

LAYLA FAE

WED TO
JACK FROST



Wed to Jack Frost
Arranged Monster Mates
Layla Fae

Copyright © 2023 Layla Fae

All rights reserved

The characters and events portrayed in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

No part of this book may be reproduced, or stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without express written permission of the publisher.

Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Content note](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Afterword](#)

[Free Monster Romance](#)

[Books In This Series](#)

[Books By This Author](#)

Dedication

I have 24 books out and not one of them is dedicated to my wonderful, hard-working, supportive husband. I hereby rectify this horrible oversight.

My beloved, darling hubby—this one is for you.

Content note

I'm so used to writing trigger warnings for my books, I thought long and hard about what to include here, but truth is, I don't think there is much triggering content in *Wed to Jack Frost*. It's filled with cozy intimacy, smut, and Christmas fluff.

That said, there is verbal abuse and parental neglect in the heroine's past, mentioned briefly.

Now for the kinks and other yummys! This book includes: femdom, pegging, tail play, praise, gentle degradation, impact play, fur brushing, knotting, knotting cuddles, penetrative sex as well as non-penetrative sex, use of a magical lubricant, size difference, virgin heroine, own sperm consumption by the hero, and orc milking porn.

I hope you enjoy this Christmas monster romance! See you on the other side.

Chapter 1

Jack

“For the last time, Mother, I am not getting married,” I said, keeping my voice calm and respectful, even though I was seriously annoyed. “I’m going there to undo this mess. That’s all.”

Mother harrumphed and folded her arms on her chest. She was about three heads shorter than me, a festive apron embroidered with holly covering her torso and legs, the silver fur on her arms shiny from brushing. With a pointed look, she glanced at *my* fur, which hadn’t been brushed in weeks, and tsked.

“Is that what you’re wearing to your wedding?” she asked, her face wrinkling in genteel displeasure. “Boy, that woman will run for the hills when she sees you.”

I glanced down, wondering what in a reindeer’s ass was wrong with my leather britches. They covered the important bits, which was all that mattered. And who needed a shirt when they had a chest full of bluish, *maybe* a bit tangled but very warm, fur?

“Good,” I said through clenched teeth. “Because I am not getting married. I’m too young! Also, she’ll run no matter what I wear, Mother. You know how humans are.”

A troubled look crossed her face before her orange eyes glimmered with renewed determination. Mother never let worries settle on her shoulders. She brushed them off just as she brushed tangles out of her fur.

“Well, do what you must,” she conceded, turning around to pummel her large, clawed fists into a big chunk of dough that smelled of spices and honey. Her tail swished with agitation, but when she looked at me, her eyes were kind. “And if you do marry her, the second house down the street will be yours. Just as promised.”

I leaned down carefully, mindful of my antlers, and gave her furry cheek a kiss. “Don’t worry, Ma. It’s not my time yet.”

She sighed but said nothing, taking her emotions out on the dough instead. I cast one final look at the spacious kitchen, with the merry fire roaring in the hearth, gleaming copper and steel pots hanging in neat rows, and garlands of dried herbs dangling under the ceiling. Even though I knew I wouldn't bring my human bride here—I wasn't going to marry her—I couldn't help but look at our house with fresh eyes, wondering what a human would think of it.

The room was large, the ceiling high, just like all ceilings in the house that was the Frost family seat. The men in our family were tall, reaching up to seven feet including the antlers.

The floors were made of wood, worn but clean and polished, and beautiful fairy candles stood on the windowsills and shelves lining the walls. They burned in hues of orange, pink, and yellow, their magical fires flickering enchantingly.

The official Yule celebrations would start in two days. The Yule Lads Parade would come through our small mountain town, and after that, the Yule season would be officially open. But Mother always started decorating and baking long before then. Hence the colorful fairy lights.

The kitchen was easily the hottest room in the house with its fire roaring at all hours of the day, so I stepped out with a sigh of relief, quickly cooling off in the corridor.

It wasn't easy to keep the enormous house warm in winter, and only the key rooms had a fire going most of the time. Kitchen, the living room, and long ago—the nursery. Now, me and my brothers were all grown up, and the oldest two, who were married with children, lived in the two houses flanking the main one. There were five of us, and at 54, I was one of the youngest, with only Cris younger than me. My two unmarried brothers lived in the family home, too.

Those were the rules. Single men lived with their parents. Married ones got their own houses.

I didn't mind living with my parents. For one, I spent most of my time in the carpentry workshop where I made furniture using the old family methods, so we only crossed paths at

mealtimes. And even my married brothers, Ruslan and Ivo, brought their families to dine with us most of the time, so living apart didn't really mean *being* apart. Family stuck together.

Soren and Cris lived in the family home, and it was mostly their fault—and Ivo's—that I was in my current predicament. Namely, betrothed to a stranger through the matchmaking temple.

Not bothering with a coat, I stomped out of the house, over twenty Yule bells decorating the front door ringing fiercely when I shut it. The day was bright, the pristine snow reflecting the weak winter sunlight with blinding whiteness. I had cleared a path this morning, so I walked down to the gate, the piles of snow on either side of me reaching up to my hips.

"Uncle Jack!" little Mary called, waving at me from the neighboring yard where she played with her brother. "Where are you going? Will you bring us presents?"

I waved back and shook my head with a grin. "Just running an errand, and no presents for you yet, little fiend. Have to wait for Ole Frost like everyone else."

She pouted, her furry face twitching adorably, and I grinned before heading up to the main square where the portal was. I might have even brought them some candy, but temples didn't sell any. And what they *did* sell wasn't suitable for children. My cheeks grew hot under the fur when I thought about the pamphlets I'd been sent along with the confirmation of my match.

As a member of the larger races, I was apparently required to procure a special oil that would "help my bride accommodate me without being injured". Which just meant, in common speak, that I was likely too big for her and would rip her apart with my cock. I snorted. One more reason not to bother with humans.

They just couldn't handle us.

I huffed angrily, speeding up to the sound of snow crunching under my feet. I shouldn't have agreed to the Yule dare game

with my brothers. Though to be fair, I never expected Ivo to give me such an outrageous dare.

We all knew about the matchmaking temples, and more and more males of other races used their services to get human wives. No one in our town ever did, though. We were a traditional folk, and we married for normal reasons: for love, because the girl was pregnant, or to force peace upon feuding families.

To pay for a bride, even if the money was a kind of dowry that supported her family, was ridiculous. And to get matched to somebody using just a drop of blood—preposterous.

So when Ivo dared me to send a sample to the temple, producing an official blood-drawing kit, I thought it was a prank. Because the mere idea of applying for a human bride was laughable. Humans were fearful, weak, and ridiculously fragile. On the rare occasions when human traders passed through our lands, they got injured more often than not, slipping and breaking their thin legs on perfectly even ground.

They stared, too. We Frosts were a friendly bunch, always calling out greetings to strangers, but instead of answering, most humans just gaped with their mouths hanging open. Mother maintained they were afraid because we were big, antlered, and furry, as opposed to their small, furless bodies that required layers upon layers of clothes to stay warm.

As I said. Fearful, breakable creatures.

It stood to reason, I would have never decided to apply for a human bride on my own. But when Ivo dared me, I did it, of course. To refuse a dare was to be a coward.

We drew the blood sample from my finger, sealed it, and Ivo made a point of following me to the portal to make sure I sent it. When I sobered up the next day and had just set out to withdraw my application, a messenger came from the temple, informing me I got a match.

Now, two days later, was the date of my wedding. My bride waited for me in the temple, and I was going there not to say my wedding vows, but to politely reject her.

Because I'd sooner freeze than marry a human.

Chapter 2

Scarlett

He was late. I paced from one end of the empty wedding chamber to the other, my stomping footsteps echoing louder and louder against the marble walls. It was so fucking typical of a man, I thought, clenching my jaw so hard, it hurt. Disrespecting his future wife right from the start.

Well, at least I knew what to expect of him. I could brace myself and take all the scorn and disrespect he would surely dish out, because I was used to it. My father had trained me well.

The heavy skirts of my woolen dress swished around me with every angry step, and I raked my fingers through my long, blond hair. Even though I had taken great care to brush it this morning, it was already frizzy, small curls forming where the snow had melted during my journey. The resulting look was likely hideous, and I gritted my teeth, refusing to let it bother me.

It did, though. I couldn't help but think I should have worn a braid. I would have—if not for my mother.

“Leave it loose,” she said when I was getting ready in the morning. “That hair is your only womanly quality. You don't want to scare him away with your boyish looks, do you?”

And even though that pill was so bitter, it burned my throat, I swallowed it with difficulty and did as she said. Because it was true. I *didn't* want my future monster husband, no matter how repulsive, disrespectful, and tardy he was, to reject me. I would do anything for him to take me away. I desperately wanted to be free of my mother's harping, the village people who scoffed whenever they saw me, and the deadly burden of my father's debts crushing me every night so hard, I couldn't breathe.

My father was dead, but in the final years of his life, he managed to drink away every last penny Mother and I made.

He amassed a mountain of debts from goblin usurers, and goblins were known for one thing—they always got their money back.

Already, me and Mother had been insulted and threatened with arson. Only a few days ago, the goblins came again, giving us one last chance to pay up before they set fire to the old, neglected shack where we lived.

Being the goblins' debtors immediately upset Mother's and my social standing, already wobbly because of my father's drunkenness. We were pariahs and no one was willing to help us.

So when I finally got my match from the temple, over a year after sending in my application, I wept from joy, even though I didn't usually cry. The money my monster husband would pay for me was enough to cover my father's debts. It would free my mother from his shadow and let me leave her and our unfriendly village behind with a clear conscience.

Did I dread marrying a monster? Maybe, but the benefits far outweighed the disadvantages. Because one good thing about the matchmaking temples was the generous settlements they required from the monster grooms in return for matching them with human women.

Getting away from my home village, a place of many dashed hopes and scornful looks, was an added bonus. But for all that to happen, I actually had to marry the monster and then have sex with him. Only consummated marriages were valid.

I stopped in front of the gilded door leading into the corridor outside the chamber. My hands shook, and I balled them into fists, trying to control the outward signs of my nerves. Because I wasn't just angry at my groom for being late. The fury was, frankly, a cover-up. Anger was my usual way of dealing with the sea of fear underneath.

I was truly terrified of meeting my new husband.

Even though the priestess who processed my match told me what he was—a male from the old lineage of Frosts from the mountains—I had no idea what he looked like. Did he have

fangs and claws? Batlike wings? Spikes running down his back? Was he stupid and brutish or gentle and refined?

I had no idea. Before today, I had never heard of the Frosts, expecting to be matched to something more common, like a troll, a vampire, or some type of shifter.

Or no one at all, if I were completely honest with myself. My father had drilled into me that I was undesirable, a shrew and a bitch unfit for marriage. Sometimes, his words got so deep under my skin, I believed them. But I also knew, logically, he was wrong. I could be kind and friendly. Maybe. Sometimes. Mostly toward women and children.

He simply never gave me a chance, because he had such a foul temper, the only way to deal with him was with snarls and barbed insults.

I hugged myself, squeezing my arms tight with nervous fingers, and looked around helplessly. There was no clock in the wedding chamber. I had no idea how much time had passed since the priestess left me here, telling me she'd be back in ten minutes with my groom. All I knew was the promised ten minutes passed a long time ago.

Was he simply late? Or was he stuck dealing with the paperwork? Maybe he had applied on a lark and now couldn't pay?

I huffed and threw the door open, stomping out into the corridor leading to the main area of the temple. I wasn't good at sitting patiently in a corner, and I wouldn't do so now. If he was in the temple already, I would meet him head on, no matter how scared the prospect made me.

I walked fast, fueling my rage with fighting thoughts. *So he thinks he can disrespect me? He thinks I'll just meekly wait for him because he's a big, scary beast? Tough luck, monster boy. I'm coming for you, and I'll drag you to that altar with bare hands if I have to.*

When I reached the main area, I stopped, looking around the brightly lit hall. It was big, with a domed ceiling supported by impressive columns made of veined blue marble. Circular

stations were evenly spaced out on the marble floor, each manned by a priestess. On the far side of the hall, a portal shimmered with blue and green light, a bored operator standing by the golden arch.

It wasn't overly busy—just six monster males standing at various stations. I narrowed my eyes, looking them over. An ogre, a dark elf, an unsettling male looking human apart from his wide, flapping ears, a plantlike creature with a row of sparkling eyes around their head, a large, strange beast sporting a set of feathery, pink-and-gold wings, and...

I took a step forward, my stomach lurching. I didn't know how, but I knew. That was him.

Tall and muscular, the male was of a humanlike build, but burlier and wider in the shoulders than the human men I knew. His body, from the top of his head to his bare feet ending in blunt black claws, was covered in longish, gray fur that had a blue sheen to it.

A pair of short antlers sprouted from his temples, a symmetrical bony structure curling from their bases resting over his forehead, forming something that looked like a crown. His face was humanlike, the fur covering his cheeks short, longer only at his chin and jaw.

His eyes burned orange, his mouth set in a grimace. And maybe I would have dwelled on that unhappy expression, but my attention was instantly drawn to movement behind his leather clad thighs.

A long, furless tail that reached down mid-calf swished behind him in agitation. It was gray and looked strong, swinging rapidly from side to side while the monster listened to the priestess—*my* priestess—explaining something to him with an exasperated expression. Suddenly, he reeled back from the counter, the tail freezing, poised up into the air before it twisted, showing an incredible range of motion.

It wasn't like a dog's tail, that much was clear. It looked like it could grab things, winding around them with precision. Like another limb.

“Mister Frost, please, those are the rules! You have to at least meet the bride before you...”

The priestess lowered her voice, but that was fine. I was already striding toward my future groom, my fear folded into a tiny ball and buried under layers of fury and impatience. Here he was, refusing to even meet me, when my very survival depended on him. It was just so *typical*.

I stopped by his side, swallowing a wave of unease when I realized how much taller than me he was. His face was so far up, I had to tilt my head back when I cleared my throat to make him pay attention.

The priestess fell silent and the monster looked down at me, his angry expression sending a spike of fear into my gut. A spike I immediately turned into fuel for my rage, because that was what I always did with fear.

I drew myself up as tall as I could and jabbed my finger into his furry sternum.

“You there! Furball! Where the fuck have you been?”

Chapter 3

Jack

I stared at the female who just called me a furball and my first thought was, “What a rude little human.” But as I watched her cheeks flush with anger, pale blue eyes gleaming with thunder under thick blond brows pulled low in a scowl, I couldn’t really stick to that first judgment.

Because, as I took in her slender frame and long limbs, the mane of blond hair, and her hands placed furiously on her narrow hips, I couldn’t help but have a second thought. And it was, “*Whoa, down boy. We’re too old to do that in public.*”

I opened my mouth to answer her, but my brain blanked out, dazzled by her full pink lips, beautiful even when twisted with anger. So I closed my mouth, cleared my throat, and blinked at her stupidly, completely forgetting what it was she asked.

“Mister Frost, meet your bride,” the priestess said helpfully, and I thought I detected faint echoes of laughter in her voice. But when I glanced at her, her face was perfectly schooled into a look of demure politeness. “This is Scarlett. Scarlett, this is Jack Frost, your matched groom.”

“Or furball,” I blurted out before my brain caught up with my mouth, because I was back to staring at Scarlett’s lively face. It made my thoughts scatter. “You can call me furball.”

She huffed, tilting her head to the side, flinty eyes assessing me. “I just did. I also asked you a question.”

I rubbed the back of my head, my skin heating with a blush under the short fur on my cheeks. “Ah, yes. So you wanted to know...”

“Why you’re late,” she snapped, her foot tapping with impatience.

I glanced down, eyes falling to her shoes, which were made of soft leather and so worn, they were practically falling apart.

Even her shoelaces were so threadbare, it was a wonder they still held together.

Focusing on this new detail, I let my eyes roam up her slim figure, taking in the ripped hem of her dress, which looked warm, but was visibly patched up in many places. The knuckles of her right hand, still bossily clamped on her hip, were raw, the skin wet with crimson.

I reached out and grabbed her hand, bringing it high to inspect the damage. Scarlett's gasp, followed by an angry hiss, stopped me in my tracks. I looked down at her warily, my face really hot, her hand still clasped in mine.

"What are you doing, monster boy?" Her voice was even more cutting than before, cold fury pouring out, and there was no mistaking the way my cock twitched eagerly in its sheath.

Oh, fuck.

"Why are you injured?" I parried with a question, warming up to this verbal match. Her every word was like a swing of a blade, sharp and lethal, and that broke my reverie. Still dazzled and uncomfortably horny, I could at least think again.

It was her turn to blink stupidly, her lips parted as she stared at me. I huffed and looked at her palm, stroking my thumb over the back of it, right under the broken skin. "How did this happen?" I asked, looking back at her. "Did you punch somebody?"

She bit her lip, looking away, and snatched her hand out of my grip.

"A pickpocket at the train station," she muttered, glancing up at me from under her lowered brows. "He tried to steal my ticket."

"Oh, no," the priestess said sympathetically, making me jerk. I was so focused on Scarlett, I almost forgot she was still there, watching our interaction. "Are you all right? Did he hurt you?"

Scarlett shook her head, giving the priestess a grim smile that looked really out of place on her sweet face, and yet, did things to me. Things that soon would become painfully

obvious to anyone who looked at my pants if I didn't get a grip.

Why was this woman making me act like I was a young buck with hormones all abuzz? It was embarrassing.

"You should be asking how much *I* hurt *him* for trying to steal from me," Scarlett said, her voice vicious and low. "I think I knocked out a tooth. He'll remember me every time he tries to bite off a piece of meat. Bastard."

I chuckled, not even trying to hide my reaction, because I was so focused on keeping my cock from sliding free. Scarlett gave me a sharp look, her grim smile replaced by an angry frown. "Why are you just standing there, laughing at me? Don't we have somewhere to be? *Why are you late?*"

The way she spoke that last question gave me pause. For a moment, she looked not just angry, but also scared. Yet that look flashed on and off her face, making me think I only imagined it. I couldn't dwell on it, either way, because my initial daze had worn off enough for reason to come back.

And I had to tell her. There was no way around it.

"Well, uh, you see..." I started, glancing helplessly at the priestess, who pursed her lips and leaned back with her arms folded, making it plain she wouldn't help me. "I... That is... I didn't even want to apply!" I burst out.

Scarlett's face paled, but she said nothing, watching me with that angry scowl. I continued, determined to deal with it fast so I could go home.

Without her. For some reason, that thought wasn't as appealing now that I actually saw her. When she had been just a faceless human bride, I could cast her aside without a thought. Now? I felt a pang of reluctance.

But it had to be done, so I plowed on.

"I did it on a dare, and before I could take it back, they told me I had a match. But I... I'm too young to get married!"

Scarlett looked confused as she cocked her head to the side and gave me a quick once-over. Her voice was hoarse when

she asked, “How old are you?”

I sighed and scratched the back of my head, feeling really sheepish. I knew how my answer would sound to her. But it wasn't my fault human lifespans were so short compared to ours.

“Fifty-four. But,” I raised a finger when she drew in a big breath, probably getting ready to yell at me, “that's like barely a quarter of my lifespan! It's like... like... How long *do* humans live?” I asked, turning to the priestess.

“Eighty years if we're lucky,” she said, her eyebrow twitching. I couldn't tell whether she was amused or displeased at this point.

“Thank you. So it's as if you got married at twenty,” I said, pointing a triumphant finger at Scarlett. For some reason, I was eager to make her see my point and not think badly of me, even though I would never see her again. Which was *ridiculous*.

“I am twenty-six,” she said in a low voice that sounded calm but really wasn't. The fur at the base of my tail stood on end at the sound of it. It was... predatory.

Also freakishly hot. And terrifying.

“Well, still young by human standards, eh?” I said, unsure what she meant by telling me her age.

Scarlett shot me an icy look and straightened even more. And holy shit, I was significantly taller than her, but suddenly, I felt small as she glared at me. “A lot of people marry at twenty even if I didn't. It's an appropriate age for marriage, so it must be something else. Spit it out, *groom*. Just say it.”

My tail flicked with agitation as I pressed my lips together, very reluctant to just “spit it out”. Playing for time, I raked my eyes over her frame once more and noticed with a jolt that her hands, balled into tight fists, were trembling. The right one was bleeding, a small rivulet of blood slithering down the back of her palm.

“I can't marry you. I'm sorry.”

I stared at her trembling hand, watching as a drop of blood reached her bent knuckle and hung precariously off it. Her skin under the red was white from how hard she clenched her palm, and the sight made a sharp pang pierce my chest. I refused to look up at Scarlett's face, terrified of her expression.

Because she should be relieved, right? No human in her right mind would want a big, furry monster. She even called me a furball, which clearly meant she opposed to my appearance. And I wasn't a good husband material, anyway.

She should be happy, but the fur down my back bristled with the electrifying awareness that she was as far from glad as a person could be, and it baffled me.

I looked up in time to see a grimace of fury settle on Scarlett's dainty face. "I don't accept this," she said, her nostrils flaring with sharp breaths. "Try again, furball."

I frowned, staring at her body, which vibrated visibly. She was so tense, I could see a muscle in her jaw jumping, her shoulders hunched protectively, posture leaning forward, like she was ready to fight me.

"Try again?" I repeated, nonplussed even as my eyes tracked the hard lines of her body, memorizing the sight. She made me sweat in the *best* ways, and I was both confused and excited by this. "There is nothing to try. Look, I'm sorry, but it's just as I said. I applied on a dare and..."

"I said try again, because I won't accept this!" she hissed, coming closer—so close her scent drifted up to me, making me blink in a stupid daze.

Damn, she smelled good. Like something cool and tart, her scent made me think of cranberries over crushed ice. I drew in a breath, trying to be surreptitious about it, and savored her fragrance as it sat in the back of my throat. It made my body buzz with pleasant anticipation, completely at odds with my current circumstances.

Maybe the temples were on to something with the blood matching. Because the way I reacted to Scarlett was too intense to be a coincidence.

“How...” I began, my mind growing foggy with lust and the simple pleasure of being near her.

“How about you get down on one knee, apologize for being late, and ask me to be your wife?” she said, putting her hands on her hips as she looked up with challenging eyes. “Can you handle *that*, monster boy?”

I shook my head, trying to clear it. Was this slip of a girl... ordering me to marry her? Damn, that was hot. But I couldn't. Could I?

“I already told you...” I began but broke off the moment she stepped closer, her body almost pressing to mine. My chin pushed into the dip between my collarbones as I struggled to keep looking at her upturned face.

“What is it? You can't pay?” she asked, staring at me with such vicious intensity, tingles ran down my spine.

“That's not it,” I said, because I *could* pay. I carried the payment for my latest job, an intricately carved dining set, in my pocket. It was more than enough for the temple's fee, and even that special oil they wanted me to get. “But it's too early for me! Look, if you're still interested in five years or so...”

She let out a bark of bitter laugh, slicing me deep with her cutting gaze. “I'll be dead in five years. You have to marry me today.”

Chapter 4

Scarlett

I made a fool of myself, standing there and demanding that the furry monster marry me, but I couldn't stop. Panic churned in my belly because the thought of going back and facing my mother and the goblins was far more terrifying than the prospect of getting married to an enormous, furry stranger.

So I kept fighting the losing fight, knowing it was for naught, because I couldn't force him to marry me if he didn't want to. And even though I wanted to leave and save the shreds of my self-respect, I stayed put, watching him squirm.

He actually looked flustered and unsettled, and it gave me a vicious stab of pleasure. At least I wasn't the only one suffering in this ridiculous situation.

"What do you mean, dead?" he asked, and I stepped away when my neck gave a twinge. Why did he have to be so ridiculously tall? I would have to climb him like a tree if I wanted to reach his face.

Now, where did that come from?

"My father left debts behind," I said, shrugging. I was honest, because I had already humiliated myself to the point where my dignity couldn't be salvaged. "And his creditors want my blood. And my mother's. I've waited over a year for this match, because it's the only way out for me."

I looked away, swallowing tears, because if I started crying here, it would be the last straw. I would just run to the goblins and beg them to off me. There was only so much humiliation I could handle.

"I... I'm sorry to hear that," he said, his deep, rumbling voice feeling like a stroke of warmth down my back. For the briefest moment, it made my defenses crumple when a deep yearning for comfort overwhelmed me, making me feel weak and pathetic. I clenched my jaw and reset my purpose, doing my

best not to let intrusive thoughts slither in and shatter the remains of my self-control.

They pushed through, anyway, because I was too shaken, too weak to withhold them. My father's hideous voice whispered in my ear, gleeful and cackling with triumph. *"See? He doesn't want you. Told you, girl. No man in his right mind would marry such a bossy shrew. Even a monster. You are his perfect match, and he still doesn't want you. Here is your proof I was right, because I'm always right. You're good for nothing, not even to spread your legs for a man."*

I usually didn't let the echoes of Daddy Dearest poison my thoughts, so it was a testament to how unsettled I felt that I couldn't stop them today. But I wasn't about to give up. When my father was still alive, he often crushed me with his cruel words, but that just made me more furious and eager to fight. And so I took a deep breath, looked up at my monster groom, and shot my last shot.

"You being sorry solves nothing," I said looking into his orange eyes with black pupils, slightly narrower than human ones. "Look, Jack. The temple matched us, and they are never wrong. We are perfect for each other, believe it or not, and I just hope from the bottom of my heart you're not too dense to see that. I don't care how old or young you are as long as you're a grownup. All I'm telling you is that either you marry me today or not at all, and if you don't, you'll regret it. So man up and decide."

In the short moment of stunned silence that followed my desperate final speech, I heard whispers. When I glanced to the side, I realized with mortification everyone in the temple was staring at us. Because, of course. We were a spectacle. I closed my eyes for a moment, bracing myself for Jack's final rejection.

After he told me he was done with me, I would run and hide somewhere until everyone who saw this little scene was gone and I could slip out unnoticed. And then, I would... I didn't even know. I just wanted this to be over.

“I’m sorry,” Jack began, and I pressed my lips together to trap my whimper of defeat inside. But honestly, what did I expect? It was just as my father always said. It was impossible to want me.

Jack cleared his throat and spoke again. “I’m sorry for being late,” he said, making my heart thump painfully as I shot him a sharp look. “Will you please forgive me and marry me? Please?”

My mouth fell open as I stared at him. The floor wobbled under my feet, and I struggled to keep my balance as laughter and cheers came from the onlookers. But the sounds were distorted, the relief pouring down my spine so powerful, it blurred my vision and muddled my hearing.

“I believe I told you to kneel,” I heard myself saying, my voice coming as if from afar. And then I cringed, because why was I doing this? I didn’t want him to turn away now. So why did I push him?

Jack shocked me again by falling to one knee with a grunt. His head was now finally below mine, though not by much, and I could look at his face from up close, noticing the thin red circles around his orange irises, the way his wide, flat nostrils flared, and a fang peeking out from under his upper lip as he gave me an uncertain smile.

Oh, God. He kneeled. A man kneeled for me in front of an audience, and I had never felt so... so... wanted. It was like he really cared.

“Will you marry me, Scarlett?” he asked in a low, intimate voice that made my body buzz with pleasure. He had such a good voice. Rough and masculine, with just a hint of a melodic accent.

“Yes. Thank you,” I said, and it made his smile widen until two tips of white fangs peeked out.

Another round of applause followed, and I didn’t even dare look around, my cheeks burning furiously hot. I felt loose and unmoored, all that tension inside me leaving, but not entirely gone. Because getting married was just step one. I had to get

Jack to sleep with me tonight and somehow, it seemed like that might require another battle.

He had rejected me, after all, even though I got him to agree to this match in the end. He probably didn't feel attracted to me, which was understandable. I didn't have a womanly figure, I couldn't smile sweetly, and my temper was foul most of the time. And even though I didn't agree with many of my father's opinions about me, these were facts.

So this fight wasn't over.

I stood by Jack's side as he dealt with all the paperwork the temple required. As he counted out the gleaming credits into a golden bowl, I thanked the stars each time a coin clinked against metal. I knew the temple took a percentage of the fee, but the rest would be sent to my mother. I cringed, imagining how happy she'd be when she got it. All her burdens, meaning her debt and her bossy shrew of a daughter, gone in one day.

And right before Christmas, too. My mother was a lucky woman. Whereas I...

"We have the Frost marriage rite on record," the priestess said, drawing me out of my anxious thoughts. "We can use it if you'd like. The other option would be to go with our standard wedding vows. Which do you prefer, Mister Frost?"

I looked up at Jack, who scratched the fur behind his antler with an uncertain expression. When he looked down, his eyes meeting mine, I bit back a gasp. Now that I was out of the battle mode, with at least part of my future secured, I had no more panic and fear to distract me from how alien he looked.

Yet his eyes, even with their unsettling coloring, sparkled with intelligence and kindness.

"Our family rites are very poetic," he said, and I realized with a jolt, he was speaking to me. "Though to be frank, a Frost wedding is mostly about the eating, drinking, and dancing that goes on for days after the ceremony... Which we can't do without my family here. So... would you like to use our family vows?"

Our family. I knew he wasn't including me in there, just speaking about the Frosts, and yet, those words sent a painful jab into my heart. *Family.* Of course, he had to have one. Really, the Frosts were more like a clan from what I understood. After my dysfunctional family of just me and my parents, becoming a part of a clan would be... different. The thought of it made a weird longing rise up in my chest, and I did my best to thwart it before it consumed me.

Also... he asked for my opinion. I knew brides had no say in these matters. They just waited demurely in the wedding chambers for their monster grooms to come and claim them, but I... I had already broken the protocol. I might as well get a say in how my wedding happened.

"Um, yes, of course," I said. "I... It would be a pleasure."

I bit the inside of my cheek, unsure whether that was the right thing to say. Maybe it would be better to keep the wedding as formal as possible? It was a transaction, after all, and I had no delusions that Jack would become a doting husband for his human stranger of a bride. But I was curious about those poetic vows, and I really wanted to hear them.

When Jack grinned, his fangs peeking out, I knew it was the right call. Because I wanted him to like me, at least until we fucked and the marriage was sealed. After that... I had no idea. It seemed impossible I could be a good wife for anyone, let alone a monster from a race I knew nothing about.

I'd do my best, though. Hopefully, he would, too, though I wouldn't hold my breath.

When I glanced at the priestess, she gave me an encouraging smile and nodded at Jack. "Well, then. Everything is settled. Scarlett, could you guide Mister Frost to the wedding chamber? And I'll fetch a copy of the vows."

I gave her a sharp nod and set out, not looking back to see if Jack followed. I had exactly a minute to contain the shaking of my hands and stop my knuckles from bleeding, which seemed impossible. To stop the bleeding, I would have to stop clenching my fists... but that would make their trembling painfully obvious.

