



Ashley
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Author of
*Muscles &
Monsters*

THE
DARING
DEMON

THE DALWICK DEMON

ASHLEY BENNETT


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CONTENT WARNING

This story contains the following: mentions of physical and sexual assault, mentions of physical assault of a sex worker, mentions of parental death, religious undertones/religious trauma, double penetration, double vaginal penetration, temperature play, rimming, anal play, tail play, degradation, praise, use of a contraceptive.

Please reach out to the author with any additional questions regarding content.

To anyone struggling.

I see you.

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CHAPTER I

 Iris's point
of view



Hot hatred burned inside of me as I watched Jeremiah sleep in bed beside me. Occasionally a snore would tear out of his gaping mouth, and I had to fight the urge to smother him with a pillow. He was one of my least favorite clients. More often than not, he'd get drunk and be too rough or smack me around a bit for being disobedient—but money was money. When you had no family, no dowry, and no marriage prospects, you had to take what you could get.

I wanted to get up and leave so badly, but if Jeremiah woke and I wasn't there—there'd be hell to pay in the form of his fists colliding with my face the next time he caught me alone.

I let out a deep sigh and gazed out the frosted window. Fluffy snowflakes fell from the sky, coating the dreary town of Grafberg in a thick layer of white. We were finally at the tail end of winter, and this would likely be the last snowfall. I eagerly awaited springtime—for the return of the flowers and the feel of the sun on my skin.

It wouldn't be much longer, and at least for now, I was warm.

I laid my head back against the headboard and just as I closed my eyes in an attempt to get some sleep, a commotion erupted from the first floor of the inn.

“Where's Iris?” someone yelled.

Shit, shit, shit.

My stomach twisted into a tight knot, and my heart pounded in my throat.

What could they possibly want with me?

“She's upstairs in room three with Jeremiah. What business do ya have with her?” I could identify Henry, the old innkeeper, by his voice.

“Mind yourself, old man. This is none of your concern.”

Heavy footsteps clambered up the stairs while I hurried to put on my dress with shaking fingers.

Just as I finished cinching my bodice, the door burst open and Jeremiah bolted upright in the bed. Four men flooded into the room. The only two I recognized were the town guard, William, and Father Aldous, the newly appointed town priest.

“What’s going on here?” Jeremiah yelled as he clutched the blanket to his bare chest.

The large man looked scared out of his wits. It would have given me satisfaction to see him in that position if I wasn’t so concerned with my own well-being.

“We’ve come for the girl,” William said and pointed a gloved finger at me.

My heart raced and my breaths came out sharp and fast. “W-why? What have I done?” The words were strangled; I could barely speak.

“Iris Browne, your crimes include prostitution, theft, and witchcraft. It has been determined that you will be put to death by sacrifice to the demon that resides in Dalwick Cave.”

I grew up hearing the legend of the demon of Dalwick Cave. A horned beast with bright red skin, said to be the spawn of the devil himself, who feasted on the flesh of the unfortunate souls that were tossed into the cave.

It had been ages since the last sacrifice, but since Father Aldous had taken over the parish, he’d reignited a sense of religious righteousness and zealotry amongst the townsfolk. Of all the sinners in Grafberg, it appeared he’d chosen me to make an example of.

“No! Please! I didn’t do anything!” I insisted, my body trembling with fear.

“Grab her.” William ignored my plea and the two men grabbed ahold of each of my arms.

With brute force, they hauled me out into the hall and down the stairs.

“Please, please. Don’t do this,” I begged with tears tracking down my cheeks.

My words fell on deaf ears as the men dismissed me and the patrons of the inn focused their attention on their food and ale. It was as if I was invisible; that I suddenly ceased to exist now that the judgment had been made against me.

I shivered as the men pulled me out into the cold, my bare feet dragging through the snow. I hadn’t been allowed to put on my coat or my shoes, but I guess for someone being sacrificed, it didn’t matter. Frostbite didn’t bother the dead.

The men were silent as they dragged me through the woods to the cave that sat at the base of the mountain. Father Aldous would occasionally flash me a look of disgust if my cries became too loud, so I sobbed as quietly as I could with snot and tears rolling down my face.

Before long, we arrived at the jagged mouth of the cave.

I remembered the games of my youth where we’d get close to the edge and toss stones into the black depths before running away screaming, in fear of the demon.

My blood ran cold and terror overwhelmed me as the men holding my arms marched me toward the edge.

This couldn’t possibly be happening.

“Please! Please don’t do this!” I screamed, my cries echoing down into the pit below us.

“Iris Browne, you are sentenced to death for your crimes. May the Lord take pity on your soul,” Father Aldous said from behind me.

Was this the end?

Condemned by men for doing what I must to survive?

In perfect synchrony, the men gripped my arms and tossed me into the cavern.

I screamed as my body flew through the abyss, knowing that with each passing moment, I was careening closer to the rocky cavern floor below. I braced myself for impact, but was

shocked when I collided with a spongy bed of what felt like moss and leaves.

“Oof,” I groaned as my breath left my chest.

Even with the soft landing pad, it was still a long fall.

The scent of damp earth and decay was heavy in the air, and a tiny pinprick of light filtered down from the mouth of the cave. I could just barely make out two silhouettes staring down at me, but after a few moments, they disappeared and I was alone.

I sat up and gathered my thoughts, trying desperately to understand how human beings could do this to one another.

Prostitution, theft, and witchcraft.

There were rumors of witchcraft and magic being practiced in the lands beyond the mountain, but I'd never practiced witchcraft a day in my life. After the death of my parents, I did what I had to in order to survive.

I stood on shaky legs and traced the walls of the cave with my fingers. It was surprisingly smooth, almost as if someone had removed all the rough edges.

It was probably the demon, making sure his meals couldn't scale their way out of the pit.

The demon.

He had to know I was here.

A shiver ran down my spine at the very thought.

The way I saw it, I had two choices. I could stay and wait for him to find me, or I could head further into the cave and at least attempt to get away.

There was no way I'd let him take me without a fight.

I blinked several times, trying to get my eyes adjusted to the darkness, but it was no use. I'd have to feel my way around the cavern.

Placing my hands out in front of me, I ran them along the cave walls in search of an opening. Stones dug into my feet

with each slow step, but I continued to explore until a warm breeze caressed the tips of my fingers.

A tunnel.


For a moment, I hesitated.

What if the tunnel led me straight to the demon?

I shuffled around blindly, my fingers skimming along the wall for another way out, but it was no use. There was one route and one route only.

I followed the tepid air wafting from the tunnel, journeying into the depths and likely closer to the demon himself.

CHAPTER 2

 Selvyn's
point of
view



The pointed tips of my ears perked up when I heard a faint thud resonate from the bottom of the pit. The moss and leaves I'd laid there had softened their fall, but it was still a long way down. It had been a long time since the last sacrifice—easily ten or so years—but I still kept the area padded just in case.

What had this human done to anger the townsfolk?

I was certain I'd received a blessing and they'd forgotten about my existence.

It seemed that was not the case.

I sighed and rubbed the cracked tip of one of my horns.

Humans had terrible eyesight. I should probably go and retrieve it before it wanders off a cliff.

Rising to my feet, I let out a deep groan as I stretched out my body. Here in my main quarters, I could comfortably stand upright, but in the tunnels, I resorted to crouching to fit.

Although I wasn't eager to experience that sort of discomfort, I trekked off into the tunnel with my tail swaying back and forth behind me.

My nostrils flared as I sucked in deep breaths, the scent of the human filling my nose. It was definitely female, but there was a male undertone—that of sweat and sex.

I rubbed my temples with the clawed tips of my fingers and tsked in disgust. *Another mistress.* Why couldn't they leave those poor women alone? Or at least make the men utilizing their services suffer alongside them?

If that were the case, all the wealthy men in Grafberg would find themselves down in my cave.

As I padded through the tunnel, I heard a low scuffling sound, followed by rocks skittering about the cavern floor with

each of the human's steps. I couldn't help the amused smile that curved up the corners of my lips. It was obvious she was trying to be quiet, but with my superior hearing, it was no use.

I paused as the sound drew nearer, contemplating how I was going to approach this situation without frightening the woman.

I was kidding myself.

Of course she was going to be frightened. My legend preceded me and I had this struggle each time a new 'sacrifice' ended up in my cave.

I convinced myself to call out to her first, to offer her whatever reassurance I could.

"Do not be afraid, human. I mean you no harm."

I winced at the sound of myself. It had been so long since I'd last spoken, and my voice was harsh and gravelly from disuse. The resounding echo from the cavern walls made it all the more ominous.

How was I supposed to earn her trust when I sounded like the devil himself?

I heard her suck in a breath, followed by the pounding of her feet against the tunnel floor as she ran the opposite way.

My tail twitched behind me in annoyance. It was dangerous for a human to run blindly in these caves. The floor was littered with rocks and the tunnels often led to dead ends. I had no choice but to chase after her.

"Wait," I called out as I pursued her. "I said I mean you no harm."

Her screams bounced off of the cave walls and pierced my sensitive ears, but there was no way I was going to leave her to die down here, lost and alone.

With each of my broad steps, I closed the distance between us. When I was only a few feet behind her, she tripped and fell to the ground with a loud thump.

I crept closer until her body rested in front of me. Reaching out with my boot, I gently nudged her bare toes, but she didn't move. The soles of her feet were bloody and small stones dug into her skin. The poor thing had been running from me in her bare feet. Each step she took must have been pure agony—all in an attempt to get away from me.

Before I knew what I was doing, I scooped her limp body into my arms and carried her back through the tunnel to my living quarters.

I laid her down on my bed to check her over for any other injuries. Thick waves of brown hair hung over her face, and I pushed back the strands with the tip of my finger. A jagged cut ran along her hairline and blood trickled down her temple.

Shit.

She must have hit her head on a rock when she fell, but thankfully, it wasn't a fatal wound. I should have known better than to chase after her. After all the rumors she likely grew up hearing about the demon that lived in this cave, I couldn't blame her for fearing me.

I grabbed a rag and dipped it in the water basin before returning to where she was sprawled out on the bed.

Her dress was damp and dirty, and hung loose on her gaunt body. It was likely she lived a life of poverty, like most of the unfortunate souls who found their way into these depths.

Gently, I dabbed at her wound and took note of her features. Her face was thin and pale, with a pert nose and full lips. Along one of her eyebrows was a greenish-purple streak, the telltale color of a fading bruise.

Anger roiled up inside of me. My magic tingled along the surface of my skin, threatening to ignite.

Her too-thin body, her scent, the bruising.

It was obvious she lived a hard life, one that disgusted the townsfolk's fragile sensibilities, but that was in the past. She'd be safe now.

As I held pressure on the wound to stop the bleeding, I stared down at her face. She really was quite beautiful, and with the proper care, she would be even more so.

I gently trailed the back of my free hand along her jawline. She stirred beneath my touch ever so slightly, but she didn't wake.

When I was confident I'd stopped the bleeding, I stepped back and checked her over once more. There was no way I could leave her feet like that. She was probably in immense pain.

I looked at the shelf I'd carved into the wall lined with tinctures and selected one specifically for pain relief. After popping off the cork top, I poured the mixture over her feet.

While she slept, I used the sharp tips of my claws to pick out each jagged piece of rock from her soles before bandaging them with clean strips of linen.

I sighed, allowing myself one last look at her before I rose to my feet, sat down by the fire, and waited for her to wake.

CHAPTER 3

 Iris's point
of view



My eyes fluttered open, the room around me swirling in warm orange tones and shadows. There was a steady throbbing in my head and my feet felt as if they were on fire.

Everything began to come back to me. Father Aldous. The bite of the cold against my skin. The rush of air as I flew toward the cavern floor. The panic, the pain, and then, the darkness.

The demon.

The low hum of a familiar song filtered into my ears as a large figure moved from out of the corner of my vision.

“Ah, she wakes.” The shadow stood in front of me, his voice deep and rumbling. A set of piercing golden eyes, with pupils reminiscent of a cat’s, peered down at me and seemed to sear into the depths of my soul. “Don’t be afraid. I’m not going to hurt you.”

I blinked rapidly, trying desperately to clear my vision. When I could finally see, I panicked at the sight in front of me.

He was easily six feet tall, with two horns sprouting from the top of his head. He was even taller if you considered the length of his unbroken horn. His skin was crimson in color, like the hot embers of a fire, and heat seemed to resonate from his body.

I tried to dart away from him, but my head started pounding the moment I moved.

“Get away from me!” I gasped, clutching my head in agony. “Please don’t hurt me!”

He sat down on the bed and held his clawed hands up in a submissive gesture. “Truly, I mean you no harm. I’m trying to help you. Look at your feet if you don’t believe me.”

When my head stopped spinning, I hugged my knees and glanced down at my feet. Clean strips of linen were expertly wrapped around them—as if someone had bandaged them.

I gave him a sideways glance from where I was huddled on the bed. “Y-you did this?” My voice was a hoarse whisper from all the screaming I’d been doing as of late.

Firelight reflected off of his face and his lips parted in a kind smile. “Yes. I picked out each piece of stone, cleaned them with a tincture, and bandaged you up. You fell in the tunnel and got a nasty cut on your head, but I think it’ll heal fine without stitching. Your hairline should hide any scar that’s left behind.”

My hand drifted up toward my forehead and I winced when my fingers ran over the crusty edges of the wound.

“Careful. Don’t want to bust it open again,” he said in that baritone voice of his as he smiled down at me.

I studied him for a moment in disbelief. If he was the demon, he didn’t seem all that threatening. Sure, he looked different than any man I’d seen before, but he’d already shown me more kindness than I’d experienced from the townsfolk in all my twenty years.

“Would you like some water?” he asked before rising from the bed.

When he stood, I admired his shirtless form and the way the glow of the fire illuminated the smooth planes of muscle covering his body. His shiny black hair was woven into a tight braid that hung down past his shoulders. A piece of fur—almost like a short skirt—covered his lower half. Peeking out from beneath the skirt was a long tail, topped with a fuzzy tuft of black hair, that swayed back and forth behind him.

My gaze slowly tracked up his body to his face, and he let out a warm laugh. “I asked if you’d like some water, little human.”

All I could do was nod my head.

The Dalwick Demon had dressed my wounds and was making sure I was cared for? I was certain it had to be a

dream. Perhaps I'd hit my head harder than I thought.

With dirty fingernails, I reached out and pinched my arm.

"Shit," I mumbled to myself when my fingers dug into my skin.

"Are you alright?" The demon spun around quickly, sending water sloshing out of the cup as he rushed over to me.

"I-I'm fine," I croaked, and held out my hands for the water.

The demon sat down at the foot of the bed, far enough away for me to feel comfortable, and handed me the cup.

I sniffed the liquid a few times, confirming it was water before I took a long drink. He stared at me while I drank, and for the first time, I was able to get a good look at his face.

Other than the unnatural hue of his skin and his thick horns, he looked fairly human. His face was angular and defined, with a well-trimmed beard covering his jawline. If he wasn't an infamous demon, one might even say that he was handsome.

When I'd drained the cup, I handed it back to him and gave him a small smile.

"Are you hungry? Would you like something to eat?" he asked.

I tried to remember the last time I'd eaten. When you lived the life I did, food was scarce, and it wasn't often that my clients offered to buy me supper.

I looked down and smoothed my hands over the furs. "Um, if it isn't too much trouble, I'd love something to eat."

