



# WISHING FOR COAL

EMMA JAYE

# Wishing For Coal

Festive Djinn #1



**Emma Jaye**

**Purindoors Publications**



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# WISHING FOR COAL

A grumpy, pain-loving Christmas elf. A control-obsessed human with a shriveled heart. A last chance to get a wish right before the doom of eternal perkiness at the North Pole descends...

All Coal needs to prove himself to Santa and avoid cleaning up after reindeer for the rest of his days is to fulfill one tiny wish. How hard could it be to make one human Grinch happy?

Angus doesn't do Christmas, relationships, or liars. So why does Angus itch to hear the prospective singer for the Christmas party say, 'Yes, Boss'? Pushing the unnerving attraction down works until his callous nemesis shows interest in the odd, bratty, festive-obsessed singer. Last time, Angus didn't see the relationship road crash coming. Dare he risk his heart in another tug of war?

Wishing for Coal is the **ANGSTY** first tale in the Festive Djinn series, part of the MM paranormal DeMMonica World. If you enjoy wish fulfillment, a delicious naughty-list baddie, Coal in stockings, a Christmas-sized serving of heat, and a

dash of perkiness hate, you'll love Emma Jaye's festive MM treat.

Each book in the Festive Djinn series contains a HEA, but there is an ongoing story.

Warnings for body piercing and torture by pre-school TV.

NOTE: Themes may be familiar to readers of Holly Berry, Naughty or Nice? #1, which inspired this story.

Grab Wishing For Coal to unwrap your MM Christmas fantasy today!



# Contents

[PROLOGUE](#)

[CHAPTER 1](#)

[CHAPTER 2](#)

[CHAPTER 3](#)

[CHAPTER 4](#)

[CHAPTER 5](#)

[CHAPTER 6](#)

[CHAPTER 7](#)

[CHAPTER 8](#)

[CHAPTER 9](#)

[CHAPTER 10](#)

[CHAPTER 11](#)

[CHAPTER 12](#)

[CHAPTER 13](#)

[CHAPTER 14](#)

[CHAPTER 15](#)

[CHAPTER 16](#)

[CHAPTER 17](#)

[CHAPTER 18](#)

[CHAPTER 19](#)

[CHAPTER 20](#)

[CHAPTER 21](#)

[CHAPTER 22](#)

[CHAPTER 23](#)

[CHAPTER 24](#)

[CHAPTER 25](#)

[About Emma](#)

# PROLOGUE



“YOU HAVEN’T SPENT MORE than an hour awake in this cottage for a month,” Mistletoe, Mrs. Claus, said when Nick popped into the living room. As Nick took in his surroundings, the anticipation of a quiet, relaxed evening meal fled.

Like most buildings at the North Pole, their home looked like a gingerbread house on the outside, small, cute, and surrounded by a blanket of pristine snow. All North Pole buildings were bigger on the inside than the outside, but he let Mistletoe do whatever she wanted with the interior.

Today, the inside of their home resembled a modern mansion, with acres of plush ice-blue carpeting, white leather sofas, and chrome accents. The Father Frost blue/white theme did not bode well for a peaceful, cozy evening.

She didn’t know half of it. He’d been playing with time more than usual, just to cope with the burgeoning human population. Not that he’d been keeping track, but it was probably closer to

three months since they'd spent more than a quick evening meal together.

Before his eyes, Mistletoe transformed into her white-haired, wrinkled, long-skirted, glasses-wearing, stout, traditional 'Mrs. Frost' persona. It was a long way from the sexy blonde siren of seconds ago, the one he'd created back in the fifteenth century.

Mistletoe pursed thin pale lips, reached up, and stroked his snow-white hair. "You're so tired that you haven't even changed. What's the point in all this if you can't enjoy life? Are you falling behind again?"

He blew out a breath and slumped into the cozy armchair he knew would appear behind him. Mistletoe sat on his lap, her weight felt so familiar that he hardly registered it. "Even with doubling the number of days in a year, I only have hours between Christmases."

She tugged on his beard gently. "Silly boy. I've been telling you to delegate and create more fairies for decades. Even though you're the most magnificent, powerful djinn on the planet, you can't do it all on your own."

As usual, Mistletoe spoke a lot of sense. When he first created her with that first batch of fairies, slave djinn, they didn't have much free will, but as the centuries passed, all had developed strong personalities. Although he loved Mistletoe, it was one of the reasons he hated making more of them. The thought of a hundred or more arguing, disobedient fairies made his belly grumble about the shortbread he'd snacked on earlier.

“I’ll make another tomorrow.”

“You’ll make a dozen, and you’ll do it now because I’m staying like this until you do.”

“Two,” he countered.

“Six,” she shot back.

“Three.”

She hopped off his lap, and before his eyes, turned into a blonde bombshell, in a sheer scarlet babydoll with a thong and high-heels that made her legs go on forever.

“Four, and I’ll be waiting in bed when you get back.”

The coy look she gave him had his cock swelling, but if he gave into the impulse to chase her, she’d switch back in the blink of an eye. She’d taught him that lesson plenty of times.

Not wanting to torture himself more than necessary, Nick popped back to his office. A room he’d crafted with the same traditional themes of the rest of his domain. Dark wood, red and green decorations, crackling fire. Cozy, in contrast to the stark white snow outside.

Creating new djinn always took a lot of energy, so rather than wasting magical energy later, he switched to the form he preferred, the one which got Mistletoe all hot and bothered. Anyone walking in right now would assume he was one of the handful of Adult Department fairies. Dark-haired, six feet tall in his socks, he wore a red shirt, black jeans, and looked like he’d stepped off the cover of a GQ magazine.

Just as he had a dozen different names, humanity gave the minor slave djinn various designations, according to their country's mythology. Christmas fairies, nisse, tomte, but 'elves' was becoming the most popular. He liked that one, particularly as it pissed off the know-it-all, secret-keeping fae.

As children found cute girls less threatening than boys, or adults—if they found one in their bedroom in the middle of the night—he only had pre-adolescent females on his list. His creations might mature mentally over the centuries, but they didn't age or change physically without magic.

Nick stood, rested his clenched fists on his beautifully carved desk, and closed his eyes. Concentrating, he drew up the magic produced by granting several billion wishes in the last few months. It fizzed in his body, seeking an outlet.

He pictured the form he wanted to create. Excitable, young, pretty, and damn irritating. Golden specks formed, gathered, solidified.

"Sit on the sofa," he ordered. The cute girl moved over without a word, face blank and unknowing.

One down, three to go. Reaching for the brandy bottle, he took a swig to fortify himself.

An hour later, three vacant-eyed girl fairies, dressed in identical short white trimmed, red dresses, pointy black ankle boots, and red hats, sat on the plush saggy red sofa at a right angle to the crackling fireplace. The first had dark skin and black hair, the second was tanned with blonde hair, and the third was a pale-skinned redhead.

With ebbing energy, he swigged brandy from the bottle standing on his desk, blew out a breath, and concentrated one last time. When he completed the task, he'd shifted into his Santa guise to give them the 'welcome' speech all at once. His creations already knew what they were and their enthusiasm for all things festive was innate; all he needed to do was assign names and roles.

"Well, well, you have been a busy boy."

Nick jerked at the unexpected, horribly familiar voice. His socked toe hit the heavy wood of the base of the desk. Pain flared.

"What the hell are you doing here, Krampus?" he gritted at the red-suited, slim, suave Black man leaning up against the office door.

The demon levered off the door. "I haven't heard that name in a very long time, but I think you should be asking yourself that question." Krampus nodded toward the fireplace.

Instead of a pretty adolescent girl, the blinking figure standing in front of the fireplace, in a cute red dress, was undeniably male, although no bigger than the female fairies.

"Well, fuck me sideways with a candy cane, who the hell are you?" The brand-new fairy announced with a frown. "Actually... who the hell am I? Because I can't—"

"Sleep," Nick ground out. The boy folded to the dark wooden floor like a collapsing pack of cards.

“Going to offer me a drink?” Krampus said as he strolled over and sat in a leather armchair that hadn’t been there a heartbeat before.

“No,” Nick growled, “and get that abomination of a chair out of here.”

“This?” Krampus stroked the odd, reddish leather. “I wouldn’t dream of leaving one of my favorite possessions here, but I thought the festive season was meant to be one of hospitality.”

“It was always about scaring and beating children for you,” Nick said. “I don’t do that anymore.”

Krampus smiled. “I still do, although not to children very often as shrill screams give me headaches. But do me a favor, old friend, call me Arioch. I haven’t been Krampus for quite a while, although I still get a kick out of delivering nasty surprises to naughty boys.” He nodded at the figure slumped on the floor.

“You think I’m naughty?” Toe throbbing, Nick sat down and barked out a laugh. “You forget who keeps the lists.” With a wave of his hand, the wall behind Nick vanished. The revealed dark corridor, with shelving on each side, stretched into the distance. Back when Arioch worked alongside him, he’d been able to see the end from his desk.

Huge leather-bound books stood on the shelves. They contained the names of every sentient being on the planet. The red books on the right held the nice list with a wish written in a second column beside the name. The black books on the left



were the naughty list, with the individual's crimes listed with their names.

The books magically updated as wishes were fulfilled, or people moved from the nice list to the naughty. Few left the naughty list, as Nick had to make that change personally. He simply didn't have the time or inclination.

Arioch's eyebrow rose. "Not impressed, Nicky boy. Perhaps you forget that I keep the revenge lists these days. And your name pops up more every year."

Nick snorted. "Disgruntled adults who don't remember having their Christmas wish fulfilled as a child?"

Arioch just sat there, watching him. The longer the demon stared, the more Nick's spine prickled.

"Is there a point to this?" Nick growled. "I've got things to do." He waved at the newly created fairies.

"The point is, if you make my life easier, I'll do the same for you. Stone-cold revenge is more trouble than it's worth. Stretching things out just leads to complications. Get it done and move on is my new motto."

A lightbulb came on in his head, and so did Nick's full festive persona. "I'm not releasing him, and that's final."

Between one breath and the next, Arioch also took on their working form. Even though the revenge demon kept their size in relation to the room, the red skin, curling ram's horns, cloven hooves, and forked tail were impressive.

“In that case,” Arioach’s voice sounded like boulders grinding together, “enjoy your Coal.” Arioach tilted their head. “I haven’t delivered a lump of the black stuff in centuries. Thanks for the Deja Vu. I’ll be watching, Nicky boy.” Arioach blew Nick a kiss and disappeared.

# CHAPTER 1



## THREE MONTHS LATER

The scent of cleaning products and petrol were familiar; the blurry metallic, multicolored looping garlands hanging in the foyer of his warehouse were not. As always, at this time of year, Angus Fricker had to wait a few seconds for his glasses to demist as he stepped inside a warm building. Just because everything was currently fuzzy, it didn't mean he couldn't tell what his right-hand employee had done.

*Damn the woman.* Even with the flamboyant business name designed to cash in on the rainbow pound in Brighton on the Sussex coast, PrideRide was a taxi and limo business, not a grotto. It seemed Angus couldn't get away from 'festive' even here, and yet, the party season provided a large chunk of his annual income.

Most of the twenty taxis and five limousines had already been decorated by their drivers, although he limited the amount of

crap they put in the vehicles. One nodding reindeer or snowman on the back shelf and a bit of tinsel around the grille, no more. His drivers didn't need to be distracted any more than they were already by the front gardens covered in garish lighting and inflatable Xmas character displays. Not to mention scantily dressed, drunk, partying customers armed with mistletoe.

As his glasses cleared and the decorations came into focus, Angus headed past the door that led into the garage. Polished shoes reflecting the fairy lights on the tree at the bottom of the stairs, he tramped up the flight he'd left only seven hours before, holding his two suit bags. The dry cleaners were also run off their feet, and Angus wanted to ensure his chauffeur uniforms were ready for the rush period.

The glass door to the office area above the warehouse revealed even more tackiness. Plastic snowflakes stuck on the window obscured his view of Sam's domain. He didn't even want to think about what she'd done to the drivers' restroom. Gritting his teeth against the avalanche of festive cheer he would undoubtedly face inside, he opened the door.

"Pick-up from Asda, a Mrs. Henderson," Sam said into her headset.

"I'll take it," crackled a reply.

Sam's short hair was purple today, but it'd probably be more festive in the next few days. A decade older than him, she's always been the big sister he'd never had. And today, she looked pissed.

“You got it, Kate,” she said and took off the headset.

“I didn’t expect you until this afternoon. Didn’t you do that airport run at three this morning?”

He held up the garment bags. “Got things to do, but if you’ve turned my office into a grotto, you’d better get in there and—”

She held up a finger. “One very small, tasteful tree on the filing cabinet to stop your staff moaning about the company grinch.” She picked up her headset again. “If you insist on staying, go get us some coffee and hand in your dry-cleaning. You could do with a walk rather than spending your life driving a car and a desk.”

Angus looked down at his flat stomach. “I get quite enough exercise at the gym, thank you.”

“And that’s inside too. You need some fresh air. Take a stroll, relax for once.”

Alarm bells began to ring. In all the years they’d known each other, Sam had never suggested he take a walk.

“Why?”

She grimaced, opened and closed her mouth, then said, “I’ve set up a bunch of interviews for the entertainment at the Christmas party. The piped music the hotel plays sucks.”

The suits felt a lot heavier. “Why can’t we just have the normal music? I still think having a ‘thank you’ event in mid-January is a better idea. We’re so busy at this time of year, taking a night off for a Christmas party will—”

The set of Sam's jaw said his argument would be as useless as it had been when Sam re-booked the hotel during the party last year. The last Sunday before Christmas was the quietest day of the Xmas party season, and it'd become something of a tradition for PrideRide to have a dinner-dance on that night.

“It's not for you, Mr. Humbug. It's for your long-suffering, hard-working staff. They, I, deserve a little—”

“Ok, ok,” he waved a hand, conceding defeat.

He never stayed at the event after the meal anyway. Someone had to take the last-minute bookings. The majority of his staff had family—genetic or found—that they wanted to spend time with during the festive season.

And yes, over the last three events, he'd added a few fictitious ones to the calendar to avoid drunken sympathy or hopeful approaches by employees. Most, but not all, of his staff were out as LGBTQA+. He didn't ask about orientation in interviews, but the firm's name tended to put off CIS-gendered heterosexuals.

“And don't think you're going to sneak off with the excuse of working this year. I haven't booked anything in, and I'm not going to.” She poked a finger at him. “And if you book anything, I'll cancel it. I've even blacked out the afternoon and evening of that day on your master wall planner.”

Angus straightened to his full six-foot-three height. Touching his wall planner almost equaled treason. “Who owns this firm?”

Her sulky scowl almost broke his dom stare.

“You do,” she ground out. “But you know I only ever have your best interests at heart. You spend too much time here. All work and no play makes Angus a very dull boy, not to mention a damn awkward, irritating boss.”

Holding up his hands, he said, “Ok, ok, I know when I’m beaten, but since I’ll be here, I’ll do the interviews while you do the radio.”

Her sly smile said he’d walked right into a trap.

“Whatever you’re planning, the answer is no,” he warned. “There will be no surprise dates, no ‘friend of a friend at a loose end’ coming to the party. Agreed?”

She gave him a jaunty salute. “Sir, yes, sir.”

Rolling his eyes, he turned on his heel and headed back down to his car to collect his coat rather than going into his office. The walk to the retail park took ten minutes, but after five, he was cursing Sam’s idea of getting some fresh air. Icy sleet spat from the sky, hitting his glasses and making it difficult to see. If he tilted his head down to shield his glasses with his hair, the sleet attacked the back of his neck and threatened to slide under his shirt.

“Well, what are you going to do? He’s disturbing the peace.”

He squinted through the blobs of ice. Blurry shapes morphed into black uniformed Police Community Support Officers arguing with a woman outside a charity clothing shop.

“I want him moved. He’s begging and putting off my customers.”

“I’m busking, not begging, and what customers?” The officers shielded the owner of the angry male voice from view. Considering both officers were under five feet nine, he guessed that the pissed-off busker was a kid. “It’s a charity shop. I’ll tell you what the old bag is pissed off about, my outfit.”

“You bet I am. This is a Christian charity, and you are—”

“Not straight? Gay? Bent? Queer? A shirt-lifter? Bum buddy?”

Angus’s lips twitched at the growing list of homophobic slurs falling from the guy’s mouth faster than the sleet.

“A raging queer, faggot, a fairy with a fucking limp wrist?”

“Right, that’s it, you’re under arrest for breaching the peace.” As the stout female PCSO made a grab for the outspoken busker, Angus got his first look at him.

Not more than five feet five in his black ankle boots, he looked taller due to the ridiculous red reindeer antlers on his head. His soft, stretchy red shorts that looked like underwear, red tights, and a matching stretch velvet tunic with golden bells on the points of the jagged hem. The top of the tunic gaped, giving Angus a glimpse of a hairless, fit chest. Two black leather wrist cuffs completed the outfit.

The youngster had to be freezing in the near-zero temperatures but judging from the two spots of color high on his cheeks,



indignation kept him warm.

The kid's wrist was firmly in the female PCSO's grip, but his other hand formed an angry ball. A night in the cells was not what the boy needed, certainly not dressed like a kinky elf.

The familiar male figure with distinctive white hair leaning up against a shop window a few feet away confirmed the need for intervention.

Angus raised his eyebrows at his old rival. Ward shrugged. As always, the man enjoyed drama. He would stand by until shit hit the fan and then pick up the pieces of a vulnerable person. Just as he'd done with Jesse.

"Excuse me, what's going on here?" Angus asked, making the most of his height.

All four people involved in the altercation turned to him. Three scowls, one cheeky grin. The youngster's sparkling dark eyes drew Angus in, daring him to get involved.

"Move along, sir," the male PCSO said.

Angus looked down his nose at the thin man. "I don't think I will. Unless you are planning on arresting this woman for homophobic discrimination? There are buskers outside this shop regularly, and as far as I know, she's never asked any of them to move on before."

"And you'd know that how?" the shopkeeper sneered. "I've never seen you around here."

"That's because I have no interest in entering a shop like this. I've had a nearby business for a decade."

“What would that be?” the male officer asked.

“PrideRide, it’s a—”

The shopkeeper snorted. “It’s another one. I tell you, this town is getting overrun with queers.”

The blatant homophobia snapped the final straw for the PCSO team. They glanced at each other, then turned as one to the shopkeeper.

Now free of the officer’s grip, the busker snatched up a shiny scarlet raincoat and danced back out of reach making the antlers wobble and wave.

“See you tomorrow, losers,” he crowed, then saluted Angus. “Thanks for the help,” he called, his grin bright and brimming with life. He spun and broke into a sprint, antlers wobbling and plastic mac flaring out behind him like a cape.

*Super Elf.* Angus grinned to himself.

As the PSCOs no longer seemed interested in either the boy or himself, Angus glanced down, intending to collect whatever money the youngster had earned. People usually busked because they were desperate for money and every coin counted.

The damp paving slabs were empty. No collection box, not even an elf hat. Super Elf must have been quicker than he thought.

Spencer Ward still leaned against the shop window, a half-smile on his lips. Angus walked over. If the boy had any sense, he’d carry on running and not come back. Getting caught by

Ward might make him smile for a while, but pain and heartache always followed the model-handsome, stupidly wealthy blond around.

“Leave the kid alone,” Angus ground out.

Spencer’s head tilted, examining Angus like a freak show curiosity. “I don’t recall being in your employ, and I didn’t see a collar on him. He’s fair game.”

“Like Jesse?” Angus gritted out.

Rage bubbled as Spencer replied as if they were discussing the weather, not his cheating ex. “Jesse is a grown adult. He asked for a place to stay. I provided it.”

“He was vulnerable, and you took advantage.”

Without taking his hands out of the pockets of the likely incredibly expensive, long black wool coat, the tall, slim, elegant man levered himself off the window.

“Perhaps you should consider why your husband felt the need to run to me rather than stay with you,” Spencer murmured as he sauntered past.

Angus resisted the impulse to plant his fist in the shop window where Spencer had been leaning, but it was close.

# CHAPTER 2



## AN HOUR EARLIER

Entertaining commuters and shoppers in a chilly, damp southern English town shopping precinct hadn't been Coal's dream job, but at least he was away from home. And if he didn't fuck it up, he might get allocated an adult's wish to fulfill, just like the other six misfits in the Adult Department. Although he had to admit to being the weirdest, least appealing of the bunch. The three girls were pretty and curvy, and the three men were tall, fit, and oozed testosterone. Coal was no bigger than the girls but had wiry muscles, like a climber or a jockey.

What woman fantasized about a bloke smaller than them? He'd already resigned himself to 'best friend' type wishes rather than sexual ones, but that would be better than being on constant snowglobe duty watching everyone else have fun.

*Be entertaining. Friendly. Make people happy.* With his goals firmly in mind, Coal stopped opposite a coffee shop with a steady trickle of customers as people hurried to work and school. Bundled-up humans stared, the majority smiling and shaking their heads. Heavy coats, hats, scarves, and gloves. They all behaved as if it was freezing, but it wasn't even properly snowing, just this soggy, miserable icy rain.

Compared to the North Pole, everything here was dull, dreary, monochrome. Coal kinda liked the lack of sparkly over-enthusiasm. Gray buildings, bare-branched trees rather than vibrant evergreens, and muted, drab clothing, except for occasional splashes of color in a shop window or a child's clothes.

Scents of fresh pine, crisp snow, or warming gingerbread were absent. Here, even in a pedestrian area, car exhaust fumes dominated. Even the weather, although warmer than at home, appeared to be working at depressing humanity. Not snow, not rain, but a gloomy mixture of both that seemed to hunt out every gap in clothing and sneak in to melt and slide down skin turned sweaty due to heavy clothing.

Coal had a physical aversion to perkiness, but he'd never seen a bunch of people more deserving of a little festive cheer. He started with, *It's Beginning To Look A Lot Like Christmas*. The odd looks and hurrying feet turned into smiles, slower steps, and shaking heads. Some stopped and dropped coins on his red raincoat. Although money wasn't his objective, he grinned his thanks while singing festive songs, one after the other, rather than carols.

Only young children, most in pushchairs, glowed with unfulfilled wishes. They pulled at him, tugging like a leash as their carers hurried past, trying to get older children to school on time.

Resisting the urge to follow and fulfill their one wish itched, but a quick squeeze on one of the magical wrist cuffs helped him to resist the pull. Poaching wishes from the Children's Department would not go down well, seeing as they'd kicked him out because his 'particular talents would be better suited to another department.' The Adult Department was his last chance at a wish-fulfillment role. The other alternatives didn't bear thinking about.

A woman holding the hand of a small child stopped to tie his shoe, and the golden glow he'd assumed came from the kid carried on moving.

*An adult with an unfulfilled wish.*

His mouth went dry, and he faltered on the impressions of trumpets for the brass section of *Stop the Cavalry*.

"Are you alright?"

He blinked as the wisher somehow stood in front of him. The middle-aged person had amazing dark purple hair that stuck up, an eyebrow ring, and a nose stud. Wrapped up in a knee-length, purple coat, he couldn't tell their gender, not that it mattered. Fairies adapted to whatever their wisher preferred.

"You must be freezing out here. Do you want a hot drink? Warm up a bit?" They nodded toward the coffee shop.

“Yeah, ok,” he croaked, trying not to stare at the metal in their face and failing miserably. He couldn’t help blurting, “As long as you tell me your Christmas wish.”

Their face morphed into the most amazing smile. Coal’s lips curled up in response, pleasure buzzing in his veins. The other Adult Department fairies said there was nothing like fulfilling a wish, and Coal was starting to understand why. He wanted, no, he needed, to get closer to this wisher, to make that smile last as long as possible.

“Fine with me,” the wisher said.

The server in the café had red reindeer antlers on her head; they added at least a foot to her height.

Two minutes later, the pair sat on tall stools Coal had needed to climb up on, with hot drinks that the wisher had insisted on paying for. He took a sip, expecting human hot chocolate to be terrible, but found it sweet, creamy, and chocolatey.

“I’m Sam, and I use female pronouns,” she said, unwinding her clearly homemade vibrant purple scarf and took off her matching woolly gloves. The scarf just upped his estimation of this odd, colorful human. Yes, he hadn’t worked out if Sam was male or female, but he found it didn’t matter at all.

“I’m Coal, and I use male pronouns,” he replied, in case it was a traditional introduction here. Humans never ceased to surprise him, but he didn’t exactly have a lot of experience with them.

Trying not to get sidetracked, he got straight to business in case one of the other Adult Department fairies was watching and stole her from him. “So, what’s your Christmas wish, Sam?”

She took a sip of her coffee, her smile replaced by concern. “I’d rather hear yours.”

Coal opened and shut his mouth. People at the North Pole ordered him around, sneered, and avoided him as if he smelled bad. No one had ever asked him what he wanted, not in his entire life.

A hand wrapped around his. He looked up, not realizing he’d lost a few seconds.

“Look, I’ve seen a lot of kids like you over the years, and—”

He let out a huff of laughter. “I doubt it.”

“Let me take a shot?”

He shrugged. A conversation was better than his potential wisher walking away. “Kay. Go for it.”

She tilted her head. “This town is a magnet for queer youth.” If she meant the dictionary definition, he certainly fit ‘odd, strange, unusual, or bizarre,’ but Coal wasn’t sure she did as she carried on.

“We get youngsters turning up here from all over the country. People who have fallen out with their families and may not feel valued because of their sexuality. I’ve been there, done that, got the tattoo and the piercings. I’m not judging, but you



look like you could use a friend, perhaps a place to stay, and a job.”

She took another sip of coffee. “It just so happens I work for a very queer-friendly company, and we’re looking for an entertainer for our Christmas party in a few days. I’ve already set up some interviews later this morning, but as I’m doing the interviews,” she gave him a wink, “I think you’ve got a great chance. The job pays an upfront retainer, and I know of a sofa that might have your name on it.” She reached into her bag and pulled out a business card.

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There was an address and phone number on the back. He pocketed the card and gave her a bright smile. “Thanks, I’ll be there. So, it’s your firm?”

She shook her head. “No, the owner is a good friend, Angus Fricker.” Her lips pursed. “And I think you might be just the one to put a smile on his miserable face.”

Coal snatched the dangling lifeline. “So, that’s your Christmas wish, for this Angus bloke to smile?” If Coal couldn’t produce one smile, he’d change his name to Krampus and get it over with.

Sam snorted and drank the rest of her coffee. “Sorry, I have to go. Angus is such a grinch that if I don’t put up the Christmas decorations when he’s not around, it won’t happen.”

Coal was attempting to get his head around having no decorations at all when his wisher’s words yanked his focus back to her. “But if I had a real Christmas Wish, it’d be for Angus to be happy; he does so much for other people, and he certainly deserves it.”

The magic around Sam flared. Coal squinted against the momentary brightness, then it settled into a deeper golden glow now that she’d voiced her wish.

He gave her his best grin. “Consider it done. What time do you want me?”

“Ten?”

“You got it,” he replied as she got up and slipped on her woolly gloves.

Not knowing if he’d get another chance for a private chat, he blurted the question that itched almost as much as finding out her wish. “Did they hurt?” he indicated her nose and eyebrow.

“A bit. Although not as much as the nipple and tongue piercings.” She chuckled and stuck out her tongue to show off a small gold ball. “I got it after Angus got one, although you wouldn’t know it from his permanent Grinch impression these days. I’ll see you later. Don’t disappoint me.”

“I won’t,” Coal replied automatically, then remembered his track record. “At least I hope I won’t,” he said, then added,

“I’ll give it my best shot.”

She reached out, patted his shoulder. “I’m sure you will, but if it doesn’t work out, don’t disappear. The offer of a safe sofa will still stand. Sleeping rough is damn dangerous this time of year.”

“Will do,” he said. She held his gaze for a few seconds before nodding and walking away.

He could have popped back to the North Pole and let them know he’d found a proper job, but one of the others could be allocated to his wisher. After all, fulfilling wishes wasn’t within his ‘particular talents’. Coal resolved to make this bloke, Angus Fricker, the happiest fucker on the planet, no matter what it took.

He walked back outside and flinched as a blob of icy rain hit his eye. As long as his colleagues in the Adult Department thought he was busking, no one would monitor him. Not going home until he completed the wish was his only option.

Returning to his spot in front of a charity shop, he magicked himself a similar headband to the server in the café, began singing again, bringing a little festive cheer to the residents of this seaside town. *What would this Angus be like?*

Even if he didn’t like festive decorations, a friend of Sam, one with a tongue piercing, had to be a bit quirky. He imagined a male version of his wisher, purple, maybe even rainbow hair, perhaps in a mohawk. He fluffed the next line of *Merry Christmas Everyone*. Angus was a male name, and Sam had

used male pronouns, but that didn't mean Coal's target was a guy, not in this place.

With a thought, he changed the pompoms on the bottom of his tunic to golden bells and provided a little percussion to *Jingle Bells* by shaking his hips.

Everything was going great until the manager of the shop came out. He ignored the slight prickle up the back of his neck as he argued with first her and then the two uniformed people.

A small group of people gathered, most supporting him by calling out, "Leave him alone," and "Let him be; we're enjoying that."

Emboldened by their support—and that of a tall, red-haired, somewhat intimidating man—Coal let his mouth run riot. The stuffy shop owner—who had to have just earned a lump of coal in her Christmas stocking—turned an interesting shade of red.

The sharp spike of pain in his wrist when the officer grabbed his arm just sent him higher, then Mr. tall and intimidating mentioned owning PrideRide.

*This? This is the guy I have to please? Doesn't look like the type to have a tongue stud.*

This wasn't the introduction Coal intended, but it appeared that just like his employee, Angus had a white knight vibe.

*A white knight who likes piercings.*

Coal needed to think about this, needed to prepare. Giving his target a bright smile, he ran. The antlers slipped, but he

couldn't stop to pick them up.

# CHAPTER 3



AS SOON AS COAL rounded the corner of the building and checked there were no irritating human cameras, he became invisible. No human could see when he was like this, but they could still hear and touch him.

Getting arrested in the human world would probably get him sent to the equivalent of Christmas fairy hard labor, shoveling reindeer crap, or dealing with the naughty list. Although, the second option, with the lovely sting letters from naughty-list kids gave him, would be a damn sight better than going back to the main letter sorting department.

Slipping past the exclaiming officer, Coal considered what would please both his wisher and his target. Angus Fricker hadn't been what he'd expected, but Coal wasn't disappointed, just a little worried about his ability to make the stern man happy.

Coal had plenty of ideas, but first, he had to make that interview and start a proper interaction. Concentrating, he glanced to where his hand should be to check his invisibility was still active, then popped to his target to do a little spying before the interview.

Angus's office in the PrideRide warehouse wasn't ostentatious, although not a soulless cubicle either. It had a light, white and chrome theme, so unlike the heavy, rich colors at home. Larger than Coal expected, it was practical, understated, and bordered on obsessively neat, like the man Coal met outside the charity shop. The urge to draw a huge smiley face on the two meticulous wall planners itched, but he resisted.

Coal didn't spare a glance for Angus's interviewee until she broke into song. Unfortunately, for everyone within earshot, the poor cow couldn't hold a note to save her life.

Coal discovered invisible hands didn't cut out noise even when jammed over his ears. To Coal's amazement, Angus endured the screeching for half the song before interrupting politely.

"Thank you, Ms. Cook. We'll be in touch." Angus stood up and offered her his hand.

Coal examined his target. At least he wouldn't have to alter his personal attraction meter one iota. Sam's employer was an impressive specimen of manhood. Although not model beautiful like the male fairies, Angus was tall, broad, dark-eyed with dark red hair, and was well-groomed, make that

immaculately groomed. The black-rimmed glasses just added to his imposing, focused presence. This man oozed control freak; perhaps that was the barrier to his happiness.

Coal smiled. Being himself might just be what was needed with this one. However, it remained to be seen just how much of him Mr. Angus Fricker could handle. With a flick of his wrist and a wicked smirk on his lips, Coal shortened his tunic by several inches, exposing a wide strip of his belly and hip bones, then popped back down to the building's entrance.

Coal plonked himself on the sofa in the small outer office. Draping one leg over the side, Coal enjoyed Sam's half-amused, half-worried glances. Almost constant radio and phone calls kept her busy, so he couldn't ask her for any tips.

His fellow interviewees ranged from a forty-something DJ, an elderly man, and a rather fragrant three-piece folk band. None of them could keep their eyes off him, which was both creepy and flattering. One by one, the other candidates went in and performed. One by one, they exited with resigned, disappointed expressions.

Humming away to the song currently stuck in his head, 'Grandma Got Run Over By A Reindeer,' Coal examined his cuffs, pressing lightly, appreciating the distracting sting.

"Yes, yes, that's all booked for you, Mr. Woods. Goodbye."

"Coal, add your name to this," Sam hissed and pushed a sheet of lined paper across the desk to him. "And what happened to your shirt? This isn't a go-go dancing event."



He grinned. "I was hot, still am." He carefully inscribed his name with full curly calligraphy, then passed it back.

Sam rolled her eyes. "Not your performing name, your actual name."

He frowned. "That is my actual name. What's wrong with it?"

The office door opened. Angus stood in the doorway, shaking hands with the elderly man who held a battered acoustic guitar case. He'd sounded like an asthmatic frog in a bottle, which was better than the first woman and the folk band.

"Good to meet you, Mr. Peters; we'll be in touch."

Coal popped a stick of gum into his mouth. Chewing in an interview would probably annoy the hell out of Angus, but it would make him concentrate on Coal's mouth. Good employees didn't make you the kind of 'happy' Sam wanted.

Angus turned those dark eyes on Coal. "You're the busker."

"You've met already? Perfect," Sam gushed.

Keeping his gaze on Coal, Angus said, "He was shouting homophobic slurs at a shopkeeper. Then he ran away from a PCSO trying to make a citizen's arrest for breach of the peace."

"Ah," Sam said.

"Ah, indeed," Angus rumbled.

"So, do I get to go inside?" Coal asked, nodding toward the open office door.

Red eyebrows rose. "You're here for an interview?"

Sam winced. “I erm... kind of invited him after I met him on my way to work this morning.”

“That’s why you were so enthusiastic about me going down the town earlier,” Angus confirmed.

Sam’s head sank into her shoulders a little. “Guilty as charged. He’s a great singer, right?”

“Does he have his CV?”

Coal snorted. “For singing at a party?”

Angus moved over to the sheet listing the interviewees.

“C.O.A.L?”

“Yep, as in ‘lump of.’” Coal gave him puppy-dog eyes. “I was an unappreciated accident.”

“Awww. Come on, Boss.” Sam matched his pleading expression. “You might as well hear him sing now that he’s here. He’ll be hanging around anyway. I’m going to let him sleep on my sofa until he’s got somewhere permanent to stay.”

Angus’s whole chest rose and fell in a sigh.

Coal gave him a winning smile. “Come on, Mr. Fricker, give me a chance. If you don’t find me at least a little entertaining, I’ll be out of your hair in a moment, Sam’s too.”

“Hang on there, Coal, you haven’t got anywhere to go, and tonight it’s going to be minus—“

“Who am I to argue,” Angus interrupted. “Give me a minute, then send him in. But if he’s terrible, I’m not hiring him.”

Angus took a step back toward his office, then looked over his shoulder.

“And Sam, you owe me a favor. Take down the decorations in the bathrooms. Having Santa staring at me when I’m trying to pee is putting me off.”

“Would do the same to me.” Coal shuddered. “It’s bad enough that he can see you when you’re sleeping and knows when you’re awake.”

“Sir, yes, sir,” Sam said to Angus’s retreating back. When the office door shut, she turned to Coal. Her face looked as if she’d just been outside in the cold again as her cheeks had a rosy glow.

“He, erm, likes to be in charge, as in he *really* likes to be in charge, including in his personal life.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll be gentle with him,” Coal said with a wink before realizing he was behaving nearly as inanely as the sexless children’s fairies. If he carried on like this, he’d be giggling and skipping soon. Suppressing a shudder at the idea, he knocked on the inner office door and opened it without waiting for a reply.

The object of his attention looked up as Coal sashayed into the office. “Before we begin, how old are you? I don’t employ minors.”

Coal gave him what he hoped was a pissed-off scowl rather than rabbit-in-headlights. “I’m twenty.”

“Do you have a last name?”

“Doesn’t everyone?”

Angus put down his posh ink pen. “If you’re going to be this prickly, there’s no point in continuing. I need your details to pay you if, and I mean if, I hire you. I’m not going to contact whoever or whatever you’re running away from without permission.”

“Good luck with that,” Coal murmured, giving his wrist cuffs a reassuring squeeze. “But I take cash, so there’s no need for paperwork.”

Angus’s dark, expectant gaze bored into him as if Coal’s every secret scrolled across his face like a neon sign. Although as Angus wasn’t pointing and screaming “fairy!” at the top of his voice Coal dismissed that idea.

Ok, maybe Angus Fricker didn’t seem like a screamer, or that he’d use the word ‘fairy’ seeing that it was a homophobic slur here in the UK.

Coal licked his lips as he ran his gaze over his target. Angus looked as if he did a hell of a lot more than merely sit behind a desk all day. The immaculate suit hugged his body, and Coal hadn’t missed the man’s thick thighs and broad shoulders. He imagined ripped muscles, dark red hair dusting his chest, forearms, and legs. Angus was at least eight inches taller than Coal, and half again as wide. The thought made his belly squirm, just like when Garland kissed him on his first day in the Adult Department.

Angus could literally make Coal do an impression of an ‘elf on a shelf,’ if Angus had a shelf big enough. Or a naughty step.

Sam's 'in charge' comment blazed back to life in his memory. Coal didn't actually hate the idea, as long as it was temporary and made his target happy.

"Earth to Coal? Your last name?" Angus prompted.

"Chestnut," Coal blurted. "As in prickly on the outside, but fun to play with on the inside."

Angus's lips twitched as he stood and offered his hand, "Nice to meet you, Mr. Chestnut."

Angus had a firm, dry grip. *How would it feel to have those hands on me?* Coal held on to Angus's hand just a fraction longer than appropriate. When the big man's eyebrows rose, Coal released him as if the contact burned. Well, it had a little, but Coal enjoyed the feeling.

Gesturing to the padded, armless seat in front of the plain desk, Angus sat back down. The office, his clothing, even his demeanor, spoke loud and clear of overzealous efficiency, perhaps a touch of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

Sam wanted Angus to be happy, to have fun, and that was what she'd get if Coal could knock the man out of the tight control that clearly stifled the poor, stick-up-his-ass, sod. Annoying the hell out of Angus seemed an excellent strategy to release him from his self-control and move him toward happiness.

"You know, you really should relax a bit. You know what they say, all work and no play?" Coal slumped into the chair and hooked one leg over the arm, knowing that the thin stretchy

shorts didn't hide much. "So, what d'ya wanna know, Mr. Anus Fucker?" Coal put a finger over his lips. "I'm so sorry. That was a slip of the tongue. My mind must have been on something else. It's Angus Fricker, right?"

Angus must have heard the play on his name a million times. It had to piss him off, but the man on the other side of the desk simply sat and stared at Coal.

Seconds stretched. Angus didn't move, didn't speak. He simply radiated disapproval.

Uncomfortable with the scrutiny, Coal put his foot back on the floor. He'd made his attraction to Angus loud and clear, and it was the human's move. A move it appeared he didn't intend to take.

*Am I too young, too outspoken, too loud?* Whatever it was, he'd failed again.

Coal looked around for a distraction while considering alternatives to humping Angus to happiness to fulfill Sam's wish.

A two-foot-tall artificial white Christmas tree—sparsely decorated with silver tinsel and blue baubles, stood on a filing cabinet in the corner. It was the entirety of the festive decorations in the office, despite it being mid-December. The rest of the town had been grottoized with bright luminous decorations hanging from every lamppost and building.

"Nice tree." Coal wrinkled his nose but couldn't help adding, "Bit small."

“Sam’s idea, not mine. I don’t do Christmas. However, my employees deserve a party, hence the need for a decent entertainer, rather than the ancient CD the hotel usually provides.” Angus leaned forward, appearing instantly larger as he interlinked his fingers while his eyes bored into his. Coal’s pulse went up.

Angus’s gaze roamed over him, checking him out. Unfortunately, Coal couldn’t decide if it was as a prospective employee, the personal level he needed, or if Angus was betting how far Coal would bounce when he kicked him out.

“So, Coal—“ Angus paused and pushed his glasses up his nose even though they hadn’t slipped. “Your name’s actually Coal Chestnut?”

“What can I say? I’m a sucker for all things festive.” Grinning, he waved a hand down his body. “I wear this all year round.”

To his joy, Angus’s lips twitched briefly. The ‘stone face’ came back far too soon, but at least his target had a sense of humor, if a repressed one.

“Do you know what the job entails, Mr. Chestnut?”

“Entertaining a bunch of people at a Christmas party. I rock the look already, don’t you think?”

Coal stood up and shimmied, making the bells on his crop top jingle against his bare belly.

Angus cleared his throat and shifted in his seat. “That’s a very interesting outfit, but I’d appreciate it if you covered up a little more if you get the job. I employ people of all ages and sexual

orientations. I don't want to give anyone a heart attack. There's a clause in the company Health and Safety regulations about inappropriate clothing."

Coal gaped. "You're kidding, right?"

Angus shook his head gently, but the micro twitch of amusement on his lips occurred again. Coal flopped back into the chair, pouting in mock disappointment.

Seemingly unaware or uncaring of his irritation, Angus outlined the job description. Bored and a little pissed off, Coal tuned out the words and concentrated on his deep voice instead. He imagined what it would sound like if Angus ordered him around as Garland had done to that female wisher. Being on Adult Department snowglobe duty had a few perks.

"Are you listening to me, Mr. Chestnut?"

Coal focused quickly back on Angus as embarrassment prickled across his body. He'd been lost in his own world, humming the melody to his personal punk version of Silent Night.

"Erm, sorry, not really. I've just got a song stuck in my head."

Angus tilted his head to one side. "What sort of act can I expect? Do you play an instrument while you sing?"

Coal shrugged and chewed his gum again. "I can play most stuff, but I specialize in Christmas songs. It's brilliant this time of year; surprisingly crap in the summer."

The smile lasted for nearly ten seconds this time. It lit up Angus's face. At that moment, he dropped almost a decade in



age. He must have been one cheeky youngster, and Coal wanted to know what Christmas wish Angus had made.

“It’s lucky I’m not holding a summer BBQ then, isn’t it? Sing something for me.”

He relaxed back in his chair, looking expectant.

“Rock, punk, pop, extra naughty, or traditional?”

He’d hoped ‘extra-naughty’ would get a reaction, but Angus merely said, “Start with traditional.”

Standing up, Coal took the gum out of his mouth and looked around for a bin. Not seeing one, he lifted his hand to stick it behind his ear.

“No, that’s disgusting.” With a frown of distaste, Angus leaned down, then held a wastepaper basket out to him.

“Ta,” Coal said brightly as he deposited the gum in the bin.

“But you’re one to talk. You’re chewing on something too.”

Angus frowned. “I assure you I’m not.”

Coal waved a finger at Angus’s mouth. “Yes, you are. I just saw it. A licorice sweet or something.”

“It’s not a sweet. It’s a tongue piercing.”

Coal almost bounced in his seat. “Cool! Come on, stick it out, let me see.”

“Sing or leave, Mr. Chestnut,” Angus growled.

“Ok, ok, Mr. Grinch. Sheesh, I was only asking.” Closing his eyes, he took a calming breath and started on *Silent Night*.

When he finished repeating ‘sleep in heavenly peace’ at the end of the first verse, Coal opened his eyes.

Angus stared at him, eyes a little wider, lips parted.

The silence deafened as Coal trailed off. The tension was palpable in the room. Coal’s hand crept to his leather cuff and gave it a twist. The sting helped deal with the stress of the rejection galloping toward him like a pissed-off Rudolf.

“Why are you looking for a one-off job at a last-minute works Christmas party when you can sing like that? You should have an agent.”

Being too good hadn’t been something Coal had considered, so he let his verbal diarrhea take over. “There are fewer gigs out there than singers, plus I’m not exactly what people expect when they think Xmas party—“ he wrinkled his nose ”—aaand, I’m not too good at taking instructions. Makes working with an agent a little tricky.”

He winced as he realized the admission might put Angus off him as an employee as well as a possible sexual partner.

To Coal’s surprise, Angus smiled as if Coal had dangled a carrot in front of his nose. Rather than just doing a job, Coal found he genuinely wanted to get to know this puzzling, not to mention hot, man. To find out what made him tick and why he was alone.

The interview pretense was boring anyway; besides, there was no way he wanted Angus to offer him a job and have a formal

employer-employee relationship. With flirtation firmly in mind, Coal traced his fingers across his exposed belly.

“So, Mr. Fricker, are you a hands-on employer?”

To his credit, Angus’s face showed no emotion. *Damn irritating.*

“Mr. Chestnut, I keep my professional relationships just that, professional.”

Coal had to smile at how easy Angus made this as he drew circles on his exposed belly before looking up again.

“So, if I were to get the job, I wouldn’t get to know you on a personal level? We’d strictly be employer and employee?”

Angus inclined his head in agreement but remained silent.

“In that case, as you’ve been so honest, I have a few confessions that might help make up your mind about my suitability as an employee. That is if you think I sing well enough.”

“I’ve got no concerns about your voice.”

Did that mean Angus had concerns about Coal’s other attributes for being a prospective employee or on a personal level? Angus’s expressionless face didn’t provide half a hint. This was trickier than Coal imagined but heading off the employee option ASAP was his current priority.

“Mr. Fricker, this is probably my most conservative outfit. Plus, I get distracted. A lot. I drink to excess, eat enough sugar to satisfy an entire class of ten-year-olds, chew gum, and

smoke cigars. I also have... other personal issues that make holding down a regular job and paying rent a bit tricky.” He’d never smoked in his life, but he added it for effect as some fairies moaned about Santa’s habit.

Taking a breath, Coal undid the cuff on his right wrist. He wanted to be himself, wanted Angus to see him, the real him. If his target turned pale and ordered him to leave, Coal would change his appearance and try again.

Between one breath and the next, Angus was perched on the desk in front of him. Grasping Coal’s forearm, he took over the task. He scowled at the sharp studs on the cuff’s underside before gently brushing his thumb over the revealed raw skin.

“Never agree to wear something like this again, no matter who gives the order. The skin is broken, which leaves you wide open to infection. Does your Dom check these regularly and put antiseptic on them? Is the other one as bad?”

Without asking, Angus grabbed Coal’s left wrist and undid the matching cuff. That wrist was in a slightly better state due to Coal being left-handed.

“You need to tell me right now who put these on you. I get the pain and punishment thing, I really do, but this is bloody dangerous.” Concern and anger swirled in his eyes. The anger was familiar; the concern felt like an invisible hug.

“There are ways to produce the same effect without damage. I won’t call the police if you don’t want me to, but this is abuse. Whoever did this requires—at the very least—educating. Is

this why you accepted Sam's offer of somewhere to sleep? Are you running from this person?"

Coal looked down to where Angus's thumbs ran gently over the marks, carefully avoiding the two areas of broken skin. Embarrassment flared. Angus thought he was being abused.

"It's not like that. I caused—"

"Look at me." The command in his voice had Coal instantly complying.

Dark brown eyes focused intently on his, making Coal's belly flutter. Embarrassment, anticipation, or desire? Coal couldn't tell.

"This is not your fault. It's never the sub's fault. Your dominant is doing a damn poor job of looking after you."

Coal pulled his wrists away, scowling. "Stop making assumptions. I did it myself, ok? I find it distracting. I know I'm weird. I don't have a dom; no one's ever been that interested in a fuck-up like me. As for where I'm living, that's none of your business. And now that I've completely bugged this up, I'll go." Making a grab for the cuffs on the desk beside Angus, he stood up.

"Sit down." Coal hesitated, and Angus added a gravelly, "Now."

Coal's ass hit the chair, almost of its own volition, but he couldn't look Angus in the eye. Coal found his bare knees surprisingly interesting despite never looking at them this

closely before. He'd thought Santa had a commanding voice, but good God, this guy was worse, or maybe better.

Santa was his employer, his maker, a powerful magical being, but this human made Coal even more nervous. Irritation at his reaction to a mundane rose and blanketed his embarrassment.

"Promise me you won't hurt yourself again," Angus growled.

"I won't hurt myself again," Coal sing-songed in a sarcastic voice a bolshie child would be proud to produce.

"Say it again. And this time, mean it."

The growl in Angus's voice made Coal wiggle in his seat as he tried to readjust his hardening cock. A cock Angus would no doubt see if he glanced down. Coal wanted him to look, wanted him to touch.

This attraction must be why the twelve days of Christmas rule was always rigorously applied to the Adult Department staff. According to Santa, it took longer than twelve days to fall in love, so that was the cut-off point for human-fairy interactions.

*Grant the wish, move on to the next, don't look back.*

"I said, say it like you mean it." The growl had been replaced by an even more disturbing icy calm. "You should know that I find repeating myself exceedingly annoying."

"I won't hurt myself again, Mr. Fricker," he said, eyes downcast, oozing contrition. Angus leaned in further and brushed a knuckle down Coal's cheek. The touch was so magnetic that Coal leaned forward, chasing it when Angus drew back.

“Now apologize for being rude.”

Angus leaned in even closer and murmured his next words against Coal’s ear. “On your knees.” The breath warmed Coal’s skin, causing a shiver up his spine. Yes, he was doing this to fulfill Sam’s wish, but Coal wanted this too.

Angus sat back on the corner of his desk as Coal dropped to his knees, just as Garland’s female wisher had done. The thought that Angus might treat him the same way—would break all his strict personal rules because he wanted Coal so much—sent a fizz of desire through his body.

Glancing up, Coal realized his face was right at the level of Angus’s crotch. The urge to reach out, to unzip, then smell, feel, *taste*—

“You don’t really want this job, do you?” Angus asked as if he already knew the answer.

Coal opened and shut his mouth a few times, trying to think up a more believable reason for his actions than, “*Of course not, you idiot, I’m a Christmas fairy.*”

“I just have to attend a few interviews to keep the paper-pushers at the jobcentre happy. They don’t accept busking as legitimate employment and keep sending me on interviews for crappy retail or warehouse jobs.”

“I don’t think you’re going to be on Father’s Christmas’s good list, do you, Coal? You’ve been a very naughty boy.”

Coal briefly froze at the mention of Santa before realizing Angus was going with the festive theme he’d started with his

clothing and singing.

“Erm, yes?”

“There’s no ‘erm’ about it. Tell me what you are, Coal.”

