

PROUDLY A.I.-FREE

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*Not a New York Times
Bestselling Author*

DEFENDING A
BIG-DICKED
ELVEN WIZARD
BOOK ONE

*"Wow, this is horny. Is this legal?"
— Karen Alabama*

Defending A Big-Dicked Elf Wizard

Book 1

Dana Mcknight

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**This is a work of protest against the flimsy
erotica of Romantasy Fiction.**

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and make as much fanart as you want and send
them to the author at your leisure.

First Edition: Volume 1

**This book is dedicated to those determined to
please their lovers with enthusiastic consent
(and lots of spit).**

Big Huzzah to my ride or dies who proof-read this
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smutty crime.

Defending a Big-Dicked Elf Wizard

Book 1

Chapter 1: Wow, He's Hot.

The late afternoon sun blanched the edge of the deep woods as I leaned my sore frame against the side of a gnarled birch, my breath coming in slow deep gulps. Twenty well-cleft goblins lay scattered upon the forest floor around me, innards steaming in the cool autumnal air.

I ran my forearm across my brow, attempting to sluice off some of the sweat sliding into my eyes. A tendril of fleshy goblin flotsam clung to my eyebrow and I gave a hard shake of my head, a bitter smile of success creasing my mouth as my heavy long braids swiped the ichor away.

Goblin raids had increased in the territories surrounding Kumhaven, and there was quite a bit of gold on offer from local merchants and magisters if you had the skill.

Suffice to say: I was very skilled.

With a seasoned flick of the wrist, I twisted my sword, dislodging chunks of goblin offal and scalp. With my sword cleaned, I grabbed a handful of leaves from the

underbrush and wiped the blood smears from my face and hair.

Once, back when I was a prim, fresh-faced mercenary, I had attempted to bring a towel along to aid in my post-battle cleanup. A failed attempt. After a week of skirmishes and travel through places where water was often scarce, the choice between slaking my thirst or doing laundry was easy. I gave up on the towel idea and eventually, months of fighting had layered enough blood onto my thick black leathers to permanently stain them an earthy ochre.

“I don’t know what we would have done without you.” A woman’s voice nearby dragged me out of my post-fight reverie. My eyes flicked back to the woods behind me where a woman trembled, a small fluffy white dog swaddled in her arms.

“You’re lucky.” I said simply. I had been on my way to Murkbum when I had heard the feminine yelps of terror and the gibbering scree of excited gobbos. The woman now rose from a crouch, stepping out from behind the brambles I had roughly pushed her into earlier. Her grease-stained apron and simple linen dress marked her as a cook for a tavern or for

a low-ranking noble. Save for a couple scrapes, the woman was fine—especially considering she most likely would have been stewing in a goblin cauldron if I hadn't happened to take this particular route.

The woman nodded, taking in my sword, mercenary leathers, and scar-laced face; a new worry dawning. "I am afraid I have no money." She said, her lips quivering.

"I'll just take your dog then." My tone was cool.

The woman's eyes grew wide, but I grinned suddenly, breaking character. "I'm just kidding. What are you doing out here? The wilds are no place for a..." My eyes slid over to the long metal spoon in her hand and the sagging travel satchel on her back.

A tremulous sigh escaped from the woman's mouth. "Just a scullery woman, Ser—er—Marm. Escaped from Murkburn when it was overrun by the demons and—"

"Wait. What?" My eyes narrowed, and a familiar flutter wormed its way through my chest.

The small dog wiggled in the woman's arms and she placed it on the ground, where it promptly squatted out a few small poos. Emboldened by her safety, a fresh tremble ran through her. "The town is gone! Dozens, no—hundreds!—of demons, laying waste to anyone moving through its streets. I barely escaped with my life, I did!" The woman looked proud of the accomplishment, and if the tale was true, I had to begrudgingly admit that she came by that pride honestly. The dog finished pooping, and she picked it back up before it could bite into a bloody chunk of goblin near her feet. "I ran into two other men on my escape from Murkburn. Handsome fellows, they were. Said that remaining Murkburn survivors were gathering near Diggydop Falls, but I fear they fell to the goblins. Went off to pee together just before the attack and that was the last I saw of them..." Her voice trailed off.

The woman lifted eyes that welled with fresh tears.

I stared back in silence.

"I know I am asking much after being saved and all—but would you mind ever so much, escorting me to Diggydop Falls?" The

woman bent into a deep crushing bow from the waist, drawing startled yaps from the dog.

I frowned. I was a mercenary, and I never worked for free, but if there were Murkburn survivors at Diggydop Falls the chances of getting paid would be higher if I were to hand-deliver a lost member of the flock to them. The woman was homely, but maybe in another era and born within a different class, she would have been on the edge of almost good-looking... There was bound to be some equally homely tavernkeep or lonely stableboy excited to see her alive who might pay me a bit of coin for keeping her that way.

“I can escort you to the falls, but there is something I must do before we set off.” I turned back to the mess of goblin corpses, drawing my wickedly sharp dagger.

I returned shortly toting a small burlap sack dripping blood, and the woman, her tiny dog, and I, all set off westward towards Diggydop Falls.

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The sun had just begun its slow descent, darkening the path through the woods, the canopy of leaves enveloping us in a premature twilight. The woman led the way, her stride sure, and her talking non-stop. Her name was Daffodil, a plant which she was ironically allergic to. She was thirty summers old and had lost her virginity a decade prior to a blacksmith, an encounter that had given her nethers an infernal itch which she had only just recently been cured of. Like her namesake she loved rain showers, and her favorite food was stewed pigeon with a side of fresh-cut pears. Daffodil broke her nervous stream of chatter to ask me if I liked stewed pigeon, and I had to admit that I did, though it was a rarity on the innless roads I often traveled. She seemed excited by this admission, as if I had called her a friend.

“Wait, I do not know your name!”

Daffodil paused mid-stride to look back at me, her eyes wide with embarrassment.

“Clove.” It wasn’t really—But I didn’t give my real name out.

“Clove.” Daffodil breathed the name, looking at me with a smile. It was a nice smile, I decided.

I could hear the sound of rushing water, each step drawing us closer to the source. Daffodil's excitement was evident, her pace increasing in speed, the dog trapped in a tight vise between her elbow and forearm, flopping.

"Wait." I caught up with her easily with my longer legs and placed a gentle but firm hand on her shoulder. "Let me go first. Just wait here for a moment until I call for you."

The woman blanched, her eyes furtively glancing around at the verdant foliage surrounding us, then nodded frantically in assent.

I strode forward cautiously. While the sky through the tree canopy still bore bright orange evidence of sunset, the shadows beneath the boughs were heavy, darkening the path. Voices, low and conversational, carried over the rumble of the cascading falls. I crouched, moving low in the underbrush, creeping steadily closer. Goblins weren't the only worry in these woods. Brigands, highwaymen, kidnappers, or even this supposed demon horde could have easily found the Murkburn survivors and claimed the camp as their own.

Or was I walking into a trap? I suddenly imagined Daffodil, cackling and rubbing her hands together in the underbrush behind me.

I felt the now-familiar flutter in my chest and steeled myself with a deep breath, calming down. No, my intuition was well-honed, and Daffodil was about as much of a threat as the nettles I was traipsing through. Annoying and itchy, but certainly harmless.

The treeline broke, revealing a small clearing of flattened earth and river rock next to Diggydop Falls. At the center of the clearing, a small campfire blazed merrily, surrounded by a gaggle of people in a diverse spectrum of garb. I spotted a handful of men and women in homespun dress, some vendors and merchants, and a few men in heavy steel plate armor bearing the insignia of Murkbum. Town guards—far from their posts—their presence lending credence to the tale spun by Daffodil. Perhaps the town *had* fallen. Everyone was consumed by tasks, their faces drawn and haggard, and a smattering of mild injuries were being tended to. In the center of the camp, a large cauldron that hung over the campfire bubbled with a delicious smelling stew.

My eyes were drawn to a particularly striking profile—a white-haired Elf—his silhouette sharp and refined, adorned in exquisitely tailored silk robes of deep violet. As I watched, one of his long, pointed ears twitched almost imperceptibly, and his head snapped up, his gaze locking onto my hiding spot with unnerving precision.

I stared. The elf was pale enough to be considered an albino, or some variant thereof, but his skin bore the natural luminescence that I had only seen from the Fey folk. Long hair the color of moonlight streamed down to touch his robed backside. A True Elf, I realized with a hint of awe, not the watered down version that was so often found in exquisite banquet halls of royal courts, in brothels, or on the gilded streets of major cities. His slightly narrow face was a sculpture of high cheekbones and delicate jaw. A level of beauty reserved for thoughts of noble maidens—though the Elf's bearing was decidedly masculine. Despite the flowing white locks, his eyebrows were of a more ashen hue, arched with cosmetic intent over eyes of slightly almond shape. The Elf's nostrils suddenly flared, and I had no doubt that he was smelling my blood-caked leathers.

As if to confirm that thought, his pert lips twisted in a delicate sneer of disgust.

The Elf raised a hand, fingers elegantly tracing a sigil in the air in front of him.

Wow, He's Hot. I thought to myself as a sudden burst of mage-light illuminated my crouching form for the whole camp to see.

The Elf's companions all looked startled, their bodies freezing with fright. I slowly rose from my crouch, lifting my empty hands in a gesture of peace. Half of the assembled group drew steel, their movements wary and nervous, while the others took quick retreating steps, drawing closer to the fire.

"I come in peace," I stated, my voice even and clear, carrying over the roar of the falls. The white-haired Elf's cool gaze remained fixed on me, a flicker of something unreadable in his eyes. He lowered his hand, a silent command that made his armed companions pause, though their weapons remained ready.

"There is little peace in these lands. State your purpose here." The Elf replied, a touch frosty, though his eyes were sweeping clinically over my well-worn leather armor, my sword, the fresh scrapes on my face, and the

small bloody burlap sack tied to my belt. I was surprised to see his inspection slow with a new appraisal; leaving a trail of heat over my armor-covered breasts and thighs.

Languidly, the Elf's eyes traveled back to my face and stayed.

"Are *you* from Murkbum?" I retorted with a query of my own.

His head cocked a bit as he regarded me through cold eyes.

My body instinctively tensed. I had seen that expression before—on countless battlefields, and in fleeting moments before the eruption of Tavern brawls. This Elf was no scroll-pusher.

My eyes traced the path and distance I would need to get close enough to the Elf to cut him down before he could weave a spell at me. Twenty paces, and I would need to strike swift and true. As if sensing the math I was conducting, he continued staring as he lifted his hand, sliding his thumb over each knuckle to crack them with extraordinary one-handed dexterity and speed.

Well shit.

"Daffodil!" I called out, my voice carrying clearly over the rushing water, my arms still raised. The summons were barely out of my mouth when a clumsy crashing and the excited yapping of a dog erupted from the underbrush behind me. A moment later, Daffodil burst into the clearing, her face streaked with dirt. She froze for a moment, wide-eyed, her eyes adjusting in the glare of the mage-light before her attention settled on two men in the crowd.

"Jimson? Peter? You're alive?!" Daffodil exclaimed joyfully, rushing forward with her dog in tow.

Jimson and Peter blanched, looked at each other, and winced simultaneously as Daffodil crashed into them, throwing her arms around them both.

They seemed, hale and whole. Not a single scratch upon their bodies to indicate that an escape that would warrant abandoning Daffodil had been necessary. I shot a glance at the travel bags near the men's feet, a neatly tied bundle of freshly cut wildflowers were tied to the strap of one bag. A lover's token.

"You would think they would be more thrilled to have their missing companion back."

The voice in my ear was surprisingly deep in tone. Resonant and sarcastic.

Jimson and Peter were trying to pull out of Daffodil's embrace without harming the dog. I sighed.

I turned quickly to face the white-haired Elf who was suddenly standing next to me. I tried not to show my surprise—I hadn't even noticed him move.

We stared at each other for a long moment. The mage light was dissipating, but not before I could make out the startling pale violet of his eyes.

"Forgive my rudeness." The Elf smiled and took a slight step back to execute a graceful bow, his waist-length white hair swaying elegantly. "I am Gallow. I was in Murkburn perusing their archives when the demons descended. Myself and a few of the more... military-inclined, helped guide these civilians here."

"Then you are not here in any official capacity for the Murkburn survivors?" I asked, the prospect of gold coins in exchange for Daffodil's rescue fading with each passing second. I shot another glance at Jimson and

Peter, who were gazing at each other over Daffodil's head, no doubt preparing a second escape... or a homicide.

The Elf's lips quirked upwards in a smirk. "Alas, all magisters and deputy magisters seem to have been eaten. But mayhaps you can apply your skills to another fresh contract—though I do not believe your former ward's *friends* have the gold for it." The Elf's violet eyes briefly alighted on Daffodil.

"Then it was you who made the decision to go to Diggydop Falls?"

An indignant scoff fluttered from Gallow's lips. "Diggydop... *Aerowyn Falls* was the name the Elder Elves gave this place before the humans came and demeaned it. And no, I simply chaperoned Murkburn's leftovers here."

I released a snort. *Leftovers*, that was one way to put it. "Well, since Murkburn is lost, the closest town now is Kumhaven. My charitable deed for the year has been completed, so I'll be off now."

Gallow's attention slid to the blood-moistened bag flapping against my thigh. The blood had begun to dry, but the smell of

not-so-freshly chopped goblin dicks was potent; a heady waft of licorice and vinegar.

“And you hope to sell these in Kumhaven’s apothecaries?” Gallow asked me with a delicate sniff of his perfect nose.

Hoisting the bag up, I wiggled it a bit, acting as if I wasn’t fully aware of elven nasal sensitivity. To my annoyance, the Elf didn’t even flinch. “Goblin dick powder is still the most lucrative aphrodisiac around. I can fetch enough gold to keep me fed and bedded in a decent inn for weeks with this bag of dicks.”

Gallow’s faint smile widened, a flicker of something intense in his lavender eyes. “Indeed,” he conceded, his voice soft, almost a purr that cut through the silence. “That is quite the haul of goblin dick. And this is by your hand?”

“One fight.” I said, my tone edging on challenge.

He took a slow, deliberate step closer to me, the surrounding camp seeming to blur into insignificance. The air had cooled notably with the setting sun, yet heat wafted off of the Elf, along with a slight crackle of electrical current. I

stood my ground, intensely aware of my nipples hardening under my armor.

"It seems my initial assessment of you was... shallow," The Elf said. "I find myself quite intrigued. A rarity for one as traveled as I am."

I was also well-traveled, but that was by human standards. Forty years, twenty of those spent doing mercenary work wherever it was needed. Elves stopped aging after the first hundred years, and even then, this Elf was...

Different.

Gallow was staring at me with something akin to hunger.

My body was responding. I could feel moisture begin to gather between my legs.

I saw Gallow's nostrils flare, and a sudden serene look crossed his features that seemed at odds with the feral look in his amethyst eyes. "I have come across many mercenaries, but none like you."

"I know." I said. I was something of an anomaly. A rare Death Doler. Barbaric, efficient and thoroughly aware of my skills. Many claimed that it was this air of self-awareness

that made me intimidating. I knew the jagged scar from hairline to cheek helped.

The Elf paused, his eyes lingering on mine. "Might we not travel together? I believe our combined strengths could prove... advantageous, especially in these uncertain times." His voice held a silken promise, an offer that felt less like a suggestion and more like an expectation.

"I don't work for free." I replied instantly. "Or... trade."

Gallow's answering smile was sharp. "Nor do I. The merchants I saved in Murkbum will pay us upon arrival to our destination. Lend me your swordarm and you will be... pleased."

"You mean, compensated?" I glared at him.

"Yes." Gallow said with a secret smile.

He stretched out his arm for a handshake and I bit back my grin, clasping his forearm and the fine silk robes garbing it with my goblin-ichor-encrusted leather glove. It was absolutely a bratty move on my end, but I loathed authority and perfection, both of which Gallow exuded with annoying natural grace.

Instead of recoiling, he clasped my forearm back with equal vigor, fingertips dancing out a secret rhythm I felt through my leather bracer. The Elf's grip was strong, far stronger than his elegant frame belied. I felt a door open inside of me, and then hastily slam shut.

I pulled my arm back first, eyes narrowing suspiciously.

Gallow was already turning away, his ankle length purple silks flowing around his leather boots as he strode back to the campfire. He waved his hand without looking back. "There is a spare bedroll near Jimson and Peter, since they share one. We leave at first light. Rest well, Amana Karl."

