

WITCHY GAMES



BOOK ONE

GAMER QUEER

READY... SET... DOPS

INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR
KIRA ROMAN

GAME OVER

WITCHY GAMES

BOOK 1

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*To my readers I see you,
There are no less than 8 men in this series
Every time I sit down to write a new one pops up
This book is for you thirsty peeps who just want someone to be obsessed with
them or 8+ someones...*

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PROLOGUE



Moon - Age Fifteen

The Elven games, or if you want to be fancy The Elven Tournament of Blood, is held every ten years in the Elven Realm. Ten years ago today, my father was taken away in a cage.

The Fae Queen sentenced him to eternal imprisonment. I still don't know what the charges were, because the Fae guards wouldn't tell me shit, and my mother dipped out before I could get answers from her.

What kind of mother abandons her child the day after she loses her father? Not only that, but I was extremely ill. I still remember that day so clearly.

“You must enter the Elven games, Moon. Only the Elven crystals will be enough to free me,” my father says as the magical collar is wrapped around his neck. “Take this! Never take it off, Moon, no matter what.” The necklace is still too big, and the crystal hangs almost to my belly button. Tears fall down my face as I watch my father walk onto the platform and up into the cage. I look around the sidewalk as strangers pass me by, no one saying a word as they all stare at my father.

“Is there someone I can call to come get you, sweetie?” the older woman from the ice cream shop we just left, asks. My melted strawberry cone lies on the concrete, and I wish I could just melt with it.

“My mom,” I say, wiping my snotty nose on my shirt, as I watch my father disappear.

My mother picked me up off that sidewalk and cradled me in her arms as I cried. I started feeling sick that day, and by the time the sun went down, I was feeling so bad, I couldn't even sit up. When I woke up the next morning, Grams was crying, and my mother was gone.

For years, I thought she was coming home. Then I realized that was just some dumb kid's naive wish. Mom was gone. Dad was gone. But I had Grams.

I flick the TV on and turn to the universal channel that's only available for the Elven Games.

“I wish you wouldn't watch this,” Grams grumbles, as she walks into the

room.

“I have to.” I cross my arms over my chest and settle in. I watch every player carefully, noting the things they do wrong and where they fuck up. I watch the things that get someone killed, and the one man no one seems capable of beating.

Crow. An Elven man that moves with deadly accuracy but looks like some kind of model. Shoulder-length blond hair and curved ears. His brown eyes spark to life with every kill. Even though death isn't supposed to be a part of the games, we all know it's inevitable. It's like an unspoken promise. I mean, Tournament of Blood? What kind of name would that be if no one bleeds?

I note the way he fights and the fact that he's skilled in every trial of the game as well. He's fast, agile, and quiet.

The way he moves is impressive, and two weeks later, when he wins the tournament, I'm not the least bit surprised.

“Thank goodness it's over,” Grams murmurs, as we watch Crow receive his trophy and the ultimate reward. Rare Crystals, only available if you win the Tournament. He'll be treated like royalty for the next ten years. Until the next Games, and there's a new Champion.

That Champion will be me.

CHAPTER

ONE



Moon - Ten Years Later

“Jerry, I swear on chicken fried fuck balls, if you don't cover the left while I grab this damn flag, I will fillet you and mail the pieces to your mother!” I snap, gripping my controller too tight as I practically breathe fire into the mic. I'm sitting on my favorite bean bag panda, legs crossed, eyes glued to the TV screen, attempting to enjoy my day off. I would be if Jerry wasn't being such a camping bitch. I swear, he does this just to make me scream at him.

“Relax, Moonlight,” Jerry grumbles, before sniffing.

I nervously chew my bottom lip as I crouch low behind a pile of rubble since this map is meant to resemble a demolished mall.

I know this nearly thirty-year-old wolf shifter isn't crying. Again.

“Jerry, are you crying?” I hiss, as I move my character through the game, taking out as many of the other team's players as I can. They'll respawn, of course, but every kill counts in this game.

The map is a big circle with one flag in the red zone and one flag in the blue. We're blue, so our objective is to capture the red flag before they get ours. There are three rounds, and this is round two. Jerry failed the last round, along with the rest of us, and the red team managed to capture our flag and return it to their base.

Jerry is the only player on the team I know, so he's the only one I can yell at. He's another gamer I met online a few years ago, but man, does he suck. At least at capture the flag. He does alright in the survivalist games, but first-person shooter games will forever be my favorite. When he saw I was online, he asked to join. Little did I know I'd be carrying his ass the whole game.

I love that this is my job, but right now, I'm playing for fun. Jerry is seriously killing my vibe at the moment, though, with all that sniffing.

“No.” Jerry sniffs again, and I sigh.

“Jerry, tell me the truth. Are you crying?” I creep behind a destroyed car, ready to sprint forward and grab the flag when I spot another player from my team. He's about to grab the flag when the opposite team shoots him down. It's a sniper, but I can't pinpoint their location.

“You're just kind of, you know, mean, sometimes...” Jerry huffs, and I'm thankful he can't see how far back into my head my eyes roll.

“Oh, Jerry,” I sigh, pinching the bridge of my nose. I'm stuck in this spot

until the sniper reveals himself or someone else gets him first, so I take a moment to shake off my tense aggression. “Listen, I’m sorry, just... watch my back, yeah?” I try to sound chipper. I need to relax, as Jerry said. This isn’t a serious game... I’m just here to let off some steam. But once I get into the zone, I can’t exactly control my game rage.

“Sniper,” Jerry mumbles in a dull tone before taking the guy out. Then, before I can overthink it, I dash out and snatch up the flag.

“Fuck yeah, Jerry! Follow me!” I shout, as I make a run for it. It’s a decent distance, but surprisingly, Jerry keeps up and helps me make it all the way back to our base. “Hell yes, Jerry! That’s what I’m talking about, bitch!” I whoop and hear Jerry let out a small laugh. “You like it when I call you bitch, don’t you, Jerry?” I tease, as the next round starts, and I can just imagine him blushing furiously from my words.

“Jeez, Moonlight,” Jerry groans, and I laugh much too hard, but can’t help it. He’s just too easy to rile up, one way or the other. He’s also the only person I let call me Moonlight. Mostly because we’ve never met, and Jerry actually has a deep and kind of sexy voice, even though he’s terrible at gaming.

“What? You didn’t say no.” I smirk, the poor guy is probably trying so hard to convince himself he’s not into it.

“Why are you like this?” Jerry grumbles, and I scoff.

“Like what? Super amazing and extra awesome?”

“A tease. Kind of mean and super hot,” he says, and I cackle.

“Oh, Jerry,” I say again, but this time, I smile. “One day you’ll meet a sweetheart who thinks you’re just the best guy ever. One who doesn’t push you around unless you ask for it. Now, cover my back, or I’ll follow through with my threat.” My voice darkens at the end, so he doesn’t fall back into his sucky mode.

“Anything for you, Moonlight.” I don’t miss the way he tries to flirt, and sometimes, I even flirt back, but right now, I’m in the zone.

“Focus, Jerry.”

“Yes, Mistress.”

I play eight more games with Jerry, who apparently just needed a slight pep talk, or maybe it was my threat. He manages to stay close, helping me successfully capture flag after flag for countless rounds. I actually have a blast, despite poor Jerry realizing he’s definitely got a submission kink.

“Be a good boy, Jerry,” I tease, before our last round.

“Fucking hell, Moonlight.” He plays the best game of his life. Sheesh, poor Jerry.

By the time my fingers ache, and my body is stiff, I realize the sun set a long while ago.

Oops, I was supposed to go grab some groceries... I guess I can always do that tomorrow after I sign up for the Games.

I don't have to clock in till noon tomorrow, which is probably the second-best thing about my job. Truthfully, I could go in earlier if I really wanted to. But I don't. I wonder if there are actually people out there who genuinely enjoy waking up at such a mind-numbing time.

I can hardly manage to get up before ten a.m. most days.

I log off, after letting Jerry know I didn't hate playing with him today.

Taking off my headphones, I hang them on their stand and then put my controller in its case. I pull on a hoodie and grab my phone, curling up on my futon. Technically this is my office, but I live here too. It's a small studio apartment style room, with a mini kitchen and bathroom, so why not? Of course, I filled it with my favorite things, added a wall-to-wall bookshelf, and even painted the walls my favorite color. Dark purple.

As soon as I'm comfortable, I open my phone and see a message from Marcellus that I promptly ignore. He'll track me down if it's important, but I have a feeling I know what he's going to say.

Not in the mood to play anything else or talk to anyone right now, I just scroll through my newsfeed mindlessly. I considered logging onto Echo's live but decided against it. He'll notice I'm there, and I don't really feel like doing anything other than lying here.

Of course, this means I see pictures of my ex and his new girlfriend, who are both super excited to sign up for the Games tomorrow! Cue eye roll.

I would rather make out with a Goblin than deal with this shit. He's just joining to fuck with me. I told him how much winning meant to me, and he never even mentioned giving a shit about the Games.

Spencer and I broke up months ago. Wait... two years ago, actually. He'd shown up at my office, nearly kicked the door in, and screamed at me about not putting out often enough. Nasty fuck. Ugh. I still kick myself over dating that creep.

Well, Marcellus showed up, ready to decapitate Spencer with his bare hands, but I can take care of myself. Marcellus watched as I punched Spencer in the throat and then kicked him in his junk for good measure. Then I

dragged him by his ear down the hall and literally tossed him out of the window from the thirtieth floor. I smirk to myself at the reminder of his scream.

Obviously, he's fine. Since, you know, he didn't die. But he did get quite the scare since he was unaware that our building has a very strong safety net in place to prevent any accidental death. Magic caught his ass and placed him gently on the concrete, and I got to watch the footage of him screaming like a baby for weeks. Of course, Marcellus refused to allow me to release the footage. Something about getting sued.

I drop my head back and stare up at my star-covered ceiling. Waving my hand in the air, I make the stars dance and zone out.

If I see that skeezy fuck in the games, I'll steal his girlfriend and run away with her. Set her free from that butt beaver.

I know him well enough to know he picked a girl who's meek and quiet, especially after dating me. He thinks he wants a girl like me, but the reality is, he can't control someone like me, and he hates it.

He wasn't abusive, just a dick head. He was smashed off his ass the day he showed up here. I don't know what he thought I'd do, but he was not expecting me to kick his ass.

Dumbass.

I need to stop scrolling and just go to bed. Tomorrow, I have to be up at eight a.m. The devil's hour. Jk, jk. Kind of.

CHAPTER TWO



Moon

“Full name, and realm of origin?” the petite Elven woman asks in a bored tone, not even bothering to look up from the stack of papers in front of her as she flips through them. You know when you can just tell that someone hates their job? Yeah, that’s this lady.

“Uh, full-full name?” I ask, already cringing. My full name is probably the most embarrassing thing about me. It’s a mouthful, and I cannot fathom why my Grams thought it was a good idea to make it so long. Or so ridiculous. Normally, giving the Fae or Elves your name is a big no-no. But for the purposes of something like this, signing up for the games, it’s at least mildly safe. The only contract it obligates you to is participation. My intuition tells me this woman isn’t a threat, just really bored.

“That *is* what I said,” she grumbles, rolling her eyes, but still not looking at me. She mumbles something under her breath about dense Witches, before letting out a heavy sigh.

“Hurry up!” the woman behind me snaps. Or rather, the woman on the shoulders of the Giant behind me. Okay, that’s one way to get around. Certainly keeps others from causing you harm when they can’t even reach you. I’m both impressed and terrified.

“Aphrodite Moonlight Blossom Hart...” I rush to say, trying to keep my voice low. There’s a pause as her eyebrows go up, and she finally looks at me. She snorts and starts to sift through her papers once more. Wow, rude.

“You’re already in the Games, Aphrod—”

“Please don’t say it, I go by just my middle name,” I interrupt her, not wanting to hear her say my given name. It’s a damn crime. I love you Grams, but honestly, not cool.

“Moonlight,” a man says, as he steps up behind the Elven woman. A handsome man, that I quickly look away from. “Hmm,” he looks down at the papers, and the small woman jumps to her feet with a yelp, bowing low.

“Champion Crow!” Her voice is shrill and startled. I’m still in a bit of shock after her sudden movement and the fact that I didn’t see this guy before his sudden appearance behind her. How I missed him is beyond me. He’s a force as he stands there in all black, hidden by shadows, but I can see his striking brown eyes trained right on me every time I glance up.

“There must be a mistake, I haven’t signed up yet.” I’m ignoring the fact

that the woman is still bowing to the Champion. He's the Elf who won ten years ago. I'm suddenly glad that I can't see his face because, from what I remember, he's seriously hot and super scary.

"You're in the Games, Moonlight. It matters not if you signed yourself up or if someone else did it for you," Crow answers me, rather than the woman. Looking up, the sight of him steals my breath completely as he lowers his hood. Fucking hell. All the Elves are attractive, but damn, he's even hotter in person. Same blond hair I remember, but it's longer now, hanging midway down his back. Dark brown eyes and chiseled cheekbones. He looks like a marble statue. It's been ten years, which means he's thirty now, but he doesn't look like he's aged a single day.

"Oh." I can't say I have any idea what's going on, but I just nod. I won't argue myself out of this one. I wanted in, and now here I am. How I got in does not matter to me. That's a problem for future Moon.

"Next!" the Elven woman snaps, and it's clear I'm being dismissed as Crow walks away keeping his eyes on me.

I hustle to the second table, trying not to stare at the Elf, even though I can still feel his eyes on my body. Telling the woman my formal name for the sake of the Games is okay, but giving your name to the Elves or Fae can be a mistake you can't take back. If they already know your name, though, that's okay, right? I didn't tell Crow my name, he read it. And he didn't have to tell me his, I just knew it.

I should have worn a nicer outfit. Ripped jeans and a baggy, black t-shirt aren't unattractive, but when you pair them with raggedy sneakers and a messy head of purple hair? I'm not exactly a catch in this form.

Not that I have time for a relationship. I'm also not trying to attract the attention of the Elven man, but I would probably feel less self-conscious if I were dressed a bit better. I feel like everyone looking at me is thinking, 'What's this chick even doing here? She's got no hope of winning.'

I pinch my arm and scold myself for the negative thoughts. I'm a delicious snack! It doesn't matter what I'm wearing. Heck, I look good even in a paper sack. Plus, if they all think I'm no threat, I won't be a target.

"You are sexy and deadly," I whisper, giving myself a firm nod, hoping that by saying the words out loud, I might believe them.

"Well, I don't think I've had a woman compliment my ability to kill, but I'll take it from you, gorgeous." The man that turns around is dressed in black from head to toe. That doesn't manage to hide the effervescent glow coming

off him in waves, though. He's an Elf, for sure, but he's not like the others. He feels more... royal? Black hair, bright eyes. Nope, not talking to this guy, especially because his words make all his buddies turn and look me up and down.

"I wasn't talking to you," I grumble, looking away from him and crossing my arms over my chest. I'm embarrassed he overheard my pep talk, but I'm not about to admit I was talking to myself, even if it is obvious.

"No? Talking to yourself, then?" he asks, leaning into me, as a strange tug on my magic tries to make me confess. I narrow my eyes at him and step into his space. Back straight, chin up.

"Keep using your coercion magic on me, and I'll break your fucking nose," I hiss, as his bright magenta eyes go wide, and he stands there in shock for a moment. I wonder if maybe his magic usually works. I'm stronger than I look, though. Or maybe he wasn't really trying. This close, I notice a scar on his eyebrow, which might be his only imperfection.

"How did you..." he trails off, as the woman at the table calls for the next in line, and I step around him, so I can claim my formal game invite.

"Welcome to the Elven Tournament of Blood." The woman nods, and as I grab the envelope, I tip my head.

"Thank you," I murmur before I dash off. I don't bother looking back as I hustle to the portal that brought me here.

I'll worry about that encounter when I'm forced to kick his ass in the Games. Or maybe, if I'm lucky, he'll be eliminated before then.

CHAPTER THREE



Moon

“Moon!” an annoyed voice snaps my name, making me jump as I hustle down the hall toward my office. I do not have the time or energy for this. I just got back from the Elven Realm, and I have other shit to do. Like a nap, before I clock in at noon.

“Fucking light beams, Marcellus! Must you be so snippy? You scared me!” I scold him, speed walking away since I already know what this is about. I do not feel like getting lectured by a man whose gamer tag is Lustnix. As in Lust Phoenix. Lust is a play on the last three letters of his name, and then, of course, he’s a Phoenix.

“Woman, stop running away from me in those Goblin-damned mini shorts...” he growls, making me blush bright red and run faster. Two weeks ago, I got completely smashed on magical booze, and uh... Well, I stripped naked and tried to climb Marcellus like a fucking tree. A man who has never once given me a reason to think he wants me in over thirteen years. Sure, we sometimes flirt, but we both flirt with everyone.

There had already been this tension between us since, you know, I’m not blind. He’s fucking gorgeous because of the nature of his species, and if I look directly at him, my heart races. Especially if he’s looking back at me. But now that I’ve thrown myself at him like some kind of starving Succubus... Things are awkward as fuck.

Seven feet tall, built like an Olympian, with disheveled blond hair, and a well-cared-for beard? He reminds me of the Valhallans, from the Odin realm. Someone the Human realm would call a god. They’re not wrong. He’s very God-like. Stupid sexy Phoenix.

“Listen, if you pretend you never saw me naked, I’ll pretend I didn’t throw myself at you like a desperate and super horny virgin.” I move faster, reaching the door of my studio, and launch myself inside. Unfortunately, Marcellus follows me in, using his size and strength against me.

“Woman,” he growls, grabbing my hips in his massive hands and lifting me off my feet. He sets me on top of the small bookshelf, bringing us face to face. “Moon, if you don’t stop avoiding me, I’m going to tie you to a fucking chair.” His voice is low and husky, making my legs shake as a shiver travels across my skin. I look up into his crystal blue eyes and bite my lip. Fuck, he smells good.

“I like being tied up,” I say, letting words fall from my lips without a filter once again. Balls. I need to work on that. The embarrassing confession is almost worth the pained look on his face. Almost like someone gave him blue balls, and then sucked someone else’s coc-. Maybe I shouldn’t finish that thought.

He groans, dropping his head forward as his eyes fall closed, and I grimace.

“Yeah, my bad. You know how stuff just comes out before I think,” I apologize, and he nods but doesn’t look any less distraught.

“I didn’t follow you in here to talk about what gets you off-”

“Jeez, you could have worded that better yourself,” I interrupt but snap my lips shut when he lifts his head to glare at me, flames dancing in his eyes.

“I came in here to tell you not to join the Elven games. You know how dangerous it is. You were fifteen during the last one. You saw how many people were injured. How many people died,” he grumbles, and I shake my head.

“I have to, Lust. My dad is never getting out of that fucking Fae prison if I don’t win those Elven crystals,” I snap, my anger rising. I know he just wants me to be safe, but I haven’t dedicated my life to gaming just for fun. I did it specifically to compete in this competition. “He’s already been locked up for twenty fucking years, Lust. I haven’t seen him since I was five, and I’m not going to give up before I ever even try!” I push his chest away, but the beast doesn’t budge.

“I know you want to save him, but what if you die? He wouldn’t want you losing your life for him!” he argues, and I shake my head.

“My father is the one who told me to join in the first place. I’ve been training since I was five. I’m the best fucking gamer in this realm, and I am not going to lose.” This time, I use my magic to push Lust back. With a wave of my hand, his arms are above his head, wrists tied together, and back against the opposite wall.

“Moon!” he growls, and the thrill I get every time I use my powers makes my heart race. I’ll run out of juice soon if I’m not careful. I won’t be able to recharge until tonight, either. Need that moonlight. I touch the moonstone resting against my chest. The last gift from my father before he was imprisoned.

“*Never take this off. Never.*” he’d said, and I remember how terrified he’d looked. So, I never took it off. Not once in my entire life.

“Unless you want a blow job, or to bend me over this bookshelf, get out!” I snap, jump down, and walk further into my studio before I release him. I know he’ll leave. He rejected me once already. He doesn’t want to fuck me, even if he is attracted to me. Probably has something to do with the fact that we met when I was just a kid. Or maybe because he’s my boss. Either way.

“One of these days, I’m going to bend you over my knee and paddle your ass. Keep pushing me, Moon. I only have so much self-control.” His voice is angry, and as he leaves my room, he slams the door.

“Yeah, well, I’d probably enjoy that!” I shout back. Frustrated with myself, more than him.

Marcellus might be my boss, but he’s been in my life a long time. I’ve known him since I was twelve and he was seventeen. Back then, he looked out for me and made sure I stayed out of trouble. But when he left, I went four years without seeing him.

Until I applied for my job here, after an ad was emailed to me. He recognized the name I used to get teased so mercilessly for, and when I came in for an interview, it was like catching up with an old friend. That was six years ago when I was just nineteen.

“Moon?” the man behind the desk asks, as I nervously look up. I really need this job. Please let him like me a little. Please let my mouth not say something stupid that I can’t take back.

Holy hell. It’s Marcellus! I launch myself across the room to hug him. It’s been four years since he moved away. Four years since I got to talk with my oldest friend. Once he was gone, I felt like I was so alone.

“I didn’t think I’d ever see you again,” I admit.

“Surprise?” he chuckles. “I recognized your name on the application,” he admits with a shy smile. He’s twenty-five right now, and damn, hot as hell.

But he doesn’t look at me like that.

For him, this probably feels like being reunited with a sibling.

My skin is flushed, and I’m buzzing with pent-up energy, as I shake off the memory of the day we were reunited. I want to break something, but everything in this room is too valuable. I could go to the gym, but I need something live to beat up.

Storming out of my room and down the hall, I smash my fist against Echo’s door in quick succession. There’s only one person who’s always

happy to play me, and only one game he beats me in. Right now, it's exactly what I need.

To be clear, I'm talking about wrestling. No matter what moves I try, he always pins me, the giant man-beast that he is.

"Moon?" he asks with a frown, as he pulls his door open. The mask he always wears is firmly in place, covering him from nose to clavicle, but he's shirtless. I pause, staring at his rippling muscles and the distinct v that leads below the waistband of his sweatpants. All thoughts leave my head as I ogle the man like a vulture ready to feast on roadkill.

"Light beams! Do you spend all your free time working out and getting tattooed? Is that a moon?!" I point to the crescent moon over his heart, and he grumbles, rolling his magenta eyes at me as he pushes a hand into his black hair before leaning against the doorway.

"I've had that since before I met your annoying, perky little ass," he snarks, and I smack his arm.

"My ass is not little. I'm short compared to you, but I am not little." I cross my arms over my chest and glare up at him while he stares at me.

"I could lift you with one arm and do pull-ups at the same time without working up a sweat," he counters, and I just know he's grinning under that mask.

"No shit? Bet," I say instantly. I can't resist. It's probably the gambling blood my father passed down. The entire reason he's been locked away for 20 years. At least, that's what Grams thinks happened since we don't really know for sure.

"*Never say no to a bet, Moon.*" he'd said that to me once when I was still too young to really understand.

I wish someone had told him the opposite. Like my nut-bag mother. Before she ditched us, anyway.

"What do I get when I win?" he asks, eyes crinkling, making me think he's smirking under his mask again.

"You won't win, so a back massage?" I offer, certain I'm going to win this. There's no freaking way he can do a one-handed pull-up while carrying an extra 150 pounds. "And if I win, you have to join my next four lives. Shirtless." I smirk, and he rolls his eyes. "What? My viewers love our rivalry. And if you're shirtless, I bet I'll attract at least half your female audience."

"Are you objectifying me, Moonlight Blossom?" He lifts a brow, using half my name against me like the sharp edge of a blade against my throat.

“Hey! Do not say that name again!” I snap, looking around the hall, hoping no one else heard him. “How do you even know that name?!” I demand, and he shrugs.

“I know many things about you... including your first name-” he taunts, and I jump at him, covering his mouth with my hands.