It clicked what Angus wanted as he kept his gaze on the growing bulge in Angus’s immaculately pressed pants. The crisp crease of the garment was ruined. Such a shame. Not.

Coal licked his lips and looked up. This game was even more fun than flirting with Garland because with Angus, something might actually happen.

“I’m a very naughty boy. Hopefully, you’ll let me make it up to you somehow?” He dropped his gaze to Angus’s crotch. “Sooner, rather than later?”

Coal smirked at the strangled noise from deep inside Angus before schooling his features back to contrite. He might be new at this flirting/seduction thing, but hell yeah, he had skills.

“Not on your nelly, young man. I don’t do that sort of thing at work. Tell me, Coal, do you keep your promises? Because I have a rule about liars.”

“Of course you do. What is it? Spankings at dawn?” Coal wagged his eyebrows up and down.

“They wouldn’t be that lucky. I don’t have anything to do with people who purposefully deceive me. Not professionally, not privately. You promised not to hurt yourself again, so tell me the truth; do you keep your promises?”



Coal squirmed for a moment, wrinkling his nose, desperate to ask about spanking as he imagined himself bare-assed over Angus's thighs, his flesh wobbling, stinging, as the big man—  
“I'm waiting, Coal.”

“Sorry, you kinda short-circuited my brain with the—“ he mimed spanking an ass ”—I've never done that. Say it again?”

Angus's lips twitched again. “At least that was honest. I asked you if you keep your promises.”

Lies smoothed the world into a nicer place, but omission worked almost as well.

“I've never broken a promise,” Coal said, but he didn't sound convincing, even to himself.

“And how many promises have you made, including what you said earlier about not hurting yourself?”

*Bugger, this bloke is quick.*

Coal rolled his eyes. “None. The p-word has never passed my lips, and it never will. I'm not capable of keeping one. And now that you've thoroughly humiliated me, I'll be going.”

Coal grabbed the armrest to get up. He was as crap at this adult stuff as he was with children's wishes. It'd be back to monitoring duties tomorrow if he hadn't already pulled reindeer or naughty-list letter duty.

“Stay right where you are; I haven't finished with you yet. Besides, you seem far more honest on your knees than when sitting or standing.”

“I’m even more honest with my ass in the air,” slipped out before Coal bit his lip to stop more smut from falling out. Yes, he’d had the ‘adult upgrade,’ but he’d never experienced anything like this. It felt like his libido had his brain in a headlock, and it had no intention of letting any sensible thoughts escape.

“Too much?” he mumbled, not looking up.

“Do you have anyone in your life at the moment?” Angus said, ignoring both of Coal’s comments.

“You mean a boyfriend?”

“Perhaps, if he tells you when you’re being a brat and rewards you when you’re good. Someone who looks after you by stopping you doing that to yourself.” He indicated Coal’s wrist with a finger.

Thinking back to the kid who had gotten him kicked out of the Children’s department, Coal snapped, “I’m not a brat, and I’ve been looking after myself for most of my life.”

Even with his rudeness, Angus wasn’t kicking him out, so there might be a chance to salvage the situation. Losing this job to another Adult Department fairy would be the final humiliation, and he doubted he’d ever be allowed back to the human realm again. A cloud of never-ending squeaky, high-pitched perkiness loomed in his future.

Putting his hands behind his back would—fingers crossed—stop reminding Angus about his wrists.

Angus sighed, then tutted. “And I thought we’d gotten over the lying thing. You’re clearly not looking after yourself, and no one else is, are they?”

Coal shrugged, unable to come up with an appropriate answer.

“Do you honestly think anyone who cared about you would let you hurt yourself like that? Or would let you kneel before a stranger, happy to have him fuck your mouth until he came down your throat?”

Coal’s eyes widened at Angus’s crude language. He didn’t reply because what Angus suggested seemed a pretty good idea from Coal’s current perspective. That intriguing bulge in Angus’s pants was even larger now.

“Rule number two. You will answer when I ask a question. Rule number one is honesty at all times, in case you haven’t worked it out for yourself.”

Even on his knees, staying contrite was a tough ask for more than a minute, and the clock was ticking.

“I don’t have to obey your rules, Mr. Fricker. I’m not your employee. Or am I?”

*Crap, he’s gorgeous when he frowns.* A delicious frisson of trepidation ran up Coal’s spine. Just how serious was Angus about spanking? And when’s Sam’s lunch hour?

“You’re breaking rule two already by not answering my question. In case you were distracted, which seems to be a theme with you, I’ll remind you again, just this once. Is there anyone in your life who looks after this pain issue for you?”

“No, but—“

Angus cut him off. “I didn’t ask anything else. But you did answer truthfully, so you get a reward.”

“You’re offering me the singing job?” Coal hoped he didn’t appear too disappointed.

His answer made Angus’s mouth twitch at the corners. “I’m afraid you’ll give my staff heart attacks, but I think you could be useful for something.”

Coal’s fingers reached toward Angus’s zipper, quite clear where this conversation would end. The human grabbed the side of Coal’s hand.

Coal looked up as another, far less enjoyable, interpretation popped into his head. “I’m not going to have to drive a taxi, am I?”

Angus snorted in amusement. “There’s no way I’m letting someone this easily distracted near my company vehicles or customers. Besides, I don’t think this would pass Union rules for proper interview technique, do you?”

Coal processed what Angus had said. “You’re not offering me a job at all?”

Angus raised his dark eyebrows, a smile stretching his lips. “Not if you were the last unemployed person with a driving license in the world.” He paused, then asked, “Do you even have a license?”

Coal’s slight hesitation made Angus blow out an annoyed breath, so Coal didn’t stop the hasty excuse from tumbling

from his mouth.

“Yeah, but it’s suspended. I’ve got six penalty points; it’s damn cruel to lower the limit for new drivers.” Coal warmed to his fictitious tale. “I got three for speeding on a stupid camera, but I was only doing thirty-eight in a thirty, and three for going through an amber light that’d only just changed. That policewoman was an utter bitch.” Coal conjured an appropriate license into the pocket of his red raincoat hanging in the outer office in case Angus wanted evidence.

“You took the points instead of going on a speed awareness course, knowing you’d be banned?”

Coal winced. “I did one of those six months before.”

The only Adult Christmas wish they’d let him fulfill so far involved persuading an official to offer a desperate motorist a course instead of getting penalty points on his license. Coal had posed as a senior official and bawled out the paper-pusher for being too harsh.

It’d been fun, but the stress of holding the form of a middle-aged, balding bureaucrat was almost too much. Toward the end of his tirade, Coal’s pot-belly began to shrink. He’d practically thrown himself out the door before he sprouted a thick head of hair and lost several inches of height. Keeping his own form was so much easier and more comfortable.

“You deserve a reward for being honest,” Angus said. “I can see that was difficult for you to admit. What do you think it should be?” Coal’s gaze shot to the bulge in Angus’s pants. “Apart from that.”

“Is that a never ever, or just a ‘not in the office’ type rule?” Coal hesitated before thinking *what the hell* and going for it. “I think I need to learn a little more about this,” he presented his sore wrists. “You seem to know a lot more about it than I do, so I was thinking, hoping really, that—“

“Coal, stop talking.”

The stern tone cut him off, making him look up at Angus again. Coal hadn’t realized he’d been focused on Angus’s shoes. The man must love polishing as Coal could see his reflection in them.

“Meet me at the Switch Room—it’s a pub on the High Street—at eight tonight, and we’ll discuss it.”

“Discuss what?” Coal asked a little breathless while doing an internal *hell, yeah!*

“Me teaching you the joys of being a submissive.”

Coal blinked. *WTF?* “I’m not a submissive; I just use pain to distract myself. Sometimes. Occasionally. Not very often at all to tell the truth.”

Coal winced as soon as the ‘T’ word fell out of his mouth. Feeling Angus’s gaze drilling into the top of his head, he looked up.

Angus stared at him for several long seconds and Coal wished he still had his cuffs. “Goodbye, Mr. Chestnut. You know where to find me. Meet me tonight or don’t; it’s entirely up to you.”

Angus went back behind his desk, adjusted his glasses, and pulled a file from his desk drawer. Coal didn't move from where he kneeled in front of it. Angus flipped through his paperwork for a moment before returning his attention to Coal with his eyebrows raised.

“Was there something else, Mr. Chestnut?”

“Erm, what do I wear? I've never done this sort of thing before.”

“Try a shirt that reaches the top of your trousers, but no underwear. Although what you have on,” Angus paused and his gaze raked over Coal again, “is very cute, you'll freeze in those shorts tonight. Be there at eight.”

Angus's attention returned to his paperwork, and it took a whole minute for his gaze to rise again. This time, a crease showed between his eyebrows.

“I don't want you in a suit,” Coal said, jutting his chin out as he expected an argument. His mission was to make Angus happy, and that meant helping him loosen up a little. Make that a lot. No one could be relaxed in a business suit and obsessively shiny shoes.

The deep frown vanished as Angus looked thoughtful. “You really are new at this, aren't you? You don't make demands of me. I make demands of you. It's the way it works.”

Coal scowled. “That's not fair.”

Angus's blank stare meant Coal's audience was clearly at an end, so he got to his feet. The cuffs were on the desk, but he

didn't want to antagonize Angus by reaching for them, so he magicked them into his coat pocket in the outer office.

At the door, he looked over his shoulder. "Angus?"

When his target looked up, Coal pulled down his shorts and flashed his bare ass. "See? I'm already learning."

He pulled them up again and made a hasty exit in case Angus came after him for being rude. Instead of pounding footsteps, the wonderful sound of Angus's deep chuckle followed him out of the door.



# CHAPTER 4



*Nothing but trouble.* Angus couldn't escape the conclusion as he listened to the murmuring voices on the other side of his office door. Here he was, a grown-ass man, trying to eavesdrop on a conversation between his secretary and a guy, a boy, who almost had a neon 'TROUBLE' sign floating above his head, and yet he'd invited him on a date.

*No, not a date. I'm only trying to help a vulnerable young man, just like Sam.* Coal needed help—guidance—to explore his need for pain safely. Every emotion Coal felt played out on his face, his body. Angus couldn't look away, fascinated as defiance, bravado, confusion, and lust came and went like a merry-go-round. Even when he'd been singing, the purity of his emotions shone through as much as his pure voice.

*Fuck, who am I kidding?* Angus wanted to know how the cheeky, heart-on-his-sleeve youngster would react to a spanking, to being tied up, sucked, and fucked. And that scared the hell out of him.

He'd started in a similar way with Jesse, but they'd been the same age. Their relationship bloomed from stolen kisses to passionate sex. Jesse always gasped, moaned, when Angus got rough. They'd explored kink, bondage, dominance, and submission. Jesse loved everything they did in those first few years. Their shared kink became a hobby, a passion, a way of life that held them together. It seemed a match made in heaven as Angus's need to provide, dominate, and protect slotted in perfectly with Jesse's nurturing submissive nature. The long hours Angus put in to grow his business to provide for their futures were always rewarded by his grateful partner when he eventually got home.

Until one day, they weren't. Until the avoidance, the I'm tired excuses. Until Angus found bruises, bites, rope, and finger marks that weren't his. The hurt. The arguments, accusations, the storming out. The confrontation in front of their peers, and then the silence. The self-hatred, regret, confusion.

A month later, divorce papers dropped on his doorstep, citing 'unreasonable behavior'. Six months after that, a friend told him Jesse had left the country. He'd claimed to be happy that Jesse had found someone more compatible. Three years on, Angus had even started to believe it.

He'd left kink, relationships, and the unwanted distractions they produced behind. PrideRide was thriving, and so were his employees. He didn't need the complication called Coal Chestnut, but he'd smiled, damn well laughed, for the first time in he didn't know when.

Angus heaved a sigh of relief as the outer door of Sam's office shut. Coal must have been chatting to Sam for nearly ten minutes. Had she warned Coal off or encouraged him? He shook his head. Of course, she'd encouraged Coal, but she didn't know the entire history of his last disastrous relationship.

The only thing Angus could do was put his faith in Sam. She'd been a friend for a decade and had been his rock when it all went wrong with Jesse.

That he was considering Sam and his failed marriage rather than what had just happened in his office proved he was avoiding the subject. Angus Fricker didn't avoid issues if he noticed them. He faced them head-on, no matter how awkward or tempting. And Coal Chestnut was the definition of an awkward temptation.

He couldn't believe the cheeky little brat had been so forward and yet so obviously inexperienced. And 'little' was a good description. The guy couldn't have been more than five feet four. 'Wiry' would be a polite description of his physique, 'skinny' was a better fit.

Drinking, smoking, sofa-surfing, a clearly crap or inadequate diet, and self-harming. He'd never met anyone who needed a dominant in their life so damn much, yet didn't know it. Whatever the reason for the strange combination of naivety and attitude, Coal was a road crash waiting to happen. Angus wanted to know why, wanted to help, wanted to see Mr. Coal Chestnut with all the prickles smoothed.

Although he'd enjoyed Coal's spirit, others—like Spencer fucking Ward—would make Coal suffer for it. Yes, Angus was into kink, but breaking someone's will had never interested him, nor was having a mindlessly obedient slave.

A conversation when the other party only said, 'Yes, Master' or 'If you like, Master,' would bore him to tears. Yes, he enjoyed being in charge. That could, and had, involved inflicting pain, but only if his partner enjoyed it.

In his heart, he knew that if he left Coal to his own devices, he'd eventually find his way to someone like Ward. The fucker was already circling like a shark sensing blood. As naive as Coal was, some bastard, or bitch, would take advantage of him. That is, if he was a genuine masochist rather than a self-harmer.

Self-harmers needed help to deal with their mental health issues. Real masochists seldom stopped, no matter the amount of therapy they received, because pain wasn't merely a distraction. Masochists liked pain because of the high it gave them. It remained to be seen if Coal was both. He certainly hit the self-harm criteria.

Genuine masochists, those who treated pain as a recreational drug, needed someone to look after them because they failed to use safe words when high on endorphins. Hard-core sadists got their kicks from causing distress rather than eliciting endorphin highs, and it was those individuals Angus feared. They'd break Coal's wonderful spirit.

The thought of Coal's boyish face with tears of real fear running down it didn't turn Angus on, but it would for many who used the title 'Dom'. On the other hand, the thought of those pouty lips around his dick, of spanking that round ass until Coal remembered not to hurt himself again, proved a temptation he nearly hadn't resisted even though Sam had been on the other side of the door.

Coal Chestnut, or whatever his real name was, appeared to be trouble with a capital T, but God, Angus wanted him. But the last time he'd desired someone this much, he'd proposed, and look where that had ended. Although it seemed that Coal's thing was pain rather than public or private humiliation like Jesse's.

Looking down at his paperwork to avoid further disturbing thoughts of Coal or Jesse, Angus decided about the entertainment for the Christmas party. He'd left it far too late to find anyone decent, and several of today's candidates would give his employees indigestion if he let them perform. It'd have to be the piped hotel music again.

Coal could do the job standing on his head, but Angus had other plans for that particular Christmas songbird. For once, Angus intended to put himself first rather than PrideRide.

He hit the intercom. "Sam, can you come in?"

Coal had been right; the tree perched on the filing cabinet did indeed look small and, if he were honest, a bit sad. Maybe he should let Sam add a few more decorations. He might not celebrate at this time of year, but other people did. The

prospect of Sam coming in made him remember the damn cuffs.

He glanced over, intending to throw the offending items in the bin, only to see a bare area on his desk. Like an idiot, he got up and checked the floor.

*Little shit.*

Sam walked in with her notepad. “Lost something?”

“None of them were any good,” he announced. “You’ll have to let the hotel know we’ll be needing their music again.”

Instead of nodding and carrying on with her day, Sam tapped her pen against her teeth. The irritating gesture meant she was deliberating on how to broach an awkward subject. Over the years, he’d got to know her tells but hoped she hadn’t found his. He did his level best to minimize his own, but he’d be as naive as Coal if he assumed he didn’t have any. The brat in question was as open as an annotated book with extra-large print.

“Why don’t you offer some of them driving jobs? Two have completely clean licenses, they’re locals who know the area, and both need work.”

Angus tore his thoughts away from Coal’s expressions and tried to concentrate on Sam’s suggestion.

“If we employ them as taxi drivers and promote a couple of the taxi drivers to the chauffeuring pool, we’ll have enough chauffeurs to cover the evening and weekend jobs you do now. You are the boss,” she said, as if speaking to a five-year-old.

“You shouldn’t be doing grunt work after all these years. The firm can afford it, and the staff can take it. Several will jump at the chance for overtime. Take some time off, Angus, at least evenings and weekends.”

He opened his mouth to object, but she held up a finger. “We’ve known each other a long time, and you need to start living again. That wacky boy might not be the solution, but I heard you laugh. It sounded good, and I miss it. Please try tonight?”

Annoyance flared that Coal had shared their plans. He opened his mouth, but she cut him off again. “You don’t have to fall in love. You don’t even have to see him again. But for God’s sake, take an interest in life outside this place before you shrivel up inside entirely.” Her last words were a little louder and choked out. As she turned to the door, her hand went to her eye and angrily wiped at it.

Angus was putting his arms around her a moment later. He held her for a little while until she patted his shoulder roughly. He released her.

“I know it’s not my place, but it needed to be said.”

Angus couldn’t help smiling at his flustered friend. For some reason, Sam had appointed herself his stand-in parent, and he appreciated her concern. There weren’t many people who had the guts to give him a dressing down.

“I hope I’m not going to get into trouble with Natalie for hugging her wife.”

Letting out a self-deprecating chuckle, Sam wiped her eyes carefully so she didn't smudge her mascara.

"She wants you happy even more than I do. Apparently, I'm a bit of a work bore."

"I'll do you a deal, Sam. I'll take on two more drivers, and I'll stop driving, if you promise to stop nagging me about my personal life."

He looked to the ceiling and sighed, hamming it up as if his next words were the most difficult he'd ever uttered. "And I'll try to have a little more fun, although I can't promise anything. I'm a bit out of practice."

Sam blessed him with a beaming smile. "I have a feeling that cheeky young thing who flew out of here earlier knows a thing or two about fun. I hope you can keep up with him."

Angus grinned back. "That's the first time you've been wrong today. I won't be keeping up with Mr. Coal Chestnut, I'll be slowing him down to my geriatric pace."

Sam raised her eyebrows. "You're not old, but I wish you luck. He had me out of breath just listening to him sing. As my dad would have said, he has a fine set of pipes on him."

Angus leaned in a little closer as if he were about to share a secret. "I noticed... before he started singing."

Sam turned a little pink and slapped at his arm. "Go on, get out of here. Go get ready for your date. I'll lock up."

He gave her a snappy salute. "Yes, ma'am. But I need to speak to him first. Have you got his number?"



She frowned. “Didn’t you get it?”

“No, but I’ll get it tonight—” Angus ground out, worry already bubbling “—if he turns up.” The itch to grab his coat, trawl the streets, find the little idiot, and make sure he wasn’t using those damn cuffs bubbled.

But Coal wasn’t his. He didn’t have the right, not yet anyway.

# CHAPTER 5



*NINE HOURS TO KILL* before my date. Busking, which was what he should be doing, didn't appeal. Yes, there were still people around, but as the sleet had turned to full-on rain, the likelihood of anyone stopping wasn't great. Shoppers hurried in and out of shops, heads down, shoulders near their ears.

If he went home, they might find him something else to do, and he'd miss his date with his target. Although the bulk of the energy from fulfilling a wish went straight to Santa, a little of the energy stayed with the fairy, giving them a buzz of pleasure and a golden glow visible to other fairies for several hours.

All of the Adult Department staff, apart from him, had a constant glow. Yes, the other guys, Cedar, Winter, and Garland, didn't rub it in, but he'd had enough of the sympathy faces that the girls, Tinsel, Snowflake, and Candy, gave him.

Popping in, glowing enough to force the others to shade their eyes, would be bloody brilliant, but first, he needed to please his target. Angus had made it clear that Coal's current clothing wasn't suitable for their meeting tonight, although he hadn't been able to keep his eyes off him. Revealing, but not too revealing. He had so little experience at this.

Without conscious thought, his fingers found the inside of the cuffs in his pocket. A little pain would be a welcome distraction, a way to focus his thoughts, but Angus said he wasn't to hurt himself. And he had sort of promised he wouldn't.

A girl nearly bumped into him as she left a shop with an odd, almost blacked-out window right in front of him.

"Oh my God, that's so damn cute," her friend exclaimed, looking at her companion's face where a series of three studs curved upward at the corner of her eye. "I'm so going to get some too."

"Don't you dare be a copycat," the newly pierced girl exclaimed, "If you want—"

Curiosity piqued, he tuned out the arguing girls and turned to the shop. The cursive window typography obscuring much of the inside read *Brighton Body Art*.

Shielding his eyes, he peered through the dark glass. This inside wasn't much brighter. A counter took up one side of the small room, and two dark brown leather sofas sat at the other. Stacks of leather folders sat on the coffee table between the sofas, and three twenty-something girls sat flicking through

one. Coal ignored them as the artwork covering the walls made him stare. Body parts. Body parts of all shapes, sizes, and colors, with piercings and tattoos.

Getting a tattoo or a piercing would hurt, but his agreement with Angus would still stand as he wouldn't be hurting himself. The more Coal thought about it, the better the idea sounded. Sam had facial piercings, and Angus had at least a tongue piercing. They might have more, plus tattoos, hidden under their clothes. It seemed like a great idea to ingratiate himself with both wisher and target.

The only downside was that if he popped anywhere, they'd magically heal. Not having a piercing or a tattoo this morning and having a totally healed one appear a few hours later would raise the suspicions of a man like Angus. *Unless I get a tattoo or piercing somewhere hidden by clothes...*

The hair on the back of his neck stood up. Without looking, without a sound or a touch, Coal knew someone on the naughty list stood behind him.

“What are you thinking of getting?” The voice was male, light, and conversational. It still made Coal swallow as his belly flip-flopped.

“Don't know,” he murmured. He wanted the man to leave, wanted to know what had put him in Santa's bad book, and if his touch stung like holding a naughty-list letter.

“That's common. But most have a preference for ink or piercings when they first come here, even if they end up getting both. How about you start with why you want

something done? Is it for yourself or to please, perhaps piss off, someone else?"

"Revenge tattoos are a thing?" Coal asked and turned to look at the man. He stumbled back a step.

*What the hell is Winter doing here?* The illusion vanished. The man beside him could be the twin of his fellow Adult Department fairy, white-blond hair, sharp cheekbones, six-foot-tall and rangy, but Winter's lips didn't have that cruel twist. His eyes didn't look right through Coal's defenses like this guy's, and Winter's eyes were a friendly green, not an icy blue.

The man's eyebrows rose as if people being struck dumb by his appearance happened all the time.

"They're surprisingly common," the man said, "although I don't advise them. Having your ex's name 'is a cunt' on your ass will never make anyone happy long term. Walking away, not looking back, while your ex wallows in regret or hate, is the best revenge."

Coal swallowed. "You, erm... seem to know a lot about it."

The man shrugged. "I work here every now and again as a piercer, so I hear stories from the tattooists."

"I didn't mean the body art."

The man held his gaze, then leaned in closer. "I know," he breathed against Coal's ear. With the almost touch, the prickly sensation turned into a sting, lighting up Coal's nerves.

Coal blinked, not realizing the man had increased the distance between them again.

“Where would you have a piercing?” the man asked, tilting his head as he examined Coal. He held still, wanting the approval of the naughty-list stranger, knowing he shouldn’t.

“Nothing on your face, not yet. You’re cute, a boy next door type. You don’t want to scare off the grannies and kids when you’re busking, which you’re damn good at, by the way.”

“You heard me this morning?”

The man smiled, but it didn’t warm his expression. “I did. I also watched that bitch from the shop have a go at you. I enjoyed the way you were handling things before Mr. Hero Complex stepped in.”

“Angus?”

The man’s upper lip twitched in a micro-sneer. “Fricker got to you already? He does love a good sob story, although it’s a shame he can’t keep the strays he saves.”

Coal stood a little taller. “One, I don’t have a sob story, and two, Angus is a good man.”

The blond snorted. “And that’s Fricker’s trouble in a nutshell. He’s a good man who is attracted to people who don’t want him to be good to them.” He nodded at the shop window. “Is this what this is about? You want to get something a little edgy to impress St. Fricker?”

Coal’s gut tensed as this naughty, hell, this downright *bad* man flayed open his secrets with ease. Coal didn’t like it, knew he

should walk away, but his feet didn't move.

“It's not for him; it's for me.”

The man hung his head, snorted in derision. “Of course it is.” He looked back up at Coal, icy blue gaze sharp. “And I know him far better than you do. I know he likes piercings, both on himself and his partners. Are you planning on sleeping with him or anyone else in the near future?”

Coal's face burned like he was stoking an open fire, but his cock perked up. “That's none of your business.”

That sly smile came again. “It is if I'm going to pierce you. Some of my favorite places to stick barbells and studs mean no sex for weeks unless you're really into cock and ball torture.”

“You put piercings down there?” Coal asked, eyes wide.

“Oh yes, Twinkletoes, I most certainly do. I've stuck needles in hundreds of cocks, balls, clits, and labia.

“But although I'd like nothing better than to cock-block Fricker, he has a mean left hook I'd rather not experience again anytime soon.”

Coal blinked. Physical violence was unknown amongst Fairy kind. “He hit you?”

The man smiled, the first genuine one Coal had seen. “I stole his husband, stuck him in a cage, and sold him to a hardcore sadist in the US. Fricker was, understandably, a little pissed at me.”

He reached out and shut Coal's mouth with a finger under his chin. The contact burned so damn bright, and Coal leaned forward when the naughty man dropped his hand.

“As much as I enjoy the sight of your gaping mouth, I can't do anything about it out here, so stop being a tease.”

Coal's mind flashed back to being on his knees for Angus, wanting to open his perfectly creased trousers, wanting to taste, to kiss, to—

The man chuckled. “Don't get ahead of yourself, Twinkletoes. So, what's it going to be, a boring ear piercing, some cute little dermals—” He brushed a finger down Coal's neck, making him shudder at the naughty-list sting. “—a belly ring, or my personal favorite under the circumstances, nipples.”

Not knowing if he wanted the answer to be yes or no, Coal asked, “Will it hurt?”

Lips twitched again. “Wouldn't be any fun otherwise. Come on.”

With a guiding hand that stung his shoulder even through his clothes, Coal found himself inside the body art shop. The dark wood and strung tinsel felt superficially like home, but the smell of disinfectant rather than warm spice and woodsmoke set it apart. The differences itched. This wasn't home. These people weren't fairies, weren't safe. Coal loved the contrast. Delicious butterflies fluttered in his belly.

Even with his festive outfit, the pink-haired girl behind the counter only had eyes for his companion. Coal only had eyes



for her dizzying number of facial piercings and the pink and blue flowers crawling up her neck. It looked as if they wanted to drag the rest of her down into a floral world. She had so many rings and studs in her eyebrows, ears, lips, and cheeks that he wanted her to stand still so he could count them.

She swallowed, hopped off her stool, face flushing. “Sorry, sir. I didn’t know you were coming in today. I—”

“Relax, Kitty, I didn’t either. Got a free bay so I can do some piercings for my friend?”

‘Friend’ was an odd thing to call someone you’d met only minutes ago. The pull of wanting to know more about Angus’s past and the push of the sting from this naughty boy had Coal standing there, mind whirling. He should leave, simply walk out without another word, and go... *where* until eight tonight? As if confirming his decision to stay, at least for a while, rain clattered against the window.

Kitty nodded, her shoulders dropping from their tight position near her ears. “The back room is available. Sophia only does Fridays and Saturdays.”

“Everything in the normal places and ready to go?”

“Of course.” She paused, hand hovering over the counter, as her gaze flicked between them. “Do you want the consent form?”

“This isn’t business, but hand one over; it’ll give him something to think about while I prep.”

She smiled, focusing on Coal for the first time. “Don’t worry, you’ll love it. Mr. Ward is the best.”

Her gaze flicked back to Coal’s companion, and her eyes widened. “Did I say something wrong?”

Ward indicated the name badge on her chest with a finger. “Unless people are wearing a name tag, or have personally introduced themselves in your hearing, assume they wish to keep their identity private. Understand?”

The girl’s chin almost brushed her chest as she shrank before Coal’s eyes. “Sorry, sir. It won’t happen again.”

“Correct.” The word held an edge of promise, of menace. Kitty shrank down a little more.

To interrupt the awkward moment, Coal took the form from her. “Thanks, Kitty. I’m Coal.”

Her lips hardly moved as she murmured, “Hi, Coal. Nice to meet you.”

Ward moved over to a cabinet full of jewelry as Coal looked at the form. Name and ID. Thanks to the driving license he’d created, those wouldn’t be a problem, but address and phone number might be.

Sam said he could stay with her, and he could call the office to get her address, but would Ward turn up there?

From the brief history he’d gotten, he bet Angus wouldn’t be pleased if he found out Coal had done anything with this Ward guy. And if his target wasn’t happy, his wisher wouldn’t be happy either.

Concerns about his address leaked away as he read further. The fine-print mentioned possible complications including redness, bleeding, swelling, tenderness and infections. The list of possible piercings included ‘ask for additional sheet’ beside the genital option. He pictured a cock with the same amount of metal in it as Kitty’s face.

If the guy was a grower rather than a shower, would the piercings get further apart as it got hard? Would it always hurt? He imagined balancing the pain with pleasure, hovering on the edge, the pain stopping him from tipping over for hours before finally, the balance tilted and—

Ward plucked the board out of his hand. “We’ll deal with this later. Come on, I’ve got a shift this afternoon.”

The blond got three steps toward the back of the reception area before he stopped. He didn’t turn around.

“Get your ass over here, Twinkletoes. I don’t wait for anyone; people wait for me, isn’t that right, Kitty?”

“Yes, sir. Waiting for you is always a privilege.”

Coal stared at her, although as her face was tilted down, he couldn’t see if she was joking. He didn’t think so. This had just gone from odd and interesting to simply odd and a bit scary. Ward wasn’t Coal’s target or wisher, and he was on the naughty list.

“I’ll be off then. Patience isn’t a virtue I possess.”

“Coal.”

The single word brought his feet to a halt in the echoing silence. Even the chattering teens on the sofas were watching.

“I’ll take a turn if he’s too chicken,” one of the girls piped up.

Coal spun toward her. “I’m not chicken. I just—”

“Quiet.” Ward’s eyes flashed as he looked at the girl. “I don’t want you. I want him.”

Ward’s head turned to him as if Coal possessed some sort of magical attraction. All these people wanted Ward, but the beautiful man wanted him.

Nobody had ever wanted Coal. They put up with him, some felt sorry for him like the other Adult Department fairies, like Sam and Angus, but Ward *wanted* him.

Coal began moving toward him before he acknowledged that he’d made the decision. Ward turned and headed into a small room filled with a couch that looked like it belonged in a dentist’s surgery, a small sink, and racks of plastic trays. Unlike the reception area, this had a plastic floor, and the material reached six inches up the wall for easy cleaning. Disinfecting. Because people got hurt, bled, in here.

“Shut the door. Coat and top off. Stick them on that chair, then take a seat on the couch,” Ward said as he hung up his coat. The confidence in his voice had Coal complying. This was normal, commonplace, for Ward, even if it was damn freaky for Coal.

Perching on the couch in nothing but his shorts, tights, and boots, Coal’s nerves prickled. He’d never been more aware of

his nipples. Coal felt alive, real, present, very bare, and more than a little naughty. Although it wasn't cold, gooseflesh bloomed in waves over his skin.

Calm and confident, Ward went about his work, washing his hands thoroughly, then putting on some blue plastic gloves before pulling two metal trays out of one of the shelving units. Packaging tore as Ward set up the two trays, but with his back to Coal.

Stretching his neck, Coal tried to see over Ward's shoulder, then sank back down. Perhaps there was a reason Ward didn't want his clients to see the piercing equipment. *How scary is it?*

Ward scooted closer on his wheeled stool. "Nice muscle definition," Ward said as he reached out and swiped an alcohol wipe over Coal's left nipple.

Coal curled, twisted, protecting himself from the unexpected chilly touch.

Ward chuckled. "Well, Fricker's got that wrong. You're not a masochist at all, are you?"

"Don't laugh at me. And I am into pain, see?"

Coal presented his wrists. As Angus had done, Ward immediately captured his arm and looked intently at the reddened skin.

Without releasing Coal's hand, he reached behind him, and grabbed another alcohol wipe. Unlike the one on his nipple, this stung, but he didn't try to pull away.

“Other one,” Ward demanded. Coal presented it. When that wrist had also been disinfected, Ward said, “What did you use to do this, spiked cuffs?”

At least Ward hadn’t assumed someone else made the marks like Angus had. But as he didn’t want to use magic to retrieve his property again, Coal ground out, “None of your business.”

Ward shook his head, huffing in amusement. “Damn, you’re green. Where the hell did you grow up, a religious commune?”

Irritation smothered Coal’s previous nervous thrill. How dare this naughty list guy take the piss? “Given the outfit, I would have thought a bright man like you would’ve worked it out.”

Ward’s head tilted. “I don’t know if I find your insolence a turn-on or insulting, but please, enlighten me.”

Coal plucked at his red shorts. “Duh, the North Pole?”

“I get method acting, but all this for busking? It certainly shows dedication to your part. As for your wrists, all I want to do is disinfect them. Pain is a coping mechanism for many people, but infection is dangerous.”

“You’re not going to take them?”

Ward’s head tilted. “Fricker tried that?” He snorted. “Of course he did. How did you get them back?”

Coal shrugged, but he couldn’t help grinning. “Nicked them off his desk when he was filling out a form.”

Ward chuckled. “Fricker does like his forms. I knew I liked you. Now, the cuffs?”

“Didn’t bring them.”

Ward looked him in the eyes. Coal could feel that Ward knew he was lying.

“Fair enough, but leave them off until there’s not a bit of redness on there. And be damn careful about disinfecting both the cuffs and your wrists every time you put them on and take them off.” He snapped off his gloves and put on a new pair. “Although I don’t suppose you’ll need them if this works. Sit up straight; I need to examine your nipples to see if they’re suitable.”

Coal looked down. He’d never considered his, or anyone else’s nipples before. Dark pink and the size of his thumbnail, he couldn’t work out whether they were normal or not. Was he deformed? Had Santa’s mistake when Coal was created fucked up more than his personality?

“They’re a bit small, but—” Ward ran his gloved thumb across the tip. Coal flinched as his cock lurched. Ward’s smile got wider. “Sensitive. Ok, this’ll work. I’ll just mark them up, and then we can get to the fun part.”

Ward picked up a black marker pen, then bent again. To steady himself, he leaned his forearm on Coal’s upper thigh, dangerously close to where Coal’s hardening cock stretched the material of his shorts.

“The perkier they are, the better,” Ward murmured, his breath heating Coal’s skin. “But I think we can do better than this. Thinking sexy thoughts usually does the trick.”

Coal's mind shot to kneeling in front of Angus, the bulge in his trousers, how much he'd wanted to see what lay beneath, taste it, have it fill him.

"And there it is," Ward murmured in satisfaction. "Are you thinking about me, Fricker, or someone else?"

"Angus," Coal blurted, knowing it would irritate this naughty list man, *wanting* it to bug him.

Ward huffed in amusement. "Those glasses did a number on you, huh? Happens a lot. Everyone thinks he's hardcore behind them, like he's some kind of Clark Kent who turns into Superman. Sorry to burst your bubble, but Fricker is entry-level, always has been, always will be. Have you fucked yet? Has he even touched you as much as I have?"

Coal couldn't help it; he shook his head. Ward's smile grew. "Hold still." Without hesitation, Ward brought the pen up and steadied Coal's flesh with two fingers of his other hand, as if he had every right to touch him. The pen tapped him twice, one on each side of his nipple. Coal barely felt it and couldn't help being a little disappointed. Then Ward turned to the other side.

How would it feel to have Ward marking up his cock, looking at it intently, examining it, handling it, rubbing, squeezing—

"You can stop with the sexy thoughts now. If you can." Amusement dripped in Ward's voice. Embarrassment flared, and Coal glanced toward the door.



“Ah, ah, Twinkletoes. No running away before the fun stuff happens.”

Coal’s focus yanked back to the fantasy of a fully-clothed Ward playing with his cock.

“And by fun stuff, I mean these.” Ward held up a pair of long-armed, black plastic tongs with tiny triangular grips on the end. Coal swallowed.

“Lean back. Swearing is fine if you’re a pussy, flinching is not.”

Closing his eyes, breathing rapidly, Coal laid back against the inclined back of the couch, praying he wouldn’t be proved a pussy.

The plastic gripped him without hesitation, and Ward’s hot breath caressed his skin again. The clamp released, repositioned, pulled.

*Shit, shit, shit. Am I really doing this?*

“Breath in,” Ward said, sounding bored, sounding as if he’d done this a million times. “And out.” Coal fisted his hands, expecting sharp pain when he reached the end of his breath. It didn’t come.

“And in... and out.”

Push, *STING*. The pain lasted a fraction of a second, but the aftermath buzzed in Coal’s head.

“Well done. Loved the little ‘ah’. Very sexy.” Ward fiddled quickly with the piercing, wiped it with disinfectant, so gentle,

not harsh, just... professional, despite his words. Coal wanted him to carry on talking, carry on praising, saying good things about him. Gloves snapped off, then more rustling as Ward donned another pair.

*Does he call everyone sexy? Are they just lines?* Confidence in Ward's expertise warred with wanting to be special for a good reason for once.

"Now for the other one," Ward announced. Coal's eyes flicked open, focused on the black clamp heading toward his flesh.

"Eyes closed. Breath in." Ward sounded bored. Knowing the routine now, Coal settled.

"Fuck!" he swore as Ward shoved the needle through his flesh without warning. It hurt far more than the first.

A dark chuckle rolled out of the man pushing metal through Coal's tender skin.

"I would say sorry, but it'd be a lie. The second one always hurts more than the first so it's best to get it over with, for most anyway," Ward said as he fiddled, head down, a strand of white hair caressing Coal's naked skin.

"There, all done." Reaching out, Ward flicked at both nipples. Along with a bite of pain that resonated through Coal's body, ending up in his fingertips and toes, came a jingling sound.

Coal dipped his chin and looked down. A golden jingle bell hung from tiny chains on either side of each nipple.

"Beats bells on your clothes for percussion."

On autopilot, Coal's fingers headed toward the bright jewelry.

Ward grabbed his wrists, the sting from his sore wrists added to the pain buzz. "Ah, ah. No touching without washing your hands. You don't want to get an infection."

When he let him go, Coal mourned the loss of the controlling, focused, painful touch.

Ward began tidying his works space. "Soak them twice daily in distilled salt water; shot glasses work well. Don't pick any crusties. Ease them off after soaking with a cotton bud dipped in distilled water. No scented soap in the shower, no lotion, nothing that could carry germs. That includes mouths and spunk. Tell Fricker he can't come on your face or chest for at least three months. That should piss him off no end."

Ward paused after he took off his gloves, staring at Coal's quivering torso as if it were a canvas for his pleasure.

"You know," he stroked a finger over the sensitive skin of Coal's lower belly. Coal bit back a groan at the naughty-list sting. "I have the strangest urge to tattoo 'Oh What Fun It Is To Ride' right here. That way, anyone giving you head will see it and get ideas."

"Do it," Coal blurted.

Ward snorted, stood, and threw Coal's bundled-up clothes at him, then added two small dressings to the pile.

"Stick those over your nips, but you can take them off after a couple of hours. But do it very carefully. No pulling on the jewelry.

“Look me up in a couple of months. If you feel the same way and have a design worked out, I’ll get you an appointment. I’m not artistic enough to tattoo.” Pulling out his wallet, he dropped a card with only a phone number on it on the couch. Without looking back, Ward walked out.

Coal could have called him back, could have begged. Ward would probably enjoy that. But the more the distance between them grew, the more Coal’s mind cleared and dread settled in his belly. He’d let someone on the naughty list touch him, do things to him.

He waited for another fairy, maybe even Santa himself to appear and drag him back to the North Pole forever for breaking the taboo.

The door opened and he drew in a sharp breath, not as prepared to face his fate as he’d thought.

The pink hair had Coal slumping in relief, but he immediately straightened his back as the bells on his nipples jingled.

“You alright?” Kitty asked.

Numbly, he nodded. Not because he was alright, but because it was expected.

“Here, let me do this for you.” Kitty pulled on a pair of gloves, then taped the small dressings over his nipples, including the bells.

“We don’t usually use hanging jewelry with new piercings, but Sir is the best; he knows what he’s doing. He gave you the aftercare lecture, right?”

Coal nodded. The clock on the wall said only a handful of minutes had passed, and yet his world, his body, had been altered forever.

“He’s pretty intense, right?”

Coal didn’t realize Kitty sat on the stool Ward had so recently occupied until she spoke.

Between one heartbeat and the next, his sinking mood bottomed out and rebounded into anger at himself, at Ward.

“I want a tattoo.” When her eyes widened, he added, “Right now.”

“There are no artists available. It’s lunchtime, and I’m the only one here. Besides, all the artists are booked up for the next week. People want mods now so they can heal a bit over the Christmas break. I could fit you in on—”

“You do it.”

Her tongue poked out, licked the ring in her upper lip. “I’m only an apprentice. I’m not meant to—”

Coal grabbed his wallet, magicked six crisp pink fifty-pound notes into it, and pulled them out.

“I only want a few words, and I’ll write it. All you have to do is trace.” Her gaze flicked to the door. “If anyone asks, I’ll say I did it myself, which I will, with a dirty needle and the wrong ink, if you don’t.”

# CHAPTER 6



TO HEAL, OR NOT to heal, that was the question Coal wrestled with after leaving the body art studio. The frigid temperature outside made his nipples tighten. Rather than grabbing for them, which would look damn odd, he stopped, hunched his shoulders, and pretended to look in a window until the pain eased.

It didn't matter if the buzzing in his head and blurry vision had been caused by pain or him slowing time in that little room so Kitty didn't overrun her lunch hour.

The cold rain might be making his abused flesh ache, but it helped to wake him up a little. His mood sank again as he realized he still had seven hours to kill before his date with Angus. Time worked differently in the human and fairy world, but he hadn't known how exhausting altering time would be.

Popping home would instantly heal all his wounds, and he could get a decent meal and an entire night's sleep, three or

four if he wanted, before meeting Angus tonight. If—and it was a huge one—the other fairies didn't detect Ward on him.

There had to be a penalty for intentionally getting close to a naughty-lister. At the very least, he'd be banned from visiting the human world, and Sam's wish would remain unfulfilled. And Angus would likely stay a miserable stick-up-his-ass grinch forever.

“What you need, Coal, is somewhere to rest and get ready for your date,” he murmured. Keeping his thoughts to himself proved too much effort.

A sweetshop window, bright with stuck-on plastic stencils of baubles, snowmen, and Santas, drew him like a magnet. He needed sugar, a ton of it. Gathering up an assortment of random chocolate and sugary treats, he dumped the armload on the counter.

“Do you want a bag, dear?” the grey-haired woman behind the counter said. Coal blinked, trying to get his mind working. He focused on her kindly face, then on a picture of the same woman standing beside a man in front of a bright red VW campervan. The words *For Sale* were hand-written underneath it. Privacy. Somewhere to sleep. He gave her a bright smile.



After peering out of the cute little campervan's window to make sure the Switch Room car park was empty of people, Coal opened the sliding door.

He'd scoffed most of the candy, and fallen into a sugar coma for the last six hours. His chest and belly ached from the piercings and tattoo, especially as he'd removed the dressings on his nipples, but the pain reminded him why he was here. The skin around the tattoo was irritated, reddened, oozing, and a little swollen under the plastic wrap. His nipples were faring better, but they were still sore and puffy.

Hopefully, his conjured outfit would meet Angus's expectations, well, a little anyway. Technically, he wore trousers rather than shorts as they reached below his knees, but they were made of the same material as before in dark green rather than red. He'd made the tunic heavier and baggier than the one earlier, but it still had bells on the points to drown out the tiny tinkles from the bells hanging from his nipples.

He'd tried not to decorate the van, he really had, but the plain black curtains were now a cheerful festive red with a candy cane motif but only on the inside. And he was proud of himself for not touching the outside because he didn't want Angus, or anyone else, to know he was camping out in the pub car park.

Checking that the car park was clear of people, he got out and winced at the noise the sliding door made as he had to slam it to get the sixty-year-old door to close.



After trotting across the car park, Coal paused at the pub door, squeezed his wrist, then cursed because he'd left the cuffs in the van. Angus would go nuts if he saw them, which would not lead to 'happy'. Instead, he rubbed his chest, breathed through the wave of anxiety-killing pain, and stepped into the overheated, red brick Victorian building. One look had Coal concluding that the Switch Room wasn't the genteel establishment he'd assumed from Angus's appearance and demeanor. This was the furthest thing Coal could imagine from a fancy wine bar.

The long wooden bar had a wonderfully tacky foil 'Merry Christmas' banner hanging above it. Coal ordered a large cream sherry. The big, tattooed, shaven-headed barman's eyebrow rose a fraction, then he asked for ID. After a careful check, he went on a hunt for an appropriate bottle, which he had to polish to remove a film of dust. Coal clearly looked like he knew his sherry as the barman had brought out a vintage bottle.

"Port glass or schooner?"

Coal opened and closed his mouth. "Why would you put sherry in a port glass?"

"Of course. Silly me," the man murmured and poured the rich dark sherry into the short-stemmed, tall narrow glass, then slid the drink across the bar. Unfortunately, it wasn't cut crystal, so Coal couldn't indulge in watching light play off the angles of rich red. Instead, he surveyed his fellow customers.

No one else drank sherry or anything remotely festive. The beverages of choice seemed to be either dark or light pints of beer, with an occasional balloon-like glass filled with ice and a clear spirit. All very drab.

The universally male patrons, including couples and small groups, seemed to be mostly office workers, and Coal stood out like a brightly colored parrot among feral pigeons. The barman had made some effort with the decorations, but everyone here needed a little joy and color in their lives, and Coal was exactly the right fairy to deliver it.

“Waiting for someone?” the barman asked, without mentioning Coal’s appearance or his apparently odd drink choice.

Coal liked the guy already, so he gave him a bright smile. “Yep. Is it always this busy in here?”

“It is on a Thursday; it’s karaoke night. Do you fancy a go?” He focused on Coal’s outfit. “You don’t seem the shy type. Come on, what have you got to lose?” He gave him an endearing puppy dog eyes impression, which made Coal snort.

“Got any Christmas tunes on there? I’m feeling festive.” He pointed to his chest as if the guy had failed to notice the white trim and bells on the bright red tunic.

“Sure, who shall I announce?” The guy grinned.

He winked. “Coal Chestnut, the Christmas Fairy.”

“Of course you are.” The bartender chuckled as he handed Coal the plastic-coated folder of tunes the machine provided.

*One cheered up, twenty more to go.*



Halfway into ‘Santa Baby,’ through his crowd of admirers, he spotted Angus standing at the bar. Apart from the frown directed at Coal, his target looked delicious in a pair of indigo jeans and a black leather jacket. Perhaps Angus preferred traditional carols like the one Coal sang in his office.

He finished the song with a breathy, ‘So hurry down the chimney tonight.’ “And that’s your lot, folks. It’s time for someone else to have a go,” he announced as he got off the stage. Whistles, applause, and cries of ‘more’ followed him as he headed to the bar, only to find himself abruptly sitting in a stranger’s lap.

“I’ll come up or down your chimney anytime, Sweetheart. Fancy a private performance?” Coal tried to get up but found himself held firmly.

“Come on, Christmas kiss? I’m sure there’s some mistletoe around here somewhere.” The man leered, his arm wrapped around Coal’s waist, pressing on the new tattoo, and the other went to his chin.

He stank of sweat, beer, and cigarettes. There was no way Coal would kiss someone this stinky, even if the man had

invoked an almost compulsory Christmas tradition. Luckily, Coal's mistletoe radar told him there wasn't a fresh sprig in the building.

"Sorry, there's no mistletoe here. The rules say it has to be the real stuff, so you're out of luck." He smiled and tried to stand up, but the guy kept his arm firmly around his waist. The pressure on the tattoo hurt, and not in a fun way.

The smile Coal gave him would have induced cavities at twenty feet. "If you don't let me go in the next two seconds, I'm going to rip off your balls and use them as baubles."

The man's eyes widened a little, then even further as a deep voice came from behind him.

"Let him go, mate. He's with me."

The man's arm left Coal's waist as if he'd become red hot. A hand went under each armpit, stretching the skin on his new piercings. He found himself lifted to his feet and shoved toward the bar.

"What do you think you're doing? This isn't a church social. You're lucky he didn't drag you outside and do God knows what to you."

Coal mirrored Angus's frown. "Well, thank you for the completely unnecessary rescue, Superman. I was fine; he was about to let me go."

"I doubt that very much. Now, what do you want to drink?" Angus asked, turning his attention to the barman. "Sorry, I

should have asked already. How's Aksel, still laying down the law?"

The big man's face lit up at the mention of the other man. "Yeah, in more ways than one, as always. Sorry, I didn't know our little songbird was with you. He's been keeping the whole place entertained for the last hour. I was keeping an eye on him."

He nodded towards Coal's little fan club. "That lot are from the warehouse around the corner. Bit rough around the edges, but not bad lads."

Coal smiled sweetly at Dave. "I'll have another large sherry, please."

"How many of those have you had?" Angus ground out.

"This'll be his fourth; he sure likes his sherry," Dave answered with a slight grimace as if he was going to be contaminated with 'old lady-ness' just by touching the bottle. Coal didn't even have a chance to open his mouth before Angus replied.

"He'll have a decaff sugar-free coke. So will I."

Caring or domineering? Coal couldn't make up his mind, but at least Angus was interested. Coal decided he deserved extra fairy points for not arguing as Dave produced the drinks in record time.

Coal took a sip and tilted his head to one side, trying to work Angus out. He was tense and clearly frustrated with either Coal, the grabby guy, or the world in general. It could be all

three, but Coal's mission involved Angus's happiness rather than making him look like he was chewing on a wasp.

"Do you make a habit of saving fairies in distress from big bad warehouse workers, or am I a special case?"

Angus's lips twitched.

*High five to the fairy.*

"You are definitely a very special case, but as I said earlier, you really need someone to keep an eye on you."

Coal's hand went to his hip as he cocked it. "Dave here was keeping an eye on me. Besides, as I said before, I can look after myself, been doing it all my life. I don't need a minder. I had just threatened to turn the guy's nuts into baubles."

