

The Fae Chronicles



# Seducing Destiny



Amelia Hutchins

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## About the Author

*Seducing Destiny*  
The Fae Chronicles Book Four  
Written by Amelia Hutchins

*Books Also by Amelia Hutchins*

**The Fae Chronicles**

**Fighting Destiny Book One in the Fae Chronicles**

**Taunting Destiny Book Two in the Fae Chronicles**

**Escaping Destiny Book Three in the Fae Chronicles**

**Seducing Destiny Book Four in the Fae Chronicles**

**A Guardian's Diary Series**

**Book One Darkest Before Dawn**



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The Fae Chronicles Book Four  
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## *Dedication*

**This one is dedicated to the fans that rock my world. Thank you for understanding that I am human and that death doesn't care when or how it comes—and when it does, it rocks your foundation. For understanding that I am not only an author, but a mother and wife and everything that entails. For being there for me when the haters come knocking.**

**To the family I've lost this year. It's not goodbye, it's only goodbye for now. I hope you enjoy good company and other angels as you await our souls. To Jeannette who also suffered an unimaginable loss this year. We often have to continue smiling, for we are left to hold the families together in place of those we have lost. Death is never the end, it is only the beginning. Keep smiling, and know that the world cannot wait for little Gia to make her debut.**

**To Gina who spends countless hours making sure the entire story is pulled out and told to you in its entirety.**

**For my family and understanding that sometimes I go to other places, even when I'm in the same room with them. Also for not having committed for arguing with fictional characters.**

**And to my team—together we somehow managed to get this this out. Yay us! XoXo**

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## Warning

This book is intended for mature and adult audiences; if you prefer adorable and sparkly Fairies and Vampires...look elsewhere. It is the second in the Fae Chronicles; buy the first one before reading this or you will be so lost you won't know which end is up. Fighting Destiny can be found with reputable book sellers for your convenience. Seducing Destiny picks up right where the third left off. This book is dark, gritty, tear jerking, panty soaking, edge of seat grabbing, and *dark*. It does contain hot asshole alphas that seduce and wreck sensibilities. Explicit language is used liberally as is the use of magic in acts of naughtiness. The author strongly advises buying batteries or securing a willing victim to your bed while reading this book. (Handcuffs are optional.) Side effects include, but are not limited to: lip biting and/or chewing, screaming at the author, wet panties, unexplained leaking from the eyes, or other parts of the body. Some people may experience strange attachment to characters, and may scream for the next book in the series immediately after reading. If you experience one or more of these symptoms, do not seek a health care professional. Thank the author and wait for the next book in the series. (Stalking the author is normal behavior. Rest assured she has already started the next in the series.)

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## Chapter One

The Horde was assembling for war. The process seemed unreal, as thousands of our allies had gathered around to protect us and gain favor with the newly crowned Horde King. Some came to see the birth of the miracle babies—as they now referred to the wee beasties inside of me—who grew stronger with every rising of the suns. Those who gathered in the walls of the keep did so with the pretense of wanting to protect my glorious beast—as if he needed protection.

Ryder was one of the deadliest creatures that existed, and yet, despite my best efforts, he behaved as though I was too frail in my current condition to protect myself, so he had his brothers watching over me night and day as war loomed on the horizon.

He was trying to shield me from what was coming, but I wasn't a fool. I could smell the conflict brewing in the air, thick and dangerously near. I wasn't an idiot either; I knew we wouldn't make it out of this fight unscathed. No one would. For all we held, and all we cherished, peace would come at a steep price—because it always had. Even in my world, wars left devastation in their wake, but these were creatures who didn't want control; they wanted to destroy. These were powerful creatures that could do damage on a scale that Humans had never witnessed before.

Ristan had been spending more time with Alden, and was now acting as his shadow on all things Guild, bringing back any information he or Alden discovered. I often protested that it was no longer safe for Alden to be there; however, he stood fast in his belief that the Guild could be saved. He was hell-bent on ensuring that those who were worth saving *were* saved.

It gave me some comfort to know that Alden, with all his stubbornness, was protected by the Demon. Well, for the most part. I feared for both of them as they continued to put together the missing puzzle pieces. Trickery was everywhere, and no one was safe from it. Not even me.

Fear had become a constant thing in my life, and I was sure it wasn't going to go away anytime soon. It had grown roots, and each day a new bud would bloom as my time to bear Ryder's children grew nearer. What I feared the most wasn't losing Ryder, or if I would ever be able to gain his love, but what would come when my babies were born. I was strong, but that alone wouldn't keep them alive. I had spent more time with Danu, and so far we

hadn't found anything to protect the babes, except keeping them where they were—inside of me, where they would be alive and safe.

Time wasn't on our side though, and it kept moving along, oblivious to the turmoil around us. More than a month had passed since Ryder's coronation, and my time was steadily drawing nearer.

The uncertain and fragile state I was in weighed on my mind heavily as the days passed without a cure for the land. Ristan had been given visions that led everyone to believe that Ryder's and my children were the cure for this world. However, other than a few visions in infancy, including the one vision of me handing my son to Adam, he hadn't seen anything more of them in our future and that scared the hell out of me. I mean, if they were the cure, why couldn't he see them with us, unless it ended badly?

So much had happened in the short time since I'd met my beast that I hadn't even been able to catch my breath or wade through my inner fears. I knew I loved him, but love wasn't strong enough to seduce destiny into giving us what we wanted. Danu kept telling me that destiny had to be won, that I wasn't just born to it, and that I had to fight to get it.

More reports came in daily from Ryder's spies in the Human world; some of the reports we had gotten over the past month were frightening. They hinted that the Mages were gathering strength, torturing and killing the lesser Castes of Faery both here and in Tèrra, as they called my world. They were smart, but their actions did not seem coordinated, strategic or very organized as one would tend to expect from people who planned on wiping out an entire race for vengeance. Unlike Ryder, who was continually watching them and learning how they moved. He tried to learn everything about how they thought, and how to intercept their moves.

Information on Faolán was almost non-existent and it worried me more than the Mages, backed by Danu's husband did.

Watching Ryder as he countered each attack on the Horde Kingdom had given me both comfort and an uneasiness that I couldn't explain. Knowing he was strong enough to protect our children was comforting; on the other hand, I knew that if I ran from him, there was no one who could protect me from him—not even Danu could achieve that, based on the rules that governed her powers, even though he was one of her many creatures. Not that I was planning to run; it wouldn't be an option even if I considered it. Knowing Ryder's power and the strength of the Horde Kingdom didn't give me as

much comfort, for I knew that most castles and powerful dynasties such as this one usually fell from within. It was one of the problems in this world—everyone wanted to rule it.

Ryder's schedule was so busy that I saw him only for a short time each day. Between the intelligence he was assessing and the clamoring of the Castes for the attention of the new Horde King, our time together had become precious. Although I knew he cared and I had no doubts about how much he wanted me, it was almost like a stall in our relationship. Nothing had progressed as I had hoped now that he'd been freed from his engagement.

As the babes grew, so did my insecurities. I wanted Ryder to love me for myself and not for what I'd been *designed* for. Danu had explained that our never ending attraction and the need to rip each other's clothing off every time we'd been close to one another was in fact the design at work. It made sense, and it scared me. I'd never been one to be so sexually active, or to need it on an obsessive level as I had since meeting him.

I held on to the knowledge of who my mother really was, and the secrets behind my birth, in hopes that he would give me a sign or the answers I needed, but with each passing day, nothing changed on his part. I was so big with the babies that all I could do at this point was waddle, and it only added on to the insecurities I held for my future.

As a strong person, it was painful to know that I needed him, and that I wanted him. I still held the belief that if I ever left him, I would be on my hands and knees crawling away from this magnificent man and beast who'd claimed me, body and soul. I was his, as he'd repeatedly told me from day one. He'd claimed me as his plaything, in more ways than I'd ever thought possible.

I never thought that I would become this needy female who had to have a man, but Ryder was so much more. He'd pierced my heart and when I needed him to be strong so I could be weak, he was. When I thought I would go boneless with worry, he became the bones which held me up. It was hard to admit it, but I wasn't the same girl I'd once been. I was no longer an Enforcer; I was his light, and he was my darkness.

Dristan and Sinjinn were on guard duty this evening. Although they tried to make it seem as if they were just hanging out with me—yes, hanging out with little ol' me; the entire concept of me hanging out with the Fae was still sometimes comical, considering how much I'd hated them once upon a time.

We had settled into another round of Monopoly to pass the never ending hours. Yes, they'd secured a few board games, because Adrian had mentioned how much I liked to play them—and Darynda was starting to get the hang of them; however, seeing as she had never been to my world, some of the concepts like *Go to Jail* were a little out there for her.

Dristan had just begun to roll for his turn when the faint sound of music reached my ears. I hefted myself up and walked to the window to see where it was coming from. Off in the distance was the sight of exploding prisms of color, flashing out of what looked like fireworks? I pointed to where it was, which seemed to grab Dristan's attention.

"What is that?" I asked as my eyes shined with the colors that continued in the distance. He pushed away from the table they had set up for the game and ambled over, peering over my shoulder. "It doesn't look like someone's attacking, unless they're very patriotic about it. It looks like it's in the fields," I continued.

"Looks like the Demon started a party. That must mean he's done with the Guild for now, or back to check on things here," Dristan said softly, close to my ear. "Something must have bothered him enough that he needed to work it out, and he seems to be doing it with the lesser Fae."

"It looks like fun," I said. Fun was a thing you really didn't get to have when preparing for war. "Can we go down there? Just for a little while? It would be nice to get out of this room even if only for a few moments." I was tired of being cooped up. I was starting to understand why Rapunzel had grown her hair so long.

I watched as the men eyed one another warily as they considered it for a moment and then Zahruk sifted in, which caused Darynda to stiffen up and close off as she moved to stand beside me.

"It's not safe down there, Princess," Zahruk grumbled as his eyes quickly skimmed over Darynda. "You of all people should know that."

"Are you saying you can't keep me safe?" I taunted him. Zahruk and I had this love-hate thing going on. He'd stabbed me, and I hadn't let him forget it. "I'm not saying we stay 'til they're done with the gathering, but surely a few moments can't hurt, right?"

I smiled with victory as Zahruk held out his arm, his features taking on a look of annoyance. Once I grasped it, he sifted us down to the field. We were just outside of the walls of the keep, and protected on either side from the



overflow of armies who'd come to serve their new King. We waited until the others had sifted in behind us before moving closer to the entertainment.

The early evening air was warm and the moons were rising as we moved to where the lights and music were coming from. It was strange seeing two moons instead of one; it was another reminder of just how different this world was from the one I grew up in.

Strains of Coldplay's *Viva La Vida* seemed to be coming from the Demon's body as well as the air as he danced, oblivious to us.

The smaller of the Fae that looked like fireflies had flocked to this area and were dancing with him as though he was some sort of deranged conductor. On every down-stroke or change to the music, colors or fireworks would shoot around the dancers. The energy was palatable and I noticed others joining the dance. Dwarves and Far Darrig stood by, jeering at the dancers, while Nymphs and Fauns jumped into the game. I even saw those of the Sluagh creeping around to see what was happening.

I looked back at my escort and realized by their half-lidded, glowing eyes that they were all feeding off of the energy created by those dancing. The Demon's expressions seemed to range from anger to frustration as he danced. With a flick of his finger, the music changed to Imagine Dragon's *I bet My Life* and I decided to sit on the grass as the babies began kicking as though they were excited by all of the energy that was being sent out. No; as I looked around, I noticed that it was more symbiotic between the dancers and the observers as energy was being fed to all of them in a continuous cycle.

Asrian jumped in with the Demon, and began to dance as Ristan opened his eyes and noticed me for the first time. It was as though a mask slid into place and he grinned and nodded to Asrian who took over conducting the impromptu party. I watched from my reclined position as he made his way over to where I sat upon the grass.

"You shouldn't be out here, Flower. Not with such precious cargo stowed away in your blessed womb," he teased as he shook his finger at me as though I was a naughty child who had snuck out past curfew.

"I had to mess with Zahruk a little, but he finally allowed me out to play with the grown-ups," I said as I smiled at Zahruk, who stood alert, watching for threats. "So, what's up with the show?" I smiled and placed my hand on where one of the twins continued to kick.

"Fairy Ring—we will have a nice one going here by dawn. It's a way of

working things out. Some Humans work out, others go mad,” he replied smoothly with a devastating grin. He watched silently as Darynda sat beside me, and it didn’t slip our notice that Zahruk watched her as well. “Puzzles have a way of being solved when you least expect it,” he added softly.

“Which puzzles are you working through?” I asked cautiously.

“A shit storm of information with very little time to figure it out,” he replied easily, his eyes looked troubled, betraying his cheerful attitude. “Danu has been fucking me over with no new visions for the past month, and can’t seem to leave me alone. The Guild is slick with traitors and your uncle is too stubborn and prideful to just walk away. Just trying to see where it all connects, because it has to. Every puzzle has a starting piece,” he said on a deep exhale.

“You, of all people, *would* like puzzles,” I smirked as I turned to look at the dancers when the music changed again. “Those first few weeks here, Ristan, I couldn’t have done it without you by my side. I’m pretty sure I would have killed at least a dozen Fae before I settled in without you guiding me,” I said.

“You told me once that it’s what a true friend does, and you taught me a few unexpected things as well, Flower. Just tell me what is on your mind, weighing it down, and I will help you where I can. Even if you think it’s silly, sometimes it may be the most important thing,” he said as he gave me a meaningful look that made me feel even guiltier than I did before, that I was hiding who I was from both him and Ryder. I swallowed hard and nodded at him.

“So tell me, Demon, what’s bothering you at the Guild?” I asked.

He tilted his head and then narrowed his eyes as if he was considering it. “I want to pull your uncle out. It’s not safe in that place. Treachery is afoot and I’m watching a few of them who I suspect of being spies. Even one of the librarians seems to be in with the Mages,” he said on a growl.

“A librarian, which one?” I asked having my curiosity rise. The library of the Guild was huge and complex. It ran deep beneath the entire city and housed most of the records for the entire Guild, which took a lot of work to protect and run it. There were about fifteen or more librarians who all reported to Alden.

“She has dark red hair, and she’s not very tall,” he said but something in his tone caught my interest. Maybe it was nothing, but he seemed to be

warring with something about this librarian. “At least I believe she is working with the Mages, and she has access to Alden; it just doesn’t sit well with me. She’s a piece of this puzzle, I can feel it. Alden won’t listen to me where she’s concerned though, says she’s a sweet girl who wouldn’t harm a fly.”

I smiled and shook my head. “Olivia? Little mouse?” I asked with a wide grin. I knew her; we all called her the mouse, because when she spoke, it was just above a whisper and she was barely over five feet tall, at most. She’d only spoken to me a few times, and she’d looked as if she wanted to scamper off for the entire conversation.

“If I didn’t know better, I’d say she’s part Demon,” he growled.

“Olivia is sweet. She’s very timid, but still sweet, from what I know of her, anyway. She’s not a spy,” I said but then considered the fact that a few months ago, I wouldn’t have believed my Guild was the Mages’ main source of soldiers. “Well, maybe... Tell me why you think she is a spy.”

“She has red hair, and she’s always listening, always,” he growled as his eyes moved over my swollen belly.

“So since she has red hair and pays attention, that makes you believe she’s a spy for the Mages?” I continued.

“That’s not all. I just have this gut feeling. I can’t *read* her. I can’t see her soul and mind. So far, those I can’t read have turned out to be Mages as it is a powerful spell to block someone like me. Only you and the Dark Princeling have been exceptions to that rule,” he said as he rolled over and propped himself on his elbows at eye level with my stomach. “You’ve grown a lot this week; have you talked to Eliran about it?” he asked carefully.

“Yes; we’ve come to the conclusion that I’ve had my womb invaded by aliens which have now decided to use it to start a colony of clones,” I said as I tried to keep as straight of a face as I could manage while speaking of aliens.

“Ha-ha,” he snapped as he rolled his eyes and tried to focus on my belly that continued to wobble with the squirming babies. “I’m serious; you’re as big as a house.”

“Thanks for the confidence booster,” I replied, shaking my head at him. “You think it’s managed to slip my notice that I have a wide-load sticker on my ass?” I spoke in a heated tone, and then exhaled deeply. “Sorry, it’s kind of a sore subject with me at the moment, Demon.”

“Has Eliran seen the genders yet?” he continued, ignoring my outburst.

“No, they seem to prefer to hide it. Every time we try, it’s the same thing: either baby will have his or her rear end in the way, or a leg is blocking us, or an entire fetus. I seriously don’t care what they are though, Demon, as long as they are healthy.”

“And Ryder? How has he been these days?” I awarded him with a sour look that gave him his answer. “Don’t give me that look, Flower. Must I remind you that he’s—”

“Fae and love isn’t something you guys do a lot? No, I get it. Really, I do. The thing is, I wasn’t raised Fae and even if I had been, I’d still want love. Maybe it’s a female thing, but the Blood King and Queen, they have love. Actually, even Kier admitted he loves his wife so that’s two couples that I know of that don’t follow the norm. Ryder’s turned me into a giant beached whale and lately, he barely sticks around to do more than feed me. He was making an effort before, and now, nothing. I get that’s he’s super busy, but I need him right now, too.”

“You do know he’s preparing for war, right?” Ristan said as he placed his palm over my swollen stomach. His eyes lit up with wonder as one of the babes kicked him. “That one must be female like her mother; she’s got spunk and an attitude behind that kick.”

“Well, at least we already know that I have one boy inside there,” I said with a soft grin.

“Just because the vision showed you handing Adam a son, doesn’t mean they will both be males. After all, I was wrong about who had sired them; I could be wrong about the sex of the child as well.”

“True, since you didn’t see both of them in the vision,” I whispered. I was afraid to say it out loud, but we both knew that the chance of both babies making it out alive was slim. I’d conceived them immediately after Transition which was unheard of by Fae standards, and no one knew what it meant, or how it would affect them. Not even Danu had an answer to that question.

“Don’t go there,” Ristan said softly as he nodded to Zahruk, who had made an impatient noise indicating that he felt my playtime among the lesser Fae was over. “I haven’t seen them die,” he said as his eyes tightened as he watched me. His hand continued to stroke where the babe had yet to stop kicking.

“You haven’t seen them though, Demon; at least, not through to their adulthood. You can see Ryder’s future as the King, but you’ve yet to see me

or his children in it. I'm just worried that with the war coming, they will be born into a broken world which will be too damaged to accept them."

"That's good," he said with a mischievous smile on his full lips. "It means you're thinking like a mother already. Now, back to what's bothering me," he said with a roguish wink. "The librarian, how well do you know her?"

"She's a mouse. Why, you thinking of fucking the information out of her?" I teased.

"I'm pretty sure she wouldn't know what to do with a cock if it was staring her in the eye. She's a little too prim and proper for my taste, which, as you know, I like the kinky fuckery."

"Nice mental picture, Demon, can I go toss my cookies now?" I said, wincing.

"I'm serious. She's so far from my type that I'd rather bend a Light Fae over and go to town. Better one of those insufferable pricks than that little wench. At least they'd know what to do with a cock," he continued.

"Now I need ear bleach! But, on a serious note, I think you're protesting a little too much. Maybe you have a slight Demon type crush on the poor little mouse?" I joked with a knowing grin.

"She could be in league with the Mages! Who knows anymore? I can't abide betrayers and I have had more than enough of them lately." He grimaced as he expelled a shallow breath.

"I doubt it, but anything is possible," I conceded.

"She's a fucking she-demon in pretty pink heels," he grumbled.

"Oh, here now, Demon, maybe you just want her to play with your Lego parts, and tinker with your big blue balls? Just once?" I said.

He laughed outright, which made me smile so big it actually hurt. His snort afterwards brought us back to the problem at hand. "My balls are not blue, and I will even volunteer to show them to you for proof; can't let you go around thinking my boys are from a toy store and shit."

"Ristan," Ryder growled as he materialized behind us. "You have somewhere else you need to be?"

"Not really," Ristan said absently as he stood up and began working the buttons of his pants.

I covered my eyes as I squealed with laughter. "Don't do it!" I said between giggles that felt good, even if they did hurt my middle.

“You show her, and I will promise to make them blue for real, brother,”  
Ryder growled.

“She accused my boys of being blue! I only offered to let her inspect them to assure her I suffered no such disorder,” Ristan said between a snort and a laugh.

“Enough, children,” Ryder said as his glittering golden eyes took in the size of my midsection. “You’re too exposed out here, and I’d like to feed you, Pet.”

## Chapter Two

Ryder spent the next few days checking our defenses, knowing that sooner or later, they'd bring the fight to us. Somehow I didn't see them coming here, or being the whole *charge* kind of army that Ryder thought them to be. I was looking beyond that to treachery from within.

Claire was an obvious one for me, but she'd been submissive to the point of grotesque since the Mages attacked us during the coronation and Ryder called off the engagement to her sister. I wasn't sure why she'd stayed, but she had. Every once in a while I'd catch her staring openly at my massive midsection, but today there was something else there—I just couldn't figure out what it was.

I pretended to not see it as I headed to the library with the guards, trailing close behind me until I was safely behind the doors.

“So, what do we get to learn today?” I asked softly as all eyes turned to me. I had been in the Horde Kingdom for several months now, and even though I had learned a lot, there was still so much more to take in and Dristan had just been giving me the highlights of it all. I had also been getting daily rations of the language that the Horde used, which had to be learned. Evidently, it couldn't just be magically understood as I had understood most of the other dialects so far. No, this one had to actually be taught, and I wasn't making very much progress. I'd agreed to it for the sake of the twins, since I wanted to be a part of this world with them. I also wanted to be the one who taught them when they were old enough to learn.

Dristan scooted a stack of books my way and Ristan pulled my chair out for me. He was rarely in on these sessions since he had been spending much of his time at the Guild, so this was a nice change. Darynda sifted in quietly, as not to disturb the lesson, and smiled as she handed me a mug which was filled with chamomile tea and sugar cubes. I'd decided to reduce my caffeine intake to almost none, mostly because I was under the impression that it was somehow missing my system and going directly to the babes who then used it to kick the crap out of me.

I got engrossed in Ristan and Dristan's lessons and it was about two hours and five trips to the bathroom later that I found myself exploding with laughter. We were on to the history portion of my day, or as I liked to call it, crash course of Fae 101. The lessons were extensive, but then, considering

how ancient the race was, I had a lot to catch up on.

“He did not!” I smiled, tears in my eyes from laughing too hard. Ristan was telling me about their distant cousin who had gotten into Ambrosia right before one of the Horde’s skirmishes with my people; the Blood Fae and had made quite a mess of things from the rear.

“Okay, Demon. I have a question for you,” I giggled mischievously. “I thought that Demons had horns and tails, or like wings and stuff—so how come you and Alannah don’t?” I watched as my question put a guarded look in his eyes and his face fell. He actually looked at a loss of words for the first since I had met him. I lowered my eyes to watch his throat as it bobbed, before he finally spoke.

“Uh, Ryder is calling for me,” he whispered as his chair screeched as he abruptly stood and sifted out of the room. I looked to Dristan for the answer. The look in Dristan’s emerald eyes made my heart lurch. What the hell had I said?

“Did Ristan just lie to me?” I asked slowly and watched as Dristan nodded his head.

“He can and does,” he shrugged as the words flowed. “Don’t ask him about the wings and the things you think a Demon should have, Synthia.”

“Why, he tells me just about everything else. I didn’t think anything of it since even his sex life is available in all its sordid details upon request.”

“Ristan had them, Synthia. He had wings, horns, and the tail. For about two hours after he finished his version of our Transition. Alazander docked them just as he had with Alannah. He wasn’t perfect enough for our father, and so he made him as he wanted him to be. Ristan was born to be a true Demon; he just wasn’t allowed to remain so.”

I felt sick as I looked up at Dristan in unhidden horror at the monster that had sired him. “But wouldn’t they just grow back eventually? The Fae heal their wounds, even he did when the Mages tore him to pieces.”

Dristan shook his thick chestnut colored curls and lifted his tri-colored eyes to meet mine. “He uses glamour to hide the scars, but he has them still, his skin never healed from the damage. When Alexzander was of a mind to take something, it stayed gone. As you know, it’s part of the power of the Horde King, to scar when he wishes it. You saw your brother and what happened to him,” he said softly.

Liam had extensive damage to his face that had never healed. His hands



had been taken during his imprisonment, but they had grown back, and Ryder had done that to secure my place in his pavilion. The difference was, one was the Horde King, and the other had been the Horde Heir. “If Ryder had been the King when he’d cut Liam’s hands off...?” I asked.

“Ryder was never as cruel as our father,” he said with a distant look in his eyes. “The only wound he ever delivered that was permanent was our father’s death. He is just in his rulings, and never abuses his powers to bring others down unless he’s backed into a corner.”

“I should find Ristan and apologize for stirring up the pot,” I said as I mulled over what had been said.

“He’s just outside the door. He wouldn’t leave you unprotected while we are scheduled with your care. Ryder is afraid I’d try to get into your pants. Even with your blooming condition. It is probably why one of my brothers is always scheduled to be here during your lessons.” He grinned with a roguish look filling his eyes. I’m sure that look had left panties littered on the ground in the Human world. I patted his hand and pushed up from the table and grimaced as I felt like a penguin waddling to the door.

Sure enough, Ristan was there in the corridor, staring off into space. Or, maybe he was reliving old nightmares because I’d opened my mouth and swallowed my swollen ankle. “Hey, Demon,” I said softly as I looked up at him. His smirk was on cue, as if he had expected me. He offered me his arm and I accepted the extra support.

“Hey yourself, Flower. You ready to be delivered back to your tower?”

“Towers aren’t really my thing,” I said with a small smile. “My hair’s too short, and I’m pretty sure it wouldn’t make great rope,” I said as I crinkled my nose. I caught the start of a smile on his lips. “I wanted to say sorry about sticking my foot in it.” He snorted and looked down at me as he slid his fingers into my hand and held it protectively.

“I should have prepared myself for it. You were bound to ask it sooner or later. You know what they say about curiosity though, right?”

“That it killed the cat?”

“No, it ate the pussy,” he said slyly and winked.

“That’s so not what they say, Demon,” I laughed.

“No, the truth is, I don’t like to talk about it.”

“Why would he do such a horrible thing, though?”

“For years, I thought it was because he, like many, didn’t like Demons.

He wanted the alliance with the Demons, he just didn't like them. The wings are dangerous, like the Horde King's are, but not all feathery like his," he said abruptly. "I used to think he took my mother's tail because he didn't want to chance it taking off his cock," he hooted with laughter as I made a sour face and winced until I caught his eyebrow raised with interest. "I could have done a lot with my tail, you know," he said suggestively, making me snicker at him. This beautiful creature with a tail would have been dangerous to womankind.

"But years later I met my maternal grandfather when I was acting as an emissary with Ryder. I got to meet my mother's people," he looked sad as he mentioned them, but he kept going. "I found out then that losing the trademarks of what makes a Demon is considered a shame to them. Someone to be pitied," he spat angrily. "It's one of the reasons my mother didn't want to return to her family when Ryder released the women from the pavilion," he took a long, deep breath and continued. "Anyhow, it was a time long ago and nothing can be done about it. There are worse things he could have done to us, but he chose to take what marked us as something other than what he wanted us to be. Fae," he said gutturally.

"Like what?" I asked wondering what the hell could be worse than to take away what had marked him a Demon. He looked at me for a few moments and nodded, as if accepting something.

"I'll show you. Someone you should have met already, I think; it's about time you do anyway." He pulled my hand with purpose as he walked us down the long hallway in the direction of the pavilion.

We entered the woman's pavilion and he didn't stop until we stood in front of a door with no name on it or people around it. Inside, I could hear the faint moaning and cries from a woman. "Who is it?" I asked as a shiver ran up my spine.

"Kiera; she's Ryder's mother."

I pulled my hand away from his. "I thought she was mental," I mumbled as he ignored me and opened the door.

Kiera was on the bed, chained to it. She had golden eyes, and wild, midnight hair like Ryder's. There was a wild look in her eyes, as if she'd been tortured and had endured unimaginable pain. I swallowed

"Kiera, this is Synthia Raine, the mother to your grandchildren," Ristan said, and she turned those unseeing eyes to me. They lowered to my growing

midsection with a look of disdain.

“Horde King’s bastards,” she mumbled. “Kill them,” she whimpered as a single tear slid from her eyes.

“She and Ryder are happy, and welcome their children,” Ristan said as he placed a hand on my swollen womb. “Twins, Kiera. She’s given him twins to heal the world. To undo what Alazander has done.”

“What the fuck do you think you’re doing?” Ryder growled from the doorway.

“My son,” Kiera said with a vacant look as she turned to Ryder’s voice. “My beautiful, little boy,” she cried, a gentle sob escaping her lips.

I felt as if I was intruding as Ryder walked in and placed his hand in her outstretched one. “Mother,” he whispered as he lowered his mouth to kiss her palm—as he often did with mine.

“You made a life,” she accused. “To secure the line, one that will end us,” she whispered brokenly.

“I chose a mate, one who can help me to bring forth the prophecy to *heal* the lands,” he said in a calming tone as he went to his knees at the side of the bed. Her chains sounded as she turned to look at him. “The beast chose her and planted his seed in her womb, mother.”

Talk about medieval talk! Seed, womb, all we needed now was a knight to walk in, rattling his shield and chest plate.

“Beasts,” she whispered as her eyes looked over to me. “And she lived.”

“She’s his mate, in every way.”

Ryder and I both turned to look at Ristan, who had spoken softly behind us.

“Impossible,” she screeched, which caused the babes to move deep in my stomach. I felt a sharp pain and cried out, which sent Ryder into overdrive as he moved to me and lifted me in his arms.

“Get Eliran, and I swear, Ristan, if they come to harm for this...” He let his threat go unsaid.

## Chapter Three

I was in a nightgown and resting in my bed when Danu showed up. She was dressed in black leather pants with a tight ruby red halter top. “Sorry about that, Synthia. You carry my grandchildren, so we will have to be more careful moving forward,” she said thoughtfully.

“Thanks for the reminder, but it wasn’t like I walked in there expecting the poor woman to take me for a ride through crazy town.” I’d mumbled it and knew she was going into another lecture as her eyes flew back to me.

“I’m serious. You may have my blood and the Fae’s, but Fae women and infants can die in childbirth—and they do, a lot more now than they once did.”

“Is that why you came?” I asked with more attitude than was necessary.

“I came because you’re my daughter and I needed to know you were all right. You need to worry about yourself, Synthia. Besides, I asked Ristan to show you Ryder’s mother. I thought you might be able to reach her where I had failed to, but it’s apparent now that she’s a lost cause.”

“Lost cause?” I asked as I turned on my side, trying to ignore the twins who were practicing their kicking skills on my ribcage.

Danu’s eyes lowered to my stomach where it moved in a frenzy of activity. “Nothing has gotten through to her and worse, based on what she did today, she’s becoming more unstable. Alazander crushed her mind and he had finally broken her just before he died. Now she goes into fight mode when others get too close to her, and I’m not sure she’s strong enough to come back from that. I had thought maybe she’d see you as a victim as she was, but I was wrong.”

“That’s bullshit,” I whispered, remembering coming back from Larissa’s death. I didn’t want to; in fact I’d been inside my mind, and it had taken Ryder coming in to get me. She just needed someone to do the same for her. “It’s easier to hide from our feelings, from reality. She was abused mentally and physically. It makes perfect sense to give up when you can’t see light at the end of the tunnel, but there’s light now. She can come back from it, she just needs help.”

“He comes,” she said as her silhouette shimmered and then faded. I looked at the spot where she had just been and turned in time to see the door open as Ryder walked through it. He was beautiful, with his large velvet

wings that swept the frame with their width.

“Pet, how do you feel?” he asked as he took me in with his golden eyes. He looked tired from playing war games with the Mages, and I felt bad for disturbing him from them. He’d missed being with me and Eliran for the quick check up after the disturbance with his mother, as something had called him away.

“I feel fine. Eliran said it was just Braxton Hicks contractions, which is a fancy way to say my body is preparing for birth, but he said they can be just as scary and painful as regular labor contractions,” I said feeling a twinge of embarrassment at knowing beforehand what was wrong with my own body. “It had nothing to do with your mother,” I said softly as tried to keep the blush from taking color on my cheeks.

“Do you need anything?” he asked, but I could see he was torn between staying with me and preparing his kingdom for their survival.

“Mmm, I’m good. I’m going to rest, but can you please send Darynda in after she’s done with Faelyn?” He tucked the blankets around my body and gave me a chaste kiss on the forehead, and held up a cup for me to sip. It was filled with an herb drink that Eliran said would help with pain. It relieved the pain, but it also made me sleep like the dead.

“Synthia,” Darynda’s voice penetrated my sleep-riddled mind. I looked up to find her green eyes peering with concern at me. “Are you well?”

“I’m fine,” I said as I turned over and winced as one of the babies protested at the slight movement. “I think they are training for the Elite Guard already.”

Darynda smiled as she brought over a crystalline container full of blue liquid. “This is from the Fairy Pools in Scotland; well, from our side of it anyway. “There’s a story that says Danu blessed the waters of the pools for the Fae, and mothers would drink it to give their unborn babe strength for his journey into his new world.”

“Is that so,” I asked the air, hoping for some sort of confirmation to this old wives tale from the person in question, and then noted that Danu wasn’t here. Normally she was around when my eyes first opened in the morning, and today she wasn’t.

Judging from the bright shade of blue that filled the sky outside the window, I’d slept through the entire rest of the day as well as part of the night. “What time is it?” I asked.

“It’s later than you usually nap, but Ryder said to let you sleep. He said that you had taken some of Eliran’s herbs yesterday. With everything going on today, and what he’s done...well,” she tilted her head with a knowing smile, “I knew you’d want to be woken up.”

“What’s he done now?” I asked deciding her words were worth waking up for. I accepted the glass with a thank you and drained the blessed water without blinking. “Well?” I asked again when she just smiled.

“I had mentioned to the King about our lack of female books, and well, he misunderstood me and ordered them all. I think you now own every romance novel ever written.”

“*Every* romance novel ever written,” I whispered with a small grin spreading across my lips. “That’s a lot of books. It would take forever to just make a dent in that many novels.”

“Synthia, you’re immortal now and time is something you have in abundance. Ristan also suggested we get you some books on mothering, and birthing as well. He also said to give you this,” she whispered wickedly as she glamoured a doll.

“A baby doll—this is a joke, right?” I asked, confusion stamped on my face. She handed me the small newborn-sized doll, which started shrieking with an ear piercing cry the moment I held it. “How the hell do you shut it off?” I shouted over the wailing thing, which I held up by its leg.

“Try cuddling with it, Flower,” Ristan said from the door. I turned a horrified look up at him.

“You ass,” I growled as I tried to comfort the doll and failed. I had zero knowledge of how to calm a screaming baby; it wasn’t as if we had child raising classes at the Guild.

“Here, like this,” he said as he sifted to the bed and took hold of the doll. “Gentleness is universal. Even Fae babes love a cuddle to feel secure; smart little things also like breasts.”

I lifted a brow as he swaddled the doll in a blanket he glamoured, and rocked the lifelike doll in his arms. It instantly stopped crying and made gentle mewling sounds. I groaned. “I’m probably going to be the worst mother ever known to Fae and mankind alike.”

“No, you just need to practice making Bob here, happy,” Ristan said as he eyed my growing belly. He, out of everyone here spent the most time watching my tummy, as if he expected the twins to show him the future, or

theirs maybe. “Every mother fears that she will be a bad one. It’s what makes them a parent.”

“And you think handing me a doll who hates me, will help? I’ve never had a mother, not one that I remember anyway, except for my foster mother, but those memories are mostly faded now. I’ve never even held an infant.”

“Flower, those babes will have an entire Caste of Fae watching over them and protecting them. You won’t be raising them alone. A wise woman once told me that it takes a village to raise a child. You’ll be a fierce mother, and no other children will ever be as loved as yours.”

That was *if* they lived. No one said it out loud, but we all thought it. It weighed on everyone’s mind as each minute passed and the birth grew closer. Faery was sick, and there was a real possibility my children would die because of it. It was a threat we couldn’t protect against, even though Darynda had been giving me every remedy known to the Fae race.

I knew he was here before he peered inside the door. Adam looked good in his new role as the official Dark Prince. His hair was a little longer than I was used to, and his brands were more pronounced in contrast against his smooth skin.

“There’s my girl,” he said as he leaned his tall body against the door. “How’re you feeling?”

“I’m doing pretty good considering I’m the size of a small house. Well, minus the strange cravings and the persistent crying at random times.” I smiled as he shook his head.

“Synthia, you’re pregnant. Crying is allowed.”

“I feel like my entire body has been taken over by aliens,” I admitted.

“Flower, it’s time to join Ryder in the throne room. Your presence has been requested,” Ristan said as he lifted his head. I’d known for a while now that he, his brothers, and Ryder were able to communicate telepathically, just like Ryder had done with me on occasion. I wasn’t sure if this was one of those times, as he didn’t seem to have the telltale cocking of his head to the side, as they normally did when they listened to someone using that channel of communication.

I waved my hand, ‘showering’ with a single thought. The magic washed over me and Ristan nodded and glamoured a dress over my bursting curves. I’d curbed using the more strenuous magic, since we were unsure if it would draw from the babies. Eliran had been unable to answer that question, and

since then I hadn't sifted, or dressed myself unless it was done as a normal Human. I didn't mind it, but others here thought it was weird.

I was dressed in a striped blue and white chevron maxi dress. It was comfortable, and Ristan had even added accessories to the wardrobe, including bracelets and a crystal necklace. I slipped my feet into the fur trimmed slipper boots he'd glamoured for me. My feet had been swelling off and on, and the slippers seemed to be the only thing I could wear comfortably these days.

"Here," Adam said as he held out his hand to help me up.

"Thanks," I said and accepted his extended offering. He smiled as he effortlessly brought me to my feet.

"Shit, Synthia, have you even gained any weight?" he asked with concern lighting his emerald eyes. "Well, besides for the bulging midsection that is."

"A few pounds, but I feel like I have gained a lot more. Ryder doesn't want me to continue training so I'm feeling the neglect in my muscles," I frowned. "I'd prefer to keep training and with a war coming, it only makes sense to be ready for anything."

"Sorry, but I have to go with Ryder on this one. You need to be careful of what you do, and be mindful of my nieces," he replied with a smug grin.

"Nieces...?" I asked.

"They'd drive Ryder insane, so yes, my nieces," he replied just as smugly. "It's something I would get much entertainment out of watching."

The doll that had been discarded on the bed chose that moment to squawk. Adam's eyes flew to it as if it was an unknown threat. Oh yeah; he was going to take being an uncle just great! I looked to Ristan, and smiled as he winked at me. As I watched him, his face fell as if he heard something we couldn't.

"Flower, have Adam escort you to the hall. I need to go help Alden, he's in trouble," Ristan as he sifted without waiting for an answer.

"Demon," I growled, feeling as if the rug had been pulled from beneath my feet. "You can't just say something like that and sift out!"

"Alden is smart, Syn. If he has the Demon on his side, he'll be fine," Adam supplied as he offered me his hand and then tucked mine into his elbow. Together we made our way through the halls discussing his new role, and mine as well.

Darynda was silently brooding behind us, but had refused to speak of why



she was brooding. I knew it had to do with something that had gone down between her and Zahruk, but I also knew she'd tell me when she was ready to. I wasn't the prying type, and being a friend meant waiting until she was ready to talk about it.

"So, has he said the big L word to you, yet?" Adam continued talking, unaware of the woman moping right behind us.

"Labor?" I asked with a serious face even though it was hard to keep it straight.

"Smart ass, you know that's not the word."

"Nope, but he's Fae and stubborn as fuck," I whispered with a soft frown on my lips. "I hope it's not serious with Alden. He should have come here with us, where it's safe."

"It's Alden; did you actually expect him to come here after he'd been sending kids to their death unknowingly?"

"It wasn't his fault, he's been sending us out on missions forever, and it wasn't like he knew the last few assignments had been like sending sheep to the slaughter. He couldn't have known that many of those times he was following orders from Mages. He has nothing to prove to us. We know it was the Mages, and so does everyone who matters," I argued.

"Synthia, had it been you who'd sent those Witches off to the slaughter, you'd hunt everyone responsible down, and you wouldn't show them a single grain of mercy. I'd be the crazy best friend right beside you, holding them down."

"I get that, but it's...it's just not realistic. He can't do it alone, and I can't go to him and help him!"

"And that's the real problem isn't? You can't protect him and it's driving you insane knowing he's out there alone."

"Yes!"

"But he isn't alone. He's been working with Ryder's guards by his side, and he has Adrian as well. He's not out there alone. Not even when he's inside the Guild; he has your Demon then, and he's got a connection to the Demon which tells him when he's in danger."

I rolled my eyes, because I knew he was trying to stop me from worrying, but I was done losing people I loved. "I—" I paused as I entered the empty throne room. "What the hell?"

I looked around, and it wasn't until I turned back the way we had come in

that I saw what was out of place. *“Ryder, I need you.”*

I sent out the distress call immediately at the sight of Adam lying in the corridor, bleeding on the floor, with Darynda lying next to him. The entire room had looked normal, right up until I’d stepped through the entryway to the chamber. It was then that I noticed the crystals that formed a ring on the floor around me and locked me into a small area. The crystals that locked me in must have been what knocked Adam and Darynda back. From where I stood, I couldn’t tell if they were badly hurt or just had been rendered unconscious from the power of the crystals and the spell.

*“Synthia?”*

*“Now, Fairy! I’m in the throne room!”* I screamed inside my head, knowing Ryder would be here in seconds, but seconds would be too late.

## Chapter Four

By the slight rise of his chest, I could see that Adam was still alive, as well as Darynda. They'd been spared, for now, and I could feel the malice and evilness of the Mages that currently surrounded me. I could hear Ryder snarling and shouting inside of my head. He'd be here, but it wouldn't be in time to save us.

The Mages were cloaked in invisibility, as they had been at the coronation, but someone else within the castle had to have let them in and draw me here. Ristan had told me to come, but deep down I knew he'd do anything to protect my unborn babes. No, this was an inside job. The Demon had to have been misled and this wasn't something he'd known about.

That meant it had been someone else; someone from our inner circle or close to someone in it, was working against us. Someone we trusted had allowed the Mages to breach our defenses, and welcomed them into our sanctuary. I eyed the floor, seeing the crystals. I knew what crystals could be used for, and I had a feeling these ones were used to keep me in, and the guards out. No one would be able to remove the crystals with the exception of the person who spelled and placed them there, and that was something only a very talented Witch/Warlock/Mage could do. I knew it wasn't easy to get the crystals to work right because this was something we'd learned to do at the Guild towards the end of our training.

I weighed my options.

They sucked.

Freaking hairy Fairy balls!

It wasn't ideal to kick ass while pregnant, but it was doable. I'd fight to protect my children from being in the hands of these depraved assholes to my dying breath. I'd fight to keep them alive, that much I knew. I could still hear Ryder as he roared with anger. Zahruk and the rest sifted in close behind Ryder, and I watched as they moved to the motionless bodies of Adam and Darynda. Dristan and Asrian were examining the crystals blocking the entryway and the barrier they created. I could see Dristan touch the barrier and wince as he quickly pulled his fingers back.

"Get out of there, Syn!" Ryder ordered, even though he knew he was asking the impossible.

"*You know I can't, Fairy,*" I replied on the mental path. I didn't want the

Mages listening in, or hearing my distress, which would be stark in my voice.

The fact that they'd waited to make a move until they had an audience was telling. It told me they wanted Ryder enraged, and to feel the loss where they could witness it. Idiots.

"Synthia," Ryder continued as the first Mage took a shot.

It was deafening at this close proximity, but I'd felt the disturbance in the air and had easily dodged the attack even clumsy as I was with this new form. This was real, and I could feel my panic increasing with every passing second. They'd brought guns? Who the hell brings guns to a magic fight? Were they loaded with iron bullets or something? Something that could kill me was my guess.

*"Fuck, Synthia, tell me how to get these fucking crystals down!"*

*"Calm down, I need to concentrate,"* I ordered back. *"Danu, I need you now,"* I prayed, knowing Ryder could hear me. He probably thought I was asking for strength, but nope, I wanted my kick-ass Goddess mother to get her ass in here and now. *"Danu!"* I continued screaming inside my head. I could hear Ryder as he continued to order me to remove the crystals. Another bullet tore through the room, hitting my shoulder and grazing my flesh. *"Mother! Right now, I need you now!"*

Silence filled my mind as what I said took root in both mine and Ryder's minds. I didn't turn to see the shock on Ryder's face. I just knew it was there. I hated the idea of knowing it would be seen as a betrayal, which honestly, I deserved. *"Mother, if you don't get your ass in here now, I'll hunt you down and—"*

"Duck," Danu snapped at me as she shimmered into my view. She had called out in the nick of time, and I ducked, barely missing being hit by the bullet.

I was awkward, but not about to give up. "Swords," I growled as I stood shoulder to shoulder with the Goddess, aka: my mother. Swords appeared in my hands.

"He knows. I'd have thought you'd of kept us a secret a little longer, daughter," Danu said softly as she tilted her head to look at me. Her eyes filled with worry as the knowledge of my mistake set it. I only spared a second to hate myself for calling out for her where Ryder could hear it. He was in my head, and I'd even heard the gush of air that filled his lungs and rolled out in a growl of anger.

“I’d do anything to protect my children, even spill my secrets to the world, if it meant they’re safe. Can they see you right now?” I asked barely above a whispered breath.

“No.” She shrugged. “The Fae tend to worship me when they can see me or feel my presence. Now is not the best time for them to do that. I’d rather have them standing erect, ready to fight for you, than on the floor kneeling.”

I knew he could hear us, and it couldn’t be helped.

“Turn off your humanity. It’s time to show your beast just how badass you are,” Danu said and I felt my brands as they appeared on my arms. Thin, colorful lines crawled up and swirled around my forearms, biceps, and then my face. My inner demi-Goddess was now on the outside; my hair was fuller, and my eyes glowed with power from within. With Danu so close beside me, the raw electrical current was massive.

I wouldn’t look Human or Fae in this form. I wanted to see myself through Ryder’s eyes, but didn’t have the luxury of looking as another Mage moved towards us, unaware that I could see them now.

I waited until he was close enough before I brought the sword in my right hand up and spun with enough force to remove his head from his shoulders. The other Mages watched the detached head as it rolled over to where they stood. I knew she wasn’t supposed to interfere, but I was damn glad she was standing beside me, giving me strength and calling out warnings and encouragement as I did the damage. She couldn’t wield the weapons herself, but I could feel her giving me her strength to go on the attack.

“Game on, bitches,” I growled as Danu moved in sync with me step for step, and I made short work of the Mages that were left. Either this was a different group or the Mages didn’t have word back from what had occurred at the coronation. Or maybe their communication skills sucked. You’d have thought they would have put a little more effort into getting me, but they’d sent only a handful of Mages, and that came with being cocky. It was a slap to my confidence, but I was glad for it considering I was huge with the babes.

As the last Mage fell, Danu moved several of the crystals and brought down the ward that had kept me contained to the small area. For a moment I felt panic, because I knew I’d have to face the music. The moment I turned to face Ryder, I regretted it.

His eyes spoke volumes, and I could see his anger burning in the endless black pits of them. I opened my mouth to say something, but closed it when

Danu sifted out without a single word. I wanted to scream at her to come back, but this was my fight and we both knew it.

I looked for Adam and Darynda; they were up, both staring at me, as were most of the people who stood in the small crowd that Ryder had brought with him. I shed the power like a second skin and turned back to face Ryder.

“Ryder, I can explain,” I whispered.

“Zahruk, take Synthia to my rooms and do not leave her alone,” Ryder growled. “I’ll be there shortly to deal with her.”

I paused as my heart sank to my stomach.

I didn’t wait for Zahruk to lead the way. Instead, I marched out of the room and made my way to Ryder’s chambers. I could explain this to him if he’d give me half a chance. He had to be willing to give me that chance though, and I wasn’t sure my heart could take the waiting.

Zahruk’s silence was deafening as he stood in the doorway of the giant bedroom. He had to have been on the same mental path Ryder and I had been using; his eyes wouldn’t meet mine. I got it. This was a big secret, and yes, I’d have told them eventually, but on my terms. I had barely wrapped my own head around it; how was I supposed to get them to understand it?

The idea of Ryder discarding me because I’d been crafted to be his perfect mate was something I hadn’t been willing to deal with yet. It felt like forever before Ryder finally walked into the room.

He dismissed Z, who glared once before he left, as Ryder walked over to where I’d chosen to stand beside the window. “You lied to me,” he snapped angrily. “You kept this from me and I’d like to know why.”

“I didn’t lie, Ryder, I withheld the truth,” I whispered. “I’m half-Fae, and can’t lie just like you.”

“You knew this, and yet you didn’t tell me. Omission. It’s the same thing as lying, Synthia. How long have you known you were the daughter of a fucking *Goddess*?”

“I’ve known she was my mother for a little over a month now, so to answer your question, not very long,” I replied, meeting his angry eyes.

“And you just thought you’d keep it from me?” he demanded.

“I didn’t want to, but I’ve learned things that I’m not sure how to talk about with you,” I replied honestly. My heart was beating wildly as my walls came down around me. It felt as if I’d had the carpet pulled from beneath me.

“Like what? What couldn’t you fucking tell me?” He folded his arms

across his chest angrily and as I tried to lay my hand on his arm, he jerked away from my touch.

A single tear slid down my cheek. Here it was; it was going to all change, and I'd lose him forever. "Danu replaced one of Madisyn's eggs with her own. She created me, for you."

"Impossible," he whispered. Ryder whispering was deadly.

"It's not impossible for a Goddess, Ryder," I said as I turned to look away from him to stare out the window. "She was there with us at your crowning, helping me to fight off the Mages who helped Faolán. She had been after me to accept her, and I hadn't. I had been holding back from doing it. When Ristan was hurt, and I thought he was dead, I accepted her. She told me things the next day, things that could never be unheard."

"I'm running out of patience," he growled hoarsely.

"I was created to be everything you want and need in a mate. I was *made* for you, Ryder. It's why we felt a need to be together on a physical and sexual level when we first met. Even when we hated each other, we felt it. It's why my brain went from hate to lust in zero-point-five seconds. It's why you're obsessed with owning me," I said as tears fell freely with the ugly truth laid bare. "I balance you, and you balance me. It makes us potential heirs of Faery as a whole. Danu was afraid that you'd turn out to be like your father, and in her mind it made sense. She said that Alazander was corrupted by Bilé, her husband. He cursed the Horde King's beast to be unstable and to become corrupted by power because he knew her favored creature was the Horde King. Neither one is supposed to directly interfere with us, but they can influence us. Her husband cursed the beast of the Horde King because the he was jealous of the Horde, who she favored more than the other races. So she made me, of her own egg, to be the balance for you. It wasn't fate that brought us together, it was some stupid revenge, and we are nothing more than pawns in their deadly game."

"And I'm supposed to just accept that?" he asked angrily. "Obviously you can lie, and have been."

"Why would I lie about that?" I asked with tears blurring my vision.

"Why hide that you're a demi-Goddess from me?" he countered. "Why keep this to yourself, unless you planned to keep it a secret forever? Or did you plan to leave me and take my children with you?"

"It's not like that, Ryder. I wanted you to need me and want me for who I

really am. Not for the reason that she made me—to be your favorite drug of choice. I hate that we feel this attraction because we're 'supposed' to. They removed your choice, and instead made us feel it without knowing if we even like each other. You're supposed to be attracted and addicted to me, not because you actually are, but because I was created to draw you in."

I waited for him to say something, anything. He didn't for a long while.

"Say something!" I shouted back at him with my hands on my abdomen as a sob threatened to let loose.

"You're not to leave this room, at all. No one is allowed in to see you until I come back. Do you understand me? Nod, Synthia," he said when I just stared at him.

"No. Screw you, Fairy! Say something, talk to me, please! Don't leave it like this."

"Guards will be posted inside the room until I can figure out where to go from here," he said as he started to sift out, but I grabbed his arm and held him in the room.

"Don't do this—don't just leave me without talking to me. Tell me what you're thinking, at least!" I pleaded to him, but his eyes said he was pissed, and unwilling to even touch me. "I won't stay in a room where I'm guarded and controlled. I won't be a prisoner here. I'll leave before I allow you to do that to me or my children."

"Your children?" he sneered. "Are they even mine, Synthia? You lied about what you are, so if you have anything else you want to disclose, now would be the time to lay it all out."

I gasped as pain shot through my heart as it was crushed at his angry words. My hand dropped as if his flesh burnt me. "Fuck you, Fairy," I said dejectedly. "I know you know they're yours, and I know they can feel *you*. Why would you even ask that?" Tears choked my words.

He looked down at the floor, as if he was deciding what to say, but before he could, an alarm sounded. "Stay here, Synthia. If you leave me, I'll hunt you down."

I remained silent as I closed my mind off to him. My heart broke into a million pieces, useless pieces. "I'm so sorry, Ryder," I whispered brokenly. "I didn't mean to keep it a secret this long for the reasons you might think I did, but I won't become something you keep locked away. Goodbye, Fairy." I choked back tears as I sifted out of the room.



## Chapter Five

I sat beside the huge rowan Tree that fed Faery with its magical powers. It was their version of the Tree of Life, and was a thing of breathless beauty. The small fairies flew around me but none of them tried to land on me this time around, unlike the time Ristan had brought me here in his vision.

