggling close.

"Where's our troublemaker?" he yawns.

"Hopefully not trying to make us breakfast." She's an utter disaster in the kitchen. So unlike Lux, and yet she feels right to me in a way I never would have expected.

Yaelyn rubs his chest with a grimace. "Can we please go find her?"

I can tell he's feeling out of sorts, so I go to grab his robe for him, only to discover it missing. Stolen. I can't help my chuckle. She always did like Yaelyn's robe, preferring his even after we got her one of her own. I snatch my discarded sweater

up off the floor and bundle him up in it. “Come on, love. Let’s find our spark.”

The bathroom is dark and empty, but I’m sure she’s in the kitchen or perhaps curled up in front of the fire like a contented cat.

Then I see the unlit tree and I know.

My hearts crack in my chest, sharp, bitter pieces like jagged glass. Ripping me open and letting the darkness in.

She stole the last shard she could from us.

I roar out a curse and slam my fist through the drywall. She’s fucking *gone*. I trusted her. I loved her. And she’s gone.

Yaelyn drifts around the great room, pausing to touch one of the baubles on the tree. Her favorite, the one she couldn’t stop admiring on the drive home. He yanks it from the tree and dashes it to the ground. It explodes in a shower of shards and dust.

“I failed her,” he utters, before falling to his knees on the glass-strewn floor. His head drops and he scrubs his hands through his hair, tugging at it. “Rez, I failed her.”

“*You failed her?* She betrayed and abandoned us again. She’s probably laughing all the way to the bank right now. Come on, love. You’re getting all torn up.” I gently lift him into my arms and then set him on the kitchen counter so I can clean the glass from his bloody knees. A single white piece of paper catches my eye and I snatch the note up off the counter and read the three lines over and over, trying to make sense of them.

This was the only way. I couldn’t let Khadyr get the shards. Protect the rest. I love you always and forever. – Lucy

I shove the note into Yaelyn’s hands while I stomp into the bathroom for the first aid kit. Yaelyn heals quickly—not as quickly as I do—but I need to do something. I feel like a volcano about to erupt, helpless anger roiling inside me.

“Make it make sense,” I beg Yaelyn as I carefully clean the bits of glass from his wounds.

“She’s the Light Bearer,” he says despondently. “Lux’s soul or magic or... or I don’t know what, reborn.”

“Impossible,” I growl.

He strokes my hair back from my horns, running his fingers through it. “When she said the shards were safe but not in a way where she could give them to her buyer, she meant she was carrying them inside her, just as we do. We were drawn to her because the shards sensed that we would protect her.”

“I was drawn to her because she’s an... an impossible *menace*. Brave. Funny. Reckless. Beautiful. Strong.” Fuck, my breath burns in my lungs, and I want to put my fist through something else. I want to smash every ornament on our Yule tree. Lucy’s the Light Bearer?

“Oh, Rez,” he sighs, the faintest note of humor in his voice. “I meant the curse. It wasn’t a curse at all. That’s the draw I was talking about.” He sets a hand over one of my hearts. “You love her because she’s an impossible menace.”

I shut my eyes and let out a ragged breath. “She’s really the Light Bearer?”

“She glows, Rez. That first night, after you’d both fallen asleep, her chest started glowing faintly. That’s when I began to suspect.”

I can hear the hesitation in his voice. “But?”

“But when we spoke of Lux, it was like she had no memory of her past life at all. I felt her emotions. There was no recognition whatsoever. Only jealousy.”

I can’t help my wry smile. “She was jealous of Lux?”

He frowns. “Put yourself in her tiny shoes. The men she loves pledged their hearts to this mythical being a thousand years ago. Wouldn’t you be jealous?”

I sigh. “She knew how much we loved her. But it wasn’t enough for her to trust us.”

My incubus pauses and then hops down from the counter, going to the closet for the broom. “There’s more. I felt

something from her last night but didn't know what to make of it. She felt... wrong. Different. Something upset her, but I have no idea what. It struck suddenly, without anything seeming to provoke it. She was a mess after that. I'm sorry I didn't tell you."

"She knew," I realize, and it feels like I've been kicked in the chest by an ogre. "She knew she'd have to leave us."

The broom clatters to the ground. "She was saying goodbye? I can't say goodbye to her again, Rez. I won't survive it. I feel like... like my heart is being torn in two." He rubs at his chest, wincing.

My shard twinges in my chest. Before Lucy's return, the shard had lain inert within my chest for a thousand years. And for it to pain me now? No... it can't be. "She's in danger!"

Yaelyn thinks he failed her, but he believed what was right before his eyes. I didn't. He never doubted Lucy, and I did. I failed not only the Light Bearer I vowed an oath to, but the woman I love as well. And if anything happens to her, I won't be able to live with it. I won't survive it. "How do we save her? We are *not* saying goodbye to her. We are not losing her. Fuck, where would she have gone?"

He paces, but as he does, he flicks his fingers toward the shadow, drawing out the armor he hasn't donned in centuries. It moves around him like smoke before it snaps in place. He taps his nose with his knuckle, thinking. And then he sees the shadow-metal gauntlets on his arms. "Iradil's tomb! The draugrs stood aside because they sensed she was the Light Bearer. What if she went back there so they could protect her? It's the most fortified place she knows of. Somewhere Khadyr couldn't find her."

Pain lances through me and I fall to my hands and knees, the floors shaking beneath me. It's the same pain that tormented me when Lucy tried to escape our loft after falling back into our lives, shredding my insides like claws through paper. I pound the wooden boards with the side of my fist, waiting for the wave of agony to pass. "He found her," I grit out, summoning my own armor. "We have to go. Now!"

He pauses just as I'm about to slip into the shadows. "If I'm injured, and it comes down to me or her, save her, Reznik."

Like *hell*. I yank him to me and kiss him, pouring every ounce of love I can into it. "We're all coming home together or not at all." I hold him close while I let the shadows take me, let the shadow realm call us home.



WE TEAR from our shadow walk into the Welsh countryside, untouched for miles around. We warded Iradil's tomb so no demonkin could shadow walk directly into it, but when I find the stone door untouched, I know that didn't stop Khadyr. Yaelyn jabs the switches around the nine-point star quickly and the rock grinds away from the opening, revealing the tunnel that leads into the labyrinth I haven't walked in far too long. Before Lux fell, we walked the labyrinths in prayer and meditation. When we laid our brothers-in-arms to rest, we murmured their final rites and reflected on their lives and sacrifices as we followed the curving tunnel around the tomb. Now we sprint through it, boots clattering on the stone floor.

I skid into the main room of Iradil's tomb and my knees buckle, but I catch myself just before I fall. My heart stutters and my soul aches as my eyes settle on Khadyr Blackmore. He stands over Lucy, drawing her light from her small body and into his dark claws. Her back arches and her mouth opens in a silent scream. I can't hear it, but I can feel it.

No, no dark gods damn it, I am *not* losing her again.

I dash toward her.

A wall of impenetrable darkness slams into me, holding me in place.

Yaelyn lets out a battle cry and his magic floods the tomb and the wall of darkness drops. I know he won't be able to hold back Khadyr for long, that his magic isn't meant for this, but I take the opportunity and rush to Lucy's side as she sucks

in breath after desperate breath. I rip my chest plate aside and summon the shard from deep within me.

Lucy squints up to me, the sparkle gone from her blue eyes. “Fuck, you can do that? Next time your Light Bearer is reborn, two words: fucking instruction manual.” She grimaces. “That was three words.”

“Shush and conserve your strength, menace. Spark. Beloved.”

The light of my shard illuminates her weak smile before the shard dips into her chest, vanishing like the setting sun.

“Yae!”

He grits his teeth, sweat beading on his gray brow. His hands are held out before him, binding Khadyr, but I know he won’t be able to hold him much longer. “Take it, Luce! Call it and it will come to you.”

I help her sit up, cradling her weakened body close to mine as she raises a shaky hand.

Darkness swirls around us once more and she yelps as the light is pulled from her, strand by strand. She resists. My brave, brilliant spark resists, clutching her chest, her face contorted in anguish, as she tries to hold the light inside her.

But I know she is losing the battle, and so does Yaelyn.

He draws his sword and charges Khadyr, and I’m caught between the kin who my two hearts beat for. And I can’t save either of them.

Yaelyn spins, putting his back to Khadyr just long enough to unlatch his armor and summon his shard. He whirls back around, and Khadyr is waiting for him with a gruesome blade forged from darkness itself.

Lucy cries out as the blade spears him through the heart. I can only watch as he slumps and falls to his knees. Before I felt the agony of the shard in my chest, I thought I knew pain, and after that hellish torment, I was sure I did.

How wrong I was.

When he drops to the ground, the shard rolls out of his hand, and he stares at it with regret in his gray eyes. With his last breath, he lashes out with his tail and flicks the shard toward us. Lucy catches it just as the light disappears from Yaelyn's eyes.

And then the whole tomb fills with pure, blinding light.

From the light, Lucy rises.

The Light Bearer reborn.

CHAPTER 10

LUCY

Holy fucking hell to the nah. I thrust my hand out toward Yaelyn and I fill him up with my light. No one is taking this man from me. Not ever. And I am *not* getting back on my bullshit after this. When this is all over, I'm coaxing my fucking crown of light to bind us together permanently. I'm never leaving their sides again.

Because, apparently, I'm the mother trucking Light Bearer and more than just my protectors, these men are my whole heart.

So, you know what? It doesn't matter that I have no fucking clue what I'm doing and that my new job didn't come with any onboarding paperwork or an employee manual. No standard operating procedures here.

My crown floats above my head, shining down on us and illuminating the tomb and I push. I push my light into Yaelyn as hard as I can.

He wakes with a desperate gasp, clawing at his chest where once there was a wound, where once there was a shard. My shard.

My incubus looks up at my crown with a shaky smile. "I am so fucking glad that worked, Mischief."

"You did that on purpose?" I shriek. "You are *so* the one getting spanked next time!"

Reznik pauses, hand on the hilt of his sword. "Dark gods below, I spanked the Light Bearer. My lady, I'm so sorry. It won't happen again."

I glare over at him and then smirk. “It had better happen again. I ran off on you again, didn’t I?”

“I should not be this horny in a tomb,” Yaelyn mutters. “If there is a hell, all three of us are going.”