“If you say it, I will break into your room and steal all your power cables and hard drives. Every day. For the rest of the year,” I threaten, and then frown when I feel something strange under his mask. “What are those?” I ask, as I fondle whatever is hidden by his mask, about to tug it down to get a better look.

“Moon!” he snaps, jumping away from me. “Don’t do that again.” His voice is low and angry, eyes wild, and I throw my hands up as I take a step back as well.

“Shit, sorry. I wasn’t trying to be a dick. I just let my curiosity get the better of me. I’ll keep my hands to myself!” I vow, putting my right hand over my heart and holding the left one up. I have seriously low impulse control. Words just fly from between my lips, and my body has a mind of its own. Very mischievous. He grabs the wrist of my left hand and tugs me against his chest.

“You can touch my body. You’ll have to when you give me that massage.” He winks, spinning me around so my back is to his chest. Lifting me against him, he tugs a pull-up bar down, fixing it to the doorway. I look up as he jumps, grabbing the bar with one hand, and pulls his chin above the bar five times, effortlessly.

“Fuck,” I complain when he puts me back on my feet. Shit, why is that sexy? An image dances through my mind of me straddling his shoulders, as he holds me up with his hands on my ass... Sheesh, what is going on with me!?

“I want my rub down off camera. Tonight.” He winks, closing his door in my face, and I realize I never even got what I came for. Doesn’t matter though because I don’t feel like committing mass murder anymore.

Echo served as the perfect distraction.



Moon

I'm making myself a double-stacked sandwich when my phone starts buzzing. I only have half an hour to get ready before I have to run down to do some actual work. I don't know who's calling, but I do not have time to talk.

"Hello?" I ask, as I flick the green button and put the call on speaker. I'm not neglecting this sandwich for a call. I'm too hungry.

"Aphrodite! I can't believe you finally answered!"

I end the call and toss the phone across the room like it's on fire.

"Mother fucking raccoon ass!" I snap, irritated that I wasn't paying more attention. The phone rings again, and I sigh heavily. Looks like it's time to get a new phone. Again.

I'll give the batty old hag one thing, she isn't giving up easily. When my phone rings for a third time, I nearly toss it out the window, but the ringtone tells me exactly who's calling. Get Low, by Usher from the Human Realm. Ha.

"I'm not talking to her Grams..." I complain as I pick up the call. I grab a soda from the fridge, needing the caffeine boost after that bull shit. Cracking it open, I sip the sugary goodness as Grams speaks.

"She said you answered. Was that an accident?" Grams asks, but when I don't respond right away, she sighs. "Aphrodite!"

"Please call me Moon, Grams," I tell her once again. She never listens, but it's worth a try.

"I named you after the goddess from the Mythology realm for a reason, Aphrodite! She's strong and powerful, but also soft and loving. Just like you," Grams reminds me for the billionth time. "But never mind that. Your mother insists she has something important to tell you, and I have no idea what it is, so please call her. She refuses to tell me but insists that it's life altering. Whatever that means."

Her words make me pause. My mother has been trying to get back into my life for a few months now, and I've been dodging her successfully. But with Grams up my ass about talking to her, I don't know how much longer I'll be able to avoid it.

"What could possibly be so life changing, that I need to know it now and not when I was five? When she abandoned me?" I ask, and Grams chuckles, then coughs in an attempt to hide the laugh. Grams is my mother's adoptive

mom, and I know she's not fond of my mother's actions, but still loves her. Can't blame her. There's also history there, from before I was born, but Grams refuses to tell me anything about my mother's past. Says it's not her place.

"I know you're still cross with her, *Moon*," she says, using my preferred name, so I know she's trying to butter me up. "But your mother has never been one to do things without good cause. If I had to guess, I'd say she's hiding something and has been hiding it for a long while now. Just have one conversation with her. I'll even be there if that helps?" She pauses, and just before I can refuse, her tone changes, and she sounds like a rickety old lady. "It's just been so long since I've seen my only granddaughter. With my daughter away for the last twenty years, I haven't had much family to keep me company..." She trails off, hitting me with a low blow. After all, I did learn from the best.

"That's hardly fair," I grumble, knowing I've already lost this battle. Grams raised me for fifteen years, all on her own. She knows exactly how to make me cave.

"Fine. I'll be at your house in three days, but I'm not staying long, and I'm leaving if her bullshit stinks. I'm gonna be in the Games this year, so I don't have time to linger," I grumble.

"Oh goodie, I'll start the roasted finiginnie now!" I wrinkle my nose up at the reference to the creepy little moth-bird-like-bug thing from the Fae realm but decide not to protest. Chances are, I'll be too busy screaming at my mother to eat. "Wait, did you say you're in the Games?" she asks when she realizes what I said.

"See you then, Grams." I hang up and toss the phone on my bed like the phone is at fault for this whole ordeal and has just betrayed me by ringing.

I have to take a few deep breaths, calming myself, before I can finish my sandwich.

The truth is, I don't know what happened. Not to my dad, and how he ended up locked in a Fae prison. Not to my mother, and why she dipped out on me when I was so young. Not why they were ever together to begin with. They couldn't be more opposite.

I don't know fuck all about my past, other than the bullet points.

Mom is gone.

Dad is locked up.

Grams raised me.

I take a deep breath and refuse to let the tears fall. Big girl Moon has to protect her inner child. So that means getting answers because eight-year-old Moon would have sold her doll collection for a moment with my mother.

Which reminds me to burn those creepy things that are all still in Gram's basement.

Of course, sixteen-year-old Moon would have sold her skirt collection if it meant never speaking to my mother ever again, not that mother was trying to reach me back then.

Maybe I should make a list of all the things I need answers to.

Maybe I should show up one day early, so I can visit Grams, and then just be like, oops!

I finish off my soda and clean up my mess before distracting myself by admiring my own tattoos. Reminding myself why I got them.

Because I promised myself, I would only do the things that make me happy for the rest of my life.

I guess, technically, getting my mother to leave me alone would make me happy, so in a roundabout way, this is something that'll make me happy.

Or maybe I'm making shit up, just to make myself feel better about giving in to her.

CHAPTER

FOUR



Moon

“Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit!” I squeal, as I run for my fucking life through the maze. Good thing I wore sneakers today.

“On your six, baby girl!” the most infuriatingly sexy voice calls out, as he advances.

“Fuck off, Echo!” I holler back, as I push my body harder. If I had known Lust was going to have me play Ultradoom in the new Doom Room, I would have worn real pants! Thigh highs and booty shorts are not great for long-distance running. These are my cozy gaming clothes.

“Nice ass, Witchy Moon!” he shouts, gaining on me.

“This win is for you guys!” I shout, pointing at the camera that is magically trained on me. Have to give the audience what they want!

“Stop playing around, Moon, and finish the game!” Lust shouts through my headset. He knows full well that half of my job is entertaining the viewers, and the other half is playing the game.

“Everyone, let Lust know his sass is not appreciated. We’re trying to win a game here!” I talk directly to the camera, making sure my live audience feels included. They don’t pay me to ignore them. Everyone subscribed to my channel can also see Echo and Lust since both men are in the gaming room.

Echo is my arch nemesis, and Lust, or Marcellus as he’s called outside the game world, is the moderator. I have a tendency to cheat if given the chance, so Lust watches me closely. He’s such a party pooper.

What?! It’s so much fun to get away with it, and if I get caught? Still fun.

Because Marcellus is a Phoenix, every time I piss him off, just enough, he bursts into flames! It’s extremely entertaining. Sometimes, I cheat while playing against a high-value customer, just to watch his face get all red and angry.

“If you don’t move that curvy ass, Echo is going to catch up and steal your spotlight. Again,” Lust taunts me, and I growl in a very unladylike way, pushing stray purple hairs out of my eyes.

“He’s a cheater!” I accuse and hear the sneaky bastard laugh behind me. Shit, he’s way too close now. How did he catch up already? Sometimes I wonder if he’s more than just a Witch.

With one last leap, I launch myself at the giant red target that marks the

end of the maze and slam into the wall seconds before Echo would have blasted me with a paint cannon.

Ultradoom is basically tag, paintball, and a maze dash all in one. With a few Witchy tricks thrown in. Like the damn cannon.

I'm panting, holding one hand up, and protecting myself from the paint splatter Echo had tried to demolish me with, when he steps up onto the platform.

"Ha, loser!" I tease. "Now you owe me lunch and a foot rub. Live!" I do a silly victory dance, and the gamer boy rolls his eyes at me.

I can only see half his face since the lower half is hidden behind a black mask with a skull face. This mask, much like the last one, covers him from the bridge of his nose, all the way down to his chest. Just like always. His vibrant magenta eyes glow as he stares at me in amusement.

I clear my throat, looking away from the attractive jerk when he pushes his jet-black hair away from his face. That's way too sexy for someone who is the literal bane of my existence. Okay, maybe not literally. But he is way too flirty and all around a pain in the ass.

"Sure thing, Moon, just let me know when you want me." I don't miss the suggestion in his tone, but I wave it off, looking back to my camera and smiling at my viewers.

"Okay guys, tune in today at noon for my next live! We'll play Valor and Gangs, while Echo here gives me a foot rub!" I cut the camera off, hoping no one saw my blush. When I made the bet, I thought Echo having to rub my feet would be embarrassing for him, but I think maybe it's only going to fuck with me. The man is way too attractive, even hidden under that mask.

It's his energy, his swagger. He gives off this vibe like he doesn't care about anything, so when his focus is fixed solely on me, butterflies dance inside my chest.

"Nervous?" the annoying man asks, as he steps in front of me, arms crossed over his chest, making his biceps bulge. The tight black shirt makes his colorful arm tattoos stand out even more. He's so tall that I have to crane my neck back to meet his eyes when he's this close.

"For?" I ask, grabbing a towel, and heading to the locker rooms. I worked up a sweat during that game and need a shower.

"Having my hands on your body, Witchy Moon." The way he says my gamer tag is way too sexy, considering he's only doing it to fuck with me.

"Oh, shut up," I grumble, turning away and heading for the exit to the

Doom room. I need to get cleaned up, so I can head up to my gaming studio, where I usually do most of my lives. Echo and I have the same job here at the largest magical gaming company.

Witching Games WonderRealm.

The only competitor is the Elven realm, whose magic is so damn impressive, they hold a competition every ten years, where the winner gets Elven crystals so rare, the only way to get your hands on one is to be in the royal family or to win the tournament. No other realm has access to them, and from what I understand, the Fae realm is very salty about this.

This will be my first year entering, and I will not be losing. I need those fucking crystals. I've heard rumors that the crystals are so valuable because they come from a secret realm that only trades with the Elves.

"See you in two hours, Moon," Echo says, as we both leave the room, heading in separate directions.

"Sure," I grumble, mentally scolding myself for not thinking that bet all the way through. That's two bets this week. You'd think I'd learn my lesson by now.

CHAPTER

FIVE



Moon

I pull a large, baggy, gray sweatshirt over my head before putting my headphones on. The cat ears were just too cute to resist. I'm really not in the mood to play anymore, but I know I can't cancel. Echo will gloat. He'll think it's because he makes me nervous. His making me nervous isn't even on the list of things I need to worry about right now, though.

A knock on my door lets me know Echo is here for our gaming session, so I shout for him to come in, and turn to watch as he enters. I flick the game console on, and then the camera.

"This will be a quick sesh guys, I'm in serious need of a snack!" I say to the camera, lying through my teeth. I honestly just need to get this over with quickly. I mute the mike and glare over at Echo. "If you have a foot fetish, we aren't doing this," I announce, looking up to see him holding a basket.

"No fetish, but you do have cute toes." I'm sitting on my favorite gaming beanbag when he says this. I suppose I do have super cute toes.

"Toes are not cute," I say, just to argue with him. Looking up again, I watch as he sits on the floor in front of me.

"Why do you wear that mask?" I ask him, noticing he's changed it from earlier, as I start the game, still muted. Plain black now, no skull. "I thought maybe you only did it for the mystery, but you freaked when I touched you yesterday." I squint, wondering what he's hiding. "Lip piercings gone wrong?"

"No." He doesn't elaborate. Just starts pulling things out of his basket. I move, so he's in the view of the camera.

"You're not going to tell me, are you?" I ask, and he shakes his head. "Wait!" I lean forward, "Do you ever take it off?"

"Nope. Unless I'm alone."

"So, if you're around other people, you keep it on at all times?"

"Yep."

"Always?"

"Yes." His tone is bored, and he's not looking at me. I lean forward even further, our faces inches apart.

"So, you've never kissed anyone! Are you a virgin? Oh my god, you are, aren't you!" I gasp, as his magenta eyes meet mine.

"No, Moon. I'm not a virgin. I've also kissed women before. Can we

move on?" He sighs.

"No. How have you kissed anyone with a mask on? You just said you never take it off... was that a lie?" I frown. "Even if I close my eyes, I'll feel whatever it is you're hiding under there..."

He doesn't respond, so I turn the mic back on and focus on the game. I falter, nearly falling into a pit of lava, when Echo removes one of my thigh-high socks. I take a deep breath and notice that my viewer count is rising with every passing second. Thirsty bastards.

When he warms the lotion between his large hands and then starts rubbing it into my skin, I get goosebumps everywhere he touches me.

"Heck, guys, I might fall asleep over here!" I tease, until his hands slowly work their way up my calves to my knee.

I keep playing, doing my best to focus, as he switches to my other leg. That's when I can't take any more because the slow way he peels off the stocking is just too much.

"Sorry guys! That's all for today! I'll hop on again tomorrow, oh, and good news! You'll be able to watch me in the Elven games this year! Whoop! Wish me luck!" I cheer, before shutting everything down and turning to face Echo.

"So, when you kiss someone, do you like, have to like, keep the kiss quick? How does it work, so they don't see what you're hiding? When is the last time you kissed someone?"

"Fuck's sake, Moon." He throws his hand up, looking up at me. "If I'm kissing you, I promise, you won't be worried about what I'm hiding," he growls, but I shake my head, leaning forward since he's still kneeling in front of me.

"I'd be too busy trying to figure out-"

"Moon. Drop it. Unless you want me to prove you wrong?" He lifts a brow at me. Uh oh, is that another bet?

"Um." I pause, staring at the mask, curiosity overpowering my usual annoyance with him. "Fuck, that's tough. I really want to know what's under your mask, but if I kiss you, then you're gonna fall in love with me." I'm sort of kidding, sort of serious.

Echo chuckles, shaking his head at me. "Fine, but I don't trust you, so," he reaches into the basket and pulls out a blindfold. "Wear this, and I'll kiss you."

"I can just take it off." I shrug, and he shakes his head.

“Only you can put it on, and only I can take it off.” He watches me with curious eyes.

“You’re not going to leave it on all day, are you?” I ask, and he winks.

“Guess you’ll just have to trust me if you want that kiss.”

“It’s not that I want a kiss exactly, but I do want to test my theory.”

“Put it on, Moon.” He nods to the black silk in my hands.

“Fine,” I concede, putting the blindfold on and waiting. He grips my hips, pushing me back against my bean bag, and pins both of my hands when he grips my wrists in one hand.

“You smell like strawberry cream,” he whispers, his warm breath fanning against the skin of my neck. A shiver runs across my skin, and I try to tug my hands-free, so I can hold him, but he doesn’t let go.

“What are you-” My words are cut short by him kissing my shoulder gently, before biting it softly. I can feel the press of something against my skin but can't tell what.

His free hand cups the back of my neck, and I gasp as his lips meet mine. The kiss starts slow but quickly turns hungry when his tongue pushes between my lips, and I feel the metal bar of his tongue ring.

When he bites my bottom lip, tugging it between his teeth, I can’t hold in the moan. My legs move on their own, and I wrap them around his waist, pulling his body tighter to mine. I’ll admit I get a bit lost in the kiss. It’s been a long time since I’ve been touched like this. Echo might be my competitor, but he is seriously hot.

He releases my hands finally as his hand wraps around my waist, holding me tightly to him. I shamelessly grind against him, making him grunt in surprise. He’s hard, and I can feel how large he is.

He pulls away from my lips, dropping his lips to my neck again, and I push my fingers into his hair, holding him to me.

“Believe me now?” he whispers, as his tongue flicks out against my skin.

“Yep.” I nod my head quickly, he’s sufficiently proved me wrong.

“Then maybe you wanna let me go? You’re wrapped around me like a snake,” he chuckles, and I sigh heavily.

“Boo, lame.” I drop my legs, arms falling limply to my sides, my ass on the floor, and my back against the bean bag. When I feel him move away from me, I cross my arms over my chest, worked up worse than earlier after Lust stomped off.

Not only do I have no idea what he’s hiding, but I’m also now super

turned on with no release in sight.

His dark chuckle further frustrates me, so I stick my tongue out at him.

“That was not fair. I couldn’t tell anything, and you got me all riled up!” I accuse, and he chuckles.

He tugs my blindfold off, and I pout, seeing his mask back in place. When I try to remove it with magic, he lifts a brow at me. I shrug.

“Had to try.”

“I can’t fuck you, Moon,” he says, sounding equally disappointed.

“Why not?” I ask, mostly curious at this point. “Scared you’ll fall in love with me?” I tease, wiggling my brows at him as I try to break the tension.

“Something like that.”

“I get it. I’m hard not to love.” I push his arm with my foot, and he falls back. I can’t help it, my eyes drop to the bulge in his pants. “At least I’m not the only one suffering,” I smirk. I know he wouldn’t actually fall in love with me by sleeping with me, but whatever his real reason is, he clearly doesn’t want to tell me.

“Boo!” a low, dark voice complains with a laugh, as a man appears beside us, scaring the ever-loving pixie-shit out of me.

“What the fuck!” I screech, picking up a controller and chucking it at his head. He catches it easily, and I squeal when Echo grabs me and pulls me against his body protectively.

“What do you want?” Echo demands, as he stands, lifting me with him, and takes a step away from the other man. That’s when his curved, pointed ears and brown eyes register in my brain. He’s the Elven Champion. Are those things tattooed? Woah. I didn’t notice the ear tats earlier.

“Crow?” I ask, because I recognize him, not because the terror has settled.

Echo goes still behind me, and I start to panic. Oh shit, have I said something wrong?

“Indeed.” He looks my body up and down, smirking. “Pity you two stopped. I was just getting into the show.” He winks, and I frown. The man is attractive, seriously handsome, for a battle-worn warrior. He and the Elven woman from yesterday are the only ones I’ve seen in person. And the cocky dude who tried to use his powers on me...

“I feel that. I didn’t want him to stop, either.” I shrug one shoulder, and Echo grips me tighter.

“Why are you here?” Echo asks again, and the Elf clears his throat.

“My name is Crow Blackblood, and I am the Champion of the last Elven games. I am here to formally invite you to participate in the Elven Tournament of Blood and join us for the Banquet of Roses in four days.” A blackish-red envelope appears in front of my face, and I blink, grabbing it from the air.

“Seriously?” I ask, wasting no time, as I rip the thing open. Sure enough, it’s an invitation to the banquet.

“As a charging Mungus.” He nods, and I frown.

“The fuck is a Mungus?” I ask, and he chuckles.

“Terrifying creatures. Never insult one. They’re deceptively sinister.” The Champion removes his coat, revealing his pale white skin that reminds me of moonlight, or that sparkly vampire from the Human realm. Just, sparkle free.

“Woah,” I whisper, letting out a low whistle. Echo pinches my side, and I grunt. “Ouch, you jerk,” I scold, elbowing him.

“Knock it off,” he scolds right back, and I roll my eyes.

“What?” I ask, pushing away from Echo. “It’s not like he doesn’t know what he looks like.” Crow drapes his jacket over my gaming chair and looks around my room.

“I’m aware of my allure. Oh, right,” he says, as if he’d forgotten something and only just remembered. “You’re invited as well. Those cards allow you to enter the banquet. Do not lose them unless you enjoy waiting in extremely long lines,” Crow says, as he starts walking around the room, his hands clasped behind his back. Echo pulls open an identical envelope.

“I didn’t enter,” he says, but the Champion chuckles.

“Think of it like a mandatory meeting. You don’t need to sign up, but you’re still required to attend. In this case, play.” Crow’s silver eyes flash a deep red as he scents the air. “Interesting,” he comments as he looks between Echo and me.

“What?” I ask, and the Champion looks behind me at Echo.

“I don’t think it’s my place to say, Pixie,” Crow says, glancing back at me. He’s barefoot, and the threadbare pants he wears hang off his hips in a way that should be illegal. So different from the man in all black from this morning, yet he’s the same person.

“Cryptic,” I grumble.

“Indeed. You must realize, you won’t be permitted to wear your mask in the Tournament, Arlo.” Crow turns back to Echo, and I frown again.

“Who the fuck is Arlo? His name is Echo...” I point out, turning to look

over my shoulder. Echo's usually vibrant magenta eyes look dull and filled with panic.

"I'm not playing," he insists, but says nothing about the name confusion, but Crow chuckles.

"No? Very well. You may forfeit, but you will be at the first trial, and then forced to exile until the game's end, and you know how brutal exile is."

"I thought playing was voluntary?" I ask, and Crow nods.

"In most cases." He's so casual about this, and it throws me off.

"But if Echo said no—"

"Arlo," Crow corrects, and I shake my head.

"Echo..."

"No, little Pixie—"

"I'm a Witch, bro." This time I cut him off, getting annoyed that he keeps calling me a Pixie.

"Are you? You're quite small but vicious. Just like a Pixie." The grin he flashes is so charming, I almost ignore all the other red flags. Almost. "As I was saying. Arlo here is hiding many secrets. Not just what's under his mask."

"Do you know what's under there?" I ask.

"I do." Crow grins again, and this time, it looks a bit... hungry. He flashes a pair of fangs, and I stare at them.

"Elves have fangs?" I actually know next to nothing about Elves and Fae. I don't know much about any species if it wasn't born in the Witching realm. Everyone is so hush, hush about their people.

"We do."

"Why?"

"To make biting through your skin easier." Again, his tone is so casual.

"Creepy," I mutter, and he laughs.

"You're brave, Pixie. Not many mortals are brave enough to call the Elven Champion creepy." He takes a predatory step in my direction, and I yelp when Echo grabs me once more, and this time thrusts me behind him. "Yes, you two are the perfect addition to the Tournament. All those juicy secrets will no doubt come to light." He says this as if he's excited, but something in his eyes makes me think he's... worried?

"Echo—"

"Arlo."

"Stop that!" I snap at the Champion, swerving away from Echo, and

storming up to the Elf.

“Stop what?”

“You know what! You’re pissing me off. I’ve known Echo for over a year! I’m the one who looked over his resume!” Yes, I hired my own nemesis, but at the time, I didn’t realize he would be such a solid threat. I have no regrets, though.

“Your Arlo has so many delicious secrets. Just like you do. We can make a deal if you prefer. I’ll keep all your secrets if you let me have a taste of your blood. I’ll even allow your Arlo to play with his mask on.”

“No fucking way!” Echo says for me, and I realize, he hasn’t tried to correct Crow on his name not being Arlo.

“He’s not just a Witch, is he?” I question, and Crow’s eyes light up with mischief.

“Not at all, Pixie.” The words are suggestive, as if he’s saying Echo isn’t a Witch, *at all*.

“Moon. Just call me Moon, please,” I say, and this time his eyes flash brightly, and I realize my mistake too late.

“Giving me your name, so soon?” he questions, as he wraps one arm around my waist, and pulls me tightly to him.

“You already knew my name!” I yelp, knowing it’s no use.

“Mmmm, yes, I do. But knowing your name, and you giving it to me freely, are not the same thing. Why do you think your friend hasn’t said one way or the other what his name is or isn’t?”

“Fuck, Moon!” Echo curses behind me, and I hear his fist smash against the wall, making the Champion chuckle.

“Woah, what the hell! What was that!” I scold, staring at the mess he made all over my floor.