So I just walked, taking deep breaths, until a warm, heavy hand fell on my shoulder, stopping me in my tracks.

“Wait.” Jack’s deep rumble made me stiffen with unease, because I couldn’t help but think he was about to change his mind.

But when I turned back, he looked at me with a kind expression, his eyes glowing in the gloom of the corridor as he spoke. “Give me your hand.”

Chapter 5

Jack

She hesitated, her eyes darting from side to side. Now that I had agreed to marry her—don't think about it or you'll go insane, just do it—her demeanor became much less combative and now verged on uncertainty.

Which was so strange. I had Scarlett pegged for a ridiculously self-confident or even arrogant person because of how she approached me, making her demands, but now I wasn't so sure.

“I just want to tend to your wound,” I said, realizing maybe she needed more context. We didn't know each other, after all, even though my body screamed with every heartbeat that it knew and craved her.

Now I understood why the priestess was so adamant I at least met Scarlett before rejecting her. She knew I wouldn't be able to resist.

Oh, dear gods and Ole Frost, I'm getting married. Fuck, fuck, fuck.

Scarlett bit her lip, and then, her features rearranged, sharpening into a suspicious glare as she stuck her bleeding hand out to me, her long fingers trembling. “Do you carry bandages in your pockets or something?” she asked, watching me keenly with narrowed eyes.

“No,” I said, suddenly unsure. Would my magic freak her out? It was too late to wonder, so I clasped her fingertips gently in my claws and explained. “All Frosts can do certain magic. It just so happens I am adept at healing. You will feel a bite of cold and then your skin will be whole. Uh... Hope you don't mind?”

She watched me for a moment, her lips pursed, before her expression softened as she gave me a tiny smile. Well, not really a smile. More like a half-curl of her upper lip that pulled up her cheek, revealing a hint of a dimple.

My insides swooned with a rush of affection that took me completely by surprise, and I cleared my throat, staring at her with my mouth open like a total jackass.

The tiny quarter-smile vanished, and Scarlett gave me a glare that, instead of cooling off my affection, made my belly tighten with a deeper kind of heat. I clenched my jaw, cursing at my body's inappropriate reactions.

“Well? What are you waiting for?” she demanded, and I exhaled in a rush, doing my best to concentrate.

“Sorry. As I said, it will feel cold for a moment. Ready?”

She nodded and I let my frosty magic loose, pouring the stream into her palm. The torches lining the walls flickered, and Scarlett's injured skin glowed blue as she gasped, her fingers twitching in my gentle hold. But she didn't pull back, watching with wide eyes until the glow vanished, and her palm rested in mine, fully healed and clean of blood.

She looked up, her eyes wide open in awe, her face soft and vulnerable. I stared, unable to look away, our eyes locked in the most intimate, romantic moment of my life.

Which quickly burst like a soap bubble when Scarlett reared back, looking completely horrified, and then plastered a scowl on her face, fuming at me. All the glacial fury in her blue eyes was focused on me, and after everything, it was too much.

Her furious look made my eager cock peek hopefully out of its sheath until I stumbled back, the wet head rubbing against my underwear. *Uh-oh. Go back in there.*

“Uh. Shall we go?” I asked, desperately trying to make my half-boner go away. Why, *why* did Scarlett's angry attitude make me so horny? Or was it just her scent? I didn't even know anymore, I just knew I would do anything she wanted, which was evident because... I was about to marry her.

It filled me with existential dread, and I was still doing it. Damn the temple's magical matchmaking or whatever they did in here. Damn it to the seven hells of deep freeze, because it made me do the one thing I dreaded the most in my life. With a stranger, on top of everything.

Scarlett gave me a fierce look and turned on her heel, striding toward a gilded door, her skirts swishing around her legs. I cocked my head to the side, watching her bottom as she walked. With the movement, the material almost clung to her curves for one brief moment, and before I knew it, the half-boner was back, chafing in my pants.

Reindeer's ass. This is embarrassing.

"In here," she called over her shoulder, opening the door.

I followed, stopping just inside and taking in the spacious, marble chamber with a large metal bowl of eternal blue fire in the middle. Scarlett stopped by it and looked back at me, her hands clasped together, fingers winding and unwinding until she looked down with a frown and clenched her hands into fists, letting them rest at her sides.

Now I was certain she was nervous. I wondered if she was afraid of me. Or maybe she thought I was flaky and would bail on her since she had to practically bully me into agreeing to this wedding. My gut roiled with doubt again, fear piercing through me at the thought of being married, so I quickly cast around for anything to say to distract myself.

Because I was doing it. She'd die if I didn't and I couldn't let that happen now, could I?

Dear gods, she smelled so good.

"We have this wedding night tradition," I blurted out, my cock apparently in charge now that I was busy battling my qualms.

Scarlett stepped from foot to foot, her scent growing more potent with the movement, before she fixed me with a flat stare. Her hands still shook, even though she clenched them really hard. I cursed my lack of sensitivity, but it was no use backing out—her eyes bid me to go on.

"Ah, yes. So we—the Frosts—have fur. As you can see, of course," I muttered, getting embarrassed. She arched an eyebrow but said nothing, so I plowed on. "And it's traditional for newlyweds to, uh, brush each other's fur. On their wedding night."

I cringed internally, waiting for her reaction—but at least I wasn't panicking about the impending wedding anymore. Finally, Scarlett gave me her quarter-smile, and I breathed out in relief. "But I don't have fur," she said, pointing at herself.

"You have beautiful hair," I said instantly, gazing at the mane of long, blond hair that framed her face and cascaded down her shoulders and back. "I can... I can brush it. If you want. Though we don't have to... You don't have to..." I looked at her with desperation, because I was quickly reaching the end of my tether.

Why was I getting married again? And at fifty-four? Was I insane? Did she bewitch me?

But then, Scarlett's quarter-smile morphed into a half-smile, deepening the dimple in her cheek, and I remembered *why* I was still here. Because of *that*. Honestly, if I could get her to smile at me just once a day, it would be worth it.

I stared at her face, made mischievous and sprite-like by the smile. She only had one dimple, which was adorable and made me want to lean down and kiss it.

"I... It sounds nice," she said after a moment, the amusement replaced by a wary look. "Any... other traditions I should know about?"

"My mother will insist on a proper wedding celebration," I warned her, already picturing my mother's happy face when I brought Scarlett home. She would be so glad to have another daughter-in-law. "And since it's almost Yule, we'll probably wait until it starts. Yule weddings are supposed to be lucky. Good for... fertility and stuff."

I looked away, my face burning *again*. For Ole Frost's sake, I wasn't normally shy with females. True, I hadn't been with anyone in over two years, but I used to be popular with girls in my thirties, when my hormones ran amok. I could charm the panties off a mountain girl with a few compliments and a smile, and now I couldn't even utter the word *fertility* without blushing?

Something was seriously wrong.

“Oh,” Scarlett said, her face setting into a tight expression. “Well, I suppose if your relatives want a celebration, they should have one.”

I wondered if she was uneasy because I talked about fertility—*as if you want her to get pregnant, oh gods, haven't even thought about it, what if she does*—or because I mentioned celebrating with my family. Since I wasn't about to poke that first bear in the eye, I settled on the second.

“We could invite your relatives, too,” I said, perking up. “You mentioned your mother? I could...”

“No,” Scarlett cut in, her shoulders tensing up. “I don't have any relatives I want to celebrate with. Or ever see again.”

I stared at her, because that was unfathomable to me. “You don't have any family?” I asked, not even trying to hide the incredulity in my voice. “But surely, your mother...”

“My mother is glad I'm gone,” Scarlett interrupted again, turning away from me, her jaw working. “She wouldn't come, anyway. And I have no one else. My father's dead. No siblings. No cousins that I know of. No one.”

I gaped at her, the sheer loneliness of that statement punching me in the gut with a surprising force. She had *no one*? And her mother was *glad* she was gone? It sounded preposterous and so painful, my insides ached on her behalf. How could a person be so lonely and still alive? How was she not insane?

An urge to engulf her in my arms and tell her she would never be alone again because she would have me and my family made me step toward her. But before I could act on it, the door opened and our priestess came in, holding an ornate scroll with red tassels.

“Found it! All right, let's start, because we're seriously behind schedule.”

Scarlett gave me a tiny smile, which made me ache even more, and stood opposite me, the blue flame of the eternal fire between us.

“Let's get married,” she said, looking up at me, the blue of the fire making her eyes sparkle like ice.

“All right.” I grinned, noticing with surprise my panic and doubts were gone.

So it was official. I was marrying this human girl and taking her home. To my family.

Chapter 6

Scarlett

In all this ordeal of marrying a monster stranger and becoming his to have and do with as he pleased, I never even considered the vows might be a problem. I thought that surely, I would do my part with ease, because it was necessary. These were just words, after all. The real predicament would come later, in our marital bed.

So when I choked on my vow again, my eyes burning from holding back tears, I stomped with annoyance. Why was it so freaking *hard* to say these words?!

“Maybe you just need a minute, honey,” the priestess said with sympathy. “And I’ll just... Let me just read it again, all right? So you can get used to it.”

I nodded mutely, my tongue between my teeth, the pain of my bite keeping the tears from spilling.

“All right. Here we go.” The priestess cleared her throat to read the vow again, and I bit my tongue harder in preparation.

“I, Scarlett, take you, Jack, to be my husband, my protector, the father of my children. I vow to be your candle in the dark of night, your shelter in the heart of winter, your comfort in pain and loss to come. I shall be your warmth keeping icy winds at bay.

“I enter your family as I stand, my heart open to welcome everyone you cherish, my voice ready to rise in song together with those you hold dear. I vow to respect your elders, befriend your brothers and sisters, guide and soothe your nieces and nephews. I thank you for welcoming me into the Frost clan and wrapping me in the loving arms of those who were before us, those who are now, and those who will come after our light shall perish. Your family is now my family. And my heart is forever yours.”

The priestess sniffed loudly in the silence that rang after she finished reading the vow. She openly wiped away a tear and

looked at me with a tremulous smile. “No wonder you’re having trouble with it. This is a beautiful vow. Your kind is very family-oriented, isn’t it, Mister Frost?”

I glanced at Jack, the burning in my eyes manageable now, my spine stiffening with resolve. I still flinched in shock seeing Jack brush a tear from his furry cheek, his face soft as he smiled at the priestess. “We are. Family is everything.”

He then turned those kind, gleaming eyes on me, and I released a shaky breath, my chest squeezing with longing. Oh, how I wanted him. Or not simply *him*. I wanted everything that was spelled out in that vow, so the family, the ancestral roots, the warmth and comfort... I wanted it so much, my heart ached with a visceral craving.

But that was just a wedding vow, I reminded myself. My parents had said vows, too, so long ago. Did that stop my father from beating and demeaning my mother? Did it stop her from blaming me for how her marriage turned out?

That thought helped me calm down, and I returned Jack’s smile with a cool one of my own, nodding at the priestess. “I’m ready. I will say it after you.”

This time, I said the full vow, though halfway through, my calm ebbed away. The promises to respect, befriend, and soothe were thick on my tongue, feeling like callous lies. Was I even capable of these things?

With my heart hammering and my palms sweaty, I pushed through until the end, breathing in relief when the final words left my lips. When I looked up at Jack, he regarded me with a kind expression, and that just made my chest tighten more.

He had no trouble saying his vow, and he watched me the whole time. It was similar to mine, only, he didn’t thank me for welcoming him to my family, but welcomed me into his, all the while looking at me with those soft eyes. It felt like a promise, and there I was, battling tears again.

What a soppy mess this wedding turned me into.

“Right, so that’s done,” the priestess said brightly, rolling the scroll back up. “You may kiss if you want, and then there’s

only the matter of your special purchase, Mister Frost.”

Jack winced, and I reeled back, feeling wounded that the mere mention of kissing me made him react like that. He scratched the back of his head in embarrassment, still looking at the priestess.

“Does the... uh, the special thing... come with instructions?”

“Apply liberally on the appropriate parts before intercourse,” the priestess said brightly, giving him a flat smile. “I’ll leave you to it. Come to the counter when you’re done here.”

“Right,” Jack muttered, turning back to me as the priestess left. “Well, come here, Scarlett Frost. Let us give you a kiss.”

So the wince... wasn’t about kissing me. I kept my face impassive for fear of showing the wrong expression. There were so many weird emotions battling inside me, and some of them were warm and fluttery, which took me by surprise.

“I... If you want,” I said, my voice coming out hoarse as I took a tiny step forward, looking up at him with foreboding.

“Of course I want to kiss my bride,” he said, frowning.

When I shuffled closer, my stomach filling with eager butterflies, Jack snorted impatiently and picked me up without effort, one forearm settling under my butt, his other hand securing my back.

“There you go. Light as a feather. My ma will want to feed you,” he said with a grin, his face suddenly right in front of me, his glowing orange eyes boring into mine.

My breath hitched when the warmth of his exhale fluttered over my skin, and I breathed in deeply, because he smelled surprisingly pleasant. There was a hint of cloves, and mint, and something sweet yet dark, like buckwheat honey... I closed my eyes, breathing in again, and suddenly, it wasn’t just the scent in the air that I felt, but a taste in my mouth, as well.

Jack’s warm lips were pressed to mine, the fur on his face brushing my skin, his tongue gliding against mine.

I had kissed a few boys when I was younger and still hopeful. I knew what kissing was all about. And yet... It had never felt

like *that*. Like my entire body was wrapped in warmth and light, everything forgotten and pushed away in the face of this... this immediacy.

Jack's mouth was soft but insistent, his tongue pressing against mine wide and firm, the fur tickling my cheek soft rather than bristly. He kissed me slowly but with a dazzling thoroughness, his tongue directing mine, his lips consuming.

At first, I just kissed him back, reveling in his clean, spicy taste with a hint of dark sweetness. Sharp tingles ran down my spine, awareness growing in my body, and every firm glide of Jack's tongue fanned the flames higher until I couldn't be still.

It wasn't enough to just respond. It didn't feel right to let him set the pace. So I pressed my tongue against his, eager for control now that the haze had burned away in the fire licking up my spine.

He grunted when I reached for his face, burying my fingers in his warm fur and holding him close so I could take over. I sucked on his lower lip and slid my tongue into his mouth, squirming over his forearm to improve my balance, or maybe just because it felt good...

"Scarlett," he said hoarsely, tearing his mouth free. "Damn, little snowdrop. Stop or I'll embarrass myself."

I froze, mortified I did something wrong. I stared at him, panting, uncertainty churning in my belly. Before it turned into anger, Jack held me closer until my face buried in the furry crook of his neck, and he rumbled a low, pleased sound deep in his chest. My body, which had tensed back up at the rejection, softened into him until I sighed with relief.

"What did you mean?" I asked, my voice coming out small. "Embarrass yourself... how?"

Jack laughed softly and stroked my hair. "Let's say... My body wanted that kiss to turn into something more, but this isn't the place for it."

My eyes widened when I got his meaning, or at least, I thought I did. Because could he really mean he was aroused? From kissing *me*? Even more importantly, from me kissing him

like... Like I was in control? That seemed preposterous, and suddenly, I really wanted to get a good, long look at his crotch to see if he really was as *embarrassed* as he claimed. I couldn't believe I had that effect on a man.

But when Jack set me down on the floor, there was no big bulge filling his leather pants. That was disappointing, and not because I wanted to see his cock straining against his pants, I told myself firmly. I just wanted to see if he lied to me. Just that.

Jack's tail swished in tight, tense movements, and I watched it for a moment, wondering how much of his mood it revealed. I would keep an eye on it for sure. Maybe the tail could warn me if... when... Jack lost his temper, for example.

That thought was like a bucket of cold water falling hard on my soft, buzzing body. I straightened, shoulders tensing, and gave him a tight smile. "Shall we go?"

He nodded and reached down for my hand, wrapping it firmly in his. "Just need to get something and then we can go home."

Chapter 7

Jack

That bottle of oil was burning a hole in my pocket as we stepped out of the portal in Svålgörg, my hometown. Scarlett stopped, squinting at the small tablet with the name of the place. “Sval... gorg?” she asked uncertainly and I grinned at her cute attempt.

“Zvolgerg,” I corrected her, enunciating the rolling *r* clearly. “With harder sounds. We mountain folk are tough people.”

She gave me an unimpressed look, took a deep breath, and tried again, this time almost getting it right. Blood buzzed in my veins, because Scarlett speaking the sounds of my ancestors’ language was another thing that apparently did it for me.

She was just so full of contradictions. Those blue eyes with long lashes seemed to be made for coy glances, and instead, they glared and sharpened with anger. Her lips, so pink and soft, were destined for sweet smiles and gentle kisses, and instead, they flattened with demand, pronounced the harsh sounds of my language, and kissed with fire that...

That I had no business dwelling on where everyone could see us.

Besides, Scarlett was shivering and that reminded me how woefully unsuited humans were to the mountain climate. When she stepped from foot to foot, clearly cold in her thin shoes, I heaved a sigh. It was a good thing the temple hadn’t stripped me of all my money.

“Come on. We need to get you proper clothes.”

She glared at me, folding her arms on her chest. “What’s wrong with my clothes? Too shoddy for your tastes?”

“Huh,” I muttered, frowning at her. I didn’t even understand how she jumped to that conclusion, but it certainly revealed

something. Namely, Scarlett was proud. Which wasn't a bad thing as long as she could tone it down before her toes fell off.

"I don't care how patched up your dress is," I said slowly, hooking my arm around her shoulders so we could move away from the portal in case someone came through. "Though our neighbors are sure to talk if I don't get you good clothing, so that's something to consider."

I pinched the bridge of my nose, a bit of a headache gathering in my temple when I thought about the *talk* about to explode all over town when people saw her, the first temple bride on our soil. "What I meant by proper clothes was winter boots lined with fur and a warm coat. And mittens. And a wool hat. Because you're freezing."

Scarlett had the decency to flush with embarrassment. "Oh, fine, then. But... I don't have any money."

I snorted. So she could be reasonable, even when still holding on to her pride. That boded well for future negotiations.

Another stab of pain shot through my temple when I considered it briefly. A lifetime of negotiating and compromising. Discussing things with her, taking her into consideration in every decision, and if we had children, adding them to the equation... I winced, the sheer enormity of everything married life entailed slamming into me like an avalanche.

I wasn't ready for all this. I hadn't even had one hour to prepare myself for the reality of it.

Slowly. Make sure she doesn't freeze to death first. Or not. Just leave her outside and see how long it takes a human to turn into an icicle.

I glanced at Scarlett with wide eyes, thankful humans had no magic and couldn't read minds. It wasn't even a serious thought, just a joke. I was clearly overwhelmed by everything that had happened.

"Right. Boots and a coat," I said gruffly, taking her hand and leading her down the street from the portal.

It was lunchtime, and the narrow, white-covered streets were mostly empty. And yet, with the Yule Lads Parade coming only in two days, it was busier than usual. I waved at Patrick, who stood on a ladder leaning against the front of his candle and soap shop, hanging a colorful garland of fairy lights over the entrance. His brown tail swished, helping him balance nimbly as he waved back.

Further down the street, Alva and Lucia carried a big basket filled to the brim with wine, the clay bottles clinking with every step. I greeted them when they spotted me, and even as they replied, they couldn't tear their orange eyes away from Scarlett.

I knew it was rude, but I didn't stop to introduce her because... What was I going to say? *"Hi, second cousin twice removed, Alva! Hi, Alva's girlfriend, Lucia! Meet my wife. She's brand new. I got her fresh from the temple this morning!"*

Dear Ole Frost's wrinkly ball sack. No. No way. The word *wife* would simply not pass my lips. I wasn't ready.

"They, uh, stared a lot," Scarlett said in a hushed voice when no one else came into view as we walked down the sloping street. I held her elbow, doubting the soles of her shoes were made to prevent slipping, and the packed snow under our feet could be treacherous.

"Well... We don't get to see many humans up here," I said and didn't add that seeing a woman on my arm was *probably* another reason why Alva had stared so intently. I hadn't dated in years, and my last casual hookup was about two years ago.

When you got to a certain age, people had expectations about your relationships. Those expectations included weddings and tufty, giggling babies so... I just didn't start anything I couldn't finish.

And I still ended up getting married. Now, wasn't fate a funny thing?

"Here," I said, opening the tall door to a respectable fur and leather shop where all Frosts got their winter gear. "Hello,

Mister Schmidt.”

The shop owner, who was a kobold, bent his slender body in a respectful greeting. He was about Scarlett’s height, his back hunched, a pair of big purple eyes blinking thoughtfully over a crooked nose. His skin was leathery and pale brown, and so wrinkled, even his wrinkles had wrinkles.

“Welcome, welcome, Mister Frost. How can I serve you today?”

“My... That is... I...” My tongue tied into knots as I tried to call Scarlett a word, *any* word, that was not wife, and failed. I cleared my throat, glancing at her as my cheeks grew hot, and found her looking up with her eyebrow mockingly raised, her lips twitching.

I realized with outrage the *little hussy* enjoyed my discomfiture, and that made me speak boldly.

“My hussy needs a coat. I mean... Missus Frost! Missus Frost needs a coat. And boots. And... a hat. Yes. Thank you.”

To Mister Schmidt’s credit, he didn’t even blink at my outburst, merely set about rummaging in a rack of smaller winter coats lined with fur dyed in various colors. When he was distracted, Scarlett sidled up to me, looked up with a sweet smile, and then stepped hard on my toes.

I hissed and moved my foot from under hers, my tail wrapping instinctively around her leg to keep her from doing it again. “Ouch,” I whispered furiously. “You can’t just step on people’s feet!”

She narrowed her eyes at me, her fake smile vanishing. “If you want to call me names, furball, make up something original, at least. I’ve been called a hussy by dimwits and bullies. I don’t like it.”

In my outrage and—*yes, hello again, still not the right time for this*—growing arousal, I instinctively tightened my tail around her leg and moved it up her thigh. Scarlett’s eyes widened in shock, and she looked down, watching as her dress bunched up where my tail dove under it.

I found upon careful, totally innocent exploration, that she wore stockings. But they only reached up just above her knees. Her thighs were bare and cold, her skin peppered with gooseflesh.

“What are you... What...” Scarlett tried to speak, her face flaming.

I snapped my tail away from her the moment I heard Mister Schmidt’s voice. He announced he had picked out a selection of items for Scarlett to try on while he went to look for boots in her size.

“Could you please add a few pairs of warm tights to our order?” I asked, glancing down at Scarlett’s flaming face. “Something fit for a human female.”

Meaning, for someone without a tail.

She bit her lip and shot me a venomous look, but I just grinned back, my headache dissipating. It wasn’t all bad with my little snowdrop, I thought with growing anticipation. On that, me and my tail agreed.

Scarlett put on the coat she picked out—black, out of all the colorful options—and boots, but since there was no private way to put on tights in the shop, she had to suffer for a little longer. Despite my fur, I knew what cold felt like. Winter nights in the mountains reached outrageously low temperatures, so each Frost owned a full set of winter gear to put on in extreme situations.

“You all right?” I asked when we headed for Frost Street, which was further down the slope, though still pretty close to the main square.

Scarlett just glared at me, though at least now, she wasn’t shaking.

“Look, I’m sorry I called you... that,” I said after a moment, the furious crunching of snow under her boots making me uncomfortable. “It was a slip of the tongue. I guess I need to get used to, well, everything.”

She heaved a small sigh, and when she looked up again, her expression was marginally softer. “As long as you don’t do it

again,” she said haughtily, then paused before adding in a quieter voice. “And thank you. For the clothes.”

I shrugged, holding her elbow again, not to prevent her from slipping now that she had proper boots on, but simply... I didn't even know why. It just felt nice.

“You'll need more. I'll ask my sisters-in-law to take you shopping, I'm sure they'll be delighted. They love shopping and clothes. Though I'm surprised you don't have any luggage. They really send you in there with nothing but the clothes on your back, eh?”

Scarlett released a long, annoyed breath and looked up, her eyes colder than the snow gently floating down as we walked. My heart lurched, and honestly *what* was it about those angry looks that turned me on so much?

“Some brides have luggage,” she said in a clipped tone. “I had nothing worth taking.”

I winced, cursing internally. I was kind of blunt and didn't give much thought to how my words might be received. Now, the thought of having to watch my tongue around Scarlett made my headache return with a pounding vengeance. Thankfully, we were almost there.

“Whoa,” Scarlett said, her eyes going wide when we stopped in front of my family home.

“Welcome to the Frost family seat,” I rumbled and picked her up, knowing my ma would be very unhappy if I neglected the tradition of carrying my bride inside the house. “Welcome home.”

Chapter 8

Scarlett

The house was enormous and kind of untidy in a way that made me smile. Sprawling with multiple extensions and mismatched architectural elements, it was a bulky yet cozy structure of red brick, gray stone, and wood. The windows were painted in frost ferns, smoke curling over three of the six chimneys, and the yard surrounding the house was crowded with tall, naked trees.

A wide path of cleared ground led from a whimsically ornate gate to the wooden porch that wrapped around the front of the house. The front door was tall and painted blue, a twinkling wreath of fir boughs and silver bells decorating it.

When Jack scooped me up in his arms, I floundered for a moment, flustered and uncertain. But the sound of his deep, rumbling voice welcoming me to his home calmed me down, and I stayed in his hold, rocking with his long, even steps.

Before we reached the porch, the front door swung open with a bang, and a creature similar to Jack, yet shorter, rounder, and without antlers, stood in the doorway, her mouth stretched in a smile revealing a row of sharp teeth.

“I knew Ole Frost would hear my prayers!” she exclaimed, folding her arms on her ample bosom covered by an embroidered vest. “My wife-phobic son, finally married! Praise the frost and all that’s cold!”

She huffed in satisfaction and stepped out of the way when Jack climbed the porch steps, grunting but saying nothing. When I looked up, his eyes were averted, and he looked sheepish.

And no wonder since his mother just called him *wife-phobic*. I closed my eyes briefly, gripping the fur on his shoulder. What had I gotten myself into?

“Well, go in, go in!” Jack’s mother ushered him inside, practically bouncing on her slipper-clad feet. “It’s good

fortune to carry your new wife over the threshold. Many, many grandkids!”

Jack groaned but did as she said while I winced, the thought of not just one child, but *many*, making me shudder. I wasn't fully opposed to the idea, and I knew I might get pregnant soon, but if I could choose, one would be enough.

“Well, there you go,” Jack muttered, letting me down in the entrance hall cramped with coat racks and rows of boots standing on the floor.

When I took off my coat and shoes, Jack stood on a towel in the corner and proceeded to clear snow and dirt off his bare feet with a brush embossed with the letter J. I stared for a moment, because the sight was oddly endearing, before my new mother-in-law cleared her throat right by my ear.

“Oh, um, hello,” I said, turning to her. She was a bit taller than me, covered with fur that shone silver and looked so soft, I wanted to pet it. Her expression was kind but seemed stern, her eyes orange like Jack's. “I... Nice to meet you. My name's Scarlett.”

Her furry face split into another toothy grin, and before I knew what was happening, I was firmly folded into a warm, fluffy embrace.

“Welcome home, my daughter,” she said in a kind, rumbling voice that trembled slightly. “I'm so happy you finally joined us.”

My throat closed up and my eyes burned as I hesitantly returned the hug, my fingers sinking into the soft fur on her arm. When was the last time my mother—or anyone, for the matter—actually hugged me? Years, if not decades. That explained why my insides suddenly turned to mush and I had to blink rapidly to keep myself from crying.

When Jack's mom finally let me go, my eyes were wet, my throat still tight, and I didn't dare speak, because I knew my voice would be hoarse.

“You can call me ma, mother, or mom,” she said, making me hiccup when I desperately choked down a sob. “My, my, look

at you. Such a fine girl. Tall for a human, eh? And those eyes. Jack, can you imagine a Frost baby with eyes so blue? Or with fur so light?”

She caught a lock of my hair and stroked it gently with her fingers. “Beautiful, my dear. Well, we have to celebrate tonight and welcome you to the family! Good thing I had a hunch. A wild goose is baking in the oven, and I’ll send Cris to get some roasted ham, too. We have to plump you up. You’re too thin, girl!”

“I... thank you. For the dinner,” I said, cringing when my voice came out thick and throaty.

Jack’s mom patted my arm and gave me another warm look that threatened to unleash tears. “You’ll meet everyone soon. For now, let Jack show you around the house, and then come to the kitchen. You’ll tell me all about yourself over a cup of mulled wine, eh?”

She disappeared under a wide archway leading off to another room, which turned out to be the kitchen when we passed it. Jack led the way, his tail wrapping around my wrist, like he made sure I followed.

He gave me a brief tour, showing me two living rooms, one for the guests, one for the family, a dining room, a big bathroom downstairs with a huge sunken bathtub and a fireplace, and then upstairs he pointed to various doors that led to family members’ or guest bedrooms.

The house was old, rebuilt and added to over centuries, and Jack claimed the core foundations were pre-Shift. Legends of the Shift had been passed on through his clan, but like his ancestors’ language, they too became partly forgotten and twisted over the years until no one was sure what was the truth and what—fiction.

“They say the entire town, complete with the mountain it sits on, was ripped out of the earth and transported between worlds,” he said, opening a door to another room upstairs. “And the people who lived here knew at once, because the landscape changed. On a clear day, you can see for miles and

miles from up here. I'll show you another day. And this is the nursery."

He motioned inside but didn't go in, and I only looked from the threshold. The room was cozy but cold with the fireplace unlit, three cots standing in a row on one side, a few wooden trunks with toys on the other. There was a small fence surrounding the area in front of the fireplace.

"Ivo, my older brother, fell in the fireplace when he was six," Jack said when he saw my eyes snag on it. "So my parents had that installed. We still climbed it when no one looked, though."

He chuckled, and we moved back so he could close the door. "And now, my bedroom. Well... our bedroom, I suppose. At least until our house is ready."

I stopped and he turned when his tail tugging on my wrist didn't get me to move. "Our house? We won't be living here?"

The prospect of leaving this warm, sprawling place full of spicy scents, roaring fires, and old memories of ancestral legends and happy childhoods gave me a pang of regret.

"Uh, yes. There is a house ready for when I get married. It's just down the street, so we'll visit all the time. Ruslan and Ivo, my older brothers, both have houses flanking this one. They and their kids are in and out of here all the time. You'll see. We'll go to see the house later, though. I still have... I should go to my workshop."

He opened his bedroom door, showing me into a spacious, cozy room with a sloping ceiling, a huge bed with a carved headboard pressing into a light blue wall, and a matching set of furniture with beautiful, ornate carvings. A fireplace took up one wall, a big, fluffy carpet spread in front of it, though not too close to the grate. A big window let in the murky daylight. It was dusk even though it couldn't be past three yet.