Khadyr lets out an impatient cough and I round on him. I mean, excuse you, right? Can’t he see I’m in the middle of a sordid reunion? Oh, right, he was trying to kill me before I got the megawatt treatment.

No fucking instruction manual. Okay, so we’re winging this. I blasted some light into Yaelyn. I’m sure I can do the same thing to Khadyr. He charges at me with his darkness sword, and I swear up a litany that makes my incubus chuckle.

Fuck, I’m glad he’s alive. He’s so getting spanked.

I dodge Khadyr’s strike and then throw out my hand, but instead of a beam of light, I find myself holding the hilt of a mother-trucking lightsaber. Oh fuck *yes*.

I give it an experimental swish and let out a whoop, whirling it around in my hand and pointing at it with the other, grinning widely at the new Captain of my Light Guard.

“What the fuck is that?” Reznik mutters. “Lux never had a.... a...”

“Lightsaber!” I crow, gleefully. “Just like Star Wars. May the force be with me. Now, let’s Jedi master this place up!” I try to remember Liam Neeson and Ewan McGregor lightsabering it up, but all I remember is daydreaming of them crossing swords of another variety all together. Damn dirty memory is no help in the lightsaber wielding department. Shit, I really hope I can’t slice off my own tit with this thing. I manage to parry a few of Khadyr’s strikes but it quickly becomes clear who the better swordsman is. Spoiler alert: not me.

“Trust me, Luce?” Yaelyn asks, shielding himself behind Reznik so he can work his magic.

I get where he’s going immediately. He really is the brains of this outfit. “You can do that so long after um, eruption?”

“You accepted my shard from me. We’re bound now, love. I can do it any time I want.”

Bound. Yaelyn doing whatever he wants with my body with his incubus magic, whenever he wants. Fuck, I really shouldn’t be this horny in a tomb either, especially not when facing down a sadistic scrap of darkness with a night-night sword.

“Do it!”

His magic flows into me, and it isn’t like being a puppet at all. It’s like his muscle memory is mine. I wheel the blade around (looking like a badass. Succccck it, Qui-Gon Jinn!) and then charge toward Khadyr. Our blades meet, darkest dark and brightest light. I grunt with the exertion as he bears down on me, forcing our crossed swords toward my face.

Heh. Crossed swords. I am definitely demanding a front-row seat to my demonkin crossing swords when we get out of this. Because we’re definitely getting out of this. Guided by Yae’s magic, I swoop my lightsaber down and out, pulling it free from Khadyr’s. He advances toward me, murder in his black eyes, and I realize I’m going to have to fight dirty if I’m going to beat him.

Good thing dirty is my specialty.

I reach into my coat pocket, and he cocks his head, wondering just what the fancy fuck I’m doing.

I whip my hand from my pocket and toward his eyes, throwing a handful of light at him. “Pocket sand! Uh, light. Pocket light!”

He lets out a bestial howl and drops his blade as he tries to rub the light from his eyes. It vanishes back into the darkest corners of the tomb, and I race forward, stabbing my lightsaber through his chest. I pour all of my will into the strike. My arms shake, aching from the strain, as I drive my light into him, and I grit my teeth and lean hard into the thrust.

He cracks, just a little, but where darkness flooded into me when I cracked, light now floods into him. *My* light. I brace myself and force more light into his darkness, willing my light

to burn inside him. I stumble, my boots rasping against the tomb's stone floor as I'm pushed back by the force of his resistance.

I'm doing this for the shadow realm. For *all* the fucking realms.

I *will* stop Khadyr. I will stop the darkness.

And I'll do it by doing one of the things I do best.

I pour all of my strength into one final desperate move. I yank my blade upward, just like I did to get the shard from Iradil's chest, just like I did to the other demonkin of the Light Guard. I send out a silent prayer to them for their sacrifices in life and their sacrifices in death, and I put all my power into the strike.

"I am inevitable!" he cries out before he bursts apart in a blinding blast of light.

When the flare of light dims, I call my shards back to my crown, survey the tomb, find nothing left of Khadyr, and then nod in satisfaction.

My legs go out from underneath me, but Reznik swoops forward and catches me in his arms. He cradles me close and then Yaelyn is at his side, stroking the side of my face, wrapping his tail around my calf.

"You did it, Mischief," he says, soft, sweet awe in his voice.

"We did it," I say, stumbling into his side as my knees give out. Fuck, never mind my light, I feel like I just drained every last drop of energy from my body. If not for the loves of my lives holding me up, I'd be back on the cold, hard ground. "Gonna need to sleep for like a week after this, though." I cuddle into their embrace with a sigh. "So, um, guess it's at least twenty spanks after this one, huh?"

"Spark, we're just glad you're alive."

I look up sharply, though I feel about as weak as a day-old kitten. "Look, I may be the Light Bearer, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't hold me accountable. What I did was supremely

shitty. And honestly, my plan pretty much sucked. I came here to hide and die with the shards.”

“That *is* a pretty sucky plan,” Reznik admits in a low rumble.

“How did you find me, anyway?”

“Yaelyn suspected you were the Light Bearer and that you would do whatever it took to protect the shards. He also figured out that you’d go to the most fortified place you knew. Here.”

“Our shards were paining us. We knew something was wrong. But, love, why didn’t you say anything?”

I duck away, reminding myself that my men are very much alive and Khadyr very much destroyed. And that I *did* prove worthy enough to claim the Light Bearer’s crown (and lightsaber, fuck yes) after all. “Khadyr threatened to do unspeakable things to the two of you. The only way I could protect you was to leave. I didn’t... I didn’t know I was the Light Bearer until Khadyr told me. I thought he was an agent of the darkness, not the legit darkness itself. That was a bit of a plot twist. And I thought maybe I was some kind of agent of light. I don’t know, it probably doesn’t make sense. But I needed to protect the shards.” I look at Yaelyn and bite my lip. “You didn’t tell me.”

“I wanted to be sure. You glow, you know?”

I shrug guiltily and absorb the shards back into my chest, the glow showing through my shirt. “Might have used my chest as a flashlight to make my way around the labyrinth.” Talk about headlights. I still think I prefer my little shard buddies in my chest, not crowning my head. Shit, I have so much to learn about this Light Bearer schtick.

“I thought if we told you stories of the Light Bearer, it would trigger a memory or something. But you’re not Lux.”

“I wish I could be. I know what she meant to you. I know you were hoping she would return.”

“Oh, Mischief, no. No. Lux did mean a lot to us. We served her and we came to love her. But you? We loved you

before you were the Light Bearer. Before I even suspected. And don't you dare suggest it was because you were carrying shards. We loved you before you stole the first from us. Because you... you're everything we want."

"Brave, bratty, reckless menace," Reznik breathes, and I have to duck my head to hide my tears. "Beautiful, sexy, stabby, troublemaking thief. I meant what I said when I told you to never change."

"Sweet words, big guy," I murmur. "Fuck, is it ever dusty in this temple. I'm not crying."

"You're totally crying," Yaelyn says, rolling his eyes. But he's smiling.

"And you're so getting spanked."

"Let us take you home, Spark."

"There's something I need to do first."

Reznik helps me to my feet and I'm shaky, but I'm slowly getting my strength back. I wonder if I need to sun myself like a lizard to recharge the sun shards. This 'Light Bearer without a fucking instruction manual' thing is a bit bullshit, but I trust that Reznik and Yaelyn will help me figure it out. That, together, we'll help drive back the darkness taking over the shadow realm. One step at a time. After my week-long nap.

"Can we put the draugrs to rest? They deserve peace now that their duty is done."

Yaelyn drops a soft kiss on my forehead. "Of course, love."

And so we do. I bestow a blessing of light on each soldier, sort of making up the words on the fly, but the effect is just as I had hoped: the undead become dead once more, finally able to rest.

Reznik scoops me into his arms when I've completed the rites, and after stepping out into the snowy countryside, I'm dragged into a world of shadow.

The moment we emerge from the shadow walk, I race to the kitchen sink and vomit up the marranitos I snacked on

while waiting for my death.

“Never fucking do that to me again!” I moan, shaking as I heave. “Fuccck. We’re going to have to do that loads when we save the shadow realm, aren’t we?”

Yaelyn rubs my back and draws some of the nausea from my body with his magic. “You’ll get used to it after a few times.”

“I don’t know how to save the shadow realm,” I admit in a murmur.

“We’ll figure it out, Luce. The three of us. We’ll be by your side no matter what. I’ll teach you to properly fight with that lightsaber of yours, we can refine your pocket light technique, and we’ll beat back the darkness.”

I make a few sleepy lightsaber sounds and Reznik strokes my hair.

“But for now, you sleep for a week. Yuletide was always our time of rest, and you’ve earned it, little thief,” my demon says, pressing a kiss to my temple.

“Not a whole week,” I mumble, then yawn. “I seem to remember a promise of tying and feasting...”

“Our pleasure is to serve you,” Yaelyn purrs, his voice silky, and I wish I wasn’t so exhausted, because I do so love the promise in his words.

“Save that thought,” I say, blinking my heavy eyelids.

And then I swoon into their arms



I WAKE up in the pickup truck, groggy and confused, curled half on the seat and half in Yaelyn’s lap.

“Morning, sunshine,” he says, pushing a thermos of his makeshift cocoa-and-coffee mocha into my hands.

“Where are we going?” I ask, sitting up to survey the world whizzing by around us.

“I broke one of your ornaments,” Yaelyn confesses. “So Reznik decided you need a hundred more.”

“Only a hundred new shinies?” I ask with a pout.

“Menace,” Reznik rumbles. “Beloved.”

“Love you more,” I tease, poking him in the side with my booted toe.

He cuts a glance in my direction and doesn’t try to hide his smile. “Impossible.”

EPILOGUE

LUCY

My demonkin spend the days after our epic battle doing everything in their power to show me they love me.

Everything, that is, except railing me. I don't know if it's the whole "I'm the new Light Bearer" thing, the "Yaelyn kind of died" thing (for which he has yet to receive his funishment...), or something else entirely, but all of their touches since the tomb have been chaste. Careful. And it's driving me absolutely off-the-wall bonkers. I'm honestly surprised I haven't taken to sleep humping them. If I don't get a dick, tongue, or tail in my mouth soon, I'm lighting this loft up like a K-pop concert.