I let my legs rest on the ground as the cooling moss soothed my aching feet and swollen ankles. I watched the fairies as they worked to undo the damage that the Mages had wrought to the Tree. The sky was cloudless, but the hues of the rainbow filled it in a beautiful war of colors. The air around me was filled with beauty. I inhaled the seductive fragrance of sandalwood, knowing this was why Ryder smelled of its intoxicating beauty.

I talked to the babies and let the tears flow freely until I couldn't cry anymore. When I was done, I wiped my eyes and promised myself that I'd cry no more over what had happened between me and Ryder. It was only a matter of time before Ryder came for me. I could feel the bond we shared as he pulled on it and searched through the world to figure out where I had gone to.

He would never stop looking for us, and while I could shut down the bond for small amounts of time, I'd need to sleep sooner or later and he'd find us then. Besides, he'd marked my ass, and would find me soon enough with or without the shield I had in place.

I was safe here, for now at least. He wouldn't hurt me, of that I was sure. He wasn't cruel, and I could understand his reasons for being pissed. I had more than a month to wonder at our connection and the knowledge that we'd been unable to fight the desire because we'd been made to feel it. He'd only had a few minutes to digest the information.

I even understood his hesitancy and why he probably said what he did about our children being his, considering I'd just told him how I'd been conceived. It was unheard of, and it had left me confused until Danu had explained it in detail. I felt him growing closer and shook my head. I wasn't ready to talk. I may have understood his reasons but it did little to sooth the pain that his words had caused. I hadn't deserved his heated words about the parentage of our children. He knew they were his. It had been a low blow meant to hurt me, and he'd succeeded.

I stood up and dusted off the dress before I sifted to the Fairy Pools,

soaking my feet in the cool water. The alga was glowing brightly tonight as it illuminated the springs. I made sure to step around it so as not to disturb it. My exposed skin glowed with the light illuminated from the water, which created a greenish-blue tinge to my pale pallor.

I felt the electrical sizzle of his presence the moment he found me knee deep in the water's delicious depths. He remained silent, and I continued to pretend I was still alone. I could sift again, but I had already broken my own self-imposed rules about magic use while pregnant enough for one day. He'd catch me eventually, anyway. I was running to places that had reminded me of us, and not necessarily away from him. There was no running from him; I'd needed space for the moment, and I'd gotten that. Now it was time to embrace him, and his anger for my choice to hide what I was from him.

I heard the splash of water as he waded through the shallow pool to me. I held the tears in; refusing to cry about what fate had delivered to me. I refused to look up even when I felt his eyes on me.

"You didn't run far or fast enough," he growled.

I ignored him as I turned and walked further into the water. I let the silence be his answer to his questions since I wasn't ready to give him one verbally.

"You didn't run at all. Did you, Pet? You came to where I first made you mine."

I stopped and lifted my head to meet his eyes. This is where we'd come after the Wild Hunt. This was where he'd taken me for endless hours, only to take me back to the mansion as a traitor. I wanted him even then. We'd come in a full circle, because my mind had brought me to him, here.

"Why did you come, Ryder? If it's to take me back to keep me locked in a room, you can leave now. I understand the anger, but I refuse to be the kind of girl who allows a man to cage her. I cannot and will not be caged."

"You actually think some Goddess could make me want you? Or you, for that matter? Synthia, you're the strongest woman I've ever known. No one made us feel this way. Maybe in the beginning but love isn't lust. I know you love me. I know that I feel this connection to you that I've never felt for anyone else. I don't love, but I care for you, I do. You're the mother of my children and for the first time in Fae history, the Horde King has released his own concubines willingly for one woman. No Goddess made me feel those things or do what I have done. You made me feel the need to be a better

person. You, Synthia, *you* made me want to be a better man.”

“You don’t get it,” I whispered. “I was *created*; every detail of my entire life was planned. Right down to me having your child; how should I feel? Knowing that meeting you was even in her plans. She set me and you on a crash course, and this is where it was supposed to lead us.”

“And it’s not where you want to be,” he said guardedly.

“No,” I whispered but thought about it for a moment. “I want to be with you. I want to be in Faery, but I want it to be *our* choice. I want *us* to decide our destiny, not Danu or Bilé. I need you, Ryder. It may sound stupid to you, but I need to feel needed and loved. I’m having your children and I don’t even know where I stand in your world. The only thing I know is that I stand where I was created to stand which is by your side and for me, that’s not good enough. I need you to want me there because you actually *want* it to be so, not because it was meant to be. I need it to be your choice, and not the one you make because you feel what they wanted you to.”

“You stand with me,” he said as he pulled me against him and kissed the top of my head. “I wasn’t raised to love anything. Not even my people. I can’t promise you love, but I can promise that I will stand beside you forever, and I *can* promise you that it is by my choice and no one else’s.”

I closed my eyes and pulled away from his body. “It’s not enough.”

“That’s too bad, because you’re coming back with me,” he said before he slipped a necklace over my head. It was the same necklace, or one just like the one he’d placed on me as he laid me across his Lamborghini on that day not so long ago when I’d first met him.

“Ryder...” I warned, remembering what I’d said after the last time I had gotten free of one of his necklaces.

“You did say that if I ever put another trinket around your neck that it better be because it carries my mark,” he said softly. “This is me publically marking you as mine.”

“And if I asked you to allow me to go to the Blood Kingdom?” I asked, because I’d thought of what I needed to tell Madisyn; she deserved to know what had happened.

“I forbid it, for now. You’re pregnant and the Mages are aiming for you, not me. They were let inside my home to get to you. You’re my weakness, and I need you to be safe so I can focus on eliminating the threat against us. I need to know that the children *we* created together are safe.”

“Can we stay here for a little while?” I asked and watched as his jaw ticked, as if he thought I might be planning my grand escape. “I’ve been patient, and have remained locked in the castle for over a month, Ryder. I just want to stand here, with you.”

“With me?” he asked carefully.

“Is that so crazy?”

“I could strip you bare, and take you in the water,” he replied hoarsely. His eyes shone with lust as they raked over my body hungrily.

“You could...but you’d have to let your guard down to do it,” I said, already knowing he’d never drop his guard, not when we were exposed and in the open. I didn’t blame him, not with our children’s lives on the line.

He held his hand out and the moment I placed my hand in it, he sifted us home. Zahruk, Asrian, and Dristan entered the small space as seconds ticked by, and I knew without having to ask that they too had been out searching for me.

“You’re an asshole,” I whispered and pulled away.

I moved away from him as he released his hold. Eliran was there, waiting for me with the stupid machines. I didn’t need instructions. I’d had to do this a million times. I climbed up on the table, uncaring of the others that were in the room as I lifted my dress to give everyone an eyeful of my stomach and silk panties. Asrian pushed his coppery hair out of the way to disguise the nonchalant peek he was trying to get of me.

“Cover her,” Ryder snapped at Eliran. His eyes bored into mine.

“No,” I said as I felt like a piece of meat. I wasn’t embarrassed over them seeing my panties. I mean come on; they covered more than a lot of swimsuits I’d seen at the Guild.

I felt my panties growing as Ryder glomoured on a set of boy-cut panties. The men had given us their backs, and poor Eliran stood still, unsure of what he should do. Eventually, he moved into action, placing the gel in a heaping blob on my stomach, and then using the Doppler to search out the heartbeats.

I waited, and waited...and then panic set in. “Eliran?” I asked through trembling lips.

“I don’t know,” I he said as he continued to search for them.

I turned and looked at the screen, straining to see what was wrong. I could see them moving, but the usual loud sound of their hearts was silent. I felt an array of emotions, one being guilt that I’d fought the Mages, and used

magic. Had I hurt them? Had I done something wrong?

“Eliran,” Ryder said barely audible and I realized he like me, was holding his breath trying not to freak the Fairy fuck out!

“I can see them moving, but it’s almost like they are blocking us,” he said.

“How’s that possible?” Ryder asked.

“Ryder, as of right now you’re looking at twins. I have no answer for why anything is happening with these two. But they seem to be blocking us, or doing something to prevent us from seeing them completely. Here, let me try something,” he said as he poked one side of my stomach, and held the Doppler on the other.

“Are they okay?” I asked as I stared at the machine’s image, which looked more like aliens than babies. Eliran pointed to something on the screen, and Ryder smiled and my breath caught in my throat.

“Sons,” Ryder said breathlessly. “We’re having boys.”

“But—” I paused. His eyes looked down at me, and for the briefest moment, I caught regret in his eyes.

“There’s no but, Synthia. You’re going to give me sons, just as Ristan has foreseen. I claimed you from your father, the Blood King. I had hoped for a daughter, but sons are a great start for our family. We will try again when you are willing for daughters.”

I closed my eyes and rested my head against the soft pillow, and smiled. Sons... We were having boys.

## Chapter Six

I didn't want to fight with Ryder anymore today. We were at odds, but I was willing to keep trying and he'd seemed a little happier after learning that we would be having boys and they still looked healthy and safe. I'd waited up for him, knowing he would be busy with checking the wards and what not, but I still needed to talk to him and really explain my side of things.

I'd dressed in a silk nightgown that was a soft color of blue. Was I hopeful that he'd come in? Yes. I'd expended a lot of energy using magic today; I also needed him to say everything was okay between the two of us. I had just finished dressing and preparing for bed when I heard footsteps coming down the hallway. I held my breath, hoping it would be him.

I didn't have long to wait until he slammed the door to the room open and strolled in with a sinfully delicious look in his very black eyes. He smiled wickedly at me as he prowled closer, his eyes filled with lust as his lips twisted into a seductive grin. He was ominous, and with his entry, he'd managed to catch me off guard.

"Ryder," I whispered, wondering if he was still upset from discovering what I was. But he seemed to have dropped it, like he didn't want to talk about it for now.

"I want you," he said crisply, his bottom lip was sucked between his teeth as he continued to slowly stalk me. I got off the bed on the other side and slowly stepped backwards. "If you run, I *will* find you. I'll always find you, Synthia. That's not a threat, it's a promise."

"Ryder..." Ryder what? He was scaring me, and I hated that he could do it. I hated any weakness for him.

He released his lip from between his teeth and the door to the room slammed shut, making me jump as my back hit the wall. "I was informed today, by a Demon; that my little pet hasn't been happy in my rather soft, but gentle fucking of her succulent body. I'm about to change that."

"He...did *what!*?" I was pissed that Ristan would tell him about our private talks, because they were private! I was going to murder him!

"Ristan mentioned to me that you felt neglected, and missed me being myself with you—in the bedroom. I plan to remedy it, with these," he held up two delicate necklaces with a small matching medallions dangling from them. "They are dream medallions. As you know, I can reach you in the dream

realm anytime I wish. Ristan gave me these yesterday, and he said that you will be able to feed if you are wearing the medallion while we are playing in the dream realm and you certainly won't feel like I am being too gentle with you. I promise to make it hurt, so that you'll be reminded tomorrow of who owned this sweet body all night long." He draped it around my neck and slid the other around his own.

I glared at him. "Sex isn't the problem. I know you love making me your pretty freaky little sex slave." I looked down at the golden medallion's dainty imprint of Caer Iborneith, the Celtic Goddess of dreams on one side, and a beautiful swan on the other.

"Is that what you are? Because I thought you were my dirty little plaything. One who screams my name so loudly while I'm driving my cock into you, that the Humans can hear us going at it in their own realm."

"Ryder," I whispered, and gave in to the need for his body. He was already stripping from his clothes; his body was my paradise. My escape from reality...

He was my beast.

I liked that he used his hands to undress instead of glamour. It was sexier, and with each angry jerk of his hand, I became more aroused and he knew it. "Fairy, unless you want me to clobber you over the head and ride you this very second, I'd start this magic carpet ride," I whispered huskily as he continued to undress.

I had a huge weakness, and it was this man, naked. He was right; one minute I was Synthia, and the next I was his dirty little plaything. One who would do anything he said just to feel him inside of me. His smile was lopsided, but still devious as he stripped himself naked before my eyes.

I started to remove my nightgown, but hesitated as that damn insecurity came rushing back. It wasn't until I turned away from him and his hands caressed my swollen tummy that I let out the breath I'd been holding.

"You're beautiful, even more so with my babes growing inside of you, Pet. No woman has ever looked more beautiful to me than you do right now. You're going to give me brave, strong sons."

I felt a tear slip from my eye as I turned to face him. "I'm the size of a freaking house," I said through the tightness which had formed in my throat.

"You're carrying twins, *my* twins, and I like this bump. I like the sight of you carrying my children in this beautiful body," he whispered huskily as he

placed both of his palms on my swollen midsection, just in time for the babes to kick him. “They can feel me,” he replied with sincerity. “I already feel them linking us together. We’re a family, and nothing and nobody will change that.”

Tears fell openly as his words vibrated against the soft column of my neck. His hands lifted the nightgown over my head and I stood in front of him, bared. Only a skimpy pair of silk undies remained.

He pushed me towards the bed and we both crawled in. His arms wrapped around me protectively and held me as his hot breath fanned against my cheek. “I hope you are up for what I’ve planned to do to you. I’ve craved so many dirty things, and the desire to do them to you has been overwhelming, but I was afraid of hurting you or the babes with my needs. I’m not going to be gentle.” His voice was raspy, which sent a new wave of desire flooding through my body with a wave of heat that made me moan at the promise of sex that dripped from his tone. “I can fuck you gently right now, but I don’t want it to be gentle any more than you want it to be, I want to pound inside this pretty flesh like a crazed beast, and I want you to beg me for mercy. I want you to know and feel the fine line between pleasure and pain, and scream from how much you enjoy it. I want these walls you’ve erected to crumble, and to watch as you unravel with my touch.”

“Is that so?” I asked as I reached behind my ass, which was currently where his erection was positioned.

“It’s exactly so, just as I told you. I want to have you in the worst way, and make it last forever,” he growled as he turned me over and looked down at me. I moaned as his hand lifted up my breast to his mouth to suckle on my tender nipple, and felt my arousal take root deep inside as his words filtered through me. His eyes glittered with a mixture of obsidian and gold. Flecks of his beast shone brightly from within them. “I’m going to make you scream and beg for mercy, but I’ll have none. Not for tonight. Tonight you are going to beg me for every release I give you.”

“You sure you can handle it?” I was taunting him, because yes, I wanted both him and his beast tonight.

“I guess you’ll have to wait and see, now won’t you? Now close your eyes. We have to be asleep for this to work,” he growled, the sound coming from deep in his chest.

I fell asleep rather quickly and knew he must have cast the same sleeping



spell he'd used on me once before, only this time I didn't mind it at all. I smiled as my lids grew heavy, and I accepted his darkness, welcoming the whisper of promises as he growled them against my ear while sleep claimed me.

I woke into the dream realm wearing black stockings and a matching lace garter. He'd dreamt me into the dream world basically naked. He'd left my most vulnerable areas exposed for whatever seductive torture he had planned. My hands flew to my flattened stomach with an overabundance of panic, but then Ryder was there.

"It's a dream, only a dream," he assured me as he melted back into the shadows, leaving only his golden eyes visible to me. "Lie on the bed, and spread your legs apart for me," he ordered.

I rubbed my hands over the flatness again and lifted my eyes to where he was standing in the shadows. "Why are you in the dark?" I whispered the question as I took in the room. There was a large bed, with a thick metal frame, but no chains as I'd grown accustomed to with Ryder. The only bedding was a few thin, scarlet red sheets. For once not a single pillow could be seen, and what little light the room held came from a single candle which burned dimly at the far end of the room.

"I said lie down—or do you wish for me to punish you?" he growled deeply.

"As you wish," I said with a bemused smirk as I headed to the bed and lay on my back in the middle of it.

"Spread your legs; show me what belongs to me," he continued as he stepped a little closer, still remaining hidden in the dark shadows of the room. I did as he asked, already feeling the growing heat which started in my limbs and traveled to my pussy. "Have you touched yourself today?" he asked.

"No," I whispered through lust that was making my tongue heavier than normal.

"Good girl," he replied. "Now do it and let me watch you," he continued.

I enjoyed the hiss that left his lips as I allowed my legs to drop open for his eyes alone, and slowly, seductively trailed my fingers over my hardened nipples and down my taut belly, until my fingers found my clit and worked it in a circular pattern.

My cheeks heated as I felt his eyes on me there. Even after all of this time, it always felt like it was our first time together.

“Finger that sweet flesh, and get it wet so I can clean up the mess you make,” he ordered, and I obliged. I moaned as my fingers found the entrance already wet for him, and pushed one deep inside. “More, put another one in and imagine it’s my cock, fucking your sweet flesh,” he continued as he moved closer. I gasped; the beast took over as he strode out of the shadows, wings and all. He was ethereal; his beauty was dangerous and deadly. The air sizzled and popped with his immense power as he continued to grow while I watched his transformation.

“Ryder,” I squirmed as heat furrowed in my belly.

“Stop,” he said and when my hand didn’t immediately leave my core, he sifted to the bed and lifted my right leg high in the air exposing my ass, hitting the delicate flesh of the round cheek hard enough that I would have a red welt where he’d struck my flesh...Maybe; this was a dream after all. “When I tell you to do something, you do it,” he whispered as his fingers rubbed the abused tissue gently. “Give me your hands,” he continued and as I did, he wrapped a silk cord around them, and then positioned them on my stomach.

“Now, part your legs and lift them for me,” he growled. “Show me what’s mine.”

I did, and heard him growl as he saw the mark he’d left on my ass. “Do you want me to lick you?” he asked but when I nodded my head, he slapped my ass again, harder. “Say it,” he demanded, and I caved to his demand.

“Lick me; please, I need you to do it now,” I whispered wantonly. I let out a soft growl as his hands parted my legs painfully, leaving me fully exposed and bereft of any control. His strong hands held my legs apart as my hands moved to the area which needed his mouth on it.

“Bad girl,” he snapped, and before I could guess his move, my legs were pushed down and he was straddled over my chest. He turned us easily, until my head was hanging over the edge of the bed. He got up and stood in front of me; his hands pried my mouth open and then he was pushing his cock down my throat. “Bad girls get punished, good girls get fucked,” he told me. I couldn’t reply; he was driving his shaft painfully down my throat and I loved it, my teeth scraped and fangs elongated as I took advantage and nipped his tender flesh for a taste.

Tears formed in my eyes, and rolled down into my hairline as he continued to push and pull his cock as he abused my mouth. It was primal

and erotic, and even though I feared choking, I continued to take more of him until I couldn't. "Damn," he rasped gutturally. He moved his hand until his fingers held my throat, and then he applied pressure. Stars erupted as blackness took hold. He eased off only to do it again. He'd stolen my breath once before, but this time, I wasn't afraid of it. I could feel the moisture pooling between my thighs and knew his eyes were currently watching what his action was creating as a result.

When he pulled out, I cried at the loss of him and moved my bound hands to find him again. He pushed me back onto the bed roughly, and his cock bounced with his steps as he walked around the room, his huge wings eventually blocking my view.

When he came back, he was holding what look like nipple clamps in his hand. "Present from the Demon; they even vibrate," he said with a wicked smirk that would melt the bones of any sane person. Good thing I wasn't sane. His mouth moved to one breast as he kissed and suckled on one nipple and then the other. His fingers pinched and fondled them as well. He reached up, clamping one nipple—which tore a surprised gasp from my lips—and then clamped the other. He slid down to sit between my legs as he once again spread them as wide as they would go. He spread his wings and the single candle went out, leaving us enshrouded in darkness.

The only sound left in the room was our hard breathing and the sound of the clamps which were making me numb with lust. I sensed his movement as he moved his mouth hungrily over my breasts and started licking the tip of one nipple as the clamp worked it for him. Ryder didn't need toys, but he was making a point and I got it. I'd allow him to do anything to me, and he wanted me to know it and accept it. He chuckled softly, as if reading my mind. "Now that I know how these things work and how much you enjoy them, I will have to create these again."

I was moaning as his tongue worked my nipple, but the moment I felt his thumb doing sweet circles on my clit, I mewled and gasped with the raw pleasure which surged through me. I couldn't see anything—not even his brands were illuminating the room, which told me he wanted me blind. He wanted me to use my senses and feel what he was doing to me, without seeing it.

"You need to be fucked, don't you, Pet?" he whispered huskily as he pulled back from the bed, giving away his retreat. Then he was back, and I

felt him as he slipped something hard, but soft around my neck—a belt maybe, made of soft leather. “Not right now; you’re not wet enough yet. I’m going to feed you my cock, because I know it makes this sweet pussy weep to be fucked. You like me fucking your mouth, don’t you, Pet?”

I moaned.

Yes, it definitely felt like the leather of a belt, which he used to direct me into a new position, one that had my head tilted up and to the side, and then I felt his cock as it pushed against my lips, demanding entrance. “Open your mouth,” he ordered and I did, forcing it to open wide while trying to relax my jaw to accept his massive size. He was rock hard, and once again water leaked from my eyes as he hit the back of my throat. I could barely fit him half-way inside, and I knew he had more to feed me. I started to move my tongue and lips around him, sucking and licking as best as I could.

“Fucking hell, woman,” he hissed as I sucked, forming a vacuum around his salty cock. He wanted me to be dirty; well hell, I could be whatever he wanted in his fantasy. His hips rocked as he started using my mouth faster, but then the leather around my neck tightened and I gasped and started to panic, but he only used my shock to further his cause and go deeper into my throat. He pushed in and then pulled out only to find a rhythm to fuck me with, and I moaned at the sensation and then his magic filled me and took hold, pulsing over my skin.

“Ready, Pet? I’m going to fuck *all* of you, hard.”

He didn’t wait for an answer. One minute I’d needed to be filled, and the next I was painfully full. His magic was completely filling me; as if he himself was between my legs fucking me, it pulled in and out, pushing harder than it ever had before. Pushing my limits, and decimating my boundaries. With him, there were no limits.

This wasn’t just the beast; this was Ryder and him working together to show me just how dirty they could be. It was brutal, and I wanted more. No, I *needed* more. I needed this; this show of total domination was both overwhelming and blissfully erotic to my senses. I’d never been so full in my life, and we both knew it. He was allowing the beast to help dominate me. It was as if we were having a threesome, and we all had needed it.

Every time I got close to orgasm, they’d stop. He was still filling my mouth generously and when I opened my eyes, it was to find his eyes a brilliant shade darker than midnight, as they caught and held the candlelight.

The leather loosened, and then was gone, and he pulled out of my mouth abruptly. “That’s a good little plaything; now it’s my turn,” he said as he crawled down the bed until he was between my legs. His magic had yet to stop, and I was getting to a painful level of arousal that demanded to be fulfilled.

His lips kissed my thighs as he continued pounding into my core magically. His breath mingled with heat as it skimmed my flesh but refused to touch it. His tongue darted out here and there as it drew circles in my flesh. He sucked the labia, and kissed it as he licked everywhere around my soaked heat. It wasn’t until his magic ceased and I felt him pushing against my opening that I fought to get him inside. I needed this creature more than I needed air.

“Such a wanton little thing, and so close to coming for me,” he growled, but it came out in the beast’s voice, not Ryder’s. “Is this what you want, Princess?” he asked as he pushed a single inch inside, only to pull it back out and rub it against my slick opening, teasing me. “I love those sweet noises, those sexy as fuck sounds you make as I tease this sweet pink flesh.”

He rubbed my pussy with his thick cock, which sent shocks of pleasure through my entire body. His hands held my legs wide open as he continued to torture me with what he knew I needed. He did this for what seemed like an eternity, and then he wrenched at my arms and pulled me up, only to shove me back down with my ass in the air, exposed to him.

“You’re going to scream for mercy, and we’re only going to fuck you harder,” he growled and before I could prepare for it, he was inside of me, all of him. He stretched me fuller than ever before, and I struggled to get it out, but he held my hips and laughed as he continued to pound his cock deeper and harder with each thrust. “There’s no escaping us,” he snarled as he placed his thumb on my exposed perineum. It pushed against the skin, and I screamed as it penetrated me there.

It was brutal sex, bone crushing, never walk the same again sex. He pushed and slammed into me. I could feel my muscles burning as he assaulted me and they clenched violently around him. I wasn’t prepared for the orgasm that ripped through my body and neither was he; his husky laughter said he’d enjoyed it though. He also used it against me as he pushed in even deeper, finding a rhythm of motion that he knew was hitting me exactly in the right spot.

“I didn’t say you could come yet, did I?” he asked, and slapped my ass lightly in warning. He shoved my head, which I had lifted for the orgasm, back down on the bed and lifted my ass up even further, only to use it to move my body to his will. I screamed with a mixture of pleasure and pain as he continued to rock me onto his magnificent cock. It was a weapon, and he knew it. He pierced me with it, penetrating me harshly as he used me for his pleasure.

“You’re so wet, and we haven’t even gotten started with the night yet,” he crooned.

Hadn’t we?

He pushed me away from him and I was helpless but to fall since my hands were still bound. He pulled me to the edge of the bed, which was now higher than it had been, and pulled and pushed my legs until they rested on my shoulders. “This is going to be amazing, Pet.” He warned as he once again penetrated and filled me. His thumb pushed at my lips until I accepted it and sucked on it as he fucked my pussy.

I moaned and whimpered as I continued to suck on his thumb, but then I felt another sensation, a vibration that ripped through me and it had little to do with the nipple clamps attached to my nipples. I felt it pressing against my ass and then I tightened as a new fullness took root inside of me.

“I may not need toys, but I love the look in those eyes when you think I’m using them to ready this sweet tight hole for me,” he smirked, as I moved my head from side to side, unable to dislodge his thumb, his cock, or his magic from my body. I exploded so violently that tears fell from my eyes and I shook uncontrollably.

“There it is...Fuck, you’re so beautiful when you come for me,” he said as his body tightened; he moved faster as he used my body. I felt his release, and was almost relieved that I hadn’t begged for mercy, but even as I thought it, I felt him already growing hard again. “I will never get enough of this; not with you, Pet. You’re my perfect match.”

## Chapter Seven

It had been less than a week since Ryder had taken me in his dream, and I was beginning to think he would never broach the subject of my parentage again. Life seemed to move in a whirlwind around us, and I'd been having more Braxton Hicks contractions or pre-labor pains as the time grew nearer for delivery.

I was in the now half-empty pavilion, sitting in a sun room with Darynda. She was silent as if she'd been lost in her own mind, which I had feeling was on Zahruk. They'd been tense around one another, and it was getting harder not to meddle in their business with each passing day. I knew he'd taken up a spot just outside one of the sets of doors that led into the sunroom to give us a sense of privacy.

I kept reminding myself that she'd bring up her problems when she was ready. I wasn't the best person for giving advice, either, considering my own precarious relationship right now. I had just closed my eyes as I stretched out on the exquisite softness of the chair when I heard Darynda say she'd be right back.

I was really glad for the grapes Darynda had found for me to indulge in. Along with the privacy, I actually felt Human for a few moments.

I was staring absently at my tummy that was concealed nicely by the pretty, white sun dress, that Darynda had glamoured for me this morning, when I heard Ryder clear his throat. I looked up and found him looking over at me. His eyes were cold; his body seemed tense as he watched me.

He stood for a brief moment before he turned and walked away as if he didn't know I had seen him. I sat up and looked after him, wondering why he was in the pavilion, since he usually didn't want to talk to me until he was sure we were safe from outsiders. Had he changed his mind and decided to seek out another to feed from? Would he go back on his word, or was this a game?

I stood up and looked back towards where Zahruk had stationed himself outside of one of the sets of doors and then back at Ryder and set out following in the direction which he'd taken. I exited the sunroom and stood in the corridor, looking one way and then the other, and took in the sight of Ryder taking Claire in his arms. His eyes looked back at me over her fabulous hair. I watched in horror as his hand curved around her back as he

pulled her closer to his body, and kissed her right in front of me.

I moved forward, pissed that he'd be so cruel, but as I moved, so did the two of them as they saw me coming. Someone was having crispy, Kentucky Fried Fairy tonight! I watched them turn a corner at the end of the hall, and as I rounded it, someone grabbed me from behind and as I looked, I could only see Claire, who was directly in front of me. She smiled coldly as she brought up both hands and shoved something through my shoulder, which I felt pop out the other side painfully.

I screamed and gasped for air as Ryder looked down, his lips curved cruelly as he and Claire both watched me. I couldn't speak, my only fear for my unborn infants as I looked down to see a God bolt lodged in my shoulders. Ryder raised a second bolt and impaled my other shoulder, as I shrieked in pain.

These types of bolts had been designed to weaken or immobilize a God. Bolts which I had the horror of being pinned with once before—when I'd watched Larissa being murdered in front of my eyes.

“Good work, my lovely,” Ryder whispered lovingly to Claire. “Now go back before they notice you missing. We still need you inside; alert us if he finds anything amiss with her leaving. Remember the plan, and you will be rewarded richly,” Ryder said as I watched his face, and then his hand weaved in an intricate design, and a portal was opened.

He reached down, roughly grabbed my useless limbs, and pulled me up into his arms. He whispered a few words as his fingers began to glow; he reached for the necklace Ryder had given me, and removed it effortlessly from my neck. His features shimmered, and his eyes faded from cold, golden eyes to a lifeless dull shade of blue. His shoulder length hair was a light blonde, and he didn't have brands, which made me wonder what kind of Fae he was. I felt a familiar pain shoot down my spine and ripple around my abdomen as a contraction ripped through me.

I tried the mental path I'd shared with Ryder, and found it gone. It was Joseph all over again. I felt myself start to panic, but reminded myself that it wouldn't help me or the babes. Danu would feel my distress; she had to. Ryder would realize I was gone and he'd come for us.

I slowed my breathing as I was picked up and carried through the portal. Faolán was waiting for me on the other side.

“Hello, *sister*.” He smiled evilly. “What's the matter? Cat got your



tongue, bitch?”

I glared at him as another pain tightened my stomach. I tried to show no fear, but the man behind me pulled me back up from where I'd hunched down. He held me tightly against his frame, and Faolán produced a knife, and he ran the dull edge over my swollen stomach.

We were in what looked to be an abandoned temple, in a deep, dark crypt which was almost completely empty, other than a few stone slabs and candles, which sat on dingy, decrepit shelves that were placed high in the walls.

“My friends will be pleased now that we hold the King's brats along with his whore in our grasp. You see; I knew going in as we did at his coronation was not worth trying again, but by taking you, we've now gained the upper hand. He'll come for you, and when he does, we will kill him, and the rest will fall behind him,” Faolán spat; a little spittle hit my face as he grew excited.

Obviously, he hadn't figured out who my mother was, or that Ryder could only be killed by his own heir. I winced as he continued to push the dull edge of the blade over my abdomen. Fear was playing hell on my mind, but I refused to allow it in, to seep into my soul.

The pain in my shoulders was to the point of unbearable, and he wouldn't cut me open—not yet. Or so I hoped. I kept trying to make my mouth work, but nothing would come out. I was going to incinerate Claire as soon as I got free, and I knew I wouldn't waste any time about doing it.

“Hmmm, nothing to say? Nothing sharp and witty?” he taunted as he brought the knife up and ran it over my cheek, poisoning it beneath my eye. I refused to blink or show a lick of fear as he did so.

His other hand worried me more, because it was slowly tracing down my belly to what the sundress barely hid. “I wonder if you'd like it as your whore of a guardian did; would you beg me to fuck you more, sister? Maybe harder, as she did?”

I felt nausea pushing to come up. He was sick, twisted and so fucking dead. His fingers pushed past my panties and I did it. I threw up on him.

“Fucking bitch!” he growled as he dropped the knife and used his magic to slam my face as if I was being slapped and hit repeatedly. I felt pain but I took it. I could handle it, as long as he didn't punch my stomach, or harm the babes. He dropped me to the floor and pulled off his shirt and started

removing his pants; he wasn't using magic, which told me he wanted me to beg him, he wanted me to know what was coming without the quickness of using magic; he was taunting me. "Let's see how you handle a real King," he snapped.

"Isn't she your sister?" the other man asked as he sat on a stool, slicing an apple into small pieces. From where I lay slumped against the wall, I still couldn't tell which type of Fae he was, or if he was of another Caste. He'd been such a convincing Ryder, so he had to be some sort of Fae, and he had to be powerful if he could open a portal. Impersonating Ryder, I knew, would be an automatic death sentence, so this guy had to have giant balls to have done so in the castle with the real beast in it.

"No, she's a traitorous bitch who I plan to ruin. By the time I'm finished with her she will know real pain, and she will beg me for death!" he was spitting. His hands ripped at my dress and he grabbed my arms as he pulled me back up onto my feet, until I stood before him wearing only my bra and panties on.

"Faolán, do not touch her. This wasn't the agreement we made. I trade her to you, you trade her to the Mages, and you give me my sister back," the other man said as his eyes slid over my tummy. He looked like Light Fae, but it was hard to see or concentrate through the pain. "If you try to fuck her, she will give birth to the Horde King's spawn now, and unless you plan on delivering them yourself, I'd stop this very minute. She's in labor, you fucking idiot."

"I'm done waiting! She's bested me at every turn, and I'm through waiting for my revenge. She took my birthright; mine!" he snarled as he slapped me again.

I had blood oozing from my eyebrow, nose, and lip. I coughed up blood, and felt my eyes roll to the back of my skull as he backhanded me yet again. The other man shot out of his chair and grabbed Faolán's arm before he could hit me again.

"Enough!" he growled, daring Faolán to try for one more. "She can't even fucking hit you back," he said calmly. "I will not watch as you fuck your sister, or hurt her anymore. Do you understand me?"

"I'm going to rip your balls out of your throat!" I shouted, surprising both of the men in the room. "Do you have any idea how dead you are?" I snarled as I finally found my voice.

“He won’t find you,” Faolán said shaking out of the other man’s grip as he smiled and picked the knife back up. “They plan to cut you open, sister dear, like this,” he said as he pointed the sharp tip of the knife up and cut delicately into the flesh at the top of my collar bone, slowly cutting a thin, fine line down to my pubic bone. It wasn’t a deep cut, but it burned like hell. “To here, then after they pull the fucking brats out, I’ll take your powers, and then I’ll fuck your rotting corpse until it grows cold and even then, I’ll use it when the need suits me. You see, I have a way of reanimating the dead, as you found out with Joseph, so I could bring you back at my will, and kill you again and again, sweet sister.”

“You seriously need counseling,” I whispered and then gasped as he slapped me again.

“That’s enough,” the other man said as his eyes slid over me with something akin to regret.

“Dyson, I’ll fucking tell you when she’d had enough!”

Dyson stood stiffly, and shook his head. “She’s in labor, you fool. What you are doing is unnecessary and will only bring on the babes faster,” he growled and glanced down swiftly.

I narrowed my eyes through the unmanageable pain and tried to see what they had. My feet were soaked, and unless I’d somehow managed to pee myself, I was pretty sure my water had broken, and I was now out of time. The babies were coming and no one was coming to save them.

## Chapter Eight

\*~\* Ryder \*~\*

I wait in my office for Ristan to answer my call, as I weigh and consider my options. It was a delicate situation, one I wasn't prepared for, but one I couldn't ignore either. I watch as Ristan sifts in, his mind elsewhere. He turns and takes in the anger I'm churning with.

"What's up?" he asks, his silver and black pattern eyes narrowing as he watches me.

"Where have you been the past few days?"

"Alden used the link I gave him; he said it was urgent and I tend to believe him," Ristan's tone is even; unaware that he's a few words away from being dead.

"He needed you directly after you sent Synthia to the throne room?" I ask, his eyes watching me as they narrow even further.

"Yes," he continues. "What does it matter? You knew of this agreement, and you know Alden means a lot to Synthia, brother," he says, reminding me of our bond.

"Why did you send her to the throne room?" I ask as my beast watches him for any sign of weakness, willing to rip his throat out if he lies.

"Because you told me to," he says, and then he shakes his head. "I fail to see where this needed immediate response."

"I'm giving you this courtesy because we are blood. You are my brother, and together we've been through a lot," I say and try to word it correctly, since lying is something Ristan can do.

"What am I being accused of?" he growls, directly getting to the point, his silver and black pattern eyes swirl, watching me.

"You sent Synthia to the throne room, where she was attacked by Mages."

I watch as the blood leaves his face and his eyes open wide and then he's moving towards me. "Is she okay? Are the babies okay?" he demands. His voice filled with pain as he watches me. And then he stops. "I didn't set her up, I'd never do that to her," he assures me as his hands comb through his hair and he scrubs his face with worry. "Answer me, please, are they okay?"

"They are fine. She escaped and killed those who attacked her. The

question is, why did you send her to the throne room and tell her it was at my request?" he falters for a moment and his throat works.

"Because *you* asked me to," he says softly, very much afraid. My brother isn't afraid of anything, so his fear is not for himself.

"I did no such thing, Ristan," I say and watch him cautiously.

"You met me in the corridor on my way to see her and requested she join you in the throne room!" His voice is louder this time, as if he is trying to convince himself of what he saw. I reach out and feel his mind. Fear for Synthia and the babes is all I find at the forefront of his mind. I find the memory and it is as he said. He believes he met with me and I asked him to bring her. My brother didn't betray us.

"No, I never asked you to send her there, which means the Mages are both braver and bolder than we had anticipated. The babes are fine; their mother is quite the little warrior Goddess, even pregnant. Thankfully," I say.

"I would never harm Synthia or your children, Ryder. I've grown very fond of her in the time she's been here, and even before. I promise you this now, I will hunt down whoever it was who deceived me and I will kill him for you as a gift."

"That's not our goal right now, but thank you. What makes this so disturbing is if someone could impersonate me well enough to trick you—I need to find Synthia," I growl as I push away from the desk and sift to the women's pavilion.

The sunroom that she likes to relax in is void of her presence. I can feel an emptiness which only comes when she closes herself off to me; it's just like when Joseph had her and I couldn't feel her anymore. I don't like it. I'm beyond pissed. My body shakes with anger and I find a focus point as Darynda comes into the sunroom from one of the entrances and looks around.

"Where is she?" I demand.

"She...uh, she was here. Right there," she stumbles over her words as her slim finger points to the very empty chair.

"She isn't there now; if you've helped her to escape or have agreed to help my enemies, I will end you," I warn her, my voice filled with deadly promise I will keep.

"I swear it! She was right there, I mean, she was when I stepped out a few moments ago. She has to be here!"

She is about to get hysterical and I don't have time for it. I didn't miss

Synthia by much. I can smell her sweet scent still. I call the guard violently. Zahruk sifts in, his eyes searching for threat instantly.

“Synthia is missing. Search the entire castle for her,” I growl. One by one they sift in and then out. I stand perfectly still, using my magic to search for her, but she’s gone. I can feel that the medallion is still here, but she’s no longer in possession of it...which means someone has removed it from her neck. I eye the room, sensing for it as I leave the room—because it’s not here. It’s close, though. Synthia is powerful, and I’m not sure if she can shield both the necklace and the mark.

I turn and walk out of the sunroom, searching the corridor, following her scent even as I change forms. He’s better with scents and tracking and he’s shaking the fucking cage. Wings unfurl from my back, the pain of the shift brief as I don’t fight it.

At the end of the hall is the medallion. I reach down swoop it up, smelling it. It’s male. I don’t recognize the scent. I growl from deep in my chest and turn to find my men watching me, waiting for me to give them direction. My eyes take in the blood on the floor, and I feel eviscerated as I determine my next move.

I can’t feel her connection through the mark either. It’s a bad sign, very bad.

“She’s with a male,” I snarl; the kick to my gut is raw and brutal. The beast growls deadly, the thought of another male touching our woman is unfucking-thinkable.

“She’s no longer in the walls of this Kingdom,” Zahruk says as he dares to step closer.

“She left here with another warrior,” Claire states as she moves close to me, pushing her way through my men. “I was coming to find you, Ryder,” she says as she moves closer and tries to place her hand on my chest. I catch it and twist it painfully.

“What man did she leave with?” I seethe, watching as her pupils dilate.

“I’ve seen him around a few times; they were practically all over each other, and she doesn’t deserve you. Not like I do,” she whispers seductively.

For a brief second I hesitate, but the thought of someone impersonating me well enough to fool my own brother burns through my mind, then Syn’s eyes full of desire and love flash in my mind, and I know her; she’s not deceitful, not with me. She wouldn’t leave me without saying something. She

isn't like that; she'd come up to me and slap it in my face, but she wouldn't hide it from me. Reason returns and I realize that males aren't permitted in the pavilion unless they have medallion marking them as mine, so this male had to have had help to access this place. My eyes narrow on the simpering beauty before me.

I slam Claire against the wall, my wings pinning her in as I allow the fangs in my mouth to elongate and my eyes to fully change to obsidian, giving the beast full control. "You play with words, wench. I'll give you two seconds to tell me the truth in its entirety before I end you."

She's shaking, her hands visibly so. She's never been this close to the beast and he loves the fear in her eyes, loves the heady scent that wafts from her feeding us both. The beast loves fear, and he's excited for the chance to make a kill.

"Have it your way," I say as I reach out with my magic, watching as Claire feels the blood in her veins as it begins to boil. The pain on her face is priceless as she realizes I'm burning her from the inside, and she can't stop it. No one can except for me.

"No!" she screams and huge tears fill her eyes. "I just wanted her gone!"

"Is that so? And tell me you stupid bitch; did it slip your imbecilic mind that you wanted her gone while she was heavily pregnant with *my* children?" I say, and it's barely above a whisper. I can feel my men as they relish the excitement of the beast, wanting the kill as much as he does.

Her eyes flick to my men as if she's looking for help. "Zahruk," I growl and he steps up, his eyes gleefully aware of what I want. His clothing changes to his robes and he bares his brands as he whispers words that draw on his mother's powers. He lays his hand on her forehead and projects for all of us what happened in this hall.

He'd used it on Syn before, and she'd hated me for it. I step away as she slides to her knees, as he pulls her past and replays the few minutes she'd had with Synthia. We all watch silently as she pleads for Zahruk to stop, but he continues.

I watch as Synthia follows me, or who she thinks is me, into the hallway and away from her guards. She thought it was me, up until the bolts are shoved through her tender flesh. Only then did she realize her mistake. Too late.

I don't know the man who pretended to be me; don't care, because he's

already dead. I watch as a portal is opened in the corridor, and she's carried through it.

"Aodhan, trace and locate where that portal goes. Zahruk, ready the men for war," I say, knowing it will be a dead end.

My men are ready, and as Claire stands up once more, I turn in her direction. "Asrian, take Claire to the lower levels and await me there." I turn to my men who have already glamourised their armor on.

I glamour my armor on in anticipation of getting my woman back safely. I search through this world and the next for the mark, letting the beast do it this time, to track her through the bond they share and the mark alike.

As we get ready to sift out, Ristan shakes himself out of a vision. Probably the first he has had in a month. "Ryder, I know where she is, and this is very bad," he says grimly. His eyes fill with despair that I won't accept.

I'll find her, and I'll save her.



## Chapter Nine

\*~\*Synthia\*~\*

I was slammed roughly against the floor as the Mages entered the room. They looked like Humans; no brands, no markings, or anything identifying them as being even partly Fae. They reminded me of Joseph and his ability to hide what he was; Changelings. They spoke to each other in low voices, and in a strange dialect I couldn't identify or understand.

"The babies come," Faolán called to them with malice in his sickening tone. It scared me with the sheer volume of hatred in it. The pains were growing closer and stronger now. I knew it meant I was running out of time and soon I'd have to push or chance the babes dying inside of me. Right now I wasn't sure I'd get a choice as the Mages continued to pour into the room.

"Place her on the stone; it's time to finish this," one said coldly. He produced a dagger from the sleeve of the black cloak he wore, and then whispered to the candles, which leapt to life and bathed the room in the gentle glow of candlelight. I hadn't been able to make out much of the room before but now with it finally lit, I could.

They began to chant, and as I watched, the entire room transformed. The magic they were using was the same as I used before I discovered I was fully Fae. In the middle of the room was a stone slab, which looked like something out of a medieval era. I was roughly picked up and placed on it, and angry hands held me down as chains were slipped around my hands and legs.

I couldn't move, and I felt the power draining from me from the bolts still lodged in my shoulders. I watched as the male who had posed as Ryder moved forward briefly, as if he was unsettled with what he had done, but then he sifted out, leaving me to a fate worse than death.

"Stop this, please!" I begged the Mages. "They're just babies!" I hate that I'm begging these hateful beings for anything, but for the lives of my tiny unborn babes, I'd beg. To save them I'd give my own life, or anything I could to give them a chance for life.

The knife was brought closer as hands held my motionless limbs in place—as if they were afraid I would break through the chains and fight them. I was spread out like a sacrifice. Tears of helplessness fell freely, and when the chants began, so too did my anger. "I'll gut you all! I'll eat out your fucking

hearts like a Demon! Pussies! You stupid useless waste of beings! Hiding behind your hoods; take these bolts out and fight me! Me! Not the helpless beings you plan to kill! Fight me! You murderous bastards,” I seethed.

They ignored me and continued on task as they chanted around the stone slab. The one closest to me watched me with wonder in his eyes. As if he found it amazing that I was willing to challenge them even bound and helpless.

I was about to challenge him directly when something exploded into the room. I lifted my head as best as I could with the bolts still in, and watched as the man who had saved me from Faolán at mine and Adam’s handfasting, fought singularly against the Mages. His eyes were wild as he took down as many as he could.

“Cailean?” Faolán growled and moved in his direction. I screamed out to Cailean, and he sifted, his hand pulling out one of the bolts which gave me a slight reprieve. He hadn’t removed both, which left me still unbearably weak and unable to do much. Instead of challenging the Mage closest to me, I reached out with my weakened power and tried to blast him, but it only seemed to shock him. I pushed more power into it, and watched as he exploded, but it drained me. I was about to try another one when I felt the bolt being shoved back into my chest violently.

Someone had stabbed it into my chest instead of my shoulder without taking into account the proximity to my heart. I screamed in agony and ceased struggling as I fell back against the unforgiving slab. I coughed violently and winced as blood from my lungs splattered across the closest Mage to me.

I searched the room and fray for Cailean, and watched as he was downed by Faolán. I coughed again, but just as hope was failing, something struck through Faolán’s shoulder, impaling him. He looked down at his shoulder, and then up into my savior’s unforgiving gold and obsidian eyes. Faolán screamed in anger and frustration at his attacker, and then he was gone, sifting out at the first sign of losing, as usual.

The Elite Guard was here, fighting against the Mages.

Ryder was leading them, and I closed my eyes, knowing that my babes would safe now; their father was here for them.

Danu was with him, but it didn’t look like she was visible to him or his men. I watched as Ryder moved towards me, killing and impaling anything in

his way. He dismembered bodies and severed heads as he cut a path, his magic reaching out to those who were out of his physical reach to crush them. He reached me quickly and removed the bolts and chains that held me in place, and then I was dragged into his arms carefully.

“Synthia,” he whispered as he placed his ear against my chest and then looked down into my eyes. He lifted his eyes to look around the room. His men awaited his orders, covered in the blood of the Mages.

I watched as Savlian reached down, hauled up Cailean, and moved his sword up, holding it against the soft column of Cailean’s throat. His deadly intent pulled a numb response from the man, as his eyes met mine in a silent plea.

“No,” I whispered. “He’s friend, not an enemy. He’s wounded because he beat you here to save me,” I whispered, doing my best to ignore the blood that covered my lips.

“Eliran, help us!” Ryder snarled as he shimmered back to his Fae form.

“Here...Oh, shit,” Eliran whispered as he moved closer to where Ryder stood with me in his arms.

I didn’t need him to say it out loud. I could feel death’s rattle working in my chest. “Take me home, and save my babies, Eliran. You have to save them,” I told him with tears slipping from my eyes.

“Fuck that; you save them! All of them!” Ryder demanded.

I watched as Eliran stepped back and away from Ryder, as we sifted as a group to the sterile rooms of Eliran’s medical ward. I was gently placed on a bed, and I watched as Eliran looked at me helplessly.

“Get them out,” I whispered in a pleading tone as Eliran moved to me to see what he could do to try and stop what was going to happen no matter what he did.

I knew I was dying; they didn’t have long to wait. I knew my fate was sealed, but I had to give my children a fighting chance. I felt myself fading away, slipping from consciousness. “Fairy, be good to our children. I love you, I’ve loved you since the moment you walked into my world, and always will,” I whispered as I held his eyes. “Tell them I loved them and how much I wanted to be here for them, Ryder, and how much I love you,” I pleaded as I lifted my hand but missed his.

\*~\* *Ryder* \*~\*

I watch helplessly as her eyes glaze over. My mark, our link snaps and I feel pain as it rips through my chest as surely as if someone has removed my heart physically.

“Save her!” I shout at Eliran, but he slumps his shoulders and shakes his head.

“Save the babies, Eliran, it’s what Synthia wanted,” Ristan pleads as he sifts behind Eliran. “You have to save her children.”

I feel cold and dead inside. I move towards Synthia, but my brothers hold me back. I growl in warning but they just hold me, feeling my pain as the bond of blood races through them. “Call for Danu!” I demand, but those around me just stand there, holding me away from the lifeless body of my woman.

I struggle against them to get to her, but I’m numb and even in my grief I know I can’t harm them for guarding the babes. The beast roars, and I shake with the emotions. My heart is bleeding for her; I don’t want to live without her. She’s my fucking everything!

“Save them now!” Ristan orders Eliran, and a moment later Eliran stumbles away from Synthia’s body. His head shakes as he looks from me to the Demon, as if weighing which of us will kill him first.

They’re blocking my view of the body, and Ristan is nowhere to be seen, and then I hear his torn, broken whisper. “I’m so sorry, Flower. I wish you could have held on for us.” I hear the sickening sound of flesh as it meets the sharp edge of a blade as it cuts through. I jump to stop him, but my men are there, holding me back. Zahruk’s mental voice is shouting in my mind, trying to reason with me and the beast. My mind struggles to find the bond I share with Syn but it’s gone. I feel my beast as he struggles to get loose, pushing and tearing at me to get to the surface to get out, to get to Ristan. He’s fighting for total control.

“I’ll fucking kill you, Demon!” I snap, and the room shakes from my anger. My power pulses and begs to be released. In the struggle, the room shifts and I’m able to see her, as Ristan cuts her from one side of her stomach to the other with a scalpel. As I watch them, Eliran moves into action and women come pouring into the room as it comes alive with movement.

One son is pulled out of her lifeless body and given to Eliran, who briefly checks the child before passing it to one of his helpers. The woman takes the babe and with her magic, she pulls, forcing the fluid from his lungs until he

lets out a cry of shock and surprise. The other boy is pulled out next and passed to Eliran, and I want nothing to do with them. If I'd never gotten her pregnant, she'd still be alive. It isn't until Ristan pulls out a third babe that my heart stops cold.

"She did it, fucking hell, she did it," Ristan says it as he stumbles back from the body and hands off the silent, blue, lifeless child. "She gave you a daughter."

I'm up before I know it and my men release their hold, as I move to the child. She's not breathing, and Eliran looks down at the helpless child and then over to where her mother lays lifeless on the bed, gutted. Ristan gutted my world to save my daughter, and maybe he had known, maybe he hadn't. In the end, nothing matters beyond her children living, all of them. I step back from Eliran, knowing my menacing presence isn't helping. "Save her, please, save my daughter."

He moves into action, asking for things I have never heard of, but one of Eliran's helper's moves forward to help him.

Adam sifts in, his hands pulling at his hair as he sees Synthia. He looks around at the men; every one of them was as helpless to save her as I was. He must have felt their familiar bond shatter as her life slipped away. Devastation is written on his features as he stands there, trying to come to grips with what he is seeing. He spins and sifts out, only to return minutes later with Alden and Adrian, who wisely doesn't lip off. Instead, he stands and watches the proceedings, unable to look away from the train wreck scene unfolding before his horrified eyes.

We all watch, waiting for a sign that one of the three will live. I stare at Synthia; where has her spirit gone? Did she go with Larissa, or did she join with her Fae ancestors? Or did demi-Goddesses have a cherished place among their own dead that I couldn't follow her to?

One of the Fae assisting Eliran walks over to us and in her arms is a screaming infant. I hold out my arms, numbly. I then stare into azure eyes with a dark crop of midnight hair. He's strong for something so small; his little arms push against mine as he frowns up at me. He's tiny, born too early, yet strong like his mother.

Our link joins and I can feel the small boy. *My son*. I feel tears as they slide down from my eyes. Everyone in the room stops and looks at me and I don't fucking care.

I break.

I cry for the mother they will never know, the one who will never hold them. I cry for my mate as the beast howls with pain at the loss of his equal. I know my men can feel my pain. It's raw and brutal. She should be here with me, seeing the tiny precious lives we created together.

Another healer comes forward, her arms holding yet another fighting bundle, which she places in the crook of my other arm. He has white blonde hair and deep violet eyes, much like Synthia and Lasair, have as one of the colors of their matching eyes. I look into the child's eyes and our bond connects. I can feel his heartbeat as if it's my own. I hand off the first boy to Adam, and Ristan watches me as he shakes his head. Visions can change, we all know it, but if he had told me this would be my future, I'd have fucking stopped it.

Next comes the girl; she doesn't fight like her brothers, and is almost still. As I move the thin blanket from her face, I'm filled with love as her golden eyes look up at me and I touch the wispy, fine platinum curls on the top of her head that's so much like her mother's. "Your brothers hid you and protected you," I whisper into her ear as I kiss her tiny cheek. Her brothers had protected her, and kept her existence a well-guarded secret. Her mother never even got to know she existed. I feel the last bond connect, and my eyes lift to her mother's lifeless ones.

"What now?" Ristan asks as he moves to the body.

