

MORGAN ROBINSON

HIS
HUMAN
TO

adore

His Human to Adore

Morgan Robinson

Copyright © 2023 by Morgan Robinson

All rights reserved.

No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from the publisher or author, except as permitted by U.S. copyright law.

Contents

Content & Trigger Warnings

1. A12-04
2. Dath
3. Deja
4. Deja
5. Dath
6. Deja
7. Dath
8. Deja
9. Dath
10. Deja
11. Dath

12. Dath

13. Deja

14. Deja

15. Dath

16. Dath

17. Deja

18. Deja

19. Dath

Author's Note

About the Author

Content & Trigger Warnings

This is a pretty light, fluffy read, but I want to list anything that could be triggering, just in case. If you have no triggers, feel free to skip.

- FMC is forced to live in an unknown world to breed with the males there.
- Talk of parental death.
- Child endangerment about MMC in the past.
- Pocket and textured monster genitals.
- The males on the planet have pheromones that draw in their mates.

A12-04

Two hours and forty-seven minutes left until I'm forced from Earth and sent to another world. I'm scared, but I should be terrified, right? I shouldn't be excited to explore a whole other world. Especially not when I'm being sent to have some weird alien-human-hybrid babies.

I can't help the slight hope growing in my chest, though. It's almost like I'll be happy even though it's a messed up situation. Or at least I'll make my own happiness. Maybe find some happiness? I don't know exactly, but I know I'm more excited to go than not.

Soon, the Hands will come find me. They're the aliens that came to save what was left of the human population on Earth after we may or may not have let the world fall into an actual world-ending calamity that we never even bothered to try to fix. The Hands ushered all the women in New York City into a baseball stadium in the Bronx. All the women willing to follow orders from a species that came out of the sky without warning found shelter there. I don't really know what happened to the others, but I'm not sure I want to know either.

The Hands have kept us fed, housed, and healthy for the last two years, and now, in payment, I'm getting sent off the planet. If someone had asked me a couple of months ago if I was excited, I would have been crying hysterically about it and complaining incessantly about how unfair it all was. Now? I'm ready to leave Earth and start a new life. Simone and Nia are the only things holding me back, but they'll be sent not too long after me.

The last woman the Hands sent off was picked up two hours before they sent her to get prepared to leave Earth. So, I assume I have less than forty-seven minutes until I'm being sent to live amongst actual aliens. Less than forty-seven minutes until I'm sent to procreate with an alien species because humans are going extinct, and so is their kind. Less than forty-seven minutes until...

Less than forty-six minutes, and I'm forcing myself not to think about what's about to happen. These are my last few minutes with Nia and Simone until we meet again on whatever the new planet we're being sent to is called. They're what's important right now. Not daydreaming about what my alien might look like. And yes, my alien, because I'll be damned if I get sent to a new world and don't at least get a commitment out of it.

"Where's Simone with the snacks?" I ask Nia as she snags another of my braids and snips at it. "She said she'd be back before they came to get me, but at this rate, I'm going to leave Earth without having some chips."

"Well, I'll just eat enough for all of us." Nia laughs as she throws the braid on the floor and starts to unbraid the remnants from my natural hair.

A little earlier, one of the Hands stopped by to tell me that my braids couldn't be sent through the portal that would take me to the new world. Apparently, anything that doesn't naturally grow from me isn't allowed to go through.

Simone threw a fit at the Hand before stomping out of our room, saying she'd be back with snacks. Nia and I tried to tell her we didn't need any snacks, but we both knew she was off to talk to her mysterious boyfriend, alienfriend?

Simone's been talking with one of the Hands that presents as a human man. We don't know which one, how long they've been talking, or how serious they are about one another, but we know she's not being honest with us when she talks about where she disappears in the evenings. Why she even talks to any of them is beyond me, but I stopped asking about it after she begged me to drop it months ago.

Nia is helping me get all the braids out of my hair. Simone braided the extensions not even a week ago, which means we wasted our time, and the pain wasn't even worth it. I'm tender-headed to the extreme, and I hate the maintenance that comes with my hair. Simone convinced me that the pain of braiding my short hair would be worth it to keep maintenance lower until she was there to bug me and remind me to take care of my tight curls.

"Oil your hair, Deja."

"Use this new leave-in conditioner I convinced a Hand to find for us."

"If you use that brush on your hair, I'll shave your head myself."

Simone cares more about me taking care of the tight curls I have been attempting to tame since I was twelve than I do. If I had my way, she'd make good on the threat to shave my head. I bet I'd look great with no hair. Well, maybe not great since it'll probably be something a bit dramatic, but I'll feel great.

I didn't have the heart to ask her to shave my head when she came to me with extensions to braid into my hair, so I never voiced it. What she didn't consider, or what the Hand she's talking to didn't tell her about, was that I'm

not allowed a protective hairstyle, and my natural hair isn't long enough to start dreads. Hell, it's barely long enough to keep these braids in, but we thought it would be better than going all natural.

"Just shave my head," I pout as Nia works on snipping another braid short enough that she doesn't have to do as much work to unbraid the rest. We've been going at this for twenty minutes already and aren't even a quarter of the way done. "We both know I'm not about to take good care of my hair until Simone joins me, so let's just shave it and call it a day."

"Seriously?" She shakes her head, knowing that Simone is going to lose her shit if she comes back and sees me with a bald head. That's why we need to do it now before she can come back and talk me out of it. She'll be able to, too. She always knows exactly what to say about how beautiful my hair is if I take care of it. I think about that, and I forget about how much I hate taking care of it for long enough that the urge to shave it off goes away. Then, I regret not just shaving my head, and the cycle continues.

"We've known each other for two years now." I grab the scissors out of her hands and toss them on the bed next to me. "In that time, how much have I given a shit about my hair?"

"You need to care about it now," Nia warns me. It's easy for her to say when she's got soft and easy curls compared to the tightly coiled mess that happens to mine if I don't take the time to treat it right. Not that I hate my hair, I just hate the work, and I think that's fair. "Simone is going to murder you if you shave your head."

"Nah," I laugh as I click the buzzer on and start running it across my hair. It snags on the braids that I definitely should have cut off before attempting this, but after a few passes in the same spot, I'm left with a nice, smoothish spot on my head and a handful of hair that someone else can use if they want.

I won't be able to take it with me, so maybe someone else here can use it for their own braids or something. "If she kills me, I won't be there to keep her company when we're thwarting the advances of alien men left and right."

"Hey, I've heard through the rumor mill that we all apparently love alien dick. Maybe you won't be thwarting all their advances," Nia laughs as she tells me the latest nonsense that's being spread about us.

How the other women in the stadium can even think any of us are that willing to be sent to a new planet to be bred is beyond me, but here they are, gossiping about how much we all like alien genitals. It might be funny if I wasn't so annoyed about how I'm going to be remembered when I leave. Not that I'm not excited to go, but I don't need any of them knowing that because it only adds fuel to whatever bullshit narrative they've decided to spew.

The whole world goes to shit, and twenty-three of us are forced to go to another planet to breed with a species of alien so the human race and this other race can live? All in exchange for the safety and comfort of all the women we're leaving in the baseball stadium. You'd think we'd be treated like saints or martyrs, but no. The Hands have enacted the rationing of medical supplies, food, and other things. All of which those in unit A12, the breeding unit, can still access if they have any need or desire.

"They've only sent three so far. How could they possibly already be making up such bullshit?" I ask as I run the buzzer over a new section of hair.

"Well," Nia's eyes dart back and forth before she moves the fabric that works as a partition to my room. "You've heard the rumors about Simone, right?"

"Nia." I give her a pointed look. "We both know she's out there flirting with him right now. That barely counts as a rumor."

Nia throws her head back with a cackle. Her soft curls puff up around her as she falls back on the bed. I wonder for a moment if she's going to keep them as healthy and nice-looking once we're on the other planet. Will they even have anything she'll need? The thoughts make me feel better about going completely bald.

“Okay, if that's one, what are some others?” I want to know what the other rumors are because I know I'm a part of those. Yeah, I shouldn't care about what other people are saying about me, but it's hard not to care when it's literal gossip about me from women I'm sacrificing my body for so they can live comfortably on Earth once I'm gone.

“You mean besides A12-03 practically running through the stadium when it was her turn to go so she could get there faster?” Nia gives me a knowing look, and I nod in agreement with that. A12-03 was practically counting down the minutes until she went to the new world. “Or there's the fact that A12-22 and A12-14 have been having those weird dreams that we can all hear.”

My face flushes at the reminder of the sounds we may have woken up to on a few occasions. Nia doesn't say it, but those same sounds have been coming from my room, too. “The Hands have been messing with our pheromones,” I tell her. “Something about trying to determine mates and whatnot, so it's easier to acclimate to our new home.”

“Yeah,” Nia waves away my explanation. “Simone told us both all of that, but it doesn't explain why you three are the ones getting all weirdly sexual in your dreams and no one else is. It makes the other women think you're aching for some alien tentacles.”

I frown at her words and feel the back of my head to see if I've missed any hair. “First, we both know they don't have tentacles.”

Simone asked someone, the Hand she has been secretly seeing, to give us a descriptor of the aliens we're being sent to. Each woman is supposed to be told about it before we leave Earth, but we may have wanted to know before then. I already know they're reptilian-like, with red scales and horns. They're supposed to be giant, but I don't know if that means a really tall human or an actual fairytale twenty-foot behemoth. I'm really hoping for a normalish-sized man, considering all of him is probably scaled up.

"Second, will you get the rest of my head?" I hand her the hair clippers and wait for her to clean up the last little bits of hair I can't seem to get.

"What did you do?" Simone enters my room as soon as we set the clippers down and are all done with my hair. She has a bag of hot chips and a bag of sour cream and onion chips. I reach out for the hot chips, but she keeps them away from me with a look of horror on her face. "Deja, no."

"Simone, yes," I laugh as she continues to stare at my head. "I have eighteen minutes left before they come to get me. Give me the damn hot chips."

Simone narrows her eyes on me but reluctantly hands them over. I open them quickly and start funneling the tasty treat into my mouth for the last time. I know Simone must have done some weird stuff to get us our junk food since the Hands have told us they're no longer available, but I'm so grateful for it. Plus, she doesn't look like she's just had to sleep with a weird, almost human, so maybe she doesn't even have to do that for all of her information and snacks. Maybe she really is just playing with one of the Hand's emotions, if they have any, to get what she needs.

"When I get there, I'm giving you dreads, and you're going to deal with it." Simone gives me a pointed look that tells me I should try to fight her on it. When I just nod along and chew on the hot chips, she keeps talking. "They

have oils there we can use on our hair. I don't know about soaps. I think the other humans have been just washing it with water, which means we're about to all be greasy."

"What else?" I ask.

I love hearing Simone talk about what life has been like on the other planet for the three women who have gone before me. Somehow, she always has new things to tell us, like how humans can scent their mates on these aliens, how there's about to be terrible storms that hit that the Hands didn't even know about, and she's been keeping us up to date on if any of the women are pregnant yet. They aren't, but it's been interesting to know that they're actively trying instead of completely opposed to the idea. It makes me feel better about not completely hating the idea of trying to find an alien for myself.

I thought I'd be repulsed, but knowing that there's some lizard alien man on that planet who wants to mate me, cherish me, love me. It's kind of exciting. None of the others have been hurt, and Simone makes it sound like they're all enjoying themselves there. Maybe I can find happiness there too.

"A12-04," A Hand calls my name as he opens the curtain to my room. "It's time for us to get you prepared for your exit."

My insides churn and my hands shake. I'm nervous about leaving Earth, about being implanted with a translation device, and about not being with any of my friends for a while. I'm even more worried that the Hand is here early. Not by much, but I still have at least ten minutes if I go by the same time as they took the last woman.

Simone will be with me in a month since she's A12-05, but that still means twenty-eight days without a friend.

I should be terrified about what I'm being sent to do. It has to be the weird

pheromone experiments the Hands have been doing on some of us that have me feeling calm and settled about meeting the new world's inhabitants. I'm not about to jump anyone's bones. I'm also not opposed to the idea. If someone told me this is how I'd feel about being sent to another planet not even four months ago, I'd have called them crazy.

"We must hurry," the Hand tells me as he looks down at his bare wrist. Another one of the human mannerisms that they do that's definitely wrong because they don't seem to get that human people look at their watches, not just their bare wrists. "A storm is approaching the tribe we are sending you, too. Normally, we would prepare you a meal and brief you on the creatures, but time is of the essence. Even the doctor will not be performing the usual exams."

"Why don't we just wait until the storm is over?"

I regret asking as soon as the words leave my mouth. I don't know why the thought of not being there breaks my heart slightly, but it does. Like I'm supposed to be there right now, and I need to get there as soon as possible.

The Hand, thankfully, doesn't give my question a second thought as he guides me through the halls of the stadium. Nia and Simone keep up with us, but once we reach the doors to the doctor's office, they're told they need to let me go.

"I'll see you soon," Simone says as she wraps an arm around my back and pulls me into a tight hug. "And I'm doing your hair, so don't keep shaving it all off when I'm not there."

"I don't know," I chuckle as I go to hug Nia. "Maybe I'll keep the bald look for a while. I haven't seen myself in a mirror, but I'm pretty sure I'm rocking it."

"Shut up!" Simone pushes my shoulder but then wraps me in another hug

before the Hand taps his foot, ready for us to move on from this part so he can ship me off the planet.

“Okay, okay,” I push away from Simone. “Make sure Nia gets taken care of when I’m gone. Heaven knows she needs someone to make sure she doesn’t do anything stupid.”

Nia shakes her head, giving me a crooked smile as she side-eyes Simone. “Yeah, I’m the one getting in way over my head.”

Simone slaps her arm, and then the two are waving and smiling goodbye to me. Maybe it should feel worse since I’m leaving my two best friends, but I know it won’t be forever. No, Simone will be with me in twenty-eight days, and Nia will be with us at some point. She’s A12-18, which means she’ll be sent during the eighteenth month if the Hands continue sending us in the same way.

I offer a small wave goodbye to them, and then the Hand pushes me into the doctor’s office so I can get my translator chip and move on to being sent off Earth.

“Sorry for the rush,” the doctor says as he wipes an antiseptic behind my ear and then plunges a needle deep into my head. I open my mouth to scream, but he covers my mouth with his hand. “Your friends will hear.”

He pushes the plunger down, and a jolt of pain sears through the left side of my head and down my spine. My body shakes and tremors, and then, just as fast, it’s over.

“Can you hear me, A12-04?” The doctor asks.

I nod my head, rubbing at the spot where he forced the needle in. My skin is still tender, but the pain is gone. “Yes, I can hear you.”

The doctor turns to the Hand who brought me here. “She’s ready to go.” He looks down at his bare wrist, causing me to frown at the motion. Do they

actually have something on their wrist, and they cover it with the weird human masks they wear? “You need to leave now.”

The Hand who brought me throws me over his shoulder and runs down a new hallway with me. I’m so shocked by being touched by a Hand in this way that I don’t even respond for half a minute, and at that point, we’re in another room filled with computers and scientific equipment. I’m about to start kicking when I’m placed in front of a metal archway.

“A12-04, we’re sorry for the rush and sorry for any questions you may have.” A new Hand speaks to me.

She holds up a pair of safety shears and begins to cut at my clothing as another Hand holds my arms in place. I don’t dare move. I can feel the power in the Hand who’s holding me, and I don’t want to know how much power they’ll use if I’m not compliant. They told me beforehand that my braids weren’t allowed, so I’m not surprised when clothing isn’t allowed either.

“Thank you for cooperating,” The Hand with the shears says as she pulls the last bit of clothing from my body. I cover myself as best as I can with my hands, but the aliens aren’t even looking at me. They’re all hyper-fixated on a map on one wall.

“Five-second window opening in five, four, three, two, one...”

The Hand that was holding me pushes me into the middle of the arch right as the countdown reaches one, and the archway opens in a bright white light that engulfs my entire being. I feel weightless for a moment, and then my vision goes dark.

I’m stumbling on a stone floor, trying to keep myself upright before giving up and sitting on the ground. I rub my eyes, trying to clear the darkness from my eyes. There’s talking all around me, making it obvious I’m not alone. No one seems to notice me, though.

I can feel it under my skin, a soft warmth and buzzing that sings to my heart and makes me gasp in wonder. It's what I would imagine a strong dose of dopamine would feel like if I could inject it straight into my brain because I'm stupidly happy. That feeling keeps me from freaking out, even though I can't see anything for a few moments.

My vision clears slightly, just enough for me to make out an enormous dark creature walking around a corner and locking its big black eyes on me. My eyes go wide as I take in what the world's inhabitants must look like. Tall, scaled, and horned, just like Simone had said.

I don't scream, even though I definitely should be screaming. Maybe it's the high of whatever is currently in my veins, or maybe it's because the creature looks just as scared as I am.

He snaps his palm over his eyes as his other hand thrusts a piece of fabric out to me. "Naked human! Kendra! Get over here. A sister is here, but she is naked, and I do not want to look at her."

A chair slides against the stone floor, and then a human, Kendra, I'm assuming, runs up to the lizard man and grabs the shirt from him. "Ignore him. Pretend he's not here, A12-04. You're safe. No one here will hurt you."

I grab the shirt from Kendra and pull it over my body to give myself some semblance of modesty. The thin material does nothing to conceal the shape of my breasts, and I doubt it's going to leave much of my lower half to the imagination, either. Something covering me is better than nothing covering me, though, so I don't complain.

I'm separated from the rest of the room by a wooden partition. I stare at it, wanting to know if there are more lizard men on the other side. Rationally, I know that, of course, there's more out there. What I'm most interested in is if my lizard man is out there.

The room has gone silent, and I'm sure it's because they're all waiting for me. The warmth underneath my skin starts to fade, a chord of it wrapping around my chest, tugging on me, begging me to follow wherever it's leading. Exhaustion, probably from being teleported through space, has me unable to move very much now that I'm surrounded by other humans and feeling so safe.

"A12-04." Another human woman comes around to the other side of the partition. "I'm Olivia, A12-01. Can you see?"

I nod my head, not trusting my voice to work correctly right now. Exhaustion, the high of the warmth, the ever-calling pull to follow the string that has somehow wrapped itself around my chest and is tugging me toward a deeper part of the building. Everything is too confusing, and I'm not aware enough to figure it all out. Am I this tired because of being teleported? That must be it.

"Good, good," Olivia kneels down beside me and offers me her hand. I give it to her, and she's cupping it between hers. "First, you're safe here."

"Nowhere safer." A third woman, who looks exactly like Kendra, comes to stand next to her. "We promise you. There's happiness here."

I nod again, not even needing their words of encouragement because I can feel the safety in my bones. I can feel the warmth of love and family in my veins somehow. Like I was always meant to be here. It's insane. Completely and totally nonsensical, but I'm home that much I know for certain.

"It takes a minute to adjust," Olivia says as a clap of thunder rattles the air around us. The sounds cause goosebumps to erupt on my skin, but no one else seems worried, so I try to calm myself down. "You don't need to see anyone else tonight if you don't want to."

I close my eyes slowly and then press against them, trying to push some

reasoning into my brain. My brain is lagging right now. When I go to open my eyes, my brain tells me we're lying down, and the vertigo has me swaying where I'm sitting. My eyes close again, this time refusing to open back up.

"Sleep, I think."

"Alright," I don't know which woman says it, but I feel two of them grabbing me underneath my shoulders, and they're helping me walk down a hallway. "You still with us, A12-04?"

"Deja," I murmur. I hate being called by the name the Hands gave us. "My name is Deja."

"Okay, thank you for telling me, Deja."

I'm shuffled around until I'm falling softly into a bed. Blankets are pushed away from me, and I'm grateful since the warmth of the world is already making me sweaty. They adjust my body on the bed until I'm in a comfortable position.

"Hey, Deja," Kendra starts speaking to me. I mumble a response that she must think is good enough to continue. "You're staying with my mates and me tonight. You're in your own bed, but we're in one across the room. The room you were going to get was taken by some assholes who stayed over here too late, and now the storms have them trapped here with us." As if to make her point, another rumble of thunder shakes the room.

"Okay," I think I say the word, but maybe it doesn't actually leave my mouth.

"She's good," Kendra says. "If she needs anything, we'll be right here. Erkoz and Xoth know to behave themselves until she knows them."

"Deja, if you need anything, you just say something, okay?"

"Mhm," I mumble and turn to my side, my hand bending underneath a

pillow as I try to let myself drift off to sleep to the sounds of a storm raging against the stone building I'm now apparently living in. The door opens as the other women leave, and then new people enter. I'm assuming it's the mates the woman was talking about. They say nothing, or if they do, I don't hear it. I'm too busy letting the rain lull me to sleep, and before I know it, I'm drifting off.

Dath

“**T**here are even more females in the tribe now. Another is coming soon, but I need to talk to you first.” I rub my horn, refusing to look where I know I should. I’m uncomfortable enough as it is, and to know what I am about to speak about only makes it worse. Not that talking about females should be considered wrong, because it is not. It is just that I have never talked about females with anyone.

“I have been spending time with Erkoz and Xoth’s mate. I know you probably would not like that, but it is nice to have a female care for me. We are just friends, though. She sits in my lap and talks with me like we have known each other since I was young. Sometimes, I put my hands on her, but never in a way that her mates would. And I never sleep with her in my bed, not since the one time I won that as my prize.” I screw my eyes closed, trying to forget about how when I woke that morning, I was so upset when she was no longer in my arms. Not because of her but because having a female in my arms had felt so nice.

“None of that is important.” I shake my head and try to get back on track.

“I have decided I will not survive if one of the human females does not choose me as her mate. I know what you’ll say. That I’m being irrational or ridiculous. I am not, though. I have felt the warmth of a female’s embrace and known the companionship that even one as a friend can bring. In my dreams, I have felt what it is like to care for and adore one of these humans, and I know there is one for me. I just have this awful, sinking feeling that I will not meet her for many, many days or that she may never come at all.”

The wind picks up around me, strange since it has been still all day. I cast my eyes up to the sky and see the clouds are still the soft shade of green that they normally are. The weather is nice. There is no reason for my stomach to be tightening and for worry to be curdling inside me, as it does when the storms come. The elders told us storms were coming early, but none of us truly believed it, even though we sealed all the windows, just in case.

“Are you upset with me?” I focus my attention back on who I’m talking to. “I have done my best to be an honorable male. To be kind and caring to my brothers and to the new humans. I do not think I deserve one of them, but I want one of them all the same. How can I not when I am plagued with the most amazing dreams? The goddess wouldn’t be showing me all of this warmth just to take it away. Surely not.”

The trees surrounding the tribe sway slightly, their enormous frames moving only the smallest amount, but their needled limbs shaking and dropping softened dead needles down to the lower branches and some falling against the grass.

I furrow my brows, silently cursing whatever has decided that now is the time for a storm to come. Yes, I can see it now. The clouds are darkening, taking on a grey appearance until they slowly morph into black clouds of rage and torrential downpours.

I sigh softly and sit in the grass, hoping to get my conversation over with quickly so I can retreat to my room. The new human is coming, but she will not want to see a brother who is afraid of the weather when it turns ugly. No, I am still like a babe in that regard, but I have my reasons, ones that the brothers don't even tease me about.

“Please, I am just here to get your blessing.” I bite my tongue softly to make the tears in my eyes feel more like they are from pain than the tightness in my chest. “I have kept the books you created for me. I have kept all the letters. I know you wished for me to find a female of our kind to mate with and to have many young to remember you by, but that is not the way my life is meant to go. I need to know you will not hate me for making this decision, that you will forgive me for not fulfilling your last wish.”

Light flashes in the clouds, slicing through them with a jolt of power that is deadly to us and wreaks havoc on our trees if it strikes. I clench my jaw closed, begging for this not to be the sign I am asking for. My hands are already starting to shake, my body tensing as I try to fight off the fear that will soon consume me.

“Mother, please...” My plea is cut off as a loud clap in the sky coats my spine in ice.

I understand what she is trying to say to me. No, of course, she is not happy with me wanting to mate with a human. I rub my chest as my teeth bite down against one another.

My breathing is ragged when I get to my feet, and I only hope I can get back to the great hall before I am left immobile because of the fright that will consume me soon. My movements are jerky and panicked. All the other males are probably inside, waiting for the arrival of the newest female, and I

cannot even be happy because of the fear and regret that is pulsing through my body.

I make it inside just as light zaps the grass right outside the great hall. No one notices me when I enter, but they also don't notice the portal open behind the partition. Ralleth has said something that has all of their attention for just a small moment as the white light appears and disappears much faster than it has for any of the other humans. I stumble toward it after seeing all the humans who are already here have not noticed that there is a new human joining us. She is probably scared and alone, much like I am. But no one notices her, just as no one notices me.

Erkoz rounds the corner of the hallway closest to the partition with a smile on his face that quickly turns into a frown when his eyes land on whoever is on the other side of the partition. He yells something, covering his eyes with his hands. My mind is too splintered in fear, disgust with myself for disappointing my mother, and curiosity at the new human. All of it makes me hate myself more.

I am the closest to Erkoz, so I am the one who grabs his arm and helps him back to the tables because he is still covering his eyes.

I don't look back at the partition. I can't. Not right now. No, right now, I need to go to my room and hide under my blankets like the scared young I still am deep in my soul. A young who fears the storms and needs his mother's permission to do anything. A young that needs her because he cannot do this on his own, but he must.

None of the brothers notice me stumbling past the tables toward the hall that leads to my room. They're all too focused on their own humans or on the new human about to make her appearance. The only one who looks at me is my friend.

Kendra is the only person who will not visit me and make sure I am okay because there is a new human here, and she wants to be respectful in case the new human is my mate. Her little furry brows bunch together, and her lips turn into a frown. I shake my head, hoping she understands I do not need anyone to check on me. She will still probably send her mates since she will not come on her own. I do not need to listen to Erkoz try to be funny or Xoth try to be positive about what it is I'm feeling. I just need to be alone.

The new human will still be here tomorrow, and I can see her then. I can also tell Kendra that I will take none of the human females as mates so I can continue to enjoy her company. There is nothing she needs to be respectful about because I cannot go against my mother's wishes. No, what kind of son am I if I ignore the only thing she truly wants for me? I ask her about it, and she brings this storm to silence any opposition to her I had. I will be a dutiful son. It is the only thing left I can do in this life.

My dreams do not come easy, which is for the best since they will be full of fear and terror. I lie, trembling in my bed as the sky claps and thunderous sounds rattle my bones. I do not cry. I have not cried from fright in long years, but that doesn't mean I don't feel the sting behind my eyes or the burn in my throat. No, that is only relieved when I am finally exhausted from being scared that my body physically cannot stay awake. My sleep is fitful, and I will wake the brothers plenty. I can only hope the storm drowns out the sounds of my cries in the night.

Deja

My body stirs awake as a scream splits the air right after a loud clap of thunder. For a moment, I forget where I am and what's happened to me. Hell, the first thing I freak out about is how bare my head is since my arm is propped against it. The memories of how I ended up in the bed come back to me quickly, and I steady my worry before it can turn into full-blown panic.

“Go to sleep, human,” a man's voice calls out in the darkness. Again, I try not to let it freak me out too bad since Kendra said she was sleeping in this room with her mates. Still, I can't see anything, and a masculine voice that has a lisp when he says a word with an S is freaking me out because it's reminding me I'm stuck on a new planet with lizard men. “Dath is having nightmares. His screams are nothing to fret over.”

Another scream from nearby has me pushing off the bed and standing in the room's darkness. The weird tugging in my chest is begging me to go to the scared demon alien, but I can't see anything. So if I try to get to him, I'm only going to hurt myself. The tightness in my chest only restricts me more as

thunder rumbles outside. There's a rustling coming from across the room as one of the demons sharing a bed with Kendra gets up. Kendra mumbles something with a whine, and her other mate huffs in what I'm assuming is a laugh.

"One moment, sweet Kendra," the demon says to Kendra before I hear footsteps padding against the stone floors. "New human, can you see me?"

"Of course, she cannot," Kendra's second mate grumbles from the bed they're sharing. His irritation seems forced like he's trying to keep himself serious. Kendra said something about them behaving before they knew me, so I'm going to assume his crankiness is because of that. "There are torches in the hall. Toron and Yril leave them lit for Dath when there are storms in case he leaves his room."

Footsteps move from in front of me and then across the room in the other direction until a door swings open, and a soft, warm light streams in from the hallway. The demon man turns around to face me, his big, black eyes narrowing at me like he's trying to determine if I can see him yet or not. I move toward the light as his eyes cut over to the doorway again.

"You can see?" He asks. I open my mouth to respond, but another scream has the demon frowning. His eyes soften as he continues to stare out the doorway. Whatever is happening to the screaming demon must be something they're all used to if no one is rushing to aid him. It makes me sick. Not just that it's a normal occurrence but that he has had something happen to him to have him have such nightmares.

