



*Feral*  
**KING**

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
**SARA FIELDS**

# FERAL KING



SARA FIELDS



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## CHAPTER 1



*S* ophia White

“Don’t worry, sweetheart. You’ll be the prettiest one of all.”

My stepfather’s voice rang out in the oversized dressing room. He didn’t care that I was right there beside him. As per usual, he ignored me and smiled broadly with eyes only for my mother as he kissed her, sliding his hands around her waist as he pulled her closer against him.

He didn’t even glance my way. I was the ever-invisible daughter. Sometimes, it was like I didn’t even exist at all.

I don’t know why I was expecting anything different. We had never had any kind of relationship at all. For the most part, he pretended I wasn’t there. Things weren’t much better with my adoptive mother, either. The only time she gave me literally any attention at all was when she felt threatened by me.

No matter what I did or said, she was utterly obsessed with comparing her beauty to mine.

I’d lived in her shadow my whole life. Madison White was a world-famous top model and actress who had been photographed in nearly every fashion magazine in print and on the web. She’d made the top list time and time again for her high cheekbones and perfectly plump lips, not to mention her olive-green eyes, radiant dewy skin, and her sculpted, toned physique. Her work in charity made her a reigning queen in

the New York socialite scene too, which meant she was invited to the top events in the city.

But it didn't end there. Some time ago, she'd gotten the idea in her head that a family would make her look even better to the press, which was where I came in.

My adoption years ago had solidified her selflessness in the face of the public, just like she thought it would, but I knew it was all a front to reaffirm her own vanity.

She didn't love me. She never had.

Sometimes I wondered what my real mother was like, but she'd disappeared right after I was born and left me at an orphanage in the countryside of eastern Europe. I didn't know if she had died or just hadn't wanted me, but there were no records left for me to find her. I lived there from the time I was a baby until I was adopted when I was four years old, and I had no memory of her. There wasn't enough information to even begin to find her. I didn't have very many positive memories of the orphanage as a child, aside from rich donors coming to visit us on occasion. Our house mother always made apple strudel on those days.

Madison had been one of those wealthy people. She'd come in with a large donation, saying she wanted an older child, and after she'd given every child in the place a once-over, she eventually settled on me. I recall her kneeling down in front of me with her hand reaching out, gently brushing a lock of my dark chestnut hair off my forehead. At the time, her touch had felt nice. I'd welcomed it back then.

"Her eyes are the color of honey. They're so bright against her pretty black hair," she'd said.

Her gaze had searched my face, assessing me with shrewd calculation. It was only much later in life that I'd realized she'd been deciding if I was cute enough to stand by her side in pictures that would show how charitable she was for helping a poor orphan in need, not if I was a child she wanted to love, care for, and make an actual member of her family.

That understanding would come much later.



My stepfather's loud voice jarred me out of my thoughts.

"They'll all be looking at you tonight, Madison," he proclaimed, his words echoing throughout the room with his biased confidence.

I sighed. Tonight was going to be like every other night, where I would trail behind them with a smile plastered on my face, presenting as the perfect daughter in the perfectly happy White family at yet another charity ball.

Inwardly, I scowled. I really wanted nothing more than to curl up with a book.

All three of us were dressed to the nines. A bright red Valentino gown hugged my stepmother's every curve, highlighting the timelessly perfect shape of her body. Her makeup was impeccably done to hide even the slightest wrinkle that hadn't been corrected yet by Botox or plastic surgery.

Her birthday had been only yesterday, but no one had uttered her age, not even once. It was practically forbidden, so much so that I think she denied it herself.

She'd turned fifty.

She had only gotten meaner and more bitter with every passing day. Her eyes slinked over me like a viper ready to strike, and I quickly dropped my gaze so as not to instigate her ire. But I wasn't fast enough, and she lashed out at me anyway.

"You think you're more beautiful than me, don't you?" she accused, sneering at me. Her vitriol was always hard to bear, especially like this.

"I don't think that, not at all," I whispered.

Her twisted scowl told me that she didn't believe a word that came out of my mouth. I stared back down at the floor, and soon after that, the loud clicking of her heels against the marble tiles indicated that she'd turned her attention away from me and left the room. Only then did I hazard a glance in her direction. She didn't look back at me, not even for a second. With a deflated sigh, I gazed at my own reflection in

the mirror. I did feel quite beautiful tonight, but I'd never made the mistake of telling anyone that, especially her.

I fingered the side of my own fancy gown. It was a pretty slate blue color, much more subdued than that scarlet satin of Madison's dress. It was some lesser-known designer than I'd already forgotten the name of, but it made me feel pretty anyway.

It was okay to feel pretty every once in a while, right?

Feeling a little defeated, I slid my feet into a pair of black and blue kitten heels and walked out of the dressing room into the front foyer. I caught a glimpse of the two of them walking out the door and stayed back, letting them climb into limo first before I followed and sat down in the seat across from them. They popped a bottle of champagne as the vehicle started but didn't offer me any, even though it was technically the night before my twenty-first birthday.

They said nothing on the drive to the charity ball, choosing instead to chat between themselves instead of interacting with me.

To be honest, a part of me both loved and loathed the silence.

Eventually, the limo pulled up to the red carpet rolled out in front of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and a man in a suit opened the door. My stepfather climbed out and offered Madison a hand. As soon as she interlaced her fingers within his, the camera lights started flashing and people started screaming her name. Her face lit up in an instant. She was in her element. She loved this kind of attention more than anything in the world.

I waited until she was halfway down the red carpet, letting her soak up the spotlight. Eventually, I climbed out of the car and stepped into the light. I paused and took a deep breath, then continued onward, making sure I didn't trip over my feet.

I didn't belong here. I wanted nothing to do with the limelight. I'd much rather be camping in the woods, letting the quiet peace of nature surround me.

Tomorrow would make it seem like this had never happened. I'd already packed my car with supplies so that I could take off and celebrate on my own. I was going to drive up north to Adirondack Park and spend the day hiking and listening to my favorite music.

You only turn twenty-one once, after all.

Everything was all laid out. I had mapped out my route, planning to make a stop at a local liquor store to pick up a bottle of red wine to stuff in my pack along the way. Then, when the sun set, I'd have dinner under the stars with my first legal drink.

I'd been looking forward to the trip for weeks.

When I finally raised my head, knowing it was time to face the music, camera lights started flashing in my direction. Suddenly, it felt like there were a thousand of them all turned on me.

What the hell? They usually all focused on Madison, never me.

"Sophia! Miss Sophia White! Tell us how it feels to make Cosmo's list of the most beautiful women in the world!" one reporter shrieked. A second followed up with something similar, and then the entire red carpet erupted in chaos.

What? I didn't have a clue what they were talking about. This had to be some kind of mistake, right?

One of the cameramen rushed forward, leaping over the ropes with his camera flashing, and I took a step back. Another followed and then another, until a group of them were racing towards me. Soon, they were surrounding me, leaving me nowhere to run and nowhere to hide. In their hurry to get the best photo op, a man's elbow knocked me in the chin, and I staggered backwards, almost tripping over my feet until a pair of secure arms wrapped around me and lifted me clean off the ground. My panic welled up from the bottoms of my feet, constricting my chest and making it hard to breathe.

I turned my head to see a friendly-looking security guard offering me a sympathetic smile. I didn't struggle as he carried

me backwards, finally placing me down on my feet once he'd managed to get some distance between me and the paparazzi.

Quickly, a group of security guards moved between me and the photographers. They escorted me safely down the red carpet until I managed to get inside. I pressed my hand to my chest and attempted to calm my frantically beating heart. When I lifted my head, I saw my stepmother standing in the entryway, her accusing, scornful gaze locked on me.

I could see her hatred for me written all over her face. The intensity of it made me feel sick.

\* \* \*

By the time I climbed into my own bed and finally closed my eyes that night, I was exhausted. I slept hard, but in the middle of the night, I woke up with a shriek, startled when a massive hand clamped over my mouth. My eyes popped open to see a man in a black ski mask crouched over me, his dark eyes full of vicious intent.

I screamed again, but the sound was muted by the cloth he had pressed over my mouth. No one was going to hear me, not like this. My room was in the wing opposite that of my adoptive parents so they could interact with me as little as possible. I'd always liked that, but right now I wished it had been different.

The staff had long gone home and would only return in the morning. Even the ones that lived on the property were in the servants' quarters beneath the kitchens. They wouldn't hear a peep either.

My hope of rescue withered away.

A flowery scent assaulted my senses, and I tried not to breathe it in. All my efforts were thwarted though when he punched me in the stomach hard enough to force the air right out of my lungs. I wheezed, trying to catch my breath.

The edges of my vision danced with blackness, and I kept trying to fight as slivers of my consciousness began to fade. Gradually, my muscles grew exceedingly heavy, and my

kicking and struggling started to slow until I wasn't moving much at all. Eventually, everything went dark.

I didn't know how long I was out.

When I finally came to, I was sitting in a chair with my hands tied behind my back. The rough, scratchy fibers dug into my wrists, and I stilled, trying to take stock of myself. My head pounded and a wave of nausea rattled through me. It took everything in me not to throw up all over myself. Once the sick feeling eventually passed, I focused on taking several deep, calming breaths. The events of last night slowly came back to me, and a fresh wave of panic washed over me. I didn't dare open my eyes yet, not wanting to give away the fact that I was conscious to whoever had taken me, especially if they were close.

Keeping still, I just listened.

A bird chirped overhead, and the sounds of the gentle breeze cutting through the boughs of the trees met my ears. In the distance, I could hear the constant flow of rushing water, likely indicative of a river or a waterfall not too far off. In my immediate vicinity, I listened as a faucet dripped once, then twice off to the right, and someone drummed their fingers on what I assumed was likely a wooden table in front of me. The plank floor beneath my feet creaked, but I didn't move. Not yet.

My stomach ached where I'd been punched, but the rest of me felt intact. My face felt a little sore, likely from how hard the person had held that cloth over my nose and mouth, but it wasn't that bad. I doubted I had any bruises.

Small victories, I supposed.

I shifted my leg the tiniest bit, finding them bound just like my wrists. Rough, scratchy twine dug into my ankles too, and I gathered that whoever had taken me wasn't interested in letting me go. If I wanted my freedom, I was going to have to fight my way out.

Resigned, I opened my eyes.

There was a lone man sitting across from me in a wooden chair. He leaned back so that only the two back legs were touching the floor, his expression cocky.

He'd taken his mask off.

My stomach roiled with bile, knowing that if he was letting me see his face, he was probably going to kill me. His dark brown eyes slid over me, pausing on my breasts.

I swallowed hard, knowing that nothing more than a pair of panties and the thin fabric of my white cotton nightgown were covering my body. In this light, he could probably see the dusky rose of my areolas right through it.

From what I could tell, we were in a small cabin in the woods somewhere. Maybe he'd brought me north, but there was no telling exactly where we were from the limited information at my disposal. The faucet leaked and there was a small fridge, which told me there was at least some power connected to this place. Most of the furniture seemed to be hewn by hand. I guessed that maybe this was a hunter's cabin of sorts, or maybe just a place meant for camping.

My gaze locked with the man sitting at the table, his piercing brown eyes scanning me with an intense scrutiny that sent a shiver down my spine. He exuded an air of deadly confidence, his presence commanding the room. Dressed in sleek, black attire that clung to his lean frame, he seemed like a shadow given form. His dark hair framed a face chiseled with sharp angles. A subtle smirk played on his lips. Every movement he made was deliberate and controlled, betraying the lethal precision of an assassin honed by years of training.

He wasn't as big as I had thought he was last night, but he still had at least fifty pounds of muscle on me. One on one, I probably couldn't beat him in a fight. I'd taken some self-defense classes in the past, but the maneuvers were foggy, and none of them involved being tied to a chair.

In silence, I shifted my wrists, testing the tightness of my bonds. There was a little give in the rope, maybe just enough to slide my slim wrists out if I worked it enough. I started

slipping my arms back and forth, trying to loosen the rope while keeping the rest of my body fully still.

“I must admit, you’re the youngest one I’ve ever been contracted to take care of. How old are you anyway?” he questioned thoughtfully. His voice carried with it a bit of unexpected warmth, not nearly as sinister as I imagined it would be.

“Twenty-one.”

The moment the words left my mouth, something else hit me.

“Christ. Old enough to drink.”

“It’s my birthday, actually,” I murmured miserably.

He shook his head in disgust. “I was offered a shitload of money for you,” he muttered, sounding awfully unsure of himself.

“You’re a hitman, aren’t you?” I asked, my voice sullen.

He didn’t answer. Instead, he looked away, confirming my suspicions without saying anything at all. He reached inside his thick black coat and pulled out a gun. I stiffened, immediately trying to loosen the rope around my wrists, but he didn’t point it at me. He placed it on the table.

“Usually, my targets are men. Big time CEOs. Government figures. Jealous family members arguing over an inheritance which can be more easily solved with a bullet in between the eyes. Once, it was a woman, but she knew I was coming and took her own life before I could get to her. Never have I had to look a girl like you in the eyes. The money she offered would set me up for life, but I don’t know if it’s worth it,” he rambled, his indecision painted all over his face.

“She?”

I didn’t really need to ask who. I knew who was responsible for this.

“Everything was set up for me on a silver platter. She told me all about your trip, made sure there were records to follow. You would disappear on your hike and never come back. She’d be free of you.”

I swallowed hard. I had thought my adoptive mother's jealousy was mostly harmless, but I could see now that I'd been dead wrong.

My death would put her back in the spotlight, making her someone to be sought after, adored, and pitied. She'd put on a front to organize a massive search for me, and the press would eat it up. Search parties would commence, but they wouldn't find me. Even if they found my body, she would still probably be invited to every talk show. She might even get a book deal.

I bit my lip and dropped my gaze to the floor. He moved and my eyes flicked up, watching him pick up the gun and then place it back down like it had scalded his fingertips.

"I don't think I can do this," he whispered.

I kept quiet, watching him closely. With a scowl, he pushed up off the table and started pacing the room. He'd left the gun on the table. The bonds around my wrists had loosened up quite a bit and I shifted them back and forth a little faster. Eventually, I was able to free one arm, but I stalled on the other.

I didn't want the rope to fall to the floor and give away the fact that I was partially free, so I slowly slid it down my wrist until I could grasp it loosely in my hand.

Eventually, he stopped and stared at me. I stiffened, appraising him. He looked like he'd settled on a decision, and when he came striding towards me, I acted. I tipped the chair to the left, smashing on the ground as I curled forward and slipped the rope around my ankles off the legs of the chair. Free, I scurried back, and he stopped short.

"No. Wait. I wasn't going to do anything," he exclaimed, holding his hands up.

I pushed myself up off the ground to my feet. As soon as I was standing, I raised my arms defensively and glanced back at the gun on the table, trying to calculate which of us could reach it faster.

"Listen, if I can stage your death, you can disappear. I can't imagine you'd want to go back to a woman that hired a hitman to off you," he quickly explained.



He didn't seem to be bluffing. There was honesty in his eyes.

"I'm listening," I said quietly, but taking a small step towards the table anyway.

"Look, I'm going to reach in my pocket and pull out my phone. There aren't any stipulations in the contract as to how it needs to be done, just that there's photo evidence. We can make it look real, and then we can both go on our way."

"So, she'd think I was dead, you'd get paid even though you didn't kill me, and I could just go off and live my life. That's what you're offering," I stated quietly.

"Yes," he answered.

"How am I supposed to believe you?" I questioned warily.

"Go get the gun. It's yours."

"Really?"

"Yeah. Take it," he replied.

"Open your coat," I countered.

With a curt nod, he did as I asked. There was no indication of any other firearm, but he did have several knives holstered along his belt.

"Keep your hands in the air," I demanded, and he obeyed without a word. Quickly, I stole over to the table and picked up the gun. I'd taken a lesson or two back in the day, so I slid the chamber back and confirmed that it was loaded. I ejected the magazine to find it full of bullets before I pressed it back into place.

"Satisfied?"

"For the moment," I replied. "So, if you want to stage it, what do you suggest?"

"Take the rope and wrap it around your throat tight. If you lie down on the floor face down, they won't be able to tell that you're not actually dead. I'll take the picture from over here. I won't move from this spot. I promise," he implored, his voice sounding at least partially genuine.

Slowly, I did as he asked, keeping the gun close at hand.

“If I hear you move or anything, I’ll shoot you,” I growled, making a point to aim the gun straight at his chest. My finger clicked off the safety, letting him know that I knew my way around a firearm well enough.

“I have no doubt,” he smiled, obviously trying to break the tension. “I’m going to take my phone out of my pocket. You can keep the gun trained on me if you like.”

I watched as he pressed his fingers into his pocket. Just like he said he would, he pulled out a phone and held his other hand up in the air.

Slowly, I tightened the rope and lowered myself to the ground. Once in place, I lay down on my belly, but I kept the gun close to my chest and my eyes trained on him. Not moving a muscle, he waited for me as I arranged myself on the ground and made sure the rope was visible.

“That’s great. I’m taking the picture now,” he murmured, and I heard the sound of a shutter going off several times before all was silent.

“Done?”

“I got it. I’m going to go now. Good luck with everything,” he stated. Once he started to move, I swiftly aimed the gun at him again, but I didn’t need to.

He fled out the front door, leaving it wide open behind him. I didn’t move yet for fear of ambush from someone else, but no one came. A few minutes ticked by, and I heard the gentle rumble of a car engine starting before it drove off. All was quiet for a while, and I eventually moved towards the door, keeping my gun up in case anyone else appeared.

I peered out the door, seeing nothing but trees in front of the cabin. I slowly circled the small structure, looking for signs of life, but found nothing. I was out here alone.

I should be more upset. I should feel scared or angry or panicked, but I felt none of those things.

Instead, I felt relief. I was free for the first time in my life.

## CHAPTER 2



*S*ophia

I settled into the cabin for a few days, eating some of the canned food that had been left in the small pantry. It was extraordinarily quiet out here, surrounded by the silence of the trees. From my knowledge of the landscape, I guessed that I was deep in the forest of upstate New York. I couldn't pinpoint my exact location, but that didn't much matter since I had no intentions of returning home. Soon enough though, food became scarce, and I decided that I needed to move on.

I had high hopes that I could find a small mountain town where I could bleach my hair, get a job, and start a new life out of the limelight.

I packed a bag and started out once the sun rose the next day. I had taken several things from the cabin, including a thick flannel shirt, a pair of pants, oversized socks, and boots. Everything was meant for someone much larger than me, so they fit big, but I didn't have any other options.

Later that day, storm clouds began to gather overhead. Within an hour, it was drizzling and by mid-afternoon, it was pouring. My feet slid in the mud, and it wasn't until I almost fell that I knew it was time to seek out shelter. Almost as if the heavens were confirming my decision, a bolt of lightning lit up the sky and a crack of thunder rumbled so loudly, I questioned if the Earth had split in two.

I held the flannel above my head and tried to look around for shelter. When I spotted a cave off to the right, I sprinted in that direction and prayed it wasn't already inhabited by an animal, most notably a black bear. Grizzlies were highly unlikely in this particular area, but that didn't mean the risk was zero. Hopefully there wouldn't be any wolves, coyotes, or bobcats waiting out the storm in there either.

Another crack of thunder sounded, and I ran faster, my feet slipping a little in the mud, but I kept myself upright. Just after I raced inside, a bolt of lightning crashed into a tree nearby, causing a tremendous amount of electrical energy to discharge into the tree trunk. In an explosive release, a fiery wave of heat and light followed as the trunk splintered with a loud thunderclap.

I threw myself to the ground and covered my head as splinters flew every which way. Thankfully, the cave sheltered me from much of the fallout and after a few seconds, it started to quiet. I pushed myself to my feet and looked back at the wreckage.

At least I'd have firewood tonight.

Once I determined that the threat had passed, I began to gather the large branches just outside the perimeter of the cave before they could get too wet and piled them up safely inside. The rain came in waves, and when a lighter spell took hold, I went out and gathered enough wood to last through the night.

When I was finally done, I reached into my pack, digging out the flint I'd found in one of the drawers of the cabin. With deft hands, I guided the flint against the rough piece of steel, creating a spark that flew straight into the tinder. The spark danced among the kindling as a fire began to take hold. Slowly it grew stronger, licking up the broken branches, and I sighed happily, tucking the flint back into my pocket.

For a while, I relaxed by the fire. The rain hadn't let up again, creating an impassable waterfall that cascaded off the rock at the entrance of the cave. The sky grew darker outside, and I settled in for the night. Once my clothing was dry, I peered into the back of the cave, unable to see past the encroaching shroud of darkness.

I realized I should probably make sure I was in this cave by myself before I went to sleep.

I put it off for a while longer until it was pitch black outside and my exhaustion was coming in waves. With a massive yawn, I lit the end of a long stick, carrying it with me like a torch. I wandered deeper into the cave, the fire casting light on the rocks as I moved. When I reached a fork in the road, I looked one direction and then the other, trying to decide which way to go. Eventually, I settled on going to the right first. If I found any other forks, I'd choose the right one, that way I wouldn't get lost on my way back. The passage narrowed and then opened up far beyond what my little torch could illuminate, and when I looked around, I saw a glowing light in the distance.

I kept going, trying to figure out what I was seeing. I climbed up onto a ledge and approached the light, lost in confusion.

It wasn't another way out like I'd expected.

It was as if I was looking into a mirror, but what I was seeing wasn't a reflection. It was an image of a forest, but it was surrounded with a hazy greenish glow that was circling around it. It looked like a magic portal.

Magic wasn't real, but I could think of no other explanation.

I stared at it, studying the massive wooden tree trunks and the green leafy boughs overhead. Not far in the distance was a flowing river, creating a picturesque haven of peace. Unable to stem my curiosity, I reached out. Hesitant, I paused before I made contact, but some strange pull of gravity made me feel like I needed to keep going.

So, I did.

As soon as my fingertip contacted the strange magic, my whole world collapsed and turned upside down. Wind ravaged all around me, dragging me through the portal and up into the air. Gusts picked up all around me like a whirling tornado, throwing me around like I was nothing more than a leaf caught in the breeze.

I tried to back away, but my feet no longer had purchase on the ground.

The pressure made my ears pop, and it suddenly became incredibly hard to breath. I wheezed and tried to gulp down a lungful of air as the wind rushed through my hair, and all at once, it became too much.

My eyes rolled back in my head and nausea roiled through the pit of my belly.

Then my whole world ceased to exist.

\* \* \*

When I came to, I wasn't in the cave.

Flat on my back, I opened my eyes to see an overwhelming tree canopy overhead. Every leaf was massive, large enough that if I'd curled one around my shoulders, I could have worn it like a cape. The tree trunks were wider than I'd ever imagined they could be. Nearby, the sound of the rushing river soothed me, and I groaned, wondering what the fuck had happened.

Had I had some kind of mental break? Was I dreaming? Had I hit my head or something?

I pressed my fingers into the soft moss, noting that it was thick enough to create a comfortable, plush carpet beneath me. Honestly, it felt kind of nice.

My head ached and my stomach still felt like it was ready to heave its contents all over the forest at any given moment. Despite all of that, I pushed myself up to a seated position and tried to figure out what this was.

Had that been a portal? If so, where was I? Was this somewhere on Earth, like the Amazon Rainforest or something?

I should be committed.

There was nothing to signify a location. The trees were thick enough that I couldn't see too far in the distance to find

anything of significance to help me.

Needing to clear my head, I pushed myself to my feet and approached the river. Its crystal-clear waters meandered through the landscape, glistening under the gentle caress of the warm sunlight streaming down from above. The water gracefully flowed into a swimming hole, creating a serene oasis of tranquility. Dappled light danced over the rippling surface, the shimmering hues beautifully calm and peaceful. There were moss-covered stones all along the edge of the water, along with vibrant wildflowers gracing the riverbank. It was quite beautiful.

I knelt down and slid my fingers beneath the water's surface, finding it cool and inviting. Songbirds chirped in the distance, and when I looked all around, there was no one to be seen.

I sat down on the bank for a while, knowing I should be afraid to be in some strange fantasy land, but unable to bring myself to be.

Instead, I had a weird feeling that I was finally home.

I enjoyed the warmth of the sunlight streaming down on my face for a while longer until I decided to go for a swim. The air was warm, and the cool water called to me. I stripped off my clothes down to my bra and panties, wavering for a moment as I decided whether to take them off or not.

There wasn't anyone here. *Fuck it.*

I reached behind my back and swiftly unclasped my bra before I whisked my panties down my hips. I folded everything together and put it in a neat little pile. When I was finally ready, I dipped my toe into the water and hummed happily at the cool embrace. Slowly, I stepped in, lowering myself under the surface bit by bit. Eventually, it became too deep for my feet to brush the pebbled sand below, and I swam out, sighing softly as I flipped and drifted a bit on my back.

This was paradise.

## CHAPTER 3



*R*oken

I'd never seen such beauty before in my life.

Her long, dark mahogany hair framed her pale naked form like wildflowers swaying in the gentle breeze. Her dark eyelashes complimented honey-colored eyes that I'd only been able to catch glimpses of as she looked around the river and walked into the water. A rosy hue stained her impeccably high cheekbones, setting off her plump pink lips perfectly. My gaze drew over the flawless contours of her face, trying to cement it into memory before I had to run.

I couldn't help but follow the long, lean lines of her body. She was floating on her back, her perky round breasts set off by very hard, pink nipples that begged for me to reach out and touch them. Her legs kicked in the water, splashing little water droplets that pebbled on her flesh like tiny sparkling diamonds under the sun. Her arms spread outwards as she sighed contentedly, painting an impeccable picture of beauty and grace.

I'd been hidden amongst the thick foliage, so she hadn't seen me when she'd stripped off her clothes so she could enjoy the cool waters of the Silversong river. I didn't dare get any closer.

If I did, I'd lose control.

I'd take from her what she wasn't ready to give. Her scent was already calling to me. In fact, the aroma of jasmine, vanilla,



and cherries was what brought me here in the first place, and now I couldn't pull myself away.

I needed to keep a level head.

The sun, although bright overhead, was approaching the end of its downward trek in the sky. Night would soon fall, and with the darkness came dangerous creatures that would make a meal out of an innocent human without a thought.

It had been some time since I'd seen a human. I'd done my best to keep myself far away from the inhabitants of Terraheim for a long time.

They were safer that way.

I knew what they called me—the mad king, the cursed king, and (worst of all) the feral king.

The truth was that they were right. I was a monster.

The throne was my birthright as Dragonborne, but I'd long abandoned my seat. Centuries ago, I'd been betrayed by someone I loved. I'd given her my heart, and she'd thrown it right back in my face.

In exchange for more power than she could ever have imagined, I'd been cursed.

Any heightened emotion, such as anger or arousal, sent me into a feral state. Everyone near me was in unparalleled danger. In the past, I'd killed people that happened to be too close. I fought without recourse. I lashed out without thought. Even in my human form, I posed an incredible threat to every single creature in the realm. In my dragon form, the danger was without equal.

I lost complete and total control.

With a soft grunt, I turned my head. I didn't want to think about the terrible things I'd done in the past. As punishment for my sins, I'd exiled myself to the western reaches of the realm where the forests were too thick. There weren't humans for miles—that was, until this very moment.

Where had this woman come from? Didn't she know the dangers of these woods? How had she gotten here without

alerting the ferocious beasts that inhabited this forest? How was she still alive?

Questions whirled around in my head, but I knew I couldn't find the answers to them. I couldn't even approach her for fear that I'd hurt her, so instead I just chose to stay and watch over her in case something else came along.

Her scent assaulted my senses once again, and I couldn't miss the innocence hidden amongst the intoxicating layers of it.

She was a virgin.

My heart pounded in my chest, the blood rushing through my skull in a whoosh. I took a step back, needing to distance myself, but feeling an extreme need to stay and protect her should she come to find herself in danger. Every muscle fiber in my body felt ready to burst, and sweat beaded at the edges of my brow. Heat burned through me as I tried to restrain myself. Leaning forward, I pressed my hand against a tree in order to keep myself steady.

My cock was rock hard. I wanted nothing more than to drag her wet, lithe body out of the water, pin her down on her back, and mount her. Even though I knew I shouldn't, I yearned to sink myself into her and give her the rutting she deserved for having the audacity to swim in my forest naked.

I wanted to protect her, but the truth was that she was already in the worst danger imaginable.

There wasn't anything more dangerous that inhabited this forest than *me*.

## CHAPTER 4



*S* ophia

A twig snapped somewhere in the surrounding trees, and I started, immediately looking around as I treaded water.

*What was that?*

I spun around, trying to search the thick foliage for signs of life, but I couldn't see anything. For a moment, everything remained silent, and the only thing I could hear was my startled heart pounding in my chest. My uneasiness settled after a minute or two, but then the crunching of a dead leaf underfoot set my pulse racing once again. Slowly, I started to swim closer to shore until my feet brushed the sandy bottom. I kept my eyes peeled, but the forest remained silent except for the musical songbirds perched up in the treetops.

I only just made it out of the water when a dark blur came crashing out of the jungle and barreled towards me. There was no time to grab my clothes and get dressed, so I swam in the opposite direction. I looked back over my shoulder, only to see the furry creature give chase. A small, frightened squeak escaped me as I poured every ounce of strength and adrenaline into swimming away from it. At last, I crawled up onto the mossy shore and started to run. Looking back over my shoulder, I shrieked at the sight of it.

Apart from its massive, fur-covered body and gnashing teeth, what really scared me was the glowing purple eyes that stared back at me like I was its next meal. It was a sinister kind of

violet, supernatural light that left me feeling unsettled, almost like I had just seen a ghost.

This wasn't a creature that lived on Earth, that much was certain.

I tried to ignore the aching pain in the bottoms of my feet. I wasn't used to running barefoot anywhere, and even though the moss covering much of the ground was soft, that didn't mean that stepping on a sharp stick or a stone didn't cause me any pain. I gritted my teeth, my heart pumping with fear and adrenaline as I raced forward. I tried to avoid stepping on anything as best as I could, but soon enough, the side of my foot crashed down on the side of a rock and a piercing pain shot up my leg.

I didn't have to look. I knew I'd sliced it open.

Regardless, I dug deep for whatever courage I had left even as my eyes watered from the terrible, pulsing agony. The muscles in my legs burned fiercely, but I tried to ignore them, pushing onward with every step as I raced through the jungle.

The roaring footsteps behind me kept getting closer. Savage growls echoed, growing fiercer by the second, and I cried out, my panic reaching a fever pitch.

Then my foot caught in a vine and my world came crashing to a halt, each second lengthening until it felt like time stood still. I flew forward, the ground rushing towards my face at a dizzying pace until I made contact with a brutal jolt.

I didn't want to die, not like this.

Purely on the instinct to live, I pushed myself up and looked back over my shoulder as the wild beast bounded towards me on all fours. My fingers dug into the soft moss, finding traction as I tried to scramble back up to my feet, but it was too late.

The beast leapt towards me, closing the distance between us in one gravity-defying leap. It crashed down on my back, and I cried out as I flattened beneath it. Sharp claws dug into my back, and I yelped, unable to fathom any way out of this.

It grabbed my upper arm and threw me on my back, and I finally got a good look at the creature that would soon be the

cause of my death.

It was a werewolf, but nothing like the kind I read about in romance novels in the past. This one was undoubtedly evil, from his imposing and muscular form to his supernaturally glowing, circular gaze, screaming with nothing but malevolent intent. His black, scraggly fur glistened with an eerie sheen under the light of the moon, casting him in a sinister aura that made my heartbeat turn frantic with terror. I glanced down at his blood red claws, carefully poised over my ribcage as it contemplated ripping me open and feasting on my raw flesh. His snout furrowed as he rolled his lips, exposing gnashing teeth that were as long as each one of my fingers and sharp enough to rend my flesh with ease.

The glowing amethyst of his gaze was chilling down to the depths of my soul, and I whimpered with fear.

I didn't know why at that moment, but I suddenly chose to look up into the sky. The sun was setting, and the moon was rising. The vivid red, oranges, pinks and yellows cut through the sky, but the light of the full moon was jarringly bright.

I didn't dare move, deathly afraid the terrifying creature might retaliate.

Then something else roared with fury somewhere in the distance.

The creature stilled, pressing its clawed hand down on my chest and holding me in place. Its head circled unnaturally far as it looked around for whatever had made such a terrifying noise.

I swallowed hard, not knowing what to do, and that frightening growl came again, but much closer this time.

The werewolf quivered, intelligent enough to be afraid of whatever was coming, which only made my own fear spike further. Something crashed through the forest, taking no care to be quiet as sticks broke and dead leaves crackled beneath its feet.

The beast's claw dug a bit into my chest as it cowered over me, like it was protecting its last meal and didn't want to let

go. I felt the sharp tips pierce through my flesh, but I didn't dare move a muscle. The werewolf's fur bristled as he bared his fangs towards the right.

All of a sudden, a blurred form raced out of the surrounding brush and smashed into the werewolf astride me. Another fierce roar sounded, coming from the new, terrifying creature.

It was only when the fighting slowed that I realized that the new beast was a *man*.

His arms whipped out, sinking hard punches into the side of the werewolf's head as they grappled in close combat. The man's muscles flexed, and the two clashed in a display of raw power.

The werewolf managed to break his hold and lunged backwards as his claws slashed the air, gnashing his teeth in a primal show of aggression. The man moved with terrifying agility and spun forward, striking the werewolf with so much force that it seemed to defy his human form.

In a show of unwavering strength, the man rained down blow after blow as the werewolf slashed his claws and tried to fight him off. The sound of snapping fangs reverberated throughout the small clearing, but the man evaded the sweeping claws and the werewolf's gnashing jaws with superhuman speed. There wasn't a single moment where the werewolf overpowered the man. They crashed into a tree and the trunk cracked, the sound reverberating so loudly that if I had been somewhere else, I would have thought it was a clap of thunder.

I watched as the man's broad fist sailed into the side of the werewolf's head with bone-shattering impact, and the creature staggered, momentarily stunned. That's when I noticed that the man had his own set of long, jagged claws.

He wasn't human.

With a final burst of strength, the man seized the moment of vulnerability and punched the opposite side of the werewolf's head, causing the beast to waver from one foot to the other before it crumpled to the ground with a pained howl. It didn't get back up again.

The man pulled his shoulders back and stood tall amidst the aftermath, breathing heavily with his hard-earned victory. As the moonlight bathed down on the clearing, it cast an ethereal glow upon the battle-scarred landscape, and the man's gaze lingered on the fallen werewolf. In that moment, a mixture of triumph and empathy flickered in his eyes.

With a silent nod to the defeated beast, the man turned away and set his dark brown gaze on me. The intensity of his stare made me gasp, and I made a move to crawl backwards, but for some reason, I stopped.

I studied him just as intently as he did me.

Tall, commanding, and remarkably handsome, he possessed a raw magnetism that exuded strength and confidence.

His dark, cascading brown hair tumbled freely to his shoulders, framing a face that mirrored rugged masculinity and untamed allure. He had a square jawline and a piercingly intense gaze, and I was captivated within his molten, dark chocolate depths. His chiseled cheekbones were accentuated by a hint of stubble along his jawline, only adding to the raw masculinity pouring from him as he stared at me. He was wearing a pair of dark brown leather trousers that hugged the musculature of his thighs like a glove.

His chest rose and fell with the exertion of battle. His tanned skin glistened with sweat, setting off the thick hair that covered his upper body. His brawny arms and powerful torso attested to the strength I had just witnessed with my own eyes. A tapestry of tattoos wove a story over his body, covering his arms and much of his torso. Each inked design intertwined, dancing in harmony with his movements as he crouched down and watched me.

There was a natural charisma to him that drew me in, like a moth to a flame, and I found myself pushing up and taking a step towards him before I realized what I was doing. Immediately, I stopped myself, not certain whether his rugged demeanor would be warm and inviting, or sinister and deadly.

“Don't come any closer,” he growled, the rumbling sound of his voice like music to my ears, the perfect combination of

strength and sensuality, and my body reacted in kind instantly.

Heat ignited deep in my belly and settled in my core. My skin prickled with warmth as I stared back at this seemingly feral creature, not daring to move another muscle.

Even though I tried to keep myself from reacting, my body called to him. I told myself that I should be more shaken, or even more afraid, anything other than what I was feeling for him at the moment. As his eyes raked up and down my body, I finally realized what it was.

*Arousal.*

His very presence was all it took to evoke it. I'd just seen him kill a creature that shouldn't exist. Even now, the werewolf's blood was drying on his chest, evidence of the violence that had just occurred right in front of my eyes. I should be scared. I should want to turn tail and run away, not edge closer to him.

My gaze settled on his lips, and my chest rose and fell, each lungful of air searing my insides. What was this? Had I turned into a cat in heat at the first sight of a man in this strange new world?

I attempted to reign my arousal back in, but it was like trying to stop a train from careening off its tracks. The more I tried to contain it, the more it spiraled fiercely out of control. My pulse rushed so fast that the blood surged through my head, pounding along with the beat of my heart. I licked my lips as his perusal of my naked body continued, and my nipples hardened into tight little peaks right before his eyes.

A single, molten drop of arousal dripped down my inner thigh, alerting me to the rampant wetness between them. With a gasp, I pressed my legs together, only to find that I was wetter than I'd ever been in my life.

Without meaning to, I took a step closer.

"Don't," he growled.

"Who are you?" I asked, my voice trembling a little from the heat coursing through my veins.



“Have you not been warned about me? Have you not been told to fear the mad king?” he answered, his head cocking to the left as he appraised me. His tone was cool and calculated, but the rumble caused my core to constrict with a foreign need that overwhelmed me in an instant. I sucked in a heated breath.

“I don’t know who you are,” I replied, pressing my fingers against my chest in an effort to calm myself, but it did nothing. Instead, my arousal just continued to build.

The moonlight cascaded down on him, illuminating him like a mythical beast. I swallowed a whimper of yearning, trying to hold myself back despite the fact that I knew I was utterly failing.

“Don’t come any closer. Don’t make me warn you again,” he growled, curling his hands into fists at his sides. He squeezed his fingers so hard that his knuckles turned white. The rest of his body tensed with restraint, and I couldn’t understand why.

All my life, I’d kept quiet. I’d done what I was told without argument or even a word to stand up for myself. From what I could tell, this was a whole new world with terrifying creatures. For me, it was something of a new beginning.

So, I did something reckless for the first time in my life.

I took another step towards him at the same moment that the breeze picked up, swirling through my hair and winding directly towards him. His face twisted with scorn at me, his frustration towards my disobedience clear, but then I saw something else.

He was grappling with a desire all his own.

He wanted me too.

His herculean physique quivered with tenuous arousal. I saw his Adam’s apple bob up and down as his fists tightened even further. His gaze darkened considerably with feral need, and the confidence that had drawn me in before turned to something far more savage and unhinged.

That didn’t stop me.

There was something about him that told me he wouldn't kill me, but there was a tiny part of me that wasn't sure I was right. I couldn't really identify why I was testing fate like this, but he called to me in a way I'd never felt before.

"I warned you, human," he snarled, the rumble of his voice ruthlessly vicious, but I kept going anyway until we were mere feet away from each other. His hands were shaking now, and I bit my lip, fully aware that I was standing before him naked while he was clothed.

I was close enough to reach out and touch him.

The magnetism between us was all-consuming, pushing me beyond all reason and fully into the realm of raw instinct.

My breasts hung heavy with desire, and I wanted nothing more than for him to reach out and graze his rough fingertips over them. He bared his teeth, not moving, and I stretched towards him, brushing my fingers against the coarse hair on his chest.

As soon as I made contact, he lunged towards me, and I cried out, startled. His fingers closed around my upper arms, and I yelped at the ache that coursed through my body. It hurt, but then my core constricted, and a fissure of yearning crackled through me with dizzying intensity.

He spun me around and pushed me down over a fallen log before he kicked my legs wide. With a frightened squeak, I looked back to find him staring at my bare ass with arousal, need, and something else.

One of his hands remained in position on my lower back, pinning me facedown. The log was thick enough to easily support my torso, leaving my head tilted only a little downwards with my arms and legs hanging. Neither my fingers nor my toes could reach the ground.

I felt so small and vulnerable this way.

For several long moments, all I heard was the hoarse sound of his breath. I imagined that he was studying the wetness between my thighs, the rounded curves of my bottom, and the long lines of my legs. The thought of him looking at me that way was especially arousing, and I squirmed a little,

heedlessly showing myself off for him. Would he take me just like this?

In the books I read, it sometimes happened this way.

His breathing gradually slowed to a calm and even measure before his other broad hand settled on my bare backside, and I stiffened in an instant.

“What are you doing?” I questioned.

He didn’t answer right away. Honestly, I didn’t know why I’d expected him to. Instead, he manhandled my left ass cheek, squeezing tight before he let it go, and then he did the same to the other side. A vicious jolt of pleasure raced straight to my core, and I let out a soft moan before I realized what I was doing. As the sound echoed around me, I clamped my lips shut and chewed at the inside of my cheek, feeling a fierce flush of shame come over my face at my inability to control my own arousal.

“You defied my orders,” he snarled.

“So what?” I sassed. I didn’t think as the words flew out of my mouth. Maybe I was too curious for my own good and just wanted to find out what he would do. I didn’t know. Knowing it was too late to take the words back even if I wanted to, I just waited with bated breath, my skin warming one degree after the next with whatever unfathomable heat had come over me.

“No one defies me.”

*Except I just did.*

This time, I kept quiet as his palm left my backside. Without warning, he smacked the fullest part of my right bottom cheek so hard that it echoed throughout the forest. I squeaked in surprise, unable to really take in the fact that this man had just *spanked* me.

No one had ever taken me in hand like this.

I gulped hard as the scenes of a dozen different romance books passed through my mind all in a blur. Alone in my room in the dead of night, reading about a strong, firm man taking his woman over his knee for a stinging spanking had made my

pussy wet. I blushed, knowing that those specific scenes had been the reason that I'd gone to bed afterwards and slid my hand in between my legs to play with my needy little clit. Even worse, I'd made myself come fantasizing about getting a spanking of my own for doing something naughty.

His hand smacked the opposite side, and I cried out in shock, the sound catching me off guard once again. It was loud enough to rival a gun shot.

Then the sting hit me out of the blue.

The books always referenced it hurting, but I'd never really thought about the part about it being an actual punishment that was meant to leave me contrite by the time it was over.

My pussy clenched hard, my body enjoying the entire exchange despite the fact that my mind was fighting it. Wanting to protect myself, I quickly lifted my arms and pushed up off the tree trunk, but his palm at the center of my back swiftly shoved me back into place. I whimpered, but he held me there as the two handprints on my backside stung with fiercely increasing intensity.

Without another word, his palm lit into my backside. I kicked and struggled, but nothing prevented his broad hand from spanking my bare ass. With ferocious intent, he haphazardly smacked all over my bottom, punishing every bit of me from the tops of my cheeks all the way down the backs of my thighs.

This was far more than I bargained for.

