

VOLUME I



A
COLLECTION
OF
MONSTROUS
SHORT STORIES



LILY MAYNE

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VOLUME ONE
MONSTROUS

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Beta-reading and editing by [Kate Wood Proofreading](#)

Warning: These stories contain explicit sexual content and are not suitable for young readers. The introduction for each short story contains content and spoiler warnings specific to that story. Main content warnings include explicit sexual content, non-human genitalia, mentions of death, injury and violence, restraint and mentions of past trauma, but please check the warnings specific to each short story.

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Author's Note

This is a collection of short stories for the Monstrous series that were first (for the most part) published on my website. They are arranged in this book in sequential order of the events of the series, and each short introduction contains content and spoiler warnings specific to that story.

There is also a bonus novella at the end! A short and sweet 20k-word story about two new characters, Ruke and Jamie. If you are up to date with the series, you may remember Collector Mary's pet shulc vanishing into a tiny town that Rig briefly explored in *Gloam* (Monstrous: Book Four) and returning with a dark green arm, freshly removed from a poor beastie.

Ruke is that monster! I had the idea for his and Jamie's story while I was writing that scene. I hope you enjoy their sweet little romance.

There are a few exclusive short stories in this collection that haven't been read by anyone before! One is for our newest (at the time of publication) Monstrous couple, Lor and Jugs. And, of course, I thought it was only fair to give you all more Orlith, so we have The Chronicles of Orlith, which includes a new story from his perspective.

I hope you enjoy this collection! I've called it Volume One because there will undoubtedly be a new batch of shorts going up on the website in the coming year. Hopefully, we will one day get a Volume Two. And maybe more.

"I choked on an incredulous breath. Volume 25? What could that evil sicko possibly have to say that would fill twenty-five freaking journals? God, she was such a self-centred asshole."

—Rig

Gloam (Monstrous: Book Four)

Moth and the Rycke

This is a little 2k-word short set at the end of *The Rycke* (Monstrous: Book Three) when Moth goes to find Aury because he can't bear seeing his unrequited love (Ghost) so miserable.

Content warnings: Bad language, mentions of violence

Spoiler warning: Set during the events of *The Rycke* (Monstrous: Book Three)

First published 2022 by Lily Mayne
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MOTH

I had no idea why the fuck I was doing this.

My heart was pounding as I made my way slowly through the forest, sword in hand even though I was fully aware that if the rycke decided he wanted me dead, I'd be ripped in half before I even had time to take a breath.

But fuck. Ghost was so sad. I'd never seen him like that—like he'd just given up. He'd always been quiet and closed off, even when we were growing closer, but now it was like the spark in him had gone out.

I hated it as much as I wanted to take his pain away.

Why does he want him? I couldn't help but think bitterly as I traipsed through the forest, looking for the terrifying monster Ghost had chosen over me. I slashed viciously through a bush with my sword even though it wasn't in my way. *He's a true monster. He's uncontrollable. At least my face looks mostly human. At least I don't have giant wings and sharp spikes and big, taloned bird feet.*

I cut through another bush with too much force, watching with disinterest as a wanuk squealed and scampered out from under it, disappearing behind a tree.

I'd been searching for a few hours, and I hadn't sensed the rycke yet, but I knew he'd be close. He was mated to Ghost now—the thought made bitter jealousy churn in my gut—so he'd want to keep an eye on him. He'd want to make sure he was safe.

He wouldn't be able to bring himself to go too far.

How the fuck was I supposed to compete with that? With that kind of all-consuming possessiveness and want and longing? How was I supposed to compete with slaughtering and destroying an entire camp of raiders to keep him safe?

I would've done it, if I'd known that was what it would take for Ghost to fall in love with me. I would've killed anyone he wanted. But I knew if *I'd* done that—if I'd murdered dozens of people for him—he wouldn't have had the same reaction. He wouldn't have tried to defend me, saying I couldn't control it, saying it wasn't my fault.

He hadn't even forgiven me for leaving him with a pack of tiny little monsters who'd barely weighed enough for me to feel them through the toe of my boot. And that hadn't even been my fault. I hadn't *wanted* to leave him.

But I couldn't tell him why I had. Besides, what did it matter now anyway? Ghost loved *Aury*. The big, stupid rycke with his big, sad eyes and the murderous, terrifying beast lurking under his skin.

My gut suddenly cramped with a sharp stab of foreboding. Tingles raced over my scalp and down my spine, my limbs twitching with the sudden, overwhelming desire to turn and run in the opposite direction. Run very, very far.

He was close.

For a moment, my vision whited out with terror at the thought that he somehow knew what I'd been thinking and he was going to kill me for it.

I didn't mean it, I thought timidly, forcing myself to take a tiny step forward. *Your eyes are fine.*

Leaves crunched under my boot, making me wince. The feeling of dread grew stronger as I forced myself to keep moving, my fingers clenching tighter around the hilt of my sword.

When I felt his eyes on me, I froze. My body stiffened up. I physically couldn't move. For all of his seemingly soft, gentle nature, he had the eyes of a predator. Always watching. The beast lurked constantly under his skin, waiting to come out. To destroy.

That was all he was. Chaos inside. Chaos and death and destruction. A wolf wrapped in sheep's clothing.

And Ghost wanted *him*.

I licked my lips nervously, my tongue catching on the warm metal ring piercing the lower. My voice was the slightest bit unsteady when I found the courage to speak.

"I want to talk to you about Ghost."

My heart gave a mighty jolt when a branch snapped high, high above me. Leaves rustled furiously before the rycke thudded to the ground at the base of a very tall tree. His wings slowly unfurled, flexing, the sharp talons on the end of each finger glinting in the dappled sun.

I saw that dark fire flare in his eyes at the mere mention of Ghost, but he didn't move. His black eyes watched me, making my skin crawl.

"Is he alright?"

That soft voice was *so* at odds with the monster lurking within. It made me angry—like he'd tricked Ghost into loving him, making him think he was all soft and sweet. Like it was all an act.

But he'd already latched on to Ghost. He was a true monster, but he would keep Ghost safe for the rest of his life. That was what was important.

I forced myself to stand tall, turning to face him fully. But my voice still wavered when I said, "No, not really."

That dark fire flared again. The rycke's lips peeled back from his teeth in a snarl, and when he took a single step closer, I couldn't stop myself from stumbling back. My heart felt like it would explode.

"What has happened? Is he hurt?" His voice had grown more guttural. Long fingers flexed at his sides, and I pictured them plunging into my abdomen and tearing out my guts.

"Not physically," I said quickly, my hand sweating around the hilt of my sword. "But he's... he's hurting. Because you left."

The rycke's face became a picture of misery. He hung his head, green-hued hair shifting around his jaw.

"I can't stay there," he said, barely above a whisper. "I don't want to hurt anyone."

"You're hurting Ghost by staying away."

Aury shook his head. "I can't risk it. And I can't take him away from his home."

"Okay, well," I began nervously, "if Ghost is willing to do that for you—leave the camp, I mean—then... surely it should be something to consider. Together."

My gut clenched at the thought of Ghost leaving with the rycke, vanishing into the Wastes. I'd never see him again.

The rycke's huge wings twitched, folding in and out like a clenching fist. A nervous tic.

"He deserves better," he mumbled.

Bitter resentment rose in me like a wave, clouding my judgement about this temperamental, dangerous monster and what he was capable of.

"Well, he picked you," I snapped.

Aury's head jerked up. He stared at me through wide eyes.

"He picked you, and he loves you, so all you're doing is making him feel worse. You *knew* you have that thing inside you. You knew when you met him. If you really cared, you should have stayed away. You shouldn't have made him fall in love with you."

As soon as the words left me, terror made my scalp tingle. I anticipated watching this quiet monster change, grow, become something from a nightmare. I'd heard the rumours about the rycke. Overheard whispered, fearful conversations from monsters about the rycke being in this world, roaming the Wastes until he'd vanished all those years ago.

I remembered hearing relief in their voices when no one had seen him for years. Remembered them hopefully muttering that perhaps no new rycke would return if this one was dead—that perhaps the thing that had terrorised the monster world for aeons would finally be gone forever.

Aury was watching me in silence. As I stared back, breaths escaping my nose in forceful spurts, his face softened. Sympathy bled into his eyes, and I hated it. I fucking *hated* it. It made me want to charge at him with my sword, fuck the consequences.

An ugly thought crept into my head. I could. I could attack him. The rycke was known for withstanding immense pain and suffering inflicted upon themselves. It was seeing those they cared about get hurt that brought out the beast under their skin.

I was good with my sword. Good at cutting body parts off. But... fuck. Even though I *knew* what this monster was capable of, he was gazing at me with those big, stupid, sad eyes, his posture utterly despondent, the pain he was feeling clear in his face.

Uuuggghh.

"I didn't know the full extent of it," he whispered, looking away. "I didn't know I was capable of such... chaos. I keep seeing them. Those humans in that camp. I keep... seeing what I did. If I did that to Ghost's camp... his friends..."

He trailed off, rubbing his scarred cheek with one hand. I clenched my jaw and took a deep breath. I wasn't here to be the rycke's fucking therapist.

"You know you'd never hurt Ghost," I said woodenly. "And if you become part of the camp, you'll grow protective of the others too. You'd probably be an asset," I forced myself to add.

When he didn't speak, I cautiously added, "Ghost is miserable. He's suffering."

Aury's expression grew pained, as if the very thought of it devastated him. But then his head cocked. He stared at me too intently, making me want to shuffle my feet and fold in on myself.

He knew. He knew how I felt about Ghost. I could see it.

And I despised the sympathy still wavering in his black eyes. I almost turned and walked off, leaving him here. To go back to the camp and never breathe a word of this. To act like the rycke was long gone, never coming back.

Surely Ghost would get over it eventually.

But then I pictured Ghost's face, miserable as he picked at his dinner in his room. I'd never seen his whole face before, and I'd tried to commit it to memory while I could, because I knew I'd never see all of it again. I knew I'd never be in his room again.

"It was kind of you, to come and find me," Aury said softly. He gave me a tiny smile, and I barely resisted the urge to scowl back. "You're a good friend to Ghost."

I nearly snorted. I didn't want to be Ghost's *friend*, and I wasn't even that anymore. He'd blocked me out after that scouting trip. Even if I could have explained why I left him, he hadn't given me a chance.

So I'd used my only defence. Arrogance—a cold mask. As if I didn't give a shit that Ghost didn't

want me anymore.

I was used to people not wanting me. It was all I'd ever known, so one more wasn't a surprise.

"He has been out here," Aury said softly. "I've seen him and Lilac searching the forest."

"Yeah, for *you*," I snapped, trying hard to ignore the deeply ingrained instinct in my monster half telling me to *run run run run*. "He's been looking for *you*. So he's putting himself in more danger than he needs to, coming out here. You're making it worse."

Aury flinched. His head twitched hard, once, then twice.

"I don't know what to do," he whispered, and I fucking *hated* the pang of sympathy I felt in my chest. Big black eyes gazed at me mournfully. "How can I be sure that I won't hurt the others? Can I control it?"

"I'm the wrong person to ask," I shot back. "I don't know how to find out more about your kind. Monsters hate me."

Aury stared at me in silence. His mouth quirked into a sad little smile. "Monsters hate me too."

Yeah, but at least you still have someone.

The rycke's eyes drifted toward the direction of the camp at the edge of the forest. His brows pinched, eyes filled with longing. At length, he nodded.

"I will go back. To see him. To try and..." He rubbed his arms anxiously and whispered, "I need to see him."

Peachy. Great job, Moth, reuniting the man you want with his big monster lover.

"Swell," I bit out, turning and stalking off in the direction of the camp. "Let's go."

Aury followed in silence, but I could hear the rasp of his wings dragging through the dead leaves on the forest floor.

The Adventures of Danny and Wyn – Part One

This is a short, 8.6k-word story that features our favourite, original monster-human couple, Danny and Wyn, and includes Danny *almost* getting a dog, the pair visiting an old, abandoned amusement park, and a very intriguing game of tag in the dark...

Content warnings: Explicit sexual content (pretty much from the outset), 18+ only, restraint, horny chasing in the dark, Wyn is too busy to push his stabby agenda

Spoiler warning: Technically set before *Moth* (Monstrous: Book Five) but can be read at any point after the novella *Wyn*

First published 2022 by Lily Mayne
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WYN

“What was that?” Danny ripped his mouth away from mine with a sharp little inhale, his body tensing beneath me on the bed.

I found his lips again, murmuring, “Nothing,” before kissing him. It successfully distracted him, his body relaxing back into the mattress as his arms twined around my neck.

His thighs shifted, parting, letting my hips sink between them. I smoothed a hand down his bare chest, tracing my fingertips over the scar there and feeling his heart thudding fast and hard against my palm.

It made me smirk as I broke the kiss to trail my mouth down his neck. His cock dug into my hip, hard and insistent behind his pants. I burrowed my hands between our bodies to grasp it through the fabric, rubbing my palm against the stiff length and making him gasp.

“Wyn,” he whined in a low voice, hips flexing to drag his cock against my hand.

“Yes, sweet?” I trailed my tongue down his chest before curling it around a tiny nipple.

Danny’s hips jerked, cock bucking against my palm. I gave it a firm squeeze in answer and he let out a strained, breathless laugh.

“I don’t even know. Just... keep going. Maybe speed it up a bit.”

I grunted. “So impatient.”

He huffed and reached down to curl his fingers around my horns, making me shudder. Sneaky little shit. He knew all too well that it drove me wild.

I reached up and pulled his hands free, sitting back as I kept his wrists locked in the cages of my fingers. Then I slowly brought them down to his sides and gently forced them between his back and the mattress.

Danny’s breath caught, but he lifted his hips to help as I transferred both his wrists to one hand, keeping them pinned together at the small of his back. It couldn’t have been particularly comfortable, but I knew he liked it. He squirmed a little, legs shifting restlessly. He lifted his head to look in my direction, but it was pitch black in here, and I knew he couldn’t see anything.

I could, though. I could see the flush on his throat and cheeks. The desperate hunger in his blue eyes. The sweet tip of his pink tongue as he licked his lips, already breathing fast.

“Wyn,” he rasped again, deeper now.

I smoothed my free hand up and down his tense stomach, then lightly trailed my fingertips lower until they met the waist of his pants. Danny’s hips shifted again as I tore open his pants with one hand, reaching in to curl my fingers around his pulsing cock.

The tip was already wet, which made me huff in amusement as I pulled it free. “Needy tonight.”

“Your fault,” he mumbled, the flush deepening on his throat when I glanced up.

I smirked and shifted back until his thighs were no longer pressing against my hips. He couldn’t see anything, and the anticipation was making a fine tremor run through his lean body, his breaths already trembling out of him. His cock throbbed in my fist, so I let go of it and didn’t move for a long

moment, just staring down at him.

His dark hair was messy on the pillow behind his head, face flushed and blue eyes heavy with lust-filled impatience. His bare chest and stomach were gloriously displayed, lower back arched with his hands pinned behind him. His long legs splayed out on either side of me, encased in black fabric with only his cock jutting out, flushed and hard and glistening at the tip, bobbing over his stomach.

My mouth watered. Moving slowly, I lowered my head, fingers tightening on his pinned wrists. At the first feathery lick over the weeping tip of his cock, Danny choked on a breath and jerked his hips, bumping the head of his cock against my nose.

I huffed and spread my free hand over the thatch of hair at the root of his cock, holding him still as I licked again, twirling my tongue around the head. Danny let out a low, shaky moan, his cock giving up another tiny pulse of pre-cum. I closed my lips around the head in a wet, sucking kiss, being mindful of my teeth.

I could feel Danny's hips trying to flex up, but my hand easily kept him pinned. Both hands. He was trapped, his torso stretched, legs shifting restlessly against the mattress. I released his cock from my mouth when I felt my lips stretching into a sharp smile, and I dipped my head to graze my teeth over his hip bone.

Danny twitched, neck arching as his chest heaved. His cock bobbed, as though straining for my mouth. I trailed wet, licking kisses down the hard length, because I knew he was desperate for me to suck him into my mouth.

He groaned, fingers flexing behind his back. "You're an asshole."

"You love me anyway," I murmured, tracing over the vein winding up the underside of his shaft.

Danny shuddered, cock bucking. "I extended my life for, like, four thousand years for you! The least you can do is suck me off. *Please*."

I paused, then let out a huff as I sat back. "You can't use that for *everything*."

"Well I'm gonna. Especially when—" He froze when another faint sound came from downstairs. "Okay, I definitely heard something that time."

He'd tensed up again, so I reluctantly released his wrists and slid the hand pinning him up to give his stomach a soothing stroke. "It's nothing, my sweet."

I could hear the creature down there. Something from this world, small and non-threatening. It was padding around in the kitchen of the old house, snuffling over the ground.

Danny chewed on his lip, wide eyes trying to find me in the dark. "Are you sure?"

I let out a long-suffering sigh and eased off the bed. "I'll go and chase it off. Do *not* move. Keep your cock hard for me."

He choked on an incredulous breath, but I was already striding out of the room. I didn't bother getting fully dressed, making my way downstairs in just my pants and boots.

The house we had stopped in for the night sat alone, surrounded by old farmland. As I started paying more attention, I realised I could sense a lone human a short distance away. Not near enough to be concerned about. Not that a single weak human concerned me, especially now that Danny was far less vulnerable to injury. My stress levels had lowered considerably since we'd visited the Mabs and tethered our lives.

I stepped into the kitchen and stopped, staring at the furry creature as it gazed back up at me. It was a dog.

A dog wearing... some kind of rucksack. It had a harness on with small pockets all over the back. Its fur was short and yellow, and its tail wagged lazily as it stared at me from beside the kitchen table, flat pink tongue lolling out of its mouth.

I eyed it back with disinterest, but then I remembered Danny's ridiculous cooing over the fat little nask back in my world. He had mentioned wanting a dog when he was younger, saying he'd never been able to have one.

Well, there was one here. I pointed at the floor in front of my boots. "Dog. Come here."

Over the years, I'd seen humans with their brainless little dog pets, giving them commands that they seemed to always follow. If a human could control these ridiculous creatures, I obviously could.

The dog just panted at me, tail wagging faster. Then it turned and darted through the small flap that humans used to cut into their doors for their animal pets.

I clenched my jaw, glad Danny wasn't here to see that, and strode after it. Flinging open the door, I stepped outside and narrowed my eyes at the dog trotting away.

"Dog. You will come here *now*."

It stopped and looked back at me, head cocking with a clueless expression on its face. Its tail wagged again, slower, and it looked in the direction of the human I could still sense a short distance away.

My mouth stretched into a wide, sharp grin when it turned and started trotting back over to me.

I felt the human hurriedly approaching before a clear voice rang through the darkness. "Hey, asshole, that's *my*—"

The voice cut off when my eyes snapped up toward them, just as the dog reached me and sat at my feet, still panting disgustingly loudly.

Plain human eyes locked with mine in the weak moonlight, growing wider and wider as her face went slack.

Then she started screaming. And screaming.

I rolled my eyes. The dog whimpered at my feet, glancing up at me before rising to start running to the human. I snatched it up before it could.

The screaming cut off with a choke, and I saw the human start running toward me even though her narrow, brown face was drawn tight over her bones with terror. Her hand shook wildly as she fumbled to pull free a hunting knife.

"I'll fucking kill you if you hurt him—"

I gave a careless wave with my free hand. My other arm was wrapped around the dog's middle as it hung from my side, still panting cheerfully.

"I'm not going to hurt it," I drawled, and saw the human cringe at the sound of my voice before I turned to walk back inside.

"That's *my dog*!" she cried, still running toward me.

I shot her a sharp grin over my shoulder. "Mine now."

"*No*—"

I turned back and snarled at her, successfully freezing her in place even as her watering eyes kept darting to the dog.

"It is mine now, human." I bared my sharp teeth. "Do you know what I am?"

She swallowed and weakly shook her head, hand shaking around her knife.

"You humans call me the Soul Eater." I sneered. "Do you know why? Do you know what I can do?"

I wasn't above using the silly rumours about me when it suited me. Besides, I could easily kill her if I wanted to without even putting down the dog.

The human choked on a gasp, eyes darting over my face.

"Y-you—you're—I th-thought you w-wore a hood." She took a tiny step back, but then her

shoulders stiffened when she looked at the dog again, and she stepped closer. “No one’s ever seen your f-face.”

“Well, congratulations.” I hefted the dog higher under my arm. “Your dog is mine now.”

Her face jerked, brows pinching with desperation. “No—please—”

I strode back into the house and locked the door behind me, because I knew she would—

Pounding started up as the human slammed her fists against the solid wood door. “No! I’ll kill you!”

I snorted. “No you won’t.”

As I started walking to the hall, I heard a rustling sound from the door and glanced back to see the human desperately trying to wriggle through the animal flap.

“Won’t fit through there, human,” I drawled, then made my way upstairs with the dog still dangling under my arm.

I wasn’t worried about the human. There was nothing out there she could use to smash any of the windows, and if she did manage to get in, I’d just throw her back out. I’d fling her *gently*, very far away.

Danny was pacing the dark bedroom as I stepped back inside, holding his flashlight and swinging the weak beam back and forth over the dirty floorboards. He stopped dead at the sight of me, and I scowled when I noticed he’d zipped his pants back up.

“I heard screaming. What the fuck is going on out th—” He froze, blue eyes locked on the dog. “Is that a dog?”

My brow rose up as I eyed him, setting the dog on the floor. Was he not sure? Sweet Danny.

“Yes, sweet,” I said gently, because he seemed confused. “You said you wanted a dog, yes?”

“I—” He stared at the dog, then me, then back at the dog. His brows pulled into a frown. “Where the fuck did you get a dog? Wearing a backpack?”

He jumped when the human started pounding on the door downstairs again. Wide blue eyes locked with mine. “What’s that?”

I shrugged one shoulder, eyeing the dog as it started sniffing around the room. “The human whose dog this was.”

Danny spluttered. “You *stole someone’s dog*?”

“You said you wanted a dog.” I stretched out an arm to gesture at the clueless furry creature. It trotted over and sat at my feet, gazing up at me with its tongue lolling out again. “That’s a dog.” Then uncertainty flared. I slowly looked down at the creature again, suddenly unsure. “Isn’t it?”

“Yes, it’s a dog, but it’s *someone else’s* dog!” Danny strode over, but couldn’t resist crouching to scratch the creature’s head. Its tail thumped against the floor. “You can’t steal people’s dogs, Wyn!”

I huffed. “What difference does it make? You’re going to take care of it. The dog doesn’t care who’s feeding it and... the other things humans do with them. Throwing things for it.”

Danny let out a weak snort and looked up at me, his long fingers still scratching behind the creature’s floppy ear. My lip curled as I looked at it. Why did he want one of these? It was just sitting there, panting its hot breath everywhere. Its gums were bumpy and kind of disgusting. The only thing it had going for it was the sharp canines, but they weren’t even all that sharp. Not like mine. I bared my teeth at it, but the dog just let out a bark and started trying to lick Danny’s face.

He laughed, fussing over it and talking to it in a stupid voice. I narrowed my eyes at the dog, which was basking in Danny’s attention.

Maybe this had been a mistake.

Danny sighed and stood up, gazing down at the dog with big, yearning eyes. It stared back up at

him, *still* panting, before twisting its body to scratch ferociously behind its ear. The stupid little backpack bounced with the movement.

“You have to go and give it back, Wyn.”

The human was still out there. It sounded like she was slamming her body against the door, trying to get in, yelling something about not being scared of a stupid soul-sucking demon. Threatening to gut me for stealing her dog.

My lips twitched.

“Are you sure?” I asked, pretending not to be pleased that we couldn’t keep it, because I wasn’t so sure I wanted to share Danny’s attention that much. “She’ll get over it. Aren’t there millions of dogs? She can find another one.” I gestured at the dog again. “And this one comes with a backpack. That’s useful, yes?”

Danny choked out a laugh and slid his arm around my bare back, leaning in to kiss my throat.

“That’s not how it works, baby. People are... They form emotional attachments to their pets.” He looked down at the dog. “She’s pretty desperate to get him back. He’s hers.”

I grunted and pulled away to shove on my shirt and coat, lifting the hood. Might as well give her a show while I returned her dumb dog. I hefted the creature under my arm again and walked out of the room, snarling down at it when it tried to lick my hand.

“Stop trying to lick everything,” I snapped as I thumped down the stairs.

What were the other wild animals humans liked to keep in their homes? Cats, I was fairly certain. Smaller, angrier and less clingy. They seemed preferable. Why didn’t Danny want one of them?

“Shut up,” I barked at the human as I strode into the kitchen. She was still hammering on the door, shouting so much her voice was hoarse.

She fell silent immediately, and I heard her scramble back as I unlocked the door. I pulled it open and stared at her in silence from within the depths of my hood. Her hand was shaking wildly—her whole body was as she raised her little knife in an attempt to look threatening. She sucked in panicked, gulping breaths, frozen in place as she stared at me.

The dog started wriggling under my arm at the sight of its human owner, making the ambience a touch less threatening, much to my irritation.

I set it on its feet and straightened. “It’s defective.”

“Wh-what?” She jerked forward then stopped before frantically patting her thigh to get the dog to trot over to her.

Dropping to her knees, she tugged the dog close. Her face tightened with fearful anger as she looked at me, eyes narrowing. “My dog is not *defective*, y-you asshole.”

I let out a low, ominous sound. She scrambled up, gripping the dog’s harness and tugging it back, her face slack with terror.

“Go.”

She scooped the dog up and turned, almost tripping in her haste to run away. I could still hear her heaving, terrified breaths as she stumbled over the uneven field, not stopping or slowing until she was out of sight.

I cast a final look around the still, quiet fields to make sure no other annoying humans would interrupt us, then went back inside, locking the door behind me.

“Danny.” I threw my voice as I slunk back up the stairs, so that it echoed around the house. I heard him let out a surprised squawk. “Did you do as I asked?”

He laughed in disbelief, staring at me from beside the bed when I stepped into the room. “You mean did I *keep my cock hard* for you? No, Wyn. Shockingly, I didn’t stay hard during all the

screaming and pounding on the door and you bringing a fucking *dog* in here.”

I huffed, pulling off my coat. My voice was sulky when I muttered, “You said you wanted a dog.”

Danny laughed and approached to slip his hands under my shirt. “You’re real sweet. But no more stealing people’s dogs.”

“Fine.” I tugged him closer and kissed him, but Danny made a muffled sound against my mouth and pulled back.

“We have to go wash our hands. And my face. The dog licked it.”

I clenched my jaw, looking over at the bed and thinking wistfully about Danny stretched out on it, hands pinned behind his back and hard cock straining for me.

Fucking dog.

DANNY

“Hope the dog’s okay,” I commented for the twentieth time as we set out from the old farmhouse the next morning.

Wyn huffed from beside me. “You said you didn’t want it.”

“I can’t steal someone else’s dog.” I reached over and threaded my fingers through his, shooting him a teasing grin. “I’m not a *monster*.”

“Hilarious.”

I snorted, swaying closer until he let go of my hand to wrap his arm around me. “But if we *did* find one out here without an owner...”

“You want us to keep a feral dog,” he said flatly, his tone entirely unimpressed.

“*You’re* pretty feral and I kept you.”

“Then why do you need a dog? You have me.”

I slowly turned my head to stare at him incredulously. “Did you really just liken yourself to a pet dog?”

“No, obviously not,” he snapped immediately, fingers tightening on my shoulder. “I just meant... dogs are stupid.”

I gave his stomach a weak shove. “They’re not stupid. They’re actually really clever. They can—”

“Yes, very impressive.” Wyn let go of me. “There’s a parasite nearby.”

I froze, then squinted at him. “Is there?”

“Yes.”

“Where?”

He waved a hand vaguely toward the forest that edged the big field we were crossing. “Over there.”

I placed my hands on my hips and looked at him. “Just... in the forest? There’s an infected person just wandering through that forest.”

“Yes.”

I looked back over my shoulder at the farmhouse. “Huh. Weird. We’ve been walking for, like, two

minutes. You didn't sense them at all during the night? Even though they're this close?"

"They must have just arrived." He folded his arms over his chest, hood turning away.

My mouth twitched. "Just arrived for a nice jaunt through the forest."

We were both fully aware that I knew he was bullshitting, but there was no way in hell Wyn was going to back down now.

"Sure you're not losing your touch, old man?" I said slyly, bursting out laughing when he snarled at me.

"Okay," I continued with a sweet smile, "go get them. I'll wait here. Alone and exposed in the middle of this big field." I glanced around. "Sure hope nothing else comes out of that forest while you're gone."

Wyn let out a low, feral growl, then snapped, "Fine. They're—They've gone anyway. Let's just go."

He grabbed my hand and yanked me forward, making me laugh as I said, "They've just gone, huh? Sprinted out of the forest?"

"Yes," he said, trying very hard to make his distorted voice carefree. "Or they died, I suppose."

That made me pause, and I glanced over at him with a worried expression as I chewed on my lip. "You... you were joking, right? There wasn't really someone in there who just... died?"

He huffed and stopped, turning to cup my cheek.

"No," he said gruffly. "There wasn't anyone."

I shot him a big shit-eating grin. "*Such* a liar. So anyway, what I was saying about dogs is that—"

Wyn let out a strangled sound and tugged me forward.

—

I could feel my eyes getting bigger and bigger as I stared at the tall, winding shape looming in front of us in the distance, the setting sun throwing the many loops and high, curving peaks into sharp relief.

"Is that an amusement park?" I asked breathlessly, clutching Wyn's hand tight.

I'd heard about them. I'd seen them in old TV shows and movies, with their rollercoasters and water slides and haunted houses. I remembered asking my momma if she could take me to one before I was old enough to realise that they'd all been abandoned, left to rot in the monster-infested wasteland that made up most of the country.

She'd gently told me that they were all outside the city walls, and we weren't allowed to go to them. When I'd woken up the next morning, she'd spent the night turning our little apartment into a makeshift funfair.

She'd dressed up as a witch and turned the bathroom into a tiny haunted house. I remembered shrieking with laughter when she'd popped out from behind the shower curtain, until I'd tripped and skinned my knees and burst into tears. I wasn't clumsy—it had just been dark.

"What's an *amusement park*?" Wyn asked disdainfully.

"Rides and stuff." I clutched his hand with both of mine, turning to face him. "Wyn, *please* can we go in?"

"*Rides*?" he repeated, his head cocking as he stared at the sprawling, abandoned park in front of us. "Will they still even work?"

I laughed. "No, but can we go and look around? I never got to go to one. I just want to see what it

was like.”

He sighed and trailed his long, blackened fingers over my face, leaning in to kiss me from the depths of his hood. “Alright.”

I smiled into the kiss, reaching up to cup his face. My thumbs trailed blindly over the raised ridges on his cheekbones, and he made a little growly sound into my mouth as he shuddered.

“I’ll play with your horns later as a thank you,” I murmured with a grin, grunting when Wyn dropped his hands to palm my ass and tug me closer.

He squeezed, and I could tell he was preparing to hoist me up and wrap my legs around his waist, so I pecked him on the chin and stepped back before he could.

“Come on, old man.” I grabbed his hand and tugged him forward. “Park first. Can you sense anything in there?”

Wyn grunted. “No humans. Just a narid living in a body of water in there.”

“What’s a narid?” I eyed the front entrance of the park as we approached. It didn’t look particularly big, and there was a creepy clown face looming over the old turnstiles to get in. Beyond it, I could see the outline of a rusting Ferris wheel, its carts swaying softly in the breeze, squealing with even the tiniest movement.

“Nothing you need to worry about,” Wyn replied with a flick of his fingers. “The worst it will possibly do is try and fuck you, and if it does, I will rip off its cock and choke it to death with it.”

I snorted, then cocked my head as I side-eyed Wyn. “I swear I’ve heard you threaten someone with that before.”

“Hmm?” His hood tilted as he glanced over. One shoulder lifted in a shrug. “It’s a satisfying way to kill someone.”

I grimaced. “Well, if any other monster tries to... fuck me, I’ll just politely tell it no. Then we don’t need to kill anyone. Or rip anything off.”

“We’ll see,” he muttered as we reached the entrance. Reaching out, he pushed on a turnstile until something snapped within and it spun with no resistance. I slipped through and bit the inside of my cheek to hide my smile when Wyn’s coat got caught on the metal arm as he followed.

He snarled and yanked on the stile until it snapped off completely. Clearing his throat, he dropped it carelessly on the ground and brushed invisible dust off his coat.

“Okay there, Soul Eater?” I asked, making a big show of tugging my backpack strap up higher so I could hide my smile.

Wyn huffed and grabbed my hand, pulling me away from the entrance and deeper into the park. My amusement fled quickly as I looked around in awe, instantly distracted.

It was creepy and abandoned and overgrown, with vines and plants engulfing the public bathrooms to our right. The asphalt was cracked under our feet, and the row of food huts were crumbling and discoloured as we passed them. There was a giant cartoon hotdog sign on the ground, fallen from the front of one of them, and Wyn’s big black boot snapped it in half as he stepped on it.

The metal frame of the park’s biggest rollercoaster loomed ahead, ominous creaks coming from it even though there wasn’t much of a breeze. Beyond it, the carts of the Ferris wheel swayed gently. A low, flat-roofed building advertised bumper cars, and I could see the faded paint of the dodgems within, their rubber bumpers decaying and leaves littering the smooth metal floor.

“So.” I could tell Wyn was curling his lip as he surveyed the silent, depressing park around us. “What is it you want to do here?”

I laughed and swung our linked hands. “Nothin’, just—”

When I saw the big, creepy house ahead of us, I stopped dead. A huge, weathered face stared

down at us from above. Big black horns curved up from its sharp red face, and its mouth was open impossibly wide to create a dark, shadowed doorway.

“Fuck yes, a haunted house.” I dragged Wyn in that direction.

He let out a derisive huff as his hood tilted up so he could eye that grinning, gaping face. “Haunted by what?”

I laughed and brought us to a stop outside the entrance so I could grab the flashlight from my backpack. “It’s just a spooky house. Like, animatronics and stuff. Not that any of them will be working. It’ll probably be scarier now it’s been abandoned for twenty years.”

“And some humans... enjoy being scared?” There was a touch of curiosity in Wyn’s voice as I switched on my flashlight and pointed it into the dark entrance. Dust motes floated in the beam, which revealed a half-torn down black curtain shielding the attraction within from view.

“Oh yeah.” I tugged Wyn inside, holding the curtain out of the way. “I loved horror movies as a kid, even though Momma would make me turn them off if she caught me watching them.”

“Yes, but you’re... fairly odd, my sweet.”

I froze and slowly turned to face him. “Excuse me?”

Wyn huffed and cupped my chin. “I mean that in the best possible way, Danny.”

“I’m not *odd*!” I huffed, turning back to keep walking forward into the haunted house. “What does that even *mean*? ’Cause I like horror movies? Millions of people do!”

“I was referring more to the fact that you’re in love with me.” His voice was dry.

I rolled my eyes, swinging my flashlight beam toward a half-collapsed skeleton covered in fake cobwebs and rags. It was propped next to a sign reading, *This Way*... and the finger that was supposed to be pointing had fallen off at some point.

“Right, because you’re *so* terrifying,” I deadpanned as I pulled Wyn behind me.

“This is what I mean,” I heard him mutter, but then I was distracted as I brought us to a stop in the first room of the old haunted house.

A big mannequin dressed like the devil loomed down from the ceiling, its spiked tail hanging limply and the head of its plastic pitchfork long gone.

I snorted. “Looks kind of like Edin, if you got rid of the little goatee.”

Wyn’s hood tilted. “Edin’s not that scrawny.”

“I think the last word anyone would use to describe Edin would be *scrawny*.” I pulled Wyn into the next room, lazily casting the light from my flashlight around to reveal a poorly made forest scene.

A small, child-sized mannequin in a ragged, faded red cape peeked out from behind a cardboard tree. On the other side of the room, a big werewolf jutted over the walkway, fake red blood painted onto its long, exposed canines. Some of the fur had dropped off over the years of neglect, giving it little bald patches that kind of ruined the effect a bit.

“My sweet.”

I turned back to face Wyn, getting a little weirded out when the beam from my flashlight shone directly into his hood and still revealed nothing but smoky black shadows.

“Yeah?”

“This is... not scary.”

I snorted. “What a shock. Does *anything* scare you?”

“The stupidity of mankind.”

“Yeah, but anything real? Like... clowns?”

He huffed and strode past me without even bothering to answer. Which... fair enough.

“Hey.” I trailed after him and tangled our fingers together. “Stop hiding your face in your smoke

thing.”

He grunted, turning to face me. “My eyes are sensitive when you shine your flashlight directly into them, Danny.”

“Oh.” I snickered and lowered the beam. “Sorry.”

The shadows dissipated until I could see the pale jut of his chin. When I grinned, he grinned back, revealing sharp white teeth in a wide mouth.

“There you are.” I leaned in and kissed him, one of my hands creeping into his hood so my fingertips could play over the scarred patch of skin on the side of his head. Wyn shuddered and pulled me closer, hands dropping to palm my ass.

My cock was twitching eagerly when he eventually broke the kiss to trail his tongue and sharp teeth down my neck.

“You know, if you want to be scared...”

I paused. “I never said I wanted to be scared.”

Wyn huffed, and I could feel him eyeing me from his hood as he pulled back. “You made us come into a scare house.”

I snorted. “Scare house. It’s a haunted house, baby.”

“That makes no sense. There’s nothing here haunting it.”

“It just—” I shook my head. “What were you saying, anyway?”

I could hear the feral grin in Wyn’s voice when he tugged me closer and rasped, “I can scare you.”

I froze, then snorted. “No you can’t.”

Wyn stiffened. “What—Yes, I can.”

“Wyn, I know what you look like naked on all fours shooting a massive load. I’ve seen you smack your horns on a shower rail and nearly slip over. You *cannot* scare me.”

He snarled. “Yes I can.”

Before I could react, he’d snatched the flashlight out of my hands and switched it off, plunging us into darkness. I went still, then let out a wary chuckle.

“Okay, that’s—”

I fell silent, sucking in a breath when Wyn pressed the flashlight back into my hands and leaned in close. In the complete darkness, I felt him half-dissipate, becoming almost incorporeal, cool black smoke curling around my throat and whispering over my mouth. Tendrils snuck under my shirt, tightening my skin. They slipped down my sensitive inner forearms and tickled my palms, making me shiver.

“Run, Danny.” Wyn’s distorted voice sounded even more inhuman in the total darkness, making instinctive goosebumps prickle over the back of my neck. “I’ll give you a head start.”

And then he was gone.

I stood there, frozen, for a few seconds, my heart already starting to pound as nothing but total silence and complete darkness surrounded me.

But my cock gave an eager twitch in my pants, and slowly my lips quirked into a tiny smile.

“Am I supposed to be scared or horny?” I fumbled with the flashlight, switching it back on and panning the beam around the room. I couldn’t tell if Wyn was even in here still or not. He could have been hiding. He was a sneaky little fucker when he wanted to be.

He didn’t answer and I narrowed my eyes in suspicion, darting the beam to the corners of the room in case he was lurking as a little smoke thing.

I jumped violently when his ghoulish voice curled around me from every direction at once.

“Run, Danny.”

I let out a slightly nervous laugh but rolled my eyes. “Alright, alright. I’m running.”

I took a slow step forward, swinging the flashlight back and forth as I shed my bag and left it on the floor with my baseball bat. Then I took another step. The panicked yelp escaped me before I could stop it when an unseen hand gave my ass a firm, solid smack. I spun around, narrowing my eyes suspiciously, still swinging the flashlight back and forth, but Wyn wasn’t there.

My entire body tensed when I felt something rush up behind me—something intangible that made the very human instinct to flee rise in a tingling rush. My shoulders wanted to hunch to my ears and the back of my neck prickled. All the tiny hairs on my arms stood on end.

“*Run.*”

I yelped and took off, letting out a mildly hysterical laugh as my heart started to pound in my chest. A touch of deep-rooted, instinctive fear thrummed beneath the excitement, but for some reason it only made my belly heat even more. I *knew* Wyn would never hurt me or do anything I didn’t want him to.

But I also knew he really, really wanted to chase me down and catch me. And I wanted it too.

I tripped over an old rug as I ran into the next room of the haunted house, only because it was dark and I couldn’t really see where I was going, the flashlight beam jolting wildly. This room was styled like a dungeon or something, and I jumped when a hooded figure holding a scythe in a skeletal hand loomed out of the darkness in front of me.

If Wyn ever asked, I was *not* going to tell him that I thought it was him for just a second.

I veered right and stumbled into a fake jail cell, sending the whole flimsy structure falling back and on top of the old figure of a screaming prisoner. I was pretty sure I heard a faint huff of amusement from somewhere behind me in the dark, but I was already running for the next door.

I let out a tiny yelp when something rushed up on me again, the whisper of smoke curling over my nape and throat, sliding down the front of my shirt. The instinct to flee blurred with the hot stab of excitement at the thought of being captured, but I kept running—even though he could’ve got me at any second. He was toying with me.

This room had the old figure of a haggard, cloaked witch hunched over a cauldron. My flashlight beam lit up her face a split second before I crashed into the display, sending the plastic cauldron tumbling and rolling across the floor. *Shit.*

When I spotted the staircase, I sprinted toward it, hoping that it was real and I wasn’t going to stick my foot through a fake cardboard step and land directly on my face. I didn’t let myself slow down because something invisible rushed past me in the dark, making my entire body break out in goosebumps even as I grinned breathlessly.

I tripped on the first step, despite it being real. My eyes snagged briefly on a sign stating “Come and see the séance in our Victorian parlour...” as I ran up the stairs. My foot caught on another step and I went flying, a sharp stab of real fear making my breath catch.

The low huff was right in my ear as unseen hands yanked me back at the last second, before my nose could smash into solid wood, and set me on the step.

“So clumsy.”

“I am not!” I was already scrambling up the remaining steps, away from Wyn, but I heard his amused huff from behind me. “It’s dark!”

I burst into a room with ancient, thick red drapes hanging in tatters from the fake windows and four figures placed around a circular table with a ouija board in the centre of the room. Three of the mannequin’s faces were tilted up in looks of horror as the fourth hung suspended from the ceiling by thin wires, fake ectoplasm—I was pretty sure it was just sheer white fabric—curling up out of its stretched mouth.

I knocked into one of the mannequins as I ran past, sending it to the floor and making the floating figure swing wildly from its wire suspension. The next room was like a creepy funhouse, and I grimaced as I ran through it as fast as possible. The clowns looked even scarier half-decayed, and I couldn't help but yelp in fear when something rushed ahead of me and made them all rattle like the mannequins were coming to life.

Past the half-fallen red curtain was another staircase, and I clattered down it, my heart pounding in my throat and my palms sweaty. I tried very hard to ignore the fact that my cock was *definitely* into this, stiff and pulsing in my pants. Was that weird?

As I reached the bottom step, long fingers slid around my sides and under my shirt, but I tore myself away with a breathless laugh and kept going. I heard Wyn grunt behind me, but it didn't sound irritated. It sounded the opposite.

"Danny..."

Even though I knew he'd been right behind me this whole time, knowing he was *right there* made the urge to flee mingle confusingly with the very intense desire to turn and jump on him. I let the former guide me, determined to make him catch me and stop me from getting away.

I let out a very manly scream when Wyn materialised out of thin air in front of me, his hood down and his grin sharp and wide on his pale face. I veered left and darted through the doorway, getting briefly tangled in cobwebs that I *hoped* were fake, then immediately tripped over the same fucking rug as before.

The flashlight slipped from my fingers, rolling until the beam shone on the base of some old, fake torturing device. I stumbled forward, but before I could land on my belly on the rug, long arms wrapped around my middle and tugged me upright.

Then I was being plastered to a cold wall, my cheek smushed against it and my hands flying up to press my palms into the cool surface. My gut lurched with excitement when Wyn tutted in my ear.

"Terrible attempt."

I choked out a laugh, shifting a little, my cock pulsing when long fingers curled around my nape and held my face against the wall, while Wyn's other hand slid down and tore open my pants.

Before I could answer, his hand slid around to cup my jaw. My eyes widened when his palm covered my mouth. I stared blindly into total darkness, my heart thudding hard and muffled breaths shallow against Wyn's hand.

"Don't move," he rasped in my ear before pushing a long, cool finger into my mouth. I jerked with a tiny, muffled moan but immediately began to suck, shivering with pleasure when a forceful hand tugged my pants and underwear down until they sagged at my knees.

My breath caught when a long, slick finger circled my hole before sliding in without any preamble. My brows pinched and I couldn't help but arch my hips back just a little into his touch, which made Wyn let out a low huff of amusement.

He gave my lower back a gentle shove, pinning my cock to the cold wall and making my eyes fly open wide.

"I told you not to move."

My breaths were shaky around the finger in my mouth. I kept sucking, my eyes sliding shut. The wall was still cool beneath my hot forehead and cheek, and my cock throbbed hungrily against the smooth surface.

The finger in my ass became two, sliding in and out and making me go lightheaded. Wyn thrust them deep and grazed his sharp teeth over the pulse point in my neck, his lips curving into a grin when I whimpered.

A second finger joined the first in my mouth, and I slid my tongue between them, feeling Wyn shudder with pleasure behind me in the dark. He pulled his fingers free from my ass, and I heard the rustle of fabric.

“Do you want my cock, Danny?”

My head immediately bobbed in a frantic nod as I grazed my teeth over the fingers in my mouth. Wyn snarled, long fingers grasping my hip and tilting my ass back and up. His cool fingertips bit into my ass cheek as he spread it wide, and my cock bucked when I felt a smooth, hot head rubbing over my hole.

“F-fuck—” My voice was garbled around Wyn’s fingers. I tried to push back, to make him sink inside me, but he snarled and somehow got both my arms pinned behind my back in a blur of movement too fast for me to track.

Long fingers bit into my wrists, pinning them together, as his cock slowly sank inside in a long, smooth glide. I shuddered, biting down on the fingers in my mouth, which made Wyn let out a low moan as his hips pressed against my ass. His length pulsed inside me, and he pulled back just a little before pushing inside again in a tiny thrust.

My breath hitched. Wyn’s fingers slowly slid from my mouth, and then he was gripping my nape and keeping my face pressed into the wall as he started to thrust. Hard.

“Ah!” My trapped fingers twitched, curling into loose fists. My cock jerked, the head brushing against the wall and spilling pre-cum. I tried to spread my legs wider, but my knees were trapped by my pants.

With a feral snarl, Wyn suddenly pulled free and spun me around. My head reeling, I could barely keep up as he lifted me and pressed me back against the wall, one hand yanking off my right boot. I heard it hit the floor with a thud before he was tearing my pants free of that leg, not bothering to take them off completely before slinging my calves over his shoulders.

I yelped when his cock pushed all the way back inside, his long fingers gripping my ass and easily keeping me suspended. One socked foot bounced behind his head, the other tangled up in my pants as he fucked me with hard, pounding thrusts that made my whole body jerk against the wall.

“Fuck—Wyn—” I was gasping for breath, my cock twitching between us and leaking everywhere. He snarled in response.

I couldn’t see a single thing, the room pitch black, but I knew he could see me clearly. I knew my throat and face would be flushed, brows pinched in desperation, hands scrabbling over the wall behind me because I didn’t know where to put them. He was holding me up completely with absolutely no effort. I settled for reaching out and gripping the sides of his coat, holding on for dear life as he fucked me in hard, jarring thrusts, each one making a moan burst out of me.

When his hips shifted and his cock started tagging my prostate with every thrust, my entire body jolted as I let out a frantic shout. “F-f-f-fuck—”

His little snarl of laughter was feral and so inhuman it made me shiver even as my cock swelled and grew agonisingly stiff. Wyn resituated his grip on my ass, wrapping an arm over my lower back so he could slide a hand around and fist my prick. He yanked me closer, burying his cock deep as his lips found mine in the dark.

I moaned in desperation into his mouth, hips writhing as he slowly stroked my cock and started moving again in heavy, languid thrusts. I shuddered, bent in half like a pretzel, barely able to keep the kiss going as our tongues thrust together with breathless intensity.

I had to break the kiss when my cock started throbbing in Wyn’s fist, my ass tightening up around him. “I’m... g-gonna come—”

I could practically feel his wide, rabid grin in the dark. His hips sped back up, pounding into me until I was bouncing against the wall and struggling to suck in enough air. White-hot pleasure pulsed through my prostate, my nuts tightening in a rush and my cock stiffening to the point of agony. Everything was so sensitive, and Wyn wasn't giving me any time to prepare for the rush of pleasure gathering, his hips smacking into my ass with each jarring thrust and his hand flying over my cock so fast that—

“*Fffffuuuck.*” My head thudded back into the wall as my limbs jerked, legs almost slipping off Wyn's shoulders. My hips spasmed, cock firing round after round of cum all over my chest and stomach and Wyn's long, slippery fingers as they continued to stroke.

I knew I was making completely nonsensical sounds. White spots burst over the pressing darkness in my vision, my brain emptying out entirely for long seconds. I let out another guttural groan when Wyn snarled and crushed his mouth to mine, his hips jerking forcefully below. His cock flexed inside me, pulsing with each spurt of cum. His sharp teeth grazed the sensitive inner flesh of my bottom lip before his tongue invaded my mouth, just a fraction cooler than mine but still hot and demanding.

I was trembling wildly when the haze began to lift. My legs shook over Wyn's shoulders, and I knew I'd probably fall flat on my ass if he put me down. I heard his huff of amusement as he carefully pulled out and my face went hot when I heard the drip of his cum hitting the hardwood floor.

Wyn gently lowered my legs, twining them around his middle before he wrapped me in his arms and lifted me away from the wall, but didn't put me down. I looped my arms around his neck and tightened my grip with my legs, nuzzling blindly against the strip of scarred skin on the side of his head where his hair had never grown back.

When my cheek brushed the rough, bark-like texture of his horn, I turned my head and kissed it. Wyn shuddered and pulled me closer.

“Are you alright?” he asked, his voice a low rasp.

“Yeah.” I cleared my throat. “Can we do that again?”

He wheezed out a little chuckle. “Yes. Maybe you'll give me a real chase next time.”

“Ass.” I gave the back of his head a weak tap as I slumped against him, too boneless to really care about his snarky words. “You have an unfair advantage. Several, in fact. Everything *about* you is an unfair advantage.”

Wyn huffed and carefully set me on my feet. My knees almost buckled, and I glared in his general direction in the dark when I heard him snort.

“Why is it that you always look completely fine and put together after we fuck, and I look like a total mess,” I grumbled as I tried to untwist my pants from around my leg.

I couldn't see him, but I knew he'd probably just tucked his cock away and lifted his hood to look the same as always. Meanwhile I was over here bare-assed, cum all over my shirt, hopping on one foot as I tried to tug my pants back up.

“Because I know how to make you a total mess.”

I shivered at his low, distorted rasp in the dark. But outwardly I just grumbled, “Yeah, whatever, old man.”

Wyn gave me one last spank before I tugged my pants and underwear up over my ass. The beam from my discarded flashlight suddenly rose into the air as I buttoned my pants, and Wyn pressed the flashlight into my hand as he kissed my neck.

“I'll go get your bag,” he rasped, before turning into black smoke that flew out of the room in a sinuous stream.

By the time he got back, I'd pulled on and laced up my other boot, and had managed to get the

worst of the cum stains off my shirt with an old curtain.

“Legs feeling steadier now, sweet?”

I mock-glared at the smugness in his voice as he handed me my stuff. “You are *so* sure that you’re some... ghoulish Casanova from the hell dimension.”

He wheezed out a little chuckle and helped me shrug my bag back on, before taking my hand and leading me out of the haunted house. It was fully dark when we emerged into the cool air, which smelled clean after the mustiness of the old building. I switched off my flashlight, happy for Wyn to guide us.

“Thanks for bringing me.” I wrapped my arm around his waist and tipped my head onto his shoulder as we slowly made our way through the creepy abandoned amusement park.

Wyn turned his head briefly to press a kiss into my hair. “Of course. We’ll find somewhere for you to sleep in here.”

“And then we’ll keep heading north, yeah? Keep looking for Edin?”

“Yes.”

“And Hunter,” I tacked on, which made him huff.

“Perhaps.”

I lifted my head and grinned over at him. “He will for sure have stayed with Edin. I’m gonna win our bet.”

Wyn’s hood was up, but I could feel his smirk as his head tilted toward me.

“We’ll see.”

The Adventures of Danny and Wyn – Part Two

This is a short 5.3k-word story that features a hypothetical conversation about hotdogs, a visit to an abandoned mall, and Danny in lingerie and a crop top. So. There's that. Wyn enjoys himself.

Content warnings: Explicit sexual content, 18+ only, lingerie, crop top, Wyn is too busy to push his stabby agenda

Spoiler warning: Set sometime after the novella *Wyn* (Monstrous: 3.5) and before *Moth* (Monstrous: Book Five)

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WYN

“Okay, what about hotdogs for fingers or hotdogs for, like... legs?”

My right eye twitched within the depths of my hood. This was something Danny often did when we had been walking for a long time and he started getting bored.

The questions. The ridiculous, pointless, nonsensical questions.

I loved him more than anything, but in moments like these, I often thought back fondly to the time when humans were all terrified and ran screaming in the opposite direction at the mere sight of me.

“I don’t understand, sweet,” I said—my response eighty percent of the time.

Danny huffed and rolled his eyes. “It’s just hypothetical. If you had to pick one, which would you pick?”

“But why would I have to pick one?”

“Just *because*. It’s funny to think about.”

“Is it?”

His cheeks went pink as he glared at me. My mouth twitched, and I felt a touch of guilt for embarrassing him, but before I could apologise, he yanked his hand free from mine. I hissed in irritation, fingers flexing.

“You’re lucky you’re so hot,” he muttered, clutching the straps of his backpack so I couldn’t snag his hand again. “Such a fucking grump.”

I rolled my eyes, and Danny shot me a suspicious look as if he knew, even though my hood was up. Letting out a silent, exasperated breath, I woodenly said, “Fingers.”

“What?” he asked, examining his nails, trying very hard to sound like he didn’t care.

“I’d pick hotdogs for fingers,” I elaborated, unable to keep the disdain out of my voice.

“Really?” His mouth twitched, like he was fighting the urge to smile. “Why?”

For fuck’s sake. Now I had to give a *reason* for my answer?

“Well, wouldn’t your legs just snap the moment you tried to walk? Hotdogs don’t bend.” I despised myself, just a little, for actually putting some thought into my answer.

“Hmm.” Danny’s head cocked like he was thinking deeply about it, as if we were discussing something actually important. “That’s true, but so would hotdog fingers.”

“Yes, but I can just do this.”

I stopped, which made Danny come to a halt too. He turned to face me, eyeing me warily as I raised my hands. They dissolved into smoke up to my wrists, and I moulded that oily black smoke into the vague outline of palms and fingers. Long, wispy fingers that trailed black fog as I wiggled them to try and make Danny smile.

It worked. His mouth twitched, then stretched into a wide grin. “Okay, smoke boy, neat trick. But *I* can’t do that.”

My hands resolidified, and I took a step closer to slide them around Danny’s waist. “What would you pick, then?”

“Legs. I wouldn’t be able to touch you properly with hotdog fingers, and I wouldn’t be able to feel you because, duh, hotdogs don’t have nerves.”

My eye twitched again.

“But you’d have to carry me everywhere,” Danny continued, palms resting on my chest as he grinned up at me. “Like you said, my hotdog legs would snap if I tried to walk on them.”

For a brief moment, I thought about how much Edin would probably enjoy this fucking ridiculous conversation.

“Of course I would carry you if you had hotdog legs, Danny,” I told him solemnly.

His hands slid up until he wrapped his arms around my neck. Lifting up on his toes, he tilted his chin, silently asking for a kiss. “I know you would, old man.”

I dipped my head to kiss him, tightening my grip on his waist when his tongue brushed softly against mine. Danny let out a muffled sound when I thrust my tongue into his mouth aggressively, one hand rising to fist his hair and hold his head in place.

The other hand slowly slid down, over the swell of his backside. My lips curved into a sharp grin as I squeezed, jerking his hips closer, and he grunted into my mouth in surprise. But just as I was about to hoist him up in my arms and carry him into the nearest house, he ruined it.

“Mmm.” After one final kiss, Danny moved back and cupped the sides of my neck. His beautiful face was entirely serious as he asked, “What about tiny hotdogs for teeth or a hotdog for a tongue?”

—

The further north we travelled across the Wastes, the colder it got. I didn’t feel it much, but I grew concerned for Danny.

“Shall we stay further south during the winter?” I asked him as we made our way down a highway littered with old vehicles, the clouds heavy and grey in the sky above.

“No, Wyn!” Danny nudged me with his elbow. “We have to find Edin and Hunter to tell them about the time place.”

My lip curled. “Do we?”

He laughed, slipping his arm under my coat and around my waist as I tugged him closer. “Yes. We need to make sure Hunter is your brother-in-law for thousands of years. And don’t you want to see Edin?”

Of course I wanted to see Edin. Aside from Danny, Edin was the only other being alive who I gave a fuck about, even if he annoyed the shit out of me most of the time. But I did *not* want to see his oafish human—assuming the soldier had even stayed out here, which I doubted. He’d probably abandoned Edin the moment he had his little friend back.

I grunted in response to Danny’s question, which made him laugh again just as fat drops of rain started falling from the thick clouds above.

I tightened my grip around his shoulders, pulling him closer. “We need to find shelter.”

Danny chuckled. “So dramatic. It’s just rain.”

“You might get sick.” I quickened my steps, tugging him along with me.

“Tethered to an almost indestructible, ancient monster man, remember?”

I grunted. “You could still get a cold.”

“Wait.” Danny stopped, making me hiss with irritation. He turned to face me, a fat raindrop

landing on the tip of his nose. I reached up to wipe it away. “You get colds?”

“What?” I scowled irritably, wiping away another drop that landed on his cheek. “I didn’t say that.”

“But you just said I can still get a cold, which surely means you can too, right? For you to know that?”

My eye twitched. My jaw clenched. Both reactions were hidden by my hood, but Danny always seemed to know anyway. His lips curled into an amused smirk.

“Very rarely,” I muttered, my fingers twitching with the urge to grab Danny’s headgear and force him to put it on. “Sweet, why don’t you put on your—”

“You *get colds*?” Danny sputtered with laughter, stepping closer and reaching into my hood to cup my face.

I scowled and snapped, “Why is that funny?”

“It’s not! It’s... I don’t know. Really cute.” He leaned up and kissed me. “I promise to look after you whenever you get the sniffles.”

My scowl deepened until I knew he could feel the iciness of my glare. “I do not *sniffle*.”

“Well.” Danny smirked, irritating me further. “I guess we’ll find out one day, won’t we?”

I flailed for something to say, feeling heat rise in my cheeks, which *infuriated* me. “This is ridiculous. We need to get out of the rain. Let’s go.”

Danny just laughed as I grabbed his hand and marched forward, toward the big, sprawling building just off the highway. It sat beyond a huge stretch of cracked and weed-strewn concrete, with countless cars left rusting and abandoned. An old parking lot.

“Oh cool, a mall.” Danny let me tug him off the highway, winding between old cars. “We can scavenge for stuff.”

“What stuff?” I asked immediately, glaring up at the sky when it started raining harder.

“I dunno. Maybe some clothes?”

“I can get you clothes,” I countered. “New ones. From the cities. Just tell me what you need.”

Danny chuckled. “I know you can, but if we’re going to wait in there until it stops raining, it’ll be fun to look around the old stores anyway.”

I grunted, leading him to the glass doors of the building. One was smashed, and the interior was already littered with dirt, dead leaves and old trash. I reached out with my senses and could detect no one else within—no other humans or creatures in the building.

We made our way inside. The front entrance opened up into the main shopping area, several floors stretching above us. Old stores lined the edges either side of us, several with broken front windows and clothing rails and mannequins strewn from doorways. Human raiders had hit this place many times over the years, it seemed. The stores had been ransacked, most shelves empty and tipped over, only useless items left behind.

“You ever hang out in malls in your smoke form before the world turned to shit?” Danny asked, looking around with interest.

I huffed. “Obviously not.”

“You’re so boring, baby.” The kiss he placed on my cheek took the sting out of his words, but I still scowled. “If I could turn to smoke, I’d mess with people all the time.”

My mouth stretched into a wide, sharp grin. “I do *mess with people*. I just never bothered fucking with pathetic little teenagers moping around these places.”

Danny snorted and muttered, “You would’ve fit right in.”

“What?”

“Nothing, baby.” He squeezed my hand. “Let’s go look around.”

I grunted. “I suppose we could see if there are any clothes left. You need dry ones.”

“Sure,” he said absently, pulling me toward the lifeless escalators in the centre of the mall.

Glass, grit and dead leaves crunched under our boots, the only sound echoing around the vast empty space. We skirted around an old, dry fountain, the base discoloured a dark brown. Big, empty pots sat beside peeling benches, some still containing the dried, shrivelled twigs of whatever plants used to thrive in them.

“It’s empty in here, right?” Danny asked as we walked up the unmoving escalator, our boots loud on the metal steps.

“Yes.”

There was no life within the building except for us. Outside, over the relentless pounding of the rain, I could sense the fast, thrumming heartbeat of a small creature from this world in some long grass. Nothing threatening.

I didn’t tell Danny though, just in case it was another of those dogs that came with their own backpacks. He’d want to keep it.

Most of the stores had been ransacked already, shelves smashed and tipped over, clothing rails empty, useless items left behind to rot. We wandered along the storefronts, Danny occasionally pulling me inside a shop to have a look around while I waited near the entrance. I wasn’t interested in useless human crap like old candles, plastic junk, hideously overpowering perfume sticks called ‘incense’ and little figurines of dragons and other mythical creatures that humans had previously wished were real.

Instead, they got me. My mouth stretched into a sharp grin as I set a little model of a half fish woman back on the shelf.

As we left that store and headed for the next one, Danny chuckled and squeezed my hand.

“You might like that store.” He jerked his chin toward a shop window.

I eyed it with disdain. The interior looked dark, and there were lots of stickers on the windows. It looked like it had been a clothing store, but most items had already been scavenged. What was left was mainly black. Or grey. Or bright colours in chequered patterns. I could see a wall of logos printed on fabric.

“Go take a look, old man.” Danny kissed my cheek and gave my backside a firm smack. I shot him an unimpressed look—not that he could see it. “I’ll be next door,” he added, tone absent.

I glanced over at the store next door, but couldn’t see much. The mannequins in the windows had been tipped over and stripped bare, but I could see that they were shaped into impossible versions of female human bodies.

I couldn’t work out what the store had sold, but Danny was already wandering inside. I hesitated for a moment before reluctantly slinking into the dark store he’d told me to look at. I flicked the sleeve of a short black dress as I wandered between clothing rails, eyeing everything with disinterest.

I stopped in front of a display of long, brightly coloured striped socks, staring at them in mild horror. Why did Danny say I’d like this place?

I turned to stride back out, curling my lip at a display of pink backpacks with unicorns on them. An almost empty shelf contained a few rainbow-striped belts and others studded with metal. Just inside the entrance, there was a display of faded plush toys—ridiculous, brightly coloured creatures with big, stupid eyes and cutesy faces. I kicked it over before leaving the store.

My eyes narrowed when I stepped into the store Danny had entered. Old, faded posters of human women in their underwear lined the walls. A big pink light dominated the centre of the ceiling, the

walls dark and floor smooth under the grit from years of neglect.

I spotted Danny at the back of the store, head bent as he fiddled with something on the shelf in front of him. His backpack rested on the top of the display.

“Danny?”

He jumped, stuffing something into his backpack. “Yep.”

I approached slowly, eyeing him. “Are you done, sweet?”

“Yep, uh-huh.” He shoved something else into his bag before zipping it shut. His cheeks were pink when he turned to face me, slinging his backpack over his shoulder. “All done. Just browsing. I—um. So did you find anything?”

“What?” I huffed. “No. Was I meant to?”

Danny laughed and stepped forward to slip his arm around my waist under my coat. “Just thought you might like that store’s *aesthetic*.”

I grunted, tugging him toward the exit. “It was juvenile.”

“Uh-huh.” He rested his head on my shoulder as we wandered out of the store. “Is it still raining? Should we stay here tonight?”

I looked around the mall with disdain. There wouldn’t be a bed here, or a way for Danny to wash. It was also too big and open, with too many ways for creatures—or humans—to slip inside.

“No.” I slid a hand up Danny’s spine to scratch the back of his head affectionately. “We’ll wait for the rain to stop and find somewhere better to sleep.”

DANNY

My heart was pounding as I opened the bathroom door, shivering at the rush of cooler air against my exposed stomach.

We’d found a big house after the rain stopped and we left the mall behind. The bed in the master bedroom was enormous, and Wyn was currently slouched back against the headboard in the centre of it. He was still wearing his boots, legs crossed at the ankles, and the hood was down on his coat. I smiled as my eyes met his mismatched ones, but nerves made it wobbly.

“Are you alright, sweet?” he asked, but his voice was already deeper and huskier, distracted as his gaze slid down to my exposed midriff.

I’d hacked a couple of old, baggy t-shirts in half to wear as crop tops to bed, and Wyn freaking *loved* them. Especially when it was the only thing I was wearing.

Right now though, I was still wearing my pants, and when I remembered why, my gut lurched with nervous anticipation. The carpet was threadbare but thankfully pretty clean under my bare feet, and I set down my backpack before slowly approaching the bed.

I licked my lips. “Um—I, um, have something to show you.”

I could already feel the splotchy heat rising up my throat. But at the same time, my cock was already twitching, brushing against soft fabric that felt so foreign and... weird. But hot. Really hot.

Wyn might not like it. I was pretty sure he would, but... still. He might not.

“Mm?”

I could tell Wyn wasn't really concentrating on my words, mainly because he was still running his gaze over my midriff, his eyes heated.

“Wyn!” My face was hot now, but I forced myself to lower my hands to my fly. “Focus!”

“What?” His gaze jerked up, then immediately dropped back down to follow my fingers as I fumbled with the button on my pants.

A sharp-toothed grin stretched Wyn's mouth. He began slowly unbuttoning his shirt as he watched me, but he froze the moment I got my pants undone and tugged them down just a little.

Revealing the bright pink lace panties I was wearing.

My face and throat were splotchy with heat, but I forced myself to take my pants off and straighten up with my hands on my hips, now wearing nothing but the crop top and panties. Wyn still hadn't moved, long, blackened fingers poised over a button on his shirt. He was like a statue.

I cleared my throat. “Um, so, what...” I gave him a hesitant smile. “What do you think?”

Fiddling with the lacy edge, I glanced down and felt my face go bright red at how obscene my dick looked in this underwear. Despite my nerves, it was already rock hard and trapped at an awkward angle, threatening to poke out the side of the left leg hole.

Wyn hadn't spoken yet. Or moved. I chewed on the inside of my cheek as I looked at him uncertainly. His mismatched eyes were locked on my groin, but I couldn't tell if he hated or loved what he saw.

After another ten seconds of silence, the humiliation threatened to overwhelm me.

“Okay, I'm taking them off.” I spun around to speed walk back into the bathroom, my face on fire, and heard Wyn let out a distorted, choked sound from the bed.

Cringing, I remembered too late that the back of the underwear was... smaller than the front. Not quite a thong, but pretty damn close.

Before I could take another step, arms looped around my middle and yanked me back. I squawked in shock, the sound turning into a grunt as I hit the mattress on my back, bouncing once.

Wyn loomed over me, already naked somehow. I blinked, staring up at him in disbelief. “How did you—”

He cut me off with a bruising kiss, roughly shoving my thighs apart to nestle his hips between them. My throat got hot again because I was pretty sure one of my nuts had popped out the side of these panties, and the head of my dick was definitely poking up past the waistband. They weren't exactly designed to fit all my junk in.

Wyn didn't seem to have noticed, at least. He was too busy shoving his tongue in my mouth, so I quickly wriggled my hand between us and readjusted my goods, my breath hitching when my fingers brushed over my straining erection through the lace.

Wyn tore his mouth free to trail his lips down my neck, sharp teeth scraping my throat and making me shiver. He sat up, eyes wild as he stared down at the bright pink panties. My thighs twitched when long, black-stained fingers trailed lightly up and down the sensitive inner skin.

He cleared his throat, but his voice was still more distorted and gravelly than normal when he asked, “Did you take more than one pair?”

My heart was thundering in my chest, breaths already escaping fast, but my mouth quirked up into a crooked smile. “Yeah.”

Wyn's breath shuddered out of him. “Good.”

My smile turned into a smirk. “You like them then?”

I could already guess the answer, judging by Wyn's enormous erection and the pre-cum dripping

from the head of his cock. His slit was flushed and wet, and my mouth watered with the urge to taste him, but he was already leaning down to kiss me.

“We are going back to that place so you can get more,” he rasped against my mouth before kissing his way down my neck.

I tilted my head to give him more room, grinning widely. “I grabbed plenty, baby, don’t worry.”

He let out a little growly sound, hips rocking to rub his cock against the soft lace covering my junk. He used his flat nose to nudge my crop top up until he could reach a nipple, swirling his tongue around it. My hips jerked as I gasped, threading my fingers through his dark hair. He gave my other nipple a soft lick before kissing his way down my stomach, dipping his tongue briefly into my navel.

“Wyn,” I mumbled shakily, tilting my head on the bed so I could keep watching him.

His eyes met mine as he mouthed at my cock through the thin, lacy fabric. His hands framed my hips, thumbs slipping under the sides of my underwear to stroke my bare skin, making me shudder with sensitivity.

His lips trailed along the length of my stiff shaft through the lace. A guttural groan left him when he reached the head and felt the wet patch from the pre-cum seeping through the fabric. My hips jerked when he sucked, eyes flaring with heat.

He licked his way back down before nuzzling my lace-covered sac. My hips shifted restlessly, a tremor running through my frame as my hard cock rubbed against soft, wet lace. It was an entirely novel experience, almost overwhelming in its intensity, making my hands shoot down to grab Wyn’s horns and ensure he stayed down there.

Wyn snarled, his body shuddering between my legs. I was already panting, skin flushed and prickling with pleasure, but I had enough sense left to slide my fists up and down over the sensitive base of Wyn’s horns as he mouthed at my cock again through the lace.

“Danny,” he rasped, sounding almost feral, which made my heart leap and my cock buck with excitement—until I felt a tug on the delicate lace panties.

My head shot up from the bed. “Don’t rip them with your teeth!”

Wyn huffed and rolled his eyes, lifting his head. “It’s the quickest way to get them off—”

“They’ll be ruined if you do that.” I let go of a horn to give his head an affectionate shove, which made him bare his sharp teeth at me in a snarl. “Just take them off normally. Or maybe...” I shrugged, trying to look like I didn’t care one way or another, but I could feel the splotchiness on my chest and throat. “Maybe just leave them on.”

Wyn stared up at me for a second before his mouth slowly spread into a wide, wicked grin. I shivered. I knew that evil smile well.

“Do you want me to leave them on, sweet?” he asked in a low, whispery voice between kisses to my lace-covered cock. The delicate fabric was completely soaked through at the tip, and the sensation of it sliding against my cockhead was making my mind go blank as I trembled with pleasure.

“I—” I let out a shuddering breath. “I-if you want to—”

My words cut off with a gasp when Wyn peeled back the lace to give the tip of my cock a single lick. He settled the fabric back in place and slid his hands to my hips, dropping kisses over my belly just above the edge of the underwear.

I melted into the bed with a tiny groan, knees falling open wide. Wyn groaned as I stroked my thumbs over the base of his horns. His fingers tightened on my hips and I felt his muscles tense with purpose.

I let out an embarrassing squawk as I was suddenly flipped onto my stomach. Before I could even react, my knees were shoved open wide and my ass yanked up. My cock jerked, the head pushing out

from the panties' waistband.

"Oh fuck," I croaked, staring at the ugly pattern on the bedspread as Wyn's big hands landed hard on my ass, making me jump as a jolt of pleasure rushed up the length of my cock. He squeezed tight with a little snarl, spreading me wide.

I held my breath as I felt his thumb slide down the thin strip of lace nestled between my cheeks. He rubbed over my covered hole with unerring accuracy, making me bite back a groan as my fingers curled in the comforter.

Cool lips pressed against my ass cheek, simultaneously tightening my chest with emotion and making my cock buck hungrily, still trapped in lace. I bit the inside of my cheek to hold back a whimper as Wyn's sharp teeth sank gently into the meat of my ass before his tongue trailed slowly inward.

Long fingers hooked under the lace and pulled it to one side, just enough for a warm tongue to lap at my hole.

"Hhhnnngg." I made a real undignified noise as my fingers scrabbled over the sheets. "F-f-fuck."

Wyn moaned against me, a low, rabid sound. He licked again, then drilled his tongue inside with no preamble. My entire body jerked as I let out a shocked shout, pressing my cheek against the mattress. My thighs trembled wildly, ass trying to clench, but Wyn's fingers dug in like claws and kept me spread wide, his thumb still hooked around the panties to keep them out of his way.

My lips parted on a gasp when I felt the rasp of his sharp teeth against the most vulnerable part of me. It only made my cock harder, nuts tightening, the brush of lace against my junk making my head spin.

Wyn's tongue vanished as he sat up. My heart was pounding, and my breath caught when I felt the slick heat of his cockhead notch against my hole. He gave me a few seconds to prepare for the invasion, and I tipped my forehead into the mattress as I bore down. Wyn's hiss of pleasure accompanied my tight groan as he slipped inside.

Since we'd tethered our lives, Wyn was less concerned about hurting me during sex. Which meant he was rougher. Which was *freaking amazing*. My mouth stretched into a wide grin as he clenched his fingers hard into my backside, keeping my panties out of his way and my ass tilted up to take him. His other hand found the middle of my back and pushed down, pinning me to the bed.

I moaned in bliss as he sank inside me in increments, using his last scrap of control to lessen the ache. It hurt way less now—I didn't know if it was from me getting used to Wyn fucking me, like, all the time, or if it was because I was more resistant to injury. Either way, I wasn't complaining.

I only had a second to enjoy the slick heat of him against me as his hips met my ass before he was pulling back out. His first thrust was hard enough to jolt my body on the bed, a surprised grunt leaving me. The next thrust shoved me up the mattress again, and I laughed breathlessly as I tried to brace myself.

Wyn growled in irritation. The hand pinning my lower back vanished before his long, black-stained fingers appeared in my periphery as he braced himself on the bed, clutching the sheets in his fist. He finally released his death grip on my ass to curl an arm between the bed and my stomach, holding me in place as his hips rocked again and again, getting faster and faster.

"Uuunngh." I squeezed my eyes shut, shuddering as his tunnelling cock shot pleasure through every inch of me. My dick rubbed constantly against soft, damp lace, my nuts restricted by the underwear, which somehow made everything feel so much better.

The loud sound of Wyn's hips smacking against my ass filled the room, accompanied by my increasingly desperate moans and his rabid snarls of pleasure. My hips jerked when sharp teeth

clamped down on my shoulder through my shirt, Wyn's soft black hair cascading forward and brushing my neck.

"Wyn," I panted pleadingly, reaching up with a trembling hand.

My fingers curled around the base of his horn, holding on for dear life as he fucked me in hard, pounding thrusts.

"Fuck," he bit out, shuddering as I rubbed my thumb over the rippled texture of his horn. "Danny."

I tightened my grip, holding him in place, and lifted my head. His panting breaths hit my cheek before I craned my neck around so I could kiss him. It was messy and heated, and I could barely focus on anything but the relentless pounding of his cock in my ass. I moaned with every breath against Wyn's mouth, feeling it stretch into a devilish grin.

The smile dropped from his face in an instant when I squeezed his horn. A low, broken moan escaped him as he shuddered.

My cock was leaking profusely against the sheets, painfully hard and mere seconds away from exploding as it rubbed over hot, damp fabric with every one of Wyn's jarring thrusts. I couldn't keep up our messy kiss anymore—I dropped my forehead back to the mattress, moaning on every heavy exhale and shaking wildly from the feel of Wyn's cock grinding against my prostate.

I kept hold of his horn though, sliding my fist up and down so I could feel his body tremble at my back as he buried his face in my neck.

"Danny," he bit out, his distorted voice unsteady. His hips sped up, pounding me harder, his arm looped around my middle pinning me against his body.

"Fuck," I gasped as the pleasure mushroomed, my cock swelling and growing agonisingly stiff, my balls wrenching up. "Fuck," I moaned again, trembling wildly, my voice muffled against the mattress. "Wyn—"

I seized up as the orgasm hit, accidentally yanking on Wyn's horn and jerking his head closer to mine. He seemed to like the rough treatment though, judging by the feral snarl that escaped him and the heavy throb of his cock inside me as he started to come. I could feel the base of him flexing as he pumped his cum inside me while my own cock spurted liquid heat against the mattress.

I felt the tension drain out of Wyn's body as his orgasm came to an end, a sated groan vibrating against my neck, his hips still thrusting gently. I slowly uncurled my trembling fingers from around his horn, my arm flopping lifelessly onto the bed.

His nose nudged the loose neck of my crop top off my shoulder before cool lips pressed kisses over the exposed skin. I smiled contentedly, my eyes shut and cheek resting on the mattress. I clenched around Wyn's cock just to hear him hiss with pleasure. His teeth scraped my shoulder as he carefully pulled out, both of us groaning at the feel.

Wyn collapsed onto his side with a deep, sated groan, slinging a leg over my ass. I turned my head to face him, smiling when his long fingers brushed my hair back from my sweat-damp face.

"You liked the panties then." My voice was hoarse from my moans.

Wyn's mismatched eyes flashed, his hand sliding down my spine to toy with the edge of the lacy underwear. They were still kind of pushed to one side, sitting uncomfortably on my ass, but I was too boneless to move. Even though I was lying in a giant wet patch.

"I liked the panties," he confirmed, his voice hot and raspy.

I let my eyes slide shut as I grinned. "That's good. I picked up some pairs for you to try on. In black."