"Don't touch her," I warn. I move, rushing to the body as I hand off my tiny daughter into Ristan's arms.

"Ryder, she cannot be brought back. Danu has shown me what would happen if she intervened, and there was no world, no Humans, and no Fae left. She's gone but your children are here, and they need you, brother, we all do."

"What do you mean no world?" I snap.

"Nothing, nothing would be left of either world if you break the balance. This was supposed to happen, and you can't break the balance by changing it. Synthia would never forgive you if you did, and you know it."

"She's my fucking world," I say through the pain I know they can feel. I hate this weakness, and yet I don't fucking care. She was my mate, and I was too afraid to admit it even to myself because of this, this useless pain. It eats at me, and consumes the beast with an anger that can easily overtake us all.

“Then tell her goodbye, brother, and let her go in peace,” Ristan says and I feel my brothers at my back, feeding me their strength. All of them await me, to see my choice. They’d kill this world if I ordered it, I know they would. Ristan is right, though. If I bring her back and kill the world to do so, I lose her anyway.

“Get out,” I whisper to everyone in the room. I scream the moment the room has emptied, and fall to my knees beside the bed where her body lays. I should have given her more; I should have given her everything she’d asked for in life. Now I was left with nothing, no warmth filled my body, nothing but regret and emptiness was left in my soul which could never again be filled.

\*~\*~\*

I stand in the room, staring down at her lifeless body. Her hand is in mine, and it has since grown cold. The others had left the room at my command; Adam, Ristan, and Zahruk stood just beyond the door. I could hear them discussing a funeral. The babes had been taken up to the nursery, which had been created in my chambers, where I could protect and watch over them.

I look down at her face and close her eyes. I place my hand over her midriff where Ristan had removed our babes and healed up as much as he could of the damage he’d been forced to do. I was a father now, but the joy of it is diminished without Synthia to enjoy it with me. It felt empty without her, and I felt like I didn’t deserve the beautiful gifts she had left me; not without her by my side to watch them grow.

Soon, it will be time to take them to the Tree, and offer them for Danu and the land to accept. I place my hand on her ice cold cheek and stifle the emotion that tries to lay me low. “This is your love; it has to be. I can’t breathe. I can’t fucking breathe without you, Synthia Raine. You weren’t supposed to leave me, Pet; that wasn’t the deal. I told you I would find you, damn you. How could you run from me in death where I cannot follow you? This isn’t right, but I get it now, you taught me. I know what love is, and it hurts. It’s tearing me apart, and I find I don’t enjoy it at all. Had you told me of this kind of pain, I’d have denied wanting it. I’d have lied if I could have. But if not feeling this pain meant never knowing you, I’d feel it again and again—just for you. I’d do it all again for one more moment with you.”

I reach down and place a long, gentle kiss on her lips, then walk out of the room. I'm leaving her there for burial. My world is gone, and every Mage left should be worried. I plan to kill every single fucking one of them, and by killing my world they've left me one thing...Revenge. It will guarantee that they all will die—violently. I've failed her, but I won't ever make the mistake of failing the children she has left me to protect. Ever.



## Chapter Ten

\*~\*Synthia\*~\*

I was behind him as he walked out of the room. His shoulders were slumped in defeat and I stood there, helpless to stop him from leaving. I turned and stared in horror at my body. I was dead? He loved me and I was freaking dead! That shit wasn't fair!

I moved out of the room, oblivious to everything going on in the corridors. It wasn't until something or someone grabbed me and pulled me back to my corpse.

"You can't go to him yet," Danu said softly. "You're not ready and the others won't be able to see you for about five or ten minutes as you complete the transition to your new form."

"I'm dead?" I whispered, choking on the words as if they were sawdust.

"No daughter; you've been reborn. It was the only way I could save you without interfering. If I had saved that body, it would have broken the laws of the Gods and the natural order of the universe. If I had done so, the world of Faery would have crumbled, killing them all. Those who escaped would have killed the Human world as they tried to take it over. There's not enough Witches left to protect them, and I knew if it was up to you, you would have wanted me to let your Fae body die. So I allowed it."

"So I am dead?" I croaked and looked down at my body and the delicate white dress I wore. Everything seemed to be there except my baby bump, and I looked back at her trying to understand what was going on.

"You have to stop thinking like a Human now, Synthia. You're a deity; I give you the title of Goddess of Faery to protect her at my side," she said as she smiled softly. "I'm the Goddess of the Fae, and you're the Goddess of the lands."

"I'm a Goddess?" I asked, unbelievably.

"You are overthinking everything right now," she said as she sat on the bed next to my corpse and started filing her nails. "There are rules to being a Goddess, and we will go over the big rules later, but for now all you need to know is while you can help the Fae, you can't interfere directly and change the future. You have an advantage over me, as I sense you can physically help in the fight against the Mages. Your powers will come online soon and

we will see exactly what you can do,” she said with a hint of excitement.

“Did—did my children...” I couldn’t ask, because if the answer was no it would be too painful.

“All three of them are alive for now, but I must warn you, Synthia. I used a lot of my power to save you and bring you back. I will need as much help from the Fae people as I can get in order to draw enough magic to accept them and to feed the lands, as well.”

“Three?” I asked, confused. “I was carrying twins.”

“You gave birth to the first set of triplets in Fae history. And before you ask, none of them came from me, and I had nothing to do with it. It was all you and your beast. All yours! And as luck would have it, turns out that beast of yours gave you a litter of little fighters,” she chuckled gleefully.

“Okay, I love that you saved me but...” I eyed the door eagerly.

“Go, but be aware that your beast is in for the shock of his life.”

I ran for the door, since I’d tried to sift but couldn’t seem to figure it out and in my hurry, I was too busy to care about figuring out how to use my magic. I ran up through the crowded corridors and no one seemed to be able to see me. I ran to Ryder’s bedroom clumsily, as I felt weightless, and yet I hadn’t sifted. I pushed open his bedroom door and found Darynda sitting next to the crib crying softly, patting one of the babes on their tiny back. .

She gasped and screamed as she saw me, and sifted out.

I ignored her reaction to my presence as I leaned over the crib to look at the tiny little boy. He had beautiful azure eyes and deep, dark hair with midnight highlights in it, like his father’s. I moved to the next crib and found another boy with violet eyes and blonde hair who looked much like Liam. I guessed the rules of them taking after their mother didn’t apply with my mixed DNA. I heard a tiny cry, which tore at my heartstrings and moved on to the next crib.

I gasped; she was beautiful. Her golden eyes looked up at me as if she knew me; her whitish blonde hair was curly and beautiful. I reached down and pulled her up against my chest as I placed a kiss on her tiny little cheek and then her nose.

“No—she’s fucking dead. Get the fuck away from my daughter,” Ryder’s voice growled as he entered the nursery. I felt the moment his men sifted in, sensing me as a threat. I didn’t turn around right away. Instead, I placed another kiss on my daughter’s cheek and placed her back in her crib.

“Step away from—” Ryder continued as I turned to look at him.

“Sweet Jesus,” Adam swore as his eyes took me in.

I looked back at Ryder, who had gone silent, as if he was afraid to believe his eyes. I watched as a single tear slid down his cheek as he replaced his sword in its sheath. “Who the hell are you?” he demanded.

“I’ve only been dead for a little while, I seriously hope you haven’t forgotten me that quickly,” I whispered as I watched him.

“You’re dead. I just came from your body a few moments ago,” he seethed as he watched me closely; as if I’d go for one of the babies.

“Yes, my body is,” I said. “Danu made me a Goddess.”

“Impossible,” he said.

I moved to him and raised my hand but dropped it when he flinched. “Fairy, it’s me. I’m here, just in a new body.”

“You died.”

“I did.”

“You look a little different,” he growled as he tried to puzzle it out. “I felt you die; the mark is gone.”

I hadn’t even considered how I looked, but then I’d been in a hurry to get to my babies. “I was reborn, and I don’t know the *hows* of it, only that I was.” It was so quiet in the room you could have heard a pin drop.

“Prove it’s you,” he demanded.

“How?” I asked narrowing my eyes on him.

“Do something that my Synthia would never do,” he growled.

I smiled and dropped to my knees in front of him and his men. I placed my palms to the sky and tilted my head. “I give up,” I smiled impishly.

He dropped to his knees and crushed me into his arms. “My girl would never surrender without a fight,” he whispered and then kissed me. When he pulled away from the kiss he looked at me, uncertainty shining in his eyes. “You taste different,” he admitted.

“I’m the same person; my soul is the same, but I think I changed a bit physically with the new body and all,” I whispered. He just watched me, as if he was still afraid to look away. As if he was afraid he’d blink and I’d disappear. I brought up my hands and cupped his face before I leaned in to place a gentle kiss on his lips.

“Ryder—” Eliran said as he entered the room and then stopped. “Uh, Synthia...you’re...” he scratched his head and then shook it. “I swear you’re

half cat. The babes look good, and the little lady is improving.”

“That’s great,” I said and then looked to Ryder for answers.

“She had a hard delivery,” he explained.

“I missed it...” I said as I sat back on my heels. “I missed it all. I just remember talking to you...and then nothing.”

“You died,” he said with unshed tears in his eyes. “You said you loved me and our children and then you *died*.”

## Chapter Eleven

Ryder had transformed my room, or what used to be known as the Queen's chambers, into a nursery to give us a place nearby to protect them. The nursery was done in a soft green color with small cribs for each child that had been made from white ash wood. Aodhan had crafted a few rocking chairs for us out of the same wood, which we had settled into with the babies. Ryder had to add a crib which he made from glamour for the daughter we hadn't known about. Aodhan had already started on the wood for the third, since he insisted she have a matching one to her brothers.

Danu shimmered in, allowing Ryder to see her for the first time since she had chosen him as an Heir and explained to him what she'd done, and what the repercussions of my death and rebirth would be. After all the mistrust created when I found out she was my mother, and I'd kept it to myself, I thought it best that he be present as she answered my questions.

"How do you propose for us to make enough Fae want to come here? You do realize that most don't understand the laws, or the way that the Tree works, and they certainly will not understand why they need to give you enough power for you to accept your grandchildren," Ryder said softly, his eyes taking her in and I was sure he was sizing her up. "We are surrounded by allies, prepared to go to war on our behalf, is that not enough to draw power from?"

"I'm getting to that," she said waiving her hand impatiently. "You have other concerns to take into account with all that happened. Synthia died, and when she did, her bond with Lasair broke. That means he knows she's dead, but more than that, the power she held is now in limbo until I decide on a new host. Liam is the likely one to inherit it," she mused thoughtfully as she watched me. "He's my choice, even though he's a little damaged," she mused as she shot an accusing eye at Ryder. "The Blood Fae are currently on their way here now, and the Light Fae won't be far behind them. Kier has his family here already; they came when Adam sifted out abruptly. He felt the familiar bond break, and knew she was dead—it was the same with her father. Lasair, Kier, and Adam also felt the power shift, which the Light Fae will have felt as well, and it's drawing them here. They will want proof of her death, and you will give it to them. You, Ryder, will call for Sanctuary and they will be admitted for the grieving period. They will need to see her body,

and the children she birthed. You will then announce that we have a new Goddess of Faery,” Danu said as she eyed him cautiously.

“And why would we do that?” he asked as he wrapped his free hand around mine reassuringly. He hadn’t stopped touching me since I’d knelt as his feet and surrendered.

“Because we need the royal Caste members of the Fae at the Tree, so I can draw from them. They need to see her mortal body, and know that she died and has been reborn. The people will love her; she will become a beacon of hope. They will fight for her, Ryder, and your children will thrive if the world accepts them as her people will. While we have them in your hall, we will ask them to help us bless your children, and those who come with us to the Tree will share their powers with me and this world and help us to welcome your children. Synthia, Ryder was correct in his assumption that to get to him, those who wished to ascend to power would reach for you. You must show them that you’re stronger than they assumed. You’ll show them a united front, and unite them in the process. You’ve both underestimated the Mages; they have more bodies to throw at us than any of us even thought of.”

“Us?” I asked as I reached over the crib’s rail to touch my son’s cheek. He blinked sleepy blue eyes at me.

“I’m in this fight with you; this is my world, and I created it,” Danu said with fire in her eyes. “I may have made you the Goddess of Faery, but I am still bound to it, and if they want a fight, we will give them one.”

“So we show them Synthia’s corpse?” Ryder asked skeptically.

“Yes, you open the gates and call for sanctuary. You allow the other Castes to see and grieve for Synthia and the Blood King will call for blood, be assured of it. You’ll call for the final rites, and in doing so, you’ll have the Elite Guard come in to carry her away, but as they do, Synthia will follow them in to show her new status. Also, your people need to know she stands beside you, and that together you are united. They will also know that she will no longer feed from you, but you’ll feed from a Goddess, one who stands beside you and is yours alone. Your handmaidens and I will watch over the children while the preparations are made. Synthia will be prepared, and then we will proceed. You two need to ‘talk’ first, as I can see the beast pacing inside of you, Ryder. He’s anxious to get to his mate,” she said with a wicked gleam in her eyes.

“No,” I said as I turned to face Danu. “We won’t win them over that way.

We let the babies win them over, and we don't have to tell everyone exactly what happened. We can show them a united front and I can speak to my father so that he can see for himself what's going on. I'm here, and very much alive. The rest of the Fae probably felt a shift in power, but they don't know why. If we tell them what I am, we lose the advantage we have against the Mages. You've made it clear that I'm to be a secret weapon that the Mages won't see coming, so we follow through with that. Lasair is a different matter though, and Madisyn as well. We need these people on our side to fight the Mages and I just don't think a complicated ceremony will send the message we want. Danu, burn the body. We don't need it and it's probably better to get rid of it rather than having someone discover it and start some sort of stupid conspiracy theory that will tear these people apart with speculation. The Fae are already on edge, let's not give them fuel to light a fire."

"Synthia," she said softly.

"These are going to be our people, and they don't need a big elaborate show to get the point across. I've been studying my Fae history and politics with Dristan pretty well and I know that the presentation of newly born children for monarchs can be a call for sanctuary as well. I say we show them our little miracles, and then we ask them for their help. We win them over by being honest and being fair. I've seen how the Fae behave, and from what you have told me, I don't think my role will be like any of the other Fae Heir, Queen or whatever you want to call it has experienced before, I want to be someone they love and trust. I want them to love my beast for the same reasons I do, because he's brutally honest and he does the tough stuff, and not because he's the strongest, but because it's what's right for his people. How long do you think it will take for those who are coming to help us raise enough support so we can bring them to the Tree and give you the power needed for the blessing?" I gave Danu and Ryder a worried look and sighed. "I just need my children blessed and accepted by this world, and then hopefully everything else will fall into place."

Danu pressed her lips together tightly and looked at me with a faraway look in her eyes before she exhaled. "They will have to meet us at the Tree in no more than two weeks. Any longer and the results could be dire. I will start the preparations on my side, and do what I can to strengthen myself—and the land—for the blessing. I am here for you, daughter; you need only call for

me. If anything goes wrong with the children, I need to know. I won't be in the dark where they are concerned, not as I was with you," she said softly.

I swallowed hard at her unspoken words and warning, and nodded in acknowledgment. "I understand. Thank you, for saving me. Can you please get rid of the body while I go and 'talk' to my King? Oh, and one more thing," I said as I leveled her with an uncertainty in my heart.

"Yes?" she asked.

"If I am like you now, what does that mean for us?" I asked as I tightened my hold on Ryder's hand. "Can we still be together?"

"Of course, Synthia," she said with a soft smile. "I knew you wouldn't stay away from him even if the Gods had decreed it. By being together and bringing forth life, you had bound your selves together before your rebirth. That's something not even the Gods would mess with. Love has its own rules. Ryder is immortal, so you don't have to worry about outliving him either. Now, I need to go get rid of the body."

I stood up and moved to hug her, and whispered against her ear. "Thank you, mother," I said as I kissed her cheek and watched as she looked at me uncomfortably. I was willing to bet that she didn't get affection very often. That was about to change now that she had grandchildren. I would make sure of it.

\*~\*~\*

With the babies securely tucked in their cribs and being watched over by Keeley and Meriel, we stepped into Ryder's adjoining room and it was awkwardly silent between the two of us. I watched as he walked to the bed, and sat down on it. His body language was stiff, and when he finally looked up at me, his expression was unreadable.

"You died," he repeated. He shook his head as if dispelling the knowledge from it. "I couldn't breathe without you in my world."

I stepped closer to the bed and kneeled at his feet. "It hurt you, and I'm sorry for it. But honestly, Ryder, that's how I feel when I think of you leaving me, asking me to leave because you're tired of me, or not loving me back. I love you so much it scares me." I whispered as I raised my eyes to his. "It hurts to feel something so much and to have the other person not know or be unwilling to return those feelings. That's what I feel for you; that's love. And yes, at times it hurts like a bitch, Fairy. But I didn't leave you willingly; I'm still here and even death couldn't take me away from you in the end."



He smiled and it took my breath away. His eyes grew heated, and wickedness took root in them as he pulled me up into his arms. He tossed me onto the bed and crawled up my body until he straddled my hips. “You wanted my love, Pet, well, you have it. The only question is; can you handle it now that you’ve unleashed it.”

“Oh, I think I can handle it, Fairy,” I replied.

He lowered his mouth and kissed my forehead and then my cheek, slowly, his teeth pulled at my earlobe as he growled. “You sure about that?” he asked as he sifted over and lowered his teeth to nibble at my bottom lip.

“Better than that, I love you back. I absolutely, unwaveringly love you.”

“Oh yeah?” he asked as he pulled at the white silk dress I wore. “Then marry me, Synthia, fucking marry me and make me yours as I want to make you mine. Forever,” he whispered breathlessly.

“Forever is a very long time,” I replied, enjoying his teasing.

“Forever is a very long time, Pet,” he said as he delivered a toe-curing kiss. “And I swear to the Gods, if you ever make me feel as helpless and lost as you did when you died, I’ll tie you to my fucking bed and use you as my plaything. I’ll place that bed in a cave deep inside of Faery, where only I will find you. Fuck bubble wrap, I’ll just hide you and keep you safe.”

“Is that so?” I taunted as I kissed him back. “I seem to recall you liking me as your plaything no matter what I do.”

“You made me feel something I have never felt before in all my time alive; fear and helplessness. When Ristan cut you open to save our children, I wanted to kill him, and the beast was right there egging me on.”

“Fairy, if you don’t soothe this ache you’ve created, I’ll be tying your ass to the bed,” I threatened grumpily.

“Is that so? What if I tie you up instead and keep you here until I’ve sated this need to touch you?”

“We have responsibilities, Ryder,” I whispered as I rolled him over and climbed up his body as I pushed him down on the bed.

His hands cupped my face as he pulled me down and kissed me hard. He removed our clothing with glamour, and smiled against my lips as he drove his need inside of me. I cried out at the intrusion of his cock as he filled me brutally, swiftly. I pulled away from him before he could thrust again and got on my hands and knees presenting him with my ass. I looked over my shoulder and watched as he took my naked backside in from his viewpoint

behind me.

“You can’t run from me,” he warned playfully as he slowly shook his head.

“Who’s running? Get over here and fuck me, Fairy,” I smiled seductively as I shook my ass at him.

It didn’t take him more than a second to sift behind me and fill me again with what I needed. I growled with approval at his roughness, but then I took control. I placed my palms flat on the bed and anchored myself on all fours as I prepared to use him; he remained still and I used his cock to pleasure myself. I pushed against him, and didn’t stop until he was buried inside me.

I repeated it, enjoying the growls of pleasure as each one left his lips and I used him to impale myself over and over again.

“Damn,” he whispered throatily.

“Do I feel dead?” I laughed as I turned to watch his eyes glowing. I loved them when they glowed with hunger. It was something I’d never thought to admit, but I did. His hunger turned me on and made me want to be dirty for him.

A power surge seemed to build within me along with the sensation of an orgasm, and helplessly, I pushed it into him and watched as his brands leapt to life, pulsing with untold power. I was his Fucking Fairy Happy Meal, and he was getting a huge power feed from fucking me, and I was in control.

Well, I *was* until he flipped me over onto my back and took over. He stopped slamming into me, and slowed down, taking his time. His cock rubbed over my opening, and then would sink a few inches inside, only to pull out and slide over it again.

“I’m in control in the bedroom unless I give you permission to be, Pet,” he rumbled with a knowing smile as he slid home inside of me. My back lifted from the bed as a scream tore from my lips. “After we present our children to our people, I’m going to kiss every inch of you and I promise to not leave anything untouched. I’m going to make you beg for my cock, and then maybe I’ll let you have control of my cock...maybe,” he growled as he rocked his hips and entered me with a swift, deep thrust.

“Ryder,” I moaned and cried out as the orgasm he’d created ripped through me and the world exploded into shattered, prismatic colors. I felt him grow taut, and his movements grew hurried as he joined me in release.

When his breathing grew regulated, and he stretched out beside me, I

smiled like a sated cat that had just been fed a juicy, fat tuna. “I couldn’t imagine losing that,” I admitted with a soft kiss to his lips.

“I feel like I could take on the world with you by my side,” he whispered seductively.

“Good, ‘cause you may need to,” I whispered thickly. “We need to get moving so we can get started on raising support for the babies.”

“Marry me, Pet,” he whispered and my head swam with the words.

“No,” I surprised us both by saying it. “Not like this, Ryder, not because you’re upset that you almost lost me. Ask me again when we’ve had time to process everything that’s happened.”

I wanted him, and yes, I wanted to marry the beast, but he’d been through a lot. We both had. It was an emotional overload, and we were both still riding the waves of it. Faolán was still out there, wounded, but alive.

“You almost killed Faolán?” I asked, narrowing my eyes on him.

“He moved, or he’d be dead right now. If he hadn’t sifted when he did, and you weren’t bleeding out...I’d have tracked him until I found him, and I’d have killed him for what he did, for everything he’s done to you.”

“Thank you,” I said before I pulled him closer for a kiss and then pushed him away. “As much as I like our ‘talks,’ it’s time to go show Faery that I am still alive, and bring them together.”

## Chapter Twelve

I stood in the nursery as Faelyn and Keeley dressed the babes for their presentation to the Fae. It was unreal to know I had three children and my beast had asked me to become his wife. Not that I wasn't happy with him doing so, but the timing wasn't something I was willing to chance him regretting later on.

He'd been through a huge shock, and while I was thrilled with the idea of marrying him, I wanted him to ask me because he wanted it and not because he'd thought he'd lost me to death's cold clutches.

Danu's plan had held merit, but in the end it wasn't how I wanted to win the people over. We needed them to be peaceful as we presented the babes. It was imperative that they allow us to speak and bring them over to our side for Danu to draw from their strength to bless the babies.

We were pretty sure we pushed the war back momentarily with the amount of Mages we had slaughtered in both recent attacks, but it was still looming and present in our minds; however, the infants had to come first.

I had a daughter, and the thought of screwing her or the boys up was overwhelming. I knew nothing of raising children, and a daughter really scared me. I'd been a hard child, almost to the point of cold after my adopted parents had been killed. I was more afraid of these tiny beings than I had ever been of my beast.

I was standing over my daughter when Ristan and Adam sifted into the room. Both of them had bags bulging with items from a popular chain of baby stores back home. "What's all of that?" I asked, unsure I wanted to know.

"Baby stuff; you have no idea how much stuff they need," Adam answered as he dropped his bags inside of one of the empty cribs. The boys had yet to leave their sister's side, and I wasn't certain if they should. They seemed hell-bent on watching over her, and Eliran had admitted that she seemed to do better with them beside her.

"Formula is a tricky thing to glamour without knowing the ingredients," Ristan said as he walked over to me. "Danu let me know that you wouldn't be able to um...feed them now. So we figured we would get what they needed. The idea of using a wet nurse wasn't something Ryder liked, and well, not a lot of mothers currently lactating in Faery to choose from. We

were able to bring in two right after your untimely—ahem, death to help, but they cannot stay long. The babes are mortal for now, as weak as Human babes.”

I laughed. “Never tell their father that,” I said as I wrinkled my nose at the idea. “Besides, I doubt they are helpless; they’re the Horde King’s offspring.”

I looked in the crib at the array of assortments they’d brought back. Cans of formula, bottles, and a few other items which I tried to imagine them picking out. “You really went all out.”

“You should see the shit they sell at those stores! They have everything and more, and some of the shit I couldn’t imagine using on the poor wee things!” Ristan said as he made cute noises at the babies as he gave me a roguish smile.

“Have you thought about names?” Adam asked as he too looked down at the babes.

“I was thinking of names, but I’m waiting to see their personalities a bit before deciding.” I looked at Ristan as he leaned over the crib, playing with the babies. “Ristan, thank you for what you did. For getting them out in time,” I whispered and watched him as his eyes darted to mine in startled confusion.

“Danu showed me what would happen if we tried to save you,” he said uncomfortably. “I knew what had to be done, but it didn’t make it any easier. You don’t have to thank me, not for saving your children. I made a choice, one I knew you would want me to make. I never dreamed that my skill with a blade would extend to that, and I am certainly pleased that you are here to enjoy your children,” he said as he scooped my daughter up, and cuddled her on his shoulder.

“Was what Danu showed you really that bad? Ryder told me a little of what happened, and I have to admit that I was kinda surprised that you delivered them,” I said and watched as he shook his head.

“Eliran is brilliant,” he said quietly. “And every time you’ve been hurt, Ryder has threatened to kill him if he couldn’t heal you. Eliran knew what we all knew. You were gone and I think he just could not process it, and those babies couldn’t wait for him to do so. I am not a surgeon, but I knew I couldn’t do any more damage than had already been done. If Ryder chose to kill me, so be it,” he said with a soft smirk. “I also knew we all stood a real

chance of dying in that room if the beast had gotten loose and I think the delivery helped prevent that from actually happening.” He shook his head as if the memory bothered him.

“Synthia,” Danu said as she stood by the doorframe and eyed Ristan a little hesitantly. “I need you to come with me.”

I watched Ristan as he turned away from us, as if he was annoyed or angry with her. I made a mental note to ask him what was going on when things finally calmed down enough and I got a moment alone with him.

I blew kisses to the babes and planted one on both Ristan and Adam’s cheeks before joining Danu.

Danu took me to the Pools of Faery, which according to her, was blessed by both the Fae and the Gods. The area was breathtaking, and unlike the pools Ryder and I had been to, these ones were shielded, hidden by huge ivy plants. We stepped through the bushes, and there were three plump women who all looked exactly the same, waiting for us.

“Synthia, these are the Fates,” Danu said softly as she bowed her head to each one in respect. “For every God or Goddess that is birthed, even the lesser ones, the Fates have been attendance to wash, bless, and prepare them for their new roles. This is true for the Human world as it is in Faery.”

“Come child, for the blessing water grows cold,” one said, but it seemed to come from all three at once. I swallowed and shed the white gown Danu had created for me after my rebirth, then stepped into the water.

The moment their hands touched me, I felt their exquisite powers as one. It was awkward to have the Fates here, considering how much I’d fought against my destiny, but it seemed as if my entire life had been driving me to this one moment in time.

“You’ll face your past, and become your future,” one said, her eyes vacant as she placed her hands over my eyes. I was no longer in the pools, but instead I was with my adoptive parents. I watched as they accepted me with loving arms.

They had accepted me, knowing what I was.

And then I was the scared child, who watched as they were slaughtered by Faolán. I didn’t feel the pain which had been with me since the day it happened; instead, I felt sadness for them, and I was grateful for all that they had sacrificed. No longer was there a blackness of hatred either, but instead there was a lightness to it, which I am sure had to do with the beast. If this

event hadn't happened, I probably wouldn't have found him.

I was shown my life through their eyes, and in it, I was always strong and proud. Even when others had thought me weak, I'd stood my ground and never wavered. I did what had been expected of me, and never questioned why until I was told to breach the Dark Prince's tower to retrieve his crown, which I now knew to be a useless piece of silver.

I watched as Ryder ran his hand over my flesh and then watched us, his hand touching me. His Fae magic hadn't been what made me react to his touch that day he'd found me in his tower. From the first touch, we'd sealed our fates. The connection had sparked, and we did as we'd been meant to. It was destiny, calling, pulling, beguiling, and tantalizing me. I'd hated myself for responding to him and for being unable to deny him, but I'd never had a choice—we'd never had a choice.

The attraction had been there, and both of us were unable to deny it. He hated it as much as I had, and it's shown in the shock on his face as I push through his magic and deny his touch. From the moment he'd entered my apartment and we'd ended up with me naked on the floor, and him hovering above me, it had been fate. Every move that had brought us to this moment in time had been preplanned.

His club and my need to get away from him...I'd been terrified of these feelings, and I'd run, only to have my friends talk me back inside. Larissa, she was there, always the voice of reason and I wouldn't have him if I hadn't listened to her; she'd always been the smart one.

The Wild Hunt, and his intentions, which he'd brazenly laid out for me, before the hunt and after he'd caught me. I'd known I wanted him before the hunt, and I didn't really try to get away; I expected just enough of an effort for him to chase me. I'd needed the decision to be taken away from me, and I'd needed to have him. We'd both needed it, and in a way, it broke one of the barriers that stood between us.

I watched as he overpowered me with his need, and the way he kissed me, both in the vision left me boneless and panting for his hungry mouth. I watched as he listened to his men outside, and then grew hard and angry as he made a choice for his people, even hating it as he took me back to the mansion as his prisoner. He had to be King of his people, and they had to come before his pleasure.

Then I was there with Ristan, and he was kissing me, feeding me power

as my body had been weakened from iron poisoning. I watched as he kissed me, and then smiled as he watched me leave him. He'd known I would do the right thing; he'd had faith in the woman I'd been.

I watched as we moved to Ryder's engagement party, and his actions as he mirrored mine, itching for me to move so he could touch me. He hadn't even planned on hurting me; he had just wanted to touch me right up until Zahruk had stabbed me.

I felt his pain as he looked to where the dagger had protruded from my chest, the hopelessness he'd felt as he sifted me to Eliran. His anger as the Guild took me from him and left him helpless but to wait until I could heal so he could claim me again.

And then I watched as Joseph waited for me and everything he'd done to Larissa during that time. This part I could have lived without, but I understood it was a piece of who I was, and the person I was now becoming. I watched as he cut her open again, and then Ristan was there, pulling me into his arms and sifting me to safety. I'd begged him to save her, but I could see what he could see now, her soul wasn't there. She'd already left her body and departed the living world for the other.

Then I was inside my head, and Ryder was there again. He'd brought me back when no one else could have. Danu might have had a plan, but she couldn't have seen us as this, as a unity of one who worked well together. She'd had no guarantee that we would end up together, since all she could do was push us in the right way without interfering directly.

I was shown my entire life up until the moment I died. It had been a turbulent ride, but I was still here. I heard the Fates as they whispered behind me, and I as I turned toward them, they spoke.

"For one so young, you've seen a lot," they whispered, and one narrowed her eyes on me.

"She's pure of heart and her soul is perfect for the change. What is done is done, and so you shall stay as you are. You have been blessed, and we will take your story to those who shall seek to argue against you becoming a Goddess. One pure of deed, whose heart is true normally cannot be challenged; however there are those that may try. Blessed be, Synthia."

They talked through each other. As if together, they were one. Three pairs of hands grasped me at the same time and then my vision was blinded with light, and I was pushed into the water.



When I popped back up, it was to them scrubbing me like a naughty child who'd played in the mud. One used a sponge, which washed over my skin like sandpaper; another washed my hair until it slid over my flesh as the softest silk. The third snapped her fingers and the most beautiful dress appeared in her arms.

Danu watched it silently, her hands filled with golden jewels as pride filled her pose. "It's not every day a Goddess is born, Synthia; enjoy it now, for you will not remember meeting them, once they've gone."

"Is that true?" I asked the Fates, who nodded as one with an impish look in their eyes.

"We will remember you, and you will be watched closely for the first century of your new life, but no; you won't remember us, for we must know if you are truly worthy of this gift Danu has bestowed upon you."

I was helped to stand, naked, in front of an oval shaped, full-length mirror. I looked at my naked form, noting my body was slim, and showed no signs of having carried the triplets. My eyes were once again the azure blue they'd been before I'd become Fae. My hair was longer, but not by much. "May I ask you a question?" I looked at the tallest, and watched her as she looked right through me.

"You may, but you will not like our answer."

I had to try. "If you can see, and know everyone's fates, can you—"

I was silenced, unable to get the next word out.

"No; it's not our place to speak of the future. Changing it by saying too much can cause destruction and devastation," they said.

I deflated a bit and I felt the cool whisper sensation as a dress vanished from one of the Fate's arms and reappeared on my body. The creamy-white dress was made of the finest silk, and was fashioned in the way I had always seen Greek Goddesses depicted. Gold trim was wrapped high on the slim waistline, forming a beautiful, intricate belt.

Next came jewels of the same gold; cuffs went around my biceps as earrings were placed in my ears. My neck was left bare, but my wrists were dressed in thirty or more slim bracelets that fully covered my wrists. The nearest Fate, twirled her fingers and my hair braided and then piled atop my head as thin bands of gold laced through it.

"She's ready," they said as one looked down at my naked feet. She wiggled her nose and I looked down to find golden sandals with laces that

twirled up to my thighs in a beautiful pattern. “Danu, *now* she’s ready to meet her people.”

## Chapter Thirteen

I stood worriedly in a room alone as Adam went to find my parents. Ryder walked in, causing me to lift my eyes to meet his. “Has he found them?” I asked softly.

“Adam found Liam, who is taking him to your father,” he confirmed as he walked over and kissed me softly. “You sure you don’t want the babies here to lessen the blow?”

“You think our children will lessen the blow that Danu hijacked an egg and created a child that Madisyn carried thinking it was her own?” I asked as I lifted a brow at him. “I’m pretty sure nothing will make anything I say easier on her.”

“Gods, you’re so sassy for a newborn.” He smiled cockily. I heard noise outside the door and prepared myself for what was coming.

Madisyn was dressed in black, which confirmed our suspicion that they thought I was dead. They hadn’t noticed me yet; their eyes were on Ryder, who had blocked me from their view, even though he was in his Fae form.

“You bastard,” Lasair whispered brokenly and moved forward. Liam stopped him and held him back. “He killed my daughter!” he shouted angrily.

I started to interrupt them, but Adam closed the door from the outside, locking myself, Ryder, my parents, and my brother inside. Madisyn held a small dagger in her hand, and I paused in shock. “Mother!” I shouted as she turned to Ryder.

Her hand froze. She held the dagger that she’d once tried to give me to kill the Horde King. Her eyes filled with tears as Lasair stepped closer with his eyes scanning me carefully. “What is this?” he demanded.

“It’s me,” I said and moved to him but felt a sting of rejection as he pulled the arm away that I’d tried to grab. “Listen to me, I’m Sorcha. I *was* killed, but that was Faolán and the Mages’ doing, not Ryder’s. That’s why we have no bond,” I said, repeating what Danu had told me to. It wasn’t an easy thing to explain, but I had to explain it on a level that they would understand and be able to accept.

“I need you to listen, and I need you to keep an open mind, please. This won’t be easy for you to understand, but I can prove it. I am not Madisyn’s daughter. Not technically. Danu is my mother.”

Liam, Madisyn, and Lasair all snorted and turned on Ryder.

“She replaced her egg with Madisyn’s! You could feel the bond, Lasair, because you *are* my father,” I shouted, pulling their attention back to me.

“Impossible,” Liam sneered.

“Is it? Danu’s a Goddess, and a very powerful one, too. She needed a way to heal this world without directly interfering.”

“Why would she use me?” Madisyn asked.

“Because you’d send me away to protect me, and she knew it. You and Lasair did what she planned, Madisyn. You sent me to the Humans to protect me and I learned from them. I learned things that I couldn’t in this world. She knew Lasair was the right father with the right bloodline, and that you were the perfect surrogate mother for me. I am who I am because of what you did. I don’t think anyone else would have been strong enough to do what you and Lasair did. You sent your Fae daughter to the mortal realm, where she learned to love and be compassionate. I’m strong because of what I’ve been through, and I needed to be. I needed to be exactly who your choices have made me become. She’s a Goddess, and while sometimes I find her extremely weird, and not always loving, she was right in this. I’m glad she gave me to you, and I hope you are glad to have me as your daughter as well.”

“Synthia,” Madisyn said as she embraced me tightly. “I thought we lost you again,” she cried against my ear as she held me tightly against her slightly smaller frame. “I’m honored that Danu chose me, and I’m glad she kept the knowledge to herself of your parentage. If she hadn’t, and I’d known who you really were, a daughter of the great Goddess, I’d have kept you. I’d have done everything differently for fear she’d be angered and seek retribution for handing her daughter over to the Humans.”

“I think she knew that,” I whispered as I hugged her back. I felt a weight lift off my chest as the secret was finally exposed and the knowledge that it hadn’t crushed Madisyn and her gentle heart was a relief. “I need to explain what is going to happen, and I need your help. I also need you to keep my secret.”

“Mother, get away from her,” Liam snapped as he watched me as if I was a viper. “She lies.”

“Give me your hand, Liam,” I said when he continued to glower at me. I held out my hand to him and moved closer.

“You can’t be her,” he said with an angry sneer. “It’s impossible, only

those born from the Gods and Goddess can become them, and you're half Fae.”

I didn't wait for his permission; instead I gripped his hand and showed him what had happened to me in the last few hours. When I was done, he stepped back and gawked at me. I'd shown him what our brother had done, and I'd included how I'd almost been raped by Faolán, and how he'd help to hold me down for my children to be removed—and I made sure to include Danu, and her instructions of what I'd become and how.

“Faolán is lost to us, then,” he whispered as he pulled me against his chest and surprised me with a bone crushing hug. “I'll kill him myself for what he's done to you and our family.”

“No, not yet, Liam,” I whispered with a reassuring smile. “He's a big part of this, and yes, he helped them kill me as they tried to steal my babies...”

“Babies! Oh gosh, I almost forgot about them,” Madisyn whispered with huge eyes. “Oh,” she said softly as she deflated. She eyed Lasair, who just watched her.

“It's true that he tried to kill me and steal the babes, but they are fine for now. I need you all to keep my secret until we face the Mages. They cannot know I was reborn a Goddess. Liam, you will become the new Blood Heir. You are the strongest of the Blood Fae right now according to Danu, and you're her choice for the Heir. I fear if the knowledge of it gets to Faolán he will change his game and come after you. He's no longer the child you once knew; he's cold and calculating. In his mind, he believes that the Mages can change who the Heir is, and I'm not actually sure if they can or not, or if it's just how they are keeping him on their side of the fight. He is bringing them everything about our defenses, and he can get around Faery to places they can't get into, but they will soon if he keeps feeding them information.”

“We can do that, and will support your husband. I do hope he has made you his Queen for supplying him heirs,” Lasair said as he stood to his full height.

“He asked; I said no,” I spit out as I continued on, but when Lasair guffawed with laughter at Ryder's expense, I held my breath as I watched his eyes slip from gold to black. “I should explain that better,” I said out loud. “He was there when I died, and it was a shock. I died less than a day ago and it was just too soon. I want him forever, and he knows it. I also want him to ask me when the time is right. I know it sounds selfish, but when he does ask

me, I want it to be him and not the grief asking me.”

“Smart girl,” Liam said with a mischievous smile on his lips. “Make him work for it,” he finished with a roguish wink.

“Madisyn, I have something to ask of you,” I said as someone knocked on the door.

“Yes?” she asked and I could see she was internally struggling with what I’d just told her.

“Danu is my mother, but she can’t interfere or help me to physically protect my children. I am a part of her, but you, you’re my mother. Or at least I hope you still consider me as your daughter. You’ve held me in your heart and even though I’m not of your blood, I was hoping you’d still be my mother.”

“Oh. Of course,” she wiped at her eyes and hugged me again, and I smiled at her effort to hide the emotion.

“My children need a grandmother who can interfere and be there when they need them. One who can show them love and help us to direct them on the right path. I have no idea what it means to raise a child, and I have three of them now.”

“Three?” she asked, pulling back to look at me.

“Two boys and a girl,” I smiled at her bewildered look.

“That’s unheard of!” She gasped and then smiled. “Lasair, we have *three* more grandchildren!”

Lasair didn’t share in the joy. I could see him calculating the chances of all three being accepted by the land.

“That’s another thing,” I said as I read his mind accidentally. “We have to unite the Fae to help us take our babies to the Tree, and Danu will need to draw on all of your powers to bless them and, if they survive, they should begin the healing process for other babies in this world, and also help to heal the damage the Mages and Faolán have done.”

“You have my oath as your father and as the Blood King that we will do whatever is needed to save our grandchildren, and that Faolán is forever banned from my Kingdom.”

“There’s one more thing I need to ask you about,” I said softly.

“Yes?” Lasair asked.

“Cailean, why does he still protect me?” I asked wanting to know exactly what part this man had played in my life.

“Cailean was part of Faolán’s guard before he brought you to us; however he has not been seen since you left the Blood Kingdom so he was not able to be reassigned. If he has been protecting you, you will have to ask him. What I can tell you is that he is devoted to you; that much was apparent when he brought you back to us, and he is the type of man who’d willingly lay down his life to protect those he chooses to guard.”

“He almost did; he was there fighting for me when Faolán and the Mages tried cutting me open to take my babies. I want him; I want him to protect my children as fiercely as he fought for me. He should be rewarded for what he has done and I’d like your permission to give it to him.”

“You really are a Queen,” Madisyn said softly. “He is yours; may he protect your children as fiercely as he protected my daughter.”

The knock sounded again and this time the door opened and Ristan stuck his head inside. “It’s time for the Blood King and Queen to take their places, so we can begin the proceedings.”

“Thank you, Ristan,” I said as I smiled at my parents. Danu may be my actual mother, but Madisyn had grieved for my loss and had done what only a true mother could have. She sacrificed me for the greater good, and she’d taken my loss to heart. She loved me, and I could feel it.

## Chapter Fourteen

Ryder had taken his Horde King form and was seated on his throne as the assembly watched him. It was as if they looked for a sign of weakness, which was common with the Fae, but it upset me that we had deal with treachery on a daily basis from his own people.

Like Claire.

She was seated in the front as if she was a guest of honor. I watched, cloaked in invisibility glamour, as she smiled seductively at Ryder. The woman had absolutely no brains. If I'd faced the Horde King after trying to kill his offspring, I'd be suspicious of why he'd invited me to the presentation of his children.

Not her; she wore a bright red dress which barely contained her breasts, and was smiling at Ryder, who was ignoring her. The old adage of wearing a red dress to a funeral popped into my mind and I wondered if she thought that she could just sex Ryder up and he would forget about what she had done. Zahruk was at Ryder's side, as was custom as Ryder's second-in-command, and the crowd was growing restless as they waited to see what was going to happen.

I looked around the crowd from my vantage point, and spotted the Dark King and Queen, along with Adam and his brothers and sister, all seated in the front row, right beside my own family. The Light King and Queen were seated on the other side, with some of their own offspring in attendance as well. Ciara was beside them, with a few of Ryder's own family, including his mother, who was mentally unaware of what was going on. I was planning on getting through to her, and had asked Ryder to bring her out of the pavilion for this. She needed to see us, and it was time she came back from where she was hidden inside her mind. She'd been seated at the far end of the aisle, in case something set her off; so that Aodhan could easily get her out if he needed to.

Alannah, Ristan's mother, had come as well. I figured she was here for the show, and while Ryder didn't really trust her, I knew Ristan would stop her if she tried anything. She had wanted revenge on Alazander in the worst way for too many years and, to me, had seemed content with his demise and appeared to understand that Ryder was not the monster that his father had been; he was his own man, and a better one at that. He fought *for* his people,



not against them.

The babies would be presented to the world soon enough, and I feared it. They were so tiny and defenseless. These were creatures that would use them for gain, and an example would have to be made. It was a slippery slope we were climbing right now as the Fae tended to prize ambition and ‘stacking the deck in their favor,’ however the actions of a few went beyond ambition and we would have to show them that any attempts to harm our children would be punishable by death.

I watched as Ryder stood and called Claire to the throne. She smiled and swayed her hips seductively.

“Claire, you were a part in actions that have led me to believe you would do anything to have what you want. What do you have to say for yourself?” Ryder’s voice echoed through the entire hall.

I’d thought her treachery was just for me, but it went beyond it to my children. She wasn’t just insane, she was delusional. While I had been with Danu, Claire had been treated to one of Ryder’s little nap sessions and would never remember the interrogation she had gone through with Ryder and Zahruk. Just as Ryder had done not too long ago with me, he and Zahruk had gone rummaging around in her mind so she was fully unaware that her dreams and plans of treachery had been ferreted out and documented. She now held no secrets, and she had no clue of it.

“I’m a woman who desires you, yes, my King,” she said saucily. I could only see her back, but even I could tell from the smacking of her lips that she was laying the lust on thick.

“Is that all?” Ryder asked with his body held stiffly, unmoved by her declaration.

“I’ve served you well, many times, and plan to do so now that the Blood Princess is no longer in attendance to serve my liege’s many needs. I’ll even watch over your children and love them as my own,” Claire continued.

“Is that so?” Ryder asked coldly.

“I’d do anything for you, and anything to have you. I have never hidden my desire for you, and I’ve done everything to please you,” she went down to one knee. “My sister failed to draw your lust, but I’ve had it many times. I can give you what you need and crave unlike Abiageal,” she said with full confidence. “And unlike the Blood Princess who fought you and thought to betray you. I would never turn you from my bed, Sire.”

I'd never betrayed him. Kept shit from him and omitted the truth out of fear of him wanting me for power, sure. That I was guilty of, but it hadn't been a betrayal.

"What part did you play in the treachery that occurred in my castle?" he asked and I watched as her spine stiffened and she grew nervous.

"I...I don't wish to speak of it, for I know I overstepped in my ambitions, but the end result is as I wished it, Sire. I have you and I hear you have obtained your children."

"Was it your intention for me to find them at all? Or were they supposed to die with their mother?" he continued and even I could see the anger burning in his eyes from my vantage point.

"Ryder—"

"I am your *King*, Claire. You do not address me as anything but my rightful title as the Horde King," he sneered.

"My King, I only wished for her to go away and didn't care how it happened," she said in a soft voice, as if she was hoping he'd understand.

"You gave her to the enemy while she was heavily pregnant with my children, and you hoped that by doing so, they all would perish and that in my grief I'd come to you to feed."

"She's gone. I see no reason to speak of this now," she responded defensively.

I smiled and started down the aisle, shedding my glamour as I went. I heard the inner thoughts of her as I did so, wondering if this was one of the gifts Danu had mentioned I'd be plagued with. To me, it was a valuable asset; I just needed to figure out how to turn it on and not just have random thoughts coming to me out of nowhere.

*"Why does he even care? I gave his bitch away to be killed, and her brats should have died too! They promised me they'd all die. That I would have the King in his grief, even Dyson said he'd be forced to feed and I was the only one left who he would take from the pavilion. I'd kill his whore myself if the bitch was here!"* Claire was talking shit in her head when I approached her. She'd planned the murder of me *and* my children in hopes that she could replace me and give him more babies.

"Here's your chance," I said as I stood behind her. "Make a move, Claire. Please," I growled and watched as she spun around, white as a ghost.

"You're dead! They promised me you wouldn't live through it!" she

whispered shakily.

“They lied because they *could*. You, on the other hand are guilty of trying to kill an Heir and her unborn children,” I seethed the words out but kept my anger in check. I knew she could feel the hum of my power, as it was much like Ryder’s, and I could see her hair starting to rise with static from the magnitude of it.

“I...I...Ryder, please,” she spun around and fell to her knees at his feet. “I just wanted to be with you! You must understand that I did it for us, so we could finally be together!”

“I don’t think Synthia agrees, and your actions will not go unpunished. Treachery is punishable by years of the Traitor’s Punishment. Your smooth skin should make beautiful parchment,” he rumbled harshly.

I felt my own skin crawl as I remembered signing the skin parchment at Ryder’s club after he’d dragged me there to force my hand into signing his contract. It meant she’d be locked up, and skinned until he decided to release her.

“No, please, I’ll serve you! I’ll do anything for you!” she cried.

“Have some dignity, Claire,” I said as I stepped around her crumpled form to stand beside Ryder.

“Claire, I sentence you to the Traitor’s Punishment for the next ten thousand...”

“No,” I stopped Ryder and reached for his hand. “No,” I repeated louder and watched as light flickered in Claire’s eyes and she drew herself up to stand in front of us. Hatred shone from within her, and I could still hear her inner thoughts.

She thought me weak and too tenderhearted to allow her harm. Boy was she wrong.

“Then what shall my punishment be, Blood Princess,” she hissed angrily, not even bothering to hide her smug smile.

“Death,” I smiled coldly. “You committed treason against my King. That alone I could overlook and award you the punishment my King has chosen for you. However, you tried to kill my children, innocent babies who had done you no harm. For that you will die,” I spoke loudly so those in the assembly could hear.

“No!” Cornelius screamed as he sputtered to his daughter. “You have no proof!”

“On the contrary; we have enough proof to kill both of you if Synthia so wishes it,” Ryder growled and moved closer to me. “We know your daughter was under your instructions to kill Synthia, and you sent the Skin Walker, Dyson, to your daughter. He committed crimes against the Horde Kingdom in the belief that his sister would be returned, but Faolán’s already killed her. You knew that; you told Claire as much. You were working with your daughter to secure her place by my side and on the Queen’s throne. You are the one who promised her that she’d be my second choice, and why? I never led you to believe I was interested in your daughter, not beyond the need for sustenance.”

“You have no right!” Cornelius screamed as spittle left his mouth.

“I am your King! I have every right. Danu granted me the right when she chose me as Heir to the Horde. You, Cornelius, are guilty of high treason and I sentence you to the Traitor’s Punishment to begin tonight. You will be stripped of your lands, which shall be granted to your daughter Abiageal,” Ryder’s voice boomed out loudly, the hair on my neck stood up as he dished out the sentencing. “I concur with my consort’s recommendation and your daughter Claire, as foolish as she is for following, will pay for it with her life, here and now. I will not tolerate treachery from my own people, nor will we tolerate any attempt on our children’s lives. Claire, you are sentence to die by my blade,” he said as he pulled out a sword and looked to me for my agreement.

I stepped back and nodded as he stepped closer.

“You should have been satisfied with the life my men offered you. By your own deeds, you forfeited your life; may the Goddess forgive you,” he said and looked at me.

*Highly doubtful!*

He swung in a wide arch, and I refused to flinch as her head was severed from her shoulders.

“Bring forth Cailean,” Ryder growled as some of the lower guards moved to remove the body of the selfish Fae who’d sealed her own fate. Zahruk made a quick motion of his hand and every trace of blood disappeared. I felt like a horrible person, because I felt relief that she was dead, and could no longer do harm to those I loved.

Cornelius didn’t pause to grieve for the daughter he’d lost, instead he shouted orders to his men who only stood by and watched his feeble attempt

to start a riot. I watched him as he continued to froth at the mouth as his only daughter watched him with anger burning in her eyes. Tears had slipped from her eyes as she mourned her sister. Another group of the lower guards pushed through and took a screaming and struggling Cornelius away to his punishment.

“Abiageal,” I whispered but it was enough to force her eyes from her bitter father’s form. “These are not your sins, nor will we judge you for them. You will join us in a treaty, and I’d like it if you stayed here with the protection of the Horde for a few weeks.”

“My lady,” she mouthed. “I have wronged you, because my family has,” she said as her shoulders slumped. “I should be thrown to the far corners of Faery and our lands should be given to the crown.”

“No; the deeds of the father are not that of the child. Alazander was a bastard, and yet his son is just. Your father misled your sister and walked her down a very dark path and she chose to walk beside him. You did not. You were innocent of these crimes and you shall retain your father’s holdings. You will make a great ruler of his lands. One I am counting on to help us when the time comes.”

I hadn’t realized that everyone was silent, watching me as I spoke to Abiageal. Others had moved away from her as if I’d been ready to accuse her of a crime. By the time I turned back to Ryder, Cailean was there watching me with a guarded look in his eyes.

“Cailean, you’ve been following me. I’d like to know why,” I said as I stood tall and watched him for any sign that something was off.

“I know Faolán and what he is capable of. I have tried to protect you as should be expected of those that guard the royal family. Although I was part of his guard, my primary duty is to the family. You know I shielded you when he found your guardians, and I have been trying to protect you from him for years. I could do nothing when you were given to the Horde King, but I *could* follow you to make sure you were safe. I was with you when you were in Faery as well, on the last outing. I was following you, of that I am guilty, Princess.”

“Why were you in the woods?” I asked, intrigued to know that he’d been like my own guardian angel.

“Faolán had sent many Mages to track and intercept you. Despite all of your precautions, I fear you still underestimate him,” he said and I stiffened

as Ryder growled.

“I mean no disrespect, Horde King, only that I was afraid it would cost Sorcha—Synthia, her life. I meant to keep watch and only intervene if needed. I chose to protect her and appointed myself as her guardian,” he said solemnly.

“And would you die for me?” I asked him as I stepped down onto the floor at eye level with him.

“Yes,” he said without hesitation.

“And would you kill Faolán to protect me and my children?”

“Yes,” he repeated.

“Good,” I said. “As is my right, I choose you for guardian of my children,” I said and smiled.

“My Princess,” he whispered. “I’m honored.”

“Oh I wouldn’t be honored yet,” I said as I wrinkled my nose.

“It’s an honor to protect your children,” he said. “I’ll not let either of them out of my sight.”

“Three of them,” I said with a huge smile as the entire assembly started talking excitedly at once.