I tried to keep my mouth closed so that he wouldn't know how much it hurt, but I only lasted four or five more swats before I let out a cry. After that, there was no way I could keep myself from yelping with nearly every hard smack.

The gravity of instinct had pulled me towards him, and I'd thought that it might result in the taking of my virginity at best, and definitely not in his broad hand smacking my bare bottom.

"Please, you don't have to do this," I tried.

The ensuing growl was so savage that I didn't know if he was still lucid or if he'd turned into a feral creature himself.

His palm cracked down on my bottom, over and over again. The ones to the backs of my thighs stung most, but nothing about this was careful or calculated. It was wild, so much so that his stinging fingers occasionally caught me directly between my thighs, spanking my soaked folds and making me scream out loud.

Even worse, his punishing treatment somehow made me even wetter. Each time his hand landed on my vulnerable backside, my pussy would clench, and my core would constrict with ever increasing need.

I opened my thighs a little wider.

Immediately, his splayed fingers caught me in between the legs, close enough to my clit to cause an agonizingly smarting jolt to spear right to my core and to my nipples. I gulped in a breath of air, trying to steel myself against the terrible sting, but I soon realized that I wasn't in control of this.

He wasn't either.

There was a terribly deep part of me that found pleasure in that. It began as a small glimmer at first, tiny enough that I could deny it, but it gradually swelled larger until it consumed every fiber of my being.

For the first time in my life, I felt like I was truly *alive*.

I arched my back as his palm slapped down on my bare ass, crying out as the sting intensified. I allowed myself to enjoy it as much as I could, but soon the sting became too much, and his swats were coming faster and harder.

This was a *real* punishment, and the worst part of it all was that I didn't know when it would end. I struggled over that fallen log, throwing my hands back and trying to protect my bottom as best I could. He paused, but only just long enough to pin my wrists behind my back and continue the spanking even harder than before.

Maybe I was wrong. Maybe he still held onto a tiny tendril of control. Maybe he was just reminding me how much more

powerful he was than me. Maybe he saw that he was making my pussy even wetter.

Every punishing spank seared into my backside until the entire surface burned as if it had been scorched in a fire. They came harder and more firmly than I ever imagined they would, and soon, I worried that he was going to make me cry.

It was overwhelming, and I could think of nothing other than the stinging spanking his hand was rendering on my backside. I flinched as a particularly firm slap caught the lower curve of my ass where it met my thigh, and I blinked as my eyes watered.

“Please,” I begged.

The punishment continued and I bit back a cry.

“You earned this,” he growled.

He still had some semblance of control.

My pussy clenched hard, as if it knew he was right. I whined out loud, but then a vicious flurry of spanks punished my upturned backside, and my eyes watered. I tried my best not to cry, but when the first tear eventually escaped, another followed, and then a torrent of tears dripped down my cheeks onto the forest floor beneath me.

I sobbed, my stinging bottom on display for a perfect stranger, and still I wanted him to look. The need within my core hadn't subsided.

Even as I cried, it continued to grow stronger. The spanking persisted, but he slowed his pace, each spank hitting deeper, so much so that it seemed to reverberate in my clit enough to tease me with the possibility of orgasm. But it wasn't quite enough.

His hand stayed wrapped around my wrist, and a strange part of me found comfort in that close physical contact. I wept and eventually, the spanking stopped.

His palm didn't pull away from my scorched flesh.

“You will remain just like this until I can get far enough away from you. Do not follow. I don't know if I'll be able to hold

onto my sanity again,” he warned.

*What if I did want you to lose control?*

I shook my head as he let go, trying to make sense of my traitorous thoughts. I'd already accepted that my body was lost to whatever this was, but I fought the following of my mind.

I turned my back, watching as he backed away and wanting nothing more than for him to return and take what I'd wanted him to take from the very start.

Instead, he moved further away with every step, and my core constricted. I shifted, trying to swallow the fact that I'd just received the first spanking of my life while I also still wanted the very same man to fuck me. It was like his wild nature had taken over me and I simply wanted to satiate the animalistic need inside of me, too.

The further he moved away, the stronger those feelings became.

Sweat beaded at the edges of my brow. A single droplet dripped down the length of my spine as I lay there over the fallen log, my scalded backside still high up in the air.

I'd thought I was wet before. Now, I was literally soaked.

My inner thighs were dripping with my arousal, and I couldn't make it stop. My clit pulsed and my nipples throbbed.

This heated arousal was so much worse than all the times I'd touched myself under the covers in bed. I held onto the log, trying not to move, but my hips rocked just a hair, and the man stopped dead in his tracks. Slowly, I pushed myself off the log and climbed onto unsteady feet, all while keeping a watch on him.

I stilled, not knowing what else to do.

The passionate need I was feeling seemed unnaturally strong, so much so that my core cramped viciously hard, and I pitched forward with a mournful cry. His face hardened as he peered back at me. When the cramping passed, I stood back up straight as my body continued to betray me right before his eyes. My nipples were rock hard. My thighs were beyond

slick, and every inch of my bare flesh felt like it was on fire. My punished backside was scorching hot, but the sting had morphed into scalding hot desire. Everything inside me was calling to him, and I couldn't make it stop.

He lifted his head the tiniest bit and sniffed the air.

Could he smell my arousal?

My thighs pressed together, and my face flushed heatedly. Did I like that? What even was he, and why did I want to find out?

With my eyes trained on him, I watched his restraint ripple over his colossal form, and then my heart stopped as I saw him lose that battle. He took a step towards me and his face hardened.

*“Run, human. Run before it’s too late.”*



## CHAPTER 5



*S* ophia

I *wanted* to heed his warning.

But I didn't.

Instead of running, I stood starkly still. Somewhere deep down, I think a part of me wanted to test fate to see what he'd do.

I swallowed hard, watching his muscles ripple once more as he fisted his hands at his sides. His chest rose and fell with the exertion of keeping his instincts at bay, but then the wind picked up enough to caress my bare skin and lift my long, dark flowing hair right off my shoulders. It carried my scent straight towards him, and he stiffened like he'd been slapped across the face.

His eyes narrowed as he bared his teeth.

"Or else what?" I dared.

"You're playing with fire," he spat through gritted teeth.

"I'm not afraid of you," I countered.

"*You should be,*" he growled, and my core ignited with a flush of heat. I gasped, but it came out sounding more like a soft moan than anything else. The veins in his forearms were visible as he squeezed his fists tighter.

Instead of saying anything more, I took another step towards him, and his face flashed with fury, uneasiness, and arousal all of his own.

All of a sudden, he lost his battle with his restraint.

He rushed towards me in a flash of movement. With a sharp cry, I took a step back as my own instincts finally kicked in, but it was far too late. In a flurry of motion, he was on top of me. I tried to push against his chest, but his arm was around my waist and my world turned upside down as he lifted me clean off the ground and deposited me flat on my back. His fingers dug into my hip, and I swore I felt the tips of his claws pressing into me.

I didn't know why that made my insides do somersaults.

"Wait! I don't even know your name!" I shrieked, but it was too late.

His other hand pressed against my throat, and my mind recoiled, but my body screamed for him. Soon, all I could focus on was his hands on me and the blood rushing through my head. I bit my lip and tasted blood as his eyes bored down into mine, giving me my first real good look into who he was. As if giving me a window into his soul, I saw every emotion flicker through his heated gaze as he stared back at me, the strongest being regret, hunger, and uncontrollable desire.

His irises were a rich emerald green with flecks of glistening golden honey. The moonlight caught his gaze just so, inviting me in at the same time I wanted to pull away. My lips parted as I struggled to cope with what was happening now whether I wanted it or not.

His brow furrowed as his gaze dropped to my lips.

"Please don't," I tried, my nerves quelling up from deep in the pit of my belly. I whimpered as his stare burned into mine. His gaze grew darker, hiding the flecks of honey behind dark shadow.

My heart pounded in my chest as he braced himself above me and pressed one knee in between my thighs, forcing my legs

open. He breathed in deeply, and there was no question in my mind as to whether he could smell my arousal now.

The hand holding my hip dipped down the curved surface, gliding over my arousal before he pulled it away and held it before my face. Even as his touch left my skin, a fiery, tingling sensation remained, and I wanted nothing more than for it to return and touch me in the place I needed it the most.

My wetness glistened on his fingers in the glowing light streaming down from overhead. A strangled cry of shame fell from my lips, and he stopped short. While maintaining eye contact, he slipped his fingers into his mouth and swirled his tongue around them, cleaning my wetness off right in front of me.

My core constricted even tighter, and my pussy clenched, practically begging in silence for him to take me as hard as he saw fit.

Before I could do anything to stop him, his lips fell to mine. At the moment of contact, my whole body ignited with tiny fireworks, and I trembled, immediately overwhelmed with intense desire. Tentatively, I touched the side of his hip.

His kiss started off vaguely gentle, but it didn't stay that way. The longer it continued, the more persistent he became until his lips were possessing mine. His mouth demanded my surrender, turning bruisingly hard and devilishly intoxicating. A part of me wanted to pull away, but an even bigger part of me wanted to find out what else was coming.

"Please," I whispered.

I didn't know what I was asking for anymore. His teeth nipped my lower lip. They were somehow sharper than I thought they would be, and then he kissed me even more savagely than before.

I fell prey to his demands without meaning to, and I kissed him back. His hand slammed into the ground beside my head as his tongue speared in between my lips, our kiss turning into a wild, animalistic dance that was fueled not by thought, but by raw passion.

I moaned, and he growled in return. I should have been terrified, but his rumbling, feral growl did nothing but fuel my desire to even greater heights. Delirious, I nipped his lower lip and he growled again, only to pull back and nip my throat. His gaze roved up and down my naked body, and I shuddered hard, knowing he wanted far more than what he had already taken.

He dragged his teeth along the sensitive expanse of my neck, dropping downward until he reached the swell of my breast. He palmed my right side, grazing his thumb over the hard tip of my nipple, and I gasped. Without meaning to, I bucked my hips, inadvertently rubbing my clit directly against the fabric of his pants. An electric fissure of pleasure spiked through me, and I bit back a moan, but only just.

He glanced up at me and lowered his mouth further still until it closed over my nipple. Using his teeth, he nipped me lightly, and then his tongue curled salaciously around the aching bud. My whole body trembled at once, and he did it again on the other side as his other hand dipped back down in between my thighs.

I knew what he would find even before he touched me.

I was so wet that it coated both inner thighs now. With every passing moment, I felt another droplet of arousal drip down my naked flesh. Gently, one fingertip passed over my clit lightly and I arched up into his touch with a heated cry.

His answering growl consumed me.

He palmed my other breast, and my body gave way. My mind was a muddy mess of dizzying sensation, and I could do nothing but try to stumble through the staggering haze. Beneath him, I came alive, and I never wanted it to stop.

I knew that it wasn't my choice, though. I'd pushed him into this. I'd ignored his warning, and even though a tiny sliver of me was afraid of what might happen, I openly ignored it in favor of the needy pulse in between my legs.

His tongue laved at my breast, and then he bit down much harder this time, causing me to arch right off the mossy

ground.

My core throbbed with frantic excitement, my heart racing in my chest. His touch was like fire, billowing across my skin with scorching heat. His movements were wild, predatory in nature, and savage with desire. He continued his explorations of my body, pinching and biting his way across the expanse, using the tips of his claws to tease me while he took me down as if I was his prey.

I was caught in a haze of willing and unwilling, and I drowned in it. Soon enough, what I wanted didn't matter.

He was going to take me whether I wanted it or not.

His savage demeanor set my soul on fire, surging with electricity as every single nerve in my body begged to ignite. My clit pulsed and my pussy clenched when he reached down and unbuckled his pants. In one quick motion, he freed his cock, and I gasped with fear.

It was a throbbing monstrosity, a thick club of a cock that promised as much pain as pleasure once it speared inside me. I let out a nervous whine, watching as the veins on either side of it pulsed with blood.

I was a virgin. How was I supposed to take that?

My core coiled tighter, and I bit my lip, trying to keep my needy sounds quiet, and failing. He pushed his pants the rest of the way down and climbed back on top of me, one thick thigh between mine. When the heated head of his cock glanced against my thigh, I shuddered hard, needy and fearful and wrought with every emotion imaginable as I grappled with what was to come.

I was going to get fucked—not by a man, but by a feral beast that held no semblance of control. I didn't know if I would survive this, but I knew that if I did, maybe this wild creature could eventually be tamed.

Maybe I could eventually make him mine. Maybe that was foolish.

I didn't know.

My breath caught in my throat as he splayed his fingers over my stomach, quietly holding me in position as he moved his hips closer to mine. The tip of his cock brushed against my entrance, and I struggled before he leaned down and kissed my lips, albeit more gently this time.

“I know that you are innocent, little human,” he growled hoarsely, revealing he still had the tiniest semblance of control.

His voice was ragged as his hips thrust gently in between my thighs. He didn’t push inside me just yet, and I tensed, anticipating his roughness, but it didn’t come.

“I will do my best to take you gently, but I can’t promise you that it isn’t going to hurt,” he continued. His body was shaking above me.

I didn’t know what took hold of me just then, but between the stinging still left behind from his hand and the intense need for orgasm, I was helpless to my body’s desires. Without thinking, I bucked my hips, dragging my pussy up and down the massive club of his cock. I moaned, the sound sharp as it echoed all around us.

Silence reigned, but there was a tenuous rope between us, and I could feel it fraying thread by thread. All of a sudden, it snapped, and he thrust forward into me with savage force.

Once inside, he stilled, and I started to scream.

He’d torn through my virgin barrier with one fell swoop. I’d read time and time again that such a thing would hurt, but none of that prepared me for the real thing. I squeezed my eyes shut when they started to water, the pain sharp for several moments. Eventually, I sucked in a breath, and thankfully it began to fade.

His body remained rigid, like he was only holding himself back for however long he could just so that he didn’t hurt me more than he needed to. The sweetness of that moment wasn’t lost on me. Even as his feral nature whirled out of control, he’d still held on for me.

Eventually though, that control came to an end. His hips snapped back and thrust forward, forcing his thick girth inside

of me with a wild strength. My pussy burned as he stretched me wide open, and the more that he pumped into me, the more I realized that every single thrust was going to hurt.

There would be no getting used to his monster of a cock. It was far too big for that.

Then, rather unexpectedly, he purred, and my body somehow yielded to him. My thighs tensed around his waist, and I whimpered as he started to move faster, laying claim to my body with every savage thrust.

There was nothing gentle about this fucking. I had ignored his warning, and now I was getting exactly what I deserved.

My arms curled around his neck, holding on as he started truly taking what he wanted, what his instincts demanded. I squirmed and bucked my hips beneath him, but every movement only resulted in his cock sinking deeper and deeper inside of me until it slammed against my cervix, rocking my very core like a dizzying earthquake.

My nails dug into his shoulders, but I could tell that he hardly noticed. Instead, he snarled with his own desire, nibbling on the side of my neck as he rutted me. My entrance still ached from the taking of my virginity, but that all paled to the pleasurable pain that rocketed through me from such a feral fucking.

I managed to keep at least mostly quiet for the first few thrusts, but I couldn't stay that way for long. At first, I let out tiny cries, biting back whatever I could. As the fucking increased in savagery, my volume followed along with it. My cries turned to moans, and my moans turned into screams. His cock was like an ironclad spear, so hard that it hurt as he took what I'd foolishly offered.

His pelvis ground against mine, rubbing my clit just right, and my pleasure grew. All at once, I knew that I was going to climax with his cock deep inside me.

Did I *want* to come?

As his big cock speared into me harder and faster, I knew that I was simply going to. There was no choice in the matter. As

his captivating gaze bored into mine, I could feel my own semblance of control quickly fading, the precipice of orgasm approaching far more quickly than I was ready for. I trembled and moaned as my need rose higher and higher.

I was powerless to fight against this.

I struggled with the rising need inside me, bucking and arching into every thrust until it all became too much. My first release crashed over me, and I started to scream.

From the moment it first began, I knew every orgasm I'd had beforehand would pale in comparison to this. My inner walls fluttered hard around his cock before they clamped down, yet still he continued to fuck me. My torso flexed and then every muscle in my body followed. Sheer bliss rocketed through my veins, and my eyes rolled back in my head. His hand wound around my waist, holding me in place and using his grip as leverage to fuck me even harder as I screamed for him.

Pain and pleasure twisted together, rebounding through my body over and over again as I suffered through the sweet sin of my orgasm. I writhed, coming harder than I had ever come in my life, for a man whose name I didn't even know.

White hot ecstasy poured over me in waves, my body constricting tight. When it finally began to crest, my heart was hammering in my chest, and I was finding it difficult to draw in a full breath. My thighs were drenched with my flowing arousal, and every nerve in my body was tingling with electric bliss.

His frenzied fucking didn't slow. If anything, it got harder, more visceral, and even more feral than before.

Fuck.

I'd never come more than once at a time before. I'd never even tried.

For a moment, I panicked. What if this was what he'd warned me about? Maybe he would fuck me raw, or maybe he would use me harder than my human body was capable of taking? I cried out, but then my pleasure spiraled once more, catching me in its wicked embrace and dragging me under the surface



whether I liked it or not. Questions tumbled through my head and for a moment, reality speared its ugly head.

This could kill me, or this might turn out to be the best sex I would ever have in my life.

Should I be enjoying this? Should I not?

A part of me told me that I shouldn't, but I swiftly ignored it, choosing instead to focus on the blissful feeling of his cock pumping in and out of my needy channel with wild abandon.

What I did know was that I didn't want it to stop.

And it didn't.

He rutted me with rising ferocity, his growls echoing around me, and then my desire reared its head. I opened my mouth in shock, a moan escaping me as my pleasure swelled once more. In disbelief, I realized that I was going to come again and nothing I did or thought would stop it. I could feel it coming. My need pinned me down to the mossy ground as my thighs tensed around his waist. I held on for what would ultimately turn into the ride of my life.

My core constricted with heat, and sweat beaded at the edges of my brow. I could hear the wet sounds of our fucking, and that's when I noticed that there was a tail emerging from the base of his spine. His growls sounded wilder, his claws sharper, and his bites more intense.

Until that moment, I'd almost forgotten he wasn't human.

His tail snaked in between us, lightly pushing down until it rested on top of my mound. The surface was velvety soft, and when it descended even lower to glide over my clit, I wasn't prepared for the jolting pleasure that came with it.

"Please, more," I begged.

No longer was I playing the unwilling participant. I wanted everything that this man was offering, no matter if it hurt, maybe especially if it hurt.

I quivered as the tip of his tail played over my throbbing clit. Every slithering movement stoked my pleasure that much higher, causing jolts of need to race up and down my spine as I

writhed beneath him. I begged and moaned, the pressure of the tail teasing as it edged me closer and closer to orgasm.

“Please, more!”

He rutted me so hard that it began to truly burn, but the pain quickly morphed into ecstasy as he increased the pressure of his tail on top of my clit, and suddenly the world snapped in two. I came for a second time, much harder than the first.

My screams reverberated all around us.

My fingers dug into his shoulders as he rode me at a feral pace. I couldn't stop my thighs from quaking as my pleasure imploded, surging up and down my limbs with vicious intensity. I screamed and moaned, taking every inch of his cock as deeply as I could, his tail teasing my climax higher and higher until I could have sworn that my head was lost somewhere up in the stars.

I bucked beneath him, truly overwhelmed with every tingling tendril of desire. My nerves fired over and over again much harder and faster, and I soon worried that I might not survive this much longer. Pain speared into my core with a savagery the likes of which I'd never known, far more intense than the pleasure that came with the first.

By the time my second release finally started to quell, I was trembling everywhere, but he didn't slow down, not even in the slightest.

I felt like I was balanced on the edge of a knife.

I bit my lip and pushed my hands against his chest. Forcefully, he wrapped his hands around my waist and lifted me from the ground. In a feat of strength, he spun me around and deposited me on my hands and knees. Before I realized what was happening, his thick cock was already pressing back inside of me. I tried to crawl away, but his hold on my waist was firm, and my fucking began all over again.

His tail curled around my belly and dipped between my thighs once more, finding my clit without delay. It pressed down much more firmly now that it had the proper leverage, and I

was quickly tossed into the throes of a third oncoming orgasm before I could do anything about it.

I cried out.

His cock speared into me with ferocious force, taking me even more deeply than he had when I was on my back. Every thrust hurt, but my cries didn't do anything to slow the hard pounding he was giving me.

I pleaded for him to slow down, but he didn't listen to a single word out of my mouth. If anything, every word fueled him to go faster and viciously harder.

Despite the pain, my body begged for more.

My arousal surged up and down my spine, and I knew I was going to lose control again, and soon. I tried to fight it, but it was like trying to stand on a beach and stop a tidal wave from breaking over me with nothing more than my bare hands. My thighs started to quake, and my fingers dug into the thick carpet of moss beneath me as I whimpered.

There was nothing I could do now but come.

When my third orgasm crashed over me, I was wholly unprepared for the merciless pain and ruthless pleasure that came with it. The onslaught of sensation was terrifyingly intense. My back arched as he continued pounding into me, fucking me through the dizzying, delicious agony until I had trouble holding myself up.

His arms wrapped around my waist, supporting me so that he could continue this feral fucking for as long as he saw fit.

And it was a long time.

I lost track of the number of times I shattered beneath him. Every subsequent orgasm wrung more and more energy out of me. It took everything in me just to survive it all. One bled into another and another until there was nothing left but animalistic need.

Vicious pleasure.

Terrifying agony.

All-consuming bliss.

He kept going and my blood pounded in my head. With a feral roar, he slammed into me, and his seed spurted deep inside me. Every lashing spurt felt like a fiery whip, filling me up to the brim. I gasped, coming one last time, deeper and harder than all the rest.

There was no more thought. There was simply sensation. By the time it was over, I collapsed in his arms, exhausted, satiated, and thoroughly used.

I closed my eyes and passed out.

## CHAPTER 6



*R*oken

When I woke, I didn't open my eyes right away. Instead, I enjoyed the scent of the trees all around me and the tired feeling of the well-worked muscles of my body. There was something else on the air, though, and I breathed in deep without realizing what it was.

It was a woman.

Fuck.

Not only that, but the scent of her arousal was strong all around me. In panicked disbelief, my eyes popped open, and I instinctively crawled backwards, seeing a beautifully naked, dark-haired angel sleeping beside me. My chest rose and fell with horror.

Had I lost control? Had I killed her?

It had been so long since I'd allowed myself to even get near a woman that I'd forgotten how beautiful one could be, from the soft, vanilla scent of her flesh to the rose petal aroma that adorned her hair, the way her perfect eyelashes framed her face, and the pretty plump pink of her freshly kissed lips. Everything about her spoke to her beauty, yet I couldn't understand why she was here next to me.

Where had she come from? What had I done?

Her chest rose and fell with her soft breath, and I let out an audible sigh of relief. She was still alive.

I moved away as everything slowly came back to me—her swimming in the river and then me rescuing her from the jaws of a werewolf only for her to continue to tempt me after I'd warned her to stay away from me.

It had all gone dark after that.

Her thighs drifted apart, and I could see a mixture of the blood of her innocence, her glistening arousal, and my still drying seed in between them. I swallowed hard, ashamed and horrified about what I had done.

I could see the marks of my fingerprints on the round globes of her ass and down the backs of her thighs. Vaguely, I remembered my words of warning to her and her willful defiance as she'd approached me.

I'd lost control after that.

I hadn't risked getting close to a woman in a very long time. In the throes of passion, all it would take was one false move and she would die beneath me. It wasn't something I was willing to gamble with, so I avoided it at all costs.

*You didn't kill her though. She's still alive.*

I'd been cursed for more than five hundred years. The realm of Terraheim was self-governing now, awaiting my return if I was ever of sound mind again. I hadn't ventured east in a long time. I knew that I was better off alone. The less that people were around me, the less they got hurt.

And that way, they couldn't hurt *me* either.

I hadn't dared allow myself to get close to a human, nor did I allow myself to shift into my dragon form because my curse didn't only apply to my life as a man. I couldn't afford to be careless. I had too much power at my disposal to lose control of it. I'd put too many lives at risk if I did.

Even now, I tried not to think about the painful events that had led to my curse.

I'd loved once. I vowed never to do it again.

Her face flashed before my eyes, and I gritted my teeth, a volley of emotion spearing right into my heart with the savagery of the tip of a blade.

Her name had been Elenwen, a beautiful elvish girl that had stolen my heart from the moment we'd met. I hadn't been enough for her. She'd fallen prey to Helheim's promises.

I wasn't sure who the sorcerer was who was responsible for my curse, but Elenwen led them right to me when I was at my weakest, in the middle of the night when I was asleep in my human form. She'd betrayed me to him, and I'd woken up to find her standing over me, my curse already firmly in place. In my anger over her treachery, I'd shifted and taken flight, soaring over the city of Taverna as I tried to reign in my raging instincts, but to no avail.

Terrified, the men of the village gathered every sword, pitchfork, and knife at their disposal. Their challenge had pushed my fury over the edge, and I'd lost control. It had resulted in a confrontation that had ended with so much bloodshed that I'd shied away from human contact ever since for fear of making the same mistake.

I'd ripped through them with my claws and teeth, and when I was done with my assailants, I'd burned the rest of the village to the ground with my poisonous green flames. I'd come to amongst the devastation and made a vow to never again hurt the people of my realm, so I went west to the overgrown forests that surrounded the rift.

I'd carried the guilt with me ever since.

After that fateful day, I'd kept to myself, not trusting my feral nature around any human, elf, fae, or dwarf. The only other living creatures I'd seen this far into the forest were orcs, werewolves, hellhounds, and a range of terrible creatures sent through the rift by the Dark King himself.

The forests served as a natural barrier to keep out those that escaped through the rift, but over the years, that had started to fail, too. It was only very recently that the Dark King had started to escalate the number of forces he was sending

through, and it was everything I could do to keep up with the threat.

None of that explained her.

I didn't know where this beauty had come from, but there hadn't been a single ounce of fear in her eyes, not like all of the others.

This one was somehow different. Had he sent her too? What was this?

I reached for her and brushed a single lock of dark hair off her forehead and behind her ear. My heart pulsed for her, like there was a magical tie between us and I didn't understand it. I moved away at once, needing to gather myself before I decided on my next move.

She'd been lucky to survive me once. I wouldn't put her at risk again. I'd have to reign in my control even tighter, so she didn't end up dead.

Why wasn't her mere presence sending me into a frenzy right now, though?

I should want to tear into her or rut her into oblivion, but none of that was pulsing through me. Instead, there was a sensation that felt distinctly foreign.

I wanted to protect her. Not only that, but I needed to know she was alright. A part of me knew I should walk away, that she'd be safer that way, but I was drawn to her in a way that demanded I listen.

*Even if I thought it was a bad idea.*

For a long while, I just watched her sleep. She looked so peaceful.

I couldn't leave her here. She didn't stand a chance against the beasts that roamed these wild lands.

*She should be scared of you the most.*

I gritted my teeth and turned my head. It was selfish of me to want to keep her, but the idea of leaving her felt far worse. I chanced moving a few feet towards her, testing if closing in on



her would threaten the boundaries of my control. When it didn't feel like my consciousness was fraying apart, I took another several steps towards her until I was within reaching distance.

She was absolutely breathtaking, like a glowing gemstone sparkling under the moonlight.

I couldn't live with myself if another creature destroyed her.

While she was still asleep, I carefully lifted her off the ground and carried her off. I'd take her to my home, where she would be safe from the monsters that roamed these woods under the cover of night.

There, the only thing she needed to fear would be me.

## CHAPTER 7



*S*ophia

When I woke, I was snug under a cocoon of warmth. Keeping my eyes closed, I pushed my palms up and wrapped my fingers around thick blankets and soft furs. Furrowing my brow, I opened my eyes, unsure of where I was and how I had gotten here.

Not only that, but my body was bare beneath the covers.

I shifted my thighs, noting that there was a gentle ache between them which continued all across my backside. It felt like I had run a marathon, every muscle sore and well-used.

Hesitantly, I pushed myself up to a seated position, all while keeping an arm wrapped around the blankets to cover my nakedness. With a hard swallow, I looked around and tried to take stock of where I was.

From the light streaming in through the rustic window, it was daytime. I was in a log cabin of sorts, but I could see the green of the treetops just outside.

Was I on the ground, or was I in some sort of treehouse?

To the right of me was a roaring fireplace with a stone hearth and a thick wooden mantle. Every piece of furniture from the bed to the dresser to the large armoire was hand-carved out of the richest cherry wood I'd ever laid my eyes on. There was a table laden with dried meats, fruits, and bread.

There were several other doors that led off from the main room. I hoped one of them was a restroom and not just a chamber pot should I need to relieve myself. I honestly didn't know what kind of world this was, but I was certain it wasn't my own.

The creak of leather jerked my head to the left, and I sucked in a breath. I turned my head to see him sitting in a chair beside the window, the sunlight streaming in through the pane and illuminating him in a glowing light.

It hadn't been a dream. He was *real*.

In an instant, my cheeks flushed with a furious heat, and I bit the inside of my cheek to keep myself quiet.

Would he think I was just some cheap whore?

When he cleared his throat, my heart leapt into my throat. I searched his dark gaze, noting that his eyes were much greener than I last remembered seeing them.

"It is dangerous in these woods for a girl to be on her own. I took you to my home last night while you were sleeping to keep you safe," he offered.

Unlike last night, there was a warmth to his voice. Seemingly, whatever danger that had occurred between us had either passed or settled. I knew not which.

"What's your name?" I asked shyly.

"Roken," he answered, his voice remaining calm. "Will you tell me yours?"

"Sophia," I whispered.

"Are you hungry?"

I nodded quickly, just before my stomach decided to rumble and announce my presence with vigor, much to my embarrassment. My gaze quickly dropped down, and I heard the gentle jostling of the leather chair again as he stood up and headed towards the table. Unable to quell my curiosity, I glanced back up to see him gather a few pieces of fruit and some meat that looked at least similar in nature to bacon and put them on a plate.

“I can make you a more filling meal in a little while, but this should be a good start for now,” he offered. I curled the blankets closer to my chest as he strode towards me, but he didn’t make any move to uncover me or lash out at me as he handed me the plate.

My bottom and my pussy clenched reflexively as I glanced at those big broad palms, the same ones that had brought stinging pain and mind-bending pleasure. A tremor raced down my spine as I took the plate from his waiting hand.

His fingers brushed against mine, and a firework of sensation cascaded all over my body from that single touch. There was tension between us still, that much was for certain.

“Eat your fill. I’m going to prepare a bath for you,” he stated, and I nodded once as he walked away. I couldn’t help but appreciate the wide expanse of his shoulders and upper back, especially how it tapered into his narrow waist. I had to force myself to look down at the plate in front of me once he left the room.

I didn’t recognize the berries. Some of them were white, others powder blue and lavender. But once I popped them into my mouth and they burst on my tongue with flavor, I moaned. I couldn’t quite place what they tasted like, but somehow, they were like strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, and blackberries all meshed into one extraordinary fruit. The dried jerky was even better than bacon, fatty and flavorful and hinting of smoked bourbon. I ate every last bite on that plate before he emerged from what I assumed was the restroom.

“Come. I will bathe you now,” he stated purposefully, leaning against the doorframe. I opened my mouth a bit in disbelief before I managed to put together a few words in response.

“I can take care of myself,” I whispered.

“Come,” he repeated, and I looked around, trying to find something to cover myself with, but my clothes were nowhere to be seen. His expression screamed with expectation, and his hand flexed, reminding me without words what could happen should I defy him once again.

Would it end the same way as last time? Did I want it to? I wasn't certain.

When I didn't move, he strode over from his position on the doorframe to me, making my heart pound with every single step. He held out his hand, and I saw no other option but to take it. With a soft gasp, I pressed my fingers into his, and an electric tingle raced up my arm and spiraled all the way down to my core. Tentatively, I let the blankets fall from my grasp, revealing my naked chest bit by bit.

When I pressed my feet to the floor and stood up, I saw him stiffen at the sight of me.

"I can bathe myself," I said out loud, and he shook his head.

"I mean to examine you, sweet girl. I want to ensure that I didn't hurt you," he replied firmly.

"I wasn't, at least not by you," I said in a rush, feeling my cheeks heat at the memory of him pinning me over the fallen log. My gaze dropped to the gash on my leg, and he gritted his teeth.

"I want to see for myself. You will be obedient, or I will redden your bottom as thoroughly as I did yesterday. If need be, I won't hesitate to take off my belt," he threatened.

There was something about him that was different today, more in control than yesterday. A soft gasp fell off my lips as I glanced down at his waist, the dark brown leather strap around it ominous. A part of me was intrigued, but the rest of me remembered just how much his hand had stung. My clit didn't get the memo, though, because it quickly throbbed to life at his warning.

"I understand," I murmured, hating how compliant I sounded. Could he tell how much the thought of him being so firm with me turned me on?

"Good girl," he praised.

Just as I was taking a step to follow, I stopped short, a tornado of heat cycling through me at those two words. I didn't know what to do or say to respond. My pussy fluttered with need, and I realized that I was just as wet as I had been yesterday. I

dropped my gaze, and his fingers traced down the back of my spine.

“You are a beauty,” he murmured.

“Thank you,” I said shyly, not knowing what else to say.

“Why do you not fear me?” he asked, his expression a dark mask of brooding mystery.

“You have not given me a reason to be afraid of you,” I answered.

He stilled, gazing back at me with forest green eyes. Flecks of honey sparkled like gold within those emerald irises, pulling me in just like they had yesterday. I placed my hand against his chest, and he looked down, contemplative before he reached up and wrapped his hand around my wrist. With a shake of his head, he pulled my hand away.

“I will not put you at risk like that again, Sophia,” he said softly, his tone full of regret. I opened and closed my mouth, not knowing what to say as my body simmered before him. A single droplet of arousal rolled down my thigh, and I turned my head.

Did he not want me anymore? Did he not find me attractive enough?

His hand dropped to my lower back as he guided me forward, and I went willingly, my mind a mess of thoughts and emotions. I wanted to sigh in relief. I wanted to cry. I wanted to disobey him so that he might spank me and then fuck me again.

I did none of those things.

Instead, I went obediently through the doorway into a beautifully crafted bathroom. I breathed in, the scent of cedar planks strong, and closed my eyes. The aroma of roses wafted through the air, and I opened my eyes again, seeing a beautiful, clawfoot ivory bathtub at one side of the room. It was full of steaming water with coral-colored petals strewn across the oiled surface.

I did my best to ignore my body's simmering needs, and I walked forward without his prodding. Keeping my eyes down, I took his hand when he offered it so that I could climb into the tub.

"I mean it. I'm perfectly capable of washing my own body," I spat, not really out of annoyance towards him, but with frustration towards my body's reaction.

Without missing a beat, he spun me around and popped a stinging smack to both sides of my ass before he paused.

My pussy throbbed with need, and I did my best to ignore it.

His rigidness was both alarming and comforting in the same breath. On the one hand, I felt pouty about the fact that he was being so firm with me. Both swats burned long after he'd delivered them, maybe especially so because my ass was already sore from the spanking he'd given me last night. In opposition to that, however, a part of me was relieved that he was still willing to give me that kind of attention.

Maybe that was what he liked. Maybe that's what I liked.

My head a mass of confusion, I complied when he pressed lightly down on my shoulder, indicating that I was to lower myself down into the water. It was the perfect temperature, and I did so with ease, but not without my entire core throbbing incessantly with want.

I did my best to ignore it.

He picked up a cup and dipped it beneath the water's surface. Gently, he tipped my head back and doused my hair. He did that a couple of times until my dark locks were dripping. In silence, he poured a helping of shampoo into his palm, and with a tenderness I didn't know he was capable of, he started to wash my hair. Tingles of pleasure raced through me as his fingertips dug into my scalp, washing away the sweat and dirt from traipsing through the forest yesterday. Dirt coursed down my arms in tiny rivulets.

He rinsed me off with the cup of water. Next, he poured several conditioning oils into his hand and worked them into

my hair with his fingers. Then, he rinsed off and held out his arm, meaning for me to take it.

“Stand back up,” he directed.

My body pulsed again. Boldly, I kept my gaze level with his as I stood up before him. It seemed to take him tremendous effort to keep his eyes on mine, like he was fighting the desire to look at my wet form with everything he had in him. Just having that knowledge gave me a large amount of satisfaction.

I held my head a bit higher as he looked away. He grasped a washcloth beside the bathtub as well as a bar of soap before he finally gave in and looked at me. His entire frame turned rigid, his muscles rippling with the same restraint that I’d seen pass over him last night.

His gaze turned heated, but he didn’t reach for me. It was as if he was struggling with something internally that he would not voice.

Was it me? Was it him?

There was no way to tell, but I wasn’t ready to ask. After a few tense moments, he nodded so subtly that I almost missed it, and then his fingers were on me once again. His strong hands washed me with a detached thoroughness, and as much as I wanted to enjoy it, I couldn’t because I could tell that he didn’t want to do it and was simply washing me out of duty.

He took a significant amount of time to rinse and clean the gash on my leg. It wasn’t very deep, but his movements were gentle, as if he didn’t want to hurt me anymore than I was already.

“Does this hurt?” he asked, his voice soft and sweet.

I shook my head as he rinsed it once more, and his concern seemed to be sated, at least for the moment.

Maybe he did care after all.

The shy shame I had felt towards him seeing my nakedness washed away along with the dirt covering the rest of my body, but it returned in a flash once he spoke again.

“Spread your legs,” he demanded.



I tried to stop myself from smirking as I shook my head.

“No,” I replied brazenly.

His emerald green eyes darkened with shadow, and a dangerous gleam came over them. I stepped from one foot to the other nervously, waiting to see what he would do.

In a flash, his fingertips closed around both nipples and he pinched them. Without pause, he twisted my sensitive little buds, and I pitched forward with a cry, pain lancing across the expanse of my breasts. When he didn't let go, I slowly stepped my legs wider and wider. Eventually, I spread myself wide enough to please him and he released my throbbing nipples. I sucked my lower lip into my mouth as my own hands reached up to attempt to soothe them, but I flinched the moment my own fingers made contact.

He lightly smacked them away. “Your gorgeous bare bottom isn't the only place I can punish, little human,” he warned, and his words lit a fire in my core.

I didn't respond, my tongue caught up with embarrassment at how easily he'd forced me to comply to his demands.

He soaped up the cloth once more and pressed it between my legs. His touch was teasingly light, and I had trouble keeping my legs straight as they trembled with sensation.

“Are you sore here?” he asked, his voice once again tender.

I shook my head, unable to make myself speak as he dragged the cloth back and forth over my pussy. He pulled away, though, and I had to bite back a groan of disappointment. With gentle thoroughness, he washed the dried arousal off my inner thighs, and when he was done, he placed the cloth back down.

“Does anywhere else hurt?”

I shook my head again, too shy to tell him my ass was still smarting from his hard hand.

“Good. You may enjoy the bath for as long as you like,” he dictated, pulling out a soft, fluffy towel for me from the cupboard and leaving it on a small table within reach.

I opened my mouth to say something, but nothing came out.

I wasn't sure what I was going to say, but as he strode out of the room, I realized I had been about to ask him to stay.

## CHAPTER 8



*S*ophia

I sulked in the bath for a long time, well past the time the water cooled, in an effort to keep the desire in my traitorous body at bay. Eventually, I couldn't stand the chill any longer, and I climbed out. Still shivering, I wrapped myself in the fluffy white towel and picked up the comb that was waiting beside it. I sat down on the edge of the tub and tamed my thick, tangled mane as best as I could, wanting to delay my exit as much as possible. He'd left the door open, and when I finally summoned the nerve to enter the main room again, he wasn't there. I didn't know whether I felt relieved or sad that he was gone, but I tried not to give it too much thought.

I chewed the inside of my cheek, uncertain of what to do. After a few moments, I decided finding clothes that would fit me was of utmost importance. The cabin wasn't especially large, so it wouldn't take that long to search out.

I started in the most obvious places, like the armoire and the handmade dresser. It was mostly full of men's clothing that were all far too big for me. I even searched the kitchen cabinets, but by the time my search ended, I'd turned up emptyhanded.

Out of desperation, I pulled one of his cotton shirts over my head, but it was so big it hung off my shoulders and went down to my knees. Relieved to be covered at least, I ventured towards the front door. I listened closely for signs of his

presence, but I didn't hear anything, so I decided to open it. I stepped out onto a front porch.

I had suspected that we might be in a house up in the trees, but actually seeing it right in front of my eyes was something else entirely.

We were way up in the treetops, maybe three stories high by Earth standards. The ground looked ridiculously far down below, and I hesitantly pressed my fingertips against the railing. It was a heady sensation to look at the ground, and I stepped away, choosing instead to look out all around me at the wildlife in the treetops instead.

There weren't just colorful birds, squirrels, and vibrantly scarlet monkeys, but there was a whole village strung up here. Rope bridges connected several different cabins. It took me an embarrassing amount of time to approach one of them, but I was too uneasy about the height to take a step onto it.

I would leave that exploration for another day.

Maybe when I did, I would find the way out. At first glance, I didn't see any ladders down, so I guessed that maybe there was a spiraling staircase down inside one of the massive tree trunks. I couldn't be certain, though. Roken could have a ladder and have hidden it from me so that I couldn't escape.

I looked up into the sky, trying to guess what time it was. The sun looked like it was on its downward trek, and my stomach growled, reminding me that I'd only eaten a late breakfast. Venturing back inside, I sampled much of the various dried fruits and meats until I had eaten my fill.

Roken didn't return that night.

I waited up for him for a long while until my eyes were too heavy to keep open and my yawns hurt my jaw. I climbed back under the furs and curled up underneath them with his scent all around me.

\* \* \*

I woke the next morning to see that Roken had come back sometime during the night. I smiled in his direction, but he didn't return the gesture. He looked away, like he was avoiding eye contact with me, and I licked my lips, feeling a bit deflated. I searched his face, trying to read his expression for any clue regarding what he might be thinking, but he gave me nothing. Instead, he just gestured towards the table, where there was a steaming plate of food and a large box beside it.

"Your clothing was damaged during the fight, so I went searching for something for you to wear," he said, his tone emotionless.

The blanket slipped off my shoulder as I shifted in the bed, revealing what I assumed was his shirt on my body. His gaze ventured across my bare legs like I was a decadent dessert for the briefest of seconds, but then he turned away as soon as a flash of heat flitted across his face.

"It is my duty to protect you. I will take residence in the cabin next door. If you need anything, you can simply cross the rope bridge to get to me," he explained, keeping his response taciturn and just as icy as before.

What had happened? Was it something I said?

"Why not stay here with me?" I pressed, furrowing my brow in confusion. I didn't understand his sudden coldness, but his expression remained rigid, like he had decided something and he was going to stick by it. What was he thinking? Why the sudden change?

"It is not safe for you if I remain close to you," he replied curtly.

Annoyance surged through me, and I tried to swallow it back. Why keep me here if he was going to be like this? This man had taken my virginity, and now he was treating me like nothing more than a possession, or even a burden.