“You have no fucking clue what you’ve just done,” Echo growls, and Crow’s laugh turns malicious.

“From one predator to another, maybe you should give your... friend... a little tutorial on *our* kind.”

“Our?!”

“Well, almost.” Crow winks, and my mouth falls open in shock. Then I’m screaming when his teeth sink into my flesh. I barely have time to process what’s happened when he’s pulling away. “Mmm, fucking delicious!” He releases me, wiping at the blood dripping down his face, dramatically. “You should taste her, Arlo. You’ll love it.” And just like that, the Elven prince is

gone, and Echo is rushing to me faster than I can blink.

“Explain!” I snap, taking several steps away before he can grab me.

“I-I can’t, Moon. I just can’t. If I do, you’ll never speak to me again!”

“If you don’t, I’ll kick your ass, and THEN I’ll never speak to you again!” I charge him this time, slamming my body into him, and shoving him back until his ass hits my couch cushion, using magic to increase my strength. I climb on his lap, and before he can react, I tug his mask down.

“Holy shit,” I whisper, and Echo goes from shocked to furious to devastated in the span of three seconds. When he attempts to shove me off of him, I hang on for dear life.

“Elf...” I whisper. The intricate tattoo that spans from his clavicle up under his chin marks him as royalty. Elven royalty. I couldn’t see it before, since the mask he had worn covered his neck as well. The tusks, however, are not an Elven trait. “Orc...” I whisper, reaching up to touch one. They’re small, maybe only a few inches long. “Oh, ouch, sharp! You’re an Elf and an Orc?” I ask, as I stare at the bloodied finger.

“Fucking hell, Moon? Why don’t you ever listen?” The look of sadness in his eyes makes my heart ache.

“I listen just fine, but you were clearly hiding something from me.”

“For good reason! You can’t- Moon!” Echo snaps, grabbing my wrist when I reach up to touch his tusks again.

“Jeez! What?” But he’s not listening to me. He’s staring at my blood as it drips down my finger. He does the last thing I expected when he sucks the digit between his lips and sucks, groaning. “Oh, fuck...” I moan when his tongue laps at my wound. Echo growls, flipping us, so he’s hovering above me.

“You’re reckless! So careless with your own life, Moon! Do you have any fucking clue what I could do to you? What that Elven bastard is going to do to you? How do you not know better than to give them your fucking name!” Echo scolds, as he grabs both my wrists and pins them above my head and settles himself between my spread legs.

His tusks are very distracting, and the mark of his Elven blood is just as eye-catching. No wonder he hides. He’s a hybrid. A royal hybrid at that.

“You have no fucking idea what I want to do to you, what you are to me, do you?” This snaps me out of my dazed stupor.

“Your competitor?” I ask, confused.

“My Promised. My Heart Bonded mate,” he whispers, and my mouth

falls open.

“No!” I snap, shaking my head. “That is just insane. You’re confused. Mistaken... There’s no way!” I argue, but Echo shakes his head.

“I’ve tasted your blood. I know who you are to me. Even if I couldn’t feel it in my heart, with my entire being, I’d know by the taste of your blood. That, and your bonded mark...” His words trail off and I glare.

“What do you mean Bonded mark?” I ask, and he sighs.

“Fae and Elves get them when we find our Heart Bond, and the mark also appears on our Heart Bonded.” Echo leans back, grabs my arm, and shows me my forearm. A dull outline of a tree appears from my wrist to elbow, in the same swirling black as the marking that spans from Echo’s clavicle up to his chin.

“Holy fucking shit...” I stare at it, not sure what the hell I’m supposed to do or say now... “You sure?” I ask, just to double-check. Echo takes my hand, and pushes it to his chest, holding it over his heart. Over the Moon tattoo, which I’m now suspicious of.

“You don’t feel the connection? The draw to be closer to me?” Echo whispers, and I frown. I feel it. I’ve been feeling it, I just thought it was like a ‘You’re my rival, so I want to hate fuck you,’ kind of thing. As we’ve already established, I have impulse control issues, and I’m also a horn dog.

The way his heart pounds under my touch, and the desperate look in his eyes, have me nodding. I don’t want him to think this is one-sided.

“What’s your name?” I ask, and for a moment he’s pale.

“Arlo. Elves don’t freely give their true name. I lied because of my nature, not because I was trying to hide from you. I don’t know how Crow knew...” Echo- or I guess Arlo, says, leaning back, and pulling me up with him.

“It feels different, hearing you say that, than it did when Crow said it,” I admit. “Like you’re more real now. Not hiding from me,” I say, hoping he understands what I mean.

“It should. Now that your mark appeared. I’ve had mine since I felt you, and then a year ago, when I realized it was you, it got darker. The pull to be close to you got stronger, but I didn’t want to complicate your life more, and you didn’t seem to have any idea who I was to you. So, I just kept it a secret.” Arlo drops his head, but I lift his chin, smiling softly.

“I’m glad I know now.”

“Me too.”

CHAPTER

SIX



Crow

I stare through the window of her tiny studio home as she paces the room. I'm sure she has a lot going through her mind right now, and I wish I could help ease some of her confusion.

Unfortunately, if I reveal too much, she'll be in even more danger, and honestly, she'd just have more questions and be further confused.

My skin prickles as I feel the snake slither up the balcony. I watch him slip through the bars and watch her. Whenever he's near, I shiver. It's not his fault, not really. It's just the nature of his kind. Most living things have a natural fear of him.

He turns his head my way, letting me know he's aware of my presence, but I was already well aware of that fact.

Of all the creatures, in all the realms, having a Light One stalking you is most unfortunate. She's blissfully unaware, but I have a feeling he'll be making himself known soon enough.

After all, even the strongest of us can only resist our pull to be close to Moon for so long, before we break.



Silas

The Elf sits there, watching her like the weirdo he is.

At least I have a reason. I'm keeping her safe. From other Light Ones. From others like me, and the beasts she'll never know have been sent for her over the years. Not even the Phoenix is aware, because in this universe, and all others, my power and ability are unmatched. Mostly.

She'll never know about me either unless the shady fucking Elf reveals me.

Which, he might. I'm not sure if he's aware of the full situation yet, but he will be soon enough. They all will.

Unfortunately for Moon.

I suppose it could be worse. My tongue flicks out, as agitation pushes me until my larger form threatens to break through. Unfortunately for me, I won't be allowed to kill her Heart Bonded.

My nature is solitude.

So of course, the fates would bond me to a woman with more Heart Bonds than Zeus has mistresses. Bloody fuck-boy, that one.

I watch Moon shiver, her head turning toward the window, as she searches the dark for the cause of her discomfort.

I know it's me.

That my presence makes her uneasy. She senses danger but has no idea what's causing her worry.

That's why I must keep my distance for as long as possible. Once she realizes I'm the cause, she'll...

Fuck, I don't know. Perhaps I'll allow her to trample me in my smaller form.

Better that, than seeing her displeasure when she realizes what I am. Who I am.



Crow

“I see I’ve caught you at a bad time, but I need to speak with you,” I announce, sitting on the edge of the half-breed lost Elven Prince’s bed a few hours after I left him to deal with the wrath of our little Moon.

“What the fu-”

“Before you speak, Arlo, listen,” I cut him off. “I was not the one to demand your presence in the Games. A contract was made in your name, and I cannot break it, or you will die. Moon has no more say than you do in this. Which means you are both in danger. For obvious reasons, I would like to keep her alive. You know she’s your Heart Bonded, and that I am hers as well.” I watch as Arlo stares at me with wide, shocked eyes. Perhaps he wasn’t aware she was mine as well. Oops.

“You?” he asks, and I roll my eyes, pulling up my sleeve to show him the mark I received just after leaving Moon earlier. *Aphrodite Moonlight Blossom Hart*. A fucking mouthful. Her mother must have a sense of humor or a mean streak. I suspect that because Arlo is of royal blood, all the marks of Moon’s Heart Bonded will be the same as his royal mark. Although, maybe his mark was made to match Moon...

“Yes, me. As well as...” I pause, counting the others I sense. “At least another five, perhaps six, but the sixth one is a bit of an unknown,” I admit. He may be the lost Prince of the Elves, but he’s my best chance of keeping Moon safe. I’m not allowed to compete in the games again, as I have already won.

“Fuck,” he grumbles, and I nod.

“Quite a bit of fucking if I had to guess,” I agree, and Arlo glares at me. Oh, not what he meant. Right. “I apologize... Anyway, as soon as Moon gave me her name freely, I knew she was mine, her blood only confirmed it. Do inform her of the dangers of that in the future.”

“Eight bonded?” he whispers, still stuck on the number.

“Have you not sensed her true form?” I frown, wondering if his mixed blood dampens his Elven abilities. I watch him closely as his eyes go wide. “Oh good, I was starting to think you were useless.”

“Fuck you, Champion,” he hisses, and my eyebrows shoot up.

“What’s with the hostility!” I throw my hands up. “We are literally on the same side. Our blood be damned. You know, as well as I do, that two

powerful men being Heart Bonded to one woman is designed by the fates. There is a purpose. She will be our people's salvation." I nod, firm in my belief that she will be the one to save us all.

"I was abandoned, Crow. I did not run, nor did I have a choice. I was tossed into a fucking river and left for dead. My mother, my true mother, the one who raised me, was a Human." His face crumples with pain, and my reaction is immediate. I wrap the Orc hybrid in my arms, holding him tightly. Humans do not live long lives. Even if he doesn't know the full truth, his love for the Human was real.

"Your mother, the Elven Queen who gave birth to you, did not abandon you, Arlo. It was her husband who forced her hand."

"You mean, the dead queen? She can't... I'm not..." Arlo's eyes grow wide, and I sense his panic.

"You don't know the truth, do you?" I ask, and he pulls back.

"What truth..."

"Oh, dear. We must hurry." I check the moon's location in the sky and shake my head. "We only have a few hours. Come with me," I say, but as soon as I stand, Moon storms into the room.

"I knew it! What are you doing in Echo's room?"

"Arlo," I correct her, and she glares.

"Why are you here!" she snaps.

"Many reasons." I nod, loving the anger in her eyes. Yes, fate chose well for me. Very well indeed.



Echo

“Stop that,” I scold the Elf, hating how riled he gets Moon. She likes it way too much.

“You should go back to your room,” Crow tells her, but she plants her hands on her hips, looking between us.

“Going somewhere?” She glares, and I can’t hold in my smile. My firecracker.

“No-”

“Yes-” Crow tries to lie while I confess the truth.

“Where?” she asks.

“Nowhere-”

“No idea-” Once again he deflects, while I confess.

“I’m coming.”

“No-”

“Okay-” This time I smirk. He and I clearly aren’t on entirely the same side.

“Yes, I am. If you try to stop me, I’ll just stab you.” She shrugs like she didn’t just threaten a Champion with violence.

“Fine, but you better get used to a great deal of things very quickly,” Crow says, crossing his arms. His eyes flash to mine, and the subtle head shake lets me know he’s not talking about their Heart Bond. I guess that’s still a secret then. Can’t say I blame him there. I hid mine from her for over a year after meeting her.

“Like?” she asks, crossing her arms now, but walking closer to us.

“Arlo is the lost Elven Prince, who’s an Orc hybrid,” the fucker says, pissing me off.

“None of that was yours to tell,” I scold him, as Moon stares at me with big eyes. She knew I was a half-breed, just not the lost Prince part.

“Perhaps not, but you might have hidden it from her longer. For the purposes of this trip, she needed to know. Come here.” Crow motions for the two of us to come closer. When neither of us moves, he sighs heavily. “Fine, be difficult.”

“Ass!” I shout, as the world goes black.

CHAPTER SEVEN



Moon

“What the heck!” I complain when I fall to my knees in the grass, nearly puking up a lung. Too much, all at once, man. I suspected Echo... Arlo? Does it matter? Fuck, I don't know... I suspected he was royal blood, but to have Crow confirm it?

“Where are we...” Echo demands, looking around the field we landed in.

“Orc realm.” Crow shrugs, and I jump to my feet with a yelp.

“What!”

“Don't worry, we're safe.”

“Safe?! We're in a different realm, filled with hostile giants!” I snap, and Echo flinches.

“Perhaps consider your words more carefully,” Crow scolds, making my eyes go wide. The Elven Champion pats Echo on the back, and I just stare at them. They're friends now?

“Since when are you two friends?” I ask, but they ignore me. I walk over to Echo and bump him with my arm. “Sorry. That was shitty of me. I said a dickish thing, and I didn't mean to be an ass,” I apologize, not making an excuse. There isn't one, but I want him to know I wasn't being a bitch intentionally.

“Ah, here we are,” Crow says, as the ground starts to rumble. Instinctively, I step closer to Echo, wrapping my hands around his arm, and partially hiding behind the large man. He's not wearing his mask, and I wonder if that's because of our talk, or if he just forgot.

“Crow?” a booming voice calls out, as a massive, monster-sized dude steps into view. No, not dude. Orc. A scantily dressed Orc. He's basically naked, with nothing but a leather triangle covering his naughty bits. His bulging body is covered in scars and is a deep shade of green. I look at Echo, confirming he's definitely not green at all.

“Over here, Fasakasha!” Crow calls back.

“Call me Fas! My true name sounds weird on your Elven tongue!” The rather chipper Orc chuckles as he approaches us. Homeboy is like ten feet tall and built like a fucking double-stacked bus.

“Who have you brought with yo- ” Fas pauses as his eyes land on Echo. “Arloshanas...” he whispers. Fas moves so fast, that I don't process what's happening until it's already done. In the blink of an eye, the giant is hugging

Echo to his chest and squeezing. “And you brought your Heart Bonded mate!” The jolly green giant bellows with laughter, and I watch as he spins Echo in a circle.

“What the fuck?” I whisper.

“Borkis! Sound the trumpets! My lost son has returned to me! We’re having a feast!” Fas shouts so loud I have to cover my ears, and seconds later a horn starts blaring in the distance.

“What’s happening?” I ask Crow, who just smirks.

“Fas is Arlo’s father. He’s not only a royal Elven Prince but an Orc Chieftain’s firstborn son.” Crow looks very pleased at the moment, but I’m still a bit lost.

“I’m Heart Bonded to a... hybrid prince? A double prince?” I whisper, and Crow chuckles.

“And then some. Come on, princess,” he teases, as the Orc Chieftain sprints into his village, carrying Echo in his arms still. The ground literally trembles under his booming steps, and as the trumpets sound, more bodies start pounding the ground like an earthquake. If Echo’s mom is Elven... Nope, none of my business.



Moon

We spend about ten minutes standing back as I watch massive dude, after massive dude, pass Echo around for hugs. Apparently, his mother, you know, the Elven Queen who isn't really dead, is hunting, but will probably return after hearing the trumpets, but Crow wants us to leave now.

"I don't like this," I protest.

"Well, your options are, stay here with Arlo and allow the Orcs to hold a traditional bonding ceremony for you and your Heart Bonded... Or you leave with me now." Crow shrugs, and I manage to stop myself from punching him in the nose.

When the Chieftain first suggested it, I think I turned almost as green as the Orc's, and Echo just froze up. Neither of us is ready for that, although, as far as I know, this Heart Bond is unbreakable. It's not the permanence that scares me. I would want a moment like that to be meaningful. He only just found out who he truly is, and it's been like five hours since we realized we had a Heart Bond...

"I don't want to just leave him behind," I grumble, and Crow frowns.

"Why not?"

Fuck. I don't really have a valid reason that isn't just... 'Cuz I don't wanna...'

"Right, well. He needs to get to know his kin, and you need to return to your own realm. Your Bonded will be fine here." Crow grabs my arm and starts to pull me away, as he looks around us like he's fleeing from something. I ignore the spark of magic between us when he touches me and yank free from his hold.

"At least let me say goodbye, jeez!"

I stomp off, looking for Echo. Arlo... Fuck, I need to ask him what he wants me to call him. Fortunately, he finds me before I have to go too far.

"Leaving?" Echo asks, and I can't help but stare at his lips. His tusks. Honestly, it's cute as fuck. I bite my lip and blush when he clears his throat.

"Sorry, yes. We're leaving. I wish you'd come with me..." I mumble, dropping my gaze to the grass. "Maybe I should stay?"

"Hey, look at me," Echo lifts my chin until our eyes meet. "I'll be fine here, and I'll return before the Games. Just, promise you'll attempt to keep yourself safe?" He looks genuinely worried, and I wonder how much of that

is real, and how much is the bond. Apparently, my thoughts are transparent because Echo pulls me hard against his body.

“My feelings are entirely real for you, Moon. All of them. Do you know how I know that?” he asks, stroking my back.

“How?” I look up at him, glad I can see all of him, including the mark that tells everyone he’s mine.

“Because when I first met you, I knew immediately who you were to me, and for like four months I found you to be completely insufferable,” he teases, and I smack his chest. “I’m kidding. But it wasn’t instant love. Maybe an instant desire to make sure you didn’t accidentally kill yourself with your clumsy ways, but not love. The love happened slowly.” The last words are nearly whispered, and I lean up on my toes until our lips are almost touching.

“Well, I still find you insufferable, but what fun would it be if you weren’t?” I tease him right back, and when he smiles, it warms my heart. “I’m glad I can see your smile now, Arlo,” I say, closing the gap between us and kissing him. A real kiss this time. Something about leaving him here feels so wrong, but I can’t figure out why. The way his cheeks blushed when I used his name, makes me think that’s what he wants me to call him from now on. So, I will.

“Sorry, Princess, but it’s time to go,” Crow interrupts, and this time I send a gust of wind to smack him. Unfortunately, he dodges it easily. I give Arlo one last peck, and a hand squeeze, feeling like I’m walking away from something that’s only just begun.

“Be safe,” I tell Arlo, who nods, watching as I turn to Crow and narrow my eyes.

“Stop calling me that. You know I’m no princess,” I grumble, as I reluctantly approach him.

“No? Are you sure?”

“Crow. I’m sure there’s a market for Elven blood, especially from a Champion. Don’t make me drain you and sell you for parts,” I growl as I reach the far more frustrating man.

“I should warn you, I’m not easy to kill, but I would absolutely love it if you tried, baby.” The way he whispers this in my ear has my body erupting with shivers.

“Don’t tempt me,” I deflect, hoping he doesn’t see how those words affect me.



Moon

“You did what?!” I snap, throwing my hands in the air, as Lust stands there with his arms crossed over his chest. I’ve only been back for one day when Lust decided to piss me all the way off.

“If you’d just dropped out, I wouldn’t have needed to join.” He shrugs, making me shove him uselessly.

“You dumb beast! I didn’t even join! I tried! But someone else already signed me up, and I couldn’t drop out even if I wanted to, which I don’t!” I shove at him again, even though it’s no easier to shove a boulder.

“Well, now I’ll be there to make sure you don’t end up dead in the first round.” He spins, starting to walk away from me, but I can’t think of a good come-back.

“Yeah, well every time you try to save me, I’ll just flash the audience!” I counter, and the Phoenix spins back around, his eyes blazing with fire. “What, you don’t want to see my boobs, but I can’t show anyone else either?” I know I’m being childish, but I don’t care. Sometimes, all I can do to fight back against his logic is piss him off with bullshit. Maybe I’m irritable after not getting any answers from Crow once he dumped me here and disappeared.

“Moon...” he warns, and I grab the hem of my shirt as one of the guys who work in mechanics walks around the corner. A Vampire named Daire.

“Hey handsome, I got a new piercing recently, want to-” I’m not actually going to flash the Vampire, but the look on his face is almost hurtful. He looks disgusted. However, my plan works, and Lust’s Phoenix takes over as he shifts into his flaming bird-like form and immediately turns into a pile of ash. Honestly, I think it’s a bit dramatic. I giggle, shaking my head. He needs to get his shit together.

But I won. So, I start to walk away, until the Vampire stops me.

“Do you frequently expose yourself to strangers?” he snaps, and I frown, turning to him.

“I didn’t show you anything. My shirt stayed firmly in place,” I counter, pointing at my boobs, which I did not flash.

“You were about to.” He glares, red eyes flashing behind his black-rimmed glasses, and I wonder why I never noticed how cute he was before.

“No, I wasn’t. Why are you wearing glasses? I thought Vampires had,

like, perfect eyesight.”

“Yes, you had the bottom of your shirt in your hand.” He points, and then scoffs. “And the glasses aren’t to improve my eyesight, they’re so I-” He pauses. “You know what. It’s none of your business,” he waves me off, flashing away from me too fast for me to track.

“Dick!” I shout, but he doesn’t respond, since he’s probably long gone by now.

CHAPTER

EIGHT



Moon

“Grams...” I sigh heavily, when I walk into her home, finding a woman already sitting next to her on the couch.

My emotions cycle from annoyed, to angry, to shocked. I frown, as I stare at the woman who could be my twin. Except her hair is brown. That’s not what throws me off. Not even her youthful appearance.

No.

It’s her outfit.

Black leather from neck to toe. “Is... Is that a katana?” I murmur, staring at it with wide eyes and my mouth hanging open.

“Moonlight,” the woman whispers, tears flooding her eyes. She stands but doesn’t approach me. I watch as she lifts her hand and presses it against invisible glass like she’s trapped behind a window.

“Grams?” I say again, looking to the old woman for direction.

“Your mother was cursed. She isn’t allowed to get close to you, or it poisons you. Do you remember the day Steven was imprisoned? When you were given that necklace?” Grams asks, and I frown but nod, unable to speak. “Your mother nearly killed you, before she realized it was her presence poisoning you.”

“What?” is all I can say, as I look at the woman who left me. “Why tell me this now? Not when I was five?!” I demand, and Grams sighs.

“I didn’t know. I thought she had abandoned you.” Grams drops her head in shame, and I look at my mother for answers.

“I’m sorry Moonlight. I know my mother. She would have spent years trying to break the curse. I didn’t want her wasting her life trying to save me. I’ve always been close, though. Looking after you, protecting you.” She sniffs, dropping her gaze to the floor. “But that’s not why I’m here. Moon, you must be careful in the Games. Surround yourself with protection. Use your true power. I wish I could explain more. Tell you—” suddenly my mother chokes, coughing, and clutching her throat. Grams reaches for her, but my mother shakes her head, holding her hand up to keep Grams back. “I’m okay. I just needed her to see. I can’t speak it. I’ll die. And then I won’t be able to protect you. Some things I can say, though.”

“I don’t understand.” I frown, my chest aching as everything I thought about this woman turns out to be wrong.

“I know, baby. Just listen. Steven cannot be—” She chokes again, and her eyes water. “Trusted.” Her choking intensifies, and she falls to her knees, hacking up blood. I rush forward, but I’m stopped by a magic barrier and push my hands against it.

“Stop...” I beg, not wanting her to hurt herself for this. “I’ll be okay,” I promise, shaking my head because I’m still lost.

“I know, my girl. You always are. Suspect everyone. Dig deeper. Remove —” She pauses, her eyes dropping to my necklace, and I frown.

“But—”

“Not until you’re in the Games. You must, Moonlight.” My mother rises to her feet once more and sucks in a deep breath. “Rely on the Heart Bond. Your magic knows what it needs, let it guide you,” she adds, as a strange sort of dizziness sets in, and I sway on my feet.

“Shine, you must go,” Grams says, giving my mother a push. “The barrier is weakening. Go.”

With one last sad look, my mother swipes at her tears and blows me a kiss. “I love you, my Moonlight.”

I can’t respond as I watch her run from the house, and my world goes black.



Moon

“Grams, what the fuck?” I ask, as I come to, and she hisses.

“Aphrodite Moonlight Blossom, must you use that language?” she grumbles, and I shake my head.

“Did she leave?” I ask, looking up at Grams, who somehow managed to get me on the couch by herself. I don’t know how, maybe magic, I guess.

Grams sighs heavily. “Yes. And she left me with more questions than answers.” Grams helps me so I’m sitting up and wraps her arm around my back, as she sits beside me.