## Chapter Fifteen

I was seated with Ryder at my side as the babies were brought down the aisle, each wrapped in silk blankets of the same black as the men who carried them wore. It was almost comical for the Elite Guard to be carrying something so tiny and yet so precious to their hearts.

Ristan carried my daughter. Sinjinn carried the dark haired boy, and Dristan carried the blonde haired boy. The entire assembly watched in awe as the first set of triplets in Fae history were brought out and presented to us. I'd been warned about what was coming, and it was tradition, but my heart still leapt to my throat.

In true Fae tradition, the children would be presented to the father, and if he so chose, he'd accept them. This was why Tatiana had hidden her daughter, because the child wasn't Dresden's. She'd known he would throw the child out to the elements. I knew her fear, but I also knew Ryder would never reject our precious children. Tatiana didn't have that reassurance.

I watched as my hulking beast kissed the top of his daughters platinum curls, and then her cheek, which he followed by doing the same to her brothers. When he'd accepted them, he took his seat and one by one, they were handed to us.

I wasn't sure how Ryder had brought this many Fae here on such short notice, nor did I know if he told them they were coming for an heir's death, explaining a shift in power, or administering punishment of traitors to the presentation of newborns and potential heirs. The man was good at this; whatever he told them, and the way he'd reached for our daughter when Ristan had tried to move towards me had sent warmth through me that filled my heart.

She'd already tamed the wild beast with only looking into his golden eyes with a matching pair. I held the boys, who had done the same to me, and I watched with wonder as they lifted their hands to touch the multi-colored brands that pulsed on my arms.

They were alert and active, unlike their sister who was content to just wrinkle her brow line as she watched her father's every move. I listened as Ristan called off the news of the triplets, and the assembly stood as they moved to form a reception line.

Apprehension filled me as they moved toward us. I wasn't ready for them

to be close to my children, and my power emitted from my entire body as I grew worried. It didn't go unnoticed by those closest to us, but it was Ryder who calmed me.

*"You have my best soldiers surrounding us, ready to kill to protect them. You have your own guard; now calm down. If I can feel your discomfort and powers, so too can everyone else in this room."* His mental voice rumbled reassuringly across my mind.

I turned to look at him and smiled softly, replying the same way. *"Easier said than done; I have no idea how to stop it,"* I warned. I felt Danu's presence, and then her hand as she touched my shoulder.

*"Breathe daughter, before you give everything away,"* Danu said, and I knew I alone could see her.

One by one, the members of the Castes came forward to bless our children and then returned to their seats. It wasn't until Madisyn reached us that I smiled and relaxed a bit. She had tears in her eyes as she touched the babes, and then stood before Ryder. I had been informed beforehand that customarily during this ceremony, she as my mother could hold them, but she only moved to my daughter and touched her hair.

"She's so beautiful, and these boys, so active for being born early," she whispered and kissed each babe's head before she touched my cheek. Lasair stood behind her, watching me. I smiled at him and about fell off my chair when he smiled back. His eyes filled with pride, and then he shouted.

"My daughter birthed triplets! Long live the Horde King and soon to be Queen!" I jumped as his voice boomed through the room, and then smiled at his out of character reaction to my children. He was proud of me, and it felt foreign. I'd only known one father figure, and that had been Alden, since I'd been too young to really know my adopted father.

"Long live the King and Queen!" someone else shouted and then a chorus of it sang out through the room.

Ryder's hand caressed mine and I looked over at him. "You're going to have marry me now, Pet," he smiled roguishly. "The people have decreed it."

"The people have decreed it?" I lifted a blonde brow and smiled.

"They have," he assured me.

"I told you my answer, for now," I whispered and narrowed my eyes on him.

"We'll just have to see about that, for I plan to change your mind," he



growled and Lasair hooted as Madisyn smiled.

“I love weddings, especially royal ones,” she said, not bothering to hide her wide grin.

“I’ll let you know when he actually asks me and I accept,” I said.

Adam was behind them with his family. He smiled, and I smiled back. Our familiar bond had been broken, but our bond formed of love and loss would never be touched. He stepped up and placed his hand on my cheek and I smiled.

“You are so going to have your hands full,” he said softly.

“So is Uncle Adam,” I teased.

“Is that so?” Adrian’s voice sounded from not far behind Adam. I smiled and turned to look for him.

Vlad was with him; both smiled knowingly and, as Adam moved back to his seat, they stepped up.

“Pretty girl went and gave birth to another pretty girl,” Vlad said with a wink. “Go figure.”

“She’s as gorgeous as her mother is,” Adrian said as he looked down at my daughter.

“Is she now?” I asked as I looking lovingly at my daughter. “Good thing she’s got two brothers to protect her then.”

Adrian laughed, but Ryder wasn’t.

“Keep your hands off my *wife* and my *daughter*, kid,” he growled, but as I turned to glare at him, it was to find him smiling with his eyes, which Adrian couldn’t see.

“Hey, I won’t touch your wife, because I don’t see one here,” Adrian teased. “But this little beauty? I can wait for her to get old enough to date.”

“The hell you say,” I sputtered. “You cannot date my daughter!” That was just wrong on so many levels that I couldn’t even begin to count them.

“And how about me?” Vlad asked. “Oh, not the baby; but I did tell you to go Vamp before you went Fairy, or after. You know, for comparison’s sake.” I smiled as his silver eyes took in my sons. “Who knew the beast planted an entire litter of little beasties in that belly?” he asked and turned to Ryder with a gentle nod.

“Indeed,” Ryder growled proudly.

I smiled at him before Vlad bent down to kiss my cheek. “We will be staying for a few days, and now that you’re not pregnant, I owe you a stiff...

drink,” he whispered before he turned and bowed at his waist to the King.

Hundreds paid respect to Ryder and the babes. I could hear Ryder speaking to each one, asking them for their support when the time came to gather at the rowan Tree and many pledged to return and bring more support with them when the call went out to gather at the Tree.

Many of the women that came through the receiving line added subtle hints of his prowess in the bedroom, and his virility. It was downright embarrassing the way they behaved. As if they thought he’d give them the same boon, and they’d pop out triplets as well.

“Synthia,” Ryder whispered as his hand slipped over my smaller one and his fingers trailed softly, warmly over mine. “It’s time for the babies to go to the nursery to be fed,” he continued when I stared at where his fingers absently stroked mine.

The babies were taken by his men and soon after that the assembly of Fae gathered in the room where a sizable feast would be held in the honor for the birth of the new babes—or possible Heirs, as Danu had pointed out to me earlier.

I didn’t want to be away from my babies, but it was imperative that we win the Fae over, and that they all come with us for the blessing of the infants when it was time. We stood as one and moved through one of the small antechambers, before making our way to the head of the table where we both sat and gave praise to those who came by and offered gifts for our babes like it was some sort of Fae version of a baby shower—just without the games.

It took less than an hour of being polite and smiling until my face hurt, before Ryder pulled me to my feet and smiled wickedly at me. He bid the guests goodnight, but as I opened my mouth to tell him that I’d like to see the babies, he stopped me with one finger gently pressed against my lips.

“They’re fine. My men have secured the room, and your ladies and my sister tend to them and their every need. I have plans for you tonight, ones that won’t be waylaid. Tonight, you’re mine.”

“Is that so?” I whispered before I kissed his fingers still held to my lips.

“Come with me, Pet, and I promise to make you shiver,” he said silkily, as his eyes flashed from amber fire to obsidian.

## Chapter Sixteen

Ryder had changed back to his Fae form, and he'd dressed down for whatever it was that he'd planned for me here. He sifted us to a forest, and it was beautiful. The huge wild oak trees shared limbs, as if it was one tree that filled the entire forest. Moss covered the forest floor, and I could feel its softness through the sandals I wore. He didn't allow me to take the beauty of it in for more than a few second before he glamoured a length of powder blue silk and let it slip from his fingers.

"No peeking, Synthia," he said lightly, his tone layered in lust.

"Bondage?" I joked, but he didn't smile. Instead his heated gaze met and held mine and melted my bones.

I swallowed and stepped forward, closer to him. "Kiss me first, Fairy, and I'll do anything you want me to."

"Remember those words," he replied.

"I remember everything I've ever said to you, and everything you've said to me," I answered him and lifted my mouth to his as my hands caressed the hard muscles of his chest. His mouth lowered to mine, and I closed my eyes as the heat of his mouth swept away everything from my mind.

His mouth was hungry and demanding at first as his tongue pushed past the seal of my lips and met, warring with mine. I gasped hungrily as my body responded to his touch instantly, as if his tongue was pressing some magical button that turned every part of me on.

His hands captured and cupped my face as if he was afraid I'd escape his kiss. That wasn't likely. I was right where I wanted to be; with him. His hand that held the silk left my face, and then I felt it as it covered my eyes, and then was tightened behind my head.

His teeth captured the plumpness of my bottom lip and bit softly until I cried out as pain lingered with pleasure. "I planned to bring you here a month ago, but then the Mages grew bolder, and I couldn't chance the babes or you being hurt by them," he said softly as he turned me around in his arms until my back was pressed against his chest, and my ass against his hard erection. "Do you trust me, Pet?"

"Yes," I said without hesitation.

"Good," he growled as he trailed his fingers down the inside of my arms, creating a whirlwind of sensations that made my nipples harden with need.

I'd felt the world change beneath my sandals. Gone was the soft moss and in its place was rougher terrain that crunched beneath my feet, along with warm winds that sent my hair flying. My heart pounded, and I smiled as I knew it was only because I thought it's what it should do and not really because it was beating that hard.

I wasn't ready when Ryder removed the blindfold, and beautiful ruins were revealed. I gasped in delight as I took in the thousands of candles which were lit around them. An entire rock face stood before us, with huge rock pillars that went into the earth.

"Wow," I said in a breathless whisper.

"This place was built by the ancient race of these lands. The ones Danu first created. Now all that is left is where they came to worship their mates."

"Danu made another race before the Fae?" I asked curiously.

He grunted. "Bilé and Danu made them together, but he created a rift in them that ripped them apart, because he thought they should be made in his image, but the scrolls say she was torn by them and unhappy with the outcome, so much so that she left Bilé soon after they'd created them, and then one by one, she destroyed the entire race. Centuries would pass before she would try again, and that's when she made our race."

I could feel the power radiating from inside the gigantic earthen dwelling. There were huge horned statues, which I could have sworn moved as I watched them. They looked like gargoyles, only more dangerous with their long talons and needle teeth.

"They are dead," he said as if he was reading my mind.

I continued to peer up into the pieces of history Dristan and Ristan had seemed to have left out of our lessons, or hadn't gotten to yet. Around us was night, dark and eerie, but thousands of candles lit up the area so that it looked like day, but only if you stayed close to the stones.

I moved closer without thinking, my hands itched to touch the history of the place. I paused at a massive staircase, and then turned to find Ryder gazing at me impishly.

"You coming?" I asked as I planted my hands on my hips.

"I didn't say it was safe, yet," he added the last word wickedly.

"Did I ask?" I smiled as he sifted to me and took my extended hand.

"You never do, always going off on your own and getting in trouble," he whispered as he waved the hand I wasn't holding, and the wide doors moved

apart.

“Oh, wow,” I whispered excitedly.

Inside were balloons, filled with what looked to be fireflies, but I knew it wasn't. Tiny fairies lit the balloons as they danced in them. I smiled and tossed a curious look to Ryder. “You put Fairies in them all?”

“They offered when Ristan told them I planned to seduce you,” he replied casually.

“Is that so?”

“Fairies like to entertain,” he started to explain.

“I meant the seducing part,” I replied impishly.

“You doubted it?” he grinned widely, his perfect teeth catching the light from one of the Fairies giving them a feral look.

I stepped closer and watched as the balloons bounced and spun as the show continued. Eventually Ryder moved us forward, and thanked them in the language of the Horde for the entertainment. I could hear them now, laughing and cheering on the King as he escorted me further into the ruins.

I wasn't sure ruins were the right word to call the place, as it was truly beautiful even if it had been abandoned. When we reached the end of the long hallway, a door presented itself, and I lifted my hand instinctively and allowed my fingers to trail over the etched dragons that covered both sides of it. In the center sat a moon, and above it a sun. It was crafted of antique wood, sculpted by a master of his trade, judging by the details.

“As I child I came here, intrigued by the history of the race the Goddess had wiped out. This door would keep me entranced for days on end; each detail was woven into the wood masterfully. As if the carver had become enamored with the wood and caressed it as he would his lover with each stroke.”

He flicked his wrist and the beautiful doors opened for him. I smiled as we walked into an expansive, beautiful room that looked like the baths similar to what the Romans or Greeks once used, possibly something Danu could have used herself.

Inside, lanterns had been lit and floated in the air. There were squares of tranquil pools of water that called to me. More etchings of dragons covered the walls, and I turned to look at Ryder's chest; his brands looked exactly as these ones inside the room did.

“Your brands,” I whispered.

“The same as these dragons,” he smiled. “I loved them as a young child, and would come here just to gaze upon them. When I inherited the heir brands, the dragons formed. To me it’s a reminder of this place and what could happen if we stray from her designs for the world. I’d often wondered if Danu hadn’t placed them on me as a warning to right the wrongs of my father. As time passed, I changed, and eventually my brothers and I started to right the wrongs, and then the Mages came, and now we fight for survival much like these beings did.”

“Can we swim here?” I asked, itching to sink beneath the inviting water’s surface.

“No, the waters are poisonous,” he smiled.

“Seriously?” I asked feeling my disappointment rise.

“These ones are; the beings were ripe with treachery against one another,” he explained. “They were pitted against each other, and history says Danu started it, unwilling to do the job herself. She set them on one another to kill each other. The Queen poisoned the waters, and then sacrificed her handmaidens in their depths. If you look,” he said as he held me as if he was afraid I’d fall in. “You can see their corpses at the bottom.”

I could see one, and she was whole, as if she only slept in the depths. “Creepy.” Some men took women to the movies or wined and dined them, but my beast took me to see dead things, and ruins that he’d loved as a child...he was seriously lacking in the seduction part right now, but I was actually pleased that he’d brought me here, even if it was creepy as all get-out.

“Come,” he whispered as he pulled me to yet another door. This one had stairs leading down into the pits of the ruins. As we walked further down, the wall gave way and you could see what looked like a huge aquarium.

Inside the wall of water were more ruins. Huge pillars stood, some broken but all were damaged, and in the far distance, I could just make out what looked like a Roman coliseum.

“Holy crap,” I said as I moved to the wall and slid my hand through it.

My hand became fully engulfed in the water, and I smiled as I pulled it back out. “It’s not poisoned too, right?”

“No; if it was, I wouldn’t have let you stick your hand in it. You can’t go inside; I’ve tried on many occasions. It’s quite painful when you try to place your head inside.”

“That sucks,” I said eyeing it and wondering if it was worth a try.

“There’s more to see, and I grow impatient of this eternal hard on,” he growled against my ear when I remained at the water wall.

I laughed and turned to look at him. He took my hand and held it against his cock, which was very hard and throbbing. “Pervert, just can’t take you anywhere,” I mocked him, complaining playfully.

“Come.”

We entered another room and I paused; the floor was sand, and someone had taken a very long time to draw the same dragons in it. In the middle was a larger dragon, and beside him a much smaller one. In front of them were three very small dragons.

Tears filled my eyes as I lifted them to him. “You did this,” I whispered breathlessly.

“Yes,” he smiled. I watched as he lowered his hulking frame to the floor and took my hand. “I’m asking you this, not because I almost lost you, but because I know now that I need you. You’re my air, Synthia Raine McKenna, the mother to my children and my entire world. I know now that I’ve always wanted you, and while I went through deceitful ways to obtain you, we now know that this was our destiny all along. I love you, and I don’t want to live without you. So, Pet. Will you marry the beast?”

“Marry the beast?” I laughed but the moment his smirk faltered I stopped. This was Ryder, Horde King to the entire Fae world, and he was on bended knee, asking me to marry him.

He started to rise and I sank to the ground before him. He paused as he watched me, and I could see fear in his eyes, fear that I’d say no yet again. “If I fall, will you promise to pick me up and always put the pieces back together?”

“Yes,” he said.

A single tear slid from my eye as I continued. “And when I’m stubborn, and refuse to bend to your will, will you always use a gentle hand to bend me back into place?”

“Always,” he continued.

“And will you always promise to love our children, and always be the beast I have fallen so utterly and hopelessly in love with?”

“I promise,” he whispered as he lowered his mouth to kiss my forehead, which seared its print into my soul for all times.

“You didn’t wait very long before asking me again, Ryder,” I whispered.

“I never wait when there is something I want as much as this; as much as I want you.”

“I’ll marry you,” I replied and claimed his lips.

He pulled away and spoke softly. “I really had been planning to ask you to be my Queen for some time; it just didn’t seem right to rush this thing between us after I broke off the engagement to Abiageal. Do you know that the men brought me hundreds of rings, but I didn’t think any of them suited you? I needed something as beautiful as the woman who would wear it. I decided that I couldn’t give you just any ring, it had to fit you and had to be created from something that we both shared.”

I watched as he walked over to a wild vine growing against the wall that had beautiful electric blue flowers growing on it and plucked a thin tendril from the vine and began to fashion it into a band. He then plucked a single blue flower from the vine and set it on the band. Next he moved his fingers and the flower and vine turned into gold, which he continued to bend until it was fashioned as a ring. The way his eyes turned to fire and his lips tipped up in the corners told me this wasn’t his first attempt. When he’d finished with the ring, he pulled droplets of water from the pool and as I watched them, lost in his hypnotic magical show, they turned into a large round diamond before my eyes that he dropped into the center of the flower. Several smaller droplets appeared and he placed the smaller ones around the band, until it was the most exquisite thing I’d ever seen.

“As I said; I wanted something as beautiful as my bride,” he whispered and slid the band onto my finger.

“It’s perfect, Ryder,” I whispered. I looked up at him with tears in my eyes.

“Good, now come on. I don’t plan to fuck you in the sand,” he replied wickedly as he dragged me behind him.

I laughed as I ran to keep up with him. We rounded a corner, and I paused in shock. There in the middle of an opening with stars high above us in the sky was an abandoned stone room, with steps that led up to where a huge bed was placed on a dais. Around it were even more candles; the steps had candles embedded in them as well, which created a lit path to where the bed was waiting invitingly. Four huge pillars looked as if they held the sky up, and around them was silk of the same color of blue like the one Ryder had



used to blindfold me.

“You did all of this for me just to get me to say yes?” I asked.

“No, I did all of this for you. I’m seducing you, Synthia,” he smiled wickedly. “And I plan to make love to you the first time, and then I plan to fuck you hard.”

## Chapter Seventeen

I was led up the stairs until I stood before the satin draped bed that was covered in pillows. Like most beds associated with Ryder, it was huge. As I approached the bed, rose petals rained down from the sky. I smiled as I brought my hand out to catch one, and then lifted it to my nose to inhale the fragrance deeply.

I turned to Ryder who watched me silently. His hands shook slightly, as if he was nervous. “Did Ristan plan this?” I asked, knowing he’d helped Ryder plan most of his romantic escapades, but this one felt different. It felt real, as if he’d done it all himself.

“That depends,” he whispered throatily as he watched me through hooded eyes.

“On?” I continued.

“Do you like it?”

“No,” I shook my head and somehow managed to hide the smile.

“Oh,” he said as he deflated a bit.

“I love it,” I smirked.

“Naughty girl,” he growled and shook his head. “This one is all me,” he admitted. “I could have followed what Ristan suggested, but I wanted this one to be ours. No one else knows exactly what I planned for you, and no one helped. Fuck,” he sighed. “I’m no good at this wooing shit.”

“Actually, this is better than anything the Demon could have planned. The others, they lacked your touch and so they meant less, but this,” I said as I took another look around the area. “This is you, and that means more than flowers and chocolate. I don’t need romance, but it’s nice. I wanted your love, but only because I loved you so much that it hurt to feel it without thinking it could be returned.”

“You’re a one of a kind jewel, Synthia Raine,” he said as he sifted to the bed and reclined on it. He placed his arms behind his head and watched me languidly. “Will you strip for me?”

“No glamouring off my clothes?” I asked. I was so used to him controlling everything, including how quickly my clothes melted off, that I was almost shocked that he was asking.

“No magic, not tonight. I’ve never taken anything slowly, but I plan to savor you tonight. I plan to make love to the woman who captured my heart,”

he rumbled.

“Stole it,” I smirked as I pushed my hair from my shoulders to show him everything. My hair was thicker now, and longer than it had ever been. I slowly reached up to remove the first layer of my dress. The Goddess dress was wispy, but the layers had ensured that it covered the parts it had needed to.

I pulled the top off and smiled as he exhaled a shaky breath as my stomach was exposed for his viewing pleasure. I smiled shyly, enjoying the fluttering of butterflies in my stomach that came with being with Ryder, as if every time with him was my first.

“Stop thinking,” he said with a wicked smile filling his mouth.

“You’re overdressed yourself, Fairy,” I whispered with lust thick in my tone.

“That’s an easy fix, Pet,” he whispered and glamoured off his own clothing, breaking his own rule.

I removed the top of the dress completely, and watched as his eyes lowered to the rosy tips of my nipples which grew taut in the subtle wind as rose petals continued to fall on us. I brought my hands up to rub the sensitive tips as his eyes greedily watched the slow, sensual motion they made.

Gone was the hypersensitivity from pregnancy, and in its place was the sensation of his eyes consuming them without a touch.

“Pinch them,” he urged, and I followed his command and pinched each with my fingers.

His hands refused to move from where they rested behind his head, and I knew he held them there to resist the urge to touch me. I brought my hands away from my breasts and undid the bow that held the dress together, exposing his greedy gaze to the silk panties.

“Come to me,” he said and I did, slowly taking my time to reach his hungry mouth, which I longed to kiss.

I was almost to it when he sat up and pushed me down on the bed. His eyes were liquid gold as he slowly parted my legs and growled at the sheerness of my panties. “You’re wet,” he acknowledged, and I smiled.

“You have that effect on me,” I admitted.

“Good, ‘cause this is mine now, forever. This is mine to savor,” he said as he rubbed his knuckles roughly over the sensitive nub. “Anytime, anywhere, any place I want it,” he continued and watched as I lifted my hips and

allowed my legs to drop at the knees for him.

“Yes,” I whispered.

“I love the taste of you in my mouth, the exquisiteness of you on my tongue while I stroke you and caress you from the inside,” he continued as he lowered his mouth and blew hot air across my core. “Ever since I took the first taste of you, I’ve been unable to stop craving it. When you walk into a room, my tongue wants to seek this sweet haven out, my nose searches for the sweet scent of your arousal. My senses seek your readiness, and my balls grow tight with the need to release their pent up tension between your sweet lips, or deep in this sweet pussy.”

Yeah, there he was: my Ryder. The sweet, dirty talking Fairy that could make my mind go blank with his dirty mouth.

He removed his mouth and lifted one of my legs, his fingers deftly working the ties of the sandal as he kissed my inner thigh. His other hand trailed softly down until he pushed at my opening through the fabric of the panties.

“Soaking wet already, Pet,” he growled right before his teeth nipped at my flesh and then kissed it. He did the same with the other leg, kissing and nipping as he released my foot from the sandal.

When he had removed both, he tossed them aside and raised his eyes to the petals that still rained down on us. One moment they’d been lightly raining down on us, and the next they stopped in midair. The bed was covered with them, we were covered in them.

He moved up until he sat beside me, his hands moving to remove the panties and expose my wetness to his gaze. His fingers stroked over it, slowly, until his forefinger found the nub, which he stroked continuously for a few moments before he lowered his head and stroked it roughly with his tongue.

“Fucking delicious,” he whispered huskily before he pushed a single finger deep inside of me. “I’m thinking one time of making love and one time of fucking you won’t be enough, not tonight.”

“Ryder,” I whispered, worried about our babies.

“Give me tonight,” he said calmly. “Tomorrow we can be with them, but tonight is ours. I have my brothers and your handmaidens protecting them; nothing will get to those babies. I am sure Danu is with them as well; not visibly, but there still.”

He withdrew the finger, and replaced it with his thick thumb. He pushed it inside, only to pull it back out. His mouth kissed my stomach, and then moved up to capture one nipple between his teeth. He growled, sending a new wave of heat rushing through me. He released the hold his teeth had held, and used his tongue to caress it. When he finished with it, he moved on to do the same to the other one.

His thumb moved inside of me, using the juices he was creating to move faster. I watched his dark head as he continued to suck on my nipples and slowly kiss his way to my mouth. When he reached my mouth, he removed his thumb and moved over me.

He kissed me deeply, slowly, until I thought I would drown from lack of oxygen. He took my air away on purpose, and I didn't care this time, because he fed it back to me seductively, as he had once before. He captured my face and held it between his hands as he kissed me, almost as if his survival depended on it.

When he pulled away, I cried out from the loss of his mouth against mine, from the loss of his lips melting together with mine. He sat between my legs, his cock poised at my entrance, but he didn't enter me, instead he slowly rubbed the tip of his cock against the sleekness of juices he'd created.

"This pussy needs to be fucked," he said.

"Yes, like now," I encouraged him.

"Patience," he urged.

"Ryder..." I tried to put the need I felt in my tone, but it came out as a benediction.

He pushed inside, but only an inch, and then pulled back out as his eyes watched me. His eyes consumed me with their golden heat as he took in my need, and smiled knowingly in reply.

"This is easier than I thought it would be," he whispered. "I can do slow and easy."

"Mmm," I replied and then gasped as he entered me again. I'd expected inches, instead I got it all. His hands held my legs apart, but then he released them both and leaned over my body until his mouth captured mine.

"I love this," he whispered as he began to move his hips slowly. "Being buried inside of you, hearing the noises you make as I take you. Feeling your body as it welcomes me in and caresses my cock."

He found a pace that mirrored my own, and I wrapped my hands lovingly

around his neck as his mouth claimed mine. The world around us faded away. He kissed, caressed, and continued to slowly fuck me. It wasn't until we both exploded in harmony that he smiled roguishly and sat back on his heels.

“Now that I managed to slowly make you come, I'm going to fuck you.”

“Thank God,” I whispered with a wicked smile as his eye grew round and large.

“You didn't like that?” he asked confused.

“No, I loved it, but I love how you fuck me. Gentleness is nice, Fairy, but I like the leg shivering, hair pulling, sweaty bodied, earth shattering fucking that you always give me,” I said, cocky and taunting him with my core as I spread my legs for his eyes to take in my need.

I felt his magic wash over me as he cleaned us both and then watched as his eyes grew dark and an even darker smile took hold of his mouth. “Thank Gods,” he said finally. “Because I love making you scream, and I love making this sweet flesh sore...”

I grinned, but it was short lived as he pulled me up until I was on my knees in front of him, and then pushed down by my hair as he pushed his cock against my lips. “Be a good girl, and suck,” he growled.

I did as he commanded; taking what he pushed inside, and pulled it back out. His hands released my hair, and he pushed me backward, his hands pulling at my legs as he pushed them apart and then held them open.

“Ready?” he grinned.

“I'm always ready for you, Fairy,” I whispered and then screamed his name as he plunged inside until my body couldn't take anymore of him. He used his Fae speed as he rocked and moved his hips until I exploded, and my ears rang from the sheer pleasure of his assault.

He continued to pound into me, and when I thought I'd come again, he stopped and pulled me up using only my hips as he moved me to my stomach and lifted my ass in the air. I moved my hips invitingly, only to scream out as his hand landed on one cheek punishingly and then moan as his hand massaged the area.

He did that a few times, and each time, I could feel my core growing ready for him. I turned my head, trying to steal a glance at him, but he growled.

“Face forward,” he demanded.

I did, and as I did, I felt him moving my legs, until I was spread fully for

him. It was uncomfortable, and yet I could sense just how exposed I was. I felt his magic as it wafted over my flesh, kissing my cheek where his hand had punished the tissue, and I was unprepared for his entrance as he slid inside of me.

He pushed inside with one swift move, and I cried his name at the sheer volume of him buried deep inside of me. “Good girl,” he growled seductively as I continued to cry his name like a mantra. “Give me your hands,” he urged, and when I did, he pushed my own hands to my ass, and gave a command in a tone that brooked no argument. “Hold yourself apart, and don’t let go.”

I nodded, and then tensed as his thumb pressed against the second opening. “Let go for me, be my good girl, and stop tensing before I have to punish you.”

I gave myself a mental shake and cried out as he pushed inside, his thumb soaked and slick from the juices he’d pilfered from my soaked pussy. His thumb began to move the same moment his cock did, and I felt the heat growing, and unfurling in my belly as I began to shake with the oncoming orgasm.

He moved faster, his free hand pushed against my spine. My hands held me open and fully exposed for his pleasure. His body was sating my hunger, no longer the hunger to sustain life, but a hunger for this man who had mastered and seduced my soul.

“I can feel you growing wetter. I can feel your sweet pussy gripping my cock as it prepares for release. You want to come on my cock, don’t you, Pet?” he growled.

“Yes,” I cried out.

“Good, ‘cause I’m coming with you,” he whispered as he moved even faster, his body hitting mine with inhuman speed as he gave me an earth moving orgasm, and then growled as his own body tensed with his. I almost giggled with the way his brands were still lit up with the power surge that I had been pushing through him every time I had come tonight. Soon, he’d look like a Christmas tree.

“I love you, Fairy,” I said as he lay down beside me on the sweat covered satin sheets.

“I love you too, Witch,” he whispered as he pulled me tightly against his body and claimed my lips. “Sleep, we have a few hours left before the sun rises in Faery, and then we have to pick names for our sweet little ones.”

“Minions of darkness,” I offered.

“Yes, that could have potential,” he replied impishly. “But I’m not sure you should call them that.”

“No, I kinda like the minions of darkness; seriously, I’ve always wanted minions.”

“You can be my minion,” he offered with a self-assured smile on his mouth.

I slapped his arm and felt my heart melt more as his smile filled his mouth and love lit in his eyes. A real smile had replaced his normal cockier one.

“No woman could ever give me what you have,” he said softly. “I’ll spend eternity loving you, Synthia. And tormenting you in my bed, until you admit who your master is,” he finished.

“I have no master,” I whispered sleepily. “I’ll have a husband soon, and the love of my life. No master though,” I continued.

“I guess we’re not done here,” he replied roguishly.



## Chapter Eighteen

I awoke to Ryder's startled jump from the bed, his beast coming to the fore as he shifted form. "Get dressed," he growled, and then looked at the dress I'd worn and its multiple layers. He didn't hesitate, and instead he glamourous us both clothes.

His was a tight t-shirt, and loose fitting jeans. My outfit was a backless tank top, and a pair of kick ass jeans with a large, silver disc belt buckle. I smiled as he pulled me against his frame, but the happiness was short lived as the words slipped from my mind. "Is it the babies?"

"They're fine, but something is wrong in Faery. I can feel it," he explained and then sifted us back the Horde stronghold.

We paused at the nursery door, and then he opened it.

We both stood motionless at what met our eyes. Z was in the corner, rubbing his temples, while the other men sat or lay on the floor making silly noises at the infants that lay swaddled on the fluffy rug surrounded by the horde of men.

"Yes, and your mother—" Dristan stopped midsentence as he looked up at the open door.

"No, Dristan, by all means. Continue," I said as my eyes narrowed on him.

"—Kissed me, and then put me to sleep."

I smiled as heat stole up his cheeks and Ryder glared down at his baby brother.

"Keeping them entertained with stories are we?" Ryder growled as he looked down at the tiny babies. His gruff nature gave way to a smile of pride as he took them in.

"My King!" one of the servants shouted as she ran for Ryder.

I watched as she rushed to him, threw herself at his feet, and wrapped her arms around his legs. She paused in her wails and seemed to finally notice what she had done, and crab walked backwards away from him.

"What is it?" he asked without even asking her name.

"The Tree, it's been iced!" she screamed, which caused one of the boys to start crying.

I watched silently as my heart sank, and Dristan instinctively picked up the baby and began to soothe him. I didn't need to know which tree they

spoke of, because there was only one in Faery that could cause a panic like this. Without the Tree, the land couldn't accept the children even with Danu's blessing. The Fae children who survived to Transition had both Danu's blessing and the acceptance of Faery. Without both, the children stood a higher chance of becoming sick and dying, specifically iron sick as that was what the land had originally been poisoned with. It was a slow and awful death for the children that couldn't combat it.

"Iced, how?" Ryder growled as I watched his hands ball into fist.

"The guard just said iced, my King. He's waiting for you in the throne room."

I watched the determination play upon Ryder's features as his eyes took in the sight of his Elite Guard playing with the tiny infants. Full grown men had been making cooing sounds, and sitting in a full circle around the babies as if they were nannies.

"Zahruk, Dristan, and Aodhan with me," he said firmly. "The rest, continue to..."

"Entertain our children," I finished for him with a small smile.

They all looked up from the babies and smiled. I followed Ryder, feeling a twinge of regret as I left my babies in the very capable hands of the Elite Guard, who'd been rendered Elite Nannies. When we entered the throne room, it was to find a guard covered in frost, his body trembling with the remnants of ice that seemed to be growing as we watched.

"That's not just ice, it looks like an enchantment spell of some kind," Ryder growled. "Call for a fire Fairy, now!" he shouted at those who seemed helpless to do more than watch the poor guy as frost and ice seemed to be overtaking his entire body.

"Is this something the Mages could have done?" I asked carefully, trying not to cause panic.

"Yes," Ryder answered as he reached over and grabbed my hand, then pulled me behind him, away from the ice that had formed on the floor. "Get me the Winter Elves; maybe they can figure something to prevent his death," he said to Zahruk who stood silently beside us.

"There's no need for that," a woman in a silky white cape said as she dropped the hood of her cloak, exposing her face.

Her features were sharp, but ethereally beautiful. She had hair the color of a fresh blanket of snow. It was piled high in a bun on the top of her head. A

silver ribbon was threaded through it beautifully. Her eyes were blue, the color of ice as it frosted over the lakes midst a deep freeze. On her forehead were gems, white in color that matched her lips, and went well with the blue coloring around her eyes. Silver glitter covered her neck, shoulders, and the tips of her delicately pointed ears.

“Ice Queen,” Ryder said as he bowed his dark head slightly.

“This ice is no work of mine, or of my people. We’ve come as a show of faith; we’ve heard of your fight Horde King, but it is not our fight,” she said softly.

“Not your fight?” I growled. “It’s everyone’s fight! If we don’t all pull our heads out of our asses, there will be no world.”

“We have been told for centuries that we are a lesser Caste, and see no reason to interfere. For a very long time we have been unwanted and no one was willing to help us in our time of need,” she said, turning her eyes to me. “You are not Fae,” she whispered breathlessly. “You are more, so much more.”

“It doesn’t matter what I am. I’m willing to fight and kick Mage ass to save this world and my babies! If you choose to stick your head in the snow,” I was *so* using that pun, “so be it, but hear this now, anyone who helps us will \_\_\_”

“Synthia,” Ryder warned.

“Stuff it Fairy,” I growled. “I won’t allow this world to merge into mine...The Human world; and I will not allow this world to reject my children. They need to know you’re not your father, and they need to pull their heads out of their asses. This isn’t a fight they can ignore; this is one that decides their fates too.”

“They are lesser beings,” Ryder said smoothly, as if it explained it all.

“That’s bullshit,” I argued. “Every single Caste of Fae. Every Caste of so-called lesser beings, they all count! This is their fight as well,” I explained as I turned to the Winter Queen and those of her court who had joined her here. “Even if they don’t want this fight, it will come down to every single being to help us win. We didn’t ask for it either, but the Mages will soon attack the lesser beings, because that’s how they work.”

“What can we possibly do to help?” she asked, and squared her shoulders.

“More than you think,” I said. She was beautiful, but I was also willing to bet she was strong in mind and soul. I could see her aura, and it was as bright

as those who stood beside her.

“I have a council, which I will need to confer with. I’m willing to try to help, but not at the expense of my people. They depend on me to keep them alive.”

“Then do so,” I said to the Queen. “Just remember that Ryder isn’t like his father, who I understand was a bigot as well as a psychotic piece of shit. Ryder’s a good King who will fight for you. He’s the kind of King who will protect you and his own people. Remind your council that the sins of the fathers aren’t that of the sons. You will be pulled into this fight either way. In the end, all that matters is that we win, and that Faery itself survives this war so we can repair the damage that has been wrought by those who seek to harm her.”

“I will remind them, and I will tell them of his brave mistress who fights at his side. Your reputation precedes you, Blood Princess; thank you. Thank you for considering even us lesser beings as worthy of standing at your side in such a precarious situation,” she said before she kneeled before Ryder and me, her people following her lead.

I moved forward and offered her my hand, which she hesitated before finally accepting it. “Yes?” she asked with a tremble in her tone, as if she suspected treachery.

“There is no reason for you to bow at our feet. You are a Queen, and we don’t expect you to bow; your people, either. In this time of need, we are all equals, we all stand together, and that, to me, means more than I can possibly say. Please, stand with us, and not beneath us.”

She smiled and I bowed my head to her which caused those around her to gasp in surprise. “I make no promises, but I hope that after this war is over that we can unite the entire world of Faery so that something like this can never be brought here again. It is my hope that if we stand tall together, we can withstand the next evil before it even reaches Faery,” I explained, which turned her smile into a frown of worry.

“You don’t think this is the last time we will need to stand together in a fight?”

“I have no doubt that, once we cut off the head of one monster, another will rise to take its place,” I said knowing in my heart that, with the number of enemies that Ryder’s father had made, and with the nature of the Fae, we would always have something or someone trying to fight against us.

“I will go now, and I will speak of your kindness, and that your heart is pure. I know you’ve read my aura, but know that I too can see yours and know the truth of your words. I’d also like to bring gifts for your young ones, if I may?” she asked and glanced curiously to where the guard was in the care of the fire fairies, who seemed to be making head way on thawing him out—sorta.

“We would love that,” I said, and felt Ryder as he slipped his fingers through mine and entwined his fingers with mine.

“My Princess speaks the truth, and she’s wise beyond her years. We would indeed be in your debt for your help, and would welcome a gift from you and your people for our triplets.”

## Chapter Nineteen

We sat in the nursery with the babies; Ryder was holding our daughter as I held one of the boys. It was overwhelming to know we'd created life, and a little scary to consider we'd created three lives in the midst of an all-out immortal war.

Almost a week had passed since the Tree had been iced, and we didn't have a clue yet how to reverse the damage. The guard who brought the news had eventually thawed out, but fire fairies didn't seem to be having as much luck with the Tree. The Ice Queen had not yet returned with the decision from her council, either.

"You should name your sons," I whispered as I kissed my little purple eyed boy. He was beautiful and surprisingly strong for something so tiny.

"I've never named anything before," Ryder admitted.

"Me either, Fairy, but we cannot continue to call them babies, or minions of darkness," I said as I placed a soft kiss on our son's dark head. "It's hard to believe we created something so perfect," I whispered as I held the baby to my chest.

I hadn't stopped to think of the things I'd lost out on by dying. I hadn't been able to feed my own children, but then...I'd had three, and it wouldn't have been an easy task, not that I'd have known how to do it. I'd also missed the first few hours of their lives, which Ryder had told me about in length, omitting only the parts which had included their hasty delivery.

"What do you think about Nyxaria? And we call her Nyx for short?" I asked as I watched our daughter as she held Ryder's finger.

"It's beautiful, but it doesn't suit her," he said as he smiled lovingly down at the little minion who was quickly stealing her father's heart as she wrapped him around her tiny little finger.

"Kahleena Larissa," I offered, and he raised his eyes to meet mine.

"She smiled," he said, and looked back down into her golden eyes with his own. "Kahleena it is, little daughter."

"You do know she is slowly wrapping you around her finger, right?" I asked.

"I know it, but aside from her mother, I've never looked upon anything so beautiful."

A few moments of silence passed before he looked up. "Cade, for our

little violet eyed warrior,” he said as he watched me for a response.

“I was thinking Puck,” I said with an impish smile. I’d read several childhood books with the famous character who was keen to host pranks. Besides, it wasn’t like I planned to name him that, but it would put a fire under his father’s backside to choose names.

“*Puck?*” Ryder cringed.

Mission accomplished.

“Cade fits him, and for the other?” I asked as I continued to hold the dark haired one.

“Zander, for my father,” he paused and lifted his eyes to mine. “I know people hated him, but he was cursed and it tainted everything he did. I want my son to know where he came from, and I want the people to know that he, unlike my father, will be an honorable ruler when the time comes. I know Danu has yet to show us which one will lead, but he seems to be the watcher, and the most solemn of the three. If we only give him a part of the name, we won’t curse him.”

“I love it,” I admitted. “Much better than Puck,” I agreed impishly. I had to mentally stop myself from rolling my eyes at his curse comment.

“Zander, Cade, and Kahleena it is. I’ll tell the men to fly the banners to announce them to our people.”

“Can’t it wait?” I asked as I placed Zander down to pick up Cade, who was pretty much anything but dark. “Just a few more minutes, please? I want to just be here with you and them, as a family.”

“A family,” he tested the word out on his tongue.

“We seriously cannot mess them up,” I said as I ran my finger over Cades cheek, and watched as he opened his violet eyes to look up at me. “My little man,” I whispered in awe. “How we made three little perfect things is so beyond me.”

“What did you think we would make?” Ryder asked with a gentle smile.

“I don’t know, but I never imagined loving anything as much as I love them. I hardly even know them and yet I’d give my life for them.”

“You’re going to make a fierce mother,” he said wickedly. “The men seem to think I would be the overprotective parent, but I think it will be their warrior mother. Gods help anyone who tries to fuck with your babies,” he said with a proud look in his eyes.

I smiled at him, but when Zahruk sifted in, I stopped and looked up at

him.

“You two need to come see this,” he said carefully. “Dress for your station, and call the Elite Guards in, now.”

I started to interrupt him, but thought better of it. “It can wait,” I finally said as I leveled a look that told Ryder that I didn’t want to leave this room at this moment. “Whatever it is, it’s not more important than this,” I said as I moved with Cade in my arms, and smiled as Ryder glamoured a chair for me at his side.

“I wouldn’t have interrupted you if it wasn’t important,” Zahruk said as he walked over and gently picked up Zander. He smiled, which made my eyes widen. Zahruk’s face changed completely when he smiled, which wasn’t often. He was a born warrior, and a damn good one. But when he smiled, he was beautifully dangerous. His eyes glowed with a light that he normally kept hidden from everyone, and his lips took on a softness that you never saw behind his warrior side.

“On a scale from one to ten, how important is it?” I asked as I moved my hand over to touch the wispy blonde hair on the top of my daughter’s head.

“Twenty,” he said as he kissed the top of Zander’s head and placed him back in his crib. “I’ve called the handmaidens in, and guards to watch over the babies. There’s also been no word from Ristan since he left to go check Alden’s progress.”

“How long has Ristan been gone?” Ryder asked as he held our daughter closer.

“He left after the presentation of the babes; ‘bout two days ago in the Human world, but when he left, he mentioned he would only be a few hours there. You know how punctual he normally is.”

“Did he go to the Guild?” I asked, butting into the conversation.

Zander let out a small wail and I watched in amusement as Zahruk deftly picked the small infant up and started rocking him in his arms as if he’d done it a million times before. I was amazed at the sight in the room. We each held a child, and it was the farthest thing from what I could have ever imagined. Ryder cocked his head to the side for a moment and from the narrowing of his eyes, I could tell he was concentrating very hard on something. He shook it off, and I felt a foreboding twinge in my gut, but I wasn’t sure if it was for the babes or something else.

“Send Sinjinn to check on him. Tell him to be careful and not to try and



enter the Guild. The Mages are desperate, and it's likely they've grown bolder since they think they've gained a foothold in our world. They iced the Tree. It shows that they've become stronger, but it also shows how desperate they've become. We can use it against them," Ryder finished and stood as he slowly moved to Kahleena's crib to set her down.

I'd never get tired of seeing my fearsome beast become a gentle one when he cradled our daughter like she was the most precious thing in his entire world. I hadn't thought of what it would be like to watch him with our children, and it's probably best I hadn't.

My emotions sat perched in my throat at the thought of it, along with watery eyes that made me feel too much, too fast. Seeing him like this floored me and made my heart grow warm. I moved to place Cade in the crib as well.

"Ryder," I said his name and then felt his magic as it washed over me. I had a scheduled playdate with my mother in the morning to figure out my abilities, since at the moment, I couldn't even sift. The basics were gone, and I had to learn everything over again. It was like every time I figured out who I was, life would knock me down, and I'd get back up swinging.

This time, I could feel this most recent change was the last one I'd endure, but I wasn't afraid of it. I was happy. I had my beast, and he loved me. I had beautiful children who would survive because there was no way I would let this world reject them. We were also on the brink of a massive war, but I knew in my heart that we would be victorious, because we had to be. The alternative was unthinkable.

I hadn't spent half of my life protecting the world from these beings, to become one and let them wipe out the entire Human race. No; I was still me and I still had the same principles. Just because I was in their camp now and could see that they weren't all monsters, it didn't mean I'd allow them to consume the people I'd once protected. Which meant we had to win this fight, and quickly.

I looked down to find a beautiful white lace dress with a high imperial waistline, which had small flowers that matched the ring on my finger; it hugged my curves beautifully. I could feel the weight of the crown Ryder had fashioned on my head, and smiled since the beast had even done my hair for me. "Nice, but you forgot something," I said as I lifted the dress to show him my naked feet.

“Maybe I like you barefoot?” he said. As I lifted my eyes to his, it was to find those beautiful golden eyes smiling.

“Maybe, but I still need my feet covered, Fairy.”

“As you wish,” he said, and I felt the cool touch of leather as it covered the soles of my feet. Next were the bands of silver that covered my biceps, and then bracelets that went halfway up to my elbows and jingled musically. Next he wiggled his fingers and a thin metal band slid over the soft column of my neck. I looked down at the thin band, and then back up at him.

Zahruk cleared his throat, and I smiled at Ryder, as if we were naughty children.

“Zahruk, is something in your throat?” Ryder asked him as he glamoured on his cloak, and his weaponry.

“No,” he said with a grin as he set Zander back in his crib just as Darynda walked into the room. The moment she did, his eyes slid longingly in her direction. But one minute his blue eyes were longing, and before I could even blink, they turned cold and indifferent.

I watched silently, observing Darynda’s own reaction to Zahruk’s presence. It seemed like Ryder and I were not the only couple in the room. Something was boiling between those two, and it was getting to a point that one of them was about to explode. My money was on Zahruk, because he was primal in everything he did, and I had a feeling Darynda was just as stubborn as I was.

“We’ve named them,” I announced, trying to cut through the tension in the room. “This is Zander, after his grandfather. We wanted to give him another chance at life, an un-cursed one,” I added quickly when Zahruk’s angry eyes seared into me. “This little lady is Kahleena, and this one is Cade,” I finished and watched as Ryder’s eyes dared Zahruk to say anything about Zander’s name.

“Beautifully chosen, my lady,” Darynda whispered as the rest of the handmaidens entered the room.

“I wanted to name her Larissa, but I settled for Kahleena Larissa, princess of the Horde. My friend told me she would be reborn, and I wanted to honor her.”

“It’s perfect,” Adam said from where he leaned against the doorway. “Larissa would have loved it.”

I smiled at Adam, and felt a pang of regret that I couldn’t feel him with

me any longer. I walked over to him, smiling at the jingle of sounds I created with the jewelry Ryder had glamoured on.

“You look beautiful, Synthia.”

“Thank you, Adam.”

“So, she said yes?” he asked as he reached for my hand and held it up to get a better look at the beautiful ring.

“She did; she’s to be my wife, soon,” Ryder said as we started out of the nursery to where the other guards were waiting at a distance from the doors.

“This calls for a celebration,” Adam said as he winked and smiled at me wickedly.

“There will be no wedding until the babies’ futures are secured. They are our number one priority right now,” I said, more to Ryder than to Adam, and was relieved when he agreed with me.

“Speak,” Ryder said to the guards, their eyes on us as we approached.

It was amazing how he could change from my Ryder to the ruler of the Horde instantly. As if he wore two faces, and went from being my smiling doting beast, to the elusive yet very deadly Horde King in a blink of an eye.

“You’ll have to see it Sire, it’s not something we can explain,” Aodhan said as he glamoured on his own armor, as did the rest of the men.

“Well, that can’t be good,” I said as they glamoured on their weapons as well.

Ryder sifted me to the throne room and what my eyes beheld was beyond anything I could have ever imagined. I gasped, but held all other emotions in check. The room had been enlarged, which was a good thing considering what had been waiting for us here. I felt the tension in Ryder as well, and was glad that he wore his weapons, as well as his men.

## Chapter Twenty

The Winter Queen stood as tall as she could, and smiled at me. She'd not only brought her own people back with her, but she'd brought every court, and more. The Summer, Winter, Spring, and Autumn Elven courts stood together, even though they were like the Unseelie and Seelie of our courts, with both a benevolent and malevolent side.

“I've spoken to them of our meeting, Ryder, King to the Horde. They have come to see if I spoke the truth of the changes to our world, and your court. I told them of the fierce woman who stands at your side, and of her promise.”

I remained silent as I took them all in. They were all, at first glance, strong, eerie, and ravishing. The Spring Court was filled with dark and green haired Elves, all of who wore vines and clothing that mirrored spring. Flowers covered naked breasts and skirts looked as if they'd taken leaves and fashioned them into something a model would wear on a catwalk in Paris. The scent of spring waged war with the other seasons, and yet I found myself drawn to it and the promise of flowers that normally blossomed to life in the spring.

The Winter Court all wore outfits similar to their Queen, beautifully crafted garments of ice, and soft blue dresses and cloaks. They stood behind their Queen proudly. I withheld a shiver as a gentle breeze started, and even though I knew it was a test by her people, I refused to shiver even as my body shivered internally.

*Mental note: When visiting the Ice Kingdom, make sure Ryder actually puts underwear on you, dumbass!*

The Autumn Court had flame colored hair, and other varying shades of leaves that you'd often see in fall. They wore outfits which matched, but instead of leaves, they had actual clothes on which had simple things like acorns and other varying items on them. Their eyes were mostly deep reddish-brown, their features sharp and expressions revealing that they were intrigued by us.

The Summer Court looked nothing like summer. Their King had horns that spiraled up, and looked like they belonged on a goat; only these were golden and really quite beautiful. His eyes were clear, and completely white. If he had irises, they couldn't be seen. He wore paint on his face that was

illuminated by his skin, and eerie didn't even begin to describe the look of him.

There were others as well. Some were unclaimed Unseelie, as well as Seelie from the looks of mixed Fae and Castes in their ranks. They looked hardened, and cold. Their eyes told of a hard life, and trust was not something they'd give us anytime soon. They were of medium build, and differed in height. The only thing that said they were together was the leather they wore. It crisscrossed over their shirtless chests, and held an assortment of weapons on their backs. Their pants had been crafted from leather as well. They all carried similar axes and swords, and it looked like they were more than capable of using them. Another sign of their mixed breeds was the ears. They were slightly less pointed than the Four Courts that stood beside them.

A male moved forward, but I couldn't make out which Court he was from. He was beautiful, and yet I could feel power wafting off of him, and so too could Ryder. His eyes were a clear blue, so light in color that they appeared to glow from within. He had a symbol tattooed on his cheek, just below his left eye. His hair was the same blue-black of Ryder's, and thick white and black brands pulsed on his biceps, and chest.

"I am Elijah," he said as he approached us. "Half-Angel and half-Fae, King of the Unclaimed Fae and son of Alazander." The last part was said with hatred.

"My father took no angels other than one, and she remained in his pavilion until just recently," Ryder said quietly so that those in the assembly would be forced to strain their hearing.

"No; shortly after he took her, my mother was called back to heaven, and he couldn't stop the summons. He did not know she carried me when it happened. I chose to come back here and help others like me who had no rightful place in this world."

I remained silent, as did Ryder as animosity poured in waves off of the stranger.

"I could challenge you, fight you, kill you," Elijah continued. "Would you fight me...*brother*?" he sneered.

"No," Ryder replied, and you'd have had to be deaf to not hear the threat in his answer.

"And if I demand it?" The stranger continued.

"Enough!" I growled and stepped forward, my eyes turning to match his

own as the Goddess within moved to defend her beast and her people. “This is not the time or place to retaliate against someone who had nothing to do with the details of how you were conceived.”

“Synthia,” Ryder warned.

“No,” I said as I turned to look at him. “You are not your father, and you’ve never raised a hand against this man. You’ve not wronged him by words or by deed and this meeting means too much for us to have one of your father’s offspring popping up and pushing up daisy drama!”

“I was told you were bold,” Elijah said as he raised a hand as if he’d touch my face.

“Then you’ve also been told I bite,” I warned. “Don’t touch me. If you’ve come here to damn Ryder for the deeds of his father—*your* father—you can leave now. If you damn him, you better damn well damn yourself in the process. He killed his father! He killed him for what he’d done to helpless women who he protected long after his father had gone. He’s a better man than any of you, for he’s fighting this war alone! He’s been fighting it, for you, for this world, and for what? To protect you, *all of you*. He’s better than I am, for I would have called for blood if I’d been left alone to fight for entire world. He doesn’t ask anything from any of you, and yet you think because of some crap his father did, that you are all lesser beings and not valid? His father was a tyrant, and incorrect in his beliefs. You all have power, if you all stand together. Do not let the deeds of one monster sway your choices. We’ve asked you all here because we need you. This is no longer a fight we can win alone, and it’s not one we should even consider fighting alone. It’s not only the High Fae who will be pushed out of Faery; you will *all* be pushed out. If this world dies, and the Mages win, we all lose. It doesn’t matter if you are lesser Fae or born of the higher Castes, in this fight we are equal and we can win, but only if you can all pull your heads out of your asses and stop listening to some tyrant that has long been gone from this world. You all have a place in this world, as do we.”