"Someone should be with him," I cross my arms in front of my chest, not liking how thin the shirt feels now that I'm fully aware of everything around me and not about to pass out from being sent to a new world so quickly. The red alien standing in the doorway doesn't lower his gaze from my face, which

I guess shouldn't be surprising since he's probably wrapped around Kendra's finger. "He's obviously in pain."

"Dath is in pain whenever there is a storm." The demon rubs his head, and I notice he doesn't have horns like the first one I saw when I was first sent here. I hope my demon has nice horns. Woah, that thought hits me out of nowhere, and I try to swallow it down and pretend it didn't make me feel all warm and fuzzy inside. "It is best if Kendra's sister just goes back to sleep."

"You want me to sleep while someone is screaming his head off right down the hall?" I put my hands on my hip, cocking my hip to the side and narrowing my eyes at the big demon standing in the doorway. He's blocking the doorway, but I have a feeling if I told him to move, he'd do it.

"His head is still connected to his body." The demon frowns even harder at me but steps away from the doorway so I can walk past him if I want. When I don't make a move to go toward the door, he looks over to the bed he was sleeping in. I turn to look, too, and see another demon staring at us in the darkness. A smaller body still pressed against his chest, apparently still asleep or pretending to be, so she doesn't have to be part of this conversation.

"Let the human go," the dark demon that's still in bed says. His scales are so dark I can barely make out his features, but I can see a smug smile has found its way onto his lips. He's the same one who saw me when I first entered the world. "Maybe it is her nose that is making her stubborn."

"Excuse you?" I turn my full attention to him. There's someone screaming down the hall while thunder shakes the entire stone building, and I'm stubborn for wanting to make sure the man screaming is okay. Nia used to have nightmares after moving into the stadium two years ago, after waking up to her brothers both dead in their apartment. She would wake up feeling like the world was ending, with heartbreak still fresh in her mind. I can only

imagine how the man screaming now feels when he wakes up alone every time this happens.

“Shut up, Erkoz,” Kendra says. There’s a shift in the darkness, and then she’s sitting up in the bed, pushing her hair behind her back. “Sorry, ignore him. He thinks he’s funny. How are you feeling, Deja?”

The dark demon in bed, Erkoz, mumbles, “I am funny.”

I don’t get a chance to respond to Kendra before another scream makes me clench my fists together. “I’ll meet you all in the morning,” I say before walking out of the room and following the sound of the scream to the room right next door. No wonder it’s so loud and disruptive when it’s happening not even ten feet from me.

A part of me thinks the demon who was watching the bedroom door will come out to the hall and make sure I make it to wherever I’m going safely. Instead, I’m standing in the hallway, alone, and trying to decide if I’m going to barge in or if I should knock on the door first. When he screams again, I open the door and leave it open so the light from the torches illuminates enough for the room so I can find my way around.

There are three beds in the room. Two of them are completely empty, but they’re messy like they’ve been slept in recently. The third has someone covered up in a blanket, their body thrashing around as they cry and whimper, something I can’t make out since it is mostly hissing. I stand in the doorway, unsure of what exactly I thought I was going to do, but I know someone needs to do something. The poor man is obviously in distress, but it shouldn’t be up to me to make him feel better, considering there are plenty of other men here who probably know him a lot better.

“Please,” Dath’s whimper is heartbreaking when he manages to get the broken words out. The tightening in my chest almost becomes unbearable at

hearing his broken voice. "Please, I'm sorry."

I rush over to the side of the bed and press a palm against where I think his cheek is.

"Shh, it's okay," I whisper the words, but he's already calming as soon as I touch the cool scales of his face. The muscles of his body seem to relax slightly, and then he lets out a deep, trembling breath.

I keep stroking his cheek, hoping that he just needs some touch to feel safer or more secure where he is. If he were Nia, I'd be crawling into bed behind him to hold him in my arms until the nightmares finished, but he's not Nia, and I don't know if he's going to feel violated by a stranger climbing into bed with him.

A roll of thunder claps loudly outside the stone building and causes Dath's enormous eyes to open wide in horror as his mouth contorts to scream again. I grab his face between both of my hands and try to will him not to scream, not when I'm this close to him, because it will absolutely break my heart. Especially when I can see the terror in his eyes. His mouth trembles, his eyes still wild, but it's clear he's not fully awake. His body is reacting like he's awake and ready to fight, but he's still deep in his nightmare.

"You're safe," I stroke his cheek as his mouth starts to close. I don't know how true my words are, but I just need to make him feel comforted enough to get through the worst of his dreams. The women told me I was safe when I first arrived here, so I'm assuming he's just as safe as me. "You're safe. Nothing can hurt you."

Dath blinks slowly, his breath ragged and blowing against my face, and his hand comes up to rest on mine on his cheek. His hands are icy, just like the rest of him, but a warmth settles in my chest and stomach as he touches my

hand. He tilts his head to the side, his eyes still dead and asleep even though they're open, but says nothing.

We stay like this until his breathing is calm and the trembling in his body is still. His hand leaves mine, and I'm almost sad to lose his touch until I feel him grab my hip so quickly that I don't have time to react. He pulls me into bed with him until I'm the little spoon to his big spoon.

"At least the goddess allows me a female in my dreams," Dath whispers against my head. His heart is racing, but his body is more relaxed, and his breathing is even. His grip against my waist is so tight there's no way I'm getting away from him, but I don't even want to. For some reason, I'm perfectly content to act as this weird demon man's teddy bear since it's calming him so much. "She gives me such a beautiful female to ease my terrors."

The words he's saying shouldn't have butterflies erupting in my stomach. Nope, they should be slightly scaring me since this giant alien with nightmares seems to think I'm just a figment of his imagination. Instead, I'm wiggling around in his grasp to get as comfortable as I can and allowing myself to relax in his arms. His big hand rests against my collarbone, and he presses against me with a bit more force. He's stilling my movements, and then I feel why, as something long and hard presses into my backside.

"This is not one of those dreams, beautiful human," Dath mumbles as his hand moves down my collarbone until he cups my breasts, causing me to squeak in surprise. A low rumble in his chest tells me he thinks my reactions are amusing, but he still thinks all of this is a dream and that I'm not actually here. He leaves his hand on my breast but stops squeezing it. A soft rush of air blows against the top of my head, and then he's settling, the dead weight of his arm an indicator of his body relaxing in sleep.

Thunder rumbles the room around us, but this time, instead of screaming, he holds me tighter as his body tenses. He speaks softly, much too soft for me to understand his words, even if they weren't some weird combination of hissing and clicking that I'm assuming is their language. Somehow, my translator isn't picking up whatever those words are, even though they're the ones I really want to hear. His arm flexes, his hand tightening on my breast. He's not doing it sexually, but I still feel my insides cramp and a pulsing starts in my clit. I squeeze my eyes shut, not letting myself feel weird sexual feelings for an alien who's having nightmares and isn't lucid enough to know that I'm actually in bed with him.

I wiggle against him, trying to see if I can still feel his hard length against me. It twitches when I rub against it, reminding me he's probably much larger than anyone I've ever been with. His hand lowers to my hip, his grip tightening until I stop moving against him. Yes, he's asleep, and yes, I shouldn't be taking advantage of a man having nightmares, but my body isn't understanding that it's not time to have sexy thoughts about some demon from another planet that I just arrived on, not even a day ago. Instead, I'm growing hornier and hornier, like some unknown force is pumping me full of aphrodisiacs or whatever makes people horny.

Dath makes some more hissing noises too soft for my translator to pick up and then moves his hand further down my body until he's pressing his fingers against the fabric that's barely separating my sex from his touch. I try to spread my legs to give him more access, but he only cups me and pulls me against him even tighter. He says something else with more harsh hisses before his body relaxes again, his fingers still pressing against the soft skin between my legs but not pushing further into me. I try to grind myself against him to relieve some of the pent-up sexual frustration. He hisses loudly,

causing me to still my movements and for a prickle of fear tickling the back of my mind. When I stop moving, he relaxes again.

I let out a long, shaky breath and try to rein in the absolute mess I'm being. I can feel my wetness dripping from between my legs and against his fingers. My nerve endings feel like they're on fire. Dath's stupid hold on me makes it impossible to move without him hissing or admonishing me with his murmurs that I don't understand but get his point across very well. I'm not supposed to move, and we are supposed to be sleeping. Two things I can't even remotely want to do with how I'm currently feeling.

I don't know how long I lie in bed as rain pounds against the wood that covers the large window against one wall. The sound of water dripping onto the stone floors distracts me from the arousal burning my body. I count the drips, hoping that at some point, my brain will get so bored of the monotony that it will allow me to sleep since we aren't getting any relief from the burning desire in my core.

Two-hundred-thirty-four is the last number I remember thinking in my mind before everything else gets dark. My desire never lessens, but my body gives in and lets sleep drift me away from the torture of being held still against a man who somehow makes me feel things I definitely didn't think I'd already feel for an alien I've never even talked to. I'd like to say my dreams are a reprieve from the desire I'm feeling. If anything, they only make it worse since I have the first sex dream I've ever had in my life, and that dream features a bright red alien with horns and a forked tongue that does wonderful things between my legs.

Deja

A warm hand shakes my shoulder softly until I'm able to crack my eyes open. The cold scales of the demon behind me do nothing for the fire raging underneath my skin, and his hand still cupping between my legs isn't helping anything. A human face is close to mine, and she's looking at me with her lips pressed tightly together and a wrinkle in her brow.

It takes me a moment to remember who this one is, and maybe that's wrong of me since I spent two years in the same unit with her, but we all went by the new names the Hands gave us, and I'm not about to call her A12-01 because I hate when I'm called A12-04.

Olivia. That's what her name is. I need to file that away in my brain so I can hopefully remember it better.

"Deja," Olivia says my name softly, her eyes cutting up to the demon spooning me like she's making sure not to wake him. "Time to get up."

"No," I mutter as I close my eyes. "Still sleeping."

"Hey," Olivia says a bit more forcefully. I stare at her, a little pissed that she's still trying to get me out of the comfort of my demon's arms. I'll take

him as mine. I have no issue with that. It's just that I still haven't spoken to him. Sure, he's giving me more action than I've had in the last few years, but I still need to have a conversation with him before I start claiming him for myself. "You're not yourself right now, and we need to discuss some things with you."

"Don't wanna leave," I say as I try to turn in Dath's arms so I can ignore the woman and hope she just leaves.

"Deja, he's not allowing my mate in here, and I really need you to come with me." Her voice is tense like she's trying to hold back how nervous she actually is about having to talk to me. I crane my neck to the open doorway and see another demon standing near the door. His arms are crossed over his chest, his eyes bright red as he stares at me. "Your demon won't let Ralleth in here. We've been trying to get you out for a while now. I'm surprised you haven't woken up until now."

"We've been sleeping," I say, rubbing my eyes with one of my hands to try to rid myself of some of the sleep I still feel. I must be out of it still since there's no way she just called Dath my demon. "No one's tried to wake us."

Olivia looks back over to the doorway. "You've been in a haze. So has your demon." She says he's mine again, and instead of being weirded out, I actually feel a sense of pride. Maybe she's right, and I'm not thinking clearly. "I need to get you out of this room so we can explain what's happening and so he can calm down."

"Okay," I nod my head, trusting what she's saying to me to be true. She has nothing to gain from lying to me, and it's not like I'm in my right mind. I can feel burning under my skin. A desire to stay with Dath claws at my chest so intensely that I know I can't be thinking rationally.

I twist in Dath's arms. He tightens his grip on me and hisses softly. His

body is telling me he doesn't want me to leave, but according to Olivia, I need to. I lift my hand up to his face and try my best to stroke his cheek as I wiggle out of his grasp again. "Let go. I need to get up."

Dath groans, and the chord around my chest tightens, begging me to stay in bed with him. My heart tells me it's safer here with this demon I don't really know. I want to listen to my heart, but Olivia looks so worried. I must be thinking irrationally. Considering I want to think with what's between my legs more than my brain, I'd say I should definitely listen to someone who isn't me right now.

"No, I need to get up," I whisper. Dath's body softens slightly, but he doesn't want to release me. His eyes never open, and I'm not entirely sure he's awake. For all I know, he's not thinking with his brain, either. He makes some more sounds, grumbling about having to let me go. I get the distinct impression he wants me back in this bed as quickly as possible, and I can't say that I mind that at all. "Let me go talk with the other women."

Dath huffs and finally releases my body from his grasp. He pulls the blankets tighter around him when I roll away from him, never fully waking. He probably thinks all of this is still a dream. I know I don't feel completely myself. Like I'm walking through molasses, and my brain is foggy. Only one thing is in focus, and it's the demon curled up in his bed, making soft sounds that makes me think he's thinking about how much he cares for me. I smile at the sweet idea but shake my head, knowing I don't need to get attached to the first alien man showing me any interest. In fact, I shouldn't be falling for any alien men until I'm thinking with more than what's between my legs.

Dath's hand snatches mine as I stand from the bed. His dark eyes are now completely red, but they still seem far off, like he's not completely awake. "Come back. Promise you'll be back." His words are a whisper so soft that

they're meant only for me. The absolute fear in his voice breaks my heart, and it's only made worse when it's clear he's still partially unconscious.

"I'll come back," I say softly as I stroke his cheek. He nods once, his eyes closing again and his hand dropping from my wrist.

I turn to face Olivia to tell her to lead the way where we need to go, but her eyes are wide, and she's staring out the door like she's not sure exactly what to do. Ralleth tilts his chin in my direction, and Olivia returns her focus to me.

"Right, okay, this way." She grabs my hand and walks me out of the room until we pass the alien that she said was her mate. His bright red eyes are still staring into Dath's room, watching the sleeping man like he might make a move to get up or attack someone at any moment. I'm curious what could have happened while we were sleeping to have the two acting so strange.

Two more demons stand in the hallway. Their eyes are black, and one of them is smiling brightly at me. The same stupid, smug smile that called me stubborn last night.

"You've turned Dath into a monster." Erkoz laughs as he watches my frown deepen.

Dath didn't seem like much of a monster when we were in bed since all we were doing was cuddling and sleeping. He definitely wasn't doing anything monstrous.

"Hey, Deja, do you remember us?" Kendra talks to me like I'm a child, and it might piss me off if I wasn't looking at all of them and their worried faces. I give her a soft nod, not wanting to worry them anymore. "Good. These are my mates, Erkoz and Xoth, they're assholes, but they're safe males. They're going to take us somewhere to talk. Is that okay with you?"

"Get her out now," Ralleth hisses as he closes the door to Dath's room

quickly. “He will wake and notice she is gone. Explain to her as best you can and do not bring her back until she accepts him as a mate. He is not himself and won’t be until she is his.”

“Wait, what does that mean?” I ask. I’m definitely not about to mate with a demon, not even one that has me all kinds of hot and bothered. I need to talk to him first. Talk to him when he’s actually conscious and not thinking I’m a figment of his imagination. I was sent here to breed with the demons, but I’m not about to just spread my legs and let an alien fuck me. At least, not until I say a few words to him when he’s conscious. Then, we can see about the whole leg-spreading thing.

Ralleth stares at me, and then his expression softens, the red of his eyes turning black like all the others. “You cannot be here right now, little human. Dath is not himself.”

“He won’t hurt me,” I whisper more to myself. We might be strangers, but he’s a stranger who held me all night like a lover. Somehow, that makes me almost certain he’s the safest demon to be around. It doesn’t hurt that my chest actually warms when I think about him touching me.

“No, he wouldn’t,” the annoying demon, Erkoz, says. “He will hurt us, though. You should have seen the look of surprise on Ralleth’s face when he tried to help his mate get you from the room.”

“Did he hurt you?” I ask, turning my attention to Ralleth.

Ralleth huffs and smiles before speaking to Olivia. “Your sister worries for me.”

“You really slept through all of that?” Kendra asks as she touches my upper arm, trying to redirect me down the hall and away from Dath’s room. “It’s been almost a whole day since you came to this world. We’ve gone in there a

few times, but every time, Dath tried to attack any males that entered the room.”

“Dath is blessed with a female that trusts him so much. She has no reason to wake because her soul knows he will keep her safe,” Ralleth says behind us. He’s still standing at the door, his hand clutching the handle like he’s waiting to hold it closed. “Now, get her out before the next storm comes.”

“What?” My eyes go wide. I can’t leave him if another storm is coming. He’ll have more nightmares and be terrified. I told him I would be back. I can’t do that if they’re separating us completely from one another. “No, I’m not leaving”

“Deja, come with us,” Kendra grabs my upper arm a little tighter. Her eyes are pleading with me to do what she asks, but I can’t focus on anything but going back to Dath. My chest is burning with each step I take away from him. A pull that I’ve never felt for anyone tugs at me like I’m on a leash that’s quickly being pulled taut. “Come with us, or my mate will carry you.”

“I can’t leave,” I mumble under my breath as the tightening of my chest squeezes me so intensely that I think I might pass out.

My breathing is ragged by the time we make it out of the hallway and are dumped into a room filled with tables. Dozens of red aliens are sitting around the tables eating food, and they all turn to look at us as soon as we are visible. Anxiety spikes in my mind, and I’m trying my hardest to fill my lungs with one deep breath.

“If you stay, you need to accept him as a mate,” Erkoz says from right behind me. “Are you ready to do that?”

I shake my head, not wanting to tie myself to one of them so soon. Not when I haven’t been conscious in this world for longer than a few minutes at a time. How could I answer yes to that question? Erkoz’s face hardens for a

moment, and then he grabs my arm and hauls me through the great hall. I regret my refusal to mate Dath as soon as Erkoz touches me. Heat singes my skin where Erkoz's scales are touching me, and my heart aches to be back in bed with him.

"I need to go back." I push against Erkoz's hold on me, but he doesn't slow his steps. If anything, he walks faster. Kendra is next to us, so I can see her face and the worried lines that mark it as I try to break free.

"We can't go back," Kendra says as she lifts her hand to hold on to mine. "We need to figure out what's happening with both of you, and we can't let you make life-altering decisions when you're like this."

The tears start as she finishes speaking, but I don't pull my hand from hers. No, I let them both drag me even as my heart begs me to fight. Pain radiates from where our bodies touch, but it's the breaking of my heart that causes me the most distress. The imaginary rope around my heart pulls taunt like it is urging me back into bed with my demon, but it's impossible now. Erkoz isn't releasing me, and Kendra is practically dragging me by her hold on my hand.

"Deja," Kendra moves her hand in front of my face as the fight starts to die in me. I can barely see her movement as my brain disconnects from what's happening. My vision is hazy, the world around me spinning as my feet keep trying to move me forward, even as my nerves scream at me to run back to Dath's room. "Hey, are you with us?"

"Need to go back," I say again, but it's like no one is listening to me. They keep a grip on my arms and keep pulling me forward, even as it feels like I'm torturing myself to move. "Please, I need to go back."

Kendra releases my arm, and then she's talking to someone else. "Can we just let her stay?" There's a pause as another female voice, I think it's Olivia, says something to her I can't quite make out. Erkoz keeps dragging me.

“Look at her! No, she’s not okay. Where’s your mate? Does he know what this is?”

“None of us know what this is,” Erkoz says. His voice is too close to me. My eyes dart around the room. I can’t make anything out because of how blurred my vision is, but I know I’m way too close to another demon. I’m not supposed to be close to another. Not until I’ve claimed my mate. The thought comes from nowhere, but it sears itself into my mind and into my soul. Dath is the only demon that can touch me, no others.

“Get away.” I move my hand through the air like I’m trying to swat away something, but there’s nothing in front of me. The burning on my arm is still there where Erkoz is holding me, and that’s what I should swat away. He can’t be touching me. I don’t want him touching me.

“Fuck!” Kendra yells. She sounds more worried than I am, but that has to be impossible since I feel like I am about to go out of my mind if I can’t get back to Dath. I can’t see anything. I barely register the words around me, and my body is too sensitive to everything that’s happening around me. “Just, fuck, just pick her up.”

“No!” I try to shake my head, but it’s too difficult. Hands wrap around my waist, and then I’m picked up off the ground even as I weakly try to fight against whoever is touching me. No one is supposed to touch me. No one can touch me but him. I don’t know why, but that’s all my mind is screaming at me as Erkoz wraps his arms around me and carries me further through the building. My chest screaming in pain, my eyes watering as I try to control the swell of emotions threatening to consume me.

“I am sorry, human,” Erkoz says as a large door is pushed open. He’s not being snarky right now, which worries me more than it probably should. “I should have stopped you last night. I should have kept you in the room with

us so we knew you were safe. Be angry at Erkoz. He can handle the wrath and the hatred, but do not be angry at your sisters for wanting to keep you safe.”

“Just take me back,” I cry. My vision has completely gone, and I don’t know where we’re going or how far from him I’ll even be. I wipe at the tears burning down my cheeks. I don’t want to be crying, but I can’t stop it. My chest is tight and painful, and my mind only thinking of how to get back to the alien they took me from. “Please, just take me back.”

Erkoz shifts me in his arms. “I am sorry.”

A door swings open, and I hear it tap against the wall of the new building we’re entering. I don’t know how many others are joining us in the house, but I hear more than a few pairs of footsteps.

“Oh god,” a woman already in the building gasps when she sees me. “What did you do?”

Erkoz hisses above me, obviously not loving that her immediate reaction is thinking he’s done something to me. “Ralleth told us to get her away from Dath before the storm came.”

Right on cue, fresh raindrops fall on the building we’re in. Erkoz moves me around in his arms until he’s setting me on the ground. I can’t see anything, so I reach out, trying to find something to brace myself on, but I only end up grabbing hold of another alien, which has me pulling my hands back and grimacing. A clap of thunder rumbles around us, but that isn’t what coats my body in fear. No, the loud roar that sounds from the great hall we left is what has fear tugging me into the embrace of darkness. My body goes limp, and I fall to the ground before anyone realizes I’m passing out.

This is better, though. There’s no pain and no fear in the darkness of unconsciousness. No, I’m filled with dreams of Dath between my legs again,

and that is much better than the blind and terrifying world that awaits me when I'm able to stir back awake. So, for as long as I can, I want to remain in my dreams.

Dath

How many days has it been since I have been trapped in my room? Five or six? I cannot remember exactly. I only know the rage simmering under my scales. Something was taken from me. I do not know what it is or who took it. I know it is mine, and I will kill anyone who keeps it away from me any longer. I just need to find a way out of my room so I can claim what is mine.

Many wardrobes are barricading my door. They are placed one in front of the other so that I can not move them enough to get out into the hallway. We boarded my window up because of the storms that have been raging on and off for the last few days. So, there is truly no way out of this makeshift prison I am trapped in.

Not even my nightmares plague me now because I am filled with too much rage, too much fury. The small pile of dried olack meat that was tossed in here like an afterthought is almost out, and then I will be starved and furious, a combination I am sure my brothers do not want.

If they just return what is mine, I will no longer be upset or angry, but even

when I tell them this, they do not listen to me. They don't even acknowledge when I call out to them. They will try to speak with me through the barricade, but when I respond with venom in my voice, they whisper amongst themselves and then leave me to my anger and my fury.

I rub at my chest. There's been an empty ache in my chest since I woke up a few days ago. Since then, the feeling has only grown worse. My blood simmers under my skin so much that I am starting to understand the humans when they say our world is too warm. My body is reacting to something, but what it is, I do not know. I have been trying to ask the brothers what has happened to me, but they do not answer me. I know this has to do with what they have taken from me, but I do not know what they could have taken that has me acting out as I am.

I have the door to my room open just in case they ever try to move the wardrobes. I will be ready to pounce and run out of my prison if given the chance. They will have to release me at some point, and then I can make them pay for what they have done.

"This is our last option," Kendra's voice surprises me when I hear it so close to the wardrobes. Hearing my friend's voice actually helps some of the aching in my chest. Maybe she will help me understand what is happening since none of the brothers seem willing.

"I'm going in there, so you can either help me or you can suck each other's dicks from now on." She must be talking to her mates, but I do not know why they would help her get in here even if she threatens them. There is a reason the brothers have trapped me in my room, and I doubt they will risk their female if they think I am dangerous.

"Dath!" Erkoz yells my name much too loudly since I am sitting right by the wardrobe. His dark body comes into view between the cracks of the first

wardrobe, and then our eyes meet. “You will let us in, and you will not try to escape, yes?”

I narrow my eyes at him and pull my lips back in a snarl. I will make no such promises, considering they have all trapped me in here against my will after taking something that I know makes my soul whole. A hiss escapes my lips as a response to him. Erkoz can see from the red of my eyes that I am not in the mood to be negotiating my freedom.

“He is not able to talk now, Kendra.” Erkoz turns to his mate, who must be behind him, but she doesn’t listen.

Instead, Kendra squishes her small human body through the crack in the wardrobe until she is wiggling and smashing herself into the room with me. She stares at me, worry in her eyes, as her mates yell at her to return to them and to stop being foolish. She lifts her hand in a gesture that the humans have told us is vulgar and then closes the door on her mates.

“We need to talk.” She crosses her arms in front of her chest. Her eyes dart around the room, the only sign that she is scared to be trapped in here with me. I would never hurt a female, especially not a human female. She is small and weak. I gain nothing by hurting her for what my brothers have done to me. She takes a tentative step toward me, her eyes not landing on mine and the rage that simmers inside of me. “Can you speak to me?”

I let out a soft grunt that is meant to be a yes, but she shakes her head like it is not good enough.

“I need to hear your words.”

“Yes.” The word sounds rough as it leaves my throat. My throat aches and burns, and I must work extra hard to get the word out.

Kendra tilts her head to the side, a look of surprise crossing her face for just an instant before she sits down in front of me, crossing her legs so she is

mirroring my position. “What do you remember from the night the new human came?”

My brows furrow, and I narrow my eyes on Kendra. Does she somehow know the discussion I had with my mother before the storms started? Surely not, but that is the only thing of note that happened that night. “I need to speak to you about that. I will not be taking a human mate, so you do not need to worry about not touching me.”

“I’m sorry, no,” Kendra rubs her face with her hands, completely dismissing my words as a look of anger and disgust crosses her features. “Answer my questions. Then we can talk about whatever the fuck you just said.”

I cock my head to the side, not understanding why she seems so upset by my words. I thought she might be happy that we could continue our friendship in the same way. She is unsure of her place with the brothers since the new female came, but she does not need to worry about her place with me. I cannot take a human mate, so I will refrain from entertaining any of them at all. I do not want to get their hopes up or my own because I will not go against my mother’s only wish for me.

“I talked with my mother, the storm started, I came to bed, and when I woke, I was trapped in here with all of you ignoring me and a rage inside of me that makes me want to rip my brothers apart because they have taken something from me,” I answer her question hoping it will make it all make sense to me if I say it out loud, but I am left even more confused when Kendra shakes her head with a frown.

“That’s all you remember?”

“I had nightmares, of course,” I say.

My nightmares are not something I enjoy thinking about. Not when it

shows how pathetic of a male I truly am. If I was a stronger male, I could live with what happened when I was young. I wouldn't scream and cry out in the night every time thunder shakes our home. "I have them every time there is a storm."

"What about any dreams?" She sounds hopeful, but my stomach drops at the mention of my dreams. I dislike talking about them because I do not like that I still want a human female so badly, even when I know I cannot have one. It is kind of the goddess to give me one to comfort me in my dreams, but I do not want to speak of her since it shows my desire for a human mate.

"I do not talk of my dreams." I cast my eyes away from Kendra, even though she is still refusing to look at my face. I cannot stop the rage inside of me even with my friend so close, so my eyes will be red until I am returned what is mine. "Why do you ask about my dreams?"

"Why do you think you're not taking a human mate?" Kendra ignores my question and asks her own instead. I do not appreciate the change in subject, but I do like that I will not have to tell her about the beautiful human in my dreams. I want to keep her all to myself even though she has not returned to me since the first night. She told me she would return, but maybe that was just another cruelty added to an already cruel existence. No, I cannot think like that. The goddess blesses me with crumbs, and I should be grateful. They are better than starving.

"I have my reasons, but I know they are correct," I answer vaguely, not wanting to tell Kendra of my mother and her wishes for me to mate someone of my kind. "The storm was a sign that I am not supposed to take a human as my mate."

Kendra chews on her lip as she thinks of what to say next. Silence surrounds us for long moments before she leans closer to me and asks me,

“What do you think the brothers have taken from you?”

Her question catches me off guard because I do not know what my brothers could have taken from me to have me so upset, but I know it is the most important thing in my life. They have taken a piece of my soul somehow. I do not know how they have done it, but I need it back. I rub my chest, a lump forming in my throat as I think of the constant ache that has plagued me since I woke the first morning of my imprisonment.

“I do not know, but it is important.” My voice breaks slightly as I say it, but I do not hide my emotions from my friend. She has seen me in despair before, and I am sure she will see me become emotional many times in our lives.

Kendra chews on her bottom lip, her small white teeth pressing into the pink skin as her brows furrow and her eyes look up at me with pity.

“I need to speak with my mates,” she says as she stands slowly. “We need you to control your anger so we can let you back out.”

