

# The Hawk Soul

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# Chapter One

The war with the Farungal has been going on for as long as I can remember. Longer than that. They tell me it's been thirty-eight years now that we humans have been fighting beside the Fae, our lands burning and breaking while the Fae lands lay safe behind enchanted barriers. Not that I'm bitter. Because of those barriers, called wards, the Fae didn't have to help us. But they did. They fought and bled alongside us because they knew that if we fell, the Farungal wouldn't stop until they found a way through their ward, and they'd ravage the Fae lands worse than they had ours. Because Farungal hate Faeries. Something about their origins—something the Fae won't tell us. Again, I'm not bitter. I couldn't care less about what had happened between the monsters and the gods we call the Fae.

No, we don't worship them and they've never asked us to. They're not really gods—I've seen enough of them die, despite their immortality, to know that—but we revere them. It's hard not to when they're so powerful and so beautiful and so fucking fae. Of course, I'm talking about the Sidhe, the race of faeries who most resemble humans, though comparing them to us is an insult to the Sidhe. The other fae races can resemble humans as well, though not as closely as the Sidhe do. They can also resemble the Farungal—monsters with claws and wings and fangs. They fight against the Farungal too, but they have their own armies, separate from ours. Mixing humans and the other fae races—as a group they're called the Unsidhe—can go badly. So, human armies only fight with Sidhe warriors. *For* them, really.

We have generals and lieutenants and all that crap—human officers to lead us—but really, it's the Fae who run the armies.

They know best how to fight the Farungal and they have magic so... yeah, they make most of the decisions. Our leaders have a say, of course, but usually, they bow to the will of the Warlords.

Fae warlords run the war, at least our side of it. They're Sidhe commanders, each with their own army and each with the power to crush anyone except maybe their kings. When a warlord gives an order, you follow it, no questions asked. Their armies are divided by the Sidhe races. Yes, I know, that's a lot of races, but what else do you call a race within a race? A sub-race? A second-race? Race-squared? Look, there are the Fae who are divided into the Sidhe and the Unsidhe, and then those two have many races beneath them. Unsidhe are more diverse, everything from Dwarves to Goblins. But the Sidhe are split by their animals, the animals they can transform into.

Yeah, the Sidhe are shapeshifters, but they're limited to one beast, and that animal is their race. Each Sidhe race has its own kingdom, with twelve in total. Those kingdoms are then grouped by their animal family. They are: the Canines—Wolves, Coyotes, Foxes, and Jackals; the Felines—Lions, Tigers, Leopards, and Lynx; and the Avians—Eagles, Hawks, Falcons, and Owls. Yes, the Fae live in animal kingdoms, and each kingdom has their own army run by a warlord—those badasses I mentioned earlier.

I'm a human, and I'm stationed with the Hawk Army—a joke the recruiting officer couldn't resist since my name is Ravyn. I'm used to it. My name has always been a bit of a joke since it sounds feminine, but I'm a guy. Mostly. At least, that's what my mother said when she tossed me out of the house after finding me making out with Travis Graverwault when I was sixteen. As I walked away with nothing but the clothes on my back, she called after me that she never should have named me for my raven hair. That it had cursed me and made me into a half-man/half-woman thing. An embarrassment to my father, the village governor.

I signed up with the army that very day. I did it out of



desperation, as many men do, but I found a home here. A place where men like me are accepted and even welcomed. Soldiers—on the whole—don't care who you take to bed as long as you're willing to stand beside them the next day and swing a sword without screaming. I admit the not screaming bit took a while for me, but I was lucky; an older soldier took me under his wing and taught me some extra moves that my trainer hadn't. It gave me the confidence to face down the Farungal, and after my first battle, I had taught him some moves of my own to celebrate.

Yeah, living in an army camp can be tough, but it's a hell of a lot better than where I came from. For acceptance and the freedom to be publicly who I am, I'd live in a mud bog so I think of my tent as a bonus. Plus, there are a lot of very handsome faeries to look at and sometimes, those faeries even feel like slumming it with us humans. That was one perk I particularly enjoyed. I enjoyed it as often as possible.

Raeshal, one of the fae Hawks, bent over my back and bit my ear as he drove into me. I shivered and reached back to grab his hair, pulling him closer. His slim body was solid with muscle—no floppy belly slapping my back. I loved soldier bodies; half the time, it didn't matter what their face looked like. Rae chuckled and kissed his way down my throat, one hand skimming my chest, teasing me before going lower. He twirled a fingertip around my bellybutton, and I growled impatiently.

“Easy now, my dark bird,” Raeshal purred in my ear. “I’ll be hard awhile more, and we both know how quickly you come.”

“I don't have to be hard for you to fuck me,” I shot back.

Another chuckle, then another bite. Raeshal rose onto his knees behind me, his hand finally moving to my aching shaft as he did. Those nimble fae fingers worked magic over me, and I mean that literally. Oily liquid gathered on my cock, likely the same liquid that had coated his cock earlier and even now eased his

movements inside me. Raeshal drew his hand down my shaft, strong fingers tightening almost too much. He pumped his hand in time with his hips and, just as he predicted, I didn't last. How could I with that divinely beautiful creature inside me? I spilled across the blankets with a broken shout, and Raeshal laughed again, but this time it was a pleased laugh, full of masculine pride. He loved it when I came fast and especially loved bringing me back to life afterward.

But Rae had lied about his own climax. Either that or mine had aroused him more than he expected. He threw back his head and gave a groaning cry, pulling out at the last second to empty himself across my back. The flaccid tip of his cock trailed down the curve of my ass as Raeshal let out a deep, satisfied sigh, but before he could move to lie down beside me, a gruff voice interrupted.

"Captain Lethene," the voice called for my lover. "A word... if you are finished?"

Raeshal heaved a sigh as he wiped off my back with a cloth. "I'll be out in a moment, Beryl."

I flopped onto my back, avoiding the wet spot I'd left, and smirked at Raeshal as I adjusted myself. Beryl was a fae captain too, but he was a rule-follower. One of those soldiers who took everything very seriously. He'd been named after a precious stone, but his nickname was a play on the word. We called him Beryl of Laughs, in the way that you call a big man tiny. The guy never even cracked a smile.

Beryl cleared his throat. "You may want to bring Corporal Ravellar with you."

"What's that?" Raeshal asked in surprise.

I perked up. Ravellar wasn't my real surname, it was one I'd chosen when I joined the Army. I'd seen it in a book once and liked

the alliteration of it with my first name. Why take a fake name? Because I wanted no connection to my family. I'd only kept my given name because I'd gotten used to it.

“Bring your... aide,” Beryl said. “And hurry.”

“Well, shit.” Raeshal grinned at me and slapped my ass. “Get your pants on, Ravyn. It looks like you're coming with me.”

“Again,” I whispered, and we both laughed.

“You do know that only a piece of fabric separates us, right?” Beryl growled.

We laughed harder.

## Chapter Two

There were perks, beyond the obvious, to having a fae captain as a lover. Raeshal had made me his aide, mainly so he could get me in his tent whenever he wanted, or mine, for that matter, but also because he knew I had other talents. Those techniques I mentioned earlier? They had only been the start of my blossoming skills. It turned out that I was pretty good at fighting—fast, quick, and with great balance. As a human soldier in the Hawks—a mostly aerial army—I had learned to make use of anything that could get me off the ground. The Farungal knew to watch for birds attacking from the sky, but they never expect to see a human. I'd taken more than a few monsters unaware by jumping out of trees or off cliffs onto their ugly heads.

As we approached the largest tent in camp, the one in the center of it all, I started to get nervous. The walls were striped with black and gold—the Hawk Lord's colors, and a black flag with a golden hawk in flight crested the center pole. And if those two clues weren't enough to tell you who slept in that tent, the two enormous hawks, the size of bears (grizzlies, not koalas), sitting to either side of the entrance flap should clear things up quickly. They weren't real birds but shifted Sidhe, knights in Lord Dalsharan's personal guard. Many of the fae Hawks were knights of the Hawk Kingdom, but they held a separate rank in the army. These faeries didn't. They were knights, period. They didn't command any troops or take orders from anyone but their warlord. Their sole purpose was to protect the Hawk Lord and do whatever the fuck he said. When they perched outside that tent, it meant that the Hawk Lord was inside.

And the Hawk Lord was... he was everything.

My first sight of Dalsharan Arandel was what had first prompted me to label the Fae as gods (at least in my head). I'd known they were beautiful and powerful, but I hadn't thought them divine until him. Because I'd never seen a man like the Hawk Lord before—one so handsome that the word handsome horribly failed at its job. He had the kind of raw masculinity that screamed power, with sculpted muscles and broad shoulders, but not the overdone bulge of wrestlers. It was a body built to kill, not merely pin men down. Though many men fantasized about being pinned down by the Hawk Lord, myself included.

And his face... it was the face of a god. One look had me aching to get on my knees and worship him. The Hawk Lord was so brutally beautiful that seeing him for the first time was like a punch in the gut, leaving me gasping for air. And he radiated magic; it poured off him like steam from boiling water. Even a magic-less human like me could sense it. You just knew that he could snap his fingers and you'd be toast. Dalsharan had a reputation for being brutal when he needed to be, but he was a fair leader and never asked anything of his soldiers that he wasn't willing to do. On top of all that, he was wicked-smart and cunning. I had seen him take down an entire Farungal unit with subterfuge alone. As I said, he's a fucking god.

Okay, so maybe it's not all the Fae who are gods, just the Hawk Lord. And I was about to walk into his tent.

I swallowed past the dryness in my throat. I'd been to the Hawk Lord's tent before to deliver messages, but I'd always passed them to the guards outside or to one of the generals. I'd never gone inside, never seen more than a glimpse past the heavy flap that served as a door. And the closest I'd ever gotten to him was once when he had come by the human camp to inspect our troops. He had walked past me, looked over my armor, and nodded in approval. And I'd instantly gone rock hard. Thank goodness I'd been wearing armor.

I wasn't wearing armor now.

*Don't look at him, I said to myself. Just don't look. If Raeshal sees you get a hard-on for the Hawk Lord, you will never hear the end of it. And you'll never be taken into that tent again.*

Oh, fuck, there it was. A few more feet...

"Hey." Raeshal slapped my arm. "What's wrong with you?"

"Huh?" I cleared my throat. "I, uh, I'm a little nervous."

Raeshal laughed. "Relax, Ravyn, you'll be fine. Dal's a good guy. He probably won't even notice you're there."

"Dal?" I whispered in wonder. My fae lover called my fae fantasy Dal. Dal—yeah, I could totally scream that name in bed. Oh, shit, I was already getting excited.

The Hawks on guard outside the tent nodded to Raeshal as he strode past. I lagged a step behind and had the flap smacked in my face for my dawdling. I grimaced and shoved it out of the way, then gawked. The tent was divided into sections by fabric partitions that hung from the ceiling. The center section, maybe 20 feet long and half that across, was full of people. Everyone with the rank of captain or higher was there. They stood around a central table where the Hawk Lord was seated—and he was the only one seated—while he stared down the length of it... at me.

When our stares collided, something pulsed through my body, and I flinched in shock. It was as if someone had stroked a hand down my back—no, a fingertip—right down my spine. The Hawk Lord's gaze lowered, roaming slowly over my entire body before going back to my face. Then he smiled at me.

To my credit, I didn't get a hard-on. I did, however, fall a little in love. Just a little. Maybe a bit more. Okay, a bit more than

more. I couldn't help it. I know it's shallow, but he was just so fucking hot. Golden-brown skin coated his warrior's body like poured metal and hair so blond that it was white streamed over his broad shoulders, framing a face of sharp angles that was softened by a pair of lusciously full lips. And those lips had smiled for me. I grinned back lopsidedly and self-consciously, the movement feeling awkward. Then I followed Raeshal forward.

The Hawk Lord's eyes tracked me through the room, and even as I wove around the bodies of men much higher ranking than me, I couldn't drop his gaze. I held it until Raeshal brought us right up to the table. And then I was standing closer to the Hawk Lord than I'd ever been before, close enough to see the color of his eyes. I had thought his eyes were green, but they weren't. No, of course not. This man was too fucking special for green eyes. He had green eyes bordered by rings of bright violet. Fucking purple. They were the most beautiful eyes I've ever seen.

“Raeshal,” the Hawk Lord spoke in a voice deep enough to cause a vibration.

The other men stopped speaking, even though they'd obviously been in the middle of a conversation. Everyone went quiet to hear what the Hawk Lord had to say.

“My lord.” Raeshal bowed.

“Is this the man who leaps out of trees and off cliffs?” The Hawk Lord—Dal—was still staring at me, even as he spoke to Rae.

Raeshal glanced at me and grinned. “Yes, my lord. This is my aide, Corporal Ravyn Ravellar.”

I gave the Hawk Lord my most perfect bow. I'm sure it was lacking.

“Ravyn,” the Hawk Lord made my name into something

special just by speaking it. “What a coincidence. We are in need of a crafty bird.”

“My lord?” I asked and finally broke our stare to glance at Raeshal.

My lover only shrugged. None of the Sidhe were ugly, but standing beside Dalsharan Arandel made Raeshal look drab. Even with his crimson hair and perfect features. Even with his wry smile and shining blue eyes. I could only glance at Rae before my stare was dragged back to the Hawk Lord. Ugh! I wasn't supposed to look at him and now, I couldn't stop.

Dalsharan's lips twitched as if he'd heard me.

*Oh, fuck, I thought. Can the Fae read minds?*

“Corporal?” The Hawk Lord lifted a brow at me.

Raeshal smacked me.

“What?!” I barked at Raeshal. Then I blanched. “My apologies, Hawk Lord. Were you...” I cleared my throat. “Uh, did you just say something to me?”

The men around us shook their heads, especially my General. There are always two generals in a beast army—a fae and a human.

The Hawk Lord chuckled. “I tune people out too. Especially when they all talk at once.” He rolled his eyes around at the other men pointedly. “I was saying that I'm looking for a special type of soldier.”

I gulped and tried to think of open sores, broken bones, moist female parts—anything to keep me from getting an erection. “Oh?” I tried to sound casual but it came out as a whimper.

“A human,” the Hawk Lord went on. “One with the skill to



scale walls and slip into a castle unnoticed. Raeshal has spoken highly of you.”

“He has?” my voice broke a tiny bit.

The Hawk Lord grinned again and this time, his eyes twinkled mischievously. “He has—all good, don’t worry.”

“Oh.” I cleared my throat again and glanced at Raeshal, who looked on the verge of exploding with laughter. “Great. Um... may I ask why you need a human who can scale walls?”

The Hawk Lord went serious. “I’ve had some unsettling news. The Farungal have stolen two amulets from fellow warlords. Amulets that, when added to a third, would give them enough power to breach the wards of Varalorre.”

Varalorre—that’s what the Fae call their home. I glanced around the room. As I said, the general in charge of the human soldiers in the Hawk Army was there, but other than him, I was the only human in the room. I started to sweat, all possibility of an erectile display fading.

“We know where they’re keeping the amulets, but no faerie can get into a Farungal stronghold undetected, not with their magic-sensing wards,” the Hawk Lord went on. “We could travel to Alantri and lay siege to the fortress, but that would require a huge force, and even if we succeeded, the Farungal could destroy the amulets before they surrendered. The best option is subterfuge. I need a human to slip in and retrieve those amulets for us.”

“From a Farungal stronghold?” I asked as if someone might slap me on the back and start laughing while everyone else pointed at me and declared how funny it was that I’d fallen for the joke.

No one laughed.

The Hawk Lord said, “Yes. Two, actually.”

“He's only twenty-six, Dalsharan,” Raeshal's voice had lost its amused tone. “That's a lot to ask of a young man.”

“Only a young man will have the dexterity we need,” the Hawk Lord argued. “I believe you said that he can climb trees like a monkey born in one and scamper up mountains like a goat.”

Raeshal grimaced—first at the Hawk Lord and then at me. “He can and he can scale any wall, but that isn't a skill limited to Ravyn. Find someone else, Hawk Lord. *Please.*”

“But that's not his only skill, Raeshal. There's one more thing that's special about our Ravyn,” the way the Hawk Lord said my name made my throat constrict. That possessive “our” before it didn't help either. “When he walked in, I tested him, and he passed.” He paused to grin at me. “With flying colors.”

“What do you mean, you *tested* him?” Raeshal snapped.

“No one with magic can enter a Farungal fortress undetected,” the Hawk Lord said. “So, the obvious choice is a human. But to find the amulet after getting inside the fortress, that human must be sensitive to magic, as sensitive as the Farungal wards themselves. Corporal Ravellar has just proven that he can sense magic.”

“I have?” I gaped at him.

“I touched you when you first walked in,” the Hawk Lord said.

Why the fuck did he keep saying things like that to me?

“You what?” it came out a bit breathless.

“With magic,” he clarified. “I touched you, and you felt it, didn't you?”

That jolt—the fingertip along my spine. It had been real, I

hadn't imagined it. It had been *him*!

“Yeah,” I whispered. I cleared my throat and tried again. “Yes, I felt your... magic.”

The Hawk Lord grinned at the rest of the people in the room as if I'd just performed a great trick. “See? He's perfect.”

Perfect. The Hawk Lord had just called me perfect. Hold on. What was I perfect for? Right. This wasn't good.

“You can't do this,” Raeshal growled at the Hawk Lord. “If they catch him, they'll torture him to death.”

“They won't catch him.” The Hawk Lord set his stare back on me.

My heart was beating in my ears. I'd fought the Farungal hundreds of times on battlefields, but to leave the continent and sail to theirs? To sneak into one of their strongholds and steal magical amulets? Fuck me, no man was beautiful enough to convince me to do that.

But then something shivered through my chest, and I heard myself saying, “I'll do it.”

Raeshal gaped at me, then lifted a hand. “Hold on a second. He ambushed us, Ravyn. I didn't know he was going to ask this of you. You can think about it.”

“Raeshal,” the Hawk Lord growled.

“No, he's a damn kid,” Raeshal growled back. “And he doesn't deserve to be sent to his death.”

“Old enough to fuck,” one of the other men muttered.

“He's a grown man by human standards, and he's our best option,” the Hawk Lord said gently. “I'm sorry if you feel

blindsided, Rae. But it's Corporal Ravellar's decision." Those incredible eyes shifted to me again. "Take a day to think about it, Ravyn. I'll postpone the mission for you."

"I don't need a day." I lifted my chin. The last time I'd felt that tingling surge of rightness, I'd been walking into a recruiter's office. I knew I had to do this. Of course, I wasn't about to squawk on about some weirdo human feeling I got to the Hawk Lord. Instead, I simply repeated, "I'll do it."

The Hawk Lord abruptly got to his feet and held out a hand to me. "Thank you, Corporal."

I shook his hand, the warmth and strength of it cementing the feeling that this was my path. "It's my honor to serve, Hawk Lord."

"Good. And I'll be honored to fly you to Alantri personally." He winked at me as if he knew exactly what kind of chaos those words would cause, but he still winced when everyone started shouting at once.

## Chapter Three

“Hawk Lord, you can't risk yourself,” General Faron, Dalsharan's highest-ranking officer, said firmly. “We need you here.”

“But Corporal Ravellar needs me more,” the Hawk Lord said.

*Dear Gods, help me.* It was as if he knew what words would affect me the most and was choosing them specifically to fuck with me.

“Only a superior Hawk can make the journey across the Bellor Sea while carrying another man,” the Hawk Lord went on. “And the Corporal will need someone powerful watching his back while he's inside the fortress—someone who can help him if he gets into trouble.” He looked at Raeshal. “I promise you that I won't let him die.”

Raeshal's jaw clenched, but he nodded crisply.

“But, my lord, why you?” Beryl asked, almost whined. “There are other Hawks strong enough to carry and guard him.”

“No, there aren't,” Dalsharan argued. “Not strong enough to fight off a fortress full of Farungal long enough to get him out.”

“You're going to fly into a fortress if he gets caught?” General Faron asked. “They'll kill you.”

“I will not send a human into a Farungal stronghold without backup,” the Hawk Lord snapped. “If he's brave enough to go, I

am brave enough to watch over him. I will ensure his safety.”

“We could send a team, they—” Raeshal started to say.

The Hawk Lord cut him off, “A team will be spotted. Enough!” He sliced his hand through the air. “Corporal Ravellar has agreed, and I have vowed to protect him. That is the end of this discussion!” His expression gentled as he turned toward me. “Prepare yourself, Ravyn. We leave in an hour.”

“Yes, Hawk Lord!” I saluted the warlord and strode out of the tent.

## Chapter Four

“You can change your mind, Ravyn,” Raeshal said as he followed me into my tent. “You don't have to do this.”

“I *want* to do this,” I said absently as I shrugged out of my cotton tunic and pulled on the padded one I wore beneath my armor.

“Why would you want to do this?” Raeshal asked, baffled.

“I have a feeling.” I grinned and slapped Raeshal on the shoulder. “I'll be fine, Rae. Don't worry about me.” I grinned wider. “Although, it's very sweet that you are.”

“Oh, fuck you, you little prick,” Raeshal huffed but cracked a grin. “I feel awful that I'm the one who got you into this mess.”

“You didn't,” I went serious. “It was my choice. Those amulets sound important.”

“They are,” Raeshal admitted, lowering his voice. “It astounds me that not one, but two of them were taken.”

“Which warlords lost them?”

His voice dropped to a whisper, “The Lion and Coyote Lords. Every warlord has an amulet, and they're supposed to guard them with their lives.”

I whistled. “I have to admit that I'm a little shocked that anyone could steal anything from a warlord.”

“Being powerful doesn't make you smart,” Raeshal

grumbled. “And neither does being fast. Be careful out there.”

“Always.” I grinned.

I reached for my leather breastplate, but Raeshal grabbed my wrist and pulled me against his chest. His other hand went to the back of my head, holding me still for his violent kiss. I growled against his lips, and he nipped at mine as he pulled away.

“Don't you dare mess up that fine ass,” he smacked said ass and strode out.

I smirked after him. I'd had no expectations when I started screwing Raeshal. I'd heard about him from some of the other guys, and the Red Hawk, as they called him, never nested for long. Rae had gone from man to man in the camp, changing lovers every week. But that was before me. We'd been together going on six months now. My grin faded as a pair of amethyst-emerald eyes flashed in my mind. Did I love Rae? No; I hadn't allowed myself to. I'd thought we'd be over in a week after all. But he was showing possessiveness and... could he... nah. Not the Red Hawk. He liked me, liked fucking me more, and we had become friends. I was pretty sure we'd be friends even after he moved on. But love? No, he didn't love me. No one ever did.

I got into my armor—a design of boiled leather plates cut to resemble feathers. The gold feathers—one on each shoulder—showed my rank and the black of the rest of them showed my affiliation. Any soldier from any beast army could take one look at me and know that I was a corporal in the Hawks. Just looking at my armor made me proud, especially those feathers. It was a symbol of what I'd accomplished—just me. I'd gone from a homeless unwanted gay boy to a Corporal in the Hawk Army and now, I had a chance to save Varalorre.

“Varalorre,” I whispered to myself.

There wasn't a human alive who hadn't dreamed of seeing



the Fae lands. They were rumored to be beautiful enough to make a man weep. The thought of helping to protect them straightened my shoulders. The Fae were our allies; we never would have lasted this long without them. It was an honor to be chosen to help protect their home. I picked up my helmet—a streamlined thing with a point resembling a beak that served as a nose guard—and tossed it on my cot.

My sword was in its sheath beneath the cot, but I didn't think it was worth the extra weight. In fact... none of this would help me. If I got into a situation where I needed a sword and armor, I was probably going to die. With that thought in mind, I started removing all the armor I'd been putting on. I had just gotten down to my underwear—a pair of thin homespun shorts—when someone walked into my tent. I turned to see who it was... and froze.

The fucking Hawk Lord was standing in my tent. Staring at me. Not at my eyes either.

An elegant hand that looked better suited to holding a scepter than a sword, dropped the tent flap, sealing him inside with me. My tent suddenly seemed small, his presence expanding into every corner and his body looming above me. I hadn't realized just how tall he was. I was around six feet, but he had a good five inches on me. The Hawk Lord had his hair braided back and was dressed in a robe, but not the sort that fancy men wear in their fancy houses. No, this was a war robe. Fae soldiers wore them into battle so they could shuck them off quickly and shift into their beasts. His war robe was deep black and embroidered with a gold hawk on the back. Not that I could see the back at the moment. Not that I even cared about the back when he was looking at me like that.

The Hawk Lord's jewel eyes had gone molten as they roamed my body. Moving over my shoulders and down my biceps, taking in every hardened curve that I'd built over years of battle. They slid across my chest, pausing at my nipples, then down the

ridges of my belly. His jaw clenched and he swallowed visibly, his gaze snared on the bulge in my shorts. My cock had decided to salute its warlord.

Under the Hawk Lord's hot stare, I felt no shame for my body's reaction to him. Instead, I stretched my shoulders and stared back, all of my nervousness gone now that it was just him and me. I ran a hand through my hair, smoothing back the cropped locks, and gave him a lopsided grin.

"Is there something I can do for you, Hawk Lord?" I drawled in my I-want-to-suck-and-fuck-you voice.

The Hawk Lord's stare snapped up to mine and a flush suffused his cheeks. He cleared his throat. "I'm sorry. I didn't expect to find you... I thought you'd be dressed by now." He made to turn away. "I'll be outside."

"Don't go," I said softly.

He lifted a brow as he turned back toward me.

"I could use your advice," I said smoothly.

Sweet Gods, had I worried about being nervous around him? It suddenly felt as if I'd known him for years. Known and lusted after him.

"Oh?" The Hawk Lord grinned, his flush replaced by an intrigued look.

"I was going to wear my armor, but I'm having second thoughts." I waved at the leather, totally disregarding the fact that I had a serious erection tenting my shorts—a hard-on that seemed impossible for the Hawk Lord to ignore. His gaze kept straying to it.

"Why is that?" Dalsharan edged closer under the guise of

inspecting my armor, and his chest brushed against my arm.

I felt his nipple harden into a pebble through the fabric of his robe. I twitched my hand, “accidentally” sliding it against his thigh, and he inhaled sharply.

“I think I should go with something lighter.” I looked up at him. His face was inches away from mine. His fucking gorgeous face. “Dress for speed instead of protection. After all, *you’re* my protection, right?”

Dalsharan made a low, pensive sound in his throat as he looked from me to my cot. I got the feeling that he wasn't contemplating armor anymore.

“That's right,” he murmured and shifted further into the tent, sliding around me to gracefully sit on my bed. He picked up my bracer and stroked a hand over the leather, then looked up at me. “Wear something dark... like your hair. And lightweight. Don't bother with weapons.” His gaze didn't have far to go to find my cock again, but he took his time lowering it so that it was clear what he was looking at. Then he stood, and as he passed behind me, he brushed his chest along my back. Just before he moved beyond my reach, he leaned down and whispered in my ear, “Very impressive, Corporal.”

Then he was gone.

## Chapter Five

“What is this thing?” I asked as the Hawk Lord handed me a mass of leather straps.

I wanted to ask him if it was something kinky, but we were in front of his personal guards, his generals, and a shitload of other people. Which meant that I was back to being nervous.

“That thing is a flight rig,” the Hawk Lord said. “Here.”

Dalsharan took the rig from me and undid the buckles, then brusquely helped me into the straps. I blinked in surprise as he casually set a hand on my waist and spun me so that my back faced him. I met Raeshal's stare and widened my eyes in a what-the-fuck way. Rae chuckled just as I was spun again so that the Hawk Lord could finish fastening me into his kinky flight rig. When he was done, I wore a series of leather straps that formed a sort of vest with solid loops curving up from my shoulders.

I eyed the thick, wire-wrapped loops and lifted a brow at Dalsharan. “Are those where your claws go?”

“Unless you'd prefer to go bareback,” he whispered and then stepped away from me, grinning at the flush that rose to my cheeks. “Now, *that* is called payback, Corporal.”

“I don't know what you're referring to, my lord, but I'm certain that whatever offense I gave, it was done unintentionally.”

“We'll discuss it later,” the Hawk Lord said sharply as he handed me a satchel to slip over my shoulder. Then he nodded to General Faron. “Look after my army while I'm gone, General.”

“Yes, Hawk Lord.” The General bowed.

Dalsharan nodded crisply, then his gaze went back to me as he untied his robe. He stared at me as if daring me to look, and he grinned when I didn't. I kept my chin lifted and my stare on his face... until he stepped back and started to shift, that is. In that brief moment between bird and man, I looked. And boy am I glad I did. When I said the Hawk Lord was everything, I didn't realize just *how much* of everything he was. Let's just say that I was the one impressed now.

I caught a glimpse of a pendant on his chest, its translucent jewel a honey-brown. But then a giant hawk stood before me, its tawny feathers shining in the sunlight and one golden eye focused on me, and the pendant was gone. Either it had disappeared or was hidden in all of those feathers. The Hawk Lord was magnificent in this form, and the power that had flared out with his shift had made goosebumps rise on my arms.

He lifted his deadly beak, shrieked once, and took to the sky. My head tilted to watch him circle me, then swoop, and I braced for his grip. Massive claws curled around the loops and lifted me. It wasn't as jolting as I'd expected and the rig made dangling from Dalsharan's talons comfortable, but as the ground dropped away and we headed for the coast, I had to push down a flare of panic.

I had dreamed of flying but having your own wings and having someone carry you while you prayed that they didn't drop you are two different things. I almost reached up to grab his bird ankles just in case.

“I will not drop you,” Dalsharan's voice sounded sharper and much louder coming from that beak. But the volume was helpful with the roar of the wind in my ears.

“Oh, I'm not worried about that,” I lied.

“Liar,” he called me on it.

“No, seriously,” I shouted. “I was just thinking that it's a long way to Alantri and hoping that I don't have to pee.”

The laugh that burst from that enormous beak was squawking, jubilant, and loud enough to make me cringe.

“If you must, go ahead. I won't look.”

“I don't trust you not to look,” I teased.

The huge hawk head angled down to eye me. “Are you questioning my honor?”

I barked out a laugh. “Not at all, only your willpower.”

“We're not in the sky five minutes and you're already flirting with me,” he noted. “You do realize that Raeshal is a friend of mine.”

I went still. We were seriously flirting? And what did Raeshal have to do with it?

“What does Raeshal have to do with it?” I went ahead and asked. Why not? What's the worst that could happen?

“You do know that he's in love with you?”

And *that's* the worst that could happen; he could answer.

“No, I didn't,” I said as my mind reeled. “I... I don't feel... I didn't expect...”

Dalsharan looked down and laughed. “Well, fuck me, a human has caught the Red Hawk, but he doesn't want him. Serves Rae right for all the men he's toyed with.”

“You're not mad?”

“That you're not serious about Raeshal?” He asked. “Why would that make me mad? You've just given me permission to proceed.”

“I don't think you need permission for anything,” I muttered.

“Hawks have excellent hearing,” he noted. “And you're right, I don't usually. But I do try to avoid stepping on the hearts of my friends.”

“Fuck, please tell me you're not going to back off because of Raeshal.”

“I believe I just said I was proceeding.” He chuckled again. “Humans are so... direct.”

“We're direct?” I scoffed. “Do you want to know how Rae got me in bed? He asked where my tent was and then asked why I wasn't naked in it beneath him.”

Dalsharan shrieked with laughter again. “Yes, that sounds like Raeshal. But that's only in camp. In Varalorre, he's a different man.”

“What does that mean?” I asked as I eyed the beach below; we were just leaving land and that anxious ball in my belly got larger.

The Hawk Lord peered at me again. “If you don't know what that means, I can say no more.”

“Rude. Just rude.” I crossed my arms.

He chuckled again.

“Does he really...?” I asked hesitantly.

“Love you? Yes. He wouldn't have fought so hard to keep

you in camp if he didn't. I've seen Raeshal watch lovers die and not shed a tear, but you... he couldn't even stomach the possibility of you getting hurt."

"Fuck," I muttered. I liked Rae. I didn't love him, but I did like him. I didn't want to hurt his feelings.

"Don't worry about Rae; he'll recover. He'll have to head home soon anyway and then his days of freedom will be over."

"Freedom?"

Dalsharan sighed and confessed, "Raeshal is engaged. To a woman."

"Dear Gods, I'm so sorry for him."

Dalsharan laughed uproariously. "He's not. He loves her too."

"Greedy fuck," I joked.

"Faeries have a broader view on love and sex than humans do," Dalsharan mused. "We believe that a heart should not be limited by bodies or quantities."

"Yeah, I know; you guys fuck whoever you want, whenever you want. I admire that."

"Stop it," he said with a laugh. "I'm trying to be serious."

"So am I. I truly respect that you faeries take pleasure where you find it," I kept teasing because, well, he was damn funny, and I think that shocked me and aroused me more than anything else—even more than his huge cock.

"Yes, that's a rather masculine human opinion," he noted. "But it goes deeper than that for us."



“Do tell,” I purred. “I love deeper.”

Another chuckle. “We believe that people can have many great loves.”

“That's because you fae live so damn long.”

“There is that,” he agreed.

I went quiet a while, watching the water go from turquoise to cerulean. Then I asked, “So, how long do you think it will take us to reach the first stronghold?”

“An hour perhaps.”

“Excellent.”

“I thought you were worried about having to pee?”

“Well, sure. Despite what you said, I can't just whip it out while we're flying. The wind would blow piss all over me.”

Dalsharan laughed again, and I grinned up at him. I was beginning to like that loud bird laugh.

“But I'm glad we have an hour together,” I went on as I reached up and laid my hand on his claw. “I think I like you, Hawk Lord.”

“Careful now, Corporal. I'm not Raeshal, I don't fuck every pretty thing that bends over for me.”

I flushed. Talk about a build-up only to be smacked down. “No, my lord,” I said crisply and removed my hand. “Of course not. My apologies for being so forward.”

“Don't get prickly with me,” he snapped. “I'm telling you that I want some substance with my sex and warning you that if I decide to make you mine, you will not be flirting with other men as

they carry you off to sneak into Farungal fortresses.”

My flush turned into one of pleasure and my dick twitched as his possessive words. I don't usually go for the whole possessive dom thing, but for the Hawk Lord, I'd bare my neck and beg for a collar. Of course, I wasn't about to tell him that.

“I think I can easily promise that I will never flirt with another man as he flies me to a Farungal fortress. So, we're all good, Hawk Lord. Go ahead and think it over.”

Dalsharan started laughing again.

## Chapter Six

I had never had so much fun just talking with a man. I was especially surprised to enjoy myself on my way to infiltrate a Farungal fortress. But then, my life had been about war since I was 16. You stop fearing the fight when your life is focused on it. If the war ever ended, I'd probably be fucked and not in a good way.

All of my amusement vanished when a jagged, misty coastline came into view.

“That's Alantri?” I asked as we drew closer.

“Yes. The coast is bleak but it gets better inland.”

“You mean there are pretty places where monsters live?”

“Of course. There are even pretty monsters.”

I pondered that as he started to descend. We dropped through the mist. There was nothing but black cliffs with windswept plains atop them; I saw no sign of a stronghold.

Dalsharan set me down first and even though he did so lightly, I wound up crumbling to my knees. An hour of dangling from the claws of a giant bird will do that to you. The Hawk Lord politely ignored my grumbling and awkward stretching as he landed beside me and shifted.

This time, I looked.

Dalsharan grinned wickedly as my gaze roamed his naked body from broad shoulders to graceful toes, then he held his hand out for his satchel. I shrugged it off and handed it to him slowly,

pretending to let it slip a couple of times so I could stare a little longer at his glorious muscles, all honey-brown and sculpted to perfection. His cock, as I mentioned, was beyond perfect. Even flaccid, it's pale-gold length, nestled in snowy curls, was mouthwatering. But it was the rest of the Hawk Lord's body that I couldn't stop looking at. The corded sinews in his arms, the curves of his ass, the dimples at his hips, and the rosy nipples crowning that magnificent chest. There was that pendant again—a triangular stone set in gold, hanging from one point. Neither the chain nor the gold around the stone was anything special, and I would have said the same about the stone—what with it being a polished jewel, not faceted—but there was something strange about it. I swear it winked at me.

“Ravyn,” Dalsharan said in a chiding tone, “give me the bag.”

“Huh?” I realized that my hand had fallen as I stared at his amulet. “Oh!” I tossed the satchel to him.

The Hawk Lord grimaced as he caught it, then pulled out his clothes and a pair of boots. He got dressed as I shimmied out of the flight rig. I snagged the bag back while he was busy, picked up his robe, and tossed the rig and robe inside before slinging the satchel over my shoulder.

“So, where is the fortress?” I asked as I tried to see through the mists that drifted over the rocky plateau.

“Not far. This way” He started walking.

I stepped up beside him. “This feeling I'm supposed to follow to find the amulets, it's the same as that tingle you gave me?”

“I gave you a tingle?” Dalsharan lifted a pale brow.

“Oh, you have no idea,” I drawled. “But I'm talking about

that magic pulse thing you sent me.”

“Yes, Ravyn, I know what you're talking about,” he gave me a bemused grin. “And the feeling you'll be searching for will be similar but not exactly like that. What you felt was my stone.”

“I felt your stone? Shit, I don't even remember it,” I teased. “It must be pretty small.”

“If you think you're going to talk me into letting you feel my balls because you call them small, you're more of a child than Raeshal thinks.”

I stuck my tongue out at him, and he snorted a laugh.

“I sent you a pulse through my amulet, the Hawk Soul.” He tapped his chest, right where that pendant hung beneath his tunic.

I stumbled to a stop. “The Hawk Soul? That thing has a *soul*?”

He glanced back at me. “I'll tell you all about it after you fetch the first amulet. It's not a conversation to be had in the open, especially on Farungal land.”

“All right.” I started walking again. “So, I'm after an amulet that feels like yours?”

“Yes. The soul stone will be in distress so it will be—”

“The soul stone?” I interrupted. “They're *all* souls?”

The Hawk Lord gave me a stern look.

“Sorry,” I muttered. “Please, continue.”

“It will either be the Lion or the Coyote Soul, I'm not certain which stone is held by which army, but it doesn't make a difference. They will both be emitting panic pulses, trying to locate

their owners. These pulses are strong; you should be able to sense them as soon as you're in the stronghold and follow those pulses straight to the stones.”

The landscape changed slightly. We'd been walking down an incline and after a few feet, the mist dispersed, revealing a thick forest surrounded by rolling hills. On the other side of the forest a castle stretched its deadly spires toward the sky. Although the landscape was bright and lush, the castle seemed to leech the life from it—a dark wound that absorbed instead of bled. The shortest way to the castle was through the forest, but the Hawk Lord angled our descent so that when we reached the bottom of the hill, we were poised to go around the edges of the forest instead.

I looked at him askance.

“Trust me when I say that you don't want to wander through those trees,” he said in a low voice.

“Right. Got it. No skipping through Farungal forests.”

“Not unless you'd like to meet the creatures the Farungal consider monstrous.”

I turned to look at Dalsharan, certain he was joking, but he only stared grimly back. I swallowed past a dry lump in my throat and followed him around the edge of the forest, keeping an eye on the shadows further in. We stopped about fifty yards from the castle to take stock. The straggling line of trees offered some cover and the hilly terrain helped. We crouched in the grass. The Hawk Lord pulled out two cylinders and handed me one—farseers. Compact spyglasses.

“I'll approach from that side.” As I stared through my farseer, I motioned toward the hills to the right of the castle.

No, it wasn't a castle. It hadn't been built as a pretty place to live that could also be defended, it had been made purely for

defense. There were arrow slits in the walls, hinged vats for boiling oil on the battlements, and iron spikes sticking out of the top of the walls, angled downward. This was a fortress. A stronghold. Those spikes would make scaling the wall hell on a fae, but they wouldn't bother me. I might even be able to use them as footholds.

“It will be dark soon and then you can make your approach. For now, we watch the guards.”

I nodded. I'd already been making a mental note of how many guards were on the battlements. Even after 10 years of fighting these creatures, the sight of them still disturbed me. The long limbs, hunched backs, sin-black skin, and wide faces weren't so bad, but the fangs behind their feral lips dripped venom and the barbs on their tails held even more poison. If that didn't scare you, there were twisting horns atop their heads that they loved to use to gore people and the knife-sharp claws they could sprout from both hands and feet whenever they felt like it. I'd never seen one who wasn't in the mood for some claws but then again, I'd also never seen one off a battlefield. The Farungal I stared at now were on guard duty, and they looked calm and clawless.

“Hand me the satchel,” Dalsharan said as he lowered his farseer.

I shrugged out of the strap and passed him the bag.

The Hawk Lord moved away and settled at the base of a tree to rifle through the satchel. He pulled out a flask of water and tossed it to me. “You might want to see to that worrisome bladder of yours.”

“Are you telling me to piss in the water flask?” I scowled at him.

“That's not even funny.” He motioned to the trees with his head. “Find a tree.”

I grinned and took a swig of water. "I'm good. Did you bring anything to eat?" I went to crouch beside him and peer into the pack, even though its magic made it appear empty.

Fae satchels can hold crazy amounts of stuff and still look empty. You had to stick your hand in while you thought of what you wanted to remove, and then the satchel would push it into your palm. It's a little creepy at first but you get used to it fast. And when you're marching for miles, you really appreciate the weight it literally takes off your shoulders.

"You want to have a picnic outside a Farungal stronghold?" He lifted a brow at me.

"It's been hours since lunch," I grumbled.

Dalsharan smiled and dug out a bundle of dried meat strips. He tossed one to me before taking one for himself. I sighed in disappointment and started gnawing.

"What? The food isn't to your liking?" the Hawk Lord asked.

"I was hoping that since I was with you, we would get better grub."

"I eat the same food that the rest of you do. I thought my soldiers knew that."

"I've been told it, but I never believed it."

He gave me an insulted look.

"What kind of idiot runs an army but doesn't eat better than the lowest private?"

"Evidently, *this* kind of idiot." He waved at himself.

"Evidently," I agreed with him.



The Hawk Lord flicked a finger at me, and I fell back on my ass.

“Hey, what the fuck?” I whined as I sat up.

“Don't speak to your warlord like that,” he chided me. “That was the least of what I can do to you.”

His threat sounded more like a promise, and I grinned at him in anticipation. “Is that right?”

“Focus!” Dalsharan snapped at me. “The time for camaraderie is over, Corporal. You're heading into the second most dangerous place for a human to go. You need to prepare yourself.”

“Fine,” I grumbled and chewed at the jerky. Then I processed what he said. “If that's the second most dangerous place, what's the first?”

The Hawk Lord smirked as if I'd fallen right into his trap. “My arms.”

I tossed my jerky at him, and he laughed his ass off.

## Chapter Seven

When night fell, I pulled out the few tools I'd brought with me—a grappling hook with rope, gloves, and lock picks. I checked the lock picks before tucking them into a boot, then slipped on the gloves and readied the hook by unfolding it and clicking it open. I took a step forward, but the Hawk Lord grabbed my wrist and stopped me. I looked back at him.

Dalsharan lifted a hand and gently brushed my hair behind my ear. I stared up at him, mesmerized, my heart suddenly racing. But then he slipped something in my ear and tapped it in place. It buzzed as it connected—a communication device.

"I'll be listening," he said softly. "If you need me, call my name."

"It's kind of a long name." I was trying to be funny but it came out breathless.

"You can call me Dal." He brushed my hair back down over my ear. "While we're on our mission."

I cleared my throat and hurried away before I embarrassed myself, tossing a, "Thanks," over my shoulder.

"Be careful, Ravyn," his voice purred through my earpiece.

Then I was creeping over the dark hills and melding with every shadow. I had done some scouting for the Hawks but if I'm honest, I'd learned most of my stealth by playing pranks on my friends. I could sneak up on a man and dump soapy bathwater over his head in three seconds flat without spilling a drop on myself. I

never did it to women, though. Not because I thought women soldiers should be treated differently, but because they *cannot* take a *fucking joke*. They always think you're screwing with them because of their sex and then they complain to your captain and... I reached the wall and realized I'd spent the whole trip thinking about jokes and female soldiers. What the fuck?

I blamed it on Dalsharan. Dal. The fucker. Why'd he go and play with my hair like that just before I had to sneak past monsters? Who does that shit? Idiots who ate jerky when they could be eating steak, that's who. Oh, you can call me Dal but only while we're in the land of evil and no one can hear you but the monsters and me. Gee, thanks, Dick. I mean, Dal. Then I grinned because he so wasn't a dick. I'd idolized him before but after spending a few hours with him, I had gotten to see him as a person, and I liked the man even better than the idol.

Right. Climbing now.

I waited for the passing of the guards, knowing I'd have five minutes before another soldier made his rounds. I tossed up the hook and it caught on the first go. It did make a loud clink, however, so I waited a minute just to be sure no one came to investigate. Then I started climbing.

"You *are* a monkey," Dal's voice drawled in my ear.

"Would you mind shutting the fuck up while I scale a fucking Farungal wall?" I muttered while I slid my foot over an iron spike.

"Remember who you're talking to," he growled.

"Oh, sorry. Would you mind shutting the fuck up, *my lord*?"

Dal chuckled. "Okay, I'll be quiet, but I'm here with you, Ravyn. You're not alone."

“Thanks,” I said again. This time, I meant it.

I reached the top of the wall and clung to the edge, listening once more. Still clear. I swung my legs over the edge and dropped into a crouch. A quick movement collected my hook and I spun its length of cord up as I moved into the shadows. There was a guard on his way. I could hear the swish of his tail across stone. But I also knew that in the opposite direction, there was no one. I sprinted that way as I folded the hook, wrapped it in the thin rope, and tucked it into my belt.

My crouching run along the battlements gave me a bird's-eye view of the courtyard. Although the Farungal were monsters, they weren't animals. In addition to their prompt patrols, the fortress was orderly and clean. I crept down a set of stairs and dashed across the courtyard toward the keep. A group of Farungal passed by, but I ducked behind a stack of barrels just in time. They grunted at each other, one shoving another so hard he went stumbling forward. The shoved Farungal swung back around and launched himself at his companion. In seconds, a monster brawl was happening less than two feet away from my face.

I looked from the fight to the front door. A bunch of Farungal came running out of the keep. I thought they were going to break up the fight but instead, they gathered around eagerly and started placing wagers. For a second, I felt right at home.

The keep doors had been left wide open and in a few minutes, the rush of gawking Farungals slowed to a stop. I couldn't believe my luck; they were serving as their own distraction. I grinned and shot into the keep.

Once inside, I darted along the walls until I reached the relative safety of an alcove—a little nook with a window. I slid behind the curtain, a little surprised that Farungal bothered with draperies, and closed my eyes. I wasn't about to blunder blindly around the stronghold; I wanted to know where I was going. So, I

focused, searching for a feeling like the one Dal had given me.

There! A tingle. A pulse. Almost a roar.

“The Lion,” I whispered.

“What?” Dal whispered back.

“I feel the stone. Now, shh.”

I could hear his annoyance even in his silence, and I grinned to myself as I slipped out of my hiding place. I followed the roaring pulse deeper into the fortress, carefully pausing at corners to listen for footsteps before moving on.

Although the stronghold was relatively clean, it wasn't hospitable. I passed very little furniture and there was no decoration—no art of any kind. The walls were bare stone and the further into the castle I went, the colder it got. The pulse was taking me down, leading me beneath the fortress and into the earth, but this cold wasn't merely the chill of damp rock. My breath puffed in the air before me.

“What is that sound?” the Hawk Lord whispered in my ear.

*Sound? What the fuck was he talking about?* Then I heard it. “My teeth are chattering,” I whispered back. “Now be quiet. I'm below the keep.”

He went quiet. I went quiet too, clenching my jaw together to keep from making even that little noise. Because the pulse was stronger, but it wasn't alone. I sensed something else down there, lurking in the dark corridors. The lanterns that had lit the upper level were more sporadic here. I'd thought that a gift at first, but now, I wasn't so sure. Every patch of shadow became sinister. Even the wavering light from the few lanterns seemed to fear it. I slid through the darkness anyway, but I became painfully aware of my surroundings. Every tiny hair on my body lifted as if they knew

we were walking into danger.

But no claws came for me in the darkness; I crept ahead unimpeded. Then light, brighter and warmer than the corridor lanterns, pierced the darkness. It seeped from an arched passage and with it came the pulse. I padded forward slowly, listening for any sound that might alert me to the presence of a Farungal. None came. Whatever was down there, I had managed to bypass it. I stepped up to the passage and found it barred by an iron gate.

Iron—this was definitely the place. The Fae, especially the Sidhe, have an aversion to iron. They couldn't touch it. That is, they could, but it wouldn't be pleasant. Iron weakens the Fae and represses their magic. It also hurts like a bitch, I'm told. They'd never be able to touch this gate long enough to pick its lock. But I could.

I grinned even as I shivered violently. I'd never been a fan of the cold, and I'd grown to especially hate it after fighting the Farungal, who seep cold like normal people give off heat. They are truly cold-blooded. Not like reptiles, who have to rely on external heat sources and can slow their metabolisms in colder environments. No, the Farungal literally have cold blood. Although, some say that they are cousins to the Sidhe, that the Farungal's animal forms were reptilian and then evolved into what they are now. That they practiced dark magic that forced them into their beasts constantly and altered them into evil things whose bodies create that famous Farungal chill. It preceded them into battle—a wave of cold generated by a large gathering of monsters.

But the chill in this room was only a remnant. So many of them had come here so often that they had cooled the stones and the earth surrounding them had served as insulation. It was like walking into an icebox. It felt as if there should be slabs of venison hanging on hooks in there. I glanced inside briefly, just to make sure no monsters were hiding inside, and there wasn't so much as a jug of milk. Nope, not an icebox, just a favorite hangout of

Farungal. Yay!

I grinned grimly as the lock clicked, then slipped my tools back into my boot. The gate swung open silently and for some reason, that raised my hackles. But I stepped forward anyway, across the frigid stone, to a shelf chiseled out of the wall. Similar shelves lined the entire room with all manner of oddities upon them. Massive trunks stood in lines across the floor, doubtless full of more strange things. I didn't bother inspecting the Farungal treasures. I had a feeling they'd scare the hell out of me.

Instead, I focused on the shelf before me. The source of that roaring pulse was there, and the pulse sped up as if it knew salvation was in reach. I saw it immediately—a pendant like Dalsharan's. Its stone was a shade of gold too, but it was a paler shade than his, closer to lion fur than hawk feathers. *The Lion Soul*. The words rang through my mind as if a god had spoken them. I ignored the tremble in my hand and snatched it up. I was going to put it in my pocket but at the last second, I decided to slip it over my neck. I figured it would be safer there.

As soon as the stone came into contact with my chest, a burst of energy rushed through me. Vibrated through me. I gave a broken cry and fell onto my hands and knees. My whole body twitched, muscles going into spasm. My vision went strange—sharper but also less colorful. I drew in a deep breath and lifted my head to roar.

“Ravyn!” Dalsharan shouted in my ear; he sounded as if he'd been shouting for a while.

I gasped and shook my head. Had I been about to roar? In a fucking Farungal stronghold? In their frigid treasure room? What the fuck?!

“Ravyn!” Dal shouted again.

“I'm fine,” I panted. “Give me a fucking second.”

“What happened?”

“I got the pendant. It's safe. I put it on to—”

“You did what?!” he shouted even louder.

“Was I not supposed to do that?” I smirked.

“Great blessed Moon,” Dal whispered.

I lost my smirk and scrambled to my feet. “What?” I asked, my voice going panicked. “What did I do?” I pulled the pendant up, over my head urgently. A shimmering glow ran down my arms, following the path of the pendant as I lowered it. The glow seeped out of my skin and into the stone, then winked out. “Oh, wait, I think it's okay now.”

“You think it's *okay*?” he growled.

“I took it off and this glow left me.”

Dal was silent for so long that I got worried.

“Dal?”

“Get back here. *Now*, Corporal!”

“Yes, Hawk Lord!” I said automatically, the soldier in me responding to his tone.

I tucked the pendant into my pants' pocket and crept out of the room.



## Chapter Eight

“One more time,” Dalsharan demanded.

We were in a cave somewhere in Alantri, halfway to the second stronghold I'd be infiltrating. I had gotten out of the first one without a problem—it had been ridiculously easily, actually—and ran back to where Dal was waiting for me. He'd already been shifted into his hawk form and had ordered me to get into the flight rig immediately. I got rigged up, and the Hawk Lord flew me across Alantri until he spotted this cave, halfway up the side of a mountain and inaccessible for anyone without wings. Only when we were secure did he shift, yank on his war robe, and start firing questions at me. He was stuck on one, in particular.

“I thought it would be safer to just wear the pendant.” I waved a hand wearily at the satchel where he had stashed the Lion Soul amulet. “So, I put it on and—”

“You put it on!” he shouted—again. As if he couldn't believe my idiocy. “*Why* would you put it on?!”