“Me too. I really don’t understand. Remove the necklace? Don’t trust my dad?” I ask, and Grams shakes her head.

“You know, I’ve never had any kind words to say about Steve. That hasn’t changed. However, I want to tell you something that I suspect your mother was unable to. I don’t believe he’s your—” Her words are cut off, and she starts spitting up blood violently, making me scream in horror. I drop to my knees in front of her, trying to help her up, but she shakes her head, resting her hand on my shoulder to keep me back.

“Grams...” I say worried, as she starts to take sharp breaths.

“It’s okay. Apparently, I am unable to speak the words either. The truth will come to light in due time, my sweet Moon.” Grams pats my back as she stands, and ushers me out of the room toward the front door. “Now go. I have some things to arrange,” and with those words, I’m dismissed.

“Okay,” I grumble, looking down at the blood on my clothes. “Guess I should wash up first?” I ask, but she shakes her head, giving me another push.

“No, you need to leave, now. Go, Moon. Please.”

I don’t like the way her voice shakes, or the way her eyes flick around the room, but I can’t exactly boss the old lady around. She’d whoop me for trying.

“Be safe,” I tell another person in my life for the second time in one week, and I hate it. It feels ominous. Like I’m inviting trouble to her door.

Maybe I’m the trouble at her door, though.

CHAPTER

NINE



Moon

“What the fuck?” I murmur, as I look around the grand ballroom. I haven’t seen Arlo or Crow since I left them both in the Orc realm. Many of the contestants have been summoned here so we can participate in this weird as fuck ball-banquet thing.

Apparently, this is exclusively for the players who got accepted without needing to try out. Which is more annoying than anything else. Players have been known to die, disappear, or even kill themselves during these games. The last thing I want is for a bunch of my competitors to get a chance to size me up.

But here we are. I tried to refuse, but the invitation had some kind of spell imbued, and when I said no, it changed itself to yes.

So that was really annoying.

Now here I am.

In this stunning dress that none of these people deserve to see, and high heels that might be the actual death of me. They’re just too pretty not to wear, though.

“Fucking hell, Moon.” I hear my boss grumble behind me. I can’t help the smile that stretches across my face, as I turn to see him biting his fist.

“What?” I ask with fake innocence. I know what his issue is. My dress is silver and completely see-through. The bodysuit I’m wearing under it covers the naughty bits, but you can still see my ass. The length stops at my knees, and the slit goes all the way up to my hip. The strappy high heels are black, winding up my calves, and making me about three inches taller.

“You know exactly what, you fucking demon in heels,” he hisses, and I shrug. Lust is one confusing man. Sometimes I feel like he’s fighting himself to resist me, and other times it seems like he really isn’t interested. Not that it matters when I have a Heart Bonded who should be here somewhere.

“A man who has no intention of touching shouldn’t look, either,” I scold him.

“Trust me, Moon, you don’t want my touch,” he huffs, before spinning and walking away from me and further into the crowd.

“How’d you even get into the ball? It’s for the special guests only!” I snark, but Lust just keeps walking.

“I bet you’d thoroughly enjoy my touch,” Crow whispers in my ear,

startling me. I throw a punch on instinct, making him grunt when it connects with his ribs.

“Stop sneaking up on me, you bastard. You’re lucky I pulled back at the last second. I may have spent years training for these games, but I also trained my body too,” I growl. I should have broken his ribs. Taught him a lesson and scared off some of the people giving me side-eye.

“My apologies, Pixie.” Crow smirks, still standing in my bubble, and much to my delight, rubbing his sore ribs. Serves him right.

“Is this her?” a song-like voice asks, and I spin to see a woman so beautiful it steals my breath. Long, cascading blonde hair, and big blue eyes so bright they look like crystals. She wears a small tiara, and I can see her pointed ears peeking out of her hair. She holds herself with grace, and the look she gives me is assessing, but not unkind.

“Indeed,” Crow says, and as I look between them, their resemblance becomes obvious. “Moon, meet my sister, Genevieve.”

“You can call me Evie. Only my brother insists on using my full name,” she says, as she holds her small hand out for me to take.

“It’s a beautiful name. I chose it myself.” He straightens his back as he says this, making me frown.

“You chose your sister's name?” I question, and Crow nods once.

“Our mother died in childbirth, and our father refused to care for Genevieve,” Crow says, as a darkness falls over his features.

“Crow has always been more like a father to me, than a brother,” Evie adds, not seeming the least bit bothered by that fact.

“Fuck. That’s... Wait, how old are you both?” I ask, trying to guess based on their looks.

“Crow is thirty, and I am eighteen.”

“Crow is still considered young among our people, but far less insane.”

“Youth and insanity are common for Elves?” I ask, and Evie snorts.

“Youth and carelessness along with the reckless ability to find trouble are common.” She winks.

“Right. So, when can I leave?” I ask, wanting to get the fuck out of the Elven realm. There’s a weirdness in the air that I can’t quite name. Maybe, murderous intent?

“At the end of the night. Eventually, the Elven King will come out and welcome the contestants.” Crow looks around the room, and I don’t like how on edge he seems to be.

“Let's go, brother. You'll have time to woo the Witch later,” Evie says, as she locks her arm with his and starts pulling him away. I wave to them both as they make their way through the crowd, but I notice Crow keeps his eyes on me.



Cato

“Why are you stalking the purple-haired Witch?” Odas asks, and I hate the smile I hear in his voice.

“I’m not,” I grunt, not liking that he’s forcing me to speak in a crowded room. Odas is taller than I am, and I’m over six-four. His black hair is cut short. Brown eyes so dark they’re almost black, and his brown skin is darker than my tanned skin.

“Oh, but you are. In fact, you’ve marked her with your scent twice now...”

“I have not.” I spin, hating how smug he looks right now. He’s pleased that he’s caught me slippin’ up. I’ve managed to control myself for many decades now. Then I saw her in the crowded banquet.

“I feel it too,” he whispers, as he looks past me and toward the woman who caught my attention as soon as she stepped into the room. She’s breathtaking in that dress, and the overwhelming urge to drag her to a cave and claim her, show her my hoard, and present it to her. Fuck... I swallow hard, unable to look away from the silver slip of a dress and the wild purple hair. My other form is at war inside of me, pushing me to take her.

“Do you?” I narrow my eyes, and he takes a step away from me.

“That never gets any less creepy,” he mumbles, and I roll my reptilian eyes.

“What do you think it means?” I ask, and he shrugs.

“I don’t know, but I’m sure we’ll find out soon enough.” His grin is lopsided, and I have to hand it to the man, he has a way of blending in that I don’t.

“She feels...”

“Like something more than just a Witch?” Odas asks, and I nod. “She’s Heart Bonded,” he adds, nodding to her forearm.

“More to hoard,” I murmur under my breath, and Odas chuckles. Asshole.



Moon

“Arlo!” I rush over to him when I finally spot him. I’m a few steps away when I pause. “Holy hell,” I whisper, as I take in the sight of him. He’s dressed in a tux, and his mask is covering the lower half of his face, down to his neck, per usual. But damn. Arlo in a tux? Yes, please.

“Sweet fucking hell—” Arlo says, as he looks from my shoes up to my eyes and groans. “Are you trying to cause a scene? Fuck. Every man in this room looks ready to kidnap you, Moon,” he grumbles, and I smirk.

“Let them try.” I shrug. “I could use a good warm-up fight,” I chuckle, and Arlo sighs.

“You will be the death of me.” He shakes his head, and I frown.

“The mask?” I ask, and Arlo nods.

“I’m allowed to keep it on. Fortunately, Crow is one of the Elves running the Games and changed the rules. I won’t be the only one masked,” he says, nodding to a few others also hiding their faces. “You should wear one too. Along with a large tarp. And a paper bag for your head,” he jokes.

I just shake my head, hooking my arm in his. “You have a lot to tell me,” I say, and Arlo smiles.

“Not here,” he says, but I understand. It’s not safe. Especially if his not-dead-dead mother is the ex-queen of the Elven realm.

There’s a hiss in the crowd, as it parts like the sea, and a man in all black, towering over everyone except Arlo, every inch of his body covered, stomps by us. Arlo tugs me back, and I frown.

“Do you know him?” I ask, but apparently not quietly enough, because he stops mid-stride, turning to face me.

“Do you not?” the stranger asks, and I frown. Like Arlo, he’s wearing a mask over the lower half of his face. But unlike Arlo, his eyes are solid black, with a dirty blonde head of messy hair. He’s large, toned, muscular, and intimidating. Fucking hell, the danger radiating off of him is so thick in the air I can almost taste it. Small, curved ears suggest Fae.

“No. I don’t. Should I?” I ask, and I wonder if maybe I’m not as prepared for these games as I should have been. Why didn’t I do more research into the other species I’d be competing with? I suppose I wouldn’t have gotten terribly far anyway, given how secretive we all are.

He lifts a gloved hand, trailing it down my cheek, and I remain still as

people around me gasp, and Arlo goes still.

“You should be scared,” he says, rather than introducing himself.

“Of? You?” I question because, as we’ve discussed, I’m an idiot.

“Very much,” His eyes narrow, as he looks me over, and his eyebrows rise. “Try not to die too quickly out there. You’ll be so fun to toy with if we make it to the finals together.” I can’t see his smirk, but I know it’s there, as he spins and stomps on.

“Okay. That was-”

I don’t get to finish my statement, because, for the second time in two days, my world goes black.

CHAPTER TEN



Phoenix

“Fuck,” I curse when I roll onto my side and see that I’m in a cage. The Elven games have started. I look around, hoping Moon is with me, but I should have known better.

Instead, the Elven Prince, son of the cruel king, is here with me, along with another person I don’t recognize.

I sit up, watching as the prince gets to his feet, assessing his surroundings, and spots me watching him. His magenta eyes remind me of Echo. His features harden, and I wonder if maybe he was putting on a show back at the banquet when he was acting like a drunken ass.

I close my eyes, take a breath, and just hope Moon makes it long enough for me to catch up to her.

I’ve been looking out for her, protecting her, since we were both kids. If I fail now? I can’t even think of that.

I didn’t stumble into her life by accident, I was put there. My kind are so rare that no one talks about us anymore. No one talks about the fact that Phoenix’s are meant to be guardians. Protectors. That our main purpose is to serve.

It’s not exactly something I advertise since I’ve been protecting the same person since I was ten. Not that she knew. We didn’t even meet until she was twelve.

“Tristan?” the other man I don’t recognize, asks. The Elven heir just glares, not speaking a word.

From the life of the party to dead silent. This will be a fun first trial.



Moon

I groan, rolling over onto my side and coughing into the dirt. Fuck. Where am I? I lift my aching head from the ground and look around as my vision clears. I pop up, because holy shit, I'm in the Games. That's the only explanation that isn't much worse, like I've been kidnapped, and someone's about to make me their dinner.

And I'm in a cage. I look around quickly, needing a weapon or something... The Games aren't meant to kill you. And you're not required to kill. But I'm not stupid enough to think that every person here is going to have the same morals as I do. So, I search for a rock or something sharp...

That's when I see it. A massive dragon. His head is as wide as a car, and his body is longer than a school bus, maybe two. I freeze and watch it. It's asleep, head resting in the dirt like mine was. He smells like smoke, even from over here.

There's a rumble beside me, and I look over to see a fucking Cyclops. It's- no- he's watching me with his one eye, and it's rather unnerving. I notice he's wearing this sack thing around his waist. At least it covers his bits.

I'm still wearing my banquet dress. Awesome. Sexy, revealing, and completely impractical. Fuckers could have warned us. I kick my heels off, gripping one in each hand. At least I have these. They're slightly sharp.

"Can for sure use these to kill if I have to," I warn since the Cyclops is still staring at me.

A loud, thunderous voice fills the entire area beyond the cage. I look around, seeing nothing but hedges. Stones... There's only one direction to go. Straight into what is clearly a maze. Fuck nuggets.

"For the purposes of this round, you'll be playing in teams of three," the voice bellows, stirring the Dragon. "This will change, so don't get too attached. After all, they're still your competition. Each team must make it from their cage to the end of the maze, alive, obviously. Beware the shadows, and do not let your guard down," the voice cuts off, and the silence is so loud I flinch. Until the beast beside me moves.

"I thought..." I murmur. "Aren't Cyclops, uh, a bit... childlike?" I ask, unsure how to word it without being rude. I've just heard that they're rather gentle and kind. Their size makes them clumsy, and they only fight if

provoked. Still, as the jumbo-sized being stares at me with its one eye, I nibble my lip. Apparently, these two are on my team. The dragon's eyes blink open, and I stand, stepping backward. "Are your teammates allowed to eat you? Because I feel like you're looking at me like I'm dinner."

I back up against the cage bars and hold my hands up.

"I'm not tasty. I smell like... feet?" I don't know what dragons find gross, but feet usually do it for the rest of us... Unless of course the dragon has a dirty foot fetish... I might sound even tastier now.

In a swift move that makes me scream bloody murder, the monstrous Cyclops lifts me and plops me on his shoulders. I wrap my legs around his neck, attempting to strangle him, but it's no use. Dude's neck is thick. He lifts a massive hand and waggles one finger in front of my face.

"Are you... scolding me?" I yelp, holding on for dear life. He's got short dark brown hair, and I imagine as far as his kind is concerned, he's an attractive guy. Lean and strong, just you know, one eye right there in the middle, and a very innocent demeanor.

I look down and watch as the Dragon transforms into a humanoid man. "Oh shit, tell this guy to put me down!" I yelp, now that I'm not scared I'm dragon boy's next meal. Don't get me wrong, I don't think the big guy means me harm, but this is... super awkward.

"I thought you were worried I'd eat you?" is his only low tone but snarky response, as he observes me with reptilian eyes.

"Wow. How unhelpful. Can you blame me?! You were staring at me..." I hiss, as the cage walls fall, and a gong sounds through the game grounds.

"You were staring at me, too," he says, and my mouth falls open, and I have no response. I could point out that he was the one with the pointy teeth, but he doesn't seem interested in arguing. "Just, hang on tight, and don't scream again. His ears are sensitive," the Dragon says, and I nod.

"I'm Moon, by the way," I say, waving as he turns back to me again, looking up.

"Cato."



Moon

“So, did you want to maybe cover up?” I ask the very naked Cato.

Once the immediate threat of being eaten passed, I realized he was butt-ass naked. I’m holding onto the giant’s hair like you’d hold a horse’s reins. I tug one side or the other every so often, getting a good look around. He seems content to follow my direction and to trail behind the danger lizard.

Cato’s ass cheeks flex with every step, and it’s honestly distracting. I’m trying so hard not to look, that all I can think about is looking. This leads to me glancing down... You get it.

We’ve been walking for maybe two hours, and Cato hasn’t even tried to make himself a leafy cover.

“No,” is his only response, and the jumbo-sized mountain between my thighs grunts. It shakes my entire body and feels a little like being in a car on a gravel road. Only bumpier.

“He’s awfully grumpy, isn’t he?” I whisper, patting my new buddy’s head. He huffs, and Cato glares over his shoulder.

“I also have sensitive hearing,” he snaps, and I pull my lips between my teeth, biting them shut. Well, this has been awkward from the first moment.

“Think they would have put me in with my Heart bonded,” I huff. Better the devil you know. Not that Arlo is a devil.

I was warming up to the idea of Arlo being my Bonded, but then I’ve spent thirty seconds with him since I learned about it.

The giant gets a bit stiff and jerky under me when I say that, and the dragon... Did he just?

“Was that smoke that just puffed out of your nose?” I ask, but Cato ignores me. Apparently, I’ve annoyed him into silence. Lovely.

“Can you say your name, big guy?” I ask, patting the big guy’s head after a few minutes of silence, and then cling to his hair for dear life when he shakes his head no. “No more big movements please unless you’re trying to fling me off,” I chuckle.

“There’s a pond up ahead. There’s something in the pond, maybe just fish, but if I had to guess, this is where we gather supplies for the next few days,” Cato says, and I sigh with relief. Once the Games start, you don’t leave until there’s only one player standing. This is just level one. Almost all contestants will make it past this level. They always make the first trial more

about getting supplies and making sure anyone dumb enough to eat the berries is taken out quickly.

“You think someone is watching me ride you right now, and is thinking about how lucky I am that I got paired with you two for this trial?” I ask my giant quietly. He shrugs his shoulders ever so slightly, shaking me violently. “Sheesh, maybe you should let me down?” I ask, but he waggles his finger at me again.

“There’s no reasoning with him. He won’t really listen if he doesn’t want to,” Cato says, and I rest my chin on the big guy’s head, sighing.

“Fair.”

We make it to the pond pretty quickly, and after Cato shifts into his Dragon and looks around a bit, he shifts back and heads for the supplies.

That’s when the giant sets me down, rather gently, too. He points to the clothes as Cato fills a backpack full of stuff now that he’s finally dressed.

“It’ll get dark here soon. We need to stay here for the night.” Cato nods to the tree furthest from the pond, and the giant Cyclops stomps over, plopping down on his butt. “He’ll take first watch.”

“How do you know?” I ask because nothing the Cyclops has done suggests that was his intention.

“Just do.” He grabs a sleeping bag and hands it to me, before getting started on our campsite for the night. He digs a hole for the fire, and I help him gather sticks. I didn’t see him do it, but I suspect he used his fire-breathing skills to start the fire.

I frown as I watch him gather pebbles from the pond’s edge and then bring them back to his sleeping bag. I guess Dragons really do hoard everything.

I was able to pull on a long sleeve black shirt and a multi-pocket pair of pants. Tight-fitting, but handy for sure.

And, the best part, a pair of black boots. I use my dress to wipe some sweat off my face. But I don’t fully get into the pond. Maybe if the other two do it first, I will. Cato said it was safe, but what if the fish are just waiting for me to step in so they can snack on me?

Despite being carried the whole day, I’m exhausted, so after scarfing down a granola bar and an entire bottle of water, I lie down in my sleeping bag, snuggling in. Of course, that’s when I feel the urge to pee, so I reluctantly crawl out of my warm cocoon and head for the bushes on the other side of the pond. Cato appears to be asleep, but the big guy just keeps

his eye on me. Unnerving.

I do my business quickly behind a bush, but then have to air dry. No way am I using a leaf, and I also don't have toilet paper. So, I just squat here for a few moments before I pull my pants up and stumble in my loose boots back to the wonderful little sleeping bag.

It's beautiful out here tonight. The stars we see are formed by the universe of this realm, and dance in a way they don't back in the Witching Realm. The grass is soft to the touch, like moss, and the ground is warm, despite the cool night air. I take a deep breath because it smells so good. I spent a lot of time camping to prepare myself for being out here, so I feel right at home.

Kicking my boots off, I'm about to lift the top of my sleeping bag when I see three pebbles. I frown, looking around. Cato is out cold, and the big guy is scanning the trees around us. I think I would have felt it if the big guy moved even an inch.

"Psst." I try to whisper, but if they hear me, they both ignore me. I look back down, picking up the three pebbles and examining them by the light of the small fire. "Ooooh," I breathe, holding one up as the fire reflects through it, almost looking like a ruby. The next one is a foggy green with little cracks of blue. And the third is purple. Freaking purple, like my hair. I nibble my lip and resist the urge to caress my new pet pebbles.

Looking over to the pond's edge, I can't see the pebbles' colors, but that has to be where these came from.

"Who gave me the pebbles?" I ask, suspecting the danger lizard, but he's out cold.

I bet he'd strangle me if he could hear me refer to him as a danger lizard. Heh. Definitely thinking of him as such from now on. Cato the Danger Lizard.

Since I'm a practical gal, I stash the pebbles in my bra and pat it several times. I even do a little chest jiggle, double-checking. Yep. Secure.

"Thank you, mysterious pebble fairy," I whisper, and the Cyclops smirks, making me think maybe it was him... "If it was you, you know you're not getting into my pants, right? Your dick is probably the same size as my entire body," I hiss, and this time the big guy chuckles. It shakes the ground, and I drop my eyes to his minimal coverage.

"Okay, maybe that was a bit dramatic, but I can tell you right now, it would not fit," I say, and then cringe when the big guy blushes and lifts one

knee like he's trying to hide his body from my eyes. "Oh shit, I'm a goblin's ass," I stand, not caring that I'm barefoot, and take a few steps toward him. "Sometimes stuff just comes out of my mouth. But I want you to know, I know you're not going to hurt me. That you wouldn't... I just meant, our anatomy isn't made to fit together... as in, don't start crushing on me, because... well... you know. I suppose I could kiss you. And there's other stuff—"

"For the love of all things in this universe, please shut up, Moon. He's not going to try to fuck you or develop a crush or whatever the fuck you're rambling about. Lie down and go to sleep. And for fuck's sake, leave him alone," Cato snaps from his sleeping bag, making my cheeks burn red, especially because I have no doubt that will be televised. Across all the realms. Awful. I just hope Grams doesn't see that...

"I'm sorry. I hope you can forgive me. I wasn't trying to make you uncomfortable." I bow my head to him because I don't know how else to say sorry that doesn't involve a hug that he's too large for when I'm snatched up off my feet by jumbo hands.

He holds me up in front of him, tipping his head to me. He just holds himself there, and I freeze. Do I scratch his head? What should I do?

"Kiss his head, pat his hair, I don't care, just hurry up. I can't sleep with your ruckus," Cato growls, and I turn and stick my tongue out at him. Annoying danger lizard.

I go with a simple head pat, and the big guy sets me down, giving me the smallest push with his finger toward my sleeping bag. I pat the pebbles in my bra, making sure they're still there, and then climb into bed.

"Thank you both. I know having me as a teammate hasn't been beneficial for you. But I promise not to die before we make it to the end," I whisper, and as I snuggle into my inflatable pillow, I find it easy to drift off with the big guy watching over me.



Odas

I watch as she pats her chest where she hid her pebbles, and I smile. She's cute. Even more so out here than at the banquet. She seems to think this is my only form though, which has been fairly entertaining, even with all the dirty looks Cato shoots my way.

I had seen Cato stashing a few pebbles in his bag before he climbed into bed, but he never got near Moon's sleeping bag. I would have noticed. But I haven't seen anyone else out here, so whoever placed the pebbles is either powerful enough to hide from my superior vision or very small. Or Cato tossed them when my head was turned.

I'll have to shift back tomorrow. But for now, I'll watch as these two sleep, and attempt not to chuckle as Moon snores like a train. Cato doesn't even notice.

CHAPTER ELEVEN



Moon

“Once we make it to the end, they’ll pit us against each other,” Cato announces as we walk the next morning. The big guy agreed to let me walk for the first half, and I am grateful. I need to get a lay of the land and feel out the area. I suspect he might be slightly suspicious of me as well though because this morning when I got up to pee, a freaking Goblin jumped out of a bush.

I was about to use my powers to stop him when this crazy little murder snake jumped out of the same bush and bit the Goblin's neck!

Of course, I screamed, making both men come running. They found the Goblin dead, but the snake was nowhere to be seen, and neither of them seemed to believe my story about the murder noodle.

I need to find a way to disappear once we reach the end. Because Cato is right about one thing at least.

“Best case scenario, it's three on three or something, and we can work together to make it through to the second trial,” Cato adds, and I sigh. One can only hope. The games are constantly changing. Trials changing, plans flipping on their side. Whatever gives the audience the best show.

“I won’t win in a fight against you two. My magic—” I pause, remembering my mother’s words. Take the necklace off... My heart starts to race as I realize I must do it now, while things are mellow. And let’s be honest, while I remember, because I forget everything, man.

Who fucking knows what will happen, though.

My fingers tremble as I reach up, grab the stone, breathe deep, and then lift it off my head. I wait, but nothing happens. Maybe it was more of a symbolic thing? I kneel, dig a small hole in the dirt, and place it there, covering it back up. I feel weird leaving it. Like I’m cutting off my toe... but I think I need to do this.

My intuition usually isn’t completely wrong. Usually...