So, to say I've been going to bed frustrated is an understatement.

I find no satisfaction... until Yaelyn drags me into the dream he's sharing with Reznik. I'm bound by some unseen dream magic, relegated to the audience.

And I'm not complaining. Because all my fantasies of seeing my demonkin cross swords are coming magnificently, exquisitely true.

Reznik kneels, his glorious wings spread either for my benefit or for balance, and Yaelyn rides him with abandon, working himself on the demon's thick cock and moaning on every single down stroke. Reznik fists the incubus' hard length, twisting his hand up over the crown of Yaelyn's cock every time he bottoms out inside the incubus. They kiss, a brutal, consuming clash of tongues and teeth, desperate for each other.

And fuck, I'm desperate for them, too.

But all I can do is watch.

Watch as Yaelyn draws close to his climax, as he thrusts the tip of tail into Reznik's ass, making the other man roar into their kiss.

Fuck, they're beautiful: all muscle and mayhem, strength and sensuality. Their pleasure is tender and brutal all at once, this joining one of countless over the millennia they've spent together, achingly familiar, but somehow still new. And they've brought me into their love, their passion. I see them as they are: raw, authentic, intimate. Beautiful.

Reznik grabs Yaelyn's hip and drives into him, flesh meeting flesh with an aggressive slap. Yaelyn is just about to come and drag Reznik into his own release when the dream fades away.

I wake to find them kneeling over me, Reznik working both of their cocks in the same broad hand that spanked my ass pink just days ago, Yaelyn clawing desperately at our demon lover, pulling him into a deep kiss. They come hard, growls and moans, as Reznik jerks them, as he aims their release over my belly. Jet after jet of hot cum hits my skin, but my demonkin clearly have plans for it—and me. Rez draws a thick finger through their spend and then traces it over my slit before pumping it inside me.

I groan when Yaelyn does the same, painting my clit with his seed. Now that we're bonded, he can work his incubus magic without first giving me his seed, pluck the strings of my pleasure like he's playing a harp, but his spend is potent in other ways: it lights up every nerve ending it touches.

Rez slides the pad of his thumb through what remains on my belly and then rolls one of my nipples between his finger and thumb. I jerk off the bed as the bud goes painfully tight. Desire jolts into my belly, and my cunt clenches hard around the demon's thrusting fingers.

Fuck *yes*, this is exactly what I've been wanting. What I need.

Yaelyn captures my lips in a kiss, and I only break it to cry out my pleasure when they bring me over the edge.

Rez draws me into a kiss, stealing the last of my cries as he devours me. When I finally still against him, the warmth of Yaelyn's seed still simmering beneath my skin, he tilts my chin up and drops the sweetest kiss on my lips. "Merry Christmas, Lucy."

I curl against him with a content sigh. "I thought demonkin were supposed to celebrate Yule, big guy."

Yaelyn wraps himself around me, slinging an arm over my hip, fingers trailing up the inside of my thigh in a way that lights me up. Literally. My shards are glowing again. Rez trails the rough pads of his fingers down my breastbone, pausing when he feels the warmth of the sun shards inside me.

"My brilliant spark," he murmurs. "We aren't actually celebrating Christmas today. We're celebrating *you*."

"And we have a present for you," Yaelyn says, voice silky.

I move to hop out of bed because he said the magic word (and holy guacamole, I hope it's a *shiny* present), but Yaelyn draws me back down to the soft mattress. "After breakfast, Mischief."

I pout up at him, but he rolls me closer to Rez before releasing me.

"Rez, love," he says lightly. "Eat her out while I make coffee and start breakfast? I want to hear her screaming all the way in the kitchen. Ah, better yet. Let her ride your face and hold your horns like she so loves to do. But hold her down until she's squirming. Make her come so many times she won't be able to walk to the breakfast table because her knees are so wobbly."

Never, ever, ever has a Light Bearer been so lucky.



OKAY, amendment. Never, ever, ever has any woman ever in the whole entire world been so lucky. Because Yaelyn made *all* of my favorite breakfast foods: French toast, breakfast potatoes, the most delectable bacon I've ever tasted, and a cocoa mocha to wash it all down.

In another lifetime—my pre-Light Bearer lifetime—I would have worried that they were buttering me up to deliver bad news, to let me down gently as they cast me aside for someone a little less steal-y and stabby, and, okay, so I still worry about that a little. But the worry is quieted quickly and easily by Rez running his fingers through my hair as he holds me close.

I finally shove my plate away. “Holy tits, I’m so full,” I whine, setting a hand on my belly.

“Oh, Mischief,” Yaelyn says slyly. “You think you’re full now?”

“Hopefully not too full to enjoy your present,” Reznik rumbles in my ear, and hot damn, I should *not* be getting little horny tingles again after just coming my brains out, but I guess that’s just life as the Light Bearer, eh?

Aside from the whole having-to-bring-balance-back-to-the-shadow-realm situation, it’s a pretty damn good gig. And my guys have assured me that we *will* bring balance to the Force. Well, Reznik didn’t put it that way, and yes, that earned him a marathon of Episodes I through VI, but that was the gist. Together, with my shiny rack rocks, we’ll be able to battle back the darkness overtaking their home realm and save it.

Not to mention the realms beyond.

Saving the world is on our agenda, right behind upping my light saber skills and oomphing up my magical mojo.

First on my agenda? Opening my Christmas present.



THE PRESENT ISN’T SHINY, but I’m not disappointed in the fucking least. Because my present is an honest-to-goddess

playroom of the very sexy adult variety. There's a long, sturdy frame, taller even than Reznik, with metal loops along the edges. A few skeins of rope hang from one of the loops, and my mouth drops open.

Yaelyn draws me into the room and pulls down a length of rope. "Rez developed a new hobby while you were away causing trouble."

"I told you I'd tie you up like a present and feast on you," the demon adds in a low purr.

"And you've already done the feasting," I say, swaying on my feet. Shit, I thought my knees were wobbly after this morning's face-riding rodeo. But this... this means business. This room means giving all control over to my demonkin, putting myself in their hands and trusting them completely.

Yaelyn must sense the curl of anxiety building in my belly because he passes the rope off to Reznik and comes to me until we're standing toe to toe. He takes my hands in his and brings them up to his lips, kissing the back of one and then the other. "We're going to push you, Mischief. Do things you've never done before. But it will all be in service of *your* pleasure."

I swallow hard. "Never more than I can stand?"

"Never," Reznik swears, coming up behind me and setting his hands on my hips, pulling me back against his hot body.

Yaelyn drops his forehead to mine and brushes my nose with his. "You're the most courageous woman I've ever met. Impulsive, risk-addicted, and of occasionally questionable judgement, but courageous. Be courageous for me now. We will never harm you, love. We only want to *worship* you." He steals a slow, lazy kiss that stirs desire in my belly. "Make you feel pleasure more intense than you've ever felt before." His lips drop to my jaw, then my neck. His teeth lightly scrape over my pulse point, and I let out a low moan. "We're both claiming you today, Luce."

"You've done that before," I say, my throat suddenly hoarse.

Rez grinds against my ass, and my eyes go wide.

“Not like this,” the demon rumbles in my ear. “I’m going to tie you up, tease you until you’re panting, kiss you until you’re breathless, taste and touch... all while Yaelyn plays with your virgin ass. And when you’re so wrung out from the pleasure, when you’re soft and ready for us, we’ll take you together.”

It’s a good thing I’m pressed between them because I’m pretty sure my knees have been replaced by gummy candy. I let out an incomprehensible string of syllables, and Yaelyn chuckles against my skin. Because he knows. He knows my cunt clenched, achingly empty, at Reznik’s words. Yae steals a nipping kiss. “We’ll take it slow,” he promises, “but don’t you dare tell me you’ve never thought about this, stroked your soaking pussy while imagining what it would be like taking me in your tight ass while Reznik claimed your cunt.”

“Fuuuccck,” I groan because of fucking *course* I’ve thought about it. Okay, big girl panties (except, really, no panties, because I’m about to get my brains fucked out). If Yaelyn can take Reznik’s absolute monster dong in *his* ass, I can take Yaelyn in mine. “Okay. Yes. Please.”

Rez nuzzles my cheek with his and then steps away, unwinding a length of the cord and then beckoning me toward him.

He spends the better part of an hour tying me up while simultaneously winding me up, looping and knotting the rope until it crisscrosses my body. He touches me as he works, a brush of the pad of his thumb over my nipple as he draws the cord beneath my breasts, the scratch of his claws on my inner thighs as he binds me open for them, long sucking kisses along the column of my neck as he wraps my arms at my sides. By the time I’m suspended from the frame, and he nods with satisfaction, I’m panting for him, needing so much more of his touch. Knowing I’m going to get all I want and more.

I hang in the air, not even a toe touching the ground, bound open for them. Rez has made my body his canvas and the rope

his paints, and when Yaelyn looks at me, it's like he's looking at a work of art.

“Breathtaking,” Yaelyn murmurs, then steps forward and captures my lips in a kiss. I want to grind against him, to get some relief from the fire Rez's touches have set burning beneath my skin, but I can't move even an inch. All I can do is clench my fist, curl my toes, and throw my head back to moan when Yaelyn thrusts a buzzing vibrator into my needy sex, anchoring it inside me with one of the swoops of rope that trace up my thighs to my hips.

It's not nearly enough stimulation, but I know it's not meant to be. It's an unrelenting tease, meant to keep desire simmering in my blood as they touch me.

It's their first touches that send me to that blissful place of stillness inside me. Yaelyn massages my shoulders while dropping kisses down my spine and Reznik... Reznik looks at me as though there's nothing more precious in all of time and creation. He steps forward, takes my face in his hands and draws me in for a kiss I feel down to my very soul. And I rise, rise above my worries and doubts, above oaths and obligations, until I'm floating in a world of sensation and emotion, suspended between the two demonkin I love above all else.

This. This is where I belong.

And Yaelyn knows it. “There she is,” the incubus says softly, pressing a kiss between my shoulders.

“Love you, Spark,” Reznik murmurs against my skin.

“Love you more,” I promise.