My body froze.

I had never given the Elf my name.

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I was standing next to Diggy—Aerowyn Falls. The sky and landscape were swathed in rich vibrant purple, as if a lens of amethyst had been fitted over my eyes. The ground was soft with verdant periwinkle-hued mosses and

flowers that swayed in a gentle breeze. The falls, cascading down from the bluffs, crashed upon the rocks below with the sound of windchimes.

I looked down. My armor was curiously missing, and I was wearing my beige linen shortclothes, which seemed to have been freshly laundered.

“S’gotta be a dream.” I said out loud.

“Yes. A dream.” The voice was familiar despite first gracing my ears only recently. I turned, surprised—and yet not very—to see Gallow standing a few feet away. His purple silk robes were the same as when we had met, but the very fabric now seemed possessed of a wanton edge, as if a singular breeze or thought could remove it.

Gallow’s lips quirked upwards in a not-quite smile, his gaze slowly raking over my body, from my bare feet to the taut muscle of my thighs and belly, up to my breasts, which I had bound tight with a long strip of linen. Dozens—no, a hundred—skirmishes reflected in thick corded keloided scars over my brown skin. A slash from an axe that had ripped me from shoulder to wrist. Dozens of healed puncture wounds from knife-points that had

found their way through poor-quality armor in my early years, before I could afford leather. My body was a roadmap of will to power.

I stared back proudly. "Do you like what you see?"

A chuckle, deep and resonant, echoed throughout the dream space. The secret smile remained fixed, but I knew the sound had somehow come from him. Demurely, the dream Gallow lowered his eyes, his long silver lashes guiding my eyes down his face to his chest, and lower still to the immense girth straining against the silk robes.

"Oh." I bit my lip to stop the wild hag-like cackle of delight that threatened to burst out of me.

"Show me." My voice was bright, thoroughly emboldened, because this was only a dream.

Dream Gallow smiled and reached for the elegant sash that held his robes closed and began to unbraid the binding. His fingers were long, the dexterity I had witnessed at the camp suddenly returning with purpose. Within moments, the long embroidered cloth had fluttered to the ground, and he opened his

robes slowly, shrugging them off with courtesanly leisure.

“Oh.” I said again. This time in surprise.

“I thought you were a mage?” My voice was accusatory and a bit breathless.

“I am many things.” The Gallow in my dream said, his voice almost a purr. His shoulders were slightly broad, but the body revealed was akin to those that I had seen honed by acrobatics and boxing. All rippled muscle and smooth lines, with a tapered waist I felt I could almost fit in my hands. My eyes lowered to the muscular V-shape ending at the top of his matching purple trousers, and then descending farther to a bulge that seemed nigh-impossible.

“Should I continue?” Gallow’s eyes had lifted back and were watching me with intensity.

I was turned on, and despite the fact that I knew this was only a dream, I could see that this mirage of a Gallow was well aware of my desires.

“Take off everything.” I said, almost too quickly.

I still have my pride because this is only a dream. I reminded myself.

That secret smile slunk back onto the Elf's face, and I watched in rapt attention as the silken trousers dropped and Gallow lowered himself with cat-like precision down to his knees, hands on thighs, elbows out and back ramrod straight. His long silver hair touched the back of his bare heels.

MY GODS.

It was perhaps the biggest cock I had ever seen. A thick bulbous head, housed upon a girthy shaft of nearly pearlescent skin that mirrored his pale countenance. A tremor ran through me as I beheld every ridged vein and the slight curve, my body involuntarily doing the math. Yes, this artisanal cock would hit every spot, scratch every internal itch, make every—

"Does it please you?" Gallow's voice was harvested spider silk. The look he gave was raw, unyielding.

"It's alright." I lied. My voice cracked a bit. Pitched too high.

As if sensing my rapt attention, his cock gave a responsive twitch in mid-air, dislodging a perfect pearl of precum at its tip.

“Touch yourself.” I commanded.

The Elf made a neat sucking noise with his mouth and a thick wad of foamed spit slipped from between his perfectly pursed lips to fall in slow motion to the tip of his engorged head. We both watched attentively as the spittle slowly slid down his shaft, and when it finally eased its way to the base of his length, Gallow shifted on his haunches, spreading his knees a few inches wider.

Then he began to stroke. Tantalizingly slow, his grip slickened by his own spit and pre-cum. His elegant fingers tightening as he milked himself. He leaned back a bit, his free hand settling into the thick blanket of moss and flowers beneath him, steadying his frame as he lifted his hips. All the while, his stare stayed fixed, matching mine.

“Join me.” Gallow’s voice was a commanding thrum of desire, his lips parted in pleasure. A low moan escaped him and I nearly tackled him right then and there.

“Keep going.” I said instead, lifting my chin as I peered down at him. I wanted to see his face contorted, his body fouled with his own release.

He must have understood the look on my face, because his hand began to pump with more ardor, rougher. His delicate brow took on a furrow of intensity. Errant silver strands of hair slid across his face.

Yes. I breathed, leaning forward a bit to watch. My feet stayed rooted on the spot.

A raw moan slipped from his lips, his eyes breaking contact with mine for a moment as they rolled back in his head. His frame quivered.

I wanted to lick him.

Gallow arched into the air—

I woke with a start as a large soup cauldron clanged with an echo on the rocks surrounding the edge of the encampment at Diggydop Falls.

“Sorry!” Daffodil called out with an embarrassed laugh. “The pot just rolled out of my hands!”

There was a chorus of groans from multiple nearby bedrolls, accompanied by a few curses. Overhead, the sky was a soft mottled pink at the edge of the pre-dawn darkness.

I covered my mouth, effectively halting the raw string of expletives that threatened to slip out. *The worst possible time to end the hottest dream I have ever had.* I threw the top layer of the bedroll off and sat up, letting the cool morning air wash over my feverishly hot limbs.

It was just a dream.

I glanced down at my undershorts.

I had soaked through to the bedroll. Casually, I pulled the thin blanket back over my legs and glanced around the camp. Save for Daffodil and an older man gathering firewood, everyone else was still in their bedrolls.

Not everyone, I corrected myself.

I watched as Gallow strode from the treeline back into camp. He had exchanged his purple robes for pale grey silks that would have been more suited for manor life than the woods. Despite this, in his arms was balanced

a woven basket heavy with foraged food. He saw me watching him and changed course for my bedroll, his lips quirking upwards in that secret smile again.

“Did you sleep well?” Gallow asked, sliding effortlessly into a crouch next to me.

My eyes narrowed as I examined his face. But his expression was neutral, bordering on pleasant.

“Great. A dreamless sleep.” I added.

Gallow made a small noise that sounded suspiciously close to a chuckle, then dipped his hand into the basket, rummaging. “Ah, I was worried that you retired before your needs were met. You must hunger from your journey to Aerowyn Falls with beloved young Daffodil.”

I gave a little snort and Gallow paused his basket-rummaging to give me a warm look. “Would you indulge an old elven tradition with me?”

“Depends what it is.” My stomach gave a small gurgle of need and I sat up a bit, the cool air chilling me.

Gallow's amethyst eyes flashed. "My people believe that when the dawn comes, you must feed those who have not been sated the night prior, or else be cursed to a life of dissatisfaction." Gallow pulled his hand out from the basket, a plump blackberry between his fingers. He looked from the berry to my mouth. "May I?"

"Yes."

Gently, Gallow pushed the berry between my lips, my eyes widening as it burst upon contact with my tongue. A torrent of sweet and slightly tart juice. I swallowed. Again and again. The berry pulsed continuously until I could take no more, and then suddenly, as if sensing my satiation, the berry ceased its squirting, settling into simple masticated fruit on my tongue.

Gallow watched me swallow the last drop and then his gaze danced to my mouth. "May your belly be full of fruit." He said with a sagelike air.

His thumb brushed gently at a bit of purple juice dripping from the edge of my lip and then he rose, gracefully, balancing the wicker basket on his hip. I stared as he strode away, licking the juice from his finger.

Chapter 2: Kumhaven

The camp packed up, and the caravan moved out. A somber procession of nearly twenty-five souls. Five armed guards, veterans of the city's defense, led the way to Kumhaven, followed by a motley group of civilians and a few tradesmen pulling carts laden with salvaged tools. Hopeful laughter occasionally broke through the quiet, a fragile sound amidst the prevailing gloom.

As their newly hired defender, I took up the rear of the procession, fully aware that goblin raiders seemed fond of hitting travelers from the back. Making matters worse, on top of the usual threats posed by goblins and highwaymen, there was now the additional risk of demon attack. I glanced over at Daffodil, who was chattering loudly to Jimson and Peter, their faces furrowed with blatant annoyance.

If the demons came, would they leave Daffodil and her dog behind?

I decided that I wanted to see Daffodil settled somewhere cozy in Kumhaven. A bakery or a shop that sold handmade napkins. A place with a dog bed.

“What are you thinking about?” The warm voice next to me would have startled me if I hadn’t glimpsed the purple silk out of the corner of my eye a moment before.

“Dog beds.” I answered. Which was true.

Gallow shot me a cool look. “Planning on spending more time with your ward?”

“Till the end of my days.” My voice dripped with sarcasm. Ages ago, centuries before my time, defense of one’s charge would have been a lifelong pact. A consensual union between ward and protector.

“She is lucky then.”

There was a fine-edged layer under his tone that I found more than a bit interesting. “So you’re a mage?” I deflected, remembering the magical light that had illuminated me in the shadows last night.

“I prefer wizard.” Gallow said haughtily.

“Is there a difference?”

The Elf gave a sniff. “It would be akin to calling you a tavern bouncer. Admittedly, a very *charitable* bouncer...” He glanced at Daffodil

who was walking alone—Jimson and Peter's strong pace had finally outmatched her.

"My charity is complete for the year, I already told you." I was trying to ignore how good his hair smelled. "And you can drop the act. Your fine robes and genteel manners don't hide the fact that you're a battle-class magic user."

The Elf looked at me with refined surprise. "Impressive, I am well-spelled against magical detection."

I grinned and tapped my nose. Beneath the warm scent of expensive oils there was a slight acrid tang of soiled oxygen surrounding him. I had smelled it on countless battlefields, just before battle-mages and wizards had released waves of burning death upon soldiers.

I knew this from personal experience, because I had killed many of them.

Gallow made a small contemplative sound but said nothing further.

"Were you with any adventuring companies?" I asked, my curiosity piqued.

"Many." Gallow admitted after a pause, a slight smile gracing his features. "And you?"

"I've been a mercenary for over 20 years. Worked at a few adventuring companies. Went solo. Hated it. Then I went to ranger school for a bit because I thought I needed fresh air. That was... rough. Then I returned to merc work. I think I am ready to retire. I should retire... But I am not sure to what end."

Gallow was listening intently, his long ear twitching every so often as a bird warbled in the distance or something small disturbed the thick underbrush flanking the forest road. "Twenty years is a long courtship with death."

"Mmph". I mumbled noncommittally. "Tell me about the demons in Murkbun. Does anyone know where they came from?"

"I've never seen them before—and I am well-versed in demonology. I'm hoping to acquire some ancient bestiaries from the Kumhaven archive. And... a bath." Gallow ran his hand through his hair, giving me a nice view of his bicep through his silk sleeve. I had a brief flashback of the dream and a wave of heat washed over me. This Gallow and the one that had visited me in my dreams last night didn't seem to have any physical differences.

At least, none that I could see with his clothes on.

"I'm going to see how folks are doing up front." I increased my pace, a sudden urgency seizing me, hoping the physical distance would create a mental one, outside the Elf's intense scrutiny. A soft, knowing chuckle floated from behind me, and Gallow effortlessly matched my new stride, his movements fluid and unhurried. His eyes sparkled with an unhidden amusement that made my cheeks warm.

"How far is Kumhaven—and is there a possibility that the horde of demons that ransacked Murkbum would follow?" I ask, forcing a neutral tone, trying to ignore the heat rising in my loins.

"I believe we are safe. At our current pace, and without further... interruption," he replied—pointedly flicking his eyes towards several well-dressed merchants up ahead who had already paused the procession several times to empty their bladders—"We should reach the outskirts by late afternoon. The main gates will be visible just before dusk if the path remains clear."

The forest canopy continued to filter the daylight, casting long, shifting shadows ahead

as the caravan wound its way deeper into the woods.

"I haven't been to Kumhaven in a decade." I admitted, after a companionable stretch of silence.

"Do you like whiskey?" Gallow asked, glancing at me. .

"Obviously."

"Then you will love Kumhaven's new distillery. And it has a very nice inn."

I looked him square in the eye. "Can wizards influence dreams?"

The corner of Gallow's lip curved upward. "A rumor from the anti-magick establishment."

That wasn't a firm denial, I noted. But I decided not to press it. Just then a scream rent the air near the front of the caravan.

I unsheathed my sword, dashing forward, Gallow keeping up easily next to me.

We reached the guards at the front of the line, who had already taken up a defensive formation. Up ahead, a dozen men stood in

front of a felled tree, blocking the path forward. I took in their roughspun garb, cladded shoes, and worn, rusted swords.

Bandits—and of the more formidable variety. I shot a glance at Gallow who gave me a slight nod.

Yes, this was exactly why I was here.

I stepped forward and the bandits regarded my scarred visage, heavy leather armor, and large sword nervously. I was tall—easily six feet—and built sturdy. All corded thick muscle and gravitas. My long braids were half piled in a bun on the top of my head, the rest cascading freely down my back. Already I could feel the familiar flutter in my chest, and I took a deep slow breath to calm myself down.

Gallow watched me intently.

“Let us pass through and no blood will spill.” I called out in the sudden silence. My tone was pleasant, but my eyes were cold.

One of the bandits, the largest of them all, strode forward, spitting on the ground as he approached to within an arms length. “Seems we outnumber your swords.” The man looked past me to eye up Daffodil, who was crying

openly, then shifted to Gallow, lingering there before returning to me.

I had seen that hungry look before. A rage, visceral and raw, coiled in me.

“You send a woman to spea—”

I unsheathed my sword in a flashing arc and took his head in one clean swipe.

There was a moment of shocked silence from both the caravan and the bandits as the headless body swayed and a great geyser of blood sprayed everyone within a ten foot radius.

Daffodil shrieked, her screams turning into gurgles as a great gout of bandit blood splashed into her mouth.

“Quiet her, Gallow.” My voice was cool. I heard him mutter an incantation, the arcane words spilling from his mouth with warm resonance, and Daffodil’s screams were cut off. I glanced back at her, her mouth still moving, pumping but soundless.

I turned back to the bandits who were staring agape at their headless leader’s body. I cleared my throat and they looked up in unison, faces ashen.

“We are going to pass through now. Please leave the area or there will be more heads in the dirt.” I said calmly.

The bandits ran, scattering in all directions. We waited a moment for the sound of the last boot crashing through the undergrowth to give way to silence.

“Move the body.” Gallow commanded the guards. They hustled quickly, nearly scrambling over each other to fulfill the request.

I shot Gallow a look. “You speak to the guards with such disrespect. It’s a wonder they listen at all.”

He let out a short, dismissive snort. “You should ask why they are here in these woods with elderly merchants and scullery maids.” He shot me a pointed look, eyes cold for a moment. “I found them sniveling behind rubble, attempting to sneak out of the barracks while their comrades were disemboweled by demon claw. Cowards. They travel with me because they are scared, and they obey me because humans crave an armored hand telling them what to do.”

"I'm human too." I reminded him, leaning in close, my tone low. "Look at them. They are children—barely twenty summers alive."

Gallow looked at me then, his face softening back to its ephemeral lines, the edge leaving his voice. "Perhaps," he conceded. "Yet, how many goblins did you fell to return a lamb to a flock that would discard it again in a heartbeat?" His stare was unwavering, a silent challenge in his compliment.

I frowned.

Turning away from me, Gallow snapped his fingers and Daffodil's screams rent the still air again.

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It is said that several elves left the UnSeelie Realm due to a civil war between enclaves hundreds of years ago. As birthrates declined and the Elders began to die, elves became increasingly more visible in the cities and forests above the plane of the Fey. Some even chose to bear children with humans, their progeny becoming less rare as time progressed and the bloodlines diluted.

But then there were **True** elves. Old creatures who rarely, if ever, left the UnSeelie Realm and scorned humanity, as well as those of their own kind who had lived for generations in the Above World.

I had never met a True Elf before last night.

Tricksters.

Liars.