“Uh, I just told you that—”

“Don't you understand that these things are powerful?” Dal waved at his chest, where his own amulet gleamed. “It could have killed you! It's a fucking miracle you survived. The Great Mother must love morons!”

“No, I didn't know!” I shouted back.

Dal gaped at me. I'd bet it had been a long time since someone had shouted at him.

And I kept going. “You didn't tell me! You said you'd tell me about the stones and their fucking souls *after* I got the first one. So, no, I didn't think that putting a fucking necklace on could get me killed!”

Dalsharan let out a long breath. “And yet you live.”

“We'll see how long that lasts,” I muttered. “I just fucking yelled at the Hawk Lord. It seems as if I can't stop risking my ass.”

“Your ass is not at risk,” he said dryly. Then he added, “Not in that manner.”

I lifted a brow at him. “Are you trying to imply that you're so huge that—”

“Do *not*,” Dal cut me off, “finish that sentence.”

“You started it.” I grinned.

“Ravyn.” He shook his head. “You... what happened when you put it on?”

“I felt weird.”

“Weird.” The Hawk Lord closed his eyes and rubbed at his temples. “Weird in a... oh, I don't know, a *leonine* way?”

“If you're asking if I felt kind of like a lion, then yeah. Now that you mention it. I almost roared.”

Dalsharan's eyes popped open. “You almost *roared*?”

“Weird, right? You think the stone did some kind of lion-fae-magic on me?”

“Lion-fae-magic,” he drawled. “Yes, I think it was lion-fae-magic.”

“Don't get all patronizing with me,” I growled. “You shoved me into your kinky leather straps, flew me out here with no briefing—even though you had ample opportunity to give me one during the flight, and then sent me into a Farungal stronghold unprepared. I'm allowed some leeway with my terminology.”

“Fuck,” Dalsharan whispered and sort of crumpled onto the ground.

“Whoa, now, don't be getting your pretty robe dirty,” I said as I fumbled for the satchel.

As I mentioned, fae satchels are enchanted to hold a shitload of stuff and this one was no exception. Camping supplies came to hand as soon as I reached for them with intent. I pulled out a rolled pallet and tossed it to the Hawk Lord before bringing another out for me. Dal stared at the cylinder of cushion as if he'd never seen one before. So after I unrolled mine, I grabbed his and opened it for him. It puffed up into a fairly comfortable bed.

“Get your fine ass on that pallet, Hawk Lord,” I nudged his knee with my boot before I plopped onto mine.

Dal blinked from the pallet, to me, and back again, then moved his fine ass. He brushed some dirt off before he sat on the cushion, then lifted his stare to me. “I'm so sorry, Ravyn.”

“Well, that was unexpected,” I murmured and scratched my head.

“You're right, I didn't prepare you enough. I thought your sensitivity to magic would warn you from doing...” he waved his hand vaguely.

“Doing something stupid?” I asked and started fishing around in the satchel again. My arm disappeared to my shoulder, but I still couldn't find what I was looking for. “I think this satchel is fucking with me,” I muttered.

“Give me that damn thing,” Dal growled.

I handed it over. “I was looking for a pillow.”

“Not food?” He smirked as he pulled out two cloth-wrapped bundles and tossed one to me.

I caught it. The smell and warmth of hot food hit me. “Yes! I knew you were fucking with me earlier!” I unwrapped the bundle and found a meat pie. My face fell.

“I wasn't lying to you.” Dalsharan chuckled. “I eat the same food everyone else does. The only exception is when I have guests.” He stretched out his leg and pushed at my boot. “Come on, the meat pies are good.”

“Yeah, they're not bad, and at least it's hot.” I took a bite and sighed.

Dal passed me a water flask next. Then came a pillow and a blanket. I mumbled my thanks as he ate delicately. The Hawk Lord might eat the same things his soldiers did, but he didn't eat the same way. Every movement screamed of wealth and power, from the strong but polite bites to the way he brushed crumbs off his lips. I shrugged and chowed down. Crumbs went everywhere.

“I'm sorry I yelled at you,” I said after I had a few bites in my belly. “But you were getting a little hysterical.”

“I *never* get hysterical,” he said in a clipped tone.

I snorted. “Uh, yeah, you do. Cause you just did. You were *freaking* the fuck out.”

“You did catch the part where you almost turned into a lion, right?” Dal asked dryly.

I dropped my pie. “What now?”

“That weird way you felt—it's a prelude to shifting,” he took great delight in informing me. “And if your body had tried to shift, it would not have succeeded. You would have been twisted to pieces.”

“Fuck me,” I whispered.

“I haven't decided yet.”

I blinked. “Was that a joke?”

Dalsharan chuckled. “I thought we could use a little levity.”

“We have plenty of levity; I'm as levit as they come.”

“Levit is not a word.”

“It is now. Welcome to my world, Hawk Lord, where words aren't so much about being proper, but about being properly understood.” I winked at him. Then I went serious. “You said you'd tell me about the soul stones.”

“I suppose it's better late than never,” he muttered. “Very well. *The Soul Stones* are jewels imbued with the essence of our beasts—their souls. The magic within them connects directly to the kingdom of their beasts. That connection allows us warlords to draw on the magic of Varalorre in times of need.”

“The magic of an entire kingdom?” I whispered.

“Yes,” he said sternly. “Singly, they are very powerful, but they will work only for a member of the race they belong to. As they are the essence of our animal's soul, they magnify those abilities. By accessing his soul stone, a warlord can become stronger, faster, and more cunning. But if three warlords of different animal families were to unite their stones—an avian, a feline, and a canine—they would combine their power into a charm that could, at the very least, open wards.”

“And at the most?” I asked.

“I don't know. No one has ever dared to join three of them. The magic would be wild. Unpredictable. And if you merged three stones of the same color, the power would be even greater.”

“The same color?”

“There are four colors of soul stones—gold, red, blue, and green,” he explained. “Each animal family—Canine, Feline, and Avian—has four fae races within it, and each of those races has a different color of stone associated with it so that every family contains all four colors. To distinguish between the jewels of each family—”

I snorted. “Family jewels.”

Dalsharan gave me a hard look and I went quiet.

“To distinguish between the jewels of each family,” he started again, “each color has three shades—pale, neutral, and dark. This makes every soul stone unique. Now, if three warlords whose stones were of the same color, just different shades, united their soul stones, the already extraordinary power would be magnified.”

“Hold on.” I lifted a hand as something started to click in my head. “The Lion Soul Stone is a shade of gold,” I said. “And so is yours.”

“The Lion Soul is pale gold, my stone is dark.” Dalsharan nodded as if encouraging me to continue.

“What color is the Coyote Soul Stone?”

“Neutral gold,” he said in an approving tone.

“That's why you guys were so worried about getting them back! And that's why they didn't want you to go!”

“And that's why I had to,” he said softly. “Those stones are brothers to mine. I *must* see them safely back to their warlords.”

“Why couldn't their warlords go after them?”

“Because without them, they're weakened. I was the only one left, Ravyn. It had to be me.”

I shook my head at him. I didn't follow his reasoning, but I let it go. “You said that three merged stones could open wards *at the very least*. What could three merged stones of the same color do?”

“Potentially, they could do anything,” he said grimly.

He probably thought I was concerned about what the Farungal would do with that kind of power, and I was. But something else had occurred to me.

“How about stop the war?” I growled. “Could they do that?”

“You don't understand.” Dal shook his head. “Sure, a trinity of soul stones might be able to wipe out the Farungal. But they might also wipe out the rest of us along with the monsters. The risk is simply too great.”

I went still. “Oh.”

“Yes. Uniting the soul stones are our very last resort. I told you, they are wild, just like our beasts, and such savage power cannot fall into the hands of the Farungal.”

“But if a single stone only works for a specific race, wouldn't the three together need members of those three races to use it?”

“Not necessarily. For a warlord aligned with one of the stones, it would, of course, be easier to wield the power; the Beasts

would help him. Guide him. But if someone were strong enough—*mentally* strong enough—and had the will to withstand the Beasts, they could command the soul stones. They wouldn't even have to be Fae to do it.”

“So, with only two of them, the stones are useless to the Farungal, but with three, they could be united and used.”

“It's a possibility. If one of the Farungal were strong enough.”

“But on their own, they only work for faeries of a specific race.” I made a huffing sound. “No wonder you were shocked when that thing worked for me.”

“It didn't work for you; it nearly killed you. Still, you shouldn't have lived long enough to remove it. The Lion Soul should have torn through your human body and killed you instantly.” Dalsharan shook his head at me and a tone of wonder entered his voice, “Ravyn, you survived wearing a soul stone. Who are you?”

“What kind of question is that?” I scowled at him.

“I'm asking if it's possible that you have some fae blood in you. In particular, *Lion Fae* blood.”

That wasn't as crazy as it may sound. Humans and faeries have been getting down and dirty since they first met, over a thousand years ago, and sometimes—it's rare, but it happens—children are born from those unions. When those children are born to human mothers, both mother and child get whisked away to Varalorre, where the baby is raised as fae and the mother is awarded a sort of honorary fae citizenship. But some human women have been known to hide their pregnancies because they don't want to leave Stalana. I think those women are fucking crazy; I'd give anything to go to Varalorre. Maybe all those baby hormones made them nuts, but whatever the reason, there are now



humans running around Stalana with fae ancestry that they don't know about.

“I don't think so,” I said and snorted.

“Why do you say it like that?”

“I come from a long line of close-minded assholes. I can't imagine any of my ancestors having sex with a faerie, much less bearing a child by one.”

“A randy fae man wouldn't have cared if your ancestor was an asshole so long as she was beautiful. And if you're any indication of the looks that run in your family, I'd say there's a good chance that was the case.”

A slow grin spread across my face.

“Don't smile at me like that,” Dal said but he smiled too.

“You think I'm pretty,” I said in a sing-song tone. “You want to kiss my pretty lips.”

“I told you, I haven't decided yet.”

“Oh, you've decided.” I tossed the meat pie aside and crawled over to him. “You just don't want to admit it yet.” I rose on my knees before him and leaned forward to whisper in his ear. “I won't tell anyone.”

Dalsharan jerked back, put a hand to my chest, and pushed me away. “This is why I don't take a lot of lovers.”

I flushed with embarrassment and sat back on my heels. “Whoa. Okay. I misjudged that situation.” I started to get up.

Dalsharan grabbed my wrist with a growl, yanked me down, and rolled me beneath him. He pinned me to his pallet with his body, and I felt him harden against my thigh. But he didn't kiss

me. He glared at me.

“You're a fucking distraction!” the Hawk Lord snarled in my face. “I was so busy flirting with you that I didn't think things through. I didn't warn you about the cold in a Farungal fortress or the dangerous treasure they keep. I didn't even tell you about the soul stones. I let you go in there unprepared and you almost failed your mission because of it. Because of *this*!”

His mouth finally met mine, but his kiss was crushing, as if he were punishing me for his fuck-up. He ground his cock against me as he shoved that twisting, hot tongue into my mouth and grabbed a handful of my hair to angle me the way he wanted. I let him get aggressive, let him pour out his rage into me, because, frankly, it was fucking hot. I moaned into his mouth and slashed my lips over his, undulating up to rub my hard cock against his belly, brushing the tip of his mine.

Dal pulled away, breathing hard, and stared at me. His eyes had gone pure amethyst and his face twitched. But he took a deep breath and when he let it out, his eyes shifted back to their usual color. He released his hold on my hair and stroked it soothingly before rubbing a thumb across my swollen lips.

“You are a beautiful man, Ravyn, but I still haven't decided.”

I made a choking sound until I was finally able to form words. “Are you fucking kidding me? You're as hard as I am.”

I rolled him onto his back, and he let me—a little smile playing on his lips. I yanked open his robe and groaned when that magnificent cock was revealed. My mouth watered as I started to move down his body.

“No.” He grabbed a handful of my hair again and pulled me up by it. “I said I haven't decided.”

“Oh, come on!” I whined. “Just let me suck your dick.”

Dalsharan burst out laughing. “You are very tempting, Corporal. But no, thank you.”

“No, thank you?” I pushed off him and went back to my pallet. “Fuck this.” I undid my belt and tossed it aside, then untied the waistband of my pants.

“What are you doing?” Dal growled as he yanked his robe closed and sat up.

“I’m taking care of myself since you’re a fucking cocktease,” I muttered and yanked out my dick.

Dal’s breath caught as he stared at the length of my shaft. I almost grinned. I knew I had a pretty cock. It was a good size, not veiny, and flushed a deep rose at the tip when it was hard. It had made more than a few men sigh. And this was the first time the Hawk Lord was seeing it. I licked my palm slowly. His eyes flicked up to watch my tongue. I licked my hand again and again until it was dripping, then I grabbed my dick and started stroking it.

“Ravyn,” Dal growled in warning.

“Either you can rub it or I will,” I said as I laid back and looked at him. “But if you’re not going to, at least do me a favor and open that robe.”

A flush rushed over the Hawk Lord’s cheeks but, with his stare locked on mine, he opened his robe and flung it back, over his hip with a sharp movement. With him lying on his side as he was, his cock laid on his thigh but was long enough to touch the mattress and hard enough to make me whimper.

“Fuck,” I whispered. “That cock would go deep.” I licked my lips and stroked faster. “And it would stretch my ass so good.”

“Yes, it would,” Dalsharan growled as his hand dropped to his shaft. That magical lubricant glistened over his flesh as he began to rub himself. “And I would fuck you so hard that you'd be sore for a week. But I wouldn't give you any rest. I'd take you, over and over again, even as you begged for mercy. I'd hold you down and slide my cock deep in your ass because it would be mine to fuck.”

I groaned and rubbed faster. “You could fuck my mouth too.”

“Oh, I would.” Dal grinned viciously, his stare latching onto my lips as the wet sounds of him stroking his massive dick became erotic music to my ears. He laid his head down on his pillow as his gaze went heavy-lidded. “I would make you kneel before me and suck me slowly, and when I grew bored with that, I would grab you by the hair and face-fuck you until you gagged. I'd come in that pretty mouth and choke you with my cock until you swallowed.”

I cried out and came, spilling across my pants.

Dalsharan avidly watched me come, then made a deep, rumbling growl as his hips bucked into his fist. “Pull down your pants and get on your hands and knees.”

Heart racing and cock limp but twitching, I hurried to comply.

“Face away from me. I want to see that thick ass.”

“Oh, fuck,” I whispered as I got into position.

“Push your pretty face into your pallet and spread your cheeks for me,” he ordered.

A flush spread across my face, and I was glad that he couldn't see it. I pulled my ass cheeks apart for him, air hitting my

hole and making it pucker tighter. But then I heard him moving across the cave floor, and I prayed he had made his mind up and was coming to fuck me as hard as he'd promised. Please, whatever horny gods are listening, make that gorgeous man stick that amazing cock in me. Please!

A warm hand slid over my ass and I twitched in need. The sounds of him stroking himself were loud and feral. I angled my head to watch him. Dalsharan knelt behind me like a savage god, his hair coming loose of its braid, hanging in wild tendrils around his stunning face. His lips were parted and wet, as if he'd been licking them, and his violet stare was fastened on my ass. But he still didn't fuck me, just stared, stroked himself, and touched me.

“Fuck me,” I begged.

Dal met my gaze and made a low, growling sound. I went quiet, shivering in a strangely erotic fear. His hand worked faster and faster until he suddenly lurched to his feet and loomed over my lifted ass like a pirate king, his legs spread and his eyes burning with lust. Then the Hawk Lord snarled into his climax and came across my ass in searing ribbons. He watched with dark satisfaction as his thick cum dripped between my cheeks and over my hole.

I hadn't even realized that I was hard again. Hadn't realized that I was so turned on that when his cum hit me, I followed him into a second orgasm. I came all over my pants as my asshole clenched to suck some of his cum inside it. Then I fell forward onto my pallet in exhausted relief.

The Hawk Lord went back to his pallet and seconds later, I heard his deep, even breathing.

## Chapter Nine

Dalsharan was all business the next morning, acting as if nothing had happened between us while I was so wrecked by what he'd done that I had passed out in my own cum and woke up in the middle of the night with my pants glued to my belly. And now, just looking at him made my balls tighten. I couldn't imagine what really fucking him would do to me. Maybe it would be better if he never decided.

“Ravyn, are you listening to me?” The giant hawk who was carrying me asked.

“Nope.”

“That's not funny.”

“I'm not joking. I seriously wasn't listening. You've been saying the same things over and over for the last fifteen minutes. I get that you're upset over not telling me enough last time, but let me assure you that you've told me enough *this time*.”

“I'm going to drop you if you keep being so disrespectful.”

“Disres—” I sputtered. “Are you fucking kidding me?!” I screeched up at him. “You left me lying on my pallet covered in cum last night, but this morning, you act as if nothing happened, and now you call *me* disrespectful?”

“This is exactly what I was talking about,” he snapped. “If you can't do your job because I've distracted you, then we can't be lovers.”

“I think it was the other way around and that's why you're so pissy.”

“Yes, it was!” he roared. “And now, I'm trying to focus, but all you can think about is my dick.”

“That is not all I'm thinking about! I'm also thinking about your mouth!”

Dalsharan let out a surprised shriek of laughter.

“Look, I have no problem with doing my job. I heard everything you've said to me,” I went serious. “Keep to walls where my body heat will be covered by the cold coming off the stones, watch out for the feeding troughs—that was disturbing, by the way, and don't touch any of their treasure. Oh, and don't wear the Coyote Stone amulet. I got it.”

“Okay. Good,” he said, sounding mollified.

“And I can think about how fucking amazing you are without failing my mission,” I added.

“How amazing I am?”

“Don't fish for compliments,” I chided him.

He laughed again.

“But could you just tell me one thing?”

“What's that?” the Hawk Lord asked warily.

“Have you fucking decided yet?!”

Dal started laughing again, boisterously, but he stopped abruptly when we hit bad weather. The clouds darkened around us and thunder boomed in the distance. I gripped his bird ankles.

“Don't worry, I've got you,” he said. “We have to land anyway. The stronghold is just over that hill.”

“What hill?” I peered into the gloom just as rain started to fall.

I squinted against the stinging drops. The Fae have magic that works with nature and the natures of their beasts. Weather is not an issue for them. That being said, they can't access their other magic when they're in their beast bodies. So, Dal couldn't shield us. Not that the water bothered him much, it just rolled off his feathers, but I was getting wet.

The Hawk Lord set me down on a rocky knoll, then landed beside me and stretched a wing over my head. “This way.” His massive claws tore into the wet earth as he led me down the hill and up the side of another. The giant hawk settled into a squat and tucked me in against his side to shield me. I snickered.

“What?” Dal lowered his head to peer at me with one eye.

“I feel like a baby bird. Please don't vomit anything into my mouth.”

“The baby bird thing was cute but then you took it too far.”

I snorted. “In case you haven't realized it yet, I always take things too far. It's kind of my specialty.”

“Yes, I have noticed that.” He smacked me gently with his wing. “Now, take out the farseer and start watching the guards.”

I fished out the farseer and focused on the fortress several yards away. “There are five groups of—”

“I'm in hawk form, Ravyn. I can see them.”

“Oh, right. Okay.”



With the weather darkening the landscape, we weren't worried about being spotted, and I didn't have to wait for nightfall before heading in. As soon as I got the rotation of the guards down, I stuck in my earpiece, pulled on my gloves, unfolded my grappling hook, and headed off.

“Corporal!”

I stopped and looked back at him. The Hawk Lord had shifted back to his fae body and stood there naked, a barrier of air around him, turning the rain into a shimmering outline.

He slipped in his earpiece and said, “I'll be listening.”

“Put some fucking clothes on. I really don't want you saving me bare-ass naked.”

“If I have to save you, I'll do it in my hawk form. I want to be ready to shift immediately.”

“So, you're just going to stand in the rain naked?”

“For the sake of the blessed Moon!” Dal snarled. “No one is out here. Now, stop ruining a dramatic moment and get your ass in that fortress.”

I chuckled and headed for the stronghold, rain soaking my clothes. But it had been worth it to rile up the Hawk Lord. And to get another look at his naked body. That image had gone straight in the spank bank where it would earn monthly interest.

After scaling the wall and dodging guards, I slipped into the keep, just as I had the last one. But I made one fatal mistake. I remembered everything that Dal told me; that wasn't the problem. I simply hadn't thought of what wet weather would do to my boots. As I followed the pulse of another soul stone, I didn't notice the tracks I was leaving, or that they were distinctly not Farungal footprints.

Still, I made it into the treasure room and snatched the Coyote Soul without a problem. It wasn't until I was leaving and nearly to the main door that I realized something was wrong. The place was eerily quiet, even the walls seemed to be holding their breath, and as I retraced my steps, I saw them—my boot prints.

“Fuck,” I whispered as I scanned the entry hall warily.

“What?” Dal asked.

“I left tracks,” I whispered.

“Get out of there now!”

“That's what I'm doing, but I don't see anyone around—like no one—and it's really fucking quiet in here.”

“I don't see anyone outside either,” Dal's voice took on a wary tone. “The last rotation was done ten minutes ago.”

Ten minutes. Was that enough time to surround a human and kill him? Oh, yes. I sprinted for the door. I was nearly there when someone barreled into me. I cried out as a clawed hand closed around my throat, then started to squeeze.

“Ravyn!”

All I could do was make strangled sounds.

“A human,” the Farungal who held me declared in delight.

“I'm on my way!” Dalsharan shouted.

I was lifted by my throat as I clawed at scaly black skin, gasping for breath.

“Put him down before you kill him. Humans are so fragile,” another one said—this one had breasts.

Oh, fuck, the females were the worst.

The male lowered me to my feet and eased up on his grip, but didn't release me. He was about to reply when something big and covered in feathers slammed through the front doors. The Hawk Lord screeched, the sound going into a pitch that hurt Farungal ears. They cried out and cringed. I was suddenly released and I scrambled away. Dal used his beak like a spear as his wings swept out, knocking Farungal to the floor. I ran for him.

"Grab my leg," he ordered.

I dove for Dal's leg and wrapped myself around the thick limb. He turned toward the doorway, but before he could launch himself through it, a group of Farungals slammed the doors shut and lowered a bar over them. They began to chitter—their version of laughter. Dal shrieked again, but the monsters had stuck something in their ears and it didn't affect them this time. He slashed out with his talons. I jumped off his leg and pulled out my grappling hook—the only thing I had that resembled a weapon.

I spun around to his back and started using the hook like the Hawk Lord was using his claws—to slash open Farungal throats. We were doing well too. Okay, *he* was doing well. Dal took down Farungals as easily as shaking ripe apples out of a tree. They fell to his beak and claws and wings. Sure, he could have used magic in his other form, but against a group of Farungal in tight quarters, his hawk form was the better option. The Farungal didn't have magic like the Fae; they could cast spells, but couldn't manage anything instantaneously, so he wasn't giving them an edge. All I did was watch his back as he kicked ass.

But that changed in a second.

A net dropped from the ceiling, and Dal screamed in pain as it covered him. I was caught in it too, but it did nothing to me beyond hampering my movements. I couldn't figure out what was

hurting him until I saw the bits of iron woven into the net. I yanked at the covering, trying to drag it off Dal as he curled himself into as small a form as he could without shifting. The little hooked pieces of iron kept snagging on his feathers and while I struggled, the Farungal kept attacking. A hand caught my ankle, and I was yanked away. In seconds, I was overpowered, my makeshift weapon smacked out of my grip and then my hands were shackled.

With the iron weakening him and pushing down his magic, Dalsharan was forced into his Sidhe body. Dal snarled and thrashed. One hand shot upward, its fingers sprouting claws. He sliced at the net even as he shouted in pain, and his claws vanished. As soon as Dal was fully Sidhe, the net was yanked away and he was stabbed in both shoulders with iron spears. The pendant on his chest flared to life, one last-ditch effort to overpower his enemies. But before it could do whatever it was going to do, an iron spear with a hook at its end snagged its chain and broke it. The Hawk Soul fell away with an ominous clatter while Dalsharan was shoved backward and pinned to the ground. In seconds, he was manacled. The spears were yanked free and the female Farungal who had spoken earlier came clicking up on her clawed feet. She wore an armored dress and had her hair braided back from her hideous face.

She picked up the Hawk Soul and tapped it with a claw as she sneered at Dalsharan, “The Great Hawk has fallen. We knew that if we could just get you inside our walls, we could subdue you. You Avians rule the sky but once you're grounded, you're easy pickings.”

I clenched my jaw to keep from mouthing off to her. Dal had been far from easy pickings for them, but saying that wouldn't help him now. At least he wasn't screaming anymore and his wounds were starting to close. Even though he was manacled with iron, it didn't hurt him. The Farungal and Fae alike use manacles lined in silver to subdue their enemies and criminals without

hurting them. Which meant that the Farungal weren't going to kill us immediately; they wanted something from the Hawk Lord. This had been a trap. But why not trap us at the first fortress? Had they been luring us further into Alantri?

“What do you want, Gremara?” Dalsharan growled.

I blinked in surprise. Dal knew her. I have no idea how he was able to tell her apart from the other females. Hell, the only reason I could tell females apart from the males was that they had boobies and wore their hair long. But, he knew her, and she knew him.

The female grinned and rubbed her hands down her curves. “I want you, Dalsharan Arandel.” She laughed. “Honestly, any warlord would have suited my purposes, but I figured it would be you. You're always the one to jump into the flames first. And considering that we took the other two golds...”

“And what about them? Why take the soul stones?” he demanded.

“Just to get you here. What do we want with those things? Singly, they'll only work for one of you and in a trinity, they require someone with certain strengths that we lack.”

“You mean willpower,” he spat at her. “Strength of mind and heart to command the Beasts. You're right, I shouldn't have worried about one of you using the stones; it's impossible.”

She shrugged and tossed the Hawk Soul at me; it hit my chest and landed on the ground in front of me. “Keep your soul stones, we don't want them. Their magic makes our skin crawl.”

I twisted free of my captors and scrambled forward to grab the Hawk Soul amulet. The Farungal chittered and cackled in amusement as I snatched it up, and they even let me shove the stone in my pocket as if it meant nothing to them,

“Then what do you want me for?” Dal lifted his chin, staring at her imperiously despite being stark naked.

She chittered and the other Farungal around her chittered too. “For *breeding* purposes.”

Dalsharan went pale. “You can't mean to...”

She chittered again, this time in a higher pitch. “Oh, yes, *lover*, I do. Your kind fucked ours long ago and made us who we are. We've been searching for a cure for this curse ever since and, at last, we have found one.”

“You cursed yourselves with your dark magic,” he sneered. “It had nothing to do with us. We were your victims!”

“If it's as you say, then why would one of you be needed for the cure?”

I looked back and forth between the female and Dal, wondering what the fuck she was talking about. So far, I was only being restrained, and I didn't want that to change, so I tried to keep still. But seeing the fear flash through the Hawk Lord was twisting my own gut. Warlords don't get scared. They lead their armies unfailingly and never showed fear. But Dalsharan was frightened and very, very disgusted.

“What cure?” Dal finally asked when it became apparent that she wasn't about to tell him without encouragement.

“I just told you.” She smirked. “Your seed, Hawk Lord. We're going to make a baby and that child will break the curse on my people. We will be beautiful again.” She leaned forward to growl, “We'll get our wings back and rule the sky!”

“Farungal and Fae cannot breed successfully,” Dal growled. “You will miscarry, or the child will die soon after its birth.”

“Once I’ve conceived, I will perform a spell that will ensure the child’s survival.” She glanced at me and grinned. “And you’ve so thoughtfully supplied the human sacrifice I need to power it.”

Black magic. My blood went cold. This bitch wanted to kill me to make a freaky baby with Dalsharan. Fuck, no. Not happening.

“I will never harden for you,” Dalsharan said confidently.

“Oh, yes, you will,” she purred as she gestured to the men around him.

The Farungal soldiers grabbed Dal and started dragging him away. The monsters holding me yanked me to my feet and shoved me in the same direction. We were taken deep, down into the stronghold, to the subterranean level that I’d just come from. But we went past the treasure room and into a much larger space decorated in slaughter-chic. Actually, no. It was more like slaughter-shabby. This was the first room I’d seen that wasn’t clean, and I really didn’t want to know how the stones got stained.

They chained Dalsharan to a wall spread-eagle while I got tossed in a cage across from him like a dog.

Dal eyes went to mine as his voice whispered through my earpiece, “I’m so sorry.”

“Don’t worry, Hawk Lord,” I whispered back. “I’ve got a plan. Just hang in there.”

Dal looked at me as if I were insane.

“Sorry, bad choice of words.”

He choked back a horrified laugh just as the female, Gremara, approached him. She looked him up and down, then trailed her fingers down his chest, retracting her claws as she did

so that she cut only the topmost part of his chest. He didn't even flinch, just stared her down as the blood flowed. Dal's wounds healed almost instantly, his immortality kicking in. Even the holes in his shoulders had closed. You had to seriously injure a fae—especially a fae warlord—before his healing slowed down and made death possible.

Gremara picked up Dalsharan's limp dick and weighed it in her palm as if it were a cucumber she was thinking of buying. “Very nice. I've never seen your cock before, Dalsharan. It's as soft as velvet.” She pulled on it, and he winced. “Bring me the ointment,” she said to someone while keeping her black gaze on him.

Farungal have no irises. Or, rather, all they have is iris. Their eyes are black from rim to rim.

One of the males plucked a jar from an assortment of knives spread across a table and handed it to Gremara. She held up a finger and extended her claw. With a flick of that claw, the lid of the jar went flying and a sharp aroma filled the room. Dalsharan's eyes went wide.

“Recognize this?” She purred as she retracted her claw and scooped some thick ointment out of the jar.

“We destroyed all of your crops,” Dal hissed. “There are no flowers left to make the wild-rot.”

“You *thought* you destroyed our crops, but you didn't get all of them.” She licked her lips. “I have a hidden greenhouse full of crespas flowers, and I've made several jars of wild-rot to use on you. More than enough to last us until I conceive.”

Wild-rot? That sounded gross. I watched warily as Gremara spread the paste onto his cock, Dalsharan twisting to try to get away from her. His cock hardened as he gave a groaning cry, and his hips lurched forward as if seeking a hole to fuck.



“Perfect!” She handed the jar off to someone, then waved everyone out. “Go on, you perverts! I’ll need some privacy to make love to my consort.”

The monsters chittered as they left and the heavy door shut behind them with a groan. I guess it was okay for me to watch. Either that, or she had forgotten that I was there. I wasn’t about to remind her either. I needed to be near Dal for my plan to work. Okay, it wasn’t exactly a plan so much as an idea. But I couldn’t put it into action until the bitch left.

Except now, the bitch was getting naked.

Armor clattered to the ground and her clothing followed it. Despite all her monstrosity, Gremara was still humanoid and she rubbed that human-ish pussy over Dalsharan’s cock. But as she angled her hips and grabbed his dick to work it inside her, Dal started whispering. The words came through my earpiece, but I didn’t understand them. They sounded like Old Fae—a language even the Fae didn’t speak anymore. He was casting a spell—something faeries rarely do. As I mentioned, spells are a different kind of magic and iron doesn’t suppress them. It has something to do with the difference of calling on power outside of themselves as opposed to using what’s inside.

Gremara cursed and lurched back. Dal’s dick was limp again.

“You fool!” She screamed at him. “You could have just closed your eyes and enjoyed it. I would have fucked you for a few days and then let you go. But now, you’re gonna rot.” She leaned closer and snarled in his face. “And I’m still going to fuck you! Your spell will wear off by morning and then I’ll be back for you. You’ll have pieces falling off your body, but your cock will be hard again because you won’t have satisfied the wild-rot. You’ll be begging me to fuck you even as you die!”

“No, I won't,” Dalsharan said as he met her stare. “I'll cast the spell again and again until you're left with nothing but a putrid corpse.”

Gremara hissed and struck Dal across the face. I flinched, but she had her claws retracted so all she left was a hand print instead of raking half his face off. I let out my breath softly as she stormed from the room and slammed the door shut behind her.

“What the fuck did she put on you?” I hissed under my breath as I reached for my boot.

“It's an evil potion,” Dal said, his voice strained, then he gasped.

“Dal?” I looked up to find him hanging limply. “Dalsharan?!” I hissed.

“I'm all right,” he murmured. “For now. In a few minutes, the rot will start. If you deny the potion its fuel, it starts to eat you.”

“What the fuck?!” I gaped at him.

“The magic in the potion feeds on the energy of sex. If denied, it will feed on the body it's applied to instead. I will start to decompose soon. You need to prepare yourself, Ravyn. It will be brutal and painful. I will likely scream. Don't watch. I don't want you to see me like that.”

“That's not going to happen. I won't let it.”

“There's no cure for this. None but sex.”

“Fine.” I sighed as if it were a great sacrifice. “I'll fuck you. Sheesh, you didn't have to go to such great lengths just to get me in bed.”

Dal chuckled but it was a grim sound. “To save me, you'd

have to start very soon, sweetheart.”

Sweetheart. No, he didn't just fucking call me sweetheart when I was locked in a Farungal cage and his fucking dick was about to rot off! I pulled out my lock picking tools and started rapidly working the lock on my cage.

Dal's head lifted when he noticed what I was doing, and he made a huffing laugh. “Holy fuck, you do have a plan.”

“Stick with me, Hawk Lord, and I'll get us into *and out of* all the worst places.” I winked at him.

Dal chuckled again, then he groaned. As soon as the cage door swung open, I scrambled out and ran to Dalsharan. His head hung on his chest. I started to pick his shackles but as I worked, he lifted his head, and I caught a smudge of black in the corner of my eye. I glanced at him and flinched. Half his face was mottled as if bruised. As I watched, a lesion opened and pus leaked out.

“Fuck!” I hissed and worked faster.

I had him free in a few minutes. Dal took a single step and stumbled. With a deft dive, I caught him and swung his arm around my shoulders. He groaned and I heard a wet plop. I looked down and saw a blob of flesh on the floor.

“Shit,” I whispered.

“Keep going,” he groaned. “I'll be fine. Don't look at me, just get us out of here, Ravyn.”

“Yeah. Okay,” I said a little breathlessly.

We had to go slowly but luck was with us and most of the Farungal were absent from the corridors. At one point, we heard the cacophony of raucous voices and chitters echoing down a corridor.

“They're celebrating,” Dal whispered. “Just get me to the entry hall and open the door. I'll fly us out.”

“Are you sure you can?”

“I will fly us out,” he repeated firmly.

“Okay, okay.” I grabbed his waist and took more of his weight so I could speed our progress.

We made it to the entry hall in seconds, leaving a trail of Hawk Lord goo behind us. When I set him down and got a good look at him, I nearly vomited. One side of his waist was oozing pus and half his face was gone. But he shifted with a shimmer of magic, and then his enormous hawk body towered over me. I tried not to look at the rotted half of his head and its missing eye as I ran for the doors. The Farungal had removed the bar. With their prisoners locked up below, there was no need for it.

As soon as the doors were open, Dal stumbled out, his claws sliding on the steps. I ran after him. Farungal guards started to shout. They sprinted for us, but I latched onto Dalsharan's leg, and he jumped into the air. His wings pounded hard, taking us higher and over the walls even as bloody feathers rained down upon the monsters.

## Chapter Ten

We made it to another cave, this one much too close to Gremara's stronghold for my comfort. But Dal was losing pieces of himself too fast to make it any further. He shifted to Sidhe, and I caught him as he stumbled.

We had made a short stop for the satchel that Dal left on the muddy hill outside the fortress. He refused to leave it behind since it had the Lion Soul Stone inside it. Now, I was glad that he'd insisted because I didn't want to lay his bleeding body on the dirty cave floor. I propped him against the wall and dug out a pallet, then helped him onto it.

“Give me my amulet,” he murmured.

“Oh, of course! It will help, won't it?” I pulled the Hawk Soul out of my pocket. The clasp was broken so I couldn't fasten it, but I laid it on his chest. His bloody chest.

Dalsharan let out a sigh of relief, but nothing else happened.

“Okay, should I... do you want me to...” I waved a hand at his cock. Thankfully, it was untouched by the rot. “You'll have to remove your spell.”

“It's too late, Ravyn,” he whispered.

“What the fuck are you talking about? I don't care how you look, I can just suck your cock or something.”

Dal smiled wanly. “I won't recover from this. The Fae

cannot heal damage caused by wild-rot. I can already feel it entering my brain. I'll be a..." he swallowed hard and started again, "I'll be senseless in a few hours, so I'm asking you now. I need you to—"

"No!" I lurched to my feet. "Fuck, no. I'm not killing you."

"I'm so sorry, sweetheart. You're going to have to try to find a boat and row home alone. I can't help you. I failed at protecting you."

"You shut the fuck up, asshole!" I snarled at him.

But he didn't hear me. Dalsharan had passed out from the pain. Frankly, I was amazed that he'd lasted so long. His chest was one big wound and his hands were nothing but bones with sinew holding them together. I wanted to vomit. I wanted to scream. I wanted to bawl like a fucking baby. But then I heard the strangest thing—the cry of a hawk.

I hadn't realized that I was weeping until I looked down at Dal's chest. Among the blood and gore, something glowed gold. I heard a whisper but couldn't make out the words. My hand reached for the Hawk Soul as if someone else were controlling me. I picked it up, its chain dripping blood. Once in my hand and the jewel touched my skin, the voice became clear.

*Listen to me carefully, human.*

I flinched and nearly dropped it.

*Do not drop me!*

My hand tightened into a fist.

*I can feel your soul, Ravyn Ravellar, and it is pure. It is strong, as is your will. You can survive.*

"Survive what?" I whispered.

*Do not interrupt me!*

“For fuck's sake, you sound like him,” I muttered.

*I sound like magic. I'm not really speaking words to you.  
I'm touching your mind.*

“Great. A soul stone is—”

*Shut up and listen!*

I went silent.

*Gather the other stones.*

“The other... you mean the Lion and Coyote Souls?”

*Yes, of course! Are there other soul stones here?*

“You don't have to be so rude,” I grumbled as I went to the satchel and pulled out the Lion Soul. The Coyote was still in my pocket where I'd shoved it hours earlier after taking it from Gremara's treasure room.

*Lay the Lion beside me so that our sides touch.*

I laid the lion pendant beside the Hawk in my palm. The stones started to glow, and then they adhered together, the gold of their settings melting into one.

*Now, the Coyote!*

I pulled out the Coyote Soul just as a lion began to roar in my mind. The roar startled me. I fumbled the cloth-wrapped stone and dropped it.

*Don't drop it!*

I groaned as I bent to pick it up. Something was pressing against my mind. Clawing at it.

*Hurry! Place it along the Lion's edge. Form us into a half-moon. Then prepare yourself, Ravyn. You must be strong. Be strong for him or my lord will not survive. Do you understand? Focus on him. Focus on healing him! See him as he was.*

I couldn't speak, my teeth were clenched too tightly, but I did what the Hawk Soul ordered me to do. The Coyote Soul Stone melded to the Lion and the three amulets became one, wedged together like half a pie. For a second, nothing happened, nothing but the easing of pressure on my mind. And then light flared from my palm—three shades of gold blending into one. The merged stones pulsed, and my hand closed around them, clenching into a fist. Their chains dangled and clinked together, but that soft sound was lost to the three voices that filled my head, echoing with roars and shrieks and growls. In the primal cacophony I heard music, music so beautiful that I wept.

I reached for that song with my entire being, and it surrounded me. It comforted me. I sank into it. I sang with it. No, it wasn't music, it was magic. And its power was too much for me. I started to burn.

I screamed and fell to my knees as the magic seared through my human cells. I couldn't hear the Hawk anymore, but I latched onto what he'd said. Focus on Dalsharan—that's what he'd told me to do. So, I opened my eyes to look at the Hawk Lord. But the vision of him lying there, rotting and weak, only horrified me. Then I remembered that the Hawk Soul had told me to see Dal as he had been. I shut my eyes again and imagined Dalsharan whole. Healthy. Safe.

I summoned my memory of the Hawk Lord standing before me, shrugging out of his robe just before he shifted. I saw him lying on his side, staring at me with sharp arousal as he stroked himself, and remembered how he laughed, joy brightening his amazing eyes.



The magic inside me went still, like a hound that had caught a scent. The burning eased as the power pulled inward, gathering in my chest. As it condensed there, knowledge came to me. Just popped into my head. I suddenly knew what to do to heal Dal.

I lurched to my feet and pointed my fistful of soul stones at the rotting warlord. That glittering golden glow surged out of my hand and hit the Hawk Lord in his chest, right over his heart. Dalsharan gasped, his back arching, but didn't open his eyes. The light gathered in his chest as it had in mine, but then spread outward. Within its radiance, flesh regrew and rotted filth burned away. The magic swept over Dal's ruined body like water and in the wake of its wave, honey-brown skin appeared over the thick bulge of muscles.

But I wasn't really seeing the healing take place, not with my eyes. My eyes were still closed. It was the magic that saw Dalsharan made whole. The magic of three fae beasts that pounded in my heart with clawed paws and sharp talons, filled my mind with primal cries, and blasted power through my trembling human body. And then that magic showed me *his* soul.

I didn't think the Hawk Lord could be any more beautiful than he already was, but his soul—that shining, glorious, ethereal being that lived inside his pretty shell—was the most magical, heart-stoppingly handsome thing I have ever beheld. And it reached a sparkling hand out to me as if it could see me too.

I didn't move and yet, I took that hand. I saw a transparent version of my arm lift out of me like a ghost and reach for Dal. I didn't glow as he did, but he still smiled at me as if I were lovely to look at. He took my hand and drew me closer. My body moved with my soul until I was crouching over his body and his soul was lying back inside him, taking mine with it.

For a second, I balked. I needed my soul, didn't I? But he

wasn't taking it, he was giving. Part of his sparkling energy flowed into the hand of my soul—my ghostly hand that he had drawn right into his heart. I felt my phantom fingers close around a seed of light, and when I drew my hand back, I took the seed with me. As my soul settled inside my body, the tiny orb of light—that spark of Dal's soul—surged straight into my heart and absorbed the magic of the trinity of soul stones. Then it blossomed. The power that had threatened to burn me earlier now sang to me once again. A song of acceptance and healing. I fell backward, my body trembling violently, and the song rose to a crescendo that exploded in my mind.

“Dalsharan,” I whispered and died.

## Chapter Eleven

Death wasn't so bad. It felt an awful lot like dreaming. But when I opened my eyes, Dalsharan's face was above me. I smiled softly and touched his cheek. His hair was loose and hung around my face like a veil. It looked as if those religious zealots were right; there was a heaven. I wondered why I got to go there. And then I wondered what Dal was doing there. And then I wondered why my cock was getting hard. Is that kind of shit allowed in heaven?

"Ravyn," Dalsharan whispered my name. His stare slid downward, and he chuckled. "I see that you're feeling better."

"Dalsharan!" I sat up and my momentum took me into a standing position, and then nearly back to the ground. I waved my arms as I tried to catch my balance.

Dal smoothly got to his feet and steadied me. "You've been through some changes, not the least of which is improved strength," he said gently. "Sit down, Ravyn."

"What the fuck?" I looked down at myself and could see every fiber in the fabric of my pants. I grabbed my pants and that's when I noticed my hands. "What the fuck?!" I held up my hands. "What the *actual* fuck, Dal?" I swung to face him.

And then just stared. Had he gotten *more* handsome?

"Sit down, Ravyn," Dalsharan said again. He took the hand that did and didn't look like my hand, and used it to pull me down with him.

“Why is my hand glowing?” I tried to keep my voice calm.

“Your whole body is glowing.” Dal smiled softly. “It will stop soon. At least, that's what I've heard.”

“That's what you've heard?” I leapt to my feet again, and the newly improved muscles in my legs sent me tumbling backward.

Dal shot forward and caught me, going into a half-crouch with me. He sat me up and set his hands on my shoulders. “Take a breath.”

I took a breath.

“Now, let it out.” The Hawk Lord laughed.

I gaped at him again; his laughter was the most beautiful sound in the world.

“Your body will be sensitive for a little while until it grows accustomed to its new...”

“It's new *what*?” I lifted my hands again, the light was starting to fade, but that only made it easier to see that the scars I had earned from many years of war were gone. My skin looked brand new and as the glow settled completely, I saw that my skin was also paler than it had been. Much paler. “Why am I so damn white?” I demanded.

The Hawk Lord burst out laughing.

“This is not funny. I am not a joke, Dal!”

He stopped laughing and went serious. “No, sweetheart, you're not.”

“Stop calling me sweetheart,” I grumbled. “That's an endearment for a woman.”

Dalsharan laughed again. "Says who?"

"Me."

"Women call men sweetheart."

I frowned. "Yeah, that's a good point." I thought about it. "Okay, fine, you can call me sweetheart. But not in front of the other soldiers!"

Dal lifted a hand as if to make a solemn vow. "Never."

I nodded crisply. "Go on then."

"You want me to call you sweetheart again?" He lifted a brow.

"No, I don't want you to call me sweetheart again," I huffed. "Get over the fucking sweetheart thing, honey snookums. I want you to tell me why I was glowing and why all my lovely scars are gone!"

"Honey snookums?" Dalsharan lifted a brow at me.

"It's not so funny when it's done to you, is it?" I grinned at him.

"As long as you don't call me that in front of the other soldiers," he said with twitching lips.

"Dal, will you just tell me... hold on. Are you saying what I think you're saying?"

"About what?" Dal's voice dropped to a low purr and his lips spread in a sensual smile.

"Did you make a decision?" I whispered.

"I did." He grinned wider. "I've decided that you're mine,

Ravyn.”

I swallowed with some difficulty. “I am?”

“You are,” Dalsharan said firmly. “No more Raeshal. No more *anyone else*. Am I clear?”

“Uh-huh,” I squeaked.

“You may keep your own tent if you wish, but you will sleep in my bed every night.”

“Yeah, okay,” I whispered as I continued to gape at him.

“And when I want you,” Dalsharan growled as he got to his knees and pushed me down onto my back, “I will take you.” He covered my body with his and brushed his lips over mine. “Is that understood, Corporal?”

“Yes.”

“*Any* time I want you,” his voice dropped even lower. “I don't care what you're doing, you will stop and come to me. And you will submit to whatever I wish to do to you.”

I may have whimpered.

“Or you will do whatever I tell you to do to me,” he went on. “No disobedience. Not where sex is concerned. I don't share, and I don't tolerate rebelliousness in my lovers. This is who I am. Either I dominate you completely or I won't take you at all. That's why I've waited and given you time to get to know me better. To know if you can be that for me. Now, think about it for more than a fucking second,” he growled, bit my lower lip, then pushed away from me. “Tell me when you know if that's truly what you want.” He held up a hand when I started to speak. “Think about what I've said, Ravyn. I don't want you to stop being yourself, but you will have to make adjustments. You will belong to me. Think about

what that means before you answer.”

I laid there and looked at him. “Uh, I was going to ask about my stupid white hands.”

Dalsharan burst out laughing. He laughed and laughed and laughed.

I sat up and grimaced at him. “Yeah, all right, chuckles!” I shoved at his shoulder. “I’m serious! I want to know what the fuck happened to me!”

“See this”—he waved a hand at me—“this I will permit. You may continue to share this familiarity with me, but only in private. In public, you must show me the respect I’m due as your warlord.”

“Yes, Sir, Hawk Lord, Sir!” I saluted him. “Now, if you’re done giving me your list of kinky rules, could you perhaps tell me *what the fuck happened?!?*”

Dalsharan’s expression dropped into sacred seriousness. “The Hawk Soul chose you. It spoke to you and helped you heal me.” He took my hand. “You wielded incredible amounts of magic and you lived, Ravyn. Your desire to save me was so great that you survived a trinity pairing of soul stones. You survived and then the Beasts accepted you. But only after I did.”

“You did something... to...” I trailed off as I remembered his soul reaching for mine. His beautiful soul pulling my hand into his body and giving me a seed of light. My hand went to my chest, right above my heart. “You gave me some of your soul, didn’t you?”

Dalsharan nodded. “The Hawk Soul made it possible. Every warlord has the ability, but it’s not done lightly.”

“Why did you do it for me?”

“Because you saved me when no one else could.” He lifted my hand and kissed it tenderly. “Because you refused to let me go, Ravyn. You fought for me and you nearly died for me after I had failed you. That kind of *valor* deserves a reward.”

“What am I?” I whispered. “What have you made me into?”

“You are something very special,” Dalsharan said softly. “You are what my people call a Valorian—a human who has shown great valor and has been honored by a faerie with a piece of our magic. But not just that. Humans have been honored with life seeds before and still remain human. Long-lived, but human. Only those who the Beasts and the Goddess deem worthy are remade into fae.”

“Remade?”

“You are one of us now, Ravyn of Varalorre.”



## Chapter Twelve

“Ravyn!” Dalsharan scowled as he watched me pace. “Ravyn, sit down!”

“I'm not your sex slave yet, Hawk Lord!” I pointed a finger in his face. “*I haven't decided!*”

Dalsharan grabbed my wrist and with the barest movement, used it to twist my whole body and drop me onto my pallet. He followed me down and covered my mouth with his. I groaned and pulled him closer, wrapping my legs around him and grinding my sudden erection against his hard belly. Dal made a low noise of pleasure in his throat and ground back, thrusting his tongue over mine in a mimicry of what he'd soon be doing to me. Because, let's be honest here, there was no decision for me to make. I was so hot for that man that I'd agree to anything. He could collar me for all I cared. In fact, I might enjoy that.

But then the Hawk Lord eased out of our kiss and stared down at me. “Are you calm now?”

“Calm?” I snorted. “You think that *calmed* me?” I angled my hips so I could rub my cock against him again. “No, I'm not calm.”

“But you're not hysterical over your new species either.”

“I have a new *species!*”

“You're fae now, Ravyn,” he said slowly, as if that might help it sink in this time. “You're a true Hawk. You're even of my line since it was my magic that seeded you.”

“Seeded me.” I smirked. “That sounds kinky.”

“You, sweetheart, have a one-track mind.” Dal pushed off and away from me, leaning back to sit beside my pallet.

I sat up in disappointment. “First of all, I'm a man, so yeah, I think about sex a lot. But second, I do not have a one-track mind. I was upset—not hysterical, mind you, just upset—over my new race. *Race*, not species. Members of a species can't breed outside of their species, and faeries have bred with humans before.”

“True, but we're still considered a separate species with races and sub-races under them. And you were absolutely hysterical. Far more upset than I was when you called me hysterical.”

“I cannot even believe we're having an argument this fucking stupid *when my cock is this fucking hard!*” I waved a hand at my crotch. “I accept your terms. You own me, blah, blah, blah. Now, fuck me already!”

“You accept *all* of my conditions?” Dalsharan asked with an intense look.

“Yes, I accept.”

“No one but me?”

“Yes,” I said with matching intensity. “No one but you.”

“Then take your clothes off.”

The breath left me in a rush, and I yanked off my clothes as fast as I possibly could, laying back on the pallet to shove my pants down before sitting up to pull them off and toss them away as if they were on fire. I briefly noticed my perfect skin, but then Dal got to his feet and started stripping. My whole body constricted as his was revealed. I went to my knees and as he stepped closer, I

slid my hands up his thighs and sighed as I nestled my face against that beautiful cock. *Oh, fuck, that's where heaven is—right between the Hawk Lord's legs.*

Dalsharan laid his hand on my head and stroked my hair back as he gazed down at me tenderly. I locked stares with him and turned my face, drawing the long, velvet length of him against my cheek until I reached its tip. Still holding his gaze, I slipped my lips over that plum head and sucked at the liquid already beading it. Dal groaned and tangled his fingers into my hair. He nudged forward, just a little to test me, and I slid him into my mouth with a rumbling sound of pleasure—a wordless cry of *at last*.

Dalsharan Arandel tasted of sunlight and salt. He smelled of feathers and clean man. I moved over him, unable to stop sucking down his flavor, and wrapped a hand around the base of his shaft to help me work him.

But Dalsharan grabbed my wrist and moved my hand away. “Use only your mouth.”

His command made something shiver in my chest. I laid my hand on the indent of his hip, tightened my lips, and moved over him. Dal made an approving sound, stroked my hair again—like you might pet a dog, and then moved his hand to the back of my head. He grabbed me there with that large palm and yanked me onto his dick as he shoved himself deeper. I gagged and he growled, taking my head in both his hands. The Hawk Lord started slamming into my mouth, his hot stare holding mine prisoner as I whimpered and choked, spit running down my chin. The white curls around his cock tickled my nose and his heavy sacs hit my chin. Then, when I thought I'd suffocate, he pulled out and rubbed a thumb over my wet lips.

“Lay down and lift your legs for me,” the Hawk Lord growled. “I want to see all that's mine.”

