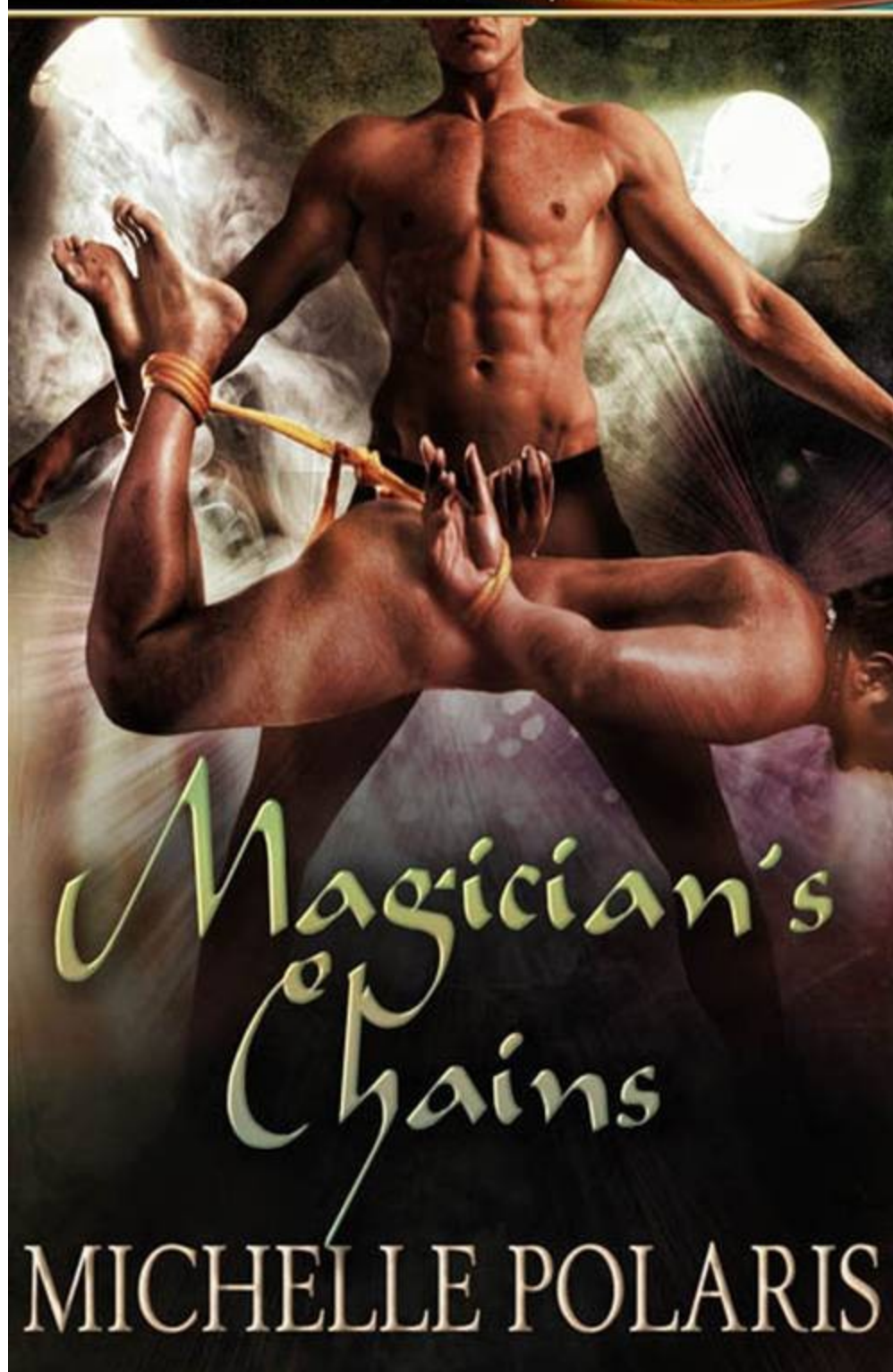


ELLORA'S CAVE *Spectrum*



Magician's Chains

Michelle Polaris

Jesse and Savin shared one strange, hot kiss and an even stranger mystical connection over a decade ago. Now reunited at a BDSM-flavored erotic magic show in Las Vegas, Jesse finds Savin performing as the Dominant magician. He's one sexy, powerful package, and Jesse fights the call to expose himself to Savin, giving up body, soul and heart. But dark fae nightmares prophesy a more dangerous magic than stage tricks at work as their lives collide.

Jesse has given up on his dreams after a personal tragedy. Savin's only dream is to be human, although he is *not*. Drawn to one another, the men enter into a weekend Master/slave contract. In Savin's chains, Jesse submits, letting loose destructive passion and grief. Both resist the craving to make their bond permanent, sure that if they do they place one another in jeopardy. If they cannot accept the magic they create together and their joined destinies, the survival of two worlds will be at stake.

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorascave.com

Magician's Chains

ISBN 9781419928819

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Magician's Chains Copyright 2010 Michelle Polaris

Edited by Mary Moran

Photography and cover art by Les Byerley

Electronic book publication June 2010

The terms Romantica® and Quickies® are registered trademarks of Ellora's Cave Publishing.

With the exception of quotes used in reviews, this book may not be reproduced or used in whole or in part by any means existing without written permission from the publisher, Ellora's Cave Publishing, Inc.® 1056 Home Avenue, Akron OH 44310-3502.

Warning: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. No part of this book may be scanned, uploaded or distributed via the Internet or any other means, electronic or print, without the publisher's permission. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000. (<http://www.fbi.gov/ipr/>). Please purchase only authorized electronic or print editions and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted material. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

This book is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, or places, events or locales is purely coincidental. The characters are productions of the author's imagination and used fictitiously.

MAGICIAN'S CHAINS

Michelle Polaris

Trademarks Acknowledgement

The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of the following wordmarks mentioned in this work of fiction:

BMW: Bayerische Motoren Werke: Aktiengesellschaft Aktiengesellschaft (joint stock company)

Circus Circus: Mandalay Resort Group Corporation

Corona: Cerveceria Modela, S.A. de C.V.

Dumpster: Toccoa Metal Technologies, Inc.

Elvis: Elvis Presley Enterprises, Inc.

Fenway Park: Boston Red Sox Baseball Club Limited Partnership

Fiat: Fiat Group Marketing & Corporate Communication S.P.A.

Forum Shops at Caesars: Caesars World, Inc.

GQ: Advance Magazine Publishers, Inc.

Looney Tunes: Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.

Madame Tussauds: Tussauds Attractions Operations Limited Corporation

Miracle-Gro: OMS Investments, Inc.

Paris Las Vegas Hotel and Casino: Harrah's License Company, LLC

Planet Hollywood Resort: Planet Hollywood (Region IV), Inc.

Road Runner: Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.

Southwest Airlines: Southwest Airlines Co.

Superman: DC Comics

Technicolor: Technicolor Trademark Management

Teflon: E.I. Du Pont de Nemours and Company

The Beatles: Apple Corps Limited

The Grand: MGM Mirage Corporation

The Lord of the Rings: The Saul Zaentz Company DBA Tolkien Enterprises Corporation

Tim Tams: Campbell Soup Company

Tinkerbell: Disney Enterprises, Inc.

Tinkertoys: Playskool, Inc.

Valium: Hoffman-LaRoche, Inc.

Viagra: Pfizer Inc.

Volvo: Volvo Trademark Holding AB Corporation Sweden

Wile E. Coyote: Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.

Prelude

WBDT evening news, Las Vegas, brings you live footage from today's protest in front of the Planet Hollywood Resort. Several hundred people calling themselves members of the Final Judgment Church gathered outside the Miracle Mile Shops carrying signs warning of the end of times. This fundamentalist group claims the apocalypse is coming at any time and that Las Vegas epitomizes sins that will lead to the Second Coming. Here is interview footage of church member Ronald Courtney in front of the resort earlier this afternoon talking to reporter Kate Riley.

"Mr. Courtney, why is your group out here today warning Las Vegas of destruction?"

"The world is crumbling around us, Miss Riley. Crime rates are up. The economy is crashing. Skyrocketing unemployment. Political corruption. Adultery. Environmental disasters in the news all the time. People are angry and scared. Turn on your own news channel any night and you see disaster after disaster. Bombings at school buildings, terrorists at sea and in the air. Even the housing market plummet here in Las Vegas. People are being evicted left and right, and houses stand empty while homelessness increases. You can't take this stuff alone. Put it together, look at all the vice this city proudly sells to the world and any true believer in the Lord will know it's all about to end. We want the people of Las Vegas and the powerful, rich owners of the resorts to know we see what's happening. We want them to understand, have a chance to repent and prepare. I'm up nights sweating as I feel it all crumbling around us. Only my love and faith in our Lord keeps me steady. Are you willing to watch the world implode and waste your final chance at seeking forgiveness? I hope not. So we're here today to remind folks of what's happening in front of their noses. Have you found the Lord, Miss Riley?"

"Thank you, Mr. Courtney. Now back to the studio for further updates."

Jesse clicked off the TV in his hotel room, threw the remote on the bed and looked down at his watch for the hundredth time. If she'd only stop primping and come out of the bathroom. His fingers tapped the mattress with impatience to get to the theater. To make it through the night. Through the weekend. To just get the hell out of Vegas. He wished the fucking world *were* coming to an end.

Everything would be so much easier.

Chapter One

Shadows moved behind the sheer screen covering the front of the stage, jacking up the anticipation. The spectacle was a grown-up version of shadow puppets, with dark outlines of jutting breasts and naked limbs behind the see-through curtain. Enough to send pulses past their legal limit. Or at least past his, goddammit.

Though it proved his libido wasn't completely dead. He'd begun to wonder.

Fog crept along the floor of the platform, setting the mood for this erotic magic show. Jesse shifted in his chair and rubbed his palm along his thigh, unable to find a comfortable position. The buildup to the curtain lift, including the foreign music in the background, strung out his nerves, which hadn't been spectacular to begin with. How the hell had he let Corrine convince him to come here tonight?

He swiped a glance at her out of his peripheral vision. Yup, she was all toothy smiles and eyes glued to the performance. So fucking giddy to be here it depressed him. He wanted to scream over it, the son of a bitch he was. But he held himself back. He had to in order to walk the fine line of keeping his shit together. For her sake. She deserved this vacation. Still, this whole weekend trip to Las Vegas had been insane.

The synthesized music, a combination of Indian, Middle Eastern and techno beats, started winding higher. The pulse of it throbbed in his cock. The curtain rose and Jesse found himself sitting forward in his seat. Onstage a dozen men and women, faces covered in domino masks, danced, wearing leather-studded harnesses and mesh G-strings, nipples hard points, groins outlined tightly to advertise their assets and sweat gleaming from their skin. Pantomiming servants rushing with excitement to prepare the room for their Master. Jesse imagined he smelled their sweat but even with his front-and-center orchestra seat that had to be impossible. From the faux stone walls hung manacles, coiled whips on hooks, other devices he wasn't quite ready to name but which unmistakably reeked of nasty.

And above this dungeon setting perched a metal scaffold. Atop it stood a bare-chested man in leather pants, a clichéd black cape hanging from his shoulders. The magician?

Before Jesse could draw a breath, the man jumped. Shit. It had to be forty feet. But instead of plummeting to a messy, splattered landing, the laws of physics shifted, his fall slowed and he flew down in a controlled descent. Damn good wirework. Jesse shifted in his seat again.

The magician strode to the front of the stage while the music dropped to a background hum. Jesse's heart sped to overdrive as the man looked out into the seats and met his gaze dead-on. He smiled a secret, his slate-blue eyes narrowing and the

cleft in his chin becoming pronounced. He tossed his head back and laughed a rich thunder. Holy hell!

Jesse recognized that laugh. Deeper but still the same. *Fuck it!* It was *him!* Savin. No, Jesse thought, he had to be wrong. His damn mind played tricks on him all the time now. That's what happened when a person barely slept.

The magician began to stalk back and forth across the platform. Jesse's eyes traced the line of his body, the lithe, lean muscle. A sleek jungle cat. His soft, burnished golden-brown curls wild and unruly to his shoulders. His low voice purred out into the air and Jesse clenched his teeth.

"Tonight, my dear ladies and gentlemen, you come to witness magic. An erotic tease to your senses. What masks do you wear to hide your darkest fantasies, I wonder? And are you brave enough to strip them off?" His gaze squared on Jesse. "My intrepid theater seat travelers, this evening I offer you new questions to ponder. If you surrender to magic and forget what you think you know about bondage and freedom, pleasure and pain, what ecstasies await?" He reached his hand out to the audience and curled one finger as if to beckon. "Join me if you dare."

Jesse's cock hardened viciously with the challenge. The volume of the music swelled as the magician strode back toward his servants. "Come, poppets," he called to his entourage. "Gather 'round and let your Master practice his magic."

Jesse tried to take his eyes off the stage and the man who cast his spell on the room. He couldn't afford to fall under anyone's spell. He tried and he failed.

Savin stood on the stage among his people, aware of the crowd's response to the mood he'd created with sound and movement, setting and showmanship. A daring script, pushing every boundary as he played out a story of the Dominant magician among willing sexual servants. The irony was that he'd taken a core truth of his life, and the lives of the men and women who worked with him, and sold it as a fiction to paying customers. Showing barely a hint of the true D/s or Dominance and submission lifestyle. But as much as he dared in this public forum, even among the Vegas crowd.

Tonight his awareness of these spectators soared to a new high. Really, his consciousness of one individual member of his audience.

Jesse Kabat.

Mount Washington, the happenstance meeting one sunny weekend afternoon, the kiss. Goddess, that kiss. Hot. Deep. Possession. With the edge of violence lurking. The taste of Jesse's complex humanity. Perfect. His skin itched with need thinking of it. The memory was a distraction and dragged at his thoughts dangerously. He needed to focus.

He pushed away this vision from ten years ago. Around him stood his people, and here he was ignoring them when each wanted to give him the valuable gift of their submission. Not to mention he was ignoring a houseful of paying customers.

Ah well, what came later after the show would happen as it was meant. And Savin was clear there would be an *after*. He tasted the expectation on his tongue.

For now, he turned when David, sandy-haired and eager, desire in his masked face, stepped closer as scripted. Savin grabbed the young man's chin, tilted it back and leaned into his neck, running his tongue along the long line of David's carotid artery, scraping his teeth over the same path. "Ready?" he whispered in his ear as the young man's breath hitched and his shoulders tightened in expectation.

"Yes, Master," David replied.

With one quick rip Savin tore the mesh pouch G-string from the man, exposing the cock harness wrapped around his balls and shaft and the significant erection jutting out from its grip. He spun David, an eager Kara there to hand him the cuffs he needed to lock the man's wrists behind his back.

David's body shuddered. Savin knew his preference for exhibitionism, the added sexual excitement his sub gained from being exposed and forced to a Master's will in front of others. Savin understood everything about the penchants and limits of his submissives, able to read the slightest tensing of their muscles, the tiniest clouding of their eyes. It was what a good Master did.

Two vertical wooden boxes were rolled onto either end of the stage, his assistants congregating around each. Savin turned the man in his arms, offering him as a sacrifice to his waiting companions. "Play, poppets. Touch, tease, torment but then deposit our friend into the waiting chamber and watch me work."

Hands reached and stroked down David's chest, fingers pinched his small nipples, nails raked his skin. One young woman boldly grabbed his cock, pumping him up and down as another caressed his ball sac. David moaned, struggling in the cuffs and the living bonds of their hands while they moved him to the first box.

Locking him inside, Savin called his magic, gesturing to the wooden chamber. After seconds, he commanded those standing near the identical box across the stage to open those doors, revealing David magically translocated fifty feet. He was torn from the second container to be fondled again by his friends before being relocked inside, disappeared and reappeared across the distance. Over and over.

Each time Savin practiced the magic, the helpful assistants showed the audience that the other box stood empty after his showy incantations and gestures whipped the man from one location to another. As the music built, the speed increased between the translocations, David, a ball of arousal, volleyed between two ends of the stage as he thrashed in the arms of his companions, whose touches grew bolder.

Savin ordered a halt to the action. David's breath heaved as pre-cum leaked from the slit of his engorged cock in its harness. Savin made a great show of enclosing the man into a black body sack with holes for air. David's wild eyes shone bright just before the bag covered his face. An expression begging for relief and further torment at the same time. Savin zipped him in and ordered the contraption lifted on chains to hang swaying above the stage. Waiting.

He left him there in the dark, knowing David's anticipation would continue to escalate and leave him glassy-eyed, cock painfully rigid and flying high. Endorphins pumping.

Savin's imagination broke through and he pictured Jesse up there, bound and constricted by the leather, awaiting his pleasure. Goddess, but it was a fool's dream. Too much already burdened his one-time friend.

He shifted to ease the constriction of his pants and breathed deep to find his center of control, leash the tremble in his limbs. It fed something inside him to practice this power over lovers. Willingly, honestly relinquished by them, it filled some of the endless hole inside him. Although never perfectly. He felt the insubstantial brittleness to his bones. A deficit the others of his kind ordered him to end. An impossible task unless Savin sacrificed his integrity.

Even now he knew Eamon watched from the back of the auditorium, waiting for his capitulation with violence in his thoughts, as he did every performance night. Savin hated this reminder of his other life.

Ignoring Eamon was one of Savin's greatest pleasures because he knew it offended the man stupendously. Ah, satisfaction. Served the bastard right.

The show continued as he beckoned a dark-haired Stephanie into his arms. The crowd gasped as he played out a punishment scene with her for some imagined transgression. Kneading her breasts and nipples, pinching them with small clamps, one on each peak and strung together with fine chain. Briefly using a strap to make pleasing red stripes on her buttocks while she lay over his lap. Dangling his fingers through her labia folds while she tossed in his arms, gasping tiny mewls. Then commanding that she be manacled onto the frame of an adjustable St. Andrew's Cross. With dramatic flair he hypnotized her, her eyes becoming glassy as she stared into space. Her breathing slowing to almost nonexistence.

A hoist lifted and lowered the entire wooden frame into a clear box. At Savin's scripted order, water began pumping into the glass. Filling it higher and higher. Covering her head. Yet she didn't move, didn't struggle. Yes, he'd been successful placing her in stasis. He checked and rechecked his control to assure himself she remained safe.

After the container was completely full, he ordered a cloth dragged over it and the tick of a loud clock sounded above the music. His people danced around the stage as an empty locked cage of a size to hold a tiger was lowered from the rafters to hover ten feet from the ground. More cloth was draped over the metal contraption as he mystified his assistants with small slights of hand, producing gems and flowers and floggers and knives from out of thin air. They pretended fear or delight based upon what he produced. He stripped and bound two more of his subs with cuffs at their wrists and ankles, and levitated the pair. They twirled in the air in front of him, a spinning ballet, their naked groins and chests brushing one another until he safely deposited them on the stage.

Savin frequently looked out into the audience and watched their gazes bounce, fascinated, between what he was doing and the covered glass container and hanging black leather sack. He imagined the aroused wonder twisting their bellies. Would the woman survive? What happened next? What was the third cage for? Every spectator perched, teetering on the edge of his or her chair.

But not all of them interested Savin.

Only Jesse, whose chocolate eyes followed him closely. Piercing eyes. Pupils dilated. Lips parted as his breathing quickened. Pulse running wild at his neck as Savin's talent allowed him to see clearly from the stage. He wished he could reach out and encase Jesse's throat with his palm and fingers, feel the breakneck thud of that pulse, part fear and confusion, part desire. Some of what he'd sensed ten years ago from the then boy-man at the base of the mountain after their hike.

Distraction again. He shook himself away from the memories. Stephanie deserved more from him. So did David. It was time for the show's climax.

Savin strode back to the edge of the stage to address the audience. "You find yourself wondering, what has this man done with those poor innocents? Is it all illusion? How could these women and men submit to this treatment? But you see, my dear ladies and gentlemen, my servants know a secret." He leaned farther toward the audience, projecting his stage whisper to reach even the farthest seats in the auditorium. "The truest magic happens when you trust and let everything go, become free, throw off your masks and allow experience to rush over you. My servants have stopped pretending that their dark desires do not exist. And in giving it all up, magic can be born."

A wild crash of cymbals punctuated the music and an echoing gong sounded in reverberating solemnity as the rest of the soundtrack slowly died away. He walked back to the cloth-covered receptacles and threw out his arms. Savin focused his energy, tossed it into the air to saturate into wood and glass and metal and flesh. And it did his will.

He spun back to the audience. "Behold, ecstasy is born."

At this cue, his assistants yanked the cloth from the metal cage hanging above the floor to reveal David and Stephanie, unchained bodies writhing, entwined in lovemaking. Unconcerned over their audience or, more likely, further excited by it. The flattened leather body sack released from its hook and plummeted to the floor, empty. The fabric covering the glass tank was pulled to show a vacant chamber, water lapping peacefully.

In the cage, David thrust into Stephanie, ass clenching as he drove his cock forward. Her nails dug into his buttocks, goading him deeper, ankles wrapped around his hips. The duo racing faster. Until with a last cry they both orgasmed, locked frozen as their release shook them. And Savin drank them down. An imperfect meal, but one he needed.

As the audience gasped, clapped and hollered their approval and excitement, Savin turned to the crowd. He heard a distinct voice float up from the orchestra seats.

"Holy fucking Christ. I need a drink."

Savin's lips twisted up and he chuckled. *Just wait, Jesse. You'll need more than one after I'm through with you.*

Chapter Two

The curtain fell and his first impulse was to bolt. Get the fuck out of there and let Corrine catch up. Instead, Jesse kept his ass in the chair and his temper at his idiotic reaction under leash. His skin twitched, electrified and tight. He turned to his girlfriend and pasted on the closest he could manage to a smile.

Corrine touched his arm proprietarily and fanned her face with her fingers while grinning. "That was incredibly hot. Can you believe they let them have sex onstage? And the magician was sexy. Give you any ideas for back in the room, sweetie?" She winked and chuckled suggestively.

Jesse's stomach turned. He couldn't be less interested in her proposition if he tried. "Yeah, it was great. Let's get going." He stood and stepped into the aisle, expecting her to follow. She didn't, remaining seated as the others from their row wiggled past her to exit. "Corrine, we need to leave." Even his jitters had jitters. Maybe he could escape tomorrow and go climbing. Surrounded by the traffic and noise and closed-in walls of Las Vegas hotels, he was suffocating. Cliffside he'd be free. Or what little of it was left him. Now to get out of here.

But Corrine sat, with arms crossed and lips turned down, glaring at him. "What's the rush?"

"Nothing. I'm just tired."

Her frown deepened. "Don't you have any reaction to the show?"

Certainly none he planned on sharing with her. So instead, he answered, "You're right, it was hot. And you seemed happy watching." He tried to keep the answer civil, but instead of masking his irritation, the words came out sounding cold, his voice dead.

He heard her teeth grind together as she replied. "The question is, are *you* happy now? Happy ever? You never even try to have fun."

"Do we have to have this conversation here?" *Keep it together, Jesse. Just keep it the fuck together. Of course she's upset. Do something nice for her tomorrow. Get her one of those spa day packages. She's looking tired. Christ, this bullshit is hurting her too.* Familiar guilt constricted his chest.

"Where do you suggest we have the conversation?" she continued. "In that romantic suite I booked where you'll take one look at the gargantuan bed created for sexual sin and complain how tired you are and how you just want to go to sleep?"

That did it. The constant rampage in his gut teamed up with his jitters and snapped the brittle leash he kept on his self-control. "If I'm such a sexual killjoy, then why the fuck did you even propose this trip?" Heads turned at the loud volume of his challenge.

Corrine's face reddened. "I thought a getaway might wake you up." She darted her eyes to check if anyone listened to their conversation. Her voice dropped to a loud whisper. "You're sleepwalking through this relationship. Through your entire life. It's been two years, Jesse. Space and time to grieve is one thing, but I'm not sure you even want to live again."

She didn't get it. But she never had. Still, staying with her was what his folks would have wanted. And he hated that after the years she'd offered him he could give nothing in return.

His fists squeezed tight enough to leave marks on his palms from his blunted nails and he dialed back his response to cool. "I'd prefer to hash out the melodrama away from an audience. I'm leaving now." This wasn't fair to her but he needed to escape. He spun to launch himself up the aisle and out of there, only to collide with a younger man.

Shit, one of the Magician's assistants in the show.

He'd dressed hastily, leather cuffs on his wrists and one around his neck showing beyond the edges of the shirt he'd pulled on over jeans. He cleared his throat, a nervous sound. "Mr. Kabat?"

Jesse swallowed the curse on his lips. "Yes."

"My name is Kris. Mr. Rosca asked me to extend an invitation to you and your companion to join him for a drink in his suite."

Rosca. Savin Rosca. It was *him*. Jesse had known deep down, but the meaning of it rushed over him now. Clenched the muscles in his neck and shoulders hard.

At his lack of immediate response, the performer continued. "Sorry, Mr. Rosca is the headliner from tonight's show. The magician."

"I know who he is," Jesse bit out before catching his attitude.

"Jesse, be civil," Corrine scolded. She turned to Kris. "We'd love to join Mr. Rosca. Does he extend the invitation randomly to audience members? Were we the winners of a drawing?"

The performer's forehead scrunched. "No. I thought—"

"Rosca probably recognized me," Jesse interrupted. "We went to the same high school."

"Why didn't you say something before?" Corrine asked, annoyance back on her scowling lips.

"I forgot."

She clearly considered that response the excrement it was. Corrine wasn't stupid or unkind. Just tired of his baggage. So was he, truth be told.

"Um, can I escort you up?" the assistant interrupted.

"Yes," she responded at the same time as his "No."

She stared him down. No matter where this relationship was or was not going he could give her this. She deserved it.

Fine. He'd make a polite hello, exchange some vague chitchat, have a quick drink and leave. He could handle that. Right?

They followed the younger man through the hotel casino and up the bank of elevators, Jesse's eyes constantly straying to the locked cuffs and collar on this Kris, causing a zing to run through his nerve endings. Who was this man to Savin? What would it be like to have someone to take care of Jesse like that?

No, not his business and no reason to care. He kept wiping his palms on his pants legs, reminding himself the visit would be a short in and out.

Despite the pep talk, Jesse's mind continued to flash back to high school.

Walking through the halls with his buddies, turning at the itch down his spine to find Savin's slate-blue eyes watching him. The hardening of his cock as blood rushed down to his groin. Every damn time. And there were many.

Savin, the enigma. Gypsy boy, so the rumor went. Liked by all, known by none.

Who the fuck cared whether Jesse's long-ago reaction to Savin meant Jesse was bisexual? Or that he'd been ignoring his attraction to men for years now? It made no difference after the accident when the last thing he had time for was exploring personal preferences. Women were fine. Women were normal. And he deserved all the normality he could get.

Thing was, he *wasn't* normal. Not anymore. Savin knew him from *both* before and after the time his life had been flipped on its head. And that made Jesse nervous.

Suck it up, asshole, and get this over with.

The elevator light rested on the twenty-ninth floor and the car stopped. Corrine slid him a look, her eyes wide and bright. She'd kept quiet for the trip, but her excitement was palpable as they approached the double doors to a suite. Guess this hotel kept their headliners in style. Bully for Savin.

"So were you and this Rosca friends?" Corrine burst out while Kris knocked on the doors, waiting for an answer.

He shook his head. "No. Maybe. Who really knows? It doesn't matter."

The joy dimmed in her face. "As clear an answer as always. Could you at least try to be pleasant? You did a good job pretending at it when we first met."

Before Jesse could respond, the doors opened.

And there he stood.

Savin.

With a knowing grin painted on his face as Jesse's erection kicked. Savin had covered that distracting bare chest with a simple white dress shirt, unbuttoned to leave his torso exposed, although he still wore the black leather pants from the stage. In each ear he wore a small diamond chip. Exotic and tempting as hell. Shit.

Jesse was frozen. Caught in some bizarre effect from the proximity to this man.

"Welcome." Rosca extended his hand and sheer habit had Jesse grasping the offered palm.

"Rosca." Jesse nodded in a brusque hello.

His grip was firm. No way did Jesse intend to offer less. He returned the squeeze, hard.

All at once Savin's palm relaxed, gave way. A split second of triumph flashed strong in Jesse until he felt a thumb caress the back of his hand, watched a sleek, sensual smile cover Savin's lips.

Jesse's mind hiccupped. He tore his fingers away fast, too fast, as if flame burned his skin.

Rosca's eyes widened with a twinkle but he made no comment. Instead he turned to Corrine and extended his hand again. "Savin Rosca. Thank you for agreeing to my invitation. I hope I'm not delaying your plans this evening."

"Not at all, Mr. Rosca. I'm Corrine Goodwin. Very nice to make your acquaintance. Your show was, um, remarkable."

Jesse locked his muscles hearing Savin's low chuckle. "I hope remarkable in a good way. It's not to everyone's taste. And you must call me Savin." He turned toward Jesse. "And how about for you?"

His eyes caught on the pendant hanging at Savin's collar. And stuck. "What?" Jesse asked dumbly.

Where the fuck did Rosca get that pendant? The tattoo at the back of Jesse's neck prickled.

Savin interrupted his daze. "The show. Was it to your taste, Jesse?"

The question jolted his gaze up to Savin's face. Clearly the inquiry held more than innocent curiosity.

Jesse's first impulse was to deny enjoying the performance. Instead he found himself blinking hard, shivering under that slate gaze and wanting to avert his eyes to avoid the dig straight into his soul. "Yes," he answered, mumbling.

"Good," Savin replied.

God, how soon could he get out of there? He hadn't even made it through the door yet.

"Come in. Join me for a drink. I'm celebrating the end to the show's run and the chance to finally relax."

"This was your last one? I didn't know that," Corrine answered as Savin gestured them into the main room of the suite, the luxurious, tasteful furnishings way outside Jesse's usual existence.

Kris slipped past them to disappear into a back room.

Savin led them to the couch. "I made the decision recently. Other opportunities have caught my interest."

Jesse waited for Corrine to sit first so he could position himself next to her, leaving no room on his other side for Savin. Hoping like hell he sent a clear message to his former acquaintance.

As Savin folded onto the loveseat, Jesse's eyes were drawn back to the pendant. Silver latticework encompassed by a wider silver circle the size of a half-dollar. The fine interior lines joined together to form an image of a gate. Jesse knew that image well.

"So what brings you to Vegas this weekend?" Savin asked as a woman exited the kitchenette off the living room, carrying a tray of wineglasses filled with a red vintage. She wore a short swath of translucent cloth tied around her hips. No top. Jesus, her nipples were pinched with tiny clamps. Fine-link jewelry chains hung from both clamps to her navel with a small tear-shaped gemstone at each end. Weighing down the points of her breasts.

The woman offered them each a glass with her eyes dipped to the ground. The last went to Savin, who murmured a simple, "Thank you, sweet," brushing her fingers as he accepted the wine, eliciting a smile from the server as if he'd given her a tremendous compliment.

Jesse's visceral reaction to the scene battled with the nagging questions in his mind. Once in his life he'd picked up a pretty comprehensive book about the BDSM lifestyle. Maybe five years back. He remembered sitting in his car, reading it straight through. Three times. After, he drove to a Dumpster and tossed it in. If the book told the truth, the people who acted like slaves and accepted the Domination were completely willing. It was part of the deal. An exchange of power made explicitly. But his seesaw reaction inside, reading about it and having it paraded in front of his face here left him questioning whether this "slave" was okay. Coerced?

He glanced over at Corrine to gauge her reaction. She'd led a pretty sheltered small-town New England life. Maybe he should say something, protect her from the shocks commonplace in Rosca's lifestyle? No, she was an adult and had picked up the tickets to the show to begin with. It was hard to break the caretaking habit after over a decade, the disastrous state of their relationship notwithstanding.

The serving woman disappeared back into the kitchen, her hips swaying as she left. Although the sight of her engorged nipples pumped blood to Jesse's already-stiff shaft, it was Savin's sure, unapologetic attitude toward her presence, as if it were commonplace to be served wine by a bare-breasted woman wearing a collar and clamps, that had his gut churning and his balls starting to creep upward.

His reaction was crazy. He wasn't into this stuff and hadn't seen this man in ten years, his bisexual leanings or not. Screw it, this was too much to ask of him. He was hurtling off a cliff. He swallowed the wine, the first sip turning into an overlarge gulp. The red was good, a cabernet by the taste. A warm flush started in his belly as he took another drink.

Corrine answered for him, resting her hand on his thigh. "The trip was a spur-of-the-moment thing. Jesse needed to relax, get away. So I surprised him with tickets."

Savin's gaze trained on him, leaving him with the feeling his friend saw too much. Savin's lips turned down. "I was sorry to hear about your parents."

Jesse's limbs twitched suddenly. The familiar pain in his chest returned.

A quick flash of his father's face, rage twisting lips ugly.

He took another swallow of wine to hide his surprise. "You heard about that? When you took off before the end of senior year, I thought you wrote Westlea off forever."

Savin answered without hesitation, ignoring the jab in the challenge, as if he knew he needed to change the subject ASAP. "You still own the specialty grocery?"

Jesse shrugged. "It pays the bills." The heat built in his gut, the wine zipped to his brain and the grip on his anger loosened more. Rosca needed to leave him the fuck alone. Too many questions.

"The market sounds more of a burden than benefit. I hope you've been able to travel from time to time. It suited you."

Corrine chuckled. "You must be kidding me? I had to force him on the plane to Las Vegas. He never wants to leave town. He's tied to his business and his house."

Jesse shifted his thigh and tried to dislodge her hand without her noticing. Sweat pooled at the small of his back and he gulped more wine. Magically the serving woman was there to refill his glass.

The room shrunk and the temperature crept higher. His anger met his arousal and fear, and fire ants started a march along his skin. His mind hazed a soft red. Jesse returned Savin's gaze with focus for the first time. "You seem to have a nice setup here. Got the kinky Master thing going for you well, don't you?" Corrine's mouth dropped open in shock but Savin never blinked. "It's always the quiet ones. Never thought you'd end up this way."

The silver of Rosca's pendant glinted under the lamplight of the room. He quirked one eyebrow. "Didn't you?"

The question shot straight through Jesse's skin and took a fast path down his spine into his cock, jerking the organ hard.

A door opened off the side of the room. Kris entered and hurried over to Savin, dropping his gaze to the floor a moment while Savin stood, his frown indicating he read the upset churning off the younger man's body. "Sorry to interrupt, Master, um, Sir, but Stephanie is having a problem."

From the beyond the open door, Jesse heard female weeping, low-murmured voices interrupting the inconsolable sound. What had happened? Was she okay? He gritted his teeth to keep from demanding answers from Savin. *Not your job, Kabat. Remember, not a caretaker. Look where that gig got you.*

"If you would excuse me?" Their host made a shallow bow and followed Kris into the next room. Kris closed the door behind them.

Saved by the bell. Or at least the sobbing.

Jesse was at his limit and he needed out now. His feet, however, refused to cooperate. As if some invisible chain kept him seated. And didn't that image send his mind reeling faster.

Corrine turned kitty-corner to him. "Wow, he is intense. Was he like that in high school? Do you think those people live with him 24/7?" She shook her head. "I should yell at you for being so rude but this situation is bizarre." Her cheeks flushed. "I thought I'd have a heart attack when that woman came out with no shirt and her nipples in those things."

"Clamps."

The red on her face darkened. "You don't think he expects us to join him? You know, *join* him?"

A flash of pendant, of Savin's long fingers gripping his hand in greeting, his body standing too close.

"No." The loud negation didn't bring him relief. Strangely it echoed someplace hollow inside him. He swigged the last of his glass of wine and clicked it down hard on the coffee table. "Look, let's get out of here. Who knows how long Rosca needs to deal with the problem."

She blew out a disgusted breath. "Running again? I thought maybe you'd appreciate being here. At least it's a distraction. God, even this guy you haven't seen in years backpedaled to avoid upsetting you when he brought up the subject of your parents' deaths. Anyone can see it bothers you to even acknowledge it. He's trying to be kind and we owe him the courtesy of a goodbye before we leave."

Her face had tightened, eyebrows drawn down as her disapproval built. She shifted on the couch. "Maybe being here threatens your he-man sensibility, finding some other guy more alpha than you, but I think Savin's lovely. Be social. I don't know what happened to the great guy I first met, devoted to his family, but I'd love him back. I'm trying everything I can to help you, Jesse. If you'd just work with me the smallest bit."

Jesse's feet unstuck. He stood and glared down at her, the alcohol and the sourness of her last comment crashing into his thin thread of control to burst apart the ball of fury that had been building and building. It mixed with the regret that he'd wasted years of her life. Regret that he couldn't offer her love. He was an idiot. He'd been trying but he couldn't do it anymore. Not even to save her from his anger, anger she didn't deserve.

He yelled, "Can you leave it the fuck alone, Corrine! I'm fucking broken and not getting fixed. I'm done faking this and, for Christ's sake, I don't know why you haven't walked before now. It's over. That guy you first met was an illusion. And I can't be careful around you anymore. I'm too fucking tired. Just save yourself the pain and get out." His voice filled the room. Probably filled the entire floor of rooms in this place.

Corrine leaped to her feet, her face twisting in angry offense. "I don't need this crap, Jesse Kabat. You want me gone so much, fine. You've got your wish. Your bags will be down at the hotel front desk. Maybe Savin can find you a nice bed of nails to sleep on tonight. It's probably what you want anyway." She turned and stomped to the exit, slamming the door behind her.

"Fuck!" Jesse grabbed his empty glass from the table and pitched it against the wall. The goblet shattered, pieces falling to the beige carpet in glittering defeat. Broken. Like him.

When he spun at a sound behind him, he froze. There was Savin, staring at him with an unreadable expression. The man must think him some out-of-control gorilla.

Jesse focused on a point beyond Savin's shoulder, not keen on meeting his gaze. Jesse's knees weakened and he fused them straight to keep standing. "Don't be afraid to call me a rank bastard for treating her like that. I am one. I'll just get out of here and let you do your thing."

"Stay." It wasn't a request.

God, if only he could. He wanted... Whatever it was he wanted it was too late. The pain was so deep it had become ingrained in his bones.

"I think it's better if I leave."

"And go where?"

"It's Vegas, there are rooms."

"Stay."

Jesse ran his fingers through his hair. "Savin." Coming out of his mouth, the name sounded too much like a plea for comfort.

Savin shifted his head to catch Jesse's reluctant gaze. "We can go to a bar. Have a drink."

Jesse gestured to the broken glass on the rug. "Alcohol's already part to blame for this mess." His eyes skittered away. "It loosened too much inside."

"Maybe you need to loosen it more." The soft reply twisted Jesse's gut further.

The air in the room hung like lead. Savin kept watching him with those enigmatic slate eyes. Powerful eyes. Power leaking everywhere off the man. Savin lived adventure. God, if only...

Jesse couldn't get his mouth to work. Seconds ticked away.

Savin smiled a wicked smile. "I'll get my coat."

Christ, Jesse was in trouble.

Chapter Three

The world's greatest idiot. Savin cursed himself for bringing Jesse to the Butterfly Club tonight. Savin should have taken his friend to a normal bar, bought a few rounds and let him drink himself into oblivion. Then dragged him back to his suite and put him to bed in the unused guestroom, carefully distant from Savin's own bed. After which he was sure to wake and find his guest conveniently gone, snuck out at daybreak to crawl back to whatever personal hell he'd designed for himself. Goddess, but his teeth ground together at the thought of letting Jesse limp away still injured like that.

Instead Savin had brought him to Las Vegas' premier BDSM club, where he watched Jesse fidget in the seat across from him at their small table, tapping his nail repetitively against the bottle of Corona with which he'd quickly chased a shot of high-end tequila. Savin saw this endeavor as his own form of personal torture. His will fought both his lust and his magic to keep his hands on his side of the table instead of letting them ease over to Jesse, wrap around his wrists and drag him into the back dungeon where he belonged. But Savin refused to be a dictator. At least not outside the boundaries of consensual D/s play. Jesse deserved to choose his life. Didn't Savin struggle every day to do the same? His magic bucked against his control, spikes of electric displeasure running through his cells. He beat them back and ignored the discomfort. It was worth fighting the temptation. Despite his increasing nightmares of a dying land. Everything had to end at some point and perhaps the prophetic dreams painted the picture as it should be.

Still, he'd like nothing more than to collar and cuff this man, force him to his knees and begin to siphon off the poison pouring from Jesse's skin as Savin stroked Jesse's cock, brought cries of pain and pleasure from him with a lash and a hard fuck. He'd like nothing more than to keep Jesse forever. Not that that would be happening. Savin sometimes wondered if his rib cage enclosed an empty cavity, the loneliness was so stark.

Enough self-pity. He'd make do with this momentary gift. It was a risk exposing Jesse to a place like this and to the hunger of his magic. And arrogant of Savin to think he could lessen his friend's pain. But he'd never been good at standing by to watch those he loved suffer. Not since Adelle's death. He had only this weekend, and Jesse hit his bloodstream like an addiction, scrambling his mind and making his good intentions crumble to dust. Even his silk dress shirt and fine cloth trousers grated his skin, rubbing against his growing erection and raw nerve endings to force a growl of possessiveness from his lips. A growl he pushed back beneath the surface. Jesse wouldn't appreciate the sound. Yet.

The crossing time was soon, dammit, and his impatient magic argued with him to gorge on Jesse Kabat. A perfect meal. A way to charge his power. Ironical that the magic was in complete agreement with Eamon over the issue. The bastard.

And there was Jesse to consider. Jesse, his energy tasting like rich coffee with a shot of smooth Irish whiskey, a complex core with the kick of both caffeine and potent alcohol. Making him vibrate with emotion and potential. The subtle flavors underneath gave Savin as much a high as the force of the drug-like kick. A sure temptation indeed. One would think he'd neglected to feed the magic for days instead of the only several hours since he drank down David and Stephanie as they exposed everything of their selves, no barriers, only truth in their perfect submission and letting go.

Goddess, Savin needed distraction from the demands of his hunger—it was a force lacking any moral compass. *That* he had to impose on it himself. If only he wasn't alone among his people in valuing such a code.

The front barroom of the Butterfly Club was civilian friendly, separate from the dungeon and with a strictly hands-off policy even between the regular Doms and subs negotiating scenes for the evening. The transient nature of Las Vegas, with constant streams of wealthy visitors looking for new experiences, meant the establishment had to create a safe holding area to contain the curious vanilla wanderers who passed through the door. Staff was well-trained to identify those visitors who understood and would respect the strict rules of safety and play in the D/s lifestyle, and weed out the simply inquisitive, basely ignorant or egotistically brutal individuals who did not belong in the club. Only those who belonged made it beyond the back doors of the bar and into the dungeon areas.