Rumors of elven wiles and mischief abounded, passed down from the olden days, watered down by the river of time. But I was a northerner, a mountain brat. Generationally raised on stories of besotted children and adults alike being whisked away through secret passages conjured within cold fireplaces, dragged into the dark paths towards the shimmering gates of the Unseelie Realm, never to be seen again.

A sudden memory of a violet-hued waterfall washed over me. A tendril of white hair brushing over a heaving pale chest. A masculine moan shuddering. The thought sent a soft pulse of electricity through my clitoris.

Horny as I was, lived experience had taught me to be cautious around ancient things.

“Is there something that I can help you with?” Gallow’s hefty baritone cut through my reverie. His eyes were glittering with amusement.

I frowned. “We should get moving.”

“To Kumhaven.” The Elf intoned. He turned and shot a stern look to the guards and the caravan then set off at brisk pace at the front of the line. I waited, watching the line of civilians pass me, their horrified eyes avoiding mine while also trying not to stare at the body that had been rolled off into the underbrush behind me.

“Thank you.” Daffodil said quietly. She was the last in the caravan line, the dog in her arms eerily silent. With a start, I realized that Gallow had magicked the both of them and only Daffodil’s enchantment had been dispelled.

I gave her a small but gallant nod and she smiled, though it didn’t quite reach her eyes this time.

One thanks out of twenty-five wasn't too bad.

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The dense forest finally yielded as we arrived at the outskirts of Kumhaven a few hours before sunset. The trees gradually thinned out until they gave way to welltrodden dirt roads. Ahead, sturdy stone walls encircled Kumhaven, a stark but necessary scar on the landscape. Above the gatehouse, a worn banner bearing a stylized oak leaf fluttered lazily in the breeze. The town itself was a bustling hub. Timber-framed buildings with smoke curling from their chimneys lined cobbled streets, and the air hummed with the sounds of commerce and daily life. Farmers' carts rumbled past, children chased each other, and the scents of woodsmoke and baking bread mingled with those of heavy metals from a blacksmith's forge, filling the air.

The guards at the giant portcullis gate looked harried, dark circles bruising the delicate skin beneath their bloodshot eyes. They waved our caravan through without even

a cursory glance. Beyond the portcullis, the town teemed with activity; an obvious byproduct of the razing of Murkburn and the presence of its displaced residents. Our caravan made its way deeper along the main street before halting en masse at the large statuesque fountain in the center of town.

There were a few goodbyes, but for the most part the caravan simply began to dissipate; folks breaking off to head towards the homes of friends and distant relatives, or making their way to their respective guilds to sign up for work and try to begin new lives in Kumhaven. Daffodil gave me a small hug and ran off to catch up with Jimson and Peter (who appeared to have mustered an astonishing burst of speed while Daffodil was occupied with her goodbyes). The Murkburn guards looked to Gallow with a pitiful mix of hopefulness and desperation, but the Elf had already turned his back to them, fixing a silent scowl on any who seemed inclined to approach. After a time, the guards left as well, making their way to the pubs to drown their sorrows or to the Kumhaven barracks to plead for work.

Then it was only the merchants who remained. I watched them bow in unison to

Gallow, who echoed the gesture elegantly. The older of the three reached into their satchel and handed over a hefty looking velvet coin purse. One by one, the merchants also peeled away, until I found myself standing alone with Gallow, the last echoes of gratitude fading into the sounds of Kumhaven. He watched me, an unreadable expression on his face, as the sunlight glinted off of his white hair.

“And my coin?” My tone was firm.

“I will need to count the purse before I can equitably distribute your cut, of course, but I’m sure you are famished. Let us go over the particulars of your payment over dinner? I know a place that excels in roasted lamb shanks with a sublime lemon sauce.” Gallow’s voice was light and lilted. An advanced sales technique if I ever heard one.

It worked. At the mention of food, my stomach gave a loud snarl, audible over the din of passers-by on the street. I glanced down at my blood and dirt-caked armor, a frown forming on my face.

Gallow stepped closer, his eyes sweeping over my battle-worn appearance with a familiar intensity that felt almost comforting. A soft smile played on his lips. “First, I imagine

you desire a bath, a change of clothes, and perhaps a cold draught of whiskey?"

I *did* imagine that.

He gestured with an elegant hand towards a more prosperous looking street. "There's an inn I know, quite comfortable, and with remarkably good spirits. You've earned it, Amana. Allow me to see to your... arrangements. After all," his eyes met mine, a promise in their depths, "a hero should not have to concern herself with such mundane matters."

"As long as you don't cover these arrangements out of my cut." I said, overly wary of tricks.

Gallow drew his shoulders back with a small indignant sniff. "I would never repay your labors with such a ploy."

"Fine." I was starving and suddenly exhausted from the day. A good meal, a decent rest, and I would be off to see whether the magistrate or the apothecary would pay more for my bag of goblin dicks.

Gallow's smile widened, a twinkle of triumph in his eyes at my weary acquiescence.

He turned while performing an almost imperceptible flick of his hand and a small young man in threadbare clothing who had been discreetly watching us from a nearby fruit stand stepped forward immediately. Gallow murmured a few low, precise instructions—in the midst of the whispered exchange I heard a jumble of requests that included abundant hot water for bathing, fresh, clean clothes, and indeed, a generous measure of aged whiskey. A surprisingly heavy weight of coin was placed in the kid's hand, and he bowed deeply before hurrying off to execute the orders.

I released a snort as Gallo extended an arm towards me, a gesture of almost courtly propriety amidst our dirty bustling environs. "Come, let us feast." His voice was velvet.

Gallow led me through Kumhaven's main thoroughfare, past the general hubbub, to a grand establishment that stood apart from the surrounding timber-framed buildings. The Silver Chalice Inn boasted a facade of well-maintained stone covered with crawling rose, and a sturdy oak door adorned with intricate carvings. Inside, the air was a warm embrace, thick with the scent of spiced wine, roasted meats, and polished wood. The common room was a hive of activity, though

not chaotic. Adventurers with gleaming gear, merchants in fine clothes, and local gentry occupied polished tables by a roaring hearth. Soft lute music drifted from a corner, lending an air of sophisticated comfort.

The kid from the street was there, standing by the bar, sneaking a sip from a discarded drink left on the counter. He spotted us and gave a thumbs up before sneaking out of the inn like a shadow. Gallow steered me away from the throng towards a discreet staircase leading to the upper floors. Even as I ascended, I could feel the grime of my journey begin to erode against the promise of clean sheets and hot water.

We traversed the second floor landing and Gallow halted at another heavy oak door, this one covered in delicate carvings of sprawling trees. I inhaled deeply, catching the faint, sweet scent of incense rubbed into the wood—or perhaps it was the wood itself, infused by age and luxury? I hadn't been privy to such opulence in a long time.

Gallow was watching my face, a small, knowing smile playing on his lips. "I've been to Kumhaven many times on my journeys, and I will say this is my favorite room in the town."

He opened the door with a muted flourish, revealing a chamber that redefined comfort.

Sunlight streamed through tall leaded-glass windows, illuminating rich tapestries depicting vibrant woodland scenes and a meticulously carved four-post bed draped in crimson velvet. A thick, fur-covered rug was laid across the polished wooden floor, a silent invitation to tired feet. In one corner, gleaming under the light, stood a magnificent freestanding copper bathtub—easily large enough for four—its surface polished to a brilliant sheen. Beside it, thick soft towels were stacked, and ornate bottles of fragrant oils promised a decadent wash. A small, intricately carved table near the bath held a crystal decanter and two delicate glasses, a harbinger of the promised whiskey. Gallow's amethyst eyes hadn't left my face—he was clearly savoring my reaction.

"Not bad." I said simply, striding inside. I heard Gallow close the heavy wooden door behind us, the sounds from the landing and first floor silenced suddenly. I took note of the magnificent, singular canopy bed in the corner of the large room and I shot Gallow a pointed raised eyebrow, a scowl deepening on my face.

Gallow, however, merely chuckled. It was a low, melodic sound that filled the luxurious space. He met my gaze directly, an unrepentant smirk playing on his lips. "It is indeed rather splendid, isn't it? And after the journey we've had, I thought you deserved nothing less than the best Kumhaven has to offer." He leaned against the doorframe, his lavender eyes sparkling with amusement, clearly enjoying my discomfort. His relaxed posture suggested he had no intention of leaving me to enjoy this newfound splendor alone.

A scent was wafting off of him like perfume. A heady mix akin to the smell of summer sweat melded with jasmine blossom, and beneath that, the slight salty undercurrent of pre-cum.

My body reacted immediately, my leathers suddenly too hot.

But I was stubborn, and the problem of Gallow—that far outweighed my desire—was that he knew things he shouldn't. My proclivity towards whiskey. My favorite meal. My name...

An anticipatory pulse tolled through my clit as my brain screamed at me to run. Run from this room, the inn, even Kumhaven

altogether—that I needed to get as far away from Gallow as my human legs could take me.

But I wasn't leaving without my pay.

"I will be right back." I said, marching out of the room without waiting for his response. I nearly ran down the stairs, skirting around the throngs of patrons clapping for the bard. The innkeeper looked up from the front desk at my breathless approach, a frown creasing his mouth.

"Do you have any more rooms?!" I asked. I could almost feel Gallow's smile from behind the door upstairs.

The innkeeper, after a quick glance around the bustling establishment, offered a sympathetic shrug. The answer was plain in his weary eyes: every refugee from the ravaged Murkburn, and likely many more, had descended upon Kumhaven. Rooms in town were a rare commodity indeed. I sighed, the weight of the day and the absurdity of the situation pressing in.

What am I so damned afraid of? I asked myself, the question echoing hollowly.

I turned and stomped back up the stairs, the familiar scent of my own road-worn leather armor a comforting—if pungent—embrace.

No matter. If I had nothing else in the world, I was blessed with extraordinary willpower. Tonight I would bathe, go to sleep, spur all advances and in the morning sell my goblin dicks and ask the half-elven apothecarist if True Elves could enter dreams.

Then, depending on the apothecarists answer, I would either fuck Gallow, or flee. Either solution would be easy.

Brimming with pride at my resolve, I pushed open the heavy door to the inn room and stepped inside. Unsurprisingly, a neat pile of silken robes and polished boots now rested on the fur rug. Gallow was already in the magnificent copper tub, steam rising around him like a mystic shroud. He leaned back, his eyes closed for a moment, then opened, and he regarded me with a languid, feline smile. His wet, white hair was slicked back, revealing the sharp, elegant lines of his face, and the water gleamed on the sculpted planes of his chest and shoulders.

Fuck.

I stood there, absolutely unable to pull my eyes away, an edge of hysteria bubbling up within me. Gallow's lavender eyes, sparkling with mischief and unmistakable desire, held mine, utterly unashamed. A slow, knowing smile played on his lips as he extended a hand, shimmering with water droplets, towards me.

"Come, Amana," his voice a soft murmur, rich and inviting, yet laced with command. "The water is exquisite and you are exhausted. Let me wash the dust of the road from your hair, the grime of battle from your skin. You carry the weight of so many burdens, but for tonight, let them fall away." He shifted, the warm water swirling hypnotically around his sleek, muscled form, his gaze never once breaking contact. The low candlelight glow of the room caught in the fine veil of water on his shoulders, highlighting the sculpted lines.

I stayed rooted to the spot. "Is this another elven ritual? Co-bathing after an adventure?" I was stalling.

"No." Gallow blinked slowly, like a cat. "It's entirely personal."

Oh, I know. I thought.

"Let me see the woman beneath the armor," Gallow continued, his voice dropping to a near whisper that seemed to curl around me like a tangible thing, "the fire beneath the fatigue. Or perhaps," he added, a challenge now evident in his tone, hand resting casually on the copper rim, "you've been on the road for so long that you've come to fear pleasure?"

The invitation hung heavy in the air. Even from my position near the door I could see that Gallow had added oils and salts to the water, turning it a soft opaque pink, obscuring his form below his nipples. Steam rose freely from the water, and my road-weary muscles gave a yearning ache. Every instinct within me screamed caution, a lifetime of solitary battles asserting itself, yet my body begged for the blissful release the tub promised.

Fuck it.

I began to shed my armor, each piece of leather and steel clanking softly, as if in surrender, as it hit the plush rug. Naked, I stepped towards the bath, the smooth warm copper welcoming my touch. And then, with a deep breath, I descended into the steaming water, the heat a sudden, shocking embrace. Gallow watched my every move, his smile

widening slightly, his lavender eyes now gleaming with an undeniable expression of triumph.

Chapter 3. Soft and Wet

I released a little sigh of pleasure. It had been three weeks since I had felt the joy of a bathtub, and even then it had been merely tepid water—barely above room temperature. The sheer size of this tub was impressive, almost a miniature pool. A sudden memory arose of the secret hotsprings that dotted the mountain passes surrounding my hometown. A surprisingly rare moment of nostalgia.

“Your smile is magnificent.” Gallow murmured.

I opened one eye, to peer at him. We had been in the tub for a good ten minutes, sitting in what had quickly become a comfortable silence—although even then, my dagger lay against the back of the tub behind me, in easy reach.

“May I come nearer to you?” His voice was disarmingly soft.

I nodded.

He slid closer, the scent of exotic spices and wet elf now mingling with the fragrant oils in the water. His hand dipped beneath the waterline and there was a sudden flash of light

beneath the surface. The water heated rapidly, and then steadied to a tolerable intensity.

“Fire magic?” I raised an eyebrow. Fire was a heavily regulated magical skill due to the fact that few possessed the ability to use it without employing magical scrolls or tomes. “What rank are you?”

“Wizards are... unranked.” Gallow said simply as he used his cupped hand to scoop freshly heated water over my shoulders. I could feel his eyes following the lines of my scars, and there was no sign on his face to indicate prior knowledge of secret things that he may have seen—in what I still suspected to be a shared dream. Despite this, he seemed transfixed, a dark delight sparking in his lavender eyes.

"It was... invigorating to see you wield a sword. To see a woman of such... experience." Gallow's tongue rolled over the word as if he were tasting it.

He had moved closer, I realized. Just a bit. If he had body hair, it would have brushed against mine.

“Yes, I’m very experienced.” I said, completely unable to help myself. I grabbed a

sponge and a bar of soap from the edge of the tub and brought them together, lathering vigorously as Gallow watched. His eyes followed the sudsy path of the sponge as I soaped my shoulders and chest. I tried not to smile as his eyes were drawn to my nipples when I partially lifted myself out of the water to scrub at my chest and scar-lined stomach.

Gallow's eyes narrowed, and finally he lifted his face towards mine. "I have a proposition."

Here it comes. I steeled myself, sinking back into the dirt-darkened water, ready to launch the rejection now primed on my tongue.

"Become my bodyguard."

"What?" I froze.

Gallow's eyes, deep lavender pools, bore into mine, devoid of their usual playful glint. The smirk, the seductive undertones, all vanished as he spoke, his voice clear and firm, cutting through the steamy air.

"You're serious?" I stared at him. "And just what am I protecting you from?"

The Elf sighed, lowering himself into the water until it reached his chin, long hair

spreading out around him like white flotsam. A forlorn angel. “Everything. I had traveled to Murkburn to investigate possible demon sightings when it was overrun and destroyed.”

“Aren’t you a mage? Why would you need to hire a bodyguard when you could just hurl a fireball from a distance?” I retorted, a small wave of contempt rising in my chest.

“Wizard, not mage. Killing the bandits on the way to Kumhaven would not have been an impossible task, however, using those techniques too often is... exhausting. It leaves me drained and vulnerable.” He said somewhat morosely. “And, I am *ill-suited* for traveling on the road.”

I thought of the bandit leader's lecherous glance towards the Elf that had ignited my fury and swift sword-arm. I didn't fully trust Gallow, but I liked him. More than I wanted to admit. A sharp vision of dirt encrusted hands leaving a trail of sooty fingerprints on Gallow's pale torso sent a wave of hot possessive rage through my frame.

Gallow lifted his lavender eyes to me once again and I could see flecks of glistening silver on the tips of his eyelashes. For a

moment, I wondered if they were a cosmetic addendum or a natural feature.

“And the pay?” I asked, forcing myself back into the realm of the practical.

“A hundred gold coin a week.” Gallow blinked slowly. “And... an orgasm every day.”

I tilted my head back and released a wild braying cackle. A hard grin flashing across my face as I leaned in close to the Elf, my exhaustion and hunger miraculously dissipated. “A hundred gold coin is a good start. But, it is very audacious for you to assume that you have the ability to make me cum.”