“Ready to sing, little magpie?” my demon asks. He reaches between my spread thighs, and I expect fingers stroking through my folds, his thumb on my clit, but instead I hear the click of a switch and the vibrator inside me kicks up a notch. Sensation floods through me, a deluge, and a throaty moan escapes me. He finds my clit and strokes me slowly, then traces his other hand up my belly until he can weigh my breast in his palm. He squeezes just enough to make me moan again,

lets me feel the tips of his claws digging into my skin. Just enough that I feel them. Just enough for me to let out a needy whine.

“You only get one for free,” Yaelyn warns me, but I’m already approaching my first peak, already riding a wave of pleasure so strong I don’t think to question him.

Rez kisses me through my orgasm, his tongue moving against mine in a way that makes me pant and whimper into our kiss. Fuck, I want to touch him, to run my hands through his hair, along the curves of his horns, but my hands are bound at my sides. He deepens our kiss, his lips moving against mine, and I’m so caught up in him that I almost miss the soft snick of a bottle cap being flicked open.

Yaelyn warms the lube between his fingertips before swiping it over my hole. I jerk in the ropes, more from surprise than discomfort, then take a deep, steady breath and nod for him to continue. He doesn’t penetrate me right away, instead massaging his finger into the sensitive ring of muscle until pleasure crashes through me. Fuck, I didn’t expect it to feel so... so *good*. Pleasure coils tightly in my belly as the vibrator buzzes inside me and Yaelyn plays with my ass. He strokes and massages, taking his time, but really, with his magic, we could be boning already.

“Just use your magic, Yae. Get me ready so we can fuck,” I plead, needing more. Needing them inside me, not the teasing toy.

“Oh no, Mischief,” he tuts. “I’m saving my magic for something else. This... you’ll feel every moment of this.”

I’m just about to ask him what he means by that when he penetrates me with a single, slippery finger. I feel every inch, every knuckle as he works his finger into me, as my body clasps around the invading digit. Letting out a shuddering breath, I force myself to relax, to get out of my head and just feel the slow slide of his finger in my ass. My eyes flutter shut, and I let out a low, needy whine.

“Such a good little spark,” Reznik rumbles before claiming my mouth in a kiss once more. He drives the vibrator deeper

into my cunt with the heel of his hand and I cry out, shaking in the ropes. “I think how well you’re taking our lover’s finger deserves a reward, don’t you?”

He doesn’t give me a chance to answer. He flicks the vibrator to a higher speed, then drops to his knees in front of me and I realize why I’m suspended as high as I am the moment he pulls me forward and seals his lips around my clit.

I let out a broken cry that has him growling against my sex, and wetness floods from me. Then my demon thumbs the rope holding the vibrator inside me to the side, releasing the toy. But he gives me no reprieve. He fucks me with it while he laves at my clit. It’s too much and not enough all at once, and I’m desperate. Desperate for their cocks. Desperate to come. I feel my oncoming orgasm curl tighter and tighter, low in my belly, feel the first flutters of my cunt around the toy as Rez thrusts it into me, but my orgasm never comes.

“I told you that you only get one for free,” Yaelyn whispers in my ear, dark and seductive, his lips brushing against my skin.

His magic. My incubus isn’t using his magic to bring me pleasure, but to hold it back instead.

“Yae,” I whine, fighting the ropes to rock against Reznik’s face. I’m close, so achingly close to exploding, but the incubus just murmurs dark praise in my ear as he slips a second finger inside me.

I shout and shake, knowing for sure that his second finger in my ass would have made me come if not for his magic. He gently scissors his fingers inside me, stretching me open, and I’m reduced to breathy little cries.

“Perfect Mischief,” he says, curling his tail around my bound thigh. “Taking everything we give you. Your ass is opening so beautifully for me, little thief. Dark gods, if you only knew how long I’ve wanted to claim your sweet ass. To thrust inside you while Reznik spears you with his thick cock.”

I groan, whining out panting pleas. I’m right on the edge, the pleasure of an orgasm I’m not allowed to have like a

white-hot inferno inside me.

Yaelyn plunges his fingers deeper, just as Rez angles the toy as he drives it into my body, and they meet inside me. I let out a sharp cry, and fuck, I know it's a prelude of what's to come, that I'll feel so much more when it's their cocks working inside me, not fingers and toys.

My demon lashed my clit with his tongue, and I thrash in the ropes. "Yae, please, please, please. Let me come."

"Give her more, beloved. She can take it," Yaelyn tells Rez in a light tone as he pumps his fingers into me.

The toy buzzes faster, and I can feel the vibrations in every inch of my body, in my quivering thighs and curling toes, as Rez slowly fucks me with it.

Yaelyn drives a third finger into me just as he withdraws his magic. I come apart with a scream, my whole body shaking. Wave after wave of perfect sensation crash through me until nothing else exists but their touch, my ecstasy.

"There is nothing more exquisite than your pleasure, Luce," Yaelyn rasps, his breathing ragged. He breathes me in, feeds on my ecstasy as aftershocks make my body squeeze around his fingers.

"Need you both," I plead. "No more toys, no more games."

"No more ropes?" Rez rumbles as he presses kiss after kiss to the insides of my thighs.

I look down at him the best I can from my bound position and give him a lusty wink. "Those can stay, lover, but let me touch you?"

I'm boneless and spent from my earth-shattering orgasm, and content to rest in the bindings as Rez releases the ropes on my wrists and ankles. When he steps close, I immediately pull him to me, wrapping my arms around his neck and my legs around his hips. I moan when I feel how hard he is behind his loose lounge pants, how ready for me he is. I draw him into a kiss, tasting myself on his lips, and moan when he grinds into me.

Yaelyn comes up behind me and kisses along my jaw until I turn and let him capture my mouth. I whine into the kiss, finally having the leverage I need to move, to twist and take his face in my hands, to kiss him how I need to. I pour everything into our kiss: my love for them, my trust, my joy.

“I love you,” I whisper.

“Love you more,” he vows.

“Impossible,” I tell him.

“Beautiful Spark,” Rez says, caressing my cheek with the pad of his thumb. “You’ve brought so much light into our lives.”

I roll my eyes and stick my tongue out at him. “I’m the Light Bearer. Comes with the territory. Though, apparently, a fucking instruction manual does not.”

He takes the opportunity and kisses me, stroking his tongue against mine. “Menace,” he mutters, but I can feel his smile against my lips. “I’m trying to be romantic. Even before your magic, Lucy. Even when you were robbing us blind. You brought us more joy and contentment than we’ve felt in... in ever. You are so much more to us than just the Light Bearer. You’re our spark, our thief, our mischief, our magpie. First, foremost, and forever.”

“Found your gooey center, big guy,” I tease, but tears of joy stream down my cheeks and make my voice catch in my throat. “I’m so glad you’re the two demonkin I stole from. I’m so glad the shards brought us back together. I’m so fucking glad we didn’t die in that tomb. And I’m glad you’re mine. Make love to me?”

“We’ll take it slow,” Yaelyn promises.

Reznik unwraps my legs from around his hips just long enough to drop his lounge pants to the floor and step out of them. He strokes his hard, thick length, the dark tip glistening with precum and I groan, reaching for him.

He unfurls his wings, and Yaelyn lets out a surprised, sharp laugh. “Those get her every single time, Rez. Fuck, if you

could feel her the way I do, you'd never tuck your wings back in. And you'd loom all the time."

Reznik steps forward, and even suspended in the air, he towers over me.

And, oh, the incomprehensible nonsense that spills from my lips as he does. He's so fucking perfect: strength and brutality wrapped around the tenderest heart. And he looms like a mother-trucking god.

"That make you even wetter, Spark?"

"Come feel for yourself," I challenge, smirking.

"Luce, you're literally dripping." I hear Yaelyn's clothes hit the floor behind me, hear the plastic flick of the lube cap, can just make out the sound of my incubus working the lube over his cock. He traces the tip of his tail through my folds, making me shiver, and groans. "Fucking perfection, Mischief."

Reznik finally steps close enough for me to wrap around him once more, and I grind against him, sparks of desire shooting through me. He takes himself in hand, dragging the thick head of his cock through my wetness before guiding himself to my entrance.

I moan when he presses into me, as my cunt stretches around him, and he fills me.

And then I understand exactly what Yaelyn meant about feeling full before. My eyes go wide, but Yaelyn only laughs at my realization, the sound so light and full of joy that I can't help but smile.

Rez rocks forward, sheathing his entire length inside me, and I throw my head back and moan. There's no bliss like this, like feeling the first long stroke of his cock in my tight cunt when we join.

His eyes fall shut and he lets out a shuddering breath, hands going to my hips. He's silent and still for a moment. "Dark gods, Lucy. You feel so fucking good, and you're going to feel even better with Yaelyn's cock in your ass." He draws

out of me and then plunges back in, hot and hard and sweet, all at once.

And then Yaelyn's behind me and I'm held between their hard, muscled chests. It's so much more than all my fervent fantasies, and a warm flood of belonging washes through me, leaving pure bliss in its wake. I let my head loll back onto the incubus' shoulder and he gives me a quick kiss on the cheek. "Ready for me, Luce?"

"Yes, Yae. Please," I murmur, nuzzling against him.

I wince when the thick head of his cock penetrates me, but the sting lasts only a second. When he pushes forward, his slick cock sliding into my ass, I let out a raw cry, shifting my hips to take more of him.

"Good?"

"So fucking good," I pant.

He thrusts in me slowly and I clench around him, my need spiking. And then he meets Rez inside of me, through the thin barrier of my body. I feel so full, impossibly, perfectly so, and when Rez rocks forward just enough, hitting every perfect spot inside me, I fly over my peak with a scream.

They fuck me through my orgasm, alternating thrusts in my cunt and ass until I feel another orgasm building inside me. I twist and pull Yaelyn into a kiss, giving him every bit of pleasure I'm feeling, and he groans, snapping his hips against my ass, driving hard and deep, fucking me until I come apart again.

Rez draws my hand up to his shoulder and sets the other on Yaelyn's, then curls his wings around us, closing us in. The three of us together, just as we're meant to be.

"Ride, Spark. Take what you need."

I have just enough leverage between them to lift myself up and drop back down on their cocks, moaning when they both bottom out, Rez in my cunt and Yaelyn in my ass. I ride them slowly, kissing one and then the other, moving between them until we're panting. Until there's nothing between us but our love, our joy, and our light.