"Then let me go," I demanded. I didn't need him to look after me if he didn't want to be around me.

"No. You will remain here with me."

"Why?"

“It is dangerous for you to wander these forests. There are worse things than werewolves hunting out in the dark. I forbid it. You will remain here in Vedanta with me where I can protect you,” he explained.

I scowled, annoyed both by his coldness and his iron will.

“I will not trap you in this cabin. You are free to wander the village.”

“Does anyone else live here?” I asked, sulking.

“No. It was abandoned a long time ago,” he answered sadly.

“Because of the dangers in the forest?”

“A human from my realm would know these things,” he observed, finally meeting my gaze with interest.

“I’m not from here,” I replied warily.

“Where do you come from, human?” he asked as his gaze furrowed with suspicion.

“Earth,” I sighed. He jolted back like someone had slapped him across the face.

“This is Terraheim. There has not been an Earth human in my realm for more than a thousand years,” he stated.

The gravity of his words was not lost on me.

“You are not human, are you?”

“I am not. I am Dragonborne.”

I didn’t know what he meant, but I nodded quietly anyway. He must have seen the confusion flittering across my face, because he took pity on me and smiled gently with understanding.

“I am man, and I am also dragon. I can shift between one form and the other,” he explained.

I stared at him in disbelief for a moment. As much as I wanted to discount his theory, it made at least a little sense. I’d seen magic portals, a werewolf, and the way he’d fought. I’d known he wasn’t human. I didn’t see any reason not to believe him, but it was a big pill to swallow that he was a dragon shifter,

and that dragons were real and not just some mythical creatures that existed in books and in the movies.

At least he wasn't a sparkly vampire. A girl should count her blessings.

"Why keep me here?"

"Because I don't want to find your severed head on an orc's spike," he said through gritted teeth. His tension rattled me, like he was growing angry that I had no understanding of his world, or maybe it was something else. Whatever it was, he didn't explain any further, and I sat there stewing with my own frustration.

"And you? Will you not hurt me, too?" I snapped back.

"No more questions. I cannot risk being around you any longer," he barked, and in a flash, he left the cabin. I opened and closed my mouth in disbelief, not knowing whether to be angry or hurt.

What had gone wrong?

Eventually, I sighed and got out of bed, walking over to the table where there was breakfast still waiting for me.

It was a stack of waffles.

Apparently, the breakfast treat spanned his realm and mine. With a growling stomach, I dug in. This particular recipe tasted a lot like pumpkin and gingerbread cookies, slathered in sugary syrup and a thick slab of partially melted butter. By the time I finished it, I felt full and a little better, albeit not by much.

I sat back with a sigh and noticed the wooden box next to me. I'd forgotten all about it.

I stood up and moved in front of it, reaching for the intricate top. For a moment, I appreciated the hand carved design woven into the wood, a series of vines and roses that hinted that this had once belonged to a woman.

For some reason, I held my breath as I pulled the top off.

Inside the box was a fairytale gown, a deep forest green silk embroidered with golden thread. The torso was covered in metallic beading. With a sharp gasp, I gripped the shoulders and pulled it out of the box so that I could see the whole thing at once.

It was the prettiest gown I'd ever seen, the kind that must have belonged to a princess or maybe even a queen in the past. The A-line skirt consisted of several lustrous forest green silk layers, and the beaded torso was meant to hug a woman's upper body like a corset. There was lace cording to cinch it shut in the front.

It looked to be my size. Could I really be that lucky?

All alone, I shucked Roken's shirt over my head, a bit in a rush to get his belongings off my body after our ill-fated meeting this morning. I unlaced the front of the dress and stepped inside, pulling it up over my hips and around my waist. There were draped sleeves that hung off the shoulder with more delicate beadwork that emulated a feathery design.

It fit my body like a glove.

The sweetheart neckline cupped my breasts perfectly, lifting them up so they appeared perky and seductive. The waistline hugged my own, cinching me in just the slightest bit to make me feel even slimmer, and when I caught my reflection in the glass of the window, I gasped.

I wasn't moonlighting as a princess, but a queen. The only thing I was missing was a crown.

Where the hell had he found something like this? And how did he know it would fit me? Why had he even cared?

The man was an enigma. Certain parts of him seemed rough, like he hadn't been around people for a long time, yet other times he was soft and sweet, like preparing a bath for me and finding me something nice to wear instead of just his shirt.

I'd known that he was impossibly strong after watching him fight. He kept telling me that he was dangerous, but I didn't believe it.

I should be afraid of him. I should want to run. But I *didn't*.



I wanted to stay.

## CHAPTER 9



*S*ophia

For the next several days, Roken made himself far scarcer than I preferred. Whenever I caught sight of him, my heart leapt into my throat, and I wanted to call to him, but I didn't know what to say. So, I ended up staying silent. I watched his movements throughout the village, and I followed him on the safe paths that were strong enough to hold his weight. I told myself that since I was about half the size of him, the wooden rope bridges would hold my weight easily. With my anxiety tempered, I began to explore the long-abandoned village, finding more clothes and supplies which I took back with me to the small cabin I'd taken to calling home.

I found books that detailed the history of this place, but they were from long ago. Some of them hadn't stood the test of time, their pages crumbling and stuck together. Several had survived, though, and I was able to learn about this realm that was not mine.

There was a lot of this place that was like Earth. There were lakes, oceans, forests, plains, and all the terrain that I was familiar with back home, but there were some pretty big differences, especially in the creatures that inhabited this place.

Fae, elves, dwarfs, and those touched by magic most certainly existed here, as did monsters such as orcs and goblins and other terrifying beasts, but what held my interest the most

were the dragons. I wanted to know more about Roken, even when he'd made it his business to keep us apart.

Roken was Dragonborne, which was a family of dragon shifters that had ruled over this realm since before the written record of history. At any given time, there was only one single male dragon, and he generally ruled over the realm with an iron fist. They were highly respected and feared. There were small segments of rebellion from time to time, but they had been mostly uncontested for much of history.

Roken was the break in the line. According to historical records, as well as a few written diaries from the inhabitants of this village from about five hundred years ago, he had abandoned the throne, or was driven away from it. The stories were tumultuous and hard to follow, but from what I could gather, he'd turned his back on his people. Worse than that, though, he'd attacked them and leveled the once glorious capital city of Taverna to the ground.

No one knew why. It was rumored that he had gone insane. Some called him the mad king, but there was one scroll that suggested that he might have been cursed. It was signed by a sorceress that went by the name Aurelia.

All of this was real. Magic and dragons actually existed and weren't just some fantasy fairytales meant to entertain children in their beds.

I searched the rest of the village as thoroughly as I could, but I found no more information that would explain why Roken was the way he was. I repeatedly went over our interactions in my head with a fine-tooth comb. There was nothing about him that suggested that he was insane. In fact, he'd been levelheaded, caring, and thoughtful since I'd arrived here, providing me with food, clothing, and gifts. Somehow, he'd noticed my interest in books, and he'd found a few that I hadn't, which provided me with a history of Terraheim's sister realms, Icegard, Blazelheim and Sungard, as well as deeper insight into magic and prophecy. None of what I'd learned suggested that there was any way back home, but I wasn't in a rush to return to that life. Even a lonely life in this world was better than that one.

Another week passed, and I read through the last of the books I'd gathered as well as the ones Roken had brought to me. Lost in thought, I ventured out onto the front porch of my tiny little cabin. The leaves shifted in the wind all around me as I sipped a hot cup of tea. Wistfully, I stared down at the ground.

Maybe if I could find one of the cities referenced in the books at my disposal, I would feel more at home. For some reason, my loneliness felt heavy today, especially since I knew that Roken usually disappeared for much of the day. Sometimes he came back covered in black blood. Occasionally, he didn't come back until the next morning. I'd heard him moving about the village as I'd lain in bed, listening through the open window.

Standing on my front porch, my gaze drew towards the great hall, a building that wrapped around the largest tree in the village. The other day, I'd explored much of it and found a way down to the forest floor. Inside, the trunk was carved hollow, and a spiraling staircase went all the way down to the ground.

He'd warned me not to leave the village, but I'd found leather armor and weapons in the surrounding cabins. I'd hidden them in my own home, beneath the bed should I need them. Left to my own devices, I'd even been practicing my sword work.

Growing up, I'd taken several fencing classes. The sword I'd managed to find was a good deal heavier than the saber I'd used back home, but my muscles were getting used to it at a fast pace.

I didn't need Roken. I could protect myself.

Slowly, I finished sipping my tea before I went into the cabin and dressed in a pair of brown leather pants, a dark grey cotton shirt, and several pieces of soft leather armor meant to protect my body without sacrificing my agility. I knew that I wouldn't win a fight based on brute strength alone, but I was quick and small, both traits that were underestimated time and time again.

I slipped the baldric over my shoulder and holstered my sword on my back before I gathered a pack of food, a full waterskin,

and a flask with blackberry brandy should it get cold at night, as well as a flint and a small dagger. I grabbed a small bestiary book and shoved in it my bag, just in case I ran into anything I didn't know how to deal with.

When I was ready, I quietly crept towards the great gathering hall. Roken was nowhere to be seen as I snuck through the village, just as I'd expected. He'd grown comfortable and assumed I was just going to do as I was told like I had always done, but this was a new chance at life for me. I wasn't going to fall back into bad habits.

Recklessness had rewarded me here thus far.

It was easy to make my way down to the stairs. There was a door hewn right out of the trunk at the bottom. With trepidation, I opened it slowly, peering around to see if there was anything there, and when I saw that the coast was clear, I closed it behind me and kept going.

I knew that the sun rose in the east and set in the west. From the maps I'd been able to get my hands on, the capital city of Eldoria was to the east, so I looked up to the sky and started in that direction.

It wasn't long before the brush grew so thick it was difficult to push my way through. The longer I went on, the more concerned I grew because even the tree cover overhead was difficult to see through. Needing to take a moment, I paused and leaned against a tree when suddenly a magical tingling sensation raced through my body.

With a gasp, I pitched forward, the heady feeling taking me by surprise. All of a sudden, a tunnel opened up for me, clearly visible through the tangled brush.

*"I will help you seek what you know not you need find."*

The voice of an elderly woman rasped inside my head, and I slapped my hand over my mouth, looking all around me and finding no explanation for the sudden voice of a stranger.

"Who are you?" I whispered fearfully. There was no hiding the trembling in my voice.

*“I am the seer, the voice between worlds. Follow the path I’ve created for you. Go forth and find your destiny,”* she answered, her voice hoarse.

This was ancient, *powerful* magic.

This was not magic casted by a sorceress, a sorcerer, or even a wizard, meant to heal or to build, or to destroy like I had read about in the books here. This was something entirely different.

“My destiny?”

The voice didn’t answer again, but the forest tunnel remained. Hesitantly, I took a step in that direction. There was a magical pull edging me forward, as if whatever destination the seer had in mind for me had its own source of gravity. I took another step and then another. The tunnel opened up wider and wider, the greenery all around pulling away as if it was weaving a path just for me.

Vines unwound and slipped away as I walked, until at long last, I reached a small marble stone building. The heavy stone door swung open as I approached it, at least a foot thick of solid rock. Even if I had tried, I wouldn’t have been able to move it on my own.

For whatever reason, the seer was leading me this way.

With a trembling breath, I strode inside the structure. There was nothing inside except for a stone staircase that descended below ground. Behind me, the door drew to a close, and at once, a line of torches lit in each corner as well as the path down below.

I kept going.

The stairs ended in a long hallway. I crept forward in silence, my leather boots no more than a whisper on the stone beneath my feet. Eventually, the hallway opened up to a massive room, and just before I passed through the threshold, a series of runes lit up in a showcase of bright green sigils. The ground hummed and I stopped, watching the steady pulse of magic vibrate before me.

Still, it pulled me forward, and I reached towards it with a sliver of hesitation. The magic hummed louder, sounding like

the buzzing of bees before my fingers passed through the doorway.

It calmed then, almost as if it had recognized me.

Tentatively, I crossed the threshold, the magic tingling through me with a fierce, welcoming jolt. I breathed out, took another step, and it passed, leaving me feeling more alive than ever. As if a magical curtain was lifted, bookshelves appeared along the walls and pedestals with vases, weapons, and magical amulets appeared in the massive room. There was row after row of bookshelves laden with leather bound volumes as far as my eyes could see, lit up only by the light of mystical torches all throughout the room.

The sight took my breath away.

Something pulled me forwards towards one of the pedestals, and I stopped short once I saw what lay on its surface. I'm not sure how, but somehow the object felt like it was meant for me.

It was an emerald pendant on a long golden chain. The sparkling gemstone was set in a meticulously crafted gold setting. The vibrant green gemstone glimmered with an ethereal inner beauty, each facet reflecting the light like a myriad of emerald flames. The pendant rested against the marble stone, and I reached out to take it in my hands.

All at once, my entire world flashed with light and faded away, only to be replaced by a vision of everlasting darkness. I opened my mouth to scream, but nothing came out. Panic swelled deep inside me, but I couldn't think of anything that might make it stop. Just as the speed started to pick up, the old woman's voice echoed all around me once again.

*“This is only the first step in your journey, human. Should you fail in your quest, this kingdom shall fall into ruin, and those which don't belong will take it for themselves. When the time is right, I shall reveal the rest.”*

I glanced down to see the tops of the trees far below, racing by as if I was traveling at light speed through the realm. Then suddenly, everything stopped and I started to fall.

There was a sprawling city below surrounded by a massive rock wall. All seemed quiet, at least for a few minutes as my gaze searched beneath me.

It was only then that I noticed the corpses of men lining the streets. Vivid red blood stained the white painted stone of the dwellings along the road, evidence that something terrible had happened here. In horror, I watched as young men and women emerged from their homes, every single one of them stilling when a monstrous roar echoed from deep in the mountains.

I jerked my head to the side, instantly noticing an emerald-green dragon perched on a mountaintop.

Instinctually, I knew it was Roken.

Its massive form was covered in iridescent emerald scales. As he shifted, each scale shimmered in the sunlight. All at once, he leapt into the sky, his sinuous body gliding effortlessly through the air. His wingspan was incredibly wide, showcasing a delicate, yet formidable membrane between each talon. Towering, curved horns crowned his monstrous head, while sharp, curving claws extended from each muscular limb. He turned his head and looked directly at me, his eyes pools of molten gold that held a piercing intelligence and an ancient wisdom. Yet something was off. Deep in his golden gaze was the same savage need that he'd shown right before he'd pinned me over that fallen log and taken what he'd wanted from me.

With a roar, he flew through the air and let a brilliant green stream of fire rain down on the trees beneath him.

If I could have, I would have turned tail and run.

With horror, I watched as his feral nature only grew more out of control the closer he flew towards the city. I yelled out for him to stop, but it was as if he didn't hear me.

*“Roken is your destiny. You must save him before you can save the realm. If not, this visage of the past will only be a pebble in the ocean of what is to come.”*

I opened and closed my mouth, watching as Roken bore down on the city, breathing fire on every surface as he destroyed it.

He'd lost control.



“He is cursed.”

*“It is up to you to free him of his curse. He is your fate.”*

The city crumpled as screams echoed throughout the valley. I was forced to watch every harrowing second as he burned it to the ground until there was nothing more than fire and ash.

When it was all over, the vision swirled into nothingness, and the world rushed by again. Overhead, the night sky flashed and the woman started to speak once more.

*“In shadows bound, a soul beset,  
By curse of dark, both fierce and yet,  
A celestial dance shall light the way,  
To bring forth dawn and break the fray.  
When stars align in cosmic grace,  
And moon’s embrace reveals its face,  
A grove enchanted, deep and old,  
Shall witness secrets yet untold.  
Seek the tome in wizard’s keep,  
Where riddles lie, both vast and deep,  
Unveil the truth, with heart laid bare,  
For only then, the curse shall wear.  
Trials await, tests of the soul,  
Through perilous paths, they take their toll,  
With courage bold, and spirits true,  
The chosen one shall journey through.”*

She had spoken in the tongues of prophecy. I’d read about it in the books I had gathered, but reading the passages felt like nothing compared to the visual journey this woman was guiding me on.

The vision changed again, the night sky overhead swirling in a dizzying circle. An explosion of purple fire cascaded out from

a single point, and then the sky tore open, revealing a whole world beyond it.

This was the rift between worlds, the magical barrier that protected one realm from another, and it was ripping apart right before my eyes.

Monsters crawled through. Giants, orcs, goblins, and all manner of beasts stormed into Terraheim. Time rushed forward and the world burned. The land raced by until it centered on another city. For a second time, I watched a city burn, this time with a deep purple supernatural flame instead of Roken's vivid, emerald-green fire.

My stomach roiled in knots as I watched the devastation. I turned away when it all became too much, and then the vision wavered, rushing past me as I fell towards the ground. I screamed, my voice silenced, and then all of a sudden, I fell back into the underground library.

My feet crashed into the stone floor, and I pitched towards the pedestal, catching myself only seconds before I fell to the ground. For a few moments, I just listened to the overwhelming silence and the sound of my heart racing in my chest. I took a deep, steadying breath as I closed my fist around the emerald, bringing it close to my chest.

This was mine. It was meant for me.

I took the pendant and lifted it up over my head, pulling it into place around my throat. It sat heavy against my chest, but it felt like it was supposed to be there.

Deep inside my belly, my own magic swelled to life for the very first time. It was as if the emerald had awakened it. A scroll appeared on the pedestal before me, the words of the spoken prophecy etching onto the paper right before my eyes. I watched in silence as it finished before I hazarded reaching for it.

I needed to get out of here. *Now.*

I wound the scroll closed and pressed it into my pack before I turned around and left the room. I sprinted up the stairs to the top, where the door lay open for me.

When I exited the stone building, I turned back around to see the greenery of nature overtake it once again. Vines curled up over it, hiding every inch of the white marble surface until it was completely masked from view.

I knew now that I couldn't leave Roken. Not only did he need my help, but his realm did, too.

I just hoped that my help wouldn't come too late.

## CHAPTER 10



*R*oken

The tear in the rift was getting worse day by day, as was my curse. With more monsters came more battle, so much so that I fell prey to their wretched claws over and over in order to keep the people of my realm safe.

Each day when I left my home, the fraying of my sanity grew worse. It was taking far longer for me to pull myself back, and some days it seemed that the only thing that worked was returning to Sophia. Just her presence was enough to keep the beast at bay, and sometimes it was even enough to bring me back from the brink.

I kept telling myself I needed to stay away from her, but I kept coming back again and again.

The sight of her naked body flashed before my eyes, a distant, cherished memory that ravaged my vision again and again. I slammed my palm against the trunk of a tree, the thunderous boom reverberating through the forest as it cracked under my strength.

My cock was so hard it hurt. Why was she having this effect on me? Why couldn't I stop this rabid desire for her bare flesh from surging through me, even at just the thought of her?

I'd felt her gaze on me many times in the past several days, but I'd kept my distance from her because I didn't want to lose control again. I didn't want to hurt her. I couldn't risk it.

Worse than that, however, I didn't want to make the mistake of actually caring about her. The last time I'd allowed myself to do that, I'd had my heart torn out. The memory of Elenwen's face flashed before my eyes and I gritted my teeth, immediately replacing it with Sophia's.

Maybe she was different.

I pushed away the thought immediately. She was a woman, and I was a man. It was as simple as that.

I leaned forward, grazing my fingers against the turgid steel of my erection, shuddering with desire. I was wearing a pair of leather trousers, but my dick was so hard that even just the confinement of the thin hide was too much for me to bear. With a snarl, I leaned back against the trunk and freed my cock.

Without pause, I took it into my hand and let myself fall back into the fantasy of Sophia's beautiful body. I'd enjoyed it once and I would have to settle on never enjoying it again, for her sake more than mine. She deserved that.

She deserved a better life than the sheltered one I was giving her.

Already, the thought of losing her was too much to bear. I should bring her to one of the settlements on the fringes of the forest, but I couldn't imagine life without her.

I was going to keep her, at least for now.

I would need to guard my heart against her, but it couldn't hurt to fantasize about her beneath me, right?

I stroked my hand up and down my cock, slowly working myself faster and faster as I envisioned her lying flat on her back, her legs spread wide and her tiny little fingers playing with her cunt as she showed me just how ready she was for a fucking.

Not wanting to come too quickly, I slowed down, teasing and edging myself until my body started to tremble. The moment I thought about sinking into her sweet, tight depth, pleasure welled from the base of my spine, surging up the length of my

cock and shooting straight out of me onto the forest floor. With a roar, I watched as my come coated the mossy ground.

A part of me was disappointed that it wasn't deep in her womb, *breeding* her.

I shook my head. I couldn't allow myself to think such things. I stroked my cock a few more times, enjoying the sensitive touch of pain that came right after an orgasm, imagining it was her tight sheath gripping every inch of me.

Finally, feeling much more sated than before, I sighed and tucked my cock back into my pants. I lay against that tree for several minutes, enjoying the brief clarity that was becoming harder to come by.

A shrill scream cut through the air, and I started.

It was Sophia.

Immediately, I leapt into action, following the direction of the sound. It was a scream of terror, and when it echoed through the trees once again, I shot towards it, sprinting as fast as I could. Despite my curse, I still had access to some magic. I pushed my palms forward and used it, making a path and forcing the forest to move aside and make way for me. Behind me, it surged back into place, but not before I made it through. I ran so hard that my muscles burned with exertion, but I ignored it because Sophia needed my protection.

What the hell was she doing out of the village? I'd given her the express directive to stay within the safety of its walls. If she had defied me, I would deal with that after I rescued her, but for now, I needed to focus on getting her to safety.

I sprinted faster, and all at once, I burst into a clearing. The rotten, burning stench of Helheim met my nostrils, and I snarled, looking around to see that the clearing had been there naturally. But it had been destroyed.

Sophia screamed again, and my head ratcheted to the side, only to see her cowering before a creature that should have never left the deepest pits of hell. She held what remained of a broken sword out towards the beast, but her hold was

trembling, and her brow was coated with sweat. She had been fighting for a long time.

My gaze returned to the fiery behemoth, an infernox hailing from the deepest incendiary abyss in Helheim. Towering in stature, its form eclipsed the trees behind it, casting a sinister glow upon the ground where it stood. Dark purple flames, black as soot and infused with the supernatural fury of a thousand blazing infernos, leapt and danced across its smoldering skin, creating an aura of unmatched destruction.

Its eyes, seething orbs of molten violet lava, radiated with unyielding malevolence. Jagged horns curled from the sides of its skull, their tips glowing with an eerily incandescent heat. Razor-sharp fangs protruded from its gnashing jaws, gleaming like obsidian daggers under the dappled light of the fading sun.

It had its gaze firmly locked on Sophia.

With each thunderous step the beast took towards her, the ground trembled. The air itself quivered as the creature breathed one ragged breath after the next, unleashing scorching gusts that withered all-natural life in their wake. I watched in horror as leaves burned to a crisp.

It opened its mouth and roared, the demonic sound reverberating throughout the deep jungle, a haunting symphony that sent shivers down my spine. I gritted my teeth, knowing that I had the fight of my life ahead of me.

This creature was a testament to the darkest corners of existence, a nightmare given form, whose mere presence ignited a primal fear within the hearts of all who beheld it. If I had questioned that the rift was failing before this, I knew for certain that it was now.

“Sophia!” I yelled.

Her head jerked in my direction, her eyes wide with fear. “Roken!”

The infernox turned its fiery gaze on me, its violet purple flames burning brighter. It opened its mouth in a wide grin at the sight of me, and I gritted my teeth. This wasn't a fight I could win in my human form.

For the first time in centuries, I needed to take to the skies as a dragon.

I hadn't risked shifting in a very long time, not since I'd destroyed Taverna. I had even less control of my sanity in dragon form, but I didn't see another way around it. I would have to shift for Sophia's sake. If I didn't defeat the infernox, we were both as good as dead.

I reached down deep into my core, touching my dragon magic and reacquainting myself with my birthright.

Sophia looked at me, her gaze questioning, and I shook my head.

"The infernox will kill you. It is an enemy not meant for you," I said quietly, and her face furrowed with fury.

"Do not underestimate me," she snarled.

"We will discuss this after the infernox is dead. Until then, you will stay out of my way," I replied firmly.

Her face paled and she took a step back.

Good girl.



## CHAPTER 11



*S*ophia

Roken stared back at me with pained eyes. His mouth was set in a firm line as if he had decided something infinitely dangerous, and I swallowed hard. My eyes swept from him back to the monster, and he shook his head.

A hushed silence enveloped the clearing as he stood there, his expression suddenly calm. He tensed his muscles, and a surge of primal energy coursed over him as his skin started to ripple and contort. As he shifted right before my eyes, his bones elongated and cracked, his limbs lengthening into sinewy appendages. Scales emerged and shimmered across his flesh as his human visage gave way to his magnificent dragon form. With a triumphant roar that shook the heavens, his dark green wings unfurled, casting shadows onto the ground all around him. He spread his majestic wings wide with a dangerous roar that seemed to shake the very foundations of the realm.

The creature that he'd called an infernox finally turned its attention away from me and directly towards him. There was a tense silence as the two stared each other down. I took a step back and moved behind a tree, wanting to shield myself a least a little bit from whatever was about to take place.

Roken's head wove back and forth, fierce determination in his gaze as he unleashed a torrent of vibrant, bright green flames towards the infernal creature. Seemingly undeterred by the flaming assault, the infernox shook off the attack and emerged

unscathed. With a fierce snarl, its ebony form radiated with fury. Without warning, it bound towards Roken, its own molten flames licking at its talons as they dug into the dirt.

Roken leapt into the air, agile and swift as he unleashed a barrage of razor-sharp claws and powerful wing strikes upon the infernox. The monster retaliated with devastating force. Its fiery breath surged forth, an all-consuming storm that swallowed the dragon's flames whole, transforming the once majestic inferno into nothing more than ashes on the wind. Dark, flame-tinged wings emerged from the infernox's back, and the two of them leapt into the air, burning their way through the tree cover above until they circled one another, locked in a furious aerial standoff, each waiting for the other to strike first.

Roken swept forward, clashing straight into the monstrous creature with devastating force. As the battle raged on, I trembled. Roken's dragon form was fierce and magnificently beautiful, but I didn't know if he was powerful enough to defeat such a formidable enemy.

Utilizing his agility and cunning, Roken dodged and weaved through the infernox's relentless onslaught, striking with precision and grace. The infernox, unyielding and relentless, pressed forward with its fiery attack, its glowing eyes fixed on his enemy. The air crackled with raw power as each beast unleashed their elemental magic, a tumultuous symphony of fire and shadow that painted the sky in a breathtaking display of power and peril.

They crashed into each other with devastating force. Claws and talons slashed at one another. Roken roared and the infernox shrieked with a demonic cry.

Then the two spiraled down and crashed into the ground with a thunderous explosion. In the aftermath, silence reigned. Terrified, I peeked around the tree in the ominous quiet, taking a step out when the surrounding brush rustled in the wind.

I chewed the inside of my cheek, moving into the plentiful light, searching for any sign of life.

"Roken?" I called out, my voice shaking.

For several minutes, it was silent. There was nothing other than the quiet chirping of the wildlife in the forest. There was no more growling, no more roars, and my heart thumped, anxiety spiraling up from deep within my core. Cautiously, I took another several steps into the clearing, feeling the warmth of the sunlight streaming down on my shoulders. Any other day, that would have brought me comfort, but not at this moment.

Fear pressed down heavily on my chest, making it hard to breathe. Anxiety curled around my lungs, constricting them even further than I thought possible.

Why did I care if he lived or died? Why did I care for this wild beast of a man?

Footsteps crashed through the brush, racing towards me. I swallowed back a strangled cry, retreating back towards the shadows. Terror billowed up through me like a cold wave, and in my hasty retreat, my back slammed into a tree.

I stared into the jungle, my nervous heart slamming right out of my chest. I could see a dark form, and I breathed an audible sigh of relief when Roken emerged.

That feeling was short-lived.

His face was contorted with a savage snarl, and he didn't stop. He kept racing towards me, his feral expression unwavering, but something deep inside me told me not to run.

So I stayed there with my back against the tree as he slammed a hand to either side of my head. The tree trunk cracked, a thunderous boom reverberating all around me, but still I stayed.

"Roken," I whispered.

His breathing was wild and uneven, his hair a tangled mane, but there was a glimmer in his eyes that told me not to fear him.

He wouldn't hurt me. Everything in me told me he wouldn't.

He just stood there, his bare chest covered in the black blood of the beast he'd just slain, grappling with whatever internal

battle he was now fighting.

“It’s me. It’s Sophia,” I whispered.

I didn’t know what I was doing. This was nothing more than basic human instinct.

His flesh quivered before me, his restraint fraying right before my eyes. I needed to do something more. Whatever this was, he needed me to break him out of it.

My eyes flicked upwards, his face close enough to mine that I could feel the heat of his breath. I tipped my own towards his. I stretched upwards, standing on the tips of my toes. My heart pounded with fear.

Then, I kissed him.

It wasn’t a kiss of a friend. This was a kiss of a lover.

Immediately, he responded. Slowly, he melted around me, the anger and fury bleeding out of him with incredible speed. He pinned me against the tree as his arms wound around my waist.

I’d initiated that kiss, but he finished it.

His lips molded to mine, tentative at first. Soon, though, his kiss turned more persistent. His confidence bled through as he pulled me firmly against his body, allowing me to feel every hard ridge of his muscled physique. His pelvis brushed against mine. There was no missing my sharp intake of breath as the iron steel of his cock brushed against my hip.

Roken was a wild, feral creature, but I would be the one to tame him.

My core throbbed with mystical energy, a foreign feeling that hummed through me with dizzying intensity. His lips possessed mine with increasing ferocity, and my heart leapt into my throat. I wound my arms around his neck, holding on as I kissed him just as fiercely.

“Sophia,” he breathed, his voice wavering somewhere between lucidity and insanity. With a snarl, he yanked me against him, not letting me shy away from him any longer.

I'm not sure how, but his cock seemed even larger than before.

Arousal coursed through me, savagely unabated and wildly out of control. I pressed my chest up against his. My nipples were unbearably hard, and I wanted nothing more than to touch them, but the fabric of my shirt kept them inaccessible. As if he could read my mind, his fingers started to unwind the corded string that kept the vested bodice closed. His touch seemed gentle, in stark contrast to the savagery he'd shown before.

Gradually, he untied it and the fabric started to part. Without the support of the dress, my breasts hung heavy with desire, but he didn't touch them, at least not yet. Instead of giving me what I wanted right away, he stared into my eyes and undid the cord the rest of the way.

"I should run away from you," he murmured.

"Don't," I answered, my voice only a whisper in return.

"I could hurt you," he rasped. His shoulders bowed with regret, but he didn't pull away even though I could tell that he wanted to.

"You won't," I replied, more confidently this time.

"You shouldn't have left the village," he scolded.

"I know," I answered.

"I should punish you for defying me," he snarled. His body had turned rigid, and I leveled him with a heated look.

"I'd like to see you *try*."

The words were out of my mouth before I could stop them. A tense moment of silence followed my daring, open challenge. With a hard swallow, I watched as the edges of his mouth turned up at the corners in a dangerous smirk, and I suddenly got the feeling that I had bitten off way more than I could chew.

"Very bold, little human," he growled, but his own desire was apparent with every confident syllable. He dragged his finger down the length of my torso, stopping just above the cusp of my mound. Aggressively, he yanked the hem of my shirt up,

exposing the whole of my breasts in one fell swoop, and I cried out in shock. My nipples stood impossibly erect, and his grin turned wider once he laid his sight on them.

I'd initiated a battle for power between us without even realizing it. The only choice now was to see if I could make it through in one piece.

He loosened the string until the waist fully parted and roughly pushed my pants past my hips, allowing the leather to pool around my feet. I stood there before him, fully bare. His gaze continued downward, past my bare breasts to the rest of me, and my cheeks heated. He'd seen me bare once before, but this felt different.

This time he was truly looking at me. This had nothing to do with his curse. Roken was entirely himself right now.

It was as if it was my first time all over again.

His fingers reached for me, dragging along the length of my collarbone and sending a fierce volley of fiery tingles racing through me. With a sharp gasp, I watched his fingertips trail down my arms, the electric sensation of his touch lasting long after he pulled away. He continued his exploration of me, using his fingers to explore along with his heated gaze.

My whole body trembled, my core constricting and my skin blazing with an aroused fever. Even my legs quaked as I swallowed hard, realizing that I was getting so wet that it was making my thighs slick enough to slide against one another.

My face flushed along with the rest of me.

"You're so beautiful like this, naked and trembling as you wait for me to punish you," he purred, and my legs went weak.

I watched with bated breath as he pulled his hands away and lifted them out to his side, raising them up as a bright green sphere spiraled above them. All of a sudden, the brush around me began to move. Vines snaked along the forest floor until they circled around my ankles and up my legs, then around my waist.

I cried out in alarm. Roken smirked with seductive amusement.

More and more vines encircled my ankles and my wrists. When they lifted me clean off the ground, I shrieked, my nerves getting the best of me. Roken watched, his eyes sparkling with darkly enticing intent. Once the vines held me aloft enough so that our gazes were level, they stopped moving, and I whimpered out loud.

I was fully bound.

My arms were held out above my head, my ankles spread wide enough to put all of me on display. A vine had wrapped around each breast, lifting and presenting it like a centerpiece. Despite the vines encircling my waist, there was nothing covering my naked backside or my very bare and very wet pussy.

In fact, this shamefully exposed all of it.

His gaze roved up and down my body like he knew what I was thinking, and I blushed hard. I attempted to bring my thighs closer together in a ploy to hide my arousal, but the vines only stiffened and spread me even wider.

Roken drew close enough to drag the backs of his knuckles against my inner thighs. Without meaning to, I let out a small, strangled whine as his flesh slid over my wetness.

“I knew you were wet, Sophia. The scent of your arousal was strong, but I didn’t think you’d be this soaked for me,” he observed, which only made my shame spiral out of control.

“I don’t...” I tried, but the words died on my tongue as his thumb slipped dangerously close to the sensitive folds of my bare pussy. I bit my lower lip and shifted as much as I could in my bonds. In my movement, I couldn’t quite gauge if I was trying to get away him or force his fingers to brush against the place that I needed them the most.

“Look at you, strung up before me and left to my mercy. You couldn’t escape my magic even if you tried.”

Just to test his theory, I jerked my arms hard, but the vines had very little give. I tried kicking and punching, yet nothing worked.

“Your magic?”

“I am Dragonborne,” he replied softly. His words were laced with warning, and I knew then that I was way out of my element.

“What are you going to do with me?” I asked shakily.

“I’m going to punish you.”

He walked around me as he continued, his voice ominous and terrifyingly in control.

“You’re going to scream, and you just might cry, but this soaking wet little pussy is going to tell me exactly what you need. I’m going to make sure that you get it,” he purred.

A shiver of fearful anticipation raced down my spine as I chewed the inside of my cheek, trying to think of what to do and slowly realizing that there was nothing I able to. I was truly trapped and entirely exposed for Roken’s deepest, darkest desires. Fear and arousal warred inside me as my pussy clenched so hard that I would have pitched forward if I could have. Instead, my muscles tensed, and my body heated.

Trying to be brave, I lifted my chin and leveled him with a look.

“I’m not afraid of you,” I snarled.

He chuckled softly, the devilish sound making my insides flutter with nervous excitement.

“You should be, princess,” he purred.

One hand brushed against the small of my back while the other passed over my naked breast. His thumb skimmed over my nipple, teasing it gently, and I gritted my teeth. I wasn’t certain what he was up to, but I would take whatever he gave me for the sake of my pride.

Without warning, his forefinger and thumb pinched down on my right nipple punishingly hard. Taken by surprise, I couldn’t hold back my cry, fierce pain glancing across my breast in one solid wave. I whimpered as he cruelly twisted it back and forth.

“I’m not,” I repeated, but it was more to myself than to him. I tipped my head back, struggling against the vicelike vines



until he finally released me. I breathed a sigh of relief, but it only lasted for a few seconds before his fingers flitted against the curve of my left breast. I pulled in a shaky breath as his fingertips teased over the opposite bud, knowing what to expect yet anxious about it all the same.

I opened my mouth to beg him to be gentle, but then I closed it. With a knowing smirk, he pinched the other side just as firmly, and I whimpered as I suffered through the merciless agony. When he eventually let go, both nipples throbbed with aching soreness. Waves of pain radiated around my breasts long after his fingers had pulled away, and my audible breathing was a dead giveaway for my silent suffering afterwards.

The look in his eyes told me he was enjoying this.

Then he slapped my right breast, striking the tip of my nipple with such firmness that it ignited the same burning sensation that had rendered me speechless such a short time before. Without a word, he spanked both breasts one after the other as I writhed before him. The pain was instantly overwhelming, and just when my eyes started to water, he stopped.

With a hard swallow, I glanced down, seeing the pink, punished flesh of my chest. I could make out his fingerprints within the red marks and pressed my lips firmly together, trying to bear the stinging punishment as bravely as I could.

When I had gathered myself and blinked away my tears, he did the same thing again, only this time he spanked my breasts for a long time until they were a much brighter pink. This time, I couldn't keep my cries quiet.

That hurt and now he knew.

Like a predator, he circled around me, stepping through the vines and moving behind me until he was out of sight. I couldn't anticipate what he had in mind for me next. I tried to listen for signs of what was to come, but his movements were silent. I knew he was standing behind me, just looking at me.

He was right. I *did* fear him, but I would never tell him that. Even if I didn't voice it though, what scared me more was that

my body would betray me first. I could feel it happening already, just like I could feel his eyes moving over my bare form. The muscles of my ass tensed.

What was he going to do to me? Would he spank my bottom, too? What about my pussy? Would he fuck me again? Was this all foreplay to him?

A hopeful shiver raced down my spine, and I gasped when his fingertips caressed my backside, following the gentle curve where my cheek met my thighs.

“I remember our last encounter in flashes, but I have far more control over myself right now, sweet girl. Does that scare you?”

“No,” I lied. He chuckled shrewdly, continuing his light touches against my bare bottom and making me quiver with open arousal.

“It should. I’ve already spanked your breasts. There are several other places on this beautiful body that need tending to before I’m through with you,” he threatened, his voice a gentle rumble that lit my body on fire.

With my core ablaze, I struggled within the vines, trying to break free while also keenly aware that I was at his mercy and that a very deep part of me wanted to be. My clit throbbed, wanting him to touch me and make me come just as hard as he had done the last time.

His arm wound around my waist, settling over my belly as he moved beside me. His other hand gripped my left bottom cheek so hard it hurt, and I gritted my teeth. I made a vow to myself to take whatever he had in mind quietly. I’d instigated this. I’d been the one to directly challenge him, and now I was seeing what he was really like. My desire for him only increased with every painful moment, even when he did the same to my right ass cheek.

“Do your worst.”

I didn’t know what had gotten into me. Maybe I wanted to push him to see what he was capable of when he was in control, or maybe it was just my pussy doing the talking for

me. At this point, I couldn't tell if my head or my body was in charge, and truthfully, I didn't much care.

“Oh, little human, you don't know what you're asking for.”

Maybe I didn't, but I wanted to find out.

His palm cracked down on my ass in a firm smack that left my head ringing and my body whirling. My pussy clenched down hard at the terribly deafening sound, my core vibrating as it echoed all around me. A second snapped against the opposite side, just as loudly as the last. The delayed sting hit me with the power of a meteor upon impact, and I whimpered for the briefest of seconds before I was able to quiet myself.

My ass smarted with delicious agony, but without realizing what I was doing, I arched my back and lifted my bottom, like I was seeking out his punishment. His hand caught just beneath my ass, and my pussy clenched hard as the sting intensified.

A single drop of arousal dripped down my inner thigh, rolling past the back of my knee and onto my calf. I closed my eyes, awash in shame as another followed on the other side. Could he see how wet I was getting? Did he know how turned on his firm hand was making me?

I liked his roughness. I wanted more of it.

His hand lit into my ass with renewed vigor. As much as I tried to keep quiet, it soon proved impossible. His fingers slapped every bit of me, sometimes across my ass cheek and other times they glanced against the folds of my pussy. The pace of the spanking was so fast and hard that it quickly overwhelmed me. Soon, my desperation overcame me, and I cried out, exposing myself once and for all.

He would know I was struggling to take it, but maybe that was the point.

I didn't know how it could, but the spanking suddenly turned firmer, the smacks coming faster, the sting much fiercer. I cried out over and over again as he punished the bare flesh of my ass. Soon enough, the smacks descended down the backs

of my legs and along my inner thighs. Every inch of my bare flesh burned with liquid fire.

It didn't end when I thought it would. It went well past that.

Before long, my eyes were watering, and I started blinking faster, trying to prevent myself from crying. But his cruel hand was relentless, and I could do nothing to escape each terribly scalding spank. I squeezed my eyes shut as I wailed, trying to take what he was giving me and knowing my tears would eventually fall.

The spanking stopped only a few seconds before I lost control, and I quickly took advantage of the momentary lapse to blink my tears away before they gave away just how much he was getting to me. I sniffled, whimpering quietly in my own aroused misery, my bottom fully ablaze.

The vines didn't let me go. They didn't even loosen.

I gulped anxiously as Roken moved around me once again. He paused right in front of me, letting his gaze drop between my thighs. For a long moment, he just stared before he reached for me and lifted my chin with gentle fingers.

"You can protest all you like, but your pussy gives you away, princess," he observed darkly, and my core constricted impossibly tight because I knew what he was saying was true. I turned my head, unable to meet his eyes, and he quickly grabbed my chin and forced me to look back at him.

"I don't know what it is about you, but I can't pull myself away from you. I shouldn't have this type of control around a human. I never have," he murmured.

I let out a shuddering breath.

"Please, I need..." I answered quietly. My entire body was burning with desire, and I wanted his hands on me once again. Even with my breasts and my bottom burning, the only thought on my mind was when I was going to come. I hoped that he would let me.

"In time, sweet girl. For now, there is a needy little pussy that needs my firm-handed attention, doesn't it?"

“Roken,” I begged, gasping when his hand cupped my mound. His fingers pressed lightly over my clit, and I ground my hips forward as best as I could, only for him to pull his hand back and spank me with the flats of his fingers.

Unlike the punishment on my bottom or even my breasts, the smack to my pussy stung instantly, burning so brightly that I keened and closed my eyes.

“Do I have your attention, naughty girl?”

“Yes, sir,” I whispered, nervously anticipating the next strike. He purred instantly at the respectful term, making my heart flutter with hope at the same time that my body whirled with desire. It was a dizzying sensation, and I couldn’t make heads or tails of it.

His palm lifted again, spanking my pussy firmly. The wet splat of his hand smacking my most sensitive flesh was shamefully loud, and I cried out, more from embarrassment than from the sting, even though it smarted even more than the last swat had.