Gallow lifted himself from the water until his eyes were level with mine. A challenge. “Of course, I could not offer such an intangible concept without offering you a sample for your approval.”

I pursed my lips, staring at him. I had fucked positively rancid individuals with far less forethought than this—and quite a few of them had been wards by contract. However, none of them had ever *guaranteed* an orgasm, much less delivered one without a decent amount of assistance from my own clitoral machinations.

And none of my trysts had been nearly as exquisite-looking.

That's because it's a trap. Logic reinforced the cage restraining my raging clitoral boner. I had heard enough tales of fairies, mermaids and elves turning humans into willing thralls with their wiles to put me on high alert. I was prideful, intentionally masterless, and free.

The dull throb between my legs deepened.

Maybe, just a taste?

“If you cannot deliver on your... bonus. I will consider your defender contract valid with two hundred gold coins a week. Show me your wares, Elf.” I was smirking now. It was a noble’s ransom I was asking for. An impossible ask for work that would have typically netted me twenty coins—if I were lucky.

“Done.” Gallow’s voice was lilted, and suddenly his pert mouth was pressed against mine, his tongue sliding between my lips with an almost familiar ease as he kissed me deeply.

Surprised, I reflected it back with equal gusto. His mouth was warm and wet. Wanton. And when he pulled away, our lips parted breathlessly, a thin line of spittle still connecting us.

Hot.

I looked down. The water line in the tub had been dropping rapidly as we made out, and I could now see him fully. Broad shoulders, a tapered waist, and a surprisingly muscular frame—Identical to the dream at Aerowyn Falls. Gallow followed my line of sight as I stared at the thick head of his engorged length peeking out of the murky bathwater. A serene knowing smile quirking his mouth at my expression of disbelief.

My suspicions were confirmed. Gallow had indeed infiltrated my dream in some nefariously delicious fey way. My imagination was too limited to have imagined such a cock coupled to Gallow's frame. An eleven inch impossibility. An elven chimera with a baby arm attached to his loins.

"You—!" My accusation cut off with a hiss as Gallow's head dipped suddenly and his mouth clasped onto my nipple, his long tongue swirling as he sucked.

Whatever, I said to myself—dashing the dream on the rocks of my mind like a bear with a fish, then discarding it. I gripped the back of his head and pulled his face against my chest, demanding pressure. Gallow released a surprisingly sweet moan of pleasure followed by a series of small slurping noises.

We faced each other on our knees, the water in the tub lapping at mid-thigh level now. Gallow lifted his gaze to me, pausing in his administrations, my nipple lightly seized between his teeth. I could feel a nerve in my back pulsing, sending electric jolts through my backside and down my leg.

“Continue.” I nodded, breathlessly.

Gallow bit down. Firm enough to draw another sharp hiss from me, then his tongue was sliding over my nipple again like a warm salve.

All the while, he did not break eye contact.

My clit was throbbing almost painfully now. Slowly, I spread my thighs a bit, my partially submerged knees making a muffled noise against the bottom of the copper tub.

“May I give you a hand?” Gallow asked, his words vibrating around my nipple. His eyes were sparkling pits of deviance.

“You’re welcome to.” The words had tumbled out, and I was proud of myself for not yelling.

Gallow pulled his mouth from my nipple with a wet plop and I put a comradely hand on his shoulder to steady myself as his hand snaked between my legs in a slow sweeping cup, brushing against my swollen clit towards the wet. He made a small satisfied noise, like a cook testing hot soup, and then scooped, covering the scope of my nethers in my own juices.

Despite myself, my head bobbed affirmatively. Perversely pleased that I wouldn't be rubbed dry.

Then his splayed fingers began to move. Each digit, gliding in synchronization between my wet folds, interspersed with slick circular motions around the base of my clit. A perfect amount of pressure pushing down. A growl spilled out of my mouth as his head dipped down, seizing the other, yet-to-be-touched nipple, tugging and then suckling.

I could feel a familiar pressure rising inside of me.

He was actually doing it. I thought breathlessly, almost giddy.

This Elf Wizard was going to make me cum.

Gallow's hand suddenly stopped and he slowly pulled his mouth from my saliva-soaked tit. "Lay down, please."

Oh.

There was only a small puddle of grime-encrusted water in the tub now, but the copper walls and bottom were still blissfully warm. Still in a kneel, I leaned back slowly until my back touched copper, watching with interest as Gallow spread my knees. His cock bobbed, but instead of bringing his body forward, he leaned down as he bent at the waist and scooted backwards, head lowering to the dark curls crowning my mons. He slid a hand through his hair, pushing the long wet strands from his face, his lavender orbs locking onto mine again.

And then Gallow's long pink tongue slid along my clit, curling at the end like a cat lapping milk.

A full moan escaped me, my face contorting despite my best efforts.

In circles where bathing was an uncommon luxury, cunnilingus was frowned upon— a rare exotic treat reserved for patrons of brothels and nobles who could afford a daily bath. I was more experienced in fucking than most, and even then I had only been eaten out a handful of times in my life. I suddenly remembered forcefully sitting on a lover's face after they had taken their orgasm and attempted to deny me my own.

I knew I would have no such trouble this time.

Gallow began to lick earnestly, his tongue a mastery of movement and pressure. I was rolling my hips now, meeting his gusto with my own. His hands moved suddenly, one sliding to pinch at my nipple while the other dropped below his chin, his long fingers pressing against my entrance.

His fingers stayed still, his questioning eyes peeking over my pubes as his tongue worked.

“Yes.” I demanded in a growl.

I felt two fingers slide in slowly, testing, followed soon by a third. I could feel my inner walls pulsing around him, stimulated by his transcendent tongue. My knees were lifting higher, uncontrollably, as his hand began to pump an ancient rhythm. Each stroke dragging against my g-spot, each experienced thrust of his fingers drawing a wet splash out of me. The noises spilling from my lips grew louder and more raw as Gallow’s arm pumped faster, a piston. I realized I was holding my thighs, my knees almost to my shoulders. Surely the noises reverberating through the copper tub weren’t from me?

Suddenly, Gallow’s mouth pulled from my clit. His chin dripping with me, his hand still pumping. “Do you accept the contract?” His voice was cool and collected but his eyes were victorious.

I screamed out multiple affirmatives and climaxed so hard I blacked out.

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I awoke the next morning, naked and swaddled in blankets. The sun was high, streaming through the leaded glass windows of the room, bathing the bed in jarringly bright light.

“Good morn.” A warm voice called to me from close by.

I groaned and flipped over, peering out of a hole between the blankets groggily.

The Elf sat in a high backed chair at an ornate writing desk a few feet from the bed. His white hair was piled in a thick neat bun atop his head, and silver spectacles balanced on his nose. Unlike me, he was fully dressed—his purple silks replaced with an ensemble of pale smoky grey that darkened in a gradient as it flowed down his frame, near-black by the time it grazed the floor. In his hands, a large tome lay open.

I sat up, memories of the previous night crashing through me. “What happened after—?”

“After you *climaxed*?” Gallow finished with an angelic smile that reeked of gloating. “You woke up a few moments later and demanded the lamb I promised, ate

voraciously, then promptly drank the rest of the whiskey and fell asleep.”

My eyes shot to the nightstand where a platter of desiccated baby sheep remains lay picked clean next to an empty carafe. I rolled my tongue over my teeth, feeling the bits of flesh trapped in the holes of my molars.

Looks to be accurate. I sniffed.

“I didn’t sign anything did I?” I asked cautiously. “Didn’t prick my finger to paper or give a blood oath?”

Gallow blinked. “A verbal contract is sufficient for me. But you are welcome to dissolve it and end your service at any time.” He reached for a velvet bag on the table and tossed it to me. I snaked my hand out from the blankets, catching it easily in mid-air.

“Your pay for escorting Murkburn’s survivors to Kumhaven.”

I opened the satchel and dumped the coin into my hand. Two hundred gold pieces. Enough gold to catch a ferry to Scarletspire and hunker down until winter passed and the contracts returned.

There had to be a catch. At this point the gold was the farthest thing from my mind.

Gallow was watching me closely.

“I have questions before we go further.” I said, sliding out of the bed and making my way to my armor. I felt Gallow’s eyes rake over my frame appreciatively as I hoisted the leathers up. I frowned.

My armor had somehow reverted back to its original black. I ran a hand over the supple, conditioned leather. “Did you wash my armor?” I shot him a neutral look.

Gallow sat his elbow on the desk and rested his chin on his hand, peering at me, his lips quirked in that now familiar pseudo-smile. “Yes. It’s a wonder it wasn’t covered in maggots... But I imagine that was not the question you really wanted answered. Ask away.”

What does that dick do? I thought with an internal gleeful screech as I began donning my underclothing and armor.

“How long would this contract be for?” I asked instead.

Gallow blinked. "As long as you want. You are not a prisoner, Amana. Nor will I be dragging you into the depths of the Unseelie Realm... unless, you wanted me to."

I froze, my fingers clutching the strap of my chestplate. His tone had changed again. So subtle it felt like a wisp of smoke. But then he smiled again, and the flutter in my chest dampened the pit in my belly.

"So let me get this straight. I travel with you as your defender. Protect you from all manner of things that may potentially physically harm you, and you'll pay me one hundred gold a week as well as give me an orgasm every day?" I was trying not to scowl.

Gallow shot me a look that would have felled a kingdom. "Was I not to your satisfaction last evening?"

I was forty summers old and had grown up with several younger siblings, walked away from dozens of lovers, and had an uncanny ability to befriend every street cat I'd ever encountered. A chuckle loosed from my chest before I could stop myself. "Pouting doesn't work on me." I said evenly.

I watched with amusement as Gallow's face smoothed with terrifying speed. With an elegant finger he pushed his slipping spectacles further up his nose. "I figured as much. Yes, I am paying you quadruple the going contract rate for protection because my enemies are legion and very strong, and you are one of the fastest swords I have ever seen."

This was true. I was neither braggart nor humble.

"And the cum bonus?" I asked.

Gallow smiled, genuinely this time. I was surprised to see a bit of fang amidst his bright white teeth. "I am deeply attracted."

I finished donning my last piece of armor and strode over, boots heavy. Slowly I loomed over his seated frame, watching as his elegant neck stretched back to regard me comfortably. "So you're into muscle?"

The Elf gave me a slow languid blink. "Very much so."

I raised an eyebrow. "How old are you?"

"Very." Gallow said simply.

I figured as much. A True Elf.

“I have some rules of my own.” I said, my body casting a shadow over his pale form. “I am very serious about contracts and do not intend to die in the near future because of a misspeak or Fey trick. If there is danger for either of us, you must tell me true. If you mean to deceive someone, you must tell me true.”

It was an old rhyme that had suddenly dislodged itself from my youth. An ancient jig passed down through the mountains for generations since the UnSeelie Gates had appeared in the nearby forests. The Old Ones loved tricking humans by turn of speech, but they were bound by laws older than themselves to speak truth if it was demanded.

*Tell the Fey, on that day, to tell you true,
or you shall rue.*

A flicker of surprise crossed Gallow's features. It was only for a moment, but it was enough. Few humans knew the old Fey ways these days.

“Tell me true.” I repeated.

“Only you.” Gallow said seriously, his lavender eyes suddenly bright. His tone lilting

like my grandmother's when she sang the old foraging songs in the forest.

A scent of pine filled the air in the inn room for a few seconds before dissipating, and I almost closed my eyes in a moment of relief as the old homesickness in me abated.

"Then I am ready. Where do we go now, ward?" I smiled.

Gallow smiled back with surprising warmth. "To the Kumhaven archives."

Chapter 4: A Lot of Little Deaths

I strolled behind Gallow, my hand casually settled on the hilt of my sword as we made our way through the clogged streets of Kumhaven. On either side of the main road, carts lay strewn, laden with possessions, burlap bags of hastily harvested vegetables, and the occasional sleeping Murkbummer who had arrived too late to find lodging. I shot a glance at the overcast sky, sniffing experimentally.

I could smell no rain.

“The archives are just ahead.” Gallow’s head turned a fraction as he informed me, before his eyes returned to the path forward through the teeming crowd. He turned suddenly onto a side street, guiding us through a few back alleys and a park before we ended up on a smaller thoroughfare lined with shops and containing far less foot traffic.

A few heads turned at our approach, their gazes sliding over me and my armor, and then turning away quickly at the sight of my scarred face. It happened often enough that I

was nearly immune to either the recoil or scrutiny—but on this day, I was not the focus of attention.

I watched with interest as every head on the block was drawn to Gallow as he sauntered past. His long white hair was still piled in a thick bun at the top of his head, though a few misbehaving strands slid along the back of his high-collared long gray ombre robes. A rich purple silk sash was wrapped tight around his narrow waist to accentuate the elegantly tailored cut of his outfit. Gallow was a pale shaft of moonlight against the weathered stone, timber, and leaded glass of the storefronts we passed.

“With so many supposed enemies, do you ever think to... I don’t know... be a little inconspicuous?” I muttered.

Gallow’s long pale ear twitched in my direction, and without breaking stride he shot me a delicate scowl over his shoulder. “Only a human would wish to prune a grand garden.”

I snorted.

We rounded another corner onto a street lined with tall scholarly rowhouses. At the end of the block, a large squat structure

stood apart, its dark stone lined with ancient runes and sigils in lieu of windows. A fortress built for endurance through the ages rather than martial defense.

The main entrance was a heavy iron-bound door, scarred with age and guarded by two stoic armored figures whose faces remained partially obscured by their helms. We passed them, and inside the air was cool, dry, and laden with the scent of old parchment, leather, and dust. I released a small whistle, surveying a labyrinth of towering wooden shelves stretching up into the shadowy heights, each loaded with countless scrolls, leather-bound tomes, and clay tablets. Scholars hunched over cluttered tables poring over ancient texts, their hushed whispers and the rustle of turning pages the only sounds. Lanterns glowed softly in deeper alcoves, casting pools of warm light on delicate manuscripts.

"It's huge." I paused, feeling suddenly dizzy.

"This is the largest archive in the Eastern Reach." Gallow informed me in a low whisper that I could just barely hear. "Though it

has been a long time since I have returned to these hallowed halls.”

Gallow offered a crisp nod to a robed figure in clerical robes sitting behind a massive, ornately carved reception desk. The cleric, whose face was a network of gentle wrinkles, returned the gesture with a soft, deferential smile before returning his attention to the open ledger in front of him.

I trailed behind Gallow, my voice a hushed whisper, overly conscious of the cathedral-like silence of the space. “Have you worked with that cleric before?”

Gallow glanced back, a hint of amusement in his lavender eyes. “Oh, not at all, I’ve never met him before in my life.” he replied, his voice a low, resonant murmur. His smile turned coy. “It is amazing what humans will let you get away with when you are *undiminished*.”

“Or have the look of wealth about you.” I added, my eyes dropping to a delicate ceremonial silver dagger—complete with sapphire inlaid handle—tucked into his sash. If sold, the proceeds would feed several families for months.

A deep chuckle slipped from Gallow's lips, but no denial followed. "The tomes I seek are below, in a secret area forbidden to most. Come, my defender."

I followed him through the stacks and past book-absorbed scribes, towards a dark hallway that led to a spiral stone staircase descending into the depths. Gallow snapped his fingers and the unlit lanterns on the walls flared to life, winking out in our wake as we continued, obscuring the path behind us in total darkness.

We walked for a few minutes, my mind keeping count, as there were no landings to indicate floor-levels. Four stories below the earth, Possibly five? The stairs abruptly ended and we found ourselves standing at the edge of a massive subterranean room. Rows of stone bookshelves, seemingly carved from the foundations of the building itself, lay in neat rows that stretched out into the cavernous darkness beyond the lamplight. I lifted my foot, unsurprised to see an imprint left by my boot in the heavy layer of dust.

I also noted with some concern that ours weren't the only recent footprints here...

“Atrocious.” Gallow remarked darkly, sliding a pale finger along the spine of a book and frowning as he examined his now dust-coated digit. He set off again at a healthy clip, but soon after suddenly halted.

“Odd.” I remarked, noting several unusually bare shelves.

Gallow was frowning. “Yes. It is. Someone has taken the majority of the tomes I was looking for.”

“Can’t we just ask the front desk who took out the books?” I asked.

Gallow shot me a blank look. “It’s an archive, not a library. No true scholar would sully their reputation by gutting the innards of such a venerated repository.”

“Then a thief.”