I looked up at Jack, who stood in the doorway, his tail twitching now that he'd let go of me, his eyes focused on the carpet under my feet. "Your workshop? What do you do?"

“I’m a carpenter,” he explained. “Well, and a sculptor in a way. I make decorative furniture. And I have one order to finish before the Yule so... Better get going. Will you find your way to the kitchen?”

He still didn’t look at me, and I bit the inside of my cheek, a prickle of annoyance coursing under my skin. *Wife-phobic* replayed in my mind in a singsong voice. Well, I could live with it. As long as he fucked me tonight and sealed the deal.

“I’ll be fine,” I said slowly, watching him with narrowed eyes. “And you better not leave me alone on our first night together, or I’ll tell your mother the word you called me today.”

It was a gamble, but Jack’s reaction let me know it was the right choice.

He finally looked at my face, orange eyes widening in shock. “I wouldn’t dream of... I don’t... Oh, reindeer’s ass. That was an honest slip of the tongue! And you don’t have to coerce me! Please, believe when I say I wouldn’t miss our wedding night for the world. *Especially* when you glare at me like that. I’ll be done with work before dinner. I promise.”

“Fine,” I said, tapping my foot. “I’ll be waiting. You may go.”

He gave me a spooked look, shook his head, and left, closing the door. I did my best putting my hair in order in the bathroom by his room and set out to brave Jack’s mother. I wondered if I would be able to call her ma without bursting into tears.

Probably not.

Chapter 9

Jack

While carving an intricate design on the elements of a wooden doorframe, I wondered whether Scarlett possessed supernatural abilities. Because how else would she know I considered skipping our wedding night?

It had been just a thought knocking at the back of my mind. Not even a real plan. And she still sniffed it out.

If I consummated the marriage, my fate would be sealed. Until that happened, though, there was still a way out. If I didn't sleep with her, I could ship her back to the temple, and our marriage would be null and void. I'd be a free man.

And somehow, Scarlett's piercing blue eyes saw right through those cowardly thoughts. Obviously, I wasn't actually going to do that and leave her all alone in the world but... The temptation was strong. For a moment, it was even stronger than the allure of Scarlett's delicious scent and her angry huffs.

But then she glared at me, a threat sliding off her tongue like the sweetest promise, and I was done. No more thoughts of bailing on her. Icy gales, if she glared at me so angrily while lying beneath me on the bed, her hair spread in its golden glory on my pillow, not even a horde of mountain trolls would drag me from between her legs.

So... I really would be a married man. And she would be my *wife*.

I groaned when my grip on the chisel slipped, driving it into my thumb. Sucking it into my mouth, I sent a small burst of healing magic into the sore spot, deciding to purge the cursed word from my personal dictionary.

There. Done. Now, there was nothing between wiener and wig, and I didn't even know what word had bothered me so much.

Ha. As if.

I got up, stretching my back, and tidied up the wood shavings before putting my tools away. Now, all I could think about was Scarlett, naked and pink, that one touch of her bare thigh burned into my tail so much, it tingled.

Groaning when my cock tried to slide out *yet again*, I went outside and let the icy air cool me down under the dark, starry sky. It stopped snowing some time ago, and the evening was clear and crispy, perfect for a little walk up the mountain.

Which would not be happening. I recognized the urge to take a walk was just a way of putting off seeing Scarlett, and now that I'd had some time to process, I knew it would be shitty of me. Yes, we were strangers. She had practically bullied me into marrying her. But in the end, the decision had been mine, and I said the words of my vow willingly.

Also... I couldn't help but feel a pang of sorrow thinking about the way she grew up, all alone, with her folks sounding really unpleasant. I didn't want her to ever feel this lonely when she was here. And I knew my mother would make Scarlett feel welcome and loved, because that was what she did, but that wouldn't be enough. As a husband, I was responsible for my... my little snowdrop.

There. A thousand times better than hussy. And a million times better than *wife*.

So I heaved a sigh, plucking up my determination, and walked back to the house. The sight I found in the kitchen after clearing my feet made this difficult choice completely worth it, so I entered the hot room with a lighter heart.

Because what I found was my mother sitting in her reading armchair, her feet resting on a footstool, a mug of mulled wine in her hands. She wore a blissful expression, watching Scarlett as she busied herself with dinner preparations, tasting, stirring, and putting side dishes into small, decorative bowls.

She seemed to feel right at home in my mother's kitchen, and that made my chest squeeze with affection.

"The broth is excellent, ma'am," she said as I entered, her voice animated and happy. "It's so flavorful! How did you do

that?”

“Ma’am is not quite ma, dear child,” Mother said, shaking her finger playfully. “And the secret is in the cooking time. I put my broth on the stove right after I get up. Mister Frost still snores in our bed while the broth already bubbles away. And it can’t overboil. It has to be just so—making those little, lazy bubbles. Now, be a dear and pour some mulled wine for Jack.”

Scarlett turned around, the light in her eyes dimming when she saw me, though she still gave me a smile. A moment later, I nursed a clay mug of hot, spicy wine while Scarlett was back to her post by the stove, seeming like she was completely in her element.

“Your wife has worked as a cook and cleaner in an inn, and even a stable girl in some rich shifter’s mansion,” Mother said with a satisfied smile. “She isn’t afraid of hard work and can command a space like a general! I don’t even know when she took the spoon out of my hand, bundled me into this chair, and took over. All I know is I like this girl. So, Jack. Better not mess it up, eh?”

“I’ll do my best.”

I drained my cup in a few big gulps and stood up to lay the table, squeezing Scarlett’s hip when I stood behind her to get the plates. She gave me a piercing look over her shoulder, and I went away feeling uncomfortably hot again.

Ole Frost and northern wind, let her glare at me like that when we fuck.

Soon, my father and brothers got home from work, and Ma took over in the kitchen while Scarlett shook everyone’s hands, a polite smile frozen onto her face. I could tell she was overwhelmed, squeezing hand after hand, offering her cheeks for my father to kiss, and receiving wishes of prosperity and good health.

Then, Ruslan and Ivo came in with their families, bearing gifts. Ivo’s wife, Tatiana, handed us a wrapped box, shooting me a saucy wink. “For the fur brushing tonight,” she said in a loud whisper, making me want to groan. I thanked her, and

Scarlett's smile grew fixed until it seemed more like a grimace than anything else.

Dinner was loud, with all of my rambunctious relatives gathered in the dining room, children diving under the table and squealing, tugging on our tails when they thought they could get away with it. It was madness, and as I sat by Scarlett's side, I noticed patience draining out of her. Soon, her leg bounced under the table, and her answers to the questions everyone shot her way—*Why did you apply to the temple? Do you know any fun knitting patterns? Can I braid your hair one day?*—became more and more clipped as the evening wore on.

I took her hand and wrapped my tail around her shin, trying to give her support, and Scarlett leaned into me, lacing her fingers through mine. Finally, when most of the food was gone and my father went to the living room to smoke his pipe, it was time to break up the party.

"I'll help," Scarlett said when Ma started gathering the plates.

"Oh, pish! None of that, my dear," my mother scolded her. "Go upstairs and I don't want to see either of you until morning. Go on! Shoo!"

She grinned widely, and I just sighed, too tired by the day's events to feel embarrassed about my whole family knowing exactly what me and Scarlett would do tonight. I took my snowdrop's hand to lead her up the stairs when my mom halted us.

"Wait! Let me do a scrying."

I rolled my eyes but didn't protest because it would actually be useful to know beforehand. Scarlett looked confused, so I explained.

"Remember how I told you each Frost has a magic skill? My mother can tell whether a female is, uh, ready to conceive."

Mom stood in front of Scarlett, took her both hands, and smiled, closing her eyes. Scarlett shivered, the magic coursing through her, and my mom's smile fell slightly.

"Well, not tonight," she said, patting Scarlett's cheek. "But I'm sure that won't stop you. Good night!"

She turned away with a chuckle, and I heaved a huge sigh of relief, perking up at the news. “It means you can’t get pregnant tonight,” I murmured, looking closely at Scarlett’s face. She relaxed, the lines of tension around her eyes fading away, and I squeezed her hand before ushering her upstairs.

So at least we felt the same way about this. It was a good sign. And as my cock perked up in its sheath, I realized I would have a much easier time getting—and keeping—it up when no vision of future offspring hung above my head.

“I want to shower first,” Scarlett said without preamble when the bedroom door closed behind us.

“Of course,” I said, nodding at the bathroom. “There are clean towels in the basket. Um... New toothbrushes should be over the sink. Use whatever you need.”

Her face softened, and she nodded gratefully before closing the bathroom door. I set about laying a fire in the fireplace, then looked around critically. When I noticed my pile of porn magazines sitting on the bookshelf, bold as brass, my eyes widened, and I hurried to hide them under the bed. Not the most ingenious hiding place, but it would do.

I had nothing against Scarlett knowing I liked raunchy kind of, uh, literature. But she might be spooked about the nature of the things that turned me on the most, and since I knew temple brides were supposed to be virgins, I thought she might use some... easing into things.

After getting rid of my porn, I lit a few candles and laid out the gift from Tatiana and the oil from the temple. It actually came with instructions, though they said exactly what the priestess had told me.

When the sound of running water in the bathroom cut off, I jumped, looking around frantically for anything else to tidy up. Icy gales, I was nervous. Maybe I shouldn’t have been so celibate in the last two years.

Scarlett emerged moments later, and my jaw grew slack when I saw she wasn’t wearing any clothes, just a towel wrapped around her torso. It barely covered her, and she didn’t seem

timid at all. She stood straight and proud, staring at me with intent, determined eyes.

My cock throbbed, and I reminded myself I had to wash my feet, at least. Like most of our race, I washed my fur once a week, and it was still fresh, for which I was thankful. There would be no traditional brushing if my entire coat was wet after washing.

“I’ll, uh... Just get comfortable. I won’t be long,” I said, my voice dropping low in my growing arousal.

Scarlett just nodded and sat down on the bed, her long, slim legs gleaming golden in the firelight.

My little snowdrop was utterly mesmerizing, and for the first time today, I let myself completely surrender to the fact I was married.

Here she was, and she was mine.

Chapter 10

Scarlett

Tatiana had gotten us two beautiful brushes with carved wooden handles and natural bristles. One was bigger, evidently meant for Jack, and the other looked like a proper hairbrush. We hadn't even met when she bought this gift, and she already knew I was human and what to get me. It was overwhelming.

The warm, completely accepting welcome I got from the Frost family was, frankly, mind-boggling. They behaved as if it was perfectly natural for Jack to marry a complete stranger of another race and bring her home. They treated me like a member of the family, even though they didn't know me, and it made my heart beat painfully in my chest.

Somehow, it was all so much more than I had bargained for. So much *better*. Or it would be, as soon as I got used to this and stopped getting the urge to cry every fucking minute. It was pathetic.

Jack emerged from the bathroom and zeroed in on me at once. His orange eyes flared with heat, and that made a pleasant warmth buzz in my belly. That felt so good, too. Somehow, despite his uncertainty and almost reluctance, I could tell he wanted me, at least physically.

No human man had ever looked at me like that.

And yet, I clutched my towel to myself, dreading the moment I'd have to let it fall. Because even if my hair was nice—my only womanly feature, as my mother said—the rest of me was quite boyish. I was long, lean, with small breasts and narrow hips. Definitely *not* a fertility goddess.

“Let's sit in front of the fire,” Jack said in a low, raspy voice, pulling his towel off his hips. “I'll brush your hair first.”

I didn't answer, because I was busy staring. He had worn trousers today, so I expected there was something to hide in there... And the sight of nothing, just more fur, confused me.

I noticed a bulgy shape between his legs when I squinted, but still, it was all covered in his bluish-silver fur, long and slightly tangled. And wet. It looked like he washed it.

“You’ll see it soon enough, snowdrop,” he said, voice lowering into a pleasant rumble, and I jerked my eyes away, my face heating with embarrassment. “Come here.”

He sank down to the soft carpet in front of the fireplace, and I took the brushes and followed, my towel still tightly wrapped around me. Jack spread his legs open, sprawling on the carpet, with only his flicking tail giving any indication he might not be as relaxed as he seemed.

“Here,” he said, pointing at the ground between his legs. “Sit down.”

I exhaled, straightened my shoulders, and sat between his furry legs, my skin prickling from his proximity and the heat of his body. I tensed when he touched me, but Jack only stroked my hair, inhaling audibly.

“You smell really good,” he said, burying his face in my hair. “There’s something addictive to your scent. Something bewitching.”

I jerked when he ran his fingers through my hair, the tips running down my back, tugging the towel down. I gasped and held it to my front while my back was bared. Jack didn’t comment, just stroked my skin, which immediately broke out in gooseflesh.

I expected to feel sharp claws, but his nails were blunt. He must have filed them down, and that made me relax just a bit. Jack was considerate. That was a decidedly good quality in one’s first—and probably only—lover.

“Your skin is so soft,” he rumbled, running his fingers up my spine. “What a pretty thing you are, Scarlett.”

I couldn’t help it. I snorted, shooting him an angry look over my shoulder. “You don’t have to lie to me to soften me up. I’m here. We’re doing this.”

He paused, hands on my ribs, the span of his fingers so big, they could almost circle my torso when splayed open like that.

“Lie to you?” he repeated, sounding confused. “I wouldn’t do that. Frost men never lie to their... their women. I think you’re really attractive. And I do have to soften you up, little snowdrop. It will hurt otherwise.”

That made me slump a little in defeat. I knew there would be pain and expected it. It seemed impossible to relax enough for this to be bearable, let alone pleasant. But it was fine. It had to happen, and I wouldn’t bail.

“You can try,” I said scathingly, making it clear I didn’t think he would manage.

Jack rumbled out a low laugh and ran his fingers through my hair again. “Do you know what it does to me when you speak like that?” he asked. “Let me show you.”

He gripped me under the armpits and yanked me back so I was flush against him, my lower back pressing into his crotch, his thick, furry thighs flanking me. I could immediately tell there was... something. A slick, hard length that was smooth and furless, pressing into my lower back and higher. When I pushed harder into it, just to test things, Jack gasped, and the hard slickness bucked against me.

“You said you’d show me,” I said, my mouth going dry as I tried to turn around, my belly flooding with equal parts warmth and dread. It seemed so impossibly big.

“Not yet,” Jack said with a chuckle, grabbing my shoulders to keep me from turning. “Come on, snowdrop. Brushing first. But you can sit close like this. Let it be proof and a reminder of how attractive I think you are.”

He gathered my hair and draped it over my shoulder, letting it fall down my front where I still held the towel in a white-knuckled grip. Jack didn’t say anything about it, and slowly, I loosened my fingers one by one, the heavy length at my back giving me courage.

If it truly were a gauge of how he felt about me, then at least I’d know. If his cock shriveled when I showed him my small tits, then I’d know.

The towel pooled in my lap, and Jack exhaled in a rush, his cock jerking so hard, it pushed me away for a moment. “Damn, snowdrop. A word of warning next time, or you’ll make me come all over your back.”

I made an intrigued sound, pushing into his bucking erection again. It almost seemed like... Like I had some kind of power over him. Like I made him feel pleasure so big, he lost control, and I hadn’t even done anything, just showed him my body.

My belly warmed with an exhilarating rush, and as Jack’s cock throbbed against my back, a low moan falling from his lips, I suddenly stopped dreading it. I thought I would just have to lie there and take him, but this... This already felt so much better. Like I could decide, too.

“You little minx,” Jack grunted, snaking his arm around my torso, just above my breasts, to hold me still. “We can play, but please, for the love of Ole Frost, not today. I’m already stupidly horny as it is.”

“Why not today?” I asked, squirming between his legs. A pleasant tension built between my thighs.

“Because we have to go slow today. So, please. Next time, you can tie me to the bed and tease me all you want, but I have to do things right tonight.”

My mouth went dry, my pussy giving a powerful throb to match the throbbing of his cock. “T-tie you to the bed?” I repeated, my eyes wide as I stared into the crackling fire.

Jack stilled, releasing a frustrated breath. “I mean, if that’s not something... If you don’t... I’m sorry. It was just an idea. A stupid one.”

I frowned, putting my hands on his thighs and grabbing his warm fur maybe just a tad too tightly. Jack’s breath hitched, and his cock twitched yet again. My back felt really slick now from being pressed flush against it, but it just seemed like another proof and reminder that he wanted me, so it felt good.

“I want to tie you to the bed,” I said, slowly dragging my fingers through his fur until my nails scratched his skin underneath. “Is that something people do?”

“Oh, gods. Yes, some.”

Jack said nothing else, just picked up the brush and combed through the ends of my hair in slow strokes. I squirmed again, little tingles enveloping my scalp. He brushed my hair in silence, making sure not to tug, and soon, my body softened and warmed, the pleasant buzz in my belly growing stronger when my neck and shoulders relaxed.

“There you go,” he murmured, the brush now stroking down the entire length of my hair, from the roots to the ends, in slow, luxurious movements. “Maybe you’d like to lie down on your belly? I could do a better job then.”

I hesitated only a moment before giving a curt nod and sprawling on the soft carpet. I pulled the towel from underneath myself, biting my lips when Jack released a heavy breath and muttered a word too quietly for me to hear.

“Well, I managed not to come all over your back,” he said after a bit, his voice sounding strangled. “But it’s as if I did. Let me just...”

He picked up the towel and gently ran it down my back, making me smile. I didn’t mind the slickness of his arousal, but that he chose to clean me sent another warm throb into my core. I hadn’t even known sex could be about pampering like this, and it felt so surprisingly good.

“There,” he whispered, putting the towel away. “Close your eyes, snowdrop.”

I pursed my lips in annoyance at being commanded, but finally did as he said when the brush glided through my hair. I got lost in the softness of Jack’s unhurried brushing, my body undulating further now that I was lying down.

When I felt like my body melted into the carpet, Jack ran the back of the hairbrush down my head and back, and then lower, and lower, until it traced the curve of my buttock. I didn’t tense, but my core clenched, and a rough sound tore out of my throat.

“This looks delicious,” Jack said softly, doing it again. “You could command me to spend hours worshiping your ass, and I

would.”

My face flamed and I said nothing, even though the idea of commanding him made wetness gush between my thighs. But I didn't even know what “worshiping” meant in this context, and uncertainty held me back.

“Does it feel good?” Jack said some time later, his fingers running through my hair and down my spine and backside along with the brush.

“Mmm. Yes,” I managed to say, with much effort. I tingled all over with watchful alertness of him and his touch. “Maybe... Your turn?” I asked, a sort of urgency gathering inside me. I couldn't just keep lying there. I wanted to do something.

“If you want,” he said in a low voice.

I raised myself on my hands, so relaxed, I forgot I was completely naked, and turned to look at Jack. My eyes widened, and we stared at each other, crackling energy passing between us in the warm, fragrant air.

“Icy gales,” Jack whispered. “You're beautiful.”

Chapter 11

Jack

I didn't think Scarlett heard my awe-struck words. She was too busy staring at my cock, which had been out and painfully hard all this time. It glistened in the firelight, completely coated in precum that kept spilling and spilling the longer I touched her.

I couldn't help it. She just smelled so good, looked so striking, and then she said she might want to tie me up, and that just took it all to another level.

"Jack," Scarlett said, wetting her lips, her voice hoarse. Her eyes were still glued to my cock, which gave an eager twitch, preening under the attention. "There is no way... No way it can go inside me. It's impossible. You'll have to send me back."

She didn't sound scared, simply awed. That gave me hope as I reached to grab the oil.

"We got this at the temple. Remember?" I asked, showing her the glass bottle full of syrupy, golden liquid. "They sell this when there is a significant difference in size. It will help. Don't worry, snowdrop. I'll make sure you're ready."

She glanced at the oil, then at my face, her throat bobbing as she swallowed. "But, Jack... It's... It's so long. And thick. And... strange."

I nodded. I actually had some human porn in my collection, so I knew why she found the sight of my cock so shocking.

"And where... Where do you normally keep it?" she asked again, looking mesmerized. When my cock jerked again, her fascinated gaze feeling like a caress, she made a soft sound in her throat and shuffled closer, her fingers twitching.

"In here," I said, spreading my legs so she could see the furry sheath hiding the root of my cock. "It only comes out when I'm horny."

Her guttural sound made my balls tingle. They were hidden inside my body yet bulging slightly through my skin. If she stroked me there, she would be able to feel them, and if she just squeezed a little...

I groaned and Scarlett shot me an inquisitive look. "This is killing me, little snowdrop. Please, don't worry, all right? They know their stuff at the temple. You'll be fine. And I can control myself enough not to hurt you."

"Why is it thicker at the base?" she asked, eyes returning to my cock.

"I doubt it will go inside you," I said regretfully, because knotting was one of my favorite parts of sex. "But since you ask... It's a knot. It can swell and lock us together when I come."

"Oh, like a dog," she said, a tight frown giving her an air of intense concentration.

I snorted, offended by the comparison even as her cute expression caused another flutter of arousal to shudder up my cock. "I doubt dog cocks are shaped like this."

She nodded, tracing the curve of my cock with her eyes. It was gray, the same color as my tail, protruding, bluish veins winding their way up the curved shaft. It curved away from my body, the shaft an even, symmetrical arc. The head was blue from intense, prolonged arousal, its shape bulging, clear precum trickling out of the long slit that almost parted the tip in two even halves. The head was almost as thick as the knot, but not quite, and the knot would swell even more when I came.

"If you'd rather skip brushing me and go straight to the sex..." I began, my mind growing hazy with lust.

But Scarlett interrupted, giving me a slicing look that made my cock burst with more precum. "No! I won't deprive you of your tradition. Give me the brush."

I was half-disappointed, half-gratified when I handed her the brush and she told me to get comfortable on the carpet. I knew if I lay on my stomach, I would just hump the floor like an

animal, so I stretched out on my back, fidgeting until the position was comfortable for my tail.

“Oh. Um. All right,” Scarlett said, her cheeks on fire. I grinned, putting one arm behind my head and her eyes widened with heat, a stern look creeping onto her face.

“Are you trying to make me uncomfortable on purpose?” she asked, her eyes narrowing as she lightly tapped the brush against her open palm.

My tail flicked with excitement as I tracked the movement of her hand, my grin slinking off my face instantly. Ole Frost’s mighty ball sack, she looked like she wanted to smack me with that brush, and that made my cock pulse with another bout of debilitating horniness.

As if this could get any hotter.

“What would you do if I was?” I asked carefully, doing my best to contain my excitement before I embarrassed myself.

She frowned, thinking, and my tail twitched with agitation. “I would make you beg for every stroke of the brush,” she said finally, making me groan. “But since you stopped this nonsense, I can just...”

She exhaled, bracing her shoulders, and knelt by my side. “Do I have to brush all of you?” she asked, slowly running the brush down my arm.

I winced when the brush tugged on a tangle. Okay, so maybe I should have brushed a tad more often. Scarlett just raised an eyebrow and attacked the tangle with intent focus until it was gone.

“N-no,” I said, gritting my teeth to keep my cock from shooting. “Usually... From what I heard, that is, couples brush each other until they can no longer control themselves.”

“Humph,” Scarlett snorted softly, tackling another tangle down my arm. “Well, clearly those couples are better at self-care than you. I saw everyone else’s fur tonight. Yours looked the worst.”

I winced, a strange mixture of hurt and complete devotion overwhelming my poor brain. My cock spurted more precum, and Scarlett's breath caught when she noticed. "Are you... do you like this?" she asked, raising incredulous eyes to my face. "When I tell you off?"

I nodded eagerly, and her expression softened. She ran the brush through the fur she had already detangled, and it felt so good, a purr rumbled in my chest. She startled, looking at me with wide eyes, and I swallowed, clenching my fists to keep myself from stroking my cock.

We hadn't even touched properly, and this was already the hottest sex of my life. What did that say about me? Dear gods.

"It... We purr. When it feels good," I said, struggling to form words. A pink, hazy mist descended on my mind, getting worse with every tingling brush stroke, and I knew I was too far gone. Scarlett was naked by my side, her perky little breasts rising and falling with rapid breaths, her eyes sharp, the tang of her arousal thick in the air. I was certain I wouldn't be able to control myself like I wanted to when the time came to fuck her.

"Icy gales," I swore, looking at her pleadingly. "Snowdrop, I think I have to make myself come now. And then you can keep brushing me until the knot releases and I can go again. Because I don't think... I can't be as patient as you deserve."

I sat up with a groan, my cock so hard, it hurt. But as I brought my hand closer to jerk myself off, Scarlett caught my wrist, her nails digging in. "Stop. I'll do it."

"Fuck," I barked, staring at her determined expression. "If... If you want."

She pressed her lips together, her lashes fluttering, and I realized she was nervous. But despite her nerves, she reached for me with a sure hand and wrapped her slim fingers around my knot, then slowly stroked up to the very tip.

"Icy gales," I swore again, my hips bucking on instinct. I had never been more ready to come, and the fact she touched me brought me closer to the edge. But I had some pride, dammit. I

had to withhold for at least... three more strokes. That was how much self-control I possessed.

“Like this?” Scarlett asked, her voice hoarse as she looked at me from under her lashes.

I nodded and purred, unable to speak. She had me in a chokehold, her hand moving so easily up and down my slick cock. Gods, I was so wet from all the precum, and more kept coming out under her blissful touch.

“Angle... away... from fur,” I choked out when my balls throbbed with my impending orgasm. Scarlett gasped softly and tilted my cock to the side, aiming it not at the carpet but at herself. I groaned, shaking my head, but no words came. I trembled wildly, my cock and balls on fire, and when Scarlett gave me a harder stroke, her other hand squeezing my knot, I exploded with a guttural shout.

Cum shot out, painting her breasts and stomach, and the sight of it made my balls pound harder, more and more shooting out, until she was covered in my release. I just sat there, twitching, my knot swollen to double its size under her fingers.

“Wow,” she said, glancing down at her body, then at me. “That’s... wow. I... did that.”

I chuckled helplessly, my cock jerking with sensitivity, feeling cold because it wasn’t inside her. My knot pulsed helplessly. It wanted to be locked in Scarlett’s hot pussy. “Y-you... Yes. It’s all you. Those beautiful, glaring eyes. And those tits. They look so good with my cum on them.”

Scarlett looked at me suspiciously, like she thought I was joking, but whatever she saw in my face must have convinced her I was completely serious. Her frown softened and she blushed but didn’t look away, despite her embarrassment.

I had an urge to tell her she could demand I lick my cum off her and I’d do it—with pleasure—but I held back. She was still far too innocent for my perverted ways. But at least now I knew she was open to trying some of my kinks.

“I’ll wash this off,” she said, getting up on legs that shook a little, and I nodded.

My knot loosened since my cock was clearly not inside her, but my erection was far from deflating.

Icy gales.

My little snowflake owned me more than I thought possible, and I hadn’t even tasted her yet. I couldn’t wait to finally be inside her, and I prayed to all gods that my knot would fit against all odds.

It felt so cold and lonely outside of her.

Chapter 12

Scarlett

I stared at my reflection, awed and a little worried that this didn't disgust me. It should, right? Cum covered me from neck to pubic bone, and I knew enough to understand this indicated a certain power balance. A man coming on a woman's body was a sign of domination, maybe even a way of humiliating her.

Except, I had done this. I had controlled it all, and I did it out of purely practical considerations. Getting cum out of the carpet didn't seem like a pleasant chore.

Now I just stared at myself, the proof of Jack's attraction all over me, making me feel beautiful and wanted for the first time in my adult life.

Then I shook myself off and turned on the shower, the pipes banging before the spray of hot water rushed out. I rinsed off quickly, worry churning in my stomach. Because what if Jack was done for tonight? What if he decided to go to sleep now that he'd come so profusely?

The money had already been sent to my mother, and they wouldn't demand it back even if Jack had the marriage annulled. But the debt wasn't my only worry. If he discarded me, I wouldn't be fit for another match through the temple, and then, where would that leave me? I would be homeless, stranded gods knew where, because I wouldn't be able to afford a ticket back to my family village.

I couldn't let it happen.

But other reasons urged me on, too. I liked Jack's family. Their warmth, loud affection, and the sheer energy of so many people gathered in one house was addictive. I wanted to experience more of that.

And... I liked Jack, too. In a way. Mostly, he intrigued me and roused some latent sense inside me. Like a part of me knew

him and knew what he needed, and maybe, just maybe, I was the right person to deliver it.

My body liked him, too, more than I cared to admit.

So when I came out, getting ready for battle in case he was already snoring, I was surprised to see Jack sprawled on his back in front of the fire, his orange eyes glittering with warmth when he saw me.

“Ready to make my fur shine?” he asked in a low voice, and I couldn’t help but look at his cock. It was still hard, and the sight made my belly ache with pleasure. “You don’t have to be gentle,” he added with a grin.

I arched my brow, sitting on my heels by his side, and got to work on his other arm. “You like pain then?”

Jack groaned softly when I tugged harshly on a tangle and shook his head. “Not pain as such. I like... force. Maybe a bit of violence.”

I stared at him, my pussy fluttering with a surprising bout of arousal. I wet my lips, the brush forgotten for a moment when I tried to understand the implications of what Jack just said.

“How much violence?” I asked finally. “Give me examples, monster boy.”

He groaned, his cock twitching, and I gasped softly, my insides really clenching now. I returned to brushing him, not being gentle at all, and looked closely between Jack’s face and his cock to gauge his reactions.

“I like it when someone squeezes my balls,” he said in a strained voice when I quickly dealt with another tangle and directed him to raise his arm so I could brush the other side. “And I, uh, have this... this paddle thing. To swat my... my butt when I’m naughty.”

“Naughty,” I repeated incredulously, squirming in place, because the thought of getting to smack Jack’s furry ass made my pussy thrum with want. “Naughty how?”

I ran the brush slowly through detangled fur until Jack purred, and then I switched to his torso, brushing out the tangles with

just enough force to make his cock twitch.

“Like... If you told me to do something, and I didn’t or was too slow to obey,” he choked out, breathing hard now. “Or if I displeased you in some way. Say... if I forgot your birthday. You could paddle me hard for that.”

I couldn’t tear my eyes away from his leaking cock. The head had turned gray like his shaft after he came, but it was back to blue now, straining and twitching with every touch of the brush.

“Are you telling me you want me to order you around? And punish you if you don’t obey?” I asked, looking back at his face with wide eyes. It sounded too good to be true.

Because, if I were honest with myself, I would do both of these things anyway. I would make demands of Jack, and if he misbehaved, I would threaten him or stomp on his feet. This was how I dealt with men and why I was known as such a shrew. This was what ultimately drew everyone away from me.