Rez steps forward, rocking up hard into my cunt, and when I scream my pleasure, singing like a magpie, he captures Yaelyn's lips in a desperate kiss. I clench around them as ecstasy crashes through me and all I see is light. Stars. Sparks.

And then I realize it's not white light I see behind my eyes, but light that's coming from within me as I float in the bliss of my orgasm.

Rez breaks their kiss, sets a hand over my glowing chest, looks up into my eyes, and comes apart in two hard, desperate thrusts, dragging Yaelyn over the edge with him as they meet inside me.

We stay like that, wound together, for a few perfect moments until the joyful glow in my chest finally fades. Rez steals a kiss, then brushes my nose with his.

They unbind me, letting me down gently, and they never stop touching me. Massaging feeling back into my shaky legs, kissing down the length of one arm and then the other.

Rez carries me back to bed and Yaelyn appears with a warm washcloth, cleaning me and then them before tossing it into the bathroom and settling down at my front. His tail goes around my calf, and he kisses me, as sweet as sunshine, as Reznik takes the space on the bed behind me.

I snuggle closer and tug Rez's arm up over my waist, fitting perfectly between them. Where I belong. Where I'll find the strength to wage war against the darkness overtaking the shadow realm. Where I'll find the strength to fall apart when I need to, trusting that these demonkin will build me back up.

"Got you another present," Reznik rumbles, as Yaelyn takes my hand and slides a ring onto my finger.

"Is... is this a—" My breath hitches as I hold it up to the light streaming in the bedroom window. And fuck is it *shiny*. The glittering crystal catches every beam of light, sparkling just like the snow on the rolling hills of the Welsh countryside.

Yaelyn looks up into my eyes, his slate eyes shining with emotion. "It's whatever you want it to be, Luce. An oath, a

promise, a shiny treasure.”

“So shiny,” I breathe.

“You have us, always and forever,” Reznik promises. “Ring or no ring. Whether you want to wed or hand fast or neither. Demonkin don’t celebrate Christmas and we don’t do rings, but for you, my spark, we would do anything.”

“Yes,” I say. “Always and forever, yes.”

**EPILOGUE 2: LIGHT
BEARER BRIDAL
BOOGALOO**

LUCY

T hree hundred and, um, fifty-something? days of being a badass(ish) Light Bearer, definitely not nearly lopping off a nip with my lightsaber, saving a whole-ass realm, and getting thoroughly and immaculately railed on just about the daily later...

Oh, and the bit I left out? Three hundred and fifty-something days of being the worst bride in any of the realms. Like being the Light Bearer, reborn centuries after the last Light Bearer, gods rest her soul, being a not-quite-human bride to two very-not-human-and-actually-quite-sexily-demonic grooms didn't come with an instruction manual.

I'd say I'd go into the instruction manual business because someone should and that someone would make a killing at it, but that person will not be me. Because choo choo, bitches, it's all aboard the Hot Mess Lucy Express. I am in no way organized enough to launch an instruction manual business, let alone plan my wedding to the men I love. This should be the happiest time of my life! I've got kick-ass light powers and a mother-trucking lightsaber! I'm doing good in the realms! I'm getting married!

I'm getting married... *probably*. Eventually.

But, real talk.

I am not bride material.

Because when Reznik casually brings up who we should invite to our as-of-yet-unscheduled nuptials, I break out in a cold sweat. Listen. Aside from Aron and the veritable hoard of demonkin children that call Shadow House their home, who

would I invite? My options are: business associates, people I've stolen from, and business associates I've stolen from.

And let me tell you. That'd be one fucked up seating chart.

And one fucked up stack of invitations on ivory linen paper. Or was it cream cotton paper?

Fuck me seven ways from seven realms, because I thought paper was made from *trees*.

If I had my way, I'd just shoot Aron a quick 'waddup, getting hitched' text and tell him to bring the whole brood.

I'm trying to do this right, and it has mostly led to sobbing over bridal magazines and swatches of lace while eating Nutella straight out of the jar with a spoon. And then maybe trying to lick the rest out with my tongue in the most undignified manner ever.

Don't judge me, thank you very much. I'm doing that more than well enough on my own. World's worst fucking bride, that's me!

Wait, Lucy, I hear you saying. The guys said the sparkly ring on your finger didn't have to mean a wedding.

Yeah, okay, but Rez has since said, "Well, it can't hurt to try it on, right?" when we ever-so-coincidentally went blocks and blocks out of our way to stroll past a bridal boutique and a dress caught his eye.

And Yaelyn? "Oh, but a cake tasting will be fun, don't you think, Mischief? Even if we're not ready to order a cake yet."

And, okay, getting treated like an absolute princess at a bougie Soho bakery and drinking champagne while sampling cakes *was* kind of a blast. And, obviously, the strawberry chocolate chip cake with cream cheese frosting was our winner. Total no brainer.

Suffice it to say: my men want a wedding.

And for the past three hundred and fifty-something days, they've been nothing short of perfect: endlessly patient as I've learned my new magic, sweet and supportive when I've struggled, and my soft place to land after the hard work of

trying to save a whole-ass realm. And the regular immaculate, imaginative railing. I did mention that, didn't I? But most of all, they want to wife me up. Steal-y, stabby, snarky me. And that means everything to me.

They deserve a wedding, and while I'm not remotely cut out for this shit, I'm going to damn well give them one. It's the least I can do, right?

So, I stay up late and read the bridal magazines that Rez sneaks into our grocery cart, and I cut out articles and tips and pictures to put in my little vision board scrapbook thing. Never mind that it's held together by as much Nutella as it is rubber cement.

Speaking of magazines.

"Hey, Rez?"

Reznik looks up from the old tome he's been leafing through and looks me over with a slow, sultry grin.

Oh, right.

My demon warrior was getting me ready for a hang-and-bang when we got word from Yaelyn that he'd be a little late getting back and not to start without him. So, I'm butt-ass naked, strung up in a masterpiece of knots with just my hands free, two vibrators lightly buzzing away inside me, getting personally, pointedly, repeatedly and thoroughly attacked by bridal magazines.

"Yes, Spark?"

"Would you say my arms are toned?"

Big Apple Bride says I should begin an upper-body toning program six months before my big day, so my arms look sleek in my dress.

"Your arms are perfect, Lucy. Every inch of you is perfect."

"But are they *toned*?"

"Is this because Yaelyn had to help you open your new jar of Nutella this morning?"

“I got it started for him!”

And then I stress-ate half the jar.

“Of course, love. I’m sure you did.”

I glare at him.

Look, we can’t all be as ridonkulously sexy like my two demonkin. Not all of us have asses you could bounce a quarter off of. Strange use for an ass. And a quarter. Anyway, muscles come as natural to them as breathing, while I still get winded after a long bout of swordplay with my lightsaber. They’re going to be so stupidly sexy on our wedding day that they’re going to have to spend most of it trying to keep my hands out of their fancy pants.

“What’s bothering you, Lucy?” Rez rumbles, setting his book aside and coming over to me, wings unfurling behind him.

Ding *dong*. I know he doesn’t intend to loom, but fuck. Effortlessly, ridonkulously sexy.

I flip the magazine around and show him the exercise plan. It’s illustrated in cutesy line art, awash with sweet pastels, and I resent every stupid step and rep it says it’ll take to get me sleek and walk-down-the-aisle ready.

Fuck. I have to practice my bridal walk, too.

Reznik looks over the magazine spread, takes it from me and tosses it aside. “Spark, you don’t need bridal bootcamp. I told you, you’re perfect.”

But I’m *not*. Because perfect would mean checklists and, I don’t know, like charts and shit? In place of my Nutella-smudged scrapbook thingy, I’d have a well-organized binder with soft watercolor florals on the cover, filled with calendar pages, menus, swatches and dark gods even know what else.

Honestly? When it comes to binding and filling? The only ones I enjoy are the ones that should be happening right now. Bound up for and by my men, filled with them.

Rez scoops up his book and hands it to me. “It’ll still be an hour before Yaelyn gets home. Here, something more

titillating for you to read until then.”

“Titillating would be an orgasm or two to tide me over,” I suggest lightly, squirming a little in Rez’s ropes.

“Patience, Lucy,” he says, before vanishing from the room, presumably to grab a new book now that I’ve pouted my way into his. I stick my tongue out at him behind his back because I am the epitome of maturity, and also, we *all* enjoy it when I act like a brat, and they have to take matters—and me—in hand.

I sigh because I know I won’t be able to goad Rez into a little nookie pre-gaming. The man is ungoadable, but I guess waiting for your whole purpose in life to return for centuries makes you pretty patient. Especially when that purpose is me. Me and my rack full of rocks, and my penchant for relocating shiny things into my pockets.

Speaking of shiny.

Ding *dong* again.

Rez *just* missed the good part of the crumbling old book he gave me. There, amidst all the dry, dusty-ass history, is my literal catnip.

Booty.

And not the sexy bounce-a-quarter-off-it kind, but definitely sexy in its own way.

Liora’s locket.

Fuck, it even *sounds* shiny. Call it intuition, but I can just tell that in terms of shininess, this locket is going to give my Light Bearer’s crown a run for its rocktastic-racktastic money.

Made for the fae princess Liora by her demon betrothed Iradil—

As in, former head of Lux’s Light Guard Iradil? As in, I had an epic showdown with a man who wanted to make a skin coat out of me in his tomb Iradil?

Hold the fucking phone.

I flip back a few pages, and sure enough, the woodcut print definitely looks like Rez and Yae's late brother-in-arms.

Yeah, that Iradil.

Who was apparently arranged to be married to Liora to save the fae and demon realms from going to war over the darkness encroaching on both. But here's the twist: Liora and Iradil were secretly and deeply in love, courting in secret, which is apparently what they called immaculate railing back then.

And then came the Darkest Days. Darkness swept over the realms, and no one knew then that it wasn't coming from the fae or demons, but from an evil, and a realm, beyond. Fingers were pointed, words were said. Nuptials were called off.

But Iradil continued to see Liora in secret, naturally, even as the darkness took hold of her. She started to weaken and fade, and was no doubt on her way to sloughing off the immortal coil and turning into a field of flowers or whatever happens when a fairy princess kicks it when Iradil was visited by, well...

The old tome isn't specific. A demigoddess? One of the Arcane? An Arcane demigoddess?