Savin's problem was not so simple. His guest belonged, only hadn't realized it yet. Jesse—with chocolate eyes, short-cropped dark hair and five o'clock shadow adding a rough, rustic, sexual appeal to him, even dressed up as he was for tonight's theater performance. Firm muscle of a man used to hard labor, or one who'd driven his body to exhaustion to exorcize his demons. Clearly that plan wasn't working. Dammit, he'd let anger eat him almost into oblivion. It was clear to Savin's trained eyes.

Jesse's gaze jumped from the patrons of the club, many in fetish wear designed to communicate their Dominant or submissive interests, back to Savin. Specifically to the pendant hanging around his neck. Why? He'd caught Jesse staring at it all evening.

Jesse tore another strip of label from his bottle and flicked it to the table, finger tapping the wood in staccato beats. With one last drum he stopped, resolve in the lines around his mouth and eyes. "Did you wear that in high school?" His friend gestured to the hanging design, finally caving under whatever drove his interest.

"No. My mother gave it to me after I turned eighteen. Her legacy."

His brow creased. "You're sure? You didn't borrow it a few times before then? Wear it around?"

Savin shook his head. "I'm positive. But something about it's been disturbing you all evening." *Slow, Savin. There's a clue here somewhere. Let him get to it.*

Jesse rubbed at the back of his neck, massaging the skin there as if the area bothered him. "Just...I used to have this dream. Of a picture, a pattern." He dropped his hand, met Savin's gaze. "Shit, why not tell you. Whatever happens in Vegas and all that crap, right?" He grunted and his body straightened. "I've dreamed of the same pattern on your pendant. Exactly the same. Starting about a year after you left. When it got so bad I was seeing the image every damn night I did something about it. I found a tattoo parlor, drew out the design and had it inked on the back of my neck. After that the dreams stopped." He glanced down at the empty bottle and shot glass. "I need another round."

Shock iced through Savin's veins. His thighs clenched and a fierce wonder spread through his entire body. *Mine!* His lust rebounded in spades and he let out one low growl before Jesse's suspicious eyes glared back.

"What the fuck's your problem?" Jesse asked.

"You're wearing my personal insignia on the back of your neck and you want to know my problem?"

"Personal insignia? Who speaks like that? And let's not go there, man."

Savin glared in return. He let silence grow between them, the background hum of the bar, glasses tinkling, low-voiced laughter, seductive suggestion filling the space until he was sure Jesse would break under it. Then Savin nodded. "You brought up the topic, but fine, if we need to change subjects, what next?"

Jesse relaxed back in his chair, shifted his eyes to their surroundings. "So, how'd you end up in this lifestyle? As a Dominant?"

Savin chuckled. "An interesting choice given what you so clearly wanted to avoid discussing. Glutton for punishment, are you?"

Jesse's jaw clenched. "I'm trying to be polite. I'm not particularly good company right now but you insisted on dragging me out. And here of all places, though Christ knows why. So, I think the question makes sense."

Tilting his head in acknowledgement, Savin let his raw awareness of Jesse out of its cage to fill his gaze. The edge of a vicious type of glee lacquered his words. "My interest in this lifestyle began one day a little over ten years ago. I went hiking with this guy I unexpectedly ran into at the top of a mountain. After the hike, we kissed. We were leaning against a car. He'd pressed his wrists behind him to the metal as I moved in, pinning himself without even realizing. It excited me. Woke something inside me. To have him make himself vulnerable like that. Waiting for my move."

Jesse's eyes grew wide. "Whoa! Time out. You are *not* telling me what happened between us led you to all this." His hand flung in the direction of the surrounding club. "I won't listen to that crap."

Savin shrugged his shoulders in mock defeat. "Another conversation blocked. Imagine that. The weather's a safe subject. Not much risk in that one."

"Fuck you."

"You wouldn't enjoy where that discussion led either, Jesse." Savin reached under the table in a sudden move, resting his palm on the other man's thigh. Squeezed the hard muscle, brushing an engorged cock along the way.

Jesse jerked his leg. "Get that off."

"Why?"

"I don't want it."

Savin withdrew his hand, his muscles taut as stretched rubber bands. The effort almost killed him. "I never force a companion. D/s is not about force. It's about people willingly relinquishing power and others accepting it as the gift it is. To reach one of the most intense levels of arousal and pleasure when the exchange is honest."

"I'm not an idiot. I know about the kink scene. I've read about it. It's just not for me."

Jesse's answer surprised him and jolted him back into control. Learning about the tattoo had driven him over the edge.

"Fair enough." He leaned back in his chair and picked up his own neglected glass of wine. He pushed down the magic again, leashed the throbbing under his skin and in his cock. He would not use glamour to influence Jesse. It was honesty between them or nothing. "Want to talk about Corrine?"

Jesse rolled his shoulders, accepted the change of subject, although remained stiff in his chair. "There's not much to say. She deserved better. It's over."

"How long had you been with her?"

"Three years."

"Long enough. That would mean you met her a year before your parents died."

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

Jesse would not take kindly if he admitted to following the events of his life.

Instead he said, "I subscribed to Westlea's local paper."

"Why?"

Sharp curiosity, a man fixed on the scent of untruths. Of course Jesse would see deeper. The connection between them was pulsing, a strong inexplicable link that had Savin sitting forward in his chair examining him again. "I liked Westlea."

"You were only there for the four years of high school. A little under four. You left the April before we graduated."

"I liked the people I met."

"You mean me." Jesse's tone shot accusation.

Savin laughed then, unable to help the raw, astounded joy at being next to this man again. He'd forgotten. How had he managed to leave all those years ago? "Yes, I mean you. I wanted to know what happened to you."

Jesse sat farther back in his seat, crossed his arms. "Making your questions unnecessary. You have all the details already."

The involuntary catch in Jesse's words, a jagged rip of pain in the sound, made Savin's heart stagger a beat. The organ was alive and well inside there after all. "I know the basics." His even voice put a lie to the brutal stripping of masks he intended to accomplish. "A business degree through a part-time local college while you kept your father's store going. Features of you in the paper commending the hardworking humanitarian, a former high school all-star super jock, caring for two severely crippled parents in his home, running a successful business in a time when small businesses dropped like flies, giving back to the community constantly. Running marathons to fundraise for children with cancer, cystic fibrosis, those who were burn victims, perhaps even saving small kittens trapped in trees." He meant to sound relentless. And he was. "A manic town hero, my friend. Property records confirmed you remained the occupant of your family home. Paid the mortgage on time. Your insurance covered the regular costs of healthcare providers and medical bills for your mother and father. And, as Corrine said, you never once left the state for business trips or to take vacations. All this for ten long years. More if you count the last half of high school after the accident. Constant motion. Or were you really running in place?"

Jesse pushed his chair back with a loud scrape. "What the fuck, Savin? This is more than what you get from a town newspaper. You stalked me all these years. I should call the police and report a psychopath."

"I've left you alone. It's you who stumbled into my theater tonight."

"And now what? You want to strap me to some post and whip me? What do you want from me?"

What did he want? Yes, to be balls-deep in this man, pounding into him until there wasn't a difference between their bodies any longer. But more. Closer. Sinking deep enough to find a home.

His nails dug into the table, gouging the grain, fighting visions of impossible dreams. Then throwing them away. Not safe. Not for Jesse. And impossible for him. So what did Savin want that he could have?

Jesse's eyes followed Savin's fingers as he made shallow furrows on the wood. He looked up, and for a second his friend's gaze softened, filled with a compassion Savin remembered from their years in school, before this anger. What had Jesse seen on his face as Savin battled this longing that hit him too often? Jesse hadn't been the only one who'd been haunted by dreams.

No matter. His friend deserved an answer. He needed to give one, to set a limit for himself hearing it out loud. "I want a weekend. This weekend." It wouldn't be enough, not even close to enough for either of them.

"I told you I don't do this." Jesse gestured again to their surroundings.

"No touching, nothing sexual if that's your preference, though I'm sure you know it's not mine."

"Savin." There was a warning in the name. But at least he wasn't calling him Rosca any longer.

"A weekend to relearn a friend."

Jesse ran his hand through his hair, scrubbed his scalp. Blew out his breath. "We were never friends. Acquaintances maybe. Jesus, the longest conversation we ever had was the time on Mount Washington."

"We were friends that day."

Jesse grunted a noncommittal answer. "Just hanging out? That's all."

"If that's all you want."

"I don't know what the fuck I want anymore. I haven't for years."

Savin felt a grin spread over his lips. "You don't need to know. That's not a prerequisite for the weekend. Your plane ticket's not until Monday, yes? Two full days, that's all I ask."

Jesse crossed his arms again. "You're a strange asshole, you know that?"

"Ever the charmer, Jesse. I bet they voted you prom king end of senior year."

He snorted a laugh. "I definitely need another drink, Mr. Intense."

Intense? His gaze scanned Jesse's tight shoulders, rigid posture and burning leashed irritation. "A bit pot calling the kettle, isn't it?"

"Hey, I've given full disclosure about my attitude this evening."

"True." And there it was again. The miracle of Jesse—an inherent honesty, a willingness to look hard truth in the eye and name it for what it was. Even when he was uncomfortable and out of his element. Even as another part of him tried to close it out. Other men carrying his baggage would never have stepped foot in this club. Emotional pain usually kept folks from accepting difference. An automatic self-defense when body and brain were under attack. Including attack from their own demons. Another man would never consider this weekend with him, knowing his inclinations. But Jesse was still here. Still sitting across from Savin despite how anger and fear had grown over him like some insidious creeping vine, covering the man beneath.

Savin's head turned as a light touch landed on his shoulder from behind. Damn, he hadn't sensed her approach. Jesse had most definitely crawled under his skin, into his mind and begun to deftly wreak havoc with all he experienced.

He nodded at the newcomer, burying the surprise with a pleasant smile to cover how blind, deaf and dumb Jesse left him. "Dalia, you're looking lovely tonight."

Dalia, a frequent Domme at the Butterfly Club, and dressed in formfitting leather bustier, pants and fuck-me boots, held a package in one hand, a thin bamboo cane in the other. Standing a pace behind her was Ethan, a favorite sub of hers, his eyes trained to the floor, waiting. Ethan was dressed, though barely, as required in the front bar. The leather straps wrapping his groin were just the creative touch Dalia favored. She was a rope bondage aficionado and loved knots. Other than straps, he was bare. Ethan's pierced nipples sported silver bars. And although his hands were free he stood with wrists crossed behind him as if she'd placed him in cuffs.

Jesse's gaze froze on Ethan. Jesse licked his bottom lip, a nervous gesture, and shifted his vision to Dalia. Savin noted the faster thump of Jesse's pulse, the slightest shake to his hands, undetectable to anyone else. Anyone human, that was.

Dalia ignored her sub, although it was clear from the bulge pressing out against the straps, the slight sway to his pose and the spacey look in his eyes that she'd already worked him to high arousal and subspace. Subspace, the state a transcendent high, almost like flying, like a connection with a deity that subs entered when they let go all boundaries under a good Dominant's hand. Lucky Ethan. Dalia was a magnificent Mistress.

"I haven't seen you around lately, Savin," she said. "I started to wonder if you'd left town but kept spotting the billboards advertising your show. Everything well in your life, I trust?" Her eyes appraised his tablemate, running over the promise of the hard body under Jesse's clothes, resting leisurely at his thighs and crotch before returning to Savin.

"Busy with the show. But that's closing and I am planning to leave town soon."

She smiled, and as always he appreciated her genuineness. "Then I'm glad I found you. I've been carrying around a present for you from my last trip to Australia." She held out her package and Savin reached for it. "Tim Tams, your favorite chocolate biscuits. Your sweet tooth is outrageous, Sav." Her eyes glided over to Jesse again. "I see it hasn't diminished."

Jesse scowled at the pointed playful innuendo and cleared his throat. "If you'll excuse me, I need a restroom break. You two catch up." He stood from the table, the bulge in his pants drawing a sympathetic lurch from Savin's cock. "Direction?"

"Down that hall on the right," Savin answered.

Jesse started to leave but hesitated. "No one tries anything funny in the bathrooms?"

Savin chuckled. "No. But if they do tell them Savin said hands off. Private property. If you want I can come supervise."

"Very funny, asshole."

"Still with the charm, Jesse. You're melting me in my seat."

Jesse snorted and strode away.

"Haven't broken in the newbie yet, I see?" Dalia asked. "Bring him back to the dungeon and we can play together. I'll have his cock harnessed, his body in ropes and his balls stretched with weights as quick as a bunny in heat." She punctuated her offer with a dramatic wink. "We'll take that mouthy attitude and gag it quick."

"Not tonight, D., Jesse's a civilian."

She rolled her eyes. "Don't tell stories. The man may be uninitiated but he is so clearly panting for the end of your leash. I was watching from the bar. His posturing is only inconvenient male testosterone getting in his way. You're not going blind to have missed the signs?"

"My eyesight is fine. And yes, I have...plans for him. But as of now we're taking it slow."

"Slow can be good, dear," she drawled. "Although, sometimes pulling the bandage off hard and fast is more of a mercy. Don't make him suffer too long before you make him suffer."

"Thanks for the Tim Tams, Dalia. I'll think of you as I eat them over the next weeks."

"Oh, now I know you're lying. Those babies will be stuffed down your gullet by the end of the night. I always wondered how you kept such a svelte figure with those flat abs after the sweets you put away."

"Good metabolism. Lots of exercise."

Dalia smiled and leaned down to give him a hug. "Stay well, Sav. Come back soon. We'll miss you at the Butterfly."

"Me too." He avoided promising a quick return. It was a lie and he tried hard not to lie to those he cared about. Or wasn't his entire life a lie? No wonder Vegas drew him and his kin. The hollow shell of it rivaled Hollywood's tinseltown.

She sent an obvious glance toward the restrooms. "And enjoy working off those biscuits with your exercise tonight." She winked at him again and walked away, casually swatting her palm with her cane, Ethan trailing behind the appropriate distance of a well-trained sub. Ethan would likely be the recipient of more rigorous cane use after they crossed the doors of the playrooms.

His eyes turned back to the hall where Jesse had disappeared. Just one weekend, Savin promised himself. His magic flared dark, seductive pinpricks down his spine, settling heavy in his cock. As if trying to entice him to take more than a weekend's worth with the crossing so near. Damnation, he hadn't even achieved that much yet.

It helped to picture his magic as that whirling dervish Road Runner cartoon character, and himself Wile E. Coyote, deluded and doing himself in trying to capture the seemingly simple but probably secretly malicious bird. A cartoon image of the magic could be laughed at. Reduced to pretend instead of acknowledging the powerful burden of it in reality. Adelle had loved sitting next to his child self, watching the cartoons flicker on the screen. Simple joys she'd call them. So different from their joyless homeland.

TV was not foreign there. Once invented, his folk found ways to connect to human broadcasts. Their fashions and architecture and daily habits mimicking eras of human civilization beaming from the screens. Knights in armor hand in hand with top hats and Victorian walking coats. Flapper beads, pillbox hats and poodle skirts. Pathetic grasping for mortal trappings. Long before broadcasts they'd relied on visits here to steal their obsessions with different human civilizations. But once travel was no longer so possible between Faerie and Earth the progression of mortal fashion reflected in their wardrobes stopped in time. Only three decades before his birth were they no longer powerful enough to be able to access the images. And they'd never stolen cartoon

images so there was something pure and delightful to his mother about watching Looney Tunes or even the more recent comedies and dramas.

When the shows they watched together ended, she'd turn off the television and go to another room, humming in apparent happiness. Though Savin saw beneath it to the sadness. She missed the land of her birth. Even though she'd fled on purpose. The days when the queen gave her sendings in her dreams were the worst. Thank Goddess the queen's power didn't touch him here.

Without warning, the magic doubled back up his spine to leave his groin and settle over his shoulders like a painful flaming cloak, interrupting his memories.

He twisted his head toward the entrance to the Butterfly, his stomach roiling even before the presence entered.

Eamon.

He strode through the door as if he owned not only this place but the entire universe. Golden hair, golden eyes, larger than life as he let his power shine out of him. He never bothered to cloak it. He didn't care about humans noticing. Eamon could easily chew them up and spit them out, collecting more power from their fear and pain. Barriers to the true self were stripped away when his people applied their tortures. There was no more will to pretend anything when suffering horror show torment. Blood and disfigurement. Victims suffered in the hands of his kind to be forced to expose their most basic vulnerabilities and identity. And that's what fae fed upon while on Earth to keep their magic strong. Pure truth of the soul.

Trial and error showed that the most potent, energy-rich form came from mortals within the depths of torment. Goddess curse them all.

Perhaps they needed to develop an ad campaign to recruit human volunteers—*Torture, the sure path to stripping away self-illusion*. Sick disgust forced bile up his throat at the thought.

A splintering headache railed at his temple. It happened each time Eamon intruded on his everyday mundane life. In between visits, Savin tried to pretend he was a normal man with an ego driving him to seek fame, and the bank account letting him chase the American dream of life, liberty and the pursuit of consumer goods. His power, sifting the fastest path through his veins to ready a defense, argued otherwise. Damn all of Faerie.

The fine hairs on Savin's nape rose as the blond man walked over to him. His magic snapped and crackled in response but didn't attack. Eamon's was stronger, better fed, like the well-kept lions in the habitat attraction at The Grand. No brittleness to *his* bones. The outcome was risky if Savin acted.

The older man stopped before him. His dead expression reminded Savin of everything he and Adelle had meant to escape coming through the gate.

"Eamon, why are you here? This is my place. Go scare defenseless pups somewhere else."

The man's lip curled, changing the cold emptiness of his golden expression to disdainful contempt. "Your need to mimic mortal humor is pathetic."

Too rich. The one thing Faerie had never learned was mortal humor or the ability to notice their own slavish obsessions with humans. Living, breathing caricatures with no ability for true joy. And way too much power to be safe. "Go away."

"The time we have given you to indulge yourself is up, dearest Prince. The gate needs opening and all of us must be at full strength to do so. I refuse to remain stuck in this horrific land any longer." He stepped closer. "You will do as I say. Your deluded mother believed this place would help us. She was wrong and she is dead. It is time for us to go home."

"You can leave without me." He knew it for the lie it was but, Goddess, how he kept hoping it was true.

"I'd wipe my hands of you in a second, Prince, if I could. Unfortunately that is not the case. All five of us are necessary as well as your particular blood-gifted talent."

Savin clenched his fists hard at his side, calling up every last scrap of his will to face down his dangerous opponent. "You want my help; you take it on my terms."

In one swift move Eamon's hand shot out and wrapped around Savin's shoulder blade, squeezing and pressing down until it felt as if the bone would snap. "In four days you will present yourself at the gate. Not barely fed as you like to exist now. Fully charged. Or I'll strap you down and make you watch me hurt your precious humans. Then I'll force their power down your regal throat."

Around them these same humans went about their business, the bespellments Savin wove making them ignore the drama between the men. As much as Eamon didn't care about witnesses, Savin did. His first urge was to protect them. From the monsters Eamon and the others had become. Tzrina, Geltano and Braal were just as bad. He'd fought too long to keep humans safe from his own monster to let another terrorize the people he called his own. The control it took to manage the crowd was exact. Mastering it a heady rush. His exhilaration battled his rage at the fae.

Savin refused to show fear or submission to this beast. He let his power kick up for a brief moment, long enough to throw off Eamon's grip. Eamon staggered back half a step. "In the end, going home is pointless. Faerie is still dying. Its magic is still dying."

"Yes, and your mother convinced the queen that Earth would hold answers to replenishing it. But it has not." His show of teeth had little to do with a smile. "This place is worthless, a crumbling irritation that lasts moments. Disintegrates into nothingness. It has no eternal beauty. Even the power the humans provide fades away quickly. Faerie may be dying but at least there is a nobility in its history of perfection."

"There is nothing noble remaining in Faerie. And what there used to be we stole from this place."

"You left as a young child. How would you know? All you care for is playing mortal." He snorted. "But conversation is pointless. You will do as I say or I will harm your pet humans as well as you."

Savin's body chilled into ice. His mind scrambled for a way to protect his people. David, Stephanie, Kris, all of them. Goddess, and Jesse! "You won't kill me. The queen would eat your heart for dinner if you harmed her grandson."

"At least I'd die in my home."

"You don't wish to die."

"I am as good as dead with our magic at risk. Queen Soliandra will decide the next steps for our people. Besides, I plan to take a few mortals back home. Perhaps we can funnel the power we drain from them into the stuff of Faerie itself. It's not like they'll have much future here if Faerie's gone."

The last comment flicked through Savin's mind for brief seconds, disturbing him even as it didn't make sense. The distraction left as his magic surged a hard twist, flowing through his limbs, kicking him in the kidneys. Riding it down, Savin blew out in disgust. "I wish our kind had taken that nickname the humans use for us of the *hidden people* and stayed a little more hidden. Hidden from me at least. Your threats do not scare me." Or at least the ones just to him. *Think fast, Savin. Don't screw this up.* "Besides, what if I show you a way to fill our magic as completely without the torture you wreak on these mortals?"

Eamon threw back his head and laughed in scorn. "If a way existed, we'd have found one by now. Surely your sex games of pretend pain and frustrated lust don't do it. They barely provide any punch."

"As much as I hate you, Eamon, I don't believe you or the others enjoy what you do to these people. If there were another way you'd take it."

"But there is no other." The fae's response came fast and sure. Yet just for a moment Savin spied a flash of doubt, a weakening.

"If I come with proof you'll listen?"

Eamon's wide smile never reached his eyes. He shrugged his disbelief. "Of course, dear Prince. And bring your newest plaything." The fae leaned in and sniffed Savin's collar. Close, too close. "I smell him all over you. And when your proof disintegrates into the nothing it is, his pain and fear can be the first meal we feed you."

No! Hot, molten fury shot up from his veins. Savin released a hard yell and shoved his power out and into Eamon's chest. But Eamon was ready, his own magic meeting and shattering the force of Savin's.

In a blink, the fae was on him, pushing him to the nearest wall and pinning him by the throat. "Never again, Prince." The pressure crushed Savin's windpipe, his power whipping madly for a hold to save himself.

The closest he'd come to death yet. But death would not visit tonight. Not if Eamon wanted a way home. And Savin was not so easy to kill.

"Get the fuck off my friend!" The yell came from behind them. And as suddenly, a familiar arm wrenched Eamon back and away.

Jesse.

He saw through the bespellment that Savin had held tight despite the attack. But how?

A pure primal rage colored his friend. Had him charging at Eamon, pupils dilated, cheeks flushed red. His fists pummeled the fae's torso, face. Two good punches each before Eamon took control and called his energy.

Savin had only a split second. He threw every last molecule of power toward Eamon to distract him with silver ribbons of strength bombarding his magic. Had only a second to keep the fae's strike from surging into Jesse's body and breaking it apart as easily as dry twigs for kindling.

As it was, Jesse was thrown back. Contact. Wood splintered as he hit the nearest table, crashed down through the surface. Goddess, no!

His body lay still amid the wreckage.

Eamon stood tall, pulled down on his shirt hem to straighten the wrinkles, no marks on his face from Jesse's punches. The older fae stared straight at Savin, the dead expression returned. "I have no time for this. Four days, Savin."

He walked calmly out of the bar.

Bastard. He'd kill the fae for hurting Jesse.

Savin dropped to where Jesse lay and felt for the pulse at his neck. Blood pumped steady through the artery and Savin relaxed. His magic depleted, he made the smallest scan through organs to check for damage. His friend would be bruised, have a few lacerations, but Jesse would not suffer much beyond that.

Jesse blinked, came to in a rush and coughed hard, struggling to sit up and keep fighting. Savin watched the anger snap to life again ready to find a target. He pulled back to avoid Jesse's lunge.

Jesse's eyes found their focus and he froze.

"Steady, Boyo," Savin said.

"Where is he?" He coughed again, wiping blood from the corner of his mouth.

"Gone."

Jesse grabbed Savin's shirt. "Did he hurt you?"

The heat of the contact soaked through to Savin's skin, their connection buzzing with life. He felt the sides of his lips curl up. "No. A white knight came to my rescue." Something about Jesse's defense of him pleased him excessively.

Their eyes met and Savin's smile drained away.

"I wanted another chance at him," Jesse said.

"What, so he could leave some more attractive black-and-blue designs on your body?" Savin's muscles tightened, the reality of the near miss hitting him again.

"I'm not really caring all that much. Besides, isn't that what you'd like to do to me too?" Jesse's eyebrows rose in a wry, rough challenge.

"Behave."

Jesse shrugged and his lips tightened from the discomfort of the movement. "Who the hell was that man and why did he have you pinned?"

"No one important. The trouble's over so forget about it."

Nothing in Jesse's sparking eyes told Savin he would forget about it. And anything but that would place his friend in more danger. Time for distraction.

Savin pressed his hand to Jesse's chest, running fingers down his pecs and abdomen, ostensibly checking for damage. Lower to his tense thighs. The firm muscles, bulging curves tempted Savin. He caught the faint whiff of alcohol on Jesse's breath, inhaled the sweat from the fight and the bitter scent of his rage. It made Savin's erection harder than ever.

Goddess, he wanted nothing more than to flip this man over, hold him down and watch him struggle. Tear off those damn pants to squeeze his balls, get to that tight asshole and make Jesse buck. To help him lose control in a safer way than leaping into a bar fight. Wanted to watch him shake, his legs and arms straining under bindings. Body red and aching, and in the end at peace from giving it all up to his Master. Wanted this even more so after the disaster of Eamon's visit.

His fingers slipped inward to the hard bulge at Jesse's groin.

Jesse froze, sucking in a breath. "What are you doing?"

"Checking for injuries."

"I wasn't hit there."

"Just being thorough."

"I bet. Move 'em."

The anger still simmered under Jesse's surface, watching for a reason to explode. This wasn't the time or the place to push him further.

"Let's get you out of here." Savin rose and offered his hand. Eyes narrowed, Jesse took the offer and was pulled upright. But didn't immediately release the hand. It surprised Savin. The grip encircled Savin's palm as if it were a lifeline.

"A weekend, right?" Jesse asked. "Just that?"

"Of course. Then you get on that plane." That's how it had to be. Must be. Although the promise he'd made to Eamon about finding another way to fill the magic nagged like a skittering bedbug at the back of his mind.

"Okay then." Jesse nodded, a jerky movement that betrayed his nerves, and dropped his grip.

The air vibrated with his answer. As if the entire freakish universe witnessed a pledge—a deal signed and sealed. The problem was Savin wasn't sure what deal Lady Fate had in mind. The Goddess worked in mysterious ways. And sweet hells, he hoped both of them would come out of it alive.

Chapter Four

Jesse dreamed.

The airport, international terminal. He sat surrounded by a crapload of luggage, exhausted but still high from the trip to Madrid. The Spanish club advisor, Mr. Fernidat, was behind him at the bank of phones. His parents and Martin were an hour late, all the other kids on the exchange trip gone home. His dad probably got caught up at the store, arguing with a vendor about some overdue shipment of imported olives. Martin right there next to him, sorting invoices. Or out in the aisles, neatening shelves. Fine by Jesse. Better that his older brother loved that shit. It meant his dad stayed off his case about embracing the future of a small-town businessman.

After this trip and the one before it the previous spring, Jesse knew it was the road for him. Traveling. Wanderlust pulsed in his blood and he loved every second he'd spent in foreign countries. Rome had been great last year. France next, he planned. If he could just convince the principal two trips abroad in one school year was reasonable. It's not as if his grades suffered. His mind zoomed forward to university overseas. Diplomatic corps after college? Photojournalism? He didn't care. Just wanted to be tripping it around the world.

The airport foot traffic buzzed around him, the excitement as people shifted and sorted on the way to and from flight destinations. The scent of adventure spicing the antiseptic air. God, he loved it. Meeting new people constantly. Tasting new foods. The music. The way folks rubbed together on the streets in a way totally different than in American towns and cities.

Jesse kneaded his eyes, moved in his chair to get the circulation back in his butt from sitting so long. Okay, so maybe he did care his family was late. Geez, didn't they want to see him after two weeks apart? His folks had been nervous about sending him despite the success of the past trip. God help their homebody genes.

"If you leave who will make us laugh at the dinner table?" his mom had joked when he decided on the Lisbon trip. "Or throw a ball with your dad. You know how he gets sullen when he can't play catch regularly." His mom tried hard to be cool about his interest in traveling and joke about it, but she couldn't hide how clingy the family was by nature. Sometimes he felt as if the house were choking him.

But he wanted to get home now and call his girlfriend. Call Baker and fill him in on the details of Spain. Shit, what was taking them so long?

Time stretched an eternity. The picture fuzzed around the edges as Mr. Fernidat turned away from the bank of phones and walked, frowning, toward Jesse. In the background, he noticed two cops, a guy and woman, moving with determination in their direction. The air in his dream thinned, making it harder to breathe. Maybe this time his advisor wouldn't make it all the way to his side. Maybe the cops would turn around and walk back down the terminal.

No, they kept walking. Stones rubbed together in his stomach, knocking and battering his insides. The cops had arrived. Mr. Fernidat rested a hand on Jesse's shoulder.

"Hey, Jesse, I have some bad news."

A car accident. His parents and Martin. The hospital. A cruiser to bring them.

His head spun in the dream. Faster.

The two police carrying his bags as his advisor went with him to the black-and-white.

The airport shrinking in the distance. Far distant. A speck.

His body sucked into a looming vault, swinging open to catch him. The door slammed shut, locked behind him. His head pulling off his shoulders. The press of a semi-truck sitting square on his chest.

Accident. His fault, his burden.

If only he hadn't gone traveling. No more Martin. No more trips to the airport. No more road for him. His fault. God, the walls of the vault kept shrinking. Shrinking.

About to squeeze him to death. No!

"No!" Jesse bolted upright in bed, his bare skin covered in clammy sweat. The dream. The sheets stuck to his stomach as he shoved them off. He kneaded the back of his neck. Dammit, he hadn't had that one in a while. Others, sure. He'd become used to interrupted sleep.

The airport dream always made him ice cube cold, restless.

He grabbed his pants and pulled them on over his boxer briefs. Despite its generous size, Savin's guest bedroom suddenly felt like a closet. Ignoring the twinge in his muscles, the sting of the cuts on his cheek and arms from the bar, he escaped to the living room to pass the wee hours of the morning.

He paced in circles. Why was he here? Lust? Fine, he was attracted to Savin. Attracted? Damn near aching, his dick so hard when the guy opened his mouth to speak or flashed that charming grin of his. He moved like some hybrid of shark and leopard and water running over marble. Jesse's body couldn't decide whether to prepare for a knock-down, drag-out fight from the threat or flop to its back to expose belly and neck. Pathetic.

Jesse padded over to the bank of windows overlooking the lights of Las Vegas. New York had nothing on Vegas as the city that never slept. Twenty-four-hour casinos, shows and buffets guaranteed that. The glare of colored buildings and billboards, traffic dotting the streets, hammered the ache in his chest hard. People busy, moving, celebrating their lives no matter how petty or useless. Jesus, he'd become a cynical son of a bitch.

A voice cleared from behind him and his head dipped with his sigh. *Of course.* He didn't turn around. Truth was he'd expected the company. Knowing Savin, it was inevitable. Yet Jesse had come out of his room anyway.

"Couldn't sleep?" Savin's smooth, low voice expanded into the room. The still air wrapped around them, enveloping them as if they were buried in a quiet cave deep beneath the earth.

Jesse ignored the question and kept staring at the city lights, words choking him as they forced their way out. His whisper hit the air, echoing loud. "Funny, this is the closest I've come to traveling the world since seventeen. It's all out there." He gestured outside the glass. "New York, Venice, Paris, Egypt, Rome. Vegas is a lazy man's adventure." He pressed a palm against the cool window, snorted. "And even this I can barely stand." His eyes squeezed shut. "I can hear that damn French teacher echoing in my head. 'You've a talent for language, Monsieur Kabat. Use it. Travel the world.'" Why was he saying this? He paused, swallowed around the boulder lodged in his throat. "All that *talent* in the fucking trash."

"So what's stopping you from using it now?"

If he didn't turn around he could keep talking. And he wanted to, amazingly. Savin had had the same effect on him years ago on the mountain. "You know I've bought plane tickets easily a half-dozen times this past year? To Europe, Asia, South America. Each time I drive to the airport I can't do it. I can't even park. I circle the damn terminals and turn around." His eyes stung and he blinked. "Once I did make it in, even to the gate. When they called the flight for boarding, I bolted to the men's room and threw up for fucking twenty minutes."

Savin didn't say anything more. It surprised Jesse. He'd expected commentary. Maybe reassuring platitudes about grief and time healing wounds. But no. He just got the quiet, and the tat on his neck itched like a son of a bitch.

Jesse spun, needing to see the expression on Savin's face. If he saw pity he'd wring his friend's damn neck.

Instead, he found Savin standing with head tilted, considering. An unreal glow edged his eyes for a second, like star fire. A trick of the light probably. He wore an intent expression on his face and the gleam of, what? Some emotion in his eyes. Unhappy emotion. And personal, as if he was thinking of his own bad memories. But mostly what got to Jesse about the expression was how clear it was Savin would wait patiently for Jesse to say more. As if Savin were plenty capable of waiting forever but expected in the end to hear it. Every last damn detail crowding deep inside Jesse's soul. It made Jesse need to fidget, get away from the examination.

Better to focus on the physical. He let himself notice what Savin wore. Or more precisely what he didn't wear. He'd come from bed, so no shirt, his smooth, defined chest glowing in the pale half-light of the living room. Sectioned abs. Hips slim and covered with black silk sleeping pants. Wavy hair sleep tousled. The lean, exotic face, divot on his chin, fuller lips making it hard for Jesse to concentrate. Men weren't supposed to be that beautiful. His balls started aching again. It was sick how quickly Savin could rev his motor. As if he were some drooling teenager who couldn't keep his dick in his pants.

He needed a change in topic. He shrugged. "I'm particularly pathetic in the middle of the night. I didn't mean to wake you."

"I wasn't sleeping." Savin frowned. "Dreams are not always welcome."

"Good. I mean, sorry you couldn't sleep. You must have a lot on your mind with the show closing." Shit, what to talk about now that his self-pity stopped him from spilling his garbage? He crossed his arms. Too damn bad if it looked defensive. "How did you get into the magic business anyway? And don't tell me it had to do with the day we went hiking." Jesse tried to make it sound funny but it fell flat, instead calling their uncomfortable history into the room. He shifted in place to relieve the pressure behind his zipper.

"To explain that I'd need to show you a photograph. It's hanging on the wall in the other room." Savin tilted his head toward the door from which Kris had exited earlier, the one that had had the weeping Stephanie behind it. "But that room also acts as my personal dungeon play space. Will it bother you to be in there?"

"Are your, um, friends still back there?"

Savin smiled a knowing smirk. "My subs? No, they went home. I rarely have any sleep over."

"Then fine. I should be able to take it." *Wrong words, Jess. You really like to play with fire, don't you?*

"Come on." Savin led him through the door to the other space, the twinkle in his eye showing he'd caught Jesse's unfortunate word choice.

The room was easily twice the size of Jesse's bedroom, almost as big as the living room. But instead of carpet the floors were hardwood, with a large four-poster bed to one side and pieces of Savin's "play" equipment throughout, including a leather-padded sawhorse and several sets of chains with dangling cuffs suspended from the ceiling. A restraining post like the one he'd had onstage, made up of adjustable wooden beams in the form of a large X, figured prominently in the room in addition to a person-sized spider web of thin straps and netting resting in a frame flush to one wall. Another piece had a cloth thrown over it as a cover. All interspersed with a few overstuffed chairs. Comfy perches to watch a show? Jesus. A wide ornate floor-length mirror with gold-gilded frame was pushed to the wall. An armoire sat in another corner. Jesse's imagination provided too many ideas about what rested inside. At least the place was well-lit with painted neutral walls. There were no manacles set into stone or wall torches to recall an inquisition-like dungeon atmosphere. Thank God for small favors. Still, sweat started gathering at the base of his spine. Maybe he shouldn't have agreed to come in here.

Farthest back in the room were a few clearly antique pieces, including a wooden freestanding cabinet that looked like the ones used in the show when Savin translocated the male performer. Another was a mummy-shaped, standing, metal casing that would come close to contouring a human body if someone was locked inside. Except the head of the case was missing so the person would be uncontained from the neck up. Hanging next to these on the wall was a series of photographs in black and white.

Savin walked directly to these antiques. Jesse reluctantly joined him, having a hard time ignoring the equipment in the room.

"These are the most valuable of my collection. I own a variety of pieces from the master magicians of the past. Many are integrated with the equipment I use on the stage and are kept in the theater storeroom."

Savin focused on one of the black-and-white images, drawing Jesse's attention. It looked vaguely familiar. "This is Harry Houdini. An original print of him performing an escape. I ran across a reproduced image of it in a used bookstore soon after I left Westlea. It fascinated me." Savin seemed captured by the photo, his eyes brushing the textured grain of the image again and again, lost to its depths. "See how he's bound and tied on his side on the ledge of that roof? It's in his eyes, his intense struggle. As if he was fighting for his life. So honest. Magic is a powerful drama."

With his slate eyes focused elsewhere, Jesse could watch the flex of his friend's jaw, the fine edge of an earlobe sticking out from the hair Savin had haphazardly tucked behind. The man was fucking beautiful. Not that he was effeminate. Definitely a no-go on that description. He deserved to be in his own photo display. But how could any camera capture him? No, Savin Rosca had to be seen in person to understand the full impact. There was something about him that defied explanation. A feeling that vibrated in Jesse's gut.

"And this photo made you decide to become a magician?" he asked, conscious of breaking a silence he'd let grow long.

Savin turned to him and the focus was almost too much. "In the brutality of life, people need miracles to let them put aside their burdens. Even for only a moment. Magic gives them mystery, the divine. Coming to see a magician's act is another way for humanity to worship."

"But I saw your audience. No one was relaxing in the presence of anything divine. The tension was as heavy as a ton of bricks." His tension at least.

"Magic lets observers confront their collective primal fears. It reinforces a shared humanity and that's as spiritual as it gets. That's what D/s is about as well. Being human together. Humans need the divine. They need their burdens taken and it's what I do for my audience and my submissives. It's not the same thing as removing pain and suffering and tension. The real burdens are the boxes in which we place ourselves to cope with the pain. Like the masks we wear to pretend everything is fine. Most of the time the boxes hurt us just as much. Their walls are made of barbed wire."

Jesse turned back to the picture of Houdini, searching for the spark that set all of this in motion for Savin. He saw the desperation in the dead magician's eyes and found it familiar. "Maybe he's not struggling for his life. Maybe he's struggling for his humanity." The words choked up his throat. "Maybe he's forgotten what it is to be human anymore?" He snorted. "Fuck it, I know how that feels."

"You've forgotten?" The question rang out gentle. At least Savin hadn't contradicted him or told him he was stupid to think that. "Or you're afraid to remember?"

What the hell was he talking about? The whole night felt out of time, as if space had been displaced and threw him into some weird reality television where he spewed it all. Jesse's fists contracted hard, second nature nowadays. "After my parents died, I became so angry at every goddamn thing." His words spilled out beyond his control. "That's all I am anymore, the fucking anger. I read about the stages of grieving. But it's been two years and nothing's changed. No denial, no bargaining, no crying jags. Just the fucking rage."

He spun to face Savin. "They died after over a decade. And what did I do when they went within weeks of one another? Shit, I trashed the storeroom at the grocery. Broke the damn shelving unit." He was vomiting up the anger, the red spikes of it burning his throat as it passed. "It hasn't gotten better since. That's me in a nutshell. Too broke to fix. What kind of humanity is that? Where's the divine in that, Savin? I for one would like to know if you or Houdini have the answers because I'm about done." His breathing came fast and the pressure in his head and chest threatened to burst him apart.

Words buzzed his ears, soundtrack from the past. *Murderer. Worthless.* Thrown at him from the wheelchair. Him frozen in place, not able to move away. Wanting to strangle the speaker as he spewed more shit. *You deserve to be dead.* The voice pummeling into him. Pressure unbearable. No!

Movement blurred, too fast for Jesse to catch, and suddenly *he* was there. Savin grabbing him close, one hand wrapping tight around the back of his neck, the other squeezing his jaw, his bones feeling the pressure. Faces just apart enough for him to catch Jesse's gaze.

A blazing urgency shone out of Savin's eyes, demanding, desperate in its own way. "Then let me help you. Give me this weekend."

He was caught. Fingers dug into his cheeks just short of bruising. Electric tingling surged through his tattoo where Savin's hand touched it.

"Give yourself to me, Jesse. Submit to me for the weekend and I'll show you what you can gain from this lifestyle. You have it in you. I saw that a decade ago. What else do you have to try? I don't promise healing, but I do promise truth between us. I want you and that's *my* truth. We have a weekend. You *will* do this for me."

The command in the voice dug through Jesse's sinew and muscle, jumped down all the synapses of his nervous system and went straight to his cock. His balls pulled up tight as if Savin's touch had been focused on his groin all this time and not his face, as if foreplay had been going on for hours.

Savin's voice gentled. "Will you do this?" The grip loosened but didn't release. A thumb traced Jesse's cheekbone. The softness threatened to kill him. "This is your choice, Jesse. The final choice if you consent, but the decisive one. For over ten years I've wanted this."

Jesse dropped his eyes, the look out of Savin's too much for him anymore. But he didn't wrench his head free. He suspected he could, that Savin would let him, though

strangely wasn't sure if he wanted to. "It's no good. I'm a dangerous proposition." Toxic. His anger would chew up and spit out anyone around him. He wouldn't risk Savin. He'd end up hating Jesse in the end. And he didn't know if he could survive that last punch. But what if it was only a weekend? Even his fucked-up self couldn't do too much damage in so short a time. What a selfish son of a bitch to be considering this. Nausea and desire mixed up inside him, enough to make him dizzy. God, he needed this to be over.

"Do you trust me?"

Savin's question rolled over him and he dragged in a breath, but the answer came to him in swift surety. "I trust you," he whispered out, not able to say it louder. He cleared his voice and tried again. "You let me go that day. On the mountain. After the kiss, when I said no. Though I knew you saw it. How fucking much I wanted you to take that choice from me. But you walked away instead. Because my head wasn't on straight." He snorted, paused, lifted his eyes. "I do trust you. I need...something. I don't..."

"Hush. I'll take care of you here." Savin's hand released Jesse's jaw and dropped to his lips, feathering over them even as he kept his grip on his neck.

When he let go altogether, Jesse hated it. Like a junkie craving a drug, he didn't know what he missed until it was gone. But Savin stepped back. "Tell me clearly, Jesse. Yes or no. Will you submit to me this weekend?"

The choice was like a seduction hanging in the air. Crawling over his skin and fighting for control with the familiar anger.

"Yes." His voice cracked with the answer.

"And do you know what that means? You said you read about the D/s lifestyle. You know about safe words?"

"Yes. I know. I read about the whole thing. The specific kinks, the way limits work. The bondage. The discipline." Christ, a part of him must have known he craved this somehow. Still, he'd thrown the book away.