I couldn't speak; his words had stolen mine, making me shiver again and again. I laid back on the pallet and grabbed the back of my knees, lifting my legs up and out to the sides, exposing myself to him completely. Dalsharan moved between my thighs and stared down at my throbbing cock as if inspecting it. He gave it a long stroke, then squeezed it, almost to the point of pain. I cried out and he slapped my dick before moving down to my balls. Carelessly, he played with them as I panted and clutched my legs, heat rising to my cheeks.

“Higher!” Dal shoved at my thigh. “I want to see your asshole opening for me.”

I groaned and lifted my legs higher.

“Say, 'yes, Dalsharan,' when you obey me.” He stroked the head of my dick with a fingertip.

“Yes, Dalsharan,” I panted.

He cocked his head at me in consideration. “No, I've changed my mind.”

“What?” I whimpered.

“You'll say, 'yes, Hawk Lord.’”

The panic in me eased. I grinned and said, “Yes, Hawk Lord.”

“Good bird,” the Hawk Lord purred and rubbed a hand over himself. His cock glistened with that magical oil, drawn from the very air, then he angled the tip down and pressed it gently against my clenching hole. “Beg me to fuck you.”

“Please, fuck me, Hawk Lord,” I cried, nearly trembling in need. “Oh, sweet Gods, please stick that glorious cock in my ass and fuck me!”

Dal slid the tip in, just far enough that my eager hole clenched around him and wouldn't let go. I undulated encouragingly, but he wouldn't move.

"Please," I panted, stretching my legs even wider. "Please slam it into my ass. I want it so bad. I've never wanted anything more than your big dick inside me."

The Hawk Lord growled in approval and slid an inch deeper. I moaned. Tears gathered in my eyes—fucking tears. One spilled down my cheek and he leaned down, his cock going deeper, and licked my tear away.

"Who do you belong to?" Dalsharan demanded.

"You. I belong to the Hawk Lord!" I shouted. "At least I would if he would just fuck me!"

He drew out of me completely and glared at me in disappointment.

"No!" I shrieked. "What did I do?"

"Did I not make myself clear about rebelliousness?" The Hawk Lord demanded. "When I fuck you, you will not talk back to me!"

My legs started to fall.

"Do not lower those legs!" He smacked the back of my thighs, one after the other.

I moaned and lifted them higher, air cooling my oiled hole. "I'm sorry. Please, fuck me. I won't talk back."

The Hawk Lord looked mollified by this and repositioned himself at my entrance. He slid the tip in, and I bit my lip to keep from making a sound. Once he was firmly encased, he bent over me and slashed his lips across mine. I opened to him and his

tongue shoved inside my mouth while his cock simultaneously surged forth, slamming all the way to the base. I cried out raggedly into our kiss. My spread legs allowed him to pump every millimeter of that thick rod inside me, stretching me and filling me as I'd never been filled before. I tried to show him with my tongue that I loved it, that I wanted more.

Dal drew back with a possessive chuckle, grabbed my thighs, and started slamming into me. I buckled under the ferocity of his fucking, his pelvis slapping my stretched cheeks with every thrust. My calves bobbed with his rapid movements and my cock wept.

“Hold your legs tighter,” Dal ordered but he did so gently. “I need leverage to fuck my naughty Ravyn.”

I wrapped my forearms around my knees, stretching myself further than I thought possible, and braced my legs.

“That's a good bird,” he growled as he reached down and gave my cock a single stroke.

I cried out, my whole body bucking. He had left a film of oil on me.

“You may stroke your cock now,” he said generously.

“Thank you, Hawk Lord.” I let go of one leg and started rubbing frantically.

“Do not come on me, Ravyn,” he warned me.

“I won't,” I promised.

He lifted a brow at me.

“Hawk Lord!” I added in a rush. “I won't come on you, Hawk Lord.”

“Good bird.” Dalsharan pumped faster. “Beg me to come inside you.”

“Oh, Gods. Please, come inside me, Hawk Lord,” I begged. “I want to feel your cum filling me. Please!”

Dalsharan gave one last shove, his whole body clenching gloriously, and emptied inside me with a deep grunt. The sensation of his hot release filling me sent me over, and I made sure to angle my cock so that it only hit my belly. The Hawk Lord groaned deeply—a primal, pleased sound—and drew his slippery flesh out of me, making me shiver. He stared at the cum on my belly with a satisfied smile and then laid down beside me. As I finally lowered my legs—which surprisingly didn't ache—he twirled a finger and the cum on my belly disappeared. I gave him a broad grin, but he pushed me onto my side and wrapped an arm around my waist, tucking my head in beneath his and nestling his spent cock into the curve of my ass.

“Okay, so you like spooning, huh?” I drawled.

“Bad bird,” he whispered in my ear just before he bit it. “I see you're going to need some serious training.”

“Are you one of those sadistic freaks who likes to tie people up and beat on them?” I murmured.

“No, I'm a warlord and you are mine,” he said simply. “Now, go to sleep, my naughty Ravyn. You will soon learn your place.”

“Yes, honey snookums,” I whispered.

The Hawk Lord's laughter followed me into my dreams.

## Chapter Thirteen

“So, there have been others like me?” I asked Dalsharan as I got dressed the next morning.

The wind was howling at the cave entrance, but nothing else had disturbed our sleep. I had slept lightly, thinking that the Farungal would find us for sure. The second time a random sound woke me, Dal had murmured that he'd warded the cave entrance and we were perfectly safe. But now we had to cross miles of Farungal land before we made it to open ocean and then, hopefully, the shores of Stalana—the human portion of our continent.

“There has been one other like you,” he said softly.

I looked up from the pallet where I was tying my boots. “Only one?”

“At the beginning of the war with the Farungal, a human soldier saved an entire army, possibly even the continent.” Dal was leaning against the wall, naked. No sense in getting dressed when he was about to shift. “His warlord, the Tiger Lord, had learned of a Farungal weapon that had the power to destroy our continent. The Tiger Lord sent a small unit of soldiers to infiltrate the Farungal camp, but they were discovered. The battle was brutal. They were vastly outnumbered and were forced to retreat. But while the others ran away from the camp, one man—a human man—used them as a distraction to sneak further in. He crept past the guards, who were focused on giving chase, and he found the weapon.”

“Fuck.” I got to my feet and grinned. “That's my kind of



guy.”

“Indeed.” Dal smiled back and looked at my new fae body. “Your kind of guy exactly.”

“So, he found the weapon and stole it?”

“He found the weapon and destroyed it,” Dal corrected. “It was black magic, a thing of evil that had cost the Farungal dearly. Cost them so much, in fact, that they've never attempted to recreate it.”

“But what was it exactly?”

“A curse,” Dal whispered. “A curse that would have required the slaughter of a battlefield to release it.”

“How did he destroy a curse?”

“There was no way that he could have known what it was. He shouldn't have even been able to recognize it as a weapon. All he found was a bottle. But he was drawn to it. He said that he heard a voice. It told him what the weapon was and how to defeat it.”

“I'm not a five-year-old listening to a bedtime story, Dal,” I huffed. “You don't have to draw it out for dramatic effect. Just tell me.”

Dalsharan snorted. “I'm trying to tell you that a human has heard the Beasts before.”

“How do you even know about that?” I asked suddenly. “I didn't tell you the stones talked to me.”

“*All* of them talked to you?” Dal lifted his brows.

I frowned and thought about it. “No, the Hawk Soul spoke to me directly, but the others were talking in the background.”

“What did they say?” he asked urgently.

I shook my head. “I don't remember. Something about... nope, I don't remember.”

“It's all right.” Dal took my shoulder in hand companionably. “It's miraculous enough that you heard them.”

“You still haven't told me how you know about that.”

He waved a hand at his chest where the Hawk Soul lay on its freshly fixed chain. “It speaks to me all the time.”

“All the time? That's gotta get annoying.”

“Not constantly.” Dal rolled his eyes. “Just often. It told me that it saw the greatness in you. That you were meant for a different life than the one you were born into.”

“I am?” I whispered, something shivering through me.

“You are.” The Hawk Lord smiled.

I just stared at him, amazed at how incredible he was, how casually gorgeous and powerful, and how I now seemed to have a place in his life.

“Mathias, that was the human soldier's name, sacrificed his life to destroy the curse,” Dal went on. “He drank it.”

“He drank it?” I made a face.

“It was a potion meant for the Farungal commander. He would have taken it right before battle and become like a god. A dark, evil god. He would have swept across Stalana and then into Varalorre, crushing all of us under his heel. But Mathias had a pure soul, and the magic had no evil to enhance. All it could do was release its power and fury upon him.”

“So, he died?”

“He *almost* died,” Dal said with a wry smile. “The men who escaped went straight to the Tiger Lord. Upon hearing of their failure, he decided to take a more direct approach and led his entire army to the camp. They found the Farungal General shrieking in fury as he beat on the dying human soldier. The Farungal had been so enraged by the loss of their curse that they hadn't even noticed the Tiger Army's approach. They were slaughtered, including the General. Mathias, however, clung to life, and the Tiger Lord was moved to save him. He used his soul stone to give Mathias a piece of his soul, granting him enough magic to heal the damage done to his body and extend his life. But the Beasts had called to Mathias for a reason. They wanted him. They admired his pure soul. So, when the Tiger Lord gave Mathias a seed of life, they decided to nourish that seed and give it the magic to turn a human into a fae.”

“And that's what happened to me?”

“That's what happened to you.” He nodded.

“But why am I so damn white?!” I grumbled. “I had a really nice tan going.”

Dalsharan chuckled. “Your body has been remade. You're like a newborn in a way. You will tan again once you get in the sun. For now, you are as the magic has made you. And you are beautiful, Ravyn.”

“I am?”

“You'll see.” Dal smirked.

“There's only one other guy like me?”

“Ever since that day, warlords have tried to make another Valorian. They have granted pieces of their souls to humans who have impressed them with their great valor. But no one since

Mathias has been favored by the Beasts. No one until you.”

“You're proud that you helped to make me,” I said with a grin.

“Of course.” The Hawk Lord grinned back. “It's a great honor for me as well. You are mine after all.”

I snorted. “Arrogant bastard.”

“Beautiful bird,” he shot back.

I grinned. Then I remembered something. “What was Gremara talking about when she said the Farungal were cursed and it was the Fae's fault?”

Dal sighed deeply. “It happened a long time ago, before I was born.”

“That is a long time ago,” I teased.

“Yes, it is.” He didn't laugh. “I'm two hundred forty-six.”

“You're what?!” I screeched.

“The Fae are immortal, Ravyn.”

“Yeah, I know, but... wow. You're really old.”

Dalsharan grimaced and rolled his eyes. “Do you want to hear the story or not?”

“Yeah, I do. Go on.”

“Our history records say that the Farungal were once dragon-shifters. Shapeshifters like the Sidhe but more powerful.”

“More powerful than the Sidhe?”

He nodded. “They had magic back then, not just spell craft,

the magic of nature.”

“Like you have.”

“Precisely,” he said. “Their beasts were bigger and stronger than ours, but we weren’t at war then so it didn’t matter. They kept mainly to Alantri, and we stayed in Varalorre. Until a Farungal caught sight of a Hawk maiden flying along the coast.”

“A hawk, eh? What a coincidence.” I grinned.

“I didn’t make up the story, Ravyn,” he chided me.

“Okay.” I grinned. “I believe you.”

“The Farungal tried to woo the Sidhe woman, but she refused to be swayed. He scared her, with his leathery wings and fire breath. But the male couldn’t stop thinking about her. He became obsessed and searched for a way to make her his. He started twisting the magic of nature, altering it with spells that worked with darker energies. Blood, death, and pain. He used anything that could give him power over her. And she went to him.”

“Oh, no.” I shook my head. “Here it comes.”

“Nothing happened right away,” Dal surprised me by saying. “They married and lived for many years peacefully. The Hawk woman bore the Farungal man several children, which surprised both races.”

“Because you both have such a low birth rate,” I murmured.

“Yes. The combination of the two races did well, though the children born had mixed magic and physical features. No one cared about their strange appearances. In fact, many thought them to be beautiful. Farungal started journeying to Varalorre to find

themselves mates, and we welcomed them. There were great parties held to promote such unions and many of our kind married theirs.”

“Shit, really?”

“Really.” He nodded. “But we had no idea that they'd been using their twisted magic against us the entire time. The first Farungal had taught his brethren his dark arts, and they had used their spells to sway us, to seduce us. More children were born, but they were born of grounded Sidhe and had no wings. The Farungal didn't like that. As dragons, they ruled the sky. They wanted children that were as strong as they were.”

“Oh, no,” I whispered.

“Yes,” Dal went grim. “They worked their magic upon their children.”

“And turned them into monsters?”

“No. I mean, yes, the children were transformed into the creatures the Farungal are today. But they weren't the only ones affected. We don't know exactly what happened, but we suspect that the Farungal accessed evil forces to alter their children. Forces so dark that they killed the light inside themselves and that death spread throughout the entire race.”

“The entire race paid for what a few did? That hardly seems fair.”

“As I said, we don't know for certain what occurred.” Dal shrugged. “They may have tapped into the power of every living Farungal to cast their spells. I don't know. All we know is that after the children were changed, all the Farungal changed. They became twisted creatures, stuck in a wingless half form. Denied the one thing they were after and stricken of all their natural magic.”

“Sounds like Nature kicked their asses,” I murmured.

“We believe so.”

“What? I was joking.”

“The Goddess and the Beasts are not like the Gods of humans,” Dalsharan said gravely. “They don't wait for death before they punish evil. Many fae believe that the Farungal offended the Great Mother, and it was she who punished them. That she took their magic and the power of their beasts, cursing them into a monstrous existence with only their dark spells to cling to. However the curse came about, they have always blamed us for it.”

“For being super sexy and making them want you?” I huffed.

“Desire can be destructive,” he whispered.

“Yeah, if you're a crazy, evil motherfucker,” I huffed.

Dalsharan looked away.

“Hey, you don't think it's the Fae's fault, do you?” I asked him in surprise.

“No,” he murmured. Then in a stronger voice, he repeated, “No. The fae who had been seduced by Farungal returned to Varalorre after the transformation. The magic holding them in thrall had broken when the Farungal were cursed. They were the source of our information about the curse, and I see no reason for them to lie. It is simply sad for anyone, even the Farungal, to be denied the Mother's light.”

“Wow, you pity them.”

“They are pitiful creatures,” he said softly. “But they are also vicious and cruel. The war began shortly after the return of the

released Sidhe.”

“So, humans had nothing to do with it?” I asked, suddenly pissed.

“No, they were simply caught in the crossfire.”

“That’s why you fae help us,” I whispered. “Fuck, that’s disappointing.”

“You thought we fought for humans out of the goodness of our hearts?” He smirked at me.

I shrugged. “Well, that and the fact that if the Farungal get past us, you’re fucked.”

“You are one of us now, remember?”

“I’m still processing,” I muttered.

“We could have abandoned Stalana,” Dal said sternly. “We could have stayed behind our wards and fought the Farungal from the safety of Varalorre. But we refused to let humans pay for something that had nothing to do with them. *That* is why we fight beside you.”

“Okay, I guess I can accept that.” I grinned.

“Thank the Mother, we have Ravyn’s approval,” Dal said sarcastically as he pushed off the wall. “Now, get your flight rig on, Corporal. It’s time to go home.”



## Chapter Fourteen

The Hawk Army rushed forward cheering when they spotted Dal and me flying in. Soldiers swarmed the landing pad near the training yard. As I was shrugging out of my rig, Raeshal pushed his way through the crowd and hurried over to me with a look of relief on his face. That expression changed to shock when he got a good look at me.

He stopped short and gaped. “Ravyn?”

“Hey, Rae,” I said with a sheepish grin. “There's been... uh, some, uh...”

“We have a new Valorian!” the Hawk Lord declared in a loud voice as he stepped up beside me, already shifted back and dressed in his war robe.

There was an awe-filled silence and then wild applause, roaring cheers, and a few hawk shrieks.

Raeshal looked from me to Dal and back. “A Valorian? You gave him a piece of your soul?”

“And the Beasts and Goddess accepted him.” Dal put a hand proudly on my shoulder. “You were right, Rae. Ravyn is exceptional. In many ways.”

A look passed between the men, and Raeshal sighed. He turned to smile at me sadly but with understanding. Then he pulled me into a hug.

“I'm happy you're one of us, my dark bird,” he whispered in

my ear. Then he pulled back and amended, “Well, I guess you're not mine anymore.”

“I'm sorry, Rae,” I said gruffly.

“Not necessary.” He grinned. “But thanks for caring. You look good as a fae. It suits you.”

“Thank you,” I grinned.

“Is it true?” General Faron asked as he came striding up with General Harvis—the man in charge of the human portion of the army.

“Look for yourself.” Dalsharan waved a hand at me, then swept by the Generals and cheering soldiers. “Come along, Corporal.”

I nodded to the Generals as they gaped at me, then hurried after the Hawk Lord.

“My lord!” General Faron chased after us. “Did you retrieve the amulets?”

“We did,” Dalsharan said sharply. “Assemble the officers, Faron, there is much to discuss.”

“But, my lord.” Faron rushed past me, casting me another look of amazement as he did, and caught up with Dal. “The Lion Lord and Coyote Lord are here.”

Dalsharan paused to glance at him. “Good, they should hear this too.”

A few Lions and Coyotes roamed around the perimeter of the Hawk Lord's tent. Above them, the Hawk Lord's Guard circled. Two of the massive Hawks landed and settled into their posts to either side of the tent entrance just as their lord strode through it. They made the timing look effortless, but they both cocked an eye

at me, widening it as I passed by. I grinned to myself; shocking the Hawk Lord's personal guards was a feat I'd never thought to accomplish.

"Brothers," Dalsharan said as he stepped into the main room of the tent.

Two men were seated at the central table. I recognized only one of them—the Lion Lord. He was thickly built like Dal, with skin the color of dark topaz and blue eyes that seemed even bluer because of his skin. His long, golden-brown hair hung wild around his shoulders. Strangely enough, the shade of the Lion Lord's hair was nearly an exact match to the color of the second man's eyes. This man, who I assumed was the Coyote Lord, was slim, elegant, and had a cunning look to his features. His ebony hair was pulled back tightly into a club bound with leather, and he was draped across his chair indolently. Both men rose to greet Dalsharan.

"Dal!" the larger man boomed, coming forward to hug the Hawk Lord. "Well met!"

*Betrayal*, someone whispered. I jerked around, nearly smacking into Rae.

"Are you all right?" Raeshal asked.

"Yeah. Sorry." I chuckled. "I thought I heard something."

"Well met, Hadrian." Dal grinned at the Lion Lord as he backed out of their embrace. His grin faded a bit when he stretched out a hand to the slimmer man. "Brendallen, well met."

"Well met, Hawk Lord," Brendallen drawled, his eyes roaming Dal's body before settling on his face. "Nice robe."

"I've just returned," Dal said in a chiding tone and walked away, heading behind a partition. "Give me a moment to change," he called back to them. Then he shouted, "Corporal, attend me!"

I bowed to the warlords as I hurried past and then slipped around the partition. I had a brief glimpse of a bed before strong hands grabbed me and yanked me forward. I smacked into Dalsharan's chest and his arms wrapped around me as his lips found mine. I held back my groan as his hands slid possessively over my body, squeezing me through my clothes—the muscles of my back, my ass, my arms. His tongue lashed mine as if to remind me who I belonged to, then he pulled away and looked me over slowly.

The Hawk Lord stepped back. He was naked, his robe cast over a chair. The space we were in was a third of the size of the main room but lavishly appointed, especially for a tent. A real bed, not just a cot, took up most of the room, its frame made of intricately carved wood and its mattress piled with blankets and pillows. Dal strode around it to a rack of clothes and selected a pair of pants. I waited, watching him step into them, then buckle on a belt. He slipped on a tunic next and lifted his hair out of it, spreading the brilliant strands over his broad shoulders. A comb lay atop the chest at the foot of his bed. Dal snatched it up on his way past and handed it to me.

“Put the satchel down and help me with my hair,” he commanded.

I shrugged the satchel off and dropped it on the ground as the Hawk Lord settled into a heavy chair, his back to me. I started combing his hair out. Dal winced.

“Have more care!” he snapped. “Haven't you ever brushed your hair before?”

A snide chuckle came from the other room. I could hear the shuffling sound of numerous people gathering. Great.

I leaned down to whisper in his ear, “Are you seriously having me brush your hair while two warlords wait outside?”

“They deserve to wait,” he whispered back. “Those fuckers lost their soul stones.”

I laughed softly and drew my cheek along his as I eased back. His hand whipped out quickly and caught the back of my neck before I straightened completely.

He drew me back down and bit my lip with a light growl. “As soon as this meeting is over, I'm having you in a proper bed.”

“Yes, Hawk Lord.”

He made an approving grunt. “Braid my hair. Be gentle and quick or I will punish you later.”

“I really think you're secretly a sadist,” I muttered as I braided.

“Have I hurt you?” He kept his voice low.

The sounds of conversation came from the other room. Only a few feet separated us from all those people and yet, he was risking an intimate conversation with me.

“No,” I admitted. “But you can if you want to.”

The Hawk Lord inhaled sharply and cast a look at me over his shoulder. “I think it's the other way around, my bad bird. You are a masochist.”

“Nah.” I grinned at him. “I just like my ass bit every once in a while. Maybe spanked.”

The Hawk Lord rose to his feet and turned to face me. A muscle ticked in his jaw. His stare raked me possessively as he grabbed my throat and pulled me forward by it. His fingers shifted into claws before I could process it, their deadly tips scraping my skin but not slicing. Only the most powerful Sidhe could manage a partial shift like that, and Dalsharan had done it in a moment—a

casual display of terrifying talent. If he was trying to intimidate me, it worked.

Dal's head lowered and he breathed me in as I shivered, one hand pressed to his broad chest. A brush of lips over mine, then a flick of his tongue, and I was hard and aching again. Dal breathed in deeply again and grinned.

"That's how I want you," he whispered as he squeezed my throat just a little. "Rock hard and desperate for me. Remember that you are mine when we go out there. The Coyote Lord and I are not on the best of terms. He will try to seduce you merely to get under my skin. And Ravyn," he growled low and dangerously, "if you let him get under *my* skin, I will beat the beautiful new skin on *your* ass until it's red instead of white. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, Hawk Lord," I said in a strong voice, so everyone outside could hear.

Dalsharan grinned. "Good bird. Now fetch the soul stones." He swept past me and into the council room, saying something to the gathering that I couldn't hear over the pounding of my heart.

I looked at his massive bed and trembled in excitement, then looked down at my erection with a grimace. I couldn't go out there like that. My pants held my cock down a little but hardly enough to hide my hard-on.

"Jiggling boobs and wet pussy," I whispered urgently as I fetched the stones from the satchel. "Jiggling boobs and wet pussy. Come on, go away, cock." I turned around and came face to face with myself—my reflection in the mirror on Dal's dresser. "Holy fuck balls," I whispered as I stepped up to it.

I was still me... mostly. But in addition to my pale, baby skin, my bone structure had shifted slightly—cheekbones angling up higher, along with my brow bone, giving me a distinctly fae look. My lips were fuller and my hair gleamed as if it were

polished onyx. And my eyes... I leaned closer to the mirror to stare at them. They'd been blue before, just a normal sky blue. Nothing special. But now they had a sparkling iridescence that could only be attributed to one thing—magic.

My cock went limp instantly.

“I'm a fucking faerie,” I whispered. The enormity of that sentence hit me suddenly. I was immortal. Not invulnerable, but still, I'd live forever if I didn't manage to get myself killed. That was kind of a big deal.

“Corporal Ravellar!” The Hawk Lord shouted.

“I'm coming, Hawk Lord!” I shouted back and hurried around the partition.

*If only*, I thought to myself.

Then I stopped short. Everyone was staring at me, including the other warlords. The room was utterly quiet as I walked warily toward the Hawk Lord, who had claimed his seat at the head of the table. The Lion Lord and Coyote Lord flanked him in chairs to either side, but both were turned to face me. Their stares followed me across the room.

“My lord.” I held out the amulets to Dalsharan.

*We have been betrayed*, the whisper came again.

“What?” I hissed.

“I said, you fucking took long enough, Corporal,” Dal growled.

“Oh. Sorry, my lord. I was looking for the stones,” I muttered. “You know how the satchel likes to mess with me.”

Dal snorted.

“He truly is Valorian?” the Coyote Lord whispered as he looked me over. “How magnificent. You must be so proud, Dalsharan.”

“I am indeed overjoyed that my choice pleased the Beasts and the Great Mother,” Dal said as he handed the amulets back to their owners. “Corporal, attend me.”

Attend me? I frowned at him. What the fuck did that mean?

“Stand behind me and wait on my commands,” Dal whispered to me in irritation.

*Help*, the voice whispered. I stumbled as I went to stand behind Dal.

The Coyote Lord laughed low and sensually as he secured his amulet around his throat. “Don't be such a brute, Dalsharan. The boy has just been promoted from human to fae and to your...” he lifted a brow at Dalsharan in question.

“Consort, yes,” Dalsharan declared and gave the Coyote Lord a firm look. “He's mine.”

I gaped at the back of Dal's head. *Fuck me, did he just claim me as his consort in front of a roomful of people and two warlords?*

As I mentioned, the Army and the Fae, especially, are completely comfortable with every kind of sexuality, so I wasn't shocked that Dal would announce that he swung like that. However, warlords rarely took consorts. They had lovers, who enjoyed a certain status, but that status wasn't the same as a consort's. A consort was a step away from being a husband or wife. In a war camp, it gave me clearance to hear whatever he did. He had just basically handed me an invitation to any meeting I wanted to attend and a say in them. From the looks on the faces of the officers gathered in that tent, they were even more shocked than I



was.

I lifted my chin, crossed my arms, and smiled broadly. I could very well be falling in love for the first time in my life.

“Consort, eh?” The Lion Lord asked as he glanced at me. “Were you two together before this mission?”

“Are we going to discuss my sex life now, Hadrian?” Dal smirked at the Lion Lord.

The Lion Lord chuckled, gave me a long look, and then said, “Only so I might offer my congratulations. I'm happy you've finally settled on someone.”

“For now,” Dal murmured.

Something shivered in my chest and my previous happiness vanished. *For now?* Why did that scare the fuck out of me? I had never cared about how long a relationship lasted. Why did it matter if the Hawk Lord saw me as temporary? He'd just handed me a title that I hadn't expected after giving me a piece of his soul and the immortality that came with it. I should focus on the positive—there was a shocking amount of it.

*Help me*, the voice came again.

My stomach twisted as I suddenly recognized the voice. It was one of the beasts. I stared at the warlords before me. Was one of their stones speaking to me? Asking me for help? No, it couldn't be. For one, they were safe now. For two, I wasn't touching any of them. I had to touch the Hawk Soul before I could hear it. Which meant that my mind was playing tricks on me. Maybe I was remembering what the beasts had said—all those whispered words that had eluded me. That would make more sense. They had been stolen, so maybe they had been asking me to bring them safely back to their warlords. And now that I had, I was remembering. Weird. But I probably had a very long life full of weirdness ahead

of me.

“We have other things to discuss,” Dalsharan went on crisply. “Is everyone here?” he asked General Faron.

“Yes, my lord.”

“Good. I made an unsettling discovery in Alantri,” the Hawk Lord declared, and everyone went quiet. “The first fortress was breached easily and the Corporal retrieved the Lion Soul without issue.”

I bit back my surprised snort just in time. Without issue is hardly how I would have described that shitshow. But it was probably best not to tell the Lion Lord that I'd tried his necklace on.

“But he was captured in the second fortress,” Dal went on.

“What?” The Coyote Lord sat up straight. “You rescued the boy?”

“He is not a boy, Brendallen,” Dalsharan drawled, “and it was the other way around.”

That was met with astonished silence.

“It was a trap. They were waiting for me to fly in and attempt to save him,” Dalsharan said. “They had iron nets and an amulet hook. They removed the Hawk Soul from me before I could access its power.”

“Fuck,” the Coyote Lord whispered.

The Hawk officers—from the Generals down to Captains—all cursed furiously.

“It was Gremara,” Dalsharan said to his fellow warlords. “She didn't care about the stones. She tossed mine to Corporal

Ravellar carelessly.”

“But... I don't understand,” the Lion Lord said. “Why steal them if she didn't want them?”

“It was an elaborate plot to get one of us to go after them,” the Hawk Lord explained. “She...” He cleared his throat and started again, “We did not destroy all the creskas fields as we thought.”

“We didn't...” the Coyote Lord frowned and then comprehension lit his features. “By the Moon! She didn't use wild-rot on you, did she?”

“She did. But not to torture me,” Dal said grimly. “Gremara tried to have intercourse with me. She wanted to conceive a child.”

“What?!” The Lion Lord roared.

“They have found a spell that will permit a fae to breed with a Farungal,” Dalsharan announced. “And supposedly, this child—a child born of a Farungal and a Sidhe warlord—would break their curse.”

The whole tent erupted into shouts and cursing. The Hawk Lord let it go on for a few minutes and then lifted his hand. He didn't have to do anything more than that to shut them all up. They went quiet and stared at him as if he had all the answers.

“We need to send forces to Alantri and find those creskas fields,” Dal said. “And we need to burn Gremara's fortress to the ground.”

“Send forces to Alantri?” the Coyote Lord drew back with a pensive frown. “That's risky. Almost as risky as you going there with only a human corporal.”

“And yet that *corporal* got me out of Gremara's fortress, even as the wild-rot took hold of me and left pieces of me behind,”

the Hawk Lord said in a steely voice. “That *human* corporal tended me and refused to give up on me. And when I gave up, my stone spoke to him and showed him how to save me. That *human corporal* risked everything he was to make me whole again. So, Coyote Lord, maybe it wasn't so risky after all. Maybe it was the Goddess guiding us.”

The Coyote Lord snorted. “It was luck, Dalsharan, and you know it. You chose the right man for the job, I'll grant you that.” He slid me another lusty look. “But you shouldn't have risked yourself. I think we should stay the fuck away from Alantri for the time being, especially us warlords.”

“How did you resist the wild-rot?” The Lion Lord whispered to Dalsharan.

“I used the lessening spell,” Dal murmured back.

“Fuck, man,” the Lion Lord whistled. “You accepted the rot.”

“It was either that or impregnate Gremara and help to destroy our race,” Dalsharan gave the other warlord a grim look.

“Admirable, my friend.” The Lion Lord smacked Dal's shoulder. “But, fuck! I wouldn't have had the balls to... well, to give up my balls. You are more man than I.”

“So I've heard.” Dal grinned at the Lion Lord.

The Lion Lord burst out laughing. “That was one time after too many glasses of sharani, and she had no business squealing to you. That beautiful, evil tart.”

“That evil tart is your wife,” Dal chided.

“I know.” Hadrian grinned broadly. “And I wish she had never befriended you. You two are vicious together.”

“If you two are done reminiscing, could we discuss our plans?” the Coyote Lord asked sardonically.

“We can make no plans without first speaking to the other warlords,” Hadrian declared. “I will summon them here, Dal, and we can decide together what we should do about that vicious bitch.”

“Very well,” Dal agreed.

“If you would pardon my ignorance, Hawk Lord, would you mind explaining what the wild-rot is?” General Harvis asked.

“Of course, General,” the Hawk Lord said. “It is a potion that was originally created to rape men. The creskas flowers, when made into a paste and applied, give an immediate erection despite whatever that man is feeling. The Farungal loved it for that alone; it meant they could capture males of my kind and force them to participate in their own rape. But then they discovered that the magic fed on the energy of sex and that if they applied the paste and didn't touch the man, the potion would feed on his body. It eats flesh, rotting a living person as if they were a corpse. Another name for creskas flowers is corpse flowers. We believed that we had destroyed all of them, but it seems we were wrong. Gremara kept some in a hidden greenhouse.”

“Dear God,” the General whispered.

“God will not help you if you are unlucky enough to have that shit rubbed on your dick,” the Lion Lord said. “Only sex appeases it and without sex, you're as good as dead. Unless, it seems, you have a guardian Ravyn.” The Lion Lord grinned at me.

I smiled awkwardly back.

“He's good looking,” The Lion Lord said to Dalsharan.

Dal laughed. “Thank you for trying, but you don't have to

make that kind of effort, Hadrian.”

“Oh, thank the Goddess. I'm bad enough at complimenting women, much less a man. Still, congratulations, Dal.”

“Thank you.”

“Before we leave you to enjoy your new consort,” the Coyote Lord drawled, “I'd like to give you both my sincere gratitude for rescuing the Coyote Soul Stone.”

Dalsharan went serious. “You're welcome, Brendallen.” He looked back at me with a prompting lift of his brows.

I flinched and said, “It was my honor to retrieve the soul stones, Coyote Lord.”

“So brave,” the Coyote Lord murmured. “A Valorian. How wondrous. Your king will be eager to meet him, Dalsharan.”

Dalsharan tensed. “I haven't spoken to His Majesty yet, but I'm sure he'd prefer me to stay with the army.”

“I don't know about that,” the Lion Lord said apologetically. “A new Valorian is miraculous, Dal. They'll see him as Goddess-touched. A Beast Champion. They'll want him trained and they'll want you beside him.”

Trained? I frowned at the back of Dal's head as if I could push my questions into it. I could see his shoulders bunching.

“He's needed here, as am I,” Dal growled.

“Dalsharan,” the Lion Lord said gently, “I know your army is important to you but this is even more important. He's a Valorian. There's only been one other and he—”

Dal made a hissing sound to cut the Lion Lord off. “You know that is not to be spoken of in mixed company.” Dal looked

pointedly at the human officers in the tent.

“Of course.” The Lion Lord straightened. “But you know what I was going to say and you know I'm right. You must speak with the Hawk King as soon as possible. Your consort could bring untold blessings to Varalorre.”

“What about the war? Shouldn't his blessings be used here?”

“You argue with me as if I am your king,” Hadrian said. “If it were up to me, I'd tell you to do as your heart compelled you. But we are not kings, Brother. We are their swords, and we must go where we are swung.”

Dalsharan nodded grudgingly and stood up. “Dismissed!” he shouted to the room. He hugged the Lion Lord again, then nodded to the Coyote Lord.

The Coyote Lord stood up but instead of going straight past me, he stepped behind my back and around me. As he passed by, he trailed a hand over my ass and whispered in my ear, “Such a pretty bird. I'll be here one more night if you're inclined to leave the nest. I promise to make you scream.”

I swallowed roughly and straightened uncomfortably, but didn't say anything. What could I have said to a warlord? “Fuck off” didn't seem appropriate. The Coyote Lord grinned knowingly at me over his shoulder and sauntered out of the tent.

When everyone was gone, and I was finally alone with Dalsharan, he turned to me and growled furiously, “What the fuck did I tell you?”

## Chapter Fifteen

“What?” I gaped at the Hawk Lord.

“I claim you as my consort and you stand there and do nothing when that weasel propositions you?!”

“What did you want me to do? He's a fucking warlord!”

“I wanted you to say that you belong to me!” Dal grabbed me by the throat and shoved me toward the bedroom. “Get your ass in there and strip. Now!”

Fuck. I didn't know whether to be frightened or turned on. I rushed into the bedroom and hurried out of my clothes, but Dal didn't follow me. Instead, I heard him go to the tent flap and call for someone. I stood in the center of the bedroom area, naked and at attention, with my hands clasped behind my back like an idiot. I ground my teeth as I heard people moving around the main room, then the sound of water came from somewhere on my right. Dalsharan finally appeared around the partition and crooked his finger at me.

I followed Dal into yet another section of the tent. This one was closer to the tent entrance. It had a packed-earth floor covered with only a few wooden slats that circled a round tub large enough for three men. There was a table laden with cloths, sponges, soap, and shampoo, and the tub was full of steaming water. Dal stripped, left his clothes on a chair, and climbed into the tub. He sank into the water, closed his eyes, and sighed deeply.

“Get a cloth, soap it up, and wash me,” he said with his eyes closed.



I gaped at him.

Dal opened his eyes and stared at me through the steam. “Stop looking at me like a scared rabbit. I forgive your first mistake.”

“You do?”

“You will, of course, accept your punishment before I take you,” he drawled, making my cock twitch. “But first, you will bathe me until you're so hard that you beg me to beat your ass just so that I'll fuck it.”

“Yes, Hawk Lord,” I whispered and hurried to gather soap and cloth.

He grinned wickedly as he watched me approach him, his gaze lowering to my twitching dick.

“I think I want you shaved,” he said pensively.

I looked down at my nest of dark curls and then up at him with wide eyes. “What?” I squeaked.

“Get to it, Consort!” Dalsharan snapped and waved a hand at himself.

I knelt behind the tub, dipped my hand into the water to wet the cloth, and then soaped it up. Dal leaned forward, exposing his broad back. I hurried to scrub it, then took the cloth down, over that delicious expanse of muscles, into the water, and over his ass. He stood up, water sluicing everywhere, and brought that gorgeous ass to face level with me. I groaned and soaped it up, drawing the cloth between his cheeks and scrubbing his asshole gently. He growled in pleasure and lifted a leg, propping it on the rim of the tub.

I drew the cloth down, my other hand bringing the soap up

to slide over that bent leg. I moved across his powerful thigh, massaging his muscles, washing him all the way to his foot. I even scrubbed between his toes, then I dipped the cloth and brought it back up. He dropped that leg and lifted the other for me, and when that torture was over, he turned around.

I groaned. He was thick and hard and stretching toward my lips. I started to lean forward, utterly dick-matized, but his hand fisted in my hair and pulled me back. I looked up at his amused expression and made a petulant sound.

“Wash me first, naughty bird.”

I drew the cloth over him, then the soap. Then I dropped both into the water and just massaged him with my hands, delighting in the feeling of slick, soapy skin. I swept my fingers along that mouthwatering length, rubbed circles over his heavy sacs, and then slid my fingers back, along his taint, to rub his asshole again. Dal lifted a brow at me as I slipped a finger in and twirled it.

“I want to make sure you're clean,” I whispered.

Dalsharan drew away with a grunt and sat down to rinse off. I moaned in disappointment.

“You haven't washed my chest. Get in the tub and straddle me.”

I whimpered as I climbed in. The hot water made me sigh as I sank into it. It covered my shoulders as I skimmed my hands over the bottom, searching for the soap and cloth.

“Looking for these?” Dalsharan held them up and grinned.

I crawled over him and straddled his lap before I took them. “Yes. Thank you, Hawk Lord.”

Dal made a purring sound of pleasure when our cocks rubbed together. “My chest, Ravyn.”

“Yes, Hawk Lord.” I soaped him up, then tossed aside the soap and cloth again, massaging the soap in with my hands.

I worked those solid muscles, running my hands in broad strokes and then kneading deeper. The Hawk Lord sighed and stretched his neck, his eyes closing to the pleasure. My thumbs twirled over his pebbled nipples, and he gave me a lazy grin. Encouraged by it, I leaned forward and brushed my lips over his. His eyes opened and he pushed me back.

“Rinse me off,” his voice had dropped to a sexy rumble.

I took the scoop that hung over the tub edge and used it to pour water over him. The water slid over those sculpted muscles as if worshiping him, and Dal's cock twitched against mine. I licked my lips as I watched the steam bead on his cheek and slide down his chiseled jaw. He reached back and undid his wet braid, giving me a pointed look. I wet it more, and then washed his hair, sliding against him the entire time. Dal kept his arms propped on the rim of the tub, smiling knowingly at me.

“I need to rinse your hair,” I said.

Dal hung his head back, over the rim. I rose on my knees and leaned forward to pour the water carefully over his head, making sure not to get any in his eyes. He bit my nipple as I did.

“You're dirty,” he declared as I sat back. “Wash yourself.”

I sat back on his lap and scrubbed my upper body, holding his hot gaze as I did. He stared at me with the lazy look of a sultan watching a dancing girl. But then I stood up, propped my foot on the edge of the tub, and scrubbed my leg. His gaze widened. I did the same with the other leg, then blatantly soaped up my cock and balls, rubbing them thoroughly. Maybe a little more than

thoroughly.

“Clean your ass,” he ordered.

I lifted my leg again and soaped myself.

“Turn around and let me see you finger yourself.”

“Oh, fuck,” I growled and did as he said.

I put my leg back up on the rim so that my ass spread for him, and slipped my soapy finger into my hole.

“Go deep, Ravyn. I want you clean enough to tongue.”

I pumped my middle finger into my ass, the wet sound of it making my cock ache. His hands suddenly grabbed my hips and pulled me down. I hurried to get my other leg under me so I wouldn't fall. Still, I made a splash as he brought me between his spread legs. Dal picked up the water scoop and rinsed me before pulling me back to lay on his chest.

“Relax,” he whispered as he wet my hair, then massaged shampoo into it. He rinsed me, smoothed my wet hair back, and bit my ear. As he stroked lazy circles over my chest, he asked, “Are you ready to beg yet?”

“Fuck, yes, I am,” I moaned and angled my head to look at him. “Please spank me, Hawk Lord. Smack my ass until it's red and then fuck it hard.”

“Oh, I will.” He licked my cheek. “But first, a little taste. Stand up and bend over.”

I got up eagerly and bent over, bracing my hands on the rim of the tub. I felt his hot hands spread my ass and then... was that his face between my cheeks? Oh, fuck! A wet, thick tongue laved my hole, then slipped into it. I cried out as my knees buckled. Dalsharan drew back after his little taste and rubbed a fingertip

over my puckered asshole.

“You may sit down.”

I crumpled to my knees. While I sank deeper under the water and panted in arousal, Dal got out of the tub and wrapped himself in a robe. Not his war robe, this one was thicker, made to absorb water. He left without a backward glance.

“What the fuck?” I whispered. Then I shrugged and sat back. If he was going to leave me there, I was going to enjoy the hot water. I stretched out my legs and propped my arms on the rim as he had done.

Just when I was starting to get sleepy, the Hawk Lord returned with a woman holding a box. I shrank back against the side of the tub when they approached me, drawing my knees up to my chest. What was that fucker up to now?

“This is Adeline,” the Hawk Lord waved a hand at the woman.

She smiled and bowed to me.

“Hi,” I murmured warily.

“She's going to shave you.”

“What?!” I snarled.

“Get out of the water and stand over here.” Dal pointed to a spot on the wooden slats beside the tub.

Adeline set her box on the table and started to remove her tools—several sizes of razors and a pot of shaving cream.

“But I like my curls,” I whined.

“They will grow back,” Dal said. “If I allow it.”

I made grumbling sounds as I got out of the tub and went to stand before the woman.

“Please, spread your legs and stand still,” she said to me.

I did as she asked, and she dried me off before she spread cream all around my dick. Then she lifted a razor. I didn't even breathe as she set it against my skin. My hard-on vanished with the first swipe, and Dal laughed his ass off. It only took the woman a few minutes to shave away all the hair surrounding my cock and balls but it felt like forever. Finally, she wiped me clean with a wet cloth and stood up. I slowly looked down, dreading what I'd find, but was pleasantly shocked by the result.

“I look huge!” I exclaimed.

The woman giggled. “Yes, you have a very nice penis. One of the nicest I've ever shaved.”

“Thanks.” I grinned at her.

“Now, turn around and bend over.”

“What?” I squeaked.

“I'm going to shave your ass.”

“What?! I don't have a hairy ass!”

“Not your ass itself, but the area around your asshole,” she explained as if it were perfectly normal to go around talking to men about shaving their assholes. “Most men have some hair coming up along the taint and around the hole.”

“I... I can't even...” I shook my head, at a loss for words.

“It will make sex very smooth. More enjoyable,” she promised and winked at me.

“Oh,” I whispered. Then I blinked. Processed. “Okay then.” I shrugged, turned around, and bent over.

Her razor swept over me as I flushed. No woman had ever touched me so intimately. Not since my mother bathed me as a little boy. But when Adeline was done, I did feel nice and smooth. I stood up and shifted my ass, grinning.

“Okay, that's pretty nice.”

“Use this cream once a week.” She handed me a jar. “It will prevent regrowth. Just stop using when you want your curls back.” She grinned.

“Thank you.” I took the jar. “I feel all silky.”

Adeline giggled.

“Thank you, Adeline. Lovely work,” Dalsharan said.

“My pleasure, Hawk Lord.” Adeline cast another look at me. “Definitely my pleasure.”

She left the tent, and he strode up to inspect my new look. He lifted my cock to make sure she'd gotten every hair, and my hard-on returned instantly. But Dal dropped my dick and stepped behind me.

“Bend over,” he ordered.

“Yes, Hawk Lord,” I said eagerly.

I bent over and braced my hands on my knees. He crouched behind me, spread my ass, and tongued me again. That hot, wet tongue slid up me and his face rubbed against my silken skin. The vibration of his groan rippled through me. Although, I may have been groaning too.

“Very nice,” Dal said as he stood. His fingers trailed over

the smooth skin between my ass cheeks, one slipping briefly into my wet asshole. He gave it a casual pump, then withdrew. “Now, you're ready for your punishment.”



## Chapter Sixteen

“Dalsharan, I just wanted to say...” the Coyote Lord trailed off and stopped halfway into the tent.

I was following Dalsharan to the bedroom—him in his robe and me naked and twitching with need. I froze at the sound of Brendallen's voice and looked over my shoulder to find his stare on my bare ass.

“Ah, I'm interrupting. Please, forgive the intrusion,” he murmured in a tone that said he was more than pleased to intrude.

“I won't be joining you, Coyote Lord,” I said without turning around. It was bad enough that he got to see my ass. “Just so you know. I belong to the Hawk Lord.”

“Oh, my!” the Coyote Lord exclaimed. “You've got him trained already, Dal? How efficient.”

“Get into the bedroom now.” Dal pointed past the partition.

I went.

“What do you want, Brendallen?” Dal growled.

“Just to say thank you again and give you this.”

I heard Dal move, then grunt grudgingly. “Thank you.”

“Just a small token of my esteem.” A pause then, “Your consort is lovely. It's been a long time since I've seen an ass that fine.”

“Stay the fuck away from him or I will shred you.”

“Oh, come on. You're not still pissed about that little eagle in Reshabar?”

“Get out.”

“I did you a favor then, as I did tonight. I tested your Ravyn and look at that, he's worthy. You should thank me.”

“Get the fuck out!”

“You're welcome—for the gift and the test of truth.”

Dal came storming into the sleeping area and tossed a box on the dressing table.

“Are you okay?” I asked—no tone to it, just a straight question.

“Of course.” He shrugged out of his robe and cast it over the chair.

I looked at that beautiful body and groaned because what I was about to say might delay my touching it. “We can... talk about it. You know, if you want to.”

“What I want is for you to kneel on that trunk, bend over the bed, stretch your arms out straight, and stay that way until I tell you to move,” he snapped.

My eye twitched. I didn't offer heart-to-hearts to just anyone, but he'd tossed my offer in my face. “Fine,” I growled and knelt on the trunk. I bent over, lying on the mattress to stretch my arms out straight. The position made my ass angle up.

Dalsharan made a pleased sound deep in his throat and stepped up behind me. His hand slid over my ass, gently stroking it. “You have the most plump, perfect ass I've ever seen.”

“Thank you.”

He smacked me suddenly. “Thank you, what?”

“Thank you, Hawk Lord,” I amended.

“Better.” He went to his clothes rack and pulled a belt off a hook, then folded it in two, holding it at the buckle end.

I watched him walk back behind me as a spark of wariness shot through me. A spanking was one thing but a belt?

“Are you..” I looked over my shoulder at him. “You're not going to hit me with a belt, are you?”

“Did you think a warlord spans men with his hand?” Dalsharan growled. “I said that I'd make your white ass red. Now, shut the fuck up.”

“But I told him.” I twisted to look at him. “I said I was yours.”

“Only after he got a good look at your ass,” he snarled.

“Dal, come on. This is taking it too far.” I rolled onto my butt and pulled up my leg. “Just talk to me. Tell me why you hate that guy.”

“Are you disobeying me?” He looked as if he was torn between shock and fury.

Fear spiked through me. “No,” I whispered. “I said I wouldn't, and I won't.”

I turned around and laid back down, then clenched my teeth. He was obviously working through some shit and my ass was gonna pay the price. So be it. He'd given me a piece of his soul, I could take a few smacks with a belt for him.

The belt came down on my ass hard. I grunted. Again. Again. Much harder than I'd expected. A whimper slipped past my lips as I clenched my hands into fists.

“Lay those hands out straight!” Dal ordered.

I did as he said. He brought the belt down again. I cried out. My cock was dead. My ass on fire. This wasn't sexy, it was torture. I pressed my face into the blankets and wondered what the fuck I'd gotten myself into. Crack! It came down again. My body started to twitch uncontrollably. Crack! A sob shot past my clenched teeth. Crack! I bit my lip to stop myself from begging him. He'd stop soon. He'd have to stop soon. Right? Crack! I was crying. Fucking crying. I think my ass was bleeding. I could feel something dripping down my thighs. My skin felt like it had been shredded with knives. I twitched with every hit and kept twitching between them.

“Please, stop!” I finally cried out.

The next blow didn't come. Instead, a cool hand touched me. I flinched away from it and wept. Then a tingling heat swept over me and the pain faded. His hand smoothed over my skin again, swiping a cloth over me. Probably wiping up the blood. My body didn't seem to understand that it was over; it kept twitching and I continued to cry. I wept like a child with my face buried in the blankets.

“Ravyn,” Dalsharan's voice was gentle and so was his touch. “Turn over, Ravyn.”

“Fuck you,” I sobbed and crawled away from him. “Fuck you!” I rolled out of bed and immediately crumpled to my knees.

My body had been so strained by the tension—exhausted from the emotional ups and downs, and then pushed past its pain threshold—that I could barely get to my feet. I kept wobbling. But I stood up at last. I snatched a pair of pants off the floor and

shouldered past him.

“Ravyn!” He grabbed my arm.

I shook him off and when that didn't work, I pushed. A flat palm to his chest sent the Hawk Lord flying. He bashed into the partition that separated the sleeping area from the bathing. The whole tent shook but it held. He slid down the wall, then laid there staring at me in shock. I gaped back at him. Then I shoved my legs into my pants and walked out.

“Ravyn!” Dalsharan shouted.

I kept going, so fucking mad at him and myself. He had told me to think about what I was agreeing to, but come on. How could I have known that he was going to really whale on me? I thought he might be a little kinky, a little possessive, but that shit back there was fucked up. He never said he wanted to beat me till I bled. And as grateful as I was for the immortality, I couldn't submit to that again. Fuck no. I wasn't a scared little boy anymore, crouching in an alley as the bigger boys beat on me. I was a soldier, and I knew how to fight back now. No one gets to do that to me anymore, not even the fucking Hawk Lord.

I burst into the night bare-chested, my breath puffing in the cold air, but so hot from shame and fury that I didn't feel the chill. I stormed off into the mud, then realized that I'd forgotten my boots too.

Fuck it. Fuck *him*. He could find another bad bird to beat on.

“Ravyn!” the Hawk Lord's shout echoed behind me.

But I'm good at hiding. Good at blending into the night. I slipped between a couple of tents just before the Hawk Lord went storming by, dressed only in his war robe. I watched the bright banner of his hair until he turned a corner. Soldiers jumped out of

his way, staring after him in shock, then muttering to each other. I slumped in relief, then headed into the forest.

## Chapter Seventeen

I haven't cried since I was a little kid. Not even when my mother kicked me out. Life is hard when you're different. It makes you strong. It makes tears useless. Senseless. But I had wanted Dal so badly. Wanted his love. I hadn't wanted that before. Mainly because I thought I couldn't have it. No one had ever loved me. They loved my mouth or my ass or my cock, but they never loved me. I guess Raeshal had, but he never told me. Then I threw him away for that fucking warlord with his beautiful cock and sexy alpha bullshit. All because I thought I could love him. Because I thought he could love me. How fucking pathetic.

I was a soldier. We fought, we feasted, and we fucked. We didn't love. Not in the camps. But I had dared to hope. I dared to feel pleasure when he claimed me, never knowing that being his consort meant bleeding for him. That his pleasure was given with pain. That he wanted something I wasn't willing to give. Fuck, we'd lasted a day—two, if you counted our time together on the mission.

I dropped onto a fallen log, set my face in my hands, and wept bitterly. I cried big fat ugly tears until snot stuffed my nose and I couldn't even clear it because my nostrils were so fucking swollen. Then I sobbed over how pathetic I was. I cried and cried and cried. Finally, I let out one last stuttering breath and lifted my face. The moon was out and had found a crack in the tree canopy. She shined her soft light on me.

“Goddess-touched,” I whispered. “Yeah, right. I've fucked things up again. In record time. Now, what do I do? I can't go back. This is the only home I've ever felt comfortable in, and I

can't go back. Fuck, I'm actually afraid of him.”