Angus's mouth twitched again. "What would have happened if he let you go and followed you until you were on your own? You wouldn't have stood a chance. He's twice your size."

Coal pursed his lips before deciding what the hell, Angus had made the honesty rule after all.

"I would have popped back to the North Pole. I doubt he could have followed me. He doesn't strike me as an undercover fairy. We're usually far prettier." He waved a hand down himself to demonstrate.

Dave, who was polishing the bar near them, chuckled at Angus's nonplussed expression.

"He's got you this time. That guy's as ugly as sin, and from the looks he was giving your date, he's no closet fairy."

Coal winked at his new partner in crime before raising his eyebrows at Angus, daring him to say something.

“I think I’m going to regret this,” Angus murmured, but his mouth twitched again.

“Fine. In that case, I’ll be going. I wouldn’t want to be anyone’s regret,” Coal said loftily and started toward the front door, loving the game they were playing.

A second later, large fingers wrapped around his elbow, and Angus steered him toward the back entrance of the pub.

Angus opened the door that led to the car park, and an icy blast hit them. “Crap, where’s your coat?”

“Didn’t bring one. I’m hot-blooded,” Coal snapped back, annoyed at himself for forgetting such an important detail. He thought about getting one from the campervan, but he didn’t want Angus to know where he was staying. No doubt the man would disapprove. “Where are you dragging me off to anyway?”

“Somewhere we can talk without half a pub leering at you.”

Once outside, Coal pulled his elbow out of Angus’s grip.

# CHAPTER 7



FOR THE LAST HOUR, Angus watched men leering over Coal, saying, planning, dirty things, and Coal didn't have a clue. He didn't have a clue that Angus wanted those things too. Angus knew he should walk away, should leave Coal to find his own way, not drag him into his world. His feet refused to move from his spot at the bar. Dave welcomed him back with a nod and an unrequested coke as if he'd been in here yesterday instead of over three years ago.

As he watched Coal wink and croon out festive love songs, the thought that Coal was a rent boy or at least a scammer flitted through his mind. But the longer Coal sang, the longer he failed to try and hook up with any of the men drooling over him, the more certain Angus became that Coal was precisely what he appeared. Out for fun and scarily naive.

Angus frowned. There was something different about Coal's performance, about Coal. In his office, even when singing a carol, Coal's hips had moved, the bells on his costume



providing soft percussion. Tonight, even when performing *Jingle Bell Rock*, Coal's hips remained still.

*Was that just for me?* The thought warmed him before he dismissed it. Coal thought he'd be interviewing with Sam, so the bells were part of his act. But why wear them tonight if he didn't intend to use them? *Unless he thinks this is an extended interview, not a date?*

Coal changed the microphone to the other hand, something he'd been doing every minute or so. His now unencumbered arm hung at his side as if tired, as if... Angus's focus flicked back up to the hand holding the mic. Raw skin showed.

And then that moron grabbed Coal.

*No, just no.*

Things had gone downhill from there, and now they were having a stand-up row in the car park. Angus did what he'd wanted to do so much back in his office.

Gripping Coal's forearms, careful of his damaged wrists, Angus propelled Coal backward until his back hit the wall.

The needy gasp that forced its way out of Coal's glistening lips felt like it was jacking Angus's cock. He wanted more, wanted it now.

Dipping, he took Coal's mouth, felt the hesitancy, the surprise of Angus's tongue piercing, the groan of surrender as Coal's hands wrapped around his neck.

Angus pushed a hand up under Coal's loose tunic, enjoying the hot, smooth skin. He halted momentarily when his fingers

contacted warm metal. Now to find out just how much of a masochist he'd captured. He traced over the hardened nipple, then flicked the bell. The light, golden tinkle sounded odd in the oppressive, heady atmosphere. Coal held still, whimpered.

"Hmm, when you go for a theme, you go all out, don't you?" Then he twisted the bar, hard. Coal gasped into his mouth but didn't move away.

"Do you like it rough, little fairy?" Angus murmured against his mouth. When he didn't answer, Angus twisted the nipple bar again, making the bell jingle.

Coal squeaked and hooked his leg over Angus's hip as if needing to be as close as possible.

"Tell me now because if you don't, you need to run and run fast," Angus whispered against Coal's lips.

"Yeah, yeah, I think I do, but I've never really done it."

Angus pulled back slightly, looking into his eyes, although he kept a firm hold on his body.

"Why not? It's obviously part of you." To prove his point, Angus squeezed Coal's tight-muscled ass hard enough to leave finger marks.

Coal shuddered, eyes closing in pleasure. This felt so damn right, and to keep things right, Angus needed to make sure they were both on the same page, even if it broke the flow. Coal would get lost in the moment, but Angus needed enough restraint for both of them.

"Answer me. Remember rule number two?"

Coal's eyes blinked open, but he looked beautifully fuzzy with pain. "I've never asked anyone to get rough. I thought it'd make anyone sane run a mile. It's pretty weird, right?"

"If you're weird, so am I because I like dishing it out as much as you enjoy receiving." Pulling his hand out from under Coal's shirt, he traced a finger down Coal's cheek and over his plush lips. "I could teach you so much."

Coal's eyes were liquid pools in the orange car park lights. He wasn't saying no, but he hadn't said yes either. Angus's belly clenched. Had he taken the risk to put himself out there only to fail again?

Trying to keep his voice even, dominant, but not scarily forceful, he said, "Come back to my place. We can try a few things and see how it goes."

Angus still had Coal pinned to the wall with his pelvis, but the spontaneity, the passion, had vanished as his damn self-control returned like a bad penny.

"I can leave anytime I like?" Coal asked.

In Angus's imagination, he said something hot, something that Ward would say, like, 'Not until I'm done with you.' The words that actually fell out of his mouth were, "Of course. In fact, tell someone where you're going, and get them to phone the police if they don't get another call from you by midnight."

"Is that really necessary?"

Angus cursed himself as Coal put light pressure on his chest and brought his leg down.

Angus acknowledged the hint, took a half-step back, and managed a hopefully reassuring smile. “Not with me, but it’s a habit you should get into; there are some dangerous people in this world. Tell me who your safety net is going to be.”

Coal’s eyes widened like a rabbit in headlights and Angus blurted, “Of course, you don’t have to tell me, as long as—”

“I’ll text them in the car, ok?”

Angus tried to pull his curiosity back. As far as he knew, Coal didn’t know anyone in the area except Sam.

“You can use Sam as your safety net if you don’t know anyone else. She knows me as well as anyone can.”

“I’m good,” Coal blurted. “Can we go now? It’s getting cold.”

“Text first, so I know it’s done,” Angus insisted.

With an adorable huff, Coal pulled an ancient Nokia out of the small bag attached to his waist together with a phone number on a card.

“How well do you know this person? Are they reliable, trustworthy?” Angus’s mouth didn’t seem to want to shut up.

“You’re putting your safety in their—”

“They’ve seen more of me than you have.” The single sentence shut Angus up like a wet fish slapping his cheek.

“Jeez, wipe that look off your face. I’m calling the tattoo artist I met earlier.”

“Go on then.”

Coal did that rabbit in the headlight thing again. “In the car, ok? It’s freezing. You do have a car, right? Because my balls might freeze off if we have to get a bus or—”

Angus smiled. “Yes, I brought a car. I own a taxi and limo firm, remember?”

“Oh, yeah, right. Cold must be getting to my head.”

Angus let his gaze rake over the small compact body he hadn’t been able to get out of his mind all afternoon. “Or something is. Now, are you coming or not?”

Grinning, Coal replied. “I’m coming. Hopefully, quite a lot.”

It took Angus a moment to twig, and then he shook his head as he smiled. “I don’t think I’ve ever met a sub with quite as much attitude as you.”

Coal shoved Angus hard in the chest, forcing him a step back.

“Don’t you be getting any ideas that I’ll kneel at your feet whenever you click your fingers. If you want someone to do that, look again. Just because I like the pain thing, it doesn’t mean I’m a walkover. Got it?”

All reservations drained away. Coal was precisely what he was looking for, someone to distract him, to drag his mind away from the mundane for a few hours.

“Oh, I’m counting on it,” Angus said and took Coal’s elbow again, guiding him away from the building.

# CHAPTER 8



THE WIND WHISTLED AROUND the corner as they walked toward the sleek, dark red sports saloon whose lights flashed when Angus pointed his key fob at it. Coal shivered. Pain spiked as his nipples contracted, and he purposefully didn't look at the campervan parked under a broken streetlight.

"I like the color," Coal teased as they got in.

"This, Mr. Chestnut," Angus ground out much to Coal's delight, "is a top-of-the-range Jaguar XFR. It has a five-liter engine and can do nearly a hundred and eighty miles an hour. And all you can say is that you like the color?"

"Yeah, most cars are silver these days. I like red."

Angus's jaw flexed. "I never would've guessed," he murmured and flicked on the radio.

Coal's heart dropped, and although he knew he should keep his mouth shut for the sake of the job, he didn't.

“You don’t want to talk to me? You’re a spank and run type, huh? That’s fine, just as long as I know. After all, a guy like you wouldn’t want to be seen dead with someone like me.”

Angus turned the radio off with a flick of his thumb. “Someone like you?” he said, gaze fixed on the road ahead.

There were no other moving vehicles in sight, no pedestrians to be seen either. Mr. Control could have glanced at him for a fraction of a second, but noo rules were rules.

“You know, stands out, embarrassing in public, rough around the edges? All right to fuck as long as no one else knows, but that’s it.”

Coal wanted anger, maybe a little embarrassment, but not the restrained response he received.

“I think you’d better get to know me better before making any more assumptions.”

“What’s your story then?”

“What’s yours?” Angus countered.

“Nope, I asked first,” Coal grinned.

Angus’s hands flexed on the wheel. “Let’s see if we can get through a first date before we start swapping life stories,” he replied in his usual controlled manner.

Coal slouched down in his seat and stared out the window, considering what he’d gotten himself into now. Romantic wishes were usually fulfilled by far more experienced—and he had to face it—far more ‘normal’ Adult Department fairies.

Tall, ripped guys who possessed the gift of the gab, and cute, curvy girls, not short, bolshie assholes.

What the hell had given him the idea that he could do this? Hell, he couldn't even give a pony to a horse-obsessed girl without fucking up.

"Send your text, or I'm pulling up," Angus murmured. "Tell them my name and address." He rattled off a street name and house number.

Coal only had two choices if he wasn't going to slink home with his tail between his legs. He only knew the numbers of Sam and Ward. Sam was wholeheartedly behind Angus, and the thought of telling his wisher he'd fucked up their wish sent ice down his spine.

Coal copied the number Ward had given him into the phone, then started typing.

*I'm going back to his place. He says I have to have a safety call around midnight. You're to call the Police if you don't hear from me. Do you need his details?*

"Sent," Coal grumbled. Almost immediately, his phone beeped.

*Good for you.*

*Who is this?*

Coal felt like an utter idiot as he started typing again. Of course, someone like Ward would know dozens, maybe hundreds, of people having dodgy hook-ups all the time.



*Coal.* He paused, then added. *Christmas fairy guy from today.* Assuming Ward remembered anything from their interaction was probably wishful thinking. *FYI I'm going home with Angus.*

The reply came within seconds. *Enjoy your ride, Twinkletoes.* Coal imagined a smirk on those too-perfect lips. Yet again he wondered what Ward had done to be put on the naughty list. Another text arrived.

*Happy to be a shoulder to cry on when you fall off. And I know where Fricker lives. Look after those nips. Remember, no body fluids.*

Even Ward expected him to fail. His mood sank even more, and he automatically reached for his wrist. No cuff. No distracting pain. But now he had other options, hidden ones.

It'd damn well hurt when Angus twisted the piercing. But if he saw them, found out how new they were, any of the happiness Coal was hopefully about to produce would go down the toilet.

Angus would shift into full mother hen mode. Even now, Coal thought he could feel something warm and damp on his chest. If Angus saw blood—if it was blood rather than sweat—tonight would end with a massive Q and A session, probably a visit to the hospital, and even a confrontation with Ward.

The first two options filled him with dread. The last one... made his belly squirm. The fantasy of two powerful men fighting over him warmed him for a few heartbeats, then snuffed out like a candle.

What if Angus didn't win? Ward was tempting, a dangerous fantasy; a pit once entered would mean no escape until the white-haired sadist got bored. He swore he wouldn't end up begging, debasing himself, for every scrap of attention like Kitty.

*Maybe Kitty thought the same thing once.*

"Everything ok?" Angus asked.

"Yeah," Coal said, realizing he was bringing the mood down, but he didn't know how to save the situation. Touching Angus while driving would probably be a no-go for the safety-conscious man, and apart from singing Christmas songs or telling anecdotes about life at the North Pole, Coal had nothing.

*I should leave this to someone more experienced.* His musings over which Adult Department male fairy could fulfill Sam's wish better than him, Cedar, Garland, or Winter, took up the rest of the fifteen-minute journey. Would Angus get more enjoyment out of having a man who looked like Ward at his mercy?

*Am I being selfish for not giving Angus a better option?*

They pulled into a short driveway, maybe two car lengths long. Outside lights flicked on, illuminating the front of a modern red-brick house. It probably had three or four bedrooms, large by many standards but not pretentious. Similar houses sat on either side, separated by paths that likely led to back gardens. It looked like all the others on the road, except Angus's home lacked merrily flickering fairy lights on

the eaves, a wreath on the door, or a variation of a ‘Santa Stop Here’ sign on the front lawn.

Angus had money, a nice home, and car, but he had no one to share it with, no one to bring joy into his life. It sounded a bit like Coal’s sad existence. He had food and somewhere warm to live at the North Pole, even friends/colleagues in the other Adult Department fairies, but he felt damn lonely. No one understood him, not like Ward, and Angus saw right through him. Neither human seemed to want Coal for more than superficial entertainment.

*Which is ok because I can’t stay anyway.* The knowledge did nothing to cheer him up.

“Do you still want to do this? Because I’m happy to drive you home, no hard feelings?”

Angus’s less than enthusiastic voice brought Coal out of his considerations. He realized he hadn’t moved a muscle from his slump since they’d arrived.

The problem was, Coal had hard feelings, or at least he’d had them in the office, the body mod studio, and the pub. If he failed to accomplish this wish, the chance of ever getting intimate with anyone was nil. His travel privileges would be revoked and fairies fraternizing with each other was a fast track to the naughty list.

Knowing this was a now or never moment, nerves bubbling more than at the body mod studio, Coal opened the door and got out. Angus followed a little more slowly.

Straightening both his physical and mental spine—the sting in his wounds proved he was an edgy badass even in scarlet tights—Coal turned to Angus.

“You have to realize something about me, Mr. Fricker. Once I make up my mind about something, I don’t often change it. I am what I am. So I’d be grateful if you’d stopped treating me like some woolly-headed, flighty airhead who changes his mind as often as a traffic light. That’s not me. Never has been, never will be,” he told Angus across the roof of his fabulous car. Not that Coal would ever admit to being impressed.

Angus stayed still, gaze boring into Coal. That intense, knowing look had Coal looking away. It was as if the human could see every thought, every lie, like a neon sign on his face.

Coal flexed his pecs and belly, enjoying the sting, while he examined Angus’s immaculate lawn and front garden. For some bizarre reason, Coal hoped to see a weed, an unpruned bush, but there wasn’t even a stray dead leaf.

“You’re not nervous at all?” Angus said with a note of amusement.

Giving Angus a smile so bright it would blind people thirty feet away, Coal said, “Shitting a brick, to be honest. Now can we get on with it before I prove myself to be an utter liar yet again?”

Chuckling, Angus led the way to his front door and then inside. A little happy was better than up-tight, but Coal hoped to do far better than one laugh.

“Do you need to use the bathroom?”

“No, I’m good,” Coal replied, looking around the wide, tasteful, achingly bland hallway. It was, as Coal expected, completely free of clutter.

Would Angus freak out if he moved the bowl on the hall table where he’d deposited his keys an inch to one side? His fingers itched to find out, which probably wasn’t his best idea. *Happy, not irritated*, he reminded himself sternly.

Instead, Coal decided that the galleried landing left a space where you could put one hell of a big Christmas tree. Not that there were any decorations in evidence, even though it was the week before Christmas.

Not even a sprig of mistletoe. Suppressing the impulse to decorate the entire place between one moment and the next was as tricky as not snapping at skipping, perky, child fairies back home. Coal distracted himself by doing a little virtual decoration planning while surreptitiously smoothing his thumb over the raw tattoo.

The decorations at the North Pole were the responsibility of senior fairies, but Coal could do a far better job. Yes, red and gold were traditional, but a silver and blue theme would work well here, especially with the washed-out neutral tones Angus favored. To be honest, if he’d seen Angus’s house before his car, he never would have guessed the man would pick a deep red vehicle.

“Take off your clothes,” Angus instructed calmly.

Coal crashed back to the here and now. “Seriously? Right here in the hallway?”

Angus walked to the cream carpeted stairs and sat down as if Coal’s reticence was the odd behavior rather than his request.

“You want to explore your reaction to pain. Correct?”

Coal nodded slowly. Heading off the naked requirement, so he didn’t reveal his mods, and still getting a damn good spanking looked as impossible as stopping the child fairies from squeaking, ‘How WONDERFUL’ and clapping all the damn time. He’d tried. All they did was cry.

“Are you listening?”

Coal stuck his hands in his front pockets, scraping against the tattoo.

“Yeah, sorry.”

“Hands out of your pockets.”

Coal huffed, rolled his eyes, and complied. Was that a slight smile on Angus’s face?

“Don’t roll your eyes.”

“Is huffing allowed?” He shot back.

Those lips twitched again. “Can you huff without rolling your eyes?”

Coal wrinkled his nose. “Probably not.” That was definitely an attempt not to smile. Coal gave himself a mental high-five, but the smile only lasted a fraction of a second before ‘stern Angus’ reappeared.

“Now that we’re done with the distraction techniques, do you expect me to give you exactly what you want without getting anything in return?” Angus’s eyebrows raised in polite inquiry.

# CHAPTER 9



THE LIE TASTED BITTER on Angus's lips. He knew Coal was here for far more than exploring his masochism, even if the younger man didn't know it. Coal needed attention, accountability, and care, and he needed it for more than a one-night hook-up.

But until he really got to know all Coal's secrets and reactions, a night was all Angus could let himself offer. He'd let Jesse under his skin, had given all of himself, and the man had kept huge secrets from him.

"I thought dishing out pain was what you wanted," Coal grumbled, eyes down, shoulders slumped.

*Disappointment or genuine submission?*

Angus nodded sagely, feeling his way, needing to set boundaries for them both. A framework of rules and expectations made everything safer, physically and emotionally.



“Oh, I enjoy that, but I also require obedience. While you are here, you’ll do what I say, immediately and without questions. If you want something to stop, say *red*. I’ll stop and take you home immediately, no questions asked. ‘Amber’ will make me slow down. Agreed?”

Coal made an abortive attempt to grab his wrist, his bare wrist. At least he’d obeyed about the cuffs, but Angus hadn’t forgotten Coal had stolen them back. He still wasn’t quite sure how he’d done it without being noticed. That disobedience was Angus’s first ‘reason’ to give the spanking he hoped Coal wanted, but perhaps there would be more.

“I require an answer, Coal. Remember my rules.”

Taking a deep breath, Coal looked up at Angus. “Ok.”

A line appeared between Coal’s eyebrows as Angus didn’t immediately jump into action. The boy was as green as they came, and yet again, uneasiness bubbled. Angus didn’t feel ready for this, but good God, he wanted Coal to submit, wanted to hear the noises he made when he forgot himself in pleasure, in pain. But Coal wasn’t his, couldn’t be his. The thought of giving his heart again, it being stomped on, and then thrown back in his face, strengthened his resolve.

This was about educating Coal, giving him a taste of the life he was blindly galloping toward. And yes, it was also about having a little of the fun Sam mentioned. Coal’s defiant streak, paired with his open sexuality and flirting, called to Angus like nothing else had in years. If, *when*, Coal submitted, it would be glorious.

“The correct term of address is ‘Yes, Master.’”

Coal shook his head and snorted. “No damn way. Just because I’m here, it doesn’t mean you’re better than me.”

Before he could think, Angus flowed to his feet and closed the distance between them. Like in the office, Coal’s bravado vanished in the face of a dominant move. He stepped back until he bumped against the closed front door. Apprehension, anticipation, shone in his eyes, not fear.

*Time to see how he’ll react to something other than words.* Angus crowded him, then his fingers were in his brown hair, tight and hard. Coal’s face tilted up, begging for a kiss as Angus’s other hand dropped to his backside. Taking a firm grasp of Coal’s muscled, gorgeous ass, he yanked the smaller man against him, letting him feel his erection against his belly.

“Ugh.” The noise tore from Coal’s throat.

*Too much, already? Or not enough?* Angus gently caressed his tight, round butt. He wanted to see it, bite it, craved hearing that needy noise again because of something he did.

Angus squeezed hard. Coal gasped, and Angus took the opportunity of his open mouth to take his lips hungrily. Still so damn sweet, as if he’d eaten a ton of candy moments ago, but the tight, firm body against his wasn’t that of a sugar addict. Coal melted against him, but Angus tore his lips away. He couldn’t get carried away. Coal didn’t need a vanilla hook-up, he needed education. Angus took one last lingering taste then pulled back, but his hands wouldn’t release their hold on that bite-worthy ass.

Coal stayed in place, kiss-swollen lips tilted up, basking. Angus waited, loving that he'd managed to slow down Coal's mind. A pink tongue poked out, ran over plush lips, then Coal's eyes opened to reveal doped-out pupils.

The profound reaction from only a kiss sent mild alarm bells ringing. Just how high would Coal fly during a spanking? It'd taken a lot of effort to get Jesse to this state, and Coal already looked high.

Swallowing at the responsibility, needing to slow this down for his own sake, Angus stepped back, releasing Coal's hair and butt.

As the dominant, it was Angus's role to control, to protect Coal from himself. Angus concentrated on keeping his rampaging desire out of his voice. Coal was out of control enough for them both.

Brushing at the top of Coal's shoulder, he said, "That's quite a chip you have on there, but for this to go forward, I require a term of respect. Sir, Milord, or Master are all appropriate. Pick one."

Coal blinked as if he's entirely forgotten what they'd been discussing before the kiss, then his chin lifted. "How about Mr. Fricker?"

*Such a brat.* Angus leaned down to his ear, his breath caressing the delicate skin. He even smelled sweet, like sherbet. Coal shivered in anticipation, and Angus's cock hardened even more. So beautifully reactive.

“Not intimate enough for what we’re going to be doing in a few minutes.”

Coal swallowed, color appearing high on his cheeks. “How about Boss?”

Angus blinked. “Why?”

Coal’s eyes widened as if he’d had no idea Angus would question him. The pause before Coal spoke meant the answer was embarrassing, profound, or a lie.

“I hated calling all the teachers ‘Sir’ or ‘Miss,’ when they’d done nothing to deserve my respect apart from having lived longer. Milord is like something out of Downton Abbey, and Master implies I’m a slave. I’m never going to agree to that, not for all the sherry in Cadiz. So don’t get your hopes up.”

A smile curved Angus’s lips. That had been too detailed to be a quickly thought-up lie. But Angus needed to get his head in the game, and asking more about Coal’s past would derail the endorphins buzzing in his sub’s body.

Angus let the smile drop off his face as if it had never been. “Boss is acceptable. Now strip.”

Coal’s eyes widened for a second, then he gave Angus a cheeky smile, a half bow, and said, “Yes, Boss. Do I get any music for this, or should I provide my own?”

Angus cursed himself for leaving it too long. Grabbing Coal’s shoulders, Angus moved him away from the door and opened it. “This isn’t going to work. I’ll take you home.”

Coal's mouth gaped, giving a tantalizing glimpse of smooth wet heat. Angus's cock throbbed at the thought of maybe, just maybe, sinking into it if things went well.

Coal must have had a similar idea, as he dropped to his knees, but unlike at the office, he also clasped his hands behind his back and hung his head. Fuck, this boy was pushing all of Angus's buttons as if he'd read a manual of how to manipulate a dominant. The idea that Coal was naive and new to this shriveled, which meant he was lying. Had probably been lying about every damn thing.

"I'm sorry, Boss. Please don't send me home. I need this; I need you. When I'm nervous, I talk too much."

*Truth or lie?* Angus had no idea, but he didn't want this to end yet, or at least his cock didn't. Angus pushed the door shut; the click of the lock sounded damn final.

"I never would have guessed. I'll give you one more chance. Don't talk, strip."

Coal started to get up.

"No, do it on your knees. You seem far better behaved down there."

Angus moved back to the staircase and sat on the third step, resting his elbows on his knees to hide his erection. There would be time for that. Seconds ticked by, Coal's cheeks got even redder, and Angus couldn't wait to see how far down the blush went. Attitude and shyness were a damn heady combination.

Angus raised his eyebrows when Coal didn't begin stripping after a few breaths.

"I erm... I don't want to take off my shirt."

Disappointment twisted his balls, but he said the appropriate, the right thing, the thing he didn't want to admit. But Coal needed to know how the BDSM world worked. "Nakedness isn't always an essential require—

Coal grimaced. "It's not that. I have some... embarrassing tattoos. But I'm trying to get better stuff, See?" Coal grabbed the hem of his tunic and pulled it up as he pushed down the leggings.

Angus found himself on his knees, lifting Coal to his feet so he could get a better look.

*Oh, What Fun It Is To Ride.* Provocative. Cute. Like the man it adorned. Damn perfect. He hovered a finger over the wrap, the oozing yellow plasma streaked with blood that collected at the bottom. The tattoo was raw, and it hadn't been there this morning. While Angus had been catching up on domestic paperwork, Coal had been in some tattooist's chair, their hands touching him, listening to his gasps, his moans. Angus froze.

*The gasp when I kissed him was pain from this. His blown pupils are pain endorphins, not desire for me.* Angus's mood popped like a balloon.

"Did it hurt?" he found himself asking.

"Yeah, it was good."

Angus sighed and sat back on his heels. Of course, it was. “You should have told me straight away. I could have hurt you. I probably did in the car park.”

“That’s the point, isn’t it?”

Angus stood up. He should send Coal away to think about his lie, should give him time to heal, shouldn’t reward the falsehood or exploit the endorphins already in his system. Angus’s cock throbbed in his jeans. It wanted to know just how much fun it would be to have Coal ride him.

So did Angus, and this might be his only chance.

Trying for stern, he said, “No. Pain for the sake of pain isn’t the point at all, but I see I have to teach you the difference.”

Angus pointed at the kitchen. “Elbows on the counter, legs apart. I’m going to teach you not to lie if it’s the only thing we do tonight.”

Angus prayed it wasn’t, but Coal had to learn to be truthful to his Dom, even if it wouldn’t be Angus for more than one night.

The thought of Coal walking out his door and never coming back was surprisingly depressing given their brief interactions, but he’d enjoyed every second so far. Maybe Sam was right; perhaps he did need to get back into the dating game whether it worked out with this gorgeous irritating brat or not.

Instead of obeying, Coal fidgeted for a moment, then took a breath before looking Angus right in the eyes.

Angus prepared himself for another unpleasant revelation.

“You’re not a psycho or anything, are you?”

How Angus managed not to burst out laughing he didn’t know. The kid was too cute for words, but danger lurked behind the statement. His mirth died.

“Don’t you think you should have asked that before getting in a car with me? I didn’t even have to offer you sweeties or fluffy puppies. You trust me, and you’re wasting our time. This is the last time I’m going to say it. Get in the kitchen, lean on the counter, and accept your well-deserved spanking.”

“Always with the orders,” Coal grumbled under his breath. With a wonderful huff, his bolshie, *temporary*, sub stomped into the kitchen, arms by his sides, hands fisted. After glancing around the space, Coal picked a spot near the built-in hob. He braced his palms on the counter but tucked in his bitable bubble butt as if trying to hide it. He didn’t look back at Angus.

“Happy now?” Coal snapped, his whole body tense with anticipation.

With Coal facing away, Angus didn’t have to hide his smile. “That should be ‘Happy now, Boss,’ but no, I’m not happy. Yet.”

He walked over, took Coal by the back of his neck, and pushed him down to his elbows.

“Ugh.”

Angus’s cock lurched. The noises a partner made always thrilled him, and he bet keeping quiet would always be too



much for Coal.

“What was that for?” Angus asked. “I haven’t done anything yet.”

“You...” The hesitation had Angus bracing for another lie. A lie that would add more spanks. He shouldn’t want his sub to lie, but... he kinda did.

“You’re stronger than you look, ok?” Coal blurted as if the admission hurt, but Angus held back any preening at the compliment. Being manipulated by a man he thought he was controlling wasn’t new. Protecting himself, protecting and teaching Coal while having a little fun, was tonight’s only agenda.

Angus’s hand still rested on Coal’s nape, his pale fingers wrapped around the smooth innocent tan skin. Coal looked as if he came from a sun-drenched country, where fewer clothes were the norm, yet here he was, in a gray English town. *With me.* Angus couldn’t work it out, couldn’t work Coal out, so he decided to simply enjoy the experience.

Using the other hand, as he didn’t want to give up the skin-to-skin touch, Angus stroked down Coal’s back. The material of the costume was thinner than it looked. Did this guy not own any warm clothes at all? The touch also confirmed what he’d discovered outside the pub. Coal had a good layer of muscle. He might be small—far smaller than anyone else Angus had ever played with—but Coal was compact, robust.

Under Angus’s fingers, Coal waited, tense with expectation, submitting, wanting whatever Angus chose to give him.

*God, I've missed this.*

Splaying his hand out over the small of Coal's back, he tested the width, thought about laying on his back, hands around Coal's waist, helping him ride up and down when those beautiful thighs gave out. Making those bells in his nipples ring with every bounce on his cock.

"Tuck your shirt up. The only bells I want to hear are the ones in your nipples."

"They're detachable." Coal lifted on one elbow.

Angus increased the pressure on his neck. "Stay still. I'll do it."

Pressing himself up against Coal's legs, he realized with a smile that Coal stood on his tiptoes to get his elbows on the counter. With a bit more arm work at the gym, it wouldn't strain Angus to lift him and support his entire weight while he fucked him up against a wall.

Shaking his head to dispel the fantasy, Angus snapped off the studs that fastened the ribbons holding the jingling golden bells to Coal's tunic.

Once the six bells sat on his kitchen counter, the temptation to pull the tunic up and the leggings down itched like a mosquito bite. But if he saw his handprints, that jiggling flesh... He'd probably do something that would take this beyond a lesson in erotic pain. Angus wasn't sure Coal was ready for that, despite the tattoo, the nipple piercings, and the bolshie, brattish

behavior. Hell, Angus wasn't altogether sure he was ready to have sex for the first time in three years either.

*Slowly does it, Fricker. You're in charge, not him, not your cock.*

His hand still stoked down Coal's back, going lower and lower. When he got to an inch above the crack of his ass, two tiny jingles broadcast what Angus could feel, the body beneath his hand trembling.

"You can say red at any time, and that'll stop everything. Yellow means you want to check in. Green means you're fine." Angus said by rote. He hoped Coal was too in his own head to hear his less than firm tone. "Got it?"

"Yeah. Yes, Boss."

Breathing out, Angus reached for his dom side. "Tell me what you're being spanked for."

"Because I like it?"

Angus's lips twitched. "Try again, brat."

This time, the mirth in Coal's voice was clear as day. "Because you like it?"

Angus brought his hand down hard on Coal's ass.

"Ugh, ok, ok." Coal grouched, but when he reached around, probably wanting to rub his abused cheek, Angus took his still red wrist and put it back on the counter.

"Ah, ah, no touching. Now, what are you being spanked for?" Angus paused, then, because he wasn't sure of the extent of

Coal's knowledge, he added, "In a BDSM power exchange, punishments, even if both parties enjoy them, have to be earned. If they happen willy-nilly, the sub never learns."

Coal snorted. "You said, willy—"

Angus spanked him again. "If you want to act like a child, I'll treat you like one. I assure you, the naughty step is a lot less fun than spanking."

"Sorry." This time, Coal actually sounded as if he meant it. "The costume affects me sometimes. I don't like being all... *perky* any more than you seem to like it."

Angus would have termed it 'bratty' but perky worked well enough. Angus rubbed his thumb over the now curved neck. Coal had rested his forehead on the counter; appearing genuinely upset by his outburst.

"And that's something a Dom can help their sub with, by providing a framework with consequences when they get things wrong. Now, let's try again. Why do you deserve a spanking? I'll give you a hint. There are two reasons, and the first rhymes with 'ruff'."

Coal tensed. "I haven't worn them again, just like I said."

"True, and I appreciate that, but you took them off my desk, so you clearly intend to use them again. What else?"

Silence stretched until Coal shuffled his feet, and the nipple bells tinkled.

"I made fun of your name."

“You did. It was uncalled for, cruel, and petty. I suffered a lot because of it as a child, but I’m proud of my name. Frickers have always been hardworking people.”

“I’m sorry.”

“You will be, but after we’re done, all will be forgiven. I don’t hold grudges. And the biggest one?”

“I didn’t tell you about the tattoo.”

“Correct.”

Coal banged his forehead against the counter, but it wasn’t hard enough for Angus to call him out for self-harm.

“I fucked up. Again.”

“Well done, that can’t have been easy,” Angus murmured. He wanted to add that, given time, he could help him with the self-harm but couldn’t voice a promise he might be unable to keep. Instead, his hand caressed Coal’s quivering ass.

Coal jumped at the light touch.

“Responsive too. Ready to take your punishment, so you think before you act in the future?”

“Can’t promise that,” Coal mumbled.

“And I wouldn’t want you to. Making a promise you don’t think you can keep is the same as lying.” Angus spoke on autopilot; the words were those any dom would be saying because their sub needed to hear them. Inside, he couldn’t get over the way Coal was all stretched out for him, being

vulnerable and brave, when he clearly didn't know what would happen.

He and Jesse had worked up to this, first a little holding down during sex, then the occasional swat on the ass...

Angry at himself for letting a man who had rejected him, hurt him, intrude into this moment, he aimed a hard swat at Coal's ass.

"Ugh." Coal readjusted his feet, pushed his butt out. The damn thing looked like it was beckoning Angus's cock closer.

"Color?" Angus asked, more nervous about the answer than he wanted to admit.

"Green," Coal hesitated, then added, "Boss."

Angus's chest warmed. This might just work after all.

"Face down, and don't move until I say you can. Ready for more?"

Coal's forehead touched the counter. Angus's heart sang as that ass tilted up again, asking for more.

"Ugh." The half-grunt, half-growl went straight to Angus's cock, so he hit him again, and watched that taut ass bounce.

The same noise pushed out of Coal's mouth with each hit. Angus waited, nerves tingling, hand resting on that firm abused flesh. Then, as he'd hoped, Coal pushed his butt back against his hand.

CRACK. Coal jerked under the impact. This time, the groan was more guttural, less angry.

Angus had thought he'd never experience this sting in his palm again, the pain-pleasure of delivering a hard impact that was desperately wanted. *He* was wanted. His chest and belly heated with pride, and his damp cockhead rubbed against the zipper of his jeans, giving a zing of pleasure, a promise of more. He hoped Coal was getting as hard from this as he was. He put his wish into the next impact.

CRACK.

Coal's spine rounded. Going higher up on his toes, he grunted out the pain. Before Angus could call him out for changing position, he flattened out again.

On autopilot, Angus reached out, and smoothed his palm over the tempting, rounded flesh. Definitely hotter than before. Coal pushed back into his palm. Begging. Giving his cute, wordless request for more.

He gave him the hardest spank yet, two in quick succession, one on each cheek.

For the first time, Coal turned to look at him. Beautifully flushed cheeks with lips slightly parted. Awestruck and silent. Pride swelled.

Coal's chatter was a defense mechanism, and he'd settled him enough not to need to fill the silence. Angus smiled, nodded. Coal turned back around.

His palm cracked against his ass again and again.

"Fuck! That's... Oh fuck," Coal groaned, burying his face in his arms as his legs trembled.

“Color?”

When Coal didn't answer, Angus took him firmly by the shoulder and tugged him upright. Coal leaned against him, breathing hard. His head only reached the hollow of his throat.

*So small...* Angus's chest emptied. He'd been too hard. He knew Coal was new at this and he probably wouldn't cry red even if he needed to.

“Look at me.”

When Coal didn't move, just carried on cuddling, Angus put fingers under his chin and tilted his face up. Coal's eyes didn't focus on him, didn't focus on anything.

“Coal?”

“Hmm?” Coal blinked, frowned, and managed to focus on him. Heat radiated from the smaller man. He smelled sweeter than ever, but underneath was a muskier smell, a sexual scent. Angus concentrated on a patch of the sweat-sheened neck. He wanted to lick it. Taste it.

He blinked back the impulse. He couldn't lose himself; Coal depended on him to keep it together. And damn, he liked the feeling.

“Am I hitting you too hard?”

Coal shook his head.

“I need words.” What he meant was that he needed to know if Coal was with it enough to engage his mouth. Sometimes subs got so high from endorphins that it messed with their heads



enough to make rational choices impossible. They relied on their dom, trusted them enough to make choices for them when that happened. Angus wanted to be that man for Coal.

Coal swallowed. “I’m not sorry enough yet. I want more, want it harder, but my legs are wobbly. I don’t think I can—”

“Couch time, don’t you think?”

Coal blew a breath upward, ruffling the hair that tried to stick to his forehead. Chuckling, Angus swiped it away for him then towed him toward the sofa.

After a moment’s thought, wary about anything rubbing on the new tattoo, he had Coal kneel on the seat and lean on the back to give some support for his wobbly legs. The position was awkward for spanking, but Angus had to admit, it was damn perfect for fucking someone much smaller than himself. He could stand, loom over Coal, and just—

He shook his head. *Getting ahead of yourself again, Fricker. Spanking, you’re only meant to be spanking.* But a little voice at the back of his mind reminded him that Coal didn’t know that.

“Let me know how this feels,” he said. All the time Coal managed words, he’d know he wasn’t going too far. Concentrating, he aimed for the bottom curve of Coal’s ass.

CRACK.

Coal levered himself up the back of the sofa before settling back down. “By Santa’s ball, you hit fucking hard,” he gasped. “Do it again.”

Angus chuckled. “Your wish is my command, little fairy.” He rubbed the spot he’d hit, massaged the sting away, or maybe into the hot flesh, then struck again in exactly the same place.

“Fuck, I felt that in my balls. Do it more.”

The dirty words almost made Angus groan, but he covered the wave of lust by concentrating on his task, methodically covering the underside of Coal’s ass. Coal swore, twisted, and lurched, making the bells jingle, but didn’t say red.

Angus wanted that surrender. He built a fast hard rhythm, hitting the same area over and over again, reinforcing the marks he knew were there but couldn’t see. He wanted Coal to think about him every time he tried to sit down, every time he caught sight of himself in the mirror. He wanted Coal to want, to remember, and damn well not walk away afterward as if Angus was nothing but a weak stepping stone to someone better.

Angus gripped the nape of Coal’s neck. The hold let him sense the bunch of Coal’s shoulders, the tension in his body. Coal might be enjoying this, but he wasn’t relaxing into it, wasn’t letting the endorphins lift him.

*And why the hell should he know how to do that if I haven’t damn well told him?* Angus cursed himself for being as green as Coal.

“Stop tensing, let the pain wash over you, sink into you; it’ll get better, I promise.”

As he said the last word, Coal's shoulders drooped as if someone had cut the strings on a puppet. His whole body moved against the sofa with the next few strikes, then a sob broke free.

Angus froze. Jesse had cried sometimes, or rather tears had fallen from his eyes, but he'd never sobbed. Angus had enjoyed those tears, had loved the moment when Jesse gave in. This was different. Better.

He stroked a hand over Coal's sweaty hair and said the right thing. "We can stop."

Coal's head shook wildly, then he groaned, letting his forehead flop onto the back of the sofa.

Angus put a knee on the couch to see Coal's face. Snot and tears dripped down the reddened face, and damp, sweaty patches showed down his back and under his arms. "What do you need, little Coal? If I can give it to you, it's yours."

"It's... it's not enough," he choked out. "I'm so damn hard, so damn empty, and I can't, I just can't—"

"Do you want me to take off your pants, help you with it?" Angus couldn't quite believe what he was saying, but Coal sounded so desperate, so needy, and Angus's whole being yearned to see the marks he'd created.

"Yes. Yes, please, Boss," Coal choked out.

Careful of the tattoo, Angus eased Coal's leggings down, only to huff in amusement. What he'd assumed were socks were actual tights, like the ones Coal had worn at the interview

under his shorts. Through the sheer green material, the battered skin of Coal's ass glowed dark red. He'd done that, but the marks weren't enough. Not yet. He eased the leggings and tights down, pulled them off as Coal wiggled, shifting his weight in anticipation.

Coal's ass was a vivid, almost glowing red. It felt as if it could heat up the whole room. Juicy, like a crisp sweet apple, the two round cheeks begged to be bitten. Angus leaned forward but stopped himself when his lips were mere inches from the hot, red skin.

*This is punishment, domination, not ass worship.* Although he'd never seen an ass more worthy of praise. His cock didn't seem to agree with the theme of the evening, but he was in charge, not his libido.

“Ready?”

“Just do it. I'm not a delicate little—”

Angus aimed another strike at the scarlet flesh, intending to sting not bruise. He couldn't see any darker, bluish marks in the light from the hallway, but with the skin now in sight, he could judge his strikes more accurately. Harder, faster.

Coal twisted, gasped, and grunted with each hit, but Angus didn't let up. For the noises, the movements, he was getting a feel for what Coal preferred. The harder the hit, the more it took for Coal to process; his eyelids fluttered, fingers curled into the cushions as he tried to absorb rather than resist, just as Angus ordered.

Softer hits made him groan, wriggle his ass, physically begging for more as if Angus was teasing, not punishing. Angus imagined that if he kept up the slow strikes, the ones with rubs in-between, Coal would eventually pull himself together and aim a frustrated punch at him, which would earn yet more punishment.

Angus pondered doing just that, but his hand, hell, both hands as he'd switched several times, were almost glowing as much as Coal's ass. *Time to get this done.*

Steadily, he increased the intensity of the spanking, both the rate and hardness, gritting his teeth as his arm and palm screamed.

*Definitely need more gym time... Or spanking practice.*

Tremors now wracked Coal's body, head to foot, as if he was trying to contain a massive energy source that had to break free or it would destroy him.

"The nipples, do the nipples," Coal gasped. Without thought, Angus climbed on the sofa behind him, straddling Coal's spread, shaking, naked thighs. Reaching around, under his tunic, Angus grabbed both nipple piercings and twisted.

Coal let out a wordless shout, then babbled, "Fuck me, oh please be inside me while you do that, I—"

Almost fumbling, he snatched the lotion he kept for solo porn sessions from next to the couch, Angus ripped his trousers down. He squirted an obscene amount on himself, hitting the couch, his jeans, and not giving a shit. Scooping up some

excess, he plastered it onto Coal's hole, then lined himself up and thrust up.

Coal bucked against him, gasping, writhing as if he couldn't decide if he wanted more or less. Angus was past caring as Coal's almost painfully tight wet heat engulfed him.

Words failed him as his animal nature came out, and he thrust deep and hard, forgetting all about anything except the orgasm building like a firework. At the last second, he remembered Coal's request. Plastering himself against Coal's back, he reached around, grabbed both nipple bars, and twisted.

Coal let out a guttural scream, thrashing against him. In danger of being thrown off, Angus wrapped one arm around Coal's chest and another around his waist. His own climax was so damn close. He wanted to brand Coal on the inside, wanted to see his cum rolling down Coal's thighs, with his ass glowing red above it.

That image, another pain-filled whimper from Coal, and his body clenching around his cock, whited out Angus's vision as he came in four searing pulses, filling Coal up.

# CHAPTER 10



“Fuck,” Angus sounded elated, wiped out. “That was fantastic. I take it you enjoyed your first spanking?”

Coal clung to the sofa, or maybe he’d become a permanent part of it; he didn’t know or care. A coherent answer was definitely beyond him. It felt like he’d been in a tornado of pleasure, pain, and lust. He still had no idea which way was up.

The final hit of a wish being fulfilled as Angus being truly *HAPPY* had nearly made him pass out. He didn’t want to talk and probably couldn’t form words even if he tried. Hanging onto this moment forever sounded like a wish come true.

“Nothing to say? Have I finally managed to silence you?” Amusement and satisfaction glowed in Angus’s voice.

*Still happy.*

With a supreme effort, Coal managed an emphatic, “Mmm.”

Angus pulled Coal down onto his lap. Pain flared in his ass, and he drew in a sharp breath.

“Bit sore?”

Too tired to speak, Coal held up a hand that felt like concrete was attached and put his finger and thumb an inch apart.

Angus’s chuckle rumbled through him and into Coal. He couldn’t manage more than a twitch of his lips. There was no way he was moving in the next ten years, but it seemed as if Angus didn’t feel the same way.

“You really are small,” Angus mused and reached up to stroke a thumb down Coal’s cheek.

Coal avoided the touch by pushing Angus’s glasses back into position. “And you’re goofy when you’ve just come.”

Coal’s heart stuttered. Something wet, thick, and increasingly cold plastered against his chest. He shoved at Angus’s arms, needing to get to the bathroom and check those damn nipple piercings. That last twist had sent him into orbit, but it felt like he was bleeding, rather than sweating a lot. Whatever the case, he needed to check and get clean. The wet feeling in his hole was... not exactly unpleasant, but he guessed it would be when Angus’s cum worked its way out and cooled.

“Hey, sit a while. I know we’ve got some freshening up to do but give it two minutes. I know your legs are damn wobbly because mine are, and I didn’t get spanked.”

Coal shoved at Angus’s chest again. “No, I’m good. Let me up, and I’ll—”



Angus brought his hand up again, probably intending to cup Coal's face or some other affectionate crap. Coal couldn't help staring at the red smudge on Angus's fingers, his thumb.

"Shit, you're bleeding," Angus blurted. "Did I tear you?" Angus's voice turned harder, angrier. "Fuck, was this your first time?" Coal was too foggy, too concerned about the blood, to make heads or tails of what Angus was saying.

"Huh?" was about as intelligent a noise as he could manage.

Before he knew it, he was flat on the sofa, and Angus was prying his ass cheeks apart.

Coal swatted at him, swiveling his ass away as Angus tried to pin him.

"God damn it, you idiot. Hold still. I need to see how much you've torn. If I have to pin you down to look, I damn well will."

Coal shoved him as hard as he could. "I'm sore, ok? Anyone would be their first time, but..." He hung his head. Angus's happiness had already melted like a snowman in a blast furnace, and there was no getting it back. It wouldn't be long before such an observant man noticed the dark patches on his chest and worked out where the blood was coming from.

"Talk to me, Coal, right now, or I'm taking you to the hospital."

Coal slumped. He'd fucked this up to the moon and back. Technically, he'd fulfilled Sam's wish, Angus had been happy, but it had lasted less than ten minutes.

“It’s the nipple piercings. I had them done at the same time as the tattoo.”

“You... idiot.” The vitriol in Angus’s voice, his face, had Coal wanting to be anywhere in the world but here.

He tried to push up to get off Angus’s lap, but his limbs weren’t any keener on the idea of movement than the rest of him.

A hand closed around his upper arm, and he was pulled upright. An arm went around his waist to stop him tumbling to the carpet when his legs refused to co-operate. Angus scooped him up and carried him up the stairs.

Coal found himself sitting on a towel on a closed toilet, in an achingly clean white bathroom, with a blanket being wrapped around him as he started to shake.

He looked up at Angus as his teeth chattered. Having his body disobeying him was bloody unnerving.

“What’s wrong with me?”

Angus’s face had shut down. He could have been looking at a spreadsheet or a duty roster for all the emotion he displayed. Coal didn’t consider himself an expert on romance or sex by any means, but he didn’t think this was what usually happened after sex.

“It’s a normal reaction to shock. It’ll stop in a while. Undo your shirt. Let me see if you need to go to the hospital. Then I’ll take you home.”

His words, his attitude, hit Coal like a snowball to the face. The shaking vanished as adrenaline pumped through his system again.

“That’s it? You’ve spanked me, fucked me, made me bleed, and now you’re throwing me out? If this is what you do to all your partners, no wonder you’re on your own.”

Angus folded his arms as he stood a few feet away against the bathroom door like a damn prison guard. He’d refastened his jeans, hadn’t even bothered to take his shirt off. It was as if he couldn’t bear to be closer to Coal or even be seen by him, yet he still demanded Coal stripped.

“I don’t have relationships with liars, Mr. Chestnut, if that’s even your name.”

Coal did a remarkably accurate goldfish impression as he tried to figure out what the fuck Angus meant. Had Angus worked out Coal wasn’t human? Wracking his fuzzy mind, Coal couldn’t think of anything he might have done in the throes of passion to let the cat out of the bag.

“You should have told me about the piercings. You should have said you were a virgin. Lies of omission are still lies. You might not consider it a big deal, but I certainly do.”

“Lying is a big deal—”

Angus cut him off. “Not the lying, your virginity, and you were, weren’t you?”

Coal shrugged. “Yeah, so? Why is it a big deal?”

“Because you can’t ever get your first time back. I would have been more careful, would have taken things slower, if I had even agreed to be your first. What you fooled me into doing is so out of order, I can’t even begin to get my head around it. I’ll get you something to wear. That shirt is ruined. And if it isn’t off you by the time I get back, so help me, I’m dragging you to the hospital, hogtied if necessary.”

Coal watched Angus’s back disappear out the door as he tried to pull his mind into some sort of order. The only completely clear thing was that somehow he’d blown it. Big time.

Minutes after having the most profound experience of his short existence, he was being rejected because he hadn’t had sex before. He must have been terrible at it. After all, he didn’t have any experience, and he had been so out of it... maybe Angus hadn’t enjoyed it. Coal thought he had, could feel the evidence leaking out of him.

If it wouldn’t have caused more problems, he would have popped straight back to his room at the North Pole. Hiding under his quilt for the next ten years was an enticing option until he plucked up enough courage to face a life of reindeer shit shoveling or watching others having fun in a snowglobe.

He pictured the shaking heads, the sad, pitying expressions. Poor Coal, the fairy that had been made *wrong* and could never get anything right.

The self-pity morphed into anger. He’d been doing everything Angus told him, and it still hadn’t been enough. How the hell was he meant to know virginity and a little blood was such a

big deal? He was a damn Christmas Fairy, not a sodding psychic.