“Have them bring back what they’ve taken, and I will be calm,” I say, knowing that she must know what it is they have taken since she has not been trapped in this room like I have. I rub my chest again, the tightness amplifying as I think about how empty I feel without whatever it is they have taken. “Please, convince them to return it because I cannot be myself until they have returned it.”

Kendra nods, but the sad look in her eyes doesn’t leave. “I’ll try my hardest, but I think you should reconsider not taking a human mate.”

“I cannot,” I answer, sounding more angry than I intend to. Of course, I want a human mate, but it has been made clear to me I am not to have one. The goddess will surely not tempt me with a human mate after my mother’s wishes have been made clear to me, so there should be nothing to worry Kendra about. Her sad expression does hurt my chest, though. I might care

more if I wasn't already dealing with the worst emptiness I have ever felt in my life. "The goddess will look out for me. Do not pity me."

Kendra laughs more to herself than to me, but it is still nice to see a smile cross her lips. "You remember the goddess is looking out for you, okay?"

"Always," I say, nodding. "She has looked favorably on my brothers and me. Why else would she send my brothers such sweet mates?"

She gives me a knowing look, but I do not know what she could know that I do not, other than the thing my brothers have taken from me. "You're deserving of a sweet mate, too."

"Maybe so, but I cannot, and the goddess will not tempt me with one. She is much too kind for that." I stand from where I've been sitting, knowing that I need Kendra to leave so she can go talk to her mates about returning to me what is mine. I want my soul to feel complete again, and it never will if my only hope continues to sit on the floor with me. "You will ask your mates to return what is missing, yes?"

I offer Kendra my hand, but when she takes it, I hiss loudly at her, my eyes narrowing and pain searing through me like I have touched something that has burned me. I do not drop her because that would be unkind, but it pains me to help her to her feet. Once I do, I release her and step further into my room, so I am not near her. She does not seem surprised by my reaction, which is confusing since she has touched me plenty of times, and not once have I ever reacted in this way.

"I'll have them bring what you're missing back, but you need to open your mind." She rubs her hands together like she knows she just hurt me with her touch. "Things are going to be really hard if you refuse what the goddess is giving you."

I do not dwell on her words, mainly because she has told me she will return

what has been taken. This means they have taken something from me, and I am not losing my mind.

I open my bedroom door for her and am met with the glowing red eyes of Erkoz and Xoth, who are still only staring from the crack in the wardrobes that is only big enough for a human female to fit through. I am surprised they have not moved the wardrobes in an attempt to come to get their female since they both seem angry, but I cannot even begin to imagine how they are with their mate since they share her so frequently.

“Oh shit,” Kendra mutters as she starts to wiggle back through to her mates. “I’m in trouble, aren’t I?”

Kendra doesn’t get an answer. No, Erkoz throws her over his shoulder while Xoth watches me with red eyes until they are back in their own room before following them.

I try not to get angry since they will have their way with their mate before they return to me what they’ve taken, but it is difficult when I can hear them through the walls. I lean against the far wall and wait for their sounds to silence before I get my hopes up for getting what they have taken from me. Kendra has told me she will get her mates to give it back, and I trust her since she has never given me any reason not to.

Deja

My vision came back on the second day, and that was also when all of my senses started to come around. My hearing was no longer muffled, the ache in my chest was still there but more manageable, and the sensitivity of my skin lessened. I spent most of my time sleeping as the storm raged outside. I would sleep for a few hours, wake for a little while, and then go back to sleep.

My body aches like I'm hollow, and my heart has an empty feeling of heartbreak that I haven't felt since my mother passed away. I've maybe eaten four times in the six days since I was taken from Dath's room and trapped in this house.

The storms ceased this morning, and Kendra and her mates went back to the great hall to speak with Ralleth, the tribe's leader, to see what they're supposed to do with me.

They all give me pitying looks when I wake up and move around the house. Apparently, I'm in Diane and Almaac's house, but Kendra and her mates have been staying here as well in case I try to leave or Dath tries to get out of

his own prison cell. No one has told me why we're being treated this way, but it doesn't seem like they really know either.

I'm sitting at the dining room table when the front door swings open. Kendra's eyes are red-rimmed, but she wears a smile, and her demons stare at her like she's their entire world. It would be adorable if it didn't make the hollowness in my heart amplify. Her eyes meet mine, and her smile grows.

"Okay, so we have a few things to discuss." She says as Erkoz pulls out a chair and sits in it before pulling her into his lap. "One, you need to go back to the great hall, or Dath might actually lose his mind and kill someone."

She tries to say more, but I cut her off by trying to get out of my chair. "Let's go now."

"Not so fast, little human." Xoth, Kendra's other mate, blocks me from moving away from the table.

No one has touched me since the first day when I was carried into the house. Erkoz has repented for touching me and bringing me pain many times, and still, he looks at me like he's full of regret even though I've told him over and over that it's okay. None of us knew that leaving Dath would cause as much damage to me as it has.

"We need to discuss mating first," Xoth says.

"Mating?" I ask, my voice going up an octave and then feeling childish for acting so embarrassed about it. "I don't even know if I want to mate him."

"Don't worry about that yet." Kendra shakes her head. "Olivia wants to explain the mating. We're supposed to take you to the great hall and tell you that Dath is being a fucking moron."

I narrow my eyes at her and frown at the way she's speaking about the demon I kind of like more than I should. I shouldn't be getting upset. Not

when I barely know him, and I don't even know why she's saying he's being a moron. Maybe he is?

Kendra smiles when she sees my thunderous expression but doesn't make fun of me, even though I am ripe to be ribbed since I'm falling for an alien that I spent a single night cuddling.

"He thinks he isn't supposed to mate a human female," she says, watching my face to see how I react. "He hasn't told me why, but he's certain the goddess wouldn't send him a human to tempt him."

If my heart wasn't already broken, it would be shattering into a million pieces right now. "He doesn't remember me?"

"Not in the slightest," Kendra says it like it isn't actually gutting me to hear it.

I force myself not to cry, at least not in front of these people I barely know and who are basically my prison wardens. I can't keep the sting from my throat or the tears from welling up enough to make my eyes glassy, though. It's almost enough to piss me off and takes some of the burn away from the rejection that isn't even a rejection because the damn demon doesn't remember me at all.

Kendra wraps my hand in hers as she leans closer to me. "Hey, hey, don't be sad about that. He's going mad with missing you. He just doesn't remember you, which gives us plenty of opportunities to show him that whatever his bullshit reasons are for not wanting a human mate are stupid."

"So, let me get this straight." I try to take a deep breath without my throat constricting. The only thing keeping my tears at bay is the smile that Kendra wears, even though her mates are watching us both with frowns and uncertainty. "He doesn't remember me, and he doesn't want me?"

Things couldn't be any worse. I'm over here brokenhearted for an alien I

barely know, and he wants nothing to do with me. Or he wouldn't if he even remembered me.

Kendra waves her hand like my concerns aren't that big of a deal, which only upsets me more. "You need to understand the demons can be kind of dumb."

"Very dumb." Erkoz nods his agreement. A smile lifts his lips as he continues talking. "You should have seen Almaac with his mate, always running off to the trees instead of claiming her."

I'm actually surprised by what he says because I've been trapped with Almaac and Diane in this house, and they seem inseparable. The adoration in his eyes, when he looks at her, is so pure it would make me feel warm and fuzzy inside if I wasn't completely hollow with sadness. It does kind of make me feel better to know that he didn't claim her immediately, though. Maybe Dath will be the same, or at least, I can hope he's the same.

Kendra keeps talking when she sees that Erkoz's words have made me feel a bit better. "So, we're taking you back to the great hall. We're hoping the pain you both feel will lessen the closer in proximity you are since it definitely seemed like you got worse and worse the farther from him we took you."

"No shit," I mumble.

"Again, sorry about that, but you've responded to your mate a little differently than everyone else has, so we didn't know you guys were physically tethered to one another." Kendra actually seems upset about that part of it, which makes me feel better, but I still don't appreciate that no one was listening to me when I tried to tell them I was in pain when they were taking me from him.

"I told you," I say, leaning forward across the table. "I said over and over

how I needed to go back, and no one listened to me.”

“Deja, you and your demon are weirdly tied together in a way that none of us, even the other demons, know about.” She says it like it’s supposed to make me feel better for being ignored. She must see her explanation isn’t good enough because she continues. “You said you didn’t want to mate him, and he was going to claim you if you stayed. We gave you a choice. Does it suck looking back on it? Yeah. But I’d rather you hate us for giving you a choice than you being forced to mate him when you didn’t want to.”

It’s the first time she’s said that to me. They’ve all apologized, but none of them have really put it out there in black and white. My choices were to tie myself to a demon after five minutes on this planet or leave with them. My face burns in embarrassment, but Kendra continues like she didn’t just put me in my place. “It didn’t help that Dath was just one giant growling hiss for the last week. He finally used actual words today, and they were still ragged and forced like he wanted to go all feral again.”

“Okay, so what’s the plan, then?” I ask, trying to brush off my embarrassment. If Dath doesn’t want to mate with me, I’m not about to force him into it. I mean, I know how I feel about him, and it’s weird that I want him and want to be with him and, for some reason, feel completely hollow without him. Kendra says he’s being dumb, though, so maybe he’ll want to mate me once he remembers who I am or how I made him feel. At least, I’m hoping he’ll want me when he meets me again.

“Does it still hurt if one of the males touches you?” Kendra asks and looks up at Xoth and then nods at him. He holds his hand out in front of me, and I raise mine to it, not wanting to touch him since we found out the first day that having one of them touch me, even accidentally, felt like a fire was burning me. I touch him for all of half a second with the tips of my fingers before

ripping them away, invisible flames licking at my skin. “Good, it hurts when he touches females, too.”

“Who touched him?” I ask, my lips pulling back slightly. I’ve never been a jealous person, but I’m not about to sit by and let someone touch what’s mine. Mine? I might actually be a lost cause.

“I did, and I’m going to touch him again, but only with your permission,” Kendra is still smiling as she leans back into her mate’s lap. “He’s going to be an idiot, Deja. I want to know if you want to force him to see what an idiot he is.”

My teeth grind together at the thought of Kendra touching him again. The idea that he’d want anyone to touch him at all, that isn’t me, makes my heart break. If what she’s saying is true about not wanting a mate? He may try to hide that the touch of other women pains him. I’m hoping he’ll see me or be near me and only want me, but if he’s set on not taking a mate, then what if he tries to fight that?

“Okay,” I lean forward, trying to hype myself up for this plan. “What do I need to do?”

The pain in my chest lessens with each step we take back toward the great hall. I still feel empty in my heart, but it’s not an all-consuming sadness like it was. By the time I enter the giant door that leads inside, I’m able to smile without forcing it. I realize just how different I feel by being so far from Dath as I grow closer and start to feel more like my normal self.

Alien men who look somewhat like Dath fill the dining hall. They’re all various shades of red, with horns and big black eyes. Some of them smile at

me as I walk toward the tables and some even wave. I thought they might not like me since I'm the reason they've had to trap one of their friends in his bedroom for the last six days. Instead, they all look at me like they're glad I'm there. Like I belong.

"Dath's female finally joins us," one of the men says as he pulls out a chair near Olivia and Ralleth for me. "We were starting to think his bad mood had scared you away for good."

"This is Toron," Erkoz introduces me to the alien, who pulls the chair out for me and then turns his attention to him. "My mate needs to speak with you. She is scheming something, and it involves you."

Toron smiles even brighter at Kendra and then follows her to another table so they can discuss our plan. Hopefully, he agrees to it, even though it could mean he'd be upsetting one of his brothers. Erkoz and Xoth promised me that many of the demons would be willing to help show how dumb a brother is acting, but Toron or Yril would be the best to ask since they're related to Dath. I want him to be angry, not angry enough to kill someone, but angry enough to realize that maybe he wants to mate with a human.

Yes, it only takes six days for me to decide that I'm willing to trick an alien lizard man into mating with me. I don't want to talk about how easy I apparently am for a horned alien. Maybe the women on Earth were right about us being eager for aliens. The thought has a flush warming my cheeks and a giggle escaping from my lips.

"Kendra told me you wanted to explain mating to me?" I turn to Olivia. Her cheeks turn a bright pink color when a few demons laugh at my question. "What? Is it supposed to be private?"

"Human females normally think so, yes," another demon answers, but I don't know his name. "You do not turn pink like the others, so we do not

know if you are embarrassed or not, but the talk of mating usually makes the others turn pink.”

“It’s fine,” Olivia waves her hands in front of her like she’s trying to rid herself of the embarrassment that marks her cheeks. “We need to go talk over by the hall, though. Your mate is about to be released from his room, and I don’t want him to get too close to you until we’re sure he won’t attack you the first chance he gets.”

“Attack her?” A few of the demons ask, their eyes flashing red. “He would never.”

Olivia rubs her temples. “Sorry, no, you’re right. I meant sexually, not like he’d actually hurt his mate.”

The other demons nod, appreciating that we don’t think Dath is actually going to attack me, but her pink cheeks show off both of our embarrassment at the mention of him not being able to stop himself from being sexually attracted to me. The fact that the other demons just nod along with it also makes me think they think he might try to jump me the first moment he sees me, too. I don’t exactly hate that idea.

Olivia stands from her mate’s lap and walks around the table to grab me. “We can stay in here until I know whether you’re safe, but I want to be close to the new human room since it has a lock on it.”

“New human room?”

“The room you would have slept in the first night if Diane and her mate weren’t stuck here. He’s a little anal about things, and one of those was making sure his mate didn’t have to share a room with anyone else when they were trapped here.” Olivia rolls her eyes. “If he didn’t do that, we may not even be in such a pickle with you and your mate.”

“Why don’t any of you use his name?” I ask. I’ve been meaning to ask it

for a while since none of the women say any of the men's names unless it's their own mate. I don't hate that they call Dath my mate, but I don't know why they don't call him by his name since it's easier.

“That's one of the things we need to talk about.”

Olivia spends the next ten minutes explaining to me all the normal mating customs they've learned since being on the planet. Saying the name of someone of the other sex alerts them to your willingness to share a bed with them, which explains why no one says my name and why the women don't say the name of anyone but their mates. In order to mate with one of the demons, we're supposed to eat their semen and then call ourselves theirs. I thought it'd be like some normal wedding ceremony. I didn't think I'd need to suck on an alien's dick to mate with him, but all the other women have apparently done it, and they don't seem traumatized.

She's about to explain to me what happened to all of their females when I feel the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end. The emptiness in my chest is filled with a warmth that moves through me and fills me completely. I don't want to turn around because I don't want to be disappointed if what Kendra warned me about ends up being true. I can't stop myself, though.

I turn slowly and scan the dining room until my eyes land on deep red, angry eyes that pierce me down to my soul. Dath doesn't look happy to see me. No, he looks so unbelievably angry that if I wasn't feeling all the butterflies in my stomach, I'd be shaking in fear. His jaw ticks back and forth, but his eyes never leave mine as he walks through the dining hall until he's standing beside Erkoz and Kendra. He sits down in the seat next to them and then pulls Kendra into his lap like I mean absolutely nothing to him. I see his nostrils flare as pain ignites his nerves, but he's just as stubborn as Kendra said he'd be.

Tears prick at my eyes, but I'm not about to cry for some demon who's trying to convince himself he isn't my mate, even though he's in pain by not being with me. I know he can feel the pull to me because I've felt nothing so strong in my life. Even the warmth in my chest is growing just by being in his presence, so he must notice it, too.

"Come, little human," Toron kneels down in front of me and offers me his hand. "We will make sure he regrets being a fool, yes?"

I steel my resolve and nod my head before bracing myself for the pain about to singe my nerves when I touch Toron's hand. I force a smile onto my lips right as I touch his cool scales, and the fire that burns my skin is endured so I can prove to this stupid demon that he wants me, even if I have to piss him off to get him to realize it.

Dath

The goddess has forsaken me. She has forsaken me, punished me, and determined I am the male who will take the brunt of her fury for the rest of my life.

There is no other explanation I can think of.

First, my mother shows me I am not meant to take a human mate by bringing a terrible storm many days too soon since we are far from the storm season. Then I am graced by the most beautiful human female I could have ever imagined in my dreams, who soothed my nightmares and made me feel complete. Then, when I am finally starting to feel better, and the hole in my chest is being filled, I see that same human from my dreams here in my home, and I know she is not to be mine.

I do not know why I walk over to Kendra and pull her into my lap, even though I know it will hurt. I don't think about anything other than how much I need to get the beautiful, dark human out of my mind. But it is impossible when I cannot take my eyes off of her. Even with Kendra in my lap, the

burning of my scales is excruciating, but I can tell I have hurt the new female's feelings by doing it.

Good, I need her not to want me, so I do not have to deny her advances if she tries to be with me. I doubt I will be able to be a strong male if she were to pursue me. I am only strong now because I can feel my mother's wrath when I feel the pain under my scales.

"You're an idiot," Kendra mumbles in my lap. She doesn't touch me like she normally does when she is in my lap. No, she just sits there awkwardly, like she wants to be there about as much as I want her there. She doesn't make a move to leave, and I don't force her from my lap either.

I'm trying to ignore the feeling of warmth in my chest when the new female looks into my eyes, but it is so hard since I cannot seem to take my eyes off of her. When my vision of her is obstructed by Toron kneeling in front of her, my entire body tenses and my lips peel back in a snarl.

No one can touch her. No one can entertain her. No one can look at her except for me. No one.

She does not seem to realize this yet because I watch as she walks, hand in hand with Toron, to a seat across the dining hall. My hands are shaking as I watch him pull her into his lap. I want to stand, but Kendra is still on my lap, and I do not want to let her fall to the ground. The pain of touching her is too much, though.

"Please, get off of me," I say, my eyes still on my female. Never leaving her. "Now, get off of me now."

Kendra stares up at me, a look of amusement on her face, but I cannot deal with her right now. I need my human underneath me, calling my name, knowing that she belongs to me and no one touches what is mine. I do not know which of Kendra's mates snatches her out of my lap, but I am grateful

because I am moments away from just standing and letting her fall to the ground, even though it would have made me a dishonorable male. She clears my lap, and then I'm on my feet, stalking over to the new human.

Toron smiles when he sees me coming over, and I notice he is making sure to touch her as little as possible. She sits in his lap as he leans back in the chair, his hands behind his head so he does not touch her. I should think about why he is doing this more, but I cannot think rationally. Not when what is mine is being held by someone who is most certainly not me.

"Get up," I snarl at the new human when I'm still a few tables away. She can hear me because the entire hall has gone silent. They're all watching my reaction to the human, like we all watched Almaac when he was trying to fight Erkoz all the time for getting between him and his mate. Now, it is all the brothers watching me to see what I will do to Toron. "Get up now."

The dark human keeps her eyes on mine as she gives me a scathing look. "You don't get to command me to do whatever you want."

"If you are still in his lap when I reach you, it will be him I take my anger out on." My hands clench, anger flowing through me like I have never felt before. My lips pull upward slightly when I see her eyes widen in worry about what I might do to Toron. I will not tell her that even if she gets out of his lap, I may still kill him.

She is very unhappy with me, but she is standing from Toron's lap and walking to me with a finger pointed at me. Her eyes are filled with fury, but my soul sings when her attention is fully on me. I don't even care that she is upset with me. I will take her words and her looks, no matter what kind they are.

"You have no right to treat me like this. You just had someone in your lap." The little female is right, of course, but I am no longer rational because she is

mine, and no one touches what is mine.

“You are mine,” I say to her as I snatch her hand out of the air. These are not words I would normally say, and I am not acting how I normally do. This little human and the strange feelings in my body have me acting strange. Her mouth parts slightly, and I want to lick at those sweet lips as I have seen Erkoz and Xoth touch their mate’s mouth. Not yet, not while I am angry. “You are mine, little human.”

“I am not yours.” She tries to wrench her hand from me, but I only hold her tighter. Even my little human knows her words are lies. I can see it on her face that she is forcing herself to say these things to me because she is hurt that I pulled Kendra into my lap. Yes, it was a mistake. One I regret now that I see how much it has hurt my female. I cannot take a human mate, though. If I were thinking rationally, I would know it is better to have her feelings hurt so she does not want me. However, I am not rational right now, and I want her not to be hurt by my actions. I want her in my arms, under my body, finding pleasure in my touch.

This human is mine. I may not mate her, but I will allow no one else to, either. Is that selfish? I do not care. I cannot make myself care about anything other than making sure this human only ever finds herself under one body and that it belongs to me.

“Come with me to my workshop, and I will not take you here in front of everyone so they know who you belong to,” I lean over her. My stature is much larger than hers, and I need her to understand that I will use everything I have to make her concede she is mine. “If you do not come, I will throw you over the table now and bury myself in you.”

“Fuck you,” the little human snarls up at me as she speaks, but I only smile at her.

“I will,” I say, her hand still in mine, my other hand grabbing her backside and pulling her close to me so I can press her against my groin. Her mouth parts when she feels the hardness of my cock against her. “You decide if it is here in front of everyone or in my workshop with just the two of us.” Her eyes try to dart around to the others in the room, but I hiss loud enough to get her attention back on me. “None of them matter. You pay attention to me.”

She narrows her eyes on me but then says the words that thrill me. Or they would if I could feel anything other than anger right now and for the last several days. “Take me to your workshop.”

“Smart little human.” I release her hand just long enough for her to set it on my chest. If she is trying to pretend to be angry at me, she is not doing a very good job. I can feel the want she has for me. It is the same want I have for her. I kneel to wrap my arm underneath my human’s backside so I can pull her up into my arms. She pushes against me once when I pull her off the floor, but her need to be mine is far stronger than her need to walk herself to my workshop.

“Deja,” Kendra’s voice irritates me since she is trying to take my mate’s attention. My human keeps her eyes on mine, even though she seems to want to respond to my friend. “Deja, do you want to go with him, or is he forcing you?”

I turn my face toward Kendra and feel the ugliest satisfaction when she steps back. I do not understand what is going on with my head for me to be so angry, so territorial over a female that I have only ever seen in my dreams. I cannot even mate her, but I am acting so unlike myself that I worry I will never go back to how I used to be before the storms came. The human in my arms touches my face gently, no longer trying to wriggle out of my grip but trying to comfort me and draw my attention back to her.

“None of them matter,” she whispers to me, the same words I said to her when she tried to look at my brothers. “You pay attention to me.”

My lips twitch upward in appreciation of my human being, just as territorial as I am. It makes me feel less like I have turned into a monster and more like I am figuring out how to be with my human. Maybe I just need to claim this female in the way lovers do, and I will start to feel better. I know I need to be more myself so I can talk to this little human about how I cannot mate her but would still like to share a bed with her. I cannot do that while I am the way I am now because I can think of only being inside of her in every single way.

“Deja,” Kendra says the strange word again, and both my human and I hiss at her. We are tired of being interrupted, but Kendra is not a female who is easily swayed away from what she wants. “I need some sort of confirmation you’re okay with this. You’re both acting like rabid animals, and we’re just worried.”

I cock my head to the side, realizing that the strange word must be my human’s name. That is the only reason Kendra would say it so frequently when I’ve never heard it before.

“Deja?” I say the word low and so quietly that only the human in my arms can hear me. I want her to lean closer to me and to find comfort in my touch, even though I have given her no reason to. She smiles up at me and nods her head like she understands I did not know it was her name until just now. “Beautiful.” I caress her cheek with my hand that is not underneath her backside and holding her up.

Deja keeps her eyes on mine as she holds up one of her hands toward Kendra. I can see her thumb sticking up in the air in my peripheral. I’m irritated she’s paying any attention to Kendra, but it is probably for the best

since if she didn't respond, Kendra might have her mates do something stupid that would only hurt our relationship.

All the brothers are worried about me and the red in my eyes that has not faded for many days. Even with Deja in my arms, I can feel the anger under my scales. The red in my eyes doesn't scare her, though. I wonder if she feels the same under her skin.

As I walk toward the doors that lead out of the great hall, Yril runs over with a pack. He doesn't get too close to me or my human because he probably can see that I am more than willing to rip my brothers apart if they try to get near Deja. I grind my teeth against one another because I do not want to be kept from Deja any longer than I have already. Six days they have kept her from me, and I have many things to do to her to make up for those lost days.

"Another storm is coming, brother," Yril says softly as he stands to the side of the door. "You may be sated with just your mate, but she will need food and water."

My jaw ticks at him being kind. I should have thought about what Deja could need if we were to leave the great hall where there is safety and everything we need to survive. It shouldn't take another brother filling a pack of dried olack meat and skins filled with water. This is how I know I am not in my right mind. Well, I already knew, but now, I know for certain. I am always thinking of how to help others, but since the storms started, I have been a selfish male. I am more surprised that the brothers are not more angry with me for how I have treated them, how I am treating my human, and how forgetful I am being in her needs.

"Thank you," I say as I take the pack from Yril, but I do not turn to face him.

Deja's eyes have not left mine, and I do not intend to be the one to break our contact. Unfortunately, I don't realize how difficult it is to walk to my workshop at a decent pace without looking at where I am going. My eyes must leave my human's face so I can get her to shelter before the storms return. I tell myself this is okay because the sooner I get her to my workshop, the sooner I can have all of her to myself.

Deja

Oh, I'm so completely fucked in the head. I have to be, right? There is no other explanation for why I'm in a demon's arms, letting him take me to a secondary location where we'll be trapped all alone, just the two of us, until the crazy storms that apparently happen here end. What's even more messed up? I'm not scared at all. I know I should be. Dath is at least two feet taller than me, definitely way stronger, and he seems pissed off to the extreme. I can't make myself worry or be upset when the warmth in my chest and lower is taking over any and all rational thoughts.

For someone who apparently doesn't want a mate, Dath sure loves calling me his and telling me I'm only allowed to be with him. Kendra was right about him getting mad about Toron showing me any interest. I wasn't in his lap for thirty seconds before Dath was growling and hissing and telling me to get out of Toron's lap. Then, he was touching me and calling me his. Was it way more intense than anyone has ever treated me ever? Most definitely. I don't hate it, though.

Olivia told me that the aliens all seem to believe in what we'd call

soulmates, and as far as the three women who came before me, they all found theirs and believe it just as much as the demons. My soul feels pretty tied to Dath's, so it's hard for me to think of reasons I shouldn't just let myself sink into the deep end of the pool with him. I mean, I'm here, and I can't leave, so I might as well try to see if I can find happiness with a demon alien man who is insanely possessive of me.

Dath pushes open the door to his workshop just as a roll of thunder sounds in the sky. His jaw tenses, and his eyes snap behind us until he's looking up at the sky like it's slighted him. Based on the screams from my first night here, he's not a big fan of thunderstorms.

"Hey, are you okay?" I ask. It's the first words we've spoken to one another since leaving the others in the great hall.

He turns his attention back to me and slowly closes the door. "I treat you as I have, and you worry about me?" He shakes his head, but the smile on his lips tells me he's in a good mood under the anger. "You should be worried about yourself. I plan on taking you repeatedly. I need to, and I am sure you feel it as well. We are tied to one another, and I need the feelings to lessen so I can think rationally again."

"You're going to fuck me until you're thinking rationally?" I ask. I knew the plan was sex when I agreed to go with him to his workshop, but I'm surprised he's just ready to go right now and so blatant about why.

"I would say we are to make love, but with how I am feeling, I am worried that there will not be much tenderness." He sets me on the ground, stepping toward me, boxing me in until my legs bump up against the edge of a bed. "I need you, Deja. More than anything, I have ever needed. Tell me you feel it too?"

I open my mouth to tell him I do. Maybe not the intense possession that

seems to take hold of him, but I definitely feel called to be with him. He moves his body closer to mine until I've fallen on the bed. The tunic rides up around the top of my thighs. Dath doesn't notice how close I am to being exposed, though. He's too focused on leaning down until his forehead is resting against mine. His horns frame my face before twisting upward in dark peaks.

"Humans touch mouths?" He asks, changing subjects so quickly that I barely register my nod before his black, forked tongue flicks at my lips, asking me to open for him. "Do this to me, Deja. Teach me how this works so I can treat you right before taking you."

I laugh and let my head fall to the mattress. "If you want to treat me right beforehand, your tongue needs to be a little lower."

Dath hisses at me, his red eyes closing as his jaw ticks back and forth again. "Little human, it is taking everything in me not to sink my cock inside your sex right this instant. Do not tease me right now. Any other time, I will welcome it, but I am trying to be an honorable male."

I grab his face between my hands and place a quick kiss against his scaled lips before pushing him away. "Be honorable later." I smile up at him. Something about being so close to him and pretty much pinned against his mattress has gotten me worked up so much that I'm slick between my legs, and my clit is aching for him to touch me. "I will teach you everything, but I need you right now. I need my mate, Dath."

"I cannot be your mate," He says through gritted teeth. His hands move to my waist, and he pushes me further onto the mattress as his words ring in my mind. He can't be my mate? Then why do we feel this way about each other? His eyes reach mine again, and a look of anguish crosses his face. My heart

feels like it was just flayed and left discarded. “Deja, I need to be inside you, but I cannot be your mate.”