"You give your safe word to me. Something you won't accidentally say while you're under my command. You use it if I'm doing something too much for you, a boundary you can't cross. And if you say it I stop. No questions. My only request is that you use it only when it's a true uncrossable boundary. Discomfort is part of this. Emotional and physical. Crying uncle at its first sign won't do either of us any good."

The challenge in Savin's words stripped through to the anger again, only temporarily kept quiet by the intimacy of the moment. "I said I know," Jesse bit out. "I'm agreeing."

Savin's jaw clenched, his eyes narrowed. "Jesse."

The warning had him struggling to keep his eyes from dropping. "Mount Washington. That's my safe word. You stopped then, so it fits." His voice sounded sullen.

"Good." Savin moved in close. Jesse's tat started burning again without any touch this time. "If we were doing this the regular way we'd sit and create a contract between us. What's acceptable to you and to me. What's not. You're too new to this, Jesse. But I also know you're honest. We start with basics because we don't have time for more anyway. I promise no flagrant humiliation, no waterplay, no knife play, no permanent marks."

Shit, this was all too real. The terms he'd learned about came racing back as he tried to dredge up memory of what he'd read. His cock was pressing against the zipper of his pants, uncomfortable, insistent.

"I have no time to train you. I'll make my will known explicitly, you follow it. I'll give you pain but nothing I don't think you can't handle. A taste. Maybe some sensory deprivation, cutting off your sight or hearing or ability to speak. I won't constrain your breath. The goal for a sub is to find a place of total submission to his Master. So that everything is about my pleasure. Subs find peace in it, a sense of place and who they are in the world. I'd be a fool to assume you'd reach that in a weekend. You won't. But maybe if this works for us, you can find someone back home to explore this with. For now just know it pleases me to see and hear your honest reactions. You may speak, make any sounds you want. I demand respect from my subs and obedience, but seeing how filled with crap your head is right now and hearing that mouth of yours, I'd also be a fool to expect that. We'll play any punishment for insolence by ear. And last, although submission doesn't always mean it's necessary, I want sex. I mean to take you, Jesse. I'm clean, there's paperwork in my drawer if you need to see it. Given your personal habits these last years, my guess is you are too. Am I right?"

Jesse could barely nod. He heard the words, understood them even, but so much was choking him now coherence wasn't an option. Excitement. Fear. Anger. His craving for this man and to lose himself in this. Or maybe be found.

"Do you understand the things I've just said? What I said I'd do to you and not do to you?"

He nodded again.

"Out loud, Jesse."

"Yes. I still agree." His voice shook. "I don't need to see paperwork."

Savin stared him down, as if he were able to measure through his gaze if Jesse was telling the complete truth. The seconds ticked by until he spoke. "Kneel. From this point you address me as Master."

"Shit."

Savin's eyebrows rose. Jesse's teeth clenched. "Master." He dropped down, awkward in his movement, his heart hammering a panic attack. Did he really just agree to do this? Who the fuck was he anymore? If he focused on Savin it would be all right. It didn't matter who Jesse was. Just Savin.

Savin walked toward the armoire, opened it and removed a black leather collar and set of cuffs. He stalked back to Jesse, who tried hard to focus on the ache of his knees on

the hardwood. He shook, the image of this powerful man approaching with the leather upping the charge across his nerves. Savin's fingers rested at his throat, stroked the edge of his Adam's apple. Waves of hot and cold cascaded over his skin.

"Be still."

"I don't know if I can do this."

"Master. Say it again."

He released a shaky breath. "Master."

"You've made your promises, Boyo. I will help you meet them."

His friend, soon-to-be lover, his Master, the goddamn unreality of it all, lifted the collar and began to wrap it around his throat and cinch the buckles. Savin produced a small lock and snapped it closed over the fastening. As small as the sound was, the click jerked Jesse's cock, brought a swallowed cry up to his mouth.

Savin leaned down, pressed his lips to the hollow below his neck. The tender kiss rubbed against the caustic restlessness of his body and set his skin jumping. Savin's voice drifted up with his lips as they settled next to Jesse's eardrum. "You make me want to tie you down, Jesse. Make me so hard. I'd take a bite of you now. Mark those shoulders and ass of yours." The words were violent but the tone gentle, and it drove Jesse crazy.

Savin enclosed Jesse's wrist in his long, powerful fingers, directed Jesse's hand to the black silk of Savin's sleeping pants and forced it over the erection tenting the fabric. Jesse's palm closed over the hard shaft, feeling the ridge below the bulb of the cock head and the moisture that had leaked through the silk at the tip. Christ, he wanted that in his mouth. Wanted to suck hard and just forget everything until he made Savin come.

The magician backed away, removing Jesse's hand by the wrist, keeping a tight grasp of it. "But that's not where we'll begin." He buckled on one wrist cuff, locking it down. Then the second. The feel of cool, stiff leather at his throat and wrists called up a trapped sensation, as if he were already restrained.

"You'll tell me if at any time a binding is digging into your skin in a painful way. I decide if it needs adjusting. I won't have you hurt."

Jesse nodded, not trusting his voice.

The slate-eyed man dragged Jesse to standing and led him over to the magician's collector pieces. Savin opened the ceramic top of a standing, waist-high, porcelain urn, drawing four straight steel swords from the receptacle. He leaned one after another against the wall next to the mummy-shaped metal casing.

"What are you going to do with those?" Jesse asked, tasting his pulse on his tongue.

Savin laughed. "You don't get to question." His head tilted and his eyes sparked wild. "I'll get around to punishing you for that later."

God, and how that threat made Jesse shudder harder. He was one sick asshole to be excited by the promise of violence.

Surprising him, Savin swung open a hinged door on the mummy contraption and stepped inside. "Close the door behind me. The latches lock on the side."

"What? I thought you said no knife play."

"No questions. Close the door." The bite in the command pulled at something deep inside him.

Jesse swung it shut, his fingers fumbling over the latches. Top, middle, bottom. Savin's neck stretched above the top edge of the container. His tousled hair brushed the metal. A sense of wrongness stirred deep in his cells at Savin's restraint. It should be Jesse inside.

"Now what?"

"Magic. Will you trust me?" Savin's voice wound with mystery. The same kind he was trying to describe before. It was almost as if the air undulated around them. But fuck that, even Jesse's eyes were playing tricks on him he was so screwed up right now.

"Pick up the first sword."

Jesse followed the command, the cold steel weapon lighter than he'd imagined. The side edges were sharp but not overly so. The tip, however, was a honed point. This sword was made for thrusting.

"Do you see the thin, wide holes on the outside of the sarcophagus?" Savin's question drew him from a hypnotic focus on the deadly tip. They were each two inches wide. Spread up and down the body of the case.

"Yes." He shook his head, trying to rid it of the fog that layered inside his brain.

"Slide it in the first of the holes, right under the sternum."

"What? No!"

"Jesse. Do as I say."

"It's a trick sword. It compresses, right?"

"The magic is none of your business. Just do it."

This was just a trick. But visions of Savin bleeding, eyes dimmed near death came fast and hard. Jesse was choking. His body wanted to convulse on itself the panic ran him so ragged, came so fast. He lifted the sword, lined the point up with the hole. The blade shook with his unsteady hands. A flash of red rage fired through his gut. He should just do it. Shove it home as Savin asked. Fuck him for asking, he deserved what he got. His hand jerked an inch forward.

"I can't!" He threw the sword to the floor, staggered back. "What the hell is this? This isn't what you're supposed to be doing."

Savin's eyes narrowed. He remained silent and that silence spoke more than anything he could have said to Jesse. Finally, "Unlock the latches."

Jesse licked his lips but did it, the tremors from the rage still licking up and down his limbs.

When the mummy's door swung open, Savin's hand was immediately around his throat, the squeeze just enough promise of violence.

"Strip. Everything."

He was pushed back to the middle of the room before he was released. Savin watched with cool, calm collection, his arms folded. Waiting.

If this was a fucking mind game, Jesse wanted no part of it.

"Strip."

But as much as he wanted to slam out the door, a stronger part of him wanted to stay. That dark, twisted half of him writhing inside and wanting to start destroying. And the part that was flying high standing next to this man. God, he wanted closer to Savin.

He unbuttoned his fly and drew down his jeans. The boxer briefs next, stepping out of them to expose the painful hard-on he couldn't seem to control in this man's presence.

"Kneel. And put your cheek to the floor, hands laced behind your back."

He went slowly, his cock jerking with the expectation. On his knees with his ass in the air he felt the touch of Savin's fingers on the center of his back above his laced hands. Another click and the O-rings of the wrist cuffs were locked together. He sucked in a breath.

His first instinct at the touch of hot fingers at the crease between his buttocks was to retreat and collapse his hips. But instead he found himself thrusting them higher, closer to the touch. A soft chuckle made him grit his teeth.

A tap at his thigh urged him to spread his knees wider. Fuck it, the position left him wide open. Vulnerable. Savin's fingers began a gentle glide back and forth over the pucker of his anus. Barely touching. He loved it, hated it. Didn't want it to stop. "More. You haven't forgotten what to do down there, have you?"

"Hmm, you'd like that, wouldn't you? For me to take this ass and fuck you violently, endlessly. But as Master I have the choice. To savor you, build you to an edge and keep you there."

His hips bucked up to make the damn man spear him with those fingers. He knew it would feel good. Knew there'd be pain but he wanted that too. "I can take it, Savin. Do it. Don't worry about hurting me."

"Your problem is you're scared to death of losing control," Savin replied.

"You're wrong." Jesse's panting grew faster. "I lost control so long ago nothing more could drive me over the edge."

"There *you're* wrong. The anger is a way to control. And your concern for my worry is touching but misplaced. Though I suspect you've spent so many years worrying about others you can't take something for yourself without considering another."

Savin had to be squatting although Jesse couldn't see him because a second hand snaked under his stomach as the first rubbed the outside tissue of his hole. In one strong

grasp, Savin squeezed his shaft then brushed down to cup his balls. "So tight and high. Ready to shoot, Boyo? Not yet."

Fingers disappeared from his buttocks as a second hand joined its mate at his groin. "A cock harness to separate and lift those balls, squeeze the base of your sac and shaft tight to keep you hard, make it difficult to come. No need to ruin our fun too soon."

Jesse's gut tensed, his cock jerked and hardened further as Savin wrapped him in the harness. The straps dug into his flesh, tight, the near edge of painful but just right. He suspected Savin was a pro at finding the perfect torture without going too far. Christ, but he wanted to go too far.

Fingers returned to his anus, pulling apart his buttocks to stretch the opening. The sensation was incredible but not enough. "The foreplay's getting old, Savin. Inside!"

"You want me to make it hurt, don't you, Jesse? To punish you early and often for misbehaving."

"Fuck, yes."

Another soft slide down his pucker. Ah, it was killing him. Hands slid up the inside edges of thighs, thumbs circling in again to his balls, whispering across them.

"I remember how you loved adventure." Savin's easy voice continued, ignoring the hungry, growling urgency in Jesse that built higher each minute.

He pulled against the cuffs, digging the edges of the leather into his wrists, unable to stop himself.

"I saw how high you came home from Rome your sophomore year. That essay you wrote that won the school's big contest about the summer program you did in Belize. And your trip to Spain. We can't forget that."

No! He didn't want to talk about that. What was Savin doing?

"You do know how to fuck, don't you? I mean you haven't gotten me all trussed up just to exchange conversation?"

A hand stroked his hair, ending with a slight pull. "Impatient. I promise you I'm familiar enough with where to put my dick. In good time."

"In what fucking good time? The twenty-second century?"

"You don't like my topic? Ah, I remember you kept closing down our earlier conversations. Here, let me give you something to focus on while we continue our talk."

He heard the snap of plastic and a squeezing sound. A cool liquid slid against his asshole followed by a fingertip spreading what must be lube.

"Push out with your sphincter, Boyo, while you get a small taste of what you're craving."

Finally Savin's finger pushed through the outer ring of his muscle and into his ass. One slow increment at a time. The immediate feeling of fullness drove Jesse wild. A slight burn, but the plunge was slow and easy.

"Stretching you is a pleasure. You're tight. Virgin territory for sure." A second finger joined the first and Jesse released a growl, bucked back to force them deeper. Savin's hand rested on his lower back, restraining. "Stop. We do this at my pace or I pull them out, sit you in a corner and stroke that cock of yours so slowly I promise you you'll never come. Then I'll tuck you into bed with a chastity device and make you suffer all night. No touching possible."

"Ball-buster."

"At times, but for now the stretching. You want my cock inside you so bad then we make you ready. I won't have my property bleeding and torn when a little prep will fix the problem."

The fingers began a slow scissor inside him and he lifted his head off the ground, standing up on his knees, slamming back into the hand.

A firm grip pressed his head with unnatural strength, forcing him back down. "Enough, Jesse." It pinned him to the floor by his neck, ink burning madly at the contact of skin. "Spread wider and stay still and I promise I'll give you something you like."

Jesse's skin twitched, writhed as he struggled to settle, to follow Savin's order. He wanted to, wanted to give him what he asked. Just, it was so difficult.

The blunt head of an object settled once more on the pucker of his asshole. Another sound of squeezed lube and the cool touch of the gel drizzling against him and on whatever Savin had back there.

"A plug. Relax your muscles and let me slide it in there. It's not so long as to work your prostate but plenty pleasurable, I assure you. The tissue just inside your anus is filled with nerve-rich endings." The pressure grew, the plug wider at the base than the two fingers he'd taken before. The burn magnified. It slid in full. Jesse grunted. But Savin just left it there. Wasn't moving it around.

"Savin!" The demand shot out of his lips.

"Master. You keep forgetting, Jesse. Remember my threat of the chastity device. Punishment is not all floggers and whips and fun." Savin attached another set of straps around his ass and groin that must help hold in the plug.

"Master," he bit out.

"Here, let me turn it on."

Fuck, it was vibrating. Jesse's head spun fast as low-level buzzing shot those nerves to hypersensitivity. God, he'd never felt anything like it.

"Now stay put." Savin removed the restraining grip on Jesse's neck, and after a pause, he heard a scrape across the wooden floor. As if Savin had pulled up a chair to sit and watch.

"Any popcorn with the show?" Jesse goaded, unable to stop his mouth.

Savin chuckled, a cascading silk slide over what was left of Jesse's sanity.

"Surprise, surprise. We hear from the peanut gallery."

His cock, already diamond hard, defied the laws of physics and stiffened more. He hoped to Christ that cock harness did its job because he felt so close to launch he doubted the space shuttle lifted off this prepared for a mission.

"Now where were we in our conversation?"

Jesse cursed a good dozen expletives, pushed by the outrageous situation to new heights of creativity.

"You're making me hard, struggling against it the way you are. But you're good at that. Fighting things. Just like you're fighting to deny yourself what you really want. Why are you still in Westlea, Jesse? Your parents come back as ghosts and tell you to keep at the small-town life you hate so much?"

"Fuck you, Savin."

"Master." The word whipped out like a lash.

"Fuck you, Master."

"Let's turn up the speed, shall we?"

Savin must have hit a remote control on the plug because the vibrations sped faster. Jesse moaned and squeezed around the device, willing it to go deeper. But it wasn't a full dildo and it certainly wasn't Savin's cock. Fucking bastard.

"I think you're scared to leave. Scared to find what you've wanted all these years. And you're punishing yourself. Why? What did you do to deserve punishment? From what I've learned you gave everything for over a decade. Did more for your parents than any son should have to do at a time when he's supposed to selfishly explore his own needs."

Voices, more voices, stabbing into his ears. *You killed her too! Just like you'll kill me. I fathered a monster!*

No!

His anger slammed against the sides of his organs, exploding from the slow fire in his gut into the inferno that burnt him time and again. All magnified by the burn in his ass, the white noise and spin of his head, the shake to his limbs and painful cock.

He lurched upward again, staggered to his feet, unbalanced by the rage and his restrained hands.

Quicker than his eyes could follow, Savin was there, catching him by the shoulders as brutal noise erupted from his throat.

Lost in it. He tried to slam against Savin, to throw them into a wall. Something. Jesse needed... Fuck everything! Christ.

He wanted to batter. It hurt. It hurt too much.

"Stop, Jesse!" Savin dragged him against a wall, pressed him stomach first to the surface. "I won't let you hurt me or yourself. You're safe here. Safe with me."

"Then shut the fuck up about my parents!" he yelled, his throat bloody against the roar as he bucked forward and back against the wall and Savin. Couldn't stop.

Savin didn't answer, didn't give way, but kept him caught and held him during the shaking fury with unimaginable strength.

Until exhaustion hit, the lava bubbling to calm, leaving him with cold shivers and half-choked sobs. A hand twined in his hair, pulling hard at the roots to center him. He came down to earth.

Lips pressed his nape below the hairline. A warm suction of mouth and tongue pulled at the skin. Teeth bit down and the small pain helped. Fingers dug into his hipbone, holding him in place.

"You want your Master to go crazy, Boyo?" a tired voice reverberated against the tattoo. "I don't want to see you injured. I don't want to see the friend I value throw himself into danger like at the bar. Eamon, that man you attacked, could have had a gun, a knife, you never stopped to consider. You race into danger with some sort of death wish born out of that pain of yours. But you're safe here with me." The teeth bit down once more, punctuating the promise. "The only pain you need is the kind I decide you need. And more, you need the pleasure."

"It's no good, Savin." Jesse shook his head despite the grip at his hair, his skull weighing a million pounds.

"Are you mine for the weekend or not?"

He blew out. "Yeah."

"Then you do not have my permission to decide that."

Chapter Five

Savin knew he'd screwed up. Pushed too fast. But Eamon's warning echoed in his mind and the seconds of the weekend ticked by. As a Master, he knew better. But the calm judge was absent. Watching Jesse's pain slid razors through his insides. A waste of a man. Jesse was made for greater stuff, Savin smelled the spark of it in him. Sweet Goddess, he was fascinated by him. Wanted to possess him and show him a way through the blackness. Guide him and devour him at the same time. His magic kept rearing up to reach Jesse, and Savin would wrench it back. Savin petted down the beast, took a deep, calm breath.

"We'll slow it down, Boyo. You need to throw a fit, I can take it. I'll pin you all night if need be. But there's so much else I'd like to do to you. I'm willing to take a breather from discussing your past. We'll get back to it later." Jesse flinched under his hold. "Settle down. Shh."

Jesse went lax again. Savin's fingers loosened in the short, dark hair and he stroked the back of Jesse's skull. "You want to buck tonight, go for it. Because your Master's going to play now. You'll love it. You'll hate it. Both please me. What I want are your reactions. All of them. I'll bite pieces from you. Because I want to and you've given yourself to me."

Jesse wasn't struggling actively, so Savin let one of his restraining arms slide down to the other man's buttocks, press against the outside of the vibrating plug. "Understand?"

Jesse grunted an affirmative. His body shivered hard as his breath ran ragged. "I'm shaking. I can't stop."

"That's normal for a first-time sub."

With teeth chattering, he answered, "Normal. Haven't been that for a while."

"You can't be anything but with me. Because normal is just Jesse, whoever and whatever he is at the moment. I deal with magic. Normal is never part of the equation."

"Do you have to act so fucking mysterious all the time, Magician?"

It wasn't "Master" but he liked the sound of the nickname coming from Jesse's mouth. He chuckled. "Let's turn the plug down to low and see what we can find to do."

Savin bent to lick Jesse's shoulder, the fine sheen of sweat on his shoulder blade and biceps kicking up the hunger in Savin's gut. What was it about this man? Part of him wanted to throw away his plans and just fuck. But no. He got high off the control. The control was a part of him. Had to be if he didn't want to be reduced to the monster his other Earthbound kin had become. Beside, his cock more than confirmed it wanted to burn Jesse under a slow wick of torment to see his response. Drive him beyond his

usual boundaries and expose his raw core. Jesse deserved the freedom of it. No need to judge himself. He deserved that relief and more. A sorrowful chord tried to pluck Savin's chest but he'd have none of it. Focus. Time to get on with the business of pleasure and pain, and, sweet Goddess, he wanted that more than anything.

He stroked down the knobs of Jesse's spine, stopping just above the crease between his buttocks to tease both himself and his lover. "I'm going to bring you over to the cross now, Boyo. Strap you on because it makes me damn aroused to see you caught. But I'll lock you there as much because I don't want you forgetting I'll keep you safe. Not able to hurt yourself. You hurt only when I say you hurt." The words came out harder than he intended. Mostly from a panic simmering under his surface. Savin knew his promise for a lie and it cut him. He only had the weekend to protect his friend. After that, when he cut Jesse loose, there was no protecting him from danger. The danger from the world. The danger from Jesse's own destructive heart. *Enough*. He'd drive himself crazy with these thoughts.

"We'll walk nice and slow. I'll do the leading. You're here for the ride."

He loosened his hold on Jesse and guided him over to the St. Andrew's Cross. The man moved in jerky steps, a skittish colt unsure of his feet. Savin unhooked the cuffs that kept Jesse's wrists behind his back and helped him raise his arms to the restraints, rebinding those wrists, his lower arms and biceps as well. Then onto ankles, calves and thighs. Another strap secured Jesse's forehead to the post. Making him helpless. At Savin's mercy, what little there'd be. His magic kept hungering, pacing up and down his veins.

Savin reached for the first of the clamps on the table next to the post. Jesse panted hard now, feeling the first bite of desperation securely captured.

"Shhh," Savin urged. "Nipples first. Breathe with the pain, Boyo. Let me know what you feel, call out if you have to. It's meant to hurt and I want to hear how it affects you."

Jesse's eyes widened as Savin brought the tiniest of the clips up to his small, dark buds. He opened the screws and positioned the first nipple between the clamp, tightening it with practiced ease until it produced the right amount of tension.

His lover jolted at the bite. "Fuck." His teeth ground together and his body pressed against the restraint cuffs, trying to lean away from the cross and ironically closer to Savin's touch. But Jesse's ability to move was almost nil.

"You'll take it, Boyo." Savin attached the second nipple clamp. He reached for more, swiftly adding them to Jesse's inner thighs and one underneath the skin of his scrotum, harder to place because the skin was taut in that strip between testicles and anus. Jesse moaned hardest at that one. Savin proceeded to string chain between all of the clamps, each one made with a small O-ring at the top. The chain was fastened together by a clasp and allowed to hang. The picture of the reddened skin pinched under the devices, of Jesse's struggling soul and body hanging on the cross finally made

Savin's hungering magic quiescent. As if it waited, knowing what was happening would make the meal richer later.

"You need your safe word?"

"No," he gasped. Jesse's breathing struggled. "Hurts."

"Yes, it does," he answered simply. He knew his friend didn't mean the clamps.

The thorns lodged in Savin's heart were streaking down pain to all his limbs as he witnessed the agony writhing inside Jesse. Savin swallowed. "But I want to make it better. You're not the only one who's dreamed all these years. You've walked in mine for over a decade. A beautiful ghost haunting the moments of my rest."

He saw Jesse's face layered through his memories. An early spring day in Massachusetts, trees barely budding, the grief-wrecked face struggling to find a direction. Standing in front of Savin after a long climb, exhausted and defenses down. Vulnerable, confused and wanting to find direction. Intelligence and spirit burdened by grief. A desperate call for someone to save him from his newfound hell after the accident. Something even then had called to Savin's newly developing power.

Jesse focused his glazed eyes on Savin, the endorphins clearly pumping, working him toward subspace. His Boyo's cock wept pearly liquid at its tip. His hips pumped forward and back in short thrusts almost unconsciously he was so aroused by what Savin had done to him. Yes, Savin had known Jesse's true nature.

"A beautiful ghost? A man of mystery and a poet. Who knew?" Jesse gasped out as Savin ran light, tugging fingertips over the metal of the clamps at his thighs and under his groin.

Savin's thumb skipped up to skim the length of the dark-veined cock, the deep red color of the harnessed organ bringing a fresh spurt of arousal to Savin. Even the loose black silk of his sleeping pants was too constricting. Just as maddening as the visual were Jesse's irreverent words, his wild spirit peeking out from beneath the torment to confirm its survival. Goddess, he loved that about this man.

"You can't shut up, can you?" Savin felt the tug of his lips pulling up. "Maybe this will help." He pressed into the bound man, their heights close enough that their lips met easily. He tasted the firm line of Jesse's mouth, plunged tongue and teeth into the cavity, eating him, sure and steady. Not crushing, he wanted to savor, make it hot but soft enough to keep Jesse begging for a harder invasion. And he did. He pressed forward into Savin, trying to demand the kiss roughen.

Savin's fingers dug into Jesse's ass as they kissed. His thumb pushed against the outside of the plug still vibrating on low, as deep grunting sounds of need escaped out of his Boyo from under the crush of lips. The grain of the wood brushing the back of Savin's hands as he touched, the hot skin of Jesse's buttocks covered with fine hairs, the sweat slicking their chests between them. Goddess, how long could Savin hold out before taking him? The scent of musk and desperation leaked from Jesse's pores. Savin wanted to reach with both hands and pull away some of that skin to burrow under it and into Jesse's body. Become a single being and be eaten up by the humanity they'd

share between them. Completely illogical, but Jesse got to him this way. Always had, even during the first years when they'd yet to exchange a word between them.

Savin broke away his lips, let them wander in obsessive need over the other man's body, his shoulders, around the clamped small nipples, down his sternum to his abdomen and along the line of dark hair that plunged down to Jesse's groin. All the while listening to Jesse's panting, his deep moans at the assault. Interspersed with low growls as he'd lurch at the restraints, fighting the touch of Savin's lips as they delivered licks and small, sharp bites on the journey.

Savin stopped just above his ultimate goal, the enflamed cock, and circled around to Jesse's hipbone. He let himself sink his teeth deeper there, driven to leave an imprint on his sub, the need to mark him beyond the tattoo that stirred the magic and the never-ending hunger of his kind. His hands dug into Jesse's outer thighs, steadying himself, the smell of his lover's pre-cum drawing him more. One hand moved to grasp Jesse's cock, began to pump him slowly even as Savin knew the pain of the clamps where he purposefully knocked them with the movement drove his Boyo higher. His other hand adjusted to deliver light taps on his lover's buttocks, interrupted as he scratched his blunted nails over the clenched cheeks.

The entire effect was causing Jesse to lose it. Sweat dripped down Jesse's chest to land on Savin's head as Savin watched the hardened cock slide between his fingers. The picture hypnotized him he stared so hard at the suffering shaft.

Lost to the moment, Savin's magic escaped, reached inside Jesse's body, deeper than the plug went, and caressed the walnut-sized prostate of his Boyo. Short, fast rubs that escalated Jesse's moans to harsher sounds of strangled need. Like some third hand moving independently with a mind of its own.

"Savin, please..." Jesse gasped, his head grinding hard against the wood of the cross, grinding into the device as if he could find escape there.

"You're not to come. Not without permission. And you don't have it." Savin tightened his grip, increased the speed of his fist on Jesse's cock.

"Fucking bastard." The words flew from between Jesse's clenched teeth.

Goddess, Savin's magic escaped him as the throb of his dick and the tingling along his nerves became intolerable watching this man fight himself. The fae power reached again for its prey, encased Jesse's cock in the wet suction sensation of a mouth although Savin's lips were not touching the man. The layered effect of feeling both a hand and mouth wrap his entire shaft set Jesse onto a short path toward explosion.

Savin wrenched away the magic, shoving it back down into his blood, and removed his hands from Jesse. "Enough. I want to take you before I let you ejaculate." He stood and fingered the thin chain joining the clamps. "Pain now. To bring you back from the edge and let me work you back up again." He tugged gently on the links and Jesse bit his lip, squeezed his eyes shut. "Open your eyes. Watch me do this to you because it pleases me. You want to please me, yes?" He paused a beat. As he predicted, Jesse

jerked his chin in angry agreement. "Removing the clamps is worse because the circulation returning to those points is brutal."

Jesse's chocolate eyes tried to focus on him, all wide and lost. "Just do it."

"Scream for me, Boyo." He yanked the chain back in a quick jerk, pulling all the clamps from his lover's skin.

Jesse screamed, low and loud, sending a dark thrill through Savin. "Son of a fucking bitch!" Jesse called.

Savin stepped close again. Ran a gentle hand over the red area of Jesse's inner thigh, scraping a finger along the crease between thigh and groin. His Boyo's erection had lessened but not by much. His soft touch already caused renewed stirring in his lover.

The bright overhead lights of the room, kept that way to remind his subs there was no hiding from their Master, shone down on the sweat-covered, panting man. A wet trail slid down both Jesse's cheeks. "Fuck me now!"

The harsh demand struck something inside Savin. The honest desperation of it, the bottomless need he tasted in this man reminded him too much of himself. He undid the restraints, aware of the exhausted, jittery movements Jesse made as his limbs came free. He stumbled a step away in automatic escape, but Savin moved to block him. He pulled Jesse's wrists behind him, using fingers to create a natural restraint, and pushed Jesse over to the bed. Brutally ignoring the stumbling gait, he lowered Jesse to the bed and positioned him on his back, lifted his arms over his head and wrapped his fingers around the slatted posts along the headboard, squeezing them against the wood. "Hold them. Do not let go."

The irony was, as much as Jesse's body wanted to fight, wanted to lash out and resist, his grip tightened on the headboard. A death grip. Jesse was shuddering again at the contact between them. Savin couldn't help but slide his palm beneath his friend's nape, lay it over the tattoo to find a vibration singing from the skin where his hand touched. He turned Jesse's head to the left, exposed the side of the gate design in dark ink. His mouth traced the exposed part of the tattoo, teeth scraping the edges of the pattern, lips vibrating along with the mark. A reminder of Savin's past, of his other identity he tried to ignore. On Jesse he wanted no more than to sear the pattern in farther to his neck with a brand, deeper than the ink. Salt from the skin coated Savin's tongue. His chest tightened with expectation. Goddess, what was this? Why did this man call to him? More than any man or woman who'd submitted to him in the past. The urge to just fuck his lover rode him strong. But it wasn't as simple as that. He owed Jesse more. Owed a Master's obligation of providing his sub exactly what he needed. At least as much as he could in these circumstances.

He spread Jesse's legs, sliding his hands over the coarse, dark hair of his outer thighs. The rub of it against Savin's palms helped center him. He unbuckled the plug harness to ease the device from him, eliciting another moan. Savin leaned to whisper

near Jesse's ear, reached down to finger the slit on his cock head, digging in deep with a blunted nail. "Do you want me inside you?"

"Yes." The hissed reply came sharp and ragged.

"Good. But it comes with a price." He hesitated, hoping his gut was correct about exactly how to help Jesse plunge off the edge safely. "First, you suck me off. We switch places; you bind my wrists to the headboard. And you take charge. Make me come hard and use that mouth of yours for something other than talking back to your Master."

"No!" Jesse's glazed eyes sparked even as exhausted as he clearly was.

"Did I ask your permission, Boyo? Your Master gave you a command. You want my cock inside you, you want to please me, then release the headboard and take these cuffs." Savin had reached for the other pair of leather wrist restraints near the bed.

Jesse's head came off the mattress as his face contorted. "You want me to bite it off, Savin? I can't be responsible. Even now part of me wants to beat that pretty face of yours."

"I have a weekend. No time to let you spurt bullshit and indulge you. I'll risk my pretty face and my dick. My choice. Now move that ass of yours and take these cuffs."

If Jesse didn't trust himself Savin would make it crystal clear that he could trust enough for the two of them.

"Warning you, Savin," he gasped back even as Savin scratched nails along the length of his lover's shaft. But Jesse never let go of the posts. His body was arching off the mattress as Savin's other hand cradled his balls, exerted a firm squeeze. They were tight and high, ready to release.

"Let go of the headboard."

"Can't." Jesse moved restlessly on the bed, the tension clenching his muscles, his body fighting itself with every movement. His fists stayed in place.

"You're willing to live with the consequences?"

"That fucking chastity device."

"No. You do this or I cut you free and kick you into the night. The weekend's done. You obey or you're out." He swallowed the bile that rose with his threat. He knew it cut deep. Jesse was grasping, flailing even to find a lifeline, someone's hand to pull him to safety. To withdraw the offer of help was ugly cruelty. Goddess, Savin hoped he was right about what Jesse needed.

His Boyo's glare lasered into him. But Savin kept his eyes hard and focused, unrelenting.

After a terrible silence, Jesse blinked, turned his gaze away. He sucked in a ragged breath. "Fine. Your funeral."

Savin waited another thirty seconds before Jesse remembered to loosen his fists. He lurched up, rubbing his wrists as if they'd been bound to the wood, and grabbed the cuffs Savin proffered with a rough jerk. Moving off the bed, Savin took his place,

holding out his arms to Jesse. As the dark man swore, he wrapped Savin's wrists with the leather.

Savin lay back, spread his arms wide, knuckles brushing the headboard. "The chains are already attached, which link through the O-rings."

Glaring more, Jesse secured him to the bed. "Now what?"

"You heard my intent, but this is your show at the moment." Savin forced his voice even and calm while his body and magic screamed to take charge. To fondle and suck and bite and shove into Jesse. To make him come hard and feed from that moment of total exposure. As much as his soul screamed to crawl inside Jesse's heart, curl up and make himself a part of this man forever. Goddess, he wanted so much. So deep. The caring hurt in its demands.

Jesse's hands fisted open, closed as he kneeled at the end of the mattress, body dripping with sweat. "You're nuts, Savin. Between your swords and this, I think you wish you were the sub. Maybe *you* have a death wish."

"Clearly I'm deranged. Get on with it."

Jesse wrenched the tie of Savin's black sleep pants loose and gave a firm pull, ripping the silk as it came down his legs, a nasty smile on his lips silently shouting a *told you so* message to Savin. Quite a show since Jesse would never hurt him. Savin could break the cuffs from the chain and free himself. His fae strength and remaining magic more than allowed it. But despite the fact it was him manacled to the bed now, it was Jesse who still remained trapped.

As Savin's cock sprang loose, stiff and aching, weeping in expectation, Jesse grabbed the organ. Savin gasped, hips thrusting off the bed as he craved the tight grip. Jesse began to shaft him, running his fist up to the bulbous head, the foreskin folding over the flange and exposed dome and then back down again as it sank to his base with a quick and brutal pace.

Jesse's words streamed out, hot and jagged, as he worked Savin ruthlessly. "I could hurt you, you know? Beat you black and blue. Cut you up. Strangle you. I never asked for a safe word from you. A fucking idiot, putting yourself in this position."

"Then why don't you do it?" Savin gasped as the pace and pressure started an electricity building at the base of his spine.

"Fuck you."

"That's what I thought. You're just as much my sub with me locked up. Suck it, Jesse. Lower your mouth and make it worth my while to keep you this weekend."

Jesse's jaw clenched hard, his muscles clearly battling, but Jesse lowered his face to the raging hard-on driving Savin insane. Just as Savin knew he would.

Jesse enveloped his shaft in wet heat. Suction. Hard pulls of his mouth combined with the grasp of that fist working him. Jesse hadn't been with other men. Savin knew it deep inside. But for a novice he was blowing Savin's mind. Goddess, so good. His sac drew up tight and his magic went berserk, firing rockets inside his veins and snaking

down his body to his organ, through the hollow urethral tube and reaching for Jesse through his open lips.

Savin's cry was as much about wrenching it back under control as about the hellishly wondrous torture of his cock. Hot. Pressure. He focused on Jesse's eyes as they kept steady watch on his face, his Boyo captivated by his reaction. Good. He wanted it that way. Jesse's hands dug into Savin's hips as they grasped him, the small hurt nothing in contrast to the mind-numbing pleasure. Jesse's face twisted with fierce intensity around his stretched mouth, dark, angry and driven.

He added teeth to his effort and Savin almost came from the sensation. So close. Goddess help him hold a minute longer. He gasped out his words, watching them work their way inside Jesse. "No destruction, Jesse? You promised I'd be sorry. Instead you're sucking your Master as ordered." His hips jerked off the bed as Jesse let go of his cock and dropped his mouth to Savin's balls, closing his lips around one in strong suction before moving back up to engulf his erection again.

"Didn't like that reminder, did you?" Savin chided with a weak chuckle as the saliva running down his cock trailed down his perineum to wet the crease of his buttocks, pool on the sheets beneath him. "Trust you, Jesse. You show me that hate but you'd never hurt me. Never throw it at me." He gasped, almost losing it to another strong suck and the twisting motion his Boyo made to his cock. Jesse's eyes glared outrage, the cords along his neck clenching as he fought the words. But his mouth was gagged by Savin's organ, forcing him to listen.

"I trust you. I always will. Don't you dare forget it. Now finish me off and swallow. You'll take all of me, Boyo."

The growl around his cock vibrated through his bones and the storm at the base of his spine built to explosion as his sub increased the pace of fist and suction, dropped his other hand to press underneath Savin's shaft where the line of skin between sac and anus covered the spot his prostate lay.

"Jesse!" Savin hit his limit and came. Shot lightning and endless pleasure. *Goddess, yes!* And better because his power read the uncontrollable arousal in his lover. His Boyo watched him come, his lover's raw, needy soul shouting with satisfaction, the scent of his fascination a heady musk and the link between them holding fast. Jesse's throat swallowed repetitively to take down the ejaculate. The pendant at Savin's neck burned an inferno as it never had before. His vision blacked in the release though he hated losing sight of the other man even for a moment.

When he could see again, his pulse racing hard at his groin, neck and wrists in the aftermath, Jesse was lying between his legs, absently and nervously licking his lips, his glazed eyes boring through Savin. Temples furrowing, eyes widening, Jesse's satisfaction morphed quickly to panic. His hands rested on the top of Savin's thighs, fingers flexing over and again as if they didn't know what to do.

"Unlock me, Jesse." He spoke softly, talking his lover away from the ledge.

His voice broke his Boyo from a trance and Jesse crawled up Savin's side, worked with shaky hands to unlock the wrist cuffs. With each passing moment the shaking grew stronger. He jolted at each brush of skin. He said nothing, but that nothing spoke multitudes. Jesse's anger was crumbling, giving way to the fear and grief underneath. But he fought it. The shuddering of his body was the consequence of the battle and he seemed to be trying to lock down the change rampaging through him. Savin's magic tasted the internal war and lifted its head, excited by the prospect of drinking this truth. Savin was close to letting it have its way but kept his own lockdown strong. *Wait*, he called to it.

His wrists freed, he sat up on the mattress, hand reaching for Jesse's chin, gently but firmly directing his gaze. "Thank you, Boyo. Now lie down for me. You get your reward."

With Jesse still in his daze, still shaking, Savin pushed him to the bed, back flat. He'd left the lube near the cross. His power reached, flew the tube through the air to his waiting hand, a show of impatience he never usually allowed himself in a mortal's presence. Jesse was too lost to notice such a detail now. He quickly lubed Jesse's hole with fingertips covered in the gel, causing indrawn gasps from his lover. He fixed his own shaft with a condom from the bed stand and coated it with the lubricant.

Savin moved between his legs, kneeling, and lifted them while Jesse began to struggle once more. His fingers automatically grasped the railing again, hard enough their skin mottled. As if they were glued in place. That Savin's will held Jesse so fast brought a fierce satisfaction. *Mine*. He pinned his Boyo's calves to his shoulders where he'd draped them. Jesse tried to pull them off, resisting. As if he couldn't help himself. But not like before. Not the uncontrollable violence that required Jesse to be pinned to the wall so no one got hurt. The arousal and pain of the session and Savin's show of trust had worn him down, opened a door.

"I'm going to push my dick inside you and fuck you slowly. You'll take every inch but not the pummeling you've wanted."

His hand dropped to position his cock at Jesse's tight pucker and he let his fingers brush the side of Jesse's clenched buttocks. "Relax. Don't fight it. Bear down as I'm pushing in and you'll take me easier."

He gritted his teeth as the helmet of his cock pushed in the first inch. Tight, squeezing, pressure. Goddess, how he needed to control his urge to thrust. He kept it shallow, pushing in then back before dipping deeper each time. Velvet friction. Hot. Hotter still was Jesse's twisting face, the pain and pleasure etched clear. His dark groans and sharp, shallow gasps as Savin shafted slow and sure. Finally rubbing up against the walnut-sized prostate, knowing the friction would drive Jesse wilder.

"Savin, God," he moaned again, pushing his ass into the intrusion to force Savin's cock deeper. "Feels full. Amazing."

"Love this, Jesse. You feel good around me. Perfect." He kept up the thrusting, the shorter movements turning into longer slides in and out of the squeezing passage. He

gasped out words under the incredible pleasure. "Fucking you is everything. Wanted it like crazy for years." He tightened his grip on his Boyo's legs, pinning him in place as he fought to keep his pace. Jesse's hands were convulsing on the bedframe and his eyes were squeezed shut against the sensation.

"Eyes open," he commanded. "Keep them on your Master. I want to know you remember who's taking this virgin ass of yours."

Jesse's lids wrenched open, and between clenched teeth he answered, "No way I can fucking forget. Popping a cherry...doesn't seem...right description."

Savin's gut-deep laugh erupted out as he thrust deeper, harder with the surprise of his lover's humor in this vulnerable moment. Jesse was too much in his head to have found full subspace, but Savin ferociously embraced this part of his lover. "Your spirit's there. So alive I don't know how you doubt it." He reached to Jesse's groin, snapped open the cock harness, wrapped his fist around his lover's jerking, dark-red organ and tightened, matching the pace as he fisted the hard-on to that of his pumping cock. "No coming 'til I say, love." He upped the speed, allowing the motion of his hips and hand to increase.

Beads of perspiration dripped from Jesse's brow. "Please! God fucking damn, dying here."

His panting grew more rapid, shallower. A fierce joy and surge of love and lust shot through Savin to each of his cells. His eyes soaked in Jesse's self-imposed restraint with his fingers latched to the wood of the bed as his body rocked into the mattress. Savin's magic surged, reaching.

"You're mine. You belong to me. Say it!"

"Yours," Jesse gasped. A transcendent peace mixed with the roiling arousal, confusion, anger and fear on his face.

"Master," Savin reminded.

"Yours, Master. Fucking hell, I'm coming, Savin." Short, harsh cries spilled from Jesse's mouth as his climax neared, his balls sitting higher, tighter than even a moment before. His movements danced disjointed under Savin's touch.

"Wait," Savin ordered.

"Please!"

"Wait."

Savin threw away his careful plunges, sank deep and faster into his lover. So good, so torturously pleasurable he didn't know how he'd lasted as long as he had. His testicles flushed so high to his groin he expected them to disappear into his body. The magic storm in his blood surged into an epic wave, hammering at his skin to escape and envelop Jesse.

Closer, just a moment more to let it build. Deeper still. Shafting faster. Goddess! "Come now, Jesse!"

And with the command, Savin convulsed as well. His seed spewed as he kept up the pumping, refusing to withdraw from the sweet-pressured squeeze around his cock.

Beneath him, Jesse's hoarse yell accompanied the cum jetting from his sex, spurting over his stomach, torso and neck. In that moment completely exposed, vulnerable, no boundaries. The perfect meal.