A rustle came from above, and I flinched. But it was just a bird. I'd probably woken it up. It ruffled its feathers, spread its wings, and glided down to me. I blinked in surprise when it landed at my feet. It was a hawk. They're day birds; it shouldn't have been active and it really shouldn't have approached me. The hawk cocked its head and moonlight set its eyes aglow. It hopped up on my knees suddenly, and I leaned back as my mouth fell open. The bird had a wingspan of at least four feet and it showed it all to me, stretching its wings wide. Then it flapped those wings, brushing my face with a gentle breeze. Calm washed through me.

The hawk gave a soft cry, more of a chirp, and bent its head. With a shaking hand, I reached out and stroked it. Just a light touch on its feathered crown. The hawk lifted into that touch and that feeling of peace spread through me. I knew I would be okay. I was strong, and smart, and I could make it on my own. I didn't need the army or its warlord.

“Ravyn?” Raeshal's whisper came from my left.

The hawk looked at Raeshal, cried, and then launched itself into the air. Rae started after it in wonder.

“Sweet Goddess,” he whispered.

“That was something, huh?” I asked softly as I stared after the bird.

“Something?” Rae laughed in amazement and stepped up to me. “Ravyn, that was—” He burst out laughing.

“What?” I huffed.

“You just... you're so... fuck, you *are* Goddess-touched.”

“What do you mean?”



“That was a messenger.” Raeshal sat down on the log beside me. “The Goddess sends them to her favorites when she thinks they need guidance or comfort. You’re a Hawk now, a real Hawk, so she sent you a hawk.”

“A real Hawk?” I whispered, pushing away that other stuff to deal with later. “Are you saying that I can shift?”

“Probably.” He grinned. “You wanna give it a go?”

“Right now?” I snorted. “No, not so much.”

“Ah, yes. The Hawk Lord is storming through camp calling for his new consort and everyone is hiding while you’re here, sitting on a log, petting birds.”

“Fuck,” I whispered, the fear returning in a rush.

“Ravyn?” Raeshal asked in a suddenly worried tone. He took my hand. “What happened? Why are you hiding in the forest while he searches for you?”

“He...” I swallowed and let him go—moved my hand away. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

“The Goddess sent you a messenger, dark bird.” Raeshal stroked my hair. “You are special. I’ve always known it. That’s why I was so scared when you offered to go on that mission.”

“You were scared?” I whispered.

“I love you,” he said simply. “Have for a while now.”

“Rae, I...”

“It’s okay. I know he told you I’m engaged. He must have.”

“Yeah.”

"I love her too." He grinned. "You not loving me back, it's kind of freeing. I don't have to worry about leaving you." He scowled. "Except now, maybe I do. Tell me what happened."

"He beat me with a belt," I whispered.

"What?!" Raeshal growled.

"I thought we were just playing," it all started tumbling out. "I thought he was kinky or something. And then the Coyote Lord came in. He said something to me at the meeting, basically offered to fuck me, and I didn't say anything to him. Dal got mad. He said that he had claimed me but I didn't... I don't know, what I didn't do. Didn't act claimed, I guess. He was so mad. We took a bath and were heading to bed when the Coyote Lord came in. So I told him right then. I said that I belonged to Dal. I said I *belonged* to him, Rae! Fuck, who have I become? In two days, he's turned me into someone else."

"Belonging to someone can feel safe," Rae said gently. "Especially when the person you love needs to possess you."

"Yeah, well, I thought I did what he wanted, but when the Coyote Lord left, I tried to talk to him and—"

"Oh, sweet mother," Rae whispered. "You tried to talk to him about Brendallen?"

"Yeah! I don't do that shit! You know me. If you want to share, fine, but I'm not gonna ask. But he looked so upset and I... I thought we had something. I wanted to know why he was mad. So, I asked him. And he fucking beat me for it. Beat me so bad, I couldn't stand up at first, even after I healed."

"Fuck," it was barely a breath of sound on Rae's lips. "Ravyn, I'm going to tell you something that no one but the Hawk Lord, the Coyote Lord, Jaxon, and I know. You must swear to me to never repeat it and swear to never tell Dalsharan that I told you."

“Okay,” I whispered. “Who's Jaxon?”

“Jaxon was Dal's first love,” Rae said, then let out a long sigh. “They were great together. Inseparable. Then the three of us went to Reshabar one year.”

*You're not still pissed about that little eagle in Reshabar?*  
Brendallen's voice slid through my mind.

“Is Jaxon an Eagle?” I asked.

“Yeah.” Rae frowned. “How did you know that?”

“Fuck. The Coyote Lord taunted Dal about him just before we... before he...”

“Beat the shit out of you?” Rae asked sadly.

“Yeah.”

“Dalsharan is a good man, Ravyn. He will stand by you to his last breath. He will fight for you and protect you and sing your fucking praises. You heard him tonight; he made sure that everyone knew what you had done for him, even though it made him look weak.”

“But?”

“But he's got a darkness in him,” Rae admitted. “And its name is Jaxon.”

“What happened?”

“Jaxon pledged himself to Dal. They were going to get married. But he'd been cheating on him the entire time. Jaxon had this... need that Dal couldn't fill. He liked to be hurt. Beyond mere domination. We're talking real whips, strangling, you name it. The guy wanted to bleed.”

“Oh, fuck,” I whispered.

“Yeah. And Dal wouldn't do it. So, Jaxon found someone else to.”

“Let me guess, the Coyote Lord?”

“You got it, bright eyes,” Rae put an arm around my shoulders and squeezed. “Dal found them together in Reshabar. Brendallen had Jaxon bent over a bed with his hands stretched out before him and was—”

“Fuck!” I jumped to my feet. “Gods damn fuck!”

“He did that to you?” Raeshal asked.

“So, he couldn't hit his beloved Jaxon, but he can whale on me?” I snarled.

“You don't understand, Ravyn. Jaxon made Dalsharan feel like less of a man. He made him feel weak. Dal was twisted by it. He nearly killed Jaxon and Brendallen when he found them—beat them both senseless. Then he walked away and got drunk for a long time. Ever since then, there's a part of him that believes that loving someone means hurting them. He thinks he has to dominate a lover to show his masculinity. And the worst trigger is Brendallen.”

I slumped back on the log.

“He hit you like that because he was afraid of losing you, Ravyn,” Rae whispered. “He thought you were going to leave him.”

I gave him the look that statement deserved.

“I know it's fucked up.” Rae held up his hands placatingly. “But that's how it is. You scared him. Brendallen scared him. It was Dal's way of holding on and it, of course, drove you away.”

“Fuck,” I whispered again.

“Don't give up on him,” Rae said gently. “Please, don't. Give Dal a chance to talk to you, to explain. Give him a chance to discover that love doesn't have to be that way. You can show him that it can be fun and light and beautiful. You just have to be strong. For him. For both of you.”

*Be strong for him or my lord will not survive*, the memory of the Hawk Soul's voice whispered through my head, pushing away Brendallen's.

“Fuck, Rae. I don't know if my ass can take it.”

Rae barked out a laugh. “It can. You're immortal now, remember?”

I rubbed at my chest where a piece of Dalsharan's soul had taken root. “Yeah, I remember.”

“And yes, he's a part of you now. Feel him through it. Reach for him. You'll see that I'm right.”

“Okay,” I said. “Okay. But how do I go back now? What would I even say?”

“Don't go back.” He grinned at me and stood up. “I'm gonna take a stroll through camp and when I *just so happen* to pass by Dal, I'll mention that I saw you here. We'll make that idiot come to you.”

I grinned. “I like the sound of that.”

“Try to look angry and really sad. Like stub your toe or something to make yourself cry.”

“Fuck you, Rae!” I pushed him away as I laughed.

“There's that smile I love.” Rae leaned down and kissed me

tenderly. “I will always be here if you need me, Ravyn.”

“Thank you,” I whispered.

“Now try to look more pathetic than normal.” Rae winked and walked away.

“Dick,” I muttered affectionately.

## Chapter Eighteen

After Raeshal left, I started thinking about what Dal had done to me. Yeah, I understood it now, and I was even a little touched that he had been afraid of losing me. But I couldn't tell him that I knew about all that. I had to act as if all I knew was what he'd done. And what he'd done had been brutal.

The stupid fucking tears came back.

I sniffed and leaned forward with my forearms on my knees, hanging my head. How was that for pathetic?

A branch broke, and I twitched. The Hawk Lord wouldn't have made that mistake. I lifted my head and searched the woods. It was him. Dalsharan stood in a shaft of moonlight so I could see him. I realized he'd snapped the branch on purpose so he wouldn't startle me.

“Get the fuck away from me, you sick motherfucker,” I growled.

“Ravyn, please, can I just explain?” Dalsharan asked.

I blinked. This was new.

“You wanna explain why you beat me like I was your fucking enemy?” I sneered. “Sure, asshole, go ahead. Let's fucking hear it.”

Dal winced but stepped forward. “That bastard that came onto you—the Coyote Lord.” He cleared his throat. “He... Ravyn, he took someone from me a long time ago. Someone I loved. That

person wanted me to abuse them as I did to you tonight.”

“He wanted to be beaten to a pulp?” I asked doubtfully.

“Yes, he did. He was... he had desires I couldn't fulfill.”

“And now you can?” I stood up. “Good for you, Dal.”

“Ravyn, please... aw fuck!” He shook his head as he shouted. “I'm sorry! I thought you wanted that. You told me that I could hurt you. You seemed to like all the rough treatment. That's what Jax always...” he broke off. “I thought you might need the same things he did. I thought that if I didn't, you wouldn't...”

I stepped up to him. “I am not Jax, whoever he is. Do not ever hit me like that again. I don't like pain.”

Dal's breath was coming fast. His stare coasted over my face. “Okay. I swear I won't.”

“Okay.”

“But I...”

“What?” I asked wearily.

“I've changed because of what happened with him. I have a need to dominate now. I need you to submit to me. Can you still do that?”

“Dominate but not hurt?”

“If I go too far, you'll have to tell me to stop. But I will stop. For you, I will. If you can help me. Will you help me tame this beast inside me, Ravyn?”

I smiled wickedly and drawled, “Yes, Hawk Lord.”

The Hawk Lord grabbed the back of my head, yanked me



forward, and kissed me fiercely. Fiercely and tenderly. His lips were crushed to mine but his tongue stroked mine gently. After several breathless minutes of that, he took my hand and led me back to his tent. No one was out in the camp; Dal's fury had sent every soldier scurrying for the safety of their tents. Only his personal guard had stood firm under his fury, and they barely blinked at us when he led me inside.

Dal looked down at my feet. "You didn't even put your boots on, you silly bird." He pulled me into the bathing room and sat me in a chair. Then that beautiful, fucked up bastard went and got a bucketful of water, set it before me, and washed my fucking feet. I was deeply uncomfortable and deeply touched.

"Fuck, Dal, get up already. This is weird," I huffed when I couldn't take anymore.

Dalsharan chuckled and stood up, then stretched a hand out to me. "I was trying to apologize."

"Well, use your words next time, dick," I huffed.

"Very well. Take those pants off and get in my bed."

"Yes, Hawk Lord!" I saluted and ran for the bedroom.

Dal laughed and chased me.

## Chapter Nineteen

The Coyote Lord left the next morning and took a cloud of pain with him. His gift—a clear stone carved into a cock—was disposed of. Dal went back to being dominating, arrogant, and utterly sexy without all that scary shit. A week went by and the Coyote Lord returned with the rest of the warlords to discuss what to do about Gremara and her fucking corpse flowers. I stood beside Dalsharan as he welcomed the warlords into camp, but when we reached Dal's tent, he motioned them in ahead of us, then pulled me aside.

The Hawk Lord clasped the back of my neck possessively. “You will stay with Raeshal until the meeting is over and I come to collect you.”

“What?” I gaped at him.

He nodded to someone behind me, and Rae stepped forward.

Raeshal inclined his head to Dal. “I’ll look after him, Hawk Lord.”

“I’m not a kid to be looked after!” I growled as I pushed away from Dal. “What the fuck?”

Dal reclaimed my neck, pulled me back to him, and leaned down to say, “I can’t have you in there with him. Go with Rae. Have fun. Drink with your friends. I’ll come for you later.”

“I’m your consort; I have a right to be in that meeting,” I growled.

“You do,” Dal conceded, his hand sliding forward to lift my chin. “But if he says one wrong word to you, I’m afraid I’ll hurt him, Ravyn. I will *fucking tear him apart*. And then I’ll be in a world of trouble. So, please, go with Rae.”

I held his stare and my shoulders slumped. “What are they going to think when I don’t walk in there with you?”

“I don’t give a flying fuck what they think,” Dalsharan growled. “I don’t want my consort around that piece of shit. If any of them think less of me for it, so be it.”

Then he yanked me forward and kissed me. It was fast, hard, and had me breathing heavily in two seconds.

“Okay,” I panted when he released me.

“Good bird.” He brushed a finger over my lips, nodded to Rae, then strode into the tent.

“Aw, fuck,” I grumbled.

Raeshal chuckled. “Yep, he’s got you good.” He pushed me away from the tent. “Come on, Consort, let’s get a strong drink.”

“As if I’m a little princess and I need a fucking escort through my own fucking camp,” I muttered but I followed Raeshal.

Ten minutes later, I was playing dice in the dirt with a bunch of my old friends around the communal fire in the human section of camp, swigging cheap swill, and generally having the time of my life.

“Look at me, I’m a fancy consort,” Kevin drawled as sashayed up to me and stuck his ass out. “I get to sleep in the big tent and drink fancy wine and shit.”

I laughed my ass off and beamed him in the chest with the dice. “You know it, asshole! I’m only here cause I feel like

slumming.”

“I’ll bet his dick is huge.” Frederick nudged my shoulder. “Give us a hint. Is it like *'Yeah, daddy,'* big or is it like *'Take it out! Take it out!'* big?”

I laughed harder. “It’s bigger than *'Yeah, daddy'* and smaller than *'Take it out.'* It’s *'Fuck me harder, Hawk Lord'* big.”

“It’s the fucking Goldilocks of dicks!” Frederick declared. “I knew it! One look at him and you can practically smell the cock perfection rolling off him. He reeks of it.”

“I don’t get it,” Jesse, one of my straight friends, shook his head at us. “Wouldn’t a small dick be better? If it’s big, won’t it tear your ass? I mean, fuck, I’ve taken a shit that had me crying. I can’t even imagine wanting a huge dick pounding away up there.”

“That’s because you have no finesse,” Kevin, also straight, declared. “You’re one of those bastards who thinks foreplay is ‘Hey, wanna fuck?’ All sex requires preparation, you savage. You gotta kiss the pussy. Pet it. Coax it into releasing its nectar for you. Then, when it’s nice and wet—”

“Agh!” all the gay guys in the vicinity groaned and made various sounds of disgust.

“Hey, we fucking listen to your ass-pounding dick talk all the time, you can listen to one wet pussy conversation!” Kevin pointed his finger at us.

We all chortled.

“Now where was I?” Kevin frowned. “Oh, yeah. You don’t slam your dick in, you fucking cretin. You gotta work up to the wild pounding. Start nice and slow, then go hard.”

Several women started giving Kevin considering looks. He

grinned back.

“What the fuck does that have to do with ass-fucking?” Jesse asked.

“It's the same thing. You gotta work it in slowly. Loosen things up a bit. Slide the tip in first and make yourself some room.” Kevin held his hands out before him and started undulating his hips. “Be gentle with it before you go brutal.”

“Looks as if you've had some ass experience. Is there something you wanna tell us?” Jesse teased him.

“Ass-fucking ain't just for the gays.” Kevin grinned and winked at one of the female soldiers. “Women dig it too.”

The woman he winked at got up, gave him a look, and walked into the woods.

“Speaking of which.” Kevin grinned and followed her, tossing over his shoulder, “Catch you pricks later. I've got a pussy to finesse and hopefully an ass too.”

“I ain't never had a complaint,” Jesse huffed.

“Not to your face,” I said.

“Fuck you, man,” Jesse huffed. “I can eat pussy. I'm an ace at eating pussy. The women scream when I lick their slits.”

One of the women in the room snorted.

“Hey!” Jesse stood up. “Who was that?”

“It could have been any of us, eh? You've disappointed so many,” one of the women called over, and a bunch of them laughed.

“Jesse the Messy!” another woman shouted.

“Challenge accepted!” Jesse shouted back. “I will eat any pussy here and guarantee that I’ll have that woman screaming my name by the end of the night.”

They threw things at him and told him to sit the fuck down.

“That’s right!” Jesse continued to shout. “It’s because you all know it’s the truth. One tongue-ride from me and you’ll be screaming for my cock.”

A woman stood up. She’d been sitting with a group further back from the fire. She was tall, sleekly muscular, and beautiful. As in fae-beautiful. Jesse gaped at her as she strolled forward, her long blond braid swinging behind her. Everyone went quiet. The Ravager. She was a Hawk known for picking out the eyes of her Farungal victims. She stopped in front of Jesse and looked him up and down.

“Show me your cock,” the Ravager demanded.

Jesse cleared his throat. “Excuse me?”

“Your dick.” She waved a hand at his pants. “I want to see it before I decide.”

Jesse couldn’t undo his pants fast enough. He held them out for her. The Ravager grabbed the waistband, peered down Jesse’s, and smiled slowly.

“You’ll do. If you can make me scream your name, you may fuck me,” she declared and sauntered away.

He gaped after her.

“Go!” Frederick hissed. “Go, you moron!”

Jesse ran after the Ravager, licking his lips.

“Why do I hang out with humans?” Raeshal asked the air

above him.

“Because we're so fucking classy.” Frederick pounded Rae's back.

Raeshal looked Frederick over. “How far away is your tent?”

“Not far!” Frederick said eagerly.

“Let me see your ass.” Rae grinned as he mimicked the Ravager, “I want to see it before I decide.”

Frederick pulled his pants down so the waistband bunched beneath his ass and arched out enticingly. Rae grinned and ran a hand over it.

“Hey! You're supposed to be watching me,” I reminded Rae.

“You'll be fine for an hour or so.” Rae grinned, picked up Frederick, tossed him over one shoulder, and headed away from the fire, his hand firmly on Fred's bare ass.

I looked around at the buddies I had left and grinned, “Who wants to get shitfaced?!”

## Chapter Twenty

Four hours later, I had achieved my goal. Yes, it took me that long. Evidently, fae metabolisms run faster than human and we process alcohol better. One of the fae Hawks took pity on me when he saw me pouting in the middle of a bunch of laughing, drunk yahoos; he handed me a bottle of fae wine with a wink. That's when I finally got a good buzz on. Enough of a buzz that I spent all the money I had in my pockets on more fae wine.

When Raeshal finally returned—without Frederick, who I imagined he fucked senseless—he found me singing a nasty song with a bunch of nasty soldiers making nasty gestures in the air nastily. In short, we were having a fucking great time. Raeshal shook his head, pilfered one of my bottles of wine, sat back against a crate, and proceeded to enjoy the entertainment.

It all got pretty hazy after that. A bunch of time went by and then...

“Ravyn,” a deep voice said.

I was on my back. No, wait, I was leaning against a crate beside Rae, with my head laid on top of the crate. That's what I was doing. The stars were dancing for me. It was awesome.

“Ravyn,” the voice came again.

Was it the Beasts again? Were those memories coming back? I went still, listening carefully. Maybe I'd remember more of what they told me.

“Yes?” I asked cautiously.



“Get up,” the Beasts said.

I scowled. Why would they tell me to get up? Had I been standing when they were talking to me? Or had I fallen? Did it matter? Maybe I had fallen? Had I fallen now? I definitely couldn't get up.

A strong hand grabbed my arm and pulled me up.

“He's a bit in his cups, my lord,” I heard Rae say.

I swung my head around and a face came into view. *His* face. “You're not a beast,” I said accusingly.

The Hawk Lord frowned at me.

“You're pretty,” I said in that I-love-you tone drunks get. “No! You're *handsome*,” I corrected. “And you have a Goldilocks cock.”

Raeshal snickered.

“I have a what?” Dal lifted an amused brow.

“It's in between '*Yeah, daddy*' and '*Take it out*,’” I explained sagely.

Dalsharan looked at Rae.

“It's a compliment,” Raeshal said with twitching lips. “Best to leave it at that, my lord.”

Dal sighed, picked me up like a bridegroom, and carried me away.

“You're carrying me like a girl,” I said irritably.

“I'm afraid that if I throw you over my shoulder, you'll throw up down my back,” he said dryly.

“Oh. That's a goosh point.” I frowned. “A goo-on point. No, wait, it's a goo-ul—”

“It's a good point,” he cut me off. “Sweet Mother, how much did you drink?”

“Well, that's a goosh question.” I nodded. “I think... hmmm. There were a few at the beginning. And they didn't work.” I shook my head at him sorrowfully. “But then!” I straightened, and he had to scramble to adjust his grip. “Lo and behold, a fae Hawk did appear and give unto me... faerie wine.” I grinned at him.

“I will murder this Hawk,” Dalsharan growled.

“No, no, no.” I meant to brush a finger over his lips affectionately but wound up just pushing on them. “He was a messenger of the Goddess, sent to comfort me in my time of knees.” I frowned. “That's not right. My time of neat. No, hold on, I'll get it. My time—”

“Your time of need,” Dal said before I could go on.

“Yes, that.” I smiled and sighed.

“Fetch the doctor,” Dal said gruffly.

“Who are you talking to?” I swung my head around trying to find this elusive person.

“Bress,” the Hawk Lord said as he carried me into his tent. “One of my guards.”

“Oh.” I squinted at the bright fae lights in his tent. “Is it morning already?”

“No.” He took me into the sleeping area and set me on my feet.

I wobbled as he stripped me.

“Are you gonna fuck me with your Goldilocks dick now?”  
I asked.

“No.”

“Shit,” I huffed in disappointment and climbed onto the bed. “At least come spoon me. You like to spoon.”

A smile twitched over his lips. “Be still, Ravyn. A doctor is coming.”

“I don't need a doctor, I feel fine. Better than that even.” I grinned and watched the stripes on the tent ceiling swirl.

“You've drunk too much fae wine,” Dalsharan said gently as he sat on the bed beside me and pulled a blanket over me. “You will be severely ill soon if it isn't removed from your body.”

“Removed from my body?” I gaped at him. “How the fuck do you remove wine after it's been sunk? Trunk. Drunk! That's it! I got one!”

“It will be painless,” he assured me as he swept my hair back. “try to relax.”

“Hawk Lord?” a voice came from the main room.

“In here, Perrel,” the Hawk Lord called out.

Yes, the camp doctor was named Perrel. It sounds just like peril. Which is a rather unfortunate name for a physician. But he was good at what he did so I guess it didn't matter. He came into the room, took one look at me, and shook his head in dismay. Perrel set his case down on the Hawk Lord's dresser and pulled out a smooth, clear pebble.

“His first time with fae wine?” Perrel asked Dal.

“Yes. I’ve tried to keep him away from it. Tonight, I failed at that endeavor.”

“I’m right here,” I growled. “And I’m not a dog to be kept away from stuff.”

The men exchanged a look that said otherwise.

“Stay still, Corporal,” Perrel ordered as he set the pebble on my chest. Then the doctor closed his eyes, held his hand over the stone, and started speaking in Old Fae.

“Is he casting a spell?” I whispered loudly to Dal.

“Yes. Fae doctors use spells and tools to magnify their healing magic. Now shut up.”

I pouted. But my pout faded as my mind suddenly cleared, and I took a deep, embarrassed breath. “Oh, fuck,” I groaned.

“I believe he’s recovered, my lord,” Perrel declared as he collected the stone.

“Thank you, Perrel.”

“Hawk Lord.” Perrel bowed, put away his stone, and left.

“I may have drunk a little too much,” I confessed.

“Do you think?” Dal laughed.

“Shut up, dick,” I huffed as I sat up. “That’s a nice trick with that rock.”

“Stone sober,” Dalsharan drawled as he drew a hand down my chest.

I laughed. “Yeah, I am. Now, are you going to fuck me with your Goldilocks cock?”

“Ravyn, what the hell is a Goldilocks cock?” Dal asked dryly.

I leaned forward and nibbled on his lower lip before answering, “A perfect, glorious dick that's just shy of being too big.”

“Ah,” he murmured as he got undressed. “Then, yes, I'm going to fuck you thoroughly with my Goldilocks cock.”

I watched him hungrily as his clothes fell to the floor and that Goldilocks cock was revealed. Dalsharan smiled wickedly at me as he rubbed his hand over its thick length, gilding it with oil. Then he returned to bed and pushed me onto my back.

“Hold on.” I set a palm on his chest. “What did the warlords decide?”

“Later,” Dal growled as he flung back the blankets and lifted my legs. “Guide my cock in.”

I groaned and reached down to angle him inside me. He worked his tip in and then pumped in gradually, just as Kevin had advised. But soon, he was pumping away savagely, his face gone feral, and I was screaming, “Fuck me harder, Hawk Lord!”

## Chapter Twenty-One

In the morning, I discovered why Dal didn't want to talk about the meeting. The warlords had decided to hold off on going after Gremara and her flowers. They wanted to gather more information before they took their troops across the sea. I didn't blame them, but Dal was pissed. After breakfast, he called a meeting with his officers to discuss flying to Alantri with our army alone. It took his officers and me over an hour to convince him to wait on the other armies. The Lion Lord's timely interruption helped with that; Hadrian suggested that Dal send some Hawks to watch the coast of Alantri instead. It was a far cry from what the Hawk Lord wanted to do, but at least it was some kind of action. Dal agreed and once the visiting warlords left later that afternoon, he calmed down again.

And got even more sexually demanding.

He started strolling through the camp during the day because that's when I'd be training or helping some privates repair their armor, or cleaning my tent, or doing one of the many things that need to be done every day in an army camp. My human friends had given me wary looks at first because of my new face, but after getting shitfaced that night, they realized that I was still me. We were back to normal, hanging out and playing pranks on each other. That is, when the Hawk Lord didn't demand my attention.

Just as he'd warned me when I first agreed to his conditions, he expected me to drop whatever I was doing at any time of day or night and go with him to do whatever kinky shit he had thought up. And the Hawk Lord could get kinky. One time, he

strapped me into my flight rig and used it as leverage to fuck me deeper. Another time, I had to suck his cock while I hummed a Hawk Army cadence, all while he sat at his table and ate his lunch.

The worst was when I was with my friends. I'd be hiding behind a corner with some of the guys, waiting for another soldier to walk into some perfectly laid trap, and there would be the Hawk Lord, strolling up to ruin our prank and crook his finger at me. The other guys would go silent and bow to him, all respectful and shit while the Hawk Lord was there, but the next time I saw them, I got teased relentlessly. That's how it goes with soldiers. It's called affection.

Still, I started to get annoyed.

I was in the middle of a training match with a fae Hawk (the humans might still be friends with me, but they wouldn't train with me anymore because of my increased strength that I'd yet to get a handle on) when things went quiet around me. I looked up and there he was—perfect, handsome, fucking breathtaking, his white hair shining in the sunlight. Watching me with those jewel eyes. The Hawk Lord lifted his hand and curled it in. A swift, curt motion with a clear meaning—come here, my naughty bird.

“Fuck,” I cursed.

“Yep,” my opponent said with a smirk. “That's what he wants all right. Go run off and bend over for your master.”

“Fuck you, Alsand,” I grumbled as I tossed my practice sword to the side of the yard.

“Nope, not me,” Alsand said gleefully as he followed me. “I just won the match since you're forfeiting. You're the one getting fucked in multiple ways. You lose the match and you have to take a big fat hawk cock up your ass.”

I turned and punched him in the nose.

The men around us went wild with excitement, shouting and cheering us on as Al swung back. We dropped together and rolled in the dirt. Overhead, the Hawks that had been practicing aerial maneuvers flew lower to get a better view. People placed bets as more soldiers hurried over to watch.

Alsand got a good hit in, knocking my breath out, but I headbutted him, and he shouted as blood poured down his face. We didn't hold back. That's another soldier thing. Alsand isn't my enemy, he's a brother-in-arms, and I wouldn't hold his words against him. He was just fucking with me, and I blew up because he did it at the wrong moment. It wasn't Al's fault, but he knew the risk he was taking when he taunted me, and he'd help me blow off steam cause he was a soldier.

Alsand kicked my feet out from under me.

He might be helping me blow off steam but that didn't mean he'd let me win. And I wouldn't have expected anything less.

“Hawk Lord's whore,” Al whispered in my ear.

“Okay, that shit went too far,” I growled.

Al shrugged as if nothing was too far when you were fucking with a fellow soldier. Which is pretty much true unless you're dealing with females. As I mentioned, they have no sense of humor.

I sent an uppercut into Al's chin, and he went flying. This time when he landed, he didn't get up. The other men cheered and money exchanged hands. I trudged off the field, past an irate Hawk Lord, and headed toward his tent.

“No.” Dal grabbed my wrist and twisted me around. “This way, bad bird. You're not fit for my bed at the moment.”

The Hawk Lord pulled me into the woods, to that same spot



he had found me in that night when I had run from him. He took me right to that same log and pushed me down in front of it. At least it wasn't muddy this time. I knelt in the dirt and leaves, and he shoved me forward so that I sprawled over the log. Then he kicked apart my knees and knelt between them. Air hit my ass; my pants and underwear got shoved around my knees. I heard the shift of Dal's clothes and let out a long sigh. Sweat and blood coated my skin but my injuries were already healing and my body now wanted what was best after a fight—a hard fuck. I trembled like a stud in heat, the tip of my cock rubbing against rough bark.

“When I call for you, you come to me immediately,” Dalsharan growled as he slid his cock in with a single thrust.

It was oiled and thick and so fucking glorious. He worked it even deeper, making me groan. I grabbed my cock and started pumping it.

“Do you hear me, Ravyn?!” Dal demanded and slammed his hips against my ass.

“Yes, Hawk Lord,” I groaned. “I'm about to come for you right now.”

“That's not what I meant,” he growled.

“Isn't it?” I purred.

“Ravyn, you *will* obey me.” Dal bent over me and nipped my ear.

I gave a deeper groan. “Sure, baby. Just keep fucking me like that. I'll do whatever you say.”

The Hawk Lord yanked out of me. I pushed myself up in irritation and looked at him over my shoulder. He brushed a hand over my cheek and it came away bloody.

“Why did you punch that soldier?”

“It was nothing. Guy stuff.”

“I am a guy.”

“No, you're the Hawk Lord,” I said as I pushed up and sat on the log, not bothering to pull my pants up. My cock was hard and reaching for him, but I ignored it. “You won't understand if I tell you. You'll just get mad.”

“You will tell me anyway.” Dal grabbed my knees and lifted, pushing me back over the massive trunk. My legs were straight against his chest, my pants still bunched around my knees as I arched over the log. He slid back into my ass and then wrapped his arms around my thighs. “Tell me, Ravyn.” He pumped languidly, his hand trailing down to slid over my cock as his eyes went completely amethyst.

“No.”

Dalsharan started fucking me faster, jostling my cock with every pump. I moaned and grabbed myself again.

“No!” He pushed my hand away. “You will not have your release until you tell me.”

“The jokes on you, babe, cause I'll come just from you fucking me.”

“You have gotten very disrespectful today,” the Hawk Lord snarled and bent forward, taking my legs with him, which opened me more for his thrusts. Then he grabbed my throat. “Do not make me punish you again.”

“You swore you wouldn't!” I snarled.

“Not hurt you, *punish* you,” he clarified. “Punish you for breaking your oath to me.”

I went still.

“That's right, Ravyn, you swore to be mine and be obedient. Where is your honor?”

“I was about to win that match!” I whined.

Dalsharan chuckled and slowed to a gentle pumping. I let my head hang back and groaned. His hand slid over my nipple, then pinched it hard.

“Ah, fuck, babe. Let me touch myself,” I begged.

“Where is this 'babe' business coming from?” Dal asked casually as he flicked my nipple. “You know what you're supposed to call me.”

“I don't want to right now,” I growled.

He slapped me suddenly, turning my head with the blow. “You will show me respect, Ravyn!”

Something flickered in his eyes, and I knew that I had pushed him too far. I'd broken into that other Dal, the one who thought pain was love. He began wildly fucking me, his face twisted into rage.

“I'm sorry,” I whispered as fear shot through me. “I'm yours, Hawk Lord. I'll obey you. Whatever you want.”

Dal grabbed my chin viciously. “Say it again!”

“I belong to you, Hawk Lord. You can fuck me whenever you want. However you want. I swear it!”

“I want you to submit to me now,” he growled.

“I am!”

“I’m going to fill your ass and send you back out to fight, my bad bird. I want my cum dripping out of you while you swing your sword at other men. While the sweat drips down your beautiful body. I want you to remember every fucking second that you belong to me.”

“I do! I will! Oh, fuck me! Fuck me hard, Hawk Lord! Fill my ass with your hot cum. Fill my ass, fill my ass, fill my ass,” I chanted it like a prayer.

Dalsharan groaned and gave me what I wanted, his hips jerking with the last spasms of his climax. I went seconds afterward, despite him refusing to let me touch myself. He smiled and made a satisfied grunt as he withdrew, then wiped his cock off on my thigh. I yanked my pants up, over the cum I’d spilled across my stomach. He didn’t do that twisty finger thing and clean me. Nope, he left me dirty, and damn if that didn’t turn me on more. He did help me up though.

After a searing kiss, Dal pushed me back toward camp and smacked my ass. “Get back to training, Corporal!”

“Yes, Hawk Lord!” I grinned all the way back to the training yard.

## Chapter Twenty-Two

“I need to talk to you about something,” Dalsharan said to me over dinner that night.

“Look, he called me your whore, okay?” I huffed. “It's not a big—”

“What?!” Dalsharan roared as he stood up.

“Dal, it's okay. Calm down.”

“He called you my *what*?” Dalsharan growled in a low, dangerous tone.

“It's just soldier talk.” I got up and put my hands on his shoulders. “It's fine. I promise.”

“It is *not* fine. You are my consort, not my whore, to call you such is an insult to both of us.”

I went still. Oh, fuck. No one insulted a warlord.

“Who was it?” He demanded.

I backed away.

“Who was it?!” He roared.

I crossed my arms and stared him down.

“I have had enough of your disobedience, Ravyn,” Dalsharan snarled and stalked over to me. “You will tell me his name right now.”

“I’m not a snitch.”

Dalsharan shrieked like a hawk as he grabbed my throat and spun me, then slammed me down on a bare section of table. He leaned into my face, his teeth bared, and narrowed his eyes at me. “No one disrespects my consort. You are *mine*. The way people treat you is a reflection on me. That man, whoever he was, was a fae, was he not?”

I blinked. “Yes.”

“Then he knew what he was doing. It wasn’t, as you say, soldier talk. He was testing you to see how much he could get away with.”

“And I laid him flat on his ass for it,” I said smoothly.

“You should have skewered him for it.” He shoved away from me and then straightened. “Now every fae Hawk will know that they can disrespect us and nothing will happen. That they can call you a whore, and I will do nothing! That is not acceptable. Give me his name.”

“No.”

“Do not make me punish you over this man,” he growled. “I can find his identity on my own, but I’m asking you to tell me.”

“No, you’re not,” I snapped. “You’re *demanding* that I tell you. Our agreement was that I obeyed you when it came to sex. You said that outside of that, I was free to be myself. Well, this is me, baby! I don’t rat on my fellow soldiers. If I did, they would remember that shit the next time we were fighting the Farungal and they might not be so inclined to watch my back. This is family, Dal. We don’t rat on family.”

“If you think that, you must not have siblings,” Dalsharan huffed.

"I have a sister," I said softly. "Older. So, yeah, I get what you're saying. But you also know what I'm saying. I can't be a party to you punishing him."

"Fine. I'll say that I overheard it myself."

"He whispered it in my ear."

Dal growled. "Then I'll make it known that I forced it from you. You will not be blamed."

"Can't you let it go just this once?"

"No, Ravyn," Dal said wearily as he resumed his seat. "Consider it as a soldier. What if someone called General Harvis' wife a whore to her face? How do you think he'd react?"

"Fuck," I whispered and sank into my seat.

"Yes, now you understand. It's no different because you're a man and a soldier. You're still mine. I've claimed you as my consort. That position demands great respect. If someone slanders you, I *must* retaliate. Now, please, tell me the name."

"Fuck," I grumbled. "This feels so wrong."

"We won't be here much longer anyway."

"What?" I looked up at him.

"I wanted to talk about this over a nice meal." He waved his hand at the half-eaten dishes.

I looked at the food. I hadn't realized it was better than usual. "Damn!" I started scooping buttered carrots into my mouth. "You did this for me?"

Dal laughed. "Yes, you fool. Slow down or you'll choke."

“It's really good. Thank you!”

“I can see that I'll have to teach you manners before we go to court.”

“Wait. What?” I gaped at him.

“Swallow,” he said. “And don't talk with your mouth full.”

“Always with the swallowing.” I rolled my eyes and smirked at him.

Dalsharan chuckled again but then went serious. “The Hawk King has summoned us to court. It is as the Lion Lord predicted, our King and Queen want to meet their Valorian. And they want you trained.”

“Trained to do what?”

“You have magic now, Ravyn. You must be trained on how to use it.”

“Rae said something about that,” I murmured. “He didn't mention training, but he said I'm a real Hawk now.”

“Yes, you're technically an Arandel now. You're of my line.”

“That makes it sound as if we're married.”

“We're closer than that,” Dalsharan whispered. “I told you, Ravyn, you're mine. My soul has claimed you and you accepted.”

I sat back and let out an amazed huff. “And if we don't work out?”

Dal shrugged. “There will always be a piece of me inside you. But if we decide that we don't want to be together, it will not interfere. We're closer than a married couple, but we haven't made



any vows. You can leave at any time.”

“Babe, I'm not the one who's gonna leave,” I said softly.

Dalsharan blinked. “You already did.”

I sighed deeply. “You know why that happened. Do you want to talk about it again?”

“No,” he conceded. “I'm just trying to point out that your vow lacks credence.”

“Fine,” I huffed.

The Hawk Lord leaned forward and took my hand. “I don't want you to leave again.”

I met his amethyst stare. “I don't want to leave again.”

“Good. I'm glad we've established that.” He smiled tenderly. “Now, give me the name.”

I blinked and laughed. “You little shit.”

“Tell me.”

“You first,” I countered. “Where are we going?”

“To Kestria, the crown city of the Hawk Kingdom in the Avian region of Varalorre,” he said and lifted a taunting brow. “Have you heard of it? Ever been there?”

“Ha-ha,” I grumbled. “We're staying in the city?”

He nodded. “I have an estate there. We'll stay in Kestria until your training is over and then we'll see where the Goddess leads you.”

“Where she leads me?” I thought of the hawk. I hadn't told him about it. Damn, that was two weeks ago. I probably should

have mentioned it.

“The Mother often gives us a sign of what our best path would be,” he explained. “And since you are a Valorian, it's almost guaranteed that she will send you one.”

“I think she already has.”

Dalsharan straightened. “What?”

“That day I walked out and went into the woods...”

“Yes?”

“I was upset. I... was...”

“Crying,” he finished for me. “I know. It haunts me still.”

“It does?”

“Of course, it does,” he growled. “I want you to be happy, Ravyn.”

“Oh,” I whispered. “I want you to be happy too.”

Dal smiled and it was radiant. “What sign did she give you?”

“Huh? Oh! This hawk flew down onto my lap and let me pet its head.”

Dalsharan gaped at me. “That's not a sign, that's a messenger.”

“Yeah, that's what Rae said.”

“You told Rae about this before me?” Dal frowned.

“He walked up when the hawk was on my lap.” I shrugged. “I forgot about it until now.”

“You... I hurt you badly,” he whispered brokenly.

I swallowed roughly and looked down at my plate. “I don’t offer to talk to my lovers, not the way I offered to listen to you. I gave you that and you beat on me for it.”

“Ravyn,”—he took my hand—“I’m so sorry.”

“I know. You apologized once and that’s all I need.” I squeezed his hand back. “I don’t mean to harp on it, I’m just telling you why I was so upset.”

“So upset that the Goddess sent a messenger to you,” Dalsharan murmured and bowed his head. “Great Lady, forgive me.”

“Hey, cut that shit out,” I growled and yanked on his hand. “I’m over it.”

Dal chuckled and lifted my hand to kiss it. “It is a great honor to be comforted by a messenger. You are indeed Goddess-touched.”

“I’m sorry that it’s taking us away from your army.”

Dal let out a sigh. “So am I, but they’re right. We can’t have you out here not knowing how to control the magic inside you. And if you’re special enough that the Goddess is comforting you, you definitely need to be in Varalorre. You need to see your home, Ravyn.”

“I have a home?”

He smiled softly. “Yes. Varalorre is now your home. Specifically, the Hawk Kingdom. We need to teach you to fly, my bad bird.”

“Fly?” I whispered wistfully.

“Yes, fly.” The Hawk Lord squeezed my hand and pulled me closer. “Now tell me the name.”

“Aw, fuck,” I whined.

## Chapter Twenty-Three

I had to stand beside Dalsharan as his consort while he punished Alsand. Since the whole thing was about Al disrespecting me, I couldn't avoid it. And I was really fucking pissed about it. I understood, but I was still pissed. I crossed my arms and stared straight ahead of me, refusing to look at Alsand as he was brought before Dalsharan.

“Do you deny insulting my consort?” Dalsharan asked Alsand.

Alsand paled. “It was just banter on the training field, my lord.”

I looked at Dal beseechingly, but he ignored me.

“Was it?” Dalsharan cocked his head at the soldier.

All around us, the army stood, watching solemnly. Men and women, hardened soldiers, exchanged worried glances. Dal said there was no difference between men and women consorts, but I could see that there was. That everyone thought there was. Men could take banter like that and shrug it off. Women had other issues to deal with—those words weren't banter for them. Calling a woman a whore has more cruelty behind it—more history and hatred and subjugation. Men use such talk with each other all the time without truly meaning it. At least, soldiers do.

“It was, my lord,” Alsand stammered. “Truly, I meant no disrespect.”

“Hawk Lord,” I said gruffly, “I would ask for leniency this

one time. We soldiers can be crass, especially in training. I took no offense.”

“I watched you knock him into the dirt, Consort,” Dalsharan growled. “And yet you say that you took no offense?”

“I was upset for other reasons and used the excuse to fight.” I shrugged.

Oh, Dal was pissed. He'd given me plenty of time to argue my case in private, but now I was airing our dirty laundry in public. I saw immediately that it was a line I shouldn't have crossed. But for Alsand to pay for something he didn't intend to do... I just couldn't stand there and watch.

“So it was banter?” Dalsharan looked around at the other soldiers. “Do any of you think it's appropriate *banter* to call my chosen consort a whore?”

“No, Hawk Lord!” every person there shouted.

Everyone except Alsand and I, that is. I stared at him apologetically, and he widened his eyes at me, begging me to help him. Fuck. I was gonna pay for this but...

“Please,” I said. “He's my brother-in-arms. He made a mistake. I hold no ill will toward him. Please, Hawk Lord. I'll take the punishment on his behalf.”

People gasped. Fuck, that was the wrong thing to say. Dalsharan turned to face me slowly, that dark part of his soul rising to glare at me through his eyes.

“Shut your mouth right now,” he said under his breath.

I clenched my jaw and looked away.

“What do you have to say about that, Alsand?” Dalsharan focused back on him. “My consort, the new Valorian, has just

offered to take your punishment.”

Alsand hung his head. “I am deeply ashamed, my lord. Please do not punish him in my stead. I spoke without thought. I didn't consider his status. Please forgive me. I will take whatever punishment you decree proper.”

The other soldiers went tense around us.

I sent Dal a pleading look and whispered, “Don't do this.”

“Five lashes,” Dalsharan declared.

I winced but then let out a relieved breath. A punishment of five lashes was brutal for a human, but a fae would heal quickly. It would be painful but not unendurable.”

“Thank you, Hawk Lord.” Alsand stood and lifted his chin. “I'm deeply sorry for offending you and disrespecting your honorable consort.”

“You are forgiven.” The Hawk Lord nodded to him and then to the guards at his sides.

The guards motioned the crowd of soldiers back and a circle was formed before us. Alsand was taken to its center, where he removed his shirt and stood, waiting for his punishment. No pole to chain him to, nothing for him to hold onto. He would just stand there and take it. A guard appeared with a whip in his hand but before he could start, Dalsharan strode up to him and took the whip from him. Alsand flinched, bent his head, and hunched his shoulders. He knew he was about to be made an example of.

It was one thing for a warlord to order a punishment but quite another for them to mete it out personally. The fact that the Hawk Lord himself was wielding the whip meant that he had taken deep offense to the crime. It meant that if it were to occur again, the offender would die. No mercy. No explaining. This was not

just a punishment, it was a warning.

“Fuck me,” I whispered as I stared at my furious lover. All this because some soldier had called me a whore. How many times had I called other men that? How many times had I jokingly called myself it? I had been acting as if nothing had changed when Dalsharan claimed me, but I was wrong. Everything had changed.

The Hawk Lord was magnificent in his fury. His face became terrifyingly handsome, drawn into cruel lines. His eyes flashed with magic and vengeance as he drew back the whip, then flung it at Alsand.

I clenched my hands into fists so I wouldn't flinch.

Alsand grunted and a bright red line appeared on his tan back. A shiver ran through the crowd. That single blow had made Dalsharan's message clear. No one in the Hawk Army would ever dare to insult me again, not even behind my back. Part of me loved Dal for it. Loved him for making a spectacle to protect me. For making a display of how much he valued me. But another part of me hardened as I finally understood what it meant to be the consort of a warlord.

I was losing friends with every blow that landed on Alsand's back. Not their friendship exactly, but their willingness to show it. I saw it when I caught Kevin's eye and in the way Frederick wouldn't meet my gaze at all. My fellow soldiers would be more careful around me now. No more pranks, no more jokes, no more laughter. I had just become the Hawk Lord's completely. Alsand's blood and pain had sealed my fate. Dalsharan was not merely cutting into Al's back, he was also slicing away pieces of my life. I wasn't a soldier anymore. Not like everyone else there. I was the Valorian, Consort to the Hawk Lord.

I lifted my chin, watched my lover vent his fury on my behalf, and pushed down the pain of losing the only family I had.





## Chapter Twenty-Four

I was silent when we entered the Hawk Lord's tent. My eyes landed on a pile of my things near the entrance flap and my jaw clenched. Was this because I wouldn't have my own space anymore or was it because of our trip? I was too chickenshit to ask, especially when I met Dal's gaze and watched the inner green overtake the amethyst.

Dalsharan was panting, his jaw clenched, and the skin around his eyes twitching. He cast the whip aside and backhanded me. I stumbled back with the blow and part of me snapped. I swung without thinking, catching him in the jaw. Dal recoiled and gaped at me.

“You swore not to hurt me again!” I pointed in his face. “I let it go last night, but not today. If you're going to cut me off from my friends like that, then you had better treat me right, motherfucker!”

“Treat you right?” he snarled. “You just defied me in front of the entire army! Did you expect me to bring you back here and make love to you? You deserved that blow. You deserve even more than that, but I was reining myself in. Being my consort earned you some mercy, but it doesn't make you exempt from punishment.”

“Oh, I get that. Believe me, I do,” I growled. “You've made it *painfully* clear that I'm your slave in bed and your soldier outside of it.”

Dalsharan took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “I did warn you.”

I made a bleak sound and turned away from him, running my hands over my face. I wanted to scream, and walk out, and kiss him. I wanted to punch him again and then ride him rough. I wanted him.

“No one's ever fought for me like that,” I whispered.

“What?” Dalsharan's tone softened.

“I'm really fucking pissed that you did that to Alsand,” I spun around to snap at him. “Now no one will be themselves around me. You've taken away my family. The only family who accepted me. All I have is you now. But fuck, Dal, what you did was also brutally beautiful. It made me feel...”

“Yes?” He took a step forward.

“Important. To you.”

The Hawk Lord lifted his hand and set it gently on my cheek. The sting of his slap was already gone, now there was only warmth. His eyes were back to their normal color and he stared at me tenderly. “You *are* important to me. You've become important to me very quickly, and I think the pace of our relationship has confused us both. So, let me make myself clear. When I say that you are mine, I'm saying that I will fight for you. That I will look after your body and your heart. That you're safe with me. I'm saying that I love you, Ravyn.”

The breath left me in a rush, and I launched myself at him. Dal caught me and met my lips halfway. His mouth was demanding, his tongue lashing mine, while his arms held me with the strength of steel. Like a cage and a shield. Chains and the key to open them. I became his in that moment, completely his, and I suddenly didn't give a fuck about losing friends. Fuck 'em, I had the Hawk Lord.

We pulled off each other's clothes and fell to the floor to

roll across the carpet. He was growling and pawing at me, his rough hands sliding over every inch of me possessively, and I couldn't get enough. But I wanted to be in control for once. Take something for myself. I pushed him back and straddled him, bending down to bite my way along his strong jaw and then kiss the column of his throat.

Dalsharan made a rumble of pleasure, his hand going to the back of my head. I found my way to one pert nipple, flushed rose against the gold of his skin. A moan left me as I sucked at it, the little bud like a childhood sweet to roll across my tongue. I bit and lathed it as I pinched the other.

“Ravyn,” his voice was low and so fucking sexy.

I smiled as I moved down, over the hard planes of his belly to where his beautiful cock strained for me. I bypassed it, moving down his thigh instead, luxuriating in the feel of the crisp golden hair curling there. I bit his knee, then pushed it out to the side, making room for me to slide between his legs. Dal growled and spread his legs wider for me.

I looked up and sighed. The hawk Lord had exposed himself to me at last—opened the gates to paradise. There, beneath the perfect column of his cock, cradled in a nest of pure white curls, were his glorious stones in their velvet case, blushing pale pink. And beyond them, between the spread globes of his ass, was a puckered hole painted dusky rose. I groaned and dove for it.

The Hawk Lord gasped as I kissed the sensitive skin beneath his sacs. His legs bent and opened further out to the sides, urging me onward. A hot breath on his hole had him shivering, and I took great delight in slowly pressing my face against him, the heat of his thighs enveloping me while his scent filled my nose. And then, when neither of us could stand the agony of anticipation any longer, I flicked my tongue over him.

“Ravyn!” he cried out.

I shoved my tongue into his ass.

“Oh, fuck,” he groaned. “Deeper.”

I pushed my tongue in deeper as I took his shaft in hand and started stroking it. Dal's hand clenched over the back of my head and pushed me down as if he could force me deeper inside him. I laved that clenching hole, my cock starting to pulse with need, and then licked my way up to his balls. After sucking them into my mouth and playing with them a while, I drew my tongue up the underside of his cock and laved the tip.

“That's it, suck me,” Dalsharan growled. “Suck my cock, Consort.”

I groaned and shoved it into my mouth, taking his dick as deep as I could, loosening my throat for him. A sigh that sounded half aroused and half relieved slid past Dal's lips as he stroked my hair back gently. I slid my stare up his muscular body and met his hot gaze. Now it was entirely amethyst. The Hawk Lord's lips parted and his tongue slid over them. I moaned and drew him out of my mouth so I could lick his impressive length.

“Can I ride you, my lord?” I purred.

“Do it,” he groaned. “Ride my cock, Ravyn.”

I crawled up his body and straddled his hips, positioning him at my entrance. Dal made a rumbling groan as the head of his cock breached me. My hips started to undulate, working him in. With a wicked grin, he reached between us and stroked himself, summoning that glorious lubricant. As soon as he withdrew his hand, I slammed down his greased length, and we both cried out.

I started a lazy pumping, rising and falling on his rock-hard rod. His curls tickled my ass and clung to my bare, oiled skin. I

pressed my palms to his chest and rode him faster. Licking his lips again, Dalsharan grabbed my cock and worked his oil into it, making it glisten. His fist pumped me in time with my movements. We fucked faster and faster, our grunts of pleasure filling the tent. The sound of people walking by filtered in and heightened my arousal. So close. All of them so close while I fucked their warlord. Could the guards stationed outside hear us? Was it making them hard?

I moaned louder.

“That’s it, my naughty bird, take my cock deep. Hold me inside you.”

“Come in me,” I begged. “I want you to fill my ass with your cum.”

“No,” he said in a strict tone. “I will tell you when I’m close and then you will take me in your mouth and swallow every drop.”

“Oh, I like that even better,” I growled and bent down to kiss him.

Dal drew his hand away from my cock and grabbed my ass instead. He spread it and used his grip to pull me down on him. I eased back from our kiss and smiled at him. It was nice to see him beneath me for once.

“You will do so the rest of the afternoon,” Dalsharan declared. “I want your belly full of my seed when we leave for Varalorre.”

“We’re leaving today?” I paused.

Dal used my distraction to roll us. He lifted my legs onto his shoulders and started a wild thrusting. “Yes,” he panted. “Tonight, we will sleep in Varalorre. We will *fuck* in Varalorre.”