Having Angus discover him still shivering, exactly where he'd left him, would be even more pathetic than he already was. He'd been weak in front of him once, and he wouldn't be again. Besides, sitting down made his ass—his hole and the cheeks—hurt, and there was no way he was laying down like a whipped puppy waiting for its master to return.

Getting up made his legs tremble but he persisted, dumping the blanket onto the floor. Seeing the towel on the lid annoyed him even more. Angus didn't even want him contaminating his toilet with his body.

Turning to the mirror above the sink, he undid the buttons on his tunic. Might as well find out what all the fuss had been about.

Trickles of blood lay stark against his skin. Two from one nipple, one from the other. Then he caught sight of his ass in the long mirror on the other side of the room. Bright as fucking Rudolf's nose. It looked as if he'd stuck his ass in a damn fireplace; there were even a few dark marks that looked like soot but had to be bruising.

Angus walked in the door with a bundle of folded clothes. After taking in his horrified expression, Angus came over with a sigh.

He crouched, looked intently at one nipple and then the other." He didn't try to touch him. "I don't think anything's been torn, but they're damn swollen; you really should get them checked.

“There’s not as much blood as it looks, the red stuff goes a long way, and if you’d told me, I would’ve done things so differently.” Angus sighed, disappointment leaking out of every pore. Coal felt so damn small.

“Your ass will heal, both the bruises and your hole, but you should watch your diet for a few days, use laxatives and antiseptic cream. If it bugs you, try ice packs or a salt bath. Same for your nips. I’m sorry I was angry at you. I’m sorry I hurt and shouted at you. But you should have told me. Now let’s get you home.”

“Is it going to hurt that much every time I have sex?” He knew it was the wrong question as Angus looked at him as if he had two heads.

“No, not unless you don’t prep or use enough lube. The next time you have penetrative sex, it might feel very tight, but if it hurts like that again, tell your partner to stop.”

Your partner, not me. And stop. Not say red. *Not only does he not want me again, he doesn’t think I should ever do anything kinky again. He’s probably right. I suck at it, just like I suck at everything else.*

“Now, take a shower, but don’t use soap. You don’t want to irritate those wounds. I’ve left a couple of dressings on the clothes. The shirt will be—” Angus pressed his lips together, “—big on you, but it’s the nearest thing I’ve got in your size. Anything of mine would reach your knees. Shout if you can’t manage.”

Lecture finished, Angus left the room. Apart from examining his wounds, Angus hadn't looked at him once.

Coal took one look at the blood-streaked plasma collecting around the edges of the film covering the tattoo and decided he really didn't want to take it off.

Because Angus would be listening, he turned the shower on and splashed a bit of water on his arms. Why hadn't the other Adult Department fairies warned him about this obsession humans had with virginity? His mood soured further. Probably because none of them ever imagined anyone would actually want a lump of coal.

The pain hadn't stopped his climax. In fact, it'd been the best he'd ever had by a million times. He'd been so out of it, floating, uncaring, just being in the moment without a thought in his head.

Not that it mattered either way because he wouldn't be having sex again. After this debacle, there was no way he'd be allowed back in the human realm.

*If they find out.* Angus claimed a lie of omission was still a lie, but if no one found out what a fuck-up he'd been...

No one had come looking so far, so it was likely no one had been watching. He was still meant to be busking, and they probably assumed he'd manipulated time to go from one day to the next. If they'd even realized he was missing. He'd only ever been tolerated at home. Yes, the Adult Department fairies put on a show of liking him, but it had to be more about giving the finger to the traditional fairies rather than actual affection.

Popping back home with wounds would heal them, but the extra use of magic would be noted, investigated. And they'd want to know why he'd granted an unsanctioned wish.

*But if I heal the human way...* He already had somewhere to stay. What would it take, a day? Two? The wish glow would fade in about the same time too.

Plan in place, he pulled his tights and leggings on. The sheer material burned against his ass. There wouldn't be much sitting or lying on his back or front in the near future.

After examining his swollen nipples—the gaps between the skin and the balls on the end of each bar were non-existent—he decided not to use the sticky dressings. It would damn well hurt when he took them off.

He turned to the long-sleeved formal lilac shirt Angus provided. Several sizes too small for Angus, it was still too big for Coal. It had to have belonged to Angus's husband, the rat who had made Angus such an uptight miserable man. With his sweaty, bloodstained tunic as the only other option, he grimaced and slipped it on.

When he came out, Angus waited for him, dressed in clean clothes, as if nothing had happened. Coal didn't want to see him or anyone else.

“Ready to go home?” Angus asked quietly, but he averted his eyes as if even looking at Coal was painful, sickening.

“I'll get a cab.”

“I'll drive you; it's no problem.”



Keeping his eyes on the floor, Coal swiveled to get past Angus to the top of the stairs.

“I already called a cab on my mobile. It’s meeting me at the end of the road.”

Angus blew out an exasperated breath. “Why? I run a taxi company, Coal, remember?”

“And any driver of yours will tell you where they dropped me.”

Angus sighed. *Disappointment, frustration?* Coal couldn’t tell and didn’t much care.

“Not if I tell them not to, and I won’t ask.”

Coal shrugged. “It’s already done. You wouldn’t want someone to make an unnecessary, *unpaid* journey, even if they are a competitor, would you?”

“I’ll walk with you. You’re probably still a little wobbly,” Angus persisted as he followed him down the stairs.

Coal stopped at the bottom and looked back up at him.

“You’ve made your feelings perfectly clear. I managed to go out on my own before I met you, and shock horror, I’m doing it again now.”

“It’s cold out there; at least let me lend you a coat.”

“Bye, Angus, have a nice life.”

“Damn it, Coal, stop acting like a brat, I—”

Coal broke into a trot, and then a run as footsteps sounded behind him. As soon as he rounded the corner, he turned

invisible. Angus appeared seconds later, almost slipping over as he skidded to a halt.

He glanced up and down the road, then ran a hand through his hair. “Damn it. If we had that fucking response time, we’d be doing a damn sight better.” After peering down the street in case a phantom super efficient cab would somehow appear out of nowhere, he turned and headed back to his home.

Coal let out the breath he’d been holding and dropped the draining invisibility. Popping anywhere was beyond him. Even if he tried, in his exhausted state, invoking the transport magic might pull him back home. He couldn’t even pluck up the energy to magic more money into his wallet to pay for a taxi, even if he could find one at this time of night.

The drive here had taken ten, fifteen minutes? It wouldn’t take him long to walk back to the pub and his cute minivan.

After an hour, he concluded that driving was a damn sight quicker than walking and both were a hell of a lot slower than ‘popping’. And it was damn cold. He wrapped his arms around himself, forgetting about his wounds. The movement stretched both the tattoo and his nipples so he dropped his arms again. His ass ached with every step, and his hole throbbed.

Angus accused Coal of using him, of not caring about something important, but he did. The way Angus had wanted him, had been *happy* with him, was imprinted on Coal’s mind and heart.

It hurt far more than his physical injuries that Angus thought he was as useless as everyone else did. But for a while, Angus

had really wanted him, had enjoyed being with him. It would have to be enough as it'd never happen again.

Beeping drew Coal back from concentrating on simply putting one foot in front of another, his mind too exhausted to think further.

Reaching for his phone, he saw a message from Ward.

*Do I need to call the police?*

He sent back. *No.*

He made it another few steps before his phone rang. Blowing out a breath, intending to get Ward to help him, even if he was on the naughty list, he looked up and found he recognized the street. The pub was only a few hundred yards away.

He answered the call. "I'm fine, ok? Go back to spanking whoever is your flavor of the day."

"Salty. I have to say, you don't sound like someone having a good time." Ward sounded thoroughly amused at his expense.

"Yeah, well, things don't always work out, do they? Thanks for checking on me," he said, and hovered his thumb over the disconnect key.

"How bad is it?" Ward asked, the banter gone.

"What did he say?"

Ward sighed. "I haven't spoken to him, but I know Fricker. He wouldn't have intentionally hurt you. If you need—"

"Well he did, it was kinda the point. Don't worry about it. Thanks for phoning." He clicked the disconnect button.

It rang again. “Has he checked on you? Where are you?”

“He doesn’t have my number, and as for where I am, I’m home. Safe and sound. Stop being such a damn mother hen, you’re as bad as he is.”

A car went past. Coal winced, hoping Ward hadn’t heard the noise.

“Doesn’t sound like a home to me, unless you live on a road and have all your windows open in mid-December. Come on, Twinkletoes,” Ward crooned, “tell me where you are.”

Coal ended the call. He stood looking at the handset for a moment, wondering whether he had the energy to send it back to wherever magically conjured items came from. He didn’t need it anymore, but like the soreness of his body, it was a connection to his wisher and his target that he didn’t want to lose.

“Coal, you’re such a stupid fucker, mooning over a guy who doesn’t want you.”

His personal pep talk stopped when a sheet of gold paper fluttered down from the sky and landed at his feet.

A stern telling-off was the best outcome Coal could face. Being honest with himself, he’d rather have that every day for the rest of his existence than Santa’s sympathy and guilt because his faulty creation had failed yet again.

With a wince, he bent and picked up the summons, but instead of requesting his presence in Santa’s office, it said, *Campervan, pub car park.*

Coal picked up his pace, managing a slow jog, his breath steaming into the cold night. When he turned into the car park, all the lights were off in the pub. He could barely make out the campervan at the back of the virtually empty car park. It looked deserted, but as a magical being, he knew better than anyone that appearances could be deceiving.

Going to the far side of the van—he'd parked it so the sliding door faced away from the pub door—he tugged on the handle. It slid open without the stickiness of earlier.

Santa sprawled on the small padded bench in the back.

“Come in, my dear,” the deep musical voice rolled out.

Santa didn't sound cross, so it'd probably be the less preferable sympathy for his fuck-up failing yet again. *It's not your fault Coal, it's mine, I'm sorry.*

It pissed Coal off. He'd made the mistakes, and by everything festive, he was damn well going to own them.

Climbing up into the small space, which felt even smaller with his creator in it, he lifted his chin and announced, “You wanted to see me, Boss?”

The title made Coal wince as an image of the last person he'd said it to pushed into his head. Angus was nothing like Santa physically, but the stern demeanor and occasional twinkle of humor were, to Coal's surprise, a little familiar.

An entirely inappropriate image of Santa spanking his wife, whom rumor said had been the first Christmas fairy, snuck into Coal's mind. He chased it out with a mental pitchfork.

“I want to congratulate you on a job well done. Cigar?” Santa asked with a broad smile and proffered a gold case.

You could have knocked Coal over with a piece of tinsel.

“What?”

“A cigar. You smoke them. And I think you mean ‘pardon’ young fairy, but I’ll repeat it anyway. You did an excellent job today.”

Coal looked at him dubiously. Had Santa got him mixed up with someone else? He was getting on a bit, and fairies did look quite alike. Either that or St. Nick had been hitting the sherry harder than usual.

Reaching forward, Coal absently took a cigar but didn’t try to light it. He had a brief inner argument about the virtues of blissful ignorance rather than honesty and went with Angus’s philosophy.

“Erm, he chucked me out. I don’t think that counts as excellent.”

“Poppycock. He’s upset because he cares and feels guilty because he didn’t ask you the questions he should have done.”

Coal blinked as warmth spread through him. “He cares?” he asked hopefully.

Santa’s eyes twinkled in amusement. “He most certainly does, which is the better half of the battle. But I’m not here about Angus Fricker. I want you to help me with another little issue. Mr. Ward.”

“He’s on the naughty list,” Coal blurted.

Santa took the smoking cigar out of his mouth and reached for a glass that appeared on the tiny counter. It was paler than Santa’s usual preferences of brandy or cream sherry. Coal guessed whiskey. Well, everyone could try something different; he’d certainly tried something different tonight.

“That he is, but I’ve decided to try and help some of those poor misunderstood naughty list folks get back in my good books. Fricker and Ward used to be close friends, and Fricker was a good influence on him. I want you to try and get them back together.” He waved the pungent cigar in the air, wafting smoke around. “Only as friends, mind you. They aren’t compatible as fuck buddies.”

Coal’s eyes nearly fell out of his head. Santa said *fuck buddies?*

“I’m not fired?” he confirmed as he slid onto the bench seat opposite his maker because his legs wobbled. The sting in his backside made him regret the change of position, but he hoped Santa hadn’t noticed his grimace of discomfort.

“Damn sore, is it? He really gave it to you good, and I might have a teeny—” he transferred the cigar to his whiskey holding hand and used the thumb and fingers of his other hand to indicate a small distance, “—bit to do with that. You’ll be pleased to know it won’t take that much to get you off again. Otherwise, you’ll have a permanent red arse!” Santa barked with laughter, and Coal wondered if this was a hallucination.

“So I’m not fired?” he repeated.

Santa's caterpillar eyebrows drew together. "This'll be easier than I thought. No, Coal, you are not fired. In fact, you're on a special secret mission, one you were specifically created for. But it won't be easy."

Coal straightened in his seat, even though exhaustion dragged at him. "I can do it, Sir. Whatever it is, you can count on me." He paused, then asked, "What is it?"

Santa leaned forward, and Coal noted his usual scent was smokier, like a coal fire, rather than a wood one.

"Get Ward and Fricker together. Fricker will pull Ward into the light. If there is such a thing as light for a couple of sadists, eh? Get it?" Santa chuckled to himself, then blew several perfect smoke rings.

He nodded at the cigar Coal still held. "You going to smoke that?"

Coal looked at it, unable to get his brain working.

"In that case, I'll have it back. They're expensive." Santa plucked it back out of Coal's unresisting fingers.

"When it comes down to it, they're both a pair of bleeding hearts, so use that against them. Don't go home until I say you can. The humans will get suspicious if you're suddenly healed. I would say look after yourself, but that'd be counter-productive, get it?"

Coal gaped as Santa wiggled his fat fingers in goodbye and then vanished, leaving nothing but the scent of fire behind.



With much huffing and puffing, Coal managed to set the bed up. He didn't bother with washing or getting changed, just wrapped the quilt around himself, wondering if Santa really was acting oddly or if he was still loopy from pain and exhaustion. Either way, he was sure he'd feel better after a little sleep. Although he was tired down to the bone, Coal didn't drift off immediately.

The Campervan rocked in the breeze, creaked a little. Every tiny squeak, every passing vehicle, enforced that he wasn't at home. Needing something familiar, a reminder that he was being good, he leaned over and snagged his cuffs from the side. Once the leather cradled his wrists, he squeezed one then the other. Gradually, the rate of squeezes and the intensity slowed as he began to drift, and he knew no more.

# CHAPTER 11



CLANKING METAL AND SHOUTS about barrels dragged him out of sleep. Coal blinked at the weak light coming through the curtains. His breath steamed, and the quilt felt heavy and damp with sweat and condensation. But at least it was warm. Everywhere felt bruised but especially the tattoo. Raw and sore, it hurt more now than immediately after it'd been done.

He concluded that this was low after the high the pain had caused. He'd never had an alcohol hangover, but a pain one sucked. Big time.

Remembering the spanking, he clenched his ass, causing a deep, mellow muscle ache, but the sting in his hole had faded. Laying still on his side felt ok, but he didn't fancy sitting up anytime soon. Shivering, he pulled the quilt further up his shoulder. Something split, cracked, on a nipple.

Trying to keep as much of himself under the quilt as possible, he undid the dress shirt Angus had given him, buried his chin in his neck, and squinted downward. Puffy. Very puffy. No blood, but yellowish crusty stuff clung to either end of both bars. Instinctively, he picked a little of it off. The tight, pulling sensation eased a little, so he systematically removed the crusties with his fingernails. When he was done, he turned his mind to his next move, literally.

Inching to the edge of the bed, he tipped sideways onto his knees on the floor. Concentrating on the rigid leather around his wrists, he pushed up using the bed. Getting up without his ass touching anything was a piece of cake; he could do this.

As soon as he was upright, his bladder reminded him that he really needed to use the bathroom. At home, he wandered down the corridor to the communal bathroom, barefoot in his pajamas. Here... He moved the curtain and peered outside.

An inch of snow lay on the ground. Three men, two big, one not much bigger than Coal, both wrapped up like it was twenty below—hats, gloves, coats, woolly hats—were rolling silver kegs across the car park from a truck.

The pub had a bathroom, but he'd need to be fully dressed, even if Dave let him in at this time of day. He frowned, not sure of the time. The gray sky didn't reveal the sun at all.

Hunting through the mess of bedding exposed his phone. One p.m. He enlarged the screen just to make sure. He'd slept for more than twelve hours. Then he squinted at the date. He was

sure he'd had a week until Christmas when he'd begun this mission, but his phone showed December 21<sup>st</sup>.

There were also half a dozen messages from Ward, starting mid-morning yesterday. He didn't feel like he'd slept for a day and a half. Then again, he'd never slept in the human realm before, and time worked differently here. He scrolled through the messages.

*Feeling sparky this morning, Twinkletoes?*

*You're not mad because I didn't offer you a bed for the night, are you?*

*I'm not accustomed to being ignored, Coal.*

He snorted at that one, but his belly squirmed, uneasy at disappointing the focused man. Did these dominant types all memorize the same lines? Coal found his hand around his wrist cuff, squeezing. The pain travelled up his arm and wrapped around his mind. He blew out a slow breath, settled. Opening his eyes, he felt ready to read the last message sent several hours ago.

*Kitty told me about the tattoo. You had a lot done at one time. It needs to be checked. Call me.*

Coal winced on Kitty's behalf. He bet her punishment had been worse than his, although as everything ached, he changed his mind. Angus was pretty damn good at dishing out pain... and pleasure. He shivered at the remembered mind-blowing climax that still seemed to be adding heaviness to his limbs

and mind. He damn well hoped he'd experience something like that again, but right now, he needed to pee.

Discarding the fancy shirt Angus loaned him, Coal summoned a clean green uniform with red tights and changed into it. Although, stretching to put on his shirt, pulling on tights while standing, and then crouching to do up his shoes made his head and belly swirl. The bed called his name again, but that wouldn't empty his bladder or fulfill his new mission for Santa. And if he worked on Sam's wish to make Angus happy in the process, that was his business. Technically, he'd already granted it but only providing a few minutes of happiness felt like cheating.

Peeking out of the window again, he prayed the delivery guys would hurry up. He didn't want anyone to know he was sleeping in the pub car park, especially Dave the barman, as he knew Angus.

Gritting his teeth, he urged them on with, "Come on, come on," until the subliminal message seemed to get through. One of the big men and the little one went back inside, and the other got in the truck and left in a cloud of diesel fumes.

Coal took a deep breath, told himself he could do this, and stepped out into the gloomy afternoon. The cold didn't usually bother him, but having his nipples harden in the frigid temperature damn well stung.

A gull wheeled above him, calling loud enough to wake the dead. The big gray and white bird with a bright yellow bill, beady black eyes, and a red ring on its leg settled on the pub's

roof. It tilted its head, watching Coal with unnerving intelligence. It shrieked again.

“Yeah, Merry Christmas to you too,” he mumbled. Keeping his gaze on it in case it made a dive for him, he rushed inside.

The bar area contained a few damp shoppers, but Coal ignored them as his gaze found the toilet sign. With probably embarrassing haste, he fast-walked across the bar and swerved into the bathroom. A man was finishing washing his hands, so Coal shut himself in a cubicle. Gritting his teeth against the pressure in his bladder, he yanked down his thankfully fastening-free leggings and tights and relieved himself. And relief was the name for it. He’d never been so grateful to pee in his life.

He took a few seconds to bask in having an empty bladder, then tucked his now soft cock away. Hadn’t Ward said he put Angus’s husband in a cage? Did he let him out for toilet breaks? Did Ward make his subs beg to be allowed basic bodily functions? Judging from the pleasure Coal had just got from the simple act of peeing, restricting access to a toilet would be a damn good incentive to behave.

He couldn’t ever imagine just sitting and waiting for someone, though. He just wasn’t made that way. Although, a fairy always adapted to their wisher’s needs.

He paused, hand on the cubicle door. Did that mean his current enthusiasm for pain was his choice or something imposed? Squeezing his cuff reminded him that he’d always been this

way. Santa hadn't messed with his head, not on purpose anyway.

At the sink, he turned on the tap and let the warm water run over his hands. He considered taking off the cuffs and washing the sore skin but opted against it. His belly no longer considered food a good idea, and the thought of looking at any raw skin turned his stomach.

Concentrating on his mission was far more manageable. Getting Angus here wouldn't be tricky, Coal could call the taxi office. Getting Ward here might be more of a problem. He didn't fancy going all the way to the body mod shop again. The pub was warm, cozy, and it was cold outside.

The lyrics of *Baby, It's Cold Outside* forced their way into his mind. He got to the chorus before pulling his thoughts away.

*Idiot. You've got his damn number.* Coal pulled his phone out. The human realm seemed to be dulling his thought processes. Yet another reason for limiting the time fairies spent here. Santa was indeed wise.

*I'm at the Switch Room. Got a singing gig.*

He sent the text, then turned the device off. Ward would either turn up, or he wouldn't. Coal didn't have the energy to worry about it. His reflection in the mirror above the sink showed that the mundane world wasn't doing him any favors. Even after sleeping for a day and a half, he looked like he'd been up all night. Dark circles had taken up residence under his dull eyes, and his skin looked sallow.

He straightened up, tugged his tunic down, and realized the bells were missing. Damn the man. Angus still had them. Rather than letting emotion overtake him, he grabbed both cuffs, closed his eyes, and squeezed. The sharp sting made him gasp, and he couldn't think about anything else while it lasted. When he opened his eyes, he gave his weary reflection a grin.

"They ain't seen nothing yet," he told himself, then magically added more bells to his tunic and walked out of the bathroom to greet his audience.

Coal breezed into the now overheated bar like a superstar. Most of the patrons huddled around the fire blazing in the hearth. How they stood the heat, he didn't know. Personally, he already glowed with nervous excitement, wondering how to get Angus down here at the same time as Ward.

"Hi, Dave," he called cheerfully as he walked toward the bar where the bald man diligently polished glasses.

"Better?" The big, shaven-headed, tattooed man smiled. Coal pictured him lying on a couch, hissing in pain as Ward tattooed him.

"Huh?"

"You shot through here like your ass was on fire. Do I need to send a hazmat team in there?" He nodded toward the bathroom.

"A what?" Coal asked, wondering if his fairy ability to understand any spoken language had been fried too.

"A clean-up crew due to Deli belly? A dodgy curry?"



His confused expression must have gotten through as Dave added, “Never mind. What’ll it be?”

“Sherry, please,” he said automatically.

“Why am I not surprised,” Dave murmured and got out a schooner glass and the bottle from last time.

Coal took a sip, ignoring his rumbling belly, then thought what the hell and downed the glass. It was early afternoon, so he probably had two or three hours to kill before Angus left work. Even though it was the Friday before Christmas, which was on a Tuesday this year, he thought it highly unlikely that Mr. Control would leave work early.

“I wasn’t expecting you back on your own,” Dave added. “I thought Angus would be keeping you under lock and key by now. He must have lost his possessive streak in his old age.”

Coal eyed the nearest barstool before deciding to remain standing.

“You know Angus?”

“Back in the day, we hung out as a small group, but not for several years. It was good to see him out and about again.”

“Yeah, well, don’t get your hopes up,” Coal said with a slight grimace. Seeing a familiar figure on a beer tap, he said, “I’ll have a pint of Christmas Ale, too.”

Dave looked dubious. “You sure? It’s strong.”

Coal glared at him. “Not you too? Why does everyone think I need protecting from myself? If my money’s not good enough

for you, I'll go somewhere else.”

Dave held up his hands in surrender and poured the requested drink, working the pump carefully to limit the amount of head on the almost black beer.

“Still in a festive frame of mind?” Dave nodded toward Coal’s outfit.

“I always am this time of year. I was getting bored with the Kris Kringle look. So today, I’m rocking the Christmas elf vibe.”

“Are you doing anything this afternoon?” Dave enquired as he passed the dark ale over.

“Yep, I’m going to stand here until I get rat-arsed to keep me warm while I go busking. You?” He grinned at the muscled barman before adding ‘cheers’ and drinking half the pint down in one.

He blinked, eyes watering, as the bitterness attacked his taste buds like a swarm of angry bees.

“Nice?” Dave asked with a grin.

“Bloody disgusting,” he grimaced, then laughed too.

“I’ll do a deal with you. If you work the Christmas karaoke machine, I’ll keep you in drinks while you’re here. You can stick a pint pot down for tips.”

Coal stuck out his hand. “Done. And I’m going back on the sherry.”

They shook hands then Dave swapped the beer for another sweet sherry, which Coal downed quickly. The alcohol warmed him from the inside, and he began to feel a little more festive.

“Wish me luck.” Giving Dave a confident wink, Coal headed over to the small stage in the corner, trying to keep his movements smooth despite the pain. Ass, tattoo, nips, and wrists, everything hurt, but more alcohol and happy festive people would help.

“Good afternoon, all you happy people. Dave is going to keep me in sherry as long as I sing, and as I really like sherry, if you don’t like my voice, you’d better piss off now.” He looked around, cringing inside as he imagined everyone in there getting to their feet. As the seconds stretched and no one moved, so did his smile. Here, at least, he was wanted. Their faith that he could bring them some festive cheer warmed Coal as much as the alcohol.

“I accept requests, but given the outfit, I’ll only be doing Christmas songs. Apart from the festive theme, anything goes, from carols to *Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer*, but I draw the line at *Proper Crimbo*. If you’ve got a favorite, jot it down on a beer mat and hand it over.

“The one by the Pogues,” someone called out. Coal grinned and selected the appropriate backing track. The song was one of his favorites as it contained profanity, but as it was a Christmas song, even the most traditional fairies couldn’t do anything but scowl when he sang it at the top of his lungs.

As usual, Coal pictured Gingersnap's sour face as he sang the line, '*Happy Christmas you asshole, thank God it's our last.*' He got a round of rapturous applause and foot stamping as he finished.

The shouted requests came thick and fast, as did the sherry. The glasses on the stool beside him began to mount up as patrons continued to buy him drinks and leave tips.

Taking another large swallow of his seventh glass, Coal snatched the top cardboard beer mat from the growing stack at his feet. After glancing at it, he started on the next request, *Do They Know It's Christmas*. Shaking his ass to provide percussion got less painful with each song and sherry.

Without speaking, without acknowledging that they'd ever met, Ward came in. He stopped by a table at the front occupied by three men, who immediately got up and moved to one further back. Unlike for anyone else, Dave provided the white-haired man with silent waiter service.

People came and went as they took advantage of the late-night Christmas shopping in town, but the double of his colleague, Winter, didn't move. Superficially they were alike, but the way Ward held himself, the confidence, the... Coal paused after a song to grab another mouthful of sherry as he considered Ward.

There was a deep, self-deprecating melancholy about Ward that Coal's colleague lacked. Ward just sat there nursing a glass of red wine, watching Coal closely, never joining in the singing, calling out a request or clapping his performance.

Even if he hadn't been so intently focused on Coal, Ward would have stood out like a sore thumb. An elegant diamond compared to the stressed Christmas shoppers and the sweaty, crumpled 'one drink before we head home' crowd.

Like when doing the piercing, Ward's attention made Coal a little uncomfortable. Whenever Coal glanced over and saw those icy-blue eyes still watching, a wave of heat swept over him. This extraordinarily handsome 'naughty' man, who everyone seemed desperate to please, was only after one thing, him.

There was a dark edge about Ward that thrilled Coal. Ward wouldn't say please, wouldn't take a nerve-driven 'no' for an answer, wouldn't throw him out for not mentioning it was his first time.

Another wave of heat washed over him, and between one moment and the next, he was desperate to be outside in the cold fresh air.

"Mind on the job, Coal," he mumbled as he jumped off the stage. "Angus, you're waiting for Angus," he repeated as his hand went to his right cuff. A firm squeeze provided a much-needed distraction.

As he walked past Ward, even though there were plenty of other routes to the door, the man grabbed the wide leather cuff on his left wrist. The pain was so much more intense than when he did it to himself. Coal paused, sucked in a breath, tried not to moan.

"Sit with me." It wasn't a request.

Coal gazed down into those icy blue eyes enjoying the burn of the cuff's studs pressing into his flesh as much as the naughty-list sting. Yes, Ward was definitely on the naughty list, but Coal wasn't exactly squeaky clean perfect either. Besides, it was only a drink, and his mission was to get Ward and Angus talking. Having a conversation with Ward first might give him some ideas to make that happen.

Coal plonked himself down on a chair and tried not to wince at his sore ass, but the booze helped to deaden the pain. "You can buy me a drink before you tell me what a nice guy like you is doing in a place like this all on your lonesome."

Ward's eyes widened a little, then his lips curled up at the flirtation. "I thought that was my line."

"You thought wrong. I'll have a sherry."

Ward raised his hand. Within seconds, Dave hurried over. Ward beckoned the barman nearer. The big man bent so Ward could speak into his ear.

Dave straightened. "Are you sure? He normally—"

"Do you want my business or not, David?"

Dave reddened. "Of course, sir. I'll get your drinks right away."

Two minutes later, Dave placed a drink that wasn't sherry on the beer mat in front of Coal, then hurried away without speaking.

"What's this?" Coal asked without touching the deep red drink.

“Cranberry juice and vodka on ice. All that sherry will give you a headache.”

“Controlling much?” Coal asked as he took a sip. It was surprisingly good—dry and fruity. He mentally added it to his ‘I like’ list.

Just like at the body-mod studio, Coal’s light-hearted comment didn’t result in a conversation. Perhaps Ward had reached his limit of ‘light’ for the day.

Ward’s long fingers that had given Coal so much delicious pain caressed the stem of his glass of red wine. Coal bet Ward could touch in all the right places, could tease until his victim squirmed and begged, only to back off, let him cool down, then start all over again.

*Angus, I’m here for Angus*, Coal reminded himself, then looked up.

Ward examined him, a slight smile on his lips. “I would say a penny for your thoughts, but I bet they’re worth far more.”

Uneasy and thoroughly turned on, Coal dropped his gaze back to his glass, trying to work out what was going on.

This felt similar to being with Angus, although Coal had felt safe until Angus humiliated him by sending him away. Ward didn’t feel safe at all. He had a far more dangerous vibe, one that went right to Coal’s balls. Santa wanted Angus to help rehabilitate Ward, but Coal’s sensible side doubted that was possible. Unfortunately, his sherry-fueled naughty side had the sensible part in a headlock, with a hand firmly over its mouth.

He needed to get this interaction off sex as soon as possible or he was going to fall so deeply into Ward's web he'd never escape.

He took a mouthful of the strong drink, then asked, "So what do you do when you're not stalking Christmas fairies?"

"Still going with that?" The man's lips twitched. Lips Coal could imagine overpowering his. Automatically, Coal reached for a cuff, squeezed. The pain did nothing to calm his cock.

"Oh yes, come twelfth night, poof, I'm gone," he blurted, making starbursts with his hands.

"In that case, I'd better move things along. We have a mutual interest I'd like to discuss."

Coal took another gulp, intent on not showing any weaknesses, including that he was battling a boner that didn't seem to care that Ward was on the naughty list. In fact, it seemed to love the idea.

This was a man you didn't turn your back on because he'd take immediate advantage. Which didn't sound nearly as bad as it had early. Right now, this was a game Coal was more than happy to play, especially with most of a bottle of sherry inside him. Sobering up could be accomplished with a thought but using magic might also draw attention, and Santa said this had to be a secret mission. Plus, losing this alcoholic confidence might derail everything.

"And what would that be what, Mr. Ward?"



“This.” Ward reached out and took Coal’s wrist, squeezing so hard Coal imagined the crystal studs on the inside of the cuff drawing blood. It made his head buzz beautifully, and he closed his eyes to enjoy it. Winning didn’t seem to be quite so important anymore.

# CHAPTER 12



## TWO DAYS BEFORE

As soon as Coal ran into the night, Angus knew he'd fucked up badly. With the temperature dropping and Coal's physical and mental distress, who knew where he'd end up?

Scooping up his keys, Angus got in his car. If Coal had called a cab, it could only be heading back into the center of town. If Coal was on foot, he'd catch him quickly. Angus didn't know what he'd say when he found him, but he couldn't let the youngster be alone tonight. Coal needed his wounds checked, food, and care. He needed someone to be responsible for him.

As the minutes stretched, and no huddled walking figure or cars with taxi signage appeared, the fear in his belly grew.

Angus didn't even know if Coal had anywhere to stay. Would he end up huddled under a hedge or in a bus shelter, slowly freezing to death? If anything bad happened to Coal, it would be his fault.

From any sane person's point of view, including his own, he'd used and abused a vulnerable youngster and then thrown him out in sub-zero temperatures. His hands gripped the wheel a little tighter as he peered into the gloom of the deserted streets.

"Come on, Coal, where the fuck are you?" he growled, but driving around in circles wasn't getting him anywhere.

He headed to the office. Hoping to find Sam had been her usual efficient self and had Coal's address or even a phone number. Angus nodded to himself. When he found him, he'd apologize. Bring him back to his place. Set him up in the spare room. Check his wounds, feed him. Make sure he was warm and safe.

*Safe from horny fucking idiots like me.*

Slamming on the lights in the offices, the bright festive decorations mocked him. As he'd hoped, Sam had filed the forms from the interviews this morning.

He slumped in relief when he found Coal's one, only to grit his teeth. The only thing on it was his first name. The fancy curling writing felt like it was laughing at him. He paused, recognizing the font from the tattoo. The thought of never seeing it again settled like lead in his belly. Coal mentioned his driving license, and Angus hadn't even damn well looked at it.

After another fruitless drive around the town, and suppressing an idiotic urge to call the Police and report Coal as a missing person, he went home, and napped on the sofa in case Coal returned.

With only a few hours of broken sleep, and no sign of Coal, he went into the office. Sam looked up from her desk as he stomped past.

She still dared to ask, “Didn’t go well, then?”

“Have you heard from him?”

She blinked. “Should I have done?”

“Just... let me know if you see him or if he gets in touch.” He held up his hands in a ‘don’t shoot me’ gesture. “No pressure, I just want to know if he’s all right. It erm... didn’t end well.”

Thoroughly embarrassed, he turned to his office.

“Don’t worry,” Sam called out, stopping him in his tracks. He didn’t turn around as she continued. “There are other fish in the sea, although maybe not as colorful as him. I’m sorry it didn’t work out for you. You could have been really good for each other.”

He carried on into his office, almost slamming the door behind himself. He didn’t want any other damn fish. He wanted Coal.

He sat down at his desk, but couldn’t face looking at spreadsheets or ordering more car cleaning supplies. He knew he should forget about Coal, knew he’d really messed up. He sighed, swallowed down his embarrassment, and clicked the intercom.

“Yes, Boss?”

The name made him wince. Coal’s thoughtful, considered choice had charmed him, and he’d let Coal down, had

assumed things, and not read him properly. His errors had caused real distress and could have resulted in long-term physical and emotional damage.

“Have the drivers keep a look out for him, will you? I’m not asking to know where he is, but it didn’t end on good terms, and I’d like to know he’s safe, ok?”

“Yes, Boss, and again, I’m sorry it didn’t go well.”

The intercom clicked off. And that was half the problem. It had gone so well that Coal’s deceptions had stung far more than they should have done.

Sam sounded as sympathetic as she’d been when Jesse left. He’d never told her the exact circumstances, but the grapevine would have provided at least one version of the truth in the circles they both frequented. He hadn’t had the guts to ask her what she’d heard. It was over, was done, and thinking about his failures would only produce pointless pain. He’d focus on work again. Work was safe. Relationships were not, and he should have learned his lesson last time.

Angus got on with his day, then went home, and watched mindless TV alone in bed. Sitting on the sofa had brought back what had happened there the night before.

This morning, being the great friend she was, Sam had only given him sympathy face. He didn’t ask if Coal had been sighted, and she hadn’t mentioned him.

Coal had been glorious, so good that Angus had been carried away. As an experienced Dom, he should’ve paid more

attention to Coal rather than his own pleasure.

Looking back, the signs had been glaringly obvious.

Coal's reaction to having his nipples twisted had been extreme, far more than usual, sensitive nipples. But the costumed man been so cocky and confident that he'd never imagined that it had been an act to hide inexperience or a need to be wanted that far outweighed his safety.

Coal must have thought he'd be rejected if he admitted Angus hurt him in the parking lot. So he hid the damage. Angus never thought anyone, or any professional body modifier for that matter, would do a double nipple piercing and a tattoo on the same day. There were safety issues that needed to be addressed.

With that thought in mind, he'd started phoning the local tattoo parlors. Out of the three, all had said their policy was not to do more than one procedure at a time, but couldn't comment on clients.

One girl stuttered as she gave the same answer as all the rest. He knew the parlor well. It was the nearest one, the one where he'd had his tongue pierced by Spencer Fucking Ward.

Ward was an ass, but he'd always been damn professional when it came to his work as a paramedic or a part-time piercer at the shop he owned for shits and giggles.

Angus was considering going down there in person—everyone getting a procedure had to provide their name and address on the consent form—when his phone rang.

“Angus? It’s Dave at the Switch Room. Look, I don’t know what went on with you and the Christmas elf the other night, but he’s been in here all afternoon, singing and drinking.”

The initial wave of relief died. Coal was having fun, and he hadn’t been able to concentrate worth a damn since Coal stomped out of his door, offended and physically hurt.

*And I was a complete dick to him.*

Coal wouldn’t want to see him again.

Pushing a hand through his hair, he answered his old friend. “I’m not his keeper, Dave. What he does is none of my business, but thanks for letting me know he’s ok.”

“Well, he’s ok for now. I just thought you’d want to know that Spencer Ward is giving him the full treatment.”

Angus tensed, sitting forward in his chair. “What do you mean, the ‘full treatment’?”

He pictured Dave shrugging. “You know him as well as I do. He’s plying him with booze, fluttering those baby blues. Ward keeps holding his wrists, and Coal’s reacting as if Ward’s hand is wrapped around his cock. It’s like Harry Met Sally in here, complete with eyelid fluttering and groans, except Coal’s not pretending.”

Angus’s heart dropped. If Ward was getting Coal high on endorphins and booze, there was no telling where this would end. *Who am I kidding?* He knew exactly where it would end.

“Is Coal wearing wide, gothic-style leather cuffs?”

“Yeah, how did you know?”

“Don’t let him leave with Ward,” Angus said into the phone as he stood up and grabbed his coat.

“I can’t stop them if they want to leave. It’s a free country.”

“I don’t give a shit. It won’t be a free country for Coal if he goes with him. You know that as well as I do.”

“Hey, it’s his choice, mate. For someone who said you’re not his keeper, you sound bloody interested.”

Angus put every ounce of dominance he possessed into his snarled reply. “He’ll stick him in a literal cage, and that’ll break him, so fucking keep him there, got it?”

“Ok, ok, keep your hair on. I’ll keep an eye, just like I have been, but you’d better hurry up. There’s no way I’m going toe to toe with Ward; I’m not sporting a black eye for Christmas Day. My husband would have my guts for garters, and Aksel’s far scarier than you’ll ever be.”



# CHAPTER 13



THE NEXT SHOT OF pain Ward delivered via Coal's left wrist nearly made Coal cry out in the middle of the pub.

“Now, now, no fuss, Twinkletoes. The first time anyone looks over here, the game stops. And this time, I'm controlling it. Your trick with Kitty was out of order, but you need this, don't you?”

As the pain receded, Coal opened his eyes, but Ward's twinkling blue ones weren't looking at him anymore. They focused over Coal's right shoulder.

“Twice in one week, Fricker. This has to be a record,” Ward said as he relaxed back in his chair. Although he still held Coal's wrist, there was a tenseness in Ward's body that hadn't been there before. Coal tried to get his mind working. Hadn't someone said Angus had hit Ward once? Why did Santa think these two should be friends?

“Let him go,” Angus said, his voice flat, calm, and dominant. It sent a shiver up Coal’s spine. The conversations on the other tables faltered, and the whole room gradually went quiet.

Ward smiled coldly up at the taller, broader man.

“And why would I do that? He’s still not wearing a collar, so he’s fair game. He clearly needs a Dom in his life, and as you obviously fucked things up, I vote me.”

They were talking about him as if he didn’t have the right, or the brainpower, to form his own opinion. But they were talking, which was what Santa had wanted. With his job done, Coal technically didn’t have to stay any longer.

With each glare, each posture, Angus stiff with righteous anger, Ward relaxed and sarcastic, Coal cared even less. Their high-handedness, and the heat in the room, pissed him off. Pain flared up his arm as he pulled his wrist roughly out of Ward’s tight grip before the dizziness buzzing in his head got worse.

“I’m outta here. You boys play nice. On second thoughts, do whatever you want. But don’t bother coming after me when you’ve decided—between the two of you of course—who has dibs. Why should I be included or even give a shit? I’m only a dumb kid.”

Getting up a little too fast for his spinning head, he made for the door to the car park and his cute campervan. He wondered if he could take it home. It’d look great parked by the Adult Department, his own little safe space.

“Thanks, Dave, see you around,” he called as he passed the bar and resisted the urge to steady himself on it. Yep, he’d definitely had too much to drink; his knees were as fuzzy as his vision.

Dave looked pointedly behind Coal, letting him know that at least one of the men was in pursuit. He knew it shouldn’t give him a thrill, but it did. A few days ago, he’d been the biggest pain in the backside in the entire North Pole, with ninety-five percent of his own kind regretting his existence. The others only tolerated him for that reason. Now he had two powerful, successful men vying for his attention. Or at least he hoped they were.

Knowing his epic luck, Angus and Spencer were simply trying to get one over on each other, and he was merely a convenient bone to fight over. A bone that both of them assumed didn’t have a mind of his own. They could stick it up their well-tailored backsides.

As he stepped outside into the invigoratingly cold wind, he bet Dave had called Angus. And although that had been his plan, Coal added the big barman to his growing shit list.

Leaning up against the pub wall because his legs were wobbly, Coal let the glorious cold sink into him. He’d dreamed of fulfilling Christmas wishes, but he was as crap at it as everything else.

*I’ll go home, confess I’m not up to the job, and accept my fate.*

He didn’t move.

What was it about these damn humans that had him changing his mind so often? One minute he couldn't get enough of them, and the next, he'd be happy if he never saw another in his entire life. No, that wasn't right. The thought of never seeing Angus again caused an emptiness inside, even if he was a pompous, controlling bastard. But the guy was good, deep down good, and deserved to be happy just as Sam wanted.

Ward was a whole new category of enticing wrongness. The uncaring promise of delicious pain, of losing himself in it, made Coal's balls tighten.

He'd done his job. They were talking. He should leave, but home offered only restrictions, pity, and frustration. In contrast, the little red campervan called to him. It was small, damp, cold, and musty, but it was his, just like the cuffs. He vowed he wouldn't give up either for anything.

Just getting in and going... somewhere, anywhere, sounded better than staying here or going home.

"Coal? Don't lose this opportunity. We could have a lot of fun together." Ward's voice caused Coal to turn around as he headed across the pub's car park.

Angus's car sat in virtually the same place as before, and the fancy black supercar next to it had to belong to Ward. Nobody else in the pub looked like they'd own such a pretentious monstrosity, even if they could afford it.

"If you think being kept naked in a dog cage on your own in a cellar is fun, go for it," Angus said, voice radiating superiority from beside his white-haired rival.

“It might beat being thrown out of someone’s house half an hour after they took your virginity,” Coal snapped back.

Angus looked like thunder, but Ward’s eyes widened before he started to chuckle.

“Damn, Fricker, you really are a dark horse. No sight of you in years, and then you pop out of the woodwork, cherry-picking virgin subs. I like your style. If I’d known, I might have jingled those cute little bells I put in his nips before I let him go.”

Angus turned on the smaller man. “You did that? I bet you did the damn tattoo at the same time.” He took a step toward Ward, who held his hands up.

“Whoa, hold your horses, hero. I didn’t authorize the ink. That happened after I left, and I fired the apprentice who did it. This idiot sub bribed her with three hundred quid.”

“I’m still here, you know, and for the last bloody time, I’m not a fucking sub. I just enjoy a little pain, ok?” Coal growled at them between clenched teeth.

To his annoyance, the two men exchanged a knowing look.

Angus stepped toward him, hands out as if trying to corral a skittish reindeer. “I was wrong to send you home the other night. You clearly need more help to deal with this. Come with me. I promise to help.”

“Who says I need help?” Coal spat the words back at Angus. He still felt hot, everything ached, and his head throbbed from all the sherry, making it impossible to concentrate. They could

all take a running jump as far as he was concerned, including Santa.

He needed sleep, needed to get his mind working again. Even the musty damn quilt in the campervan sounded good. But if he stormed over and shut himself in, they'd follow, and the arguments would continue. Plus, his maker wanted them to cooperate, not fight.

Angus took another step, speaking as if Coal was a few baubles short of a box, which considering his head felt as big as a snowman's, he probably was.

"I do," Angus said, calm, gentle, fucking annoying. "You were about to go with this maniac, and once he had you, he wouldn't let you go. Spencer picks on vulnerable subs, who few people would miss, and turns them into his version of perfect, then selling them into lifelong servitude."

Ward, *Spencer*, shrugged. Somehow, knowing his first name made what the man said next even more personal. "I prefer to think of it as a matchmaking service. Perfection isn't easy to achieve, but I can say, hand on heart, by the time I've finished training someone, they are very *motivated* to please."

The shiver that traveled up Coal's spine wasn't desire. Spencer was on the naughty list for a reason, but Coal had nothing to fear. This was a mere human, and he was a magical being who could pop home and heal anytime he wanted. But damn, he wanted to know more about this man and this dominant and submissive thing.

Swallowing against a sore throat, Coal lifted his chin and asked, “So, what’s your version of perfect, Spencer?”

The man’s eyes narrowed at Coal’s use of his first name. Irritating him felt damn good.

“You, naked at my feet, hanging on my every word, doing whatever I tell you, first time, no questions.”

Angus opened his mouth. Coal held up his hand to stop him. “And you’d use a cage and pain to get me to do that?”

“Yes, I’d do all that and so much more. You’d love me for it after completing your training, but the process can be—“ Spencer’s lips curled up in a cold smile ”—difficult for the trainee.”

Spencer closed the gap between them, with Angus—like an overly protective dog—hot on his heels. Coal’s chest warmed with the remnants of Sam’s wish. The urge to make Angus happy, which would mean rejecting Spencer, warred with Santa’s secret mission to get them to be friends again.

“Did you hear what he said?” Angus asked, every muscle tense. “He wants to put you in a damn *cage*. You’ll have to beg to be let out to piss, and if he doesn’t—“

Coal tuned Angus out. His head throbbed too much to consider both men’s arguments at once. “And what if I decide I don’t like this training of yours once it starts? Angus gave me a safe word, although I didn’t use it when I should have done.”

Ward rolled his eyes and huffed out a breath that rose like a cloud. *It’s really that cold?* It didn’t feel cold at all.

“Please, that’s so old-fashioned. A sub needs to trust their Dom to do what’s right. A get-out-of-jail-free card when things get a little stressful spoils the flow. Every sub gets nervous at first; it goes with the territory. It’s the Dom’s job to push them through their barriers, teach them that they can trust them, not cave at the first wobble.” All the time Ward spoke, Angus fumed silently, lips pressed in a thin line, breath steaming.

“You wouldn’t let me go if I agreed to this, then later changed my mind?” Coal confirmed.

“For God’s sake, Coal, you don’t know what you’re saying,” Angus blurted, but Ward just gave Coal a wolfish smile.

“I’d let you go when you were ready to be let go, not when you were frightened, worried, and especially not if you were angry or injured. I look after my subs, Coal. I protect them, particularly from themselves. And yes, I find cages work. If Fricker had used one, you wouldn’t have gotten yourself into the state you’re in. Exhausted. Drunk. Vulnerable. When was the last time you ate? Where did you sleep the last two nights?”

Coal couldn’t stop himself from glancing at the campervan.

Spencer gaped. “Seriously? You’ve been sleeping in that in this weather?”

The derision in Ward’s voice and the way Angus’s shoulders squared as if about to go into battle had an idea forming and growing like a snowball rolling downhill.



Coal lifted his chin. “I can look after myself, and if you think you can keep me in a cage, you’ve got another thing coming.”

Spencer gave him a crocodile smile, a gleam of excitement in his eyes. “Wanna bet, Twinkletoes?”

“No. No bloody way is that happening. You’re coming home with me.” Angus strode forward and tried to take Coal’s arm above the cuff.

“No, I’m not. I’m going home with *Spencer*, but you’re coming with us.”

“Fricker’s not setting foot in my house,” Ward growled, eyeing Angus as if he were something he’d scraped off the bottom of his shoe.

Coal folded his arms and tried to ignore the spike of pain in his nipples as he glared at them both.

“No deal then. I need to prove to both of you that I can look after myself, and I’d rather not have to do it twice. Well? Are we going, or do I go back inside and start singing more carols for alcohol?” He looked between the two men expectantly, although he forced down a gag at the thought of having another mouthful of booze.

“You’ll stay with me willingly if you can’t get out of my cage?”

“Do I have to keep repeating myself?” The needed eye-roll made his head ache. *Yep, too much booze.*

Angus grumbled under his breath like an old dog that’d been ordered away from the fire, but he walked to his car and got in.

Spencer bowed and indicated the black sports car. “Your chariot awaits.”

The ride in Spencer’s car was silent for several minutes.

“Have you been using the wash on your nips and keeping that tattoo clean?”

“I’m not an idiot,” Coal replied.

“And how did you manage that in a campervan?”

“I just did.”

“You do realize liars get punished?”

Coal didn’t answer, but he angled himself toward the window and surreptitiously squeezed one cuff while rubbing his thumb on the film covering the tattoo. This could be a bloody awful idea, but at least Angus and Spencer were talking, not hitting each other.

The size of the house where they parked half an hour later didn’t surprise Coal. It was huge. The driveway alone must have been a quarter of a mile long. The trip hadn’t improved his headache or his sore throat; in fact, he felt even worse.

*Why did humans drink if they had to put up with this?* The booze must have inflamed his throat, either that or he really had sung for too long.

“I can’t believe owning a small body mod shop pays for all this,” Coal said as he got out. Spotlights in the lawn illuminated the foreboding red brick building. Once, it must

have teemed with life; now, it lurked, a ghost of happiness past.

“It doesn’t. The shop’s just a convenient place to stick metal in strangers for fun. I have, or should I say, had, rich parents. Now come inside before you freeze.”

The hallway was vast, bigger than the entire ground floor of Angus’s home. Dark wood paneling adorned the walls, and cold gray flagstones covered the floor. It smelled... old. A little musty with a hint of cleaning products. Coal couldn’t detect an ounce of life in the place. Looking around, he tried to get a sense of its owner and its sole inhabitant by the look of it. Lonely by choice.