Savin's magic gulped Jesse's energy down, greedy swallows of that mix of pain and joy, anger and confusion, pleasure, relief and torment. He simply was. The raw stuff of self, the personal truth in his core. It swallowed its fill. Savin was no incubus of legend. The meal didn't steal something from Jesse permanently. Not like the results of violence his kin wielded to reach the similar emotional reactions of their victims.

Savin's head spun under the dual sensation of his shaft spasming with mind-blowing bliss and his cells pumping full of more power than he'd ever absorbed. Shock, euphoria and the heady belief he could explode the universe with his magic if he wanted.

The queen's grinning face flashed in his vision. He shook it off with his revulsion. All of it had him pulling out of Jesse too quickly and letting his Boyo's legs drop, collapsing from his knees on top of the other man. Savin's head buzzed from the overfull feel to his power. His nerves jangled, bumping one another, uncomfortable. A quick thought of his promise to Eamon, to find a way to build significant power without torture. Jesse as a key? Never! The desire to purge this newfound energy zipped through his mind as acid roiled his stomach.

How was he even close to human with it inside him? What kind of monster could he become with this much power?

Jesse stirred, drawing Savin's attention to Jesse's glazed expression. Even with the force of their orgasms he'd still kept his hands wrapped around the headboard. Savin refocused his purpose, shoving aside his self-indulgence. He ignored the exhausted, tipsy, sick feeling of his body and crawled up his lover, settling next to him.

He reached to carefully force Jesse's grip off the wood, lower his arms by his side. Slow fingers tipped Jesse's head in his direction. Wet trails smeared his lover's cheeks, puncturing Savin's lungs with arrows. "Shhhh. You're okay, Boyo." Voice soft, he stroked a thumb over the line of a cheekbone, the tip rubbing over the dark stubble of facial hair.

Dim sunlight limned the edges of the closed blinds against the outside wall. Dawn. He wanted Jesse in his own bed, his own room, not this generic play space where he'd worked other subs. But his Boyo needed his attention and care, not to be manhandled into another chamber at Savin's selfish whim. Fatigue lined Jesse's face, those tears painted over layers of hurt. His limbs lay collapsed like deadweight on the mattress. Everything wrung from him, leaving only the raw essence of Jesse behind.

He blinked, took in Savin's examination of him. He licked dry lips and a broken voice croaked out, "I can't do it anymore. I can't be strong."

The admission sank deep into Savin, stirred a hope he then purposefully shut away. Maybe Jesse wasn't as bad off as he'd feared. Not if he could make this admission so soon. "I'll be strong for both of us," he answered. An idiot to make a promise he'd never be able to keep.

"Good." Jesse's eyes grew heavy, dipping down so his dark lashes brushed the top of his cheeks. His breath sighed out in his half sleep. "Thank you."

Savin doubted he'd remember his words when he woke. After staring his fill at this man he'd loved for years, he removed his spent condom and wiped himself clean. He retrieved another warm, wet cloth and cleaned his Boyo's body, layering a soft brush of lips over the red marks from the session. Dead to the world, Jesse never made a peep as Savin completed the work. After, he retrieved blanket and pillows from a closet, arranging them for Jesse's comfort. Turning the slack weight of his lover to his side, he settled in, his front against the bare skin of Jesse's back, resting his cock between the sleeping man's buttocks. Jesse roused long enough to grip Savin's arm where it wrapped his chest, push his ass back in a rocking motion against his genitals. Seemingly satisfied, he grunted and fell still once more.

Savin lay there, mind spinning, ricocheting between the constraining walls of his situation. Examining and dismissing possibilities, only to come up defeated at the end. His magic purred inside him, a content cat lazily licking the cream of its feast from claw-sheathed paws. He hated his fae self, fae obligations more than ever as they distracted him from the perfect humanity he held in his arms. No, he'd enjoy this moment. Not waste it away with impossible dreams or resentment. The weekend would end soon enough. He let the lateness of the hour and the post-coital lethargy overcome his sense of disquiet. And slept pressed tight to Jesse.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Time bent behind his closed eyes, skidding down the hallways of his past. He found himself peeking behind the curtain, his young self celebrating the success of his spy mission. The throne room echoed emptiness at the midnight hour, the room holding only the queen and his mother, aside from his small, hidden body. Even at five a fae appreciated the finer points of gathering secret knowledge. And by his mother's recent behavior and the restlessness at court, he knew there were secrets worth collecting. So he set himself the task of listening to the whispered exchange between his parent and grandmother, the dream memory only finding him now after long years.

"I'm taking him, Your Majesty, despite what the court thinks. What matters guarding the life of a royal heir if all of us are doomed anyway?"

"I will not naysay you, Adelle. The six of you leave at sunrise and I am sick of debating the matter with the lords and ladies. They'll live with my decision or find themselves behind lock and key."

His mother's eyes slit in reaction. "You approve?"

"Your suspicion does me a disservice and is insulting."

"I only act as you've taught me, Queen Soliandra. Better suspicion now than a knife in my back later."

"At least you've paid attention to my lessons, my dear. Although your eagerness for this mission leaves a sour taste on my tongue."

"You yourself told me we've no more options than searching the mortal realm for a solution."

"True, but that does not explain your willingness to depart Faerie and embark upon the hunt yourself. Earth is not without discomfort, Adelle."

"You warn me, but your heart is not in it. The entire court notices your despondence. You doubt we'll find an answer and you embrace our eventual death. That is entirely the same reason I want to leave Faerie. My heart is dead here. Everyone's is. I remember a spark I used to carry, a distant vision from hundreds of years ago. I dream of it at night, as pale as those dreams have become."

Soliandra's face contorted, surprising to the boy as she rarely displayed much emotion. Even as she pronounced terrible sentences of punishment at the court. Even when she celebrated the small triumphs of her people. "The heart is not your ally, Daughter. Fae have no business trucking in its fancies."

"And why is that?"

The boy shifted behind the curtain, uneasy with his mother's show of defiance to the queen. He wanted her head intact on her neck, thank you very much.

The queen tilted her head, considering. After several empty minutes she spoke. "Do you know why the fae are masters of illusion?"

"It is our magic, my queen. What we are."

"But why? Did you never wonder?"

"It is the Goddess' will."

"For someone so set on an adventure you are singularly uninquisitive." She frowned. "A forbidden tale then, Adelle. A last fractured legend to send you off to sleep this night."

His mother sat quietly, knowing better than to disturb Soliandra when she had a goal in her sight.

"My mother and hers before her whispered bedtime stories of the fae's origins," the queen began. "Preparing us to rule, though it was made clear to spread the story was treason and would mean my death."

"How warmhearted Grandmother was," Adelle interrupted.

The queen spared her a killing glance but continued. "Long ago, as our people reveled in their magic, they craved more. They wished to live forever, or as close as possible. At the time their lives were closer to a mortal span. They were ephemeral things, dead before they could discover the true power and might of their magic."

He watched surprise spread over his mother's face.

"But to find this longevity meant sacrifice. And so after the fae prayed for this long life, the Goddess revealed herself and in anger at her people for rejecting the circumstances in which they were formed, she granted them their wish. She split her people into two halves, draining all magic from one part, making their lives even more mundane, more brutal and short. Making them mortal. To the other she gave all of the magic and the gift of living centuries, millennium sometimes."

"So, the price was paid by half our people," Adelle commented, eyes wide with her thoughts. "They became those banished to the Earth realm? Mortal?"

"More that Faerie was divided into two along with this split, half becoming Earth so the story goes. But we all paid the Goddess' price. The ones who kept the magic lost their hearts. Those were given to our Earthbound kin. Since that time, the fae have slowly misplaced the ability to love, to have care for anything or anyone beyond their own beautiful shells. And so we are the masters of illusion and glamour. Nothing true. And we now die from it just as surely as our mortal cousins die so quickly after birth. If Faerie crumbles, it is our own doing."

"And if being among the mortals, joining our peoples together again is the answer, why not be hopeful that you send us on this mission?"

"If it was so easily done we would not have needed the Goddess to split us the first time. She is infinitely compassionate, but sometimes compassion does not come in allowing children to fix their mistakes. I am not even sure our people would wish to rediscover their hearts again. It is so foreign to them, they may be more repulsed by it than the thought of dying."

"You are, are you not, Mother?" Adelle asked, daring to use the familiar as her voice hardened. "You will sacrifice your people despite the hope you know exists."

"I know no such thing." Soliandra settled back on her throne, her femme-fatale dress the very type of beautiful creation fae spent time magicking to reality. "Hope seems to be your penchant. Mostly I believe I send the group of you to stare at what becomes of all heart with no magic and cunning. But Earth folk do not mind if their race self-destructs from that particular imbalance. They die so quickly anyway, who is left to tell? Yet you are free to bang your fists against the cage that separates our two halves. Perhaps I am more cruel than I thought and find bitter satisfaction in making fae wonder at what they cannot have."

The boy did not understand all of the discussion of heart and death. It was not in one so young or so fae to grasp the finality of endings. The women seemed to debate nothing tangible but old bedside tales and the value of mortal beings.

Cruelty he knew. He'd witnessed it enough at court. And knew it played out here between his mother and queen. Maybe Queen Soliandra did not tend toward great displays of passion when she punished, but she seemed to know how to twist a knife enough. No heart meant no love for her daughter, rejection of her own blood. To tell a story and build hope, only to pronounce it a lost cause, was also cruel.

He decided he did not like the queen. She hurt his mother. The thought sparked a hard beat in his chest and tightened a fist in his stomach.

The fog of dreams drifted up behind the curtain as he sat watching the unhappy women. It coated him again, creating a drifting sensation in which he felt helpless.

But as he blinked, expecting to wake in that semi-aware way a dreamer is aware of his condition, he found himself elsewhere.

The dark forest at the center of Faerie.

He'd been brought here as a child. But now around him the vines climbing the ancient trees were crumbling husks. The scent of decaying wood hit his nostrils, the natural fecund smell of loam, debris and living things changed to a smell of infection and unnatural stink. It was his full-grown self that stood amid the dying forest. His boots crunched the forest floor and the vegetation slithered. Dying as they were, vines crawled toward him, touching, tasting. He brushed them off, disturbed by his need to reach back to them. No, he had no place here. The forest hissed with disagreement in his mind.

"Savin."

He spun at his name. To find his queen.

Glowing beauty, a firefly multitude of color and breathtaking countenance. Flowing wisps of clothing. All packaged with a whipcord will and unimaginable strength. And on her shoulder a crow, a harbinger of death.

This was no dream.

"Your Majesty." He had presence of mind to go down on one knee and bow his head even as his pulse took on a breakneck pounding. Memory of Soliandra's dream sendings to his mother after they'd moved to Earth flooded back.

"The dream of your boyhood was interesting?" she asked, trailing around the thick trunk of a dying redwood, her hands skimming the wood and great chunks of bark crumbling at her touch.

"I had forgotten the episode," he answered.

"Ah, but I had not." She stopped her circling. "I've watched you with interest as you've grown."

He buried the shock deep, hiding his surprise she had the ability to look into the mortal world so easily. If her magic remained this powerful, why had she not retrieved the party of fae herself before now?

"Young enough to unlearn the nasty habits of the fae and adopt, embrace in fact, the passionate, senseless yearnings of mortals. You keep them in your bed often. Your sexual appetite is quite entertaining."

A flash of rage and a quick image of Jesse lying defenseless on his sheets, exposed to her eye. He bit his tongue, his harsh retort too dangerous to voice. He might not remember everything of Faerie, but he remembered well his queen's cruelty. And more,

he remembered the easy choice his kind made here on Earth to torture. The same was inside her.

"Adelle had your blessing to bring me here. It is true I've matured among a different people. Was that not your intention?"

She laughed but there was nothing welcoming in the sound. All cutting shards and screeching edges. He fought to keep his hands from covering his ears.

"Savin, dearest, I supposed us all to die. I cared little for one small boy's formative environment."

"And your interest in me now?"

"Your heart."

"From my dream I've been made to believe I have none."

"How untrue, dearest. For I've seen it sleeping on your pillow just moments ago."

All of Savin's insides clenched at once, his bowels loosening.

The last thing he wanted for Jesse was Soliandra's attention.

"I've seen my subjects' attempts at filling the dry well of their power here on Earth. Amusing though ineffectual. And watched your useless thrashing to avoid the same. But now it has changed." She stepped closer and he found himself taking an equal step back. "Even across the gate in Faerie I felt the alteration in your power, the quality of the energy that fueled the magic with your latest conquest. I imagine fucking has never been so satisfying, Grandson."

"It's only temporary, Majesty. The method I used to recharge never lasts. Even Eamon admits that the stronger fuel of terror and torture only keeps him filled a short time. Admittedly my methods are less powerful."

"Oh, do not avoid the issue, Savin. Fae do not lie. How useless. You noticed the difference same as I. I rejoice knowing that your unusual upbringing has changed you enough to stumble on the solution."

"How so, my queen?" He didn't really want her answer but she expected his question. He was trapped here with her until she chose to release him.

"I cannot ask my people to live their lives here on Earth and grow their hearts again as you've seemed to accomplish. It would take generations we do not have. Most are too old to change. But if one of us brought his newfound heart back to Faerie and we observed the results. Yes, that might do much to replenish our magic."

A frigid wasteland expanded across his bones. His fear tasted of encroaching icicles. He dipped his head to hide some of it. "The gate opens in a few days. I will return as you wish."

"Oh no, Grandson. Not just you. Your little plaything will accompany you."

"No!"

The dark forest turned in on itself and shrank down to a pressing weight on his body and mind. Tearing at him. A reminder of her cruelty.

After a moment it ended.

"If you believe you have a choice, you've become more foolishly mortal than I thought."

"He is human."

"And tied somehow to you and this strange heart you've developed, Savin. Or he carries yours for you where you are too fae to do so. Return with him. There are many worse outcomes I can imagine. For yourself and for your lover."

The threat was potent, a promise laced with poison and the queen's solemn truth. And to it he could say nothing.

"I expect you back with the others in a few days, dearest. Please be well until then."

She disappeared faster than his next breath and the forest exploded.

He was tossed through nothing, even the fog absent, his body buffeted until his bruised skeleton landed hard on his mattress.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Savin's eyes shot open. He froze, trapping the scream wanting out of his lungs. Silent, careful terror. Perspiration covered his skin.

They'd shifted position in their sleep. Jesse now faced him, crowding into his body while Savin had moved to his back, separating from his Boyo. Maybe to keep him farther from the intruding dreams.

Dreams, sweet hell, a nightmare. And Soliandra's trap worse than the one Eamon had woven.

An amorphous awareness curled around him, his magic homing in and clinging to a spot in the middle of Las Vegas, a density to that spot pushing at him. The gate. With the crossing time approaching, his stronger magic was now able to sense the approximate location it would form. The portal calling to his royal blood. No wonder all five of them had felt drawn to this city in the desert recently. These doorways, common in the past, became rare and infrequent as Faerie's power faded. Thank Goddess for that.

Still unconscious, Jesse reached an arm, laid it over Savin's middle and moved closer. "S'okay," Jesse mumbled, as if even from his sleep he knew Savin needed comfort.

Savin lay rigid, denying himself the right to touch back. A Master in name only after betraying Jesse's trust with this mess, the worst a Dominant could do to his submissive. His job was to keep him safe even in the midst of pain. But Savin had done the unthinkable. If Jesse deserved a chance to reach for his dreams, Savin had single-handedly wrenched Jesse's chance at a normal life away from him and put him at the mercy of forces more deadly than any self-destructive impulses he harbored.

No. Unacceptable. Savin would keep to his plan this weekend and send his lover home. Jesse had sacrificed enough. Time to discover a way to challenge a queen and win.

Even if it meant cutting out his own heart.

Chapter Six

Jesse dreamed again.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

He barely remembered the drive to New Hampshire that morning, pulling into the parking lot at the base of Mount Washington almost blind with numbness. He looked up at the highest peak in the Northeast, famous for dangerously erratic weather and high wind gusts. The screwed-up hope he'd get lost up there and be caught in some late April freak thaw rockslide was the only thought popping amid all the White Mountain beauty. Christ, he hated his life.

But he had to get away. This morning was the last straw. His father's smirking face sitting there in the dark kitchen in his wheelchair. Waiting for Jesse to tread barefoot into the room to start the day.

Sunday, and he'd been up late doing inventory at the store the night before. He'd hoped to make a quick breakfast for his parents, run by the drugstore for his mom's med refills then catch an hour to do the term paper due tomorrow. More bills had arrived, so if he also got those done and then got lunch prepared, he might be able to go over the stuff the lawyer had sent. His mind had spun to the million details and he'd almost walked into the kitchen, no lights on to warn him.

A noise had done it anyway. Maybe his Dad's wheelchair wheel squeaking on the tile. He'd stopped mid-step. His gut flipped over and his hand reached for the switch. The sharp glass glittered under the room lights. At least five or six cups' worth smashed and jagged. He and his dad had stared at one another for what seemed an hour. That damn wide clown smile of his father's on his face. Finally, Jesse had turned back to the living room, called Mrs. Rossetti next door to ask her to come over, shoved into boots, grabbed his coat and was out of there. To Mount Washington.

Why here? Christ if he knew. Autopilot had his car turned north with no thought process behind it.

He got out of the car, headed up Tuckerman Ravine through the Pinkham Notch camp area. Ignoring the well pump near the hikers' store at the base of the bowl. No food, no water bottle. He didn't care.

He hadn't done this trail in over two years. Even now he barely noticed the view as he trudged upward. He ignored everything but the goal of reaching the top. His pace relentless, almost running, he stumbled a half-dozen times, knuckles scraping rock. He gained a certain sick satisfaction at the red abrasions on his hands. He shivered,

alternately hot then cool. The fifty-degree spring weather dropped lower this far up the mountain. Only the pace he kept prevented worse chill.

Finally, breath racing, he reached the top. Stumbled to a vista point to the views of the ravine and across the notch to Wildcat Mountain. Dizzy, he found a place to rest against the rock and slid down to sit. His palms pressed the gravel, grit digging into the lacerations. If he pressed hard enough he could burrow into the rock, become the rock itself. A mindless lump that didn't have to care about obligations and payback and a crumbling life. Jesse half-convinced himself it would happen. No convenient accident had occurred hiking to the top, so maybe if he sat long enough he'd freeze into part of the stone.

Was he hallucinating? In a detached way he recognized the dehydration. Voices buzzed in the background, other hikers passing. He made sure to arrange himself in a casual pose, turn his sightless gaze out to where he appeared to be enjoying the view so no one would stop and question him. Leave him the hell alone and let the mountain do its work. He shivered again.

"Jesse."

The voice came from a distant place but the rock underneath him was real. The rock was part of him and wouldn't disappear or change its nature. Dependable.

"Jesse."

Something was shaking his arm. Go away.

"Jesse. It's Savin." The deep, melodic voice in his ear sounded familiar. It accompanied another shake of his arm. "Are you okay?"

He blinked, turned to the disturbance. Blinked again.

Savin Rosca. From school.

"Fine. Go away." He turned back, but the shivering began again.

"No you're not." The hand on his arm dropped. A bottle was shoved into his vision. "Drink this." His hand was gripped and forced around the plastic bottle.

He took a swallow. Licked his lips and only then felt the pain of chapped skin at his mouth. Swallowed again.

"Slow."

He took another.

"Enough for now." The bottle was taken. "Get up. You're walking with me. Easy."

Jesse was rising. Following that something not to be questioned in Savin's voice. He wondered why he wasn't just flipping off the guy's orders.

Savin helped him stand. He wasn't even embarrassed about it. Maybe he was too tired to care. Rosca supported him with a strong arm attached to a lean, athletic body. Jesse noticed the gold in his long hair pulled back in a tie.

After a few feet he stumbled again.

Savin caught him. "Hell."

He was lowered against another rock and Rosca pulled off his jacket. Jesse let him wrangle him into the extra thermal layer.

"I don't need it."

"Of course you don't."

But they both left it on. Savin handed him the water bottle once more and he drank. After another couple of minutes his friend had him up again and they began a slow walk around the viewing area, Savin supporting him. Where their shoulders touched warmth began to seep into Jesse. Weird. He grew more clearheaded. Enough so he rediscovered embarrassment, felt the flush on his face.

He pulled away. Savin said nothing about it. Instead, he walked next to Jesse and began to talk about everyday shit. His last physics test. The no-hitter he saw at Fenway Park two weeks ago. The practical joke the drama class pulled on Mr. Henderson last week.

A pack appeared in Savin's hands a bit later. Jesse swore he hadn't had one before. From it he pulled some trail bars. He offered one to Jesse. A ravenous hunger took over where a second ago he'd had no appetite. He took a bar, tore it open and devoured it. A second one followed. Again Savin handed him the water bottle and he drank. Savin continued the conversation.

Mostly between the talk, Rosca stayed quiet. Never asking Jesse questions about why he was up here like this or anything else for that matter.

As time passed, it helped. Jesse felt...more real. Calmer.

Even simple comments Savin made came out as if they were absolute truth. Not arrogant or anything. Just self-assured.

Rosca had appeared the middle of freshman year with a spark in his eyes. The girls gossiped about him from day one. Hot to get him to ask them out. As far as Jesse knew, he'd never gone out with anybody. Still, they lusted and speculated even four years later and called him a god. Despite holding himself apart from any of the cliques, everyone liked him.

The weird part was how often over the years Jesse had caught Savin staring at him in the halls or in class. Jesse barely kept his shit together at school nowadays, so he hadn't noticed the looks recently.

He glanced at Rosca, now silent after making some random comment about the mountain. Fuck, his cock was hardening. He scrambled to focus on what Savin had just told him.

"What?"

The edges of Rosca's mouth tilted up. Sly. As if he'd caught Jesse's reaction.

"I was saying that before the European settlers arrived Mount Washington was called Agiocochook, home of the Great Spirit."

"No shit?" Jesse dug his fingernails into his palms and willed the erection down.

Savin studied him harder. His smile disappeared and he mercifully moved a step farther from Jesse. "You ready to head down?"

It was a question but somehow not. As if he expected Jesse to comply no matter what.

Why didn't it bother him? It should bother him. "Uh, sure."

They followed the trail back down the mountain. This time slowly.

Savin kept up his pattern of discussing random things, not expecting answers. Except Jesse started to talk back. He didn't have much to offer. His life was about keeping it all going and he had no time to notice the social scene, watch TV or catch a movie. But he managed a few comments.

Until he even found himself talking about his last trip abroad. About a hike the students had taken outside Madrid. Once he caught himself, he waited for the thick guilt to kick in like always. He'd never spoken about the trip after arriving home at the airport the day his life crashed and burned.

He stopped the story midpoint once he realized what he was doing. He couldn't continue even if he didn't feel as shitty as he expected. Again, Savin never asked why. Never demanded he finish explaining. Of course everyone at school knew about the accident. Still, most guys wouldn't put two and two together and figure out why a story about Madrid would matter.

They reached the base of the mountain and passed through the camp area and over to the parking. Jesse stopped in front of his car, a beat-up Volvo his family had kept garaged as backup. After the crash it was the only transport he had.

He stood there awkwardly in front of his driver side door, key in hand. "Thanks." His eyes dropped down to the ground. The erection he'd just about killed started growing. Jesus Christ. What was wrong with him?

"Go home, Jesse. Rest."

"Yeah. Sure." It wouldn't happen that way but he didn't want Savin worried. Why he cared about disappointing Rosca he had no clue. "Thanks."

But Savin didn't step away and head to his car. He stood there, staring at Jesse. Jesse's heartbeat thumped so loud Savin had to be able to hear it.

A wind whipped past them, whistling through the trees lining the parking lot. Savin moved closer, began to lean toward him.

Christ! His hands moved behind him, the key bit against his skin as he pinned his wrists to the metal door. He couldn't move. His mind flipped in a million directions then went silent. He knew what was coming. Wanted it though he had no clue why.

Contact. Savin's mouth rested on his, lips hot, firm but just resting. Jesse breathed out, clenched his muscles to stop the trembling. The pause in time broke and a tongue licked around the outline of his mouth, sank inward a slow inch. Dipped and retreated. Savin's teeth bit gently into his lower lip. Slow. Fucking. Confusing. Exciting. Agony. Oh God.

The mouth withdrew from his. Savin examined him, his head tilted as if seeing through to Jesse's bones. He leaned in again.

"No," Jesse mumbled. Shook his head. Too much.

Savin straightened. Jesse swallowed around the urge to ask for more anyway. Opened his lips to say just that.

"Drive safely, Jesse." One last slate-blue glance and Savin was walking away toward a sleek black Fiat. He opened the door, slid into the driver's seat and looked back to where Jesse stood frozen, leaning into his Volvo. Wrists still behind him.

The Fiat drove away. Jesse shook himself out of his stupor. Got in his car. Reached home as the sun set. That night crawling into bed he slept deep, no nightmares.

Good.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Jesse's hips thrust into the large, warm hand cupping his morning erection, his body responding before his mind clicked into action. As his jumbled thoughts fought to become coherent, his eyes opened slowly to a slate-blue examination.

Savin.

Jesse must be prone to arrhythmia because his chest reacted with a staggered hitch.

"How are you feeling?" Savin asked, leaning over him, his voice a deep purr as he tightened his already-firm grip on Jesse's cock.

"I pretty much figure you can tell for yourself." He thrust his groin into those fingers purposefully this time, hips lifting off the bed. God, it felt great. His arms rested down at his sides on the mattress as if they belonged there, unable to move under his free will. Jesus, he was nuts. Or maybe he wasn't. Maybe he would be okay.

Savin's rich chuckle kept that heart condition of Jesse's in action. "From my seat you *feel* more than fine, but I mean the rest of that excellent body of yours, Boyo. Aches and pains?"

Jesse took stock, noticing a few protesting muscles and a whole lot of sore at his back entrance. "About as to be expected." His brow pulled down as his mind struggled to identify exactly what had changed. "But the edge is off. Like I fit my skin better."

Savin quirked his eyebrows. It went with his mysterious Magician and Master routine and it should annoy Jesse, but it didn't. It was just...Savin.

And he couldn't keep the grin from creeping to his face at the thought. "Who knew BDSM was better than Valium for mellow? Watch out or some drug company's going to take a hit out on you for cutting into their market."

Savin laughed again, a deeper sound that had the muscles in Jesse's ass clenching as he caught the vibrations of it in the hand circling his shaft. The grip was different than from his previous lovers. Stronger. Women were always afraid to squeeze as tight as a guy liked. If Savin kept this up much longer he'd come even without any motion.

"Your sense of humor is endearing, Jesse. I always liked that about you." His smile was tender and his words soft, at odds with the iron grip.

"Come on, Magician. Sounds a bit sappy. Endearing? I expected tough talk from a Dominant. You know, Master voice and all."

The smile turned wicked in under a second and then disappeared into pure pupil-dilating lust. "You mean like this? I'm going to release that hard cock of yours now. And you're going to place your hand on it and start shafting yourself. I want to see my sub masturbating and fighting not to come as he waits his Master's command."

Jesse's breath hitched and, damn, but didn't shaky fingers lift automatically to grab his dick at the order. Was it worth pretending he wasn't responding to Savin's Domination? Probably not. Jesse might be stuck running circles in his life, but he tried not to lie to himself. And this felt too good to fight.

"Was that the voice you expected, Jesse? The one telling you how incredibly aroused it makes me to watch your cock redden and that pre-cum leak from your slit? How I want to take that ass of yours again and pound into it after you get on those knees and spread for me?"

"Yes," he hissed, his hand jerking his cock and the pressure behind his balls building fast and furious. His brain short-circuited and all he thought about was wanting his belly to the mattress, Savin above him, pinning him down by his neck, Savin's palm pressing into the tattoo there and holding his hips high while he sank into Jesse's ass.

The words flew out of his mouth, mixed with a deep groan of pleasure. "Fuck me."

The Magician's head shook. "As much as I'd like to, you're too sore for it now. Later."

His anger rumbled up again, twisting in his gut, though not at full force. So familiar, but after last night, lacking some fuel. "I want it. I need you to take me hard this time, fast. To tie me up and give me no choice." His fist pumped steady and he struggled to pull in enough air with the pictures playing over his mind. His skin rubbed against the sheets underneath him as his body moved on the bed, restless.

Savin watched him intently, gaze dropped to Jesse's groin, seemingly fascinated by the stiff cock slipping back and forth through his fist. "Later. This is not your decision. Ask me again and it's punishment you'll receive."

But his eyes said something different. Even through the dizzy picture as Jesse's body became one throbbing thing of need, he saw Savin's eyes change. The slate blue sparked into starlight, pinpricks of searing light flaming out of them. Lust gone supernova. Not at all human-looking.

Fuck! Who was this man? Someone unreal. Bigger than this room and not part of the regular world. Just as this weekend was for Jesse. Those eyes kept dancing hot, faceted spears. He couldn't concentrate. He had to be hallucinating. The thing between them was out of control, but it seemed right to be here. To give himself to it. Just as long as he didn't burn Savin at the end.

The pounding of his erection and the haze of excitement from laying himself exposed like this, following Savin's order to perform, made him doubt even his sight. He needed Savin to understand, to screw him into oblivion. The idea that he might be denied and left in hellish stiff-cocked torture was just as damn arousing as the drive to have this man fill his body deep and make it hurt, make it perfect.

"Just do it, for Christ's sake," Jesse gasped.

Savin's gaze shot back to his face. "I've made it clear I won't let you punish yourself."

"Maybe I am, but this shit is turning me on. To let you be in charge. If this is only for the weekend, I want all of it. Please, *Master*." He made sure to stress the title through his gritted teeth. "Fuck me."

Savin stared at him with those freaky starburst eyes, calculation spinning behind the intelligence on his face. In the next breath something broke in him. He changed from a cool, controlled Dom to rabid beast. Lips twisted feral.

Shit.

Lightning movement, surreal strength and Savin had Jesse flipped to his stomach, wrists bound together and attached to the headboard, another second and a rough slide of leather blocked his sight. A blindfold. Knots tied quick and tight in his belly with the loss of that sense.

"Mine." Savin's growls punctuated his touch as he jerked Jesse's hips to leave him on his knees, pushing his thighs wide.

Wildness radiated from him, not like Jesse's anger. Something different, primal in the low, animalistic noises coming out of Savin's mouth. But even lost in it, Savin didn't brutalize him. Part of Jesse wanted that, but instead he felt a quick, cool spurt of liquid, a hard touch spreading his pucker with the lube.

"You want me inside you?" Savin challenged, voice harsh. "I'll pump you so deep you'll wonder why you don't have a hole on the other side."

Fingers at his opening, his pulse pounding in his ears. Those digits sank inside, pushing against his tissue, widening, short, quick stabs of preparation. Stretching. Yes! His entire body shivered at the rough touch and violent eroticism in the Magician's invasion.

Emptiness then digging fingers at his hips, a hard, blunt pressure behind him as Savin held him in place, worked his cock into Jesse's ass.

Jesus, so full. Not slow this time. Sawing in and out, nerves on fire and sending shocking jolts through his entire frame. His shaft swelled to granite from the stimulation, a pulsing pain of its own.

The long, wide cock sank home in another thrust, bumping up against his prostate in mind-numbing sensation. Balls slapping against his ass. Again. Again. Without his sight, everything felt more. Bigger. All-encompassing.

"Cry out for me, Boyo," Savin commanded in another low growl. "Let your Master hear you at his mercy." A hand shoved under his chest where it hit the bed, twisted a nipple before releasing.

Jesse let go. Let his own groans of pain and pleasure escape the dark trap and heave into the room. Hands kept digging at his waist but a wet suction centered over his cock, drew it in deep and sucked ecstasy. An invisible mouth, hot and moist and pulling on his erection enough to drive him wild. Impossible with Savin at his back.

Leather dug into his wrists as his body jarred forward with each thrust. Cotton scraped along his skin. Pinpricks burst in his vision under the blindfold. His mind loosened further. Where and when and why broke away to leave only this moment. Throb. Slide. Heat. Pain. Wonder. Possessive rutting touch, he was not alone in the black. Him and Savin.

Wet heat kept at his cock. His ass filled again and again. Wildfire grew along his spine, skirted down his tailbone and fired in his sac.

"Come before I say and I'll stripe this ass good," Savin panted as Jesse struggled to hold back.

Savin's hips pounded, pistoning faster. Raw, hoarse cries choked out of Jesse.

A last hard, inexplicable suck of his sex and Savin called out. "Come. Now!"

He exploded, seed jetting out, warm fluid spattering his belly even as Savin pushed Jesse's torso along the sheets, spreading the wet ejaculate over the cloth. His Magician's own cries filling the air. Jesse came forever, the pulses lasting longer than ever before. And the dizzying sensation of his everything, his very soul, shooting out with his orgasm. The lights behind his eyes exploded with killing pleasure. Christ, never like this before.

Savin's organ was thrust deep in him, his hot semen spraying inside Jesse's passage, hitting his prostate and heightening the awful fuckingtastic bliss.

Finally, chest heaving, his mind registered the heavy weight on his buttocks and back with Savin half collapsed on top of him.

The weight rolled off. The leather blindfold was pulled from his face, his eyes closing against the sudden brightness. Movement at his wrists and they released from the headboard. A moment later separated altogether. A gentle caress feathered down his nape and his spine to his coccyx.

"Roll, Boyo." Savin sounded weary, his voice tight with emotion.

Jesse's body was gently turned to his back, the wet sheets sticking to his skin. He liked the reminder. He slit his eyelids and adjusted to the light of the room.

But instead of the satisfied expression he expected from his Magician, his gaze met a pair of worried eyes, back to their normal slate color while his friend rubbed circulation back into Jesse's wrists. No, that wasn't right. This had been some of the best damn sex he'd had his entire life barring last night. Savin shouldn't look upset. A Master sure as hell shouldn't be bothered by what they'd done. Did he regret

committing to Jesse for the weekend? The horrible inside him raised its head and snapped razor teeth. Shit. Who could blame Savin with that stuff in there?

Savin sat farther back, removing himself. "I worked you hard. Let me get some cloths and clean you up. Then I'll rub you down with some oil and massage out the hurt."

The thought, *He's so alone*, flashed inside Jesse's mind, watching Savin's withdrawal.

His irritation flared. Savin moved to get off the bed and Jesse snaked out a hand and grabbed his arm. "Wait. Can't you just, I don't know, lie here next to me a moment." An idiot for asking, but why the hell not?

A shadow passed away from Savin's face, a slight grin creeping over his mouth to replace it. "Of course."

Savin stretched out on his side, head propped on his palm. He rested his other hand, fingers spread, on Jesse's wet belly, the remnants of his ejaculate spread over the skin. "You are very distracting." The hand slid farther down, the tip of a finger just brushing the top of his flaccid penis.

Jesse shuddered but ignored the goad to fall back into arousal. Strange shit happened during the sex. He needed to talk to his Magician. Needed answers to the nagging questions percolating inside him.

Jesse rolled to his side, the hand sliding off as he turned to face Savin. "Why me? Sexual attraction is one thing, but you have plenty of men and women at your call, it seems. One kiss at the end of high school is not a lot to explain why you want this weekend."

Savin's eyes widened and the divot in his chin deepened. "You underestimate yourself. Even early in high school you were a collage of movement. Dizzying energy with your finger in everything. Like a frenetic ballet of primary color. You could have run the world. How could I not want to hold a piece of that?"

"Luckily I'm pretty secure in my masculinity or I might complain about that decidedly gay-sounding description of me. But I still don't get it. I appreciate you wanting to help me with my anger, Savin, and you may have stalked me all those years, but you don't know me." Though he wanted to believe his Magician saw something inside him. Something that meant he had more future than just rage.

"You need this," came the quiet answer along with the softening of Savin's eyes, a distracting brush of his fingers over the hair at Jesse's temple.

Dammit, that wasn't good enough. "So, you go around adopting inexperienced submissives and expose them to the wild, beautiful world of sexual domination? Is it like a catch-and-release program? How about you cut the shit and tell me?" There was something Savin wasn't saying. Something bothering him. Maybe it was a gut instinct, but Jesse knew he was right. Though why it mattered to him so much was hell-and-back confusing.

Savin's eyes dropped, avoiding him. "I told you before, you're not the only one who's been dreaming. Maybe it's unhealthy, but ever since that day on the mountain I see you when I sleep."

"Every night?" A hot flush was creeping up Jesse's chest, radiating out to his shoulders and down his arms to his fingertips. Surging down his body into his groin and thighs.

The Magician lifted his gaze, met his eyes with an intensity to the slate blue that was still human-looking but no less difficult to return. "Every night. Without exception. But if you're looking for answers about why, I have none. And more importantly, your spinning thoughts will just get in the way of what we're doing."

Although he sounded earnest, Jesse was left feeling this wasn't the whole truth. That something more bothered Savin.

His mind scanned their time together, stumbling over moments of strange. "Then give me other answers. Your eyes. I swear to God I'm out of my mind frequently, but this morning was the second time I saw them change color. Not just the blue looking more gray in different light, but freaky starlight shining from them."

Savin licked his lips, a show of nerves that looked wrong on him. "I have unusual eyes. Nothing more. I'm sorry they disturb you."

"And the sex. You had your mouth on my cock this morning. When your mouth couldn't possibly be anywhere near it. Hell, I even saw a bottle of lube fly through the air last night. And my orgasms with you. They're bigger...unreal. Am I hallucinating?"

"D/s is intense sometimes. Causing chemical changes."

"So, I was hallucinating?" *Mentally unstable, the doctors said, consulting about his father. The brain injury. But the seed was there somewhere, wasn't it? His father's son.*

Savin didn't answer, shrugged instead. Vague evasion, the bastard.

Cactus-like irritation started pushing out of his skin. "Fine. I'm the last person to claim complete sanity." His mind tried to grasp at anything concrete. He hated his suspicion of Savin. "The bar. Last night. At least tell me who that man was, Eamon you said, pushing you against the wall."

Another shrug. "No one important. A disgruntled patron of the club."

Jesse practiced dragging in a slow breath, disliking the anger that started flashing behind his forehead. The sex had tempered it earlier, lulled it partway to sleep, and he wanted that peace back. The memory of Savin's touch, his shaft filling Jesse and driving him over an edge into some type of freefall space, swarmed into his mind. Leaving everything behind. Jesus, he wanted that back.

So what if Savin didn't have all his own shit together. It had been over a decade since they'd seen one another and only less than twenty-four hours since they'd reconnected. Who was he to judge? He'd hated it when Savin dug into his own family skeletons. He'd leave it alone, hope to hell Savin might do the same for him, though he doubted it. That wasn't the bargain. Damn. It killed him, but his word was important to

him. He swallowed back the anger, pushing it brutally down, something he'd been less than successful at many times. But here, now, it worked. Or just enough.

Savin slid closer to him and settled a hand on Jesse's buttocks, fingers playing between the crease back and forth. His cock gave an interested jerk. A clear distraction tactic on the Magician's part, but one his body was more than willing to endorse.

"I'm dropping the subject. You don't need to get out Mr. Seductive and try to sex me up."

Savin's gaze lowered to where Jesse's cock was already swelling, pressed between their bodies. "I don't know, you're pretty much up as it is. I won't have to try hard."

"You're too sexy, you know that? And beautiful." His body was jonesing for the Magician, but he wanted something more. More than the sex. A weekend was too short. Though it wasn't fair to Savin to ask him to put up with his garbage longer. Jesse lifted his hand and touched the side of Savin's cheek, giving back one of the numerous caresses he'd received. Skin touching skin. He wanted that. It mattered. "How'd you end up looking so young? We're the same age, but I feel like I'm robbing the cradle, like I have a good five years on you." Not that his youthful appearance detracted from the presence of command that screamed out of the guy. And those confusing eyes. Old eyes.

"Good genetics. My family ages slowly."

"I remember your mom. I saw her once when she came in to school. She was hot for an older woman. How is she, by the way?"

When Savin froze, his lips pressed tight and his fingers stopped their motion at his ass, Jesse's stomach dropped.

"She died."

Again the loneliness.

Damn. "Why didn't you say something?"

His voice hardened. "What was I supposed to say? Hi, Jesse, nice to see you. Oh, by the way, my mother is dead. These things don't arise naturally in casual conversation."

Pain flashed bright in Savin's eyes. A brutal wish to erase it, soothe away the hurt from his Magician scored Jesse in the chest. Confusion swam to the surface about what was expected of him in their situation, about what was allowed. And it started to piss him off again.

"Funny, my personal crap seemed to be front and center on the agenda."

"Maybe because you walk around with that crap reeking out of your pores 24/7."

"So, there are different rules for you than for me?"

Savin's sudden frost coated his skin. "Yes. There are. I am your Master this weekend. You are my submissive. If you want to cry over the unfairness of the arrangement, then leave."

The silence layered thick between them. After a time Savin's features softened. "The choice you made leaves little time for friendship. I value it, but it takes second place to our contract. You're mine before anything else."

Jesse dropped his eyes with a warm buzzing flushing through his veins at the claim of ownership. "I'm not backing out." It came out too soft and his confusion multiplied with his own reaction. His chest tightened, concrete poured into his lungs. Like a drowning swimmer, panicking as he couldn't find which direction was up, lost under the waves. God, and he thought the anger was bad. Clamps and whips weren't what this was about between them. Not if he was completely truthful.

Savin pulled back from him. "I'm taking a shower. You'll go out to the kitchen and put on the kettle for tea. I like mine black with honey. Two pieces of toast, lightly buttered. Feed yourself as well. Do not get dressed. I want to watch you move around my suite naked."

Gooseflesh raised on his skin at the command. He expected the no-nonsense order to make him more pissed and feel insulted, but instead, it hit a chord inside him and settled. Causing? Excitement. Acceptance. Okay, the reaction was strange. But what wasn't about this situation? At least it was something he could do for Savin that didn't involve being his sex toy. Savin needed something from him. And not just the sex. He could walk around *al fresco*. No one else was around. What was the Magician hiding behind those strange eyes? No, he'd agreed not to pry, as frustrating as it was.

Savin strolled to the door of the playroom, completely unconcerned with his own nudity. "One of the subs from my show may stop by any time now to clean. Do not leave the common rooms or dress yourself if he arrives. He knows what he's here to do. You may speak with him if you want."

Fuck.

Jesse ignored the knot in his belly at this news. He had enough to process. "Savin." His call was impulsive.

Savin turned, eyebrows lifting.

Damn, stupid rules. How was he to remember them all the time? Thank God this was only for a weekend. "Sorry. Master."

"Better."

Jesse cleared his throat. "I don't really understand this...thing." He gestured to the room, to their used bed sheets. "But no matter what, I am sorry about your mom. I had to say it even if we don't talk about it." Screw Savin if he didn't want to share something personal between them. Jesse noted the irony in relation to his hang-ups about sharing his personal history.