A Monstrous Christmas on the Homestead

This is a short, 7.7k-word story set between books four (*Gloom*) and five (*Moth*) of the Monstrous series. It features our big purple monster, Edin; his asshole human lover, Hunter; and Hunter's best friend, Charlie, having a sweet little Wastes-style Christmas at their homestead before Charlie returns to the military...

Content warnings: Explicit sexual content, 18+ only, restraint, Santa Edin, tail play

Spoiler alert: Set after the events of *Edin* (Monstrous: Book Two) and just before *Moth* (Monstrous: Book Five)

First published 2021 by Lily Mayne
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HUNTER

“Okay, so I’ve had an idea,” I told Charlie as I joined him in the kitchen, which was a hell of a lot cleaner than it had been when we first arrived at the homestead.

He was sitting at the big kitchen table, carefully packing a medical kit, which dampened my good mood considerably.

Charlie was getting ready to leave—to go back to the military. It had been so long that I’d kind of hoped that he’d just... forgotten about going back. That he was just going to stay here on the homestead with us. But nope. He’d said a week ago that he was going back, and Edin and I were going to fulfil our promise to get him safely to the Tennessee base. We were leaving in a week.

I was going to miss the shit out of him. Strangely, I could only say those words to Edin and not to Charlie himself. Edin had told me that Charlie might stay if I made it clear how much I’d miss him, but... I was so fucking shit at talking about emotions to anyone but Edin.

“Mm?” Charlie raised a dark brow at me as he stacked up pill packets and slotted them into the little red bag.

“Well, it was actually Edin’s idea.” I sat down opposite him, my lip curling at the sight of his half-packed bag. He’d been slowly gathering supplies from the bunker and basement for the journey back. “I was telling him about the stupid little Christmas celebration you’d make us do if we were ever out on a job in December.”

Charlie snorted, glancing up at me. “Call it stupid all you want, you loved it.”

I grunted. “I tolerated it for you.”

“Whatever, Hatton. What about it, anyway? It’s not even winter yet.”

“No, but it nearly is, and you’re...” I gestured at his pack, trying not to glare at it. “Heading off soon. He wants to do it before you go.”

Charlie put down the medical kit and grinned, his grey eyes brightening. “Yeah? That’d be fun.”

“So you’re up for it?”

“Hell yeah, I’m up for it. We found those Christmas decorations in the attic. We can put ’em up.”

I snorted. “I think half of them will disintegrate into dust the moment we touch them.”

“I’ll go up and take a look.” Charlie had already abandoned his medical kit and pack, getting up from the table and heading toward the door into the hallway.

“I’ll go tell Edin.” I followed him up but went out the back door to the yard, knowing I’d find Edin out there.

It wasn’t warm anymore, but the sun was out, which meant he’d be lying on the deck sunbathing if he had nothing else to do. My gut tightened at the sight of his big body stretched out, gleaming pale purple in the sun. His booted ankles were crossed, bulging arms folded behind his head and eyes closed. His handsome, craggy face split into a grin the moment I stepped onto the deck, fangs flashing.

“Hello, josdo.” His deep, rumbling voice still made my belly swoop—not that I’d ever admit it. “Come here.”

I smirked and went to sit beside him, my skin tingling when he blindly reached out and slipped his big hand under my shirt to slide it up my back.

I glanced back at the house. Charlie was probably in the attic by now, sifting through old Christmas decorations, so I laid down and practically draped myself over Edin, resting my cheek on his warm chest. He rumbled with pleasure and stroked his hand down the back of my head.

“Charlie wants to do the Christmas thing,” I mumbled, tracing the hard dips on his stomach with my fingers.

Edin grunted. “Good. Did you ask him to stay?”

My gut squirmed with discomfort, and I propped myself up on an elbow. “No. If he wants to go back, that’s his choice. He knows I don’t want him to.”

Edin quirked a brow, peeking open one eye to look up at me. “It would be nice to hear it though, no?”

The discomfort intensified. “He knows, scratch.”

Edin snorted and grabbed the back of my neck, pulling me down.

“So stubborn,” he murmured before kissing me, catching my bottom lip in his fangs before smoothing away the sting with his tongue. I melted, sliding my hand down his chest and stomach to toy with the band of his kilt.

“Remind me what the Christmas thing is, josdo.” Edin kissed his way along my jaw and down my neck, yanking me closer until I was practically sprawled out over him.

I rolled my eyes. “*You* were the one who said you wanted to do it.”

“And I do. A little human tradition, one that Charlie enjoys very much—it sounds fun. Maybe it will make him stay. And you said it involves giving gifts.” He palmed my ass and squeezed. “I will give you many gifts, josdo.”

I made a face. “I mean, the point isn’t necessarily the gifts—”

“I will give you many gifts.” His fangs gleamed as he grinned up at me. “Including my big—”

“Alright, scratch.” I raised a brow at him, extracting myself from his gropy hold to sit up. “Charlie and I never did a *proper* Christmas while we were out in the Wastes. We’d make each other a stupid little gift from whatever we could find, hunt and catch something to roast for meat, and... that was about it. If Charlie could find a small tree or something, he’d decorate it with junk.”

Edin just watched me solemnly with big purple eyes. “And why did you do all of that, josdo?”

I chuckled. “I don’t know. Because it’s... tradition, I guess? And Charlie wanted to.”

“So we find a tree.” Edin sat up in one smooth, graceful movement, every muscle in his stomach rippling and making my gut lurch. “What kind of tree? Any tree? Does it have to be small?” He stood up, tail lashing side to side as he placed his hands on his hips and stared out at the forest. “I will get you a big one.”

I choked out a laugh, rising up from the deck. “It’s a specific type of tree. Uh... one of the pointy ones.”

Edin nodded seriously. He turned and grabbed my face between huge hands, jerking my head closer to plant a hard kiss on my mouth. “I will get you a big, pointy tree.”

—

The point of the gifts we exchanged was that they were silly and pretty much useless. I made sure to

try and convey that to Edin before he prowled off into the forest to find a “big, pointy tree” and an animal to roast for our Christmas dinner.

Charlie emerged from the attic juggling two soft, wrinkled cardboard boxes filled with Christmas decorations. He dumped them on the kitchen floor and wandered over, snagging a chunk of carrot that I’d already peeled and chopped.

“Wonder what Edin will hunt for our dinner,” he commented, crunching down.

I chuckled. “I kinda like the taste of wanuk now. Like gamey chicken.”

Charlie nodded enthusiastically. “Yeah. It makes good jerky.”

“So what did you find?” I glanced over at the boxes. “Anything salvageable?”

“Shit yeah. Loads of decorations.” He crossed to the box and squatted down to open one of them, the cardboard top tearing away like tissue paper. “Oops. Are we doing secret Santa?”

I rolled my eyes. “There’s only three of us.”

“Yeah, but we still did it when it was just the two of us.”

I barked out a laugh. “Which was even *more* ridiculous.”

“Maybe we shouldn’t, anyway. I wanna make you both something.” He rummaged through the box and pulled out several gold, red and green baubles.

“Edin’s getting a tree,” I told him, transferring the chopped carrots to the pot I’d already filled with water.

“Awesome.” Charlie pulled out more decorations, including a long coil of old-fashioned garland. “Does he know what kind to get?”

We both paused when we heard a faint, echoing crack come from the forest behind the house. I chuckled and started roughly chopping some dark, leafy greens that grew in the garden faster than we could eat them.

“I think so, but it doesn’t really matter, does it?”

“No, it’ll still be good.” Charlie shot me his big, charming grin. “This was a great idea. I’d just be sitting here stressing about going back otherwise.”

I went still, staring down at the chopping board. “You don’t want to go back?”

Charlie was silent behind me for a few seconds before I heard him clear his throat. “No, yeah. Of course I do. I just... You know. It’s still going to be a shitstorm at first.”

I gave a brief nod, keeping my head bent toward the counter as I carefully chopped vegetables.

“You don’t *have* to go back,” I said in as light a voice I could manage—which wasn’t all that light. It came off as more stilted and awkward. *Great*. “No one would ever find you out here. We’re safe.”

Charlie snorted and exhaled heavily. “Yeah, I know. That’s... kind of part of it, Hunter. Am I just going to spend the rest of my life alone in the spare room here? While you and Edin build a life together?”

“That’s not what it’s like,” I snapped immediately, spinning around to glare at him. “It’s not *me* and *Edin* and then you. It’s *all* of us, together. Come on, Charlie. You know I’d never treat you like a... a nuisance or a third wheel.”

“I know you wouldn’t.” He stood up from his crouch beside the boxes and came over to pat my chest. “But it doesn’t change the fact that... you’re right. If I stayed here, no one would ever find us. I’d just... be alone forever.”

His voice was wooden, as much as he tried to mask it with a carefree tone. I felt a stab of discomfort in my gut, which made me want to promise him ridiculous things. Thing like, *Hey, we’ll find you someone if you agree to stay*. I almost snorted to myself. What, were we going to go out roaming the Wastes for Charlie to pick a life partner? Get Edin to hogtie them and bring them back

here for Charlie to woo?

Charlie had always been the more sociable of the pair of us. The charming, friendly one who people were drawn to. He'd always been the one more likely to get lucky when we were in a position to get laid if we were in a city. Most folk preferred a smiling, handsome, charming Texan boy over a giant, surly asshole with a scar on his face and a permanent scowl.

He was right. If he did stay here with us, odds were he'd be alone forever. Wasn't like we got any visitors up here, and I doubted we'd be leaving this place often at all. We didn't need to.

But... shit, I wanted him to stay. The thought of never seeing him again was devastating, and there wasn't much I allowed to get to me that badly. Charlie and Edin were the only important people in my life. When Charlie left, I'd lose half my family in an instant.

I swallowed, staring down at him. My voice was rough when I said, "Not... not necessarily. You might meet someone—"

He snorted. "How? And where? Besides, that's not... That doesn't matter. I... I'm going back, Hunter. I don't have anything else. I think I need that... sense of purpose, you know?"

"You have a purpose here," I croaked. "Living is enough of a purpose. You don't have to be living your life for anything greater than that."

Charlie's face softened, even as he quirked a brow at me. "Never thought I'd see the day where *you* would say that, my man." He clapped me on the shoulder. "I agree. And I know your purpose is here, with Edin, living your lives together. But it's not mine."

He stepped away and returned to the boxes of Christmas decorations, picking one up off the floor carefully. "Gonna go start decorating the deck."

But before he could get outside, we heard Edin's deep yell.

"Hunter!"

It sounded good-natured rather than anything to worry about, so I didn't tense up with stress. One of the best things about this place was how remarkably quiet and peaceful it was. Other than the two gentle borolash, we never saw any other humans or big monsters in the forest.

I wiped my hands on the dishtowel and wandered over to the back door. As I stepped outside, Charlie just behind me, I froze. Charlie and his box bumped into my back with an irritated "Oof". He barged my shoulder to get past me.

Then he froze too.

"Edin," I said faintly, watching my big purple monster drag an enormous ponderosa pine into the backyard from the forest. "That's... a big tree."

He grinned at us, fangs flashing in the weak fall sun. His arms bulged as he heaved the massive trunk of the felled pine tree over his shoulder.

"Yes, the biggest!" He grunted as the top of the tree finally emerged from the forest. Charlie and I stared gormlessly as Edin dragged the pine all the way to the edge of the deck. "You said one of the pointy ones. This looked the best."

Charlie barked a laugh and strode across the deck, dumping the box and jumping down to clap his hand on Edin's shoulder. "You sure as shit don't do anything by half measures, do you, champ?"

Edin dropped the tree trunk, which landed with a heavy thud and a frantic rustle of pine needles, and squared his shoulders, placing his hands on his hips as his tail whipped around proudly.

"You should have the best pointy tree for your Christmas," he told Charlie with a grin, clapping his hand on his shoulder and making Charlie's entire body jolt down. "What do I do with it now? Do we burn it?"

"No." Charlie laughed. "You're meant to decorate it. But... I have no idea how we're gonna prop

that upright.”

“Gah.” Edin grunted and waved a big hand. “Easy.”

“Scratch, don’t hurt yourself—” I needlessly said, stepping forward as Edin turned and grasped the trunk of the pine.

He shoved the entire tree back just a little, then placed his boot on the roughly split end of the trunk. I blinked in disbelief as I eyed it. It looked like he’d just... shoved the tree over. Used his sheer weight to crack through the trunk and topple it.

Edin’s big hands wrapped around the sides of the thick trunk. Using his boot as counter leverage, he grunted and somehow—*somehow*—slowly lifted the entire tree until it was upright. Charlie and I followed it, our heads tilting up—and up—to watch the top of the ponderosa shudder gently, dwarfing everything around it—including the house.

“Now that’s a fucking Christmas tree.” Charlie nudged me with his elbow, face flushed with a wide grin.

I rolled my eyes, lips twitching into a smile. “And how you gonna get decorations all over that, champ?”

“More importantly, how are we going to keep it upright?” Charlie said, and we eyed Edin holding the trunk steady.

He grinned. “That is easy.”

Wrapping his thick arms around the trunk, he bent his knees slightly, and shoved down with all his strength. The earth split beneath the trunk, and the tree jolted down as Edin shoved it into the ground.

“Jesus Christ, Edin,” Charlie spluttered, turning to look at me with wide eyes. “How does he not break you in half every night?”

“Dude,” I barked, shooting him a dirty look even as my face got hot.

“It’s a valid question!” Charlie gestured over at Edin, who had shoved the tree trunk another few feet into the ground. “*Look* at him.”

I did, and felt my mouth twist into a wide grin. Shit, Edin was so hot—especially when he was showing off his immense strength. His wide back bulged with muscle, shoulders straining and all the veins in his arms standing out in sharp relief.

My cock twitched in my pants as I tilted my head, letting my eyes drift down to his ass beneath his kilt.

“Do *not* ruin my Christmas vibes by getting horny.” Charlie shoved at my shoulder and turned to walk back to the house. “Stop checking out your monster and come help me get the decorations.”

I reluctantly turned to follow him into the kitchen, grabbing the second soft cardboard box and taking it outside while he picked up the garland he’d left on the floor.

“How are you gonna decorate it?” I asked him, setting the box down on the edge of the deck and opening the top.

“Maybe Edin can help me up?” Charlie glanced up at him, and Edin nodded with a grin as he finished shoving an entire fucking tree into the earth like it was nothing. “We’ll just hang some on the front lower bit.”

“Now what?” Edin jumped up onto the deck eagerly, barely even breathing hard from felling and dragging an enormous tree to the homestead. “What next?”

I chuckled, crossing over and cupping his big face in my hands. “We need something to roast for dinner, but I can do it.”

“No, I will hunt for you.” Edin tugged me closer and kissed me, then nuzzled at my scarred cheek. “I will hunt extra. You said you have a feast, yes?”

“Hell yeah,” Charlie piped up before I could tell Edin he didn’t need to do more work than was necessary. “I want to eat until I can’t fucking move.”

Edin looked at me earnestly. “Do you also wish to eat until you can’t move, josdo?”

I chuckled. “No, I’m good with eating a normal amount.”

He grinned wickedly, and I knew exactly where his mind went. “Excellent.”

My cock twitched again, especially when Edin gave me a final kiss, with a tiny nip of his fangs, before pulling back.

“I will hunt your Christmas meat,” he announced imperiously, jumping off the deck and striding back toward the forest. His tail swished contentedly, and he patted the trunk of his pine tree—now standing monstrously tall over the deck and the house—as he passed it.

Charlie set about decorating. He concentrated his efforts on the deck, seeing as that was where we would be eating, under the shadow of our new gigantic Christmas tree.

I helped him until Edin returned with a wild chicken, a rabbit and a wanuk slung over his shoulder and a big grin on his face. He passed me his catch with a quick kiss, so I let him take over helping Charlie as I went around the side of the house to the spot where we dressed our kills.

“Can you get the fire going when you’re done?” I called back, looking over my shoulder to see Edin bodily lifting Charlie into the air with his big hands wrapped around his waist.

Charlie burst out laughing, stretching up to hang decorations on the lowest branches of the enormous tree. He shot me a distracted thumbs up as Edin lowered him back down to grab more decorations.

I rolled my eyes and left them to it. Once I’d finished dressing Edin’s catches, I went and built the fire myself, seeing as the pair of them were goofing around like kids as they hung up the rest of the decorations.

Soon the meat was roasting over the fire and I went inside and got the pot of vegetables to boil. This was already *way* better than any Christmas meal Charlie and I had had out on the field. We had actual, fresh vegetables and enough meat to last us several days.

Edin and Charlie had covered the very lowest branches of the pine in gaudy, retro decorations. The garland was wrapped around its trunk, for some reason, and Charlie had gone and collected all the solar lanterns from the basement and bunker. Several were hung from the tree, with more dotted around the deck.

Once all the food was cooking over the fire, we split up to go and make each other our crappy little gifts. Charlie and I had a brief bickering match as we both tried to rummage through the cardboard boxes filled with Christmas stuff. He snatched away a stocking before I could grab it, shooting me a smirk as he rose and walked off into the house.

I grunted in irritation, but a second later I found a set of jingle bells tucked into the corner of the box. Glancing over at Edin, who was striding back into the forest, my mouth twitched with a tiny smile as I rose and went inside to start preparing my gifts.

—

Charlie was teetering on the edge of drunk—though he’d call it pleasantly merry—by the time we finished eating our Christmas dinner. He was laughing with Edin about something stupid as I gathered up our plates and the rest of the meat, carrying it all inside to store in containers and place our dishes

in the sink.

When I stepped back outside into the cool darkness of the night, I froze.

Charlie made a long, abrasive sound, kind of like a donkey, as he tried to hold back his snort of laughter. He failed.

“Come sit on Santa’s lap, Hunter,” Edin rumbled, leaning back from his cross-legged position on the deck and gesturing at me with a wide, wicked grin.

He was wearing a red and white Santa’s hat—no, wait, he was wearing *two* of them. One over each horn.

My face burned pink, and I slowly turned my eyes to Charlie and glared at him. “Did you put him up to this?”

“No, I wanted to fulfil your tradition,” Edin said, and I could hear the laughter he was trying to suppress. “Now I know much of your human customs. You must come and tell me if you have been evil this year, yes? What was it, Charlie? If he deserves to die?”

“Jesus, no.” Charlie just about pissed himself with laughter, making me roll my eyes as I crossed my arms over my chest. “It’s just if he’s been good or bad. You know, whether he’ll get any presents.”

“Ah.” Edin nodded solemnly, gazing at me with his big purple eyes. “Come, josdo. Let Santa judge you.”

I clenched my teeth together and stalked forward, but I paused when I got to Charlie, who was lolling about on the deck, the bottle of rum still in his hand.

“It’s not nice to make him the butt of a joke, Charlie,” I gritted out, feeling a wave of defensive anger rise up for Edin.

Charlie’s face immediately fell. A stab of guilt shot through me when his brows pinched with hurt.

“I wasn’t. I wouldn’t do that, man. I was explaining Santa to Edin and he thought it would be funny to—”

“It was my idea, Hunter.” Edin shot me a wide, fanged grin when I looked over at him. “I knew it would put that surly look on your face. It reminds me of when we met.”

He smiled at me sweetly—too sweetly, which made me snort.

“Okay, fine.” I walked over and sat myself in Edin’s lap, pressing my back to his chest and sighing when his big arms wrapped around me tight from behind.

Charlie cleared his throat, back to smirking at me. “Anyway, *you’re* the butt of the joke, you jackass. Not Edin.”

I grunted in response, trying not to close my eyes with bliss when Edin nuzzled my neck, just beneath my earlobe.

Charlie looked away quickly, having another sip of rum. I knew he wasn’t jealous of either of us, but his words earlier made me wonder if he was jealous of... what we had. Or maybe not even jealous. Maybe he just really wanted it for himself. And he was right—he wouldn’t get it if he stayed here.

Not unless Danny and Wyn decided to bring an eligible bachelor along with them when they eventually came to visit us.

“Well, that was the best meal I’ve had in a long time,” Charlie announced, patting his flat stomach as he leaned back on an elbow. “Thanks, Edin. And you too, Hunter.”

I grunted, distracted by Edin’s big hands slipping under the hem of my shirt to stroke my stomach.

“Shall we do the gifts?” Charlie asked.

That succeeded in stopping Edin’s hands dead.

“Yes,” he said eagerly. “The gifts.”

Charlie grinned and scrambled up, walking unsteadily to the small pile we'd made off to the side. "Is gift-giving important to your people, Edin?"

I tensed up, expecting Edin to go stiff against me. He didn't have any of his people anymore, but that wasn't Charlie's fault. He didn't know that.

But Edin's big body remained relaxed around me. "Yes, we enjoyed giving trinkets to one another in our pack." He gave my neck a playful bite. "A way of showing who our favourites were."

Charlie snorted with laughter as he settled back beside the fire with the hastily wrapped presents swaddled in old scarves and pillowcases. "Well, I think we all know who your favourite is here."

"You are my favourite in other ways, Charlie," Edin told him earnestly, which made Charlie's cheeks flush with pleasure. Or maybe that was the rum.

"You too, big guy." Charlie shot me a wide, slightly sloppy grin. "You're *way* better than Hunter. Have I said that before? He sucks compared to you."

Edin boomed out a big laugh, squeezing me closer as I shot Charlie a dirty look. He'd said it *plenty* of times already, finding it hilarious. At first, Edin had bristled, his arms and shoulders swelling with tension as he glared at Charlie, ready to defend my honour.

When we'd explained it was just a joke, he'd paused, then burst out laughing. And then—much to my aggravation—joined in every fucking time Charlie made the same goddamn joke. Together, they were like annoying little kids.

"Okay, presents," Charlie announced, just a touch too loud as he squinted down at the gifts in the low light of the fire. "This one's heavy as shit."

"That's Hunter's," Edin said immediately, and my brows hiked up when Charlie passed it to me and I realised just how heavy it was.

"Jesus, scratch, did you wrap a brick?"

Edin snickered and kissed the back of my neck. "No. You will see."

"Okay, this is Hunter's from me... and Edin's from me..." Charlie finished handing out the rest of the gifts until we each had two in front of us.

I slid off Edin's lap so he'd be able to unwrap his. Charlie had a final noisy gulp of rum before gesturing for us to open them.

I opened mine from Charlie first. It was a stack of tiny brown envelopes, held together with a rubber band. My brows twitched with confusion as I carefully flicked through them, realising each one had the name of a fruit or vegetable written on the front in Charlie's messy handwriting.

"What's this?"

"Oh, um, I've been drying out and storing the seeds from the stuff we've grown, so you can keep growing them." He shot me a slightly bleary smile. "Was going to give them to you before I left, but thought now would be good."

Inexplicably, a huge lump formed in my throat as I stared down at the envelopes.

"Charlie, I..." I shook my head. "These are supposed to be silly gifts. Not... good stuff. If I'd known, I—"

"It's fine." He grinned at me. "I mean, two years ago you would've called seeds a silly gift, wouldn't you? So..." He shrugged. "Merry Christmas."

Edin was watching us in silence. I pinched my mouth pinched into a tight line to stop myself from blurting out that Charlie should stay here, and when I looked at Edin, he gave me a tiny, sad smile.

"Anyway." I cleared my throat and gestured at the short, silky, floral patterned robe Charlie had unwrapped—my gift to him. "Remember when I found one of those in that hotel down south?"

I knew Charlie wouldn't care about the pattern, or the fact that it was technically "made for

women”, but a short, silky robe was not exactly conducive to surviving a hostile environment like the Wastes.

He snorted a laugh. “Yeah. This one’s in slightly better condition, huh? This is actually nice, man. I’m gonna use this.”

He’d unwrapped his gift from Edin too. It was a narrow crown of pine needles, which Edin had bent and twisted into shape. Charlie fucking *beamed* as he shoved it on his head.

“A goddamn crown. Edin, this is *amazing*. Hunter, look. I have a fucking crown.”

“I see it, champ.”

“Open yours, josdo,” Edin rumbled from beside me. I could hear the mischievous smile in his voice.

I realised why when I pulled the scarf off my heavy gift. It took me a few seconds, and Charlie got there first, bursting out laughing. When I finally worked it out, I slowly looked up at Edin.

“Edin, is this—”

“A likeness of my cock, yes,” he said brightly, then made a face. “Well. The best I could find. It’s not quite as big, but... the shape is almost there. Isn’t it, josdo?”

My face flamed as I stared down at the chunk of rock in my hand. The long, phallic, hefty chunk of rock, that... actually, yeah, did kind of resemble Edin’s dick. There was a crack in the stone that almost looked like the vein he had—

“Is this a custom, Edin?” Charlie sounded *way* too interested. “Or did you literally just see a dick-rock and decide Hunter would like it?”

I shot him a dirty look as Edin laughed. “No, it’s a custom. It is not to be *used*. It is to remind your mate of what will be returning whenever we have to leave our pack for a night or two.”

Charlie snorted. “Oh, *okay*, it’s a likeness of your dick that Hunter can stare at longingly when you’re not around.” He gave a serious nod, but his eyes gleamed with mirth—directed solely at me, and solely at my expense. *Fucking Charlie*. “I understand.”

“Yeah, well, I will,” I snapped, grabbing Edin’s craggy chin and jerking him in for a hard kiss. “Thanks, scratch. I love it.”

Edin beamed and rubbed his cheekbone over my hair. “I am glad, josdo.”

I pulled back and nodded down at the two gifts still in his lap. “Open yours.”

He picked up the one from me first, his head cocking as he unwrapped the loop of jingle bells.

“They’re to go around the base of your tail,” I told him with a smirk, and Charlie groaned and literally flopped back onto the deck, spilling rum.

“So if I hear the rhythmic tinkle of jingle bells in the night, I will *not* be running out of my room expecting to see Santa.”

“I wouldn’t,” I drawled, grinning when Edin chuckled and actually threaded the bells onto his tail, settling them at the very base on his lower back.

He smirked at me and swished his tail once, the melodic tinkling filling the air over the crackling of our fire. I snorted a laugh and squeezed his thigh, nodding at his final gift.

Charlie had had the same idea as me. He’d wrapped up the stocking and told Edin it was a tail warmer—but only for the last foot or so. Edin laughed and dutifully put it on, though it slipped off the moment his tail gave a twitch.

“Humans are rather fixated on tails,” he noted in a low rumble as he tugged me back onto his lap.

Charlie cocked his head. “Maybe because we don’t have them? I dunno. Yours is cool. It’s like an extra limb—you can literally throw people with it.”

“I can do other things with it too,” Edin rumbled in my ear, making my gut clench with the first low

twinge of arousal.

Yeah. Edin liked to use his tail. A lot.

“Ugh, I know that look.” Charlie waved us away with a loose hand. “I’ll stay out here a while longer. Go fuck like there’s no tomorrow.”

Edin shot up immediately, trying to haul me into the house, but I stopped him with a chuckle to look down at Charlie.

“Have you had a nice day?” I asked him. “Maybe lay off the booze now, man. You never drink.”

“Yeah, I’m good.” He grinned up at me. “It’s been great. Thank you. Both of you.”

I hesitated for a moment longer before going inside with Edin. It only took me a few steps to slip the bells off his tail with a groan of laughter, the sound already pissing me off.

“Are you alright, josdo?” Edin asked as we thumped up the stairs.

“Yeah, I’m good.” I rubbed my face. I didn’t want to kill the mood, but... “I’m gonna miss him.”

Edin grunted, reaching back and blindly finding my hand as we made our way down the hall to our room. “He will miss you too.”

When we got to our bedroom, Edin hurriedly lit several candles on our nightstands as I closed the door behind us. Once the room was softly lit with flickering orange light, Edin turned and approached. He cupped my jaw in his big hands, staring at me with big, dark eyes.

“Do you regret your decision, josdo?” he asked me solemnly, making my brows pinch. “To stay here, instead of going back with Charlie?”

“No.” I kissed him hard. “Never. Not for a single fucking second. I love you, scratch. More than anything.”

That made him shoot me a huge, fanged grin, even as his eyes gleamed with emotion. Edin was such a secret softie, which just made me love him even more. My big, soft-hearted monster.

“Although...” I wrapped my arms around his neck and grinned up at him. “Maybe you should remind me of some of the *perks* I get from staying with you.”

Edin growled and hefted me into his arms, making my cock lurch in my pants.

“Shit, why does it make me hard when you manhandle me,” I grunted as he carried me over to the bed. I quickly pulled the Santa hats off his horns.

“Because you love it when I boss you around.” He deposited me on the mattress and straightened up, standing imperiously beside the bed with his hands on his hips. “Clothes off, Hunter.”

I scrambled to comply embarrassingly fast, yanking off my boots and socks before jumping up to pull off my pants. Edin smirked and decided to help, tugging my shirt up and off before dropping to his knees as he urged me to sit on the edge of the mattress.

Kissing the front of my thigh, his long fingers deftly removed my prosthetic and sock as he glanced up at me with big, deep purple eyes. My cock bucked, already filling rapidly, and it only got harder when Edin’s gaze drifted down to it jerking under my boxer briefs.

“Didn’t I tell you to take *all* your clothes off, Hunter?” he rumbled, reaching up and curling his fingers under the waistband of my underwear to yank them down.

I chuckled and lifted my hips, then shuffled back on the bed to lie down. Edin climbed over me, straddling my hips, and I was practically salivating as I greedily took in his huge, ripped body and slid my hands up his thighs under his kilt.

“Is your big dick my final gift, scratch?” I asked with a smirk, my hand creeping up to wrap around his thick length beneath his kilt.

My gut bottomed out at the feel of it. Fuck, it was so hard. And *so big*.

Edin rumbled out a laugh and leaned down to kiss me. I could feel his tail brushing over my balls

as it swished back and forth, making me let out a strangled groan into his mouth.

“Not tonight, josdo.” He scraped his fangs along my jaw. “Tonight, I want *your* big cock.”

Oh shit. My dick bucked eagerly. I fucking *loved* when Edin bottomed, because he always did it from the top, so to speak. He was still always in charge, and there was nothing I loved more than being held down and overpowered by my big purple monster.

Sitting up, he reached out to the nightstand.

“Get it ready for me, josdo.” He smirked at me as he handed over the bottle of oil, standing up to strip off his kilt.

My mouth went dry when his enormous cock sprang up as his kilt pooled around his feet. I’d already slicked up my cock, but I kept stroking as I stared at Edin’s big body, my eyelids getting heavy with lust.

“Fuck yeah, scratch,” I rasped as he climbed back on top, straddling me and looking down with a wicked, fanged grin.

He pried my hand off my cock and pinned both wrists to the pillow above my head, making me grit my teeth to hold back a needy moan.

“First I want to feel your tongue, josdo.”

Edin kept my wrists pinned as he knee-walked higher up my body. I sank my teeth into my lower lip, then released it when the hot head of his cock brushed my mouth. It was already leaking, and I couldn’t help but moan as I gave the sensitive V on the underside a wet, licking kiss.

When I looked up at Edin, he was already gazing down at me with a wicked grin, looking every inch a demon. His proud horns curved up over his forehead, the left one ending jaggedly. His lavender skin gleamed in the candlelight. His cock was a hot, heavy weight against my mouth and chin.

I licked again, and Edin snarled. His fingers tightened around my wrists, pushing them harder into the bed, and my eyes slid shut with bliss when he slowly arched his hips, dragging the hot length of his shaft across my waiting tongue.

“Mmm.” I shivered when I felt the thin, sinuous length of his tail spiral around my straining cock and squeeze. “Fuck,” I gasped, my hips flexing up, then jerking when his tail circled my nuts and tugged.

It continued even lower, sliding down until it brushed over my hole. I grunted, thighs falling open wider. I could feel the sharp, dagger-like tip of his tail brushing my inner thigh, but it only made my cock reel even harder.

“Edin,” I rasped, and I would have been embarrassed by how needy my voice sounded in any other situation.

I tongued his balls feverishly before he dragged his cock back down across my mouth. He gave me time to lick up the pre-cum spilling from the tip before he was moving down my body, his tail curling back around the base of my cock and tilting it up. I shuddered with anticipation, my wrists still pinned by his big hands, my chest heaving with my panting breaths.

My lips parted with a little gasp, head craning back when Edin slowly sank down onto my cock. I shuddered when I felt his tail wind around my balls, cinching tight and making me grin and wince at the same time.

Edin rumbled, transferring both my wrists to one hand so the other could clasp my face as he leaned down.

“So hard already,” he murmured against my mouth. “I will *not* be happy if you come before I am done with you, Hunter.”

I let out a tight chuckle. "I'll try my best to hold out, scratch."

After a firm kiss, he sat up and lifted his hips until just the head of my cock was still inside his hot body. My breath caught, limbs tightening in anticipation. When he sank back down, I couldn't stop the hoarse groan that left me.

Edin's cock was flushed a deeper purple, jutting out from his hips and dripping. It jerked with his movements as he started rocking harder and faster on my dick, squeezing tight around it while his tail rippled around my balls.

"Jesus," I gritted out, flexing my trapped fingers to try and get the blood flowing back through them. I stared at Edin fucking himself on my cock, practically drooling at the sight. He snarled with pleasure, the sharp tip of his tail lashing over the bed and his thick, muscular thighs flexing.

Snarling again with a shudder, Edin trailed his free hand down my chest before fisting his cock and giving it a solid stroke.

"Fuck," I breathed, struggling to suck in enough air. "That is the hottest thing I've ever seen."

He grunted a breathless laugh, his hips moving faster to match the frantic pace of his hand on his cock. When his big body shuddered with pleasure, he lunged down to kiss me, grunting into my mouth.

"Your cock feels incredible, josdo," he rasped, then thrust his tongue into my mouth, making me moan. I could feel his knuckles dragging over my tense stomach as he furiously stroked his cock—could feel the drip of his pre-cum on my skin.

Shivers broke out all over, making me go hot and cold, my nuts trying to wrench up and hug the base of my shaft, but Edin's tail prevented them from tightening. I panted into his mouth, moaning again as our tongues fought for dominance.

"I need to come, scratch," I mumbled shakily against his mouth when we finally broke apart.

Edin chuffed out a deep laugh and nipped my chin, then my neck. "You like being inside me, josdo?"

"Fuck." My voice was husky, tinged with desperation. "Yeah. Shit, Edin, please—"

He rumbled out a low sound and rubbed his horn against the side of my face before sitting up. His hips moved faster, slamming down again and again. His ass was so hot and tight around me, and when his tail finally unwound from around my balls, I barked out a pleased shout, my head craning back.

"Edin," I panted desperately, fingers curling into fists, still trapped above my head. "I'm gonna come—"

"Yes." He stared down at me from above, his free hand curling around my jaw to hold my head steady, to keep me looking up at him. I swallowed, loving the possessive hold. The restraint on my wrists. His huge, muscular body on top of me, using my cock for his pleasure.

Fuck, he was amazing.

"Edin." My voice trembled out of me, hips trying to buck up and get deeper inside him. He snarled and slammed down, sinking my cock as deep as it could go.

I shouted in bliss and arched, my vision greying out when hot pleasure exploded from my groin and made all my limbs tingle. My cock flexed inside Edin, flooding him with cum. He snarled again and stiffened above me, hips jerking as his hand lost its smooth rhythm on his length until it spasmed and he grunted out a rough sound.

At the first shot of hot cum that spurted from the tip, we both moaned. He covered my chest and stomach, shuddering over me as my orgasm gradually came to an end.

But he didn't let go of my wrists. Instead, he shot me a wolfish grin as he dipped his head before dragging his tongue through his release painting my heaving chest. I grinned before he clasped my face, forcing my lips apart so he could dip his cum-covered tongue inside.

I moaned and shivered, swallowing everything he fed me. Only then did he release my wrists, raising them to kiss my palms and down my sensitive inner forearms. I exhaled in bliss, melting into the bed as my eyes slid shut.

“I love you,” I mumbled, feeling myself already drifting off as Edin rubbed his cheek over my hair before nuzzling my neck.

“I love you too, josdo,” he rumbled, slowly lifting his hips and leaning over to grab my shirt from the floor. He used it to clean the rest of his release off my stomach before lying down beside me and tugging me onto his chest.

I sprawled out over him, my stump dragging over his thick thigh as I caged him in with my limbs. Edin rumbled a sated sound, big hand sliding down my hip and thigh to palm my stump.

“You had a nice human Christmas then?” he asked, nuzzling my temple.

I smirked and kissed his chest. “Yeah, real nice. Thanks, scratch.”

He grunted. “If I could, I would have hunted down a bahyk for its pelt to give you. They live in the forest my tribe came from. Their pelts are prized—bright white with purple stripes.”

I chuckled. “Sounds nice. Maybe we’ll come across one someday.”

“Mm.”

“Do *you* have any holidays?” I asked him, my voice already slow and lazy with sleepiness. “That we could celebrate?”

He snorted and imperiously told me, “I am of the old races, Hunter. We don’t follow the foolish traditions of the younger folk.”

I lifted my head to shoot him an amused smirk. “Far too important for that, huh?”

He shot me a wolfish grin. “I *am* the last isdernuc.”

“Sure.” I settled my cheek back on his chest, eyes drifting shut. “Well, thanks for giving me and Charlie one more Christmas before he goes back.”

Edin pulled me tighter to him. “Do you think he will go back?”

“Seems like it.” My brows twitched into a sad frown at the thought. “We’ll make sure he gets there safe, at least. And he knows where we are if he ever decides to leave for good.”

“Mm.”

We fell into silence, and I could feel myself drifting off. I fucking loved it here. How peaceful it was. How quiet it was. How simple our life together was, growing food and hunting and chopping firewood and just... being.

I nuzzled Edin’s chest, breathing in his wood and leather scent and soaking up his warmth, content in the knowledge that I would get to do this for the rest of my life.

Ghost and Aury Take a Trip

A short, 8k-word story that features our favourite goblin shark monster baby and his anxious mate, a surprise for Ghost, and a *ahem* new experience for Aury. Enjoy!

Content warnings: Explicit sexual content, 18+ only, mentions of anxiety, mentions of the horrifying chaotic monster that lives inside Aury, a LOT of fluids, Ghost trying to take control, edging

Spoiler warning: Set after the events of *Gloam* (Monstrous: Book Four)

First published 2022 by Lily Mayne
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GHOST

“Ghost!”

The sharp crack of Anchor’s stern voice made my shoulders flinch. Turning with the bundle of fabric in my arms, I gave her a hesitant smile behind my mask.

She was striding across the grass from the diner, clipboard in hand and a determined look in her dark eyes, telling me that I wasn’t going to like what she was about to ask me to do.

“We’re running low on a few essentials,” she said in a no-nonsense tone when she reached me, flipping over the sheets of paper on her clipboard. “I need you to make a run to the market.”

My shoulders slumped. I furtively glanced around for Aury or Rig, but couldn’t see either of them. I’d thought Aury was in the vegetable patch, but I couldn’t see his wings from here.

“Um...” I shifted the bundle in my arms. “Okay. I just need to—”

“Can you go today?” She wasn’t looking at me as she scribbled something down. “You and Aury?”

My gut clenched. Going out into the Wastes wasn’t so bad anymore, now that I had Aury. I felt safe with him.

But it still sucked.

Clearing my throat, I lifted the fabric in my arms slightly. “I was actually just going to sew Aury —”

“Sorry, Ghost, but we really need this stuff now. Apollo needs more bandages and a few other things. We need salt. I’ve got a pack of stuff to trade all ready for you. I really need you to set off today.”

Resentment flared in my belly, and for a moment, I thought I had it in me to refuse. To just tell her no, we wouldn’t go *straight away* just because she wanted us to. That I had stuff to do first.

But I heard myself quietly say, “Okay.”

“Great.” She flipped the papers back and looked at me. “Go pack a bag and I’ll get the pack to trade.”

My mouth twisted under my mask as she turned and strode toward the bar without a look back. I slowly started walking to our room, my steps dragging. The market was at least a week’s walk from here.

Aury wasn’t in our room, but as I stepped inside I could hear him murmuring softly in the yard out back. It helped to chase off some of the bitterness pinching my features, and after dumping the fabric on the table, I went back outside to meet him.

He was sitting on the ground in the yard, legs loosely crossed with Trixie on his lap, Ginger perched precariously on one of his long toes, and Bianca glaring with beady eyes from a short distance away.

He lifted his head when the metal gate squeaked as I pushed it open, giving me a big beaming smile.

I grinned back as I tugged down my mask, letting it hang around my neck. “Hi.”

Crouching beside him, I rested a hand on his thigh and leaned in for a kiss. Trixie squawked indignantly and hopped off his lap, flapping her wings to let me know that she didn't appreciate sharing him.

Aury smiled into the kiss, dropping another on my cheek when I pulled back.

"Are you alright?" he asked, curling a hand around my hip.

"Yeah, but... Anchor has asked if we can go to the market to get some stuff." I winced. "She wants us to go today. Like, now."

"That's fine." Aury twitched his clawed toe until Ginger reluctantly hopped off, then stood gracefully. "Shall we pack your bag?"

I sighed, slipping my hand into his. "I guess."

He looked down at me as we walked out of the yard. "You don't want to go?"

"I was going to start making your new coat," I grumbled.

"I don't mind waiting for it." Aury opened our bedroom door and placed a gentle hand on my lower back to usher me through. "And it's best for us to go now before the weather starts getting worse."

He was right. It was getting cold quickly, which meant snow soon. I was still pissed as I packed my bag, shoving in clothes, my small medical kit and a blanket because I knew there weren't that many safe shelters between here and the underground raider market, so we'd probably be spending a night or two camped outside. The thought made me sigh as I zipped up my backpack and glanced back longingly at our bed.

At least I could take a proper weapon on trips into the Wastes now. Not just my useless gun and crowbar. Aury and I had brought back a cache of weapons from the soldiers we'd encountered on our way back from the Topeka camp, and he made sure I always got one before we went anywhere.

Before we left our room, I pulled on my gloves and fitted my gas mask back over my mouth. As we stepped outside, I saw Lilac and Anchor walking over from the bar, the former carrying a big duffel bag that he promptly handed to Aury.

I eyed it. "What's that?"

"Your food and the goods to trade," Lilac said flatly.

"Oh." I fidgeted with the strap of my backpack. "Do we need such a big bag? I don't want Aury to have to carry that—"

"It's fine, Ghost," Aury said softly, smoothing a hand over my hair. "It's not heavy."

Anchor was grinning behind her plain green mask as she and Lilac followed us to the container entrance. "Have fun, you two."

Fun? I resisted the urge to shoot her an unimpressed look as Aury stepped into the container, the claws on his wings scraping the metal ceiling.

"Take your time," Lilac said, crossing his arms as he watched us. "We'll be fine here. I'll look after the girls."

I snorted. "We're not going to draw it out. The market isn't fun. We'll be back as soon as we can."

Because I wanted to sleep in my bed with my big monster, not in a crappy old gas station or on the hard ground.

"Mhmm," Lilac said, raising a hand in goodbye as I followed Aury out of the camp.

"I could fly us some of the distance," Aury said when I fell into step beside him, threading his fingers through my gloved ones.

My stomach twisted into an anxious knot. He'd offered several times to fly me places. But the thought of being that high off the ground, precariously held in his arms...

I trusted Aury with my life, but still. All it would take was a moment of distraction and I'd be plummeting to my death. I shuddered, trying to push the memory of the wind rushing past my ears as I fell from the camp wall. Cutter's furious eyes, Lilac's horrified ones. The awful, anguished sound Aury had made when I'd vanished over the lip of the wall.

"It's okay." I smiled up at him. "At least I have you with me this time. And it might be nice to be alone for a little while. Even though Gloam and Rig have moved one door over, I can still hear them sometimes."

Aury chuckled. "Yes. They are certainly... passionate."

My cheeks heated yet again at the memory of Rig telling us he'd heard us fucking through the wall. He'd mentioned hearing something the morning after mine and Aury's first night together, but... I hadn't realised we'd been *that* loud.

I glanced up at Aury through my eyelashes. Maybe if we found somewhere safe and secure out here, with a relatively clean bed... We could be as loud as we wanted.

The Wastes were quiet as we walked. But then, they always were now. Everything avoided Aury, which meant any monsters that we did see quickly vanished. But after a few hours of walking, I realised that Aury was veering off course.

"We need to keep going this way," I told him with a smile, squeezing his hand.

He shook his head. "No, there's a quicker way."

My brows twitched into a frown. "We're basically walking in a straight line. There isn't a quicker way."

Aury chuckled, coming to a stop and turning to face me. He clasped my chin and dipped his head to kiss me. "Trust me, Gage. We go this way."

I huffed, even as I allowed him to tug me in the wrong direction. "I've made this journey lots of times, Aury. We need to keep heading—"

In a rush of movement, Aury picked me up and shot forward, his wings giving a single powerful flap to propel us. I squawked, clinging to his arms where they wrapped tightly around my middle, and felt his breath ghost over my ear as he chuckled.

He set me down on a low branch of a towering oak, and my gloved fingers scrabbled over the rough bark to steady myself. I was panting lightly, my heart pounding.

I shot him a mock glare as he hovered in front of me, his feet barely off the ground and his wings lazily flapping to keep him suspended. With a mischievous grin, he tugged down my mask and swooped up to kiss me.

Before I could even properly kiss him back, he shot up into the air.

"Aury!" I spluttered, peering down at the ground. "You can't leave me in this tree!"

I jumped when his face suddenly swung down in front of me—upside down. Looking up, I saw his big bird feet curled tightly around a higher branch.

"Hello," he said with a teasing smile.

I couldn't stop the grin that stretched my mouth. His black hair hung in a wavy waterfall, the sun reflecting off its emerald sheen. His wings were tucked into his body, and I felt the curving talons at the top of the fingers brush my jacket as I carefully leaned forward.

Long fingers squeezed my thighs as our lips met, sliding up and making me shiver. I'd never kissed anyone upside down before, and for some reason the sensation of our tongues meeting at this angle in a slow glide made my cock twitch in my pants.

Aury moaned softly into my mouth, his lips and tongue growing hungry. Gripping the branch tightly with one hand, I raised the other to cup the back of his head, sifting my fingers through silky strands of

hair.

The kiss made me forget I was sitting precariously in a tree. The anxiety melted away with every slow thrust of Aury's forked tongue, until I leaned closer and felt my body pitching forward before I jolted back, heart hammering.

Aury smiled and nuzzled my cheek—still upside down. "I won't let you fall, Gage."

"No, I know." I peered down anxiously. "But maybe—Shall we get going? It's a long walk to the market, and now you're taking us some weird route I don't know. How do you even know where the market is?"

Aury laughed, swinging up before his feet uncurled from the branch above. He gathered me into his arms, pressing a kiss to my hair as my boots touched the ground.

"I know where I'm going, Gage," he said with a teasing smile, picking up the duffle from the ground and slinging it over his shoulder.

I huffed, but threaded my fingers through his and let him pull me in the direction he chose. Which was the *wrong direction*.

Maybe Anchor had told him to go to a different market? But they hadn't spoken before we left. And why would she do that?

I got a bit tense as we kept walking. Where was Aury taking us? I parted my lips beneath my gas mask to ask several times, but nervously stayed quiet instead.

"Are you alright, Gage?" Aury asked gently when we'd been walking for a while, squeezing my hand.

We'd cleared the forest and were crossing wide, flat fields with long grass and rolling hills in the distance. It was chilly, but the sky was bright blue behind the clouds. I gripped Aury's hand tighter when I heard something skittering through the long grass, hidden, but then whatever it was let out a terrified squeak and raced away.

"I'm okay." I shot Aury a hesitant smile. "But, um... Aury, this is definitely the wrong way for the market."

He stopped and turned to face me. I squawked when he swept me up into his arms, my legs snapping around his hips as I clung to his shoulders.

As he nuzzled my cheekbone just above the edge of my mask, his lips curved into a mischievous smile. "We're not going to the market."

"What?" My eyes darted to the duffle slung over his shoulder. "But Anchor said—"

"Do you trust me, Gage?"

I huffed. "Yes, but—"

My words ended with a scream when Aury shot forward with incredible speed, his wings giving a powerful flap until we were airborne. My heart lurched, my fingers digging into his shoulders too hard.

"I won't go high off the ground," he said in my ear, the wind whistling past us. When he dipped his head and kissed my neck, I shivered while simultaneously clenching up with fear.

"Aury! Shouldn't you watch where you're going?"

He chuckled. "I am."

"Wh-where *are* we going?" I refused to look down at the ground blurring beneath us. I was used to heights thanks to the camp wall, but this was height at *speed*. There was no solid metal under my boots, just air. Air that was rushing past us very fast.

"I know you don't like surprises, Gage." Aury kissed my neck again, his lips so warm in contrast to the cold air chilling my skin. "But you will like this one."

That almost made me relax—almost. I trusted Aury and he knew me better than anyone. But even as he told me I'd like this *surprise*—I couldn't imagine *any* surprise in the Wastes being a good one—he angled his body up and started flying higher. And higher.

I clutched his shoulders with clawing fingers, panting in fear, trying not to make a sound like a total baby. I got a little dizzy, and even when I felt the gentle impact of Aury's feet hitting the ground, my head still spun for a few seconds.

He kissed the top of my head, carefully setting me on my feet and leaving his hands on my shoulders. "Are you alright, Gage?"

"Yeah," I said faintly, tugging down my gas mask with trembling fingers to suck in a full breath.

Aury cupped my face the moment it was revealed, tilting my chin up. He grinned down at me, black eyes gleaming in the sun, their pinpricks of colour so bright in this light. The burn scars on his cheek looked ruddy, the texture rough. My chest ached at the sight, making me stretch up to kiss him on the cheek.

His head turned, his movements fast like a predator, to capture my lips with his. One hand cupped my chin, thumb stroking the corner of my mouth, while the other raked my windswept hair back from my face before cradling the back of my head.

Before I could get too distracted, I broke the kiss to smile up at him. "Okay. Where have you brought me?"

A mischievous smile tilted his lips. Settling his hands back on my shoulders, he gently spun me before looping his arms loosely around my neck.

I blinked at the tiny cabin. It was set back from the ridge Aury had flown us up to, and looked like an old, single-room cabin, the wood weathered but the roof intact. A stone chimney rose up on one side, and while the glass was gone from the small old windows, I could see curtains covering them from the inside.

There were fairy lights strung up along the front porch. I blinked at them, then looked up at Aury. "Does someone live here?"

"No." He kissed my head before tangling our fingers together and tugging me forward. "Lilac and I have been cleaning it for us."

"Lilac?" I echoed, letting him pull me toward the cabin. "Huh?"

Aury chuckled, glancing over at me. "When he and I went foraging the other day, we actually came here. He let me fly him here so we could be quick." He nudged me playfully with his elbow.

My cheeks heated as I rolled my eyes. "Okay, Lilac's fearless, unlike me."

Aury stopped, turning to cup my face. "I don't need you to be fearless, Gage," he told me earnestly. "I will keep you safe."

I grinned up at him. "I know."

Taking my hand again, he led us to the cabin's front porch. "It was Anchor's idea for us to come here for a few days, to be alone."

"Anchor? But she wanted us to go to the market." Realisation dawned, and my face grew hotter as I silently acknowledged how slowly I was catching on. "Oh. Okay. That was just... a ruse."

"Yes." Aury shot me a tiny smile. "She fooled you well."

I immediately felt guilty for the resentment that had flared when Anchor asked us to go to the market. I'd sew her a new mask when we got back, I decided. Or some socks. Aury loved the socks I'd made him.

Excitement bubbled when Aury opened the front door and gestured for me to step inside. It was small but cosy—and *clean*. Lilac and Aury had done a great job. The floors were swept, the surfaces

wiped down. The fireplace had been cleaned and was already laid, ready to be lit.

The metal bedframe was bare, the mattress gone, but the old couch had been covered in a clean blanket. More blankets were piled up on the floor in front of the fireplace. Most furniture had been scavenged over the years, and the kitchen cabinets were bare, but candles had been dotted around, some new, others half-melted already. I knew they came from the camp stores—I'd scavenged them myself.

We were out in the Wastes, but this was *nice*. My wide grin made my cheeks ache as I looked around, clutching Aury's hand. This would be like a little vacation—just me and Aury. No camp chores. No guard shifts keeping watch on the wall.

No listening to the faint sounds of Rig and Gloam fucking like animals every night.

I spun around and cupped Aury's face, tugging him down from his towering height so I could kiss him.

"Thank you," I mumbled against his mouth. "This is amazing. No one's ever done anything like this for me."

My face burned when my vision went a little blurry. I blinked quickly to get rid of it, but I knew Aury had already noticed. He nuzzled my cheek, cradling the back of my head with long fingers.

"We can come here whenever you like." He pulled back to smile at me. "Whenever things get too much. Lilac has said he will look after the girls when we do, and Anchor said you just need to say we're going to the cabin. It doesn't matter when."

I nodded quickly, sniffing, feeling embarrassed even though I was just with Aury. The thought of having a little safe space—somewhere that was just *ours*, away from everything—loosened something in my chest. That tight little knot of anxiety that was always there—something I'd grown used to, living in the camp.

I wasn't built for being surrounded constantly by people. The benefits of camp life outweighed the drawbacks, but that didn't mean it wasn't hard living in such a tiny, close-knit community.

But now we had this place. I gave Aury a watery grin, then tucked my face under his chin to breathe in the scent of his throat. My eyes slid shut, my body relaxing against his chest as he wrapped his arms around me.

I was *definitely* making Anchor new socks when we got back. I'd make Lilac some too.

"How did you even find this place?" I asked Aury, turning in the cradle of his arms to survey the cabin again.

"Anchor remembered it," he told me. "From the early years of the camp. We didn't know what state it would be in—or if anything would be living here—but I flew here to see. It was empty."

"So you've been sneaking off, huh?" I playfully bumped his chin with the top of my head. "*I'm* the one who's supposed to be good at sneaking and noticing things! How did you all keep me from realising?"

"I'm good at distracting you," Aury murmured in my ear, making my belly heat with desire.

We'd be alone all night. All day. We could be as loud as we wanted here. Even though we were out in the Wastes, technically exposed without the safety of the camp wall, I wasn't worried. Aury would keep me safe. I knew he would. Besides, everything avoided him anyway. Nothing would come close to the cabin while he was here.

I couldn't help turning again to grin up at him, rising on my tiptoes to kiss him. "I love you."

His sweet face softened. Cupping my chin and giving me another firm kiss, he gazed down at me with big, sombre eyes.

"I love you too, my Gage."

AURY

“Okay, so if this was all a ruse concocted by you, Anchor and Lilac... what’s in the bag?” Gage quirked a brow at me, cheeks still sweetly flushed from his surprise.

I stroked my thumb over one before releasing his face to tug the duffle bag off my shoulder. “Food, clothes, more blankets and things.”

“Did you pack your nightie?” Gage asked as he followed me over to the couch, slipping his own backpack off his shoulders.

“Of course I packed my nightie, Gage,” I told him solemnly, but looked back over my shoulder with a teasing smile.

The big T-shirt with an owl pattern that Gage had given me was one of my favourite things. I had slipped it into his backpack while he wasn’t looking before we’d left the camp.

“And our towels,” I added, pulling them out of the bag. “There is a stream nearby where we can get water and wash. Do you want to go now?”

“Yes,” he said quickly. His head was bent as he pulled things out of his bag, gaze studiously diverted, but I could see the flush on his cheeks. I knew what it meant.

My mouth twitched into a tiny smile.

“We can stay as long as we want,” I told him. “There’s no rush.”

“No, I know, but...” His face was still pink as he came over and took my hand. “Um... you know. We’re alone. So...”

“Yes.” I smiled down at him and tugged him toward the door. “We are. Let’s go.”

“Um, is our stuff safe here?” he asked, glancing back worriedly at the bags.

“Yes. The stream isn’t far. I’d be able to sense anything getting close.”

“Okay. But, um, what if something smells the food—”

“We won’t be long,” I said easily, kissing the top of his head as we stepped outside.

The walk to the stream was quick and quiet. It was late afternoon, the sky starting to darken as I set down our towels by the edge of the water. Gage undressed quickly after glancing around to make sure we were alone, but he was used to this anyway.

I pulled off my coat and shirt carefully, mindful of my wings. Gage grew distracted when I pulled down my pants and got them over my feet, almost tripping as he hopped on one foot to tug a sock off. His cheeks flushed, eyes fixed on my cock, but he managed to get both socks off before shucking his underwear.

We stared at each other for a second. I would never get tired of the sight of my Gage. His beautiful, slender body, his sun-freckled shoulders and narrow hips. His toned legs and small hands. There were still the remnants of pink nail polish on his fingernails, though I had picked all of mine off when deep in thought while speaking with Gloam.

His cock was already half hard just from looking at me, and mine was no better, but I knew that would change when we got into the water.

“It’s cold,” I warned. Gage cleared his throat and looked away, cheeks flushing deeper.

“Uh-huh.” He carefully stepped down into the water, and I saw his skin prickle from the cold across his shoulders.

I had brought soap, so I passed it to him as I stepped into the water, not really feeling it lapping around my feet. At least this stream wasn’t deep—I didn’t like the feel of water dragging on my wings. Only the tips were submerged as we washed hurriedly. I knew Gage was eager to get back to the cabin, and my mouth curved into a tiny smile as I finished washing and watched him instead.

His erection had gone down from the chilly water, but his cheeks were still flushed. Once he was done, I quickly got his towel ready and wrapped it around him to warm him up. Gage smiled up at me, hair wet and dripping into his eyes, so I got my towel to dry it off before stepping back so we could both get dressed.

“So what food did you bring me?” Gage asked teasingly as we walked back to the cabin, his gas mask looped around his neck seeing as there was no one but us for miles.

I smiled down at him, squeezing his hand. “Daisy and Bo made some of your favourites. There is enough for us to stay for several days, if you want to.”

“Yes,” he blurted immediately. “I want to stay here for as long as we can get away with. Do you think... Um, are others gonna want to come stay here? Like Gloam and Rig...”

I could hear the trepidation in his voice, and I knew he was picturing Gloam and Rig potentially destroying the cabin with their... *passion*.

“No,” I told him. “It’s just for us. Anchor said she won’t breathe a word of it to anyone else.”

He beamed up at me, fingers gripping my hand tighter. My throat ached as I looked back down at him. I didn’t know if I was an anomaly among ryckes, or if those before me *had* been capable of love, or at least affection. My memories told me it was unlikely—possible, but rare. I had memories of long-ago pairs establishing bonds, but those bonds were formed more out of a desire to protect territory or possessions with greater strength. Less about love.

I loved Gage so much it consumed me. I was possessive of him, of course—I was the rycke. It was deeply ingrained in my nature to be fiercely possessive. But I didn’t view him as an actual *possession*. He wasn’t mine to do whatever I wanted with. He was mine because he had *chosen* me. We had chosen each other. He was mine, and I was his, because we would do anything for each other.

And I would. Do anything for him. The thought of killing again horrified me—I was still tormented by what I had already done, the pain and suffering I had already inflicted—but I would kill anyone and anything to keep him safe. Even if it destroyed a part of me in the process.

I didn’t want to be weighed down by melancholy thoughts while we were here, so I raised our linked hands and kissed Gage’s knuckles as we reached the cabin. The sun was setting, and from up here the land looked bathed in murky reds and oranges. A breeze rustled the grass. I could still faintly hear the babbling of the stream we had left.

It was peaceful.

“It’s kinda chilly,” Gage commented as we stepped into the cabin, taking my towel to set both down on the couch next to our bags.

“We cleaned the chimney and Lilac laid the fire so it’s ready. There are matches in the bag.”

I pulled them out and passed them to him, then started removing the containers of food Daisy and Bo had made. I listened to Gage starting the fire while I laid the containers out on the kitchen table in neat rows.

“I’m not sure what some of the food is,” I said, hearing the crackle as the fire caught. “But I can

—”
“It’s okay,” Gage said quickly.

I turned to watch him walk over, his cheeks flushed. When he reached me, he tangled his fingers in mine and pulled me over to the fire. I realised he’d set out a nest of blankets from the bags.

“I’m not hungry.” His cheeks were still pink as he turned and placed his hands on my chest, giving me a shy smile. “Not yet.”

My mouth slowly curved into a mischievous smile. “No?”

He huffed, going even redder, before clasp my face and drawing me down to kiss me. I wrapped my arms around him immediately, my life seed thrumming faster, heating my blood. When Gage’s tongue dipped into my mouth, I dropped my hands to palm his backside and lift him into the air.

The kiss grew all-consuming. When the tip of Gage’s soft tongue tickled between the fork of mine, I shuddered, my cock filling rapidly. He knew how sensitive that was. He knew, because I had told him how keenly I could feel the heat of his cock when I teased the crown with the forked tip of my tongue.

I clutched him tighter to me. My wings flexed, my toes curling, the talons gouging into the wooden floor. Without breaking the kiss, I managed to get us to the nest of blankets, nestling my hips between Gage’s spread thighs. We both moaned when the stiff lengths of our cocks rubbed together through fabric.

Gage was breathing hard beneath me, his tongue thrusting hungrily into my mouth. I felt his fingers fumbling with the buttons on my shirt, so I reluctantly broke the kiss to pull it off. My cock pulsed as I hurriedly stripped Gage of his clothes, needing to see all of him, needing to feel him bare against me. As I tugged off his boots and yanked down his pants, I sank my mouth over his hard cock, moaning at the feel of him against my tongue.

“G-god.” He shuddered, panting fast. “Aury.”

My mouth curled into a smile as I pulled free and flicked his tip with my tongue. Gage’s thighs spasmed, his chest and throat flushed with arousal, blue eyes beautiful and desperate as he looked down at me.

“I love you, Gage,” I said quietly before kissing the head of his cock.

He shuddered again, eyes briefly squeezing shut. “I l-love you too. Come here.”

I moved up his body, kissing my way up his stomach and chest to his throat. Gage cupped my face, fingers absently stroking the burn scars on my cheek. I turned into the touch and kissed his palm, my chest aching just from being with him like this. My life seed thrummed harder. Not just from want or lust, but from him. His presence. Just... him.

“Get on your back,” Gage whispered, kissing me once before dropping his hands so I could obey.

I settled on the blankets, leaning back on my elbows so my wings weren’t pinned completely to the floor beneath me. They flexed in anticipation as Gage knelt between my spread thighs, his cock flushed and jutting up.

“You’ve done all this for me, so I want to do something for you.” He smiled at me as he fumbled with my pants, tugging them down and carefully off over my feet.

My mouth curved into a tiny smile. My eyelids were heavy with lust as I watched him. “What do you want to do?”

Gage laughed lightly. “It won’t be as fun if I tell you, will it?” Then his gaze darted to my wings, which were steadily stretching and contracting in anticipation. He chewed on his lip. “Are your wings okay like that? We’re—Um, they’re kind of close to the fire.”

“They’re fine, Gage.” I smiled at him. In truth, we *were* quite close to the fire, and my wings tended to... snap out fully when I came. I’d have to be careful to stop them doing that when I did, because my left would probably end up at least partially in the flames.

But in the end, that didn’t matter. Gage dipped his head and started sucking slowly on my cock. So slowly. His fingers teased my sac before sliding back to brush my hole. I tensed and moaned, chest heaving with my quickening breaths despite how soft and slow his mouth was moving.

The pleasure built slowly until I felt it in every part of me. I clenched my teeth, trying to keep my hips still as Gage’s pink tongue wound around the head of my leaking cock. He moaned at the taste of me, greedy for it. My cock swelled, throbbing under his tongue.

“Gage,” I panted, hands clenching into fists at my sides as I kept myself raised on my elbows. Partly for my wings, and partly so I could watch everything he was doing. How slowly he was breaking me apart.

My thighs trembled as the pleasure mounted, becoming overwhelming. He didn’t speed up at all, but it felt so wonderful that it didn’t matter. I didn’t need hard or fast movements. My cock grew agonisingly sensitive, every lick of his soft tongue making me shake. Each slow draw of his mouth tightening my balls until the bliss started to crest, making my life seed thrum.

“Gage—”

He pulled back immediately, breaking all contact. My hips jerked as I panted, thighs spreading wider as if that would help. My cock leapt against my belly, flushed and shiny with wetness from his mouth.

“I was—c-close.”

“I know.” He shot me a mischievous grin before leaning down to kiss my stomach. It dipped with sensitivity. His tongue trailed over to my hip before following the valley of muscle back to my cock.

I held my breath, eyes flaring as I went perfectly still, watching keenly. Waiting. Some deep, violent part of me tried to urge me to grab his head. To thrust into his soft mouth until I went over the edge. I refrained, not wanting to be rough with him. Gage didn’t like rough. He was soft and sweet—such a contrast to the monster that lurked deep within me. The one that I could never escape.

But for him, I tempered it. *Because* of him, I could. I hated that part of me. Hated the violence and destruction and chaos I could cause, but he made it easy to bury deep, to control. He made me better.

I let out a shuddering breath when the tip of his tongue connected with the weeping head of my cock. He sucked it into his mouth in a slow, wet kiss, and my hips bucked before I could stop them.

Gage kissed his way down my length before sliding his tongue over my balls. My thighs jerked open wider to give him as much room as possible. His hands slid up and down my inner thighs, waking up millions of nerve endings, making my cock jerk in the air.

When he pushed on the backs of my thighs, my wings fluttered. Life seed thrumming hard beneath my sternum, I drew my knees up, my breaths trembling out of me. “Gage.”

His tongue brushed over my hole and I cried out, trying to press closer, my cock leaking all over my belly. He licked again, then swirled his tongue, and the pressure started building again immediately. My cock throbbed. I shifted my weight onto one elbow so I could reach down with a trembling hand, intent on stroking myself while Gage licked me.

“No,” he barked, lifting his head to give me a stern look.

I froze immediately. The hideous thing inside me was conditioned to obey him now. It was how we had mastered my control of it. I focused on his voice to calm the beast, and although Gage wasn’t normally demanding, that newly ingrained instinct made me obey him now.

“You can’t come yet,” he told me. I stared at him.

“W-why not?”

“Because I said so.”

My eyes widened with shock, even as my cock throbbed from his stern tone. He held my gaze as he dipped his head and licked my hole again, making my brows pinch with desperation. I slowly drew my arm back.

“W-when can I come?” I couldn’t help but ask, the idea of him not allowing me to making the risk of it happening spontaneously even greater.

He just shrugged one shoulder before closing his eyes as he started licking me in earnest again. I shuddered, toes flexing. My head tipped back, but I forced myself to lift it so I could watch him.

Once I was mere seconds from coming, despite my cock remaining untouched, he stopped again. I clenched my teeth, the desire to obey him warring with the beast inside me, which demanded I *take*. To give us both pleasure, to get as close to him as I possibly could.

He started sucking my cock again, just as slowly as before. But this time, he gathered the fluid coating my stomach and smoothed it over my hole, making it twitch. When he sank a finger inside me, I cried out.

“Gage—”

“Not yet,” he murmured, tongue winding around my cockhead.

The third time he pulled back when I was on the brink of release, I whined. The fourth, I had to bite back a snarl *demanding* he make me come. I was shaking uncontrollably, wings flexing with agitation, and I let out a desperate moan when Gage lifted his head and I saw his achingly stiff cock dripping with pre-cum.

He was breathing as hard as I was, face flushed and eyes heavy. At this point, it would take only a brush of his tongue over the tip of my cock to make me come. And he knew it. My balls ached, cock painfully stiff. My channel clenched around the two fingers inside me, squeezing them tight to try and get relief.

“P-please,” I begged, gazing down at him.

Gage rose up, shuffling forward on his knees. He slicked his cock with the fluid leaking from me, and I moaned loudly in anticipation, lifting my knees higher to my chest.

“Yes,” I whispered, staring intently at his cock as it notched against my hole. “Please.”

We both groaned as he slid inside. Gage shuddered, leaning his weight on the backs of my thighs with his hands. My wings fluttered, the dry, leathery sound rustling through the cabin. I reluctantly lifted my gaze from where we were joined to gaze at him pleadingly.

“A-are you going to make me wait again?”

“Yes.” Gage slid out before thrusting back inside. I cried out as he moaned, every inch of me agonisingly sensitive already.

His control started slipping rapidly. His chest heaved with his panting breaths as his hips sped up, smacking into me, both of us moaning with every hard thrust. My skin was too hot and flushed. My scalp tingled with the overwhelming pleasure, and it wasn’t long before bliss gathered once more in the core of me, stiffening my cock to the point of pain.

“I’m—I—”

He stopped thrusting immediately, and this time a snarl *did* slip out of me. The monster clawed inside me, as overwhelmed as I was. I couldn’t think. I was nothing but a bundle of nerves. Instinct rose, clouding everything. His cock was inside me, not moving, so I clenched around it to tempt him to keep fucking me.

Gage moaned breathlessly, but it didn’t work. I snarled again, baring my teeth at him, but all that

did was make him grin back.

“Gage.” My voice was guttural. Deeper. But unsteady from how hard I was shaking. “Keep going.”

I saw his throat bob as he swallowed, palms stroking the backs of my thighs soothingly, but it did nothing to help calm me.

“I will. In a minute.”

“No,” I snarled, and was moving before I even realised it.

Gage squawked as I rose up and grabbed him, spinning us until he was on his back on the blankets. He stared up at me with wide eyes, breathing hard, and let out a shuddery moan as I clambered over his hips and gripped his cock far less gently than I normally ever would.

I sank back onto his cock with a relieved sound. My hands found his shoulders, pinning him down, and I knew I should be being gentler with him, but I couldn’t stop. My cock bounced between us, leaking everywhere, as I slammed my hips down again and again.

“G-god, Aury—” Gage’s head craned back, fingers digging into my thighs as I rode him. “D-don’t stop—”

A vicious, ugly part of me wanted to. Wanted to take my release and deny him his, at least for a while, as he had done to me. I blinked hard to try and focus, to try not to let the memories and thoughts and feelings of those before me cloud my judgement.

When Gage’s flushed face came back into focus, love rushed through me in an overwhelming wave, drowning everything else out. I lifted my hands from his shoulders to cup his face, leaning down to kiss him as my hips kept moving frantically.

My cock dragged over his stomach with my movements, sliding through the wetness that had leaked from me. It was enough, and I knew Gage could tell that I was reaching my peak, but he didn’t try to stop it this time. He moaned desperately into my mouth, hips bucking to try and meet my forceful movements.

I sucked in a breath, breaking the kiss to tip my head back as the pressure broke. My wings snapped open wide, the right scraping against the warm edge of the fireplace but thankfully missing the flames. My cock spurted over and over as I shook, loud moans leaving me. My channel squeezed around Gage’s cock, and I heard his breath hitch as he trembled beneath me.

“Aury—” His neck arched as his cock flexed inside me. I was still coming, coating his chest and stomach, but I leaned down on trembling arms to fit my mouth to his.

Our unsteady breaths clashed as our tongues wound together. As the tension slowly drained from our bodies, the kiss grew softer. I moaned into his mouth in relief, still shaking wildly.

I smiled against his mouth as peace flooded me. My life seed thrummed in contentment, slower now. Sated. I was as close to my mate as I could possibly be.

I broke the kiss to look down at Gage, gently pushing his hair back from his flushed face. “I’m going to do that to you next,” I told him, trying to make my tone stern like his had been at first.

He laughed, rubbing his hands up and down my chest. “Are you mad at me?”

I clenched around his softening shaft, making him gasp with sensitivity, and leaned down to kiss him again. “You play a dangerous game, working the rycke up like that.”

He snorted and lightly smacked my chest. “As if you could ever hurt me.”

That made me smile. It made every part of me grow warm with happiness. My mate worried, he was anxious by nature, but the knowledge that he wasn’t afraid of me—when almost *everything* was afraid of me—settled deep in my bones, soothing me entirely.

“I love you, Gage,” I told him, and he smiled up at me, flushed and sleepy and content. All I ever

wanted.

“I love you too.”

GHOST

We stayed at our cabin for three days. I wanted to stay longer, but anxiety started flaring again, making me worry about what was happening back at the camp, if anything had gone wrong while we were gone.

The journey back was shorter, because I let Aury carry me as he flew for some of it. It was getting less scary, because I knew he would never let anything happen to me. But still. It would take time to be completely comfortable with the wind rushing past me, whistling in my ears, nothing but air beneath my boots.

I felt looser and more relaxed than I could ever remember being as we made our way back into the camp. Lilac was walking toward the motel but paused when he saw us, eyes crinkling as he gave us a tiny smile behind his mask.

“Have fun?”

I felt my face grow hot from the question, but Aury chuckled and pulled me closer, kissing the top of my head. “Yes. It was wonderful. Thank you.”

Lilac gave a single nod. “Good. The girls are fine. I checked on them this morning.”

“Thank you,” I said, just as Anchor burst from the diner and started striding toward us, a wide grin stretching her masked face.

“Did I fool you?” she asked excitedly when she reached us. “Did you guess?”

I laughed. “No, I was embarrassingly clueless, even when Aury started leading us in the wrong direction.”

“Ha!” She gave my shoulder a gentle shove.

I smiled back, but a tight little knot of worry made my gut clench. “Um, do we really need those things though? From the market? We could go—”

Anchor snorted. “*No*, Ghost. It was just a ruse. You don’t need to go anywhere.”

I exhaled in relief. “Okay.”

“Now go finish making Aury’s... whatever you were going to make him.” She gave us both a smile. “Glad to have you back.”

“Okay,” I repeated as she turned to walk back to the diner. “Um, thank you!”

Aury turned to me once she’d left, stroking my hair back as he smiled down at me. “Shall we go and see the girls?”

I grinned up at him, finding his hand to thread my fingers through his. “Yeah. They’ll have missed you.”

That made him flush with pleasure, and he dipped his head in a shy nod before we started walking to the motel. The camp was fairly quiet, but it was still a little jarring after the total peace and solitude of the cabin.

As we neared the motel, I heard a distinct thumping sound coming from the direction of Gloam and Rig's room. Wincing, I glanced up at Aury as we rounded the side of the building to the yard.

"Maybe we could go back soon," I said. He chuckled, looking down at me. If *I* could hear Gloam and Rig, I didn't want to know what Aury's sensitive ears were picking up on.

"Yes." He squeezed my hand. "We'll go back soon."

Charlie and Moth's Safehouse Honeymoon

A lengthy 12.6k word short about our prickly, beautiful half monster, Moth, and his doting partner Charlie. FYI, there is a *lot* of sex in this, including a very long scene that I was originally going to include in their book, but decided not to in the end, as it was something I wasn't sure Moth was "ready" for yet seeing as he had to open up to Charlie about it first. (It will make sense when you get to it.)

Anyways, enjoy! This short features:

- Wyn and Danny, including Wyn being a grump yet also, somehow, a smug ass, and Danny being freaking adorable as per usual
- Edin and Hunter, including some cute Edin and Chuck bonding time, plus Charlie teasing Hunter, obviously
- Moth's tail (including some light tail play) and his monster feet (with toe beans!), and
- most importantly, Charlie reducing the rich history and mythology of elves to: "They're hot with pointy ears and I want to fuck them"

Content warnings: Explicit sexual content, 18+ only, tail play, fantasy talk, monster genitalia, a lot of fluids, internal frottage I guess?, Wyn pushing his stabby agenda

Spoiler alert: Set after the events of *Moth* (Monstrous: Book Five)

First published 2022 by Lily Mayne
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CHARLIE

“Oh shit.” Moth’s head lifted from my chest, his face still flushed and strands of damp white hair sticking to his temples. “Um, Chuck is climbing all over the Soul Eater’s human again. I can hear him, uh, snarling about it. He’s... not gonna hurt her, right?”

I rolled my eyes, threading my fingers through Moth’s hair to gently urge his head back onto my chest. My skin was slightly damp with sweat, heart rate gradually slowing as my body recovered from how hard Moth had just ridden my cock.

“Danny won’t let him hurt her.” My eyes slid shut in bliss when Moth’s long fingers played with my chest hair, but then they popped back open as I had a thought. “So if you can hear them out there, could the other monsters hear us fucking just now?”

“Yeah. Edin told Hunter what we were doing. Hunter yelled at him for telling him.” Moth lifted his head again, resting his chin on my chest as he gazed up at me with big, pale eyes. “So, when the Soul Eater rescued you from the prison... did you talk to him?”

“Huh?” I frowned down at him. “Talk to him? Uh... no, not really. Why?”

Moth gave a jerky shrug with one shoulder, eyes lowering as he traced my collarbone with a fingertip. “Just wondering.”

“But why?” I cupped the back of his head, fingers sifting through his long hair. “Did you want to... ask him something? I don’t understand.”

He shrugged again, still not looking at me. His cheeks grew pink, and it wasn’t just his usual post-fuck glow. “He’s just... I don’t know. Kind of a legend.”

I went still, staring down at Moth in disbelief. “A *legend*? He’s not a legend! According to Hunter, he’s just an asshole.”

I propped myself up on my elbows, jostling Moth’s chin and making him grunt with irritation before he leaned up on an arm.

“Are you actually *fangirling* over the *Soul Eater*?” I gestured incredulously at my cock. “I was inside you less than five minutes ago!”

“I’m not *fangirling*,” he snapped, face turning bright pink. He glared down at me. “He’s just—You can’t go past any humans out here without overhearing them whispering about the *Soul Eater* and how terrifying he is and how he just shows up every three years to suck out people’s souls.”

“Yeah, but you know that’s bullshit now. He’s sucking out nasty parasites, not souls.” I wrinkled my nose. “Do you think Danny can, like, taste it when he kisses him? That cannot taste good, right?”

“What?” Moth smacked my chest. “Charlie, that’s such a weird thing to think about.”

I spluttered with indignation. “You’re calling *me* weird? You’re mooning over a parasite-sucking ghoulish man who—”

“I am not!” Moth clambered over me to straddle my hips, shoving my shoulders down to pin me to the bed. He glared down at me, white hair framing his face in a curtain.

When I grinned up at him, tucking my hands behind my head on the pillow, he just glared harder.

“I didn’t really talk to him, baby,” I told him in an overly patient voice. “I just watched him murder an officer and get all sweet on Danny. But…” I raised a brow, still grinning widely. “I’m sure I could introduce you.”

“Ugh, shut up.” Moth gripped my chin and leaned down to give me a punishing kiss. “You’re so annoying.”