“Beautifully said, for a mother who is willing to do anything to save her babes,” Elijah stated.

“You’re not wrong,” I admitted. “I *am* a mother, and I will see that my children are accepted by Faery. Make no mistake, I *am* desperate. What I am *not* is stupid. I was raised by Humans, and while you may think it makes me weak, I say it makes me stronger than you. I have felt mortality, and I have

lived in its world. I've also lived in this one. I've been on both sides, and I see us as one. I'm willing to break down walls and create a world where we all live as one; can you say the same?" I challenged him.

"I can, because I too lived in the Human world for a very long time. I've also seen their weaknesses, and I know without a doubt that my people could live amicably with them, should this world die."

"For how long, Elijah, or how long would Humans continue to exist should the Fae fully come into their world? The half-breeds could, and depending on who sired them, they might even get along with the Humans. But then add the Horde, the rest of the High Fae, and the rest of those who live in Faery into the Human world, and recalculate the odds. How long before their Gods move against us for touching the Human race and wiping them out? How long before your mother's God intervenes and removes us as a threat against his children?" I asked.

His jaw ticked, and it reminded me of Ryder's when he was angry with me. I turned to him and found him sizing up his brother. He'd stepped away from a challenge, probably for the first time in his entire life. He'd done it for his children and I couldn't have been more awestruck and in love with him as I was right now.

"I asked the Winter Queen to speak with her council, because we need you. The Tree has been frozen by the Mages, and for those of you who are not up to date on the Mages, they want us all dead."

"Not us, just your kind," someone shouted to Ryder.

"My kind?" I asked and watched as one of the pasty Elves approached us. He was unclaimed Unseelie, of that I was sure judging by his fierceness, and his eyes.

"His kind," he corrected with a tilt of his head.

"His kind is your kind," I said softly. "You are my kind. We are all Fae, and that's all they see in their rage of hatred. You think this war won't come to your door? How long after they kill us would it take them to find you? They don't want to rule this world; they plan to wipe us out by killing our world. Now correct me if I am wrong, but you live here too. If the entire Horde dropped dead tomorrow, they wouldn't stop. If the entire high born Fae Castes left this world, they'd come after you next. They'd either want to rule your people, or kill them. It's hard to say when they are fucking insane."

"You would have us fight beside you?" he changed his direction so

quickly that I had to pause and actually look at him. He was scarred horribly, but he was still beautiful.

“I would, as would my King. We want to unite this world, and make it one. You are a warrior, and it would honor us to have you on our side,” I said softly, pulling a page from Ryder’s book and making them all strain to hear me, “to have all of you on our side, and by our side for the upcoming battle.”

“Then we have a Tree to unthaw so that your children can be accepted,” the Winter Queen said with a brilliant smile.

“Hold,” said the Elf. “Do you accept us into the Horde?” the elf asked, his eyes no longer on me but on Ryder.

“If you swear an oath, but I will not take one under false pretense. I will accept everyone into the Horde, and I have never turned a Sidhe away. My father did turn many Sidhe away towards the last years of his rule, I admit it. His actions went against everything the Horde stands for. I am not him, as my brave, soon-to-be wife has said, and I do not rule my people as he did. I accept any and all that need us, and I do so with no conditions or clauses. You are either with us, or not. That is your choice to decide amongst yourselves. There will be tents and other necessities for you and your people in our great hall and courtyard should you decide to stand with us. Our home is now open to you. But know this: the royal suite is off limits. My children are off limits and protected by my Elite Guard, and while we will accept visits from the ruling King or Queens of the races, we will not welcome those without invitation to see them. I hope you’ll understand our need to protect them.”



## Chapter Twenty-One

“Are we just supposed to sit here and wait?” I asked as I watched Ryder pace the room. None of the others had come forward to swear an oath, or even agree to help us. The Winter Court was on board, but unless we had more come forward, it would help us little. We needed them all to stand with us, because a race was most powerful when the entirety of it stood as one.

It was doubtful that the Light Court would be with us, which was yet another issue. No one knew where they stood, and since they’d sifted out during the presentation of the babies, no one had heard from them since. They’d locked down their court as if they thought that alone would protect them from the Mages.

“Synthia, we can’t force them to swear an oath or make them stand with us against the Mages.”

“Yes you can, you’re the fucking Horde King!”

“Woman, you’re driving me insane!”

“Bad timing?” Sinjinn asked as he sifted into the room, a troubled expression on his face.

“No,” Ryder growled, looking too happy for the interruption.

“Yes,” I growled at the same time. I then turned my angry glare on Ryder.

“We got trouble, big trouble,” Sinjinn said, quickly changing the subject.

“What is it?” Ryder asked, and I narrowed my eyes on Sinjinn as he moved from foot to foot nervously.

“Spit it out,” I warned.

“I went to check out the Guild. What I found wasn’t good. From what I could see from the front of the Guild it almost looked abandoned. Humans walking by don’t seem to notice, like it’s been spelled to look normal to them. Adrian said there’s been no chatter from the Guild since he got back there. It looks bad, considering we know it was in full working condition only a few days ago. Ristan’s been reporting to you,” he said to Ryder. “I was in on the last report when he said he wanted to pull Alden out against his will if necessary because the old man won’t budge. Said Alden wouldn’t abandon ship, not with the kids still in there and he couldn’t move ‘em’ without raising alarms from the other Elders.”

“Wait, back up. The Guild never looks abandoned. There’s a full school in there, and close to a hundred students at any given time.”

Sinjinn looked at me as if there was a ‘but’ in there somewhere. I stared back at him, and the sick feeling inside of me only seemed to intensify. “Alden wouldn’t abandon those kids, so they have to be there!”

“Synthia, it looks deserted, and I didn’t go in so I can’t say what’s going on. It’s normally heavily warded, and Vlad said that the vamps and Shifters have never been able to make it past the wards either. Adrian said something was off about the place lately, more than usual anyway.”

“So where are they?” I asked with my heart felt as if a vise held it.

“All I know is that it’s bad, and when I circled around to the back, I was able to jump the compound wall, and I could see one of the buildings had a wall blown out. I think the wards might be down, or at least the ones on the back of the buildings are. I brought in Vlad and Adrian and stationed them outside the compound; if something moves, we’ll know it.”

“Call the guards, and place some on the children; we have to go,” I said, already standing to be sifted out and to the Guild.

“No, we have to make a plan, Synthia. We don’t know what we will find there,” Ryder said as he pulled me against him. “Let’s go to the war room,” he said and sifted us there, knowing Sinjinn would follow us.

No sooner did we arrive than every single one of Ryder’s men sifted in as well.

I watched numbly as I allowed them to plan it all.

I only added input when I was asked, or if they said something I knew wouldn’t work. None of these people had actually been inside, and I’d lived there. I began drawing a rough diagram of the Guild for them on a large parchment that Zahruk had glamoured for me.

“Okay,” I said once I had enough of the main rooms drawn on the parchment. I paused and quickly drew in the hallway and the staircases and wrote down which of the larger rooms that they led to. “The Guild’s main entrance would be my choice for our entry point.”

“The main entrance?” Aodhan asked as he looked to Zahruk for his opinion. I wasn’t upset; they normally looked to Ryder or Zahruk for direction.

“They’d never expect us to walk through the main entrance if they’re still there.”

I smiled and nodded at Zahruk’s answer. It was exactly what I’d thought as well. “Can I continue?” I asked, looking directly at Zahruk and waited for

his nod.

“This is the entryway, and if they bombed the back of the building like Sinjinn said—and hopefully that’s only an illusion spell, because bombing the Guild makes no sense, at all. Zero, since it’s a smaller Guild which is basically used just to train new recruits. Why would they bomb a building they had full access to? The only thing that makes sense is that the Guild was actually under attack, and someone fought back. Anyway, this is the main area; we have a small reception desk here,” I pointed to the side where it would be. “Over here is where the higher-ups would be. The offices have iron walls, and are surrounded in lead. It’s a precaution in case the Fae were ever able to breach the wards and get inside. And if they somehow did, the paper pushers would hide in there,” I pointed to the doors on several sides of the building. “Each one of these doors leads down into the catacombs.”

I was showing the Fae how to breach the Guild, and it felt wrong. I had to remind myself that I was doing this to save Alden, Ristan, and whoever else was still alive inside. It was our only chance of getting in, since I knew Ryder wouldn’t let me go in alone. I looked around the group, and knew they were thinking the same. They nodded reassuringly, and I took a deep breath and continued.

“Down here is the hallway that leads to the training facilities, but they stopped using those, according to Ristan. They stopped teaching them weapon skills, and were more focused on showing the kids how to use their powers. A Witch’s power is ten times more effective in a fight, which makes sense. Anyway, there are two small staircases down here.” I pointed to them on the map. “These ones go directly to the catacombs and the libraries. Archives are further down, and that is where the librarian Ristan was asking me about was stationed when I was active in the Guild. They normally stick to protocol so my guess is she’d still be at the same desk. The catacombs themselves don’t have a map; only librarians know to get around in there. Those things run under the city, and can take you pretty much anywhere you want to go.”

“So if they are in the catacombs?” Ryder asked.

“Then we’d have a hell of a time finding them. I don’t honestly think they’d go down deep into them though; if you don’t have a Guild librarian with you, you’re pretty much screwed down there. Librarians were the only ones who were allowed to study the maps of the catacombs.”

For all we knew, it could be for nothing. Ryder hadn't been able to make contact with Ristan; they shared a mental path, but it was empty, as if Ristan had ceased to exist. I could see the tension of that question in the room, and knew that I wasn't the only one praying that both he and Alden were okay.

There were also the children who trained at the Guild to consider, if most of the Witches and Warlocks were Mages or had joined ranks with them over time. The Humans needed the Guilds, but they needed them to be there for the right reason, they also needed them to not be on a crazy vendetta and run by Mages hell-bent on revenge no matter what the cost.

"So this is what we know from Vlad and Adrian. The Guild went quite a few days ago, and they said that the Fae are growing bolder. It's like they know that no one is there to stop them. It's gotten worse in the last few days. Vlad had to take out a few of the Light Fae. Said they fed until the woman turned FIZ, and then continued until she was dead. He doesn't allow that shit in his place and took their heads without a second thought," Zahruk said, looking right at me. "Then yesterday some unclaimed Fae turned up and caused a bar brawl, and when Adrian threatened to call the Guild, they told him go ahead. It was like they knew there was no Guild."

"Because there isn't one in Spokane now," I mumbled and got up to pace. "I should have gone and checked on them."

"When could you have done that, Synthia? When you were dying, or when you were fighting here, against Faolán?" Ryder asked calmly.

"I knew Ristan wasn't telling me everything, and I didn't make him say it. I know better, I was a damn Enforcer! I know when something is wrong and I felt it but I chose to ignore it."

"You can't hold yourself responsible," Aodhan said. "I knew something was off with Ristan as well, and I didn't pry either." Many of the brothers nodded in agreement as if they all had noticed the same thing.

"Nobody is at fault here," Zahruk said, cutting in. "The only thing we can do now is load up on weapons and go have a look. Maybe rid the world of some of those fuckers in the process. It's the only choice we got right now, but first we need to secure the castle and the babies. I have Darynda with the babes, along with some of the guards who I trust. We leave the castle guards here—I trained them myself—and they know what to do should any of the visiting Fae get itchy. I doubt they'd have the balls to do it, but I never take chances."

“And me?” Ciara asked as she moved into the room. “I’ve trained with you as well, brother. I can help protect the wee ones.”

“I’d like that,” I said when the others failed to answer her.

“Ya sure, Ryder?” she asked, ignoring me as she looked to Ryder for his agreement.

“They’re my children too,” I said, and didn’t back down. I liked her, even though I didn’t know much about her. She was hidden from most of the Fae at court, and while I understood Ryder’s need to protect her, I also knew she was a little wild at times.

“You shouldn’t be out of your chambers,” Ryder replied quietly as he studied the map.

“But I am, and even I can taste the energy in the air. If Rissy’s in trouble, I’m going to play a part in helping save him, even if it’s a small one.”

*Rissy?*

“Ciara,” Ryder warned.

“I said it was okay, but I guess I’m mute and invisible,” I offered as I sat back down to stop pacing the floors.

“Synthia, this doesn’t concern you,” Ryder growled.

“Oh stuff it, Fairy. They are my children and my soon-to-be sister in-law, and it’s pretty much in my face, so I think it does concern me. She’s trained in weapons, right?” I asked Zahruk, who nodded with a look of *duh* on his face. Or maybe it was a please-don’t-make-me-choose-a-side look.

Poor girl had to deal with an entire army of alpha men who thought her some weak-minded sissy. She had fire, I knew it. I could see it in her eyes, and yet I also saw the spark of spunk and the mischief that I’d seen in a lot of the younger Witches, which boiled down to trouble. I knew she’d protect the babies. That wasn’t a worry in my mind.

“Ciara is trained to fight, but should the need to fight arise, we will abort and come home,” Ryder snapped.

I was off the chair and in his face. “Snap at me again, Fairy, and I’ll show you how you how to sing fucking soprano! I’ve had enough of this pissing contest with you and your sister; she’s a grown ass woman trained for war and in my book that alone makes her the best God damned babysitter here!”

“Fine!” Ryder growled.

“Fine,” I smiled and took my little victory over my beast.

“Then let’s gear up and gather in the great hall,” Ryder said.

“If we gather in the great hall, they will know we are leaving to fight,” Zahruk pointed out what everyone else was thinking.

“Yes,” Ryder said. “We’ll also return there, no matter what. They need a fucking reality check, as a very smart woman told me not too long ago.”

## *Chapter Twenty-Two*

We met in the courtyard, instead of the great hall, since many of the lesser Fae were camped there, more than we had expected, even though they had not made a decision to support us yet. I was dressed in the same lightweight armor that the Elite Guard wore, with weapons strapped to every place they'd fit comfortably. I knew the moment they caught sight of us, because a quiet hush fell over the crowd.

We didn't talk, or even acknowledge them for now. I was so focused on the problem at hand that I barely even noticed the look of awe that spread through the crowd at the sight of me dressed for war. It wasn't until I looked up and found the Winter Queen looking right at me that I considered what I looked like.

They'd probably never even seen a female geared to fight, let alone carrying weapons. I didn't move, or say anything as she watched me; the only acknowledgment I gave her was a slight nod of my head.

Ryder came out with his full Horde King armor on, along with the entire Elite Guard. He looked like something out of an anime show. His armor was once again black and formfitting. He wore a black heavy cloak, and I almost smiled as it caught the light and absorbed it. The armor beneath it was the same as his men wore. Unlike the others, his cloak was held together by a jeweled clasp of black onyx, and a single dragon was embedded in the middle of the silver disc that hung from his neck. Unlike last time, all of his men wore the disc, signifying their position as his guard.

The entire assembly watched them, as if waiting for them to make a move so they could sift out. I could see the panic beginning to rise and took control of it.

"Let's go," I said as I accepted the cloak Ryder held out for me, and then I accepted his hand. I turned in his arms and eyed the assembly, knowing they'd be at ease once the Elite Guard of the Horde King left the area. I did however, notice Silas standing with Elijah, watching Ryder and I.

I didn't have time to over think it as Ryder swept open his arms and opened a giant portal big enough for an entire company of Elite Guard to go through. We could see the deserted Guild Compound not too far from the portal and the castle guard moved into position behind us to prevent anyone from following us through. It was like a well-orchestrated move, and they all

knew it. We were, after all, the elusive Horde, a monstrous bunch who never did anything half-assed.

We materialized beside Vlad, and Adrian, who paused and then relaxed when they saw it was us. I looked up at the vacated stairs of the Guild and felt the stillness of it. I was sure Adrian had felt it as well.

The Guild was normally busy, and even when it wasn't, there were guards posted at all times outside. We knew something was off. The Witches would never leave it unguarded, not under Alden's careful watch.

"It's too quiet," I said, and turned to Adrian, who watched me.

"That's what I said, the back looks a mess. I took a peek, and one of the buildings has a wall blown out. We don't smell blood, and we couldn't see anything dead from here," Adrian said.

"Shit's getting weird Ryder; my club and yours were both sites for some huge fights. I'm fighting with the liquor boards just to keep them both open. Cops are pulling doubles, and the fact that the Guild isn't sending out help hasn't gone unnoticed by the locals. People are staying inside, or home. It's almost as if it's open hunting season on the Human race," Vlad confirmed.

"All of this happened in the last few days?" I asked.

"It started when we left to come to the presentation. It's also why we left so hastily and without word. You guys had been through hell, and we were handling it. We handle our own, but this, this is something else. It's like they've all gone mad. Could just be the rumors of the Mages and their plans, and some sick fucks are taking advantage of it, and getting a head start. Hell, it could be just about anything."

"Or they caught wind that the Guild in Spokane is out of whack, and down. Is this happening near any of the other areas with standing portals?" I asked.

"No, only here; Adrian asked the same thing," Vlad confirmed. His silver eyes watched me closely.

"It's the Guild. They know there's no one around here who can stop them. They figure *why* not? We've seen this before; when I was nineteen they announced that this Guild might be closing, and that we'd be stationed in Seattle. Hell broke loose, and it took the Elders coming out to stop it, but even then, they were careful to keep it out of the news."

"I remember that," Adrian said with a confirming nod.

"It took us almost a week to find the worst of the violators and contain



them,” I said.

“Where were they taken to when you’d contained them?” Ryder asked, and even I heard his jaw pop.

“Don’t know. It was above my pay grade. We took them to the river where they were placed in iron containment cells. My guess would be that they were taken to other Guilds so that students could train or so the higher ups could...” I paused and winced. “Experiment on them.”

“I bet,” he growled.

“Let’s just get to the part where you call me an ass, and I admit that I was a good little solider back then, and then we go see what’s going on,” I said as I faced him.

“You’re an ass,” he said.

“Yes, I was a good little solider, and did anything I could to help kill Fae, because—and stop me if you know this part—they killed my parents...or so I thought. Anything else you want? Do you need me to say sorry? Because you can hold your breath on that one,” I warned as I glared at him. Adrian looked uncomfortable beside me, because he was riding the same ‘good soldier’ horse I was.

His men laughed, and I caught hint of a smile on his lips before he dropped back into warrior mode. “We need to move. This is too many armed Fae to have in front of a Witches’ Guild and we will have company we don’t need sooner than we like if we don’t move now.”

“Agreed; so do your invisible thingy and let’s go,” I said in agreement.

“My invisible thingy, huh?” Ryder asked as he pulled me closer to him, and looked across the street. “Are you okay?” he asked, without waiting for me to answer him on his first question.

“I’m not going to lie; seeing it like this is sad. Not knowing what we’ll find in there is even scarier. I don’t want to even think they won’t be alive, but if they were captured...it might be easier on them to have died,” I whispered.

“What they did to you...” Ryder hissed.

“I don’t want to think about that right now. Let’s just stay on point here, please,” I whispered. We hadn’t discussed what had happened to me during my stint with Faolán and the Mages, and I wasn’t ready to. I wasn’t sure I’d ever be ready to speak of what Faolán did to me and what he wanted to do before Dyson stopped him. Now definitely wasn’t the time to talk it out.

“You guys want lead?” Aodhan asked as he walked beside us, and Zahruk took flank on the other side of Ryder.

“You have to ask?” Ryder asked.

I turned to smile reassuringly at Aodhan, and caught sight of a blue strand of hair peeking from beneath his armor.

“Just figured I’d ask,” he said as he continued to walk beside us.

We approached the stairs that led into the Guild, and Z stopped us. “Do you feel that?” he asked.

“I feel nothing,” I admitted.

“No wards,” Ryder announced as he chanced a step forward. “Nothing,” he continued.

“That’s just not possible. It’s always warded,” I said, but then again, I wouldn’t be affected by it, since I wasn’t really Fae.

“Shit; why would they pull the wards down?” Vlad asked as he moved closer.

“They wouldn’t. Someone else had to have done it. No one that I was aware of knew how to remove these wards; it was a safeguard, to protect us,” Adrian said as his eyes met mine meaningfully.

I met his turquoise stare head on and shook my head. “That means anything could have done this. We were attacked often by Fae trying to get in, and if they knew the Guild was vulnerable, they wouldn’t have hesitated to make a try for it.”

Asrian moved in, his lime and grass-green eyes watching us as he interrupted. “Hate to say it, but we gotta move faster. We’re sitting ducks here.”

I looked at him and nodded before I moved up the steps with guilt in my heart that the Guild was in rubble, and the chance of anything or anyone being alive inside was getting slimmer with each new discovery.

It was hard to believe that this had happened in so little time, and although it was hard to imagine, we’d made a lot of enemies who wouldn’t hesitate to join in the destruction. I couldn’t see any sign that any of the other Guilds had come to see what was going on at this one, but if they’d been here or sent someone to report on the damages, it only made sense that they’d report back immediately and call it a complete loss.

I stepped through the doors and had to force myself to remain strong.

It was eerily silent. Huge pieces of the once elegant cathedral ceiling lay

upon the floor, the stained glass ruined. The smell of sulfur was rich and pungent. The holy cross from the church in Ireland had been tipped over and chopped apart, as if someone took an axe and destroyed it on purpose, instead of damage that happened in the midst of looting.

Not that this place could be looted. The weapons were in a vault, one that you'd need a live Witch to open, and not just any Witch, one registered to this Guild. Glass crunched beneath our feet as we made our way through the main room and into the separate ones that were in the main hallway.

I paused and chewed my bottom lip. I could smell the nauseating scent of death. I could do this. I was strong enough and, as sad as it was to admit, I wasn't a stranger to death, or the sight of it. I'd been trained to see it, feel it, learn from it, and grow stronger because of it. Problem was, I was tired of seeing my friends and people I cared about die.

I winced at the dead body that lay over the reception desk. Douglas, one of the Elders from the look of it, had a pistol in one hand and his brains on the far wall. How could it have gotten this bad and I'd not known it?

*You've been in Faery, playing with the Fairies!*

Guilt heated my face as I moved closer and looked around the room. Something was off, as an Enforcer I'd been trained to look at scenes, and Douglas had been left handed, and yet the gun was in his right hand, as was the entrance wound. The angle of the wound and the exit wound was off, even if he had been right handed. Someone had shot him, and tried to make it look as if he'd done it himself. Why? It wasn't like the other Guilds would come investigate it, since most were probably run by the Mages, unless they were still trying to cover it up to the Humans.

Everyone had stopped outside the door, except Adrian and Ryder, who both held one of my hands and I had to shake my hands loose to gather one of the many tapestries and pull it from the wall to cover the body.

I'd liked Douglas. He'd always been nice to me...one of the good ones, which was probably why he was dead. I left the room, and started down the right hallway that led to meeting and conference rooms, using my heightened senses to search for anything living, moving, or dead. It became almost unbearable when every room held a dead occupant, but none were the ones I was looking for.

I was getting to the last ones when I heard it, and my heart stopped. I sped up, and turned into the next room. It was empty. So was the next one, but the

third one wasn't, and I ran in, heedless of what else might be in there. Alden was sitting against one of the pillars in the room, and he wasn't moving. Ropes were the only thing holding his upper body upright. I dropped to my knees and placed my fingers on his artery, and sighed.

"He's alive, but just barely, Synthia," Adrian said as he started helping me with the ropes. "I don't sense any spells or curses around him," he hissed.

"Alden," I whispered, afraid to have gotten here too late. I couldn't have found him just to turn around and lose him. "Alden, get the fuck up, don't you fucking do this to me!"

"Synthia," he whispered without opening his eyes to look at me.

"I'm here," I whispered and kissed his bruised cheek. "Now get up," I urged.

"Can't, kid, they broke 'em'," he said.

"Broke what?" I asked, and my hands instantly started to feel down his body, but Ryder stopped me.

"His legs, and much more; Asrian, we're going to have to risk sifting with him; get him to Eliran, and tell him to be ready for when we find Ristan," Ryder ordered.

"Demon wasn't so lucky," Alden whispered and started coughing. "I should have listened to him, should have just moved the kids like he wanted."

"What do you mean not so lucky?" I asked, as ice wrapped around my heart.

He opened his eyes and I could see veins that had ruptured in his eyes from torture. I sat back on my heels and reminded myself that right now I had to be strong. I had to find my Demon and save his ass.

"Is Ristan alive?" I asked, hoping the lead in my throat didn't show in my voice.

"They had us both in the catacombs for a while, don't know how long, and don't know what day it is. Brought me back up here and left me for dead. They tortured us both to figure out how to get to the Horde King and his girl. Ristan took the brunt of it, never thought I'd hear a man scream like that. They cleaned house. Anyone standing, anyone alive is our enemy. They killed the kids, all the kids...I failed them all."

"Alden, they're partially Fae, and while you may train them to fight the Fae, they couldn't have been ready for treachery from their comrades—their coworkers—and if you tried to tell them, it would have given you away.

Sometimes you have to sacrifice a few for the many. You taught me that, remember? We knew this might happen, I told your stubborn old ass to come with me.”

“Synthia, this is my life. This is my world and those were my kids. I raised them; I raise all of them when they come here to be trained. Sometimes I think you got your stubbornness from me, even if we aren’t blood. I sent you to the Dark Prince, because I had to make a sacrifice, and I knew you would be able to stand up to him, but these kids...They didn’t even have a chance.” Tears flowed down his damaged cheeks.

“I survived it, and that choice gave me my babies, Alden. I’m actually happy you sent me to the Dark Fortress, and I wouldn’t change my life for the world. You already know that. Now, do we know if they have wards preventing anything sifting out?”

“I don’t know what wards are left, but there really can’t be any if you are all inside the Guild,” he said wryly as he cleared his throat of the emotion that he’d just felt, shedding it like a second skin. One minute he’d been broken, and in the next he was back and fully in charge of his emotions. “They’ve got a guy with them, scary as shit. Not Human, and not Fae. The way he moves...it’s not normal. Shit, damn thing doesn’t even pretend to be Human.”

“We can handle him,” I whispered as I helped Alden as he tried to get up and failed. Asrian was right behind him and scooped him up as if he weighed nothing.

“Leave me here and go save the Demon,” he whispered brokenly.

“Never,” I answered and looked up at Alden.

We waited for them to sift out before I stood and looked at Ryder and his men. I knew that if Ristan had screamed, something had been horribly wrong. He was a born fighter, as were all of these men. They didn’t show weakness to an enemy, ever.

“They’ve got God bolts. That’s the only way—” I announced, and then I felt power, immense power unchecked in shielding itself. I turned and watched as Danu shimmered in, and then the feel of power was gone.

“It’s a trap,” she announced and I noticed she was dressed for war.

“We kinda figured as much,” I said, and then tilted my head. Well, I had figured it was. Why else bring Alden upstairs where we would find him and keep him separated from Ristan?

“No, Synthia, Bilé is here. Not even Ryder can stand against him. He’s helping the Mages, and he’s close. I can feel him.”

“We’re not backing down, period. Ristan is alive, and down in the catacombs. I won’t believe otherwise unless I see his corpse,” I seethed. I was serious; I wasn’t leaving without him or his bloody heap of remains. I owed him that much.

“I can’t challenge the Mages, but I can help with Bilé. He’s crossed the line, and he’ll pay for what he’s done. That I can do without repercussions,” she said, and I turned to find the entire Elite Guard staring at me like I was insane, except Ryder.

“Mother, show yourself, at least enough that they can see you,” I groaned.

“You think it wise?” she asked Ryder, instead of me.

“Yes,” he said. “My brothers know her secret already. I trust them with my very life.”

I heard them gasp, and knew the moment she revealed herself.

“Shit,” Aodhan whispered and then kneeled at her feet, as did the rest of them.

“Get up, fight now, worship later,” I said and turned back to Danu. “If Bilé is here, that changes everything. Zahruk fashioned some of the bolts that Joseph used on me into daggers, he showed them to me the other day. Will they work on him?” I asked, and then almost groaned as her eyes grew wide with pleasure.

“Yes, they should. He created them to use on me. He and his men tested them on another God who had displeased him first. We can’t touch them though,” she admitted.

“Actually, we can. The guard, grip and pommel of the daggers are bronze wrapped with leather. He’s pretty bad ass with knives and daggers, and I should know, he stabbed me once.” Zahruk rolled his eyes as he glamoured the sheathed daggers and gave them to us.

“Then let’s go take their God, and see how tough they are without him fighting at their side,” Danu said with a little bit too much enthusiasm for my taste.

## Chapter Twenty-Three

We were back in the main hall, deciding what would be the smartest route. Ryder had dispatched part of our group to search for the living and the dead in the upper and central areas, keeping the main body of Fae with us. I had showed them to one of the many hidden ways into the catacombs that lay just beneath us in the Guild's lower levels. We couldn't hear anything, and Danu couldn't sense Ristan, or feel him either.

She'd gone back to being hidden from the men, which was how it should be, considering the way some of them had looked at her.

Ryder had decided it best that we not sift to the catacombs, since I knew the Guild had spelled it for sifting, and we didn't have the time it would take to undo the spell if it was still in place. That meant we had most of the Horde's Elite Guard stealthily sneaking into some trap.

I waited as Zahruk and Ryder whispered intensely over which would be the best course. Zahruk wanted Ryder to sift out, and I understood his fears. There was only one thing the Mages wanted, and that was to kill the strongest being in Faery, which was Ryder. I wanted him away from here as well, because I needed to focus, and the idea that there was a *God* down there, waiting to help the Mages hurt him, left me mindless.

"Forget it, not going to happen. I owe Ristan, and I'll be damned if I hide from a fight."

We both stared at Ryder, and I got it. It sucked, but I understood his need, and knew how it felt to know someone you loved was in trouble, and the almost suicidal need to sacrifice yourself to save them. Not that Ryder was thinking he'd need to, but he wasn't going to back down.

"Ryder will be fine. He's the King, and for all we know, they already know we're here. If he leaves, who's to say they won't just kill Ristan?" I asked; and yes, my heart was in my throat, and I knew they could see the anxiousness in my face.

"We'll be fine," Ryder said as he finally agreed to fall back and let his men go before him. "*Synthia*," his mental voice flashed across my mind as we fell in behind Aodhan, Savlian, and Zahruk. "*I need you to stay back, so that my focus is on Ristan and what is happening when we get there.*"

"*Don't do that,*" I said not bothering to meet his eyes. "*You didn't leave so your men could focus, so don't even think of asking me to stand back and*

*wait this shit out. Maybe I should be asking you to stand back, so that I don't worry?"*

"Yes please," Zahruk growled from the front of our line.

"*Shut it,*" I snapped at Zahruk's back, hopping on Ryder's mental path to his men and watched with an angry glare as his shoulders moved with his silent laughter. "*We are facing a God, and neither of us knows how to handle that, but if we get him, Ryder, if we can take away their advantage, we have a huge chance of ending this war before it even begins.*"

"*Then I want you beside Danu, and we go with her plan,*" Ryder said. "*I'll stay with Zahruk and my men, and we both win.*"

"*I'll agree to that.*" I slipped my hand into his and twisted my fingers around his larger ones. "*I just hope we're not too late.*"

We stopped in front of an old tapestry and Zahruk shot me a questioning look. "*That's not it,*" I noted, and moved closer to it, as I pointed out one of the other tapestries further down the hall. "*The steps at the bottom of that one are in shambles, but we can get to the catacombs faster that way. They also wouldn't think we'd use these ones. From the bottom it looks like it's completely destroyed.*"

I passed the one we'd been standing at and headed to the secondary one which was never used because of the mishap of a young Warlock who'd accidentally blown most of the bottom steps into pieces. I slid the Plexiglas out of the way, and slipped through before holding it open for the rest to make it through.

The staircase was rounded, and the upper half wasn't as damaged as the bottom. I made sure to overstep the large pieces of stone that would alert anyone with clear hearing of our arrival. At the bottom, I paused and listened. It was eerily silent, and that worried me. The rest of the men followed my lead, and then I fell back to Ryder's side, and continued to listen.

Ristan was a fighter, and a damn good one at that. He was powerful, and the only thing that I knew of that was strong enough to slow the Demon down, would be God bolts. Luckily Zahruk had the foresight to make weapons out of those things that we could use when they couldn't figure out how they worked.

As we grew closer to the large open room that served as one of the reception rooms for the library and archives, I stopped and paused. So too, did everyone else. Not far away from us, we could hear soft crying that



sounded like a female. I couldn't tell who it was, but I figured it was a start at finding where they'd placed Ristan.

I didn't make a foot before Ryder grabbed me and pulled me back to him. "Wait," he whispered against my ear.

"Stop crying. Stupid girl, what are you crying for? Huh?" An angry male's voice sounded from less than a few steps away from us.

"You killed innocent people. You didn't have to kill them. They wouldn't have told anybody!" the woman cried, and my spine straightened. My hands itched, and I moved forward. I had to get closer, and Ryder knew it.

He and his men followed me as I snuck up and ducked beneath one of the massive shelves that housed part of the Guild's history. I couldn't make out who was crying, and who the men were, but I could feel the hatred pouring off of them. My guess was at least the male was a Mage, and the woman was from the Guild.

*Mages.*

I felt them in the space now; felt their anxiety and their cocky self-assurance that they'd be successful today. Joke was on them. I'd learned that lesson the hard way, which they'd learn as well. You never got cocky when you hadn't been dealt your hand yet.

"Shut her up, the Elder is gone. The Fae are in the building," another male's voice ground out and I stopped breathing.

I felt the others go still around me as well. We all watched as one of the Mages walked over to where we were, his eyes searching up and down the aisle, and missing us completely. I released the breath I was holding, and thanked the stars that he couldn't actually see us while we were cloaked by Ryder's invisibility veil.

Danu looked down at me and shook her head. "*I can't feel Bilé; not yet anyway, which means he can't feel us, either.*"

"*That's good,*" I replied and watched as the Mage moved around, heading back in the direction he'd come from.

"You feel that? It almost feels as if we're being watched," he said to the others in the room.

"If we were being watched, Bilé would tell us," another said. We stood up and moved further down the room until we rounded the corner, and the smell that met us, was nauseating. Dead bodies had been piled together.

I had to stop, close my eyes, and seal off my heart at the sight of people I

had once known, people who had been killed recently, from the looks of the remains. I moved away from them without bothering to see if anyone followed. I couldn't stand the sight of it, or the guilt that gnawed on me.

I knew I couldn't have changed it, but it was a different matter getting my heart to accept that. I entered another room and waited at the threshold for the rest of the group. Inside the room was dark, but I could almost make out a silhouette. Whoever it was had their back to us and their head down.

I used the senses I'd been given, and tried to see through the darkness, but it was as if the darkness was a thick mist, and no matter how much I tried to, I couldn't see through it.

*"That's not Ristan."* Ryder pulled me back.

*"Whoever it is needs our help,"* I growled.

*"No, they don't. They're beyond our help, Pet,"* he replied and pointed to the floor where even I could make out the thick dark pool of blood.

*"I'm really going to enjoy killing these bastards."* I accepted his outstretched hand as we headed down the hall to where the library was. It would be the ideal place to create a setup, because it had the most unused space.

*"You and me both, Syn,"* Zahruk said as he moved in front of us.

As we rounded the corner, we all stopped. Ristan was there, and he was tied to what looked like a mediaeval torture device. His arms were tied to one end and his feet were tied to the other. His eyes were vacant, and he had been brutally tortured. His face was a mass of slashes and angry looking bruises and his body had fared no better. His shirt was missing so I could see that his ribs were sunken in, and he had at least six God bolts in his shoulders and upper arms. I could sense there was more damage that we couldn't see. I couldn't stand to see him like this.

*"He's not coherent,"* Ryder growled.

Inside the room with Ristan was a large number of Mages and quite a few Guild Warlocks I recognized, but they weren't who I was worried about. Bilé was somewhere in this place, hiding as he waited for us. I stepped further into the room, noting that if I didn't, Ryder would. It didn't matter though. Danu passed us, and stopped everyone as she took the lead.

*"Bilé,"* she whispered.

I watched as one of the larger Mages turned and looked at her, and then transformed. He was over seven feet tall, and beautiful. He had silver hair,

and eyes of the clearest summer sky. His mouth was soft, and yet as I watched him, it grew tight with emotion.

He paused, his eyes raking over her and for a brief second, I saw raw need in his eyes. He growled her name, and the entire room shook.

“Husband, it’s been awhile,” Danu purred, and I turned to look at her. She was beautiful as a pure Goddess; her inner beauty was alight with a glow that created a halo of blonde curls that framed her face. Gone were her leather pants, and in their place was the Goddess attire. This was the Danu that Ristan had described to me in the Maze.

She held her hands palm up, her face tilted, pain in her eyes. It was raw, emotional pain that this man had created, and it was strong. They’d held true love at one time, until years of competition had created strife between them. I reminded myself why we were here, and turned back to find Bilé watching me with open curiosity.

“Is she yours?” he asked as his eyes slid down my body.

“Yes,” Danu answered him softly.

“She’s beautiful, just as our own child would have been, had she survived,” he whispered as his eyes moved back to Danu’s.

I looked to where Ryder and his men stood, silently watching what was occurring. They’d remain invisible until Danu made a move, and then they’d become visible to the Mages, to keep them engaged.

I blinked and almost looked away, but Ristan let out a strangled bellow of pain and I turned my attention to where one of the Mages had stabbed yet another bolt in his chest. “Don’t,” I warned as he pulled yet another one up and readied it.

“What are you going to do?” he sneered, which made his features pinch and I was reminded of Joseph, as he removed Larissa’s heart from her chest.

“I’m going to rip your guts out, and I’ll do it while you’re still using them. Then, after I’m done, I’ll show you your insides, and give you a fucking anatomy lesson.”

He blanched, but regained his composure. “We have a God on our side!” he shouted defiantly.

“So what’s your plan, wife? Kill me for what I’ve done to your children?” Bilé asked as he tilted his head, and watched her.

“I’ve no intention of killing you, husband.”

“Ahh, then this newly hatched Goddess must be the one who’s planning

to end my life,” he said with a narrowed look my way.

“She’s not a part of this, Bilé,” Danu warned. “She’s mine, of my womb.”

He swallowed and narrowed his eyes on me and for a brief moment, I felt him inside of me, searching my DNA until he found what he wanted, and then pulled back. I felt slightly violated, but something in his demeanor changed and he snapped.

“You mated with those vile fucks!?” His entire body shook with anger and his head swiveled to look at Ristan with an evil glare. His voice actually shook the ancient stone columns of the catacombs, and new leaks appeared and started to fill the floor with water.

It had always been damp down here, but new cracks were forming and water was leaking from the walls of the catacombs. Bilé was coming undone. He was actually glowing with hatred, and I could hear the Mages that were hiding in his cloaking field.

“I lay down with no Fae, I only placed my egg where a seed could plant it,” she sneered angrily. “After all this time and you’re jealous of my children.”

“I’m not jealous. You are mine! You’ve always been and will always be mine,” he growled.

I blinked and then chanced a peek at Ristan, who was glaring at me with a look of sheer hatred, but I knew it wasn’t for me. He was glaring at Bilé. I smiled. He glared. He was glaring, so hell yes I was smiling! If he could glare, it meant there was hope for him yet. I waited until Bilé moved closer, his angry arms swung out as if he was going to hit me, and I paused.

Danu shoved me, because I was trying to sift and we both knew it. She brought her fist up and slammed it against Bilé’s lips, and blood exploded from his nose. Oh yeah, that relationship was toxic! The Mages stood rooted to the spot, watching and waiting to see who would win. I wanted to, but I had a job to do.

I waited until she sifted behind him and Zahruk’s daggers materialized in her hands as she drove them into Bilé’s back while the Mages called out warnings. Two seconds later, I was left in the room with close to twenty Mages and Warlocks, and one bloody heap of Ristan.

I smiled, and felt a level of pleasure I shouldn’t have at the knowledge that I could now slaughter these sick bastards. I felt the moment Ryder and his men became visible, because the Mages turned a pasty shade of white. I

pulled power from within and my brands lit up.

“Showtime,” I growled as I moved toward the Mages. The first one started chanting, and I punched him, right in the teeth, and enjoyed the burn as his teeth cut my knuckle, and then his scream as he choked on them. I dropped low and swung my foot out, catching his feet and taking them out from under him.

I stood up and kicked out with the other foot, catching one in his cheek, and another in the nose. I kept kicking, swinging, and slicing through them with the wicked iron blades Zahruk had been overly willing to part with since he was basically allergic to the metal they’d been formed out of.

Out of the corner of my eye, I could see Ryder and the rest of the men engaging the balance of the Warlocks and Mages. Seeing Fae fighting is a frightening, barbaric thing to witness and I was glad I was fighting with them, and not against them.

I watched as a set of Mages started towards me, and waited until the first one was close enough and swung out—as Alden had trained me to—and slit his throat with the weight of my body. I may have been smaller than a man, but I had enough tricks to hit as hard as one. The other moved closer, his eyes briefly following his friend, right before I let one of the blades fly, which landed in his eye, killing him instantly.

Brains were tricky like that. I turned to find the rest, only to find Ryder and his men watching me calmly as they glamoured the blood from their weapons.

“Missed it, did ya, Pet?” Ryder asked, his eyes diverted from where Ristan was being helped and the bolts were being removed.

“Always,” I said as I moved in the direction of the Demon.

“The girl,” Ristan snarled. His eyes were almost feral. “I want her with us.”

“What girl,” I asked, and turned to look around the room, only to find Sinjinn entering the library holding Olivia by the arm.

I stepped forward, torn on what to do. My heart said to stop them, to protect the poor girl. My head replayed Alden’s words, and in the end, it won out over Olivia being of my Guild. In my heart, I was no longer a part of this place. I was Ryder’s. I was Fae, even if only by choice, because my babies were. If she had betrayed the Guild, it affected my children and that wasn’t something I could ignore.

“Olivia,” I whispered with a questioning look at her.

“She doesn’t talk to anyone, she doesn’t get fed by anyone, nothing. Not unless I myself do it,” Ristan whispered, but that whisper held a level of anger that I’d never thought was possible from my fun-loving Demon.

“Understood,” I said as a single tear slid from my eye.

“I don’t care if you’re her best fucking friend, Syn, cross me on this and you’ll wish you never had,” Ristan growled.

“Understood, Demon,” I growled back.

I watched as Sinjinn took the Guild librarian and Savlian took Ristan, before they all sifted out to await us in front of the Guild. “I want to know what she did that made him hate her that much,” I whispered through the hurt that Ristan had been torn and damaged the way he was.

“Something horrible,” Zahruk replied.

“Synthia, leave this alone. He isn’t up for a challenge and that is what will happen should he do any harm to you,” Ryder said, and I heard the silent plea in his tone.

“She’s his problem,” I confirmed. I knew Ristan; whatever she had done, it had been horrible. Mix that with Alden’s warning and I could make a pretty good guess about what she’d done to them. “We need to focus on replenishing this Guild with Witches, because what happened out there can’t continue,” I said as I looked around helplessly as the Elite Guard winked in and out of the rooms, removing the dead.

“For now, let’s just go home. I’d like to see our children.”

“Me too,” I whispered, and held my hand up to his, intertwine our fingers together. “Take me home.”

“I like the sound of you saying home, and meaning ours,” Ryder whispered as he kissed my neck.

“Wait,” I said as I looked around the place. “Do you feel that?” I asked as my skin grew aware of being watched, and tiny bumps arose on it. I listened, and heard the sound of small hearts racing, and I stepped away from Ryder. I heard the heartbeats of children. Ryder’s head cocked to the side momentarily, listening.

“Children. They haven’t counted yet, but...some of my men found a large group of them hidden; they are terrified,” he said with barely controlled anger.

“Get them out of here, take them to Faery. It’s too dangerous for them

here and who knows how many of their parents were killed when the Guild fell,” I said hurriedly and watched as Ryder nodded his head in agreement. I knew without a doubt he was already relaying the orders to his men.

“What the hell, Syn?” Adam yelled as he moved through the rubble and bodies.

“No time to explain, Adam. Did you bring the Dark Fae with you?”

Adam nodded absently as he took in the carnage in the room. “I brought Shadow Warriors as well as Dark Guard from the Fortress. It is all over the news stations that a Fae army stormed the Guild. Humans are panicking out there. I had some of the Guards set up a perimeter out there to keep the Humans away, and others are going through the upper levels looking for survivors,” Adam said, and I watched him in silence since I’d never seen him this angry before.

“There aren’t any more survivors, we’ve already checked,” I said softly as I placed my hand on Adam’s arm, sharing his anger and pain at the destruction of our childhood home.

“We need to go,” Ryder’s voice was a sharp growl.

“Wait,” I said as I pulled back on Ryder’s arm. “We can’t leave the library and the archives for anyone to stumble on; there’s some shit in there that is incredibly dangerous. Is there any way we can seal this area?”

Ryder gave me a nod with an evil glint in his eyes. “I think we can do something.” Ryder led us to the foot of the stairs, just before the entrance of catacombs and once he was assured that all of his men had cleared the area, he spread his arms wide and let loose with a gigantic push of power, causing the entrance of the library to cave in. “That should hold until we can bring back a group to clear that place out. For all we know, there could be one or more of the relics down here,” he said grimly as we turned and made our way to the upper levels and out the front door of the Guild.

Once outside, it looked like pandemonium had taken over. Armed Fae surrounded the Guild, keeping the Humans away from it and from attacking the would-be rescuers. The Elite Guard and Shadow Warriors had been winking in and out, leaving rows of the dead behind the Fae barricade and in front of the steps of the Guild. The most heartbreaking were the small, lifeless bodies of the children. Humans screamed and shouted in fury at the Fae. If ever there was a recruiting poster for the Mages, this was it.

The Fae who had been bringing up the bodies gathered around the dead

and awaited orders. This had to have been their way of saying the Guild was clear now.

“Have them take the dead to Faery for burial. They died bravely and deserve to be buried with honor.” I looked at the Guild compound where I had spent most of my life one last time. “Burn it down,” I whispered. The Fae overseeing the dead bowed to Ryder and then winked out through the portal with the remains.

I watched as Aodhan smiled as his eyes started to glow an iridescent blue. “Watch the master,” he said and I watched him, but it wasn’t him who had fire. It was Sinjinn. His double colored eyes changed, and turned to an angry red that bordered on creepy. He lifted his hands, palm up and I watched as flames leapt to life in them.

Even from where I stood, I could feel the heat of his flame as he brought it up to his lips and blew, which sent the flames rushing through the air as if they were liquid accelerator. Olivia screamed hysterically and fought against Sevrin’s hold, and the savage smile that took over Ristan’s face floored me. Whatever she’d done to him, I couldn’t intervene, no matter what.

Ryder turned and looked at the crowd of Humans that were wailing and shrieking in outrage at what had happened to the Guild. My heart mirrored their screams as flames licked the sides of the compound, as it caught and started to erupt in flames.

“Fae were not responsible for what happened here!” his voice boomed with regal authority over the crowd, stunning them to silence. “This was an act of insanity, caused by madmen and their accomplices within the Guild who betrayed their own brothers. One of ours was trapped inside protecting a Guild Elder when it happened. We will not tolerate violent acts against our people and we came here to get him out. This travesty had already happened when we arrived. We will go in peace now, but understand this; force will be met with equal force. Do not provoke my people by attacking them over false beliefs.” Ryder’s glare swept the crowd one last time before he looked at me. “Now, let’s go home.”



## Chapter Twenty-Four

We emerged from the portal and walked through the courtyard, uncaring of those who looked upon us with fear. I felt the crowd's uncertainty as the warriors passed through the crowd. These Fae must have also seen Alden and the children that were brought through, as well as the dead from the Guild, which had started trickling in just before we had.

The Spokane Guild had been burned to the ground, much to Olivia's dismay, judging by her hysterical screams and the horror on her face. We'd burnt every trace of the Guild and its people from the cityscape of Spokane.

She'd sworn at us and cursed me out as Ristan had watched her with a look of hostility and anger that ran so deep even I feared it. It was so out of character for him to look at someone as he was looking at her now.

I could see Elijah as he watched me closely. I was covered from head to toe in blood from the Mages, and soot from the fire that had quickly started to burn out of control as I'd watched, waiting for proof that it was gone.

Vlad and Adrian had come back with us, and together, as if we were all one, we walked through the masses of lesser Fae to make a brutal point. If they could do this to a proud warrior such as Ristan, then what chance did they hold?

"Who did this?" the Winter Queen asked, and her eyes never left Ristan's face. I could tell she was assessing the situation; he was a Demon in her eyes and I wasn't sure if she knew that he was one of Ryder's brothers. All that would matter to her is that Demons were a powerful part of the lesser Fae.

"Mages," I said when he didn't answer her. "Just imagine if it had been one of yours they'd captured."

"Is he, is he going to make it?" she continued.

"He'd better, or someone will pay for it," I said, and turned my eyes to Olivia who watched me silently. "We take harm upon our own very harshly, and those who fuck with my family will get no mercy."

"You're a traitor!" she cried.

She had drunk the same Kool-Aid I had, and sounded just as I had when I'd first met Ryder. I couldn't blame her for that, but Ristan hadn't deserved this, and as far as I was concerned she didn't just betray Alden. She'd betrayed the true Guild.

"I'm no traitor; not to my people. Not to my family, either," I seethed as

Ristan shifted painfully, and opened his eyes. “The Guild left me, and so we cut ties. I was born Fae, not a Witch. The Guild was your family, Olivia, and I hope Hecate has mercy on your soul—for I know that Demon won’t. If you did what I think you did, you may want to make peace with Hecate, and quickly,” I smiled coldly. “Take her to the dungeons, and see that she is chained and unable to use her hands or legs. Gag her mouth, for she can spell her way out with it. And, Olivia, if you do somehow get out of this place, know that I will ride with the hounds that hunt you down and drag you back here for his revenge. He is my family, and this world is mine. I would claim no part of the sick bastards who slaughtered those innocent people,” I seethed, and then allowed my eyes to glow to the electric blue and purple of the Fae. I pushed power into the brands, projecting their image and beauty so that everyone gathered could see.

“I did what I had to!” she cried as Sevrin made haste to remove her from Ristan’s presence. We started in the direction of the castle, but Silas stopped us by stepping into our path.

“I’ll fight beside my King, and gladly die with him to protect this world from the Mages,” he said proudly. The shifter had often given me the chills, but I could see his aura now, and it was pure. He was honest in his words, and his oath was welcomed by Ryder who placed a hand on his shoulder and accepted it.

“You have mine as well, but I need an oath of my own,” Elijah stated as he approached us.

“And that would be?” Zahruk asked as he stepped up and placed himself between Elijah and Ryder.

“That should I fall in battle, my people will be welcomed here, that they would have a safe place to live in peace. Most of the unclaimed don’t live forever, but they live long enough to need protection.”

“And you, how long have you lived?” I asked.

“Well over five hundred years,” he said as he watched me carefully.

“Your people would be welcome here,” Ryder said. “But if you think to cross me, know that I will have no mercy for you.”

Ryder’s eyes slid to me and I smiled. I could sense that he was eager to get into the castle, to have Ristan tended, as well as to check on our children.

“The rest of you who plan to claim an oath to the King can do so at a more appropriate time. His brother needs tending to, and our children must be

fed. We shall hold court tomorrow, and hear any concerns or demands you may have. Until then, we bid you safe passage into the main hall for the celebration of the return of the Demon,” I said, and then turned to Danu who had just shown up, anxiously watching Ristan as he labored to take air into his lungs.

*“Decorate the hall, and create a distraction...please? Like food, or whatever, just keep these people busy until we can secure an oath.”*

“How is he?” she asked, ignoring my request.

“Alive, barely,” I whispered.

I could feel Elijah’s eyes as they bore into my back as we walked inside the stronghold; tomorrow we would deal with the world, but tonight we needed to tend to those who had died, and those who needed medical help. The lesser Fae could wait. Later, we could pull an oath from those who seemed more ready to run home and hide.

“Fine, but after I create the distraction, I’m coming to check on him,” she said and disappeared.

“A distraction?” Ryder asked softly.

“We need to buy time. I’m sure some of those Fae were planning to leave, but I know how they can feed, and be merry while we deal with this problem. Danu is going to create food, and other things to give us the time we need.”

“...That’s genius,” Zahruk said as he turned to look at me. “Fuck, she’s ruthless,” he grinned and winked at me roguishly. “Maybe there’s hope for her yet.”

“Oh admit it, Zahruk, you like me. I just have that effect on creatures.”

He laughed and shook his head as he turned and moved forward to help them carry Ristan to the infirmary. I wasn’t sure why we were still walking, only that I was glad, since sifting wasn’t my strong suit right now.

I’d no sooner thought it, then the entire Elite Guard sifted, and I was no exception. Ryder had gripped my arm as we sifted to Eliran, who immediately took in Ristan and then looked up at me.

“What did you do this time, hide in a closet? Normally if someone’s hurt, you follow their lead and then almost die on me,” he snapped with frustration and ran his fingers through his hair before he started shouting off orders.

I stood still and watched as Ristan was carried into one of the small rooms and a curtain was closed around him. Eliran slipped behind the curtain

and called for a bunch of other things he was going to need. Ristan didn't have iron in him; that much I was sure of. Not that it would have done too much to the Demon, but the Mages may have experimented with it when they tortured him.