I push at his chest. My heart cracking once again, and I’m surprised he can’t hear it with how much pain I’m in now. If he really wants to, he can do whatever he wants to me since he’s so much stronger than me. His eyes squeeze closed, and he lets out a long breath that blows over my face. When his eyes open, he nods his head slightly before rolling over so he’s on his back on the mattress next to me. I try to catch my breath and don’t dare move since he seems to be holding on by a thread.

A clap of thunder shakes the workshop, and then rain starts to hit the outer walls. Dath twitches slightly, his hand instinctively reaching for me before he stops himself and sets his arm back on the mattress between us. The slight gesture helps to mend some cracks in my heart. A second thunderclap quickly follows, and when he twitches again, I move to press my body against his. My need to comfort him and be close to him outweighs the pain of his rejection. He wraps an arm around me and pulls me on top of his body so I’m straddling his groin. I press my lips together and shake my head, but he keeps me in place with a firm grip on my hips.

“You are mine, Deja,” Dath groans as he holds me against his hardened cock. He’s still wearing his pants, which is good because he’d be feeling my wetness against him if he wasn’t. “Only mine. I will keep you safe. I will provide for you. I will be everything you need from me, but I cannot mate you.”

I suck my bottom lip into my mouth to keep myself from moaning when his cock twitches against me. I’m grinding against him slightly even though I’m still grappling with the bomb he dropped on me of not wanting to mate me. Kendra told me Dath said he couldn’t mate a human, but I kind of hoped that

was over with now that we're together. Being so close to him, using him to pleasure myself, it feels so good that I don't want to stop.

"Tell me it's enough," He begs as I keep grinding against him. I've grown brazen in it since he's not forced himself on me. No, he's just letting me use him to pleasure myself while he just lays there and takes it. "Please, Deja, tell me I can be everything for you. Let me be everything for you."

I release my lip, and all the moans I've been keeping back come tumbling out, which has him grabbing my hips, his claws softly pressing into my ass. Maybe I can agree to this just once. I can use him once to get off if he doesn't want to mate me. It feels too good to stop. Maybe I can do this without regretting it. Maybe. "Are you going to touch other women?"

"No," He says as a hiss forces itself between his teeth. "My body is yours. All of me is yours."

"Say that again." I lock eyes with him and roll my hips more deliberately. Maybe I can use him more than once. My heart sings at that idea.

He cocks his head to the side like he's confused, but he's smart enough and figures it out quickly. "My body is yours. Use me to bring yourself pleasure. Let me worship you with my tongue and my cock and my fingers. Whatever you need from my body, take it. All of me is yours."

"Fuck," A shiver runs down my spine, and heat pools in my lower stomach. I need him. I'll worry about not mating him later. Right now, my body needs his. "Get your cock out. Let me use you now."

Dath moves his hands from my hips to the drawstrings in his pants. He works them quickly until his pants loosen, and he's lowering them down his hips. He moves them enough to have his cock spring free, and then I'm swatting them away. "Please, can I touch you?"

"If I say no, what will you do?" I ask as I grab his cock in my hands and

admire the size of it.

Dath hisses, his cock twitching like crazy in my hands. “If you wish for me not to touch you, then I will not touch you. I want to be yours, and if you allow this, even though I cannot mate with you, I will do anything you require so long as we live.”

I try to digest his words. I’m pretty worked up, and I want to know what it will feel like to have a scaled dick inside me. It’s much cooler than my skin, and I’m curious how weird that’s going to feel. “Grab my hips. Next time, I’ll take my top off, and you can play with my tits.”

“You are goddess sent,” Dath rushes the words out as his fingers bite back into my skin. “So beautiful. So understanding. A human sent to soothe my soul and my rage.” He worships me with his words so easily that I can almost fool myself into thinking we’re going to mate still. It’s like he actually thinks the things he’s saying even though I’ve only touched him and allowed him to touch me. He lavishes me in praise and still says he doesn’t want to mate me. It’s a confusing combination, to say the least. “I will not last long, little human. You are the only woman I have had, and I know I will be in you for only a short time before I release.”

“Do you want to come inside me?” I ask, moving my hands up and down his cock. He exhales loudly, but a small look of confusion crosses his eyes. “Do you want to release inside me?” I use the same terminology as him, hoping that’s why he’s having such a hard time understanding.

“Yes, please. You honor me.” His red eyes look from my face to his cock in my hands. “I will cherish any young I can plant in your womb.”

Those words should not have me about to climax, but I still don’t really know the true effect these aliens have on humans. For all I know, he’s making me come with his mind, and I’m falling for it. Not that I’m

complaining since it feels like I'm on the cusp of the best orgasm I've ever had.

"You want to have young with me but don't want to mate with me?" I ask, one hand wrapped around his cock, stroking it, the other between my legs, rubbing my clit.

Dath's hands move from my hips in an instant, and he's grabbing both of my hands in his. I want to snap at him to put them back where I told him, but his eyes are pleading with me to listen to him for a moment. I take a shuttered breath and nod at him, letting him know I'm listening.

"I want to mate you more than you could ever know." He grabs my hips again. "I cannot, but that does not mean that I will not want it every moment of every day for the entirety of my life."

I grab his cock again and position it at my entrance. "Tell me who you belong to."

Dath's breathing is erratic as he locks his eyes between my legs, where we're about to join as one. "I belong to you, Deja. My mind, my body, my —" His words are cut off with a vicious hiss as I start to lower myself on him. His fingers press into my hips so tightly I'm pretty sure he's going to bruise me, but he's retracted his claws so they don't pierce my skin. "I am yours. All yours. Everything I am, everything I do. It is all for you, Deja." His words are labored, and he only stops when I sit flush against him, his cock twitching and releasing inside of me as soon as I've fully encased him.

"That was your first time?" I smile down at him when he finally looks back up at my face.

"Yes," He returns my smile, but his eyes are still bright red. "Would it please you to give me my second time?"

"Right now?" My eyes go wide, surprised that he's already ready to go

again. He hasn't gone soft at all, and he's still buried deep inside of me.

He cocks his head to the side, a smile lifting his lips, making him seem more innocent than he's looked since he brought me here. "Anytime. My body is yours. I told you this."

I grab the hem of my tunic and pull it over my head. A promise is a promise, after all, and I told him he'd get tits the next time we did this. Dath hisses again, the smile on his lips leaving. His eyes are pinned to my breasts, but his hands don't leave my hips even though I know he really wants to touch them. His tongue flicks out on his lips softly, and I swear, I think he's trying to figure out what they'll feel like to lick.

"Do you like my body?" I ask. I love my body, and based on Dath's face, he loves it, too. It's always nice to get compliments, and I'm not above fishing for them.

"You are a small human, but your tits are so round," Dath says, his eyes never leaving my chest. I laugh, which has my pussy clenching on his cock, reminding us both why we're here. "You are so beautiful, and seeing your tits has only made me feel even worse about how I am treating you."

My brows furrow, and I open my mouth to tell him that is not the compliment he thinks it is, but his cock is twitching inside of me, and not because he's coming again. No, I'm pretty sure he realizes he said something dumb and is trying to distract me with his cock. Luckily for him, he has a great cock.

"How rough will you be?" I ask as I move my hips again. I slide him halfway out of me before taking him again. I work at a steady rhythm so the adornments of his cock rub against my g-spot, causing the climax I've been working on to come to the front of my mind. "If you get control for the third time, how rough?"

Dath grinds his teeth together as he stares holes into my chest, as my tits bounce each time I take him inside me. “I need you on your hands and knees, letting me ram inside of you over and over until you clench down on my cock and force out all of my release.”

I moan at his words, letting my head loll back as the pleasure builds inside me. “I need to fuck you hard, too. The others say we’re tied together in ways they don’t understand.”

“I do not understand it either, but yes, we are.” He starts to pick me up and slam me down on his cock at a faster pace than I was going, but he’s doing all the work, so I let him. “I am a gentle male. I have always been kind and quiet. Then a beautiful human came to my dreams and soothed my nightmares. Now, all I feel is rage. Even in her presence, I am incensed by not bending her over and spearing her with my cock over and over in every hole until she is dripping with my seed. I am yours, Deja, but I need you to be mine as well.”

“Not your mate, though,” I moan. Am I throwing his weird stipulation in his face? Yes. But he needs to admit that everything he’s offering me is stuff a mate would offer. He’s just unwilling to give it its name. “How can you fill all my holes if you can’t mate me?”

The red in his eyes flashes, and a snarl curls his lips. “Do not taunt me right now, little human.”

“Or what?” I wiggle my brows at him, but he’s slamming me down on his cock perfectly, so I’m falling apart instead of teasing him more. “Fuck, Dath, yes,” I call out his name a few more times as he rides out his own orgasm as I pulse around him.

“Third time.” He gives me a wicked smile before pulling out of me completely. I feel his come rush out of me, but if he cares, he doesn’t show it.

He throws me onto the bed, his hands raising my hips into the air. I'm still trying to catch my breath and come down from the high of my orgasm. I'm surprised when he plows into me from behind and immediately bottoms out inside of me.

"Fuck!" I scream as he pulls out and enters me just as hard a second time.

"Be as loud as you want, Deja," Dath moves one of his hands next to my head so he can lean over me, allowing even more of his cock to bury itself inside of me. "I want the others to hear us over the storm. Let them know that this little human is taken care of and wants for nothing."

"Dath," I don't know why I'm saying his name. A plea for more, begging him to make me come again? I don't know, but I need him. All of him. And if I can have him all without the title, maybe I can learn to be okay without the title.

"Say my name again, little human," He grunts above me. "I want my name on your lips more often than any other word. I need to know that you are as lost in this bond as I am."

"I am, Dath," I cry out as he hits the sensitive spot inside of me. "I need you. I feel so empty and broken without you. Please, just tell me I'm yours forever. Tell me you'll stay with me even if I'm not your mate."

"Oh, little human," Dath chuckles above me, his pace finding a steady rhythm that has me panting and rolling in pleasure. "You will never be rid of me. You need not worry about being my mate or not. I am yours always, forever, and even in death. I am yours. I will tell you as often as you need to hear it, though, so never fear asking."

"Fuck," I reach behind me and grab his scaled thigh as tightly as I can as my orgasm floods my system and causes me to go limp. "Thank you, Dath," I say his name again as his come fills me for a third time.

“Do not thank me,” He says as he pulls out of me. He brings a cloth up between my legs and begins to clean up the mess. “You have changed my life more than you could ever know. It is me who will thank you every day in every way you could ever want.” He finishes wiping the come and wetness from between my legs and then cleans himself off. I roll over to my side and watch him clean off. The thunder outside makes him tense every once in a while, but he’s not screaming like he was when he had nightmares.

He looks over at me, his eyes narrowing. They’re still red, but they’re not as frightening anymore now that I know it must just be a part of whatever this bond is between us. “Should you use the bathroom?”

“Actually, yeah,” I stretch quickly and then look around. “Diane and Almaac had a—“

Dath is on me as soon as another man’s name leaves my lips. The red in his eyes flashes as he forces me down on the bed, his cock sliding inside of my very well-used pussy. “I belong to you, and you belong to me. I am not usually this territorial, but it seems it is another effect you have on me.”

“Fuck me, Dath.” I turn my head to the side so I can see him, at least partially. He’s watching me like he’s scared he’s going too hard, being too much, by being so territorial and possessive. I might think the same, but for some reason, knowing he’s this worked up about me has me falling even harder for him. I smile up at him, and some of the tension in his face leaves. “Fuck me until I know not to make the same mistake.”

He hisses loudly, one hand leaving my hips and coming down on my back to stroke down my spine softly. He’s still fucking me with reckless abandon, and I’m feeling just how desperate he is for me. Desperate to claim me, mark me, make sure I know that I’m his just as much as he’s mine. He’s trying to make sure I’m comforted, too, though. Sure, it’s not the best comfort since

it's just his hand rubbing my back while he rams himself into me over and over, but he's trying, and it's pretty hot.

“So beautiful, so perfect.” He groans. “You take my cock so well. Made to be filled by me, yes?” I nod my head, watching his face as best I can. I thought the devotion I saw Kendra's and Diane's mates look at them with was something special, but I'm seeing now that's just part of being with one of these men. He huffs out a breath as a smile pulls at his lips. “Squeeze my cock, little human. Show me how badly you want me to release in your womb.”

I have never practiced kegels in my life, but I'm trying now for this demon who wants to feel me pulse around him before he comes inside of me. I only tense around him twice before he's twitching inside of me, his warm come filling me just like it did the three times before. I grab his thigh like I did earlier and squeeze it so he knows I want him close to me still, even when he needs to fuck me hard. His breathing is ragged above me, and his hands release me completely, so my wet noodle of a body is going limp against the mattress.

“I will clean you and take care of you now,” He says as he touches my face with the tips of his fingers. I give him a blissed-out smile so he knows I'm perfectly fine. I've never been fucked like that, but I'll survive it. Hell, I may grow accustomed to it, and then I'll be screwed on ever finding someone to fuck me as good. Which is fine since this demon seems to think he'll never tire of me.

“Thank you for being so understanding.” He says softly as his hands spread my legs, and he cleans me up again. I sigh and relax against the mattress. I'm not napping, but I'm enjoying being taken care of. Once he finishes, we can

get to know each other a bit more since we kind of just jumped into bed with one another.

Dath

My cock is still hard in my pants, and my rage is still simmering underneath my scales. I thought making love with Deja would make me feel better, but I released four times inside her, and I still feel like I need to mark her as mine. She has agreed to be mine even though I cannot mate her and give her the certainty of being claimed fully by a male, but I will be everything a mate is, just without the title. It is the only way I can think to get around my mother's request.

“What's this?” Deja is moving around my workshop, looking at all of my supplies and touching them as she looks. This is as much her workshop as it is mine now, so she can touch and look and do whatever it is she wants to any of it. Unfortunately, she's holding a piece of parchment and frowning at me like I have betrayed her. I know why, and I know I need to explain the image to her before she starts thinking things that are not true.

I grab my human around her waist and pull her back against my body as I look over her shoulder at the sketch I am still working on. I let her hold it, hoping she does not want me to destroy it. I will for her if it is what she

wants. I know that if I found an image she had drawn of another male, it would fill me with more rage than I am currently. I can only imagine how mad she must be at me.

“What is this?” She asks again, her voice smaller, like she’s sad instead of angry, and that most certainly will not do.

“It is a sketch of a human who has been a friend to me these last thirty or so days,” I answer her honestly. I would never lie to my human, not when she has blessed me with all of herself. “Erkoz’s and Xoth’s mate has been a good friend to your Dath these long days. I have not been a good friend to her, though.”

Deja traces her fingers over the charcoal lines of Kendra’s face. I have sketched her as she is most of the time. Carefree and full of happiness. Her eyes crinkle as a smile pulls at her lips. She is looking to the side. I imagine it is Xoth that is making her so happy since I have sketched her in the bathing pool, and he is always the one having her strip in front of all of us. Her shoulders are bare, and her collarbones are visible, but the water covers the rest of her body.

“You’ve seen her naked?” Deja looks up at me, her bottom lip getting sucked into her mouth so she can chew on it.

“I have.”

“Have you slept with her?”

I narrow my eyes on my little human. She is very jealous, and I know I should feel bad that she is feeling these feelings, but I cannot when it is making my chest swell to know she cares so deeply for me. “I have shared a bed with her, but only for sleep.”

“She’s mated, though.” Deja runs her fingertips over the sketch, her fingers lingering on all the details I have put into Kendra’s face. It is a portrait of her

that she can hang in her room. I do not plan on keeping it, but I have not yet finished it since I have been away from my workshop for many days.

“Erkoz and Xoth enjoy watching her touch other males.” I pause to see her reaction, and when a question seems to form in her mind that I know I will not like, I add. “I do not enjoy that, and you will not even think of touching other males. We will see if I can handle you even being in the same room as them.”

Deja laughs and turns in my arms so she’s looking up at me. “Why did you draw this?”

She holds the parchment up to me, and I take it from her before placing it back on the small table it was resting on. Maybe I can finish it before this storm is over, so I can give it to Kendra and get it out of my workshop since my sweet human is not enjoying that I have sketched another female.

“We have decorated twice for the new humans that come through the portal to join our tribe. We decorated for Almaac’s mate, but she was bruised and broken when she first got here, so she did not see the decorations. We decorated for you because I asked the brothers to. I do not know if you saw or enjoyed the decorations, but we tried to make it look nice.”

Deja smiles up at me, and it causes me to stop talking so I can lean down and lick at her pretty lips. I want to know how she can find pleasure in touching her mouth to mine, but her giggling stops me from asking again. I will ask once we have finished speaking about why I have sketched Kendra.

“I didn’t see the decorations.” Deja shakes her head, but her smile stays. “I didn’t know you’d decorated for me, though. If I knew someone I like did that for me, I would’ve tried to stay awake.”

“No,” I shake my head. “The decorations are much less important than whatever you need. I just want to explain to you why I am drawing this

because there is one female we did not decorate for once we knew humans were coming to our tribe. She was very hurt to know that all the brothers put in work to make the great hall look nice for her sisters but not for her. I made this for her as an apology.”

“Oh,” Deja’s hands roam over the scales along my chest as her eyes refuse to meet mine. They are still red. I do not think they will ever not be red again, but that is not why she isn’t looking at me. I watch her in silence for long moments as she continues to trace my scales and cause my cock to harden even more, thanks to her touch.

My body has changed since she has come to our tribe. I have grown almost half a head taller, and my muscles have filled out much more of my frame than they ever have before.

Just when I’m about to bend her over the table and fuck her again because I cannot handle all of her attention without releasing, she speaks. “So you’re normally a pretty sweet guy, then?”

“I have been told I am the kindest of my brothers,” I say with a small smile. She still is not looking at me, and it is frustrating because I do not know what she is not telling me. “I am not usually so angry, but something is changing within me, and I do not know what it is. I know I do not hate it because I am changing because the most perfect human has come into my life.”

“I like who you are right now.” She traces my scales again to buy herself some time like she is trying to choose her words carefully. “I like how possessive you are over me. I love that you’re willing to give me everything just so I’m yours.” She sighs softly, her eyes looking over at the sketch of Kendra.

“Tell me what is bothering you, Deja.”

She chews on her lip before looking up at me. “I didn’t know I wanted that

version of you until I saw that. Not that I'm not enjoying you like this, but I don't think I realized you're not always upset or wanting to angry fuck me."

I grab her face with one of my hands and keep her eyes on mine. "Anything you want, any time you want, anywhere." She opens her mouth to speak, but I cut her off. "Yes, I am not sure who I am right now, but your happiness is all that matters to me. I can lose myself a thousand times, and so long as you are here, I will strive to make you happy."

I wrap an arm around her back and pick her up so I can carry her back to the bed. I set her down and pull on her tunic until she allows me to strip it from her. My cock aches at her naked body on full display for me, but I am not doing this to find release. No, I need to make sure my human knows I do everything for her now. She is my reason for being.

"Dath," Deja says my name so sweetly, but I cannot acknowledge it just yet. I need to gather my supplies so I can sketch her and show her I can still be just as sweet. She may just have to ask for it instead of me being able to do it on my own. "Dath, what are you doing?"

I grab a piece of parchment and settle into my chair that I've brought over near the bed. I balance a piece of smoothed wood in my lap and place my charcoal on one side and my parchment in the center. I make sure I have everything, and then I look up at my sweet little human, who is watching me with wide eyes. I smile at her, very proud that I have made her speechless. Her eyes dart from the parchment in my lap to my face and then to her naked body.

"You want me to be..." Her voice trails as her hands try to cover her body.

"Naked," I nod my head, leaning forward so I can pull her hands off her body. She does not need to cover herself from me. "Lean back and spread yourself for me. Let me draw you like this first."

“Dath,” her voice wavers, and she is no longer saying my name sweetly. No, she seems uncertain and worried.

“Tell me whatever it is that worries you,” I say, leaning back in my chair. I want to give her space if she needs space. Something about me wanting to sketch her beautiful body has made her wary, and I do not know what it is. She seemed to want me to sketch her not many moments ago, but now she does not seem to want it. Or maybe she does, but she is self-conscious of herself. I do not know why since she is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen.

“You want to sketch me naked?” She says the same question she has already asked, and I have already answered.

“And spread, yes.” I nod my head, not understanding why she is having issues with this. “My Deja has the most beautiful body. I would like to sketch it, and I thought she would enjoy this.”

“Naked?” she asks again.

I narrow my eyes on her. “And spread.”

“Who will see this sketch?” She blows out a long breath of air but starts to lean back against the bed. She positions some pillows behind her so she is leaning up and still looking at me, which has a smile splitting my lips. Her hands move between her legs, but she has made no move to spread herself for me.

“Any sketch of my human is only for me,” I tell her as I begin to do a rough outline of her upper half. I will wait to begin on her lower half until she is doing as I ask and spreading herself for me. “I will kill any male who thinks of looking at what is mine.” I glance up at her to make sure she understands just how true my words are. Her plump lips part slightly, and I think again of how badly I want to feel them on mine. “You worry about someone else

seeing this?” I do not need to wait long for her to nod her head. “No, little human, never worry. You are mine. I will keep you safe in every way. This includes making sure that only my eyes view all of your beauty.”

My words seem to have convinced her she is safe with me because, ever so slowly, she spreads her legs to reveal the wiry hairs between her thighs. Her lips are still parted, her breathing hitching in her chest, but I want to see if she is weeping between her legs for me. If she enjoys baring herself for me as much as I enjoy looking at her.

“Wider, little human,” I keep my eyes pinned between her legs until her thighs spread obscenely wide. “Use your hands and spread your sex for me.” My voice is gravelly as I try to keep the words from being a growl. I’m barely holding on to my sanity as her fingers pull her lower lips apart, and she presents herself to me so beautifully. I close my eyes, willing myself not to mount her right this moment, and when I open them again, she is smiling at me like she is proud to have such an impact on me.

“Stay just like that, Deja,” I grunt as I begin to sketch as fast as I can. I will make sure it is done correctly, but right now, I only need to get the outline done.

If I can get the outline done, I will allow myself to ravage my human again, and then we can continue the sketch. As I continue drawing, her sex glistens more and more. The wetness between her legs drips onto the mattress as more time passes. The little nub between her lips grows slightly in the need to be touched.

By the time I finish the outline, my human is panting and needy, and I am going to be rough with her even if I want nothing more than to be a sweet male. When I plunge myself inside of her in one swift motion, she cries out my name and scrapes at my scales with her fragile claws. Her body responds

to me like it knows it belongs to me, and it is not long before she is thanking me and crying my name loud enough to cover the sounds of thunder that shake my workshop.

I want to continue drawing her, but she yawns loudly when we have finished making love, and I know I need to take care of her and make sure she sleeps. We can continue our sketching and lovemaking in the morning when she is refreshed, and her sex has healed from how roughly I have treated her.

The rain continues to beat down on my workshop as I pull Deja close to my body and hold her tightly. The thunder and the storms do not seem to scare me as much when she is in my arms. In fact, I am able to fall asleep with very little tension in my body, even though normally I am filled with terror until exhaustion forces me to sleep.

Deja

Four days of storms mean Dath and I have been sharing the small workshop space together for four days of drawing, painting, fucking, and talking. Dath now has about five sketches of me in various sexual positions. I'm sure if he could figure out a way to sketch us fucking he would, but he hasn't broached the topic with me yet. I want to tell him he needs to draw some sketches of him jerking off so I can look at those the same way he looks at the sketches of me.

Dath is currently sitting in his chair, watching me finger myself on my hands and knees while he sketches what I look like from the side. He's hissed each time I've brought myself to orgasm, but he promises me he hasn't released yet. He knows the rules now. If he's going to release, it's going to be in or on me and not in his pants. He tried to be kind the second day and not cover me in his come, but I made sure he knew exactly where I wanted it to go. His red eyes had flickered brighter when I told him, grateful that I want him to be this beastly version of himself.

A knock on the workshop door alerts us to the fact that the rain has

apparently stopped. Dath's face contorts into a snarl as he looks toward the door. I still my movements and turn around to face him. I want to reach for my tunic, but he picks it up and takes it with him as he goes to open the door.

“Stay on the bed, little human. I will be back, and then I will be inside you. I cannot stand that someone has interrupted our time together, and I need to make sure I take you.”

I whimper softly at the promise of Dath using my body to calm his anger. The rage that he feels is always just barely hidden, but he's never upset at me. No, his anger is at everything else in the world. Anything keeping him from me, interrupting us, or having to share my attention. Yes, he fucks me harder when he's upset or when he thinks something is keeping us apart, but he's loving and caring in everything he does for me. He keeps waiting for his normal self to come back, but I'm wondering if we've changed each other forever.

“What?” Dath hisses as he opens the door.

I can just barely make out the other voice and am surprised to hear a male and a female voice. I know I'm not myself. I know I'm about to piss Dath off more, but I can't stop myself when I hear the voice of the other woman that Dath has allowed to impact him. He's seen her naked, he's touched her, and he's shared a bed with her. Even just one of those has me seeing red, but all three have me wanting to claim my alien in front of her and her mates so they know he's mine now and not hers.

I grab a tunic from the floor. It doesn't seem to be dirty, but it could have been used to wipe up come at some point. I don't really care. I just want to be covered so I can touch my demon and remind him he belongs to me. He won't be happy that I'm not in bed anymore, but he'll have to get over it when he sees how upset I am that he's even entertaining another woman. I

creep closer to the front door as quietly as possible so I can listen and also not alert Dath that I'm there until I'm right beside him.

"Tell your mate I cannot speak to her unless my mate is here," Dath's voice is lethal as he speaks. There's an irritated sound coming from Kendra, but she says nothing, and Dath doesn't tilt his head downward to face her. "Why are you here, Erkoz?"

"The elders say you need to mate with the human, or the storms will continue," Erkoz says. "We hoped it would happen since you've been here alone for four days, but the storms are only pausing. The elders say even more will come."

"My lack of mating should have no effect on the storms," Dath's words are barely audible through the rumble of a warning hiss in his chest. His irritation is plain to see, and I'm surprised that Erkoz and Kendra are willing to listen to him being so hostile toward them.

"Toron and Yril's father says you are a chosen," Erkoz says the words slowly, like they mean something important. I pause my movements and listen to what they're saying because it seems more important than showing them that Dath is mine. "The goddess blesses us with human females, and now she is blessing us with warriors to keep them safe."

"I am not a chosen," Dath says. "And I cannot mate the female. I have already told your mate this, and I have explained it to my Deja. She has agreed to be mine, but we will not mate."

I shouldn't care about not mating Dath since he's right that I agreed to allow him to be my everything without mating me, but having him tell them he's not willing to mate me makes my stomach sour. It's one thing to know between the two of us we've agreed not to mate, but for him to tell others hurts.

“You disrespect the goddess and your mate by refusing her?” Erkoz’s voice is filled with anger and vitriol, a stark difference from the amazement he had when talking about Dath being a chosen warrior.

I barely have a moment to register the rage in his voice before the sound of fighting fills the air. Erkoz pulls Dath out of the workshop and has him on his back when I finally kick into action. I scramble out the door behind the two males and stand next to Kendra as they fight with each other. I don’t look at her, too embarrassed about our behavior.

“You do not know what my relationship is,” Dath uses the anger that’s always burning under his scales to overpower Erkoz and roll him underneath him.

Dath’s told me so many times over the past few days how he worries about the anger and the rage that he can never get rid of. He says it’s calmer when I’m near him, but it’s never gone away completely since I’ve been in his world. For a day or two, I thought maybe he had some anger issues that he needed to work through, but he’s never shown me any of the aggression that keeps him tense and alert.

“I know you are a weak male if you think you are doing right by anyone,” Erkoz spits. “A dishonorable male allowing himself between a female’s legs with empty promises.”

“You do not know—“

“I know that all the females have passed, and not one of them would be proud that you were the one left to be a chosen if this is how you are treating a female the goddess has sent to you.”

Erkoz can’t overpower Dath. My demon might’ve been smaller when we left the great hall, but he’s grown in height and muscle since we’ve been alone.

To me, Dath's physical changes were noticeable after waking up the first morning with him in the workshop. He was at least twenty pounds heavier and an inch or two taller. Dath told me I must not have seen him very well since we were mostly in bed all day. By the second day of being trapped alone, he noticed it, too. His clothing getting tighter and tighter is what finally made him concede maybe I was right about saying he was growing. The differences aren't that outstanding until I see him rolling around on the ground with Erkoz. Dath's body seems to have changed just as much as his mind apparently has.

"You act like this. You should have been banished with Xarr and the other dishonorable males." Erkoz continues to berate Dath as they fight each other for dominance.

"I am nothing like them," Dath roars in Erkoz's face, but Erkoz only smiles cruelly, knowing he's getting under Dath's scales.

"Keep treating your female this way. I am sure your mother is proud she passed from this world and left a son that disrespects the goddess and her memory."