Who—or what—ever visited Iradil was freaky powerful, and he begged her: take his life and save Liora's.

And this Big Bad Bitch of Arcane Magic did what exactly no one trying to offer sympathy to someone whose lover is dying does. She gave him a fucking quest to prove his worth.

There's always a fucking quest, but this quest. This fucking quest.

“Cleave a ray of starlight from the night sky.”

My dudes. A ray of fucking starlight.

And he *did* it. He cleaved starlight from the sky and put it into a locket for his love.

Man, talk about romantic. I appreciate the absolutely luscious leather thigh holster Rez surprised me with for my birthday, but a locket full of starlight?

I need it. Holy tits, I need it.

So, the Big Bad Bitch saved Liora, infusing her with arcane magic, making her the very first Light Bearer.

Oh damn. Light Bearer locket.

Light Bearer locket with a whole slew of terms and conditions that Iradil probably read and agreed to before signing off his life in blood. He definitely seems like the type.

He was consigned to serve the Light Bearer for all his days—and not just Liora, but all the Light Bearers to come after her. Because there *would* be more Light Bearers. Despite being saved once, Liora would perish, and her powers and light would pass on.

Iradil served her every day until she did.

She vanished upon her death, returning to the stars—and fuck, do I have to worry about poofing into starlight one day too? I am way too slightly horny to be having this existential crisis right now.

“Lucy?”

I jerk my head up.

“What’s wrong, Spark?”

“Liora, the first Light Bearer. Iradil loved her. Yes, your Iradil. He cut a sliver of actual starlight and put it in a locket for her. And after she died, he hid it away where they used to meet in secret. There is a literal Light Bearer locket full of starlight and it’s in the Fae Realm.”

My fingers itch.

“Like, we could go *find* it. Just like that.”

The locket calls to me just like the first sun shard did, and I know I won’t rest until I have it in my hands. Something so beautiful shouldn’t be hidden away. It should be cherished. It should be with the Light Bearer, and for better or worse, that’s me. If I had something of Liora’s, some connection to her, maybe all of this would be easier.

“Just like that? Lucy, that was millennia ago. If it even still exists, going after it could be dangerous. The fae courts are at war with each other.”

“The fae courts are *always* at war with each other. We’ll be careful. We could sneak in and back out before anyone’s the wiser.”

“I don’t know...”

“Pretty please? It could be my Yule present. And my Christmas present. And my birthday present. All of my presents for the next decade, I promise. I won’t ask for anything else.”

“You’re asking for a lot, Spark. You’re asking me to knowingly put you in harm’s way over a necklace.”

“We can bug out at the first sign of danger. Shadow walk right out of there.” I pout, sagging as much as I can while still restrained. How do I explain to the demon I love that I need this, not just the treasure, but the procurement of it? I need an adventure and I need to do something I’m good at for a change. And finding treasure... that’s something I’m very, very good at.

“Rez, I’ll do anything. *Anything*. If we can do this, I’ll train until I drop every day. I’ll stop bringing home every shiny thing I find on the streets and cluttering up the loft. I’ll do all the chores naked or in a skimpy maid outfit. I’ll be less of a brat. Or more of a brat—”

And just like that, in the middle of my very sophisticated argument in favor of going after treasure, I come.

I come so hard I nearly black out.

Apropos of absolutely nothing, I orgasm with such intensity that I can’t feel my toes anymore.

“Yaelyn’s coming up the stairs,” I pant, my voice shaky, as aftershocks of pleasure tremble through me.

The door snicks open a moment later and I hear my incubus drop his keys in the bowl on the little table in the

entryway. I hear him shuck out of his wool coat and toe off his boots.

I hear him take his damn time, as though I haven't been strung up and waiting for him for what feels like forever.

When he finally steps into the playroom, he looks me over with a smug smirk on his handsome face.

The bastard.

The amazing, mischievous, very talented bastard.

Not long after we bonded, when I took the sun shard he was protecting, he discovered that he could make me come with nothing but his magic. Since then, he's been testing the limits of his magic, surprising me with orgasms when I least expect it. And I love it. I've come to love their little surprises: the magical orgasms, one of them coming home with New York City's best Nutella cupcakes in pretty pink bakery boxes, waking up in the truck for an impromptu trip to the Yule Market in the kin town up north.

They've found so many lovely ways to surprise me.

Dang, if only surprise weddings were a thing.

“Good orgasm, Mischief?”

Fuck yeah it was. I'm still dazed. So dazed I've nearly forgotten about—

“Yaelyn! There's treasure. Light Bearer treasure and it's so shiny, and we could go find it.”

“I asked you a question, Lucy,” my incubus says sternly, and I know I'm in for it now, because when Yaelyn's stern like this, he's a single-minded master of giving pleasure—and denying it.

He strips off his shirt, stops to kiss Rez hello, and then stalks toward me, his tail swishing behind him. He reaches between my legs, trailing his knuckles over the insides of my thighs, and switches the vibrator in my cunt higher. He captures my lips in a lingering, teasing kiss as he slicks his fingers through my soaked pussy, finding my clit and circling it slowly. “Are you going to be a good girl for us tonight?”

Pleasure jolts through me and I whimper. “Y-yes.”

He kisses me again and I can feel his satisfied, devious smile against my lips, right before he drops to his knees. Rez has tied up me so I’m at the perfect height for them to stand and fuck me, or for Yaelyn to kneel before me, grab the globes of my ass and bury his face in my pussy.

I go to grab for his horns, but Rez favors me with a similar stern look as he takes my hands and, one by one, ties them behind me so my breasts are thrust up for his attention.

He traces one clawed finger between my breasts and all the way to my belly button. I shiver as my nipples tighten.

“Perfect, exquisite Spark. You look so beautiful with Yaelyn’s head between your thighs. The way your whole body shakes and your pretty tits quiver.” He ghosts a callused palm over one of my nipples and I keen. “I can’t believe you thought you needed bridal bootcamp...”

Oh, right. I was reading about an arm workout and then Rez replaced my magazine with the old tome and... and just like that, I’m thinking about treasure again.

Priorities, Lucy. My two loves are about to make me orgasm myself stupid—and that’s before they even fuck me—and here I am thinking about shinies.

Yae sits back on his heels. “Lucy,” he warns.

“I’ll be good!” I swear.

And I try to be. I really do. I try to focus on the way Yaelyn’s wicked tongue feels laving over my clit and teasing my opening, on the way my breasts tighten when Rez bows his head and takes a nipple between his lips.

But, instead, my mind keeps slipping to scheming.

Even as I teeter at the edge of another orgasm, I scheme, thinking of ways to get Liora’s lost treasure.

But I don’t crash over the edge. I don’t come when Yaelyn angles the vibrator in my cunt so it hits the spot inside me that makes me scream. I hover at the edge, blinding pleasure building and building...

I whine, thrashing in Rez’s ropes, so close I could scream—and I do scream, a little, as Yaelyn slowly fucks the vibrator into my needy cunt—but his magic holds back my tidal wave of ecstasy.

“You’ll pay attention, Mischief, or I won’t let you come again at all tonight. You know you only get the first one for free,” Yaelyn says, his stern voice making me shiver.

I feel his magic singing through my veins, feel every sensation that much more as it works through my body.

“You said you’d be good, Spark,” Reznik rumbles, and I swear, those gravelly words send a whiplash of lust straight to my core. “Are you going to behave for us?”

I notch my chin up, look him straight in his deep, oil-slick eyes, and I smirk. “Maybe. Maybe not.”

Forget what I said about him being ungoadable.

“You’re in for it now, Mischief,” Yaelyn promises.

And I’m here for it. For every single minute of it. For the way the toys are abandoned in favor of their cocks. For the way they move against me, touching and teasing until I’m out of my mind with pleasure, my full attention only on them.



AFTER YAELYN finally let me come, it was like the floodgates opened. They subjected me to a barrage of orgasms so intense my toes still haven’t uncurled. But now, after a few hours of sleep snuggled between them, my mind starts to wander again when I slip from bed to use the bathroom.

Liora’s locket is out there for the taking, and I need it, just like I needed the shards. And, I mean, going after the shards turned out pretty damn good for me. I didn’t end up skewered or crushed by booby traps when raiding tombs. I gained a whole new purpose as the Light Bearer and met the loves of my life. The need for the locket... it’s just like how it felt when I first saw the shard in faded ink on old vellum in once-

very-scary-but-now-very-vanquished Khadyr Blackmore's hands.

Just a few minutes of research, I tell myself, as I steal Yaelyn's silky robe off the back of the Spanking Chair. I'll just flip through a few old tomes on the fae realm, read a few passages to make myself sleepy again and then head back to bed.

A few books turn into, I don't know, a zillion? A zillion books open to the little clues and tidbits I've uncovered, a dozen pages of notes, and a veritable puzzle of map pieces traced on tracing paper and carefully stuck together with tape.

It takes me half the night and half a dozen calls to a *very* grumpy Vhalar to translate some old fae words missing from the lexicon in our library, but I find it. Without even a glimmer of doubt, I find where Iradil hid away Liora's locket.

"Mischief? It's four o'clock in the morning."

"I found it," I murmur.

He comes up beside me and surveys my work before pressing a kiss to my forehead. He scoops me up from my chair, steals it, and then settles me down in his lap. "Already? In just a few hours? That must be a record, even for you."

He sounds a bit put out, and guilt pangs through me. Rez made his misgivings clear, and I should have let it rest. But I couldn't. And now, knowing just how to find it, I definitely can't.

"I know it's totally insane, Yae, but I need to find this treasure. I need Liora's locket. I can't quite explain it, but I can't get it out of my head. I feel like I'm meant to be its next owner."

My incubus hugs me a bit closer and nuzzles my cheek. "Show me?"

So, I do. I walk him through the little passages I gleaned clues from. I show him how I pieced together the maps and unwound a mystery practically lost to time, and, okay, it involves a whole separate treasure—literal pirate booty!—and an amulet and a couple portals, but it's all there.

He's achingly sweet to me as I explain my madness, stroking my hair and murmuring soft, awestruck praise.

"And, with this route I've mapped out, we can completely skirt the fae courts that are feuding, save ourselves days with some shadow walking and be home in time for Christmas dinner at Shadow House. So, can we go find it? Please?"

Yae drops a kiss on my jaw. "We can talk to Rez in the morning. I'll do my best to make him come around."