As the pain flitted away, intense desire followed. His touch returned to cup my pussy, and I moaned, my clit throbbing greedily and my hips bucking shamelessly as I attempted to grind myself against his fingers.

Then he smacked my pussy several times in quick succession, punishing my tender flesh without mercy. I knew in theory that he wasn’t spanking me there as firmly as he had my ass, but it burned more than any other place on my body. I writhed as I tried to take it, and my eyes watered once again.

When I was on the cusp of tears, the pussy spanking stopped, and I whimpered, catching my breath as my sensitive folds blazed with stinging fire.

It was over.

I slumped against the vines, using their support to hold my body up. I breathed in and out, suffering under the burning sting while also soaring with consuming desire that was only growing stronger with each passing second.

He said nothing as he spread his palms out and lifted them towards the sky. The vines rose above me, hefting me up until

my pussy was level with his chin. He looked directly at my pink, punished mound as the vines uncurled from my legs. He reached for the backs of my thighs, sliding his rough fingertips against my still stinging flesh until he took them over each shoulder.

“What are you doing?” I asked shakily.

“We’re not done, naughty girl. I have punished you with my hands, and now I aim to finish it with my tongue,” he warned.

“You can’t mean to...”

The warmth of his lips against the top of my mound stole the words right out of me.

“Roken,” I tried again.

“Hush, princess. It’s time you learned that pleasure can be just as punishing as pain,” he warned me, and his mouth closed down over my pussy.

My eyes nearly rolled back in my head when his tongue parted my soaked folds and passed right over my clit.

“Oh my god,” I gasped.

I had no idea how this was going to punish me. If anything, this was everything I hadn’t known I’d wanted or needed.

If he kept this up, I was going to come really hard right on his tongue.

## CHAPTER 12



*R*oken

The taste of her was the sweetest thing I'd ever experienced on my tongue. From the moment I put my mouth on her freshly spanked little pussy, I knew that I wouldn't be able to stop myself from making her come.

Even when she did, that wasn't going to be enough for me. I needed more.

When she'd brought me back from the brink with her kiss, I had simply intended on taking her back to the village. I had decided not to punish her, but then she'd pushed me, and I'd seen something in her that I hadn't realized was within this intoxicating slip of a woman.

She wanted this. She wanted *me*.

When her lips had pressed against mine, I'd felt it. She'd chased away the feral bonds of my curse and brought me back to sanity. Nothing else had ever done that before.

It had all been *her*.

She'd looked at me with defiance, her pupils dilating with desire as she challenged me, but I had seen something else in her eyes.

Hope.

She'd lifted her chin with the sweetest disobedience, pushing me to take control, and I hadn't been able to resist. From the

baring of her body to the feel of each punishing slap on her full breasts, her gorgeous ass, and her pretty pink pussy, I'd enjoyed every moment. And judging the wetness dripping down her legs, I knew she had too.

Now, I wanted to teach her a different kind of lesson, but I could already feel myself melting for her and she hadn't even begun begging for mercy yet.

"Roken, I've never..."

"There's no need to explain. I know, sweet girl," I answered.

"But I..."

The vines gave way, allowing her to lie down on her back while still held aloft in the air, the vines presenting her pussy to me in the most delightfully shameful display. Her thighs tensed with her embarrassment, but there was no hiding from me with my head in between them.

"This is a punishment, princess. It will end when I decide it should and not a moment before," I said firmly.

Her face reddened beautifully, and she bit her lip, nodding with understanding. She struggled not to clench the muscles in her legs.

Gripping her still warm cheeks in my fists, I pressed my mouth to her delicious little pussy once again. She struggled, but my spelled vines kept her still for me, allowing me to tease and taunt the needy little bud hidden between her soaked folds.

She moaned and bucked, but I kept going, pushing her closer and closer to orgasm with nothing more than my lips and the tip of my tongue.

I couldn't remember the last time I'd had a woman like this. It had been centuries. What I did know was that no one else had ever tasted as sweet as this. This one was truly special.

I couldn't get enough of her. If she wasn't careful, I'd keep her here like this all day.

I circled my tongue around her clit, pressing just lightly enough to taunt her with orgasm, but not enough for her to sail over the precipice. The longer I teased her, the more her body



trembled, and just when she was about to come for me, I pulled away. She started, her flesh quivering from the power of denial. Her muscles tensed and she wailed softly, her legs practically shaking with her unspent release. Her tiny fists clenched in her frustration and her lips came together in the most beautiful pout.

I wanted to kiss her.

“Roken, please, I was just going to...” she tried.

“You will come when I allow it,” I stated decisively, and her hips bucked seductively. She was enjoying this. She liked it when I took control.

*So did I.*

“Yes... Yes, sir,” she replied.

My cock surged with need all of my own.

Needing to focus on something else other than my own desire, my mouth returned to her needy little pussy. I edged her again and she cried out this time, her desperation clear. I didn't stop there, either. Using my tongue, I tortured her, pulling away when she grew close and keeping her from orgasm as long as I could.

“Please, please let me come!” she cried out, her need reaching a fever pitch. Her body was writhing before me, and her sweet little clit was rock hard for me. She was so aroused that I could see it peeking out from between her swollen pink folds. When my lips pressed down against the needy bud, she tried to grind her clit against my tongue.

“Not yet, naughty girl.”

Her face fell and her brow furrowed with confusion. I smiled down at her as her mouth twisted with her pained frustration. Her muscles twitched several times, her desire holding her every move captive. Even her toes curled with it, evidence that she was having extreme difficulty keeping her arousal at bay.

I liked having her at my mercy. It felt really fucking good.

“You're going to earn it first, princess.”

I wasn't ready for her to come for me yet. I wanted her well and truly desperate before she screamed my name, before all who dwelled in these woods heard who she belonged to.

She was like a drug, intoxicatingly addictive, and I just needed another hit.

Touching the core of my magic, I reached my arms out and lowered my palms to the ground. The vines holding her captive pitched her forward and brought her down to the forest floor, except this time they deposited her on her knees. The ones around her wrists loosened, finally releasing her, and the look of relief on her face was more gratifying than I cared to admit.

Her eyes were glued on me as I freed my cock for her, my hard length throbbing with desire.

*For her.*

"You're going to show me just how much you want to come for me with that pretty little mouth, princess," I directed.

The moment of shock that flitted across her face was the most delicious thing I had ever seen. There was no disgust or annoyance, simply a reluctant desire of her own as she crawled forward towards my hard length. Her acceptance made my cock even harder than I thought possible.

Tentatively, she reached for me, steadying herself on my thigh. Her gaze held mine for a moment, shy and needy before she looked down to take in my cock. Her eyes widened deliciously as she licked her lips, incredulous and anxious about what she was going to do.

She hadn't seen me like this, not up close.

"I've never," she began, her cheeks reddening with her embarrassment, yet her hips rocked with desire at the same time. She couldn't hide from me. I could see it in her eyes. Even though she was innocent, she wanted this.

*Badly.*

Her shy nature gripped tight around my heart, and I reached down, brushing my knuckle against her cheek.

“I know, princess. Now be a good girl and take my cock in between those beautiful lips. If you impress me, I’ll make sure you come good and hard for me,” I said firmly.

Her blush deepened, but she nodded with understanding. Hesitantly, her eyes met mine, and then she opened her lips, at once enveloping the head of my cock with the wet warmth of her perfect mouth.

Oh. Fuck.

This was absolute heaven.

When her tongue circled around the tip, I bit back a groan and pumped into her mouth slowly. There was no need for me to be rough with her yet.

This was more than enough.

With her thighs still quivering, she took my cock little by little until the head brushed against the back of her throat. Pleasure surged from the base of my spine all the way up my turgid length, and I let out a small groan. I glanced down to see a tiny smirk play across her lips.

The devious little thing was enjoying herself.

Gods, this woman was heaven.

I didn’t understand it, but for the moment, my instincts seemed to be precariously under control. It was both comforting and alarming at the same time. What was it about this woman that was keeping them at bay? Why wasn’t I losing my mind and turning into a wild beast?

For centuries, I’d been afraid of hurting someone, or worse, killing them if they happened to be unfortunate enough to get close. Until her, I hadn’t even risked stroking my cock for fear of losing complete control.

I tipped my head back and groaned, tensing as the sweet little thing suckled my cock so perfectly that my anxious thoughts flitted away like ash on the wind. When I groaned with desire, she smirked a little again.

It was time to remind her just who was in charge.

“You’re sucking my cock like a naughty girl who needs her bottom reddened,” I purred.

That was all it took.

The sound of her soft whimper was like music to my ears. Instantly, she redoubled her efforts, sucking a bit harder and taking me a bit deeper. I reached out and braced myself against a nearby tree trunk. I tensed every muscle in my body, keeping myself upright so that I could enjoy every brutally addictive moment of her perfect mouth.

Gods in heaven, a man could get used to this.

When her lips rose in a proud grin, I slid my hand on top of her head, petting her gently. She leaned into my touch and let out a quiet mew. Slowly, I pressed onwards towards the back of her skull where I fisted her long, dark hair roughly enough to make her gasp simply because I wanted to hear it. My fingers dug into her scalp, pulling hard, and she moaned for me.

She didn’t realize what was happening yet. She would very, *very* soon.

Slowly, I pumped into her mouth, and she quietly panicked for a moment before I pulled out enough for her to gather herself before pushing back in. She choked, but eventually she was able to get herself under control and opened her throat for my thick cock.

“There now, you’re being such a good girl for me.”

Her eyes flicked up to mine just as a tiny moan escaped her lips, revealing to me just how much she was enjoying herself. I dug my fingers into her scalp harder, and her pupils dilated with both pleasure and pain. Her shoulder bowed towards me, and she arched her head back, leaning into my roughness like she was made for it.

*Like she was made for me.*

I thrust into her mouth, slowly picking up the pace. Once she realized what I was doing, her eyes opened wide with a simmering panic that only increased the faster I went.

It was breathtaking to behold.

“Press your fingers between those pretty legs. Tease that needy clit for me as I use this perfect little mouth. Do not come unless you want your pussy spanked bright red after I’m done,” I growled. A shudder of raw desire passed over her and I saw her through new eyes for the very first time.

She didn’t just *want* to be used like this. She *needed* it.

*I needed it, too.*

I pumped into her hard enough to breach the back of her throat. When she started to choke again, I gave way, but only enough for her to get ahold of her gag reflex before I thrust back inside. The tight ring of her throat opened and clenched around my cock, and I gripped her hair hard as I fucked that beautiful mouth just as hard as she needed me to.

“You’re going to be a good girl and swallow everything I give you, princess.”

She moaned and cried, but her fingers teased between her legs all the same. Fully erect, her nipples gave away just how much she was enjoying herself. The glistening wetness on her thighs revealed how deep her desire went.

I didn’t back down. I went harder, faster, until it felt like pleasure was spiking up and down my legs. She moaned, and my release surged all the way down my spine and straight out the tip of my cock.

With a roar, I came deep in her throat and her muscles swallowed all around me, her desperation to please me evident and sensationally beautiful. I watched as she struggled, choking and pushing past it in her need. Her muscles tensed with exertion, but she kept suckling me all the same.

I didn’t know if I could walk away from her after this, but I knew I *needed* to.

I gulped back my feelings and shoved them deep in the heart I’d made cold long ago. A man like me wasn’t supposed to find happiness or love.

I was a man cursed to live in exile.

I needed to walk away. This had to be the last time. Keeping her close was putting too much at risk. I'd have to cherish this memory for the rest of my days and leave it at that.

With regret, I thrust into her mouth more slowly. She suckled and swallowed every last drop of my seed until I let her pull back.

"What a good girl," I murmured.

I tucked my cock away and used my thumb to roughly scrape her bottom lip. My savagery only elicited the most delicious moan from her, and I decided that I would savor these last moments to the fullest.

I didn't use magic this time. I wanted to put my own hands on her and feel every moment of her pleasure, every tense jerk as I slapped that beautiful pussy, not because she'd done anything wrong, but just because I wanted to. She'd been perfect.

I was going to spank and suckle that perfect little pussy until she shuddered beneath me with pleasure of her own for however long I wanted, and it was going to be a long time.

I knelt down and gently pressed my hand to her chest, pushing her down to the ground. Willingly, she laid back and parted her thighs as I speared between her legs with my knee. If I was only going to give in this one time, I was going to enjoy every last second of this. I was going to give her pleasure and pain and everything in between until she shattered for me.

My heart pulsed with feeling, and I ignored it.

*She's not meant for you...*

I lowered my mouth to her neck, pressing my mouth softly against her in a gentle kiss. She arched her back, wiggling against me with her need, but I continued my long, slow journey of exploration down her body until I reached the cusp of her thighs. She was trembling now, whimpering and moaning with insatiable desire.

Fuck. My cock was rock hard again.

Holding myself up on one arm, I cupped her pussy with my hand and lightly tapped the flats of my fingers against it.

“Oh, please,” she gasped.

The sound was a mixture of reluctance, like she wanted me to stop, but she was struggling with her desire for me to continue. I slapped her pussy a bit harder, making her flinch rather beautifully.

“Are you ready to come for me, princess?” I murmured. She shuddered hard with her desire, trying to keep still and losing control of her need at the same time. When she didn’t respond right away, I slapped between her legs three times in quick succession, each one harder than the last. She squirmed and cried out before she nodded quickly as her thighs tensed with fear.

“Yes... yes sir,” she wailed, her words nearly indistinguishable.

It was time for her to learn that pleasure could be just as punishing as pain.

In an instant, my cock turned to a hard length of steel, pulsing with a desire all my own. I growled and rubbed over her clit, enjoying the way it throbbed under my fingertips. It was hard with her need, and I teased her, slowly building her pleasure once again until she was just on the cusp of climax and not a millimeter further.

Just before she could come, I pulled my hand away, eliciting the most delicious snarl of frustration from her.

I could see the battle of wills written all over her face. She wanted to protest about the continued denial, but a part of her was reluctant too, especially with my hand still cupping her pussy. Should I decide more punishment was warranted, I could spank her pussy bright pink with several well-laid smacks, and she knew it.

“Please?” she tried, and I growled, my cock growing harder by the second. I kissed along her hip bone, paying special care the closer I drew to her pussy, and she bucked beneath me, needy and wanting and devastatingly beautiful.

The scent of her arousal was intoxicating. The sweet aroma of peaches, spices, and sugar offset with a creamy vanilla wafted

around me, and I couldn't resist dipping my head down and lapping over her clit. The taste of her was just as magnificently sweet, and I suckled her hard enough for her back to arch right off of the mossy ground. Her fingers dug into my hair gently. She didn't try to hold my head down in between her legs. Instead, it was as if she just wanted to reach out and hold onto me.

*Fuck*, if my heart didn't melt a little at that.

With a flick of my tongue, I circled her hard little bud, making her squirm and moan for me. Her cries slowly turned more and more desperate as she writhed beneath me. Her hips lifted, trying to keep in close contact with my tongue as her whole body quivered. Her whimpers told me that she'd reached her limit.

I'd teased her long enough. This time, I latched onto her and forced her right over the edge.

Her thighs tensed immediately, clenching against my head. Using my hands, I forced them wider and pinned them to the ground.

I was going to enjoy my fill of this sweet pussy, and nothing was going to stop me, not even her. Her moans escalated to all out screams as every muscle fiber in her body clenched. Her hips rolled and her fingers dug into my scalp as she held on for dear life.

I enjoyed every second of that quivering climax. My cock was so hard that I swore it had turned to iron.

As she reached her peak and began to crest in the blissful throes of orgasm, I slowed down the movements of my tongue, but I didn't let go. I teased her gently as she moaned and came down from that first release.

She wasn't done. She hadn't realized it yet.

My hands slid up the front of her thighs until I reached her waist. As she relaxed, I tightened my hold on her and pinned her hips down. The position of my forearms ensured that she wouldn't go anywhere unless I decided to let her go, but that wasn't going to happen anytime soon.



She was going to beg for mercy first.

I started circling the tip of my tongue around her clit and she shuddered.

“Roken. Please, *sir!*” she tried. Her chest was rising with each heated breath.

I knew she was sensitive. I didn’t care. She was going to come for me again.

I latched onto her and used my tongue a bit harder and a bit faster, forcing her to the brink once again. I did that over and over until she was trembling and quivering for me, her voice long gone hoarse. With every subsequent orgasm, she fought me, and I overpowered her.

I don’t know how many times I made her come for me. It didn’t much matter. She would come for me until I was satisfied.

“I’m sorry! I won’t leave the village without you again, sir!” she wailed, her words trembling with her exhaustion.

I smiled, knowing that she fully understood that pleasure could be wielded just as unmercifully as pain.

“I know you won’t, princess. I’m not through with you yet, though.”

I slapped her pussy lightly, and she wailed. Sweat dripped down between her breasts, her skin glistening with it. I’d pushed her body to the limit, and I was going to keep going until I went far past it.

“Yes sir,” she breathed as she trembled.

“Ask me to teach you the rest of your lesson with my tongue, princess,” I prompted her gently.

Her face twisted with anxious arousal and reluctant anticipation as she struggled to surrender to me fully.

“I’m going to give you a choice now, sweet girl.”

“What’s that, sir?” she whispered, biting her lip to keep her nerves quiet.

“I can either spank your pussy bright pink, hard enough to truly sting, or I can make you come with my tongue. Choose, or I will choose for you.”

There was trepidation in her expression now. It was clear that she was hesitant to choose either, and I knew that both options would be painful for her, no matter how much pleasure she derived from either one. Her thighs tensed beneath my arms, and I squeezed her waist a bit tighter.

“The clock is ticking, princess,” I warned.

“I choose your tongue, sir,” she blushed.

“Be specific, princess,” I continued, narrowing my eyes in silent threat. Immediately, her own face furrowed as she struggled to get the words I wanted to hear out of her mouth.

“I choose... I choose... to come on your tongue,” she whispered hoarsely, rushing to finish speaking before she failed to get the words out at all.

“That’s my good girl,” I praised. I held her eyes with mine, watching her lips turn up in a sweet smile. My heart pounded with emotion, and I pushed it away, deep down into the dark depths of my blackened soul.

This was a one-time thing. I would give her the time of her life and then this could never happen again. I would tell myself this a thousand times if I needed to. She was worth the world, and I wouldn’t be the one that ended it for her.

I couldn’t live with myself if I did.

I pressed my mouth back to her clit and I made her come again.

And again.

And again.

I made her come so many times that she nearly passed out. She screamed as tears poured down her cheeks, every muscle quivering with overwhelming sensation. When I finally had my fill of her, I pulled away and her body kept shaking with one aftershock after the next.

I gazed down at her, enjoying the subtle signs of her pleasure from the twisting of her mouth to the sweat beading along her brow, to the quivering panting breaths she pulled in as she tried to pull herself together.

She didn't have to worry about that. I was here for her now.

I gathered her in my arms and pulled her into my lap, holding her as she cried against my chest. Her arms wrapped around my neck as she pulled in closer to me.

There was no reluctance now, only the sweetest surrender.

For a while, I just kept her close. Gradually, her uneven breathing started to level out and her tears dried. Her hold on me never wavered, and as much as I tried to stop it, I could feel my guarded heart softening with this little slip of a woman.

When I was certain she'd fallen asleep, I stood up and situated her on one hip. I gathered her things with my other arm and carried her back to the village, using my magic to create a lift for us up to the treetops.

I placed her down in her bed and tucked the covers in around her before I took a step back. For whatever reason, I couldn't bring myself to walk away, at least not yet.

For a while, I just watched her sleep. She had this adorably cute, satisfied smile on her lips as she curled up in the furs and blankets. I leaned against the wall, studying the dark shadow of her eyelashes against her pale cheek.

I didn't understand what she was doing to me. Whatever this was, I had to put an end to it before she got hurt.

With a sigh, I pressed the back of my head against the wall and stared at the ceiling as if it was an opening to the heavens.

What if she was... No. It couldn't be.

I shook my head, steeling my heart and my head against anything that came after that. I wouldn't think it or dream it or anything of the sort.

I wasn't meant to find a mate.

I needed to get away. Putting distance between us was the only solution right now. I couldn't risk bringing her to the cities to the east. That would put the people of Terraheim in danger. The only choice I had to keep her safe now was to guard her from afar.

With a hard swallow, I stared at her sleeping form, memorizing her pinkened cheeks, her dark hair, her glowing skin, and every inch of her luscious, gorgeous body. I'd remember the way she sighed when I put my hands on her and the way she'd moaned when I'd first put my mouth on her, how she clutched at me when I held her after it was all over.

I couldn't keep her, but at least I'd have my memories.

I turned around and walked out the door.

I wasn't going to let myself come back.

## CHAPTER 13



*S* ophia

The soft musical chirping of the birds outside my window woke me the next morning. I hadn't a clue as to how long I'd slept, but judging by the soreness in my limbs, I'd needed the rest.

I blushed, not only remembering why, but realizing that I was still fully naked.

I stared down at my fingers, recalling the feel of his mouth against my most sensitive flesh, and a wave of aroused shame passed over me. I pressed my thighs together for a second, but I couldn't resist sliding my fingers between my legs in remembrance of his mouth on me there. My fingers grazed against my clit, and I flinched, more than a little sensitive from yesterday's activities. My face flushed even hotter as I jerked my hand away, feeling naughty yet undeniably satisfied.

Something between us has changed in the forest. I could feel it.

I'd seen the emotion in his eyes when he'd looked at me, something that hadn't been there when he'd first lost control and taken me in the forest.

He cared about *me*.

Even in the way he'd clutched at me after he'd driven me mad with pleasure and pain and everything in between had revealed how he felt for me. He hadn't wanted to let me go, so much so

that I could still feel the places where his fingers had dug into my flesh.

They might have even left a mark.

With a sigh, I looked around my cabin, but he was nowhere to be seen. To be honest, waking up without him felt sort of empty. I wanted him to be sitting over in the corner in his chair, where I could get out of bed only to settle safe and sound in his lap. I curled my knees into my chest and smiled when I saw my things gathered on the table.

I wondered where he was. Maybe he was out preparing something special for breakfast or gathering something sweet for me from the area of the village I hadn't yet explored.

With a start, I jumped up and rushed over to my bag, looking for the scroll. I shuffled through my pack and breathed a sigh of relief the moment my eyes grazed upon the aged paper. I hadn't lost it.

Unfurling it, I read it again, trying to figure out the mystery of what the prophecy could mean. Flashes of the vision the seer had cast over me raced before my eyes. I hadn't seen anything like the enchanted grove it mentioned, nor the wizard's keep, and I couldn't shake the feeling that a part of it felt a bit unfinished.

Maybe once I found the grove and the wizard's keep, I would figure out how to break Roken's curse and finally free his heart.

I waited for Roken to return, but he didn't make an appearance that day, nor the day after. I stayed in the cabin, passing the time by reading books, and when he didn't come back on the third day, I went out. I looked around the treetops, trying to see if I could catch sight of him, but I saw nothing.

What if I was wrong? What if he didn't care after all?

My own insecurities plagued me, and I did my best to ignore them, yet it proved especially difficult. The longer he was away, the more I worried that something had happened to him. It was possible that he'd held onto his sanity for as long as it

took to bring me to bed. What if he'd lost his mind and it was already too late?

I shuddered, remembering the dark vision of the realm's future. I had only just begun to accept this place as my new home, and I didn't want to lose it.

I didn't want to lose Roken, either.

I had to find him. Maybe he was hurt, and I was the only one who was here to help him. My mind whirled with worst case scenarios as I paced back and forth in my cabin.

Eventually, my patience wore out. I needed to do something, so I pulled on my leather boots, a long dress, and a fur mantle. The sun was on its downward trek in the sky, and the temperature was beginning to fall, so I needed to stay warm. Lastly, I grabbed my pack and stuffed it with a few supplies as well as the prophecy scroll.

With silence reigning throughout the forest, I made my way to the great hall and then down the winding staircase until I found myself on the ground. I looked back and forth, trying to decide which direction to go when a roar sounded to the west. I started and backed into the tree, sliding my fingers along and finding the trigger to open it and hide inside if need be.

A chorus of shouts and yelling joined the growl, and all at once, Roken broke out of the brush at a full sprint. In an instant, his eyes were upon me.

"We cannot stay here. It is no longer safe. We must make for Eldoria so we can warn them," he explained.

"Warn them of *what*?"

"The armies of Helheim have come for Terraheim, and the realm must be ready!" he shouted, looking back over his shoulder. He raced towards me and wrapped his arms around me, lifting me up off the ground and jumping into the air.

I shrieked as he shifted around me, his arms lengthening and his fingers edging with sharp talons. The hard muscles of his chest expanded behind me, and I closed my eyes as we shot up into the air, his massive wings forcing the tree canopy to give way. We were up above the treetop in seconds as his claws

wrapped around my waist, fierce yet gentle as he flew upwards into the sky.

My stomach rolled and almost gave way. I closed my eyes, but that only seemed to make the vertigo that much worse. I opened them back up and that's when I saw what was coming for us.

An army of monsters, tailed by a supernatural, purple cloud of magic, was storming through the trees. Thousands of beasts like the werewolf and the infernox patrolled down below, joined by stone giants, ogres, trolls, and orcs. There were massive, scraggly-haired mammoths with six tusks and giants with oozing blood and flesh. More grotesque forms followed, but soon enough, we were too far away for me to identify them.

Terror consumed me. It was one thing to see Helheim's army from the safety of a vision that may or may not come true. It was something else entirely to be faced with it in reality. This wasn't a slow trickle attack. This was a full-scale invasion.

*"Roken is your destiny. You must save him before you can save the realm. If not, this visage of the past will only be a pebble in the ocean of what is to come."*

The old woman's words repeated in my head, and I bit my lip. I curled up within Roken's talons and closed my eyes. Eldoria had been mentioned in several of the historical books I had devoured, but those were centuries old. I hoped what they'd said was still true. It had been the woodland city of the elves over five hundred years ago. Now, it was the capital of the realm.

Roken's incoming return would not go unnoticed. I just hoped we'd survive our arrival.

\* \* \*

During the day, the army of Helheim slept. It was nightfall when their fires lit up the night. I could see their progress as the days passed and it was harrowingly fast. Their unnatural speed cut through the forest far more swiftly than I thought



possible. Nothing seemed to hinder them—not the dense forest, the rushing river, or the deep furrows of the canyons to the west of the tree top village.

Roken traveled faster, but only just. We flew together in silence, only stopping when I needed to eat or relieve myself and then getting back into the sky just as quickly after I was done. Finally, when my limbs were starting to ache from disuse, Roken dipped into a valley and spiraled down to land in a clearing.

He placed me down gently and shifted behind me, placing his hands on my shoulders.

“They already know we’re here,” he whispered quietly.

“Who?”

“The elves,” he whispered.

For several moments, there was complete silence. The birds stopped singing and the bugs stopped chirping. There wasn’t even the slightest rustle of the wind in the trees. It was as if the entire world had gone quiet.

Then all of a sudden, we were surrounded by dozens of elves, their bows nocked with arrows trained on the two of us. Roken’s arm curled around my waist, his body shielding me from much of the threat. He breathed out, and I could have sworn that there was relief hidden within the sound.

“It has been a long time since you’ve come by our woods, your grace,” a musical voice spoke to the left of me. I turned my head to see a man that I could only describe as ethereally beautiful.

His long blonde hair shone in the dappled light of the sun, perfectly tucked behind pointed elvish ears adorned with sparkling gold jewelry. Bright blue eyes met mine as he cocked his head, his perfectly carved high cheekbones mesmerizing.

“That it has, Lord Valdar,” Roken answered.

“Queen Isolde was not expecting you, your grace,” Lord Valdar threatened, his smooth melodic voice lulling me into a

false sense of security. I glanced around, taking note that every bow was still nocked and drawn, ready to fly at a moment's notice should Roken and I pose a threat.

"I do not come without cause," Roken replied.

"Speak now, mad king, or forever keep your silence," Valdar growled, his harmonious voice dropping to a more sinister tone.

"Helheim has come for us," Roken answered simply. He didn't show any signs of fear before the elves, and Valdar set his sights fully on me.

"And who is this?"

"She is human, innocent in the ways of war."

Valdar's gaze assessed me coldly. The books suggested the elves of this land were something to be feared, but I hadn't believed them until now.

"My name is Sophia, and I'm the key to breaking the mad king's curse and saving the realm from the hands of the Dark King," I said quickly.

Now was not the time for vague mistruths. Time was running short, and the armies of Helheim would be here within days.

Roken started, his surprise quickly apparent, but he did not let go of me.

Valdar grinned, cocking his head as a smirk graced his devastatingly beautiful face. "Queen Isolde is going to want to meet you," he replied smoothly. There was a hint of danger to his tone, and I quickly realized that if he was someone to fear, that meant that the queen might be someone to be terrified of, too.

"Then take me to her," I replied.

Valdar smiled and my blood ran cold. Roken took a step back, and I shivered, no longer surrounded by his warmth. His hands squeezed my upper arms, but then he took another step back as Valdar offered his hand.

I strode towards him and took it. All at once, the wind rushed around me and the world fell out beneath my feet.

“Roken!” I called out.

“One does not enter Eldoria without an invitation, princess.”

As I started to fall, a scream emerged from my lips. Suddenly, the world rushed by, and my feet slammed into the ground. Blackness edged my vision, and I raised my head.

Valdar had taken me through a portal, and straight into Queen Isolde’s chambers.

\* \* \*

At first glance, Queen Isolde emanated an aura of ethereal regality and grace. Her slender figure, draped in flowing robes of lavender iridescent silk, moved with an otherworldly elegance as she stood by the window. Light cast her in shadow. Long silver hair interwoven with delicate floral adornments cascaded down her back, framing her delicate features and giving her an air of beauty and wisdom. A sparkling diamond silver crown sat atop her head, and her pointed ears were adorned with matching earrings that wound along her earlobe. Her silver eyes were like pools of shimmering moonlight, soft and warm on the surface, yet cool and calculating beneath it.

“Sophia White,” she greeted, her voice melodic and soothing, but instinctually I knew that it could turn the exact opposite if need be. For a moment, I forgot myself and just stared, captivated by her beauty, before I quickly bowed my head.

Was I supposed to curtsy?

“Queen Isolde,” I greeted quietly, dipping slightly with respect.

“You bring danger to my people,” she began, her musical voice dropping to a more dangerous tone. I swallowed nervously as she lifted her hand to the side, a soft tendril of shimmering magic shooting towards a lamp. It lit instantly, both a wonder and a warning at the same time. Elves had

access to magic, and she would use it to protect the city of Eldoria if she needed to.

“Danger was already at your doors,” I replied. Her eyes flashed with uncertainty as she slowly walked over to a pedestal full of sparkling water. Her fingers flitted along the edge as she glanced over at me.

“I have protected my people for a long time,” she murmured.

“You do not know what is coming. I have seen it. There isn’t much time,” I replied softly, trying to implore her to listen. There was something in her expression that gave me pause, though, like she had decided what to do with me long before I set foot in her chambers.

“There is a prophecy that has been long forgotten in my halls, a foretelling of a human girl’s coming that would bring about the end of Eldoria and Terraheim,” she began.

I spoke the words seared deep into my mind,

“In shadows bound, a soul beset,

By curse of dark, both fierce and yet,

A celestial dance shall light the way,

To bring forth dawn and break the fray...”

I tried to move on to repeat the rest, but she cut me off before I could go any further.

“No. Not that one. There is another. Come,” she beckoned.

Tentatively, I strode over to the pedestal with her. The liquid in the bowl wasn’t exactly water like I had expected, but a thick, metallic silvery substance. Queen Isolde reached out and took my hand, pressing it into the bowl until my fingertips broached the shimmering fluid. In an instant, the old woman’s voice was playing in my mind, yet the verse she was speaking was far different than that of my own.

*“When the moonlight kisses the sacred ground,*

*A human woman emerges, her destiny profound.*

*With hair as dark as the moonless night,*

*Her arrival foretells the realm's destined plight.  
Yet woven within her journey's thread,  
Lies a path that leads to destruction spread.  
Beware when she walks through city gates,  
For she holds the power to seal its ultimate fate.  
In her hands, the realm's future lies,  
A fragile balance, teetering on demise.  
Her arrival intertwines hope and despair,  
As the realm's end hangs heavy in the air.  
Beware the allure of her untamed might,  
For it holds the realm's salvation or blight.  
Her purpose entwined with its final hour,  
Will be the beginning or end of Terraheim's power."*

The prophecy complete, an ominous silence followed. I stared into the silvery bowl, seeing nothing but my own reflection upon its surface.

"That cannot be true. I'm the key to breaking the king's curse. I have seen it," I implored.

"He has not been king for a long time, human. He relinquished his hold on the crown the day he burned Taverna to the ground," she replied, her voice hardened with anger.

"I may be new to this world, but prophecy is not a simple science. This could be a forked prophecy hinging on certain events," I tried, relying on the limited knowledge I'd collected in the village, but she shook her head.

"I cannot take that chance," she murmured, and my blood ran cold.

"Helheim is coming. They will be here within days. You must prepare," I beseeched.

"I must protect my people and I will begin with you," she answered. There was a soft sadness to her expression, and I lifted my chin.

“Don’t,” I whispered.

“Guards!” she called out.

I took a step back, but it was already too late. In an instant, a series of magical portals opened up all around me. Elves stepped through, all of them equipped like warriors on the brink of battle. When one hand reached out to me, I tried to jerk away, but a dozen more took hold of my arms and my legs. Elven rope looped around my wrists, and with a snap of the queen’s fingers, the world went black once more.

\* \* \*

When I opened my eyes, it was still dark. I was lying down on a cot, and I pushed myself up to a seated position. With an anxious sigh, I started to look around.

As my eyes gradually adjusted to the oppressive darkness that enveloped the underground chamber, faint whispers of sound echoed through the damp air, sending chills down my spine. Far off in the distance, a solitary torch cast a flickering glow, revealing the gloomy expanse of the desolate dungeon. The walls themselves, hewn from cold, unforgiving rock, seemed to exude an eerie aura, as if they had absorbed the despair and anguish of countless prisoners who had languished within their confines.

To my right, a line of imposing iron bars stood as a formidable barrier. I approached them cautiously and reached out, my fingers brushing against the rusted surface, only to recoil from the chilling touch of the iron. The door loomed before me, an impassive sentinel, its lock a stubborn guardian preventing any hope of freedom. With a surge of determination, I pressed against it, but it didn’t budge even an inch.

Fuck.

Wrapping my fingers around the bars, I looked out. There were other cells that looked just as miserable as my own, but I couldn’t see into any of them.

“Hello?” I tried.

No one answered.

What the hell was I supposed to do now?

Silence reigned for hours. I searched every crack and crevice in that cell, but I didn't find anything useful. There was no key in sight, and I was convinced that I was the only one being kept prisoner down here. None of the bars were loose, and the door was locked tight. I couldn't even be certain that I was still in Eldoria. The elves had used portal magic both ways. For all I knew, I could be on the other side of the world.

I reached up to wrap my hand around the emerald necklace on my neck, squeezing it as it warmed underneath my fingertips. A faint tingle of magic flitted up the length of my arm and I started.

In the dim light, I angled the necklace so that I could see it. Just when I noticed a very faint glow at the center of the gemstone, the scrape of a shoe against the rock floor caught my attention, and I jerked away in surprise, quickly hiding the necklace underneath the fur of my mantle.

A dark form crept through the hallway, covered in a brown hooded cloak. I couldn't see the person's face, but from her size and stature, it appeared that it was a woman. When they moved close enough, they pushed their hood back, revealing the face of a beautiful, red-haired elf woman.

"Who are you?" I whispered.

"You can call me Mais. I'm here to help you."

## CHAPTER 14



*S*ophia

Mais smiled at me, her expression warm and kindhearted. Long burgundy hair reached all the way to her waist. Her pale, dewy skin was touched with a rosy pink, adorning high cheekbones and perfect lips. Her beautiful green eyes seemed eternal, full of whimsical tales and ominous words of warning. I didn't know why, but there was something about her that seemed off. I couldn't put my finger on it.

"My name is Sophia," I replied.

"I know who you are. There are many prophecies that mention a girl transported to a realm that is not her own," she continued.

A part of me sighed in relief. "Terraheim is in danger. I need to break the king's curse to save it," I said quickly.

"That you do. Stand back. I don't want you to get hurt," she said with a grin. I saw no sign of malice in her expression, so I took several steps towards the back of my cell.

I watched as she lifted her palm in front of the lock. A small purple flame spiraled in the center of her hand, growing larger and larger until it burst towards the door. Supernatural sparks exploded around the lock and the door slammed inward, the clang of metal echoing off the rock.

"Let's go. Quickly, before someone realizes you're gone," Mais said in a hushed voice. She beckoned me forward, and I



quickly sprung in her direction. She turned on her heel and swiftly strode down the hall. I followed, looking back and forth into the dark cells all around me. Every single one of them was empty.

“I was the only prisoner?”

“We’re in the old capital city of Taverna. You and I are the only ones here, aside from the elvish guards currently sleeping off their body weight in mead,” she answered. There was a telling smirk on her lips, and I laughed softly.

“I take it that has something to do with you?” I asked.

“Maybe... Maybe not,” she said with a wink.

“Plausible deniability,” I answered, and she chuckled.

“Something like that,” she replied.

I chewed my lip, trying to decide what to do next. There was no use focusing on Queen Isolde. She believed that I was the end to her world. She was protecting her people and her crown. The prophecy ran through my mind once again, and I stopped short, glancing at the back of Mais’ head.

Perhaps she could be my ally in this.

“Do you know where in Terraheim I might find a wizard’s keep? There is something I must find there,” I explained quickly.

“You must mean Sorrenthiel,” Mais said with a warm smile. When she saw my confused look, she cleared her throat and explained further. “Sorrenthiel is a fortress built straight into the Stony Ridge mountains in the north. For thousands of years, no one but mages could enter through its gates, but there are less and less born every year. Very few sorcerers inhabit its mighty walls now.”

I followed her up a winding staircase, climbing several stories before there was any hint of daylight.

“Is it far from here?”

Mais opened a wooden hewn door, and the warmth from the sun streamed down from above, caressing my cheeks. I

breathed a sigh of relief. I was free.

“A few days’ ride on horseback or so. See those mountains over there? Sorrenthiel is hidden in the mountain pass, deep in the valley between the two tallest peaks. I should warn you though. The path is treacherous. Unless you know the way, it’s ridden with traps meant to keep the wizard’s enemies out,” she replied, her tone deadly serious.

“The realm is depending on me. I have to go.”

\* \* \*

Mais and I walked through the ruined city together, side by side.

Once a thriving metropolis, the city now lay in ruins, a haunting testament to Roken’s wrath that had descended upon it a long time ago. Once magnificent structures now lay in scattered heaps, their grandeur reduced to debris strewn across the desolate cobblestone streets. The once vibrant colors of painted walls and bustling marketplaces were obscured by layers of ash and dust, while the scent of charred wood and smoldering embers still permeated the air hundreds of years later. Roken’s fiery breath had left a devastating mark, reducing a once thriving capital to a ghostly shadow of its former glory and leaving only tales of loss and devastation in its wake. It was haunting to imagine, and I shivered, keeping my eyes trained all around me for any hint of a threat.

“Where are the guards you mentioned?”

I stiffened when she pointed to one of the only buildings still standing across the street from us. It was a small two-story house made out of plaster, but the exterior was scorched with black soot. Parts of the roof had blown away, allowing light to stream into the structure. Pieces of the exterior were crumbling, and others were covered by a thick carpet of winding vines. Seeing the look of alarm on my face, she pressed a single finger over her lips, insinuating that we should both keep quiet. I nodded once, and she crept along.

A light green supernatural glow entangled within the vines caught my eyes, and I stopped.

“Hold on,” I whispered. She stiffened, but I used my fingers to rip some of the vines off of the wall, revealing a beautifully crafted elven blade. The handle was wrapped in gold filigree with several emeralds laid into it. I wrapped my hand around it and hefted it off the ground, finding the weight comfortable and perfectly balanced. I tucked it into my belt. At least I’d be able to protect myself, should the need arise.

She beckoned me forward, and I followed until we passed the crumbling wall that surrounded the city limits only to see a beautiful black horse tied to a tree.

“Yours, I take it?”

“That’s Midnight. She’s a good, reliable horse, not easily spooked.”

The two of us approached the mare, and Mais reached out to brush her fingers along her snout. The horse nudged her, blinking slowly. For the briefest of seconds, I could have sworn the horse’s eyes were a deep, otherworldly purple, but it was gone in a flash, so quickly that I thought that I might have imagined it.

I was probably just tired and a little hungry, so I shook it off.

Mais put her boot into the stirrup and pushed herself up into the saddle. She offered me a hand, and I took it, sitting behind her and holding onto her waist.

“To Sorrenthiel, then?”

“To Sorrenthiel,” I confirmed. I took a deep breath as she flicked the reins, and the horse immediately responded. She started with a slow walk, and when Mais clicked her tongue, Midnight took off in a swift canter, straight towards the valley in the mountains.

\* \* \*

Over the next few days, Mais and I traveled together towards the mountain pass. She had plenty of food and supplies stored in her saddlebags, so we made camp each night with a fire and a few pieces of jerky, fruit, and bread. Her company was enjoyable, but I found myself missing Roken more with each passing nightfall.

I missed his sweet and caring nature, especially when he saw to my needs without me having to say anything at all. I was still wearing one of the outfits he'd found within the treetop village, and I fingered the soft fabric, wishing it was his hands on my skin instead.

On the third day, we stopped just outside the entrance to the mountain pass to camp. We'd slept under the light of the stars and awakened with the vibrant glow of the rising sun.

"The way will get more dangerous from here on out," Mais said quietly.

As we traveled, I noticed that the plains before the mountains were quiet and strangely devoid of life. I looked towards the two peaks Mais had pointed out and then down to the entryway of the pass. It was surrounded by a deep wooded forest, casting it in shadow even in the morning light. I glanced into the darkness, uneasy at the mystery of what lay beyond.

"Do you have any idea of what could be waiting for us?"

"Yes and no. I know the path, at least in theory. Not really though, because the spelled defenses are known to shift. One day, there might be acid rain, and another there could be a bridge that is there but not really there. Every step will matter," she explained.

Wrapping my arms around my knees, I stared into the flickering flames of the fire. It was much smaller than the night before, but the dying embers were still glowing with heat.

"If everything goes according to plan, how much longer will it take to get to the keep?"

“Should we not get lost along the way, we will arrive in Sorrenthiel by nightfall.”

I took a deep breath and stood up, gathering my things and tucking them into the spare pack that Mais had given me. She followed suit and untied Midnight with a heavy sigh.

“From here on out, we travel on foot,” she murmured, and I nodded, watching as she removed the reins and the saddle from the faithful horse. When she was done, Midnight nickered, and Mais talked in soothing tones. Once she finished speaking, the mare reared up and stomped her feet on the ground before taking off across the plain to the west. I watched her for a long moment before turning back to my companion. She nodded once, indicating that she was ready.