Erkoz's words have the desired impact on Dath, who staggers off him and shakes his head like someone's punched him in the face. His red eyes snap over to me, but he doesn't move any closer to me. No, he turns away from me and runs back through the tribe in the opposite direction of the great hall.

I want to call out to him, to run after him, but Kendra grabs my arm and pulls me into a hug. Erkoz dusts himself off and stands near us.

"He will be back before nightfall," Erkoz says as he looks up at the sky. "Another storm is coming, and he won't be caught out in it." He looks down at me and the silent tears that are rolling down my cheeks. "Come with us to the great hall. We will keep your mind off how foolish your male is being."

I sniffle loudly and wipe my eyes. "I need to get something real quick," I say as I run back inside and grab the sketch of Kendra that Dath finished yesterday. I don't want him to go back to the workshop and me not be there and him to do something rash like destroy any of his art. Plus, it's completed, and Kendra deserves to have it after Dath was rude to her and treated her like she didn't even exist. I mean, I loved it while it was happening. Now I'm back to thinking rationally, and I feel awful for wanting him to ignore his friend at all.

"Dath has been working on this for you," I hand the sketch to Kendra, who takes it and stares at it with wide eyes and a smile on her lips. "It's his apology for not decorating the great hall when you showed up."

Erkoz snatches the sketch out of Kendra's hands and examines it. "He should have added your tits." He smiles at his mate before looking back at the sketch. "Maybe we ask him to make another so your mates can have a sketch to look at when we touch ourselves to thoughts of you."

I narrow my eyes at Erkoz, knowing full well Dath isn't allowed to sketch any more human females, especially not any intimate details of them. He catches my eyes and laughs loudly. "Dath's female is just as angry as him, isn't she? This is why you need to mate. A chosen and his mate are tied and will slowly go mad if they are without one another."

The sound of thunder far off reminds us we need to get back to the great hall.

"You can explain everything the elders told us as soon as we get back," Kendra says as she scans the sky. "I don't want to be out when the weather is this unpredictable."

"What about Dath?" I ask as I look back in the direction he ran off.

"He hates the storms," Erkoz assures me. "He will be safe before they

come. If he is a smart male, he will come to the great hall where his mate is. I have a feeling he is a stupid male, though, so he may stay in his workshop until the storms finish. In that case, he might actually go mad and mate you, even if he is not thinking clearly. Either way, the goddess will make sure he mates you and that our tribe has a chosen.”

“Dath is still a stupid male, brothers,” Erkoz shouts when we near the dining tables where all the other demons are sitting. “He tried to fight Erkoz and then ran off when he realized he was no match for my superior strength.”

I roll my eyes, not giving him more of a reaction than that. Thankfully, all the others seem to know he’s full of shit, too.

“You are stronger than a chosen?” Toron smiles at Erkoz and challenges his statement. “Tell us then, why has the goddess not chosen you to be our warrior?”

Erkoz flops down in a chair and pulls Kendra into his lap. “The goddess has already blessed me with the best personality and the best female. If she made me our warrior as well, all the other brothers would have no reason for being. Erkoz is the closest to perfection we will ever see in a male, but even the goddess knows she cannot make a male perfect. She saves that for her females.”

The brothers all grumble, but Kendra is swooning in Erkoz’s lap and kisses his scaled lips as he smiles. I find a seat near them, but I’m called away by an older male motioning for me to sit near him, Toron, and another demon. They all have the same shaped horns as Dath and similar coloring. I have a fleeting thought of questioning whether they’re related before remembering that

Kendra told me Toron and Yril were his relatives when we used Toron to make Dath jealous.

“Dath’s mate?” The older demon asks as I sit across the table from him. Toron is in the seat next to me, his presence comforting since he helped me get Dath to want me when he was acting a little dumb.

“Uh, not yet, but maybe one day,” I say as I rub the back of my head. Dath has made it perfectly clear that he can’t mate me, but everyone seems to think that he needs to, even if it isn’t what he wants. “He’s pretty adamant that he can’t mate with me.”

The older man’s eyes flash red for a moment before they return to their dark black. “He will see reason. I am sure.”

I nod my head, not knowing what else I’m supposed to do. “Are you the elder that thinks Dath’s a chosen?”

“Yes. My name is Narrath,” the older man says. He looks from Toron and Yril before returning to my gaze. “Dath is my blood. His father was my brother. He still is if he’s alive and well in another tribe. Toron and Yril are my sons. I stayed behind when all the females died since I had two young sons. Their mother and sisters died quickly when the sickness overtook them. Their older brother was sent with Dath’s father to find a home in a new tribe.”

“Wait, his father left him?” I ask, trying to fully understand everything Narrath just told me. “What about Dath’s mother?”

“She was the last female to pass. She found out she was pregnant right before Dath’s father left.” He rubs his horn as he looks around the room, almost like he’s trying to make sure Dath isn’t there to listen. “Ulmara was a strong female. She was young and knew nothing of carrying a babe, but she forced herself to live through the sickness until Dath was born. Then her fight

was over. Many of the males do not talk about those we have lost because many of them do not remember their mothers at all.”

“Our father always told us stories, though,” Toron smiles and breaks up some of the sadness that the older male is telling me. “No more sad stories today, though. Tell Dath’s mate why you think he is a chosen.”

“Where would you like me to start, Dath’s human?” Narrath asks. “I can start at the beginning when Dath was still young and survived the storms when some of the elders tried to thin the number of mouths we had to feed, or I can skip to ten days ago when you blessed this tribe with your presence?”

“The beginning,” I say and then chew on my lip when I see Toron’s face fall. He gives me a weak smile, shrugs his shoulders, and turns to face his father.

“Toron suggested less sad stories, but yes, let the female hear the saddest.” Yril crosses his arms in front of his chest and leans back in his seat. “Just know that we all survived, and the worst any of us have to deal with now is nightmares.”

“Nightmares and issues with mating females, it seems,” Narrath chuckles to himself. “I need my sons to find a mate because maybe the goddess will look favorably on them as well and allow them the honor of being a chosen. My father was one, so maybe they will be.”

“Tell your story, father,” Yril says, shaking his head and apparently not wanting to listen to his father talk about him and his brother possibly being warriors like Dath. Maybe they realize just how much it’s affected Dath and his personality, or maybe they don’t want the responsibility. It’s not really my place to judge, especially since I don’t really care unless it’s about my demon.

“Eat your food, Deja.” Narrath points at a plate that another demon brought

over at some point. I frown at his use of my name, but he smiles at me in amusement. “There comes an age where we know names no longer symbolize the want to bed someone. I have been at that point for many years, but never thought there would be a female here I could say the name of. If it offends you in any way, I can refrain.”

My eyes dart between Narrath and his sons, who don't seem stunned by him using my name. He must be telling me the truth about it no longer mattering as we age. Which makes sense. I'm sure there's going to come a time when the other women and I have children, and it'll be too much of a headache not to call them by their names.

“No, it's fine. Start your story, and I'll start eating,” I say as I grab my fork. I don't know if he's not wanting to tell it or if he's just stalling. I don't want there to be any more stalling, though. I want to know everything about my demon, even if I have to get the information from his family because he's too busy fucking me to really talk to me about the important stuff.

Narrath smiles and motions for me to begin. As soon as I raise a piece of meat to my lips, he speaks, telling me about what happened to Dath when he was still a child.

Dath

Eighteen Years Ago

*“**W**here are we going?” I tug on Toron’s sleeve as one of the elders leads us out of the tribe’s walls and into the trees.*

The elders have been teaching some of the older males to hunt, but Droth, the tribe’s leader, has told me many times I am much too small to carry a bow yet. Yril is also much too small, but he is walking next to Toron, who is holding both of our hands as the elders take some of us into the trees.

“I do not know.” Toron’s eyes narrow at the other young males walking with us. His body is tense, but he just holds my hand tighter. His jaw ticks softly as he looks up at the elder, who seems to be in charge. I do not know his name. I barely remember all the names of the brothers close in age to me. I just know that we are supposed to do what the elders ask because they look out for us. They keep us safe.

“Where’s father?” Yril asks from the other side of Toron.

The elder nearest us casts a downward glare and pulls his lips back in a snarl. I avert my eyes from his quickly. I dislike it when the elders are mad at us, and some of them have been getting more and more upset as time passes.

They complain that there are too many of us and that we do not help around the tribe.

“We should have left the older one at the tribe,” the elder, who looks mad, speaks to another.

“He would not leave his blood, so he had to come.” Another elder says. They do not use hushed voices, which is strange since it seems like they are speaking of things they shouldn’t. “Narrath will learn that he should not put up such a fight when it comes to the betterment of the tribe. If he had agreed with this plan, he would have only lost one son instead of two.”

I do not understand why they are mentioning Toron’s and Yril’s father or why they talk about him with so much anger. Toron must understand them better than us because his eyes flash red, and he is tugging us closer to him. His claws dig into the scales of my hands until he is drawing blood. I want to cry out and tell him he is hurting me, but the elders are staring at us with a look of amusement in their eyes. Why are they happy that Toron is upset and hurting us?

Toron’s footsteps slow, and his hold on Yril and me ensures that we slow as well. We are in the middle of the group, away from the elders, when he speaks to us in a low voice. It is clear what he says is only for Yril and me and that we must take him seriously, but I am becoming frightened of the trees and the monsters that lurk in their darkness.

“We need to be careful,” Toron says. “They mean to kill us, and I will not let them kill my blood.”

“They aren’t going to kill us,” Yril says as he looks around at the group of males that were led into the trees. “There are too many of us and only a handful of them.”

“And most of you are small.” Toron hisses like it is our fault that we are

still small males. Even he has not gone through the changing to become a large male, I do not know why he speaks of our smallness like we can help it. “They do not mean for any of us to return to the tribe.”

I want to tell Toron that he must be mistaken because the elders have always looked out for us. Yes, there is often fighting over feeding all the young since there are many more of us than there are males who can hunt. The elders who keep looking back at us with a look of accomplishment on their faces are worrying, though. My chest begins to beat rapidly as my body starts shaking. Yes, something is very wrong.

“What should we do?” I ask. My small voice is louder than I mean for it to be. One elder turns to look at us, but they know they’ve walked all of us to a spot in the trees that we are not familiar with. It is easy since none of us have ever been outside the walls except for Toron, but he is never allowed to venture this far.

“We stay together.” Toron slows his footsteps again. “We can survive together, yes?”

I nod, and I assume Yril does as well because Toron keeps slowing his steps until we are nearing the back of the group. His head moves to scan our surroundings as the brothers move around us. I think he is waiting for the right time to move away from the group so we can make our way back to the tribe, but no, he is watching all the elders.

“They are leaving now,” Toron says. “They will leave us here to die when night comes.”

“What?” My little voice is shrill and grating on Toron’s nerves, I am sure, but he cannot say things like that and expect me not to be frightened. “We need to go back. We cannot survive the night.”

“Calm down!” Toron hisses loudly next to me, his red eyes causing me to

cry when they land on me. His face softens when he sees how he is scaring me, and he releases my hand to brush my tears from my face. "You are a strong male. Both of you are. You need to be strong for all the other brothers."

"What are you going to do?" Yril wipes at his own eyes but tries to look strong even though we all know he does not actually feel that way.

"Today is not a hunting day, but Almaac told me he was coming out on his own because we need more meat." Toron scans the trees like if he hopes for it hard enough Almaac will appear and be there for us to ask for help. He is almost a full-grown male, and he is a wonderful hunter, so he will be able to get us all back to the tribe safely. "He was going to train me since father still thinks I am too young, but then I overheard the elders talking about grabbing all the young, so I knew I needed to stay close to both of you."

"So you will find Almaac?" My frown wobbles on my lips as I try to hold back my fright. I am hoping I can be strong like Toron needs me to be.

"I will," Toron nods his head and then turns his eyes to the sky. "You and Yril need to gather the brothers and find a shelter."

"Where?" I ask.

I do not know why will need to find shelter if Toron is going to find Almaac, who will save us, but I do not ask these questions because I must be a strong male. I need to be strong and help my brothers. Not be scared and crying like a babe.

"I do not know, but there are many shelters out here. Father says it is where brothers go when storms catch them by surprise during a hunt or if they are caught out at night." Toron grinds his teeth against one another and nods his head like he is trying to convince himself to be strong, just as Yril

and I are. “You need to find one. A storm is coming, and the brothers will perish if they are caught in it.”

“There are many days until the storms,” Yril says, pulling on his brother’s hand like he’s trying to make him believe his words.

Toron keeps his eyes above us, even though the trees block our view of the clouds. “A storm is coming. Trust your brother, Yril.”

“We will find shelter,” I grab Yril’s hand in mine and tug him toward the brothers, who are all looking around like they are just noticing that there are no elders around us any longer. “Come, Yril. The brothers will not listen to me. I am the smallest of us all.”

Yril does not rip his eyes away from Toron until brothers, who are full of questions, surround us. Some have already started crying and asking for their fathers if their fathers are still around. Toron must disappear into the trees because Yril is returning his attention to the brothers and me.

“The elders have left us,” Yril shouts as loud as he can over the sounds of crying brothers. “Toron has gone to get help, but we need to find shelter.”

Yril pauses and looks around at all the big black eyes that are staring at him. He is not the oldest, but he speaks for Toron, who is the oldest in the group that was brought out, which means he is the leader by default.

“My father would not have sent us out here to die,” Erkoz speaks up from the back of the group.

“Your father was not here leading us, was he?” Yril asks. It is true that Erkoz’s father is an honorable male and often speaks of the older males needing to eat less or hunt more often, so they can feed all of us. It is the same with Toron and Yril’s father and many other males who were not out here in the trees with us, leading us to our deaths.

“They will look for us,” Erkoz says, his brows pulling together. “How will

they find us if we leave this area?”

“They would not have taken us somewhere that the others would look.” Yril counters. I am grateful he is the one to speak with all the brothers because I can hardly keep up with what they are all saying. “We move as a group, and we find shelter.”

Erkoz opens his mouth to say something else, but his mouth wobbles before a small cry falls from his lips. He wipes at his eyes but nods at Yril like he is done arguing with him. He is scared like all of us, and he wants to do what he thinks is right so the elders can find us quickly.

Yril does not tell them about the storm, which is the main reason we need to find shelter. If he tells them about the storms, they may really panic, and that will not be good for any of us.

Yril keeps his hand locked in mine the entire time he speaks with the brothers and even when we begin walking through the trees. We try to go back the same way we were brought out, but none of us have ever been out in the trees. We hear sounds in the trees that remind us we are not alone out here, but thankfully, it is only olack that is out during the day. They are dangerous, but only if they think we are a threat. We are small males, so hopefully, they will all think we are pathetic and not a threat to them at all.

We walk for so long that I am surprised there is still light in the sky. All of us are tired and thirsty. Our legs are aching, but we encourage one another to keep walking. We have most certainly become lost because we did not travel for this long with the elders before they left us, but we must be getting close to one of the many shelters that are out here. They are not very well made, but they will keep us safe from the cracks of light that strike the ground when storms are here.

Thunder sounds in the sky, and all of us freeze our movements. Yril and I

kept the fact that Toron thought a storm was coming from the brothers because we did not want to make them panic if it was unnecessary. Now, it is clear that Toron was correct about a storm, and we will need to panic soon if we cannot find shelter.

“Keep moving, brothers,” Yril tries to keep his voice from wavering, but it is difficult when the rain starts to drip through the trees above us. Thankfully, the brothers have no choice but to move with us, or they will be stuck in the storm.

“The goddess is looking out for us, Yril,” I say excitedly as a small stone building comes into our vision. I run toward it, wanting to get there as fast as possible to make sure it is fully built and not falling apart. When I throw the door open and am met with just darkness, I cannot stop the smile from breaking across my lips. “Brothers, hurry!” I yell, but they are already behind me, trying to get inside and smash themselves in so they are safe from the storm that is coming quickly.

“We are blessed,” Yril murmurs under his breath as he steps inside. He is the last brother to enter, and it is clear that we will all be packed in close together since the building is tiny. We also have no warmth since none of us know how to make a fire yet. Toron knows, but he is not with us any longer.

“Yril,” Erkoz calls out and waits for Yril’s eyes to meet his before he continues. “There is a dagger here. Do you want it?”

“We are the closest to the door,” I say to Yril. “One of us should have it.”

Erkoz laughs when I speak, and I want to make an ugly face at him because I already know he will say I should not have it because I am too small. I am the youngest brother and the smallest, even for my age. They all like to remind me of it any chance they get. “Dath is a small male. He should give the dagger to a male who won’t accidentally poke himself with it.”

“You are the most likely to poke yourself,” another brother says. I do not see which one it is, but I nod my head in agreement with him.

“Just pass us the blade, and we will use it if we need to leave,” I say.

“You would leave in this?” Erkoz scoffs like he does not believe me.

“Only if I must.” I cross my arms in front of my chest and try to ignore the sinking feeling in my gut that makes me think I will leave at some point. I do not know why I spoke it into existence, but it is like the goddess is telling me something that has yet to happen.

I hand the dagger to Yril when it is passed to us, and then we are all trying to get comfortable in the small building. Rain is dripping in from the cracks in the sealant. We are all touching one another since there is not enough space without us being on top of one another. Some brothers are able to find sleep since we are in a safe enclosure, but most of us are awake and uneasy as thunder rumbles around us.

“Yril!” The voice is so faint that I think I have imagined it at first. My eyes dart around the room, trying to see if any of the other brothers heard a voice calling out from in the trees, but they do not seem to have noticed. “Yril!” Yes, I am most definitely hearing a voice, but it does not belong to one of the elders or any of the fathers. No, I am almost certain that it is Toron yelling for his brother from out in the trees while the storm is raging outside.

“Toron,” Yril staggers to his feet and wrenches open the door that is barely hanging on its hinges.

I grab his arm and force him to stay inside. “Stay, brother,” I beg him. He is the one the others will listen to. They need him to stay because he is their leader right now. “I will get Toron. You must stay. Keep our brothers safe until the elders find us, yes?”

“Toron,” Yril’s eyes fall down to me, tears threatening to spill from his

eyes.

“Let me save your blood, yes?” I push him away from the door as best I can. He hands me the dagger, even though we both know I do not know what to do with it. We can only hope that I will find Toron out in the trees easily and bring him back to our shelter.

“You will be safe, yes?” Yril looks out into the darkened trees where the rain is falling strong now, even through the thickness of the treetops. Light flashes as a spark ignites a tree nearby before the rain puts out the fire.

“I will bring Toron back,” I say quickly as I step out into the rain. I clutch the dagger close to my chest as another light strikes the ground nearby.

“Yril!” Toron’s voice is barely loud enough to be heard over a clap of thunder, but it gives me a direction to run in. I hold the dagger close to me as I run to where I am sure I heard his voice. “Yril!” Yes, his voice is much closer, but it is also far from the shelter. I must make sure that I do not lose track of where it is behind me.

“Toron!” I call his name as light flashes against the ground near me.

“Dath!” He is close, very close.

I wipe the rain from my eyes, trying to see better in the darkness of the trees. Normally it is easy to see during the night, but when it rains this hard, I must wipe my eyes frequently, or the water burns them. I turn around and make sure that I can still see the shelter behind me, but it has long been lost to the trees. I trip and fall into a small den. A loud growl sounds from deep within, but I scramble from the den and beg that the creature is too worried about the storm.

“Dath!” Toron’s voice reminds me I am to be finding him and bringing him to the shelter before the storm kills us both.

“Toron!” I yell. The sound of branches crunching to my left has my heart

racing for a moment until I look in that direction and see nothing but trees. “Toron, hurry!” I yell, my eyes never leaving the spot where I heard the twigs snapping. The nights are dangerous, and even with a storm raging, there are creatures that must hunt no matter what.

“Dath!” Toron’s voice is to the other side of me, but I do not look toward him. I must keep my eyes where I think the creature is. I am hoping it will not attack if it thinks it is being watched. Toron’s hands wrap around my shoulders, and he is pulling me into his embrace before I can tell him of the danger. “Where are the others?”

“Shh,” I try to silence him and look back at where the creature would be. I am lost, though. When he pulled me into his arms, I even lost track of which direction the shelter is in. I am spinning in circles, the dagger in my hand trembling.

“What is wro—“ Toron’s words are silenced as a verpar lunges from the darkness and tackles him to the ground. A scream erupts from Toron’s lips as the dark, hairy beast bites down on his shoulder and starts to thrash him about. Light strikes nearby, illuminating the brutality of the verpar’s attack. It is easily the size of me, and its jaw is already unhinged so that it can sink each of its teeth into Toron’s body. Its hind legs dig into the soaked grass and drag into the mud. Its front claws pinning Toron down as it tries to rip his shoulder from his body.

My eyes are wide as I watch the panic and fear in Toron’s face grow as the creature sinks its teeth deeper into his shoulder. I clutch the dagger in both of my hands, knowing that I need to do something, but my body is forcing me to be still. Toron screams again, and then it is silenced with a sickening snap of his bones.

The eerie silence forces my body from its frozen state until I’m running at

the verpar with the dagger raised above my head. I scream as I sink it into its bloodied neck, where Toron's blood has soaked its fur. I rip the blade out of its neck and push it back in. The verpar are dangerous beasts, but their bodies are soft underneath all of their fur. I do not know when it perishes, and I do not know how many more times I sink the dagger into its lifeless body. A fresh crack of light too close to us has me scrambling to push the creature off Toron's body so I can pull him back to the shelter.

The verpar's body is heavy, much too heavy for me, and I feel my sobs wracking my body as I struggle to push it off of my friend. The goddess is watching out for me because she gives me one bout of strength that is greater than I should be able to have at such a small size. The verpar's body rolls next to Toron's body right as a flash of light ignites its fur and singes it before the rain puts the fire out. I wipe my tears, feeling the sting of blood burning worse than the rain does.

"Please be alive," I beg Toron. I put the dagger in my waistband and try to drag him back to where I think the shelter might be. I do not get very far before I realize I do not know where I am going, and I do not know how long it will take for me to get there. I am not strong enough to carry Toron's limp body very much further, and my eyes land on the small den I stumbled in right before the verpar attacked.

I drag Toron toward it and let his body fall to the ground as I peer inside the den. A growl erupts from the creature inside, and I pull the dagger out of my pants. I will kill this creature, too, if I must, but I do not want to at all. I hiss at the creature, trying to imitate some of the older males when they are angry. The creature inside growls louder until it is stalking closer to the edge of the den. Another verpar, but this one is much smaller. A cub and I have just killed its mother.

A snarl forms on the small verpar's mouth, and its fur is raised on its back, making it look larger than it is. Its front paws are the size of my hand, and its claws are much larger than mine. I am going to die, and if I die, Toron will surely die. I suck in a shaky breath, the dagger still trembling in my hand as I hold it up in front of me. I hiss at the creature again, but it is a pathetic sound that would surely have the creature laughing at me if it had the ability.

The young verpar jumps at me, his jaws unhinging so he can rip me apart more easily when he sinks his teeth inside of me. I do not know why I raise the dagger up the way I do, but I know it is the goddess guiding my hand when the dagger digs into the roof of the verpar's mouth and lodges itself in its head. The creature's hot breath warms my cool scales, and its blood coats my hands. Its body falls limp right outside the den's entrance, and I am quick about pulling the dagger from its mouth and putting it back into my pants.

Toron's body is even harder to pull into the den, but I know we will not survive if we are caught out in the storm for any longer than we already have been. Light is striking closer and closer to us, looking for a body to jolt and kill. We need to be in a shelter, and if we cannot return to the one with our brothers, we will find it in this small verpar den until someone comes to save us.

"Do not die, Toron," I cry against his chest when I get us both in the den. It is not deep, but we are protected from the light that strikes the ground. It is all I can ask for, even though it does not give me enough space to help my brother's wounds. No, we are laid next to each other, with me crying hysterically against him, begging the goddess to send someone to save us because I cannot do any more than I have. "Please, you must live."

I do not sleep for two days. Thunder shakes the dirt that cocoons us in our den. Toron does not wake even when light strikes so close that I can feel it

zing underneath my scales. I cry all of my tears the first night, and after that, I have no more to cry. I stay awake to keep us safe because Toron's chest is still beating, and he is still breathing. I have to keep my friend safe, and I have to make sure I can signal someone when the storms finally cease.

On the third day, I hear a voice. It is not the first time I have heard voices, but these are the closest they have been since the storm has ceased. The thunder stopped not long ago, but I am too tired to move. My body is weak and exhausted, and I need to sleep, but I cannot until we are safe.

“Dath!” A voice is close, and I know I need to call back. I open my mouth to speak, but my throat is dry, and my voice is silent. “Toron!”

I open my mouth to call out and sob silently when I can't make any sound. I pray to the goddess that she gives me enough strength to get out of the den. I promise her I will never ask for anything again, so long as she allows me to get my friend help. I move my arms in front of me even though they burn with the feeling of being asleep. I pull myself through the dirt. No more tears fall down my face since they ran out so long ago, and my throat does not sob because it is too dry and raw. I pull myself out of the den, thanking the goddess as I grow closer and closer to the light of day.

“Over here!”

I lay my head in the grass, not caring that I have fallen asleep next to the corpse of the young verpar I killed. They have found us, and I can rest now.

Dath

“**W**hat do you want from me?” I yell at my mother’s grave as soon as I am close enough to see the stone tablet that bears her name. “You want me not to take a human mate? Okay, I have told you I will not. But you are with the goddess now. You see what she is doing to me. How could you be so cruel as to ask me not to take a human mate when you know the goddess is putting one so perfect for me in my life?”

Thunder rumbles above me, but the rain has not started. I have replaced my fear of the storms with anger. Pure and absolute rage. I am being torn in two because the two greatest females in my life besides my Deja just so happen to be against one another. And for what reason? I surely do not know.

“The goddess cannot be happy with how you are punishing me for wanting this human female to be my mate. Deja is a wonderful female. You would be proud that she is your blood.” My yelling softens as I fall to my knees, the grass soaking my pants. Rain has started to fall, but there have been no cracks of light causing fires, so I think nothing of staying out for a few more

moments. I know this weather is my mother telling me she does not approve of who I want as a mate, but I cannot understand why.

“If you could just tell me what you want from me. Tell me if there is another female you want me to have, or tell me why the goddess is making this female be everything to me.” Tears of fury and rage stream down my face and mix with the rain as it hits me.

She is acting ridiculous. That is the only thing I can think of. Surely, my mother, the most amazing female who forced the illness back in her veins until she could give birth to me, must be a ridiculous creature since she is so against me mating a human.

“Yes,” I nod my head, deciding that I cannot take anything my mother tries to tell me seriously. She was an amazing female for being so strong and carrying me in her womb until I could survive outside it. That does not mean that she is infallible and that she cannot be wrong about something that she never could have imagined happening.

“I think I must listen to the goddess.”

A roll of thunder accompanies a flash of light in the sky above. It does not strike me where I am sitting, so either my mother’s aim is poor, or the goddess is still looking out for me even though I have been a disrespectful male toward her and the female she blesses me with.

I narrow my eyes at the sky before lowering my gaze once more. “I will make you proud and be an honorable male, but that means I must not listen to these signs you are giving me. The goddess has never led me astray. I cannot forsake her now that things are hard.”

Another flash of light stays up in the clouds. I am overstaying my welcome near my mother, and I do not want to make the goddess work even harder to protect me from my mother’s wrath since she has already protected me so

much in life. It is not right that I rely so heavily on the goddess's grace and kindness. Eventually, she will become annoyed with me for always needing her protection and her aid. I need to claim Deja before the goddess decides I am not worth the effort she puts forth and has Deja become attracted to a new male.

I am quick at running back to the great hall. I have been a stupid male. So stupid and selfish, so worried about what my mother might think that I have not accepted what the goddess is giving me or even thought about what I want. No, I have thought my mother's opinion on the matter is the most important when it cannot possibly be since I can feel the hollowness of my chest and my soul when I am away from my mate.

Yes, Deja is my mate. I just need to take her in that way before she realizes just how foolish I am. Surely, she will not want a male so foolish, so I will take her before she realizes.

I am near my workshop when three strikes of light hit the ground right in front of me so close that my scales vibrate with their power. The feeling reminds me of when I was young and hiding from the storms in a verpar den. My eyes grow wide, and I know I am not meant to move any further toward the great hall.

Maybe the goddess is doing it because I need to repent for how I have treated Deja, or maybe the goddess is no longer holding my mother back from attacking me. Either way, it is clear that I must stay in the workshop until this storm is over, and then I will claim my female. I just need to hope she doesn't realize there are better males or that I can survive until then because I can feel my mind unraveling every moment I am not with her.

I have been unsuccessful in making sure that I do not unravel without Deja in my bed or in my life. No, I have completely fallen apart.

My body has finally stopped growing to accommodate the figure of a chosen warrior, but my mind has not stilled because I have been away from that which calms the beast inside of me. The rage that will forever simmer under my scales is all that fuels me, and it keeps me from finding any peace until she is back in my arms. No, not even then. I know I am completely lost because I am likely to mate with her as soon as I spot her.