Savin nodded, calm, collected. "Thank you, Boyo. Clean up. There are wipes by the bed. Then get to that kitchen."

* * * * *

"Damn toaster." Jesse yanked out the blackened bread from the appliance, cursing when his finger brushed the coils and burned his skin.

He shoved the digit in his mouth, mumbling while he tossed the ruined toast and dropped in two new pieces to try again. At least the tea was ready. He hoped Savin would be out of the shower and dressed before it went cold. He wasn't usually this inept. Years of meals for his parents had made him depressingly handy around a kitchen. But everything was off for him today. His entire life, the mess it had been recently, thrown off kilter.

He walked the steaming mug into the common room and toward the bare dining room table, his ear confirming the continued sound of falling water from behind a closed bedroom door. His other ear listened for the turn of lock or creak of an opening door. Although the room was warm enough, goose bumps covered his skin from the anticipation of the visit from that other sub. His awareness of the cuffs and collar at his wrists, ankles and throat kept him at a baseline burn of arousal, his dick semi-erect and his teeth at a continual grind. Or was that from the man currently lathering himself in the shower?

He placed the hot ceramic on the wood.

"Hello."

At the unexpected voice his hand jerked before releasing the cup handle and the tea sloshed onto his already-burned finger. "Fuck," he cursed, turning toward the dulcet female tone coming from the direction of the windows of the suite.

And there she was, standing in front of the view of Vegas.

Tall. Long-legged. Hair a rich red no shade he'd seen before. Strangely dressed up to look like Marilyn Monroe. Well, this was the land of impersonators. Was this the sub Savin expected? He prepared to hide his surprise and hope to Jesus she'd ignore his hardening cock when his gaze landed on her eyes and was caught.

They glowed firelight, strobing with green ice. Otherworldly. She was clearly not anyone describable as a submissive. What the fuck? How had she gotten in here?

Every hair on his body stood on end.

A feral grin met his examination, the kind he'd expect from a rabid wolf bitch showing her teeth to her next meal. So her words shocked him more as seemingly smooth and composed as they were.

"You're Savin's new toy, yes?"

"Who are you?"

"Ah, my manners. Wherever did they go?" She tilted her head, the glow of her eyes flicking out like a bright knife. "Oh, I remember. I have none." She laughed and the sound bit over his skin like a physical attack taking small chunks from his body.

A hard shiver had him locking his knees to keep standing through it. Jesus.

"Eamon told me how Savin's newest human had attacked him. I wanted to see for myself a creature willing to sacrifice his life for our prince."

Prince? This woman made no sense. But Jesse didn't need to understand the shit she spouted in order to know she was danger. His senses went on full alert.

"How did you get in here? Savin didn't tell me he was expecting anyone." Or anyone fitting her description at least. It wasn't so much his lack of clothing he regretted as the lack of some sort of a weapon. He eyed the room and his gaze fell on several breakable porcelain objects he might be able to reach. This was crazy. He'd never thought of attacking a woman in his life, and she'd made no outright threat. She hadn't even moved from the windows.

She sighed. "You must not be too bright. But attacking Eamon, surely the strongest of us all, told me as much."

"I don't know what you want, lady, but I think you need to leave. Now." His hands had fisted and the familiar grinding anger had started ricocheting around his stomach. "Give me your name and I'll let Savin know you stopped by."

"My but you sound so fierce, human. Are you Savin's little bodyguard? Do you care so much for our prince?"

"I'm only asking once more. Then I call casino security."

She stared at him with the same trick Savin had displayed of being able to see directly to the center of him. But with her it was disturbing. Not as if she really looked to learn who he was, more as if she were watching the blood beat through his veins and was waiting until the right moment to pounce and devour him. And not in a sexual way either.

The redhead's tongue licked her lips, a slow, alarming path. "You care for Savin, yes?" She leaned closer from her place, inhaled deeply as if trying to catch a scent. "I smell him on you."

This woman was loony. Or that's what he told himself. Better than the alternative, although he wasn't quite sure what the fuck that was. But there was no way she was anything good for Savin. The edge his Magician had loosened returned, making him take a step closer to her despite the unnamable threat she posed. He'd deliver a threat of his own if it got her away from Savin. A fierce need to do just that was born in his gut.

She waved a finger at him. "Behave." Her eyes burned even brighter if possible. "I wonder what this is like to care so much for another you'd foolishly risk your own safety? Is it a death wish you have, little one, or is Savin more than I've given him credit for?" She sighed again. "Ah well, whatever the cause, and whatever our prince gains from you, maintaining it seems too much work. I'm all for the quick meal and fill to my magic."

Jesse's mind beat down his urge to throttle this woman and he forced himself to change strategies. He walked over to the phone on the side table and picked up the receiver. The sound of running water cut out, the new silence layered by another of the redhead's skin-biting laughs.

"I do know when I'm not wanted, human. Although I look forward to seeing you in a few days' time. If Savin tires of you before the gate needs opening, call for me. I'd hate for you to miss the fun. The name is Tzrina, by the way."

"How may I help you?" the voice on the other side of the phone echoed out after Jesse hit the number for the front desk.

He drew in a breath to collect himself, looked down at the table and up again at their uninvited guest.

And found another new sight.

Savin, naked and dripping, stance squared in front of this Tzrina. "Get out of my home!" His voice reverberated through the space enough to shake the mug on the table. Like some sort of angry god.

His starburst eyes glowed back at the woman's, forcing Jesse to squint against the intense light. The air snapped in the room, the stinging force playing over his body. A razor growl escaped Savin's mouth. His teeth snapped.

The woman gasped, her palm flying to her cheek. She pulled it away to reveal a small gash, a red drop trailing down the side of her face. She settled into her smirk. "Interesting," she drawled. "Eamon will be pleased." She shifted her gaze to Jesse where he still held the phone, the voice on the other end demanding a response while he stood mute. "'Til later." She winked at him.

And vanished.

Shit!

His stomach kept kicking, insisting the threat still existed. He dragged in a long breath through his nostrils, blew out. "Your friends suck."

Savin's eyes lost the last of their starburst, slate blue returning though his lips stayed compressed in a tight line, his body clearly fighting to regain control. "No doubt." He walked over to where Jesse held the phone, took it from him and gave assurances to the other end of the receiver before hanging up.

Jesse gritted his teeth and struggled to keep his voice from a shout. "Who the fuck was she? Or what was she, for that matter? 'Cause she kept calling me human like it was important to distinguish that she wasn't. I'd say she was psychotic, but the woman just disappeared into thin air and her eyes had a similar freaky glow to yours. I get strange. This was beyond strange." When Savin didn't answer, he shoved his hand through his hair and paced toward the unmoving magician. "Jesus, you're not going to tell me, are you?"

"This is my business, Boyo."

Wasn't it his business if the man who was fucking him wasn't human either? Christ, he didn't know if he was delusional or what. But Savin's refusal to trust him pushed its way back to the front of his mind from where he'd tried to shut it away. "I think it became my business when she threatened me."

Savin's back straightened, his eyes narrowed, a dark, silky danger lacing his voice. "She threatened you?"

"Sounded like it to me."

Another growl from Savin and a shudder flicked Jesse's skin. God, his wires were all crossed. But the sudden taste of fear on his tongue, the fascination with this new idea of Savin's inhumanity brought the same reaction as the D/s. He knew his Magician was someone safe, but there was always that lingering tantalizing possibility that a safe word might not work. That he'd be totally at Savin's mercy with no end to what he might do. It jacked him higher but couldn't erase the drive to figure out this shit.

Savin's voice hardened to diamond. "I'll take care of this. She won't hurt you."

He didn't need a protector, thank you the fuck much, but the promise in Savin's voice heightened the mix of arousal and fear. He fought through it and purposefully rolled his eyes along with his shoulders. "Oh sure, if you've got it covered, then let's forget it." He snorted and stepped closer to Savin, grabbed for his arm while part of him knew it for the mistake it was. He couldn't help himself. "She threatened you as well. What sort of shit are you involved in?"

"The sort of shit I refuse to include you in. Enough!" His arm pulled out of Jesse's grip and he moved in, chest touching chest, his palm wrapping the back of Jesse's tattooed neck, squeezing the skin with a warning.

Their faces inches apart, Jesse dropped his eyes before he could stop himself. Too much. But damn, this wasn't right. His dick pounded, stiffening more each moment as much from the adrenaline caused by the recent threat as from Savin's power and the crazy desire he dragged out of Jesse. The knowledge that he wanted his Magician to lock him up again and make him moan, whether in pain or ecstasy. The idea of it had his cock head weeping. *Focus, man.*

His mind reeled. The hooks of Savin's betrayal, not trusting him with the truth, or maybe not trusting him to be a support, sank into the meat on his bones with a sudden rush.

Along with the need to defend his Magician as much as he said he wanted to protect Jesse. The fear. The building anger.

The rage was creeping higher even as he struggled to keep his eyes down now that they'd dropped. Better to hide it. His thoughts swung wild. His gut burned. He wanted to screw, he wanted to punch this not-quite-human man who had him by the neck. And he wanted more. More than this promised weekend. Christ, the pain was sharp, like a stake in his vitals. Out of control.

Pictures shoved into his mind. Making him shake. The stench of sickness and antiseptic. White hospital walls. An ambulance siren. The smell of depression and stale bodies that turned his house into a hospital ward of its own. His brother's gravesite. The blank stares of his parents. Later his father's caustic blame and seesawing emotion. Poison spit at him constantly. Needing constant strength to care for them but so alone in it. He was falling into the past. Caught inside the prison of it. Unable to escape. He

spiraled down in seconds, felt himself unraveling, desperately shaking his head to clear it of the mess.

"Boyo, look at me!"

The command allowed him to raise his head, face Savin through the haze of confusion and fury.

"Walk to the back of the couch. Lean your hands down on the ridge."

"Savin."

"Do it. Now."

He tried to shut off his mind, just react. Jesse walked to the couch, struggling to drag in breath after breath to his lungs and find some calm. He leaned over, hyperaware of his ass sticking up in the air. The cool air licked over his bare buttocks. *Concentrate on that, man. Goddammit.* Anything to get away from the jumble in his mind.

He turned his head to track Savin as he opened a closet, removed a long, thin cane from the inside and glided back to Jesse. The picture fuzzed.

Voices again. *You should be the one dead.*

"One strike. Brace yourself."

Deep breath.

The air sung with the whistle of the cane flying through it.

Thwack.

Pain.

He arched back with it, his ass a red fire. His knees almost buckled but Savin was there. Goddamn fucking son of a bitch. The single stroke of the cane hurt more than any hand or whip he imagined. But the sure support around his waist, smooth fingers gripping his hips, holding him upright, steadied him.

"Shhh, love," Savin whispered next to his ear, his long fingers stroking carefully over the welt. The press hurt more but was...comforting. "Come back to me. Center on my touch." The mouth trailed down over the skin of his neck, back and to his buttocks. "Pay attention to my lips." Savin landed a kiss on the throbbing mark, running soft brushes over the line. Again. Cooling the fire. Bringing Jesse back from hell.

The haze of his mind cleared, rage softening with the hypnotic movement on his skin. A fragile peace settled over him, matching Savin's gentleness. Yes. Christ, he wanted this. Not just the sensations his Magician gave him but the contact. To be seen, as if his life were a Braille text covering his body that Savin's magic fingertips read with every touch. Caressing him as if he were precious. Even the pain, the punishment and teasing were delivered with a reverence Jesse didn't understand. How could Savin stand it? Touching him when he was so stuffed with the shit that ate away at him? His skin should be acid, repugnant to Savin. But he loved that touch. Loved...

"That's it, pet. Join me here." The vibrations of the words teased his buttocks, and Savin followed the command by blowing on the skin below his ass directly onto his balls.

So good. His dick pressed harder into his navel.

The buzz left him floating, the anger disappeared into the ether as if it hadn't just charged through his body full force. Savin really was magic, a distant part of his brain commented.

His Magician worked his way up Jesse's torso, part of Jesse wanted to beg him to keep his mouth down near his ass and groin and use it to make him moan. A warm body pressed into his back where he remained leaning, arms wrapping his chest and drawing him upright. Savin's heartbeat thudded at his back, vital and reassuring. Alive. Only increasing that hypnotic state into which he'd fallen. Yes. Good.

The low voice at his ear kept him in place even more than the restraining arms. "Good, love," Savin encouraged. "I know you want the truth from me but I won't let the ugly in my life become yours."

Jesse focused on the skyline outside the windows. The sunlight filtering through the wide glass and the energy that was Vegas even during the day. A question hatched in his mind, strong and clear from the remnants of the rage and the bizarre hours they'd spent together. "Have you been in love before?"

Silence from Savin. A slow answer then. "Once."

A green constriction strangled Jesse's heart a split second. "Who?" His mind raced to the dozen taut bodies of those stage assistants. The submissives at Savin's fucking beck and call.

"A boy. Someone back from high school. Quite a jock, really. Liked to climb mountains." A smile was in that voice.

Warmth melted the iced-green constriction in a sudden rush. He blew out, aware of the skin and fine hairs of Savin's arm meeting his chest. The slight squeeze of his rib cage. "Yeah? Kind of young back then to be falling in love."

"I never thought so. But I do know it makes you want to give the person you love what they need."

Jesse stayed silent. Savin was trying, he'd give him that. But if he insisted Jesse should let go, be everything he was without fear, then that included Jesse's desire to understand and help. He stayed in his calm, more centered now than the first moment the strange woman had popped into the room. "And if what the person you love needs is truth? I want this to work, Savin. I do." Almost all the shake was gone from his voice. "You've already given me something amazing. But damn if I don't feel I'm owed something more. If it means I suck as a submissive, fine."

Savin's hands shifted and he dug into Jesse's sides, spun him around to face him. A hunger in his slate eyes. "You make me crazy, you know that?" Savin leaned closer, lips hovering over Jesse's. No touching. So close. Damn tease. Finally his tongue slid out and licked an erotic trail over Jesse's bottom lip. A nip, teeth catching on and holding skin for a long count. Possessive. Enough to make Jesse groan. Savin's mouth pressed forward, eating him soft and deep. Wet, fucking seduction. He returned the favor.

Wanting to taste. Drown in the power of the man and stamp his own damn ownership onto him no matter who Jesse called Master.

Savin pulled away with gentle insistence. "Have I told you how beautiful you are?" The resignation in his voice was a killer.

Jesse snorted. "I'm the one with an ugly puss. You're the GQ model."

"Do you remember in high school, beginning of sophomore year before the accident, when you were sitting in the cafeteria with your friends? You were already popular and your table was full. It was a regular afternoon. I sat at a nearby table and watched you. A boy came in. A nobody really. Overweight. A little slow. After several months of school it was clear he had no friends. I saw you frown when a guy from your table pointed the kid out and started making loud, derogatory remarks, calling him names. You turned so the awkward student was in your line of sight. He sat alone at another table, had just spilled his milk carton over his food and looked about as miserable as a kid can be. You said something to the girl sitting next to you, got up, and brought yourself and your tray over to him. I remember your smile as you sat next to him and made a light comment about how ridiculous those containers were to open and that you spilled yours all the time. You ate the rest of your lunch with him."

Jesse shook his head. "I don't remember that day."

"Funny, it's etched in my mind. It's the day I fell in love with you."

Electric current ran down Jesse's skin. He focused on remembering how to draw in air, breathe out again.

"And you were more beautiful at the time than any GQ cover spread. You still are." Savin cupped his face with one palm, stroked a thumb over his shadowed cheek, making Jesse's chest tighten. "We'll talk, love. Some more. No promises of all the answers, but—"

A timid knock at the door interrupted his speech. Damn.

"Come," Savin called.

The man from the show entered. The one who'd been zipped up in the hanging sack and ended up fucking in the cage. His head dipped and he dropped to his knees. "Master."

"David," Savin answered, releasing Jesse and stepping back, completely unconcerned to be found naked, wet and holding another naked man. But of course he was. This David was a submissive and Savin sure as hell was a Dominant. But was he more? Christ, his mind re-latched on to that question and the perverse son of a bitch he was, the uncertainty turned him on.

Savin approached the other man, his eyes sweeping the kneeling figure. "Stand up, David. Strip. You know your duties. Is Stephanie better this morning?" The warm concern in his voice kicked active the wicked green envy inside Jesse.

"Yes Sir," David replied, standing and beginning to shuck his jeans and t-shirt. "She's adjusting to the idea of your leaving." The guy's cock sprung out of his pants, erect already. Savin clearly had the same effect on this guy as on Jesse.

David's frenum was pierced, that area on the underside of the shaft just behind the glans. Jesse's cock waved at the sight, almost damn right greedily wanted the same. But the brief visual of getting it done came with the picture of Savin holding Jesse's dick with a needle in hand. Imagining the look of thrill on Savin's face as he did the piercing just about made Jesse come standing there.

David stole a glance over at Jesse before retraining his eyes on the floor. "Master, may I ask a question?"

"You may."

"Is your guest the man Kris said you invited here after the show last night?"

"Yes."

David's tongue licked his lips but the gesture was far from a nervous one. "Will you give me permission to play with him later? To entertain you?"

Fuck. He hadn't thought about Savin including him in the festivities of his stable of subs. He was not ready for that. Was he? His balls crept higher while his stomach gave a sick lurch. Christ, but what would he do if Savin commanded it?

Savin chuckled. "From the look on your face, Boyo, I'd say you don't know whether to freak and run away or beg me to chain you up and let David get busy with you."

His damn tongue was stuck to the roof of his mouth.

"No playing today, David," Savin answered, and smiled at the look of disappointment on his sub's face.

Thank Christ.

"Although I'll think about it for later."

Fuck.

"I want you to start with the spare bedroom this morning. I'll be going out shortly and don't expect to return before you finish cleaning. Lock up when you're done."

"Of course, Master."

After a gesture of dismissal by Savin, David began down the hallway toward the bedrooms, shooting one last glance of wicked invitation Jesse's way. No way could Jesse have guessed his life would take this bizarre turn.

His mind scrambled to distract his throbbing erection, but since Savin stood about three feet away, the cause was lost before it began. Two hundred feet away wouldn't have been much better. Jesse tossed his head at the retreating man. "Does he know about your big secret?"

"Is that the panic speaking at your close call with David or true curiosity?" Savin asked, a glint in his slate eyes and the corner of his lip turning up.

There went that damn divot in his chin again. The smug, sexy-as-hell bastard. "Both," he ground out, hating to admit it.

Savin swept him with the same penetrating examination he'd given David. But with a lot more hot hungry kick to it. "I think you and I need a break. How about something more normal? What were you intending to do today before I stampeded into your life and decided to lock you up for the weekend?"

Jesse's mind stuttered, trying to switch tracks, absorb the somewhat predatory look with the meaning of the question. What sort of normal was Savin talking about? "I'm not sure what you mean by 'normal'. Corrine would probably have dragged me shopping if she was still in the picture."

"If it wasn't up to her, but your call?"

Good question. And he'd go crazy, or crazier than he was at the moment if he didn't try to take the query at face value. Before this previous twenty-four hours, he hadn't known what he wanted to do. The last two years had been a bottomless black vortex. But now...? "Climbing. I'd have found the local climbing club or checked out staff recommendations for verticals at one of those outdoor gear stores."

"I'm going to overlook the obvious appeal of all of those ropes being needed for the activity and check my inner Dom at the door. Let's just go and enjoy the hell out of a climb. I know a local club where we can pick up the equipment or rent some. I'm going to put on clothes, have your bags sent up from the front desk then you'll get dressed and we'll head out." He glanced toward the dining room table where the solitary mug of spilled tea rested. "We'll pick up breakfast on the way."

"Oh, definitely none of the boss man in those instructions." Still, the plan sat perfect with him and his off-kilter brain and body. And with his intentions to keep Savin on the hook for explanations.

"Jesse, I promise you will never mistake when my Dom comes out to play."

He swallowed hard. "I believe it."

"Good. Now get showered. We have a long day ahead."

As Jesse found himself heading to the bathroom, cursing at how easily he fell into his Magician's plans, he reviewed his resources. Savin wasn't the only one used to dealing with recalcitrant or stubborn folks. He'd coaxed two fairly disabled adult individuals to eat, take their medicines, basically keep agreeing to live. He'd done it for over ten years. He'd dig in until Savin agreed to answer his questions. Fully.

Enough with letting the D/s limits roadblock this need. He wasn't stupid. Whatever mystery painted itself black and dangerous in the Magician's life, he'd peel back the layers until he hit it. Because no way would this man run into danger without someone protecting him. No matter what superpower he claimed already.

So he'd agreed to lie down, expose his belly and wait for the man to torment him. It may make him hotter than hell and medicate to shit his anger, but agreeing to the deal didn't mean a lobotomy. His dick might ache for the man, but Savin wouldn't get away with hiding any more than he demanded Jesse avoid it.

The mountaintop was Jesse's territory. Watch out, Magician.

Chapter Seven

Jesse led the way, his grip on the rock a thing of grace and amazement to Savin with his lover's fingertips wedged into the smallest of cracks and his use of simple human strength to pull his entire body weight up to the next hold. Goddess, Jesse was that strength. Harsh and lovely and tenacious.

The grit coating Savin's teeth from the sandpaper red-brown rock of the landscape, coupled with the baking yellow sun drew him out of his circling thoughts. The climb was no strain on him although they'd made four pitches already, leaving it too easy to focus on the morass of emotions Jesse and his demands drew out from Savin. Easy as well to fall back into the bubbling fury from catching Tzrina in his living room, standing mere feet from his Boyo. He'd been seconds from obliterating her, and wasn't that the problem? His control was no longer trustworthy with his newfound strength, but he was too selfish to cut this weekend short.

He was relieved with the opportunity to escape Las Vegas today to the Red Rock Canyon. The awareness of the gate, coalescing somewhere on the Strip near where Flamingo crossed Las Vegas Boulevard, grew stronger, digging into his insides with clamps, calling with insistence. Yes, better to get out of the city. This was right. Doing something that passed for normal at a time when a great whirlwind of change poised, ready to sweep them up, spin them in a dervish and crush them against rock much like that of this mountain.

It didn't escape Savin the symmetry of spending this lost weekend together climbing to the way their relationship began over a decade ago. Granted they'd been hiking more than climbing that day. He caught Jesse's look when suggesting the climb and was certain he was thinking the same.

"The rock plateaus up ahead," Jesse called over his shoulder.

Savin was aware Jesse needed to rest, unzip their packs and drink water, but part of him wanted to keep climbing and avoid the promised conversation.

With a last grunt, Jesse set his arms and pushed up and over the ledge of the plateau, moving to the side to make room for Savin to join him. Sharp-edged protrusions covered the rocky ledge a few yards deep, leaving little room for comfortable rest. But it would do.

Jesse squatted, gazing out over the sandstone mountains, the Joshua trees studding the landscape and the wide, empty plains beneath. "God, I've missed this." He ran a hand through his short, dark hair, wet from exertion, and then over his shadowed jaw.

Resting next to him, it was impossible for Savin to avoid sweeping his gaze over his Boyo's body, slim hips, fine ass, corded thighs. "How often do you climb?"

Jesse focused on unzipping his pack. "Haven't since my parents died. But before that I went out maybe once a month." His lips turned up in a wry smile. "I agreed to the climbing as a concession to friends' demands I do something just for myself not related to work or home."

Savin's face must have shown his surprise because Jesse continued. "Yes, I did have friendships, asshole. Or at least as many as I had time for."

"Of course," he answered. The reassurance that Jesse's life contained elements of normalcy loosened some of the tension knotting Savin's shoulders and back.

Jesse passed the water bottle to him. "How come I'm sweating a rainforest and you're cactus, man? Christ, even after a climb you're beautiful, GQ. Or is that part of your secret eye-glow magic identity I'm not supposed to know?"

"Jesse," he growled, but the warning just made the man roll his eyes.

Jesse settled quietly after that, taking back the bottle, slowly rolling it between his calloused palms as his eyes fell distant, caught in some inside place Savin wished he could visit.

"Why climb?" His impulsive jealousy of Jesse's private thoughts pushed him to break the silence. "What does it bring you?"

Jesse glanced over at him, accusing. "It's your fault I started. After that day on Mount Washington."

"Ah, so you did it to keep alive fond memories of me." He made it into a light joke, but really the iron grip caging his heart squeezed down. The desire to end his loneliness bit with sharp teeth. Too tempting and not at all part of his plans.

"Self-important bastard, aren't you, Magician?"

Savin shrugged. "It comes with the job description."

Jesse snorted. "The climbing started after Mount Washington, but...I did it to stay alive." His eyes dropped to the floor of the ledge. "Mostly in Westlea I was a dead man walking." Jesse refocused on the mountains and stark, beautiful red-rock vista, sounding as if he'd gone as far as he could, referring to his history. "Up high, I can almost remember how it was before the accident. The wanderlust. The beauty of the world. Just enough to keep me going. It's about the only place I feel God."

"You believe in one?"

The black hurt in Jesse's resounding laugh stripped tendon from bone inside Savin.

"I believe. I was just never on good terms with the motherfucker after the car crash." His gaze sharpened on Savin. "I thought we came here for normal. A little guy talk. Maybe sports. Not the heavy crap, since you obviously don't want to talk about the real issue."

"Football then?"

Jesse's eyes narrowed and swept Savin's body with a look that hardened his cock. "No," Jesse said. "You're definitely not the football type. Something with more finesse."

Fencing maybe. No, wrestling. Greco-Roman style." His wicked grin brought a sizzle to even the thinner air of these heights.

Savin chuckled. Was his Boyo trying to seduce him? It would take little to break his plan to limit the day to climbing and conversation. The magic coiled inside his blood stretched out, sniffing the rarified air and nosing out toward his companion. The beast was too fond of how well-fed it had been from sex with Jesse to make Savin rest easy. What would this much magic do to his control? The queen's opinion of Jesse's role in this left Savin shaky.

Jesse took another swig of water and slid him a look. "Earlier, after your big declaration of the heart, you never asked me if I'd been in love."

"Not my business." Savin's stomach clenched as he faked nonchalance and he looked down to his own pack, pretending to root through it for an item. Jesse hadn't returned the sentiment then, although that was much better in the long run. "I won't push."

"You're such a hypocrite. Here I thought everything about me was your business this weekend."

"I ask you what I consider necessary and what pleases me."

"So, you don't want to know?"

Savin shrugged even as he dug nails into his palm. "If you wish to tell me."

"That's some yawn-stopping enthusiasm in your voice." Jesse's lips twisted, unhappy.

Savin forced his limbs to remain loose. He crossed his arms. "Fine. Do tell, please."

"You have to know what I'm going to say and you're being a star-studded asshole about it."

Savin let the sick roil in his belly morph to anger. Much easier to manage. "I really don't want to hear about your past girlfriends."

"What?" Jesse's brow furrowed and he blinked hard. A pause. Then, "It's you. I love you."

No you do not. There is nothing to love in the fae. It's too dangerous. "You only think so. This weekend is an emotional experience, giving yourself to me. Your reaction is understandable after our earlier friendship."

Jesse stood from his squat, dropping his canteen. "You are *not* going to tell me how I feel, Savin. You get to tell me you love me, but if I do it I'm deluded. Fuck it, I dreamed about your damn pendant for years." He snorted. "I love you. It happened a sunny afternoon at the base of a goddamn mountain when I was eighteen. I was kind of young for it. But I do know it makes you want to give the person you love what they need."

Savin remained carefully seated, his magic stirring and demanding response to the threatening posture. How little he trusted himself now. "No need to throw my words in my face, Boyo."

"It's Jesse. For this discussion here, now, it's Jesse. And I am not going to forget that Tzrina's visit or my questions. Mostly because my gut's screaming at me that you're in some type of trouble. And to give you what you need, goddamn help. Instead, you're locking me out."

Savin stared up at the man, letting his expression warn his Boyo away from the dangerous edge he treaded. "Okay, *Jesse*, you want full disclosure? Are *you* willing to be a good boy and open up about your parents, your brother? The entire hellish story? Tell me what it was like the day you came back from that trip to the news? Or at your brother's funeral or your parents' funerals years later?"

Jesse's eyes widened and his face blanked as if he was physically unable to respond.

"That's what I thought." Savin's answer was a slicing razor and he hated himself the minute it passed his lips. He softened. "Your concern means everything to me." He wrapped a hand around his lover's ankle. "Sit."

Still speechless, Jesse squatted next to him, a jerky movement. Savin reached out, stroked a rough cheek. He sighed. "If you give me a moment, I will tell you what I can. I don't do well being forced. Call it a Master's shortcoming."

Savin spent a moment soothing the demanding pull of his energy, filing down the sharp blades of the magic. Goddess, the effort was more difficult than ever before.

His Boyo was a determined, stubborn man, but he'd known that already. How else would he have managed all these years? If Savin didn't provide some answers, Jesse would continue to beat his head into the wall and perhaps place himself in more danger.

He chose a point on the horizon to watch as he spoke, vague images of the tunnel of light and the freezing ice of his travel here through the gate as a child flashing back. "Since you already seem willing to believe what should sound unbelievable to most, then I will say plainly that I am not human."

Silence.

Jesse stirred next to him, hand rubbing along a jeans-clad thigh. "What are you?" His voice croaked low and he cleared it, obviously trying to regain his self-possession.

"The closest word in this language is fae. Faeries, as mortals like to call us."

The response came slowly, Jesse's voice still a bit hollow and scratchy. "And by that you don't mean you bend your pinkie delicately holding a teacup and you aren't referring to why you like inside my ass?"

Savin smiled. There went the humor that attracted him to Jesse to begin with. He deserved answers, or as many as were safe to provide. "No bent pinkies. More standing circle of stones and gates to another realm although without the actual stones. I have no answer for Stonehenge and the like. But magic, yes. Glamour, yes. No wings or faerie dust involved. More in the spirit of the maniacal self-centered evil elf willing to grind everything and everyone else into said dust."

Jesse's eyes had popped wide and he'd lost the last remnants of the blankness. "Fuck. This is true?"

"True. But almost useless for you to know. My...associates, those like me who live on Earth, are planning to return to Faerie in a few days. They need my help to open the gate home. We've had differences of opinion in the past, so I am less than popular with them."

"Tzrina called you prince. You're some kind of Faerie royalty?"

"Not in any way that matters."

"And why are you here? Are you going back? Why was Tzrina threatening you?"

"I will assist the other fae opening the gate. They will be pleased to go home. The rest is a matter of detail." As close to a lie as he'd come. Even that much hurt to say as he saw irritation flash again on Jesse's face.

"Why do I get the feeling that what you're *not* telling me is enough to fill a stadium or two?"

"Because you're intelligent and observant. But fae strength can end your life faster than in a breath." *Tzrina or Eamon could have simply wished your lungs and heart into malfunctioning.* His muscles tensed with the thought. But he didn't want to scare Jesse. Or worse, poke at his rage and instigate him to some misguided drive to man-up. He needed to quash that drive in as brutal a way as possible. "Your 'help', as you call it, would be more hindrance than anything to me. Like asking a flea to help in a battle against another man."

"Fleas bite. And I do too if given a chance."

"Leave this alone, Jesse. Take this weekend for what I've offered. Then get on your plane and allow me to take care of my business. It's none of yours. I have my own plans and don't want to worry about stumbling over any pesky mortal while pursuing them. I'm countless times stronger than you and the last thing I need is your help."

"Pesky mortal. No wonder you sound so stilted. English is a second language. What's your first? Pretentious-holier-than-thou asshole?"

"You wanted to know. I've told you what I can. I deserve respect for my boundaries as much as I respect yours with a safe word. Not to mention the fact that we are not the same. I never agreed to be your submissive and obey your will because that is not what I need. You, on the other hand, are in dire need of a spanking at this point."

"So, the fact we've both admitted we have feelings for one another means jack shit?"

"Love matters but ultimately is not enough if our destinies are not the same. The Beatles got it wrong. *All We Need is Love* is a fool's refrain."

And as much as I wish it different, my love is an illusion. It has to be. Goddess, it was as if he were shredding his own insides with each word.

"The Beatles? Guess fae aren't out of the pop culture loop. Or have you been on some secret spy mission all this time to steal our top forty legacy?" He shoved his hand

through his hair. "Jesus, Savin, you expect me to listen to this and accept your pat on the head, dismissing me after you get your fill of play? Like I'm a meaningless toy you can throw aside when you're done?"

"That comment's beneath you, Jesse. I care enough to want to give you something this weekend. If it's helpful, you can seek something like it from another Master or Mistress."

Jesse stood. "One size fits all? Give him a little petting and pain, tie him up and hand him over to the next Dom to work more miracles. Maybe it works that way for you with your stable of subs back at the ranch, but not me. What the hell are you so afraid of?" His voice rose to a yell, his mouth a slash of pained anger.

This time Savin's magic refused to allow him to remain lower than Jesse. The position rubbed against the ingrained habit of a Dominant he'd developed over the years. He rose.

Jesse's face turned red and the lines of rage firmed around his mouth and brow. He stepped closer to Savin, invading his space. Savin's magic snapped its teeth, pulling against his leash.

The buzzing in Savin's head swarmed up and mixed with an arousal so intense, a lust for the passion and potency vibrating off this man, a cavernous hunger for it, that Savin almost choked.

"I'm not afraid. But from the looks of it you need to stop now."

Jesse stepped closer. "Asshole. It's some sort of mind game to tell me you love me. You don't trust me. You ask me to trust you and leave it alone but you don't trust me. But of course. I'm a selfish bastard who screws up everyone's life."

His fists were clenched tight, his breathing growing faster as he pushed his chest into Savin's. The scent of his rage, the core of it layered so deeply in his soul that it twined into everything, stoked the magic's attempts to reach out and snare the mortal. Savin scrambled for control and to center himself in the knowledge that his Boyo needed him. Jesse's fury looked to take him over, throw him into a dissociative state that had little to do with their discussion. Goddess weep, they were on the ledge of a mountain. Jesse could easily fall in his rage. Savin's fault for allowing this discussion at a place like this. His trust in his judgment was gone. But he had to do something or they'd never make it down safely.

"Enough!" Savin placed a firm hand on Jesse's shoulder and barked out his steel command as he pressed downward. "Kneel. Now. Carefully, the rocks are sharp."

Jesse twisted his upper body away but he stayed rooted in place. As if half his soul tried to yank away from the call to submit. The other half fighting to give it all up.

"Of course you're pulling the Master crap. Motherfucker," Jesse growled even as he let Savin press him down, his eyes falling to the ground as they burned resistance. He fought it all the way, but, Goddess, it was beautiful watching him kneel.

"You'll listen to my voice, Boyo." Savin unzipped his fly with quick motions, using the hand not weighing Jesse's shoulder. His cock sprang out, thick and aching and

hungry as much as his magic. He pushed the fabric of his jeans down to give it freedom. "You want to lose it over my decision, you do it in a safe place. I won't allow you to be unsafe. Plans have changed. Right now you're going to suck my cock. Take all of me until I gag that throat of yours. Hands behind your back, wrists clasped. Now! Your only job is to make me come. We worry about the rest later."

Jesse growled again but placed wrists behind him. Shaking his head in jerks as if trying to dislodge the dark thoughts stuffing it full. His eyes still too wide, pupils large despite the brightness of the day.

Savin grabbed his short, dark hair, pulled that snarling mouth toward his erection and watched as Jesse opened his mouth wide with a rumble and latched on, as if he struggled with hating the lifeline offered to him but couldn't refuse the help.

The suction was hot, intense, a strong clamp around Savin's shaft. He held Jesse's head tight, pulling at the roots of his hair to cause sensation and bring him back to the moment. Savin forced his penis deeper into the cavity of his Boyo's mouth until he bumped the back of his throat. He thrust forward, his groin pumping with a life of its own. The sight of his Boyo's lips stretched around him made him wild. That face twisted in pain and anguish and need. So hot, so heartbreaking. Goddess, please!

Jesse's energy intensified as he scraped teeth against skin and sucked with his angry fervor, as if he could eat Savin in his entirety and finally fill that dark chasm in his soul. But he kept his anger contained, met Savin's demands just as he had the night before despite his mistrust of himself. Jesse was made for this.

The honesty of Jesse's actions, the depth he sank into the service he gave Savin after so short a time provided even more temptation to the prowling magic. As he gasped against the erotic, aroused, mind-blowing pleasure of Jesse's mouth, Savin's controls loosened and the magic leaped forward, grabbing for primacy even as he fought to catch it.

Mine!

His hips pumped faster, his cock hardening to an ache, his balls pulling tight to his body as electricity traveled his spine. Almost there.

"Open your pants, stroke yourself," Savin ordered, voice lashing with his spiraling pleasure.

The hands moved from behind Jesse's back, fumbled at his crotch as he unbuttoned his jeans and took down the fabric to his thighs. Savin moaned at the picture of that rigid length of cock, slit weeping, veins popped and skin darkened, standing away from his Boyo's body. He imagined it wrapped in chain, pierced or locked in a spiked cage, hard and red, suffering with an edge of pain to please its Master.

Jesse's large hand wrapped the organ and began fast, furious strokes. The other hand cupped his balls, squeezing them between fingers as his groin pumped helplessly into his own palm. All the while he still worked his mouth over Savin's erection, sucking with desperate intensity.

Too much. Savin couldn't hold it longer. "Coming, Boyo. Swallow it down."

Savin exploded, the spurt of seed flowing into his lover's mouth, drank down with sounds of groaning want. Even in the throes of the orgasm he ground out his words. "Come for me, love."

Fist squeezing a last stroke, hips hammering in uncoordinated jolts, Jesse spent, ejaculate spraying onto his belly and shirt.

The perfect moment hit and Savin's magic tore free of its last restraints, greedy and sinking hooks into the totally opened soul of his lover. Jesse's boundaries were nonexistent as everything flew loose in his surrender to the Domination and the release. His raw self exposed.

The fae magic ate Jesse's truth, preening and crowing and shoveling the purity of the soul into its maw.

Savin was dizzy with the meal, his energy filling to heights he hadn't imagined possible. So good, equal to the perfection of the orgasm and making him drunk off it.

With a last cry, Jesse released Savin's spent cock from his mouth, fell back on his ass, hands catching him while scraping along the rock. Savin staggered back a few steps, disoriented from his reaction to the feeding. The power of it. The image of Soliandra smoked into his vision, her pleased smirk fogging out everything else. No, she wouldn't haunt him today. He shoved her out of his head in time to see Jesse.

His Boyo lurched to his feet, panting, his expression still unfocused from post-coital collapse. He raised his gaze to Savin. "Jesus, your eyes again. Fucking starbursts."

At the attention, Savin's magic swung around toward the voice, licked its lips and crooned for more. Unfocused, Savin lost his grip on it and the energy launched out and into the wind, a blind cache of power filling the air between them.

The blunt impact of the magic against his Boyo had Jesse stumbling back, losing his footing, his mouth wide with surprise. "Shit."

Too late, Savin watched his lover's distance to the edge shorten as he faltered. Savin cried out, "No!"

Jesse fell over the cliffside.

Savin's head and heart screamed, a killing force of refusal. Blood pulsing a tidal wave through veins too small to contain the demand of it.

"No!" he screamed again.

He reached.

Power answered the call, lassoing out with fine, exacting control, diving down to follow and to snatch at the plummeting body.

Savin's energy wrenched Jesse from the air, denying gravity and the will of the universe to pull him back up to the ledge. It lowered the clenched body to the rock floor.

With soft intention, it released. Jesse collapsed.

He coughed, turned to his side and retched bile.

Savin stormed to him, went down to his knees, ignoring the cut of jagged rock, holding his lover's head as his stomach emptied and turning the man gently to his back once the spasm passed. He had to touch Jesse. Confirm he was still there. Still alive.

"Christ," his Boyo said between gulping breaths. "You saved my life."

Savin swallowed the bitter that wanted to explode up from his gut. Widened his lids against the sting of his eyes.

He shook his head. "No. I came close to killing you. I'm a monster who will only hurt you in the end."

"Savin." Jesse's body was shivering as he tried to deny the words.

All of Savin was a well of sick dread.

He leaned his forehead against Jesse's jaw, curling over the vulnerable man, needing more contact to pull it together. His voice croaked against his Boyo at the juncture of throat and shoulder blade. "You may hate to hear it, but walking away from me, leaving this alone, is the only way to keep you alive." He pulled his head up, gripped Jesse by the chin to capture his eyes, force him to understand. "And keeping you alive is all that matters to me."

Time to cut Jesse loose altogether. Before it was too late.

Chapter Eight

Jesse slammed the door after following Savin into the suite. Goddamn the asshole if he thought so little of Jesse, throwing out melodramatic declarations and giving him the silent treatment down the mountain and during the car ride back. And what sort of head trip was this "I'm a monster" thing?

Savin placed his gear down on the side table and started walking back toward the bedrooms. "Pack your bags. We leave for the airport in ten minutes."

"No fucking way. I'm not getting on a plane any sooner than my ticket Monday. You promised me a weekend. I'm holding you to it."

Savin pivoted, a flash in his eye. "You're leaving now!"

"You want me gone then you use that special magic mojo on me. Otherwise I'm staying." He squeezed his fists, preparing for battle. He even managed to keep his damn eyes up and shooting back at the Magician despite the instinctual reflex to drop them under his glare.

So the gaze made his skin stand on end and his cock twitch? Just because he was angry at Savin didn't mean he'd lost his reaction to the power of him. He wasn't dead, just pissed as hell.

A voice cleared from across the room and both men turned to the sound.

Kris, the guy who'd shown Jesse and Corrine up to the suite that first evening after the magic show. Light blond hair neatly trimmed, blue eyes respectful but sharp. He wore dress pants and an open-at-the-collar button-down, a contrast to their dirt-streaked climbing wear.

"Excuse me, Master," Kris said, his eyes averted. "I didn't mean to intrude. But the casino owner asked me to deliver this note to you immediately, so I thought I'd wait until you returned to avoid any time lag before you read it."

Savin's formidable calm deepened, and after about a ten count, he walked to Kris and accepted the envelope, sending him a particularly genuine smile. "Thank you, pet."

Jesse ground his teeth together at the gentleness in his tone. He experienced an instinctual urge to throw Kris out of the suite then checked the attitude. Why should he care?

Savin scanned the contents of the letter. "It looks like I'm busy tonight. As the show is closing, the management wants me to sit down and review my thoughts on other magicians they might try to acquire. And go over some legal details of terminating my contract early." He smirked at Jesse, a goddamn highhanded expression, and Jesse's blood pressure shot Eiffel Tower high. "Zero time for fun, I'm afraid," Savin purred.

No, he'd keep it together. Savin would not need to pull out that Master shit to bring Jesse down from his temper. This wasn't a moment to confirm Savin's high opinion of himself.

"Fine. Kris will go out with me and show me Vegas tonight." He hated to drag the man into the middle of the argument, but Savin had started the immature crap.

Kris' eyes went wide. Savin's narrowed to slits and attempted to flay Jesse alive.