“Shall we?” I asked, trying to remain brave even in the face of whatever unknown dangers lay ahead.

“Let’s go!” Mais exclaimed.

## CHAPTER 15



*R*oken

I'd done what I'd set out to do. Sophia would be in safe hands now, but still, something didn't feel right. A very big part of me didn't want to let her go. Icy cold surrounded my heart, and I tried to remain calm.

Sophia could stay here and live a life free of me. Eldoria had turned into a thriving metropolis since the fall of Taverna. It was ruled by elves, but a great many humans, dwarfs and all manner of creatures lived within its gates. Much of it was hidden in the woods, but that was a purposeful defense tactic that had worked well to keep the trickling forces of Helheim at bay for a long time.

Even though the city was strong, they were unprepared for what was coming. Helheim had sent an army through the rift, and it was hell bent on destroying the stronghold of the realm.

Queen Isolde was a smart woman. She'd realize that soon enough.

She had ruled in my stead ever since I'd stepped away from my position as king. She'd been there during the destruction of the old capital, leading my people to safety through a series of underground tunnels in the mountains. She was a good queen, a fair one, and she'd kept my people alive and far away from me. She'd protected them, and I was thankful to see it for myself. But this was close enough.

I needed to put distance between us once again.

The elves had escorted me a few miles away from the city. Not a single one had lowered their bow, keeping it nocked and steady on me the entire time. I didn't blame them. I was Dragonborne, a powerful, magical creature that could render their city to the ground should I wish it.

They didn't know that it would take a lot more than a few arrows to bring me down.

I should be relieved that I'd been able to control my curse long enough to bring her here, to warn the people of Eldoria about Helheim, yet I found myself missing her, like I wanted to find her once more and hold her in my arms just one last time before we said our final goodbyes.

The thought of saying such things hurt my heart. I wanted to press my hand to my chest to relieve the ache I felt, but I kept my fists at my sides instead.

I would remain strong for *her*.

I turned my head, trying to steel myself against the thought of her, yet the more I tried, the more keenly I felt her absence. The chains of my curse clutched tighter, and I lifted my chin, trying to draw in a calm, steady breath so that I could keep the monster inside at bay. Lord Valdar was watching me closely, assessing me for any sign of distress, and I did my best to keep a level head. There was nothing I wanted less than to hurt the people I was counting on to keep Sophia safe from the incoming threat.

As the seconds ticked by though, I could feel my instincts starting to emerge no matter how hard I tried to keep them at bay. My hearing became more sensitive to my surroundings, picking up the almost silent step of an elf, the chirping of a songbird above me in the trees, and the scampering of a mouse along the forest floor. I could pick up no sign of her, only the very slim traces of her scent.

My mind started to fray at the seams as I began to lose control bit by bit. My magic boiled within my belly. I fisted my hands

by my side, trying to get ahold of myself, but it was like trying to stop a stone giant in its tracks.

“Where did you take Sophia?” I growled. My voice hinted that I was approaching the limits of my sanity, that the curse was beginning to spiral out of control. The elves all around me tensed, likely picking up on my struggle to maintain stability.

“She is with Queen Isolde,” Lord Valdar answered simply.

I gritted my teeth, gripping my magic and throwing it outward in a sudden burst. Mystical energy tore through the forest, searching for her and finding nothing. There wasn't even a trace of her, not a footprint or her scent or the brush of her fingertips against the wall.

It was as if she had disappeared *completely*.

“Where is she?” I growled.

“I think it's time for you to leave,” he answered. His body tensed, and every elf surrounding me pulled back their notched arrows just a hair, forever at the ready. Their bows creaked as they held their positions, waiting for the order to strike.

I was just about to open my mouth to say something in return when a horn blared deafeningly loudly. All of a sudden, I heard the heavy crash of footfalls in the forest, and I knew in an instant that the forces of Helheim had arrived.

They'd moved far faster than I'd anticipated. I thought I'd given the city a day or two of warning so that they could ready their men with weapons, food, and supplies, but Helheim was already here.

It was time to act.

I felt the surge of my ancient power coursing through my veins, a heated sensation that intensified with every beat of my heart. My transformation started with a deep ache, like a relentless pressure building from within, ready to be set free at any moment. I braced myself for the inevitable change. My muscles tensed, and my bones shifted beneath my skin. My limbs elongated, stretching and contorting as my body rearranged itself into my dragon form.



My hands and feet elongated into talons, their strength and sharpness emerging with each passing moment as I lunged forward onto all fours. Digging my claws into the dirt, I roared as scales sprouted from my skin, glistening with a dark green metallic sheen. Wings unfurled from my back, their span impressive and commanding, ready to carry me through the skies with grace and power as I fought off the invading army of the Dark King.

As the final vestiges of my human form slipped away, my senses sharpened, taking on a new, primal acuity. The world transformed around me; every detail intensified as if I was seeing it through a heightened lens. I rubbed my tongue on the roof of my mouth, feeling flames flicker in the depths of my throat, crackling with a powerful heat that begged for release.

With my wings spread wide, I launched into the air, feeling the wind beneath my scales as I embraced the exhilarating freedom that came with flight. A growl rumbled deep in my throat as I shot up above the trees to see a scene far more shocking than I was prepared for.

The army was even bigger than I remembered. The very ground trembled beneath their relentless march, a sea of armored soldiers stretching nearly as far as the eye could see. They advanced with chilling determination, their blackened banners billowing ominously in the wind. Their steps tore roots from the ground, ruined colorful flowers and lively brush, and crushed foliage beneath their feet. As they pressed forward, the forest groaned beneath their heavy boots, and they left devastation in their wake.

The soldiers were many, clad in obsidian armor while they wielded weapons forged in the deepest fires of Helheim. All manner of terrible creatures marched towards Eldoria.

Beneath me, Lord Valdar gave a shout and rushed back towards the city. There wasn't enough time. I had to do something.

I flew towards the castle, built into the ancient trunk of the tallest tree in the forest, and shifted back to my human form in midair to land on the queen's balcony. My feet crashed into the

wooden planks, and I shot up, immediately rushing inside her chambers. She was standing beside a table laden with a map of the entire realm, including the mountains to the north, the rift to the far west, and Eldoria in the east. Her head shot up and her eyes met mine.

She stepped back, her expression instantly wary.

“Make ready. Helheim is already here,” I exclaimed. My voice showed signs that I was losing control, my curse fraying at the edges of my sanity. I did my best to keep it at bay.

“Will you fight for us?” she asked, her uneasiness quickly morphing into fear.

“I will do the best that I can,” I promised.

Without another word, I turned around and leapt off the balcony, leaning into my ancient power once more and shifting into a dragon midair. My wings burst free of my back just as the ground was approaching, and I flapped them hard, lifting myself up into the air and shooting above the trees once more.

The army was moving more quickly now. Their continued march felled one tree after another, the heavy crash of each trunk slamming into the ground echoing far and wide.

The air crackled with tension as I descended upon the battlefield, my massive wings casting a shadow over the advancing hordes of Helheim’s army. With a mighty roar, I unleashed a torrent of poisonous green flames down upon the ranks of orcs and trolls, engulfing them in a deadly inferno. Their anguished screams echoed through the battlefield, their bodies quickly charring as they fell to the ground. But even though I’d taken out more than a hundred with that single attack, I’d hardly made a dent in their number.

Aware of a new, dangerous threat to their continued march, several stone giants approached me, their towering forms shaking the ground beneath me. They loomed over the battlefield, their massive forms hewn from rugged boulders and weathered rock. Towering pillars of strength and endurance, their bodies were chiseled with deep crevices and rugged edges, resembling ancient statues come to life. Each

step sent tremors through the earth, resonating with a terrible power that commanded the attention of everyone around them. Their eyes, glowing with an otherworldly violet light, surveyed the chaos I had rendered with a stoic determination until their gazes finally settled on me.

With a deep breath, I maneuvered with precision and agility around the stone giants. When I drew close enough, they struck out at me, but my scales deflected their mighty blows with ease. With a flick of my tail, I sent one crashing to the ground, its immense weight causing tremors that reverberated through the ranks of the enemy. Another raced at me, but I grasped its shoulders with my talons, lifting it off the ground. Using immense strength, I carried the giant up several stories into the air before I let go, allowing it to crash down into a large group of orcs.

As I descended back towards the ground, a pack of hellhounds charged at me, their blazing eyes filled with bloodlust, but I swirled in a graceful dance, avoiding their snapping jaws and striking with swift precision with my talons. One leapt at me with a rumbling growl, and I caught it in my jaws. With a harsh snap, I rendered the hellish creature nothing more than a pile of broken bones and blackened blood.

Amidst the chaos, I surveyed the battlefield with a mix of fury and determination. My green flames continued to lick at the enemy, devouring their forces one by one. The ground was strewn with fallen foes, their bodies twisted and broken. With renewed vigor, I spread my wings wide, ready to unleash further devastation upon the creatures that dared to challenge me.

I'd held onto my sanity thus far, but I'd been fighting it for far too long. I pictured Sophia's face in the forefront of my mind, the image immediately calming. Back under control for now, I soared above the army as Eldoria's forces gathered at the edges of the city. Every elf was outfitted in beautifully crafted armor. Even their bows and swords were exquisitely fashioned, from the sharpened tip to the handcrafted helm. There was a large battalion that was stationed on the ground, but many others had taken to the trees.

There were other segments of the army clustered at the center. Various creatures such as dwarves, humans, fae, and warlocks stood at the ready. In the middle of the army was a group of mages that were prepared to weave spells and attack at a moment's notice.

I recognized the lead mage, Lady Seraphina. She was half elf, half human and wielded more power than any sorceress in the history of Terraheim. There were only a handful of wizards that could stand against her, and even then, I wasn't sure who would come out the victor.

A wild roar sounded in the distance, and I turned my head to see a pack of three infernox making their way through the trampled forest.

With a ferocious roar, I locked eyes with the menacing infernox monsters before me. Flames flickered in their dark, malevolent eyes, a reflection of the darkness that fueled their relentless assault. Embracing the feral, animalistic instincts coursing through my veins, I lunged forward, venomous green flames billowing from my jaws. The first infernox met my onslaught with a frenzy of claws and fiery breath, but I moved with the agility of a predator, evading their attacks with precise maneuvers. With each counterstrike, my talons tore through their hellish hides, their pained howls echoing through the battlefield.

The infernox retaliated with a vengeful fury, their flaming appendages whipping through the air. Dodging their ill-timed attack, I countered with a swift flurry of tail swipes, sending them sprawling across the charred terrain. The acrid scent of burning flesh filled the air as my poisonous green flames engulfed the terrible creatures. They fell, each one in kind, and the curse settled momentarily, temporarily replaced by the primal satisfaction that comes with victory in battle.

The armies of Eldoria roared their approval behind me. Then something inside me snapped, and the curse took hold.

With a feral roar, I spiraled up into the air and shot across the battlefield, raining down fire on our foes.

I'd lost control.

## CHAPTER 16



*S*ophia

I followed Mais up the dark path. The trees were thick on either side of us, creating an ominous tunnel devoid of light. Not even the sun broke through the thick overhead tree cover. Our torches flickered, casting dancing shadows that seemed to mock our trepidation with our every step. The towering trees loomed overhead, their twisted branches reaching out like skeletal fingers, as if eager to ensnare unsuspecting wanderers like me.

I kept my quest at the forefront of my mind. With every step, I reminded myself that not only the realm, but Roken, needed me.

Neither of us spoke a word. It felt too dangerous to even utter a sound. With the trees closing in on us, it took everything in me just to put one foot in front of the other. Silence reigned, which was even more unnerving than the encroaching darkness. There was no chirping of birds or buzzing of bugs. There was no wind to rustle the leaves either.

I trailed behind Mais, my steps quickening as we ventured deeper into the forest on the foreboding path. The air grew thick with an inexplicable tension, the once-muffled sounds of our footfalls magnified in the unnerving silence. I kept my arms close to my chest, careful to avoid the sharp brush should it slice my vulnerable flesh like a knife.

I took a step and a rock tumbled to the side, bouncing off a thick tree root. The pendant around my neck blazed hot, and with a sharp cry, I wrapped my fingers around it. Magic blazed through me with a sharp buzzing tingle as though it was warning me of what was coming.

All of a sudden, an invisible force constricted around us, immobilizing our feet in place. Panic surged within me as I struggled against the invisible restraints, my heart pounding in my chest. Mais, her eyes wide with fear, began scanning our surroundings. When she came up empty-handed, she reached into her pack and pulled out a small velvet bag. She searched inside and cast her arm out, throwing dust into the air. In an instant, a string of glowing magical threads illuminated right in front of my eyes, surrounding my body, and closing in as the seconds drew by.

In my time in the treetop village, I had read a number of books about magical spells out of sheer curiosity. I had never in my wildest dreams thought I would encounter one. But in this moment, I was extremely thankful that I had been such a voracious reader in my time there. One of the books had suggested that sometimes magic could be fought off with a spelled weapon. I glanced down, and the sword at my waist was glowing an otherworldly green again.

I thanked my lucky stars that I'd stopped and dug out the blade when I had.

I grasped the sword tucked into my belt and pulled it out. The emerald around my neck grew warm, and magic tingled deep in my belly as I hefted the sword and slashed down, cutting the mystical threads before they could close in on me. I had to move fast in order to disentangle myself from the magical web. Mais followed suit, and in less than a minute, we were free.

I breathed a sigh of relief when the trap gave way and collapsed to the ground in a glowing cloud of dust. There was barely enough time to catch my breath because Mais started moving again, and I cautiously followed her. Neither of us dared make a sound.

We ventured further into the perilous depths of the tunneled labyrinth. The air grew thick with our anticipation, and my heart pounded in my chest as I waited for what came next.

Abruptly, the trees around us started to shift, morphing into an array of twisting and turning patterns. A sense of foreboding washed over me as the trees started to close in on us, the path narrowing in from both sides. Panic threatened to consume me, but I forced myself to stay calm, at least as much as I could manage.

“Any other tricks in that little pack of yours?” I called out, my tone fraught with anxiety.

She shook her head, her expression frantic, and I looked around, desperate to find anything that might free us from this trap.

At last, I noticed a small, barely visible inscription etched into a large boulder beside us. Something about it told me that it held the key to our escape. I rushed towards it, but my steps were slow. With every stride, it felt like my foot was stuck in a thick casing of mud, and the boulder seemed farther away. I cried out, squeezing the sword so hard that the emeralds cut into my palm. With my other hand, I wrapped my fingers around the necklace, and the world short-circuited in front of my eyes, glitching as though a record had skipped as the illusion fell away.

In a flash, I raced forward and used the side of my blade to scratch it out. The path straightened and returned to normal. With a heavy sigh of relief, I slumped my shoulders forward while I caught my breath.

I wished Roken was here to hold me.

The distance between us was greater than it had ever been, and his absence was painful. Every muscle fiber in my body ached with a loneliness far deeper than I thought possible.

“Come on. It shouldn’t be much farther,” Mais implored.

“Let me go in front. I think I might be able to sense the traps before we walk into them,” I said quickly.

“How?”

“Something about this pendant is special. I think it’s spelled somehow,” I replied. With a curt nod, she stepped aside, and I walked forward.

For the rest of the day, we navigated the path. Fortunately, I was able to use the pendant to avoid any more traps. The path started to widen, the surrounding trees becoming sparser until it opened up into a grassy plane. I looked up with a sharp gasp at the first sight of the wizard’s keep.

Sorrenthiel rose majestically from the mountain, its towering walls and battlements crafted from pristine white marble. Carved with meticulous precision into the rugged mountainside, the keep stood as a beacon of strength and resilience against the backdrop of the jagged peaks.

Elaborate archways adorned with delicate carvings framed the grand entrance, welcoming both friend and foe alike. Towering spires reached towards the heavens, their pointed tips piercing the sky. From the highest ramparts, guards could stand watch, able to spot an enemy from miles away.

The sheer scale of the fortress was both formidable and mesmerizing. Its stone walls, weathered by time, exuded an air of ancient wisdom and magic.

“Wow,” I breathed.

“It’s quite a sight,” Mais whispered beside me.

We approached the looming walls and climbed up a narrow winding staircase as high as we could go. There was a thick stone door that had been left slightly ajar, and we pushed it open, entering the abandoned keep in silence. Mais seemed to know the way, so I followed quietly as we descended down the silent streets until the two of us stood in front of a grand building which must have been the wizard’s central keep.

As Mais and I cautiously pushed open the creaking doors, a rush of dusty air tickled my nose. The dim light of the setting sun filtering through the cracked windows revealed a scene frozen in time. Dust-covered bookshelves lined the walls, their ancient tomes standing as silent sentinels. Pieces of shattered



glass and fallen debris scattered the floor, evidence of the fortress's long neglect.

It didn't look like anyone was here.

With each step we took, the echoes of our footfalls resonated through the empty halls, amplifying the eerie silence that hung in the air. The remnants of forgotten spells and magical artifacts lay strewn about, their once-potent power now faded and dormant. Time had taken its toll on the once-great bastion of knowledge and mysticism, and I feared much of it had been lost.

As we ventured deeper into the abandoned keep, a sense of both trepidation and fascination washed over me. The weight of history and forgotten secrets seemed to press against my skin. I couldn't help but think of wizards who had once walked these very halls, their whispers of missing knowledge echoing in the recesses of my mind.

Eventually, we moved far enough inside that everything lay untouched, each book and magical object perfectly in place. I passed through a hallway, and a gentle hum surrounded me. The rushing tingle of magic raced through me, and I stopped short.

Mais stopped behind me. With a frustrated look, she slapped her hands against an invisible wall.

"It's a magical barrier. It won't let me pass," she said as she scowled.

I looked back and forth between her and the way down and made a quick decision.

I needed to go on and find the book of prophecy so that I could find the key to Roken's curse. I could wait to figure out how to get Mais through. The realm needed me, and I couldn't waste any time.

"Wait for me here. I won't be long."

"I'll find a safe place to cook us some dinner."

"That sounds great. I can't wait!"

I turned around and continued down the hallway without her. As I strode along, my thoughts were fraught with visions of Roken.

Did he miss me as much as I missed him?

My footsteps rang off the stone floor as I descended down winding staircases and long hallways until I eventually approached a door covered in mystical green glyphs. I pressed my hand against the wall, and the inscriptions glowed even more brightly before a lock clicked and the door swung open.

Beyond it lay the biggest library I'd ever seen. Shelves were carved straight into the white rock. Every single one was stuffed full of leather-bound books, and in the center of the room, there was a single pedestal with a dark green book. As though a magical thread was pulling me towards it, I strode forward and brushed my fingers against the stone. Immediately, the front cover flew open, and the pages rushed by until it stopped on a passage that I recognized.

It was the same prophecy the seer had revealed to me, only there were four more verses added to the end.

*Beneath the veil of night's embrace,  
The Heartbloom's blossom, a fleeting grace,  
On celestial eve, seek its glow,  
To free the beast's soul from captive woe.  
Confront the past, embrace the light,  
Atonement sought, in darkest night,  
In altar's embrace, redemption found,  
Humanity restored, profound.  
With love's embrace and will unbowed,  
Break the chains, let beast unshroud,  
The ancient curse shall fade away,  
In hero's triumph, on destined day.  
These sacred words, true love's kiss,*

*Guide the chosen to avoid dark abyss,*

*With the mark of one's mate,*

*One shall rescue the realm's bleak fate.*

My mind whirled with questions. What was a Heartbloom, and where could I find it? I chewed my lip, reading the prophecy over and over again, trying to understand it, yet missing several valuable pieces. If Mais couldn't offer any insight, I would come back and search the books until I could find mention of anything that could help me.

In an excited rush, I grabbed the book and shoved it in the bag at my waist. I turned around and rushed out of the massive library. I sprinted back to the place where I had left Mais. Not seeing her, I passed through the magical barrier and kept going. I looked through each doorway as I strode by, yearning to explore the abandoned keep and read all the books lost in time in this forgotten place. The magic that had awakened deep inside me rumbled with a thirst for knowledge and to understand how a normal human from Earth could be transported to a fantasy land and come to find a magic of her own.

If you had asked me whether I preferred the red carpet or this, I would choose this each and every time.

As I wandered onward, I heard the crackling of a small fire. I rushed forward and found Mais in one of the larger rooms. She'd gathered a few pieces of broken furniture and made a small campfire. Some of her supplies were laid out, but one thing caught my eye and made my stomach growl immediately with hunger.

There was a bowl of fruit beside her, and she smiled, grabbing one of them and holding it out to me.

“Apple?”

## CHAPTER 17



*S*ophia

With a wistful smile, I took the apple from her hand, marveling down at the unexpected treat.

“Where did you find such a beautiful batch of fruit?” I asked, rubbing the apple against my sleeve to clean it. The beautiful scarlet color of the apple’s skin was ridiculously tempting, and when I glanced at the jerky and other items she’d rummaged for dinner, I decided to save the sweet fruit for dessert.

“Out that door over there is a small courtyard filled with different kinds of fruit trees. The runoff from the mountain feeds a small brook through the center. They’re thriving in there.”

“I didn’t know you had apples here in Terraheim,” I whispered.

“No?”

“It’s comforting, to be honest. It kind of reminds me of home,” I mused.

“Earth?” she asked.

“Yes. It’s very different from here,” I answered.

“Do you miss it?”

“I don’t. I already have people here I care far more about,” I smiled, winking in her direction. Her face softened, and she

grinned in return. I told her more about back home while we snacked on dried meat and thin bread. When I was finally done, I stared down at the apple.

“I think I’m going to save this for later. I want to explore the keep a bit before it gets too late,” I said.

Mais’ face tightened for a moment before she nodded with some sort of disappointed curtness. Curious, I cocked my head in her direction, and she shook her head. Quickly, she covered up whatever she was feeling with a smile as she prodded the fire with a long stick. The flames billowed up, and smoke spiraled up towards the ceiling.

“It’s been a long day, hasn’t it?”

“It has,” I replied. Wanting to get her opinion before she fell asleep, I reached into my pack and drew out the book of prophecy. I turned to the right page and held it out to her.

“You said you were familiar with prophecy, right? This holds the key to breaking Roken’s curse, but there’s some things I don’t understand. It mentions the Heartbloom flower. Do you know what that is?”

Mais took a moment to read through the passage before she shook her head. “According to the text, it blooms under the moonlight, but I’ve never heard of it before,” she answered. With a mournful shrug, she shook her head. “I wish I could be more helpful,” she added.

“I’m going to search the keep for anything useful. I’ll save this for when I get back,” I smiled, placing the apple down on the blanket she had laid out.

“Goodnight, Sophia,” Mais said with a soft smile as she passed the book back to me.

I picked up my pack and stuffed the book back inside. I slipped back down the hall and past the magical barrier, searching through one room and then the next for answers. Hours passed and I found no mention of the precious flower that I needed to find. With a frustrated growl, I peered at the endless shelves of books. Even if the answer was here somewhere, the chances of finding it were slim.

I needed a bit of luck to find the answer. Maybe... a bit of magical help would do the trick.

I wrapped my fingers around the emerald, igniting the tingling magic in my core. In an instant, I ached with longing for Roken. I tried to push it away, but it only grew more intense as the seconds passed. A bout of tiredness hit me, and my jaws opened so wide with a yawn that my eyes started watering.

I needed sleep. I'd renew the search and find the answers tomorrow.

With another yawn, I headed back up into the keep. The campfire had died down, and Mais was already resting beside it. She looked so peaceful as she slept, curled up and using her pack as a pillow. I sat down on my own blanket and picked up the apple. I held it delicately in my hands, its surface smooth and inviting as I laid down on my back.

Bringing the fruit to my lips, I took a big bite.

A burst of crisp juiciness exploded in my mouth, awakening my taste buds with an unparalleled sensation. The sweetness danced upon my tongue as I chewed the tasty morsel, perfectly balanced with a hint of tartness that made my lips tingle with delight. Each succulent bite was a symphony of flavors, as if the apple had captured the essence of sunshine and pure natural perfection. Its flesh, tender and refreshing, yielded effortlessly to my teeth, releasing a fragrance that enveloped my senses in a divine embrace. In that moment, time stood still.

Then a strange weight started to settle down on my shoulders. It began deep in my belly and spread outwards, traveling through each of my limbs with a numb, tingling sensation. If I had been back on Earth, I would have thought it was just regular drowsiness, that it had simply been the result of a tiring day and I needed rest. This was not what that was, though.

I recognized it. It was magic.

I could feel myself drifting into something of an otherworldly state, a realm between full consciousness and deep slumber.

As I sank further into the abyss, a strange sensation gripped me. I found myself trapped within my own body, unable to move or speak, as if held captive by invisible chains. Panic surged through my veins, but my limbs remained immobile. Desperately, I tried to move, but my body wouldn't respond. Terror rushed through me at a frantic pace.

"I was beginning to think you were never going to eat that," Mais stated boldly, and I started. What was happening? Had she had something to do with this?

Completely paralyzed, I couldn't respond as she moved beside me. Out of the side of my eye, I saw her grab my pack and pull the book of prophecy out. With a malevolent chuckle, she held the book in my field of view before she dropped it in the fire. I would have cried out and tried to pull it free before it was destroyed, but the aged paper burst into flame in an instant. As if she wanted to make my fear worse, she reached out and roughly turned my chin towards the fire as the flames licked the leather-bound tome.

"You're not going to need that anymore. The Dark King has other plans for you," she grinned.

My breath caught in the back of my throat. She grabbed her own bag and pulled out a silver chalice embedded with shimmering purple gemstones. Then she yanked her knife free from her belt and crept towards me. My panic jolted me anew, and I would have screamed had I been able to. Reaching down, she took my hand and swiftly sliced the blade through the meat of my palm. Blood welled instantly. Quickly, she turned my hand and allowed the blood to drip into the goblet, drop by drop. The wound stung with a fiery burn. When she was through, she smirked down at me.

"A tribute for you, my Dark King," she whispered reverently.

She held the goblet up and a deafening boom sounded over our heads. The ceiling exploded in a fit of stone and rubble, raining down all around us. The dust made my eyes water, and several pieces of rock bounced off my body bruisingly hard. Dread raced through me as a volley of supernatural purple lightning arced through the room straight down from the sky

overhead. A single lightning strike hit the chalice dead center. All the energy in the air gathered into a single black hole, and somewhere to the east, a terrifying boom reverberated through the ground beneath me.

Her betrayal struck deep. I shouldn't have trusted her.

Then she pulled a small glass vile out from her belt and poured my blood into it with careful diligence. She capped it and put it down on the floor while she reached around her neck and pulled a chain free from her shirt. There were two other vials just like the one with my blood. My hand stung as she threaded my blood onto the chain with the others before she clasped it back around her throat.

I grappled with the cruel reality of being stuck in my own paralyzed shell, unable to do anything to fight back against my enemy. This was a waking nightmare, and all I wanted was to break free. Mais shifted around me, and the hair on the back of my neck rose with alarm.

What was her plan?

I watched as much as I was able as she pushed her arms underneath me. With inhuman strength, she lifted me off the ground and carried me out of the room. My mind raced, and I wanted nothing more than to force my body to respond. I tried again and again just to move my fingers and toes, but nothing happened.

"You're probably wondering who I am while you lie there trapped in a waking sleep," she chuckled, as if amusing herself.

If I had control of my arms, I would have punched her square in the nose.

"I am not of this realm. I serve the Dark King. As you can guess, I'm not human either. I'm a changeling. It was easy to take the face of an elf, especially one long dead. Everyone trusts a pretty face, and you weren't any different."

She stared down at me with an evil grin, her eyes glimmering with ominous intent. How had I not seen any sign of her treachery before this? Grinning wider, she glared down at me



as her eyes flickered an otherworldly purple. Her pupils grew much larger, rimmed by thick lined irises that shimmered with a violet, ghostly hue. I swallowed hard, deeply troubled by this sudden turn in events.

“The Dark King’s sorcerer was right. A spelled apple was key to capturing one of you. You’re much more amenable this way,” she continued. She descended deep down the winding road of the keep, where even the light of the rising sun could not reach. Internally, I struggled, trying to break free and forever entombed in my waking nightmare.

At the end of the street was an entrance to a dark cave. She carried me inside, and I soon realized that this place was the burial ground of several powerful mages from eons past. Great statues were erected in their honor, painted with vibrant colors, and preserved in the dank shelter of the deep cave. I screamed inwardly with fury as she strode deeper and deeper, until at long last, she reached a massive cavern. It was a mystical place. I could feel it deep within my bones.

In the middle of the cavern was a steaming pool warming with light green glowing lights that swam by in flashes. In the center of the pool was a curving rock slope. At first, the lights reminded me of eels swimming through the water, but upon closer inspection, I realized that they were not. Instinctually, I knew I was seeing the personification of magic right before my eyes. This place hummed with it.

She strode up to the top and pulled another vile out of her pocket. This one wasn’t empty. The inner contents swirled like hazy purple clouds. At the sight of it, my stomach sunk, and my blood ran cold.

Without a word, she threw it against the ground, shattering the glass with ease and releasing the cloudy contents into the air. With a loud pop, the misty haze expanded and swirled outwards in a circle, faster and faster until a blurry violet-hued sphere appeared. In the following seconds, the magic glitched until it eventually stabilized to showcase a whole other world. She’d created a portal between Terraheim and Helheim.

This was bad.

A feeling of terror brewed deep inside me, and had I the chance, I would have run straight out of the cavern screaming.

A massive mountain range lurked in shadow, rimmed with a sinister, dark purple glow. A great castle rose ominously from the desolate landscape, surrounded by nothing but ash and dust. Constructed from dark grey rock, its towering spires pierced the brooding sky, casting long shadows that seemed to devour the surrounding barren lands. The fortress loomed with a sense of foreboding, its angular architecture evoking a formidable presence that sent chills down my spine.

The castle's massive stone walls bore the scars of battle and decay. Gargoyles perched upon the ramparts, their stony, twisted gazes leering down upon unsuspecting intruders. At the heart of the fortress, a central tower reached towards the heavens, its pinnacle lost in the dreary gloom. Jagged spires adorned its surrounding towers, resembling the gnarled fingers of a skeleton reaching up into the sky.

Mais stepped forward, leaping off the rocky slope and straight into the portal. I screamed on the inside, terrified as my world turned inside out. My sense of gravity tilted as wild, vicious wind buffeted my body, dragging me up into the air away from the ground as if I was caught up in the whirling winds of a tornado. The magic was a veiled haze all around me until her feet landed on the ground with a hard jolt.

She'd taken me straight to the gates of the fortress of Helheim.

With purpose, she strode through the front doors of the castle, and then, as if her steps were lighter, she descended into the pit of it with me in her arms. The elvish façade that had kept her identity hidden faded away, leaving the face of a frightening demon in its place. One side of her face, from her temple to her jawline, was burned away in a savage looking scar. The edges were jagged and raised. Much of the flesh of the right side of her face had been destroyed, revealing the sinewy threads beneath. The eye on the right side of her face burned a brighter purple than the other. What remained of her marred flesh had taken on an ashen hue. Much of the right side of her lips had been destroyed, showing off her pointed, catlike teeth.

She was a monster.

Once we arrived at the dank dungeons beneath the castle, Mais deposited me on a cold stone bed before she looked down at me with a vicious expression of victory.

“My master is not ready for you. You’re going to have to wait to meet him. He’s going to be especially pleased with a prize like you,” she smirked maliciously. She slammed the door shut and locked it with a skeleton key. I watched her tuck it away in her pocket before she turned around and strode up the stairs, her steps light.

I was left in woeful silence for a blissful few seconds before the tortured screams of the damned started. There was no end to them, and my eyes watered.

A single tear raced down my cheek.

What was to become of me?

\* \* \*

Time seemed to stretch on for an eternity as I lay there in the cold, dark dungeons of Helheim. It could have been minutes, hours, or even days that I listened to the agonized cries of the forsaken souls of this land. Sometimes I could make out words and even a few occasional full sentences. Most of the time, though, the screams just revealed how much pain was being meted out in this terrible place.

It was impossible to tune out.

As I stared into the shadows, I wished for the thousandth time that Mais had shut my eyes, that at least I could pretend this was some awful nightmare that I’d eventually wake from.

*“This place fell to ruin long ago. It is what is waiting for Terraheim if the barrier between worlds should fail. The Dark King will kill everyone that inhabits this place. He will come not for just their lives, but the very fabric of their souls.”*

It was the old woman’s voice, seemingly far away, like she was speaking to me through time or a world all of her own.

*“Your fate does not rest here in this world, Sophia White. You are not meant for the Dark King. That is the destiny of someone else,”* the seer whispered, her voice hoarse and scratchy. It came from everywhere all at once, yet there was no one there to utter the words.

Right in front of me, a small portal opened up. It was different from the one that Mais had opened for me, swirling with white magic instead of the deep violet of Helheim. Looking through the portal, I was able to catch sight of the seer for the first time. I had been right to assume that she was an elderly woman, with white hair flowing back and forth long past her shoulders. Her face was kind, but when I settled upon the disconcerting vision of the inky black voids of her eyes, I shivered with fear.

Although powerful and seemingly on my side, the seer was a being to be respected and feared.

She reached through with a single hand, taking hold of my arm. Slowly, I floated towards her, my body weightless with her magic. It flowed through me with a heavy jolt as she pulled me through the portal.

As my world turned upside down, she cradled me close and closed my eyes with her fingertips.

*“Your fate lies with the feral king.”*

## CHAPTER 18



*R*oken

I lost three days to madness.

It was the longest spell I'd ever had to date. In my untamed fury, I laid waste to a respectable portion of Helheim's army, but it hadn't been enough. Eldoria wasn't designed to withstand this kind of invasion, and the sheer number of monsters the Dark King had thrown in our direction had been overwhelming. Many of the Elven soldiers had been lost, and when the outlook started to look bleak, Queen Isolde called for a full retreat to the nearby fortress of Ironpeak. In more treacherous times, it had served as a battle fortress, but that had been more than two thousand years ago in the times of my ancestors.

It would be much more defensible than the forest city of Eldoria.

My people moved through an intricately designed underground tunnel system beneath the forest. Now in control of myself, I guarded their trek through the air, occasionally breaking off and tricking Helheim's men into thinking the citizens of Eldoria had gone another way. The tactic worked several times until I left them lost in the forest to the west while I turned my way north. By the time I arrived in the fortress city of Ironpeak, Queen Isolde had already settled in and was preparing for the moment when Helheim realized we had changed locations.

In all that time, I had not seen Sophia anywhere. I hadn't sensed her either, not her delicious scent nor even the soft, steady music of her voice. In her absence, I realized something.

I *needed* her.

Even though a part of me had wanted to bring her to the city of the elves so they could protect her, an even bigger side of me yearned to have her at my side forever. Around her, I had control of my curse. Without her, it was agony. Every second she was away from me risked those around me.

Maybe she was the key to my curse.

I shifted in midair and landed on Queen Isolde's balcony overlooking the mountain valley. She had done something with Sophia, and now that I had a level head, I needed to know what. My people were safe for now.

I needed to know Sophia was too.

As if she expected me, Isolde was sitting by the window at a small table.

"Where have you taken Sophia?" I exclaimed.

"I fear Ironpeak may not be enough to hold back Helheim's army. Even with your assistance, I fear for the fate of the realm," she replied, ignoring my initial inquiry.

A deeply uneasy feeling brewed in the pit of my belly.

"Where?" I pressed, not letting up.

"She escaped."

"You do not know?" I blurted, my fury tangible. I took a deep breath, pushing it aside and trying to focus on the memory of her to keep calm. I breathed a sigh of relief as my anger eased at once.

I needed to find her, not just to keep my curse at bay, but to finally admit what was in my heart. I loved her and I was never going to leave her side again.

She was mine, forever and for always.

“Her role in prophecy is unclear. She is the subject of a forked thread. Either she is the key to saving the realm or destroying it.”

Immediately, I gritted my teeth. There wasn't time for me to canvas the realm and search for her. I could focus on picking up her scent and use the pull of the magical connection between us, but I didn't know if that would be enough. Further still, my curse could ravage me again, and by the time I found her, it might be too late for Terraheim and its people.

The Dark King was hellbent on taking my realm as his. I needed Sophia by my side to defeat him.

“Gather your mages. We will go to the only one with answers,” I growled. Isolde didn't know it, but she was lucky I was in control, or I would have torn her head from her shoulders in a fit of fury. No one touched my Sophia.

No one aside from me.

“You mean to speak with the seer?”

At that moment, a knife pierced through my heart, and I jolted forward, magic humming through my body with agonizing pain. Something was terribly wrong.

Sophia was no longer in this world.

I didn't know if she was alive or dead.

\* \* \*

In less than an hour, every mage had been gathered deep in the caves beneath Ironpeak. There was a long dormant sacred cavern, carved right out of the rock. The central vein of the magic world was strongest beneath the bedrock here. There was only one other cavern in the realm stronger in the abandoned wizard's keep of Sorrenthiel to the north, but the power here would be enough for what I needed to do.

The swirling flashes of green mystical light swam through the steaming pool. The water was a hazy milky white.

Lady Seraphina was already waiting for me at the peak of the curved rock incline. A mage of elvish descent, she was graced with long life. When I was still king, she served me faithfully, and she dipped her head in reverence to me as I approached her. Her lavender irises sparkled with power. Her ethereal beauty masked a powerful being underneath. I knew that if the need should arise, she could lay waste to her enemy in the blink of an eye.

“It is good to see you, your grace,” she said softly. She flicked her wrists and a line of hooded mages filed through the entryway, walking in both directions until the cavern was surrounded.

“Lady Seraphina,” I greeted her.

“I understand you wish to visit with the seer,” she replied, her tone trembling and revealing just the slightest trepidation.

“Time is short, Lady Seraphina,” I implored, and she nodded quickly. She started to chant, and the mages all around us lowered their hoods, joining in along with her. As she called on her power, the veins in her arms started to glow a pale emerald. She pushed her palms out, and the mystical energy crackling all around her burst outward. With a fearful glance, she reached out for me and pressed her hand against my shoulder. A second, more powerful jolt of magic slammed into me, and I closed my eyes.

*Please let Sophia be alright.*

Magical power billowed through my veins, supercharging every cell in my body with enough energy to offset a surgical storm. I tensed every muscle in my body as I withstood such powerful magic, and all at once, it all went dark. The only thing still visible was the flash of green mystical energy in the pool beneath us.

The mages continued to chant more quietly now as a soft, billowy glow speared above me. I looked up to see a shimmering staircase of light, and with no hesitation, I climbed onto the first step. I practically raced to the top when a portal glimmered to life right in front of me.



I wasted no time. I immediately stepped through into the unknown.

In an instant, the air was forced out of my lungs. Everything turned pitch black, as if my body had hurtled into the heavens and was falling amongst the stars. Savage gusts of wind whipped all around me, and I gritted my teeth, unused to the feeling of portal magic. It had been a very long time since I'd stepped through one, and when my feet finally slammed into the ground, I sighed with relief.

I opened my eyes to see a rushing river to my right. It cut through a secluded meadow nestled amidst ancient woodland, its lush greenery painted with vibrant hues of emerald and jade. The air was ripe with the delicate fragrance of wildflowers. Sunlight filtered through the canopy above, casting speckled patterns on the soft, mossy ground.

It was beautiful.

The seer's realm was one of mystery. Legend said that her world was fluid in landscape, and that the magic took its own form depending on what creature was walking upon its hallowed ground.

The seer was a being to be respected and feared, an all-knowing goddess that ruled over all the realms, including my own. To call on her was to put myself in danger. There were stories of visitors disappearing after they stepped through her doors, the price of entry too high for them to ever be seen or heard from again.

As I ventured further into the mysterious realm, a solitary glowing light beckoned me, casting a soft glow that pierced through dappled sunlight. Intrigued, I cautiously treaded the path, drawn irresistibly towards the radiant beacon, instinctually knowing that it would take me straight to the seer. I strode along the path, descending down the slope of a hill. Hidden amongst the rolling planes and the wooded pines, the seer's home came into view.

The walls of the little cottage were composed of interwoven branches, the roof was adorned with a tapestry of leaves. Poised upon sturdy stilts, the cottage stood elevated above the

ground. With trepidation and curiosity intermingling within me, I climbed each rung of the rope ladder that brought me closer to the seer's sanctuary. Finally, I reached for the beaded fabric door and entered.

It took a moment for my eyes to adjust, but lying there on the bed was my Sophia. Her eyes were closed, and she was deathly pale. I couldn't tell if she was breathing, and my panic swelled deep. I rushed over to her, lost in my fear that she was terribly hurt, or at worst, dead. Immediately, I pressed my fingers to her throat, finding her warm to the touch. Her veins pumped fiercely under my fingertips, letting me know that she was still blessedly *alive*.

Who had done this?

*"Do not lose control in my home, mad king."*

The seer's voice came from everywhere all around me, harsh and scratchy and full of wisdom. I gritted my teeth, reigning in my fury more easily now that Sophia was beside me.

"Can you help her?"

*"The answer lies not with me, Dragonborne, but with yourself."*

I sat down on the bed beside her, wrapping my arms around her and pulling her to my chest. She didn't move. She didn't say a word. It was as if she was fast asleep. I studied her serene countenance, her features illuminated by a gentle glow that emanated from a mystical flickering torch. She appeared fragile, yet within her slumber, her inner strength still radiated clearly across her features.

My heart pained at the sight of her, yearning to free her from the grasp of whatever this waking sleep was. With a tender touch, I reached out, my fingers brushing against her skin. My heart reached out to hers, relieved to find her still alive, but aching to see her like this.

"Wake up, my love," I whispered, shaking her gently in hopes to rouse her. Her eyes didn't flicker open, and my heart cracked with emotion.

*“Look deep into your heart, Dragon King. The answer will come to you.”*

I lowered her back towards the bed, tracing my knuckles across her deathly pale flesh. Seeing her like this broke me, and I swore that I would never put her in danger like this again. I would keep her by my side for the rest of her days, keeping her safe and in my bed.

Determination surged within me, fueled by a love that knew no bounds. With trembling hands, I cradled her face, my gaze locked onto her beautiful face, and I knew what to do.

Leaning in, my lips met hers in a tender, lingering kiss—a union of souls like no other. Time seemed to hold its breath as my lips sought out her sweet kiss. In that moment, I felt a gentle tremor vibrate through her body, a sign that she was gradually emerging from the slumber that had ensnared her. My heart bloomed with hope, and I deepened the kiss, fully embracing that she was mine for the first time since I’d first laid my eyes on her.

*Mine. Forever.*

A soft sigh escaped her lips, her eyes fluttering open like delicate petals unfolding to greet the dawn. Recognition and warmth sparked within her gaze, a testament to the power of a true love’s kiss.

“Roken, I thought I was never going to see you again,” she breathed.

“My Sophia,” I whispered.