“Oh, say it again,” I begged.

He leaned down, opening me wider, and growled, “I’m going to fuck you all night in a bed with a view of the stars. You will scream my name to the Hawk Kingdom and all will know that I possess you.”

“Oh, fuck,” I moaned. “Yes, you do. You own me. And I love you, Dal.”

Dalsharan roared triumphantly and forgot all about pulling out. He came hot, and wet, and thick in my ass.

## Chapter Twenty-Five

“How long will this trip take?” I asked as I strapped on my flight rig.

I'd already said goodbye to Raeshal—the only friend who wasn't avoiding me—and our trunks were outside the tent. We'd be leaving in a few minutes. Dal would carry me while his guards carried our belongings. Every knight in the Hawk Lord's Guard was coming with us. This wasn't unusual; the only time I knew of when they hadn't escorted him was when we'd gone to Alantri.

“A few hours,” Dal said. “The Hawk Kingdom lies on the Northernmost tip of our continent.”

“I've always wondered where exactly the Fae Lands were.”

He frowned at me.

“I mean, I know they're off that way.” I waved a hand toward the tent flap. “You can see the mist of the ward. But humans can't see how far the land extends. Our ships can't even follow your coastline since your wards push them away.”

“*Our* wards,” he corrected me with a soft smile. “Varalorre makes up two-thirds of the continent in a roughly triangular shape. Currently, we are close to the center of one coastline, which means that if we go straight inward to Varalorre, we'd be about a third of the way up from the Southernmost point of Varalorre. We need to go to the Northern point. Do you understand?”

I scowled. “Maybe.”



“I’ll show you a map when we get there.” He stroked a hand over my jaw, then rubbed a finger over my lips.

He’d spent the afternoon coming in my mouth, as promised. I could still taste him and damn if I wasn’t hungry for more. I flicked out the tip of my tongue and licked him. Dal growled and shoved his finger in my mouth, watching me suck it for a few seconds before sighing and removing it.

“Come along, my naughty bird. It’s time to be off.” Dal turned and left the tent, expecting me to follow like a puppy.

Which, of course, I did.

The Hawk Lord’s Guard was gathered before the tent. Trunks strapped with leather rigging sat before several of them. They shrieked in salute as Dal approached. He nodded to them and removed his war robe, handing it to me. I folded it and distractedly put it in my satchel, too busy watching him shift to focus on silly things like robes and bags.

The Hawk Army had come out to see their lord off, and they cheered and shouted as first his guards, and then he, took to the sky. I went to stand in the open space they left, glancing at the crowd around me. The soldiers bowed their heads respectfully to me, and I flinched, startled. Then I saw Rae; he grinned, then blew me a kiss. I winked at Raeshal just as the Hawk Lord’s claws closed around the shoulder loops of my rig and I was lifted into the air. I waved at Raeshal, and he waved back as the Hawk Lord carried me off to his homeland. To *our* homeland.

The Hawk Lord shrieked and his Guard fell into formation behind him. We veered right, toward a wall of mist on the horizon that surged so high there didn’t seem to be an end to it. I took a shaky breath as it drew closer and closer. What if it didn’t let me through? What if I was a fae fraud? Fuck, why hadn’t I considered any of this before I let my lover carry me off in his big bird claws?

But the mist didn't push us back as it did to humans and Farungal. It was only mist for the Fae. Soft, glowing fog that welcomed us into its cool embrace. All I saw was gray for a few seconds and then...

"Holy fuck balls," I whispered.

I thought I knew the colors of trees. I thought I'd seen every shade of leaf and flower imaginable. But I was wrong. Before me spread a paradise of vibrant green in shades I didn't know existed, and a rainbow of colors spotted it in the form of flowers, fruits, and flying creatures. A flock of multicolored birds flew beneath us, crying to the Hawks in greeting. The Hawks cried back and surged over an ancient forest that spread beneath a gentle sun.

The forest rapidly thinned and farmland came into view, then a village, and, finally, a city. But none of it was normal, or human, rather. The people who worked the fields did so with magic, tools moving in front of them without being handled and water rising to drench the fields at the wave of a fae hand. The villages were clean, composed of houses grander than those in any human city. I had thought the village was a city until we flew over a gleaming collection of palaces so beautiful, I could only gape at them.

A pack of Coyotes ran through a cobbled street below, yipping up at us.

"The Coyote King will soon know we're passing over his lands," Dal said.

"Is that bad?" I asked warily.

"No. We are free to travel through any kingdom. Landing, however, would require permission."

"So, we're in the Canine Region?"

“Yes. Passing into the Fox Kingdom now,” he said. “We have six more kingdoms to fly over before we reach the Hawk Kingdom.”

“And the Felines are in the other direction?”

“It's always best to keep the Cats and the Birds separate,” he joked.

At least, I think he was joking. He must have been; he was friends with the Lion Lord.

“What do you think of your new home so far?” Dalsharan asked.

“It's beautiful. Is the Hawk Kingdom similar to this one?”

“Each region is slightly different. Varalorre was divided by landscapes that suited our beasts best. The Felines got the grasslands, the Canines were given the forests, and the Avians got the mountains. Of course, no region is entirely one type of terrain, but those are featured predominantly.”

“Mountains,” I murmured, thinking of the caves we had camped in, in Alantri.

“We birds like heights. You'll see.”

And when we crossed into the Avian Region, I finally did.

Though they were taller than any I'd seen before, the ancient trees of Varalorre knelt at the feet of mountains that shimmered in the sunlight. Ranges of rock rose and fell with valleys of farmland and villages cradled between them. The Owl Kingdom came first, then Falcon, Eagle, and, finally, the Hawk Kingdom. There, the mountains overlooked the sea and the sound of waves hitting rock became soft background music.

The peaks were capped with a sprawling city joined by

arched bridges. Palaces took the place of pointed mountaintops and streets wove across the plateaus they stooped upon. The buildings were built to resemble the mountains, either using the same stone or carved out of the mountain itself; I couldn't tell from that distance. Richly dressed people strolled through gardens that spotted the lofty city while water glinted in fountains and small lakes. Wide platforms spotted the shimmering gray mountainside below the crown city of Kestria, some of them loaded with giant Hawks. More Hawks flew around us, crying out in greeting. The Guard shrieked back and the Hawk Lord angled sharply, taking us into a dive toward one of the platforms. He pulled up when we reached it, flapped his great wings to hover just above the outcropping, and set me carefully upon it. I hurried out of the way so he could land.

The Hawk Lord's Guard landed around us as I retrieved Dal's robe from the satchel. Dale stepped up to me, and I opened it for him, holding it up while he shrugged into it. He smiled appreciatively and brushed a finger across my cheek before belting the robe.

“Welcome to Kestria, Ravyn,” Dalsharan whispered.

“Thank you.”

“Hawk Lord!” a woman's voice came from our right.

Dalsharan grimaced at me before turning toward the sound. I turned with him to find a blonde woman in an expensive gown. She sashayed up to us, her hair swept back in an elaborate braid and crowned with a band of gold feathers.

“Princess Farina,” Dalsharan greeted her. “Well met.”

“Well met, Hawk Lord,” she purred and looked him over as if she might like to lick him from toes to nose. “I was so excited to hear that you were coming home at last and with a Valorian!” She looked over at me. “Is this him? Are you *he*?”

“Yes, this is my *consort*, Ravyn *Arandel*,” Dal introduced me.

The Princess' eyes widened as if she couldn't understand what he'd said. Oh, fuck, don't tell me she was one of those who didn't know that there was more than girl on guy action.

“It's true?” Princess Farina asked and pouted. “You've decided on a consort?”

“I have. Allow me to introduce you. Your Highness, this is Corporal Ravyn Arandel. Ravyn, this is Princess Farina of the Royal House of Hawks.”

“Your Highness.” I bowed.

“Oh, it's lovely to meet you.” The Princess rushed up and kissed both of my cheeks. “We are thrilled to have a Hawk Valorian. Welcome, Ravyn! And what a glorious name. Perfect!”

“Thank you,” I said in surprise. Honestly, the way she had eyed my man, I thought I was going to have to fight her off.

“Now, I'm sure you'll want to freshen up a bit first,” she said to Dalsharan. “But my father bid me to you to attend him with the Valorian as soon as possible.”

“Of course, Your Highness.” Dal bowed.

“Oh, so handsome.” Princess Farina stroked Dal's cheek. “If only.” She sighed and walked away.

I lifted a brow at him.

“Do not start with me,” he growled at me.

“So handsome,” I mimicked her.

“Shut up, Ravyn.”

I snickered.

Dal headed through an arched opening in the mountainside, following the path of the Princess. Behind us, Dal's Guard had shifted and donned their war robes. They shouldered our trunks and strode after us without a word. We went into an echoing passage spotted with fae lights. The Princess was already far ahead of us—that girl was fast—climbing a sweeping staircase that led to an archway of sunlight.

We took the same stairs, but I lost sight of Princess Farina when she stepped into the light. We did the same a few minutes later, emerging onto a busy street full of beautiful people dressed in silk, leather, velvet, and damask. Voices spoke in melodious tones, birds chirped from the branches of trees that randomly spotted the sidewalks, and the scent of flowers and saltwater was everywhere. I sighed in delight. Shops selling food, jewels, and clothing lined the streets—shops so luxurious I would never have ventured into any of them. Above their squat roofs, I could see the spires of stone palaces.

A carriage passed by and Princess Farina waved at us from the window.

“So handsome,” I said again.

“I will beat you,” Dalsharan said dryly.

I laughed brightly. “No, you won't.”

He glowered at me. “Fine. I will *not* fuck you.”

I blanched and shut the hell up as he laughed uproariously.

Then another carriage approached but this one stopped before us and the driver, perched atop his platform, greeted Dal. “Welcome home, my lord!”

“Thank you, Creshal,” Dal said as he waved his knights forward.

The guards stowed our trunks on top of the carriage and one of them opened the carriage door. Two guards climbed on a platform in the back and the rest went to a second carriage that pulled up behind the first. Dal got inside, and I took one last look around before going in after him. I shut the door, and the carriage started to move. I was leaning forward even as I sat down, not wanting to miss a single sight. Every time I glanced over, I caught the Hawk Lord watching me instead of the view.

“You're making me nervous,” I muttered.

“By looking at you?”

“Yep.”

“You're worth looking at. Especially when you're seeing our home for the first time. I like the way your eyes widen.”

“This place...” I shook my head. “Why are there so many birds? That makes me a bit nervous too.”

“Why would that make you nervous?”

“Uh, where birds fly, there's a risk of being pooped on.”

Dalsharan burst out laughing. “I promise that you won't get pooped on. The birds who live among us are attuned to us. That's why they flock here.”

“Aren't hawks predators? Don't they eat smaller birds?”

“We are not normal hawks, Ravyn,” he said wryly.

“Right. Of course.” I cleared my throat and looked back at the city.

A woman formed on the sidewalk. Her body was mostly transparent, but as I watched, she seemed to absorb color from the world around her and became solid. I lurched toward the window, gaping at her.

“Fuck me flying,” I whispered. “I think I just saw a Sylph.”

Dalsharan glanced out the window. “Probably. They’re one of the few Unsidhe who live in Kestria. Most wingless faeries prefer the ground.”

“Sylphs have wings?”

“*Flightless* faeries prefer the ground,” he amended. “Sylphs are air spirits, they float.”

“I’ve heard of them but have never seen one,” I murmured as I scanned the streets for another. “Fuck, there’s a Pixie!” I gaped at the tiny, winged faerie as she landed on a branch beside a brightly colored bird. “I’ve never seen one of those either.”

“There are Sylphs in the Unsidhe Armies, but the Pixies don’t leave Varalorre.” He leaned back against the leather cushion and propped his boot on the seat beside me, giving me a possessive look. “As you will not be leaving without me.”

“Since I can’t fly, that’s a given,” I grumbled.

“You will fly.”

“How can you be sure?” I gave him a somber look.

“You have me inside you. You *will* fly.” Dalsharan grinned sensually.

“Well, as much as it felt like flying when I had you inside me earlier, I don’t think your cock can give me wings. It’s not that magical.”



Dalsharan threw back his head and chortled. When he looked at me again, his eyes were sparkling amethyst.

“What does it mean when your eyes go amethyst?” I whispered.

Dalsharan blinked. “Are they now?”

“Yes.”

“Huh,” he said and grinned. “Interesting.”

“What's interesting?” I leaned forward. “I've figured out that green means you're furious. Is amethyst arousal? Is it a sign that I can jump your bones?”

Dal's grin turned wicked. “You don't need a sign, you naughty bird.”

“Is it?” I insisted.

“You will just have to figure that out for yourself. If you are a good consort, you will.”

“All right, be like that.” I pushed his foot off my seat.

Dal laughed again, then he straightened as he glanced out the window. “We're home, Ravyn.”

Home. The way he said it made my chest constrict. I looked out the window and felt my jaw fall open. We were passing through a gate manned by a couple of guards who bowed to us as we rolled by. Even the gates were impressive—soaring silver things with flying hawks shaped by the twisting metal. Beyond it lay a glorious garden of fruit trees and flowers with flocks of birds swirling from tree to tree. And beyond the garden stood the Hawk Lord's home. My home. At least for now.

It was made of paler stone than the other palaces, a snowy

white that matched Dalsharan's hair. The palace rose into the sky before us in tiered arches, each arch bearing a carved design within its tip. It appeared to be more of a collection of towers than a normal palace. Various heights of towers rose behind a sweeping entrance, their spires connected with walkways and every sharply pointed arch accented with a balcony. The grand entry held the lowest arch that nonetheless stretched the highest, with walls sweeping down from it to either side and then up at the ends, into columns topped with statues of hawks. The Hawk Lord's black and gold banner hung from the central arch of that entry, standing out sharply against the white stone.

"This is where you live?" I asked in wonder.

"This is where *we* live," he said softly, watching me again.

The carriage pulled around a circular drive and stopped before a set of steps that led to the peaked front door. Our driver jumped down and opened the carriage door for us. Dalsharan went first, then stepped aside for me. I jumped out, landing hard on my boots, and peered up at the palace that soared over my head.

"Ravyn, this is Creshal, my steward." Dalsharan waved at our driver. "Creshal, this is my consort, Ravyn the Valorian."

"It's an honor to meet you, Sir." Creshal bowed deeply.

"Uh, thank you. Nice to meet you too."

Dal's grin pressed together as if he were holding back laughter.

"Your rooms have been cleaned and a selection of clothing was delivered this morning for the Valorian, my lord. I had them taken to the Consort's rooms."

"Very good, Creshal." Dalsharan strode up the stairs where the front door seemed to magically open for him.

Actually, there was a guy in a fancy uniform who'd somehow known that Dal was walking up and had opened the door for him at precisely the right moment. It must be a pain in the ass to be a faerie servant.

Dal paused in the doorway and glanced back at me. “Are you coming?”

“Nearly,” I muttered before running up the stairs after him.

Creshal chuckled under his breath and jumped back on the driver's platform. The carriage rolled away. It probably had its own palace.

I nodded at the guy holding the door and followed Dal into his home. A shining interior of silver, pale gold, and dark gray greeted me. Dal strode forward, barely glancing at the chandeliers above or the designs of hawks in the marble floor below. He went straight to a doorway at the end of the entry hall, got into a tiny room, and turned around to face me.

“What are you doing in there?” I frowned at the small space.

A maid passing by coughed to cover a laugh.

“It's an elevator. It will take us to the upper floors,” Dal said.

“A what?”

“Just get in, Ravyn,” he growled.

I stepped into the room and a door slid out of the wall, closing us in and startling me. I jumped and spun around while Dal chuckled. There was a numbered panel to the right of the door and he hit the largest number—18. The button lit up and the whole room trembled.

“What the fuck?” I held my arms out for balance, but the room only shook slightly. It felt as if we were moving upward. “You have magic that lifts boxes full of people?”

“It's not magic,” Dal said and laughed again. “There's a system of pulleys and chains and... I don't know what exactly. It's all very tedious, I'm sure, but it's a machine, not magic, Ravyn. Relax.”

“Fuck me flying,” I whispered as the room stopped moving and the panel opened on another place entirely. I walked out warily, peering around the circular space he'd taken me to.

“You keep using that exclamation, and I'll take it as an invitation,” Dal purred in my ear as he stepped past me. “This way, Consort.”

I followed him to the right, gawking at the vaulted ceiling with its glass panels that let in the late afternoon sunlight. All around me were amazing pieces of art—statues carved from precious stones and metals, paintings taller than me, and curtains worth more than I made in a year. I suddenly felt dirty and coarse. My shoulders began to hunch in as if the opulence were pressing down on me.

Dal kept walking right out of the room. I stumbled through a doorway after him, then jerked back when open sky greeted me. We were out on one of the walkways I'd spotted from the carriage. I wasn't afraid of heights, I just hadn't been prepared to encounter them right that second. I glanced at the garden far below, then across the bridge to the tower Dal was heading to. The walkway looked solid enough, with a stone railing to either side. I stepped out further and then took a good look around. I only made it halfway before I stopped completely, leaned against the railing, and stared at Kestria. That feeling of being dirty and coarse? It vanished and all I felt was damn lucky.

“It's lovely, isn't it?” Dal was suddenly beside me. He leaned his forearms on the railing next to mine and stared at the city with me. “It's been a long time since I've seen it.”

“It's...” I leaned my shoulder against his. “It's the most beautiful place I've ever been. Thank you for bringing me here.”

The Hawk Lord's arm slid around me, and he pulled me in against his side. “It's more beautiful when I have someone to share it with. Thank you for coming home with me, Ravyn.”

“As if I had a choice,” I teased and nudged his chin with my cheek.

Dalsharan turned to look at me with surprise, then frowned. “You always have a choice, Ravyn. I'm sorry if I made you think otherwise.”

“No, I know.” I cleared my throat awkwardly. “It's just this thing with meeting your king—that wasn't optional, was it?”

He grimaced. “No, I suppose not. You could have said no, but it would have made things difficult and truly would have been to your detriment anyway. You need training. You need to be here. And, honestly, now that we're home, I'm glad for it. I feel as if I can breathe for the first time in years.” He gazed down at me and brushed a kiss over my forehead. “No battles to plan. No soldiers to look after. Just you and me and the whole of Kestria to explore.”

“Sounds amazing,” I whispered as I stared at him.

“Come on.” He took my hand and pulled me across the bridge. “I want to show you your rooms.”

“I have more than one room?”

Dal took me through another doorway, across a grand dining room, a library, and a sitting room before we reached a

bedroom. The space was massive, circular, and centered around a black and gold bed that was also circular. Swaths of black silk hung from a gold hook in the vaulted ceiling and swept out to drape across golden posts that bordered the bed. Embroidered on the silk were golden hawks, glittering in the light that fell from panels of glass in the ceiling.

Masculine furniture dotted the room and dark rugs covered the pale floor. A fireplace stuck out from one curved wall and a fire flared to life within it as Dalsharan passed by. Two armchairs sat in front of the fireplace, one to either side, and a chessboard waited on a table between them. But Dal kept walking. He stepped through another doorway and across yet another walkway.

This one took us to a smaller tower. There was no library or dining room or even a sitting room in this one, just another circular room with a round bed in its center. The bed wasn't draped, but was still impressive, swathed in white with a golden base. The room continued this color theme with gilded furniture upholstered in pale fabric and a fireplace bordered by swans stretching their long necks and holding their wings up. I walked across the thick rug, looked out at the curving balcony, and peered into a golden bathroom before I turned to face him.

"This is a woman's room, isn't it?" I crossed my arms over my chest.

Dalsharan burst out laughing. "It's meant to be a neutral palette, but you may change it in whatever ways you wish."

I grinned and lowered my arms. "Nah, it's fine. I kinda like the white. I don't know how long it will stay this clean around me, but I like it."

"You will not be training in the mud here, Ravyn." He stepped past me to a door I hadn't noticed. "You will be at the Academy."

“I'm going to school?” I asked in surprise.

“Who else would teach you except a teacher?” Dal shot back. “And besides, you don't have to worry about keeping this room clean. It will be cleaned for you.”

“Nice.” I whistled as I followed him through the hidden door. Then I stopped short. “Now this is more like it.”

He'd taken me into a dressing room done in warm mahogany with gold clothing racks running down the longer walls and a rectangular chest of drawers in the center. A huge mirror in a golden frame leaned against the far wall, reflecting the racks of pants, tunics, jackets, and cloaks. I pulled out some drawers to find folded underwear in the softest cotton I'd ever felt and the finest silk. Belts, chains, and cloak clasps filled another drawer. Then there were lines of boots and dress shoes set out on low shelves beneath the racks. A padded bench waited at the end of the chest of drawers. Dal sat down on it and watched me.

“Try something on.” He waved a hand at the clothes. “We need to make sure they fit.”

I smiled as I started to strip. His eyes followed every movement. I was hard by the time I was naked, but he merely nodded toward the clothes. So, I turned away and picked a pair of pants. They were black suede, embroidered with a golden design up the sides, and they felt like heaven against my skin. I sighed as I buttoned them.

“Perfect,” Dalsharan murmured.

“They're a little tight,” I argued, peering at the way they stretched over my ass.

“As I said, perfect.” He grinned.

“I've never worn anything this nice before.”

“You will wear something far nicer tonight when I take you to the palace.”

“I’m a little nervous,” I admitted.

“Come here,” he whispered.

I went to stand before the Hawk Lord, and he held my gaze as he unbuttoned my pants and pushed them down my thighs. My heart sped up as I watched him take my cock in his hand and stroke it. He made a soft sigh and bent his head to rub his lips over my weeping tip. The moisture slicked his lips and his tongue flicked out to taste it.

I let out a broken breath. Dal had yet to go down on me. He’d stroked me and kissed me and tongued my ass but he hadn’t sucked my cock. I didn’t need it, didn’t even want a lot of it, but a little tongue action would be nice once in a while. I bit my lip and prayed for a small miracle.

But then Dal removed something from his pants pocket. It looked like strips of leather. He spread the leather, revealing two metal rings, and slipped the rings over my cock. They fit snugly but not tightly. The leather straps hung from the rings and for a moment I thought they were decoration or maybe a leash. But then Dal took one strap from each side and brought them around my waist, lifting my cock with them, and tied them behind my back. My breath caught in my throat. The Hawk Lord grinned devilishly as he slid the other two strips between my legs and brought them to the back where he tied them to the first. It created a harness that held my cock tightly against my belly. Dal leaned forward and kissed the tip of my dick again. I whimpered. Then he pulled my pants back up and fastened them. I nearly wept.

“Now, you’ll be too focused on that kiss to be nervous,” Dalsharan declared as he stood up and strode out of the room. “And the harness will prevent your erection from tenting your



pants.”

“What the fuck?!” I huffed as I headed after him. “You’re not going to fuck me?”

Dal chuckled. “We don’t have the time for that. We have to get ready for the king. Princess Farina said he wanted us there as soon as possible, remember?”

“Yeah but—” I waved at the outline of my cock. It may not have been tenting my pants but with the suede so snug, you could see everything, including the rings. “Not even a quick bang?”

“A quick *what?*” He spun to glare at me.

“Bang,” I whispered. “Just, you know, bend me over a bench and fuck me fast?”

Dal’s lips twitched. “No, we are not having a bang. I need to get dressed. Go back to your dressing room, I’m sending someone to help you.”

“I can dress myself!” I called after him.

“Not for the king, you can’t!” he called back.

“Fuck,” I whined as I rubbed my cock through the suede. “That feels good, actually.” I headed back to the dressing room, stroking my cock as I went.

## Chapter Twenty-Six

Before I could figure out how to rub one out with my dick in a harness, a woman walked into the dressing room.

“Valorian.” She curtsied to me. “I’m Marla. The Hawk Lord sent me to help you dress.”

“Oh, uh. Hi. I guess you could help me pick something out.”

Marla smiled sweetly and started looking through the racks. “As a warlord’s consort and the Valorian of the Hawk Kingdom, you must wear attire befitting your status, especially when you meet the king. You will likely go from the meeting directly to the celebration that has been planned in your honor.”

“In my honor?” I squeaked.

“Yes.” She pulled out a few things and laid them on the bench. “Please try these on, my lord. I will find the appropriate shoes for you.”

“Thanks.” I looked over her selection and had to admit, she had an eye for it.

Marla had chosen garments in black and gold, likely to represent my connection to the Hawk Lord. There was another pair of pants, looser than the ones I had on, thankfully, and made of thick silk. I got into those, then pulled on a tunic of midnight velvet with a V neckline. Over that went a jacket of gold brocade.

I stepped up to the mirror. “Yeah, this is nice.”

“You need the belt, my lord.” She held out a gold scarf.

“That's a belt?”

“Allow me.” She wrapped the fabric around my waist, angling it downward, and knotted it. “There. And your shoes are here with the socks. Shall I adorn your face now?”

“What?” I looked up just as I sat down to pull on the socks.

“The Hawk Lord wants you adorned.”

“What does that mean?”

“Your face.” She waved a hand at my face. “I'll apply some cosmetics to enhance—”

“Oh, fuck no, lady,” I growled and stood up with a sock only halfway on. “I'm not wearing makeup.”

“But the Hawk Lord wishes it,” she whispered, her eyes wide.

“Nope. Uh-uh.” I sat down and pulled on my socks. “Thank you for the offer, but I'm all good on the make-up front. You can go, Marla.”

“Yes, my lord.” She hurried out.

“Thinks he's gonna put makeup on me, eh? Like some kind of pretty boy. Fuck. I'm not wearing makeup to meet a king. I don't fucking think so. I'm a soldier, not a trollop.” I got my shoes on, checked myself in the mirror, and grinned. “Not bad.” I ran a hand through my hair, settling the choppy locks. “Not bad at all.”

I sauntered out of my dressing room, across the walkway, and into Dal's room, feeling pretty good about myself. Then I saw Marla. She gave me an apologetic look as she hurried away.

“Just wait outside the door, Marla,” Dal called after her, then turned and glared at me.

“That little snitch,” I muttered. Then I saw him. “Fuck, babe, you look good.”

I looked Dalsharan up and down. He was in black and gold too, but where my jacket was gold, his was black. In fact, the only gold on him was the trim embroidered on his jacket and the Hawk Soul amulet. Oh, and the crown on his head.

I eyed the simple band of gold with its single tawny stone in the center. “I didn't know you got to wear a crown.”

“It's not a crown, it's a circlet. It has no points.”

“And what is the *point* of that?” I grinned.

“The point is that I'm the Hawk Lord, not the Hawk King. My circlet is a symbol of my status,” he growled. “And my consort is supposed to be adorned to announce his status as well.”

“I'm not wearing makeup,” I growled.

“It's not makeup...” he made a frustrated sound and took a calming breath. “You must be adorned as my consort and the Valorian. It is a mark of honor, Ravyn.”

“I'm good without the honor.” I crossed my arms.

“Get back in your room and sit down at your dressing table right now!” He pointed toward my tower.

“No.”

The Hawk Lord lifted his hand toward my throat. I stared him down. He lowered it with an exhale.

“If you don't adorn yourself, the whole court will think that

you have not accepted me. That I've chosen you, but you're undecided. Do you understand? Every randy fae there will be pawing at you, trying to get in your pants and take you away from me. You will disrespect and humiliate me in front of the entire court. Is that what you want?"

"I..." My arms fell to my sides. "No, I don't want to do that."

"I'm sorry that you think this is demeaning," he said gently as he edged closer. "It's meant to be an honor, I swear. An honor to both of us. It will not make you look effeminate. It will just make you look like the Valorian and"—he slid a hand up my face and into my hair, where he gripped a handful tightly—"mine. It will mark you as mine."

"I love you too," I whispered.

Dalsharan yanked me into a brutal kiss, his hand going to my crotch to rub the bulge there roughly. I groaned and pushed into him, but again, he eased back, giving me one last nip before shoving me toward my tower.

"I'll send Marla to you," he said.

I sighed and headed back to my tower so I could be *adorned*.

## Chapter Twenty-Seven

The makeup wasn't that bad. Marla had outlined my eyes in black kohl and then painted a golden design on my forehead—a triangle pointing down between my eyes, connected by stylized wings that arched over my eyebrows. Then, along the height of each cheekbone, she'd painted a claw, tip downward. The forehead piece was to show my status as the Hawk Kingdom Valorian and the claws were to display my status as the Hawk Lord's consort. They kind of looked badass, to be honest.

“You like them,” Dal said with a smirk.

“Like what?” I played innocent.

We were in his carriage again, headed to the royal palace.

“The markings.” He waved a hand at my face. “You like them, don't you?”

I grinned. “Yeah, okay. They're sexy.”

“Yes,” Dal purred as he looked me over, “they are.”

I bit my lip and let my gaze wander down his body.

Dalsharan's gaze, however, wandered out the window. “We're here.”

Again, we went through a grand set of gates but these were grander than Dal's and had more guards posted around them. The palace itself stretched out three times wider and taller than the Hawk Lord's residence. The soaring walls were pale gold stone but the sunset painted them rose in sections, making it look as if the

castle were blushing. Fae Hawks flew around the sleek towers, keeping a close watch on everyone below. And there were a lot of people to watch.

“Is it normally like this?” I asked as I shrank away from the window. I didn't like crowds unless they were soldiers. Soldiers could be relied upon to act like soldiers. Civilians were unpredictable; they could behave any damn way they wanted to.

Dalsharan scowled at the people milling about. “Fuck.”

“What?”

“No, it isn't usually like this.” He sat back and sighed. “He's invited the other kingdoms.”

“What?” I squeaked. “How would the other fae even get up here?”

“There are other ways up the mountain, Ravyn,” he said with a little grin. “We transport visitors in carry cages.”

“Carry cages?”

“Huge cages with seats inside them and handles on top. They're wide enough for two hawks to carry one together.”

“Oh. Okay. So, I'm meeting more than one king tonight?”

“You're likely meeting all the kings and all the queens of Varalorre,” he grumbled. “Damn Avamael and his pride. He wants to show you off.”

“Avamael?”

“Our king,” he whispered as our carriage stopped. “Do not call him by his given name.”

“I know that,” I huffed as the door opened.

Dal gave me a little grin before he climbed out. He waited for me this time, and we strode up a long set of stairs to the palace doors together. They were open, but men stood beside them anyway, bowing to those who passed by.

“Don't acknowledge the footmen,” he whispered to me when I started to nod to one.

“Why not?”

“It's not appropriate here. Just follow my lead.”

“Fine.”

I strode through a long corridor beside the Hawk Lord and when people stopped to bow or curtsy to us, I ignored them. I felt like a fucking asshole, but I guess that's expected of rich people. Dal led me deep into the palace, passing a huge room full of dancing, laughing people.

“The ballroom,” he said, nodding to it. “We'll be heading there after speaking with the King.”

We got in another of those elevator rooms and went to the 30<sup>th</sup> floor. This place had 30 floors! Something chimed and the door slid open to reveal a guard in armor, standing at attention, directly in front of the elevator.

He bowed when he saw us and stepped aside. “The King is in his library, Hawk Lord. He's expecting you.”

Dalsharan nodded to the guard and led me down a corridor to the right. I guess when someone speaks directly to you, you could nod. Or maybe guards were above footmen on the rudeness ladder.

We entered a vast room of books, golden fae light, and polished hardwood. There were no windows, only shelves of books



covering every wall, and the walls were so high that a gallery bisected them. A curved column of stairs hid in one corner, leading up to the gallery. In the center of all this knowledge sat a man with messy blond hair, a skewed tunic, and a scowl. He wasn't scowling at anyone in particular but at a book that lay before him. He leaned over the tome on his forearms as if he might conquer it with sheer will.

We stepped up to him, and Dalsharan bowed. "Your Majesty."

"Ah, Dalsharan!" The man's face changed abruptly, a grin spreading across it and turning him into something profoundly beautiful.

I tried not to gape at the Hawk King. He stood up, the light catching him fully, and his hair turned molten. He was slim, with sharp cheekbones and an even sharper jaw, but sleek muscles nudged at the lines of his tunic and his golden-brown skin hinted at time spent outdoors. He shook back his mane of gold, flinging it carelessly over his shoulders as if it annoyed him, and stepped forward to hug Dalsharan.

"My boy! It's so good to have you home."

Boy, he'd said. He looked to be my age.

"It's good to be home," Dal said warmly as he hugged the King back. "How are you, Ava?"

"I'm good." He smacked Dal on the shoulder. "But you... you are better than good, aren't you?" He grinned from Dal to me. "And you must be the reason why."

"Your Majesty." I bowed.

"Come here, let me get a look at you." The King waved me forward.

I stepped up and faced him.

“My consort, Ravyn Arandel, Your Majesty,” Dalsharan introduced me.

King Avamael stared me in the eye as if searching for something, then made a satisfied sound and nodded. “Goddess-touched. Clear as day. You are a miracle, my boy.” He patted my shoulder as he had done to Dal. “Welcome home.”

For some reason, that touched me deeply, and I had to blink away some stray moisture as I bowed again. “Thank you very much, Your Majesty.”

“Ah, we're in private, call me Avamael.” He leaned in to add, “Just don't tell anyone about it.”

I made a shocked bark of laughter that had him chuckling.

“Ava,” Dal chided, “you're giving him too much too soon.”

“I am, eh?” The King looked back at the Hawk Lord. “And you haven't? Consort in two days, so I've heard. I believe that's the fastest courtship ever recorded.”

“I saw his soul,” Dalsharan said simply.

King Avamael's expression softened. “Yes, I know. It's hard to resist the pure ones, isn't it?”

“He's not so pure anymore,” Dal said darkly. “He has a piece of me inside him now.”

“Ach, Dal.” Avamael shook his head. “When are you going to get over that shit?”

Dal made a rumbling growl.

“Maybe you can help him with that, Ravyn,” the King said

to me.

“I’m trying, Your Majesty—I mean, Avamael. I think we’ve made some headway.”

Avamael laughed at the glowering Dal. “I think you have, my boy! I think you have. Look at him, he’s pouting. You’ve turned the savage beast into a man.”

“I’m sorry, Your Majesty,” I sank back into formality since I was about to disagree with him, “but I must protest. It’s true that my lord has great passion that can overwhelm him at times, but he controls it in front of his soldiers. He’s the best warlord there is. Fair, wise, and strong. Everyone in his army respects him greatly. He has never been a beast. A beast cannot pick when and how to release its rage. Dal is a man who struggles with his beast.”

Dal’s eyes went wide as the King gaped at me.

“You’ve misunderstood me, Ravyn,” the King said gently. “It is his struggle that I speak of, though perhaps not as articulately as you just have. I meant no offense when I called him a beast. It’s not an insult for us fae; the Beasts are our other halves. We revere them nearly as much as our goddess. To struggle with our beast, as Dal does, is common and there is nothing shameful in it. They magnify our emotions and force us to experience life in a simpler way that can tempt the fae in us. Tempt us to terrifying hatred and profound love. You’re right, Dalsharan Arandel is a great warlord and a great man. I count him as one of my closest friends. And as a friend, I’ve seen Dal set his beast loose. I’ve seen the fury take him. But now I see that fury fading and it’s clear why. I’m grateful to the Goddess for sending you to him—a man to defend our defender. Take care of our Hawk Lord for me.”

“Yes, Sire,” I said fervently.

“Good man.” He smacked my cheek. “Now, I suppose we should attend this party since it’s for you.”

“Thank you. I'm honored.”

“We are honored to have a Valorian,” the King said gleefully. He clapped his hands and rubbed them together, then looked around. “Now, where did I put that damn crown?”

Dalsharan lifted a crown of golden feathers. In addition to a band of feathers, like the circlet (no points means no crown evidently) that the Princess wore, there were feathers set at angles, pointing up from the base to form triangular points around the band. Within those points were set trillion-cut jewels that matched the one in Dal's circlet. I realized they also matched the Hawk Soul Stone.

Dal handed the crown to Avamael. “Did you have to invite all of Varalorre?”

“I only invited the Birds,” the King huffed as he took the crown and shoved it on his head, not bothering to smooth his hair back first.

“Well, at least that's something,” Dal grumbled.

“But there is one thing I need to tell you—warn you about, rather. Something I just learned today after the Royals arrived,” Avamael said grimly.

“What?” Dal frowned at his king—our king, I mean.

“*He's* here. He came with the Eagle.”

“Why would the Eagle King bring *him*?!” Dalsharan growled.

“Because Jaxon is the Eagle's latest toy,” King Avamael said gently.

Jaxon. Fuck. I stared at my lover and watched him swing through several emotions—fury, disgust, pain. Up rose that beast

we were just discussing.

“But you've got a Valorian,” I said brightly to Dal. “Don't I trump a toy?”

Avamael looked back and forth between us, waiting for Dalsharan to answer.

“Come here.” Dal held a hand out to me.

I took it and let him pull me to him.

He kissed me on each cheek, over the claws, and said, “Yes, you are far greater than a toy. And I'm proud to have you with me tonight.”

I grinned broadly. “Then let's go show your ex what he's missing.”

“Indeed,” Dalsharan said. Then he bowed to our king. “After you, Your Majesty.”

Avamael chuckled and muttered to himself as he led the way out of the library, “Goddess-touched. No doubt about it.”

## Chapter Twenty-Eight

The ballroom went silent when the King was announced, then he stepped into the room. Dalsharan held me back when I moved to follow him. He watched until the King was seated on his throne, up on a dais at the far end of the room, and then removed his hand from my chest. We moved up into the doorway. A uniformed man standing there looked at us, did a double-take, and then bowed deeply.

“Hawk Lord,” he murmured, “it’s an honor to have you back with us.”

“Thank you.” Dal nodded and then waved a hand at me. “My consort, Ravyn Arandel.”

“Yes, my lord.” The man bowed again, turned to face the room, and then announced in a clear, strong voice, “Dalsharan Arandel, the Hawk Lord, and his consort, Ravyn Arandel, the Valorian!”

The respectful silence of the King’s arrival was suddenly shot through with eager whispers, and the Hawk Court turned their sharp focus on Dalsharan and me as we strode into the room together. Dal didn’t acknowledge anyone but instead took us straight to the dais where the thrones were perched. I tried not to gawk at the extravagant chandeliers, walls of mirrors, and—the hardest to ignore—the Pixies. The little, winged people flew about the room on their butterfly wings, snagging treats from the buffet table to eat as they sat casually on the branches of potted trees and dancing over the heads of the Sidhe. But everyone was staring at me, so I couldn’t stare at them. Instead, I focused on the King.

King Avamael sat between his daughter and a woman who I assumed was the Queen. Her brilliant auburn hair was topped with a crown that matched his. To either side of the women were more thrones. On their left sat two men and a woman, and to the right were a man and a woman who were holding hands and giving each other goo-goo eyes. They all wore crowns that matched King Avamael's except the stones set within the points of their feathers were different colors.

When we reached the edge of the dais, Dalsharan bowed deeply, and I hurried to do the same.

“Dalsharan, it is good to have you home at last,” the King declared as if he hadn't just seen us moments before. “And you have brought us a gift.”

“May I present to you, Ravyn Arandel, Sire? Our Valorian.” He waved at me and whispered, “Kneel.”

I knelt and bowed my head, waiting for the King to acknowledge me before I lifted it.

“Valorian, welcome to Varalorre and the Hawk Kingdom,” the King said grandly. “Welcome home, Ravyn.”

I lifted my head and smiled, “Thank you, Your Majesty.”

“You may rise, Valorian.”

I stood and bowed again.

“You have done us proud, Hawk Lord,” the King said. “Now, you will see to the Valorian's training personally, correct?”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

“Good.” King Avamael grinned. “I have awarded you a holding in Larinesse, and for you, my Valorian, a residence in Kestria. My steward will deliver the details tomorrow.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty,” Dal and I said together.

“It is well deserved.”

“It's good to have you home, Dal,” the Queen said. Despite a stark difference in their coloring—Princess Farina being tan and blonde while the Queen was pale with hair like fire—there was a clear resemblance between mother and daughter. “We are so delighted that you have found a consort, and such a handsome one.” She smiled at me.

I beamed at her.

“Thank you, Your Majesty,” Dalsharan said.

“Enjoy your celebration, Valorian,” the Queen said to me.

“Thank you, Your Majesty.”

We bowed again and slipped back into the throng. Dal placed a hand on my lower back and led me to the side of the room, nodding to people who greeted him as we went. Several tried to stop us, but Dal kept murmuring something about feeding the Valorian, as if I were some kind of exotic pet.

“Did the King just give me a palace?” I whispered.

“Yes.”

“A fucking palace?”

“Yes. Likely next to mine. But you will not be living in it.”

“I have a palace.” I grinned to myself. “I never imagined I'd ever own a shack, much less a palace.”

Dal shifted a tender look my way. “You're too handsome for a shack.”



I couldn't stop the goofy grin that spread across my face.

Dalsharan led me to a banquet table overflowing with food, and my grin spread wider. Not a single strip of dried meat in sight.

"Now, this is more like it," I whispered and reached for something.

Dal slapped my hand. "Get a plate, you heathen," he said teasingly.

"Soldier," I said and waved at myself.

"Valorian," he corrected meaningfully.

"Yeah, fine," I huffed and grabbed one of the little plates stacked to the side. "I won't be able to fit much on it anyway. What's the point?"

"The point is that you come back. It gives you something to do," Dalsharan said and chuckled. He picked up a plate and placed little round things topped with puffy things on it, then long things with frilly greens.

I picked a puff up and sniffed it. Smelled like meat. I shrugged and piled them on my plate, creating a precarious pyramid of puffs. Dalsharan gave up on me with a shake of his head and another laugh. Then he turned around, snagged a drink from the tray of a passing footman—they were just walking around holding trays with drinks on them!—and sidled to an open chair near the wall. He sat down, leaned back, propped an ankle across his other knee, set his plate on his lap, and nibbled at his tiny food.

I grimaced, grabbed a drink for myself with a muttered, "Thanks, man," and went to stand beside Dal. "You couldn't have found two chairs?" I grumbled and took a sip.

The Hawk Lord waved at a passing footman. "Bring a chair

for the Valorian.”

“Yes, Hawk Lord,” the man scurried off.

“Pompous asshole,” I muttered as I bent my head, bit a little round thing, then leaned back to get it in my mouth.

“Don't do that,” he hissed at me.

“Well, don't act like a pompous asshole and I won't have to call you one.”

“I mean, don't eat like that.”

The footman set a chair down beside Dal's and bowed to us.

“Thank you,” I said as he wandered off, then sat down.

“And stop thanking everyone,” he whispered. “They're just doing their jobs.”

“I don't care, he brought me a chair and the polite thing to do is say thank you,” I shot back. Then I mirrored his pose and started to eat properly. Like a Valorian. I picked up a puff, held my pinky out, and took the tiniest bite of it before chewing thoroughly and going back for another.

A bunch of Pixies in a nearby plant laughed their little butts off. I winked at them, and they laughed harder.

“You are hopeless,” the Hawk Lord lamented.

“You're the one who gave me a piece of your soul,” I said brightly. “I didn't ask you to do that.”

“Indeed.” The Hawk Lord rolled his eyes. “Whatever possessed me?”

I snorted.

Then they descended. Not the Pixies, the Sidhe. Evidently, shoving your mouth full of food only keeps courtiers at bay for a few minutes, then it's open season. They flocked to the Hawk Lord and his prize like soldiers to bad wine, pawing at the both of us—Dal called it fawning, but whatever—and gushing about his return and my rebirth. They droned on about their holdings, their latest hunts, and the parties they'd been to recently. But whenever Dal mentioned the war or—Goddess forbid—the Farungal, they clammed up and looked uncomfortable. But at least it got them to leave.

When the latest bunch took off with strained excuses, I got up, stretched, and grimaced at him. “These people are obnoxious. I don't like them.”

Dalsharan laughed hard enough that half the room stared at us. He got up and kissed my forehead. “You have no idea how obnoxious they can be.” Then he went tense, looking as if he'd just spotted a Farungal.

I followed his gaze to a pair of men a few feet away.

The Royals had come down off their thrones and were mingling. Dal was staring at one in particular—one of the kings who had sat to the left of the Princess. He was dark in both appearance and demeanor. Sin-black hair flowed like a veil down his back and his eyes were such a rich brown that they nearly matched his hair. Those eyes had a dangerous look to them and his lips, a vicious twist. This dark king stood beside one of the most beautiful men I've ever seen.

Not handsome, but beautiful. The King's companion had delicate features, almost feminine, with soft, full lips, a pointed chin, and arched eyebrows. Chocolate brown curls brushed his shoulders, highlighted with golden streaks, and his tanned skin had

been dusted with gold powder to compliment his hair. His eyes, almond-shaped and thickly lashed, were a shade of green that matched the jewels in the dark King's crown. And those brilliant green eyes were focused on the Hawk Lord.

“That's him, huh?” I asked. “Mr. Green Eyes?”

Dalsharan refocused on me and smiled ruefully. “That's him.”

“He's pretty,” I said grudgingly.

Dal grunted. “I prefer handsome men to pretty. If I wanted pretty, I'd be with a woman.”

I grinned. “You're just saying that to get me into bed.”

Dal snorted.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the men start to move toward us and a naughty idea blossomed. I leaned forward against Dal's chest and gave him a lopsided grin. He cocked a brow at me, angling toward me, turning his back on the approaching men without realizing it.

I waited until they were close enough to overhear then said, “It's been hours since you fucked me. When can we leave?”

Dal chuckled low and sensuously. “Not for a while yet.”

“Come on, we've been here long enough, take me home and give me that huge cock.”

“Behave,” he growled.

“Or what? You'll spank me again?”

Dal went still and scowled in confusion.

I widened my eyes at him, hoping he'd catch on. "Will you beat me until I cry?" I purred. "Put your big hand around my throat and hold me down? Or will it be the whip again?"

That lie did it. He finally caught on. His eyes flashed and flicked to the side. I nodded, once, sharply—a soldier on a mission.

The Hawk Lord's lips twitched as he snatched my throat, squeezed, and leaned in to drawl, "Keep pecking at me, bad bird, and I will strip you bare, chain you to my wall, and whip that beautiful ass until it bleeds."

"Promise?"

"I hope we're not interrupting anything," a deep voice drawled in a tone that said he knew exactly what he was interrupting and was a little disappointed that he couldn't participate.

Dalsharan straightened as if surprised at being caught in an intimate conversation. He turned and inclined his head to the crowned man. "King Zanerelle, I'm sorry you had to hear that. My consort can be..."

"A bad bird?" The King asked gleefully.

The man beside him, Jaxon, had a sour expression on his face. His eyes twitched as he looked me over, then they softened on Dal almost beseechingly.

"Yes, indeed." Dal grinned back at the King. "You understand, I'm sure, that consorts must be kept in line."

"I've never taken one." King Zanerelle shrugged. "I don't see the point. My interest wanes too quickly."

Jaxon flushed. He cleared his throat and spoke softly, "Hello, Dal."

Dal gave him a cursory glance. “Jaxon.”

Before Jaxon could say more, the King backhanded him. I flinched as Jaxon's head swung with the blow. People nearby gasped and moved away.

“How dare you! You will address the Hawk Lord with respect!” King Zanerelle growled. “You don't deserve such familiarity with him.”

Jaxon licked his bloody lip and stared at the King as if he were the most glorious being in the world. “Yes, Sire,” he whispered. Then he bowed to Dalsharan. “Forgive me, Hawk Lord. I meant no disrespect.”

“It's forgotten,” Dal said flippantly, but I caught a flash in his eyes—a flicker of arousal.

My stomach clenched. The violence had turned him on. Fuck. But I had meant every word of my speech to the Hawk King. I believed in Dalsharan. He was struggling with his beast, and I had promised him that I would help him. I loved him, and his love was worth fighting his darkness. So, I wouldn't let this unnerve me. I'd face it like I faced every battle—with a grin.

“If you'd like to punish Jaxon yourself, I'd be happy to trade for the evening,” the King offered with a covetous look my way.

My battle grin faltered.

Dalsharan stiffened. “Thank you, but no. I've already played with your toy. I found him... disappointing.”

Jaxon paled and actually took a step back.

The Eagle King chuckled. “Yes, I've heard. I thought I'd offer anyway since it seems that your attitude toward certain things

has shifted.”

“I don't pick up the trash I've discarded,” Dalsharan said scathingly. “No offense to Your Majesty, of course.”

“None taken.” King Zanerelle grinned broadly. “I love trashy men. The trashier the better.” He looked me over. “Do be sure to let me know if you change your mind.”

Dalsharan nodded crisply.

Hold on, was he calling me trashy too? I grimaced at the Eagle King.

“Bid Hawk Lord and the Valorian a good night, Jaxon,” the King commanded.

“Goodnight, Hawk Lord,” Jaxon's voice trembled. He bowed to Dalsharan and then me. “Goodnight, Valorian.”

I nodded at him.

“Goodnight, Jaxon,” Dal's voice held a note of something that made my stomach clench.

I watched the Hawk Lord's face as the other men walked away, but he was watching Jaxon. My grin vanished completely.

## Chapter Twenty-Nine

An hour later, we had been approached by nearly everyone in the room, including the other royals. I was ready to leave, especially since I was having another issue. And no, it wasn't my irritation over my man checking out his ex.

“Why do you keep fidgeting like that?” Dalsharan hissed at me.

“Because I lost my hard-on and this stupid contraption you put on me keeps slipping,” I hissed back. “It's fucking uncomfortable.”

Dal snorted a laugh.

“It's not funny,” I growled. “My dick is going to be rubbed raw.”

“Your dick is immortal and will heal before it has a chance to get raw,” he shot back as he glanced at the banquet table.

“Oh, talking about my raw dick is making you hungry? That's nice. Real classy,” I huffed.

Dal just grinned mischievously and strolled away. I crossed my arms and pouted. First, he goes and looks at his stupid, pretty ex-boyfriend like he wants him, and then, he decides to have a snack after I tell him I'm uncomfortable. I was not pleased with the Hawk Lord.

My gaze wandered across the room and caught someone staring at me. Jaxon. He looked away with a flush spreading over



his face. I grimaced deeper. A fucking blusher. I mean, sure, my cheeks get hot when I'm embarrassed too, but it didn't happen every five seconds. That guy got off on being humiliated.

"Come with me," Dal growled as he passed by.

I frowned but followed him. He led me out of the ballroom and through the palace corridors until he found an open room. It was just a sitting room, but it was dark and private and had a very comfy looking couch. I started to grin when he locked the door behind us.

"Kneel on the loveseat, push your pants down, and bend over the back," Dalsharan commanded.

"Yes, Hawk Lord!" I exclaimed in excitement, practically running for the couch. Oh, excuse me, *loveseat*. How perfect.

My cock was hard by the time I knelt on the loveseat and pulled my pants down. I yanked my jacket out of the way too, my balls tightening as I bent over the gilded back. Dal came up behind me and stroked his hand over my ass. His finger was slick with that lovely oil, and he worked it gently into me, then pumped it. I sighed and got comfortable.

*Oh, thank you, Goddess, whoever you are, I prayed. Thank you for this beautiful man and his beautiful cock that he's about to stick...*

"What the fuck is that?" I rose up and spun around when I felt something cold and thin press between my cheeks. It definitely wasn't Dal's dick.

Dalsharan grinned. "Something to keep you hard until I can fuck you."

"Just fuck me now!"

“I can't, we'll be missed. We have to go back.”

“What the fuck is that?” I asked again as I stared at the bright orange thing in his hand.

“A carrot.” He smirked. “One cut into a very convenient shape.”

“That is *not* a convenient shape!” I squeaked. “An uncut carrot would have been a convenient shape. That looks very *inconvenient*! What is it even supposed to be, a feather?”

“Precisely.” He held it up for my inspection.

The carrot feather had a thick base, likely for attaching it to whatever centerpiece Dal had stolen it from. Up from that base, it flattened and then tapered into a point. Lines were carved along its length; it was a detailed representation. A lot of work had gone into that stupid thing.

“You're not sticking that in my ass,” I declared and started to pull up my pants.

The Hawk Lord's hand went to my back and pushed. “Bend over,” he growled.

“Aw, fuck,” I grumbled, let go of my pants, and bent over.

Dalsharan made an approving, aroused sound as he stroked my ass again. Then he parted my cheeks and pressed that fucking carrot feather against my hole. At least he'd greased it up, but it still felt strange to have its thin, flat tip enter me. I twitched as he slowly worked it in, then made a surprised moan. Dalsharan chuckled wickedly as he shoved it deep. He gave its protruding base a tap, then pulled up my pants. His hands slid around to fasten them for me and when they were buttoned, he helped me up, pushing his cock against my ass as he did.

I groaned and grabbed the back of his head, pulling him down for a kiss. But Dal evaded me as he laughed, then rubbed a hand possessively over my hard cock. Satisfied with my arousal, he stepped away.