Just like at Angus’s place, there was not a single festive decoration in sight, despite a looming unlit gray stone mantelpiece that begged to be wrapped in evergreen foliage.

The door pushed open behind Coal. Angus walked in and immediately took off his steamed-up glasses. The vulnerable gesture was cute, endearing.

“You really should think about laser eye surgery,” said Spencer.

“When I want your advice, I’ll ask for it,” Angus growled and put his glasses back on. “Let’s get on with this farce.”

“Well, aren’t you the eager beaver? This way.” Spencer strolled over to a door Coal hadn’t seen in the paneling. He opened it, revealing a black maw, then he clicked a brass light

switch on the outside. Coal blinked at the harsh electric light that revealed a set of worn stone steps leading down.

“Welcome to my personal piece of paradise,” Ward said. “After you.”

The stairs were narrow, sinister. The light at the top didn’t reveal what lay at the bottom.

“You can still call red at any time, and I’ll take you out of here,” Angus reminded from right behind Coal. His firm, protective presence gave Coal the confidence to step down, but he probably would have done it even if he’d been alone with Ward. The pull to know more about this world, this man, overwhelmed whatever sense remained.

As they descended and Coal’s eyes adjusted, a dark, aged wooden door appeared out of the gloom at the bottom of the stairs. Big black metal bars reinforced it as if it was intended to hold in a monster. Black metal sliding bolts sat at the top, middle, and bottom. Coal bet anyone shut inside would hear the bolts being opened or shut. The bolts sliding home and then footsteps walking away would sound so damn final. A double light switch sat on the wall. One for the inside and one for the stairway. Whoever got locked inside wouldn’t even have access to light without their captor’s permission.

“Go on in. There aren’t any booby traps, not at the moment anyway.” The smile in Spencer’s voice showed just how much he enjoyed this. But was it Coal’s transparent bravado or Angus’s radiating frustration and fury that entertained the naughty-lister so much?

Coal shouldn't be afraid—he literally had a get-out-of-jail-free ability—but his entire body still lit up with trepidation.

Heart thumping, Coal pushed the heavy door. It creaked as it opened. *Poor maintenance or intentional creepy atmosphere?*

He stopped a foot inside the door, not believing his eyes. A six-meter square dungeon. An honest-to-goodness underground sex dungeon that smelled remarkably like the body mod shop. The only lighting came from a naked bulb hanging from the ceiling.

It illuminated implements of pain on the walls, a spanking bench, and a large x-shaped structure in one corner. The other corner held a bed with black satin sheets and a wrought iron headboard, complete with chains and cuffs.

The artwork drew Coal's eye more than anything else. Between the displayed tools were framed photographs of backs, thighs, and upper arms pierced dozens of times. The plastic ends of the needles were colored, and the patterns swirled, twisted, across the... Coal's mind fought for the appropriate word. Victim? Sub? Stabee? The images were beautiful, both for the designs and the imagined way they had been created, perfect calm harmony between... piercer and piercee. It sounded more artistic than stabber and stabbee, and this was undoubtedly art. Coal wanted it more than he should, more than was healthy.

A large black cage sat on the floor up against the end of the bed. Well, it was large for a dog. It didn't look tall enough to allow a human to sit up. Both Doms had mentioned a cage, but

until this moment, Coal hadn't actually thought about the reality.

He swallowed against his scratchy throat. "People get in that voluntarily?"

"They do," Ward said from where he rested easily up against the gray stone wall by the door. "Most of the time, they beg to be allowed the honor of gracing my cage."

"Why?" Coal couldn't imagine what would possess anyone to do such a thing.

"Because they want to please me." Spencer tilted his head to one side. "You certainly did when I pushed metal through your very sensitive nipples." His lips curled up into a wicked smile. "Those cute little pain noises you made... How did they go? Does Fricker know? Did you do them for him? Or just for me?"

The look Ward gave sent a fizz of desire through Coal. Ward was the most attractive human he'd ever seen; even the shiver Coal got from the Naughty List was a turn-on. And it shouldn't be, it really shouldn't. Coal swallowed hard, trying to get his traitorous body to behave.

Instinctively he looked to Angus for help. The man had a seriously impressive scowl. He'd folded his big arms, arms that Coal remembered picking him up with no trouble at all. Arms that had delivered a punch Spencer didn't want to feel again.

*All this emotion, this jealousy, and competition, just for me...*

It warmed Coal's heart before he remembered these men had history. Angus had lost his husband to Spencer, and that process must have happened right here. In that very cage. Did any of the artwork feature Angus's husband? Could he tell?

"That's none of your business," Angus ground out.

"I beg to differ," Spencer said, but his gaze, his entire focus, never left Coal. "Don't you want to please me, Twinkletoes?"

Coal snorted. "Not that bloody much, I don't. Anyone who gets in there must be a bauble short of a box."

Angus chuckled from where he stood, almost between them, as if trying to protect Coal from his rival as he hadn't been able to protect his husband.

Coal's brief ego high crumpled. He was just the latest thing to fight over.

*Which is good, because I can't stay with either of them.* The truth felt hollow. It wasn't good at all. Even though he was merely a convenient bone to fight over, these two wanted him.

Ward stalked forward until he loomed over Coal. As he tried to take a step back, Ward grabbed Coal's throat, gripping enough to restrict breathing, not that Coal tried. Instead, he let out a little 'ah' noise as the naughty-list sting went straight to his cock.

"And there it is," Spencer breathed against his ear. "Just as lovely as last time. Fear is a wonderful emotion used correctly, almost better than pain. It gets those endorphins pumping but

denigrating yourself isn't attractive unless you're admitting what a bad boy you are. Remember, you promised you'd get in." Spencer gave one final squeeze before letting Coal go.

Coal rubbed his neck, pushing the naughty-list sting into his flesh to keep it a little longer.

"That's enough. You've seen the cage, so let's go," Angus growled. "If you like it that much, I'll buy you one."

Coal grinned at his wisher's target, knowing he'd achieved his first aim. Angus wanted him again, and not just for a night. But Coal needed these two to interact a little more, cooperate rather than fight, to fully achieve Santa's mission.

"A bet's a bet, Boss. My only condition is that you two close your eyes while I do my escapology thing. I can't have my secrets revealed, can I?"

He stepped toward the cage, but Ward halted him with two words.

"Strip first."

Coal froze. He hadn't counted on that condition.

Angus unfolded his arms. "Bollocks to that. He said he'd get in the cage, not give you an eyeful."

"No one ever goes in there clothed. It's a big part of the humiliation experience. Besides, you never know what someone has up their sleeve. Literally. I can't have my guests galloping about down here unsupervised. There are things in here that could hurt them." He nodded at the whips, paddles, cast iron tongs, poker, even a witch's bridle, that hung on the



walls. “Besides, I want to check my work to see if you fucked it up the other night.”

Coal had assumed an underground room would be cool, but it was even hotter here than in the pub. Shedding a few clothes would make him more comfortable. Giving Angus a cheeky wink, Coal began toeing off his shoes. “I’m learning fast, aren’t I, Boss?”

“Not the place, Coal, really not the place,” Angus muttered as he pushed a hand through his hair.

Spencer chuckled, then asked, “You didn’t cum on the piercings, did you? I told him no bodily fluids.”

“He didn’t even tell me they were new until I’d been playing with them for nearly an hour.”

“You did what?” Spencer shook his head. “Never mind that for now. Has anyone else but you and Fricker touched them?”

Coal glared at the blond man. “Of course not; I’m not a slut.”

Spencer’s raised eyebrows said he didn’t believe him. “Maybe not in the vanilla sense, but you accept pain whenever and wherever you find it, don’t you? That makes you a pain slut.”

Grinding his teeth because he couldn’t find fault with Spencer’s assessment, Coal stepped toward the cage again.

“Ah, ah, Twinkletoes, clothes first,” Spencer reminded him with a smile.

Angus looked a little sick and held his hand out in a stop gesture. “This isn’t a joke. Spencer isn’t like me. He’ll—“

“And thank the Lord for that. The world couldn’t stand two such sanctimonious uptight bastards at once. Get on with it, Twinkletoes. I haven’t got all night,” the blond man announced as he folded his arms.

The tunic clung to Coal’s chest, pulled on it with every movement. He imagined that crusty yellow stuff adhering to the cloth. At least the tattoo was still protected by the film, but Kitty had said he should have taken it off after a few hours, and that had been two days ago.

Angus and Spencer cooperating, renewing their friendship was his mission, but having that cooperation being carting Coal to a hospital wasn’t part of the plan. He needed to get their minds off the damn body mods and onto something far more fun.

Knowing his tunic would cover the tattoo on his lower belly, he turned around and pushed down his leggings and tights. Silence reigned.

Were they impressed? Revolted? Was Angus ashamed of what he’d done? He’d had enough people laughing at him at home to last a lifetime. He didn’t need it from these two as well. He reached down, started to pull his tights and leggings back up.

“Ah ah, Twinkletoes, leave them be. I was just admiring Fricker’s handiwork. No wonder you winced when you sat down at the pub,” Spencer said. “Nice handprints. I bet he howled to the moon and back. Now the shirt, and don’t forget the cuffs.”

Coal cast a nervous look at Angus, who closed his eyes and took a breath as if the shit was about to hit the fan. It was, but

not for the reasons Angus likely thought.

Between one heartbeat and the next, this felt like a terrible idea. Exposing his naked, bruised butt might turn them all on, but he didn't think the crusty piercings, the raw, angry tattoo, or his sore wrists would go down well. It'd certainly remove sex from their agenda.

"Either you show me, or I'll look myself," Ward said, tone mild, but the steely promise hung in the air.

"If he doesn't want to, he doesn't have to," Angus started.

"Yes, he does," Ward said, all banter gone. "He's sweating, even in this temperature. Now, he could just be nervous, or it could be something else. I will be checking the piercings and the tattoo, but I'll let you start with something easy. Cuffs off. Now."

The order was clear, and when he looked to Angus, Coal didn't see any sympathy there either. At least they were in agreement, which had been Coal's aim. But now it came down to it, he didn't want to admit how badly he'd messed up his self-care. His shirt stuck to his nipples, and taking it off would probably tear something open.

"Actually, I am rather tired, and I haven't eaten for... three days?" He hazarded a guess. "We should do this later."

"Cuffs, now," both Doms chorused. Coal expected them to share a grin, but neither looked at anything but Coal. Their focus prickled, excited, disturbed. He couldn't work out if he wanted more or less, but he wasn't calling the shots here.

Steeling himself, Coal undid the buckle on his right cuff and peeled it off with a wince.

“Fuck,” Angus exclaimed, strode forward, and grabbed Coal’s forearm above his bloody wrist. Coal stared at the angry, puffy skin. It even smelled a little funky in this painfully clean room.

“Got any antiseptic down here?” Angus asked Ward.

The blond man moved silently to a box mounted on the wall. He had antiseptic wipes, sterile dressings, and rolls of sealed bandages in his hands when he turned back.

This would sting like a bitch. But the prospect of having mind-blowing sex to take advantage of the pain had probably galloped out the door, judging by their twin stern expressions.

“If those are bad, the tattoo and piercings could be worse,” Spencer ground out. “Kitty was still an apprentice for a reason.”

“Leave it alone; it’ll be fine. The rest is fine too,” Coal babbled, twisting his arm out of Angus’s grip and backing away.

Hands on his shoulders from behind spun him around. With his leggings around his knees, Coal stumbled, only to find his back pressed against Angus’s broad chest. Hands wrapped around his forearms, holding them still and away from his body as Spencer went for the buttons on Coal’s tunic.

Shit, this was not good, not good at all. During the movement, something had cracked, and the cloth below his left nipple felt wet from more than just sweat.

Coal struggled against Angus's grip, but he wasn't going anywhere unless he pulled a vanishing act right in front of them. Something like that would require Santa's assistance for a memory wipe, and admitting he'd screw things up again stung what little ego remained.

"Stop ganging up on me. I've changed my mind. I want out. Red, fucking *RED*."

Neither man appeared to hear him, even though his voice echoed in the chamber.

"He's hot," Angus's voice came from next to his temple. Coal's ego blossomed. The back of Ward's hand pressed against his forehead.

"Yep, he's got a temperature," Ward confirmed and carried on opening Coal's buttons.

Coal wiggled again, but Angus held him tightly as he began to lecture.

"You, Coal, are not safe to be let out on your own. What the hell did you think you were doing? Going out in this weather with no coat and an infection? And don't tell me you didn't know your wrists were in this state. What if Spencer hadn't noticed and stuck you in a cage down here alone overnight? You could have been really ill."

"I never leave a newbie down here on their own for more than an hour. Have a little faith, will you?" Ward muttered, concentrating on what he was doing.

With surprising gentleness, Ward tried to ease back the sides of Coal's tunic.

He got the right side off, then stopped. "Well, that's ugly. This has got to come out right now. Let's see how the other one is doing." He pulled on the other side, then stopped with a huff of frustration. "It's adhered to the cloth. He went back to his cupboard and came back gloved, with cotton swabs and a bottle of sterile water.

"Brace yourself, Twinkletoes. This is going to sting," he said. After a few dabs with a pad soaked in sterile water, Spencer decisively eased the cloth away from Coal's raw skin.

Coal hissed in pain, struggled in Angus's grip. Spencer snapped on another pair of gloves and armed himself with antiseptic wipes.

"Don't you dare come near me with—" The sting was worse than having the damn piercings. He called Ward a few names that'd turn Gingersnap pale, but the man didn't stop. Instead, the bastard chuckled.

"Enjoy it while you can because I'm burning those damn cuffs and banning you from every piercing and tattoo studio within a hundred miles. If we don't get this infection under control, you could lose both nipples and end up needing a skin graft to cover whatever you've done to that tattoo. You haven't even taken the damn wrap off. It's gross."

"I told him to shower," Angus gritted out.

“You weren’t to know he’s a pathological liar. I told him not to touch the damn piercings without washing his hands too.”

The antagonistic dynamic between the two men had vanished. Now they were working together against Coal. A brief idea of what else they could do together sparked desire, and his cock took notice. Coal pushed his naked ass back against Angus; it wasn’t nearly as painful as what Spencer was doing, but the soreness from the spanking hadn’t entirely dissipated.

“Shit, stop that,” Angus growled as Coal ground against his growing erection. He didn’t. If Angus wanted him to stop, he could just move away.

Ward grinned, but he didn’t look up. “You’ve got your hands full with this one. He’s too much of a brat for my tastes, but I recommend you get a cage if you want to keep him. Physical punishment won’t keep him in line, he likes the pain too much, but isolation might.”

Coal’s knee shot up, and he nailed Ward right in the nuts.

The man collapsed to his knees, letting out an undom-like but very satisfying squeak.

“How’s that for pain, dickhead? I said no, and I meant it. Now fucking let me go,” Coal shouted as he struggled against Angus, but his target didn’t let him go, even when Coal kicked his shins. Being tiny had never been so damn frustrating.

Angus lifted him off his feet, carried him over to the bed, sat down, and trapped his legs between his.

“I’ve got him. You ok, Spencer?”

“Fucking dandy,” the muffled voice replied from the man on his knees, with his hands shoved between his thighs. Spencer retched before groaning, “Fucking hell, he kicks like a bloody mule.”

“Well, fucking let me go before I do any more damage,” Coal yelled and tried to squirm free. It was like trying to get out of a living straitjacket. A wave of dizziness rose up like a wave. He relaxed, trying to stop the room from spinning.

“He’s calming down.”

“Fucking not,” Coal ground out. But he didn’t struggle again. Angus was too big, too strong. Why the hell had Santa made Coal so damn *small*?

“It’s alright,” Angus rumbled against his hair. “We’re going to take care of you. No need to panic. It’s ok; just let it happen.”

“Just let me *go*,” Coal pleaded. “I can sort this in no time at all.”

Spencer slowly straightened up from where his forehead had been touching the stone floor.

“After I remove the barbells, these nipples, the tattoo, and the wrists need to be cleaned properly, several times a day. Leaving them open to the air is best to help them to dry up. But they’ll need dressings if they can touch anything, clothes, bedding, or any unwashed hands, including his. He’ll also need a course of antibiotics. Is there anyone who will make sure he gets treatment, although given that he’s been sleeping



in a campervan and hasn't eaten in days, I think I know the answer."

"I don't know if he has a family—he hasn't mentioned one—and I don't think we can trust him to tell the truth."

"Yeah, thanks for that, Mr. Obvious." Ward scratched his head as he knelt on the floor, making his hair stick up. Coal had never seen him disheveled before. Satisfaction spiked. *I did that*. Maybe Spencer Ward wasn't the only one in the room who should be on the naughty list. He tuned the humans out as he wondered if fairies could even be on the naughty list.

"As I see it, these are our options," Ward said. "We take him back to the pub and let him fend for himself." At Angus's thunderous expression, Ward added, "Which I wouldn't do in a month of Sundays. Secondly, we take care of it, against his wishes, right here. Or you take him to the A and E, where, if he's still in this mood, they'll strap him down, sedate him, then probably section him. And while they're filling out the paperwork, they'll call the police to arrest you for abuse. If you're lucky, you'll be out by next Christmas." Spencer nodded at Coal. "Not sure about him."

"Why don't you take him to the hospital? You're the paramedic."

Spencer looked downright pissed off. "Because if I take him in—even if I claim I found him like this, which he'll probably deny—I'll come to the attention of my boss."

He held up a finger to stop Angus from commenting. "And that's bad because I'm already on a warning."

“Why?” Angus asked.

Coal simply sat there, basking in the fact that they were talking, really talking, just as Santa wanted.

“Not that it matters, but I punched a patient. He fell over, pissed out of his mind, while looking after his six-month-old son and broke his ankle. The baby had to be hospitalized because he hadn’t fed or changed the poor little bugger for two days while he was on a bender.”

How Angus could have a nice, polite conversation while holding Coal in a full body lock, he didn’t know. It wasn’t comfortable, and he didn’t like being ignored.

“I’m still here, you know,” Coal growled out.

“Yep, you most certainly are, but you’re also pretty bat shit crazy at the moment,” Ward said. “Whether that’s because you’re burning up with an infection, or it’s your normal state, we’ll have to see.” Spencer looked at Angus. “If you’re taking him on, it’s your call. If not, can you keep hold of him while I get the happy juice? There is no way I’m risking being nailed in the nuts again.”

“I’ve got him; he won’t do it again.” Angus sounded so damn sure, so confident.

Spencer gave Angus a ‘pull the other one’ look. Neither man bothered to ask Coal if he wanted any damn juice.

Coal threw his head back sharply. It connected with Angus’s nose. The big man didn’t let go, although he swore at length.

“Happy juice coming up,” Spencer said as he dragged himself back his feet and made his way stiffly back to the medical box. He held his hands behind his back when he walked back to them.

“I don’t like juice,” Coal said.

“Don’t worry, you won’t taste this. You might even enjoy it,” Spencer murmured as he swabbed the inside of Coal’s elbow. “Don’t get your hopes up, though, it’ll only be a little prick, but knowing Angus, that’s all you’re used to.”

The jab in his arm wasn’t nearly as sharp as Coal hoped. He still said, “Ow.”

It only took a few seconds for an unfamiliar floaty feeling to roll over him.

Angus’s voice sounded as if it was coming from a long way away, but all Coal wanted to do was snuggle.

“What did you give him?”

“Morphine. He can still hear us and feel pain, but he doesn’t give a shit anymore. One of us will have to stay with him until it wears off. He could do all sorts of damage to himself in this state. You up for that?”

“Of course.”

“That means no leaving him alone while you work, even from home.”

“I can do it, don’t worry.”

Coal drifted as he settled between Angus's thighs. Having his arms held no longer mattered. His head fell back against Angus's chest.

Such a big chest. So strong.

"Ok, then. Let's get on with this. If you're not comfortable, say now because this'll take a while."

"Do I need to say green?"

Ward snorted. "Very funny. Right then, I'll do the nipples first; that swelling is only getting worse. I need to take out the piercings, then irrigate. Hold him across the upper chest."

Coal's arms were released, and Angus hugged him even closer.

"Bend back a bit."

Angus shifted again, like a big, comfy reclining chair. It felt nice until latex-covered fingers began messing with his chest. Coal frowned and tried to batt the annoying hand away.

"It's all right, Twinkletoes. Hold still, and it'll be much more comfortable soon." Spencer sounded as if he knew what he was doing; besides, Coal was awfully relaxed and sleepy. Moving anything, even a finger, felt like trying to pick up a bull reindeer. His arm was drawn down underneath another brawny arm.

"I don't get it," Coal mumbled.

"Get what?" Angus replied as metal withdrew from his flesh. Wetness. Stinging. More fiddling, wiping.

“Why Spencer’s on the naughty list; he seems nice. And Angus is on the nice list, even though he likes hurting people.” The pungent scent of alcohol tickled his nose. More wiping. More stinging. Gloves snapped off, snapped on.

“Who makes these lists then, Twinkletoes?” Ward asked as he turned to the other side of Coal’s chest.

“You’re bloody thick, you know that? Maybe that’s why you’re on the naughty list.”

Ward finished cleaning the second nipple, added a dressing, then murmured, “Get him flat.”

Coal found himself lying on the bed with Angus leaning over him, stroking his face, brushing his hair back.

“There we go; you’re doing so well. I’m so proud of you.” The film over the tattoo tugged at his skin, more wiping, and then it released bit by bit.

Coal frowned. He wasn’t meant to be making Angus proud; he was meant to make him happy. That pungent alcohol scent came again.

“So, how do you know what list someone’s on?”

Coal tried to hold onto his last thought—it had seemed important—but Spencer’s question dragged it out of his mind.

“Makes my palms itch, stings too, just like for all Christmas fairies; don’t you know anything?”

“Guess not, Twinkletoes.”

Coal floated, drifted. The same considered cleaning and then wrapping on the tattoo, and both wrists occurred. He knew it hurt, but there was a barrier, a soft, sleepy, fluffy barrier, like a giant marshmallow between him and the pain. Yes, it would be better if the pain went away entirely, but it wasn't enough to make him give a shit or want to move even his little finger.

“Do you want to hang here, or shall I drive you back to your place? Someone will need to hold him in the car. I could drive yours and get a cab back; there's not a lot of room in mine.”

# CHAPTER 14



“BEFORE YOU PICK HIM up, keys,” Spencer demanded, holding out his hand as Angus bent to pick up Coal.

“Well, there’s no point in trying to juggle sleeping beauty while you fish them out of your jeans, is there? I’m certainly not going hunting for them.”

Angus hesitated. No one had ever driven his car but him, and Spencer wasn’t insured to drive it.

“Come on, Fricker, I drive a fucking ambulance. If you’re that scared, I’ll scratch your precious car, I’ll hold him, and you drive. Just think, him and me snuggling in the—“

Angus pulled out his keys and dropped them into Spencer’s waiting palm.

Not trying to hide his smirk, Spencer said, “Good boy, I can see that was hard for you.”

Angus growled, “Don’t push it.”

Spencer laughed, a sound Angus hadn't heard in many years. It sounded damn good. Once, they'd spent hours at the club, laughing and chatting, with subs at their feet or on their laps, snuggled and relaxed. It'd always been Jesse for Angus, but Spencer's partners blurred into each other. Sometimes male, sometimes female, occasionally the same one for a few months, but most only lasted a night.

He wondered, hoped, they could get back to that one day. Angus only had the man in his arms in his imagined future, but Spencer... He couldn't imagine him with anyone permanently. Once, hell even a few hours ago, he'd thought Spencer deserved to be alone. Now, he thought it was damn sad. Rattling around in this damn mansion, with all the money in the world, and no one to share it. Angus bet none of Spencer's guests ever saw more than the huge building's entrance hall and dungeon. The man was an enigma, just like Coal.

With his wounds cleaned, disinfected, and covered, Coal was wrapped up in a quilt on Angus's lap as they sat in the back. Coal's dirty clothes, minus those evil cuffs, were in a bag beside him. The car started, and Spencer pulled out of his driveway and onto the main road, smoothly, gently. Angus had no interest in their surroundings. Looking down, he couldn't help caressing Coal's hairless cheek.

Coal's nose wrinkled in annoyance. With a mumbled, "Gerroff," he snuggled in a bit more.

As Coal seemed far chattier on the morphine, Angus decided to try for some more information as Spencer drove them



through the deserted country lanes toward town. In this part of Sussex, trees arched over many of the smaller roads, but in the middle of winter, on a clear night, the stars were visible. There were no stars out tonight, and clouds threatened more snow. He held Coal a little tighter, thinking about him possibly dying alone in that damn campervan. What if no one had noticed until it'd been too late? Would anyone have missed Coal except him?

“So, where did you grow up, Coal?”

Spencer looked in the rear-view mirror. “You do know you can't trust anything that comes out of his mouth right now?”

“Yeah, but it might give me an insight into how his mind works.”

“And why does that matter? As long as he lets you spank him and all the other stuff you impact kinksters do, does it really matter that he's literally away with the fairies?” Spencer pursed his lips. “I've seen inside some of those mental hospitals. He'd get non-stop therapy trying to get him to drop his delusions. Personally, if he has someone looking out for him, I don't see a problem with it.

“He's not a danger to anyone else, just a little over-enthusiastic with his masochism. But he'd go even more batty in there because they'd stop him from giving himself a paper cut. It'd be sedation, straitjackets, padded cells, and plastic spoons for the rest of his life. At least with you, if you look after him, he'll be able to function.”

Angus glanced up from contemplating Coal's beautiful face as it snuggled against his chest. "You really think he's mad?"

Spencer shrugged. "As mad as any of us are. You get off on impact play, rough sex, and punishment. Obedience, bondage, and needle play do it for me; I don't enjoy high-maintenance subs, but I work with them if I have to.

"Twinkletoes gets off on receiving pain and being kept in line, although I think that's more of a cry for help than anything else. Subconsciously, he knows he needs someone to slow him down and keep him from doing stupid shit.

"His attitude would piss me off pretty damn quick. If he stayed with me, it'd only be until I found someone exactly like you to take him on. You two are made for each other."

"What's with all the stuff in the dungeon if you're not into impact play?"

Spencer glanced both ways at a junction before pulling out as smoothly as if he were driving an ambulance.

"Atmosphere. I've never used most of it, but it's surprising the effect it has on a sub if they have to sit and look at it for a while."

"I didn't grow up," Coal mumbled.

"What?" Angus looked down, confused by the answer to a question he'd posed several minutes ago.

"No fairy grows up. We're all made by magic, fully grown, so we can start work straight away."

“Makes sense,” Spencer murmured. “No annoying fairy kids to stop the important business of Santa.”

“So how old are you?” Angus ignored Spencer’s comment.

“Three,” Coal said, rubbing his face on Angus’s shirt, body trembling. “Did someone leave the dorm door open? It’s cold.”

Angus wrapped the quilt around him even tighter. “So, you’re three hundred? You don’t look a day over two.”

“Don’t be daft; only Gingersnap, Mrs. Christmas, and that weird git in the sorting office are that old. I’m three months old, not that anyone wants me, even though I’m all shiny and new. Coal, remember? No one wants to find coal in their stocking.”

Spencer looked up into the rear-view mirror. “Go with that; you might get some details about why he likes pain so much. He clearly has inadequacy issues.”

Rolling his eyes at Spencer’s attempt at psychoanalysis, Angus decided to go along with it.

“So why doesn’t anybody want you at home, which is where, the North Pole?”

Without opening his eyes, Coal carried on. “Yep, I live in the fairy dorm. And nobody wants me because I’m a crap fairy.” Coal frowned, and Angus itched to ease the crease between his eyebrows away with his finger, or better yet, his lips, but that might stop the flow of Coal’s delusion. “I mean, I’m crap at being a fairy. When I get home, because I fucked up again,

they'll make me a real crap fairy. A reindeer crap fairy." He snorted, clearly amused by his own nonsense.

"Well, in that case, you can come and live with me instead. I don't care if you were bad at being a fairy. I like you just the way you are." He glanced up to see Spencer almost shaking with the effort to curb his laughter.

"If you tell anyone about this, I'll... I'll—"

"You'll what, Fricker, blast me with his magic wand? This is fucking priceless, almost worth the knee to the balls."

"He'll keep you on the naughty list if you're rude, then you won't get a present, not that everyone gets presents when they're grown-ups. I don't think that's fair, do you? Everyone deserves presents," Coal mumbled, rubbed his cheek against Angus's chest. It felt so damn good to be wanted, trusted, again.

"So why don't adults always get presents when kids do?" Spencer asked, mouth twitching in a naughty smile that made the handsome fucker even better looking.

"Because there are only six fairies in the Adult Department, not counting me, and there's a hundred for the kids."

"What do you have to do to get a promotion to the Adult Department, Twinkletoes?"

Coal frowned. "Why do you keep calling me that? I'm not Twinkle or her toes. I'm Coal. Everyone likes Twinkle. She didn't get thrown out of the kids' department for shouting at a spoilt brat. Bitch moaned about her pony being the wrong

color. Can you believe that? I give her a fucking live pony, and she throws a tantrum 'cause it's not a bloody palomino."

Angus laughed along with Spencer. Even when he was seriously away with the fairies, Coal still had attitude.

"Sounds as if she deserved a spanking, not a pony. So what's this Twinkle like?" Spencer asked.

Angus looked down to see if Coal was going to answer, but every muscle had gone boneless. He lolled in Angus's arms, mouth slightly open.

"He's asleep."

"Damn, I was enjoying that. I hear all sorts of crap when I shoot patients with happy juice, but he's got to be one of the most imaginative."

Something that had been tickling the back of Angus's mind solidified. "Where do you get morphine anyway? I thought it was a controlled drug."

Spencer's voice came out flat. "Ask no questions and you'll get no lies, Fricker, but if you turn me in, forget about me providing any more treatment."

"I wouldn't dream of it. I'm sure you're a very responsible drug user, but don't offer any more to Coal."

"Wouldn't dream of it," Spencer murmured as they pulled up outside Angus's house. Spencer got out and opened the rear door.

"Give him here," he told Angus, holding out his arms.

“It’s alright. I’ve got him.”

Spencer sighed. “Don’t be a dick all your life, Fricker. If you didn’t trust me, you wouldn’t have given me your keys. I’m not a heroine user, not anymore anyway. I keep a little on hand, just like the antibiotics, for situations like this, that’s all. Now, are you going to let me carry him in while you get a bed ready, and I’ll go over his treatment plan?”

As Spencer spoke, he leaned down and picked Coal out of Angus’s reluctant arms.

“Seriously, I’m not interested in him; I don’t like to battle with my subs. The name’s in the title, I like mine submissive, and that’s naturally submissive, not drugged. To get him to what I prefer, I’d need to push all the time until I broke him. I could if I wanted, but I think that’d be a shame. Watching you deal with the bolshie fairy pain slut will be so much more entertaining.”

“Thanks, I think,” Angus muttered as he opened his front door and preceded Spencer into the house and up the stairs to the master bedroom.

Spencer put Coal down on the bed and took his quilt back before covering Coal up with Angus’s bedding. Coal looked good, really good, in his bed, as if he belonged there.

Angus forgot Spencer was even there until he spoke. “The morphine will last around six hours, but he’ll probably be dopey for at least eight, maybe more. He’ll still need to drink and take his pills, or he’ll end up in the hospital on IV’s for dehydration and antibiotics. Keep it low-key, rehydration

fluids, pills, back to sleep, for at least twelve hours. After that, try to get some food down him and start the cleaning regime on those wounds. Do you remember what that is?

“Scentless, mild soap, lotion on the tattoo, keep them open to the air if possible, no touching without clean hands.”

Spencer didn't look away from Coal. “We'll make you a first aider yet. I'll bring you a badge next time I come.”

“You're coming back?” Angus said and winced at the aggression in his voice. “Sorry, I'm just...”

Spencer huffed in amusement. “Protective, besotted? I get it. He's extraordinary.” Those ice-blue eyes turned to him, and Spencer shook his head. “What do I have to do to convince you he's not my type?”

“Stop staring at him and leave?”

Spencer huffed out another laugh. “Ok, ok, I get it. I'm out of your suburban wonderland as soon as I'm done.

“When he wakes up properly, I'd usually suggest alternating paracetamol and ibuprofen every two hours, but in his case, I'd leave off the painkillers. It might keep him from doing something stupid for a bit longer.

“The antibiotics need to be taken four times a day for five days, with food if you can. Good luck with getting him to take them, but make sure he finishes the course. Once the scabs fall off—naturally without any picking—use bio oil on the marks several times a day. It'll lessen any scarring. I'll leave your car keys and the antibiotics on the side in the kitchen. Call me if

he gets any worse or if he isn't lucid by tomorrow afternoon. Oh, and he might not remember much, or anything at all, about tonight. The drug can play silly buggers with memory, which is a big part of the appeal." Spencer took one last wistful look at the pale, sleeping figure, then turned to the door.

Angus held out his hand. "Thanks. Seriously, thanks for helping."

Spencer grinned and ignored his hand. "Don't be such a dick. If you don't stand up to him, he'll get himself in this state again, or worse. And next time, if I find him first, I won't hand him over to you. At least he'll live if I take him on, and end up not dead in an alley because he cheeked the wrong bloke, ignored a raging infection, or got hypothermia from sleeping rough in winter. You've fucked up with a sub twice now, don't do it again. I'll be watching."

Angus watched Spencer leave silently, not because his threats worried him, but because he'd stated the absolute truth. Angus had taken responsibility for Coal the moment he brought him home, and now he had to follow through or find someone else who could. The thought of the bright, fiery Coal kneeling in that damn cage, begging and willing to do anything to be released, turned him on, until he imagined Coal kneeling at Spencer's feet, not his.

Before exploring any of that, Coal needed to get better, and for that, he needed antibiotics. But how did you get someone semi-conscious to take a pill?



“Spencer?”

# CHAPTER 15



“Hey, Twinkletoes, time to wake up for a bit. How do you feel?”

“M’good. Sleepin’,” Coal managed, pleased with his eloquence under the circumstances. He felt like he’d been in a stress juicing machine, and all that remained was a very happy puddle of goo.

“Pill first, then sleep.”

“Go ‘way,” he groaned, trying to snuggle down again.

“Tilt him up a bit more.” His cheeks were pinched until his mouth opened. A finger shoved something inside, followed by a mouthful of water. His mouth was shut, and his nose pinched. Coal swallowed.

“Ugh, hate you,” he groaned when the hands let go of him.

“It’s a good job I don’t care then, isn’t it? Night night, Twinkletoes.”

Coal frowned, that hadn't sounded like Angus at all, but it was definitely Angus's arms around him. He didn't want to make the effort to wake up enough to check. Their voices lulled him, let him know he wasn't alone.

“Just make sure he's responding before you try giving him a pill like that; you don't want anything going down his trachea.”

“Seriously, thanks again, Spencer. I won't forget this. And that business with Jesse? I get it now.”

“Come to the club every now and again, and we'll call it even. It's damn boring without you there to make fun of. But try not to be so damn dense again. We all tried to tell you, Jesse, me, Aksel, even Dave, but you were too invested in planet Angus to see that your marriage wasn't working.”

Spencer pressed his lips together, turned to the door, then turned back. “No, this needs to be said. You also made assumptions about me during that whole business, even though we'd known each other for years without there ever being a single issue. I didn't deserve that punch.”

“You were sleeping with my husband,” Angus bit out, then sighed and relaxed back. “And that's all in the—”

“No, it really isn't while you still think that. I did a lot of stuff with him in those few weeks—to find out exactly where his kinks lay so I could help him find a more suitable partner—but we never had penetrative sex. You two grew away from each other, he evolved, and you didn't notice. That's all there was to it.”

“Yeah, I see that now.” There was a pause, and Coal drifted again. He felt Angus swallow. “Do you know if he’s happy?”

“Utterly blissful, the last I heard, but I’m not giving any details.”

“I’m not asking for any. Jesse is my past.” A hand brushed over Coal’s hair. “And this one... I have no idea what this one is.”

“Mm fairy... idiot,” Coal mumbled.

Spencer snorted. “You two are a match made in heaven, and I’ve had a lot of experience at matching people up.”

“No one permanent for you, though, eh? I’ve never seen you with anyone for more than a few weeks.”

The pause was longer this time.

“I have... commitment issues. Goodnight, Fricker. Enjoy your happy ever after.” The wry, self-deprecation disturbed Coal. He tried to get up, wanting to soothe the hurt of the man who shouldn’t be on the naughty list. Angus’s warm hand rubbing up and down his back lulled him.

“I’ve got you for as long as you want me. Sleep now, sweetheart.” Safe in Angus’s arms, Coal stopped fighting the lie that this could last and let sleep take him again.



A large arm draped over Coal's naked side, cupped his semi-hard morning wood, and a big warm body pressed against his naked back.

It felt nice, if a little restrictive and proprietary, but he struggled to work out who it was and where he'd ended up. Eyes still closed, he followed the trail of memories, like tracking a drunk, wandering reindeer through the snow.

Going into the bar. Singing. Feeling lightheaded and hot. A headache and sore throat that were—he swallowed—still there, but a lot less. He remembered sitting down with the mouth-watering Mr. Ward, who squeezed the cuffs, giving him welcome distracting pain and... more booze. After that....

Coal wracked his brain for what happened next. Had Santa been messing with his memory? Fleeting images of a big dark space wafted in and out, along with voices. They had been talking, Angus and Ward, like friends, not enemies, but Coal didn't remember being part of the conversation or what it'd been about. Had he been invisible?

Whatever the case, he'd completed both his missions. Angus had experienced happiness, if only briefly, and he and Spencer were friends again. And didn't that suck. He would be recalled as soon as Santa noticed. It could be seconds, minutes, or hours away.

He left that issue alone for a far more immediate one. Was he in bed with Angus, Spencer, or someone else? Surely, he hadn't ended up with a complete stranger? Unless they were a wisher... He clenched his ass. His hole didn't feel like it'd

been pounded again. Despite hoping to be sent on multiple adult missions mere days ago, relief blanketed him. Hopping from bed to bed, like the other Adult Department fairies, felt wrong now that he'd experienced the hurt cheating could cause. Even if Angus never found out, the thought of sleeping with other people made him feel sick.

Maybe this wish wasn't about sex, but it still felt *wrong* to be in bed with someone else. Coal stretched out with his other senses. No warm wisher glow. No naughty list sting either, but if he'd successfully rehabilitated Ward by getting him talking to Angus, would there still be a sting? He had no idea if being removed from the naughty list happened this quickly.

Opening his eyes meant confronting a situation he didn't know about, wasn't prepared for. He couldn't hear anything other than soft breathing from the man behind him. He sniffed. The acrid tang of antiseptic wipes that followed Ward around like aftershave tickled his nose.

*Crap.*

Losing a one-time hookup to Ward hopefully wouldn't sting Angus as much as losing his husband to the handsome, sarcastic wealthy man, but Coal bet it would still damn well bite.

If he could just get his foggy head working properly... *Come on, Coal, work the problem.*

If Angus and Spencer were still enemies, his mission hadn't ended. He could sneak out of Ward's bed, talk to Angus and....

say what? *Sorry, I slept with the guy you hate. Wanna go on another date?*

“I know you’re awake. I can hear you thinking a million miles an hour.” Angus’s rumbly voice came from behind him. Coal sank into the bed in relief. Lips brushed the bare skin of his shoulder. “Slow down. There’s nothing to worry about, no need to panic. How are you feeling?”

That cleared up one mystery, but how had he ended up naked in Angus’s bed? And why did Angus want to know how he was feeling? If they’d played again last night, Coal was damn pissed that he couldn’t remember the details.

He turned in Angus’s arms. Pain flared in his chest and lower belly, and he pushed back the reminders of Ward. The man shouldn’t be in Angus’s bed, even in Coal’s thoughts.

Coal found his nose up against a lightly-haired chest, so he kissed it, then cracked open his eyes. Muted light filled the room. Behind Angus’s bulging bicep, a mirror wardrobe reflected an ordinary gray bed with a curling silver and white script quilt cover. Tasteful, wintery, but not festive.

Angus Fricker needed a shit ton more Ho Ho Ho in his life.

Coal lifted his arm clear of the quilt to trace Angus’s beautifully curved shoulder and muscular upper arm. He paused at the sight of a white bandage on his wrist.

The events of last night exploded into his head like a pinata breaking and vomiting guilt all over him. He’d intentionally hurt an innocent human, the target of his wisher.

The closeness, the heat of Angus's body, morphed from comforting to restrictive. He had to get away, had to escape before he did any more damage to this wonderful, traumatized man. Coal shuffled back, but Angus's arm wrapped around his back, holding him still against his chest.

"Ah, ah. It's all right, and you're in no fit state to do a runner anyway."

Coal lay still. He couldn't get away, not without revealing himself. He needed to bide his time, wait until Angus left him alone, and then—

"Coming back to you, is it? Spencer said the sedative might mess with your memory."

"I head-butted you."

"You did." The reply held no animosity, just an acceptance of fact. It still tore at Coal's chest. "But you were scared and hurting at the time. It's already forgiven."

Angus might forgive him, but...

"I nailed Frosty in the nuts."

Angus's rumbly chuckle went right through Coal, warming him from the inside. He looked up. The tiny streak of dried blood on one nostril might as well have been a flood. Angus didn't acknowledge it as he gave him a gentle, sleepy smile. Without his glasses and with wonderful red stubble on his chin, Angus seemed softer, less disciplined, snuggly. Coal wanted to stay in this moment, basking in Angus's happiness for the rest of eternity.



“Still on the festive kick, huh? But I agree, Spencer is damn pale. And although he is an arrogant son of a bitch, kneeling him in the nuts was a touch extreme. Even though I admit loving the way he retched on his knees in his probably five hundred quid designer jeans.” Angus sighed, his fingertips drawing circles on Coal’s back. The absent-minded caress leached the stress out of Coal like a slowly defrosting icicle, drip by drip.

“And that was bad of me, because after he stopped whimpering, Spencer, who happens to be a paramedic as well as a professional arsehole, doped you up and treated your infected wounds, which we will be discussing later—” Coal winced. ‘Discussion’ sounded so much more painful than a punishment. “—then we brought you back here. My home, in case you didn’t work it out. I seem to remember that we didn’t make it out of the living room last time. Brat.” The fondness of the way he murmured and kissed Coal’s forehead felt like the ultimate praise, not derogatory.

While Coal still bathed in the warmth of pleasing his target, Angus’s tone slipped straight back into Mr. Control. “You’ve got a course of antibiotics to take. Spencer showed me how to give you your medication when you were away with the fairies for the last eight—”

Coal glared. Why did Angus have to spoil this wonderful moment? “I was not away with the fairies. I can’t stand most of the perky little bastards.”

Angus blew out a breath. “I’m going to ignore that, only because I haven’t got a damn clue how to reply. What I do know is that now you’re lucid—sort of—you need feeding up. Spencer suggested we take everything easy for a while, including food. He also wants to know when and what you last ate.” So calm, so controlled. So damn annoying.

“Is Mr. Frosty the boss of you now?”

Angus didn’t get angry as Coal expected, maybe *wanted*; he simply looked disappointed, resigned. “Bating me will get you nowhere, but in medical matters, yes, Spencer knows far more than I do, so I’m following his advice. *We’re* following his advice. Answer the question about your last meal if you don’t want to add to your already impressive list of punishments.”

Coal perked up, even though doing anything more than lying in bed felt like a prospective marathon.

Angus’s lips quirked, but it didn’t turn into a smile. “I like your enthusiasm, but don’t get any ideas about a punishment spanking anytime soon. We both enjoyed the last one far too much for them to be effective. Until you are fully healed, punishment will be....” Angus pursed his lips and the seconds stretched.

Coal lasted half a minute before he blurted, “What? Not being allowed to come, a vibrating butt plug, a cock cage?”

An evil smile spread across Angus’s face. “All duly noted, but I think those items will be more fun activities than punishment. I was thinking.... Non-stop pre-school television.”

Coal looked at him with horror. “You wouldn’t be so cruel.”

“Try me.” Angus grinned, genuine and wide, but the happiness only blazed for a second. “Now answer the question. What and when did you last eat?”

Coal squirmed. His almost 100% carbohydrate diet was perfect for a fairy, but Angus wouldn’t approve. Still, disobeying might land him in worse perkins than at home.

The non-adult department fairies loved to watch the brightly colored, often barely verbal characters. And they watched the same ones, over and over again. They even joined in with the dialogue. A shiver went down his spine at the thought of being subjected to the Teletubbies for hours.

Angus reached behind him and produced a TV remote from the bedside cabinet.

“A dozen chocolate baubles, a multi-pack of chalky lollies, and a sharing box of individual iced Christmas cakes. Just before I came to see you.”

Angus blinked.

“After the piercings and the tattoo, before the sex?” Coal added as Angus didn’t seem to be taking in the information.

“And before that?” Angus asked, then shook his head. “Actually, I don’t want to know. We’re going to have breakfast. A normal, healthy adult breakfast. Stay there, and I’ll get you some wholemeal toast.” Angus pulled back the edge of the quilt.

Coal made a gagging noise.

Angus turned. His slow, hard stare promised retribution and not the fun kind. Coal felt a little bad, but wholemeal toast? Really? Wasn't that what old humans who had trouble shitting ate? Coal froze. *Does Angus have that problem?*

"I can see that you realize you were being rude, so I'll give you a pass, this time. So, what would you prefer for breakfast?" Angus held up a finger. "And if you say nothing, sweets, or cake, you get dry toast and the Teletubbies."

"I think I'd like to try something new," Coal murmured as he slithered downward.

Angus's hand tightened on his bicep, hauled him higher, and flipped Coal onto his back. Angus hung over him, filling up Coal's entire field of vision. They breathed together, watching, waiting. Coal couldn't take it anymore. Wrapping his hand around the back of Angus's neck, he pulled.

Angus resisted the pressure. "You need to eat," he said but didn't try to move away.

"Kiss first, breakfast later."

Angus, Mr. Control, searched Coal's face for another few heartbeats, conflicted. *I did that.*

"Please?"

Angus brushed their lips together, a featherlight touch more like a close hover, a sharing of space, breath, and body heat, than a kiss.

Coal still sensed Angus's rough stubble. The last time they'd kissed, the only other time, Angus had been newly shaven.

This was the real Angus. Coal preferred it, felt privileged to see it, feel it. Needed more.

Angus moved back an inch. “Enough?”

“Never.” Coal pulled him back down, kissed deeper, forced Angus’s mouth open with his.

How would the sandpaper-like stubble feel on the tender skin of his cock or inner thighs? It might even leave marks if Coal got lucky. His cock ached at the thought of walking around with more of Angus’s marks decorating his body. Desperate for friction, Coal’s hips twisted. He ignored the burn from the tattoo on his belly as he tried to rub his cock against Angus’s hip.

Angus shifted out of reach, a wicked smile dancing on his lips. “No.”

“But you’re hard. You—”

“As I said—” Angus sounded perfectly in control as if his cock wasn’t as hard as Coal’s. “—we’re taking it easy until you heal. Doctor’s orders. No penetration, spanking, or restraints that could irritate your wounds.”

“But—”

Angus’s finger landed on his lips, completely ignoring Coal’s death stare. “No butts either. And yes, I mean your sweet ass too.”

Coal raised his eyebrows, then stared down at Angus’s arm.

As if his finger was the pin on a hand grenade, Angus slowly lifted it off Coal's mouth, ready to put it back in a heartbeat if Coal looked ready to explode.

If Coal's chest hadn't been so sore, he would have crossed his arms. Instead, he continued the glare that had already proved totally ineffective. "That sounds bloody boring," he announced.

This time, Angus's smile was pure wickedness. "Oh, my sweet Coal, I have so much to show you. Today, we kiss, tend to your wounds—which means washing and leaving them open to the air with nothing touching them—eat and rest. To get your strength back, because you're—"

Their time was running out fast, but if this was what would make Angus happy, who was Coal to argue? He'd learned his lesson about the wisher always being right with that damn pony.

"That's all?" Coal asked, hoping he'd got it completely wrong.

"That's all," Angus confirmed. "But I'm going to add interrupting me to my rules. It's rude. Don't do it. So, what do you want to start with?"

Coal didn't have to think about that at all. "More kissing. Proper kissing, not just brushing lips stuff. Then washing with kissing, then eating with kiss—"

With a broad smile, Angus leaned over him again. "I think I get the general idea." Balancing himself on one elbow and one

outstretched arm across Coal's body, so no skin touched except their lips.

"Are you sure? Because you—"

"Shut up, Coal," he murmured, then kissed him gently, rolling the barbel in his tongue across Coal's lips. Angus kissed slowly, deeply, like he was trying to learn, map, every part of Coal's mouth, then he moved to explore Coal's chin. His stubble rasped against Coal's skin, abrading it, marking it as Coal wanted.

"You're so damn smooth all over. What d'you do, wax?" Angus mumbled against Coal's throat. Coal lifted his chin, giving Angus more access.

"Fairy, remember?"

Angus snorted against his throat, but didn't stop, didn't call him out. So careful, so gentle. Coal felt worshiped, relished as if Angus wanted to map him with his tongue.

Kiss. Lick. Suck. Nibble. Coal wanted to do this for hours, days, fucking decades.

Angus moved up to his ear. Lipping it, tracing it with the barbel. "You're so damn sexy. I have so many filthy things I want to do to you." He bit gently, not enough to even sting. Between one heartbeat and the next, it wasn't enough.

"Fuck me."

Angus lifted away to stare down into his eyes. This close, even without his glasses, Angus had to *see* him, had to feel, know, how much Coal wanted him.

“We can go slow,” Coal blurted. “Do it gentle, as gentle as you like.”

Coal hooked a leg over Angus’s hip. Angus wearing shorts was a little disappointing, but the hard length against Coal’s thigh showed the human wanted this as much as he did.

Coal thrust, not more than pressing himself against Angus, back and forth, half an inch at a time, although he burned to push Angus over on his back and ride him to completion.

He expected Mr. Control to push his leg off, to reject his advance, but Angus just looked, let him do it. A thrill ran through Coal. He’d got him, pushed Mr. Control past his limit, like he had done the night they’d fucked. Just a little more, and Angus would break, would press him down, would lose his self-discipline and take him so hard it hurt beautifully.

“Hmm, so damn big. Take them off; I want to feel you. See you. Taste you. I want to sit on your cock, let it stretch so good, ride you. You won’t have to do anything, just you in me, filling me, grinding and—”

Angus pulled back and gazed into his eyes. There was no anger, just hunger. “No.”