I’d fought my love for her for so long that the freedom that came with finally admitting it out loud felt glorious. Unable to get enough of her, I leaned down, meeting her lips with a second, more possessive kiss. Her lips rose to meet mine as my hand wrapped around the back of her head. Her fingers twitched, and she reached up, threading them through my hair. I groaned, blissful tingles of sensation racing across my scalp at her desperate touch. The beast inside me sprang to life as her nails dug into me, and I growled softly. It took everything

in me to pull away and turn back to the inky black gaze of the seer.

“What is your price, seer?”

*“Your curse has already been price enough, mad king. Instead, I might offer you a gift in your greatest time of need.”*

Cautiously, I stared back at her, my brow furrowed with concern. I had not heard a single tale of the seer not naming a price.

“A gift,” I repeated, my voice questioning. Could the seer be an ally? Or was this a trick to extract her price? What did she want?

“Yes.” With a soft smile, she snapped her fingers and a portal opened up right beneath us.

In an instant, the seer’s realm became a hazy cloud, drifting into shadow. I wrapped my arms around Sophia and kept her close as we began to fall through the blackness together.

Whatever happened, at least we were together.

At least I had my *mate*.

## CHAPTER 19



*S* ophia

No matter how many times I went through a portal, I would never get used to the endless falling and the torrential wind. I clutched at Roken's chest, grateful to be in his arms once again. I focused on the steady sound of his heartbeat instead of what was happening around me, and that made traveling like this more manageable.

His feet jolted into the ground, and he gripped me even more tightly against him. I glanced around as he gently placed me down. The night sky glimmered with brilliant starlight from above, while the moon shone like a radiant pearl, casting its soft light on the world below.

I knew this place. The seer had taken Roken and me back to where we'd first laid eyes on one another, to the swimming hole where he'd taken my innocence weeks ago.

The moment where I'd first become *his*.

The riverbank was even more beautiful under the cover of nightfall, but that wasn't the only thing that took my breath away.

The grassy bank was covered in radiantly glowing flowers.

*Heartbloom.*

Their slender stems rose gracefully from the ground, adorned with velvety leaves that shimmered in the moonlight. The

blossoms themselves were a sight to behold—petals unfurling in shades of rose, magenta, and crimson, and arranged in a series of delicate layers. Each flower possessed a heart-shaped center, a vibrant core that pulsed with an ethereal luminescence, as if infused with the very essence of love and life. They clustered together, creating a mesmerizing tapestry of vibrant color and ethereal beauty in the same place where Roken and I had lain together that very first time.

This was the key to breaking Roken’s curse.

“It’s beautiful,” I whispered.

I grabbed his hand and led him over to the clearing, where he yanked me back towards him and stared down into my eyes.

“I shouldn’t let myself fall for you, but I fear it’s too late,” he mused.

I wrapped my arms around his neck and pulled him close, reveling in the feel of his strong form against mine. “I love you, Roken.”

“I don’t want to hurt you,” he whispered.

“You won’t. I trust you,” I answered. I slid my fingertips up the back of his neck and dug into the back of his scalp. The same wild look that had come over him in the seer’s cabin graced his face, and I pushed onward. The prophecy had guided me to this moment, and now I had to trust in destiny to break his curse.

After all, his kiss had broken mine.

I angled my face towards his and looked deep into his eyes. The emerald green of his irises sparkled with gold flecks, almost silver under the light of the full moon. His eyes searched mine, reluctant yet full of yearning at the same time.

“I need you,” I whispered.

My admission awoke the feral beast deep inside him. His eye glowed with the slightest tinge of otherworldly violet—magical evidence of the curse instilled upon him by the Dark King’s wizard.

Without warning, I rose up on my toes and pressed my lips against his. At first, my kiss was tentative, explorative, but it didn't stay that way. He kissed me back with rising persistence, like all the emotion he'd kept hidden inside was finally rising to the surface to be set free. His hand wound around the back of my skull, holding me firmly as he deepened the kiss. His other arm circled my waist, pulling me in close and pressing my body firmly against his.

His cock was rock hard.

"You're playing with fire, mate," he rumbled, and my core danced alive with heat.

"I'm not afraid of you," I snarled in return. His gaze glimmered with restrained savagery as he pulled back to study me, but that didn't last long. His mouth swooped down, not just to kiss me, but to claim me as his. The brutal kiss hurt from the start, demanding my full attention as he took my lips as his own. His tongue broke through my meager defenses, dancing with mine roughly enough to leave me sore. As he pulled away, his teeth dragged against my lower lip, nipping me hard enough to make me yelp out loud.

"If you want this, sweet girl, it's going to hurt," he warned.

"Then make it hurt," I dared him.

His answering growl made my core clench tight. My fingers clutched at the back of his scalp, digging in as he gripped the cord lacing my gown together and yanked it hard. I slapped his hands away, and his gaze darkened. With nimble fingers, I unlaced the ties holding my dress in place and quickly shimmied out of it, leaving me in nothing more than a simple lace bralette and a pair of panties.

He reached forward to take my bra within his grasp, and with one hard yank, he tore through the lacey piece as though it were a sheet of paper. The threads gave way to his strength, fraying one by one until the fabric pulled away from my body and bared my breasts. They bounced free, heavy with desire as I stood before him.

My nipples were already tight little buds, desperate for his attention.

As I leaned in closer, inhaling his intoxicating scent, my heart skipped a beat. The ruggedly woodsy aroma enveloped me, intertwining with my senses in a way that felt so familiar, so inherently right. It was as if the very essence of him, strong and untamed, ignited a fire within me. In that moment, I knew with absolute certainty that he was my true mate.

I wanted him to take me right then and there.

Without a word, he splayed one hand on my lower back and took hold of my panties, pulling them up gently so that they slid between my folds. The fabric held my clit captive, and I drew in a heated breath as he rocked them back and forth, using enough pressure to tease my needy clit, and I panted as a surge of desire rocketed straight to my core. He taunted me until I cried out, but it came out sounding more like a moan, and I clamped my lips shut. I bit the inside of my cheek, trying to keep quiet. But as the seconds passed, it became more and more difficult. Before too long, I was holding back one gasp after the next, and he leaned down, kissing a moan straight out of me.

His fingers tightened and I tensed, but that was the only warning he gave before he tore my panties from my body. The fabric pinched the lips of my pussy, and I cried out, a surge of sharp pain rushing over my most sensitive place. The bite was harsh at first, but then it lessened until the only thing left was the gentle throb of desire.

He'd barely put his hands on me, and I was already on the cusp of release.

His arm wrapped around my waist. His hands grasped my ass roughly as he lifted my feet off the ground. My legs wrapped around his hips as he lowered me to the ground so that I was flat on my back. His larger form covered mine with ease, but he was careful not to press his full weight on me, just enough to keep me prisoner beneath him.

My nipples brushed against the rough hide that covered his chest, and a single surge of arousal raced straight to my core. I



reached up with my own hand to tease one of my needy buds, and he caught my wrist in one hand. He quickly grabbed the other and pinned them both over my head with a single broad hand.

I whimpered and he kissed me cruelly hard, nipping my lower lip as if to admonish me for trying to pleasure myself without him. I used my own teeth against him, and his other hand wound around my throat.

“Keep pushing, naughty girl,” he warned. His threat revealed that he was on the cusp of losing control, and I knew that I was going to have to force him over the edge if I was going to break his curse.

I snarled in return and lightly bit his lip. His answering chuckle told me that it had been enough.

“You’re going to regret that, mate,” he growled, every syllable igniting a fire inside me that centered deep in the core of my belly. My legs felt restless, and I squirmed beneath him, just so that I could feel the hard line of his cock pressing against my hip. He was even harder than before, and I wanted nothing more than for it to press inside me.

I yearned for him to fuck me just as hard as I needed to be fucked.

As if he could read my thoughts, he rocked his hips back and forth, rubbing his hard length against my needy center. I cried out, the rough fabric both torture and unyielding bliss. His fingers tensed around my wrist as he lowered his head to the side of my throat. He kissed the tender flesh there, suckling gently and driving me wild with need. His other hand gathered my nipple between his thumb and forefinger.

I arched into his touch just as he pinched it hard. I cried out, but he smothered my sounds with his kiss. My cries died on my lips as I kissed him just as fiercely in return. He swallowed my every gasp as he twisted my nipple harshly before he finally let it go. In complete silence, he slapped my nipple with the flat of his palm, striking right on top of my sensitive bud. Immediately pain radiated outwards around my punished nipple, but it didn’t remain there. It blossomed across the

entirety of my breast, savage and cruel and everything I ever needed.

“Yes!” I cried out.

He let go of my wrists. Beside me, a vine snaked through the grass and encircled my wrists, ultimately holding me captive to his mercy. I lay before him with my arms stretched high over my head as he slapped my breast again with the flats of his fingers. I tensed, gritting my teeth as the sting took hold immediately. I tried to remain still, but my body jerked away involuntarily.

It burned immensely, but there was nothing for me to do but take it.

I moaned, arching away from him, but he didn't stop. Instead, he used his hands to spank my breasts until they were burning. My flesh pinkened under his punishing touch, darkening until it approached a rosy red. By the time he was through with my chest, my body was practically strumming with passionate desire, so much so that the burning ache quickly transformed into unquenchable need.

He crept back, trailing kisses along my collarbone and across the punished surface of my breasts. Immediately, I started to whimper as his mouth approached my nipples. I had the sudden feeling that he wasn't done torturing them, and I was right.

His lips closed down over my right bud. I tensed, trying to remain still, both dreading and yearning for what was to come.

“Please,” I begged.

I didn't know whether I was begging him to stop or pleading for him to continue, but none of that mattered because his teeth bit into my nipple with brutal savagery. I cried out and he bit down even harder, holding it in the vicelike clamp of his jaws.

Then his teeth lengthened, the sharp points jutting into the sensitive flesh of my nipple. He turned his head slightly, pulling the skin punishingly hard, and I arched into his mouth. At the same time, he shifted one knee in between my legs,

rubbing the rough fabric of his pants against my clit. I gasped, swallowing back a scream of painful desire, but I couldn't stop myself from unconsciously rocking my hips against his thigh.

He smiled knowingly and released my nipple.

The burning pain intensified for several seconds, and I writhed through it, watching with passionate anxiety as he lowered his mouth to the other side. I tensed and tried to twist away, but he wrapped his hand around me once again, forcing me to lie back on the mossy ground. He lightly nipped my left side, causing both peaks to stretch forward, impossibly erect and needy.

“I can't...”

“You'll take what I give you, sweet mate,” he growled, and my core constricted tight.

He bit down on the left side punishingly hard, and I shrieked, my eyes watering as the familiar burn spiked, seemingly more intensely than the other. He clamped down with his pointed teeth as I writhed against his leg.

I could protest as much as I liked, but somewhere deep down, a part of me was enjoying this.

When he finally released my nipple, I breathed a sigh of relief before the intense stinging pain that came after rocketed through me. I arched and struggled to take it, but when his fingers dipped between my thighs, the agony fell away, and the only thing left was intense, fiery need as he caressed my needy clit.

I was slick with my own arousal. A deep flush came over my cheeks, and I wondered if he could see it in the light of the full moon.

“You're very wet, for me, mate, but not wet enough,” he growled.

With one swift motion, he crept backwards and wrapped his hand around my ankles. He lifted my legs straight back towards my face, exposing my bottom and my pussy in an entirely shameful display. Held up like this, he could see everything in between my thighs, and I blushed even more

deeply when I realized that he could likely see my bottom hole, too.

For a long moment, he just looked at me. Feeling bashful, I tugged at the vines overhead in an attempt to hide my body, but they only tightened and pulled my hands even more firmly over my head.

He pushed my legs down a bit further, stretching my hamstrings and lifting my hips partially off the ground. If he hadn't been able to see me before this, he was most certainly getting an eyeful now. I whimpered; my shameful arousal impossible to keep at bay now that I was fully aware of that fact that he could see all of me.

His eyes darkened considerably, and then his hand slapped down directly over the center of my ass, threateningly close to my pussy. The sound loudly echoed all around me, shocking me at first, at least until the frightful sting followed. With my ass stretched out like this, his palm burned much hotter than I remembered. Another swat fell on my right cheek, and I bit my lip, trying to keep quiet.

I didn't know why I tried.

A third spank punished my left cheek, and I squirmed, trying to break free of his hold, but the only thing I earned was a slap directly on top of my pussy. Burning sting exploded over my sensitive flesh, and my vow to keep silent quickly went out the window. In that instant, I yelped, but then the burn flared hotter. My punished lips smarted, and I whimpered as it crested. When the tender ache subsided to a throbbing soreness, I bit my cheek for an entirely different reason.

I felt a droplet of arousal roll down the inner curve of my thigh.

"Please," I pleaded, embarrassed that he would see my wetness seeping from me.

"You're so very beautiful like this, my sweet mate, with your breasts spanked bright pink and your ass the same color," he mused, and the heated flush painting my cheeks flared with fresh flame.

“Roken,” I breathed.

“I’m enjoying the sight of you, my Sophia. Soon, I’m going to enjoy both of your quivering little holes. They’re both getting fucked. The only question is which one will take my cock while the other takes my tail,” he threatened, and my core twisted hard with desire. My skin flushed with fever, and sweat beaded at the edge of my brow.

I panted, struggling to draw in a full breath as though the very air I was taking in was molten lava. I flexed my fingers and lifted my hips as much as I was able.

“I don’t think my ass is red enough,” I challenged.

His answering growl made my core clench so hard that if I were standing, I would have doubled over.

“You’re perfect, my naughty mate,” he rumbled.

I watched as metallic, emerald-green scales emerged over his skin. My breath turned ragged with anxious desire when his tail extended behind him, the ridged end thick and smooth. It seemed bigger than the last time, especially up close like this. It slithered back and forth, its movement like a snake while I stared, my attention entirely focused on the magical appendage.

Instinctually, my bottom hole clenched, and his grin widened immediately.

“That needy little asshole wants my tail, doesn’t it?”

I cried out loud, too embarrassed to say a single word. The best I could do to hide my shame was turn my head to the side.

“You’re going to have to be patient, my needy mate. I’m still enjoying the rest of this gorgeous little body.”

As if to tease me, the tip of his tail grazed my left bottom cheek, dangerously close to my tightest hole. I drew my lower lip between my teeth, trying not to tense the muscles of my ass and failing spectacularly. He chuckled decisively as the tip explored my aching nipples before it drew upwards further still and gradually wrapped around my throat, cutting off my blood flow just enough to send my desire straight to my head.

The position of his tail ensured that I could still breathe, allowing me to draw in shallow mouthfuls of air.

Immediately, pleasure surged up and down my limbs, igniting every nerve with fiery bliss and setting me more on edge than ever before. I arched my head back and his tail tightened a little, causing another whirlwind of pleasure to cascade through me.

I squirmed, and his palm lit into my ass again. The spanking started anew, hard and fast. It was more than enough to take my breath away, and I struggled to keep myself from crying out loud. My whimpers quickly became cries as the harsh discipline continued with his tail still wrapped firmly around my throat.

My hips bucked involuntarily, trying to avoid the terrible sting, and only succeeding in getting my ass and pussy spanked harder.

“That’s red enough,” I squeaked.

“I’ll be the one to decide that, mate,” he growled.

My pussy clenched so hard that I almost came.

He spanked me more firmly, ensuring that he didn’t miss a single inch of bare flesh. With my legs held straight up, he was able to punish the backs of my thighs with ease. Not only that, but the gentle curve where my ass met my thighs was particularly vulnerable to the harshness of his palm in this new position. By the time he was through with me, my entire ass had been scalded, as well as the backs of my thighs and even down to the backs of my calves. My eyes were watering, and his palm stopped falling a moment before my tears began to fall.

His fingers squeezed my punished flesh, digging in to take what was rightly and willingly his. I gasped, my pussy squeezing tight.

His tail unwound from my throat, and I drew in a full breath, right before he took the tip and slid it in between my thighs. It glided over the top of my mound, pressing onwards as it parted my wet folds and settled directly over my clit. As he

slowly rubbed it back and forth, I realized that the surface wasn't entirely smooth, but gently ridged.

The only purpose for such a thing would be for my pleasure.

He knelt down beside me and used one arm to bend my knees towards my chest. This sudden change in position put my asshole even more on display, and I cried out in alarm when his other hand slipped between my legs. His fingers grazed against my stinging folds with ease, gathering my wetness as he stared down at my pussy with sordid interest.

It made my desire ratchet even higher.

Held firmly like this, I couldn't move at all. He smiled as if he knew what I was thinking and drew his fingers back through my wetness, swirling it all around until it coated the surface of his skin. Then he continued on further still until his pointer finger settled directly on top of my bottom hole.

I tightened reflexively, the actions of my body far outside of my control.

With a dark look, he pushed the tip of his finger past my reluctant barrier of muscle, and I cried out, my bottom hole immediately simmering with heat. He only pushed a little inside, and a soft, shameful moan escaped me.

"Roken, please, I need..." I began, but he shook his head, and the words died on my tongue.

"You're going to get exactly what you need, mate."

He pushed the rest of his finger inside me to the knuckle, and pain radiated around my asshole. I tried to suck in my cries of pleasure as he pumped it in further still until it was all the way inside me as the rest of his hand cupped my ass. It was unnerving while at the same time it aroused me.

It felt far more personal like this.

I could feel every ridge of his finger inside me in a place it wasn't supposed to be. This was shameful. I shouldn't like how wicked it felt and how much my pussy was aching for release. His tail slid back and forth over my clit, teasing my pleasure higher and higher as he pumped that single digit in

and out of me. My empty pussy fluttered with need, but the combination of his finger and the attention on my clit had me nearly sailing right over the brink.

“Oh, oh, please!”

“You will be allowed to come only when you take a second finger in your bottom,” he murmured.

“Roken, I can’t,” I started, but he cut me off when another digit thrust inside far more roughly than the first. A much deeper, burning agony followed as my whole body tensed, fighting his entry even though a part of me wanted it, too. It raced up and down my spine, taking my breath away. Eventually, a strangled cry escaped me as the pain started to crest, and I whimpered, fearfully anticipating what might come next.

When my body finally acquiesced to the taboo intrusion of his fingers in my bottom, the pain faded into a delicious desire that rode on one wave of bliss after the next, each one more powerful than the last. Soon enough, my thighs were trembling, and my body seemed ready to ignite. I moaned, swiftly approaching the edge.

His tail pressed down more firmly with each passing moment, pushing and pushing until I was fractions of a second away from orgasm. My cries swiftly increased in desperation, becoming higher pitched the closer I drew to release.

“Come for me,” he commanded.

My body obeyed in an instant. White hot ecstasy burned through me as my core squeezed tight, over and over again as I began to soar. My toes curled and my fingers grasped the vine that held my wrists captive. My hips bucked as much as they was able to, all as his tail and his fingers continued to torture my clit and my asshole, forcing my pleasure higher and higher. The nerves in my body fired all at once as my inner walls fluttered, desperate to milk a cock that wasn’t yet there.

My eyes rolled back in my head as my orgasm took over every fiber of my being, making my legs quiver with unending passion. I screamed as my pleasure reached its peak and



moaned as it slowly crested, my entire body trembling. Aftershocks tore through me, forcing me to clench around his fingers over and over again, forever reminding me of their presence in my tight little hole.

He kept his fingers in my ass as I came down. I bit my lip, slightly embarrassed as my bottom hole clenched around his thick digits before he finally decided to pull them out. He released his hold on my legs, and I breathed a sigh of relief.

His tail unwound from my waist, and he pushed himself up to his feet, standing before me with a dark, seductive expression written all over his face.

“Spread your legs and show me where you need me the most,” he commanded, and my core swirled with desire once again.

I did as he demanded.

Slowly, I opened my legs and displayed myself for him, knowing I was soaking wet, that I needed him to fuck me, and he could see every drop that revealed just how much I yearned for him. He watched with a sordid smirk, scanning everywhere between my thighs. He yanked his shirt over his head, revealing his chiseled torso, and my mouth watered. Then he reached down and unbuttoned his pants. He kicked off his boots and pushed his trousers past his hips, revealing his cock to my view.

It was even bigger than I remembered.

Seeing it was one thing, taking it was another. My legs instinctually flexed, anticipating a painful fucking, but as he knelt back down, he kissed my forehead, and I knew everything was going to be alright.

This man was my destiny. It was my fate to lie beneath him.

Then his tail slipped between my thighs again, this time gathering the wetness from my orgasm and swirling it around and around until it was fully coated. Then the tip settled on the very same place his fingers had been only moments before.

He wasted no time in thrusting it inside. His tail was much longer and much thicker than his fingers, and I yelped, the now familiar burning pain that much deeper and more intense

than before. He pressed one inch inside after the next until I felt full in a very different kind of way than I had anticipated. The agony was intense for several moments, but it eventually crested, and I moaned, pleasure at having such a naughty place so full making my body warm.

His cock brushed against the wetness coating my thigh, and I whimpered, my asshole aching and my pussy wanting.

“Let me touch you,” I begged.

Immediately, the vines holding my wrist slid away, freeing me from the confines of my binds at once. I wrapped my arms around his neck as my thighs tightened around his waist. I tensed, anticipating the coming thrusts of his cock.

He didn't rush.

Instead, he dragged the length of his cock back and forth through my wetness, coating his thick shaft just as he had done with his tail and his fingers. My body came alive beneath him, rocking back and forth as he pushed me towards a second climax. My sensitivity only seemed to make me more responsive, and I cried out.

“I need you inside me,” I pleaded.

“I know, sweet mate,” he whispered, his breath tickling the tiny hairs of my ear as he kissed me gently. He pulled his hips back a little, nudging the head of his cock against my entrance and making me quiver with nervous anticipation. My core pulsed with need, and I spread my thighs wider, welcoming his advances.

With gentle thrusts, he pushed the head of his cock inside me bit by bit.

I opened my mouth to cry out, the burning stretch almost too much for me to bear even though he had prepared me as much as possible. His mouth swooped down to mine, swallowing my sounds with a sweet kiss that left me breathless. I arched up into him as his hand threaded behind my head, his fingers twisting through my hair roughly. He tightened his fist, and I cried out, but he only deepened the kiss, his lips bruisingly hard.

My heart pulsed with magical connection as he slowly thrust the full length of his cock inside me. He felt so much bigger than I remembered, every thick ridge forcing itself inside me as I arched beneath him. Eventually, he pushed the entirety of his shaft into me, and I gasped, feeling fuller than I had ever imagined possible.

It was a glorious feeling, and I hummed happily even through the delicious pain that came with it.

“That’s it, sweet girl. You can take it,” he purred, and my pussy clenched down hard on his cock. His eyes danced as he stared down at me, revealing he had felt every moment of my pleasure, and my face reddened.

With a knowing smirk, he pulled his hips back and slowly pushed inside. Building a steady cadence, he slowly increased the pace, every thrust painfully perfect and immeasurably delicious. I wrapped my arms around his neck and held on, knowing that he was just getting started. My nervous anticipation only compounded on itself when he snapped his hips punishingly hard, and I cried out.

He fucked me hard and fast, every delicious thrust forcing me to moan and cry and expose myself for just how much I was enjoying his claiming. His pelvis ground against my clit, forcing my pleasure to a head faster than I was prepared for, and my cries slowly transformed to more desperate screams.

“That’s my good girl. You’re taking my cock so well,” he growled.

“Roken...” I breathed.

“You’re taking my tail in that pretty little ass so well, too,” he purred.

His tail pumped into me roughly, every ridge torturing me in the most delicious way. His tail was narrow at the tip, but he kept forcing more and more of the wider base inside me. Slickened with my own wetness, I couldn’t help but enjoy every last sordid thrust.

Taking both his cock and his tail at the same time was even more incredible than I remembered. A deep, shameful part of

me wanted it to last a long time. An even more embarrassing part of me wanted to do it again, only with his cock inside my ass instead. I cried out, blushing at the direction of my own wicked thoughts. My desire spiraled even higher, and I knew I wouldn't be able hold out for much longer.

He snapped his hips especially hard, and the head of his cock bounced off my cervix. It was painful and pleasurable in the same breath, and then he did it again. I felt myself hurtling towards orgasm, and I tried my best to hold it back, but nothing I did worked. Instead, I felt myself surging forward, and all of a sudden, I was sailing over the brink. I screamed.

Ecstasy and agony came together as one, vivid and so vibrant that I had to squeeze my eyes shut from the blinding light that came along with it. My inner walls clutched at his cock, and my asshole tightened so hard around his tail that a fierce volley of pain cascaded up and down my spine. My hips bucked, rocking forward as my body sought out every inch of his cock. My pussy seemed to open even further for him, taking more of him as I shivered with immeasurable bliss.

“More,” I pleaded.

He listened. He fucked me harder than I thought possible, punishing me with the length of his cock in smooth, even strokes. My body rocked and I shuddered hard, my pleasure peaking. Stars dotted my vision as every nerve inside me came alive all at the exact same moment. My screaming increased in desperation and pitch. There was no way it wasn't echoing all around us, but I didn't care. I just wanted more.

He gave it to me.

Before I knew what was happening, I was sailing over the edge of another, more powerful orgasm than the last. My legs started to tremble moments before it started, a warning tremor that told of an even bigger quake to come.

My screams began again. In the ensuing seconds, my climax followed.

My entire world shattered.

Ecstasy.

Agony.

Pleasure and pain, delicious and wrong and perfectly right.

My eyes rolled back in my head as I broke beneath the man I loved. He picked up the pace with both his cock and his tail, fucking me through another orgasm before he roared with his own pleasure.

The moment his seed seared my insides, I came for a last and final time, harder than all the rest. I screamed and moaned, thrashing beneath him as my pleasure took hold. One spurt after another burst into me, bouncing off my cervix and coating my channel with his come.

“I love you, my Sophia,” he purred.

“I love you too, my Roken,” I whispered.

A faint glimmer of light pierced through the shadows from over our heads, casting a soft radiance upon his form. The moment it began, I knew what it was.

His curse was breaking.

The light began as a mere flicker, a distant beacon beckoning him towards salvation. The glow expanded, ethereal tendrils reaching out to caress his burdened soul.

With each passing moment, the luminescence grew stronger, swirling and dancing around him like an enchanting waltz of light. The radiance shimmered with hues of gold and celestial purple, painting the air with a palpable energy. It wrapped around him, delicate as a silk embrace, infusing his being with a renewed vitality.

As the light continued to weave its magic, his features underwent a gradual transformation. The strain etched upon his face began to soften, replaced by a glimmer of hope in his eyes. The weight of his curse seemed to dissipate, just like the shadows yielding to the bright light of dawn.

With a final surge of brilliance, the violet glittering curse shattered like fragile glass, its hold over Roken forever broken.

He was finally free.

## CHAPTER 20



S ophia

We lay together for a long while after the breaking of his curse, just clutching at one another like our lives depended on it. Hope surged through me as I knew he was finally free of the weight that had been holding him captive for so long.

“My Sophia,” he murmured over and over, pressing his lips to my cheek, to the side of my neck, and all the way down the length of my shoulders. Soft tingling sensations spiraled through me, and I sighed contentedly.

“Because of you, I will never lose control again.”

My body continued to tremble with aftershocks. Both my pussy and my asshole ached, evidence of a truly perfect fucking at the hands of the man I loved. I couldn't have asked for anything more.

Exhausted, I closed my eyes and fell asleep in his arms.

I began to dream.

*All on my own, I strode through the forest, dragging my hands at my sides through the tall blades of grass. Occasionally, I would stop and kneel down to brush my fingertips against the petals of the Heartbloom flowers all around me, enjoying the soft tingle of magic that swept through me just from a mere touch. It made me feel more alive than I had ever been.*

*The swimming hole wasn't far. Even from a distance, I could see the steam rising from the surface of the pool. With a soft sigh, I smiled, stood back up, and lifted my foot to walk in that direction.*

*But something gave me pause. I stopped and looked around, sensing a sinister, foreign magic swirling through the air.*

*It wasn't supposed to be there.*

*"Sophia..." A quiet male voice echoed all around me, soft and rumbling, yet a deep, ominous feeling began to brew in the pit of my belly.*

*Whoever this was, he was not my friend.*

*"It is an honor to finally speak with you."*

*"Who is this?" I asked, the hair rising on the back of my neck with sudden alarm.*

*"I have watched you from afar for some time now, Sophia. You are a force to be reckoned with. Mais wouldn't have survived the ascent to Sorrenthiel without you, would she?"*

*"Mais underestimated me," I replied simply, not wanting to say too much until I knew more about who I was speaking with.*

*"That she did. I will not make that same mistake," he continued.*

*I gritted my teeth. "What do you want?"*

*"Straight to the point," he mused, and my heart pounded in my chest.*

*"I don't like to waste time," I answered, swallowing hard.*

*"I see. Then I'll get right to it. You may think you have saved Roken from his curse, but it will never be truly broken while I'm still alive. There's a tiny tendril of my magic still piercing his heart. If I should wish it, I could use it to kill him at a moment's notice."*

*I stopped short, swallowing nervously.*

*“The Dark King certainly wishes it. He has been greatly amused by the mad king’s turmoil over the years. Especially considering the circumstances around his curse.”*

*“What circumstances?”*

*“Do you not know?”*

*I didn’t answer. I just let silence wain until his voice swirled around me once again.*

*“Roken loved once, but it was that same love that betrayed him to me,” he began.*

*“What do you mean?” I paused. I knew how the curse operated within Roken, how it turned him into a feral beast devoid of all reason.*

*“Come to me, and I shall show you.”*

*“What do you want?” I asked, my voice strong and resolute despite the fear I felt inside.*

*“You.”*

*“Tell me your name,” I said through gritted teeth.*

*“Malachi Stormweaver,” he answered, his tone dangerously sinister. I shrugged off a shiver of fear and held my head high. I wouldn’t let this man intimidate me, not when I’d accomplished so much already here in this perilous fantasy world.*

*“Why me?”*

*“The Dark King has his eyes set on you.”*

*“And if I give myself to him? Will you release Roken from your magic?”*

*“Come to me and the Dark King will give you everything you’ve ever wanted.”*

*“And Roken?”*

*“I will remove all traces of my magic from his heart. You have my word.”*



With a hard shiver, I woke up with a start and immediately glanced over at Roken, only to see him clutching at his chest in his sleep. Alarm bells went off in my head as his brow furrowed and his lips parted, releasing a soft, pained groan.

What if he wasn't truly free after all? What if the true love's embrace hadn't broken the curse? What if he needed more? What if what Malachi had warned was true? Could he really kill Roken as easily as he'd warned he could?

Still asleep, Roken grunted quietly, and I bit my lip. There really wasn't a decision to make because I had already made it. If his life was still in danger, I would save him. It wasn't even a question.

With exceeding gentleness, I pressed my fingertips over his heart, and immediately, a cold jolt of magic passed through my arm.

The sorcerer *hadn't* been lying.

Roken was still afflicted with Malachi's magic, and I was the only one in the world that could save him. I would sacrifice anything to make certain Roken was able to survive, so that he could take his crown back and protect the people of this realm.

I dipped my head, pressing my forehead against him, and his arms surrounded me with warmth. For a minute, I just allowed myself to pretend like the rest of the world didn't exist, that monsters and magic weren't real, and that the only thing that existed was the two of us. It was gloriously liberating, but I knew it needed to end before it was too late.

Carefully, I unwound myself from his arms and rolled away from him before I pushed myself up to my feet. For a long moment, I stared down at him, not wanting to go and silently thanking him for the love and affection he'd shown me since I'd first stepped into this wild world.

Not wanting to waste too much time, I pulled on my dress and slipped on my shoes. I threaded the belt around my waist with my sword, cinching it tight before I silently made my way down the overgrown trail that followed the riverbank. I carefully avoided branches and dried leaves, choosing to walk

on the thick carpet of moss in order to keep my journey as quiet as possible.

There was a gentle pull of mystical energy leading me downriver, and I knew that it was Malachi guiding me towards him. I walked for nearly an hour before I emerged into a shaded clearing only to see a shadowed figure standing in the center.

My breath caught in my throat as he pushed down his hood, and his sinister gaze locked onto mine. The clearing seemed to shrink in his presence, his aura consuming every inch of space, commanding attention and respect. It took everything in me not to turn around and run straight back into Roken's arms. Instead, I held my head tall and boldly met his gaze with just as much intensity.

His features were chiseled, sculpted by the passing of time, bearing the weight of untamed knowledge and forbidden magic. The lines of his face traced tales of a troubled past, etched with both wisdom and malevolence. His eyes, like shards of obsidian, held a depth that hinted at the vastness of his arcane abilities and the darkness lurking within.

As our gazes interlocked, I felt a surge of conflicting emotions—fascination mingled with trepidation, curiosity tempered by an ominous, instinctual warning. In that moment, I knew that crossing paths with Malachi had set into motion a fateful collision of destinies, one that would forever alter the course of my own.

“Sophia, it is so nice to finally meet you in the flesh,” he said, his voice dripping with just as much formidable, timeless wisdom as his gaze.

“I would say the same, but this is not a visit between friends, is it?” I countered.

He smirked knowingly, his eyes darkening several shades deeper.

From the woods all around him, several hooded figures emerged. Their hooded cloaks were so dark that it seemed like the fabric swallowed all the light around them. They were

chanting in low, hushed voices, and the blood rushing through my veins suddenly turned icy cold with fear. I stiffened at the sudden threat, listening closely until I could make out their perilous words.

*“We see you, Dark King,*

*We bow in the shadow of your darkness.*

*We are your disciples, Dark King,*

*It is our mission to free you from your cage.*

*We will unite the realms in your honor,*

*And you will finally take the one true throne.”*

One of them pushed down her hood, and I stiffened, recognizing her. Mais stared back at me, her elvish features somehow muted but still reminiscent of the ethereal beauty she had taken on before this. I took a step back, watching her with rising suspicion.

“Sophia,” she purred. Her voice was somehow less elegant, and her irises glittered with a deep violet that almost bordered on black.

“Mais,” I greeted the changeling coldly. My gaze shifted back and forth from her to Malachi, keeping both figures in my field of view should either one of them try anything. I didn’t trust them, not even a tiny bit.

“You impress me, human. I’m curious how you were able to escape from my realm, especially after I placed you in one of the most secure dungeons in the kingdom,” she purred, cocking her head and appraising me with interest.

“My secrets are my own,” I answered, glaring at her with a vitriol I did not know myself capable of. She didn’t need to know that the seer had chosen to become my ally in that moment. Right now, it would help me the most if Mais thought I was more powerful than I actually was.

“Fine then,” she chided.

“What is all this?” I asked, my gaze searching over the hooded figures standing in a half circle behind Malachi. They were

still chanting, their voices a soft whisper now, yet ominous all the same. Mais took a step towards me, and I took one back. Immediately, she held her hands up as if to say she meant no harm, but I knew better than to fall for her veiled kindness. I'd made that mistake once.

"This is the Clan of Eternal Darkness, the most devout sect in all of Helheim. I carry the highest title. We are the Dark King's sword, while Malachi and others like him are his magic," she explained, her pride visible from the way she pulled her shoulders back and held her head high.

"Why are they here?"

"We are here to kill you, should you not willingly go with Malachi," she grinned maliciously, and I gritted my teeth as each member drew a curved blade off their back. They stepped inward, circling closer as they pointed the tips of their swords directly towards me in a silent threat.

I wanted to reach down and yank my own sword free, but I stopped myself, at least for the moment.

"The Dark King would prefer you alive, but he isn't opposed to the taking of your soul," she continued.

"You've already taken my blood," I accused.

Her grin grew wider as she pulled the chain around her throat free from the neckline of her laced black dress. Three vials full of dark red blood clinked against one another, and I narrowed my eyes in her direction.

"One. Two. Three... *One more remains...*"

"Who were the others?" I pushed.

She chuckled, the sound eerily low. Instead of answering, she just stood there, smirking and laughing at my confusion. Seeing that pressing her for more information was clearly a dead end, I turned back to Malachi.

"You promised you'd remove your magic from Roken's heart if I came," I stated purposefully. I would not forget the reason why I was here in the first place.

“Should you travel through a portal of my making with me to Helheim, I will remove any trace of me from Roken for the rest of his days.” He smiled, and I could not help but feel as if there was a clouded threat hidden between his words.

“You will remove your magic before I go anywhere with you,” I replied curtly.

“This one would make a better queen than the last two, I think,” Mais purred slyly, and bile rose in the back of my throat.

“His queen?”

“Yes. The Dark King has been searching for his mate for a very long time. Perhaps you are the one for him after all,” she mused, and my fingers tightened into fists at my side.

“The moment your hand touches mine, I will remove the last threads of his curse completely. I vow this to you,” Malachi implored me.

“And the people of Terraheim?”

“The Dark King has no interest in the people of this realm should he have you,” he promised.

“He won’t kill them all?”

“He has no interest in shepherding more lost souls through his realm,” he answered.

“What does that mean?”

“You will understand in time,” he sighed.

Malachi’s hands began to weave a complex tapestry of gestures in the air. The very fabric of reality seemed to ripple and distort, as if bowing to the sorcerer’s will. Threads of ethereal energy, pulsating with a malevolent violet hue, spun and intertwined, forming an intricate circling sphere of magic that defied mortal comprehension.

With a surge of dark power, Malachi spoke an incantation in a low voice using a language I did not understand. As he chanted, the air crackled with energy, vibrating with an ominous anticipation. The space before him trembled, the

fabric of existence tearing apart to reveal a portal, a gateway into the realm of Helheim.

Purple wisps of magic emanated from the fissure, like ethereal tendrils reaching out to the dark corners of the room. A chilling wind swept forth from the opening, causing goosebumps to rise upon my skin. The air grew heavy with the scent of brimstone and decay, and a distant cacophony of tortured screams and infernal roars carried through the portal, a haunting symphony from the depths of Helheim.

Malachi's eyes glowed with an eerie intensity, reflecting the deep hues of the purplish abyss beyond the portal. With a triumphant smirk, he extended his hand, his fingers barely grazing the threshold of the gateway. The portal widened, revealing glimpses of a realm shrouded in darkness and infused with twisted magic.

A place that seemed fated to become my destiny.

Even now, the seer's voice remained silent. Maybe she had been wrong, and I was meant for the Dark King after all.

"Now come. The Dark King awaits his queen," Malachi rumbled.

"I am no queen," I said forlornly.

"She is *my* queen."

Roken's voice was like a welcome song on the wind. I breathed a sigh of both unshakeable fear and overwhelming relief as I turned my head and looked over my shoulder to see him standing behind me, dressed in nothing more than a simple pair of dark grey trousers and his sword belt around his waist.

"If the Dark King wants my Sophia, then he is going to have to kill me before he lays a single finger on her," Roken growled.

## CHAPTER 21



*R*oken

My eyes rested solely on my mate. Her eyes held mine, pleading and innocent and impossibly strong.

“Your *queen*?” she questioned with a whisper, her words directed solely at me.

I nodded.

She was my mate. It was because of her that I was back in control.

Every fiber of my being thrummed with newfound vitality and purpose. It was as if I had been reborn, granted a second chance to embrace life without the constraints of the curse.

I felt so much lighter, as if the burden that had haunted me for ages was finally lifted. A rush of emotions flooded my senses—joy, elation, and an overwhelming sense of liberation.

A sharp pang pierced my heart, and I gritted my teeth, turning my attention from Sophia’s gaze to Malachi’s.

Beside him was a ring of hooded figures and the face of the woman that had been the reason he’d been able to curse me in the first place. My heart broke a little at the sight of her.

“Elenwen,” I breathed.

“Actually, the name is Mais,” she smirked.

“Ah, Roken,” Malachi sneered, relishing the opportunity to recount his malevolent plans. “You were a fool to trust the depths of love so deeply. It was your vulnerability that allowed me to seize upon your weakness, to wield it against you with a vengeance. And oh, the rewards I offered to sweet Elenwen, your once beloved, if she dared to betray you to me.”

“Mais is a changeling, Roken. That is not her,” Sophia murmured as she moved to my side. Her fingers threaded into mine, and all the hurt from Elenwen’s betrayal slipped away as my love for her brewed to the surface.

“Her screams were exquisite in the end, Roken. I thought it poetic to take her face in this realm after she met her end in mine,” Mais taunted, her smirk malicious.

“Don’t listen to her,” Sophia implored.

A piercing pain shot through my chest, so sharp it felt like someone had stabbed a knife right through my heart.

I pressed my fist over my heart, trying to sense what was wrong and relieve it at the same time. I allowed a tendril of my freed magic through me, recognizing the touch of a foreign energy within me. The magic pierced through my heart again, more persistent this time, and Malachi grinned. Immediately, I knew what had happened, and why I was here.

Malachi had threatened my life with his magic in order to get my Sophia.

I wouldn’t let him take her from me. I had loved once, and he’d destroyed that. I wouldn’t let him do it again.

I locked eyes with Malachi, his malevolent grin even more treacherous than I remembered. Anger surged within me, fueling the flames of my resolve. Hatred coiled around my heart, intertwining with the powerful magic that surged through my veins. With each breath, the cyclone of power within me swelled, eager to be unleashed upon my enemy.

“Who is she?” Sophia asked softly, glancing at Mais and then back to me.

“Does she not know?” Malachi asked gleefully. His eyes glinted with sickening pride. I took a deep breath and stared



him down. I wasn't going to back down this time.

"Elenwen was a woman I loved once. She betrayed me to Malachi. It was because of her that he was able to afflict me with his curse five hundred years ago," I explained.

"It was much more than that, wasn't it? It was because of her that you lost control of your anger and ruined Taverna, *your grace*," Malachi taunted.

Malachi's voice dripped with persuasive honey as he continued, "It didn't take much to bend her to my will. I offered her untold power to reshape the world to her desires. All she needed to do was reveal your most guarded secret—the vulnerability you bear when trapped within your human form, and she did."

"Elenwen led Malachi inside my castle in the middle of the night. His magic shackled mine in my sleep, and he was able to cast the curse that held me prisoner for so long," I continued.

"She served her purpose," he smirked, his amusement dark.

"And now she is dead," I answered.

Malachi's smile grew wider, and I wanted to rip his heart right out of his chest.

Beside me, Sophia drew her sword. The ring of metal scraping against metal rang clear, and she stepped forward, her head held high with an undying sense of courage.

It made me even more proud to call her mine.

At my side, Sophia stood unwavering, her sword gleaming in the dim light, a testament to her resolve. Her presence ignited a fire within me, reminding me of the love and loyalty that burned brightly in her eyes. I drew strength from her steadfast courage, knowing that she stood by my side, ready to face any challenge that dared cross our path.

Simultaneously, Mais sprang into action, her weapon glinting as she threw the whole scene into chaos. A whirlwind of fury and grace, she lunged forward, her blade colliding with

Sophia's in a resounding clang. The clash of metal filled the air, and I braced myself for battle.

Magic surged through me, crackling with raw power as my very being trembled with the uncontrollable force. I let it billow up from inside of me, building and boiling with a vengeance that threatened to blow at any given moment. With a resounding roar, I launched myself into the fray, unleashing the full force of my earthen elemental power.