“Hmph” the big guy grunts, and I stand up, looking up at him, and shrug.

“I don’t know, man.” I don’t explain, just start walking once more. I feel exactly the same. “Boo, lame,” I hiss. “Can I have another granola bar?” I ask Cato because I’m starving all of a sudden and feeling lightheaded.

He doesn’t respond, just tosses it at me. I catch it but just barely. My hands shake as I try to open the wrapper and nearly drop it.

“Um, Cato?” I mumble, just in time for him to spin and watch me fall to the ground.



Cato

It smells like dirt and trees out here, and that annoys me for some reason. That is, except for the scent of strawberries wafting off Moon in waves. I can hardly look at her without wanting a taste. Dragons love strawberries.

“Cato,” she murmurs weakly, and I spin just in time to catch her limp form as she falls.

“Moon, what the fuck?” I ask, and the Cyclops punches his chest, but I shake my head. “No, you carried her yesterday,” I grumble, as I lift her and carry her bridal style through the maze. She’s burning up and shivering like she’s cold. Her skin is pale and looks sickly. What the fuck?

“Mmph,” the dude grunts, and I shake my head.

“No, greedy fuck,” I snap, making him stomp, shaking the ground beneath my feet. “If you don’t stop your shit, I’ll drop her, and that’ll be on you,” I hiss. “We need to find another place to rest. Something’s wrong,” I say and pick up my pace.

“Moon?” I ask, aggravated, but not at her. At my fear for her.

“Well, what do we have here?” a man says as we pass through a narrow bit of maze, and I realize we’ve made it to the end. Instantly I’m on edge. I can sense the murderous intent, and so can my companion. He takes her from me, and I don’t fight as I release her to him. He holds her close to his chest, and she grumbles something about danger noodles.

“Three dead men walk into a clearing, but three men walk out. Who are the three dead men?” I ask, as my Dragon rises to the fight, ready to spring. Dragons love dumb ass riddles too.

“We just want the girl,” one of them says, licking his lips. Oh, wrong words to say.

I back up, as the Cyclops starts to stomp forward. He’s about to crush one of the men under his enormous foot when I hold up my hand. Moon snuggles into her protector, completely unaware of what’s happening.

“Yeah, man, we aren’t even here for the game. Give her to us, and we’ll bow out. You two can go on with that guy,” the scrawny dude says, confirming my theory about not all of us making it on to the second trial. I flick my eyes to see who their third is and hiss.

The Fae Prince. The supposedly bastard Fae Prince. The rumors about him are unending, and I swear, if I didn’t know better, I’d assume he was

here to kill freely.

But I've watched him, observed him. He's dangerous, but he's never harmed an innocent. And I would know, just as well as Odas, what the vicious Fae are capable of.

"Just one little problem, boys," Fenrick says, as he slowly removes one glove. "She's mine." And then the Fae Prince is on them. With one single touch of his skin against theirs, they scream in pain, before dropping dead.

I consider my chances of convincing the Cyclops to give the girl over to Fenrick, but he just shrugs. "The terms are six in, four out. Just keep her alive a little..." Fenrick pauses, looking at Moon in a way I don't like. I also noticed he said 'mine.' I don't like that either.

"What the fuck..." he whispers, disappearing before our eyes.

"Nifty trick," I grumble, checking the area for instructions. "Of course. 'The remaining four will continue on to the next part of the maze.'" I read out loud, noticing the supplies in the center. "Put her down and shift back already," I tell him, already annoyed with this game. He's been letting her think he's some kind of pet this entire time, and I just can't deal with it any longer.



Moon

“You’re no fun. She thinks I’m like her pet,” a gruff voice says from beside me, and I roll over, once again lying on the ground. At least it’s grass.

“Odas, I’m well aware of that...” Cato grumbles, and I flinch because I can feel someone touching me, except, there’s no one near me at all. I narrow my eyes, either I’m going crazy, or something sus is happening here.

“Fine. But I’m not doing this for you,” a man I don’t recognize says, and I watch as he pulls his clothes on. The longer I watch, the more familiar he gets.

“You lying little-“ I groan, and both men snap their gazes to me. I’m about to jump to my feet so I can cut their throats for lying to me this whole time. That’s when I see the two dead bodies. What the fu-

“What did I miss?” I ask, distracted for a moment. But only for a moment, because then the man I know was a giant Cyclops just a moment ago grins at me. “You shady fuck...” I say, glaring and pointing my finger at him.

“In my defense, you just assumed—” he starts, but I cut him off.

“How dare you.” I shove my finger at him wishing it was a knife as I sit up, but the world spins. “Oh, I’m gonna throw up.” I dry heave, but nothing actually comes up. “Oh, man. That was awful. What’s wrong with me?” I groan, falling back to the ground, but I swear I hit it softer than I should. Like someone caught me. I look up but find nothing.

“Strange things are happening,” I complain, as I reach my hand up and rub my head.

“Are you okay?” the man, who's apparently Odas and supposed to have only one eyeball, asks me. The concern in his eyes, yes plural, is clear, but I’m still mad at him for lying to me like the bastard he is.

“Someone, tell me what’s going on.” I wave off his question, annoyed, flicking his hand away when he kneels down and reaches for me. “Are they... dead?” I ask, but I can tell they are, I just need verbal confirmation.

A man appears out of thin air beside me and scares the fuck out of me. I scream and then pull my fist back, but just before I can punch him, he catches my wrist with a gloved hand.

“You don’t want to do that. One little touch and you’d die,” he says, and I frown. It’s the man from the banquet who’d worn a mask like Echo. “Which

is terribly unfortunate.” His last words are a whisper and make me frown. Odd thing to say when I was about to break his nose.

“Those men tried to convince us to hand you over. They didn't even care about the game,” Odas says, looking around the small clearing like he's on edge. He shakes his head and grumbles something under his breath. “If the Blood Fae here hadn't killed them, I would have stomped them to death,” he adds, and I resume glaring at him, reminded that he lied to me.

“We reached the end of the trial? Did I pass out or something?” And then his words sink in. “They wanted you to hand me over to them?” My mouth falls open, and I just stare. “How'd they die, exactly, since you didn't stomp them?”

“Touched me,” the man still hovering over me says.

“He touched them, actually,” Cato clarifies. “Didn't you, Prince Fenrick?” I frown, the way Cato just said Prince felt very angry. Like the word itself offends him.

“Is this going to be a thing?” Fenrick asks Cato, who just scoffs and walks away, heading for the supplies.

“What was that?” I ask Odas, who just shakes his head with a solemn expression.

“It's a long story, and it's not mine alone to tell,” Odas says, before standing, and stepping away from me to follow his friend.

“It's not my story to tell either, but I can say that my mother isn't a very good person, and unfortunately those two know that all too well.” Fenrick frowns, the first real emotion I've seen flashing in his eyes, but then it's gone before I can identify it, and he's back to stone cold.

I pat my pebbles again, feeling unsettled, and for whatever reason, that helps. This makes Fenrick frown before he disappears before my eyes once more.

“Blood Fae can disappear?” I ask, and Odas shakes his head, as I weakly stand and make my way over to him. Unable to resist, I flick the back of his head, before grabbing my bag and refilling it with fresh supplies.

“No— ow— No, not all Blood Fae can disappear. There are only two Blood Fae alive, after all. The king and his son. As far as I know, the king doesn't have that power...” Odas says when I feel heated breath against my ear.

“He doesn't,” Fenrick whispers, making my skin tingle.

“Hey!” I yelp, falling forward as I flip my head to the side, looking for

the culprit. “That’s super annoying,” I hiss and hear him chuckle.

“Don’t worry, little Witch. At night, my ability to bend light is much harder to control.” Fenrick grabs me, pulling me upright, even though I still can’t see him.

Odas frowns and then throws a random punch into thin air. There’s a masculine grunt beside me, and then Odas is snickering.

“Ha, where’d I get you?” Odas asks, returning to his task.

“Shoulder,” Fenrick grunts, reappearing. “You’re lucky it wasn’t my face,” he snips, before turning to me. “If you’re going to keep throwing punches at me, put gloves on,” and then he’s stomping off. “All of you,” he adds, and I smirk. Guess he wants all of us alive.

“He’s just one big ball of sunshine, isn’t he?” I grumble, shaking my head. I do as he said, though, looking for a pair of gloves in the chest of supplies. I know myself well enough to know I’ll probably try to knock his ass out again.

As I pull my sleeves up to pull the new gloves on, I notice something odd. The Heart-Bonded mark I share with Arlo is... All the way wrapped around my full forearm, even dipping down to wrap around my fingers. Some of the black lines look like lightning strikes, and some resemble a tree’s branches.

Fire and leaves... “What the fuck?” I whisper, and before Cato can see what I’m seeing, I put the gloves on and push my sleeve down. I jump to my feet and race toward the same exit Fenrick took.

“Strange things indeed,” I mumble, not understanding one fucking bit.

My pack is stocked, my thighs carry knives strapped to me, and I’m hiding a secret weapon, my tits.

Now, that last one won’t work on a person who isn’t attracted to women, but I’m crossing my fingers here. Straight men seem to have a reset button, one of which is boobs.

It’s something I will never understand. I don’t lose all brain functions when I see dick...

Men are strange.

CHAPTER TWELVE



Moon

“We should attempt to stick together,” Odas says as he jogs up beside me, and I curse under my breath.

“No, we shouldn’t. The instructions didn’t say we’re still a team, we could very well be enemies at this point. The next task could be to incapacitate someone in the group. Being the smallest and least blessed with shifting abilities, I’d be the first target.” I jog faster, but Odas matches my speed easily, as does Cato, who’s just a few steps behind his apparent friend.

“Moon—”

“No. I’m still mad at you for the lies—”

“I never lied. You just assumed—”

“You’re about to be *presumed* dead if you don’t cut the shit. You let me think I was insulting your super-sized dick, when in fact, it’s probably quite small and ineffective!” I snap, knowing men find this insulting.

Like, no one has ever been like... ew, small boobies, cover those up, when I flashed them. Although Daire did seem less interested in seeing them than I’m used to. I pause mid-stride.

“Have I been... Is it assault to flash you?” I ask, as Odas runs past me, and Cato crashes into me. Thankfully, his buddy was anticipating this, because he catches me before I can go flying into outer space from the force of Cato’s body slamming into mine.

“Moonlight Blossom!” Cato snaps, and we all fucking freeze, because at no point have I ever told a soul my full name willingly. Especially not in the last two days.

I narrow my eyes on him, holding up one finger. “First,” I say, shoving said finger in his face. “If I hear you say my full name again, I will cut your tongue out and feed it to Odas. Second,” I add a second finger and step closer. Cato crosses his arms over his chest, attempting to look unaffected, but I can tell saying my full name was unintentional. “I don’t know how you know that name, but I now solidly believe I can’t trust either of you as far as I could throw you, and since I can’t even lift you, that is exactly zero percent!”

This time I get right in his face. “And third. Answer the question. You too, Fae boy. I can feel you breathing down my neck,” I snap, taking two quick steps back, right into a chest. Fenrick appears behind me, lifting his brow, and I just glare.

These men severely underestimate me, which suits me just fine.

“No. I can’t say I’ve ever felt assaulted by seeing a woman’s breasts,” Odas says, clearly failing to hide his grin.

“No,” is all Cato says, before Fenrick spins me and tugs me against his chest.

“Why?” he asks, searching my eyes for an answer, and I get the urge to tug his mask down. However, the last time I snatched someone’s mask, my life flipped on its axis. This makes me wonder, though, is he pulling his mask down just so he can breathe down my neck? Or is he sniffing me? Creeper.

“Well. In a pinch, if I flash a man my breasts, it usually saves me a good three seconds. Long enough to bolt and escape, rather than fight.” I shrug, honestly. Unsure why I just confessed. “Do you have compulsion magic, you fuck?” I accuse, making him frown and flinch back slightly. Understanding flashes in his eyes, before he shrugs, clearly smirking under that mask.

“No more flashing your breasts to anyone,” Fenrick growls, and I lift a brow.

“Why? They’re lying, aren’t they? It is like an assault!” I screech, and Fenrick rolls his eyes so far back into his head, I think he just saw his own brain.

“No, Moon. If a man is already attacking you, and you’re doing it to protect yourself, it’s no more assaulting than breaking his nose would be. Honestly, it’s a free show they don’t deserve,” Fenrick grumbles, and I nod.

“What if I’m not being attacked? What if I’m just trying to escape?” I add, needing to know.

“Listen, if you flash a coworker, or some rando on the street, sure, that’s offensive. But if you’re doing it as a defense tactic, I’d say no. All’s fair in war, right?” Odas says, but I shake my head.

“No, war is evil. War ends lives, even if the person escapes with a heartbeat. War does irreparable damage,” I say vehemently. I shake my head, looking up at Fenrick. “No flashing titties, I guess.”

“Just to be clear, if I’m in a fight with a woman or at war, titties are the least traumatic thing I’ll see,” Odas adds.

“What if it was a dick. Huge monster cock?” I ask, hands on my hips as I search all their faces, and all three men cringe.

“I mean, ew, but not traumatic,” Fenrick says with a shrug.

“Maybe it’s because I’m a woman. Maybe it’s because men have been using their power against us since time began, but I can tell you, if a man

whipped his dick out in a fight, I'd be traumatized. It's a double standard. It's not okay, and I'm an asshole." I nod, deciding right then that I will never flash another man that doesn't ask to see my boobs.

I look around, knowing I won't see the camera. "Jeffery James, from my senior year of magical practice, sorry dude. I know you ended up following me around for the rest of the year, but I was wrong. Although, you were holding a fucking bat, so..." I pause, thinking of the other time I used my boobs to save myself. "To the bouncer at my favorite bar, Henry's, sorry. You were just huge and super intimidating, and I panicked. This is my official confession, in case either of you decides to press charges..."

"Are you done?" Cato sneers, and I shrug.

"No. I need to apologize to my coworker Daire. I didn't flash him, but I threatened to, just to piss my boss off, and he was very upset about that. So." I shrug. "I can do that one in person, though, after I win this shit." I wiggle my eyebrows.

Three groans make me roll my eyes before I duck out from under Fenrick's arms.

"You three just— stay away, okay? I think it's best you all go elsewhere. You might already be in love with me, but I'm Heart Bonded to someone else. So." I jog away, but they follow.

"You can have more than one Heart Bonded," Odas calls out, but I shake my head.

"Witches never do," I shout back, picking up my pace, but Fenrick jogs beside me easily.

"Full-blood Witches, maybe. But half-breeds?" he says, before disappearing, making my steps falter.

"What does that mean?! What are you insinuating?" I shout, but trip over my own feet, landing hard on my hands and knees.

The ground shakes, and I shake my head. Jeez, I didn't fall that hard.

Fenrick drops beside me and wraps his arms around me. The world around me takes on this bizarre glow, and Cato and Odas freak out.

"Mungus," Fenrick whispers, and I freeze. Crow warned me about those...

"Don't offend them!" I whisper-shout, and the other two men smash themselves against the hedges of the maze, keeping their eyes down, as Fenrick holds me tightly to him on the opposite side.

An animal that looks super similar to a very small hippo-cow-zebra thing,

comes prancing around the corner. It pauses, sniffing the air, sensing us. It just stands there, waiting. I can feel its glare. Practically hear it calling us a bunch of bitches.

“Let me go.” I tug free from Fenrick, who curses, and I step into its path. I tip my head down, not looking up at it. “Uh, hi. We’re just following the maze. We mean you no harm. Would you like some berries?” I ask, keeping my hands up where the Mungus can see them.

“Moon,” one of the guys hisses, but I shake my head.

“It might have found it offensive that we were hiding,” I hiss back, and it stomps its thick... uh paw? Foot? Hoof? And I look up and watch it huff, doing a little head shake thing. “No berries?” Another stomp. “Okay, uh. What did I say?” I ask, and on the third stomp, it steps toward me.

“Damn it, Moon.”

“Hush, Cato.”

“She’s a girl. Not it,” Odas supplies, and I look back up.

“Oh, I’m sorry, I didn’t want to assume. You’re very kind, not trampling me for my mistake,” I quickly add, and she huffs again. This time, the foot stomp is less sassy. Barely.

“Berries,” Odas instructs, and I nod. I move slowly, pulling the berries out of my backpack, and holding them out to her in my open palm.

“On the floor?” I ask, which gets me a very angry double stomp. “Okay! Okay, straight from my hand, then?” I guess, and her answer is a huff. As she walks forward, much slower now, she bows her head and then lifts it to rather gently lick the berries from my hand.

The chirping sound she lets out, which sounds like a ferret, combined with her slobbery tongue makes me giggle, and she nudges me with her wide flat nose.

“Pets?” I ask, lifting my hand to scratch her ear, and nearly dying as her little tail flicks around happily. “Oh, aren’t you just the smartest, most pretty girl there is?” I praise her, as I rub her head cheerfully.

“Balls,” Fenrick hisses, and I lift my head.

“What?”

“You would find a way to convince a Mungus to imprint on you. I hope you’re a skilled berry and fish hunter because that’s what she eats most.” Fenrick shakes his head and then vanishes. Very annoying. “Guess you’re a mother now,” he adds, making my jaw fall open, as I stare at my new... uh. Baby?



Moon

“I’m starting to think you were the dangerous part of trial two,” I say, as I pat the sweet girl’s head. I’ve started calling her sweet girl, so until someone can tell me her name, that’s it now.

“She’s not. When night falls, there will be a new task,” Cato says, and I sigh, really wishing they’d go away. Sure, they are grade-A eye candy, but I really don’t want to have to fight them.

“It is night,” I point out, but Odas shakes his head.

“No. Deep into the night. It’ll be something that seems trivial but will be extremely difficult. The Games last until there’s only one person standing. Today is day two. The next few days will be an all-out bloodbath. Starting tonight,” Odas whispers, as we turn the corner, and I yelp when my chest collides with someone else’s.

“You!” he hisses, and I flinch back. Sweet Girl is not having it because she stomps forward, but I stop her.

“Woah, it’s okay, no maiming.” I hold my hand up, and the Vampire hisses and then sucks in a deep, ragged breath. His eyes flash red, and his fangs descend. “Okay, maybe a little maiming...” I step back, and Fenrick appears in front of me.

“Get back,” he warns, and Daire hisses.

“You get back!” My eyebrows shoot up, and I frown. “Two days, no blood,” he adds helpfully, and my eyes go wide.

“Weren’t you with a group? They didn’t—”

“They knocked me out, tied me up, and when we made it through the first trial, the other team... well they left me there after nearly killing the two that tied me up.”

“Because you’re a Vampire?” I ask, and he nods. “Shit, is there no blood in any of the supplies? They give us food...” I frown, that seems super fucked up. Rigged.

“Blood can’t be kept fresh out here,” Daire says, before taking several steps away from me. “Most other groups have split by now...oh.”

“Oh, what?” I ask, and he shakes his head.

“Nothing.” He pushes his glasses up the bridge of his nose, and I smile. I wonder what those do for his vision...

With a speed I wasn’t expecting, Daire flashes away. And at first, I think

he's gone, until my world blurs.

We move so fast, for so long, that I get sick. I could do nothing but hold on for dear life.

When the world stops moving, and I'm placed on the ground, I look up to find Daire pushing his hands into his hair, pacing around.

I curl up in the fetal position, hugging my stomach, and closing my eyes, hoping my body adjusts to that bullshit.

"What the fuck? That was horrible," I whine, and Daire laughs, but it's lacking humor. It's dry, almost angry.

"Not feeding for two fucking days is horrible," he snaps, and I blink up at him.

"They weren't gonna hurt me if that's what you were thinking? I didn't need to be saved. I guess I appreciate the help, though. I haven't been able to shake them since we all got dropped in here," I groan, as I slowly sit up.

"I don't want to do this," Daire groans, dropping to his knees, and my alarm bells start going off.

"Do what?" I grab the handle of my knife and Daire laughs.

"Unless you have silver, that won't do shit," he chuckles, and I shrug.

"Could be silver. You know, for someone complaining about almost being flashed, you sure do look ready to assault me. With your fangs."

"Why do you think I was so upset? I have no control over my need, Moon!" Daire flashes to me, and in a blink, I'm on my back and looking up at him.

"Can you drink, without killing me?" I ask, and Daire nods.

"When I'm not starving," he whispers, and I nibble my lip.

"Try not to?" I ask. If I didn't know Daire from work, I'd be trying to kill him right now. But I know he's a decent man. He's just starving. I might try to cut a chunk off the danger lizard if I were hungry enough.

"I should have grabbed the Cyclops," he groans, dropping his forehead until it's resting on my shoulder, and I shiver under him. "But then I'd be dead. I don't want to hurt you, but I need to feed," he whimpers.

"Bite me, now. Quickly. And then I'll stab your leg or something before you take too much?" I offer, poking his side. When he turns his head, removes his glasses, and licks my skin from my collarbone to my earlobe, I shake under him, because that should not have felt good. This is a terrifying and life-threatening moment. Not a sexy one.

"You smell fucking incredible," he groans, and I giggle nervously.

“I didn’t expect you to be so flirty. You’re normally so uptight, no offense,” I say breathlessly, clutching my knife for dear life.

“Control is something I struggle with. It’s all or nothing.” He nibbles my skin now, and I gasp.

“Sheesh, no kidding. Am I about to die?” I whisper, wondering if I’m more, or less, likely to survive if I just stab him now.

“Maybe,” he admits. “It’ll feel good, at least,” he adds, and I scoff.

“That doesn’t make it better.” I pause, “Good how?”

“Like fucking and eating ice cream, after taking a long hot shower,” he says, and I laugh.

“That’s an unusually specific description,” I say, noticing I’ve wrapped my legs around his waist. “I feel like maybe you should do it now, before I chicken out, and try to kill you,” I add, and then pull his head down with the knife-free hand. “Or try to fuck you, because apparently, my body’s response to being threatened is to be horny as fuck.”

“I’ll. Try,” he hisses, and then he’s biting. My back arches, and I moan like a porn star working for her money. He wasn’t wrong, this feels fucking insane. Life changing. Shit, if I live, I’m making him bite me every day. I know I’m grinding against him, like a horny teenager getting kissed in the back seat of the car owned by the guy’s parents.

“Shit, Daire...” I moan, completely shameless. One second, I’m grinding against the hungry Vamp, and in the next, I’m lying there, and Daire is gone.

I look up, finding a man I’ve never seen before hovering over me. He looks down at me, eyes wild, and the look in his eyes scares me. He drops down, kisses my cheek, and then places a pebble on my chest, before running away. He’s faster than even Daire was and disappears into the hedges. No, he plows through them... Wow.

I grab the pebble, holding it up and seeing that it looks like the other ones, only this one is silver. I tuck it into my bra, sit up, and find Daire unconscious, slumped like fifteen feet away.

What the hell is happening? Who just saved me from... either the best orgasm of my life or being murdered? What the fuck is up with the cheek kiss and the pebbles?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN



Crow

I shake my head and sigh. I didn't realize the king was allowing the Light Ones to participate. I watch the screen, feeling like I need to act, knowing I can't, as I watch the Vampire climb back to his feet and walk over to Moon, who's still sitting on her ass. She looks around and watches the area where the Light One just disappeared through.

"What the hell was that?" Daire asks, and Moon shakes her head. The camera zooms in on the bite marks on her neck and then pulls back out so we can see the blood still dripping down Daire's chin.

"No idea," Moon whispers like she's in a daze, and a spark of jealousy ignites inside my chest. Not because I want what Daire just had, although, I do. But because he's in there, he can protect her. I'm doing everything I can from the outside, but my hands are so fucking tied it's insane.

I know the king suspects me of treason, but without proof, what can he do? Hell, he's got his own fucking son playing this year. The man's a loon.

I have some sway and influence over what games to throw at them next, but in the end, I don't get the final say. Fortunately, I was able to convince them to pit Moon against a weaker Witch for capture the flag.