I sag back against him with a yawn and a satisfied smile, worn out after my frantic frenzy of finding. "I've kinda missed treasure hunting and finding clues like this. It's the only thing I've ever been really good at."

"I can think of a few other things you're pretty damn good at," he whispers in my ear, a deep rasp to his voice.

"Blow jobs? Is it blow jobs? Because I am not above using them to get my way."

"Devious little Mischief. I wasn't too hard on you tonight, was I?"

I turn so I can kiss him. "No, you never are. And I needed that tonight. I'm sorry I was distracted at first. You and Rez mean more to me than anything. More than the shiniest treasure in the world, and I should have been more present with you two when you got home. I know I can be a lot, too much, just—"

He shushes me with a kiss. "You're never too much for us, our brilliant little thief. You amaze me, every day, in more ways than I can count. I mean, look what you pieced together in only a few hours. You truly are terrific at finding things."

"Found you and Rez, didn't I?"

"I suppose you did, love. And found your way into our hearts."

"Finders, keepers," I tell him with an impish smirk. "There's no getting rid of me now."

"We would be lost without you, sunshine. You found us, but we're keeping you."



TO MY SURPRISE, Reznik relents with only minimal grumbling once I've shown him my plan the next morning. To my even greater surprise, he sends me back to bed with a kiss, to catch a bit more sleep while they prepare for our adventure.

Of course, I'm too excited to sleep, more buzzed than I would be if I'd downed half a dozen of Yaelyn's hot cocoa mochas.

Finally, I give up the ghost of trying to fall back to sleep and help them with our preparations. Honestly, we've gotten really damn good at readying ourselves for adventures—missions, really. Dark gods know we've ventured to the Shadow Realm to wage war against the darkness trying to overtake it enough times now to be really good at packing and preparing.

And at my favorite part.

There is something stupidly sexy about Yaelyn strapping weapons to my body: the way his touch lingers when he buckles my holster around my thigh, how the back of his hand grazes my breasts as he cinches a strap tighter. And he knows how wild it drives me. Wild enough that we've gotten a late start on more than one of our missions. So, yeah, I have a low-level lady boner from his attentions, but right now, my adventure boner is the bigger boner.

By the time we shadow walk (which I'm getting so good at I don't even puke anymore!) and take our first steps in the shadow realm, I'm practically skipping with glee.

And that glee?

Totally fucking justified.

The leg of our route through the shadow realm takes us past the ruins of one of the oldest temples in all the realms, and though it's long been picked clean of treasure, its might and beauty still leave me full of wonder as we wander its halls and walk through its chambers.

According to my calculations—if you can call them that—we have just enough time to linger and explore, something we’ve done very little of in our missions in the Shadow Realm. Even with the anticipation of treasure putting a spring in my step and urging me onward, there’s something about pausing to explore the old ruins with my demonkin that nourishes my soul.

Yaelyn translates inscriptions and Reznik tells old demon tales, the rumbling burr in his voice soothing away all the stress of the past few months. I forget about wedding planning and swatches and stationery—everything in the world, except for them. Treasure or no, this journey will have been worth it just for these fleeting moments where I feel like I’m right where I belong.

I say that, but when we leave the old temple behind and find the long-lost demon pirate treasure that’s *supposed* to have an amulet that can unlock a portal between the shadow realm and the Winter Court and it has everything *but* the amulet, my heart sinks a little.

I kick the old iron chest, grateful for the steel-toed boots that Rez insisted on for saving me from stubbing my toe.

That portal was our one way of avoiding the war spreading through the fae courts. It was our ticket to Iradil’s and Liora’s old meeting place and the locket hidden away there. And it’s gone. Pilfered from the chest by whoever got here first.

I slam the chest full of diamonds, rubies and double my weight in pirate gold shut and sit down heavily on top of it, dropping my head into my hands.

Yaelyn, sensing the pit of disappointment in my gut, sits down beside me and wraps his arm around me. “There might be another way, Mischief. We can regroup at home, do some more research and try again. Or we can figure out a long way around the Night Court’s forces. We just won’t be able to do it before Aron’s Christmas party, and he’d be crushed if you missed it.”

I sigh and nod, slumping against him.

“This isn’t adding up,” Rez rumbles, pacing. His wings unfurl behind him, magnificent under even the shadow realm’s weak winter sun. “Lucy, you’re sitting on a fortune worth of treasure and whoever took the amulet left it all behind. Why?”

“They must have known the amulet’s significance,” Yaelyn muses.

I startle, alarm ripping through me. “Do you think someone found their way to the locket before us?”

“Worse,” Reznik grumbles. “I can guess where the amulet ended up, and it just so happens that a certain relics-hoarding druid librarian owes me a favor.”



THE RENEGADE LIBRARY is my new favorite place in all the realms. Full stop. Roll credits.

It’s somewhere outside the realms, which seems like it shouldn’t be possible, but Reznik assures me it is because something something ancient arcane magic, and it’s massive. Sprawling. Magnificent. Full to the absolute *brim* with treasures beyond even my greedy little magpie imagination.

And getting in was a bitch, and not the normal bitch way I’m used to that involves a lot of sneaking. Nope. We went in the front door. Which ended up meaning a lot of waiting, an incredibly suspicious druidess and the most thorough pat down of my life.

The pat down was warranted. As is the warning glare she gives me as I drift a little too close to a crystalline case housing an incredibly shiny, utterly impractical bejeweled ceremonial dagger. My fingers itch and I scan the case and the area around it before Arabella, the demon druidess librarian and keeper of the relics, clears her throat sharply. “Even if you got into the case, you wouldn’t make it out of the library in one piece, so don’t even think about it.”

Reznik rolls his eyes. “Too late for that, Bella.”

Bella? *Bella*? Just who is this druid to *my* demon warrior?

Sensing my jealousy, Yaelyn snickers at my side and grabs my hand, lacing his fingers with mine, and I know the action is meant as a deterrent from acting on my itchy fingers as much as it is a comfort.

“And you doubt my Lucy,” Rez continues. “I’m not saying the Renegade Library wouldn’t be a challenge for her, but I bet she’d surprise you.”

“I’d really rather she didn’t. I’ll lend you the amulet—begrudgingly—but don’t make me regret it.”

“It sounds like you already do!” I chime in cheerfully.

Yaelyn elbows me lightly as Arabella unlocks a case with a series of runes she weaves so quickly I can’t follow them. She hesitates when handing the amulet over to Reznik, but finally does so with a sigh.

“We’re even now, so long as I get that amulet back when you’re done with it. Don’t make me send hunters after you. I have no war with the Light Bearer or her Light Guard, and I’d like to keep it that way.”

I give her a jaunty salute, which probably brings her no comfort whatsoever, and she escorts us from the library, muttering the whole way.



WE SHADOW WALK BACK to where we found the pirate treasure—and, okay, I slip some into my pockets—and bunk down for the night, planning to set out for the portal the next day. With patches of darkness still infesting the shadow realm, we have to be careful shadow walking through it, especially as we get closer to the portal. It may not be the main point of our little journey, but I do plan on whipping out my shiny crown and lightsaber and banishing what darkness I can along the way.

But tonight, tonight is for campfire snuggles and then bedding down on a bed of shadows, which is surprisingly comfy, and getting bound up by them, which is not surprisingly absolutely amazing. Ten out of ten recommend.

Rez may be the master of knot tying, but I give Yaelyn full marks for shadow weaving.

The trek to the portal is slow and arduous, but not nearly as slow and arduous as the shorter but more treacherous trek through the Winter Court, because we portal straight into a fucking blizzard.

We're pinned down in an ice cave for a full day until it relents, and let me tell you, we do not spend that day playing tiddlywinks.

I wake to a cup of pour-over coffee in one of our camping mugs the next day, and even though I'm eager to get to Liora and Iradil's secret rendezvous spot and the treasure it contains, I'm more than content to take a few extra minutes snuggling between my two demonkin in front of the campfire, sharing coffee-flavored kisses.

My spirits are high as we snowshoe through the still, snowy morning, even though snowshoeing honestly kind of sucks and I don't have nearly enough core strength for it. I guess Rez was right when he said, "Coming your brains out isn't a workout, Lucy." I hate when he's right, especially when it comes to the state of my abdominals. I am definitely going to be feeling this little jaunt tomorrow. And the next day. And probably into next week if Yaelyn doesn't incubus magic some of the pain away. Still, I'm on top of the fucking world and snowshoeing as fast as I can, which, admittedly, is so slow that Rez offers to carry me multiple times. Nothing can bring me down today. Nothing at all.

My men, on the other hand, seem reserved, almost hesitant, despite being all smiles before we set out. I honestly can't remember the last time I saw Yaelyn so nervous, and even Reznik seems a little grumbly-rumblier than usual. I can't fathom why: we're in the home stretch now and we haven't encountered even a whiff of danger so far.

Well, as long as you don't count the very real danger of me stealing from the Renegade Library, which I didn't. But I could have. Mark my words, Bella the Druidess, I could have stolen from your library if I wanted to. And if I get drunk

enough off the contents of my secret flask of fae fire whiskey at Aron's Christmas party and manage to sneak away from Rez and Yae, fuck it, I just might. I wonder what funishment my men would dole out for attempting to sneak in and steal from the most magical—and heavily fortified—library in existence?

“Spark? Are those the mountains from your map?” Rez points to the three peaks up ahead, sitting on the horizon, nestled together like Yule trees.

Holy tits, they are. At the base of those mountains, at the bottom of the valley beneath them, is Liora's locket. Fuck me, I can nearly *taste* the treasure, even though Rez has told me multiple times not to put treasure in my mouth. Funny how he never complains when *his* treasure is in my mouth.

I launch myself forward, ready to run the rest of the way, and instantly face plant in the powdery fresh snow.

Rez tuts and scoops me up into his arms, carrying me just like a bride, and at this point, I let him. I'm already worn out from snowshoeing as far as I have and shivering from the icy wind despite my heavy coat, hat and mittens. My demon warrior is warm and strong, and only holds me tighter when I snuggle in close.

We make it to the spot I've triangulated(ish) by midday and my men immediately bust out the folding shovels we brought specifically for this task. I gamely shovel for all of half an hour before my weak, limp noodle arms finally give out. Despite all the swordplay Yaelyn and I have been working on, I'm not remotely up to the task of digging through the rock-hard earth like they are.