The idea that he might actually enjoy that was almost impossible to believe, but at the same time, it made wild, uncontrollable hope bloom in my chest.

“Well, when we’re al-alone,” Jack stuttered when I drew the brush down his stomach, stopping inches away from the base of his cock. “Everyone would... w-would laugh at me if I let my... if I let you order me around.”

“Oh, would they?” I said darkly, working on the fur at the tops of his thighs. Jack’s legs shook, and his cock was coated, the wetness gathering in the fur around his sheath. “Even if I made it really clear what happens to people who laugh at us?”

Jack’s cock jerked, and he looked at me with wide eyes, his now shiny chest rising and falling rapidly.

“You would threaten people to defend me?” he asked, his tail slashing from side to side in excitement.

“Not just threaten,” I said casually, working my way down his legs. “I might put lard in their shoes, free their pigs, or set their children against them.” I felt ashamed when Jack’s eyes

bulged with shock, so I hurried to explain, “Not that I have done any of that recently. Mostly when I was younger and very angry, and I grew out of that. I wouldn’t do anything so unpleasant to your family.”

Jack looked at me in silence, and my face burned as I brushed his fur, already working on his shins. Finally, he cleared his throat, and I reluctantly looked up, cringing away from the judgment I expected to see in his face.

Jack looked down his body at me, his head propped up on his arm, a wide grin stretching his mouth. For a moment, I was weak with relief that he didn’t hate me.

“Vicious little snowdrop,” he rumbled with affection. “I can teach you some of the pranks we pull on each other. I haven’t done any of them in a long time, but it should be fun. So if anyone gives you grief, you’ll know what to do.”

I grinned back, brushing through his fur a few more times for good measure. It looked so much better now. “I can handle myself,” I said finally, shaking my hand out and checking if blisters formed. Brushing Jack was a surprisingly challenging task. “But you were worried people might laugh. So, I can tell them off for you. I’m good at it.”

His eyes glittered as he nodded, sitting up with a groan. “You are,” he said softly. “Well, ready to brush my backside?”

I laughed when he winked, and soon, he sat cross-legged with his arms folded on the bed while I untangled the fur down his back. It was even worse than at the front, probably because he couldn’t reach it on his own.

“Seriously,” I hissed when my hand cramped up, and Jack groaned after I tugged hard on a tangle. My arousal simmered somewhere in the back, but mostly, I felt sweaty and annoyed. “Why have you been so neglectful? You’re such a slob, furball. I really should paddle your ass for that.”

When he moaned and arched his back, I froze, thrown by his reaction. A moment later, Jack’s tail wound around my waist, the tip sliding down my stomach. I swatted it away, and Jack moaned again.

“Oh,” I said finally, my cheeks burning even as a pleasant buzz chased my annoyance away. “I see. This is going to be a problem.”

Jack looked at me over his shoulder, smiling lazily. “Why? It works for me.”

I shook my head and bit back a laugh. I really shouldn’t encourage him, but it just felt so nice. That he wanted me for my barbs and hard edges, and not despite them, was something I never thought was possible.

“Well, what if I want to tell you off for real? Or punish you for real?”

Jack’s tail wrapped around me again, sliding up my spine this time, and he chuckled. “Well, that’s easy, snowdrop. You’ll get me all riled up, calling me a bad boy and threatening to castrate me, and when I beg at your feet, you’ll just forbid me to come. And keep me begging and writhing on the floor until I agree to do anything. Though I assure you, I will always want to please you.”

I squeezed the brush hard as heat flooded my face. The vision of Jack begging at my feet was so hypnotizing, I panted and squirmed, eager wetness spreading between my thighs.

“Holy shit,” I choked out, squeezing his tail on instinct, which made him yelp and arch his back again. “That’s... something you’d do? You would beg?”

“I would,” he said, his voice gravelly. “But snowdrop, this is getting me too worked up again. I don’t... It’s your first time, and a tight fit at that. I’m so happy you’re not repulsed by the things I like, but can we please explore all these kinks later? Also... I don’t think I can handle you brushing my butt today.”

I sat back, stunned, my mouth falling open. I almost felt the power I held over him. It thrummed in my fingertips and tingled over my mouth, and I couldn’t help but want to exercise it. Still, he was right. We had to consummate. No matter how much I wanted to paddle his ass with the brush and tie his tail into knots for misbehaving.

At least I was all ready for him. My pussy throbbed with arousal, wetter and hotter than it had ever been before. I was still nervous, but not even half as much as earlier. And after talking to Jack and him being so open, I trusted him a fraction more.

“Come on, snowdrop,” he said in a low, rumbling voice, turning to me. “Lie back on the bed and let me take care of you.”

Chapter 13

Jack

When she lay on the bed, her knees pressed firmly together, her face delightfully pink, I couldn't help inhaling deeply. Her aroused scent was everywhere, delicious and mind-numbingly good. I wanted to press my face to her sweet pussy and breathe in, then lick it all off until she made more.

I definitely wasn't as in control as I needed to be. Scarlett wanted to try some of the things I enjoyed and that kept my cock achingly stiff, despite coming once already.

"Come on, little snowdrop," I murmured, putting my hands on her knees to gently push them apart. "Show us your petals."

She snorted and shot me a look that was half-nervous, half-irate. "Petals? I don't have flowers down there, monster boy. Nothing as pretty."

I cocked my head to the side, watching her guarded expression. "I know," I said finally. "Believe me, no flower has ever driven me so insane with lust. You smell so good, Scarlett. I really want to see and taste you. Please?"

She exhaled and let her knees part. I knelt by the bed, pulling her closer to the edge, and leaned in so I could finally bury my face between her thighs. When I drew a deep breath, I moaned from how potent her scent was here. It made my cock leak, my balls tingling blissfully.

"Did you just sniff me?" Scarlett asked in a tight voice, and it took me a moment to get my mind clear enough to respond.

"Mmm. Smells so good. Wanna taste?"

She gasped but said nothing, and I slowly ran my tongue through her wetness, moaning again when her taste hit my tongue. Gods, she was perfect. My cock thrummed with constant, aching readiness and I licked and devoured, feasting on my little snowdrop until she made sweet, impatient sounds, her hips writhing, her hands buried in the fur on my head.

When some clarity returned, I slowed down, listening keenly to the sounds she made. When I licked the throbbing protrusion at the junction of her folds, she arched her hips and pressed herself into my face, so I stayed there, licking and exploring that space until she made constant, needy sounds muffled by her forearm pressed to her mouth.

Once I knew what she liked the most, I focused on alternating short swipes of my tongue with a bit of sucking until Scarlett's legs on either side of my head shook wildly. I told her the truth before—I wanted to please her above all. And not to brag, but I was good at finding the best way to get a female off.

When she made a drawn-out, almost painful sound, her entire body tensing into a graceful, sweaty arch, I gently pushed my finger inside her, groaning when I felt the contractions of her muscles. A wild pride swelled in my chest when I made my snowdrop come. It hadn't even been that hard. I just had to pay attention.

Scarlett collapsed on the bed, breathing fast, her legs falling completely open. She raised herself with a soft grunt of effort and looked at me with wide, glassy eyes. We stared at each other until a small smile quirked her lips.

“This was amazing. You're pretty good at this.”

I grinned, palming her open thighs, and leaned in for another lick, making her gasp. She was still sensitive.

“You can call me a good boy if you liked it so much,” I said, looking up from between her thighs to gauge her reaction.

She arched her eyebrow and then snorted, smiling. “Good furball. You did very well.”

My hurting cock twitched at the praise, and I clenched my jaw, doing my best to regain control. It was time to use the oil, and I hoped with all my being that it worked. If it didn't... there were still ways to make this work, but Scarlett cared a lot about the traditional consummation since it was the only way to validate the marriage. And I was dying to be inside her.

“Lie back and relax,” I said gruffly, getting up to get the oil. “And let me work the magic.”

She snorted with laughter, so much more relaxed now that I showed her how much I wanted her. I wet my finger in the oil and, instead of staying between her legs, lay down by her side so I could watch her face while massaging her.

I started slowly, just dipping my finger inside and gently spreading the oil over her opening. Scarlett's breathing quickened, and she looked at my face, her features tight with pleasure. "You're so hot inside," I murmured, eager to show her how much I enjoyed her body. "So smooth and wet. You want me, don't you? Making it easy for me to touch you."

She let out a sigh when I pressed deeper, spreading the oil. Her body hugged my finger so tightly, I was equally distressed and buzzing with bliss. Just the mere thought of pushing my cock in there had me sweating, but it felt impossible when even my finger felt like too much.

I got more oil and kept working on her. Slowly, she relaxed enough for me to push all the way in, murmuring with pleasure. Again and again, I reached for more oil until the sheets underneath her were soaked, but I didn't care. "Apply liberally," the instructions said. And so I did, careless of the mess.

Not once did Scarlett wince in pain, not even when I added a second finger. It was still tight and hot inside her, the smooth muscles strong yet yielding to my touch. Soon, we were both breathing hard, because it finally registered with me that it worked. I could fuck her. Tonight.

"How does it feel, snowdrop?" I asked, deliberating whether to try one more finger.

"Relaxed," she said instantly. "And also, not. I... it feels like I could take more. Take you."

I groaned, looking at her pink face painted with lust. Reaching for more oil, I pressed two fingers into her and then watched her face as I squeezed in a third. Scarlett's pupils widened in a rush, and she grabbed my wrist. I immediately froze, thinking she wanted me to stop, but she caught my hand and guided me deeper inside her, making me swear.

“Snowdrop...” I groaned, my tail lashing violently from side to side.

“I think I’m ready,” she said, eyelids heavy, lips parted. “Come on. Be a good monster boy and fuck me.”

That made me groan very loudly, and I hurried to pull Scarlett further up the bed and put a pillow under her hips for a better angle. She watched me warily, some of the softness in her face giving way to tension. She was nervous.

“I’ll be gentle,” I said, kissing her shoulder. “Very gentle.”

I dropped another kiss on her collarbone, then another on her neck, then chin. When I nudged her lips with mine, she opened for me, twining her hands around my neck. I kissed her carefully, teasing her tongue lightly until she made an impatient sound and pushed her tongue in my mouth, her hold on my neck growing more forceful.

My cock throbbed as she demanded more and more of me, making the kiss passionate and hard. My tail wrapped around her thigh, the tip sliding up until it pressed inside her, and Scarlett broke away with a panting gasp.

“You should be on top,” I blurted out, the arousal coursing in my blood making it painfully clear what would get me off the most while giving her enough control to soothe her nerves.

Her eyes flared, and the next moment, she scrambled up to sit while pushing me down on my back. I fell with a grunt, cock spilling more precum, because holy shit—she was magnificent when she manhandled me like that.

Scarlett tried to straddle me, snorting with annoyance when it became obvious my cock wouldn’t go into her in this position. It jutted up into the air, so hard it was completely rigid. I couldn’t recall ever being so hard in my life.

When she climbed on top of me, with her knees on my hips, I held her up, taking her sweet ass into my hands. I couldn’t help running my fingers over her smooth, furless skin. For some reason, I found Scarlett’s body, so different from my own, addictive.

She positioned herself carefully right over my leaking tip, but instead of sinking down to take me inside her, she looked at my face sternly and said, “Don’t you dare move, furball.”

Damn. So fucking hot.

“I’ll be as still as a rock,” I promised, tensing my entire body to make sure I obeyed. When Scarlett was satisfied, she leaned forward to brace one hand on my stomach while grasping my dick with the other. My hips wanted to flex so badly just from that single, mind-numbing touch, but I stayed motionless.

She notched me at her entrance, and I stared, completely transfixed, as my cock disappeared inside her. When the head was in, she gasped and stilled, breathing hard, and I wanted to touch her face, but didn’t. She hadn’t forbidden me from speaking, though.

“You feel so good,” I rasped. “So hot inside. So perfect. Even just this is the best thing I have felt in my life.”

She snorted at that, looking at me with ice-cold eyes until a shiver ran up my spine. “That’s a bit much, don’t you think?” she asked, slowly lowering herself down until I was halfway buried inside her, my cock throbbing with pleasure, my body shaking. Oh gods, how I wanted to jerk my hips up to push all the way in. But I held back, focusing on her words to grab onto the dregs of my control.

“It’s true,” I choked out when Scarlett slowly moved up and down, fucking herself on my cock. Her movements were uncertain and halting, and still the hottest sex in my life. “Gods, where have you been all this time?” I asked, gazing at her face. “This is sublime. You feel so good.”

Her face finally softened at that, and she gave me a tiny smile. Gradually, she sank lower and lower onto me, hissing and making half-muffled moans that she trapped behind clenched teeth.

“Are you all right?” I asked, worried she was in pain.

“Fine. And... You feel good, too. Great job keeping still. Good boy.”

I melted at the praise, my chest growing hot and big with affection. She learned so fast, I could tell she was a natural. My stern little snowdrop, dishing up commands and praise like she was made for me. Icy gales, how I wanted to show her more. All the things I loved and those I wanted to try but had never had anyone willing to do them with me.

When she sank down completely, her hips flush with mine, taking even my knot, we both stared at one another with awe. I snarled softly, clenching my fists at my sides. My cock was so blissfully ensconced in her tight heat, I felt like I could come from the merest touch. Scarlett blushed, her eyes glazed with arousal, her hand still bracing on my stomach. She gripped my fur so hard, it stung, but I didn't mind.

“Will you ride me, my beautiful queen?” I asked, mesmerized by the sight of her tiny form on top of me. “Please? I’ll do anything. Please, beautiful. Will you ride my dick?”

She smiled, a full, radiant smile showing off all her teeth, and nodded. While I struggled to recover from the stunning brilliance of that smile, she delivered another strike that completely undid me.

“Of course. You’ve been such a good boy. You deserve a reward.”

Chapter 14

Scarlett

He groaned, his eyes rolling back, and the intoxicating sense of power returned, making my body buzz with arousal. I moved slowly to catch my rhythm, still bracing on his tight stomach, which was hard and muscular under the fur. Somehow, it just added to Jack's attractiveness. He was strong. And all that male strength was putty in my hands.

My insides warmed and fluttered, slick with the oil and my arousal. I felt so full, almost like I couldn't take it, and yet I did every time my hips sank down to swallow him whole. Jack moaned constantly, the sounds he made vulnerable and getting louder. It just made me want to ride him harder, to make him come inside me, helpless and shaking.

"You look so good like this, Jack," I murmured, trying out another type of praise. The fact my words seemed to drive him rabid was an exhilarating discovery, and I was eager to keep pushing him. What I said was true. He looked splendid, a complete wreck under me, writhing and moaning, his face twisted in pleasure. "Such a good boy. So handsome when you give in."

"Oh, fuck," he rasped, looking at me with wide, pleading eyes. "I can't... Keep up for much longer... But I want to... Make you come, too... Please. Let me t-touch you."

My pleasure coiled tightly inside me, and it felt like I didn't need much, either, so I nodded. "You may touch me."

Jack groaned in bliss, his tail diving for my clit at once. It rubbed me with small, precise movements, and soon, I was shaking, too, my moans mixing with Jack's.

"I heard... most men are... too stupid to find the clit," I wheezed out, bouncing on top of him even though my thighs burned. My core felt painfully tight, everything inside me clenching in pleasure. "You really are a good furball, Jack. So good."

He craned his neck back, baring his throat to me, and gave a short, barking shout, his tail rubbing faster and faster until the wave inside me broke, bliss rushing through. I came for a long time until I finally slumped on top of Jack, suddenly weak and dizzy. My legs slid down his sides, spread uncomfortably wide over his large frame. Jack's hips flexed, fucking up into me until I felt his cock throbbing as he came deep into my body.

Next thing I knew, the base of it swelled and engorged, making me whimper half with pain, half with delirious pleasure. I came again, squeezing him tight, and that made Jack snarl, lifting his hips off the bed with me still on top, his orgasm doubling in intensity.

When he fell back, breathing hard, his eyes bleary, I tried to move off him and couldn't. It was indeed as he'd said. We were knotted. Locked together.

"It will take a while," Jack mumbled, sounding loopy with bliss. He smiled so widely, all his sharp teeth showed. "Better get comfortable. Lie on top of me, my pretty little snowdrop. Let's cuddle."

I was sated, my body trembling with weakness, my thighs a bit sore, so I sighed and let him call the shots. I shuffled my legs to get more comfortable and lay on his furry stomach, my head resting on his chest. I rubbed my cheek against his fur, soft and smooth now that I had brushed it out. Jack rumbled with pleasure, hugging me closer.

"There," he murmured, a vibrating purr starting in his chest. "So good. You're so perfect, Scarlett. The best I could get."

He sighed contentedly, and my chest fluttered with a soft, vulnerable ache as I allowed myself to believe him for once. He really seemed so happy. His words soothed a piece of me hidden deep inside until I could breathe a little easier.

"You're perfect, too," I whispered. At that moment, with my body flying high on the pleasure and closeness, he seemed like it. Like somehow, fate had brought us together. Like he was made for me.

Jack purred louder, his hands stroking idly down my head and back. It was so comfortable on top of him. He was firm yet yielding, and so perfectly warm. I snuggled deeper into his fur and listened to the steady beat of his heart that gave a rhythm to the continuous purring. His tail came to wrap around my shin, stroking my skin gently, and I sighed, letting go of the last remnants of tension.

It felt so safe being so close to him. I had never expected I could feel this way with a man. In my experience, men were petty, judgmental, often dangerous and entitled. They thought they deserved everything they wanted, whether it be unpaid labor, food, or a woman.

It only stood to reason I always had my guard up with men, only relaxing when I was in female company. Yet Jack... Jack was different. He eagerly gave over control, he asked and even begged, and he made me feel beautiful and wanted.

But that didn't erase the fact he hadn't wanted to marry me. Even knowing I would die without this marriage, he was ready to cast me aside.

I pushed the unpleasant thought away to deal with later and focused on the relaxing sounds and touches. "This is nice," I said, my voice languid and sleepy. "How long will it take?"

"Hours," Jack murmured softly, stroking the dimples in my lower back. "These are cute."

"Hours," I repeated, flabbergasted. "So we... we'll sleep like this?"

A part of me tensed at that, because I wasn't used to sleeping with anyone else, let alone with another person pressed so close. Inside me.

"Mmm. Yes," Jack answered, running a soothing hand down my back. "But it's just because it's been a long time. I haven't knotted anyone in years. So, that's why. Next time, it should be closer to an hour."

I sighed and nodded, playing with his fur until I felt hard, pebbled skin underneath. Jack hissed, his cock twitching inside me, and I realized it was his nipple. I played with it

some more, smiling when he wiggled under me, the tip of his tail tapping nervously against my skin.

“It’s sensitive,” he said. “Ouch. Please... Please, stop.”

I did, burying my fingers in his fur.

“In years, huh?” I asked, shifting a bit until his cock gave another small twitch, and Jack exhaled a frustrated breath.

“Yes,” he grunted. “People have... expectations. Once a male reaches a certain age. It was easier not to be with anyone.”

So he really was afraid of commitment. I snorted, patting his chest not too gently.

“Oh? I thought you were too young to marry?” I asked, smirking when he shifted uncomfortably, making his cock jolt inside me. He hissed even as his purring grew louder. He clearly enjoyed himself.

His tail wrapped more tightly around my shin and kept sliding back and forth in a caress. Jack rumbled out a sheepish laugh and gently scratched down my back. “Well, I *am* young. Relatively young.”

“Is that another way to say ‘immature’?” I asked, unable to hold back the sharp comment.

But he just sighed, his breath fanning my hair. “Maybe,” he mumbled. “I’m sure you’ll whip me into shape. And I’ll keep you young, too. Healing magic can do that. You’ll outlive me.”

That gave me pause, but I shrugged it off. I wasn’t worried about aging or death, because it was so far away. I had more pressing things to consider, like my immediate future. All my goals were completed. I was married, the marriage was consummated, and I had no idea what to do next.

Well, I did have an idea. Playing with Jack was fun.

I squirmed, finding his nipple again to pinch it lightly. He yelped and flexed his hips, jostling me, and then caught my hand so I wouldn’t be tempted to tease him again. He growled a bit, but he still purred, so I settled more comfortably on top of him with a smile. A low throb of arousal pulsed in my belly, but I was still relaxed and soft.

“That sounds useful,” I conceded, at which he tightened his hold around me.

“Sleep, snowdrop,” he said. “It’s been a long day. And evening.”

I yawned immediately, closing my eyes. It was pleasantly warm, the fire burning low in the fireplace, the candles flickering softly. Jack’s low purr settled deep inside me, reverberating in my marrow until I fell into a deep, dreamless sleep for the first time in years.

I felt safe, with no volatile father threatening to wake me at any time and no threat from greedy goblins. In the old, sturdy Frost home, in a beautiful snowy town in the mountains, with my furry monster breathing calmly, I could finally let go.

At least until morning when I woke up in a cold bed, completely alone.

Chapter 15

Jack

It was evening, my final job of the year was long done, and yet, I still lingered in the workshop, unsure why I was hiding anymore. I had no reason to. Last night with Scarlett had been the most amazing sexual experience in my life, and there had been quite a few good ones in the past, so it meant a lot. I wanted to see her again, talk to her, run my hand through her hair.

And yet, I didn't. Roiling unease squirmed in my gut, chasing hunger away. I hadn't eaten anything after getting an early breakfast in the morning, and I didn't want to. For one, it would mean I had to go to the kitchen and meet Scarlett or my mother.

Which was ridiculous. I had no reason to avoid either of them.

But as it got later and later, and I saw the lights in the dining room turn on, indicating dinner, I still didn't budge. I had started another project, a set of drawer fronts for a dresser I would make when I got more wood.

I carved intricate, beautiful snowdrops in the wood, thinking about Scarlett and sighing wistfully from time to time. Even I knew I behaved like a lovesick fool. So why didn't I go to see her?

When the lights went out in the dining room, my skin prickled with anticipation. Scarlett wouldn't leave me to my bullshit, would she? She would come for me, lips pursed, eyes casting thunders, and I would follow her meekly to the bedroom, where she would punish me for avoiding her. It only stood to reason.

My cock almost slipped out of my sheath when I heard the crunching snow outside. Any moment, she would come in and scold me. I practically shook with excitement.

So when my father appeared in the doorway instead of my snowdrop, it was like a bucket of cold water.

“You were missed at dinner, Jack,” he said kindly, smiling as he shook snow off his feet. “What are you working on?”

“Just something for the new house,” I muttered, pointing at the worktop. “Thought I’d get ahead on that.”

“Did you run it past your lady?” Father asked, eyes narrowing with admonition. “Remember, Jack: always ask. It’s the best way to keep the lady happy, eh? You’re not on your own anymore. Time to man up.”

I grunted, the unease in my gut swelling until it became a bad stomach ache. My father liked preaching about marriage and the rules every husband must obey, and even though I hated his little talks, I listened dutifully. After all, he and Mother were happily married for over a hundred years.

“Will ask her tonight,” I said, wincing.

“Better late than never,” he said with disapproval, his claws clicking against the floor. “Don’t leave her alone for another day, though. A wife expects her husband by her side, especially so early in the marriage. Don’t let her forget who she’s married to.”

I turned away to hide the grimace on my face. How could Scarlett forget? I wasn’t a displaced flowerpot, for Ole Frost’s sake. I was her... her man. If she didn’t like my absence, she would storm my workshop, her hands on her hips, and order me to be with her. And I would. It wasn’t like she was going to find herself another man if I left her alone long enough.

Which was what my father implied, and I hated it.

Though... she hadn’t come here to tell me off. Maybe there was something to what he said. After all, he was usually right. Even my mother called him affectionately the best husband in the world.

He was the shining example to us all, and I just didn’t feel like I was good enough to ever be like him.

“And remember, son, it’s your job to make decisions. You ask for her opinion, and in matters that don’t count, like the furniture, let her decide. But sometimes, you will know better,” my father continued the spiel I had heard so many

times, it was drilled into my head. “And in those instances, make sure to convince your wife with gentle arguments and coaxing. Give her time. And she’ll come to love you even more for valuing her opinion enough to convince her.”

I gave a non-committal grunt, busy putting away my tools. My back was still to him, so I allowed myself a grim smile, wondering what Scarlett would do if I tried some gentle convincing. She’d probably bite my head off. And not in a sexy way.

Truth was, I didn’t care about much apart from my job, and I didn’t imagine Scarlett would have a reason to interfere with that. I would be fine with her deciding in all other matters. But that wouldn’t make me a good husband.

I sighed, turning to my worktop to take one of the drawer fronts with me when I went home. I still wasn’t hungry. It felt like a lead ball sat in my gut, unpleasant and cold.

“Well, good night, Father,” I said, opening the door.

“Good night yourself,” my father said with a wink. “Ah, to be young and newly married. Cherish this time, son.”

I grunted and walked back to the house, only stopping to clean my feet. Everything was quiet downstairs, so I trudged to my bedroom, feeling defeated and inadequate.

From my youngest years, I had this clear image of the perfect husband in my head. He was strong and capable, dominant but kind, and he ruled his household with a gentle but stern hand. He made all the important decisions, worked to earn money, and spoiled his wife with small presents and flowers. He complimented her meals, appreciated her work in the house, and respected her in everything.

Some parts of that I tentatively felt like I could do. For example, respect. I could do that and so much more. Icy gales, I would worship Scarlett if she let me. I would be a willing slave at her feet. Except, I was also supposed to somehow rule her, and that felt impossible if I was on my knees, begging her to let me touch her. Those two things were mutually exclusive.

I opened the bedroom door with a sigh. Fire burned in the fireplace, and Scarlett stirred in the bed when I entered, looking up with sleepy eyes. “Hello,” she said, sounding like she was smiling.

She didn’t seem angry or disappointed, and my heart beat faster at once with relief and worry. Did she not care? Was she happier without me by her side?

“I’ll just wash up,” I said quietly, heading to the bathroom. “Oh, um. Just wanted to ask you. Is this okay? As a pattern for the furniture in our new home?”

She sat up and squinted, and I lit a candle to show her. When she saw the delicate carvings of drooping snowdrop flowers, she smiled in delight and ran her fingers gently over the wood.

“It’s beautiful,” she said. “But you don’t have to ask me. You’re the expert. I’m sure you’ll make beautiful things for us.”

My stomach loosened, a huge wave of anxiety rushing out and before I knew what I was doing, I was up on the bed, hugging her close. “Missed you,” I said through a tight throat while Scarlett patted me awkwardly.

“You... you did?” she asked, confused. “I thought you wanted some time alone. To, you know. Get away after everything that happened yesterday.”

“Maybe I did,” I admitted. “I still missed you. Did you miss me, too?”

She was quiet for a moment, making me draw back uneasily. I wasn’t usually this needy, but after the little talk with my father, I felt low and unsteady. Now, Scarlett’s silence made all the despondent feelings come back with force.

“It’s fine if you didn’t,” I said finally, standing up. I avoided her eyes as I shrugged, feigning nonchalance. “We don’t know each other, after all.”

I turned to go to the bathroom, already planning a long bath to make sure Scarlett was asleep when I got out when her quiet but sharp voice made me freeze.

“Stop,” she said. “Turn around. Come back here.”

I obeyed without a thought, looking at her face, golden and soft in the firelight. When I sat on the bed, she took my hand and looked at me with a frown.

“I don’t know if I missed you,” she said in a matter-of-fact voice that made me pay attention despite the sharp pang of hurt at her words. “Because every time I wondered where you were and when I would see you again, I instantly felt angry. I was certain you were avoiding me. Which is your right. As you said, we don’t know each other.”

Except, I was wrong. We knew each other in the deepest sense after last night. I had bared myself to her, and she did, too.

“You were angry?” I asked, perking up. Anger meant she cared.

“And disappointed,” she said, straightening, her posture growing regal. “I thought you wouldn’t run from me after yesterday.”

I hunched over, clearing my throat. It seemed like she missed me, after all. And that feeling had somehow turned to anger. I shouldn’t have avoided her, that was certain.

“What did you think I would do, then?” I asked, trying to learn her expectations.

But Scarlett gave me a frustrated look and shook her head. “Well, I don’t know,” she admitted, sounding pissed. “I hadn’t thought it through this far, you know? My two goals were: get married and consummate. And after that I thought I would still be miserable but, well, at least provided for.”

“Oh.” I cocked my head, intrigued. “You think marriage will make you miserable?”

“Not marriage,” she snapped, her face twisting into an angry grimace. “Men. Men make me miserable. I hate men.”

I reared back, staring at her in shock because whatever I expected to hear, it wasn’t that. I was about to ask her whether she hated me, too, because it certainly didn’t seem so last

night, when Scarlett's face softened and she sighed in frustration.

"Not you," she said, patting my hand. "I don't hate you. You're really good."

I swallowed, my chest swelling with pride. That wasn't so bad, then. It was a start. I nodded and drew a big breath. "I don't know what to do, either," I confessed, feeling a bit pathetic. "I'm afraid I'll be a bad hus... a bad partner."

For some reason, Scarlett found that amusing. She snorted with laughter and stroked the fur on the back of my hand, but in a mindless way, like she comforted herself more than me. "You're doing really good so far," she said, mischievous eyes looking up. "You're kind and really good at..." She trailed off, looking at the pillows before swallowing, her cheeks tinting darker. "At sex. It's me who's being a nasty bitch."

I drew in a shocked breath and clamped my hand over her mouth. "What! Don't you ever talk like this! You aren't."

She threw my hand off, glaring at me. "Aren't I? I bullied you into marrying me. And I order you around. I mean... I thought that was why you avoided me. I'm not... I'm not a good person."

That sounded all kinds of preposterous. Ice gales, did she really think that? Even worse, did she believe I thought that? I took her hands, drawing her closer until she was in my lap, looking mutinously up. Firelight danced in her blue eyes.

"I like it when you order me around," I said slowly. "I thought I made that clear yesterday. As for the marriage, it was my decision in the end. You didn't hold a blade to my throat. You just... showed me who you were. And I liked it enough to want you for myself."

She stared at me, not even blinking, and I chuckled. "Also, I think they really know their stuff at those temples. My body was wild for you the moment you appeared. It was like it knew you even though we were strangers."

She was tense for a moment longer before finally deflating. "Fine," she said simply. "So let's just... take it one day at a

time?”

Later, when I quickly washed up and came to bed, she still wasn't asleep. When I pulled her to my body, she came willingly, molding herself to me until her curved back was nestled against my front. We fell asleep like that, and I vowed to spend the next day by her side. It was the Yule Lads' Parade, after all. The first day of Yule.

We would go together, I would show her our customs, and everything would be fine, I promised myself.