However, Moon still has to survive the fucking trial itself, assuming she gets to the flag first.

The screen cuts off as my sister stomps into the room. My heart aches for her because her fate is so entwined with my own. If I die, she'll be left without protection. If I stop, for even a second, the fucking king will sink his claws into her. His wives mysteriously go missing or die of some illness, whenever he finds someone new to toy with. He's been stalking my sister for far longer than he should.

She's still nearly a child in Elven years. She won't have to worry much longer though, assuming I can enact my plans before my Heart Bonded gets herself killed, thus weakening me beyond repair.

"You need to do something," she announces, her hands on her hips. She's putting on a good front. She wants me to believe she's stronger than she is, but I raised her. I know when her strength is real, and when it's being faked. Right now, she's terrified I'll die. Terrified something will happen to my Heart Bonded. Terrified, she'll be taken away from her life and have her freedom stolen.

Over my rotting corpse.

“I’m aware,” I sigh. I have nothing more to offer.

“Now,” she snaps, and I stare at her for a moment before I speak.

“I know...”

I just don’t know what the fuck I’m supposed to do about any of this. I have a plan, sure. But the players keep changing, and the game board keeps moving.

What does any of this mean? Why am I Heart Bonded to a woman who’s bonded to six other men? Powerful men. Fuck, maybe even seven others.

Lost princes, royal Fae, the last of the Dragons... fuck.

Bad things are coming for us all. That’s the only explanation.



Moon

As soon as Daire helps me to my feet, there's a thundering voice above us.

Both of us look up, searching for what could be coming next. I don't know if shit's about to fall from the sky or pop out of the ground. I've spent so much of my life preparing for this, and I have no idea what I'm doing.

It's so strange to have this voice filling the space around us when it seems like we're out in the middle of nowhere.

The truth is we're inside a game. This game might be somewhere located in the Elven realm, but it is still a game.

Half of the games at my company were invented to simulate games played in the past Elven games.

I don't know how far Daire ran to get us here, but it doesn't seem like the other guys are going to be catching up anytime soon.

Maybe I shouldn't be happy about that, but I do feel a bit uncomfortable being alone out here with just Daire.

Not because Daire makes me uncomfortable, although he did just bite me. But because I'm unsure of what's gonna come next and when you're alone, you're the first target. At least, when you're surrounded by other people, there are other potential targets.

I wonder if Daire would be pissed if I metaphorically tossed him to the wolves and then ran. He's standing super close to me, like he knows what I'm thinking, and keeps glancing in my direction. I've seen him lick his lips like four times, and I'm starting to get suspicious. Is he about to bite me again?

“Contestants will now face off in a one-versus-one competition. There will be six pairs of competitors. Six colors to represent the flag you're to retrieve and to define your opponent. Green, red, blue, purple, orange, and white.”

“Whoever retrieves their flag first is the winner for that color. Loser will be immediately removed from the game. If the competitor with the same color as you dies, you will automatically win. However, this does not encourage you to kill your opponent. That will not result in a win.”

“But other contestants, and things living within the game, could contribute to the death of a competitor.”

“Again, do not kill anyone going for the same color flag as you. If

someone else is threatening your life, though, all bets are off. After all, this is the Elven Tournament of Blood.”

The voice cuts out and in front of Daire and me, two flags appear. One white for me, and the other purple for Daire.

I let out a sigh of relief because I don't think I stood a chance against the Vampire. He's too fast and has just fed. Something we haven't addressed since someone I've never seen before in my life tossed him off me and then ran off. Of course, not before he gifted me another pebble and a freaking kiss.

“I'm glad I'm not going against you,” Daire says. He seems to have snapped back into that guarded nerdy type now that his glasses are back on.

“Yeah, me too. You're fast as fuck, and I don't think even my magic can keep up with you. Also, you should probably, you know, feed...” I shrug. “Not on me, not again, I mean in general.” Daire gives me a look that definitely says, yeah, no shit. “What I mean is, try to stay fed, and if you can't find anyone else, then ask me again. At least for now. If it's you and me in the end, I think you understand why I won't be able to feed you,” I sigh. “I have to win,” I mumble, and Daire nods.

“I have to win too.” The way he looks at me makes some part of me ache. He doesn't like the cruelty of the games any more than I do, but we both have our reasons. I watch him pat his pocket and wonder if he's comforting himself the way I've started to with these pebbles. I don't even know why. If my secret pebble grifter is the wild man who chucked Daire... Why should that be a comfort?

The silver pebble was just like the others, but maybe if he saw me admiring them, he just guessed I liked them? I don't fucking know. Everything is a mess.

“Do you think the others are going to catch up?” I ask, looking back, but not actually sure what direction we got here from.

“I can hear them coming,” Daire says with a chin nod in the direction they must be coming from.

“You can hear them?” I ask, straining to focus on the quiet, but hearing nothing.

“Yeah, they're not exactly quiet; that, and they keep screaming your name. My hearing is already enhanced, but they sound like a stampede,” Daire chuckles.

“Why the fuck would they be coming for me? We are literally being

pitted against each other right now. One of them could be my other white flag,” I ask, throwing my hands up. “Do you think they’re gonna like, I don’t know, save me for dinner in case they get hungry?” I ask, semi-serious.

“I think they’d definitely try to eat you,” Daire chuckles, smirking. “No more than I want to, though.”

“That was a bit creepy, my guy. Like... It felt like you were trying to insinuate they wanna fuck me, but you literally just bit me. So.” I hold my hand up, shaking it a bit. “Not exactly comforting.

“Moon, I think anyone attracted to women wants to fuck you. Unless they’re asexual. Which is valid, but my point is, if they like sex and find women arousing, they’re more than likely trying to fuck you.”

“That was... What’s your point exactly? They could still try to kill me. They could want both. I wasn’t asking if they wanted to fuck me first, I was asking if you thought I’d be their literal meal.” I shake my head and widen my eyes, hoping my face says ‘dummy’ so I don’t have to.

“You say the most off-the-wall shit sometimes,” Daire grumbles, walking away from me. “I can hear the arena, that way, for the flags.” Daire points to a dark area, and I wrinkle my nose. “I think that we’re sectioned off. The 6 of us against 6 other competitors and for each maze arena, it’s 6 against 6.” He looks up at the night sky and nibbles his lip.

“Are you nervous? What do you think’s going to happen right now?” I whisper, and Daire shrugs.

“I don’t know, but it is the Elven Tournament of Blood, so it can’t be anything good. Probably some stuff trying to eat us. Traps. Bloodshed, of course. I know they say we’re not meant to die, but a fuck ton of people end up dying.”

“I remember watching Crow fight in his 3rd trial ten years ago. He decapitated someone within the first 10 minutes of the third trial.”

“Yeah, I know. I’ve seen the footage.”

“It was weird, though, because the guy he killed was trying to kill him. But not as if he cared about anything other than killing Crow.”

“Yeah, I remember that too. It was one of the strangest parts of his year. It seemed like he killed an abnormal amount of people. Maybe someone was sent in to kill Crow, rather than play the game, and when he failed, they sent in others.”

“I think maybe that’s what’s happening to me too! Someone else signed me up for the Games, and Crow explained that I didn’t have a choice but to

play. And then back after the first trial the guys I was with told me that there were two competitors aiming to kill me, or at least they were willing to quit if I was handed over to them, rather than trying to win the game.” I frown, thinking maybe I shouldn’t have just said any of that out loud.

“Let’s focus on this next trial and go from there. I’ll watch your back if you watch mine,” Daire offers, licking his lips, as his eyes wander to my bite mark. I quirk my brow at him.

“Just trying to keep me alive so you can eat another day, huh?” I snark, and he smirks.

“Something like that.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN



Moon

So, Daire won his flag easily. I don't know what his opponent was, but one second the Vampire was next to me, and then in the next, he was gone. Only for him to reappear seconds later with his flag.

He decided he'd accompany me to find my own flag after that. There are little hints about which way each color should go. A white arrow here, and a sign that says white there.

"Seems unfair that you found yours so easily," I say, and Daire nods.

"It was strange. The path was so easy to follow, and I didn't see anyone or anything on the way there." Daire shakes his head, and I sigh.

"Who do you think that guy was, the one who tossed you off of me?" I ask, and Daire shivers.

"A Light One. They're... His kind isn't meant to exist anymore. They were originally Angels. Black wings and beautiful souls. Then they started doing soul magic. Lost their wings, hair turned white, and they all just devolved into these mindless murderers," Daire explains, as I step over a huge puddle of mud in our path.

"Yikes..." I whisper, looking around at the darkness of the new part of the arena. It's no longer maze-like, but a forest. Massive trees and muddy ground. It smells incredible, but I don't trust it. Everything is sus out here.

"He seemed, I don't know, not so mindless?" Daire offers, and I nod.

"He kissed my cheek and dropped a pebble," I tell him, and he frowns.

"This game is changing everything I thought I knew about every-fucking-thing," Daire mumbles, and I chuckle.

"No kidding... Oh, look, my flag," I whisper, pointing to it up ahead. The flag is attached to a thin pole that's just stuck in a pile of dirt. It's in a small clearing, surrounded by trees. Easy-peasy.

"Be careful," Daire warns, as I creep forward. He barely gets the words out when I'm pulled up off my feet and flung into the air. I expect to go flying, but instead, I find myself trapped in a damn net.

"Balls! Cut me down..." My words trail off when I look down and find that Daire is gone. "Rude," I hiss and then snap my mouth shut when two Goblins come slinking forward.

"Got her," the small and slightly creepier one says. Goblins are not much fun to look at... Dark green skin the texture of a pickle with the biggest bug

eyes ever. I firmly believe that beauty is subjective, but my goodness, Goblins are my only exception.

The small creep has a stick and uses it to poke me. Evil little jerks with a penchant for bloodshed. Goblins are easily one of my least favorite beings.

I screech in pain, as the sharp edge of the stick slices through my skin when he pokes me harder this time.

“You’re not supposed to murder your opponent!” I hiss, but he just chuckles. Who even allowed Goblins to enter!?

“We’re just here for you, dearie,” the other one says in a voice that sounds like what I imagine dog shit would if it could speak.

“Well, I’m not interested, thanks, so just let me down!” I yelp, as I clutch my side, where the mean fuck stabbed me. Shit that hurts.

“We’re gonna have some fun first,” the creepier one says, before stabbing me again.

“Ah!” I scream, wanting to cry out to Daire for help, but not wanting him to risk himself for me. Maybe he’s scared of Goblins, or maybe something got to him too? He wouldn’t have just run away, would he? Maybe he thought this was the perfect opportunity to ditch me.

“Very good,” a man I can’t see says from behind a cloak, as he steps out from between two trees. “Kill her, and then get her down.” My heart stalls, and I start to panic. Frantically I call to my magic, but it doesn’t answer me like it has for the last twenty years.

“No, no, no,” I cry, trying to set the net on fire or send the evil fucks flying, but nothing happens. “I don’t want to die,” I whisper when I hear a scream from below me. I look down, watching as he rips the head off one Goblin, and then spins, reaching for the other.

“Fenrick!” I yell, as the man in a cloak lashes out with magic, at the same time the fucking Goblin stabs me again. Harder, straight through my stomach. I start coughing up blood instantly, as Fenrick is hit by the cloaked man’s magic. It knocks him down, and the Goblin shoves him backward against a tree. My net is cut, and I fall to the ground, hitting it so hard, I’m disoriented as I fucking bleed out.

The world spins, and I can’t breathe, but I lift my head, searching for Fenrick.

“No,” I whisper when I see him. I crawl forward, trying to save him when two boots step in my path.

“Time to go, kid,” a familiar voice says, but I’m so disoriented, I can’t

place it. I call for my magic again and find nothing when the cloaked man curses. “Fuck, get out of here!”

And then he’s running. He’s gone, and I don’t know when he’ll be back, so I crawl for Fenrick, tears burning my eyes when I see the state he’s in. That fucking Goblin impaled him on a tree branch. He’s slumped forward, and I can’t tell if he’s breathing. It seems like it takes an eternity to reach him, and when I do, I don’t know what to do.

I’m bleeding out, and if I pull Fenrick off the tree, he will too.

Unless...

“Come on,” I whisper, pulling with all my strength, and he wakes up, screaming in pain as I pull him off the branch. We tumble to the forest floor, and I lift a gloved hand to his mask, pulling it off. He’s unconscious again from the pain or the fact that he hit his head pretty hard. I don’t know.

“I can’t stop the bleeding,” I whisper, knowing not to even try. So instead, I remove my glove, grab a sharp rock, lift my wrist, and cut it open. Using my gloved hand to part his lips, I let my blood drip into his mouth.

He’s a Blood Fae, maybe blood will heal him. All Fae and Elves drink blood to survive, but not in the same way Vampires do. It’s more of a supplement. I hope this works.

His eyes fly open, but they’re entirely black, so when he grips my arm with so much force and flips us, so I’m on my back, and then sinks his fangs into my neck, I know it’s just the beast inside. His need to survive.

He wouldn’t save me, just to kill me himself, unless he was out of his mind. His touch means death, though, so as my world fades to black, I whisper a final goodbye to Grams.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN



Fenrick

“No, no... Moon...” I shake her, needing her to open her eyes, or take a breath... “You can’t die,” I whisper, as her blood drips down my chin. I swipe it away angrily. I killed her. Just like I’ve killed everyone who’s ever touched my skin since I was five.

My touch is poison. I’m poison. Her Heart Bonded mark is slashed open from where she cut her wrist, trying to save me. I still don’t understand how her blood was able to bring me back from certain death.

Blood Fae can only manipulate blood, or so I thought. Blood has never healed me so much in the past... No more than it would any other Fae. It’s not like I can ask my father, the mad Fae royal. He lost his mind long ago.

“I’m so sorry,” I whisper, lifting my sleeve, knowing my mark will be gone. The one that showed up years ago, but I didn’t know why. Until now. When I saw her pull her gloves on, I knew... But then, I think I knew from the moment I laid eyes on her at the banquet.

It terrified me, and now I’ve killed her. A wrecked-looking Daire stumbles forward. He’s bleeding, or maybe just covered in someone’s blood, almost head to toe. He falls on the other side of her, and without speaking, slashes his own wrist, dripping the blood between her lips.

“That won’t help,” I whisper. I sensed her half-blood once we entered the Games, but normal Fae don’t heal from blood. They certainly don’t come back from the dead.

“My blood heals,” he hisses, snapping his eyes up to meet mine. “If she dies—”

“She’s already dead,” I say, shaking my head, but the Vampire sneers.

“If she fucking dies, I’ll rip your spine out your throat, and shove it up your—”

He never finishes his threat, because Moon gasps, choking on Daire’s blood, before he helps her sit up.

“Oh maaaaan,” Moon moans, attempting to lift her arm, but dropping it. “This is one killer hangover,” she says, before collapsing into the other man’s arms. Daire stuffs a white flag into her pocket, and I just shake my head. Who gives a shit about the Games when Moon almost died!

“Unless she’s dead, you know they won’t come for her. The losers all get exiled until the end of the games. I won’t have her half dead with a bunch of

losers,” the Vampire snaps.

I just sit there, as I stare at her. She’s alive.

“Why didn’t my touch kill her,” I whisper, and Daire shakes his head.

“I don’t fucking know. Maybe because she’s... not really a Witch. Maybe because she’s Heart Bonded to your dumb ass.” The Vampire gets to his feet, carrying my girl.

“Give her to me,” I snap, but he scoffs.

“She’s not just yours, Prince. And I don’t answer to you. So, suck my dick, and get the fuck out of the way.”

I follow close behind him, as he carries her toward a small waterfall. I’m too stunned to respond to his insults. She’s alive...

“The Light One’s close,” Daire says, and I shake my head.

“The fuck are you talking about?” I snap, and he chuckles.

“Try to pay some attention, Prince. The game just changed. Someone wants our girl dead.”



Moon

“Pay attention, Prince. Someone wants our girl dead.” I hear Daire say but can’t open my eyes. Too heavy. Who’s their girl? Ugh, pain...

“Mmm,” is all I manage, and Daire holds me tighter in his arms, whispering soothing words.

Everything goes black again, and this time, when I come to, I’m able to open my eyes.

“Ah!” I yelp, because ow! Cold!

“Moon, relax,” Daire grumbles, and I realize I’m in a bath. No, pond. I flail around a bit, trying to get to my feet, but I can’t.

“Cold!” I practically screech and watch as the Vampire goes pale.

“Shit.” Daire wraps his arms around me, and I brace myself for him to use his speed, but thankfully he moves at a reasonable pace. “Snakes are cold-blooded,” he says in a much too-loud way, and I shake my head.

“I’m a Witch, Daire,” I sigh, and he chuckles, shaking his head. Weirdo.

“I can warm her,” a man says, and I look up to find Fenrick standing at the edge of the water. He’s shirtless, and I see he’s got his shirt hanging on a tree branch. A shirt with a huge hole in it.

That’s when everything comes flooding back in, and I nearly pass out.

“I’m not dead!” I yelp, and Fenrick shakes his head.

“Nope.”

“Does that mean I can touch you!?” I push free from Daire’s arms and stumble forward on shaky legs. Fenrick realizes my intentions too late, and I see the look of stone-cold terror pass through his eyes, until my bare hands are pressed to his warm chest, and I squeal. “I can!” I whoop, not entirely sure why that’s so exciting.

“Moon!” Fen scolds, and I smile up at him, my grin mischievous. I feel kind of strange. Almost like someone slipped me some magical booze, and I got a bit drunk recently.

“Am I drunk?” I decide to ask, as I frown. I run my hands up Fen’s chest, as water drips down his skin, and he shakes under my touch. “Does that feel good?”

“Very,” his words are a whisper when I hear a heavy sigh from behind me. I look over to see Daire tugging off his wet clothes. “My blood may cause you to feel a bit more impulsive, as well as horny.” He rubs his

forehead, and my mouth falls open.

“I haven’t had your blood.”

“You have. After you saved your lover boy, I saved you,” Daire supplies, and I frown.

“Blood does heal you!” I whisper, looking up at Fen once again, my hands still caressing his chest.

“No, not all blood.” Fen grabs a necklace out of his pocket and slips it on over my head. I pause, waiting for him to explain. “It blocks magical signals. You can’t be seen by the game’s cameras if you’re wearing it, and neither can anyone you’re touching.”

“You feel like warm stone,” I mumble, distracted by his hard muscle and soft skin. I’m shivering, so I strip my wet shirt off and toss it on the tree branch next to his before I wrap my arms around his middle. My head rests on his chest, and I listen to the sound of his heart racing as my body heats up.

“You feel like heaven,” Fen whispers, as he tentatively touches my back with his bare hands, making goosebumps erupt on my skin. “I’ve never—” But Fen doesn’t get to finish that statement, because a charging Mungus busts through the clearing, headed straight for Fen and me.

He freezes, and I turn, smiling.

“Sweet girl!” I shout, and she skids to a stop. I think when she realizes I’m not in danger. Her nose bumps straight into my chest, and I wrap my arms around her, as Fen jumps back.

“Careful!” Fen snaps, and I look over my shoulder to see him pulling on a new shirt, mask, and gloves. “My touch could still kill others,” he says, and I nod.

“Right, I’m sorry.” I nod, but my attention is snapped away when I hear two men stomping our way. I knew who it was before I even saw them, but I’m shocked to see them in their current state.

“Fuck,” Cato huffs, as he falls to his knees, sucking in air like he’s been running for days. He’s covered in blood, and I can see a couple of wounds still dripping with fresh blood. Odas is in his other form, but when he sees Cato on his knees and then finds the rest of us scattered about the small pond area, he shifts back into a pocket-sized Cyclops.

“Danger Lizard. Lying baboon.” I greet them with a head nod to each man. This is literally the opposite of my plan to escape them. How am I supposed to finish each trial on top if I have man shadows?

“Oh shit! The trial!” I shout, but Daire nods to my pocket.

“Your flag,” is all he says, as he leans against a tree, and Sweet Girl makes her way over to the pond and dives right in. I watch her disappear under the surface and get nervous when she doesn’t come back up. But I’m guessing she’s made for water, so she’s probably fine. Still, I keep my eyes glued until I see her little ears pop up through the surface.

I relax and turn back to the blood-soaked men. I put my hands on my hips and glare.

“Are you two gonna die?” I snap because they look like crap, as Cato finally stands on his two feet and looks around.

“You’re okay?” he asks, looking around until his eyes land on Daire, and he glares. “Do I need to kill him?” Cato sneers, and Daire lifts his wrist, shakes it at the Dragon, and then drops his arm, leans his head back against the tree, and closes his eyes.

“Guess not,” Odas says, and my glare turns to him.

“Speak when spoken to,” I hiss, and he snorts a laugh, before dropping the hand that was hiding his dick from my eyesight. Obviously, he doesn’t get to keep his clothes during his shifts. He makes his way over to the water and jumps right in. Dick no longer in sight.

“You have so much attitude, Moon. Do you need to be spanked? Or maybe fucked?” Odas’s bold words make my mouth drop open, and my eyes go wide.

“No!” I shout. Too loud. Too quickly. Cato strips out of his bloody clothes and follows his friend into the water. I guess they aren’t worried their nakedness will offend Sweet Girl.

“Right,” Cato chuckles, and I somehow find the inner strength not to murder him.

“Okay, well, this has been super great.” I throw my hands up and look around the area for my backpack. Nowhere to be found. Great, guess that means I need to get a new one. I look around for a supply stash but don’t see anything.

“You’ll have to stick with us, unless you were planning to venture out on your own with no supplies?” Daire asks, eyes still closed, and I scoff.

“I think I can manage.” I straighten my spine and lift my head as I walk over to my still-damp shirt. It’ll have to do since it’s all I have. I won’t lie, I’m super annoyed by the fact that there are holes in it now, from being fucking stabbed.

Double balls. Goblins, and cloaked bad people. Could have used that little murder snake earlier.

That thought gives me an idea.

If I find the little murder noodle, and bring Sweet Girl with me, I might be alright.

With that thought, I start searching the bushes for the little bugger, even though he's probably way back by the first pond. I can probably make it with just Sweet Girl.

The question is, how do I sneak off? I could lie about needing to poop. Say I'm taking Sweet Girl as my bodyguard...

I'm about to call for the Mungus when a pair of reptilian eyes meet mine. I freeze, because now that I've found the murder noodle, what do I do? I take a step back, and it keeps its eyes on me and then starts to transform.

Oh, balls... I yelp, but it's too late to retreat. The danger noodle grows until its size rivals Cato's dragon, and I don't dare look over my shoulder to see if the others have noticed this shit yet.

I grab the hilt of my knife because I'm not getting swallowed whole. I will cut my way out, I swear to fuck.

The head of the cobra sways, and I lean forward, still feeling the effects of Daire's blood I think because I suddenly want to pet the murder noodle.

"Light One!" someone shouts, but it doesn't matter, because the giant snake wraps its tail around me and lifts me off my feet, before slithering away so fast that I black out.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN



Silas

“Well fuck.” I run a hand through my hair and stare down at the unconscious woman. I had been retrieving my flag when I realized Moon was under attack. I need to follow the rules of the game. Keep playing, or I’ll be in exile for eight days, unable to protect her.

Magical contracts are something that even I can’t break. Well, not without killing innocent people.

“Ohh,” Moon lifts her hand, rubbing her head, and I grab myself some pants. She won’t want to open her eyes after being knocked unconscious to find a man standing over her naked.

I also grab a pile of clean clothes for her to change into and lay them next to the sleeping bag I have her on. Hopefully, she doesn’t notice the fact that it’s sitting atop a nest... I can’t help myself. I couldn’t. She won’t notice... Probably.

“What?” she groans, rolling over, and clutching her stomach. I hand her a bottle of water that she takes easily, not even checking to see who’s handed it to her.

This is why I had to take her. The others failed to protect her. Twice. She needs me. So, for the rest of the Games, until the very end, I’ll keep her by my side so I know she’s safe.