I made a frustrated sound and climbed off the couch. “You are a cruel man, Hawk Lord,” I grumbled.

“And you love me,” Dalsharan declared as he left the room.

I followed him, my ass clenching deliciously around a carrot feather, and muttered, “Fuck yeah, I do.”

## Chapter Thirty

“Now?” I asked after our carriage was on its way back to Dalsharan's palace.

“No,” he said firmly. “Be patient.”

We'd spent another long hour mingling and sipping wine as that fucking carrot kept me hard. If he gave me blue balls with a carrot, I was going to be pissed.

“We've got enough time,” I argued.

“No.”

“Can I at least suck your cock?”

The Hawk Lord cracked a smile. “You did well tonight, Ravyn.”

I grinned. “I did?”

He nodded. “The King adores you, especially since the other royals are so envious. You spoke eloquently, handled yourself with calm poise, and didn't embarrass me.”

“Thank you.”

“And your performance with...”

“You're welcome,” I whispered.

Dal nodded again and looked away. I wanted to ask him if he still loved Jaxon, but I chickened out. Instead, I watched him in the darkness, treasuring every slash of moonlight that wandered in

to briefly illuminate his brutally beautiful face. I watched the shadows turn his cheeks into sculpture and his lips into glass. How had I wound up there, in that carriage, riding through the streets of a fae mountaintop city with the warlord of the fucking Hawk Army? What had I done to deserve this?

Dal glanced at me, saw the way I was looking at him, and settled his gaze on my face. His stare dropped to my lips. I licked them, and his jaw clenched. Slowly, holding my gaze, he unbuckled his belt. My whole body tensed, ready to pounce. The Hawk Lord spread his legs casually, undid his pants, and pulled forth his glorious shaft.

It seemed to glow in the moonlight, a thing of alabaster carved for pleasure. I went to my knees with a fervent groan, my mouth watering as I watched moisture gather on its blushing tip. Dal leaned back, sliding his hips closer to the edge of the bench, and laid his hands to either side of him. I crawled between his knees and took him in hand.

The Hawk Lord inhaled deeply but other than that made no sound. Gave me no encouragement. I stroked his velvet length and bent forward to rub my cheek along it. His scent rose around me, and I breathed in deeply, then buried my nose in his platinum curls and inhaled again. His balls twitched. I took them in hand lovingly, stroking a finger on the line that ran up the middle of his sac, and then licked his cock from base to tip. He let out a small groan when I crested the tip and brought my mouth down over that plum head. I plunged all the way to the base.

With a hungry moan, I sucked upward and took the lower stretch of him in hand. I'd left him wet, and I used that slickness to rub him in time with my bobbing head. The Hawk Lord didn't touch me, just sat back and watched, his eyes almost black in the shadows. That excited me even more, and I groaned as I worked him slow and hard, my lips tightening as much as they could. I tongued that salty head and sucked at it. I massaged his balls and

tickled my way over his taint. I loosened my throat and took him down to his base. And he just stared, utterly unmoved.

I worked him faster, my wet efforts and deep moans echoing in the confines of the carriage. Faster and faster I drove myself over him until my lips began to ache. I sucked and stroked and licked and laved while moonlight streamed through the open window and turned us silver. I could hear people outside, just a few feet away from our carriage. All that hid me from their view was the lower half of the door. No one knew that as the Hawk Lord rode past, his face the epitome of boredom, I was between his thighs sucking his magnificent cock.

“That’s enough, Ravyn,” Dal whispered.

I drew back, panting, and stared up at him in disbelief. He stroked my cheek affectionately before pushing me back toward my seat. My cheeks flamed as I sat back, and I couldn’t help thinking of the way Jaxon had blushed earlier. Fuck, I was turning into a blusher. But then I saw Dal’s guards. They were inches from the door as we passed through his gates. That’s why he’d stopped me.

The carriage rolled to a stop. Dalsharan climbed out and strode to the front door without waiting for me. I followed in a predator prow, staring at his ass as if it were my prey. I was going to lick his little hole tonight—lick it until it quivered around my tongue. Fuck, yeah. I wanted to see him holding his legs up for me, wanted to see him in that vulnerable position as I made him scream my name. I got into the elevator with the Hawk Lord and as soon as the door slid shut, I shoved him against the wall and kissed him.

Dalsharan allowed it for a minute; I think I had shocked him. But then he grabbed me by the throat and pushed me away with a growl. My back hit the wall and then his body pinned me to it. He made a low, rumbling sound as he lifted my chin and bit my neck. He sucked hard, and I squirmed. It stung, but he didn’t let up.

His cock was pressed against mine, but mine was mashed up against my belly while his angled down. We ground together as he mauled my neck.

Then the door opened, and the Hawk Lord shoved me out of the elevator. I went stumbling into a room lit only by moonlight. He growled as he prowled up to me, then he bared his teeth.

“Fly, little bird,” he said in a tone that hinted at pain.

Some primitive part of my brain realized that I wasn't the predator; he was. I wasn't going to have him beneath me, open and vulnerable. He was going to have me in whatever way he wanted. And there was nothing I could do about it. Nothing that I *wanted* to do about it. Except maybe run. I spun around and ran toward his bedroom.

I heard him coming after me, his footsteps steady as mine faltered. I bashed into a door, clipped my thigh on a table, and went sprawling. The Hawk Lord kept coming, making soft growls that seemed louder in the darkness. My heart was racing, and I didn't know why. This was just a game. He wasn't going to hurt me. Right? Right?! But I suddenly remembered that look in Dal's eyes when the Eagle King had backhanded Jaxon. Fear lanced through my chest. I jumped to my feet and ran through his bedroom, straight to the walkway that connected his tower to mine.

I was halfway across when I risked a look back. The Hawk Lord appeared in the doorway, grinning devilishly. Moonlight lit his hair and shadowed his face as he surged forward. He suddenly seemed like a stranger—a man who didn't love me. One who wanted me for the most base reasons. I turned and ran once more.

Dal caught me just as I came abreast of the bed. With a casual flick of his hand, he spun me onto the mattress. And then he was on me, pinning me face down. I struggled as he tore at my pants, but the weight of his body held me in place. Then my pants

were around my knees and that stupid carrot was sliding out of my ass without him touching it. Magic. It was flung away, leaving me aching and empty and still fucking afraid.

Then Dal rose to his knees, and I automatically tried to push up as well. He snarled and grabbed the sleeves of my jacket, pulling my arms behind me as he yanked it off me. I fell back onto the bed, my face in the blanket. Dal shoved the bottom of my tunic upward, off my ass, and then his large hand grabbed the back of my neck and pushed me down. I went limp, something inside me sensing that I was conquered.

“That’s right,” he growled viciously. “You’re mine, Ravyn, and I will fuck you whenever and however I wish.”

His cock slid into me, and I groaned. At last. He pushed down harder on my neck, smothering me in the blankets as he drove deeper. My cock was pressed painfully between my belly and the bed, those rings cutting into me.

I angled my face to the side. “Take the straps off, Dal.”

“Do they hurt?”

“Yes. Take them off.”

He ground harder into me. “Fuck, your ass is tight.”

“Please, take them off.”

“Tell me how much you liked having that carrot in your ass.”

“I loved it. You had me hard all night,” I freely admitted.

“Tell me that you were thinking of this all night. My cock in your tight hole.”

“I was. You know I was. Please, Hawk Lord, release my



cock. It hurts!”

Dal grunted and relented at last, untying the leather straps and pulling out so I could get to my knees and remove the rings. I pulled off my shirt, kicked off my shoes, and shoved off my pants before turning to face him, completely naked. He was still fully clothed, the waistband of his pants bunched below his glossy cock.

“At least take off your clothes,” I whispered.

“Get your ass in the air and your face on the bed,” Dalsharan snarled.

The fear returned instantly. I swallowed past it. “No. Take off your clothes.”

The Hawk Lord growled furiously, but shrugged out of his jacket. He climbed off the bed to slip out of his shirt and kick off his shoes. I watched him greedily as he undid his belt and shoved down his pants. He removed his circlet last, tossing it casually on the floor with his clothes, then stood before me in all his glory, giving me a moment to savor it. He stroked his cock as he pointed at the mattress.

“Yes, Hawk Lord,” I drawled and bent over, pressing my cheek to the blankets and lifting my ass in the air.

I spread my legs so he could kneel between them. Then he was there, his strong thighs shoving mine even further apart, and his cock nudging my hole in seconds. I moaned in relief as he entered me, and slid a hand down to stroke myself. I was close. So close.

“I saw you smile at him,” the Hawk Lord growled.

“Who?” I panted.

“The Eagle King. When he offered to trade, you smiled.”

“I was already smiling,” I snapped.

“Admit it! You thought about his cock taking your ass, just like this. You wanted him to slap you as he did...” he let the sentence hang.

“No, I didn't!”

“Yes, you did,” he growled. “You were staring at his lips as if imagining them around your cock. Is that what you want, Ravyn? You want a man to slap you and suck your dick?”

“No!”

“I'm never going to suck your off,” Dal growled. “That is what a consort does. You suck my cock and I fuck you. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” I ground out.

“And my cock is the only one you will ever suck. It's the only one that will ever fuck you. Say it!”

“Your cock is the only one I'll ever suck or fuck.”

Dal pulled out suddenly. “Turn around and suck my dick now.”

I crawled around to him and reached for him.

He slapped my hand away. “Use your mouth.”

I glared up at him as I slid my mouth over his thick shaft. It was slick with that fae lubrication and tasted sweet. I moaned and sucked on him, my tongue sliding out to stroke him as I pulled my mouth back. Fuck, was that oil nectar? I sucked it off him greedily.

“Get your ass in the air while you suck me,” Dalsharan demanded.

I complied and even spread my legs though he wouldn't be able to appreciate the view from where he was. My cock pulsed in need, left hanging on the cusp of climax. Then something nudged my asshole, and I jerked. The Hawk Lord's hand went to the back of my head to push me down.

"It's a candle," he drawled. "I'm moving it with my magic. Keep sucking, Consort."

A carrot and now a candle? Couldn't he just use his damn cock? But then the candle, with its lovely tapered end, slid into me and started a lazy pumping. I moaned in delight and showed his dick my gratitude.

"That's it, good bird," Dal growled as he ground his hips forward. "Take that candle up your ass because I put it there and suck my cock because I told you to." He shoved deeper and gagged me. "Just like that. Choke on my dick."

The candle started thrusting faster. I cried out around his flesh. My dick wept and pulsed. I swear I could feel my heartbeat in it. The Hawk Lord grabbed my head with both hands and shoved himself down my throat, then stayed there. I gasped for breath past his girth, strangling, staring up at him in horror. He watched me, pumped back just enough to let me breathe, then shoved forward again. Spit ran down my chin. The candle moved so fast it was starting to heat up and melt. I whimpered.

Dalsharan pulled back but began a rapid thrusting. His face twisted into a cruel smirk and his grip shifted, one hand going to my chin and the other to the top of my head. He pumped vigorously into my mouth. But then something shifted in his gaze and it widened. He seemed to register the tears glazing my eyes and the whimpers I was making. The candle withdrew and so did he.

"Ravyn," he whispered in horror, "I'm so sorry."

I panted past my swollen lips as I sat up. "It was him, wasn't it," I said softly. "You were seeing Jaxon while you choked me with your dick."

Dal's jaw clenched as he looked away. "Seeing him tonight was unexpected and... difficult."

"It's fine, you didn't hurt me." I went cross-legged and looked down at my poor aching cock. "Much."

Dalsharan let out a shocked laugh, then went serious again. "I am sorry."

"So you said."

"What can I do to make it up to you?"

I grinned and looked down at my cock.

"I meant what I said about the cock sucking. You're not going to get that from me."

"You can tongue my asshole but you won't suck my dick?" I huffed.

"Yes. One is preparing you to receive me, the other is demeaning."

"It's demeaning for me to suck your cock?" I growled.

"No, you're my consort, that's what you do," he said softly. "It's demeaning for me, as the Hawk Lord, to suck *your* cock. Sucking cock is submissive. I will never be that."

"That's bullshit," I grumbled. "Sucking cock is not submissive; it's just giving someone pleasure."

"Is it going to be a problem?" Dal asked evenly, without emotion, but a muscle in his jaw ticked.

I grimaced. "I guess not."

He let out a long sigh and stood up.

"Where the fuck are you going?"

"I thought you were angry?" Dal frowned. "Don't you want me to leave?"

"I want you to fuck me!" I shouted. "How many times do I have to say it?"

Dal's eyes went wide and then he grinned. He crawled back onto the bed, his stare sliding over my ass.

"Although, there is one thing I'd like to do first if you really do want to make it up to me."

He lifted a pale brow.

"Lie back and spread your legs, Hawk Lord," I purred. "I want to tongue your hole."

The Hawk Lord made an aroused growl as he laid back on the mound of pillows and spread his legs for me. I went to my belly and sprawled between them, giving his cock a reviving lick before lifting it out of my way.

"You'll have to hold your legs up for me," I said wryly.

Dal scowled, knowing where I was going with it, but complied. Those strong, warrior hands slid under his knees and he lifted his legs into the air, spreading himself wide as his hips moved forward and his sweet, little, puckered hole came into view. I made a sound of deep delight and nuzzled my face against him.

"Oh, fuck," he whispered as I made my first swipe.

I flicked my tongue over that dusky rose skin, tracing the

rim, then slipped it inside slowly. He cried out as his ass clenched around my tongue. I straightened it and thrust deeper, like a tiny wet dick. Oh, sweet Goddess, I was fucking his ass with my tongue and he was letting me.

“Stroke yourself for me, Hawk Lord,” I pulled back to say. “Stroke that thick cock while I tongue your asshole.”

“And how will I hold my legs?” Dal grinned at me.

I grabbed one of his thighs and shoved it up as I dove between his ass cheeks for more. Dalsharan groaned and then the slick sound of him working his cock filled my ears. I had him before me just as I wanted, spread and vulnerable, moaning and masturbating. It sent a triumphant spear of pleasure through me and ricocheting pulses through my cock. I ground against the bed as I tongued him, stretching that tight hole and sliding as deep as I could. His flesh and scent surrounded me. I ground myself harder against the silk blankets. Pressed my face so tight against him that his flesh molded to my face. I growled and licked and pumped into him while his hand worked faster and faster over his beautiful cock. And when the Hawk Lord finally spurted across his taut belly in thick ribbons, he shouted my name. It sent me shivering into my own climax, spilling over the blankets with my tongue still inside him.

## Chapter Thirty-One

I was a mess when I woke up. Black and gold paint smudged my white sheets and cum hardened them. I was tangled in all of that, my hair stuck to my face and wax coating my ass. But the Hawk Lord looked perfect.

Dalsharan came striding into my room, hair shining, combed back from his clean face, and clothes impeccable. He took one look at me and burst out laughing.

“Fuck you, dick,” I grumbled as I climbed out of bed.

I stumbled, righted myself, peeled the sheet off my thigh, and trudged to the bathroom.

“Hurry up,” he called after me. “We’re expected at the Hawk Academy in half an hour.”

“Fuck you!” I shouted through the door, then grimaced at my reflection in the gold mirror. “Not lookin’ so hot today, Rave.”

I shook my head at the pathetic man in the mirror, then climbed in the shower. The hot water revived me and bits of the night before came back. The Hawk Lord had made me wipe up his cum with my sheets, then held me against his chest and idly played with me—pinching my nipples and fondling my dick—as we talked. The talking didn’t last long though. As soon as his cock revived, he was back inside me, making me ride him. It went on like that for hours until I was so exhausted that I passed out. That’s when he must have left me in the bed we’d sullied and gone to sleep in his clean one. The prick.

“Hurry up!” his voice through the bathroom door.

“Fuck you,” I said again but not loud enough for him to hear.

I scrubbed my body, washed my hair, and even soaped inside my asshole just in case I got lucky and he decided to “prepare me to receive him” again. I sighed as I thought of having my tongue up him last night. The way he looked with his legs lifted in the air; I bet no one's ever seen the Hawk Lord like that. Not even Jaxon.

I was grinning when I came out of the bathroom with a towel around my waist.

“We're going to be late,” the Hawk Lord growled.

“Well, that's what you get for fucking me senseless last night and failing to tell me about this appointment,” I drawled and headed into my closet.

The Hawk Lord followed me. “You knew there would be training.”

“I didn't expect it to be this morning.”

Dal made a grumbling sound and sat down on the bench to watch me pick out my clothes. I casually tossed the towel aside and bent over to look at the boots. He growled as his hand swept over my ass.

“Uh-uh-uh.” I stood up and moved away from him. “We're going to be late.”

The Hawk Lord grimaced. “Get dressed or I'll harness your cock again.”

I got dressed.



We headed downstairs to a waiting carriage that took us across the city to an enormous structure perched on the edge of the mountain. Hawks flew around it in complicated patterns, shrieking at each other. A group landed on one of the numerous balconies that protruded from the towers, shifted into a bunch of Hawk Sidhe, and went inside.

Our carriage stopped before a wide set of stairs. A pair of double doors at the top of them opened and a muscular man in a leather vest, plain cotton pants, and scuffed boots strode down them toward us. He wore his black hair short like a human soldier and had a tan that spoke of hours in the sun. He reached the carriage just as we were climbing out.

“Dal,” he said with a warm smile, “it's good to see you.”

The men hugged, then Dal waved me forward.

“This is my consort, Ravyn. Ravyn, this is Master Greskal. He taught me to fly.”

“And it will be an honor to teach the Valorian too,” Greskal said.

“You're probably the only one who can,” Dal drawled. “You'll have to get past that human conditioning and his stubbornness.”

“I'm not stubborn,” I grumbled.

“And his tendency toward contentiousness,” Dal added dryly.

Master Greskal chuckled and waved us inside. “I seem to remember a certain young Hawk Lord giving me attitude over his lessons some years ago.”

I slid a smug look Dal's way.

“That's different. I was a little prick,” Dalsharan said to Greskal. “This one is a stubborn rebel—something particularly surprising since he's such a good soldier.”

“So, you haven't changed much,” I said to Dal.

Greskal burst out laughing. “This way, boys.”

He led us through a maze of corridors wide enough to accommodate giant Hawk bodies, past classrooms full of young Sidhe who gawked at us, and into an elevator.

“Do you get lazy when you learn to fly?” I asked as we surged up to the 23<sup>rd</sup> floor.

“Excuse me?” Master Greskal asked in surprise.

“Elevators.” I waved my hand at the panel of numbers. “You guys can't walk up stairs?”

“Do you want to climb twenty-three flights of stairs?” Dalsharan asked dryly.

“Well, when you put it like that,” I grumbled.

“Think about your arguments before you present them.” Greskal smacked my shoulder as the door opened, and then he led the way out.

Dal shook his head at me as he passed by, as if I'd embarrassed him in front of his teacher. I made a face at the back of his head before I followed.

“Don't make that face at me, Consort,” Dalsharan drawled.

I gaped at him. “How did you...” then I noticed the mirror hanging on the wall directly across from the elevator. Dal was grinning at me through the reflection. “Son of a bitch,” I muttered. “For a second I thought you had some kind of fae superpower.”

“Boys,” Greskal growled.

Dal shook his head at me again and pushed me toward the teacher.

“He said, *boys*, as in both of us,” I pointed out.

“Yes, but I am the Hawk Lord,” Dalsharan announced as we followed Greskal into an enormous, open, rectangular room.

And I don't just mean open in the lacking furniture way. A long section of the outer wall was missing and a landing platform extended from it. The Hawk students dove and swooped past the massive archway. Along the solid walls stood shelves containing odd contraptions, and the floor was covered with padded mats.

“You're the Hawk Lord?” I asked. “What kind of argument is that?”

“The winning kind.” Dal grinned.

I snorted.

Greskal went to the nearest mat and sat down cross-legged. He cleared his throat and looked pointedly at us. The Hawk Lord and I hurried to sit before him.

“So, you have hawk magic in you,” Greskal said to me.

“It would seem so.” My gaze flicked out at the flying Hawks.

“Yep, you'll be out there soon,” Greskal said to my gaze.

“Shouldn't I learn some basic things first?” I asked.

“Such as?” Greskal cocked his head at me.

“You know, the other stuff that all faeries can do. The”—I

twirled my fingers—“magic air and fire and *stuff*.”

“Magic air?” Greskal grinned.

“Like moving objects.” I glanced at Dal. “Say for example I wanted to pick up a candle.”

Dalsharan cleared his throat pointedly.

“Or summon oil to my hand,” I went on.

Dal closed his eyes as if in pain and shook his head.

“Why would you want to summon oil to your hand?” Greskal scowled.

“I’m just saying what comes to mind.” I shrugged.

“He’s talking about nectar,” Dalsharan said in a low voice.

“Nectar?” Greskal frowned before his eyes widened. “Oh! Yes, that is... well...” He cleared his throat gruffly. “As Sidhe, we work with the magic of nature and must progress naturally into our powers. Magic that can move objects or summon things is a more advanced skill. You were right in assuming that you must start with the basics and create a foundation to work from, but your foundation is a hawk. That is your base magic. So, you must first learn to shapeshift into a hawk, then you learn to fly, and then the rest.”

“Ah, okay. So, how do I shapeshift?”

“You might actually learn something if you shut up for five minutes,” Dal said dryly.

“Ravyn’s right, you’re still a bit of a prick,” Greskal said.

Dal grimaced at him as I laughed my ass off.

“Now, the way to shift starts with visualization,” Greskal said to me. “You need to hold an image of a hawk in your mind. For these first attempts, it would be best to be as detailed as possible. Picture the different shades of feathers on a hawk. See the curve of the beak and the gleam in their eyes. Imagine—”

I held up my hand.

“Yes?”

“I know I've fought beside Hawks for most of my life, but I don't sit around staring at them. I know what they generally look like, but that's about it.”

“Oh, well.” Greskal looked around and then spotted the Hawks flying outside. “Take a good look at those Hawks out there. Watch them until you can picture one when you close your eyes.”

I squinted out at the flying hawks and then grimaced at Greskal.

“Yes, all right, moving objects aren't the easiest to focus on.” Greskal winced. “Hawk Sidhe are raised by Hawks so I didn't consider that you'd need a visual example right in front of you.”

The Hawk Lord got up and pulled off his boots. I looked over at him in surprise.

“You need to focus on a Hawk.” Dal shrugged. “What better Hawk to focus on than the one whose soul you have?”

“Yes! That's a good point,” Greskal exclaimed in relief. “You're likely to shift into a twin of Dal's hawk.”

“I am?”

“Mathias, the first Valorian, can shift into a tiger that's nearly identical to the old Tiger Lord's form,” Greskal said.

“The *old* Tiger Lord?” I asked.

“After Mathias was made Valorian, Lord Derringar retired. He came back to Varalorre to help train Mathias and never returned to the war,” Greskal explained.

I looked at Dal, who looked uncomfortable.

“We're going back, right?” I asked.

“We'll see,” Dal said gently. “It's up to the Goddess.”

“Are you saying that you might have to retire because of me?” I gaped at him.

“If I do, it will be with great honor,” Dalsharan said. “It won't be a sacrifice.”

“Yes, it will,” I growled. “You love being the Hawk Lord.”

“There are other things I love more.” Dal's gaze softened on me.

I went silent and stared back at him, breathless.

Greskal cleared his throat. “If you wouldn't mind shifting now, Dal?”

Dal dropped the boot he'd been holding and started on his clothes.

“Way to ruin a romantic moment there, Greskal,” I huffed.

Greskal chuckled. “You're on my time, boy. Coo over each other somewhere else.”

“Coo?” I turned to make a face at Dalsharan, but found him naked, and ended up gawking.

“You'll need to memorize his *other* form,” Greskal said.

“Yeah, I know,” I shot back. “I already have this one memorized but it doesn't mean I get tired of looking.”

Dalsharan winked at me and shifted. In seconds, he was a massive Hawk, his feathers settling into sleekness as he tucked his wings in.

“Very good.” Greskal got to his feet. “Now, extend your wing, Dal.”

The Hawk Lord followed orders for once.

“Note the length of the feathers,” Greskal said to me. “Note their color and design. When you have that, move on to the breast—learn the curve of it, the lift. See how it angles down toward his talons.” He slapped the dark gray, pebbled skin covering Dal's legs. “See how tough the skin is here? Note that too. And take a deep breath.” He did so as if I might need an example of how breathing worked. “Smell the feathers. Really get a feel of what a Hawk is.”

I bit my lip before I blurted out that I was already very familiar with Dalsharan's scent. Dal cocked his head at me as if he knew what I was thinking.

“Turn around Dal.” Greskal smacked his wing down. “Look at his tail feathers, Ravyn. See the spread of them?”

“Yes, Sir,” I said because he seemed to need some confirmation that I was listening. “Checking out the Hawk Lord tail right now.”

Dalsharan made a reproving kee-ah sound. I grinned.

“Take a good look at everything,” Greskal chose to ignore us. “In fact, come over here and stroke his feathers. Get a feel of him too.”

“Yes, Sir!” I said eagerly.

I got up and went to thoroughly inspect the Hawk Lord. Hey, if I was being told to gawk and feel, I was going to take the opportunity to really *gawk and feel*. I stepped up to my lover and laid a hand on his rounded breast. He towered over me, I could tuck my head beneath the swell of that feathered chest. His legs were about the same length as they were in his other form, but on top of them was a bird body that stood at least fifteen feet tall.

Dalsharan lowered his head to focus on me with one golden eye. “Having fun?”

“Yep.” I grinned as I stroked my way beneath a wing and then drew my hand along the underside of it.

Dalsharan shivered, his feathers rustling. “That’s sensitive. It’s like drawing your fingertips beneath my arm.”

“Is it?” I slipped my hand up to the top of his wing and then stepped behind him to stroke the longest feathers.

“Those are the primary feathers,” Greskal supplied. “The shorter ones just above them are the primary coverts.”

“And these?” I asked as I moved inward along his outstretched wing.

“The secondaries and above those are the greater, median, and lesser secondaries.”

Greskal continued to list the names of every bit of feather I touched as I moved down Dal’s back—excuse me, his mantle and then his back—and over to the other wing. Dal’s head swiveled to watch me. Was it wrong that I wanted to crawl under his wing and take a nap?

“Do you think you have it?” Greskal asked.



“Huh?” I looked at the teacher. “Ah, yeah. I think I can imagine him now.”

“Good, resume your seat.” Greskal waved a hand at the mat, then sat himself.

I sat in front of him, facing Dal so I could see him if I needed to.

“Now, close your eyes and picture the Hawk,” Greskal instructed.

I closed my eyes and saw the Hawk Lord clearly. Every feather, every color, every claw.

“Do you have him?”

“Oh, yeah. I have him,” I drawled.

Dal snorted through his beak.

“Now breathe him in. Remember the feel of his feathers. Get the whole picture settled in your mind.”

“Got it,” I said.

“Good, good. Now, all you need to do is believe that the image you're looking at is you.”

“Believe he's me?” I cracked an eye open.

“Close your eyes!” Greskal reprimanded me.

I shut my eyes.

“Picture him. Smell him. Feel him.”

“Picturing, smelling, feeling,” I muttered.

“Now, believe it's you.”

“Believing...” I squished my eyes up tightly and believed. Or at least I tried to believe. How the fuck do you believe that you're a bird? I squished my entire face.

“Keep trying. Don't force it, just *feel* it,” Greskal advised. “Somewhere inside you is the magic. Your hawk is just waiting for you to call it forth. To believe in it. Believe in the Hawk Lord. Believe in his magic inside you. Believe that you are now holding a piece of him and that piece will give you the sky.”

And I believed.

## Chapter Thirty-Two

Four hours later, my belief still hadn't given me shit. We finally gave up for the day. Greskal took us into his office and went to fetch some mugs of tea as Dal and I relaxed near his fireplace. While he was gone, I whined. Because I'm a stubborn rebel.

"Believe," I grumbled. "I'm never gonna be a real Hawk."

"You *are* a real Hawk," Dalsharan said gently as he nudged me with his shoulder. "This is not going to happen in one day, Ravyn. You were a human for all your life. It's hard for that side of you to let go of the earth and release itself to the sky."

"How long did Mathias take to shift?" I asked.

"Twenty days."

"Twenty days?!" I shrieked. "I have to go through nineteen more days of sitting on my ass picturing you and believing you're me?"

"You never know." He patted my shoulder consolingly.

I started to smile.

But then he continued, "It could take longer."

I punched Dal in the arm, and he chortled.

"Eh, now. No roughhousing," Greskal chided as he came in with a tray of cookies and tea.

“Cookies?” I sat up straight. “Are those cookies?”

“This is your reward for training hard.” Greskal set the tray down on his desk and passed out the mugs before waving me toward the plate of cookies. “Young Hawks always get tea and cookies after their lessons.”

“I haven't had a cookie since I was sixteen!” I exclaimed as I reached for one.

Greskal gave me a strange look. “And how old are you now, lad?”

“Twenty-six,” I said before I stuck the cookie in my mouth and chewed in bliss.

“You haven't had a cookie in ten years?” Greskal asked as if this were the greatest tragedy he'd ever heard.

“I joined the Hawk Army at sixteen,” I explained after my first swallow. “They don't give soldiers cookies. Because we're already tough cookies.” I chuckled at my own joke and took another bite of my cookie. Warm, soft, chocolate chip cookie.

Greskal looked at Dalsharan as if the cookie shortage in the Hawk Army were all his fault.

“They're *soldiers*,” Dal huffed. “They get paid. They can buy their own damn cookies.”

“That's true,” I defended him. “I just don't like leaving camp.”

“Why ever not?” Greskal asked.

Dalsharan looked at me too.

I shrugged and shoved more cookie in my mouth.

“Why not?” Dalsharan asked with more demand.

I sighed. “Fuck, can't you just let me enjoy my cookie?”

“Ravyn, tell me,” Dal urged gently.

I stretched my shoulders. “Civilian humans aren't as accepting of who I am as soldiers and fae are. And my father was a governor, everyone knows me in the big towns.”

“What does that mean?” Dal's voice went low and dangerous.

“It's nothing, okay? I left that behind me, and I just prefer to stay away from it.”

“You left *what* behind you?” Dalsharan growled.

“Ridicule,” I finally snapped in irritation. “Bullying. Beatings. You want to hear more? Or can I just fucking eat my cookie?”

Dal sat back and gaped at me. “People hit you for preferring men?”

“Oh, wow, you fae really are a lot more open-minded,” I murmured. In a louder voice, I said, “Yes, Dal, they hit me. Except it was more like a gang of boys cornering me in an alley and beating the shit out of me because I dared to look at one of them with my faggot eyes.”

Greskal flinched back and cursed as if he'd been hit.

Dal just let out a long breath. “What else?”

“You want a list of every bad thing that's ever happened to me?” I huffed. “No. I'm not doing that. I had a few rough years and then I joined the Hawk Army and shit got better. Besides, those bad things made me who I am. Assholes like that are the ones who

turn faggots into soldiers.”

“Do not ever say that word again,” Dal said sternly.

“It's just a word. A word that made me strong. I could go into any town and hold my own now. Hell, I could probably leave *them* crying. But it's not worth my time or the chance that I might get in trouble for it. They're just ignorant assholes.” I shrugged and grinned at Greskal. “I didn't even miss the cookies till now.”

“Well, fuck, son, have all the cookies you want.” Greskal pushed the plate toward me.

“Those primitive bastards,” Dalsharan hissed. “The Goddess determines who we desire. By hurting you, they insult her.”

“That's just the way it is in the big towns,” I said gently. “I might have gotten away with liking guys in a country village, or if my father hadn't been Governor. But everyone knew my parents, and they had to be *respectable*.”

“There is nothing disreputable about desiring men,” Dalsharan growled.

“So you left?” Greskal asked gently. “That was very brave.”

I snorted. “I wasn't brave until I got trained on how to defend myself. That's when I realized that I could be the strong one.”

“Bravery isn't about being strong. It's doing what's right, even when it scares you,” Dalsharan laid a hand on my shoulder and rubbed his thumb across my neck.

“And leaving home at sixteen must have been very scary,” Greskal added.

“I got kicked out. They wanted me to marry the daughter of one of my father's friends. So, I made sure I got caught in a compromising situation with a guy.” I grinned. “No woman would have me after that.”

“Your father kicked you out of your home for some boyhood indiscretion?” Dalsharan asked in horrified amazement.

“No, my mother did,” I whispered.

It had been 10 years but that still stung, and I hadn't realized how much until I said it aloud. I tossed my half-eaten cookie on the plate and sipped at my tea. The chocolate was turning bitter in my mouth.

“By the Moon,” Greskal murmured. “What kind of mother rejects her child like that?”

Dalsharan's hand slid down to mine and wove our fingers together. I looked over at him and he met my stare steadily.

“This is your home now, and the Hawk Sidhe are your people. You will never be turned away and never be looked down on for who you love or how you want to love them. And if anyone dares to hurt you again, I will shred them into pieces and drop those pieces in the Bellor Sea for the sharks to feed on.”

A smile slowly spread across my face as I stared at him. “That's the most beautiful thing anyone has ever said to me. I'd make your enemies into shark bait too, babe. In a fucking heartbeat.”

Dalsharan grinned.

“Cookie?” Greskal held up the plate.

I laughed, took my discarded half and another cookie for good measure. “Don't mind if I do.”

“So, I hear you saved Dal's life?” Greskal smoothly changed the subject before we started cooing at each other again.

“Kind of.” I shrugged.

“Actually, I wanted to talk to you about that, Dalsharan,” Greskal went serious.

“Yes?” Dal prompted.

“Are you able to tell me how exactly the Farungal got two soul stones?”

“The Lion Lord and Coyote Lord were drugged,” Dalsharan explained.

I straightened; I hadn't heard this yet.

“Drugged?” Greskal asked. “*Both* of them? It seems farfetched that one warlord would have a traitor in his midst, but two?”

*Betrayal*, a memory whispered through my mind.

“They don't believe it was a traitor. They think a Farungal snuck into camp and tampered with the warlords' food, then waited till they were unconscious, crept into their tents, and took the amulets.” He glanced at me. “Yet another reason for me to eat the same food as my men.”

*We have been betrayed*, the memory played on.

“Hold on, they managed to get past an *army* of soldiers, into the cooking tent, *then* into a warlord's tent twice?” I asked. “Greskal's right, that's not possible.”

Dalsharan scowled. “There is no human or faerie alive who would betray a warlord to the Farungal. A traitor is far more impossible than a Farungal sneaking into camp. A Farungal could



have used magic to conceal or disguise themselves.”

I chewed my cookie and looked at Greskal. He shook his head at me. It looked as if I wasn't the only stubborn one.

“It's not possible,” Dalsharan said again.

I took a fortifying sip of tea then said, “I have to tell you something.”

“What?” Dal growled.

“Before you get mad, you need to understand that I thought it was just a memory. I didn't think they were talking to me right at that moment cause I wasn't touching them. But now—”

“Who?” Dal demanded.

“The soul stones,” I whispered. “I heard the other stones in the tent the day you returned them.”

“You heard the Lion Soul and the Coyote Soul?” Dalsharan asked carefully.

“I heard one of them.” I held my mug with both hands, seeking its warmth. “I'm not sure which it was. I thought I was just remembering what they said to me when I saved you. All those things I couldn't hear, I thought they were coming back to me. But now, I'm not so sure.”

“Ravyn, what did the stones say to you?” Dalsharan asked slowly.

“It was just a whisper.” I clenched my jaw. “Just one word at first.”

“What word?!” The Hawk Lord was on the verge of losing his shit.

“Betrayal.”

“Fuck!” Dalsharan roared and surged to his feet. “Fuck!”

“What else did the soul stone say to you?” Greskal asked calmly.

“It said that they were betrayed,” I went on, casting a worried look at Dal as he continued to curse. “And then it asked... fuck.” I hung my head, feeling suddenly as if I had betrayed the stones. “It said, 'Help me.' Fuck, it asked for my help, and I ignored it.”

“Son of Farungal!” Dalsharan shouted. “I need to see the King. Grab some cookies, Ravyn. We're leaving.”

I widened my eyes at Greskal and grabbed a handful of cookies. “Thank you, Master Greskal.”

“I'll see you boys tomorrow,” he called after us as Dalsharan stormed out.

## Chapter Thirty-Three

“What would you have me do?” King Avamael asked Dalsharan after he explained our suspicions.

“Allow me to lead an investigation,” Dal said.

“Into the Lion and Coyote Armies?” The King gaped at his warlord. “I have no authority to do so.”

“I’m not saying that we tell them we’re investigating them.” Dal gave the King a heavy look.

“Espionage?” King Avamael gaped at Dal. “You want to spy on our fellow Sidhe armies?”

“Your Majesty, if the Farungal have somehow managed to get a fae or human soldier to turn traitor, it could risk every life in *every* army,” I said. “Now, I’m a new Hawk, but I’ve been a human for most of my life and I can tell you that there are ways to sway us. What if the Farungal abducted someone’s wife or child? They could use them to force that soldier into betraying us.”

The King sat back in his seat and let out a sigh. “That’s a lot of what-ifs with very little evidence.”

“Which is the point, Ava!” Dal growled. “We need to gather evidence.”

“And what will *you* do, Dal?” King Avamael shot back. “Are you going to supervise this spy mission yourself?”

The Hawk Lord straightened and looked at me.

“Yes, you have your consort now. You can't go running off to your army and leave him here.”

“You were gonna leave me here?” I gaped at Dalsharan.

“You can't leave Kestria until you're trained,” Dal said. “But no, I wasn't going to leave if I didn't have to. I thought I could arrange it from here. I will choose members of my guard to serve as spies and send them into the Coyote and Lion camps.”

The King considered this.

“Sire, the stones asked Ravyn for help. Have you ever heard of such a thing?” Dalsharan looked beseechingly at the King. “We can't refuse the request of a beast soul—not any request but especially not this. If one of the soul stones believes itself to be in danger, we must save it!”

Finally, King Avamael nodded. “Very well, send your spies, but make sure they are not caught, Hawk Lord. If they are...” He shook his head. “Relations between our kingdoms could suffer for centuries. It could even lead to war.”

“If they are found, I will say that I acted without your knowledge.”

“Dal!” I growled.

He gave me a quelling look.

“I don't like it,” the King said. “But if it comes to that, your sacrifice might be necessary to save thousands of lives.”

“So be it.” The Hawk Lord lifted his chin.

## Chapter Thirty-Four

The Hawk Lord sent out his spies, and we waited anxiously for their return. I trained every day and my belief failed me every time. But Dal always took me out to explore the city afterward, like a consolation prize for not getting my wings. We strolled through parks with views of the valleys far below, dined in expensive restaurants where I always got dessert, and shopped in all the fancy stores that I would never have gone into alone. And the citizens of Kestria treated us like royalty. No whispers, no scorn, only deep respect. I was quickly falling in love with Dal's home. If only I could become one of them truly.

“Just relax,” Dalsharan said.

He was in Hawk form again, standing before me to give me a reference while I tried to convince myself that I could be him. Greskal stood to the side, leaving me on the mat alone in the vast training room, with the cries of young Hawks coming in from the balcony. I sighed and closed my eyes, picturing Dal again. And then I prayed.

*I know I wasn't born one of your people, but you claimed me. You helped me. Please, let me be a Hawk. You've given me this chance, help me succeed. Help me, and I'm yours forever.*

A gasp came. The sound of ruffled feathers.

I opened my eyes and realized that I wasn't sitting anymore. I was standing on two strange legs with claws poking out of my feet. My feathers fluffed in response to my shock, and the odd sensation rolled over my entire body. Feathers? I stretched out an arm and stared instead at my wing. Joy burst up my throat and

emerged as a shriek—a hawk shriek.

“Yes!” Greskal shouted and pumped his fist into the air. “Take that, Tigers! He did it in five days! That’s a new record.”

“It is?” I asked. My voice sounded weird coming out of a beak.

“It is,” Dal’s voice had a pleased tone to it. “And now, Consort, it’s time to set another record.”

Dalsharan came at me and something in his manner made me back up. His chest was puffed and his wings spread. I backed up faster.

“No, wait!” Greskal shouted. “He’s not a born Hawk, this isn’t the way!”

But Dal had already bullied me to the edge of the balcony and even as he looked back at Greskal with a tinge of fear in his eyes, I lost my footing and fell.

I shrieked as I stared up at Dal’s dwindling form. My wings flapped upward but not by will. It was the wind tearing at them and gravity pulling at me. Bent, not flapping as they should. More shrieks came as Hawks dove around me, formations breaking as I fell through them like a stone. Then the Hawk Lord was there, his head just above mine, his body streamlined in a dive.

“Stretch your wings!” Dal shouted. “Catch the air, Ravyn! You’re a Hawk! Fly!”

The wind whistled. I pulled my arms down. My wings, I mean. I spun into a tumble and lost sight of Dalsharan. Now facing downward, my vision filled with the rapidly approaching ground. But just fifty feet out from the Academy was the edge where the plateau dropped away. I rolled, taking myself further from the side of the building, and cleared the plateau’s edge just in time. Hawk

shrieks came from everywhere. My own cries echoed off the side of the mountain as it surged past me. The ground was now far, far below me, but in those brief glimpses I got as I tumbled, I saw jagged rocks looming at the base of the mountain.

I couldn't die like this! Not after all I'd gone through to get there. *She* wouldn't let me die, would she? Their goddess. *My* goddess! Faith suddenly burst inside my chest, and I went calm. My hawk eyes focused on the horizon and my body moved instinctively to right itself. My wings stretched wide and air struck them like fists. I embraced the punch, cupped it, and rode it upward.

A triumphant shriek came from below me. I looked down to see Dalsharan circle back up. Had he gone beneath me to attempt to catch me? To slow my fall somehow? It didn't matter. Because she hadn't failed me. The Goddess' love bloomed inside me and all around me. A warmth I'd never felt before—unconditional, unwavering, and unfailing. The Goddess had me now; I was hers. I had vowed forever, and I'd gladly give it to her for giving me this—the sky. I shrieked with joy.

My wings came down and I surged upward. Flocks of Hawks drew back to watch my rapid ascent. They cried and it sounded like cheering to my new ears. It sounded like happiness. Like home. I flew straight up toward the sun, clearing the edge of Kestria's plateau, surging alongside the Academy, and finally, past it. Into bright blue. Into Heaven. Freedom as I'd never known before.

Dalsharan shrieked as he chased me, then spun around me in excited circles. I dove and danced with him. Our wings brushed and my Hawk heart filled with love. The sky was ours. There were no limits now. Land couldn't hold me—couldn't hurt me if I fell. Fear vanished. I felt like a god. But the pulse inside me reminded me that I wasn't. I belonged to the Goddess and the Hawk Lord. And I was good with that. So very good.

But my wings started to ache and my breast fluttered.

“Come down!” Dal shouted. “It’s too much for your first flight. Your wings will fail! Come back with me, Ravyn!”

I pulled in my wings and dove. Dal dove beside me, then surpassed me to show me where and how to land. I watched how he opened his wings and caught a draft just before a ledge came even with him. I watched with my sharp stare and mirrored him, making a perfect landing. Okay, so I tumbled beak over tail into the room. But I *landed*.

“Well done, my boy!” Greskal applauded despite my embarrassing return. “Well done! Now remember your Sidhe body and let the bird go.”

I imagined myself—my new Sidhe self—and a tingling rush enveloped me. My eyes closed and when they opened again, I was staring down at my bare legs. Yep, I was naked. The remnants of my clothing were scattered across the mats. But I didn’t care. I shoved my fists in the air and shouted in joy.

Dalsharan shifted back to Sidhe and rushed forward to yank me into an embrace. “Are you all right? I’m so sorry. Dear Goddess, I’m sorry.”

“Why?” I asked in shock as I pulled back. “I’m fine.”

“I nearly killed you.” His eyes were wide. “I didn’t know it would be different for you. That’s the way a Hawk learns to fly; we are pushed off a ledge and our hawk takes over. I didn’t know it would be different for you.”

“Hey.” I grabbed him by the back of his neck and pulled his face down to mine. “I’m okay. I’m glad you did it. It was... a revelation.”

“A revelation?” He frowned.



I laughed and kissed him.

The kiss went on for a while. Finally, Greskal cleared his throat, and we broke apart.

“Your robe, Valorian.” Greskal held out a black robe embroidered with gold feathers.

I stared at it as a goofy smile split my face. “I get a war robe?”

“You get a *Valorian's* robe,” Dal corrected as he took the garment from Greskal and helped me into it. His arms came around me from behind as he tied the belt around my waist. “It looks good on you.”

“Thank you.” I grinned at him.

“Perhaps, you'd like to put yours on as well, Hawk Lord?” Greskal prompted.

Dal chuckled and went to pick up his robe, where he'd discarded it at the edge of the training mat. “You will fly every day now, Ravyn. We'll start with half an hour and work up to three.”

“Why did I get tired so quickly?”

“Your hawk body is new,” Greskal explained. “It's like a baby. Your muscles need time to strengthen.”

“But I feel great.” I stretched my shoulders.

“That's because your two bodies haven't harmonized yet,” Greskal said. “Once your hawk body is fully matured, it will connect to your Sidhe body. Then anything felt by one will transfer to the other. Conversely, your Sidhe body will be enhanced by your hawk; your sight and stamina will improve. This means that despite feeling strong now, your hawk is winded. You need to rest. Take him for a meal, Dal. Tea and cookies won't be enough this

time.”

Dalsharan nodded and went to shake Greskal's hand. “Congratulations, Master Greskal. You just trained a Valorian.”

“Got him flying in a day!” Greskal exclaimed. “Though that wasn't my doing,” he settled into a glower. “Don't bypass my instructions again, Dalsharan.”

“No, Sir, I won't,” he said gravely.

“Good. Now feed the hatchling before he passes out.”

“Yes, Sir.” Dal and I strode out of the room in only our robes, smiling at each other like idiots.

## Chapter Thirty-Five

The days that followed were magical. When I told Dal why my flight had been a revelation, that I'd prayed and the Goddess had answered, he'd fallen into a reverent silence and then kissed me as if I were something wondrous. He was so damn proud of me, he wouldn't stop bragging. Everywhere we went, he told the story of my dramatic first flight, saying that I was a true Hawk, I'd merely been born in the wrong body. That the Goddess herself had taught me to fly. For a brief time, I was blissfully happy.

I should have known it wouldn't last.

"My lord?" Creshal called through Dal's bedroom door.

Dalsharan came awake with a frown and slid out of bed. He shrugged into a robe as I sleepily turned onto my side and snuggled into the heat he'd left behind. I didn't sleep in my bed anymore. That hadn't happened since our first night there, and that had only happened because Dal couldn't wake me up—so he says.

"Yes?" Dal opened the door.

"Hawk Lord, the King's guards are here. They have this for you, and they are waiting for you downstairs." He passed Dalsharan a letter.

But Creshal wasn't alone, one of Dal's knights was with him. He stepped past the steward and knelt before the Hawk Lord. "I have failed you, my lord. Please, forgive me."

"Stand up, Brevis," Dalsharan said, a grim look crossing his face. "You tried and that is all I can ask of any man."

Brevis stood with a stricken expression.

Dal took a deep breath, cracked the seal on the King's letter, and opened it. As he read, his jaw clenched and his shoulders straightened. He finally folded it and looked at Creshal. "We will be leaving today, Creshal. Have our things packed and sent to the property in Larinesse."

"How long will you be gone, my lord?"

I got out of bed, a knot forming in my belly.

"I don't know. You may have another lord for a while."

"What?" Creshal's face fell.

"I have acted without the King's authority and was unsuccessful in my endeavors," Dal said, the words coming out strained. "I will do my best to make amends but it may not be possible."

Brevis made a strangled sound but went silent when Dal shot him a quelling look.

"I understand, my lord." Creshal bowed. "I am ever your faithful servant, no matter what you have done. I will pack our things and journey to Larinesse with them."

"You don't have to do that, Creshal." Dal laid a hand on his arm. "You have family here."

"My family will understand, Hawk Lord." He bowed. "Shall I tell the King's men that you will be down shortly?"

"Yes. Very good. Brevis, prepare the Guard."

"Yes, Hawk Lord." Brevis followed Creshal out.

Dal closed the door and turned toward me. "The Lion Lord

caught Brevis in his camp. He's furious, but at least he was honorable enough to send Brevis back to us unharmed. The King is officially stripping me of my title and banishing me from court to appease the Lion King." Dal sighed deeply. "I'm afraid I've lost a friend today."

"A friend?" I gaped at Dal as I climbed out of bed. "You've just lost your position as warlord and your home."

Dal lifted his chin. "Those, I shall get back."

I shook my head and headed for my bedroom. In the dressing room, I slipped on my Valorian's robe and padded back to Dal barefoot.

"Get dressed and fetch the flight rig," Dal said when he saw me. He was already dressed in his war robe with his circlet over his shining braid. "It will be a long flight."

"I can handle it."

"Do not disobey me today, Ravyn."

I let out a long sigh, but went back to my closet and changed into a tunic, pants, a thick jacket, and boots. I tucked my robe into a satchel with the flight rig and as I did, I caught sight of my old trunk. I flipped it open, pulled out my sword and belt, and strapped them on. Although the satchel could have held everything in the room, I left the rest. Creshal would pack it. But, honestly, I didn't care about the fine clothes, only the Hawk Lord. I slid the satchel over my shoulder and went back to Dalsharan.

The Hawk Lord looked me over and nodded. We went down to the entry hall together, standing in the elevator in silence. I nearly took his hand, but he had a look about him. I knew that look; I had worn it myself once when I had walked down the main street of my hometown and straight into a recruiter's office. It was a hard look, one of stone, but stone that could crack if struck the

wrong way. The best I could do for him was to stand beside him and make sure he didn't break.

We stepped out and across the beautiful floor, the Hawk Lord's bare feet making no sound, while my boots echoed hollowly. Four men in royal uniforms waited for us.

One of the men stepped forward and bowed deeply; he held a box in his hands. "Hawk Lord, I am ashamed to speak these words to you, but also relieved that I may be the one to see you off with the respect you're due." He looked up at Dal with a broken expression. "We all know that you did nothing wrong, my lord. Your sacrifice will be remembered among the Royal Guard."

"Thank you." Dal removed his circlet. "I assume that box is for my circlet and amulet?"

I gasped. I hadn't considered that he'd lose the Hawk Soul too.

"Yes, Hawk Lord." The man opened the box.

Dalsharan set his circlet inside, then removed his amulet and lay it within the band of gold.

The soldier closed the lid reverently and bowed again. "We will guard this well until it is returned to you, Hawk Lord."

Dalsharan nodded and strode out of his home. I followed him outside, where the royal carriage waited for us. His personal guard stood there as well, all wearing war robes. When we got into the carriage, they got into one of Dal's to follow us. I strapped myself into the flight rig while we were taken through Kestria, to one of the landing docks. Dal was silent as we were escorted down to an empty platform, obviously cleared for this purpose.

The Hawk Lord didn't give his guards the option to stay, he had already warned them that this might happen, and they had

sworn to follow him wherever he went. So, they all shrugged out of their robes and shifted. I collected the war robes and stuffed them into my satchel. Once Dal and his men were settled in their Hawk bodies, the royal guards saluted us.

With a shriek, the Hawk Lord dove off the platform, and his guards followed instantly. Inside me, a bird screeched at me to follow. To spread our wings and fly. Instead, I stood at the edge and waited for my lover to take me. For a second, I thought Dal was going to leave me behind, but then I saw him surging up the side of the mountain toward me, wings spread wide. I spun around so we were facing the same direction and braced myself as Dal's talons snatched the loops of my rig. He lifted me up and out, higher and higher. The city of Kestria spread beneath us, its grandeur sparkling beneath the rising sun. Then the Hawk Lord turned toward the East and flew straight, his guard falling into formation around us.

I stared down at the saluting royal guards and wondered if we'd ever be back. If the people of the Hawk Kingdom would ever know the sacrifice their warlord had made for them.

## Chapter Thirty-Six

The city of Larinesse lay on the Eastern coast of Varalorre, a barrier of mists hanging over the sea several miles before it. Beyond that ward, across the Bellor, lay Alantri and the Farungal. But we were safe in the Hawk city, safe in the palace the King had awarded his Hawk Lord for bringing him a Valorian.

The palace spread along a length of imposing cliffs, overlooking the water, and the city sprawled at the base of those cliffs. Larinesse wasn't a mountain city like Kestria, it ranged over wild coastland and spread inward toward towering forests. A vacation spot for the wealthiest Sidhe. The trip there hadn't been nearly as long as the one we'd taken from Stalana, and I knew I could have flown it easily. But I also knew that Dal needed the responsibility of carrying me. He needed something to focus on as he left his home—a home he'd only just returned to and now, may never see again.