I held my arms out, sparkling emerald spheres of magic swirling over my palms, growing larger with each fraction of a second until I threw it forward, aiming it directly at Malachi's heart. With a rumbling growl, he leapt out of the way just in time for my spheres of energy to blast a hole right in the center of an ancient tree. The deafening boom of cracking wood reverberated throughout the woods, and the hooded chanting figures rushed forward, holding their curved blades aloft. His concentration broken, the portal to Helheim vanished in a swirl of purple mist.

A mystical knife stabbed deeper into my heart, and I roared with pain.

Then the world came to a sudden stop. Mais and Sophia were locked in battle, their swords hoisted high as they stood frozen in time. Malachi had his arm thrown back, a swirling ball of magic ready to counter mine moments from being let loose.

*"Mad king, should you need my assistance?"*

The wise voice of the seer echoed all around me, seemingly everywhere and nowhere all at the same time. A translucent vision of her stood before me, her inky black gaze capturing my attention in an instant.

"Yes," I breathed.

*"Good."*

She pitched forward towards me, her hands reaching for me. Her palms slammed into my chest, and I tensed, her ancient magic flowing through me with boundless wild power. Immediately, white tendrils of magic seeped out of her fingers, sinking right into my chest. The white glowing mystical

energy tingled through my chest and wound through the muscle fibers of my heart. Slowly, violet magic seeped out of me, taking the pain along with it. I sucked in a ragged breath, slumping forward as I met her gaze. The obsidian depths of her eyes stared into mine.

“Your price?” I whispered, terrified of the answer.

*“You must take Sophia as your one true mate. She must be marked.”*

“That is your price?”

*“You will understand the price I have taken when the time is right,”* she replied. Her voice was thick with meaning, and I didn’t fully comprehend it. She didn’t give me enough time to ask any further questions because she snapped her fingers and disappeared.

Instantly, the battle sprang back into action.

Sophia and Mais circled each other, their swords poised with deadly grace. The clash of steel filled the air as sparks erupted from their blades.

Sophia’s eyes blazed with furious determination as she lunged forward, her sword arcing through the air with lethal precision. Mais parried with swift agility, her curved blade deflecting the attack with a resounding clang.

With a swift motion, she withdrew a small glass vial from her belt, the contents swirling with a mysterious purple haze. In a calculated move, she shattered the vial against the rocky ground, and a resounding snap pierced the air.

As the glass shattered, an ethereal portal materialized, a gateway to the castle of Helheim. Swirling purple clouds beckoned, promising escape from the raging battle. Mais seized the moment, darting towards the portal with a swift leap. Sophia, caught off guard, lunged forward in a desperate attempt to stop her, but it was too late.

The portal swallowed Mais whole, her figure vanishing into her home realm. Mais looked back over her shoulder, showing me her real face. Dark glowing purple eyes stared into mine as she smiled. It was startling to see the jagged burn scars that

had destroyed the right side of her face. Her lips were most jarring of all, eaten away to expose the flesh of her gums and the sides of her teeth. The sight of her was unnerving as she smiled, her eyes dancing with malevolent intent.

With a steel resolve, Sophia leapt forward, fully intending to follow Mais into the portal, but with a swift, ominous clap, the portal snapped shut just inches from her outstretched hand. She snarled out loud, her frustration at losing her foe clear.

The hooded figures rushed towards her, and I roared with restrained fury of my own. Without another thought, I shifted into my dragon form, fully free for the first time in more than five hundred years. Muscles elongated and bones rippled as my wings unfurled from my back with a loud snap.

I rubbed my tongue against the roof of my mouth, igniting the flames at the back of my throat. Careful to avoid Sophia, I roared and rained flames down on the figures racing to attack her. Two made it through, but Sophia slashed her own blade down in a whirling arc, catching the first directly across the throat in a volley of blood. The man didn't even have time to scream before he fell to the ground in a slump. Then she sunk her blade deep in the belly of the second man before yanking it free with a hard jerk.

I turned my gaze to Malachi, setting my sights on him once and for all. I flapped my wings hard, lifting myself up into the air above the treetops. He threw balls of wind and magic towards me, trying to throw my flight off course. He would fail.

As Malachi unleashed his magic, I soared through the air, evading his every onslaught. My instincts guided me, my senses heightened in my dragon form. I twisted and turned, my powerful wings propelling me with speed and precision, dodging the tendrils of dark violet energy that lashed out towards me. The air crackled with the remnants of his failed attempts to ensnare me, but I remained elusive, a phantom weaving through the storm of his attacks. As I deftly avoided his magical onslaught, I could feel the surge of exhilaration coursing through my veins. With a mighty roar that shook the very foundation of the earth, I dove towards him, my claws

slicing through the air like sharpened blades with the full intent of disemboweling him alive.

Malachi's eyes widened, a flicker of fear betraying his confident façade. But he refused to back down, summoning dark magic in a desperate attempt to repel my attack. Bolts of powerful violet energy crackled towards me, but I avoided them effortlessly with a swish of my wings. Closing the distance, I unleashed my fiery breath, a torrent of poisonous green flames that engulfed him, searing through his defenses before he had enough time to use his magic to block it.

As the flames subsided, I saw Malachi, his body scorched and broken, struggling to regain his composure. With a menacing growl, I closed in, my razor-sharp teeth poised to deliver the final blow. A glimmer of resignation flashed in his eyes, the realization that he'd finally met his match, and I reveled in it.

With a primal fury, I lunged forward, fully intending on sinking my teeth into his flesh, but Sophia got to him first.

She emerged from the shadows, her sword gleaming with determination. With a swift and decisive motion, she raised her weapon high, the blade catching the dim light with a deadly glimmer. In one seamless motion, her sword cleaved through the air and sunk into his throat, meeting its mark with an explosive force. The sound of metal meeting flesh reverberated through the battlefield, accompanied by a sickening thud. Malachi's head soared through the air and slammed into the ground with a loud thunk, a chilling testament to the end of his terrible reign.

Sophia stood tall, her breath ragged, but with the adrenaline of victory written all over her features.

She turned her head and met my gaze.

“It's time for you to take back your crown.”

## CHAPTER 22



*S*ophia

I walked up to Roken on shaky legs. Before today, I had never killed anyone, and the surge of that victory was making my thighs tremble. I tripped as he shifted back into his human form, catching me before I fell. His arms wrapped around me so tightly that I could scarcely breath.

“He could have killed you,” he scolded, but his tone remained light with relief. His arms squeezed a bit tighter, revealing the emotion that he wouldn’t voice.

“Roken, I couldn’t bear the thought of him taking your life,” I breathed, pressing myself so closely against him that I could hear the steady beat of his heart in his chest.

“You fought well, my sweet girl. I’m proud of you,” he murmured.

“How did you free yourself from his magic? He had said he could have killed you with a snap of his wrist, that that’s all it would take to end you. He would have spared you had I gone with him,” I explained, feeling a bit shy.

“There was no need for your sacrifice. The seer granted us one last miracle,” he answered.

I breathed a sigh of shaky relief. “Thank you, seer,” I whispered.

His hand splayed across my lower back, pulling me against him even more firmly than I thought possible. I wound my arms around his neck, and he lifted me off the ground. Gently, he pressed his lips against my forehead, kissing me softly. Warmth spread through my limbs, chasing away the ache of battle in an instant.

He carried me all the way back to the swimming hole, where he carefully disrobed me and dipped me beneath the warm water. With a tender touch, he wiped away the blood and sweat that peppered my aching flesh. His fingertips massaged my scalp, causing tendrils of pleasure to race through my body at his rough touch. I gasped, enjoying every moment before he laid me down in the shallow end of the pool to see to my clothing.

I watched as he swept his hands over my gown, cleaning it with magic as I soaked in the pool. When he was finished, he disrobed and joined me in the water, cleaning himself in the process. I enjoyed the sight of his naked form, from the rounded globes of his ass to the chiseled plane of his chest as he moved around me.

He gathered me in his arms and pressed his lips to mine, taking me in a gentle kiss that left my head reeling. He took my breath away in that moment, and I knew that we were meant to be.

Forever.

\* \* \*

*One week later*

The time had finally come.

Roken's curse had been broken. It no longer held him back from his rightful place as king.

I stood on the massive overlook at the top level of Ironpeak's castle where there was a magnificent tree nestled amidst

ancient stone structures, its branches reaching skyward like a crown of lush splendor. Its bark was weathered and gnarled with the weight of centuries. Leaves of vibrant green adorned its boughs, while delicate blossoms burst forth like stars scattered among the foliage.

I looked out at the vast expanse of rolling hills and fertile valleys, a panorama of breathtaking vistas that stretched as far as the eye could see. The land below, dotted with settlements and cultivated fields, unfolded like a tapestry of life and prosperity. Rivers meandered through the landscape, glistening like ribbons of silver, their gentle currents nurturing the surrounding flora and fauna. The air carried the scent of wildflowers, and the earthy perfume of the forest. The sunlight danced upon the fields, casting a golden glow on the land.

Helheim's army had been pushed back in the days since our return. Scouts had returned to inform us that the rift has temporarily mended, but the magic holding it closed was tenuous at best. We were safe from the Dark King for now.

It was time for a long overdue celebration.

The streets teemed with life, vibrant with colors and the hum of animated conversations. Decorations adorned every corner, vivid banners fluttering in the breeze, while flowered garlands lined the doorways. The scent of freshly baked bread, aromatic spices, and sweet baked goods wafted from the bustling market stalls. Musicians tuned and played their instruments, their melodies resonating with joyous notes that echoed through the cobblestone streets. Dancers performed along the streets with grace, their movements an intricate celebration of jubilation, captivating the wandering crowd with their skill and exuberance.

Amidst the commotion, a feast fit for royalty was being prepared. Tables groaned under the weight of lavish spreads, an array of delectable dishes and exotic delicacies that represented the diverse regions of the realm. The air was filled with the enticing aroma of roasted meats, fragrant herbs, and spices that infused the dishes with mouthwatering flavors.

The city had come alive for the return of the king.



As the sun began its descent, casting a golden glow upon the white marble city, the people began to line the streets.

Roken emerged from his chambers, dressed in a garment befitting his royal stature. Woven with threads spun from the purest silks and embellished with intricate golden embroidery, his robes exuded an aura of majesty and grandeur. The fabric cascaded in elegant folds, flowing with a fluid grace that emphasized Roken's commanding presence. The emerald-green hue was vibrant and rich against the golden sash that wound around his waist. Each seam and stitch spoke of meticulous craftsmanship. Intricate patterns of intertwining vines and swirling dragon motifs decorated the robes, their golden threads glinting in the fading sunlight.

His dark green eyes met mine, filled with promise of the night to come. The two of us hadn't had any time together in the days following our return. There was too much to be done. The remaining segments of Helheim's army had needed to be dealt with and disposed of. Citizens of the realm needed to be housed and fed. Soldiers needed to be cared for and wounds mended.

There had been no time for us. I swallowed hard, my insides swirling with need at his dark look of desire.

He had told me how exceedingly proud he was of me for how brave I had been in the face of Malachi, but he'd also warned that he was going to show me exactly what would happen if I snuck off on my own like that again.

I bit my lower lip, drawing it in between my teeth with excitement for what was to come.

It wasn't to be a punishment, but a reminder that I belonged to him in every way, and I was looking forward to it, even if it meant that I was going to spend a significant amount of time begging for mercy before it ended in his bed.

My pussy clenched hard with need, bare beneath my dress simply because Roken had commanded it. His every step emanated with a powerful sense of royalty, his very presence commanding respect as he prepared to take back his crown.

Even Isolde dipped her head in respect towards the both of us. She had stepped down from the throne upon our return, insisting that the rightful king should take the seat.

In stark contrast to our initial meeting, she and I had become fast friends. She showed me around the city and introduced me to the king's court. She had helped me to become familiar in the ways of the city, too. Together, the two of us had assisted in the makeshift hospitals, tending wounds and helping the soldiers and their families get back on their feet.

“Sophia,” Roken murmured, capturing my attention once and for all. I smiled, turning my gaze fully back to him.

He extended a hand, and I took several steps towards him, entangling my fingers within his. I dipped my head in respect and curtsied, but his arm quickly wound around my waist and lifted me back up.

“You bow to no one, my queen,” he scolded lightly, and my cheeks flushed with heat at the unexpectedly firm admonishment. His gaze slid up and down my body, taking in the gorgeous forest green gown that embraced my body like a glove. The tailor-made gown accentuated my every curve. The sweetheart neckline exposed a scandalous amount of my chest, and the trailing train was adorned with glittering gold embroidery, sewn in a beautiful landscape of dragons and fire. With every step, the gentle rustle of silken fabric followed.

“You are breathtaking, my sweet mate,” he whispered. He angled his face upward, scenting the air, and I blushed harder, knowing exactly what he was searching for.

“I followed your instructions,” I whispered, unable to admit to what he had demanded this morning out loud.

“Good girl,” he purred, and my heart constricted tight in my chest. I breathed a sigh of relief as he pulled me forward up onto the stage that overlooked the entire city and the surrounding landscape.

An attendant stood beside us, waiting with the king's crown, a true masterpiece of regal craftsmanship. Fashioned from the

finest gold, it formed an intricate framework adorned with glittering emeralds.

It was a crown worthy of a king.

As I stood beside Roken, his voice rang out with a commanding presence, resonating through the grand hall as he addressed the gathered crowd. His voice, once burdened with the weight of a curse, now soared with newfound clarity and purpose. My heart swelled with emotion at the sound.

“My beloved people,” he began, his eyes sweeping across the faces before him, “today marks a new era for our kingdom. Together, we stand, united by the bonds of loyalty and resilience. It is with great pride and gratitude that I stand before you, once more, as your true king. At this same moment, I must ask you to accept Sophia as your reigning queen. She is to rule by my side as your sovereign and my one true mate.”

A wave of applause and cheers filled the hall, a testament to the unwavering support of our people. Roken’s gaze shifted to me, his eyes reflecting the gratitude and love that flowed between us.

With a smile, he continued, “But let us not forget the journey that has brought us here. We have faced adversity, darkness, and the weight of our own doubts. Yet, we have emerged stronger, bound by an unbreakable spirit. Our shared determination has shattered the chains that once held us captive, propelling us towards a brighter future.”

His voice carried the essence of a leader, intertwining humility and strength as he rallied our people with words of inspiration. “Today, we reclaim what was rightfully ours. With every step forward, we leave behind the shadows of the past and embrace the light that guides us. Together, we shall rebuild, restore, and ensure that our kingdom flourishes under the principles of justice, compassion, and unity.”

As his speech reached its crescendo, a surge of hope filled the room, a palpable energy that electrified the atmosphere. The crowd erupted into a deafening, thunderous applause. I watched with pride as Roken stood tall and resolute, his

presence radiating the essence of a true leader and I knew that, together, we would forge a future filled with limitless possibilities.

It was our destiny.

The sun descended past the mountains on the horizon, and Roken dipped his head towards me. With a gentle kiss to my cheek, he pulled me in close.

“I think we have something to deal with tonight, don’t we?” he murmured, his voice low enough that only I could hear. His hand pressed firmly against my lower back, holding me captive against him.

“My king,” I began.

“I like the sound of that rolling off your tongue,” he continued, the sound of his words a soft purr that reverberated through me with vigor.

Any sassy retort died in my throat at the heated look in his gaze.

“Now, my queen, would you like me to be gentle tonight?”

The gentle rumble of his voice set my core on fire, and I shifted my feet, causally rubbing my thighs against one another and noticing that I was already wet. There was no doubt in my mind that he already knew.

“No, my king,” I whispered in a rush, afraid I wouldn’t get the words out before I lost my nerve.

“Good.”

## CHAPTER 23



*S*ophia

The festivities raged long into the night, but Roken's hand never released mine as he led me through our people. Hands reached out to graze my shoulders with reverence, and I smiled, dipping my head slightly in acknowledgement as we passed by until we entered the castle and ascended a spiral staircase to the king's chambers at the very top of the castle.

The archway hummed with magic as we passed through the threshold.

"My chambers have been spelled to me and you, my queen. No one else may enter here. You will be safe from all manner of threats," he explained softly.

He guided me forward, and I sucked in a breath, taken aback by the regal opulence of the bedroom as I took it all in for the first time.

The walls were draped in luxurious emerald-colored tapestries, creating a sense of grandeur, their intricate designs depicting scenes of valor and battle. Soft golden light spilled from elegant candelabras, casting a warm glow upon the chamber's ornate furnishings.

At the center of the room stood a grand four-poster bed, its intricately carved, dark wooden frame reaching towards the ceiling. Cascading emerald-hued curtains enveloped the bed, creating an intimate sanctuary within the spacious chamber.

The bedding, adorned with golden embroidery, beckoned with promises of plush comfort and rest.

Adjacent to the bed, there was a polished wooden desk, its surface adorned with parchments and lavish inkwells. Delicate quills awaited the king's touch, poised to transcribe his thoughts and commands onto parchment with meticulous care. Surrounding the desk, there were shelves lined with ancient tomes and priceless artifacts that displayed the wisdom and history of the realm.

In one corner, a seating area beckoned, upholstered in lush green velvet. Rich golden accents embellished the furniture, their complex patterns mirroring the grandeur of the chamber. A large, intricately designed mirror hung on the wall, reflecting the room's beauty and amplifying its sense of space.

A magnificent table lined the wall before us, its surface adorned with a lavish feast. Silver platters heaped with succulent roasted meats, tender vegetables, and fragrant herbs beckoned with their tantalizing aromas. Gleaming silver chalices brimming with rich, dark red wines reflected the copious amount of flickering candlelight that danced across the room. Bowls of luscious, ripe fruits overflowed, their vibrant colors adding a refreshing touch amidst the decadence. My mouth watered at the sight.

"It's beautiful," I whispered.

His arms wrapped around my waist, pulling me close against him as I took in the sight of our regal chambers. His chin settled on top of my head, and he cleared his throat.

As Roken's strong arms enveloped me in a tender embrace, I felt a surge of warmth and adoration wash over me. In his embrace, I found solace and a sense of belonging, as if all the uncertainties and trials we had endured had been worth it to lead us to this moment.

"I spoke to my people earlier, my queen, but now I want to speak to you and you alone," he murmured.

My stomach cinched tight with sudden nerves, and I clutched at his arms. "Roken?"

“I want to thank you for all that you have done, my sweet mate. Without you, none of this would have ever been possible. My curse would have never been broken. I would have never taken back the crown, and my realm would have been lost to the Dark King without you.”

I opened and closed my mouth to say something, anything, but nothing felt like it carried the emotion that was swelling in my heart.

“Tonight is not to be a punishment, but a reminder of just how proud I am of you and to show you I can be a king worthy of you, my sweet mate,” he continued.

“What’s going to happen?” I asked, my voice quivering with trepidation and slowly building arousal.

“I’m going to mark you, first with my belt and then with my teeth,” he purred.

My core constricted tight with arousal, my nerves torching with sudden heat.

“Your belt?” I asked, my voice husky with desire.

“I threatened you with my leather strap once, pretty girl. I did not forget the wetness seeping down your thighs at the mere mention of it,” he threatened heatedly.

Carefully, he lifted his hands and untied the cord holding the corseted back of my gown closed. He unthreaded it bit by bit, snapping the ties against my skin as he slowly bared my back. I sucked in a breath, the slight sting a promise of the pleasurable night to come. With every strike, my curiosity about the use of his belt amplified, so much so that I found myself looking forward to the moment he bent me over the bed and used it on me.

Would I like it? Would it sting as much as I thought it would?

When he pulled the cord out of the last rungs of my corset, he pulled hard enough to snap it one last final time across my back. I arched back, the sting of the leather ends striking across my naked flesh, pain radiating in sharp jolts straight into my core. As the sting began to lessen, heated desire followed, and it took everything in me to remain still.

“Show me,” I whispered.

“I plan to give you everything you could ever wish for, my queen,” he promised.

Slowly, he guided each sleeve of my dress down my arm until it pooled around my hips. When he pushed it past my waist down to the floor, he offered me a hand as I stepped out of it. His eyes roved over my body as I stood before him, dressed in nothing more than a pair of gold heels.

He circled around me, his gaze dark and purposeful as he studied my bare flesh. Purposefully, he reached for me and grazed the tips of his fingers lightly along my skin, causing fiery tingles of sensation to race across my arm. I bit the inside of my cheek to keep myself from gasping out loud.

“You are absolutely regal, my queen. Every inch of you is a sight to behold, and I’m lucky to call you mine,” he breathed.

He stepped close and curled his arms around my waist, dragging his fingers up and down my bare flesh. With my back to his chest, I sighed, enveloped in the safe haven of his arms. I pressed my head back against him as he squeezed me tight.

“Let me explore this beautiful body. I want to see every inch of you before I mark you as mine,” he purred.

A heated shiver raced down my spine as he brushed my hair over my shoulder and pressed his lips to the side of my throat. I gasped, unable to keep myself quiet this time. I felt his lips curve with his smile against my neck. He trailed his kisses all over my shoulders, following the line of my collarbone and down my arm all the way to the tops of my knuckles. He spent time kissing each one, igniting my body with sordid desire.

“My king,” I breathed.

“Hush. Let me take care of you,” he purred.

He continued exploring my body with his mouth. When he approached my breasts, he took his time, gently suckling and dragging his tongue around my nipples until they were so hard, they were like little pebbles. I arched into his kiss, and he scraped his teeth along my erect buds, torturing them with a hint of roughness.



What he knew I craved.

He bit down on my right nipple, and I rose onto my tiptoes as a muted stinging pain radiated across my breast. I cried out, whimpering quietly as I rode the wave of pain, knowing that pleasure would ultimately follow. Finally, it did, but I wasn't quite prepared for how powerful it would be.

I moaned out loud as it settled deep in the pit of my core.

He did the same to the left side, back and forth until both sides ached with painful desire before he pressed his lips in between them for a soulful kiss that left my head reeling.

As I stood before him, my thighs slid against one another, my wetness beginning to drip down my thighs. His arms slipped underneath me as he carried me to the bed. Carefully, he laid me down on my belly and immediately continued his exploration of me with his mouth. I arched my back, lifting my bottom as he kissed up the back of my calf and then my thigh, pausing several times to kiss the gentle curve of my inner thigh.

"You're already so wet for me, my love," he growled, his possessive rumble enough to set my soul on fire.

"Please," I begged.

"Are you ready for your king's belt?" he asked, his tone aching with promise, and I shivered with need.

"Yes, my king," I breathed. I turned my head, looking back over my shoulder at him. There was something particularly heady about being naked with him fully clothed like this. It made my desire soar to even greater heights and my sore nipples scraped against the bed. I watched as he untied his gold sash from his waist. With a dangerous glint in his eyes, he leaned over me and wound it around my wrists before he wrapped the ends around the bedpost. When I was fully bound, he grabbed my ankles and straightened me down the length of the bed.

Then he took a step back and held my gaze as he slowly unbuckled his belt. He pulled the tip through the buckle with a sinister expression, and I shivered, nervously awaiting what

was to come. I chewed the inside of my cheek as he pulled it free from the loops of his trousers, the gentle swishing sound ominously loud within the confines of the room.

He looped it in half, holding the buckled end in his fist as it swung by his side. I drew in a heated breath, watching the leather strap closely and knowing what was going to happen very soon.

“Why am I about to take my belt to this gorgeous little ass?”

The sound of his voice caught me off guard, and I shivered, chewing the inside of my cheek until eventually I worked up the courage to speak.

“Because I wanted you to be rough with me?”

“Partly, sweet mate, but there’s also another reason,” he continued, his tone gentle and sweet and overwhelmingly seductive.

“What’s that?” I asked shyly.

Without meaning to, I’d unconsciously allowed my legs to drift apart, enough that the fingers of his free hand were able to graze against the wetness between them.

“Because of this, naughty girl. You need this, don’t you?”

His fingers drew close enough to graze the swollen folds of my pussy and I sucked in a breath, trying to stay still and ultimately failing as I attempted to grind myself against the rough pads that promised so much pleasure if he would only grant it.

He didn’t. He pulled his fingers away from my pussy, making me sigh quietly in disappointment. My hips rose, seeking out his touch once again.

“Not yet, naughty mate. When I allow you to come for me, it’ll be with you grinding that sweet little pussy on the same belt that just thrashed this little ass bright red,” he warned, and my core nearly burst with excitement. My bottom tensed, anticipating the lash.

He lifted the belt and I whimpered, but he didn’t use it just yet. Instead, he just laid it against my quivering cheeks and

dragged it off, allowing me to get used to the feel of leather on my skin. I slowly forced myself to relax.

“Please,” I begged again, lifting my bottom and opening my thighs just a little to show him how much I wanted this.

He brought down the belt for the first time, hard enough to sting just a little bit. The gentle bite was enough to take my breath away, but the pain quickly faded away to be replaced by a gentle warmth that centered right in between my legs.

My clit ached for his touch, but I knew it would all be worth it in the end.

He brought down the belt a bit harder and I sucked in a breath, the sting rising just below the first lash.

It wasn't until the third that I realized that he was teasing me with it. The gentle slap of leather striking flesh reverberated off the stone walls, making me blush at the thought that someone close by might hear the sound.

His hand pressed down on the center of my back, and I knew that the time had come for my belting to truly begin.

“I'm going to be watching this pretty little pussy, sweet mate. It's very wet right now, but I bet it will be soaked by the time your ass is thoroughly marked from my belt.”

I shivered with desire, unable to quell the overwhelming swell of need brewing within my core. I rocked my pelvis upward, and the belt came down hard enough to force the air right out of my lungs in a single loud whoosh.

A line of fire flared red hot across both cheeks, far more intense than I could have ever imagined. This sunk even deeper than his hand ever had.

The pain delved into my core, surging up and down my spine before it crested. Roken waited for my body to settle before he struck again with the same brutal intensity.

I cried out, riding the wave of pain as it peaked and spread through the rest of me. The second lash fell just beneath the first on the fullest part of my bottom and he waited until I was

lying flat once again before he struck me with a third right below the first two.

“How many?” I breathed, moaning as needy warmth flooded my core. My pussy brushed against the quilt beneath me, teasing my clit lightly enough to make me shiver.

“However many it takes,” he murmured.

I tugged on my bonds and his hand pressed a bit more firmly down on my back, holding me in place as he used the belt three times in quick succession.

He thrashed every inch of my backside, starting at the tops of my cheeks and continuing down until he reached the lower curve where my ass and my thighs met. Just when I thought the sting couldn't get any worse, he used the belt across my upper thighs. My toes drummed on the top of the bed as I struggled to take it. I yanked my wrists, but his sash held me captive as the belt painted my ass with welts.

Each line of fire burned right after the belt struck, but then it simmered even hotter for several seconds before it peaked with a fierce, scalding sting.

He paused and I took the chance to catch my breath, my hips rocking as I moaned. Delicious pain and agonizing pleasure swirled within me as he lessened his hold on me and dove his hand back between my thighs. His rough fingertips found my clit, teasing me gently as I grappled with the scalding burn aching across my backside.

My sore bottom only seemed to amplify my pleasure. Without conscious thought, I spread my legs and opened for him, feeling my need build to heights I didn't think possible. Just when I thought I was about to fall into the burning world of climax, he drew his hand away and whipped my bottom again with his belt.

This time, the pain gave way to pleasure that much sooner, and I moaned. He whipped the backs of my thighs fiercely and I squeezed my eyes shut, trying to take it gracefully while knowing I would soon sail off the edge if it went much longer.

He whipped my bottom faster and harder, making me whimper out loud. I blinked, trying to stay strong as my eyes watered.

Did he mean to make me cry?

Just when I thought I was going to lose control, his hand pressed back in between my thighs, teasing my pleasure right to the edge before he pulled away again.

He used the belt again a few more times, hard enough to make me gasp, before his hand returned. I rode the waves of pleasure and pain over and over again until the touch between my thighs became more painful than pleasurable. Just the lightest brush of his fingertips against my clit became agony and I started to beg.

“Please, my king. Please let me ride your belt,” I pleaded.

His hand brushed over my scalded cheeks, following a single welt across my left side all the way to the right. The rough pads of his fingers ignited fiery tendrils of pleasure that raced right down to the depths of my core.

“You should know that you’re soaking wet now, sweet mate. You’ve come alive under the mark of my belt,” he purred.

He was right. I did feel alive.

“Lift your hips for me. Show me that needy little pussy,” he commanded, and my body rose with obedience. I spread my legs and arched my back as he slid the folded belt beneath me. I gasped, surprised to find it still warm from being used on my welted bottom.

I cried out as the firm surface slid across the soaking wetness of my arousal, until at long last, it moved into place beneath my clit. Just the pressure of the leather strap against my throbbing bud was enough to make me moan, my need spiraling higher by the second.

“Ride your king’s belt, my queen,” he demanded.

In an instant, the weight of his command settled on me. My face flushed with embarrassment as I thought about what he might see and I bit the inside of my cheek, but even in my overwhelming shame, I felt my hips begin to rock.

Every inch of my body was over sensitized with desire. Every cell was crackling with energy begging to be released as I began to ride Roken's belt.

I could feel his eyes on me as I ground my needy clit against the leather. It didn't take long for my body to approach the edge of bliss, and just before I went over the brink, his fingers grazed against my spine. There was no pretending he wasn't there while I made myself come.

"Come for me, my queen. I want to watch your hips writhe and your welted bottom clench as you scream for me," he growled darkly.

My whole world fell apart at the sound of his words.

My pelvis ground into his belt hard as I came, white hot bliss spiraling through me with wild abandon. My mouth opened in an instant as a silent scream emerged from me that didn't stay silent for long. I bucked on top of the belt that had just whipped my backside, and when my pleasure peaked, Roken reached out and squeezed my right bottom cheek hard, reigniting the sting tenfold. I cried out, but the tremors that followed made my climax reach even further up into the clouds.

He moved over to me and deftly unwound the sash around my wrists, freeing me from my bonds as my entire body quaked with powerful aftershocks.

As my arousal seeped into his belt, I turned my head and watched Roken slowly untie the royal fur trimmed mantle that he had wrapped around his neck. He slipped it off and threw it onto the weathered leather chair beside the bed. Then he pulled off his vest and his shirts, exposing the chiseled plane of his chest, and my mouth watered.

"Reach back and spread your bottom for me. I want you thinking about exactly where my cock is going in a few minutes. I want you to think about how much it's going to hurt to take every inch of me, but you're going to come harder than you ever have for me when you do."

His rumbling voice speared through me, a sudden rush of heat settling deep in my bones. Unconsciously, I raised my hips in anticipation and stilled once I realized what I was doing.

“You can’t mean to,” I began, my face flushing with shame because I was not only looking forward to him taking me there, but I had been for a long time now.

I shouldn’t want him to fuck me there.

It was wrong, right? Why had I enjoyed his tail pumping in between my cheeks, fucking me gently into the throes of one powerful orgasm after the next? Why did I want to take something even bigger there? His tail had hurt, especially the wider parts of it that had stretched me as it had taken me. There was no doubt in my mind that his cock would make me scream even louder.

My bottom hole clenched firmly, as if I was anticipating every long inch of him inside of me with a sense of anxious expectation.

“Do you want more of the belt, my queen?”

A nervous shiver spiraled down my spine, and my hands shot back to cover my scalded cheeks. He chuckled dangerously, like he was looking forward to reddening my ass even more than it already was, which made my fingers finally do what he wanted before he ran out of patience and decided to punish me after all. Instinctually, I knew that even though the belt had stung, he had been holding back and simply using it to make me even wetter than I had been before, and it had worked.

There would be no denying that I liked pain with my pleasure after this.

With an increasing volley of shame, my fingers gripped my welted cheeks and slowly spread them apart, exposing the dark hole hidden between them more salaciously than I could have ever imagined. My muscles tensed and I squeezed my eyes shut, knowing he could probably see every clench as I lay there bare before him.

I hid my face in the blankets, unwilling to look at him in my moment of aroused shame. His fingers flitted along the backs

of my thighs, letting me know without a single doubt that he was looking right at me.

I heard him kick off his boots and the rustle of fabric as he stripped beside the bed. The bedframe groaned as he climbed over me, and I stiffened when he gripped my thighs and spread them wide apart, too, so that he could move in between them.

His cock brushed against my stinging left cheek, and I whimpered.

“So beautiful like this, anxious and trembling, and so hot with your own desire as you wait for me to claim this tight little hole for the very first time,” he purred, and my asshole tightened right before his eyes.

“Please,” I begged.

His hands wrapped around my hips as he hiked them up. Gently, he slid the belt out from underneath me. The familiar sensation of his tail slithering against my skin made me tremble and gasp as it brushed against my clit. I bit my lip to try to keep quiet, but then the tip moved towards my soaking wet channel, and I let out a ragged moan.

“Tonight, my tail is going to fuck this needy little pussy while my cock enjoys this very tight, virgin asshole,” he murmured. His dirty words ignited a fire in my core, and I shivered with need, raising my hips for him on my own this time.

He took a hold of my cheeks himself then, and I cried out as a warm, wet liquid splashed against my bottom hole.

“It’s lubricant, my queen. Since you’ve been a very good girl, I’m going to spoil you and start off gentle with this gorgeous little hole before I ride it the way it’s meant to be ridden.”

He swirled his fingers through the liquid, coating his flesh with it. With one thick digit, he lubed my bottom hole, working it in knuckle by knuckle as I gasped and writhed beneath him, all while feeling his cock harden right against my cheek.

He was enjoying this.



His finger sodomized my poor little hole, causing small tendrils of pain to blossom outward, but eventually those started to fade and turn into red hot surges of desire.

When he added a second digit, I protested, the pain returning for several long moments, but he worked them inside me slowly, stretching my bottom open with tender steadiness. I could not keep my hips still as he pumped his fingers in and out of me, especially when his tail started to twirl in the wetness dripping from my entrance.

“I’m going to fill this tight hole with my cock first. I want you to feel every inch of me as I claim you once and for all as my one true mate,” he purred, and my heart swelled at the same time that my pussy clenched.

He didn’t miss the fact that my asshole clenched too, chuckling knowingly as he pressed a third finger inside of me. I yelped, unable to stand just how much it hurt at first, but there was nothing to do but lie there and take it.

His cock was much wider than three of his fingers.

The rough surface of his tail teased over my clit, and I shuddered with pleasure, the promise of sweet oblivion not far away.

Then he pulled his fingers from my bottom, slowly but surely as if to remind me what was going to replace them very soon. I tensed, but he still had his hand holding me open. I bit my lip as he moved behind me. Like a heavy weight, his cock slapped over my bottom hole, firmly enough to make me jump. It stung just the slightest bit, but it also reminded me just how big he was.

“You’ve been looking forward to this for a long time, haven’t you, my queen?”

“Yes, my king!” I wailed, ashamed and aroused and lost somewhere in the middle of both.

“Lift your hips for me. Show me how much you need your king to remind you who you belong to,” he demanded. My body obeyed without thought, and he pulled his hips back,

pressing the slickened head of his cock against the place I was most nervous to take it.

Very gently, he pushed forward, but as much as he had prepared me with his fingers, his cock was so much thicker. As my tight hole started to give way, pain blossomed outward, surging up and down my spine with savage force.

There was nothing feral about this taking. Roken was cool, calm, and collected, which made him taking my ass even more terrifying than if he had been out of control.

This way, I knew that he would see my every sign of desire, from the way my hips rocked, to the way my fingers clutched at the blankets beneath me, to the way my cries quickly turned into moans as I begged for more. He wouldn't miss a single moment of my aroused shame.

Even worse, I knew he would enjoy every minute of it.

The head of his cock breached into my asshole, and I cried out, trying to take him gracefully, but it still hurt. He pushed onward, taking me slowly as delicious agony surged up and down my spine. I felt every ridge as he pressed each inch into me, filling me up in a way I was never meant to be filled.

When he eventually bottomed out inside me, I was clawing at the bed. The pain ran deep for several long moments as my body slowly accepted him. Even when the deep burn relented, a simmering ache remained. He didn't move for a moment, just letting the image of him inside me like this fully sink in.

“Where is my cock, my queen?”

“Inside my bottom, my king,” I whimpered.

He pulled out just a little bit and pushed back in. My muscles clenched, and a fresh wave of agony flattened me to the bed. But that didn't dissuade him for even a moment.

It made his cock harder though.

His tail slid beneath me, pressing into my pussy gently. With my ass so full of his cock, his tail felt massive as it pushed inside me.

I was so full.

A bit more roughly, Roken tipped his pelvis back and thrust back inside me, reigniting the soreness from just how wide I was stretched for several long moments.

That's when I realized something else.

Every single thrust of his cock was going to hurt, and that was going to make me come harder than I ever had in my life. I could feel my core spiraling with pleasure, and then the tip of his tail breached my entrance enough to make me moan out loud.

"Please," I begged again.

Both him and his tail started fucking me at the exact same moment in concert. Every thrust was harder than the last. Without meaning to, my hips rose and fell, taking him deeper and deeper, and I couldn't get enough.

Pain and pleasure wound into a thin rope, threatening to fray me apart at any given moment.

My muscles clamped down on him, fighting his taking while they were welcoming him in. His fingers wound around my hips and hiked me up onto my knees.

His tail ground against my clit as it thrust between my legs, forcing me right to the edge. I tried to fight the oncoming onslaught of pleasure, but it was a losing battle.

I was going to come this way. It didn't matter that it was shameful or wrong or wickedly taboo.

My whimpers became full-throated cries, and soon I was screaming his name as I sailed over the brink. The tidal wave of pleasure consumed me from the second it started, powerful and overwhelming and the sweetest climax I'd ever experienced in my life.

Someone once told me that the orgasm could be called the little death. I hadn't understood it until this moment. The dark oblivion that swallowed me whole rocked my body senseless. Overwhelming sensation whirled through me like a tornado, lifting me up and throwing me about as if I were a feather on the wind. As I started to fall, the air constricted around me,

and I panted, drawing in one ragged breath after the next as I tried to take back control and failed.

I screamed louder as my inner walls fluttered around his tail. It pumped inside me with feral savagery while Roken brutally fucked my no longer virgin hole. My muscles clamped around him, but his strength overpowered mine with ease, taking me in the way I was truly meant to be taken.

He was my king, but I was meant to be his queen.

With every thrust, he reminded me that I was his, and I fell into one climax after the next, pleasure sweeping me off my feet and drowning me in its vivid intensity. There was no escaping even a single second of overwhelming bliss.

There was only once choice.

*Surrender.*

I gave in. The moment I truly accepted that I was no longer in control was the most terrifying and the most liberating moment of my life. With a roar, he thrust into me especially hard, and I cried out, a sharp pang of agony ripping through me. He leaned over me, his chest flush against my back as his arms wrapped around my waist. Using his unparalleled strength, he lifted me up with ease and his teeth brushed against my shoulder.

I leaned back towards him, my arm reaching to cup the back of his head. He growled and I arched my back, taking his cock deeper in my bottom with his every thrust.

“Mine,” he snarled.

“Yours, my king,” I moaned.

His tail took me even more roughly, pumping harder than I thought possible into my sopping wet entrance. The wet sounds echoed all around me, salacious and wrong and perfectly right.

With a roar, his seed spurted deep inside my bottom while his teeth bore down on my shoulder. For the briefest of seconds, I felt the sharp tips of his teeth pierce my flesh, the stinging pain

harsh, but in an instant, my body came alive with the brutal thrill of magic.

A golden thread joined my heart with his, braiding together and forming a connection stronger than time itself. His emotions became mine as mine became his, love and heartache and everything we'd ever felt shared as one.

I felt a profound shift within my being. It was as if an invisible cord was woven between our souls, intertwining our destinies in an unbreakable pair bond. The connection hummed with an electric energy, crackling with a deep power. Every fiber of my being resonated with a sense of familiarity, as if I had known Roken my entire life.

It was a connection that defied logic and explanation, transcending the barriers of time and space. With every soft breath and every touch shared, the connection between us grew stronger, weaving a tapestry of trust and love. In that bond, I could feel a reflection of my own hopes, fears, and dreams, as if he held the key to unlocking the depths of my soul.

Every nerve in my body came alive, firing over and over again as my eyes rolled back in my head.

This was true love.

I came so hard one final time that it was as if the world had stuttered out of existence for several dark seconds. My eyes rolled back in my head as I shattered into the most delicious orgasm of my life. Everything and anything paled in comparison to this as I broke into a billion pieces. My thighs quaked and my hips bucked, riding both thick appendages as my mate marked me as his once and for all.

My shoulder burned red hot as our hearts intertwined, and I floated in the realm that had become us.

My heart pounded along with his.

## CHAPTER 24



*R*oken

The bond between fated mates had no parallel. There was no love I had ever experienced that would be as deep as this, nor would I ever again.

I drew back, and as our eyes locked, an inexplicable surge coursing through my veins and a primal instinct stirred deep within me. It was as if an invisible force enveloped us, connecting our souls as one. In her gaze, I glimpsed a reflection of my own strength, determination, and unwavering loyalty. It was a connection that resonated on a level beyond words, instinctively drawing me towards her with an undeniable magnetism.

In that electrifying moment, I felt a surge of possessiveness, a powerful need to protect and cherish her. The bond between us pulsed with a raw intensity, awakening the dormant parts of my being and igniting a fire within.

It was a connection that transcended reason, pulsating with an undeniable energy that thrummed in my veins. In her presence, I found solace and a sense of purpose, knowing that together we would conquer the challenges that lay ahead.

I held her against me for a long time. Eventually, my cock softened, and I still continued to slowly fuck her, watching as my mark shifted until it settled into the shape of the earth dragon, a symbol that represented Terraheim and my family

line of succession. It surged with green, fiery magic. Unable to resist, I leaned down and pressed my lips against her mark.

The taste of her blood was still sharp on my tongue.

I'd lost control, but it hadn't been because of my curse. My own instincts had reigned free, without bonds and without the dark magic of Helheim to contort it.

Despite everything I'd done to try to fight this connection, Sophia had forced her way into my heart even though I'd shut it off to everyone and everything. Her sweet, gentle, caring nature had worked its way past my resolve and melted the defenses I'd erected around me.

The thread between us pulsed with her utter contentment, and I sighed with happiness. I leaned back over her and trailed tender kisses all around the mark as if I could take the soreness all over her body away. She sighed and curled against me.

"It is because of you, my sweet mate. This is all because of you. I love you, my Sophia," I purred, and she melted into my arms.

"I love you too, my king," she whispered, her voice hoarse with emotion and exhaustion.

With no warning, a vibrant green light burst forth, expanding from a singular point between us. Though we stood in the safety of an enclosed space, a gust of wind rushed around us, carrying the exhilarating surge of potent magic. The unmistakable essence of bright green sorcery swirled in the air, weaving its ethereal presence between our beings.

In an instant, a hazy portal materialized before us, its mesmerizing glow radiating with an otherworldly green energy. Instead of stepping through, we were drawn into its captivating embrace, as if an unseen force beckoned us forward. The ground vanished beneath us, and the vertigo-inducing sensation of falling gripped us within its brutal clutches.