"It's no trouble at all. It's been a long time since I've had company." He rose from the bed and rummaged through a basket near the fire. "Here," he said before passing me a piece of crusty bread and a generous hunk of cheese.

"Thank you." My mouth began watering the moment I held them in my hand, but I did my best to eat slowly, as if I had some manners and wasn't absolutely starving.

He watched me eat and let out a satisfied chuckle. “I take it that it’s been a while since you’ve eaten.”

I nodded my head as I gulped down a large bite of cheese.

“What did the townsfolk accuse you of?” he asked quietly, his voice taking on a sympathetic edge as he stared down at me.

I swallowed and wiped my mouth with the back of my hand. “Prostitution, stealing, and witchcraft. I, um, am certainly guilty of the first two. I did what I had to in order to survive. But I’ve never practiced witchcraft a day in my life. Grafberg was just appointed a new priest, and I suppose he wanted to make an example out of me.”

“Hmm.” He nodded his head and rubbed his jawline with a clawed hand. “I see. That would explain why it’s been some time since a human ended up down here in my cave. Though it appears that some of the townsfolk are still the same. They seem to think it’s easier to persecute others than to lend a helping hand.” The last few words came out as a harsh growl and his tail flicked back and forth in agitation.

“I-I take it you don’t want to eat me then? Unless you’re fattening me up a bit first.”

He shook his head and laughed again. “Those are rumors. I don’t eat the humans that end up here. I help them.”

“Help them?”

“Yes. Remember the moss that cushioned your fall? I lead each sacrifice that finds their way into my cave under the mountain to safety. They start a new life in the next town over.”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. My entire life I’d been told that the demon of Dalwick Cave feasted on the sacrifices offered to him, but in truth, *he led them to safety*.

He was a purer soul than William, and even Father Aldous, a supposed man of God.

“So you’re saying that you’ll take me under the mountain too?”

The demon smiled and nodded his head. “Yes. If that’s what you wish. Belden is a welcoming town, but I’ll warn you it’s different from Grafberg.”

“Considering I was just thrown into a cave for *my crimes*, that can’t be a bad thing.”

He sat down at the foot of the bed, leaning closer to me. “What if I told you that magic, *witchcraft* as your kind call it, exists in the lands beyond the mountain?”

“You can’t be serious.” I stared at him with my mouth hanging open. “I thought those were just stories.”

“Very serious. Would you like me to show you?”

I pondered his question for a moment.

Witchcraft, *magic*, was forbidden in Grafberg, and to be honest, I was skeptical of its very existence.

But he was The Dalwick Demon.

Surely if such a thing existed, he would be capable of wielding it.

“Do you promise it won’t hurt me?” My voice was a shy, yet curious whisper.

“I promise,” he said, and I could have sworn something akin to sadness simmered within those golden eyes. “Watch my hand.”

The demon brought one crimson palm out in front of him, curling his fingers just slightly, almost as if he was holding something. A strange crackle permeated the air and thick swaths of black smoke swirled around his hand before gathering in his palm. With a pop, the smoke ignited, and in the center of his hand, he held a brightly burning flame.

“H-how?” I mumbled, my eyes fixed on the tiny pyre.

“Magic.” He closed his hand, extinguishing the flame and allowing thin tendrils of smoke to creep out from between his fingers. “The type I was born with is slightly different from the kind practiced in Belden, but they were able to teach me to wield it just the same.”

I looked down at the tiny crescent-shaped marks on my arm from earlier—the ones that confirmed this wasn't some vivid dream.

Magic.

He would take me to a place where there was magic.

“Can I learn to use it?” I asked.

He gave a slow nod of his head, his massive horns swaying up and down with the motion. “In time, perhaps. There is an inherited affinity for it, but there are also those that can learn to pull it from the world around them. It's rare, but not unheard of.”

The ability to pull magic from the land and wield it.

Just the thought of it made me feel giddy.

“When can we leave?” I tried to rise from the bed, but my head began to spin and I felt unsteady on my tender feet.

The demon bolted upright and gently gripped my arm. “Easy now. You need to get some rest first.” He guided me back down onto the furs and his gaze lingered on my bandaged feet. “I'm sorry for frightening you.” He gave me an earnest smile, his expression softening.

“It's fine. Really. Your kindness and generosity have already made up for it.”


It was the truth too. As things stood, I felt silly for ever running away from him.

“We'll begin our journey to Belden tomorrow, but for now, sleep.” He pulled an extra fur from a trunk at the foot of the bed and laid it down next to the fire before stretching out on top of it.

I couldn't help but sneak another glance at him and the way the glow from the fire highlighted his muscles and the tapered shape of his hips.

As I snuggled in the furs, he started to hum that familiar song again, and it wasn't long before I lost myself to sleep.

CHAPTER 4

 Selvyn's
point of
view



I woke early the following morning, and after packing the necessities for our journey, I took a few moments to admire her while she slept. Her ample chest rose and fell with each delicate breath that fluttered past her parted lips.

Ah, those lips.

I wondered what they'd feel like pressed tight to mine.

It was a shame that this little fallen angel had been dealt such a rough hand in life and found her way down into my pit.

But it would be better soon. I'd help her to safety, and Marta and Elric would make her feel at home in Belden.

As I gazed down at her, it occurred to me that I never asked for her name.

It would seem that after all my years in solitude, I'd forgotten my manners.

I cleared my throat and sat down next to her on the pile of furs. "Miss? Excuse me, Miss? It's time to wake up." I spoke softly so as not to alarm her.

She stirred before squinting her brown eyes at me. "Time to get up already?" Her hair was a ruffled mess and her voice was gruff from sleep, but she was beautiful all the same.

"Yes. It's time we get going. Would you like some water?"

She nodded her head and I passed her my drinking skin. After taking a deep swallow, she handed it back to me.

"I realized I didn't get your name yesterday," I said as I tied the water skin onto my satchel.

"It's Iris."

Iris.

"After the flower?" I asked.

My mother's favorite flower.

She nodded her head before standing and stretching with a groan.

“How do your feet feel?”

She bit her lip. “They’re a little sore.”

“I have something that might help. Sit down.”

Iris sat on the bed and I handed her a tincture from the shelf before pulling several strips of leather from my bag.

“Drink that. It’ll help with the pain.” I held up the leather strips. “I’m going to wrap your feet with these. They’ll provide some extra protection from rocks and stones.”

She yanked the cork off of the tincture and gave a look of disgust as she brought it up to her nose.

I let out a warm laugh. “It’s best if you drink it quickly. It tastes awful, but I promise it’ll help.”

“Fine,” she grumbled and downed the tincture in one go. Her face contorted into a tight grimace. “Shit. You weren’t kidding.”

There was something about her crass demeanor that I found endearing.

I finished binding her feet and took the vial from her. “I told you it was awful.” I shrugged my shoulders and smiled.

“You didn’t tell me *your* name, you know.” She cocked her head to the side, her arms crossed over her chest.

“It’s Selvyn.”

It had been so long since I’d introduced myself, so long since I’d heard someone call me by my name.

“Selvyn,” she said to herself and tapped a finger to her full lips in thought. “I like it.”

“My mother was quite fond of it as well.”

She stared at me in disbelief, as if the very thought of me having a mother shocked her to her core, but I decided that now wasn’t the time to explain.

“Shall we head out then?” I asked, eager to change the subject and get started on our journey.

“What about the fire? How will we see in the caves?” she asked. “Will you use your magic?”

An inquisitive little thing.

I liked it.

“The fire will be just fine. And as for eyesight, I have no problem seeing in the dark,” I said as I led her down into the tunnels. “It takes focus and concentration to use my magic for an extended period of time, so for you, I’ve grown these.”

The tunnel brightened to a light blue hue as we arrived at the portion I’d populated with glowing mushrooms.

“Selvyn, are these real?” Iris asked as her fingers brushed over the luminous, velvety caps.

“Yes, they’re real. I grew them myself.”

She smiled, leaning closer to examine the mushrooms. “I’ve never seen anything like this. They’re beautiful.”

This tiny human was really stroking my ego. She wasn’t the first to be impressed by the mushrooms, but she was the first to awaken feelings in me that I hadn’t felt in a long time.

It was unusual for me to be attracted to the humans that found their way into my tunnels, but there was something about this one that felt different.

“Um, Selvyn,” she asked. “Is there somewhere I can, you know, relieve myself?” She rubbed her neck and refused to make eye contact with me.

It dawned on me what she meant and I felt embarrassed I hadn’t thought of it before.

Generally, I was conscious of these things with those I led to safety, but in my enamored haze, I’d forgotten about her bodily functions.

“I should have asked you before we left. I’m sorry. There’s a little alcove down here just a ways.”

Before I knew what I was doing, I grabbed her hand and led her down the tunnel.

“Here,” I said as I came to a stop in front of an opening in the cave wall. “There’s plenty of moss lining the walls.” I plucked a handful of mushrooms and handed them to her.

She looked at the mushrooms for a moment then stared up at me, her teeth digging into her lower lip. “Could you, um, maybe go down the tunnel a bit? So I have some privacy?”

It seemed that humans were more sensitive about their bodily functions than I remembered.

“Yes, I’ll be just down the tunnel. Yell for me if you come out and can’t find me, okay?”

“Alright.” She gave me a genuine smile, then turned into the alcove to take care of her business.

I hummed as I made my way down the tunnel in an attempt to give her more privacy. Perhaps during our time together she could teach me some new songs. I was growing tired of the ones I’d been singing to myself all these years.

I leaned against the cavern wall and rubbed the jagged tip of my broken horn.

Had I really been down here alone for years?

I did make the occasional trip into Belden, but only when necessary. And even then, I only interacted with those that I could explicitly trust, like Elric and Marta.

When I thought about it, my life was actually quite lonely. One filled with darkness and solitude. A choice I’d made for myself out of guilt and passed off as a necessity.

“Sevlyn?” Her tiny voice rang down through the tunnel.

“I’m here, Iris. Can you see me?” I asked.

“Yes, I see you.” She was closer now. “Even in the low light, a giant demon is hard to miss.” She giggled and nudged my arm playfully.

I liked the fact that she was becoming more comfortable.

Perhaps I even liked it a little *too* much.

“A giant demon?” I feigned shock, whipping my head back and forth. “Where?”

Her high-pitched laughter echoed off of the tunnel walls and warmed my heart.

After a few moments, she cleared her throat. “If you don’t mind me asking, are you really a demon?”

“Why are you asking?” My tail whipped back and forth behind me as we walked.

“I always thought that demons were, you know, evil. You don’t seem evil to me.” Her voice was a faint whisper, as if she already regretted asking her question.

“I’m what’s called a cambion. My father was a demon and my mother was a human.”

“I’ve never heard of a cambion before.”

I took a deep breath. “Few have. My kind are often exiled. Not demon enough for the demon realm, and not human enough for the human world.”

“How did you end up here? In Dalwick Cave?”

I didn’t normally share these intimate details about myself, but with the parallels between our lives, I felt compelled to. Iris was worthy of knowing about my mother and my past. About how I came to be the Dalwick Demon.

“Considering we have quite the hike ahead of us, I guess I can tell you my story. But be warned, it’s a sad one.”

She shrugged. “I’m no stranger to sad stories.”

“Alright then...” I took a swig from my drinking skin and passed it to Iris. When she was finished, I hooked it back to my bag and cleared my throat.

“Like you, my mother was a prostitute, pleasuring men who had money and power, but holding neither herself. One day a handsome man approached her, seeking her services, but he was a demon in disguise. She fell pregnant and she never saw him again.

“According to my mother, I was born on a dark and stormy night, just as the clock struck twelve. The midwife took one look at me and ran out of the house screaming, swearing that I was the devil incarnate. But to my mother, I was everything. For a long time, she hid me from the townsfolk and raised me in secret. She taught me to read and write, and since I had no other children to play with, I’d lose myself in the pages of a book.

“Just as I was on the cusp of becoming a young man, I was discovered. One night, the town guard and head priest stormed our home, ripping my mother and me from our beds. She begged and pleaded, saying that I meant them no harm, but it was no use.”

My eyes grew misty as I recalled that fateful night so many years ago.

As I struggled to find my words, a tiny hand clutched mine, and Iris drew closer to my side.

This sweet, innocent human. If anyone understood, it was her.

“They brought us to the mouth of the cave, and despite my mother’s protests, into the pit we went. As we fell, my mother wrapped her arms around me, using her body to cushion our fall. I heard the crack of her bones as we hit the ground, but the only injury I sustained was a cracked horn. Even in her final moments, my mother fought to keep me safe.” Tears tracked down my face, but I kept my voice steady and even. “I sat with her as she took her final breath. When she passed, I laid her to rest here beneath the mountain.”

Iris sniffled and gripped my hand even tighter. “I’m so sorry.”

I ran the rough pad of my thumb over the soft skin of her hand. “It’s okay. It was a long, long time ago.”

“How did you survive? How did they know you were down here?”

“I swear they knew my mother was going to sacrifice herself for me. Occasionally, they’d call out to me and throw

rotten food down into the pit. I discovered my magic when I was desperately trying to make a fire, and in a fit of anger, my hand ignited. Things improved for me from there. I came to know the tunnels and found my way to the other side of the mountain. Marta and Elric, a couple from Belden, befriended me. They taught me to hunt and fish, and how to use my magic. I bring them each sacrifice, but for the most part, I stay here in the caves. I smoothed the walls of the pit and made the landing pad. I refuse to let anyone else die like my mother did.

“The guards and the church—I believe they kept me alive to use me. To drive fear into the hearts of the townsfolk and keep them obedient. It seems that humans fear what’s different, the things that they don’t understand. I was born in the unfortunate position of being one of those things.”

Iris clenched my fingers and stopped dead in her tracks. She looked up at me for a moment with fat tears rimming her eyes before slamming her body into mine. Her skinny arms wrapped around me as best as they could in a tight hug.

I stood there frozen, my body rigid and in shock.

I couldn’t remember the last time anyone had shown me even a hint of affection. And yet, here was this tiny woman who had every reason to fear me, showing me she cared.

I pulled her to me tightly, running my fingers along the waves of her hair as she cried against my bare abdomen.

“Please, Iris. Please don’t cry.” I leaned over and murmured in her ear.

“Humans are awful,” she said through her sobs.

I ran the clawed tip of my finger along her jaw and tilted her gaze up to meet mine, needing to see those wide brown eyes. “Not all humans, Iris. Not all humans.”

CHAPTER 5

 Iris's point
of view



I stared up into Selvyn's molten eyes, my heart beating a wild rhythm as he used his thumbs to wipe away my tears.

When was the last time I'd reacted to someone like this?

With him bent over me, our faces were so close. His handsome face. And those full lips. It would take nothing to lean forward and press my mouth to his, to claim the cambion with a kiss.

But it was over before it began.

Selvyn cleared his throat before straightening as best as he could in the low tunnel. "Come. We have a lot of ground to cover." He took a deep inhale, his nostrils flaring wide before he continued down the path, leaving me to follow behind him.

For a long time, we walked in silence. Me stewing over his rejection and Selvyn lost to his thoughts.

After a while, he started to hum that familiar tune.

That song.

I decided to put an end to the tension between us. "That song. When I was a girl, my mother would always hum that song."

I could feel Selvyn staring at me, waiting for me to continue.

"My mother also died when I was quite young. She got very ill and passed, leaving me alone with my father." My throat constricted and tears threatened to well up with just the mention of my parents. But Selvyn had shared his story. In a way, I felt as though I owed him mine.