I rub my arms through my coat with a frown, and Rez rolls his eyes.

“For the last time, Spark, your arms are perfect. Sit tight, relax, and let us uncover your treasure for you.”

He really does say the sweetest things.

They make quick work of the dirt, ice and rock and finally one of their shovels clangs against something decidedly

metallic, and I leap from the old fallen log I'd been sitting on and dash over to find Yaelyn brushing snow off a metal chest.

My heart skips a beat, and then another.

“Breathe, love,” my incubus says softly.

They haul the small chest out of the pit they dug and set it on the ground before me. I kneel in front of it, looking up at both of them, a mix of trepidation and excitement rushing through me. What if it isn't there? What if the starlight the pendant contained has faded to nothing and winked out, just as Liora did all those thousands of years ago? What if I dragged the two men I love on an absolute fool's errand?

“Aren't you going to open it, my spark?” Rez rumbles.

I pry the frozen latch open with my dagger then squinch my eyes shut, praying to every god I can think of that the locket is there when I open them. I take a deep breath, shove back the lid of the chest and open my eyes.

To one of the most beautiful sights I've ever seen.

The locket is small and delicate, the shining silver engraved with swirling words in the old demonic language few speak anymore—but I just so happen to know a demon who's been around for a very long time.

I look over my shoulder and Rez comes forward to peer down at the locket. “It reads ‘For the light of my life,’” he says softly.

I tear up a little at that and reach for the dainty pendant, only for Rez to grab my shoulder quickly.

“Lucy, wait!”

“Mischievous, no!”

Too late.

Is every freaking piece of jewelry in the world a portal? Fuck, is it just portals all the way down?

My men grab me just before the magic of the pendant yanks me away from Liora and Iradil's meeting place, and

they're sucked through the icy air of the Winter Court along with me.

We land in an inelegant heap of arms, legs and bruised noggins right in...

Right in the middle of the most resplendent, elegant, shiny, beautiful, magnificent wedding I have ever seen.

"Surprise, Spark," Rez murmurs in my ear.

I stare at him. And then I stare at Yaelyn. And then I stare at the rows of heavy, hewn wooden benches bedecked with garlands, flowers and glittering baubles.

"Welcome to your wedding day, sunshine," Yaelyn says, brushing a soft kiss over my lips that I am still way too surprised to return.

"But— And the— You planned this?" I whisper-shriek, now painfully aware of the guests starting to fill in around us. A thousand questions whip through my mind, but they're ready for them.

Where are we? "Oh, this is where Liora and Iradil would *really* meet. Iradil built a portal into the pendant so they wouldn't be found out, even if Liora was followed. And it's where they hand-fasted."

How long did it take them to work this out? "It took us months to find the treasure and work all this out, and you went and found it in hours, just like that. Brilliant little thief."

How did you know the pendant would be there? "Ground penetrating radar. Humans are so fucking smart, Mischief. They have radar. That penetrates the ground."

Is there cake? A scoff. "Of course, there's cake, and of course, it's strawberry chocolate chip with cream cheese frosting. Do you really think we went and tasted all those cakes for nothing?"

But... but why? "Because we love you, Lucy. Intensely and endlessly. Now, shall we get married?"

Yaelyn goes to untangle himself from me so we can stand, but a fae woman beats him to it, and when I look up at her, all

I can see is a jaunty little elf hat and a bright red handprint on her ass. Well, she's not wearing them *now*—at least, not the elf hat, but I won't speculate on the handprint, and I'm not about to ask—but that's all I can remember.

“I saw you with a handprint on your butt,” I point out, the epitome of eruditeness.

“And now I'm your maid of honor. Up you get. It's bad luck for the grooms to see you before you walk down the aisle. Come on, let's get you ready.”

She hauls me up out of the ungraceful pile my men and I landed in, tosses a grin over her shoulder, and drags me away to a warm tent where there's a vanity, a privacy screen and a garment bag hanging from one of the supports.

The fae woman flicks on a curling iron—no clue how she got it to work in the fae realm in the first place—and then sits me down in front of the vanity. She stalks around the tent, huffing, digs a brush out of a duffle bag, and finally rounds on me, pointing the brush at me.

“You! I cannot believe Vhal kept you from me! He never told me you were badass, steal-y and stabby. My absolute favorite kind of person, and he didn't tell me. Asshole. Oh, I'm Vivienne, by the way, but you can call me Viv. And we are going to be the very best friends. You're definitely coming to bad girl bestie brunch when you get back from your honeymoon and are able to walk again. How's your February look?”

I gape at her in the mirror, but she just barrels on, unbothered, as she curls and pins up my hair. She and Vhal are apparently deeply in love, despite her claim that he's an asshole, and living in blissful sin with a master vampire and a dark demigod in a penthouse over the nightclub they own.

“Love a girl that loves her knives,” she says, and twiddles her fingers. A dagger of dark gunmetal-colored steel appears between them. She plays with it for a moment and then makes it vanish just as quickly as she made it appear. “Stab first, ask questions later. That's how Vhal and I met, actually.”

“I stabbed Rez.”

“Atta girl.”

She carefully pins flowers into my up-do and clips a veil beneath them. I carefully inspect the gauzy fabric, never really having taken myself for a veil kind of thief, but this veil. *This* veil has to be some kind of magic because it sparkles like a clear night sky, full of stars.

“You deserve a little extra glitz on your big day.”

She does my makeup, which I’m grateful for, because I haven’t attempted it since I stabbed myself in the eyeball with a mascara wand while trying to doll myself up for date night a few months ago, and within minutes, I’m made up to perfection.

“Nothing left but the dress, gorgeous.”

She unzips the garment bag and the most beautiful dress I’ve ever seen hangs inside it. Like the veil, it glitters in the low light of the tent. In the bright sunlight of the Winter Court afternoon, it’ll be absolutely dazzling. Blinding, even.

In other words: absolutely perfect.

And then it gets even perfect-er. Viv fans the full skirt apart to show me that it’s slit up to mid-thigh so I can access my dagger in a pinch if I have to.

My men truly have thought of just about everything, haven’t they?

Viv has just done up the last button of my dress when Aron calls “knock, knock!” from the closed flap of the tent. She gives me a wink and a quick hug and slips from the tent just as she lets my dad enter.

His dark eyes bead with tears when he takes me in, and he holds me at arm’s length for a moment before hugging me tightly. “Oh, Lucy. You have no idea how proud I am of you. No, no, don’t cry. You’ll ruin your makeup.”

I blink away the sting of tears as he guides me before the mirror once more. He draws something very sparkly from the pocket of his tux and carefully clasps it around my neck.

Liora's locket.

It feels just as right, resting between my collarbones, as I thought it would. Like a piece of the legacy of the Light Bearer that I'm only just beginning to understand.

"You ready to get hitched, kiddo? Will you let me walk you down the aisle?"

I blink away more tears and nod, not trusting my voice, and take my dad's arm.

And it's a good thing I have something to hang on to, because the sight of my men at the end of the aisle nearly sends me to my knees. And it's not the tuxes that nearly do me in—though those are just as sexy as I thought they'd be—but the look of love and wonderment shining in their eyes when they see me at the end of the aisle.

I don't remember a single step, or any of the faces in the pews we pass, as I make my way down the aisle. In that moment, there's only Reznik and Yaelyn, the demonkin who I conned, who stole my heart while I stole their treasure, who let me back into their lives after I betrayed them, and saved my life when I nearly threw it away to save theirs. The men who have stood by my side ever since I arose as the new Light Bearer.

Aron drops a kiss on my cheek and then steps around the altar to officiate our ceremony.

I'm sure his speech is beautiful and thought-out, poignant yet humorous, but I don't catch a single word of it until he places my hands in those of my demonkin, my loves, and winds a glittering golden cord around them.

In demon tradition, we're hand fasting, though that hasn't stopped Reznik and Yaelyn from preparing vows. Aron steps away to give us a bit of privacy, and they murmur their words of love, their promises, as they gaze into my eyes.

"I vow to surprise you, in little ways, every day of our lives together," Yaelyn says softly. "To make you your favorite breakfast carbs at least twice a week and always open your jars of Nutella, if you get them started for me."

“I vow to follow you on any adventure your heart desires, to protect you from every danger, and to dig up every bit of treasure you set your sights on,” Rez rumbles. “To take you to the kin market every Yule and buy you as many shinies as you can fit on our Yule tree—and if you run out of room, to get you another.”

“To make crinkle cookies with you for every Christmas party you want to go to.”

“And to cue up a Star Wars marathon every Yuletide and pop the popcorn over the fire just the way you like it.”

“To bring you coffee every morning—”

“After we keep you up every night.”

“Now, and always.”

My heart swells, and never, ever, ever has a Light Bearer been so lucky.

Aron nods at me to say my vows.

Of which I have absolutely none because my grooms threw me a surprise wedding.

I stammer. How in any of the seven realms can I express to these two men that I was broken when I found them, but they made me whole? That I have never felt belonging like I do when I’m in their arms. I look up at Rez through the sheen of my happy tears. “I vow to make you smile, even when you’re feeling grumbly, to try to light up your days and bring you the same happiness you’ve brought me.” I give Yaelyn’s hand a soft squeeze. “And I vow to give you all the joy you bring me, to share it with you so you can always feel just how loved you are.” I close my eyes for a moment and swallow hard. “I vow to love you both more, even when you say it’s impossible. Always and forever.”

They kiss me, first Yaelyn and then Reznik, and with our heads bowed together, they murmur their love to me once more.

“Merry Christmas, Mischief.”

“Spark.”

“Our brilliant, beautiful thief.”

“Our brilliant, beautiful *wife*.”

I smile through my tears. “Love you more, husbands.”

“Impossible.”

“Always and forever,” I promise.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cara Bryant pens paranormal reverse harem romances about real, vulnerable heroines who discover their inner power throughout their journeys of saving the world and falling in love. She loves writing domineering, alpha heroes, “cinnamon roll” heroes, and “grumpy rolls” who are only soft for the heroine.

Cara has been writing since some kind soul first taught her how to pick up a crayon and write her letters. She definitely believes in happily-ever-afters and true love. She lives in the Midwest with her wonderful husband and two canine writing assistants.

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