Gallow’s frown deepened, then he shook his head, a quick decisive shake, “It matters not.” His features had slipped into a cold mask, impassive and emotionless, but I could feel a deliciously explosive rage simmering just beneath the elegant veneer.

I leaned in. “What are you looking for down here?—and tell me true. It’s not just a bestiary to identify a demon, is it?”

Gallow’s eyes swept towards me. There was a pause, as if he were weighing his words, and then a soft sigh slipped from his lips, accompanied by a rueful smile. “Yes and no. The day Murkbum fell there was... a tear, ripped between our world and the Dark. A tear large enough for dozens of demons to spill into Murkbum in a destructive rampage. Hundreds were slain. Possibly thousands.”

As Gallow spoke, I could feel the flutter in my chest swell to a drumbeat. “Tears happen all the time though.” I said, my voice hopeful.

Gallow shook his head. “The UnSeelie Realm is stable. The mortal realm is stable. Yes, random tears occur, and the occasional demon slips out and wreaks a bit of havoc before a paladin or mage can put it down, but this was not one of those events. This tear was more like... a hole. And it was deliberate.”

“So tell me true—why are *you* here? From what I can tell you don’t seem overly interested in saving humankind.”

A small smile twitched on the Elf's mouth. "I can think of one or two that might be worth sparing."

"Tell me *true*." I reminded him, my eyes darkening.

"That *was* true. But Murkburn was not the first to fall. Two weeks ago, a hole opened in the UnSeelie Realm. The resulting chaos nearly eradicated the Silver Enclave."

Ah, that would explain why a gossamer-skinned True Elf Wizard was roaming around these godsforsaken lands. Elf business. Which also explained the nearly endless gold on offer.

Gallow was watching me closely, his lavender eyes radiating a faint bioluminescent glow in the low light.

"And you're hoping a human-penned bestiary would hold a clue as to who opened these unusual tears?"

A derisive sniff flared Gallows nostrils. "My people sealed the Dark a millennia ago, and the toll of that effort nearly eradicated us. There are only a handful of human wizards across the realm with the skill for a tearing of

this magnitude, and most of them—in their hubris—wrote books about the demons within those realms. The wizards are ancient, kept alive beyond human years by magic extracted from the same tears we shuttered. Their names remain obscured still by that same magic. But— it is said that a name or two may still be found... on printed page.” Gallow smiled, and it was terrible and Fey—all teeth.

“And how will you know which wizard summoned the demons?” I asked. The few human wizards that I could recall that were old and skilled enough to rip planar holes were either sequestered in kingly courts or had gone into hiding deep in the wilds.

Gallow fixed his eyes on me, his smile widening further, revealing finely chiseled porcelain points... “I don’t need to know. I plan to kill all of them, just to be sure.”

I felt the thrumming in my chest drop to my clitoris.

Gallow’s wicked smile disintegrated like cake in the rain, his lips fluttering with a resigned sigh as his attention slipped back to the bare shelves. “But someone seems to have realized my discovery of this information was nigh... and the trail ends here.”

I closed my eyes, attempting in vain to banish the thought of those shark-like teeth scraping delicately along my neck.

“Who was your contact in Kumhaven?” I asked instead, attempting to distract myself.

Gallow waved his hand dismissively. “The Redhand. A local thieves guild. I paid them handsomely to confirm that the books still existed down here.”

I smiled. I knew of the Redhand intimately. A network of rogues scattered throughout the eastern cities of the realm. They weren’t very well-organized, unified, or trustworthy, but I knew exactly where their safehouse sat, because I had fucked a Redhand a year ago who had breathlessly begged me to join. (I hadn’t, obviously.)

“The moment the Redhand believe something has value they start taking bids for it on the black market auctions.” I smiled serenely, enjoying Gallow’s sudden scowl. His face contorting to express a blend of annoyance and hope.

I turned, beckoning Gallow to follow. “Let’s get your books.”

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The Redhand safehouse was a roughshod tenement nestled on the opposite end of Kumhaven. I had never been, but I was good with maps and directions. Our new course dragged us out of the neighborhoods containing scholarly rowhouses and affluent shops into decidedly rougher territory. I watched a child scurry past, her small bare arms trembling in the cold as she picked her way through the street, a wizened apple half-eaten in hand.

Some of the families that huddled against the walls and one another for warmth appeared to be from Murkburn—though the majority of the shanties and lean-tos of spare wood and bits of timber appeared to have been lived in for months.

I glanced at Gallow as he walked alongside me. His face was impassive, though every so often I saw him glance about, taking in his surroundings with cool interest. The

gawkers were more obvious here. Any pretense of respectability or manners was far outweighed by pure survival instincts for these locals. Furtive eyes scanned us to determine if we were threats, marks, or worse.

“You should go back to the Silver Chalice.” I said quietly.

Gallow looked at me, his jaw tightening imperceptibly. “I will do no such thing.”

“Then let me do the talking.” This was my world as much as the wilds were. Gallow was a creature whose ethereal countenance may have granted access to high courts, merchant halls, and ancient archives—but I was a child of muddied mountain hovels.

We reached the thick wooden safehouse door, a small iron sliding grate set within its center. I rapped twice and the grate slid open on well-oiled tracks, revealing a pair of kohl-smeared eyes.

“*May the Hand Swipe.*” My voice was neutral.

There was a pause. “You are early. The auction doesn’t start for an hour.”

I kept my face neutral, as if that information had already been known to me. “Yes, but I was supposed to meet Tamara in advance.”

The man behind the grate made a snarling noise. “Godsdamnit, I told her to stop inviting her scissor-cunts here!” The grate slid shut with a loud clang and the entire door swung open. The man behind it was large, his own leather armor thick and lined with red rope around the waist—the official mark of the Redhand.

“And this is my companion.” I said, turning back to the street—but Gallow was gone. My eyes searched the spot where he had just stood, my nostrils flaring.

I felt an invisible hand gently caress my butt.

Oh.

“*This* is my companion... which is my sword. Because—I am a... sword-wielder.” I straightened my back, gripping the hilt of my sword like a dumbass as I stared at the doorman.

“The fuck?” The doorman blinked.

“Sorry. Smoked far too much clipweed earlier. Still getting my bearings.”

The man looked at me and then nodded, his face softening a bit. A large swathe of soldiers and mercs smoked clipweed for pain relief, and it just so happened to be an extremely lucrative trade for the Redhand and other blackmarket dealers. One look at my scarred visage and it was easy to assume I was a very heavy smoker.

“Clipweed bar is on the second floor landing if you need to re-up. Tam’s room is four doors from that.” The man stepped aside and let me pass into the hall, closing the door behind me.

The hall was mostly empty, the walls covered in floor to ceiling red velvet curtains and expensive looking brass sconces. The attempts at opulence were thwarted by the smell of clipweed and liquor-laced vomit permeating the air, not to mention the threadbare rugs underfoot.

“Who is Tamara?” A voice whispered in my ear, a bit too casually. I tried not to grin.

I kept my eyes straight ahead. My stroll was purposeful. “A fuckbuddy.” I replied. A bit

of a stretch, since we had only fucked once—and I did not consider them a friend.

But Gallow didn't need to know that.

"Invisibility is a very high level spell." I said, also with an air of nonchalance. "How long can you make it last? One minute? Three?"

"Thirty minutes. I will find you when I have the book." Gallow purred in my ear. His breath was hot, and my nipples immediately perked as the warmth from his mouth faded, the air now feeling cool in contrast as he departed.

Incorrigible. I bit my lip to stop my grin and steeled my features as the hallway gave way to a main gallery. I looked up, my eyes scanning the mezzanine walkway of the second floor. On the gallery floor, a few dozen folks milled about or lounged on velvet upholstered couches, drinks in hand. Their extravagant clothing—a far cry from the thin rags covering the townsfolk outside—marked them as customers rather than Redhand. A bard sat plopped on a mountain of cushions in a corner, strumming a mournful dirge on a lute. His eyes were red and rheumy from clipweed, which seemed to be the norm for those who

frequented this area. Beyond the gallery, two large double doors stood open, revealing rows of wooden chairs arranged to face a small dais clustered with pedestals, each showcasing a different object.

The Auction Room.

“Clove?” A familiar voice called out from above me.

It took me a moment to realize someone was addressing me—because they were using my alias. I looked up, dismayed to see a familiar face gazing down at me.

Fuck.

“Hi Tam.” I sighed and ascended the stairs.

+++++

“I can’t believe you came to see me!”

Tamara’s excitement was palpable as I sat down at a stool next to hers and picked up the drink she offered. There was a soft flush of red on her cheeks that nearly matched the hue of the bright mop of shoulder-length curls on

her head. Her dark, nearly black eyes were sparkling. I took a large gulp of my whiskey and tapped the bar with my finger to signal another.

“I wasn’t expecting to be in the area.” I said truthfully as I glanced around. This floor made the gallery below seem nearly empty in comparison, and the majority of the patrons seemed to be here at the Redhand’s speakeasy. The barkeep, a solid woman of dwarven lineage, glanced at Tamara, then at me, then slid the whole bottle in our direction.

“On the house.” The barkeep winked benevolently. Tam shot her a smile.

Tam poured generous portions of whiskey into our respective goblets and then lifted hers in the air, her gaze locking onto mine. “To flames returned.”

If Gallow wasn’t lying about the duration of his invisibility, I would be out of this situation in the next few minutes. Not wanting to appear rude, I lifted the whiskey to my lips and drank deeply.

“Hear, Hear.” I heard a voice whisper in my ear, sultry and secret. A finger slid down

the small of my back, firm enough to raise goosebumps under my leather armor.

I almost choked on my whiskey.

Tamara raised an eyebrow.

I swallowed roughly, my gloved fist pressed against my mouth. The phantom warmth of a taut belly and chest pressed against my back, followed by arms gently wrapping around my torso. A delicate chin pressed into my shoulder. I didn't need to see Gallow to know he was staring daggers at Tamara.

"Sorry. I was just surprised." I admitted, lifting my eyes to meet Tamara. I kept my elbow on the bar, my stance loose.

I hadn't mentioned to Gallow that my "fuckbuddy" was the head enforcer of the Redhand. A formidable fighter in her own right, Tamara was also beloved by her fellow Redhanders and extraordinarily violent. If she detected even the slightest whiff of deception, or worse— that my invisible ward and lover was currently suckling on my ear in the middle of a reconciliation drink— I had no doubt that the room would run with blood, and the bulk of it would be my own.

Play it cool. I mentally hissed to myself. I poured another finger of whiskey and gulped it down.

“Surprised about what? That our night together a year ago meant so much to me?” Tamara’s voice was soft. Hurt. But her eyes were wild with emotion. “You cannot tell me that it meant nothing to you.”

I opened my mouth to speak just as the full spread of Gallow’s tongue lapped warmly along the length of my ear. A slow tantalizing drag. Noises escaped me that contained no actual words.

“What did you say?” Tamara frowned.

I collected myself, pretending to stretch so I could jam my elbow into the invisible body behind me. I felt his weight shift, dodging easily. A soft, almost imperceptible, chuckle in my ear.

“I said ‘*Aargh*’ because there are no words... really.” I was stammering now, gladdened beyond belief that my skin was too dark to reveal the flush creeping up along my neck. I leaned forward on the stool, hoping to appear attentive, but in actuality desperately

attempting to escape the searing heat of Gallow's invisible tongue.

Tamara leaned forward too. Her eyes shimmering with emotion. "Yes, there are no words. Clove, I yearned for you. There are... so few like us."

This was true. We were both powerhouses, rippling muscle and a patchwork of scars. But unlike mine, Tamara's face was still unmarred. A delicious splash of brown freckles covered her nose, and her lips were a natural blood red, set in a soft heart-shaped face. Beautiful. In any other moment, with any other person, I may have felt a modicum of guilt. But my last interaction with Tamara had ended in an acute understanding that we were indeed, very different.

I wouldn't kill an innocent.

Tamara would and often did.

"Stay with me." Tamara whispered. She was so close—and extremely tantalizing. My body was responding accordingly. Summer memories of riding her and being ridden.

I was about to tell her that I could not, that I had an errand to fulfil in the next town

over, when I felt Gallow's hand snake down from the small of my back to my trouser-clad taint. My eyes widened. The audacity of the movement, coupled with the powder-keg sitting across from me, sent a wild wave of uncontrollable desire crashing through my body.

Erroneously reading my gape-mouthed expression as joy, (Maybe it was?—There were no mirrors in my field of vision that I could use to confirm) Tamara leaned forward, closing the distance between us with extraordinary speed, smashing her soft lips against mine, her tongue slipping into my mouth.

This is too hot.

Gallow's invisible hand had not moved from its position beneath my rear. A patient question for me. In answer, I lifted my ass off of the stool.

There comes a time in life when one must appreciate the blessings of the universe. The gentle trundle of a bumblebee as it lands on the open petals of a top-heavy spring tulip. The delicate burble of a clear, spring-fed brook in a secluded glade. A rainbow streaking across a sky as the sun comes out after a rain...

For me, it was my dangerous ex-fuck-buddy, who I had declared off-limits for future dalliances, making out with me while an invisible big-dicked Elf wizard rubbed me out from behind in a secret opiate speakeasy.

I moaned around Tamara's mouth, and she moaned around mine. Gallow's fingers were firm, possessed of an expertise that had me soaking through my trousers. His other hand gripped my thigh, holding my shuddering body in place on the stool.

Tamara was a good kisser. Rough in all the ways that I craved. Gallow's fingers pushed my senses to their limits.

"You're so hot." Tamara breathed as we came up for air, assuming that the slow movements of my hips on the stool were the result of our chemistry.

The bartender was staring at us, her mouth agape.

Suddenly there was a sharp warning shout from below. Gallow's hand paused its wanton stroking and Tamara pulled away, the pale freckled flesh around her mouth red from the intensity of our kissing.

“A fire in the auction hall! Thieves!”
Several voices were yelling from downstairs. I could see smoke billowing from the common room downstairs, seemingly from the double auction room doors.

Tamara’s eyes focused with startling speed and clarity as she stood, her muscular frame flexing over me. She looked annoyed. “We’ll continue this later. Meet me in my room?”

I nodded firmly. A blatant lie.

She gave me a small smile and dashed to the edge of the balcony railing, clearing it with an easy leap to land on her feet with a tiger-like thud twenty feet below. I stood too, watching as Tamara dashed into the auction room, pushing through the small escaping crowd with her sword drawn.

“We must go.” Gallow’s voice was husky in my ear. I felt his still-invisible hand grab mine, and then we were running. Down the stairs, through the common room, and out the long hall to the exit.

The streets were nearly empty save for a few sleeping or exhausted refugees, and I let Gallow lead me through a series of alleys and

side streets until we reached a dark alley a mile away from the Redhand hideout. Gallow's invisibility flickered, the spell finally wearing off.

"Did you get it?" I asked, a bit breathless, but not from the run. My trousers were sticking to my skin.

Gallow reached into his robe pocket and pulled out a book. It was old, the spine aged by the passing of centuries. The triumphant smirk on his face was answer enough.

I pressed my hand against his chest gently and then slammed him against the alley wall, taking more than a little pleasure as his pristine robes scraped against the grime-caked stones of the wall. Gallow met my hard stare with doe-like lavender eyes.

"You seem upset." His voice was silken and held zero distress.

I wanted to throttle him.

As if sensing my ire, Gallow locked eyes with me, raised his hand to his nose, and gave a deep sniff.

The reaction of my body was instantaneous. A wellspring of thwarted lust and anger coalesced into a bomb waiting to

explode. Gallow's eyes widened at my expression.

But the surprise on his face vanished, replaced by a flash of raw hunger as my lips crushed against his. A fierce kiss, untamed, a primal expression of all the coiled frustration and desire that had been building within me. His mouth responded with equal fervor, a low growl rumbling in his chest as his hands found purchase on my waist, pulling me flush against him. The alley, dark and shadowed, added a sense of furtive urgency. I knew Tamara would soon come looking for me.

I drew my head back, interrupting the raw kiss, and a small grumble of protest slipped from Gallow. My body was crushing his against the alley wall. Slowly, I slid my gloved hand up his chest to the graceful lines of neck. Gallow's perfect hair was askew, sticking to the alley wall behind him, a soft flush of pink mottling his cheeks. He took a small gulp of air, causing the lump in his throat to bob, but his eyes were glittering with feral excitement.

"Do you recall our rules?" I asked, my voice calm. I could feel his massive boner hardening between us.

Gallow blinked. "Yes. I remember them well. I did not knowingly draw you into danger, and there was no deception."