After a long minute of silence where Kris tried to catch Savin's gaze, obviously begging for some sort of direction to escape the seismic tension in the room, the Magician's expression lightened.

"Kris, you're going to the club as usual this evening?"

"Yes Sir."

"David will be there?"

"As he is every Saturday night there's no show and you don't ask for his service."

"Good." Savin's smirk had returned. "Jesse, you have my permission to go out on the town. Kris will be taking you to the Butterfly Club. Since I won't be able to put you through your paces, but you so clearly want to finish the weekend as we agreed, I'll be turning you over to Kris' tender care. He's an excellent switch when needed and will top you well with my permission."

"Savin."

"Do you have a problem with that?"

Shit! But he had a point to prove. "No."

"As David asked so nicely to play with you this morning, I'm inclined to reward him. Kris, please direct David and Jesse in a scene of your choosing, although you'll keep in mind his novice standing. His safe word is Mount Washington."

Savin focused his attention on Jesse. "David is a great fan of exhibitionism so I'm sure you will receive plenty of attention at the club. Kris will keep you safe. Obey him as you'd obey me. His hand is an extension of mine tonight. No one will be allowed to touch you other than those subs belonging to me. I'll choose some club wear for you and lay it out in the guest bedroom. In the meantime, shower and I'll fill Kris in on the limits we agreed on in our verbal contract."

Jesse's entire body was one huge, fucking, tangled knot. "If you think you're going to get me to leave pulling this shit you don't know me very well."

Savin's lips firmed. "Then you will obey?"

"Yes, *Master*."

"I don't enjoy sarcasm, Boyo. Kris will make sure you receive a pretty punishment for that disrespectful tone. Now get the hell into the bathroom. I find I'm tired of you right now."

His gut contracted but Jesse buried the pain hard. He was used to that.

* * * * *

Jesse sat next to Kris in the BMW convertible as they drove down Las Vegas streets toward the club. The top was down and Jesse sucked in the fresh air. It took supreme effort not to squirm in his seat and embarrass himself.

After the earlier shower, the cold water doing nothing to calm the supertanker of “pissed off” inside him, he’d emerged to find black leather pants with the groin, buttocks and inside panels made to snap off and leave chaps. To their side was a matching leather jacket. No shirt, no underwear. But the kicker was the other “extras” the Magician had left. A cock harness for his shaft and balls that strapped his hips and wrapped under his perineum to leave room to secure a butt plug. The silver plug sat nice and shiny next to the harness and a squeeze bottle of lube. The whole thing included a locking device around the harness buckle with a small key. Savin’s scrawling handwriting on the accompanying note kept his blood burning high after seeing the club wear.

Wear the harness and plug under the pants. Lock it on. Give Kris the key once they’re secure. No one has permission to be inside your ass tonight except me. What happens to your cock, however, is another matter. I’m sure Kris will employ all of his creativity. Enjoy your night on the town, Boyo.

No signature.

Jesse had cursed a good dozen times putting on the harness and plug, preparing to show Savin none of the discomfort from wearing the stuff when he exited the bedroom even as the plug sent constant sparks through the nerve endings in the first few inches of his anus. The hard-on he couldn’t hide. No underwear meant it was pressed tight against the leather, the material arousing him more as his shaft rubbed against the grain while he moved.

But when he walked into the living room, he found only Kris, leaning back against the fireplace mantle with arms crossed. “Savin left for his meeting.” He held out his palm, waiting.

Jesse swore again and handed him the key.

Interestingly, the sub attitude melted away from Kris once Savin was gone. The man stood straighter, made clear eye contact and gave Jesse a slow once-over with an appreciative hum at the end. But he’d have to be part Dominant if he also worked as Savin’s business assistant and promotions man as Savin had mentioned. Too beta and he’d be ineffective in professional channels.

“Let’s get going,” he said.

From there they’d picked up the car from the valet and started on their way to the Butterfly. Dusk settled over the busy streets, the hot, dry air of the desert folding around the tourists dressed for dinner and shows or hard play at the tables.

Jesse's fixation on helping Savin was likely fucked. He'd do better to follow the guy's suggestion and go home. But, Jesus, his Magician had crawled under his epidermis and set up permanent shop. His body throbbed with the memory of flying through the air encased in Savin's magic, every nerve ending burning from a combination of that power and his terror. Even now a ghost scent of the man, musk and smoke, floated up to him from his clothing. He imagined Savin holding the black pants and jacket, fingertips stroking the grain of the leather as he laid them on the bed, permanently marking the material.

So he'd stay. When had Jesse ever done things the easy way?

After a few minutes of crisp silence during the drive, Jesse failing at his attempt to forget their destination or the plug up his ass keeping him edgy, Kris slid him a speculative look. "You must have had some type of knock-down-drag-out to put Savin in such a snit. What did you do?"

"I see we're skipping the chitchat and going straight for the jugular. You assume the Magician's mood is my fault."

"Don't know yet." Kris shifted the car into first after a red light. "But Savin's usually smooth tempered. He forgives his subs most everything and I've rarely seen him upset. But, man, was he angry with you."

"I'm just lucky that way."

"Savin's been good to us. Your attitude is not winning you points. Makes me prone to agree you need a bit of an attitude adjustment tonight." He raised an eyebrow.

Savin's Master habits must rub off if one spent enough time around him, but the inherent threat hit as intended. He shifted in his seat, the leather of his pants sliding along the soft leather of the interior.

But maybe this was an opportunity to find an ally. "You protecting him?" Jesse asked with a sudden need to understand the relationships between his Magician and the submissives he kept.

If he wanted to convince the man—strike that, convince the fae—to spill his secrets he needed to drop his own irritable crap and get it together. Forget about wasting energy on the mind fuck of the *Lord of the Rings* come to life, it was time to find his game face and do his research.

Kris' expression turned fervent. "Savin's kink may be control. Like most Dominants he needs it. It feeds something inside him. But regardless, in any D/s situation it's the sub who has the true power. You have the power because ultimately you decide how far a scene goes. Giving up your control is a gift to him. But like any gift it can be misused, withheld, manipulated. Don't crap all over him. He's a good man. He deserves protection."

That paused him. Brought him back to Savin's expression on the mountain after he'd saved Jesse. He'd appeared out of control. And scared of it. "I agree. He deserves more."

Kris softened his regard, watched him between negotiating the traffic-filled streets. "Okay. That I'll buy."

Silence again except for the music vibrating out into the road from the open doors of lesser-known Vegas venues trying to attract patrons away from the main strip. Promises of showgirls and hypnosis, topless vampire reviews and Elvis impersonators. From above came the thump of chopper blades as aerial tours of the nighttime strip skyline got going for the evening.

"How long have you known him?" Jesse asked.

Kris grinned. "Five years. I'd just turned eighteen and hit the streets on my own to find fame and fortune. I'd found the kink scene young and at the time Savin seemed to have a radar for youthful talent with a yen for sexual service as well as performance." He chuckled. "He's a collector by nature. There's fifteen of us. And if you took a poll I'd venture most would say they're in love with Savin Rosca."

Jesse snorted. "No surprise there."

Kris laughed outright. "Yeah, he has that effect on almost everybody – gay, bi or straight, male or female."

"Killer pheromones." Or did faeries have pheromones?

"But until now it's been a one-way street. We worship the guy and he'd do anything for us, but his warmth has been distant. Even in the middle of the most intense scene it's like a small part of him is fighting a battle somewhere else. As if he wants something so badly and is afraid of it at the same time. But from what I saw earlier he was one hundred percent front and center for you."

There it was again. Savin's fear. What would he be trying to control so hard when his subs were obviously ready, willing and able to give it up to him? Hell, Jesse had. This had to be about his fae shit. "Why are you telling me this? I thought you wanted to protect him from me."

The other man's lips twisted. "What I want is for him to be happy." Kris tapped the steering wheel in an absentminded fashion, eyes becoming remote. "Maybe you're good for him."

Jesse let that percolate around his mind, trying out the fit. "Have you ever noticed something...different about Savin?"

"Different how?" Kris' voice held an immediate edge.

"Special. Not...normal."

Pause. "Do you mean that he can do real magic?"

Jesse's mouth must have hung open because Kris smiled again. "You work with and submit to a man for five years and you learn a thing or twenty about him."

"Yeah." Jesse coughed. "I mean that. The magic."

Kris shrugged. "A few of us know or suspect. But Savin is private. He closes down when anyone mentions it. Let out a bare word and you find yourself strapped onto his cross or a spanking bench faster than you can apologize. It's not worth it. He's helped

me to learn more about myself in the last five years than I had in the eighteen previous."

"That never bothered you, not talking about it? I mean, it's a helluva idea."

"He's made it clear its one of his limits. He's my Master, Jesse. If I try to manipulate him past it I deserve what I get and it's a betrayal of the trust we've developed. He's not in love with me and certainly hasn't promised a lifetime. So I respect our contract and get off big-time on what he does have to offer." He frowned. "Or at least I did. Now that he's pulling stakes everything will change."

"You sound worried."

"Savin will take care of us. When he told us the show was closing late last night —"

"Wait, you only knew since after the show yesterday?"

The eyebrow went up again. "Since after he saw you."

That wrenching thing in his chest happened again and he turned to look out the side window, hoping like hell Kris didn't notice his face lose control, leak out the slice of despair starting to build inside. Kris' words were more proof that his appearance meant something significant to the Magician. And it kicked him in the ass that Savin was so set on ending whatever this was.

Fuck it, Jesse had to do something. He wanted to save the man. If only he understood from what. Jesse rolled his eyes at himself at the reaction. Jesus, he'd never learn. He couldn't save everyone. But Savin wasn't everyone.

He glanced over at Kris, the set of his jaw, the light, sure grip on the wheel as he easily maneuvered them through the traffic. He was an attractive man. Sexy even. Jesse's mind surged ahead to the club and his pulse started running faster. If he were a hardwired submissive and not just reacting to Savin specifically, what would it be like to submit to other Dominants? He'd be finding out damn soon thanks to Savin's plans.

* * * * *

The Butterfly was more crowded than the previous evening. The front bar held the same mix of the kink crowd and the just curious, with a low-simmering tension buzzing the air. Jesse probably imagined the inquisitive stares walking into the place next to Kris. The blond exchanged a few friendly words with the front bouncer and again passing the bartender, but it was clear from the moment of entry that they were on a straight course for the back rooms.

Every step closer kicked Jesse's erection up a notch from expectation, the friction of the leather and the full, tingling sensation from his ass.

As they wove through the crowd, Kris placed a hand in the center of Jesse's back, proprietary, leading him through the room with a clear message that the next transition of the evening was on its way. "After we pass through the door you follow a step behind me and keep your eyes lowered. We'll stop after we enter and you will prepare yourself at my direction. Speak only when asked a direct question. The appropriate

response to me is *Sir* followed by compliance to my orders. I will tell you if the rules change or I want something different. And, above everything, you use your safe word if you need it. Not using it stomps all over Savin's trust. He's trusting you to know when things are too much. So am I. When you're not safe, your Master's not safe. Someone like Savin is hurt when the people he cares for get hurt. Hurting is not what this is about, only finding a way through to your true self. Understood?"

Big on those safe word reminders. Savin was trying to keep him safe? Ironical that was what Jesse wanted for Savin as well. The word "trust" kept echoing around his mind. He had at least a few brain cells left after all the blood had abandoned his head and traveled south.

Jesse nodded and dragged in a breath as they reached the door.

At the doorway separating the "front" from what he'd been told was the serious action of the club, another man stood, over six feet, carrot red hair, a welcoming smile on his face as he extended his hand to Kris. "Hey, man, Master Savin called ahead and said you'd be escorting his latest to make sure we knew he had approval to access the dungeon and that he was well taken care of."

The clear innuendo in that last part had Jesse's balls twitching and jaw aching from its clench.

"Master's generously loaned me Jesse for the evening. Jesse, this is Max. Max, Jesse."

Loaned and taken care of as if he were a goddamn library book. Though he doubted any book ever received quite the same treatment. Savin had called ahead. The ink at the back of his neck itched hearing it.

A picture snapped into his mind of his Magician, that sly, slaying grin of his that brought out the divot in his chin. Energy sizzling from him as he touched Jesse's body, tore out a fucking riot of sensation he'd never known existed. He almost expected the man to walk up behind him, his presence loomed so real. God, the club and the day's events had him jazzed high. Too high. As if he were on something.

"Hello," the red-headed bouncer said to him pleasantly enough but without an offered hand. "The rules are basic. Safe, sane, consensual. We keep a close eye on the floor and the private rooms. No alcohol for any players until scenes are completely finished for the night. Although you're free to drink anything nonalcoholic before or during." He glanced over at Kris. "That is, if you're permitted." He chuckled. "No blood. No permanent injuries. No brawling unless appropriate to a scene of course. And privacy for all club visitors. First names only and no one's identity leaves the dungeon." He clasped Kris on the shoulder. "Same for you, man. Though I know it's burned into your memory already."

"Took it in like mother's milk." Kris smiled. "Are David and Stephanie back there?"

"Came fifteen minutes ago. Last I checked they were still sitting at a table, watching. You better move quick if you need them because, knowing David, he's about

to offer himself up for the evening. A few unattached Doms showed up the last five minutes who he'll have scoped in a second flat."

Kris laughed. "Forewarned. Thanks. We'll head in." He turned to Jesse and the smile left. "Deep breath." He touched the center of Jesse's chest. "Obey and you'll be well rewarded." He tossed his head. "Follow."

Kris pushed through the door, Jesse trailing a step behind and his stomach one big cramp, his cock pushing to escape the leather.

The music shifted from that at the front of the club. Something softer but spicier, with a low, thudding beat weaving through it that mirrored the added charge to the new room. They had stepped into a wide hallway with benches and shelves lining the walls.

Kris directed him to halt. "Remove shoes and jacket and unsnap the panels on the pants. Fold it all and place it on the nearest shelf."

Jesse's mind froze at the sharp words, Kris' voice falling into a cool command through the door. Jesus, was he really doing this? But his body started moving without more urging, clearly ready to fall into line. He focused on the task, toeing off his shoes, willing the jitters down hard and pushing back his awareness of the crowd ahead. Removing the panels meant the leather pants turned into leather chaps with his groin and backside fully exposed to the world. The cinch of the cock harness tightened, his dick so hard and primed he felt the slide of pre-cum down the side of his shaft.

Kris slid a collar around his neck, buckling it on.

Jesse took deep breath after deep breath. When Kris reached for his dick with a length of chain and attached a leash to the O-ring on the cock harness, it took all he had to keep from stepping back.

His face flushed warm as Kris turned to lead him through the room by his cock. *Shit, shit, shit.*

A slight buzz floated over his brain as he took in the other patrons. He soaked in impressions of leather, bare skin, the blurred view of dungeon equipment in the background. Soft cries mixed with throaty laughter completed the soundtrack to these visuals. He tried to remember to keep his eyes down and follow behind that required step in order to keep his cock and balls from being wrenched.

He could do this. If Savin wanted to play this game, he'd play right along. Part of him wanted to hold it together to prove he couldn't be manipulated to leave by the Magician. The other part kept imagining Savin watching him, evaluating him as he walked totally exposed into this crowd, becoming aroused as Jesse complied with his orders. And, Christ, Jesse wanted that. Wanted to know the man was turned-on by watching him do this. That he could trust Jesse to give him what he needed. Somehow, it was easier to get through this by picturing Savin in the room.

Distracted by the thoughts, Jesse stumbled before realizing Kris had stopped. A hard tug at his groin brought pain and he gasped before dropping eyes to his dick to watch the reddened organ stiffen more. He risked a quick glance up again. They'd

reached another set of tables at the edge of the room. There, club visitors sat nursing drinks, engaged in conversation, enough room between the furniture so kneeling subs could await their Masters' or Mistresses' wills.

"Look what the kitty cat dragged in," Jesse heard a familiar voice greet Kris at their destination. "Say he's a gift for me and I'll promise you my firstborn, Kris."

David.

"Say hello, Jesse," Kris said, palm again coming to rest on Jesse's back.

Jesse looked up, not sure what the hell Kris expected at this point. Awkward didn't begin to cover this. David's Cheshire cat grin met his gaze and the sub licked his lips, his eyes dropping to Jesse's erection. His balance twisted, mind spinning that much faster.

He jerked his chin and forced out a greeting between clenched teeth. "David."

"Master has kindly provided Jesse for an evening of play. If you grovel nicely, I'll include you. Master explicitly said you deserved a reward."

Something clicked immediately in David, his lids dropping to half-mast. "Of course, Sir."

A sweet grin decorated his tablemate's face. "Me too, Kris?"

"You as well, Steph. But you'll have to move your lovely ass and find us an empty bed center of the floor, big enough for the three of you."

"Yes Sir," she said with an almost girlish squeal, leaving the table in her postage-size latex minidress. Jesse's eyes followed her heart-shaped behind until a firm pinch at his own ass snapped his head back to the table.

Kris moved behind him, leaned his head over Jesse's shoulder and licked a trail over the artery at his neck. "Ready, lovely?" A hand wrapped his chest, Kris' fingers resting over his nipple and squeezing. That bit of pain caused Jesse to suck in a breath. "We'll find a space of our own and have some fun. You are so hot, I know the crowd tonight will love to watch you perform for me."

His buttocks tightened with the pressure of Kris' pants-clad cock at the line of his ass. The press pushed his plug in farther, sent an uncontrolled shudder through his body. Jesus, he didn't know whether he could get through this. But his body clearly wanted it. Which annoyed him even though he'd agreed to this. A tingling irritation started playing his nerves and he squeezed his fists against it, refusing to allow the bite of anger to barge its way in.

Stephanie was back, still beaming as she rested, eyes averted, before Kris. "I've found us space on the dungeon floor, Sir."

"Good girl."

Kris led him by the cock leash through the main part of the room, David and Stephanie trailing next to him.

Other Doms engaged in their own play paused to watch their progress and that had Jesse's ears and throat burning hot. He focused on each step, keeping himself steady as

the pressure building in the room pounded around him, into him. He scrambled to call up Savin's face, the feel of the wind blowing against them up on the cliffside. The peace of the big sky surrounding them amidst the red rock before it had gone bad.

Instead, it called to mind Jesse's terrible rage. The salty taste of Savin's cock in his mouth as he sucked and tried to devour him, eat out all of those secrets. The pain of the Magician's denial after Jesse told the bastard he loved him. Confusion over the incredible admission of Savin's heritage. Jesse's throat started to close as he remembered falling back into his rage up there on the ledge, the lust and love rising up and overwhelming him at the same time the anger rode him hard. The memory left a slicing need to see Savin, yell at him for shoving Jesse into this mind-bending mess of reaction and then trying to push him away.

A hard jerk at his cock told him he'd fallen behind Kris too far. He shook his head and focused eyes on the fist holding the chain as they approached their goal.

They ended at a large king-sized bed on a platform up against one wall. The fitted sheet was black latex and there was no headboard.

"I want all three of you naked and on this mattress. Jesse on your back. Stephanie behind David who'll be on his knees. The gentlemen both need a fine coat of oil on their bodies because there's a wrestling match ahead. I find I want to see those muscles of yours at work, glimmering as you try to pin one another. Winner takes privileges over the other man. David, you get the honors of slicking up our newest guest. Stephanie, as David works on Jesse, you'll apply the oil over David from behind. Don't forget all the pertinent nooks and crannies."

The looming competition had Jesse's blood creeping up from a simmer. He'd avoided any approximation of physical fighting these past two years, afraid of the hair-trigger to his temper. He stuffed the growing worry over his reaction.

As David and Stephanie responded to Kris' commands by shucking their clothing, David commented. "Sir, not all of Jesse's nooks are available with his plug. Can I remove it?"

"No fucking way," Jesse growled before he could stop himself. *Savin's*.

Kris shot him a censoring look before answering David. "Master prefers it to remain on. If you win the match you can use his cock any way you like. He wins, he can fuck you or require you to blow him."

David grinned. "Sounds like I'm a winner any way."

Another growl leaked out of Jesse. Each moment grew increasingly difficult as he fought to keep a lock on it.

"Jesse, quiet! On the bed now. Hands to your sides on the mattress. Don't move them." Kris unlatched the leash and urged Jesse ahead. He removed what was left of his chaps and put them to the side of the bed.

He crawled onto the latex, the plastic sticking to his hands and legs with his sweat. His pulse raced so wild he felt it at his groin, in his throat as he swallowed around his temper.

He lay on his back as directed, Kris' firm orders enough to keep him reacting, moving. Submitting. The power in the switch's words was real but still a shadow of the voice he craved. *Magician*.

Firm hands touched his muscles, warm and slick with oil. Jesse startled, not expecting them even though he realized Kris' voice had whipped another command to David to begin. The fuzz in his head increased.

Stephanie twined around David's back, starting her own intimate massage.

David leaned over him, his large hands rubbing Jesse's chest. Nails trailed over Jesse's tiny buds, digging in as his breath caught. A hand dropped down his rib cage, lower to his stomach and straight toward his genitals.

At the first contact of those hands on his cock, his hips shot off the mattress. His hard-on was almost painful to touch. His balls were so high and primed he expected to come right then.

On time with the danger of ejaculating came Kris' voice. "You come without permission and we move this party to the whipping post."

The crazy burn of arousal from the threat, the desire to obey whether firsthand to Kris or to the looming idea of Savin bought him the control to hold on. Even as David started to massage his balls, dip lower to his perineum and over that line of skin between his sac and anus. Oiled fingers played around the outside edge of the plug, moving the device and sending streaks of pleasure through his ass.

"You feel perfect," David purred, his lips dropping to follow his fingers as they moved to Jesse's thighs and legs. Behind him, Stephanie was running her own slick fingers over David's shaft, another set of digits at his backside, clearly pushing into his hole and causing the man to moan against Jesse's skin where David's teeth made small nips on the skin of his inner thighs.

Jesse wound higher. His hazy mind struggled for focus as natural chemicals coursed through his system. Overload. Needed to stop. No, he was tougher. He wouldn't disappoint Savin.

David moved his mouth up Jesse's body, briefly brushing his groin, licking over his hip and abdomen, his pecs, shoulders, sucking at the skin of his neck while his hands continued to spread the oil. Torture.

And through it all Kris sat on a nearby chair placed for viewing. Jesse turned his head, caught the spark in the switch's eyes as he feasted on the action. Excited as shit. But he wasn't Savin. Wasn't who Jesse needed to be watching. The irritation kicked again. But he wanted to follow his Magician's orders. Needed the man to trust him. Trust. Control. Jesus, he wished Kris had chosen to bind him to the bed. Or a post. Or a table. Anywhere. This was too difficult. Lying still on his own and letting himself be touched by the wrong man.

David's teasing voice brushed his ear. "I can't wait to pin you under me. Do I make you fuck me as the club watches or give me head?"

No.

"Hmm, Steph, rub faster," David moaned as Stephanie coated the lubricant over the sub's cock head.

"What a lovely sight," a feminine voice joined the conversation from near Kris. A familiar voice.

Jesse turned his head, thrashing it over as David stroked down his cock again, twisting it in his oiled fist. Mistress Dalia swam into his vision. Standing next to Kris' chair. His gaze caught on her outfit.

She'd dressed as a cop and casually stroked a baton in her gloved hands as she spoke to Kris. "I need to join Ethan in our private dungeon. It's his birthday and he's always had a fantasy of receiving a rough interrogation." She laughed lightly. "But Master Savin called and asked me to look in on you first. All's well, I'm assuming?"

"Very well, Mistress. I'm getting quite an eyeful, as is the rest of the club. We were just about to move on to the next stage of the festivities. Care to watch longer?"

"Maybe a minute."

Cop. No. That was the woman from yesterday. Just a costume. Not real. Savin checking on him again through another. Not trusting he'd obey. Not trusting him. The frenzy of irritation boiled again, surged up as David's hands invaded his body. He wanted it to stop. Was it supposed to stop?

"David, let Jesse up. Both of you on your knees. Stephanie, off the mattress to your knees next to me. At my count you two go at it. No blows. Wrestling only. First one to have the other pinned to his stomach for my count of ten is winner. You fall off the bed, get your asses back on it immediately."

Jesse struggled up from the latex and to his knees. David's taunting face squared off with him. Jesse wanted to wipe the smile off that mouth.

"Look how fierce he looks. And that gorgeous cock standing tall. Maybe Savin will let me borrow him next." Dalia's words pulled at his rigid muscles, their clench mirroring the fight inside his skin.

Police. The airport flashed.

Keep it together, keep it together, he chanted to himself. The anger slithered inside, the roiling magma force of it zipping around his veins, looking for a way out.

Fight. He'd get to fight.

From behind him yet another new voice sounded, recognizable tones, derision inflecting his words.

Sounding like that man. Eamon. The fae from the other night who attacked Savin.

Holy Fuck, no! Savin!

His head jerked behind him to check. Something flashed in the corner of his eye. Unreal golden hair, a golden iris. There, gone. A phantom.

"On my count," Kris intoned. "Jesse, pay attention!" he snapped.

Danger. Recent threat mixed with past haunts.

"Care to wager on the outcome?" the female cop asked.

Vision fuzzed around the edges.

Police. Danger. How did he stop it? A word? There was a word. What was the word? Screw it, he had to warn Savin. Warn his parents, his brother. Danger.

But the enemy was in front of him on his knees, leering a challenge. Fucking asshole, he'd tear him up. Protect them. The red curtain of pain and fury fell over his sight.

"One, two, three, now!"

Attack. He lunged, body shoving into the dangerous man. He wrapped his hands around the vulnerable neck. Squeezing. Never again would he hurt them. They'd be safe. Wouldn't fail them this time.

"Jesse!"

Arms scrambled to hold him back. He snarled and struck behind him, throwing his elbow. No, they wouldn't stop him. He needed to keep them safe. They trusted him. He'd be there for them.

A high-pitched scream.

"Get him off David. He's killing him."

An arm wrapped his neck, squeezed down on his windpipe. No fucking way. No way. He thrashed against it, digging it deeper.

"What the hell is going on?" another low voice yelled over the chaos. Deep voice. Power. "Let him go. Jesse, stop!"

Hands released Jesse's neck though he kept his grip on the enemy. Squeezed the other throat tighter. He sucked in air. Strong arms went for his chest this time, wrapping him from behind. "Let go, Boyo! You need to let go. I'm here. Your Master orders it. It's okay, love. I'm here. Let David go. I have you."

Savin.

"He's no threat. Relax your hands. Let him up. Do it, Boyo!"

The words burrowed in. Safe? The order hit home, his body leaning hard into the firm command.

His hands spasmed but went loose.

He fell backward into muscle. The tight grip of someone.

Where was he? A man was collapsed in front of him. David? Coughing violently, rubbing his neck.

Jesus, he'd been choking him. He'd dissociated and been choking the man.

Violent nausea rocked his stomach.

But strong arms held him. Musk and smoke filled his nostrils. "Kris, get help for David. You're safe, Jesse. I have you. I'm sorry I let you leave without me. So sorry, Boyo. I have you now."

"Savin," he gasped.

He'd screwed up again. So fucking pathetic. Breaking Savin's trust by not calling a halt when he needed it. He couldn't do this. Savin needed to depend on him. Needed his trust. How could he expect his Magician to do the same if he didn't prove his shit with his own?

And he was tired. Tired and ragged and wanting to dump the toxic waste inside him.

His eyes burned madly.

"Love you, Boyo," Savin crooned, stroking his hair. "It's okay."

Jesse wanted to weep. Fuck, the wet on his cheeks probably meant he was. The arms held him tighter.

His sight went jagged with black. Then nothing.

Chapter Nine

Savin jerked awake from his doze, his mouth sour from yet another dream of Faerie's death throes – enchanted cauldrons shattering, ever-fertile crops disintegrating to sawdust. Tudor-style mansions, magicked skyscrapers, suburban ranch houses, an ancient Hindu temple and medieval castles razed as they mingled side by side in the psychotic landscape of his home. Fae strangled and impaled upon the clawed arms of the dark forest gone mad and growing into cobblestone streets. And through it all the realm of Faerie calling to him. Begging his help. So enticing, almost seductive in its pleas. He refused to care. They'd brought it on themselves. So why the dull ache in his middle?

What disturbed him more were images of Las Vegas mixed between the scenes of Faerie, the city swallowed by earthquakes and sinkholes that could not possibly exist this far from a fault line. Rows of broken wax statues from Madame Tussauds lying crumbled on the buckled asphalt streets and the Forum Shops at Caesars in rubble. Images new to his dreams. Born from anxiety for Jesse in the human world? Strangely the destruction in both worlds looked eerily familiar.

He watched Jesse swim up from sleep. With his Boyo encased in his big bed where he'd deposited him, Savin had spent hours late last night and this morning gazing at his lover, revisiting the string of his decisions leading to the horror at the club until he risked going crazy. Savin must have dozed off in the last hour. Although he reminded himself his personal magic was responsible for Jesse's long, dreamless sleep, he couldn't take a single clear breath until Jesse woke.

Chocolate eyes blinked open, those long, thick lashes framing a beard-shadowed jaw. "Hey," the rough, cracked sound greeted him. Jesse's abused voice squeezed Savin's heart.

"Hello yourself."

Jesse's brow wrinkled. "What time is it?"

"Two p.m. Sunday."

"I was out hours." He scrubbed at his face, wiping sleep from the corners of his eyes. His gaze became unfocused a moment. Jesse bolted to sitting. "Shit! Eamon. I heard his voice at the club."

Savin restrained his shoulder and that raw edge of panic. "It's okay, Boyo. He wasn't there. I would have sensed him or the echo of him if he'd been near the place."

He was certain of this, especially now with his magic strong and frothing inside him like churning storm waters. Strengthening his monster alongside his ability to

protect. Still, Eamon's name spun his mind to the threat. The stink of his own rage at the situation filled his nostrils. For Jesse's sake he kept it caged.

Jesse relaxed back against the headboard. Sighed out the stress, shaking his head. "I'm losing it." He examined the room. "You brought me back to your place?"

"Yes. You need food." Savin reached for the bedside where he'd prepared a tray during one of the short breaks he'd allowed himself.

He sent a small burst of energy into the covered plate, lifted the dome and tore off a chunk of the fresh, warm bread, spreading butter from a crock next to it.

Jesse sat up, waiting with no comment. Savin brought the bread to his lover's mouth, making it clear he'd retain his hold and do the feeding. His Boyo sent him an amused look, rolled his eyes but leaned in and bit down on the small loaf. His lips turned up as he chewed, sending a frisson across Savin's skin, trailing all the way down to his groin. He liked feeding Jesse. A human act. Valuable beyond measure to Savin for just that reason.

Jesse finished the bite. "It's good. The bread's hot. How did you know when I'd wake up?" He glanced over at the tray. "Even the soup bowl is steaming."

Savin shrugged, looked down, perplexed by his sudden shyness. "Simple magic."

He reached for the soup and a spoon. Lifted the mostly filled bowl and dipped a taste to bring to Jesse's lips. The steam billowed up and coated his lover's face. Savin resisted the urge to brush fingertips over Jesse's cheeks to wipe away the condensation. "Careful. Don't let it burn your tongue."

As Jesse opened to accept the creamy liquid, mouth enveloping the spoon, his eyes caught Savin's. Intensity layered the silence between them. A drop of water from the steam trailed down Jesse's jaw, hovered on the tip of his chin. Beautiful, arousing. After the bite, Jesse slowly, purposefully lowered his eyes.

The show of submission stirred something deep in Savin, a savage joy and warmth completely at odds with his self-disgust over hurting Jesse. Goddess, he wasn't entitled to it.

Savin continued to feed his Boyo, bite after bite, shrugging off tension in the act of taking care of him. Stealing peaceful moments against the future. Against Faerie.

The last crumb of bread went into Jesse and he swallowed, licked his lips to remove a tempting dab of butter left on his skin.

Savin leaned in. Couldn't help himself. "My turn to use those lips." He closed the final distance and kissed him, needing to taste, to feel the strength of Jesse with those small, erect nipples pressing into his chest. The rock biceps as he shackled it with his grip.

Jesse ate back at his mouth, tangling his tongue with Savin's as the heat grew. He fisted his hands in his Boyo's short, dark hair, pulled at the roots. He sucked, bit at his lower lip. Jesse moaned low and Savin's cock jerked at the sound. *Mine*.

His insides screaming in protest, his skin demanding touch, Savin pulled back, yanking Jesse's head apart from his. His Boyo tried to use teeth to latch on to his mouth, lunge back into the kiss.

"More," Jesse growled.

"Stop, Boyo. We need to talk."

Jesse groaned and sat back against the headboard. "Okay. You're right." He ran fingers through his hair, closed his eyes for a count, opened and refocused on Savin, an army of determination in the expression. "I fucked up. I needed to use my safe word when it started feeling dicey at the club. I didn't." His gaze narrowed with pain, dropped to the bed.

"No!" Savin leaned in again, wrapped the back of Jesse's neck with his hand, craving the contact with the inked mark. "I say this once and you listen. You did *nothing* wrong. This was my responsibility. I know what's going on for you, or as much as you'll tell me. I've prided myself on being a decent Master but my judgment is off concerning you. I let my personal demons get in the way of what you needed from me. A single blasted safe word wasn't it."

Jesse didn't look convinced. "Is David okay?"

"He's fine. Kris and Stephanie got him checked out by a doctor who consults for the club. David understands."

"Christ, Savin. I could have easily killed him. There's no understanding for that."

"Not your call. David gets to decide what he feels in all this."

"You mean pity," Jesse sneered.

"Understanding. Exactly what I said before. No one pities you, Jesse." Their faces inches apart, Savin's grip cradling his nape, the intimacy was almost too much. A force of nature itself.

Turning point.

Jesse remained quiet, a herd of different emotions stampeding over his face. "I thought...I thought with you I might get better. It seemed like it the first night." His Boyo met his gaze square-on. "Heading to the club, part of me figured that even if you got your damn wish and sent me away maybe the whole D/s scene *would* do the trick for me. Guess not." He blew out a breath, long and bitter, shook his head. "I need help, Savin. I've known it awhile, but..."

His hands fisted on the comforter as if he wanted to reach over to Savin but forced them still. "I know you're planning to jettison me after the weekend if not sooner. It's what we agreed. I'm not promising I'll go with grace or even cooperate. But I do know that while I have you, I need you. I don't want to hold back, but I'm fucking afraid I won't be able to help myself." He sucked in a shaky breath. "I trust you to catch me when I spin out of control. Jesus, you've even done it literally. I just need help figuring out how to get off the damn ground first."

"Jesse..." Savin's hands moved to cradle his Boyo's jaw.

Jesse lifted his fingers to rest them over his grip. "No. Wait."

Did he realize how his heart shone from his dark eyes? Jesse pulled back, freed himself from the gentle hold. He extracted himself from the bed, his naked body beautiful in its fluid, purposeful movements. Muscle and sinew flowing over bone.

His Boyo dropped to his knees next to the bed in front of Savin. "Master." He laced his hands behind his head, elbows out, and carefully lowered his face to the ground so his cheek rested on the carpet, spreading his thighs apart in a pose of submission leaving his haunches in the air. Exposing himself. "Please." More than a whisper, but not by much. A plea like the first night but with a sense he knew what he was asking this time.

The air solidified, choking Savin as he watched.

His magic welled up, demanding, reaching to take. He was a selfish bastard but he wanted this. Another feeding of his power would strengthen him, allowing better protection for Jesse. Or so he justified. The contradictions between how he both protected and endangered his lover was acid eating away at his organs. The large beating mass in his chest the most.

He rose, knelt by Jesse's head and pulled him from underneath his shoulders to kneeling. Savin gripped his chin, gentle insistence. "Okay. We both know what we want, but I make one demand before we continue. That after, no matter how we finish this weekend, you get therapy. And if the recommendation is medication, that as well. You joked about D/s as a substitute. And it can help. It's what I've wanted to give you from the beginning. But Goddess knows you're too important to fuck around about this. I love you."

Jesse searched for something in his gaze, finally nodded. "I promise."

"Good." Savin's eyes stung but he let them trail down his Boyo's naked body to his semi-erect cock. Back up to where Jesse had kept his hands laced behind his head.

Savin allowed the sight to stir deep in his belly, to kick up the eternal need for control and the sexual excitement from using that control on his lovers. For one more day he'd ignore the nagging doubt over his fae curse and the fact his compulsion might come as much from some racial drive to feed his power as from his basic sexual identity. To pretend he was human and that his love and need to care for the other, for Jesse, was true and not a self-imposed delusion. That the magic he needed to help his lover was not fae skill but his ability to read the nuances of body, flick of an eyebrow, twitch of muscle. And lead him through his pain to the other side, using the tools of D/s.

For safety's sake he let his power out to scan the area. No matter Jesse's or his own needs he'd only do this if he knew they were as safe as possible from his people for the time.

The power stirred, expanded. Nothing. No other taste of fae in the area.

He ran his hand from the tip of Jesse's elbow, inward, skimming under his armpit and over to the small erect buds on his chest. He pinched lightly and watched his

Boyo's breath hitch. His fingers played down Jesse's rib cage toward his abdomen. How would it look with none of the dark hair matting it? If their future had been different Savin would require he shave his skin clean. Leave beautiful, smooth flesh over which to play and make his marks. Instead, he let his mouth follow his fingers and gently sucked at the skin, pulling the tiny hairs into his mouth.

His hand dipped lower, moved sideward to Jesse's hipbone and rested there, keeping the man steady on his knees as the other hand took hold of his cock, twisted the hard, silky skin in his grip. The erection had filled, leaving Jesse at full mast, his foreskin stretched completely away from his glans.

"So lovely." Jesse would feel the vibrations of Savin's voice on his bare skin. He let his mouth travel back up to his Boyo's neck and jawline, bit against the flesh and bone as the hand on his hip moved to fist in Jesse's hair.

Jesse shivered, pelvis tilted forward as Savin lowered fingers to squeeze his balls, tugging at them as he kneaded the heavy testicles.

"Christ, yes," Jesse gasped, earning him another tug, harder this time. The low, pain sound drove Savin crazy.

"That's it, love. Tonight I want you to speak, make all the noise you want, tell me what's happening inside of you." He kept hold of Jesse's phallus as he urged the man to stand, letting his thumb rub over the leaking slit at the bulb head. "I'll take care of you, give you everything you need."

He led his Boyo out of the room by his hair and genitals, walking backward. Holding the lead of the skittish wild animal he intended to tame. As much as he wanted Jesse in his bed, he needed a more neutral location to work his sub through the black inside his head. Goddess, let him do it right.

They moved slowly but arrived at the play space, Savin releasing Jesse long enough to open the door and throw on lights. He intended the promise of his pulling fingers on Jesse's body to start the slow slide into tension, excitement and pain for his lover.

The far corner held his latest playroom equipment, so far untested. He'd created the design in a fit of inspiration one evening after waking from a dream of Jesse. That had been months ago, and he'd laughed at himself that the device would never be used on its intended recipient.

And then Jesse had arrived. Fate. Cruel. Kind.

He drew off the sheet covering the frame. Jesse glanced over at it, eyes widening. He recognized the design.

The man-height stand-alone rectangular frame had been mounted onto a base. The frame itself had begun its life as a hollow rectangle and placed on two joints at its sides to allow it to not only tip but also be spun a complete three-sixty. Like a tilting floor mirror that made a complete circuit. It was wide and tall enough to contain a person with arms and legs spread. Building inward from the sides of the wood, Savin had commissioned a hybrid of decorative steel latticework and wider crossbeams that

would allow that person to be suspended like in a web, body accessible from all sides and inverted in space at will. His will.

The latticework and general shape was a direct match of the gate design on the pendant at his neck. And on the tattoo currently stamping his Boyo. The royal family kept control of all of the gates from Faerie, having the sole magic able to open them. Hence, the image of the gates was stamped into their crest and his mother had traveled with the pendant denoting her relation to the queen, passing it on to him before her death.

Together he melded the best of a St. Andrew's Cross, an extended inversion board and his personal insignia. And he intended to strap Jesse into the frame, the wooden beams reinforced internally with steel. Hold him secure through whatever became necessary.

"Step up," Savin directed.

Jesse hesitated but turned backward and stepped onto the foot-sized rests that left his legs open wide. He leaned against the device.

"Spread your arms along the beams." Savin began to strap Jesse's arms and legs into the multiple cuffs attached to the wood. They went as far up his limbs as to wrap the tops of his thighs and his biceps, along with wrists and ankles. All were lambskin-lined and adjusted to provide support but avoid unnecessary strain on the body as the device spun. When finished, he closed another around Jesse's neck and yet another around his forehead.

Fully encased, he slid the footrests to the side, leaving Jesse hanging in space without anywhere to touch down.

His Boyo's pupils were dilated and he continued to clench and unclench his fists in the cuffs.

Savin added a cock and plug harness, sliding in the lubricated plug while Jesse's breathing picked up pace. When he ran a fingertip over the engorged shaft, a low groan escaped his Boyo.

His slit leaked freely and his wide eyes shone glassy. He was well on his way to subspace.

Goddess, the man was a pretty picture all bound up like this and helpless. The scent of sweat filled Savin's nostrils, a potent aphrodisiac from his lover's anxiety and arousal. Savin prayed to the Goddess he had the patience and the skill to give Jesse what he needed. He'd failed him one too many times already.

Savin tilted the frame horizontal and locked the position in place, leaving Jesse a delectable dish laid out flat in front of him. Savin leaned on the side supports, his lips inches from his Boyo's. "You asked for my help. Here it is and I won't let you run from it anymore."

"Jesus, I can't believe I asked for this. You're in love with a crazy man, you know that?"

"No delaying. I ask the questions this afternoon, love. You answer them. Understood?"

"Yes." An exhalation with his answer, tension cutting his response.

"You're safe here. No one can hurt you. I protect what's mine. It's my right as your Master to know everything inside that soul of yours. You focus on my touch, my words and responding with truth."

Jesse blinked, voice a hoarse response. "I'll try."

Savin reached for a blindfold and covered his eyes, blocking out the distractions that might get in the way. One sense deprived so Jesse could focus intensely on the others. Savin poured massage oil on the nearby table into his hands, rubbing them together to make them warm and slick. An image of a doctor preparing his hands for surgery came to mind. And it was surgery of a type. Of the soul.

He started at Jesse's feet, the first touch jolting the man with his surprise. He continued a slow massage of each tendon, thumbs pressing deep into his instep and heel. He bent to take one big toe into his mouth, sucking and biting down while appreciating the small involuntary contractions of Jesse's muscles at the effort.

He straightened and tried to memorize the feel of skin under his kneading hands. Knots betrayed the places his lover carried his burdens. It was as good a place as any to start the conversation. "These are traveling feet, made for adventure and the dusty road. You wanted to see the entire world. Your eyes lit up when you talked about it."

Jesse's jaw clenched, face rigid beneath the blindfold, betraying how hard he focused on the sensation. Fighting it or wishing for each new touch? "Sometimes you don't get what you want."