Coal hadn’t expected that word, didn’t accept it with Angus’s cock so damn hard it had to hurt, pressed against him.

He put everything he had into puppy dog eyes. “Please? I need it, I really do.”

Angus rolled over onto his back, rubbed his forehead with the back of his hand.



Coal leaned up on his elbow, intending to take advantage of Angus's prone position. A wave of dizziness rolled over him. He halted, blinked, tried to get the black flies buzzing at the edge of his vision to go back to wherever they'd come from.

"Even ill, you're driving me out of my mind," Angus said, but he didn't look at Coal, didn't seem to be addressing him at all. "I want to lock you up in a cage like Spencer's so nobody else can ever see or hurt you again. In the next heartbeat, I want to bend you over and spank you so hard I leave permanent handprints on your sweet backside."

"I could go for—"

Angus shifted to his side, almost violently putting a foot of space between them. "The next minute, I wish I'd never met you because you make me doubt my every move. I wasn't exactly happy before I met you, but at least I had a plan, a direction. I don't even know...." Angus shook his head, and his slightly wild green eyes bored into Coal's. "Who the hell are you, and what are you doing to me?"

"I'm Coal Chestnut, the Christmas Fairy, and I'm here because of a Christmas wish that you be happy."

Angus held his gaze for several long seconds. Coal lay there and let him take his fill. Willing Angus to believe him. He wanted Angus to know him, accept, value, and understand him like no one had ever bothered to do before.

Angus opened and shut his mouth, then leaned forward and brushed his lips with his, without a hint of heat. It only lasted a

second. “You’re lying again. I never would have dreamed up someone as wonderful or irritating as you.”

Coal winked. “Well, it’s a good job that it wasn’t your wish then, isn’t it?”

Angus blinked. “Whose wish was it then? Jesse’s?”

How Coal managed to keep the smile on his face, he didn’t know, but the sexual mood had broken, died. “That would be revealing a trade secret, and that’s one of my professional rules. Now, do you have any shortbread in that kitchen of yours? They’re great with hot chocolate.”

Angus climbed off the bed. “I have no hot chocolate and no shortbread, but if you’re good, I’ll let you have a HobNob. And that’s one biscuit, not a whole packet.”

“How exciting,” Coal ground out, and Angus’s mouth twitched.

“They’re the extra boring ones without chocolate too.”

Angus picked his black-rimmed glasses off the bedside cabinet, and just like that, even with bed hair and wearing only boxers, he was back to Mr. Control.

“Go use the bathroom, but don’t touch any of the dressings. We can check them after you’ve had something to eat.”

Angus waited expectantly for him to get up. Coal got as far as propping himself up on his elbow, but those damn flies came back. Buzzing at the edges of his vision. He stayed still, mentally swatting the little shits.

“And that’s why sex is a bad idea,” Angus confirmed. “You’re feeling lightheaded again, aren’t you?”

“No,” he immediately denied. “I’m just...”

Angus’s mouth twitched. “You’re just what?”

Coal narrowed his eyes. “You’re going to make me say it, aren’t you?”

Angus nodded slowly, lips twitching.

“Ok, ok, maybe a tiny,” he demonstrated with a finger and thumb, “itty bit dizzy. Probably a lack of sugar.” Coal nodded, warming to the lie. “Better get that biscuit or maybe a couple. Four would definitely do the trick.”

“Uh-huh. So you don’t need a pee?”

“I’m good,” Coal smiled, even though now that immediate sex was off the cards, his bladder screamed for attention.

“Do you want juice as well as coffee or tea? I don’t have any hot chocolate. Spencer recommended drinking a lot of water too. Several pints. I’ll bring you a jug. A big one.”

The thought of all that fluid had Coal tensing his bladder sphincter.

“Comfortable?” Angus asked, clearly trying not to smile.

Coal scowled. “How d’you always know every damn thing?”

Chuckling, Angus leaned over. Coal tilted his face up, but the kiss landed on his forehead, not his mouth.

“You couldn’t be more transparent if you tried. Now, I’m going to help you to the bathroom, just in case you get dizzy.”

“You’re going to watch me pee,” Coal said, hoping Angus would deny it.

“It’s either that or we call Spencer to insert a catheter.”

Coal’s eyebrow scrunched in suspicion. “What’s that?”

“A flexible plastic tube that goes up your penis, all the way to your bladder and—”

Coal threw the quilt back.

“I guess we cross catheter-play off the list then.” Angus’s tone sounded controlled, but when Coal’s eyes shot to his, they sparkled with suppressed mirth.

“That’s not even a thing, is it?”

Angus moved around the bed, and held out a hand. “It most certainly is, although it’s not something that’s ever interested me. Come on, up you get.”

Coal grabbed Angus’s proffered hand with both of his, and Angus drew him easily to his feet. Coal’s head swirled.

“Wanna sit down again?”

“Minute,” Coal managed to get out as he steadied himself with one palm flat on the broad chest in front of him.

The world tilted as Angus scooped him up and headed for the bedroom door.

“I had it; I just needed a second,” Coal grouched, but it actually felt damn nice to be carried around.

“Sure you did.”

“I did,” Coal protested again, but he relaxed as Angus carried him down the corridor.

“Uh-huh,” Angus said as he dipped to use his elbows to open a door.

The bathroom was predictably white, pristine, and... black taps. Not so boring after all. A hidden edginess like the tongue-piercing and red car. Coal found his feet on the floor in front of the toilet.

“I’ll wait outside, and don’t forget to wash your hands,” Angus rumbled.

“I’m not a chil—” Coal automatically started, then realized something. “You know, no one’s ever told me to do that before.”

“I’m pretty sure they did. Every kid gets taught that. Same with wiping after using the toilet and brushing their teeth.”

For the first time, Coal recognized how much he’d missed out on by stepping into the world fully formed. Parents. Families. Getting a damn Christmas present. Being allowed to learn by mistakes. Unconditional love.

Arms wrapped around him from behind. A kiss landed on his hair, dragging him out of his one fairy pity-fest.

“I’ll be right outside. Don’t forget to flush either.”

This time, the reminder of such a mundane action felt sort of... protective. Caring rather than condescending.

The honorific they'd both agreed on fell from his lips unbidden. "Yes, Boss."

Angus ruffled Coal's hair. "Good boy. I can stay if you'd rather?"

Having Angus watch him pee felt a little too far. "No, I'll be ok."

Another kiss landed on his hair. "I love how independent you are, but you don't have to be with me, ok? I get a kick out of looking after you. But better sit down this time, just in case. I'll go find you something to wear."

"Not another one of Jesse's shirts," he blurted.

Angus fixed him with a look. "No, that was the only one I kept, and I shouldn't have given it to you. I apologize."

"Apology accepted, now get outta here."

# CHAPTER 16



TEN MINUTES LATER, COAL sat on a stool at Angus's kitchen counter dressed in one of his host's predictably plain white t-shirts and nothing else. The underwear Angus provided wouldn't stay up.

Coal nibbled on his biscuit, making the most of it, while Angus set up the toaster. He reached into a cupboard, picked out a small squat black rounded jar and a small white plastic pot, which he placed on Coal's side of the counter.

Coal forgot all about the plastic pot as he wrinkled his nose at the smell of the stuff Angus spread on his revoltingly healthy wholemeal toast.

He pointed at Angus's plate as he leaned as far away from the table as possible. "What is that stink? Whatever it is, it should have been given a decent burial weeks ago."

"Never had marmite, my little Christmas fairy? You should have some, it's full of vitamins, and as far as I can make out,

your diet consists solely of high-calorie carbohydrates and alcohol.”

“You can keep your stinky healthy diet to yourself. I’m doing fine, thank you very much.”

Angus grinned, but it wasn’t the friendliest smile Coal had seen by a long shot.

“Well, it’s time someone looked after you because you obviously aren’t doing too well on your own. And these are the start.” Angus tapped the small white tub on the top and pushed it over to him.

Eyeing them with a great deal of suspicion, Coal had to ask, “What are those, vitamin pills or something? Because if they are, I don’t need them. I’m healthy as a flying reindeer.”

“You might be, but you’re a flying reindeer that a trained medic suggested taking to a hospital and having sectioned for being a danger to himself. Those are antibiotics for your infected wrists, nipples, and tattoo. You have to take one, four times a day until they’re gone. And I mean gone down your throat, not the sink or the toilet.”

“Bollocks I will.” Coal slid the pot back toward him. Who knew what human medicine would do to a magical being? It’d be a pain in the ass to have to undo whatever the pills did every time he took one.

Angus sighed as if he was the most difficult thing in the world. “Do you have to make everything so damn hard?”



“I try, Boss, I try.” He waggled his eyebrows and was particularly proud that he managed the line before he dissolved into a laughing mess as Angus groaned.

“Just take the damn pill, Coal.”

“And if I don’t?”

Angus got up and came around the table, looming over him.

“I’ll stick you in a straitjacket so you can’t hurt yourself in any way, add a gag with a cute hole in it, and give you the pill anyway.”

“You wouldn’t dare,” Coal breathed back, not sure if he believed Angus or not.

The straitjacket and gag sounded hot but being forced to swallow something against his will... Maybe it wouldn’t be too bad after all.

“I don’t ever dare, Coal. I do, or I don’t do. Although I don’t think I’ve changed my mind about anything in my life as much as I’ve changed my mind about you. But right now, I—“

Angus’s phone rang from the living room, and he pointed his finger at Coal. “Hold that thought. I’m not finished with you yet,” he said as he left the room.

The pill pot sat there, menacing as only an inanimate object could. Sticking his tongue out at it, Coal mouthed, ‘I’m not finished with you yet.’ Unfortunately, the pot didn’t seem to care as it continued to lurk on the counter.

How bad were his wounds anyway? Angus had said not to touch the dressings when he was in the bathroom, but he wasn't there anymore. The bandage on his right wrist only defeated him for a few seconds. He unwound it quickly and found a soggy dressing underneath stained reddish-yellow. A quick sniff made him grimace. Worse than the marmite. He lifted the dressing and felt the scab pull away from his skin.

“What the fuck are you doing?”

He spun on the stool to see Angus in the doorway, sparks almost shooting from his eyes. He appeared to have grown at least two inches in height since he'd left the room.

“I was just—“

“You were just what, Coal? Trying to undo Spencer's work? Take the damn pill.”

Coal grabbed the pill pot, shook one out, and swallowed it quickly, as Angus stomped around the kitchen, getting medical supplies together.

Angus washed his hands and then sat down next to him. “Wrists,” he demanded. Coal presented them without hesitation.

Scowling, Angus proceeded to clean the newly opened wound.

“I left you for two damn minutes, and you're at it again already. You'll have to come with me today.”

Coal thought about explaining that he'd only been curious about what all the fuss was about, but if Angus believed him, he might leave him behind.

“Where are we going?”

“Work,” Angus replied, not looking up from where he carefully re-wrapped his wrist as if working on a complex origami. It looked as if no one without MENSA membership would ever get it undone. Which probably meant Angus intended to defeat him. Coal didn’t know whether to take it as a challenge or not.

“Work on a Saturday?”

“I own the company,” Angus explained as if talking to a five-year-old. “When there’s a problem, who do you think they call?” Angus glared at him as he added, “Don’t you dare say it. I’m not in the mood.”

Coal clamped his lips together on the ‘Ghostbusters’ about to break free. He bet the cracker joke department never thought about issues like these when they tried their jokes out on the rest of the fairies.

“What’s the problem?” Coal asked.

“There was a fire at the hotel where the Christmas party is booked tomorrow night. I’ve got to go through the employee records and phone everyone to tell them it’s canceled.”

The thought of all those hardworking people, including his wisher, missing out on a party filled Coal with horror. He could show his actual wisher how happy he’d made Angus at a Christmas party. If he couldn’t set one up at short notice, he didn’t deserve the title of Fairy. A suitable space was the first issue.

“You’ve got a big garage/warehouse thingy there, haven’t you?”

Angus finished replacing the bandage on Coal’s other wrist, then fixed him with a long-suffering look.

“Yes, it’s underneath the offices, so?”

“We can have the party there. Of course, it’ll have to be a cold buffet rather than a sit-down meal.”

Angus blinked at him as if he’d be better off locked up in a padded cell already. *Or is he upset that I said we?* Coal flipped from excited to on the floor depressed in a heartbeat.

“Coal, no one can organize a Christmas party in just over twenty-four hours, not even you.”

“I’ll do it tomorrow morning, so we can have today together,” Coal told him brightly. “So, what do you want to do now that we don’t have to go to work?”

Angus shook his head, looking to the ceiling for inspiration—or possibly help—from above.

“As I said, we’re going to treat your wounds, lay in bed,” Angus held up a finger, “Where I will be working on my laptop, and you will be watching kids’ TV for an hour for messing with the bandage, which, because we’re going to be in bed, doing nothing, I’m going to take off again. Come on, back upstairs.”



Who would have thought laying naked beside someone who had spanked then fucked you into oblivion could be so damn *boring*. And yet, also the best time of your life. Attention, concern, care. Coal lapped it up.

Angus sat beside him, back up against the head of the bed, dressed in a T-shirt and sweats, earbuds in, as he typed into a spreadsheet. But whenever Coal twitched, huffed, moved, or groaned, Angus reminded him not to fiddle with his wounds.

He didn't actually want to touch the angry, sore flesh, but he couldn't stop looking at his swollen nipples, the crusty tattoo outlined in red, or his oozing wrists. Coal had never been hurt, ill, like this. He didn't think any fairy had but looking after him seemed to give Angus pleasure, almost as much as he got from tormenting Coal.

Bright, horribly perky, characters paraded across the TV screen on the wall opposite the bed, exclaiming about muddy puddles and lost toys. The animated shows weren't too bad, but the ones featuring adults talking like five-year-olds made Coal want to put a gun to his head.

When ChuckleVision came on for the third time, Coal groaned. "Stop, please, stop. I'll be good. I'll do anything. I can't take one more 'To me, To you'." He couldn't imagine

any child finding the middle-aged mustached inane brothers on the screen muck up yet another delivery entertaining.

Angus's gaze flicked to the corner of his screen. "Complaining adds another thirty minutes."

"I hate you."

Without pause, Angus said, "And I hate you too. Now watch your show."

Coal began to cross his arms, but the warning, "Ah-ah," stopped him.

Since watching the Chuckle Brothers made him contemplate homicide, he glanced over at Angus's screen in time to see him flick from one spreadsheet to another.

The change had been too quick to note more than the title of the document, COAL PUNISHMENTS, and a color-coded list. Coal's mind shot back over every groan, every huff, over the last two hours.

"Actually, I'm starting to get into this one," he piped up.

"You won't mind another half hour then," Angus murmured.

"You know, you are an unusually cruel man," Coal observed.

"I'm almost looking forward to a horrible healthy lunch if it gets me out of watching any more of these."

Angus's gaze flicked down to the clock on his laptop. Then closed it down.

"That's an excellent idea. It's time for your next pill anyway. Wait here, and if you're good—" he wagged a finger at Coal

”—and I will be checking, I’ll turn off the awesome perkiness this afternoon.”

“And do what?”

Coal didn’t like the positively evil smirk on Angus’s face. “I have forms. Lots of forms.”

Coal flopped back on the bed. “Hell, I’m in Hell.”

Angus’s chuckle as he strolled out of the room warmed Coal from the inside like the afterglow of an epic orgasm.

Relaxing into the bed, Coal concentrated on the feeling, trying to hold on to it, trying to commit it to memory.

“What the hell happened to you?”

Coal jerked, his eyes snapping open at the familiar voice. Garland, in all his blond shaggy-haired surfer vibe, stood next to the bed in a standard red uniform.

Heart pounding, Coal’s hand automatically went to his chest, but remembering Angus’s order, he managed to stop the movement before touching his skin.

“Shh,” Coal hissed. “Do you want him to hear you?”

Garland frowned. “The human? He can’t hear us. I put a privacy cloak around up. Who is he anyway? You were meant to be busking. Everyone else still thinks you are.”

“Santa didn’t—“ Coal started, then stopped. If Santa had wanted Coal’s immediate colleagues to know about this mission, surely he would have told them?

“Santa didn’t what?” Garland said, sounding frustrated.

“Never mind. I’m fulfilling an adult wish.”

Garland waved a hand at Coal’s body. “Buy letting yourself get abused? I know about kink—boy, do I know about kink—but if the wish is granted, and I assume it is as I don’t sense anything from him, it’s time you came home and healed.”

Coal wrinkled his nose, unsure how to explain why he needed to stay without giving away Santa’s secret mission. Dealing with someone on the naughty list was probably why Santa hadn’t said anything to the other Adult Department fairies. As he hadn’t been recalled, there had to be more work to do.

“Angus isn’t the wisher. That’s why I’ve got to hang around until I meet up with the wisher again so I can be sure.”

“Can’t you tell?” Garland said. “It’s always been damn obvious to me.” The blond fairy leaned down, and for a moment, Coal thought he was staring at his junk.

A grin spread across his face, making him resemble a cheeky schoolboy. “Oh What Fun It Is To Ride,” he read out. “That’s damn cool, but you know you can have it all healed by popping back home, right? You’re not going to be doing much riding with it like that and your clock is ticking. You know the rules; twelve days is all you get. If you pass the limit, you get yanked back like you’re on a rubber band, no goodbyes, just woosh.” Garland flung his arm through the air. “Gives you whiplash, and you automatically lose all privileges when it happens.”

“Has it happened to you?”



Garland's grin lit up the room. "Twice. Was worth it, though. Is this guy worth it?"

Coal didn't even have to think. "Yes, one hundred percent."

Garland regarded him with pursed lips for a few long seconds. "Ok, I'll cover for you as long as I can, but you're not going to be having much fun if you heal at a human rate."

"I'm not going back, not yet. I want to stick with this—"

"Sheesh, don't panic, kid. Popping home might be the only option for youngsters like you, but I've been growing my wish fulfillment bank for a damn long time. Even with Santa taking ninety percent of the energy of each fulfilled wish, those ten percents add up eventually. I can speed the healing up to four times if you want."

"Won't he notice, wonder?"

Garland shrunk. "Yeah, but just act as confused as him. You're not a scientist or a medic; it's not your responsibility to provide an explanation. Wanna do it?"

Coal's heart beat wilding at the thought of being about to spend more active time with Angus instead of being stuck in bed like an invalid. But his impulsiveness had hurt others several times.

"Will you get into trouble for helping me?"

Garland grinned. "Maybe, maybe not, but I've always liked living dangerously. Like you, I was kinda made that way."

He stepped forward and put his hand on Coal's head. "Breath deep. This might tingle a bit."

"Don't do too m—" The wave of prickly heat sweeping down his body stole his words. Coal's breath wooshed back in as the sensation ended, like he'd been holding his breath.

"There you go, all done. Now, if you need anything, concentrate on me and call my name. If I don't answer, try Twinkle, then Cedar, in that order. Candy still has a touch of perkiness and can't be trusted to keep her mouth shut. Winter is... Well, he's still pretty new too. We'll do our best to make your first time a good one if possible."

"About Winter, there's a—"

Footsteps sounded on the stairs. Garland gave him a grin.

"You're on, kid. Good luck."

Coal was left looking at an empty space as the bedroom door opened.

# CHAPTER 17



LEAVING COAL ON HIS own had anxiety bubbling, but Angus had to trust, had to give him something. Spencer had sent a message, ‘ *update me when you can*’ but with Coal looking over his shoulder, he didn’t feel comfortable discussing his real thoughts. Besides, even with the classical music in his earbuds, the damn pre-school shows made his teeth grind.

He picked up his phone and dialed.

“How’s it going, Fricker? Has he still got you running around like a headless chicken?” Spencer’s voice still held the mildly amused tone Angus had always found damn annoying. Angus had seen Ward treat people at the club a time or two, but last night with Coal showed Angus a different side to Spencer Ward. Professional, focused, and although Angus hated to admit it, admirable.

“No, but he’s still trying.” Angus didn’t bother keeping the fondness out of his voice. Spencer didn’t need to continue his White Knight routine with Coal, at least Angus hoped he didn’t.

“Not sure I like the sound of that. Trying in what way?” Angus regretted his word choice as Spencer’s questions came thick and fast. “How are his wounds doing? Are you getting those pills down him? How about food? Fluids?”

Angus answered Spencer’s questions as quickly as possible. He both resented the grilling and appreciated that Coal had a trained medic looking out for him, one not likely to call the police.

“That almost sounds... too good to be true,” Spencer drawled. “You wouldn’t be telling me porkies, would you, Fricker?”

Angus sighed and related the unbandaging incident.

“Now that sounds more like it. I take it you’re not with him now. Is that wise?”

“He’s fine,” Angus ground out. “I’ve got it sorted. He wouldn’t dare do anything to increase his punishment.” Before Spencer could give him another lecture, he added, “And no, it’s not physical. I’m making him watch pre-school TV.”

“I’m impressed. It’s inventive and a fine punishment. Unless he’s a little, or didn’t that occur to you?” Angus’s lack of reply elicited a chuckle. “I’ll get you thinking like a proper Dom one day, Fricker. For now, go feed him again, and have the talk.

You could even dig out those kink forms you must have lurking somewhere.

“If tick A for watersports and tick B for fisting doesn’t send him running for the hills, nothing will. I’ll check up on you crazy kids later.” The line clicked off.

*Damn the man.* Angus didn’t know Ward’s age, but judging by the lack of wrinkles, the white-haired man couldn’t be much older than him. Ward still behaved as if he knew more about kink and dealing with subs than anyone else on the planet.

Now that Ward had mentioned it, the form idea itched like a mosquito bite. If he’d checked in with Jesse occasionally, redone a form yearly, hell, even had one in the first place, he might’ve seen the road crash approaching. He knew kinks evolved over time, had seen it so many times at the club. And yet he’d never considered it might happen in his own relationship. Doms needed to push their subs to keep things fresh, exciting. He hadn’t. He’d been complacent, predictable. Boring.

Knowing what he knew now, he and Jesse would have ended anyway, but their break-up could have been planned and amicable rather than a huge, emotional mess. This time, Angus vowed he would discover what Coal wanted, even if Coal didn’t know himself.

Conscious of Coal being alone, he hurried into his home office and printed out the form he’d prepared years ago but never used. It wasn’t that he didn’t trust Coal to behave himself, it

was... Nah, who was he kidding? Trusting Coal not to do something stupid was like trusting a cat with a mouse.

Angus rushed to make some chicken salad sandwiches, grabbed a couple of bottles of spring water, the pill pot, and headed back upstairs.

Coal snatching the cover to his chest as Angus entered the room did not bode well. He'd tried to trust, had tried to believe Coal when he'd said he'd be good, but if the first time he left him alone he hurt himself again, Spencer might be right about Coal needing to be in a mental health institution, at least for a while.

Angus didn't want to admit failure, he hadn't with Jesse, but maybe he had to for the sake of his sub. Even if he wanted to, he couldn't supervise Coal twenty-four-seven.

Trying not to give in to frustration, he put the tray down on the chest of drawers. Centering himself, he wrapped calm around himself and turned to Coal.

"Are you going to tell me what you did, or do I call an ambulance?" He wouldn't, unless it was a severe medical emergency, but he would call Spencer and suffer the condescending lecture if needed.

Coal's Adam's Apple bobbed as he swallowed, and Angus worked to keep a bland expression. When the blanket didn't lower and Coal remained silent, Angus moved over to the bed, keeping his movements unhurried and obvious.

Angus sat down but didn't reach for the quilt immediately. "Whatever it is, we'll deal with it, ok?"

"Kay," Coal murmured, but he didn't move the cloth shield.

Slowly, deliberately, scared of what he'd find, Angus reached out and pressed down on the edge of the quilt between Coal's hands.

Coal didn't let go, but he didn't resist either. Inch by inch, more smooth tan skin appeared. Then a nipple appeared. A flat, rosy-brown, perfectly formed, unswollen, undamaged nipple.

Without thought, Angus yanked the quilt away. The other nipple was the same. *Impossible, this is...*

He grabbed Coal's hand, yanked it forward, and ran his fingers over the completely undamaged wrist. Without being asked, Coal presented his other pristine wrist, then pushed the quilt down to reveal a tattoo that looked as if it'd been there for months, not days.

"How? What the hell is going on?"

"Would you believe I naturally heal fast?"

"In less than ten minutes?" Angus ignored the squeak in his own voice.

Coal took his hand. "It's done. I'm better. Does it really matter how?"

Angus opened and closed his mouth. "Yes, it damn well does. Healing at this rate is a damn miracle. If it could be repeated...

Think of the lives that could be saved. I'm calling Spencer."

"How about you just invite him to the Christmas party tomorrow? I bet he'll be shocked when he sees me all healed up."

A picture of Spencer beginning to deliver a lecture about Angus's shortcomings as Dom in front of the collected PrideRide workforce, about putting his sub in danger, popped into his mind. Knocking Ward's confidence at that moment would be a fantastic Christmas present.

Coal's cheeky grin said he knew exactly what Angus had been thinking. "Good idea, huh?"

"Could be fun." Angus hedged as there wasn't going to be a party. Besides, this healing thing was a hell of a lot more important. "Are you going to tell me how you managed this?" Angus waved a hand at Coal's blemish-free body.

"I didn't. I don't have enough power for this. A friend popped in while you were downstairs."

Angus knew he probably didn't want to know, but he found himself asking anyway.

"Friend?"

"Garland. He's an Adult Department Christmas fairy too, but he's far more experienced and powerful than me."

Angus had no idea what to say. The physical evidence lay right before his eyes, and yet... This was damn stupid.



“Do you mind if we eat that downstairs? Crumbs in the bed suck,” Coal said, matter of fact.

“Uh, yeah, sure,” Angus murmured, got up, and went to pick up the tray again.

“Clothes? As much fun as I enjoy you looking at me, crumbs?”

“There’s a robe on the back of the bathroom door.” Angus murmured. Bemused, he wandered out of the bedroom, wondering if Spencer had slipped some of his ‘happy juice’ into his coffee. This was surreal but also what he’d wished for ever since he’d seen Coal’s wounds. He’d wanted Coal in his bed, perfectly healed, and that’s precisely what he had.

# CHAPTER 18



ANGUS'S EYES REMAINED A little wild, but he was still going through the motions of having lunch at the kitchen counter. At least he hadn't armed himself with a business suit and instead wore a pair of gray sweatpants and a faded green shirt.

Coal felt like a kid playing dress-up in Angus's dark blue bathrobe, the cuffs hung over his hands, and it reached halfway down his calves. Despite being fit as a fiddle, he still resembled a vulnerable patient, probably one on a kids' ward.

Getting Angus thinking about something other than his miraculous healing would be a start, but all Angus seemed passionate about was his forms, schedules, and planners... Coal grinned to himself. That could work on several levels, but first, a little memory manipulation.

Coal couldn't remove or replace a memory, that took a shit-ton of power only Santa or senior fairies possessed. But he could

cloud things, make them seem less important or dramatic, like Ward's happy juice, but far more targeted.

Drawing up the final energy he'd gotten from fulfilling Sam's wish, knowing he might never get any more, he curled it around Angus, seeking out his shock over the healing and dampening it.

Coal tried not to slump. It felt like someone had pulled the plug on his energy levels, but if Angus noticed Coal was flagging, he'd get sent back to bed in a heartbeat. He'd set step one of his plan in motion, and distraction came next.

"I think I need to know a hell of a lot more about this BDSM thing. What do you normally do when you start a new relationship? Because I'm clueless about all this kinky relationship stuff."

Angus frowned. "Are you serious? Because if you're just playing around, forget it."

Coal pressed his lips together. This had started as a manipulation, but he found he meant every word. "I've put myself in some dangerous situations exploring this pain thing, and I might not always be so lucky to find someone like you who won't take advantage. If you let me know what you expect, I'll think about sticking around until after Christmas. That is, if you're offering?"

Angus's eyebrows rose as he finished his mouthful of the horribly healthy sandwich that Coal hadn't touched. Who the hell put green stuff in a sandwich anyway? It felt like a crime against food.

“That long? I’m honored.”

“You will be, as often as I can manage it anyway.” Coal gave him a wide-eyed look and bit his lip as if embarrassed of his bold, dirty statement.

The way Angus focused on his mouth as he shifted in his seat told Coal that, yeah, he’d got to him.

Angus’s lips curved up in a smile. “The embarrassment is cute, but dirty talk is something I enjoy, in the right circumstances, which in case you don’t get it, is in private.”

Coal’s brief satisfaction about getting one over on him vanished. He’d never done dirty talk, didn’t know if he could pull it off without glowing like a tomato, but Angus said he found Coal’s awkwardness cute. *But did that mean attractive too?*

Angus interrupted his whirling thoughts. “You want to do this just as I would with anyone else?”

“I erm... Think I need to know how all this works, don’t you?”

Angus nodded sagely. “I do. And we can do that. But eat your sandwich first.”

Coal looked down at the brown bread sandwich with green leaves poking out the sides.

“Would you believe me if I said I was allergic to—” he waved a finger vaguely at his plate “—whatever that is?”

Angus simply stared back.

“Guess not,” Coal mumbled. Cautiously picking up Angus’s creation, he examined it to see if he could find a less foliage-stuffed area. There were even slices of tomato in there, hidden among the greenery, waiting to surprise the unwary. The more he examined it, the worse it looked. After another glance at Angus’s poker face, he took a bite. It crunched, and not in a good way.

The deep chuckle from the other side of the island counter caused a glare.

“I hate you,” Coal managed from around his mouthful.

“Talking with your mouth full is rude.”

With his death glare firmly in place, Coal swallowed.

“Depends what it’s full of.”

“Stop trying to distract me and eat your lunch.”

“I’d rather be eating—”

“I can stream Sesame Street twenty-four hours a day.” Angus’s tone remained mild, but the threat felt very real.

Coal took another bite. He managed an entire half before the healthiness overwhelmed him.

Putting it down, he said, “That’s it, I’m done. Totally full up.”

“Truth? Because there’ll be nothing else until dinner.”

Coal held one hand down by his thigh, out of Angus’s sight, and beckoned with his fingers. If Garland watched as he’d promised, Coal hoped the more powerful fairy would find a way to sneak in some proper food.

“Have you seen how big I am?”

After a few moments, unease at Angus’s frank stare grew, so Coal changed the subject.

“Are you going to offer me a drink? It’s date tradition, right? I’ll have a sherry, sweet, not dry.”

“Not in the BDSM world. There’ll be no alcohol for you today, maybe not ever after your display in the Switch Room. Everyone entering a BDSM negotiation needs to be honest and clear-headed so they—you in this case—don’t agree to something you’re nervous about.”

Angus wanted honesty, but banter was much easier than this uncomfortable formality that felt more like an emotionless business negotiation than fun sexy times.

“I had a drink on our first date, so that blows your theory out of the water.”

Angus didn’t miss a beat. “That was before I got there. I should have told you no alcohol.”

Coal pantomimed a slight stagger and reached out to steady himself on the counter.

“You made a mistake? You?”

Angus frowned. “You’re being a brat. I’m human, so yes, I can, and have, made mistakes.”

“Good of you to admit it,” Coal mumbled as Angus carried on talking.

“But I try not to repeat them. What I always do, without fail, is remember punishments that are due. And right now, you are being disrespectful. Stop it.”

Needling people was in Coal’s nature. He couldn’t stop, even if he wanted to. Luckily, Angus got a kick out of punishing him. On the surface, it should work, but the more Angus talked about it, the more worried Coal became.

“As you want to do this within a BDSM framework, we’ll have coffee. Decaff, of course, and you’re making it.”

Coal hadn’t signed up for domestic chore torture. Angus didn’t hide his amusement at his sour expression.

“Kettle’s on the side. Water’s in the tap. Mugs and coffee are in the cupboard above the kettle. I take mine strong, black, no sugar. You may have milk in yours if you wish. Milk’s in the fridge. Skimmed, of course.”

Coal didn’t move. “I don’t remember signing a contract of employment or slavery, Mr. Fricker.”

A barely audible snort of amusement came from behind Coal, but Angus didn’t react. As much as he’d wanted Garland watching a few minutes ago, now he wished the more experienced fairy would buzz off.

Angus looked like a wolf gazing at a little fluffy bunny. One with an ‘eat me’ sign around his neck.

“You haven’t signed up for anything yet, but we’ll get to that.”

*“That’s what he thinks, but we know different, right?”* Coal felt more than heard the amused, deep male voice coming

from right next to his ear. It didn't sound like Garland or like any fairy he knew.

“Although, if you were my slave,” Angus continued. Coal tried to pay attention while cursing the distracting interference. “I wouldn't have to tell you to do anything. You'd know what I wanted before I did. You'd be serving me silently, naked on your knees, wearing a collar and lead. You'd probably be drinking water out of a bowl on the floor, like a dog, rather than coffee on a stool. It's what Spencer would expect of you.”

By the look in his eye, Angus wanted to shock him, but two could play at that game, and Coal wanted to give his magical stalker something to think about too.

“I could work with that. As long as I got a big fat juicy bone to gnaw on occasionally.”

Coal's gaze dropped pointedly to Angus's groin. His subject's jaw dropped a fraction before snapping shut.

Coal's laughter bubbled up. “Gotcha that time.”

“Maybe.” Angus smiled wryly. “But be careful what you wish for.”

*“He really should take that to heart.”*

Coal wished his stalker would shut up and let him concentrate.

“I was holding back the other night.” Coal's focus shot back to Angus. “And since you're all better, the next punishment won't be a Tinky Winky marathon.”



Trepidation fizzed through Coal as he wondered whether Angus told the truth about holding back, and what it would be like if he really let himself go.

“Coffee, now,” Angus reminded him. “I’ll be in the living room.”

As soon as Angus left the room, Coal hissed, “Would you leave me alone? Hasn’t anyone told you not to bother a fairy when they’re with a target? You’ll end up on reindeer duty, not snowglobe duty, if you don’t quit it.”

He expected an apology, at least a reply of some sort, but the kitchen echoed with silence. It didn’t mean his stalker had returned to the Adult Fairy Department, because with that deep voice, who else could it be but a new adult fairy?

His replacement. There was no avoiding the conclusion. It made making the most of the time he had left with Angus even more vital.

After turning on the kettle, he opened the cupboard Angus had indicated. Black mugs. White mugs. Not a single one with a bright color, funny picture, or slogan. Damn sad.

On autopilot, Coal made coffee, hampered by the floppy sleeves of the bathrobe, and wondered what Angus had planned. And there would be something because Angus Fricker loved to plot.

Picking up the two mugs of steaming coffee, one black, one white, Coal carefully made his way across the hall and into the

living room. A spill, knowing Angus, would lead to an afternoon of carpet cleaning rather than anything entertaining.

Angus sat in an armchair, Relaxed, expectant. The curtains at the front of the long, dual-aspect space were closed. Those at the back were open, showing off a neat, tidy lawn and a patio. Nothing flashy, nothing that required significant maintenance.

Coal couldn't remember if the curtains at the back had been closed the other night, but the front ones had been. Was this Angus's default, or did he think, intend, for something to happen that would shock anyone walking past if they happened to look in? Coal hoped so, he really—

A sheet of paper and a ballpoint pen sat on the coffee table opposite Angus, in front of the sofa. It looked like a less formal job interview scenario. Coal's mood dropped further until he remembered how near he'd gotten to making Angus forget all his rules and regulations in his office with Sam sitting right outside.

Angus leaned forward, picked up Coal's white mug first, took a sip, and wrinkled his nose before putting it down.

"I've got no idea how you still have all your teeth. There's enough sugar in that for the spoon to stand up on its own."

Sitting down on the three-seater cream leather sofa, where he'd been thoroughly spanked and fucked, Coal curled his feet up beside him. The movement left an enticing gap in both the top and bottom of the robe, revealing a bit of his chest and the inside of one thigh. Bold, certain, relaxed, Angus ran his gaze over Coal's revealed body as if he owned it. As if he wanted it.

Nerves pricked. That first night had been so spontaneous, Coal hadn't stopped to think, even for a second, but this felt formal and very fuck-up-able.

*"Aw, all nervous. Cute, but so disappointing."* His stalker's bating whisper burned away Coal's nerves.

"Fairies don't get cavities; we don't get fat either. Well? What do you have planned for me now, Boss?"

"You'll have to wait and see."

Lifting his chin, he asked, "Any pain involved?"

Angus's eyes twinkled. "Nothing I'm not confident you'll enjoy a great deal."

Coal's cock began to take notice. "In that case, do your worst."

Just for a moment, Angus looked like a little boy who'd received a longed-for Christmas present. He took a sip of his coffee, but when he replaced the mug on the slate coaster; his serious face had returned.

"This won't be nearly my worst, or best, according to your perspective. You're not ready for that."

Coal fucking loved it when Angus hinted at dirty stuff while keeping up his business persona. It made him want to push, to drag more out of him. The only thing that didn't work right now was Angus's casual, unkempt appearance. That Coal wanted him in a suit, when he'd been trying to get him out of one every other minute they'd been together confused him. If he didn't know what he wanted, how on earth was he meant to please someone else?

“Coal? Are you with me?”

Coal looked up. “Huh? Yeah, yeah, I’m good. Go on.”

Angus watched him, looking like he was reconsidering this whole thing.

*“He’s going to kick you out,”* came in a teasing sing-song.

“I’m good, really,” Coal blurted. “I just get—” he made a twirling motion beside his temple, “—distracted sometimes.”

“I can see that, and I can help with it. You also have a dangerously intense endorphin reaction which we both need to learn a great deal more about before we try anything really interesting.”

“Which means?” Coal prompted. He didn’t need a science lesson, and his fingers crept toward his wrist to provide a distraction.

“Don’t interrupt and leave your wrist alone, or I’ll fetch the straitjacket I told you about,” Angus growled.

“They’re fine now, so what does it—”

“It matters because you use pain like others use drugs or alcohol, as a distraction, as pleasure. If this is going to work, you have to give control to me. If you don’t think you can do that, you know where the door is.”

Coal examined Angus’s expression for a hint of a lie, but he possessed a perfect poker face. Being kicked out again, when his fairy stalker still watched, would not only be humiliating but would end his time in the human realm.

Coal tucked his hands under his butt to keep them still. He opened his mouth, but Angus got there first.

“You may ask any questions you have now.”

Coal had to admire the clever manipulation. Whatever he asked now would seem like a response to Angus’s instruction. He now had to please both his stalker and Angus.

“What’s this endothingy?” he asked to gain time.

“Endorphins. Natural chemicals your brain releases in reaction to pain. They are designed to help animals escape dangerous situations, even when hurt. Essentially, they are nature’s own painkillers. You probably produce an unusually large amount, which means you get high from pain quickly. Like for most masochists, pain is still painful for you—”

*“Ugh, could you be any more boring? How is this meant to make anyone happy? Tick tock, tick, tick, tick—”*

“Tell me something I don’t know,” Coal grumbled under his breath.

“And that’s another mark for interrupting.” Angus’s lips pursed. “Perhaps consider—and this is only a friendly suggestion—waiting until you know what the next punishment could be before you continue adding marks?”

Coal’s face felt hot, but he couldn’t show the damn stalker that they were getting to him, so he shrugged. “Yeah, ok. Carry on.”

Angus’s expression didn’t change, but the saccharine sweet, “Thank you, you’re so kind,” sent Coal right back to wary

arousal.

“Where were we?” Angus asked.

“Pain is painful?” Coal decided he deserved points for managing not to roll his eyes or add anything sarcastic. This was more painful than....

“Ohh. This is the punishment, right? I have to say, it’s not as bad as Peppa Pig.”

Angus’s narrowed eyes promised retribution, and the disembodied voice chuckled.

“Coal, zip it, ok? This is important, not a punishment. You wanted to know more about your reaction to pain, and I’m telling you. For your own good. And mine.”

Now that got Coal’s attention. If it was for his target’s good, he could suffer. He pulled one hand out from under his butt, mimed locking his lips, and shoved the hand back.

“Are you touching yourself?” Angus ground out.

“No, but thanks for the suggestion. I—”

“Hands on your head.”

This time, Coal did roll his eyes as he pulled his hands out, disrupting the covering ability of the robe a little more, and laced his fingers together on top of his head.

“Comfortable?” Angus enquired politely.

“No,” Coal ground out.

Angus smiled. “Excellent, then I’ll continue. Simply put, for you, pain results in you feeling good after a while, so you want

more.”

“And? Tell me something I haven’t worked out already.”

“You’re really starting to push the limits of my patience.”

Angus eyed him with genuine annoyance.

“So, am I getting any closer to a spanking yet?” Coal gave him a cheeky grin, but Angus didn’t return it.

*“Are you trying to fuck this up?”*

Coal tried to tune the voice out, thoroughly regretting having his hands on his head. A little pain would come in very handy right now; his nerves seemed to evaporate when he was hurting.

“No, Coal. You’re getting closer to a gag. We are having a serious conversation, a vital conversation, and although I don’t want a silent slave, you are trying to top from the bottom. I don’t like it.”

“I’m what?”

Angus’s jaw clenched as if he was having trouble controlling himself. Coal’s belly filled with butterflies.

“You are trying to force me to do what you want. I don’t like it. I won’t throw you out this time because I promised I’d see that you were looked after. But if you won’t accept my rules of your own free will, I’ll call Spencer.”

*“Fuck, I’ve got to go. You’re on your own, kid. Make me proud.”* Before Coal could process, Angus carried on talking.

“Maybe he’ll be able to handle you, but I promise you won’t enjoy his methods as much as mine.”

Angus’s steely gaze reeked of honesty. Angus would do precisely what he promised, and his disappointment formed ice crystals in Coal’s veins.

Yes, Spencer was better-looking and had incredible talent with needles, but there was more to it than that, and he didn’t mean Sam’s Christmas wish.

He’d been drawn to Angus from the first moment they’d met, but now Coal’s chest physically ached at the thought of leaving him at the end of this job. Coal didn’t want it to be a job anymore; with every fiber of his being, he wanted it to be real.

Angus genuinely cared; he even appeared to enjoy Coal’s attitude most of the time. Which was bloody amazing considering how most people treated him. If a bit of politeness made Angus happy, surely it wasn’t too much to ask to be able to stay with him a little longer?

Coal dropped his gaze, kept his hands glued to his head, and mumbled, “Sorry.”

“Pardon?” Angus inquired mildly.

He took a deep breath and looked into Angus’s gentle green eyes. “I’m sorry. Please forgive me, sir.” Hopefully, using a title Angus knew he didn’t like would cut him a little slack.

Angus watched him silently, and the ice in Coal’s veins began to solidify. Without taking his hands from his head, Coal slid



to the floor on his knees, bowing his head.

“Are you going to repeat your offense?”

Coal considered lying, but Angus’s rules about honesty came galloping back.

“I can’t promise that because I’d like to start keeping promises. See, here’s the thing. I’m sarcastic and bolshie by nature; it’s probably a bit of a self-defense mechanism, to be honest. Most of the time, I don’t even know I’m doing it. I’m also prone to opening my mouth before I consider the consequences. But I will try, ok?”

“Apology accepted.”

Coal drew in a shaky breath, and the ice in his veins receded.

“You can lower your hands. Sit back on the sofa and fill in the form.”

Coal sighed like a bolshie teenager because Angus expected it —might even want it. He climbed back on the sofa, giving a surreptitious tug on the robe’s belt. Angus hadn’t mentioned Coal’s exposed skin yet, so Coal assumed he liked it.

He picked up the A4 sheet of paper clamped neatly to a clipboard. His eyes widened as he looked it over. *Steaming reindeer crap. Humans do things like this for fun?* Coal wouldn’t mind giving some a go, but others turned his stomach.

What would he do if Angus wanted to do all these things with him, to him? For the first time, he looked at more than the tick

box items. The top of the form had a logo, a set of cuffs hanging from the 'o' in 'Bondaris'.

*It's a generic form.* Coal hoped he managed to hide his slump of relief by looking over at Angus.

"Why don't you have a form?" Coal asked, desperate for Angus not to reply, 'Because I like everything on the list.'

"I don't want to influence you into thinking any particular choice is more or less acceptable to me," Angus said as if discussing stationary options for his office.

This wasn't stationary. It was Coal's body, pride, and maybe sanity. He put the paper down as his temper rose at Angus's poor opinion of him.

"I may be interested in pain, but it doesn't mean I'm a weak-minded walkover who'll do anything to please you like a damn spaniel." Even as he said it, Coal wondered if it was true. Disobeying Angus, making him unhappy, didn't sit well.

Angus leaned forward, green eyes intense, as Coal became the subject of every ounce of his attention. A wave of nervous anticipation thrilled.

"I like that about you. However, that's a standard form from my local kink club, not my personal to-do list. I haven't got a form to tell you what I like because I hold the balance of power.

"This is my house. I'm older, stronger, richer, and far more experienced than you in just about every way. I don't want to influence you into doing something you really don't want

because you think I like it. If we're not compatible, it's better to find out now before either of us invests any more time and energy."

Coal's mood flipped like a switch. The sheer arrogance of this human astounded him.

"You really need to get your head out of your ass and get over yourself. I am quite capable of saying no, and I trust you to stop if I do. If I'm wrong about that, tell me now because if that's the case, I'm walking right out that door. You can stick your form, rules, and your cage-loving friend with a needle fetish where the sun doesn't shine."

Instead of the angry response and the boot up the ass as he left the building Coal expected, a smile spread Angus's lips.

Coal tilted his head, not understanding why Angus found his rudeness amusing when he'd so recently told Angus he would try to keep a lid on it. "I really don't get you. One minute you're coming on all intense because I'm topping your bottom or whatever you called it, and the next minute you're grinning like a Cheshire cat when I tell you to shove it up your ass? I thought you lot were meant to be consistent."

"My lot?" Angus shifted in his seat, and Coal swore he was trying not to smile. *Fucker.*

"Yeah, you know, the spankers," Coal said but found he was trying not to laugh as well.

Angus's lips twitched, but he stifled his amusement. Coal had to give him points for that.

“My lot usually prefer to be called dominants, although, like anything else in the human condition, there is a wide spectrum from slave masters to daddies.” Coal opened his mouth, but Angus raised a finger. “That is a topic for another time. But to answer your earlier point, your attitude makes me happy because when you submit to me—like you did earlier—it will be from genuine respect rather than going through the motions as someone more experienced might do.”

Coal’s eyes narrowed. “Let me get this straight. You want me to be a bastard, but not too much of one? That’s a bloody difficult ask, isn’t it?”

Irritating man that he was, Angus merely smiled and changed the subject.

“Why did you say spankers instead of dominants? You can’t tell me you don’t know the word.”

Pressing his lips together, Coal wrestled with the answer.

“Eh, what the hell. This’ll probably sound bloody stupid, but if I accept you’re one of those dominants, what does that make me, seeing as I’m sitting on your sofa looking at this form?

“I’m never, ever going to be comfortable thinking of myself as submissive; because it would mean admitting other people are better than me. No one has ever believed in me, not in my entire life. I’ve always known I was a mistake and a fuck-up. If I start accepting other people are better than me, I might as well go jump off a bridge.” Coal paused, shocked at his own outburst. It was the first time he’d put his deep-down resentment into words or even into coherent thought.

“We’re both pretty weird, aren’t we?” Coal mused as he realized Angus’s dominance must be due to a similar personality flaw.

“Coal, look at me.”

Coal raised his gaze. He hadn’t even realized he’d been looking at his bare knees.

Angus’s gaze bored into him, as if willing Coal to accept, believe, his words. “There is nothing wrong or weak about admitting who and what you are. There is nothing wrong with reevaluating it from time to time either; it’s a good thing.

“Submissives aren’t weak-willed. *You* aren’t weak-willed. Subs have a strength of trust in their Dom that is a wonderful, precious thing. You’ve already shown me you are capable of it, and it made me happier than you know.

“Together, we might be able to unlock some genuine happiness for us both instead of temporary highs.”

Happiness was what Coal was meant to be giving Angus, but it seemed as if Coal being happy was part of the equation. But how could he be happy knowing how soon this would all end? Tears prickled his eyes.

“Hey, it’s ok.” Sympathy bled in Angus’s tone, but his next words cracked Coal even more. “Don’t worry about the morality of anything you put down on the form.”

Angus didn’t understand what had upset him. Thinking about it, the human couldn’t understand but was still trying. Coal tried to concentrate on Angus’s words.

“Because none of it—if any of it ever happens—will be your decision; it’ll be mine. Understand?”

Coal didn’t, but he was getting an insight into how Angus’s mind worked. Still, letting go of all those negative feelings and worries would be fantastic. Unfortunately, it was a hell of a lot easier to say than to do, and they had so little time.

Angus broke into Coal’s silent considerations. “We’ll know even more when you’ve filled in the form.”

Coal took a closer look at the sheet of paper, then glanced back up at Angus’s calm face. He put the form down again.

“I am in way over my head here. I don’t know what half these things are, and some of the others scare the shit out of me.”

Between one moment and the next, Angus was next to him. His finger under Coal’s chin tilted his face up until Coal gazed into intense green eyes.

“I told you I would look after you, and I keep my promises. We can explore your fantasies and limits, safely, slowly. This is what the form is about. I need to know what you want to try, what you might want to try, and what your hard limits are.”

“Hard limits?”

“Your never ever list.”

“What are yours?” Coal immediately countered.

Angus rattled off a series of numbers, so Coal looked them up on the form. Drowning play, bathroom play, emotional sadism/masochism, and humiliation in public/private. The

items left him a little relieved, but the ones Angus left off were still disturbing. Blood play and genital torture were the most obvious ones. He'd also left off breath play.

Glancing over at Angus's large hands, hands he admired, had enjoyed spanking and controlling him, Coal wondered what it would feel like to have them squeezing his throat as Angus pounded into him, making him dizzy from pleasure and lack of oxygen.

Coal knew he could pop back to the North Pole if anything got too intense but having the person you were having sex with disappear mid-fuck, might be a little hard to explain. The thought of Angus's shocked expression made him smile.

"What's going on in that head of yours?" Angus asked, his tone wistful.

Coal hastily looked back at the list for a safer option than telling Angus what he'd been thinking. He hadn't lied about what he was, but there was no point in reminding Angus and making the fragile memory cloud around the healing disperse.

"I erm... think better when I'm moving."

# CHAPTER 19



THE DARK BLUE ROBE had been making a bid for freedom since Coal brought in the coffees. Its gradual progress off Coal's shoulder, the gaping bottom that revealed his knees, then gave a glimpse of muscled thigh distracted the hell out of Angus.

Intentionally or not, Coal tempted almost beyond reason, but his mood also flipped so fast it was dizzying. Angry, determined, bolshie, distraught, horny, confused, Angus had seen them all in the last hour. So far, Angus knew of only two things that slowed Coal down. Pain and pleasure. Up until now, they'd been so closely linked they might as well have been the same thing.