“He’s Edin’s best friend,” I continued, jerking my head to dodge Moth’s hand as he tried to cover my mouth. “I could ask Edin to set up a playdate—”

“Shithead.” His face was bright pink, but his glare slowly melted away as a hint of worry sparked in his eyes. I felt his tail swish with agitation over my thighs. “You don’t—You’re not actually gonna say anything, right?”

That look made me melt humiliatingly fast. I pulled a hand free to reach up and tuck his hair behind his ear. “Of course not, baby. I’m just teasing. I wouldn’t try to embarrass you on purpose.”

Moth’s pale eyes softened. He dipped his head to kiss me. “I know.”

“Doesn’t mean I won’t embarrass you on accident, though,” I added when he broke the kiss. Moth somehow went even paler than normal as he stared down at me in alarm.

“There *is* a way to remove the risk of that happening,” I said quickly, tracing over one of the tattoos on his neck. “At least temporarily.”

Moth narrowed his eyes at me in suspicion. “How?”

I trailed my fingertips down over his chest to lightly circle a nipple, making him shiver. “You could take me on a romantic getaway to your safehouse.”

Moth huffed a laugh, sitting up and resting his hands on my chest. I tucked my other arm back under my head as my gaze automatically slid down his beautiful body.

“We could go there…” The tip of his tongue emerged to play with the ring in his lower lip, threatening to distract me. “We’d have to get a room fixed up for Chuck to sleep in.”

“Well, maybe we could leave Chuck here while we go.” I gave him a reassuring smile when Moth’s brows pinched with concern. “Edin and Hunter would look after her. Or Danny and the Soul Eater,” I added slyly. “It would give you an excuse to talk to the *legend*.”

Moth shot me an unimpressed look even as he flushed again.

“Well…” He played absently with my chest hair and gave a tiny shrug. “It would be nice if it was just us. For a little while.”

I grinned up at him. “Yeah, it would. Or, I mean… we could ask the Soul Eater if he wants to come if you’re up for a threesome—”

“Charlie,” Moth hissed, smacking my chest and peering back worriedly at the door. He looked down at me and cringed. “That is so gross. He’s so *old*.”

I burst out laughing. “Well so’s Edin, but Hunter doesn’t seem to mind.”

“You’re such a shithead.” Moth splayed his hands over my chest, pinning me to the mattress. “If you say *anything* weird to the Soul Eater, I won’t take you back to my safehouse.”

I chuckled. “I won’t, don’t worry. I prefer not being eviscerated. I’m not going to actively try and piss him off.”

I hesitated, remembering our first night back at the camp, when we’d foisted Chuck off on Danny so we could fuck in private.

“Anymore,” I clarified, then after a pause added, “Maybe.”

Moth rolled his eyes, but seemed mollified because he leaned down to kiss me. His pierced, pointed tongue slid into my mouth, making my cock twitch with interest despite how sated I was. Breaking the kiss, he trailed his mouth down before nuzzling under my jaw. I heard him inhale deeply

as his nose slid down my neck.

Pulling a hand free from behind my head, I palmed his side and traced lightly over a little patch of scales as Moth dropped tender kisses down my chest. He rubbed his nose in my chest hair, inhaling again, then kissed his way to my armpit. I flinched and bit my lip, trying not to flail and jerk away from the ticklish feel.

I couldn't stop the groan that left me when Moth rubbed his nose in my armpit hair and took a deep breath. *Fuck*, why was that so hot?

His hips rocked, and I felt wetness slide over my half-hard cock, which made me shudder. Moth took another deep breath and loosed a groaning exhale.

"God, why do you always smell so fucking good?" He sounded almost angry about it, which made me laugh.

I ran my fingers through his hair, scratching lightly at his scalp and smiling when he let out a contented sigh as he rested his cheek on my chest. Moth was still touch-starved.

"Maybe I'm designed to pump out pheromones that make your monster half horny."

He lifted his head to give me an unimpressed look. "Charlie, that's really weird."

"Can you deny it, though?" I shot back, dropping both my hands to squeeze his ass. His tail flicked, sliding over my knuckles.

I slyly trailed my fingertips inward until they brushed over the underside of his tail at the very base. We'd recently discovered just how sensitive Moth was there, when he'd been fucking me hard one night and my fingers had scrabbled over his ass for purchase. They'd ended up curling under the base of his tail, and Moth had jerked with a guttural moan.

So, of course, I'd shown him no mercy once I'd realised what he was having such a hot response to. I mean, what else was I supposed to do?

He made a strangled sound now as my finger dragged back and forth over where his tail connected to his lower back. Only once he was shuddering and panting into my neck did I slide my hands up his back and hug him to me.

"So, when do you want to leave?" I asked.

Moth took a few seconds to respond, his fingers digging into my arms as he tried to calm his breathing. "H-huh?"

My mouth quirked. "When shall we leave for your safehouse? Today?"

"Uhh..." His voice was shaky, and as his hips flexed involuntarily, he sucked in a breath and shuddered hard. His hot, slick cock slid free and trailed over my belly, leaving a line of wetness.

I almost caved, barely resisting the urge to tackle him to the bed and suck his cock into my mouth. But I wanted to wait until we were truly alone at his safehouse, where we could be as loud as we wanted. Where I could try and get Moth to tell me if there was anything he was curious about trying in bed...

"Charlie," Moth mumbled shakily, mouth pressed to my cheek. His hips rocked again, and I could tell that he wouldn't be able to have a coherent conversation anymore—that his brain was already blanking with lust, even though we'd fucked only minutes ago. It was all still so new and exciting to Moth, and his eagerness was *ridiculously* sexy.

I caved.

Tackling Moth to the bed, I got him on his belly and swept his hair aside to press a kiss to the back of his neck as he gasped. My cock was waking up, and when it brushed against Moth's tail, he gasped again and pressed back, ass lifting off the bed.

"Charlie," he panted, long fingers curling into the pillow and gripping tight.

“Mhmm?” I kissed my way down his spine, the scarred skin rough beneath my lips. Glancing up, I saw Moth’s pierced lips parted with his fast breaths, his cheek pressed into the pillow. His face was flushed, strands of hair sticking to his temple and cheekbone.

“I—” His voice trembled, knees jerking open wider and allowing my hips to nestle between his thighs. “Sh-shouldn’t we...”

I moved lower until my lips brushed over the base of his tail, making it swish wildly in agitation against my chest. Giving the top of one firm ass cheek a soft kiss, I curled my fingers around the base of Moth’s tail and lifted it up.

“Char—” Moth cut himself off with a choking gasp when I flicked my tongue against the underside, directly where it connected to his lower back. “Oh fuck.”

I grinned as I licked again. Moth’s tail was scaly almost all over, but the skin here was softer and more tender. *Extremely* sensitive. Licking him here was making him react as if my tongue was on his slit or cock, and it was getting my dick ridiculously hard.

I reached down and gave myself a stroke as I tongued him. Moth’s hips jerked with every lick, thighs trembling. When I glanced up, his cheek was still pressed to the pillow. His eyes were dazed and heavy-lidded, cheeks flushed and tongue poking out between parted lips, which made me want to smile.

“Does it feel good, baby?” I asked between licks, my voice gravelly with lust.

Moth whimpered, ass tilting up even more. “Mmm.”

I released my cock to slide my hand up his leg, over his scaly calf and up his thigh. Moth gasped when my fingers trailed inward between his legs, gliding up and down his slit. It was slick with his arousal and my cum leaking from him, making me moan as I licked under the base of his tail frantically.

“Ah!” Moth jerked when I sank two fingers inside him. “Charlie! F-f-fuck.”

I sought out that spot inside him with my fingertips, stroking without mercy when I found it. Moth’s thighs shook wildly, his channel clenching around my fingers.

“Fuck,” he panted, back bowing, tail trying to thrash in my grip. “Fuck—Ch-Charlie—”

I moaned against him, licking feverishly, sliding my tongue down to his asshole then back up to the base of his tail as I fucked him with my fingers. Moth cried out as a fresh flood of wetness coated my fingers.

“F-f-fuck, I’m coming,” he practically sobbed, hips bucking wildly as he tipped over the edge. “Charlie—”

He cut himself off with a desperate shout, his whole body shaking, channel squeezing impossibly tight around my fingers. A guttural moan broke from my chest as I licked until his body finally relaxed. Only then did I slide my fingers free, showering kisses over his tail and the small of his back.

Moth let out a long, shaky exhale as his hips sank into the mattress. His limbs splayed out carelessly, big, claw-tipped monster toes flexing with contentment. I smiled, dropping a final kiss on his backside before collapsing beside him with a groan, slinging a leg over his ass.

Settling my head beside his on the pillow, I reached over and brushed his hair back from his flushed face. Moth’s pale eyes blinked open sleepily, cheek still smushed into the pillow.

“You going back to sleep?” I asked, cupping his cheek.

We’d both been sleeping a lot since getting back to camp about a week ago. I didn’t think either of us had truly acknowledged how gruelling the entire journey had been until it ended. Especially for Moth—he could finally relax for the first time in his entire life. The Herald was gone. He couldn’t be summoned at any time and from any place anymore. I couldn’t even imagine what that felt like—what

it was like having that weight lifted from his shoulders. It made me want to give him anything—everything he'd missed out on. Everything that would make him happy.

Luckily for me, what seemed to make him happy was lounging around in bed with me—when we weren't fucking like animals, that was. It was fortunate that the raiders—and Danny—loved Chuck so much. She spent most of her time being doted on by someone while we were busy, and when Lilac appeared she would cling to him and hiss at anyone who tried to take her away from him. He tried to ignore her most of the time.

She was still scared of Aury, but slowly warming up to him. Bo and Daisy from the diner helped by giving Aury food scraps so he could feed her, and I'd seen him sitting patiently with his hand outstretched while Chuck slowly inched forward to snatch the food from his palm.

She especially loved riding around on Edin's shoulders, and would steal Hunter's baseball cap off his head every single time he wore it around the camp, giving it to Moth like she was presenting him with the greatest gift. Moth acted like it exasperated him, but I could have sworn I'd heard him whisper to her that she was a good girl the last time she did it.

Moth blinked again, reaching up to rub his eyes. "No, let's set off." He shuffled closer, wrapping his arm around me and nestling his face under my chin. "We'll be gone a few weeks at least, even if we don't stay there very long. Do you think that'll be okay?"

"I'm pretty sure everyone will be more than happy to look after Chuck while we're gone." I threaded my fingers through his hair and kissed the top of his head. "I'll tell Hunter to keep an eye on her."

Moth grunted in response. He and Hunter were getting on surprisingly well. Moth had even smacked me on the back of the head the other day when I teased Hunter about something. The smug grin Hunter shot me had me flipping him off the moment Moth's back was turned. At least if it turned into a war, I'd have the big purple monster with horns on my side.

With a yawn, Moth rolled onto his back and stretched. I pursed my lips to hide my smile as I watched his big monster feet flex adorably, the clawed toes splaying, before he rolled out of bed. His tail swished lazily as he crossed the room to the dresser.

He had a stash of clothes that he kept here, and he threw me some boxer briefs before slipping into a fresh pair himself. His long white hair was a mess, snarled and tangled from sleep and sex, and the set of his shoulders was looser than I'd ever seen it. His whole body was more relaxed, tension I hadn't even realised he'd carried finally gone.

His pale eyes were languid as he glanced back at me on the bed and smiled. My throat closed up with emotion, and I clutched the underwear in my fist as I got up and crossed the room to wrap my arms around him from behind.

Moth let out a wary chuckle, hesitantly resting his hand on the forearm banded across his lean stomach. "What?"

I shook my head, pressing my lips into his shoulder. "Nothing. I just love you."

Moth's fingers tightened on my arm in reaction. He turned his head to nuzzle my hair, releasing a shaky exhale. "I love you too."

MOTH

“Oh, hey.”

I glanced over as Charlie and I stepped out of our room with our backpacks and saw Danny, the Soul Eater’s human mate, leaving his own room further down the walkway.

We hadn’t really spoken other than a very brief introduction, and part of me was reluctant to even look at him for too long because of how, uh, snarly and hovering the Soul Eater tended to be. But of course I’d noticed how ridiculously good-looking he was. If Charlie weren’t all over me all the time, I’d definitely be feeling more insecure.

Danny shot me a shy smile, which I briefly returned, but it dropped the moment he spotted our bags.

“Are you going?” His eyes grew panicked as he looked around. “Can I say bye to Chuck first? Where is she?”

“We’re just going on a little trip.” Charlie locked the door behind him and passed me the key, then gave Danny a charming grin. “We’re coming back. We were actually wonderin’ if you wanted to look after Chuck while we’re gone...”

He trailed off as the Soul Eater slunk out of the room behind Danny, long, blackened fingers brushing his human’s dark hair back before they gripped his nape. I felt his icy gaze trail over us, but he didn’t say a word.

Charlie cleared his throat, then stood a little taller beside me, his hand finding the small of my back beneath my coat.

“We’ll be gone a few weeks,” he said. When I glanced over, I saw him shoot the Soul Eater a tiny smirk. “She’ll need somewhere to sleep...”

“That’s fine!” Danny said eagerly, turning to face the Soul Eater, gripping the front of his ragged coat. “Baby, we’re gonna look after Chuck while Charlie and Moth are gone.”

“No, we fucking are not.”

Danny smacked the Soul Eater’s chest. “Yes, we are. We can make a nest for her in the closet.”

The Soul Eater huffed in disgust. “Can I lock her in it so we can still fuck?”

Red splotches appeared on Danny’s throat and travelled up to his cheeks. His eyes darted over to us. “Wyn.”

“My sweet.” The Soul Eater’s inhuman, distorted voice was almost patient as he cupped Danny’s face. “Do you really think the half salyik hasn’t already heard us fucking every night since they got here?”

Charlie made a big show of turning to look at me with intrigued delight as Danny shot me a weak, apologetic smile, his face bright red. I cleared my throat, refusing to meet Charlie’s gaze.

I’d tell him later.

“We can ask Edin and Hunter,” I said quickly, because I didn’t want to piss off the Soul Eater. “It’s fine. I’m sure they—”

“No,” Danny blurted, smacking the Soul Eater in the chest again. “We’ll do it. I love her,” he added, his tone completely earnest, his eyes intense as he stared at me and Charlie. “Seriously. I love her. So much.”

Wyn huffed in disgust and stomped back into their room. I glanced at Charlie worriedly, then back at Danny.

“Uh, seriously, we can ask—”

“No,” Danny interrupted immediately. “I can do it. Ignore Wyn. He wouldn’t actually, um, lock her anywhere. He’s just... resistant to change, which I guess is probably pretty common among people who are that fucking old.”

A rabid snarl came from within the motel room. I let out a nervous laugh, clutching Charlie’s hand tight when he started tugging me forward.

“Thank you kindly,” he told Danny with a charming grin, snickering as we passed the open doorway and heard a feral hiss come from within.

“Now the Soul Eater’s gonna hate me,” I muttered as we made our way down the steps at the side of the motel building.

Charlie rolled his eyes, which seemed to be a habit he and Hunter shared. “Right, and we can’t have that, can we?”

“Shut up,” I hissed, glancing back worriedly to make sure Danny wasn’t right behind us. “Can’t we just get Hunter and Edin to do it? If the Soul Eater really doesn’t want to...”

Charlie snorted. “But Danny *does* want to, and I’m pretty sure the quickest way to make the Soul Eater want to murder you is to upset Danny.”

I chewed on the inside of my lip as Charlie led me across the camp, toward where we could see Chuck perched cheerfully on Edin’s huge shoulders. “Maybe we shouldn’t go—”

“No.” Charlie stopped and turned to face me, tugging me closer. “We’re going to your place so we can be completely alone, and then I’m going to make you tell me every dirty fantasy you have and we’re going to do them all.”

I stared at him with my mouth hanging open. “Wh-what?”

“What?” Charlie slid his arms under my coat to pull me against him, giving me a sly grin. “I’ll tell you mine too. We’ll cover them all, don’t worry.”

I nearly choked on a breath, glancing around to make sure no one could overhear as I clutched the front of his shirt. “You—What fantasies do you have?” I asked in a croak.

“Well...” Charlie drawled, sliding a hand free to tuck my hair behind my ear. His fingers danced over the pointed tip, making me shiver. I was sensitive there. “Maybe we could keep an eye out for a cloak of some kind on our way to the safehouse.”

“A cloak?” I asked distractedly, trying to keep my eyes open as he slid the pad of his thumb up and down the sharp tip of my ear. My face heated. It felt almost... *obscene* for him to be doing that in public. “W-why a cloak?”

“Well, there were these movies with a blond elf and a man who eventually became a king—”

“Charlie!” Edin’s booming voice interrupted us. “Moth! Why do you have your bags? Are you leaving?”

When I glanced over, his craggy face was creased with concern. His long, spike-tipped tail lashed as he strode toward us, Chuck clinging to his hair as she rode on his shoulders. Hunter appeared from the bathroom stalls, brows drawing into a hard frown when he spotted our backpacks.

“What’s going on?” he demanded as he and Edin reached us. “I thought you weren’t leaving yet.”

“Relax, teddy bear, we’re just going away for a few weeks. We’ll be back.”

Hunter rolled his eyes. It had taken only a couple of days for him to realise he wasn’t going to be able to stop Charlie calling him teddy bear now, no matter how much he snarled at him. I’d been trying to think of an annoying nickname he could use for Charlie to get his revenge.

“Danny said he’ll look after Chuck, but...” Charlie stepped forward and grabbed Hunter’s face, squishing his cheeks a little until the puckered skin around his long scar turned white. “I’m trusting

you, Hunter, to defend her from the Soul Eater.”

“What?” Hunter asked, voice a little garbled.

“You need to defend Chuck if the Soul Eater goes rabid,” Charlie said in a solemn voice, expression entirely serious as he stared at his best friend. “You need to keep her safe from him. I’m trusting you with this.”

All the blood drained from Hunter’s face. His eyes widened as they frantically darted between me, Charlie and Edin.

“Why me?” he asked in a small, dread-filled voice.

I huffed and shoved Charlie’s shoulder. “Stop being a shithead, Charlie.” To Hunter, I added, “The Soul Eater isn’t gonna do anything to Chuck, but if it seems like he... starts getting annoyed, maybe you and Edin can just take over looking after her.”

“*Starts* getting annoyed?” Hunter scowled at Charlie and rubbed his stubbly cheek as he took a step back. “Isn’t being annoyed his natural state?”

Edin chuckled, one of his big hands raised up by his head so Chuck could play absently with his fingers. He didn’t seem to notice when she started gnawing on one. “There are varying degrees to Wyn’s level of annoyance. Many factors. It is a delicate ecosystem.” He grimaced. “If, for example, Chuck hurt Danny—”

“Chuck wouldn’t hurt anyone.” I stepped closer and smiled as she jumped from Edin’s shoulders onto mine. “Would you, girl?” I added, scratching under her chin.

She chirped, rubbing her face into my hair. I wondered if Edin had been teaching her to do that.

“So where are you going?” Hunter asked, slipping his arm around Edin’s waist.

“Just to Moth’s place for a little while. Need a break from your overbearing ass,” Charlie added teasingly.

Hunter snorted. “Whatever. As if you didn’t miss the shit out of me when you were gone.”

“He did,” I jumped in to give Charlie a taste of his own medicine. “He talked about you all the time. I thought he had a huge crush on you at first.”

A slow, gleeful smile spread over Hunter’s face as Charlie shot me a betrayed look, his cheeks turning pink.

“What the fuck, slayer? What gets said on the road stays on the road. He’s exaggerating,” he added quickly to Hunter. “I talked about you maybe... twice.”

“Sure.” Hunter smirked at Charlie, then reached out to give his cheek a pat. “Try not to miss me too much this time, champ.”

Charlie went red. “Yeah, well...” He floundered for something to say. “Shut up. Come on, let’s get going.”

He grabbed my hand, then seemed to remember Chuck and stopped to stroke under her chin, just as I spotted Danny and the Soul Eater approaching us from the motel.

“We’ll be gone for a little while, okay, girl?” Charlie smiled at Chuck as she clung to my hair. “Uncle Danny will look after you. And scary grandpa Wyn,” he cooed.

The Soul Eater let out a savage snarl as Danny beamed.

“Have you ever found someone else here when you’ve come back to your safehouse?” Charlie asked me as we made our way down the street of the tiny, abandoned town.

“Uh...” I glanced over with a frown, unsure whether telling him was a good idea. But... I didn’t want to lie to him. “Well, a pack of kolebs came through here once. A few years ago,” I hurried to add

when I saw Charlie go pale.

He swallowed, Adam's apple bobbing under his dark stubble, and gave a jerky nod. "Oh. Alright."

"I killed them," I said quickly, stopping to turn and face him. Stepping closer, I wrapped my arms around his neck. "I'll keep you safe, princess. I'd never let anything hurt you."

Charlie smiled up at me, sliding his hands around my sides under my coat. "I know."

He looked tired, eyes shadowed and face drawn. It hadn't taken us anywhere near as long to get here from the camp, because we hadn't gone via the prison further north, but it was still a long journey. And we'd pushed ourselves harder the last few days, eager to get here as soon as possible.

I leaned in and kissed his stubbly cheek. "Other monsters and a few raiders have passed through here before, but not often. I'll be able to hear if something gets close."

"I know," Charlie repeated, tucking his face under my jaw and kissing my throat. I felt his lips curve into a smile. "You're so much better than a human."

My face grew hot, and the long-ingrained instinct to distance myself from my monster half threatened to emerge. I forced it back. Charlie liked my monster parts. And my inhuman strength and speed and healing *were* good things, not just things to resent because they made me different. I appreciated them now mainly because they'd helped me keep him safe, and that was what mattered.

"I know," I heard myself say, grinning when Charlie laughed and lifted his head.

"So..." His hands slid down and squeezed my ass. "Why don't you take me into your safehouse and remind me of all your monster perks?"

My grin widened, turning salacious. "Okay."

Hand in hand, we made our way down the silent street and around to the back of the alley, behind the old burger joint. After unlocking the door, I gestured for Charlie to head inside as I pulled the length of rope from my backpack.

I'd bought the rope at the raider market when we'd originally been heading to the prison up north, in case we'd ended up stopping here. I didn't need it—I could jump high enough to grab onto the ledge where the staircase used to be, but I knew Charlie would've needed the rope. And, up until the night that we spent here, he hadn't known about my monster legs or feet, so...

Once we were upstairs and the rope was back in my bag, I took Charlie's hand and led him to my door. "We can see which room will work best for Chuck."

"Sure, baby." Charlie squeezed my hand. "But maybe not tonight. I'm beat."

It was late afternoon and starting to get dark. Once we were in my room, I gave Charlie a gentle push toward the couch before shrugging off my bag and sword. I'd cleaned the hearth the last time we were here, so it didn't take me long to get a fire going after I'd lit the candles dotted around the room.

"I'll heat some water for a bath." I grabbed the big pot I used. "Do you want a drink? Are you hungry?"

Charlie chuckled as he approached. "You don't have to do everything, Moth."

I wanted to make sure he was comfortable—that he liked it here. That he'd want to stay here with me. It was a lot lonelier than the camp—and quieter. I didn't want him to decide he hated it and would prefer to stay at the camp full-time.

I'd stay there with him, but... I was hoping he'd rather be here with me. Just us. And Chuck.

Before I could go into the bathroom to fill the pot, Charlie slid his arms around my waist from behind.

"Can we take a bath together?" He kissed the bend of my neck. "Then get into bed?"

My belly heated, throat cinching with want. I nodded wordlessly, turning to give Charlie a kiss

when he released me.

It took a while for me to heat up enough water for a bath. Charlie made us dinner in the meantime, and we sat on the rug in front of the fire to eat. Before I'd even finished pouring the last pot of hot water into the tub, Charlie had stripped naked and was humming as he wandered into the bathroom.

He helped me take my clothes off, very enthusiastically, making me laugh through any lingering embarrassment at being naked in front of him. It was almost entirely gone, but there were still moments when I felt self-conscious. Not because of anything Charlie did—the opposite, in fact. Just my lingering hang-ups that were taking a while to go away. Maybe they wouldn't ever go away entirely—not with anyone but Charlie, at least.

Once we were both in the bath, we quickly washed our hair and scrubbed up before lounging back at opposite ends, our legs tangled in the middle. My face got hot when Charlie clasped one of my feet under the water and drew it up to rest on his knee.

He'd touched my monster feet before, but I was still self-conscious about them, even though it felt good when he kneaded the pads of my toes with his thumbs. I had to be careful not to flex my claws too much or they could cut him.

"That journey's not too bad without the snow, but it's still fucking tiring," he said as he massaged the arch of my foot, making me shiver.

I cleared my throat. "I mean, I'm used to it." Used to doing it alone, which was infinitely worse.

Charlie smiled at me and lifted my foot to kiss the side of it. I bit my lip, trying not to jerk from the ticklish feel.

"You got cute feet," he said, running his thumb over my arched heel.

I rolled my eyes, heat climbing up my throat to my cheeks. "Sure."

Charlie laughed. "You do. Especially when I do this..." He pressed the pad of his thumb in the narrow crease between my toes, making them splay out in reflex. He laughed again. "Fuck, that's adorable."

"Shut up," I grumbled, trying to pull my foot back even though I secretly loved it.

He didn't let me, holding on tight as his eyes flashed with mischief. He grinned at me before bringing my foot back to his mouth to kiss the pad of my middle toe.

It tickled—bad—and my foot jerked in reflex, nailing him in the cheekbone.

"Fuck," I barked in panic, scrambling up and splashing water everywhere. "I'm sorry. Did I cut you? My claw—"

"I'm fine." Charlie laughed, briefly cupping his left cheekbone. "You just grazed it."

The water sloshed wildly as I knelt in front of him, cupping his face and trying to inspect his cheek. My chest unclenched when I saw no gaping wound from my claw.

"I'm sorry," I croaked. God, I was such a fucking—

"Baby." Charlie slid his wet hands up my sides and leaned in to kiss me. "I've been kicked in the face *far* worse before."

I leaned back to eye him oddly. "What? Why the fuck have you been kicked in the face before?"

Charlie shrugged, lying back in the tub and giving me a languid smile. "Dunno. Fights, I guess? Training? I pissed Hunter off too bad? It's happened a few times. The last one was a joke, by the way," he added when I frowned hard. "Hunter would never hurt me."

"You—" I huffed incredulously and rolled my eyes. "Sure, okay."

He laughed. "Come on, let's get out. I'm wiped."

I was too. I knew we'd had grand unspoken plans to spend the entire night fucking when we got here, but we were both tired. We towelled off in comfortable quiet before going back into the

bedroom, both of us remaining naked. Charlie wandered over to the coffee table by the couch as I set our stuff down next to the table.

“Can I see what books you have here?” he asked, smiling at me when I glanced over.

My face threatened to flush with embarrassment. Trying and failing to learn how to read had made me feel even more stupid than not being able to read at all. Like maybe there was something wrong with my brain that would *never* let me learn that skill. Like my messed up genes wouldn’t allow it.

I nodded, then looked away quickly to fiddle with my bag when Charlie picked up the first on the stack. I had no idea what kinds of books I’d gathered over the years. I’d mostly just grabbed ones with covers I liked.

“Some of these could be fun to read together.” Charlie grinned over at me, holding a couple of the books in his hands.

Self-preservation urged me to say something dismissive in response—to get us away from the topic by shutting it down. I forced it back and nodded, mumbling, “Yeah, maybe,” as I carefully folded Charlie’s shirt.

“A couple could be good to help you learn, as well.” Charlie was reading the back of one of them. I tried to ignore the pang of envy at how quickly and effortlessly he scanned the block of text before moving on to another. He looked up at me. “Do you want to start learning while we’re here?”

The instinct to protect myself from being mocked or patronised rose back up, but I shoved it down and walked over. Charlie slid his arm around my waist, leaning in to kiss my neck.

“Maybe we could take a few back with us for me to learn from, but...” I fiddled with the dog-eared cover of one of the books Charlie held. “Maybe... maybe you could read to me while we’re here?”

My face was burning, so I kept it down as if I was inspecting the book covers. My eyes locked on one with a big, fire-breathing creature on the front. I remembered staring at that cover for ages in an old house I’d been scavenging, trying to work out what animal it was.

“I’d love to.” Charlie kissed my cheek. “Any you like the look of?”

I cleared my throat and pointed at the book with the fire-breather. “Um, what’s this one about?”

“Ooh, that one sounds good.” Charlie’s voice got animated. “It’s a fantasy book. Dragons and stuff. I love these kinds of books.”

“What’s the thing on the cover?”

“That’s a dragon.” Charlie shot me a crooked grin. “Pretty awesome, huh? Remember when I called you a dragon slayer after you killed the dome bear? That’s because dragons are, like, ridiculously hard to kill. Look at ’em.”

I tried not to let my chest puff up with pride as I stared at the creature on the cover, a tiny figurine of a human silhouetted in the flames streaming from its mouth. Charlie thought I’d be able to kill one of these things?

“Is it...” I felt so stupid, but... “Is it a real animal? I’ve never seen one.”

“No, it’s a mythical creature,” he said easily. The fact that he didn’t laugh or comment on my naïve question made me wrap my arms around him from behind and hug him tight. I propped my chin on his shoulder as he held up the book so I could see the cover.

“I mean, some people believe they used to be real, I think. But there are a lot of fantasy books with them in. They can breathe fire and tend to be really old. And they hoard treasure. In some books, they can change into a human form as well.”

My mind immediately went to the rycke. I looked over the cover again, specifically at the dragon’s big wings. They didn’t look much like Aury’s, and the feet were different. The dragon looked more

reptilian than the rycke did.

“I, um... I like its scales,” I said, feeling like a total dork the moment the words left me.

Charlie turned his head to kiss my temple. “They’re cool. Yours are better.”

I flushed with pleasure, which made me feel lame—being so happy that Charlie complimented me over a *fictional creature*? Ugh. I dipped my head to kiss his shoulder, directly on the little divot where a bullet had skimmed him.

“Shall we go to bed?” I asked him.

“Yeah.” Charlie set down the books and turned, tangling our fingers together. “We can start reading tomorrow.”

I couldn’t bring myself to tell him how much it meant that he wasn’t making a big deal over my inability to read. He wasn’t singling it out. He wasn’t saying ‘*I’ll read to you*’, reminding me that without him, I’d be unable to read a single word.

After blowing out the candles and checking the door was locked, we climbed into bed. I let out a long sigh as I settled under the covers, glad to be back in my own bed. Charlie groaned in relief beside me, stretching out an arm so I could tuck myself into his side, my head on his chest.

He yawned so widely I heard his jaw crack. “Just need to lay down for a few minutes, then I’ll suck you off,” he mumbled, sounding half-asleep already.

I snorted, tilting my head to kiss his chest and rub my nose through the hair there, breathing in his scent. “Sure, princess. Maybe a nap first.”

He let out a tiny snore in response, and I smiled as I pressed my cheek against his chest, listening to the steady thrum of his heart as I slowly drifted off.

—

When I woke up, I could tell it was the middle of the night. The room was still and quiet and the fire was still lit but burning low, the crackle of the flames the only sound other than Charlie’s steady, even breaths.

He was sprawled half on top of me, breathing deeply against my neck, his short, dark hair tickling my jaw. I rubbed my chin against the top of his head before pressing my nose there, breathing in his scent. My arm was trapped under his neck, so I played with his hair as I blinked sleepily up at the ceiling.

I refused to let my mouth stretch into a big, stupid grin, no matter how much it wanted to. I’d only ever had someone else here with me one other time, and while that had also been Charlie, it hadn’t been a particularly great night.

I’d lain there, tense and too wired to sleep for hours after he’d walked in and seen me naked. I’d silently cursed myself for being so stupid and getting drunk and not *going into the fucking bathroom* to get changed.

But... it had all worked out in the end.

I didn’t think it had fully sunk in that... Charlie would be here with me now. Every night. Forever. Well, when we settled here permanently.

I’d get to fall asleep and wake up like this every day. With Charlie’s beautiful body pressed against mine, his scent and warmth surrounding me, the sound of his steady breaths and the slow thump of his heart lulling me to sleep.

My skin was hot, growing damp with sweat where it was pressed against him, but I didn't care. There was no way in hell I was moving away from him. I nuzzled my nose back into his hair, inhaling deeply before my eyes slid shut as my body melted into the bed.

Charlie stirred, letting out a cute little grunt into my neck as he shifted against me. His nose rubbed under my jaw, making me shiver, and his voice was deep and croaky with sleep when he mumbled, "Hey."

I gave him an answering kiss on the top of his head, and Charlie moved higher on the pillow, leg shifting on my thigh as his fingers trailed over my collarbone.

"Why are you awake?" he murmured, sounding half-asleep again already.

My mouth quirked. "How could you even tell?"

"Just could." Charlie's nose rubbed against my cheek before he kissed the corner of my mouth. "You okay?"

"I'm fine." I turned my head to capture his lips in a brief kiss, but when I went to pull back, Charlie kissed me again.

It was soft and slow, even as our lips parted and tongues glided together. I tried to suppress my shiver, but my breath caught in my throat when Charlie's fingers trailed down my chest and brushed over a nipple.

He circled it lightly with a fingertip as his tongue slid languidly against mine. The thigh draped over mine moved down until Charlie hooked his calf around my knee, keeping my leg pinned. Arousal throbbed through me, and when his hand trailed lower, down my stomach, my hips twitched as my other leg jerked open wider of its own accord.

My lips went slack against Charlie's when his long fingers glided down my slit. I breathed unsteadily against his mouth as my hips flexed up off the bed, chasing the feel of him stroking me. When he dipped a finger inside, I groaned. His palm cupped me, pressing against the head of my cock as it jerked, threatening to slide out.

Charlie gently rocked his palm inward, making me choke out a moan. He knew how much I loved the feel of that. As his finger moved slowly in and out, he kissed me again, harder this time, groaning into my mouth as his tongue thrust hungrily.

"Ch-Charlie," I mumbled against his lips, gripping his hair in a too-tight fist.

I could feel—and hear—how wet I was getting as he fucked me with his finger. It should have embarrassed me, but it felt too good for me to care. And I knew Charlie liked it—his cock was an iron bar against my hip, burning hot and aching stiff as he rubbed it against my skin.

He pressed soft kisses down my cheek and jaw as my head tipped back into the pillow, hips rising to meet his thrusting finger. Charlie groaned, his cock jerking against my hip. Forcing my heavy eyes open, I looked down and saw him watching what he was doing to me. His leg was still pinning mine down, spreading it wide, and I couldn't help but lift my other knee higher so I was totally open to him. My tail thumped impatiently against the mattress, my clawed toes flexing from the rush of pleasure when Charlie's fingertip glided over the slit on my cockhead.

Grey eyes darkened by lust lifted and met mine. There was enough light from the dying fire that he could see me, but I could see him so much clearer thanks to my enhanced vision. An overwhelming rush of emotion tightened my chest as I stared at his face. He was so handsome, even when tired and unshaven and with a crease on his cheek from squishing his face into the pillow while asleep.

His charming grin always made my stomach do this annoying little swoop, but when he looked at me like this—dark eyes, flushed cheeks, lips parted around fast breaths, lust painting every one of his features—it made all my limbs tingle. Made me forget about all my hang-ups, because it was so clear

on his face just how much he wanted me. How much he loved me.

I couldn't stop myself from lunging to crush my lips to his, moaning pleadingly into his mouth as I kissed him with frantic desperation. His thrusting finger was driving me wild, his palm rocking my aching dick back up inside me over and over.

Maybe it was weird or perverse in some way, but it felt so good, and Charlie seemed to enjoy it judging by the hoarse groan he let out. I was leaking all over his fingers from my cockslit, and the sound of his finger fucking me was obscene, but fuck... I loved it. I needed him. I didn't care how. I just needed to be closer to him—

“Moth.” His low voice cut through the white noise in my head, lips moving against my mouth.

I was breathing fast and unsteadily. I tried to calm down enough to focus, but his finger was still lodged inside me. My cock jerked against his palm.

“Y-yeah?”

Charlie's lips tipped up into a tiny smile as he kissed the corner of my mouth. “Time to tell me one of your fantasies.”

I blinked, my heart pounding in my chest. “Wh-what?” I swallowed to try and bring some moisture back into my mouth. “*Now?*”

“Of course now.”

I squirmed, partly out of discomfort and partly to feel his finger moving inside me. “Can't we just... you know.”

Charlie let out a low chuckle, nuzzling my cheek. “Nope. Come on, baby, tell me.”

I swallowed again, sliding my hand down his back. “What if I don't have any?”

He snorted. “We both know that's bullshit, slayer.”

I shot him a weak glare. “It might not be!”

Charlie smiled again and kissed me once. “Come on, Moth. You know you can tell me anything.”

“I—” I licked my dry lips, stomach jittery with nerves. “Well, I mean, what about one of yours?”

“I can tell you one of mine, if you want,” he said easily. “But we're gonna do one of *yours* tonight.”

Hot anticipation bloomed in my gut, making me clench around Charlie's finger. He groaned, and that helpless sound made me a little braver.

“Okay.” My voice only shook a tiny amount. “Tell me one of yours, then I'll... I'll tell you mine.”

White teeth flashed in the low light as Charlie propped himself up on an elbow and grinned at me. “Okay, well, this one's specific to *you*.”

My brows twitched up. “It is?”

Charlie chuckled. “Why is that a surprise? I love you. And you're ridiculously hot.”

I huffed and rolled my eyes, hoping he didn't notice my blush. “Sure, whatever.”

“Okay, so...” He gave me a sheepish smile. “I want you to, um, dress up like an elf.”

There was silence as I stared at him. “An... elf?”

Charlie cleared his throat, cheeks pink. “Yeah. Have you... Do you know what they are?”

“Um...” My mouth twitched, but I pushed back the smile. “No, I don't think so.”

“Okay, so, they're these, like, fictional creatures that are like... Um, well, I mean, there's a lot of mythology and stuff around them but mainly... they're really hot. And they have pointed ears. And they tend to have long hair like yours... pale blond a lot of the time...”

His face was red now, gaze lowered to somewhere around my Adam's apple. I pursed my lips and cupped his face.

“So you're saying I look like an elf. And you want to fuck an elf.”

Charlie huffed and rolled his eyes. “Well that makes it sound weird and it’s *not*. *Lots* of people want to fuck elves. They’re, like, *designed* to be desirable or something.”

“So how would I dress up like one?” This was probably a weird conversation to have while his finger was still inside me, but whatever.

Charlie cleared his throat. “Well, they’re normally in, like... old-fashioned clothes. Like armour and cloaks and stuff...” He let his eyes trail over my face as he carefully slid his finger free of my body and cupped me possessively instead, making me shiver. “They tend to use a bow and arrow, but a sword is fine.”

I choked on a laugh. “Okay, well that’s fortunate, I guess.”

“There’s the fae as well, who are similar.” Charlie cocked his head. “Like, they look kind of similar, I mean.”

I nodded solemnly. “So you want to fuck them too.”

His cheeks flamed as he shot me a dry look. “I’d be careful how much you tease me, slayer. You gotta tell me one of *your* fantasies now.”

I sobered up, belly clenching with nerves, and stroked his cheek with my thumb. “Sorry. I’m, uh—I can dress up like an elf.”

Charlie perked up. “Really?”

I laughed. “Yeah. Uh... do I have to do anything?”

“Well they’re meant to act kind of... aloof and haughty. Like they’re better than everyone. So”—he shrugged—“just be yourself.”

I gave the back of his head a gentle smack. “Shithead.”

“I mean that in a good way.” He leaned down and gave me a big, smacking kiss. “Now, tell me one of yours. But trust me, we *will* be revisiting the elf thing later.”

Shit. “Oh. Uh...” My voice shook with nerves. “Um...”

“Whatever it is, I will most likely be into it.” Charlie gave me a little smile. “Or at least willing to try. You can tell me anything.”

The hand cupping my pubic mound gave me a gentle squeeze and a small stroke, which made me soften. I licked my lips, letting my hand trail down his neck so I could play with his chest hair while I told him this, because it comforted me for some weird reason.

“Okay, so...” I cleared my throat, keeping my eyes fixed on Charlie’s collarbone. “I’ve wondered what it would feel like if you—Um, if my d-dick is... inside while you, uh, you know.” My face was burning. “Fuck me.”

When I peeked up to see Charlie’s reaction, he looked intrigued—and turned on. I relaxed the tiniest amount.

“Inside,” he echoed, voice husky. “You mean... still inside you? Like this?”

He rocked his palm gently, pushing my stiff cock back up deeper inside me from where it was attempting to slide free. I groaned through clenched teeth, hips flexing up off the bed. My chin dipped in a frantic nod.

“Y-yeah,” I panted. “Like that.”

“Fuck,” Charlie rasped, sinking a finger back inside me. “That’s so hot.”

Before I could formulate any kind of response to that, he crushed his mouth to mine and thrust his tongue inside. I kissed him back eagerly, wrapping my arms around his neck and spreading my thighs wider for the hand between them.

I could feel how slippery and messy everything already was down there, my channel growing ridiculously slick and my cock leaking profusely, still tucked inside me. My skin was hot and damp

with sweat, but I couldn't stop shivering from the pleasure of Charlie's finger sinking inside me.

"We can do that," he rasped breathlessly against my mouth after breaking the kiss. "We can *definitely* do that."

"Now," I blurted immediately, clenching around his finger and making his brows pinch with arousal.

"Now?" he echoed hoarsely.

"Yeah," I croaked, trying to tug him on top of me. "Let's do it now."

"Fuck. Okay." Charlie's cock was leaking now, and it left a trail of wetness over my hip as he scrambled to get between my spread legs.

I grinned, even though my heart was pounding with nerves and hot anticipation. *Oh my god, I can't believe we're actually going to do it.*

I'd wondered how it would feel for years, but since Charlie, I'd been able to imagine it *way* better. I'd actually had experience with similar sensations, so I almost knew how it would feel.

And I was about to find out for certain.

I pulled him into a deep kiss, thrusting my tongue eagerly into his mouth. Charlie kissed me back with a moan before pulling away as he grabbed my hand. Lowering it between our bodies, he urged me to cup my pubic mound.

"Keep this here," he murmured, and I understood. My dick would try and slide free the moment I moved my hand. I could feel the head bumping against my palm, so I pushed it back in and shuddered at the sensation.

"Are you sure this won't hurt you?" Charlie sat up between my legs, gripping my thighs as he stared down at my hand with hot eyes.

I nodded quickly, even though I had no idea. It was going to be tight. I hoped it would feel good for him.

I was *ridiculously* slippery already, and I couldn't help crooking my middle finger to slip it inside as I stared up at Charlie, waiting for him to *do* something. His brows pinched, lips parting as he watched me.

"Fuck," he croaked. His smooth, deep voice made me shudder, my cock jerking hard inside me, trying to escape.

I was trembling, already so close to coming just from the idea of what we were about to do. My legs shifted restlessly, clawed toes flexing as I slid my fingertip back and forth over my leaking cockslit inside me.

When Charlie still didn't move, staring down at me in a kind of lust-dazed stupor, I let out an impatient grunt.

"Charlie, come o—*gah!*" My face flamed at the embarrassing sound that left me when he grabbed my hips and yanked me closer, settling my ass on his thighs and making my lower back arch off the mattress.

For some reason, that small change in angle made me feel a million times more exposed. I swallowed, face hot, and wrapped my legs around Charlie's waist.

"Tell me if it hurts," he rasped as he slid long fingers around the base of his hard cock.

I nodded wordlessly, eyes fixed on his dick as he brought it closer. I quickly slid my finger free and parted them so they framed his cock as he notched the head against me. Biting down hard on the inside of my cheek to hold back a whimper, I watched as he began to carefully sink inside.

Fuck. I could feel his cock sliding through my fingers, and at the same time I was extremely aware of the growing pressure inside me. The incredible fullness that I'd never felt before. My chest heaved

with my hectic breaths as Charlie's cock tunnelled inside, sliding against mine. Fuck, it almost felt like it wasn't going to fit.

"Cha-Charlie—" I panted, pushing my palm hard against my cock as it tried to jerk free. I couldn't take my eyes off his cock sinking inside me.

Pleasure sparked, blooming rapidly. My thighs shook, so I clamped them tighter around Charlie's lean hips, forcing him in deeper.

"Fuck, baby." Charlie sounded like he was struggling to breathe. His fingers were like claws as they dug into the tops of my thighs. "Jesus. Shit, you're so tight."

"K-Keep going." It was slow going because it was such a tight fit, but his cock was gradually sinking deeper and deeper inside me—a long, slow glide against the underside of my dick. I was leaking pre-cum all over him, and I had no idea how intense it was going to feel when he got to that spot—

"Oh f-f-f-fuck." My eyes rolled back when he reached it, the head of his cock grinding against it as his hips pressed flush against me. My body shook violently, cock pulsing against his inside me, and I was barely aware of the sounds leaving my mouth.

I could feel myself contracting around his dick, tightening up even more. There was a hint of pain, but it was drowned out by a flood of overwhelming pleasure. I had only a few moments to wonder whether Charlie would find it gross if I... came like this, but he seemed to like how much I, um, produced. He'd said he found it sexy.

I couldn't stop it anyway. He wasn't even moving yet, but the fullness inside me was turning me into a mess. A shaking, sweating, incoherent mess. I had no idea what I was saying, but I was helpless to stop the heat building and gathering inside me. A knot that tightened and tightened until—

"*Fuck*," I cried out, head tipping back as my cock started pulsing against Charlie's, gushing long streams of cum all over the base of his dick, my fingers, Charlie's pubic hair, his balls. It went everywhere, and I couldn't stop it. I could hardly breathe, and my limbs locked up and wouldn't stop shaking, back bowing even more off the bed.

"Holy shit." I was only vaguely aware of hearing Charlie's hoarse voice as I squeezed his cock rhythmically. He let out a broken groan, body trembling, hands gripping my thighs painfully tight. "Fuck, Moth," he panted. "God, I can feel your cock throbbing against mine."

That made me let out another sobbing moan as more cum spurted out of me. When the orgasm finally started easing and my limbs unlocked, I blinked dazed eyes up at Charlie, breathing hard, my face damp and flushed with sweat, hair sticking to my cheek.

"Keep going," I croaked, still shuddering with aftershocks. Or maybe I was still coming, I had no idea. I could barely fucking think. "K-keep—*fuck*."

Charlie withdrew before sinking back inside, and the wet sound that filled the room as he began to fuck me was *obscene*. My slick fingers framed his tunnelling cock, everything slippery and messy, and my own dick was still achingly stiff and throbbing inside me. It pushed insistently against my palm, pressed tightly against Charlie's and shifting with every one of his thrusts.

Charlie let out a strained laugh as he slid his hands down my thighs to cup behind my knees, spreading my legs impossibly wide. "God, you're still so hard. I don't know if I can keep up with you, slayer."

"Yes you can." My voice was gravelly. "You better."

Because I was pretty sure I'd kick him in the face again if he stopped.

CHARLIE

My chuckle was strained as I carefully sank my cock back inside Moth. I was being slow because he was *ridiculously* tight like this, with his own dick still tucked inside.

My eyes threatened to roll back when I felt it throbbing against mine. I could feel his cum coating my tight sac, dripping onto the bed below. There was *so much*, and I could feel more pre-cum leaking from him again, as well as the wetness coating my cock as it tunnelled deep.

His long fingers framed my thrusting cock, stroking the base of it as his palm kept his dick pushed inside him. He was shaking, pale eyes wild, cheeks and throat and chest flushed with his fast-pumping blood.

“Ch-Charlie.” God, I loved hearing his voice so husky from his moans. “C’m on,” he said pleadingly. “Faster.”

My body obeyed him without question. I hooked my elbows under his widespread knees and leaned forward, jacking up his legs. Moth sucked in a sharp breath, his free hand shooting up to grip my hair in a shaking fist.

Shit, he was even tighter at this angle. I was sweating like a beast just from holding back my orgasm, and I couldn’t stop the heavy, frantic pace my hips took up, pounding my cock inside him. Moth was moaning constantly into my mouth as our lips met in a fiery kiss. His pierced, pointed tongue thrust feverishly, legs bouncing against my arms from my hard, jarring thrusts.

I had to break the kiss to suck in a trembling breath, resting my burning forehead on the pillow next to his head. Moth’s fingers clenched in my hair, hitching moans escaping him with every thrust.

I let out a helpless groan by his ear. “You feel so good, baby.”

I’d learned pretty quick that Moth responded well to praise. He reacted as I’d hoped, shuddering hard and turning his head to bury his face in my neck.

“Charlie,” he mumbled shakily, sounding almost delirious with pleasure. “I—I—”

“How does it feel?” I murmured.

“I—It—” Moth made a strangled sound as I delivered a particularly hard thrust. “S-s-so good.”

My lips quirked. “Are you gonna come again?”

“Fuck,” he whined. “Fuck... yes—”

My breath caught, thrusts growing jerky when I felt the hand cupping his mound shift, and a fingertip slid between our dicks inside him. “Oh shit—”

“Fuck, yes,” Moth panted into my neck, shaking wildly against me. “FuckCharliefuckyes—”

He cut himself off with a broken cry, tightening up so much around my cock that I couldn’t thrust anymore. Fresh wetness flooded my dick, and when I felt the cum spurting from his cockhead leaking out of him and getting everywhere, I exploded.

“*Fffffuck.*” My hips jerked forward, sliding my cock as deep as possible as it started to flex, pumping my cum inside him. My vision went completely white for a long moment, static filling my head, pleasure shooting down my spine and up the length of my cock. My balls ached from the force of my orgasm, and it didn’t stop until they were drained completely.

We were both trembling wildly when it ended, everything obscenely slick between our joined

bodies, our heaving chests brushing. I could barely lift my head, but forced myself to when Moth slowly pulled away the trembling hand cupping his pubic mound.

Looking down, I watched through heavy eyes as his cock finally slid free, still hard. It was glistening, coated in our combined release. My mouth watered.

Sliding down his body, I tried to calm my breathing enough on the way so I wouldn't grow any more lightheaded when I sucked his dick into my mouth.

Moth jerked, a tiny whimper escaping him. "Sh-shit."

I moaned from our combined taste, sucking up and off his cock to glance down. When I saw the ridiculous amount of cum leaking from him, white against his flushed pink skin and scales, a deep, guttural groan broke from my chest.

"Fuck, that looks so good." I dipped my head to lick him.

"*Nnngh*." I nearly smiled at the undignified sound Moth made, but I was too busy. "Ch-Charlie, I don't think I can come again so soon," he added breathlessly.

I huffed a tiny laugh against him, before gathering an impressive amount of our combined release on my tongue and lunging up to kiss him. Moth shuddered when it hit his tongue, and he swallowed eagerly with a little moan.

"Did it live up to your fantasy?" I asked him once we broke the kiss, trying to keep the anxiety out of my voice. I didn't want to have disappointed him.

Moth laughed incredulously, even as his face went bright pink. "Uh, yes."

I grinned against his cheek, kissing him there before rolling onto my back with a grunt. We needed to go clean up—we were both complete messes below the waist—but it could wait. Moth rolled onto his side and tucked himself up against me, resting his head on my chest. Automatically, his hand came up to comb his fingers through my chest hair.

I pressed my lips to the top of his head, his hair damp from exertion and fragrant with his natural citrus scent that I was addicted to.

As I let out a great, heaving sigh, my body melted into the bed. "Feels late," I commented, running my fingers through his hair.

Moth grunted. "Yeah, it is." Lifting his head, he propped his chin on my chest. "Lucky we don't have to get up early in the morning. No Chuck to look after. No Edin booming out bullshit at Hunter right outside our door."

I snorted with laughter. "Yeah."

Moth kissed my chest before resting his cheek there again, nuzzling my chest hair. I felt his lips curve up into a sly smile before he said, "Maybe tomorrow we can go looking for a cloak. Or a bow and arrow."

I smirked as my eyes slid shut. "Fuck yes, we will."

This time, when the camp wall came into view, no impending sense of doom filled my gut. My hand was tucked firmly inside Moth's, and he was chatting away about the time he cut the creepy human-like head off a mortik. I'd heard of those monsters before—Hunter had told me that he and Edin had gone up against one in the koleb tunnels while they were trying to rescue me. He'd said it was terrifying and had gone pale recounting the story to me.

Moth, on the other hand, was snickering about how long the horrifying creature's headless body had run around after he'd decapitated it.

We had spent a glorious week at his safehouse in the middle of nowhere. We'd fucked a lot, obviously, but also spent hours just curled up together in the big bed, napping or eating or talking. I'd read aloud to Moth from the stack of books he'd collected while trying to teach himself to read. He'd curled up on my chest with a leg tucked between mine, and had dozed off several times while I read to him.

Life was really fuckin' good.

We hadn't found a cloak, or a bow and arrow, or any other elf-like gear, unfortunately, but Moth was determined now. I'd told him more about elves—well, about what I found important about them, which was largely how hot they were—and said I'd grab us any fae books we spotted out in the Wastes so I could read them to him. He was invested now. He wanted to do my little elf roleplay properly, and... it made me love him even more.

It also made me super horny. But a lot about Moth did, so that wasn't really a surprise.

When we got into the camp, my eyes were immediately drawn to the Soul Eater and Danny, who were making their way across the grass hand in hand. When he spotted us, Danny said something to Wyn and tugged him over. The Soul Eater practically dragged his feet like a sullen teenager.

"Hey!" Danny gave us a bright grin as they reached us. "How was your trip?"

"All good, thanks." I smiled at him. "How's Chuck been?"

"Is she okay?" Moth asked quickly, looking around the camp to try and spot her.

"She's great! She's with Edin and Hunter in their room." Danny tried to give Wyn a subtle nudge.

"We really enjoyed lookin' after her. Didn't we, Wyn?"

The Soul Eater sniffed. "The copicen is acceptable, I suppose. She's smarter than average. Probably smarter than all the humans here, except for Danny."

I cleared my throat expectantly, but his hood just cocked for a second before he continued.

"Anyway, I taught her how to impale someone's face with her tail spikes," he said, distorted voice flat. "You're welcome."

I choked. "What?"

The Soul Eater huffed and echoed, "What?" like he didn't see what the problem was. Danny had gone very pale.

"You—" I looked at Moth incredulously. "You *taught her how to maim people*?"

"Well, I mean, maybe that's a good thing," Moth hurried out, and I barely resisted the urge to roll my eyes at his wheedling tone. God, he was *such* a little fanboy for the Soul Eater. "She needs to be able to defend herself from humans."

"Exactly," the Soul Eater drawled, and Moth's face went pink with pleasure. "It didn't take me long. I can teach her other things—"

"Oh, Wyn, you're so funny!" Danny smacked his arm and laughed, too loudly and a touch hysterically. "Of course he didn't *actually* teach Chuck how to, um... impale people's faces. He's just kiddin'. Baby, will you go and get me a drink from the diner..."

He hurriedly shoved at the Soul Eater, hissing something under his breath until the monster snarled and stalked off. The moment he was gone, Danny turned back to us.

"I'm sorry," he whispered frantically. "I tried to stop him, I swear. Please don't stop me from seeing her."

"It's fine," Moth said quickly, pale eyes meeting mine. He gave me a hesitant smile. "It *is* safer if she knows how to defend herself..."

I shot him a dry, unimpressed look. “Stabbing is not the answer to everything, Moth.”

He went pink, even as he glared at me. “I never said it was.”

“Thank you for lookin’ after her,” I told Danny with a smile, then turned to head for the motel.

Moth trailed behind me.

“I mean, it *is* the answer to a lot of stuff, though,” he said, then grunted in annoyance when I didn’t stop walking or acknowledge him. “*Charlie*,” he whined. “Ugh, you’re being so human about this.”

That made me burst out laughing. “I *am* human, dingus.”

Moth’s citrus scent surrounded me as he threw his arms around me from behind, halting me in my tracks.

“C’mon,” he mumbled, rubbing his nose against the bend of my neck. “You’re gonna make the Soul Eater think I’m totally lame and he’s, like, the coolest guy I’ve ever met.”

I let out a slow, measured exhale and turned in the cradle of Moth’s arms. Cupping his face, I gazed at him intently.

“Moth.” I stroked his cheekbone. “I love you. But we’re gonna have to nip this little Soul Eater obsession in the bud, okay? Because *that guy*?”

I pointed at Wyn, who was standing outside the diner with Danny. He paused in the middle of handing Danny a glass of water, his hood popping up and horns tilting as he cocked his head in our direction.

“That guy is just an overgrown emo kid in a hood.” I ignored the faint snarl from across the camp. “He’s not any better than you.”

“I’m not saying he is,” Moth hissed, his face bright pink as he grabbed my hand and yanked it down. “But he *is* thousands of years old and can turn to smoke and stuff. Plus!” he added brightly. “He’s, like, *saving* humans from parasites. That’s something you’re into, right? Isn’t that what soldiers are meant to do? Save humans?”

I grunted. “I guess he—”

“He saved *you*.”

That made me shut up, my mouth pursing into a thin line.

“Fine,” I relented. “But that still doesn’t make him better than you.”

“You should listen to the half salyik, human.” Wyn’s smug, distorted voice drifted over from the other side of the camp. I gritted my teeth. He was *eavesdropping*! “And by the way, I only saved you because Edin asked me to.”

“Wyn!” Danny smacked the Soul Eater in the stomach.

He grunted. “I just don’t want these humans getting any ideas that I *actually* care about them.”

“Trust me,” I called back flatly. “No one thinks that.”

Wyn started to hiss before stopping abruptly, as if he couldn’t decide how to react to that. His hood cocked. Before he could say anything else, I grabbed Moth’s hand and kept tugging him toward the motel.

“Why are you *trying* to piss off the Soul Eater?” Moth hissed at me as we ascended the stairs.

I snorted. “I’m not. He’s just so fucking *sensitive*.”

“He can probably hear you.”

“Yeah. Probably.” Shooting Moth a side-eyed smirk, I added in an innocent tone, “Then I guess I probably shouldn’t mention you saying he’s too old to have a threesome with—”

I heard a confused yet rabid snarl from the camp behind us, a split second before Moth clamped his hand over my mouth.

Moth and the Soul Eater Have a Bonding Experience

A 3.4k word short that is essentially 3.4k words of Moth fanboying over Wyn. I've said before that this is the most ridiculous of all the shorts (so far), and it really is. I have crammed every relevant cliché that I can in here.

But it is the start of a meaningful friendship between two feral, beautiful monster men who believe violence is always the answer. And that's what matters.

Content warnings: Extremely mild spice (a passionate kiss), mentions of sex, Wyn pushing his stabby agenda, discussions of death and violence, bone rings, they talk about the correct way to disembowel someone

Spoiler warning: Set after the events of *Moth* (Monstrous: Book Five)

First published 2022 by Lily Mayne
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MOTH

For what felt like the hundredth time, I shared an awkward smile with the Soul Eater's human lover as we both happened to reach our motel room doors at the same time.

Danny seemed like a sweet guy. Friendly, if not a bit awkward sometimes, but honestly, I was too terrified to get into a proper conversation with him just in case the Soul Eater took something I said the wrong way and gutted me for some perceived slight.

Charlie didn't feel that way. Charlie happily spoke to Danny, seemingly unafraid of his terrifying monster partner. But then again, I was pretty sure Charlie liked to see how pissed off he could make the Soul Eater just like he did with Hunter. I was pretty sure he thought Edin would protect him if it ever came down to it, seeing as Edin was probably the only other being besides Danny who could talk the Soul Eater off a murderous ledge.

I'd rather not risk it.

At least Danny was going *into* his room instead of leaving it, like I was, so I didn't have to awkwardly hang back a few steps while we both made our way down the staircase. I headed downstairs and across the camp to the diner to meet Charlie.

Just as I saw him stepping out of the diner with Hunter, my gaze snagged on movement to the left, tucked down the side of the building in the gap between the diner and the camp wall.

The Soul Eater was sitting cross-legged in the shade with Chuck. I smiled distractedly at Charlie when he spotted me and grinned, but my eyes darted back to the side of the diner.

Because the Soul Eater was holding up a kitchen knife, and his hood was bobbing in an encouraging nod as Chuck inched closer curiously.

Oh god. If Charlie saw, he would one hundred percent embarrass me in front of the Soul Eater by marching over there and chewing him out for "teaching Chuck violence".

"Hey." Charlie immediately dropped a handful of almonds into my palm when he reached me. Popping one into his mouth, he tilted his head toward Hunter, who was heading toward the other end of the camp. "Hunter's asked me to help him fix one of the shower stalls. Rig would normally do it, but he's repairing a section of the wall with Gloam."

"Uh-huh," I said distractedly, shoving a few almonds into my mouth and furtively watching as the Soul Eater deftly flipped the knife in his hand and held the hilt out to Chuck.

"You okay?"

My eyes jerked back to Charlie, who was gazing at me with pinched brows. I nodded, pocketing the rest of my almonds to give to Chuck later—maybe to coax her away from that knife.

"I better get over there before Hunter starts whining." Charlie stuffed the last almond in his mouth and crunched down. "Have you seen Chuck? I haven't seen her since breakfast."

I panicked when he started to turn around. He'd have a clear view of the Soul Eater waving a knife in front of Chuck, coaxing her to take it. Grabbing his cheeks, I forced his head back toward me. His brows drew together in confusion.

“Give me a kiss before you go,” I blurted, not allowing my eyes to dart up over his shoulder. Behind Charlie, I could see the blurry outline of the Soul Eater making a violent stabbing motion and encouraging Chuck to copy him.

Charlie’s face cleared as he gave me his charming grin.

“I’m only going over there, slayer.” He jerked his thumb toward the shower stalls. But at the same time, he sidled closer and slipped his arms around my middle beneath my coat. His smile turned smug. “Gonna miss me?”

I resisted the urge to roll my eyes, mainly because I felt kind of guilty for duping him. So instead of answering, I dipped my head to kiss him and gentled my unyielding grip on his face to cradle the back of his head. My belly tightened at the feel of his soft hair sifting through my fingers.

I kissed him hard, forcing open his lips straight away to thrust my tongue inside and dominate his mouth. Charlie let out a muffled sound of surprise, his fingers curling into the back of my shirt. He shivered, groaning quietly into my mouth.

When I felt him melt against me, his hips sinking into mine, I peeked open one eye to make sure Chuck wasn’t making her way over to show us her new knife.

My fingers tightened in Charlie’s hair when I saw the Soul Eater pressing the knife into her palm and covering her flat grey fingers with his own, urging her to curl them around the hilt.

I jerked my head back and cleared my throat. Charlie looked dazed, his lips pink and kiss-swollen and tempting me to lean back in. He licked them and blinked.

“I’ll do that thing you like later,” I mumbled, because I felt kind of guilty that I was literally watching the Soul Eater teach Chuck how to stab someone and I wasn’t putting a stop to it, even though I knew for a fact that Charlie would be angry about it thanks to his annoying human moral code.

My words snapped Charlie out of his stupor, his eyes brightening and face perking up. “Yeah? You mean the thing with your tongue—”

“Yes.” I glanced around to make sure no one was nearby and could overhear, because talking about sex was still kind of... new and awkward for me. “And I’ll ask Daisy if she’ll make that bread you like.”

I *really* hoped Charlie didn’t figure out that I was trying to butter him up, because he was definitely going to find out that the Soul Eater was teaching Chuck violence at some point. Probably when she got too excited and stabbed a raider in the leg.

Charlie’s grey eyes softened. Beneath my coat, he slipped his hands under my shirt and traced a little patch of scales on my lower back, making me shiver.

“Why are you being so nice? Are you gettin’ sweet on me, Moth?” he asked with a sly grin.

Rolling my eyes, I slid my hands over Charlie’s shoulders to his chest, splaying my fingers out to soak in his warmth. “Shithead.”

He smirked, leaning in to give me another kiss. “I love you too.”

I gave his chest a gentle shove. “Just... go and help Hunter. I’ll find Chuck.”

For a split second, I glanced behind him at the copicen in question, still tucked down the side of the diner with the Soul Eater. She was sitting beside him, her little hands resting on his knee, and staying obediently still so that Wyn could peel her lips back from her teeth to inspect her fangs. I tensed, but his blackened fingers looked surprisingly gentle as they gripped her cute, squashed little face.

“Okay. Make sure you do.” Charlie frowned, stepping back. “I don’t want the Soul Eater finding her and bein’ a bad influence again.”

I cleared my throat and mumbled something indistinct, grabbing his hand and dragging him away from the diner. Only once Chuck and the Soul Eater were out of sight did I let go and give Charlie one last kiss on the cheek. “See you later.”

He smiled at me and walked off toward the shower stalls. My ears were better than a human’s, so I could already hear Hunter complaining that if Charlie flaked on him and he had to do it on his own, “*so help me god...*”

“Quit bitchin’, teddy bear,” I heard Charlie drawl as he rounded the stalls. “I’m here.”

“*Finally,*” Hunter snapped as I started hurrying back toward the diner.

As I got closer, I tugged on my shirt under my coat to straighten it and quickly reached up to make sure not too much hair had slipped loose from my braid. Glancing back, I raised a hand to adjust the hilt of my sword, ensuring the most decorative, impressive part was prominently displayed behind my head.

My palms were sweating as I approached, spotting Chuck’s spiked tail swishing contentedly from the side of the diner.

What am I supposed to call him? I wondered frantically. *Wyn? Too informal. Soul Eater? Mister Eater? No, that’s stupid.*

I stopped a few yards away, taking a breath before closing the final distance with what I hoped was a relaxed, casual gait. My gut squeezed into a tight, nervous knot when the Soul Eater’s hood tilted up as I rounded the side of the building, while Chuck chirped happily at the sight of me.

Nothing but impenetrable black faced me from the depths of that hood. I had no idea what he looked like—did anyone? I guessed maybe Danny did. Unless the Soul Eater insisted on fucking in his coat, which was a possibility—

“Let me guess.” His eerie, demonic voice thankfully interrupted those spiralling thoughts and sent shivers down my spine. “Your talkative human doesn’t want me *corrupting* the copicen.”

“No, no, nothing like that. I just—um, I saw Chuck’s tail. I didn’t know you were here,” I lied, trying to force back the heat rushing to my cheeks.

The Soul Eater grunted, standing up and rising to his full height. I wasn’t short, but he still towered over me. He *felt* tall. Looming. Intimidating, but like... in the best way.

I glanced down when I felt Chuck’s fingers curling around mine. Dropping into a crouch, I smoothed my thumb over her cowlick. “Why don’t you go and find Lilac, huh?”

She perked up at the mention of the raider, chirping excitedly. After spinning in a circle, she stretched up on her hind legs to bump the Soul Eater’s blackened fingertips with her forehead.

After a pause, he stroked her flat muzzle. “Take the knife.”

My eyes widened when Chuck obediently reached for the discarded kitchen knife on the grass.

“Maybe—I’ll give it to her later,” I said hurriedly, grabbing her as she tried to lope past me. Luckily, she let me pry the blade out of her hands before she scurried off.

I straightened, tucking the knife into my belt. Hoping the Soul Eater didn’t think I was a total loser. I cleared my throat. “So, uh... I’ve heard a lot about you out here.”

He huffed, crossing his arms and leaning a shoulder casually on the wall of the diner. “Everyone has.”

“Yeah, of course,” I rushed out, stuffing my hands in my coat pockets then immediately pulling them back out, not knowing what to do with them.

The Soul Eater was watching me. I could *feel* it. The air was colder around him, and the weight of his gaze was weirdly heavy. Like frost prickling over my skin.

“And Edin has told me things about you,” he said slowly. “Your heritage. I had heard of that place,

but never cared to witness what was happening for myself.”

My throat bobbed nervously. So he’d heard of the Herald and their cult—that didn’t surprise me. What I was *more* focused on was *what the hell Edin had said about me to the Soul Eater*.

I could feel the Soul Eater’s cold gaze roaming over my neck, down to my wrists and fingers. They twitched, but I resisted the urge to clench my hands into fists to try and hide the tattoos.

“Your salyik progenitor marked you?” His distorted voice was carefully flat.

Clearing my throat, I nodded, then hesitantly asked, “Can you... read it?”

“Yes.”

I swallowed and licked my dry lips. “What... what do they say? The tattoos. I can’t—I can’t read it. The language, I mean.”

The Soul Eater—Wyn, I allowed myself to think timidly, figuring first name basis was probably okay now?—was silent for a minute. But I could sense him watching me from the depths of his hood. Eventually, he shifted his weight and straightened from his casual slouch against the wall.

“Does it matter? They are obviously a bigot. Some salyiks are, but most are insular and defensive after being downtrodden for so many years. I have seen them be unkind to those they deem different among their own. It wouldn’t necessarily be wise to ingratiate yourself with them.”

I bristled. “I don’t want to ingratiate myself with—”

“Good,” Wyn interrupted carelessly, waving a black-stained hand. He shrugged, examining his fingernails. “Where is your progenitor? I could kill them for you, if you want.”

I froze, staring at the Soul Eater in disbelief. Had he just... offered to kill my progenitor for their treatment of me?

I could feel heat rising in my cheeks, and my stomach squeezed into a tight, excited knot. For some reason, I had an intense urge to go and find Charlie and tell him that the Soul Eater had offered to kill someone for me. For my... *honour*.

“Um, I already killed them,” I muttered, twisting my fingers together nervously.

Wyn’s hood cocked. “Oh? That must have been satisfying. With the sword, I presume.” His blackened fingers twitched on his bicep as his head tilted the other way. “I do recognise that sword...”

“Not with the sword,” I said quickly, wanting the Soul Eater to know how I *actually* killed the Herald. With brute strength. And a fuck-ton of rage. “Just... with my fists. I punched them to death.”

I cringed. Oh my god, that sounded *so lame*. I bet the Soul Eater killed people by, like, ripping out their spines, or turning their brains to soup, or forcing his way down their throats in his smoke form and making them explode from the inside.

I bet that looked *so cool*.

Wyn let out a huff of amusement. “I see. Did that feel good?”

I couldn’t work out if he was mocking me or not, but I also couldn’t stop myself from blurting, “Yes. I, uh... kind of punched their face in. It felt...” I swallowed. “Fucking amazing.”

Wyn grunted. “Did you take a memento?”

“Huh?”

He lifted a hand, splaying his long, stained fingers. My gaze drifted over the rings on each one. Only his left ring finger was bare.

“Rings made from the bones of my mortal enemies,” he said casually. “The ones who were the most satisfying to murder, anyway. There have been many others. Obviously.” He let out a tiny snarl. “And one is still out there. What I wouldn’t give to rip the carapace off that spiky-haired fucker.”

I had no idea who he was talking about, but all I could think as I stared at the bone rings

was, *Goddamnit*. I frowned hard. I wanted a bone ring. Why hadn't I thought of that? Although, taking a *memento* from my progenitor's corpse seemed a little... morbid. Not that I was going to say that to the Soul Eater.

Wyn lowered his hand and shrugged. "Next time you slaughter an enemy, remove a bone with enough girth. I'll make you a ring to mark the kill."

Ohmygodohmygod.

"Cool." My face was on fire, but I was pretty sure I managed to keep my tone fairly casual. "Yeah, uh, I will. Thanks."

Oh my god, I needed to tell Charlie. I glanced over my shoulder toward the shower stalls, my heart pounding hard with excitement, but the Soul Eater's awesome, terrifying voice pulled my attention back to him.

"How are you with the sword?"

"Oh, um, great. Cut stuff off all the time. Off of other people, I mean," I added quickly. "Hands, arms, heads... Managed to slice a nose off once from a running jump." I gave a jerky attempt at a casual shrug. "I'm still working on a clean disembowelment—not piercing any organs, just letting them all..." I gestured with my hands, like everything was spilling from my stomach. "You know."

"I can teach you that," Wyn offered casually, and I tried to ignore the excited squeal in my head. "It's all about pulling your wrist back at the last second. If your blade is sharp enough, you only need a light touch to get through flimsy human skin. It splits like overripe fruit."

I snorted. "I know, right? My top half looks more human, but it's still way tougher."

Wyn grunted with what I was pretty sure was approval. I could feel his eyes roaming over my face. "I see the salyik in you more. Your face could pass as human, but you have the more graceful bone structure of one from our world."

Our world—oh my god.

The Soul Eater *just called my bone structure graceful.*

"How skilled are you with a dagger?" he asked.

"Oh, um... I had a knife for a while when I was a kid." I flushed. "Not a dagger, though. The only thing I could find was an old kitchen knife, but um... I managed to kill a few monsters with it."

I cringed, wondering if he'd get annoyed at me for calling creatures from *our* world monsters. It was what I'd grown up hearing them—us—be called, but... was it considered derogatory?

Wyn didn't seem to care. My pulse leapt with nervous anticipation when he pulled his dagger free from the depths of his coat. The handle was bone-coloured and had weird symbols carved into it. The blade was jet black and gleamed iridescent in the sun.

It was *awesome*.

"I can show you some tricks with mine, if you like." He flipped the dagger over in his hand effortlessly. His tone was filled with sly amusement when he added, "Why don't we get Edin's human to hold a target and see how good your aim is?"

I bit my lip, resisting the urge to glance back over my shoulder again. The thing was... I actually *liked* Hunter. He was kind, and funny in a dry, understated way—he just didn't talk much, which I understood. And fuck, he was the butt of the joke *constantly*. Honestly, I'd be more of a prick than he was if I had Charlie and Edin ribbing me all the time.

But, shit, I didn't want to look lame in front of the Soul Eater.

"Better not." I managed to keep my voice deadpan. "Charlie will get pissed if we maim Hunter and then... you know... I'm sleepin' on the couch." I winced immediately. God, that had sounded so stupid.

Wyn huffed. “Yes, indeed. Humans do get touchy about you hurting their *friends*. If Danny decides that I’ve killed someone without a *good enough reason*,”—his long, blackened fingers lifted into air quotes around the words—“I get the cold shoulder all night.”

I chuckled nervously. “Heh, yeah. Um... Danny seems nice.”

“Danny is the most perfect creature that has ever been and will ever be in existence in all the worlds, including ours and including this one. He transcends all others. I worship him.” The Soul Eater started walking toward the camp entrance, and gestured for me to follow. “But I suppose seeing as you can’t have him, your Charlie is fine.”

I perked up at that. “Yeah?” I asked eagerly. “You like Charlie?”

Wyn grunted. “I wouldn’t go that far.”

“Charlie’s awesome,” I rushed out, my voice echoing as we made our way through the containers. “He’s amazing. Especially for a human.”

The Soul Eater let out another grunt. “You should probably train him to fight off kolebs, though.”

I bristled, glaring at the back of the Soul Eater’s hood. “That wasn’t his fault. I’ve seen them before. In a pack, they’re overpowering. Especially if you don’t know how to deal with them.”

“Calm down, mutt. I didn’t mean anything by it.”

My face burned. “My name is Moth.”

“I know,” Wyn said flatly, then turned to face me once we emerged into the Wastes. “But you *are* a mutt. Half from this world, half from ours. Mutts are stronger. Tougher. Don’t let anyone make you feel less for it.”

I blinked in complete shock, staring into the impenetrable darkness of Wyn’s hood. “Um... I... Okay?”

The Soul Eater clapped me on the shoulder before turning to head toward the forest. “Let’s go throw blades at things, mutt.”

Hunter and Edin Pay the Nebraska Base a Visit

A 6.5k word short where Hunter and Edin return to the Nebraska military base so Edin can get his revenge on a karik. It's not *the* karik that ripped his leg off when he was a kid, but it'll still be satisfying.

It was so nice returning to Edin and Hunter! Hunter is my grumpy babe, but a total marshmallow for his big monster.

And as a surprise to no one, this is smut-heavy. Mainly smut. With some monster killing at the beginning.

Content warnings: Explicit sexual content, 18+ only, intercrural sex, restraint, throatfucking, all that good stuff, plus graphic depictions of death and violence, mentions of past trauma, Wyn somehow managing to push his stabby agenda from a distance

Spoiler warning: Set during the events of *Moth* (Monstrous: Book Five) – like, after the beginning of *Moth*, when it is mentioned that there is a karik occupying the base and Edin's interest is piqued

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HUNTER

“Are you sure this is a good idea, scratch?” I asked dubiously as I eyed the former Nebraska military base, now just an empty shell.

It looked even more dilapidated than the last time I’d been here, when Charlie and I had arrived to find it abandoned, burned out, and smeared in blood and the half-eaten remains of fellow soldiers. Nature was starting to reclaim the building, the grass wildly overgrown out front, thick vines crawling over old trucks to engulf them.

Edin chuckled, looking entirely at ease as he strode beside me. I was clutching my gun, just to be safe, darting my gaze everywhere warily.

“It’s empty, josdo, aside from that tentacle-legged fucker. I’d never risk you. Wyn came ahead to check that nothing else was here.” He flashed me a fanged grin. “He is eager to hear all about it when we get back to the camp. He offered to come with us and help me tear the creature to shreds.”

I grunted, secretly relieved that the Soul Eater hadn’t come with us on this trip, seeing as he, you know, hated my guts. I wasn’t *good enough* for his precious adopted isdernuc son. But then again, I was pretty sure no one would be, in his opinion.

“Okay, so only the, uh, tentacle-legged fucker is here,” I began cautiously. “Should I be worried about *that*?”

“I’ll keep you safe,” Edin replied airily.

I hesitated, chewing on my lip under my mask as I glanced over at him. “And uh... shouldn’t *you* be worried about that? One did rip your leg off when you were younger.”

Edin snarled, lip curling to show off a short, fat fang. “I was practically still a youth! And it crept up on me.” He grunted, horns slashing through the air as he bobbed his head side to side. “And I may have taunted it a bit instead of just killing it.”

I rolled my eyes and let out an exasperated huff. “Edin.”

“These things are terrible, Hunter!” Edin stopped to face me, giving me big puppy-dog eyes. “I am doing a good thing, ridding this world of it. It will tear the skin clean off your bones if it gets you. Just pull it off, and it will already be eating it before you—”

“Scratch.” I felt the blood drain from my face as I stared up at him. “I don’t want your skin to get torn from your bones.”