After taking a deep breath to center myself, I continued. "For most of my life, he ran a thriving mercantile business. We lived in a nice estate and he held influence over Grafberg's

leadership. But all of that changed when my mother passed. I think the grief was too much for him. The only thing that seemed to bring him comfort was ale and gambling, and then one day I lost him too.”

Warm fingers slipped into my palm and a clawed thumb rubbed the back of my hand.

“I sold off what I could to pay my father’s debts, but eventually I lost the house and had to resort to...selling my body to keep myself fed.” I took another deep breath. “I did what I had to in order to survive.”

Selvyn came to an abrupt stop and a low growl crept out of his throat. “Don’t ever let that make you feel like you aren’t worthy, Iris. Or that you’re less than,” he snarled. “You’re something precious. Shame on the townsfolk for not seeing that.”

My lips parted in awe and warmth spread over my cheeks.

“How are your feet? Are you getting tired?” Selvyn asked as he pulled me close, the anger that he’d shown already replaced by a calm mask.

A dull throb resonated from the soles of my feet, one that seemed to worsen with each step we took down the tunnel.

“They’re a little uncomfortable,” I admitted. “I could probably use some rest.”

Before I knew what was happening, Selvyn hoisted me up into his muscular arms, his crouched body hovering over top of me.

“Selvyn, I can walk. Really,” I protested, wriggling in his grip.

“Nonsense. We’ll stop just around the bend. You rest.”

His chest rumbled with each word he spoke and warmth spread over my body from being pressed tight to his skin. I could feel his muscles flexing with each of his footfalls, and a different kind of warmth blazed through me, one that pooled low in my stomach and bloomed between my legs.

“Iris,” Selvyn chuckled. “Do you like being carried?”

Oh no.

Selvyn had sniffed the air earlier.

Could he smell my arousal?

“N-no. Why would you ask that?”

He stopped walking and stared down at me. Smirking, he arched a perfect black brow.

Shit.

Warm laughter erupted from his chest and sent me bouncing in his arms.

“Selvyn!” I screeched. “It isn’t funny.”

A portion of my leg was exposed and he ran his finger along it, pebbling my skin. “Needy little human,” he murmured, before nipping at my ear.

I let out a breathy moan and rubbed my palm over his bare chest.

“Selvyn...why didn’t you let me kiss you earlier?” My voice was a low whisper, a sound I could just barely hear over the rapid thump of my heart.

Selvyn peered down at me, tilting his head to the side thoughtfully before caressing my cheek with his thumb. “It’s been a very long time since I’ve kissed someone. And how could you possibly want to kiss me, little angel?”

My soul shattered the moment he spoke those words. He’d been mistreated and alone for so long that he actually believed he wasn’t worthy of love or affection because of what he was.

“What was it you said to me? Don’t ever let that make you feel like you aren’t worthy. Or that you’re less than.” I cupped his face with my hand, the heat of his body warming my palm. “You’re something precious. At least to me.”

The corner of his mouth lifted up into a shy smile, and I leaned forward to press my mouth to his in a quick kiss.

“Was that so bad?” I whispered as I pulled away.

“Even better than I imagined,” he muttered under his breath.

Selvyn had thought about kissing me.

There was more to this cave and this cambion than I’d thought. And what was this growing tension between the two of us?

Selvyn and I were quiet after that.

It seemed that we were both lost in thought over the modest kiss we’d shared. I couldn’t help but wonder if there were others that Selvyn had charmed like this. Surely I wasn’t the first attractive human to find my way into his cave.

As we turned a corner, the pungent aroma of sulfur stung my nostrils.

“Goodness, what is that smell? Where are you taking me?” I asked, and pinched the bridge of my nose with my fingers.

Selvyn let out a bellowing laugh. “Are you always this inquisitive? It’s only a bit farther now.”

He continued walking and eventually, the white glow of sunlight began filtering into the tunnel. I brought a hand up to my face to shield my sensitive eyes.

How long had I been in the dark? It seemed as if my concept of night and day had blurred in my time beneath the mountain.

In my time with Selvyn.

“Open your eyes,” he said.

When I removed my hand, I was met with the sight of a large cavern. Light drifted down from an opening in the ceiling and illuminated a pool of bright blue water.

“It’s beautiful,” I gasped. “What is this place?”

Selvyn set me on my feet, his giant hand gripping my elbow to steady me. “It’s a hot spring. There are a few under the mountain, but this one is my favorite. I have to change your bandages and I thought you might like to bathe.”

I looked down at the dirt coating my skin and the dusty strips of leather covering my feet.

This being that I'd grown up fearing was so thoughtful. So sweet.

Selvyn removed several furs from his satchel and spread them on the ground.

"Have a seat," he said, patting the makeshift bed next to him.

I hobbled over on shaky legs and sat down on the plush pile. I was more tired than I'd realized.

Selvyn set to work unwrapping my feet and hummed that same familiar song while he worked. I couldn't help but steal glances at him. He was even more handsome in the full light of day.

"Shit," I hissed through gritted teeth as he peeled off the last few soiled strips of linen.

"I'm sorry," he said and gently rubbed my ankle. "A nice soak will do them some good. Do you need help getting undressed?"

His voice wasn't playful or flirtatious. He was genuinely concerned if I could manage on my own.

"I-I think I can do it."

I bit my lip and rubbed the back of my neck. The thought of Selvyn seeing my naked body made me feel shy-anxious even.

He rose to his feet and gave me an understanding smile. "I'll give you some privacy." With that, he turned around and focused his attention on rummaging through his satchel.

I slowly untied my dress and stood, allowing the thin piece of fabric to slide down off of my body. My feet stung with each step I took toward the edge of the spring, but there was no way I was going to call out to Selvyn for help.

"Everything okay?" he asked, as if he could sense my discomfort.

“I’m fine. Almost there,” I said.

I reached the spring and lowered myself down onto the edge. The warm water felt divine on my aching feet. With a slosh, I slid into the pool.

It took everything in me not to groan as the warm water enveloped my tired body. I felt weightless, and the temperature reminded me of what it felt like being pressed tight to Selvyn’s bare chest.

“I take it you like it?” Selvyn asked as he smiled down at me from the edge of the spring.

“It’s heavenly,” I hummed. I tilted my head back, letting the water lap against my temples while I gazed up at him.

He gave me a smug smile as the clawed tips of his fingers undid his leather belt. Without warning, his furred skirt dropped to the cavern floor—*revealing what was hidden underneath.*

Not one, but two, bright red cocks hung between Selvyn’s legs. Both had wide, well-defined heads that dripped a clear liquid. Thick ridges covered the shafts, and a set of smooth balls sat just beneath.

It was unlike anything I’d seen on a human man.

My mouth hung open and I couldn’t help but stare.

“Iris,” Selvyn said in that deliciously rumbling voice of his. “My eyes are up here.”

Before I could come up with a response, he lowered himself into the spring, submerging those double cocks under the water’s surface.

With impressive finesse, he swam over to where I was treading water.

“I have something for you,” he said, swimming closer until I was within arm’s reach. “Turn around.”

I sucked in a breath and did as Selvyn asked, turning my body so my back was to him.

The earthy scent of lavender filled my nostrils as Selvyn's fingers carefully massaged my head.

The Dalwick Demon was washing my hair.

He hummed as he worked his claws through the strands, and I leaned into him ever so slightly.

"Selvyn," I moaned.

"Yes, angel?" he whispered against my temple as the stiff lengths of his cocks ghosted over my backside.

What would those ridges feel like?

Could he use them both—at the same time?

Selvyn spun me around so that I faced him, and wrapped me in his muscular arms.

"Lean back and rinse," he instructed.

Again I followed his command and dipped my head back into the warm water, allowing the last of the soap to rinse from my hair.

"Tell me what you need." His gaze lingered briefly on my exposed breasts.

"I want you to fuck me." The words came out as a whisper, but in the otherwise silent cavern, I might as well have yelled them.

"Mmm," he hummed as he carried me through the water and toward the ledge of the spring. "You're curious about my cocks. I know you've never seen such a thing on human men."

I shook my head no.

Selvyn rose out of the water and carried me over to where he'd laid the furs.

He sat me down and looked at me with his head cocked to the side, a slight smile curving up the corner of his lips. "When it comes to pleasure, what do you enjoy, Iris?"

In terms of sex, I was quite experienced, but being intimate with someone I cared for, *someone I felt safe with*, was new to me. I wanted Selvyn to push boundaries with me—to walk the

line without crossing it. I wanted to reclaim the things I'd been made to feel ashamed of.


“I-I want you to call me your little whore,” I whispered.

He pulled back and looked at me with wide eyes. “Are you sure?”

“Yes,” I said with a nod.

“Alright, my little whore. Lean back and part your legs for me.”

CHAPTER 6

 Selvyn's
point of
view



Iris did as instructed, lying back on the furs with her legs spread wide open. Tiny rivulets of water dripped off of her body as I trailed the sharp tip of my claw along the top of her foot, then up her leg, before finally venturing between her parted thighs.

I ran the rough pad of my finger along her slit, coating myself in her arousal before focusing on her clit. Her hips bucked in my hand as I teased the sensitive bud, and a moan threatened to slip past my lips at her overwhelming scent.

The tantalizing aroma of my fragrant little flower.

My Iris.

“May I taste you?” I asked as I settled my wide body between her legs.

“Yes. Please.” Her chest rose and fell with each of her panting breaths.

I enjoyed seeing her like this. Enjoyed hearing her beg.

I kissed along her thigh, dragging my lips over her skin before flicking my forked tongue against her clit.

“Selvyn!” she moaned. Her fingers grasped desperately at the furs beneath her.

Faster and faster I flicked my tongue over her clit, delighting in Iris’s reactions.

It had been a long time since I’d pleased a woman. I’d forgotten how much I enjoyed it.

“God!” she screamed, her legs quivering as her orgasm tore through her body.

I peered down at her, admiring the way her cheeks and her chest were flushed red with arousal.

“There is no God here, Iris. He could never bring you this sort of pleasure.” I threw my head back with a dark laugh and allowed the length of my black, forked tongue to unfurl from my mouth before wiggling it up and down—just like I’d done on her clit.

“Fuck me, Selvyn.” Desire burned bright in her wide, doe eyes.

Iris desired me.

With a rough grip, I held my cocks together and slid my fist up and down them, coating them in my own lubricant as Iris’s eyes followed my every move.

“Is this what you want, my little fallen angel? To be fucked by the demon of Dalwick Cave?” My brow arched and the muscles in my forearm bulged with each stroke.

She watched my hand work over the shafts, my cocks and fingers growing slick with each pass.

“Yes. I want it.” Her voice was a needy plea as her fingers pinched the rosy tips of her nipples.

“Then that’s what you’ll get.”

In one swift movement, I settled myself over her body and claimed her mouth with mine, my cocks rubbing against the wet folds of her cunt.

With reckless abandon, I kissed her, as if all there ever was and all there ever would be in my life was *her*.

“Selvyn,” she moaned, pressing her breasts against my bare chest as I slid my tongue inside her mouth.

I braced myself with one hand, and with the other, I teased the wide head of my lower cock along her pussy, coating the tip with her sweet nectar. Slowly, I pushed inside of her, resisting the urge to thrust my hips and drive myself deep.

“Fuck,” she whined against my neck as the ridges along my shaft stretched her entrance and my upper cock teased her clit.

“Yes, angel. Yes, angel,” I chanted, rocking my hips just the slightest to ease myself inside.

Her cunt was so tight around my thick length that I was already close to coming.

But unlike humans—*I could come again and again.*

Iris bucked against me until I filled her to the hilt. “For fuck’s sake, Selvyn. Move!” she demanded, and I couldn’t help but laugh.

I liked that Iris knew what she wanted and wasn’t afraid to ask for it.

My hands darted out and clasped hers, pinning them above her head. I snapped my hips, each rough thrust driving her body into the ground and bouncing her breasts.

“Take me.” I rasped against the shell of her ear. “Take me like the good little whore you are.”

She whimpered, arching her back in response.

Over and over, I pumped into her, growling and grunting until her pussy clenched my cock. Iris threw her head back in ecstasy, writhing through her orgasm and screaming my name as one cock flooded her cunt with my seed and the other sprayed on her stomach.

Our bodies stilled, and I pressed my forehead to hers as we both fought to catch our breath, dizzy from the comedown of our pleasure.

Iris’s eyes were closed as she whispered against my lips. “Both. Give me both.”

I was silent for a moment, considering exactly how I should handle her request.

“Iris,” I said as I looked at her with pleading eyes. “What if I hurt you?”

She wriggled out of my grip and propped herself up on her elbows, tilting her head to the side thoughtfully as she stared into my eyes. “That’s never stopped anyone before. And that’s

why this is different—why you're different, Selvyn. Please, give me this. If it's too much for me, I'll tell you."

For a brief moment, I was angry for her. Angry for all the pain she'd endured in her short life. I wanted to smite each person who had wronged her. Rip out their throats and throw them down into the pit to rot for harming this tiny human woman.

My tiny human woman.

I pressed my lips to her forehead and smiled, the furred tip of my tail softly caressing the dip of her waist.

To me, she was a delicate flower, but perhaps she wasn't so delicate after all. She was inquisitive—and she craved what only I could offer her.

"Fine. My angel gets what she wants," I growled and slid the length of my tongue along the side of her face.

Slowly, I pulled out of her, feeling each ridge of my cock grind against the opening of her cunt. I watched as my cum trickled out from between her folds and dripped down onto her ass.

Perfection.

But there was no way I would take both of her holes without preparing her first.

Iris moaned as I kissed down her body, my lips exploring her until I settled between her thighs.

With rough strokes, I circled her puckered hole with my tongue, the taste of my cum mixed with hers blossoming in my mouth.

"Mmm." I hummed with delight as my tongue breached her entrance, and Iris raised her hips.

"Ah, ah, ah, angel. Stay right there. You want to take my cock in your tight ass, don't you?" I mumbled, gripping the backs of her thighs as I pushed my tongue inside of her.

"Selvyn," she moaned.

With one hand she gripped my horn, driving my tongue in deeper.

A mixture of her cum, my saliva, and my own release coated my face, but I continued on, savoring Iris like she was the last supper.

“Now. Please,” she panted as I swirled my tongue.

When her pleas grew desperate and I was satisfied that she was ready to take me, I rose up onto my knees and rubbed the lubricated head of my lower cock between her cheeks.

“Are you ready, little angel? Ready for me to fill both of your tight holes like no human has before?” I asked, my voice gravelly and thick with lust.

“Y-yes”,” she said as I trailed the furred tip of my tail down her stomach and across her clit.

Slowly, I forced the tip of my lower cock inside her puckered hole, hissing at the sensation as each ribbed band breached the entrance. Iris arched her back and took deep breaths while I worked my cock inside to the hilt.

“Is this okay?” I asked as I looked down at her, needing confirmation she wasn’t in pain.

“More than okay,” she said with her cheeks flushed pink and her body coated in a fine sheen of sweat.

I’d never seen a more beautiful sight.

This woman was going to be my undoing.

How was I ever going to part with her after this?

CHAPTER 7

 Iris's point
of view



“Fuck,” Selvyn groaned as he ran his other cock through my slick folds before easing it inside.

I let out a high-pitched moan as he filled me to the brim, my ass and my pussy stretched to their absolute limits. A low heat emanated from Selvyn’s cocks, relaxing my body and alleviating some of the discomfort of being so utterly full.