I was pulled up against Ryder's chest as we waited, numb and cold inside as Eliran and his team worked on Ristan. It wasn't until I turned and found Alden smiling at me from a bed in another small room in the healer's ward, that I left Ryder's warmth.

"How are you feeling?" I asked him as I moved to his room and took a seat in the chair.

"Never saw this one coming, kid," he admitted. "Glad you found him," he said as he nodded towards Ristan's room.

"Me too, but we have a problem. Olivia is here; Ristan made us bring her with us. I need to know what she did that made him hate her."

"She gave me up," he admitted. "She surprised me, and found me with the Demon. I didn't think she suspected him to be anything other than Human since he was wearing glamour of a Guild Warlock and was inside the wards. She came to my office with a bottle of wine and wanted me to help her celebrate the completion of another section of catalogued archives. She'd been completing a lot more of them lately, and I should have wondered why one was more important than any of the others. I was going to send her away, but Ristan said he would love to help her celebrate, and I had no reason to mistrust her. I should have known something was off; we both should have. She had never talked to me that much, not in all the time I've known her. I wanted to trust her, and I think Ristan did too; he'd been obsessed about that girl, and watching her like a hawk since he met her a few months ago, and I'd noticed it. I just thought what harm, ya know?" He sighed deeply, and then continued. "I think Ristan had more wine than I did. Anyhow, my head started to swim right away and I noticed Olivia trying to come on to Ristan, funniest damn thing I ever saw. Right up until she climbed into his lap and I think she touched his cheek or neck, next thing I know, he dropped like a millstone. And then I woke up, tied to a table, and the Mages were there with a few Warlocks I used to call friends. I heard one of the say they got wine and whatever the hell they used to take the Demon down, from that scary-ass thing."

"Olivia said she did what she had to," I admitted, hoping he could shed

some light on it.

“She had to have been watching me, or watching us. Ristan said he didn’t trust her, but that you’d told him she was just a mouse. I helped raise that girl, but if she gave us up, kid, she’s beyond our help. That wine had one hell of a punch though. Hell, when they started to torture me, I didn’t even feel it. I laughed, which had to be from the drugs. I watched them break my legs, and it didn’t start hurting until the drugs from the wine started to wear off.”

I hated that time moved differently here. Days had passed, and I hadn’t seen Ristan in that time, but then he’d been gone a lot trying to protect Alden from the Mages, and discovered trying to find more clues that would lead to relics. They’d been tortured for days, and we hadn’t even known.

“The Guild is going to want answers,” I continued.

“I bet, but I’m not sure which ones are under Mage influence anymore. I’ve been running ours under the assumption that they all are.”

“Then that’s how we will play it as well,” I said as I lifted my head as the Demon growled, and then screamed as Eliran reset bones that were healing incorrectly.

“They got him good, kid. They worked him over hoping he’d reach out to his King and brothers. That monster they work for knew things about him, and how he worked. They used it, and I watched as he did things I can never un-see again. He’s a better man than I, because not once did he cave. Not even when they used me against him. That’s why you found me on the upper level. They wanted the Demon to think I was dead and that it was his fault so they moved me figuring it wouldn’t take much more time before I died anyway.”

I swallowed the bile as I considered just how much had been done to poor Ristan. He hadn’t deserved it, and he’d done it to protect us. He’d been tortured brutally, and over a period of time which we’d been spending with our children, unaware that anything was amiss. We’d let him down, and that was my fault. He’d never let me down, and even when the others had suspected my Guild for bombing Ryder’s club, Ristan had believed in me.

“He’s immortal,” I whispered breathlessly. I was thankful for that more than anything else right now

“It’s a good thing too, kid. They took his body apart. That monster, he enjoyed it. Kept saying things about Danu, and Ristan refused to give an inch, which only made it worse,” he whispered and I turned to find Ryder

watching me.

“Ristan’s been given a sedative,” he said quietly when I continued to watch him.

“Alden needs rest, and we will take him to the Seattle Guild when he’s better, and not before,” I warned as I leveled a don’t-argue-with-me look at Alden. “You can’t just run in and explain that a God who wanders between our worlds is assisting evil Mages who are using the Guild as cover, because chances are you’ll be telling evil Mages that you know they exist and what their own evil plan is. For now you stay here. Last time you refused to listen to reason and at that time I understood those reasons. That reason is now gone, and you’re my family, Alden. I protect my family, even when they are stubborn as you. Ryder, make it known that if anyone is approached and asked for a ride out of Faery, that the gates are closed and whoever tries to assist him will suffer for it.”

“Now see here, Synthia—” Alden hissed.

“No! I won’t see anything, Alden. That Demon almost died because you were too fucking stubborn. I understand you wanted to protect our Guild, but it’s gone. There’s nothing left of it because I burned it to the ground. All of our secrets are protected, all of our agents have fled, or died. You’re safe here, and it’s now you who needs to be protected. Don’t argue with me; you won’t win this one, Uncle, that much I can promise you. Right now I need to focus on unfreezing the Tree of Life, so that my children live. That needs to be my priority.”

“Synthia, I understand that, but you forget. I don’t belong in this world.”

“You do. You belong with me, Alden. You’ve done your job, now let us do ours. Let us save those who need it from the Mages, and maybe, when enough time has passed and this war over, we can start a new Guild, one that’s run by us and the Fae. One that will protect the Humans. Time moves slower here, but I promise we will help you,” I said softly.

“You’d do that?” he asked and looked at Ryder.

“As long as my soon-to-be bride isn’t running it,” Ryder whispered against my ear.

“We’ll see about that one, Fairy. For now, Alden, sleep,” I said as I leaned over and kissed his forehead, then pulled his blankets up as his eyes grew even heavier.

“I love you, kid,” he whispered, a thickness I wasn’t used to from him

stuck in his tone.

“I love you, too, Uncle,” I whispered back and we left the room.

## *Chapter Twenty-Five*

I sat on the bed and watched Ryder as he rocked Zander in his arms. The other two had been asleep in the nursery when we'd returned to the rooms, but Zander seemed to have been waiting for our return, so Ryder moved one of the chairs to our sleeping chamber and settled in with him.

My mind wasn't on Olivia or the Fae who had seemed pacified by the party going on in the great hall right now. I was in another dimension, my mind on the Guild and those who'd been killed there. It was a safe haven, or should have been. The Mages had violated it, and that was something they'd pay for.

Danu was with Ristan, and only I knew it. She'd been beside herself with emotion, which was so unlike her; I had made a mental note to ask her why that was.

"Zander's sleeping," I commented as I raised my eyes to my beast, who continued to rock our son in his arms as if he was the most precious thing in the entire universe.

"I know, but I want him to know I love him. My father never showed me affection, but my sons will know I love them. They will know we love and cherish them."

He was shaping up to be a gentle giant with our babies. He was also making up for the lack of presence he'd felt from his own father, and ensuring that his own sons never experienced that. That alone made me want to smother them, but it wouldn't help us or them.

"Put him in bed, and come hold me," I whispered as a chill ran down my spine.

"As you wish," he grinned indulgently.

I waited until he had stepped into the nursery, knowing he'd be gone for more than a few minutes, then moved to change out of the sleek white nightgown I'd been wearing, into something a little more revealing. I walked to a chest of drawers and opened one, then smiled. Inside were the slinky panties and hose I'd been meaning to wear, but had been too pregnant to feel anything other than huge and uncomfortable.

I wasn't big and pregnant anymore, and I wanted him tonight. Ristan and Alden were recovering. The Fae were protected inside our walls, and tonight, the beast was mine. There wasn't anything to do about the Tree; not yet



anyway. We had to wait until we could figure out how to thaw it out before we could take the next step. My children were asleep, protected by Zahruk's watchful eye.

I removed the gown, stepped out of the silk panties, and changed into a black thong. Next I pulled on the stockings, and then slipped the garter belt up to my hips, arranging it until it looked seductive over my creamy flesh, then attached the clips to the stockings. I left my breasts exposed, as Ryder liked them and moved to grab out a few items from his secret stash.

I moved to the bed and crawled into the middle, and had just laid back when he sifted back into the room. His eyes instantaneously changed to onyx as they took in the dusky, pink tips of my nipples that were already hard and begging to be tasted.

"I thought you wanted me to hold you?" he asked as he watched me with ravenous eyes.

"I do, right after you own my body and soul," I answered him, and then spread my legs, wide.

"Naughty little thing; you have no idea what you're asking for," he replied.

"I've been owned by you since day one, since the first moment you made me come. You'll have to do better this time," I grinned. I was baiting the beast, and we both knew it.

He swallowed and then smiled, but it was predatory and feral. "That sounds like a challenge."

"It is," I whispered huskily.

One second I was spread out on the bed, and the next he was there, his hands hard as they secured mine in a vicelike grip. "I'm going to enjoy this," he growled huskily. His timbre vibrated through me and started a wave of heat that unfurled from my stomach and soaked my panties.

"Good, now make me beg," I continued to taunt him.

I wasn't prepared for the rope that he glamourous as it wrapped around my hands, and he then lifted me up to a hook that he pulled down from the ceiling. That was something I hadn't seen in a while! He slipped the ropes through it, and then moved away from the bed.

"I have a few surprises for you," he answered my unasked question. "Things to torture you sweetly with, things to make you come as well, tell me, Pet. Do you want to come?"

“Yes,” I answered him truthfully. I wanted him inside of me already, and he knew it. I was greedy when it came to him and the pleasure he gave me.

“Good, but I’m not going to allow it for a while yet. Tonight you’ll need to earn it,” he continued. I watched as he glamourous his clothes off and sat in a chair near the bed. “Tell me, are you wet just wondering what I plan to do to that sweet pink flesh?”

“Yes,” I replied.

“And who owns that pretty flesh?” he asked, and when I hesitated, he paused and looked at me. My body was flooded with magic, thick and powerful magic. My nipples were pulled on, my clit was pinched painfully, and I gagged as something pushed deep into my throat. I moaned and looked at him, and then it was all gone.

“You do,” I whimpered; the feeling of something rubbing against my clit was overwhelming. I moved against it, and then almost growled when he glamourous a chair in front of the bed.

“Good girl. Now, tell me how badly you want to be fucked, and make me believe it.”

“I don’t want it; I crave it. I crave your cock, and I hunger to taste it,” I moaned, and then felt a slight slap on my behind.

“Is that so?” he replied, and I watched as his hand wrapped around his cock. I licked my lips hungrily in reply.

“Yes,” I confirmed.

He moved from the chair and kneeled on the bed, but he wasn’t close enough for my taste. His hand reached up and pulled me down, without unhooking me. I was eye level with his monstrous cock and I moaned with hunger for it.

“Lusty little wench,” he whispered huskily as his cock rubbed over my lips. “You want that, don’t you?” he asked, and yet he didn’t give it to me; instead he held my hair and lifted my face until I was forced to meet his obsidian gaze.

“Mmm,” I answered and as I did, he pushed his cock inside my mouth. I moaned as he pushed, and rocked his hips slowly.

“Gods you’re so beautiful sucking me off,” he said as he pushed further, and then pulled out. He did it several times, making me struggle to keep him inside my lips. “My turn,” he said after a few moments of fucking my mouth had passed.

He pulled roughly on the rope, which placed me back upright, and then he lifted my hips and spread my legs wide as he moved my panties to the side, out of his way. He lay beneath me, and then pulled my body down until I was over his carnal mouth. “No coming yet,” he warned as he stroked my desire with his mouth and tongue.

I moved as best as I could; riding his mouth as I felt myself unraveling. I could feel him inside of me, and moaned every time his nose pushed against my clit. The masculine noises he made as he continued to ravish me with his hungry mouth alone were enough to send me over the edge, but I couldn't. I hadn't been given permission.

His hands came up and held my legs further apart as he watched me. When I was sure I couldn't hold on any longer, he stopped and crawled out from between my legs. I was a slick mess, and he knew it. He pulled up on the rope until I was hanging in the air with my knees only grazing the bed. He glamourised more rope and smiled as he wrapped it around one knee, and then secured it to the huge oak poster frame.

“I like you wet and exposed, Pet. I like you at my mercy,” he said as he tightened the rope and then repeated it with the other leg. When I was hanging there, he reached up and slapped my pussy. Hard. “I also like to hear you scream and beg me to own your sweet flesh,” he continued. “I can do anything I want to you, and I will.”

“Not complaining here,” I whimpered as another hard slap landed on my sensitive place.

“We don't need these anymore,” he said as he reached up and ripped the panties from me. He smiled as he brought them up and held them to his nose. “You're so fucking wet.” He walked to the side of the bed and sat there, my panties still held to his nose. “Taste how good you are, and how much your pussy weeps to be fucked.” He pushed them into my mouth and I groaned.

Yeah, I hadn't seen that coming! I could taste myself, and the smell was erotic as it wafted to my nose. It smelled like sex, and as I watched him, he moved to the front again, where I was completely and utterly exposed.

“Look at the mess you've made,” he said as he leaned down and stroked my mess with his tongue. “You like that?” he asked and I raised my head and moaned. “Good girl, watch me fuck you with my mouth,” he growled as he held my thighs and used his tongue on me. My legs trembled as I moaned louder.

He released my legs and placed one hand on my ass to hold me in place, as the other pushed against my opening. I cried out, it was muffled by my own panties as three fingers slid inside. He watched me, with a crooked smile on his lips as he pushed in, and then pulled out of my soaking wet haven.

“You feel like you need to be fucked,” he said smoothly, and then stopped. He reached up and removed the panties, and then tossed them aside. “Too bad I have no plans of allowing this sweet pussy its release.”

“Please,” I begged.

“I said no,” he growled.

“Ryder, fuck me!”

I cried out as he reached up to deliver a punishing blow to my sensitive flesh. “I am in control, understand?”

I glared at him.

“Are you challenging me?” he asked as he parted my legs painfully wider and then pushed his fingers inside, and roughly, quickly drove them in until I was screaming for more. It stopped too fast, and I wiggled my ass for more. “If you challenge me again, I’ll punish you.”

“Maybe I like your punishments!” I cried, as his fingers rubbed between my lips.

“Then I’ll find one you’re not so fond of, and make it hurt. Or maybe, just maybe I’ll fuck this ass that is so inviting.”

“Maybe I’ll like it!” I growled, but then his hand moved and I clenched my ass, not ready for it to be used. His finger pushed inside without warning and I bucked against the ropes; tears burned as he filled my ass and the pain assaulted me.

“It’s not ready for that yet, Pet. But it will work as punishment should you disobey me,” he said as he pulled and then pushed his finger back inside. He didn’t remove it, and eventually I relaxed against it. “It needs to be trained before I fuck it,” he continued. “Long hours of you using one of these,” he said as he used his other hand to bring up a jeweled plug.

Maybe I’d been wrong about the toys.

“Ryder,” I whimpered.

“It’s okay,” he whispered as he removed his finger and something cold pressed against it. “Relax for me, Pet. I want you to keep this in, and get used to the feeling of it. In the morning, I’ll fuck you, clean you, and then you’ll wear it all day. When you sit, you’ll want to come, but you won’t because I

haven't given you leave to. Then maybe, I'll award you with my cock in your throat tomorrow afternoon, and by the time I get this sweet, soaking wet pussy to bed, I'll finally allow you to come."

I cried out in pain as he pushed it fully inside of me. It wasn't big, but I wasn't used to it. He sat back and stroked his cock as he watched my body quiver, begging to be fucked. "Good girl. How's it feel inside your tight ass?" he asked, and then pushed his fingers inside my pussy.

"Big," I complained, but then I felt the wave of absolute pleasure as he began to fuck me with his fingers.

"You've taken my magic inside of you before. It's almost time to take me," he smiled and then lowered his mouth to nip at my clitoris. I moaned with pleasure, but then whimpered again as he pulled out. "Greedy, aren't we?" he asked, and then moved from the bed and moved around until he was by my face.

He reached down and placed his palms on my cheeks and then lowered his mouth until he claimed my lips. The kiss was demanding, and he deepened it before pulling away.

"You're fully exposed and vulnerable. Does that excite you as much as it does me?" he asked and I moaned in delight as I felt his magic raining kisses over my flesh.

"Yes," I confirmed breathlessly.

"I doubt that," he said, and then tilted my head until I was looking down. I then watched as his cock pushed to my lips. "Fuck me with your mouth, earn what I'm about to give you," he demanded, and I opened for him. He pushed it in until tears leaked to the corners of my eyes. He smiled as he gripped my throat tightly, and stars erupted behind my eyes. "Ready to be owned?" he asked, and I answered around the fullness in my mouth.

I was filled. Completely, and utterly filled, by my beast and his control of magic. Magic had consumed me and pushed into me with a blinding force as I was being fucked, while his hand applied pressure on my throat. He was rough, and growled his approval as he used the rope's flexibility to his own means.

"Take it," he demanded as I whimpered and moaned. "This is nothing compared to how hard I'm going to fuck your slick, wet pussy. I'm going to pound until you beg me for mercy. With that sweet ass filled, it won't take long. You'll want it out, and I'll take it out but only to fuck you with it. Do

you want me fucking all of you like this?” he growled out as his jaw clenched and released.

I moaned my response, and then swallowed as his hot come exploded and slid down my throat. There had been no warning, but I wasn't complaining.

“Fucking hell. Good girl,” he growled and then pulled out and pressed the tip to my lips. “Clean it,” he demanded. I did, jutting my tongue out to clean what my mouth had missed.

He used his magic to untie my legs, but the other magic still assaulted and punished my pussy. He didn't stop it, not even as he left the bed and it took root in the place between my legs. He held them up by my thighs and placed one foot over each of his shoulders. His eyes watched as his magic continued to fuck me.

“I love watching you get fucked,” he admitted. “Watching this pussy open up as it takes my magic inside. Watching your eyes as they glaze over with the need to come, but my good girl doesn't come unless I allow it, does she?”

“No-o-o,” I gritted out, since I was doing my damndest to hold back an orgasm as he spoke of it.

“You're doing good fighting it, but I find that I want you to lose,” he said as his hand reached to my behind and he pushed against the jewel there. “I want to wreck this ass, and watch as the pain turns to pleasure and then clean up this sweet bud as it leaks the sweetest nectar.”

“Ryder,” I moaned as my eyes began to roll back in my head at the strength it was taking to restrain from coming.

“Ryder, what? You're lasting longer than you ever could have as a Fae, and I want to know your limits. How close is this sweet pussy to coming, Pet? If I do this,” he said and pushed against the jewel even harder until it was going in and out at a slower tempo than his magic was. “And this,” he said as his magic pinched my nipples and then began to vibrate. “And then this,” he continued and I felt his mouth against mine, kissing my mouth hungrily with his magic. “And last but not least, I do this,” his mouth clasped over my clit and I shattered.

I shook and felt his hands as they gripped my ass in tight fists, holding my body for his mouth's feasting pleasure as he ravenously fed himself on my pussy. I was sure I was feeding him nicely because of all the mindless torture he'd done so far. It wasn't until I felt his magic stop, and his hard, hot

cock filled me, that I knew I'd left the stars and was bouncing around the solar system in a mindless orgasm.

"That was hot as fuck, Synthia. You exploded, and nothing has ever turned me on as much as you just did," he growled, building up speed as he held my boneless legs apart and drove himself into me with his inhuman speed. "Now, it's his turn," he warned. I screamed as he shifted form and the beast took over while still inside of me.

He grew and grew, until his wings expanded and sent gentle waves of cool air through the room. His eyes slid to fully obsidian, darker than any midnight sky. The air left my lungs in a whoosh of release; the beautiful beast that lived inside Ryder watched me. He was inside of me, and already moving with supernatural speed that caused my head to jerk and roll as he took me.

I felt skewered, and wasn't sure I could accept the beast inside right now. I was wet, luckily, and wasn't prepared for my hands being released as quickly as they were. I fell to the bed, and my teeth jarred. The beast turned me over without leaving my body, and gripped my hips.

"Mine, my pussy," he growled as he grew larger inside of me. "Pretty," he continued; I felt pressure on the plug and winced, then exploded again around the engorged cock inside of me. "Hot," he growled, and then I felt him pulling me up and against his chest. My leg was lifted, and I cried out in pleasure as I was filled deeper and fuller. Teeth punctured my back, and I moaned as pleasure met pain and the intense feeling of being owned flooded me.

"Harder," I growled, and felt the teeth retract from my flesh. He liked to bite, because it was his way of claiming me.

"No," he growled roughly.

"Pussy," I whimpered as he continued to pound into me.

I felt those teeth again, but this time there was no pain. The numbing agent Ryder had told me about was in full effect. He gripped my throat and released my shoulder. "Bad girl," Ryder's voice growled.

"He needed it," I said, and then I was emptied of his cock and flipped around roughly.

"He did, but you didn't," he snapped. "He doesn't get to mark your flesh, and he knows it. I should remove the plug and fuck your sweet ass; maybe you'll learn a lesson," he growled from deep in his chest. "You baited him

even when he was trying to resist his more primal urges.”

“I did, now shut up and fuck me harder, big boy, or let him out to play,” I challenged him and then winced as he painfully parted my legs and drove his full cock inside of me.

I cried out in shock, and tried to un-skewer myself from his massiveness. “What’s the matter, Pet? Bit off more than this sweet pussy can take?” he asked as he started to rock his hips. “Fuck, you’re tight. This is what you need, isn’t it? To be dominated and controlled. To be fucked by a monster, one who loves you above anything else?”

“Yes,” I moaned as my head rocked from side to side while I came undone. “Yes!”

“Good, now good girl,” he said as he rolled us until I was sitting on him. “Ride me. Ride me until this sweet pussy comes again so I can feed.”

I rocked and moaned as pain assaulted me, but I was immortal and I wasn’t going to allow him to win. I lifted myself up until only the tip was inside, and then lowered myself at a painfully slow pace as he watched where our bodies were joined.

“Holy hell,” he whimpered, and I watched him as he continued to watch us, his eyes glazed over from lust as I used him over and over again.

I pushed my own power out, listening to him and his body’s reaction to my power as I fed him; he moaned and lifted his eyes to meet mine. His heart raced as his blood pumped in his veins. I’d taken his control, and we both knew it. He’d never fully given me control, and I wanted him to like it. I sent more waves of magic out, feeding him as I continued to slowly ride him.

“Gods save me,” he growled as he took control back, using my hips as an anchor as he pushed and pulled me until we both exploded into a heap of writhing bodies, moaning and screaming from the sheer magnitude of the release of power and pleasure. I was glad he was King, and not only of the kingdom, but of the castle. He’d had the foresight to make the room soundproof, and it was good that he had.

But then, he did love to make me scream, and sex with Ryder was primal. Those animal instincts we were born with always took over with him. And I fucking loved it.



## Chapter Twenty-Six

I walked the next day with a subtle limp. Not because I was sore, but because he'd insisted I wear the damn thing, and I wasn't going to lose this game of ecstasy. It wasn't even noon when he took to me to our room and pushed me down to my knees, then used my mouth like it was his to control. When he'd finished, he'd lifted me up and kissed me as if I was the most precious thing he owned.

"Is it sore?" he asked.

"No," I lied, and smiled. I could lie! He couldn't.

"Good, come here," he said as he dragged me to the bed and removed my clothing with his magic. I looked at him questionably, but only had a second to guess his intentions before I was placed over his lap and the first slap landed.

I screamed, and then felt heat flood to my cheeks as pleasure washed over me.

"Count, Synthia," he growled and slapped my ass again, this time he caught my pussy with his fingers and swore. "Damn, you're wet," he growled and took me on the bed without warning. When we were both in another pile of arms and legs and soaking wet with sweat, he grinned. "I fucking love you, there's no question about it. No one has ever made me stop a game of seduction, or remove something before I was ready. I felt you wet and it was game over. I had to be inside of you more than I had to draw air."

I kissed his lips and then fell back on the bed.

There was a knock at the door on the castle corridor side and we both froze and then laughed. "Do *not* get that," I warned.

"I'm getting it, right after I fuck you again," he growled. He pressed his erection against my leg. "You make me insatiable. Like I'm stuck in Transition, and it's going to be never ending."

"Good," I laughed.

The knock sounded again.

"Get dressed!" Ristan's angry voice shook the door.

We both paused, and then Ryder growled enough to shake the entire room.

"He's wounded," I whispered as I stood and looked at Ryder as I waited for him to glamour my clothes on.

“Fine, but I’m not finished with you, Pet,” he warned as he glamoured clothes on us both.

Ryder opened the door, and I gasped as the rapidly healing wounds on Ristan’s face told some of the story of his torture. “Where is she? I wanted her in my quarters,” he bit out.

“I put her in the dungeon until you heal,” I answered him and then ran to him and threw my arms around him. He didn’t hug me back. Instead, he tensed and gently pushed away from me which Ryder noticed.

“She isn’t a part of this, and she’s shown the girl no mercy, Ristan. She told the guard to hold her in in a cell, without water and food, as you yourself instructed.”

“No one has fed her?” he asked as his demeanor took on a coldness I didn’t recognize.

“She’s yours to kill,” I whispered even as I felt a little part of me die inside. “That is, if that’s what you think she deserves.”

“Oh, I have no plans of killing her, Synthia. Not any time soon,” he seethed, his skin turning red as he allowed his Demon to take over. “I want to find out everything she knows and she *will* suffer for what she has done, but she won’t die anytime soon.”

I took a step backwards, away from him. “Alden lives,” I said and then watched his eyes move to mine.

“And I care, why?” he asked blandly.

I swallowed my retort and watched as he turned and left me standing in the doorway. “He isn’t Ristan.”

“That is Ristan, the one Zahruk and I knew for many years. That’s the Ristan my father created. It will take some time to get him back to the one you know.”

I turned and looked at Ryder, but screaming in the nursery made me run. Asrian and Sevrin burst into the nursery from the other door at the same moment we entered it. Ristan was there, and Meriel was on the floor, her eyes vacant as she stared up at the ceiling. I could still hear her pulse, but that wasn’t what worried me.

Ristan had Kahleena in his arms, and was slowly rocking her in the rocking chair. I could have sworn I could hear the soft strains of Owl City’s *Vanilla Twilight*. He must have sifted into the nursery directly and thought Meriel was a threat. I held my breath as he held my daughter.

I watched him, and then I saw it. Vulnerability. He was hiding behind his Demon mask to hide the pain and helplessness that he must have felt at being used for bait for his King. They'd taken away his control and from all of our talks, I knew that was the one thing he hated most. Thinking to what Ryder had said a few moments ago, it was probably how he felt as Alazander took his wings after Transition.

I placed my hand on Ryder's as he moved forward. Ristan would never hurt our daughter. He loved her. I motioned for Sevrin and Asrian to stay back. They eyed their brother warily as Asrian moved slowly to pick up Meriel. As he slipped out of the room, I could see Zahruk slowly move into the room, joining Sevrin.

"Names are important, Synthia," Ristan growled as he gently stroked the blonde curls atop her small, delicate head with his red hand.

"She's been named, Ristan; Kahleena," I said as softly as I could so that Kahleena didn't respond to my voice and remained still in his arms.

He looked up at me and then down at the baby. He'd missed her being named, and as I watched him, I caught flickers of the old Ristan in there, buried deep, but fighting to come back to the surface. I exhaled a shuddering breath and moved to the crib with the boys in it.

"This one is Zander, and this one is Cade," I announced as I picked Cade up and held him in my arms. "Do you like the names?" I asked trying to get him talking.

"Kahleena is a beautiful name, for a beautiful girl," he whispered and raised his eyes to meet mine. "She's my favorite thing in the world."

I swallowed.

Ryder growled, but luckily, it was only inside my head that he did so.

"She likes you too," I said as I took the chair beside him.

*"Ryder, his mind is partly broken, but he would never hurt our children. He's felt too much, and the pain is still too much, feel it. It's so overwhelming that it could feed an army of Fae."*

*"He's got my daughter in his arms, and you tell me he's broken. She's too frail for this; she can't be his cure."*

"Fuck you all," Ristan growled as he stood and walked to the crib. Crap, he must have tapped himself into our conversation.

He waited there, as if we'd ask him to relinquish our daughter. Instead, I placed Cade back in his crib, and placed a gentle hand silently on Ristan's

shoulder. His back tensed up at my touch. “When you’re ready, we are here. Please, make sure she’s fed before she goes back to sleep.”

I gripped Ryder’s hand in warning and together we left our sickly daughter in the hands of the Demon. I gave a meaningful look at Zahruk and Sevrin who nodded their understanding and reluctantly followed us from the room. When we were safely out of earshot, Ryder spun around and glared at me.

“What the fuck do you think you’re doing?”

“I’m fixing the Demon, because we have to fix him before we can have Ristan back! He’d never hurt that baby; he adores her. You know that! You can’t see past the anger right now, and neither can he. He’s blinded by pain, and yes, he’s a little broken but, Ryder, so was I at one time. He will get past this, and if our daughter can help him, then so be it. He’s not going to ask to date her; he’s holding her because she’s his anchor. She’s his happy right now, and I won’t take that away and neither will you.” I gave another glare to Zahruk for good measure and warning.

“I should have spanked you harder,” Ryder growled.

“Wow, can I watch?” Aodhan said as he rounded the corner and interrupted our fight.

“No!” we both shouted as one.

“Damn, but I like bitches who like to be spanked. If you hit that sweet spot...they melt.”

I turned and glared at him.

Ryder growled, which was ten times scarier than my glare.

Aodhan put his hands up in mock surrender. “Man, hands are up, I surrender?”

“Ristan is awake, and moving,” Ryder declared.

“That’s good news,” he said.

“He’s in full Demon form,” Ryder said.

“Shit, that’s...not good,” Aodhan whispered as if Ristan would overhear him and kick his ass. Zahruk grimly nodded in agreement. “Guess it’s not a good time to tell you we finally heard back from the Light King.”

“And?” I asked.

“He said this is not his fight, but that you should know he’s allowed the Mages safe passage through his lands,” he stated.

“I guess it’s time to make Danu choose another Light Heir, because they

are about to lose a King and a Queen,” Ryder growled, and looked at me.

“Agreed,” I exhaled. “I’m tired of their games, and helping the Mages goes beyond stupid. If they openly want us to know they have allowed the Mages to use their lands, and have been granted safe passage, it’s their own fault. They’re challenging us, wanting to see our next move. I say we end the game and get the Light Fae a steward until we can find the missing Heir.”

“Let’s go,” Ryder held out his hand and waited.

“Just walk right in and kill them?” I asked pointedly.

“How else would we do it?”

“Publicly,” I said. “Aodhan, go to the Dark Court and tell Kier, his wife and Heir to come immediately. After you’ve done that, tell my father to bring his wife and Liam here,” I said as I turned to Ryder. “We can’t just go kill them. It’s what they expect you to do. It’s what your father would have done. We have to be smarter, and we have to be careful right now. The other Courts will see what we do, and they will know they were deposed, and that a judgment had been decided on by the three Courts—together. We will show them a united front and a group decision, which is something your father never did.”

I heard clapping and turned to find most of the Elite Guard there, even though the clapping was only coming from Zahruk.

He smiled and pushed off the wall, his eyes on me as he spoke to Ryder. “That’s actually brilliant, Ryder. Those creatures down there think you an evil being, and not even their royalty is changing that opinion. Not even Synthia’s idea to get them drunk could change that opinion. But by deposing the Light King and Queen, you’d seal the fates of us who depend on the Tree. Synthia has a valid point, if the three royal Castes do it as one, we will show them something they’ve never seen in their very long lives. We could show them that we are not like our father, and that we are a united front with the other Castes, but it will also show them we will hold no mercy for those who help the Mages. It’s brilliant.”

## *Chapter Twenty-Seven*

Ryder presided over the assembly in Fae form and I waited beside him on the lovely throne he had created for me not so long ago. The other monarchs stood to the side of the Horde King's throne in silent support, as we knew the Light Fae would make a dramatic show when they arrived, and we weren't wrong. Tatiana wore silver. Her dress was so bright that it left behind flashes of spots in my eyes, and I refused to even acknowledge it.

Dresden stood tall and regal as he looked smugly around the room at the showing. It was a huge turnout, with every single creature in the vicinity turning up to see what Ryder would do. They expected to watch a death occur here today, but that wasn't going to happen. We wanted them to take our word that Ryder wasn't like his father, but to the Fae, actions were a lot louder. I understood where they were coming from, even if I wanted to strangle them all since the lives of our children depended on unfreezing that Tree. Danu had said that I was on the right track, but she'd be interfering if she told us exactly how to achieve it.

I watched Elijah and his people. They stood with Silas, who nodded to me when he noticed my eyes on him. I nodded back, as to not offend him. His people seemed impressed at this, and he smiled and mouthed 'thank you' to me. I mouthed 'blow me' back, which caused him to throw his head back and bark with laughter.

Elijah watched me with a keen eye. "You too," I said, and smiled. He didn't seem to think it funny, but he did however move his hand to his crotch and mouthed 'you first'.

"Did he just ask you to touch him?" Ryder asked as he leaned over and whispered in my ear.

"No, he told me to blow him first," I whispered back and then grabbed Ryder's hand as he started to stand. "Calm down. I'm mending bridges, and making new friends. No one is getting blow jobs tonight, unless it's you of course, but you'll have to earn it first, Fairy."

"I could make you," he replied hungrily, his timbre vibrating with untold pleasure in it.

"You could, but I'd like it," I retorted and noticed the entire place was staring at us, hopefully not reading our lips. "Time to get this show going," I whispered.

“By all means, Princess,” he growled and as I stood, he stood with me. “Tatiana, Dresden,” Ryder said as I slowly nodded my head in subtle acknowledgement as he started the show.

“Why were we summoned here, by you?” Dresden sneered.

“It has been brought to our attention that you’ve aided our enemies, the Mages,” Ryder said, his voice raising enough so the entire room could hear him clearly. I watched as the pair didn’t even bother to hide their smugness as Ryder slowly continued, giving them just enough time to appease the room of their guilt. “If this information is correct, you’ve committed a crime against Faery.”

“We’ve committed no crime against Faery, only aided an enemy to remove a threat,” Tatiana hissed with an ugly smile.

“And which threat would that be exactly, Tatiana?” I asked as I felt myself floating, and as I looked down to the floor, I was. Not by much, but I was! Now was not the time to discover new powers. “*Danu!*”

“*Yes?*” she asked as she moved out from behind Elijah and stepped forward.

*“I’m floating; make it stop before someone notices it!”*

My feet touched the ground as Tatiana started her speech.

“The people of Faery are tired of you and your strumpet, *King*, and most have openly acknowledged that you, Ryder, are the spitting image of your father, in looks and in deeds! You demanded this tart at her birth and you have her fully under your influence, and she’s my own niece! My heart bleeds to think of the things you’ve done to her—”

“Call Synthia a strumpet again, and I’ll forget my purpose and feed the Sluagh your entrails,” Ryder warned with venom dripping from his lips.

“See! He is no better than his sire! He threatens my husband with eternal death, and more. Will you allow him to continue to threaten us with those vile creatures of the Sluagh? Or will you stand with us, the Light Fae, and take arms against him? I say it ends here! The Mages have promised to leave us in peace if they can have the Horde! No longer would we have to live in fear, or take orders from their kind!” Tatiana shouted as her husband nodded his head vigorously beside her.

“We have given this world no reason to fear us. I stand here as the King of the Horde, asking you to admit the charges against you, not by myself, but with the other Heirs of this world, who accuse you of these crimes. I have not

raised arms against anyone here, Tatiana, so you'd call them to arms on false pretenses?" Ryder said calmly.

"Do not take your anger out on my wife!" Dresden growled, and narrowed his eyes smugly. He watched Ryder closely, planning the best way to bring out the beast, of this I was sure. He wanted him to be the creature, because this assembly would fear it.

"Seriously, Dresden?" I asked, and shook my head. "Enough with your overly dramatic games; facts are what will be used here. Isn't it a fact that you idiots have been allowing the Mages to use your lands, and to travel through them with a guarantee of safe passage? Answer the charges, because that is why you are here. Not to plan some half-assed coup," I asked and watched as Dresden turned all but purple with rage.

"Yes, and I did so for everyone here, to depose the Horde King! It is my lands, and my right to allow any who ask my permission to pass through them!"

"So you willingly allowed them into Faery via the path through the Light Lands?" Ryder continued for me as he took over. I'd given him enough time to calm the beast that had to be rattling his cage.

"Yes, again! You daft monster, it is my right to allow who I shall to pass upon my lands. I am the King! You are nothing! You and your people feed from the fear of these gentle Fae folk, and I say it ends here! Who is with me? Stand with me, and the Mages will rid this world of him and his brethren!" Dresden continued.

"You poor, misguided *being*, you allowed the Mages into Faery. They came here via your lands. Can you guess what they did after you'd allowed them passage to kill the Horde King?" Ryder asked as his eyes challenged Dresden.

"They made an attempt on your concubine's life, which sits fine with me," he grinned coldly.

"Nope, guess again," I said as I smiled back at him.

"That is the only thing they wanted!"

"Nope, they came in and used a spell on the Tree of Life, which wrapped it in ice. You allowed Faery's enemy in, and you allowed them to harm her. That alone is treason against Faery, Dresden. What do you say to the charges?" Ryder asked, his eyes watching his enemy with deadly intent, which he was barely containing.



He looked at me and Ryder and opened and closed his mouth several times before he sneered. “Then depose me!”

“Is that what you have to say to the charges against you?” Ryder asked, as his eyes took on a deadly intent.

“You won’t depose me! You’ll do as your father before you would,” Dresden hissed.

“If you won’t depose us, then why are we here?” Tatiana demanded.

“Because I will depose you, sister,” Madisyn said sadly her eyes watching her sister as she said the words.

“Because I will depose you,” Lasair smiled, and whispered it against the top of Madisyn’s head. Liam nodded as his brands slithered over his arms.

“I will also depose you,” Kier said as he stepped out with his wife, and Adam, who also agreed and echoed his words.

“Dresden, Tatiana,” Ryder said as he released his hold on me and stepped forward. “As the Heirs and royalty of Faery, together we’ve decided your offences against Faery cannot go unpunished. You will be stripped of your titles and removed from Faery henceforth. You can seek refuge with the Mages if you decide to, since you’ve already taken a side against this world, and chosen the enemies’ bed. Your children may remain, and if Danu so chooses to pick one as the Heir, we will welcome them. You have one day to exit Faery, or you will be forcefully removed. The Light warriors will be made aware of your imminent departure. Alazander put you on the throne, as you were Danu’s chosen Heir at the time, I am sure Danu will remedy that decision in light of your treachery. A steward will rule in your stead until the Light Heir is found, or another has been chosen.”

“You can’t do that! You have no bloody right to kick us out of this world!” Dresden shouted.

I watched as Ryder transformed effortlessly. The entire assembly took a step away from him, except me. “I have the right given to me by Danu when she chose me as Heir of the Horde; what you have done is treason against this world, *our* world. I did not make this choice alone or without the council of the other Castes. This wasn’t me just taking you out, which would have been a simple matter. I am not my father, but I am the King of the Horde and I have his beast, one which I can fully allow out if you choose to stay in Faery. The hounds will patrol your borders tonight, and if any of the Mages remain, they’ll be slaughtered in the name of Faery. This was the Blood King’s

choice for you as well,” Ryder said and tilted his head to Lasair. “The Dark King thought you shouldn’t be allowed to live; I fear you made a decision out of cowardice, and so that is how you will live. I suggest you choose your location and activities wisely. Do not make war with us, for we, unlike you, are the Heirs of Faery. You’re dismissed.”

Tatiana stared at me. “You little bitch,” she hissed. “This is not over!”

“You are also dismissed, *Auntie*,” I said calmly, keeping my anger pushed down and harnessed.

“You said they would come to us! You said nothing would happen to us, or our Kingdom!” Tatiana cried as she turned her anger to her husband. We watched as the Guards escorted them from the throne room, and then I turned and smiled at Adam and Liam.

“I am glad you guys are here; we have a lot to discuss,” I said and then hugged Adam as he walked over to wrap his arms around my waist and twirl me in the air.

“I’m glad I’m here too...” Adam stopped and set me down as he watched one of the older children from Dresden and Tatiana’s union approach the throne.

“I am Shea, Princess of the Light Fae,” she said in a meek tone that told me she was timid, or had been in the shadow of her parents. She looked around our age, which could mean she was a thousand years old for all we knew.

“Shea, it’s a pleasure to meet you,” I said, and then pushed Adam from behind when all he did was gawk at her. “This is Adam. Sorry for his gawking, he’s the Heir to the Dark Kingdom.”

She blushed. He continued to stare. I smiled. I knew she wasn’t the Light Heir, but they could have some fun together in the meanwhile. Suckers.

## Chapter Twenty-Eight

I stood in the dungeon and watched Olivia as she slept. I knew what it was like to take orders, and I had my own suspicions about what had gone down when she gave Alden and Ristan over to the Mages. One of my concerns was she that still probably working under the assumption that the Guild was all good.

Savlian sat in a comfy looking chair he'd glamour'd for himself in front of her cell, his eyes keenly watching her. His hands worked as he sharpened a blade, and I paused and narrowed my eyes on him.

"Her gag's been removed?" I asked him.

"Ristan was here earlier. The medallion on the torque he put on her will make sure she isn't able to cast. You might recognize the design on it. It's similar to the one you had for a while." Savlian smirked as he stood and stretched. "You going to be here for a bit?" he asked.

"A few minutes," I said as I turned to find Olivia watching me.

"You," she said as she sat up and looked away from me.

"And you," I whispered as I moved closer to her cell.

"I don't want to talk to you," she said mulishly, her eyes never lifting from the floor, as if she refused to look at me directly.

"Alden lives, and I want a reason for what you did to him."

"What do you care? You abandoned us. You and Adam both did. You're both nothing but traitors," she seethed.

"No; we were told to leave. I'm Fae, and so is Adam," I explained. Didn't the Guild tell them anything? Her head jerked towards me in surprise with this revelation, her midnight blue eyes flashed angrily.

"That's a lie!"

Had I really called her a mouse? I smiled as Adam stepped from where he'd been waiting, just out of view.

"Do I look Human?" he asked as he glamour'd away his shirt and slowly turned for her so that she could see the Celtic cross that marked him as the Dark Heir, glowing along with the rest of his brands.

Her eyes grew wide as she watched him approach. He looked one hundred percent Fae.

"I...I..."

"What's the matter, Olivia, cat got your tongue?" I asked.

“You have no idea what I did, or why I did it!” She shook her head slowly in angry confusion.

“I don’t really give a shit about why you think it was okay to help monsters bring down the Guild, I only need the details of why you thought it was okay to help them take down a man who helped raise you,” I said as I narrowed my eyes on her. “I want to know why you drugged Alden and the Demon. Not to mention, I want to know why the entire upper level of the Guild was a war zone, one we lost.”

“Good, you’re Fae,” she seethed and I narrowed my eyes on her and she quickly looked away from me and back at the floor. Almost as if she didn’t believe her own conviction.

“You stupid little twit, I didn’t lose. I never have. The *Guild* lost. They’re all dead. So many good people were killed, so many children died. It was a fucking slaughter, one you assisted in, and why? What did you have to gain?” I asked barely above a whisper. Most people understood that was the time to talk, because I was getting pissed. She cringed.

“I had my reasons,” she whispered as a tear slid down her cheek.

“Good for you, but sooner or later that Demon is going to come down here and he wants a pound of flesh for the one he lost with the Mages. You’re it. So tell me, Olivia, what happened in there and why did you help them? Were you following orders like a good little soldier? Or did you have a different reason for opening the doors to allow the monsters in?” I asked as I leaned against the cell and stared at her.

I wanted to help her, but I also needed her to know that I couldn’t get her out of this. I wanted answers, and she had them. My entire Guild was gone, and that wasn’t an easy feat. She’d been involved, and I’d dismissed her. Which either made me a fool, or her a good actress.

“Answer me, or I’ll feed the Demon myself so he can come sooner,” I seethed.

“You’ve changed into a monster,” she hissed.

“Yes, I have. I’ve also lost too much to take chances with what I have left. You tried to hurt my family, and I’m very protective of them. I’ve never changed my standards, Olivia. The Guild is and has always been part of it, and people are dead. You can either start talking, or I can come in there and show you just how much of a monster I am,” I warned.

“I didn’t have a choice!” she cried as she scooted back on the bed like a

meek mouse and let out a hiccup as tears started flowing unchecked down her porcelain cheeks.

“Suck it up, buttercup, and talk,” I growled.

“I was trained differently than you guys were. So you need to tell me, *Enforcer*, which makes me more of a traitor, getting Alden out of the way or giving Guild history and secrets to a Demon?” she asked bitterly. “I should have known better, so many lies and I shouldn’t have trusted—do you seriously think the Guild would care if I was tricked? No—God, I feel so stupid!” she mumbled. “As far as what I did to Alden, Elder Cyrus told me that Alden had betrayed the Guild, and that none of the Enforcers could be trusted. I...you wouldn’t understand, I did what I had to, or they—” she rambled pitifully.

“Of course he would say that you couldn’t trust the Enforcers, Alden’s trained them all,” I interrupted; too disgusted with the lies she had been told. I took a step backwards as I felt Ryder’s electrical pulse as he sifted in.

Olivia looked up horrified, and screamed in shock. Her face turned even whiter, if at all possible. She was terrified and I couldn’t blame her. I’d felt the same way when I’d first seen him as the Horde King. I watched her; she watched him as if Satan himself had joined our little interrogation. I rolled my eyes as she started to stammer her words and tripped over them.

“Really, Ryder?”

“Really, what?” he asked as his hands pulled me against him as he took Olivia in. “Are you intentionally overstepping what Ristan requested?” he questioned, smoothly changing the subject. He could have come in his Fae form, which wouldn’t have scared the girl senseless.

“Pretty much,” I whispered and looked back at Olivia, who had turned as white as a sheet which made her dark blue eyes striking against her paleness. “Continue,” I said.

“No-no, that’s the Horde King,” she stuttered. “I’ve seen sketches in the archives, but this is impossible, he’s...this is impossible! You ran away with the Dark Prince, not the Horde King!”

“Wow, you do have a way with the ladies, Ryder,” Adam said as he smiled.

“Worthless; she’s not going to talk,” he said. “You’d have never cowered in my presence.”

“I did, if you recall. I just did it with more grace. I was trained to accept

fear; she wasn't. She's a fucking librarian. She didn't have the same training as we did," I whispered as I watched her eyes take in Ryder's entire seven foot frame and his wings. She was coming around, and I knew the shock. It was the same as I'd felt as I took on my first Fae.

"You didn't show fear," Ryder said. "Not until I tied you to my bed."

"Wow, hey guys. Don't need the kinky details, unless you have pictures?" Adam offered.

"Perverts," I said as I felt certain sadness for Olivia at what would happen to her when Ristan got back to full health.

I could see myself in her, in the fear she displayed, and the stout hatred of everything Fae. I'd been that girl, and I remembered the level of devotion that I'd blindly handed the Guild.

"Olivia, we can help you. You have to give us details though; can you do it?" I tried again.

Nothing. She stared in horror at Ryder, as if the devil himself had come to take her soul and drag it to Hell for her crimes. "She's not built for this, and I'm not even sure she believes the words coming out of her own mouth right now," I said as I shook my head.

\*~\*~\*

I found Ristan in the nursery, and noted his skin was back to its normal color, and his face had almost healed. He looked somewhat calmer.

"She likes you," I said as I moved closer.

"You've been to see her," he growled.

"I have; she helped the Mages get to you and Alden, and she knows what happened inside the Guild when it fell, as well as who was involved. I didn't help her or offer her hope that you'd give her mercy."

"Good, because that's not something I'll have with her."

Kahleena cooed and wrapped her tiny little fingers around his hand and he watched her. Her big golden eyes looked up at him as if he'd hung the moon in her honor. "I need to know some of the details." I watched him as he lifted his eyes to mine.

"What do you want to know, Syn? That I believed you and Alden and let my guard down? Or do you want to know that I was chasing her pussy when she lured me into the trap?"

*Ouch.*

"She tried to seduce you?"

“Indeed. She was quite clumsy at it, which drew me in. More the fool was I. I had been watching her. I listened to you and Alden and what you both told me about her being harmless and how sweet she was, and started to think that she wasn’t the enemy, that she was just some stupid Guild librarian that needed to be fucked. So when she so prettily offered me wine, I accepted it. And then the next thing I knew, Alden looked like he was going to fall asleep and she crawled up on my lap like she was going to try and kiss me before I could even register what was going on with Alden. She must have had something in her hand, because I felt a pinch in my neck and that was it, lights out,” he growled with self-loathing. “So there you have it, Syn. I was too busy trying to fuck some little minx who wouldn’t know what to do with a cock if it came with step-by-step instructions on how to use it.”

“I’m not so sure she was aware that she was helping the Mages directly. She was given orders from an Elder, Ristan,” I said softly. “She’s of the Guild, and if she had known what they were, I don’t think she’d have helped them.”

“Bullshit!” he said and stood violently until he realized he still held Kahleena, and then sat back down and rocked her softly. “She knew, Synthia. She’s Human; don’t buy her lies.”

“She’s the same as I was less than six months ago, Ristan. She’s been programmed to hate the Fae, to keep them from doing harm to the Humans. She’d do anything they asked.”

“That’s crap, and you know it.”

“I’d have done anything they asked me to, and I did. I seduced Fae, and killed them. I left my boyfriend inside a parking garage to die because I was told to abort because I’d gotten too self-assured. He was my world, Ristan, and I left him there to die because those were my orders. I’d have slit my throat had they said to. That’s what they do. It’s how they raised us. We do bad shit and we do it, just as long as they ordered it first. I killed Chandra, without blinking because I was taught to. Just do me a favor when you finally get to her, and remember that I am your friend, and that I was that girl.”

“You changed,” he said as if it somehow made me different.

“Not really. I just learned that I can’t control everything. I learned that you and this world, you’re not my enemy. You and Ryder were the ones who helped me understand the differences between the Fae and what the Fae people really are, not the Guild’s version that they teach us about. That

version tells of monsters that feed and kill the Human race. She doesn't have that, Ristan. Her world just fell apart. I had one that wanted me when mine did. I was foolish back then, and we both know it. But this world," I smiled at my daughter. "This world gave me them."

He looked down at Kahleena and back up at me. "She's my calm, and I'm her protector," he whispered softly. "She is just about perfect," he admitted and kissed her head before he handed her to me and started to leave the nursery. Before he reached the door, he turned and looked back at me. "Stay out of my way with the librarian. This one time, Synthia, I'm asking you to back off and leave it be. What I do with Olivia will be my choice, and mine alone. I would have killed you when I first met you if I was a bad judge of character, remember that. I could have easily killed you in the maze at the Dark Fortress without issue. All of us were under orders to kill you if you became a distraction. And trust me, you did and I knew it. We are supposed to follow orders without question like you were. Right now, I'm glad I found a way around those orders. I don't judge people unfairly, or make hasty decisions like you and Ryder do. This is my concern, one I will take care of how I see fit."

When he was gone, I smiled down at Kahleena as she closed her eyes but continued to pucker her lips. "No, there's no *just* about it, Kahleena, you *are* perfect."

"He seems better," Ryder said as he stepped from behind the connecting door that led to our bedroom.

"Not as much as he's pretending."

"You're wise for someone so young," Ryder said as he approached me. "And you're right."

"I'd like to think so," I murmured, considering everything I'd said to Ristan.

"Our daughter is perfect," he smiled wickedly.

"And you, Fairy, are an assshooooole!" I teased and smiled.

"Please leave Ristan be on this. He was right as well. He isn't a fool, so whatever that girl did, or made him feel, it's affected him on a base level and that's not something you can mend. We have enough to worry about with the Tree and the ice swathed around it," he said as wrapped his arms around me as I held our daughter.

"I guess you're smart too, but not for your years. You'd think since you



are as old as dirt, that you'd be a lot smarter," I said with a mischievous smile on my lips.

"I think you're due for another counting lesson."

"Promise?" I asked, but the boys cooed and we smiled. Life wasn't going to be easy chasing these three, or saving them so we could enjoy chasing them. "I'm scared," I said and felt my throat as it tightened. "I can't lose them, ever."

"We won't," Ryder said as he kissed my forehead and smiled as Kahleena cooed and reached for him.

## *Chapter Twenty-Nine*

We had been to the Tree right after it had been iced to see the damage, and so far we hadn't found a way to break the enchantment. We had every friend and ally to the Horde out searching for answers, along with people searching through spell books and other archives of history to seek answers on what type of spell it could be, as well as the beings that had cast the spell to begin with.

To make sure that we hadn't overlooked anything, we had a Human doctor examine Kahleena, and he had diagnosed her with failure to thrive. He'd then ended up with failure to breath, due to Ryder's hand being wrapped around his throat. Time wasn't with us, and even though we had hundreds of beings looking for the way to unfreeze the Tree, it seemed to be just beyond our grasp.

I was holding Kahleena when Ristan came into the room, his eyes immediately seeking her out. "She's not getting any better," he whispered. "She's getting worse."

"Yes," I whispered back as I held the tears in, but failed. Danu had warned us that we had less than two weeks to bring the children to the Tree or the consequences could be dire, and we were watching it play out before our eyes now. My heart was breaking unlike anything I'd ever experienced before. I was losing my child, and I couldn't stop it from happening. No one could. A lot of good it was to be a Goddess when I couldn't even save my own daughter.

"We need to thaw out that Tree," he said as he leaned against the wall. "Does Danu know how to do it?"

"If she did, don't you think I'd be doing it?" I said as I swiped angrily at my tears. "I'm sorry," I said as he closed his eyes against my angry words.

"Have you seen her lately?" he asked and opened his eyes to look at me.