His face softened. He stepped closer and palmed my cheek, tracing the scar there above the edge of my mask. “I will be fine, josdo.”

I nodded, throat bobbing with a nervous swallow. Lifting the gun in my hands, I said, “Can’t I just shoot it? So you don’t have to get close?”

“Oh no.” Edin rubbed his cheek against my baseball cap before he started walking again. I trailed behind him. “I am eager to tear its tentacles free one by one. And its beak, if I can get to it without losing any fingers. But if I do, fingers don’t take all that long to grow back.”

I glanced over at him in alarm. “How many fingers have you lost?”

Edin shrugged, the skin around his big purple eyes growing tight as we approached the building. “A few.” He stopped walking again, and his voice was more sombre as he added, “Several in there, actually.”

My gut squeezed into a tight knot. I’d asked him repeatedly before we’d set off from the camp whether returning here would trigger any traumatic memories for him. He’d assured me it wouldn’t. I hadn’t believed him. I’d maybe started yelling a bit, the fear over the thought of him hurting—not just physically, but mentally—turning to impotent anger when he refused to call off his mission to hunt down this karik in retribution.

Gloam, the big, bald monster at the camp, had had to step in and calm me down. I hadn’t calmed down, not really, but I’d stopped yelling and stomped back to our room, not wanting to cause any more of a scene in front of a whole camp of raiders we barely knew.

Edin had followed me and promised me he would be fine coming back here. I still hadn’t believed him, but I suspected *he’d* believed what he was saying. I hadn’t thought he’d been lying to me—I thought Edin buried so much, deep down, so he wouldn’t have to acknowledge the painful memories he’d amassed over his long life. I recognised it. Charlie had a habit of doing it too.

I hadn’t wanted to argue with him anymore, so I’d reluctantly agreed to come with him. And as we’d lain in bed that night, I’d clung to him and silently decided that if I could sense him growing distressed while we were here, I’d do whatever it took to get him to abort this ridiculous mission. I’d start yelling. I’d throw down my gun and stomp off away from the base. I’d find a way to get him to follow me and leave the base behind. Edin could be a stubborn bastard at times, but being a stubborn bastard made up about half my personality. I wouldn’t back down if it ultimately achieved my goal of preventing him from being in any kind of pain.

As he stared up at the ruined building, I took a breath to begin my plan. Making sure my voice was surly, I grunted, “This is stupid, scra—”

“Hunter.” Edin turned and grasped my face, tilting my chin up so I could look into his eyes. “Do you really think I would put either of us at risk for a little revenge?”

“I don’t know,” I muttered. “You *are* best friends with the fucking Soul Eater, and he seems like the type to—”

“Why would I risk my life now when I have everything to live for?” He gave me a sweet, fanged smile. “Because of you.”

I took a deep, controlled breath, trying to prevent myself from melting entirely. That sneaky fucker.

After a minute of silence, I groaned and gave his firm stomach a gentle shove. “Manipulative bastard.”

Edin smirked, tugging my mask down to give me a kiss before fixing it back in place. “You love me, josdo.”

“Yes, I’m aware.” I glared up at him. “I love you more than anything, but that doesn’t mean I particularly want to carry you all the way back to the camp if you get all your limbs ripped off by a ‘tentacle-legged fucker’.”

“Bah.” Edin stepped back and waved a hand. “You’d manage. You’re big and strong. And it’ll rip off one at the most before I destroy it, and *only* if I am careless.”

“Okay, well let’s aim for *none* getting ripped off,” I said tightly as we started walking again. “Should I wait out here?”

Edin paused, glancing behind us, eyes shrewd as they scanned the horizon. “It is safer if you come in, josdo. Just in case.”

“Alright. And I can’t use my gun, right?” I added with an eyeroll.

“No. It’s my kill,” Edin said stubbornly. Glancing over with a tiny smile, he added, “You can use your gun if I’m two limbs down.”

“One limb.”

“Eh, fine,” he muttered before we both fell silent as we stepped into the building through the already open doors.

It looked much like it had when Charlie and I had been here before, except now there was a lot of... black goo-like substance smeared over the walls and floor.

And blood. More blood. A few unidentifiable chunks of meat and some bones, several of which looked big enough to have originally been inside large wild animals.

The building was silent, our footsteps echoing as we crunched over grit and tiny shards of glass. Edin’s loose, ambling gait was gone, his body tense and ready as we walked down the long, wide hallway.

I wanted to ask him if he was okay, but knew it wasn’t a good idea to speak. We reached the end of the hall and looked both ways. To our right was another hallway lined with doors, most open or smashed down. On our left, we could see the gloom of the doorway that led to the staircase, a huge metal structure that burrowed down into the depths of the building.

There was a lot more black goo and blood smeared around the entrance.

Edin jerked his chin toward it, then grabbed my hand and led me the other way. He took me into one of the rooms, and I spotted a plaque on the door reading Cpt Hamish. The office inside was largely intact, though the desk drawers had been ransacked at some point, all of them hanging open and mostly empty.

“Wait here,” Edin whispered, smoothing his palm over the back of my head. “I will lead it the other way. Preferably outside.”

“No,” I hissed, grabbing his arm. “I want to stay with you. You might need my—”

“Hunter.” Edin gripped the back of my neck, his eyes hard as he stared at me. “Stay here. You will only distract me. Promise me.”

I exhaled, a muscle ticking in my jaw. At length, I nodded stiffly. “Fine. But if it sounds like you need—”

“I will call for you if I need help.” Edin briefly tugged down my mask to give me a firm kiss. “I swear.”

“Okay.” I swallowed nervously and clutched at his kilt. “Be careful.”

Edin chuckled at that, which did *not* lessen my nerves in the slightest. With a gentle pat to my cheek, he turned and ambled out of the office.

I’d said I’d stay in here, but fuck that. I wasn’t leaving him to face that thing alone. I was already striding to the door to follow him when a deafening crash made me jump out of my skin, fear for Edin chilling my blood.

But then I heard him shout, “Come on then, you slimy fuckface.”

For fuck’s sake, Edin. A tiny part of my brain recognised that Charlie would be pleased to know Edin was making use of all the human curse words he’d taught him over our time at the homestead, but the rest of me was already pissed off. I gritted my teeth and reached for the door, but a hideous screech echoing up from floors below us made me freeze.

Edin let out a booming laugh. “Hungry, you tentacle-legged fucker?”

“You *just said* the other one got to you because you taunted it,” I shouted through the door, feeling my blood pressure rise. “What the fuck are you doing?”

“Shush, Hunter!” I balked at being *shushed*, but before I could rip the door open, I heard the

terrifyingly fast, slapping footsteps of something big and *wet* thundering up the metal staircase.

“Oh ho ho, you’re a big one,” Edin said, sounding delighted.

I clenched my jaw so hard I thought my teeth would crack, but it was the only way to stop myself from yelling again. Edin was right—I couldn’t distract him, but that didn’t mean I didn’t hate the fact that I was stuck in this room.

The thing let out another hideous screech, and I heard something metal and heavy slide across the floor. There was a dull, wet thud, followed by another. When I heard Edin grunt, my vision whited out briefly.

Moving silently but quickly, I eased open the door and aimed my gun as I poked my head out into the hallway. My lips parted on a little stunned puff of air as I took in the sight in front of me.

Edin was standing over a flailing, screeching *thing* with one boot pressing its bulbous mantle into the floor. Its skin was a deep, mottled blueish purple, and its eyes were bulging, but I didn’t know if that was because its head was about to pop under Edin’s weight.

He looked entirely unconcerned. His hands were even on his hips in a wholly casual pose as his tail curled around the karik’s many tentacles, one at a time, and ripped them free with a wet sucking sound that made my gorge rise. The creature shrieked as each one got torn from its body, the rest of it flailing, but it couldn’t lift itself from the ground.

Edin glanced up and frowned when he noticed me standing there gawping. “I told you to stay in there.”

The karik sensed the brief moment of distraction. It wrapped a tentacle around Edin’s boot, causing him to glance down and step back to try and shake it off. Then the creature was slithering away from him, and I went pale when I realised its bulbous eyes were fixed on me.

It lurched up from the ground, limping on its remaining tentacles, but still moving shockingly fast as it hurtled toward me.

“*Now* can I shoot it?” I yelled, already raising my gun and firing off several rounds.

I didn’t know if it was running on adrenaline, but the bullets didn’t slow it down. I stumbled back into the office as it advanced, catching a last glimpse of Edin’s tense face as he raced toward us.

The karik screeched as it burst into the office after me, black goo pouring from its half-ruined body. I shot it again, which made it jerk back, and its movements appeared weaker as it skidded forward, half of its remaining tentacles slipping out from under it.

Edin filled the doorway, his tail whipping around to embed its spike deep in the creature’s eye. I guessed I’d never realised just how much strength he had in that tail, because he used it to fling the creature back against the far wall.

His tail wound around its neck, cinching tighter and tighter. Its eyes really *were* bulging now, its mantle seeming to swell from the pressure. In a sickening gush of black goo, its mantle separated from the rest of its body and deflated, all the contents pouring out onto the floor. Its tentacles flopped limply to the ground, a couple continuing to twitch in the ensuing silence.

My heart was pounding, my brow beaded with sweat. I slowly placed my gun on the ground beside me and swallowed.

“S-sorry,” I mumbled, feeling like shit for doing the one thing he’d asked me not to. I kind of had a habit of that.

Edin waved an easy hand, breathing faster than normal from exertion. “I knew you wouldn’t be able to stay put.”

I huffed a brief laugh, my body tingling with adrenaline in the aftermath of that brief but disgusting fight. What was with all the black goo?

I realised that my breathing had sped up as I'd watched Edin destroy this hideous screeching monster, my gut bottoming out with a lurch of excitement, mingling with the brief bolt of fear. Which was... an interesting reaction to have?

Edin and I stared at each other, our hard breaths loud in the room. He eventually broke the loaded look to glance down disdainfully at the dead karik.

His lip curled and he booted the creature in the side, causing its body to roll over with a wet slap. And for some strange reason, my cock gave a hearty twitch in my pants.

Edin's intense eyes snapped back to me when my breath hitched. His tail lashed wildly, biceps bulging as he flexed his fingers. When his head cocked, eyes narrowing as he assessed me, my cheeks got hot. A tiny smile curled one corner of his lips, a short, fat fang peeking out.

"Scratch," I croaked, heart pounding as my breathing sped up.

His deep purple eyes flashed a split second before he strode forward. I had just enough time to rip my mask down before he reached me and crushed his mouth to mine. My legs snapped around his waist when he hefted me into his arms, and his horns dislodged my baseball cap, knocking it off my head and onto the floor.

I clasped his craggy face in my hands as we kissed frantically, tongues thrusting together aggressively. I still liked to make him work for it at first, but when Edin growled against my mouth and nipped sharply at my lip with his fangs, I jolted with a grunt before melting completely. Shivering with pleasure, I let him invade my mouth, taking over the kiss as he strode forward with me in his arms.

My ass hit a hard wooden surface. Hamish's old desk. The former soldier in me—the dude who had obediently followed orders for over a decade—couldn't quite believe that we were clearly about to fuck on a superior officer's desk.

Mainly though, the idea made my cock really hard.

I let out a dazed groan as Edin broke the kiss to rip my shirt over my head. His hot mouth and tongue attacked my neck as long fingers deftly unbuttoned my pants.

Edin chuckled against my neck as I clutched at his long hair with anxious fingers, already panting, much to my embarrassment.

"So hard already, josdo," he rumbled, curling strong fingers around my dick through the fabric of my boxer briefs.

I jolted with a groan, teeth clenched. My cock bucked in his unyielding grip. Edin's nose trailed up the side of my neck before he grazed my earlobe with his fangs, making me shudder.

"Watching me rip that creature to pieces made you want to fuck, hmm?"

My face burned. "Shut up."

He rumbled in amusement, releasing my cock to cup my nuts through the fabric. An undignified sound left me when he squeezed, not being particularly gentle. Pre-cum beaded, sticking the tip of my dick to cotton.

Edin kissed me, winding his tongue around mine before leaning back to give me a shit-eating grin.

"You don't want to fuck, Hunter?" The tone of his deep voice was unconvincingly innocent. My breath caught when he hefted my sac lightly in his big palm. "These feel full and heavy. You don't want me to empty them?"

Oh fuck. My breath shuddered out of me, cock jerking hungrily, trapped at an awkward angle in my boxers. I knew my face was flushed, brows pinched in desperation, but I still managed to glare at him.

"Okay, fine," I snapped, though it came out far needier than I'd intended. "Yes. I wanna fuck." I

melted again, shivering when Edin stroked my nuts and dipped his head to kiss me. “Edin,” I mumbled against his mouth.

He chuckled, leaning back and finally removing his hand to start yanking down my pants and underwear. I lifted my hips to help him, biting down on my inner cheek when my cock bounced free against my thigh, getting harder and harder in a rush.

“You’re all anger and bluster until you want to get fucked, aren’t you?” Edin purred, dropping to his haunches to tug my right boot off so he could pull my pants free. He left them bunched around the ankle of my prosthetic leg, straightening back up.

My face burned hotter, but I couldn’t stop my fingers from curling around my cock and giving it a stroke. I lifted my chin and tried to shoot him another glare.

“I can stay angry if you want.”

Edin burst out laughing, stepping between my spread thighs and palming my sides. “You couldn’t if you tried, josdo. You get too needy.” He smirked at me, a fang peeking out. “Too desperate for my cock.”

“Not always,” I shot back, clutching the base of my dick as it throbbed from his words. “Sometimes I get desperate for your ass instead.”

It was barely a win, but I’d take what I could get when it came to verbally sparring with this monster.

“Mm.” Edin smirked again and burrowed his hands between my ass and the desk, easily lifting my hips.

I quickly leaned back to steady myself, letting go of my cock to place my palms on the wooden surface. My legs curled loosely around his waist, and I stared at the bulge of his hard cock lifting the fabric of his kilt, so close to my tightening sac and the heavy length of my dick twitching against my belly.

It always did something to me, being completely naked when he wasn’t, even though he was only ever half-dressed. But watching the fabric of his kilt shift as his big cock rose, getting stiffer but still hidden from view, made my skin prickle with sweat. I felt vulnerable—naked and spread and exposed to his sharp gaze—and I fucking loved it.

I let out a surprised grunt as I was suddenly flipped over by big, strong hands, landing on all fours on the desk with my knees spread wide and ass totally exposed. I stared down at the dusty surface, the wood polished to a high shine beneath the layer of grit, as my heart pounded in my chest.

My cock bucked, hanging heavy between my spread thighs. “Edin,” I rasped, craning my neck to look back at him over my shoulder. My breath shuddered out of me.

I gritted my teeth hard when I realised he was already crouching behind me, only the tops of his horns visible beyond the swell of my ass. I jolted with a sharp moan when his hot mouth pressed a kiss to the back of my thigh.

“Fuck.” I looked back down at the desk, breathing hard, fingertips bleaching as I pressed my splayed fingers onto the wooden surface.

My cock bucked hungrily when Edin’s warm breath danced over the back of my sac. He placed a delicate kiss there, then another to the stretch of skin above, which, *fuck*, did things to me. I bit the inside of my cheek hard to suppress an embarrassingly needy whimper, and then my eyes were fluttering closed with a sigh of pure bliss as his tongue stroked over my hole.

My thighs quaked from just that soft lick, upper body sinking lower on the desk to push my ass higher, presenting myself to him even more. When Edin was unexpectedly gentle like this, it affected me more than I would ever be able to admit out loud—but he still knew. He knew me better than

anyone—even Charlie. He was the one person in the universe I could be this vulnerable with.

“My favourite morsel,” Edin rumbled, kissing the inner curve of one ass cheek before licking me again.

I huffed out a sharp breath, wanting to reach back and touch him. I settled for resting my hot forehead on my arms, my heart thudding hard in my chest.

A broken groan escaped me when Edin’s tongue swirled around my hole. He moaned—a low rumble that vibrated my skin and made my cock jerk, dripping pre-cum onto the desk.

My eyes flashed open when I was suddenly, unexpectedly yanked back, Edin’s strong arms banded around my waist as he set me on my feet and spun me around. I blinked up at him, dazed, jarred too quickly out of the lulling pleasure of his tongue.

Fangs flashed in a wicked grin as he cupped my face. “I will savour you later, josdo,” he told me, his other hand dipping between us to heft my sac in his palm. I grunted when he gave it a less-than-gentle squeeze. “But right now, you want to please me, don’t you? To show me how hungry you got watching me kill that karik.”

My fingers clenched into fists. “Yes,” I whispered, trying to temper the pleading expression I knew was painting my features.

Edin watched me for a second longer, before patting my cheek and sliding his hand lower to grip my shoulder. “Good boy.”

Oh fuck. There was absolutely no resistance from me when he applied firm pressure to my shoulder, forcing me to my knees. At the same time, he was rucking up his kilt until his hard cock finally emerged, swaying, so heavy that it pointed right at me even though it was stiff with blood.

When it brushed my cheek, I moaned and reached up to grip his thighs, steadying myself. I turned my cheek, mouth seeking out the dripping head of his cock, but before I could, Edin palmed the back of my neck in an unyielding grip.

I lifted my eyes to his, gratified to see the lust twisting his inhuman features. His big eyes flashed, top lip peeled back at one corner in a little snarl. His jaw clenched before he shot me a smile.

“Hands behind your back, josdo.”

I swallowed, slowly dropping my hands from his thick thighs. “Okay.”

I drew my arms back, and the moment my wrists brushed together at the small of my back, I felt the sinuous length of Edin’s tail cinch them tight, locking them together. My cock bucked, hole clenching and balls drawing up.

Edin’s big hands framed my face, directing my mouth to his straining dick. “Now be a good boy and suck my cock.”

Holy crap. I shuddered hard, parting my lips immediately to take the smooth, hot head inside. We both moaned as I worshipped Edin’s cockhead, licking up the pre-cum as soon as it emerged, flicking my tongue, alternating between hard and soft sucks.

When I tried to take more into my mouth, his firm grip on my head stopped me.

“You want more?” His voice was deeper, snarlier, his big chest heaving with his fast breaths.

“Mmm!” I gazed up at him pleadingly, feeling the scar on my cheek pull tight from my sucking draws.

He loomed over me, lavender skin gleaming in the bright sunlight coming in through the windows. The *big* windows. It was highly unlikely anyone would approach the base, but if they did, they’d get an unimpeded view of me on my knees, naked, sucking this big monster’s cock. My hips twitched involuntarily at the idea of it.

Edin shot me a sly grin, thumb stroking over my scarred cheekbone. “Think you can take all of it,

josdo?" he rumbled, even though he knew I could.

We both knew this wasn't the best angle for it, but it always filled me with a certain kind of blissed-out pride when my nose met the smooth skin of his pelvis, his entire cock lodged down my throat, cutting off my air and choking me.

I glared up at him impatiently in answer, and he chuckled before drawing my head closer, filling my mouth slowly. My heart pounded, fingers clenching and unclenching repeatedly where they were restrained by his tail behind my back. My eyes slid shut as I forced my throat to open up and relax, breathing fast through my nose until Edin's cockhead popped through and cut off my air.

I shuddered as he let out a snarling groan, fingers tightening on my head. "Good boy."

Holy fuck, he had to stop calling me that or I was going to come. I coughed a little when he pulled back, allowing me to suck in shuddery breaths, and then he was surging forward again, setting a brutal pace that had my eyes instantly watering.

He pulled my head forward to meet every thrust of his hips, making me go hot and cold all over, my scalp tingling where he gripped my head even tighter. I was making desperate, garbled sounds around his cock, gagging, my chest heaving, and when it suddenly felt like I was going to hurl he pulled back, wrenching a choked cough from my throat.

"Suck, Hunter," he ordered, giving me only a second to recover. I obeyed instantly, my trembling lips tightening around his shaft so my mouth could take deep draws.

Edin sighed in pleasure above me, thrusting his hips slower and gentler now, fingers dancing over my scalp and caressing my short hair. His tail was still cinching my wrists tight, but I felt the sharp tip trail lightly up the sensitive skin of my inner forearm, making me shiver.

My jaw ached, stretched wide around his thick shaft. He allowed me to pull back enough to wind my tongue around his cockhead before plunging my mouth deep again with a needy grunt.

"Watch the teeth, josdo," he rumbled with a chuckle. My eyes popped open to glare up at him.

He laughed again as he pulled his hips back and lifted me onto my feet. My knees were trembling, and my cock was throbbing so hard I was pretty sure a single touch would bring me off.

Edin cupped my jaw, thumb wiping away the spit that was all over my chin. I sucked in trembling breaths, hands still restrained behind my back by his tail.

"Why—why'd you make me stop?" I panted, unable to stop my hips arching forward, trying to rub my cock against him.

"Because you're going to make me come a different way, Hunter." He leaned in and kissed the corner of my mouth as his tail finally let go of my wrists.

"Jesus, Edin," I snapped, unfulfilled lust making me tense. "We're not shooting a porno here. We don't need to get through ten different positions before we can come."

He chuckled, lifting me easily back onto the desk. "Just one more, josdo."

When he spread my thighs and stepped between them, I shivered, hands clutching at his hips. "Are you gonna fuck me now?" I asked in what I hoped was a sultry voice. Pretty sure it came out more impatient than anything, though.

"In a way." He smirked at me as he unfastened his kilt and let it drop to the floor.

I spluttered indignantly. "What does that—"

I cut off with a grunt when he stepped back and grasped my legs in one quick movement, pinning them together with a thick arm banded around my thighs and forcing me to lean back on my elbows so I didn't completely lose my balance. My pants were still dangling from one ankle, caught on my boot.

I licked my lips. "Wh-what—"

He propped my legs up on his shoulder, keeping them tight together, and my breath caught when I

felt the hot, blunt head of his cock prodding between my pinned thighs.

Edin grinned at me, showing off his short fangs, before turning his head to kiss my calf. "I'm going to fuck these thick thighs of yours, josdo."

"Oh fuck." My voice wavered and my head bobbed in a desperate nod. "Yeah. Okay. Do it."

He chuckled. "I wasn't asking for permission."

That made my fingers twitch with the urge to reach down and grab my throbbing cock. Despite his words, I knew he'd stop the instant I told him to, or he sensed that I wanted him to. *That* was what made it so different with him. He gave me the freedom to give up control, something I struggled with in all aspects of my life. He made me feel safe enough to be vulnerable.

I quickly realised these were kind of mushy thoughts to be having when Edin was about to fuck my thighs, so I grinned up at him and tensed my thigh muscles when I felt the hard, heavy length of him sliding between them. The smile fled when the flushed, deep purple head of his dick emerged, sliding over my sac, making me gasp.

I stared in fascination as he began thrusting. The way his body was moving imitated the act of him fucking me, but I got to see the head of his cock vanishing and reappearing between my clenched thighs. It was flushed and leaking heavily, his pre-cum smoothing over my balls as his cock rubbed against them. I could feel my inner thighs getting slick with it, easing his way.

My ass squeezed around nothing, my body intimately familiar with the pounding thrusts of Edin's hips, aching to be filled by him. It was like the best kind of torture, keeping me on the edge for way longer than I would have lasted if he'd been fucking my ass. All I could feel was the rub of his cock against my sac, a muted kind of pleasure that shouldn't have been enough to get me off, but it *felt* like it could. The idea of it was turning me on so much that my own cock was leaking all over my belly, so stiff and sensitive that just the rasp of the hair on my stomach might have been enough to make me come, if Edin kept up his heavy thrusts for long enough.

His head tipped back in pleasure as he groaned, long hair shifting over his shoulders and against my calf. His balls smacked against my ass with each thrust, making me grit my teeth to suppress a needy whimper.

"You always feel so good, josdo," Edin purred, dipping his head to kiss my shin, gaze holding mine.

My chest got tight, and I almost blurted out a declaration of love before Edin's free hand smoothed over my stomach, distracting me instantly. When he lightly thumbed the slick tip of my cock, my hips bucked.

"You want me to come all over you, Hunter?" he asked with a sly grin, adjusting his bruising grip on my thighs.

"Holy shit, yes," I moaned impatiently, staring down at where his cockhead appeared with every hard thrust. "Please. All over me. Edin—"

He snarled, thrusts growing erratic and jerky. His big hand curled around my cock in an unyielding grip, squeezing almost too tight, but I loved it. My thighs were quaking and felt weak, but he kept them in place with his brutal hold and cried out as his hips surged forward one last time.

Cum shot from his cock in heavy spurts, painting my stomach first, then his hand and my dick, then my nuts. His huge body quaked with the force of his orgasm, but his fist started pumping fiercely, slicking up my length with his release, and it only took a couple of strokes before I started to shake.

"F-f-fuck, Edin—" I cut myself off with a shout, my entire body tensing up as I started to come. My hips bucked, sliding his cock between my thighs, making him growl as he pressed his cheek to my leg.

I was positive I wouldn't be able to stand unassisted when my orgasm ended. I felt dazed, blinking

repeatedly as Edin finally released my legs with a final kiss to my calf. My feet dropped onto the floor, and I stared down at the mess all over my stomach and junk. My inner thighs were slick with Edin's cum, the skin red and sensitive.

Edin let out a sated groan, stepping back and bending down to grab his kilt.

"Look at you, josdo." He chuckled as he fastened it around his hips. "So handsome when I turn you into a mess like this."

I attempted to glare at him, but it was half-hearted at best. I felt loose and boneless, wishing I could just collapse back on the desk and take a nap. Instead, I heaved myself up, grateful when Edin steadied me as my knees threatened to buckle.

Once he was sure I could stand on my own, he cupped my face and kissed me sweetly. "I love you, josdo."

I sighed, a smile playing at the corners of my mouth as I nuzzled his cheek. "I love you too, scratch."

As he went digging around the office for something I could clean up with, I collected up my clothes. Edin returned with an old shirt and wiped my front and between my thighs, and I couldn't help but snort as I got dressed. I hoped the military never came back here to collect their shit, unless they wanted a cum-crusting shirt back.

"Well." Edin smacked my ass as I fastened my pants, then put his hands on his hips as he surveyed the room cheerfully. "A successful trip, I'd say."

I rolled my eyes and collected my hat, shoving it on my head. "Vengeance and an orgasm. The ideal outcomes of any mission."

"Exactly." He strode over to the dead karik, and I grimaced a little at the realisation that we'd just had sex with it in the room. Probably not my finest moment.

"Shall we head off, scratch?" I put my mask back on, adjusting the fabric until it was comfortable.

"Mm." Edin poked at the corpse with the toe of his boot. "Which bit shall I take back?"

I froze in the act of grabbing my gun, slowly turning my head to look at him. "Excuse me?"

"Wyn asked me to take a bit back so he could see it. *I did* tell you he wanted to come."

I spluttered, unable to get words out for a few seconds. "Edin, we are *not* carrying a bit of carcass back with us." I snatched up my backpack and thrust it out. "*I'm* the only one with a bag and I am *not* putting a fucking chunk of squid monster in it with the rest of my shit."

"I never said you'd have to carry it." Edin sniffed imperiously, lifting his chin. "My kilt has pockets."

I let out an incredulous laugh. "What, so you're going to walk back to camp with a goddamn tentacle sticking out of your pocket?"

"Maybe," he shot back.

"It'll start rotting! It'll stink! It's already"—I wrinkled my nose, looking at the dead monster—"wet. There's a puddle of black mucus under it!"

"*Fine.*" I saw Edin roll his eyes. "I won't take a tentacle."

I stared at him hard. "Or any other part of it?"

"Mm."

"Edin—"

"Don't forget your gun, josdo." He waved a hand in my general direction, still staring down at the dead karik.

I didn't move at first, watching him suspiciously. When he lifted his head and gazed innocently back, I narrowed my eyes before slowly turning to grab my gun.

The moment my back was turned, I heard a sickeningly wet sucking crunch. I spun back around in time to see Edin quickly straightening up from a crouch beside the dead karik.

“What did you just rip off?” I barked.

“Nothing,” he said quickly.

“Edin.”

He huffed. “Fine.”

Opening his hand, he revealed the big, octopus-like beak of the creature, shiny white with smears of black goo on it. My mouth twisted with disgust.

“Not a tentacle, see?” he said with a beaming smile, then wiped the beak on his kilt before shoving it in his pocket. “And it fits right in my pocket.”

The Adventures of Danny and Wyn – Part Three

Here we have an 8k word short to celebrate Soul Eater hitting 3,000 ratings on Amazon! And because we all need more Danny and Wyn. Always.

Wyn has the great idea for them to re-enact their first meetings at the military base with, you guessed it, sexy results. As ever, this is basically 8k words of pure smut, with Wyn being a bit of a bastard, and Danny loving it.

Content warnings: Explicit sexual content, 18+ only, consensual dubcon and power dynamics as part of roleplay, mild degradation/humiliation, edging, light spanking, monster genitalia, graphic descriptions of death and violence, Wyn pushing his stabby agenda in his own head – a lot

Spoiler warning: Set during the events of *Moth* (Monstrous: Book Five) but best read after finishing *Moth*, to not spoil anything

First published 2022 by Lily Mayne
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WYN

“Feels good to get out of that fucking camp,” I couldn’t help but mutter as I held open the door so Danny could step inside the old police station.

I’d already been in to make sure it was empty and safe. I didn’t see why we were looking in here—it wasn’t like there’d be anything good to scavenge—but Danny wanted to poke around. He was still annoyingly—endearingly—interested in every-fucking-thing.

He snorted, nudging me in the gut with the end of his baseball bat. “Grump. They’re nice.”

“They’re annoying. All of them. Too fucking loud. Too... *sociable*.” I shuddered. “All working together to make their little camp bearable. As if they’re not living surrounded by a wall made of junk in the middle of a depressing wasteland.”

“Hey.” Danny frowned at me. “Don’t be such an asshole. It’s not like people have many options these days.”

I grunted, kicking aside an old bench as we walked deeper into the building. I glanced at Danny out of the corner of my eye, wondering if he was actually angry at me.

“And half of them are fucking monsters,” I muttered. “I *loathe* having to listen to it every night.”

“Uh, okay, *hypocrite* much?” Danny spun to face me, frowning up at me. “Seriously, what’s your problem today?”

“I don’t have a *problem*. I just...” I shrugged a shoulder stiffly. “Hate people.”

He snorted, shaking his head as he turned to carry on walking. “Got any other shocking revelations for me, old man?”

Pushing open a set of double doors for him to walk through, I said, “I just don’t understand why we’re staying there.”

We had left that stupid camp temporarily to go scavenging. Danny had offered us up to do it before I could say no, because he had grown friendly with the meek little raider who usually did it and wanted to “give him a break”.

My lip curled at the thought of us helping the rycke’s mate. It was bad enough having Danny near that creature as he lurked around the camp, even though Edin had assured us he wasn’t a threat. I still watched him constantly. I had seen ryckes in their true forms before. It was only a matter of time before something triggered him and he indiscriminately slaughtered everyone he deemed a threat to what was *his*.

I had nothing against indiscriminate slaughtering, but the rycke was one of the few things alive that could actually kill a telyth. I’d rather not come to a humiliating, agonising end in front of a bunch of human raiders, and I would murder that rycke and his mate in their sleep if it meant preventing any risk to Danny.

Being there with that creature, despite how mild-mannered and... un-rycke-like he seemed, was putting me on edge.

“Because Edin and Hunter are there, and I want to spend time with them,” Danny answered me in

a firm voice. “And Charlie will surely be back soon. I’d like to get to know him. I didn’t really get to meet him properly before, and he seemed nice.”

I side-eyed Danny but said nothing. The oaf’s friend had been a dazed mess, barely aware of his surroundings after I rescued him from that prison. He hadn’t *seemed* anything. But then, humans never did to me. Their plain faces all blended together, pathetically weak and painfully dull.

Except Danny. Danny was perfect. Danny was nothing like the rest of them.

“Besides,” he continued as we walked down a long, narrow corridor lined with flimsy doors. “I want to meet that half-monster dude. He sounds cool. Rig said he has a *sword*.”

I grunted. I could have a sword if I wanted to. But my dagger was more effective, and allowed me to get up close and personal when I chose to use it. Like when I had carved slowly and painstakingly into the flabby skin of Danny’s former superior.

I smiled a little to myself at the memory of it, the sweet echo of his desperate, bloodcurdling screams drifting through my head. The feel of his blood pumping hot and thick over my fingers. Those weak, watery eyes going flat and dull as the life finally left him.

There had never been a more satisfying kill in my long life, and I hadn’t even tortured him for as long as I would have done if Danny hadn’t been there witnessing it. I hadn’t wanted to traumatise him any more, but I still hadn’t been able to stop myself from drawing it out. From making it *hurt*.

Snapping myself out of the warm memory, I considered Danny’s words. I could begrudgingly admit only to myself that I was also... curious about the half monster the raiders at the camp had spoken about. I hadn’t ever met one, as far as I was aware.

Letting out a long-suffering sigh, I reached over and smoothed my hand down the back of Danny’s head. His helmet was hanging off the side of his backpack. “Then we will wait there for you to meet them both, my sweet.”

Seeming to move on from his less than favourable reaction to my earlier words, he smiled and leaned into me as we walked, allowing me to wrap my arm around his shoulders. “Thanks, baby. I know you don’t like a lot of people around—or, um, anyone—but they’re really great. I like them.”

Glancing over at him, I stiffly asked, “Do you want to stay there... permanently?”

“No way,” Danny said immediately, easing the tension in my muscles. He looked up at me with a tiny smile. “You’re gonna build me that big house in the monster world, remember? Near our own private hot spring.”

I huffed. “I remember. And I will.”

“Not for a while though,” Danny added cheerfully as we rounded a corner and a row of cells lined with metal bars came into view.

“Old holding cells,” he commented as we slowly walked past the first. It was empty save for a disgusting looking latrine and benches lining the walls. Tiny windows let in the sunlight from outside.

I snorted in derision, curling my lip within my hood. “*This* was what they locked humans away in? My cell at the military base was nicer than this.”

“Yeah, well, they weren’t meant to be nice,” Danny said grimly, peering into one through its open door. “But yeah, I don’t think prisoners were kept in great conditions. And god knows what it’s like now in the cities that actually have prisons and don’t just dump people out into the Wastes if they commit a crime.”

“Any crime?” I asked mildly. “Even tiny, frivolous ones?” Like... removing an eyeball. That still left most people with *one*.

“Think so.” Danny stepped back, shoulders hunched. “That’s what they did in New Louisiana at least. Just shoved people out into the Wastes to fend for themselves. Even kids who got caught

stealing a pack of gum.”

His voice was tight and uncomfortable. I didn’t want him to be sad remembering what it was like living in the squalor of one of the coastal cities. Glancing at him, I stepped away to wander into one of the cells. The bench along this one’s back wall had been removed at some point, most likely taken by raiders, who scavenged anything they could find to repurpose. I hated to admit it, but humans were annoyingly *adaptable*.

“Do you remember when we met, Danny?” I asked casually, turning in the centre of the cell to face him.

He snorted, hovering at the open cell door. “Yes, surprisingly.”

“I don’t mean when I was *captured*.” I used that word lightly. “I mean in my cell, when we met properly. When you came to question me.”

He smiled, expression growing affectionate as he leaned a shoulder against the cell door. “Yeah, I remember.”

“Asking me all those questions that your weak little superiors were too afraid to ask me themselves.”

His brows twitched. “They said you were asking specifically for me.”

I shrugged lightly. “I was. But they still threw you into that cell without knowing why or what I had planned for you.”

His mouth turned down at the corners, eyes dimming. “Yeah. I guess.”

Within my hood, my mouth twisted into a devious smile. I wanted to replace the bleak memories he had of that time with better ones.

Much better ones.

“Let’s do it again now,” I said innocently, backing up to the far wall.

Danny cocked his head, eyeing me. “Do what again?”

“Our first meetings. Our question-and-answer deal.” I sat down with my back to the wall, directly opposite where he was standing in the open doorway. “Let’s pretend we are back there, in that cell, with your superior officers watching gormlessly in the room behind it.”

Danny looked around slowly, then gave me an odd look. “Uh... why?”

I shrugged. “Why not?”

After a pause, he chuckled. “What, so I’m meant to pretend you’re the big, bad Soul Eater and I’m terrified you’re going to kill me?”

“Yes,” I said simply, making him freeze. “And you are just the nameless soldier they sent in at my whim. At my command.” Nodding at the headgear strapped to the side of his backpack, I added, “Put that on.”

He rolled his eyes, but started fumbling to untie the strap with his gloved fingers. “Why exactly are we doing this?”

“Because I want to.” Once he’d shoved all his headgear on, I jerked my chin toward the holding cell opposite. “Sit back there.”

My lips quirked at the muffled, exasperated sigh from within his helmet. He backed up and set down his backpack and baseball bat, before easing down to sit cross-legged with his back against the bars, mirroring my pose.

My mouth stretched into a wide, rabid grin, hidden within the depths of my hood. “Excellent.”

DANNY

Fidgeting against the hard floor under my ass, I looked over at Wyn directly opposite me, way back against the wall in the holding cell I was facing.

I had no idea why we were doing this, and I felt kind of silly. Did he really expect me to act like I was still in the military, in his cell at the base, with my superior officers watching our every move from a room behind us?

I resisted the urge to reach up and fiddle with my helmet. I didn't wear it all that often anymore, except when Wyn made me to keep me safe, and it was kind of uncomfortable.

"So," Wyn drawled, his voice low and smooth, like thick black smoke. "Soldier five-seven-six-nine-seven."

I grinned. "Aww, you remember my soldier number? That's so sweet."

"Focus," he barked, his voice reverberating all around me, making me jump. "You're here to ask me some questions on behalf of your coward superiors?"

I nodded, trying to make it look like I was taking this seriously even as I bit my lip under my helmet to fend off laughter. "Yes. That's right."

Wyn leaned forward, strands of inky hair slipping out from under his hood. "The last officer they sent in here to question me, I drove him mad. Does that make you nervous?"

I swallowed, sobering up a little. Wyn *had* done that. I forgot about what he was, and what he could do, a lot of the time. I forgot about what it had felt like standing in that field, surrounded by the dead bodies of my fellow soldiers. The hooded Soul Eater stalking towards me, face in shadows, black fingers twitching like he was barely suppressing the urge to murder me as well.

It was kind of hard to remember just how terrifying he could be to everyone else when I saw the other side of him. When he held me close while I slept, cool fingers drawing absent patterns on my skin. When he crooned soothing words in my ear every time I woke up from another traumatic nightmare, which thankfully happened far less often now.

When his long fingers cupped my face with infinite care as he kissed me, cool shadows slipping over my skin. When he kissed the bump on my crooked nose or nuzzled the brand on my chest. When he told me he loved me.

I almost got up and crossed the gap between us to hug him, to convey just how grateful I was to have him, but his hard voice cracked through the room again, making me jump.

"Answer me, soldier, or I won't cooperate with this farce."

Right. Roleplay. Big, scary Soul Eater. Clearing my throat and straightening my spine, I stared into the dark depths of his hood. "Yes. I'm nervous."

Because I actually kind of was. I hadn't seen this side of Wyn in a while—not directed toward me, at least—and I'd forgotten just how... intimidating he could be. The instinct to be scared of a creature like this—so powerful, so inhuman—began to creep in, blocking out all my soft feelings for him.

But my cock still twitched in my pants, already anticipating where this could lead, even though I had no idea what Wyn had planned.

Wyn huffed in amusement, sitting back against the wall. "Best get started then. Ask your first question, soldier, and I will ask one in return. That's our deal."

“O-okay.” I shifted, trying to remember the list of questions I’d had to memorise to ask him before.

Once I started, they came back to me easily, as did all the emotions I’d felt every time I interacted with Wyn. The terror, at first. The sense of his presence just being *too much*. And then the confusion when that fear faded and a strange sense of comfort began to wash over me every time I stepped foot in that holding cell and saw him sitting there, a dark, shadowy figure alone in a bright white room.

I cleared my throat. “Is there a method to how you select your victims?”

Wyn answered just as bluntly as he had all that time ago. “Yes.” I could hear the smirk in his voice when he added, “Now my question. Have you ever thought about what it would be like to fuck a monster, human?”

I choked on a breath, caught entirely off guard. Trying to remember the act I was meant to be playing—that of a young, naïve and downtrodden soldier, I shakily said, “N-no.”

Because that had been true—then, at least. I hadn’t ever thought about fucking a monster. I hadn’t ever really thought about fucking *anyone*.

Wyn huffed in amusement and watched me for a long moment. I started to squirm. He was just... a lot when he was being like this.

“Ask your next question, soldier,” he said, his voice eerily soft in the way that still sent shivers down my spine.

“Um,” I stammered, trying to remember another one. “Wh-why the three-year cycle?”

“Because that’s how often I feel like doing it,” Wyn said shortly, a slightly different answer to his original one. I could tell he was impatient to get to his own question, and anticipation made my gut clench with a confusing blend of nerves and arousal. “Have you ever had your dick sucked, soldier?”

Okay, geez, were *all* his questions going to be like this? My cheeks heated behind my helmet and mask. Trying to stay in the role I was meant to be playing, I rolled my shoulders back and glared at him. “I don’t think that’s pertinent, or appropriate. My *superiors* are listening in. Watching.”

Wyn huffed in amusement as his black-stained fingers tapped against his knee. “Yes, they are. Then I suppose it might be *inappropriate* of me to demand you do something in exchange for my answers. I don’t need to ask you any more questions.”

“That depends on what it is,” I shot back, remembering when he’d told me to remove my helmet and show him my face for the first time. “Why don’t you need to ask me any more questions? You’re not curious about me? About humans? About the military?”

Wyn’s head cocked, and he slowly leaned forward. “I already know everything I need to about you, human. Young. Naïve. Already sick of this life you’re living. Following the orders of weak men.” His voice turned sly as he added, “Already so hungry for monster cock, even if you don’t know it yet. For *my* cock.”

I spluttered with indignation, my throat and face burning. “I am not!”

But my dick was already firming up in my pants, and I was pretty sure Wyn knew it.

Rather than call me out on the blatant lie, he huffed again and sat back, picking at a loose thread on the seam of his pants. “Ask your next question, soldier, and we will get to my demand.”

Oh god. I licked my lips nervously, tongue touching the warm fabric of my mask. Maybe... maybe he’d just ask me to remove my helmet, like he had before. Maybe that was why he’d made me put it on.

But I doubted it.

My voice was unsteady when I asked the next question. “H-how many people do you kill during each three-year cycle?”

“Many.” Wyn uncrossed his legs and placed his boots flat on the floor, forearms draping over his

spread knees. His hood jerked in a nod. Toward my lower half. "Take your cock out."
"Wh-what?" I spluttered, glancing anxiously behind me as if there really *was* a roomful of officers watching this exchange. "They're... they're watching," I added in a whisper, my cock jerking in my pants.

It was like I really could feel the eyes of people on my back, witnessing this. My nuts tingled. Shit, maybe I was more into this than I'd first thought.

"Yes, they are. But if you want my cooperation, that's my demand." Wyn nodded at my crotch again. "Show me your cock. Prove you're not affected. Prove to me that you're not already imagining what my tongue would feel like sliding over it."

Oh god, now that was *all* I could imagine. I bit my lip hard, resisting the urge to reach down and grip the length now throbbing in my pants.

"My teeth are sharp," Wyn continued in a demure tone. "Very sharp. Does that scare you, or excite you more? Do you think you'd like the hint of danger, human?"

I shuddered, hands curling into fists on my thighs. "I—I—"

"Show me your cock, human," Wyn rasped again, his distorted voice drugging me into compliance.

I found myself reaching for my fly, my fingers clumsy in my gloves. My face burned as I fumbled to pull my cock out, already undeniably stiff. Clutching the base in my gloved hand, I swallowed and lifted my head to look at Wyn.

Why was this so embarrassing? Why did I feel so... exposed, with just my hard cock out, flushed but still pale against the black of my clothes? Wyn had seen my cock a *million* times.

But in this scenario—the scenario we were playing—he was still an unknown, inhuman thing whose motives and actions made no sense to my human brain.

"You don't look unaffected, human." Wyn's voice was slyly amused, making my cheeks burn even more. "Stroke it."

My fingers tightened their grip around my length, which pulsed in reaction to his order. Licking my lips, I stammered, "B-but I—I haven't asked my next question—"

"Ask it while you stroke it," he interrupted, "and we'll consider this round even. You want to keep me happy, don't you, soldier? Keep me complacent. Your superiors are watching. They wouldn't want you to squander this opportunity while I'm in such a giving mood."

"I—" Looking down, I watched as my gloved hand gave my cock a slow stroke. The leather was firmer than my bare fingers, the texture slightly rougher, but almost slippery at the same time. I shuddered as my thighs twitched.

"Good," Wyn purred. "So obedient. Now ask your question."

I let out a strangled sound. How was I supposed to think of any more questions while he was making me jerk myself off?

"I—Y-you—" My fist still slowly moving up and down my straining dick, I swallowed around my dry throat. Rather than ask him a question from the pre-approved list, I heard myself say, "Wh-why are you making me do this?"

Wyn snarled, the sound so inhuman and—in this moment—unnerving that I shivered from the confusing tangle of arousal and fear.

"Because I can," he hissed. "Because you obey *me* now. I am in control here. Not your precious military. I always was."

I shivered again, eyes widening as I stared at Wyn across from me, his long fingers twitching as they dangled from his knees. He was right. He *had* been in control when the military captured him, because they hadn't even really captured him. He'd let them.

And he'd dictated everything that happened after. He'd manipulated them into doing exactly what he'd wanted.

And then he'd set all the other monsters free and destroyed the entire base.

His frame relaxing back against the wall, he cocked his hood and watched me as I fought not to jerk at the sensation of leather sliding over my stiff length.

"I doubt the watching officers will be happy that you wasted a question," he purred. "My turn. I want you to stroke yourself in front of me until you're just about to come. Then stop."

My breath caught, cock pulsing in my fist.

"If you come, my cooperation ends. They're watching, human," he added in a low voice. "You need to be an obedient little soldier, or they might punish you when you leave."

"F-fuck." Why was the idea of people watching Wyn control me so completely turning me on so much? I should have been mortified by even the thought of my former superior officers watching me *masturbate*. In front of a monster. *For* a monster.

But instead, I was stroking my dick faster. Obeying him. My chest started rising faster with my quick breaths, the harsh panting sounds loud in my helmet. Pleasure lashed up my length, making me uncross my trembling legs and spread them, mirroring Wyn's position opposite me. It wasn't long before my knees fell open wide, hips jerking into my hand.

"You haven't asked your question yet, human." Wyn's voice was faintly amused and infuriatingly calm. Like the sight of me doing this in front of him didn't affect him at all. Like this was all just a game to him—just seeing how much he could make me do.

Why did that make my cock even harder?

"I—I—" I licked my dry lips, my face hot and damp with perspiration under my helmet. "Wh-why—*ngh*—A-are you in contact with the others like you?"

Wyn huffed in amusement. "Yes. Our minds are all connected, human. I could tell them all what you are doing for me in this very instant, if I wanted. I could even give them a mental image of it. Show them all the sight of you furiously stroking your cock because you are so desperate for mine. *For a monster.*"

Oh my god, could he *actually* do that?

Breaking character for a second, I stared at him and said through panting breaths, "You haven't actually ever done that though, right?"

Wyn huffed in exasperation. "Of course I haven't."

Okay, that made me feel a little better. The thought of that weirdo Orlith—Wyn's *ex*—getting an image of me stroking myself off or riding Wyn's cock or with my mouth between his legs was... disconcerting. Even though a vicious part of me almost *wanted* it. Wanted to lay claim to Wyn, to show that other telyth that he was *mine*.

My nuts pulled up tight, and I slouched lower against the bars as I pumped my fist faster. My hips strained, ass lifting clear off the floor as I started humping my hand in desperation. I was so close. Wyn just watched from across the room, barely moving, but I could feel his eyes on me.

Remembering his order, I let go just as the orgasm started rising up the length of my cock. I tensed my thigh muscles to push it back, panting weakly as my helmet tipped back against hard metal bars, giving a solid *thunk*.

"F-fuck," I panted, hips twitching fruitlessly.

"You asked your question, so it's my turn," I heard Wyn said from across the room. Lifting my head, I glared at him even though he couldn't see it through my helmet.

"That one didn't count!"

“Yes it did,” he rasped, letting his knees drop to the sides. “Come here, soldier.”

My stomach clenched with anticipation. Glancing behind me again as if someone was really there, watching, I said, “I’m not—I’m not supposed to go in there with you.”

“I’m sure they won’t care in the slightest.” I could hear the disdain in Wyn’s voice. “After all, you’re expendable, aren’t you? Or they wouldn’t have sent you out there to capture me. They wouldn’t have sent you in here when I’ve already killed one soldier without leaving this cell and driven another mad.”

A stab of hurt pierced my chest from his words. He was right. All I’d ever been to the military was a body. A faceless, nameless grunt whose life was theirs to control. A nobody.

With Wyn, I was someone important, because I was important to him. I didn’t need to be important to anyone else.

My legs were shaky when I slowly stood up. I went hot all over as I crossed the distance between us with my cock jutting out from my fly. I gripped it tight in my gloved fist, knees unsteady as I came to a stop just a few feet in front of him.

Wyn tipped his head back against the wall to look up at me from the black, impenetrable depths of his hood. “Closer.”

Swallowing, I took a hesitant step closer. And another, until Wyn’s spread knees were framing my legs. My cock jerked in my fist from how close it was to his hood. His mouth.

Long fingers palmed my calves and slid up, over the sensitive backs of my knees to my thighs.

“Do you want a reward for being so obedient, soldier?” he murmured, and I let out a shaky rush of air in my helmet, heating the fabric of my mask. “They can’t see exactly what we’re doing from here. They’ll never know if you actually let a monster put its mouth around your hard cock.”

Biting down on my lip, I nodded. Wyn huffed.

“You want me to suck you even though you can’t see my face? I could look like anything under here. I could be hideous.”

My chest ached when I detected the faint, bitter edge to his words. Resisting the urge to crouch and lean in to kiss him within his hood, I croaked, “You’re not hideous.”

“How do you know?” Wyn’s hands slid off my legs. “You’ve never seen my face. No human has.”

“I’m—I just know you aren’t.” I cleared my throat, trying to get back into the role I was playing. “Besides, you can’t see my face either. I could be hideous too.”

I said the last part with a tiny smile on my face, hoping he’d be able to hear it in my voice. After a pause, Wyn huffed in amusement and nodded at my erect cock, still clutched in my fist.

“Bring it to me.”

Oh god. Breath hitching, I shuffled closer until my ankles were pressed against the backs of Wyn’s spread thighs. With a lightly trembling hand, I tilted the hard length of my cock down until it pointed at his hood.

Wyn was tall enough that even while sitting, all he had to do was straighten from the wall and tilt his head a little further. The action caused his hood to slip back, just enough to reveal his pale chin and grinning mouth filled with sharp teeth. Then the length of his tongue emerged to lick slowly over the head of my cock.

“*Guh.*” My face burned at the embarrassing sound that left me, and I clutched my pulsing cock tighter in my fist, trying to stave off the orgasm already churning.

Wyn licked again, circling his tongue around the head, lapping up the pre-cum that spilled. I pressed my forearm against the wall behind him, leaning further over him as my chest heaved, trying to get closer.

But he drew back, pressing a soft kiss to the very tip of my cock before letting the sensitive V on the underside rub against his lower lip.

"I didn't know humans tasted so good," he purred, and the sight of his sharp teeth as he spoke, just millimetres from the painfully vulnerable tip of my cock, made my balls clench. "Is it all humans, soldier?" he added demurely. "Or just you?"

"I-I don't know," I got out through gritted teeth, trying not to buck my hips to get his mouth back on me. "I've n-never... never tasted anyone else."

"Hmm." He enveloped the tip of my cock in a brief, sucking kiss before leaning back. "Do you want to taste me?" he asked in a low, raspy voice.

"Y-yes," I whispered.

I could just about make out the feral, satisfied grin that stretched his mouth, revealing all those sharp teeth again.

"Of course you do," he cooed, grasping my hips and urging me down until I was kneeling between his spread thighs. "You've been dying for this, haven't you? Is that the only reason you joined the military, soldier? So you could come out here to this wasteland and get fucked by a monster?"

"N-no," I stammered, my belly clenching with hot anticipation.

Wyn gestured carelessly at the fly of his pants. "Undo them."

My breath hitched, and I glanced behind us once again as if I really thought people were watching.

"I'm—I'll get in trouble," I said, wondering if he could see my eyes through the helmet when I looked back at him. "I'm supposed to be questioning you."

"Then question me while you do it."

Wyn tugged his shirt up and out of the way, revealing the pale, greyish-white skin of his lower belly and the long, jagged scar that cut from hip to hip. I wanted to lean down and press kisses to it, but his hard, cold voice stopped me from moving.

"I'm getting impatient, soldier."

Swallowing, I finally released my cock and reached out to undo his fly with trembling fingers. My hands were sweaty under the gloves, and my face was hot and flushed behind my mask and helmet, but I didn't take either off because he hadn't told me to. Because I was supposed to be faceless. Nameless. Anonymous. Just another soldier following orders.

Wyn lifted his hips and let me tug his pants down just enough to reveal all of him. His slit was flushed and wet, revealing just how affected he really was, despite his calm, almost cold demeanour. His cock slid out the moment it had room to, slick with his natural lubrication. My dick jerked in the air at the sight of it, my mouth watering to taste him. He'd said I could taste him, right?

Even though I was still wearing my head gear, I started leaning down automatically, but Wyn palmed the front of my helmet and pushed my head back as he huffed in amusement.

"So eager. No, human. Not like that." Curling his blackened fingers around my gloved hand, he drew it down between his legs.

I huffed out a hard breath and stared as my middle finger slid inside him. I couldn't feel much through the glove, except how tight he was, but when I drew it back out the leather glistened, slick all over.

"Oh fuck," I croaked, plunging it back in, making Wyn hiss as his hips jerked.

I watched myself finger him in fascination, almost like I'd never done this before. Almost like he really was just a terrifying, otherworldly figure who I didn't know, who I instinctively feared, but one who was letting me do this to him. Who had somehow *coerced* me into doing this to him. With him.

"Ask your question, soldier." Wyn's voice was tighter now, less controlled. His hips jerked again

when I slid my finger free and returned with two.

“I—” I couldn’t think of a single question from the list I’d been given before. “Have you—have you ever been with a human?” I heard myself ask softly.

“No.” Wyn scoffed, even as he grasped my wrist and forced my fingers to plunge deeper, his head tipping back against the wall. “You’re all primitive. Weak. Self-serving and greedy. But you... you, my sweet human, I find myself taking an interest in.”

“Why me?” I whispered, trying to stop my hips from humping the air in time with my thrusting fingers.

“Because to me, you are different from all of them.” I felt Wyn’s gaze lift from where I had my fingers buried to fix on my hidden face. “You are everything.”

I bit my lip, wanting to rip my headgear off so I could kiss him desperately. But Wyn was already reaching up to tug my helmet off, then my goggles and mask. I blinked in the brighter light, knowing my face was flushed and pink, my hair damp with sweat and curling at my temples.

“Such a pretty face,” he crooned, trailing cool fingers down my cheek before thumbing my lower lip. “I knew it.”

“C-can I see yours?” I asked as I plunged my fingers deep and stroked my thumb over the bottom of his shaft where it emerged from his body.

“No.” Wyn curled his hand back around my wrist and slid my fingers free. Then he let go, and I could hear the smirk in his voice as he sat back and said, “Taste it.”

Holding back a whimper, I brought my gloved hand to my mouth and trailed my tongue over the side of one finger. I shuddered at the taste of him mingled with the musky bite of leather.

Wyn let out a low snarl. “All of it.”

My cheeks heated with embarrassment as I pushed my two fingers into my mouth and sucked the leather clean. When my eyelids fluttered and I couldn’t stop the tiny groan escaping me, Wyn let out another snarl from the back of his throat.

But he seemed to regain control of himself quickly. His voice was drawling, and I could hear the smirk in it when he said, “Such an obedient little soldier. They have you well-trained, don’t they? I can get you to do anything I want in exchange for what I know.”

I suddenly remembered that I *was* supposed to be asking him questions. Throat getting splotchy with embarrassment, I lowered my hand from my mouth and barely even noticed when it gripped Wyn’s thigh tight.

Clearing my throat, I tried to make my tone firm and authoritative when I said, “There is information you can give us that might be useful—”

“Yes,” Wyn interrupted impatiently. “I’m aware.”

He was slouched fully back against the wall now, legs splayed, his hard cock curving over his belly. He lowered his hand, and I couldn’t look away as his blackened fingertips lightly caressed his leaking tip.

“What else will you do for me to get it, soldier?” he murmured, reaching out to stroke his fingers gently down the underside of my cock. I let out a strangled sound, hips jerking.

Hand fisting around my length, he drew my hips closer with his grip until the leaking tip of my cock brushed his opening. My mouth fell open on a shaky gasp, eyes locked on my cockhead as it dipped just inside and tight, wet heat teased me.

I tried to buck my hips, to sink deeper, but Wyn held my cock firmly in his grasp, preventing me from moving at all.

“What if I wanted you to fuck me?” he murmured, thumb tracing the thick vein on the underside of

my shaft. “What if I wanted to know what a human cock feels like? Would you do it, soldier? With all of them watching?”

“Fuck.” I panted weakly. Trying to remember the game we were playing, I said, “If it—If it meant you’d be w-willing to give us more information—”

“What if I wanted to fuck *you*?” Wyn’s distorted voice was dark and sly as he tilted my cock up, away from his opening, before letting go. “What if I wanted you to ride my cock like you were desperate for it? Like the possibility of getting to do it was the only reason you ever agreed to come in here and speak to me?”

I choked on a breath, trying to focus on what he was saying even as my hips bucked, sliding the length of my dick against his. Wyn snarled and pinned our shafts together, halting my movements.

“I think I need more from you for my continued cooperation,” he rasped. “Climb onto my cock and ride me as best you can to prove what a good little soldier you are. To prove how far you’re willing to go to follow your superior officers’ orders.”

This was kind of a mindfuck, because I’d *hated* obeying them when I was in the military, hated following orders that had seemed cruel and pointless. But Wyn’s inhuman, seductive voice—so horrifying to everyone else—was sucking me in, making me want to do anything he said.

Making me want to be a good little soldier.

“I—” It was hard to get the words out, embarrassment making my throat close up as I stared at him, wide-eyed.

“You came in here to get something for them, but this way you’ll get something too.” Wyn lightly stroked our pinned shafts. “You can take something for yourself out of this. Don’t you want to know what it’s like, human?” he added in a low murmur. “To be with the monster everyone hates. The ghoul everyone fears.”

“I—” I tried to take a deep breath, sitting back on my heels to get some distance from him so I could think a little clearer. But then Wyn trailed his fingers down and sank two inside himself, making my brain blank with lust again. “I-if that’s what it’ll take to get you to keep cooperating, I... I guess I have to.”

“Yes,” Wyn rasped. “You do. Stand up.”

Licking my lips, I rose onto shaky legs. Wyn nodded at my pants, horns slashing through the air. “Take those off. Hurry up, soldier. They’re waiting.”

Hot and shivery all over, I fumbled to tug down my pants and underwear. Realising I still had my boots on, I went red as I bent down to quickly unlace them, my fingers clumsy in my leather gloves. After tugging them off, I gracelessly yanked my legs free from my pants and stood there in front of a still seated Wyn, naked from the waist down. If anyone *had* been watching us, they would’ve got a full view of my bare ass. God, how embarrassing.

“Good,” Wyn purred, sliding his fingers free to slick up his cock even more. “Now sit on my cock and show me how much you want me. How much you want what I can give you.”

Trembling, I stepped over Wyn’s splayed thighs and lowered myself until I was straddling him, my fingers curling into his shoulders and gripping tight. My cock rubbed over his shirt on my descent, leaving a trail of clear wetness against the dark fabric.

I probably could’ve done with some stretching first, but my body was better at acclimating ever since we’d tethered our lives, making me more durable. Besides, I couldn’t wait any longer. I reached back and curled my fingers around Wyn’s cock, tilting it until the slick tip brushed my hole.

He snarled, long fingers splaying over my ass and spreading me wider for the intrusion. “Hurry up, soldier. I’m done waiting.”

Bearing down, I winced when the head popped inside. The sting faded rapidly, but I could feel how tightly I was clenching around Wyn's cock. His fingers dug in harder, but other than that, he didn't move an inch.

He was going to make me do all the work. To prove that I was the one doing this—that I had agreed to do this. With the ghoulish monster who terrorised humans and instilled nothing but fear in everyone.

Everyone but me.

WYN

“More,” I demanded, voice tight and barely controlled. “Take all of it. You’ve got a lot to prove, soldier.”

“I’m—I’m trying,” Danny said shakily, rocking his hips to slide up and down my cock, taking more and more each time.

“That’s right,” I crooned, sliding a hand under his shirt until I reached a tiny, pebbled nipple. He gasped when I pinched it between two fingers, hips jerking, making him slip further down my cock.

“This is all new to you, isn’t it?” I released his nipple to run my hand around to his back under his shirt, yanking him forward. Danny let out a pleasure-drenched shout as his ass slammed against my hips, seating me fully inside him. “Your first time is with a monster. Will you want a human after this, soldier? Or will they never be enough?”

“I—” Danny’s head tipped back as he finally started riding my cock, making my teeth clench. “I don’t w-want a human.”

“No,” I purred, sliding both hands around to grip his waist. “You don’t, do you? This is what you wanted. Only I can give you what you want.”

“Ye-yes,” Danny breathed, brows pinched and lips parting with a gasp as he sank his hips back down and clenched around my base. I gritted my teeth to hold back my snarl, hips fighting to buck up into him. But I kept them still.

I slid my hand down his lower back to give his ass a hard smack. “Faster.”

Danny jolted with another gasp, tilting his head down to shoot me a look that was half wide-eyed shock, half glare. I smirked and did it again until he grunted and started moving his hips faster.

I let out a tight bark of laughter. “Faster. Ride my cock like you mean it.”

“Fuck,” Danny whimpered, but he obeyed.

His cock was rubbing against my shirt, making a mess. I wondered if it would be enough to let him finish. I certainly wasn’t going to help him get there. Not this time.

My orgasm was already tightening up my insides, liquid heat spilling from me and slicking Danny’s skin, but I held it back. He needed to work for it.

“You can do better than that, soldier,” I drawled, rubbing my palm over the tender, reddened skin of his backside. And then I gave him another smack, just to hear him gasp and feel him tighten up around me in reaction. “Your superiors are all watching, waiting for you to make me finish so I’ll

give you what they want. You don't want to disappoint them, do you?"

Danny whimpered and began grinding down onto my lap faster, even though I could feel the tremor in his thighs from the strain. The bone-deep urge to help him, to ease him, rose up inside me, but I shoved it back down.

I leaned in to nip his throat, murmuring, "How does it feel, human?"

"I—I—" Danny clutched at my shoulders and the back of my hood, gloved hands moving restlessly. "I can't—"

I smirked against his neck. "You couldn't stop now even if you wanted to, could you? Even though they're all watching you ride me like you're in heat. It feels too good, doesn't it?"

Leaning my head back against the wall, I looked at his flushed, beautiful face through eyes heavy with lust. "Tell me how good it feels, soldier."

"It—it feels so good," Danny gasped, his tone almost shocked as if this really *was* the first time we were doing this.

"Tell me how much you love my monster cock inside you," I crooned, and a strained shout tore from Danny's throat.

"Oh god." He was still grinding feverishly onto my lap, even though he was trembling all over and I could feel his body going limp from the effort. "Oh fuck. I'm—I'm gonna come."

"That wasn't the deal, soldier." My hips twitched despite my best efforts to stop them, everything clenching up inside me from how hot and tight he was. How perfect he felt. "You're doing this for *me*, not you. You can come once I have." My control slipping, I gritted my teeth and smacked his firm backside again. Hard. "Make me come," I bit out. "Do your job, soldier."

"I'm—I can't—Oh f-fuck." He cried out, body stiffening above me. "I'm coming!"

Frantic fingers shoved my hood back, yanking on my hair and making me snarl. But then Danny was gripping my horns and wrenching my mouth to his, moaning mindlessly into the kiss as his hips jerked and his cock started firing onto my shirt.

I kissed him back hungrily, grunting as he squeezed my cock impossibly tight in the throes of his orgasm. My hips bucked once, twice, and then I was coming so hard inside him that my mouth went slack against his, a long, shaky moan escaping me.

We were both breathing hard when his tongue dipped back inside my mouth, more languid now as his trembling body sagged against mine. His fingers released their tight grip on my horns to thread through my hair, mouth moving softly against mine with deep, relaxed kisses that went on for long moments.

The sensation of his soft tongue against mine made my hips jerk with an aftershock. Danny grunted, clenching around me before he relaxed again and lifted up to let my shaft slide free.

He wrapped his arms around my middle and buried his face into my neck, letting out a long sigh. "I forgot how scary you can be," he mumbled.

I huffed a laugh, smoothing my palm over his sweat-damp hair.

"That was your mistake, human," I rasped, but I knew he'd be able to detect the teasing edge to my words.

I felt his lips curve up into a smile against my throat. Then he pulled back to shoot me a weak glare, clearing his throat. "You got kinda mean, though. I'm not sure if I liked it."

"You liked it," I murmured, then cupped his chin to pull him back in for a kiss. "I love you, Danny. You are better than all of them. Everyone else. You are everything."

His throat went splotchy as he let out a self-conscious chuckle. "I'm not everything," he said with a tiny smile on his face. "I'm just a normal guy. Who, um, is in love with a monster. But

even *that* doesn't seem so weird now, after staying at that camp."

My lip curled. "You're not like them," I said harshly, nuzzling the tiny scar on his chin. "My sweet human. You are everything. Everything to me."

Danny's eyes grew big and soft as he gazed at me. His throat bobbed. "Wyn."

Holding me tighter, he nestled into my arms and pressed a kiss to my throat, resting his head on my shoulder.

"You're everything to me too."

Moth and Wyn Visit a City

or: Moth and Wyn Ransack an Adult Store and Go Home to Their Respective Partners Agreeing to Never Speak of It Again

An entirely indulgent and gratuitous short about Moth and Wyn taking a “bro trip” to a city, ransacking a sex shop and returning to the camp for Moth to be absolutely wrecked by Charlie.

This is 14.6k words of stabby monster bonding and pure smut. The longest of the shorts so far. I don’t know why I always end up having so much to say about Charlie and Moth. They’re just so dang cute!

As always, please do check the content and spoiler warnings.

Enjoy!

Content warnings: Explicit sexual content, 18+ only, use of sex toys, restraint, blindfold, overstimulation and forced orgasm, mentions of death and violence, Wyn and Moth discussing their stabby agendas

Spoiler warning: Set after the events of *Moth* (Monstrous: Book Five)

First published 2022 by Lily Mayne
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MOTH

“Hey, uh... Wyn?” I resisted the urge to call him *Mr Eater* as I approached the ghoulish, hooded figure and his human lover on the camp wall.

They were sitting side by side on the edge of the wall, Danny’s legs dangling while Wyn had his crossed as he hunched over, picking at the seam of his pants. They both looked up, and Danny leaned back on his hands as he smiled up at me.

“Hey.”

“Hey.” I gave him a hesitant smile back.

I still felt kind of awkward around Danny, and I had no idea why. Maybe it was because he’d had the courage, at some point, to start a romantic relationship with the fucking Soul Eater. I wasn’t entirely sure of the circumstances in which they’d met, but even if I’d been attracted to Wyn, I absolutely could not imagine being brave enough to... approach him like that.

“Everything alright, mutt?” Wyn drawled, flicking a bug off his knee.

“Um, yeah, I was just—I was thinking about heading to a city to get some supplies for the camp.” And for mine and Charlie’s place. My face was hot as I continued. “I was wondering if, um, if you wanted to come with me.”

Danny’s face brightened instantly, mouth dropping open into a delighted smile. He turned his head to look at Wyn, expression hopeful.

“Hmm.” Wyn uncurled one leg and let it fall over the lip of the wall, knocking the heel of his boot into the metal. “I suppose I should go and do some parasite clean-up in the cities.”

Danny froze. Then he poked Wyn in the thigh. “Have you been neglecting the cities?”

“Eh.” Wyn shrugged a shoulder carelessly.

“Wyn!”

He hissed, poking Danny back with a long, blackened finger. “*You’re* the one making us stay in this sad little camp. And besides, I decided to take some personal time.” He sniffed haughtily, turning his hood away.

I shifted awkwardly on my feet as Danny huffed in exasperation. I didn’t really want to witness an argument between them, but he hadn’t answered me yet.

“Alright, mutt,” Wyn said at length with a long-suffering sigh. He stood up gracefully, the toes of his boots touching the very edge of the wall. Danny made a worried sound and gripped the Soul Eater’s calf, as if that would prevent him from falling.

I blinked. “Oh. Uh, awesome. Um, when do you want to—”

“I’ll make sure Danny has everything he needs first,” Wyn interrupted, helping Danny stand up. “I’ll meet you at the camp entrance shortly.”

Aware that Wyn had somehow already managed to take charge of this outing, I nodded and turned to walk quickly back to the hatch. I was already kind of dreading Charlie’s reaction when I told him I’d be going with the Soul Eater, and my suspicions were confirmed when I found him in our room.

“Why can’t I go with you?” he asked sadly, grey eyes big as he stared at me. My gut clenched with guilt, and I leaned in to kiss him.

“It’s not safe.”

Charlie spluttered indignantly as I stepped away to start loading up my backpack. “*Excuse me?* I’ve survived for twelve years out here. I am perfectly capable of—”

“I know you are,” I said patiently, stuffing clean clothes into my bag. “But I don’t want you going into a city.”

“Why not?” Charlie said immediately.

“Uh, because you were recently almost infected by a parasite and killed by a monster in one.”

“Yeah, but I wasn’t,” he grumbled, crossing the room to throw himself dramatically onto the bed. He watched me in silence for a few moments as I packed my bag, then sulkily said, “So you’re going on a bro trip with the Soul Eater.”

I snorted, turning my head to raise a brow at him.

“Well that’s what it is!” he insisted, gesturing at the door. “He’s probably gonna suggest that you… have a competition to see how many body parts you can cut off of people you come across, or something.”

I shook my head, zipping up my bag and standing. “You’re kind of unfair to him. He did save you.”

“Oh my god, you *would* say that,” Charlie muttered, staring up at the ceiling. “Fine. Go have your bro trip with the Soul Eater. I’ll wait here for you. Alone.”

I snorted again, crossing the room to lean over him on the bed. “You’re such a baby. You won’t be alone. You have Chuck. And Edin and Hunter. And *all* the raiders.”

“Yeah, but they’re not you.” He reached up and fiddled with the end of my braid hanging over my shoulder. I tried not to melt as he looked at me and sighed. “I’ll miss you.”

Leaning down, I pressed my lips to his. “I’ll miss you too. We’ll be quick.”

Charlie struggled upright as I sat back on the edge of the bed. Cupping my face, he kissed me again. “*Please* be careful. I know I shouldn’t encourage it, but maybe… maybe just kill anyone who looks at you funny. Don’t give them a chance to start anything.”

I rolled my eyes. “*Everyone* looks at me funny.”

“Well everyone’s an asshole. They can all go fuck themselves.” Face growing serious, he slid his hands back to grip my nape. “Seriously, Moth, *please* be safe. Please just… be careful.”

“I will,” I promised, stroking his thigh.

Charlie pulled me into his arms and hugged me tight, pressing his nose and mouth to my shoulder. I heard him inhale deeply. “I love you.”

I couldn’t stop myself from squeezing him tighter, burying my face in his neck. “I love you too.”

After pulling back to give him one more kiss, I stood up from the bed and went to grab my backpack. “Want me to bring anything back?”

“No, you’re already gonna be weighed down by the stuff for the camp.” Charlie was chewing on his thumbnail anxiously as he got up off the bed. “How much have they asked you to get? Are you gonna be able to run if you need to?”

I chuckled. “Yes, I’ll be able to run. They haven’t asked for all that much, but it’s important stuff they’re running out of.”

“Okay.” He still sounded worried. “Make the Soul Eater carry it.”

I laughed. “I’m not gonna make him carry it.” Patting my bag before sliding the straps over my shoulders, I added, “It’ll all fit in here.”

“Hold on.” Going over to his own bag, he dug something out of it. “Take this for anything you

need.”

I realised it was the wad of leftover cash he’d withdrawn in New York. I let him tuck it into the side pocket of my backpack, already planning on buying something for him with it even though he’d said he didn’t want anything.

Tangling my fingers through his, I led us to the door. “We won’t be long.”

Except we would be a while, even if we could travel faster without a human slowing us down. My insides tightened up miserably at the thought of being without Charlie for so long, but at least he’d be here, safe, surrounded by other people. By monsters who would protect him.

I’d already got the goods to trade for the camp from Anchor, so we walked to the entrance where Wyn was already waiting with Danny.

“Stay with Edin,” I heard him say as we approached. “Do *not* go near the rycke. Or his mate.”

Danny rolled his eyes. “I’m not going to avoid Ghost. I like him. *And* Aury. Aury’s a sweetheart.”

Wyn snarled. “He is an unstoppable eldritch horror lurking beneath an unassuming form.”

“Sure he is, baby,” Danny said, patting Wyn’s chest before he noticed us and grinned. “I’ll hang out with Charlie while you’re gone.”

Charlie grinned back, shooting Wyn a sly look that made me tense with nerves over what he might say.

“Sure,” he drawled, clapping Danny on the shoulder. “You can tell me all of the Soul Eater’s embarrassing secrets.”

Wyn hissed. “Don’t think I won’t gut you, human.”

I tensed again, fingers twitching for my sword. I didn’t know if Wyn noticed, but he huffed and crossed his arms.

“As if Danny would tell you anything, *soldier*.”

“Not a soldier anymore, grandpa,” Charlie replied easily, looking completely unfazed.

Wyn silently fumed for a few seconds before letting out a strangled sound.

“Why is no one fucking afraid of me anymore.” He grabbed Danny’s face and pulled him into a brutal kiss within his hood. “This is *your* fault.”

Danny burst out laughing, shoving Wyn’s shoulder as he turned to stomp into the container entrance. “Be safe, old man. I love you!”

“I love you too,” I heard Wyn grumble, his distorted voice echoing.

I quickly hugged Charlie and gave him a final kiss before hurrying after Wyn, catching up with him as he strode away from the camp wall.

We walked in silence for a few minutes, until Wyn huffed and asked, “So why isn’t your human Charlie coming with you?”

I cringed. Charlie hadn’t been happy about not coming. But I didn’t want him going into a city again—not if I could help it. There was always the risk that someone in the military could recognise him, and I never wanted to put him in a situation again where a parasite outbreak was taking place all around us. It had been sheer luck that neither of us got infected in Chicago.

And then there had been the military’s twisted response to that outbreak, when Charlie had come terrifyingly close to being caught by a monster.

“He’s safer here,” I answered Wyn, who grunted.

“Humans are very fragile,” he commented, and I couldn’t help but bristle in Charlie’s defence.

“Charlie can handle himself. He’s tough. He’s not fragile.”

“He is compared to us. They all are.”

I couldn’t really argue with that. Instead, I hesitantly asked, “I was wondering… Can a salyik be

infected by a parasite?”

Wyn’s hood cocked. “Salyik are interesting. You know, we come from the same ancestor. A very long time ago.”

I stared over at him, almost tripping on a rock. “Really?”

He nodded. “We share some similarities anatomically. We breed the same, though salyik don’t lay eggs. Their young are born in amniotic sacs.”

Wyn’s kind... *laid eggs*? Once I’d quickly processed that fact, the rest of what he’d said pinged in my brain. Before I could stop it, my gaze darted down to his crotch and back up again.

“But to answer your question, yes. Salyik can be infected, which is what makes them interesting. Telyths can’t be, obviously. But at some point in time, salyik evolved in a way that made them susceptible to the parasites. Some believe that there is actually a human far back in your evolutionary history.” His hood tilted, and I could feel him looking at me. “Which would explain things. Like how you can even exist.”

I struggled to process all of that. “But—but how would a human and salyik have mated that long before the tear opened—”

“The tear has always existed,” Wyn said easily. “Many tears have, in fact. Creatures were crossing over long before humans discovered us. There is always a chance a couple of them made their way into *our* world in the past.”

“Well, yeah,” I croaked. “My progenitor came here before the tear got bigger. I was born five years before the monster apocalypse.”

“Salyik *are* the closest in appearance to humans, at least facially,” Wyn mused. “Your kind used to be much more powerful in our world. Masters of crafting fine jewellery and metalwork. They still are, but most creatures won’t buy from them anymore.”

“Why not?”

Wyn waved a hand. “Another telyth who is a nosy little fuck told me something about it a long time ago. I wasn’t listening. Something about the salyik population being shunned because one of their leaders mated an unknown creature. Maybe that was the human,” he added thoughtfully.

“They shunned an *entire race* because of one mating?” I stared at Wyn as we walked. “That seems a little... overkill.”

He shrugged. “All creatures fear what they don’t know or understand. Not just humans. Those from our world are the same. Though we *are* far more advanced in many ways.”

“Really?” I tried not to sound so eager to hear more about the world I partly came from, one I’d never visited. “Like, there are built-up cities and stuff there? Technology?”

Wyn grunted. “I didn’t mean technologically advanced, not that I see what the humans have done to this place as any kind of *advancement*. If those from our world hadn’t crossed over, the humans would have destroyed their entire world soon anyway. They still are, just much more slowly now. I meant that our world is more advanced morally. Ethically. In the way we treat those who live in it.”

I side-eyed him, swallowing nervously. “Don’t you, uh... don’t you just kind of kill whoever you feel like?”

I could sense Wyn’s smirk as he looked back at me. “And you don’t?”

“I mean...” I bobbed my head from side to side. “I don’t just randomly *murder* people who haven’t done anything to me.” Unless they’d done something to other defenceless humans. Or monsters. Or animals.

“Neither do I,” Wyn said airily. “Most of the time.”