Selvyn pressed his forehead to mine and slowly rocked his hips. “So tight for me,” he moaned in my ear before kissing his way down my neck.

With my eyes clamped shut, I sucked in a tight breath and tried to focus on my breathing, to focus on anything other than the burning sensation tearing through me.

“Iris, look at me,” Selvyn pleaded.

My eyes flicked open and I stared into his golden cat-like eyes.

“Breathe,” he instructed.

Together, we took a deep breath as he rocked his hips again, this time just a little harder.

“Again,” Selvyn said and kissed along the column of my neck.

I took breath after breath, and each time he’d kiss my neck, my body relaxing with each one.

“Thank you for giving me this, angel. Thank you for taking me so perfectly,” Selvyn praised, and my walls squeezed tight to his cock, the ridges dragging along that magical spot.

The pain I felt was quickly replaced by hot pleasure as he edged me closer to orgasm with each slow thrust.

“Sel, harder,” I breathed against his lips, my hands tangling in the hairs that had come loose from his braid.

Selvyn pulled away from me, digging his fingers into my hips and increasing his pace until he rammed into me hard and fast. Soft heat radiated from where he gripped me, and I looked down to find his hands lit with magic, the flames licking at my skin but never burning me.

“Yes!” I screamed out as my body convulsed beneath him.

“Fuck,” he groaned, and the flames coating his hands flared before dissipating completely. His cocks jumped inside of me, filling both of my holes with his cum.

Eventually, our bodies stilled and again Selvyn pressed his forehead to mine.

“Shit,” I said as I looked up at him, my chest heaving. “Your magic. You used your magic while you fucked me.”

He gave me a puzzled look, still panting to catch his breath. “I—I didn’t mean to. That’s never happened before. Are you hurt?”

He ran his hands over my hips in a panic, finding nothing left behind but the indentations from his claws.

“Selvyn, I’m fine,” I said with a laugh. “It was amazing.”

“It was, but I wouldn’t be able to live with myself if I hurt you.”

He glanced between my legs as he carefully pulled out of me. I could feel his release dribbling from my holes and down onto the furs.

Before I could object, he held me cradled in his arms.

“Where are you taking me?” I asked with a yawn. I was so exhausted from our escapades that I could barely keep my eyes open.

He let out another one of those warm, rumbling laughs—the kind I didn’t think I’d ever tire of hearing—and walked toward the edge of the pool.

“Look at us, Iris. We’re dirtier now than we were before we bathed.”

I laughed, snuggling closer to him as he slid us into the warm water of the spring. Ever so gently, Selvyn cleaned between my legs and peppered kisses along my neck and collarbone.

“My precious flower. My fallen angel,” he mumbled against my skin.

For a being that just ravaged my body, Selvyn was being so tender—*so sweet*. It broke my heart knowing that once he saw me safely to Belden, he’d be alone down here in the caves.

With ease, Selvyn shifted my body into one arm and hoisted us out of the pool. He held me against him as he spread out the furs, humming that familiar tune while he did so.

“I really need to teach you some other songs,” I said as he laid me down on the makeshift bed.

He laughed and trailed the back of his hand along my jaw, fixing his golden eyes on me. “I was hoping that you would. Sometimes I think I’m losing my mind down here. The music is the only thing that keeps me sane.”

I gave him a soft smile as sadness settled in the pit of my stomach. The idea of leaving him was beginning to be almost too much to bear, but at least I could leave him with some reminders of me.

“It would be my pleasure to teach you a few others.”

Tears gathered in the corners of my eyes as I looked up at the small hole in the ceiling. The light filtering inside the cave was fading, signaling that night was approaching.

Selvyn followed my gaze and looked up. “Would you like me to make you a fire? Or gather you some mushrooms? I don’t want the darkness to frighten you.”

He was so thoughtful. Being treated with such genuine kindness was so foreign to me that at first I didn’t even know

how to respond.

“As long as you’re here, I’ll be fine,” I said. And it was the truth. I wouldn’t be scared of anything as long as I had Selvyn with me.

He leaned over and pressed a kiss to my lips before rummaging through his pack. “What about food then? I’m sure you’re probably hungry. Ah, and perhaps another one of these.”

Selvyn extended a tiny glass vial out to me, and without question I downed the tincture, my face scrunching up with distaste.

“I keep thinking it’ll get better, but it never does,” I said before scraping my teeth over my tongue.

“I know it tastes like shit, but it’ll help with any discomfort you might be feeling after today.”

He was right, of course. The lower half of my body ached from being stretched to its limits, but I didn’t regret it, not even for a second. There was something about Selvyn that felt so perfect—so right.

It was curious he’d lost control of his magic while he was inside of me. He’d seemed surprised over it as well...

Selvyn trailed the tips of his claws along my thigh affectionately before clearing his throat. “I spilled inside of you. When we arrive in Belden, Marta can give you a tonic to prevent pregnancy.”

Yes, he was right. I’d used a contraceptive with Jeremiah, but the thought had slipped my mind with Selvyn—and it was unlikely he even possessed such a thing.

I nodded my head in agreement. “That would be for the best.”

He gave me a soft, knowing smile and I wondered if he’d ever considered the prospect of having a child, of moving on to a life outside of the cave.

“Would you like something to eat?”

“Do you have any more cheese?” I asked and propped myself up on my elbows, the length of my brown hair draping down over my breasts.

Selvyn’s eyes drifted over my body before he passed me a wedge of cheese and a stale chunk of bread.

“Thank you,” I said through a mouthful of the salty food.

I was probably the most unrefined woman to grace Selvyn’s cave, but he didn’t seem to mind. He stared at me with a contented smile on his face as I ate.

“Come here,” he said and gathered me—cheese, bread, and all—into his arms.

He positioned me so that I was seated between his legs with my back turned to him. After pressing a gentle kiss to the crown of my head, he carefully combed the sharp tips of his claws through my hair, working out any knots.

I let out a dreamy sigh.

It had been ages since someone had combed my hair.

“I’ll make sure we have a proper meal tomorrow. A special treat for our last night together.”

“Tomorrow’s our last night in the caves?” I sputtered, sending breadcrumbs flying out of my mouth and onto the furs.

Selvyn gathered my hair into sections and wove them together while his tail trailed absentmindedly along my abdomen. “Yes. The following day we’ll arrive at the village before sundown.”

With a rough swallow, I forced down the last of my food and sat there in silence while I waited for Selvyn to finish my hair.

“There,” he said as he tied a leather strip around the end of the braid.


I turned to face him, running my hands over my braid and struggling to find my words. “Sel—” I started to say, but he silenced me by pressing a kiss to my forehead.

He laid down on the furs and tucked me close to his side, the warmth from his naked body radiating into mine.

“Shh,” he whispered against my hair. “Sleep now. Let’s enjoy this while it lasts, hmm?”

I nodded and wrapped my arms around him, savoring what we shared in this moment and allowing the low rumble of his humming to send me off to sleep.

CHAPTER 8

 Selvyn's
point of
view



The following day, I woke before Iris and gathered the remnants of her dress from where she'd tossed it on the cavern floor. I scrubbed it with the lavender soap, washing it as best as I could before drying it with my magic. It was stained, but at least she'd have something relatively clean to wear.

As the soft glow of morning light trickled down into the cavern, I peered down at her.

She looked so at peace while she slept, her features unmarred by the sadness that had crept over her face the night before.

I told myself over and over again that this was what was best for her. The dark depths of a cave were no place for Iris. My flower needed fresh air and sunlight. She needed a man who could give her everything she deserved—the love she was worthy of.

I sighed and rubbed my eyes with the base of my palms.

Why was I subjecting myself to this torture?

There was a reason I never became close to my human charges, but before Iris, none of them ever wanted to be close to me.

Not in the way that she did.

And the way my magic responded to her last night...I'd never had something like that happen. Perhaps my control slipped during our pleasure...

I'd have to be more careful.

I pulled fresh strips of leather from my bag and set to work rebandaging her feet, hoping to slowly rouse her as I did so.

She tossed and turned against the furs as I carefully wound the strips around her soles, and when she caught sight of me,

she smiled.

“G’ morning,” she mumbled, her voice hoarse from sleep.

“Good morning, angel,” I said and passed her the drinking skin. “Did you sleep well?”

Iris stretched and arched her back, pushing the soft globes of her breasts outward. My cocks hardened beneath my kilt at the sight of her. Did she have any idea how utterly breathtaking she was or what kind of effect she had on me?

I stood and quickly turned my back to her before adjusting my kilt.

“I did. Is—is everything okay?” she asked from behind me.

“Yes, everything is fine.” I cleared my throat and rubbed the racked tip of my horn, still refusing to face her. “I set your dress there next to the pack.”

“You washed it for me.” Her voice wavered.

Another tiny act of kindness and she was practically on the verge of tears.

“I did the best I could. I thought that after bathing you might appreciate something clean to put on.”

“Thank you.”

I kept my back turned while she dressed, refusing to sneak another glance at her nude body and recall how she looked as I fucked her.

A delicate hand slid along my bicep and gave it a light squeeze.

“Are you sure you’re alright? If this is about last night—”

“I told you, everything is fine.” I was more stern than I needed to be, and I regretted my harsh response the moment I saw the hurt in her eyes.

I pulled Iris into a tight hug and mumbled into her hair. “I’m sorry. I’m just a little tired.”

Her tiny hands clenched the muscles of my back, holding me like she never wanted to let go.

“We can always take it a bit slower today,” she murmured, her lips brushing against the bare skin of my abdomen with each word.

She sounded so hopeful.

So positive that we could stretch whatever this was between us on forever.

I didn't have the heart to crush that hope. Not yet, at least.

“Yes, nice and slow.” I pulled away and gave her a reassuring smile. “Are you ready?”

“I suppose so.” She looked down at her feet and dragged the tip of her toe through the rocky ground while I packed.

When everything was safely tucked inside my satchel, we left the warm glow of the cavern and headed back into the tunnels.

“I don't think I'll ever forget these,” Iris said as her fingers danced along the blue mushrooms lining the tunnel.

I stopped and stared at her, marveling at the wonder written on her face, committing this moment to memory *because I never wanted to forget her.*

For a long time, we walked, allowing the silence and the sadness to settle over us both like a dark cloud.

Until a dulcet sound broke the quiet.

Iris hummed a light-hearted melody, her sweet voice filling the tunnel and bringing a smile to my face.

She was keeping good on her promise.

After a few moments of listening to her, I joined in, the baritone of my hums complementing hers perfectly.

Or so I thought.

“No, no, no,” she said as she hooked her arm through mine. “Like this.”

Again, Iris repeated the tune. This time I was sure I had it. I followed her instructions, changing my pitch and rhythm, and hummed the song to near perfection.

“Yes! Just like that.” She patted my arm and leaned her head against me. “You’re a fast learner!”

Her approval filled me with pride, and I puffed out my chest before starting up the song again.

CHAPTER 9

 Iris's point
of view



Just as I was beginning to lose feeling in my feet and heavily contemplating asking Selvyn to carry me the rest of the way, the soft sound of running water filled the tunnel.

“We’re almost there,” Selvyn said. He gave my arm a reassuring squeeze, as if he could sense my energy for the day was waning.

When we rounded the bend, the tunnel opened just high enough for Selvyn to stand to his full height. A slow-flowing river ran alongside the path, the water reflecting the blue tint of the mushrooms off of its surface before disappearing into a hole in the cave wall.

It was breathtaking.

I’d never expected to find such beauty in the caves, but they held so many hidden secrets—Selvyn included.

“We’ll rest here for the night,” Selvyn said and started to unpack his bag.

My chest constricted.

Tonight.

Our final night together.

I willed myself not to cry and instead focused my attention on the stream.

“Come here,” Selvyn called out to me from where he’d spread the furs by the riverbank. “I’ll take off your bandages and you can soak your feet while I start a fire.”

“A fire?” I asked, cocking my head to the side as he unwrapped my blistered feet. “But we have each other to stay warm.”

Selvyn let out a booming laugh that warmed my body better than any fire would. “It’s for cooking. I told you that tonight we’d have a special treat. Now go soak your feet.” He shook my ankle playfully before rising.

I padded over to the water’s edge and let out a deep groan the moment my aching feet dipped below the surface. The cold water felt like heaven.

“How does it feel?” Selvyn called out.

He’d already used his magic to start the fire, and I could make out his wide smile in the warm light.

“It feels amazing,” I said, throwing my head back with a hum as I kicked my legs.

Selvyn ambled over and took a seat beside me, so close that our thighs pressed tight together. The furry tip of his tail trailed across the surface of the water. Just as I was about to laugh at his antics, there was a light nibble at my toes.

“Shit!” I screeched and bolted onto Selvyn’s lap, splashing water everywhere as I went.

He broke out into a fit of laughter and settled me between his spread legs. “It’s okay, Iris. It’s just the fish.” The damp tip of his tail caressed my arm with calming strokes. “I thought you’d find it entertaining.”

“I’m glad you find scaring the piss out of me entertaining.”

Selvyn laughed again and leaned forward so that our bodies hovered just above the surface of the water. I leaned into him, relishing the closeness. Cherishing our final night together.

“Watch,” he instructed and plunged his tail into the stream.

I stared at the water, squinting my eyes in an attempt to make out whatever it was that Selvyn’s tail was doing.

“Aha!” He barked, and I nearly toppled into the stream as his tail pulled a fish out of the water.

The creature flipped back and forth like mad, its scales gleaming silver with each desperate flash of its tail.

Selvyn whispered in my ear, his beard tickling my temple. “You may want to look away now.”

I was no stranger to death, and I appreciated that the fish would fill our bellies, but I had no desire to see its life taken.

A moment after I placed my hands over my eyes, I heard the harsh slap of the fish against the rock floor, and Selvyn muttered a thank you under his breath.

He repeated the process until six fish sat beside us on the bank.

“I think that’ll do. Why don’t you sit by the fire and I’ll prepare dinner?” he said, and helped me to my feet.

I sat by the warmth of the blaze and watched Selvyn use the sharp tips of his claws to clean the fish. His broad back was hunched over the river and he hummed the song I’d taught him while he worked.

He was so gentle, so kind. All of my preconceived notions and expectations of what the Dalwick Demon was like were completely wrong. In a cruel world, he was a bright light, one that was stifled by the darkness of the cave he inhabited.

For the second time today, tears threatened to spill out of my eyes, but I wouldn’t allow it.

Not tonight. There would be plenty of time for tears tomorrow.

Selvyn smiled at me as he walked toward the fire, his eyes highlighted by the flames.

“I hope you’re hungry,” he said. He removed a sachet from his bag and sprinkled a blend of herbs over the fish. He placed the filets on a rock by the embers, then sat down beside me with a sigh.

Silence stretched out between us once again.

That seemed to be the trend, the two of us sharing a moment together before losing ourselves in our own thoughts.

“Selvyn,” I said, and rubbed my hand against his uncovered thigh. “I—I just wanted to thank you. For

everything. If it wasn't for you, I would have died down here. I'm very grateful for everything you've done for me. And—I'm glad I met you."

He placed his hand over mine and twined our fingers together before bringing the back of my hand up to his lips. "I'm glad I met you too, angel. So very glad."

With that, he dropped my hand and got up to check the fish, focusing all of his attention on the task at hand and refusing to look at me.

"Dinner is done," he said in a somber tone and moved the fish away from the fire.

He removed two wooden bowls from his satchel and placed several strips of fish in each. He sprinkled another pinch of herbs over the top before passing me my bowl.