I leaned in close, my gloved thumb running firmly over the soft flesh of his throat. An open threat. Gallow swelled beneath me.

"What, pray tell, would you consider invisibility, if it is not deception?" I was enunciating my words now.

A tremor ran through Gallow's frame but it wasn't from fear. "Ah, the invisibility. You implied that my presence would potentially hinder our mission, and I am the only one among the two of us who would recognize the book. So, I became unseen."

That was fair.

My hand was still pressed against his chest, and I could feel the heavy thud of his heart. "Then tell me true when you make a plan on the fly, so that I may be aware of it. It...worked... this time. But I can't protect you if I'm not privy to your schemes."

"Only you." Gallow echoed softly. "And you will tell me if you mean to bring me into the den of someone who has tasted you before?"

There it was. That odd inflection in his words. I could smell the cool edge of pine trees and forest flooding the alley, masking the pervasive scent of urine surrounding us.

My worries concerning his tone disappeared as Gallow's deft hands slipped between us and began to work at the buttons of my trousers.

Bonus Time. I thought, a small spark of excitement reigniting and burning away my ire.

But we were in public. I shot a furtive look to the entrance of the alley, but the street beyond was deserted save for the occasional clip clop of a passing horse-drawn carriage. "You can't make us both invisible?"

"Where would be the joy in that?" Gallow scoffed, his fingers undoing my last button. He drew his eyes back up to mine as his hand snaked into the front of my trousers, but my awareness was fixed entirely on the thick outline of his shaft through his robes, perfectly positioned against my crotch.

I *think* I licked my lips.

Gallow smiled with all the grace of an angelic being. "Shall we celebrate this... mutual understanding?"

"Yes. A sign of goodwill between ward and defender." I said stoically, my mouth watering.

I lifted Gallow's robes as his fingers slipped between my legs. His trousers were well-made, soft linen with hand-carved mother of pearl buttons. Gently, I unbuttoned him, opening the cloth reverently. Both of our eyes were fixed downward, foreheads gently touching and mouths slightly open with awe. Anyone passing by the alley would have assumed we were deep in prayer or mutual reflection. Which was true... in its own way.

I freed his cock from his trousers with one hand, pulling my leather glove off the other with my teeth.

"Is it everything you dreamt it would be?" Gallow whispered, his eyes sparkling.

I kissed him softly on the nose, the gentlest I had been in a long time. "It's better."

My forehead still pressed against his, I hawked a large wad of spit onto the thick

apple-like head of his cock. His hand was still between my legs, but his fingers moved slowly, teasing as the spittle coursed down his length. My hand gripped him, coated in my own saliva.

Then I began to stroke.

I had been privy to many cocks in my life. As my hand worked the supple hard length in long slow pulls, I realized that I was in a state of astonishment. Gallow's cock was perfect. A Magnum Opus of Dick. He began to match my fist's rhythm with his own thrusting hand, and I twisted on the balls of my feet to slide my legs further apart.

With a growl I ripped my other glove off, both hands now joining the act. Gallow released a heady moan, the back of his head pressing against the wall. His free hand squeezed my ass, pushing me forward onto his fingers, which were now buried inside of me, slamming against my g-spot in a rhythm that matched my own milking motions.

We were shuddering now, both of our eyes fluttering, attempting to stay quiet in the dark recesses of the alley. Gallow's hips pushed upwards into my firm, spit-slicked hands.

A raw release was building inside of me, and with it a series of sharp choking sobs, pure sensation destroying all semblance of civilized thought.

I had always been a screamer.

Near the alley entrance I could hear heavy weighted footsteps and loud conversation. A group of passing guards, seemingly unaware of our activity in the shadows. I tried to quiet myself. As if sensing my reticence, the fingers inside of me plunge deeper, faster.

Suddenly Gallow leaned forward, his breath hot in my ear, filling it with old elvish words. My ebbing cries cut off abruptly, my mouth open. A silencing spell to keep my pleasure secret. The world muted around me as the climax shattered through me, my internal walls pulsing around his hand.

Simultaneously, Gallow's back arched and his lavender eyes rolled back in his head. His length throbbed in my grip as he came, several massive spurts, a chalice-worth of his seed sliding over my trembling hands.

Chapter 5: Finally, It Has Happened To Me

Gallow and I sank down slowly to the piss-stained cobblestones, mutual sighs slipping from our mouths. Calm settled over us both, as if we had heroically united to douse a kitchen fire. I realized with a dull shock that I was still gripping his cock with both hands and gently released him. Gallow smiled.

“That was... Extraordinary.” But the words seemed stuck inside, my mouth was going through the motions of language, but no sound sprung forth.

Gallow’s head was still pressed back against the wall, his eyes partially closed in feline bliss. He raised a still-wet hand and snapped his fingers. A gentle rush of air slipped into my throat and I made a soft experimental noise as the muting spell was lifted.

I looked down at my hands and armor, currently coated in his release, my eyes trailing to Gallow’s once pristine robes, now wet and soaked by my own torrent. “We cannot leave

the alley like this.” I muttered. “Can you do that laundry spell again? The one that cleaned my armor?”

Gallow gave a little sniff as if my question was a taunt. “I am not a wellspring, Amana. A spell cast is a spell spent until the next morn. Why do you care if a stranger sees that you have been blessed?”

A snort slipped out of me. *Blessed?* The size of Gallow’s ego almost surpassed that of his dick.

I rose from my crouch on the ground and extended an arm to Gallow, who accepted and stood gracefully. We adjusted ourselves, re-buttoning his trousers and wiping down my armor using the sleeves of his robes. I reached over, smoothing down the wild tufts of snow-hued hair on Gallow’s head.

He’s so soft. I marveled. Like a winter rabbit.

All the while, Gallow watched me, his lavender gaze fixed on my face. Realizing that I was petting him, I dropped my hands, making a show of pulling on my leather gloves.

“You did not seem pleased to see your lover.” Gallow murmured.

I shot him a look. “*Ex-lover*. And no, I had assumed she wouldn’t be at the safehouse. Tam’s an enforcer. She’s usually on the road guarding big shipments of clipweed—and let us hope we never see her again. The sooner we get out of Kumhaven, the better.” The scar along my chest tightened.

“Well, let us return to the Inn. I fear that your bonus was insufficient.” Gallow’s voice dripped with fresh heat.

Already? “Well, per our contract I have already received my orgasm for the day, and I’m pretty sure you did too. Unless, True Elves possess a very special sliming skill.” I reached out, lifting his arm, his sleeve already crusting with spunk.

Gallow leaned closer to me, his hand brushing my arm as he tilted his elegant neck so that his lips were closer to my ear. “If you would allow it, I will take your virginity this eve.”

I turned to stare at him, eyes narrowing. “I am no virgin.”

He smiled. "Your body will feel as if you were."

A sharp breath sucked into my lungs. I had known Gallow for all of 72 hours, and too many of my secret moments had already been dedicated to imagining the phantom ache of being stretched by him. A dream deferred by tasks and teasing.

"Yes." I said quickly before I could change my mind.

Gallow's smile turned victorious as we strolled out of the alley.

"But afterwards, we must leave Kumhaven immediately." I added.

He released a loaded chuckle, and murmured what may have been "*If you can.*" But his voice was too low for me to be sure.

I shot him a dangerous look. "What was that?"

"Yes." Was all he replied.

I continued, my voice darkening. "I know Tamara, and once she has discovered I am not in her room waiting for her, she will use every resource of the Redhand to track me down.

Plus, if they've already discovered that one of their auction pieces is missing, they might even put two and two together, which would be all the worse." My eyes darted around the streets, looking for a telltale flash of red hair.

"If you insist upon departing tonight, we shall."

I patted his shoulder, pleased that he wasn't arguing—an annoying habit of most of my former wards. "As your defender, I do insist." I said as we made our way back to the inn.

"Do you fear her?" Gallow asked, his eyes searching mine.

I gave a bitter laugh. "We are closely matched in weight, strength, and skill. I do not fear her, but it would not be an easy victory."

The scar on my chest gave a nostalgic itch. Tamara and I had fought soon after we had fucked. A brutal duel that I had won. For Tamara, there was no differentiation between the pleasure of sex and the rush of battle. The memory of Tamara's excited face as I straddled her, my sword to her throat, covered in both of our blood, had kept me far away from

Kumhaven since. The look Tamara had leveled at me earlier that evening had been identical.

I knew without a doubt that the next time I saw Tamara, I would have to kill her.

Gallow and I traversed backstreets and alleys, keeping off of the main streets, and turned onto the block where the Silver Chalice Inn sat. The sky had already darkened beyond twilight, well on its way into night, and the inn was once again bustling with activity. We made our way up the stairs quickly and slipped into the room.

“Take off your clothes.” I demanded, already pulling off my armor in quick hurried motions. An imaginary clock ticking in my mind.

Gallow stepped closer, placing his hand on my arm gently. The room was dark save for the moonlight streaming in through the leaded glass windows that bathed the room in a pale blue glow. Gallow’s eyes were glowing again, and I realized that the dark would have no effect on his vision.

“Allow me.” His voice was warmed butter, soothing the frayed edge of my nerves.

I nodded and let him.

Gallow's fingers danced over the buckled straps of my leather gorget and pauldrons, pulling off each piece with the measured movement of a squire.

I had a brief vision of some other lucky bastard being de-frocked and felt a surprising flash of envy.

"You're good at this." I said, my voice even.

Gallow unbuckled the last strap and my armor clattered to the floorboards. He smiled, his thumbs hooking under my linen chest wrap. "Once, a long time ago, when battle-mages were paired with paladins, it was customary for us to help them out of their armor after battle."

His head dipped to my chest and I slipped my fingers through his mane as his teeth tugged at the end of the linen, untucking its folded mooring. The long linen strip began to unfurl off of my body, freeing my breasts from their fabric cage.

"When was this?" I asked, disinterestedly, curiosity replaced by the ache in my cunt. His long pink tongue slipped out, dabbing delicately at my hardened nipple. A raw shudder ran through me. Gallow was

observing me closely, his lips running to my sternum before his warm tongue found my other nipple. His fierce eye contact never broke from mine as he bit down.

I cried out, a sudden splash of my excitement dousing the inside of my trousers. Standing up straight, Gallow grabbed my hand and began leading me to the bed.

“The Cobalt Wars.”

“What?” In a daze, I looked down at my nipple, unsurprised to see small pin-head sized droplets of blood welling around my areola—Gallow’s teeth were as sharp as they had appeared.

“You asked when I was paired with a paladin, and I answered true.” Gallow replied, with surprising patience. Indeed, it felt like he had slowed time. My own body moved as if in a dream. The anxiety brought on by Tamara’s reappearance and the potential for Redhand vengeance seemed very far away.

A jolt of realization flashed through me. I turned to stare at Gallow.

The Cobalt Wars had been over three hundred years ago.

“Please sit.” Gallow’s voice was a resonant purr.

I sat on the edge of the bed, leaning back on my elbows as Gallow smoothly pulled off my boots and trousers.

Oh, this is full service. I blinked, staring up at him. I hadn’t had sex in a proper bed in months, often taking my pleasures when and where I could. Bedrolls in the woods, kitchen counters in seedy taverns, even a privy behind a farmhouse. I watched with a spreading grin as Gallow began to disrobe with an almost sensual slowness. My eyes dropped to his waist as his trousers fell, his fully engorged length bobbing to his navel.

He was staring at my face with something akin to genuine surprise. “Most who behold this are not... smiling... like you are.”

I tried to school my features into a scowl, but it only caused my grin to widen. “You’ll cum before I do.”

I considered myself an experienced lover. A slut, even. Well-versed in the carnal crafts even by the standards of most pleasure houses—which I regularly frequented after a

good payday. More often than not, I was even given a discount for my enthusiasm.

Gallow was on me so fast I barely registered the movement.

His arm wrapped around me, pressing my back to his chest, and in a stunning feat of strength, he rolled onto his back, pulling me along with him in a neat spin. One of his legs swept up between mine, shifting them apart. I felt his free hand slide under the bottom of my right thigh, lifting my leg and spreading me wide.

“Exquisite.” He whispered into my mouth, the head of his cock grinding against the wet saturating me, testing the pliancy of my flesh.

I reached my hand down, grabbing him, angling him as his tongue slipped into my mouth. I could feel the thick bulb of his head straining to enter my gates. I could almost hear a soft pop.

His kiss was practically sweet, his fingers tugging gently at my nipples. All generous attempts at counterbalancing what was to come.

My mouth pulled away from his, my eyes locking onto his face. “Fuck. Me.”

Without a word, Gallow slammed into me to the hilt.

I choked out a scream as he settled inside of me. I had never felt so filled. I was brimming with flesh. A low moan burbled out of Gallow’s lips into my ear, as my walls contracted feverishly, desperately milking his shaft from the inside.

“Shall I continue, my defender?” Gallow murmured in my ear.

What the everloving fuck? My mouth was agape. There was a gentle rumble emanating from his chest and through my back; a purr. I felt Gallow’s hips shift, as he began a slow luxurious withdrawal in response to my shocked silence.

I was already climaxing. My body had betrayed my earlier bravado. I was sure that this was the greatest thing that had ever happened to me. “Please—”

“Please stop?” Gallow asked, his genteel tone laced with playful mockery.

Murderous lust washed over me. I had never begged for anything in my life.

But today was a new day.

“FUCK ME!” I was growling, feral.

Gallow kissed my cheek, smoothly dropped his hand to my clit, and began to rub as his hips pistoned upward into me in a loud *schlurp*. Then he began to truly fuck me. Long, deep cervix-slamming thrusts. A relentless onslaught. The curve of his shaft dragged along my g-spot again and again and again.

But Gallow seemed so refined. I thought for a brief moment, just before an orgasm ripped through me.

A warm laugh shimmered in my ear, between moans. Gallow’s hand cradled my face, his lips finding mine even as his hips picked up speed. I could feel him swelling inside of me. Stretching me further. A physical limit I had never thought existed. Then his arms tightened around me like a vise as a final shudder ran through him heralding his own release.

My body gave a jerk as I came again as his seed splashed out of me in a torrent.

We lay there for a long moment, our breaths slowing to a normal pace. Gallow slowly lowered my thigh and slipped out of me with a loud *plop*, his fingers caressing my belly.

“I suppose it is now time to leave Kumhaven.” Gallow intoned. My body was still splayed across his.

A wild laugh bubbled out of me. My legs were still trembling in post-coital shock. “I’m not going anywhere.”

Gallow turned his head to peer at me. His lavender eyes intense. “No. No, you are not.”

As Gallow pulled the thick blankets over us and snuggled against me, pressing his nose into the crook of my shoulder, I realized why the old tales were true.

I was damned. No fey magic or fey wiles needed.

I would follow this creature into the bowels of the UnSeelie Realm in a heartbeat.

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I woke to the bright glare of sunlight streaming through the inn room's windows, my body sore and sticky.

We had overslept.

A wave of annoyance washed over me. *Damnably loins!* I had been so focused on exotic cock-jumping that I had almost forgotten to do my job.

Gently, I rose from the bed, taking care not to jostle Gallow, whose lightly snoring form lay obscured under a pile of blankets—save for a tumbled mass of white hair spilling out from the edge of the comforter. The aches in my nethers—both pleasurable and sore—had thankfully subsided.

I padded to the window, peeking through the frosted glass to the street below. The streets were surprisingly quiet, though the sun overhead hinted at late morning. I frowned. A place like Kumhaven should be bustling, especially with the recent surge of refugees from Murkbum.

“Did you sleep well?” I turned towards his voice. Gallow was sitting up on the bed, the

blankets drawn to his narrow waist, his long white hair tumbling over his shoulders onto the linens.

I pursed my lips, shocked again at how cute he was. “Yes, no thanks to you.”

Gallow yawned. The sharp points of his teeth glistening. “Usually one sleeps well after cumming *repeatedly*.” His sleepy eyes latched onto mine.

“We’ve no time for banter, Gallow. I would like to be gone before the Redhand get wind of our location.” I said, my tone sharp for emphasis.

Unphased, the Elf slipped out of bed and traced a few sigils in the air. Suddenly there was a bright smell of freshly lathered soap and a rush of moisture on my bare skin. All at once, the cloying scent of cum, as well as the accompanying sticky residue, had disappeared from my flesh. I ran an experimental hand between my legs and sniffed my fingers—it was as if I had taken a full bath.