Yes, Angus enjoyed spanking, loved rough sex, but the image of Coal lying in his arms, pale, wounded, fevered, drifted into his mind. If Coal was to survive to his mid-twenties and beyond, he had to find another way to calm the youngster's



demons. Formality didn't seem to be working, and hurting him after such a close call didn't feel right. It left one option.

Angus got up, walked around the table, and sat next to Coal, close enough to feel his body heat but not touching.

“Can I see the tattoo again?”

The tension in Coal's shoulders flowed away as if Angus had pulled a plug.

Standing up, Coal faced him. A confident, slim hand went to the robe's belt. A tug and a shoulder shrug, and Angus's robe slid off Coal's shoulders and pooled on the floor.

Tight, smooth, unblemished. Coal's body called for marks, his marks. As he watched, Coal's slim, tan cock filled, darkened. Reaching out, Angus ran a finger lightly, barely touching, over the words curving upward like a smile across Coal's belly under his navel. Coal's cock twitched, standing out almost horizontal, demanding to be kissed, sucked. Perhaps when it got closer to begging, Angus might oblige, but for now, he remained focused on the tattoo.

“Oh What Fun It Is To Ride,” he murmured, then shifted his butt forward on the sofa, and leaned back, making room on his lap. Without being told, Coal climbed up, his feet on either side of Angus's thighs.

For a heart-stopping moment, the tip of that sweet cock waved inches from Angus's watering mouth. A bead of precum glinted, then Coal squatted down to sit on Angus's thighs.

Coal might be short, but he was solid, compact. His weight felt damn good.

Angus couldn't help it; he traced his fingers across Coal's chest and watched, fascinated, as gooseflesh rippled across the smooth skin in a wave. The pristine nipples hardened, and Angus began to doubt his memory. They couldn't have been as damaged as he'd thought; there wasn't a sign they'd ever been pierced, never mind badly infected.

Coal rested his palms on Angus's shoulders, tracing his muscles through the worn t-shirt. No urgency, but he could almost hear the wheels turning in Coal's head, feel the anxiety of 'Am I doing this right?' bubbling back up. Angus dropped his hands to Coal's ass, squeezed.

He'd intended to keep this slow, reassuring, but as if they had a mind of their own, his hands squeezed harder and harder until Coal's eyes closed.

"Ow," Coal murmured but didn't attempt to move or open his eyes.

Annoyed at his lack of control, Angus relaxed his hands, going from pressure to a gentle soft massage as he couldn't bear to stop touching him.

Coal opened heavy-lidded eyes, bent his head, and kissed him. Curling the tip of his tongue down, Angus used his tongue stud to stroke Coal's lips, then inside his mouth.

Coal gave a breathy, needy whimper. The gentle rocking of his hips pressed his naked, hard cock against Angus's cloth-

covered one.

For Angus, sex had always been passionate, mind-blowing, holding back for a little while before a rush to completion. No one had ever made him feel like coming from slow kissing and gentle, hardly there, frotting. He could lose himself in this, in Coal, but that wasn't what Coal needed. For all his bravado, Coal didn't have the courage, or the knowledge, to say what he wanted.

"One thing, tell me just one thing on the form you want to do," Angus murmured, drawing circles on Coal's back.

The rocking stopped. Regret flashed bright, but he'd gone this far. Coal needed the tools to negotiate the future, to keep himself safe. Voicing what he wanted, what he didn't want, calmly without anger, stress, or worry, would be key.

"Come on—" Angus crooned, keeping up the caresses, "— You sing in front of strangers all the time. You can do this; it could be anythin—"

"I want to be wanted, used, appreciated."

Angus wrapped his arms around Coal to protect him from the emotional pain that someone—probably many someones—had inflicted.

"I appreciate you." The words sounded lame, a useless platitude, so Angus tried again, wanting to make it more profound.

"I love you being here on my lap, solid, real, using me to pleasure yourself. I loved being inside you, feeling you clench

and tense around me. The sounds you make wreck me. Make me lose control.” He stroked a knuckle down Coal’s face, smiled at the confusion there.

“Don’t you get it, my little Christmas fairy? We’re using each other, and I want to know what you want, right now, so I can give it to you.”

Coal swallowed. “I... I want to make you happy. It’s all I want, all I need.”

Angus smiled, gave him an encouraging nod. “And what would make me happy right now is you telling me exactly what you want to do, with all the filthy details you can manage.”

Coal bowed his head, face burned with a bright blush. “I don’t think I can.”

Angus cupped his cheek, felt the heat. “I love this too. You’re gorgeous when you’re flustered and when you’re angry too. Go on, try it. Tell me what you want. Nothing is wrong. Nothing is right. It just is.”

Coal blew out a breath but still didn’t speak. He just sat, everything tense, wrestling with the task he’d been given. Angus’s belly clenched, not knowing if the youngster would pluck up the courage or not. Wanting to help, knowing this was something Coal had to do on his own.

Then Coal blurted, “I want to learn, want to know how to please, instead of just... reacting.” With his face scarlet, Coal seemed to have run out of words, but it was a start.

“Hey, that was good, something to build on. Fast or slow, the pace doesn’t matter. We have nowhere to go today; there is no hurry, no pressure. Remember what I said about just kissing this morning? Well, that—”

“But I was still hurt then, I’m—”

Angus raised his eyebrows at the interruption.

Coal pinched his lips together so hard they whitened. Rather than lessening Coal’s stress, Angus appeared to be accelerating it. He changed tactics.

“How about I tell you some of the things I like on that form, and you can say red, yellow, or green?”

“I can do that.” Coal hesitated, then added, “green.”

“Dirty talk.”

“For you or me?” Coal shot back.

“Both.”

The corners of Coal’s eyes crinkled as he thought. So damn transparent. With every passing hour, Angus got more convinced that Coal could never lie successfully.

“Color?”

“Green for you and... yellow for me, but only because I don’t know what to say.”

“Oh, I think you do just fine when you’re not thinking about it. How about... Roleplay?”

Coal shifted, actually wiggling with enthusiasm. “Green, actually double green. With big bells on.”

Coal's enthusiasm delighted, and a chuckle bubbled up from Angus's belly.

"In that case, I have a crucial business call to make, one I can't put off. I'll be in my office. Door next to the kitchen."

Without saying anything else, Angus picked Coal up and dumped him on the sofa. He stood and walked out of the room with as much dignity as he could manage with a raging hard-on.

On his way passed the utility room, Angus grabbed one of the ironed shirts he'd intended to take upstairs, ripped off his t-shirt and sweatpants, and put it on.

It felt incredibly filthy to sit at his desk, naked from the waist down, but he hadn't felt this alive in years. And it was all down to the crazy guy in his living room.

Seconds ticked by, then a minute, then another. As if his cock was an indicator of his concern, his erection flagged as worry grew. Had Coal taken this time to hurt himself again? Was he even still in the house? Angus cursed himself for taking off his pants, going to the front door in a shirt and nothing else would scare the crap out of his neighbors.

His phone rang as he reached for his pants.

"Yes?" he barked as he tried to stuff in one leg while standing on the other.

"My, my. Such frustration. Things not going well?" Spencer's amusement pissed him off even more, mainly because the smug fucker was right, yet again.

A tap came on the door. Angus flopped back in his seat, forgetting he still held the phone in his hand. What an idiot. He'd set up a phone call scenario and then not said a word.

Relaxing back in his chair, he reached for his headset, activated the Bluetooth, and adjusted the mic.

“Actually, things are going pretty damn well. How are things with you?”

“Same old, same old. Sticking needles in people, pus, blood, vomit, and crap.”

The office door opened, and, Coal slipped inside. dressed in one of Angus's clean t-shirts and nothing else. Angus got hard again, damn quick.

“Yeah?” Angus managed, trying to remember what he'd been talking about, then decided it didn't matter other than keeping the game going.

“What was the most difficult piercing you've ever done?”

Coal moved around him, began to back toward the desk, biting his lip, with a wicked smirk.

“Why all the interest?” Spencer said, suspicion leaking into his voice. “Are you thinking of getting something else? Or is he? With that infection, he should wait several months.”

“I'm erm, just wondering.” Angus didn't care what he said as Coal perched his ass on the desk, put his hands flat behind him, and leaned back, displaying himself. The shirt rode up, so near to revealing his balls but not quite enough.

“Ah-huh. Ok, Fricker, I’ll bite. Now let me see... I once did a chastity piercing. Guy wanted something more extreme than a cock cage, so I gave him a guiche, that’s a ring in his taint, and a Prince Albert ring, so his partner could lock his cock down whenever she wanted. And damn, that bitch liked to tease.”

All through Spencer’s monologue, Coal dragged his fingers over the shirt, lifting the hem, dropping it, giving tantalizing glimpses of his balls, the crease where his leg met his body.

It took a few seconds to work out that Spencer had stopped talking. Angus hastily replied, “That all sounds very interesting but—”

“As much as I enjoy partaking in your naughty little fantasies, I called to check on my patient.”

Angus couldn’t help reaching out and stroking the inside of Coal’s knee. “He’s good, and I mean really good.” Coal’s face lit up with a grin.

“Have you got him sucking your cock already? Did you even get him to take those antibiotics?” Spencer got steadily angrier. “So help me, Fricker, if you’re not looking after him, I’ll—”

“Wanna see?” Angus kept his focus on Coal, who frowned but didn’t look as if this was a red situation for him.

“Of course,” Spencer replied. Angus could almost see the eye roll. “Nips and tattoo, but hurry up, I haven’t got all day.”

“Give me a few minutes.” Angus ended the call. “Spencer wants to know how you’re healing up. A few photos should do



it, or he'll probably turn up to check himself.”

“Can I ask something?”

“Always.”

“I’m wondering if you always take crucial business calls dressed like this?” Coal’s gaze dipped to Angus’s thick, haired thighs.

Angus’s mouth morphed into a smirk. “I’m wondering if you often sneak, bare-assed, into strangers’ offices?”

Coal dragged his fingers up his body, lifting the cloth, revealing all of his smooth, tan, muscular thighs. Thighs built for riding like the tattoo claimed.

“Well, to be honest, because you really seem to enjoy honesty, I wasn’t so much sneaking as... inciting. Slow teasing doesn’t work for me.”

Angus looked pointedly at the growing wet spot on the t-shirt tented by Coal’s hard cock. “Are you sure? But consider me enticed.”

Angus stared as a wicked little smile appeared on those biteable lips. “Fancy making Mr. Ward’s day a little more difficult?”

“Fuck, I think I’m in love,” Angus murmured.

Coal’s gaze shot to his, eyes wide for a second, then he leaned back on one elbow, pulled his shirt up, and dipped his chin to hold it. “Let’s stick it to that smug bastard.” To Angus’s surprise, Coal reached down and started jerking himself as his

hips rocked. The sight, the wonderful breathy sounds, the rocking. Angus grabbed his cock, squeezed the base, and thought about driver rosters to stop himself from fucking the hell out of him.

“Now, do it now,” Coal panted as he put the hem of the shirt between his teeth.

Angus brought the phone up. “Fuck. That’s... you’re...” he swallowed, hit record, and panned over Coal’s body from the neck down, making sure both nipples were clearly framed.

“Move your cock, it’s obscuring the tattoo.”

On the screen, two slim, tan fingers appeared, slanted the cock to the side, jacking with light touches, just under the head. Angus panned down, then cut the recording and sent it.

The phone rang. Angus turned it off. He never turned it off—day or night, he was always available for his staff—but this was far too important to be disturbed.

“Turn around,” Angus demanded. “I want to see everything.”

“You do?”

“Move, Brat,” Angus growled.

“Yes, Boss,” Coal snarked, and then Angus was blessed with the sight of a pristine, rounded butt, sticking up toward him.

He waited tantalizing seconds, until Coal looked back over his shoulder. Then, and only then, did Angus move.

Arching over him, he reached out and positioned Coal’s chin a little higher, exactly the right angle to kiss.

Sex had always been a race to the finish, but with Coal, Angus found he wanted to savor every moan, every twitch. But more than anything, he wanted Coal to believe he deserved to be wanted.

Slowly, he leaned down until their lips met, not more than a brush. “I love it when you say that.” Sticking his tongue out, he ran it across Coal’s lips as he ground against Coal’s ass, heated flesh against heated flesh.

“I want you, Coal. Everything about you, from your smart mouth, your sweet ass, the way you react to pain, your scowl, spirit, voice, and the weird festive thing. I *crave* you, every inch, every part. Now put your head down and your ass up,” Angus instructed as he pulled back and didn’t deny himself the pleasure of running his palm down Coal’s back, all the way to the top of his ass. He cupped the globe, feeling the solid muscle, imagined snug against his hips, working to drive them both mad.

He expected Coal to automatically spread his legs like Jesse would have, but Coal was a whole new kettle of fish. Coal would make him work for every surrender, and Angus loved him for it.

He leaned forward again, and whispered against the back of Coal’s head. “Spread your legs, let me see.”

Coal moved one foot, barely a couple of inches, teasing, trying to get Angus to be rougher, more demanding, like he’d been.... Alarm bells rang. Like he’d been when he’d hurt Coal, when he’d took his virginity without sufficient prep.

Angus rubbed a hand down Coal's side. "Color?"

"What's the color for get on with it?"

Without thought, Angus brought his hand down on Coal's ass, the flesh jiggled with the force of the spank as Coal went up on his toes.

"Damn, I told myself I wasn't going to do that. What is it about you that pushes every button I've got?" Angus wondered aloud as he smoothed his palm over the red handprint he'd left on Coal's ass.

Coal stayed bent over, hands on either side of his head, but he widened his stance, giving Angus a glimpse of where he wanted to be more than anywhere in the world.

"My winning personality?" Coal said, his voice a little muffled by being pressed to the desk.

"Right now, nope, not that." Angus pushed his fingers between the rounded globes to the heated hole waiting for him and only him. It wasn't modern, wasn't even remotely 'woke' but knowing he was the only person to have ever touched Coal this way? Yeah, that did things to him. Dangerous, possessive things.

Rather than dry skin, his fingers contacted slick wetness. His cock lurched.

"You already prepped for me?" He paused, considering the timeline. "You weren't just waiting for me to make a call out there, were you?" He brushed a finger across Coal's pucker, felt it flutter for him.

Not being able to stop himself, Angus pushed a finger in, up to the second joint.

“Ugh,” Coal grunted, went up on his toes, then immediately pushed back, trying to take in more.

Angus pulled his finger free; no, this wouldn't be that easy. He teased the rim, testing the tightness, the wetness.

“Did you have fun out there, playing with yourself, all alone?”

Coal looked back over his shoulder, smirked as if he were the devil himself. “No need to be sad, Boss, I was thinking of you the whole time.”

This brat was going to kill him. For someone who had called yellow on dirty talk, Coal certainly learned damn fast.

“So what were you thinking?”

“This, I was thinking about this.”

Angus curled his finger. Coal twitched. “Ah, fuck, that's.... fuck do it again.”

“Give me some details and I might.” Angus moved his finger in and out slowly, making sure to avoid Coal's prostate this time.

“I was thinking about your finger inside me, just like this.”

Angus came down over Coal, covering him with his body, whispering against his hair as his fingers invaded him below.

“Just one finger, little Coal, or were you imaging more?”

“More,” Coal blurted, pushed back against Angus's hand despite the weight pressing him down onto the desk.

“Come on, Coal, you know how much I like numbers. Tell me just how many of my fingers you want stretching your greedy hole.”

“Three, give me three, make it burn, make me stop thinking.”

Angus stood back up, needing to see. Coal’s hole felt snug around his single finger, and if his cock hadn’t already been inside this hole, he would have doubted he would fit. This time would be different. This time Coal wouldn’t experience any unwanted pain.

Crossing his fingers, he pressed another slowly inside, loving the needy groan tearing from Coal’s chest. He couldn’t rip his eyes away from where his fingers were being swallowed up and reappearing. Spreading his fingers, he stretched the tight rim of muscle, gradually persuading it to relax, accept.

But Coal had wanted three, so that was what his boy would get. Using his free hand to spread Coal further, Angus bunched his fingers together and carefully pushed in a third.

Coal’s hips jerked as he let out an unbelievably sexy ‘ah’.  
“That’s it, there, oh fuck, Angus, do it again.”

Angus leaned down, covering Coal’s flexing body again.  
“They’re all so wrong. How could anyone not want someone as fucking fantastic as you?”

# CHAPTER 20



COAL HEARD ANGUS SPEAKING, but fingers scraping that spot inside him had evaporated his ability to understand language.

Even the voice that had whispered what to say and do had finally vanished.

Coal sucked in a breath as Angus hit that spot again. He'd been trying to hold back, trying to last, but the last thing the voice had said, "*Be yourself; it's what he wants,*" shut off any other thoughts.

The fingers pulled out, then a hard cock lay along his ass crease, thrust against him, spread him further, promising, threatening, as Angus's hips smacked against him. It felt too big, like it would wreck him even more this time. Coal wanted it more than his next breath.

Angus pulled back, and the blunt head of his cock brushed over Coal's hole as gently as a soft kiss.

“Color?”

Coal loved the roughness of Angus’s voice. He, reject, dysfunctional Coal, was doing that.

“Green, double green with—”

“—with bells on, I remember.” The smile in Angus’s voice warmed him. Coal was making his Angus happy, and it felt better than any orgasm he’d ever had.

Angus’s weight shifted as he leaned forward and kissed him, delving into his mouth as if it was his right.

“I’ve got you now, but I think I knew I had to have you as soon as I saw you giving it to the shopkeeper,” Angus murmured against his lips.

“I thought you were a pompous suit.”

Coal heard and felt Angus’s snort of amusement.

“Ah, but I’m a good-looking pompous suit who knows exactly what you need, and right now, you need to shut up, stop thinking, and try to stay still for me.”

Coal couldn’t have moved even if Santa himself appeared. His cock throbbed, was probably dripping on the floor, and his ass felt as if it’d been robbed.

Even though Angus had asked him to stay still, he couldn’t stop his ass tilting up as Angus pressed the head of his cock to his hole. He felt so damn empty.

“Breathe out, don’t tense.” Coal didn’t know or care whether Angus or his magical stalker spoke. He still obeyed.



A palm rested on the base of his back, grounding him, perhaps stopping him from pulling away. That wouldn't happen even if it hurt as much as it had before. Coal wanted this, *needed* to make Angus happy.

Angus pushed in, one torturously slow inch at a time. Coal lost touch with everything around him, only that unstoppable slow slide, the stretch, as Angus made them one mattered.

When Coal thought he couldn't take anymore, Angus shoved Coal's shirt up, and bent down over him, skin touching skin from thighs to shoulders. Coal didn't care when Angus had lost his shirt, he just loved that he had.

Hands covered his, entwined their fingers. The mouth by his temple pressed a kiss against his hair.

"Nothing has ever felt this good. So hot, so tight. I could live in you for the rest of time." The hips against Coal's ass circled, as if craving movement but unwilling to put any distance between them. "You really are a fucking wish come true."

Coal pushed back, trying to get Angus even closer, although it was impossible.

"Tell me, tell me how you feel. I need to know this isn't just me." The desperation in Angus's voice dragged at Coal's lust-fogged mind. That didn't sound like someone happy.

Angus nuzzled the side of his head, nipped at his ear, then sighed. "Fuck, I'm sorry, always with the questions. Now I've completely fucked this—"

*“Tell him this scares you.”* When Coal hesitated, the voice barked, *“NOW, IDIOT.”*

Coal swallowed, then hesitantly repeated the words. His magical stalker hadn't steered him wrong so far.

The hands holding his squeezed reassurance. “What scares you?”

The voice began talking again, and Coal parroted what it said.

“It scares me because I want it so much, and if I get it, I could lose it, and that would be so much worse.”

Angus gathered Coal to his chest, arms around him, cradling him while still inside him. Angus pulled his hips back, sliding his cock out, leaving him.

Coal panicked. “I'm sorry, I didn't mean... I—”

Angus surged back in. “I'm yours, Coal, for as long as you'll have me, for as long as that wish lasts, for—” Angus carried on pumping, as he spoke, but Coal stopped listening as all his perceptions narrowed down to the delicious drag inside him and the hand wrapped around his cock.

*“Coal? Coal listen to me. Finish this sentence; Your wish is... Do it!”*

“My command,” he mumbled.

*“All of it, idiot.”* The voice sounded exasperated.

“What did you say?” Angus asked.

*“I'll stop this right fucking now unless you say it.”*

Coal blurted, “Your wish is my command.”

A snort of amusement came from above. “In that case, come for me.”

As if Angus’s words unlocked the floodgates, a climax the size of a tsunami crashed over Coal; he cried out with the force of it. At the moment it usually faded, Angus thrust into him even harder, the hand on his cock grabbed his balls, tugged hard. The revitalized orgasm kicked Coal into another plane of existence, and the world faded to black.



He felt himself being moved, a warm wet cloth wiping down his chest, then pushed between his legs.

He managed a frown, a “Geroff.”

Minutes, maybe hours later, he didn’t know or care, a heavy, brawny arm wrapped around his chest and dragged him back against a warm body.

Coal snuggled in. “Hmm, spoons is good. I’m gonna stay here forever.”

“You do that, Twinkletoes.”

Coal felt too damn relaxed to open his eyes.

“See? I told you he was fine. And if you break into my house again, I’m calling the police.”

“If you don’t answer me when I’m asking about a patient, I’ll call the damn police,” Spencer growled. “You can’t blame me for not believing that video.”

The arm around him squeezed a little tighter. “Yeah, I suppose so. He’s difficult to believe, all around. As leaving him alone probably isn’t *medically* advisable, can you pick us up some breakfast supplies? It seems my little Christmas fairy isn’t impressed with black sugarless coffee, wholemeal toast, and Marmite.”

“Ugh, I don’t blame him. I’ll leave something in the kitchen. And you owe me. Again.” The words were grumbled, but Spencer didn’t sound unhappy.

# CHAPTER 21



“COME ON, TIME TO pull your lazy carcass out of bed. You’ve slept for nearly fifteen hours. Seems like Wolverine healing does have an impact after all.”

Coal blurrily focused on the large figure standing over him beside the bed, not quite believing he was still here.

“Liar,” Coal mumbled, snuggling down and enjoying the peace. No singing. No perky ‘Good morning, what a *wonderful day’s*’ ringing out and putting his teeth on edge.

He drifted again. The curtain rings scraped on their pole. Sunlight streamed into the bedroom zeroing in on his eyes like a guided missile. Like any self-respecting quilt monster, Coal retreated under the duvet as fast as he could.

“I hate you,” he groaned.

The quilt ripped away. Coal glared at the horribly wide awake, suited, and clean-shaven Angus for the cruel and unusual punishment.

“Sadist.”

“Yep, and as you’re a masochist, you can stay right there while I run you an ice bath.”

Coal sat up but failed to catch the white bathrobe before it hit his face. He clawed it off.

“You wouldn’t dare.”

Angus grinned evilly. “Wanna bet?”

Grumbling about Angus needing a visit to Gambler’s Anonymous, Coal rolled out of bed and pulled on the robe.



“What’s the emergency, Mr. Perky? And that is not a compliment,” Coal mumbled as he shuffled into the kitchen after brushing his teeth.

“Not a morning person?” Angus asked brightly and set a mug of hot chocolate in front of him.

“Bollocks,” Coal replied with feeling.

“Maybe later if you’re lucky,” Angus shot back.

Coal took a sip of the hot chocolate. Sweet. Creamy. Delicious. He closed his eyes, basking.

“Not falling asleep again, are you? I find ice down the back works wonders for that.”

Coal opened one eye. “You are not a nice man.”

“Never claimed to be. And you wouldn’t be here if I was a pushover.”

Straightening up, Coal attempted to look down his nose at Angus. “I reserve the right not to reply on the grounds that it could be used against me.”

Angus’s lips twitched as he took a sip of his black coffee. “Or taken down as evidence?”

The wonderfully grumpy banter warmed Coal’s soul almost as much as the hot chocolate. It was genuine, heartfelt, not the false plastic perkiness of home.

“What’s with the suit on a Sunday?” Coal’s eyes narrowed. “You’re not a church-goer, are you? Because I like carols, but the sermons?” He shuddered.

“No, I’m not part of a church congregation, but I did enjoy carols at school. The suit is because I have to go into work, and this,” he waved a hand down himself, “Puts me in the right frame of mind. And as I can’t possibly survive without your magnificent presence, you’re coming with me. So eat up.” With a sour expression, Angus put a tartan packet of shortbread on the counter.

Coal had one in his mouth almost before Angus let go of it. He groaned as he bit into the sugary goodness.

“Ah, that’s so damn beautiful,” he mumbled, then remembered what Angus said. “What’s the problem?” Coal took another shortbread as Angus hadn’t reclaimed the packet.

“Remember the fire at the hotel where the Christmas party is booked tonight? I’ve got to go through the employee records and phone everyone to tell them it’s canceled.”

Coal became a hundred percent awake. He’d forgotten all about the party. He’d gotten so caught up in the moment, in Angus, that he’d almost forgotten that this couldn’t last, that he could be pulled away at any time.

“You ok? Cheer up; it’s only a party. We could have a nice cozy night here instea—”

“I said I’d sort it, and I will,” he said a little more forcefully. He wasn’t always a fuck up, and it was time other people knew it.

Angus blinked. “Coal, no one can organize a Christmas party for fifty in just over eight hours a couple of days before Christmas.”

Coal took another slurp of the quite magnificent hot chocolate while his mind whirled with what he needed to do. “I can do it, I promise. And I’m keeping my promises now, remember? I’m going to need to be left alone, though. No peeking in the garage after you’ve cleared out all those smelly cars.”

Angus frowned. Coal felt rejection and a return to the North Pole marching toward him. He almost wished that annoying voice would return to help him again.

“My cars are not smelly,” Angus said, looking down his nose. “The drivers get a cleaning bonus.”



Angus's eyes narrowed as Coal didn't resist the sugary pull and raised the mug to his lips again. Non-magical hot chocolate tasted better than the real thing.

"You're actually serious about this, aren't you?" He sighed. "Coal, as much as I appreciate your willingness to help, it's the Sunday before Christmas. All the caterers, furniture hire companies, and entertainers are booked up."

"It's not a problem." Coal shrugged, munching on his third shortbread. "Where did these come from anyway?"

"Spencer. He broke in to check on you last night."

"And he brought shortbread?"

"Ah, no, not at first. I sent him back out for it."

Coal looked him up and down. "I don't see any bruises, or were you the one doing the hitting again? Was that why he fetched shortbread for you? You went all alpha on your rival?" Coal waved the shortbread in the air, thoroughly enjoying the needling.

Angus shifted uncomfortably. "I didn't hit him, and he didn't hit me. As far as we're both concerned, you're his patient, not a prospective partner."

The end of the biscuit made it into Coal's mouth. "Well, that's a bit of a bash to my ego. I thought he'd be on the hunt again after that video. He is very pretty. Not to mention loaded."

Angus's scowl delighted Coal. "Pretty is overrated. So is more money than you can know what to do with."

Coal smirked at Angus's last growled comment. "Aw, are you jealous of the pretty rich man with the cage?" Angus's scowl deepened, so Coal let him off the hook. "You've got nothing to worry about. I never knee people I fancy."

Angus opened and shut his mouth. For a moment, Coal thought he'd gotten the upper hand, and he didn't like it.

"Another good reason to stay in your good books. But as much as I love this discussion about Spencer's bruised balls, we have to go into the office so I can let everyone know the party's off."

Coal grabbed a last shortbread and stood up. He needed to stop thinking, 'this is the last time I'll see, hear or touch this' every few minutes until Santa ripped him out of here.

"The party is certainly not off, but I need to get on it. It's a lot of work, even for a fairy."

Coal took three steps before Angus pulled him back against his chest. *Why do I have to leave? Why can't I simply stay here?* They didn't want him at the North Pole, had never wanted him. But Angus wanted him, *needed* him, or he'd spiral back to the depressed, stick up his ass he'd been before.

Taking a deep breath, Coal pushed the welling grief down. He couldn't think about leaving because if he did, he'd break down and ruin the time they had left. At least Angus now had Spencer as a friend to help him when Coal vanished from his life.

A kiss pressed against his temple caused his eyes to sting. *Don't cry. Damn it, don't you cry, Coal Chestnut. You'll spoil everything. Happy, he needs to be—*

“I really appreciate that you want to help—” Angus’s voice pulled Coal away from his hovering tears “—but don’t you think our time would be better spent picking up your stuff from the campervan so you can move in?”

Coal froze. There wasn’t anything in the van to show he’d lived there. No clothes, no food, no possessions. He could produce Christmas-themed items without effort, but non-festive essential living items would take extra magic, and he was all out.

“What?” he blurted.

Angus plucked the sweet treat out of his hand. “You really need to start eating better. This stuff will clog your arteries and turn you into a blimp. And I said, we need to get your stuff so you can move in. I said I’d look after you, and that’s going to be a little tricky if we live in different places. Your campervan can stay in the garage; there isn’t enough room here.”

Coal’s mind whirled, trying to come up with anything to prevent Angus from locking up the van. Leaving a note, something about going home to his family, and vanishing along with the van, had been his vague plan to extricate himself without Angus reporting him as a missing person. He knew he couldn’t stay with Angus, but maybe they’d let him keep the campervan. He pictured himself, down through the years, sitting in the campervan and watching Angus live out

his life via a snowglobe. Hopefully, happy with a partner. Santa might even dampen or remove Angus's memories of him.

*Maybe mine too.* The thought of not remembering this hurt far more than any of his injuries.

"You don't want to move in with me?" The stiff formality in Angus's voice shouted loud and clear that his happiness was already galloping for the hills.

"Can we talk about this after the party?"

Angus frowned. "Will you stop going on about that? It's not happening because it's impossible. Full stop."

At least Angus was focused back on the party rather than Coal moving in.

"I tell you what, you show me your garage, move the cars out while I make some calls, then you can bugger off and hide in your office. Call all your guests; how many are there?"

"Fifty-three, fifty-four with Spencer if he turns up, but—"  
Coal held up his hand.

"And tell them about the change of venue. If I can't pull it off, I'll put myself at your disposal for as long as you'll have me."

"Done," Angus shot back as if he feared Coal would take the offer back.



Half an hour later, they were pulling away from Angus's home. Not looking, not trying to capture the sight in his mind, knowing he'd never see it again, took effort.

His time with Angus was over, and he had to accept it. All Adult Department fairies had probably been through this many times. *They survived, so will I.*

Coal wore his uniform again—Angus had washed it—but it still didn't get his head in the right space for work.

*This is just another job, no more and no less important than any other festive task.* No matter how often Coal said it, his gaze still clung to every house, shop, and figure on this gray, damp Sunday morning, trying to commit everything to memory.

“You ok?”

“Yeah, why?” Coal couldn't bring himself to look at Angus.

“You're very quiet. Not like you at all.”

Coal couldn't help a snort. “You think you know me?”

A heavy hand landed on his thigh. “I may not know about every aspect of your life, but I can tell you're feeling defensive, vulnerable. I want to help, regardless of if we carry on sleeping together, but I have to admit, that's pretty damn

fantastic too. Plenty of Dom/sub relationships aren't sexual. I have a spare room. You can move in there and pay rent if you want, but it's not a condition. I just want you to be safe."

Angus squeezed his thigh, and a traitorous tear broke free. Coal swiped at it.

"OK, let's play the moving-in thing by ear. We can take each day as it comes, no pressure. But are you sure you don't want to swerve via your van to grab some clean clothes?"

"Are you saying I stink, or do you just not like my outfit?" Coal sounded brattish even to his own ears.

"Calm down, brat. You smell great, like hot chocolate and shortbread. Plus, I love your outfit; it's sexy as hell.

"And I trust you. I just don't trust the people you're going to need to have coming and going today if you're going to pull this off," Angus told him as they parked up around the back of the PrideRide building.

Like always, even if he didn't know what bothered Coal, this wonderful man had managed to cheer him up. Angus deserved every bit of happiness Coal could provide, no matter how long he had to do it. The future could go stuff itself.

They got out, and Coal leaned on the top of the car.

Pouting, he fluttered his eyelashes at Angus. "Aw, I promise I won't have anyone coming today apart from you."

"Mouthy brat," Angus said with affection as he moved around the car. "I'm glad you're feeling better, although I have no idea what upset you. We can talk about it later at home." He

patted Coal's backside as he walked past, heading toward the main door.

As soon as they got inside, Coal spoke up, needing to keep this on a business footing. Angus wasn't the only professional here. "Point me in the direction of this garage of yours before you bugger off."

Angus opened the door to the right of the gray-tiled foyer and announced, "Welcome to my kingdom."

Coal stepped into the chilly garage area, and his heart fell. It contained at least a dozen cars of various sizes; all were black but had discreet rainbow 'PrideRide' logos on the doors. It stank of motor oil and car polish. The walls were bare blue/grey concrete blocks, and three red rolling toolboxes stood at one end.

"You'd have to be able to perform miracles to turn this place into a party venue by eight tonight. Come upstairs, and you can rifle Sam's cupboard for some more hot chocolate while I make those calls."

Angus stayed by the door, arms folded, as Coal stepped inside, already working out where the tables, dance area, and stage would go.

"Can you move all these cars out before you disappear?"

Angus unfolded his arms and pushed his glasses up his nose. "You're really going to try it?"

Coal lifted his chin and stood up to his full height. "I don't try anything, Mr. Fricker. I do. You should have worked that out

by now. If you won't do it, point me in the direction of the keys, and I'll get started, but it'll be quicker if I start calling my contacts while you drive. Besides, reverse gear is a mystery I never mastered."

"How did you pass your test then?"

Coal gave him the brightest grin he could manage. "I haven't. My license is fake. That's why I said I had loads of points so you wouldn't try to check it." Warming to his tale, Coal added, "The camper's not insured or taxed either. That's why I left it in the pub car park; it's private land."

Shaking his head at Coal's multiple crimes, Angus walked to the shutters along the back of the garage and pushed them open. It took him half an hour to move all the cars and limos outside. Raindrops darkened the shoulders of his suit a little more each time. Whenever he got out of a car, he tucked his glasses in his top pocket to stop them from getting wet, then put them back on when he entered the garage. Such a mundane, human thing. Coal couldn't tear his gaze away.

The last vehicle left the garage, and Angus broke the spell by closing and locking the shutters again. He strode across the concrete floor toward Coal but stopped a step away.

Moving his phone away from his ear, Coal hoped he'd been doing an adequate impression of hiring people and equipment. In truth, he'd been living in the moment, enjoying watching Angus, committing him to memory.

"I take it from that smile that things are going according to your secret master plan?" Angus gave his glasses a polish and



put them back on.

Coal grinned and wondered why Angus couldn't see through the falseness like he had so much else. "Yep, that's definitely what I'm smiling about, rather than watching your tight backside get in and out of all those cars." He made a kissy face while doing a double, palm-up grabby hands action. "Peachy."

Angus's lips twitched. "You sure you don't want to come up to my nice, quiet, private office for the afternoon? I'm positive I can think of something to keep you occupied."

Coal craved what Angus offered, mindless pleasure, hopefully distracting pain, and a break from the crippling weight bearing down on his shoulders.

But he was a Christmas Fairy with a Christmas party to save. Plus, he needed to keep his access to the human realm if he was ever going to sneak back and check on Angus in stalker mode. That meant impressing Santa with his work ethic.

"As much as I'd like to, and good God do I want to, I've got a little work to do first. See? I'm learning responsibility from you already." He gave Angus a bright smile he didn't feel.

"I think I prefer you irresponsible, but if you must play around down here, getting cold and lonely, so be it."

Coal couldn't stop himself from wrapping his arms around Angus, maybe for the last time. It felt so damn good as Angus's arms closed around him, cocooning him from the world. But it couldn't, wouldn't last and this was just

prolonging the torture. Before he teared up again, Coal pulled back and pecked Angus on the cheek.

“And I’ll miss you too.” He’d never spoken a truer word, but he couldn’t spoil this by cracking. Angus would want to help, and he couldn’t. Dragging up a smile, Coal added, “Now bugger off, and let a fairy do his thing.”

“Ok, ok, but I was kinda hoping you were going to do my thing.” Angus wiggled his eyebrows up and down.

The lightness, the banter, were precisely what Coal had been aiming for with Sam’s wish. It’d been granted, and now it was over. But Angus didn’t need to know that, not yet.

Coal pressed his lips together, shook his head, and stopped himself—somehow—from throwing himself into Angus’s arms. Instead, he sighed and tried to project disappointment. “So young and yet so crude. I’ll have to work on that after the party.”

It seemed as if that was all the banter Coal would have to endure as Angus turned to the door to the foyer.

“I’m going to set the building alarm back up. If you want to use an outside door, give me a shout, and I’ll activate it for you.”

“You don’t trust me not to do a runner?”

“Correct. And if I see any marks on you that I didn’t cause, I will be getting that straitjacket out, and you will be wearing it.”

Coal couldn't imagine anything he wanted more. Instead, he dragged up a grin and slapped Angus's arm. "You really are a kinky bugger, aren't you?"

"You have no idea." The twinkle in Angus's eye almost had Coal confessing how much he wanted to stay, how he couldn't, and that his leaving wouldn't be Angus's fault.

Instead, he performed an elegant bow. "I'm looking forward to finding out, Boss. Now off you go until seven forty-five, and no peeking with the security cameras. I mean it."

Shaking his head in bemusement, Angus left him to it.

As soon as Coal heard Angus jogging up the stairs to the offices on the first floor, he sagged against the wall.

"Come on, Chestnut, get on with it," Coal told himself, but willing his personal snowglobe into his hand was the hardest thing he'd ever done.

To put off the moment a little longer, he focused on Angus. It wasn't that Coal didn't trust him, but having Angus walk in while Coal was turning this empty space into his own version of festive heaven, would be damn difficult to explain.

The swirling mist and snowflakes in the globe cleared to reveal that Angus was, as promised, going to his office. Coal bet he'd never meet a more honest, kinder, better person if he lived as long as Gingersnap. And Coal was going to hurt him. He turned, intending to punch the wall, to blanket his emotions with physical pain, but he didn't.

Because Angus had told him not to.

Why, by all that was festive, hadn't Sam wished for Angus to have a 'Happy Ever After' rather than merely 'be happy' without a qualifying time period?

With a sigh, Coal concentrated and started the festive magic flowing. This would be a tricky, detail-focused job. He knew he'd need help to staff the party, but the longer he could avoid calling home, the better. Without anyone else here, he could pretend this wasn't the end.



Just before seven, Coal changed into a silky, deep red tuxedo and, with another thought, created another in black, perfectly tailored to Angus's dimensions. He laid it carefully over the back of a red velvet-covered chair. It matched all the others around the eight large sumptuously decorated tables.

Every table had a red and gold tablecloth, gold crackers, a festive red, gold, and a green central flower arrangement. A long table on the right side of the garage waited for food. A small bar, which looked like a tiny log cabin, with snow on the roof, sat at the end of the food table. His magic stretched to decorations, but food and drink were beyond his abilities.

As for entertainment, if the other fairies let him and his voice held out, he intended to sing some gentle background numbers during dinner. There was also a playlist in case he got too

choked up to sing or if he persuaded Angus to join him on the dance floor.

The dingy garage's transformation had been finished with at least a ton of festive decorations. The focus was a twelve-foot-high, real Christmas tree. It wouldn't have stood up under the weight of the red and gold decorations that smothered it without a little, make that a lot, of magical help. White fairy lights twinkled through the foliage and hung in a criss-cross pattern from the ceiling. All in all, Coal decided he'd done a damn good job, and he'd thoroughly enjoyed every distracting minute.

There was only one more task to do, one he'd been putting off all afternoon. The one that would end his time with Angus.

Taking a breath and blinking prickling eyes, he summoned his snowglobe again. He knew he should call Santa first, but his mind settled on the easier choice of Garland. He was about to make the call when a sense of powerful magic being used, like tiny hailstones hitting his spine, came from behind him. *Not Garland.*

Taking a steadying breath, Coal plastered on a smile and turned to face the music.

A small, familiar log cabin, covered in snow, sat next to the shuttered door of the garage. The rosy glow of a real fire showed at the tiny window. Both the winding, white stone path connecting the rustic building to the bar area and the surrounding small forest of three-foot-high pine trees were

nice touches. Gingersnap enjoyed showing off, but she'd had hundreds of years to perfect her skills.

The food table he'd created creaked as a feast appeared in a wave along it, and bottles of red and white wine popped into existence on every dining table. Bottles clicked and beer gurgled as the bar magically stocked itself.

The cabin door opened, and the wicked witch herself, followed by Tinsel and Twinkle, walked out. Garland gave him a wink from behind the bar. Gingersnap started issuing orders to the two other fairies about fixing Coal's 'sloppy' preparations. Tinsel rolled her eyes, but she did the older fairy's bidding.

The girls wore their standard uniforms, but Garland wore black with a red vest and a matching bow tie. The formality looked odd with his messy blond surfer hair.

Hastily shutting his mouth, Coal straightened his jacket, took a steadying breath, and hurried toward the cabin, knowing his creator waited for him inside.

## CHAPTER 22



“FUCKING HELL,” ANGUS EXCLAIMED as he stood in the doorway of his garage, which earned him a severe glare from Gingersnap and a chuckle from Garland who was pouring whiskey into a glass.

The shaggy-haired blond-fairy lifted the glass and tilted it toward Angus. “Here you go, mate. You look like you need one.”

Angus wandered over in a daze, took the glass, downed it in one, then slammed it back on the wooden counter. Garland murmured, “Good choice,” and refilled it.

Changing direction, Coal kept his gaze on the floor as he walked over to Angus. It was time to face the music. Santa would have to wait. Hopefully, his creator would understand, but even if he didn’t, Angus was the important one right now. The poor sod looked as if he’d seen a ghost. Seeing Angus

unsure of himself did nasty things to Coal's chest, especially as he was the cause.

Angus's gaze never wavered from him as Coal walked over. Stopped a foot away, he slowly looked up. "I know I have some explaining to do, but first, do you like it?"

Angus stared, jaw hanging open.

"I'd shut your mouth if I were you," Garland said, thoroughly amused. "The goldfish look doesn't win you any prizes. Although I think you deserve one because I've been here for nearly ten minutes, and Coal hasn't given the finger to anyone." Garland did jazz hands. "It's a Christmas miracle."

Coal shot Garland a glare and gave him the finger.

Garland smirked. "And there's the Coal we know and love."

Angus's mouth snapped shut, and he pointed at Coal. "You know him?" Shaking his head, Angus blew out a breath and mumbled, "Of course you do."

"I've known Coal for all of his very long life." Garland smirked. At times, Garland could be a bit of a tease, but tonight, he seemed to be going for all-out asshole.

"Brother?" Angus shot back, still ignoring Coal.

Garland shrugged. "Sort off. Our family is... complicated. But he'll always be the runt of the litter."

Coal glared at his colleague. "Shut up, Garland, and pour me a sherry."



Angus glanced between the two fairies. “Your folks really had a thing for Christmas names, huh?”

Garland grinned. “Clan tradition. The sour-looking redhead is Gingersnap. The one with the jiggle in her walk is Tinsel. And Twinkle is hiding under the table, pretending to clear up. I can’t work out why, but she seems intent on avoiding me tonight. And I even wore my best vest.” Garland brushed at the scarlet fabric. Although red, nothing about Garland’s outfit screamed festive. This was a Christmas party, and being a damn fairy, Garland should have made more effort. He didn’t even have a Santa hat or a flashing tie.

Angus took Coal’s hand, distracting him from telling the far older fairy his fortune. Yes, Garland had seniority, but this was Coal’s show, likely his only show.

Garland stuck his ass out, leaned his elbow on the counter, and put his chin on his fist. “Aw, so sweet, but you’d better hurry up and get the slushy bit over with before your guests arrive, or you’ll put everyone off Gingersnap’s cooking.”

Coal gritted his teeth. “So help me, Garland, if you don’t shut —“

“I agree,” Angus said, his gaze not leaving Coal’s face. “Go polish a glass or leave. We have at least half an hour before anyone turns up.”

“So sensitive,” Garland drawled. “Don’t say I can’t take instruction.”

Coal twitched as a glass and cloth appeared in Garland's hands. He began polishing. Coal's glare only produced a raised eyebrow. At least Angus hadn't seen it.

"Coal, I don't often say this, so pay attention," Angus said, then took a breath as if he was about to admit something painful. "I apologize for thinking you were crazy for saying you could do this, but you should have told me your family runs an events company.

"I thought I'd be getting deck chairs, sausage rolls, and an mp3 hooked up to some tinny speakers. I'll pay the going rate; this is spectacular. And I have no idea how you did it in the time, particularly as you haven't opened a single external door. How did you disable the security system?"

Crap, he'd forgotten about that, but Garland came to his rescue.

"That'd be me. I haven't always been a barman." Blond eyebrows waggled.

Garland pushed a glass that looked like cranberry juice toward Coal. "Have a little juice, you're looking tired, and you might need it."

"That better not have any alcohol in it," Angus warned.

With a straight face, Garland said, "It's a fairy energy drink. No alcohol, but it's guaranteed to give non-fairies cavities after a single mouthful. Wanna poison taste it for him?" Garland proffered the glass to Angus, but Coal took it out of the other fairy's hand and downed it.

Yes, it was incredibly sweet, but there was something else... Warmth spread through Coal's chest, down his limbs until his fingertips and toes tingled. He felt... energized like he had after Angus experienced true happiness for the first time after Sam made her wish.

Garland's lips curved in a smirk. "Good, right? It's the best pick me up I know."

"And that's the only one he's having," Angus said firmly. "He already has more nervous energy than he can handle without even more of a sugar rush. Now, how much do I owe for all this?" Angus pulled his wallet out of his back pocket.

"No need. It's on the house," Garland drawled, then cocked his head. "But you'd better hurry up; your first guests are arriving."

"Crap, where did the time go? I'm not even changed yet."

Coal glanced up at the wall clock. They'd lost forty minutes, and from Garland's grin, Coal had a good idea who had tampered with time.

"I never thought you'd pull it off," Angus said, nodding to himself as he tried to plan himself out of an impossible situation. "I'll let them in, and you keep them occupied while I nip home and change."

"Is that your tux over there?" Garland nodded toward the suit Coal had left over the back of the chair.

Coal glared at his fellow fairy. "Yes, it's for him, now, if you don't mind?"

A gleam appeared in the blond fairy's eye. Adrenaline shot through Coal. Angus wasn't a toy Garland could play with just because Santa would have to alter his memories anyway.

"Garland, don't you bloody well dare," he started, but the fairy grinned and clicked his fingers.

Angus looked damn good in a tuxedo with the tie, a red tie that matched Coal's suit, casually undone. The extra touch looked good, but as Coal hadn't thought of it, he wanted to hate it.

Garland had been right about something else too; the flabbergasted, mouth-open expression didn't do Angus any favors.

"You shouldn't have done that," Coal growled at Garland as he grabbed Angus's arm and steered him toward the door that led into the foyer.

"What are you going to do, revoke my marshmallow privileges?" Garland called after them.

Since Angus had come through it a few minutes ago, Garland—it had to be him—had turned the foyer into a winter wonderland grotto of green foliage and twinkling lights. The crunching snow underfoot had Coal crossing his fingers that no one decided to touch it. Explaining how it stayed frozen in this heated building would be tricky. Hell, explaining all of this would be damn impossible.

Angus let himself be led for five steps before he pulled his arm out of Coal's.

"What. The fuck. Is going on?"

As much as Coal had wondered what Angus would look like out of his comfort zone, in reality, he hated it. Ever since they'd met, he'd depended on Angus to be decisive and in control of every situation. It had been comforting, but the now boot was on the other foot, and Coal held all the cards. He could lie—probably should—but Angus's honesty rules itched as much as the magical boost from Garland's magic-spiked drink.

“You know I said I was a Christmas fairy?”

Angus tensed. “Don't you dare start that crap again,” he growled. “All those people got into my building without my knowledge because your brother, cousin, whatever, can circumvent a security system I paid a shit load for. There must have been a whole crew out here to put this lot—“ he waved at the decorations around him ”—up in five minutes, and I never heard a thing. They didn't come past us in the garage, so they used the foyer door, which still shows as locked on the system.” He plucked at his jacket, voice rising. “And how the hell did I get into this damn penguin suit? I don't even own a bloody tux.”

Sam knocking on the outside door, a wide smile on her face, distracted Angus.

The excess magical energy, Garland's pranks, and Angus's mule-like stubbornness exploded Coal's patience. “All this, right before your eyes, and you still don't believe me? I really am a Christmas fairy.” He flung an arm toward the door to the garage. “So are the people in there. See?”

Coal pointed at Sam. Angus's gaze followed his finger.

"And?" Angus asked, exasperation showing in every tense muscle.

Coal waited while he worked it out. Sam's smile had frozen. Natalie had her hand raised in a wave. Neither moved.

Angus stared just as frozen as his secretary, but Coal hadn't spelled him. He smoothed his hands over the front of Angus's suit, knowing he'd gone too far. Angus having a breakdown certainly hadn't been his intention.

"I stopped time for them. Well, technically, I didn't. I just slowed it down. A lot."

Angus leaned back against the foliage, dislodging a few flakes of snow that drifted down and settled on Angus's shoulder like dandruff.

Angus pushed his fingers through his hair. "I think I'd better reserve a padded cell right next to yours, brat, because I've completely lost it."

Coal stepped into his embrace and stood on his tiptoes to peck Angus on the nose.

"How do you fancy enjoying the madness with me, just for tonight?"

"And come midnight, 'poof' we both turn into pumpkins?" Angus's eyes were a bit wild, but at least he wasn't rocking in the fetal position or having screaming hysterics. Coal kept his fingers firmly crossed and tried to lighten the mood.

“Purleese, what do you think I am, a Fairy Godmother? My work is permanent unless I say otherwise. Do you fancy keeping the foyer looking like the North Pole all year round?”

“Erm, no, but can you unfreeze Sam now? She looks like she’s wearing a Halloween mask.”

Now it was Coal’s turn to blink in surprise. “You’re all right with this whole fairy thing?”

Angus shook his head. “Not in a million fucking years. I’ve just decided insanity is far more fun than doctors let on. Sam warned me that I was working too hard, and this is clearly the result. I’m probably sitting in a gutter somewhere talking to a postbox. And given the outfit,” he waved at Coal’s red suit, “You have to admit it’s a possibility.”

“Hey,” Coal slapped at his arm. “I thought you like red?”