It wasn't often that we ate fish in Grafberg, and I looked down at my bowl with skepticism.

Wisps of steam wafted off of the fish, carrying with them the scent of parsley and dill weed. The aroma, my overwhelming hunger, and the fact that Selvyn had so lovingly prepared it was enough to convince me.

He watched expectantly as I broke off a piece and put it in my mouth. It was flaky, with a light crisp, tasting mostly like the herbs he'd used to season it with a mellow fishy aftertaste. It was much more appetizing than the watered down fish stews I was used to in Grafberg.

"Do you like it?" he asked.

"It's delicious. Thank you." I gave him a warm smile before taking another bite.

When we finished our meal, Selvyn collected the bowls, giving them a quick rinse in the river before tucking them back into his bag. He stretched out by the fire, his muscles rippling with each of his movements. It brought back memories of how solid he felt beneath my fingers. How he felt buried deep inside both of my holes.

Warmth built between my legs and I rubbed my thighs together, seeking whatever friction I could.

Selvyn quirked a brow at me and let out a dark chuckle. “Come here, Iris.” He beckoned me over with a curl of his finger, his tail swishing back and forth through the air behind him.

I joined him on the furs, lying so the front of his body was pressed tight against my back. The hard lengths of his cocks dug into my backside as I leaned against him, exposing the column of my neck.

“Is there something you want, Iris?” Selvyn asked in a low growl as his lips grazed over my skin.

“You, Selvyn. I want you.” My body was on fire, completely overwhelmed with lust for this being—this cambion—that cared for me and fucked me like no one else had ever done.

His tail crept beneath my dress, sliding along my entrance before swirling against my clit.

“Shit,” I said with a moan and arched my back, pressing harder against Selvyn’s cocks.

“Mmm,” he whispered in my ear. “So wet and ready for me. How would you like me to take you, Iris?” he asked, his tail continuing its ministrations on my clit.

“I-I want to ride you,” I all but moaned. “I want to ride both of your cocks until you fill me with your cum.”

Selvyn’s tongue danced along my skin and the clawed tips of his fingers dug into my waist. With ease, he lifted me on top of him so I was straddling his waist, his cocks and my pussy separated by only a thin layer of clothing.

He rolled his hips beneath me and I threw my head back with a breathy sigh.

“Undress for me, angel,” Selvyn said, digging his claws deeper into my thighs.

I was frantic for him, desperate to get him inside of me. Without hesitation, I wrestled my dress up and over my head

until I was completely nude.

My body hummed with excitement as I flipped his skirt up onto his stomach, exposing his thick, red cocks. Fluid leaked from the tips, and I had the overwhelming urge to taste it.

“What are you doing?” Selvyn asked as I shimmied down his body and leaned forward.

I looked up at him and smiled. “I’m going to taste you now. Suck these cocks dry.”

Without another word, I plunged my mouth onto his upper cock while I worked the lower with a fierce grip.

“Fuck,” Selvyn groaned. He wrapped my braid around his hand and thrust into my mouth just the slightest. “You feel so fucking good, Iris.”

“Mmm,” I hummed around his shaft. His flavor coated my tongue, enticing me to take him deeper.

Up and down I bobbed my head, taking each ridge into my throat until my lips caressed his balls. I reached out with my free hand and massaged them, feeling them grow tight in my palm.

“Angel,” Selvyn moaned as thick spurts of his cum shot down my throat and coated my neck and chest.

When I was certain he finished, I popped off of his cock and stared up at him. Even though his chest was heaving with each of his breaths, his expression was so calm, so at peace.

“Here,” he said and handed me a fur.

He watched as I wiped his release from my neck and chest, then took the fur from me when I was finished.

“Come here,” he said. “Sit on my face. I want to taste that sweet nectar one last time.”

While I’d partaken in my fair share of sex acts, that particular position was more intimate than most of the ones I engaged in with my clients. I wasn’t often the focus of their pleasure—not like how I was with Selvyn. I hesitated for a

moment until Selvyn gripped me under my arms and pulled me so that I was seated on top of his chest.

“Iris,” he said softly as he looked up at me, the furred tip of his tail sweeping back and forth over my nipple. “We can do it the other way if you’re more comfortable.” He placed light kisses along my inner thigh. “I just want to please you.” He gave the soft flesh a sharp nip, drawing a moan out of me. “Get you ready to take my cocks.”

I sighed and shifted my hips, my cunt already growing wet over the thought of Selvyn’s tongue licking and teasing me.

“Alright,” I said, and positioned myself over his face.

“Hold on to my horns, angel.” He gripped my thighs, burying his face between my legs.

His beard tickled my sensitive skin as his tongue lapped at my entrance with lazy strokes. He’d get close to my clit, but he never focused on the sensitive bud for too long.

“God,” I moaned, and Selvyn chuckled against my folds.

He tilted my hips, giving him better access to my backside, and I gripped his horns tight to steady myself.

“Mmm,” he groaned and circled my hole with his tongue. “I want to ruin you, Iris. No man will ever be enough for you after me.”

His tongue slipped inside, swirling and stretching, pulsing and pounding, over and over again.

I let go of his cracked horn and used two fingers to tease my clit, creeping closer to orgasm as Selvyn devoured my ass.

What we were doing was absolutely sinful, but I loved it, and I knew that Selvyn did too.

The tip of his tail swept back and forth over my nipples, tending to one and then the other. I continued to play with my clit, stroking it to the rhythm of Selvyn’s tongue until a gentle orgasm cascaded over my body.

“Now, angel. Ride me now,” Selvyn begged.

I fought to catch my breath before rising off of him on shaky legs.

He stared up at me and stroked his cocks, clutching them tight together and coating them with his arousal.

I hovered over his waist, and Selvyn helped guide his cocks inside of me, one in my cunt and one just lightly pressing against my ass.

“Nice and slow,” he instructed, moving his hands to my waist to support my weight.

“Y-yes, nice and slow.” I nodded my head and bit my lip as I slowly settled down on top of him.

The wide head of his lower cock pushed inside of my ass, a burning sensation igniting my body as Selvyn once again filled me to my limit. I felt the ridges of both of his cocks rubbing against each other inside of me, separated by only a thin layer of tissue. I rocked my hips, working myself down until he was seated fully inside of me.

“Fuck!” We hissed in unison as I pulsed up and down, the pressure almost too much for us.

Selvyn leaned forward slightly and stared with wide eyes at where our bodies were joined. “Look at you taking both my cocks. My little wanton whore.” His voice was a feral growl as he jerked his hips to meet me, the sound of our bodies slapping together echoing off into the surrounding tunnels.

The furred tip of Selvyn’s tail slid between my legs and danced along my clit, the soft touch sending shivers down my spine.

“Give me your hands, angel,” Selvyn commanded.

I took his hands in mine and used him for leverage, bouncing with force and driving him deeper.

My moans grew more desperate with each of our thrusts.

And that damn tail.

Selvyn pressed it hard against my clit and twirled, giving me the most intense orgasm I’d ever experienced.

“Selvyn,” I screamed as my cunt gripped his cock.

A stream of liquid gushed from my pussy, covering his chest.

“My god!” Selvyn spasmed beneath me as his cocks filled me with his cum.


I released his hands and rocked my hips, watching as he closed his eyes and parted his lips with a groan.

“Selvyn,” I whispered.

“Hmm, angel?” He didn’t bother to open his eyes.

“God could never bring me that sort of pleasure.”

CHAPTER 10

 Selvyn's
point of
view



I woke the following morning with Iris pressed tight against my chest. For a long time, I lay there and listened to her light breaths, the tiny whistle of her nose, savoring the way she felt on top of my body.

I didn't ever want it to end.

I would have kept her with me forever if it was possible. If this wasn't some fleeting moment in the lonely abyss that was my life as the Dalwick Demon.

Eventually, Iris stirred, leaving behind a small trail of drool as she rubbed her face over my chest.

"Morning, angel," I whispered, and ran my rough palm over the smooth skin of her back.

"Morning," she said as she propped herself up on her elbows, placing her head between her palms and fixing those deep brown eyes on me.

"Did you sleep well?" I asked, and tugged on a strand of her hair that had slipped loose from her braid.

She dug her teeth into her lower lip and looked away. "Of course I slept well after that." A bright blush spread over her pale cheeks.

It was delightful to see her like this. So sweet and so shy. In our short time together, I had somehow gained her trust. Given all she'd been through in her short life, that was no small feat.

I let out a deep laugh and wrapped my arms around her. So badly I wanted to kiss her, but it was time I put some distance between the two of us. Leaving her was going to be hard enough without continuing this affection throughout the day.

I released my grip and cleared my throat, rolling Iris off of my body and onto the furs. Rising to my feet, I turned my back

to her while I fastened the belt of my kilt and stepped into my boots.

When I turned around, Iris was cinching the bodice of her threadbare dress. My gaze caught on her bare feet and I gripped her arm just as she was about to stand.

“Your feet. Let me wrap them.” I’d see to it that the first thing Elric bought her was a nice pair of shoes—that she’d have all the things she needed.

Iris stretched out her legs and watched me as I worked.

“They look much better,” I said as I finished binding them.

“Hmm?” There was a faraway look in her eyes as she stared at me, her face solemn.

“Your feet. They look much better.”

I went to stand and she grabbed my arm.

“Selvyn, I—” The corner of her mouth pulled down into a frown, those brown eyes pleading with me.

“We should get going,” I said and helped her to her feet.

We fell into the same routine we’d established when we walked the tunnels. Except there was a noticeable tension between us, a silence that seemed to seep deep into our souls. Words we wanted to say, but didn’t permit ourselves to speak.

I wouldn’t even allow myself the comfort of holding her hand. Instead, I kept my distance and minimized my glances at her.

After a while, Iris broke the silence. Her melodic hum drifted through the tunnel. Even though I tried to fight it, I began to hum with her.

The two of us hummed and walked for what felt like an eternity, until a pinprick of light could be seen out in front of us.

“Ah,” I said and squinted my sensitive eyes. “We’re almost there.”

“Oh, lovely,” Iris said quietly, her eyes narrowing at the light off in the distance.

I’d expected her to express some excitement over leaving the caves and seeing the light of day, but there was none to be found. Her face was stoic as she hobbled forward, paying me little to no attention.

As we reached the mouth of the cave, the smell of fresh air greeted me, and the cool breeze of winter swept over my body. From the corner of my eye, I could see Iris shivering in her thin dress.

“Come here.” I removed one of the furs from my pack and draped it over her shoulders.

What I really wanted was to cradle her to my chest and warm her with my body heat, but this wasn’t the time for that.

She clutched the fur tight and continued onward, heading straight for the opening of the cave without offering me another glance.

“My god!” Iris exclaimed as she looked out at the valley.

I came to a stop next to her and couldn’t believe what I saw.

The sloping hills of the valley were coated with a light dusting of snow, and popping up through the thin layer of frost—were irises.

Thousands of irises in various shades of yellow, blue, and purple covered the landscape. It was almost as if someone had planted them just for us.

“I’ve never seen anything like this in my life,” Iris said, her voice an awed whisper.

“Neither have I.” I knelt down and plucked one of the delicate blossoms. “There must have been a warm spell while we were under the mountain. Spring is on its way.”

My hand shook ever so slightly as I tucked the flower behind her ear.

“Th-thank you,” she said, and looked down at her feet.

“Are you going to be alright walking in this? I know—”

She put her hands on her hips and glared at me. “I’ll be fine, Selvyn. Your job here is done. You don’t have to keep looking after me.” With that, she turned on her heel and marched down into the valley.

I watched her for a moment, admiring the confidence in her step. Her braid whipped in the wind and she held the fur tight to her chin.

Her feet had to be freezing.

“Iris!” I yelled as I ran after her.

She paid me no attention.

“Iris! Will you stop it!” I caught her arm and whirled her around to face me.

Her cheeks were red and tears gathered in the corners of her eyes.

“I don’t want you to leave me. Not yet.” Her voice was quiet against the howl of the wind. “Please. Give me one more night.”

Iris dropped to her knees at my feet and dipped her head as she cried.

A part of me shattered, knowing that I was the reason for her pain, for her suffering. It was my fault for getting close to her. *All of this was my fault.*

But one more night. One more night to get her acquainted with Marta and Elric. One more night to show her just how precious she was.

I could give her that.

I lowered to my knees in front of her and pulled her shaking body into my lap.

“Angel,” I whispered as I stroked her hair. “I’ll stay with you tonight. Just one more night. Will that make you happy?”

“Yes.” She sniffled and stared up at me. “One more night.”

I knew that tomorrow would be even harder, but there were so few comforts I allowed myself. This would count as one of them.

“Come on then.” I rose to my feet and began the long walk down through the valley with Iris snuggled tight to my chest.

Even in winter, Belden was just as beautiful as I remembered. The sloping valley that led to Marta and Elric’s was lined with lush forests, with birds nestled amongst the tree branches. Their songs carried through the air, and off in the distance, I could make out the sound of the river; the very same one that Iris and I had fished beneath the mountain the night before.

I looked down at Iris, watching as she stared wide-eyed at this strange, new land, that at first glance, didn’t appear all that strange. She’d find out soon enough, though.

“What do you think, angel? Better than Grafberg?” I had no memories of Grafberg—only the cruelty I’d experienced there—but I was sure it was nothing compared to Belden.

“Yes, much better than Grafberg. I think I’ll like it here, with the nature and the open space.”

On the horizon, you could just barely make out the tall spire of the capital city.

“Look there.” I pointed and her eyes followed the motion. “That’s Elsinore, the capital. There are shops and inns, and a marketplace with all the goods you could ever need.”

“What’s that tall building?” she asked, always the inquisitive thing. “I’ve never seen anything like it.”

“That’s the spire. It’s where the realm’s council meets.”

“Like the king and his advisors?”

I shook my head. “No, there is no king here. This realm is governed by a council of officials elected by the people. They act in the best interests of the realm and everyone that calls it home.”

“Hmm,” was all she said, that faraway look visible in her eyes once again.

The sun began to set just as the valley opened to flat fields, with tiny homes and outbuildings cropping up every so often along the snow-covered road.

It was easy to spot Marta and Elric's home though. One year, he'd painted it bright yellow at Marta's request, and they'd kept it up ever since. Back behind the house sat the barn, and beside it, the cottage.

"Here we are," I told Iris and forced the front gate open through the snow.

Candles flickered in the windows, a thick plume of smoke billowing from the chimney, and before I could reach the front door, Elric had already opened it to greet us.

"Selvyn, mah boy. I was wonderin' when ya'd turn up again," he hollered before slipping his spectacles onto his wrinkled face. "What is that ya've got there?"

"That's Elric," I whispered to Iris as she peered over my arms, trying to get a better look at the seemingly old man.

"Who are you calling 'mah boy,' Elric? If I recall correctly, I've seen nearly as many years as you have." I gave my friend a wry smile and continued up the front walk. "This is Iris. She found herself down in the bottom of the pit."

Elric dipped into a deep bow. "Lovely to meet ya, Iris. Yer safe here on this side of the mountain." He stood with ease, revealing a sour expression on his face. "Them Grafberg bastards. I thought they'd all but stopped the sacrifices. Come on in, then. Marta will be happy to see ya. It's been quite some time and you know how much she loves company."

I nodded my head in thanks, minding the length of my horns and the height of the doorframe, and carried Iris inside.