Old pain, his voice encrusted with it. The script was ancient too, rehearsed responses Jesse had used over and again.

"But you could. Nothing is stopping you now." Savin moved up to his calf, watched a grimace cover his Boyo's face as he dug deep. He reached inside his pocket and thumbed on the remote for the plug. Vibrations to send Jesse's dense load of nerve endings in his anal passage into overload. But this overload Savin controlled. Jesse's emotional circuits were also on overload, but damn if Savin would allow him to blow and go dark permanently.

Jesse grunted, swore low. "Told you, I tried to leave. I get physically sick. Can't do it."

Savin kept up the massage, aware he was torturing himself as much as Jesse with the slow pace of his touch. "This feels good, doesn't it?"

"Yes. Feels good."

"Do you like feeling good?"

The answer didn't come immediately. His Boyo was thinking about the question, which pleased Savin.

"Not sure. It's been a long time."

"Honest. Very good." He poured more oil into his palms before switching to the other calf. He ran his blunt nails up one leg, dragging them over goose-covered flesh, stopping just short of Jesse's scrotum. His smallest finger drifted to the side, ran over the heavy balls in a feather touch. Another brush. When he let his fist close strong around the sensitive testicles, Jesse's hips tried to surge.

"Ah! Christ!"

"I remember your brother."

Jesse gasped. Behind the mask it looked as if he tried to collect himself, struggling to focus and respond. "Martin?"

"He helped me at the store once. Two years ahead of you in school, yes? I went in because I wanted to know if the other brother was as bewitching as the younger."

"Bewitching?" Jesse was panting, short sucks of air. "Funny way to describe a human coming from a magic man."

Savin ignored the nervous commentary. "He seemed nice enough. All-American handsome. But not the same as you."

A grunt from his Boyo as Savin continued the kneading, softening the touch for moments and then going deeper. He'd let his fingers inch upward to caress his Boyo's cock for brief seconds before returning to the ball sac.

"I asked for you that Saturday I went in. If you were working."

"And?" Another groan.

"Martin laughed at me. He said you did about anything to get out of helping at the store. He claimed you'd gone to some foreign film festival that day as an excuse and that your mother melted every time you played the culture card."

Savin dipped in a quick move to mouth his Boyo's balls, lick the crease between thigh and leg. Each taste ratcheted the intensity in his own sex. He watched for response, Jesse's cock lurching at every added sensation. More importantly, Savin watched for the tell signs on Jesse's face, in his body, for reaction to the discussion.

"You two were rivals." Savin pinched his thumb and forefinger around the barely loose scrotal skin, gave a slight pull.

"Savin, I can't catch up. You're scrambling my mind. Can't focus."

"I know. Answer." He tapped those balls with the flat of his palm in a short slap. Jesse grunted, hips twitching.

"I guess we did the rivalry thing," he answered. "Regular amount for brothers."

"And your father. What was he like before the accident?"

Savin drizzled oil directly from the bottle over his Boyo's reddened cock. He lowered a hand to the shaft, feeling the beat of Jesse's pulse where Savin brushed Jesse's inner thigh with an arm. Matching it to the beat of blood through Savin's own veins. He kept his strokes firm but slow. Up and down the engorged flesh.

"My father was hardworking." Another grunt. "Fucking Christ, Savin." He paused to catch his breath. "And a bit obsessed with the store." Pant. "I don't think this feels right, to be talking about my family while you're touching me."

"There's never a good time, is there? An excuse, Boyo. You know why we're doing this. Your Master demands complete honesty. You need to get it out. I can handle it. A perfect match."

Jesse's arms spread in the device, he was hellishly beautiful, a true gift of the Goddess. Savin was burning up with it. He leaned over and bit down around the top edge of Jesse's frenum right below the exposed bulb head. "I'd like to pierce you here. Do a frenums ladder with little barbells all down your skin to the base of your shaft. Or maybe a simple Prince Albert." He let his tongue dig into Jesse's slit. Raised his eyes to look up the line of his body. Savin returned to shafting the oiled cock, increasing the pace, keeping Jesse fully aroused.

"I'm going to come." His Boyo gasped, hips thrashing in the smallest of movements, all he could manage in the restraint.

"You will not." Savin slapped his cock with the flat of his hand. Not hard enough to damage but to sting and let the pain bring Jesse back from the edge of ejaculation. Perversely, he turned up the speed on the vibrator. "Tell me about them, after the accident."

He straightened and spun the frame vertically until it tipped forward, the front of Jesse's body leaning toward the floor, hanging in space.

"Whoa."

"You can't fall, love. Just talk. What were they like?"

He stuttered but continued. "They spent forever in the hospital, in rehab. Mom could walk, slow and awkward, but with the brain damage she couldn't speak, needed prompts for most self-care. Dad. He..."

A pause.

"Your father," Savin led him further. Watched him struggle at a stuck point. His heart ached fiercely as he steeled himself to keep pressing. "What about him?"

"He was a paraplegic but he knew what was going on. First he refused to talk, but later he started. He had constant mood swings. The doctors said it was from brain injury affecting his emotional centers."

"You had no relatives to help?"

Jesse snorted. "My parents were only children. Grandparents dead. Mom's cousin helped for a bit, lived with me the first year. But she had to go home to her own family in another state and I refused to go. A neighbor took guardianship until I was eighteen to keep me out of the state system. She let me handle everything. I got myself to school, hired a store manager to keep the business going. Took care of my parents."

"That was too much for any kid, love. A complete miracle that you managed."

Jesse remained silent.

"But that doesn't tell me how it really was with your mother and father." He suspected the heart of the matter lay somewhere there. The decade and more in that house with the two dependent adults.

Savin stroked along his back, trailing fingertips up and down his spine between the tattoo and his coccyx, right above the crease of his buttocks.

Jesse began in fits and starts. "Mom was a walking vegetable. I'd find her crying maybe once a day, but that was the only emotion she showed." He dragged in a breath. "Dad... He was unpleasant." He clipped out the last words, terse, sharp.

Savin kept the motion of his fingers going, soothing. "Something just hit that anger of yours. What's hurting? Tell me. You want to tell me, love. I'm your Master and you have no choice in this. I can't imagine how hard it was for you."

"I survived." His voice lowered. His tone darkened.

"Bullshit. You do not lie to your Master. You barely slept. I saw your exhaustion in school as you dragged yourself in. You stopped seeing your friends out of school and were either at home or the store."

Jesse's body clenched in one snap of moment.

He'd hit a button. Fast flash.

"What do you fucking want? Of course it sucked!" Jesse's shout erupted.

The boundaries were crumbling. Savin needed caution. The hurt was there, pulsing under the surface and starting to shove its way through his skin again.

He unlocked the frame once more, spun it in a slow circle, tilting his Boyo upside down, his back to the ground. Off balance, not knowing what to expect in the dark. Jesse struggled against it. Cords of his tendons standing out from his muscle in their clench. Savin left him tilted head down this time but still at an angle. He grabbed for a paddle, the flat head covered in sandpaper.

He stroked the grit against the inside of his Boyo's thighs as Jesse let loose strangled sounds. Moved it to his shaft and rubbed carefully over the darkening skin of his cock. "It hurt you like this? A constant rubbing friction? Grating." He pressed harder to the skin as Jesse winced under the blindfold.

He stopped and quickly unlocked the frame again, spun Jesse up and over so his head tilted down, but this time his belly pointed to the floor. He brought the sandpaper paddle down across buttocks. "Or like this? Stinging?"

One strike. Two. Jesse cried out. A third, until he finished the count to eight. Red irritation marked his cheeks. "Is that enough?" Savin demanded, letting out the corner of his own anger on behalf of Jesse. Even so, this was not about punishing his lover.

"No!"

Savin held the strikes. Used his mouth to kiss along the glowing red ass of his Boyo, tenderness and the touch of a lover making better a hurt. He kissed up his spine to his nape, brushing lips over the gate design and embracing the surge of ownership filling

his chest. He stood, unlocked and spun Jesse again. Head pointed up but tilted thirty degrees so he'd fall to his back if loosened from the restraints.

A wildly spinning amusement park ride that withheld the promise of an end. The exact effect Savin intended.

"Shit!"

"What triggered you at the club last night?"

"Don't know," Jesse bit.

"You do know. Kris and David's persistence? The idea of violence in the wrestling match? Mistress Dalia? She was there. She couldn't say what brought it on specifically."

"A bunch of stuff," he gasped. "David's fucking pushing and provocative shit. I wanted to knock him off his ass. And the cop uniform."

Jesse's face twisted. He was trying. Struggling at it but trying. Goddess, Savin loved him more for it.

"What about the uniform? Dalia had it on for a scene with her sub."

"Don't like cops." Pain bunched his cheeks.

"Why?"

"I don't know why."

"Why?" Savin spun him again. Locked him down in place with a jerk. "You don't need to hide from me. It's useless. Now why?" He ran a gentle touch over Jesse's cheek.

Jesse tried to twist his head away. Failed. Caught. "Why the fuck do you think?" He yelled, the brutal anger stuffing his words.

Savin moved to catch his hair, pull hard at the roots. He held him as he thrust his tongue into Jesse's mouth. Kissed him with the same brutality of the shout. Hot, wet invasion and possession. Pushing at his lover's rage to win the war over it.

He wrenched off his mouth. "I'm not the one who needs to answer, Boyo. Tell me now. I'm not giving you an out."

"Damn flashbacks from the cops who gave me the news." A wrenching, low sob fell out. "I can't get the memory to disappear."

"Good boy." He cradled Jesse's nape, rubbed gentle circles over the tattoo. "I'm here now. No cops. I have you and I'll take care of you." He continued the rub and gave Jesse time to wade through the dark. "But I'm not thinking those are all the flashbacks you live with."

"Fucking relentless, aren't you?"

"I think we've covered that. What about the hospital?"

Perspiration tracked down the side of Jesse's face and neck, his hair wet with it. The room had been left cool. The inferno all came from within him.

"You want this too, Jesse. You said so. Tell me. You can't screw this up. I love you no matter what comes out of your mouth."

Silence. Then he began. "The cops took me, made me ID my brother's body since my parents were in surgery. All I could think of was how much shit I'd given him when he hounded me to take my turn at the store. He loved the place but he wanted breaks."

"You were young and wanting to do your thing. The store wasn't it."

"I was an asshole." His voice broke. "He liked skiing. Would have liked some weekends off during the winters. But I manipulated things at home to get out of it."

The grief was true, the guilt thick, but didn't explain why Jesse was full of rage. "This isn't it, Boyo." He said it softly, thumb rubbing the wet from one cheek. "Why are you so angry, love? What happened in that house for over a decade?" With the question he unlocked the frame, spun it slower than before but kept it going in a circle through several circuits before stopping it upright. "We keep this up until you tell me."

"It's difficult." His voice jagged low. Tongue licked over dry lips.

"Yes, it is."

"The docs said I needed to keep my father on meds. Without it his moods were bad. He'd be delusional, sometimes paranoid. Angry. But each time I tried the meds the amount needed to stop it was so big he turned into a zombie. He didn't deserve that." Jesse's voice deadened, cool blankness. "So I kept him off."

"And the consequences?"

"Mine to live with."

Savin grabbed his chin, tightened. "The consequences, Jesse."

As if the squeeze let him eject the words, he spit them out in a barrage. "Every fucking day he blamed me for the accident, for Martin. Every fucking day since he started speaking after the accident he told me how worthless I was, that he wished I were never born." The pain spiraled higher in his voice. "Called me 'killer' when I served him breakfast, lunch and dinner. A pile of shit at dessert. He'd knock over glasses on purpose so they'd shatter and I might step on them. Let himself defecate in his clothes so I'd have to clean the mess when I knew he was able to control it and tell me ahead of time. He even spit in my food. Thousands of little fucking degrading and vengeful acts."

His breathing ran faster. "If he wasn't physically compromised, I swear he'd have tried to hurt me more directly. When Mom fell down the stairs by accident, he told me I'd killed her too. That he knew he'd die of it, leaving me just as guilty of killing him. And guess the fuck what? He did, just to stick it to me more. For years he hammered me with this shit. And I hated him, but it wasn't his fault. He was sick. Mentally ill thanks to the accident and I couldn't condemn him. What the fuck kind of man was I to hate him for something he couldn't control?"

A knife twisted in Savin's belly. "He abused you. While you sacrificed everything. That's abuse, Jesse, intentional or not. I understand your choice but you aren't to blame for any of it."

"Yeah? Then who the fuck was?" he screamed. "If I wasn't on that trip, needing to come home from the airport, they would be alive."

Savin returned to stroking his nape. Still gentle to contrast the frenzy Jesse radiated. He struggled to move his head from the caress but the restraints worked keeping him immobile. "No! Stop it! Don't touch me that way."

"They loved you. Your father, your mother, your brother. They loved you and they wouldn't want you to suffer this way."

"Wrong. I'm the same as him. Bad. Otherwise I wouldn't be like this." He yelled louder. "I'm so fucking angry I want to crush skulls sometimes. Even with Corrine. I'd wake up at night after a nightmare with her sleeping next to me and almost hurt her before I knew where I was. Out of fucking control. An animal. Christ, I hated it! They were wrong about my father. He had to have that illness inside him already before the crash. And I have it too." The veins stood out red on his neck.

"You didn't hurt her."

"I wanted to."

"You are not responsible."

"Am!" He twisted his body hard, every muscle fighting against the cuffs, trying to shake the frame.

"You're disobeying your Master. Stop it!"

"I even want to fucking strangle *you*. Strike me, for fuck's sake. I can't take that petting."

"I won't let you hurt me or yourself. I've told you that before. I pet you because it pleases me. Everything about you pleases me."

The blindfold was soaking, his teeth clenched. "Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!"

"I love you, Jesse. You're a good man. Your father would say the same if he'd been in his right mind. He raised you as long as he could to be the man who wouldn't let the doctors medicate him into a stupor, not put him in a nursing home. The man who gave everything to his family and community."

"No!" The scream fractured air, shattering.

Savin stepped onto the pedestal base, pressed tight against Jesse at blur-fast speed. He tore off his shirt and spread his arms to lay them against his lover's, grasping him at the wrists below the cuffs. Stepped between his legs and pressed in with his pelvis to connect groin to groin. His cock against Jesse's hips, his Boyo's a stone rub against his own. He ground his cheek into Jesse's, trying to pour himself inside the other man as he yelled and tried to thrash. Skin contact.

Wrenching calls of pain.

Savin kept his voice firm, steady, repeating the mantra whether Jesse heard it or not under his screams. "I've got you. I love you."

"No! I wanted to kill him. Put a pillow over his fucking face. But I didn't. I didn't and I wanted to so bad. God, I can't stand this." He roared again, a primordial animal

sound of devastation with his face twisting. Kept at it. Killing Savin with each guttural noise.

Yelling for what seemed hours until his voice became a hoarse, weak rasp.

Until his screams stopped and he sagged in the restraints.

Then silent weeping, body shaking, heaving inside the bonds.

Savin spread the wet across both their faces with his fingers, marking them both.

When he thought Jesse's calm was to stay, he stepped down from the platform, removed the blindfold and searched out his lover's eyes as they blinked against the intruding light.

After a long minute, Jesse returned his gaze. Resignation painted his wet face. "This thing is part of me. I can't get rid of it. Like draining a boil that'll only refill."

He ran a thumb over Jesse's chest, pressing the center of the breastbone as if it would soothe the hurt behind his own ribs. "Maybe, but it's not all of you. You'll survive it."

His lips firmed, an icicle promise setting the lines. "I could kill with this inside me. If you let me, I'd kill for you, Savin. Die for you. Whatever the fuck's going on I can do it."

A clenched fist in Savin's belly. Goddess, no. "How about living for me, Jesse." He said it carefully, hiding his fear.

His lover's brow wrinkled, the shifting expression of a lost child settling over him as he hung in his bonds. "Then what do I do?"

"You wait while I get you down. You submit to me because we both know that's the truth between us. You take my pleasure and my pain and endure it, appreciate it."

He watched his words play through his lover. Now that the worst was over, he needed to remind his Boyo of his own strength. How valuable he was as a man and how loved. Letting him go might be easier knowing he'd find peace. He ignored the ache, ignored the thin seam inside his chest that threatened to split and pull apart.

Savin turned off the plug and unbuckled the restraints, helping Jesse off the device. His legs shook but he managed to make it to the big bed in the playroom. Savin put him to his belly there, retrieving the massage oil.

He took up kneading his Boyo's muscles again, this time to get rid of stiffness from holding his position so long. Jesse groaned under his hands. Swore as Savin hit embedded knots and worked them loose. Savin couldn't get enough of touching this man. He let his fingers linger over the tattoo, again and again.

Jesse came down the rest of the way from the drama, relaxing and letting Savin rebuild his arousal. Savin kneaded his buttocks, fingers drifting between the crease of ass on and off.

He bent and whispered in Jesse's ear. "I'm going to run electricity through that cock and balls of yours now. Make you writhe and beg for a hard fuck. And then I'll make slow love to you instead. You ready?"

"Yes," Jesse's voice stumbled, eyes still closed from the relaxation of the massage.

"Roll to your back for me."

As he did, Jesse opened and locked eyes with his. Stubbornly kept the gaze as Savin retrieved and placed e-stim pads along his penis. At a command to lift his legs, Savin switched out the plug for another electrosex variety, adding the needed gel to the torpedo-shaped insert.

He left his Boyo lying on the bed while he moved a large cushioned chair in front of the standing mirror against the wall, feeling the laser of Jesse's eyes following him at every step.

A side table placed next to the chair held the stim box. Savin pulled Jesse up from the bed and walked them over to the chair. He settled in first, spreading his legs wide and directing Jesse down between them, facing the mirror, his back to Savin's chest, Savin remained pants-clad to let the denial build him higher. Jesse's thighs were atop his own and he leaned into Savin's bare chest. "You look good against me, love. And I'm harder yet seeing those leads trailing off your cock and from your ass. Reach over to the table and connect them to the box. Hand it to me."

Jesse followed the command, hands fumbling at points as he connected the wires and gave the control box to Savin. "Battery-operated? Run on nine volts or Ds?"

"Joke now, love, but running a charge against your prostate and cock will get your attention back focused where it belongs." Although privately it soothed something to hear the humor return.

"Jesus." After handing him the box, Jesse's hands fell to Savin's thighs, digging in.

Resting the unit between their spread thighs on the cushion, Savin bit at the skin of Jesse's shoulder blade, his finger playing with one small flat nipple as he reached in front of his lover. "Watch yourself, Boyo. Keep your eyes on your cock in the mirror." His other hand thumbed the setting dial up to a medium level of stimulation, hitting the power and watching Jesse jerk on his lap.

"Fucking Christ."

"Feels good?"

"Yes," he hissed, grinding back against Savin, hips twitching forward other moments.

"Higher now." Savin turned up the dial a notch and grabbed his lover's biceps in a firm restraint. Holding him secure, a reminder of power given and received. The glass showed it back at Savin, spicing the air with the claim.

A strangled low groan flew out of Jesse as his eyes stayed riveted on his engorged shaft in the mirror, bulb head shining under the pre-cum spreading its tip. Savin's erection intensified impossibly at the sight. Pressure built deep in his balls, he could come just from the picture of his Boyo's pleasure, from the straining muscle under his palms. Jesse was strong, tougher than he thought. Seeing him submit and lose himself to the sensation drove Savin wild.

"We'll keep at it until you come just from the pulses. I want to watch you spurt over your belly, lose it for me while I hold you."

"Intense... Not sure... Ahh! God, yes!"

Both men danced close to a fine edge. Higher, closer, more.

Until...

A change. Swift, unexpected.

The mirror full of their sexual heat fogged black.

Savin's hands squeezed hard over Jesse's upper arms. A small sound escaped Savin's lips.

There she was. In the glass. His sparkling, beauteous, deadly Faerie queen, Soliandra.

She smiled teeth and malice.

His magic snapped to attention, never so aware of the gate hovering almost complete in his city. Never more aware of power pulsing from the glass feet from him.

"Hello, Savin." She dropped the smile like a lead curtain over a stage, leaving cold indifference, just as deadly, over her face.

She was anything but indifferent if she was here.

Mirror magic. He was unsure how she did it with Faerie weakened.

Before he had the chance to reply, she spoke. "A reminder, dear," she warned. Her long, thin hand snaked out in front of her image and her hand clenched. She struck.

Jesse's body convulsed in his arms, head tilted back, eyes squeezed shut as he cried out in pain. A high buzz whined from the stim unit.

"What are you doing to him?" Savin yelled above his lover's strangled noises. He clung to the jerking body, keeping him from toppling over. His magic scrambled, threw itself impulsively against the force locking Jesse's body. Repelled each time. Sweat beaded along his skin, sizzling with contact from the magic.

"I believe you do not take my instruction seriously, Grandson. Eamon and Tzrina both are of the impression you'll refuse to bring this lovely with you when you cross home." She gestured to the suffering Jesse.

"Stop this now!"

She shrugged, unaffected by the sight of the man writhing in pain. "If you do not care enough for him to bring him to Faerie, you will not care what he suffers now."

"Goddess, mercy, my queen. Please!" He'd never begged for anything before. Now he was willing to slit his own throat to make this stop. "Anything."

In his arms, Jesse's body was locked in a struggle against the agony of unbearable electrical overload. An unattainable amount of charge for the small box he used in his play. Savin's magic knew the threat for what it was and the impossibility of countering such strength. His impotency turned his bones to brittle twigs. For the first time he wished for more power. Maybe...

Soliandra cocked her head and narrowed her eyes, considering him. He didn't care if she noticed how desperately he clutched Jesse. "Sufficient," she crooned.

The torture stopped. His Boyo's limbs slackened to deadweight, his face heavy with exhaustion. Panting hard.

With clear determination Jesse strained to sit up in Savin's arms and confront the mirror. "Who the hell are you?" His roughened voice spewed challenge.

"Quiet, Jesse. Let me handle this." Savin whispered it in his ear, stroking sweat-soaked skin to assure himself his lover survived. "My queen, I don't know what rumors you've heard from Eamon and Tzrina, but I made no such claims to them." Truth within limits. He treaded a dangerous path.

"Yet your opportunity to reach full power sits pretty in your lap and you keep your heart blocked from accepting his full gift. Don't waste the opportunity, Savin, or I will be displeased indeed."

Understatement of the decade. If he had the power she described now he'd ram it down her pretty throat.

"Either bring him to Faerie when you open the gate day after tomorrow or lose everything. I will not see Faerie die because you play at being valiant."

"My queen, are you sure we need him? It's impossible that one human makes a difference in the problem." He'd play upon fae superiority if needed.

"It is your own fae heart that is needed most. He is only the key to it. Irritating but necessary. I see through you, Savin. Do not think you can hide. Protecting him is a wasted effort anyway if Faerie dies. Come home. You are missed."

Highly unlikely.

Yet he dipped his head in acknowledgement. Caught in her web, his rage simmered. "Yes, my queen."

"A last vision for you, dearest. Learn from it." Her face disappeared into the fog.

Replaced by the image of Savin defending a thorny thicket, sword drawn and raised to defend against invisible enemies. Swipe. Thrust. Face lined with stubborn determination. In the brush behind him, while he sought to protect it from the world, lay a beating heart being slowly encompassed by thorn-covered vines. Strangled while the man with his face ignored that true threat to wave his sword in the air. A long, wicked thorn dug deep into the undefended organ, crimson seeping from the tear. The Savin in the image screamed with agony.

The mirror fogged again, the thicket scene evaporated to leave the simple reflection of him and Jesse collapsed back in the chair. Jesse's gaze caught hard in his. Frustration, demand and shock etched his expression. For a long moment they said nothing.

Finally Jesse turned to him, words crisp. "Time to spill, Savin. Tell me the fuck what's going on. I think I've earned it."

Goddess help them, all that was left was the truth.

Chapter Ten

Savin refused to start the conversation until he'd carried Jesse to the hot tub. It pricked Jesse's ego but he ignored it. The bitch had thrown serious volts through his body. Or at least it had felt like it. If she had he'd be dead. So maybe the magic version didn't act quite the same.

The Magician stripped him of all play items then stripped himself the rest of the way and deposited them into the quickly filling sunken hot tub. If he gave a fuck anymore he'd appreciate the decadence. Instead he cursed the deep lines on Savin's face around his frown. As dead tired as Jesse felt, Savin looked worse.

Savin insisted on holding him in his lap against his chest to keep him from drowning. He let him, hating the fact he probably needed it. The Magician trailed a cloth over Jesse's skin, wiping away the stink of pain and fear. His hands trembled slightly as he did it.

In a quiet voice, Savin spoke as he washed down the slope of Jesse's collarbone and shoulder. "I'd use my magic to heal you but it doesn't work the same with Queen Soliandra's attack. She's the strongest of us. Her leftover power repels most of what I can do." He fell quiet and his heartbeat raced double-time against Jesse's back.

By the way Savin hyper-focused on the cloth, no longer speaking, Jesse knew how frazzled his lover had been. Hell, frazzled, fried, he was about the same. Still, they needed to talk.

He grabbed his Magician's wrist to stop the strokes. Squeezed to get his attention and let him know he was here and just fine. "Savin, stop it. Tell me if there's a chance we'll be attacked in the next five minutes. If not, start talking."

Savin shook his head. "We're safe for now. She won't start trouble as long as she believes I'll stick to her plans."

"Which are what exactly?"

His Magician sighed, leaned back into the porcelain tub, drawing Jesse along and tightened the arm around Jesse's chest. "It's complicated."

"These magical, homicidal fae things usually are." He turned to stare at his lover. "Just tell me. It can't get worse sharing it. Or do I have to strap you to that spinning cross thing too?"

With his responding chuckle, Jesse's insides untwisted enough to let him appreciate the heat of the water on his sore muscles. The bar fight with Eamon was nothing to this ache.

Slowly, Savin began to tell his story. He swore it included everything. His passage as a child with his mother and four other fae through the gate to discover a way to save

a dying Faerie. That would be Eamon, Tzrina, Geltano, Braal. The fae who'd agreed to travel with Adelle and try to find an answer on Earth for the dying fae magic. Despite how soon they decided the effort was a lost cause and went their separate ways. He told about growing up posing as human. A brief mention of his mother's death, although Savin skimmed that quickly. And the opportunity the day after tomorrow to reopen the gate back to Faerie if five fae, one with royal blood, worked their magic at full strength. His voice went particularly nasty and bitter when he described how the others recharged their magic. Jesse swallowed the bile threatening to shoot up his esophagus at hearing about the torture.

Finally, Savin included details of this Soliandra's theory about the missing hearts of the fae. And her belief that Savin's own heart had altered, tied somehow to the time he'd spent with Jesse.

"I feed your power when I come? Spew out some sort of soul-deep truth energy, and it's changed your magic this time around?"

"It's what she thinks."

"You don't agree."

Savin pressed his cheek to the side of Jesse's skull. "My magic is stronger this time. I hate that. But I don't know what to believe anymore."

"What does she expect you to do if you bring me to Faerie?"

"I don't know, but you're not going."

Jesse rolled his eyes. "Because refusing her has gone so well up until now."

"Going back to Faerie with me may be as good as a death sentence for you. I don't know what she intends, but she's as likely to split your rib cage open, tear out your living heart, send it through a meat grinder and sprinkle the remains on the dark forest of Faerie as anything else. She doesn't care about humankind. She never has."

"Not even though we're your long-lost cousins."

"Especially because of it."

Jesse considered the dark in Savin's voice. "You hate them."

"Yes."

"Even though it's what you are."

"*Especially* because it's what I am." He spit out every word with knifed precision, his face a mask of disgust.

Jesse knew that look. He'd seen it in the mirror enough. Hating oneself so much that it tainted every moment of every day.

"Why not use your magic on me and make me forget and walk away? I'm assuming you can. Instead you've been trying to convince me to leave."

Savin snorted. "I'm a selfish bastard. I've wanted you for as long as I could get you. Besides, I have standards. I refuse to touch your mind with my magic. I respect you too

much for that. It's one of the lines I've drawn between myself and the beasts I call my fellow fae."

Jesse heard Savin's unspoken words. The ones admitting that the self-hatred was so tied up with what it meant to practice the magic and be fae, that Savin couldn't bear to mix it into what he did with Jesse more than he had to. Less than forty-eight hours with Savin and he understood him so clearly.

Christ, don't you see you need me? You deserve us. Can't you hear yourself? I'll give you everything if you let me.

Savin wasn't going to accept that now. Jesse understood that deep inside, knowing how powerful the hurt must be that lingered in his Magician. "You must have been lonely here. After your mom died. I thought you guys were immortal."

"We can be killed."

"The others killed her?"

A long pause. "She committed suicide."

With that swift kick to his gut, Jesse sucked in a breath. *God, Savin.* "Why?"

"I learned integrity from my mother. Living here, cut off from Faerie, with her magic draining away was killing her. She refused to fill it by torturing humans and never knew about using the type of D/s interaction to meet her needs. I only stumbled on to it after high school when my power came fully online." His thumb swept back and forth over Jesse's skin as he spoke, not even realizing he did it. "She despised what the others did. She swore she'd never stoop that low. But she was weakening, she missed Faerie and her magic made demands of her. It's almost like having another person inside you pushing you to feed. In a low moment, she gave in to the urge. She kidnapped a man. Tortured him. She hated herself." His voice filled with ashes. "A month later she ended it."

"Jesus. I'm sorry."

"She wanted me to be human. It's what I wanted. But she was too fae to see her own selfishness leaving her son alone in this world. She considered herself a burden to me. And at her core she had enough of fae self-centeredness to value ending her own suffering more than preventing mine." A half-strangled sound croaked out of his mouth. "Like my selfishness sent you off to the Butterfly last night instead of taking care of you. Putting my pain above what you needed from me as your Master. At least my obsession with you wouldn't let me stay away from the club at the end or worse would have happened. Goddess, it's been a farce pretending to be human all these years."

Enough with the emptiness of his Magician's voice, which hurt more hearing than the voltage had. He pushed forward on Savin's restraining arm and ignored the water sloshing over the sides as he turned around. His Magician let him loose. It took most of his energy to turn but he didn't care.

Facing him, Jesse rested hands on the other man's shoulders. "I know lonely. I've lived it. And why anyone would choose it I don't fucking understand. So here I am to help. Why aren't you letting me?"

"I said why, Boyo."

"No. You said you had no idea what Soliandra intends. She's dropped some heavy clues that there's a missing piece. She called me your opportunity to reach full power. Said your heart's blocked from accepting my gift."

Savin's eyebrows slid up. "Quite a memory for a man who's been shot through with electricity."

"When the hungry tiger's still in the room, I pay attention even if I'm bleeding. That vision at the end had to mean something."

"Another threat to you. That she can kill you with her thorns as I thrash around uselessly."

It didn't sound right. Even if the queen thought him expendable, at the end, she couldn't dispose of him without figuring out what Jesse had to do with Savin's change. She wanted Faerie to survive. The question was, did Savin?

"I don't think that was my heart in the vision. She doesn't give a shit what happens to mine. It's yours she thinks is key. That was yours in that thicket. You were defending it." He let the ideas tumble in his head as he thought out loud. "But you're looking in the wrong direction. It's being destroyed while you think you're protecting it."

"My heart doesn't exist."

"I'm going to dismiss how that comment completely trashes your claims of loving me, Magician, because I know you do and I think this I-have-no-heart sentiment is bullshit to begin with. We need to come up with a solution, not pull out the world's tiniest violin and start playing. If I go home tomorrow and you show up to the gate exactly as strong as you are now, can you open it?"

"Maybe."

"But you're not sure?"

"You are thinking this is a science."

"I've given you everything. My body, my trust, the shit inside my head. It's been yours to take from me all along. I don't think I'm the problem at all. It's you. You're holding back. Which is crap when I love you so damn much it's eating my intestines."

Savin rested his hands on top of Jesse's, shooting that fierce Master look of his. "I understand why you *think* you do. This is ridiculous, Boyo. You're better off without me and I don't need your help."

"Don't need it or don't want it?" It all clicked together, wave after wave, the sum total glowing sure in his mind. "You don't trust me."

"What? Of course I do. I thought we moved beyond this."

"You've asked for everything from me and I've given it. But you won't take that last leap to give the same to me. Even now it's as if you can't quite believe I love you."

This has been over ten years brewing, Savin. It's real. Or maybe you just don't want to believe anything fae can be loved. That might mean you'd have to actually accept who you are and figure out a way to live with it."

"Jesse."

"Don't pull that command shit. It won't work right now." He pushed away from his Magician and stood on shaky legs. "Get out of the tub. You're coming with me."

"Sit down before you fall."

"Follow me or I swear I'll search out Eamon myself and let him bring me to the gate."

Savin glared ignited flamethrowers at him but he followed once Jesse stepped out of the bath, grabbed a towel and made his way back into the playroom to the back corner where the sarcophagus container stood. He made it there by taking it slow. He opened the hinged front and gestured inside.

"Get in," Jesse ordered with Savin still in the middle of toweling off water from his body with the cloth he'd grabbed on the run.

"I don't know what you're trying to prove. Be aware it's likely to end with my handprint permanently on your ass."

"Yeah, yeah, all talk, no action. Get in."

Glaring, his Magician threw down the towel and moved into the open sarcophagus. Jesse closed the door.

"I trust you, *Master*. You asked me the first night to do this." He opened the container with the straight swords. "You would never let me hurt you. I can't hurt you and you've proved it in supertanker-size proportions." Aligning the first of the blades to the slotted holes, he slid in the metal with a sure thrust.

For a moment the air around them expanded, a pulse flowing against his fist where it gripped the steel. Savin's expression never changed. Jesse grabbed another sword. "You insisted I trust myself. Willing to let me whale on myself while you kept it all together for me. Fine. I've learned my lesson." He thrust the second blade home. "I want to live. I hate what's happened to me but I don't hate me. I wasn't sure, but now I am." He reached for the third sword, the pressure inside him building, but not a force for destruction. "But fuck it if I'll let you wall yourself off from me." He jammed in the steel.

Savin's face remained passive. Screw that. He grabbed the fourth. Shoved it in with a thrust, squeezing the hilt hard and unable to tear his grip off the weapon. "Your mother was too fae to be selfless and stay around for her son. You want to be more than that? Be human? Then give it up, Master. Give me what's inside that magic man soul of yours. You can't love me like you say you do if you insist on placing your self-hatred first."

Still no response, but a neutral face. Savin staring over Jesse's shoulder to some invisible spot beyond him. Short waves of magic buffeting Jesse as each sword slid in.

His words grew a sharper edge. They came out loud but it hurt too much to watch the cold on Savin's face. "You're not brave enough to take off the mask you wear to pretend it's all fine? You spouted on about the masks and those barbed wire boxes long enough. They're killing you as much as they killed your mother."

He thrust a pointed finger at the black-and-white photo on the wall behind his Magician. Savin's eyes followed the movement. "You're just like that Houdini picture you love. But it's you fighting for your humanity. You're swiping at an invisible enemy. That's what the bitch queen meant. Don't you know you just have to stop struggling and you'll find what you're looking for. Jesus, Savin, I love you. Love me back enough to trust me. Trust me enough to believe that I see you and not some monster you think you are. Give me some fucking credit for knowing the difference." His hands shook around the sword handle. His breath ragged as he swallowed back liquid salt.

And that's when he saw it. A solitary tear trailing his Magician's face. Savin's eyes dropped down, blinking.

"Fuck," Jesse swore under his breath and reached for each sword hilt, pulling them out as swiftly as he could before moving to unlatch the metal container. Door open, Savin stumbled out. Into his arms. Jesse grabbed on tight.

Savin's arms wrapped him. His hand went to the back of Jesse's neck, causing the usual tingling. "You're humbling, love. And too clear-sighted for my own good. I didn't mean to hurt you holding back. I want you safe. It destroys me to think I've put you in danger."

His Magician's voice was breaking, and Jesse wished to hell he could make it better. "It's not your choice. Not this one. Not even as my Master." He pressed his lips into Savin's throat, kissed his frustration into the smooth skin. "Let me help you get stronger tonight. After, if you insist, I'll get on that plane tomorrow. I know I'm a liability if you also need to watch my back. But you can't show up at that gate without everything in your pocket you can get."

"Your promise?"

"Promise."

Savin nodded, no more words. He pulled back, raised his finger to wipe at the tear on his cheek. He looked at the damp fingertip with amazement. His lips formed a twisted smile. "You are ruining my self-image as Master, Boyo."

"Come on." Jesse tugged him toward the door.

"Pushy. Where are you herding me this time?"

"I'm not going to fuck you in the play room. We're going back to your bed and you're going to lie there and take my worst. And we're going to see if it brings some new big bang to your magic and not just your cock. We did it the other way, now we turn it around and see if it gives you more."

"There's that romance you lay on thick."

"Hey, I'm a simple guy."

Savin chuckled behind him. "You get me in bed with you and I might fall into old habits."

"I'll hide the chains first. But if it makes you feel any better you can order me to make love to you."

They made it to the bedroom and Jesse pulled Savin onto the mattress, pressed him to his back and straddled him. His burnished gold-brown hair spread across the pillow around his head. Jesse's littlest digit fingered a strand and a quick image of his wrists tied in restraints by that hair grown longer set his nerves jangling.

"Impatient?" Savin quirked an eyebrow.

Looking at the slate-blue eyes, the punch of Savin's grace and beauty, Jesse hesitated. The lump in his throat migrated to his chest. He brushed a thumb over the sexy divot of his Master's chin. "You know I never thanked you for what you did for me before the queen showed up. Telling the story. It...helped."

"I only wanted to give you back yourself."

"I think you're still more than half in love with that teenage guy I was. I'm not the same person, Savin. Don't be in love with the idea of me, some romantic fantasy about that boy. That's not enough for me anymore. The crap with my family may have screwed me up, but I need a bigger purpose now than traveling the world."

The words tasted right as he found his way to a kernel he hadn't recognized before. "I'm still looking for freedom, but it comes other ways." The freedom he found in Savin's bonds for instance. And, Jesus, how he wanted that now. Hated his promise to leave.

Savin stared back, straight into his soul just as he'd always been able to do. But it didn't make Jesse squirm anymore.

His Magician jerked his chin in affirmation. "It fits with why you can submit to me. You're built for service. Maybe you haven't worked out the details yet, but it's in you. I never stopped to think about that. I promise I love you for who you are now."

"Throw a bit of self-love into the bargain and you've got a deal."

His eyes clouded. "I can't change how I feel about myself, Jesse."

"But you can tell me about it." His voice dipped, heavy out of his mouth. "The magic feeds on truth, right? What you called truth of the soul. It almost makes sense that your magic craves that sort of thing. Gut-deep honesty is as much a truth of the heart. The fae magic is missing heart, so it wants that. The soul and heart aren't so different in a basic sense. You tell me the truth, Savin. Same as you asked of me."

Savin averted his gaze. "What do you want me to do?"

"You can start by keeping your hands on the mattress. No touching me." If he could ram Savin into trusting himself, he'd do it in a second. But nothing was that simple. Fate had a wicked sense of humor, bringing them together, both afraid of whom they were. He intended to make love to his Magician. No mercy. His aroused cock already

liked the idea as he straddled Savin, the hard shaft of the fae pressing into Jesse's balls and perineum where he connected with his groin.

Savin spread his arms out from his sides, palms upward. That picture of vulnerability gave Jesse a start. It felt...off. Rubbed against what he'd come to expect from the very Dominant man. What he'd come to crave. And so, perversely, made him uncomfortable. Not that he wouldn't love to sink to the hilt inside his Magician and lose himself in the raw of it. But Savin was no sub. Making the idea of topping him even in this simple way feel dishonest.

Savin's sharp eyes caught the discomfort. His expression smoothed, his lips firmed and command snapped his voice. "This doesn't change what I am to you, Boyo. Exposing myself doesn't mean forfeiting my right to keep you cuffed, collared and servicing me, or to keep your skin pleasantly striped. I've submitted before. Any good Dom tries the experience to understand how it feels to be on the other end. Now I order you to get on with 'your worst' as you so eloquently put it."

Jesse felt his grin stretch his lips and the knots undid in his shoulders. He let a bit of evil into his voice. "Yes Sir, Master Sir. With all deference, I plan to make you scream long and loud, so I hope you took your faerie vitamins this morning." He lightly tapped the taut abs before him.

His Magician chuckled again. "I'll cooperate with your plan. Though I hope to have you screaming along with me."

"We'll see." He leaned over Savin, brushing his lips against that tempting mouth. Lunging in and devouring the heat, biting as his Magician surged up to eat him back, teeth sharp.

God, if he could just get inside this man. His cock kicked with the thought, but really he wanted more. Something bigger. No, something more intimate. Like to be swallowed whole by him. The feeling almost drowned him. Throwing everything he'd known about his life into freefall. Except he didn't want a safety harness catching him this time.

He tore his lips away. "Use your magic on me. You did it before, remember? It was like you had your fingers inside me, stroking the hot spot. Do it!" The idea had him hot. He worked himself higher hearing the rough demand in his own voice.

His brain stuttered to a standstill as Savin complied. The sudden brush against his prostate was amazing. He groaned low as the strokes grew quicker. Jesse ran his hands over Savin's smooth skin, pinching his nipples hard and rocking with his hips against the other man. Their thick cocks rubbed one another. Just right.

He slid his hand between them, grasping Savin's balls and beginning a slow massage. "Can you do it to yourself? Touch inside yourself with your magic and run it over your gland?"

The blue slate of his lover's irises was swallowed up as his pupils expanded. His hips lurched up and Jesse assumed Savin had done what he'd asked.

"Feels good," Jesse gasped as the sensation continued inside his own ass. "Magic can't be all bad if we feel this way."

"Ah, Jesse," Savin answered in between a shuddering gasp. "This is the only good part of it."

He wouldn't let that bullshit get in the way. Jesse brought his mouth down on the other man again, his desire a roaring dragon threatening to storm and pillage. The fantasyland image of it all drew an amused bark from inside. Appropriate. He took the image and dragged lips down the line of jaw and column of neck. Wanting Savin to feel the same burn of need that rode him painfully. A war between them to get inside Savin's defenses, but with his Magician's life on the line. He fought with his own irritation at needing to drag out Savin's truth. He sucked at the skin as he continued lower to lick at the flat brown areolas around his nipples. He bit into one and got the reaction he wanted.

"Goddess!"

He reached to wrap a fist around both their cocks as he sat up enough to watch the lust on his Magician's face flush his cheeks. Good, distracted. Maybe enough to pull his head out of his ass and give Jesse what he asked. "Tell me about Faerie. Why's it bad?" He gritted his teeth around the incredible feel of their dicks hard and rubbing against one another. His hand squeezed the shafts together, started pumping up and down along their tightened skin to hit against their reddened helmets and work down again to their bases. As fast as he could stand while he struggled to keep his mind on his ultimate goal. He needed to get through this and make Savin see what he saw. Protect the man the only way left to him.