One of the elders, probably Narrath, left a book that tells the tales of the goddess's chosen warriors. I did not know we still had any books in the tribe since Ralleth's father, the old tribe leader, bartered them for goods and supplies when there were still many of us too young to aid in the hunting.

Sketching my Deja and the book about chosen warriors are the only things that keep my mind from shattering completely while I am away from my mate. I have read it many times through by the time the storms finally stop, and I am grateful for the insights into what has happened to me.

When a male is chosen by the goddess to be the warrior of his tribe, it is because the goddess is preparing the tribe for conflict that she foresees happening. She'll choose a male or males that she imbues with power straight from her vein. The goddess's blood can be toxic to any of her creatures, which is what causes the rage and the bloodlust. To get around these things, she provides the male with a mate who can tame the beast inside himself and who can soothe the rage that burns him from the inside out.

The chosen male cannot finish his transformation until he mates with the female the goddess has specifically picked out to be the one to tame the beast in his soul. A male long ago had his mate perish before they could complete

the mating ceremony, and he slowly turned into a rampaging beast that slaughtered entire tribes of his enemies before his own brothers had to put him down because he was turning on them. The bloodlust becomes uncontrollable and destructive the longer the male is without his female.

This is what everyone is afraid will happen to me, or at least they would if they knew about it. I'm sure Narrath has told them all by now that I am unstable, even though they've all known that for a while now. At least they will all know that this is not something they can expect me to navigate without issue. Especially since I have been doing such a poor job of completing the one thing that will make all of this easier. I thought being with Deja would be enough to keep me sane, but now it is clear that even if I was not planning on mating the next time I see her, the goddess will make me with how wild I have become.

I am reading through the pages of the book once again when the rain outside my workshop finally ceases. Well, I think it has recently stopped because no one has come to find me yet, and I am just noticing it. I would like to think that my brothers would come to save me from my madness as soon as possible, but they also may not want to since I am not in my right mind. They may all still fear that I may attack them or their females.

The sky looks normal, but the clouds are dark enough to tell me that the goddess is not done bringing the storms, even though they should not be here for many more days. This will hurt the supplies that should be coming to us from the other tribes. We will be lucky if anyone is even willing to venture into the trees if they see the storms raging. We have already sent the olack with a few brothers who are used to being out in the trees and are not interested in female mates. They haven't returned, but they must be in the

shelters in the trees since they left during the first break of storms almost ten days ago.

I make my way to the great hall as quickly as I can. My hands are twitching to touch my female, and my mind is of a singular focus. I need to find Deja, get her on her knees, and feed her my seed so I can claim her as mine in the traditional sense. This is the only way to calm myself and hopefully rid myself of some of the anger still in my veins. She will agree to this. She has already called me her mate and asked for me to be with her in the way mates are. I only need to be respectful of her and get her somewhere where it is just the two of us.

Erkoz exits the great hall just as I am nearing it, and I do not miss the flash of humor that glitters in his eyes and the way his lips pull upwards in a smile that promises I am not going to enjoy anything he has to say. He holds the door open for me but stands in the way so he can speak to me before I enter.

“You have been gone many days, brother.” He holds his place as I step up to him. I have grown in stature since being blessed by the goddess, but nothing makes Erkoz shake with fear. Even when I tower over him, knowing that I could make him submit with no effort now that I am larger and stronger. “Your blood has been kind to your mate.”

My teeth grind against one another, wanting to know why Erkoz is telling me this. Of course, Toron and Yril would be good to my mate. She is close to being blood to them as well. The way Erkoz watches me, like I’m a beast about to snap, and he wants to be the one to say the words to see me completely lose it. My rage is all-consuming, but I’m not lost to it completely yet.

“Yes, very kind,” Erkoz crosses his arms in front of his body. “Did you know the goddess has blessed them as well? Maybe you are meant to share as

Xoth and I do.”

I’m snarling in Erkoz’s face, my horns pressing down on him, getting him to submit even as he just smiles up at me with a laugh on his lips. I push him into the great hall and keep walking until he’s pressed against a pillar because he refuses to back down. It’s very much in character for Erkoz, but I don’t understand what he gains from getting me more angry than I already am. His mate doesn’t dare get close to us because she can see that Erkoz has made a fool of himself yet again.

“Dath,” My Deja says my name so sweetly that everything else disappears from my mind. My gaze snaps over to her, and Erkoz is given enough time to slink away back to a seat near his mate. He doesn’t pull Kendra into his lap, probably in case I am still angry at him. He wouldn’t put his mate in danger, and I most definitely wouldn’t hurt my human friend.

I try to say my human’s beautiful name, but my voice is gone and replaced with a hiss when I turn to face her. She is sitting between Toron and Yril, who both wear smiles that could rival Erkoz’s in their mockery. Their smiles are not what catches my attention. No, it is the blood red of their eyes and the slight change in their bulk. I do not miss that Yril’s hand is on the table next to my mate’s, his fingers touching her just barely. Toron’s is on the back of her chair, his posture daring me to say something about it.

“Dath?” Deja’s eyes grow wide as I stalk over to where they all sit. She must know that they are goading me into being the worst version of myself.

It does not surprise her when I pull her from her chair and throw her over my shoulder, teeth bared at Toron and Yril, daring them to fight me over my claim. My hiss is deep in my chest, a warning to anyone in the great hall that this female is mine, and I will fight to the death over her. I do not care that Toron and Yril both seem to be chosen warriors as well. They can find their

own mates because I have already claimed Deja to be the one to soothe my rage.

Deja doesn't wiggle around in my grasp. She is much too smart for that and knows that I need her now more than I need the beating in my chest. She doesn't even give me a glare when I toss her onto my bed and move my wardrobe in front of the bedroom door since it is the room I share with Toron and Yril when I am not having nightmares. I do not want anyone interrupting us as I mate my human and make sure she knows she is mine and only mine.

"You have one chance to tell me no." I crawl between my human's legs and press my length against her. I am still clothed, so I cannot feel if she is wet for me, but I can feel her rubbing against me, just as aroused as I am after being away from each other for so long. "One chance, or I'm claiming you and never letting you out of my sight again. Never letting another male touch you again. Tell me you want this. Tell me you need this as much as I do."

Deja pushes at my chest, and my chest hollows out as I move off of her. She is saying no. She must have realized in my absence that I have been a foolish and idiotic male. The worst kind of male by not claiming her immediately.

She rolls onto her hands and knees and crawls to the edge of the bed before wrapping her fingers in the strings of my pants. My mind is still dealing with her rejection, and I do not fully comprehend her hand shoving its way into my pants until her small hand wraps around my length. The other tugs my pants down until they fall to my ankles.

"We need to mate, right?" She looks up at me for just a moment before her eyes dart back down to my cock.

"You would bless me still?" I ask, so unsure that I even deserve a female as wonderful and beautiful as Deja to grace me as her mate.

I have treated her poorly and rejected her mating when it was what we both wanted. I have disrespected and disregarded the wants of my goddess. All of that falls away in my mind as Deja smiles brightly before placing a sweet kiss on the tip of my cock and then enveloping it in her warm mouth. She takes my cock as deep as she can at the angle she is taking me, but I need little before I am gripping the back of her head and releasing down her throat.

She doesn't even have time to swallow before I pull out of her and kneel so we are face to face. "Say you're mine, little human. Make me the happiest of males, even though I do not deserve it."

Deja swallows twice before she blesses me with the most beautiful words. "I'm yours, Dath. Of course, I'm yours."

I wrap her in my arms, not caring that I am almost tripping in my twisted-up pants around my ankles. "And I am yours, Deja. Everything I said before, and it is even more so true now. My body, my mind, and my soul. Anything you need, I will provide."

"I think there's something I need right now." She gives me a grin that crinkles the corners of her eyes.

"Tell me, and I will give it to you."

"I need more of my mate," she says the words and bites down on her plump lower lip.

I grasp the meaning of her words immediately, so I lay her on the bed and crawl over her body once again. "My fingers, my tongue, or my cock?"

"Yes," My little human presses her chest against me and spreads her legs wide. "All of those things, please."

I have to suppress the urge to release again at my mate being so brazen in her desire for me. I need to save all of myself for my mate's womb. She is mine now. Mine to protect, mine to worship, and mine to fill with my seed

until she is growing with my young. First, I'll fill her with my fingers, and I'll end with her dripping with my release.

Deja

By the time we leave Dath's room, I am sore, sweaty, and sticky. His eyes are still blood red, but he doesn't seem as on edge as he was when he threw me over his shoulder and marched me off to mate him. He actually seems as relaxed as I think he can with how he's been changed, thanks to whatever made him stronger, faster, and more powerful than any of the other males in the tribe. Well, any of the others except for Toron and Yril, who started changing last night.

I shared a room with them while Dath was gone in the workshop during the latest storm. Or, I slept in Dath's bed while Toron and Yril wanted to sleep in their beds, and I wasn't about to kick them out of their room just because I wanted to sleep in Dath's bed. Nothing weird happened, but they woke up this morning slightly larger with red eyes that won't go away. They know I'm not their mate, and I don't need to worry about them trying to fight with Dath over me. It wasn't even something I thought could happen, but apparently, everyone else did. Having three males all react in the same way when I

arrived apparently made them all think I was going to take all three as mates, and that most definitely won't happen.

Of course, their wanting to rile Dath up even more was their top priority when the storm passed. I don't know why I agreed to it, but I allowed them to sit around me like they were staking a claim on me they knew would piss Dath off. When he didn't return quickly, we sent Erkoz after him because he wanted to see Dath's reaction just as much as Toron and Yril. When Dath showed up, though, everyone got deathly silent. I don't think any of us realized just how mad Dath had gone since he was on day fourteen of being chosen and unmated.

"You sit in my lap now," Dath grabs my hand in his but lets me walk back to the dining room on my own. "Or at least near me." He rubs his horn as he smiles down at me. "I will be territorial. I do not think I can stop it, but I do not wish to smother you. I understand some human females enjoy being more open in their friendliness than others, but I would request that you touch me and only me."

I don't know what causes me to say what I do next, but I think I mostly want to rile him up. I know he would never hurt me. I'm actually pretty sure he'd give his life to protect me. At least from the stories Toron's and Yril's father told me of what he could remember of the chosen warriors that were around when he was younger. He made it seem like I'm Dath's world now, and he'll do everything in his power to protect me. The goddess made it so he has one tether to sanity in his blood rage, and that tether is me. They say a chosen warrior is only blessed when the goddess thinks trials will come to the tribe, and we now have three males chosen to be warriors. It's a little concerning, but right now, I'm focused on being Dath's tether, even as I'm the one riling him up.

“I should offer my touches to Toron and Yril as well since they’re chosen males, right?” I chew on my bottom lip to keep myself from giggling as I wait for Dath’s reaction. It’s immediate and terrifying, and unfortunately for the other males, not directed at me at all.

“I will kill them then.” Dath narrows his eyes on the hallway ahead of us and pulls his lips back into a snarl. “They will not need your affections in their graves.”

“Wait!” I try to keep Dath from moving, but even as I dig my heels into the ground, he just drags me behind him as I cling to his arm. “Wait, Dath, no.”

So that’s how we enter the dining hall after mating. I’m clinging to his arm, trying to get him to stop the murderous rampage he now wants to go on while he grits his teeth so hard they might actually crack. His chest is heaving, his muscles tense, and he’s on a mission to make Toron and Yril pay for some stupid nonsense I said to get under my demon’s scales.

“Dath, you’re making a scene!” I shout at him, but he merely huffs at me before pulling his arm until I’m back at his side, my legs dangling as he carries me.

“Has the mating not gone well?” Toron seems amused as we near him, but Yril is smart in standing and putting a chair between himself and Dath. Toron stays seated and even sets his arms at his sides, showing he’s absolutely no threat to my mate at all.

“The mating went fine,” I huff, and I’m met with a sideways look from Dath. “Oh, sorry, the mating was fantastic.” I roll my eyes when Dath nods and turns his attention back toward his cousins.

“She thinks she needs to touch you as well,” Dath snarls, which has Toron laughing and Yril shooting me a what-the-fuck look.

“No, I do not!” I screech, which gets Dath’s attention more than anything

else I've tried so far. "I was trying to see if I could get you all worked up."

Dath sets me on the ground, his attention fully on me as he rubs his eyes with one hand. He kneels to the ground and pulls me close to him before speaking to me in a low voice. "You were teasing me?"

I nod.

"And I threatened to kill my blood?"

Another nod as he shakes his head in disbelief.

"Am I so far lost?"

My heart beats a little harder in my chest at the defeat in Dath's voice.

"Oh, no." I grab his face between my hands and pull him close to me until his forehead is resting on mine.

Everyone is quiet around us because they almost witnessed the murder of two of their friends and can probably still feel the power rolling off of Dath's body. He's still tense, still needing something to do with the energy and power inside of himself.

"You're mine," I tell him, staring into his giant red eyes that haven't scared me in a long time. Others might fear them because of what they mean, but to me, they are the devoted eyes of a man who's willing and able to give me everything. "And I am yours."

"Yes." He closes his eyes and lets his face lean against my palms. "All mine."

"Only yours," I whisper. "No more teasing."

He opens his eyes and gives me a soft smile. "Just for a little while until I am better able to listen to the smarter half of our coupling."

"No, if it means I may die, no more teasing ever." Yril is still hiding behind his chair, but he's being more dramatic about it now that he knows Dath isn't angry anymore. Or, he is, but he's not about to kill the other two.

“We do not want your mate, Dath,” Toron laughs as he pushes a chair out from the table for Dath to take. “She is not the female chosen to keep us sane. Although, we are worrying about what is happening to us since there are no other females here.”

Dath scoops me into his arms, a hand pinning me to his lap as he settles me on top of him. I giggle softly, which has Dath relaxing even more underneath me. He just needs to know I’m happy and safe and his. “The book your father gave me said the chosen warriors would only begin the transformation when their mate was in their life.”

“Yes, well,” Yril takes the seat next to his brother, his anger apparently more prevalent this early than Toron’s. “Show us these illusive females that are apparently here to calm our rage.”

Dath frowns, his eyes scanning the dining hall. Most brothers are still watching the three demons with giant anger issues. Ralleth keeps his mate in his lap while he watches the chosen warriors with a tense body. I’m sure being the tribe leader is hard when he doesn’t know if a fight or murder is about to happen at any moment. Especially when there’s nothing that can be done about Toron and Yril’s mood swings since they don’t have mates on this planet yet.

“The goddess would not hurt you,” Dath says.

His eyes stop their movements when he gets to Erkoz, Xoth, and Kendra. He offers them a slight nod but barely acknowledges them otherwise. Kendra’s eyes narrow on him as she opens her mouth to say something, but Erkoz covers it, a smile on his lips when he sees the irritation in her eyes. I thought I’d still be jealous to know that Dath has a friend who’s another woman. A woman he’s seen naked and shared a bed with. But my heart is calm, and I don’t feel any anger toward her anymore.

“You can come sit with us if you want,” I call out to Kendra and her mates, much to the surprise of the three of them and Dath. Erkoz starts to get up, but Xoth is a little more cautious and watches for Dath’s reaction. When Dath shrugs at them, Xoth picks Kendra up and carries her over to where we’re sitting. “I’m not as possessive as I was for a bit.”

“Oh, so no more ‘do not talk to me without my mate,’” Kendra laughs as she deepens her voice to mimic Dath when he basically told her she didn’t even exist to him if I wasn’t there.

“I’m better now that we’ve mated,” I tell her with an awkward smile that’s meant as an apology.

“We are happy,” Xoth says, nodding in my direction but making sure to keep his distance from me. His attention on me isn’t appreciated in any way by Dath, though. “How are you feeling, Dath?”

“Still just as possessive as before,” Dath snaps, and the other males all turn their eyes on him instead of looking at me like they just were. “Do not look at what is mine.”

There’s an awkward silence in the dining hall at Dath’s outburst. My face heats in irritation and embarrassment.

“Shut the fuck up,” Kendra throws her head back and cackles loudly. Her mates are too slow to quiet her, but I can see the worry on their faces, thinking she’s only making Dath angrier. No, if anything, she’s helping me from losing my shit because there’s no way I’m living the rest of my life being ignored by the majority of this planet’s inhabitants because my mate is a weird possessive asshole about people looking at me.

“Yeah, I agree with Kendra.” I turn to look up at Dath, who has his eyes fixed on me. Blood rushes into my cheeks and warms my face. I didn’t realize he’d been staring at me this whole time while everything else was

happening. Not even looking at me like he enjoys what I look like, but looking at me like he wants to devour me completely.

“Hm?” Dath places a finger beneath my chin and tilts my head even more toward him. “What does my mate want? Anything, I’ve told you this.”

“People are allowed to look at me,” I say, ignoring the stares of the others around us as they watch me try to navigate talking Dath off the ledge of fury. Not that I’m really trying. I’m just talking to him like I would if he was a normal partner.

“Of course.” He nods like what I’m saying is reasonable, and then his eyes flick up to his brothers, who are sitting near us. “Maybe we think of a way to let them all know you are mine.” His free hand grabs my backside and presses me against his cock that still hasn’t settled. “Yes, need them all to know this little human is taken completely.”

“We’re not having sex in front of everyone,” I frown at him. I don’t even know why he’s thinking that’s even remotely a possibility when he has issues with the others looking at me when I’m clothed.

“No, no,” He shakes his head. “Of course not. I can’t have anyone looking at what is mine.”

Erkoz rolls his eyes, and I can’t help but smile too. “Brother, we want your mate as much as we want Almaac’s. No male is ever going to risk being sealed for looking at her wrong.”

“They will not be sealed.” Dath relaxes his hold on me and allows me to move back around in his lap, so I’m facing the others. “They will die, and it will be with my claws in their necks.”

“Dramatic,” Erkoz huffs and shakes his head. “All the brothers would be much happier if they could figure out how to share.” He starts to say more to rile Dath up, but a bright light appearing behind the partition catches all of

our attention. The room goes silent. A new human isn't supposed to be sent for two more weeks, but someone is being sent through the portal right now, much too early.

"Let me go," Olivia wiggles from her mate's grasp and runs over to the partition.

Kendra watches, wide-eyed and unsure if either of us should run over to help. Dath keeps his hand tight on my hips, telling me I'm his for the time being. The only one missing is Diane, and that's because she and Almaac finally went back to their home after the latest storm came. He really doesn't enjoy sharing a room in the main building with everyone.

Olivia disappears behind the partition, and then we hear voices softly speaking with one another.

"The older brother is hers," an unfamiliar voice says. Simone was A12-05, which means she should be who was sent, right? Whoever is talking to Olivia is definitely not Simone, though. "The Hands used our pheromones to figure out which of us were needed to complete the warriors' transitions."

Olivia's head peeks out from the other side, and she's staring past me to Toron and Yril. "Deja, I need your mate's oldest blood's tunic first." I quickly motion for Toron to take his shirt off as I listen to Olivia grumble and complain about how stupid not saying names is.

Toron rips his shirt off his body so fast I'm surprised he doesn't tear it on his horns. The cocky smile that was on his face when he was trying to get under Dath's scales is gone. He stares at the partition like he can see through the wood and get a glimpse of the human that's apparently supposed to be with the older brother.

"Goddess, please." He mutters softly as his fingers tap on the table.

"We need to get them away from one another. Can you get the younger one

outside?” The new human says. There’s a soft crying coming from a second voice that’s not familiar. How out of order did the Hands go just because they wanted to find the chosen warriors of this tribe? “Alice, we can’t stay together. We don’t know if they’re dangerous around each other like this.”

Yril takes his shirt off and tosses it to a demon close to the partition as he makes his way out of the great hall as soon as the woman says that she needs him outside. His body is tense, and it’s obvious he wants to stalk to her, but he’s willing to do as she says since he’s not completely lost to the rage and lust that consumes the chosen. His lips pull back in a snarl before he leaves the building, warning all the other brothers not to even think of touching the human who’s about to be his.

“Please,” the crying woman sobs, and it breaks my heart. Many of the demons sitting around have their eyes flash red for a moment, but it’s the deadly hiss from Toron that tells us the human’s fear is the worst possible thing that she could be feeling. “Don’t leave me.”

“You’re safe here,” Olivia says quickly. There’s a soft rustling as the women get dressed in their respective tunics.

“I need to get out of here,” the first woman says before standing. She steps away from the partition, giving the room a quick scan before rolling her shoulders. “Fucking lizard men, really?” She laughs when she makes eye contact with Kendra and me, who both wave at her, confused about whatever the hell is happening right now. “I’ll see all of you again in a few days.” She raises a hand and then takes off to the front doors.

Dath picks me up and follows her, wanting to make sure she is safe with his brother, I’m hoping. I mean, it’s why I’m happy that he’s having us follow her, and I have to imagine it’s in part to keep the new human safe. Everyone

else can worry about the crying one, and we'll make sure Yril doesn't give the one that's apparently his too much too fast.

Narrath stops us right before we leave, a pack in his hand filled with dried olack and water skins just like the one Yril gave Dath when he took me to his workshop.

"Give this to Yril before he goes after the human," Narrath says with a smile. Dath takes the pack and gives Narrath a nod before we're outside, watching Yril's mate run away from him.

"Don't touch me yet, big guy," Her voice is filled with laughter as she runs past Yril, who is smiling as soon as he sees a human in his tunic. "Give me a head start. I'm pretty sure you like to chase."

We don't have time to ask her what she means by that. Dath sets me on the ground and holds Yril back as he tries to push him away. The new human is right that he wants to chase her down, but she doesn't even give him a second look as she runs away and out the gate that leads out into the trees.

"I will disembowel you if you do not release me, Dath," Yril snaps and hisses but doesn't actually move to attack.

"Give her a head start, brother," Dath smiles, enjoying that it's not him who's being teased right now. "You do not want your hunt to be ended so soon, do you?"

"How would you feel if we kept you from your mate?" Yril snarls at him.

Dath laughs long and hard, appreciating that he's much stronger than the others for now. "You all kept me from my mate for days. Six of them, yes?" He turns to me and waits for my nod of approval before continuing. "I will keep you for just a moment, and you act as though you have been punished as much as I have."

"Release me!" Yril's claws extend, his body tensing even more. Dath lets

out one last laugh before releasing his hold on his cousin. He pushes the pack into Yril's grasp. Thankfully, Yril takes it with little thought.

Yril wastes no time in taking off through the tribe until he's leaving through the opened gate. I worry about him being able to find her, but he seems like a demon on a mission. I'm sure the men can track at least somewhat decently since their survival hinges on their ability to hunt. Dath and I stare at the empty gate for a few more minutes before he puts his arm around me and turns to face me.

"Do you want to see the other new female, or do you want to spend more time with your mate?" He drops to his knees, his tongue working along my neck as his hands pull me closer to his body.

"Take me to your workshop," I moan as he slips his hands underneath the tunic and starts rubbing his fingers against my slit. "The new woman will have Kendra and Olivia to watch out for her."

"Good answer, little human," Dath smiles down at me before pulling me up against his chest as he stands. "I will make sure you do not regret your choice."

Deja

Another storm comes later in the night. I'm curled up in the small bed in Dath's workshop with him wrapped around me, almost completely surrounding me with his enormous frame and hard body. His hands are tense on my back as he keeps me pressed against his chest, even as he's lost to slumber. I don't know if it's the storm that has him trying to protect me even in his sleep or if this is how sleep is going to be from now on. Not that I'm complaining. I've never felt safer in my life, and his cool scales help to keep my temperature from skyrocketing and dehydrating me as I sweat all night.

"Sleep, little human," Dath's voice is raspy. His cock is hard against me, but that's just how it perpetually is now. He's either angry or horny, and thankfully, I can match his arousal somehow. The thought of him pushing inside me again has my hands traveling down his abdomen until I'm wrapping my fingers around his length. "Not right now, Deja." His eyes snap open, and he hisses at me. "You need to sleep, and you're too sore to be taking your mate again."

"What if I just want to pleasure my mate?" I wiggle my brows at him, but

he doesn't share my enthusiasm. No, his hands wrap tighter around my back, and he holds me closer. His breath blows against the top of my head, and his body curls up tighter around me. My hands can't jerk him off, but I can keep holding him in my hands.

"Tomorrow," He huffs. "You can do whatever you want to my cock tomorrow, but you need sleep, little mate."

"Fine," I grumble. "But only because you're no fun right now."

"I'll be so much fun tomorrow," He sighs and relaxes slightly. "Yours to have as much fun as you want."

"You drew these while you were away from me?" I grab the parchment paper with hastily sketched images from the table. Dath tries to take them from me as embarrassment mars his face, causing even more curiosity from me. If he's embarrassed about the images, then I definitely want to look at them.

"I was desperate for my mate." He rubs his horn and avoids looking into my eyes when it's clear I'm not letting him take the sketches from me. "They are not my best work, and they are very graphic."

I smile up at him, even though he refuses to look at me. When I scoot up next to him and rest against him, he's forced to look at the sketches with me as I flip through them. "You've drawn me, fingering myself. I doubt these could be any more vulgar than that."

Dath wraps an arm around my waist and holds me close to him. "Wait to say that until you have looked at them."

I look at the first sketch. It's hastily drawn, and it's clear Dath was a little unhinged when he was sketching it out. He's clean in his lining and shading

in all of his work that I have seen, but these are less perfect and more desperate in their execution.

The first image has me in Dath's tunic, my hands pulling at the bottom of it like I'm about to pull it over my head. My lips part like I'm about to lick them, and my nipples are straining against the fabric. My stomach flutters with butterflies as I think about how erotic he must find me if he can draw these just based on his own desire for me.

"Look at the next one, little human," Dath hisses above me when I stare at the first for too long. He walks us backward until he's sitting on the bed, and then he pulls me into his lap. His fingers find a home between my legs, teasing between my legs gently while I get comfortable. "I want to feel your reaction to what I have drawn." He says before plunging two fingers inside me. I let out a surprised gasp and clench around him. "So responsive. Look at the next one."

I do what he says and flip to the next sketch. I'm on my back, my hands between my legs, and my arms pressing my breasts together. I suck in a shaky breath as I clench around him again. His dark chuckle tells me he's noticed my reaction. The sketched version of me has her head thrown back, mouth parted in a plea, as I bring myself pleasure. My hands are shaky when I flip to the next sketch.

I quickly cover the sketch up with the previous one as my face heats. I'm sure he feels my pussy fluttering around his fingers, but he doesn't make a mention of it as he grabs the sketch of me pleasuring myself and tosses it to the side so the next one isn't hidden anymore.

In the sketch, I'm on my knees with my lips parted with Dath's cock inches away from my mouth. A trail of saliva or come connects us to one another. My eyes are cast up at him as I watch him with brutal devotion. His hand

cups my head, his muscles tight and tense with wanting to pull me back onto his length.

“This was one I sketched over and over,” Dath whispers. “There are parchments that I have now burned with this sketch repeated dozens of times because this is what I wanted so badly. To have a female devoted to me and to allow me to protect her and be her everything. You have blessed me beyond what you could ever understand, and I am so grateful.”

His cock pushes against my backside, but he doesn't try to get himself or me off. No, he just keeps his fingers soaking in my pussy like he's just enjoying being close to me while I grow more and more aroused at the images he's created of us.

“Keep going,” He says. “This was my favorite, but I am sure you will like the later ones even more.”

The next sketch is less vulgar only because I can't see our genitals, but it is very clear what is happening between us. It's drawn from the side with me on my knees on the edge of the bed. Dath is buried deep inside of me from behind. One of his hands is wrapped around my neck, pulling me so I'm arched for him, and the other digs into the soft flesh of my thighs. His head is lowered, so he's looking down at me, a wicked smile on his lips. My head is pushed back due to his hand on my neck, causing me to stare back up at him as he pounds into me.

Dath's finger rubs against my clit softly, and I jump in his lap. He smiles at me like he's proud of himself. “Sorry, you seemed to really like that one.”

“Let me get through the rest, and then we can have some fun,” I pant as my fingers trace the lines of his body on the parchment.

“You're already making a mess on me, Deja,” He states proudly. “By the time we get to the last one, you'll have enough juices to drown me.” When I

clench around his fingers again, he hisses softly. “Maybe I’ll have you ride my face and attempt to drown me. Yes, that is how I would like to pass, I think.”

I ignore his words and flip to the next page. I can’t stop the moan that leaves my lips, and Dath takes it as an invitation to stroke my clit some more. His hand on my hip grips me so tightly it might bruise, but I’m too focused on the sketch in my hands and the fingers inside me.

Dath drew the sketch as though it’s through his eyes as he positions himself to fuck me. I’m laid out on his bed, on my back, with my legs spread obscenely wide to accommodate his body. He’s holding his cock, pressing it against my pussy, about to push inside of me. One of his hands is on my abdomen, keeping me pressed against the bed, and my hands are wrapped around his forearm as I beg him to fuck me. The next sketch is from the same angle, but now Dath is buried deep inside of me, my head thrown back in ecstasy.