We flew over Larinesse on our way to the palace, but no one took notice. There were Hawks circling lazily in the sky, and below, the streets were full of all manner of fae. I would have been straining to catch of glimpse of the various Unsidhe if the circumstances had been different. As it was, I stayed still and silent while Dal carried me to our new home.

From above, the palace looked like a weapon shining in the sunlight. Its towering spires were capped in scaled sheets of polished metal and its pale stones matched the froth on the waves below. Dalsharan circled down before the front doors. He set me on my feet gently before landing, and his guard descended around us. The front courtyard was enclosed in a high wall that reined in a



garden of citrus and daffodils, spotted with so much yellow it seemed to be seeped in happiness. Yet every face around me was grim.

“My lord,” a woman hurried around the side of the palace, her eyes wide and her hair escaping its bun. She swiped her hands on her dirty apron. “Hawk Lord, we weren't notified that you'd be visiting. Please, forgive us for being unprepared.”

Dal shifted to Sidhe, and I handed him his robe. He shrugged into it before responding, “No apologies necessary; it was a last-minute decision. Just air out some rooms for us; we won't need them until tonight anyway. And prepare some breakfast.”

“Yes, Hawk Lord!”

“Ms...?”

“Oh! I'm Felina, my lord.” She curtsied.

“Felina, you may address me as Lord Dalsharan, and this is my consort, Lord Ravyn.”

Her dark eyes widened and blinked. “Yes, Lord Dalsharan.”

Dal looked around the courtyard and sighed. “We'll have to make do for a few days, men,” he said to his knights. “But we're soldiers, I think we'll be fine.” He managed a grin for them.

“Yes, Hawk Lord!” they shouted.

“Do not call me that anymore,” Dalsharan said softly, turned, and headed into the palace.

I gave the guards a shrug and hurried after Dal. They didn't follow us. They hadn't even shifted to Sidhe. Instead, two of them took up a position in front of the palace doors and the rest launched

into the air to start their patrol.

“Dal?” I caught up with him as he reached the end of the entry hall and entered a library.

No, wait, it was a study. Towering bookshelves were interspersed with dark walls hung with ancient art, all surrounding sitting areas and a massive desk. Dalsharan went past it all and then outside, onto a balcony, via a pair of doors made of glass. He headed straight to the railing where he crumpled over it as if he might fall to his knees without the support. The sound of waves rose from the beach below and the salty air blew back my hair as I stepped out to join him.

“Do you want to be alone?” I asked.

Dalsharan held a hand out to me in answer. I took it, and he yanked me to him, enfolding me in a tight embrace. I hugged him back just as tightly, but my chest constricted when I felt his body shiver. He buried his face in my neck, and hot moisture soaked into my skin. I swept a hand up to the back of Dal's neck and gripped him there. Just stood firm and offered him something to hold on to.

The Hawk Lord wept silently, his body twitching the whole time as if scorning the weakness. I held him and stroked his hair, trying to show him that it was all right. I understood. Even soldiers cry. *Especially* soldiers. People think that because you kill, you lose your ability to cry. That holding a sword somehow takes you beyond tears. That blood drowns sorrow and hardens a person. Instead, it makes you more vulnerable. Battling monsters does make you strong eventually, but when the battle is over and you go back to your tent, when you're in your cot with the dark pressing in around you, you cry. You cry or you drink or you fuck... or you die.

So, I held the Hawk Lord and let him cry. Later, we would drink and fuck, but we weren't going to die today. This wouldn't

kill us. He knew it as well as I did. He just needed a moment to remember that. A breath without anyone judging him. I was honored to be there for him; to be the man he let feel his tears, if not see them.

The waves crashed on the beach below, and I held the Hawk Lord as he finally broke.

## Chapter Thirty-Seven

Later that afternoon, lying amid fresh-smelling white cotton sheets, tangled together after making love slowly, then fucking savagely, Dal idly stroked a finger across my bicep. I was half sprawled across him, watching the sea birds out the open balcony doors. Two empty glasses stood amid several empty decanters on the floor, but we weren't drunk. Even though we'd been drinking fae liquor, which was far stronger than the human stuff, we'd fucked our way into sobriety long ago.

Tears, drinks, sex. Now came talk of death.

"I'm heading to Stalana tomorrow," Dalsharan said, right on cue.

I closed my eyes and tried not to groan. Then I sat up and looked down at him. "What's the plan?"

He sat up as well and stared at me in surprise. "You're not going to argue against it?"

"Before I've even heard it?" I huffed. "No. Tell me the plan and then I'll argue."

Dalsharan grinned and bent one leg to pull it in. "Kervel is still among the Coyote Army. I want to join him and make sure he isn't caught."

"Then what?"

"Then we look for traitors or signs of betrayal."

"And if there are none?"

He frowned. "Then we go back to Alantri and get answers out of Gremara."

"Are you fucking out of your mind?" I snarled. "She tried to rape you. You almost died because of her gross gunk."

"But we won't be sneaking in this time," he argued. "And we'll be prepared. Besides, that's only a last resort. I have a feeling that we're going to find something in the Coyote camp."

"Babe, just because you hate the Coyote Lord, it doesn't make him the bad guy," I said gently.

"Of course, the Coyote Lord isn't the traitor," Dal huffed. "A warlord would never betray his kingdom. But Brevis didn't find any proof in the Lion Army, so there must be something in the Coyote camp."

"Oh," I murmured. "Okay then."

"Okay then?" He asked me.

"How far away is the Coyote Army?"

"Maybe an hour's flight at most." He grinned.

"Are you going to let me fly this time?"

He made a rumbling snort. "I suppose."

"When do we leave?"

Dalsharan started laughing, then he settled into a smile. "I love you."

"I love you too, *Hawk Lord*," I said pointedly.

"I don't think I want to be the Hawk Lord anymore," he whispered.

“What?” I gaped at him.

“I love leading the Hawk Army, but...” He shook his head. “It’s a hard life, Ravyn, and I’ve lived it too long. I’ve been the Hawk Lord for twenty-six years.”

“That’s as long as I’ve been alive.”

“I know, and don’t think the thought of that coincidence hasn’t occurred to me.”

“What do you mean?”

“I was going to marry Jaxon,” he murmured, his eyes twitching. “Then I caught him with Brendallen and everything fell apart. The King offered me the position of warlord, and I knew I had to take it. That it was my fate. My destiny took me to your home the very year of your birth, Ravyn. You don’t find that strange?”

I let out a little amazed sound. “You know what? I don’t. I don’t think anything would surprise me now. I’m pretty damn sure I was born to be yours.”

Dalsharan grinned, grabbed my neck, and pulled me into a searing kiss. After lashing me with love and lust, he pulled back to say, “I’m pretty damn sure of it too.”

I kissed my way down his throat and we got back to the fucking portion of being a soldier.

## Chapter Thirty-Eight

The Hawk Lord's guards were not happy with Dal's plan. Mainly because the plan left them out completely. Sneaking into the Coyote camp would be difficult with two of us, but with his entire guard, it would be impossible. They argued with him—something I'd never seen them do. Finally, he told them that he wasn't the Hawk Lord anymore and they weren't honor-bound to protect him. That didn't go over well, and the arguments turned into shouting matches. But, at last, Dal won because his guards didn't have the power to stop him. We set off for the Coyote Army that very night.

And I flew! I was so excited. It was my first flight into battle, of a sort, and I would be going through the mists of Varalorre as well. I clutched my satchel—packed with supplies, clothes, and my sword—in one talon as I flew along the coastline of Larinesse, anticipating the mission ahead. We would find the traitor or evidence of one, clear Dal's name, and save our people from the Farungal. It would be fucking fantastic.

I made use of air currents most of the way, so the flight barely tired me despite its length. I'd been able to fly for up to two hours of practice time in Kestria so I wasn't worried anyway. Instead, I enjoyed the journey, admiring the sea as it sparkled beneath the moon and the twinkle of the sleepy towns we passed. We flew over the other Avian Kingdoms, then into the Canine ones, but we stayed near the water the entire trip. Even after we went through the mists, we clung to the coastline. The Coyote Army was camped along the sea.

Dal brought us down a good hike away from the camp. We

shifted to Sidhe, got dressed, and circled the camp to approach it from downwind. The Coyote sentries would be able to smell us coming if we weren't careful. Once we were in camp, the scents of the other soldiers, especially the human ones, would hide us but for now, we had to keep aware of the wind.

“They've got a patrol switching now,” Dalsharan said as he peered around the side of a boulder. “That makes it a fifteen-minute rotation. We'll have about five minutes while they're settling into position.”

I scanned the area for cover. I was best with heights, but the camp was near the beach, set back from the sporadic trees that grew near the water. There were, however, many large growths of brush.

“I see a path for us,” I said. “Follow me and keep low.”

Dal grunted in agreement, and I sped off toward the camp. The guards on duty were heading toward the water which meant that they were facing away from us. We moved from brush to brush, then slipped past the communal washrooms and that were always on the outskirts of an army. Once within the rows of tents, we straightened and strolled forward as if we belonged there. I swaggered like a human and Dal kept his head lowered beneath the hood of his cloak so no one would recognize him.

We had searched for Kervel, the guard Dal had sent to spy on the Coyotes, from the outskirts of the camp, but hadn't spotted him. So, that would be our first task. We casually roamed the human section, walking past tents that emitted snores, loud conversations, and low grunting. We avoided the communal fires where soldiers gathered to drink and steered around the mess hall too. Kervel might be skirting the edges of those areas, but he wouldn't risk getting closer.

I started to get nervous when we'd made it through the



entire human section of the Coyote camp without finding Kervel, but Dal whispered that the whole point was for Kervel to hide in plain sight. It shouldn't be easy to find him. And we needed to be on guard for anything suspicious as we searched for him. We needed to listen as we looked. So, we slowed down, ambling around and pausing to hang on each other as if we were drunk. We listened in on conversations, especially those that seemed furtive, but heard nothing more criminal than a planned prank.

“Let's go into the fae section,” I said to Dal, and he nodded.

In the fae section of the camp, we had to be more careful. We didn't stroll down the lanes but instead crept in the shadows between tents. The humans wouldn't notice a few extra soldiers, but the fae would smell us if we got too close. Coyotes were keen hunters with a strong sense of smell and hearing. Their sight was fair too, but as Hawks, our eyes were better. Of course, those senses improved vastly when we were in our beast forms, but we still got a slight improvement to our Sidhe senses. At least, the other Sidhe did. My forms hadn't harmonized yet, so I was still waiting on the improvement to my already improved sight. But Dal would be able to spot the Coyotes before they did us. That being said, if a Coyote in beast form took a deep sniff in our direction, we'd be discovered. It was like a deadly game of Hide and Seek.

“Hold on,” I whispered and grabbed Dal to pull him between two tents.

“What is it?”

“I thought I saw something that I couldn't possibly have seen.”

“What?!” Dal hissed.

“A Farungal.”

Dal went silent, his sharp stare instantly searching the camp

in the direction I stared. Then his whole body tensed, and I knew I hadn't been mistaken. There was a fucking Farungal sneaking through the Coyote camp.

“He's dead,” Dalsharan whispered and started to move.

I grabbed him and pulled him back. “Hold on. Let him get ahead a bit. We'll follow him and see where he goes.”

Dalsharan nodded and we waited. The Farungal crept along the wall of a tent, his hood hiding most of his ugly face, but the tip of his tail peeked out from the bottom of his cloak, its poisonous barb twitching. I caught the gleam of moonlight on his claws as we crept after him. The monster carefully made his way through the fae section, moving ever closer to the center of camp.

“You see where he's going?” I whispered.

“He's going after the Coyote Lord,” Dalsharan whispered back. “Fuck, I have to save that bastard.”

I chuckled. “Just remember that this isn't about him. We're saving the Coyote Soul. It had to have been the stone that asked me for help. It knew it was still in danger.”

Dalsharan grunted.

We kept going, keeping several feet back until we saw the Farungal pause, watching the Coyote Lord's personal guards as they prowled around his tent. They, like the Hawks, were massive versions of their animals, standing as tall as a man. Fangs glinted as they pulled back their lips and scented the air. They'd surely smell the monster.

But they didn't. They prowled on, circling the tent at a steady pace.

“He must be masking his scent somehow,” Dal growled.

“Fuck, there he goes!”

The Farungal waited for a space in the circling guards and then dove for the tent. He slid right beneath the bottom edge, squeezing his body through the slim slit made by the staked fabric. Dal darted after him and I followed. It didn't matter if the Coyotes sensed us at this point, once we were inside with the Farungal, we'd have all the proof we needed. We dove and crawled beneath the tent edge after the Farungal.

Before I could get to my feet, something hit me and everything went dark.

## Chapter Thirty-Nine

I woke up in chains. Silver-lined iron manacles bound my wrists and ankles, and my cheek was pressed against a thick tent post. The chain between my wrist manacles had been looped over a hook, and I dangled from it. I groaned and got to my feet, feeling woozy even as I alleviated the pressure on my wrists. Something was wrong with me. Finally, I realized that it was my magic. The hawk inside me was gone, pushed down by my proximity to iron. My fae strength had dwindled too, and I felt like a human again.

“Ravyn,” Dalsharan called to me, worry tinging his voice.

“Ah, there he is,” a familiar voice purred.

I blinked as my hair was grabbed roughly and my head yanked to the left. “What the fuck?” I growled.

“Hello, pretty bird,” the Coyote Lord drawled.

My stare shot around me as I tried to process. In addition to the Coyote Lord and Dal, Kervel was also in the tent, sitting on the ground, his wrists bound to his ankles and his whole body a bloody mess. Dal's knight was naked and his eyes had a haunted look that twisted my stomach. A few feet to my left, Dalsharan was chained to a tent pole like me except that he faced outward. His face and chest were bloody and his hair hung wild around his bare shoulders, the pale strands stained red in places. He had pants on, but the rest of his clothes lay in a pile nearby, along with my tunic, sword, and satchel. Yeah, I was bare-chested like Dal, but I didn't feel any injuries. Maybe the Coyote Lord wanted me conscious before he started beating on me.

Dal met my stare with regret and apology.

“Kervel was just investigating the possibility of a traitor here. And there is one! We chased a Farungal into your tent,” I said urgently to the Coyote Lord. “I swear, we were trying to save you. Please, you have to listen to me. He could still be here!”

The Coyote Lord laughed as Dal hung his head.

*Help me*, the voice of the soul stone came again—the Coyote Soul. *He has betrayed me.*

“You fucking traitorous bastard,” Dalsharan whispered as if in confirmation of the stone's accusation. “How could you do this?”

“Wait. What?” I stretched my neck to try to see Brendallen better.

*He has betrayed us all*, the voice of the Coyote Soul held profound sadness.

“It was a trap, pretty bird,” Brendallen purred and stroked a finger down my cheek. “The Farungal Queen wanted the Hawk Lord, and I wanted you. We came to an arrangement.”

“What?!” I roared.

The Coyote Lord chortled. “Oh, don't get too full of yourself. I didn't ally with the Farungal just to get my hands on you. Gremara has found a way to unite our races and end this war. A child of mixed blood will break the curse and end their suffering. It will be a bridge between our races, one that will lead to a truce.” The Coyote Lord went grim. “I'm loyal to my people, but I knew they wouldn't understand. I trusted only my officers and guards with my plans. Most of them, at least,” he grumbled. “I had to kill those who didn't agree with me. I couldn't let them warn our king.”

“You actually want Gremara to have a mutant baby?” I growled.

Someone hissed nearby. I swung my head and saw a Farungal man step around a partition. Fuck, Brendallen really was in cahoots with the monsters.

*Help me*, his stone said.

*Yeah, I'm a little tied up at the moment*, I growled back in my head.

*The Goddess and her Beasts are with you.*

“Easy, Habbern,” the Coyote Lord held up a hand toward the Farungal. “You know he's mine.”

“Fine, but then you must stop marring the Hawk Lord,” Habbern grumbled. “My Queen will not be pleased when I bring him to her injured.”

“Queen?” I looked at Dal.

He nodded grudgingly. “We don't like to give her the title, but yes, Gremara is their Queen.”

“So, the fucking Farungal Queen wants to have a mutant baby, and you think this is a fabulous idea?” I snarled at Brendallen. “You're totally batshit!”

The Coyote Lord stepped around the pole I hung from so I could see him without straining. His stare wandered over my face and then my body. “You will be so much fun to train.” He drew a fingertip along my jaw, and I jerked away from him. That didn't go over well; he grabbed my hair and held me still. “I'm going to show you what a real man can do to you.”

“Yeah? I don't think so. You look like a pussy to me,” I drawled.

The Coyote Lord growled—as in seriously growled like an animal—and bared his teeth. Kervel whimpered and rocked himself.

“Ravyn, shut up,” Dalsharan hissed.

“He's mine now, Dal.” Brendallen's eyes flashed gold as prowled away from me and went to my lover. His black hair was loose, hanging around his slim shoulders; he flung it back with a toss of his head before he declared, “I will handle his rebelliousness.” Then he backhanded Dalsharan, who shook off the blow and bared his teeth. “Oh, it's such a shame they took your amulet away, you might have had the power to fight me. Alas, you're just another fae Hawk now. Even less than that in these manacles.”

“Leave him be!” the Farungal snapped.

“Hawk Lord,” Kervel groaned. “I'm so sorry.”

“This is not your fault, Kervel,” Dal said gently.

“His dick is fine! That's the only part of him she needs,” Brendallen snapped at the Farungal. “Besides, I'm done with him.” He grinned at me as he undid his belt. “I've got a new toy to play with.”

“No!” Dalsharan roared and pulled at his restraints. “You want to hit someone, you hit me, Brendallen. You leave Ravyn alone!”

The Coyote Lord chuckled. “Oh, my, do you love him too, Dal? What a strange twist of fate. You'll get to watch me train two of the men you love.” He let his belt drop so that the end without the buckle smacked the floor. “You're lucky I'm an exhibitionist.”

The Coyote Lord drew back his hand and brought the belt down across my back. I grunted from the blow, but it wasn't so

bad.

“You fucking bastard!” Dal shouted, blood spraying from his lip. “I will kill you for this! I will fucking kill you!”

The belt hit again. Again and again. Then it stopped suddenly. My back was hot but it still wasn't awful. Was that it? Brendallen's impressive training skills? Whatever. I'd been right, he was a pussy. Then I felt something wet run up my spine.

“Get away from him!” Dalsharan was practically frothing. His wrists started to bleed where he pulled at his manacles.

I looked over my shoulder and saw Brendallen licking my back. He groaned, his hand splayed over my skin as he traced every red mark with his tongue. The Coyote Lord's eyes opened and shifted up to catch my gaze. They glowed like candlelight as he grinned and slid his hand possessively down my leg. I turned back toward the pole and grit my teeth as that hot tongue continued to lave me, like an animal licking its wounds. Brendallen's hand moved around my hips to grab my cock. He squeezed it through my pants.

“You can have me!” Dalsharan shouted.

Brendallen went still.

Kervel moaned.

“No!” I roared.

The Coyote Lord lifted his head, straightened, and pressed his body against my back as he contemplated us both. “Hmm, isn't this a quandary? Is the great Dalsharan Arandel truly offering to be my whore just to save his consort? The man who refuses to suck cock because he's the dom?” He winked at me. “Oh, yes, I know all about your lover. Poor baby, he won't suck you off, huh? I'll take good care of you.” He kissed my cheek and whispered in my



ear, “And then I'll fuck your ass so hard that you'll forget his name.”

Dal's jaw clenched and his eyes narrowed at Brendallen, but he snarled, “Let him go, and you can have me. I'll even suck your cock.”

“Dal, no,” I growled. “No, I can take it. I'll be all right. It's just sex.”

Brendallen laughed gleefully. “Oh, this is so sweet. Both of you offering yourselves to me. But the thing is, boys, it's out of my hands. I've already told Gremara she can have the Hawk Lord, even if he isn't the Hawk Lord anymore.”

“If you're so eager for this mutant kid to be born, why don't you fuck her?” I growled.

“I tried. Believe me, I tried. I sacrificed myself for the good of our races, but it wouldn't take. She consulted some fucking seer, and they said it had to be the Hawk Lord. Something about a Hawk starting the curse and so one has to end it.”

“You're lying,” I said. “Gremara told us it could have been any warlord.”

“Of course, she did, you little fool.” Brendallen rolled his eyes. “She couldn't very well tell you that I stole the Lion Lord's amulet and gave both it and mine to her so she could use the golden soul stones to lure the Hawk Lord across Alantri and capture him.”

“Holy fuck,” I whispered.

The Coyote Lord howled with laughter. “What's so funny is that the Lion Lord is enraged because you believed him to be in league with the Farungal, Dal. But you were right; someone is allied with the Farungal, it just isn't Hadrian.”

"I never thought one of you betrayed us," Dal said wearily. "I believed it was some human in your camp."

"Oh?" The Coyote Lord cocked his head at Dal. "Then you weren't right. Darn. Not so funny." He shifted his gaze back to me. "You, my pretty bird, nearly fucked up our plans when you freed Dal. But then you saved his life, and we need him to father the child. So, in a way, you helped to bring peace to our world. You should be proud of yourself."

Brendallen stroked the belt buckle down my back, then abruptly wrapped the leather around my throat and threaded the end through the buckle. As Dal shouted for him to stop, begged him to, the Coyote Lord slowly tightened the leather strap around my neck.

"Do you know that if you bring a man nearly to the point of dying, you can give him the most delicious orgasm?"

Kervel started whimpering, pressing his forehead to his knees.

"Oops, I think I broke your spy, Dal," the Coyote Lord purred. "Don't worry, I'll be more careful with your consort. Ex-consort, that is. He's mine now."

I choked, my neck muscles straining against the belt.

"Please, Bren!" Dal shouted.

The pressure eased. Brendallen left the belt dangling around my neck, leaving me gasping as he sauntered over to Dal. One elegant hand slid up Dal's chest, through the blood, spreading a crimson swath up his throat before he rubbed a finger over Dal's lips.

"Open your mouth," Brendallen growled.

Dal opened his mouth, and the Coyote Lord shoved his bloody fingers inside. He started pumping them across Dal's tongue, gagging him.

"Suck me," Brendallen demanded. "Show me how you'll suck my cock if I let your consort go."

Dal's eyes flashed fire, but he closed his lips around Brendallen's fingers and sucked. He moved his head to draw them deeper into his mouth. The Coyote Lord growled in arousal and stroked Dalsharan's cheek, then leaned forward to grind his crotch against Dal's leg.

"You beautiful brute," Brendallen purred. "If only I could take you up on your offer." He drew his hand away sharply. "Alas, I cannot."

"You've had your fun; I will take him now," the Farungal declared.

"Not yet!" the Coyote Lord hissed over his shoulder. "Go back in the bedroom and wait. They are my prisoners now, and I will say when you can have him!"

Habbern growled but stalked back around the partition.

"Don't hurt him, Bren," Dal begged gruffly. "He's not like Jaxon; he won't enjoy it. Please, if you need to beat someone, hit me."

"So gallant," Brendallen drawled. "And listen to you, using my nickname at last, trying to soften me. Do you think I care if he doesn't want it? I'm a master at this; Ravyn will be begging for my whip and my cock by the time I'm through with him. He will break," Brendallen leaned close to Dal to add, "just like Jaxon did."

Dal gaped at him.

Brendallen laughed. “Did you think Jax was always like that? That he went looking for me because he needed someone to hit him? No, Dal. I seduced him and then I turned him into my little monster. What's so delicious is that it made you into me.”

“No, it fucking didn't!” I growled. “You're a sick, rapist bastard who will betray his own people while Dal is a man of honor.”

Brendallen laughed again, scathingly. “You really are stuck on me being the bad guy. I didn't force Jaxon to cheat on Dalsharan. And I'm not betraying my people, I'm *fighting for peace!*” He shouted the last bit. “This war has lasted nearly forty years! Forty! Why am I a traitor for wanting to find an end to it? I've bled and killed for humans at the order of my king. I've left my home to live in this squalor to save us. But it never ends! I am getting us that end.”

“You're giving a fellow warlord to the enemy,” I snarled over my shoulder at him. “Spin it however you want, dickhead, but you are a traitor. Even your stone thinks so. It's been begging me to help it from the moment I woke up.”

The Coyote Lord's eyes widened in horror, but then he roared in fury and ripped the belt from my throat. He brought the strap of leather down on my back over and over as Dal pleaded for him to stop. I grunted and bore it. This time Brendallen wasn't trying to seduce, he was trying to hurt me. And he was succeeding. Blood started to drip down my spine. He abruptly stopped, but only to yank my pants down. I flinched as his hand drew up my flank and he pressed his erection between the cheeks of my ass.

“You have the perfect ass for fucking,” Brendallen purred in my ear. “Muscular but also plump.” He undulated his hips against me. “The perfect amount of give so I can take.” He bit my neck, and I thrashed. With a chuckle, he released me but only so he could smack my ass lightly with the belt. “Let's get you warmed

up, my pretty bird.”

Brendallen smacked me gently across my ass, then harder, and harder. When I started to twitch, he stopped. Something cool slid over my warmed skin. I looked over my shoulder to see a dick made of pink stone in Brendallen's hands; it looked a lot like the one he'd given Dal. He lifted it to his mouth and licked it, holding my gaze as he slid his lips around the phallus and sucked it like a cock. Then he pushed one of my ass cheeks aside and set that thing at my hole. I faced the pole and grit my teeth.

“Don't, Bren!” Dal begged.

Kervel started sobbing.

Brendallen shoved it in my ass hard—no working it in slowly. I grunted. The Coyote Lord leaned his chest against my bloody back and pumped the stone dildo deep. His tongue traced the curve of my ear and his cock rode my hip.

“If you don't rise for me, I'll take it out on Dal,” he whispered. “I'll strip him and fuck him as I cut his back to ribbons.”

I went still. Oh, fuck. I didn't for one second believe he was bluffing. But how did I get a hard-on for a man I hated while a man I loved watched?

“There you go, pretty bird.” He shoved his tongue in my ear. “Sing for me.” He moved the phallus in and out as he kissed my neck. “Isn't that nice? Good little whore, take that stone dick. We need to loosen you up for my cock. Take it nice and deep, and I'll give you a sweet reward when I'm done.”

“Ravyn, I'm so sorry,” Dal whispered.

“I'm okay, babe,” I said gruffly. “This guy can fuck me with his toys all he wants, it don't matter to me.”

“So tough,” the Coyote Lord purred and worked his pink cock faster. “Or could it be that you like it?”

His hand reached around and went for my cock. I angled away from him.

“Remember what I told you,” he whispered.

I went still. I imagined it was Dal touching me. His body pressed against mine. His cock in my ass.

“Good boy.” Brendallen grabbed my dick and started stroking it, greasing it up with fae nectar as he shoved that thing into me.

I let out a moan. My body trembled. Fuck, I was getting hard for him.

“Such a sweet slut!” Brendallen declared. “Would you like me to suck that big dick now?”

“Please, Bren, leave him alone,” Dal begged.

“He's hard, Dal. Your consort is loving this,” the Coyote Lord drawled.

“I'm sorry, Dal,” I groaned.

“It's okay, sweetheart. Take the pleasure. It's okay.”

“Fuck, that just makes it worse,” I groaned.

“Shall I give him your reward instead?” Brendallen asked me.

“No, leave him alone!” I shouted.

Brendallen removed his hand but left the dildo inside me. It started to slide out, and he slapped it back in. “Hold it in, Ravyn, or

I will whip your lover bloody again.”

I clenched my ass.

“That's why he's responding to you, you twisted fuck!” Dalsharan snarled. “You're forcing him to get hard by threatening me!”

The Coyote Lord clucked his tongue as he undid Dal's pants. He shoved them down, revealing Dal's limp shaft. Then he knelt and drew his hand over my lover's beautiful flesh.

“Leave him alone!” I snarled. “Fuck me. I'll suck you off. Whatever you want. Just leave him alone!”

“Shut the fuck up, Ravyn!” Dalsharan snarled.

The Coyote Lord shifted his stare toward me as he lowered his face to Dal's cock. He gave it a long lick from tip to base but it didn't so much as twitch. Brendallen transferred his gaze to Dal's dick and scowled at it as he took it in hand. He stroked it and shoved its limp flesh into his mouth, sucking at it. He licked Dal's balls and sucked those too, but nothing worked.

“Don't feel bad, Gremara wasn't able to get him hard without the wild-rot either,” I said scathingly.

The Coyote Lord surged to his feet with a roar.

“He told me he'd take it out on you if I didn't get hard, Dal,” I said in a rush. “So I imagined it was you.”

“I know, Ravyn,” Dal said gently. “It's okay.”

“Ugh, I'm bored with you two,” Brendallen huffed and pulled up Dal's pants. “Habbern, take him away!”

Habbern came out of hiding with a menacing grin and hurried over to Dal.

“No!” I thrashed, that thing falling out of me. “No, don't you give him to those monsters, Brendallen!”

The belt came down on my back, “You do not get to call me Brendallen. I am your master.”

“Fuck you!” I twisted and strained at my manacles as Habbern walked up to my snarling lover and removed a slim, metal rod from his pocket. “What are you doing to him? Stay away from him!”

Habbern tapped the side of Dal's head with the rod, and the Hawk Lord went limp, his body crumpling to hang from the hook his wrists were chained to.

“What have you done to him?!” I shouted.

“It just a sleep stick,” Brendallen purred as he stroked my hair. “It's what we used on you when you first crawled into my tent. It feels like being struck, but it doesn't do any lasting damage. Dalsharan will wake up in a few hours, hopefully with Gremara riding him.”

Kervel started crying again.

“Oh, give me that thing,” Brendallen said as he took the sleep stick from Habbern. He went over to Kervel and smacked him with it. Kervel passed out instantly. “That's better,” he sighed and handed the rod back to Habbern.

“No,” I moaned as the Farungal unhooked Dal, tossed him over his shoulder, and left. “Dal.”

“Now, where were we?”



## Chapter Forty

“Oh, you've dropped your dick,” the Coyote Lord said in dismay as he picked up the pink dildo. “That's okay. It's time for the real thing.”

Brendallen tossed the phallus aside. Then his hands went to his waistband. He untied his pants and removed a massive cock. I gaped at the thing. Why was it always the skinny guys who had the monster dicks? I never would have guessed what he was hiding in his pants.

“Having a change of heart now, pretty bird?” Brendallen drawled as he stepped out of his pants. “My cock has tamed many naughty boys.” He stepped up to me and grabbed my hair to pull my head back. “And you will submit to its domination too.”

Brendallen stepped behind me and spread my ass. Fear lanced through me. Not for myself—I could give a shit if this guy fucked me—but for Dal. He was getting further and further away from me every second. I tried to call on my magic even though I didn't know anything beyond shifting. Transforming into a Hawk would be enough. Surely, it would get me free of these manacles at least. The Farungal would have sailed to Stalana, which meant that he had to get Dal on his boat, then sail across the Bellor before taking him to Gremara. I'd still have time to stop him if I could just get free of this asshole.

*Please, I prayed again, Goddess help me. Help me to stop this bastard. Help me to save the man I love. I don't know how I can get free of this, but I know that you can help me. I have faith in you.*

The head of that monster dick pressed against my asshole and began to work itself in. I braced myself for the roughest ride of my life. I just had to survive this night. Maybe if... Hold on. Was that a tingle? His tip stretched me but couldn't breach.

Brendallen growled and pulled out. "One moment, pretty bird. I just need a little more nectar. You know how it is."

There it was again. A trembling inside me. A flutter of wings. I pictured my hawk in my head and reached for it. The manacles started to burn. I ignored the pain and thought of the sky. The wind rushing past me. Falling as I spun with Dalsharan. I let my love for him fill me along with the new faith I had in our goddess. She wouldn't fail us. She wouldn't let him be delivered into the hands of monsters.

"What the fuck?!" Brendallen shouted.

My bonds slipped over feathers and broke from the strain of massive talons. I shrieked, spun about, and struck out with my beak. I speared the Coyote Lord right in the throat. He gurgled, his hands going to his neck as blood gushed, and his eyes widening.

"I can do deep throat too," I growled at him as he fell. "Die, you fucking bastard!"

As if they'd been listening, the Coyote Lord's guards came streaming into the room in their beast forms. They snarled when they saw me, baring sharp canines. I looked down into Brendallen's glazing eyes and screeched. He was as good as dead and I needed to get to my lover.

*Help me!* Brendallen's soul stone screamed.

I plucked the Coyote Soul Stone out of the bloody mess of Brendallen's neck. It dangled from my beak as Brendallen reached for it helplessly. His guards leapt for me. I grabbed Kervel with one talon and shot upward, my beak tearing through the fabric of

the tent before I launched into the sky. Below me, Coyotes howled and gave chase, tracking me from the ground. But I flew faster than they could run and soon left them behind.

Kervel was dead weight in my claws, but he wasn't dead, and I wasn't about to leave him behind. Ahead of me lay the Bellor Sea and upon it, I could just make out a bobbing light. I wanted to screech a battle cry, but the Coyote Soul dangled from my beak and the man inside my beast brain warned me that stealth would be better. So, I flew higher into the darkness and then soared straight over the sea.

Finally, I was above them—a group of four Farungal. They were in a small boat, something you might use for fishing. It crested the waves and pushed out toward open water. A little light was all they risked, just enough to illuminate their compass. Just enough to lead them home and lead me to my lover.

I saw Dal chained and unconscious on the deck. Three Farungal stood around him, each with a sleep stick ready in case he should awake, while the fourth steered the vessel. My sharp eyes noted Dal's pallor, but his wounds were already healed. He was fine and would remain so; I would ensure it. I had never carried anything heavier than my satchel and there I was about to carry two Sidhe warriors. But I would do it if I had to drag them through the water the entire way.

*Just please, Goddess, don't let me hurt Dal with my claws, I prayed.*

I dove. They didn't see me until it was too late. I was only a shadow falling through the clouds. I hit the deck, misjudging the distance, and Kervel knocked into the planks with a heavy thud. The boat rocked madly, the Coyote Soul jerked about on its chain, and the Farungal screamed as they were thrown across the boat. I had mere seconds between the slam of hitting the deck and pushing off it to grab Dalsharan, but I managed to wrap my claws around

his waist. I clutched the Hawk Lord tightly and soared high into the night sky as the Farungal roared in fury.

I glared down at them. I couldn't kill those fuckers now, but I would. Someday, they would die beneath my claws, them and their bitch queen. I swore it to the Goddess. But for now, I would take the gifts my goddess had given me and fly the Hawk Lord home.

*Thank you, Great Mother, I prayed. Thank you for saving the man I love.*

The Coyote Soul Stone flashed once, as if reminding me that Dal wasn't the only one I'd saved.

## Chapter Forty-One

The sun was just rising as I made it back to the palace by the sea. As I came in for a landing, the Hawk Lord's guards flocked to the courtyard. Neither Dal nor Kervel had stirred throughout the entire flight. An hour of carrying them through the night, following the coast back to Larinesse, without a single sound from them. But I knew they were okay; I knew they would wake up. The Goddess wouldn't have saved us just to let them die now. Maybe the god of the Farungal would, but not my goddess.

I hovered over the ground, carefully depositing my cargo even though my wings ached and my chest fluttered rapidly with exhaustion. When they were down, I sprang to the side and fell, curling my wings around myself to cushion me. The Coyote Soul clattered to the ground. I heard men shouting and felt hands on my feathers. I had just enough strength left to shift and when I did, the change revived me. My bird hadn't harmonized with me yet so I didn't share his exhaustion. Thank you, Goddess.

“Dal!” I shouted as I pushed away the men trying to help me. “Is he okay?”

“He's fine, Valorian,” one of the guards said. “So is Kervel. Be at ease.”

They had already lifted Dalsharan and were taking him inside with Kervel. I scooped up the Coyote Soul by its chain and followed, staying right beside Dal as we went through the corridors and into the master bedroom. They laid him carefully on the bed as I set the Coyote Soul down on the bedside table. Then I climbed up beside the Hawk Lord. I heard the palace staff shouting to each

other and the sound of their pounding feet echoed down the hall.

“Kervel will need... he's... the Coyote Lord tortured him,” I stumbled over the words. “Someone needs to be with him when he wakes.”

The guards exchanged grim looks and two of them left the room.

Farin, one of the remaining guards said, “We will look after him, my lord. Rest easy.”

He laid a robe over my shoulders. It wasn't mine. My robe was still in the satchel in Brendallen's tent along with my sword, but I didn't give a shit. I'd brought back what mattered.

“Thank you.” I shrugged into the robe, then brushed the hair back from Dalsharan's face. “Can someone get me a wet cloth? And can we get these manacles off him?”

“What happened?” Farin asked as another guard left.

“It was the fucking Coyote Lord!” I hissed. “He's in league with the Farungal. He sold us out. He gave Dal to the Farungal.”

“What?” Farin growled. “A warlord turned traitor?” His green eyes flashed as he turned to one of the other guards. “Send word to His Majesty.”

The man ran off just as another appeared with a roll of fabric in his hand. The guard unrolled the fabric on the bed and revealed an elite set of lock picking tools. He chose a couple and started on Dal's manacles.

One of the palace staff came in with towels and a bowl of water. “My lord, may I clean the Hawk Lord for you?” the woman asked.

“No. No, thank you. I'll do it.” I held out my hand for the

bowl, and she handed it over.

She laid the towels beside me, curtsied, and left with a worried look at Dalsharan. The manacles opened and were removed—both the tools and the chains taken out of the room immediately. Farin stepped closer, his gaze going from the Hawk Lord to the Coyote Soul Stone.

“I took it from Brendallen,” I admitted. “The Coyote Soul asked me to save it, so I took it.”

The guards exchanged shocked looks but said nothing.

I dipped a cloth in the water, wrung it out, and began to gently clean Dal's face before I went on, “That fucker admitted to stealing the Lion Lord's amulet and giving it to the Farungal Queen along with his own. He said he's trying to end the war, that if Gremara has a child with Dalsharan, it will bring peace.”

Farin cursed and shook his head. “That insane bastard!”

“I think I killed him,” I whispered.

Farin went still. “You think?”

“I stabbed him in the throat with my beak, but then his men came in. I only had time to grab the Coyote Soul and Kervel before I flew away. I'm not sure if Brendallen died. I was too focused on getting to Dal before the Farungal got away.”

“A neck wound is tricky,” Farin murmured thoughtfully. “If they got him help in time, he could heal.”

“Fuck,” I hissed. “I should have bitten his fucking head off!”

“You did well, Valorian.” Farin laid a hand on my shoulder. “Better than any of us could have done. You brought our lord and brother home safely. Thank you.”

“Not me, the Goddess.” I looked up at him. “I was chained with iron and helpless. But then I prayed to her. She set my hawk free. She saved us.”

Farin dropped to his knees beside the bed, a reverent look overtaking his face. “Dear Mother,” he whispered, “thank you. Thank you for looking after our lord.”

It sounded so similar to the prayer I'd made that I smiled softly. “She loves him as much as we do I think.”

“And you, Valorian. The Mother obviously treasures you.” Farin got to his feet and bowed to me. “I bless the day she brought you to us.”

I cleared my throat uncomfortably and went back to cleaning Dal. “Uh, thanks. But really, it was all her.”

“It was not *all* her, but I understand. I will speak no more on it.”

“Ravyn,” Dalsharan moaned. Then he sat up abruptly and screamed it, “Ravyn!”

The bowl of water got knocked aside, splashing me. I kicked it away and grabbed Dalsharan's hands. “I'm here! I'm right here, Dal.”

Dal blinked and gaped at me. “Ravyn?” he whispered in shock. Then in a stronger voice, “Ravyn!” He grabbed me by the shoulders and yanked me against his chest, his hands sliding over my back. “Sweetheart, oh, goddess, I thought you were lost to me.”

“Right back at ya, babe,” I growled.

Dalsharan jerked back suddenly and looked around. “We're in Larinesse? How? The last thing I remember is that Farungal hitting me with a sleep stick.”



“The Valorian saved you, my lord,” Farin said with a smug look at me. “He carried you and Kervel back to us. A young bird, barely a week into flight, and he bore two grown fae warriors for miles with the Coyote Soul clutched in his beak the entire time.”

“And I dropped on my ass as soon as I got here,” I muttered.

Dalsharan looked from Farin to me. “But how did you get away from Brendallen?”

“She answered my prayer,” I said and sniffed. Fuck, was I crying?

Dalsharan lifted a hand and gently wiped my tears away. “The Goddess helped you?”

“She freed my hawk. I stabbed that motherfucker in the neck, snatched his stone, grabbed Kervel, and went after you. Those Farungal bastards didn't even see me coming.”

Dal let out a shocked laugh, just a puff of air really, but then it turned into a chuckle, and then full-blown laughter. He clasped me to him again, and we held each other as we laughed.

“We're glad you're home safe, my lord,” Farin said gravely. “We're sending word to the king.”

“No,” Dal stopped laughing to say. “Don't. I need to speak to the King in person. Prepare to leave. We're going back to Kestria. And someone get a proper container for the Coyote Soul; it will need to be returned to its king.”

“Yes, Hawk Lord!” Farin saluted and left the room with the other guards.

As soon as they were gone, Dalsharan turned to me, yanked me to him, and rolled me onto the bed. He stroked the line of my

jaw before kissing me tenderly. The veil of his shining hair fell around us. I reached up and grabbed a handful, using it to pull him closer. Dal growled into our kiss and ground his body over mine.

“Whoa now, Hawk Lord,” I murmured against his mouth. “We’ve just had a long night. Don’t get me too excited.”

“I’m so sorry,” he whispered.

“For what?” I frowned.

“For what he did to you,” Dal whispered.

“Babe, you offered to suck his cock for me.” I grinned. “Don’t apologize. We’re good.”

“Don’t make a joke of it, Ravyn,” Dal said sternly. “He hurt you and it’s my fault.”

“No, it’s not. And he didn’t hurt me. That was nothing. I can take a tiny dildo up the ass. Please, my ass is a champion.”

“Ravyn.” He shook his head in amazed amusement.

“He fucked up Kervel, though,” I said with a snarl. “That son of a bitch needs to pay for that.”

“He will,” Dal vowed.

“I stabbed him in the throat with my beak, but I don’t know if he’s dead.”

“He probably survived.” Dal sighed and rolled off me. “Brendallen’s too fucking mean to die that easily.”

“Will they hunt him? Will they let *us* hunt him?” I sat up and took his hand.

“I hope so, but I don’t know. He’s a warlord, and we only

have our word as proof.”

“But you're a warlord too. Isn't your word good enough?”

“I'm a disgraced warlord,” he reminded me.

“What about me? I'm the Valorian.”

“And my consort,” he said softly.

I cursed.

“We will tell our king, and he will believe us.” Dal squeezed my hand. “Whether he can sway the other royals is the question. The Coyote King, in particular, will be hard to convince.”

“The Coyote King has a birthmark on his left ball sack,” a voice said hollowly from the doorway. “It's shaped like a star.”

Dal and I both spun to face Kervel, who stood in a war robe, surrounded by his fellow guards.

Kervel stepped into the room. “And he likes the Coyote Lord to use his teeth when he sucks his cock.”

“What the fuck, Kervel?” I gaped at him.

“The Coyote Lord told me things while he... tortured me,” Kervel said stiffly. “Taunted me with his intimacy with the Coyote King. He said the King would never give him up because he's got him trained.”

“I think the Coyote King might be interested in hearing that,” Dalsharan said and slowly smiled.

“Welcome back, Kervel,” I said with a smirk. “You're one tough bastard. I should have given you more credit.”

“No, my lord.” Kervel bowed deeply to me. “You are the one who deserves more credit. Thank you for taking me with you. You could have left me there. I would have understood if you had. But you took me with you. You saved my life. I will never forget that.”

“I don't leave soldiers behind,” I said sternly. “Not if I can help it.”

Kervel bowed again.

Dalsharan got out of bed and looked from me to his men. “Stretch your wings, everyone, it's time to go home.”

## Chapter Forty-Two

Removing the Coyote Lord from power was not as easily done as removing Dalsharan had been. But Dal had been restored just as quickly as he'd been demoted and now sat beside his king wearing the Hawk Soul Stone. I sat on his right, given a place at the table with the Kings and Queens of Varalorre because of my status as Valorian. Behind us stood Dal's personal guard, Kervel front and center to remind the Coyote Lord of what we knew.

The Hawk King, Dal, and I had a private meeting with the Coyote King before the other royals had arrived. We returned the Coyote Soul and much was discussed, but even more was alluded to. Dalsharan diplomatically mentioned a star-shaped bit of evidence we could present to confirm that the Coyote Lord had not only betrayed his people but also his king's confidence. King Wanerel had stared at the box with the Coyote Soul for a drawn-out moment and then, finally, nodded his acceptance.

The Coyote King now sat across the table from us with the other Canine Kings. The Felines had taken the far end of the table. We were gathered in the Coyote Castle. Since it was the Coyote King's warlord whose honor was in question, the Royals had agreed to meet there. Plus, his kingdom was more centrally located, making travel easier on the other Royals.

Our meeting went on for hours, during which I cast many weary looks at Dalsharan. Even with my new fae immortality, I was fucking tired. I'd been tortured, had flown two men several miles, then flew to Kestria, and, finally, to the Coyote Kingdom, all within the space of a day and with very little rest between events. I wanted to be in the meeting and hear how Brendallen

would be arrested and brought to justice, but I also wanted to sleep. My head bobbed and my lids threatened to close. Dal pinched my thigh. I inhaled sharply and straightened.

“King Wanerel, are you certain you are satisfied with the evidence against your warlord?” Queen Vervain of the Lions asked. “We have been presented only with the word of the Hawk Lord, the Valorian, and a Hawk knight, and as much as all three are above reproach, so is the Coyote Lord. I know that if my warlord were accused of such betrayal, I would demand physical evidence as well. At the very least, I'd want my warlord present so he could be given the chance to face his accusers and defend himself.”

“I have all the evidence I need,” King Wanerel of the Coyotes opened the box before him, revealing the Coyote Soul Stone. “The Coyote Soul has spoken and denounced its lord. I have no doubt that Brendallen has betrayed us.”

As the Royals gasped and murmured over the shock of a soul stone tattling on its warlord, I gaped at the amulet and then at Dal. He shook his head at me, just as surprised. Shit, we'd tortured the Coyote King with Brendallen's gossip for no reason. The Coyote Soul had verified everything. I gave the Coyote Lord an apologetic look.

The King either didn't see my apology or didn't care. He went on steadily, “It pains me to say this, but Lord Brendallen has been acting out of sorts for many years. I believe the war has taken its toll on his mind. Whatever the case, he will be allowed to make a statement. I sent for him hours ago; he should be arriving any moment now.”

My hands clenched into fists. Sure, everyone deserved the chance to defend themselves, but I wasn't looking forward to listening to whatever lies Brendallen would spout to save his ass. He was a smooth talker, and I was worried he might wriggle his

way out of this. Dal's hand slipped over my fist and squeezed. I flattened my hand to weave our fingers together. He looked pointedly at the Coyote Soul, and I smiled. No matter what Brendallen said, he wouldn't talk his way out of this; the Coyote Soul's testimony outweighed his.

“Perhaps we should conclude this meeting until the Coyote Lord arrives?” King Zanerelle of the Eagles said. “There's no sense in discussing his punishment before he—”

A knocking came at the door, interrupting the Eagle King, who sent a venomous look at the Coyote knight who stepped into the room.

“King Wanerel, the guards have returned,” the knight said as he cast a wary look around the table.

“Yes?” the Coyote King growled. “And where is Brendallen Caisse?”

“He fled, Sire,” the knight reported tonelessly.

Dalsharan cursed as the Royals of Varalorre stiffened. These were people who weren't used to being thwarted.

The Coyote King looked as if he had misunderstood. “Repeat that.”

“The Coyote Lord was not in camp when our soldiers arrived to apprehend him, Your Majesty,” the man stammered. “Evidence was found of some hasty packing.” He cleared his throat. “The warlord's personal guard and the higher ranking officers of his army left with him.”

The Coyote King growled, low and with great menace.

“You're sure he's alive?” I asked.

“There was a lot of blood in his tent but no body, my lord,”

the man said.

“A corpse cannot pack,” King Zanerelle drawled. “Brendallen is a warlord, he's not that easily killed, Valorian.”

“A beak to the throat hardly seems easy,” I muttered.

King Zanerelle gave me a slow smile. “Believe me, there are far more difficult ways to die.”

I cleared my throat and looked away.

“Has the Coyote Army been secured?” King Wanerel asked.

“Yes, Sire. Several guards stayed behind to watch over the army until a new warlord is sent to lead it.”

“Very good. Dismissed.” The Coyote King waved a hand at the soldier.

The man bowed and left eagerly. As soon as he was gone, the Royals began arguing. It wasn't merely a warlord missing, it was his elite officers and guard. All of them had information about Varalorre, the Fae, and the Fae Armies that could prove useful to the Farungal. That was scary, and people with power get angry when they're scared.

Everyone talked over each other, raising their voices like a bunch of children. I slid down into my seat and propped my head in my hand. All of that rushing, all of that frantic flying we'd done to get to that meeting had been for naught. Despite what he'd bragged to Kervel, Brendallen had been wise enough not to take his chances with his king. He had used what little time he had to escape, and he was probably ensconced within Gremara's fortress by now. The soldier in me snarled that we'd wasted time going to Varalorre to convince the Royals of his betrayal when we should have just gone back to the Coyote camp and made sure Brendallen



was dead.

But then Dalsharan wouldn't have been reinstated as Hawk Lord.

I glanced at the pendant hanging in the V of Dal's neckline. It caught the light and glowed. Had it missed the Hawk Lord while it was tucked safely in a box? Did it speak to him now? What would it say to me if it could? Probably to get off my ass and do something instead of pouting.

I stood up and left the table.

The room went silent as I strode toward the door.

"Valorian, where are you going?" King Avamael called after me.

I stopped and turned back to face my King. The Hawk Lord had twisted in his seat to watch me with a bemused expression.

"I'm going to Alantri," I said. "That son of a bitch betrayed us, and the monster Queen he serves has a spell that has put a target on my lord's back. I'm not sitting here a second longer. You may argue all you want, but I'm going to kill the Coyote Lord, and then I'm going to kill Gremara."

"No, you are not," the Hawk Lord said crisply as he stood. "*We* are going to kill them together." He turned to his king. "By your leave, Your Majesty?"

"You have my blessing and my army," King Avamael said. "Finish this and bring that traitor to justice."

"Yes, Sire!" The Hawk Lord bowed before he strode over to me, his guards falling into line behind him.

"If any of you care to help the Hawk Lord, you know where to find his army," King Avamael said as he stood too. He

offered his hand to his queen, helped her up, and escorted her past Dal, leading the way out of the room.

I grinned at Dalsharan as we fell into step behind our monarchs.

## Chapter Forty-Three

Our actions prompted the other royals to send their armies to assist us. Not just the Sidhe armies either. The Unsidhe came and set up their tents on the outskirts of the other camps, considerably putting some distance between their camp and the humans. The Hawk camp grew to the size of a prosperous city. It stretched for miles down to the coast to either side. And in the center of that madness, eleven Sidhe warlords and twelve Unsidhe commanders met with their generals to discuss one of the largest war maneuvers of their lives.

The Farungal always came to us. They crossed the Bellor Sea at night and dug into whatever toehold they could find before we could spot them. Then we'd fight. That's how it's always been, with our side ever on the defensive. Now, we talked about offense. We gathered ships as well as weapons and debated where would be best to invade Alantri—where should we land before pushing inland, toward the Queen. The number of ships alone that we'd need was staggering.

It took two weeks to get everyone prepared and our battle plans settled. Two weeks of gathering supplies, hiring ships, training the various fae to fight together, and getting the humans accustomed to the Unsidhe. That may sound like a long time but it's really not. Especially not when it comes to war. A fight goes fast and can be over in an hour, but wars drag on, and planning its strategies can be a lengthy process. Two weeks is a shockingly small amount of time to prepare a collection of armies for what we were about to do. And yet, I was tired of it. So fucking over it. As a corporal, I'd never been a party to battle planning. I just went where they told me to go and tried not to die. But this... this was

fucking brutal. I understood why Dal wanted out.

“Could I speak with you?” Hadrian, the Lion Lord, asked Dalsharan as our last meeting—the very last, thank the Goddess—concluded. We'd be sailing for Alantri the next morning.

“Of course,” Dal said stiffly.

Things had been strained between them, but they were both professional soldiers and they had put aside their issues to work together. Now, however, Hadrian looked uncomfortable. I hung back as we left the neutral tent we'd been using for meetings. Dal headed for his tent just a few feet away. All the warlords camped with their armies, but since we were the army who had taken charge of the invasion, the meeting tent had been erected in our camp.

“Come in.” Dal waved the Lion Lord inside.

I hesitated near the guards on door duty, wondering if I should go for a walk and leave the warlords to it.