Gallow cracked his knuckles. Fresh layered robes of fine pale purple silk suddenly adorned his body. His hair was instantly neat,

all traces of sleep-induced frizz now absent. He strode to me, his step light. “My apologies for hindering our departure.”

He paused directly in front of me, lavender eyes sparkling with insincerity. “I trust you are sufficiently recovered for the journey ahead?”

A scowl battled an amused snort within me. We were both well aware that the decision to get rammed last night was mine, and that we could have easily been leagues from Kumhaven by now.

“I’m fine.” I admitted, the amused snort winning in the end. “Where to now, ward?”

Gallow pulled out the book. *Planar Demonology*, the cover read in faded ink. “*Majestikus Therum* is the author’s name, and our first suspect. It will take me a moment to divine his last known location—if he even still lives.”

I shuddered. I had been privy to location divining before and I wasn’t interested in seeing the process again. “I’ll be downstairs waiting.”

I ignored the amused look on his face.

Magic made me more uncomfortable than I would ever admit out loud, and I preferred to keep my weaknesses to myself.

Most of them, at least. Gallow stepped closer, his body heat bypassing the thick shield of my leather armor. "I will make haste then."

The air in the room felt syrupy, thick with magic. He was already pulling it to him, *the weave*, the magic-users called it. A cloud of energy coalesced gently around him, causing the air on my neck to stand at attention.

I was overcome with a sudden urge to kiss him.

I sneezed instead.

Gallow looked surprised at my reaction, and then that secret smile flitted across his lips. He stepped away and turned to the stack of scrolls and books on the desk.

I scuttled out of the room.

Chapter 6: Blood for Paradise

The interior of the inn was also suspiciously calm. I nodded to the innkeep, who shot me a conspiratorial wink, and I loosed a small sigh, realizing that most of the staff and patrons had undoubtedly heard me getting dicked down last night.

I exited the inn, blinking in the sudden bright sun. The autumnal air was crisp and pleasant, and the sky was clear. A good day for journeying.

“Clove!” A familiar voice shouted from a short distance away.

Fuck.

I turned slowly to see Daffodil waving frantically at me, her white dog under her arm.

Striding close to her were several Redhand enforcers... and Tamara.

“Fuck.” I said out loud.

They moved as one, Daffodil following—chattering excitedly to Tamara—whose eyes were locked solely on me.

“See, I told you I knew where she was staying!” Daffodil halted in mid-yap at the sight of my glare.

“Daffodil, what are you doing here... with them?” My hand rested on my sword hilt.

Daffodil frowned, a sudden awareness dampening her gusto. She glanced from me back to Tamara, then back to me again. “Some folks in red came through the halfway house saying they were looking for someone named Clove. I told them I knew you well and that you were staying with Gallow here at the Silver Chalice!”

My eye twitched. “And how did you know I was staying here?”

Daffodil blinked. “Well, Jimson and Peter said I couldn’t stay in their room, and when I went back to the square I saw you and Gallow walk here. I tried to get a room too, but they told me there weren’t any left...”

I was glaring, a dull throb of annoyance building within me. Emboldened by my silence, Daffodil continued. “Anyway, this woman stopped by the halfway house and said she’d been looking all over the east side of Kumhaven for a tall swordswoman with scars.

Once I heard your description, I thought to myself, ‘Gods! that sounds just like Clove!’ Not that many folk fit that description, *haha...*” Her voice trailed off at the sound of steel being pulled from behind her. The Redhand were already drawing their short swords and rapiers.

Tamara’s hand rose, signaling a halt, and the sound of steel was quelled.

“Hello, Tam.” I said quietly. My hand tightened on my sword’s hilt, but I did not unsheathe it.

Tamara’s eyes were red, though from clipweed or tears, I wasn’t entirely sure. “I waited for you, Clove. And then you didn’t come back.”

A short burst of pity touched me. If I could go back in time and do the book heist all over again, I would have swept through the safehouse and cut down every Redhand in my path to avoid making out with Tamara and rekindling her feelings for me. Madness flared behind Tamara’s eyes and the scar on my chest itched with renewed vigor.

“Come here, Daffodil.” I said, never taking my eyes from Tamara.

To her credit, fear finally flashed across Daffodil's face. She took a step towards me, but a tall Redhand enforcer behind her grabbed her arm, holding her fast. The small white dog dropped to the cobbles with a flop and ran away.

Just then, a deep resonant word echoed in the air and there was a bright flash of blue. The enforcer holding Daffodil gave a shriek, his arm crackling with electricity, and released her. She ran over to me, sliding to a halt behind my frame.

A warm hand pressed gently to my back—Gallow's reassuring touch.

"I am ready to go when you are, Amana." Gallow said, his voice resonant, and his twofold meaning clear.

Daffodil's voice raised in pitch. "Oh Gods, Gallow, I'm so glad that—"

There came the acrid scent of ozone—of magic rendered—and suddenly Daffodil's voice cut off in mid-sentence. I didn't need to turn around to know that her mouth was still moving. Gallow stepped into my peripheral vision, a light satchel filled with scrolls slung over his shoulder.

I watched as Tamara's eyes swept slowly from me to Gallow. Fixing on him with predatory intensity. To his credit, Gallow didn't flinch, returning the stare with equal ardor.

Tamara's eyes narrowed. "Who is that?"

"My ward." I answered, hand tightening on my sword hilt. She hadn't mentioned the fire in the Auction Room—or the missing book—so I decided to try my luck for the chance of a bloodless escape. "I am on the job, and I am escorting my ward out of Kumhaven. I'm not sure when I will return. This is a good bye."

"Did you know that a book went missing from the auction room yesterday? The auctioneers discovered its absence after we put the fire out. Is that a mere coincidence, Clove? You never struck me as the thieving type." Tamara's voice was cool, anger simmering just below the surface.

Fuck.

"Amana is many things, but a thief is not one of them." Gallow said, shooting a look at me that bordered on amusement.

I saw Tamara suck in her breath, her head slowly turning to Gallow.

“Amana.” Tamara said quietly, the syllables slowly drawn out as my real name touched her lips for the first time. “I see.”

Tamara’s eyes were sparkling with hate-filled comprehension. It was as if I had bequeathed a secret gift to Gallow that had been owed to her. Her body shifted to match her line of sight.

“If not *Amana*, then do you admit to thieving and arson, Elf?” Her voice was icy.

Gallow blinked slowly. “...I didn’t start the fire.”

I released a shushing noise. Gallow’s hand, still on my back, gave me a soft assuaging tap. His fingers were unnaturally warm, a spell half-cocked at the ready. My eyes shifted to him. His face was deceptively placid, but his lavender eyes were alert.

Tamara’s stare didn’t diminish. “Are you fucking the Elf?”

“What?” I coughed, actually caught off guard.

“Yes.” Gallow said immediately, a jovial grin lighting up his face.

Tamara moved so fast even the Redhand were caught off guard.

But I wasn't.

I surged forward, my sword sending sparks along her blade as I parried the blow meant for Gallow, pushing him back with my free hand simultaneously.

Tamara cursed, pivoting, her rage refocused on me.

In my younger days, when I had trained in the way of the sword, I had been told tales of glorious battles and of the harmony of sword and magic combined. How mages worked in tandem with their swordhands, a martial bond unsurpassed. The old ways of paladin and flame. The sword takes the biggest brunt, and the mage clears the way. Like all brutes preoccupied with outward physical strength, I had underestimated Gallow.

And so had the Redhand.

Tamara's emotional charge had left the Redhand bunched in a tight group. It only took a moment for Gallow's hand to lift, his graceful fingers speedily tracing a sigil in the air. A great *whooshing* sound rent the air, oxygen charging,

and then a pillar of fire sprung from the earth, engulfing the gaggle of enforcers. Screams ripped through the air.

Tamara gasped, startled. Her sword dropped a fraction as her friends and comrades melted like fatty candles a few feet away. Hatred flashed in her eyes—a wanton madness.

I hadn't noticed before, but her armor was bloodied. A long human braid looped around her belt, decorated with an ivory cat pendant. A trophy from an enforcement run.

My pity abruptly evaporated.

I pushed Tamara back with relentless power, my sword blocking each attempted feint and slash as the daytime air filled with screams and the smell of burning leather and flesh. I could hear Gallow's voice in the background, a steady drone, containing the blaze.

A dark clarity had settled over me with each of Tamara's failed attacks. I was stronger than when I had faced her a year ago. Faster. I side-stepped her lunge, my sword arcing through the air, cleaving through bracers and bone, severing her hand and the sword gripped in it.

With a scream of agony, Tamara kicked out at me, a solid blow to my belly, and I ate it, reaching out with my hand to grab her boot before she could withdraw. Summoning all of my strength, I yanked her towards me, pulling her directly onto my waiting sword, which drove through her ribcage with a muted crunch.

She gasped, choking on the blood pooling into her mouth.

But Tamara was strong. Her remaining hand snaked down with lightning speed, grabbing the dagger from my waist. She flipped it point-side down, stabbing repeatedly into my chest, attempting to find a weakness in my armor with her final burst of rage. I pushed, twisting my sword, dragging it through bone to find her heart. With a final gurgle of blood, Tamara's hand dropped, and my dagger clattered to the ground as her body slumped. I dropped her and my sword both, sliding to the cobbles with them.

"Amana."

Gallow crouched next to me, his hands sliding over the punctures in my leather armor. The playful edge in his voice was gone. His pale fingers withdrew, bloodied.

“It’s just surface wounds.” I reassured him, rising slowly. I had been stabbed so many times I knew the difference from feel alone. “Are *you* alright? That was a hefty spell.”

There was a soft blue tinge to his rosy pert mouth, and dark shadows in the thin skin under his lavender eyes that hadn’t been present earlier. Before I could stop myself, my thumb brushed his cheek, smoothing away a chunk of ash. The corner of his mouth upturned in a small smile, meant to be comforting. “I will be fine with rest.”

I looked over at the charred pile of bodies a few yards away, still smoking. A curious crowd had begun to form. Several folks were already lobbing wads of derisive phlegm towards the fallen Redhand enforcers.

“She was fast.” Gallow remarked, gazing down at Tamara’s body. He turned to me. “I would have been run through before I could fire off a spell.”

I know. I thought to myself with a frown. Genuinely surprised at how upset the thought made me.

Suddenly Gallow stood from his crouch, his long ears twitching sharply. He looked startled.

Then I felt it too. A deep rumbling underfoot, as if the earth itself was quaking.

Daffodil ejected herself from the small fruit cart she had been hiding behind and ran over to us, waving her arms, her mouth moving though no sound came forth. Gallow snapped his fingers, almost absently, his eyes locked in the direction of the town square.

“It’s the same as before! We must go!” Daffodil screamed, voice recovered. She grabbed my hand and pulled hard, terror in her eyes.

The ground gave a small lurch and screams erupted around us. I had reached out a hand to steady Gallow, but he was unwavering, already yanking off his satchel in one smooth motion.

“What’s happening?” My question was directed at the both of them. Gallow and Daffodil looked at me, a mutual fear reflected in their eyes as an unearthly scream rent the air, followed soon by others. I could smell magic

and sulphur. The cloudless sky had begun to darken, blotting out the warm rays of the sun.

Neither Gallow nor Daffodil needed to explain. A hole had been opened and the demons had come.

“Well, goodbye Kumhaven. It has been nice.” Gallow said resolutely, unfurling a scroll with a snap. His eyes darted over the script within it and he dropped to his knees again, a piece of chalk suddenly in his hand. “Amana, please prevent anyone—or anything—from disrupting me.”

I nodded and drew my sword from Tamara’s corpse, stepping into place in front of Gallow as he crouched and spun, using his body as a radial center for a near-perfect chalk-scrawled circle. I could hear the quick scratches of chalk on the cobbles behind me. Ahead, a wave of terrified townsfolk spilled into the street, their feet pounding the cobbles. They were running right towards us.

“You’ve got ten seconds before we are overrun.” I told Gallow, using my free arm to firmly redirect a man who had almost plowed into the circle.

“I’ve finished.” Gallow said. I felt his hand gently grab my elbow, guiding me backwards into the circle.

Gallow began to chant, his deep voice echoing off of the buildings on the street. Old elvish words that I probably wouldn’t understand even if I had been an elf.

“What are you doing?” Daffodil squeaked. I noticed her feet were planted outside of the circle at the same time that I spotted her little white dog a few feet away, tiny canines bared in silent snapping barks.

“I think we are leaving.” I said, picking her up easily and placing her in the circle. My eyebrow raised in surprise—beneath the scullery garb, Daffodil was all wiry muscle. I saw her shoot a cursory glance at the dog and then turn back to Gallow, her eyes wide.

The chalk sigil beneath us began to glow with an increasingly bright light, and Gallow’s hair and robes began to float, as if he had been submerged in a deep lake. There was a shudder of power, and then a jolt, like I had been pushed by a large wave.

Suddenly, we were surrounded on all sides by tall trees. The outlines of a glowing

sigil beneath feet that no longer stood on cobbles, but leafy forest debris. We were no longer in Kumhaven.

I looked through the treeline to get my bearings. We were on a large hill a good ways away from Kumhaven. I knew because I could see smoke billowing from buildings. Fires were breaking out across the city, and winged forms circled above the carnage like carrion birds.

“Amana!” Daffodil cried out urgently.

I turned as Gallow collapsed.

Chapter 7: L. A. H

I plowed through the undergrowth, Gallow balanced on my back, Daffodil stumbling at my side.

“Are you sure it’s around here?” I asked Daffodil. Worry had formed an unpleasant ball in my stomach. The sun was setting, and we had been moving non-stop for hours. I paused to shift Gallow further up my back, his arms loosely wrapped around my neck as he snored. The teleportation spell had nearly drained him, and his skin was so pale I could see delicate spiderwebs of blue veins beneath.

Daffodil nodded, wiping her brow. “My ex used to bring me here on hunting day trips when we visited Kumhaven.” Suddenly her finger pointed towards a copse of trees. “Through there!”

I let Daffodil lead, and after a few moments the treeline opened, revealing a small wooden shack nestled in a tiny meadow.

My eyes scanned the area. The shack looked like it hadn't been used in years, but the walls seemed sturdy, and there was a well.

"Doesn't look like anyone is around. Whose hunting shack is this?"

Daffodil shrugged. "My ex's Uncle's cousin... I think. But no one comes here." She bounded forward and tried the door. It swung open on creaky hinges.

With a sigh, I followed her inside, Gallow stirring on my back.

"Where are we?" He mumbled, his voice tinged with sleep.

The shack was threadbare save for a cold hearth, a few cooking pots, and animal traps hung on pegs along the wall. A curtain separated one part of the room from the kitchenette, and I pulled aside the moth-eaten linen to reveal a narrow wooden bed, low to the floor.

I knelt and twisted, gently sliding Gallow off of my back onto the rough, hay-filled mattress. He opened one bleary eye, the lavender now faded to a soft murky gray.

“We’re outside of Kumhaven in a shack by the woods. Far enough to be safe, thanks to you.” I told him, brushing a lock of hair off of his nose. The soft moonlight tone of his white hair had dulled to pale gray. It was as if the vitality had been sucked out of him.

His eye dragged across the room to where Daffodil was busy getting the hearth going, then slid back to me. His voice rasped. “The spell was designed for two. It has... pulled much from me.”

I could see that. Years of watching mages dole out destruction on the battlefield, and I had never seen a magic as powerful as his, or as detrimental to the wielder.

“I couldn’t leave her there.” Though seeing him in this state I was beginning to wish I had. “Is there something I can do to help?” I asked, a hint of worry in my voice.

Gallow gave a small weak nod, his eyes fluttering closed. “Yes, there is a supplement, but I must rest first. Wake me when the moon is at its zenith.” Gallow murmured, falling asleep again almost immediately.

I gave his downy head a gentle pat and rose from the side of the bed, pulling the curtain closed around him.

“How is he?” Daffodil asked, task forgotten as she gazed at me with a worried furrow in her brow.

I frowned. “He will be fine.” I said, even though I didn’t know for sure.

Daffodil blew dust out of a teapot and began to wipe the interior of it with the hem of her apron. “Are you traveling with Gallow now?”

I sat in the chair by the hearth, watching the flames lick the air. “Yes.”

Daffodil smiled. “*Paladin and Flame.*” She intoned with a giggle.

I smiled, but it didn’t reach my eyes.

“Oh, but you’re hurt! Shouldn’t you take off your armor? I can look at it, if you like?” Daffodil’s voice was hopeful.

“I’ll be okay.” I said. I would rather keep my armor on until Gallow was hale and healthy again.