Though it had been ages since I'd last visited, the house was just as I remembered it. Modest, yet homey, with well-loved furniture and a warm fire burning in the hearth. The scent of fresh herbs and roasted hen wafted out from the kitchen, along with a familiar voice singing an old folk song.

Elric gestured to a worn tufted chair, the one I knew to be his favorite. "Sit 'er here. Best seat in the house."

I sat Iris down and she gave my old friend a shy smile. “Thank you for your kindness. It’s appreciated.”

Again, Elric dipped into a bow. “It’s my pleasure. After all ya’ve been through, it’s the least I can do. Let me fetch Marta. You’re just in time for supper.”

I sat next to Iris, waiting until Elric had disappeared into the kitchen before speaking. “Are you alright?” I asked quietly, and placed a comforting hand on her thigh.

“I’m fine.” She placed her hand overtop of mine and gave me a reassuring smile. “I promise.”

I gripped her hand and brought it up to my lips, placing a soft kiss on the back.

My angel had been through so much, and here she was, in a land where magic was real, sitting in a stranger’s house dressed in nothing but her tattered dress with an animal fur draped over her shoulders. It was enough to rattle any human—but not Iris. She was strong beyond measure.

“Selvyn!” Marta howled and bustled into the living room. Her bright red hair was piled on top of her head, her face flushed from the heat of the kitchen. She wiped her hands on her apron before wrapping her arms around me. “It’s been ages. Oh, how I’ve missed you.”

“I missed you too, Marta,” I grunted through her crushing hug.

She released me, allowing her hands to linger on my forearms as she looked me over. “Are you eating enough? You look thin.”

“I’m fine,” I assured her. That was the thing about Marta; she loved fiercely and with her whole heart.

Marta turned her attention to Iris. “Well aren’t you a pretty little thing.”

A light pink blush coated Iris’s cheeks and she ran her hands along the length of her braid. “Thank you.”

“Marta, this is Iris. She was Grafberg’s latest sacrifice.”

Marta tsked in disgust. “It’s been so long I was hoping they’d abandoned the practice. It’s a shame they’re still stuck in the old ways. I am truly sorry, m’dear.” Her face was sympathetic as she looked down at Iris. “I hope you’re hungry. You’re just in time for dinner.” Marta focused her gaze on me. “Will you be joining us Selvyn? Or do you have other plans for supper in the caves?” There was an edge to her voice, one that came to be after the countless times she’d tried to get me to stay with her and Elric.

“I’ll stay tonight.” I couldn’t help but look at Iris, my heart shattering at the glimmer of hope I found in her eyes. “But tomorrow I’ll return to the caves.”

“Alright then,” Marta said curtly.

She went to help Iris up, but I placed a hand firmly on her shoulder. “Marta, could I have a word?”

Marta nodded and followed me to the bottom of the staircase.

“Is everything alright?” she asked with a dark expression clouding her features.

I scrubbed my hand along the nape of my neck and stared down at my boots. “Iris is in need of a contraceptive.”

“Selvyn.” Marta gripped my arm and I glanced up at her.

She didn’t ask me any questions, but she didn’t need to. My face told her everything she needed to know—that I’d slept with Iris and spilled inside of her.

“I have something I can give her—but it’s her choice if she takes it or not. It’s no one’s choice but hers.”

“Of course,” I said, knowing full well that I’d never take that choice away from her.

“I’ll fetch it for her after dinner. Let’s not keep her waiting.”

We rejoined Iris and Elric to find the two of them making small talk.

“Ah, there they are!” Elric said and rubbed his wrinkled hands together. “Let’s eat.”

Before I could help Iris up, Marta had already taken her hand and was gingerly leading her toward the dining table. She leaned over and whispered something in Iris’s ear that made her laugh, and I was thankful for it, thankful that her and Elric were welcoming my angel with open arms. Because after tonight, they’d be all she had.

CHAPTER II

 Iris's point
of view



For a land full of magic, Belden seemed surprisingly normal. Sure, I had only seen Elric and Marta's home, but I'd expected something different.

Whimsy.

Grandeur.

Certainly something more than a run-of-the-mill farmhouse.

There was one thing that felt off though—the fact that Elric was a shriveled old man and Marta appeared to be about thirty years his junior. The woman had barely a wrinkle and was married to a grizzled old man. Perhaps she was his second, maybe even his third wife.

And exactly how old were they if they'd been helping Selvyn since the sacrifices started?

How old was Selvyn?

I'd have to ask him later. It would be impolite to bring it up over dinner.

I stared across the dining table at Selvyn, marveling at how at ease he seemed in the world outside of his cave. If friends like these cherished him, why did he steal himself away to rot in the dark?

I wouldn't allow myself to dwell on it though. This was our final night together, and I was determined to savor it.

Selvyn caught me staring at him, his golden eyes simmering as his tongue darted out to wet his lips.

I was reminded of the night before, of that forked tongue and all the wicked ways he used it.

Selvyn's nostrils flared, taking deep inhales of my arousal while Elric told him a story. The old man was completely

unaware of the exchange Selvyn and I were having at the dining table—and that made it all the more enticing.

It was at that moment that Marta rushed back into the room, a steaming hen in a ceramic dish floating out in front of her.

I couldn't believe what I was seeing... Surely there were strings or...

Elric caught my dazed expression and let out a booming laugh. "Ah, yes. That's the usual reaction from those that haven't grown up around magic."

The hen landed on the table with a soft thud and Marta nudged her husband's shoulder. "Go on, Elric. Why don't you show her your little trick?"

"Yes, show her Elric," Selvyn urged.

"Alright, alright," Elric huffed. "But you know I much prefer to take on this appearance."

Elric closed his eyes and pursed his lips. A low hum resonated from the back of his throat, and the air grew thick with static—as if the magic was being pulled from the air and gathered around us. A dense fog encompassed Elric's body until the old man was no longer visible. The mist churned around him in great whorls, and when it finally dissipated, *a handsome man no older than thirty sat in his place at the table.*

"What do you think? He asked with a mischievous grin. Even his voice was different; it no longer carried the rasp that came with age.

I had to be seeing things. I rubbed my eyes and Selvyn broke out in laughter.

"Elric here can shift into any humanoid form he wishes. Why he prefers an old man is beyond me," Marta said with a sigh.

"I don't prefer it all the time." Elric winked at his wife and she rolled her eyes.

Normally, I would have laughed, but I was much too stunned for that.

“The ability to shift into any human form,” I mumbled to myself under my breath, then glanced at Marta. “Is there a name for your magic?”

“It’s called levitation.” Using her magic, she lifted a plate from the stack on the table and set it in front of me. “I can move objects and suspend myself off the ground a bit, but I’m not nearly as talented as Elric. He’s a direct descendent of the original folk of this land.”

Selvyn must have noticed the look of confusion that crossed over my face. “The folk were here long before humans. No one knows exactly how or when they came to be, but they’ve lived here for centuries, harnessing the magic of the land for good. When humans first appeared in this realm, the folk tried their best to be amicable with them, to share their gifts, but the humans were reluctant to let go of their old beliefs. Denouncing magic as witchcraft, they chose to live separate from the folk and settled across the mountain. That’s how it’s been ever since.”

Both Elric and Marta nodded their heads in agreement.

Magic.

The folk.

The stubbornness of humans.

The last of which wasn’t at all surprising.

“Well,” Marta said, and ran her hands over her apron before taking a seat next to Elric. “Enough talk of that. It’s time to eat. The two of you could use a proper meal.”

She served me first, placing a generous portion of hen and roast vegetables on my plate, then covering it with a heavy pour of gravy. It smelled divine, and I reminded myself to exercise restraint, rather than just gobbling down the food like a starving dog.

Once everyone’s plates were filled, I waited for Elric to lead us in prayer, but instead—he, Marta, and Selvyn began to

eat.

“Is something wrong, Iris?” Elric asked through a hefty mouthful of food, his eyes analyzing my untouched plate.

“Shit,” Selvyn murmured. “It isn’t customary for the folk to say a blessing before they eat, Iris. The food is seen as the blessing.”

That was all the explanation I needed.

Grabbing my fork, I enthusiastically speared a succulent piece of chicken and placed it in my already watering mouth. It was rich and flavorful, with accents of butter, rosemary, and cracked black pepper, the luxury of which I hadn’t experienced for quite some time.

The moment I swallowed my first bite, Marta looked at me for approval. “How is it, dear?”

“It’s delicious. Truly.” I piled up my fork again, earning me a wide smile from Marta. “Thank you,” I said before shoving it into my mouth.



WHEN THE CHICKEN was picked down to nothing but bones and everyone had eaten their fill, Elric rose from the table.

“Lovely meal as always, dearie,” he said, grabbing his wife’s shoulders and placing a soft kiss on her cheek.

“Yes, it was wonderful. I forgot how much I missed fresh hen.” Selvyn took another deep swig from his mug. “And mulled wine.”

“If you’d just move to the village—” Elric started but Selvyn waved him off, and he didn’t push the issue.

Marta used her magic to begin clearing the table; the plates and the chicken carcass floated lazily through the air and into the kitchen. “Elric, why don’t you and Selvyn go ready the cottage while I get Iris some fresh clothes, hmm?”

“I think not. Iris and I will sleep in the hayloft in the barn,” Selvyn huffed.

Marta bolted out of her seat. She leaned over, her hands planted firmly on the table, and glared at Selvyn. “You’ll not have Iris sleep in the hayloft when there is a warm cottage and a comfy bed. This has gone on long enough, Selvyn.” There was a bite to her voice, one that suggested she wouldn’t accept anything from Selvyn other than compliance.

The two stared at one another for a few tense moments, until Selvyn finally spoke.

“Fine,” he said through pursed lips. He stood and sauntered over to me, bending down to whisper in my ear. “Marta may get you some fresh clothes, angel, but once I get you in that bed—” The pointed tips of his teeth grazed my ear, making my breath hitch. “They’re coming right off.”

My skin broke out in gooseflesh, the promise of what was to come once we were alone in the cottage sending a quiver of need straight to my core.

Elric stared at me with raised brows, a delighted smile curling up the corner of his lips.

Was it possible that he could smell my arousal like Selvyn could?

I could feel myself growing hot and I stared down at the floor.

Perhaps he had superior hearing and could make out exactly what Selvyn had whispered.

Selvyn cleared his throat as he rose, his attention turning from me to Elric. “Let’s get on with it then,” he grumbled under his breath.

Elric’s expression sobered. “Right, on with it...” I noticed something akin to sadness in his eyes, the way they went misty as his words trailed off, but it quickly passed.

“I’ll walk her out as soon as she’s cleaned up,” Marta said with a smile. She bustled over to where I sat, her hand coming to rest over my shoulder and giving it a reassuring squeeze.

For a moment, Selvyn glanced between the two of us, almost as if he was wary of leaving me.

Hope sparked in me at his apprehension—hope that maybe he'd rethink leaving me tomorrow.

“You get the cottage warmed up. I'll be just fine here with Marta.” I met Selvyn's gaze, offering him a warm smile that seemed to quell his unease over leaving me.

He nodded in agreement and once Elric had gathered a stack of fresh linens and shrugged on his coat, the two headed out the door.

“Dearie me,” Marta huffed the moment the door shut behind them. “It seems you've put quite a spell on Selvyn.”

“He's never been like this before with any of the others?” I looked up to find Marta shaking her head.

“Never. There's something about the way he looks at you, m'dear.”

She extended her hand out to me and I held it tight as I followed her upstairs. Side by side, we shuffled down the hallway and into one of the rooms. A perfectly made bed sat in the middle of the room, with a small mirrored vanity, wardrobe, and low dresser taking up the remaining space. It was warm and inviting—just what I expected from Marta and Elric.

“Let's see here...” Marta hummed as she sifted through the wardrobe. She pulled out a clean white nightgown and handed it to me. “Go on and change into this.”

She turned her back to give me privacy and I pulled the threadbare remnants of my old dress over my head as fast as I could, eager to never see it again.

As soon as I was changed, I gently grabbed her elbow.

“Sit down right here, love,” Marta pulled a tufted velvet stool from beneath the vanity and patted the seat.

I sat down in front of the mirror, taking in my reflection for the first time in what felt like ages.

My familiar deep brown eyes stared back at me. The same porcelain skin and full lips that I was used to—but there was something different about me.

I looked healthy.

During our time under the mountain, Selvyn had cared for me better than I'd ever managed to care for myself. He'd shown me compassion, kindness, a tenderness that my clients would have never dreamed of extending.

I hadn't wilted in the time I'd spent with him in the dark.

I'd bloomed.

Tears welled up in my eyes and a choked sob escaped me, drawing Marta's attention.

"Oh, m'dear," she tsked, rushing over to hug me with her arms overflowing with nightgowns and dresses. "You've been through it, but I promise it'll be better from here on out."

I nodded and used the fur to dab at my eyes. "Yes, it'll be much better from here on out."

But I was lying to myself.

A future without Selvyn seemed as bleak as my past.

Marta hugged me one last time, then laid the collection of garments on the vanity in a heap. "I figured I'd let you pick out a few things until we can get you into town. They might be a little big, but at least they're warm and clean."

I ran my fingers over the stack of clothes, marveling at the jewel tones, rich furs, velvets, and fine embellishments that adorned each piece.

Even the nightgowns were embroidered, with dainty pine trees, animals, and flowers circling the hem.

They were nothing like the muted palette of stiff fabrics I was used to.

"These are lovely," I told Marta, my fingers trailing over an ivy leaf embroidered in shiny gold thread.

“Thank you. My sister is a seamstress, so I often find myself with more dresses than I need. You’re welcome to keep whatever you’d like.”

“I appreciate it.” I gripped Marta’s arm. “Truly I do.”

Her eyes twinkled as she looked at the two of us in the mirror. “It’s my pleasure. If you’re dear to Selvyn, you’re dear to Elric and me.” She tucked several of the hairs that had slipped loose from my braid behind my ear. “Why don’t you let me tidy up your hair a bit and I’ll tell you about how we came to know Selvyn, hmm?”

I nodded, eager to be pampered and hear more about Selvyn’s past.

Marta untied the strip of leather at the end of my braid and used her fingers to loosen the strands. She grabbed a silver brush from the vanity, running the bristles through my hair in slow passes.

“Elric and I met Selvyn when he was still a young man. One of the first times he found his way out of the cave, we caught him pulling vegetables from out of our garden.” She laughed to herself at the memory. “He was wary, wild almost, like a skittish cat that had never experienced even a bit of affection. Elric and I began to leave food for him at the mouth of the cave, and over time he grew to trust us. We knew he was a cambion, and we helped him learn to control his magic. He’d join us for supper, borrow books from our bookshelf, and on occasion, he’d even accompany us into town. But no matter how deep our bond grew, we couldn’t get Selvyn to leave Dalwick Cave. He viewed it as his atonement for his mother’s death.”

She set down the brush and began to gather my hair between her fingers. “When the sacrifices began, Selvyn would lead them through the caves and here to Belden. He’d show up at our door with frightened, outcast humans, and Elric and I would get them acclimated to our world.”

Marta rummaged through a little jewelry box on top of the vanity, pulling out a gold hairpin lined with pearls. It reminded

me of the trinkets I'd had as a young girl, before my father squandered our fortune away.

“Marta, I can't—”

“Shh. I'd like nothing more than for you to have it.”

Before I could object, she wove several strands of hair together and used the pin to hold them in place. I couldn't comprehend why Selvyn would subject himself to such isolation, especially when he had such wonderful friends.