"Once since we brought you back, I didn't speak to her though," I replied and touched the platinum curls on the top of her head. "I just can't believe that I could live in a world where I died and was reborn just so I could watch my children die slowly."

I looked up and he was gone, and Ryder stood there watching me. "We still have time."

"No, we don't," I whispered and looked up at him. "I can't do this," I

sobbed as I held the sweet girl closer. “I can’t watch her die,” I exhaled a shuddering breath.

“Synthia,” he whispered.

“It’s not fair! I haven’t even had time to get to know them, their personalities, what they like,” I cried.

He sifted out and I continued to hold my daughter, knowing that everyone else was afraid to be in this room. They knew what I did. That we’d run out of time and we were going to lose them.

\*~\* *Ryder* \*~\*

She’s hanging on by a thread, a single tattered one that was fraying and letting go. She’s been so strong for so long that the idea of losing our child is crippling. I know the feeling; I felt it when I lost her. I know that emptiness all too well, and death’s cold hand as it gutted me. Now I’m fighting time, to prevent it from stealing her and our children. I had seen enough of this to know that Kahleena is just the first to sicken and without the blessing they need, the boys will probably be next.

I know if we lose a child, she’ll be devastated. And if we lose all three, she will most likely give up or go inside of her mind as she did with Larissa. Maybe not right away, but eventually, she’ll fade away. She already is, even though she’s fighting it. In the last week, she’s watched as our daughter ate less and moved less, and still, she’s fought to stay alive. She is so tiny, and yet she has the fight inside of her that her mother has. I need them both to continue fighting until we figure it out.

“How’s Syn?” Sinjinn asks, his eyes searching my face and then dropping a slew of curses. “We’ve run out of time. That tiny little lady is just like her momma, she needs to keep fighting.”

“Indeed.”

“Ryder,” Zahruk said as he walks into the room and stops. “I...” he pauses and I watch as his throat bobs. “She’s alive still, right?”

“She’s getting worse, but she’s a fighter.”

I’m holding my emotions in, but I want nothing more than to mow down the Mages and kill every last one of them. Ristan hadn’t seen Synthia or the children in my future and we’re beginning to think this is why; because we somehow fail and lose them all.

“Have the Pixies found anything?” I ask, and turn away from my men.

“No,” Zahruk says as he places a hand on my shoulder, and speaks. “We’ve figured out a way to help Synthia. Well, one we think will help cheer her up a little bit. Between me, Ristan, and the girls, we sorta think bringing in some Human holiday crap might work. It is the Winter Solstice on Tèrra right now, so it is their time for holidays and she is missing it this year. Humans seem to enjoy their holidays so we figure it can’t hurt. Ristan has already cast an illusion in the Pavilion to make it look like her hometown, and we’ve begun decorating.”

I exhale and shake my head. “You think taking her home will make her forget our daughter is dying?” I snarl, and then shake it off. “We can try, but don’t be offended if she doesn’t care. She’s breaking, and all I can do is watch as she shatters.”

“She’s a warrior, and a damn fine one at that. She might break for a while, but Synthia will always get back up. It’s just how she’s made, and that’s part of the reason you love her.”

*\*~\* Synthia \*~\**

Ryder walked into the nursery, his eyes slowly taking me in as I stood beside the crib. I’d moved all of the babies into one crib, and Kahleena slept with her brothers on either side of her. Always protecting her, as brothers should.

Ciara had come in and we’d spent time with them and I knew she’d done it to watch over me more than the babies, but it didn’t bother me. I was prepared when Ryder wrapped his arms around me and kissed my cheek. “How is she?” he asked.

“She’s better with her brothers beside her,” I whispered.

“I have a surprise for you,” he said against my ear as he looked down at our children, “and for them as well.”

I looked up at him, and tried for a brave smile, but it wouldn’t reach my eyes and we both knew it. Reality was harsh, and even though I wanted to stay here where the babies were safe and protected from the world, I knew it wouldn’t keep them from what hunted them—the consequences of our failure to break the spell on the Tree.

“I’ll go,” Ciara said softly.

“No,” Ryder said, his eyes moved around the nursery to where Darynda had just walked in. “We’ll need everyone for this.”

He had everyone wrap the babies in warm blankets, and I carried Kahleena, while Ciara carried Zander and Darynda carried Cade, with Cailean walking behind them. As we walked to the pavilion, all of the Fae we passed in the corridor stopped to look at us; some with wonder on their faces as the new princes and princess were carried to whatever surprises their father had waiting for us.

When we stepped through the doors to the pavilion, I felt a tear as it slid down my cheek. The pavilion was filled with snow, and the temperature was chilled with the crisp bite of a deep freeze, just like it would have been in Spokane had we been there still.

The entire pavilion had disappeared, and in its place was Ryder's glorious mansion in Spokane—or the image of it, anyway. It was decorated in Christmas lights, as was the fountain and the small shrubbery surrounding it. It was night, and as I looked up into the stars above, I smiled, noting they'd gotten every detail down perfectly, including the bright North Star which was even darker on the black-blue canopy of the sky.

The windows of the mansion were aglow from within, filled with warmth, and the enormous doors were open in welcome for our group's approach. I moved to them, noting that the crisp air would be too much for the little ones, and was thankful for Ryder's foresight and for swaddling them in thick blankets.

We stepped to the doors, and I looked around watching as Brownies and Fae women rushed around the main entrance, which had a ginormous Christmas tree set up that reached to the elegant glasswork ceiling. As I watched, a Brownie moved forward and with help from me, she took my cloak and then smiled.

"Merry Christmas, mistress," she whispered and smiled.

"Merry Christmas," I replied back and then felt my heart thump. "I forgot Christmas," I whispered and felt my stomach drop.

"You've been dealing with a lot, so we figured you deserved this," Ryder whispered against my ear. "I want our children to know your world as well as mine."

I turned to look at him as tears slipped from my eyes. I'd forgotten Christmas, and he, a male who'd probably never even cared about it, had remembered it. "Thank you," I whispered and watched as he accepted Zander from Ciara, who then proceeded to rush to the huge chocolate fountain that

was set up off to the side of the intricate staircase.

Others continued to come in behind us, and as I cast a questioning look at Ryder, he explained. "It's the Winter Solstice on Tèrra right now so Christmas will be in a few more days for the Humans. On the Winter Solstice, most of the Fae give thanks to and honor the Goddess for another fruitful year. For almost sixteen years, when we were staying regularly on Tèrra, we held it at the lake near the mansion. This year we've settled on the pools outside in the gardens. The Mages have screwed up some traditions, but not this one."

Everyone was laughing, and stamping off the snow as they entered the mansion. They then moved into the large room situated off the entryway, which held a grand fireplace. The Yule log burned, and I smiled, wondering just where they'd taken these traditions from. It looked as if Christmas had met Hanukkah, and they'd had a baby...which was this room. The huge chandelier that was hanging above the mantel was lit with candles, which increased the glow from the fire. Hundreds of other candles burned in sconces along the walls and evergreen boughs were strewn along the walls and banisters.

Mulled cider was being passed around in crystal goblets, and the scent of Christmas was heady as more of the men showed up. Everyone was wearing robes of bright Christmas colors, and I smiled.

"Come," Ryder said as we made our way through the room to one of the large comfy couches that were arranged around the fireplace.

I rearranged Kahleena's blanket and sat beside Ryder as Darynda passed us Cade. I caught sight of the Demon who was watching us. His eyes smiled as he took us in. I narrowed my eyes on him as he stepped closer.

"Not quiet what I saw for the future, but it's still one worth fighting to keep," he mumbled as he rubbed his temple as if trying to figure something out.

"You saw this?" Ryder asked.

"Yes, and no," he admitted as he bent down to kneel in front of us. "I saw us here, after the mansion was destroyed. Only one child was here, a son with blue eyes and black hair."

I didn't speak, because it hit home at that moment, how many times he'd told me that just because he'd seen something didn't make it real. A simple wrinkle could change everything. He stood back up after kissing Kahleena's

nose and walked away to where a female stood across the room.

“Olivia isn’t here,” I whispered.

“No, he took her to his quarters yesterday and I don’t anticipate anyone seeing her anytime soon. We don’t question it,” Ryder said as he rearranged the two boys in his arms. I watched them as their eyes grew alive as they watched the merriment of the Elite Guard as they pulled women onto an expanse of empty flooring at the other end of the room and began to dance.

“They are watching the men,” I said as I turned to watch them myself. “Oh, I’m not so sure they should be watching that...”

“They’re boys,” he said, as if it explained it all.

“So they get to watch the men’s frolicking and playing stick the pickle in the jar?” I asked, and watched as he did his best not to laugh.

“Stick the pickle in the jar? Please, elaborate on that...or, if you feel so inclined, show me,” he whispered.

“Fairy, you’re incorrigible,” I groaned. I called out to the men. “Hey, knock it off would ya? You need to keep it PG!”

They only smiled and winked as they continued to grind against the willing women. I watched as Ristan continued speaking to the woman in the corner, her eyes alight with whatever he’d said. Only he didn’t look as if he was as interested as his companion was.

“Is he sick?” I asked absently.

“Who?” Ryder asked.

“Ristan. He’s sorta ignoring his companion and doesn’t seem too interested in what she’s offering,” I whispered quietly.

“No, but if he’s turning down...”

“So help me God, Ryder,” I hissed. “Watch what you say around the babies.”

“I was going to say tail,” he said with a wicked grin.

“Sinjinn!” I said as he passed us.

“Yes?” he asked as he looked down at me.

“Hold your niece,” I said as I handed Kahleena over without waiting to see what he would say.

He took her, and I stood, and pointed at the couch as if to tell him to plant his ass there. I wanted my children to stay put with their badass father. I however, was going to catch a Demon by the toe and make him holler.

I spared a glance back at the couch and stopped. Sinjinn held her away

from him, but in his lap. He stared down at her as if she was too precious to touch, as if he'd break her, but Ryder was on it. He showed him how to cradle her, and protect her head from moving too much. Kahleena's eyes were closed, unlike her brothers who watched the men still.

I turned away with a heavy heart and headed for Ristan. He was still rubbing his temples as the woman...I think it was anyway, it was tall and grayish in color and it was hard to judge some of the sexes of these things, so hey, I guessed anyway.

"Demon," I said and watched as he turned towards me.

I grabbed his hand and we both froze.

The room was gone.

I looked at Ristan, and then we both looked around us.

The Tree was there, and still frozen. Around the giant Tree was moss, layered in ice. The tiny Fairies flittered here and there as they moved around it, working together to try to thaw it. I swallowed and shook my head and then wondered how the hell we'd gotten here.

"What the hell did you do?" he asked, and I watched his eyes as they swirled.

"We're in a vision? But whose is it, yours or mine?" I asked, and he shook his head.

My heart pounded, and I felt as if something was inside of me, and yet there was nothing. I felt pain and chaos. Loss was everywhere, and it felt as if I was bleeding out from the inside. I felt rage at the violation, and confusion for why someone would harm me. It was a mass of emotions, and confusion. They weren't my emotions, so what was it? The Tree? Maybe.

"I have only had one vision in the past two months, Synthia," Ristan said, pulling me out of the mess of feelings. "This one isn't mine." He looked at me curiously. "Maybe part of your new powers."

"They come," I whispered and felt a sliver of hope. Only it wasn't my hope I felt, so whose was it?

I watched as hundreds of Fae sifted in, and we were with them. We carried the children and placed them on the ground in front of the Tree. Only they weren't alive.

"No!" I shouted as my world spun apart. I fell to the ground and shook my head as I placed my hands over my ears to block out the noise level. "No, I won't let this happen!"



“We can’t stop it if we can’t unfreeze this fucking Tree. You can do it,” Ristan said as he picked me up and held me against him. “Think. Flower, you’re the Goddess of Faery. You can see the path, now think. Time’s running out, and I can’t bring you here again.”

I looked at Ristan, only he wasn’t the Ristan I’d come here with. He was the *other* one, the one living *in* the vision. It was as if somehow, or some way, he’d brought me here from the future. I was starting to consider shit like drugs, magic mushrooms. Just what the hell was in the cider? “See it, see them. You can do this. You’re one of the strongest women I know, and you never give in. Save her, save them all,” he said, and I turned to see countless babies, all dead. “Only you know the way to undo this. You’ve always had it inside of you, use it.”

“I don’t know how to unfreeze it,” I whispered brokenly. “They can’t die,” I cried. “Ristan, show me how!”

“I can’t. I’m not the Goddess of Faery. There was a reason you were reborn as the Goddess of the lands; think, Flower. You have the answers. Look for them.”

I was shown so much more, and yet nothing at the same time. Time changed. We changed. Everything changed. The world spun and continued on as I watched it from afar. As if I was a bystander, and I was being shown glimpses of things that could happen. It made absolutely no sense, but I knew if I searched...and continued to, we’d find the way. It started at the Tree, and we were meant to be there. Now.

## Chapter Thirty

I gasped for air and felt hands on me. I screamed for Ristan, but it was Ryder who held me. I looked around the room as everyone in it stared at me. I gulped in air, and that's when I caught sight of her. Danu stood where Ristan had, but unlike when she was normally around, she looked almost transparent.

"Save them," she whispered and faded to nothing. I shook the remnants of the vision from my mind and turned to the partygoers.

"I think I know how to save the babies," I whispered.

"What the fuck just happened?" Ristan asked, his fingers grasping my chin as he raised my eyes to meet his. "Your eyes *swirled*."

"I touched you, and then I was at the Tree," I said excitedly. "I was given a vision, yes, but you were there with me. Only it was another you. Like you'd pulled me through time to tell me what we needed to do. I know how to save her," I whispered breathlessly and then amended it. "I know how to try to save her, and I think it will work."

"You had a vision?" Ristan asked as he watched me carefully. "Synthia, I can't do time jumps, and I can't pull people through time, either. It's impossible."

"You gave it to me, and you were there. It was weird, but who the hell cares? We have to gather everyone!"

"Synthia, we don't know who gave you that vision or why you had it," Ryder said as he stood in front of me, our children sat with Ciara and Sinjinn who stared at us.

"I don't care. It's not like we have a choice. She's dying, Ryder. Dying. Time is up. We need to get to the Tree. Everyone, as many Fae as we can get there, all the Castes...no exceptions. I won't just stand here and watch her die. Neither will you, because if I have to duct tape your ass to my back and carry you the entire way there, I will. You understand me? Because I'm willing to spell it out for you and show you in very vivid details if that's what you need."

"And if you were given that vision by the Mages?" he asked carefully.

"I don't think it was the Mages," I explained. "Ristan was there, and he told me I know the way. He said it was inside of me, and that there was a reason I had been reborn into what I am. We need to take everyone with us,

because there's a chance we will have nothing to come back to.

"What does that mean?" Ryder asked carefully.

"I know I'm not making a lot of sense right now, but I need for you to trust me, I know it's asking a lot, Ryder. I don't know how to explain it, but I can feel it, as if it's inside of me. I know for a fact that we need to get to the Tree. Trust me," I begged, and watched as he nodded.

"I trust you, but if we do this, we could all be walking into a trap, which could be very bad. Synthia, if we take all of the leaders of each Caste, who will be left to protect the people if we die?" Ryder asked softly.

"I don't know, but I do know this. Our daughter is dying and we need to save her. We need to do this as fast as we can and, even if it is a leap of faith; it's one we can do together. Besides, the Mages won't expect the numbers we're bringing. They'd be committing suicide if they tried anything and they're not that stupid."

"Synthia," he said as he placed his hand in mine. I showed him the vision, and watched as he stared in wonder at me. "Jesus," he said and smiled. "You know this could be a trap, and we'd be walking right into it. I just got you back, woman. I don't want to lose you again."

"You didn't feel what I did," I said calmly. "It was real, and I have to believe that we have a chance. I can't live in a world that doesn't accept my children, and if I am the Goddess of Faery, this world needs me. I can't be the one to walk away without trying. I *will not* do this, so either we do it together, or I go alone," I said the last as I turned to Ryder.

"We do it together," he said softly. "This is something my people may not understand, but they'll follow. You'll need to explain it to Adam, Kier, and your family. If it even offers us a chance to save our children, I'd follow you. So take us, Pet. Wherever you go, I'll follow."

\*~\*~\*

I paced in the floor of the nursery with guards posted outside the doors. Ryder had helped and together we'd securely tucked the babes in their cribs. I'd ended up ruining the Christmas celebration, but for the moment it didn't bother me. It was the pain I'd felt all of a sudden that put an end to all the fun for me. I felt as if I was crawling out of my skin, and yet I could feel the pain as if it was my own. I had no idea where, or why I felt it, only that I did.

It was as if a gate had opened up and everything had rushed through it at once. I didn't know how to contain it or push it away. So I met it head on,

and even though I wanted to fall to my knees screaming, I somehow remained upright and on my feet.

“Synthia,” Adam said as he approached me, his eyes alert and on edge at my jumpy behavior. I couldn’t help it, though; I felt as if I was a conduit, and everything was filtering through me.

“It’s almost time to go to the Tree,” I said as I hugged him gently.

One minute we were both in the nursery, and the next we stood in front of the Tree. I gasped, as Adam looked around and then looked back at me in confusion.

“What the hell was that?” he asked.

“I think my powers are coming in. I just pictured the Tree, and I guess since I was touching you, we ended up here together,” I said as I released him to look around.

“Give me your hand, Synthia,” Adam said carefully. “It’s not safe out here; we need to go back to the babies.”

“I know,” I said watching as the Fairies worked with fire to thaw the Tree of Life. The lush glow that had once filled the massive rowan now did so from within the ice and frost that wrapped around it and drifted down over the roots. “I’m afraid, Adam,” I whispered.

“I know; I’m worried too,” he replied honestly as he pulled me in and hugged me tight. “We’ve been through a lot, but it’s just another hurdle and we will fix it,” he said assuring me.

I gave him my hand and he sifted us back to the nursery where Ryder stood glowering at us. “What the fuck?” he growled.

“Syn’s powers are coming in,” Adam said with a smirk on his lips. “She thinks it, and it happens.”

“Is that so?” Ryder asked as he lifted a dark brow.

“Yeah, remember the shower incident?” I asked rubbing the back of my neck. “Remember your shower and me on my knees?” I asked.

“Shit,” Adam said as he detangled our limbs. “Don’t need to know this stuff.”

“Totally PG...Mmm, on second thought, it was like R-rated. Anyway, I think I’m gaining some of my new powers, but I’m not sure how to stop them.”

“Pet,” Ryder growled. “It better have been nothing—”

“No, not the R rated crap, the PG part. I think I’m getting some of my

powers, or something. I don't know. Danu isn't answering me and it's not like I have a lot of people who know what the hell is going on with me!"

I moved to Ryder and placed my hand on his arm and a bed popped into my mind.

We landed with a thud on a bed, and I growled. "Dammit," I said as I fought to sit up as his arms pulled me down.

He smiled wolfishly. "You thought of a bed when you touched me?"

"Not on purpose," I whined.

"Can I help you?" Zahruk asked from the bathroom door where he stood with a towel wrapped around his lean hips and a lazy smile on his face. "You do have your own bed, brother."

Feminine laughter echoed from the bathroom behind him. I blinked and wondered just who it was inside his bathroom. I knew he could clean himself with glamour, so whatever they'd been doing in there, it wasn't showering. I narrowed my eyes on him and tried to recall if I'd ever actually seen him without weapons on.

"Mine's about to be full, so I suggest you get going," he growled and crossed his heavily tattooed arms over his chest.

"Ewww!" I grabbed Ryder's hand. Making a mental note that I would have to be really specific in my thoughts going forward as I had never seen Zahruk's quarters before and there were worse places I could have had us wind up at. I shook my head in disgust as I thought about Adam.

We fell on him.

"Fuck!" he shouted as Ryder sifted off of him and looked at me, tangled with Adam on the floor.

"Fuck a rubber duck! Danu! Get your Goddess ass here, now!" I shouted, but nothing happened. "This sucks! It's worse than sifting! Ouch," I said as pain coiled in my stomach.

"Synthia, what aren't you telling me?" Ryder asked as he moved to help me up.

"I feel her pain, and it is raw and fucking beautiful," Asrian said as he came around the corner of the nursery doors.

"That's not good," I said as I watched his eyes glowing as he fed. From me. My pain was his food of choice at the moment.

"She's feeling enough pain that I'm full, brother," Asrian said as he watched me as if he was afraid to let me out of his sight. I stepped back, not

out of fear, but because Ryder looked as if he wasn't sure if he should attack, or be amused.

"Describe it," Ryder growled after a moment of uneasy silence had passed.

"I've never felt anything like it before," Asrian said smoothly as he stepped closer, his lime and grass-green eyes glowing like a beacon. He was normally pretty reserved aside from the occasional smart-ass comment; right now he looked as if he was intrigued.

"Stop looking at me like I'm a Fairy buffet," I said, and turned back to Ryder.

"You are," he said sheepishly as he rubbed the back of his neck.

"Adam," Ryder said as he watched me. "Synthia, wait here for me."

"We need to go," I pointed out.

"Yes, but we need a plan before we move or take our children anywhere," he argued and I hated that he had a point.

"Fine, Fairy," I conceded. He placed a gentle kiss on my forehead and smiled.

"Synthia, try to stay in this room until I get back," he said as I looked up at him.

"Do not kiss my forehead, please," Adam said with a wink at me.

"Why would I kiss you?" Ryder asked and I hid the smile as he looked at Adam in confusion.

"You wouldn't," Adam said with a wide grin.

"Watch her," Ryder said and sifted out.

I felt like I was jonesing for a fix, and that Tree was it. I'd pretty much told Ryder that we had to leave his castle unprotected and just get everyone to the Tree. I knew I was asking a lot, but we needed as many beings as possible to be at the Tree for Danu to gain her full strength and power to bless our children.

The Tree being enshrouded in ice was still a problem, and yet I knew somehow if I could just get there, that we could fix it. Ristan disappeared right after I had come out of the vision, so I couldn't ask him about the visions and his sounded as if they were different from the one I had.

I needed to speak to Danu, and she hadn't answered my call for days. She was probably dealing with her spousal issue, or whatever you wanted to call it. Hopefully she'd had more luck than we had if she was looking for a

definitive way to remove the spell on the Tree. If she could break her husband, we could have a huge advantage for the upcoming war.

“Synthia,” Adam said as he held his long tapered fingers out for me as he pulled out one of the chairs in the nursery.

“Adam,” I said with a small smile on my lips and took the seat he offered.

Adam scooped Kahleena out of the crib and passed her to me, and picked up Cade who was fussing for a bit of attention.

“You really think you can do this?” he asked as Cade stared up at him.

“I do,” I whispered as I rubbed her cheek to try to get her to feed from the bottle. “It’s crazy how much has changed in our lives in so little time.”

“I wish you’d have called for me before you’d gone all *Leeroy Jenkins* into the Guild,” he said. “I still can’t believe it’s actually gone.”

“There wasn’t time. I feared that if we waited, we’d have lost both Alden and Ristan. Ristan still isn’t back to himself yet, and Olivia is his personal toy right now, or at least that’s what I gathered from Zahruk.” I frowned. “Actually, that sounds like something the Demon would say. Anyway, they’re keeping an eye on him, since he hasn’t been this out of it since Alazander took his wings and tail. Did you know Demons really do have horns? Like actual swear-to-God horns.”

“No,” he said and smiled as Cade cooed. “You have three babies,” he said and lifted his tricolored eyes to meet mine. “And you’re actually getting married this time, unless someone else steps in and kidnaps you,” he said with a wicked grin on his lips.

“I don’t think anyone would dare try to steal me from Ryder, not now.”

“Faolán is still out there,” he said as he continued to watch me. I blinked and noted that he’d frozen, and I looked up to find Danu standing over me, watching Kahleena.

“You have to get her to the Tree,” she whispered, and I noted that yet again she was a mere shimmer of light.

“What’s wrong with you?” I asked softly as I placed the bottle aside and really took her in. She had a red dress on, but where she was normally vibrant, she looked pale and tired.

“You feel it as well, now,” she whispered softly as she touched Kahleena’s forehead. “The pain and torment; there’s a reason I made you the Goddess of Faery, Synthia.”

“Can we skip the riddles? My daughter’s life—your granddaughter’s life

depends on it.”

“Don’t you think I would if I could? Think, Synthia, who is watching us? When a Goddess is born, she’s given powers for a reason. Why would I make you the Goddess of Faery?”

“Who is watching us?” I looked around.

“Synthia, stop thinking like a Human or Fae, and started acting like the Goddess of Faery!” she shouted and I flinched.

“I am!” I growled and moved to place the sleeping girl in her crib. “I am thinking like the Goddess, but I don’t know why I was given that damn vision, or how to fully articulate what it needs!”

“Why are you shouting, and who are you talking to?” Adam asked, and I spun around to look where Danu had stood just seconds ago.

“Nobody, obviously,” I whispered.

“You think Destiny knew you’d be this person, the Goddess of Faery?” he joked but my mind was back on the Tree.

“We’re running out of time. We have to go now,” I whispered as a sliver of unease passed through me.



## Chapter Thirty-One

Ryder had called all of the Elite Guard to the war room to finalize the logistics of getting that many Fae to the Tree and a tentative outline of what we could potentially face. Ristan had reluctantly joined us; he still wasn't quite himself and Ryder had confided to me that Ristan had taken both his mother and Olivia somewhere and refused to discuss any of the details with anyone. Not even his King.

"Zahruk," Ryder said as the last of the guard walked in. "Floor is yours," he finished, sitting beside me and reaching for my hand.

I looked at where our fingers were combined. As his thumb rubbed tenderly in the palm of my hand, I felt his love, and it gutted me to know I felt empty inside instead of whole. I loved him, but the idea of losing our daughter and sons was all I could think about. I had to save the Tree, and I needed to concentrate on it and it alone.

I rested my head against his shoulder as Zahruk went over the final details, and I felt the pain as if it was my own. I knew it wasn't, and I'd begun to think this eviscerating pain wasn't only mine. I was a part of Faery, and Danu's words kept playing in my head.

She'd created me as the Goddess of Faery, and if so, what did it include? Was my pain tied to a dying world? If it died, did it mean I would also die? Or would I cease to be the Goddess of anything and just continue on? I'd tried calling for her again after Adam had gone to inform the Dark King and Queen of the situation, but nothing had happened.

"Synthia," Zahruk said softly.

I lifted my eyes to his, and nodded in agreement, of what I wasn't sure of. I'd agree to pretty much anything if it got me to that Tree.

"She wasn't listening," Ryder said as he pulled me out of my chair and onto his lap. "Zahruk is going to go scout the area in beast form. When they've cleared the area and are sure no Mages are near, we will go to the Tree."

"Sounds good," I replied.

I could feel another God or Goddess close to us, as if they were hovering. I watched as all but Ryder and Ristan cleared from the room, and then spoke slowly, clearly, and deadly.

"Show yourself or I'll kill you," I seethed as I felt myself growing angry.

I hated being spied on, but this one had been privy to our entire plan. I wanted to know who they were and why they were here. A Goddess shimmered in and stood less than three feet away from me. I'd felt her power skimming over me. I'd felt it before with Danu, and yet somehow I'd known it wasn't Danu doing it this time.

"You never speak to another Goddess in such a crass way, child," she said gently as she came into focus. She was beautiful, and yet she had certain coldness to her. "Newborns have died for less—and how did you know I was here?"

"Who the hell are you?" I asked carefully.

"I am the Goddess of Destiny," she said softly as she watched me.

"Bitch," I growled.

"I could kill you," she warned.

"You can't kill me," I whispered as I watched her. "You've put me through hell. You've brought me to my knees and have enjoyed my pain. You're sick and twisted. I wondered who would be pulling the strings, since Danu is only powerful enough to set destiny on its path; someone else had to be pushing for it. That would be you, and I'd like to know why."

"And you didn't want your children, or the beast you so love and cherish? Or maybe you'd like to rewind and try it again?" she asked, but her coldness had been replaced with curiosity. "Pain is often needed to obtain the place one needs to be. Had you not been through it, Faery would die."

"No, I don't mind that part. It's the other things that are bothering me," I said. "I'm wondering why you've been interfering and why you're here now. Haven't I been through enough? If it's your intention to break me, fine. You win. You can have me, but not my daughter. She hasn't done anything yet. She deserves a fighting chance."

"You think I've put you through this just to watch you fail?" she asked and then exhaled. "Danu needed help, but she's about as stubborn as they come. She refused to ask for help even though she desperately needed it. I knew about you from the moment of your birth, even though she did her best to hide you from us. I watched you grow into a fighter, and I guessed at her plans for you. I am not an idiot, and I can foresee the future in a different way than your mother does. I saw that you'd love him," she said glancing at Ryder. "I knew that without a few pushes, you'd never get to him. I also knew the apple wouldn't have fallen far from the Tree, and that you'd be a lot

like your mother, stubborn as hell, so to say. So I pushed the Humans to send you to him, and then I pushed more. I also know the rules of my people, and you didn't. I pushed the beast that day, the one when you became pregnant. The facts were pretty simple. If you were still Fae when you'd conceived children with him, then upon your rebirth, you could live here, with him. Our people don't allow us to remain with mortals, or..." She looked at Ryder for a moment. "...Whatever he is. You'd have had to leave your babies and him behind and you'd have gone into a century of silence. That's what we do in rebirth, but I made sure you'd be spared from that. I can't change your destiny, but I can alter it so that it's worth it. As Danu is tied against physically intervening, I am tied against telling you the future of your destiny, Synthia."

"You did this," I whispered. "You made it so I could stay with him, and yet I could lose the children you ensured I was pregnant with. Haven't I done enough? I've done everything you asked of me and I've accepted everything you've thrown in my face. I won't lose my daughter, so if you have any helpful pushes, push me," I demanded.

"You've been shown all you need to know; it's up to you now. Your children will have their own destiny, but I wasn't actually here for yours. I'm here for someone else."

"Who?" I asked, as I felt another wave of pain.

"I won't tell you that, but what I will tell you; is that your time of pain is almost over. You've secured your destiny, and you've almost made it. You're a fierce warrior, one I am glad to call my niece, as I am Danu's half-sister. I've blessed your children, and bought you a little extra time as well. Be well, and Synthia, be humble in the presence of the Tree, for everything in Faery depends on it."

I turned around to find both Ristan and Ryder watching me closely. "What the hell was that?" Ryder asked.

"What did you see?" I asked and watched as Ryder turned to Ristan and looked back at me.

"Blinding light, and you talking to the chair," he admitted as he rubbed his neck.

"I just met Destiny, and she's my aunt," I admitted. "Someone in this room is about to go through utter hell, or so I think," I said. "She wasn't here for us; she's been helping Danu. I guess I passed destiny's test, but it's not

over yet.”

“I need to go,” Ristan said.

“You’ll accompany us to the Tree,” Ryder said, and it wasn’t a question.

“I planned to,” Ristan said as he shoved his hands in his pockets and looked at me. “I owe you both an apology.”

“No you don’t,” I said as I watched him carefully. “You went through hell and we were too busy with our problems to notice you were gone. We should have been there sooner, and done better by you. You deserved better friends than I was.”

“Synthia, your child is sick and could die. I knew when I left that something was off, and yet I chose to go. I said I owed you an apology, and I do. I’m sorry I yelled at you both, and I’m sorry, Flower, that I took some of my anger out on you. You didn’t deserve it.”

“Is Olivia alive?” I asked, noting his defenses were down.

“She’s alive, and that’s all you need to know,” he replied harshly, as if he thought I’d ask for her immediate release.

“That’s all I wanted,” I admitted.

“Good,” he said as he lowered his eyes and smiled. “So, the Goddess of Destiny was here, in this room?”

“Yeah,” I said and then looked at Ryder as her words filled me. “Take me to my babies.”

We sifted into the nursery and Darynda looked up at us with a beautiful smile on her lips. “She’s awake,” she whispered and handed me Kahleena.

Ristan and Ryder both watched as my golden-eyed beauty looked right at me as if she was aware of everything going on around her, and smiled. I smiled back at her. “I love you sweet girl,” I whispered brokenly as I stared into her eyes, so like her fathers. “I’m going to fix the Tree, and you’re going to live forever.”

“Can I hold her?” Ristan asked. “I promise not to be long,” he whispered as he traced a finger down her cheek. “I miss those beautiful eyes.”

I handed her to Ristan even though I wanted to snatch her back and enjoy the moments of her being awake since they were few and far between. Unlike her brothers, she slept more than anything. They watched us and made noises, but she barely made any sounds.

I watched as a smile covered her tiny mouth as she watched Ristan’s eyes. Silver and black patterns swirled, beautiful against his complexion, but

to her, they drew her eyes and held her mesmerized. She was his calm, and he was her protector, as he'd said.

“My turn,” Ryder said, as he reached out for Kahleena. She turned her tiny little head and gave him a toothless smile, and I watched as his heart melted for the little minx. “Kahleena,” he whispered as he kissed her forehead, and totally melted my heart. “Fight for me,” he said barely above a whisper. “Be my brave little fighter, just a little longer for me, please.”

## Chapter Thirty-Two

“What did you find?” I asked as Savlian walked into the nursery.

“Nothing, just the Tree,” he said as he turned to Ryder. “We scouted the surrounding area as well. I fear they know the power of killing that Tree, and what it will do to us. I think they figured with no way to break the spell, they had no reason to stand around and watch it.”

“That’s good,” I whispered as I rocked with Cade on my arm, burping him. Darynda was a gem, and had known how to handle babies; Madisyn had joined me this morning and was holding Zander, who she couldn’t get enough of.

She lifted her eyes and met mine with a soft smile on her lips. “Your father has called the Blood warriors to arms, and Kier, he has brought the Shadow warriors here to assist the Elite Guards, for the blessing. It’s time; your daughter cannot wait much longer,” she said sadly as she kissed Zander’s soft forehead.

“Ryder, dress the children for the blessing, please,” I whispered as my heart thudded against my ribs.

“As you wish,” he said and I watched as Kahleena was dressed in a white dress of pure cotton, and then the boys changed into little robes that matched their sister’s dress.

“Just remember one thing today, Synthia. If the world doesn’t accept your little angel, you still need to become the leader to our people, one they would follow even if you lack a title. This world will still need you, just as Ryder and these boys do. Anyone can lead a garrison of warriors into battle, but only a few can lead them to be victorious, and the two of you, you can be the ones to lead this world to victory, but only if you gain the respect of the people.”

I looked at Madisyn and had to admit her speech was moving. “I want to be what this world needs, but how can I fight for a world that won’t accept my child?”

“You’re a warrior, Synthia. It’s in your blood, and you will have to fight and stand up for what is right. You’ll survive it, you may not want to, but you will,” she said softly; Darynda agreed.

“You’ll need to, for the lads. They need their mother, and, Goddess be willing, their sister. You came in here strong and you’ve only grown stronger.

I know you can do this, and your mother is right. You may not want to, but you will, because you are stronger than you think,” Darynda said softly. “I don’t have very many friends, but you are among those I consider as such. I’d like to think it gone both ways.”

“It does, Darynda. I just can’t stomach the idea of losing something so precious.”

“We won’t lose her,” Ryder said.

I turned to ask Madisyn if she would assist us in carrying the babes to the Tree, but she was frozen in place, as was Darynda. I looked up to find Danu watching us.

“We’re out of time,” I said as I stood.

“I know, I felt her,” she said as she walked over to Ryder and caressed her granddaughter’s cheek. “She’s growing weak, even with the jumpstart from Destiny. There is something you both should know. Destiny was here for a reason. She’s a sly one. She didn’t make you an offer, did she?”

“No,” I said as I narrowed my eyes on Danu, who looked healthier than she had in a while. “She said my pain was almost over.”

“She knew I didn’t want her help, and yet she still somehow managed to learn about you,” she whispered as she bent down and kissed Kahleena. “Has the Demon been feeding her?”

“Why would Ristan feed a Goddess?” I asked, and watched as a guilty flush stole across her cheeks.

“I meant your daughter. Ristan has different power than average Fae,” she whispered. “Kahleena has been given strength.”

I remembered Ristan’s kiss, and I also remembered the raw power that I received from it. Then it hit me. “Uh, please tell me he didn’t kiss my daughter like that!”

Ryder lifted a brow and smiled. “I asked him to give her a little jolt—and no, Synthia, he only kissed you like that because he wanted a taste. His nose healed nicely considering how hard I hit it for overstepping. Hence why his lips haven’t touched you since,” Ryder said with a knowing grin in his eyes.

“How exactly did he manage to feed her?”

“His touch; when he holds her. He’s been helping to keep her alive long enough to get her to the Tree,” he said.

“It was the least I could do after what I’d done to bring her into this world,” Ristan said softly from the door, but his eyes weren’t on me or my

child; they were on Danu with something dangerous in them. “I just came to see how she was doing. I’ll come back when it’s less crowded.”

I handed Zander to Danu and walked over to Ristan. I didn’t know what was going on between him and my mother, and I seriously doubted that I wanted to know. I wrapped my arms around him and held him, but I felt his body tense uncomfortably, and I wondered at it. Either he didn’t want to be touched, or something else was going on with him.

“Thank you, Demon,” I whispered and lifted on my tiptoes to kiss his cheek. “You’re her protector, and I’m glad it’s you. Cailean said you’d been staying in the room more lately, and I’d wondered if it was because you needed her, or she needed you. But, it seems it’s both. Carry my daughter to the Tree, please.”

“Flower,” he started to argue but I shut it down.

“No, she needs it. She’ll need all the help she can get right now and if you feeding her can make her stronger, do it. Please,” I whispered as I watched the indecision play in his eyes.

“Fine, it would be my honor,” he said softly as he kissed my cheek back. “It’s hard to resist her anyway; she’s as beautiful as her mother. She’s also as smart as her mother, and is already showing some sass.”

“Is she now?” I asked, but my eyes were on Danu, who was watching Ristan uneasily.

Okay, something was not right here, and I needed to know it. Problem with knowing it was I couldn’t *un-know* it afterwards if it was what I thought it was. I fought a battle, inside my head on whether I should ask, or just stay out of their damn business. I lost. But, on the bright side, I didn’t need to know it all, just one thing.

One simple thing.

“I don’t want details, but I need to know if whatever the hell is going on with you two, is going to cause a problem,” I held up my hand and shook my head. “Don’t tell me it’s nothing. I’m not a blooming idiot!” I shouted as I eyed them both seriously. “All I want from you both is an honest answer about whatever it is that you two have going on—will it affect you today, since Danu, you kinda need to be on point and you can’t mess this up. My daughter’s life depends on it. And, Ristan, I need you. So, is whatever the hell’s going on here going to end up at the Tree, or can you both forget it until we save the Tree, and the lives of my children?”



I waited and watched as Ristan murderously glared at Danu, who smiled seductively back at him.

“I’m here for you and the children, Synthia. I’ve fed, and made sure I was in fighting form,” Ristan said as he tore his eyes from hers to mine.

“I am also here for *my* daughter, and hers,” Danu said softly. “I need to do something first, so I’ll meet you at the Tree. Call for me when it’s been thawed out. Good luck,” she said before she left, and the women started talking again.

This had to work, and we all knew it.

## *Chapter Thirty-Three*

Cade had been fussy so I brought him along with me for a visit with Alden before we left for the Tree. He was snuggled up on my shoulder, content for the moment as I sat in a chair near Alden's bed, watching him sleep. Alden had been through hell at the hands of the Mages, and Eliran had been trying to accelerate Alden's healing process. One of the other Fae healers who I knew had been working on Ristan a few days ago had used her healing touch on him as well.

Bruises and angry red welts remained on his hands and arms, but he was a fighter. I readjusted Cade in my arms, and turned to find Ryder watching me from the door of Alden's room.

"I thought I'd find you here," he said softly.

"He doesn't deserve what the Guild is doing, or the Humans."

"No, he doesn't. We can fix it though, and luckily the children we saved can vouch for what occurred at the Spokane Guild."

"The children," Alden whispered and turned to look at me.

"Are recovering," I said softly. He'd taken blows to the head, which the healer had been working on. Luckily she'd caught the blood clot in time to remove it before it could have done any real damage, but the side effect was a massive headache. "We saved a lot of them; some are still receiving medical care from Eliran as we speak."

"My head feels like it was used as a soccer ball," he said as he tried to sit up.

"Don't get up, Alden," I said, watching as he gave up. I stood and handed Cade off to his father. "We have news from Vlad and Adrian. It's not good."

"Damn, kid. I'm already on my ass, what could be worse?" he asked as his gray eyes watched me. I felt my stomach flip-flop as I tried to figure out the gentlest way to deliver this blow. "That bad?" he asked as I continued to search my brain for the way.

"The Seattle Guild is accusing the Fae of attacking the Spokane Guild. They're labeling you as a traitor. Because of your connection with the job at the Dark Towers, they've seemed to connect the dots and now think you allowed us in to kill and destroy the Guild."

"Shit," he said as he rested his head back on the pillows and looked at me. "I knew there would be accusations, but that's extreme, even for the Seattle

Guild,” he mumbled.

“It gets worse,” I continued. “The Humans in Spokane are calling for blood. I believe the Seattle Guild is fueling the fire—well, I believe the Seattle Guild has a couple of Mages inside that are helping to fuel the fire.”

“I thought the same thing. But even without the Mages prodding things along, you know how the Elders are. If they think the Fae attacked the Spokane Guild, they’d be forced to call for blood or chance being challenged for new leadership. I don’t blame all of them for this, and you shouldn’t either. Losing the Spokane Guild was a huge loss to them; it’s where our history was stored. We can fix it, kid.”

“It’s still there,” I corrected. “Ryder sealed off the entrance to the catacombs before we burnt the Guild down so the history is still there and safe. But fixing this won’t be that easy,” I said as I moved closer to hold his hand reassuringly. “I think they set us up. They knew we would show up, and I think we were meant to take the fall for what happened there. I think the Mages are ensuring that war is openly declared on the Fae and that we have nowhere to run. Within minutes of the Guild being burned, national news, international news, and social media had the story up. As if they’d been tipped off and had a prepared story beforehand. We think that a glamour or illusion spell had been placed on the Guild, because up until we entered it, the Humans walked by as if nothing was amiss. After we entered, it broke. There are pictures of us entering the Guild, taken just before Ryder dropped the invisibility veil over us, which means someone was there watching us from the outside. Bilé was who you saw in the catacombs, and he let the Mages know some information about the Demon and it might have given them some ideas. Adrian and Vlad were there, and yet they didn’t feel or see anything wrong. You know Adrian’s instincts as well as I do. He’s normally able to smell a trap from a hundred feet away, and he didn’t sense anything. The person there who reported it has to be either in league with the Mages, or had been tipped off.”

“How would they know you’d even be there?” Alden asked.

“Good question,” I said and shook my head sadly. “But I don’t really have a good answer to it. They just could have guessed that we would show when they started in on Ristan. Right now I have to worry about saving my children and that’s why I came to see you.”

“How’s the little miss?” he asked with a guarded look.

“She’s a fighter,” I said with a broken smile. “I wanted to be the one to tell you what’s happening. I’m sure we can fix it, but I need you to be a little patient with us. Get better first and we’ll get a plan together after we get the babies to the Tree. I’ve threatened everyone inside these walls with certain death should they assist you in leaving here before I return.”

“Is that so?” he asked as he narrowed his eyes on me.

I smiled.

“Damn, kid,” he said as he shook his head, and then winced in pain. “Don’t think I’m ready to do much of anything right now anyway.”

“Good,” I said. “You can join us today if you wish. I know you love learning the Fae’s secrets. I took them into the Guild and showed them some of yours, so it’s only fair that you be invited to this event,” I teased lightly.

“You took them inside of the Guild, kid, but it was to save us. I know that had to be hard for you to do, and couldn’t have been easy on your conscience. What you did wound up being for the good of those children, too. They wouldn’t have lived if you hadn’t intervened and found them.”

“Be that as it may, that argument won’t help us with the Seattle Guild. I do however have plans in mind for them, but my children come first right now,” I said as I watched him.

“Kid, you do what you gotta do. You go take care of those children and I’ll be right here when you get back. I’m glad you asked me to go, but this one has too much riding on it and I don’t want to slow you down. Besides, if the Mages attack, you’ll need to be focused on those babies and not this old man.”

I looked at him and shook my head. “Please wait for us; together we’re a force they can’t beat. I can’t lose anyone else, and I won’t. If you leave, and they kill you, there will be no Guilds left standing when I am done. Do you understand me? I will personally make it my mission in life to rid the Human world of them. Do you understand me?” I asked with a don’t-fucking-do-it-look.

“Damn,” Ryder said as he awarded me with a crooked smile.

“Didn’t you feed her, Ryder?” Alden asked as he looked past me to Ryder. “She’s only this grumpy when she’s hungry.”

“I don’t feed her anymore,” he said as he gave me a smoldering look that was loaded with lust. “She’s my meal, but she no longer feeds from me.”

“Try it anyway. Maybe find her a doughnut or something,” Alden offered

before he turned back to me. “I’ll be here, I promise. Don’t go wiping out the Guilds; it would be total chaos without them in place. The Fae would declare it open season on the Humans.”

“They already have in Spokane,” I said as I exhaled. “Luckily Vlad sent out a warning which seems to have lessened the instances of open attacks on the Humans. I’m sure he and Adrian will be effective in stopping the Fae until we can we create another Guild and place you back in lead of it. But, Alden, I think the one you run—that we help you run—it shouldn’t be a part of the actual Guild. I have an idea for one, and once things calm down enough, we will talk about it and see if it’s something that’s workable.”

“I’m in,” he said with a soft smile. I shook my head and started to argue that he should at least hear the details, but he held up his hand. “Listen to me, Synthia. I’m not the young man I used to be and I’m not immortal. I’ve given the Guild the best years of my life and what I’ve done under the guise of it is something I can’t forgive myself for. The Guild would retire me—even if you managed to somehow make them see that I’m not guilty of the charges, they would retire me. Think of it for a moment; just for allowing the Demon free reign in the Guild they would have retired me. Oh, he was wandering around inside the Guild long before I was aware of it. All the Guild Elders will see is that I knew he was there, even if it was to protect me. I helped him and didn’t report it. So as a proud man, I need to walk away from them with as much dignity that I can. So yes, if you have a plan for a safe haven, and a way to protect the innocents that isn’t linked to the Guild, I’m in.”

I smiled. “You’re not immortal, Alden, not yet.” I left him with that thought as I turned and left him gawking on the comfy bed, knowing he wouldn’t be able to follow me.

“You realize you just told him that you plan to make him immortal, and then left?” Ryder asked as we walked into main hallway.

“It’s not his choice,” I said and then heard my own words. “He can make it, but only if he makes the right one.” I smirked.

“He won’t choose immortality.”

“He will, and here’s why, Ryder. He’s not done living, and he needs to atone for his sins. That’s how he thinks. He thinks he slaughtered—well, sent thousands of Witches and Warlocks to the slaughter and now he wants to atone for it. He’s not a young man, but he isn’t that old either. He’s not done living. He’s the only link I have to that world, and we need him.”

“You just threatened to wipe out the Guilds,” he said as he turned to look at me as he handed Cade off to Darynda.

“And I meant it. If they kill him for the Spokane Guild, I’ll show them what true evil looks like. He’s the only reason I’m willing to fix the bond between the Fae and the other Guilds. I don’t think Fae should be in the Human world, so I would see no reason not to recall them back to Faery. We fix this world and recall the Fae, which would end the war, period. They’d have no one to fight and the reason for their existence would cease to be. But, Ryder, if they hurt someone I love, they will in fact cease to exist. You and I both know that the Gods are aware of what is happening, and that Danu created the Mages—inadvertently—but they *are* Changelings, which means they are Fae.”

“You’ve thought this through,” he said, wisely not arguing the fact.

“I have. Not because I wish them harm, but because I’m tired of being on the losing end. Alden doesn’t deserve their accusations. Not after everything he’s done for them; everything he’s lost because of them. Marie said a long time ago that each of the Witches and Warlocks were special, and that each held the Guild up. Alden singlehandedly held the Spokane Guild together and he’s lost a lot because of it. He deserves their respect, not their accusations.”

## *Chapter Thirty-Four*

We sifted in before the masses arrived. The ice that had frozen the Tree had been slowly spreading down the base and now covered the roots and the ground immediately surrounding the Tree. The rich scent of sandalwood was in the air, and I let it filter through me. My handmaidens walked behind me as I moved closer, and then we all stopped. There were a lot of other trees surrounding the largest one, and I knew for a fact they hadn't been here last night.

The Fairies worked tirelessly as they tried to save the Tree. They hadn't made a difference in the ice, as every time they thawed a small piece, thicker ice replaced it. I exhaled a shaky breath and turned to look at Ryder, who was scouting the area with sharp eyes.

"Feel anyone else?" I asked, knowing that the lesser Castes would soon be here, and while they would be a show of force, they were weaker than the others here.

"No," he said and turned his obsidian eyes on me. I watched as they glittered with the challenge facing us. I knew Ryder loved challenges. I was a challenge he'd enjoyed winning. This one, however... This one, everything was riding on. This was a big one, and we both knew it.

"We can do this," I whispered breathlessly. Anxiety was a bitch. I had it. I had so much of it right now. "We can do this, Ryder; tell me we can do this."

"We can do this," he said softly, and I believed him. "You can do this; you're one of the strongest women I know. You have escaped my grasp on many occasions. You stand up to the Horde King, and you make the beast purr like a kitten lapping at cream. I have no doubt that together we can save our children's lives and fix this mess. With you at my side as my Queen, there is nothing we cannot do together."

I turned to watch as the Shadow Warriors sifted in behind Adam and the Dark Court. Their cloaks were silver, but the moment they caught the light, they turned black as the shadows they were named for. Adam walked proudly between his parents, his eyes on me and the Tree that stood in frozen stillness behind me.

"We brought as many people as we could without leaving the Dark Kingdom vulnerable to an attack," Adam said as his tri-colored green eyes

watched me. “I hate not knowing what you’re feeling. I’d grown so used to it that I feel I’ve lost a piece of myself without it.”

“I’m terrified,” I whispered. “I’m glad you came, and I’m also glad to have my best friend at my side for this, Adam,” I said as a tear slid down my cheek.

“Don’t cry, Fancy Face,” Adrian chided as he sifted in. “Show no weakness,” he whispered as he bowed to me.

The Light Fae sifted in next, without their King and Queen. I bowed to Shea, and judging from the crown of diamonds she wore, I was betting she’d taken the lead after the exile of her parents. Their warriors were cockier and hadn’t worn cloaks; instead they’d come dressed in full armor. Theirs looked as if it was created of the same material the Elite Guard used, only theirs were a shimmering white color. We watched as they joined us silently.

“Thank you,” I said to Shea, as I squared my shoulders and tried to dislodge the fear I felt.

“I wouldn’t have missed it,” she said as she looked to where Adam stood beside his parents.

I looked at Adrian, who smiled knowingly back at me. “Don’t need super powers to feel that one, now do ya?” he said with an emphatic wink that was almost comical.

I felt the power ripple through the air and turned to look at the Tree. Danu stood beside it, her eyes weary as she took in the damage.

“Sister,” Liam’s voice sounded as he and my parents sifted in. The Blood Warriors sifted in around the King and Queen. Their armor was crimson in color, and had barbs of metal that were lined at strategic points that could easily be used against an enemy.

I knew that the guards were all on edge. It was the first time in history that I knew of that every royal Caste was present with their entire guard in tow. Skeleton crews of guards had been left at the palaces, and while it wasn’t ideal, the more we had here, the better the chances were of fixing the Tree—or more to the point, saving my children.

“Thank you for coming,” I said, and noted that I sounded like a parrot. “This means more than I can ever put into words,” I amended.

We stood united as the lesser Castes sifted in, and when they were all present, I turned to Danu who looked at the entire assembly in awe. Her eyes took us in with open pride.



“Is she here?” Madisyn asked, as she watched me.

“Yes,” I replied and turned my eyes to see Madisyn as she searched the area by the Tree. “I’ll be right back,” I said to everyone, and moved closer to the Tree and Danu.

“There is more damage than when I checked on it yesterday,” she said as I got closer.

“Can it be fixed?”

“Not by me,” she admitted. “I’m not even sure you can do it,” she continued. “This frost is meant to affect the Tree and anyone who touches it.”

“You can’t bless them and the land won’t accept them without the Tree,” I said barely above a whisper. “We have to save this Tree.”

I turned my eyes to where Ryder’s men now stood with my children as he walked in our direction. He saw the look in my eyes and for a brief moment, I saw his despair as he read my thoughts. I turned to walk and meet him, but the ground shifted. I had to struggle to keep my balance. Danu reached out and held me up, and then I felt it.

I blanched at what I felt, the raw untapped power of a Leyline. “Oh no,” I whispered, thinking that the Mages were here, at the same time and place my babies were.

I turned to warn Ryder, but then I felt calmness fall over the glade. I looked at Danu as she watched something across the water as it approached. I gasped as the White Stag—the real one—walked out from the lush forest and moved to where we stood. He was a symbol for the world of Faery, and he spoke for the world in times of great need, or at least that is what my Fae history teachers had said.

It was a massive deer, but where a regular stag normally had horns or antlers; he had elaborate branches of wood that seemed to have been interlinked into an intricate design of Celtic knots. His hooves clicked against the rocks; it was the only sound that could be heard.

I looked to where he had left the forest, and watched in shock as hundreds of tiny Bramble Pixies followed in his wake. Other animals, as well as more Pixies, followed behind them. I stood side by side with Danu. I felt her fingers as she slipped them around mine in a show of solidarity.