I place another pebble by her head and then retreat into the darkness of the cave. I’m not ready for her to meet me. For all the questions, even though I know I can’t hide forever.



Moon

I snuggle into the pillow, tugging the blanket up to my neck. I need a damn nap. My head is pounding, and the water I just drank did nothing to settle my stomach.

“There’s food. On the fire,” a deep voice says, and I’m too tired to care, so I just wave a hand at whoever just offered food.

That’s not a voice I recognize.

“It’s really annoying how I keep getting kidnapped and blacking out,” I hiss, as I roll over to face the direction the voice came from.

“I rescued you,” the voice hisses right back, and I waggle my finger in the air.

“No, I didn’t need to be rescued. Just needed to get away from them before the fourth trial.” I take a deep breath and finally, open my eyes. Okay, I’m in a cave. Why? I don’t see the person who took me, but I can sense where he is, that he’s close, as a shiver runs down my spine.

“Goblins are hunting you,” he reminds me oh so helpfully.

“Yeah, well, Goblins are dicks,” I say, squinting. “You gonna come out of there? Come into the firelight?” I ask, having a feeling I know who my captor, who thinks he’s my savior, is.

“No,” he hisses, and it sounds awfully snake-like.

“You’re the little murder noodle I saw during the first trial?” I ask, but he remains silent. “I’ll just assume silence means yes, from now on,” I tell him, pointing to the pot on the fire. “Wanna help me get a bowl of that? I don’t feel like moving,” I admit, hoping the mofo doesn’t sense my weakness and attack. “If not, I’m going back to sleep.” I close my eyes and sink back into the pillow. I want food. But I also want sleep.

I wouldn’t mind answers, but I can deal with this when the world stops spinning every time I blink.

“Okay then,” I murmur, as I drift off to sleep. Safe? No. But it is what it is.



Moon

I wake up to a hand being held over my mouth and reptilian eyes staring into mine. The man that chucked Daire has the entire weight of his body on top of mine and is covering my mouth so I can't scream.

Once again, I call to my powers, but they don't answer. What the fuck is happening to me? I used to be able to restrain a freaking Phoenix with my power, and now I can't even get this snake off me. Jerk-face noodle.

He lifts his other hand to his lips, shushing me. I glare, ready to bite his hand, but he points to his ear and then to the cave entrance. I stop myself for just a second, because what if this isn't an attempted assault, but just him keeping me safe from something worse?

When he drops his head, so he can whisper into my ear, my body trembles under him. The feel of his lips touching me softly makes me want to melt. I get the feeling this isn't intentional on his part.

"Ogre and Goblin," he says, and I bite my lip. Shit. I don't know if the danger noodle is as deadly in man form, but one thing I know for sure, is Ogres are hard as fuck to kill. "Hunting you," he adds, and I nod, still nibbling my lower lip under his hand. I flick my tongue out, wanting to wet my lips, but all I manage to do is lick his palm. His head snaps up, and his eyes go wide as he stares down at me like I licked his balls.

He stares at me for so long, I start to wonder if I'm dreaming all of this. That or he's some kind of illusion. Hallucination? When he moves off of me and removes his hand, he sits beside me, rather than retreating to the darkness. He moves quickly, and I cringe.

"They're far enough away that they can no longer hear you. My scent will hide yours," he says, and I watch, with a mix of shock and curiosity, as he lifts his hand and licks his own palm. My eyebrows shoot up, and I can only hope my expression isn't screaming disgust.

"Why?" I ask when he's still licking his hand a few seconds later, and I see his cheeks turn pink, but he remains silent. "Just like the flavor of my saliva?" I question, and his head snaps to me. I shrug. "Well, what else am I supposed to think? You licked your palm. You licked my saliva off of your palm like it was a Lollie-pop," I press, and he sighs.

"It's a snake thing," he says but doesn't elaborate.

"So, snake shifters like to lick each other's spit off of stuff?" I push, but

he just ignores me. “If I lick your cheek, will you wipe it off with your hand, and then lick your hand?” He makes a ‘What the fuck is wrong with you?’ face, and I smirk. “Remember what I said about silence? Means yes.”

“No. I wouldn’t.” He sighs, pulling some things out of his bag, and I just can’t help myself. I keep teasing him.

“So, you’d leave my saliva on your cheek? Would you let another snake lick my saliva off you? Oh! If I lick someone else, will you lick me off them?” I waggle my brows at him, and when he looks at me with so much annoyance, I just laugh. “So that’s a yes. Oh! What if I—“ I lift my palm to my lips and lick it in an overly sloppy way, and his eyes narrow. “Lick my own palm? Will you lick me?” I hold my hand out to him, expecting him to keep ignoring me. But no.

Noodle boy grabs my wrist and yanks me into him, before flipping me onto my back and hovering over me.

“If you want me to lick you, Moon, all you have to do is ask,” he whispers, before lifting my palm and giving it one long lick, all while holding eye contact.

“I can’t tell if I’m turned on or terrified right now,” I mumble, and he smirks. “So, you know my name, but I don’t know yours,” I add when he climbs off me and pulls me up with him until we’re sitting side by side and facing the fire.

He meets my eyes, and for a long moment, I can tell he’s debating telling me. I’m a little surprised when he finally says, “Silas.”

“Nice to be abducted by you, Silas.” I hold my hand out for him to shake, and he chuckles. His smile lights up the fucking cave, and I nearly die right then and there, because he’s definitely going to murder me and hide my body in a lake.

No one that attractive can be safe. Can’t be trusted with my life or my vagina...

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



Fenrick

I move to grab Moon, but the Light One is too fucking fast. In the blink of an eye, he and Moon are gone, and the four of us are left standing there.

I failed to protect her, yet again.

“He’ll still be in the game. He’s a contestant, he’s magically bound,” Cato says, as he paces the area, tugging his hair.

“Can any of you track him?” I ask, and they all freeze.

“No. He’s a Light One. If he doesn’t want to be found, he won’t be,” Odas finally says, and we all slump.

“He won’t hurt her. He saved her from me. He’s protecting her,” Daire says, and we all turn to him.

“You sure he didn’t just want to do the damage himself?” I ask, but he shakes his head.

“He won’t hurt her.”

“We still need to find her,” Cato says, as he grabs his stuff, and starts packing up the sleeping bag.

“Agreed,” the other three of us say together.

I just found her. I can’t lose her already.



Moon

“Why hasn’t the fourth trial started?” I ask, and Silas shrugs. He’s lying on a sleeping bag on the other side of the fire, one arm behind his head, and one resting on his chest.

“Third trial hasn’t ended yet.”

“But we finished ours two days ago... Why would it take so much longer for the others?”

“I don’t know, Moon.”

“I’m bored,” I admit because he’s kept me in this cave for a full twenty-four hours now. Just eating and sleeping. Minimal talking. He’s not very social. “Is it supposed to be so fucking hot?” I snap, tug off my outer shirt, and stand up so I can get away from the fire. As I do this, Silas looks over, his eyes dilating before going full snake eyes.

“Stop moving,” he whispers, and I whip my head toward the cave entrance and freeze. I don’t see or hear anything, though, so I turn back to Silas.

“What?” I whisper, in case he hears something I don’t. His nostrils flare, and he swallows thickly.

“Don’t move,” he repeats, and I frown.

“Okay, but why?” I ask, needing to know exactly how much danger we’re in. Like, do I need to grab a sharp stick, or should I just start praying for a quick death...

“You’re giving off very strong mating pheromones.” He takes a step back, but he’s already pressed against the cave wall. I look down at my body, giving my armpits a sniff, and look at my legs... Everything seems normal...

“You sure?” I ask, and when I look back up, Silas is shaking. “Yeah, you definitely look sure. Uh...” I look around for something to cover my smell, but I don’t even know how I’m sending him come fuck me vibes in the first place.

“Stop. Moving,” he hisses, and I freeze once more.

“I don’t know what to do. You look like you’re in pain, and I can’t just stand here for who knows how long. Tell me what to do!” I hiss back and take a step away. This was a mistake because he launches himself over the fire, and his body slams into mine, as he pushes me against the cave wall.

“Don’t run. Don’t turn away. Just hold still.” His words are strained, and

as soon as he's all up in my bubble, I get a whiff of his scent, and my eyes basically roll into the back of my head.

"Fuuuck, you smell good," I moan, leaning forward to get another sniff.

"Moon. My restraint is hanging on by a thread. You need to control yourself." Silas slams his palms into the wall beside my head and closes his eyes.

"Boo," I complain, and his sexy half-smirk gives me fanny flutters. You know, butterflies in your lady parts that tell you banging the scary kidnapper is a good idea.

"I'm going to step away. Slowly. Don't move, unless you want me to lose all control."

"What happens if you lose control?" I ask, and he swallows thickly.

"Then I breed you here on this cave floor like your body is begging me to." And with those hot as fuck words, he takes a step away from me.

"Why's that a bad thing?" I ask, watching him retreat.

"You just met me. And although I've done it to keep you safe, I did abduct you. And—" He pauses, takes another step back, and then shakes his head. "And you... Um," he trails off, taking another step away.

"Have a Heart Bonded?" I offer, but that feels like the wrong answer. I want to let this man rail me in a cave, and if Arlo was to walk in right now, I'd just beg him to join me. My breathing picks up speed, and my heart races, as thoughts of both men fucking me in this cave fill my mind.

"Many bonded," he says but keeps retreating. I shake my head.

"Just Arlo."

"Not just. Please stop talking. I can hear the need in your voice." He closes his eyes for a moment, before opening them, and taking another step away from me. "If your pheromones weren't fucking with us both, you would never consider fucking me."

"That's hardly true. I've thought about fucking you, like, ten times, over the last day. Maybe more," I admit, and then swallow because I didn't mean to confess that. His head snaps up, and his eyes meet mine, and I shrug. "You're really hot, and I like sex. Plus, this whole forbidden thing, because 'he's your captor' is apparently a kink I didn't know I have." I cover my mouth, and then move my hand to say, "I don't know why I'm saying all of this."

"Moon. Please. Please stop talking," Silas groans, and I smile.

"That's not really something I'm very good at. You could ask me to talk

about something else. To be honest, though, my mind is a bit focused on one thing at the moment.”

“I can’t fucking take it,” he growls, and then he’s charging me. Not one to deny myself pleasure, I match his stride, and when we collide, I see stars.

The kiss is hard and possessive. Not just from him, but from me as well. I’m claiming him. Marking him as mine, and I won’t be sharing. A growl forms in my chest, and Silas smiles against my lips, and I slip my tongue into his mouth, tangling it with his.

As soon as the taste of him is on my tongue, I’m feral with need. I jump into his arms, wrapping my legs around his waist and pushing my hands into his hair. I silently thank Fenrick for the necklace, hiding me from being watched by the entire universe.

“Fuck me,” I whisper, as I pull away from his kiss, so I can bite his neck, making him tremble under me. Kinky fuck. “Do you like pain?” I ask, biting him again. Silas shoves his hand into my hair and yanks my head back, and I smile as his blood drips down my chin. “Fuck me,” I demand.

“You’ll regret this,” he says, but I shake my head.

“If you don’t want to, it’s okay. I’ll go jump in a pond or roll in some mud to cover my scent, but if you want me, then please, Silas. Fuck me.” I don’t think I’ve ever begged a man to fuck me before. It’s kind of hot.

“Might hurt you,” he groans through clenched teeth, and I smile.

“I’ve already hurt you,” I shrug. “Only fair if you hurt me too.” I lean forward and peck his nose, and Silas drops us to the ground. He sits back on his knees, looking down at me with so much desire and longing that my heart aches.

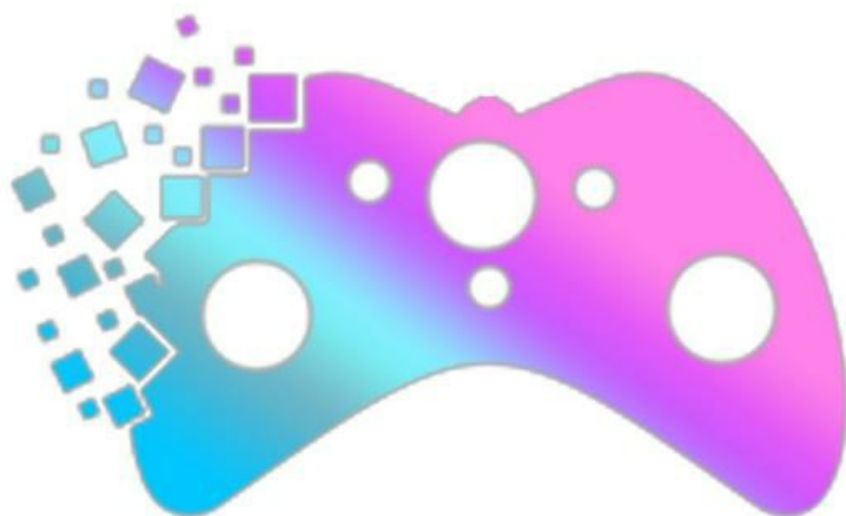
“Heart Bonded,” he whispers, lifting his shirt up and over his head, before showing me his wrist. I’m momentarily distracted by the absolute perfection of his body before my eyes snap to the mark.

“To me?” I ask, and Silas nods. I’m reaching for him, deciding I’ll deal with the implications of multiple Heart Bonds another day when I’m not so horny when the cave explodes with light, and Silas goes flying across the room. I screech because, apparently, that’s what I do when in danger, and look up, just in time to see a pair of angry magenta eyes.

Then a fucking bag is shoved over my head, and I’m lifted from the ground and tossed over a shoulder.

“You can scream, but the bag is spelled, no one will hear you but me.”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN



Moon

I flail and kick, just in case, and scream. But my own voice just echoes back to me, and I flinch. Ouch. I pound my fists against my latest abductor's back, and when that fails, I lift his shirt and scratch the fuck outta his back.

“All I wanted was one little orgasm! Is that too much for a girl to ask for?! Because I’ve been worked up so many times over the last week with no release, I might die!!” I reach around homie’s waist and scratch, rolling my eyes. “Of course, you have abs.” I hear him hiss and smile.

I might not be escaping, but at least I’m annoying. Of course, fruit flies are annoying but don’t really cause harm. So...

“Woman!” the man snaps, and when a firm, flat palm slaps my ass, I freeze.

“Did you just SPANK ME?!” I roar, and because I’m so mature, I wiggle and stretch until I can feel his hip. When I pull my arm back and slap my palm down on his ass with all the strength I have from this position, he stops walking.

I shake my hand out because that actually fucking hurt like a bitch. I get dizzy when he grabs me, and I can feel that he’s flung me off him. I’m flying through the air and expect a painful landing, so I brace myself.

Only, I land on what feels like a mattress.

I’m tugging at the bag and ready to start hyperventilating because it won’t come off when my magenta-eyed assailant tugs it off. I launch forward, aiming for the jugular. That’s his throat, right? Whatever, I’m going for a throat punch when his palm flies out and connects with my forehead. He holds me back, in what is probably the most embarrassing way possible.

So, like the badass I am, I grab his wrist, throw my legs up and around his bicep, and wrap around his arm like a fucking spider-monkey. Then, my most obvious next move is to bite the bitch. So, I do. I shove the fucker’s entire thumb into my mouth and bite.

He shouts, and I taste blood. Then I freeze.

I spit his hand out of my mouth and release him. When my back hits the mattress, I use all my strength to kick his chest and send him falling to his ass. It’s at that moment I realize we’re still in the forest, and I’m not on a mattress but a bed of moss.

“What the fuck!” I shout, spitting his blood out and wiping my mouth.

“Why does... why’d that taste... what’s wrong with your blood?!” I demand and look down to see him sitting on his ass, staring up at me like I’m a goddess.

At least that’s what I think his wide-eyed, jaw-dropped stare looks like.

“You bit me,” he whispers.

“You put a bag over my head and spanked me,” I accuse, pointing a finger at him. “You literally fucking started this.” I shake my head, glaring. “You’re lucky my powers are being a flaccid penis right now.” That statement makes him frown, but I flip him off.

“You’re mine, little badger.” His smirk is annoying, but that fucking nickname.

“Badger...” My eyebrows go up, and I squint at him, pursing my lips. The fuck kinda nickname is that?

“Feisty, ruthless, likes to bite. Badger.” He sits forward, resting his arms on his bent knees, and inspects his thumb.

“Well, okay, Baba Yaga.” I roll my eyes, and he snorts.

“Really? Old woman who kidnaps mischievous children from the Human realm?” He lifts a brow, and his magenta eyes sparkle in the moonlight. I get on my hands and knees and crawl forward, looking into his eyes with a frown. So familiar...

“If the shoe fits, Baba.” I’m staring into his eyes too intensely because he backs up, scooting his ass over the forest floor, but doesn’t get up. “Not worried Silas is coming for me?”

“He’s out cold and will be for the rest of the night. Would have killed him, but you seemed into it, so I pulled back at the last second.”

“Oh, you thought you were saving me? What the fuck is up with all these strangers saving me?” I throw my hands up. “For your information he’s—” I pause, maybe I shouldn’t reveal that the Light One is my Heart Bonded. Already not looking forward to explaining that to Arlo. “He’s really hot.” I turn away from him, looking around, and notice he’s got us in a hidden area.

“Really hot? That’s all it takes?”

“For him.” I nod, knowing exactly what he was trying to hint at. “I’m gonna go now,” I say, moving off his moss bed thing and standing. “Don’t wanna have to kick your ass in the fourth trial.” Which I hope is easy. Of course, it won’t be. But ya know, fingers crossed.

“Jackass,” a deep and familiar voice says, and I spin around to see Lust walking over. He looks up, and his steps falter, but then he’s charging me.

“You’re not dead,” he whispers, and in just a few seconds, I’m wrapped up in a bear hug. Or a bird hug, I guess. I snuggle into him because it’s the first time I haven’t been on edge in days. His familiar scent and protective hold soothe me.

Then I pull back and lady up. This is the Games, and I can’t be a wimp.

“You know her?” the other guy asks, and Lust lowers me to my feet, glaring at magenta eyes. I remember him now, from the day I signed up for the Games. Cocky Elf jerk face.

“Old friends,” is all Lust says, and I’m good with that. I take the necklace off and stuff it in my bra with the pebbles, including the newest little pearl Silas gave me in the caves. I guess I can’t hide from the cameras forever.

“She wants to go off on her own.”

“She just wants to get away from you, Prince.” Lust glares at the other man, and my head snaps to the Elf.

“Prince! Oh, fuck’s sake. I bit the Elven Prince?!” I shout, and then, all the pieces click together in my mind, and I realize why his magenta eyes are familiar. My jaw drops, but I lift my hand to cover my mouth. I can’t say shit, because I just took off my necklace. Yeah, no, I need answers. I pull that shit right back out, but the Elven Prince holds his hand up.

“Don’t bother. Mine’s stronger.” He lifts it from under his shirt, showing me his own necklace. “No one can see or hear any of us, unless I deactivate, which I only do for a trial.”

“Holy, mother forking shirt balls,” I say, having seen a really pretty blonde lady say it on TV once. That moment feels basically the same as this one. “He’s... you’re...” I stomp over to the man still sitting on the ground, drop to my knees in front of him, and grab his face, looking at his eyes.

“Moon,” Lust warns, but I wave him off. He probably has no idea what’s going on right now.

“You’re his brother...” Those words seem to grab his attention because Prince Tristan glares.

“I don’t have any brothers.”

“You have one.” But then I realize that wasn’t my information to tell. Shit. “I shouldn’t have said that.” I’m about to back away, but Tristan grabs my elbow and tugs the sleeve of my shirt up my arm. My bonded mark is revealed, and leaping lizards, it’s bigger.

I stare at it, and after a few seconds, I’m tugging my own sleeve up. When it’s clear I can’t get the sleeve up far enough, I just take the shirt off,

since I have a tank top on under this anyway.

“Bitch tits...” I whisper when I see that it now extends all the way up to my shoulder.

The leaves and flames are still there, but now I see feathers and things that I can only describe as smoke... Is that a fucking eyeball?!

“Cum dumpster.” I sit back on my ass, and at some point, I look up, because it’s way too quiet.

“I don’t think I’ve seen such an intricate mark for a Heart Bond,” Tristan says, rubbing at a spot on his neck. He whispers something under his breath, and a mark that looks nearly identical to Arlo’s appears. “Thought mine was so large because of my bloodline.”

When I tell you that I just about shit my pants, I mean it metaphorically. I have full control over my bowels, even in these kinds of situations, but fuuuck me.

“Wow.” I nod. “Lucky girl?” I ask, because maybe I’m wrong, but Tristan smirks.

“Do you feel lucky?” he asks, but it’s not really a question. It does confirm that I have three Heart Bonds, though.

“Three Heart Bonds,” I whisper, and Tristan snorts.

“Yeah, that’s way more than three, Badger.”

“I’ve... I’m...” I trail off, looking back down at my Mark. “Well, dick weasels.” I look over my shoulder at Lust, needing to see his reaction. He’s just standing there, eyes locked on my Mark.

“Heart Bonded?” he asks, and I nod. “Oh.” He looks away, and I flinch. I don’t know why he looks hurt. I don’t know why I’m suddenly sad. I guess I always just thought I’d be with him one day. Someday. Maybe. I mean, I threw my naked body at the man, for fuck's sake. Ha, no pun intended.

“Yeah,” is all I can say before I’m looking away from him too.

CHAPTER NINETEEN



Moon

“The third trial has ended, and the fourth will begin shortly. Fancy a gladiator-style battle? We’ll see how you do one on one against the beasts of the Tournament of Blood.” The voice is our wake-up call, and when I sit up, a shiver rocks through me. I’m sitting in a sandpit with no idea how I got here.

I fell asleep on a mossy bed, and now I’m in a sandpit. Looking around, I realize we’re in a circle pit, surrounded by concrete. It’s like a coliseum. At least there’s not a live audience.

Yeah, this is definitely meant to be the gladiator battle arena.

I’m not the only one here, at least. I can see Lust, and Tristan, as well as Silas, who looks particularly annoyed. There are also an ass-ton of people I don’t recognize.

“You will battle in groups of fifty. Only twenty-two will make it to the fifth trial.” My eye twitches a little bit, that it’s not twenty-five and exactly half, but whatever. “Alternate forms are allowed, no killing other contestants unless provoked, and no hiding,” the voice adds, and I nibble my lip. “Oh, and the beasts are magically spelled with a protection incantation. They can’t be killed, only incapacitated,” the voice adds, and I shrug. Seems fair. Killing off half the Elven beasts would probably not be good PR.

“Moon!” a man shouts, and I look over to see Arlo, along with Daire, Odas, Cato, and Fenrick. Great. We’re all in the same trial. At least we’re not fighting each other. Still feels a bit awkward. I do have some explaining to do.

‘So, Arlo, I know we only just realized we’re Heart Bonded, but I made out with a murder noodle, dry-humped a Vampire like a horny teen, and ogled a danger lizard’s bare ass. Oh, and I’m Heart Bonded to two other men. One of whom is your half-brother. Oh, and I can also touch the Blood Fae no one else can touch.’

“The gong will sound, and you’ll be free to move, then the beasts will be released.”

Hopefully, Sweet Girl is somewhere safe and isn’t one of those beasts, but I have a bad feeling. I don’t know where the four men were when they got sent here, but hopefully, she knows I didn’t abandon her.

The gong sounds, and everyone starts moving all at once. I can’t tell what

part of the arena the beasts will appear from, so I just do slow circles. Everyone who has an alternate form starts shifting, and I see a Dragon, and Cyclops standing close together. There's a murder snake headed straight for me, and I have no doubt the others I keep trying to get rid of will be here any moment.

The one person who really steals my attention, though, is Lust. He's on fire. Orange and red flames dance over his skin as he walks slowly through the other contestants, who all move out of his path with a quickness. I've seen his Phoenix burst into ashes, but I've never seen him like this. The flames look like wings as they grow and extend.