I ran my fingers over the hairpin and stared at Marta's reflection in the mirror. “Selvyn wouldn't stay here with you and Elric?”

“For a long time, we tried. One summer we built the cottage, hoping that the promise of having his own space might entice him to stay, but not even that was enough. It doesn't come from a place of feeling unappreciative, it's more like Selvyn doesn't deem himself worthy, if that makes sense? It's similar to how he feels about you, m'dear. He doesn't think he's deserving of love.”

It brought me to tears.

If anyone was worthy of love, it was Selvyn.

“Do you think he'll ever stay?” I asked, wanting more than anything for Marta to offer me some glimmer of hope.

She tied a length of velvet ribbon to the end of my braid, and gripping my shoulders, she leaned in. “We haven't given up hope, and you shouldn't either.” Marta stood up and her body stiffened. “That reminds me. Selvyn mentioned you might be in need of a contraceptive tonic?”

I nodded. “Please. I'd appreciate it.”

Marta didn't pass judgment or press me for more information, she simply drifted out of the bedroom and down the hall. When she returned, she presented me with a vial full of a deep blue liquid.

“Go ahead and take that dearie. Your cycle will start in a few days and you'll be right as rain.”

I popped the cork and drank it down, making sure to drain the vial of every last drop. Unlike Selvyn's elixirs, this one was palatable, with a slightly sweet aftertaste.

She took the vial from me and smiled. "Alright then. Let's find you some stockings and some shoes and we'll join them out in the cottage."

CHAPTER 12

 Selvyn's
point of
view



My heart was heavy as Elric and I trudged through the snow to the cottage. Tonight would be my final night with Iris, and from now on, the cottage would be her home.

It sat cold and vacant, kept separate from the farmhouse by a wide field. Thick icicles hung from the eaves of the thatched roof, and I stared up at them while Elric fiddled with a heavy ring of keys before finally unlocking the door. He stepped inside, and after hesitating, I followed behind him.

“It’s been some time since I’ve been inside of here,” Elric said. “I know Marta comes in occasionally to tidy.”

I held out my hand, calling to my magic and forming a tiny blaze in the center of my palm that lit up the interior of the cottage.

It was just as I remembered it. Elric and Marta had taken great care in making sure the space would be comfortable for me, raising the door frame and ceilings so that I could stand comfortably. A bed long enough to accommodate my horns sat beneath a wide window. Across from it was the fireplace, with a small table and a bookshelf taking up the remaining space.

“I’ll make the bed if you start the fire.” Elric’s clipped tone suggested it was more of a command than a request.

I didn’t acknowledge him, just huffed and set to work stacking the wood in the fireplace.

Elric fluffed the mattress before spreading a crisp white sheet overtop. “You should stay,” he said quietly.

“I don’t need you telling me what to do, Elric,” I snapped. With my focus on the fire, I imagined flames overtaking the stack of wood until it ignited with a pop and cast the room in orange light.

Elric threw a pillow down onto the bed and marched over to where I was crouched next to the hearth. “You’re being an ass. You realize that? A stubborn ass. I’ve seen the way you look at her, Sel.”

I shot up to my full height and peered down at Elric, my eyes narrowing into a sharp glare and my chest heaving with anger. “I’ve told you, I must pay my penance!” The words slipped past my lips with a growl, but Elric, knowing me too well, remained unfazed by my little display.

“How much longer are you going to go on like this? You’re just going to leave her here and forget about her? Hide in the caves and torture yourself some more, hmm?” He was shouting now. For the first time in all our years of friendship, Elric had finally lost his temper with me. “Do you think that’s fair to her? Is it fair to you?”

At that moment, the false reality I’d been living, the lies I’d told myself, completely unraveled. Iris deserved more—*and I deserved more.*

There was no way I could leave her.

I dropped to my knees and my body trembled with a sob.

“It’s time to move on, Selvyn. It’s what your mum would want. She’d want you to be happy.” Elric placed a comforting hand on my shoulder. “We can fix this. We’ll think of a proper plan and fix it. You know me and Marta will do whatever we can, and perhaps Iris can help.” Elric dropped down to his knees in front of me. “I just want you to have the life you deserve.”

I lurched forward and wrapped him in a tight hug. “Thank you, my friend,” I whispered.

“You’re welcome. And it felt good to finally tell you what an insufferable ass you can be at times,” he said with a laugh.

There was a gentle knock on the door and we both rose to our feet.

Elric cleared his throat, his gaze traveling to the door. “Talk to Iris tonight, and then tomorrow we’ll tell Marta over breakfast.”

I nodded my head in understanding, wrapping Elric in another quick hug before I opened the door.

I was unprepared for the sight that greeted me.

Iris stood in the doorway, dressed in a white night dress with a thick wool coat draped over her shoulders—and a pair of worn boots on her feet. Marta had braided her hair into a series of intricate plaits, as was common with the folk, with a delicate hairpin holding several of the braids in place. Snowflakes gathered in her hair and on her shoulders, and her cheeks were flushed red from the cold.

“Iris,” I breathed her name. “You look beautiful.”

“I know.” She flashed me a coy smile, her eyes alight with mischief and her teeth digging into her lower lip.

It seemed she hadn't forgotten my promise.

Marta laughed from behind her. “Are you going to stand there staring at her or are you going to let the poor girl inside? It's cold out here.”

I stepped to the side and ushered the two of them into the cottage.

“This is lovely,” Iris said the moment she stepped inside. She ran her fingers over the exposed beams and stared up at the raised ceiling.

“I'm glad you like it, and you're welcome to stay for as long as you'd like.” The loving smile Marta gave Iris made my heart swell.

I looked forward to seeing her reaction tomorrow, when I finally told her what she'd been waiting so long to hear.

I took Iris's coat, hanging it on a peg on the back of the cottage door before turning back towards my friends. “Thank you again for dinner, and for everything else you've done.”

“Yes, thank you,” Iris said with a nod.

Marta rubbed her hand along Iris's arm. “It's our pleasure.”

“Well,” Elric said with a sigh. “We'll let you two get some rest. Join us for breakfast in the morning when you're ready.”

“Goodnight. And thank you again for the kindness you’ve shown me.” Iris ran her hands over her braid and looked down at her dress.

“We take care of our friends here, m’dear. Goodnight,” Marta said, and with that, her and Elric stepped through the cottage door and out into the night.

I watched them leave, waiting until they were halfway to the old farmhouse before scooping Iris into my arms.

“Mmm, my angel. How I missed you.” I hummed and nuzzled her temple. “This hairstyle, these clothes—they suit you.”

“You think so?”

I nodded and pressed a kiss to her forehead.

“Thank you.” Her voice was husky, and I could smell the sweet scent of her arousal wafting off of her.

“How are your feet?” I asked as I slipped off her borrowed shoes.

“They’re feeling much better.”

She laughed as I placed her on the bed and positioned myself overtop of her. I took a deep breath, staring into her chestnut eyes while I tried to find my words.

“Iris, I—”

I felt her breath hitch. She was hanging on my every word.

“I’ve decided to stay.” I wrapped my hand around the nape of her neck and brought my forehead to rest against hers. “I’m going to stay here with you, and Elric, and Marta.”

“Really?” she asked, her lip quivering.

“Yes, angel, really.”

She wrapped her arms around my neck, hugging me tight while we cried. “It’s selfish of me, but I was hoping you’d change your mind.”

“It isn’t selfish.” I sniffled, pulling back to wipe away her tears. “I deserve to have a life, a real life outside of the caves,

and I want that life to be with you.”

I leaned forward and kissed her, swallowing the sharp gasp that left her the moment our lips made contact. Our hands roved over each other’s bodies, slow at first, but growing more frantic as we kissed. The slithering length of my tongue wrapped around hers, stroking and massaging, reminding her exactly what sort of sinful pleasure I was capable of.

“Selvyn,” she groaned as I palmed her breast through her gown.

My cocks were painfully hard beneath my kilt and Iris’s saccharine scent filled the cottage.

I pulled away and stared down at her, my chest heaving and my composure hanging by a thread. I wanted to rip off her clothes and ravage her, but I had to exercise restraint. The nightgown was a gift, and I wouldn’t be the one to ruin it.

“Undress for me,” I whispered and kissed her neck, biting the soft skin just enough to elicit a moan from her. “Let me worship you and that tight little cunt.”

I rolled off of her, watching from the bed as she rose to her feet.

Iris stared at me, quiet and confident, and slowly undid the necktie of her nightgown. She allowed the garment to slip down over her shoulders, but held her chest, keeping her breasts and the rest of her body covered.

“Beg for it,” she whispered.

Beg for it.

My tail twitched back and forth with excitement and a smirk curled up one corner of my lips. If this was her taking back some of her control—her power—I was happy to oblige.

I stepped out of bed and slowly lowered to my knees in front of her. Digging my hands into the soft globes of her ass, I pulled her close, until my nose was pressed against her stomach.

“Iris.” My voice was low and steady. “Please let me see you. Let me fuck you with my tongue. I beg you—allow me to

please you.”

She didn't utter a word, she simply grabbed my horn and tilted my head back so I was staring up at her. Releasing her grip on the nightgown, she let the fabric slide down her body and pool around her ankles, exposing her nude form.

“Thank you,” I said with a breathy sigh and trailed kisses down her stomach, stopping at the patch of dark hair that sat just above her cunt. I buried my nose in her hair, sucking in deep inhales of her scent. “Do you know what torture it was to sit across from you at dinner? To know that I couldn't lift you onto the table and feast on your pussy right then and there?”

She shuddered, a light moan slipping past her lips.

“It seems as though my filthy little whore likes that idea.” I let out a dark laugh and moved closer to her cunt, using the tip of my tongue to tease her clit with slow strokes.

“That fucking tongue,” she rasped.

“Grab my horns, angel.”

She held onto them and I hiked one of her legs over my shoulder, burying my face deep in her cunt. I slithered my tongue inside her, savoring the musky sweet flavor. Using my tail, I teased the tips of her nipples, alternating between fast and slow touches.

“Selvyn,” she moaned and rocked her hips.

“That's right, ride my face. Scream my name while you come for me.”

I called to my magic, lighting up the tip of my thumb with a tiny flame, and ran it over Iris's thigh. When I was certain it wouldn't burn her, I slid my hand between her legs and flicked the warm pad of my thumb over her clit.

“Yes, Selvyn! Yes!” she cried out as she found her release, her body quivering from the force of her orgasm.

I continued to work her through it, gently brushing my tail over the peaked tips of her breasts, and lapping at her cunt until she stilled.

I'd have to use my magic more often.

“How was that?” I kissed her inner thigh before placing her leg back on the floor.

Iris released my horns and peered down at where I knelt before her. Her chest was heaving, and I gave her a smug smile—knowing just how good it was.

“You—you used your magic,” she panted and I gave a slow nod.

I stood up, my cocks pressing into her stomach from beneath my kilt. “Now that you’ve had a taste, do you want to see what else I can do with my magic, angel?” I ran my hand along the column of her neck, leaning in to whisper against the shell of her ear. “We can have some fun while I fuck your tight little cunt?”

“Yes.” She trembled and more of that thick, sweet scent curled up my nostrils.

I knew just what I wanted to do to her.

“Wait right here.”

CHAPTER 13

 Iris's point
of view



I stood naked by the fire, watching as Selvyn exited through the front door of the cottage and out into the night.

Where was he going?

A loud crack sounded outside, the door and the windows of the cottage shuddering slightly.

Selvyn returned, the winter wind blustering at his back as he shut the door behind him. In one of his hands he held *something* wrapped in a length of linen.

He hid whatever it was he was holding behind his back. “Bend over and put your hands on the bed, angel.”

I sucked in a deep breath, positioning myself so I faced the frosted window pane with my hands gripping the edge of the bed.

I turned my head to watch him, but he tsked. “Forward, Iris.”

I complied, focusing my gaze on the pitch black night beyond the window.

There was the thud of his boots along the floorboards, followed by the heavy clanking of the belt that held up his kilt. I could feel the heat radiating off of his body as he stepped up behind me.

“Part your legs for me.” His rough palm slid over my backside and I arched into his touch, spreading my legs wide.

Selvyn’s warm fingers slipped between my legs, the clawed tips of his fingers trailing back and forth through my already wet folds.

I threw my head back with a breathy sigh and he laughed.

“More, angel?” he asked, and I nodded.

He pulled the warmth of his hand away, replacing it with the stinging kiss of cold.

“Ahh,” I moaned. “What is that?”

Selvyn laughed again, a dark chuckle that made my spine tingle, and brought something up beside my face. “Close your eyes and open your mouth.”

I clamped my eyes shut, opening my mouth as wide as I could. Cold bit at my lips as he forced a long piece of ice past them and into my mouth. He plunged it in and out, until water dribbled down my chin.

Curiosity getting the better of me, I opened one eye slightly to sneak a peek at the object.

It was an icicle—and he’d tied one end with cloth to keep it from melting in his grip.

I’d seen them hanging from the roof of the cottage, but I would have never dreamed of using one like this.

It was sinful.

Depraved.

And from the throbbing of my cunt, I absolutely loved it.

Selvyn removed the icicle from my mouth and ran it along my neck, making me shiver. “Do you want to feel it inside of you, Iris?” He purred.

“Please,” I hummed and wiggled my hips.

“Lean forward.”

Doing as he instructed, I leaned forward until the tips of my nipples grazed the quilt covering the bed.

“No, like this angel.”

Selvyn gently pushed me down until my chest rested on the mattress and my ass was up in the air.

“That’s it.” He hummed and ran the icicle up and down my crack, sending droplets of water trickling down my thighs.

With his other hand he gripped my cheek, pulling them apart slightly, and I felt the frigid pressure of the icicle on my

hole. He circled it several times, then slowly pushed it inside of me.

“Fuck,” I moaned at the brisk intrusion.

Selvyn pulsed it in and out, being sure not to force it too deep. “Is this okay, angel?”

“Yes, feels good,” I hummed. “But I want you to fuck me.”

He tsked and ran the head of one of his cocks through my folds. “Patience, angel. I’ll give you what you need.”

With the icicle still planted in my ass, Selvyn eased the warm head of his upper cock inside me, leaving the lower cock to dangle beneath us. My breath hitched as the ribbing along his shaft forced its way past my entrance and rubbed against that sensitive spot inside of me with each light thrust of his hips.

The contrast of his warm cock on one side, and the chill of the icicle on the other was pure bliss.

Selvyn gripped my waist, the sharp tips of his claws digging into my skin as he seated himself inside of me.

“You feel like heaven,” he groaned, snapping his hips, sending my ass rippling with the contact.

I moaned with each thrust, savoring the sensation, but I was slightly distracted by the fact that one of his cocks was just *hanging there*.

“S-Selvyn. Stop for a second,” I squeaked.

He stilled immediately and leaned overtop of me. “Are you alright? We can stop if—”

“No, I’m fine. But I want *both*.”

Despite the fact that he was trying to stifle it, I could feel him laughing. “You want to take both of my cocks in this tight little pussy?”

“Please. Can we just try it?”

“Alright,” he sighed. “But I don’t want to hurt you.”

“You won’t.”

He pulled out of my cunt, and I could hear him stroking his cocks together, making sure they were wet and ready for me.

“Deep breaths, Iris,” he said and ran them along my pussy.

As he began to ease them inside, I sucked in a tight breath.

They were so warm, so thick—and the ridges.

“Fuck!” I hissed through gritted teeth as my cunt stretched around him, my fingers white-knuckling the quilt beneath me.