Chapter 16

Scarlett

This time, I woke up with Jack's heavy arm pinning me to the bed. He was on his side facing me, snoring softly, and his furry face looked adorable in sleep, with those demonic eyes hidden, his mouth soft and open. I smirked to myself and tickled the fur under his nose, making it twitch repeatedly. It was such a cute sight, I did it again and again until Jack snorted with annoyance and swatted at his face. That woke him up.

"What? Oh. Hey, snowdrop," he rasped sleepily, eyes blinking in the cold morning light.

"Hey, furball," I said with a smile, bopping him on the nose. Jack was so furry and so adorable right now, he seemed a bit like a pet. And I knew what to do with pets, which was maybe the reason why I treated him like one.

Because I had no idea what to do with a truly kind man. The only ones I'd known before him were nasty assholes.

"It's the first day of Yule," Jack said after yawning widely. "The Yule Lads' Parade is today. We have to go, it's tradition."

I nodded. His mom had told me about it. The Yule lads were a magical, fae folk who lived high up in the mountains and only came down to the mountain towns once a year, on the first day of Yule. They were believed to bring luck and prosperity to everyone who came to see them, so the streets were usually packed and everyone was smiling.

She had told me to keep a wide smile on my face, too, when we came out to watch them. I promised her I would. It all sounded so exciting.

There would be stalls with sweets and mulled wine, wind-up toys for the children, and music and dancing in the main square after the lads had gone. It promised to be a lot of fun and also my first time taking part in a public celebration like that. We hadn't had anything of the kind back home.

“And you’re not working today?” I asked suspiciously, wondering if he was going to sneak off to his workshop.

Jack yawned, stretching like a big, furry cat, making a reluctant smile pull at my lips. He really was adorable.

“No. I can’t even get wood in the Yule. Only those who have essential jobs keep working. And the shopkeepers. Now, snowdrop. There is something very important we have to do. Right now.”

He looked at me, suddenly much more alert than just moments before. I blinked in surprise. “What?”

“You have to tell me I was very bad yesterday,” he said, his voice growing sultry as his tail quickly wrapped around my thigh, startling me.

“I... And then what?” I asked, my body waking up instantly, like it had just waited for a signal. I moved my hips, heat swirling in my belly.

“And then you have to demand I make it up to you.”

My pussy clenched with anticipation, and I licked my lips, which suddenly seemed too dry. “I really should do that,” I said after a moment when his tail slowly slithered higher up until it reached the junction of my thigh.

Jack looked at me expectantly, his eyes flaring with desire, and that feeling of power, which had dissipated the previous day when he avoided me, slowly seeped back into my bones. I could make him pay for that, because he clearly wanted it. And I wanted it, too.

I hadn’t been lonely yesterday, that wasn’t the problem. Jack’s sisters-in-law took me shopping, and I helped his mom with the chores. I had excellent company. And still, it hurt that he didn’t want to see me after our wedding night. After I opened myself to him more than to anyone before.

I glared at him, letting myself feel that anger and desolation again. Letting myself feel unwanted.

“You were so bad yesterday, Jack. The worst,” I practically growled, my voice coming out low and furious.

His manner changed at once. Playful and teasing before, Jack suddenly sat up, looking flustered and uncertain. But as he shoved the sheet off his lap, I saw his bulge twitch and then... And then his cock emerged out of the furry sheath, sliding out slick and long, making it clear he enjoyed it.

“You neglected me,” I said again, drawing confidence from the sight of his arousal. “Your behavior was abysmal. I’m really angry with you.”

He swallowed, his throat bobbing, eyes pleading. His tail had unwound from my thigh and swished behind him nervously. “I’m sorry,” he said, his cock twitching. “It will never happen again.”

“Do you think a simple sorry is enough?” I asked, crawling closer until I put my hands on his thighs, my fingers digging in. “Am I so cheap to you?”

“N-no,” Jack stammered when I dragged my nails through his fur up his thighs. “P-please. Tell me what to do. I will do anything.”

Well, that stumped me. I could have him doing all manner of humiliating things but that would give me no pleasure. Having no idea what to demand, I said, “I want you to make it up to me. Come up with something good, monster boy. Or you’ll regret it.”

Jack swallowed nervously but leaned closer, inhaling like he searched for my scent. “Will you let me eat you out? Can I make it up to you this way? Please, snowdrop,” he said, looking a tad more certain when my cheeks heated. This was still all new to me.

Oh. So this was the important thing he wanted to do. I blushed harder even as more warmth coursed through me, wetness pooling between my legs.

“Fine,” I said because it seemed like an excellent idea. My pussy throbbed from this little game. Then I remembered what he said last night. About how I could punish him for real. “But you can’t come. Only I get to do that.”

Jack's eyes filled with even more lust. He practically panted as he nodded eagerly, sliding down to the floor to kneel by the bed.

"I just want to touch and taste you. Please. I'll make you feel so good."

I gasped, a hot shiver going up my spine. My huge, furry monster was down on his knees, begging me. "You'd better," I said breathlessly, scrambling out of my soft pajama bottoms and lying back eagerly. Jack lost no time in spreading my knees wide open before he dove in, his tongue hot on my skin, gliding slowly over me like he savored this.

I reached down to grab one of his antlers, that grip giving me a semblance of control. But it was obvious he was the one on top now, making sweet bliss run through me until I couldn't hold back my moans anymore. It felt good to give in, and yet, it wasn't quite right.

"You're so good at this," I gasped out, remembering how he liked being praised. "Keep that up, and I'll forgive you, furball. So good."

He groaned, the sound muffled with his mouth pressed to me, hot tongue swirling around my clit. With the surge of control came more pleasure and I pushed my hips up, urging him to give me more, to go faster. Jack gripped my ass in both hands, holding it up, but didn't change the pace. Impatiently, I swung my legs up to his shoulders, crossing my ankles on his back and pulling him closer. He still didn't speed up, his tongue keeping a steady, tantalizing rhythm on my clit. It made me climb higher toward release and pissed me off at the same time. It wasn't enough.

"Come on, faster!" I finally snarled, digging my heels into him.

Jack pulled back, smacking his lips, and shot me an innocent look from between my thighs. "You said to 'keep that up', snowdrop. I'm only doing what you told me. All I want is to obey you."

I stared at him, annoyance mixing with awe, because he was definitely mouthing off, but he did it in a way I couldn't reasonably object to. He was... he was challenging me. While on his knees. Doing exactly what I told him to.

"I see," I said, desperately trying to gather my wits so I could come out on top without undermining my previous command. "Well then. Keep doing *exactly* what you've been doing, but if I don't come within the next ten minutes, you'll have to stop. And I will be very angry with you."

That fake innocent look slid off his face, replaced by a frown and then a mild expression of dread. I was fairly certain I couldn't come from the pace he had set, and Jack probably knew it, too. I checked the clock to note the time.

"I will do my best," he said finally, leaning back down, and I bit my lip, taking pity on him and myself. His tail swished with agitation, drawing my eye, and I relented.

"You can use your tail, too," I said as Jack's mouth wrapped around my clit, his tongue stroking me lazily.

I had barely said that when his tail shot to me, plunging deep in my pussy to stroke me from within. Jack's pace didn't change, but with the added friction inside me, things moved along again. Especially when the tail pressed to a spot not too deep that felt really good, making me gasp as a jolt of pleasure ran up my spine.

"There, huh?" Jack murmured, immediately licking me again. His tail focused on that spot with surprising precision, rubbing and flicking until I was a shaking, whimpering mess, writhing under the onslaught of hot bliss.

Jack obeyed my words to the letter, never changing the slow pace on my clit, but his clever tail worked me faster and harder, and that, coupled with the hot, wet friction of his tongue, finally made me shatter. He held my hips in a steely grip through my orgasm, still licking and fucking me with his tail until I slumped back, sweaty and boneless.

I just had enough wits about me to glance at the clock. "You... You made it in time. Well done. You're forgiven."

“Forgiven enough to come, too?” he purred, looming above me with a sly grin. “Please, snowdrop. You won’t have to do anything, and it won’t take long. You make me so hard. I’d love to come on your tits again.”

I wanted to laugh, loose and relaxed, but his insolence couldn’t be rewarded. Somehow, I knew Jack didn’t want me to give in. Not truly. He pushed, and I had to push back, so I lifted a stern brow and forced the budding smile back.

“Are you testing me, monster boy?” I asked quietly, making him gulp. “I’m not going to change my mind. I can, however, forbid you to come until tomorrow.”

Movement below caught my eye, Jack’s leaking cock twitching. He groaned and flopped down on the bed next to me, but when he turned to face me, he grinned. “Damn, you’re a natural. Fine. I won’t touch myself. Not even a little bit. I might need a cold shower for this to go down so I can be presentable, though.”

“You do that,” I said, keeping my voice strict. “And don’t test me again.”

Jack grinned, his tail winding up my thigh, the still wet tip stroking my skin. “Oh, I will test you. But you can deal with me. You’re the best.”

He leaned in to kiss my cheek and bounded off to the bathroom, while I floated on a little cloud of happiness, feeling relaxed and wonderfully cherished. After such a glorious beginning, this day could only get better.

Chapter 17

Jack

I loved the Yule Lads' Parade. All our neighbors poured out into the streets, wearing their best clothes. They waved small flags, the kids darting to and fro and laughing when adults jokingly tried to catch them. Even the sun peeked out from behind leaden clouds to make the snowflakes glitter beautifully as they floated down, dusting our fur and clothes.

Scarlett stood in front of me, right in the first row, bouncing on her feet. She was excited and kept shooting me happy looks, her face stretched in a smile. My entire family was out, lining the sidewalk in front of our part of the street, and Ma stood by Scarlett, leaning down from time to time to talk to her.

They seemed to be fast friends already, even though Scarlett kept calling my mother "ma'am". But they joked and laughed together, and Ma fussed with Scarlett's scarf and hat, straightening them until Scarlett's cheeks were pink with embarrassment and pleasure, her eyes growing misty for a moment there.

When Ivo tried to talk to her, she was much more reserved, though still polite. I wondered, not for the first time since last night, what human men had done to Scarlett to make her so wary. It must have been awful, that was certain. But I was hopeful she would heal with us. I wouldn't let anyone hurt her, and my family treated her as their own.

We were always accepting of Frost spouses, welcoming them to the family without reservations. I already saw the effect it had on Scarlett. She was more relaxed, smiling more, sometimes turning to tug me down to say something.

Though maybe me eating her out this morning contributed to her great mood. I'd be happy to do it every morning if it meant I got to see her smiling so much. Even if that meant I went without my own release.

Scarlett turned again, beckoning for me to lower my head so we could talk despite the chaos of excited voices. Her scent wafted up to me, warm in the chilly air. I shifted uncomfortably as lust stirred in my belly. Gods, I was insatiable.

“What’s that smell?” she asked when I bent closer. “It’s like... sweet and smoky at once.”

I glanced down the street, where Bivar stood with his cart of hot caramelized nuts. A short queue had already formed, and he gave out paper cones filled with the hot snack.

“Sugared nuts,” I answered. “Do you want some?”

Before she could answer, a loud cheer came down from the main square, letting me know the Yule lads had been sighted. We had minutes to go before the parade would reach our street.

“I do, but we can get them later,” she answered, bouncing excitedly. “Are they coming?”

I gave her a quick peck on the cheek. A little bubble of happiness rose in my chest that I had a right to do that. “They’ll be here soon. I’ll get you the nuts, though. They are best when hot.”

She nodded gratefully, craning her neck to look up the winding street. I squeezed her shoulder and made my way through the throng to Bivar’s stall. A few people were in line, but he served them quickly. My turn came just as excited shouts and cheers let me know the parade had entered our street.

“I’ll have a bit of every kind,” I told Bivar distractedly, looking up to see them.

“For your lady, eh?” he asked good-naturedly. “Hope she has a big smile on her face. Here you go.”

I blinked at him before I realized what he was referring to. There was a legend saying everyone who greeted the Yule lads with a frown on their face would be cursed for the entirety of the Yule. I’d never heard of that happening, though. The parade made everyone so happy, people couldn’t help smiling and laughing.

It was only a legend, anyway. And I was sure my mother had told Scarlett everything she needed to know.

I took the hot paper cone from Bivar and slipped him a coin, waving him away when he tried to give me change. Before making my way back to my family, I watched the parade wind its way closer, already smiling.

The Yule lads were an enchanting folk, and seeing them always gave me joy. They were rather short, around Scarlett's height, and wore colorful clothing in shades of red and green. Their bodies were lithe and graceful, their skin ranging in tone from gray to purple. Their faces were close in appearance to human, but not quite. They had sharp teeth, bared in wide smiles, their pale eyes slanted upward at the inner corners, and their ears were large and sharp-tipped.

Most of them had long, white or gray hair braided into intricate updos and decorated with colorful beads and jingling bells. Some carried small drums, on which they tapped out a fast, cheerful rhythm. They shouted out rhythmically. Not words, just sharp, encouraging shouts that rose into the air, making the crowd cheer louder and louder.

Everyone who had a flag waved it madly, and some people up the street sang a popular Yule song about a maiden who found a Yule lad under her Yule tree and thought he was her gift. It was a cheerful, bawdy song, and it made me grin, thinking about Scarlett. She was like a gift, too. A sweet, impossible surprise that fell in my lap right before the Yule.

Having looked my fill, I made my way back. People were jumping and laughing, a few of our neighbors dancing in a small circle to the Yule lads' drumbeat. I spotted Scarlett, but she was facing the wrong way. Instead of looking at the lads, she was turned to Ronan, one of our neighbors, who leaned close to her, talking and laughing raucously.

My heart jolted with unease when she turned her head enough for me to see her close-lipped, forced smile. All the ease and cheer was gone from her face, my favorite glare pinching her eyebrows. Only, it wasn't directed at me, and that sent a spike of hot jealousy through my chest.

“Excuse me. Sorry, Linda. Sorry, just going through.” I made my way through the crowd, but the lads were almost to us, and the press of excited bodies became much harder to navigate. The pavement had been cleared especially well for the parade, all the snow heaped at the fences reaching above my hips. It meant I couldn’t just circle the crowd. I had to push through.

Scarlett turned away from Ronan, looking at the lads, but he just tapped her shoulder, calling her attention again. I growled, wondering why Ivo, who stood behind Scarlett, didn’t interfere, but he was busy holding Mary on his shoulders and pointing something out to her with a wide smile.

Also, why would he interfere? It wasn’t like Scarlett was his wi... his partner.

My growing anger and jealousy made me double my efforts. I kept a smile plastered on my face just in case, remembering the old legend, but inside I was seething. And even though I got more forceful shoving my way through the crowd, I didn’t make it in time.

I saw the moment it happened. The first row of the Yule lads reached Scarlett, and she turned away from Ronan to look at them, her face tight and angry. One of the lads holding a drum, his clothes deep red and tied with a gold sash, looked right at her. His bright smile turned into an unpleasant sneer.

His eyes glinted, mouth moving as he said something, and suddenly, Scarlett gave a gentle shout like she was in pain.

I dropped the sugared nuts and pushed through the crowd. My mother, who stood on Scarlett’s other side, already leaned down to ask her what was wrong. Scarlett shook her head, rubbing her forehead, and then I was finally at her side, grabbing her shoulder to turn her to me.

“What’s wrong? Where does it hurt?” I asked frantically, taking in her pale face and annoyed expression. It cleared somewhat when she saw me, and she gave me a reassuring smile.

“Just a sudden headache. It’s fading. Nothing’s wrong.”

The parade had passed us, only the backs of the Yule lads visible now. Ronan, who still stood by Scarlett's side, turned to me with a grin, his purplish fur gleaming in the sunlight. "Pretty bride you got there, friend. I might feel tempted to get one myself. Tell me, are humans good in the sack?" He widened his eyes suggestively, his grin turning leery.

I snarled, making him flinch, and returned his wide grin, showing off all my teeth. "Not your fucking business," I said, my vehemence surprising me. "Leave *my* bride alone. You're making her uncomfortable."

He huffed, offended, and shot me an unfriendly look. "No need to be so touchy," he muttered. "I was just making conversation."

When I didn't answer, he slunk away, muttering under his breath. Scarlett, who heard everything, smiled up at me, taking my hand. "Thank you. I could have dealt with him but I'm trying not to alienate your neighbors. A fresh start and everything."

My nostrils flared, anger still buzzing in my blood as everyone around us mingled, talking and laughing, some already making their way up to the main square for mulled wine and dancing.

"Don't hold back on my account in the future," I told Scarlett. "If you need to tell someone to fuck off, just do it. If it's someone I care about, I'll smooth things over and explain to them they shouldn't piss you off. I don't care about Ronan. He can fuck himself."

Her eyes widened, and then she laughed, true joy sparkling in her eyes. "Wow, the puppy bites! Didn't know you had it in you," she said with a smile. "And thank you. It's kind of nice not to have to defend myself. Though he didn't really do anything. He was just unpleasant."

"He spoiled this for you," I muttered, remembering the sneer on the Yule lad's face. "And... how are you feeling? Does your head still hurt?"

Scarlett patted my hand and shook her head. "I'm perfectly fine. So, what now?"

I breathed a sigh of relief, seeing no signs of a curse. It was stupid to even worry about it, I knew, because it was just an old tale to make the celebration more exciting, no doubt.

My mother turned to us after talking to Tatiana and gave Scarlett a wide smile. “And? How did you like it?”

They chatted easily while we walked up the slope, the crowd now spreading all over the road and pavement. It became much looser and quiet enough to talk without shouting. When Iggy, Mary’s brother, complained loudly that she got to ride on her father’s shoulders while he didn’t, I picked him up so he could ride on mine. He squealed with joy, and soon, me and Ivo raced up the street, the kids laughing madly and pretending we were their steeds riding to battle.

When we reached the heaving main square, the musicians were already up on a dais, playing fast, Yule music for the dancing crowd. I got mulled wine for Scarlett and Ma, letting Iggy down so he could play with the other kids.

When my beautiful snowdrop reached me, her face flushed from cold and excitement, all worries were flung from my mind, already busy planning to teach Scarlett my favorite dances and treat her to all the best Yule snacks I could get.

It was our first date, after all. I wanted it to be special.

Chapter 18

Scarlett

I was definitely tipsy and having the time of my life. I danced a few Yule dances with Jack, picking up the steps fast enough to have fun without feeling self-conscious. The wine definitely helped, too, though Jack was an exceptional dancer and teacher. He moved with grace, nimble on his feet despite his huge frame, his tail slashing the air as he whirled me around on the wooden dancefloor.

When we both needed a break, we stopped by to chat with Tatiana and Ivo, their children lost in the crowd, running with a huge pack of their friends. They were cute and furry, all giggling madly as they tried to tie little jingling bells to the tails of unsuspecting adults.

Jack kept buying me more wine and snacks. I got to eat the sugared nuts, which were so hot, they burned my tongue, but that just made them better. He got me crispy cakes dripping with honey, a spicy tea that heated me up so much, I had to take off my scarf and hat, and a beautiful set of golden bangles with little bells that jingled every time I moved my hand.

It was all so delightful, I hardly believed my luck. As it got dark, beautiful fairy lights lit all over the main square, bathing it in pink and gold. People greeted Jack, and he kept introducing me to everyone, his tail twitching against my thigh whenever someone called me his wife. He never did, simply introducing me by my name, but I didn't mind. It felt like he was proud of me, eager to show me off, and it made me glow from within.

I had never been happier and more relaxed. At some point, I even had a pleasant conversation with Ivo and Jack's father, who was very interested in human cuisine. I promised I'd make cheesecake if I could get the right ingredients. Neither of them had ever heard of a cake made from cheese and they were intrigued.

“Having fun?” Jack asked me later in the night, when the square filled with raucous laughter and shouts, all the children now gone, hauled back home by their parents. We had just stepped off the dancefloor, both flushed and breathing fast.

“This is the best day of my life,” I said truthfully.

I knew I was drunk, the hot wine getting me sloshed faster than a cold drink, but Jack was steady by my side. He kept his arm around me, stooping to reach me comfortably, or wound his tail around my wrist. Such behavior normally irked me since I found it patronizing, but when he did it, I couldn't help but smile.

“Shall we go home?” he murmured in my ear, his hand stroking down my back. “Remember how you called me a puppy earlier today? You could do it again when we're alone.”

I lurched into him, drawn close by his sultry voice, and Jack's hand briefly dipped to caress my ass. I laughed, too drunk to care, and gripped the fur on his chest to catch my balance. “Puppy? For real?” I asked, more laughter bubbling out of me. “Well, it kinda fits. You're so furry and cute.”

“Mmm, I can be very cute. Especially when you call me nice names,” he said, putting both hands around me. “So, can we go? I promise we won't miss out on anything. There's another party tomorrow. Every day until the last day of Yule.”

“Every day?” I gasped, pushing slightly away so I could look at the enchanting main square with its magical lights and music that made my blood go faster. “Wow. Your town is the best.”

Jack grinned, running his fingers down my cheek, his eyes glowing with warmth and desire. I grinned back, nodding. “Let's go back. Puppy.”

He groaned quietly and caught my hand, leading me out of the square, which was still packed with people. Someone called out to him, wishing us a good night in a rambunctious shout, and Jack waved back, smirking.

“Oh, it will be good,” he murmured so only I could hear it.

We left the crowd behind, the voices and music fading. Soon, the loudest sounds around were the crunching of snow and the yowling of some animals not far away. “What’s that?” I asked curiously, never having heard a sound quite like that.

Jack chuckled. “Mountain cats going at it in the snow. Strange at this time of the year, but maybe they feel the holiday cheer.”

I snickered, lurching into him, my body so delightfully loose. For once, I didn’t feel like I had to keep my guard up. No man was going to sidle up to me and try to get me to suck his cock. Not that it happened often as I grew older and my reputation spread. But it happened a lot when I was younger. Enough to make me dread being out on my own after dark. I dreaded other things, too. People insulting me because of my low social standing or thieves trying to rob me.

It was my first time walking somewhere at night and feeling safe, but then, I wasn’t alone. Jack was with me, and he was big and strong, even if he liked me ordering him around when we were alone.

Out here, he kept me safe.

The yowling got louder, and Jack laughed, shaking his head. “Sounds like more than one couple. These are some horny mountain cats.”

He put his arm around me, making it a bit harder to walk, but he kept me steady, too. Despite my winter boots, I was afraid of slipping in my current state.

We went slowly down the sloping street. The soft glow of fire brightened some windows lining the street, a few houses decorated with fairy lights that gleamed pink and yellow on the doors and windowsills. I still heard the music faintly, and it just felt so peaceful.

Until a loud, miserable yowl came from right behind us.

Jack tensed, looking over his shoulder. Whatever he saw must have shocked him, because he stumbled, righting himself at the last moment, and cursed. “Oh, fuck.”

“What?” I asked, stopping and turning.

Dozens of shocking yellow eyes winked at me in the dark. The night sky was overcast, but the snow was so bright, I could still see enough to discern light gray shapes slinking behind us. They weren't overly big—maybe slightly larger than a common cat—but the sheer number of them was unnerving.

“Why are they following us?” I whispered, creeping closer to Jack. His fingers tightened around my arm as we both stood and watched the creatures until one of them yowled loudly, startling us both.

“No fucking idea,” Jack said, his voice steady. “Icy gales, got scared for a moment. But these are just mountain cats. They don't attack people. Maybe they just... like our scent or something. Come on.”

He turned us around and we kept walking home, faster than before. Another cat yowled, then another, until they were all constantly making noises. Jack stopped, huffing angrily, and let go of me. He shooed the cats away with vicious snarls, making them scatter, and when no cat was left in the street, he turned to me with a satisfied grin.

“There. Now they won't wake anyone up.”

We were almost to the house when the loud, obnoxious yowling resumed. Jack turned with a curse, shooing the cats away angrily, but this time, they stayed put. I shivered. Somehow, it seemed like they were looking straight at me, their unsettling yellow eyes like poisonous points of light in the dark. Jack huffed, opening the gate for me, and closed it firmly after stepping through.

Before we made it to the front door, what looked like a dozen cats had jumped over the fence, prowling in the dark and yowling so loudly, I swore the sound echoed.

“Let's get inside,” Jack said tightly, looking worried now. “Maybe they'll leave when they can't smell us anymore.”

I wasn't so sure, but I nodded, quickly entering the dark house. I couldn't shake off a chill that had nothing to do with the cold and everything—with the way the cats seemed to stare right at

me. Like there was an invisible mark on my back, singling me out for them to follow.

When a loud yowl came just from the other side of the door, Jack shook his head, his jaw clenching.

“Let’s get inside and get something warm to drink. I’m sure they will leave in a couple of minutes.”

Chapter 19

Jack

The cats didn't leave. By the time the water for our tea boiled, my parents, along with Soren and Cris, had all come down from their bedrooms to check on the horrible noise that woke them up. I made tea for Scarlett and Ma, then put the kettle on again, while outside, what sounded like a horde of mountain cats kept yowling horribly.

The sound, so amusing when heard in passing on a walk, was unbearable when made by so many creatures at once, so close to the house.

It sounded like they surrounded the building. The noise came from every side. It was maddening.

"Well, maybe someone burned some strange wood?" my father asked, pulling the fur on his chin. "Maybe the smoke makes them go crazy?"

Soren scoffed, sprawling on the couch in the family living room, his legs dangling over the armrest. "Why would smoke attract mountain cats? Besides, they followed them for some time. It's not the smoke."

Scarlett sat by my side, nursing her warm mug, looking uncertain yet pissed off. I was starting to think anger might be her default mode in any unpleasant or threatening situation. When my family discussed the problem, Mother fretting about the cats waking Ruslan and Ivo's kids, Scarlett stayed silent, listening keenly.

Finally, when no one had any more ideas about the possible causes of the cats' bizarre behavior, she swallowed and asked, "So it's not something common here? Like... magic or something?"

My father frowned, shaking his head. "Well, there is magic in these parts, and it's the most potent in the Yule. Some people practice magic, do luck charms, and sometimes small spells

and curses. But I've never heard of any spell that makes cats go crazy."

"Curses," Ma said, her eyes widening. "What if someone cursed you? What if some conniving, bigoted old boot doesn't like the fact you got a human wife?" She turned to Scarlett, smiling kindly. "Not that people are prejudiced in these parts, dear. But there are some bad seeds, like everywhere."

Scarlett nodded, giving my mom a faint smile. The yowling didn't let up even for a moment, and my head was pounding from the unpleasant sound. Trying to think despite the noise, I latched on to Ma's words.

"You're right," I said slowly, thinking back to the Yule Lads' Parade. "It is a curse. But it wasn't cast by anyone from town."

When everyone turned to me, I smiled grimly, squeezing Scarlett's thigh. "Everyone knows the legend about the Yule lads, right? That if you frown at them, they'll curse you?"

My father scoffed, muttering about old wives' tales, at which Ma gave him a hard jab with her elbow. "It's not a legend. They really do that. Did that to my friend when we were girls. And then to my fifth cousin, Magnar. Poor boy fell in a ravine and died from the curse."

Everyone grew still, the yowling frightfully loud in the sudden tension.

"He... died from a curse?" Scarlett said carefully, her voice calm, even though her thigh twitched like she tried to keep from bouncing her leg.

Mother nodded with a grimace, huffing out a loud breath. "They cursed him with bad luck. Poor boy kept slipping on even ground, getting pinned down with falling icicles, things like that. When he stayed at home, his clothes caught fire or he choked on food. It was pretty bad."

"What was he doing near a bloody ravine, then?" Cris asked, this story news to him like it was to me.

Ma sighed, giving me an uneasy look. "Well, he tried to get the curse lifted before it killed him. But he died on the way."

“So there’s a way to fix it?” I asked eagerly. “What is it?”

Ma shook her head, looking at Scarlett with worried eyes. “There’s a small lake up the mountain. I’ve been there a few times as a girl, but we stopped going up there at some point. It’s right by the border of the Yule lads’ territory and it’s rumored to be magical. Its water never freezes and it washes away curses.”

I digested this while Scarlett shifted impatiently, her leg beginning to bounce under my hand. “Let me get this straight,” she said, trying to be calm, though her voice was tinged with fury. I smiled briefly despite the circumstances. I liked her anger. “One of those pretty elf guys decided he had a right to curse me because, what, he didn’t like my expression? How is this allowed?”

“Well, everyone knows to smile when they come, so it’s rarely a problem,” Ma said, shrugging. “And there’s no one who could forbid it, really. We could stop welcoming them here, but it’s... tradition. I don’t think people in town would react kindly if anyone tried to abolish it.”

Scarlett huffed and turned to me, her eyes glaring sharply. “Why didn’t you tell me about the smiling thing?” she demanded. It would have been really sexy if my family hadn’t been there—and the horrible yowling didn’t spoil the mood.

“I thought it was just a story,” I said, squirming under her gaze.

“Well, I told you,” Ma said, though without accusation. She just stated a fact. “I told you to keep a smile on your face.”

Scarlett frowned and took a deep breath, her shoulders slowly relaxing. Inside, she was seething, but she made an effort to address Mother politely. “You did. But I thought it just meant you wanted me to enjoy the celebration.”

Ma shook her head, her eyes growing wide with realization. “Oh, no. It’s something we say as a reminder to protect yourself, dear. Smiles ward off evil spirits and bad luck. I didn’t think it might have a different meaning for you, which

was inconsiderate of me. I'll do better explaining things in the future."

Scarlett slumped slightly, her bouncing leg finally calming under my hand. "It's okay. I... I haven't been here long. I'm sure I'll learn everything with time." She snorted softly, though without amusement. "If I don't end up in a ravine like your cousin."

Mom gasped, and then her mouth stretched in a wide grin, though her eyes were worried. "Smile, quickly," I told Scarlett, because evidently, there was some truth to the old folktales.

Scarlett opened her mouth to argue but then just sighed and gave me the fakest, angriest smile I had seen in my life. I hoped it was enough.

"We don't say things like that, dear," Mother scolded her gently. "It invites bad luck. My, my, I really should have thought about teaching you all this. Instead, I've just gossiped and told you silly stories."

"It's okay. I enjoy your stories," Scarlett said, and this time, her small smile was genuine. "So... I have to go to a lake and take a dip, right? And the cats will stop yammering?"

A flash of fear sliced through me, biting as strongly as physical pain. Suddenly, I was terrified of losing Scarlett. A vision flashed through my mind, my beautiful snowdrop slipping on ice and falling back into a ravine, her dainty body crumpling down, down below in the snow, golden hair strewn over white, unseeing blue eyes staring at the sky.

"No," I said, so forcefully, everyone jerked. "You'll stay home. The curse only lasts until the end of the Yule. Right, Mother?" When she nodded I sighed in relief. "It's only thirteen days," I told Scarlett, who glared at me with narrowed eyes. "No need to go anywhere."