Sophia's startled cry echoed in my ears, but I clutched her protectively as her arms wrapped around my neck in a desperate grip. The darkness enveloped us, compressing our

surroundings as if we were submerged in a fathomless abyss. Her struggles for breath added to my own unease, but I reassured her through our profound connection, seeking to calm her as much as I could.

Whirling winds buffeted us, tugging at our very essence, until at long last, our descent ceased with a jarring impact. As my feet slammed into the ground, recognition flooded my senses as I looked around. We had been transported directly to the rift, the epicenter of magic itself. In an instant, a force of mystical energy tore Sophia from my grasp, sending her soaring skyward and defying gravity's hold. Reacting on pure instinct, I shifted into my dragon form, needing to shield and safeguard my beloved mate. But as soon as my wings unfurled, a strange gravity kept me anchored to the ground. I couldn't fly to her.

A vivid emerald light blossomed from her core, its brilliance nearly blinding me. I strained to reach her, desperate to keep her safe. As Sophia's anguished screams pierced the air, I fought with all my might, driven by an insatiable need to protect her. She was my mate, the one destined to stand by my side as my dragon queen.

In that moment, the swirling light intensified around her, and she arched her back in what appeared to be both agony and ecstasy.

I panicked, trying with all my might to get to her, but the strange magic held me captive.

From her fingertips, a surge of vibrant green magic radiated outward, engulfing the forested landscape with an unstoppable force. The pulsating wave surged across the mountains, eradicating any lingering remnants of the dark realm of Helheim.

It was a sight that evoked awe and respect as I realized that her newfound power could vanquish the very essence of darkness itself.

Earthen sigils ignited across her skin, shimmering in a mesmerizing display of whitish-green hues. From her back, magnificent wings sprouted, ethereal and adorned with



feathers that glowed with an enchanting emerald, green luminescence. Every tip of her feathers crackled with mystical energy, an emblem of her transcendent magical power.

I held my breath, captivated by the sight unfolding before me. My mate, transformed into a celestial being, hovered above, her wings gracefully propelling her through the air. She exuded an otherworldly presence, akin to an angel touched by a mystical light and bestowed with a rare, untold magic. With her wings and arms outstretched, she locked her gaze upon me, her eyes shimmering with the intensity of ethereal magic.

She turned her head towards the rift, its ominous presence stretched wider than ever before.

Glowing orbs materialized above her palms, radiating with vibrant green hues. With each passing moment, they grew both in size and velocity. Then, with a forceful motion, she channeled the power of the earth itself and propelled them towards the rift.

My gaze fixed upon the torn barrier, and in that fleeting instant, I caught a glimpse of the Dark King's glowing purple eyes.

His knowing smile hinted that he was aware of something I didn't.

The Dark King's hands thrust outward, and an electrical storm of violet magical lightning poured through the rift. Sophia threw her arms up, erecting a mystical shield, and his magic bounced right off it, exploding outwards in an electrical storm that blinded me in an instant.

"I have no more need for you, for there is another," he growled.

My gaze flicked between my mate and the Dark King as she gritted her teeth.

"Leave this place, Dark King, and never return," she snarled.

With a malevolent chuckle, he smirked wider. I roared with warning, but his laugh simply grew louder and louder until it abruptly shut off as Sophia sent more of her magic soaring towards the rift.

The rift pulsed with blinding brilliance, flashes of bright green light illuminating its form before golden threads of magic weaved their way from top to bottom, sealing it shut before my very eyes.

The silence that followed felt heavy and full of warning.

I knew in my heart that the Dark King wasn't through with my realm, but he was for now, at least.

Sophia descended gracefully to the ground, her ethereal form weightless upon the mossy ground beneath her feet. The initial radiance of bright green magic began to fade, allowing me to behold her new form for the first time. Her eyes, the most striking transformation of all, shimmered with emerald flames that held me captive, their beauty and intensity unlike anything I had ever seen.

Her ears came to delicately beautiful points and the subtly paler tone of her skin was offset by the stunning pink glow that graced her cheeks. Next, I studied her wings, regal and majestic, confirming the irrevocable truth that my Sophia was no longer human.

She was something else entirely.

Where once she had been human and vulnerable, now she stood as a dazzling forest angel, a creature of unparalleled beauty and strength. The seer had taken her mortality. She was right. I did understand her price, and it was one worth paying a thousand times over to have this woman by my side.

Sophia had not only saved me, but the entire realm itself. She wasn't just my mate. She was my Dragon Queen.

Not just for now, but for the rest of time.

## EPILOGUE



*S*ix months later  
*Sophia*

“You’re the prettiest one of them all,” Roken murmured, as his arms wrapped around my waist. I shivered with warmth as his lips pressed against the side of my neck.

The town had come alive. Just last night, we’d received word that the last of Helheim’s soldiers had been wiped out, freeing Terraheim from the clutches of the Dark King once and for all. Now, the streets were crawling with people. The delicious aromas of freshly baked goods and extravagant meals wafted through the air, and I breathed in deep.

In celebration of Helheim’s defeat, Roken had declared that not only would there be a feast and copious amounts of drink, but a ball of epic proportions. Every man was wearing his best and every woman was displaying their most beautiful gown. Roken had called in the best seamstress in the city to rush a dress for me, and it had turned out to be the most beautiful thing that had ever touched my body.

I blushed, thinking about how it drew attention to my swollen belly, and almost as if he knew what I was thinking, Roken’s hands settled right on top of it.

“You look absolutely radiant with my baby in your belly, my queen,” he murmured.

“Your son,” I breathed, and he sucked in a breath.

“You know?”

I slid my hands over Roken’s, reaching for the magic deep in my belly. I touched the tiny tendrils of lightning, molding it and drawing it out bit by bit until my palms were glowing with it. He sucked in a breath, feeling my power for the first time.

I hadn’t shown him that I could do this before. I’d only just discovered it myself.

Since my transformation, every single one of my senses was heightened. I could see much farther out into the surrounding woodlands, so close that the vibrantly colored songbirds were in focus as they sang their musical melodies. My hearing was so sharp that I could make out each lively beat of their song. Down in the center of the market, a baker was just putting out a pan of sweet cherry tarts, and the sweet aroma was enough to make my mouth water as I imagined the freshly baked taste exploding across my tongue.

My magic swirled through my fingers, and then the imagery in front of my eyes changed as I showed Roken a vision of our future.

The first image was of the birth of our son. I was lying in our bed holding him for the first time while Roken sat beside me, his massive grin heartwarming and full of love.

The next image was of our son running through the forest as a toddler. He was giggling and laughing while his father chased him, hiding behind trees and surprising him, resulting in the cutest set of giggles I’d ever heard.

The last image was of the three of us sitting around the dinner table, eating a meal that I’d just taken out of the oven. The deliciously mouthwatering aromas of a freshly baked chicken and potatoes hit us both at once, and I heard Roken draw in a surprised breath beside me.

“Our son,” he whispered, his voice thick with a whirlwind of emotions.

“Our son,” I echoed, a wistful smile on my face.

I couldn’t wait to meet him.

*Don't want it to be over? Need more?*

*Join my newsletter for an exclusive scene where you meet the Dark King for the very first time. What does he have in store for realms of the Dragonborne Kings? What does he intend to do with Mais?*

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## AFTERWORD

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## BOOKS OF THE DRAGONBORNE KINGS SERIES

### *Dragon King*

For centuries, every woman in my family has vanished on the night of her twenty-first birthday, then returned telling tales of being shamefully ravaged by a man who could turn into a dragon.

Tonight he came for me.

I fought, but he just tore off my clothes and spanked me until I was wet and ready for him.

The brute didn't take me right then and there. He made me beg for it first. But even before he marked me as his, I knew he wasn't going to send me home after he mounted and claimed me.

The dragon king is never going to let me go.

Because I'm his mate.

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### *Ice King*

When I snuck out of the house on my twenty-first birthday, I didn't expect to be struck by a bolt of lightning... or to wake up in a strange land and be saved from freezing to death by a dragon.

Then the beast shifted before my eyes into a man more regal than any king and hotter than dragon fire. A man who didn't hesitate to bare and spank me for daring to resist his rescue.

I knew in that moment not just that I would be his one day, but that I was his already.

The way he held me in his lap and caressed my burning bottom while my arousal soaked his massive thighs told me he knew it too, and that it was all he could do not to claim me right then.

But pain has left his heart as frozen as his realm, and it will take more than pure lust to melt it.

It will take the touch of his mate.

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## BOOKS OF THE ALPHA BROTHERHOOD SERIES

### *Savage*

**I thought no alpha could tame me. I was wrong.**

Many men have tried to master me, but never one like Aric. He is not just an alpha, he is a fearsome beast, and he means to take for himself what warriors and kings could not conquer.

I thought I could fight him, but his mere presence forced overwhelming, unimaginable need upon me and now it is too late. I'm about to go into heat, and what comes next will be truly shameful.

He's going to ravage me, ruthlessly laying claim to every single inch of me, and it's going to hurt. But no matter how desperately I plead as he wrenches one screaming climax after another from my helplessly willing body, he will not stop until I'm sore, spent, and marked as his.

It will be nothing short of savage.

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### *Primal*

**I escaped the chains of a king. Now a far more fearsome brute has claimed me.**

The Brotherhood gave him the right to breed me, but that is not why I am naked, wet, and sore.

My bottom bears the marks of his hard, punishing hand because I defied my alpha.

My body is slick with his seed and my own arousal because he took me anyway.

He didn't use me like a king enjoying a subject. He took me the way a beast claims his mate.

It was long, hard, and painfully intense, but it was much more than that.

It was primal.

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### *Rough*

**I came here as a spy. I ended up as the king's property.**

I was captured and locked in a dungeon, but it was only when I saw Magnar that I felt real fear.

He is a warrior and a king, but that is not why my virgin body quivers as I stand bare before him.

He is not merely an alpha. He is my alpha.

The one who will punish and master me.

The one who will claim and ravage me.

The one who will break me, but only after he's made me beg for it.

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### *Wild*



**She's going to scream for me and I don't care who hears it.**

I traveled to this city to disrupt the plans of the Brotherhood's enemies, not tame a defiant omega, but the moment Revna challenged me I knew punishing her would not be enough.

Despite her blushing protests, I'm going to bare her beautiful body and mark her quivering bottom with my belt, but she won't be truly put in her place until I put her flat on her back.

I'm her alpha and I will use her as I please.

**[Buy on Amazon](#)**

*Enigma*

**An alpha could not tame her. Now she will kneel before a god.**

For endless ages I've kept this world in balance, and over the centuries countless women have writhed and screamed and climaxed beneath me. But I've never felt the need for a mate.

Until today. Until her.

When I touch her, she trembles.

When I mark her defiant little bottom with my belt, her bare thighs glisten with helpless arousal.

When she lies next to me blushing, sore, and spent, my lust for her only grows stronger.

The world be damned. I'm going to claim her for myself.

**[Buy on Amazon](#)**

## BOOKS OF THE OMEGABORN TRILOGY

### *Frenzy*

Inside the walls I was a respected scientist. Out here I'm vulnerable, desperate, and soon to be at the mercy of the beasts and barbarians who rule these harsh lands. But that is not the worst of it.

When the suppressants that keep my shameful secret wear off, overwhelming, unimaginable need will take hold of me completely. I'm about to go into heat, and I know what comes next...

But I'm not the only one with instincts far beyond my control. Savage men roam this wilderness, driven by their very nature to claim a female like me more fiercely than I can imagine, paying no heed to my screams as one brutal climax after another is ripped from my helplessly willing body.

It won't be long now, and when the mating starts, it will be nothing short of a frenzy.

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### *Frantic*

Naked, bound, and helplessly on display, my arousal drips down my bare thighs and pools at my feet as the entire city watches, waiting for the inevitable. I'm going into heat, and they know it.

When the feral beasts who live outside the walls find me, they will show my virgin body no mercy. With my need growing more desperate by the second, I'm not sure I'll want them to...

By the time the brutes arrive to claim and ravage me, I'm going to be absolutely frantic.

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### *Fever*

I've led the Omegaborn for years, but the moment these brutes arrived from beyond the wall I knew everything was about to change. These beasts aren't here to take orders from me, they're here to take me the way I was meant to be taken, no matter how desperately I resist what I need.

Naked, punished, and sore, all I can do is scream out one savage, shameful climax after another as my body is claimed, used, and mastered. I'm about to learn what it means to be an omega...

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## BOOKS OF THE WOLF KINGS SERIES

### *Alpha King*

I thought I could defy the most powerful mafia boss in the city, but as Lawson Clearwater rips off my nightgown and pins me to the bed I'm certain he can smell more than just my fear.

This beast isn't just here to punish me. He's here to mount me, rut me, and mark me as his.

Forever.

**[Buy on Amazon](#)**

### *Alpha Boss*

She came here to find her sister. Her mate found her instead.

When she blew off my offer to help rescue her sister, Natalia Kotova learned the hard way that defying an alpha shifter will get you spanked until you are sobbing, then mounted and rutted.

But she's not bound to my bed with her dress and panties in shreds and every hole sore just because she needed a shameful lesson in manners from the most powerful mob boss in the city.

She's here because she's my mate.

**[Buy on Amazon](#)**

### *Alpha Brute*

I knew Elijah Baumann was a brute before he ripped off my clothes and blistered my bare backside with his belt. I knew it even before he mounted and rutted me with that same belt pulled tight around my throat to hold me helplessly in place for every desperate, shattering climax.

It was the way he looked at me.

Not like he hoped he might have me one day. Like I already belonged to him.

Like I was his mate.

**[Buy on Amazon](#)**

## BOOKS OF THE VAKARRAN CAPTIVES SERIES

### *Conquered*

I've lived in hiding since the Vakarrans arrived, helping my band of human survivors evade the aliens who now rule our world with an iron fist. But my luck ran out.

Captured by four of their fiercest warriors, I know what comes next. They'll make an example of me, to show how even the most defiant human can be broken, trained, and mastered.

I promise myself that I'll prove them wrong, that I'll never yield, even when I'm stripped bare, publicly shamed, and used in the most humiliating way possible.

But my body betrays me.

My will to resist falters as these brutes share me between the four of them and I can't help but wonder if soon, they will conquer my heart...

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### *Mastered*

First the Vakarrans took my home. Then they took my sister. Now, they have taken me.

As a prisoner of four of their fiercest warriors, I know what fate awaits me. Humans who dare to fight back the way I did are not just punished, they are taught their place in ways so shameful I shudder to think about them.

The four huge, intimidating alien brutes who took me captive are going to claim me in every way possible, using me more thoroughly than I can imagine. I despise them, yet as they force one savage, shattering climax after another from my naked, quivering body, I cannot help but wonder if soon I will beg for them to master me completely.

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### *Ravaged*

Though the aliens were the ones I always feared, it was my own kind who hurt me. Men took me captive, and it was four Vakarran warriors who saved me. But they don't plan to set me free...

I belong to them now, and they intend to make me theirs more thoroughly than I can imagine.

They are the enemy, and first I try to fight, then I try to run. But as they punish me, claim me, and share me between them, it isn't long before I am begging them to ravage me completely.

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### *Subdued*

The resistance sent them, but that's not really why these four battle-hardened Vakarrans are here.

They came for me. To conquer me. To master me. To ravage me. To strip me bare, punish me for the slightest hint of defiance, and use my quivering virgin body in

ways far beyond anything in even the very darkest of my dreams, until I've been utterly, completely, and shamefully subdued.

I vow never to beg for mercy, but I can't help wondering how long it will be until I beg for more.

**[Buy on Amazon](#)**

*Abducted*

When I left Earth behind to become a Celestial Mate, I was promised a perfect match. But four Vakarrans decided they wanted me, and Vakarrans don't ask for what they want, they take it.

These fearsome, savagely sexy alien warriors don't care what some computer program thinks would be best for me. They've claimed me as their mate, and soon they will claim my body.

I planned to resist, but after I was stripped bare and shamefully punished, they teased me until at last I pleaded for the climax I'd been so cruelly denied. When I broke, I broke completely. Now they are going to do absolutely anything they please with me, and I'm going to beg for all of it.

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## SCI-FI AND PARANORMAL ROMANCES BY SARA FIELDS

### *Feral*

He told me to stay away from him, that if I got too close he would not be able to stop himself. He would pin me down and take me so fiercely my throat would be sore from screaming before he finished wringing one savage, desperate climax after another from my helpless, quivering body.

Part of me was terrified, but another part needed to know if he would truly throw me to the ground, mount me, and rut me like a wild animal, longer and harder than any human ever could.

Now, as the feral beast flips me over to claim me even more shamefully when I've already been used more thoroughly than I imagined possible, I wonder if I should have listened to him...

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### *Inferno*

I thought I knew how to handle a man like him, but there are no men like him. Though he is a billionaire, when he desired me he did not try to buy me, and when he wanted me bared and bound he didn't call his bodyguards. He did it himself, even as I fought him, because he could.

He told me soon I would beg him to ravage me... and I did. But it wasn't the pain of his belt searing my naked backside that drove me to plead with him to use me so shamefully I might never stop blushing. I begged because my body knew its master, and it didn't give me a choice.

But my body is not all he plans to claim. He wants my mind and my soul too, and he will have them. He's going to take so much of me there will be nothing left. He's going to consume me.

[Buy on Amazon](#)

### *Manhandled*

Two hours ago, my ship reached the docks at Dryac.

An hour ago, a slaver tried to drag me into an alley.

Fifty-nine minutes ago, a beast of a man knocked him out cold.

Fifty-eight minutes ago, I told my rescuer to screw off, I could take care of myself.

Fifty-five minutes ago, I felt a thick leather belt on my bare backside for the first time.

Forty-five minutes ago, I started begging.

Thirty minutes ago, he bent me over a crate and claimed me in the most shameful way possible.

Twenty-nine minutes ago, I started screaming.

Twenty-five minutes ago, I climaxed with a crowd watching and my bottom sore inside and out.

Twenty-four minutes ago, I realized he was nowhere near done with me.

One minute ago, he finally decided I'd learned my lesson, for the moment at least.

As he leads me away, naked, well-punished, and very thoroughly used, he tells me I work for him now, I'll have to earn the privilege of clothing, and I'm his to enjoy as often as he pleases.

**Buy on Amazon**

***Marked***

I know how to handle men who won't take no for an answer, but Silas isn't a man. He's a beast who takes what he wants, as long and hard and savagely as he pleases, and tonight he wants me.

He's not even pretending he's going to be gentle. He's going to ravage me, and it's going to hurt.

I'll be spanked into quivering submission and used thoroughly and shamefully, but even when the endless series of helpless, screaming climaxes is finally over, I won't just be sore and spent.

I will be marked.

My body will no longer be mine. It will be his to use, his to enjoy, and his to breed, and no matter how desperate my need might grow in his absence, it will respond to his touch alone.

Forever.

**Buy on Amazon**

***Prize***

Exiled from Earth by a tyrannical government, I was meant to be sold for use on a distant world. But Vane doesn't buy things. When he wants something, he takes it, and I was no different.

This alien brute didn't just strip me, punish me, and claim me with his whole crew watching. He broke me, making me beg for mercy and then for far more shameful things. Perhaps he would've been gentle if I hadn't defied him in front of his men, but I doubt it. He's not the gentle type.

When he carried me aboard his ship naked, blushing, and sore, I thought I would be no more than a trophy to be shown off or a plaything to amuse him until he tired of me, but I was wrong.

He took me as a prize, but he's keeping me as his mate.

**Buy on Amazon**

***Alpha***

I used to believe beasts like him were nothing but legends and folklore. Then he came for me.

He is no mere alpha wolf. He is the fearsome expression of the virility of the Earth itself, come into the world for the first time in centuries to claim a human female fated to be his mate.

That human female is me.

When I ran, he caught me. When I fought him, he punished me.

I begged for mercy, but mercy isn't what he has in mind for me.

He's going to force one brutal climax after another from my naked, quivering body until my throat is sore from screaming and he's not going to stop until he is certain I know I am his.

Then he's going to breed me.

**Buy on Amazon**

***Thirst***

Cain came for me today. Even before he spoke his name his power all but drove me to my knees.

Power that can pin me against a wall with just a thought and hold me there as he slowly cuts my clothes from my quivering body, making sure I know he is enjoying every blushing moment.

Power that will punish me until I plead for mercy, tease and torment me until I beg for release, and then ravage me brutally over and over again until I'm utterly spent and shamefully broken.

Power that will claim me as his forever.

**Buy on Amazon**

***Alien Conqueror***

He's going to take me the same way they took our planet. Without gentleness or remorse.

I dared to defy him, but as this alien brute rips my clothes off and mounts me with my bottom still burning from his punishing hand it is clear what is in store for me isn't mere vengeance.

It is conquest.

Soon I will know what it means to be utterly and shamefully broken, my helpless body ravaged and plundered in every way imaginable, and when he is done I won't just be sore and spent.

I will be his.

**Buy on Amazon**

***Guardian***

After watching over this world for millennia, a woman wandering in the woods should have been of no interest to me. But the moment I saw her bathing in a stream, only raw instinct mattered.

I was able to keep my lust at bay for a little while... until the scent of her helpless arousal as I reddened her bare bottom for putting herself in danger told me she was ready to be claimed.

But even if she'd been less reckless it would have made no difference in the end.

Sooner or later, she was always going to be mine.

**Buy on Amazon**

***Dark Beast***

Many a blushing lass has screamed my name in bed over the long years I've walked this land, watching over humanity even after they turned their backs on me. But I've never claimed a mate.

Until Layna.



When I first set eyes on this beautiful creature she was fighting for her life against more men than I could count, and at that very moment I vowed to protect her... and to make her mine.

That is a promise I plan to keep, even if it means stripping her bare, marking her bottom with my belt, and forcing her to one heart-stopping climax after another until she surrenders completely.

I'm not just going to keep her safe. I'm going to keep her forever.

**[Buy on Amazon](#)**

***Blushing Bride***

No man had taken a woman as his and his alone for centuries... and he hadn't even asked.

He'd just told her she was to be his bride, watched her blush at the shameful term, then fisted her hair and pulled her in for a brutal, possessive kiss the moment she opened her mouth to protest.

A kiss that made clear this wasn't up to her, and that even if it were they both knew she would choose to wear his ring, share his bed, and one day bear his children. A kiss that said she was his already, and there was so much more to come as he taught her what that meant in every way.

She climaxed then and there as his tongue claimed her mouth.

She didn't say yes, because she didn't need to. Her body said it for her.

**[Buy on Amazon](#)**

## BOOKS OF THE BOSTON KINGS SERIES

### *Take Me, Daddy*

Kieran Murphy is an Irish mob boss and one of the most powerful men in Boston, and when he walks me home people step aside out of respect for him. He could have any woman he wants.

So why does he have eyes only for me?

Is it how he has to lift my chin with his fingers to keep my eyes level with his when he scolds me, and how I cover my bottom instinctively when he tells me that I've earned a spanking?

Or is it how I quiver at the thought of everything I'm too ashamed to beg him to do to me, and how hard I come for him when he does all of it and more without me even having to ask?

Maybe it's all of those, but I'm pretty sure there's something else too.

I think he loves how I blush when he makes me call him daddy.

### [Buy on Amazon](#)

### *Make Me, Daddy*

Caitlin McCormick is used to doing as she pleases, but that's about to change.

She's sitting on a bright red bottom because I promised her father I would look out for her, but she's in my private jet on her way back to Boston with me because she needs something more.

A daddy.

One who will spank her when she's been naughty, then pin her to the wall and take what is his.

But what really makes her blush isn't that I didn't give her a choice.

It's that we both know she didn't want one.

### [Buy on Amazon](#)

### *Break Me, Daddy*

When Shane Kavanagh waltzed into the Murphy pub as if he owned the place, what set my heart racing wasn't his brash arrogance, his obnoxiously gorgeous eyes, or his scoldy yet sexy tone. It wasn't even him promising to spank me and then ravage me the way no man has ever dared.

It was how he made me feel like a naughty little girl and a blushing virgin when I'm neither.

I'm the daughter of a powerful Irish mafia family and he's the boss of a rival organization, but when he rides me with his belt tight around my throat it doesn't make me want to call a hitman.

It makes me want to call him daddy.

**Buy on Amazon**

## BOOKS OF THE KEPT AS HIS SERIES

### *Mine to Keep*

I can still remember the moment I first heard Cyrus Holt's deep, commanding voice.

I didn't know who he was or about the life he'd left behind. I was just a trembling orphan on the run from a monster, and he was the man offering me shelter and not giving me a choice about it.

This boss of bosses didn't assign someone else to watch over me. He slept on the floor next to my bed when I woke up scared, then spanked me like a naughty little girl when I lied to him.

He could have claimed me that night, ravaging me without mercy or remorse.

But he didn't.

He made me beg for it first.

Because he didn't just want me as his for a night. He wanted me as his to keep.

[Buy on Amazon](#)

### *Mine to Hold*

*Baby girl.*

The man whispering those words in my ear isn't just a powerful mob boss. He's the brute who stripped me bare, whipped me with his belt, and claimed my virgin body roughly and shamefully in front of his men as I screamed and begged and came for him until I collapsed in his arms.

I should hate it when he calls me that.

But all I do is blush as I wait for him to make me his all over again.

Because I'm his to hold.

Forever.

[Buy on Amazon](#)

### *Mine to Take*

After escaping both my father's plans to marry me off and the Russian mafia, I woke up this morning thinking I was a free woman... until I saw the man sipping coffee in my hotel room.

He's a billionaire as powerful as any mob boss, yet even as he spanks me into soaking wet, shameful surrender I can't help begging him to ravage my virgin body right then and there.

I can run, but I know soon I'll be kneeling at his feet, bare, blushing, and ready to be claimed.

Because I'm his to take.

**Buy on Amazon**

## MAFIA AND BILLIONAIRE ROMANCES BY SARA FIELDS

### *Fear*

She wasn't supposed to be there tonight. I took her because I had no other choice, but as I carried her from her home dripping wet and wearing nothing but a towel, I knew I would be keeping her.

I'm going to make her tell me everything I need to know. Then I'm going to make her mine.

She'll sob as my belt lashes her bottom and she'll scream as climax after savage climax is forced from her naked, quivering body, but there will be no mercy no matter how shamefully she begs.

She's not just going to learn to obey me. She's going to learn to fear me.

[Buy on Amazon](#)

### *On Her Knees*

Blaire Conrad isn't just the most popular girl at Stonewall Academy. She's a queen who reigns over her subjects with an iron fist. But she's made me an enemy, and I don't play by her rules.

I make the rules, and I punish my enemies.

She'll scream and beg as I strip her, spank her, and force one brutal climax after another from her beautiful little body, but before I'm done with her she'll beg me shamefully for so much more.

It's time for the king to teach his queen her place.

[Buy on Amazon](#)

### *Boss*

The moment Brooke Mikael's walked into my office, I knew she was mine. She needed my help and thought she could use her sweet little body to get it, but she learned a hard lesson instead.

I don't make deals with silly little girls. I spank them.

She'll get what she needs, but first she'll moan and beg and scream with each brutal climax as she takes everything I give her. She belongs to me now, and soon she'll know what that means.

[Buy on Amazon](#)

### *His Majesty*

Maximo Giovanni Santaro is a king. A real king, like in the old days. The kind I didn't know still existed. The kind who commands obedience and punishes any hint of defiance from his subjects.

His Majesty doesn't take no for an answer, and refusing his royal command has earned me not just a spanking that will leave me sobbing, but a lesson so utterly shameful that it will serve as an example for anyone else who might dare to disobey him. I will beg and plead as one brutal, screaming climax after another ravages my quivering body, but there will be no mercy for me.

He's not going to stop until he's taught me that my rightful place is at his feet, blushing and sore.

**Buy on Amazon**

***Pet***

Even before Chloe Banks threw a drink in my face in front of a room full of powerful men who know better than to cross me, her fate was sealed. I had already decided to make her my pet.

I would have taught her to obey in the privacy of my penthouse, but her little stunt changed that.

My pet learned her place in public instead, blushing as she was bared, sobbing as she was spanked, and screaming as she was brought to one brutal, humiliating climax after another.

But she has so many more lessons to learn. Lessons more shameful than she can imagine.

She will plead for mercy as she is broken, but before long she will purr like a kitten.

**Buy on Amazon**

***Blush for Daddy***

**“Please spank me, Daddy. Please make it hurt.”**

Only a ruthless bastard would make an innocent virgin say those words when she came to him desperate for help, then savor every quiver of her voice as she begs for something so shameful.

I didn't even hesitate.

I made Keri Esposito's problems go away. Then I made her call me daddy.

The image of that little bottom bare over my lap was more than I could resist, and the thought of her kneeling naked at my feet to thank me properly afterwards left me as hard as I've ever been.

Maybe I'm a monster, but I saw the wet spot on her panties before I pulled them down.

She didn't come to my door just for the kind of help only a powerful billionaire could offer.

She came because she needed me to make her blush for daddy.

**Buy on Amazon**

***Reckoning***

Dean Waterhouse was supposed to be a job. Get in. Get married. Take his money and get out.

But he came after me.

Now I'm bound to his bed, about to learn what happens to naughty girls who play games.

The man who put his ring on my finger was gentle. The man who tracked me down is not.

He's going to make me blush, beg, and scream for him.

Then he's going to make me call him daddy.

**Buy on Amazon**

***Bride***

This morning I was a businesswoman with no plans to marry, but that didn't matter to him. He decided tonight was my wedding night, so it was. All he let me choose was the dress he would tear off me later.

When I told him I wanted him to be gentle, he laughed at me, then ripped off my panties.

I shouldn't have been wet. I shouldn't have moaned. But I was, and I did.

When he threw me on the bed, I told him I'd never be his no matter how he made me scream.

He just smiled. The kind of smile that said this was going to hurt and he was going to enjoy every moment of it. Then he bent down and whispered something in my ear that shook me to my core.

“You're already mine. You always have been.”

**[Buy on Amazon](#)**

### ***Daddy's Property***

As Cami Davis stands in front of me in her nightgown, cheeks blushing and voice quavering, I know what she's come to ask me even before she can muster the courage to speak the words.

Did I really mean what I said to her earlier tonight?

Would I really take her over my knee and spank her like a naughty little girl?

She's a nineteen-year-old orphan and I'm a billionaire with plans to run for mayor. I shouldn't even be thinking about pulling down her panties and turning that cute little bottom bright red, let alone bending her over the dining room table and claiming her roughly right then and there.

But the moment I found her squatting in my newly purchased estate I knew what I needed.

Her.

Calling me daddy.

**[Buy on Amazon](#)**

### ***The Count***

**Jasmina Harker is an innocent virgin, but it doesn't matter.**

I want her.

No, I need her.

From the very first moment I laid eyes on her, I knew she was the one. I craved nothing more than to tear the clothes right off her and force one screaming climax after the next from her quivering body until she admits that she needs me too.

I may be the worst kind of monster, but she will still be mine.

**[Buy on Amazon](#)**

### ***Stolen Vows***



The moment I saw Natasha Page standing at the altar, waiting for a fiancé whose lies had already cost him his life and put hers in danger, I knew she would be speaking her vows today after all.

To me.

I could have claimed her that night, ravaging her quivering virgin body as brutally as my lust demanded. But I made her beg before I tore off that beautiful dress and took what belongs to me.

Because I don't just want her vows. I want her heart.

**[Buy on Amazon](#)**

## BOOKS OF THE CAPTIVE BRIDES SERIES

### *Wedded to the Warriors*

As an unauthorized third child, nineteen-year-old Aimee Harrington has spent her life avoiding discovery by government authorities, but her world comes crashing down around her after she is caught stealing a vehicle in an act of petulant rebellion. Within hours of her arrest, she is escorted onto a ship bound for a detention center in the far reaches of the solar system.

This facility is no ordinary prison, however. It is a training center for future brides, and once Aimee has been properly prepared, she will be intimately, shamefully examined and then sold to an alien male in need of a mate. Worse still, Aimee's defiant attitude quickly earns her the wrath of the strict warden, and to make an example of her, Aimee is offered as a wife not to a sophisticated gentleman but to three huge, fiercely dominant warriors of the planet Ollorin.

Though Ollorin males are considered savages on Earth, Aimee soon realizes that while her new mates will demand her obedience and will not hesitate to spank her soundly if her behavior warrants it, they will also cherish and protect her in a way she has never experienced before. But when the time comes for her men to master her completely, will she find herself begging for more as her beautiful body is claimed hard and thoroughly by all three of them at once?

[Buy on Amazon](#)

### *Her Alien Doctors*

After nineteen-year-old Jenny Monroe is caught stealing from the home of a powerful politician, she is sent to a special prison in deep space to be trained for her future role as an alien's bride.

Despite the public bare-bottom spanking she receives upon her arrival at the detention center, Jenny remains defiant, and before long she earns herself a trip to the notorious medical wing of the facility. Once there, Jenny quickly discovers that a sore bottom will now be the least of her worries, and soon enough she is naked, restrained, and shamefully on display as three stern, handsome alien doctors examine and correct her in the most humiliating ways imaginable.

The doctors are experts in the treatment of naughty young women, and as Jenny is brought ever closer to the edge of a shattering climax only to be denied again and again, she finds herself begging to be taken in any way they please. But will her captors be content to give Jenny up once her punishment is over, or will they decide to make her their own and master her completely?

[Buy on Amazon](#)

### *Taming Their Pet*

When the scheming of her father's political enemies makes it impossible to continue hiding the fact that she is an unauthorized third child, twenty-year-old Isabella Bedard is sent to a detainment facility in deep space where she will be prepared for her new life as an alien's bride.

Her situation is made far worse after some ill-advised mischief forces the strict warden to ensure that she is sold as quickly as possible, and before she knows it, Isabella is standing naked before two huge, roughly handsome alien men, helpless and utterly on display for their inspection. More disturbing still, the men make it clear that they are buying her not as a bride, but as a pet.

Zack and Noah have made a career of taming even the most headstrong of females, and they waste no time in teaching their new pet that her absolute obedience will be expected and even the slightest defiance will earn her a painful, embarrassing bare-bottom spanking, along with far more humiliating punishments if her behavior makes it necessary.

Over the coming weeks, Isabella is trained as a pony and as a kitten, and she learns what it means to fully surrender her body to the bold dominance of two men who will not hesitate to claim her in any way they please. But though she cannot deny her helpless arousal at being so thoroughly mastered, can she truly allow herself to fall in love with men who keep her as a pet?

**[Buy on Amazon](#)**

### ***Sold to the Beasts***

As an unauthorized third child with parents who were more interested in their various criminal enterprises than they were in her, Michelle Carter is used to feeling unloved, but it still hurts when she is brought to another world as a bride for two men who turn out not to even want one.

After Roan and Dane lost the woman they loved, they swore there would never be anyone else, and when their closest friend purchases a beautiful human he hopes will become their wife, they reject the match. Though they are cursed to live as outcasts who shift into terrible beasts, they are not heartless, so they offer Michelle a place in their home alongside the other servants. She will have food, shelter, and all she needs, but discipline will be strict and their word will be law.

Michelle soon puts Roan and Dane to the test, and when she disobeys them her bottom is bared for a deeply humiliating public spanking. Despite her situation, the punishment leaves her shamefully aroused and longing for her new masters to make her theirs, and as the days pass they find that she has claimed a place in their hearts as well. But when the same enemy who took their first love threatens to tear Roan and Dane away from her, will Michele risk her life to intervene?

**[Buy on Amazon](#)**

### ***Mated to the Dragons***

After she uncovers evidence of a treasonous conspiracy by the most powerful man on Earth, Jada Rivers ends up framed for a terrible crime, shipped off to a detention facility in deep space, and kept in solitary confinement until she can be sold as a bride. But the men who purchase her are no ordinary aliens. They are dragons, the kings of Draegira, and she will be their shared mate.

Bruddis and Draego are captivated by Jada, but before she can become their queen the beautiful, feisty little human will need to be publicly claimed, thoroughly trained, and put to the test in the most shameful manner imaginable. If she will not yield her body and her heart to them completely, the fire in their blood will burn out of control until it destroys the brotherly bond between them, putting their entire world at risk of a cataclysmic war.

Though Jada is shocked by the demands of her dragon kings, she is left helplessly aroused by their stern dominance. With her virgin body quivering with need, she cannot bring herself to resist as they take her hard and savagely in any way they please. But can she endure the trials before her and claim her place at their side, or will her stubborn defiance bring Draegira to ruin?

**[Buy on Amazon](#)**

## BOOKS OF THE TERRANOVUM BRIDES SERIES

### *A Gift for the King*

For an ordinary twenty-two-year-old college student like Lana, the idea of being kidnapped from Earth by aliens would have sounded absurd... until the day it happened. As Lana quickly discovers, however, her abduction is not even the most alarming part of her situation. To her shock, she soon learns that she is to be stripped naked and sold as a slave to the highest bidder.

When she resists the intimate, deeply humiliating procedures necessary to prepare her for the auction, Lana merely earns herself a long, hard, bare-bottom spanking, but her passionate defiance catches the attention of her captor and results in a change in his plans. Instead of being sold, Lana will be given as a gift to Dante, the region's powerful king.

Dante makes it abundantly clear that he will expect absolute obedience and that any misbehavior will be dealt with sternly, yet in spite of everything Lana cannot help feeling safe and cared for in the handsome ruler's arms. Even when Dante's punishments leave her with flaming cheeks and a bottom sore from more than just a spanking, it only sets her desire for him burning hotter.

But though Dante's dominant lovemaking brings her pleasure beyond anything she ever imagined, Lana fears she may never be more than a plaything to him, and her fears soon lead to rebellion. When an escape attempt goes awry and she is captured by Dante's most dangerous enemy, she is left to wonder if her master cares for her enough to come to her rescue. Will the king risk everything to reclaim what is his, and if he does bring his human girl home safe and sound, can he find a way to teach Lana once and for all that she belongs to him completely?

[Buy on Amazon](#)

### *A Gift for the Doctor*

After allowing herself to be taken captive in order to save her friends, Morgana awakens to find herself naked, bound, and at the mercy of a handsome doctor named Kade. She cannot hide her helpless arousal as her captor takes his time thoroughly examining her bare body, but when she disobeys him she quickly discovers that defiance will earn her a sound spanking.

His stern chastisement and bold dominance awaken desires within her that she never knew existed, but Morgana is shocked when she learns the truth about Kade. As a powerful shifter and the alpha of his pack, he has been ordered by the evil lord who took Morgana prisoner to claim her and sire children with her in order to combine the strength of their two bloodlines.

Kade's true loyalties lie with the rebels seeking to overthrow the tyrant, however, and he has his own reasons for desiring Morgana as his mate. Though submitting to a dominant alpha does not come easily to a woman who was once her kingdom's most powerful sorceress, Kade's masterful lovemaking is unlike anything she has experienced before, and soon enough she is aching for his touch. But with civil war on the verge of engulfing the capital, will Morgana be torn from the arms of the man she loves or will she stand and fight at his side no matter the cost?

[Buy on Amazon](#)

### *A Gift for the Commander*

After she is rescued from a cruel tyrant and brought to the planet Terranovum, Olivia soon discovers that she is to be auctioned to the highest bidder. But before she can be sold, she must be trained, and the man who will train her is none other than the commander of the king's army.

Wes has tamed many human females, and when Olivia resists his efforts to bathe her in preparation for her initial inspection, he strips the beautiful, feisty girl bare and spansks her soundly. His stern chastisement leaves Olivia tearful and repentant yet undeniably aroused, and after the punishment she cannot resist begging for her new master's touch.

Once she has been examined Olivia's training begins in earnest, and Wes takes her to his bed to teach her what it means to belong to a dominant man. But try as he might, he cannot bring himself to see Olivia as just another slave. She touches his heart in a way he thought nothing could, and with each passing day he grows more certain that he must claim her as his own. But with war breaking out across Terranovum, can Wes protect both his world and his woman?

**[Buy on Amazon](#)**

## MORE STORMY NIGHT BOOKS BY SARA FIELDS

### *Claimed by the General*

When Ayala intervenes to protect a fellow slave-girl from a cruel man's unwanted attentions, she catches the eye of the powerful general Lord Eiotan. Impressed with both her boldness and her beauty, the handsome warrior takes Ayala into his home and makes her his personal servant.

Though Eiotan promises that Ayala will be treated well, he makes it clear that he expects his orders to be followed and he warns her that any disobedience will be sternly punished. Lord Eiotan is a man of his word, and when Ayala misbehaves she quickly finds herself over his knee for a long, hard spanking on her bare bottom. Being punished in such a humiliating manner leaves her blushing, but it is her body's response to his chastisement which truly shames her.

Ayala does her best to ignore the intense desire his firm-handed dominance kindles within her, but when her new master takes her in his arms she cannot help longing for him to claim her, and when he makes her his own at last, his masterful lovemaking introduces her to heights of pleasure she never thought possible.

But as news of the arrival of an invader from across the sea reaches the city and a ruthless conqueror sets his eyes on Ayala, her entire world is thrown into turmoil. Will she be torn from Lord Eiotan's loving arms, or will the general do whatever it takes to keep her as his own?

[Buy on Amazon](#)

### *Kept for Christmas*

After Raina LeBlanc shows up for a meeting unprepared because she was watching naughty videos late at night instead of working, she finds herself in trouble with Dr.

Eliot Knight, her stern, handsome boss. He makes it clear that she is in need of strict discipline, and soon she is lying over his knee for a painful, embarrassing bare-bottom spanking.

Though her helpless display of arousal during the punishment fills Raina with shame, she is both excited and comforted when Eliot takes her in his arms after it is over, and when he invites her to spend the upcoming Christmas holiday with him she happily agrees. But is she prepared to offer him the complete submission he demands?

[Buy on Amazon](#)

### *The Warrior's Little Princess*

Irena cannot remember who she is, where she came from, or how she ended up alone in a dark forest wearing only a nightgown, but none of that matters as much as the fact that the vile creatures holding her captive seem intent on having her for dinner. Fate intervenes, however, when a mysterious, handsome warrior arrives in the nick of time to save her.

Darius has always known that one day he would be forced by the power within him to claim a woman, and after he rescues the beautiful, innocent Irena he decides to make her his own. But the feisty girl will require more than just the protection Darius can offer. She will need both his gentle, loving care and his firm hand applied to her bare bottom whenever she is naughty.

Irena soon finds herself quivering with desire as Darrius masters her virgin body completely, and she delights in her new life as his little girl. But Darrius is much more than an ordinary sellsword, and being his wife will mean belonging to him utterly, to be taken hard and often in even the most shameful of ways. When the truth of her own identity is revealed at last, will she still choose to remain by his side?

**[Buy on Amazon](#)**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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### **About Sara Fields**

Sara is a USA Today bestselling romance author with a proclivity for dirty things, especially those centered in DARK, FANTASY, and ROMANCE. If you like science fiction, fantasy, reverse harem, menage, pet play and other kinky filthy things, all complete with happily-ever-afters, then you will enjoy her books.

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