There was a brief moment of quiet before Daffodil spoke again.

“I found some tea.” Daffodil said brightly. “Maybe Gallow would like some too?”

I released a soft yawn. “Gallow is sleeping and won’t be awake for a while, but I would love some.” I smiled.

Daffodil rose excitedly, taking the pot with her to the well. I listened for a moment, hearing the crank of the rope and bucket, Gallow’s gentle snores, and the fire licking in the hearth. I tried to enjoy the silence while it lasted, knowing it would be brief thanks to Daffodil’s presence.

Three days, and I had been pulled into a conspiracy with a powerful Elf wizard whose egregiously delicious tongue kept flashing in my thoughts. I rubbed my eyes.

And I had thought I was going to retire.

An amused chuckle escaped me.

I heard the door open and released another yawn as Daffodil carefully stepped through the room, dangling the full kettle of water by its iron handle. She placed it on the

hook inside the hearth and chattered while I watched the water boil.

“I’m sorry we had to leave your dog behind.” I said, genuinely.

Daffodil released a small sigh. “I am too. He was my best friend.” She dipped a finger in the water, quickly jerking it back. “Water is ready!”

I watched quietly as Daffodil grabbed two chipped ceramic mugs from a shelf and dropped in a few fragrant leaves. I breathed deeply as she settled the mugs on the table near me.

“This smells nice.”

Daffodil beamed. “My mother made this for me all the time.”

I took a few slurps and settled into the chair.

Then I closed my eyes.

After a while I began to relax my body, slowing my breathing. It was a lengthy process, one I often used to calm my nervous system after a battle. A trick. And I was well-versed in it.

I waited.

An hour passed before I heard Daffodil rising from her seat near the hearth. The softest padding of booted feet on the floorboards. I could feel her moving past me, stealthily making her way towards the curtained off section of the shack.

I opened my eyes and rose as well, tipping the muddled contents of the cold teacup into my palm. Looming silently I slunk forward, my well-oiled leather designed specifically for quiet movement.

I watched as Daffodil pulled the curtain back, slow and silent as a gentle breeze. A wickedly curved dagger was clutched tightly in her free hand.

She was almost on top of Gallow when my hand snaked out, grabbing her wrist with crushing force. Soundlessly, the dagger fell onto the bed. With my free hand I slammed my open palm over her mouth, shoving the still-moist tea leaves down her throat. I kept my hand still, gripping her face from behind as she violently squirmed.

“Lying. Ass. Heffer. Make a noise and I will make your death less peaceful.” I

whispered in her ear. Gallow snored beneath us.

Slowly, I backed out of the room, but my threat was meaningless as the tea leaves were already taking effect. I could feel her limbs growing limp, the paralytic poison already rushing through her bloodstream. Daffodils eyes were wild, turning bloodshot as I backed us out of the shack into the night air.

“You know, I may not look like it, but I’m a really big fan of tea.” I began, my grip on Daffodil absolute. “Anytime I travel to a new city, my first stop after a contract is to find the local teahouse.”

I was speaking casually, as if I wasn’t dragging an assassin through the trees.

“So imagine my surprise when a scullery maid offers me a mug of Well’s Flower Tea. Yes, its flavor profile is robust enough to hide the bitterness of poison on the tongue, but Well’s Flower Tea is extremely expensive. Took me two contracts worth of gold just to get access to one cup. Totally worth it, though.” I added with a nod.

I paused at a birch tree and propped her up against it.

A scowl creased my features, tugging at my facial scars. "I'm immune to most paralyzing agents. And poison. Ten years of tincturing small doses will do that. So now instead of killing me or numbing my limbs it just makes me... talkative." I smiled at her and bent to calmly wipe a dribble of saliva from the corner of her mouth. Fear glazed her eyes.

"You had me fooled for a long time." My hands patted her down, pausing as I felt an envelope neatly folded in a concealed pouch in her skirts. I opened it, my eyes skimming as I spoke. "But the moment I grabbed you to take you with us in the teleportation ring, I knew." I gave her bicep a cursory squeeze. "All muscle and no fat. Your baggy clothing hid it well. Scullery maids working in taverns tend to eat fatty tavern fare."

"And who leaves their dog behind? Your 'best friend'? Any dog lover worth their salt would have hopped out of the teleportation circle in a heartbeat." I balked. I was babbling now, the paralytic agent making me high as a kite.

Daffodil's body trembled beneath me, as if by sheer will she could disrupt the paralysis. I hadn't given her a lot. The residue on the tea

leaves would only last a few more minutes. I looked down at her, my stare cool as I held aloft the note. It featured an artist's rendition of Gallow that was middling at best. The assassin known as Daffodil had been looking for Gallow since Murkburn. Had likely fallen in with Jimson and Peter and then been beset by the mini goblin horde—which she probably could have survived—but I had come along and handled it for her, lending further credence to her false identity.

A hired assassin sent to take out a powerful wizard would most likely have been hired by another wizard.

A guilty one.

I sucked my teeth, a sudden realization hitting me. “It was you who started the Redhand auction house fire. You wanted to stop us from acquiring the book.”

Daffodil glared at me. Her lips slowly moving as the paralysis began to loosen its hold.

Fuck you, she mouthed.

I crouched close to her, sliding out my dagger. Not so gently, I gave her arm a sharp

poke. The dagger slipped in and out without any fanfare. Impassively, I watched as the blood began to trickle out. My eyes slid back to hers. "Paralysis is an interesting thing. You can't move, and yet your nerves are still active."

Sweat had begun to bead on Daffodil's forehead. Her body reacting as much as it could to the pain.

"Mouth yes or no for my questions and I will give you a painless death. Can you do that?" My voice was cold.

There was a moment of hesitation and then Daffodil mouthed yes.

I held up the picture of Gallow.
"*Majestikus Therum*. Did he hire you?"

No.

"Do you know who did?"

No.

I sighed. Assassin contracts were often anonymous.

“I have what I need. Thank you, Daffodil.” I rose from my crouch near her prone form and drew my sword.

When I was finished, I rolled her corpse into the woods and made my way back towards the shack. The moon was high in the sky, bathing the area in pale light. The numbing feeling on my tongue abating.

Gallow would be waiting for me.

I picked up my pace.

By the time I reached the shack, Gallow was indeed awake, and looking a bit more lively than when I had left him. Thanks to the nearby window, the bed was awash in moonlight. The lavender had begun to return to his eyes and his skin was more opaque, though an ashen hue remained. He looked up as I drew the curtains open.

“Where did this come from?” Gallow asked, his eyes searching, holding aloft Daffodil’s dagger.

I gently took it from him and threw it against a wall where it stuck. “Daffodil left it as a gift. How are you feeling?”

Gallow gave me a small forlorn look. “I think I’m dying.”

I touched his face and he leaned into my hand, his eyelashes lowering. My other hand rested on his neck, where I could feel his pulse. “I don’t think you’re dying.” I said slowly. His pulse was strong. The blueish tint on his lips and fingernail beds had dissipated, returning them to a healthy pink.

“I am sapped of my reserves, but there is a way to help.” His lips trembled a bit and parted.

A swell of protective energy flooded my system. “What can I do?” I sat on the edge of the bed, gazing down at him, ready.

I watched as Gallow reached for the satchel next to the bed and rummaged in it gingerly. After a few moments, he made a small triumphant noise and pulled out a small vial of a viscous liquid and a solid glass egg-shaped object with a thick flat circular base.

Slowly he handed them to me, his fingers trembling.

“What is it?” I held it up to the light, the moonlight reflecting off of the egg. “Some sort of magical amulet?”

Gallow’s eyes glowed. “Yes.”

I popped the cork off of the vial and gave it a sniff. Warming spices and oil. My eyes narrowed, rolling back to him. I had been so worried I had missed the engorged outline pressed against his trouser leg.

“You’re perfectly fine and you just want me to put this in your butt.” I surmised.

Gallow smiled. “I am and I do.”

I was already pulling off his boots. Next my hands moved to strip my own armor and underclothes off. I chucked them haphazardly across the room. Gallow gently touched the skin beneath my collarbone, his fingers tracing the shallow knife wounds Tamara had left only a few hours ago. His caress was soft.

“I’m fine.” I reassured him, unbinding my chest.

Gallow shot me a warm look. “You will run out of places for scars.”

I laughed. I doubted that.

“Is Daffodil dead?” Gallow asked, nostrils flaring delicately as he unbuttoned his trousers. His incredible sense of smell sifting through the blood spatters on my trousers.

“Yes, but let’s talk about that later.” My voice was husky. The moonlight was doing wonders for Gallow, bathing his pale skin in bright blue-ish silver. With each passing second his hair seemed to be brightening back to its full snow-white luminance. Within seconds, I had him naked before me, his excitement bare.

“Have you ever put anything into a butt, Amana?” Gallow asked me, as he descended, back against the mattress in an utterly languid pose.

I tossed the glass egg aside as I poured the contents of the vial over my fingers. “I have, sweet Gallow. And right now, I plan to feel you from the inside.” I replied. Gently, I rubbed my oil-slicked hands together, the warming spices already tingling gently.

“You’re smiling.” Gallow remarked, his eyes hooded as he watched me prepare.

I was.

My hand closed over his shaft and ran up and down the length of it, coating him. He was already dripping pre-cum, gossamer-like strands stretching from the tiny hole atop his cock head to meet the small dabs left on his taut belly. Gallow's recovery sleep had apparently been laced with wet dreams. He released a small moan at my touch.

"My hand can't even close around you." I balked, my attempts only engorging him further.

I used my elbow to lightly push his knee to the side, spreading him wider as my other hand ran along the sensitive flesh of his taint, pausing at the delicate pucker of his asshole. I tilted the rest of the vial over him.

"I'll go slow." Gently, I pushed a thumb into him, marveling a bit as Gallow's ass gave a gentle reflexive suction around it before loosening. "Is that comfortable for you?"

I looked up towards his face, his lips were parted, a subtle pink flush on his cheeks. "Please, continue."

I obliged, my thumb sliding in deeper, pushing the oil further inside of his depths. After a satisfied grunt, I replaced my thumb

with my middle fingers, firmly rocking my digits into him. All the while, my hand stroked his shaft, an equal rhythm. I could feel the firm slope of a familiar fleshy knot, buried within, and I gave it a considerate poke with my fingertips, my grin widening as Gallow released a warm moan.

Now, *that* was exactly what I wanted to hear.

“You’re very good.” Gallow’s face was pleased. Regal—but I could see his chest heaving.

Heh.

I scooted between his lifted knees and Gallow’s composed features flickered for a moment.

“I am going to ruin you.” I said.

Gallow’s breath hitched, the smug look wiped clean off of his face.

I dipped my head, my tongue running a searing path along the length of his cock. Reaching the top of his shaft, my mouth dropped, closing over him like a warm sheathe.

Gallow's back arched, lifting off of the bed, his nether muscles tightening around my fingers as my right hand began to pump with precision. My tongue rolled over his head as I sucked and slurped and my oil-slicked left hand milked his shaft.

His breathy moans were combining now into a drawn out deep groan. A splash of pre-cum splattered over my tongue, melding with my saliva spilling over the length of him, sliding over my pumping hand.

I increased the speed of my mouth and hands.

Gallow's body was trembling, his shaft pulsing. I watched with glee as his face began to contort, the muscles in his graceful neck standing out. With a gasp he grabbed my head and began to fuck my mouth, his head thrown back, his mouth wide in absolute ecstasy.

Yes. An internal bubble of delight welled inside of me.

I firmed my hand along his oil and saliva drenched shaft, halted the bobbing of my head, and stilled everything but my fingers inside of him. Gallow's hips pumped with raw abandon into my hand and mouth. But I was a mountain,

immovable. The base of his cock slamming into the wall of my curled grip, the full missile of his length— a deathblow to a mortal's throat—hampered by my unyielding arm.

His ass clenched around my hand as the orgasm erupted within him, his body bucking so hard he landed on his shoulders. I held on like a leech, wrapping my arms around his upside down torso as he convulsed into my mouth. His body bent and shuddering, the soft swell of his buttocks pressed against my chin.

I swallowed deeply, surprised at the lack of acrid aftertaste.

Gallow's arm was draped across his face, his breath ragged.

Slowly, I opened my mouth, his cock falling free with a fleshy *plonk* onto his belly, and released my bear hug on him, letting his body slide almost lifelessly back to the hay mattress.

"Are you okay?" I asked, after a moment of silence. The only sounds in the shack were the soft crackle of the fireplace and the thud of my heartbeat.

The moonlight had shifted along its natural path across the night sky, cleaving the bed into inky shadow by the headboard. Gallow's torso was awash in moonbeam, but I could see only his unsettling glowing eyes in the black beyond.

Gallow laughed, a sound so low I almost didn't recognize it. Wordlessly, he beckoned me towards him with a curled finger.

Something in the air had changed, become heavy and weighted. I crawled forward slowly, climbing over Gallow's legs to settle atop his lap. Even this close, the dark splitting the bed was absolute. A thrill ran through me. The familiar flutter in my chest echoed in my ears, my crotch over his re-hardened length, pausing at the base of his swollen tip.

"Twice you have saved my life today. I should thank you, properly." Gallow said.

It took me a moment to realize he was speaking old elvish, and that I could understand it. The tone was reverberant and raw.

My hand was reaching out into the dark space in front of me to touch his face when his

own intercepted it. Gently, he placed my hand on his chest.

“Gallow?”

“Yes?” His hips were moving so slowly my body had taken a moment to register it, his cock-head grinding at my moistened clit.

I swallowed. Suddenly nervous. “Will you tell me true...”

The luminous eyes in the dark were unblinking. “Always. And only you.”

“How did you know my name?” It was a real question. He was grinding against me now, and I found myself becoming more distracted.

I felt his hips slide back, the tip of him pressing against my soaked entrance. His face still cloaked in shadow.

“Because you have never feared death.” Gallow said. He smiled in the dark and I could see only sharp teeth and eyes. UnSeelie things only moonlight could reveal. A mirror of old ancient things that called your name in the woods, leading you away from the safety and warmth of a campfire.

His hand trailed up my arm in a caress,
and when his fingers tightened around my
bicep they were strong, holding me fast as his
hips slammed upward, impaling me in one
smooth motion.

Epilogue

The cloaked figure strode through the desiccated door of the Silver Chalice Inn, booted feet crunching loudly over smashed glass despite the din of feasting demons beyond. The figure paused for a moment, head tilted as if listening for something.

As there had been no word from the young assassin—a sure sign that she was dead—he had been sent by his master to track the Elf. The ominous figure lifted a gloved hand out of his pocket, a lock of moonlight-white hair clasped between his fingers. Suddenly, as if bound by the strings of a magical puppeteer, the hair lifted in the air like a divining rod, pointing in a straight line towards the second floor.

The man pocketed the hair and flexed his fingers, a spell readying. The Elf Wizard he hunted was old, and possessed of a cunning that reflected his years... and yet he could still sense his quarry within the inn. He felt a ripple of pulsing threaded power through the weave, its vibrations seemingly unperturbed by the wholesale slaughter happening beyond the inn's threshold.

He made a beeline for the stairs and ascended, passing the landing to halt before a sturdy oaken door inscribed with tree carvings. Steeling himself, he stepped through, taking in blown-out windows, a large copper tub in the corner, and a bed covered with rumpled sheets.

In the center of the floor, a form shrouded by pale grey silk robes lay still, a tumble of white hair spilling out from beneath.

Is the Elf dead?

The cloaked figure whispered a word, hand sliding in the air, tracing a dense sigil. The air above shimmered with sudden light as a massive silver javelin erupted from the ceiling overhead, slamming into the figure beneath with enough force to drive it through the floorboards, brutally impaling its target.

There was a sound like a wet fart as the homunculus dissipated and re-formed into a copper-tinged burlap bag. A jagged tear had been ripped down its side by the magical javelin's impact.

The cloaked figure stared as the hole in the bag strained and the contents spilled out onto the floor.

Goblin Dicks.

About the Author

Dana T. Mcknight is a queer weirdo artist who also writes. This is their first foray into penning smut but they are a huge fan of sluts (of all genders). They live in Austin, TX with their cats and husband and love going to shows, eating hotdogs with friends and scowling.

Free Palestine.

Thanks everyone for supporting this Novella!

Defending a Big-Dicked Elf Wizard will return as a short story series on dabdew.com in March 2026 and culminate in Book #2 (Chapters 8- 15) in December 2026.

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