She gave me an incredulous look and snorted with disdain. "Can you imagine listening to *that* for thirteen days?" she asked with a scowl. "Not being able to sleep because of the noise? Being afraid to leave the house because who knows

what the curse does—what if the cats attack? I'm not going to let you all suffer because of me. I'm going."

My father gave me a meaningful look, and I sighed, suddenly uneasy. Scarlett had a point, but cold terror clutched at my insides, making me speak before I could think.

"No, you aren't. This is final." There was a faint tremor in my voice, but I meant it. I wasn't going to risk her. When Scarlett opened her mouth to argue, I shook my head. "No. I don't want to hear it. I won't let you go up that mountain. End of discussion."

Her face darkened with rage but before she could do anything, Cris spoke up. "We should just shoot them," he said excitedly. "I can pick them off one by one from the balcony. I'm good with my sling."

"Icy gales," Ma said, hiding her face in her hands before she leveled a heavy stare at her youngest son. "We're not going to kill innocent animals, Cris. What in the name of Ole Frost are you thinking?"

He shrugged, shifting guiltily under her chiding gaze. "Well, it was just an option. Better than going up the mountain in the middle of winter. I don't want my sister-in-law to end up in a ravine."

"Smile!" Mother grunted, and for a moment, everyone in the room grinned widely, looking uncomfortable and fake.

"Ole Frost's balls, that sound is horrible," Soren said, pressing his hands to his ears.

When my mother didn't tell him off for crude language, just shaking her head in defeat, I knew it was bad. Maybe Scarlett was right and simply waiting for the curse to end on its own wasn't an option. Maybe we'd all go crazy from the incessant yowling.

I didn't know what to do.

"Well, let us all put some cotton wool in our ears and try to sleep," Ma said, standing up wearily. "Tomorrow is a new day. We'll think of something. And who knows, they might stop when they get tired."

I doubted it but got up, too, offering my hand to Scarlett to help her to her feet. She huffed angrily and shot up on her own, passing me without a word. “Good night,” she said tightly and hurried out of the room before anyone could even reply.

When I made my way to follow, my father gripped my shoulder. “A word, son.”

A heavy ball of dread dropped in my stomach, already tight with worry. I knew what was coming, but I waited obediently as everyone else left.

“Son, I just want to commend you on taking initiative,” Father said, looking at me seriously. “You’ve made the right decision for your wife, and even if she disagrees, it’s important you stay firm. Though maybe try speaking more gently with her when you’ve both calmed down, hm? She doesn’t seem like the type to take direct orders easily.”

I winced because that was the understatement of the year. I was already trembling inside at the thought of what Scarlett would unleash as soon as we were alone. At the same time, unease prickled down my spine. Because did I really make the right decision? What if I was wrong? How could I know?

Doubt and uncertainty grew, filling me with dread. I didn’t want to be responsible for this decision. I couldn’t handle the risk of being wrong, and I knew that just made me a horrible husband.

“Thank you, Father,” I said, my head pounding with vicious pain.

“Good night, son. Hope you can get some sleep.”

I gritted my teeth, trudging upstairs as my head throbbed. I already knew I wouldn’t sleep a wink.

Chapter 20

Scarlett

“You had no right!” I hissed, whirling toward Jack the moment he stepped in the bedroom. “I’m not a child. You don’t get to shut me up like that!”

“That’s a husband’s prerogative,” he said, though his words wavered, sounding uncertain.

I shot him a scathing look, folding my arms on my chest. “You can take your prerogative and shove it up your ass.”

Jack’s tail twitched, his eyes flaring for a moment before he sat hard on the bed, shaking his head. I watched him, tapping my foot, a long rant on the tip of my tongue. I wanted to unleash it and tell Jack in many sharp words what I thought of him ordering me around like I was a fucking kid, not even letting me speak and discuss things with him. It rankled, it pissed me off, but worst of all—it hurt.

It was exactly what my father had always done. He never let me speak and I thought... I thought Jack was different.

And yet, he did exactly the same thing. Well, not exactly. Jack’s way of shutting me up was much politer, but it still cut deep, opening old scars.

So I wanted to lay into him but something held me back. He looked utterly defeated already, not at all volatile and derisive like my father used to, and it gave me pause. Fighting people didn’t give me pleasure, it was how I defended and protected myself. And Jack didn’t attack me. He just sat there, looking miserable, and I had no idea how to react.

Any other man I knew would have insulted me if I said to him what I just said to Jack.

I was flummoxed.

“I’m sorry,” he said finally without looking up. “I’m scared something will happen to you. Going up the mountain is tricky in winter. Could be dangerous. And you are...” He trailed off,

eyes darting up to me and away as his tail twitched in agitation. “You’re human.”

I closed my eyes for a moment, praying for patience. A part of me wanted to tackle Jack to the bed and beat him up with a pillow. Another, less reasonable part wanted to stroke his head and tell him everything would be fine, which was ridiculous. The way he treated me was wrong. I couldn’t reward it.

“Couldn’t you have said that first?” I asked tightly. “I’m not an idiot. You can reason with me, and I’ll listen. But instead, you chose to shut me up. *End of discussion*,” I repeated his words from before with a derisive snort.

He fidgeted with his hands while I stood over him, bouncing on the balls of my feet. The yammering from outside grated on my nerves, making me more irate by the second, and the only thing that held my fury back was Jack’s desolate posture.

“Isn’t that what a h-husband should do?” he asked quietly, looking at his hands. “Decide for everyone in a hard situation? Shouldn’t a good husband... take on the burden of responsibility?”

When he glanced up, his eyes were filled with such anguish, I couldn’t help it. I sat down by his side, putting my hand on his thigh. All my anger was gone, though the raw wound inside me still throbbed with hurt.

“I wouldn’t know,” I said simply. “The only role model I had was my father, and he was a shitty husband and parent. Believe me, you don’t want to be like him.”

Jack frowned, putting his hand on top of mine. “Why? What was he like?”

I shook my head, the cat noises burrowing into my brain and making it hard to think. My skin crawled at the thought of my father, and I forced the words out with difficulty. “He told me to shut up a lot. Basically every time I disagreed with him, which was often. So. Don’t be like him.”

Jack’s sharp intake of breath made me look at him. He wore a horrified expression, his tail swishing wildly as he stared at me with wide eyes. “I’m sorry,” he said. “I didn’t... I shouldn’t

have tried to stop you from speaking. I was just trying to do the right thing—to decide. But I don't even know what the right choice is. It's shameful but... I don't want to make any decisions for you."

As I watched his anxious, sincere face, the specter of my father slowly dissipated, my body growing warm with relief. Jack wasn't like him, then. Of course he wasn't.

"Why is it shameful?" I snorted. "I'm an adult. I'm pretty sure I can decide for myself."

"You shouldn't have to," Jack muttered. "Making decisions is a burden. You have to bear the responsibility for the outcome and shoulder the consequences if your decision is wrong."

I stared at him, taken aback, until my mouth fell open in realization. "Ooooooh. So that's why you like it when I boss you around. You hate being in charge."

"Doesn't everyone?" Jack muttered, shrugging with one shoulder.

Gods, he really believed that. My mouth stretched in a wide grin as I reached up to scratch under his chin. He jerked, frowning in surprise, and I laughed under my breath. "My sweet, adorable furball," I said, looking into his fiery eyes. "You have no fucking idea how wrong you are."

He snarled softly, eyes narrowing. "Really?"

"Really." I knelt by his side so I could reach his face with both hands, burying my fingers in the fur on his jaw. I scratched until his expression softened, a quiet, reluctant purr rumbling in his chest.

"Because I love telling people what to do," I said softly, looking into his eyes as he melted under my touch. "I'm often right, too, and when I'm wrong, I lose no time in fixing things. I don't think it's a burden at all. In fact, I'd rather be in charge because I don't trust other people to make the right choices. No offense."

His eyes dimmed in pleasure, and suddenly, his tail was around my waist and Jack fell back on the bed, pulling me closer. I leaned over him, still scratching under his chin.

“You were ready to take off up the mountain just now, though,” he said, but he was much more relaxed, and it came out playful. “Are you sure you’re so good at making the right choices?”

“Once I have all the facts,” I said, tugging a bit on his fur in punishment for getting cheeky. He yelped, but his eyes flared with want. “If you kindly explain the best ways to make this trip safe, I’ll be able to make the right decision. Maybe I’ll decide we shouldn’t go.”

I shrugged while Jack gazed at me, his mouth falling open on a gasp when I scratched behind his ears next. “I... We can do that. I will tell you everything you want to know.”

“It’s easier, right?” I murmured, leaning closer so I could bury my face in the soft fur in the crook of his neck. “When all you have to do is answer my questions?”

“Yes,” he breathed, his purr growing louder. “But if... If you want to have a productive conversation, you should stop scratching me. It’s very distracting.”

“Oh no,” I said with a grin, dragging my nails down his chest in search of his nipples. When I found one, I pinched it lightly, making Jack twitch as his eyes shot wide open. “We’ll talk tomorrow. And since we won’t be able to sleep, anyway, I have another idea.”

His chest rose and fell fast under my hands, his pupils widening, and soon, I spied movement between his legs as his furry sheath thickened. “W-what idea?” he asked breathlessly, making me smile as I stroked his cheek.

“Someone has been very, very bad,” I whispered in his ear, smiling at his sharp intake of breath. “You made me very angry, furball. And I think you deserve to get your ass paddled hard.”

I moved back to watch his reaction. He had told me about the paddle thing and seemed very eager for me to use it, but that was yesterday. A lot had happened since then.

So when Jack moaned hoarsely and nodded, I let out a pleased sigh. Suddenly, I was excited. The fact I could channel my

anger into something he would enjoy, satisfying us both, made me buzz with eagerness.

“Yes, please,” he said, looking at me with pleading eyes. “Punish me. I deserve it.”

“You do,” I said, stroking his cheek gently. “I have to teach you not to ever speak like that to me again, monster boy.”

“I won’t,” he said at once, his hands flexing. “I’ll be good, I promise.”

“I believe you,” I said easily, my insides thrumming with pleasure even the constant yowling couldn’t mar. “But we have to make sure the lesson sticks. Show me where you keep your toys.”

Jack hurried out of bed, moving quickly in his eagerness to obey. I followed him to the wardrobe, watching as he reached inside, making something click. A part of the back wall swung out like a small door.

“A hidden compartment?” I asked, impressed. “Wow, it’s incredible. Did you make it?”

“I did,” Jack nodded, his tail twitching. “I, uh, didn’t want to leave these things lying around.”

I was curious what else he had in there, but when he pulled out a nice, hefty wooden paddle with a wide flat side and a handle wrapped tightly in leather straps, I stopped caring about his other toys.

He offered it to me, handle first, and my chest swelled with affection so hot, it almost choked me. There was absolute trust in his eyes, and even though his throat bobbed anxiously, I saw how excited he was.

“Teach me my lesson,” he said in a low, raspy voice, making hot tingles course up my back.

But when I took the paddle and he dropped to his hands and knees, offering me his backside, I shook my head.

“Wait. We have to talk about this first.”

Chapter 21

Jack

I looked at her over my shoulder. She weighed the paddle in her hand, chewing on her lower lip with a worried frown. I understood. She didn't want to hurt me, but gods, I needed this so much. I wanted the peace of being at her mercy. I'd gone so long without it, but even in the past, this had never been truly satisfying. Most women I'd been with only indulged me with reluctance.

And maybe Scarlett wouldn't pull it off, either, or maybe it was too early for her. But I hoped like hell she could do it. For her sake and mine.

"My fur will cushion the blows," I said calmly, turning to her. "Also, you're human. You're not strong enough to really hurt me. And if you do something I don't like, I'll say "fish", alright? If I say that word, you'll know it's too much and you'll stop."

Her eyes glittered as she cocked her head to the side, assessing me. Firelight played in her golden hair, making my insides twist with want. Gods, she was beautiful. The way her fingers tightened on the paddle, slim but strong, made my cock slide out eagerly. Even the constant yammering outside didn't distract me from the glorious sight.

"You want me to hit you hard, then?" she asked. There was no judgment in her voice, only curiosity, and a tight knot inside me loosened. I hadn't even realized how I dreaded her judging me. "And I can do what I want until you say "fish"?"

A tingle of unease squirmed in my gut, and I shivered. "Well, yes, but... I mean, within reason."

She gave me a slow, hungry smile, and my stomach bottomed out as she walked closer and slowly trailed the paddle down my spine to the base of my tail. "Don't worry, Jack. I'll take care of you," she said softly, making me shake.

Icy gales. She's it. She's really it.

She slowly walked around me, hitting the paddle against her open palm. I tracked her prowling movements until she put her bare foot on my nape, forcing my head down. “You’re only allowed to look at the floor.”

I bit back a whimper, my slick cock bucking in the air. Reindeer’s ass, it was happening.

This time, when Scarlett walked around me, the side of her leg brushing against my fur, I stared hard at the floor. Not being able to see what she did made my nerves flare up and all my senses sharpen. I listened to the gentle swishing of her skirts, the slap of the paddle against her hand, and even the yowling became distant as my focus sharpened.

When I drew in her scent, delicious and aroused, I couldn’t hold back a moan. She liked it, too.

I yelped when she dropped the paddle and caught my tail, grasping it at the base. Her tight fist slid down its length to the very tip. Most of my tail wasn’t really sensitive, but the way she held it, limiting its natural, instinctive movement, made my blood pound faster.

“Such a bundle of nerves,” she crooned, stroking my tail as it tried to swish anxiously. “Are you nervous, Jack?”

“Yes,” I said at once, my voice hoarse.

“Mmm. What makes you so nervous? You know I won’t really hurt you.”

I swallowed, wincing when my tail tried to slash to the side and Scarlett gripped it harder. Somehow, being deprived of that outlet for my emotions, I felt everything more keenly. “I know. But I don’t know when you’ll strike. Anticipation makes me nervous.”

“Is that so? Well, I’ll let you suffer a bit more. After all, you’ve been very bad.”

She ran her fingers up to the base of my tail and stroked the place where it met my lower back, just over my ass. I fought to suppress a twitch, hoping she wouldn’t discover how sensitive the underside was, but failed. Her fingers stilled, and then she gently stroked all over the area until her fingertips dipped

under my tail, touching the patch of skin just at the top of my ass crack.

“Ah!” I cried, bucking into her hand, my balls tingling from the sensation.

“Here?” Scarlett said, her voice smug. “What is it, puppy? Does it tickle?”

She ran her fingers over that spot again, and I jerked from her touch, my cock dripping precum onto the floor. “N-not tickle,” I bit out. “It’s just sensitive.”

“Does it feel good, then?” she asked, and I groaned as she stroked, making my hips flex helplessly, my asshole clenching. It wasn’t enough, and it just made my cock ache from being so hard yet without stimulation.

“Please,” I begged her, writhing but doing my best to keep my eyes on the floor like she ordered. “Please, t-touch me.”

“I am touching you,” she said with a low laugh. “Or do you want me to touch you somewhere else?”

“Yes!” I bit out. “Please, touch my c-cock.”

When she gave my dick a gentle slap, I almost came on the spot. My insides tightened, and I held the orgasm back with a groan, knowing it wouldn’t feel good, anyway. Not when she wasn’t touching me properly.

“N-not like that,” I choked out. “Please, stop touching my tail!”

She gasped and pulled her hand back, and for a moment, I felt relieved—but then, frustration hit. I looked at her over my shoulder, panting but desperate to make her understand what I wanted. “Did I say “fish”?” I asked.

Scarlett frowned, looking uncertain, before she shook her head. “You asked me to stop.”

“Yes. But that doesn’t mean you have to stop. I... I want you to make me beg and then still not stop even if I... If it seems like I hate it. Unless I say “fish”. Only stop then.”

Her lips parted in awe, and then she grinned and reached for the paddle, her hand shooting back to the base of my tail. “I told you to look at the floor,” she said, schooling her face into a stern look, and I instantly obeyed.

“So you want me to show you no mercy?” she said in a low, seductive voice that made my balls throb. “You want to writhe and beg at my feet as I make you suffer?”

“Y-yes,” I almost sobbed as she kept stroking under my tail. My cock dripped in a continuous flow.

“Well, then. Say you’re sorry.”

Before I could react, she smacked my ass hard with the paddle. My body jerked, my breath whooshing out of me. The sting wasn’t bad, but the unexpected impact shocked me, and I trembled, knowing I was supposed to say something. “Uh, I...”

“Too slow,” she said sweetly, letting the paddle fly again. I gritted my teeth, my tail swishing wildly until she caught it and forced it down, pinning it to the floor with her foot. It jerked, trying to get free, and she stepped a little harder. I whimpered.

“Well, Jack, this is disappointing. I thought you wanted to please me,” she said, rubbing the paddle over the base of my tail. It jerked helplessly, my body growing hot with discomfort and the need to come. My cock was so hard, it almost felt numb, yet not numb enough to alleviate the ache.

“I d-do,” I said, my voice so shaky, it surprised me. Had I ever sounded like this? What was she doing to me? “I want to please you. T-tell me what I have to do. I’ll do anything.”

“I just wanted a simple apology,” she said and smacked me again. I yelped. “But you’ve failed this simple task.”

“I’m sorry,” I hurried to say, choking on the last syllable when the paddle hit me again.

“Better,” she said, rolling her foot slowly over my tail. “Now, I want you to say it every time I smack your ass. Can you do that, furball? If you can, I will forgive you.”

“Yes,” I said, tensing as my entire body vibrated with anticipation.

At that point, Scarlett dropped the paddle with an audible thud and attacked the underside of my tail again.

“F-f-fuck,” I choked out, my cock pulsing helplessly as it bucked from her touch. “Pl-please! Ole Frost and all gods, please... I can’t stand it.”

This time, she didn’t stop, and I squirmed, my arms shaking so hard, I was afraid they would give out. My balls felt swollen and tender, my asshole clenching over nothing, and when Scarlett brushed her fingers down my crack in gentle exploration, I almost shot out of my skin.

“You need to focus, puppy,” she said sweetly, not stopping for a second until I moaned constantly, my tail squirming under her foot. “I won’t forgive you if you fail.”

“I’m s-s-sorry,” I gasped, and she stopped the delirious torture to gently pat my buttock.

“Very good, puppy. Let’s see how many you can take.”

A moment later, the paddle landed on my backside. I gave a hoarse shout and forced myself to apologize. As soon as I did, she smacked me again. And again. Soon, I lost count, my entire body so shaky, my mind hazy with lust. Only one thing mattered—that I say sorry, again and again, every time she smacked me with the paddle.

I didn’t know how many times I apologized. When I did it for the last time, my voice barely a whisper, and the next smack didn’t come, I sobbed with relief.

“You did very well, puppy,” she said, letting go of my tail.

It flicked weakly, too exhausted. Everything hurt, my cock and balls the most, and yet, I felt light and peaceful.

“Th-thank you,” I choked out.

Scarlett came closer, gently stroking my head. She leaned in to kiss my temple, and then whispered in my ear. “I forgive you. And I think you deserve a reward for being so good.”

I jerked when her fingers wrapped around my cock. She squeezed me tightly, pumping fast and hard, and moments later, everything inside me tightened, my balls wrenching up. My orgasm barreled down my spine. I came with a low shout, my cock shooting and shooting in thick spurts, and she stroked me through it until the end.

“F-fuck,” I mumbled, barely managing to stand up. I lurched to the side, and Scarlett caught my hand, leading me to the bed.

“Come on, Jack,” she said softly. “Here.”

I collapsed on the mattress, shaking, and she climbed in, too, putting her arms around me. I pressed my nose to her hair and breathed in, slowly calming down until the tremors subsided. Scarlett gently scratched the fur on my nape, murmuring praise as I lay in her arms.

“Such a good, obedient puppy,” she whispered, making my heart swell painfully. “You did so well. Rest now, my darling. You did enough. You were very good.”

Even the loud yammering outside didn’t stop me from falling asleep, relaxed and without a worry in my head. Before I drifted away, I just felt Scarlett slipping out of bed.

Chapter 22

Scarlett

It was official. Getting cum out of the carpet was no fun at all. And yet, I couldn't stop smiling widely as I worked, reliving the memories of Jack begging and trembling. The helpless squirming of his tail under my foot made me thrum with pleasure while his stammering, choked up voice filled me with a sense of power.

I loved it, all of it. I was already thinking about other things I could do. Maybe not necessarily to punish him, but to reduce him to such a delightful, shaking mess again.

But first, we had to deal with the freaking curse. I tightened my lips in anger, thinking about the obnoxious Yule lads who thought they had the right to curse people on a whim. Once I went up that mountain to dip in their precious lake, I'd keep going to their settlement so I could give them a piece of my mind.

Or pee in their shoes.

Jack let out a loud snore, and I looked over at the bed, sighing. It was already getting light, and I could see fluffy snow falling thickly behind the window. I promised to be reasonable and hear him out, which meant we couldn't set out at once. Also, there was a small possibility that Jack might convince me not to go at all.

I shook my head, getting up from where I knelt on the floor. The carpet was clean, so I tidied up, took a quick shower, and climbed into bed. Jack snorted lightly and gathered me closer, putting his arm around me. I pressed my head to the pillow, breathing in his warm scent, and tried to ignore the horrible yowling.

It was no use, though, and I couldn't sleep. I tried to lie still despite my growing irritation, but it was for nothing. And when Jack woke up half an hour later, instantly informing me

the weather was too dangerous for setting out up the mountain, my mood soured completely.

“What if I went to live somewhere else?” I asked. “At least then your family wouldn’t have to suffer.”

Jack grunted, stretching as his tail wrapped around my thigh. “We own a small cabin in the forest. It’s where we keep hunting supplies and the like. But it’s still a long walk up the mountain in winter. If we go there, we might as well go to the lake.”

“And when will that be?” I asked, gritting my teeth when an especially grating yowl came from outside.

Jack stared at the sky for a moment before shaking his head. “Not today, that’s for sure. Likely not even tomorrow. This kind of snow has to settle after it stops falling.”

He watched me warily, like he expected me to demand we set out right now. And yes, I wanted to. I hated sitting on my hands and doing nothing but it would be stupid to disregard Jack’s advice.

“Fine. We’ll wait until it’s safe to go.”

He gave me a tired yet very handsome smile and hugged me from behind, bending over me to put his arms around my chest. “We’ll find some ways to pass the time,” he murmured in my ear, making me soften. “Did I tell you how magnificent you were yesterday? You are everything I’ve ever wanted in a woman.”

I snorted with laughter even though his words gave me sweet, fluttery joy. “Glad I could help,” I said, turning to capture his mouth in a kiss. Our lips met, Jack bent low to let me reach him, but before I could get lost in the pleasure of our tongues pressing together, another loud yowl came from outside.

We both froze, and then Jack pulled back with a chuckle. “At least they seem to be quieter now. At night, it was just constant noise.”

He was right. The yowls, completely incessant before, became disjointed, short bursts of quiet between them. “Do you think they’ll die?” I asked, unease curling up my spine. “Because all

they do is make noise. Do they even stop to drink or sleep? Can they?"

Jack's lips pressed into a thin line, and he opened the window without a warning, letting in a blast of cold air. I shrieked and stumbled back, hugging myself while he stuck his head outside.

"There are fewer now," he said once he closed the window. "I think some went away to rest. They will be fine."

"That just means they'll probably gather their strength for another night of torturing us," I said with a frustrated sigh. "Ugh, let's just get dressed. See if anyone slept at all."

Jack's mother already waited downstairs with a huge pot of spicy oatmeal on the stove. She took one look at us, shook her head, and put the kettle on. "Sit down. Get some tea in you and you'll feel better. Scarlett, no sneaking out to draw the cats away. You're staying in the house unless Jack goes with you. You'll be safe with him."

Jack's mom forbidding me from anything wasn't even half as bad as when Jack did it. I nodded, pulling back a chair with too much force, and muttered, "Yes, ma'am. I won't sneak out in secret."

After breakfast, Jack tested out the cats' behavior to see if they were violent. He reported they were docile, so he took me out with him next, getting a big, heavy umbrella from a stand by the door to protect me if necessary.

But the cats didn't try anything. They simply followed a few steps behind me, like a personal, very loud entourage. That made Jack sigh with relief, because it meant the cursed animals wouldn't try to trip us up when we went to the lake. He then disappeared in his workshop, but not before he gave me a kiss and promised not to be too long.

I helped Jack's mom with anything I could, but after some cooking and baking, she shoed me away to get a nap. I was too wired for that, so I just ended up pacing the room, glancing at the window every thirty seconds to see if the weather changed.

Finally, I lay down by the fireplace on my side, curling up on the carpet. Sleep still wouldn't come, and the broken, rarer yowls were almost as bad as the continuous noise from the night. Every time I was lulled into a moment of blissful silence, it was cut off by another desperate cat noise.

It got me annoyed and riled up, and I rolled around on the floor, kicking and punching air in an effort to get some of my anger out. It didn't help, but when I rolled to my other side, my eyes landed on something under the bed. I squinted, thinking it looked like a stack of notebooks or something similar. Curious and too irate to care about invading Jack's privacy, I got the stack from under the bed, my eyes going wide when I saw what it was.

Finally distracted from the dismal situation, I settled down for some light reading.

Chapter 23

Jack

Scarlett was reading my porn. Well, *reading* wasn't the right word, seeing as there was little text. Scarlett was looking at my porn, and with avid interest at that.

I quickly stepped inside and closed the bedroom door behind me. She looked up, her cheeks flushed, eyes bright despite the sleepless night and the yammering outside.

"I see... I see you found something to pass the time," I said, watching her warily. She didn't seem disgusted or angry but I still wasn't sure how she would react. Some women got weird about men perusing porn, which was fair, I supposed, but it wasn't like I'd gotten my collection after meeting her. I was pretty sure some of the oldest mags predated Scarlett's birth.

Which was an unsettling thought.

"Come over here," she said, moving some of the mags that were strewn around her to make space for me on the floor. "You have to explain some of these things to me."

My heart thudded in my chest as I sat down by her side, drawing in a deep breath as was quickly becoming my habit. I just needed to smell her after any period of separation. With Scarlett's delicious scent in my nose, I could relax and look at the magazine that lay open in her lap, instantly cringing.

"You went right for the hardcore stuff," I muttered, cheeks getting hot under my fur.

Scarlett looked up and when she saw my expression, her face grew mischievous with a smirk. "Tell me what's happening here and if this is something you want to do. Because it looks strange, but also—kind of fun."

I glanced down at the page showing a big, detailed painting of a milking scene. A large, naked orc was chained to a wall, wearing a blissful expression, and an orc female dressed in

black leather was pumping his engorged cock with a muscular arm, holding a large, half full glass under the leaking tip.

“I don’t think I’d necessarily like this particular scenario,” I said cautiously. “It’s called, uh, milking.”

“Milking,” Scarlett repeated with a snort. “Okay, I see why. And he enjoys it?”

“Yes,” I said instantly, a pleasant tingle running up my spine. “I mean, he’s probably oversensitive, because she made him come and then didn’t stop. She basically wants to get as much out of him as she can and doesn’t care that it hurts him for some time after an orgasm.”

“And he likes it?” Scarlett asked softly, looking back at the page. “The pain?”

“I suppose,” I said. “Though he might just endure it for the sake of the pleasure. I think he mostly enjoys being passive. She does all the work.”

Scarlett hummed, tracing the line of the female’s thick thigh. “She looks strong. Powerful. And I assume she enjoys this, too?”

I was silent for a moment, looking down at her face. Her blush grew deeper, though she didn’t seem embarrassed. Ole Frost only knew how long she’d rifled through my porn, getting used to the pervy pictures.

“Why don’t you tell me?” I asked, watching her closely. “Does she enjoy it?”

Scarlett inhaled sharply and glanced at me before looking back at the painted image. “Yes,” she murmured. “She’s into it.”

“What does she enjoy the most?” I asked and held my breath, sensing that we weren’t talking just about the scene.

“The control,” Scarlett said, now touching the chains in the picture. “She can do anything to him. But I don’t imagine she wants to cause him real pain. She doesn’t want to hurt him. Just—show him who’s the boss. Which is why she does this.”

She turned the page to show me the next image continuing the scene, in which the glass was now full, and the orc female

pressed it to the male's lips, making him guzzle it down. Cum spilled down his chin and chest, and his cock was still hard, looking swollen and too sensitive.

"Yes," I said, my throat growing hot with arousal as my cock throbbed, still tucked away but getting ready to slide free. "She humiliates him like this. And he loves it."

"Is this something you'd like to do?" Scarlett asked mildly, quirking an eyebrow at me. "Not the milking. This."

I gulped, my cock twitching in its sheath. "Yes," I finally said, my voice hoarse. "If... If I came on your body... Or even on the floor... And you told me to lick it up, I'd enjoy it."

She released a shaky breath, her blush spreading down her throat and collarbones. When she reached for another magazine, stirring the air, I smelled her arousal.

"Dinner's soon," I pointed out, because it wasn't the right time to get frisky, even though I wanted to. It would be an excellent distraction from the stupid cat curse.

"I know," she said and cleared her throat. "Just wanted to ask you about one more thing."

She rifled through the pages until she found the right one, and I groaned seeing what it was. Giving me a quick look, she smiled uncertainly. "Does it mean it's good? Or bad?"

"Good," I said, my cock sliding free. I refused to acknowledge it, but I knew from her quick gasp that she saw it. "I've never done it. But I've always wanted to. How did you know?"

Because, seriously, this wasn't even a common theme in my collection. I owned just two magazines with this, and I knew them both by heart.

"The pages are crusty," Scarlett said, smirking, and I groaned with embarrassment. "And kinda worn. I figured you look at this one quite often."

"Yeah," I admitted. "It's called pegging."

"Mmm. And it requires this kind of contraption, right? The woman wears this, so she can... Well, fuck a man's asshole from what I see."

I shook my head helplessly. She could see so well because it was a series of images exploring the pegging scene from every angle, one of which was a detailed closeup of the black dildo going up the man's ass.

It was one of my few human magazines, too. The images weren't painted but photographed. Trolls made their porn this way as well, but most magazines in my collection were painted. It allowed for certain exaggeration, making the scenes even juicier.

Not that this one needed touching up. It was perfect. The couple was nude, their faces clearly visible. The woman was blond, like Scarlett, and wore a confident, aroused expression. The man's face was twisted in bliss, mouth open, eyes scrunched up. My balls tingled at the thought of how good it must have felt for him.

"Want me to fuck your asshole?" Scarlett asked, jerking me out of my reverie. She watched me, her face perfectly serious, though her mouth twitched with a suppressed smirk.

My balls wrenched up at the thought, precum dripping out of my cock. That she wasn't disgusted, and even better, that she was willing, was incredible. I hadn't expected I'd ever find a willing partner, because we mountainfolk were fairly traditional in these matters.