I couldn’t stop the laugh that bubbled up my throat, and Wyn let out a huff of amusement.

“Our moral code may not be exactly the same as humanity’s, but I still believe we are better. If you ignore the way salyik are treated, perhaps,” he added in a mutter, then stopped dead and looked around. “You know, we’d get there much faster if you let me carry you.”

I froze, eyes darting around nervously. Carry me? What, like... in his arms?

“Uh...” I shifted uncomfortably. “I don’t think—”

“I can still carry you if I dissipate. I can travel great distances very fast that way. Or I suppose I could travel to the nearest military base—the nearest *intact* one, anyway,” he added with a smirk in his voice, “and steal a vehicle to bring back here.”

I fiddled with the strap of my backpack. “I, uh, I don’t know how to drive.”

Wyn paused, then grunted. “Neither do I. Carrying it is.”

“Wait,” I blurted as he reached for me with a black-stained hand. “I—uh—How does it—So you’re gonna turn to smoke and... carry me?”

“Yes.”

“But... how?”

“Inanimate objects, I can absorb. Living creatures, I can’t.” He shrugged, as if that was a solid explanation. “So, I’ll carry you.”

“But how can smoke *carry* something?” I was getting a little frustrated. “It’s *smoke*.”

Wyn huffed, crossing his arms. “Really, mutt, of all the things you have lived through, all the things you have seen, and *this* is what you struggle to understand?”

My face went pink. “I just—”

“Look.”

Wyn vanished in an instant, oily black smoke curling up from where he’d just been standing. I watched as it swirled lazily through the air toward the old carcass of a car, most of its parts stripped by raiders over the years.

I blinked rapidly when a tendril of smoke curled over the roof before the entire car disappeared. It was just... gone. The swirling cloud of smoke rose higher into the air then hovered for a few moments.

I jumped when the car reappeared, sailing through the air as Wyn hurled it an impossible distance. The crash as it hit the ground long seconds later was faint, and it was followed by a long, shrill creak as the crumpled car tipped onto its side and settled.

I was so distracted that I didn’t notice the smoke cloud drifting closer. Not until something unseen grabbed the back of my coat collar and hefted me into the air. I yelled in shock, legs kicking fruitlessly.

I heard an amused huff that seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere all at once. “See?”

I was set back on my feet, boots touching the ground with a thud before Wyn reappeared in front of me a second later. I tried to steady my trembling knees, clearing my throat and shoving my hair back from my face.

“Don’t worry, mutt. I won’t drop you.” Wyn’s voice was slyly amused. “But we can walk it if you’re scared.”

My face flushed. I raised my chin defiantly. “I’m not *scared*. Fine. We’ll—You can carry me that way. Will we get there quicker?”

“Yes, much,” Wyn drawled, inspecting his fingernails. “I don’t think those little humans at the camp really grasp how much of an asset I am. Or can be, if I want to be. Which I don’t.” Dropping his hand, he cocked his hood. “So, are you ready?”

“I—” I quickly checked that my bag was zipped, my sword secure. “Uh, yeah, I guess.”

Wyn grunted, taking a step closer. “You might pass out.”

I froze. “What?”

“You might pass out from the speed. I won’t go so fast that it kills you, but I want to make good time.”

Dread settled in my belly, but I forced myself to scoff. “I’m not going to pass ou—”

My words cut off with a choked breath as Wyn vanished and I was suddenly lifted back off the ground, intangible smoke somehow keeping me aloft. I let out a small sound of alarm as we shot forward, speeding through the air.

Gradually, my heartrate slowed. We weren’t all that high off the ground, and once I started to loosen up, the adrenaline rush made my mouth stretch into a grin. I peered down, watching trees and old houses and rusted out cars flash past beneath us.

But then Wyn started lifting me higher, and I gripped the straps of my backpack tightly. We picked up speed, the cold air numbing my face as it streamed past.

My stomach plummeted when Wyn let go. I dropped like a stone, legs kicking, too stunned to even make a sound, before a sharp tug on the back of my shirt made me grunt as I was jerked back up.

“Oops,” Wyn said from above me, his tone unconvincingly innocent.

“Asshole,” I blurted breathlessly before I could stop myself, heart pounding. Then I stiffened up in fear. “I mean... Sorry—”

Wyn cut me off with an amused huff. “You’re not wrong, mutt.”

Okay, so maybe he wasn’t going to kill me for calling him an asshole. Still trembling, my stomach in knots, I tried to take slow, calming breaths.

But then Wyn started picking up speed again. My vision went a little spotty as everything raced past too fast for my brain to catch up.

“Going faster now,” Wyn commented casually, propelling us forward even faster. And faster. My eyes rolled back before I shook my head hard to stop them. I was... I was feeling a little dizzy.

“Now’s when you might pass out, mutt.”

I managed to get in one more weak scoff, even as my eyes started drifting back again. “I’m not gonna—”

I was out cold.

—

“Time to wake up, mutt.”

I snorted as I came to, brows pinching as a cold hand gave my cheek another gentle slap. Blinking open my eyes, I stared up at the night sky above me. No stars were visible, the sky a murky purple instead of solid black. Which meant we were near a city, its light pollution spilling up behind its tall walls.

I blinked again when the sky was suddenly blocked out by something darker. Wyn’s hooded head loomed above me as he crouched next to my supine form, the ground hard against my back.

Suddenly, the inky blackness began to melt away within the depths of his hood. I stared in utter disbelief as Wyn’s pale face became visible. One eye solid black, one white with a pinprick pupil. A flat, bridgeless nose. Raised ridges over his forehead and cheekbones. And a mouth stretched into a wide grin, revealing two rows of sharp, pointed white teeth.

“Told you you’d pass out.” After one more none-too-gentle pat on the cheek, he straightened as shadows flooded his hood again, hiding his face from the world. Holding out a black-stained hand to help me up, he added, “Need a few minutes?”

“N-no,” I said instantly, accepting his hand and letting him tug me upright so fast a wave of vertigo hit. I wobbled for just a second, Wyn gripping my shoulder to steady me.

“No,” I repeated, reaching up to try and pat down my wild hair. Realising I had to cover my ears anyway, I tugged the tie free and undid my messy braid. “I’m good.”

Wyn grunted, watching me arrange my hair so it covered the pointed tips of my ears. “Do the humans notice that you’re different when you come to the cities?”

I stiffened slightly. “Everyone looks at me weird anyway. It’s no different here. But no, no one’s ever accused me of being a monster. I think most of them live in blissful ignorance that anything can get in from the Wastes.”

“Humans do love living in blissful ignorance,” Wyn drawled, turning to look up at the wall looming above us. “I watched for a while until I saw someone use the hidden entrance so I could deposit you there.”

I realised we were indeed standing a short distance from the barely perceptible door in the wall, just a narrow rectangle cut into the metal.

I’d already figured Wyn wouldn’t be coming in with me in his corporeal form. Even with the hood up and his face concealed, everything about him screamed *monster*.

I nodded, listening to the faint sounds of the city drifting up from within. “Can you sense any parasites in there?”

“Yes.” Wyn let out a low hum of disdain. “I suppose I’d better deal with them.”

“So shall we meet back here?” I asked hurriedly before he could vanish. “When we’re both done? I don’t think I’ll be too long.”

“Alright.” Wyn looked at me. “Be safe in there, mutt.”

I grinned at him, feeling far looser and more relaxed in his presence now, especially as the disorientation from being unconscious was fading quickly. “I’m always fine.”

He grunted, clapping me once on the shoulder before turning to smoke and twisting up into the air. I watched as it trailed up the side of the wall before vanishing over the top.

Before going in, I slid my sword into the long bag I’d brought to conceal it, then crouched by the hidden entrance to listen carefully in case anyone was using it from the other side. There was no camaraderie among those who slipped in and out of the cities. Most were likely to gut you for whatever you’d just picked up inside. I’d almost been stabbed once by a trader who’d been waiting just outside the entrance of a city to do just that.

Luckily, I was quick, so I stabbed him first.

As I emerged into the dirty alleyway within the city, I wrinkled my nose at the putrid scent that rose with the steam wafting from a nearby grate. Strolling casually out of the alley, I realised it was late. Most shops were closed, only the lights above the bars, twenty-four-hour convenience stores and diners still lit.

I had no idea which city Wyn had brought us to. They all looked largely the same in the worst areas—just tall, poorly made buildings crammed together, dirty sidewalks and the overpowering stink of far too many humans crushed into far too small an area.

Buying supplies was a process in the cities, but there were some things that were really hard to get even from the traders who slipped in and out of the Wastes. First you had to find a pawn shop or black market dealer to trade whatever half-decent stuff you found in the Wastes for cash, then you

went to the stores to spend that cash on the good stuff or, as I did sometimes, to steal.

Small, independent stores I always bought from, but the bigger chains that had been established in the years since the monster apocalypse—the ones that helped to fund the military? Those I stole from.

Charlie had given me the rest of his cash from New York, but I wasn't going to spend that on the camp. I was going to spend that on stuff for us. For *our* home. I still struggled to fully grasp that Charlie wanted to be with me, to stay with me in my safehouse. That he loved me.

That *someone* loved me.

I was gonna get him the best shit I could find here. Not that it would be great, but still. I wanted to give him whatever he wanted. He hadn't asked me to bring anything back, worried that I'd already be overloaded by the stuff I was getting for the camp. But now I knew that we wouldn't be walking back, I was going to buy as much stuff as I possibly could for him. With that thought in mind, I strode to the nearest convenience store to buy the biggest bag they sold, which turned out to be a pretty expansive duffle. I dumped it in the cart, then started shopping.

Iced tea. Cans of soda. Bags of potato chips and salted peanuts. At least three of each type of candy bar available. Packets of ramen, jars of pickles and sauerkraut, canned peaches and tomatoes, oats, honey, a bag of sugar, salt, crackers for Chuck, coffee, ketchup, mayonnaise, hot sauce. It was kind of addictive once I let myself start grabbing anything I wanted, knowing I wouldn't have to drag it all back across the Wastes, knowing I had the money for it. Was this what it had been like before? Humans just able to have anything they wanted within reach? It was a hard thing to truly imagine.

I stopped at the refrigerators to pick up a gross-looking chicken salad to eat once I was done, my belly rumbling with hunger. I had no idea how long I'd been unconscious—how long it had actually taken us to get here. I wasn't sure I wanted to know just how fast Wyn had travelled as he carried my limp body across the Wastes.

I hesitated when I saw the big boxes of donuts. I didn't know if they'd be stale by the time we got back to camp, but then again, I didn't think Charlie would care. After setting the box carefully in the cart, I made my way over to the toiletries section to start grabbing shampoo, soap, medical supplies, toilet paper.

As I pushed the stuffed cart over to the register, I averted my eyes to avoid the wary look the cashier was giving me. She said nothing as I fished out the duffle bag and set it on the counter so she could scan it first, and then I proceeded to fill it with everything she scanned and shoved across the counter toward me, standing close to the register like she didn't want to be near me.

Neither of us spoke until she told me the eyewatering total, but I had enough cash from Charlie to cover it. Heaving the duffle onto my shoulder, trying not to squash the box of donuts, I pushed the cart back over to the entrance and left without a word.

Now to find someone who'd be willing to trade for the stuff I'd brought from the Wastes. It took me a while, and I walked down the street keeping my eyes peeled for the little symbol carved into a door or the side of a market stall—the one that subtly told those in the know that a trader was willing to deal in “black market” goods. While I wandered, I pictured Wyn's face.

Why had he shown me? What did that mean? I didn't know of anyone who had seen the Soul Eater's face—except Danny, of course. Hunter had told me about the time he and Edin spent with Danny and Wyn when they were going to rescue Charlie from the prison, and even *he* hadn't seen it, despite being in Wyn's company for a while.

Did he consider us friends now? It made me feel kind of pathetic to realise that Wyn was my first actual friend. Platonic friend. Charlie was my best friend—the one person in the world I could tell anything to, who I could be completely open with—but I was also in love with him, so I didn't think

that really counted. We weren't *buddies*.

Yeah, that's right. I'm friends with the Soul Eater, the guy you're all freaking terrified of, I projected at the few people who were still out at this late hour, stragglers stumbling out of bars, people doing shady deals in alleyways.

I wondered where Wyn was in the city. How many infected people were here. I'd ask him when we met back up at the hidden entrance.

I eventually found a trader sitting in a shadowed corner at the back of a dingy bar. He tried to play it cool, but when I showed him the seeds Anchor had given me, his eyes flared with interest before he could mask the reaction.

Fruit and vegetable seeds were like gold in the cities. The chance to grow and eat fresh produce? Not many people had that luxury anymore. You could buy them in stores, but they were extortionately priced. A luxury item that was grown in small stretches of military-controlled farmland out in the Wastes, surrounded by high fencing, barbed wire and armed guards.

So the chance to grow your own and have a free, long-lasting source? People went wild for it.

Anchor had also given me a hunting knife to trade in case the seeds weren't enough, but I didn't have to show it to him in the end. He gave me enough cash to buy what I needed for the camp in exchange for the seeds, and then I was heading back to the convenience store.

The cashier eyed me in alarm as I walked back in. I ignored her, grabbing a basket this time and methodically loading it up with the items Anchor had dictated to me. Medical supplies, salt, rice, coffee, instant yeast. Once I'd grabbed everything, I made my way to the register and dumped the basket on the counter.

"Forgot a few things," I said shortly, stuffing my hands in my coat pockets as I waited for her to ring it all up.

I asked her to put it all in a bag so it wouldn't get mixed in with what I'd bought for Charlie and me, already fiercely protective over my purchases just for us. As she shoved everything into the plastic bag hurriedly, I let my eyes wander over the newspapers stacked to the side of the counter.

Charlie had been teaching me to read. I was getting better, but it was an infuriatingly slow process. Charlie had endless patience for me, and he never made any mean comments when I got too frustrated and refused to continue, feeling stupid. Even on those days, he'd shower me with praise, telling me how proud he was of me, how well I was doing, until my anger faded.

He'd also said that eventually, when I was further along in learning, he'd give me an orgasm for every page I read out loud to him from a book. It was a pretty good incentive to keep trying.

I realised I'd been silently sounding out the letters, trying to form the shape of them with my mouth, when the cashier told me my total in a stilted voice. Head jerking up, I saw her giving me an odd look. My face flushed with embarrassment, and I quickly thrust the money from the trader at her before snatching up the plastic bag. After she gave me my change, I left the store without looking back, shoving my hands in my coat pockets and keeping my head bent as I walked down the street.

I sat down at a wooden table outside of a closed Mexican restaurant to eat my crappy salad. My eyes wandered as I chewed on limp lettuce and rubbery chicken, subtly watching the people who walked past, scanning the row of shops opposite without much interest.

Until my gaze landed on one that was closed, its neon sign dark above the store front and metal shutters covering the windows. My enhanced vision could still make out the store sign, and I froze with a forkful of salad halfway to my mouth.

I couldn't read the full name, but there was one part of it that wasn't a word. Just three letters, all the same.

XXX

Licking my lips, I glanced around nervously. I knew what that meant.

Charlie had found a stash of vintage porno mags in Cat's room, which was basically being used as a library for the camp while he was away. He'd thought it would be fun to teach me to read from one of them—not that they contained all that many words. But we'd quickly grown distracted once we'd started flicking through it anyway, the mag falling from my hands when Charlie swept my hair back and began kissing my neck, his hand sliding between my legs.

I finished my salad and stood up to put the container in the trash. Then I stood frozen, staring at that store.

What did they sell in there? Porn? Sex toys? I'd come across plenty of sex toys while scavenging houses out in the Wastes, tucked in bedside drawers and bathroom cabinets. Suction cup dildos stuck to shower walls. Something that I'd thought was a flashlight when I picked it up, only to realise it did *not* have a bulb at the end. I'd even come across what I was pretty sure had been whole sex *rooms* in houses before, my mind struggling to figure out how some of the contraptions worked.

Maybe I could just... take a look. It was closed, so no one would be in there to see me. There was an empty alley alongside the store and hardly anyone was walking down the street.

Insides jittery with nerves, I walked as casually as possible across the street, pausing for a second to make sure no one was around before slipping down the alley. Retrieving the tools I kept handy for lockpicking from a side pocket of my backpack, I knelt at the back entrance of the shop on slightly shaky legs. I wasn't a *thief*—okay, I was—but plenty of people had locked up their homes before fleeing when the monsters came. It just made sense to keep lockpicking tools handy.

I heard the lock click. Straightening up, I tucked the tools away and cast a final look around before pushing on the handle and slipping into the shop. It was dark, but I could see I was in a back office of some kind. Stomach weirdly wobbly with nervous excitement, I slowly made my way to the front room of the store.

Holy crap. There were dicks *everywhere*. All different colours and sizes, packaged away in boxes with clear plastic fronts to display the goods within. I felt myself go pale when I spotted one thicker than my forearm.

I started making my way slowly around the store. Riding crops, whips, paddles. A wall of leather harnesses that looked suspiciously similar to the one Gloam wore. Handcuffs, rope, chains. Boxes with unnerving blow-up dolls displayed on the front. Damn, humans were creative when it came to sex.

I saw more of those flashlight things, and I found myself coming to a stop in front of them. Glancing around as if someone was in here with me, I hesitantly picked one up and stared down at it. It was... I mean, it was pretty weird. The picture on the box just showed a butthole at the end of a flashlight.

But then before I could stop it, I was imagining Charlie sprawled out naked on our bed, working it over the tip of his cock. Or maybe he'd let me do it. Let me use it on him.

My gut clenched with arousal, body stirring. Okay, maybe I could... Maybe I'd just take this. Just... to see if Charlie would like it. Face burning even though I was alone, I slipped the box into the duffle bag. Then I stood there clutching the bag straps and staring at the shelves around me.

Before I even knew what I was doing, I was grabbing more stuff. A clear silicone tube thing with little bumps and nodules on the inside. A coiled length of soft, bright red rope. Something I was pretty sure was a butt plug. One of the dildos—not a terrifyingly thick one. Then another, this one curved and slender, with a little symbol on the corner of the box showing two batteries.

Some stuff I didn't even look at, just shoved in the bag. I recognised the tubes of lube from the one Charlie had bought in Chicago, so I grabbed ten. Then my eyes snagged on a row of something in particular, and I went hot all over as I stared at them. I was sweaty and out of breath for some reason, my heart thumping. I grabbed one of the boxes and shoved it in the bag, then hurried to the back of the shop as if someone was going to catch me in here.

As I passed the register, I stopped to clear several rows of batteries. Not *just* because of the item I'd picked up that was clearly battery-operated. Batteries were useful for lots of things.

Spotting a curtained-off doorway next to the back office, I couldn't help myself. I slipped past the curtain and my eyes almost bulged out of my head as I took in the room. Mounted crosses, long leather benches with cuffs dangling from a metal bar. A *swing*. Were those *stocks*?

I couldn't even picture how half of this stuff was used, but arousal made my breath quicken as I slowly walked around the space, which smelled like lemon disinfectant and leather. Loud, rambunctious voices from the street made me jump, and I looked around nervously. I needed to leave. There was no fucking way I was meeting back up with Wyn when I was this horny. He'd *know* somehow. I had to calm myself down before I made my way back to the hidden entrance.

I froze when I started zipping the duffle bag up, staring down at all the boxes stuffed inside. Oh shit, what if Wyn wanted to see what I'd got? What if he *looked in the bag*?

Crouching down, I pulled both my bags off my back and started hurriedly transferring the sex stuff into my backpack, stuffing it in and praying I'd be able to zip it up. Standing up, I spotted another door tucked into the corner so I headed toward it, hoping it would lead me back to the office.

It did. Breathing a sigh of relief, I shoved my hair back from my flushed face and made my way toward the door leading to outside. But just as I was about to slip back out into the alley, a sound came from the main room of the store.

Freezing in place, I strained my ears. Another sound, like the rustle of cardboard. My eyes darted to the door. Had someone else crept in while I was distracted by all the intimidating contraptions?

I already felt kind of guilty for stealing a bunch of sex toys. I couldn't let the whole shop get ransacked because I'd broken in. Slowly unzipping the long bag on my back, I silently pulled out my sword and palmed the hilt, creeping back toward the front of the shop. I'd just... scare them off. I wasn't going to hurt them.

My eyes swept over the store as I made it to the door of the back office, but I couldn't see anyone. I could still hear something though. Someone moving stuff around, grabbing shit from the shelves.

When I took another step, they must have heard me, because the noises suddenly stopped. I tensed, gripping the hilt of my sword, before a figure popped up at the other end of the store.

A figure wearing a hood. With horns.

Wyn and I stared at each other in agonising silence for an endless minute. My eyes slowly drifted down to the pile of stuff on the floor in front of him, widening when I caught sight of a few of the things he'd gathered.

Before I could react, he vanished. Thick black smoke shot through the air toward me before he reappeared, hood looming inches from my face.

"We speak of this to no one," he grated, fingers twitching at his sides. "Agreed?"

"Agreed," I croaked immediately, my face burning even though the stuff I'd taken was tucked away in my bag, hidden.

We still both knew what we'd been in here for.

Wyn cleared his throat and turned to saunter back to the pile on the floor, clearly trying to act like he didn't give a shit that I'd caught him ransacking a sex shop. "I'll meet you outside the hidden

entrance.”

“Yep, sounds good,” I said before he’d even finished speaking, turning to speed walk into the back office.

After slipping out of the back entrance and closing the door softly behind me, I walked in a daze down the street. It wasn’t until I was ducking through the hidden entrance that the heat finally began to leave my face.

It flared back up the moment the Soul Eater appeared out of nowhere beside me. My gaze dropped to his bulging satchel before I could stop it, and I quickly looked back up at the sky as I coughed awkwardly.

Wyn cleared his throat, the sound like nails grating over a chalkboard, and brushed invisible lint off his ragged coat. “Ready to go, mutt?”

I swallowed, feeling myself go pale. “Am I gonna pass out again?”

He shrugged a shoulder loosely. “Probably. Might not, if you’re more used to it now. Probably will though.”

He clapped the back of my neck, squeezing almost too tight for a second.

“At least you’ll get back to your human quicker. And you can—” He cut himself off, snatching his hand back. We both shifted awkwardly on our feet, all too aware of the contents of our bags.

“Let’s go,” he grated instead.

—

I managed to stay conscious for longer on the way back, but I was still out cold by the time we made it back to camp.

Struggling up with Wyn’s help, I swayed on my feet for a few moments and reached up to shove back my windswept hair.

“You can withstand much greater speeds than a human,” Wyn commented, a hint of approval in his distorted voice. “Didn’t even come close to dying.”

Well that was... comforting, I guessed.

He let out a disgusted sigh, turning to look at the camp wall. “I suppose it’s time to go back in. Amongst all the”—he shuddered—“*humans*.”

I snorted, picking up the duffle Wyn had left on the ground beside me. He’d absorbed it into his smoke thing on the way back.

“You’re *with* a human.”

He hissed, making me freeze up for a second. “Danny is different.”

I side-eyed him, choosing to stay silent. I didn’t really see how Danny was different—he seemed like a pretty normal guy.

Wyn cocked his head toward the entrance in a silent question, so I followed behind him. Before we entered the metal container, I glanced up at the sky. It was gone dusk, slowly getting dark.

“How long were we gone?” I asked Wyn.

He shrugged, ducking his head so his horns didn’t bang into the top of the door as he made his way through. “A couple of days. I did stop both ways and make you eat and drink something.”

“What?” I stared at the back of him. My voice echoed in the container. “I don’t remember that.”

He huffed. “You weren’t very lucid. I practically had to stuff the food down your throat.”

“Oh.” I cleared my throat awkwardly. “Well, uh, thanks.”

He grunted in response as we stepped into the camp. I noticed he was gripping his bulging satchel tightly, and I realised why a second later when Edin spotted us as he made his way across the camp, Chuck riding on his shoulders. She squeaked in excitement at the sight of me as Edin bounded over.

“You’re back. What did you get? Anything good?” He reached for Wyn’s bag, chuckling when the Soul Eater snarled and jerked it back.

“None of your business, boor.”

Chuck clambered down Edin’s back and raced over, curling her little hands into my jeans. Grinning, I bent down to scoop her up, letting her settle on my shoulder as I looked around for Charlie. I spotted him already scrambling up from where he’d been sitting with Hunter near the crops that Lilac oversaw. My grin widened as he strode over, Hunter slower getting to his feet behind him.

“How are you back already?” Charlie demanded as he approached, gaze tracking over me worriedly. “Did something happen? Did you have to turn back?”

I chuckled, shaking my head. “No, we just travelled really fast.”

“How? Did you get a car?” Charlie paused his rapid-fire questioning to give me a kiss, then tugged the duffle bag off my shoulder. His arm immediately jerked down. “Jesus, that’s heavy.”

Hunter had joined us, and after clapping me on the shoulder in greeting, he held out a hand. “Let me feel.”

He took the bag from Charlie. Even though I could see his big bicep bulging from the weight, he shot Charlie a smirk and did a few curls with the bag. “Not too bad.”

“Yeah, well, we can’t all be giant mountain men,” Charlie muttered.

Then Edin piped up. “Now me. Let me feel.”

The duffle was passed to Edin, as if this was some ritual—like everyone had to try and show off about how much weight they could lift.

He blinked down at the bag, lifting it easily with the straps hooked just around the tips of his fingers, and burst out laughing.

“It is like carrying a bag of feathers. Eh, Moth?” He elbowed me jovially, the side of the bag knocking into my gut.

I was just beyond relieved that I’d moved all the sex stuff into my own backpack so I didn’t have to stand here watching it all get passed around with the threat of something falling out ever-present. But still, the contents of my backpack felt like a live grenade. Like any second, someone was gonna point at me and shout, “He has sex toys in his bag!”

Or, shit, Chuck could unzip it and start poking around in there. I hurriedly gathered her into my arms and set her on the ground. She scurried over to Wyn to bump his knuckles with her flat snout, and he gave her chin a brief scratch. Then he went still as Danny appeared from the shower stalls, roughly rubbing at his wet hair with a towel.

Wyn vanished, black smoke shooting through the air until he reappeared directly in front of Danny, who jumped in shock before bursting out laughing. Wyn cupped his face, leaning down until his hood masked their kiss from view. Then he dipped his head to Danny’s ear.

After a few seconds, Danny’s face flamed bright red. He glanced around sheepishly, and then he was grabbing Wyn’s hand and dragging him toward the motel block.

I cleared my throat, looking away quickly and taking the duffle back from Edin. “I better go give the stuff to Anchor.”

Edin gave my shoulder a brief squeeze as Hunter smiled at me and said, “Good to have you back, Moth.”

Chuck chirped as if in agreement, then clicked excitedly when Lilac appeared from the camp entrance behind us. I heard him let out a tiny sigh as she raced over and scrabbled up his leg, clinging to his thigh. He gave us a brief nod as he passed, dragging Chuck along with him.

Tangling my fingers with Charlie's, we started walking toward the diner.

"Have you eaten?" Charlie asked. "There'll be some dinner left. I can ask Daisy or Bo while you talk to Anchor—"

"I brought some stuff back for us," I told him with a grin, and Charlie's eyes perked up before they dropped to the duffle bag.

"Yeah? It looks like a lot."

"It is, but I knew I wouldn't have to carry it back so I just bought loads." I swallowed nervously, glancing at Charlie. "I kind of, um, spent most of the money you gave me on stuff for us, but I can replace it—"

"You don't have to replace anything. Next time you go to a city—assuming I'm *not allowed* to go with you again—I'll give you my soldier ID number so you can withdraw whatever you want. It's all just sitting there." Frowning over at me, he asked, "So how *did* you get there and back so quick?"

We stopped outside the diner. I could see Anchor hunched over the counter inside, brow furrowed as she consulted her clipboard.

"Wyn carried me. As his..." I shrugged and wiggled my fingers. "Smoke form thing."

Charlie went pale as he stared at me, grey eyes wide with shock. "He... he *carried* you? What, through the air?" Spinning around as if he was going to find the Soul Eater and pick a fight with him, he grated, "He could have *dropped* you!"

I rolled my eyes, grabbing Charlie's hand again to turn him to face me. "But he didn't."

Except he had for just a second to fuck with me. I decided not to tell Charlie that.

Anchor's head had popped up at Charlie's outburst, so I nodded at her and pulled open the diner door. "Come on, I want to get back to our room so I can show you what I got us."

But my gut clenched with nerves at my words. Oh god, I'd have to show him the sex stuff. Suddenly, looting that adult store seemed like a terrible idea. What if Charlie laughed? Or was weirded out?

"You're back already?" Anchor slid out of her seat as we stepped inside.

"Yeah." I crouched to place the duffle bag on the floor, unzipping it to grab the plastic bag of camp stuff within. "Wyn—uh, the Soul Eater can travel really fast as his smoke thing. He carried me."

As I straightened up with the bag, Anchor chuckled. "He went with you? I *did* notice the atmosphere in the camp seemed a little less oppressive the last few days. But did everything go okay? Any issues?"

"All fine." I passed her the bag, plus the hunting knife I hadn't had to trade, and her eyes brightened above her green mask as she peered in.

"Thank you so much, Moth." She looked at both of us. "Any time you two want to come and stay here, you can. Doesn't matter how long."

I mean, I'd already been doing that, but I appreciated the sentiment. I gave her a nod. "Thanks."

As we turned to leave, she blurted out, "Wait."

Glancing back, I could see her forehead going ruddy. She rubbed it nervously.

"Did... uh, did you go to New York?" she asked in a small, painfully hopeful voice. "Did you... did you happen to see him again?"

She was talking about Cat. I shook my head and carefully said, "No, it wasn't New York. Sorry."

Anchor let out a long breath and nodded. "Okay. Thanks."

“I feel bad for her,” Charlie murmured as we left the diner and started making our way to the motel block. “She seems real stressed.”

“Yeah.” I blew out a breath. “Well, Cat said he’d come back eventually. When he’s finished with whatever he’s doing.”

“What do you think that is?”

“I have no idea. Cat’s always been really protective over the raiders here. He’s kind of a father figure to some of them, I think.”

“Cat and Anchor aren’t a couple, right?”

“No.” I shook my head. “Never have been, as far as I’m aware. Um, Ghost told me once that she did have a partner. But it was before he joined the camp, so he never met her. Nun told him about it.”

Charlie winced as we made our way up the stairs to the upper floor of the motel. “Ah, and they split up? I guess that’s kinda awkward in this type of environment. Did she leave the camp?”

I grimaced, clearing my throat. “No, she, uh... she died.”

Charlie’s face fell as we reached our door. “Shit.”

“Yeah.”

“How?” he asked quietly as he unlocked the door.

“She got a tiny cut from something. They don’t even know what it was—brushing against a sharp bit of metal or maybe using a tool. Could have been anything. It turned septic.”

I saw Charlie shudder as I followed him into the room.

“Fuck, that’s awful. And terrifying.” He turned to face me after I shut the door, cupping the back of my neck. “I am *so* grateful you have super healing.”

I stared down at him, his words making me realise that... he didn’t. Something as simple as a cut could *kill* Charlie out here. Wyn had been right. Humans were fragile. Vulnerable. Even Charlie, who seemed pretty unstoppable sometimes.

Thank fuck I’d picked up a shitload of medical supplies in the city and hadn’t spent all our money just on candy and snacks.

I dumped all my bags and wrapped my arms around him, more glad than ever that he’d stayed here, safe, and not come with me.

“I missed you,” I mumbled into his neck, pressing my lips to the warm skin there. My eyes slipped shut as I breathed in his scent.

Charlie chuckled, but he squeezed me back just as tight. “I missed you too, slayer.”

Pulling back, I kissed his stubbly cheek and gestured at the bag—the duffle bag. My insides twisted anxiously at the sight of the bulging backpack. “Want to see what I got us?”

“Hell yes.” Charlie hurriedly lit a couple of lanterns before joining me as I sat cross-legged on the floor. I pulled the duffle bag between us after tucking my backpack behind me, my cheeks heating.

When I unzipped the duffle, Charlie’s eyes popped open wide with delight. My lips tipped up into a wry smile as I pulled out the lightly squashed box of donuts, holding it out to him.

“God, I am giving you the *best* blowjob later,” he said, already opening the box to take a donut.

I chuckled hoarsely, the backpack a conspicuous weight against my lower back. I showed him the rest of what I’d bought as he munched, and I snagged a candy bar for myself. I hadn’t eaten all that much junk food, honestly. It wasn’t very nutritious, so when I did have money, I tended to spend it on fresh vegetables while I could.

We shared some chips and an iced tea, Charlie sighing contentedly before putting everything else back inside the bag to take back to the safehouse with us when we eventually left the camp.

“Good haul, slayer.” Charlie pushed the bag to the wall and leaned over on his hands to kiss me.

“And I am *so* glad you weren’t gone for weeks.”

I smiled against his mouth as he kissed me again, his tongue brushing against my lip ring. Shivering, I opened my mouth to let him in, threading my fingers through his dark hair as our tongues glided together.

When Charlie groaned and started pushing me onto my back, the backpack behind me rustled, the sound of cardboard getting squished coming from within. My eyes popped open.

“Mmph.” I broke the kiss and licked my lips. “I actually, um—I got some other stuff as well.”

“Oh yeah?” Charlie sat back, watching as I slowly dragged the backpack between us.

I fiddled with the zipper, face getting hot. “So I just—I saw the store and it was closed so I decided to just go take a look, and I don’t know why but I just—I thought maybe... um...”

“Moth.” Charlie gave me a wry smile. “Just show me.”

“Okay,” I said quietly, before the slow drag of the zipper filled the room.

I couldn’t look at Charlie as I removed all the items—fuck, I’d taken a lot more than I’d thought—and set them on the floor between us. He was completely silent. We both were.

“H-holy crap,” Charlie eventually said, sounding shocked. “That is... not what I was expecting.”

I squirmed, rubbing my hot face as he picked up one of the boxes. The dark blue dildo, which, shit, suddenly looked way thicker than it had in the store. Then he picked up the thing that made me go so hot my vision wavered.

Charlie opened the box and reached in, pulling out a bright pink double-ended dildo. Slowly, he looked up at me.

“This is like... the best Christmas of my life,” he said faintly, lifting the dildo, making it wobble in a way that sent more blood rushing to my face.

But my nerves lessened enough for me to chuckle hoarsely. “Isn’t that what you said about the diner in Chicago?”

“Yeah, but this is like... uber Christmas.” Charlie’s expression was awed as he picked up each item to have a look. “Okay, shit, what are we going to use tonight? How are we meant to pick?”

My belly jumped with nerves. I fiddled with the backpack zipper anxiously, excitement stirring my insides. “T-tonight?”

“Uh, yes.” Charlie put everything back down and stared at it all hard, like he was concentrating intensely on what to choose, like it was the most important decision ever.

Some of his military background started to show as he jumped up and placed his hands on his hips, staring down at me sternly.

“Okay, let’s get moving. Showers first.” When I didn’t move, he barked, “Up, Moth. Come on. Hop to it.”

I stared at him as I scrambled to my feet automatically, hot shivers dancing over my skin. I hadn’t realised I’d be... into that.

Maybe after we’d done his weird elf thing, I could ask if we could act out something where he played a stern, tightly wound soldier...

Charlie had already grabbed our towels and was pushing me toward the door impatiently. “Come on, Moth, speed it up!”

“*Okay!*” I snapped, taking my towel and slipping out of the room. He crowded me from behind, smacking my ass to get me walking.

It felt like everyone knew what we were going to do as we used the bathrooms and showered separately. After redressing, I walked quickly back to our room and stared down at the pile of toys on the floor, fear and arousal both rising inside me.

What... what would Charlie want to use?

He walked into the room a couple of minutes later, lugging in a clean bucket of water. I eyed it in alarm. Was this a part of it I didn't know about?

"What, uh... what's that for?"

"Best to wash before first use." Charlie snickered as he set the bucket down and laid out a clean towel on the floor.

After a minute of watching him, fidgeting nervously, I knelt beside him to help. I stared at the double-ended dildo as I picked it up, giving it a tentative squeeze. The texture was smooth, firm but still with a hint of give. It didn't feel anything like skin, but my gut clenched with arousal as I imagined... stuff.

Once everything was laid out neatly on the towel, we sat back on our heels and stared at it all in silence.

As if he could sense how nervous I was, Charlie rubbed my thigh soothingly and asked in a gentle voice, "Was there anything in particular that caught your eye, baby?"

Before I could stop it, my gaze darted to that double-ended dildo again. I flushed and looked away just as fast. "Um, I—I don't know."

Charlie squeezed my thigh before reaching over and picking up the coil of rope. I stared at his strong hands as he rubbed his thumb along the smooth material.

"Well, what did you imagine when you were picking it?" he asked calmly. "Tying me up, or me tying you up?"

Oh my god. I cleared my throat and struggled to answer. Either sounded amazing and terrifying.

"I don't, um—I don't know," I mumbled again, feeling kind of pathetic.

But Charlie just put the rope down and shifted to face me, cupping the side of my neck.

"We don't have to use any of it, Moth. If you've changed your mind—"

"No," I blurted, reaching up to grip his wrist. "I want to. It's... it's just kind of..." My eyes drifted over to the toys, and I swallowed. "Intimidating."

He nodded, thumb stroking along my jaw. "I get that. Well, why don't I talk you through—"

"Maybe—maybe you just pick," I said desperately, my fingers tightening on his wrist.

Charlie frowned, looking like he didn't really like that suggestion. "It shouldn't just be me—"

"No, really. I think I—I think I need you to just pick. For you to... decide."

He watched me silently for a few moments, searching my eyes. I forced myself to stare back at him.

Eventually, he nodded and dropped his hand from my neck. "You want me to be in control?"

Lust bloomed in my belly, chasing away some of the nerves. I nodded quickly. "Yes. Please."

"Okay. I can do that." He leaned in and kissed me, then stood. I scrambled up after him, hands clenching into fists repeatedly.

Charlie nodded at my clothes. "Strip."

I froze for a second. Oh my god, this was actually happening. When he raised a stern brow at me, I swallowed and hurriedly started shedding my clothes.

Charlie didn't move, watching me strip down until I was completely naked. I resisted the urge to cup my hands over my groin, my tail lashing with agitated arousal. My face was on fire.

"Get on the bed, Moth."

CHARLIE

My cock was already throbbing as I watched Moth pull back the covers, climb onto the bed and settle back against the headboard. I grinned, bending down to pick up the rope. Perfect.

His eyes were wide as he watched me approach, and I could see the nerves in them. His cock wasn't out yet, but his slit was already flushed and slick. His clawed toes flexed anxiously.

I took hold of one of his arms, pressing a kiss to his inner wrist as I drew it to the corner post of the headboard.

"You're going to pick a safeword," I told him calmly as I tied his wrist to the bedpost. Moth's head turned to watch me, his expression one of mild disbelief that this was happening. My chest warmed with the idea that I could help Moth discover more about himself in this way—what he liked and didn't like.

His choices in sex toys certainly revealed plenty.

"S-safeword?" he repeated, throat bobbing.

I nodded, rounding the bed to tie his other wrist. "Something you wouldn't normally say in this situation. Something short. It'll tell me that you want everything to stop—that you've had enough or there's something happening that you realise you don't like."

"Oh." He looked a little relieved. "Um... anything?"

"Not stop." I finished tying his wrist.

"Why not?"

Grinning, I leaned down to kiss him. "Because you might say stop and not really mean it."

His eyes widened as he stared up at me. "Oh."

I chuckled, straightening up. "Can be anything else. That you wouldn't normally say while we're having sex."

"Um..." His forehead wrinkled. "Like... potato?"

I snorted with laughter. "Sure, that works. Okay, if you want me to stop, or you just need a break, say potato. Okay?"

He swallowed, nodding. "Potato. Okay."

"And if your mouth's busy..." I shot him a sly grin. "Knock three times on the headboard."

He swallowed again, but his eyes flared with intrigue. "Got it. Knock three times."

I patted his chest before stepping away from the bed. "Okay. Close your eyes."

"What? But I—"

"Close your eyes, Moth." I made my voice commanding, watching him sternly until he let out a shaky breath and obeyed. "Don't open them 'til I say."

I stopped in front of the toys, looking down at them as I chewed on my lip. I already knew one thing I'd pick. I'd seen Moth staring at it repeatedly.

I shed my clothes as I mentally made some choices, giving my stiff cock a stroke before I knelt to gather up the items. Carrying them over to the bed, I grinned when I saw Moth's eyes still closed, his brow furrowed. After tucking everything under the covers, out of sight, I slid my hands up Moth's scaly calves as I knelt at the end of the bed.

His legs jerked, brows pinching tighter. "Can I open my eyes ye—"

"No." Reaching under the covers for my first item of the night, I quickly lubed it up before sitting

back on my ass and draping my legs over Moth's spread thighs.

Leaning back on one hand, I licked my lips and said, "Okay, if you want to watch me shove this butt plug up my ass, you can open your eyes."

They'd already flown open, and they flared as they locked onto my spread thighs. Moth licked his lips, legs twitching either side of me as I grinned at him and tilted my hips further. The lube on the plug was cold as I trailed it under my balls, pressing it to the tight pucker of my hole.

"F-fuck." Moth stared as I slowly pressed it inside, my hole taking a few seconds to relax enough.

I winced as it grew wider, stretching me, but my dick jerked when I worked in the thickest part and my hole snapped closed above the flared base.

"Damn." When I shifted to kneel between Moth's thighs, the toy pressed into my prostate, causing a low hum of pleasure to start building.

I grinned up at him as I leaned down to kiss the inside of his knee, sliding my hands up his outer thighs. "Okay, eyes closed."

Once he'd obeyed, I reached for the next toy and set it on the bed. Then I gently clasped the backs of Moth's knees, spreading his thighs wide.

His breath hitched, then a low gasp escaped him when I leaned down to lick his wet slit. I could tell he was still nervous, but he was excited too. After a few seconds, he relaxed a little, settling into the bed, his knees falling open wider. This was territory he knew, because I did it to him as often as possible. Moaning, I sank my tongue inside him and licked the head of his cock, which jerked before it started sliding free.

His head tipped back against the headboard, hips lifting off the bed as I ran my tongue down the length of his cock. Sliding my mouth over the head with a moan, I patted over the mattress until my fingers curled around the toy.

It was a vibrator designed for prostate stimulation. I teased his entrance with the tip of it as I sucked, and Moth groaned. The sound turned into a sharp gasp when I started sliding the toy inside and he realised it wasn't my finger.

I pushed it in and out a few times, slowly and carefully. Moth's thighs trembled, his breaths growing shaky as he got used to the feel. I lifted my mouth off his cock so I could watch his face as my thumb felt around the base of the vibrator until I found the switch.

Grinning, I switched it on at its lowest setting. Moth choked on a breath, hips jerking as his eyes popped open to stare down at the toy buried inside him.

I clicked my tongue disapprovingly. "You were doing so well."

Leaving the toy inside him, I sat up and reached under the covers again, this time for the blindfold he'd brought back. Leaning up over his body, I settled the elastic over the back of his head and made sure his eyes were covered. I didn't tell him that the one he'd grabbed said 'Daddy's Boy' on the front.

Moth bit his lip, fingers flexing in the restraints. His face was already flushed pink from the vibrator still inside him, and his hips jerked when I gently patted his cheek and said, "There. Now you don't have to worry."

"I—" His mouth trembled, head tipping back. "It—it f-feels..."

"Good?" I smirked, moving back down and clicking the vibrator over to the next speed.

He gasped, thighs twitching. The vibrator was glistening when I slid it in and out a little, my fingers getting soaked. Moth's cock bucked, clear fluid pulsing from the long slit along the head. His chest began to heave with his panting breaths as his fingers curled in the restraints, and when I sucked his cock back into my mouth, he let out a ragged moan.

I clicked the toy to the highest setting, the muffled vibration filling the room alongside Moth's shocked shout. His hips started to writhe, sinking his cock deeper into my mouth.

"Oh god—Charlie—" His arms jerked in their restraints, ass lifting off the bed, his whole body shaking. "I'm—I'm gonna—"

He cut off with another yelp when I pushed my finger inside him next to the toy. I moaned around his cock when he clamped down on it, impossibly tight. But I managed to pull my slick finger free to trail it down to his hole, giving him a second before sliding it inside.

"Ah!" Moth's hips bucked wildly, almost dislodging my finger and the toy. But a second later, he locked up and started to shake before his cock flooded my mouth.

I moaned hoarsely, my own cock reeling between my legs, my hole clenching hungrily around the plug. I sucked him through his orgasm but didn't swallow, and the moment he sagged back onto the mattress, I slid the toy free and pushed it into his ass.

Moth shouted in shock a second before I lunged up and kissed him, muffling the sound and shoving my cum-coated tongue inside.

"Mmmph!" His hips were jerking wildly beneath me from the vibe in his ass, but he kissed me back with frantic desperation.

Not giving him time to think or calm down, I moved back down his body and reached under the covers again.

His head tipped back as he panted up at the ceiling, chest pumping fast. I watched him twitch madly from the vibrator up his ass as I lubed up the toy in my hand.

When I smacked it against my palm, Moth went still. "Wh-what's that."

"You'll find out," I purred as I lowered it and teased one end against his slit. It was much bigger than the vibrator, but I knew he'd love it.

He let out a long, trembling moan as I slid it in. I gently pulled the vibrator free, then curved the other end of the double-ended dildo around to press against his hole. Moth jerked, whimpering as his body slowly accepted the intrusion.

"Oh sh-sh-shit." He was shaking hard again, mouth trembling as he was stuffed full. He licked his lips and shook his head weakly. "It's—It's too much—"

"Say your safeword if it's too much," I said calmly, because despite his words, his hips had begun rocking, helping me work the other end of the dildo inside him.

Once it was fully seated, I sat back and stroked my dripping cock, staring down at him. *Holy fuck.*

"Look at you," I rasped, slicking my pre-cum over the head of my dick with my thumb. "Both holes stuffed. Bet you feel full, huh?"

"Nnngh." Moth trembled on the bed, arms stretched to the corner posts. His face was pink, skin flushed.

"You love it, don't you?" I slid my hands down his thighs, keeping them pinned wide. I groaned when he clenched around the dildo, cock jerking in the air. "Being so fucking full you feel like you might break. God, you look so good like this."

"Charlie," he whimpered, making my chest ache.

Grabbing the cock sleeve from under the covers, I squirted lube onto the inner ring. Moth gasped when I carefully gripped the curve of the dildo, beginning to work both ends in and out of him as I slid the sleeve over his straining length.

"Fuck," Moth cried, the tendons in his neck straining as he craned it back. His arms jerked in the restraints again, rattling the headboard.

"Does it feel good, baby?" I asked slyly, stilling both my hands just so I could watch him writhe,

his hips moving to work his cock through the sleeve.

“Y-y-yeah,” Moth got out through clenched teeth, hands fisting by the bedposts. “F-fuck. Yes. Yes. Charlie—”

I yanked the sleeve off before he could come, but it was still close. His cock jerked into the air, pre-cum pulsing out and trickling down his length. He was panting hard, chest heaving and thighs twitching, but he kept them obediently spread wide. So I decided to reward him.

Reaching between my legs, I slowly eased the plug free. Then I clambered up to straddle his waist, reaching back to grip his cock. It was like an iron bar in my fist, pulsing rhythmically as Moth cried out and bucked. Glancing back to make sure he hadn’t pushed either end of the dildo out, I slowly sank down onto his cock.

“*Unnghh sshhit.*” He gritted his teeth, neck straining, hands clenching into shaking fists by the bedposts. His hips jerked, shoving all of him inside me and making me bounce on his lap.

I groaned through a breathless laugh, clenching around his base. “Still feeling good, slayer?”

“I w-want to see you,” he gritted out, voice tight. “Pl-please.”

Chest warming, I reached up and tugged the blindfold off, cupping his flushed cheek as he blinked blearily up at me. Gripping the headboard behind him, I leaned down to give him a brief kiss. His lips clung to me, unwilling to let go.

“You’re doing so well, Moth. Taking two dicks while you give me yours.”

He whimpered, gazing up at me with pleading eyes. I started riding him slowly, breath hitching from the pleasure. Moth’s eyelids fluttered, a gasp escaping him.

“Tell me how it feels.” My voice was gravelly. “Tell me.”

“F-full,” Moth burst out, panting against my mouth.

I gave him another soft kiss. “Yeah, I bet. I love seeing you like this, baby. Makes me need to come so bad. You’re perfect.”

“Charlie,” he whispered, cock jerking inside me. “C-can I touch you? Please.”

“Not this time.” I kissed along his cheek to his jaw. “You just lie there and let me do the work. You gonna let me ride your dick, Moth? It always feels so good.”

He gasped for breath, vibrating against me. “Y-yeah. Yeah, please. I w-want to see you come.”

I grinned, giving his neck one more kiss. “Oh, you will.”

Sitting up, I started working my hips faster, slamming down onto his cock as he bucked up to meet me. He moaned, loudly, then moaned again when I palmed his chest and pushed him harder into the bed.

I chuckled breathlessly, clamping my other hand over Moth’s mouth. “You should’ve grabbed a gag while you were there.”

That made his eyes roll back in his head, his cheeks flushed and burning under my fingers. His hips bucked frantically, bouncing me on his cock, making my head tip back as I let out a guttural groan.

When Moth stiffened up completely, I stilled my hips so I could feel him throbbing inside me. I clenched around his cock as he cried out, the sound muffled against my palm. He tipped his head back and banged it against the headboard a couple of times as he came so hard his ass lifted clear off the bed, taking my whole weight with him. His eyes were squeezed tightly closed, a tear slipping from the corner of one to roll down his temple.

My chest tightened at the sight, and I reached up to gently wipe it away as he let out a shuddering breath against my palm, his body sagging back onto the mattress.

I slid my hand off his mouth to stroke his cheek with my thumb. “Are you okay, baby?”

His eyes slowly blinked open, soft and hazy and heavy-lidded. Tremors rolled through his body, and I could feel how soaked he was against my ass. My dick jerked, drooling onto his tense stomach.

Once he'd nodded and told me, "Y-yeah," in a breathless, dazed voice, I gave him a few more seconds to recover before I started moving my hips again.

He had to be crazy sensitive by now, because he immediately shuddered and let out a curt shout. I chuckled, clamping my hand back over his mouth. Moth's wide eyes were fixed on my ass sliding on and off his cock, before he lifted his gaze to stare at me with wild desperation. He whimpered against my palm, shaking his head.

I smirked and huffed out a breathless laugh. "Use your signal if you want me to stop."

His hands curled into fists in their restraints, like he was considering it. Honestly, I was pretty sure he was strong enough to snap the ropes anyway—or the headboard. But he did none of those things, even as his hips twitched repeatedly from overstimulation.

"My turn to come now," I told him with a breathless smirk. "But you might come again, huh?"

Leaning forward, I gripped the headboard behind him, rocking my hips back and forth.

"Think you got one more for me, Moth?" I asked in a low murmur, laughing when he immediately whimpered and shook his head frantically.

But then his hips started pounding up into me as his eyes rolled back again. Maybe he was just trying to get me to come as soon as possible because it was too much for him. But he hadn't used his signal, so I didn't stop.

Sitting back up, I fumbled with the discarded cock sleeve on the bed, groaning shakily as I worked it over the tip of my cock. It was still warm and slick from Moth, and the soft bumps on the inside felt unreal as I started pumping it over my length.

"F-f-fuck, that feels good," I gasped, fingers tightening on Moth's face as he moaned hoarsely against my palm, eyes locked on what I was doing. His cock bucked inside me, telling me that maybe he *did* have one more in him.

Maybe two.

My orgasm was rising up quickly, Moth's cock tagging my prostate every now and then with his wild, jerky thrusts. He was moaning nonstop against my palm now, the sounds muffled but no less frantic, his eyes still locked on my hand and the sleeve flying over my cock.

"Oh shit." My head tipped back, hips stuttering, thighs burning from how hard I was riding him.

The ache faded to nothing as pure bliss spread through my ass, tightening my nuts and racing up my cock. My hand jerked on the cock sleeve, hips bucking wildly until all my muscles locked up.

"*Ahhh fuuuck.*" Pleasure coursed through every inch of me, making me hunch over and shake. Tingles raced over my scalp as my cock started firing cum, shooting so hard it reached Moth's throat. My limbs went numb, asshole spasming around his length as I gasped through the mind-numbing orgasm.

Moth let out a strained shout against my palm, whole body shaking as he came again. His shoulders lifted off the bed, stretching his arms further and making the headboard creak ominously. Frantic, shuddering breaths escaped through his nose, heating my fingers. I felt his knees come up and press into my sides, like he was trying to curl inward as if it would help him escape the brutal pleasure coursing through his overworked body.

I was trembling as my body finally started to calm, and I winced through a chuckle when I slipped the cock sleeve off my sensitive length, dropping it onto the bed.

"Damn," I said between panting breaths. "I think I had a full-body orgasm."

Moth whimpered plaintively against my palm, still shaking uncontrollably, his hands hanging

limply in their restraints as his chest heaved. I grinned at him before placing my hands on his tight, tense stomach to lift myself off his cock, knowing he could take my weight.

I chuckled again as I looked down, a ridiculous amount of cum seeping from me and getting all over him. Moth's cock twitched, flushed a much deeper shade than I had ever seen it before. My grin turned sly as I moved down between his legs.

When I gripped the double-ended dildo and slid it out a few inches, Moth made a choked sound, knees clamping against my sides. It was obscenely slick, and I could see a wet patch on the sheet beneath him. His tail lashed in agitation between his legs.

I pushed the dildo back in and quickly stretched my arm up to cover Moth's mouth again when he inhaled sharply.

"I think you've got one more in you," I told him in a low voice. "You just love being stuffed so full you're almost not sure you can take it, don't you?"

Moth whimpered, then shook his head frantically when I grabbed the cock sleeve and worked it over his length.

"One more," I told him sternly, pressing my knee against the dildo to keep it in place as I started pumping his cock so fast he had no time to really react.

He strained up off the bed, thighs quaking as they fell back open. His flush had spread down over his throat and chest, his nipples tight little points and stomach muscles quivering. He was so overstimulated that it didn't take long at all for him to reach his peak, but only a thin stream of cum trickled down his length when he came again, sobbing against my palm.

"Shit, I milked you dry." I chuckled as I gently slid the cock sleeve off.

Moth was definitely done. His face was flushed, forehead shiny with sweat and hair a damp, tangled mess. He was shaking wildly, but his body was limp and boneless on the bed. I carefully slid the dildo free, then stood up on unsteady legs to untie his wrists.

I rubbed his wrists and hands with my thumbs, dipping my head to kiss his palms as I untied each one. "You okay, baby?"

Moth let out a shaky breath and managed to lift his head, peering down at his lax body. His heaving chest was streaked with my cum, everything between his legs an absolute mess. His cheeks darkened again, throat bobbing.

"I'm—I—I need to clean up."

"No, not yet," I said firmly, climbing onto the bed and pulling him into my arms.

I knew he'd need a while to come down from the emotional high of being worked over so completely. I held him tightly, and he let out a shaky sigh, burying his face into my neck as he sprawled half on top of me.

His body finally started to calm, relaxing fully into me. I threaded my fingers through his damp hair, lightly rubbing the tips against his scalp in the way I knew he liked. I avoided the sensitive points of his ears, knowing he couldn't take any more stimulation right now.

"Was it too much?" I murmured after a few minutes of peaceful silence, once Moth had finally stopped trembling.

"No," he mumbled into my neck, voice drowsy. "And yes. It was... so good."

I chuckled, pressing a kiss to his hair. "You can do it to me next time. Not that I can come that many times so fast."

I felt Moth's lips curve into a sleepy smile against my throat. He started to lift his head, then gave up and let it fall back onto the pillow with a groan.

"We should probably find something to use as a gag though," I added thoughtfully. "You got pretty

loud.”

“Oh god,” Moth groaned into my neck, burrowing closer.

I laughed. “Won’t matter when we’re back at the safehouse. You can be as loud as you want.”

“Still. Maybe I’ll just stay in here tomorrow so I don’t have to show my face.”

“That sounds great.” I shuffled down and turned to face him, wrapping my arm around his middle.

“Let’s spend the day in bed. We can do some reading practise.”

Moth gave me a sleepy smile, eyes already drifting shut. “Kay.”

I kissed his cheek gently before pulling back. “I’ll clean you up.”

“I can do it,” he slurred, sounding half-asleep already. Ignoring him, I grabbed a clean towel and dipped it in the bucket of water, then returned to the bed.

By the time I’d finished cleaning him up, Moth was out cold. After gathering up all the toys and cleaning those that needed it, I paused by the duffle bag and snagged myself another donut as a reward for a job well done. When I slipped back into bed, Moth half woke up and shuffled closer, resting his head on my chest.

I lowered the donut to his mouth. “Want a bite?”

He mumbled something and took a bite without opening his eyes, exhaling heavily as he chewed. He tucked himself tighter against my body, his breaths tickling my chest, and was asleep again within seconds. I smiled and finished the donut, sheepishly trying to brush powdered sugar out of Moth’s hair without waking him.

Then I settled down with a lazy sigh, blinking drowsily up at the ceiling as I breathed in Moth’s scent. When I joined the military twelve years ago, I never could have predicted that this was where I would end up. A former soldier who had deserted the military, in love with a half monster, lying in his arms in a raider camp in the middle of this wasteland.

But life was good. Better now we had sex toys and donuts.

Charlie and Moth Do the Elf Thing

So! Charlie previously mentioned in another short that he's always had an *ahem* elf fantasy, and who better to help him indulge in it than his beautiful, pointy-eared, pale-haired, arrogant and prickly half-monster boyfriend?

This is around 9.5k words of Charlie trying his darn best to be an old-timey noble knight, Moth reluctantly going along with it as his snooty elf (until he gets *really* into it) and just both of them generally being idiots. We also discover that Moth looks good in literally anything.

As always, please check the content and spoiler warnings!

Content warnings: Explicit sexual content, 18+ only, restraint, roleplay, bad accents, monster junk, mild injury, Moth gets embarrassed poor bb, this really is ridiculous so just don't think about it too hard

Spoiler warning: Set after the events of *Moth* (Monstrous: Book Five)

First published 2022 by Lily Mayne
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CHARLIE

“Fucking hell, Charlie, what if someone *sees* me in this?”

I snorted and glanced over at Moth as he stomped through the forest beside me. He scowled when his cloak got caught on a thorny bush, yanking at the thick material until it came loose.

Okay, it was more a repurposed sack than an actual cloak, but I’d had to work with what I could find around the camp. Sneakily. I’d come across the sack in the camp stores, which were in the old bar, when I was helping Rig find some wood to fix one of the shower stalls.

I hadn’t told him why I wanted it. Obviously.

There had also been an old pillowcase in there that no one wanted to use because it was yellowed and ripped. I’d washed it, cut arm holes in it, and now Moth was wearing it as a very dashing tunic.

It was a *little* shapeless, but he made it work. And his legs looked freaking *amazing* in the black spandex leggings I’d found stuffed into the back of a drawer in our room. They weren’t giving *quite* the right effect, but it wasn’t like there were any spare leather pants lying around the camp. I’d almost asked Danny to steal me a pair of Wyn’s—assuming he owned more than one pair, which I doubted—but I didn’t really want to make Moth wear something that had probably been coated in parasite goo at some point. Plus, I very much doubted the Soul Eater wore underwear. Although I supposed there was a chance he was rocking a pair of tighty-whities under there.

Moth had his brown leather belt looped over the pillowcase tunic, but the fabric kept riding up as we walked, which made him huff in irritation and tug it back down. His face was already pink, and he kept glancing back to make sure none of the raiders were following us.

“You look hot,” I told him, which made him scowl over at me. I pursed my lips to stop from laughing. “Your hair looks real pretty.”

He’d let me tie the top third back into several intricate braids that came together in a delicate bun. Two more thin braids framed his face, and he kept irritably flipping them back over his shoulders. I’d made him a little crown thing from twigs, just to add to the effect, and he’d already complained a few times about it digging into his head.

“We don’t *have* to do this, Moth,” I said, even though I was already raring to go seeing him in his budget elf get-up.

He huffed. “No, I want to do your elf thing. I just don’t want anyone to *see* us.”

“They won’t.” I reached over and took his hand. “Hunter and I scouted out this area the other day. None of the raiders come here and there’s nothing living nearby. Trust me.”

He sighed, tugging his sack-cloak free from another bush. “Okay, remind me what I have to do again.”

Excitement churned in my gut, my cock already twitching with anticipation.

“Okay, so I’ll tie you to a tree. You’re the elf who wandered away from the rest of your... elf tribe”—what was a group of elves called?—“and got captured by a, um... an orc or something.”

“What’s an orc?” Moth muttered, adjusting his twig crown.

“Like a big green dude. It doesn’t matter. He tied you up and robbed you and left to go get his orc friends so they could come and hold you for ransom.”

“If orcs are big dudes, why didn’t he just take me with him?”

I paused. “Well, we can rope more people into this if you don’t think it’s believable. Gloam and Edin could play some orcs—”

“No,” Moth blurted, sounding horrified. “No one else is seeing me in leggings and a fucking *pillowcase*.”

His tail was swishing with agitation behind him. Its bulk pushed the back of the pillowcase tunic up, letting me ogle the pert, round ass encased in tight spandex. Maybe I could convince him to wear leggings more often...

“Okay, so you’re the elf who’s tied up, and I’m the human knight that comes along and finds you and rescues you.”

I wasn’t exactly dressed as a knight. I’d been more concerned with making sure Moth looked the part. But I was wearing his brown coat, and I’d tied my grey scarf around my middle as a sash thing. I didn’t really know what knights were meant to wear other than armour.

I had Moth’s sword sheathed on my back, and the thing was freaking *heavy*. It banged against my backpack with every step.

“You have to stay in character, okay?” I told Moth, who rolled his eyes. “Talk, like... *medievally*.”

“I don’t know how to talk *medievally*, Charlie.”

“Words like *verily* and *stuff*.”

“I don’t—” Moth exhaled and rubbed his eyes. “Okay.”

I bounced a little with excitement, clutching his hand. “You have to act all aloof and like you’re better than humans. You know, like kind of snooty. And we’ll make a deal over me saving you. Like, I’ll ask for a reward for untying you. You know”—I leaned in close and kissed his cheek—“a *sexy* reward.”

Moth snorted, glancing over at me with a tiny smile. “Sure.”

We emerged into a tiny clearing in the trees with a creek to one side. The ground was mossy and soft under our feet, and sunlight pierced through the leaves above. There was a tree with several low-hanging branches just up ahead, and I grinned at the sight of it. Perfect.

“Okay, here’s good.” I tugged off my backpack and crouched to unzip it, pulling out the red rope Moth had brought back from the sex shop. “You want some water before I tie you up?”

“Oh god,” Moth groaned, rubbing his face. “No, I’m okay. You’re *sure* no one’s gonna come out here?”

“I’m sure.” I paused. “But I’ll use knots that I can undo easily just in case. You’d be able to snap the ropes if you needed to though, right? You *do* have monster strength.”

He smirked at me. “Yeah, I do.”

“And I appreciate your ability to hold me up against a wall and fuck the living daylights out of me.” I held up the rope and gave him a winning smile. “You ready?”

Moth swallowed, gaze darting to the rope. But his eyes sparkled with excitement. He was being a grouch about the outfit, but I already knew he was looking forward to being tied up again, even just for a little while.

Still, he made a big show of throwing down his backpack with a huff and stomping over to the tree, crossing his arms and scowling at me from beneath a nice, thick branch.

I grinned at him, sauntering over, my smile turning sly when his pale eyes dropped to the rope in my hands. His throat bobbed with another swallow.

“Don’t worry, baby.” I slipped an arm around his waist and tugged him closer until our hips were flush. I couldn’t stop myself from reaching down and giving his ass a squeeze through the thin fabric of the leggings. “I’ll look after you. I always do.”

He sighed and draped his arms around my neck, jostling the sword on my back. “I know. I just look like an idiot.”

“No,” I blurted immediately. “You look *so hot*.”

Moth gave me a flat look. “Charlie, I’m wearing a pillowcase.”

“Yeah, and you’re so freaking hot that you’ve managed to make a pillowcase look sexy.”

His cheeks went pink. “Really?”

“Yes.” I leaned in to kiss him, smoothing my hand over the base of his tail and making him shiver. Our tongues glided together, making my cock twitch where it was pressed up against Moth.

He noticed, because he let out a tiny grunt into my mouth before pulling back to trail his lips down my jaw to my neck. “We could just forget the elf thing and fuck right now—”

“No way, slayer.” I let go of his tail to gather his wrists together, but I paused to eye him with concern. “Unless you *really* don’t want to?”

He rolled his eyes, giving me a tiny smile. “I told you, I want to.”

I couldn’t help but beam at him, leaning in to give his pretty mouth another big kiss.

“You make the *best* elf,” I told him. His pierced lips twitched before he grinned at me with a little chuckle.

“Well, that’s good, because I’m the only elf you’re getting.”

I grinned back. “That’s right, slayer.” Stepping back, still holding his wrists together, I jerked my chin at the ground. “Take a seat.”

“The big green dudes let me sit before tying me up, huh?” Moth dutifully sank to the ground, leaning back against the thick tree trunk. Nervousness flashed through his eyes when I raised his wrists over his head and began binding them with the soft rope.

“They were thoughtful orcs,” I said absently as I looped the rope over the tree branch and tugged Moth’s wrists up until there wasn’t any slack at all.

He grunted, glancing up warily as I secured the rope to the branch, before stepping back with my hands on my hips to survey my work. My mouth stretched into a wicked grin, which made Moth roll his eyes.

“Perfect.” I adjusted the stupidly heavy sword on my back. “Not too tight? You’re comfortable?”

“I’m fine.”

“Awesome.” I tugged on my coat, trying to tidy up my outfit. “Okay, remember, you have to act all snooty, but also like you need my help. Like you’re irritated that you need the help of a human but you know you do and then you see how sexy that human is so you’re like, willing to make a deal that involves something dirty. That’s your character motivation.”

“My what?”

“Okay, you ready?” I shot him a thumbs up and turned to leave the clearing. “Start calling for help or something.”

“What—Wait!” Moth spluttered, which made me pause and turn back. “What—I don’t know what I’m meant to do!”

“Just call for help in a sexy elfy way,” I said patiently, which just made him splutter incredulously again.

“What the fuck does that mean—”

“See you in a sec, baby!” I hurried out of the clearing and hid behind a tree, stomach jumpy with

excitement.

I was finally getting my elf fantasy. I fuckin' *wished* I could tell Hunter that it had happened, but I wouldn't share the private things between me and Moth with anyone else, not even my best friend.

Edin had a habit of blurting out details about his and Hunter's sex life, and I'd pulled him aside after we got back to the camp to gently tell him that Hunter might have wanted those things to stay private.

The big purple monster had glanced around, leaned closer and conspiratorially told me that Hunter liked to pretend he got annoyed when Edin told others about what they got up to, but the thought of other people knowing the details actually made him super horny, and some evenings they barely made it inside their room before Hunter was yanking off Edin's kilt.

I'd felt all the blood drain from my face, and had backed away quickly, aware that I now had to live with the knowledge that the rest of us were all unwitting pawns in Hunter and Edin's voyeuristic foreplay.

But that still didn't mean I was going to tell anyone—even Hunter—that my prickly, secretly soft-as-butter half monster had dressed up as a Wastes-budget elf for me. *And* let me borrow his coat and sword. I was trying very hard not to show how heavy the latter was to my puny human muscles, so while I was out of sight, I heaved it off my back with a wince and gripped it tight with both hands.

After a few seconds, I heard Moth huff and awkwardly call out, his voice inflectionless, "Help."

I rolled my eyes. "You have to put some emotion into it!" I called from behind the tree.

"For fuck's—" He huffed again, then cleared his throat. His voice was a *little* more animated when he called, "Help! I am—I have been... captured by orts."

"Orcs."

"Orcs," he corrected. "I am a, uh... noble elf! Is there anyone who can help me? You will be greatly rewarded."

Okay, time for my big entrance. I straightened out my coat again, adjusted the scarf around my waist, then heaved the sword up and stepped out from behind the tree.

"What's this?" I puffed out my chest and strode forward, though I did have to drag Moth's sword behind me. "An elf, left at the mercy of anyone who might wander by in the forest?"

"Christ," I heard Moth mutter, but before I could glare at him he sighed and said, "Yes. Some orcs captured me and took me away from the rest of my... elf team. They left me tied up here. Will you help me, human?"

"Orcs, eh?" I took a step closer, stumbling a little when I released one hand from the sword hilt and its weight tried to tip me over. Righting my footing quickly, I stroked my chin with a thoughtful expression. "If they return, that won't bode well for you, elf."

I paused, frowning. My accent was all wrong. Medievally human knights didn't have Texan accents. I liked to think I was pretty good at accents—I always made Hunter laugh with my impressions—so I figured I could give it a shot to make this feel more authentic.

I cleared my throat, straightening my spine. "Well, good elf, it is... uh, 'tis a great fortune that I found you."

Moth shot me an odd look. "Why are you talking like that? Are you okay?"

I went pink. "Like what? I'm fine. You're ruining the—"

"Were you trying to do an *accent*?"

"I wasn't *trying*!" I snapped. "I did one. A British one. Like a-an old-timey British one."

Moth snorted, shoulders shaking as he tried to suppress his laughter.

My face burned even hotter. "It was good!"

“It sounded like you were yawning.”

“It did not!” I brandished Moth’s sword, trying to point the tip at his face, but it kept drooping.

Shit, this thing was so heavy. “Watch how you speak to me, elf. *I* am your only hope of escape.”

He bit his lip, face going pink as he held back his laughter. “Charlie, I can’t take you seriously—”

“Who’s Charlie?” I smirked at him, trying very hard to move past the embarrassing moment. “I have not told you my name yet, elf.”

“Oh, Jesus Christ,” Moth muttered, but sobered up and shook out his shoulders, fingers flexing on the rope. “What is your name, human?”

I cleared my throat, lifting my chin and trying to hold a regal pose as I stared at Moth in his pillowcase tunic and leggings, slouched at the bottom of the tree, one of his boots tapping restlessly against the ground.

“I am Sir Charles Keane,” I declared. “Noble knight of these lands.”

Moth stared at me in silence for a few seconds, biting his lip again. Then he said, voice strained, “Okay. Will you help me, then?”

“Moth!” I resisted the urge to stamp my foot. “You’re not acting elfy enough!”

“*Okay!*” He took a deep breath and lifted his chin so he was staring down his nose at me even from his seated position on the floor. “A *human* knight? Elves do not normally dally with mere *humans*. But I have been left here for hours with no hope. I, uh... fear the worst if those awful orcs return.”

“Indeed,” I said slyly, taking another step closer. “Do I get a reward for untying you, elf?” I asked in what I hoped was a sultry voice.

Moth went pink, but he lifted his chin and sniffed. “What *reward* did you have in mind?”

“Well...” I stepped even closer and crouched, smirking at him as his filmy pupils expanded in a rush. “I’ve always wondered what an elf”—I let my gaze drift pointedly down to his crotch—“would taste like.”

He made a tiny choked sound in his throat, the colour in his cheeks deepening. “I... I see.”

“Does that seem like suitable payment for helping you?” I asked slyly.

Moth cleared his throat, but before he could answer, movement below drew my eyes back down.

The thin leggings weren’t strong enough to prevent his cock from sliding free. The black fabric stretched obscenely into a very obvious tent, pushing the old pillowcase up, giving me an unobstructed view. I couldn’t tear my eyes away as my lips parted with a little puff of breath.

I swallowed thickly, trying to remember what I’d just asked him. I was tempted to write off the whole elf thing and just suck him off now, but Moth cleared his throat again and spoke.

“That would be acceptable payment,” he said, trying to keep up his haughty tone even though his hips were shifting with anxious arousal. Wetness was already seeping through the crotch of the leggings, darkening the stretched material.

“Excellent.” I grinned salaciously at him before standing up. “Well, I’ll just untie you and then we can—”

“No,” Moth blurted, face going pink. “You can’t untie me yet.”

I froze, hands outstretched. “Um, why not?”

His eyes darted, his blush spreading down to his throat. When his cock twitched under the leggings, I realised *exactly* why.

“Because...” Moth’s fingers flexed in the tie, chest rising quicker as his breaths sped up. “B-because...”

He trailed off, looking at me helplessly.

“You raise an excellent point.” I nodded, stepping back. “You can’t be untied yet.”

Moth cleared his throat and raised his chin again. “Of course not. Silly human. You know better than to doubt an elf. We are... um, known for being profound and wise. Smarter than all others. *Especially* humans.”

Kind of going off-script a bit there, but okay.

Moth sniffed haughtily, tilting his face away. “You’ll just have to take your reward for helping me now.” He tried to make his voice careless.

I paused. “While you’re still tied up?” I clarified.

Moth went even pinker, shooting me a brief glare. “*Yes*.”

“Okay...” I nibbled on my lower lip. “And is it true that elves say ‘potato’ to signal when they want to stop or have had enough? You know, like, an elf safeword? I’ve heard that about elves.”

“Huh?” Moth broke character to shoot me an odd look, but his face cleared when I raised my brows at him meaningfully. “Oh. Yeah—I mean, yes, that is true of elves, human. Potato is indeed our safeword.”

I nodded solemnly. “Well, that’s useful information. Seeing as I’ll be... collecting my payment while you are restrained in such a compromising manner.”

“You have to untie me after though,” he blurted, cheeks sweetly flushed. “You can’t leave me here tied up.”

“I would never,” I told him as I knelt, my voice solemn, but a filthy grin still stretched my mouth.

He jerked when I dropped the sword and palmed his knees, spreading his thighs wider and shuffling forward so I was kneeling between them. Letting one hand slide all the way down his inner thigh, I gripped his stiff cock through the leggings.

“You feel far more interested in a *human* than an elf should be,” I murmured slyly. “Have you always secretly wondered what it would be like, elf? To have a human suck your cock?”

Moth went pink, even as his hips twitched. “N-no, of course not.”

“No?” I smirked and dipped my hand past the waistband of his leggings, skimming my fingers down his shaft to stroke his slit. It was already swollen and slippery, coating my fingers as I dipped them just inside.

“Have you ever tasted yourself, elf?” I asked, leaning forward so the tip of my nose brushed against his. Moth panted unsteadily against my mouth, pale eyes wide and dazed. “Elves are meant to taste *much* better than all others.”

“I—” He swallowed, channel clenching around my fingers. “I’ve never...”

“Here.” I pulled my hand free and raised it to his mouth, trailing my slick fingertip over his lower lip. “Let’s find out how you taste together.”

Moth’s breath hitched in his throat, but he dutifully parted his lips wide enough for me to slide two of my fingers into his mouth. He groaned, sucking hungrily, his long, dark lashes fluttering.

My cock strained in my pants. Yanking my fingers free, I crashed my lips to his and thrust my tongue inside. Moth’s familiar taste filled my mouth, making me moan as my hand dropped to start frantically tugging his leggings off.

By the time I ripped my mouth free to shuffle back and get the thin fabric over his feet, Moth was panting.

“D-do I... taste good then, human?” he asked breathlessly, face flaming again.

Rather than answer, I shoved his pillowcase tunic up so I could dip my head and kiss his flat stomach, then his hip bone. He grunted, hips straining up, cock leaving a wet stripe over my cheek before I turned my head and sucked it into my mouth.

“F-fuck.” His head tipped back, hitting the tree trunk with a solid *thunk*. “Ah!” he cried when I grabbed his knees and forced them up and out wider, settling myself between his legs.

I sucked off his cock to dip my head lower, licking at the base where it emerged from his body. Then I buried my tongue as deep as I could inside him, pushing his knees up toward his chest to angle his hips better.

Moth writhed, arms twisting in the rope keeping them suspended tightly over his head. The end of his tail lashed wildly between his spread legs, and when I lifted my head briefly to tongue his cockslit, I saw his cute clawed toes flexing helplessly in the air.

“How does it feel, elf?” I murmured, sliding my tongue around his weeping cockhead as I gazed up at him. “Does it feel good to have a human do this to you?”

“I—” Moth strained his hips, cock jerking against my lips. “Y-yes, but y-you can—you can never tell anyone I let you do this.”

I chuckled darkly, pressing an open-mouthed kiss to the head of his cock. “Mm. What would the other elves think if they knew you’d let a human suck your beautiful cock?”

“*Nnngh*.” Moth’s chest was heaving, fingers gripping the rope tight as his thighs shook on either side of me.

He tried to suppress his cry when I sucked him back into my mouth, sliding my lips down to take as much of him as possible. My cheeks hollowed as I sucked, starting up a relentless rhythm that had him squirming and making tiny, desperate sounds as his hips bucked to meet me.

“Th-this—This doesn’t seem like... adequate payment,” he panted, then let out a choked sound when his cock twitched in my mouth, gushing another healthy dose of pre-cum.

I paused, lifting my head. “No?”

Moth shook his head frantically, hips bucking, making his cock bump into my chin.

“You *are* saving me from those... those—”

“Orcs,” I supplied.

“Yeah, those guys.” He bumped my chin again, making me smile. “S-so maybe... maybe you should... take more.”

“Oh?” I smirked, letting my bristly chin rub against his tender cockhead, which made him jerk with a clipped grunt. “So what do *you* think would be *adequate payment* for rescuing you?”

“W-well, maybe... maybe *I’ve* wondered what a... human tastes like.” Moth’s face was pink, but he raised his chin defiantly and held my gaze, his pale eyes heavy with arousal.

My dick pulsed uncontrollably in my pants, straining to get free. I lunged forward to capture his mouth in a heated kiss, shuffling closer until he could feel the hard length of me pressing against his wet, flushed slit.

“You want to suck my cock?” I asked when I broke the kiss, peppering kisses all over his cheek up to his ear. I rocked my hips against him, which made him choke out a moan.

“It-it only seems fair,” he managed to get out, shuddering when I gently nibbled on the pointed tip of his ear.