“I’ve only seen this magnificent creature once before, and that was when I created this world,” Danu whispered for my ears alone. “He draws his power from the Leyline under the Tree,” she continued. “He knows what you

are.”

“How is that even possible? No one else knows, except for those who needed to.”

*“I feel you.”* A voice of deep timbre filled my mind. *“I felt your birth, and you are tied to us. To these lands,”* the voice said, and as I watched, the White Stag approached.

“It’s you,” I whispered to the Stag.

“It is I, my Goddess,” he continued to speak in my mind.

Okay, let’s be honest. Carrying on a conversation with a Stag was weird.

*“You’re of the land, and we, your people, have come to pay our respects. We have power to feed the Goddess, and the bond we share called us to you.”*

I was at a loss for words, unable to think beyond the fact that I hadn’t even known the White Stag actually existed.

*“The Elder Tree’s bark will melt the ice, my Goddess, and you can heal the Tree,”* he said softly as he bent his head with his massive horns scraping the ground. *“That is why they’ve come.”*

I looked around at the trees, and smiled, and then frowned. “Won’t it hurt them?”

I watched as one of the massive trees moved and the entire ground shook with the sheer force of it. I swallowed as the beautiful ancient tree reached for me with its branches, and lifted me up swiftly.

I saw the men preparing to move forward as Ryder stepped closer. “Stop them, Ryder. It’s friend, not foe.”

“Friend,” the tree said loudly, its voice like a severe wind rattling through the leaves.

“Friend,” I whispered as I tried to balance on the harsh branch. “Thank you for coming,” I said and exhaled a shallow breath.

*“My bark will melt the frost and ice. You can use it; it would be an honor if you did so. Elder Trees have the ability to banish or break spells. But it is only through death that the spell can be broken and rebirth can happen,”* he said through the same mental path as the Stag had.

“But it will hurt you,” I said, knowing I would risk anything to save my children. I just wanted to make sure it was aware of the danger it faced.

*“It will not hurt me,”* he said softly. *“I will die for you, and for the children you must save and the others who will come after them. It is the way of life, and I am honored to make the sacrifice for you. I only ask that you*

*allow my children into the safety of your gardens. That you protect them, and plant a seedling from my body to regrow and allow my children to watch over you and yours."*

"Done," I whispered. "I don't have a garden yet, but I will create one for the seedling and your children. I can never express to you how much this means to the entire realm of Faery. Your sacrifice will be noted, and I will make sure that this story is told to generations after this one, so that everyone will know of the Elder Tree's sacrifice to save their world."

I felt depleted and elated in the same moment. I hated the unfairness of the entire situation, but I wouldn't turn the Elder Tree down. My children had to survive, and there was no denying that it was a selfish thing, but it wasn't only for my children; it was for the ones who would come after as well.

"I'm not sure how this will work," I whispered as the Elder Tree set me back gently on the ground, and Ryder approached silently. "I'm not willing to cause you any pain, but I accept the sacrifice that you have offered. Is there a painless way to proceed?" The ground trembled a little as if the Elder Tree was chuckling at me. I took that as a no.

"Synthia," Ryder whispered as his fingers grazed mine in silent support.

"The bark of this Elder Tree will break the spell, but I've made him a promise that I fully intend to keep," I said as I turned to look up at Ryder. "His children will be in the garden that we will create, and they will watch over us as we do the same for them. They are his children, and for his sacrifice to save ours, we will in turn protect his."

"Synthia, are you sure?" Ryder asked. "Elder Trees can be very dangerous," he amended.

"My children will be vigilant, and they will know of the sacrifice I make today."

We both turned to look at the Tree. "I've already agreed to it, and I will protect the trees."

"So be it," Ryder agreed.

"Once I have said my goodbyes, Goddess, I will give you the bark that is needed to save the Tree. You will need to bless the ground around the Tree, and the White Stag will show you how."

"Thank you. This world needs more creatures like you, who are willing to make sacrifices for the good of this world."

I looked up at Ryder as his words finished, and then back at the Elder

Tree.

“We need the kind of rulers you two will be,” the tree said. “Ones who can unite our people, our land, and bring peace to this world.”

## Chapter Thirty-Five

We watched as the Elder Tree moved, and the entire ground shook with the subtle movement as it turned to the small copse of new trees. I turned to look at Danu, and she watched them with watery eyes. The Stag watched me, and I felt his calm and wondered if he was feeling my unease and had somehow managed to calm me.

*"It is his choice, and his time was nearing his end, Goddess."* His voice filled my mind, but with it came a calmness that filtered through me. I knew it wasn't my own. *"Tell me child, what do you plan to do with the ones who harmed our world?"*

*"I plan to kill every last one of them,"* I replied back.

*"Violence is not always the answer, little Goddess. They may just need a push in the right direction,"* he said.

*"They are pure evil,"* I said softly aloud.

*"Evil isn't born, it is created. Find the reason they became like this, and you could find their peace, as well as your own."*

*"They were going to cut me open and take my children. They've poisoned this land and are trying to kill my people. They've managed to create turmoil in the Human world as well. They are hell-bent on destroying us."*

*"And you feel they cannot be reached nor saved?"*

*"No,"* I replied honestly. *"I think some who embrace evil cannot be found once they've become lost in it. They feel rejected by this world, and yet the Horde would have embraced them with welcoming arms. However, they target us because Ryder is the King, and he is the strongest leader. No, I fear they cannot be reached or saved because they don't want it. They want to decimate us, and I'm not even sure they know why anymore. They, unlike the Fae, are not immortal. Those who were wronged have long since found peace. The ones who fight have no valid reason to since they were never rejected. Some evil runs too deep to be changed or saved."*

*"You are wise, but healing the world is only the beginning and a war is not something I would wish for this world. We hide in the shadows ourselves to avoid it, and we are no longer able to do that. Think long and hard, Goddess, before you bring war upon this world."*

*"She is not alone in her reasons, White Stag. These men who fight my children, they have been led by a God who sought to crush my creations. I*

*have thought of many ways to stop them, but Synthia is right in this. They will never stop. Even if we win the war, we will never kill them all. But we can push them back, and prevent them from harming this world,*” Danu added softly.

I hadn’t known she was inside my head. I turned and looked at her with a sad smile. I hadn’t considered it from her side. She was going to have to stand on the sidelines while we slaughtered a piece of her creation. She considered all of the Fae her children, so it would be a hard blow to her. These Mages were Changelings, children from Fae unions born with humans, or lesser Fae.

*“They are all my children, Synthia, but sometimes even children cannot be saved. No matter how much you wish it was otherwise.”*

I was about to respond when a loud crashing noise sounded from the right of us. I turned and watched in horror as the Elder Tree hit the ground as if someone had cut it down. I swallowed the cry that formed in my throat and threatened to release. He had been true to his word, and where a once magnificent tree had stood, was now a pile of bark and wood.

“We must move him, and place his bark beside the rowan Tree,” Danu said softly as she moved to the tree’s remains. “Synthia, you must first bless the land.”

“How do I do that?” I asked, and waited.

*“Bleed for us,”* the Stag said. *“Use the sacred dagger, and allow your blood to flow within the lands that you now rule. As the world accepts you, you will become more attuned to its needs. Its pain. Had you been in tune with it when the great rowan Tree became harmed, you’d have felt it. The land requires a sacrifice from you,”* he said softly, and I felt the calmness wash over me again.

“A sacrifice,” I whispered and felt my heart flop. “Not my children,” I said hastily. “Me,” I whispered. “Not my children.”

*“You misunderstood me. You’re a Goddess, and they seldom bleed. When they do, it’s considered a sacrifice.”*

I held out my hand as Danu glamoured a dagger. I accepted it and moved closer to the frost and ice covered ground, and then sliced painfully deep into the palm of my hand. Danu accepted the blade back as I allowed the blood to drip down my fingers, and sink into the frozen ground.

“Say these words,” Danu whispered. *“I am your Goddess, and of this I*

ask.”

I said it softly, following her lead as I repeated what she'd said.

*“I beg of thee, to accept my will, to accept my sacrifice. I promise to protect you to the best of my ability, and to keep others from tarnishing what was once so pure.”*

I expelled a breath and continued.

*“From this day forth, I become your Goddess, the Goddess of the lands of Faery. From this day forth, I become your protector and you become mine.”*

I waited and when she didn't say anymore, I asked it in my own way as well. “I promise to rid you of the disease the Mages have brought to you. I promise to protect you and always do what is best for you and the people who depend on you. Please heed my call, and accept the ones I love.”

“Beautifully said,” Ryder said as he narrowed his eyes on my hand.

“I sure hope so,” I said as I kneeled and placed my bleeding palm flat against the frozen ground. I shuddered as I felt a ripple tear through me and then just as fast as it had started, it was gone.

“It's done,” Danu said as she awarded me with a small smile.

I looked up at the damaged Tree, and prayed that the bark of the Elder Tree would work. It was no wonder that the Fae cherished the Elder trees. It was a beautiful ancient rowan, which I somehow knew had been the first thing to appear in this world. Danu had created that Tree, and then had created her people around it. The creatures that lived here before the Fae as well as the Fae themselves, which explains why we were linked to it and it to us.

*“You know it because the lands have accepted you,”* the Stag said as it bowed its head once again. *“Blessed be, Goddess. Call for me if you ever have need.”*

I paused as Ryder started to wrap my hand in a soft silk, which felt surprisingly nice against the damaged tissue. We walked together back to where our babies were, cradled in the arms of their uncles. When we reached them, Elijah moved closer to us, his eyes watching me with a mixture of wonder, and suspicion.

“That was a custom for the Gods, princess,” he whispered.

I remained silent as did Ryder.

“Very few can claim to have seen the White Stag, much less have it appear during a time of need. Two miracles in one day,” he said softly. “I

wonder if it will be enough to save your babes as well.”

“You should go help with the wood,” Ryder said narrowing his eyes on his brother. “My grandfather, the first Horde King, was one of the few to ever lay eyes on the Stag. He saw it the night of the first Wild Hunt, and so it became a signal for the most sacred of animals.” Ryder’s eyes slid to me, and a small tug at his lips seemed to be connected to my heart, because it yanked on it.

“I have many secrets, Elijah, but some of them are meant to stay as such until I wish them to be public knowledge. Every advantage in this war is needed,” I said softly, hoping he caught my message.

“You can trust that I will keep it,” he said as he bowed low at his waist and then lifted his head with a smirk on his lips. “Growing up with Gods does have its own advantages.”

We watched him walk away.

“You think he’ll become a problem?” Ryder asked, and I turned my eyes to his.

“Let’s hope not.”

We watched in silent respect as the wood was brought over, and placed a short distance from the rowan Tree. When it had been piled high, Savlian tossed a torch on the pile and we watched in silent hope. It wasn’t working at first, but as we watched, the ground began to thaw, and the moss returned to its lush, emerald-green color.

“It’s working,” I whispered past the tears that filled both my eyes and my throat. “Ryder, its working,” I said a little louder.



## Chapter Thirty-Six

The fire illuminated the sky as night fell across the glade. We watched in silence as the Tree's icy cocoon began to melt and the frost vanished. The fairies returned to the Tree, dancing around the flames. Their glowing wings cast a glittering effect in the sky. We had waited as long as we dared, and Danu had admitted that it was finally time to bring the babes closer and place them upon the moss-covered floor.

I accepted Kahleena and Cade as Ryder carried Zander over to the foot of the Tree. After he had placed Zander on the ground, he accepted Kahleena as I laid Cade down beside Zander, making sure there was enough room for their sister between them.

She was so still that I had to stop myself from checking for her pulse. I'd felt it in her as I had carried her over. Once we had them on the ground, Danu instructed us to remove their clothes, and then we had to go. I hesitated as I stood to leave.

"I have them," she said softly. "Go stand with your people, and join hands. Instruct them to push the power they wish to give me, and I will accept it. You cannot be with the babes for this. It's my turn to help them. This I can do; this is also the least I can do for you, my daughter. I promise no harm will come to them."

I had no choice.

With my heart in my throat, I walked away from my babies, knowing that their lives rested in my mother's hands. When we once again stood with the crowd, Adam took my hand, as Ryder accepted my other one.

Ryder thankfully repeated Danu's instructions to the crowd, and the entire group started reaching for the closest person's hand until we all were together as one. I felt the hum of power as they began to send it to the Tree, and I hissed with the amount of it as I felt it touch the Tree.

"It's coming to me," I whispered to Ryder. The intense feeling of power that the Tree fed to me was both scary and intoxicating.

"Breathe," Adam said softly.

"Can you feel it through me?" I asked as the power continually entered my system. I was unsure of how much I could handle, or if, as a Goddess, I even had limits. Adam shouldn't have been able to feel what I was feeling anymore. That bond severed with the death of my old body.

“No, but if you don’t breathe and release the monster grip you have on my fingers, they’ll break.”

“Oh,” I said and loosened my hold on his hand.

I heard gasps from the crowd, and then whispered excitement as the Fae got their first look of Danu. It had to have been a choice on her end to allow them to see her. I smiled as whispered words about what she looked like started through the crowd. Every one of them was wrong, which caused a smile to flutter over my lips.

She kneeled down and dug her fingers into the earth, pulling off a chunk of moss, which she used to cover Kahleena. Danu’s words were layered, her voice barely above a whispered thought, but it played in my mind because she wanted me to hear it.

“My littlest warrior, you must be strong,” she said as she placed a gentle kiss on her forehead before bringing fingers covered in what looked like gold paint over Kahleena’s cheeks, and then her forehead. “Blood of my blood, heed me now, for I bless this little one,” she said in a hushed tone. “Blood of my blood, I call you now, I bless this child of Faery and beg you to heed my call!” she shouted, which scared Kahleena, and the small babe began to cry. “I bless thee, Kahleena Larissa, daughter of mine. I bless you for all time,” she said before she picked her up and held her beneath the Tree, then lifted the small babe in her hands up to the Tree as if in a supplication or benediction.

As we watched, the Tree gave off a shimmering ray of light, which looked like the Fairy dust from Peter Pan. I felt it, and knew it was the land of Faery’s blessing, as well as the trees. The land had accepted her.

“Oh, thank God,” I said breathlessly.

“Strange choice,” Elijah said from right behind me. “Considering the facts and all,” he amended wryly as I turned and looked at him without releasing Adam or Ryder’s hands.

“I believe in him,” I whispered. “I told you where I was raised,” I finished, turning back as Danu continued the ceremony with the boys. When it was finished, all three had been blessed. It didn’t mean they’d live, or that they were safe from death, but the Fae children that had made it to Transition over the last thirty or so years all had Danu’s blessing and the acceptance of the land.

I looked around as the Fae released the hands of the others as the

ceremony ended, and Danu disappeared from their view. Ryder and I made our way to where she stood, once again invisible to the others. I kneeled on the ground and looked up at her and the ancient Tree behind her.

“You created this Tree before you created any of the races before us, why?”

“I needed a focal point, and people need something to believe in. The Tree is filled with my power, which is why, when I brought you over to this form, I was depleted in power. This world feeds me, and I in return, feed it. The Mages knew this because of my ex-husband. He told them where to strike us, and how best to remove me from the fight. Without his guidance, you should easily be able to strike against them. But I have to ask you to wait; you cannot rise against them yet, Synthia. You need time for the children to become stronger, and when that time comes, I’ll take them to the Hall of the Gods. They will be protected while you wage war among the Mages. Use this time to calm the disturbance with the Humans, and then bring war to the Mages. That is the only way that you can ensure that no other Gods intervene. Elijah knows that the other God is watching us, and he knows that we must wait. When he tells you this, believe him. No war can happen until the Humans are safe, for my children are killing them. If he wages war against us, we will lose.”

“So then we go to the Guild, and what? Help them?” I asked.

“No, you do as you said and create a new one. Create a better one. Protect the Humans, and bring some semblance of normalcy to the outcast Fae; they have none right now. This is what you had planned, you just have to do it sooner rather than later. You can do this; place Alden in the leadership role as you had planned. Allow Humans in, instead of just Witches. The Angels will come, and they will help too. I know this because I’ve seen it. Elijah will become an asset. Give him time to adjust and then offer him a role. I have to go attend to my ex-husband. He’s currently in a place where he can do no damage, nor assist the Mages. I have him handled, and until I decide to remove the God bolts, he’s stuck. Be safe, daughter of mine.”

\*~\*~\*

We were back at the castle, and already Kahleena looked better. Her cheeks had a red hue from the chilled the air, but Ryder had seen to the fire which crackled in the hearth, and as I stood watching over her, he silently crept up and wrapped his arms around my waist.

“You did good, Synthia,” he said.

“I had no idea what I was doing,” I admitted.

He smiled against my neck. “I meant with our children. They’re truly beautiful. Just like their mother.”

“They are, aren’t they?” I whispered with a smirk on my mouth that he couldn’t see. “I think they have a touch of the devil in their eyes, though. That’s all you.”

He laughed, and I enjoyed the rumble of it as his arms tightened around me.

We’d placed them all in the same crib, since they seemed to prefer it anyway. Their birth had been filled with turmoil, but I had no worries that it would affect them in the long run anymore. I wouldn’t allow it to. I wouldn’t allow the war we would soon wage to touch them either.

“If they go to the Hall of the Gods, they’ll age faster. We’ll miss it, the time that they are there. Two days there is almost a month here. I’ve considered what Danu said, and while I hate the idea of sending them away, it would be the safest place for them with Bilé locked down wherever Danu has him. We need to be focused on the fight, and not on questions about our children’s safety.”

“Then we better prepare and have it planned out so where they are only there for a few hours. I agree though; I’d prefer the safety for them and the peace of mind of knowing they are protected so that we can focus on the fight at hand. I have my eyes and ears watching for the Mages. If they so much as come up for air, we will know about it. They can’t hide from us forever,” he said as his breath fanned against the sensitive skin of my ear.

“They’re regrouping,” I said as I considered the silence from them since the attack that ended my life. “They’ll want us to fight on their terms, but I think we should prepare for an all-out attack on them. We should send out more scouts,” I said.

“You think they are here?” he asked as he considered it.

“I do,” I replied honestly. “I think Faolán has them somewhere in Faery, and they’re searching out the relics hidden here. We have the majority of the relics, but some are still unaccounted for. I think they plan on fighting us right here. If I didn’t, I wouldn’t send my children away. I know we can protect them, but I would rather be smart about this. I have a bad feeling that they will be targets in the war. Better that we be prepared for them when they

come. And Danu can have them gone from here quickly enough that, should the Mages show up, we wouldn't have to worry about it."

I hoped I was doing the right thing. The Mages were licking their wounds, but they wouldn't be for long. They'd framed us and expected the Humans to keep us busy, and yet we now had their ace in the hole. We'd taken the man who'd been fueling this war. He was Danu's prisoner, and Bilé could no longer give them information to use against us.

That was a huge gain for us and a huge loss for them. It wouldn't stop them though and we knew it. They were dead set on the path they had chosen to walk, and when they finally showed up, we'd fight them. I only hoped that now with the babes born, that it would be soon. I wanted this over with and I wanted them safe from the lunacy of it all.

"Did Ristan say anything to you after the blessing?" I asked softly after a few moments had passed. Ryder grimaced briefly.

"He told me that he wouldn't be coming with us to the Guild. He also isn't willing to allow Olivia to go back, either. I'm not even sure what to think about it, but I do know if we force the issue, he won't forgive us for it anytime soon. He is still trying to figure out what her involvement with the Mages was. I offered to interrogate her and so did Zahruk, but he feels that if he can't read her, that we probably can't and he wants a little more time to find out on his own. He did say that if he gets nowhere with her, he will bring her to me."

"I know things looked bad based on what Alden and Ristan told us, but what if she turns out to be innocent? Do you think Ristan will allow her to leave?" I asked thoughtfully, and Ryder snorted with a smirk.

"You are about to get a front row seat to how Fae and Demons feel about betrayal; more so, how *he* feels about it. No matter what happened, she betrayed Ristan and Alden and he won't let her leave until he has exacted his revenge. Ristan will get the truth from her, and until he does, none of us will really know what happened at the Guild. I will not interfere and I hope you don't plan on it," he raised an eyebrow at me.

"Hell no. If she turns out to be a Mage and was helping them, I'll put her down like a rabid dog myself, just like I did to Chandra. I've been thinking about that as well," I said softly as I replayed the time I'd murdered the girl right in front of Ryder. "Looking back, so much of what the Guild told us was basically a lie. It's too much," I whispered.

“They’ve been fed lies, yes, but they chose to blindly follow what they’d been told.”

“I did it as well. I never questioned anything until you,” I said guiltily. “How many innocents did I murder for them?”

“Don’t think of it like that,” he said as he moved my hair from my neck and placed a gentle kiss on the soft column. “There’s no undoing it, there’s only learning from it, becoming stronger because of it, and moving forward to better it.”

## *Chapter Thirty-Seven*

We stood with Alden in the room where we'd gathered the children of the Guild. His eyes watched them as they played with toys that Sinjinn had created from glamour. There were only a few who were up and moving, while the others watched from where they sat on a soft sofa that Eliran had created. The sofa was a soft creamy ivory, and had places to hold the medical IVs that held saline. Where he'd gotten the saline from was anyone's guess. The man loved Human medical technology and was always incorporating it with traditional Fae healing at every chance he got.

Some of the children had been injured in some sort of an explosion that happened during the fall of the Guild and some were just dehydrated, as they had been in hiding for at least two days, without food or water from what we could tell. None of them would speak to us yet so it was hard to figure out exactly what happened to them.

"We failed them. I failed them," Alden said through choked emotion.

"You did your best and no one can say you didn't. The Guild, however, is trying to say just that. Savlian and Sevrin were at Vlad's not too long ago, and saw a news station showing one of the Guild Elders offering a reward for your capture. They're saying you're a traitor. Of course they'd never admit to the loss of the Guild being an inside job. Instead, they are accusing us, and they have pictures they've been smearing all over the TV of us entering the Guild. Vlad and Adrian have been using some outside help, and they say that the Humans are also rising against the Fae in droves now. There are the females, and some males still thinking that the Fae are better than boy bands, but those ones have always been a little brainless concerning them. The others, however, are encouraging the Guild and backing them."

"Are you serious about starting a new Guild; a better one where we can keep people safe while we do the right thing?" Alden asked as he took in the kids that looked scared as Ryder and his men walked in.

Like me, they'd been raised to fear the Fae. Fear keeps you alert, and it keeps you alive. It was one of the things I prided myself on. I knew I was terrified of the Fae, but I'd been taught to never show it. I'd used my mouth to show them I wasn't afraid, while holding that fear in check internally.

"I am, and I still want you to run it," I said, watching as the kids kept their eyes glued to the men, and cowered a little, but I couldn't blame them

for it. “They need to be taught the right things, and not a crap load of lies. You can teach them that, and together we will build something that no one else has ever been able to do before. We can build something that helps to protect any creature that needs it. I’ve talked to Ryder’s guys, as well as Adam. We are all willing to help you, and we will back you whether you decide to run it or not.”

“You’d do that for me?” Alden asked softly.

“I would,” Adam said as he sifted in to stand beside us. “In a heartbeat, Alden,” he continued with his eyes on me. “Besides, I need a place to stay at while I search out the Light Heir. I’d stay with Vlad and Adrian, but I think it would be counterproductive. It’s a party every night with them.”

“Okay, we can discuss the new Guild later. Right now we need to account for the charges the Guild is accusing us of. I think you should do the talking, and we’ll back you up if anything happens. Vlad has a friend who will also be there with a few of his people. It will add to the army we’ll be walking in with. I’d suggest we go without them, but I don’t trust the Guild not to attack us unless we show them force. So we go in with the backing to make them stop and think. Plus, we don’t know how many Mages have infiltrated or weaseled their way into the Seattle Guild,” I said with my business face on.

“And Olivia? What do we do if they ask for her?” Alden asked.

“We hope to God that they don’t ask. Ristan will either get the truth out of her, or not. I don’t know if she’s guilty of being a Mage or just trying to be a good little soldier, but we all know that you and she have been here too long for the Guild not to suspect that you’ve both been compromised. If we hand her over to them, she’ll most likely be retired. I can’t in good conscience do that to her. There’s a chance she could be innocent, or that she’d been drinking the Kool-Aid that we all were. The point is that we don’t know what happened. You were passed out and we weren’t there. Zahruk could possibly pull it from her mind, but he and Ryder have decided to honor Ristan’s request to get the information from her in his own way. I can, however, tell you this: If someone asks us for her directly, then that is who we should suspect of being a Mage. I believe her on that part; that she was told you were a traitor. We know that you were under suspicion by the Seattle Guild for a time, which is why they sent the other Elders to the Spokane Guild. *I* think she was used and fed lies by the Mages. It may not be true, but she wouldn’t have been able to say no if it had been an upper level command.



We all know that. Her fate is out of our hands now, and Ristan isn't quick to judge people or make hasty decisions. I trust him to do what he believes is right. I have to."

"That's what I think as well, and should she prove to be a traitor, Ristan will deliver what he sees as justice to her," Ryder said, backing me.

"I'd like to believe she wasn't guilty," Alden said softly with his eyes on the children again. "Some of these kids don't have parents to protect them," he said offhandedly.

"Then keep those ones here, and they can be taught your ways at the new Guild. No child should be alone and I can think of no one else who will protect them better than you," I said softly as I smiled. "Or kick their asses into shape and make fierce warriors of them."

"Agreed," Adam said as he smiled, remembering the crap we'd gone through together in training with Alden.

"Back to the task at hand," I said, pulling us back to the here and now. "Are we ready?" I asked and watched as he started moving the children into groups. He was dedicated, and those children were terrified of us. Of me. It was weird to know that once upon a time, I'd been one of those scared kids.

"These ones have no parents," he said, pulling seven from the group. "They were found on the steps of the Guild. Like Adam was," he said calmly, in a tone that would soothe the fears of the scared little things. "I've raised them for the most part. From what you all told me, a lot more of these kids lost their parents when the Guild fell." He nodded grimly at the other larger group of children. "We're going to have to find out which ones still have parents that can take them back."

I nodded, acknowledging the sad truth to Alden's words and knelt down to eye level with one of the small girls. "What's your name?" I asked, and watched as she recoiled from me. "You don't have to be scared of me. I am a lot like you. I was raised by Alden after I lost my parents. I lived at the Guild, too."

She glared at me.

"My name is Synthia, and you have nothing to fear from us. We plan on helping you."

I watched as she turned what I had said over in her mind and processed it. Her eyes studied me, and sized me up. I smiled softly and shook my head. "We're a lot alike. You're wondering if you can run from me, or if you can

escape. You don't have to, because I'm not your enemy. I am your friend and I will never lie to you, no matter how ugly the truth is."

\*~\*~\*

We met at Vlad's club, and I was shocked that we all fit, including a small group of men who walked in after we'd arrived with over one hundred and fifty of the Elite Guard and Shadow Warriors. I watched them as they worked their way through the crowd easily. I was sitting with Ryder at the bar when one of the newcomers leaned over and spoke quietly to Vlad. They looked cold and lethal.

"Lucian," Vlad said as he watched the newcomer.

"You called, we came. Consider this payment for what you did for me. My debt is repaid, Vampire," Lucian said as I sized him up silently.

He was almost as tall as Vlad, with dark black hair that matched Ryder's in his Horde King form. He turned his head and looked right at me, and then narrowed his eyes, which were a cyan blue that, in the shadows, almost looked black. He wore a crisp white dress shirt with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows and a black tie that looked out of place in this bar. Lucian's arms were covered in tattoos, which were markings I couldn't place or recognize. He was beautiful, and yet I felt his power as it leaked from his pores. He reminded me of the first time I'd laid eyes on Ryder. I knew I should run away, and yet all I could do was openly stare, uncaring that he returned the favor.

"Horde King," he said as he finally tore his eyes from me and looked right at Ryder. His eyes came back to me and I felt the hair at the back of my neck stand up.

"Demon King," Ryder acknowledged.

"Who the fuck is he?" I asked on our shared mental path.

"Lucifer's right hand man," Ryder grumbled. *"If Lucifer didn't run Hell, Lucian would, or at least that's what they say. He owns and runs the sex clubs on the West Coast. He isn't afraid of anything. Don't piss him off; he has no morals and no fear, Synthia. He is death in raw form. No one knows what he actually is, or who his parents are. My father didn't even deal with him or his people because of the rumors that surround him."*

"And Vlad called him in, why?"

*"Because he owed him a favor, and if you have someone like Lucian in your corner, you use him."*

*“You mentioned rumors?”*

*“He barter in souls. It made us think Demon, but he doesn’t drain or eat them like soul-seeking Demons do. He sells them.”*

*“How did I not know about him?”* I asked with worry.

“Because I didn’t want your kind to,” Lucian rumbled as he continued to watch me. “Your soul is tinged with red, why? How many innocents have you slain?”

“That’s none of your concern,” I said with a glare. “My soul isn’t why you’re here, and it’s not your problem, now is it?” I was disturbed he could actually tell from my soul that I’d killed people.

“It is if I make it my problem,” he said with a harsh tone. “Lucky for you, I’m not interested. Now,” he said dismissing me as he turned back to Vlad. “You’re sure you want to call in that favor for them?”

“I am,” Vlad said as he pulled a bottle of fifty year old scotch off the top shelf. “You said you owed me, and I’m collecting. The Seattle Guild is accusing Synthia and her uncle of attacking and bombing the Spokane Guild.”

“And I should give a fuck, why?” Lucian asked as he took the glass and tipped the contents down his throat without blinking.

“You shouldn’t, but I do,” Vlad said as he refilled the glass.

“I don’t understand you, Vampire. That caring thing you do is a weakness. Kill it. If you can’t fuck it, eat it, or sell it, fucking destroy it.” I almost snorted with his version of the lyrics from the Carnivore song *Sex and Violence*.

“You sure he isn’t your long lost twin?” I asked Ryder.

“I’m sure,” Ryder said ignoring Lucian as he took a sip of his drink.

“Are we going to do this or just sit around stroking egos all day?” Lucian asked as he stood up and turned to the men who stood behind him. “Gear up, now.”

“Full metal jackets or armor piercing rounds?” his man asked, and I took him in slowly. He was taller than Vlad, easily reaching six feet and a couple of generous inches. His black hair was spiked and he had small gauges in his ears; his eyes were a lighter blue, and cold. It was the only way to describe him. Cold, and malignant; the entire group of them radiated death from their pores.

“Ask the Vampire. I’m just here to kill shit,” Lucian said as he turned his

eyes back on me.

“You’re not Fae,” he said but it wasn’t directed as a question. “That body is new, but that soul isn’t. Goddess?” he asked, and this time it was for me.

“Would it change your mind in helping us?” I asked as I lifted one brow in question.

“I like to know what the fuck I’m walking into. I am never behind my enemies, always ten steps ahead,” he said smoothly, his eyes watching me with keen knowledge. He was in full control and he knew it.

I refused to answer him, because when it came down to it, we were going in blind for the most part. “We won’t lose,” I said after a moment had past. “We go in and we do it as diplomatically as we can. If they refuse to do the same, we handle it. That’s all I can tell you, but remember this. I don’t want a war with the Humans. I used to be one.”

He smirked, and I felt my skin as gooseflesh rose on it. “Fine, we can play it your way,” he said as he turned and started to leave the club with his men.

I felt the tension before I knew what it was. Elijah, Silas, and some of their men walked in, and instantly, he and Lucian were eye-fucking each other. I was willing to bet they knew each other, and in everything I’d ever read, Demons and Angels didn’t get along. Of course, rumors went along the lines of another breed of Demons that were in fact Fallen Angels.

“Lucian,” Elijah growled and shook his head.

“Angel, I see you lost your wings. Momma get mad at you and take them back?” One of Lucian’s men taunted.

“I lost them a long time ago, when I started killing your kind for fun,” Elijah snapped and then turned his back on them.

“Pretty girl,” Vlad crooned, pulling my attention away from the men and the pissing contest. “Don’t fuck with Lucian; we want him on our side.”

“You think I care? I have Ryder and I’d bet the bank on him any day of the week. We have almost two hundred of the meanest warriors watching our backs. We could have handled this without you calling in a favor. And how the hell did he hear our conversation?” I asked Ryder.

“It’s Lucian,” Vlad answered. “I don’t question how he does shit; I only know that when I want bad shit done, he is the person I think of. You want someone to disappear? He is the person you call to get the job done.”

“I don’t want anyone to disappear,” I said with a wrinkled brow. “You

basically called in the Devil. Should I be worried?" I asked as I took a sip of the forgotten glass of wine he'd poured earlier.

"Only if he takes interest in you; other than that, I wouldn't. He is a lot like Ryder, but where Ryder wants to fix things; Lucian seeks to destroy and doesn't give a fuck about anything. He's a good person to have on your side. Not an ideal one to have against you. I sure as hell don't want him as an enemy," Vlad said as he refilled his own glass and downed it in a single swallow. "Now, let's go kick the Guild in the balls, and then I'll make you a real drink."

"We got a problem," Adrian interrupted as he walked in and turned on the news. "They're going to execute some of the Fae they've captured, the ones who supposedly killed Humans."

"Are they guilty?" I asked as I stared at the seductive faces on the flat screen TV that Vlad had muted.

"As far as I can tell, they're Light Fae. They've been the worst of the offenders we've encountered lately," Vlad said as he poured more drinks for Adrian and his crew that had just returned. The substance was thick, crimson and smelled coppery. *Eww*. "Those who were faithful to their King and Queen followed them here. Tatiana basically declared open season on the Human race. I think she's trying to start this war singlehandedly. I expected something like this from Dresden. He, however, has seems to have gone missing. In his absence, Tatiana is using her male admirers as pawns."

"Then if they are guilty, we won't stop them from executing them," I said worriedly as I turned to Ryder to judge his response.

"If they broke the laws, then you're right. We can't save them, not without jeopardizing the peace we are trying for," Ryder agreed with hesitancy in his voice. "But they don't just have an execution planned, Pet, they will plan on torturing them to make a point."

"Then we'd better do something about it," I said softly as I wrapped my fingers around his. "I won't allow them to suffer, but I won't allow them to start a war either."

## Chapter Thirty-Eight

We stood in the crowd, cloaked by invisibility. Snipers lined the roofs, and I watched silently as Lucian and his men removed the threat. They didn't just remove them though. I was certain he'd taken them someplace else and I was pretty sure I didn't want to know where, or what he was doing to them. I also didn't care, which surprised me. I didn't care as long as no one ever found the corpses, or proof that they'd been taken out.

The Guild members lined the steps of the Seattle Guild. They were preaching to the Humans who listened as if they were God himself. Fanatics, people who would hang on each word they said, and every lie they whispered.

"We will not take it, not anymore. We can rise up against them, and stop them from feeding on our race. If we work together, we can push them from our world and ensure that no other suffers the fate that these innocent women have at the hands of our enemies. Make no mistake, we are at war!" Harold, one of the Guild Elders continued. He was one we all knew, because he was the top dog at the Seattle Guild. He was also the one who fed orders to the Spokane Guild, or had before they'd lost it.

The crowd erupted into angry cries and I shook my head. I was stuck in the middle. I understood their fears and the reasoning behind it. They *were* part of the favored food group for most Fae, unfortunately, the Fae doing it didn't stop at FIZ state, they continued until death was the outcome.

"If we do nothing, the Fae within the crowd will attack," Ryder said softly, and it drew my eye to those who were indeed in the audience with disgruntled rage on their perfect features.

"Do you trust me, Ryder?" I asked and felt his fingers as they entwined through mine. He brought them up and kissed my knuckles.

"Without hesitation," he whispered.

"Keep Alden safe until I get back," I said and smiled.

I started through the crowd, pushing and shoving my way to the front of it. As I did so, the Elder continued as the Witches and Warlocks in front of the Guild held the four condemned Light Fae locked down with their magic.

"Today it ends! Today we show you who controls this world! We can't do it alone though; we need your help, and your vigilance!" the Elder shouted and the news camera's followed his movement as he started in the direction

of the Fae.

I could smell the heavy scent of freshly smelted iron. I watched as they brought it out in liquid form and my stomach dropped at the thought of how they intended to kill them. Liquid iron wouldn't kill them quickly; it would be a painfully slow death.

*"Ryder, tell the Elite Guard to turn music on, and make it loud. Phones, radios, make sure you channel it through everything."* He gave me a mischievous smirk.

*"Done,"* his voice rumbled in my head.

Fall Out Boy's *Centuries* blasted the assembly and shook the windows of the buildings surrounding us. Phones started blaring the song along with the rhythmic honking of horns in time with the music from the cars that lined the streets, as well as the apartment buildings that were close enough for their magic to reach.

I shed my invisibility glamour and quickly moved until I was walking up the steps.

"Stop her!" one of the Witches screamed, trying to be heard over the music.

"Let her try to save them," Harold said, and I narrowed my eyes on him. "Well, well, it's Synthia McKenna, from the Spokane Guild," he sneered as he moved to the iron.

I smiled and then moved with inhuman speed. The same speed that Danu had, which was faster than light. I knew the cameras were watching. I also knew that I didn't have the time to be diplomatic right now, not with the Fae in the crowd planning to attack the Guild in front of the cameras. It would be war for sure if they did that.

"Oh, I'm not here to stop you. I'm here to deliver punishment to *my* people. The Fae do not punish you when you break the laws. It's only judgment if both parties agree. Luckily for you, I do. I was, after all, part of this world. I followed your orders, and I was one of your best Enforcers, Harold. Do you not agree?" I didn't wait for his response as I began the judgment of these unfortunate Fae.

I searched their minds and viewed the deeds of which they were being accused. Some were worse than others, but all deserved death. They had, in fact, been ordered to feed openly by Tatiana. She should have done as we'd instructed, because now she would die. She may not care about her people,

but I would make damn sure she got the message of what would happen should this feeding frenzy continue. She'd be watching because the woman simply loved drama, and she was probably now watching the TV and enjoying the outcome from the safety of her comfy couch.

"You know the laws, and yet you chose to feed openly?" I asked the Fae that were being held down.

"She is our Queen!" one shouted, speaking for the entire group.

"No, she is no longer a Queen. She was deposed and banished from Faery. Now she will be marked, and she will also find death, as you do now," I said softly.

"You are not a Queen!" he raged.

"Not yet," I agreed. "I'm sorry you chose to follow her."

I shook my head and then looked up as I felt one of the Witches tried to spell me. "I wouldn't do that," I said with a small smirk on my lips as I broke the incantation she tried to cast on me; as if it was a spell from a novice.

I turned my focus on the Fae who stood accused. I walked to one and helped him up from where he'd been kneeling on the stairs, and as the entire world watched, I searched my mind for a way to make a statement that wouldn't scare the Humans too much. I smiled when I finally found it. "You stand accused of killing Humans, which the Fae now acknowledge as a crime as well. You are sentenced to death. Ashes to ashes...dust to dust," I finished barely above a whisper. I brought my hand up to weave the spell, and as I watched him, he turned to ash and disintegrated on to the steps of the Guild.

The Humans in the crowd gasped in horror, but the news cameras watched, recording it all for those who hadn't come to the Guild. Oops. It wasn't quite what I had planned, but it worked.

I swallowed and met Ryder's eyes, and then scanned the faces of the men, as well as Lucian who had joined them again. I waited for Ryder, and as he nodded, I moved to the next until each of the accused lay in ashes on the steps of the Guild.

I turned back to Harold and watched him as he looked at the dead Fae. "You've accused us of attacking the Spokane Guild."

"We have proof!" he shouted.

"You only have proof that we entered it," I replied. "Alden is going to explain the rest, but I will warn you once. Only once, Harold," I said with enough warning in the words, that his eyes narrowed with the tone of it. "If



you try to accuse him, or charge him here today without hearing him out, you will get the war you want. Look into the crowd and tell me what you see,” I whispered.

Ryder had changed forms. His warriors were decked in full armor, including the masks that concealed everything but their eyes. The crowd moved away from them as the veil of invisibility disappeared. Adam had come with his Shadow Warriors, Liam had brought a few of the Blood Warriors as well, and the army looked positively evil, and awe-inspiring.

I could see the cameras flashing pictures of the warriors, a rare sight in the Human world, since marching in full armor with this many would cause even the stoutest of heart and courage to cower.

“That’s...” Harold whispered and I watched with a mixture of annoyance, and pity.

“Man up; it’s the Horde King. It is also my fiancé, and the father of my children. I suggest you consider and weigh your options before you make any hasty decisions. Make no mistake, Harold, we don’t want a war with the Human race, but we will fight if you push us. I am the same girl who fought for the Spokane Guild, but at the same time, I am Fae. They are my people, and I will protect them at all cost. We came because you’ve accused us, so lay out the charges and one of *our* own Elders will speak for us.”

I moved to the bottom of the stairs where Ryder and his men now stood; since the crowd had given him and his men a wide berth. “I took their power to create war away. Alden, tell them what happened at the Guild. If you see parents of the children we have, we will bring them here to be reunited with them. The others will have to come later when we discover who they belong to. No child is to be returned to the Guild if they don’t have parents to claim them,” I said, making sure Harold heard it.

“I’ve got it from here, kid,” Alden said proudly as he squared his shoulders and moved to stand in front of Harold. “I’m here because you’ve accused me and my niece of betraying the Guild, and I’ve never done anything to endanger the Guild or anyone inside of it. The Spokane Guild was attacked, Harold, but that attack came from within. The Guild itself has been compromised,” Alden said sternly, reminding me of the strong warrior he is.

“You lie,” Harold said as he looked around to the Humans who now looked worried, and unsure of who to believe. “There’s no proof of what you

say.”

“I am proof, and I also have the children that you’ve accused us of slaughtering. A lot of them died at the hands of Witches and Warlocks who were supposed to protect them, Harold, and that is a hard loss for us all. I was drugged by one of my own librarians; she was only a librarian, one I trusted and helped raise, so she had to have been under the orders of another. Someone she thought she could trust.”

“Olivia,” one of the women said as she pushed her way through the large group on the stairs. “Tell me, is she still alive? She and Alden both will face charges for betraying us. You did say that it’s only fair that we judge and sentence our own people,” the woman said, and I watched her carefully.

“Olivia is dead,” I said, and watched as relief pinched her features.

*Interesting.*

“That’s unfortunate,” she said and there was nothing but relief in her features. No sorrow at the loss of life, and no regret that someone who had taught the next generation of Witches and Warlocks the past history of the Guild and had done so much with the archives and recording our history was now lost to us.

“Is it?” I asked as I watched her. “Every person in this Guild and the one in Spokane deserve to be mourned if they pass, and yet I can’t help but notice you look more relieved that she is lost to us.”

“You misread me. I’m relieved that our history didn’t fall into the hands of our enemies,” she said smoothly as her brown eyes watched me.

*“I already know everything that she knew as a student at the Guild. I was taught what she was, but where she left us to learn the archives, I learned weaponry. If only Humans couldn’t lie to me. I wonder...If I asked if you’d been in on it, would you tell me the truth? Would you answer me honestly if I asked if you’d betrayed the Guild?”* I whispered inside her mind.

“Get out of my head, Fae!” she growled.

“You were there, Caroline. I saw you as I was being tortured. Whatever your reasons were, you did nothing to save the lives of the people you are under oath to protect. Shame on you, woman,” Alden accused. “Harold?”

Harold was watching the woman. “Caroline?”

“They lie, they’re grasping at straws, and desperate to place blame on us!” she seethed.

“Still,” Harold said as he watched Ryder closely. “Another Elder has

accused you, and the process and rules must be upheld. Take her away,” Harold said and we waited as the Witches took Caroline away for questioning.

By questioning, they usually meant torture and then retirement. Retirement to the Guild meant she’d be dead by morning.

“Alden, you have been accused as well,” Harold said and when I growled he held up his hand. “However, in light of the new information you’ve brought us, we will request some time to review what you’ve told us. You will be—”

“Think hard on that one,” I warned as I read his mind. He was not keeping Alden here to question him, or kill him.

“It is protocol,” Harold said as he narrowed his eyes on us.

“Then I suggest you start a new one,” I snapped.

“Synthia, allow me to finish, please,” Alden said gently as he placed a reassuring hand on my shoulder. “Harold, I have given my time and my life to my Guild. I am done, and ready to start a new chapter. Synthia and friends are offering me a new start in a new Guild. One we can run together to police and handle the Fae. You’ve been infiltrated by creatures who can pose as us, and they are instigating a war against the Fae, one that could destroy their world and push them into ours. I am happy to give you a list of those who assisted in the slaughter; a list of those who remained loyal ‘til their deaths, as well. I don’t need to tell you just what would happen should they succeed. So I am stepping down. I will no longer be associated with the Guild. I would like to keep an alliance open, but first you need to flush out those who wouldn’t think twice about betraying the Guild. Caroline isn’t the only one who betrayed the Spokane Guild.”

“And the children; will they be returned or will you keep them from us?” Harold asked carefully.

“Most of them will be returned, but those who have no parents or a voice against the Guild will remain with me. I’ve been the only consistent thing in their lives. They will, however be given the choice to come back to you. That much I will concede. Trust me, Harold; this is so much bigger than either of us could have thought it was. If you need us, we will help you,” Alden said and then looked at me for confirmation.

“In a heartbeat,” I agreed and hoped that Harold wasn’t one of the main Mages involved in orchestrating this mess.

“You’d fight for us?” Harold asked, and I could see the camera man from one of the international news channels as he zoomed in on us.

“I came from the Guild, so with the exception of those who we suspect of being Mages or sympathetic to their cause, I would willingly help should you ask it of us. I will not be lied to, though, and I suggest you go through the history you have hidden in the catacombs here. I also suggest you take a good hard look at those who you trust. In response to what has been said, if you plan for an alliance, you need to give a statement and amend what you’ve told the Humans. They hang on everything you say, and choose to believe in this Guild. Fix it, please. If others descend on the race and choose to feed in the open, then you may pass judgment on them,” I said watching him closely. “However, you must show us proof of their crimes. We will do the same for you,” I said as I finished and stepped back.

“As will I,” Adam said from my right. “I was also raised in the Guild and I offer my hand in peace and support you if you ask.”

“As will I,” Liam said with a smirk. “I however was not raised at this Guild, but I will fight at my sister’s side anytime she needs it.”

“I will make you this promise as well,” Ryder said as we got ready to sift out. “If my people are unjustly accused, and murdered, I will bring a war to this world unlike any the Human race has waged before. Do not piss me off, and do not think these accusations have gone unnoticed by others who will try to gain support against us. I suggest you do not join them, for they won’t be alive much longer. I plan to eradicate them all. Your Gods can sort them out. I am the Horde King, but unlike my father before me, I choose to protect Humans as well as my people. You have Synthia to thank for that.”

## *Chapter Thirty-Nine*

The lesser Fae had vacated the castle. The Tree had been saved, and with each passing day, it grew stronger. I was glad to know that I'd played a part in saving it, but when it boiled down to it, it had been the Elder Tree. His sacrifice had brought a semblance of balance to our world, and while we knew the Mages weren't done, we would be a race to reckon with.

It would only be a matter of time before they slinked out of their holes and came marching on this Kingdom. I, however, wanted to use the time of peace for something I could handle, and to start bonding with my children.

Faolán was still out there, and I worried for the lives of my children, but not as much. Now that they had a chance at survival, I knew they'd be okay and I would eventually kill Faolán. He'd taken it too far, and now he would become the prey while I became the hunter. I was done waiting for him to come to me. It was time to go get him and end the sickness that grew within him.

Some people cannot be reached, but I'd like to believe that people could be saved from the evil that festered in their souls. Even if Faolán sought forgiveness, I'd probably kill him. He'd almost stolen this from me, my children and the love of a beast that still made me weak in the knees.

I smiled and thanked the powers that be that I was here to watch my gentle beast as he loved our children. If this was Destiny's plan, I was willing to concede that she'd been correct in her designs. This was right where I wanted to be, with them. My family.

Ryder held Kahleena; she made little noises and he made them back to her. It was almost surreal, watching my beast as he cooed back to our precious daughter. "You know she's going to give us hell, right?" I asked as I moved to our bed and lay next to the boys, who watched their father silently.

"She's your daughter, Pet. You actually think she'd give me anything less than hell?"

"No, I plan to teach her just how to do it," I admitted. And I planned on it.

"My sister wants us to hurry with the wedding," he said offhandedly. "I am anxious as well, since you seem to be bipolar," he laughed.

"You did not just call me bipolar."

"I did, and if you'd like me to give you an example...I have many to choose from."

“Suck it, Fairy. I’m not the only bipolar headache in this room,” I said as I picked up Zander. “I’m actually hoping they plan the whole thing and that we only have to show up.”

“You won’t get that lucky. Ciara is a diva, as your people call women who are over-the-top. She will make your head spin.”

“Maybe, but I’m more worried about Ristan. I think Olivia was trying to tell us some of the truth, and I can’t shake this feeling. I know I said I wouldn’t interfere, but...”

“Stay out of it, or I will spank you.”

“Shit, that’s incentive!” I joked with a smile on my lips. “You hear that little man? Daddy is going to spank to mommy!”

I paused as my throat grew tight with an emotion I hadn’t felt in a while. Pride at something I had done—in this case, created. “Shit,” I said and then paused. “Crap! Don’t say that,” I watched as a small smile played on Zander’s tiny lips.

“I’m not sure you should be speaking of spankings with our children,” he whispered as he leaned over to kiss my cheek softly.

“We’re parents,” I whispered. “Like, we made little people,” I sat up with Zander held against my chest. “Three of them,” I mumbled.

“Motherhood just hitting you?” he asked with a seductive smile.

“No, it’s the reality of it. How are we ever going to have sex again?”

He threw his head back and laughed.

“Like this,” he whispered as he placed Kahleena on the bed, and clapped his hands.

I watched silently as the handmaidens I no longer needed for myself walked in and started picking up my children. Darynda paused in front of me and smiled. “Can I have the little one? I promise to protect him,” she said and I noticed she had a smile on her lips that I hadn’t seen on them before. It looked nice, and I wondered if she’d settled whatever was going on between her and Zahruk.

“Here,” I said as I stood and kissed Zander’s cheek before doing the same with his brother and sister. When they’d left the room, I smiled. “Well shit, that was actually pretty easy. I’ve heard horror stories about no alone time with babies, and yet you seemed to accomplish the impossible with a simple clap of your hands,” I said as I turned and looked down at him.

“We will need the time to start on the next batch,” he said as he sifted to

stand behind me, and his lips nibbled at the sensitive flesh below my ear.

“I swear to everything that is holy, Ryder, if you get me pregnant and make me sit out this war, I’ll neuter you *and* the beast!”

“I wouldn’t imagine it any other way my sexy, blood thirsty pet,” he growled.

“I love you,” I whispered.

“I love you too, Synthia. Forever will never be long enough with you,” he said as he pulled me around until I faced him. “Bubble wrap isn’t off the table, but I am glad that you are strong enough to stand against those who would see me fall. I was afraid of losing you. I was afraid of admitting how I felt and my enemies using it against me. Now I can say it and not fear what will happen because my wife will be a force to be reckoned with. I’m going to fuck you now. I’m going to bend you over this bed and show you just how much I love you. Unless you don’t want me to?” he asked.

“Bend me, twist me. Hell, you can even spank me if it gets you off,” I smiled as the words came out huskily.

We’d survived my death and so much more. Everything we’d been through was nothing compared to what we had become. I understood everything now, and with all the losses, and all the trials, I couldn’t think of a better end result.

We knew we were facing war, but together, we could handle anything. I feared for Ristan, and even though I’d caught flashes of the old Demon returning, he’d been through a lot. I would be here for him when he needed me, because that was what friends did.

Danu had secured her naughty hubby in some undisclosed location, but until she resurfaced, I feared for her as well. She still hadn’t been answering my call, and it worried me. With her, there was always uncertainty, and the worry at the back of my mind that she would get punished for all she had done for us.

“What are you thinking about?” Ryder asked as he kissed my forehead.

“I’m thinking that we better be ready when the Mages come,” I answered thoughtfully.

“I am marrying the Goddess of Faery. They will have to wait for their damn war,” he growled. “I need to marry her before she remembers what an asshole I used to be, and all I’ve done to get and keep her.”

“I remember, and you being an asshole back then only makes me want to

marry you more. I have countless time to torture you. Karma just changed her name, to Synthia.”

“Oh really?”

“Take off your clothes, because I’m going to demonstrate it for you,” I smiled.

“Like this?” he asked as he glammed off his clothes.

“Mmm,” I said and started to move forward.

He sifted to the other side of the bed. I narrowed my eyes at him. “Get on the bed, Pet, and show me what’s mine. Show me what I own, so I can show it exactly why it belongs to me. There’s a reason you belong to me, and it isn’t because I can brand you, or own you. It’s because when I fuck you, I make sure I do it good enough that when you look at another man, the only thing you can think about, is how sore your sweet flesh is from what I did to it.”

“That’s not why,” I said with a soft smile. “I need no other man because my beautiful beast loves me. He is my equal, and mine. As I am his. That’s why you own me, Fairy. You may own me in the bedroom, but that is because I allow it. I allow you to love me, because I love you. I am never owned, but I can be charmed into a partnership. Those are facts; now stop arguing because as a smart man once told me, I always win.”

*The End  
For Now*



## *About the Author*

Amelia Hutchins lives in the beautiful Pacific Northeast with her beautiful family. She's an avid reader, and writer of anything Paranormal. She started writing at the age of nine, with the help of the huge imagination her Grandmother taught her to use. When not writing a new twisting plot, she can be found on her author page, or hanging out with others who share the love of reading the written word.

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