The one girlfriend I had approached about this was horrified.

"You'd want to?" I asked hoarsely, making sure, because it felt too good to be true.

She nodded, her smile breaking free. "Yes. And well, it was weird at first, but the longer I look at it, the more I like it. Really like it."

She shot me a mischievous look and, as fast as a viper, leaned down to give my slick cock a long lick from base to tip. I moaned, my legs falling wider in invitation, but Scarlett straightened, giving me a wink.

"We should get ready for dinner."

I groaned, my head falling back against the wall with a thump. But even though I badly wanted her mouth on me, I was also

thrilled. This was exactly what I needed from her. Now, instead of fretting about the curse, the weather, Scarlett's safety, and whether I was being a good enough husband, I could focus on my aching cock and the sharp need for release I wouldn't get.

Even though lust pumped in my veins, my balls feeling full and uncomfortable, I felt lighter and much more relaxed. It felt so good to give in to her control.

"Thank you," I said, looking up at Scarlett, who stood next to me, stretching her hands over her head.

She shot me a mischievous look, leaning down to kiss my forehead. "I figured you might need a distraction. Also, why should I suffer alone?"

"You're horny, too," I said with a grin before I pressed my face to her skirt between her legs, inhaling deeply. I looked up when she framed my face in her hands. "You like my porn."

She blushed but didn't shy away from my satisfied gaze. "Yes, I like it. I didn't even know people did things like this. It's really fortunate I got you, you know, and not some crusty old lizard man who'd make me watch as he licked his balls."

I burst out laughing, knowing exactly which unique magazine she referred to. It was filled with paintings of male lizard-like creatures who lay around in the sun and stroked their cocks and balls with their incredibly long tongues.

"Well, no one will be licking my balls," I said ruefully, nuzzling into her skirt. "They are under thick fur."

"That's fine," Scarlett said with a smirk, grabbing my antler to tilt my head back until I looked straight up at her face. "You have a lot of other bits for me to lick."

When Mother called us for dinner, Scarlett snickered, offering to give my cock an icy bath to coax it back into hiding. In the end, I got myself under control as soon as she was out of the room, all magazines neatly put away.

Outside, it was still snowing.

Chapter 24

Scarlett

Three days passed before Jack deemed the weather safe enough to go up the mountain. In that time, everyone in the Frost household grew irritated and tense, people constantly snapping at each other for no reason. The cats' yowling only let up a bit during the day, and we all napped as much as we could, but the noise still made it unpleasant. We were exhausted and sleep-deprived.

Everyone in town knew about our predicament. Neighbors kept visiting, all wanting to hear the story straight from the source, which meant even napping during the day wasn't easy. Someone was constantly at the door.

Jack's mom, who usually loved visitors, growled every time the door bells jangled. Jack's brothers threw snowballs at the cats and chased them around, and Jack's dad drank entirely too much mulled wine. I eyed him warily at first, but he was a friendly, affectionate drunk. Not like my father had been.

Everyone was on edge, trying to deal as best they could, but the atmosphere in the house was stifling. When it stopped snowing, I went for a long walk with Jack, to at least let the family have some peace and quiet, but it was awful. With over thirty cats trailing behind us like a weird procession, we looked ridiculous, and everyone in town stopped us to talk, some curious, some entirely too gleeful.

When we finally set out in the morning of the fifth day of Yule, I buzzed with cool, excited energy while Jack's face was tight with worry. He hated taking me up the mountain, but since the weather had calmed and the fresh snowfall settled, he didn't have any more excuses.

Especially since everyone in the house barely held it together.

"Remember, just follow the trail," Jack's mom said from the porch. "Don't take off your snowshoes. Come back in one piece."

“We’ll be fine,” I called over the din the cats made, the roiling mass of furry bodies following me and Jack. “Enjoy the silence!”

“Ole Frost help me, I will,” she called, waving goodbye.

And we were off. Jack led me out of town and onto the trail that he explained was commonly used, even in winter, but only up to a point. The real difficulty would start once we got closer to the summit, because the townsfolk rarely went there.

“It’s the Yule lads’ domain,” he said, pushing a cat out of the way with his walking stick. “And while it’s all fun and games in the Yule when they parade around with their bells and drums, we’re not exactly friendly the rest of the time”

I snorted, leaning on my stick as I tried to keep up with Jack. I wasn’t unfit by any means, but walking in the wide contraptions on my feet took some getting used to. We had barely started half an hour ago, and I was already sweating and puffing, too hot in my coat. Trees covered in white loomed on either side of the trail, the forest still.

In that stillness, the cats’ howling seemed even louder and more unpleasant. I fancied it had gained a new, ululating quality to it once we’d entered the forest. Like the cats were calling out to something.

That thought made me shiver, and I pushed it away.

“Can’t imagine why you aren’t friends,” I said when I caught my breath. “Those little curse-shooting bastards sound like the best company.”

Jack tutted, shoving another cat away. Somehow so well-behaved in the Frost house yard, the little buggers now loped around us, yowling and watching with mean yellow eyes. I couldn’t wait to be rid of them.

“Be careful what you say when we get higher up,” Jack cautioned. “You can be angry all you want, but don’t go insulting them in their domain. You heard what they did to Magnar.”

“Because he didn’t greet them with a smile,” I said through clenched teeth, my anger boiling hot. Sleep deprivation and

the constant yammering only made me more furious.

“Yes. Imagine what they’d do to someone who went to their settlement and called them names,” Jack said pointedly, shooting me a dark look.

“Fine,” I spat, shoving a cat away with my stick when it tried to trip me. “I won’t say anything. I just want this stupid curse gone so I can enjoy the Yule.”

It still rubbed me the wrong way to let this slide, though. To make the grueling trek up the mountain even just a bit more pleasant, I devised the perfect vengeance plan and shared it with Jack.

“So once we catch one of those sneaky little shits, I’ll just tie him up real good and attach lots of pieces of ham to his clothes,” I said with a mean smile, pushing another cat away. “I’ll hide the best bits under his clothes. And then, I’ll just leave him somewhere in the forest, smelling like dinner. He’ll be covered in hungry, yowling mountain cats, and they will rip his clothes to shreds to get to the food. How’s that?”

Jack rumbled out a reluctant laugh, his tail swishing rhythmically with every step. “It wouldn’t be the cats that ate him. A striga or a mountain troll is more likely.”

I stopped and turned, staring at him as fear crawled up my sweaty back. “What did you just say?”

Jack stopped, too, shrugging as he looked at me. “They are stronger and faster than mountain cats. And they like fresh meat. Come on, we have a long way to go.”

I set out after him, my guts churning with worry. Huffing and puffing, I caught up, almost falling over in my haste. The snowshoes were ridiculous.

“Are you saying there are monsters on this mountain? I mean, other than you and those snotty little shits?”

He chuckled. “Of course. A lot of creatures from my old world live here. It’s a big mountain, after all.”

I digested this, trudging behind him as the cats yowled and moaned, making my head pound. “Do they eat humans?” I

asked finally, my voice tight.

“I imagine they do.” Jack sounded so calm and matter-of-fact, I had a sudden urge to swat his ass with my walking stick.

I didn’t, though. For one, he was my husband, and I wasn’t going to beat him unless he wanted it—which in itself sounded ridiculous. Also, I was pretty sure I’d fall on my face if I swung the stick.

“You knew this?” I asked tightly. “Before we set out? Something up here can... can eat me?”

“No one will eat you, snowdrop,” he said with a huff. “Well, no one but me.”

My heart hammered painfully before I realized what he meant. But for a very short, cutting moment, the fear I felt at the thought of monsters combined with the eerie atmosphere of the mountain forest shrouded in white.

And at that moment, I thought briefly of Jack actually eating me. He was a monster, after all. Only, I’d forgotten.

“Stop,” I said, breathing hard. “Jack. What’s a striga? And mountain trolls? Will they attack us? What...” I broke off when he turned to me, his grin so wide, it showed off all his sharp, white teeth as he laughed, his orange eyes scrunched up.

“Snowdrop, there are no monsters here. I was pulling your leg. Ole Frost, if you could see your face!”

His laughter boomed so loud, even the cats fell silent for a moment, watching him curiously. My face grew hot, not from effort but from fury, and I swatted at Jack’s tail with my stick. He avoided it nimbly, laughing harder when I tried again to no avail.

“Come on, Scarlett. We don’t have time to play catch-the-tail. And if you just stand around there, a striga might get you.”

He laughed again, and I hissed with fury, hurrying after him. Soon, Jack ran away, swiftly climbing up the trail, while I chased him. The cats milled behind us, following at a lazy pace.

“Fucking wait for me, furball!” I growled, but Jack shot me a toothy grin and kept walking, his ass swaying with every insolent step. My hands were itching for the paddle, and as I tried to keep up, my body practically steaming under the clothes, I thought grimly about how I would punish him for this later.

I was pretty sure he goaded me on purpose. The depraved furball wanted to rile me up so I’d tie him up and... and make him drink his cum.

When he finally let me level with him, I was too winded to say or do anything. Jack shot me a worried look, but when I glared at him, he grinned again. The cats slowly caught up, and when my breath calmed enough to speak, Jack gave me his thermos to drink.

“This is where the trail gets more risky. I wanted to do the easy part fast, snowdrop, because we don’t have much time.”

“You could have just said so!” I burst out, giving him the tea back. “You didn’t have to play stupid pranks!”

“To be fair, I played the prank because it was funny,” he said, looking completely unrepentant. “And then I kept running because it was faster. You look adorable when you’re angry, snowdrop. So hot. I can’t wait until we’re alone and you make me pay for this.”

I was right, then. He did it on purpose. The vision of punishing him later sweetened my anger, turning it into a low thrum of lust in my belly.

“You’re so dead,” I said, giving him a long, hard look. Jack’s throat bobbed nervously, but then he grinned again.

“Can’t wait. Come on, my pretty executioner. We need to keep a good pace but more carefully now.”

Chapter 25

Jack

It was afternoon by the time we reached the old hunting cabin I had told Scarlett about. It was a small, one-room shack without windows, just a hearth, a stack of dry wood, and a big bed piled high with furs.

“I used to sleep here with my brothers when we were younger,” I told her while we ate our lunch outside. The shack was cold and dark, and lighting a fire would be wasteful if we didn’t stay for longer. “We could spend weeks in these forests, tracking animals, playing games, dipping in the stream.”

“Sounds nice,” she said, though her eyes looked bleak when she took in the white, frozen landscape and the pack of cats milling around. It was probably difficult to imagine this wintery place as the backdrop to carefree youth shenanigans.

“I’ll bring you here next summer,” I said, nudging her with my hip. “No one lives up here. You can make me scream properly if you want.”

She scoffed, shooting me a dark look. “I’ll make you scream tonight when we get back, and I don’t care if all your family and neighbors will hear.”

I swallowed with difficulty, excitement curling in my belly. To distract myself, I looked up at the sky. The sun was low, making my nape tingle with worry. “About that. We might have to stop here for the night, go up to the lake tomorrow. It will get dark in two hours.”

Scarlett smirked. “Nervous, monster boy? Want to delay our return so I can’t paddle your ass? You should have thought of that before you made fun of me.”

I shifted uncomfortably, because yes, a part of me was nervous about that, but in a rather thrilled way. “I’m just worried about going down the slope in the dark,” I said. “We might even not make it up to the lake before evening.”

“I refuse to spend another night listening to this.” Scarlett waved her hand at the cats, her jaw clenching. “We made good pace. You took care of it, remember? So we’re going. Pack our things and let’s go.”

Unease tightened my chest, but then, I breathed more freely again. Scarlett decided, which meant I didn’t have to. And really, darkness wasn’t really such a risk. The snow was bright. We’d be fine.

I shouldered my bag and nodded, grinning at her. “You’re right. It’s so much better when you take the lead.”

We set out, keeping a good pace. The slope grew a bit steeper, but the trail was wide and comfortable. I hummed to myself, feeling light and carefree, though I still checked on Scarlett to make sure she was all right. She was tired, I could tell, but she didn’t slow down. Her jaw was set with determination.

“You’re pretty strong,” I said, impressed, as she kept pushing, even though it was getting dark. We’d been trekking for hours.

“I can’t stop now, can I?” she asked, huffing out a white cloud of breath. “I have to show the little buggers who’s the boss.”

I wasn’t sure whether she meant the cats or the Yule lads and didn’t get a chance to ask. The snow surface under Scarlett’s feet, which seemed stable and safe, suddenly splintered. A part of it slid down the slope. It took Scarlett with it.

“No,” I whispered, too quiet to hear over the ringing in my ears.

I watched as she fell, her mouth wide open in fear, and then tumbled down the slope, the rushing snow dragging her down. The small avalanche sped down and I just stood there. After an agonizing moment of frozen panic, my body unclenched, and I hurried after her, staying on the other, undisturbed side of the trail.

“Snowdrop!” I screamed. “Snowdrop, where are you?”

Icy gales, she could be anywhere. Either she tumbled all the way down with the small avalanche, getting buried wherever it stopped, or she might have stopped earlier, buried under snow.

I looked at the jagged sea of white, frantically searching for signs of color.

Ole Frost, let her be alive. Let her not break her neck.

“Scarlett!”

I didn’t see any signs of her. Eyes frantically searching, I tried not to breathe, because the sound of it was too loud in my ears. Even my heartbeat was too loud. I was terrified I might miss her moan of pain or another quiet indication of where she was. “Snowdrop, say something!”

I stood still, listening hard, but the forest was dead quiet. My guts lurched from fear as I rushed ahead, down and down the slope. White trees loomed above me, their boughs like skeletal fingers reaching from the afterlife.

Would this forest be my little snowdrop’s tomb? Oh gods, if I didn’t find her, no one would. Her body would be gone before spring, dragged by wild animals. I’d never see her again.

Hot tears pressed into my eyes, and I swiped them away impatiently. My eyes couldn’t get blurry now. I had to find her. Because what had happened just now was all my fault.

“Please,” I prayed, not even knowing to whom. “Please. Give her back to me.”

The weight of guilt grew heavy in my chest as I walked, sticking my walking stick into the disturbed snow to check for anything underneath, my thoughts circling like birds of prey in my head. I couldn’t help but think my father was right. I should have been the one to decide. I shouldn’t have shoved the responsibility onto her.

If we had stayed in the cabin, like I said we should, this wouldn’t have happened.

But I let her take the burden away from me, and now she was... She was...

“Snowdrop!” I yelled, my body growing tight with grief.

I was the worst husband in the world. Because not even a week after marrying, I got my wife killed.

“Snowdrop!”

A sound. I stopped dead, listening sharply. There was something...

A cat yowled lower down the slope, and my chest swelled with hope. I ran through the thickening darkness, faster and faster until only sheer determination kept me from falling, my tail balancing nimbly to keep me upright. When I saw the small group of mountain cats milling over a patch of snow, I was ready to cry.

She was there. She had to be.

I fell to my knees and dug, pushing the cats away. I shoveled the snow with my palms, growing more and more frantic until something black flashed against the ubiquitous white. Scarlett’s hand in her mitten, her fingers moving weakly.

“Thank Ole Frost,” I mumbled, choking up with hot emotion. I squeezed her hand so she knew I was here. She squeezed back.

Gods, she was alive. She was fine. I hadn’t gotten her killed.

I uncovered her enough to pull her out of the hole, and then she was in my arms, cold and shaking, gulping the freezing mountain air.

“You’re safe,” I repeated time after time, hands roaming over her shaking form. “I’ve got you. You’re safe.”

“Y-you f-found me,” she said, her teeth chattering.

Around us, the cats yowled, but they seemed more subdued, watching with yellow eyes that shone in the dark like eerie lanterns. I stood up, my legs still shaking, and looked around. We weren’t far from the hunting cabin.

“Let’s get you warm,” I said, picking her up without effort, like I did when we first arrived in my family home. Scarlett protested but without her usual fire, and I just clenched my jaw and kept walking.

In the cabin, I quickly built a fire, locking the stupid cats outside. Soon, the room was warm, and Scarlett stripped off her wet winter clothes, burrowing under the furs while I went out to get some snow to boil for water. We had enough packed

food to have a small supper and leftovers for breakfast, and I sat by her side, watching her eat until she gave me a weak glare.

“I won’t disappear if you look away,” she said, her voice still hoarse after the ordeal.

“We should have stayed here,” I said instantly, my biggest regret bursting through. “We should have been more careful.”

She put her food away and sighed, watching me. Whatever she saw in my face tightened her brows with worry, and she took my hand.

“So you’re saying if we walked that way tomorrow, that wouldn’t have happened,” she said with a frown.

I shook my head. “No, it could have happened. But we would have both been rested and I might have caught you. I might have been fast enough. Because a little avalanche is no threat to a Frost. Only to you.”

She watched me for a moment before nodding, her eyes gleaming in her face, pink and alive now that she’d warmed up. “You’re blaming yourself,” she said. “But from where I stand, you did everything right. You acted fast enough, Jack. You saved me.”

“I should have prevented it!” I snapped, wishing she’d just scold me. Then, at least, I would be able to process the guilt.

Instead of getting offended by my tone, as I hoped she would, Scarlett’s eyes creased with amusement. “Are you a god? Because that’s something you should have told me before we got married, you know.”

“What?” I stared at her, nonplussed. “No, I’m not a god. What does that have to do with anything?”

“Well, you certainly have high expectations of yourself, so I thought you might have godlike powers to match those expectations,” she said, her mouth quirking. When I said nothing, she shook her head.

“Jack, no one can prevent every misfortune and stroke of bad luck. Sure, we could have been more careful. I should have

listened to you. I get so caught up in what I want to achieve sometimes, I take stupid risks to get there faster. So yes, you were right, and you should have pushed me to be more careful. We both made mistakes, and now we're here. Alive, together, our lesson learned. Isn't this a good outcome?"

My shoulders unclenched as I thought about her words. When put like that, I couldn't deny she was right. And yet, my father's lectures scratched at the back of my head, too deeply ingrained to ignore.

"My father says a good husband always knows what's best for his family," I muttered, looking away.

"Men," Scarlett scoffed, her voice dripping with scorn. When I gave her a startled look, she patted my hand. "Not you, puppy. You're good. Just... Talk to your mom sometime. Ask her to tell you about how your father once wanted to make goat-keeping the family business."

I reared back, blinking in surprise. "We've never kept goats."

She grinned wickedly, her eyes sparkling. "No, you didn't. Not after the disaster, anyway. Ask your mom about it and all the other mistakes your dad made, hm? She doesn't talk about them when he's around, because she knows his pride is fragile, but she told me plenty. Apparently, she has her hands full making sure the family stays on the right track. And your dad takes all the credit."

I tried to digest this, staring at Scarlett in disbelief. "But why did my mom never tell me any of that?"

"I don't know," she said, shrugging. "Ask her. Maybe she had good reasons, or maybe she had stupid reasons. No one is infallible, is what I'm trying to say. That means you don't have to be, either. Just... I'll try to listen to you in the future when you tell me to be more careful, all right? We'll figure it out. We've already learned so much."

"I don't want to be like my father," I said suddenly, visceral revulsion piercing my gut. "He makes it sound like... Like he's up there, all alone with the responsibility, deciding for everyone. Like a puppeteer."

Scarlett laughed, the firelight dancing in her golden curls. “I guarantee to you he’s not alone. Your mom is right there with him, prodding him in the right direction all the time. I don’t envy her, but it seems to work for them. I prefer this.”

“What?” I asked, looking around to see what she meant.

She grinned and climbed in my lap, burying her hand in the fur on my chest. “This. Talking to you. You telling me what you think, me telling you what I think. If we could just do this and make decisions together, maybe it would be best. I am bossy, though. You’ll have to fight me sometimes.”

A long, relieved breath rushed out of me as she burrowed closer and I put my arms around her, the steady warmth of her lithe body chasing the tension out of my limbs.

“As long as you punish me later,” I muttered. “So I can let go.”

Chapter 26

Scarlett

Jack fed the fire and came back to me. He took off his trousers, and I stripped off my clothes without a word, leaving just my underwear on. We curled together on the bed, which was big enough to fit Jack's tall frame, yet small enough that we had to cuddle close together.

"I can do this with you," I said softly as he held me close, his fur warm and soft. My enormous, cuddly puppy.

"Do what?" he asked, his chest vibrating against my back.

"Learn and discover everything." I sifted my fingers through the fur on his forearm. It was getting tangled again, and I thought with pleasure about how I'd brushed it out for him. I wanted to do it again.

"How we work together. What we're good and bad at. How we complement each other. I just feel like we could be perfect together, Jack. We just need to learn how we fit. Where we are the strongest."

When I shifted against him, a low purr started in his chest, making me smile.

"Keep talking," he murmured, pressing his face to the top of my head. "I like the sound of it."

I laughed softly, pushing my ass against him, and was gratified when his breath hitched. "I don't know if there's much more to say. You tell me something."

He was quiet for a while, his fingers gently running through my hair as he purred, the sound combined with the crackling of fire almost letting me forget about the horde of cats outside.

"I was scared of calling you my wife," Jack said quietly, his tail wrapping around my thigh.

"Yes, I noticed." I smiled, reaching down to stroke his tail. "So you're not scared anymore?"

“No. Not of this. I’m terrified of other things now.”

We lay in the cozy warmth, his tail slowly stroking up and down my thigh, Jack’s furry arm pinning me close. All the tension and exhaustion melted out of me and I sighed with relief. “Like what?”

“Like losing you,” he said quietly, nuzzling into my hair. “I didn’t realize how much I... It’s been just a few days. But it feels like... You’re mine, Scarlett. And I won’t waste any more time on stupid fears. You’re my wife. I can scream it from the top of the mountain for everyone to hear.”

“Won’t it set off an avalanche?” I asked, pressing closer until he made a soft sound in the back of his throat.

“No, why would it? It’s not like the snow will get scared and run away.”

“If you say so,” I murmured, squirming again until Jack made an exasperated noise.

“Snowdrop, what are you doing? Want to make me hard so I can’t sleep?”

He huffed when I pushed into him and a moment later, his slippery cock slid free. “Now you’ve done it,” Jack murmured, tightening his hold on me. “Stop moving and it will go away.”

I laughed, pressing my face into his forearm. “I don’t want it to go away.”

“Want to torment me then?” he asked, sighing deeply, though he rocked into me. “Well, I’ll take it. You smell so good.”

I rocked back, and we humped under the furs, Jack’s cock sliding against me until he hooked his tail in my underwear and pulled it off. “I don’t want to torment you,” I breathed, delightful warmth curling in my belly as his hard slickness pressed into my naked body. “I just want to feel good. With you.”

“Didn’t think to bring the oil,” he muttered in annoyance.

“That’s okay. We can do other things.”

We stopped talking then, our bodies moving against each other as our breaths grew faster. Jack pressed his cock into me, rubbing it back and forth, while his tail dove between my legs. It skittered over my wetness, making me gasp, and retreated. I looked at him, annoyed, and caught him sucking on the tip of his tail.

“You taste good,” he said with a wicked grin when he saw my expression.

My insides clenched, and I caught his tail, tugging on it gently. “Keep touching me. Make me feel good.”

His eyes flared with heat, his voice dropping low as he answered, “Of course, my queen. Whatever you command.”

I wanted to call him a good boy for that, but as his tail pressed into my clit and then inside me, my breath caught and I was silent. Jack still rocked into me, grunting in pleasure, until I sat up and faced him.

“Keep touching me,” I murmured, pushing him onto his back. “There you go. Good monster boy.”

I straddled his waist, trapping his cock under my body. Jack groaned when I pressed down, his weeping tip pointing up his belly, the shaft rubbing against my core as I moved my hips. He gazed at me with wide, dark eyes, his orange irises only thin circles around his pupils.

“You’re so beautiful,” he breathed when I rode him, my body heating up with pleasure and exertion. “My beautiful snowdrop. My wife.”

His tail attacked my clit, and I threw my head back in pleasure, rocking harder and faster. Jack flexed his hips, his soft grunts turning into moans as he caressed my thighs and hips, his big hands gentle on my skin.

“Such a beautiful body,” he murmured, gazing at me with adoration. “You are splendid. I love looking at you, my queen. So beautiful.”

The pleasure inside me coiled tighter and tighter, urged by Jack’s skillful tail. It rubbed against my clit without fail, and I

strove to press harder into his cock, to move faster, until he couldn't help but rock against me, matching my rhythm.

"Are you about to come?" I asked, gasping, because I wasn't far from that myself.

"Soon," he moaned, lifting his hips up.

"Perfect." I grinned when I climbed off him, and Jack whined in disappointment, giving me a betrayed look. I shook my head and gripped his cock in both hands, moving them up and down. "Did I tell you to stop? Make me come."

He groaned, hips bucking into my grip, and his tail pushed inside me, fucking me in earnest. It was slim, but it pressed into all the right places, the friction against my clit and inside me bringing me higher. My hands flew over Jack's hard cock, still wet, precum winding down from the tip. I watched it throb under my touch, the feeling of power growing and growing inside me until my belly tensed and bliss poured out in thick waves.

"You did so well," I panted, making sure Jack's cock pointed at me as I stroked him fast. "You're such a good furball. Such a good husband. Made me come so well. You're so good with your tail, puppy. So perfect."

He shouted, his neck craning back. His cock stiffened and bulged in my hands and cum shot out, splashing against my breasts and belly, dripping onto my thighs. Spurt after spurt flew out, covering me, until Jack heaved a deep breath and relaxed.

I gave his cock one last tender stroke and licked my palm clean.

"You did so well, puppy," I said again, watching him eagerly. Because it wasn't over. "You deserve a reward."

He raised himself on his elbow, watching me with glassy eyes, his lips parting around quick breaths. "Yeah? What is it?"

"You get to lick me clean," I said, watching his face closely in case he was reluctant. I didn't want to force him to do anything he wouldn't like. And even though he told me he wanted this when we talked about his porn, that was then.

When Jack groaned, his spent cock twitching, I knew he was really into it.

“Thank you, my queen,” he said, dropping to his knees by the bed.

He lost no time obeying me. His rough, wide tongue swiped through the mess on my thigh, and I watched in fascination as Jack cleaned my skin bit by bit. He licked me eagerly, small sounds tearing out of his throat. He glanced at me as he swallowed with an audible sound.

“You look so good covered in my cum,” he murmured, his tongue working its way up my belly. “My queen. I will lick you clean, and then I’ll make you come again.”

“Good... Good boy,” I gasped when Jack sucked my nipple into his mouth with a wet sound.

“I’ll worship you every day,” he said, licking his way to my other breast. “On my knees. Just like this.”

I leaned back on my arms, exposing myself completely. Jack’s adoration was sincere and powerful. It fed a starving part of me until I felt beautiful and cherished. I glowed under the hungry swipes of his tongue, his heated gaze making me squirm. I just came, but I wanted more.

When he was done, he sat back, surveying my body. I shook with lust, my legs open on either side of him. My pussy thrummed with want.

“You said you’d make me come.” My voice was a bit whiny, not at all powerful even though he was literally at my feet.

“I will,” he said with a grin, stroking up my inner thighs and opening me wider. “I just had to look at you. You steal my breath away, my queen.”

I moaned when his fingertips reached the crease of my thigh. He stroked the sensitive skin, looking at me with mischievous eyes. At my feet, yet—in control.

And I didn’t mind.

“Then worship me, Jack,” I whispered, forcing the words out, because they were outlandish and ridiculous, and yet, I was

dying to say them. To ask for this.

“Your wish is my command,” he said softly, his eyes glittering like precious jewels in the firelight.

Chapter 27

Jack

Scarlett let me live out all my depraved fantasies. What was even better, she didn't simply indulge me. She loved every bit of it, just as I did. She was truly made for me. My perfect match.

As I buried my tongue between her legs, inhaling deeply to trap her scent inside me, I couldn't help but moan. My tail slashed the air with frantic arousal as I licked and teased her, the taste of her wetness addictive. I couldn't live without it anymore.

She writhed and moaned, my touch driving her crazy, and I relished this. Yes, I was on my knees, obeying her, but it was clear who held the power now. I would make my lovely, human wife come apart with my tongue between her legs.

Because I had to. I needed to do everything in my power to please her. To keep her.

"This feels so good," she moaned, bucking against me as I sucked her clit into my mouth. "Jack... Puppy... So good..."

I smiled, releasing her clit, and rubbed circles around it with my tongue. When she cried out in pleasure, I slickened my finger with the precum dripping out of my hard cock and fucked her with it, her wetness mixing with mine.

She would come all over my finger and mouth.

It didn't take long. Her pussy clenched hard around my finger when I sucked her clit again, and she made a long, drawn out sound, her hips raised high, body trembling with tension. When she fell back, I licked her softly to gather all her arousal on my tongue. Nothing would go to waste.

"Did I please you?" I asked, kissing the inside of her thigh.

Scarlett laughed shakily, palming my head. "You did. You're very good at this."

I climbed into bed with her, ignoring my hard cock. “And I’ll get even better for you,” I rumbled in her ear, gathering her close. “Sleep, my wife. We have to be fresh for tomorrow.”

The next day, we made the trip up to the lake without any other accidents. The cats trailed behind us, yowling, but we got to the lake long before noon. It stood among naked stones, steaming heavily in the cold.

“So that’s why it doesn’t freeze,” Scarlett said, wrinkling her nose. “And why nobody comes here to bathe.”

The air smelled of sulfur, and even though the water was warm, it seemed muddy and thick. “Well, we made it this far,” Scarlett said, looking down into the murky depths. “Let’s get it over with.”

She undressed quickly, shivering from the cold, and I got a big, fluffy towel out of my bag. I had packed it for this very reason. I knew she’d have to get dry and warm fast after dipping in the magic lake.

“Hope it’s not boiling hot,” she bit out, stepping out of her underwear. “Going in.”

Ma had explained that Scarlett needed to completely submerge, which she did as soon as she got deep enough for the water to reach her hips. For a moment, she was gone, only small bubbles bursting on the surface. My heart gave one painful beat. The water churned and Scarlett emerged, wiping her face with her hand.

“Are the cats gone?” she asked.

I looked around just in time to see the tail of the last one disappearing among the trees.

“You did it. All clear.”

She climbed out. I dried her quickly and helped her dress. Before she put on her winter coat, I just held her close, warming her up against my body while she shoved her wet hair under her woolen hat. We lost no time setting out back home, and with no cats winding between our legs, we kept a much better pace.

We made it home just after dark and got a warm, enthusiastic welcome. After the freezing cold of the mountain, the warm kitchen was bliss. Especially with my mother bustling around together with Tatiana, who had baked us a cake and came to deliver it.