“Keep going?” he asked, and I nodded, my jaw clenched too tight to speak.

Selvyn rocked slightly, pushing them in further. Between the icicle and his cocks, I could have sworn I was being split in two, but then—I felt the warm sensation of Selvyn’s finger fluttering over my clit.

“Yes,” I moaned as my body relaxed, the searing pain replaced by pleasure.

“You take me so well, angel. You were fucking made for me,” he rasped, forcing his cocks deeper, until they were buried inside of me as far as they could go.

Selvyn started slow, with light thrusts that matched the rhythm of his fingers against my clit, giving me time to adjust. Gradually he increased his pace, and with each snap of his hips, I could feel the ridges rubbing inside of me. Again and again, they dragged over that spot, driving me closer to my release.

“Such a good little whore,” he grunted, slamming his hips against my ass. “I’m going to fill you with my cum. Have this pussy dripping with it for days.”

The very thought of Selvyn filling me—marking me with his cum—was enough to push me over the edge. I threw my head back and cried out, the walls of my pussy gripping him tight.

Selvyn leaned overtop of me, his cocks spasming as he groaned in my ear. “Take my cum, angel. Take every last drop.”

I reached up to wrap an arm around Selvyn's neck as we rocked through the last waves of our release.

He tilted my head to the side, kissing along my jawline while he eased his cocks out of me. I could feel his cum flowing out of my cunt and trickling down my legs.

"Let me take this out first and then I'll get you cleaned up," he said. Smoothing his palm over my backside, he reached between my cheeks and grabbed the icicle. "Deep breath, Iris."

I took a deep breath in and Selvyn slowly removed the icicle—or what was left of it.

"Stay right there," he said before disappearing out the front door of the cottage as naked as the day he was born.

"Selvyn—" I started, but he'd already shut the door behind him.

Regardless of whatever magical abilities he had, surely the cold wouldn't feel great on his damp cocks.

After a few moments, he stepped back through the door, greeting me with a wide smile and one hand cupped over his cocks.

"It's a bit chilly," he said.

"Selvyn," I laughed. "You could have put your kilt on first. It's freezing outside."

He stepped in front of the fire and stretched, swaying his hips back and forth while he warmed himself. "It was only for a moment, but thank you for worrying about me, angel."

He walked over to his bag, and after rummaging through it, he pulled out a clean rag.

Selvyn knelt behind me, humming the song I taught him as he gently wiped away his cum and any water left behind from the icicle. When he was finished, he placed a soft kiss on my backside before rising to his feet.

"All done." He tossed the rag into the fire and watched me climb onto the bed.

I stared up at him, marveling at the silhouette of his body against the glow of the fire. Each flicker of the flames highlighted the broad planes of his muscles and sparked the gold in his eyes to life.

But it wasn't just his looks.

Selvyn was caring, considerate, *funny*.

He was all the things I never thought I'd have.

And hopefully, he'd stay with me forever.

Forever.

Exactly how long was that?

"Come here," I asked, beckoning him onto the bed with a curl of my finger.

He climbed overtop of me so that he was laying closest to the window, and pulled the quilt over us both.

"Everything alright?" he asked, tucking me tight against him. "Are you sore?"

I slid my hand up his neck and ran my thumb over the coarse hairs of his beard. "I'm fine. It's just—" I bit my lip before sputtering out, "How old are you?"

"Iris." Laughter rumbled out of his chest. "Why do you ask? And of all times, why right now?"

I stared deep into those golden pools of his. "You look so young. And Marta and Elric, too. But I know you're not. You have to be at least seventy. Maybe even older than that."

His expression softened and he let out a deep sigh. "I'm around seventy-six, give or take a few years. Marta and Elric are much older than that. It has something to do with the magic. It slows down aging."


Tears welled up in my eyes. "So what you're saying is I'll die before you."

Selvyn gripped my chin and pressed his forehead to mine. "We don't know that for sure. But what I do know is that we've been waiting our entire lives to find one another.

Whatever time I have with you is precious. My life begins and ends with you.”

He kissed me, slow and tender, letting me know how much he meant it—confirming my life would begin and end with him too.

CHAPTER 14

 Selvyn's
point of
view



I woke the following morning to the crowing of a rooster piercing my sensitive ears. Iris was snuggled next to me, her face just barely visible from where she was buried beneath the quilt.

Sunlight streamed through the thick panes of the window and lit up her face, her full lashes casting delicate shadows onto her cheeks.

She looked so different from when I first stumbled upon her in the caves. The bruising along her brow had faded and her cut was mostly healed, but it was something else.

Like she was truly at peace.

I savored the moment, and the fact that from now on, this would be our new normal.

“Iris,” I hummed and stroked her cheek. “Iris, it’s time for us to start our day.”

She stirred, blinking her brown eyes a few times before squinting up at me. “Good morning.”

“Good morning, angel. Did you sleep well?”

She gave me a shy smile and wrapped her arms around my neck. “Of course I did.”

“Are you in any pain?” I asked, trailing my tail over the dip of her waist.

Iris bit her lip. “Not really. I’m just—uncomfortable.”

I nodded in understanding. “After breakfast, I’ll have Marta fetch you a tonic.”

I climbed overtop of her, giving her a quick kiss before I rolled out of bed. Her eyes followed my every movement, watching intently as I buckled my kilt and tied my boots.

“Is everything alright?” I asked, kneeling down beside the bed.

“Everything is fine.” She ran her fingers through my beard and gazed into my eyes. “The best it’s ever been actually.”

She was everything.

How did I ever think I could leave her?

She gave me one last bright smile before throwing off the quilt and rising with a stretch. Her braid hung down the middle of her back, the golden hairpin Marta had given her still holding tight to the strands. Humming to herself, she thumbed through the stack of dresses, pulling out a white gown with a deep emerald bodice.

“Do you think Elric told Marta?” she asked as she pulled the dress over her head.

I shook my head. “No, she would have burst through the door of the cottage last night if he had.”

Iris made a choked sound and grabbed her chest. “That would have been embarrassing.”

“It would have,” I said with a laugh. “But Elric knows I should be the one to tell her. She’s waited a long time for this.”

Iris laced up her boots before slipping on her coat. “Then let’s not keep her waiting.”

Together, we traipsed through the snow to the farmhouse, where a thick plume of smoke was already wafting from the chimney.

I lifted my hand to knock on the door, but it whooshed open before my fist could make contact.

“Selvyn,” Elric huffed. “You know you don’t have to knock. Just come on in. Especially when we’re expecting you.” He stepped to the side and ushered us through the doorway.

“Go on and have a seat at the table, m’dears. I’ll be out with breakfast in a jif,” Marta bellowed from the kitchen.

The three of us sat at the table, with Iris sitting next to me and Elric taking his place across from us.

He was in his youthful form today, and from the looks of the wide smile on his face, he was practically bubbling over with excitement.

That explained why he was so quick to come to the door.

Iris glanced at Elric, then at me, before forcing a tight smile. “Well, breakfast smells good.”

Elric tsked and rubbed his temples. “I swear if she doesn’t come in here soon...I don’t know how much longer I can wait.”

“Elric,” I said with a laugh. “You’ve waited all these years. What’s a few minutes longer.”

“What can wait?” Marta hurried out from the kitchen with baskets and plates loaded with food floating along behind her. “Don’t tell me you’re already rushing back to the caves, Selvyn. Surely you can wait until after breakfast.”

Iris bit her lip, fighting back a smile.

“Why don’t you have a seat, Marta,” I said.

She set the dishes down on the table with a loud thud and put her hands on her hips. “What is it?” she asked, cocking her head and leveling her gaze on me. “Is everything alright?”

I decided I should keep it simple.

“I’m staying.”

She slapped her hand over her mouth, rushing over to me with a squeal and wrapping her arms around me. “Oh, Selvyn,” she murmured with her face buried in the crook of my neck. “I’ve been waiting for so long to hear that.”

“I know you have.” I hugged her tighter. “Thank you for never giving up.”

Marta pulled away and blotted the tears running down her face with her apron. “I’m just happy you’ll get the chance to have a normal life.” She hurried over to Iris and enveloped her in a hug. “This is everything we hoped for, m’dear.”

“It is,” Iris said, “but we still have to come up with a plan.”

Elric nodded in agreement and Marta took her seat beside him at the table.

Now that I’d let go of my guilt and my remorse, *accepted* the fact that I deserved more, I could finally go about this rationally.

“Well.” I ran my fingers through my beard, contemplating the best course of action. “Before Iris, it had been quite some time before the last sacrifice.”

“Yes,” Iris said, “and a big part of that was the new priest exerting his power. I don’t think it’ll be a regular occurrence.”

“Ahh,” Elric hummed. “He wanted to send a message.” He sat his elbows on the table and rested his chin on his fists. “What if we come up with a schedule for checking the caves? You can teach Marta and I the route and we’ll help.”

Marta nodded enthusiastically. “Yes, we can mark the path with signs or maybe hang banners along the cave walls.”

I smiled at the two of them, grateful for the unwavering kindness they showed those in need—myself included. “I think that would be a good place to start.”

In truth, anything would be better than returning to my old life.

“Well now that that’s settled, let’s eat.” Marta placed a sweetroll on her plate before passing the basket around the table.

Iris’s eyes went wide when I sat the basket down in front of her. “These look delicious.”

“Thank you,” Marta beamed. “They’re an old family recipe. Selvyn isn’t big on sweets, but I’d be happy to teach you how to make them.”

“I’d love that,” Iris said before taking a bite so big it drew a boisterous laugh out of me.

I looked around the table, astounded by the fact that this was my life now. I’d get to experience the sunshine—and the

seasons—spending each and every day with the people that I cared about.

With the woman I loved.

My angel.

My flower.

My Iris.

EPILOGUE



Selvyn's point of
view

ONE YEAR LATER

I sat propped up in the window of the cottage, the summer sun warming my skin, and a good book clasped between my hands. It had quickly become my preferred spot for reading, and often Iris would join me, the two of us sitting in companionable silence while we lost ourselves in stories.

My ears perked up at the low whine coming from the cradle next to our bed.

“Ahh, she wakes,” I said, marking the page in my book before padding over to where our daughter rested.

Our daughter.

Each time I thought about Wren, the tiny life that Iris and I had created, it made my heart swell. The love I felt for the two of them was deeper and more intense than anything I’d ever experienced.

I scooped Wren out of the cradle, marveling at her pudgy cheeks and long eyelashes like it was the first time I’d ever seen her.

She rooted, moving her head from side to side with her mouth wide open, seeking out her mother’s breast. Her tail flicked back and forth beneath the blanket, her cries growing desperate.

“Someone’s hungry,” I hummed.

There was nothing I could do about that.

“Let’s go find your mama.”

I carried her out of the cottage and through the fields, curving my body overtop of her to shield her from the afternoon sun.

Off in the distance, Marta stood beside Iris, giving her another lesson on how to control her magic. They were surrounded by a sea of wildflower blooms; bright pinks, purples, and yellows, all sprouting from the earth around them.

Iris turned when she heard Wren's wails, a smile spreading over her face as she rushed across the meadow to meet us.

"Has she been awake long?" Iris asked, already unlacing the neck of her dress.

I shook my head and handed her the babe. "Not long at all."

"Shhh," Iris cooed. "Mama's here." She lowered to the ground and brought Wren to her breast, the baby's cries ceasing the moment she latched.

Motherhood suited her, and if she ever wished for more children, I'd happily oblige.

I sat down next to them and plucked a daisy, taking a deep sniff of the flower before tucking it into Iris's braid.

"I missed you," she said and pulled me in for a kiss.

"I missed you, too."

I did each time I was away from her—no matter how long it was.

How did I ever think I'd be able to leave her? To give all of this up for a lonely life down in the caves?

Marta finally joined us, plopping herself down on the grass with a heavy sigh. "This damn summer heat will be the death of me." She puffed out a breath and ran her hands over the flowers. "Iris is really catching on quick, isn't she?"

"Yes, much faster than I did."

Iris's affinity for plants had presented itself one afternoon when I'd caught my horn on the doorframe of Marta and Elric's house. While I rubbed my aching head, she'd broken out in a fit of laughter that had flowers blooming all the way up the front walk. Marta had been helping her hone her skills ever since.

Iris held out her left hand and wiggled her fingers, coaxing a deep violet flower out of the ground.

An iris.

The sun caught on the thin gold band that wrapped around her ring finger. The ring I'd presented her with when I asked her to share her life with me—to which she'd happily agreed.

In the months since our decision to stay in Belden, things had changed drastically.

We still patrolled the caves, but there were no other sacrifices. It appeared that Iris and Elric were right in their assessment of the situation.

Yet the threat of *what if* continued to linger in my mind.

The residents of Grafberg, humans with thoughts, and dreams, and aspirations—they didn't deserve that intimidation looming over them.

I was pulled out of my thoughts by the thunderous sound of hooves pounding against the dirt off in the distance.

"I think Elric is back from Elsinore." My ears twitched as the noise drew nearer. "He's in a hurry, too."

Elric had left for the trade capital early this morning with a cart full of flowers and the promise that he'd be back in time for supper. I'd offered to go with him, but he insisted I take a day for myself.

Marta groaned as she rose to her feet. "Let's go on and meet him then."

I took Iris's hand, helping her to stand with Wren still at her breast.

Just as we passed the cottage, Elric ran through the fields to meet us, frantically waving something in his hand.

"I've got it! I've got it!" he screamed like a madman, racing toward us.

"What is it, Elric?" I asked as he came to a stop in front of us.

"One moment," he huffed, bent over with his hands on his knees, trying to catch his breath. He looked up at Iris and she nodded, smiling.

Elric passed me a thick envelope sealed with the council's official wax stamp. I opened it and read over the letter.

Selvyn Browne,

It was brought to the attention of this council that you have dutifully spent your life escorting the human sacrifices of Grafberg to safety.

Recently, a trade agreement was reached with Grafberg on the condition that all sacrifices would cease.

Effectively immediately, you are released from your duties in Dalwick Cave.

We wish you and your family all the best.

With gratitude,

The High Council of Elsinore

MY HANDS SHOOK and my mouth hung open.

The sacrifices were over and I was released from my duties.

Iris grabbed my arm, pulling the letter away from my face so she could look at me.

“Well?” she asked, her eyes wide and expectant.

“It’s over. The sacrifices are over.” My voice cracked. I was overcome with emotion, on the verge of tears.

She hugged me, cradling Wren between the two of us as she spoke. “I wrote to the council. I told them about you and about Grafberg. I told them how profitable a trade agreement would be.”

Tears streamed down my cheeks and I let out a choked laugh. “I love you, my cunning little wife. Your father would be proud.”

“I love you too.” She stepped back and wiped away her tears, gesturing to Elric and Marta. “I had some help. Elric’s cousin was recently appointed to the council, and Marta’s sister was one of the first to put her dresses up for trade.”

I wrapped the two of them in a tight hug. “Thank you my friends. For everything you’ve done for me.”

“Friends?” Elric said. “We’re a family, Selvyn.”

Marta dabbed at her eyes and nodded in agreement. “We’d do anything for you, Wren, and Iris.”

Just as we’d do anything for them.

Iris slipped her arm through mine and pulled me in for a kiss. “Come on, then,” she whispered against my lips. “We’ll cook a nice supper to celebrate.”

As I walked back to the farmhouse, surrounded by my family, I gazed at the mountain off in the distance.

A smile curved up my lips.

Just as my mother would have wanted, I was finally at peace.

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