“Do not worry about the last sketch,” Dath grabs the parchments from me but doesn’t take them. “I do not need this anytime soon, but I thought of it plenty when I was alone.”

My heart thumps hard in my chest as my mind races, trying to figure out what he could have drawn that might worry me. I shoo his hands off the parchment, too excited not to look. So far, everything he’s drawn has only turned me on. I doubt he drew something that I’ll find repulsive. When I flip to the final piece of parchment, my breath catches in my throat, and I feel tears pricking at my eyes.

The sketch has me sitting on the bed, a smile tugging at my lips as I stare up at Dath, who’s holding me in his arms. He stares at me with adoration and reverence as he holds me tightly to him. My abdomen is swollen. It’s clear

we're lying in bed whispering to one another about sweet things while he holds my pregnant belly possessively. It's not an erotic image at all, or maybe it is for Dath, but for me, it just looks like a sketch of his utter devotion and fixation on me as his mate.

"You want me pregnant?" I turn my head up to meet his gaze.

"Very much." He stills his movements inside of me, his free hand stroking the lines on the paper. "Nothing would make me happier than having young with you."

I chew on my bottom lip and wiggle my brows at him. "Want to try to get me pregnant now?"

Dath doesn't need much more prompting than that before he's trading our spots on the bed. He puts me on my hands and knees close to the edge and then pulls my shirt from my body. His pants are the next to be discarded, and then he's leaning over me, his hard length pressing against my backside. One hand wraps around my throat, and the other grabs my thigh to keep me close to him.

"Be a good little mate and take what I give you." He moves his hand from my thigh and positions his cock before thrusting inside of me completely.

His name is a plea on my lips as he pulls me upward so my back is arched, my head tilted back to look up at him. His hand is back on my thigh, making sure that I stay positioned so his cock can slide in and out of me easily. I don't miss that it's the same way he was taking me in the sketch I liked the most out of the ones I saw. His grin is just as devilish as it was in the sketch as he stares down at me while my face contorts with pleasure as he rams into me.

"You want to be filled with my young, little human?" He asks, pausing his words to thrust inside of me over and over.

“Please.” The word is broken as it leaves my lips.

“The goddess has chosen us, Deja.” His words are full of emotion as he thrusts into me one final time, enough to have me moaning and bucking my hips as my orgasm crashes into me. Dath’s hand on my throat tightens, but not to cut off my breathing. No, he wants my eyes on him when I find my pleasure and when he finds his own. His cock twitches inside of me, filling me with the warmth of his seed until I’m filled, and even then, he holds me still with his cock firmly planted inside me. “We are chosen. You will be with young soon.”

I stare up at him. His face softens, but the red in his eyes glows brighter. “I love looking at you, but can we do it in a more comfortable position?”

“Of course.” Dath is slow about releasing me, which is nice because my body is definitely not meant to bend in the ways he has me contorted. When he pulls out of me, he pushes my face into the mattress but makes sure I can turn it to the side before sinking himself back into me. “I need to make sure you are with young soon.”

I moan and grab his thigh, digging my fingernails into his scales. “Fuck me as many times as you need, Dath.” He tightens his hold on me as his name leaves my lips. “Fill me until I’m carrying your babe.”

He hisses loudly as he leans over me, his hips brutally thrusting into me like a man with a sole focus on rutting me as hard as possible. It doesn’t matter that I’ve turned my head to see him better because my head meets the middle of his chest when he lowers himself on top of me. One hand keeps him from crushing me with his weight, while the other pins my hips to his as he fucks me with reckless abandon. He pauses for a second as he comes inside of me, but then he’s moving his hips again, pumping into me until he can find

release again. By the time he finishes, he's filled me three more times, and I feel so full that I'm ready for him to pull out of me.

"My sweet mate," He murmurs against my back as he pulls out of me and touches his forehead to my back. "Let me care for you now, yes?" He asks desperately. I'm not about to take care of myself, considering I'm a pile of mush with how hard he fucked me. "I need to clean you and feed you. My sweet mate has taken me so well. Thank you."

I let Dath clean between my legs and then rub all the soreness from my body. His hands linger for a bit too long between my legs until I'm calling out his name and coming on his fingers. When he's proud of making me come, he grabs some of the dried olack and a skin of water that he makes sure I eat before he lets me crawl in between his legs to cuddle him.

I reach for the leather journal I've been reading. It was his mother's that she wrote in the last year of her life when she was carrying Dath. He holds it in his hands for a moment before passing it to me. It was his idea that I should read it, so maybe I could understand why he felt so certain about rejecting me as his mate at first. I've been reading bits and pieces here and there between being with Dath while we've been trapped together because of the storms again.

I'm about three-quarters through, and so far, I've learned that she was younger than me and scared of leaving her unborn child alone in the world. I flip to the next journal entry and settle against Dath's chest. His fingers run up and down my body as I read out loud to both of us.

Dath

“*The storms are coming soon.*” DeJa’s voice grows sleepy as she starts to read the next journal entry in my mother’s diary. I know she should sleep, but right now, I am enjoying listening to her read.

The storms started up again this morning, but this one is not as strong as the previous ones. I am almost sure it will be over by the time the night is brightening with morning light. It will give us time to collect more supplies before we are trapped once again. Hopefully, the storms will end until the storm season is truly upon us. We have many more days before we truly need to worry about the storms, but it is clear they have been sent either from my mother being angry at me for mating a human or from the goddess trying to trap the chosen with their mates until we are all mated.

“The storms are coming soon, and I am so excited. It has been so many days since we have all eaten together as a family, and the storms give us a reason to be around one another instead of being completely alone like I have been for so many days now. Yes, the storms give us reasons to be near

one another, to converse and grow close.“ Deja rubs her eyes but continues reading.

“I have other reasons for wanting to embrace the closeness the storms give us as well. Maybe it is wrong of me, and maybe I should not write the words for someone to find, but I need to get these words out of my mind. I know I should yearn only for the male who planted his young in my womb. He is not here, though. No, he has left me, damned me to be alone during this part of my life. In his absence, I have found comfort in another.”

I pluck the leather journal out of Deja’s hands. “You need to sleep, and you’re getting to the point of the story that I skip. No reason to hear about my mother sharing a bed with Toron’s and Yril’s father.”

“Wait!” Deja tries to grab the journal from me, but I keep it out of her reach. “You can’t tell me gossip that juicy and then take it away from me. I’m awake now!”

I wrinkle my nose at her sudden interest in the relationship between my blood and my mother. When Narrath gave me the journal many years ago, he told me how many pages I would need to skip if I wanted to skip that part of the story. He did not destroy them, and I never thought it to be right to tear them out, either. Now, my little human wants to read them for entertainment, and the idea of it is more humorous than disgusting, like I thought it might be.

“I have never read it, so I do not know if it is graphic,” I warn Deja as I lower the journal back down to her.

“You draw pictures of your cock spreading my pussy,” She grabs the journal and flips it back to the page she was at. “I’ll survive reading about your dad’s brother railing your mom.”

“Such a vulgar female,” I hiss at my mate, but I am not upset with her.

“Will you scan it and see if it is explicit? If not, I would enjoy hearing the last of my mother’s story.”

Deja’s little eyes start scanning the page quickly before jumping to the next. She does the same for the next few pages until the relationship with Narrath has been discussed. She looks up at me and looks like she is debating about what to tell me.

“She talks about being with him, but there’s no mention of anything that’s too crazy.”

“No fingers, no tongues, no cocks.” I narrow my eyes on my human to make sure she does not lie to me.

“None of those,” she laughs. “Much less than that.”

“Then go ahead and read it. Sate your curiosity.” I nod toward the journal and hug Deja closer to me as she continues my mother’s story.

“In his absence, I have found comfort in another. Yes, I know it is wicked what I want now that the male I mated has left me to carry our young alone, but another has stepped up in his role. A male who lost his female and his daughters early to the sickness and who has been pampering me with his protection and his comfort since no one else is sure what to do with me.”

“Narrath opened his home to me when my male left one day with many of the other young males. He didn’t even wait for me to ask. He just moved everything into his home and offered me the room he and his mate shared because he could not bear to be in there any longer. He had been sleeping with his sons, Toron and Yril, for many days already, so he said it was no trouble to have me taking the bed. I do not know when his looks towards me became heated, but it is something he tries to hide, especially around his sons.”

“Narrath may have started being kind to me because he is my mate’s

brother, but he is still kind to me for some other reason. I can feel it in the way his touch will linger when he finds excuses to be near me. In the way, he provides for me and looks to me for approval when he is raising his sons and hunting for our peculiar little family. He gives me strength on nights when I am alone and begging the goddess to help me survive the sickness long enough for my babe to survive outside of my womb. I would not have made it this long without him, and I hope that with this next storm, I might be able to ask him what his hope is for the remainder of our time together.”

Deja cuddles up next to me and looks up at me with a smile on her lips. “The storms are good for getting people together, don’t you think?”

“If you would have asked me before you came into my life, I would have told you I hate the storms,” I answer her and trace a claw across her cheek. “I think that they have shown me their beauty by giving me excuses to be close to you.”

Deja places a small kiss on my lips, and I flick my tongue over her lips, begging her to let me taste her more. She giggles like she does every time I try to take her in this way and then turns back to the journal.

“The storms are here. It is the first night, and Toron and Yril are being put to bed now. I know I should not be scheming on how to get Narrath’s affections, but I do not think it will take much. I finished cleaning in the kitchen earlier after dinner and told Narrath that I was hoping we could enjoy each other’s company after the young go to sleep since they always go to sleep much earlier than we do. I do not want to seduce him. I only want to make it clear to him that if he feels so inclined, I will not thwart his advances toward me.”

“This is foolish, isn’t it? I am swollen with his brother’s young, and he has been nothing but kind to me in these last hundred days. No, that is a lie. He

has been more than kind. He has been supportive and patient and so respectful of me. Maybe he fears he is disrespecting his passed mate or his brother. I do not fear disrespecting my male because he has disrespected me in the worst possible way by leaving me to die of an illness that will surely kill me. All while I am in the process of creating our young.”

“I can hear Narrath finishing with his sons. The goddess must mean for me to make this final step in finding some semblance of happiness in this place that is mostly filled with sadness and despair. I may not be able to mate with Narrath since my male still lives, but I can be his comfort and his companionship until I pass from this world. I will follow this calling in my soul, and if the goddess does not want it, there is plenty she can do to stop me. The strength I feel in my decision tells me she is here with me, and she approves of what it is I want to do.”

“Is my mother about to be with Narrath?” I ask with a frown. My eyes try to scan the journal, but I cannot read too well from the angle she has it. “Just warn me when we get to the vulgar parts.”

Deja hits my chest lazily with the back of her hand. “None of it is vulgar. She talks about finding happiness in his physical touching, but that’s it.”

I cannot silence the hiss in my chest before it erupts from me. Mating and lovemaking are beautiful and wonderful things. I know this, and I believe this. However, there is a difference between thinking it is a good thing and hearing about my mother being with males who are not my father. I calm my nerves with a few deep breaths and the feel of my mate’s soft body against mine. “Finish the story since you have probably just told me the worst of it.”

Deja chuckles and rubs my chest lightly with her knuckles as my beating continues to slow. She waits until I am much more peaceful before continuing, and as soon as the words leave her mouth, I know why.

“Oh, the goddess is kind to me. I needed only to open my mouth, and Narrath seemed to understand what I needed from him. He pulled me into the living area. All the rooms in the house bore too many memories of either being his daughters’ rooms or the room he shared with his mate. He said the sweetest things to me as he removed my clothing and then knelt over me. I worried that I would not be able to control the volume of our passion, but the goddess had the storm rage outside so loud that we could not be heard even in the same room.”

“Yes, as though I could not love the storms even more for bringing us all closer together in a familial sense. I now love them for bringing me the comfort of Narrath’s touches and his tenderness. Storms are for lovers. They must be. That is how I will look at these storms as they rage outside for the next long days. It is how I will remember them even in the next life. The storms bring new love and inspire passion and dedication that sometimes is too scary to admit when the world is calm. How I never knew this about the storms surprises me. I hope my young finds beauty in them as I have. I hope they can find their mate and the comfort of the storms to mark their devotion. Yes, the storms are for lovers, and I will never see them as anything else.”

My beating is hard in my chest, but not because I have been scandalized by knowing my mother and Narrath apparently had passionate lovemaking during a storm when I was still in her womb. Although I am scarred by that, more important things have been made clear to me. I am a foolish male, and I am just now seeing that my mother never, not for one moment, did not want me to mate this beautiful female in my arms. Oh, I am the most foolish, most stupid, most despicable male. No wonder my mother tried to smite me down so many times during the storms.

“Hey, what’s wrong?” Deja has shifted in my lap so that she can cradle my

face in her small palms. She wipes away tears I do not realize I am crying. “What’s wrong, Dath?”

I wipe at my tears, a smile appearing on my lips as a dry laugh leaves me. I shake my head, unable to believe just how pathetic of a male I am and how much I have put my sweet female through all because I never read the complete journal from my mother and twisted her words into what I thought she meant instead of reading what her signs could have actually meant.

“I told my mother about the new females coming to our tribe the day you arrived.” I laugh again, thinking about how I was so upset with her that first day. So uncertain of why she would be so cruel to me. “She sent these storms, and I thought it was her warning me not to take a human mate because she knows how badly the storms scare me.” I pause, realizing I have never told my female about the nightmares I have and why I have them.

“I know why the goddess has chosen you as her warrior,” Deja says sweetly, seeing that I am trying to figure out a way to tell her. I am sure it is Narrath’s doing, probably while I was trapped in my workshop away from my mate. “Did you tell me you couldn’t mate me because you thought your mother didn’t want you to mate me?”

I nod, knowing how foolish it is now that we both know how my mother feels about the storms. “She speaks later about wanting me to find a mate that will love me and cherish me and complete me in a way she never knew.” A clap of thunder outside shakes the workshop and isn’t as terrifying to me as it once was. Not when my mother loved storms, and I have my mate in my arms to ease my panic. “I thought when she brought the storms on the day I was telling her of human females, she was angry at me for even thinking of being with one.”

“And what do you think now?” Deja asks me. Her hands travel up my face

until she grabs me by my horns, forcing me to look into her dark eyes and bask in her never-ending beauty. “What do you think now that the goddess has given you a female meant to calm you and carry your young?”

I groan in appreciation as Deja uses the same language my brothers and I use to talk about our mates. Hearing her embrace my customs and my traditions when she could just as easily ignore them has me wanting to show her just how devoted I am. I need to hunt something for her, build something for her, anything that shows her she has picked a male that can provide for and protect her. I cannot do those things now while a storm is raging, so instead, I try to grab a piece of parchment and get to work on sketching a new portrait of my female. Something she can see and hold and touch to know that she is my everything. My Deja does not release my horns, though.

“Answer me, mate,” she growls the words, and it is the sexiest sound I have ever heard in my life.

“I think I have been blessed beyond measure, and I need to show you I can be a good male for you.” I pant softly as my cock twitches in my pants. She called me mate, and she is needy and aroused as well. It is no wonder that I want to be planted firmly inside of her.

“No more being upset with yourself.” She lifts herself up, her friction leaving my groin. “You have no reason to think your mother, the goddess, or me is mad at you, right?”

“Very true.” I nod. “All the females in my life have shown me I have been blessed, even though I do not deserve any of it.”

“You deserve it and so much more, Dath.” Deja’s face softens when she hears the words of self-deprecation that come from my lips. “Stop talking down about yourself. You are the first chosen of this tribe. You were picked by the goddess to be her warrior. You are worthy of so many good things.”

“Thank you,” I whisper to my human because I cannot be strong in my words right now. I hold her tightly against my chest and let my tears fall from my eyes and down onto her. “Thank you for being my mate. Thank you for being my strength.”

Deja’s hands drop my horns, and she wraps them around me so we’re completely wrapped up in one another. “Thank you for helping me find happiness in this new world.”

“You were sent to be mine,” I whisper a final praise to her and am still amazed when she offers me more.

“And you have always been mine.”

Dath

“**W**e’re having a girl’s day,” Kendra says as soon as Deja opens the workshop door.

I am right behind her, towering over her with rage simmering under my scales. I just told her not to open the workshop door and wait for me to get to it. It is not rational. I know this, but what if whoever is on the other side wishes to harm my mate? Of course, the only creatures in our tribe cherish and adore the humans. Even so, my mind tells me to keep my mate as safe as possible. From all threats, which includes imaginary threats that I have just decided exist.

This truly is the safest tribe in all of our world, though. We have three chosen. Or at least one and a half and a half. I have not seen Toron or Yril since their humans arrived only a few days ago. Hopefully, they make quick work of mating them, but if their mating is anything like mine, they will suffer for a while before they are relieved. At least Yril’s mate seemed to want him. Maybe he will have an easy time finishing the transition into the

goddess's warrior. Toron's female was sobbing the last we saw, so hopefully, she figures that out quickly.

"What is a girl's day?" My anger is barely hidden in my words, and Kendra narrows her eyes on me like she wants to smack me. Understandable since I am no longer as sweet and kind to her as I once was.

"You used to be a sweetheart." She crosses her arms in front of her chest. She speaks the truth, but that is no longer who I am.

I snap my teeth at her, but she doesn't even flinch. She is Erkoz's mate. Of course, she is fine with making others upset to entertain herself. She probably counted on me hissing at her before she came over to entice my mate into spending time with her. "I am still a sweetheart to my mate. No one else matters, really."

"Our fearless protector," Kendra makes a grand gesture of bowing before me, which has Deja laughing. My body is still tense behind her, but I relax slightly when she leans against me. My mate's body is wonderful at calming my anger and my rage. She does not even need to be naked and writhing in pleasure, although that helps immensely.

"Seriously though, do you think you're like this forever?" Kendra asks after a moment.

I look down at Deja and wait for her to give me permission to continue speaking to Kendra. My mate is the only thing that matters to me, and while rationally I know she does not mind me talking to my friend, the savage part of me, the part the goddess has brought to the forefront of my being, wants to please my mate in everything I do. Deja has already told me she will not ask for my permission on things as I will, and I have told her this is fine. I may need to stick my cock inside of her when she doesn't ask, but we will figure that out when we get there. I, however, need to know that I have pleased my

mate, that I am pleasing my mate, and that I can continue to please her in everything I do.

Deja gives me a soft nod, understanding what it is I am asking of her, and then I turn my attention back to Kendra.

“It should ease the longer I adjust. I’m still filled with plenty of rage that I need to rid myself of frequently.” My eyes dart to Deja as my lips twitch upward. I want to see if I can get her to giggle or show any sign of embarrassment. “My mate was chosen by the goddess to keep up with soothing the mood swings.” Deja cuts me a look that tells me I have embarrassed her by making it known she soothes my mood swings with her small human body underneath mine.

“Well, can I steal her away for an evening?” Kendra shifts her weight between her feet. She already knows I hate being away from Deja for more than even a moment.

Even as I just think about it, I am upset at thinking she will not be in my vision so I can make sure she is safe. I want to say no immediately, but my mate is looking up at me with narrowed eyes like she knows I am struggling with the part of myself that wants to keep her locked away forever so nothing bad can ever happen to her.

“Where will you go?” I ask.

My eyes stay locked on my mate’s, and her face softens because she can tell that I am trying not to be a controlling male. My scales are heating at the idea of her being away from me, but I know my mate needs me to be less of the angry, controlling male I have been and more of a loving and caring mate that she is happy to have young with. I smile, thinking of her growing with my young, and for a moment, I forget she is asking to be away from me for the evening.

“The dining hall,” Kendra says quickly like she is already prepared to answer all of my questions. Her mates must have told her I would want to know everything and that it would need to be a well-thought-out plan, so I am more likely not to be irrational about it. That is also why she did not bring her mates. Having other males here would put me more on edge, even though I know Erkoz and Xoth do not want my mate in the slightest. They are far too amused with their own. “I had my mates move one of the tables into a corner so we can sit away from everyone and hang out, but you and Alice’s mate can watch us.”

“Alice’s mate?” Deja asks, surprised that the woman who was recently crying behind the partition has mated in the few nights we have been gone. Maybe there is hope for my blood and the humans that have been sent to them. I feared Toron would not find peace for many days, but if Kendra is already calling the human his mate, maybe they are okay.

Kendra frowns, shattering all of my previous happy thoughts for Toron. “Not really, but she will be. They’re taking things slow because the dumbass Hands sent a virgin to be mated to him.”

Deja gasps a little and then looks up at me with a tinge of worry in her eyes. I furrow my brows, confused about what is wrong. So far, the creatures that have sent us humans have been good about choosing ones that are perfect for us, and the goddess has helped in making sure we are honorable males who want nothing other than to make our mates happy. There must be something wrong with the human female if Kendra and Deja are both so shocked about her being sent for Toron.

I look between the two humans again and ask seriously. “What’s a virgin?” Their laughter has me smiling because human laughter is the most beautiful

sound. I am so glad that even with my anger, I can make those sounds come from them.

“Come on, Dath,” My mate wraps her hand in mine and drags me to follow her and Kendra back toward the great hall. “I’ll explain all of it to you later, but for now, I want to go have a girl’s day, and you can watch with all the other mated males.”

I sit at the table with Almaac, Ralleth, and Toron all evening. Sometimes, Erkoz and Xoth will join us and watch the females, but for the most part, they are talking with the other brothers and running off to do other things. How they always have so much to do, I do not understand, and how they can stand not watching their mate constantly is even more confusing.

Kendra has offered the women some of the alcohol that she enjoys drinking occasionally. She does not drink it much since most of the females are trying to get pregnant, and they say the alcohol is not good for the babes. Kendra and her mates are apparently in no rush to start a family, and so when she finds a new human victim, she feeds them the liquid, and they giggle all night. Kendra pours some more alcohol for her and the new human, Alice, and I feel Toron tense beside me.

“No more drinks, Kendra,” Erkoz shouts from across the hall. His eyes are locked on Toron, who is struggling not to march over to his mate and yank her into his arms. Erkoz turns his attention back to his mate, who is scowling at him. “You drink as much as you want, Xoth and I want to make you do many things tonight. The new human needs to be done, though.”

Kendra tosses her drink down her throat and then turns to the new human before grabbing her drink and tossing it back as well. Alice looks over to the table of mated males who have been watching her and her sisters all day, and she flushes bright pink when she catches the eyes of the male next to me.

“How are you feeling?” I ask Toron, who is tensing even more as the human stares at him with a flushed face.

“Empty and broken,” He snarls back at me, not taking his eyes off the human who is now turning away from him. “You did this for how many days? Ten or more? How could you stand not to be mated to her?”

“I became good friends with my palm,” I attempt to make a joke, but Toron shoots me a glare that tells me he is close to picking a fight with me. This is unwise because I am a fully mated chosen, and he is still transitioning. I am stronger, faster, and more powerful than him in all regards, but he is not a rational male right now. He won’t be for many, many days. “It will get easier, brother. It will be hard before she accepts you, but she will accept you.”

“She fears us,” Toron says in a low growl. “All of us, including me. She thinks we are monsters and does not trust me to even step in her direction.”

There is a loud laugh from the table with all our females, and then Kendra is standing up on wobbly legs. I look to see if her mates will approach to help her, but they stay where they are, an amused look on their faces. They know they cannot approach the table of females without incurring mine and Toron’s wrath. If anyone is near our females, it will be us, and we will make sure none of the other males even think to get close to what is ours.

“I’ll be right back!” Kendra says with a big smile.

Deja is laughing loudly with a hand on Alice’s shoulder, and even the new female looks to be enjoying herself. Whatever was just spoken about must have helped to ease some of the new human’s fears because she is looking

back over to Toron with more curiosity than fear. In fact, I have yet to see fear cross her face any time she looks at him. Yes, she is probably scared to be in a new world with males much larger than her, but she is fated to be with one of the strongest, so she will never need to fear in her life.

Kendra whispers something to her mates when she is close enough, and their eyes flash up to meet mine and Toron's. Erkoz nods his head, a smile burning brightly across his face. He turns to Xoth, says something, and then pushes him over to us as he runs off down the hallway toward his bedroom. Kendra follows behind Xoth because he's dragging her by her wrists even as she tugs at him. Her smile and the laugh as she throws her head back is the only thing that has the other humans not worrying. Well, they already wouldn't worry since they almost all know how Kendra and her mates are.

"Tell them, sweet human." Xoth drags Kendra right in front of Toron and me and then holds her in front of us while she glares up at him like she can strike him with just her eyes. "Come on, we do not have all night, and you want to show the females something Erkoz and I have made. You cannot expect them not to be angry. Look at their faces already."

Kendra frowns and then turns to look at me like I am the reasonable one between Toron and me. I mean, I am, but that is not saying much since we are both very much not ourselves anymore. "I want to show the other the dildo Xoth and Erkoz made me."

Xoth kneels down next to his female and grabs her chin between his fingers. "Try again, Kendra."

She narrows her eyes at him and swats his hand away. "I want to show the others the dildo Xoth and Erkoz made me."

"What is a dildo?" I ask, already not sure if I will like whatever it is. There is a reason Kendra is so red and embarrassed right now, and I do not trust it

one bit. Toron is grabbing his knees so tightly that he may hurt himself if Kendra is not careful with her words. He won't hurt her, but he might dig his claws into his thighs if he tenses any harder.

"A wooden cock," Kendra says and then scrambles behind Xoth before peeking out from behind him.

My laughter is harsher than I mean it to be, but I am amused. I am not worried about my mate seeing a fake cock. I think it will be entertaining to see how she responds to it. Even Toron is not angry, or not more angry than what is normal. His hands relax on his legs, and he sits back in his chair.

"Sweet human, Xoth cannot protect you from Toron or Dath," Erkoz laughs as he comes to stand next to his mate and Xoth. "Here it is, brothers. We did not model it after either of us."

"You made this?" I ask as Erkoz tosses me the wooden cock.

I thought I might be more angry than I am, but I am entertained. Even more, I am impressed with the details of it. I look at Kendra, amusement sparkling in her eyes when she sees that we're not upset with her. I open my mouth to speak but turn my attention to my mate because what I am about to ask is definitely not something I should ask another female without my mate near me.

"She has not used it," Erkoz laughs, somehow knowing what my question is. "We have begged, but you know how our mate is. She is cruel to us, even though we give her such beautiful gifts."

I hold the wooden cock to Toron, but he shakes his head, so I give it back to Kendra. "Go and show the females. Maybe it will entice Toron's mate to be with him if she is excited at the thought of having it inside of her."

Toron hisses, but the sound is drowned out by the laughter from the human's table when Kendra runs back over, the wooden cock held over her

head like she is bringing them a glorious prize.

Deja's eyes go wide when she looks at it, and then she looks back over at me. I narrow my eyes on her, wanting to know what she wants. Her plump lower lip is sucked into her mouth before she bites down on it. She speaks to the other women, who are all still laughing as they try to get the new human to touch the wooden cock.

"Why can my mate not react the same as yours?" Toron spits at me when my mate stands from the table and comes over to sit on my lap. Toron moves away from us by a few chairs but continues staring at his human.

"What does my Deja want?" I ask her when she makes herself comfortable on my lap. "Surely it must be very important if she is leaving all the human females to fend for themselves."

She stares up at me, the dark center of her eyes taking up all the color. It is the only indicator of her arousal that I get unless I am to put my fingers between her thighs. I place a hand on her thigh and let my fingers trail up until I reach the hem of her tunic. I pull my fingers back down, wanting her to tell me she wants me. Her soft whine tells me she definitely needs her mate now, but I do not know what could have gotten her so worked up.

"Anything you want, I will give you, but you must tell me."

"Take me to bed, Dath." Her little hands pull at my tunic until her hands are grabbing at the muscles of my abdomen. "Please, I need you."

"What could I have possibly done to get you acting like this?" I pick her up, say a quick goodbye to my brothers, and take her down the hallway to the room I share with Toron and Yril. Toron will be upset if we are still lovemaking when he comes to bed, but Yril still has not returned to the tribe.

"Are you upset?" Deja asks, her hands pulling my tunic up my body until she's licking at my chest. "How's your anger?"

“Oh no, little human,” I laugh. “You cannot blame my anger for how you are now. I think this is all your doing.”

She snorts a cute laugh that is silenced as I lay her on the bed. She pulls her tunic over her head. “Maybe I’m just that aroused. Can’t go long without my mate.”

“A good problem to have, yes?” I smile as I kneel between my human’s legs and pull her to the edge of the bed. “Wrap your legs around my head, Deja. Don’t let me breathe until I’ve satisfied this sweet sex of yours.” I don’t wait for my mate’s legs to fully wrap around me before I start licking all of her juices and focusing my attention on the sensitive little nub between her lips. Her moans are the most beautiful sound I have ever heard, and I wish to hear them for many more nights, hopefully, all the nights of my life.