“Happily Cat-Free,” Scarlett read out the words made in icing on the cake. She laughed and gave my sister-in-law a hug, burying her face in Tatiana’s shining fur. “Thank you! Gods, I’m starving. I could eat this whole cake on my own.”

“Dinner first,” Ma scolded, putting a huge plate piled high with meat and potatoes in front of Scarlett. “And then you can eat the whole cake. We have to fatten you up, girl. Cold is unkind to slim people, eh?”

“I have my own heater right here,” Scarlett said mischievously, leaning into me. I purred instantly, too pleased to care if others could hear it, and Tatiana laughed while Ma turned her face demurely away.

Purring was considered a private matter by her generation. I managed to stop so she wouldn’t be embarrassed, but wound my tail around Scarlett’s leg under the table. I couldn’t stop touching her now that we were back.

I lost her on that mountain trail. Maybe just for a few minutes, but it was enough to last me a lifetime. I was never letting her go now, no matter what it cost me. When she looked at me with a sweet smile that turned sly as soon as our eyes met, my stomach lurched with want and affection.

She was perfect.

The rest of the Yule went by in joy and good fun. Mother was determined to teach Scarlett all the traditional Yule recipes, so they spent a lot of time together in the kitchen. One night, when we lay in bed, Scarlett boasted she could now make twelve varieties of mulled wine and tell them apart by taste and smell.

“You’re a proper Frost now,” I rumbled with pleasure, seeing how proud she was. Family life and my mother’s attention

served her well. “Everyone in the family is a mulled wine connoisseur.”

I spent my mornings and early afternoons in my workshop and other places I visited in secret. Once I committed to being a husband, it became obvious what I had to do, and even though it was the Yule and hardly anyone worked, I cajoled and threatened my way into getting all the supplies I needed.

I wanted to make my wife happy.

We spent our evenings in the main square, dancing and falling into each other to the tune of cheerful mountain music. Colorful fairy lights played in Scarlett’s eyes and hair, making her look like a creature of dream and song. My heart was full, and sometimes, I still couldn’t believe she was mine.

When the old fears crept out of their hiding places, I asked her to make me crawl and beg so I could stop worrying and just be. Be with her.

Every night of the Yule, we had a sumptuous meal. Whatever festive cheer we had lost due to the curse, we made up for now. All the family gathered in the main house, and we ate and drank, laughing and singing. Scarlett fit right in, chatting with Ma and my sisters-in-law, playing with the children, and even serving human specialties.

She was still tense around my brothers and father, but that was going away, too.

Finally, the last night of Yule came, and my gift was ready. Or as ready as I could make it in the short time I had available. After dinner everyone got up, groaning and complaining about the end of the holidays while kids chatted excitedly, wondering what gifts Ole Frost brought them this year. Traditionally, he left the gifts in children’s bedrooms on the last night of Yule. I knew Ivo and Ruslan had snuck out during dinner, so I was certain the gifts were already waiting.

Adults usually didn’t give each other presents, but I really wanted to make an exception. It seemed fitting. After all, Scarlett was my own Yule miracle. It made sense to do this now.

I took her hand and led her out of the room.

“We’re going out, snowdrop. Put on your coat and boots.”

She gave me a surprised look but put on her coat without a fuss. “We’re coming back here, right?” she asked before tugging on her boots. When I didn’t answer immediately, she straightened and put her hands on her hips.

“We might not,” I said carefully, not wanting to spoil the surprise.

She narrowed her eyes and then grinned, catching the fur on my chin to drag my face down for a kiss. “In that case, I need to fetch something. Won’t be a minute.”

She jogged up the stairs and promptly came back, holding a black bag. She didn’t offer an explanation and I didn’t ask, too excited and anxious to focus on anything else other than my gift. Ole Frost, I really hoped she’d like it. As we walked down the path, snow crunching under our feet, I fretted. What if she found it lacking? Should I have waited until everything was perfect?

But before I could worry myself into a state, Scarlett clutched my hand, staring at the fairy lights in the windows of the second house down the street. “Jack... Is that...”

“Come on,” I said, my voice gruff. “You’ll see.”

She followed me, her quick breaths puffing out in the freezing air. Somewhere in the distance, a cat yowled, and we both flinched and then laughed. When I opened the gate, the hinges didn’t creak. I had oiled them earlier, and it was just one of many jobs I did around the house in secret.

It stood empty for decades, and even though we did periodic upkeep in the houses, a lot had to be done to make it fully habitable. I cleaned it of dust and washed the windows, swept the chimneys, brought in wood for the fireplaces. The piping worked fine, which was fortunate. No plumber would undertake repairs in the middle of winter.

“Is this...” Scarlett asked, staring at the front door, now decorated with a simple gold and blue wreath. The colors of her eyes and hair.

“Our house,” I said. “It still needs a lot of work. There’s little furniture, and I didn’t have time to...”

I couldn’t finish, because Scarlett tugged me down for a hot, happy kiss. Her warm mouth pressed to mine, her breath caressed my face, and she kissed me so deeply, my cock instantly perked up with interest.

The prospect of finally being truly alone with her helped, too.

“Jack, this is amazing! Your ma said it would take months before we could move. How did you manage it in such a short time?”

I rubbed my face in embarrassment. “You’ll see. It’s not finished but we can live here already.”

Then, before she could go up the porch steps, I swept her off her feet and grinned, carrying her to the door. “It’s tradition, snowdrop. I have to carry my wife inside our new house.”

She held on to my neck, the bag dangling from her fingers, and I stepped inside with her in my arms. It felt right, and she fit right in here. My beautiful new wife in my new home.

As soon as I set her down and Scarlett threw off her boots, all my worries were put to rest. She ran from room to room, exclaiming in awe, delighted by the big kitchen table I had recently refreshed. She opened and closed the built-in cabinets and sank her toes in a new, thick rug I had bought for the living room, grinning with delight.

“I love it,” she said after she explored the first floor, her eyes glittering with joy. “It’s perfect.”

“Let me show you the bedroom, then,” I said, my voice dropping low as anticipation surged. I wanted to fuck her in our new bed, away from prying ears. Just me and her.

“Oh yes,” she said, shooting me a saucy smirk. “I have something for you, too.”

She gripped the bag more tightly, and my stomach plummeted. Somehow, I already knew it was something sex-related. Was it a coil of rope she’d tie me up with? A gag so I couldn’t scream when she punished me? A bigger, rougher paddle?

“I can see you drooling already,” she said before sauntering upstairs, the bag swinging in her hand. “Come on, monster boy. You’re gonna love this.”

Chapter 28

Scarlett

The bed was enormous. Apart from it, there was nothing else in the bedroom, just a lit fireplace, a stack of wood, and the bed piled high with cozy blankets and pillows. The curtains were drawn and fairy lights were strewn on the floor, creating a romantic, magical ambience.

It was perfect.

Jack closed the door gently, his throat bobbing when I looked at him. He was nervous and aroused, and I wondered briefly if his cock would slide right out after he saw what I got for him.

“It’s new and I got it with the money you gave me for clothes,” I said, holding the bag out to him. “Not in town, though. Tatiana took me through the portal so we could shop discreetly. Well, go on. See what’s inside.”

Jack gave me a wary look and slowly opened the bag. For a moment, he just stood there, frozen. Then, a low sound broke free and he rushed to the bed, upending the bag in a hurry. When the pegging harness fell out, followed by a bottle of lube, his cock slid instantly free.

“Someone’s excited,” I murmured, coming closer so I could grip his tail at the base. “How do you like your gift, puppy?”

“It’s... You’re...” He turned to me, his eyes wide, lips parted. “It’s perfect.”

I rubbed the sensitive patch of skin under his tail, making him tense as his expression tightened with pleasure. “I’m glad you like it. Would you like me to use it tonight?”

He nodded eagerly, and it made me grin. “Are you sure, puppy? You want me to fuck your ass?” I murmured, pressing my fingers into the base of his tail. Jack whimpered from the sensation, and I kneaded his skin slowly, knowing that kind of touch drove him crazy.

“Y-yes,” he got out, arching his hips.

I let my fingers trail down his ass crack, my touch featherlight. Jack instantly tensed, his body seizing up when I traced the shape of his hole. “Here?” I asked innocently, my own arousal growing hot and restless.

“H-here,” he confirmed, arching his hips even more to put his ass on display. His tail lashed wildly, and I caught it before it could swat my face.

“Have you played with yourself here before, puppy?” I asked, gently circling his hole with the tip of my finger. It pulsed under my touch, tightening and releasing convulsively.

“Y-yes,” Jack stammered, his tail trembling in my hand. “J-just with my fingers.”

“Mmm. Let’s see, then.”

I lifted his tail higher, baring his hole to me completely. It looked so tight, and I doubted the dildo would even fit in there, but then I remembered that porn mag. That scene was so detailed, all the steps clearly shown. So yes, it would fit. Just needed some greasing.

“On the floor. Hands and knees,” I said, reaching for the lube.

Jack obeyed at once, dropping so fast, his knees thudded against the bare floor. He winced, and I tsked. “Don’t hurt yourself, furball. I want to play with you some more. Here.”

I threw two pillows on the floor, and he put them under his knees, getting comfortable. I knelt behind him, grabbing his tail again. It flicked anxiously, unable to be still, and that made me hiss with annoyance. I didn’t want to keep holding it.

Which meant I had to tie it up. I took a festive, gold ribbon my braid was tied with and knotted it quickly around Jack’s tail, securing it to a sturdy bed leg. “Don’t tear it free,” I said when his tail twitched violently. “It stays like that.”

“Yes,” Jack moaned. I rewarded him with a slow, loose stroke up his cock, squeezing his knot tightly when I got back to it. Jack’s hips bucked, his tail trying to lash, and I couldn’t hold back a pleased grin. He was such a mess already, and I’d barely touched him.

“Such a good monster boy,” I praised him, slicking my fingers with the lube.

He flinched when I let the bottle roll out of hand. With my dry hand, I cupped his round, firm buttock and dug my fingers in, scratching his skin. His fur was shiny here after I’d brushed it out the day before.

“Do you want me to put my fingers up your ass, puppy?” I asked, scratching slowly.

Jack moaned and arched his hips, his tail twitching helplessly. “Y-yes.”

“Good.” I brought my slippery hand to his hole and circled it gently, loosening him up until he released a shaky breath, his muscles yielding. I was careful when I slid the first finger in, and yet Jack made a loud, choked up sound, making me freeze.

“You all right, darling?” I asked.

“P-perfect,” he said at once. “Please. Keep moving.”

I moved the finger slowly, in and out, until he loosened with a loud sigh, and I added a second finger. Soon, Jack moaned and moved his hips back and forth to match the easy rhythm. “Breathe, puppy,” I murmured, carefully sliding in the third finger.

That wrung a deep, desperate moan out of him. His cock jabbed the air as Jack thrust back, the slick length hard and dripping precum onto the floor.

I was really glad about the lack of carpet in the bedroom.

“There you go,” I said, my pussy clenching with arousal when I saw how helplessly turned on he was. “Such a good monster boy.”

Jack thrust back with a loud moan, his cock bucking. I pushed my fingers deep, stretching him, and reached around with effort. I grabbed his cock and stroked slowly, making him shudder with pleasure. His tail tugged and squirmed, but even though he could easily free it, Jack obeyed my order. The tail stayed where it was, tied to the bed leg.

“Look at you,” I said, squirming when I felt how hard he was.
“Such a mess. I love you like this.”

I pulled my fingers out and wiped my hand to quickly shed my clothes. Jack trembled, watching me with glassy, wide open eyes. I had practiced putting the harness on and adjusted the straps to fit me, so I had it on in a blink.

He groaned when he saw me, his cock leaking profusely, but I wasn't going to fuck him just yet.

“Why don't you make it wet for me,” I said, standing in front of him. “Sit back puppy, and suck.”

Chapter 29

Jack

She looked glorious. With her golden hair loose and tumbling down her back and shoulders, her rosy nipples tight, her face dark with lust. The harness sat snugly on her hips, black straps stark against her naked skin. My throat tightened at the sight of the hard, black length bobbing between her legs. It was everything I'd ever wanted, and she gave it to me as a gift. She truly was a goddess.

I sat on my heels, my relaxed asshole clenching pleasantly, warm and wet from her touch. Even though Scarlett stood and I knelt, I had to bend my head to lick the stiff length between her legs. It was cold and tasted of nothing, but I still moaned as I sucked on it, knowing she would fuck me with it.

She sighed like my mouth actually gave her pleasure and grabbed the back of my head. The dildo grew warm in my mouth, and soon, Scarlett rocked her hips, gently pushing it deeper in. When she went in too deep and I choked, she pulled back, stroking my head.

“All right, darling?”

I nodded, opening my mouth eagerly. She smiled. “Good puppy. Just like this. You please me very much.”

I moaned around the hard length she fed me, my tail trying to thump in pleasure. Before it could slide out of the ribbon, I forced it to calm down, my heart speeding up as my mouth watered, full of Scarlett's cock.

Gods. This was already so much better than my wildest fantasies.

She pulled back and leaned lower to kiss me. I moaned into her mouth as she thrust her tongue in, confident and demanding. She took the lead, taking more and more, and I could only kiss her back, my entire body shaking. My cock was so hard, it felt like the smallest touch would set me off, and the anticipation made my balls throb.

She'd fuck my ass. Soon.

"Very good, puppy. You feel so good," she said, pulling back. Her face was flushed, eyes dark with want. "Will you be a good monster boy and take this cock up your ass?"

I nodded instantly, a shaky purr pouring out of my chest. My body was in overdrive, all my senses sharpened to the point of oversensitivity. I couldn't wait.

"Good," she said, walking around me. "You'll get it all, puppy. Every inch."

"Icy gales," I muttered in awe as she stopped behind my back and I heard the sound of the lube bottle opening. "Can you... Will you be able to reach?"

Scarlett hummed without answering. She sauntered over to the pile of wood, picked out a low, wide stump, and brought it back to put behind me. I bit my lip, already planning to make a set of special furniture we would use to work around our height differences. They would be padded, so she wouldn't hurt her knees, and...

Something wet touched my asshole, and I moaned, forgetting what I was thinking about.

"How's this, puppy?" she asked, her voice low and throaty. "Ready to let me in?"

I bore down, Scarlett pushed, and a moment later, the tip of her cock slipped inside me. I gulped a deep breath, the sting making me tense up. She stopped moving, her hands settling on my hips as my tail desperately twitched.

"Are you all right?" she asked softly.

I nodded instantly, the sting already fading. "Please. Deeper. All the way in."

She gave a low, pleased laugh and slowly pushed deeper, filling me until I whimpered. "All good?"

"Yes," I hissed desperately. "Please. Fuck me. Please."

Scarlett chuckled, the sound so confident and sexy, it made my nape prickle pleasantly. Gods, she was made for this. She

owned me with her every word, every gesture, and it was as terrifying as it was sublime. She could do anything to me. Anything. And I would love it.

“Such a wanton furball,” she murmured, gripping my hips tightly.

I choked on my next breath as she pulled back and slammed in. My asshole clenched around the slippery intrusion, the base of my tail tingling with pleasure, my cock throbbing. After a few slow, exploratory thrusts, Scarlett found her rhythm and pounded into me, soft grunts of effort leaving her lips.

Soon, I pushed back against her, moaning loud. We were alone in the house, and I let loose, making sounds I’d never dared to make until she laughed breathlessly, egging me on.

“You sound so good,” she gasped. “Such a good puppy, loving this cock up his ass. You’re taking it so well. Such a good boy.”

I arched my hips higher, my cock pulsing hard, and Scarlett leaned into me with a low snarl. The dildo hit something deep inside me, a spot that throbbed with intense pleasure, and I shouted from the impact. “Like this! Please!”

She moaned in response and fucked me at that angle, making my asshole clench desperately, my balls swelling with my impending orgasm. I kept moaning and then sobbed when she grabbed the base of my tail, not gently at all, and squeezed it rhythmically in her fist.

I shook so hard, it was a miracle I didn’t collapse. But everything inside me was so hard with tension, clenched tight, and I couldn’t... I couldn’t...

“Come for me, darling. I want you to come all over the floor. Be a good boy, Jack.”

That did it. My cock and knot swelled, my insides grew hot, that spot in my ass bursting with tender bliss. Cum shot out of me, painting the floor in wild streaks as Scarlett kept pounding into me with abandon. It took a long time for my cock to stop shooting, and the moment it did, I cried with oversensitivity, my asshole clenching so tight, the thrusting dildo felt wildly

unpleasant even as it kept teasing that delightful spot deep within.

Scarlett stopped moving, breathing hard, and then gently withdrew. I huffed out a hard breath, my muscles clenching over sudden emptiness. Moments later, she untied my tail, and it swished lazily, all tightness gone out of my body.

“Sit up, puppy. You’re shaking like a leaf.”

I sat on my heels and she came to kneel in front of me. She had taken off the harness, her body naked and gorgeous. Whatever she saw in my face made her smile as she reached up to stroke my cheek. I nuzzled into her palm, and she laughed softly.

“So? Liked your gift?”

“Yes. May I please make you come, too?” I asked, looking at her pleadingly.

Scarlett’s expression turned thoughtful. “Hm, I don’t know...”

“Please!” I begged desperately. “I want to show you how much I love this. How much I love you. Please, let me touch you.”

She stilled, looking at me with hooded eyes, and for a moment, the only sound in the bedroom was the crackling of fire.

“I love you, too,” she said softly after a while. “And of course you can touch me.”

My heart grew big and tight with affection. I took her in my arms, cradling her to myself, my tail wrapped tightly around her waist. I knew I loved her and she loved me, but until she said it, I didn’t realize how important it was to hear those words.

I laid her down on the bed and worshiped her with my tongue, fingers and tail. I took my time, playing with her slowly, her taste feeding my addiction. Her scent was all over my face and nose, and I drank her in, deeper and deeper, until she cried out and came, drenching me in wetness.

We fell asleep in our new home, the crackling of fire lulling us. My wife was in my arms, and all I could think about was how thankful I was.

I'd be grateful for the rest of my life that she hadn't let me walk away. She got me to marry her, and it was the best decision of my life.

Epilogue

Jack

“Ma, will you tell me about the goats?”

Mother looked up from the mountain of potatoes she was peeling, her hands skillfully working even as she regarded me with a wide smile.

“The goats, eh? Is your father in the house?”

I narrowed my eyes at her before answering slowly. “No, he’s out drinking with old Sloane. Why do you ask?”

She threw the last potato in a basin of cold water and washed her hands under the sink. “Because if he hears me telling you, he will mope for days, and I can’t have it.”

I gaped at her incredulously as she turned to me, wiping her hands on her apron. “So that’s why you never tell us about Dad’s mistakes? Because he *mopes*?”

She harrumphed, wagging her finger at me. “You wouldn’t be so shocked if you knew what his moping looks like. He walks around with this wounded expression and barely says a word for weeks. No, no, my boy. I can’t stand it. And I did tell you about the goats, I’m sure. Or was that Ivo?”

I groaned, shaking my head, though I couldn’t really be angry with her. My mother had raised me and my brothers while having to manage my father, as it turned out. And, as Scarlett said, no one was infallible.

“You never told me. Can’t you tell your sons apart?” I asked her, pretending to be seriously cross.

She folded her arms on her chest, looking uncomfortable. “I’m sorry, Jack. When you have your own children and they start growing up, you will understand.”

“Good thing we’ll only have one, then,” I said calmly. “But not for another five years or so.”

Mother's hands dropped to her sides and she gaped at me, completely dumbstruck. "Only... one? And only in... five years? Are you both *crazy*?"

I grinned, waving my hand nonchalantly. "You have six other grandchildren, Ma. Leave us alone. Now, will you tell me about the goats?"

She grunted, giving me a hard look that said this discussion wasn't over. I gave her an innocent smile, already gearing up to deflect when she started pestering us. I would be nice but firm at first, but if she didn't leave up, I was ready to get mean.

Meaning, I would explain to my mother that my and Scarlett's sex life was so unique, it gave very low chances of getting her pregnant.

For now, though, Ma seemed to know what was good for her, because she dropped the subject of grandkids and got to the point.

"So, the goats. When me and your father got married, we got big money gifts from both our families. Your father wanted to invest in a business that would be profitable and set us up for a comfortable life. For some reason, he decided goats were the answer."

I grabbed a beer and sat down, knowing this was going to be good. Ma sighed and put a platter of cookies on the table, nudging it in my direction.

"He bought a big herd from a family living on the other side of the mountain. Your dad put up a fence around the meadow that's just outside of town. He was impatient. He got the owners to herd the goats here before making any other preparations."

She stopped and nibbled on a cookie, settling into the story. I knew Mother took breaks before the important bits so I waited patiently, curiosity gnawing at me.

"When Trudy and Gerta arrived here with the herd and saw the fence your father set up, they laughed so hard, they actually dropped to their knees right there on the grass."

Mother's tail flicked as she grinned, her eyes growing unfocused, probably lost in memories.

"Why did they laugh?" I asked, taking a sip of my beer.

"Because those were good, healthy mountain goats that could jump as high as a Frost man. And your Pa built a fence that would barely hold in a feeble sheep."

"Oh." Well, yes, that was a mistake. "But couldn't they take the goats back so he could rebuild the fence?"

Ma cackled with glee, her tail swishing excitedly. "That would have been the smart solution, yes. One I advised and insisted on. But your father badly wanted to prove something. So he told them to leave the goats and led them through the gate. Before Trudy and Gerta were gone, the goats were already hopping over the fence. It was magnificent."

She chuckled under her breath, and I shook my head. "So, Dad still didn't want them to take the goats back?"

"No." She grinned, showing off her sharp teeth. "We spent the next week chasing after the damn things. They were all over town, eating laundry off the lines, walking around the main square, sometimes barging into people's homes. By the time your dad put up a higher fence, only two goats were left. And I was so sick of them, I told him to just sell them."

I was lost for words. So my father, with his plethora of lectures, tips, and loads of good advice, had done something so stupid? And wouldn't even own up to it?

"He lost all your money, then?" I asked incredulously.

Mother huffed and got up to finish dinner. "Of course not! I put my half away as soon as he started talking about the goat investment. We invested it into the woodworking workshop. My father was a carpenter, and your dad had apprenticed with him. He had good skills and only got better with time. We did really well."

I shook my head and drained my beer. "Well. So Scarlett was right."

Ma snorted and turned to me. “You listen to that girl, son. She’s got a good head on the feeble neck of hers. You really had a stroke of luck, getting a wife like that.”

I grinned and got up to kiss her cheek. “In that, you’re right, Ma. Thanks for telling me about the goats.”

She sniffed imperiously and fixed me with a hard stare. “You can repay me by getting me a grandkid as soon as...”

“Goodbye, Ma,” I said, backing out of the kitchen. “We’ll see you at dinner!”

I went back to my carpentry shop, where I was working on a special set of furniture. It would stay in our bedroom and wouldn’t help with making any grandkids, that was for sure. After all, my wife would use it to fuck me, not the other way around.

THE END

Afterword

Thank you so much for reading *Wed to Jack Frost*! It was my longest addition to the series, but I couldn't cut it short without sacrificing Scarlett's and Jack's character arcs. I hope it was a satisfying read!

Also, can I just say how I love my power bottoms and inexperienced dommes? I think it's becoming pretty obvious that straightforward dom/sub dynamics are no longer my jam. I love exploring the power plays and all the ways two (or more) characters come together and interact to create something more than just the sum of their parts.

The Yule Lads' Parade is actually a Christmas tradition that takes place in Iceland, but I imagine the Icelandic lads are far less mischievous than the ones described in this book. I'm also pretty sure they've never cursed anyone with cats, though I might be wrong.

If you want more *Arranged Monster Mates* in your life, there are 12 books out in the series already, with two more in this special Christmas round: *Wed to the Dark Elf* by Eden Ember and *Wed to Krampus* by Cara Wylde.

More books are coming in 2024, so keep scrolling to see what else we have in store for you!

Free Monster Romance

Visit my website www.laylafae.com to download a free monster romance novel and other free stories.

Books In This Series

Arranged Monster Mates

Wed to the Basilisk by Layla Fae

No one touches my bride. No one but me.

I am the last basilisk on Alia Terra. As I roam my lands, loneliness muddles my mind and pumps violence into my veins until I don't recognize myself. Soon I'll become a feral beast – unless I mate.

The matchmaking temple is the only way a creature like me, scaly, fanged, and with lethal eyes, can marry. Soon, I have a match. My temple bride is everything I dream of: sweet, resolute, her delicious scent calming my rage with the first inhale.

It seems like it will work out until a human male barges in the temple, grabs my bride so hard she cries out, and tries to drag her away. My fury burns too hot to control. I unleash my lethal sight, killing him on the spot.

My bride is terrified, cringing away from me. Will she ever trust me again after this?

Wed to the Lich by Layla Fae

Every living thing is repelled by my corpse-like body... but not my wife.

Liches are almost gone, only a handful of us left. I must marry to keep my race from extinction, yet how? No living female will ever stoop so low as to marry a lich. People fear us. They say we are the harbingers of death, bad luck, rot and decomposition.

In one last bid to carry out my duty, I request a wife through the Temple. She turns out to be a neglected, sickly thing with trembling hands and downcast eyes, seeking an arranged marriage out of despair.

And she's perfect. Her blushes burn hot, her voice rings with feeling, and her kisses taste like summer. She is life personified, all warmth, light, and sweetness, and I crave her like darkness craves the sun.

But will she sacrifice her warm, beating heart to a creature of death like me?

Wed to the Dark Elf by Eden Ember

In a world ruled by monsters and divided by factions, a single DNA match could change the fate of Alia Terra forever. "Wed to the Dark Elf" plunges you into the life-altering journey of Iris Flemming, a human orphan, and Vamen Blak, a formidable dark elf warrior. Thrusted together by tradition but bound by an inexplicable connection, they must navigate political unrest, brewing revolution, and their own conflicting emotions. Will their love be the catalyst for unity or the spark that sets their worlds ablaze? Prepare for a tale of love, war, and transformation that will leave you questioning where your loyalties lie.

Wed to Krampus by Cara Wylde

Is there anyone for me? Or am I meant to live and die alone?

Krampus. It could be my name, or it could be what my species is called. I don't know. During The Shift, something happened, and I lost my memory. I don't know where I come from; all I know is there's no one like me on Alia Terra. I am unique.

Uniquely monstrous. I am hard to look at.

I don't know how old I am, either. Old, for sure, but I feel young. Young enough that I have warmth and love to offer, if only I could find someone to accept me as I am. My only option is the Temple, but even as I let them draw my blood for the DNA test, I have no hope they'll find a match for me.

Against all odds, they do. And she is beautiful, perfect, so

sweet, and... horrified when she sees me.

My bride cannot look at my face. How will she see what's in my heart?

Books By This Author

SATAN: A Christmas Monster Romance

It's Christmas Eve and SATAN is here.

Yup, you read that right. And I can't spell, so now, I need to deal with Satan, who has been getting the letters I've been writing to Santa for over 20 years. The sexy devil is here in all his wicked, sinful glory, standing right under the mistletoe. Because apparently not only am I dyslexic... I am also on HIS naughty list.

You see, I've never been good, but there was that ONE SIN I've never committed. Yes, I've been saving my cherry for Mr. Right, and Satan is not pleased. He wants to corrupt me. Tempt me. Seduce me. He wants to make me sin repeatedly, in more ways than one. With him.

And while his rod is no candy cane, I might just give in to temptation.

Because tonight, Satan tastes like Christmas.

Mr. JINGLE: A Christmas Monster Romance

The faint jingling of bells is the only warning she'll get when he comes.

Mr. Jingle has been trapped for millennia, his only entertainment the faces flashing outside his prison, all as indifferent as snowflakes, all as cold.

Until her.

She captivates him. Her smile is as glorious as her tears. There has never been a more beautiful face, a more radiant personality, a more mesmerizing voice. She doesn't know he watches, so she lets him see everything. Her naked body. Her unguarded soul.

And he burns with passion. He's been trapped forever, cold and unused to affection, but for the beautiful woman who

shines like his sun, he will break the walls of his prison. Come Christmas Eve he'll break out and claim her. Because even if she does not know him, he knows her... And all her darkest desires.

Guarded by the Snake

She stole her way into my cold, serpent heart like a thief in the night.

The tiny human hires me to shield her from the vengeance of a powerful organization. There's nothing wrong with that, except she stole from them, got caught, and now I have to deal with it. Flaky creatures like her, who won't clean up their own messes, will be the death of me. Add to that her incessant chatter, and I'm in for the most unpleasant job in my career.

Until her enemies bring out the big guns, turning the annoying protection assignment into a lethal fight for survival. To complicate things further, something sparks between me and my principal. In a moment of weakness, I let her kiss me, and then neither of us can stop. When bullets rain over our heads, all I can feel is terror for her life.

She is mine and I'll do anything to keep her. Even if I have to set the world ablaze.

Falling for Mr. Hyde

I have one task: assassinate headmaster Hyde. Instead, I surrender to his cruel punishment... and beg for more.

When the Magic Council threatens to deport me, I must agree to their demand I kill Mr. Hyde, Headmaster of Luxior Academy. I am the least qualified shapeshifter for the job. I've never killed so much as a spider.

Hyde is a devious opponent, and he has a powerful, terrifying monster on his side.

Suspicious from the start, they force me to shed my disguise, stripping away my only advantage. We hunt each other, and the deadly dance soon becomes a sensuous play of power and

seduction.

As Hyde tries to uncover my secrets, his skillful hands prying at my hidden places, I search for his weak spots. It is my fatal mistake. Instead of weaknesses to exploit, I find a man who is devoted, passionate, and as hard as steel. I don't want to kill him.

No, I'd rather kiss him. Kneel for him. Surrender to anything he - or his monster - commands. I could even be tempted to risk my life to save them.

The stakes are high, and even though I'm in over my head, I need to play dirty to win this game. The problem is, headmaster Hyde wrote its rulebook.

Devil's Deal: A Dark Fantasy Romance

The devil craves my soul. It calls to him like the scent of fresh blood.

I am not afraid.

The night of summer solstice, I do something stupid. Drawn to the power and fire of magic, I dance with the gods. I am too insignificant to merit their attention.

But someone else is dancing, too. His fiery eyes burn into me as black paws circle my waist, turning me to the sound of hoofbeats. For one night, and one night only, I let him touch me.

When it's morning and gods return to their shrines, he stays. His menacing shadow follows me, a dark cloak hiding me from the sun and the light of hope. Where I walk, flowers wither and children sicken, touched by his suffocating darkness.

The more I chase him away, the more he enshrouds me in his dark, powerful presence, whispering words of seduction in my ear.

He has something I badly need, but his price is too high. I can't take the devil's deal.