"Holy shit," I whisper, and Lust smirks, knowing he's got my full attention. He stops in front of me, and I finally close my mouth since my jaw had dropped to my feet from the shock.

"Surprise." He smirks, and I throw my hands up.

"Yeah, no shit surprise! I didn't know you could do this," I say, gesturing to him.

"It's not some—"

But Lust never gets to finish that sentence, because the walls surrounding the arena open, and out pours an ass ton of fucking Goblins.

There's other shit too, that I've seen in the Elven games before, but my entire focus is locked on the Goblins because unless I'm just extremely self-centered, those motherfuckers are all headed straight for me.

"Oh shit. Oh fuck, oh shit, oh fuck..." I turn and run, not sure where the fuck I'm going. Away? How do I run away from a stampede of Goblins!? I'm so fucked. All around me is chaos, as the battle rages and beasts attack. I just need twenty-eight people to fall, and this trial will be over! I make a hard left, hoping to slow down the Goblins' approach when I see a cloaked figure up ahead.

"Hard right it is!" I murmur to myself, as I dodge a falling contestant, and run in the opposite direction of the cloaked figure. I can hear some of the men calling my name, but I also saw something toss a net over Cato's Dragon, forcing him to shift back. I don't see Odas at all, which means they're probably both out of the game already. If I run toward any of the men, they might be the next target of my Goblin stalkers.

I'm about to dash under what I think is a bear shifter when a gloved hand wraps around my face, and I'm snatched off my feet.

"Shhh."

Oh, fuck me sideways and under a dumpster... Of course! Can I ever just run away successfully?!

“Shh, or you’re gonna die!”

Well, that’s a solid threat.

Damn this stupid game, and damn whoever is trying to kill me!

CHAPTER TWENTY



Crow

“You know this will probably get you killed?”

Yep.” I nod, not caring. I hadn’t seen her until the start of the fourth trial, and then I saw the horde of Goblins. Then, I watched as she disappeared again.

“And if you manage to survive, you’ll probably end up charged with treason?”

“Unless we kill the king? Also, yes.”

“Can you at least admit that this is a risk, and asking him for help is probably going to get everyone killed?” My sister pushes, and I nod.

“I am aware that asking our brother for help is most likely unwise, yes. But he may be my only shot at saving her.”

“Unless he decides he wants her for himself.”

Yeah, there’s that.



Arlo

My skin is thicker than an Elf's, and my strength is usually a surprise to those I'm fighting. It's not obvious I'm half Orc if you can't see my tusks.

As I fight my way through Goblins trying to fucking kill me, I see Moon running for her life. Goblins are hunting her and ignoring every other contestant.

What the fuck?

Something stabs me in the back, pissing me off. I spin, grab the Goblin that stabbed me, and rip its head off. That stuns me momentarily because that shouldn't have been possible.

These fucks aren't a part of the Games, or they'd be protected by the spell...

I turn back to Moon, sprinting after her so I can protect her, when I see a cloaked man appear behind Moon and wrap his arms around her before they both disappear.

"NO!" I shout, plowing through the Goblins in my attempt to reach the last spot Moon was in, when the club of an Ogre comes swinging toward my head.

Fuck.

I hear Moon screaming before I black out. I'll save her... One way or another...

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE



Kili

I crouch behind the bush as the Tournament of Blood's last winner approaches, his arrow already drawn back on the bow, ready to launch.

"I can see you, Kili," Crow says, clearly annoyed, and I chuckle. "And I can hear you laughing."

"I should hope so. Imagine the Champion letting little old me get the best of him," I tease, before standing, and saluting the Elf.

"I need your help." Crow gets right to the point as his face falls, and I pause. I was about to launch a snowball at him, but that'd be no fun if he's just going to pout about my foolishness.

"With." I lift my brow, searching his form for signs that he's deceiving me somehow. He hasn't asked me for help since I left...

He notices the change in me, which is the only thing that stops me from slitting his throat right then.

"Kili. You raised me. I know when you're about to attack. You taught me how to attack. You are the reason I turn every corner with a knife in my hand, now can you please focus, and stop looking for reasons to fight? I promise you'll do lots of fighting where we're going." He levels a glare my way, but I just smirk.

"Only you would notice a shift, baby brother," I tease, and he rubs his forehead.

"Genevieve thinks this is a bad idea," he admits, and I nod in agreement.

"Genevieve is usually right about these things," I say. Even though I haven't spent a lot of time with our little sister, I do know her very well. Crow may have been the one to raise her, but I was always there to protect her. To protect them both.

"I think we both know I wouldn't have come to you if I had any other options." His words make me flinch, but I can't blame him. I'm not exactly... reliable? Predictable? Capable of following directions I disagree with?

"I think we both know that even if you did have other options, I would still be the best, of the worst." I look around and remain silent for a moment, listening to the sound of the wind blowing through the trees. There's no one around to hear us, but I'm still cautious. You never know when the Elven king might send out more spies. He wants our sister, and he knows he won't get her if my brother and I are still around. We'd skin him alive,

consequences be damned.

“Will you help me?” This question offends me more than the statement previously made by him. I snapped my head in his direction and glared at him. He shakes his head as if he’s the one who was just insulted, but doesn’t say anything.

“What do you think? When have I ever denied you anything, brother?” I lift my head, chin up, and wait for his response.

“Never, Kili. But this is different. This is something I will more than likely regret asking you to help me with. Not just because of the circumstances, but because there’s a chance you could be killed. A high likelihood of some kind of harm coming to you.”

“The chances that I will be killed doing just about anything increase with every passing moment. Which I think we both know. Makes no difference what I’m doing or where I am, so I might as well be where you are. Genevieve is older now, I’m not likely to influence her the way I once was. I think she’s safe and capable of making her own decisions. Regardless of my presence.” Crow pauses, thinking of the implications of all that I’ve said.

“You’re right. I never wanted you to leave to begin with. But I also knew that leaving was the best thing for you to do for yourself. Even if you did try to use Genevieve as the excuse.” I don’t argue with him about that, what’s done is done and there’s nothing to be said about it anymore. Now there’s just what we do next.

“Is this about the girl?” I ask, and Crow’s eyes widen.

“How did you know about that? How did you know about Moon?” His eyes narrow on me, and I raise my eyebrows at him in return.

“Really? Think about it for a few more moments, go on, I’ll give you a second.” Now his eyes widen far past the point that I think they should be capable. He looks like a bug. A dying bug. A shocked bug. Maybe a shocked, scared, and dying bug.

“No...” he whispers.

“Yes. I think it might surprise you to know that I’ve known longer than you’ve known, and now that you know I know you know, you know I know, we can get on with it.” Crow blinks rapidly and shakes his head, throwing his hands up.

“I don’t know what the fuck you just tried to say.”

“I said, you know that I know, and I know that you know, now we know that I know that you know that I know that you know.” I pause because now

I'm confused as well. "What were we even talking about?"

"Fuck's sake, Kili." Crow shakes his head, rubbing the bridge of his nose between his fingers and closing his eyes.

"Sorry, I just got a little confused there for a second and then forgot what you were doing here. Um, so, why are you here again?" I frown as I think about it, and remember he said something about Moon. "Ah, you need help with Moon."

"She's in the Tournament of Blood, which normally wouldn't necessarily be such a big deal, but someone is trying to kill her. Actively. I thought perhaps someone forcing her to join was maybe a glitch, perhaps some kind of prank gone wrong." He pauses, and I'm reminded of that cum bucket of an ex. Spencer. "But now I'm starting to think that perhaps her not-so-generous benefactor was in fact just trying to set up her death."

"So, you wanna sneak into the Tournament, to do what exactly? To protect her? Or to get her out? Or to help her win? What's the goal here?"

"For now, Kili, my only goal is to keep her alive. Whatever it takes."

"Typically when someone comes to me for help, it's to make someone unalive. Not to make sure someone stays alive." I chuckle. The irony.

"I'm very well aware of that fact, brother." Crow sighs, and I pat his blond head.

"I suppose you're in luck then. It's a good thing that you're my baby brother."

"Yay me," he grumbles, but I can see the smirk tugging his lips up, even if he's trying to hide it.

"You know, I named you Crow because I thought you'd have black hair like your mother. You were born bald, so I was just guessing. By the time the blond started to show, it was too late. I was committed to the name. I was also unwilling to admit my mistake," I tell him, and he nods.

"Well, you were nine, so." He shrugs, but his mood has now soured. I'm confused as to what I did wrong now, but then it dawns on me.

"You were never a burden, nor was I ever regretful of our circumstances. I couldn't very well allow father to raise you, could I? Nine years was a long time alone with those people. The day you were deposited into my arms was a very bright day, indeed," I tell him, ruffling his hair, and he swats at me as we both laugh.

"I owe you," he whispers, and I shake my head.

"You're my brother, and I would choose the same fate given the choice a

hundred times over. You were the only goodness in my childhood. The only good thing in that home before Evie,” I tell him with a firm nod.

“You never would have been forced to kill them if not—”

“I always would have killed them, Crow. Always.” And then I made Crow the kind of man deserving of the love Moon will give him.

The kind of man I can never be.



Moon

I attempt to scream against the gloved hand wrapped around my mouth. I'm about to start attacking when the man behind me bites my ear. This is apparently the reset button for my brain because I go limp and immediately stop fighting.

“Right now, they don't know where you've gone. They can't see you, but if you make too much noise, they will hear you,” the man behind me whispers. “I'm gonna let you go now, Moon, but you have to stay pressed close to me.” His voice drops lower as he says, “Don't you recognize my voice?” Those words make me frown, and I tilt my head to the side, attempting to look at the man who's behind me.

When I see that it's Fenrick who's restrained me, I roll my eyes and glare at him. “Mmmhmmhmm,” I tried to say against his hand, but of course, it's entirely muffled and makes no sense at all. When he finally releases me and I try again. “I said, you couldn't have just led with ‘It's me, Fenrick, don't freak out.’”

The frustrating man shrugs and looks away. “I thought you'd recognize my voice.” His words are hushed, but I can still hear the hurt in them. He also pouts. My shoulders sag partially with relief and partially with guilt. I'm not being murdered, but I feel bad that I thought he was the bad guy.

“Well, I was being chased by Goblins, and there was nothing but chaos around me, and I'm pretty sure there's a man in this arena attempting to actively kill me. So, when you snatched my face out of thin air, my immediate reaction was to assume that you were attempting to also kill me. Sorry, I didn't take the time to listen to your fucking voice.” I'm facing him now, looking up into his blue eyes. He smirks, and I smile back. I wrap my arms around his neck and lean into him, giving him a tight hug. “It's good to see you in one piece, I'm glad that you weren't harmed between the last time I saw you and now. Hopefully, we both survive this freaking insane trial.”

“We will. I was just waiting for Sweet Girl to get here.” The Fae Prince nods behind me, and I turn just in time to see a charging Mungus. Sweet Girl is headed straight for us, and even though she can't see me, I'm guessing she can smell me. As soon as she's just a couple of steps away from me, I move away from Fenrick, so I can greet Sweet Girl. She seems entirely uninterested in my greeting though because she lowers her head, boops me with it, and

then lowers the front of her body in a way that makes me think maybe she's trying to convince me to climb on her back. Fenrick confirms this when he steps up behind me, giving me a push toward her.

“Climb up there. I'm not entirely sure how this will fair rules wise, but I suppose if the Mungus is allowing it, no one can really stop her.” Fenrick helps me up, and I settle myself, hoping, like fuck, that I don't fall off.

“I think those Goblins are still coming for me, Sweet Girl, maybe we should get a move on. I don't want them hurting you.” I pat her back looking around the arena, and sure enough, there are the fucking Goblins. To my complete shock-horror-surprise, all of it, instead of running away from the Goblins, Sweet Girl runs straight at the motherfuckers.

The chirping grunt sound she makes reminds me of a cockatiel, but also kind of reminds me of a monkey. Mungus already look quite strange, and when she makes that noise, it really creeps me the fuck out. I'm not gonna tell her that, though.

I brace myself because it really doesn't seem like she's about to turn around, and as we head straight for the Goblins, the strangest thing happens. Sweet Girl doubles in size under me, scaring the absolute fucking shit out of me. Again metaphorically because I do have control over my bowels. Her skin becomes tougher, and as we charge at the Goblins they seem to realize that they are in deep shit, because they all turn and start running in the opposite direction. But Sweet Girl does not seem deterred.

I have to hold in my sounds of celebration as she tramples a stampede of Goblins. There are so many of them, that I originally thought they were going to trample me to death. But as Sweet Girl stomps their bodies like broken eggshells, I cringe.

Yes, Goblins are corrupt and typically pretty fucking evil, and you can hire them for very cheap to do the most fucked up things, but the sound that they make when she squishes them under her feet will haunt me until the day I die. Or at least for the next few days.

There's still chaos raging in the arena, as other contestants fight to stay in the Games, but as I look around, I see the Goblins disappearing, and the cloaked man is nowhere to be seen. I leaned forward and wrapped my arms across the top of Sweet Girl and squeeze her the best I can. I pet her and praise her for being such a good girl. The way she preens under my attention sort of fills this little hole in my heart that I didn't know needed to be filled.

“Those cock buckets really wanted to attack and murder me, and if you

hadn't been here, I don't really know what would have happened," I tell Sweet Girl, and she shakes her head, her ears flicking with agitation as she huffs hot air out of her nose. As some of the chaos subsides, I turn and find Arlo running straight for us. Sweet Girl is immediately on edge. But I pat her back. "It's okay, I think that guy is one of my Heart Bonded." I'm not really sure why I said that. I think because I am 100% certain that he is one of my Heart Bonded, but I'm pretty sure there are a few more of them out there as well.

I don't know what the fuck's going on, and I don't even know what the fuck I am anymore. Would be a lot easier if I could just ask my mom. Or maybe my dad. But every time I think of Steve, a shiver travels down my spine. That's been happening since I took the necklace off at the beginning of the Games, and at first, I thought nothing of it. But here we are a few days later, and it keeps happening. That can't be a coincidence, can it?

Just before Arlo can reach us, the gong sounds, signaling the end of the fourth trial. Immediately, every beast of the Elven realm who was partaking in battle stops, turns around, and walks away. It's bizarre to see something that was attempting to maim you, walk away as if it never even had beef with you in the first place.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO



Moon

“Congratulations to the first group of 22 contestants to progress to the fifth trial. You will exit the arena together as one. However, you will be returned to your original placement. Wherever you were last night when you were brought to the arena, is where you will be upon stepping out of the Arena doors,” the booming voice says, as all the chaos dies down, and I look around, searching the faces of the contestants. Fenrick, Arlo, Silas, and Daire are the first men I see, but then, as if rising from a pile of ash, I see Lust. He brushes himself off and looks around the arena. When his eyes fall on me, he relaxes slightly.

I sigh with relief and then spot Odas and Cato. “Oh, thank fuck,” I whisper, when those shitty little Goblins were chasing me, I thought I saw both Cato and Odas fall. All the men start walking in my direction, but the arena doors open and as the remaining 22 contestants start making their way toward the exit, Sweet Girl follows too. I consider jumping off her back, but then I realize that if I do that, I'll probably fall to my death.

I'm hoping that if Sweet Girl is with me when we pass through the arena door, she'll go where I go. Rather than us being split up.

I look over my shoulder waving at them, hoping they know that I'm not trying to run away from any of them. Although I'm not exactly super excited to have that one conversation with Arlo about, you know, the whole, I've got a shitload of mates thing.

Stepping through the arena doors feels like stepping through any doorway, except for one second I'm in a death pit, and the next I'm back on a mossy bed where I went to sleep last night. Thankfully, my theory about Sweet Girl traveling with me was correct, because she promptly dumps me off her back and gives me a little shake as if she is trying to get some nasty germ off her.

I jump off her and roll out of the way just in time because the next second she's rolling onto her back and wiggling in the grass as if she was a golden retriever and not a giant beast thing.

“Well, little badger, it looks like you survived.”

I screech because I had forgotten about that fucking guy for a minute there. I know what you're thinking, how did you forget about one of your Heart Bonded? Well, I'll be honest. They're starting to add up and keeping

track of all of them is kind of hard. Maybe I should make a list. Number one Arlo, number two Silas, number three Tristan.

“Fuck me, I forgot about you.” I spin, noticing immediately that the Elven Prince is covered in blood. “I thought we were just supposed to be incapacitating the beasts, why are you all bloody? Is that your blood?”

“What do you mean you forgot about me?” He glares, and I cringe.

“Well, back in the arena, when I was tallying up all the men I’ve met in this fucking game, I sort of forgot about you,” I admit. I sound like a huge fucking bitch, don’t I? The Elven Prince scoffs, shakes his head, and then stomps over to me.

Tristan bends in front of me just enough to grip the back of my thighs. He lifts me off my feet and presses my back against a tree.

“You won’t forget this, Moon. You won’t forget what I can make you feel.” His voice is rough, and when his lips crash with mine, his kiss is hungry and desperate. He pushes his tongue between my lips, and it tangles with my own, as he owns me against the tree.

My legs wrap around his waist and my arms around his neck, and when his large hands grip my ass, I moan.

I can’t help it. I grind against him, and despite how tired I had been from the fourth trial, this kiss is breathing life back into me. Tristan growls, pulling away from my lips so he can kiss a trail down my neck, nibbling my skin gently. When he tugs the front of my shirt down, exposing my breast to the cool air, I gasp. But then his mouth is on me, and his tongue lashes against my hard nipple, and I’m grinding against him shamelessly now.

The feel of his hard cock between my legs, hitting my clit with every thrust, and his hot tongue against my skin has me scream out his name as I come in my pants.

“Oh, fuck, Tristan!” I moan, and he bites down on my nipple, hard, and grinds his cock into me again and again, sparking more pleasure through my body as my poor pussy flutters around nothing.

“Scream my name again, Moon,” he growls, as he releases my nipple, and kisses back up my neck, and I do as I’m told.

“Tristan,” my voice is rough from screaming. When I finally come down from my high, I push my hands into his hair and tug his head back. “Thank you,” I say, smiling like a mad woman. “Fuck, thank you.” I pull him back in for a kiss. I kiss him all over his face, and keep whispering thank-yous, because finally! When I release him, he pulls my shirt up, covering my

breast, after giving it one last pinch.

“You won’t forget me again,” he growls, as he lowers me to my feet, brushes a hand through his black hair, and smirks down at me. Stupid magenta-eyed Elf. Fuck, he’s sexy.

I nibble my lip as my cheeks blush, and he just keeps smirking. Smug fuck.

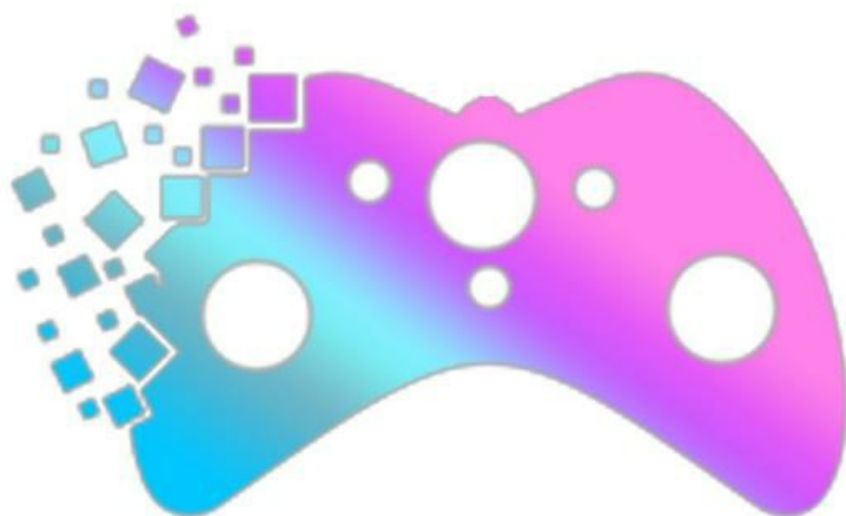
“Come on, let’s go get cleaned up.” He nods his head toward the forest, and I’m guessing there must be another pond close by.

“Wasn’t as good as sex, but damn, it’s been too long,” I grumble, as I reorient myself and my knees shake. I’m suddenly very glad that Sweet Girl ran off.

“That was just the start, badger.”

“Way to ruin the moment with that damn nickname.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE



Moon

Once we are cleaned up, we return to our little campsite, and I see that Lust is there. He's all cleaned up and looking fresh, and it annoys me just a little bit. He always looks so put together. I want to see him out of control.

“What the hell happened back there?” Lust asks as soon as he sees me, and I freeze. My eyes go wide, and I stumble over my words.

“I... I- what? Where? I don't... uh...” How the fuck did he even know?

“In the Arena, Moon.” He narrows his eyes on me before crossing his arms over his chest. “I'm not asking about you dry-humping Tristan against the tree,” he snarks, and I cringe, hiding my face behind my hands.

“Oh, goblin-dicks, you saw that!?” I groan.

“Even if I hadn't seen it, I would have heard it. You moaned so loud—”

“Stop, please!” I shout, throwing my hands up in surrender.

“Why was there an army of Goblins trying to kill you?” Lust asks, taking mercy on me, even though I know my face is bright red.

“I don't know, Lust. I...” I trail off, shaking my head. Looking over at Tristan, who looks smug as shit, I blush again. “I guess I should tell you both some stuff...” I murmur, and Lust nods. Tristan gestures to the spot on his mossy bed next to him, but Lust takes it, pointing to the log next to the fire across from the bed, and smirks when Tristan glares at him.

“Moon!” a man shouts, and I jump to my feet, startled. Then I see his magenta eyes, and my heart flutters.

“Arlo!” I start running for him, but forget that I was just sitting on a log, and go flying face first toward the ground. I know what's about to happen, seconds before my head cracks against the rock. “Fucking kidding me,” I mumble before everything goes black once again.

EPILOGUE



The Cloaked Man

“So you let her get away once again?” she snaps, and I shake my head, bowing to her.

“No, she’s being protected. She’s removed her necklace, and every time we get close, something goes wrong. I need a trap. I need to get her away from the others. I need her alone,” I say, anger flashing through my body, making me sweat.

“Twenty years. TWENTY FUCKING YEARS! I want her head on a spike. If you can’t get to her, kill the Grandmother. I want Shine to suffer before we end her. Go! Now!” The mother of my son, my only child, screams, and I bow once more.

I don’t want to do what comes next, but if I do not, she’ll kill my son. Her son.

Her evil knows no bounds.

The End for Now...

Pre-order Book Two [Rage Quit](#) coming soon

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Kadee,
You beautiful bitch thank you for making this stunning cover.

Hannah,
thank you for working even when your supposed to me MIA.

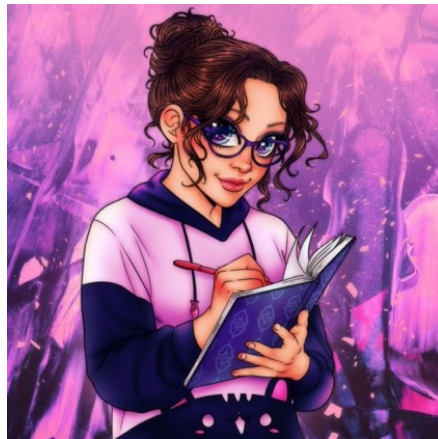
To my husband (who will never see this)
thanks for funding my obsession. It's paying for that lovely car you bought.
Your welcome...

To my beta team; Abigail, Courtney, Jennifer, Joy, Kat, Laura, Lauren,
Maddison, Nicole O, Nicole S P and Stephanie...
You bitches are always the best. Thanks for hopping on my crazy train to
chaos town.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kira is a mom of two tiny monsters, who loves reading, and binge watching The Office. She loves food, all the food. She recently obtained a jar, where she collects the tears of her readers. She uses them to water her Petunias.

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