Deja

Dath and I are out in the forest that surrounds the tribe, picking flowers to take to his mother's grave. Or, I'm picking all the flowers, and Dath is tensing every time he hears a noise out in the trees. He told me it's safe out here during the day, but he doesn't exactly make me feel safe when he's acting like we're about to be attacked. The storms have mostly stopped, but rain still comes throughout the day. We all think that's why Yril and his mate haven't returned to the tribe. They're probably waiting until they're sure they won't be caught out in a storm.

"Maybe we should have had others come with us so you could stop worrying," I say as I go to pick a pink flower next to a tree.

Dath glares at me, his red eyes flickering and narrowing on me. "My mate does not think I can protect her?"

I throw my head back and laugh, bringing a smile to his face. He wraps an arm around my waist and pulls me to his chest. I hold the flowers out so they don't get smashed as he assaults me with his hands and his tongue.

"You're acting like I'm about to be attacked," I smile up at him.

“No, the only thing allowed to attack you is me,” He hisses close to my ear. “I think I need my mate now. Maybe it will help to calm me.”

“Right here?” I ask, looking around. We’re alone and have been the whole time we’ve been out here, but there are demons out hunting. They could stumble upon us easily enough. Not that they’d ever want to. I’m pretty sure even if it’s an accident, Dath would murder anyone who sees him fucking me.

“No, we should get back home,” Dath says, but he’s pulling my tunic up. One hand gropes my pussy before he plunges a finger inside. He falls to his knees behind me. Any self-control he had is completely gone. I spread my legs for him, and he hisses his approval before thrusting another finger inside me. “So good for me. Get on your hands and knees. I’ll be quick in case anyone is out here.”

“If anyone sees, you don’t get to kill them,” I warn him as I lower myself and let him hold my hips in the air.

He leans his body over mine, the entirety of me covered by him. No one can see me even if they try, but that doesn’t matter to Dath. “I make no promises,” He says as he removes his cock from his pants and pushes completely into my soaked pussy. “So good, Deja.”

Dath’s palm comes down by my head as he thrusts in and out of me. His arm wraps around my waist, the only thing keeping me from collapsing on the ground as he keeps battering me. His thrusts are erratic as he tries to find his release, to calm his nerves and ease the anger under his scales. I call out his name as an orgasm tears through me. Dath’s come floods me as soon as he feels me clenching down on him. My moans are loud, and if anyone is near, they know not to come in this direction because Dath will most definitely kill them if they see me in utter bliss.

When Dath's cock stills inside of me, he pants above me for long moments until his heart slows and his breathing evens out. He slips out of me and tucks his cock back into his pants before removing his tunic and wiping the come that's seeping from me. I stay on my hands and knees, waiting for him to finish cleaning me and tell me to get up. His fingers trace down my sex, and then he squeezes my thighs. He readjusts my shirt around me, and then he's helping me back up to my feet and grabbing the pile of flowers off the ground.

"Thank you," He smiles at me and pulls me into his chest for a hug before finally relaxing. "I think I was getting too tense being out here."

"Then let's go back." I wrap my fingers in his free hand and pull him back toward the tribe. "We need to drop these off, and then we can spend the rest of the day together."

"All day?" Dath looks down at me with wide eyes. "I do not think my little human could take me all day."

I cock my head up at him, one brow rising higher than the other. "Is that a challenge?"

Dath looks surprised by my question, and then a smile breaks across his face. "It is now. Let us see how many times my human can take her mate's cock before she is begging for reprieve, yes?"

"Fuck off!" A familiar female voice calls out from deeper in the trees. "I don't need you telling me where I can and can't go!"

"You are walking toward lovemaking," a male voice sounds exasperated as he speaks to the woman. "Do you want to walk upon one of your sisters being spread underneath a male because that is what we are walking toward?"

"Stop following me then!" The woman shouts, and then I realize why her voice sounds familiar.

“Simone?” I call out even as Dath tries to push me behind him. I push his hands off of me and start running in the direction of the voice. Dath hisses behind me, a warning that he’s very unhappy with me right now, but he follows behind me until his steps outpace mine, and he’s in front.

Simone comes into view, her hair completely free of her braids and twisted into dreads that frame her face. She’s clothed in a tunic and carrying bags on her back, which would be surprising if not for the demon right behind her, with a sled of supplies that he’s pulling. He watches her even as she runs to embrace me. In fact, he watches her so intently that he doesn’t see Dath until he’s on top of him. His lips pull back in a snarl, showing off new elongated fangs that must have dropped with his anger. His claws dig into the scales on the other demon’s neck.

“Hey, what the fuck?” Simone turns back to Dath, where he has the other demon pinned to the ground. “He’s an asshole, but you don’t need to kill him.”

Dath doesn’t respond to Simone. He hisses again and waits. The demon he has pinned to the ground looks up at Dath and keeps his cool as well as he can, considering he’s seconds from being torn into.

“Dath.” I place a hand on his shoulder when I approach him, and his bloodlust starts to simmer. “He hasn’t shown us any aggression. He brought my sister to us safely. We should at least hear what he has to say.”

Simone gives me a worried look, but I put a hand up that tells her to wait where she is. The male on the ground doesn’t move at all. He just lets Dath hold him as he tries to figure out if we’re going to let him live or not. I’m really hoping Dath lets him live, and also really happy that he was fast about fucking me because if they had stumbled on us just a little earlier, this demon would already be dead.

“My mate,” I say as calmly as I can. That finally gets Dath’s attention. His eyes flicker over to me for just a moment, but it’s enough to break through the haze of aggression. “Let him speak, and then we’ll decide what to do with him, yes?”

Dath snarls at the demon on the ground once more but pulls his claws back slightly so the man can breathe and hopefully speak to us. He says nothing at first, just stays completely still, like he’s unsure of what he should do.

“Why are you here?” I ask him when it’s clear I’m the interrogator and Dath is just the muscle.

“I am bringing supplies.” The demon says, his eyes never leaving Dath’s face. It’s for the best since Dath is likely to kill him for looking at me right now. I’m surprised he’s letting me talk to him. “I asked Ralleth when I came last if he would mind me bringing the supplies.”

“You’ve been here before and know the tribe’s leader?”

“I came when Xarr was speaking of females being offered from the goddess.” The demon speaks slowly, and I can tell he knows just how dangerous my mate is right now. Not going to lie. It’s kind of a turn-on that my mate is so feared. “Ralleth is my blood. I met his mate when I was here last.”

Dath cocks his head to the side, scanning the demon’s face, and then huffs. He keeps his eyes on the male but stands and stalks back over to where I’m standing and asking my questions. Dath’s hand lands on my shoulder. He holds me close to him, but he’s not about to murder the new demon, which is progress.

“Are we good now?” I ask Dath, who nods just barely. “Let’s help them get back to the tribe, then.”

“You and the new female go ahead of us.” Dath pushes me in the direction

I need to be walking before taking the packs from Simone and watching the new male with his red eyes. The other male is still lying on the ground, probably wanting to make sure Dath knows he isn't a threat. "I will walk with this one. Tell the first brother you see that Rallan is here."

"You want me to say his name?" I cock a brow at Dath so he knows just how much of a death sentence that is for the other demon.

Dath's face screws up, and he lets out a long hiss. "Of course not. The other human can do it."

"The other human has a name." Simone glares at Dath, who frowns at her.

"A name I will not be saying."

"Come on." I drag Simone by the arm so she doesn't get herself into more trouble. "You have some serious explaining to do."

I want to stay and make sure that Dath isn't about to kill Rallan once we're out of eyesight of him, but when I turn to face him, he's offering a palm to Rallan and helping him off the ground. Rallan takes in Dath's stature and size before turning back to the sled of supplies that he was dragging and grabbing the ropes again. Dath catches me looking and smiles at me before grabbing a rope from Rallan and aiding him in carrying the supplies back to the tribe.

"So you went and mated one of them, huh?" Simone's voice draws my attention from the two demons stalking behind us.

"Yeah, I guess I did." I smile at her as we walk. "What about you? How long have you been out in the woods with your own?"

"I've been stuck with the buffoon for too fucking long!" She shouts the words, which have my eyes widening as I steal a peek behind us. Rallan is shaking his head with an amused grin, and Dath looks entertained.

"You're an insufferable female!" Rallan yells back at her. She sticks her tongue out at him and then turns back to me.

“It’s been days.” Simone sighs. “I was sent right before Alice and Skylar. They were only going to send them, but they weren’t sure if the storms would cause them to lose the opportunity to send me. Something got messed up, and I ended up in the middle of this stupid forest.”

“But you’re safe. Nothing happened to you, right?” I ask, surprised that she isn’t more freaked out by the whole situation. I would be absolutely losing it if the Hands sent me to this world naked, alone, and in the middle of the woods during the storms.

“Rallan found me not long after I ended up here.” She flattens her lips into a line. “I told him I was supposed to be somewhere with more humans, and thankfully, he seemed to know what we are. I figured it was better to trust him and hopefully end up where I was supposed to be than go out on my own and probably die.”

“Hey, well, you’re safe here,” I say, knowing it’s completely true. “We just need to figure out which one of them you’re supposed to mate. It shouldn’t be too hard since we all seem to find our mates pretty fast.”

“Not mating anyone,” Simone snaps at me. “I didn’t want to be sent here, and I’m not fucking mating anyone. It’s bullshit that I was sent.”

I raise my brows but just nod along with what she’s saying. I didn’t feel that strongly about not being here or about mating one of the males, but Simone can have her own feelings and opinions on these things. We finish walking up to the tribe, and I show her to the great hall. I find Ralleth inside and tell him his brother is at the front gate with Dath and that he needs to go speak with them because Dath won’t leave him on his own until he knows he’s a trustworthy male.

I show Simone the new human room that she’ll have to share with Alice since she still hasn’t mated with Toron. I want to stick around and speak with

my friend, but I can feel the tether to Dath calling me to be with him. He won't come back to the new human room because it's encroaching on Toron's mate's room, and Toron really hasn't been known for his rationality these last few days.

"Go," Simone says when she sits on the edge of the bed. "I need some alone time, anyway. I've been trapped with Rallan for days now. I could use some time to think about things. I'll see you when you get a free moment away from yours."

"I'll explain all of it to you," I give her a smile. "I'm kind of tied to him, and being away hurts."

"Seriously, go." She returns my smile, but it doesn't reach her eyes. "Be happy you're with the man you want to be with. I'm not going to get in the way of that."

"We'll talk soon, yeah?" I ask her as I start to leave the room.

"Of course," she laughs. "I'm not going anywhere, and you'll have to take a break from him, eventually."

I pause at the doorway and chew on my lip. "There is happiness here, Simone. You just have to open yourself up to it."

She looks up at me, sadness in her eyes, but just gives me a single nod before turning and looking at a bare wall like I'm being dismissed. Whatever is going on in her mind and her heart, she can tell me about when she's ready. Until then, I have a mate that's calling to me through our tether, who apparently wants to make good on his promises from earlier when he talked about fucking me until I can't take anymore. I let the tether guide me back to the workshop, ignoring the questions about another female and telling them my mate needs me.

When I enter the workshop, Dath is already stripped of his clothing and

pounces on me as soon as the door closes. “You made me wait, little human.”

“I needed to make sure my sister was safe,” I sigh as he carries me over to the bed and lies me on my back. I throw my arms back and arch my back so my chest is pressed against his. “I’m here now, though, and I don’t plan on leaving this bed until I can’t walk anymore.”

Dath smiles down at me. “Good, I don’t plan on letting you leave until I’ve planted my young in you.”

“So many promises you keep making,” I tease him as he pushes inside of me.

“I plan on keeping every single one.”

Deja

Eight Months Later

Dath squeezes me once more before finally getting out of bed. It's his turn to hunt, which means he's super pissed off because he has to be away from me and my ever-growing belly until he kills an olack. The last time he went off to hunt, he killed one before I woke and decided he would be the one to wake me with a nice orgasm. I moan softly, hoping that's how I get woken up when he comes home today. If I can finish my plans and get back into bed before he returns.

"I'll be back soon," He whispers in my ear before placing his hand flat against my belly. "You both sleep soundly until I return, yes?"

"Mhm," I mumble and hold his hand against me. "I love you."

"I love you too, little mate." He brushes my face gently with his fingertips, and then the bed dips as he rolls around to the edge. He dresses quickly, places one last touch on my abdomen, and then he's leaving me alone in bed until he returns.

I wait a few more minutes after I hear the door close before I'm fumbling out of bed and making my way through the dark tribe to Dath's workshop.

Everyone is still asleep except for the three or four brothers out hunting. I don't know who's gone out, but I know Toron and Yril are still here somewhere because only one chosen is allowed to leave at once. The sun, or whatever lights up their clouded sky, is just lighting everything up when I creep into the dark workshop and find the hidden paintings I've been working on.

Okay, they're not paintings so much as signs that we've been working on. And by we, I mean Kendra, Skylar, and I have been working on it. Kendra convinced her mates to give her some large pieces of flat wood we could paint on, and I've been stashing away some of Dath's paints so I could add the words. Skylar is the one who gave us the wonderful idea, but as soon as she did, we knew we had to see it through.

"You in here?" Kendra's whisper catches me by surprise, and I let out a soft shriek. She laughs softly and then opens the workshop door, followed by Skylar and Yril. We wanted to keep it a surprise for all the others, but we needed someone who could write in the language that the demons read since our translators automatically translate everything for us. We could have written it in English, but then the others wouldn't understand what it says.

"I have the spikes and the tar," Yril says as he takes the planks from me. "I will allow you three to watch me hang them, but you will not assist."

"Boo!" Kendra heckles him, but she knows none of us want to help with the manual labor part of our plan. We're doing this for our own amusement. "Whatever, I just want it done before Xoth and Erkoz realize they're spooning each other, not me."

Yril huffs a laugh as he walks ahead of us, the three of us following him like small children, afraid that their parents are about to walk in on them, causing mischief. Which we are, but it really shouldn't matter that much. We

took a vote on what to call the tribe since we're trying to revitalize relationships with the other tribes that may or may not have completely and totally disregarded our males for the last twenty-five years.

Now? Now, all the tribes are willing to talk to us because of how the goddess has blessed us. The only problem is we don't have a name for the tribe, and the old name just doesn't have the same pizzazz that we're looking for. Not to mention, much like the correct term for the demons, the tribe's name is too difficult for humans to pronounce. It's a mixture of a hiss with some vowels that, no matter how hard we try, we just can't do it.

"Hold these," Yril says, handing a plank to each of us as he grabs a ladder out of Erkoz and Xoth's workshop. "You want it above the gates, yes?" We all nod at him with giant smiles stretched across our faces. Yril shakes his head, probably knowing that he'll be in just as much trouble as us when the others find out, but we're all in this now, and there's no way we're not finishing this.

Yril works on nailing and tarring the signs to the stone above the gate after asking us about five times if we like the positioning. He's just about finished with the first sign when his head whips to the trees, and his eyes narrow. After a moment, he looks down at us and shakes his head. "Hand me the next one. Dath is on his way back, so you better hope he won't ruin your fun before we are finished."

I close my eyes and feel the tether that binds Dath and me together. Yep, he's definitely moving closer. I know, without a doubt, that Dath won't care about this at all, but he is going to care that I'm outside the walls of the tribe. He likes me in bed, where I'm safe and comfortable. If he had his way, I'd never leave bed. He'd feed me, bathe me, and do everything for me, so I never needed to leave. Unfortunately for him, I can't think of anything worse.

“Who went hunting with him?” I turn to the two other women.

“Not mine or Diane’s,” Kendra says. Erkoz, Xoth, and Almaac always go hunting together, so they won’t be the ones with Dath, which is unfortunate since Erkoz and Xoth are very much okay with changing the tribe’s name to what we want.

In fact, almost everyone either doesn’t care or loves our idea, but the vote hasn’t been taken yet, and for some reason, Ralleth wants the name to be something that we have all agreed on. Yes, the vote is happening today, but why worry about a vote when we can use our mate’s professions to take matters into our own hands? Plus, the name is pretty hysterical, and the word means nothing here in the demon’s world.

“Does Ralleth know my mate is causing problems?” Dath asks when he clears the line of the trees closest to the gate. His red eyes gaze up at the signs before landing back on my face. His lips twitch upward, revealing his black teeth just as he wraps an arm around my waist and picks me up off the ground. “Is this what you’ve been hiding in the workshop?”

“Yes, it is, brother,” Yril calls down from the ladder as he hangs the last sign up. “They are cunning females. Using their males so they do not have to do the dirty work.”

“Oh, shush,” I frown at Yril, who only smiles at me. I turn back to Dath, hoping that he doesn’t hate it because I really want him to be proud of me for helping to get it all worked out. “Do you like it?”

“Welcome to Hell,” He reads the signs with a shake of his head. “Your human Hell was a terrible place, yes?”

“Some people thought so,” I shrug.

“But not my mate?”

“Your mate didn’t believe in it, but if Hell was going to be real, I suspect it

would be where all the demons live.” I poke his chest, reminding him he is perfectly fine with me calling him a demon, even though those are supposed to be bad guys on Earth, too.

Dath shakes his head but just pulls me tighter to him. “Well, I will fight to keep your sign up, then. I hope you do not mind that we will raise our young in Hell.”

“It’s a great name,” Kendra says as she skips past us and back into the tribe so she can go get her mates. “Imagine all the ferocious warriors from Hell.”

“I do enjoy being seen as ferocious,” Dath stands a bit taller, even though he knows that we all know he could tear into any male at any time with his claws and rip them to shreds. I mean, we’ve already seen it happen once. It’s best if we have a name that conveys the kinds of monsters we have in our tribe. Maybe the others will learn to fear our males and won’t try to attack us again. “If the human females want this to be our name, then you know the males will make it happen.”

“What else will you make happen?” I look up at my mate through my lashes. Something about remembering him tearing into other demons to keep us safe has me getting all hot and bothered. Sure, it’s probably a little messed up, but I’m tethered to the warrior for a reason, so I’m going to blame the tether.

“Anything my mate desires, you know this.” Dath holds me tighter against him, the sign and the others falling away in our minds as he takes us back through the tribe and to the small house we share not far from his workshop. “Tell me what my mate needs, and I will provide it all for her.”

Dath

Twenty-Three Years Later

I eye the male standing in my doorway, waiting to be let in to have dinner with my family. This day was bound to come at some point, but I wanted to push it off for as long as possible.

Even when I knew my sweet Mara was speaking with males, I tried to stay calm and not let the rage under my scales consume me. Not that I think any of the males are dishonorable because I know they are not. My daughter will be taken care of and cherished by any of them. I do not have to like that she will find her comfort and protection from another male instead of me, though. I have provided these things for her for the entirety of her life, and now a gangly male with hair like a human between his horns is here to say things to convince me he can protect and care for her better than I can.

“Blake,” Deja sounds much happier than me as she squeezes in front of me so she is greeting Blake. I am content just staring at him until he feels so uncomfortable that he leaves. Unfortunately for me, he has kept my eyes this whole time, even when he can probably feel the anger I am trying to keep under control. “Come in, don’t let Dath try to scare you.”

“Thank you.” Blake looks at my mate and gives her a sweet smile. It makes me frown, even though I know I am being irrational yet again. He is a charming male somehow. His father is Almaac, which means he should be very not charming and awkward and stoic and not able to woo my daughter as easily as he has. Blake holds out a bundle of flowers to my mate. “My mother told me it would be smart to bring these for you.”

“Your mother is a smart female,” Deja laughs as she takes the flowers. “Move over, Dath. Let the poor boy in.”

Blake’s eye twitches slightly when my mate calls him a boy, and that helps to soften the anger inside of me.

“Yes, of course,” I mutter as I stand aside and let Blake in the house.

I follow close behind him as he follows Deja into the dining room, where two of my other daughters, Vara and Lara, are already sitting. They giggle with each other when they see Blake because they know why he is here, too. None of us are fools. Even the youngest, Zara, is rushing into the room to stare wide-eyed at the male who is soon to be our blood if he and Mara have any say in it. Which, unfortunately, they do. Their choice in the matter is the only one that matters, no matter how badly I want her to stay my young forever.

It doesn’t help ease my heartache when Blake stands near my daughters. They all look like their mother. Not a single scale on their entire body, no horns, no red eyes when they are upset. No, they look more human than anything else, and their bodies are small, just like their mother’s. I do not think my daughters are weak because their souls and their minds are strong. Their bodies, though, their bodies are much less strong than their will.

“Mara, your boyfriend’s here!” Vara giggles even louder as she watches Blake rub his horn and glance over at me. Yes, he has been seeing my

daughter for a while now, and my girls have all decided to call him a boyfriend, like humans used to call their mates before they mated.

“Vara, behave,” Deja scolds our second youngest daughter. Lara keeps to herself even though she takes peeks at Blake every once in a while. She will be the next to find a mate, and I just pray to the goddess it will not be one of Erkoz’s and Xoth’s sons because they are just as annoying as their fathers.

“What she made fun of me for talking with Aran the other day, it is only fair I make fun of her too.” Vara tries to defend herself, but it only has Blake and me both snapping our heads in her direction.

Blake’s eyes widen at the mention of one of his brothers talking to another of my daughters, and I just sigh as I shake my head. I need my daughters to go back to being young when they just ran around and screamed and giggled all day instead of fretting about males that will never be good enough for them.

“I was making fun of you for talking to Aran because he already has a girlfriend,” Mara sticks her tongue out at her sister as she joins us in the dining room. Her eyes meet Blake’s, and then they are traveling down his body in a way that makes my stomach churn.

“Food,” I snap at no one in particular. When heads whip around to look at me, I rub my eyes and then try to speak again without sounding so angry. “We should eat, yes?”

“Yes, of course,” Blake is quick to agree with me. Smart male.

He pulls out a chair for Mara and looks at her when she doesn’t immediately sit down. His eyes move from hers to the chair and back again, and finally, he gives a subtle head tilt toward it like he is trying to explain to my daughter that he is getting the chair for her. It is a human custom that my mate has told me about, but I do not think we ever told our daughters about it.

A more demon custom would be to pull her into his lap and feed her, so I am glad he is choosing a human custom instead.

“Sit in the chair, sweetheart,” Deja says, breaking the awkwardness with her soft voice. “I’m assuming you’ve been sitting in his lap, and that’s why you’re confused?”

My face screws up at the thought of my daughter in anyone’s lap, but then I remember how I used to be with my mate when we were first mated. She did not ever leave my arms, so it is probably difficult for Mara and Blake to be away from one another if they are feeling called to be together, even half as much as I was to Deja. I rub my temples and hope that everything will be settled when I open my eyes again. More chairs move, and when I open my eyes, we are all sitting at the dining room table, looking at the beautiful meal my mate has made for us.

We eat in an awkward air that is filled with Deja making small talk with Blake like we do not already know everything about him since we have watched him grow the same as we have watched all the other young in the tribe grow. She asks if he is still enjoying hunting with his father and cousins, and when he says he is and that he is outperforming his father, I know it is true because even Almaac has told me his shame. I also know that Blake is saying this in front of me to prove he can provide for my daughter, even though I already know this. Sure, he may be scrawny for a male, but he is half-human, so it is to be expected. He is unmatched with his bow, though, so it gives me hope he can keep my daughter protected and fed.

“He took me out in the trees the other day,” Mara says excitedly when she can speak about something. My body tenses, thinking of my daughter out there without telling me so I could be there to watch over her. Deja grabs my

thigh under the table and gives it a warning squeeze. “It was beautiful. I didn’t know there were buildings out there, either.”

Oh, goddess, help me.

“Why did you need to see any of the safety buildings?” I ask, trying to keep my voice from being angry but failing miserably. There is only one reason I can think of for taking a female to one of the safety buildings, and none of it is what I want to happen to my daughter with a male who has offered her no security.

“Alright, girls, time for us to leave for a bit.” Deja stands up from the table and pushes my other three daughters out of the room and then out of the entire house.

I can hear their complaining, but I am too focused on the wide-eyed male sitting too close to my daughter now that I know they have been out in the trees and probably in one of the buildings alone together. I close my eyes, willing the anger to go down.

When did this happen? Deja told me last night that Mara was staying with a friend, but I had assumed it was a female friend. She has been staying over with a friend often recently, and I am just now realizing that I have been a foolish male. Not that it is wrong that my daughter is doing things that we all do, but I do not want some charming male to make promises to her to seduce her when he means not to go through with his promises. If I find out it was a sleepover with this male, out in the trees, so that he could be close to her, I might make irrational decisions.

“When did this happen, and why were you there?” I ask, my focus solely on Blake, who, if he is anything like his father, will not lie to me.

“Many days ago, and we did not enter the building,” Blake states without a hint of panic. Well, he is panicked, but his words sound true enough.

“Seriously?” Mara huffs beside him, and I do not miss Blake’s hand that falls into her lap to comfort her. “You’re really worried about him thinking you touched me out in the trees?”

“Well, yes, they are unsafe, and it is not right to take a female out there with the sole intention of lovemaking.” Blake turns his full attention to my daughter like I am no longer here. “I do not take you anywhere dangerous for that.”

Goddess, give me strength.

At least Mara realizes the mistake the young male has made in what he’s said, but it is not enough to keep me from hearing the words and knowing they have been together more intimately than I need to know about. I take a deep breath, tugging on the tether between Deja and me, begging her to come back to take some of my rage from me. She is off somewhere close to the great hall and will not get here fast enough to save Blake’s life if he does not say the right thing right now.

“What are your intentions with my daughter?” I ask. I can be rational. Not often, but sometimes. If this male wants to be with my daughter, I will survive, but he will not make false promises to her of mating if it is only to touch and seduce her. She deserves more than that.

“That’s why we wanted to have dinner tonight, Dad.” Mara reaches across the table and grabs my hand. A smile crosses her lips, and I feel myself relaxing slightly. “He is your blood now.”

Her words bounce around in my mind for a moment until they fully register. My rage is dissipated, and I am filled, instead, with a strong joy that I know Deja must be feeling deep in her bones, too.

“My blood?” Mara nods, and I turn to Blake. “You have mated then?”

Blake cannot stop the smile from his lips. Not any male could when they

think about mating the female they are meant to be with. “Yes, we wanted to tell you tonight because she will be staying with me from now on.”

“Yes, yes,” I nod my head as I stand and wrap my arms around my daughter. I started this evening thinking I would be angry at my daughter, wanting to even think of mating a male, but here I am, ecstatic that she has chosen a male that will honor and cherish her in all ways. “My son. I am blessed.” I wrap Blake in my arms next, making sure he knows I am happy with my daughter’s choice of mate. “Have you told your parents yet?”

“We told them this morning,” Mara says, tears pricking her eyes, but she brushes them away quickly since this is a happy moment. “We were mostly worried about how you would react.”

“I am not that bad.” I chuckle as the words leave my mouth because I am ready to rip Blake’s throat out not even moments earlier. “Come, we must go tell everyone the good news. The first children to be mated. We are blessed.”

“You’re not mad?” Mara asks me as I hug her again, holding her tightly against me because I know she is no longer mine to protect, but I will still try when she allows me to. “We worried you might try to kill him.”

“He has honored you by mating you,” I say as I grab him by the shoulder and pull him in to hug my daughter with me. “You have mated a strong male. I will still worry about you because that is my duty, but I will worry less if you are mated to this male.”

“Thank you,” Blake nods and makes sure that I know he understands just how honest my words to him are. “I will honor your daughter, always.”

“You are a good male. I knew this before you started courting my daughter, and I know it now,” I chuckle and start moving all of us out of the house. I was not joking when I said we needed to tell everyone. The first children to be mated means we need to celebrate, and we will all celebrate such a

wonderful union. “The goddess blesses my family. I am glad you are blood to us now.”

Author's Note

Thank you all for reading *His Human to Adore*. I am so unbelievably grateful for each and every one of you who reads my stories. The Unit A12 series has been one of my favorite projects to work on, and I am so amazed each day that others enjoy reading about my silly little aliens, too.

I have so many fun things planned for 2024 that I hope you all enjoy as well! The next book for Unit A12, *His Human to Chase*, will be out at the end of December 2023 or early January 2024. I have a standalone alien romance that I work on when I get some writer's block for Unit A12, which will probably come out in February or March 2024. It will not be in the same universe, but in more of a futuristic type alien instead of barbarian-like aliens in Unit A12. Other than that, I have an omegaverse I've been writing off and on that I am so excited to get out into the world. Not to mention the rest of the Unit A12 series that will be finished by the end of 2024. I have so much I want to share with all of you and not enough time in the day to write it all. 2024 will be filled with lots of releases, especially later in the year, since so many side projects will slowly start coming together.

Thank you for your continued support and the motivation to continue writing. Seriously, without all of you who read, I would not be able to pursue this as hard as I've been able to in the last few months. My words of gratitude will never sound like enough, but I will continue to write them out anyway.

About the Author

Morgan Robinson writes paranormal and science fiction romances about sweet monsters, usually of the demon variety. She's always had an interest in demons and the bad rep they get, so her stories turn the tables and give demons the love stories they've always deserved. Her novels contain plenty of steam, fluffy romance, and sometimes more than one MMC.

[Amazon Author Page](#)

[Links for ARCs, Social Media, and Goodreads](#)