I grinned, leaning back and gazing at him as I reached down to hurriedly undo my pants. “You’re right. I *am* freeing you. And I wouldn’t be much of a noble knight if I didn’t endeavour to do everything I can to help you. In whatever way that may be.”

Moth’s gaze dropped the instant I pulled my stiff cock out. His eyes flared with heat when I gave it a slow stroke, biting the inside of my cheek to hold back my moan. I was *ridiculously* hard.

“Well then, elf.” I stood up on slightly shaky legs, grabbing on to the rope keeping Moth’s hands suspended for leverage. Arching my hips forward, I let the tip of my cock rub against his trembling

mouth, but when he tried to suck me in, I tucked them back.

Moth glared up at me, face pink, dark brows drawn into an impatient frown but with a hint of pleading in his pale eyes.

“Do not toy with an elf, *human*.”

Oh shit, that made my cock grow a million times harder. *Fuck yes, elf Moth.*

“You want my cock that bad, do you?” I murmured, trying not to come immediately when I pressed forward again and fed the tip into his waiting mouth.

He moaned low around it, tongue lapping at the slit before sliding down. My thighs trembled, and I gripped the rope tighter as I stared down at my dick sinking between Moth’s pierced lips. Fuck, I was gonna come *way* too soon. Releasing the rope with one hand, I trailed my fingers over his twig crown before threading them through his pale hair.

My thumb brushed the pointed tip of his ear, making him shudder as he sucked me harder, his lean cheeks hollowing.

“You’re—you’re really good at this,” I choked out, trying to stay in character as I began to gently rock my hips, sliding my cock in and out of his mouth. “Are you sure you haven’t sucked a human’s cock before?”

Moth glared up at me with his mouth full, which made my lips twitch with the start of a smile. But I could feel the orgasm already churning in my balls, and I didn’t want to come yet. Unlike Moth, I definitely could *not* come several times in quick succession.

Just as my balls started to lift and tighten, I carefully slid free of his mouth, shuddering with a groan when his pierced tongue flicked the sensitive V.

“There is something we could do that would let us enjoy ourselves *together*,” I rasped, trying to keep the unsteady edge out of my voice as I gripped my straining cock.

With my other hand, I continued petting Moth’s hair and ear, and he turned his face into my palm when I cupped his cheek, nuzzling me there. My chest clenched up tight. God, I loved this prickly half-monster man so much. And the fact that he was doing this for me just made me love him even more.

He cleared his throat, glancing up at me through his eyelashes. “Oh?”

I licked my lips, dick bucking eagerly when my gaze dropped to between his splayed thighs. His cock was leaking copiously, the underside of his tail slick between his legs, his slit flushed and swollen.

“I won’t tell anyone if you let me fuck you, elf,” I croaked. “And then I’ll let you go.”

Moth’s breath caught. His eyes darted around, as if some big beefy orcs or other elves might really crash through the forest and spot us. My cock jerked again at the idea of it.

“Y-you... you won’t breathe a word of it to anyone?” he said, remembering to give me a haughty look with a brow raised, just like a snooty elf would. *Oh hell yes.*

“On my honour.” I grinned at him, looking back down between his legs pointedly. “I can tell you want it, elf. You’re dripping.”

Moth went bright pink, but he sniffed and looked away. “I am tied up and helpless. And you are my only hope of escape. So... yes. Fine. You can... f-fuck me.”

I grinned again, stepping back and eagerly scrambling out of my boots and pants. I unbuttoned my shirt but kept it and the coat on, because it felt dirtier for us both to only be half naked.

“On your feet, elf.” I grabbed the rope and hoisted Moth up, smirking when he shot me a heated, shocked look.

I quickly tied the rope into several knots so that his arms were still stretched tight over his head

and he was balancing on the balls of his feet. He shifted to try and get a better footing, face going bright pink again when he realised that the pillowcase tunic was rucked up, revealing everything below his waist.

“Spread your legs.”

His breath caught, but after a few seconds he obeyed, shuffling his feet out a little.

“Wider.”

He wobbled precariously but did as I said, cock jerking in the air despite how embarrassed he looked. The delicate scales around his slit glistened with his arousal, his tail lashing in agitation. His long fingers curled around the rope tethering his wrists together, gripping on tight.

I stepped just close enough to reach between his legs and run my fingers over his slit, my dick throbbing from how hot and wet he was. Moth gasped, his hips twitching and feet shuffling again to try and keep his balance.

“Oh yes, you *definitely* want my cock inside you.” I slid a finger inside, pressing my throbbing cock against his hip as I nuzzled his ear. “Maybe I should make you wait for it.”

Moth huffed with impatience. “No, you *definitely* should not—”

He cut himself off with a gasp when I spun him around suddenly so he faced the tree. Wobbling on the balls of his feet, he shuffled to regain his balance, but I was already pressing between his shoulder blades to tilt his upper body forward just a little, stretching his arms even tighter over his head.

His breath caught. “Charlie—”

Stepping closer, I ran my hands down his sides and slid my cock between his thighs, his tail pressed tightly against my hip and lashing the top of my thigh as it flicked wildly. We both groaned when slick heat coated my shaft, the head of my cock rubbing against the base of his where it emerged from his slit.

Groaning, I tipped my face into the nape of his neck and shuddered at the feel. The urge to tilt my hips and slide inside him was almost overwhelming, so I forced myself to pull back and reach down between his legs again.

“I think you need proof of how well I’ll fuck you first,” I rasped, sliding two fingers inside him.

Moth groaned, head tipping back as I began to thrust them in and out fast, fucking his channel with relentless speed. Leaning in, I pressed kisses over the bend of his neck, nuzzling his hair.

“I can’t wait to feel this around my cock.” I trailed more kisses over his shoulder and trembling bicep. “Look at you. So beautiful. No other human will ever get to see you like this, will they?”

“N-no,” he stammered, breathing hard as his legs shook, desperately trying to keep himself upright even as he spread them wider. “No one else.”

“Just me,” I murmured in his ear, holding my fingers deep inside him and stretching my thumb back to rub his hole.

He cried out, hips pressing back into my touch. “I’m—I—”

“Can you come like this, elf?” I asked, pressing the tip of my thumb just inside his ass. “You don’t even need me to touch your cock, do you? You’re going to come just like this for me, and then I’ll—”

“*Ahh!*” Moth’s hips bucked wildly, his hot, slick channel spasming around my fingers as he started to come. I groaned at the feel, my cock throbbing against the side of his ass.

When his orgasm ended and I slid my fingers free, I quickly sucked them into my mouth, groaning at his taste as I gently spun him back around to face me.

Moth looked dazed, his eyes hazy and cheeks sweetly flushed, lips trembling as he panted. I cupped his chin and kissed him, sliding my tongue inside to share his taste.

“How are your legs feeling?” I asked when I pulled back, smirking at him. “Steady enough to hold

you up?”

He swallowed, blinking rapidly before his vision cleared enough for him to shoot me weak glare. “Yes, obviously.”

I huffed in amusement, stepping back to grab the water bottle from my bag. Cupping Moth’s chin, I held the bottle up so he could have a few sips before recapping it and chucking it toward my bag.

“Shoulders not too sore?” I asked, massaging them firmly, which made Moth groan and sag in his bindings. The branch above creaked gently, leaves swaying as it took more of his weight.

“They’re okay.” He swallowed thickly. “But maybe you can do this later when we’re back at the camp.”

I smiled, leaning in to kiss him. Moth was such a glutton for touch. “Of course. I’ll do it while you read out a page in our book.”

He was getting so much better at reading, and we’d started tackling writing too—something else he’d never been taught. The first time he’d written both our names, his handwriting big and messy and scrawling, I’d had to bite down hard on my bottom lip as my throat bobbed convulsively. I hadn’t told him in case it embarrassed him, but that scrap of paper now permanently lived in my pocket.

He stumbled over longer words a lot, and still got embarrassed and frustrated sometimes, but he was determined. I was so proud of him that I wanted to yell at anyone who would listen about how smart he was. I refrained only because I knew it would embarrass him. So instead I just rewarded him with lots of kisses. And orgasms.

Realising we’d both broken character, I gave his shoulders a final squeeze before dropping my hands to palm his ass beneath the sack-cloak, shooting him a salacious smile.

“So, *elf*.” I let my fingers drift inward to rub the base of his tail, making Moth shudder. “Are you ready to take a human cock for the first time?”

His breath caught, white teeth sinking briefly into his lower lip, catching on the piercing there. “Y-yes, but it—it will be the *only* time. You can’t tell anyone.”

“I won’t,” I purred, sliding my hand down the back of his thigh to hitch his knee against my waist. My cock slid over his wet slit, making me shiver and tip my head forward into his neck. “God, you feel so good.”

Moth’s breath shuddered out of him, his hips trying to move and arms twisting in the rope over his head. His chest heaved against me as I began grinding my hips, sliding my cock back and forth, skimming it over his own throbbing length. His pre-cum coated my cockhead, making my nuts tighten.

“How much do you want it, elf?” I rasped, which made him groan in frustration.

“C-can’t you just—” He tried to hitch his leg up higher, tilting his hips so that my cockhead caught on his opening on my next thrust.

I moaned, knees almost buckling as my tip was enveloped in wet heat. I told myself to pull back, to scold him for trying to hurry things along, but found myself sinking deeper, gripping the curve of his ass to hold him steady.

“F-fuck.” Moth tried to rock his hips, to push himself down onto me, but I pressed him tighter against the tree to try and keep him still.

It didn’t work.

In a rush of movement, he used his grip on the rope to lift his legs into the air and wrap them around my waist, his tight stomach clenching as his core muscles engaged. The branch above us creaked, but I couldn’t focus on anything but the squeezing heat of Moth surrounding my prick.

Before I could even process being lodged fully inside him, he was grinding his hips down onto me, the lean muscles in his arms and shoulders bulging as he used his grip on the rope to work himself

on my cock. His strong legs tightened around my hips, jerking me forward repeatedly.

“Goddamn,” I panted, quickly matching his frantic pace as Moth writhed feverishly against me.

He grunted with the effort but didn’t slow down for a second, skin growing flushed and damp with sweat.

I was trying very hard to remember that we were still meant to be roleplaying, but all I wanted to do was pound my cock inside him until we both came. I was pretty sure that was all Moth wanted by this point too.

But no, goddamnit! I was getting my elf fantasy! I’d worked so freakin’ *hard* for this.

Leaning in, I trailed my lips over the shell of Moth’s ear, mouthing at the sharp point. He shuddered, cock throbbing where it was trapped between our tightly pressed bodies.

“I can’t wait to feel you come around my cock, elf,” I murmured in his ear. “You’re so hot and tight. And *wet*. How wet will you get when you come?”

“F-f-fuck, Charlie.” Moth panted against my cheek, thighs trembling around my waist.

“Am I about to find out?” I trailed my lips down his jaw to kiss his neck, readjusting my grip on his ass so I could rub my fingertips against the underside of his tail.

Moth’s whole body jolted, a whimper escaping him as he tightened up around me. “N-n-no, if you d-do that, I’ll—”

“How many times can an elf come?” I interrupted with a sly smile, trailing my fingertips down to his hole then back up to the base of his tail.

“*Nnngh*.” Moth started to shake, his cock pouring pre-cum all over my belly. “I d-d-don’t—”

“Shall we find out?” I pressed closer to slide my fingertips down his crack, past his hole until they brushed against my tunnelling shaft.

Shuddering, I coated them in his slickness before circling his rim with a soft fingertip. Moth shouted in pleasure, hole twitching until I exerted gentle pressure and my finger sank inside.

He stiffened up in a rush, channel tightening around my cock. Desperate cries fell from his lips, echoing through the quiet forest around us. His strong legs squeezed my waist so tight I winced, but at least the slight pain distracted me enough to push down my own churning orgasm. My cock was agonisingly sensitive inside him, throbbing insistently, but I kept my hips still until Moth sagged back against the tree.

The branch above creaked again, and I thought I heard a very faint cracking sound, but then Moth’s hips were writhing feverishly again, the slick sound of our joined bodies making my head spin.

“I w-want to feel you come,” he panted, legs trembling wildly around my waist. “Y-you need to come so you’ll untie me. That was our deal.”

I grinned breathlessly, pulling out to sink back inside. “That’s right. You’re going to let me come inside you, aren’t you? Then you’ll go back to the other elves with my cum dripping out of you, and none of them will ever know that you let a human fuck you.”

MOTH

I had no idea why us pretending to be an elf and a human knight was turning me on so much, but it was. A lot.

Maybe it was because what Charlie was saying *was* true to an extent. We'd go back to the camp, and none of them would know what we'd done out here. None of them would know that I *would* have Charlie's cum seeping out of me, making me both uncomfortable and weirdly happy at the same time.

Charlie started thrusting again, his grey eyes dark with pleasure and cheeks flushed. The air between our tightly pressed bodies was steamy, heat wafting from Charlie's body beneath my coat, his forehead dotted with sweat.

I had a weird infatuation with the smell of his clean sweat, so I strained my neck to bury my nose in his damp hair, breathing him in, my cock pulsing in reaction. It slid against his pubes and the line of hair on his belly, the friction mind-numbing.

I was desperate to see him come, to hear that husky groan he always let out that made me go a little wild. Tightening my legs' grip around his waist, I ground my hips into him and clung to the rope binding my hands so hard my fingers ached.

"Y-you're going to make me come again," I panted against his temple, pushing past the embarrassment to get the words out. I was getting better at talking during sex, mainly because Charlie seemed to love it. And I wanted him as uncontrollable as I felt. Sometimes I got annoyed at how good his control was while he turned me into a complete mess, but I couldn't deny that I also fucking loved it.

He groaned, hips straining to push his cock as deep as possible, the head catching on that spot inside me that made me tighten up around him. Switching to short, grinding thrusts, he kept up the pressure there in the way he knew I loved, which caused my trembling legs to start slipping off his waist as the pleasure made me go weak.

Tightening his grip, he grinned at me and thrust deep, tipping his head to brush his lips over mine. "You feel better than anyone else," he murmured, making my chest get tight. "You're perfect."

"I—S-so do you." My arms and shoulders were on fire, thighs aching from keeping them clamped around his waist. My scales slid against the leather coat, clawed toes curling from the bliss he was pumping into my body.

When he delivered another hard thrust, I cried out, my head tipping back. "F-f-fuck."

Gritting my teeth, I lowered my head to gaze at him pleadingly, our panting breaths mingling in the space between us.

"Your human cock feels so good." I couldn't stop the words that started streaming from my mouth. "I want your c-cum inside me. I want those orcs to come back and smell it on me. I want all the other elves to see me and wonder if I really let a human knight f-fuck me."

Charlie groaned, his knees buckling. "Fuuuck."

"I'm—I want to t-touch myself later, once you're gone, and feel you still inside me." I couldn't believe what I was saying, my face on fire even as I kept going. "I'll make myself come again remembering how well you fucked me."

"Oh shit," he croaked, fingers biting into my ass as he held me up against the tree. "Okay, we *are* actually going to do that later. Fuck, I need to see that."

The thought of Charlie watching me touch myself—just like I had all that time ago back in Chicago—made my cock pulse uncontrollably, pressed tightly between our stomachs. I tensed, my whole body shaking as another orgasm barrelled down on me. My legs scrabbled around his waist, trying to find better purchase.

"F-f-fuck, I'm coming again." I gripped the rope tight, shoulders screaming in protest, but the lack

of stability just made my orgasm even stronger when it hit. I was completely at his mercy, tied up and balanced precariously in his arms, unable to move much when he tightened his grip on my ass and held me still to pound me through my orgasm.

My strained shout echoed through the forest, and it was quickly followed by a long, drawn-out groan from Charlie as his cock throbbed inside me. He pressed as deep as possible, eyes rolling back as my body strained against him.

Just as the tension started to leave him, there was a loud crack from above us. Before I could react, the tension keeping my arms stretched up above my head vanished. My eyes widened as I watched the end of the branch swing down, broken from its thick base.

It smacked Charlie on the back of the head. His eyes rolled back again—not in a good way this time—before he started tipping back. I had just enough time to snap the rope and loop an arm around him so he didn't crash to the ground as he went limp, stumbling to keep us both mostly upright.

He was completely out cold. I stared down at him in horror before glancing around at the silent forest as he flopped back against my arm. I was pretty sure there was a book back at my safehouse with this exact cover—except the hero wasn't wearing a pillowcase. Plus, Charlie's cock was still inside me, so my legs were awkwardly spread like I was about to do a deep squat. And we were both naked from the waist down. And I was pretty sure the heroes in romance novels didn't have monster feet and a tail. So... maybe this didn't look much like that cover after all.

I set him down on the ground as gently as possible, my face flaming when wetness dripped onto my inner thighs the moment his cock slid free. The end of the branch was dangling from the rope around my other wrist, so I clawed at the knots to get them free. The rope was ruined anyway, ripped in half where I'd snapped it to grab him.

Once my wrists were free, I fell to my knees beside him and gently cupped the back of his head to feel through his hair. I winced when I came across a tiny lump, but the branch hadn't hit him all that hard. It was probably the combination of getting smacked in the head just as he came that knocked him out. It wasn't like there would have been much blood in his brain.

"Charlie." I smoothed his damp hair back from his face, then ripped off the stupid sack and pillowcase so I could cushion his head with them.

He didn't wake up, and I suddenly realised that I was completely naked in the forest where anyone actually *could* walk by and see us. Suddenly, it didn't sound so hot anymore. Scrambling for my bag, I got dressed in my usual clothes and awkwardly tugged Charlie's pants back up his legs, carefully tucking his softened cock inside to zip them up.

What the fuck happened to humans when they got hit on the head? Was it really bad? How soft were their skulls? It wasn't like I'd ever paid attention before. I knew about concussions, but that was about it.

"Fuuuck," I muttered, trying not to panic as I gathered my sword and our backpacks, then heaved Charlie over my shoulder. He dangled there like a sack of potatoes, which made my heart beat faster as I started hurrying back in the direction of the camp.

"Please wake up." I smacked him on the ass, hoping it would jolt him awake.

He groaned, body stiffening against me. "Wha—"

Relief made me sag. "Thank fuck. The branch knocked you out." I was too hot, still flushed and sweaty from sex and now carrying all our stuff *plus* Charlie, but I didn't slow down. "We need to get back to the camp so Apollo can check you out."

"Oh shit." Charlie's voice was croaky, but I felt him lift a hand to wipe his face. "The branch? What? Why... My head hurts."

Unease tightened my gut, but I couldn't help smacking his ass again as I glared in its general direction. "Didn't you check to see if the branch was loose first?"

"Yes!" He sounded more lucid now, but he was still happily letting me carry him through the forest. "It wasn't loose. Your ridiculous monster strength must have snapped it."

I huffed in irritation, readjusting my grip on his legs. After a few seconds, he nudged my chest with his knee and slyly said, "Must have made you come really hard, huh?"

"Shut up."

Charlie snorted, reaching down to pat my ass. "Pretending to be an elf got you so hot you snapped a branch clean off a tree."

"Shithead," I muttered, coming to a stop. "So can you walk now?"

"I mean, I *can*, but this is pretty nice."

"Charlie!" I carefully set him on his feet, gripping his shoulders and peering at him to see if his pupils looked weird.

He blinked a few times before grinning at me. "That was fun."

I rolled my eyes. "Until you got knocked out by a branch."

"Worth it." Charlie took his bag off my back and pulled out his water bottle, having a sip before passing it to me. "My head *does* hurt though."

I passed the bottle back and reached up to carefully feel through his short hair. "You've got a goose egg. It's not too big, but we should still get Apollo to check you out."

He shrugged, tangling his fingers through mine. "Okay, if it'll stop you worrying."

I stared at him in concern for a few more seconds before starting forward again. He stumbled a little, wavering on his feet, which made me immediately stop and hoist him back into my arms.

He grinned at me, wrapping his arms around my neck. "Now *this* is nice."

"You might have a concussion!"

"I don't, Moth, I promise. I feel okay, the lump just hurts."

"Still," I muttered, hurrying between the trees. "Next time we need to be more careful."

That made Charlie perk up. "Ooh, what are we gonna do next time?"

My face went pink. I darted a glance at him and looked away again quickly, not wanting to voice the idea that immediately flashed through my head.

But Charlie noticed. Of course he did.

"Tell me," he said immediately. "Come on, you did my elf thing, so I want to do whatever ideas you have."

I glanced around warily before answering, because we were getting close to the camp now. "Well, um, when you got all soldiery and bossy when I brought that stuff back from the city..."

A slow, dirty grin stretched Charlie's mouth. He leaned in to nuzzle my cheek. "Yeah?"

I huffed, face burning. "I, uh. I liked it," I said gruffly.

"Mean soldier, huh?" he said thoughtfully. I hadn't specified *mean*, but my insides twisted with hot excitement at the thought of it. "Hunter and I spent some time training up new recruits. I can get pretty fuckin' bossy when I need to."

I made a strangled sound in my throat without meaning to. "Oh," I croaked. "Okay."

Charlie chuckled, giving me a big kiss on the cheek. "Consider it done, slayer. I'll play the mean, angry soldier who hates the fact that he wants to fuck a monster so much."

"I mean—Okay, maybe that—We could—Yeah," I stammered, heat rushing to my face.

The camp wall loomed up ahead, so I gently set Charlie on his feet. Without saying a word, he shrugged off my coat and handed it to me, which made my chest get tight. My tail was tucked into my

pants, but the bulk of it was still obvious. I was... less self-conscious about it now. And it would be nice to walk around without it awkwardly stuffed down the back of my pants. But I didn't think I was quite ready for others to see it yet.

"Did you have fun?" Charlie asked, concern creeping into his voice as we linked hands and started heading for the camp wall.

I cleared my throat and nodded. "Yeah, it was... Yeah."

Glancing over, I saw his mouth tip into a satisfied, lopsided smile. "Cool."

I nudged him with my elbow. "But maybe don't try an accent again."

He glared at me. "It was good."

I snorted, tugging him closer. "Sure it was."

By the time we made it into the camp, Charlie's forehead was creased with pain from the lump on his head. I ushered him toward Apollo's room at the end of the motel building and waited outside after the friendly blond raider answered the door and showed Charlie inside.

"Moth!"

Edin's voice boomed from across the camp. I glanced up from my slouch against the wall to see him and Hunter approaching.

"Is Charlie alright? We saw him go into Apollo's room."

Edin's craggy face was creased with concern, and Hunter's brows were pulled into their usual frown, but his expression shifted to confusion when his gaze drifted up to the top of my head as the pair of them reached me.

He opened his mouth to speak, but Edin got there first.

"What is this?" he asked, reaching up and touching something in my hair.

All the blood drained from my face when I realised I was still wearing the elfy twig crown Charlie had made me. I snatched it off my head, trying not to wince when it yanked on several strands of my hair.

"Nothing," I said quickly, tugging off my backpack so I could shove it in there.

My face was hot, and when I glanced back at Edin and Hunter, I was horrified to see understanding dawning over the latter's features as his gaze roamed over the crown, my pointed ears, the intricate hair style Charlie had twisted my hair into.

Hunter's mouth twitched. "The elf thing, huh?"

"What? No," I snapped, my cheeks on fire. "Shut up."

"Elf thing?" Edin's purple eyes sparked with interest. "What is an elf thing?"

Hunter cleared his throat. "Charlie's always had this thing for elves—"

"No he hasn't," I blurted. "There was no—Hunter, shut the fuck up."

"Okay, okay!" He chuckled, then muttered to Edin, "I'll tell you later, scratch."

The door opened behind me, and I spun around quickly to get away from this humiliating conversation. Charlie and Apollo stepped out, the camp medic clapping him on the shoulder before shooting us an easy smile.

"He'll just have a pounding headache for a while," he told me.

"Why?" Hunter asked immediately, tone all seriousness once again. "What happened? Are you hurt?"

"Just bumped my head." Charlie chuckled and wrapped his arm around me. "Wasn't looking where I was going and walked into a branch. Got a tiny lump. Nothing serious."

Hunter peered at his face. "Where's the lump?"

Charlie gestured vaguely at the back of his head, which made Hunter's gaze slowly drift between

the two of us.

“So you... walked backward into a branch,” he said flatly.

“Yes,” I snapped, tugging Charlie away. “That’s exactly what he did.”

Hunter’s voice was coloured with disbelief when he asked, “What the hell did you two get up to out there?”

“Nothing!” I practically yelled. “So shut up.”

I heard the big ex-soldier chuckle as I pulled Charlie toward the staircase at the end of the motel. Edin let out a confused chuckle of his own, his deep voice drifting over as he rumbled, “I am confused.”

“Me too, scratch. But I’ll tell you the elf thing later.”

Gloam Worships His Hardworking Firebrand

Finally, a short for Gloam and Rig! I think in my head they are the most solid, secure couple so I feel less of a need to revisit them, maybe? But it was so nice getting back into that headspace. They are the cutest, especially Rig. He's a precious baby who just wants to help everyone and make them all happy.

This is 8.4k words and includes a lovely look at Seraph and Lilac settling into their cosy love shack life, some light teasing of Wyn in his absence (when does that bastard not show up in conversation) and a night of Gloam pampering his fidgety, hyperactive firebrand and finally getting him to stay still and quiet for a while.

Enjoy! As always, please check the content and spoiler warnings, but this one is super sweet and soft more than anything else.

Content warnings: Explicit sexual content, 18+ only, monster junk (with a big bulge), super sweet mushiness, mild teasing of Wyn (he feels that should be a warning), Rig is super horny (when isn't he?), he also finally stops fidgeting for longer than a few minutes

Spoiler warnings: Set after the events of *Seraph* (Monstrous: Book Six)

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RIG

I fiddled with the pile of thick nails in my palm, running my thumb over them so they clinked together as I watched Gloam and Lilac talking while they cut lengths of chicken wire.

Gloam rumbled something with a chuckle, his tusks flashing, and Lilac's green eyes crinkled briefly at the corners as he smiled at whatever Gloam had said. They were getting started on the protection for Lilac and Seraph's little vegetable patch behind the RV, making a chicken wire structure that would keep out hungry wild animals.

Gloam said something else, then stood from his crouch to fetch the wooden poles that would serve as the corners of the patch. My eyes slid down his wide back, past the faint scars on either side of his spine, to the little dimples just above the waistband of his leather pants.

Then they slid lower, to the rounded ass that flexed as he walked. My tongue pressed hard to the roof of my mouth, brain already skipping forward over the rest of the day to this evening, when we'd be alone in our room, undisturbed. Maybe tonight I could—

“R-Riig?”

My attention jerked back to the beastie in front of me. Seraph was crouched beside the bench we were building, hammer dwarfed in one of his huge hands, while the other was patiently stretched out toward me.

I chuckled sheepishly, passing him a nail. “Sorry, buddy.”

I watched as he carefully poised the nail over the side of the bench, where the leg joined to the top, and drove it in with the hammer in practically one hit. We'd made some basic joins, but I wasn't good enough at woodwork to know how to do them properly. Not like Cat, who knew all the different kinds, and even though he'd taught me before, I was bad at remembering them.

Cobbled together worked just as well anyway, in most cases.

Seraph held out his hand for another nail, so I passed it over as my eyes drifted back to Gloam. He was crouching beside Lilac now, driving one of the wooden poles into the corner of the space Lilac had carefully marked off for their small vegetable patch.

His back was to me. My gaze locked on his ass again, but that wasn't my fault. It was just displayed so freakin' nicely, with the leather of his pants stretched taut. Then all the muscles in his back shifted and flexed as he drove the pole into the ground, his huge hand wrapped around the thin piece of wood and his bicep bunching. My belly swooped as I remembered the night before, when he'd fisted his cock while riding me, slamming my hips down into the mattress. I swore to god, sometimes I got a little nervous that he was going to throw my back out even when I was lying on it, not really doing much.

A snorty little chuff made me jump, my gaze snapping back to see Seraph grinning at me, his mouth stretched impossibly wide and all his sharp, crowded teeth jutting out. Going red, I handed him another nail, but instead of hammering it into the wood, he glanced back at Lilac and Gloam.

“Wh-what are they doing that is s-so interesting?” he rasped, but the sly look in his many, many

eyes told me he knew I wasn't interested in what Lilac and Gloam were *doing*.

Clearing my throat, I waved a hand. "Oh, ya know... I'm kind of the foreman here. Gotta keep an eye on my crew."

Seraph chuffed again, spine curving as he bent back over the bench. "S-some more than others, I th-think."

"Well *some* of them shouldn't be so freakin' hot that my brain short-circuits."

That made Gloam glance back at me with a grin, tusks and fangs peeking out and oblong pupils flashing with mirth. I could have sworn he tensed his glutes just for a second, making my eyes snap back down immediately. Man, my beastie was such a *minx* sometimes. And everyone thought *I* was the bad one, just because he was all outwardly refined and wise and calm around others.

It was all bullshit. He was an animal in bed. And I freaking loved it.

"How's the bench going?" Lilac straightened and wandered over, sliding an arm around Seraph's shoulders as his beastie turned and nuzzled his face against the front of Lilac's shoulder from his hunched over crouch, wrapping his arms around him tight.

"Awesome." I grinned at him. "Seraph barely needs me here. I'm just the lackey handing over nails. Soon he'll be sending me out to find a left-handed screwdriver or tartan paint."

Lilac huffed, getting the joke better than the two beasties, who probably weren't all that down with human tradesfolk ribbing and banter. I'd experienced the same when I started training as a mechanic back in the city, being sent out on fool's errands to find diesel engine spark plugs or turn signal fluid.

"It looks very good," Gloam commented as he approached, sliding a hand through my curls.

I grinned up at him, leaning into his big body. "It was all Seraph. He's a natural." To Seraph, I added, "When Cat's back, he can show you way more stuff than I can. Like all the proper joins and techniques."

"You know all of those as well, Rig," Lilac said dryly.

I flushed. "Well, kinda. Not as good as Cat. He has a knack for it. He's never mentioned if he knew that stuff before the monsters came, but maybe he did carpentry with his dad or something?"

Lilac quirked a brow. "Cat never talked about his childhood at all."

I hadn't really thought about it, but Lilac was right. Cat never talked about his life before the tear opened, but he was a fair bit older than some of us, so he'd been a teenager when it happened, like Anchor.

I didn't know whether that was better—being old enough to remember what it had been like. I'd been so young when the tear opened, I couldn't really remember how life had been before. Not properly. I remembered hot summers splashing around in the paddling pool in my abuela's backyard, my face sticky with popsicle juice. I remembered my mom tucking me into my racing car bed and smoothing back my curly hair as she kissed me goodnight. I remembered my aunt visiting from Florida and smothering me in kisses as she cooed over me in Spanish.

We hadn't seen my aunt since the monsters came. We never knew if she and her family survived.

Trying not to get sad, I shook off the thoughts and beamed at Seraph. "Well anyways, you've picked it up so quickly, Seraph."

"Just like you did with English," Gloam added, giving him a smile. "You're a marvel."

As Seraph chuffed in pleasure, Lilac shot us a dry look as he stroked the back of Seraph's smooth head. "You're going to give him a big head."

I grinned, glancing up at Gloam. "Gloam said that to me too, when we were making our way back to the camp." Shrugging, I added, "Not my fault all the beasties here are super smart and eager to learn new skills. Well, except maybe, um, Wyn. He doesn't seem interested in learning anything new."

Seraph chuffed. “T-tiny smoke man likes to pretend he doesn’t care.”

Gloam chuckled, pulling me closer as he rubbed my scalp, making me want to purr. “Oh, but you think he does, Seraph?”

“He does,” Lilac answered instead, voice flat. “He brought us a big sack of vegetables for Seraph the other day, claiming he *just found them*. But he still threatened to rip my tongue out if I told anyone. And then I heard Daisy in the diner saying she could’ve sworn she’d already peeled all the carrots for that night’s dinner, but they’d all vanished.”

Gloam and I laughed, before I said, “Well, at least Danny is, like, the sweetest guy ever. And *so* hot.” I snickered as Gloam huffed in amusement and lightly scratched my scalp. “What do you think the Soul Eater looks like under that hood? Has anyone ever seen his face? Except Danny, I mean.”

“I h-have,” Seraph said, sounding the slightest bit smug.

“You have?” Lilac raised his brows as he looked at him.

“Yes. W-we were out here one n-night, and I was s-sad about my teeth.” He reached up and lightly touched his sharp, jutting teeth. “H-how they do not look like anyone else’s. He pulled down his hood to sh-show me his. Th-they are very sharp too.”

I could see Lilac frowning behind his mask. “You didn’t tell me that.”

Seraph shrugged. “It d-didn’t matter. And it helped, seeing his. He s-said plenty of other kinds from his w-world have sharp teeth like ours.”

“Yes.” Gloam nodded, giving Seraph a kind smile. “Many, many kinds. Vints have sharp teeth, and you have some vint in you, Seraph. Yours are no doubt from their DNA.”

“I think they’re awesome,” I blurted. “Your teeth. So cool. And you have a great smile, Seraph.”

His mouth stretched into his big grin now, but he looked a little shy as he turned deeper into Lilac’s narrow frame beside him. “Th-thank you, R-Riig.”

“Okay, so we know Wyn has sharp teeth,” I said eagerly as Gloam dropped a tender kiss in my hair. “What else? How many eyes does he have?”

Seraph chuckled. “Two.”

“Do you think he’d show me his face if I just asked him?”

“No,” Lilac, Gloam and Seraph all said in unison.

I huffed. “You’d think someone as old as him wouldn’t be so precious about his freakin’ *face*.”

“People are complicated, no matter how old they get,” Gloam said sagely, making me shiver with lust. I loved when he went all hot monster professor on me. “But the telyths have always concealed their faces, as far as I am aware. Wyn is admittedly the first one I’ve met. It’s just a part of their culture.”

“Oh, okay,” I said, feeling bad for being flippant about Wyn’s culture. “I won’t ask him.”

Not that I would’ve ever had the nerve to actually ask him. He was still scary as shit, even when he was fussing over Danny or he and Edin were snickering like a pair of old gossips.

“Sun’s setting,” Lilac said shortly. “Shall we get the fence finished? Then Seraph and I can start turning the earth and planting seeds tomorrow. Aury said he’ll come out and help.”

Seraph perked up. “Y-yes, I would like to see Au-ree.”

Lilac huffed, bending his head to kiss the top of Seraph’s through his mask. “You like seeing everyone.”

“B-because I like everyone,” Seraph declared, picking the hammer back up and holding out his hand for a nail.

I practically melted as I handed one over. Seraph was the cutest beastie ever. I’d always known

there was more to him than the screaming, thrashing creature I'd come across in Mary's mansion. I'd never given up hope, even when it had seemed pretty hopeless.

When I'd caught on to Lilac's plan to steal the key to his cage and let him out—my quiet, introverted friend really wasn't as sneaky as he thought he was—I hadn't been worried. I trusted Lilac's judgement more than anyone else in this camp, and I'd *seen* how well Seraph had done. How far he'd come. How hard he was trying.

I'd also understood Gloam's apprehension, because he'd seen the aftermath of Seraph's pain-fuelled fits of rage in the fighting cage at Mary's. But I'd agreed with Lilac that Seraph wasn't going to improve as much as he could if he stayed stuck in that cage. So I'd secretly helped him.

Part of that help had been making sure Gloam was distracted—very, very distracted—every night when Lilac was letting Seraph out of the cage. It was a duty I'd taken extremely seriously. And carried out very enthusiastically.

And benefitted from greatly, in the form of almost more orgasms than I could handle.

Now, I glanced up at Gloam as my balls tingled from the memory, suddenly eager for a repeat. “Yeah, let's get this finished up and we'll leave you in peace for the evening.”

As I said it, I slid my hand down Gloam's back to give his ass a secret squeeze. He rumbled out a low chuckle, dropping another kiss in my hair before releasing me to walk back over to the vegetable patch with Lilac.

My focus was now fully on finishing this bench off so I could get my beastie naked as soon as possible. I helped Seraph finish securing the legs but let him do most of it himself, because he liked learning hands-on rather than just watching. Once it was done, we placed it in the spot Lilac wanted it and hesitantly sat on it together.

Seraph grinned at me proudly when it held our weight, the wood not flexing at all. I grinned back, bouncing up and down a little to make sure it was sturdy.

“You've done an awesome job,” I told him, leaning over to check the nails on one side. “And it's so neat, as well.”

Seraph chuckled, running his long, long fingers along the edge of the bench. “Lie-lack w-wouldn't like it if it looked m-messy.”

I snorted. “Yeah, you're probably right. Hey, I was thinking, maybe next we could make a plant stand for you guys out here. Like one of those staggered shelf things for some of your potted plants.”

Seraph's eyes brightened. “Yes. And m-maybe a w-workbench for the plants.”

“Like a potting station?”

“Yes.”

“That's a great idea. With somewhere to hang all your gardening tools.” My mind was already churning with ideas, but then I noticed Gloam and Lilac finishing up the chicken wire fence for the vegetable patch. It was a few feet tall, to allow some of the bigger plants they wanted to grow to their full height, and there was more wire rolled over the top to protect the patch from anything that could climb over or swoop down.

I jumped up from the bench eagerly. “All done?”

“Yeah.” Lilac carefully rolled up the wire they'd used to secure the top to the sides. “Thanks for your help,” he said to Gloam.

“Of course, my friend.” Gloam gave me a grin as he made his way over. “The bench looks excellent.”

“It was all Seraph.” I wrapped my arms around his waist and tipped my head back. “Wanna go back into camp?”

“Yes.” He pushed my wild curls back off my forehead. “You need some dinner.”

I made a face, releasing him to take his hand. I could forgo dinner if it meant getting him naked sooner, but Gloam was all responsible about making sure I was well-fed and well-rested and so on. I had to admit, it was kinda nice to have someone look after me like that. Usually I was the one going out of my way to look after everyone else, which Gloam told me often with a slight frown when I’d run myself ragged doing jobs for people around the camp.

But I *liked* helping people, and I was okay at most things, so it just made sense for me to be the one to do stuff like fixing the showers, oiling the hinges on people’s bedroom doors and tightening up the screws in the stools and tables in the diner so nothing collapsed on people while they were eating.

We all had jobs we were good at here. It was why the camp ran so well. Ghost was the one who sewed up people’s clothes and sheets when they got rips or seams came loose. Anchor was amazing at keeping inventory of our stores and making sure everyone got enough to eat. Dino and Keen were good at foraging. Rusty was good with the crops, and took keeping watch on the camp wall very seriously. Tank and Bishop had been the pair who collected our water, but now that they were gone, Nun had taken over that job with Spike. Nun was super strong, with a broad back, so she said she didn’t mind it at all.

Even though he was fairly new to the camp, Hunter was always willing to help as well. And he was a big, beefy guy, so he was good at helping me repair the wall or hold up something heavy. Danny was eager to help in any way he could, but he was kind of clumsy, and most people seemed too apprehensive to make him do anything strenuous in case it invoked the wrath of his scary boyfriend—no, *husband*.

And it wasn’t just the humans. The beasties were great too. Aury was so careful with the crops, and Edin was a great hunter, always bringing back more meat than Daisy and Bo knew what to do with. Wyn was... Well, Wyn did what Danny told him to do. And Charlie and Moth were like a pair of kids, usually wrapped up in each other until Hunter barked at Charlie to help him with something.

I’d always liked living at the camp, but now it felt so much *better*. Like everything had clicked into place. Like the beasties were always supposed to be here with us. Especially *my* beastie, my big, beautiful Gloam who was always so kind and patient with everyone, even the ones who’d been outwardly hostile toward him—before they left after that blow-up with Lilac about Seraph. *Good riddance*, I thought fiercely.

As we said goodbye to Lilac and Seraph, Lilac was already sitting on Seraph’s lap on their new bench, his eyes creased with a rare grin as they waved at us before Gloam and I made our way back into camp hand in hand.

I knew Gloam would make me eat some dinner, so my plan was to wolf it down in our room before I tackled him onto the bed, but as we stepped into the camp from the container entrance, Apollo jogged over from the direction of the shower stalls, his long blond hair damp and the ends dripping onto his shirt.

“One of the showers just stopped working while I was using it.” He chuckled, shoving back his wet hair. “Luckily I’d already rinsed the shampoo out.”

“Oh, okay.” I glanced over at the wooden stalls. “I’ll go take a look.”

“Thanks, Rig. It’s the third one along,” he said gratefully, clapping me on the shoulder before walking off toward the motel block.

I smiled up at Gloam. “Shouldn’t be too long.”

“Do you want me to go and get your dinner for you?” he asked, smoothing back my hair.

“No, it’s okay, I’ll grab it once I’m done.” I turned to wrap my arms around his waist, giving his

ass a furtive squeeze. “You go wait in our room for me.”

He chuckled, leaning down to kiss my forehead, seeing as I was wearing my mask. “Alright, firebrand.”

“Maybe naked?” I added hopefully.

He grinned. “Of course.”

I pressed a kiss to his chest and released him, eager to get the shower fixed so I could spend the night undisturbed with my beastie. “Leave the boots on,” I said as I made my way toward the bar to grab my tools, and I heard him loose another rumbling chuckle from behind me.

Fixing the shower took longer than I’d hoped it would, and when I finally hurried into the diner to collect my dinner, Bo sheepishly told me the trapdoor to the cold storage out back was sticking. I sighed but smiled, following him out to check it. He clapped me on the shoulder and told me he’d dish up an extra big portion of stew for me, then went back inside as I ducked into the old bar to get my tools again, having stored them away after fixing the shower.

By the time I’d finished fixing the door, I was a little sweaty, so I decided to quickly eat my dinner at the counter in the diner before grabbing my towel from our room to take a shower. Gloam was *not* naked yet, much to my disappointment, so I pointed a stern finger at him before leaving, telling him his bare ass better be ready for me by the time I got back.

I used the shower I’d fixed to make sure it worked, then quickly redressed and scrubbed my hair vigorously with my damp towel, leaving it a wild tangle of curls. I practically ran across the camp back to my room so that no one else could stop me and ask me to do something, and when I burst inside, my beastie was finally, gloriously naked and waiting for me on the bed.

I grinned at him, dumping my towel on the floor and hopping in place to tug off my boots and socks. He was leaning back against the headboard, thick thighs spread and fat cock already half hard, completely naked except for his boots and harness. My eyes roamed over him greedily as I ripped off my mask and shirt, but when I started fumbling with my pants, I realised the room looked different.

He’d lit candles and dotted them around on all the surfaces. Usually we just used a couple of lanterns at night, but this was *way* more soft and romantic. My belly tightened as I finally struggled out of my pants and underwear, leaving all my clothes in a heap by the door as I made my way over to the bed.

“Did you do this for me?” I asked, trying not to get too emotional. He’d only lit a few candles, but it made the room seem so much more intimate and special.

“You work so hard for everyone, Adam.” Gloam got up off the bed to meet me, smoothing back my damp curls. “I want to look after you.”

“You do look after me.” I settled my hands on his hips, my cock already getting hard at the sight of his big naked body, especially when he stepped closer and his heavy erection brushed against my belly.

He chuckled, dipping his head to kiss me. “Well, tonight I’m going to look after you *extra* well. Lots of special attention.”

My breath caught, dick giving an eager twitch. “Oh yeah?”

“Yes.” After another kiss, Gloam stepped back and nodded at the bed. “Lie down on your front.”

Oh heck yes. I had no idea what he had planned, but that order was enough for me to know it would be *really good*. Except...

“Why don’t *you* get on the bed first?” I grinned up at him cheekily. “Your ass has been distracting me all day. I could—”

“Adam.” Gloam gave me a stern look that made my cock jerk. “Tonight you are to do nothing but

lie back and relax. Now, on the bed. On your front. If you're not there in the next five seconds..."

"Okay," I squeaked, scrambling onto the bed as my belly lurched with anticipation. God, I *loved* when he got all stern and authoritative.

My hard cock pressed against the mattress as I settled on my front, making me shift my hips. I couldn't keep completely still, fidgeting a little, trying to get my arms comfortable, settling my cheek on the pillow to face the wall before turning my head to try and peek at Gloam.

"Eyes closed," he rumbled, making my cock pulse against the bed.

"Okay," I mumbled again, settling my arms under the pillow and closing my eyes.

I listened intently as he moved around the room, having to squeeze my eyes shut so I didn't peek. My feet shifted, toes flexing with impatient anticipation as I heard him take something out of a drawer before he padded back over to the bed. It sounded like he'd taken his boots off, which made me want to pout, but I decided to let him get away with it this time.

The mattress dipped by my leg, and then Gloam's heavy weight was settling over my ass as he straddled me. I heard the click of a lid, the slippery sound of him briskly rubbing oily hands together, and then those big hands were smoothing up my back in a slick glide. Thumbs pressed in firmly, kneading either side of my spine, and I practically melted through the mattress.

"What is that?" I mumbled, finally going still so I could focus on the sensation.

"Massage oil." Gloam's voice was a low, soothing rumble. "I asked Danny if Wyn would pick some up on his last trip to one of the cities."

My eyes almost popped open, but his hands felt too good. I could feel all the muscles in my face relaxing, going slack. "You weren't embarrassed to ask?"

Gloam chuckled. "No."

That was one of the things I found so hot about him. He was so self-assured and didn't care what anyone thought. He wasn't embarrassed about anything, especially when it came to looking after me or making me happy—like that was more important than anything else.

I tried not to fixate on the mental image of the Soul Eater returning to camp and handing my beastie a bottle of massage oil. Instead, I focused on Gloam's huge hands as they slid down my back, before gliding back up to massage my shoulders.

I groaned in bliss, basking in the pleasure-pain of him kneading out all the knots in my back. I'd never had a massage before, and oh my god, it was the best thing ever, especially when given by my big, gorgeous beastie. His hands were so familiar on my skin, the warm scent of him just detectible over the crisp fragrance of the massage oil. It meant that even though my body was slowly becoming boneless and relaxed, my cock was still straining against the mattress, *knowing* Gloam's naked body was sitting on top of me.

"This is amazing," I mumbled into the pillow, then groaned again when Gloam kneaded the back of my neck.

He chuckled. "I think this is the stillest I've ever seen you. You even fidget when you're asleep."

"Maybe I can give you a massage after," I said, even though the thought of moving right now was out of the question.

"No." Gloam squeezed my sides before circling his thumbs over my lower back in firm glides. "You're not lifting a finger tonight, Adam."

"I don't mind," I mumbled automatically. "I want to."

"Another night, firebrand." Gloam shifted back, gently parting my legs to sit between them. He propped an ankle on his thick thigh and kneaded the sole of my foot, making me twitch before the ticklish sensation faded, to be replaced by more loose bliss.

A shiver rolled through my relaxed frame as he threaded his fingers through my toes before sliding his oily palms up my ankle to knead my calf. He slowly, methodically made his way higher over the back of my thigh to the crease of my ass, before starting all over again on the other leg.

My cock was leaking onto the mattress by the time he poured more oil into his palm and smoothed his big hands over my ass, but I was too boneless to even rock my hips. His thumbs pushed up then out, lifting my cheeks and spreading them, making my hole twitch as it was exposed to the warm air in the room.

He did it again and again, his hands slow and reverent, but then he kept me spread wide with his thumbs as he shifted between my legs. My breath caught when the wet warmth of his tongue slid over my exposed hole, his tusks just scraping against my skin as he licked softly.

A long, drawn-out moan left me when he swirled his tongue before placing a tender kiss on the inside of my ass cheek. His thumbs kept me spread wide, but he kneaded them in tiny circles as he licked again and again, soft and slow, making the pleasure build gradually but keeping my body relaxed and free of any of the tension he'd worked so hard to remove.

I moaned again as I started to lift my hips, pushing myself closer to his mouth. Gloam rumbled against me, kissing my hole before lifting his head. Gently, he manoeuvred my legs until I was on my knees, ass up in the air and my chest still relaxed against the bed. I felt my spine curve, my upper body sinking deeper into the mattress as he smoothed his big hands lovingly over my ass.

"So beautiful," he rumbled, his voice so low and deep in the otherwise quiet room. "Not just your body and your face, Adam. You are beautiful on the inside. You are the most wonderful and selfless person I have ever met in my long life."

I smiled into the pillow, trying not to get too choked up over his sweet words as I whispered, "Thank you."

"I am grateful every single day that I get to be with you," he continued, making my throat ache. "I will never be able to truly show you how much you mean to me. There aren't enough words in all the languages in either world."

My eyes got hot behind my closed lids, and I wondered if I should be getting this emotional when my bare ass was up in the air, all my goods on display. "I love you," I choked out, wanting to reach back and take his hand.

"I love you too, Adam," he said solemnly, stroking his hands up my sides and back down to the curve of my ass. "Now, relax and let me take care of you."

"Okay," I whispered, burying my face fully into the pillow as I felt him pick something up from the mattress and heard the click of another lid.

My cock was still rock hard and straining between my legs, and my breath escaped me in a rush when Gloam's big hand wrapped gently around it and angled it down so it was pointing squarely at the mattress. A fingertip smoothed over my hole, the slickness thicker and slipperier than the massage oil, telling me he'd maybe asked Wyn to pick up lube for him in the city as well.

I didn't even care. I couldn't be embarrassed, not when he was circling my rim and stroking my cock in a loose fist. I gasped when his fingertip slowly sank inside, but I was so relaxed that there was hardly any resistance.

His long finger found my prostate with ease, making me jerk with another gasp as my cock twitched in his fist. He started sliding his finger in and out, painstakingly slow, before keeping it buried deep to stroke my prostate in tiny circles.

"*Nnngh.*" I started panting into the pillow, the fabric growing hot and damp against my mouth. When he began sliding his finger in and out of me again, my hips strained back, trying to rock into the

movement.

“Still, Adam.” He slid his finger free and stroked my hole, his other hand gently squeezing my dick.

Trembling already, I forced myself to go still and breathlessly waited as Gloam didn’t move for long moments except for his fingertip slowly circling me. Then he slid it deep again, once more finding my prostate and stroking with gentle pressure.

My cock jerked in his fist. I knew I was leaking all over the bed, especially when Gloam’s fingertips danced over the tip of my cock, growing even slicker before he smoothed my pre-cum down my length with the lube.

His strokes were firm but agonisingly slow, the slick sound of them making sweat bead on my forehead. Neither of his hands ever sped up, even when I began shaking with the need to come, my body still weirdly relaxed and loose even though it should have been tensing up from the sensations.

Eventually, he sank two fingers inside and continued. What felt like hours later, he slipped in a third. There was hardly any pain from the stretch—he was giving my body so much time to adjust, until I was aching for something thicker inside me. Gloam usually bottomed when we had sex, which we both preferred, but sometimes I got desperate for his fat cock inside me. I usually needed a good amount of time to recover after, thanks to that impossibly thick bulge in the middle of his shaft.

It had been a while since I’d bottomed, and now the need was rising inside me, slow and lazy. I wanted him to fuck me, but for once, I wasn’t in a rush to get there. What he was doing felt too good, even though it was keeping me on the brink of coming. There was never enough pressure to tip me over the edge, but I liked it. This time, there was no frantic tension or tightness in my muscles as he kept me waiting. Having an orgasm didn’t even feel all that important. I wanted to stay here, on the brink of it, letting the warm bliss roll through my frame in a continuous wave, feeling him touch me so intimately and carefully for as long as possible.

Neither of us had spoken for a long time, the only sounds in the room those of my harsh, ragged breaths against the pillow and Gloam’s deep, slightly unsteady ones behind me. I pictured his big cock straining between his thick thighs as he touched me, and I knew that if I flipped over and slid my hand between his legs, his hole would be leaking. But I didn’t move, not wanting to forgo this amazing, slow pleasure he was inflicting on my body.

“Still relaxed, my love?” he rumbled soothingly.

“Yeah,” I breathed, a little confused about how I was this boneless and loose when my cock was rock hard and straining with the need to come. But my shoulders were still relaxed and free of tension. My legs almost felt like they were floating, even though I was keeping myself propped up on my knees. Even my toes were relaxed, tingling a little, and my head felt too heavy to lift—not that I was in any rush to move even an inch.

Gloam slid his fingers free and circled them over my slightly swollen hole. Pressure returned when he added a fourth to carefully sink back inside, and the brief ache brought all the sensations in my lower body into sudden sharp focus.

My cock bucked in his fist, leaking continuously from the steady pressure against my prostate as he stroked it firmly. My nuts were already pulled up, but I felt them bunch tighter as the orgasm finally began to rise. It was a slow crescendo, heat gathering in the pit of my stomach, like my navel was being pulled in as my belly quivered. My pulse pounded in my ears, and I could only faintly hear my ragged breaths getting faster and faster as the steady pressure against my prostate and around my cock continued, never speeding up, not allowing me to rush over the edge in a sharp jolt.

Just as my cock began to swell even harder in Gloam’s fist, he let go, diverting all the pleasure

deeper as my dick swung up to smack against my belly, flicking pre-cum over my chest. My prostate felt like it was throbbing against his fingertips, and then a ragged, muffled moan left me as my entire body shook violently, bliss rushing through me in pulsing waves that made my limbs go numb and my scalp tingle.

I couldn't move when it ended, my chest somehow sinking even deeper into the mattress. My thighs were quaking wildly, but I was too loose and comfortable to even collapse onto my front. When Gloam reached between my legs to pull my cock back again, skimming light fingertips up and down, I realised it was still rock hard. The urge to come was still there, pulsing through my length and keeping my sac bunched up tight.

I whimpered, almost giving in to the urge to rock my hips down and shuttle my cock through his loose grip. But I managed to stay still, even though I wasn't quite sure how I'd just managed to come but at the same time hadn't.

Just go with it. He might make you do it again.

"Okay, Adam?" Gloam asked softly, his four fingers still buried deep but not moving, the thumb of his other hand smoothing over my wet cockhead, making me shudder hard.

"Yes," I whispered, my body still loose even as my heart pounded.

"Again?"

"Yes," I groaned into the pillow. "Please."

It happened so much quicker this time, like my prostate was still primed and raring to go. He jerked me slowly in a loose fist, my cock drooling onto the bed, but this time his fingertips moved quicker inside me, strumming my prostate, making me shake wildly and pant into the pillow.

I cried out when those same rolling waves of bliss washed through me, but even as Gloam let go of my cock again, he kept stroking my prostate, causing the pleasure to crescendo once more instead of melting slowly away. I barely remembered to breathe until Gloam slid his free hand down my thigh and quietly told me to take a deep breath in through my nose. I obeyed automatically, shuddering as my slow, unsteady inhalations let me feel every ounce of the pleasure even as it began to fade.

This time, my knees felt like they were going to give out, my body weak and boneless but my cock still reeling with the need to come. Before I could collapse, Gloam gently rolled me onto my back and placed a warm, steady hand on my belly, telling me again to take deep breaths.

I was still trembling. My hole clenched around nothing, feeling empty now that his fingers were gone. My eyes felt wet, face hot and flushed. When Gloam dipped down to press a tender kiss to my shaft, I felt a split second away from erupting all over my stomach just from that light touch.

He sat up and smiled down at me, removing his hand from my belly to reach for a damp cloth on the bed beside the bottles of lube and massage oil. He carefully cleaned his hands, then picked up the oil and poured more into his hand before shifting back to lift one of my feet onto his thigh.

"Still relaxed, love?" he asked as he massaged the sole of my foot.

"*Unngh.*" I wasn't capable of forming words. I was too sensitised for his touch to feel at all ticklish—it felt more like it was somehow connected directly to my cock, which strained against my lower belly, still leaking continuously.

The driving, overwhelming urge to come was still there, but it was buried under layers of satiation, warm contentment and the hazy desire for this to never end. All my limbs were flopped carelessly on the bed, too heavy to even consider lifting. I continued breathing deep into my belly, not with my chest, because it was making me feel languid and letting me focus fully on the sensation of Gloam's big, soothing hands smoothing up my shin, over my knee and the front of my thigh.

He repeated it with the other leg, then got more oil and slid his palms up my belly to my chest,

stroking my peaked nipples with slick thumbs for long moments, until my breathing grew ragged again.

“Gloam,” I croaked, weirdly feeling like I might burst into tears at any moment and having no idea why. It was just... so *much*, but at the same time it wasn’t. I let myself sink into it—not trying to hurry it along, not begging him to sink his cock inside me even though my body felt empty. I let myself relish the lazy ache of desire making me tremble, making my cock strain against my belly. Both my brain and body knew he’d look after me, so I stayed calm and loose and relaxed.

“I have you, Adam,” he said in a soothing voice, kneading my shoulders before sliding his hands down my arms to rub circles into my palms and down each finger, until every single part of my body—except one—felt like it had turned to warm liquid.

“It’s so nice,” I mumbled drowsily, my voice slurred. I felt drunk. Why didn’t we do this, like, all the time? Every night? This was *sooo* much better than just gunning for the finish line, fast and frantic, the pleasure still amazing but more of a single intense explosion than this slow, lazy roll of bliss through my whole body.

Gloam chuckled quietly, sliding his palms up and down my sides. I finally lifted my heavy head from the pillow to peer down. The sight of my oil-shiny skin glistening in the candlelight and my straining cock leaking onto my belly made my hips lift as my hole clenched with need.

“Gloam,” I whispered again. I wanted to reach for him but my arm felt too heavy.

“Don’t worry, Adam.” He rested a hand on my belly, extending his thumb to stroke it over my leaking tip. “I’ll look after you.”

I shuddered out a breath, hips straining up again as the pleasure sharpened and gathered in my cock. I began to shake, convinced I was about to blow just from his thumb smoothing tiny circles over my frenulum.

My hips kicked up, legs finally shifting to try and curl around him so he couldn’t get away. But Gloam slid his hands down my thighs, gently encouraging them to settle back down on the mattress.

“Do you want to turn onto your front again or stay like this?” he asked quietly as he reached for the lube and slicked up his hard cock.

My heartrate increased as I realised what that meant—that he was finally going to sink inside me. “Like this,” I croaked, lazy fingers reaching for his knees as he shifted closer until my thighs were draped over his.

He smiled, reaching between my legs to smooth more lube over my hole, sinking three fingers briefly inside to make sure I was still relaxed enough. Then he gently lifted my legs onto his shoulders, leaning forward until my knees slotted comfortably over the thick muscles. It wasn’t enough to cause any strain, even though I was close to being bent in half. My ass and lower back lifted off the bed, but all the tension was gone from my body. I felt malleable. Liquid. Like he could probably pin my feet over my head on the pillow and I’d still be a puddle of boneless goo.

“Breathe out, Adam,” he rumbled soothingly. “Slow and steady.”

I knew what to do, but I still nodded as my eyes slid shut. Bearing down, I let out a long breath and felt the wide, blunt tip of him press against my hole before slowly sinking inside. I was relaxed enough that at first, it only felt amazing, but then his cock started getting wider as that ridiculously thick bulge sought entrance.

I let out another shaky breath, willing my body to stay calm even as my fingers tightened on his knees.

“Nearly there, firebrand,” Gloam whispered, kissing the inside of my thigh as he tunnelled deeper so slowly it almost felt like he wasn’t moving.

I bit my lip, my hole straining as the widest part of him slid inside, before I let out a guttural, relieved groan as the rest of him followed easily.

“You did so well, Adam.” Gloam kissed my inner thigh again, stroking his palms up and down my legs as his cock throbbed inside me, unmoving. “You are perfect.”

I peeled open my eyes to give him a drowsy smile, mumbling, “Felt easier this time.”

He smiled back, oblong pupils reflecting the candlelight in the room. “Good. Do you need a minute?”

I shook my head, toes curling behind his shoulders as my hole clenched around his thick shaft. “No, I’m okay.”

Keeping the backs of my thighs flat against his wide torso, he slowly pulled back until I felt that fat bulge stretching my hole, before sinking back inside. His thrusts were short and shallow, but not at all jarring—easy glides that kept up constant pressure against my sensitive prostate, milking more pre-cum from my untouched cock.

My breathing sped up, growing ragged, but even as the explosive orgasm that had been simmering under the surface all this time began to build, demanding attention, I stayed loose and relaxed on the bed. It was like he’d plucked all the bones out of my body and replaced them with pure, hazy bliss.

Gloam let out a shuddering groan as he slowly fucked me, and the sound of his pleasure made my cock strain up off my belly before smacking back down. I usually made a lot more noise while we were fucking, groaning and babbling feverishly about how good it felt, but all that escaped me were panting breaths, even my throat muscles too relaxed to tighten up around any moans or words.

He finally released my legs to lean forward and rest his hands on the bed either side of me, his thick biceps keeping my thighs from slipping off his shoulders. His slow thrusts got longer, hips rolling forward and stomach muscles tightening in a glorious display that made me shudder out a breath. I could feel his cock retreating until the widest part of it almost slipped out, but there was no pain at all. He groaned again, even more unsteadily this time, his big body shuddering as his textured brow furrowed with pleasure.

I clutched his ropy forearms, tiny whimpers leaving me as he transferred his weight to one arm and brought the other around my thigh to stroke my cock in drugging pulls that matched the speed of his slow-moving hips. I was hot and flushed all over, my skin slippery and gleaming with oil in the candlelight. The orgasm began barrelling down on me, making my chest heave as my breaths turned choppy and unstable.

My cock grew agonisingly stiff in his big fist, throbbing as cum boiled up its length. My entire body began to shake when the pressure finally broke, a hoarse cry leaving me as hot cum spurted over my trembling stomach in thick lines. My prostate pulsed against Gloam’s cock, drawing out the pleasure as my thighs quaked against his chest.

Gloam’s hips stuttered, my name leaving him on a shaky exhale. He plunged his cock as deep as he could, the swell on the shaft throbbing as he shuddered over me, eyes sliding shut and mouth going slack as he came.

Our ragged breaths filled the room as languid satiation settled over me like a warm blanket. I was still trembling with aftershocks, especially when Gloam slowly pulled out and the tip of his cock slid against my over-sensitised prostate as his swell slipped through.

He shifted back until our faces were level and settled on his elbows, his biceps bulging as he dipped his head to kiss my trembling mouth. “Are you alright, my love?”

I could barely find the energy to kiss him back. “My brain has stopped working,” I mumbled.

He chuckled, pressing his lips to my cheek. “That’s a first.”

I finally found the strength to turn my head and kiss him, sliding my tongue inside to glide against his. “I don’t think I have the skills to do that to you.”

He huffed, shifting to clasp one of my wrists and bring my hand to his face. He kissed my palm sweetly. “These clever hands are capable of doing all that to me and more. But you don’t need to, Adam. You bring me that much pleasure just by being near me.”

My brain finally started to reboot, allowing me to let out a weak snort. “No way. Do you even *know* what you just did to my body?”

He chuckled, kissing my palm again before pressing it to his cheek. “I have some idea. I’m glad you enjoyed it.”

“I don’t even...” I swallowed, my throat dry. “That was the best thing I’ve ever felt in my life.”

He grinned, tusks peeking out and making my chest get all tight. “Good. You make me feel like that every day.”

Smiling sleepily, I stroked my thumb over his cheekbone. “I love you.”

“I love you too, firebrand.” Turning his head to drop a final kiss on my palm, he sat up and reached for the damp cloth.

I shivered as cool air replaced the heat of his big body, then shivered again when he carefully wiped up the mess on my stomach before dipping the cloth between my legs to clean my hole. Finally, he cleaned his cock before dropping the cloth and the bottles of lube and oil onto the floor, then pulled the covers up over us as he laid down beside me.

“The sheets are all oily,” I mumbled, already half-asleep.

“We will worry about the sheets in the morning, firebrand.” He gently turned my boneless body onto its side and curled around me from behind, enveloping me in his warmth and scent.

I groaned in bliss, relaxing deeper under the covers. He pressed a kiss to the back of my head, then another to the bend of my shoulder, keeping his lips and nose there as he inhaled deeply. His arm slipped under mine to drape over my belly and chest, keeping me pinned close. I had just enough awareness left to tangle my fingers through his, directly over my heart, before I dropped into deep sleep, more content than I had ever been in my life.

Lor and Jugs Get a Pet

A brand new, 7.3k word short about our newest (at the time of publication) Monstrous couple, Lor and Jugs. Here we get a snapshot of this adorable pair living in marital bliss, with each of them being the precious cinnamon rolls that they are. Jugs wants to treat his beautiful vint husband with a reminder of their ‘courting’ days, and Lor wants to shower his handsome, mulleted human with lavish, over-the-top gifts—including an adorable monster-world pet. (I’m sorry, Danny.)

Content warnings: Adult themes, mild sexual content, 18+ only, green cookies, Jugs’ new personal guard is a bit of a shit

Spoiler warnings: Set after the events of *Lor* (Monstrous: Book Seven)

First published 2023 by Lily Mayne
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JUGS

“Meriv, I tried. I really did.”

I still cringed hella hard every time someone called me by my fancy title, but I managed to suppress it in place of a friendly smile aimed at the hyll’s head baker—a plump older vint called Bavir with long white hair always kept back in a tight braid.

“These look awesome!” I told Bavir, gesturing at the platter of cookies she’d presented.

Dark green cookies.

Which was... interesting. But they did *look* like cookies. I knew that the grain they used here to make flour was green, and I was mostly used to it now, but that was in the context of, like, *this* world’s food. Not my former world’s food. Not *cookies*.

Which I supposed didn’t really make much sense—it wasn’t like I hadn’t seen food in unnatural colours before. I used to love anything and everything blue raspberry-flavoured. Jenny, my parents’ housekeeper, had once told me that my tongue was almost permanently blue until I was about ten. Then again, I obviously had a thing for the colour blue.

I grinned brightly at Bavir again. “Lor will love them. Thank you so much for making them. Especially based off my vague recipe,” I added with a chuckle.

I’d been able to explain the basic ingredients to Bavir because I’d made cookies a few times as a kid with Jenny. Never with my mom. My mom didn’t cook. I could probably count on one hand the number of times I’d actually seen her in the kitchen.

But I had good memories of standing with Jenny, diligently watching her measure out ingredients, feeling way too proud when she let me stir the chocolate chips into the dough and told me I’d done a great job. The first time we’d made them, I’d tried to give one to my mom and dad. Mom had barely glanced at it, and Dad had shot me an impatient look before telling me he was too busy.

I shook off the stab of bitter grief when I realised Bavir looked frantic at the mention of Lor.

“You must try one first before giving them to the Moric,” she said anxiously, picking up the ornate platter. “If they are not good enough, I will try again.”

“I’m sure they’ll be good enough, but um, okay.” I was a little apprehensive about trying the green cookies, but I didn’t let it show as I picked one up off the platter. I *had* asked Bavir to try making them. Lor had loved cookies whenever I brought them before, and I knew he’d be eager for me to share them with him.

As much as I loved my life here—with him, in this place, in a new world—I still got overwhelming pangs of sadness over missing the silliest little things. Cookies. Soda. Putting on my headphones and clipping my cassette player to my waistband while I went for a run. We still *had* my cassette player, seeing as I’d given it to Lor years ago, but no fresh batteries. And even if we *did* have batteries, I wasn’t all that interested in listening to the encyclopaedia on tape while I went for a run.

I was happy here—unspeakably happy, getting happier every day—but that didn’t stop those little moments of yearning. Like nostalgia, I guess. Knowing I’d never be able to recreate the feeling of

sitting down in a movie theatre to watch the latest release. Opening the fridge and chugging milk straight from the carton. Driving in my car when an awesome song came on the radio that for some reason had always made the day feel so much better.

All that was gone now, but not just for me—for most people, by the sounds of it. All those things didn't even exist anymore—at least not in the ways I'd experienced them in the human world.

Taking a quiet breath, I bit into the cookie. It was thick and squidgy, and at first, I was hit with the taste of Jenny's peanut butter chocolate chip cookies. Another wave of childish longing washed over me, but I pushed it back to concentrate.

It wasn't actually peanut butter, but something else. More like almonds. Which made sense—they used nut butter here for fat in baked goods. And in the hyll, they used some kind of syrup for sweetener that was wildly expensive and a definite "luxury" that came with Lor's royal station. Most folk used mashed fruit to sweeten their food.

There were chunks in the cookie, but when I bit into one, I realised they were *not* anything like chocolate chips. They were candied salted meat—one of Lor's favourites. I'd grown used to the taste of it now, and in some dishes it was actually super good, but I had *not* been expecting the taste of meat in a cookie.

"Oh, wow," I managed, swallowing my bite. "They're rad. Super good. Just like from my world."

Bavir beamed, little wrinkles appearing around her milky grey eyes. "Yes? The Moric will like them?"

"He'll love them," I told her earnestly, taking another bite of the cookie. "Especially with the, um, meat chunks," I added, sheepishly wiping crumbs off my shirt when I sprayed them around my mouthful.

Bavir visibly relaxed, her shoulders lowering and a throaty laugh escaping her. "I know what our Moric likes," she told me, back to her usual, somewhat overbearing self. "They're not too dense? Soft enough?"

"Oh, um..." I wasn't all that great at describing stuff, so I just nodded enthusiastically. "Just the right amount of... dense. And soft. Perfect."

She grinned, displaying her sharp white teeth. "Excellent. Take them to your Moric and let me know what he thinks."

"I will." I hurriedly stuffed the rest of the cookie in my mouth when she shoved the platter into my hands. "Thanks, Bavir," I added around my mouthful, jumping a little when she gave me a firm pat on the backside to get me moving.

"Now I must rush through your bread rolls for dinner," she grumbled, waving a hand as she walked across the kitchen to the huge wooden bowl with a mound of dark green dough resting in it.

"Sorry," I said sheepishly, deciding to make a hasty exit. One of the kitchen staff hurried to open the door for me, so I gave them a smile as I left.

"Those look good," Torv immediately piped up the moment I stepped into the hall, straightening up from his slouch.

I chuckled, holding the platter out to my baregh guard. Lor and Seis had spent a long, *long* time selecting my personal guard, eventually settling on Torv because he'd been employed by the hyll almost as long as Seis had.

He was awesome. A huge, cheerful dude with a booming laugh and the occasional tendency to forget I wasn't as strong as a baregh when he gave me a friendly shove or pat on the back and almost sent me flying. He was unfailingly respectful in public, alert and attentive, but when we were just hanging out, he was great company. He told dirty jokes a lot, which meant he got Lyri's seal of

approval.

Torv stuffed an entire cookie into his mouth after giving it an inquisitive look. I swore he barely chewed sometimes—two chomps and he was already swallowing.

“So these are what you ate in your world?” he asked me as we started walking through the staff quarters that catered only to the Moric’s private rooms.

“I mean, sometimes.” I laughed. “Cookies aren’t a key component of a human diet or anything.”

“They should be.” He held open a door for me. “Do you want me to carry the tray, Meriv?”

“Shut up, dude, it’s Jugs,” I muttered, glancing around with embarrassment.

Torv laughed, giving my hair a scrub as we made our way up the stairs. “I’m not having my Moric remove me from this cushy new position for disrespecting his Meriv.”

I rolled my eyes. “You know Lor wouldn’t do that. And what do you mean, cushy?” I asked, feeling somewhat offended even though I wasn’t sure why.

Torv grunted. “I’m not complaining, but you don’t give me any opportunities to punch people.”

I choked on an incredulous laugh. “Why do you wanna punch people, Torv?”

“It’s not that I *want* to. Just...” He cracked his knuckles. “I like a challenge. Why don’t we go out into the wild lands on a trip? Or down south? I’ve always wanted to know how I’d handle a fight with a behamot.”

I side-eyed him, staying quiet as we reached the hushed hallway of mine and Lor’s private quarters. I hadn’t visited the wild lands yet—the stretch of land to the southwest of Thinir, where the Barren Valley was located—where the big void was that allowed creatures to flood into the US. I hadn’t expressed any interest in going, because I knew the idea of it would make Lor super anxious.

“Have you seen it?” I asked Torv curiously. “The void, I mean.”

“Yes.” He sobered up. “A group of us went to look at it several years ago. It’s... eerie.”

I cocked my head as I considered that. Our void—the one I’d used to visit Lor before—had never felt eerie to me, but maybe that was because I’d known he was waiting on the other side. And it was gone now. Encased in concrete in a closed-off part of the hyll.

Torv and I stayed quiet as we entered the dining room and I set the platter of cookies down on the table. I knew Lor was in a meeting all afternoon, so I was going to have to wait to show him my surprise.

Turning to face Torv, I saw him eyeing the cookies again. Laughing, I picked one up and handed it to him. Bavir had made a mountain of them, so there were more than enough.

“Holy crap, dude, I saw you eat an entire small animal with your lunch,” I told Torv as he shoved the cookie in his mouth. He just grinned at me, bits of dark green cookie dough stuck between his tusks.

Shaking my head, I made my way to the sideboard to grab a napkin. “I’m gonna take some to Lilimar.”

“No, wait,” Torv blurted, voice muffled. He hurriedly swallowed and said, “You have to stay here.”

“Huh?” I turned to face him with a frown. “Why?”

“The royal messenger found me while you were with the head baker. The Moric has requested that you remain in your private quarters.” Torv wouldn’t meet my eyes, and he coughed into his huge fist. “Specifically in the sitting room.”

“Why?” I repeated. “I thought Lor was in a meeting all afternoon.”

Torv looked like he was struggling to answer, until he eventually just shrugged. “I’m just the guard.”

I rolled my eyes. “C’mon, Torv.”

He straightened, rolling his shoulders back and shooting me an imperious look. “As your guard, *Meriv*, I must follow the Moric’s orders. I will be escorting you to the sitting room.”

“Don’t go all *Meriv* with me, buddy,” I told him, which just made him snicker. “What’s going on?”

“I’m just the guard,” he repeated airily, gently grabbing my shoulder and steering me toward the door. “Not my place to question our Moric.”

I spluttered. “You question me *all the time*.”

“Yes, because you are Jugs, as you so often remind me.” He grinned down at me, still leading me down the corridor to the sitting room. “Not the Moric. The Moric’s word is law.”

Not always, I thought, pursing my lips to stop a sly smile from forming. Not when Lor was on his hands and knees in front of me, ordering me to go harder or faster and I refused, just to tease him for a bit longer.

Or when he demanded that I let him come, but instead I pinned his wrists to the bed so he couldn’t reach for his cock as I fucked him. That always made him go particularly wild.

I wasn’t gonna be mad if I walked into the sitting room and found Lor waiting for me naked. Or, shit, with his body jewellery on. But I doubted he would do that when he knew Torv would be with me.

The sitting room was empty when we reached it. I eyed Torv, noting the way he was hovering at the door. “Okay, so I’m just meant to stay in here?”

He just gave me another mysterious shrug and an intense look as he backed out of the room and shut the door behind him. I stared at the closed door in disbelief for a few seconds, then turned and eyed the sitting room. We hung out in here sometimes, usually when someone was joining us for dinner, like Talimuth or Seis or Lilimar.

Although the other night we *had* ended up doing... different activities in here. My cock twitched in my shorts as I fondly remembered the make out sesh on the couch that had ended up with Lor bouncing on my lap while I gripped his tight, perfect little ass, trying not to come too quick from the feel of him squeezing around my dick.

But I doubted that was going to happen now, with Torv lurking right outside. Sighing, I flopped down onto one of the fancy couches and stared up at the ceiling for a minute, then sat up and eyed the door again.

“Torv?” I called, wondering if he was still out there.

After a pause, I heard him smugly say, “Yes, *Meriv*?”

“How long do I have to wait here? And *why*?”

“I’m just the guard,” he almost sing-songed back through the door, sounding entirely too gleeful about having trapped me in this room.

Why had Lor sent a message asking me to wait in here? Had something bad happened? But Torv didn’t seem concerned. So why in here? Why not our bedroom? I wouldn’t have minded waiting for him in our bedroom. In bed. Naked. Or maybe in the tub. Or over by the window seat—

The faint sound of a door opening in the hallway followed by muffled voices made me sit up straight. I went still when I heard the deep, familiar rumble of Seis, which meant Lor was out there, followed by a chuckle from Torv and more muffled words I couldn’t make out. I scowled. Damn my puny human ears when I was surrounded by beings with supersonic senses.

I perked up when I heard Lor’s voice, softer and more lyrical than the bareghs’. He was speaking quietly as well, but as they got closer to the door, I heard him say, “Seis, take this for a moment.”

I shot to my feet when the door opened, feeling my expression brighten when Lor slipped into the

room dressed in his standard sleek black tunic and pants, with his embroidered jacket over the top. His hair was immaculate as always, his long ears dripping with hoops and jewels and that tiny blue gemstone nestled against his lower lip.

I never got tired of seeing him. I still always got this super weird jumpy feeling in my belly at the mere sight of him, and I couldn't ever resist touching him the moment he was within reach.

"Hello, *menya*," he said with the big smile that he only ever gave to me. The pet name made me grin back. It obviously had no direct translation, because I'd heard it a million times now and my brain had never translated it into an English word. He said it meant something like 'my eternal love' or 'my heartsong'. Whatever it meant, it always made me light up.

"Hi." I approached him eagerly, huffing in amusement as he lifted his hand for a high-five. After smacking his palm, I gathered him into my arms and gave him a big kiss. "What's going on?"

"Nothing bad, I promise." Lor cupped my face, rising onto his toes to kiss me again. "I just missed you."

I chuckled against his lips. "You missed me, so you ordered me to wait in here for you, *Moric*?" I teased, knowing it would make his ears twitch.

He huffed, giving my chest a light smack. "I didn't *order* it, I politely requested it. Did Torv say I *ordered* it? I swear he's as bad as Lyri sometimes. Thank the Mabs he has never been Lyri's personal guard. I can't imagine what they would've got up to."

Lyri and Torv *would've* been a pretty deadly duo.

"Torv's just been acting all smug and mysterious," I told Lor, slipping my arms under his jacket and shivering a little when I felt his hand drop down my front to fiddle with the waistband of my shorts. "So what's going on?"

Lor gave me an elusive smile. "I have a surprise for you, *menya*."

"You do?" I perked up. "Oh, hey, I have a surprise for you too. But it's in the dining room."

He blinked, a shy smile tilting his mouth. "Oh."

Glancing back at the door, he worried his lower lip with his sharp teeth. "Perhaps you should show me yours first. Just... one moment."

He hurried to the door, opening it a crack and sticking his head out. I heard him hissing to Seis and Torv, followed by the thud of heavy baregh feet hastily retreating. And something that sounded like a yip.