“Valorian, please join us,” the Lion Lord said as he held the tent flap open.

“Oh. Okay.”

Farin, one of the two knights on duty, grinned at me as I passed him. I punched his shoulder, but that only made him chuckle.

Dal was pouring us drinks when I stepped inside. He set them down on his council table and waved Hadrian toward a seat. The Lion Lord sat heavily and sighed, his hand found his glass but didn't lift it.

“I'm retiring,” Hadrian said softly.

“What?” Dalsharan growled as I sat down beside him.

“Why?”

“I shouldn't have reported you.” Hadrian lifted his gaze to Dal. “You were right to investigate. I should have realized that and opened my camp to you. I should have helped you. Instead, I set your investigation back and almost cost you your post. I'm sorry, Dal.”

“I understand, Hadrian,” Dal said gently. “It's okay. I forgive you. You don't have to retire.”

“I'm getting too mired in the fight.” Hadrian shook his head. “I've lost track of who I am. Ten years ago, I would have asked myself why you found it necessary to send a man into my camp. I wouldn't have reported you to your king like a petulant child. I don't like this new me, Dal. It's time to let a younger man take over.”

Dalsharan sighed. “To tell you the truth, I feel the same way.”

“What?” Hadrian asked in surprise.

“I think I'm ready to go home, Hadrian,” Dalsharan said softly, with yearning. “I had a taste of it, and I realized how much I missed it. I've done my service.” He looked at me. “It's time for my reward.”

I grinned. “Where you go, I go.”

Dalsharan smiled broadly. “That's right. Even if I have to tie you up and carry you off.”

“Well, then,” Hadrian said in a brighter tone as he lifted his glass, “to retirement and getting our rewards.”

“To living through this last battle so we might claim them,” Dalsharan added, and we clicked glasses.

"I hope that bastard Brendallen is being tortured by the Farungal," Hadrian muttered.

"He's probably being fucked even as we speak." I grinned. "He said he had tried to impregnate the bitch himself. That means she's had a taste of Coyote cock."

"I hope she uses the wild-rot on him," Dalsharan snarled and took a long swig.

"To Brendallen getting his just desserts." I lifted my glass. "May they be rotten."

The warlords clicked their glasses to mine with shit-eating grins.

Dal and Hadrian ended up staying up late, talking and rebuilding their friendship, but I went to bed. I wanted to be fresh for the fight. The Hawk Lord, however, had other plans. Warm hands woke me later that night; a phantom shape loomed in the pitch dark. My eyes quickly adjusted to find my Hawk Lord lying beside me, his body naked and aroused. His mouth moved over my throat and his grip tightened with alcohol-enhanced aggression.

"Been drinking with your buddy, eh?" I drawled in my sleep-roughened voice. "And now you wanna bang."

Dal growled, annoyed at my words. But we were in camp now, and I'd talk like a soldier for as long as I could. Especially since it sounded as if it would be a far shorter stretch than I'd expected.

A large hand went to my cock, and Dal's annoyed growl turned into one of passion when he found me solid. He purred against my throat, stroking me as he ground himself against my hip. I reached for him, but the Hawk Lord shoved me back and rolled me, pushing me onto my belly. Strong teeth nipped at my throat as his knees spread my thighs. Dal rose onto his forearms

and I pushed back with him, keeping contact with his muscular chest. My ass found his cock and caught it, hooking it beneath the curve of my cheeks. With angling hips, I tried to work it toward my hole, and Dal's groan vibrated through his chest, into my back.

“Put your head down,” Dalsharan murmured, his voice even sexier in the dark.

I pressed my face to the mattress and braced myself. Whenever he wanted my head down, it was going to be a wild ride. His broad hands roamed possessively over my ass, then spread me. He spat on me, then stretched my ass so it dripped into my hole. I groaned as his fingertips trailed down my crease, rubbing his spit into me. I twitched as he moved to my taint and tickled me there.

“Stay still!” the Hawk Lord snapped. His palm landed on my ass hard.

I made a surprised yelp, and he chuckled. Great, he really was drunk. They must have gotten into his special stash of the good stuff.

Dal's legs pressed against mine as he moved into position and the oiled-up head of his cock nudged its way into my wet hole. I sighed as it breached that tight ring of muscles and moaned as that slick rod delved deeper and deeper, slowly working me open. Eager, I pushed myself back on him and got another slap for my efforts.

“I said, be still!” Dalsharan slammed all the way in, and I cried out in pleasure. He started a savage thrusting, his primal grunts peppering the air along with the slap of his pelvis against my ass. “That's it. Take your lord's cock, Consort. Take all of it in that shaved, pretty hole.”

“Oh, fuck, yeah,” I growled. “Give it to me! Slam that dick in my ass, Hawk Lord.”

Dalsharan snarled and grabbed me suddenly. One arm went around my chest while the other went under and around my thigh. He straightened, lifting me up and back, and my body flopped in his arms. Even drunk, he was masterful, maneuvering me exactly how he wanted. He had me propped before him, my head hanging back over his shoulder, all of my weight on one knee since he had the other lifted to the side, spreading me wide for his fucking. He pumped up into me with wild growls and grunts, my cock banging against my thigh with every thrust. I reached back to grab him around his neck and the hand he had around my chest palmed my pec.

“You are not to leave my side tomorrow,” Dal growled in my ear. “Do you understand me, Corporal?”

“Yes, Hawk Lord,” I panted.

“Not for one fucking second.” He bit my neck and sucked hard. My skin stung when he released it. “You will not fly off without me. You will watch my back; that is your job. Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes, Hawk Lord.”

“You remember the calls?” he softened his tone and kissed my throat, right over his bite.

“Yeah, babe.” I turned my head to kiss him. “I know the calls. Don't worry about me.”

Dal growled and tossed me back on the bed. “Suck your lord's cock, Consort.”

I crawled back to him and took his cock in my mouth with a moan. My lips stretched around his girth, and I tightened them as much as I could. The Hawk Lord's hands went to my head and squeezed. I grabbed the mattress; I knew what was coming next, and it made me flush with excitement. Sure enough, Dal started



thrusting over my tongue, pumping deep enough to choke me as his hands held me still. I sucked even as I relaxed my throat, taking as much of him as I could.

“That's it, naughty bird, choke on that dick,” he growled. “Gag for me.”

My lips began to ache deliciously and spit dripped over my chin. Dal's fingers went to my nose and pinched it closed. I widened my eyes up at him as he continued to pump into me. The wet slaps echoing in my ears. I whimpered. I couldn't breathe. I tried to pull away. He held me there and then, at last, let go. I gasped for breath even as I went back to sucking him, my tongue twirling around that plump head.

“Your life is mine, Ravyn,” Dalsharan declared. “Mine. Don't ever forget that. I will protect you this time. You will not be saving me.”

Oh, so that's what this was about. I had saved him and it was bothering him. The shit always comes out when they get drunk.

I jerked back, off his cock, and sat up. “So, I can't save you, huh? You're the big, strong Hawk Lord who does the saving and I'm you're little fuck boy? I'm the one who should need to be saved?”

“No,” he growled. “That's not it and you know it.”

“Then what?” I licked my swollen lips. “You wanna hold my life in your hands? You wanna choke me with your thick cock and then give me back my breath when you feel like it? Why else do that unless you're pissed about me saving you?”

“Because it's fucking sexy,” Dal drawled as he grabbed my head and pulled me into a searing kiss. He leaned away to lick my lips and say, “Because I love the way your eyes roll up and fill

with panic, then with faith. You know that I won't hurt you. That trust makes me ache. It makes me want to thrust deep down your throat and shove more of myself into you. It makes me want to hold you down and bite your throat as I fuck your tight ass, knowing that it's mine. That your lips and cock and sacs are mine. That your soul-stealing stare is mine and your greedy hands and your eager tongue. They're all mine. Now, get your ass in the air so I can shove my huge cock in it!"

"Yes, Hawk Lord!" I was grinning ear-to-ear when I laid my face against the mattress and presented my ass. And as he slammed that beautiful cock into me and laid a hand on the back of my head to shove my face down harder, I kept smiling. I kept smiling until I was shouting his name.

## Chapter Forty-Four

I was standing on the prow of a ship, staring at the distant shores of Alantri, dressed in nothing but my new war robe. Morning mist shrouded the beach. We had decided to sail around the tip of the continent to bring us closer to Gremara's fortress. There was a risk that we'd be spotted this way, but the fortress would be less than an hour's march from that shore so the risk was deemed worth it. Beside me stood the Hawk Lord and beside him stood the Lynx Lord—a breathtakingly beautiful man with hair as dark as mine and eyes that shifted from blue to green. I might have been attracted to him if the hawk inside me hadn't been so damn nervous around his beast. Cats and birds don't mix; it was even worse than cats and dogs. But we were also fae, and we Hawks would control our beasts long enough to ferry the Lynx Sidhe to shore.

The plan was for the Avians to fly the Canines, Felines, and grounded Unsidhe to the beach before the ships got close enough to be spotted. The first line would clear the coast and scout beyond while we continued to ferry the others to shore, and then the humans would row to land. I glanced at the woman I'd be transporting first. She was the Lynx Lord's General and his lover. General Neela, a redhead with a cool demeanor and a reputation as one of the finest fighters in the Lynx Army—second only to the Lynx Lord himself. She wore a war robe with a flight rig strapped over it and stared at the shore eagerly.

Dalsharan held up a hand and the Lynx Sidhe stepped back, giving all of us Hawks room. War robes dropped and magic swept the deck of our ship. To either side of us, something similar happened on the other ships in our armada with the rest of our

Hawks as well as the Owls, Eagles, and Falcons shifting. Normally, this many birds would mean a terrible cacophony, but the Avians were eerily silent as we took to the air, hovering above the deck as we latched onto our passengers' rigs before heading toward land.

I flew beside Dalsharan as ordered, Neela hanging from my claws, stretching her hands as if itching to sprout some claws of her own. Her robe flapped in the cold air, flashing a length of strong, tan leg, but the General couldn't care less about the amount of skin she was showing. Her lips were pulled back in a snarl as her eyes scanned the beach. Dal shrieked once—a short, clipped sound. The signal to drop our passengers.

That's right, we weren't taking the time to set them down carefully. We dropped them, though it was only about four feet and onto sand, no less. I watched Neela slip out of her harness and robe all in one motion and sprint across the beach as she shifted into a giant Lynx. Her warlord ran beside her, his sleekly muscled body moving from man to cat in three steps. Their ears laid back, the tufts of black at their tips blending into their spotted hides. I turned back to the ship to fetch my next passenger.

Part of me itched to be the one scouting the shore, but a soldier follows orders. I'd even had a say in deciding what those orders would be, so I couldn't bitch about it now. I swept down to snatch up the next Lynx and swung around to head back to shore, all while the ships continued to make for land. Back and forth we went, over and over, never landing.

We still had a few Unsidhe passengers left when the ships anchored, but we kept flying them in, getting them there faster than the rowboats that transported the humans. All but the Red Caps and Trolls, that is. Even the strongest Avian couldn't carry one of those enormous Unsidhe. They couldn't use the rowboats either but instead jumped overboard and trudged through deep water with their heads popping up just above the waves.

Finally, we were all on Alantri and the path ahead was clear, scouted by Felines. The Unsidhe swept into the lead, Sylphs gliding through the air while the hooves of Glastigs pounded the earth. Goblins boiled forward around the legs of Trolls and Red Caps, their taller cousins, all of them grinning eagerly. Leanan-Sidhe—beautiful but deadly blood-drinkers—cast their glowing eyes at the horizon and licked their lips in anticipation. In contrast, the Dwarves marched grimly, battle axes slung over their thick shoulders. There were also Imps, shorter even than Dwarves, and Spriggans who were normally small but had inflated their bodies to sizes that rivaled even the Trolls. The only Unsidhe who weren't allowed to join the Unsidhe Armies were the Brownies and Pixies, both races too delicate to fight. But the rest of the fae races of Varalorre had come to Alantri to face the Farungal together.

The humans marched behind the Unsidhe with the flightless Sidhe while we Avians flew overhead, keeping a sharp eye on the unfolding landscape. So, when we made it inland, we were the first to discover that Gremara was prepared for us. Farungal soldiers lined the battlements of her fortress, arrows notched and spears ready. They weren't going to come out until forced to. Which meant it would be up to the Avians to smoke them out. And I mean that literally.

Dalsharan swooped down to advise the other warlords to set up the front lines and the fires. Our armies spread out, ringing the Farungal fortress in a sea of fae, but staying well beyond the reach of their arrows. Fires burst to life everywhere, human soldiers setting up the pits and faeries lighting the kindling. Oil-soaked, leather cannonballs attached to metal chains were piled beside each fire, ready for Avians to snatch them up and set them aflame. The other fae races—both Sidhe and Unsidhe—prowled the perimeter, watching for any weakness as they scented the air and unsheathed their weapons. They would leap into action as soon as we smoked the Farungal out, but for now, they had to wait.

Owls, Falcons, Eagles, and Hawks circled, waiting for the signal to attack. But before we could begin, Gremara stepped onto the battlements with two male warriors who dragged a human between them. The Sidhe howled, yipped, and roared in warning while Trolls rumbled and Imps screeched. Everyone could sense that something bad was coming—that Gremara had a plan. I rode the currents beside Dal, watching the Farungal Queen warily. She was smiling; that couldn't be good.

“Welcome!” Gremara shouted at us. “Welcome fae and humans. Welcome Sidhe and Unsidhe. Welcome to your death!” She cackled wildly.

The human beside her was gaunt and dressed in torn clothing. He wasn't chained but he might as well have been. Monsters surrounded him, grinning as if they'd been having fun with him for days. He looked freshly scrubbed, like a hog on his way to the slaughter. His eyes stared hollowly out of his lean face, and he wore an expression I recognized. It was very similar to the one Kervel had worn in Brendallen's tent. But this was a human, whatever had been done to him by the Farungal, he wouldn't recover from it as easily as a faerie. It would take an incredible strength of will to remain sane through the horrors they had doubtless put him through, but he looked as though he had his senses... and wished for the opposite. The man stared at the armies before him as if they were his ruin, not salvation.

“We need to get him out of there!” I shouted at Dal. “Whatever Gremara's planning, she needs him to do it.”

“Do not leave my side!” he roared at me.

“Dal!”

The Hawk Lord shrieked.

“Do you remember a time, not so long ago, when the first Valorian was made?” Gremara called to us.

I went silent, focusing on her again. Everyone did.

“Do you remember the curse that we made? The beautiful weapon a *human* destroyed?” Gremara laughed as the two Farungal brought the human up beside her. “I have reconstructed that curse except that now, the human shall be the catalyst!”

The Farungal pushed the man to his knees as he suddenly started to struggle, then pried open his mouth.

“Dal!” I shouted and started for the man. Fuck this. Gremara had practically said it herself—this guy was the key to her plans. I had to get him away from her.

“Ravyn!” Dalsharan shouted and chased after me.

The Hawks followed their warlord, and the other Avians took it as a signal to attack. Giant birds swooped down to snatch up chains and swing the attached leather balls through the fire pits. The night sky came alight with flying firebombs. But I carried nothing in my claws. I was after something instead.

Below us, the flightless fae sprinted into action, running for the fortress in the hopes that it would soon be open to them. Sylphs spiraled above them like specters. On the battlements, Gremara ignored us all as she poured dark liquid down the human's throat. He gagged, but they rubbed his neck and forced him to swallow. I screeched in fury. I was too late. I should have ignored Dal and grabbed him sooner!

The man fell to his knees, out of my reach, and I swung up, arching back toward our armies. Arrows flew past me, one clipped my wing. Feathers fell but it was a minor injury. Nonetheless, Dalsharan shrieked in fury and herded me back toward safety while firebombs fell on the Farungal fortress.

Fires caught and the fortress started to smoke, but Gremara only laughed harder. Laughed while the human man screamed. His

body was trembling and bulging grotesquely. He shot to his feet with a roar, and the world went silent. Even Gremara stopped cackling as the human stepped forward. No longer human, he was a beautiful monster, his body thickly muscled and his skin black as pitch. Eyes like twin stars stared out of his sharp face and his hands spread out to display long claws. He roared again, lifting his face to the moon.

“Isn't he fantastic? Isn't he beautiful?” Gremara shrieked. “Darkness made flesh! Poison in the shape of a man. Keep your seed, Hawk Lord; I have my child now! Gaze upon your ruin! My glorious creation shall walk across the world and burn it to ash. Poison your continent and the very magic within it. Your wards will fall to him and your cities will crumble! But first, all of you brave warriors will feed him. You will be his first sacrifice. Nearly all the races of Stalana and Varalorre laid before my beautiful curse to whet his appetite! A banquet befitting my prince!”

Beside her, the monster was panting, his shoulders hunched and his claws clicking together as if anticipating his first kill. His bright gaze swept over the armies again and again. I tried to circle back. I had this feeling... maybe I was wrong. Maybe I wasn't too late. I needed to get to him. I needed to get him away from Gremara. But Dal swept by me, clipping my chest with the back of a claw, and pushed me back. I shrieked at him furiously.

Then the monster who had once been a man took a step forward. His clawed foot scraped the stones and sparked. The monster lifted his hands and magic crackled over them, gleaming darkly. Oily, dirty magic. Evil. He held out his arms and stared up at the sky as that darkness ran across his chest. And that's when I saw the wet tracks on his cheeks. He wept. The human was still inside that monster, and he hated what he had become.

“Stalana!” the monster shouted the battle cry and leapt off the wall, his arms still spread wide. He turned as he fell so that he stared up at the star-filled sky, a peaceful expression coming over



his face.

Gremara screamed and reached for him, bending over the battlements to snatch at her fallen prince, but he was too heavy and fell too fast.

I shrieked and dove for him as well even as a part of me trembled and pulled back.

*Let him go*, something whispered inside me.

Dalsharan sensed it too. He swept by me again and angled me away from the falling human. The sound of Gremara's rage echoed over the land as her monster hit the earth with a resounding crack. The earth trembled as magic erupted in a dark cloud over her dark prince. When the magic cleared, the bulging, black body had dwindled back into the beaten, gaunt, man. The broken hero stared wistfully at the heavens as he took his last breaths, a smug grin on his face.

The humans shouted, “Stalana!” echoing his battle cry in tribute to him, and he smiled wider as he used the last of his strength to flip the Farungal Queen the bird. My heart ached for him even as my chest filled with admiration. He had gone out on his terms, and he'd given the Farungal Queen a big fuck you as he went.

*Good for you, buddy*, I thought.

As I swung back around yet again, heading to the pile of oiled bombs, I saw a giant Lynx sprint across the field to the fallen human and then shift into the Lynx Lord himself. The warlord cradled the dying human as a group of Sylphs flew over them, shielding the men in a blanket of air that deflected the Farungal's arrows. A flash of green caught my eye and sounds of awe spread through the Fae. I glanced back just as the broken human sat up and stared at the warlord in shock. The Lynx Lord picked up the revived hero, tossed him over one broad shoulder, and ran for the

safety of our front lines. The Sylphs flowed over and around them, protecting them the entire way.

I shrieked in joy as I scooped up a bomb and swung it through a fire pit. A shining feeling of righteousness filled me as I flew back toward the fortress. The Lynx Lord made it to lines of human soldiers and gently laid the human in the grass. He was alive. One, broken human had sacrificed himself to save the whole fucking world, and then he was saved. His valor had won him a fae soul. And damn if that fucker didn't deserve it more than I did. I saved one guy while he had saved us all. If he didn't become a Valorian, I was going to have a word with the Goddess.

Dalsharan shrieked orders beside me as we flew our bombs to the fortress. Farungal fired their iron-tipped arrows at us as their queen continued to rage; the bitch was losing her damn mind, going doubly crazy now that the human had been saved. We couldn't use magic to deflect their arrows in our beast form, not that I was able to do that type of magic yet anyway. But we could fly higher than the Farungal could shoot. We simply angled up sharply, then dropped our bombs from a great height.

The Farungal scrambled without leadership, their queen nearly mindless with her failure. Yeah, that had to suck, being so certain that you had one over your enemies and then having victory snatched away at the last second like that. Bummer. What was a real bummer was that I couldn't smile in my hawk form. I was able to poop though, and I let one out on the Farungal fortress after I dropped my firebomb. I sailed back with Dalsharan, laughing my feathered ass off.

"Please, tell me you did not just shit on them," Dalsharan said with barely hidden amusement.

"Fuck yeah, I did!" I shouted. "I dropped one bomb after another!"

“You are such a child.” Then he laughed uproariously.

The Farungal fortress burned, and the Queen had to be pulled down from the battlements by her soldiers. The monsters swarmed out of their stronghold and met the waiting horde of enormous beasts and very pissed off humans. But the gates shut behind them, and Gremara went into the burning fortress instead of out.

I shrieked at Dalsharan, and he looked back at me. “They’re just buying her time to escape! She went inside the keep!”

“Not fucking happening,” Dalsharan snarled.

He let out a high-pitched scream that had a contingent of Hawks—including his guards—flocking to him. We dove for the fortress and landed amid thick smoke, flames leaping around us. My eyes stung and I drew my wings in tightly to keep them from getting singed. Wood creaked and crumbled, but most of the stronghold was stone and it held. The gate, though closed, was now on fire and the courtyard empty. The fighting was happening just beyond the fortress walls but within, it was almost peaceful. The roar of battle was dulled by the wind-like bellow of hungry flames.

“This way!” Dalsharan shouted and shifted. He ran into the fortress buck naked.

I did the same and followed him inside without hesitation, as did every other Hawk there. Male and female, they all ran naked into the burning building after their warlord. That’s the kind of loyalty Dalsharan inspires—the kind of trust. They would follow him anywhere.

Inside, smoke covered the burning ceilings but the chill in the stone walls battled it back, keeping the air below clear enough to breathe. Dal led us through the corridors, down into the depths of the stronghold. He seemed to be following something, but I couldn’t tell what it was at first. Then, I saw it, a gleam of light on

the floor—cold patches. Farungal footprints. He was tracking the Queen.

Down and down we went until the sound of battle disappeared entirely and the corridors got ice cold. I couldn't see the footprints anymore but it didn't matter now, there was only one way forward. Our path let us into a dimly lit cavern and there, crossing it no more than fifty feet ahead of us, was the Farungal Queen and ten of her soldiers—at least three of them female.

Dalsharan shifted and launched into the air. The rest of us followed suit, flying across the vast space toward the fleeing Farungal. The Queen spun and dropped into a crouch, splaying her clawed hands wide and lifting her poisonous tail. Her soldiers spread around her, drawing their swords to use in addition to their deadly claws and poisoned barbs. They swung as we dove and bird shrieks mixed with Farungal screams.

The Farungal were vicious, deadly, and desperate, but we outnumbered them two to one and although we didn't have poisonous barbs on our tails, we did have claws and beaks, both made to rend flesh. I used the opportunity to perfect my beak-work since I'd done such a shit-poor job of it with Brendallen. I struck and bit. Slashed and clawed. I held Farungal soldiers down with my talons and bit poisonous barbs off their tails before stabbing their black hearts.

Then a sword hit my wing, and I screamed. Dalsharan roared and spun. He was at my side, as he had been the entire battle, so it took only a second for his claws to lash out and gut the Farungal who had hit me. The Farungal dropped to the ground as I did, but he wasn't breathing. His guts painted the floor and the stench of it stained the air.

“Ravyn!” Dalsharan nudged me with his beak.

Behind him, I saw the Queen leap, jumping over the Hawks

that had surrounded her. Her poisonous barb lifted and her clawed hands curled as she focused on her target—Dal.

“Dal!” I shouted.

Dalsharan twisted and opened his beak in one beautiful movement. I gaped, and so did the Farungal Queen as his beak snapped closed around her throat and broke her neck. Blood gushed and the Hawk Lord twisted, tearing Gremara's head from her body. He tossed it away as if it were nothing—as if killing her was nothing—and hurried back to me. Around us, the cavern went quiet, all the Farungal lay dead.

“How bad is it?” Dalsharan growled as his bloody head nudged my limp wing.

I let out a sharp, surprised laugh. “The bitch is dead and you're worried about my wing?”

Dal looked at me with one golden eye and scowled. How he managed to scowl with a bird face is beyond me, but he did. Which made me laugh harder. I laughed and laughed and laughed. Of course, it came out more like shrieking. But the other Hawks recognized it as laughter and started to laugh as well until, finally, their lord let out a small chuckle.

“You're a fucking child,” Dal grumbled. “You're my consort; of course, I'm worried about your wing. Now, shift, damn you.”

“You're so bossy.” I shifted back into my man body and grinned at him. Then I winced. “Ow, what the fuck?” I looked at my broken arm in shock.

“You've harmonized,” Dal said smugly. “The injuries sustained in hawk form have translated to your Sidhe form.”

“Yay, just in time to get my arm broken,” I huffed. Then I

recalled the way I'd been able to see Gremara's cold footprints. My eyesight had improved; I should have realized then that I'd harmonized.

"You'll heal," Dal said, then he shifted too. "We'll get you a doctor to speed up the process."

"Just get me out of this fucking icebox," I muttered and headed toward the archway.

"We'd best head the way the Farungal were going." Dal grabbed my uninjured shoulder and turned me around. "We don't know how bad it will be up there."

"Oh, right," I mumbled as I cradled my arm to my chest. "Hey, what's that?"

Dalsharan followed my gaze to the side of the cavern where something gleamed. The cavern was lit by a strip of lights that ran down the center of the ceiling, leaving the rest of the vast space in shadows. But something had caught the light—something metallic—and now that I was focused on the darkness, I saw strange shapes lurking there. The Hawk Lord stepped away from me, his expression going stern. He slapped a hand on one of those odd shapes and a series of lights came on. The other Hawks gasped.

Farin stepped up beside me in hawk form. I didn't know it was him until he said, "Creskal flowers. You just found the Queen's greenhouses, Valorian."

Dalsharan held out a hand and the flowers caught fire. The other Hawks spread out and searched the rest of the cavern. Soon, more lights came on and more fires started. When every last blossom had been turned to ash, Dal returned to me.

"Nicely spotted, Corporal. *Now* we can go," the Hawk Lord said. "Shift back. Your hawk will handle the cold better."

“Shift. Shift back,” I muttered, but I shifted.

Dal lifted a brow at me chidingly before he shifted too. Then he led us out of the cavern and through the escape tunnels, away from Farungal corpses and the remains of their corpse flowers.

## Chapter Forty-Five

The escape tunnels led into the forest beyond the fortress. It wasn't that far from the battlefield, but I couldn't fly. Dal wouldn't leave me, especially not in a monster-ridden forest, and the Hawks wouldn't leave either of us. So, we walked quietly and carefully through the woods. By the time we got back, the battle was over, the Farungal were dead, and the fires had been put out. The stronghold was smoking but looked safe enough. In fact, just as we came walking up on our bird legs, a group of chained Sidhe were led out of the fortress. Brendallen, his guard, and his officers.

Dalsharan launched into the air, flying through the small space that separated him from Brendallen, then swooped down to land before the ex-warlord. I cursed and scrambled forward, dragging my wing behind me. Dalsharan grabbed Brendallen and tossed him through the air.

“Dal, he's chained!” I shouted as I reached him.

“Get up!” Dalsharan snarled at Brendallen. “Get up and face me, you fucking bastard!”

Brendallen got to his feet, lifted his head, and shook back his dark hair with a twisted smirk. “Where's the honor of the great Hawk Lord now?” he sneered. “Are you going to beat me to death while I'm bound? That would make you no better than me.” He grinned broadly.

“He's just trying to goad you,” I said urgently. “We'll take him back to Varalorre and his king can punish him.”

“I vowed that we'd kill him, Ravyn,” the Hawk Lord



growled, keeping his stare on our enemy.

“Yeah, well, I can't help at the moment.” I nodded toward my broken wing.

“That's why I'm going to kill him for both of us.” He brushed his feathered head along mine, then swung it back to face Brendallen. “Someone release him.”

Faeries murmured around us, gathering closer.

“Hawk Lord, this man's a criminal. You don't have to fight him,” the Lion Lord said. “It's beneath you.”

“I don't care if it's beneath me, Hadrian,” Dalsharan said. “He abused my consort, and he will pay with his life.”

Not because he had betrayed his entire race, or stole soul stones, or set the Hawk Lord up to be captured. Nope, Dal was pissed because Brendallen had hurt me. I have to admit that made my little birdy heart go pitter-patter. But I didn't want to risk Dalsharan on a fight when the battle was won.

“He'll get his own,” I said. “I'm satisfied with that.”

“I am not!” Dalsharan roared.

Everyone went quiet except for Brendallen, who started to laugh.

“So angry,” Brendallen said. “Always so angry.”

“Release him,” Dalsharan ordered again.

“Give me the keys.” The Lion Lord held out his hand expectantly. He was back to his Sidhe form and dressed in a war robe like most of the Sidhe there. Hadrian took the keys from a human soldier and went to Brendallen. “If you fight with dishonor, I will tear your throat out.”

Brendallen just held his wrists out and grinned.

Hadrian released the ex-Coyote Lord and stepped back. A tight circle of fae and humans had formed, but they moved out, giving Dal and Brendallen room to fight. Canines and Felines growled, Avians made short screeches, Trolls and Red Caps clenched their fists, and Leanan-Sidhe smiled maliciously at Brendallen. If he won, he'd be torn apart. It would be smarter for him to kneel and beg for mercy than to face Dal. But Brendallen had been a warlord and he was a vicious motherfucker. I knew he'd fight to his last breath just to see Dalsharan go down with him.

I went up to Dal and whispered, "Don't do this. Let's just take him back to Varalorre and go home."

"Ravyn," Dalsharan said softly, his golden, hawk eye focusing on mine, "have some faith in me."

I sighed, nodded, and stepped back.

"Shift!" Dalsharan shouted at Brendallen.

Brendallen grinned maliciously and that smile turned into a coyote leer as he shifted so smoothly, it was almost beautiful. He was massive in that form—a great, hulking beast with fangs as long as my forearms. Brendallen gnashed his fangs and tossed his furred head before setting his menacing stare on the Hawk Lord. Dal shrieked and shot into the air.

The giant Coyote crouched, head angled up to watch Dal's flight, and as my lover dove, Brendallen launched upward and snapped at him. He caught Dal's tail, but Dal clawed the Coyote's ear. Brendallen snarled and backed up as the great bird hovered, fanning debris into his eyes. Shrieks blasted from the Hawk Lord's beak as the Coyote snarled and squinted. One massive paw lashed out and caught Dal across the chest. Feathers flew along with blood. I started forward but a hand grabbed my arm.

“You cannot intervene,” the Lion Lord said gravely.

I clenched my jaw as Dalsharan stabbed at Brendallen with his beak, aiming for the Coyote's eye. Brendallen shook his head and snapped his jaws, catching one of Dal's talons. Dalsharan hit the ground and was dragged several feet by the snarling Coyote. The Hawk Lord shrieked and bashed at the Coyote with his free foot, clawing Brendallen's snout until he let go.

The Hawk Lord rolled to his feet but limped forward, one leg barely touching the ground. With great flaps of his wings, he shot back into the air and circled the Coyote, looking for a weakness. He dove and struck, over and over, taking as much damage as he gave, until a paw caught him in the side of the head. The Hawk Lord tumbled to the ground and rolled to a stop.

The soldiers went silent as Dalsharan went still.

“No!” I shouted and surged forward.

Again, Hadrian pulled me back. “Look,” he pointed.

Dal was getting to his feet. One eye was closed and blood marred his feathers, but he turned to face Brendallen without hesitation. Limping forward, he set his good eye on his enemy.

Brendallen made a yipping laugh. “I will treasure the look on Ravyn's face when I kill you.”

The Coyote ran forward. The Hawk Lord went still, his bad leg settling onto the ground. I frowned. The eye that had been closed opened, completely unharmed, and the Hawk Lord leapt into the sky suddenly, seconds before Brendallen reached him. The Coyote hit the ground with a resounding crack, his nose crunching into the rocks Dal had been hiding.

Brendallen shook off the dirt and lifted his head, but it was too late. Dalsharan hit him like a javelin, his beak going straight

into the furred neck, just as my beak had once done to the Coyote Lord. But this time, Brendallen wouldn't be allowed to heal. The Hawk Lord's talons latched onto the Coyote's back and when he pulled his beak free, he did so at an angle, tearing flesh away. Dalsharan struck again and again with blurring speed, rending the meat from Brendallen's neck until there was nothing but bone left.

With a cracking sound, the Hawk Lord snapped Brendallen's spine and severed his head.

I gaped at my lover as he lifted his bloody beak to the sky and screeched in triumph. The crowd of humans and faeries roared, yipped, cheered, and shrieked with him. Then Dalsharan walked over to me, shifting as he came. I shifted too, and when he grabbed the back of my neck and pulled me into a conqueror's kiss, I wrapped my uninjured arm around him and kissed him back.

As the armies continued to cheer, Dalsharan eased away to look at me. "And now, we can go home, Consort."

"Yes, Hawk Lord."

## Chapter Forty-Six

Despite Dal's declaration, we didn't head back to Stalana right away. Instead, the leaders of the armies gathered around a rekindled fire pit and argued while their soldiers gnawed on dried meat and passed around jugs of water. Now that the battle was over, the humans seemed to be comfortable around the Unsidhe and lounged among them companionably. Fighting beside someone will do that—remove the differences between you, no matter how dissimilar you might be.

I wasn't with the soldiers. I stood beside my warlord watching and listening to the other leaders. Dal was quiet too, his arms crossed as he pondered the flames before him. Some of the fae officers and the Unsidhe commanders wanted to stay on Alantri and fight our way across the continent, laying waste to their cities and taking their fortresses. They wanted to push our advantage now that we were all there. But the Sidhe warlords argued against it. Now that Gremara was dead, the Farungal would be weakened, and the Sidhe hoped it would make them more open to peace. The Unsidhe especially didn't like this idea and argued that we should end the Farungal while we had the chance.

“Our soldiers are tired and our rations will only last a few days,” the Wolf Lord—a thickly built man with shocking red hair cut to his shoulders, practically a buzz cut among the Fae—said. “We are not prepared to extend this battle. And although our numbers are great, we're on Alantri. The entire Farungal race is here. I vote we go home.”

“But we'll have them quaking in their boots!” a Red Cap warlord growled, his hat dripping blood over his thick hair. “We

can end this war at last!”

The Unsidhe around us murmured in agreement while the humans and Sidhe shifted uneasily. I stood still. My arm had been healed by an army doctor, but I wasn't about to pick up a sword. Sure, ending the war would be great, but we were on their soil and if we gave the Farungal enough time to rally, they could surround us. As the Wolf Lord had said, their numbers were greater than ours here, and they had the home advantage.

Then the crowd parted and the Lynx Lord, who'd been notably absent, strode up with a beautiful man beside him. They were both dressed in pants and boots but nothing else. My gaze was briefly snagged by the intricate tattoos that covered the Lynx Lord's chest and swirled down his arms, but then I realized who his companion was. The hero. The man who had died to save us. He wasn't human anymore. The Beasts and the Goddess had accepted him, as I knew they would.

Gone was the gauntness. His body was slim, much thinner than the Lynx Lord's warrior build, but had filled out to a healthy thickness enhanced by sleek muscles. His dark, blond hair gleamed bronze in the firelight, sweeping back from his freshly fae face in a civilian style, and his pale, green eyes glowed with magic. Soldiers whispered around us, one word on everyone's lips—Valorian.

But it was the Lynx Lord who spoke in a clear, resonant, deep voice, “We will not win the war today. We don't have the advantage here and, frankly, I don't have the heart to exterminate a race. Not now that the Goddess has given me a Valorian. Who can look upon him, on the love that he represents, then turn around and slaughter children? Not I. Not even Farungal children. I say we take the win and the gifts the Great Mother had granted us and go home.”

The Sidhe warlords nodded in agreement and the Unsidhe grudgingly gave in as well. As quickly as that, it was decided, and

the warlords broke off to wrangle their soldiers. But I went straight to the new Valorian with a smile on my face.

“I'm Ravyn,” I said as I extended my hand. “In a way, we're brothers.”

“He's like you,” the Lynx Lord explained to the man.

The new Valorian's eyes widened as he shook my hand. “You were human?” His voice was hesitant but had a rich timbre to it.

“He was,” the Hawk Lord declared as he stepped up beside me. “Now he's a Hawk and he's done well in our world. You will too, I'm sure.”

“Thank you,” the man stammered and squinted around himself. “I... this is a bit... uh, I thought I was dead.”

“You'll be okay.” I laid a hand on his shoulder. “I know what you're going through. Everything seems really bright and loud and scary right now. Your body doesn't feel like your own. Even walking is weird. But you'll adjust soon and then you'll see that it's fucking fantastic.”

The man offered me a shy grin. “It's a hell of a lot better than the alternative.”

“No shit.” I laughed.

Someone dropped a weapon and it made a loud clatter. The new Valorian flinched, terror filling his eyes briefly. Then he flushed with embarrassment and stared at the ground.

“This is Luca,” the Lynx Lord said as if nothing had happened. “Luca, this Dalsharan, the Hawk Lord. Ravyn is his consort.”

“It's an honor to meet you, Luca.” Dal extended his hand.

Luca blinked from Dal to me and back before shaking the Hawk Lord's hand. "Lovely to meet you," he murmured.

"I tried to save you," I said to Luca. "But he got in my way." I elbowed Dal affectionately. "And then the Goddess told me to let you go. Now, I understand why."

"The Goddess," Luca whispered, his eyes drifting off. "I heard voices. Was one of them her?"

"No, those were probably the Beasts," I said. "I didn't hear the Goddess—or feel her response, rather—until I started speaking to her. Just say hello. Introduce yourself. She's with you."

"With me," Luca murmured, a twitch of pain crossing his stunning face. He looked around at all the bustling activity and then at the Lynx Lord. "Thorne, I can't... it's so loud. I can't do this."

"Okay, Luca," the Lynx Lord said gently. He gave us a heavy look. "We'll just be a few minutes. He needs some time to adjust."

"Of course," Dal said. "Thank you, Luca. For what you did for us. That was one of the bravest things I've ever witnessed."

"Fucking inspiring, man," I said. "If I'd been in Sidhe form, I would have gotten goosebumps."

Luca whispered, "I just wanted to go home. And if I couldn't do that, I wanted to die knowing that home still existed."

The Lynx Lord's jaws clenched and his arm went around Luca's shoulders. "Stalana and all her inhabitants continue to exist because of you, Luca. Come on, we'll get you something to drink."

And then the deadly Lynx Lord with his wicked tattoos led his Valorian away, glaring at anyone who got too close. They



passed General Neela, who stared after them forlornly.

“Is he going to be okay?” I asked Dal.

“Luca was likely tortured,” Dal said as he watched the Lynx Lord grab a bottle, then take Luca to the top of a small hill. “But he's fae now; the magic will heal him. He just needs some time.”

“I hope so.” I watched the men settle on the hill, and then the Lynx Lord tucked Luca in protectively against his side. My eyes widened when he kissed Luca's forehead and stroked his hair tenderly. “Do you think... Isn't the Lynx Lord into women?”

“He *was*,” Dalsharan said with a somber look Neela's way. “But the bond between a faerie and their Valorian is a strong one.” He turned to look at me and smiled. “We see into your souls when we give you ours. And if it's a good soul—which it must be to become Valorian—we can't help but fall a little in love.”

“That's really sweet, babe, and I love you too, but... *fuck*,” I shook my head as I stared at the two men on the hill. “That shit's gonna be fucked up.”

“It could be,” Dal agreed and took my hand. “But that is for them to decide. We have made our choices, and we're happy with them. I'm sure the Goddess will lead Thorne and Luca toward happiness too.”

I grinned. “Maybe you should give the Lynx Lord some pointers. If Luca is straight too, they're really gonna need some help.”

Dalsharan laughed and put an arm around me. “Love will lead them, Ravyn.”

I laughed right back at him. “If you think that love will magically teach two straight guys how to be gay, you're more of a

romantic fool than I thought you were.”

Dalsharan frowned at me. “I’m not romantic. I’m the Hawk Lord.”

“Yeah, yeah, says the man who calls me sweetheart.”

“Why are you so hung up on that endearment?”

We walked off arguing about love, sex, and the best names to call each other, as we grinned like idiots. Dal was right, Thorne and Luca weren’t my problem. I’d leave their hearts in the Goddess’ hands. She, at least, knew what she was doing.

## Chapter Forty-Seven

A party raged through the tent city of fae and human armies, but inside the Hawk Lord's tent, things were more subdued. For now, at least.

Dalsharan kissed his way up my body, then grabbed my face to hold me still for his plundering tongue. We writhed together on his bed, bodies tingling as our cocks slid and ground together. He pushed his knee between my legs, and I pulled him closer.

“What would you say to leaving the war?” Dal whispered in my ear.

“I told you, I go where you go.”

Dalsharan pulled back and looked at me. “But what do you want to do, Ravyn? I don't want to make this decision alone. It will affect both of us.”

I frowned and thought about it. Something tickled in my chest. “I think we're needed here.”

Dalsharan's face tightened with disappointment.

“Not forever,” I said quickly. “But... I just have this feeling that Luca isn't the last of us. That the first Valorian was needed in the war but left. That his leaving stopped something from moving forward.”

Dalsharan went still. “You think there will be more Valorians?”

“Many more,” I whispered. “I think the key to ending this war isn't uniting the Farungal with the Fae, it's combining human hearts with fae souls.”

Dalsharan grinned.

“I know, how fucking poetic.” I rolled my eyes. “But I'm serious, Dal. I think I'll be needed here. I think Luca and every other Valorian who is made will be needed. And that once we all stand together, the Farungal will fall.”

“That sounded a little like a prophecy, Ravyn,” Dalsharan murmured.

I smirked. “I'm no prophet. But I do have faith in our goddess.”

“So do I.” He brushed my hair back. “I guess we're staying.”

“For a little while longer.”

Dalsharan nodded and started kissing and nibbling my throat again. His tongue dragged a line from my collarbone to my nipple, and he bit at me until I whimpered. With a chuckle, Dalsharan ventured lower, rubbing his face over my belly, his hair stark against my tanned skin—finally back to its normal color. Then he settled between my thighs and looked up at me. I frowned, watching the Hawk Lord reach for my cock. His lips parted. He held my gaze as he bent his head.

“Whoa!” I jerked back and sat up. “What the fuck are you doing?”

Dal scowled and sat up as well. “I was trying to...” he flushed.

“Were you going to suck my dick?” I gaped at him.

“I wanted to show you that I respect you,” he growled. “That you are important to me.”

“Holy fuck,” I whispered.

“But if you don't want me to...”

“Fuck, yeah, I want you to.” I slid back down and spread my legs wide. “Respect me, please!”

Dalsharan laughed and settled between my legs again. Then his eyes went dark with passion as he set his gaze on my hard shaft. A broad, warrior hand grasped me and stroked me possessively, then Dal softened his touch and shifted his gaze back to mine. Holding my stare, he kissed the head of my cock. I groaned, my butt clenching. Those sensual lips moved over me, swirling around my tip, then his tongue flicked out to taste me, and he made a growl of desire. The breath caught in my throat. Dal opened his mouth, and my whole body went still. Waiting. Hoping. Aching.

Then it hit. Heat. Wet blessed heat. The tingling drag of a tongue against my aching flesh. Dalsharan's lips tightened. A flash of pleasure so sharp it was almost pain ran through me as he lowered his mouth, shoving that tight ring of his lips down my cock. The Hawk Lord sucked upward, one hand gripping the base of my shaft firmly, and claimed me with his eyes as he worked me slowly.

“Aw, fuck, babe,” I ground out. “Your eyes. Fuck. I think I know what the colors mean now.”

Dalsharan, his fully amethyst stare locked on mine, started moving his mouth over me faster, his hips undulating against the bed as he groaned.

“I was wrong,” he stopped to say. “This isn't demeaning at all. Giving you pleasure, watching you writhe, makes me feel

powerful.”

“You are definitely in control,” I panted.

My shaft was wet. It dripped over his fingers. The sound of him sucking me made my balls tighten. It was all I could do to hold still and not face fuck him. I brushed his beautiful hair back and stroked his thick bicep where it sprawled over my thigh possessively. Then the Hawk Lord went wild. A growl rumbled out of him and he started sliding over me rapidly, his groans vibrating through my dick. Saliva dripped over my sacs and down to my ass. He trailed his fingers in it, then worked one into my hole.

“Dal!” I shouted. My whole body was shaking. “Oh, fuck! Fuck! Dalsharan!”

The Hawk Lord pumped his thick finger into me as he sucked me hard, and my world exploded. I couldn't see. I went fucking blind for a second as I erupted in his mouth. And the Hawk Lord drank me down like wine. He sucked and sucked till I was dry. My flaccid cock popped free of his flushed lips and flopped onto my belly. I panted, gaping up at him, feeling as if I'd been sucked stupid.

With a savage cry, the Hawk Lord reared up, grabbing me beneath my ass to lift and spread me, and sank his cock into me. I shouted in bliss, my dick instantly reviving to salute its warlord, and took hold of my knees. I pulled back and he pushed forward until I was practically doing a headstand, only the upper portion of my back still on the bed. My ass pointed straight to the sky, and Dal stood on the mattress to push my cheeks apart as he drove into my hole. His cock slammed down into me, and I trembled uncontrollably as it delved deeper than I'd ever been fucked before.

“Who do you belong to?” Dal demanded.

“You! I belong to the Hawk Lord.”

“Mine!” Dalsharan snarled. “You’re mine, Ravyn!”

“I’m so fucking yours!” I groaned, my back bent sharply and my legs hanging to the sides, but I’d never been so happy in my life. And then he went and made me even happier.

“Marry me!” the Hawk Lord demanded. “Be mine forever, Ravyn!”

“Fuck, yes, I’ll marry you!”

Dalsharan cried out triumphantly and moved a leg around mine so one of his legs supported my back while the other pressed against my cock. He pumped into me savagely, his face twisted with pleasure and possession, and his arms wrapped around my thigh for leverage. His amazing eyes flashed as he lifted his head and roared loud enough that the reveling around us went momentarily quiet. In that silence, Dal pulled out and dropped me. I fell flat on the bed as he stood over me and came across my chest like fucking a god.

I opened my mouth to catch a drop of his salty-sweet ambrosia and savored it with a sigh. Dalsharan watched me intensely as he knelt, straddling my waist. He opened a hand and a golden ring appeared on his palm.

I lifted my left hand as I held the Hawk Lord’s gaze, and he slid the ring on my finger. It was a simple band, perfect for a soldier, but a detailed carving of a hawk flew across it, and within its beak, it held a small golden stone that matched the one Dal wore around his neck.

I sat up, easing out from beneath him to kneel on the bed before him. “You’re really going to marry me?”

“Fuck, yes,” Dalsharan declared with a grin and then yanked me into a vicious, beautiful, fucking fantastic kiss.

I pulled him back onto the bed with me and held him tightly. My Hawk Lord, the man who'd given me a piece of his soul and taken my heart in return. I would fight beside him until this war was over, and then we'd fly home and live in that pretty palace of his—of *ours*—with all eternity before us and a love that would only grow stronger every day.

Yes, Hawk Lord.



## A Special Look

Keep reading for a special look into the next book in the Soul  
Stones Series:

[The Lynx Soul](#)

## Chapter One

I had been happy once; I was pretty sure of it. It was hard to remember now, surrounded by monsters who delighted in my pain. The Queen monster was the worst. She kept saying that I had to be prepared—seasoned for her spell. I had to be broken to accept the dark curse she was crafting for me.

Her kind had hated mine for longer than I'd been alive, and we'd been at war for close to 40 years. Luckily, the Farungal—that's what the monsters call themselves—hated the Fae too. And the Fae, whose lands bordered ours but were protected by magical barriers, knew that Stalana, the human portion of the continent, was the last line of defense between them and the Farungal. So, they helped us. They sent their strongest warriors, both Sidhe and Unsidhe, to form armies to fight beside us humans and drive the Farungal back to their continent.

The Sidhe are great shapeshifters. In fact, their kingdoms are divided by beasts—sub-races of the Sidhe race. The Sidhe can manipulate natural magic in addition to transforming into animals, but when they fought, they usually did so in beast form. There are twelve sub-races of Sidhe, split into three animal families—the Canines are the Wolves, Jackals, Foxes, and Coyotes; the Felines are Lions, Tigers, Leopards, and Lynx; and the Avians are Hawks, Eagles, Owls, and Falcons. The twelve great kingdoms of Varalorre. I don't know much more about them, even though I'm a scholar. But then, no human does. I can tell you that out of all the Fae races, the Sidhe are the most human in appearance.

The Unsidhe are closer to the Farungal in looks. Some have claws and tails and fangs that are more monstrous than bestial.

Still, they fought for us. The Trolls, Red Caps, Goblins, Sylphs, and so forth. All the creatures of Varalorre that humans feared despite the help they gave us. I think we feared them because they reminded us so much of the monsters who tortured me. The Farungal with their poisonous, barbed tails and venomous fangs. Their spindly limbs and sin-black skin. Their knife-like claws that even now cut through my tender human flesh.

I shrieked as the Queen bent to lick my blood from my naked thigh. Then she lifted a jar and opened it. I whimpered and shook my head even before the acrid scent hit me. The contents of that jar were the source of my worst tortures—an evil substance that hardened my cock despite my fear and revulsion. She called it wild-rot and said that if she didn't take pity on me and fuck me, *I* would rot. The magic needed to be fed and if it wasn't fed with sex, it would consume my flesh instead.

The Queen smoothed a small smear of wild-rot on my member and it hardened instantly. I closed my eyes and blocked out the sight of her climbing onto my prone body. They had chained me to the floor this time. The chains were slack enough that I could have sat up, but she held me down with her thin arms as her wet sex consumed mine. My body, ravaged by torture and starved to gauntness, trembled beneath the wild pounding of her hips.

“Open your eyes, human!” She commanded.

I opened my eyes because to disobey would only lead to more torture or, even worse, she might decide to let the rot have me. There had been other humans in the cells around me. She had used them as leverage too, especially my lover. She threatened to torture him if I didn't behave. But she had killed my fellow prisoners one by one, sacrificing them in some kind of evil ritual. And she had painted me with their blood when she was done. The last to die had been my sweet Gerald. His pleas would haunt me for as long as my wretched life continued. She had delighted in

painting me with his blood and watching it destroy a part of my soul. I could feel pieces of myself slipping away even now—my mind breaking. I knew that even if I survived this, I would never be the same.

“That's it,” the Queen monster purred as she opened her dress. Her meager breasts bounced with her movements and she grabbed them, pinching her own nipples as she moaned. “You have a wonderful cock, human. Once I make you into my prince, it will be even more glorious—heavy and thick like a bull's dick. I will suck it for you then. Pleasure you every night after you spew your poison over Stalana.”

“No,” I whimpered.

She'd been telling me for days—or had it been weeks?—about how she would curse me and transform me into a creature that would spread evil over the world and destroy all the humans and the Fae. Every day she taunted me with my destiny. She wove her tales of slaughter as she rode my cock until it gave up its seed. She sliced me with her nails and drank my blood as she tried to hypnotize me with her hatred. She thought she could make me want it. That if she pleased me as she poisoned my ears with her venomous stories, I would somehow turn into her monster even before she cast her curse.

But I wouldn't let her destroy me. And I wouldn't let her destroy my world. As she moaned her way into another climax, I vowed to myself that I would die before becoming her weapon. I would find a way to end my existence and then she could go fuck herself.

Maybe it was madness coming for me at last, but I started to smile.

## About the Author

Amy Sumida is the Internationally Acclaimed author of the Award-Winning Godhunter Series, the fantasy paranormal Twilight Court Series, the Beyond the Godhunter Series, the music-oriented paranormal Spellsinger Series, the superhero Spectra Series, and several short stories. Her books have been translated into several languages, have won numerous awards, and are bestsellers. She believes in empowering people through her writing as well as providing everyone with a great escape from reality. Her stories are full of hot gods, shapeshifters, vampires, dragons, fairies, gargoyles... pretty much any type of supernatural, breathtakingly gorgeous man you can think of. Because why have normal when you could have paranormal?

Born and raised in Hawaii, Amy made a perilous journey across the ocean with six cats to settle in the beautiful state of Oregon which reminds her a lot of Hawaii but without the cockroaches or evil sand. When she isn't trying to type fast enough to get down everything the voices in her head are saying while her kitties try to sabotage her with cuteness, she enjoys painting on canvases, walls, and anything else that will sit still long enough for the paint to dry. She's fueled by tea, inspired by music, and spends most of her time listening to the voices in her head.

For information on new releases, detailed character descriptions, and an in-depth look into the worlds of the Godhunter, the Twilight Court, the Spellsinger, Spectra, and the Happily Harem After Series, check out Amy's website:

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