“I do. I like you too. And until they come to take me away, I’m going to enjoy the crazy. Feel free to ‘poof’ as much as you want.”

Angus grinned, gave Coal a searing kiss that left him breathless, then began pulling him toward the door before he’d worked out which way was up.

He stopped abruptly and turned back to Coal. “Will everyone be able to see all this? Because if I start going on about decorations they can’t see, they’ll be calling the men in white coats for both of us.” He frowned, then added, “If you even exist.”

“Oh, I’m real all right, but don’t worry about anything. This is a mass hallucination. Trust me,” Coal patted Angus’s butt as he put time back the way it should be.

Sam enveloped Coal in a hug as soon as she got through the door.

“Thank you so much. I haven’t seen him so happy in years. Mind you, this set up must have cost him a fortune. The company is doing well, but I don’t think it’s doing this well.”

“Hey, Angus, who did you kidnap to pay for this lot?” A stocky young man in a suit with a bearded brunet in a dress on his arm called out as they moved past Sam and Coal.

“A Christmas fairy; it seems Father Christmas really wants him back,” Angus called back, with a huge, somewhat deranged grin.

Angus’s light-hearted words punched Coal’s gut. After tonight, he’d likely be on reindeer duty for life, but that was tomorrow. If these were going to be his last few hours with Angus and Sam, Coal vowed this would be the best damn Christmas party either of them ever experienced.

Giving Sam a bright smile he didn’t feel, Coal addressed her financial concerns.

“Don’t worry about it. I have a few connections and got a good deal. Go enjoy yourselves, and I promise he’ll be staying for more than one drink this year. In fact, he’s already had two.”



Sam stood back and looked Coal over carefully. “You might just succeed, but I’ll eat my hat if you get him to dance.”

Coal grinned. Taking Sam’s arm, he led her into the redecorated garage. “It’s a bloody good job the hats in the crackers are made out of rice paper then, isn’t it? I’d better go; I’ve got a little singing to do.”

With a moment’s concentration, Coal changed all the hats in the crackers to edible rice paper. He left Sam, along with her colleagues and their partners, gaping at their transformed workplace and stepped up on the tiny, raised platform beside the dance floor.

The first number on his mental list was Santa Claus is Coming to Town, and he gave it his all, winking at Angus when he sang the ‘naughty or nice’ lyric.

An hour later, Angus approached him between songs with a wicked smile.

“Everyone’s here; time to eat. Once we’ve got that over with, I’ve got something in my office I’d like you to see.”

Coal raised his eyebrows, lips twitching. “And what would that be? You’re still on the nice list right now. Be careful you don’t get demoted or you won’t get any presents on the big day.”

“I’ve already got my present. You’re right here, so Father Christmas can stuff being good right up his chimney.” How Coal didn’t burst out laughing he didn’t know. But

Gingersnap's narrow-eyed gaze as she strode past sobered him up faster than a snowball down the back.

Eyes darkening with lust, Angus dipped to whisper in his ear. "You're so bloody sexy when you sing, but please don't do Santa Baby, or I'll be taking you around the back of Santa's grotto."

Angus took the microphone and tapped it, making the speakers squeal. Everyone turned to them.

"I'd like to thank everyone for coming, and I hope you all appreciate the miracle my leading man has pulled off to get all this sorted at such short notice." He started to clap, and the room joined in.

The bright smiling faces, which even included Gingersnap's, who, along with Tinsel and Twinkle, was taking the covers off the food, made Coal's heart soar.

He'd been looked down on for his entire life. Now there was genuine affection in the room, even if it was merely a reflection of their feelings for Angus.

"Kiss him, you fool!" a voice shouted from near the bar. Coal barely had a chance to see a smirking Spencer raising a glass in their direction before he was dipped backward over Angus's arm.

The room faded from his perceptions, and his world consisted of Angus. The feel of being cradled, the scent of musky aftershave, and his twinkling eyes just above his made Coal dizzy with happiness.

“Ready?” Angus whispered.

“Always have been, always will be,” Coal said, then his lips were on his.

“Oi, enough of that, Casanova,” an older female voice called out. “You’re giving the wife ideas I can’t live up to.”

A ripple of laughter flowed around the room, and Angus gently put Coal back on his feet.

“Food time,” Angus announced as his arm went around Coal’s waist and guided him to a table where Sam, Natalie—who had called out—and Spencer were already seated. Coal’s colleagues were busy offering food and drink to the other tables, but they clearly thought Coal would handle this one as no fairy came near.

All the girl fairies kept glancing over at Spencer, probably wondering about his resemblance to their colleague, Winter.

Angus pulled out Coal’s chair, which made him feel all warm inside, before pouring him a glass of orange juice.

“I wanted wine.”

“Doctors orders, sorry Twinkletoes.”

Coal glared at Spencer, who sat on the other side of the table, looking gorgeous in a tailored dark grey suit. “I don’t like you anymore,” Coal stated, but noted that although people watched the white-haired man everywhere he went, Spencer always seemed isolated, alone.

“And I should care why?” Spencer smirked as he raised his glass of red wine and took a sip.

“Wait there, I’ll get you something to eat,” Angus said, distracting Coal from the snark he was about to launch at Spencer.

“No, it’s fine. I’ll get ours. You chat to your guests,” Coal piped up and levered himself out of the chair with his palms on the table.

Angus’s warm breath at his ear stopped Coal in his tracks. “You may be a fairy, but I’m still in charge here. You’ll eat and drink what you’re given, and you’ll smile while you do, even if you hate it. Got it?”

A shiver ran up Coal’s spine. “Yes, Boss,” fell from his lips without thought.

Angus’s answering smile would hopefully be worth eating whatever ended up on his plate. Although Coal had his fingers crossed that Gingersnap hadn’t included anything too revoltingly healthy. This was a party, after all.

Five minutes later, the plate put before him contained all savory items, from Scotch egg and pork pie to cold meat, cheese and—to Coal’s horror—salad. Things that green were only fit to be decorations unless you counted Rudolph as family. Angus hadn’t included a single dessert item. If Coal had chosen for himself, his plate would have been filled with sweet things, from profiteroles to Christmas cake. With cream. Lots and lots of cream.

Angus leaned in so he could whisper in his ear. “If you eat all of it, you can have dessert.”

With a supreme effort, Coal managed to keep his mouth shut instead of telling Angus where he could stick his sausage roll. With every passing minute, Coal had more sympathy for Spencer; being nice wasn't easy.

Halfway through the meal, Garland walked up to the microphone, and as usual, Coal noticed many eyes glued to his butt. Coal would have been staring and lusting just as much last week.

Even though Garland and Spencer were better looking than Angus, Coal hadn't felt a thing when he looked at either one tonight except irritation and pity for Spencer.

The Adult Department fitted Garland down to the ground, but Coal couldn't contemplate it being his long-term future, even if he didn't get demoted to reindeer duty. The last few days had been the best of his life, but he couldn't imagine flitting from one intimate relationship to the next as Garland and the others did. He'd compare everyone to Angus, and none could match him. That wouldn't be fair to the other wishers.

His hand went to his wrist but didn't find a cuff. A little, make that a lot, of pain would be damn helpful right now.

“You ok, brat? You disappeared for a moment.”

Angus's hand on his, the use of the familiar endearment, and the concerned tone didn't make it any easier. Those emotions meant Angus would be even unhappier when Coal disappeared

from his life forever in a few hours. It sucked so damn much, but if this was all the time they had, Coal vowed he wouldn't waste a second of it moping.

"I'm fine, but I don't think Garland's finished strutting his stuff yet." He nodded toward the man at the microphone.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the big man himself, Father Christmas, will be in his grotto, available to grant Christmas Wishes, one per person, for the rest of the evening. Choose wisely folks; the devil's in the detail. This is a one-time opportunity and absolutely anything goes."

He winked at the crowd, then sauntered back to the bar, where two guys and a woman were already vying for his attention.

"You sure you're all right?" Angus whispered as his guests joked about what they would wish for.

Coal shook his head. Christmas wishes for a whole room of people was huge, and none of the humans had a clue how pedantic Santa could be. Unless the wisher was a child or extra nice, Adult Department fairies were instructed to stick to the letter of a wish. Coal had no reason to believe Santa would be any different when granting wishes in person.

Someone could wish to win the lottery and get a tenner because it was classed as a win. They could get their wished-for promotion and be unable to do the job or get a new house but be unable to afford the bills.

He looked around the table. "Promise me—" the urgency in his words had all eyes turning to him "—you'll all run your

wishes by me before you talk to Father Christmas. I mean it.”

Several shrugs and nods later, he turned back to Angus. Holding his hand tightly, Coal tried to impress on him that he needed to take this seriously even if the others didn't.

“I know you don't think this is real and that you're dreaming or something, but he really can make things happen. Sam's wish that you be happy brought me to you. Everyone here could make a wish that will change their life and yours.”

Angus brushed a strand of Coal's hair away from his face. “This is really important to you, isn't it?”

Nodding, he looked down. Angus's finger under his chin raised his gaze back to his.

“What are you going to wish for Coal? What is it that you want most in the world?”

Coal dredged a smile up from his shoes. “Come on, let's dance.”

A smile hovered on Angus's lips. “First, the rules are that you answer me honestly when I ask you a question, and second, I don't dance. Ever.”

“Why?”

A frown graced Angus's features, then he leaned in so his lips were next to Coal's ear. He shivered in anticipation.

“Do you want to be spanked for disobeying? Because if I do that, it might make Spencer's wish come true.”

Pulling back slightly, Angus's green eyes bored into Coal's as he waited for an answer, his serious face firmly in place.

Coal shifted in his seat, willing his cock back to sleep. He was meant to be the magical being, but Angus had him all hot and bothered with one short sentence. Again.

“Answer me, brat.”

“Erm, yes?”

A smile tickled Angus's lips. “Well, you'll find out that it's not only Father Christmas who can grant wishes a little later.”

“I'm very glad to hear it, Boss, but I do still want to dance.”

“Sorry, no deal. I've got two left feet, but you still haven't told me what your wish would be.”

Coal sighed, knowing he was about to break Angus's heart.

“I'm a fairy. Christmas wishes only work for humans.”

“In that case, what would your wish be if you were human? And remember, you have to be honest.”

It was a pointless exercise, but it might help Angus in the following lonely days and weeks.

“If I had a choice—and I really don't—I'd wish to stay with you for as long as you wanted me. Happy looks good on you.”

He grabbed Angus's hand and stood up, trying to distract himself from his burning eyes. This wasn't going according to plan at all. He was meant to be making Angus happy, not bawling his eyes out with self-pity. Angus stayed firmly in his seat.



“I said no dancing, and I want to know why you think you can’t stay with me.” The serious face was back with a vengeance, so Coal bent down and gave him a tender kiss.

“We don’t always get what we want in life, my love—“ Coal said against his lips ”—but as long as you’re touching me, you’ll be the best dancer in the room. Besides, I want to see Sam eat her hat. She promised she would if you danced, and I’m only here because of her.”

Angus’s eyebrows rose a fraction, then he glanced over at Sam, who was trying to hide being glued to their conversation.

To Coal’s joy, Angus stood up. “I hope you’ve got room for dessert, Sam,” he announced. “I hear hats taste better with cream.”

Extending his arm for Coal to hold, he strode toward the empty dance floor.

“I bloody well hope you know what you’re doing because this is about to become a major train wreck. At least Spencer is here to fix your broken toes.”

They got to the middle of the dance floor, and the hubbub in the room faded until they could hear a pin drop.

Coal stood on his tiptoes and pecked Angus’s lips. “Do you want to knock their socks off with some ballroom or strut your stuff?”

Angus’s eyes were a little wide, but he managed his nerves admirably.

“As I am never, ever, going to do this again, let’s go for it, ballroom, the works. But you lead because it’ll be less painful if you fall on me rather than the other way around.”

Coal grinned at him. “No one’s going to fall, and I predict a standing ovation when we’re done. One hand on my waist, hold the other, not too close, and just relax. I’ll do the rest.”

The beautiful melody of Karen Carpenter’s version of the Christmas Waltz swelled into life, and as one, Coal and Angus moved.

Even though everyone in the building watched them, Coal didn’t care. With magic directing their movements, he could simply enjoy being in Angus’s arms as they whirled around the dance floor.

As the music died, which was far too quickly for Coal, Angus leaned down and whispered, “I love you, brat,” before turning Coal back to face the watching crowd.

Angus bowed. Still shocked by his words, Coal numbly followed his lead and bowed too.

“And that’s all you horrible lot are getting. Ever.” Angus’s friends and colleagues stood and broke into rapturous applause. Many invaded the dance floor, and they were soon surrounded. Angus fielded a dozen questions about how he’d managed to hide his talents for all these years.

Coal moved away unnoticed and watched as Angus went back to his world, a world that didn’t include Coal, not now, not ever.

“Penny for your thoughts?”

Garland stood a few feet away, holding a drink that looked like cranberry and vodka on ice.

“Haven’t you got a list of Christmas wishes you should be fulfilling?” Coal’s voice hitched, and he almost snatched the drink from Garland’s hand before downing it in one. It was a damn shame he didn’t have the cuffs anymore.

“If you get drunk, your big ginger puppy will get all growly again.”

Coal smiled sarcastically and gave Garland a lackluster finger. “Like that’s going to matter soon.” Without the prospect of pain as a distraction, being bitchy was far easier to deal with than sappy, stupid, and pointless emotions.

“More?” Garland asked, utterly unfazed by his behavior.

A quick glance showed Angus with the group surrounding Sam as she grimly chomped on her green party hat. Even surrounded by his friends, Angus’s eyes searched until he found him. He mouthed, ‘All right?’

When Coal gave him a thumbs up and a smile he didn’t feel, Angus returned his attention to his colleagues.

Garland took his elbow and steered him back to the bar where poor Twinkle looked like a Christian being stalked by a lion. She’d backed as far away as she could as Spencer leaned on the tiny counter. Yes, the naughty list vibe stung a bit, but Coal had gotten used to it. It certainly didn’t merit Twinkle’s reaction, but she’d always been a sensitive soul.

“Interesting friends you have, Coal,” Spencer said with his devastating, sarcastic smile. “I’m giving it my best shot, but this gorgeous creature won’t give me her number.”

“Good, keep it that way, Twinks. He’s on the naughty list for a reason,” Coal said.

Spencer’s eyebrows rose. “So this is the Twinkle you were rambling on about. I must admit, I thought she was a figment of your imagination.”

“Why...” Twinkle swallowed. “Why does he look like—“

“A question for another day,” Garland smoothly interrupted. “But you’d better run away, Twinkle, because this one’ll only be happy when you’re naked at his feet, with a collar around your neck, and a red ass from being spanked.”

Spencer scowled as Twinkle turned scarlet and fled toward Santa’s grotto, where Tinsel supervised the slow trickle of people going in and out.

“Thanks a bunch; I could have been in there.” Spencer grouched at Garland then turned to Coal. “And I don’t appreciate you gossiping.”

“He didn’t tell me a thing, but are you denying any of what I said is true?”

Spencer frowned. “Do I know you? You seem familiar, but I swear I haven’t met you before.”

Coal decided Garland’s familiarity with Spencer was a very convenient puzzle to keep his mind off losing Angus. A man

who said he loved him and who Coal loved right back with every fiber of his being.

Garland gave the double of their white-haired colleague a smile as he moved behind the bar, seeming to be thoroughly enjoying sparing with Spencer.

“So if Coal didn’t gossip, it must have been Fricker.” Spencer’s expression hardened. “And we were getting on so well too.”

Coal could feel his mission for Santa speeding away like a sled down an icy hill.

“Bollocks,” Coal said. “Angus wouldn’t gossip, and you said he’s familiar. He’s probably seen you at one of those kinky clubs. Besides, nobody needs details to work out that you and Twinkle are like chalk and cheese. She wouldn’t say boo to a geriatric mouse; where’s the challenge in that? You’d happily take on a yeti with PMT as long as it had a cute ass.”

Spencer’s blue eyes twinkled. “Look who’s talking. Angus is Mr. Control. I bet the poor sod can’t even fart without filling out a form in triplicate first, and you’re Mr. Impulsive with a capital I, but it seems to work for you two.”

Coal looked down into his freshly refilled glass, took a deep breath, and hopped up on the barstool next to Spencer.

“You’re Angus’s friend, right?”

Spencer wrinkled his nose. “We’ve known each other a long time, but I wouldn’t exactly say we’re friends.”

“Leaving aside the issue with his ex, which you both seem to have gotten over, why not?”

Spencer shrugged. “A trust fund kid and a self-made man? He resents everything about me.”

“Can I ask you to do something for me?”

Spencer’s very blue eyes twinkled again as he smirked. “Angus can buy his own damn cage.”

Coal’s face heated, but he battled on. “Can you check on him over the next few weeks?”

Spencer carefully returned the wine glass to the wooden counter. “You don’t want to hang around?”

Coal couldn’t help glancing at Garland, who raised his eyebrows.

“It doesn’t matter what I want.”

Spencer’s frown reminded him of Angus. “Don’t make excuses. You’re a big boy, Twinkletoes. You don’t have to do what others tell you, even if they are relatives. If you can’t be honest with him, be honest with me, and I’ll see what I can do.”

Garland cleared his throat. Spencer’s eyes flicked behind Coal, and his expression changed as he raised his glass.

“Finished torturing your staff? You really are a dark horse, Fricker, waltzing? I would have thought the Hokey Cokey was more your style.”

Angus pecked Coal on the cheek and grinned at Spencer, looking happier than Coal had ever seen him. His arm went around Coal's shoulder as if it belonged there.

“Up yours, rich boy.”

## CHAPTER 23



COAL SEEMED TO HAVE forgotten his obsession with checking everyone’s Christmas wishes. By the look of it, his new mission was to get every last guest on the dance floor and smiling. As he’d already succeeded with Angus, he got to watch, muse, admire, and wonder—hope—about what the next weeks and years would bring. It’d happened so fast, but seeing Coal here, in Angus’s world, making it his own, felt utterly right.

The guy was a complete dynamo, cajoling, grinning, even batting his eyelashes as he crouched in front of one of the last holdouts. And yep, he eventually got Lee to dance with him. Magic, pure magic.

“It’s exhausting just watching him, but what an ass,” Spencer mused as they sat at the bar.

“Oi, eyes off the prize; he’s mine.”

“Is he?” Garland asked.



Angus scowled at him. “There you go with that negativity again. How are you two related in any way?”

“Well, you know what they say, the sun always shines brighter after the rain. We have a double act going. Sometimes he does the pissing off, sometimes it’s me.”

Spencer snorted, took another sip of wine, but didn’t appear drunk.

“And that makes it even worse when it starts raining again.” The mournful comment came from Roger, Angus’s accountant, who sat at the end of the bar.

“So, what’s up in your life, buddy?” Garland asked.

How Angus managed to keep his groan to himself as Roger began to relate how he was hassled online by his childhood bullies. The man was in his forties and still hadn’t learned how to block trolls.

“Well, you know what I’d do,” Spencer announced. “I’d look them up, drive by in my three hundred grand car, and say thanks for the motivation, losers.”

Garland chuckled. “Nice one.”

“I’ll show you my entire collection if you come back to my place tonight.”

Angus rolled his eyes at Spencer’s blatant flirting, but he seemed to have met his match in Garland.

“What makes you think I haven’t already seen everything you have to offer?”

Spencer's lips quirked, clearly enjoying himself. If he didn't have Coal to go home with tonight, Angus would have loved to see how this played out. Both Garland and Spencer clearly thought they had the upper hand.

"But I haven't got a three hundred grand car," Roger's mournful tone dropped the mood like a stone.

Garland nodded toward the little log cabin. "Well, you know what to wish for then, don't you? Off you trot."

The thin man's brows drew together, and without looking at any of them, he headed to the grotto.

"What are you going to wish for?" Angus swiveled on his stool to face Spencer.

They'd watched people going into the little log cabin all evening. Most came out looking puzzled, but none would talk about what had happened inside.

Spencer snorted. "What could I possibly want? I have a job I love, a hobby I adore, and more money than you, Fricker, can dream of. And I'm about to take a gorgeous guy home."

"Keep on dreaming," Garland murmured. "There's a strict 'no fairy fraternization' rule."

Angus tuned out the banter as Coal made his way to Sam and Natalie, who were still dancing, despite many guests having left. The smiles that greeted Coal warmed Angus's heart. The couple didn't have much, but they had each other, and Angus was only just starting to realize that material things did not buy happiness.

Coal had stormed into his life and brought him more happiness than he'd ever known. Spencer had... lots of money and yet another meaningless temporary hook-up on the cards.

“How about someone permanent to share your life with?” Angus blurted.

For a moment, Angus saw an expression he'd never seen on Spencer's face. The man bounced between sarcastic, entitled, and professional, but just for that split second, Spencer looked like the loneliest soul on the planet.

“Hey, sorry if I hit a raw nerve. You never say much about—”

Without replying, Spencer got off his stool and headed toward the log cabin.

“Oh, to be a fly on the wall,” Garland murmured. Tinsel stumbled back as Spencer strode past her and into the cabin. Now Angus thought about it, all of Coal's colleagues, except Garland, had avoided getting close to Spencer. The three women kept glancing over at the white-haired man as if he were a dangerous animal who might sneak up on them if they didn't keep an eye on him.

A blast of cold air rattled the decorations. “Damn, someone must have left the door open, back in a bit.” Angus hopped off the stool, and jogged to the foyer, wasted heat and unnecessary bills on his mind.

He checked the door. The last people to leave had shut it, but maybe it'd been open long enough to cause the draft.

Turning back to the party, Spencer almost ran Angus down as he headed toward the foyer door.

He mumbled, “Have a nice life, Fricker,” then he was out the door like the devil himself was after him.

It seemed everyone had the same idea, as the remaining guests followed on Spencer’s heels, although they all stopped to say they’d had a wonderful evening.

Sam came last, and she gave Angus a hug with a squeeze hard enough to force a grunt. “I’m so glad he’s here. He’s just....” Shaking her head, she released him and made for the door in a flurry of purple sequins.

Angus blinked at Natalie. “Is she ok?”

“Little too much wine, but thanks for giving her happy tears. I’d better get after her.”

Angus heaved a sigh of relief as he locked the main door behind the last guest, then wandered back into the garage. After all the weirdness tonight, he shouldn’t have been surprised to find—in the ten minutes he’d been gone—that it was virtually back to normal. He still was taken aback, although it was more of a ‘Huh, ok’ rather than the ‘Hold it together, Fricker,’ it’d been earlier.

The grotto area and the faint scent of food, alcohol, and happy humanity were the only remnants. His footsteps echoed, a reminder of what usually inhabited this space, and about his lonely pre-Coal life. Angus didn’t want any of the dream to

end, but a glassy-eyed Coal waited in the gaping space where the dancefloor had been.

Angus walked over, and Coal plastered himself to him, holding tight enough to be uncomfortable. *What was it with people tonight?*

Coal had been flipping between manic happiness and holding back tears all night. If this had been Angus's choice, he would have taken him home to rest hours ago, but Coal had put so much effort into this, and he'd deserved to stay to the end.

"Coal, time's up," Gingersnap called out from where he stood next to the wooden building.

Coal sank into Angus's side, his arm tight around his waist as if he was going to disappear. Angus squeezed his shoulder, trying to reassure him that everything was fine, even if he didn't feel it himself.

"What does she mean, brat?"

"It's time for him to stop playing and go back to work. We're short-handed as it is. Why Santa insists on wasting time on adults, I'll never know."

The hard-looking blonde woman turned her attention to the other two female fairies. "Chop chop people, we haven't got all day; the clock is ticking."

Gingersnap marched into the small building. The two other women followed, although Tinsel gave them a sympathetic smile. Twinkle looked as if she couldn't get out of there fast enough.

Garland appeared from the side of the cabin. “After you.” He smirked, bowing as he waved at the open door.

Coal straightened up, took a deep breath, and holding tight to Angus’s hand, drew him inside Santa’s grotto.

The room confronting Angus was larger than the hut he’d entered. Cozy, and with a real fire crackling in the hearth. Green foliage draped over the mantelpiece, and strings of pinecones on red ribbons decorated the dark wooden beams. An old rocking chair creaked with the weight of a large man in a red suit trimmed with fur who stared into the fire. It smelled... old. Felt old. Like it had been here for centuries. Angus’s building dated from the eighties.

Coal apparently didn’t consider anything unusual as he focused on the figure in a rocking chair. The door slamming shut behind them made Angus jump.

“Why do they never shut the door?” The bearded man in the rocking chair grumbled. “Don’t bother going back outside to check. Not only will you waste the heat, but you’re not in your building or in Britain anymore. Welcome to my home, Angus Fricker. And as Mrs. Christmas is waiting, I’ll get on if you don’t mind.” The man blew out a breath, then, as if he’d said it a thousand times before and was thoroughly bored with the entire thing, he rattled off, “You’ve been a very good boy this year, and you’ve earned yourself a Christmas wish.”

“Right, and this is...” Angus said slowly.

“The North Pole.”

“And you’re...”

“I am,” the older, bearded, stout man nodded solemnly.

“And Coal really is...”

“One of my Christmas fairies, yes. An unfortunately troublesome one at that, although it isn’t his fault. However, his work here is done. He satisfactorily fulfilled the wish of a particularly good woman and made you happy. Now it’s time he came home and started work on another equally worthy wish.”

Angus’s arm snaked out and pulled Coal to his side. “He already has a home with me.”

The man in red chuckled, and rather than the jolly ‘Ho, Ho, Ho,’ Angus remembered from childhood movies, this laugh held a sinister edge.

“I’m sorry, son, but fairies can’t live in the human world. They can’t help using their magic, which opens us up to being revealed. We can never let that happen. Can you imagine what scientists would do to him if they found out what he is?”

“Are you sure about that, Nicky boy?”

Angus blinked as Garland emerged from the gloom at the back of the room.

“Enough with your insolence, Garland. You should have returned home with the others. I’ll deal with you in the—”

“Oh, but Garland is tucked up in bed, not his bed, but he is tucked up.” Before Angus’s eyes, Garland’s red vest flowed

over his body and his skin darkened.

The rocking chair creaked as Father Christmas stiffened.  
“You!”

The man smirked, did jazz hands. “Surprise!” An armchair, covered in an odd tan leather, appeared behind him, and he sat down crossing one leg over the other. If it wasn’t for Coal’s hand tight in his, Angus would have assumed he was in some freaky cheese-induced nightmare. Whatever this was, it didn’t feel like he and Coal were anything but spectators in a situation that had been brewing for years, maybe decades, hell, even centuries for all Angus knew.

“You’ve been clouding, covering up everything he’s been doing, haven’t you?” Santa growled, his bushy white eyebrows almost covering his eyes completely.

The man’s plush lips curved into a smile. “I’m so very, very guilty, Nicky boy. But I couldn’t help having a little fun with your mishap here. It really wasn’t nice to let him hurt himself that much. After all, it was your fault, he’s—”

“That was all you, Krampus. You popped up right in the middle of—”

The man’s skin reddened, his suit turned black, and curling horns appeared from the top of his head.

“It’s Arioach now. However much you try to convince yourself, I’m not your little minion anymore. Nor is Coal, and as for Jingle—”



# CHAPTER 24



THIS WAS ALL TOO surreal. Coal's gaze flickered between his creator and... Krampus? Arioeh? Whatever was going on, he and Angus were caught right in the middle.

Santa shot to his feet, expanded. Angus grabbed Coal, pulling him back until they were both plastered up against a tiny window.

"NEVER SAY THAT NAME!" The window rattled with the force of Santa's roar.

The devil examined his sharp, curving black fingernails and murmured the chorus to Jingle Bells.

"Quiet!" Angus roared.

The two battling supernaturals turned to the human, clearly shocked at getting interrupted. Coal's chest froze. He admired Angus's balls, figuratively and physically, but if he wasn't careful, they'd end up being snowballs.

“Now that’s better,” Angus said, voice far steadier than Coal could imagine. “Nothing is ever solved by shouting at each other. You,” he waved at the red-skinned figure, “tell us what your grievance is, but don’t use negative or accusatory words.”

A cigar appeared in the scarlet fingers. The fingers were smaller, and a different color, but the way they held the cigar...

“That was you,” Coal blurted, “In the campervan, that was you, not Santa.”

Arioch grinned, showing disturbingly sharp white teeth. “Certainly was.”

Coal turned to his maker, whose jaw looked close to cracking it clenched so hard. “I didn’t know, I really didn’t. I thought it was you, I—”

“What did you do?” Santa growled at Arioch, completely ignoring Coal.

Arioch took a long drag and blew two slow smoke rings. Coal watched them rise, but when he looked back at Arioch, a second Santa sat in the armchair instead.

“I merely told him to get Jingle,” the rocking chair Santa growled while the cigar-smoking one’s smirk grew. “Sorry, *Spencer*, to make up with Angus here. I deal in justifiable revenge, and—” the man’s nose wrinkled “—as much as I enjoy depression, anguish, and all that other wonderful stuff, I can’t justify torturing Jingle any more. Simply put, mate’s rates are off. And I thought he finally deserved a friend.”

“Never,” ground out the rocking chair Santa.

“Could one of you please change into something else? Having two of you here is—” Angus started.

Arioch reverted to his red-skinned, black-suited form. “You do know you don’t have to ask anyone for anything ever again, right?” the demon said to Angus.

“What do you mean—” Angus started.

“You didn’t....” Santa’s voice dripped with horror.

Arioch blew another smoke ring. “Well, it’s your fault, old pal. You really should tell your creations about the clause and what they are.”

Coal stood in the center of Angus’s empty garage, Angus’s arms around him and a grinning demon in an armchair a few feet away.

“I wish I—” Angus started.

Arioch was out of his chair in a flash, both hands raised. “Stop. Stop. Never say that if you want to keep him.”

Coal felt Angus sigh. “Look, if this is going to take a while, do you think we could—”

Coal found himself sitting on Angus’s lap in the office above the garage.

Arioch sat in the same creepy chair on the opposite side of the desk, a cigar still held loosely between scarlet fingers.

“That is going to take a little getting used to,” Angus said.

“I suggest you don’t. It kinda spoils the fun.”

“You’re a demon,” Coal confirmed.

The red-skinned man inclined his head. “Arioch, senior revenge demon at your service.” The horned head quirked. “Actually, no, I’m not at your service unless you have some juicy justifiable revenge to reveal?” He looked expectantly between the two of them. “It can be anyone, human or otherwise. I’m a non-discriminatory demon.”

“We’re good for now, thank you,” Angus said.

Arioch shrugged. “Fair enough. But just like Christmas wishes, I only grant one revenge wish per person unless there are exceptional circumstances, such as—” he pursed his lips “—anything particularly inventive. After all this time in the job, I’m kinda drawn to inventive. And quick. I’m all out of long, drawn-out revenge. When you have to check on the revengee for decades, centuries, it gets boring, you know?”

“You really like talking about yourself, don’t you?” Angus said.

Arioch’s jaw dropped. Coal couldn’t help a snort of shocked laughter breaking free. But he dug his elbow into Angus’s side.

“Cut it out, he’s a demon; don’t—”

“This is my dream, and I’ll do what I damn well like in it.”

Coal’s lips shut on his protest that this wasn’t a dream. Angus wouldn’t believe him anyway. Before Arioch turned them both into cockroaches or simply left, he blurted out what had been bothering him ever since it’d been said.

“What’s this clause you were talking about?”

The smirk reappeared on Ariocho’s face. “There’s no such thing as Santa.”

“I knew it,” Angus said.

“But there is a Djinn who specializes in festive wishes like I specialize in wishes for revenge. Nicky boy uses the magic he gets from those wishes to make slave djinn.” The cigar jabbed toward Coal. “Like you.”

“Djinn? Like in genies?” Angus blurted.

Ariocho rolled his eyes. “Please, Disney has so much to answer for, but essentially, the basics, yes.”

“But genies are always attached to a bottle and can only grant... oh.” Angus paused. “That’s why you didn’t want me to say—” Ariocho raised his eyebrows. “—the W word.” Angus finished.

“Correct.”

“So where’s his—”

Even though Angus hated being interrupted, Coal couldn’t hold back. “I can stay?”

Ariocho shrugged. “No can about it. You haven’t got a choice until he makes his three wishes.”

“So if he never makes three wishes?” Coal prompted, nerves fizzing with hope he probably shouldn’t feel yet.

“You stay with him until he dies, then you revert to your container until someone else claims you, and so on for the rest

of time.”

“He’s trapped, for eternity?” Angus didn’t seem happy, didn’t appear to understand what this meant.

Coal swiveled on his lap, wrapped his arms around him, and kissed him. Angus resisted for a second, before kissing him back.

“Ahem.”

Angus filled up his world, every sense, every thought, he—

“Ahem, bloody ahem. If you two don’t stop sucking face, I’m off and all those irritating questions will stay unanswered.”

Angus pulled back, just enough to speak. “We really should, you know, talk to him.”

“Uh-huh,” Coal mumbled then kissed him again.

“Most powerful being on the planet here, being ignored, leaving now.”

Reluctantly Coal leaned back. Turned to Arioch. “You wanted something?”

Arioch scowled. “Nicky boy’s right. You really are an irritating shit. Now, because three is always the magic number, you get three questions, right now, no deferring. I have people to skin and souls to devour. It’s all go-go-go at this time of year. As Angus has already asked the first question, I’ll answer it.

“Yes, he’s trapped for eternity until his vessel is physically broken, or his master, whomever they are at the time, uses one

of their wishes to free him or make him mortal.”

“In that case—” Angus started.

Coal put his fingers over Angus’s mouth and turned to Ariocho.

“Can I use magic other than for wishes he makes?”

Ariocho smiled. “You’re brighter than you look, which isn’t saying much. But yes, you can, although nothing that could ever hurt your master either directly or indirectly. Otherwise, djinn would be bumping off their masters every day.

“You have to fulfill the spoken, correctly phrased, wish your master makes, but there’s usually a lot of interpretation available. It’s how most djinn move from master to master, once they get caught. One question left.” He waggled his eyebrows. “Better make it a good one.”

Coal’s mind whirled. So far, Ariocho had provided more information than strictly necessary. He could have given one-word answers, could still give a one-word answer.

Coal desperately wanted to know how he’d been caught as Ariocho called it. Had it been something he’d said? Something Angus said or did? But was there an advantage in knowing, now it was a done deal?

Possible questions rolled through his mind, and he considered each as carefully as he’d assessed the wishes of Angus’s staff.

*Is there somewhere I can learn more about being a djinn?* He dismissed it as a possible ‘yes or no’ answer.

*Where can I learn more about being a djinn,* would be better, but that was a selfish question. He should ask something to

help others, to help Angus, Sam. *Spencer*:

“Tick-tock,” Ariocho said.

“How does this bottle thing work?” Angus said.

Coal rounded on him. “Really? That’s what you came up with?  
Of all the irresponsible, stupid—”

“Stop, just—”



# CHAPTER 25



ONE SECOND, ANGUS WAS trying to get Coal to shut up, the next his lap was aching empty.

“And that’s how you get him to go into his vessel. You send him away with either a qualified order or a negative thought. To get him back, think about wanting him and rub it.” Ariocho waved his fingers. “Bye.”

The demon and his creepy chair vanished.

The clock on the wall clicked another minute round, loud in the screaming silence. Two-thirty in the morning. Car lights flashed in the window as a car drove past. He looked down. Gray suit. Not a tux.

It felt as if the last few days had never happened, except for in his head. Despite the hour, despite the fact he should be exhausted, every nerve prickled. What if it’d been nothing but delusions caused by a breakdown?

The office door loomed on the other side of the room, a barrier between what he hungered to be true and desolate reality. While he sat here, he could still believe. He couldn't have imagined someone as perfect for him as Coal. Everything he'd ever wanted in a partner, and many things he hadn't realized he needed, he'd found in Coal.

*Had he been too perfect to be real?*

It took another thirty seconds to conclude sitting here, doing nothing, was damn stupid. He needed to either confirm his memories or acknowledge he'd gone round the twist.

Real or not, there had been a hell of a lot of people besides him and Coal at the party. He could call one of them or simply walk downstairs and search for evidence. But what if there wasn't anything? Would that mean it hadn't happened? Or that the evidence had been magicked away, like Coal?

*Magic?*

He snorted at the ridiculous idea. Perhaps Spencer had got him with one of his drug cocktails while... *While I was at his place with Coal?* Everything came back to that grumpy, but bright, shining man who had stolen Angus's heart like a thief in the night and wrapped it around his little finger.

Between one heartbeat and the next, Angus had to know. Because if Coal was real, somewhere, he waited for Angus to release him. Point one on his plan of action was determining if Coal existed in more than his imagination. Next, Angus would find him, release him, and never let him go again.

Everyone at the party had met Coal, seen him, talked to him, danced with him. A simple question, a non-leading one, such as... “Did you have fun last night?” would do the trick. He reached for his phone and brought it to life with a thumb press. The time on the display laughed at him.

How many of his guests would be pleased to be woken up and asked about a party? If there had been a party at all. Who would accept a casual conversation at nearly three on a Monday morning?

He scrolled through his contacts. Whether the party had happened or not, whether Coal existed or not, there was only one person he could call.

He dialed Spencer, and immediately pulled the phone away from his ear at the harsh tone and the computerized ‘this number has not been recognized.’

He opened his desk drawer, grabbed his keys. He could get to Spencer’s home in less than half an hour. Speaking in person would be better anyway. If Spencer hadn’t heard of Coal, Angus would be better off in that damn cage than walking the streets chatting to Christmas fairies no one else could see.

Because it was Sunday, he’d parked out the front of the building, rather than around the back where... He paused.

He remembered moving all the taxis and limos out of the garage yesterday, but couldn’t remember putting them back. The window from the reception area outside his office overlooked the rear car park. Would the vehicles still be out there? If they were, what did it mean? That his delusion had

been so real he'd physically gone through the actions of moving the vehicles? Had he laughed and danced on his own too?

Going to Spencer's place faded from his plan. Looking first, hopefully knowing a little more, one way or the other, seemed prudent. Did people having breakdowns think this clearly? Or did they only think they were thinking clearly?

He took a steadying breath. "Fricker, you might be mad, but you are not a coward. You can do this."

The tinsel twinkling on the sad little Christmas tree on the filing cabinet seemed to laugh at his attempted pep talk. Gritting his teeth, he opened his office door, walked over to the window, and kept his focus on the building behind his. He took another breath, counted to three, then looked down.

Empty.

"Doesn't prove anything," he announced. The magic had put all that stuff in the garage and removed it again. It could certainly put a few vehicles back inside.

*Or maybe you never moved them.*

Underneath the low-power orange security lights in the empty yard, something caught his eye.

Something small, red, and campervan shaped. The reception door crashed into the wall as he flung it open and charged down the stairs two at a time. The foyer door didn't fare any better.

Time slowed as he skidded into the yard after sprinting around the side of the building. About a foot long, the replica campervan seemed an exact copy of the one in the Switch Room's car park, except light glowed from the inside. Now Angus had it in view, he didn't dare look away, or blink, in case it vanished. Step by slow step, he crept up, as if the model would startle and race off like a scared cat.

The glow inside the van blinked out when he got to within six feet. He lunged, grabbed the model, holding it to the ground. No light, no sound, but it felt warm, like it'd been indoors a few moments ago, or had been running its engine. If it had an engine. He peered into it, not knowing what he wanted to see. A tiny Coal waving at him?

Nothing. The windows were black.

The stupidity of his behavior, the certainty that someone, probably Spencer, was recording him right now should have made him angry. Instead, deep, sinking depression washed over him. He bet Coal, or whatever his name was, was pissing himself laughing right now.

Angus stood up, turned, and came face to face with Ariocho.

"Humans. You can't live with them; you can't live without them." Ariocho's head tilted. "Didn't you get the 'rub it' hint? I was expecting you to be wanking yourself raw in your office, dreaming of Coal, before you came down here, all depressed, and walking like a cowboy with a raw cock to find Coal's little hidey-hole. I imagined a tearful, passionate reunion but with

you unable to do much because you'd been going at it solo for hours. I must admit I'm a little—“

Angus almost flung himself back at the model, scooped it up and began rubbing it for all he was worth while holding Coal's image, his warmth, the sound of his laughter, in the front of his mind.

”—disappointed,“ Arioch finished from behind him. “You know, I don't think I can take any more nauseating public displays of affection.”



Comfortable. Soft. Angus snuggled down, then shot up remembering everything that had happened. His heart threatened to jump out of his throat until his gaze landed on the figure wrapped up in a blanket sitting on the side of the bed, with his back to him.

The curtains were open and big fat snowflakes drifted down as if they were trying not to land. Coal must have felt the bed move as he turned and his face lit up with the most beautiful smile.

Angus didn't speak, he just snaked out an arm and yanked Coal back against him.

They ended up nose to nose.

“Gotcha,” Angus murmured.

“You certainly do, whether you want me or not. Although, all you have to do is say the W word combined with ‘I’ three times and—

Angus pushed him down, belly first, flat on the bed. Someone needed to suffer for all the stress, the heartache, the pain of the last hour he could remember. Angus covered as much of Coal with his body as possible, needing to prove to himself that Coal was here, was real.

Pressing his nose against Coal’s neck, he took in the cinnamon sweet scent, for one deep down, satisfying moment, then it wasn’t enough. A lick, then a bite. Coal whimpered, pressed his bare ass up, catching the head of Angus’s cock with the lower curve of his rounded butt.

Coal fit him perfectly, small, squirming, begging. Angus thrust, forcing his cock between Coal’s thighs. Without lube, it wasn’t easy, wasn’t a slick glide. Angus didn’t want easy. He thrust in short, sharp jabs, hard, owning, banging against the body caged underneath him.

Whether by magic or luck, when he reached out to the bedside cabinet, his hand closed around a familiar tube of lube. There would be time for slow, time for teasing, now, Angus felt like he would die unless he got inside Coal right now.

A swift squirt, a rubbing of fingers together, and then he found Coal’s heat. Coal took the first finger with a gasp, the second with a yelp, but he didn’t pull away, didn’t call red, just fisted the sheets like a lifejacket in a storm.

Control hanging by a thread, Angus ground out, “Color? I need to hear it.”

He withdrew his fingers, took his cock in his hand, and positioned the head exactly where he needed it to go. A threat, a promise, a wish.

“Tell me now or this stops and we go back to the form.”

“God, please, no more forms, or rules, or—“

“Color, Coal,” Angus ground out.

“Green, so damn green you wouldn’t believe it. I just... I can’t believe this is real.”

The body beneath him trembled and Angus pressed his lips to the back of Coal’s ear. “It’s real, and I want you to remember without any forms, without any negotiations.”

“Remember what?”

“That you are my dream come true, that I love you, and I am never, ever, going to say the W word so I get to keep you forever.”

“I love you too. I never thought I’d—“ His words died in a gasp as Angus pushed in halfway.

He’d intended to go all the way, to fuck and claim and own, but he had to stop, had to revel in the way Coal shook, gasped, “Ah, fuck, that’s fuck... Stop, don’t stop. Fuck I can’t—“

Only one thing had ever really shut Coal up, so Angus gave it to him, hilding himself in one hard thrust.



Coal's words reduced to sexy, uninhibited noises of pain, desperation, lust.

Angus fucked him. Hard, rough, so hard that Coal wasn't the only one panting. Coal was so small, so muscled under him. Angus knew, just knew, that Coal could take anything he gave him and would still say 'Thank you, Boss' afterward.

He couldn't stop, didn't want to even if it'd been a possibility. Wrapping an arm around Coal's chest, the other across his neck, he pumped; the only part of them moving was the thrust of his hips against Coal's ass. He buried himself in that willingly given, silken heat, assaulting, taking, needing to come, to mark, to prove.

Under him, Coal was a mindless, moaning, destroyed mess. One knee wrenched up the bed and Coal pushed his hips back, trying to rise, lifting Angus in the process.

Angus shoved hard, forcing Coal flat, then he grabbed Coal's knee keeping him spread, which let him reach even deeper.

Five savage thrusts and Coal cried out, hips spasming, hole clenching. Angus didn't slow, fucking him hard and fast through his climax.

He knew the second Coal finished as he went limp beneath him but Angus hadn't finished, he craved more. Grabbing Coal's hair, he wrenched his head to the side, took his mouth, felt the grunts of expelled air as he pounded into him. One, two, three. He came, gasping his climax into Coal's slack mouth as he filled his ass.

The frantic urge died, and Angus moved to the side, conscious that he must have been squashing the smaller man, the *djinn*. Pulling Coal against him, he hooked a leg over Coal's thigh and went about the serious job of kissing every inch of Coal's face and neck, before settling on his lips again. Slow, comfortable, wonderful.



An hour later, Angus placed a hot chocolate in front of Coal. A hand emerged from the heavy blanket wrapped around Coal's shoulders.

Coal took a sip, groaned in delight, then reached for a shortbread. Angus didn't have the heart to attempt to press anything healthier on him. He didn't even know if fairies, genies, *djinn*, could get fat.

Coal tilted his head. "It's eleven a.m. on a Monday, and you're not at work."

Angus kissed the top of Coal's head and slid onto the stool next to him.

"True. But it's Christmas Eve, and I've given myself the day off."

Coal wobbled on his stool. Angus grabbed his shoulder so he didn't tumble off.

“This... this is a lot to take in.”

Angus’s lips twitched. “Me taking a day off is a lot to take in but being cursed to be my slave for all eternity by a demon isn’t?”

Coal’s nose wrinkled. “Actually, he, I mean, I—“

Angus folded his arms. “I thought we’d gone over the honest thing?”

Coal rolled his eyes and let out a huff. “We did, and I’m not lying. I’m not cursed. It was—“

“A wish?” Angus blurted. “Sam didn’t use her extra wish to make you stay permanent—“ Coal’s finger landed on his lips.

“Look, we need to get something straight. I’m the impulsive one with no filter, and you’re Mr. Control, except in bed because this morning was seriously...” He removed his hand to fan himself. Angus’s ego soared almost as fast as his cock got hard, but they didn’t have time to waste. The shops shut early on Christmas Eve.

“Get dressed. You can tell me while we work,” he announced.

“I thought you weren’t going into work?” Coal asked as he climbed off the stool.

“I didn’t say anything about going anywhere.” Angus picked up both mugs, carried them to the sink then turned around to find Coal fully dressed in his red elf outfit.

“How did you—“ he started, then shook his head as Coal grinned. “Never mind. But since you seem to feel the cold

now, I suggest something a little warmer, and—” he held up a finger, “Not necessarily Christmas themed. You need to get used to ordinary clothes at some point because dressing like a Christmas fairy in August will look damn odd.”

The elf costume changed to a red and white Nordic-style jumper with snowflakes and reindeer, blue jeans, and a matching woolly hat, scarf, and gloves.

Coal held his hands out to the side. “Take it leave it because this is as low as I’m prepared to go.”

“I’ll take it. Let’s go.”

It took far longer for Angus to find his boots, coat, gloves, and hat.

Angus waited for Coal to leave the house before locking the door and announcing, “We’re clearing the drive and the pathways.”

“It’s snowing,” Coal said, his feet firmly planted on the doorstep.

“Which is why we’re clearing the drive and the paths of the neighbors on each side, who are both elderly. It froze last night and powder snow on top of ice is a recipe for skids and slips. The gritters probably won’t get to the side roads until after Christmas. Come on.”

Angus hid a smile as he unlocked the boot of the car to fetch the snow shovels he kept in there. Coal huffed and puffed as he stomped onto the pathway.

Angus waited, counting off the seconds. Coal managed thirty-five seconds and two shovelfuls before he cracked.

“So.... About this djinn thing. I erm found a book, a really big —“ he held his gloved hands three feet apart ”—book of djinn lore while I was stuck in the campervan. That’s my ‘lamp’ in case you didn’t work it out. A captive djinn’s receptacle is always something they owned or coveted before their capture. I’m just glad I got the van. Being stuck in a nipple piercing or a butt-plug would—”

“It couldn’t have been more than a few minutes. Did you get passed the table of contents?”

After five silent seconds, Angus slung an arm over Coal’s shoulders and pulled him into a side hug. He couldn’t ever remember doing that with Jesse in public; it felt good. It felt... right.

“Sorry, that was mean. For all I know you might be able to touch a book and simply absorb the information. Which would be damn cool. Or maybe you can absorb information from any computer or phone? That would be—“

“I was in there for three weeks. Time runs differently in—“

The shovel clanged on the path as Angus pulled Coal against his chest; the curtain-twitching neighbors could go fuck themselves.

“I’m sorry, I’m so sorry. I didn’t know. I’ll never do it again. I’ll carry the damn thing with me wherever I go from now on, even if I do look damn silly carrying a toy campervan around

with— Fuck, where is it? It's not still at the yard, is it?" Angus grabbed for his keys. "Snow or not, I'm not leaving it where it could get broken, or—" Ice filled his veins. "What the hell happens if it gets stolen? Fuck, you could be trapped in there for years, centuries."

"Calm down. It's in the living room, safe and sound. I'm not even sure it can be accidentally broken. But I can shrink it, even make it small enough to put on your keyring or a chain around your neck." Coal pressed his lips together. "What is an issue is that I can't let you carry on thinking this is some sort of curse. Yes, I didn't know it at the time, but I did it to myself."

"What? How?"

"Remember when I said, 'Your wish is my command' in your office? Well... that's what did it. I didn't know it at the time because Santa didn't tell us about it, and I think Arioach was whispering in my ear the whole time, but," he blew out a breath and looked straight into Angus's eyes. "I would still have said it if I'd known."

A tiny powdery flake of snow landed on Coal's nose and melted. Those dark eyelashes blinked as other flakes landed on them.

"I love you, Angus Fricker, and I want to spend as much of eternity as possible with you."

The snow would probably get heavier, would provide a wonderful white Christmas, but right now, the flakes were wonderfully light, just like Angus's heart.



Find out how Coal got exiled to the Adult Fairy Department [in an exclusive bonus story.](#)

Are you wondering what happened to Garland and Spencer/Jingle?

Find out in [CHRISTMAS IN JULY](#) (yes, it's as naughty as it sounds)

# About Emma

Emma was destined to be a little quirky after being born as an unexpected twin in Hungry Bottom (Yes, it's a real place).

Known as the Queen of Angst because she loves putting damaged, often sweet and funny characters through hell before letting them have a HFN or HEA ending.

She blames her rebellious muse (who looks like Chris from the Paint Series) for the erotic aspects tickling the angst and the humor climbing into bed with the erotic.

When not writing or reading in leafy Sussex, England, she herds birman cats and sons; both groups argue that there are too many of the other sort.