"What the heck is going on?" I asked slowly, watching as Lor smoothed down his tunic and tried to look casual. "What was that sound?"

"That was just—" Lor froze, ears twitching wildly. He was a *terrible* liar. "Just Torv stubbing his toe."

As I approached him, I heard a grunt from somewhere beyond the door, followed by an offended, "That wasn't me!"

"Anyway," Lor rushed out, giving me a smile. "You... you have a surprise for me?" he asked shyly, fiddling with the barbells across the backs of his fingers.

"Yeah, but now I'm worried it'll be totally lame compared to what you've got me." I narrowed my eyes at him. "It's not a big thing, is it? You know you don't have to give me things."

"No, it's not a big thing," Lor said quickly as I took his hand and led him out of the sitting room. But I thought I heard him mutter, "Yet."

"Where'd Seis and Torv go?" I asked suspiciously, looking up and down the empty corridor.

Lor huffed, squeezing my hand. "They are hiding with your surprise. You'll find out soon."

"Okay, okay." I chuckled, tugging him into the dining room.

He immediately spotted the platter waiting on the table, because he stopped and said, “Cookies.” I laughed. “Yeah. I asked Bavir to try and recreate them for you.”

Grinning, he turned to cup my face, rising up to kiss me. “I did very much enjoy the cookies you brought back for me.”

“I know.” I gave him another kiss. “I’ll ask the cook to try potato chips next.”

“The vinegar ones?” Lor’s eyes brightened. Releasing me, he wandered over to the table. “But we don’t have potatoes here.”

“No, but there are those root vegetables that are similar. That we have in stew.”

“Boln, yes,” he said absently as he picked up a cookie before glancing back at me with a smile.

“May I try one now?”

“Yeah, of course.” I watched as he sank his sharp white teeth into the cookie, his eyes brightening as he swallowed.

“It tastes just like the ones you used to bring back!” he told me enthusiastically.

My mouth quirked as I walked over to join him. “Yeah? Awesome.”

They really didn’t taste anything like normal cookies, but I supposed it had been over thirty years since Lor last ate an actual cookie, and he’d only had them a few times.

He took another bite, eyes softening as they grew distant, like he was deep in a memory.

“I still remember our first days perfectly,” he told me, voice low and soft with fondness. “All those days of never being able to concentrate because I could only think of you. Missing you terribly whenever you went back through the void, but hoping that it would only be hours before I got to see you again.”

My chest squeezed tight. Slipping my arm around him beneath his jacket, I dipped my head to kiss his cheek. “Me too. I hated having to leave you.”

Lor’s mouth twisted as he stared down at the remainder of the cookie in his hand, sharp features contorting with a brief flash of pain. Sometimes Lor still got sad, when he was remembering the years he’d spent without me or his brother. I imagined that kind of pain was hard to just shake off, even though things were different now and he had both of us back. I tried my best to make him feel better, but I knew that sometimes he just needed me there, not saying anything, while he clung to me. Like he was reminding himself that I was with him—that I wasn’t going anywhere.

He smoothed his face out and smiled up at me. “Well, you are here with me now.”

Leaning in, he kissed the side of my neck and nuzzled me there. “And we are lawfully united. My *husband*,” he added with a smile in his voice.

My gut went all weird and fluttery. “That’s right. No getting rid of me now.”

“As if I would ever want to,” Lor told me solemnly, before turning to bury his face in my throat. “I love you, Jugs. Thank you for the cookies.”

“That’s okay,” I croaked, pressing my lips to the top of his head. “I love you too.”

“Let’s take these back to the sitting room.” Lor picked up the platter. “Seis will want some.”

I chuckled, following him back into the hallway. “Seis and Torv will probably eat half of them. I want to give some to Lilimar though.”

“Of course.”

We re-entered the sitting room, and I watched as Lor carefully set the platter on the low side table before smoothing down his tunic. He gave me one more kiss before sternly ordering, “Wait here.”

I fidgeted as he left the room, shutting the door behind him. What had he gotten me? He was always giving me things, but never made a production out of it. Usually it was almost in an offhand way. Like, he’d say, ‘Oh, I got the cordwainer to make you some new boots,’ or ‘I asked cook to make

you the dessert you like tonight,’ or ‘There’s a new bar of the soap you prefer in the waterchamber.’

He was always showering me with little gifts, despite my repeated insistence that I didn’t need anything. Not that I didn’t appreciate them—I *always* made sure to show him how much I appreciated them, which was probably his incentive for still doing it.

There were some low, muffled whispers outside the door and another soft sound I couldn’t place, before the handle lowered and Lor walked back into the room.

Carrying the freaking cutest little fluffball I’d ever seen in my life.

“Oh my god,” I breathed, watching as it wriggled in Lor’s arms. “Is that a puppy?”

“It’s a folna pup.” Lor scratched gently behind one of its ears—the one that flopped down adorably. My heart *melted*. “Talimuth told me a few weeks ago that their neighbour’s folna had had a litter. They’re now ready to leave their mother.”

“Oh my god,” I repeated, rushing forward.

Lor smiled and carefully held the wriggling pup out to me. “For you, *menya*. She’s a girl.”

“She’s so cute,” I said, getting a little choked up at just how freaking adorable she was. I’d seen fully grown folna before, as some people in the city kept them as pets, but never a baby. Her grey fur was speckled with mauve and looked downy, but I knew it would grow coarser as she got older. Her ears and feet were comically large, the latter with just stubby little claws that would get longer and sharper.

Folna looked kind of like a cross between an Irish Wolfhound and, well, a crocodile. With big, spiky ears and four eyes. Their heads were more lizard-like, as were their tails, but they had the long legs and fur of a canine. And they were *big*. Some I’d seen had been about as tall as me when they stood up on their hind legs.

This pup’s eyes were a pale mauve like the speckles in her fur, and her tiny teeth already looked razor sharp as she panted up at me, serrated tongue lolling out of her mouth.

“Hi, baby,” I cooed down at her, laughing when she wriggled and stretched her neck to lick my chin.

“Ah, be careful—” Lor began nervously, just as I winced from the rough abrasion of her tongue. He gave me a sheepish smile. “Best not to let her get into that habit. Folna tongues get... extremely rough as they get older.”

“Okay.” I chuckled, then made a face at the pup as I scratched under her muzzle. “But not yet, right?” I baby-talked to her. “Right now you’re just a little baby who would never hurt anything.”

“That’s not strictly...” Lor fidgeted anxiously, fiddling with the cuff of his jacket. “She will need extensive training. Folna are wonderful pets, but they can be a bit... rambunctious as pups.”

“That’s how puppies are supposed to act,” I said a touch defensively, cradling her closer. “But we’ll train you up real good, won’t we? Yes we will.”

“They grow very fast,” Lor added, gesturing at the pup. “She will be double this size in about a month.”

I laughed. “Are you trying to talk me out of it now?”

“No, of course not!” Lor shook his head and stepped closer to smooth long, slender fingers down the pup’s back. “I just want you to be prepared. I’ve already sought out the best trainer in the city. It’s for *her* benefit that she be well-trained, not just ours.”

“I know.” I leaned down to kiss him, making sure not to squish the pup between us. “Thank you so much, Lor. This is amazing. I was never allowed a dog as a kid, and I always wanted one.”

I’d *begged* my parents to let me have a dog. Dad had always brushed it off with a barely interested, ‘We’ll see’ designed to make me temporarily shut up, but Mom had been the one to flat-out

refuse, saying that owning a dog was “déclassé”. I mean, what the heck?

“What shall we call her?” I asked Lor excitedly, hefting the pup in my arms. She was already pretty weighty. I probably wouldn’t be able to pick her up like this for long.

Lor smiled, smoothing his hand around my waist, then lower to give my backside a pat. “You pick her name, *menya*.”

“Oh geez, that’s a big decision.”

He laughed, scratching behind her ear again, which made her twist and stretch toward the touch. “You don’t have to decide right this second.”

“Can we come in yet?” I heard Torv whine from right outside the door. “Seis wouldn’t let me hold her before.”

“Yes, you can come in.” Lor’s mouth twitched as the door was shoved open and the two baregh tumbled inside. “And there are cookies too. Just like from Jugs’ world.”

“Oh, excellent.” Torv gave me a big, mischievous grin. “Are we allowed to eat them, Meriv?”

“As if you haven’t already eaten two.” I jerked my chin at the platter. “Go ahead.”

Torv and Seis each picked up a cookie and stuffed them straight into their mouths so they could come and pet the pup.

“What’s her name?” Seis asked me, making kissy faces at her.

“Not sure yet.”

“She needs a strong name,” Torv declared. “A warrior name. Like... Torva.”

I burst out laughing, which made the pup yip in excitement, her tapered tail thumping against my sternum. “Shut up.”

“Torva is my mother’s name.” Torv gave me a stern look.

Seis snorted. “You mean your mother who used to chase us out of your house with a broom when we stole her pies from the windowsill as youths.”

“See?” Torv nodded emphatically. “A strong name for a strong female. No one will dare try and swindle Meriv Jugs, Moric, if his loyal beast is named after such a stalwart figure of the community.”

“Don’t try and convince Lor to name her after your mom,” I argued. “She’ll get her own name. Like...”

Everyone waited expectantly as I trailed off. I had no idea what kind of names people gave their pets here, but I was guessing names like Rex and Buddy and Lucky weren’t all that common.

I tried to remember if I’d ever come up with any names for the dog I’d desperately hoped for as a kid, but I’d never got that far, knowing even then that it wasn’t going to happen no matter how much I begged.

“April,” I said eventually. “She’s called April.”

A little pang went through me at the memory of my old friend. God, I hoped she was okay. That she’d survived whatever happened over there. That she’d had a good and happy life before the monsters came. Maybe she’d gotten married and had kids, although I kind of hoped it hadn’t been with that wastoid Mike.

Lor’s eyes softened as he smiled at me. He knew all about April, and Anton, and everyone else from my old life. He knew everything about me.

“April,” he repeated, stroking her head. “A lovely name. It suits her.”

Torv grunted around another cookie. “It’s alright, I suppose.”

“Little April,” Seis rumbled, crowding closer to stroke her back. “Not too little for long though. Look at her ears. She’ll be a big one.”

“Yes, I think she will.” Lor worried his lower lip anxiously. “Perhaps we can convert one of the

rooms into a den for her—”

“No!” I pulled her closer. “She’ll be sleeping with us.”

“What, in your bed?” Torv asked doubtfully, eyes darting between me and Lor.

I hesitated. “Okay, maybe not in the bed...”

A folna pup would be a definite cock-blocker.

“How about in the antechamber?” Lor smiled at me. “We’ll set up her den in there once she’s old enough to be alright sleeping on her own.”

“Okay, but we could still leave the door open, right? So she can come and sleep with us in the night after—” I went red as I darted a look at Seis and Torv. “Um, you know. Just... in the night.”

The latter boomed out a laugh, smacking me on the back. “After you’ve finished fucking, you mean.” Then he immediately sobered and coughed awkwardly as Lor’s ears twitched. “Apologies, Moric.”

“That’s—It’s quite alright.” Lor’s ears twitched some more. He sounded flustered as he continued, “But I—Yes, that sounds fine. In the antechamber. With the door open. Folna sleep for long stretches, so I don’t think she’ll disturb us in the night.”

“We’ll just have to make sure you’re tired out during the day, won’t we?” Seis cooed to April, then gave me an imploring look. “May I hold her again, Jugs?”

“Sure,” I said, but was reluctant to hand her over. Seis cradled her carefully to his huge chest, making more kissy faces at her as she frantically tried to lick his neck and chin.

“Can we train her to take down intruders?” Torv was eating yet another cookie, but he looked envious as he watched Seis fussing over the pup.

“Yes, she’ll be trained to defend Jugs.” Lor picked up another cookie for himself and nibbled on it.

“I don’t want her to be aggressive,” I piped up worriedly.

“She won’t be. But she *will* be trained to protect you.” Lor’s tone was firm—his assertive Moric voice. It made my nuts tighten, because there was nothing I loved more than when he got all authoritative in bed in his own feverish, understated way.

I gave him a sly grin. “Okay, *Moric*.”

Lor’s deep blue cheeks darkened even further, the tips of his ears twitching wildly. He took a big bite of his cookie, trying to appear composed.

“It’s my turn,” Torv argued, holding his hands out for April. “You got to hold her out in the hall.”

Seis glared. “You’ll be with her all the time.”

“Yes, so she has to get used to me from an early age.” Torv kept his hands outstretched. “She has to imprint on me, or whatever it is folna do.”

“No, she has to imprint on *Jugs*. And the Moric.” Seis pulled April closer to his chest. “And I’m not done holding her yet.”

“Well, she actually looks like she wants to stretch her legs,” Lor commented, watching as April wriggled excitedly in Seis’ arms. He looked around. “Is it safe to let her on the floor in here? There isn’t anything sharp, is there?”

“Or something she can eat,” I added. “Puppies put everything in their mouths. It’s how they learn about the world.”

“Sounds like Torv,” Seis grunted, carefully setting April down on the ground.

“Oh Mabs,” Lor mumbled, rubbing his face before picking up the platter of cookies. “We’d best put these up high.”

“I’ll take them,” Torv said immediately, grabbing another two cookies before balancing the platter

on top of the bookshelf. "So she can't have a cookie then?"

"No," I blurted, shaking my head. "They've got a load of syrup in them."

He grunted. "It'll give her energy."

"I don't think a lack of energy is going to be a problem," Lor said faintly, watching with wide eyes as April did laps around the room and circled Seis' legs, yipping excitedly.

"She can go for runs with me," I said with an eager grin. "She'll love it."

"Does that mean I don't have to?" Torv asked, squatting down to give April's back a scratch as she raced past him.

I huffed. "You were *just* saying how you want something exciting to do now you're *stuck* with me."

"Running is not exciting, Jugs. Meriv," he corrected quickly, shooting Lor a look. "Give me a target to run *at* and maybe I'd enjoy it. Or something to chase."

"Like what?"

"Like... April." Torv gestured at the pup as she raced past him again. "I could chase April. She'd give me a good chase."

"No," I insisted, frowning at him. "That'll scare her."

Torv straightened, shooting me a big, tusked grin. "I know I'm a formidable and intimidating baregh, Jugs, but I wouldn't *scare* her."

"Not so formidable and intimidating when I had to carry you home from the inne the other night." Seis shot him a dry look as April rolled onto her back in front of him, hind legs kicking when he scratched her belly. "And you were whining about Chit not wanting to fuck you."

Torv glared at him. "Chit *does* want to fuck me. He just said he wouldn't that night because I was, ah... a little tipsy."

"You could barely stand up. Lightweight," Seis muttered under his breath.

Torv snarled. "I'll drink you under the table, rockhead. Once we are both off duty for the night, of course," he added, giving Lor an ingratiating smile.

"Yes, of course," Lor said wryly. "Now, we'd best get April some food and water."

"I'll do it," Torv rushed out, making a beeline for the door. He paused and levelled a stern finger at me. "Don't go anywhere, Meriv."

"Seis, would you be so kind as to get April's den ready in the antechamber?" Lor asked, shuffling closer to me and furtively fiddling with the back of my shorts' waistband.

Seis gave April a longing look as she pawed at his arm because he'd stopped scratching her belly. He sighed and stood. "Of course, Moric."

"Thank you." Lor waited until he'd left the room and we were alone with April before swooping down to pick her up, giving me a shy smile after kissing the top of her head. "Do you like her?"

"Yes. I love her." I rubbed my thumb over her snout and between her four eyes, which all blinked at me. "I would already beat the shit out of anyone who tried to hurt her."

Lor huffed. "I can't imagine you beating the... *shit* out of anyone at all."

"I mean, yeah, I am a pacifist."

"You are perfect." Lor rose up on his tiptoes to kiss me, April cradled between us. "My gentle husband."

Gah, he said the cutest romantic shit sometimes. I grinned and couldn't help but kiss him again. Then again, cupping his face as our tongues glided together. It wasn't until April started squirming that we finally stopped, and I chuckled as she frantically tried to lick my face, her tail thumping against Lor's side.

He laughed. “She’s already getting jealous. We have to share him, April,” he told her sternly, before transferring her into my arms.

“We should both put a shirt in her nest.” I kissed the top of her head. Her fur already smelled like Lor, mixed with a hint of something rich and dark. Almost like cocoa powder. “So she gets used to our scents and associates them with comfort.”

Lor’s brows twitched. “Alright.”

“Did you and Lyri have pets growing up?”

“No. Although Lyri constantly tried to bring home wild animals. He hid a wild copicen in his room for about a week until a maid found it.”

I laughed. “Copicens are cute.” We’d seen them on a visit to a nearby farming settlement. Specifically, we’d witnessed a vint farmer shooing several of them out of his barn.

“I’m still not sure how he smuggled it in without it impaling him with its spikes.” Lor shook his head with a fond smile. “Mama tried to tell him off when she found out, but we could both tell that she was holding back laughter. It didn’t exactly stop him from doing it again.”

I grinned, shifting April in my arms so I could lean down and nuzzle his cheek. “But *you* were always a good boy, right?”

Lor’s ears twitched. “Ah, I... By comparison, yes, I was—I suppose...” Silver eyes flaring, he sidled closer and trailed his fingers over my bare stomach beneath the hem of my cropped tee. “I have the rest of the afternoon off, *menya*.”

My cock twitched with interest at the husky tone to his voice. “Oh yeah?”

“Yes.” Fingertips dipped under the waistband of my shorts. “No meetings, no appointments... We can spend the rest of the day together.”

“Well.” I cleared my throat. “We probably shouldn’t leave the quarters so April can get settled, so I guess... we have to spend the day here. In our rooms.”

“Yes.” Lor’s hand slid fully into my shorts, long fingers curling around the base of my hardening dick. “And I think Seis and Torv should go into town to buy supplies for April. Toys, treats, bedding... It will probably take them a while.”

“That sounds like a great idea,” I croaked, eyes darting to the door as I wondered if either of them were going to burst back into the room while Lor’s hand was down my shorts. “A *really* great idea. The best.”

Lor gave me a sly smile, slipping his hand free and patting my dick gently through my shorts. “I’ll go tell them. You get April settled in her den.”

“Yeah. Okay. Yeah. Awesome.” I eagerly followed him out of the room, forgetting all about my obvious erection until we bumped into Torv, who was holding two fancy dishes of water and raw meat.

His eyes immediately darted down. Face flaming, I hunched over and pretended that April was wriggling. “Oh man, better get her to—I’m just gonna...”

Torv’s face split into an evil grin. He parted his lips to tease me, then darted a glance at Lor. His expression fell, before he woodenly said, “Food and water for April, Moric.”

“Thank you, Torv,” Lor said with as much dignity as he could muster, tugging on the hem of his tunic. “If you’ll just... I’ll take them.”

After handing the dishes to Lor, Torv shot me a secret shit-eating grin that told me I wasn’t gonna escape his ribbing. He’d just wait until Lor wasn’t around.

I glared back, hastily following Lor into the antechamber to our room. Seis glanced up from the corner, where he’d pushed aside the little ornate bench to make a den for April with blankets and a

cushion.

“Folna prefer their dens to be covered,” he said, standing up with a grunt. “I could ask the carpenter to—”

“Yes, excellent idea,” Lor interrupted, setting down the two bowls. “In fact, Seis, we’d most appreciate it if you and Torv went into town to get everything she’ll need. We’ll stay here. In our quarters. With April, obviously,” he rushed out.

“Obviously,” Torv echoed politely. I narrowed my eyes at him.

“I’m thinking we’ll go on a nice long run in the morning, Torv,” I told him brightly. “All the way up the beach to the cove. Maybe further.”

He narrowed his eyes back. “Of course, Meriv.” But as he passed me with Seis, giving April’s ear one more scratch, he muttered, “Assuming you won’t be too worn out.”

I went red. “Shut your face.”

“From April keeping you up all night, of course,” he added smoothly. “New pups need a lot of attention. *Constant* attention. They don’t leave much time for... other activities.”

Shit, he was right. But after he and Seis had left the room, I glanced down at April and saw her four eyes all blinking sleepily as she nestled into my chest.

“Aww, are you tired after your burst of energy?” I cooed, carrying her over to the den. “This is a lot for you, huh? New people. Lots of new smells.”

“I’ll go and get our shirts to put in her nest.” Lor hurried into the bedroom, already stripping off his jacket.

After I carefully settled her in the centre of the den, she sniffed around for a few seconds before turning in a tight circle and curling up into a tiny ball. Lor returned, passing me one of his silky night shirts.

“She might ruin it with her claws,” I warned him. “Or teeth.”

“It doesn’t matter.” He held up one of my cropped tees. “Were you wearing this yesterday? It was on the chair.”

“Ah, yeah.” I gave him a sheepish smile. “I meant to put it in the hamper. Sorry.”

He huffed, kissing the top of my head as he handed it to me. I tucked both shirts around April, melting when she dragged my T-shirt closer with a claw and nestled her snout into it.

“She’s very sweet,” Lor murmured, fingers absently sifting through my hair as he stood beside me.

“Yeah.” I gazed at her for a while longer, my chest squeezing when she let out a little snuffle and curled tighter into herself.

Lor cleared his throat. “Jugs...”

The husky edge to his voice snapped me out of my daze. Straightening up, I shot him a wide grin. He licked his lips, stepping closer and smoothing a hand up my belly and under my shirt to toy with a nipple ring.

“Folna pups sleep in short bursts,” he told me, silver eyes already roaming down my chest. “So perhaps...”

“Let’s go.” I hefted him into my arms, which made Lor squeal with a laugh, before carrying him into the bedroom.

The Orlith Chronicles

CORRESPONDENCE

Wyn,

Humans are useless. That is what I have concluded. Utterly useless.

They didn't even know about *wheels*, for gods' sakes. *Wheels*. I had to show them that—what a shock—things move much faster when they are on discs that roll easily over the ground. I know we are not supposed to let them see us, but I just couldn't *take* it anymore. How have they survived this long??

Would it really be such a shame if we let them all get wiped out? Are they actually *contributing* anything?

Write me back.

Orlith

Wyn,

Are there any repercussions if we accidentally cause a teensy upheaval among the humans? I only ask because I happened to be in Rome recently and overheard two of their senators talking about their dictator perpetuo, Julius Caesar. Like you, I am not fond of tyrannical rule (unless I am the one in charge) so I may have casually mentioned that I had heard Caesar speaking unfavourably about the Senate, and that he seemed to be toying with the idea of making himself Rome's God-King.

Well, they weren't all that pleased. Apparently some plot spawned from that—lots of angry human men who are all equally thirsty for power, conspiring to rid Rome of its authoritarian ruler.

Anyway, my point is, Caesar has since been... disposed of. I didn't think they'd react *that* strongly. I thought it would just cause some entertaining bickering amongst the senators. Do you think it will matter that much?? Surely it won't cause a war or anything. I think he has a nephew somewhere who could just take up the torch. I'm sure it's fine, aren't you??

Write me back immediately. I do *not* want my infuriatingly saintly sibling coming after me and chastising me once they find out I may have caused the death of a pontifex maximus.

Orlith

Wyn,

You *must* come and visit me soon so I can show you the hideous tapestry the humans have created. All that work for something so ugly! I did consider stealing it so I could bring it and show you, but it's about 230 feet long, so they probably would have noticed it was missing.

I think it's something to do with a king getting shot in the eye with an arrow. I must have been hibernating when that happened because I had no idea, though I did notice on my next visit to England that people were speaking French, so something rather dramatic must have taken place, I suppose.

How do humans manage to be in constant turmoil yet so dull at the same time? Are you sure we're not allowed to spice up their lives a bit? I'm sure they'd all forget about illegitimate kings and conquerors if I appeared above that big palace they're all obsessed with. Like some glorious dark angel here to show them how fucking wrong they have everything.

What do you think? Good idea? Let me know or I might just do it.

Orlith

Wyn,

I just *have* to speak to someone about this. I am so angry that I might give up on England altogether. Let them be overrun by parasites for all I care. They are no better than parasites *themselves*.

There is some lout who is making quite a name for himself on the stage in London. Making a name for himself as a playwright with *my ideas*. I went to rid him of a parasite some time ago and came across the dreary, half-finished scripts for his little plays on his desk. I jotted down a few ideas to make them better, and that swine *used* them! *Without* giving me credit! Can you believe it?

What if I popped another little parasite in his mouth while he slept and then *happened* to stay on the other side of Europe for a couple of weeks? Are we allowed to do that? Perhaps then “the Bard” wouldn’t be feeling quite so prolific.

WRITE ME BACK.

Orlith

Wyn,

I have found a nun in a convent in France who I think might write my memoirs if I appear to her as a “holy spectre” a few more times. She’s quite gullible. Doesn’t have much for me to steal though. Nothing, in fact. Unless you’d be interested in me dressing up as a nun? The habit can be quite titillating, I suppose. Let me know.

Anyway, do you want me to get her to write yours as well? Of course, that would require you to have actually done something *interesting* in your life other than hibernate and chase after disgusting little parasites. Oh, and sculpt vile rings out of old bones, of course. Such grandeur. Why not wear all the *actual* priceless jewellery I have given you?? I know you despise any and all monarchies, but these are *stolen* from them. We are *fighting* their oppression.

Wear the damned jewels the next time I visit you. And that codpiece I gave you. Nothing else.

Let me know about the nun. And the habit. Write me back.

Orlith

Wyn,

Why must we do this? These meek little humans are not even grateful for us ridding them of the sure death that infects them. Why do we bother? They are not in our world. In fact, were it not for the delightful trinkets they seem to be feverishly obsessed with creating to show off their wealth (that *are* admittedly quite nice), I would argue that they are indeed a scourge on their own world.

Just the other day I was *trying* to rid a family in London of parasites when the wife started screaming her damned head off, calling me a devil. A *devil*? Do I look like a devil? Yes, I am awe-inspiring. Yes, my beauty surpasses theirs. But I have seen their depictions of what they call *devils*. Hooves and ugly squashed faces and daggered tails like those oafish isdernuc that used to roam wild in the forests. I am no devil. If anything, I am their saviour. They should *worship* me.

But I digress. I may have gotten a touch frustrated at the human woman's outburst, and as I was making my fearsome exit, my coat *may* have knocked over a lantern in their bakery downstairs. (As an aside, I noticed that the bakery was on a road called *Pudding Lane*. Isn't that disgusting? Why are humans so obsessed with foodstuffs?) Anyway, I believe there may have been a small fire that spread to the neighbouring houses. I didn't stay long to find out. I'm sure it was fine.

When are you next visiting? I have some new human trinkets to show you. Are you still not wearing that cape I gave you? You're as ungrateful as the humans.

Orlith

Wyn,

I found this poem on the desk of a young human woman who was infected last week when I went back to treat her husband. Don't you think it's about me? It has to be. It's a little amateurish, yes, but I agree with the overall sentiment.

Why didn't you respond to my last letter?? Did you get the self-portraits I sent? The silk gloves were nice, weren't they? Especially as they were the only things I had on...

Write me back, you swine. And make sure you read the poem.

Orlith

A haunting spectre visited my room
Awakening me from my dreamless sleep
His beauty that of a pale rose in bloom
Tempting me to offer my soul for him to keep
Yet still I still fear him, this angel of death
As he rises over me to steal my breath

His eyes, like the silver moon in the night sky
See deeply into my soul, and promise me
Such unearthly pleasures that make my heart fly
And tempt me to shake off this life, to see
What delights wait within this mortal coil
What else exists between sky and soil

His hair, a waterfall of pale starlight
Like silk as it caresses my pallid cheek
His touch is air on a frost-bitten night
And his breaths, so cool and deathly meek
Like the bite of fresh berries still coated in dew
Sweet in the early dawn, cleansing me anew

An angel of death, terrifying and
Awesome in his ominous beauty
But not only of death, for he took my hand
And gave me life, stealing the sickness from me
Before fading into smoke that kissed
My lips, and left me once more in the sweetest mist

PS. Those could be *your* lips feeling the sweet caress of my mist if you weren't such a *bastard*

Orlith,

Did you write that poem yourself?

Yes, I got the portraits.

I'll be back in my nest in a month or so.

Bring the gloves.

Wyn

Orlith Tries to Seduce Wyn

A little 1k word short of an interaction between Wyn and Orlith, long before Danny is in existence!
(**Note:** Orlith is another telyth – Wyn’s species – who makes an appearance in the novella *Wyn*.)

Content warnings: Adult themes, bad language, mentions of violence, Wyn pushing his stabby agenda (on himself by accident)

Spoiler warning: Set way before the events of any of the books, but probably best read after the novella *Wyn*, when Orlith is introduced

First published 2022 by Lily Mayne
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Around 500 years ago...

WYN

“Wyn.”

My shoulders hunched up instinctively when I heard that grating voice. Mine was possibly more distorted than his, but somehow, Orlith’s was just... *worse*.

“You can’t just come into my nest,” I muttered, not bothering to look up from where I was sitting on my thick pallet of furs and old, heavy fabrics. I continued carefully sewing up the rip in my shirt. “Next time I might kill you if you startle me.”

Orlith snorted, sweeping across the smooth stone ground—literally sweeping. When I reluctantly glanced up, I saw that over his plain black clothes, he was wearing a long, deep red cloak embellished with gold thread and edged in thick grey fur. It trailed behind him over the ground, and I noticed him glancing back to make sure it fanned out properly as he approached.

Utter dread filling my belly, I realised there was a second cloak draped over his arm. Choosing to ignore it, I lowered my head and resumed sewing.

“As if I could startle you,” he drawled. “You felt me coming when I was still miles away.”

Instead of answering that, I asked, “What the fuck are you wearing,” without inflection.

My eye twitched when Orlith lowered himself to the ground opposite me, carefully arranging his cloak to make sure it draped in heavy folds around him in the most flattering manner possible.

“Do you like it?” he asked airily, running blackened fingers over the burgundy velvet. “I got you one as well. That oaf Henry won’t miss them. He’s too busy fucking his newest wife.”

I grunted in response, refusing to look up at him.

After a pause, Orlith added, “He cut the last one’s head off.”

I said nothing.

“Humans are very strange,” Orlith said.

My eye twitched again. I stabbed the needle too forcefully through the shirt fabric, causing the tip to sink straight into my finger. Yanking it back out, I pulled the thread through so hard it nearly snapped.

“You are only now discovering this?” I snarked, quickly tying off the thread and raising the fabric to cut off the excess with my teeth.

Orlith let out an exasperated sound. “Obviously not. I was just trying to make conversation.”

From the corner of my eye, I could see him examining his fingernails, lounging back on one elbow across some of my furs. Glancing up through my eyelashes, I realised his black shirt was unbuttoned all the way down to his navel, and his neck was weighed down by a ridiculous number of thick gold chains and diamond-studded necklaces.

Gold and diamond-encrusted rings were stacked on every finger. He had wound thin, delicate gold

chains around his horns and draped them over the double prongs. Even his fucking boots had gold tips.

I *despised* the low throb of arousal that pulsed through me at the sight of him in all his pompous, regal glory. Fucking Orlith.

He smirked at me as if he knew what I was thinking. I hissed back.

Tearing my gaze away from his purposefully tousled white hair, I jerkily folded my spare shirt up and put away my sewing supplies in their designated box—dark wood with rusted hinges, it had been made by the salyiks further north, back when they had a flourishing trade in jewellery and finely crafted goods. A very, very long time ago now.

“Try on the cloak,” Orlith said, thrusting the bundle of royal blue fabric toward me.

My lip curled as I eyed the speckled white fur edging. “Fuck off.”

“That coat is *vile*, Wyn. You’ve had it for aeons. You need to replace it.” Orlith held up the cloak again. “What better a replacement than a king’s cloak?”

“You really came all this way to give me a cloak,” I said flatly.

Orlith’s silver eye flashed, his pinprick pupil roaming over my frame. Arousal flared again, making me grit my teeth with irritation.

“No,” he drawled, thankfully letting the ridiculous cloak fall to the ground. My gut clenched with a mix of annoyance and anticipation. “I came all this way to ask if you wanted to fuck. Obviously.”

My jaw muscle ticked as I tried very hard to push back the images threatening to crowd my brain, of the last time Orlith had shown up with this exact proposition.

I couldn’t give in again. He was getting too needy. Too... *clingly*. I shuddered. I couldn’t imagine wanting to spend *all* my time with another. Especially one as young and naïve as Orlith.

“No.” I sniffed and looked away. “I don’t want to fuck.”

“Liar.” Orlith let his elbow drop and rolled languidly onto his back, stretching out all his long limbs, his shirt falling open to reveal more of his pale chest and sternum. His knees dropped open wide, hips arching for just a second in his ludicrous interpretation of a *stretch*. It was a move *clearly* designed to try and tempt me.

And the fact that it was working made me want to stab something.

“We’re not fucking again, Orlith.” I forced myself to look away from the telyth practically presenting himself to me like an animal in heat.

He paused. “Why not?” His tone was utterly offended.

“Because I like being on my own and you keep fucking bothering me.”

“You didn’t seem to mind me *bothering* you when I was making you—”

“Orlith,” I snarled. “We’re not fucking. You can’t just come into my nest whenever you want.”

There was silence for a long moment. Then Orlith sat up in a rush, huffing dramatically and gathering up the heavy fabric of his cloak to stand.

“Fine,” he snapped. “Your loss, you decrepit swine.”

Before he could vanish into smoke, I said, “Take your other cloak, Orlith.”

“Keep it,” he barked, sniffing and turning his nose up at me. “I’d hate to leave you here in this poverty without *anything* decent. By the Mabs, your nest is *so* depressing. Besides, blue isn’t my colour.”

With that, oily black smoke curled up into the air, taking Orlith’s ridiculous cloak and all his stupid jewellery and his infuriatingly perfect face with him.

Orlith Tries to Seduce Wyn (Again)

Another little 1.3k word interaction between Wyn and Orlith, set waaay in the past! Orlith is continuing in his mission to get railed by (or to rail) Wyn as often as possible. Why, Orlith? Wyn is a grumpy old man, he's kinda gross (you know his hygiene standards are *way* below Danny's) and he is *not* impressed by your enormous collection of stolen human trinkets.

There are no details or descriptions of Wyn and Orlith actually doing the deed here (I guess this could be classed as fade-to-black) but if you *really* can't stand the thought of Wyn having a sex life before Danny, maybe don't read it. Because he *does* give in this time. He can't resist Orlith. Or at least, he couldn't back then.

Content warnings: Adult themes, bad language, Orlith, Wyn's anarchist agenda, Wyn gives in but don't worry there are no details, Look, Wyn has complicated feelings about humans okay?

Spoiler warning: Set way before the events of any of the books, but probably best read after the novella *Wyn*, when Orlith is introduced

First published 2022 by Lily Mayne
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Around 450 years ago...

WYN

Why the fuck am I doing this?

I had returned to our world after a dull year or so of hunting parasites among the humans. When I'd slipped through the tear and back into my valley, I had been contacted by Orlith before I could hide away in my nest and sleep.

His grating voice had rung in my head the *moment* I crossed through, as if he had just been waiting, prodding the air with his mind until he felt me—like those irritating little insects in the human world that let out a high-pitched whine right by your ear, impossible to swat away no matter how hard you tried.

You need to come here, Orlith had said, his irritating voice buzzing at the base of my skull. *It's important.*

I'd considered ignoring him, but I could still feel the press of him in my head, his bratty presence waiting for me to obey. He wouldn't leave me alone until he got his way.

What's so important? I'd snapped back, hesitating at the tiny entrance to my nest.

There's something in my nest you have to see.

Tension rolled through me. Had something got into Orlith's nest? He was an annoying little fuck, but that didn't mean I... wanted bad things to happen to him. Not that I would ever, *ever* tell him that.

Fine. I'd begun crossing the distance between our nests. His was further southwest, closer to where we had all grown up as youths. Not that I had grown up with him—I had been long gone from my parents' nest by the time he was born. He'd sought me out when he reached adulthood for “advice” on how to eliminate parasites—as if it wasn't instinct for our kind.

Things had... escalated after his fourth visit.

His nest appeared up ahead after I had travelled over hills, great lakes and the vast Amaranthine forest with its enormous mushrooms and hovering crystals. I knew he'd be able to feel me approaching, so I didn't bother to announce my arrival. I slunk through the tiny gap in the rock to the first chamber of his nest, hidden deep within the side of a mountain.

My nest had only two chambers—one for hibernating and one to store my hoard. All telyths hoarded, collecting things over their long lives. Mine was mainly leftover bones from my enemies, precious jewels from this world, preserved plants and herbs that held powers. I might have had some skulls in there somewhere.

Orlith's nest had eight chambers, all of them filled with ridiculous human crap. I solidified in his sleeping chamber, which had a fucking four poster bed draped in rich forest green fabric, mounds of silk and fur and velvet piled on top. Jewellery was strewn over it, as if he rolled around in it before hibernating. My lip curled.

“Where are you then?” I rasped, knowing he’d be able to hear me from wherever he was in here.

“Third chamber,” he called back, his voice languid and careless as if he *hadn’t* ordered me to come here. As if he hadn’t been waiting for me.

I grunted in irritation. He didn’t sound like he was in any danger, but I stomped past his ridiculous bed to the next chamber, which was filled with piles of clothing. Cloaks, coats, dresses, shirts and several coats of armour. A huge, gilded mirror leaned against one stone wall, countless gold and silver necklaces draped over its corners.

When I entered the next chamber, I stopped dead. My eye twitched, insides twisting into a heated knot.

“Well?” Orlith drawled from where he was sitting on a gigantic, ornate throne. Completely naked.

His legs were spread wide, but one black-stained hand was cupped between his thighs in some laughable semblance of modesty, as if this *wasn’t* a ridiculous attempt to seduce me.

It is not working, I told myself obstinately.

The throne had a high back and was upholstered with rich burgundy fabric, its back and arms forming elaborate swirls in gold. My lip curled at the gaudy display of wealth.

Fuck the monarchy. All monarchies.

His other elbow was propped on the armrest, and dangling loosely from his long fingers was a stupid gold crown. He *was* wearing something, I realised too late—a cloak, but it didn’t conceal even an inch of his body, and while the hood was up, his face was still visible.

He was smirking at me.

Clearing my throat, I crossed my arms and lifted my chin. “Well what?”

“Well, what do you think?” He gestured vaguely at the throne with the hand holding the crown, reflected firelight burning in a few lanterns in here making the gold glitter.

“I don’t think anything,” I said flatly. “It is a throne that humans who think they’re better than others sit on to feel important.”

“Yes, I stole it from the French king,” Orlith said airily. “And this crown was just lying around, so I thought it would be nice to add to my collection.”

“Why did you make me come here to see this, Orlith?” I asked through gritted teeth, forcing my eyes to stay on his infuriatingly perfect face and not the hand elegantly draped between his legs.

“Because the throne looks good in my nest.” He smirked at me, twirling the crown in his fingers. “And I thought I’d offer you the opportunity to be fucked on it.”

I snorted, trying to relax my tense shoulders. I didn’t want him to see how much he was affecting me. “Exactly how long have you been sitting here waiting for me?”

He scowled. “Not long.”

“There’s a scurig web attached to the back of your hood. They take at least a few hours to spin their webs. And this one stretches all the way to the wall—”

“Shut up,” he snapped, before visibly forcing himself to relax back in the throne.

Lifting a long leg, he draped it over the armrest, still keeping his hand between his legs but showing me the curve of his backside. My fingers curled into tight fists, stuffed in my armpits.

“So you’re really saying you *don’t* want to fuck?” he drawled, smirking at me again.

“I told you last time that we can’t keep fucking.”

He rolled his eyes. “And why not? Because you’re determined to stay as miserable as possible?”

“No, because you won’t fucking leave me alone,” I gritted out. “I don’t want a mate, Orlith. I don’t want young.”

He narrowed his eyes at me before sweeping his gaze down my frame. “Who said anything about

young? I just offered a fuck.”

I tried to tell him no. Tried to turn and leave. But my jaw stayed clamped shut, teeth grinding and cutting into my gums. Fucking Orlith, sitting there naked on his gaudy human throne with his legs spread and that infuriating smirk on his face, as if he thought he was getting to me.

It is not working, I told myself again.

“I also stole a sceptre,” he told me slyly. “It has a very intriguing ball on the end that I could use to ___”

“This is the *last* time,” I snapped, striding forward.

His mismatched eyes flared as he sat up straight, foot thumping back onto the floor. “We’ll see.”

“It is,” I grated, thudding to my knees in front of the stupid throne.

He smirked down at me, hurriedly placing the ridiculous crown on his head before reaching out to feather his fingertips over one of my horns. I shuddered, then grabbed his knees and forced them open as wide as possible.

“Maybe this time *you* can pretend to be the human,” he rasped, sharp teeth flashing in a grin as he shoved my hood back. “I know how much you like that. You can be the doting human worshipping his king on his throne.”

“Shut up,” I gritted out, yanking him closer to the edge of the seat.

Orlith and Faralin

A brand-new 3.6k word short from Orlith's perspective! This is set on Orlith's turf—Europe (London, England, specifically)—and we finally get to meet another of the ancient telyths wandering between worlds... Orlith's stoic, world-weary older sibling, Faralin.

Content warnings: Adult themes, bad language, mentions of violence and the possible extinction of the human race

Spoiler warning: Set sometime after the novella *Wyn*, when Orlith is introduced (and meets Danny...)

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ORLITH

“Orlith.”

I heaved a great sigh at the irritating sound of my sibling’s voice. Sometimes it felt like I never got a moment’s peace. Why was everyone obsessed with me?

Then again, there were also times where it felt like I hadn’t spoken to a single other being in weeks. Months. Years. So despite how annoying Faralin could be, I found myself glancing over at them as they settled on the ledge beside me.

Sighing again, I looked back out over what the humans called New London — now just a vast urban jungle controlled by bandits after the country’s powers fled further inland when the tears opened and the creatures from our world flooded this one.

I hadn’t noticed the one that had opened in the English Channel until I came back to England several years after watching the exodus at the tear that led to the northern border of Austria, which had allowed a wave of curious creatures into mainland Europe. I’d assumed this tiny group of islands would be fine, separated by the sea.

That had... perhaps been a mistake. When I finally arrived, the once thriving city of London had been somewhat chaotic. Apparently, humanity’s first instinct when they heard that “monsters” were streaming out of the Channel Tunnel and making their way further inland was to loot. And fight. I supposed I couldn’t judge them for that.

Because these were mostly sea-dwelling creatures, they stuck to the coastlines, but all that meant was that many of them found the mouth of the River Thames and followed it directly to London, emerging from the stinking river before the water stopped being so brackish.

From what I could gather, the army was entirely unprepared for a glut of otherworldly creatures to emerge from the murky river. Once that started happening, all the “important” humans were evacuated from the city. The parliamentarians, the rich people who controlled all the money, the royal family. I may have spent several weeks lounging around in—and looting—Buckingham Palace instead of actually hunting parasites, but who could blame me?

They had tried to take back London, it seemed. The River Thames now had a fortress-like wall along its banks from Westminster to the City of London, but it had been abandoned long before it was anywhere near completed. So it basically did fuck all in keeping out the *monsters*.

Not that they had ever been able to keep *me* out, or the vile little parasites. I had watched this city for centuries. I had watched the Romans come here and create their settlement, then abandon it when Boudica led her uprising against the Empire. Then I watched the Vikings come. I had watched the Tower of London, the very building I was perched atop, being built. I’d watched fire and disease ravage the city, then later war, with bombs raining down.

It had been somewhat fascinating to see it change so much over the years. And now, in what would no doubt turn out to be its final form, it was a strange perversion of what it had once been. Still crowded and busy, but with none of the power and wealth. Now it was lawless and decaying, with

pockets of humanity hunkering down in the fortified buildings that had existed here for centuries, while the creatures from our world formed their own kind of metropolis amongst themselves.

There were markets now, for those from my world who had decided to reside here permanently. Beings would travel back and forth to the tear in the tunnel, bringing with them food and cloth and spices that could only be found back home. There were entire districts inhabited exclusively by the beings who had crossed over. They and the humans largely left each other alone, but fights would sometimes break out—misunderstandings between different species. Wars over meaningless patches of land. Merchants ambushed and killed for their goods on both sides as they travelled through the dangerous streets.

My lip curled as I heard the faint chatter of the humans in the tower beneath us. There was one here, one human who I had heard being referred to as the Bandit King, who believed himself to be the ruler of New London. The human who controlled the largest army of people, who had holed up early in the Tower of London and now took whatever they wanted for themselves.

I'd spied on him a few times and I had no idea what all the fuss was about. He was just a bland, nondescript human man, but those around him followed his every command. He rarely left the tower himself, staying safe within its thick stone walls while he sent out his minions to ambush and rob and kill, especially now that he was getting older. Well, older for a human.

I'd considered letting him die when he'd been infected with a parasite a few years ago. But Faralin had drilled it into me that it wasn't our job to play god—to decide who we saved or left to die at our whim—so I'd reluctantly removed it from him even though he seemed like a bit of a bastard.

Speaking of Faralin, I realised I hadn't actually responded to them, which meant I would probably be getting a lecture on my manners. Heaving a third long-suffering sigh, I said, "Hello, Faralin."

They grunted, hunching over to rest their forearms on their thighs as we surveyed the great ruined city. "Why sit up here?"

I rolled my eyes, glad my hood was up so Faralin couldn't see. "Why not?"

I heard them let out a tiny snort, their own hood turning in my direction. "You are my brother, Orlith. I know you. I just thought you'd choose to sit on the highest perch you could while surveying all the humans—all the creatures who are *beneath* you. And there are certainly higher perches than this all around us."

I sniffed, leaning back on my hands. "I don't need to resort to meaningless metaphorical displays to highlight how much better I am than everyone else. It's obvious anyway."

Faralin snorted again, looking back out over the city. "Mm."

"And I liked the ravens," I added airily. "They are actually intelligent. Not that there are any left here now. Did you know the humans used to believe there had to be at least six ravens in the tower at all times?"

Faralin's head cocked. "Why?"

"I don't know. They thought their monarchy would fall if the ravens all left. A silly superstition." I swept a careless hand over the view of London. "Obviously didn't do them much good. They probably had six in here when the tears widened, and look what happened."

My sibling huffed. "Indeed."

I glanced over at them, their face hidden just like mine. We looked somewhat similar, but I clearly got all the good genes from our parents. Faralin's face was harsher, sharper, and their hair was less ethereally silver—like mine—and more of a dull grey. Plus, their horns only had one point each. *How sad*, I thought smugly every time I saw them.

“What are you doing here?” I asked, making sure the disdain was evident in my voice, because usually the only reason Faralin visited my patch was to gloat over how many parasites they’d eradicated in the last hundred years or so.

They actually kept *track*. They kept a tally, because they were unspeakably boring. So I usually just lied about how many I’d wiped out, and I tried to make sure they told me their figure first so I could always go higher.

“Am I not allowed to visit my sibling?”

I sniffed. “Well, I’d prefer if you asked ahead of time.”

Faralin huffed, sitting up straight to push back their hood and tilt their face up to the sky. They took a deep breath, flat nostrils flaring as their eyes slid shut. “At least the air smells cleaner here now.”

“Cleaner?” I snorted in derision. “Perhaps without the pollution, but the stinking river is right there. It’s not as bad as it was during the Middle Ages, though,” I added. “I had to plug my nose with herbs back then.”

From the corner of my eye, I saw Faralin look over at me. “How’s Wyn? Seen him recently?”

I scowled. “No. Yes. He’s a bastard, as always.”

“Still pining for him?”

That made me snort. “I have never *pined* for that decrepit swine. He was just a decent fuck.”

“I thought you wanted young with him.”

I wrinkled my nose. “No, Faralin. I *assumed* that if we all wanted to prevent our kind from dying out completely, Wyn and I would procreate. The pairing makes sense. He *is* the strongest. The most fearsome,” I begrudgingly admitted, then gestured at myself. “And I am the most impressive.”

“Are you?” Faralin asked mildly, making me scowl at them. “How many parasites have you destroyed recently, Orlith?”

“Many.”

“How many?”

“*Lots*.” I huffed impatiently and shoved back my hood. “If you came here simply to interrogate me, you can fuck off, Faralin.”

“I didn’t. I was just curious if you and Wyn were still... close. Because the rest of us have heard things.”

My spine stiffened. “What things?” I demanded. If the others had found out that I had essentially been replaced in Wyn’s bed by a *human*, I was going to—

“That he has imprinted on a human.”

My nostrils flared. I lifted my hood back over my head to cover my face. “Yes. Well. It would appear that our *mighty leader* Wyn has decided to slum it for the foreseeable future.”

Or possibly the entirety of his future, if I’m right in my suspicions about where they were going when I met his infuriatingly attractive little human man.

“You know he refuses to take on any kind of leadership role, as much as the rest of us might prefer some guidance in these uncertain times.” Faralin looked over at me. “But it’s true then? Wyn has imprinted on a human?”

“He’s probably just... getting something out of his system.” I waved a dismissive hand. “Indulging in a sordid little fantasy.”

He *did* have some very tangled feelings when it came to the humans. I would know, because he used to indulge in those sordid little fantasies with *me*.

Because Faralin was utterly boring and straitlaced and the *perfect telyth* in the eyes of our deceased parents, they wrinkled their flat nose and said, “A sordid fantasy about *humans*? But...

they're humans."

"Wyn is a dirty little bitch, Faralin," I said airily. "He's not just fantasising about them, is he? He's fucking one now."

And even worse than that, he was—I shuddered—apparently *in love* with one.

I absolutely could not understand what he got from a human. Yes, fine, *his* human had been nice looking. I supposed. For a human. But what did they talk about? Could the human do anything special? Did he do any tricks?

I very much doubted he could make Wyn as mindless with lust as I could. A fond smile tilted my lips as I gazed out at the ruined city of London, remembering the time I'd needled him until he flung me to the ground and rode my cock while clamping a hand over my mouth, gritting out that he was only doing it to shut me up. But I knew that was bollocks. He just couldn't resist me.

Well, apparently he could resist me now. *Apparently* he preferred having sex with an oily-skinned, fragile little human who... I don't know, had to piss out of his cock something like fifty times a day, and needed feeding at least once a week, and got all whiny about the things he apparently required to not die. Humans were all the same. How did Wyn even know how to take care of one? He paid even less attention to humanity than I did.

I couldn't remember the name of his human. Derry? Annie? Darius? But I *could* remember taking in the sight of him and wondering what, exactly, had captivated Wyn to the point of imprinting on him. He didn't even have horns to proudly show how virile he was. And he had *nipples*. I'd never understood humanity's obsession with nipples.

I *was* starting to wonder what it would be like to fuck a human though. I'd watched countless humans fucking over the years—it was probably the most interesting thing they ever did—but it had been nothing more than mild curiosity and boredom driving me to spy. Not *lust*.

Lusting after a human seemed almost... indecent. Maybe *that* was why Wyn was doing it. What a pervert.

"I don't think you should call him that, Orlith," Faralin said solemnly, back to gazing out at the ruined city. "But that is... a surprise, to say the least. I admit, some of us had hoped that you and Wyn would indeed bear young together."

"What?" I looked at them sharply. "Why?"

"For the reason you mentioned." They turned their sombre gaze to me. "What will happen to humanity when we are all gone, Orlith? When there are none of us left for the Wild Hunt?"

I looked away quickly, something unsettling twisting in my gut. I was the youngest, which meant I would be the last one. The sole telyth left.

Alone.

"Is humanity doomed to be another footnote and nothing more? We have seen it before, Orlith. The isdernucs are gone. The aytorin are reproducing less and less. We are down to just a handful of our own. And once we are all gone, what will happen to the humans? How long until the parasites wipe them out completely?"

I scowled. Of course Faralin was concerned over the humans. Not over their own brother being all alone once everyone else was gone.

"That is life," I snapped. "Species die out to make room for others."

"Is it fair to leave them to that fate, though? A fate wrought by a parasitic species not even of this world?" Their mismatched eyes turned to me. "They cannot defend themselves against something that isn't even supposed to be here, Orlith. It seems... cruel."

"Well we didn't create the bloody tears," I snapped. "It's not *our* fault the parasites got here."

“No,” they answered in an infuriatingly patient tone, “but we are the ones who can detect them and remove them safely. It is a never-ending battle, Orlith. We can never do enough. There are always more, always too many. I just...” They sighed, scrubbing both hands over their face. “I’m tired, but I know that I cannot stop despite knowing that ultimately, all of this is pointless.”

I side-eyed them with mild alarm. “Did you come here to subject me to your existential crisis, Faralin?”

It was quite unsettling seeing my unflappable older sibling look and sound so... uncertain. Lost.

They huffed without humour, dropping their hands. “Maybe I did.”

“I’d rather you didn’t.” I shifted on my perch as some uncomfortable emotion tightened my insides. Disdain? Guilt? No, that couldn’t be right. But still, I found myself looking for a way to... make them *feel better*. “You’ve said it to me yourself, Faralin—we’re not gods. It’s not our responsibility to worry about whether humanity survives or gets wiped out once we’re all gone.”

“Then what has been the point of our entire existences?” They gestured at the ruined city. “Why have we spent our lives hunting the parasites, ensuring they don’t overrun humanity?”

“Well *I* don’t know,” I snapped. “You told me I had to do it.”

“We think we’re so much better than all the others,” they murmured, more to themselves than to me. “Older and wiser and stronger. But are we? Or are we acting just the same as the parasites? Mindlessly carrying out some ingrained urge. Never questioning it. We hunt, we sleep, we hunt, we sleep. And then we are gone.”

“That’s all *you* do, perhaps.” I sniffed, raising my chin. “I do other things as well. I don’t really understand the point you’re trying to make, Faralin. Are you saying we *should* leave the humans to their fate, or we *shouldn’t*? Has it all been for nothing or not?”

“I don’t know.”

I rolled my eyes. “So you, what, came here to try and convince me to have young with Wyn so that our species continues and you can die safe in the knowledge that your precious *humans* will keep being protected?”

“I wasn’t going to try and convince you to do anything,” they said evenly. “I was just curious whether it was still a possibility. But it’s not, so. That’s that.”

“Well then.” I tugged stiffly on my coat sleeve. “Now that you’ve learned that my loins will not, in fact, be bringing forth the saviour of humanity, I’m sure you’re ready to leave.”

“That’s not the *only* reason I came, Orlith.” Faralin’s black-stained hand briefly gripped my shoulder. “I missed you.”

“Oh, do shut up, Faralin,” I snapped, feeling unaccountably flustered for some—no doubt disgusting—reason. I’d been here too long, probably. All the stupid emotions pouring off the humans were most likely addling my brain. “You’re just questioning the meaning of your entire existence and it’s making you overly emotional.”

They huffed, dropping their hand. “Yes, probably. How have you been, anyway? How long has it been since we last saw each other?”

Eighteen years, eleven months and six days. “I have absolutely no idea.”

“I admit, I’m still not used to this.” They gestured at the rotting remains of London. “What this world has become.”

I leaned back on one arm and inspected my fingernails. “One could argue it’s an improvement.”

“I don’t see how,” Faralin said doubtfully. I rolled my eyes. They had no sense of humour.

“Yes, well, at least we don’t have to be so secretive anymore.” I shrugged. “They know of us now.”

Faralin grunted, side-eyeing me. “You weren’t all that *subtle* before the tears widened though, were you?”

“I may have announced my presence once or twice.” I sniffed, reaching up to carefully adjust the fine gold chains draped over my horns. “But now I am *known*. They whisper about me. They are awestruck by me.” A smug smile tilted my lips.

“Is that something to be proud of? Being venerated? Being feared?”

“Good gods, Faralin, all this time alive and you are *still* the most boring creature in existence.”

They stiffened. “I am not boring. I travel. I do my duty.”

“Yes, and *you* were the one just saying that your life has been spent mindlessly doing that duty and nothing more. Sleep and hunt, that’s what you said. All you do is sleep and hunt.”

“Well, perhaps I will do something else.”

I turned my head sharply to take in their profile. “Like what?”

“I don’t know yet.”

“Well, *I’m* going to do something else as well,” I said quickly, not wanting to be one-upped by them.

They cocked a brow as they looked at me. “Oh? Are you feeling the way I am, then? Overcome with this... ennui.”

Ugh, they were so pompous. I ignored the strange feeling in my chest and snapped, “No, of course not. I just enjoy doing new things. Maybe I will...”

I cast about for something, looking out at the city for inspiration. In the distance, down a dirty dark street, I saw two humans scurrying along, sticking close to the buildings as they peered around every few seconds, clutching makeshift weapons in their hands.

“Maybe I’ll see what all the fuss is about with humans.”

Faralin looked at me sharply. “What do you mean? You can’t mean like...”

“Like Wyn, yes,” I said airily. If Wyn got to keep a human, why couldn’t I?

Even better... why couldn’t I have *Wyn’s* human? A little friendly competition never hurt anyone.

My mouth stretched into a wide, rabid smile. I already couldn’t wait to see the fury on Wyn’s face when I stole his human from him. He may be deliciously scarred and feral, and strong, with a fine set of horns that were nice and thick at the base, and had that rough, jagged texture near the tips that felt wonderful against my palms as I was shoving his snarling mouth onto my cock...

Blinking, I refocused on my new plan. Steal Wyn’s human from him. Yes. It wouldn’t be hard. I was far more beautiful, and I had plenty of trinkets to shower them with, and a nice big nest with a comfortable bed and extravagant clothes. *And* I wasn’t a filthy, antisocial swine who holed himself up in his nest between hunts and snarled at anyone who *dared* try and speak to him.

Perhaps we could even come to some sort of... arrangement. All three of us. The idea of fucking a human was *far* more appealing if Wyn would also be in the mix.

“Orlith, that seems... unwise.” Faralin sounded wary.

“If Wyn can do it, why can’t I?” I sniffed imperiously and rose to my feet. “It can’t be hard.”

“Orlith...”

“Lovely catching up with you, Faralin.” I swept a hand over the city. “Feel free to eradicate any parasites while you’re here. *If* you can find some.”

“They’re everywhere,” they said incredulously. “I can sense them *everywhere*, Orlith. Have you been hunting them at *all*?”

I didn’t bother to answer, already dissipating into black smoke and shooting down into the guts of the city. I’d head to the tear on the mainland, but I could make a few stops to terrify any roaming

humans on the way.

And then I would make myself comfortable in Wyn's nest as I waited for him to return to our world with his human in tow.

Prepare for battle, Wyn. Your little human is mine.

RUKE

MONSTROUS
A NOVELLA

LILY MAYNE

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Beta-reading and proofreading by [Kate Wood Proofreading](#)

Warning: *This m/m love story contains explicit sexual content and is not suitable for young readers. It also contains graphic depictions of violence and injury.*

CHAPTER ONE

Fun fact about me: I was born the night monsters rose on earth.

According to my dad, I was born almost to the minute of it happening, in a hospital in Texas close to where a big, gaping rip appeared in the air and monsters started pouring through it from some unknown world.

It had been a difficult birth, Dad said. My mom lost a lot of blood, and could barely lift her head even when the screaming started right outside the hospital. Even when nurses started sprinting through the hallways, shouting about *things* appearing and tearing people apart.

She was too weak to move when the hospital was overrun. It was pandemonium. Everyone was screaming and running and trying to escape. Patients were left abandoned in their beds and on operating tables. People were trampled in the mad rush to get out. So Dad did the only thing he could to protect me: he bundled me into his arms and ran.

He'd been frantic, already grieving the wife he'd had to leave behind, and he didn't trust anyone to look after his brand-new baby but him. So he'd gotten in the car while people were being massacred around him in the hospital parking lot, strapped me in as best he could, and driven.

Once I was old enough, he told me more about what he saw that night. The horrifying creatures with too many legs and sharp teeth and rabid, gleaming eyes. The way they ripped into human bodies like they were made of tissue paper, gorging themselves on what came out.

He told me about the screams and inhuman screeching and roaring that followed him all the way home. The crash he nearly got into when someone driving the opposite way swerved wildly as a huge, six-armed beast with dripping fangs launched itself at their car and tore into the metal with terrifying ease.

He told me about hearing the first of the military helicopters. The relentless gunfire that followed. Seeing military truck after military truck tear down the road, heading in the very direction he was desperately trying to flee.

He told me to protect me—to prepare me for the new world I was growing up in. One filled with monsters from our nightmares, where humans were no longer at the top of the food chain. Where life was a constant struggle for survival.

So, yeah. The moment the world turned to shit, I emerged into it pink and squalling and blissfully unaware that I was going to experience life very differently to every human being who had already been born.

Another fun fact about me: I hated people.

I hated the military. I hated raiders. I hated city humans, even though I'd never actually met one. I'd never stepped foot inside one of the military's 'safe zones' that eventually turned into the coastal cities, with their giant walls and watchtowers to keep the monsters out.

When I was younger, I would often ask my dad why he hadn't just taken us to a safe zone. Why he'd instead chosen to fend for us himself, looting a store for extra baby formula and diapers before barricading us inside our house until that initial bloodbath died down.

He'd always been a little paranoid, my dad, and he told me that people couldn't be trusted. That the government just wanted to control everyone and this would give them new ways to do it. He said the same thing when governments fell around the world and the military took over here.

For my entire life, it had been just me and my dad. Until three years ago. Thankfully it wasn't a monster that got him—heart attack. My throat still closed up when I thought about him, my chest

squeezing painfully tight and my gut hurting from missing him so much. But at least I'd been with him when he'd gone. We'd been laughing about something stupid, finding a little slice of happiness in this shitty world, and the next thing I knew he was on the ground, clutching at his chest. And then he was gone. It had been mercifully quick.

I buried him in the backyard. It took me an entire day to dig the hole, my skinny seventeen-year-old body not prepared for the awful task. After that, I left the remote farmhouse we'd lived in for a few years and started roaming. I didn't feel safe there without Dad. The comfort of him—his presence and strength and sheer fucking determination to keep me safe and warm and fed and *alive*—was gone. Suddenly all I could see were the gaps in the fence around the property that monsters or other people could slip through. The dwindling supplies we had carefully collected over the years. But mostly, all I could see was that fresh mound of earth in the backyard, with my crappy homemade grave marker in his memory.

So I packed a bag and took off. In the years that followed, I became a true master at evasion—evading unfriendly humans, evading the military, evading big wild animals, and evading monsters.

Anyway, that's my life story. And here I am now. Jamie Mayweather. Twenty years old—or was it twenty-one? I'd kind of lost count. It was hard to track time out here. I'd stopped growing just shy of six feet, and I was no longer quite so skinny and awkward after three years of fending for myself alone out here.

I wasn't, like, *feral* or anything. My dad made sure I could read and write, and speak properly. He made sure I knew *how* to interact with other people, he just told me it was safer not to.

So I didn't.

CHAPTER TWO

The Wastes—the lawless, monster-infested stretch of land that comprised almost the entirety of the United States now—were pretty crappy. Despite how few of them were out here, the raiders—those who chose to live outside of the city walls and away from the military’s “protection”—had stripped old stores, houses and factories of almost everything worthwhile over the last two decades.

It was hard finding anywhere that would make a decent home or temporary camp, despite the endless abandoned cities and towns and buildings. Monsters had made their nests in many, and some raiders liked to claim whole patches of land as their own, robbing or killing anyone who got too close.

But I’d found somewhere. A tiny little town, smack-dab in the middle of the country. Not even really a town. Just a single strip of buildings that had appeared like a dystopian oasis on the long, empty road I’d been trudging down, my back aching from my heavy pack and blisters forming on my feet.

It was approaching dusk when I reached it, and the nerves over having to sleep out in the open had been steadily growing. They dissipated in a rush of relief when I saw the lifeless stretch of ruined buildings. The air was dry and hot, the asphalt cracked under my boots as I walked down the silent street.

I hadn’t settled anywhere in the three years since Dad died. I’d just travelled around, spending a month at most in one place before moving on. I’d narrowly escaped with my life too many times over those years, hiding and running from monsters, raiders, the military. I was better at running than I was at fighting. Dad had always done the fighting when it’d been needed. He’d tried to stop me from having to do it.

I could still remember the first time he’d had to kill another person. I was seven. We’d been staying in a church, camping out in the old pastor’s office, and Dad had woken me with a hand over my mouth and hurried, whispered instructions to get in the cupboard and not make a single sound.

I’d already learned that it was safest to obey without question. As I hid in the cupboard, among musty robes and a stack of bibles that was uncomfortable against my butt, I’d heard voices in the chapel. Through the tiny gap in the cupboard doors, I could see Dad pressed up against the wall behind the closed office door, his barbed baseball bat clenched in both hands.

Nothing had happened for long minutes as my heart rabbited in my chest. I’d managed to suppress my terrified squeak when the door burst open, and through the gap I stared at the tall, broad man in a long leather coat with a crowbar in his hand. It had been dark, so I couldn’t make out his face—just the long, wild hair and dark mass of a beard. The sour smell of sweat and unwashed clothes had filled the small room, and as I pressed my eye against the gap to get a better look, the cupboard doors twitched.

The man’s head jerked in my direction. I saw the gleam of white teeth as he grinned, taking a step closer.

“We saw you come in here, boy.” His voice was gravelly, sending shivers down my spine. “Where’s your daddy? Left you all alone? Why don’t you come out and we’ll find you something nice to eat? Bet you’re hungry, huh?”

Before he could take another step, Dad had launched himself out from behind the door and swung that bat at his face.

I’d squeezed my eyes shut, but I’d heard it. The sickening impact—wet, yet still crunchy. The

weak, shocked cry that turned into a gurgle, followed by a heavy thud. Another voice further away shouted in alarm, and then footsteps pounded, and I'd tried to prepare myself to hear those horrible sounds again. Or worse. To hear my dad get cut down or beaten to death.

But the others had run, not willing to risk it. I'd kept my eyes shut, burying my face in my knees, as I listened to the sounds of Dad breathing hard and dragging the body out of the room. I didn't know where he put it. I heard him mopping up the blood with something, splashing water over his hands, barricading the door, and then he was easing the cupboard doors open and crouching down, wrapping his arms around me tight when I launched myself at him.

I could still remember the way his body shook wildly against me. The unsteadiness in his voice as he'd tried to soothe me, whispering that I was safe, that he'd never let anyone hurt me or take me. Once I was calmer, he'd set me down on my sleeping bag and told me to try and get to sleep. I hadn't for a long time. I'd watched him sit up straight for hours, bat clenched in his fists as he stared at the door. Waiting.

He hadn't had to kill that many people over the years that followed, and I hadn't killed any at all. So I was justifiably nervous as I approached the little town, as I always was, trying to mentally prepare myself for any eventuality.

I had Dad's old weapon—a baseball bat with long nails hammered through it and barbed wire wrapped carefully around the top half. I gripped it in both hands as I made my way slowly past the buildings, listening carefully for any sounds coming from within.

There was an old convenience store on my left. I could see from here that it was completely empty, the windows smashed and shelves upturned, no doubt by raiders desperately trying to find a last morsel of food over the years. The hardware store next to it looked equally trashed, as did the deli on its other side.

To my right was a coffee and cake shop, its faded wooden sign declaring it *Barb's Sweet Treats* in curly letters. When I looked up, I noticed the windows above were still intact.

Sleeping above street level was always a bonus. I made a note of the side door that no doubt led up to the apartment above, before continuing my way down the street.

It took a long time, but I methodically checked every single building. Dad had taught me many tricks for survival over the years, and preventing the possibility of being caught unawares was one of the most important ones. Especially when it came to some monsters—the kinds that hid in shadows and suspended from ceilings and in the corners of dank, dark basements, just waiting for an unsuspecting human or animal to wander into their nest.

But monsters weren't my biggest concern. If my entire life spent out here in the Wastes had taught me anything, it was that other humans were the dangerous ones. Monsters mostly just wanted to be left alone. There were some that preyed on humans, but they were driven by instinct. More predictable.

Humans were unpredictable.

The town was empty and lifeless, and most of the buildings had been stripped down to their bones. That didn't matter. I had enough food and water for tonight, and I'd go out in the morning to hunt for meat. I may not have killed any humans, but I'd killed plenty of animals for food. I didn't enjoy it, but that was life. I didn't have the luxury of going to stores to buy neatly carved meat wrapped in cellophane, or fresh vegetables, or snacks and soda. I knew how to hunt and forage. I knew how to keep myself alive, thanks to my dad.

Once I was certain there was nothing here, I made my way back down the now-dark street to the door next to *Barb's Sweet Treats*. The lock had been busted at some point, and the door swung open easily, revealing a narrow corridor with a staircase dead ahead. Before I went in, I cast a single

longing glance at the cake shop next door. I wondered what real, freshly baked cake tasted like. And coffee. I'd never had coffee, but Dad had lamented the loss of it right up until his death, so it must have been good.

I tried to close the door behind me as best I could. The chain was still intact, so I slid it across and hoped it held. Making my way up the stairs in silence, I could feel the grittiness of the old carpet under my boots. It stank of damp in here, which didn't make me hopeful for what I'd discover in the apartment I planned to sleep in.

I was still gripping the bat as I pushed open the apartment door slowly. This was the last place to check. It was dark, but enough moonlight was coming in through the windows to let me make out the shape of an old couch with a useless TV opposite, a coffee table and armchair. A small kitchen was to my left, all the cabinet doors open and empty. Across from the living room were two dark doorways.

I took a single step in and stopped, listening. Nothing but silence greeted me. I didn't have a flashlight—not that I would have been able to get batteries for it if I did—and my palms were sweating as I took another step inside. I normally made sure to scope out a place before it got dark, but I'd reached the town at dusk and it had taken a long time to check all the other buildings.

I strained my eyes as I stepped deeper into the apartment, softly closing the door behind me. There was an upturned bookcase next to the window, books strewn over the floor. I carefully stepped over one and headed for the two dark doors. My heart was hammering as I inched inside the first room. No matter how many times I did this, it never got easier. Fear of something or someone being startled by my presence and trying to kill me never lessened.

Humans were the ones who tended to lash out—to kill first and think later. Animals and monsters warned you. Let you know that you were entering their territory, and that you better get out before they had to defend it.

The window in here was tiny, but I could make out a toilet and a sink with a cracked mirror above it. The shower curtain over the bath was long gone. Backing out of the bathroom, I pushed open the other door fully and stared inside.

There was still a mattress on the bed.

Exhaustion hit me with the force of a truck. I made sure to check the entire room first, peering into the closet and under the bed. Blessedly empty.

Shedding my backpack and carefully setting down my bat against the nightstand, I toed off my boots before stripping the dusty bottom sheet off the bed. The covers were gone, but I had a blanket stuffed in my bag that suited me fine. After shrugging off my coat, I pulled out the blanket and got settled on the bed, curling up on my side facing the door.

There was nothing but silence. The kind that pressed on your ears and made you too aware of the lack of noise—too aware of your own heartbeat and the blood pumping around your body. But I was used to it. I'd grown used to being alone. Alone was safer, now that Dad was gone.

I kept one hand stretched out toward the edge of the mattress, my bat within easy reach as I slowly drifted off to sleep.

CHAPTER THREE

In the two weeks I'd been in this tiny town, I'd employed every survival tactic Dad had taught me. After locating a nearby water source in the form of a small river, I decided to stay here for a while. I was tired. Tired of constantly moving, constantly having to scope out new places so I'd be able to sleep without the threat of being killed.

This place was deserted, and there was nothing else around for miles. I hadn't passed any raider camps for more than two weeks as I'd been heading this way, and there was nothing left for them to come and scavenge. There were no signs of any monsters ever having lived here.

This place felt good.

After establishing that I'd have a supply of the basics—water and food, courtesy of the nearby the river and a small forest where I could forage and hunt for game—I got to work making this town my hidden fortress.

I discovered an old sledgehammer at the back of the hardware store. The head was a little wobbly, but it held out long enough for me to smash my way through several internal walls to create a network of exits. That had been Dad's most important rule—make sure you could never be trapped and cornered. Always have another way out—several, if possible.

I found spots in the upper floors of buildings where I could see the street clearly, so I could watch for any humans or monsters who might get close. I made my base in the apartment I'd slept in on the first night, creating a barricade with furniture that I could heave in front of the door. I found a building where the ceiling had partially collapsed and made my firepit in there, so I wouldn't have to sit outside when I was boiling water or cooking meat.

I talked to myself while I did all this. I didn't want to be with anyone else, but being completely alone did get to me sometimes. It had always been Dad and me doing this before, laughing and joking while we worked to make it go quicker. The silence of the Wastes could be unnerving at times. Knowing I was a lone human with no one else around for miles was equal parts unsettling and reassuring.

And in the time I'd been here, I hadn't seen a soul. No raiders or nomads had passed the town. Not even a single trader roaming the Wastes, visiting camps and underground raider markets to trade goods they'd smuggled out of the cities.

The only monsters nearby were the small, harmless ones I'd seen before, and they were in the forest. There were some kinds I knew I could eat—when we'd had no other options, Dad had killed them for meat before, not letting me eat any until he'd tried some and waited eight hours to see if it would affect him badly.

Only once, when I'd been sitting by my fire after I'd eaten my dinner, had I thought I felt eyes on me. I'd been carefully scraping the last of the meat and gristle off the bones of the small animal I'd consumed, because bones were useful for all kinds of things after they'd been hardened with fire.

The rest of the room was in shadow. I'd cleared out anything that could catch light if the fire sparked and popped, so it was a big empty space, but I knew there was nothing in here but me. I'd boarded up the windows, taking screws from old cupboard doors with my trusty screwdriver and using the sledgehammer head to nail boards over the frames. The only ways in or out of here were the closed door, the hole I'd made in the floor to get downstairs if I needed a quick escape, which I'd covered with an old cupboard door, and the gap in the roof.

It was up there that I could have sworn, for just a second, I felt a presence. Something watching me

through the smoke drifting up from my fire. Without looking up, I carefully set down the bone and my small knife, and slowly picked up my bat. Only then did I lift my eyes to the hole, but I couldn't see anything. If there'd been a head peering over, I would've seen it against the night sky, blocking out the swathe of stars.

Nothing.

The next morning, I carefully climbed up onto the flat roof of the building to see if something was living up there. There was nothing up there, and I'd been reluctant to walk too far onto the roof seeing as it had already partially collapsed.

I surveyed my new kingdom while I was up there, resting my weight on my bat. The sun was shining, a few wispy clouds marring the perfect blue of the sky. In the near distance, the small forest rustled peacefully, and sunlight glinted off the water of the river. The town below me was still and quiet. It probably should have felt eerie to me—a place built by humans now empty and deserted.

But this was what I was used to. This felt natural. I was a child of the new world. I'd never experienced life differently. Scavenging and hunting and using everything I found to survive had been ingrained in me almost from birth. I'd never known the luxury of sleeping in a nice, secure house where no person or creature could suddenly barge in to try and rob or kill me. Or opening a refrigerator and finding cold drinks and fresh food, just sitting there *waiting* for me to eat and drink whenever I wanted.

The idea of it was almost laughable. Being able to get anything I wanted? Walking into a store and leaving with something someone *else* had cooked or baked or hunted or grown in exchange for a useless scrap of paper with an old man's face printed on it? The only concept I had of money was what Dad had explained to me. Why hadn't people traded the things they didn't want for something useful? Like a knife or water or firewood? Old-world humans had been so weird.

Once I'd established that nothing was living up here, I made my way back down and got started checking out all the buildings to make sure nothing had snuck in during the night. I'd toyed with the idea of constructing tripwires attached to makeshift bone chimes so I'd be able to hear if anyone set foot inside the town's perimeter, but the problem was that it was so quiet out here, they would have heard it too. Humans would know straight away that it was some kind of signal—and humans were the ones who worried me the most.

As I did my daily rounds, I noticed some loose floorboards in the old cake shop, so I ripped them up and carried them with me, figuring I'd find a use for them. I also found a fat roll of twine, which had confused me at first, but it was next to a stack of pink and cream boxes with the shop's logo on the front. Maybe they'd put the cakes in the boxes and secured them with twine to make them look nice. Not the best use, but whatever—it was mine now.

Once I was sure my town was still empty, I went back to the apartment to dump the stuff I'd collected. I'd smashed through the walls to my fireroom so that I wouldn't have to keep going out onto the street to get to it. I ducked through the gap and made my way through the old apartments to refill my canteen with the water I'd already boiled and left to cool.

When I stepped inside the fireroom, I stopped dead.

In a tidy bundle beside my firepit were bones.

They looked like small animal bones, but they weren't the ones I'd kept from my catches. Those were blackened and still sitting at the side of the room, where I'd put them after leaving them over the smouldering fire last night to harden.

Gripping my bat hard in one fist, my palm growing damp with nerves, I took a single step closer. My eyes darted up to the hole in the ceiling, but there was nothing there. Maybe... maybe a bird had

flown overhead and dropped them. But then they would have landed in the ash from my fire, and these were piled in a somewhat neat stack. They definitely hadn't dropped from the roof.

I looked around the room, checking for any holes where a small animal or monster could have scurried inside with their catch to eat. The hole I'd made in the floor was still covered. The door had been shut before I'd opened it.

The only way in was the roof. I looked back up, staring hard until the bright sky made my eyes burn. It was completely silent. I couldn't hear anything moving up there. Slowly, I walked over to the bones and crouched. They looked like they'd been picked clean, no flesh or fat still clinging to them.

Unease made my skin prickle. Something had *been* here. Straightening back up, I looked up at the roof again. My gut instinct was to pack up and move on. Something had made it in and back out of my town without me seeing. It wasn't safe.

But... fuck, I was tired. Tired of walking for miles every day, looking for the next relatively safe place to sleep. Tired of worrying about whether I'd find a water source before my canteen ran empty. Tired of constantly staying alert, scanning the horizon for monsters or people.

Not for the first time, I regretted ever leaving the old farmhouse Dad and I had been living in before he died. That place had felt safe until he'd been gone, and maybe if I'd just stuck it out, pushed past the grief, I could've felt safe there again.

But the thought of living with his body in the backyard... no. Even now, three years later, when the grief had lessened from an overwhelming throb of agony in my chest to more of a low, constant ache that I could sometimes ignore, I knew I couldn't have stayed there. I had to carve out a life for myself out here, without him. Alone.

Defiant anger made me glare up at the hole in the roof. I wasn't going to let some unseen creature drive me away, not after I'd spent all this time making this place feel safe. And if something had come in here from the roof, the odds were it hadn't been a human. That made me feel marginally better. I knew raiders were terrified of monsters, but I could handle monsters better. Other people scared me.

Other people were cruel and calculating. Other people would try and kill me to take my stuff. That incident in the church had been burned into my memory. At the time, I hadn't considered why some men would want to take a little boy out here. Why they'd watched us and come in to try and lure me away. But I understood now.

Monsters didn't do that. Monsters acted on instinct. They left you alone unless they were hungry and you looked like a good meal, or you accidentally wandered into their territory. I knew there were some humanoid monsters out here—intelligent ones who could speak and were capable of rational thought. I'd never met any. They seemed to be rarer.

And I doubted an intelligent monster would do something as weird as leave a pile of bones in a human camp. Why would they? Unless something truly insidious had found me and was trying to freak me out—messing with my mind to scare me for fun.

Hand still gripping my bat, I bent down to scoop up the bones. Whatever had left them here obviously didn't want them, and I could use them.

And if the unseen bone deliverer came back, I'd be ready for them.

CHAPTER FOUR

When I went back to my fireroom later that day to cook my dinner, there was another pile of bones.

They appeared to be bird bones, delicate and hollow, and beside them was a stack of black feathers. I collected them up and set them to one side, trying not to feel too freaked out as I cooked my dinner and glanced up at the roof every two seconds.

The next morning, after doing my rounds, I decided to risk the precarious roof and make some kind of grate so it wasn't just an open hole to the sky. Behind one of the stores I found the remnants of a chain-link fence, which was rusted and brittle enough for me to prop up against the brick wall of the building and snap a section off. If something with mass tried to get through it, they could, but I didn't have much else. Besides, I was pretty sure something small was creeping in to eat its meals in peace. I figured this would be a deterrent, if nothing else.

I was sweating as I crawled over to the hole in the roof above my fireroom, convinced the entire thing was going to collapse and I'd break a leg plummeting to the floor below. But it held, allowing me to place the piece of fence over the hole and weigh it down with bricks. A shoddy safety measure, but it would have to do.

That evening, though, more bones appeared. My scalp tingled as I stared at them after walking into the room to refill my canteen. Eyes darting up to the ceiling, I saw my makeshift vent still in place. Gritting my teeth and trying not to let fear overwhelm me, I scoured every inch of the room for holes. I dropped down to the floor below and searched that too, looking for any possible way something was getting in. There was nothing.

The urge to leave rose again. But something was telling me... whatever this was, it didn't seem to want to hurt me. It may not have even been a monster. It could have just been some small animal that brought its meals in here to eat where it wouldn't have to fight other animals for its catch.

Whatever it was, it never appeared while I was around. I'd seen no sign of it anywhere else. I was reluctant to leave this place. It felt good, and despite my unseen bone collector, it felt *safe*. That was rare out here.

I decided to stay for the time being. If anything more insidious appeared beside my fire—like, I don't know, a human head or something—I'd leave. But for now, I grudgingly accepted that I was sharing this town with some other small creature.

The next day, it hadn't left bones. It'd left a small pile of sticks. The day after that, it was an empty bird's nest. Then an old terracotta plant pot, one side cracked and the other chipped off completely. Then the head of an old rake.

When I stepped into the fireroom one morning and saw a mound of smooth river stones, my mouth quirked just slightly as I glanced up at the vent over the hole in the ceiling.

Were these... gifts?

Deciding to test it, I collected the stones and set them at the side of the room with the other objects I had mysteriously received. Then I went searching in the town, returning with a few of the soft, useless cardboard boxes from the cake shop. I put them by the fire and glanced up at the ceiling once before leaving.

When I returned later that day, the boxes were gone. In their place was a waterlogged book, caked in dirt and the cover wrinkled and faded beyond recognition. I let out a single bark of incredulous laughter before my eyes darted warily up to the ceiling.

Approaching the book, I knelt down and carefully picked it up. The pages felt like thin cloth, so

fragile that they would tear with even the slightest bit of rough handling. The book looked a little waterlogged, some of the pages unreadable. But my mouth tipped into a tiny smile as I straightened with it in my hand.

After that, it turned into something of a game. I'd leave something by the fire when I went to bed—a broken coffee mug, or a particularly picturesque leaf I saw in the forest, or an old, crushed soda can. Stuff I couldn't use. And each morning, it was always gone, replaced by something else. Fish bones, a dirty old jar, a single ancient sneaker that was falling apart. I cleaned the jar and stored the river rocks and tiny bones in it.

I still hadn't seen a single glimpse of whoever or whatever was leaving me these gifts. But the unease had faded. Maybe that was stupid, but... it was kind of nice knowing someone else was around. That I was interacting with another being, even in this distant way. I hadn't spoken to a single person for three years.

One night, as I was roasting my dinner over the fire, I cleared my throat and hesitantly spoke. "If you're... here, you can come out."

It was probably a really bad idea to suggest it, but we'd been leaving things for each other for over a week now. I was intrigued. I still had no idea how they were getting into the fireroom—my makeshift vent over the hole in the ceiling was still in place. The windows were boarded up, and the cupboard door over the hole in the floor hadn't moved. I knew, because I'd placed tiny stones around its edge so I could see if they'd been shifted to one side.

Nothing answered me. I tried not to feel too disappointed and ate my dinner in silence, ignoring the ache in my chest. I suspected it was no longer just missing Dad, but a hollow sense of loneliness. I'd surmised from how closely packed together homes tended to be out here that humans were naturally drawn to each other. They clustered together, forming communities. Maybe people weren't meant to be as completely alone as I was.

But the thought of sneaking into one of the cities or joining a raider camp made me break out in a cold sweat. I wouldn't even know how to get into a city, and I was pretty sure raiders weren't all that amenable to strangers wandering up to their camps and asking to be let in. They were likely to kill me on sight if I even tried.

And I didn't *want* to be around a lot of people. After a lifetime of having only a single companion, the thought of being surrounded by people at all times was terrifying.

But... I wouldn't have minded having one other person to be with. One person would be okay. I could handle that. Someone I could trust and talk to during the day. Someone who I knew would be sleeping nearby in the dark, so I didn't feel so insignificant.

But that wasn't going to happen. The closest thing I had to a friend was the unseen bone collector leaving me weird gifts, and they obviously didn't want to show themselves to me.

After finishing my dinner, I banked the fire and placed my nightly offering on the floor. Tonight, it was something with a bit more value. An intact metal flask, which I'd cleaned thoroughly. I could have used it, but... I kind of wanted to give them a gift that actually meant something. An item that was useful and valuable out here, as a thanks for fending off the crushing loneliness just a little. I was pretty sure they were at least somewhat intelligent by this point, so hopefully they understood the item's worth.

"Goodnight," I said quietly before I left the room. I couldn't help but glance up at the ceiling, even though I knew nothing was there.

The next morning, the flask had been replaced by a dead rabbit.

A wide grin stretched my mouth as I approached and crouched beside it. The blood had already

been drained, but a smear of it on the animal's neck was still wet and faintly warm, as was its body. It was fresh.

Guess I didn't have to go hunting today. I was in a good mood as I made the fire and dressed the kill, talking to myself—and maybe to my unseen companion, if they were listening nearby. I cut a small amount of meat off to roast for my breakfast, already thinking about what gift I could leave tonight that was as good as this.

I took the rest of the catch down to a basement that stayed cold, which was where I stored extra meat when I had a good day of hunting. Then I started searching the town for something to offer in exchange. In the end, I collected up my jar of stones and tiny bones, and the roll of twine, and set up by my lookout post at one end of the town.

After ruining a couple of the stones trying to drill holes through them with my screwdriver, I concentrated on the bones instead. Some of them I hadn't hardened yet, so they were soft enough for me to make holes in, and I threaded them in a pattern onto a length of twine.

The end result looked pretty barbaric—a necklace of tiny bones—but I thought it was a good gift. I was too excited to wait until tonight to leave it for my mysterious companion, so I took it to the fireroom and set it down, then left to collect water from the river.

At dusk, I got the rabbit from the basement and took it up to the fireroom, my gut fizzing with excitement. I grinned when I saw that the necklace was gone. I hoped they liked it.

But as I built the fire and roasted the rest of the rabbit, I couldn't help feeling a little disappointed. A part of me had hoped that this gift would be the one that would make them show themselves. Maybe to thank me? I didn't even know.

I ate my dinner in silence, ears straining for any tiny sound that would suggest they were nearby. The crackle of the fire normally soothed me, but tonight it just made me feel unbearably lonely. Like a tiny, insignificant speck in this vast wasteland, all alone and without any greater purpose except to survive. Maybe that was enough—just being—and I knew I should be grateful for it. Grateful that I hadn't been torn to shreds or eaten whole as a baby by a monstrous being. Grateful that my dad had kept me safe and alive in the best way he knew how.

But at the same time, the thought of this—of being alone for the rest of my life, living in utter silence in a deserted patch of land—was bleak. Sometimes, a wave of anger would rise up when I thought about Dad making the decision to stay out here instead of heading to one of the military's safe zones when the monsters came twenty years ago. If I'd grown up around lots of people, I'd have been used to it. I could have gone to school and made friends. Got a job. Found someone.

Maybe I wouldn't have developed such a deep sense of mistrust for other people. I was sure there *were* good people out there. Dad had been good. I liked to think I was good—I didn't try to rob or kill anyone. I didn't kill monsters unless they tried to kill me first. When I had to kill for food, I made it clean and quick and as painless as possible.

But guilt and grief always chased away the resentment fast. Dad had done his best. He'd done what he believed was right. He hadn't known he was going to die younger than he should have.

I was so lost in my thoughts that the sound of the vent above the fire shifting slightly didn't register at first. When the soft scrape of a brick being moved drifted down, I froze.

At the third noise, I grabbed my bat and scrambled up and away from the fire, my heart pounding as I stared up at the dark hole.

“If—If you're the one leaving things, you can come in,” I heard myself say, my voice husky with nerves. “But I have a weapon. If you try to hurt me, I'll defend myself.”

I heard a soft, low trill that definitely didn't sound like anything from this world. I couldn't see

much, the smoke from the fire obscuring what was up there, but then I saw the stars above wink in and out as the fencing was moved out of the way.

My breath caught in my throat when a dark shape appeared, blocking out the sky. Something slunk through the hole. Long and lean, humanoid in shape, but... did they have *four* arms? Two were gripping onto the edge of the hole, while another set curled around to cling onto the ceiling.

A bolt of fear flashed through me when they made it completely through the hole but somehow... stuck to the ceiling, even though it was smooth with no beams or fixtures. They remained there, unmoving for a moment, before gracefully dropping down, making me jump and jerk back a step.

I could make out dark skin. Rangy limbs. A smooth head with no discernible ears on its sides. The fire was between us, but as the monster slowly straightened to their full height, our eyes locked through the smoke and flames.

My bone collector was finally here.

CHAPTER FIVE

I couldn't speak as I stared at the monster. Their four arms hung loose by their sides, the two extra ones protruding under their armpits, attached to the sides of their lean, flat chest. Their muscles were defined but rangy, and as the firelight flickered over them, their skin looked dark green with a faint sheen, like it might have been wet. Their hands were big, with three slightly webbed fingers and a thumb. Their fingertips were wide and flat—kind of like a frog's.

Like their build, their face was humanoid. Their eyes were very large and solid black, the orange flames dancing in them. Their nose was tiny, almost doll-like, and their mouth was small with flat lips. They didn't have any hair that I could see, and their chin was pointed, making their head look like an upturned teardrop.

They looked kind of like an alien.

They were staring back at me in silence. Then I saw their throat bob as they let out another low trill, but this one sounded like a question. The inflection at the end was different. They stayed perfectly still, as if they didn't want to spook me, but their features were inhuman enough that I couldn't be sure of their expression.

Standing up straight, they were taller than me. Their legs were long, but I couldn't see their feet thanks to the fire. They weren't wearing any clothes, but there was just a smooth mound between their legs—not that I looked there for too long.

When I cleared my throat nervously, I saw two tiny flaps on either side of their head lift and flutter at the sound. Their ears?

“H-hi,” I said quietly.

Their head cocked at the sound of my voice, and two of their hands twitched as they let out another soft trill. This one sounded more excited.

They said a few words in a totally inhuman language—clicks and long rolling *Rs* and more trills. I managed not to jump when they suddenly raised one of their four hands, and a hollow tinkling noise jerked my gaze down.

They had the necklace I'd made wrapped around their wrist. The sight of it calmed me just a little—this was definitely my bone collector, my unseen visitor who had left me gifts. Not just some other monster who had crept their way in here.

My mouth tilted into a tiny smile. “Did you like it?”

Their head cocked again, and they peered intently at my face before following my gaze to their wrist. When they looked back up at me, their small mouth had widened into what I thought was a smile. They shook their wrist, making the bones jangle, and said something else. I chuckled warily.

“I'll assume that's a yes.” Swallowing, I offered the monster a nervous smile of my own. “Can you—Can you understand me?”

They bobbed their head from side to side in such a human-seeming gesture that my smile widened.

“Lee—tol.” The one word was followed by a click and short trill.

“Lee—Little?” I asked. “You understand me a little?”

“Ssspeak—lee-tol.”

My gut lurched with excitement. “You can speak a little English? My language?”

“Lee-tol,” they repeated, but gave me another smile.

“Okay.” I looked around, then hesitantly sank down to sit cross-legged on the floor, resting my bat beside me. “Do you—want to sit down?”

I didn't know if they understood me or decided to copy what I did, but they gracefully sat down on the floor on the other side of the fire. It was harder to see their face now, and I tried to peer past the flames.

"Um—you can come around here. If you want." For some reason, my cheeks warmed. In case they didn't understand me, I gestured for them to come and sit closer.

Slowly, they slunk around the fire on all fours—well, sixes. The predatory grace of their prowling made my heart stutter for a second, but then the monster stopped a few feet away and crossed their legs, mirroring my pose.

"Um..." I fiddled with the fabric of my pants, feeling unaccountably nervous. "I'm Jamie." I placed a hand on my chest. "Jamie."

The monster's head cocked again. Now that they were closer, I could definitely see those small flaps on the sides of their head fluttering every time I spoke. They looked almost like tiny gills, but I was pretty sure they were ears.

They let out a trill, then said, "Jay—mee."

A huge smile split my face. I couldn't remember the last time anyone had said my name—I couldn't remember the last time I heard Dad say it before he died.

"Yeah. Jamie." I patted my chest again, then gestured at the monster.

They slowly lifted a hand to their chest and patted it like I had. "Ruke."

It came out long and rolling—*Rrrruuke*. I attempted to roll my *Rs* the same way but failed. Laughing a little, I said, "Is Ruke okay?"

The monster let out an excited trill and patted their chest again. "*Lo*. Ruke."

Lo. I wondered if that meant yes.

"So, um..." I struggled to think of what to say—what they might understand. Gesturing at the necklace around their wrist, I asked, "You liked the necklace, then?"

Ruke had leaned forward as I spoke, listening intently. Then their small mouth tilted up, and they shook their wrist to make the bones jangle.

"*Lo. Yah ji*, Jay—mee." Gesturing at the pile of gifts at the side of the room, they let out a string of clicks and trills and rolling sounds too fast for my brain to truly register.

Chuckling, I glanced over at all the trinkets they'd brought me. "Yeah, your gifts were great. Thank you."

"Ttthh-enk—yoo." A hand jerked up. "*Yah ji*. Ttthh-enk—yoo."

"*Yah ji* means thank you?" I asked uncertainly, and they made the hand motion again. I wondered if it was the equivalent of a human nod.

"*Lo. Yah ji ma* thank yoo." Leaning forward again, their big black eyes blinked once—sideways. "Ssspeak—more, Jay-mee."

They wanted me to speak more? I wasn't used to speaking to anyone at all. My mind was suddenly completely blank at the request. I licked my lips nervously and cast about for something to say.

"Okay, um... I—I'm sorry if this is your... territory. Thank you—I mean, *yah ji* for sharing it with me. I can go if you want."

That last bit came out wooden. The thought of packing up and heading back out into the Wastes, walking for days and days until I found somewhere else remotely safe, made me miserable. Especially now that... someone else was here.

"Goh?" Ruke repeated, head cocking.

"Yeah." I mimed packing stuff into a bag, then used two of my fingers to show a person walking.

Ruke's eyes widened, and their hand jerked up to make a different motion. "*Pe*. N-no. No goh."

I pursed my lips to try and fight off the smile, failing when Ruke blinked at me with wide, innocent eyes.

“Okay,” I said. “I won’t go.”

Their mouth tilted again. “Thenk yoo.”

“So, um... How do you know some English? Have you... talked to other humans before?”

I felt a ridiculous pinch in my chest at the thought of it.

“No.” Ruke made that hand gesture again, which I was guessing was like a headshake. Then they reached up a hand to tap the gill-like flap on the side of their head. “L-lee—sen. No talk.”

I nodded, but a low hum of unease gathered in the pit of my stomach. “Do people come here then? For you to listen to them talk? Um... humans.” I pointed at myself, then gestured vaguely around us. “Come here?”

Ruke’s head did that cute side-to-side bobble again. “No—long time.”

I was hoping that meant people hadn’t been here for a long time.

“Okay.” I tried desperately to think of something else to say, my eyes landing on the rest of the roasted rabbit beside the fire. “Um, are you hungry?”

I scooted forward and reached out to snag the old wooden chopping board I used as a plate. Sitting back, I set it between us and gestured at the meat. “Go ahead.”

Ruke didn’t move. They looked between me and the meat, their head cocking again.

Laughing, I snagged a piece of meat and held it out to them. “Hungry? Food?”

“Fffood.” Hesitantly, they reached out and took the chunk. “*Peran*. Sshhare?”

“Yes!” I nodded encouragingly. “Share. Share food. You caught it, so you deserve to eat some.”

Letting out a trill, they lifted the meat to their mouth and stuffed it in, making me laugh again. Taking my own piece, I chewed slowly as I watched them.

“That was meant to be a necklace, by the way,” I said dryly, nodding down at the bones on their wrist. “But it looks good as a bracelet too.”

“Neck—luss?”

Wiping my greasy fingers on my pants, I shuffled forward and reached out, but froze. “Um, is this okay? If I touch you?”

Ruke was gazing at me with big liquid eyes. I saw their throat bob as they swallowed the meat. “Touch. *Lo*—yes.”

Nerves rising again, I carefully unwound the necklace from their wrist. Their skin wasn’t wet, but it had an unusual texture that was smooth and slightly bumpy at the same time. It was warm. I could feel their eyes watching my fingers on their wrist, and when I lifted the necklace up, my face went hot.

Gesturing at my own neck, I said, “It goes around your neck.”

“Neck,” they repeated, staring at my throat. “Neckluss.”

Chuckling, I said, “Yeah. Shall I put it on?”

One hand quickly rose to give that affirmative gesture, and then they held completely still as I leaned in to carefully drape the twine-and-bone necklace around their neck. It snagged on something at their nape, but they didn’t make any noises of pain. My fingers fumbled as I tied a knot, securing it, before sitting back.

“There.” I smiled at them. “Looks great.”

Ruke glanced down and gently pulled the necklace away from their throat so they could see it. Then they looked back up at me, another smile tilting their small mouth.

“Yes, Jay-mee. Great.”

CHAPTER SIX

Ruke picked up English shockingly fast.

They asked me to talk all the time, so I did, until my voice was hoarse and my throat hurt. Now that they'd shown themselves, they started turning up far more often. At first, they'd shyly creep into the fireroom in the evenings when I was cooking. Then they'd already be waiting for me when I went in there. We'd eat together and talk, learning each other's languages—although Ruke was learning English far quicker than I was picking up their language full of clicks and rolling sounds and trills. Some of the sounds I just couldn't form with my human throat and tongue.

After about a week, they showed up one morning, and I got my first proper look at them in full daylight. Their skin was a deep green, and there were more feathery, gill-like protrusions on the back of their neck and trailing down their spine before tapering off at their tailbone.

Ruke preferred to move around on hands and feet as they accompanied me around the town. They could move ridiculously fast when they wanted to, and they demonstrated their ability to cling to smooth surfaces like walls and ceilings multiple times, scurrying up to reach things for me or eagerly show me something.

They let me inspect their wide, flat fingertips with curiosity one day. The pads felt grippy—not quite sticky, but there was a definite tackiness to them. In turn, they carefully felt my dirty blond hair, which I hacked off when it got too long. When I grinned up at them, they'd let out a low trill that I was certain was their version of laughter.

I wanted to know how to correctly refer to them—not that there was anyone else here for me to talk about them to—so we muddled our way through a conversation about gender. In stilted English, Ruke explained to me that their kind were all the same, with no biological differences between them. When I tried to explain human gender, they made a noise of understanding and pointed at me questioningly.

“Me?” I asked. “I—um, I'm male, which means I go by he. He and him.”

“Yes.” They nodded, which they'd picked up from me. “Me. Yes. Same as you.”

Okay, that was useful to know, even if only for my own thought processes.

Soon, Ruke was spending every day with me, only leaving when I went to bed. He'd carefully replace the vent over the fire every time he came or went, and he still sometimes showed up with gifts, which he'd shyly hand me, letting out a pleased trill when I grinned and thanked him.

He was always wearing the necklace I'd made him, which made my belly warm with pleasure. I caught him toying with it sometimes while we ate, one hand up at his throat while two others delicately tore the meat of the animal we were eating from the bone.

I was amazed by his dexterity. Sometimes when I was exhausted, I could barely get both my hands to cooperate. Ruke could do four things at once with ease. One hand could reach out and stoke the fire the way I'd showed him, while two others were carefully picking bones free of flesh, and the fourth was fiddling with his necklace.

He got this cute look on his face when he was concentrating. His smooth forehead would furrow over his big black eyes, and his little dark green tongue would poke just slightly out between his lips.

I found myself staring at him a lot. At his big, liquid black eyes with their interesting sideways blink. His tiny little nose, which would twitch when he gave his trilling version of a laugh. His small flat mouth, and the faintly sharp teeth I could see when he smiled.

A weird, fluttery feeling would race through my belly when I looked at him. He was all lean

strength, with long, rangy limbs and big hands; those long, flat-ended fingers somehow still graceful. When he was really relaxed—when our bellies were full and we were just sitting in front of the fire in peaceful quiet—he'd let out a little soft trill with each steady breath. Kind of like a purr.

I loved the sound of it.

I was getting a little obsessed with my new monster companion. There'd be a weird, uncomfortable ache in my gut when we parted ways for the night, and as soon as I woke up I was impatient for him to arrive. I didn't know where he slept—where he actually lived—and I felt too awkward to ask if he wanted to stay in my crappy apartment with me.

But it wasn't just the fact that I had *someone* out here with me. Ruke was a quiet, calm presence who made me feel safe. He was gentle in everything he did. His voice was soothing, even when he was speaking his own inhuman language. Sometimes he'd rumble to me in his language while he was doing something, and even though I couldn't understand, I loved listening to it.

I still missed my dad fiercely, but Ruke was a far better companion than any other human could have been.

It had been about a month since we first properly met, and we were spending another day lazily picking through buildings in the town for anything useful. It was hot, the sun a blinding ball of fire in the clear sky, and every room we went in was like an oven. The heat didn't seem to affect Ruke, but I was sweating like a beast despite leaving my jacket in the apartment.

"Jamie, look."

At the sound of Ruke's voice, I turned from the pile of cardboard boxes I'd been sifting through in the backroom of the hardware store. Ruke was crawling along the tops of the tall shelving units, looking for anything that may have been missed over the years.

Using two hands to climb back down, his other two were holding a small cardboard box that I could see was still sealed. It had gone soft from damp at some point, but was still intact. The label on the front had faded completely, nothing but a yellowed square. My interest piqued, I immediately abandoned the boxes to meet him at the bottom of the shelves.

The tape sealing the box came off easily, and Ruke held it out for me while I pulled back the flaps.

"Seeds," I said in surprise, picking out one of the packets. It had a dated, grainy photo of a tomato vine on the front. I lifted another, seeing green beans. "Wow."

"Ssseeeds," Ruke echoed, making me smile up at him. "Good?"

"Great," I said quickly, because I didn't want to disappoint him. "Um... they're pretty old so they might not take, but we can always try."

"What are they, Jamie?"

"They're seeds for vegetables. Food. We can plant them in the ground and they might grow."

"Grow food?" Ruke perked up. "Yes, we grow many food in my world. My kind, we grow by water. And we... food that grow in water, we take. *Lamba*."

With his two free hands, he made the shape of something tall and wavy. "*Lamba* grow on bottom of water."

"Like seaweed?"

"Ssseeeweeweed."

I smiled. "Yeah. Plants that grow in the water."

"Yes!" He nodded excitedly, but a hand came up to give his own gesture of affirmation at the same time. "Grow in water. We take some, not all, so water ones still eat."

Ruke tended to use the word "*ones*" to mean any other creature. I was guessing he meant fish or whatever the equivalent was in his world.

“Well, I don’t think we’ll find seaweed seeds in here.” I chuckled, adding, “I don’t even know how seaweed grows. But we can try planting some of these and see what happens.”

“Yes. We plant.”

I replaced the seed packets and took the box from Ruke with a smile. I wasn’t hopeful that any of these would grow, but there was no harm in trying.

“Okay, let’s stop for today.” Tucking the box under one arm, I wiped my brow with the back of my wrist. “It’s way too hot, and I don’t want to overheat.”

“Yes. Hot.”

We left the grocery store, and I could feel the sun baking the top of my head as we made our way down the street toward my apartment.

“Shall we go to the river?” I asked Ruke, cradling the box of seeds to my chest. “To cool down?”

He perked up immediately, looking up at me as he loped on hands and feet at my side. “Yes. We swim.”

I laughed. Ruke loved swimming, and he was obviously *much* better than me thanks to his two extra limbs. I still challenged him to races often, and I knew sometimes he let me win. If he was feeling playful, he’d also vanish underwater for a long time before silently emerging right behind me and letting out a sharp trill, like his version of “Boo!”

I wondered if he was amphibian—or his world’s equivalent. He seemed equally as happy in water as he was on land, and he’d said his kind grew things by and in the water. He was as good at climbing trees and buildings as he was at swimming. He was good at everything.

“Let’s go to the apartment to drop this off and get my towel.”

“Okay, Jamie.”

I smiled at his soft voice, pulling open the door that led up to my apartment and gesturing for him to go first. Before heading inside, he plucked the box out of my hands.

“I take.”

Then he was gone, shooting onto the wall and vanishing upstairs. I chuckled and closed the door behind me, blocking out all the sunlight from the windowless corridor, and made my way up. I couldn’t see Ruke, so I assumed he’d already made it into the apartment, but when I reached the top of the stairs the door was still shut.

My brows twitching, I opened it and stepped into the silent apartment. “Ruke?”

There was no answer. I couldn’t hear him moving in here, but then he did move pretty silently. Glancing over my shoulder, I peered through the hole I’d made in the wall that led to the fireroom, but couldn’t see him that way either.

“Where’d you go?” I made my way into the apartment. Looking around in confusion, I headed to the window to grab my towel where I’d left it to dry in the sun. “Ruke?”

There was still no answer. I walked quickly to the front door, a jab of real fear for him piercing my gut, but before I could go back into the corridor, a sharp trill behind me made me jump out of my skin.

I whirled around to see Ruke crouched on top of the refrigerator. His nose twitched as he let out his laughing trill, and I mock-glared at him.

“Real funny.”

“Yes, funny.” He deftly climbed down and came over, rising to his full height once he was in front of me. On his ascent, he gave my shoulder a gentle bump with his forehead, which was something he did when he was teasing me. Like a little signal to tell me it was only in jest.

My mouth split into a reluctant grin. “I’ll make you jump one day—mark my words.”

“Yes, Jamie.” My brows shot up at the teasing edge to his voice. “Humans make lots of noise always. Stomping their feet and breathing loud.”

I burst out laughing. “I don’t breathe loud!”

He smiled at me. “Very loud. And heart beats fast.”

When he reached out and placed a hand flat on my chest, I went very still. My skin warmed and tingled, and the heart in question sped up.

“Loud and fast, giving you away. I hear it.”

I stared up at him as he gazed back. His big eyes were like pools of liquid tar—impenetrable black, shiny, endless. The warmth of his hand seeped through my shirt, and I cringed internally when I realised the fabric was damp with sweat. But he didn’t seem to mind. When he slowly pulled his hand away, his fingertips clung to the fabric like they didn’t want to let go.

“Um…” I licked my lips, the wave of nervous anticipation rising inside me making me fidgety.

“Well, I can’t do much about that. Except maybe layer up to try and cover it. But it’s too hot for that.”

“Yes, hot.” Ruke nodded, taking my towel from me. “We go to river to swim, yes?”

“Yeah. Yes.” I cleared my throat, wondering how obvious my racing heart was making me. “Let’s go.”

I grabbed my bat and bag before we left. I was still too warm, my cheeks flushed, but it wasn’t just the heat anymore.

As we walked to the river, my mind wandered. I had, obviously, never done anything sexual with another person before. In my entire life, I’d spoken to a grand total of two people—my dad and Ruke. Romance and sex had been vague concepts, ones I saw or read about in old dirty mags or novels I’d come across out here. Sex wasn’t a necessity to survival, so it wasn’t something I allowed myself to think about often.

But I was curious.

In all the romance novels I’d read when we’d found them, it had sounded amazing. The first time I’d come across a dirty magazine and furtively looked at it, I hadn’t fully understood what I was seeing in the pictures, but my body had reacted. Then Dad had caught me, and given me an awkward talk about sex and masturbation.

That was the extent of it. I got urges. I jerked off, imagining vague outlines of bodies coming together and touching, or picturing some of the images I’d seen in those magazines. Sex with another person had seemed like something I would never get to experience. But now...

Was it perverted of me to look at Ruke and imagine it? He wasn’t human. He wasn’t from this world. But he was intelligent and kind and sweet. His eyes were beautiful, and his tiny nose and mouth were the most adorable things I’d ever seen. His long limbs made me a little breathless sometimes, especially when he did something that made the lean muscles flex under his deep green skin.

His voice soothed me, and his contented little purring breaths were one of my favourite sounds. His big hands and long fingers with their flat, wide tips were so capable and graceful. Before I could stop it, I imagined them touching me again. But not through a shirt this time—I imagined what they’d feel like on my bare skin.

My face burned, and I darted a glance at Ruke as we stopped by the river, irrationally worried that he’d know what I’d been thinking. He looked back over at me with a small smile, before scurrying forward and directly into the water after draping my towel carefully over a big rock.

I laughed, setting down my bag and bat to start shedding my clothes. I watched the murky outline of his dark body gliding gracefully through the water as I tugged off my boots. My throat bobbed when I

reached my underwear. I normally kept them on while we were swimming, but something made me tug them down and off, balling them up with the rest of my clothes. I held the bundle in front of my groin as I made my way to the river bank.

My face was hot, but Ruke just smiled at me as his head emerged from the water. Curling my toes into the mud, I told myself not to be so silly. Ruke didn't care. If anything, he'd maybe look out of mild curiosity over our differences, but I didn't think he thought of me in... any way.

Clearing my throat, I set my clothes down on a rock and quickly waded into the water. It was cold, but I didn't stop until I was submerged up to my chest.

"Cool now?" Ruke asked as he glided past, languidly swimming backward to look at me.

I nodded and smiled, then dunked my head in the hopes that it would cool the fire in my cheeks. I hadn't been naked in front of anyone in... a very long time. Not since I was a tiny kid. Never as an adult.

An adult whose body responded to things.

My eyes followed Ruke as I stood back up in the water, slicking back my hair. I couldn't stop thinking about his hand on my chest, over my pounding heart, as he gazed down at me with his big liquid eyes. It had just been an innocent touch. It felt kind of pathetic to get so worked up about it, but... no one had ever touched me, aside from hugs and pats on the back from Dad.

I'd never been touched by someone who I... wanted.

Some part of my brain told me it should have felt wrong or creepy to want Ruke that way. To look at a monster like that. To think of a monster like that.

But it didn't feel wrong. Ruke was intelligent, capable of rational thought. He was an adult—he'd told me his kind lived for roughly the same length of time as humans, and he had been alive for thirty-five years. His species came into adulthood at twenty-two years of age.

I didn't care about the differences between our appearances. I *liked* the way he looked. So much more interesting than a human—than my messy, dirty blond hair, dull blue eyes and skin that was tanned and freckled from being out in the sun too much. Ruke was beautiful in an inhuman way.

Everything about Ruke was inhuman. And I liked it.

CHAPTER SEVEN

To distract myself, I washed quickly, then waded back to the bank to clean my clothes. We'd found an ancient but unopened bottle of shampoo in a bathroom cabinet in one of the apartments, which I used to scrub both myself and my clothes.

I hadn't had any kind of soap for a long time, usually having to use silt or sand to scrub myself and get the dirt out of clothes, so it felt like a huge luxury. I let myself enjoy it, the sun warming my damp hair as I rubbed suds into my shirt.

Once they were clean, I draped them over the rock to dry and turned back to Ruke. The river was slow-moving here, and Ruke was floating on his back in the water, his long arms and legs lazily kicking him back toward me when the current carried him away.

Big black eyes blinked sideways up at the sky, his face relaxed. I stared, my gaze slowly drifting down his face to his chest. Then lower. When my eyes fixed on the smooth mound between his legs, I flushed and looked away.

To my utter mortification, my cock reacted, twitching beneath the water as it started firming up. I hurriedly cupped my hands over myself, even though he wasn't looking, but it didn't help. I wondered if Ruke even felt sexual desire. I had no idea. I could see no discernible sex organs, and I didn't know how his kind reproduced.

Even though I was curious to experience it at least once, I knew sex wasn't everything. Just being with him was enough, despite the desire to touch him that was becoming more overwhelming with each day. I just wanted to be *close* to him.

Besides, we might not even be compatible in that way. I couldn't see any... orifice or phallus that would make sex remotely similar to what I'd seen in those dirty mags.

Could he kiss? He didn't really have lips, his mouth small and flat. Would he *want* to kiss me? What if I tried and he jerked back in disgust because I was human and he wasn't?

God, I was thinking about all this like it was a remote possibility. I scrubbed my hands roughly over my face and sank deeper into the water until it was up to my chin. My erection was now throbbing between my legs, but I defiantly ignored it and just prayed that Ruke didn't suddenly plunge under the water and see it.

"Jamie?"

Ruke's soft voice made me jump, and I knew my face was on fire when I looked over at him.

He was no longer floating on the surface, now treading water as he eyed me with an expression I'd come to learn was concern.

"You are okay? Your heart is fast."

Fuck. I swallowed and tried to twist my mouth into an easy smile. "I'm fine."

When he swam closer, my cock jerked. I quickly cupped my hands over it. I didn't know how good his eyesight was—if he'd notice through the water.

"Tell me." Ruke stopped in front of me, rising slightly out of the water as his feet sank into the muddy bottom.

When he smoothed a hand over my wet hair, I bit down on the inside of my cheek to try and distract myself from the rush of want that filled my chest. He blinked, waiting patiently, his big hand cradling the back of my head.

"Really, I'm fine," I said, my voice the slightest bit unsteady as my cock bucked again from his proximity, and his gentle touch. Then I heard myself blurting out, "Does your kind have sex?"

Ruke went still. His hand slowly slipped from the back of my head. “Ssex?”

“Sorry, never mind.” I knew I was beet red, and I tried to hunch in to hide the way my hands were cupped over my groin.

“No—tell me, Jamie.”

“I—Sorry, it was an invasive question. I just meant—how do you reproduce?”

“Rrrree-proh-doos?”

“Um, make babies.” I was going to pass out if any more blood rushed to my head. “Make young.”

Ruke froze, then let out his trilling chuckle. “Ah. *Herrlya*.”

God, this was more embarrassing than Dad explaining the birds and the bees to me. “Um...”

“*Herrlya ma ssex*. Two or more bodies join. Not always make young though.”

My pulse leapt. Did that mean his kind had sex for fun?

“Oh.” I lifted one hand and anxiously rubbed my face. “Um, that’s how some humans generally do it too. But we—um, we don’t always do it to make babies, either.”

Ruke was watching me carefully.

“For *himna, lo*?” He made a frustrated sound. “What is word? For... to feel good.”

I cleared my throat. “Yeah. Because it feels good. Not that I’d know. I’ve, um—I’ve never done it.” When Ruke stayed quiet, still watching me, I tentatively asked, “Have you?”

His mouth quirked into a little smile. Slowly, he reached up and placed his hand on my chest. I shivered from the contact. He was still warm, despite the cool water. I could feel his fingertips latching slightly onto my skin, and I loved it.

“Not with human, no,” he said. “With my own, yes. But not for young.”

I chewed on my lip, wondering whether I should ask my next question. In the end, I blurted it out regardless. In for a penny, right? “How? I mean, h-how... do you have sex?”

Ruke let out his laughing trill, making my face flame hotter, and bent to nudge his head against my shoulder. “You ask many question, Jamie.”

“Sorry,” I mumbled. “You don’t have to answer.”

“No, okay.”

My mouth twitched into a tiny smile, some of the nerves fleeing. Ruke had picked up “okay” from me quickly, but he tended to forget that it was “it’s okay” in this context. It was cute.

“We all have same.” He gestured down at the water, I was guessing toward his groin area. “Hidden until we... what is the word... we want to feel good. Sex.”

“Oh.” I blinked in surprise, unable to stop my eyes dropping down to look at his lower body through the water.

“Humans are different, yes? Different parts. I have seen them.”

“Uh, yep, uh-huh.” Why had my cock not gone down at all? “Different parts.”

“I have seen humans have sex.” What? How? “It is similar.”

Okay, this wasn’t helping the erection situation. That meant we could be compatible. And now I knew that Ruke had sex for pleasure.

“H-how have you seen humans having sex?” I couldn’t help but ask.

Another trilling laugh. “Some do it in open. They did not see me. But I was curious.”

I snorted, shooting him a tiny grin. “Perv.” His head cocked questioningly, but before he could ask what that meant, I quickly said, “What about kissing? Do you... do that?”

“Kee—sing?”

“Um.” Why was I digging myself deeper into this hole? “Like... you press your mouths together. And, um, tongues. But I’ve never done that either, so...”

I thought I heard Ruke's breath catch. His eyes darted down to my mouth. Then he let out a tiny trilling purr.

"We do not. Why do humans do this?"

"For, um, pleasure as well." I fidgeted, trying to cover my dick better. "To feel good."

Ruke's hand was still on my chest, over my pounding heart. Slowly it slid up, until I felt a wide, flat fingertip brush my lower lip. My breath hitched in my throat, and I stared up at him, frozen in place.

"We try?" he asked.

Oh my god. I opened and closed my mouth like a fish, flustered beyond belief. But as Ruke's eyes dipped back to my mouth, and he slowly leaned in, my hands flew up to grip his lower arms.

"W-wait," I stammered. "It's—It's something you do with someone you're—that you like."

"I like you, Jamie."

I let out a weak, shaky laugh. "I mean someone you... want. Normally someone you... might want to have sex with."

Ruke's hand dropped. "I want that with you."

I gaped at him, speechless. "I—What?"

"I want you, Jamie." He shot me a shy smile. "It is why I bring you gifts. I was... showing you."

"What?" I repeated numbly.

Ruke wanted me? He'd been bringing me gifts to show his interest?

He'd been... *courting* me?

I barked out a tiny laugh of disbelief, and saw his eyes become guarded as he drew back.

"Is this wrong?" he asked in a small voice.

"No," I blurted. "No, I just..."

Screwing up my courage, I looked him in the eyes and, in a voice hoarse with nerves, said, "I want you too, Ruke."

He let out a low trill of excitement, stepping forward. Two of his hands slowly curled around my waist beneath the water, making my cock lurch again. One rested on my shoulder, while the other cupped the back of my head.

"I know," he said, a hint of something like pride in his voice. "You give me gifts back. You share food with me. You showed me."

I chuckled, hesitantly palming his sides. I didn't bother telling him that I hadn't been aware I was courting him by his standards, because it didn't matter now. We both wanted each other.

"Jamie." Ruke's fingers threaded through my wet hair, making me shiver. "We kiss?"

I nodded eagerly, even as nerves made my gut tighten. "Yeah. But I—Remember I haven't done this before."

He trilled with laughter. "I have not either. We do it first together."

That helped calm me somewhat. If I was terrible at it, Ruke wouldn't know the difference.

And I couldn't deny how excited I was—to get to experience this, when I'd been so sure I never would. Ruke was taller than me, so when he slowly dipped his head, I tilted my chin up to meet him.

Our mouths pressed together softly at first, both of us hesitant and somewhat unsure. Instinct seemed to guide me, and I puckered my lips a little and kissed him again. I had no idea if it felt different to kissing a human, but I suspected it did. His mouth was flat, smaller than mine, but sweet. Perfect.

A small noise escaped from the back of my throat as I pressed myself closer, wrapping my arms around him fully. I shuddered when my straining cock got trapped between our bodies, but I was

enjoying this too much to get overly self-conscious about it.

Ruke seemed to be enjoying it too. He kissed me eagerly, his mouth mobile enough to mould to mine. Pushing back the wave of nerves, I dipped my tongue inside. Ruke purred in pleasure, meeting my tongue with his, which made me shudder as my cock jerked, pressed tight between our stomachs.

The hands on my waist suddenly lowered as Ruke bent slightly in the water. I let out a muffled sound of surprise against his mouth when those long, flat-tipped fingers splayed over my ass and hefted me up. My legs wrapped around him automatically, and my arms shot up to twine around his neck and hold him closer.

My cock jerked again, spilling pre-cum into the water. I couldn't help but arch my hips forward, rubbing against his slippery skin. A broken moan vibrated into Ruke's mouth as I shuddered, my balls drawing up. I was getting *way* too excited.

But I couldn't stop. We were kissing ravenously now, both of us catching on fast through sheer desperation for each other. When I felt something brush against my sac and taint, the tip slick, slipperier than the water, I gasped against Ruke's mouth and rocked my hips again. He let out a rumbling purr, clutching my ass tighter.

Oh god, I was pretty sure I was going to come just from rubbing against him. It was all so new, and it was *Ruke*. He tasted like clean, fresh water, and he smelled like rain and wet grass. His long fingers threaded through my hair, and I distantly registered how surreal it was to have two pairs of hands on me. But it felt so good—like he was surrounding me, keeping me as close as possible.

When my balls drew up and my cock grew agonisingly stiff, I reluctantly broke the kiss, panting against Ruke's mouth. He was breathing as hard as I was, letting out tiny little purrs with every exhale. My eyes slipped shut when he nuzzled his nose against my cheek, then my neck, his chest vibrating against mine.

I clung to him and buried my face in his neck, smiling impossibly wide against his warm, deep green skin.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Even though I felt overheated, I knew the water was too cold for me to stay in it any longer. Ruke playfully bumped my shoulder with his forehead before setting me on my feet.

As I stepped back, my eyes darted down before I could stop them. Through the water, I could see something phallic protruding between Ruke's hips, and my cock gave an eager jerk in response.

Later, I thought, my belly fluttering with nervous anticipation. When we're in the apartment, safe and hidden.

What would we do? I wanted to try *everything*, but although Ruke had said his kind had sex similar to humans, he might not have meant all of it. Maybe they didn't do handjobs or blowjobs or... other stuff.

I guessed we'd find out together.

My clothes were dry thanks to the relentless heat of the sun, so I slogged out of the water and patted myself down with my towel. Ruke remained in the river for a little longer, lazily floating as he watched me.

My face heated as his big eyes fixed on my erection. I forced myself not to be embarrassed. If I wanted to have sex with him, I was going to have to get used to being naked in front of him.

"Um, this is what happens to humans with penises when they... get aroused." I cringed as soon as I said it, but Ruke just slowly nodded, his eyes lifting to mine as he shot me a small smile.

"Similar," he said softly. My gaze jerked down to his hidden lower half in the water before I looked away and concentrated on getting dressed.

Ruke got out of the water only once I was lacing up my boots, his long, flat toes flexing in the mud. I'd already noticed dirt didn't cling to him, and that water took a long time to dry on his skin. Whatever had emerged between his legs while we were kissing was once again hidden. I didn't let myself stare like I wanted to, trying to see some kind of opening or slit. It didn't matter what he had or didn't have. Despite how worked up I was, I would've been happy just kissing him forever. Anything more would be a bonus.

After collecting my stuff, we made our way back to the town and up to the apartment. My cock had gone down on the walk, but it perked right back up once we were in the quiet, safe space. It was like an oven in here, so I set down my stuff and crossed the living room to open the windows, letting in a faint, warm breeze that didn't help much.

"Jamie."

Ruke's voice made my gut clench, and I turned to look at him. He was crouching beside the couch, but he straightened up and approached me. Two hands settled on my waist, while the other two cupped my face with his inherent gentleness.

"I kiss you again?" he asked, black eyes fixed on my mouth.

I nodded frantically and croaked, "Yes. Yes please."

Before I had time to cringe over that, Ruke had lowered his head and fitted his mouth back to mine. I immediately wrapped my arms around his neck, and it wasn't long before he was lifting me up like he had in the water and carrying me over to the couch.

He laid me down and covered me with his long body, making me moan desperately into his mouth. The couch smelled musty, but I'd already taken the cushions outside and beaten the dust off them, so it wasn't too bad.

A hand slipped under my shirt and trailed over my bare side, making me shiver. I let my fingertips

move down his nape, and when they encountered the gill-like protrusions there, Ruke shuddered and let out a low purr.

“Jamie,” he murmured, breaking the kiss and stroking my cheek with his thumb. A few more words escaped him in his language, trills and clicks that I didn’t understand, but his tone sounded reverent. It made my chest heat and feel impossibly full as I stared up at him, into those inhuman, liquid black eyes.

“Ruke.” My voice was shaky. “C-can we—”

He let out a sharp click that cut me off, his head jerking up and cocking as his gaze became unfocused. He went very still above me, so I didn’t move, staring up at him in confusion.

His eyes met mine. “I hear things.”

Unease pierced the fog of lust, making my fingers tighten on his shoulders. “What?”

“Something big. Voices.”

I strained my ears, my heart starting to pound for a different reason. I couldn’t hear anything.

“In the town?” I whispered.

One of Ruke’s hands came up to absently give his gesture for no, his face turned toward the windows.

“No, just beyond.” He went very still again. “Someone coming.”

Fuck.

He slunk back and off the couch, so I scrambled up and grabbed my bat before creeping over to the window. Ruke appeared beside me, clinging to the wall as we peered out.

A single human was walking down the street. I knew straight away that it was a raider—he was wearing a mask, black leather studded with metal. All raiders wore masks, but I didn’t know why.

He had wild, curly brown hair, and his eyes looked tense and fearful as he made his way down the street. The fringe on his weathered tan jacket swayed with the movements.

I couldn’t see any weapons on him. There was a duffle bag slung over one shoulder, but not even a knife tucked into his belt.

He headed directly for the hardware store and slipped inside. Neither of us moved for a long moment, watching.

“He’s here to scavenge,” I whispered to Ruke. “He’ll probably go through every building. He might notice that someone’s been living here.”

“What do we do, Jamie?”

My hairline beaded with sweat as I drew back from the window and looked around. I could threaten him—that was the simplest idea. Go out there with my barbed bat and tell him I’d kill him if he didn’t leave. He didn’t seem to have a weapon.

But Ruke had said he’d heard voices—plural. Which meant there were more people just outside of the town. What if he ran off then came back with ten more raiders? We’d be fucked.

My eyes landed on the two floorboards I’d ripped up from the cake shop all those weeks ago. I hadn’t used them for anything yet, so they were still propped up against the wall. The ball of twine sat on a side table beside them, considerably smaller than it had been when I’d found it.

An idea started to form.

“We could scare him off,” I whispered, crawling across the floor to grab the boards and the twine. “Make him think something big is living here so he doesn’t take the risk.”

“How?” Ruke asked, staying by the window to keep an eye on the hardware store.

“We’ll make a lot of noise.” I made my way over to the front door, keeping low in case the raider stepped outside and looked up at the window. After silently pulling the door open, I glanced back at

Ruke. "Come on."

He slunk off the wall and followed me through the apartments to the fireroom. Together we quietly moved the cupboard door from over the hole in the floor, then Ruke helped me drop down before following, carrying the boards and twine I'd brought with us.

We stood in the centre of the old grocery store. The shelves were all completely empty, and it was dark in here thanks to the grime coating the front windows.

"Okay." I made my way over to the window and sat down. "When I tell you to, can you push over one of the shelves?"

Ruke looked over at one and nodded. I concentrated on securing the boards to my boots with the twine, like a pair of makeshift snowshoes. They'd be loud and heavy when I walked, making me sound far bigger than I was.

I smeared the dirt on the window with my thumb to create a tiny clear patch I could watch through. The raider stayed in the hardware store for a long time, making a lot of noise. It sounded like he was shoving shelves out of the way, like he was frantically looking for something.

Despite the tension in my body, my brow quirked. He hadn't even checked to see if something was living here first, and he wasn't making any effort to remain undetected. It was a shock he hadn't been killed out here already.

My pulse leapt when he appeared from the hardware store, eyes miserable above his mask. He stopped for a second, staring at the row of buildings opposite, so I whispered to Ruke, "Now."

The crash of the shelving unit hitting the floor was loud and made me jump even though I'd been expecting it. I saw the raider jump violently, but he seemed frozen in place, eyes wide above his mask.

Glancing back, I silently pointed through the gap I'd made in the wall between the buildings, at an old clothing rail in the store next door. Ruke silently slunk through the hole and picked it up with ease, flinging it at the wall to make another huge crash.

The raider jumped again but *still* didn't move, looking terrified. Gritting my teeth, I crept away from the window to the building next door. I shoved over another clothing rail, then started stomping my feet as I made my way to the next hole in the tunnel network I'd created. My steps were loud and ungainly, which was the point. I wanted it to sound like something big and heavy, racing through the buildings toward him.

"Watch him," I whispered to Ruke before stepping through into the next building and stomping again, feeling kind of silly but mainly just hoping that it worked.

I got the hang of it, getting quicker as I slammed my feet down, the boards attached making loud, flat smacking sounds on the floor.

"He is gone."

I stopped when Ruke's soft voice came behind me. Turning around, I grinned at him. Ruke smiled back.

"He looked very afraid."

"Good." I bent to quickly untie the boards from my feet. "That means he won't try coming back."

Ruke approached, stroking my hair as I straightened up. "I will make sure they go."

I clutched one of his arms. "No, we'll just wait here—"

"I will stay unseen, Jamie." He nuzzled the top of my head. "I will watch to make sure they leave. Go far away. I protect you."

Before I could protest anymore, he was gone, moving impossibly fast into the next room. I gathered up the boards and twine, listening carefully for any more sounds outside. It was all quiet,

which made my shoulders start to unclench.

They tensed right back up I heard a loud, excited chitter from the street. It was a sound I'd never heard before, but I knew instinctively it wasn't something from this world.

When it was followed by a cry of agony, my blood went cold. That had been Ruke.

No no no—Ruke.

Dropping everything but my bat, I ran. I'd never heard Ruke make a sound like that—loud, warbling, laced with shock and pain. I felt sick as I burst outside, the need to get to him overriding all caution.

A small, spindly monster with deep red skin was skittering down the street, making its way out of the town. My gut lurched when I saw the dark green, rangy arm clamped in its pointed mouth, the long fingers trailing over the ground as it carried it away.

Ruke was on the ground, writhing in pain. I nearly tripped as I sprinted toward him, dropping the baseball bat the moment I reached him as I thudded to my knees.

"Ruke," I sobbed weakly.

His lower left arm was gone, everything below the bicep torn away by that little monster. A pool of green blood seeped over the ground, and Ruke was making panicked, hiccupping clicks as he tried to stand up.

"J-Jamie—" He reached for me with one of his remaining hands, his big eyes tight with agony and panic.

I glanced up to see that the creature was gone before helping him off the ground as carefully as I could, grabbing my bat on the way up.

"You'll be okay," I heard myself say as we hobbled toward the apartment. "You'll be okay, Ruke. We—we'll make a tourniquet—"

"I am sorry, Jamie." His voice was despairing, making my eyes grow hot.

"You have nothing to be sorry for." Blood was audibly dripping onto the ground with every step we took, making my gut roil. "You'll be fine. I promise."

His legs were unsteady as I helped him up the staircase to the apartment. We were getting blood everywhere, which wasn't good because it could attract other creatures, but I couldn't worry about it in that moment.

Ruke sat heavily on the kitchen floor, panting shallow breaths that rasped with weak trills of pain. I knew there wasn't a belt or anything similar in here, so I raced to the bedroom to tear a strip off the musty old sheets. After grabbing the TV remote from the coffee table, I knelt in front of Ruke and wrapped the sheet around the top of his bicep, then knotted the fabric around the remote.

"Sorry if this hurts," I whispered before twisting the remote, tightening the fabric more and more until the blood pumping from his stump started to slow.

Ruke didn't make a single sound other than his shallow breaths. One of his hands crept onto my knee.

"*Yah ji*," he rasped in an unsteady voice. "Thank you, Jamie."

"You'll be okay," I whispered for the dozenth time, trying to convince myself that it was true.

Ruke gave me a tight smile and a human nod. "I will. We go—river," he said, voice stilted with pain. "I make balm."

"Balm?" I shook my head, staring at the ragged stump, the dark tissue torn by sharp teeth. I wondered how bacteria-filled that fucking creature's mouth had been. Panic rose in a tidal wave, making my scalp prickle with sweat. "A balm won't—"

"*Lo*. Balm. Help." He squeezed my knee. "I be okay, Jamie."

My vision blurred with tears. "I'm so sorry, Ruke. Your arm—"

"I still have three." He leaned in and gently bumped my shoulder with his forehead. "One more than you."

I let out a weak, watery laugh, my arms shaking from the effort of keeping the tourniquet tight. It seemed to be working, at least.

"The bleeding's slowing down," I said, my voice tinged with relief. "We need to clean the wound."

"Yes. Balm clean."

I pursed my lips. I couldn't think of Ruke as human—he was different. And he was smart—he knew what he needed to do to treat his wound.

"Okay, tell me what you need. I'll go and get it."

Ruke's hand came up to give his version of a headshake. "No, Jamie. We go."

"You shouldn't be moving—"

"We go. I hold this." Ruke took hold of the tourniquet and kept it tight as he stood up. He was unsteady, not as coordinated as usual. His stump jerked like he'd instinctively tried to use the missing arm, and he let out a weak trill of pain.

I hurried up after him. "Please, Ruke—"

"I need water, Jamie." He brushed a thumb over my cheek, giving me a tight smile.

"I can get you water," I said desperately. "Please stay here."

"No, I need to go in water."

I balked at that. "No, that's not—There'll be bacteria—"

"Jamie," Ruke cut me off, stroking my cheek again. "Trust me. I be okay."

My chin wobbled, but I nodded, choosing to trust him. Wrapping my arm around him, I helped him out of the apartment and back onto the street. Every muscle in my body locked tight with tension, my other hand sweaty around my baseball bat, but it was still and quiet out here.

We walked slowly to the river, and when Ruke let the tourniquet unwind and fall from his arm, I bit my lip to hold back another protest. He walked unsteadily into the water and let out a low trill of relief as he sank under the surface, submerging his arm.

This felt so *wrong*. Not the way Dad had taught me to treat wounds. But the pain was fading from Ruke's face, as if the cool water was soothing him. I jumped violently when he suddenly dove under the surface, vanishing from sight.

I paced along the riverbank until he re-emerged, a fistful of something green and wet in one hand. He swam to the bank and scraped some moss off a rock, then stuffed the whole lot into his mouth and chewed.

I stared, my gut still queasy with worry. "What are you—"

He spat the mixture into his hand and smoothed it onto the wound, making all the blood drain from my face.

"Ruke—"

"This is good, Jamie." He gave me a reassuring smile, but it didn't help. "I find what helps in this world. This will work."

That just made me feel worse—that he'd already discovered what helped him heal in this world. That he'd been hurt before. But he obviously hadn't lost any limbs before. The huge, gaping wound of a missing limb was a lot different to a cut or burn.

He stayed in the water for a long time, his eyes closed as he kept his arm elevated. Eventually I sat down on a rock, but my knee bounced anxiously as I watched him.

The sun was setting when he finally dipped his stump under the water and cleaned off the poultice he'd made. No streaks of blood trailed in the water, making me feel a little better. I stood up quickly to help him when he made his way onto the bank, and together we walked back to the town.

Once inside the apartment, I got him settled on the bed and covered him with my blanket, then made him sip some water.

"Do you need anything else?" I asked anxiously.

"Just rest." He smiled up at me. "Rest with you."

"Shouldn't we bandage the wound? I have—"

"No, Jamie." He patted the bed. "Please."

Letting out a hard, worried breath, I curled up beside him and stared at his beautiful profile. His big eyes and tiny nose. His small, perfect mouth.

Ruke shifted onto his side to face me. The intact arm above his stump reached out, and he curled his fingers around mine in the space between us.

"You are my *shiya*, Jamie," he told me softly. "My one. I knew it when I saw you." Drawing our linked hands up, he pressed my palm to his forehead. "I felt it here. I knew."

My vision blurred. I pulled our hands toward me to kiss the back of his.

"You're mine too," I whispered, clutching his hand tight.

Please don't die.

CHAPTER NINE

I didn't know if it was Ruke's monster biology, or the poultice he applied every day in the river, but he healed impossibly fast.

That first night, I'd stayed awake beside him, listening in terror to his shallow, quick breaths as he slept. But the next morning he had assured me he felt a little better. And with every day that followed, I could see it.

It took him a while to get used to only having three arms. He was clumsy at first, making my heart ache, sometimes stumbling when he tried to use his missing arm or hand as he crawled. But he adapted amazingly fast.

New, tender skin grew over the wound, pale green at first before it slowly darkened to match the rest of him. But it was only after a month had passed that I started to relax. To truly believe that he would be okay. The wound was healing. It hadn't gotten infected. Ruke seemed fine, eating and drinking normally, back to his playful self.

I loved him so much it hurt.

He'd told me that he had a nest in the forest, near the river. He promised to show me one day, but he slept every night with me in the apartment. The feeling I got when I woke up and found him wrapped around me, keeping me close, was indescribable. It made my throat close up—made me press my nose to the top of his head to breathe in his scent.

The thought of anything hurting him again filled me with equal parts terror and fury. I would do anything to protect him—to stop him ever feeling pain.

No one else had shown up in or near the town. It seemed that those raiders had been a one-off—they'd decided to stop and scavenge while travelling past. I didn't know if that little red monster had been with them—their pet or something. Either way, boiling rage still filled me when I thought about either of them. I'd be happy if I never saw another human ever again. All I needed was Ruke.

We were making our way back from the forest, a dead rabbit slung over Ruke's shoulder as he told me about the plant in his world that tasted almost like the hazelnuts we'd just found. The sun was setting, and I tilted my chin to feel the cool breeze wafting over my clean skin and damp hair.

As I looked over at Ruke, the golden light gleaming on his deep green skin, my gut tightened with want. We'd discovered just how compatible we were once he was healed enough for me to feel comfortable doing anything.

Ruke's cock was hidden until he was aroused, when an opening would pull back to let it emerge. It was a dark green like the rest of him, long and slender with a tapering tip.

I knew just how smooth it felt in my hand, slick with his natural lubrication. I knew that it tasted like the rest of him—clean and fresh, but warm. And I knew how he felt inside—he had a small opening below his cock that was tight and hot and wet around my fingers.

He knew how I felt inside too, but we hadn't had full penetrative sex yet. I hadn't wanted to risk hurting him. But I'd quickly discovered just how much I loved his fingers up my ass. And my cock in his mouth, against his tongue. I loved everything we did together, but mostly I loved how close it made me feel to him. Like nothing could tear us apart.

And I wanted to feel even closer to him—as close as possible. As we reached our town, I led us to the basement where we stored our meat to keep it cool. After washing our hands with the water in my canteen, I threaded my fingers through Ruke's and took him to our apartment.

"You are not hungry yet, Jamie?" he teased, but immediately scooped me up and carried me to the

bedroom when we got inside.

I shook my head, wrapping all my limbs around him and leaning in to kiss his cheek. “No. I need you first, Ruke.”

He let out a trilling purr and lowered me to the mattress, following me down. We kissed hungrily for long minutes as Ruke deftly stripped me of all my clothes, before rolling onto his back and pulling me on top of him.

My cock bucked eagerly as I straddled him, leaning down to thrust my tongue back into his mouth. Ruke’s teeth were sharp, but he was so careful with me that I’d never caught my lip or tongue on them. I kind of liked the gentle scrape of them over my neck. Or other parts of me.

I moaned into his mouth when I felt his cock slide free beneath me, brushing against my balls. Two of Ruke’s hands held my hips, rocking me against him, while his third slipped between our bodies and cupped my sac. I jerked with a gasp, loving the feel of his wide fingertips stroking my taint.

His hand vanished as he coated his fingers in lubrication from his own body, before I felt a fingertip reaching back and circling my hole. I nodded eagerly, still kissing him with increasing desperation. When he slid his finger inside, I pressed back onto it.

Soon it became two, then three, until my cock was dripping onto his stomach and I was frantic. Finally breaking the kiss, I sat up and reached down, lifting my hips until his fingers slid free.

I positioned his slick cock, the tip against my hole, and looked down at him as my chest heaved. “Is this—Can I...”

“Yes, Jamie.” Ruke stared between our bodies, two of his hands still gripping my hips while the third stroked my thigh soothingly. “I want you so much, *shiya*.”

He’d told me that *shiya* meant mate in his language—the one he’d picked over all others. The one who he knew, instinctively, was meant for him.

I felt the same. Ruke was mine. I could have never been with anyone else. He was all I wanted.

I’d already discovered that breathing out slowly let him slide his fingers inside me easier, so I did the same now as I pressed down carefully. The tapered tip of his cock slid in easily, but I felt a sharp ache as the length widened the more I took.

“Do you hurt?” Ruke asked between panting breaths, his big eyes tight with pleasure as he sank inside me.

I shook my head, resting my hands on his chest to steady myself as I rocked up and down, taking a little more each time. A relieved breath left me when my ass met his hips. Not just relief at having taken all of him, but relief at finally being this close to him. Our bodies joined so intimately.

It was amazing. Far better than any sex I could have imagined from my limited knowledge. Because it was *him*. The only person alive I trusted. The only one I wanted with me forever.

Ruke’s hands were gentle on me, and he stayed perfectly still as I got used to the feel of his cock inside me. It was strange at first, but I already loved it. And when I tentatively lifted my hips and sank back down, the bolt of pleasure that spread through my groin made me let out a shocked moan.

“Are you okay, Jamie?” Ruke asked, gazing up at me. His cock was so stiff inside me, and I could feel it throbbing. His hips twitched, like he was trying very hard to stay still.

I smiled down at him, then rocked my hips again, which made the smile slide off my face as I gasped.

“Y-yeah.” I panted, my hips moving instinctively now. “I’m good. Feels good.”

He murmured something in his language, one of his hands trailing up and down my thigh before it drifted inward to cup my balls. My hips jerked from the sensation, and when he wrapped his fingers around my straining cock, I cried out.

“Ruke.” Lunging down, I kissed him hard, moving frantically to slide his cock in and out of me. He started flexing his hips, plunging up into me with every thrust, making me shudder hard as the pleasure nearly overwhelmed me.

“Ruke,” I mumbled against his mouth again.

He smoothed his thumb through the pre-cum at the head of my cock, then started stroking me in time with our desperate thrusts. Ruke was panting against my mouth, his fingers clenching tighter on my hips. I felt him draw his knees up to thrust harder, and I broke the kiss to gasp with pleasure.

I pressed my nose to his cheek, breathing hard against his skin, unable to do anything more than moan and push back into every frantic thrust. The bed creaked and shook beneath us, and the slick sounds of his cock fucking me made me go lightheaded.

“Jamie.” Ruke’s voice was breathless, two of his arms wrapping around me to hold me close.

I moaned and kissed him again, but couldn’t keep it up for long. The white-hot pleasure gathered in the core of me, drawing my balls up tight and making my cock grow impossibly stiff in his fist. My fast breaths trembled out of me as I moved frantically over him.

The orgasm hit me in a blinding rush, my hips jerking as I cried out and clung to Ruke. He let out a ragged purr, his arms trembling as he held me close. As I painted his lean stomach with my release, his breath caught in his throat and his hips arched off the bed, pressing his cock as deep inside me as he could.

I felt it kick, the sensation unlike anything else. As my own orgasm came to an end, I basked in the feel of him coming inside me. I buried my face in his neck, hot and sweating and out of breath, and waited to feel his body relax beneath me.

Ruke let out a long, purring sigh with a contented trill at the end, making me smile. Arms still wrapped tight around me, he rained kisses over the side of my face and damp hairline.

“I love you,” I mumbled, and heard him trill again with pleasure. I’d said the words to him before and explained what they meant—their significance.

He’d said that was what being someone’s *shiya* was. Choosing them above all others. Feeling for them in a unique, all-encompassing way. Doing anything and everything for them because you wanted them to be happy and safe.

“I love you too, Jamie,” he told me, pulling me even closer.

My entire body relaxed, my breath escaping me in a long, sated sigh as my heartrate calmed. I rested my cheek on his chest and closed my eyes, knowing I’d never, ever felt this peaceful before. This safe.

Ruke was my happiness.

RUKE

“I have many valuable things,” I told Jamie teasingly as we entered my nest in the forest. “If you had waited longer, you would have gotten even better gifts. I was saving the best.”

He laughed, looking around my nest with his hand tucked into mine. A human gesture he had shown me, that ones who loved each other did. I liked learning new ways to show him how much I loved him. Holding his hand. Saying the words he’d taught me. Curling up under the blanket with him at night, feeling him safe and warm against me.

Kissing every inch of him. Joining our bodies to be so close to him. I had done *sex*—the human word for it—with other baklid before, but it felt different with Jamie. Not because he was human, but because he was my shiya. My one.

“I can see that you have a lot of stuff,” he said, eyeing the pile I had collected over the years. “You’d give raiders a run for their money.”

I didn’t really understand what he meant, but I smiled at him and gave him a teasing bump on the shoulder with my forehead. “It is yours now. Ours. We share.”

Jamie shot me a wide, bright grin. He was so beautiful. So interesting, with his eyes like the water here, and his warm, dotted skin, and his hair that was the colour of the phorim reeds from my world.

I had wanted him as soon as I saw him, when he arrived here. Sweet and beautiful, but still tough and strong. I wasn’t sure at first if he would be receptive to my courting gifts, but I’d wanted to try anyway. And then he had started courting me back, leaving me gifts in turn. I had been desperate to show myself to him, but decided to wait a little while first. And when I had, and he had shared his food with me so generously, I had known he was my one.

Jamie was picking through my pile of items. I didn’t actually know if any of the things were valuable—they were just things I had seen and liked. But I wanted to share them with him. I wanted to share everything with him.

I had come here as a youngling with my parents and several other baklid when the big tear appeared in the sky many years ago. We had explored, fascinated by the new world. But my parents had died before I was an adult, killed by another creature from our world—a cagin that had stalked us for days. The rest of us had barely managed to escape.

The others had all died over the years since, in different ways. Some killed by humans. Others by creatures from our world and this one. Until it had just been me left.

I had tried to go back to my world, but many humans guarded the big rip in the air now, with weapons that could kill instantly. I had seen them shoot down several creatures from my world when I had watched from a distance.

So I had stayed here, finding a place where I would be safe. Other humans had come here before, but I was careful and they never saw me. I had never wanted to be seen until Jamie.

“We can stay here sometimes,” he said, straightening up and smiling at me. “I like it. It feels safe.”

I trilled in pride. My nest *was* safe. Tucked into the forest, near the river so I could swim often. I had dug out a wide hole over the years, nestled under the roots of a big tree with a covered entrance.

It smelled earthy and warm, and I loved it, but I loved sleeping with Jamie in his human bed more.

“Yes, we stay sometimes.” I approached him and wrapped my arms around him. I was still getting used to only having three. “You can pick your new gifts.”

Jamie laughed, moving closer and tightening his arms around my waist as he rested his cheek on the front of my shoulder. “I don’t need more gifts. I have you.”

Yes. He had me. He would always have me, and I would have him. My sweet, strong human.

Author's Note

I hope you enjoyed this collection of short stories! Many of you will have already read some of them on my website, but I hope the brand new ones, exclusive to this book, were enjoyable as well.

Including the novella! Sweet Ruke and his paranoid loner human Jamie. I had the idea for their story while I was writing the scene in *Gloom* (Monstrous: Book Four) when Collector Mary's pet shulc returns from a small town in the middle of nowhere with a freshly removed green arm in their hungry mouth. Poor Ruke—he's so precious.

I thought it would be interesting to write from the perspective of a human who has never experienced any kind of life other than a post-apocalyptic one. Jamie's mindset is completely different to the raiders. His father's questionable but well-meaning decisions—as well as his own experiences in the Wastes—have made him suspicious and wary of all humans. To him, the actions of monsters and animals make more sense. City life is a completely foreign concept to him—any kind of communal living is. So I wanted to give him a happy ending with his monster in a remote corner of the Wastes, where he feels safe and happy and is no longer alone.

I hope you also enjoyed the new Orlith content! His snarky letters to Wyn throughout history, as well as a snapshot of his own insecurities and motivations for why he is the way he is. And Faralin! I already love them. No wonder they're tired, having to try and rein Orlith in for thousands of years.

The full **Monster Index** and **Human Index** are both available to view on my website, lily-mayne.com. Seeing as all our main humans and monsters are featured in this collection, I have included a very slimmed down Monster Index with just the relevant “side” monsters for this book in the back, and just an entry for our new human MC, Jamie, in the Human Index.

What's next?

I have a couple of things coming up soon!

There's the third book in my mm fae romance Folk trilogy, *King of Death*, which is the conclusion to Ash and Lonan's bittersweet love story. (HEA guaranteed!)

There's also the start of my new monster romance series set in a brand new universe, with a contemporary setting and a sweet, fluffy, purely romance-driven story. This is extremely low-angst, (hopefully!) funny and book one (which is MF) has the most adorable monster MMC who can do no wrong, ever, in his entire life. It also has a Domme/sub dynamic, a very interesting meetcute that may or may not involve a sex cult, and lots of fictional pop culture references that I had a lot of fun coming up with. Ultimately, this series is a super fun, light project for me, and I'm really excited for it. I'm already knee-deep in book two!

Later in 2023 will be *Lyri* (Monstrous: Book Eight) featuring our precious Lor's feral twin brother Lyri and his mysterious human Cat.

Monster Index

Baklid [*back-lid*]: Amphibious species that live in partially underground nests by water and like to collect things. Speak in a soft, trilling, purring language.

Appearance: Long, rangy build with four arms and dark green skin that has a faint “wet” sheen. Big hands with three webbed fingers and a thumb, and wide, flat fingertips like a frog’s, which lets them grip onto things with ease. Large, solid black eyes, small nose and mouth with flat lips. Hairless.

Ruke is a baklid who has been living by himself in the Wastes after the rest of his group, who travelled through the tear to the new world, were killed over the years. He has observed humans who travel through the small town near his nest for years, but never interacted with one until Jamie.

Baregh [*barr-egg*]: Species that are typically employed as guards in the monster world, due to being big and hulking. Big and muscular; pale grey skin and a thick, dark mane of hair that extends down the back.

Observed by Danny and Wyn in the monster world in Wyn’s novella. They guard the city of Thinir, including Moric Lor’s hyll and public gardens. Also seen briefly by Hunter in Book Two, at the fighting competition. This one is thickly scarred, chained up, and being forced to fight by another small, wiry species of monster with six arms.

Seis [*sayz*] is Moric Lor’s personal guard. Quiet and serious, but friendly with Lor and very supportive. Adores Jugs.

Gryf [*griff*] is Verin Lyri’s personal guard. Easily influenced by Lyri, which means he’s partial to having a drink while they’re out in town, but takes his job very seriously. He and Lyri maintain a casual sexual relationship but are not romantically interested in each other—they’re very good friends.

Torv is Meriv Jugs’ personal guard. Arrogant and snarky and likes to tease Jugs, but is still unfailingly polite to his Moric.

Copicen [*coh-pick-ehn*]: Small monster-world species with grey fur, long limbs and a long, spike-covered tail. They have spikes over their backs and small, flat hands. Flat, bat-like face with long pointed ears and big bulging eyes. Make chirruping, hissing noises. Tend to be seen picking through junk in the Wastes. Will attack only if cornered. They are the bane of monster-world farmers’ lives.

Folna [*fol-nuh*]: A canine-esque monster world species that can be kept as pets. Described by Jugs as looking “kind of like a cross between an Irish Wolfhound and a crocodile” with big, spiky ears and four eyes. Lizard-like heads and tails, but the long legs and fur of a canine. Sharp teeth and serrated tongues. Grow very large. Mentioned by Lor in Book Seven.

April is Lor and Jugs’ pet folna. She has pale mauve eyes, the same colour as the speckles in her grey fair.

Karik [*kah-rick*]: A creature that looks like a large, land-walking squid, just with more legs that are sturdy, so it can run—fast. Mottled, blueish-purple skin that looks wet. Huge, bulbous eyes and a big

mantle. Its beak is a big white protuberance fringed with little teeth. Their suckers can rip skin clean off the muscle. One rips Edin's leg off when he is young, and Wyn comes across him and helps him. This is how they meet.

Encountered by Ghost in Book Three, when one has moved into the military's Nebraska base after the rycke leaves. It chases him, but gets distracted when it is attacked by another monster.

Shulc [shuhlk]: Small, thin, bony monster that is hairless and a deep burgundy colour. Head shaped like a blank teardrop on its side, a smooth round skull thinning to a sharp point for a snout, which stretches into a wide lamprey-like mouth when it is eating. Two small black eyes. Four spindly legs that end in two tiny claws, similar to a tarantula's tarsal claws. Makes a strange chittering noise when it's excited.

Encountered by the Nebraska camp in Book Three and by Rig and Gloam in Book Four. One was the domesticated pet of Collector Mary. Until her untimely death, it slept in her RV and appeared to enjoy being carried in her arms like a baby, though it was quick to eat her once she was dead. It tries to eat Cutter's hand (and half-succeeds). It definitely has a particular taste for arms and hands. Mary's pet shulc is also the creature that rips off Ruke's arm in the novella *Ruke*.

Telyth [tell-ith]: One of the old races, known as Soul Eaters. Only seven remaining, including Wyn and Orlith. Humanoid, single-sex species that is born from eggs. Has the ability to dissipate into thick black smoke; can travel great distances this way. This ability is obstructed by behamots, whose rock-like skin sends vibrations that prevent dissipation. A species that does not need to eat, drink or sleep.

Appearance: Tall, rangy muscular build. Pale, greyish white skin. Black, curling horns that have jagged edges. Prominent brow bone and flat, bridgeless nose; sharp cheekbones. Thin, raised ridges across the curves of the forehead and cheekbones. Very sharp teeth.

Orlith has one pure black eye that can see death, and one that is silver. Long white hair. Black markings extending up past his wrists. His horns are smoother than Wyn's, but have a second jagged spike. He wears a variety of coats; he likes to steal them from the human world, as well as other human items that he hoards in his nest in the monster world. Met by Wyn and Danny in Wyn's novella. Previously had a casual relationship with Wyn; was hoping Wyn would want to have babies with him. He's jealous of Danny.

Faralin is Orlith's older sibling. They have one pure black eye that can see death, and one that is a dull silver. Long greyish-white hair. Black markings that reach the start of their wrists. Jagged, single prong horns. Faralin is stoic and regimented—they keep track of the parasites they destroy in their patch. They are quiet and a rule-follower, but recently they've begun to feel a bone-deep dread that they are wasting their long life.

Wanuk [wah-nuk]: A monster-world creature, about the size of a small pig, that resembles a large naked mole rat but with a beak instead of teeth, and six long, thin legs that end in sharp points.

Edin hunts one for Hunter and Charlie at the homestead in Book Two, but they decline to eat it. Wyn catches one in the monster world in his novella, to feed the soldier on his test-run. The shulc catches one for its dinner in Book Four, but Rig doesn't know what it is.

The full Monster Index can be found on my website, lily-mayne.com

Human Index

Jamie: Human who has lived in the Wastes his entire life, but doesn't consider himself a raider. Very paranoid about other humans—finds monsters and animals safer to deal with. He has only ever interacted with his father, who chose to stay in the Wastes when Jamie was born on the night of the monster apocalypse, until his father died of a heart attack. Has since travelled the Wastes alone, before finally deciding to set up a more permanent camp in a tiny, abandoned town.

Appearance: Dirty blond hair that is always messily cut (seeing as he does it himself). Blue eyes. Very tanned, freckled skin. Tall and lean.

The full Human Index can be found on my website, lily-mayne.com

Books by Lily Mayne

Monstrous

(MM Monster/Human Dystopian Romance)

Soul Eater (Book One)

Edin (Book Two)

The Rycke (Book Three)

Wyn (Novella)

Gloam (Book Four)

Moth (Book Five)

Seraph (Book Six)

Lor (Book Seven)

Coming in 2023: Lyri (Book Eight)

Folk

(MM Fae Fantasy Romance)

Mortal Skin (Book One)

Forgotten Vows (Book Two)

Coming soon: King of Death (Book Three)

Monsters & Mayhem Collection

(MM Dark Horror Romance)

Death's Bloom

About the Author

Lily Mayne writes what she loves to read: achingly sweet yet gritty romances against unusual backdrops—dark, futuristic, dystopian and more. She enjoys reading and writing (duh), baking, watching terrible horror movies and many other hobbies that would have potentially made her an ideal Victorian maid. Just a really lazy one.

She currently lives in the UK with her husband and several fluffballs, who like to make a lot of noise while she's writing.

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