"You expect me to talk?" Savin grunted.

"Turnaround is fair play, Master," he gasped in return as their mingling pre-cum made the slide of fingers that much slicker. "Not so easy, huh?" But he let up on the motion, held their erections together but still.

The torn conflict on his Magician's face gnawed at his resolve. Savin answered, "I'd much prefer to get off this bed, lock you into my stockade and rub myself all over you until you're begging to be fucked by me." He tried to grin with the comment, but the struggle underneath it gave away his true vulnerability. He gritted his teeth, facing Jesse's questions. "But I suppose that's not on your agenda as leader of the Save Savin campaign?"

Jesse's own control rocked at the description of restraint. God, he wanted to do exactly as his Magician suggested. Get off this bed, onto his knees and let Savin lock him up. Leave behind the choice. Belong to him. There he'd be free.

He couldn't do this. Pretending to play the Dom and force Savin to give up what he'd stuffed inside for so long.

His fingers stilled. His shoulders slumped and he bent his head, bumped his nose down on the sleek cheekbone of this incredible man and held it there. It almost hurt

how much he needed their contact. "I can't do this. I won't demand you talk," he said softer, nuzzling the cheek now covered with perspiration.

He pulled away from Savin. "I'm not your Master and I can't strip you down like you did for me. It's not who I am and I don't even want to try. I won't force it out." He dragged in a shaky breath. "But I can ask. Your slave asks his Master to share."

A resigned sigh blew out into the space between them. The taut muscles lying underneath him gave way a fraction. "Love, you deserve it from me. Even if it doesn't help the magic."

Jesse backed off the bed. "But not this way. You need to make the decision. You're in charge. You only think you'll give that up if you accept who you are. That somehow the magic will take over and rampage." He snorted. "Which is absolute bullshit from a guy who made me lock him up and go down on him just to prove I wouldn't lose control."

Savin finally moved the arms pinned only by agreement and propped himself to sit. "Maybe." He held out a hand. "I don't like that you left the bed. Come here."

The command had Jesse stepping closer without thought. He rolled his eyes once he realized what he'd done. Oh yeah, he was owned by this man, lock, stock and studded leather paddle. Christ, he wanted to spend the afternoon staring at Savin. Even upset and distracted the man sent sparks up and down Jesse's spine to rest in his balls. His Magician took his hand and yanked him back onto the mattress.

But instead of holding him, Savin sat him on one end of the king mattress and placed himself across from Jesse, way on the opposite edge. "You want to know about Faerie. Watch."

Savin motioned out to the middle of the bed, made a quick flick of his wrist. A glance up caught a flare of starlight in those slate-blue eyes.

A flood of pressure hit Jesse in the chest. He blinked, and resting in the center of the mattress was a live-action video. Shit! 3D and vivid enough to make him get the creepy sensation that the field, forest and buildings surrounding it were actually present, although none were more than a foot high.

"This is amazing." He sounded like a wide-eyed child, but he'd barely had a moment to sit with the idea of what Savin's identity meant. When it came down to it, the threat to their lives outweighed wasting the time to figure out how he felt about it.

Savin grunted and a streak of contrition flew through Jesse. "I know you hate it, but what else do expect me to say. I never believed this stuff was possible."

"Magic, alive and well in Vegas," Savin said with a cynical twist of his mouth.

In the video, castles sat next door to log cabins next door to townhouse complexes. Like some postmodern funky art piece. The tiniest details were crisply authentic. Until a strange fog rolled in, rippling over the scene and ruining that Alice-down-the-rabbit-hole-Christmas-story-village-kitsch effect.

"Faerie is like the Strip. A mishmash. A mutt. The fae get stuck in past decades from human history and insist on mimicking lifestyles and dress. Eamon and the others like to pretend our home is noble and superior to Earth, but really it's a whore to human culture, fae salivating over it and shadowing it as best they're able. Once they stopped being able to travel freely Earthside, their mania about it became worse."

Miniature people, the fae, he guessed, started filtering into the field between the buildings among the fog. Jesse shivered at seeing Savin's dark, seething regard snap to the players. Floating from a balcony of the biggest castle came a figure cloaked in blood-red. Jesse squinted to focus on her face. The queen bitch herself. She landed on the grass and made her way to a dais, sitting herself on a tiny onyx throne. The others walked into the grassy area from out of a black-leaved forest. Its trees ringed the clearing in all the spots the buildings didn't touch, filling in the spaces between them as if the forest refused to allow the right of the fae shelters to dominate. In fact, some of the trees grew into the walls of the structures in confusing patterns. Staring at it long enough would give him a headache.

"What are they doing?"

"Engaging in entertainment."

Tables were set out in the field. The fae took seats around them with mounds of food appearing in their centers, spilling over in almost comical gluttonous amounts as they shoveled it in their mouths.

"I thought there'd be trolls or those little Tinkerbell-sized zingy creatures. What about the legends of monsters or pixies or guys with antlers? These people look normal. Like you. Not even pointed ears." His eyes strayed to Savin's ears, detached lobes, attractive. He swallowed the urge to cross the bed to bite into their meat, permission granted of course. But on the whole, his Magician looked human. Gorgeous and fuckable but human.

Damn, he was trying to distract himself. The queasy feel of his gut had no real explanation, but he clamped down on it. He'd asked for this. "They're all cover models from what I can tell with the miniaturizing. So, are the legends wrong?" he asked.

"Monsters are as much made on the inside. And no, not all wrong. Fae find it entertaining to change shapes, twist themselves in as many ways possible to find their kicks with humans. This was true even before Eamon and the others turned to torture to feed their magic. We had plenty of magic for millennia, but the fae have always worn masks. They have no substance of their own, so it's all pretend and dress up to them."

A last figure walked out onto the field. No, two. A woman and a shorter fae. Jesse squinted. A boy. The woman held his hand.

"You want what's inside me, Jesse. You're sure? Because the magic can show you a lot more than you might want to see."

He stiffened. "You think I can love you and not want to understand? I might not have all my shit together, but I'm part Teflon." He shook his head. "Paddle me, clamp me, make me lose my fucking mind serving you with your cock shoved down my

throat, but do me the respect of believing I can take the pain you keep here," he slapped his chest, "just as well as what you choose to inflict on my body."

Savin's brow knotted, his darkly storming face boring into Jesse. His nod sharp, he reached a fingertip to linger on the spot the woman and boy stood in the scene. A caress of regret that contrasted the edge to his voice.

His fist tightened over the couple. His words fell out like claws scratching deep and into exposed skin. As if Savin tried to wound himself with them. He gestured to the scene on the bed. "The fae keep most traditions for millennia, but several decades ago when Faerie truly began to die, they added a new one. On each full moon they hold a fête. This is the last I attended."

Jesse's eyes zoomed to the boy.

"Boyo." Savin drew his attention up again with a word. His fingers flicked in Jesse's direction.

The magic boiled. Like an exotic, seductive shadow come to life with a whirlpool personality. Snatching Jesse from his seat and sucking him down.

Jesse blinked. Spun around, disoriented as his hand fell away from a woman. He turned to see a beautiful, curvaceous female with familiar hair. A delicate shape to her face but the same knowing slate-blue eyes he'd come to recognize. Savin's mother. What was her name? Adelle.

He glanced down at himself. Short, his arms and legs were off. He was dressed in leggings and a fine leather jerkin. His hands jerked to his face, feeling the contours. Savin. As a boy. And he looked out from his eyes. The field on Faerie loomed around him as the moonlit night and scent of grass, rich, sauced foods and wild power pulsed from all sides. Jesus, what had he gotten himself into?

Vibrant colors surrounded him, lurid almost, though he knew that was damn impossible with night fallen. The fae were dancing. There had to be at least fifty in the group. Some sort of circle dance ringing the place he and Savin's mother stood. They clasped hands as their feet pounded to the music. Their movement a confusing mixture of grace and primal essence.

The beat of a drum grew louder, the sound from nowhere, everywhere. And bodies would stop in their tracks, throw down their hands and tear at their clothes, rending them and exposing smooth breasts and sculpted thighs. Step out of their clothes with madness in their eyes and then lose the look and become calm, collected automatons, relinking fingers.

Screams cut through the fog curling around the fae. Jesse, as young Savin, whirled to the cries but saw nothing.

Another scream and he fell back to the ground as a ghostly shadow of a galloping bull ran into the circle, its power shattering bones of the nearest fae as they screeched with joy and terror.

Chaos.

Another man broke rank, hands up and turning into knives, scissored fingers stabbing into his neighbor as she lunged back. Blood ran.

A cloud of black dust shimmered over a separate woman, a funnel of it directed by her to land on a fae dressed in silver chain mail, his features contorting as it choked him, his hands grasping his neck as he tried to breathe. Skin mottling with his failure.

More disjointed movement.

A giant of a fae ran into the fragmenting circle holding an axe. He screamed pleasure and lopped the head off a nearby woman in the remnants of a pale green pants suit, her breasts exposed in the tatters as her twitching torso hit the ground.

Blood pooled black and heavy on the grass, glinting off it to match the deep, dark shine of leaves on the forest. The trees themselves seemed to creep inward from the outlying buildings.

With a rush and thrust a spiked limb of branch impaled another fae. Lifting him off the ground and flinging him hundreds of yards.

A woman left in only a ripped chemise was rutting on top of a chain-rope man, the sheen of power from the metal rolling off the restraint. She called to Soliandra as she climaxed. Begging her to take the fucking in tribute to her glory.

Jesse scrambled back on hands and knees away from the violence and sex. More than one fae had subdued others with their magic and raped them on the grass. He twisted and lost the contents of his stomach, the acid vomit staining his clothes and arms.

A cold, jagged laugh from across the clearing, echoing off the very air, turned his head to the dais. The bitch queen sat unearthly still with her mouth open, spewing her humor. Not one speck of human in her showing. His skin crawled with fear, swarming like locusts to eat at his sanity.

Men and woman changed shape, skin and organs and entrails turning in on themselves in wet, popping metamorphosis to become giant wolves or heavy horses. Their orange, glowing pupils stared out into the night as they galloped to run over their neighbors.

The chaos stretched for hours. Probably took under a minute.

A wrench on his arm. Savin's mother grabbed him, pulled him across the field farther from the madhouse stink. He wanted to tear out his hair, the magic flung from the fae battered at him as she dragged him to safety.

But he couldn't get safe. There was no safety here near his kin. These were the people he'd see at court tomorrow when his mother brought him there as commanded by Soliandra. Jesse knew this as if he'd lived every day of the five years Savin had existed at this time in history.

"Stay still," his mother hissed at him. "Watch. She'll punish you if you don't." She meant the queen. He took shallow breaths and turned back to the slaughter.

Jesse wanted it stopped. He needed it to stop. His sight began to fog as if the mist on the field pierced into his eyes and filled them up.

Christ. No more.

A loud clap and Jesse slouched onto the mattress.

Returned.

Savin leaned over him, a hand cradling his nape as he helped Jesse make it through the gasping breaths with his heart trying to pound its way out of his chest.

His brain hurt. His skin itched as if coated with powder, although the sensation had his nerve endings jumping left and right like the jerk of a reflex when the doctor wielded his tiny hammer. The abuse and fatigue of his body from the past hours slammed into him at once. His leaden limbs kept him on the bed. "Why?"

"Because we are fae. Besides that one laugh, Soliandra sat on her throne, observing it all as if some boring rerun on television. Not once did she try to stop it. And the worst is that most of my kin didn't show a blink of emotion the next day at court after fucking or savaging each other.

"This is how we treat one another. And it only grows worse each ounce of power Faerie loses. Like addicts desperate for a hit. Fae can't gain magical strength from each other's souls, but they can tear energy from one another in moments of weakness." Savin leaned over and pressed his face to Jesse's. His bitter laugh vibrated over Jesse's jaw. "You should see them dance cold, political games outside the fêtes, exchanging polite words and offering gifts to earn favor from one another as if they hadn't been wading deep in one another's blood and emissions the night before. Every month this happened. Still happens now, I assume. Fae are hard to kill except with the worst of injuries like losing their heads. They heal. To fuck and fight again for no reason. But even when the fête brings true loss of life, it's as if my people cannot help themselves in their mania."

The words whipped his skin. It was as if each lick of agony Savin experienced traveled down braided leather to connect with his body. If he could drain his Magician's pain by taking a beating he'd do it. But his stubborn son-of-a-bitch lover kept hoarding it.

"How did you survive watching?"

"I don't remember. Maybe I was just as dead inside as them. Maybe I still am, with the same monster waiting to jump out given a chance."

"You're not dead inside and you're no monster."

"I don't want to go back, Jesse."

He forced himself to sit up, rest a hand on the blade of Savin's shoulder. The strength of that arm when mastering him was completely addictive to his soul. And, man, he needed that arm strong. Selfish of him, but he wanted Savin whole. No matter where he ended up. "Then don't go back. But explain something to me. If this is all of Faerie, why was your mom the way she was? How can you be the way you are? You

don't walk around hurting people, Magician. You take care of your subs. You have friendships. You love. The disconnect is screaming loud in my head but you don't see it."

He shook his head. "I pretend well."

"So you're saying you're restraining yourself by the barest thread from grabbing a knife and gutting me?"

"No."

The connection between them charged the air. The weight of emotion and the wild ride of the last days bridging the gaps beyond even the crazy-assessed fact of the tattoo and their dreams, whatever they meant.

And because Savin had let him in, his instinctual understanding that there was something deeper to find kept him focused. Kept him digging. Savin's relationship to Faerie wasn't as simple as the horrors he'd seen, no matter how much Jesse wanted to go out and find something to punch to bury the impotence after witnessing them. Savin deserved better. So he tried.

Gritting teeth, he looked back over the years to his own struggle with his father. The cruelty that came within a heart-stabbing context. No, not simple to understand at all. And neither was Savin's version. "Then what else is there? Tell me a good memory from Faerie. Was there one?"

His lover's eyes fogged distant. He kept quiet as his lips pressed firm together with his struggle. Finally, he nodded.

"Show me with more pictures. Of the good stuff." He would do this. Prove to Savin his power was not all bad.

"You'll take my magic again?" Genuine surprise.

"I'll take all of you if you'd just let me."

Savin snorted but his tight face relaxed. Relief to see him step back farther from the edge. Savin reached a light brush of fingers to Jesse's temple.

Popping pressure. The seductive power grabbed him again, wrapped him in its silky arms, pulled him under.

Snap!

This time he had no body, just vision blurring by with a series of video shorts, the lack of focus of these images as if his Magician struggled to remember them.

Savin's mother held a baby. A group of fae stood nearby, smiling at the child. A clean, pine scent filled the air. They were genuinely pleased. "Another babe born at last after centuries. Fine job, Adelle. He is handsome." She gave a tinkling joy-filled laugh in return for the compliment.

Scene shift.

A crisp morning in the dark forest with Savin as a toddler. He rode on the shoulders of a man and the queen strolled by their side. "Color on the leaves," the boy squealed, demanding, pointing to the darkness of the vegetation.

The monarch's lips turn up a fraction. "For you, my love, of course." She nodded her head and the leaves changed to a riot of color, vibrant reds and greens, purples and blues, stripes and dots and swirls patterning the leaves.

The boy laughed again. "You fixed it."

"Yes, love. I fix what I can." A deep sigh and Soliandra's face closed down.

Scene shift.

A light-stepping fae female attended another lying on a bed. He was ill and she laid hands on him. From a corner of the room someone asked a mumbled question. "No, he is not family. But he is ill and I am a healer. What other reason for the magic inside me? I will save him. Now scurry away to your mother, Savin. You have important responsibilities and I do not wish to be disappointed hearing you neglected them."

Scene shift.

Young Savin again, who scolded a puppy at his heels, slapping him across the muzzle. Another adult fae, this one armed to the brim with weapons, admonished him. "Do not harm your dependents if you can help it, lad. A firm hand, yes, but never without thoughtful reason."

The boy spoke back. "But just this morning Tosarri struck Lady Graile for no cause."

"One day you will realize, lad, that the fae are desperate to feel. Cruelty is easy to rely on to reach what we crave. We must begin somewhere. Still, hurting the puppy is wrong."

"I don't understand."

"To tell the truth, lad, none of us do. That's the problem."

A blur and Savin walked the halls of the castle. Cold eyes greeted his passage. But every so often a shuttered look would break, a stiff fae would bend over and offer a quick kiss, a brief touch to the boy then return to his empty regard and continue by with no greeting.

The videos continued. He practiced his magic, building what looked to be complex structures of ice hovering in the air. Like a kid playing with Tinkertoys, but a strange otherworldly equivalent. And the group of fae who watched offered praise, encouragement. Voices cool, as if the words were stiff in their mouths, but they were good words.

Another blur and the sight of a throne room, fae clustered around tables, arguing. "You cannot let him go. He is your heir, Majesty."

The queen replied, "I appreciate your concern, Gwenlynde, but his mother goes to save our people. I put our survival as a race before any one individual's. We have yet to fulfill the promise the Goddess saw in us, and we need to survive to do so."

Another blur. Savin sat on the floor of the forest, his hands pressed into the dirt. Queen Soliandra sat next to him. She was covered with blood and he knew she had come from punishing a fae who questioned her judgment too often. "You run, child."

"I don't like being at court when you hurt people."

She said nothing, looked at his hands. "What do you do?"

"I'm feeling Faerie."

Her chin lifted. "What do you feel?"

"Emptiness. Cracks. The beat is very weak. It's dying."

"That is so."

"It makes me sad. But you don't care."

"I do. You will leave tomorrow and search for help."

"You could fix it if you wanted."

"I've forgotten how, child."

"Touch the soil." She bent down at his command and he wondered at such a powerful woman doing as he wished. "Do you feel it?"

"No."

His face twisted up. "I do not like this. I will go somewhere there is a beat and bring it back for Faerie."

She looked at him then, bleak but assessing. "You will hate the place you go."

He tilted his head to the side. His tongue stuck out and pressed his upper lip. "You are jealous of me. You say you hate the place but really you wish you could go."

She stared at him until he remembered who he faced and shifted his gaze to the ground. Soliandra stood and walked toward the castle.

He watched her leave, wishing she'd turn back and stay with him. Instead, his mother came and the next morning they walked through a portal Earthside. And he sought out the beat.

Jesse blinked as Savin's hand dropped from his brow. He shook his head to clear it, reshuffled what he'd seen. The seeds of compassion. A people struggling, but not all evil. What a strange comparison to the corruption of the fête.

His Magician licked his lips, sat back and crossed arms over tented knees, staring down at nothing.

"Savin."

He drew in a breath, held it too long and then exhaled raggedly. He couldn't seem to stop. And he wouldn't talk. As if these gentler memories brought his Magician closer to breaking than the others.

Shit.

Jesse moved to him, grabbed his hands and pulled them from around his knees, placed a palm mid-chest and pushed him back on the mattress, climbing on top. Savin started to protest, his eyes blinking back to normal, sharp intent.

"No. Let me take care of you. It hurts, I know. Let me."

"Back to your plan, I see."

He cut off his Magician's tries to regain the upper hand and kissed the idiot.

The kiss started gentle but went deep, teeth and tongue working Savin's mouth, and Jesse's body became electrified by it, this time in a good way once Savin got over himself and returned the effort. Jesse licked the seam of his lips, wanting to memorize the man beneath him. Pull in the command and assurance along with the pain.

He ran a hand down his Magician's smooth chest, brushing over pecs and over sectioned abs to rest on his hip and thigh. Curl around to cradle a firm buttock. Savin shuddered and Jesse's balls drew up tight.

"Love you," he whispered as he dropped his mouth down to follow his hand.

He let go of all the spinning thoughts left over from what he'd seen. Pleasure for Savin was the goal. Nothing would get in the way of that. This was only another way his Master needed serving. Some softness after Savin revisited the storm stirred by his past. Jesse could not disappoint him. He was made for this and the thought brought him a peace he hadn't known in years.

Savin groaned when Jesse's lips reached their destination and sucked in the already-hard cock. He pressed his tongue into the sensitive ridge running just under the cock head. Swirled it around, letting his fist grip his Magician's base and stroke the rigid shaft in moves to complement the suction. The salty tang of Savin's pre-cum sharpened his own edge with his hard-on aching.

Hands gripped his hair, Savin holding on, reminding him of the truth between them even as Jesse tried to drive him blind with pleasure and make him lose his control. The slight pain, the pulling at his roots, hit home to start the ink burning on his neck again. Yes. Good.

Jesse dipped to suck a tight testicle into his mouth.

Savin's back arched on the mattress. "Goddess!" he gasped as Jesse took in the other testicle, hand shafting his Master's cock, pulling at the taut skin of the dark-veined organ. Faster.

"Fuck me, Boyo. Now!"

The order came out hard, urgent. Jesse clamped down on his reaction before he lost it and came from the sound of Savin's demand.

Christ, was there ever enough pleasure he could give this man? He deserved it all. As if his own years of hell made it all the more crucial to relieve Savin's. The feeling leaking out of him almost choked.

He needed to be inside his Master. Get rid of all the space between them. Too much space. "Where's the lube? Condoms?"

"Screw lube or anything else, Boyo. Now!"

"I won't hurt you."

"Goddess, I'm almost fucking impossible to hurt. Don't get diseases. Now get that cock of yours inside me, boy, or mine will be inside your ass as soon as I flip you."

His growl slammed into Jesse and had him lifting his Magician's heels to his shoulders with the pleasant edge of uneasiness from the threat flaring his arousal.

The visual of Savin spread and open for him brought tiny lightning bursts at the base of his spine. The flush of his Magician's cheeks. The fast pants of breath. All of it jacked him. Jess needed to hang on. He pushed through the first layer of muscle in Savin's anus, the squeeze of him hot and amazing. So tight. Better than every time before with a woman. As if his cock had been waiting for just this. With this man.

"Deeper, faster," Savin growled.

Jesse obeyed. Slammed down as far as he could go and went wild at hearing Savin's cry as he rubbed against his prostate. Picked up the pace and hammered into his Magician, his penis so hard, balls so high he wasn't sure what kept him from exploding immediately.

Outside time, outside place he worked Savin. Lunging down, pulling out, slamming in again. Needing to connect and find a way to take the past and the chasm of their different blood and race and smash it. Atoms ripped apart in a supercollider and combined the way they were meant to be. Into one Savin and Jesse.

Jesse opened himself to the force in the room—Savin's building magic that he still fought against. As if Jesse owned X-ray eyes and saw inside his Magician's chest to the doors Savin desperately tried to slam against his fae nature.

Touching Savin, he called to the magic, soaked it in and welcomed the seductive force. Shivered under the crawling sting of it up and down his torso, the lick of it around the base of his cock as his penis pumped in and out of Savin's ass.

Savin's nails dug into him as his body compressed the mattress with each impact. Though blunted, he dug so hard Jesse felt the tear of skin. Didn't matter. He wanted Savin to mark him. It was right. He needed it to fight this battle.

The magic screamed its need and Jesse opened himself to the impact of it. His hand grabbed his Magician's thick, rigid cock and squeezed.

"Come for me, Master," he called low and hoarse and dripping sweat as they slid against one another, and by will alone Jesse tried to break Savin's defenses. "Let me have it. Love you."

Savin arched up, eyes star fire as he yelled his release, cum coating his belly, the orgasm lasting endlessly. The fist of his rectum tightened convulsively around Jesse. Sent him over. Magic coursed through them. Explosion.

His vision opened.

The beating heart inside Savin. Bright light breaking through as everything Savin was met the rough corridor that was Jesse. Burst apart. Seeing clearly inside his Magician. The unimaginable strength of character, the infinite size of his love, the finely tuned empathy causing a river of ache, the veins of black self-doubt and self-hatred, and the gold-and-silver-laced pattern over it all, humanity and Faerie, monster and savior in equal measure.

Jesse's own soul spilled over and into the mix. Christ, help him bear it. The agony of the joy, the pleasure of the pain. Everything. From both of them.

The magic ate it all, gulping it down—greedy, purring, gleeful.

Until even it couldn't take in all this new power.

The air shattered around them with a *boom!*

Pain. Ecstasy as Jesse was slammed back into himself, collapsed on the bed. A hurricane battered at them as he held on to Savin, bodies rolling hard together into the headboard. A crash. Loose items in the room flying through the air as the blast of magic rampaged. Debris ramming into his skin as it passed.

Feathers from torn pillows, a vase smashing into the wall, papers spiraling and the wood of the side table splintering against the doorway. Ozone burning his nostrils. Chaos, hard for the eye to track, as extreme pressure bore down on their bodies, pushed against the heavy wooden frame. Lids squeezed shut against the popping force. Amazed he wasn't cut into a million pieces, dead already from the wind. Just hanging on. His fingers dug hard into Savin as the man curled over him, sheltering him from the worst.

Until... Done.

Holy Christ. Just breathe.

"Jesse." Savin was untangling them, rolling him to his back and cupping hands over his jaw. His fingers moved over Jesse's skull as if he checked for bumps or fractures.

Shaking out of the stupor of overload, he winced when Savin fingered one area and drew his hand back, blood tingeing his fingers. "A slice," he said. "Bleeding but not deep."

A jittery laugh escaped Jesse's mouth. "You're right. Condoms won't do shit for protection against that kind of sex." He tried to catch the groan but it slipped out.

"Are you all right?"

He took stock as he sucked in a deep breath. A floating euphoria slipped over him. He focused on Savin's eyes, still starlit and blazing. Fucking gorgeous. A shimmering glow coated his entire body. Jesse reached up and touched it. Had to.

"You're dayglow."

"I know. The magic fed. The soul truth went both ways this time. You got what you hoped. I'm even stronger." But he was frowning.

"Guess that means you can kick some serious faerie ass now."

"Boyo, let's just concentrate on you. Are you injured anywhere else?" His Magician's hands trembled as he continued down Jesse's body, feeling for any more problems.

Jesse grabbed his wrists, stilling them. "That was amazing. Don't fucking ignore it."

"I'm not." A slow smile spread Savin's face. "You're mine. Part of me wherever you go, no matter how far." He slid a hand to the center of Jesse's chest over his heart. "This is inside me."

"Yours." He nodded. "But you're mine too." He returned the favor, pressing a palm to Savin's ribs.

The wreckage around them seeped into Jesse's awareness. "You did this?"

"Yes." Savin frowned.

"How powerful are you now?"

His Magician's lips twisted. "Very."

"It'll last?"

"Long enough for my purposes."

"Savin, I get how much you hate this part of you. I've been inside you."

"Seen me in all my awful glory." Bitterness flowed in the words.

"You're fae. It's in there and it's real and it's scary and big but also incredible. My mind has a hard time grasping it, but inside you it...fit." This was difficult to put to words, but Savin needed to hear them. "You're more though. God, Savin, inside you're just as human as me. Humanity isn't about a blood test."

Every muscle clenched in the man. It pissed him off that after what they'd shared Savin might not believe him. "You let me in. You chose it and now you're going to listen. You want to think you're a monster. Fine. But a monster is as a monster does and there hasn't been one second when that's been true."

"You almost died on the mountain."

"That was an accident and you saved me."

"And the club. I sent you there."

"You know this guilt thing seems pretty human to me."

"You don't understand."

"But that's just it. I do, Magician. Tell me I'm wrong after what we just did together."

Savin turned his head away, eyes squeezed shut. Tried to pull back, although Jess held on and kept him there. "Don't!"

Savin let himself be restrained, turned back. "You've got what you wanted. I love you more than ever. But tomorrow we go to the airport. You leave."

The slice stung deep. He sucked in a long breath and kept hold of the pain. Nodded. "I'll keep my promise."

"I know you will, love."

Tomorrow. Fuck!

Chapter Eleven

Savin jerked into consciousness, tearing his body away and rolling to his back from where he lay tangled with Jesse. Sweat beaded his spine.

Jesse sat up with a lurch, wide-awake and alert from Savin's sudden movement. "What's wrong?"

Light filtered into the bedroom from behind the blinds. Morning. They'd been up late, playing, fucking, Jesse submitting to him again and again until even Savin's body ached from the demands. He didn't know which of them had been more desperate to get their fill of the other. They took it out on their bodies with rough sex, their passion unleashed until it blurred into one long, sweet hurt. After exhausting himself to let the relief of mindless sleep catch him, he'd pulled Jesse hard into his chest and wrapped an arm around his middle, hand cupping his flaccid penis. Tweaking a nipple and burrowing his cock between his lover's taut cheeks, he'd fallen off in a blink.

Both relief and despair set in now that he was awake with Monday a harsh reality.

"Nothing's wrong, Boyo." The trip to the airport was burden enough. Savin's skin tightened over him, constricting.

Jesse moved, muscles bunching to climb on top of Savin. He was able to do it only because Savin never expected it. His lover's morning erection and high, tight balls brushed Savin's abdomen. "Don't be an asshole, Magician. You closed right up with my question. We're sharing now. No more secrets."

Goddess, how could he forget? He delivered a careful shrug. "I dreamed of Faerie and Las Vegas. It woke me."

Seconds ticked by after he said nothing more. Jesse's face darkened. He grabbed Savin's biceps with his demand. "That's all?"

Savin reacted. Moved in a blur and had Jesse on his back, had his grip circling his sub's balls and shaft, squeezing. His new, all-encompassing magic speared out of his fingers before any thought called it back, and Jesse arched into his hold, a moaned shudder twitching through him.

"I love you but don't push it." A searing pain fisted in his center.

Hells, he'd lost control again. The new, more-powerful, licking energy consumed everything. Bigger than his skin. He opened his grip and rocked back on his heels. Manacled Jesse's wrists to the bed with his hands instead.

"Don't stop. Feels great," Jesse gasped.

He shook his head. "You deserve honesty. And if you'd stop trying to top me from the bottom for a second I'll have the chance to explain."

"Yes, Master." Jesse's low, throaty response, the automatic use of the title, wrapped itself around Savin's soul and settled.

To give him up would kill something inside Savin. Though he'd gladly sacrifice himself ten thousand times to keep Jesse safe. No, it was the right thing to do.

"In the dream, Faerie's in flames, being destroyed." He choked up the words. "Las Vegas too. Their images are superimposed. And Faerie's calling to me, wants to consume me."

"Why Las Vegas?"

"I don't know. Other than it may symbolize you and my concerns for your safety in this mess with Faerie."

"I seem to be in one piece at the moment. Let me stay."

"No. I need you far from the gate."

"You told me to live my life making the choices I want. No guilt, no hair shirts of penance and self-recrimination. This is one of those choices." He struggled against his pinned wrists. "Dammit, you're sending me away like a little kid." Jesse subsided after Savin simply continued the hold.

"Manipulative sub, aren't you? Playing on my investment in your healing won't work." He let go a wrist and brushed a stubbled cheek with his finger. "Besides, you promised."

The string of cursing brought a smile to his lips. He rolled off his Boyo and to his back, gathering strength to rise and face this blasted day. "Let's go."

Jesse turned to his stomach, scooted down the bed to Savin's cock in a smooth, athletic lunge. "In a minute." His lips swallowed the hard-on, sucking strong and deep throating him with a single dip of his mouth. The tip of him bumped into the back of Jesse's throat. Goddess, so good. Wet heat and a strong, pulling force enough to bring him off in short order if he let it. He could not.

He tangled fingers in Jesse's dark hair and pulled him off and up. "No delaying tactics, love. Last night was it for us. You take your goodbye bruises and get on with it. We both do." He grabbed his Boyo's cock and pumped it several times, unable to resist a final Master's urge to leave his lover hard and wanting more. Goddess, even this small, arousing cruelty turned him on. Better than thinking about how he'd survive after the airport. He pushed Jesse away and rose from the bed, walking toward the shower, bricks weighing his steps though he made sure to appear casual.

"You're an asshole, Savin."

Savin looked over his shoulder, his heart a tender mess. "I know it, Boyo." He walked out of the bedroom into the shower.

* * * * *

The McCarran International Airport in Las Vegas was ranked fifteenth worldwide for passenger traffic. And although the busy concourses filled with travelers leaving Sin

City for other destinations, Las Vegas refused to give them up without a fight. Over a thousand slot machines in the airport enticed those departing, luring them with one last promise of a jackpot. Savin envied them their hope, the dreams they envisioned in their futures. The promises yet to unfold. His dream had walked into his theater last Friday, and now it was time to kiss it goodbye.

Although ticketless, Savin had used a push of glamour to slip past security unseen and escort Jesse to his plane. Jesse walked quietly next to him down Concourse C, bag slung over his shoulder, mouth turned down and eyes distracted, his body one tight line as if he marshaled arguments to use on Savin until the very end. Southwest passengers already lined up in queue at gate eighteen for his Boyo's flight east.

They stopped and stood at the edge of the crowd at the gate. Savin should push Jesse into his line but not yet. Just one more minute.

Jesse broke the building silence as the cacophony of voices flowed around them, travelers distracted with talk of their destinations. He darted his eyes, fast and uneasy around the terminal, over to the gate podium. "Jesus, I fucking hate airports." But he locked gazes with Savin with gritted determination. "So how am I supposed to know what happens to you?" The tight pain in his voice thrummed over Savin's exposed nerve endings. Jesse didn't try to spare him the vicious hurt of it.

All of the fight drained from Savin and he couldn't pretend to distance himself with his Dominance. His bones weighed ten million pounds. He owed Jesse too much to try to pretty up the truth. "You won't. If all goes well I'll return through the gate and face my queen. If not..." He shrugged through his ache.

Jesse grabbed his wrist, bearing down enough to hurt. "I need you. I don't know how more clearly to say it. And you fucking need me."

Savin almost caved. Almost relented and told him to stay. In the end, he thought of his mother, her integrity and what happened when she sacrificed that honor. He shook his head. "What do you expect me to say? My life is not for you even if I thought you'd survive the monsters of Faerie."

"My keeper to the finish, I see. You can choose to commit suicide but the option's not allowed me."

"I'm not planning to roll over and die."

"Really?" He rolled his eyes. "Because your enthusiasm for your fae life is so convincing."

Jesse wanted a fight. Savin understood. He wished he had the energy to accommodate him. He couldn't answer. Or at least answer with anything Jesse wanted to hear.

"Coward." The word stabbed out from his lover. He gripped his boarding pass as if he'd tear it in two.

"I love you, Jesse. Now get out of my life."

A new voice rang out behind them and Savin pivoted with insects crawling up his spine at the familiar sound.

"Bravo, Prince. But a bit premature."

Eamon.

Savin's eyes shot to the figure cradled limp in the other fae's arms, her head flopping in unconsciousness. Blood on her clothes. His face went cold.

"Corrine," Jesse gasped next to him. He jerked toward Eamon, but Savin caught his arm, held back his surge of fury.

Savin threw up a glamour and the airport patrons continued on around them, oblivious to anything out of place. As if there wasn't an ungodly beautiful man with a cruel, cold gaze who had popped in from thin air and stood holding a hurt woman.

He'd tortured her. *Goddess, Jesse.* But he couldn't take his attention off the threat in front of him to gauge his lover's state of mind.

Eamon bounced the unconscious form in his arms. "I suspect you have not taken my or our queen's warnings seriously, Savin. Shame. You are here, bundling your toy onto a plane when you have been commanded to bring him to the gate tomorrow."

"Bastard." The low threat from Savin's lips simmered up with the force of his magic.

"Possibly. Although my mother always claimed her husband fathered me. Do not do anything rash, Prince. Although this piece of mortal trash has fed me, there's an airport full of weak and easily broken humans at risk. Even now my magic is wrapping a dozen planes in the air lined up for landing. Should I let it loose and incinerate them? Crash them into the terminal buildings? I'm considering it. Your priorities are so skewed you need extra reminders."

A quick scan of the air confirmed Eamon told the truth.

Savin stepped forward, pulling up power in hot ribbons of display and flaunting them for his enemy, the force of his magic cackling in delight as he finally reached for it with no reservations. He might despise his magic, but now was exactly the time to use it as a weapon. "Eamon, you are entirely too full of yourself. Have you even stopped to understand what you threaten? That I have become all you wanted and more with my power? Harm these people and you will find yourself in an early grave along with any you hurt."

Eamon squinted his eyes with consideration. Savin felt the brush against his magic, the assessment of its strength. "At least you've done one thing commanded. But even great power has limits. For instance, who will you choose to save if..."

A blur. With no warning Eamon tossed the body. The woman flew high, his strength keeping her airborne.

Jesse wrenched out of Savin's hold. "Corrine!"

Chaos splintered within a few precious seconds.

A whirling rush of power shot into the sky, a hawk-shaped cloud of smoke flying through the air and targeting the net of magic surrounding the planes circling Las Vegas. Ready to trigger the explosion.

Goddess, no! His magic cushioned Corrine's landing then launched into the air to follow the bird and slash it down, his vision seeing past the walls of the building to the atmosphere above. He found the bird shielded with a dense barrier. Before today he would never have hoped to break through the shield.

Unexpectedly, it swerved from its path and attacked his pursuing energy. Savin grunted under the impact. Absorbed the sharp pain of it. The size of the avian was illusion only, a signifier for a mass of swirling magic Eamon commanded. The bird attacked again and then jaunted up into the air currents.

Savin enveloped the entire airport and runways with his own shield, protection if he was unable to stop the destruction of the planes. His magic expanded its potential, large, deadly and focused. It pushed against its wider limits but was up to the task.

A spine-riffling distraction buffeted his body as it stood in the terminal. Despite his divided attention, he watched Eamon reach for Jesse with his power.

His lover lurched, caught in this smaller fae net, struggling. "Savin! Fuck you, asshole!"

Eamon gripped him close, squeezing his ribs and unmindful of fracturing mortal bone.

Savin's mind screamed furiously. A hot, wreathing mass of hatred blew out from his core and his magic stumbled midair, hesitated in its pursuit of the avian destruction.

Eamon launched a second mass of power in the air toward the planes, expanding out to approaching flights.

Pop! He disappeared with Jesse captive. Fleeing far and fast through the ether.

Moments meant everything in finding Jesse, saving him.

The hawks arrowed closer to their targets.

The crowds of innocent humans wandered through the halls of McCarran, oblivious to their possible fate. Mothers, children, tourists ready to return home with stories of Vegas' gaudy splendor. The laughter of passing families. The moment narrowed down around him, compressing his lungs.

A choice. Even with the blasted, strong power in him.

Savin's gut splintered in shard-stuffed pain as he zoomed up into the sky with his power and flew after the twin birds of energy. He wove his own net, sinking every iota of attention into spinning and connecting sticky spider web lines of power. He breathed animation into the threads, forging a tensile strength rivaling diamond and platinum.

Savin's magic tensed and flung the construct out, spiraling it faster and closer to Eamon's hawks. Falling short, the hawks almost to the first of the flying machines, Savin coughed out a final dreg of power as he dug into his reserves, the added burst catching along the web and dragging it at even greater speeds to its target.

Almost, almost, and...connection.

The netting tangled around both birds, dragging the fae magic and strangling them. They screeched their deaths as the acid of Savin's magic melted their cloudy forms. The pieces flamed down through the air, breaking apart.

Safe, the pilots flew on, unknowing of the near disaster.

Jesse!

Savin sank back to his body, his depleted magic scouring the area for scent of Eamon's trail. The faintest hint of spice and stale air lingered. And underneath it the musk scent of Jesse. The acrid tang of his anger and pain. It clawed its way into Savin's skin and hung on.

He prayed to the Goddess, took one moment to transport Corrine's body to the nearest emergency room and ripped open the air to fling himself through.

The grasping hands of physics denied tore at him. His skin and organs turned inside out, agony. His new power stuttered, tried to build on itself to defend against the pain. He would not let Jesse be harmed. His magic thrummed in agreement even as it wobbled in supporting him through the translocation. Farther and faster than he'd ever tried before.

Winds ripped at his skin until cold ate everything he was. Faster, bulleting out of control. He made out another gap of air ahead. The scents of Eamon and Jesse mingled with the smell of a storm. Savin stood hard on his magical brakes and skidded into a free fall.

Down toward the rip, aiming for its center.

And...through.

He slammed into a hard floor, the hit bruising deep, and rolled fast into a crouch.

There stood Eamon, Jesse pinned to the ground in front of his feet. His Boyo struggled like a mad bull blinded by the red of a cape and the matador's sword sticking from his thick haunches. Lost in rage.

"Took you long enough," the older fae rumbled. And fingered the edge of a rune-covered dagger, running the tip along his thumb. It would take only a second and no particular skill given he was fae to throw the weapon down and stake Jesse. Savin recognized the type of weapon, the blade inscribed to cause copious amounts of pain no matter the injury, like a million claws digging through organs. Savin forced back his nausea as he noticed rivulets of red trailing over Jesse's chest and forearms, running down his neck with his shirt in tatters exposing the sliced skin. If Savin could kill Eamon a million times over he would.

The noisy surroundings of Circus Circus' theme park stretched around them. Behind Eamon the spinning carousel played a carnie melody. This time Eamon had chosen to wrap his own glamour around them since the visitors walked past the face-off with no care in the world.

Savin felt the pulse of Las Vegas on his tongue between his fits of determination, his rage and his abject fear for Jesse. An awareness of his adopted city. The clink of coins. The buzz of roulette wheels. The giddiness and obsession of its visitors. The weight of this awareness hung over him in a way he'd never experienced before these last days with Jesse.

In the background of that awareness the gate to Faerie floated, solidified enough for him to finally know the exact coordinates where it would soon appear. A rift opening into Las Vegas that pushed at him for acknowledgement. He ignored the call and narrowed his attention to Eamon.

"Release him," Savin growled.

Eamon cocked his head. "Have you come to your senses then?"

Savin let himself look at Jesse and feel their connection. Through his suffering and writhing anger the link pulsed strong and sure. Savin jumped down that pipeline into the warm, welcoming cavern of his Boyo's soul. His heart. His magic swam in the splendor of it and filled with energy. Recharging him.

He took only a moment to blink with understanding of this recharge before he took advantage and struck.

Eamon was slammed backward through the air, dagger flying away, the fae landing against a hard wall. Savin surged forward and grabbed him by his neck, wrenching him up and shaking him where he hung trapped. Licks of power compressed his opponent's bones against the surface. Eamon's cold, beautiful skin flattened as if he'd been spun inside a centrifuge and crushed to the edges. With one flick Savin could kill the creature. The outcome teetered by a thread.

"Kill me," Eamon managed to wheeze, "and the gate will never be opened. It takes all five."

"Maybe. Not so sure with my new power. Do you like its taste, Eamon? Should I ram you with it until you're a bloody pulp?"

Eamon twisted his already-distorted features into a sneer while his ineffectual magic battered back against Savin's new strength. Impotent.

Savin allowed a cruel grin to flow onto his face. "And who's to say I want the gate open at all? Faerie is better off destroyed if you're the standard it produces."

A hoarse half laugh grated out from beneath Savin's restraint of his neck. "You do not know. She did not tell you." A rasp and wheezing breath escaped him.

A fist clenched in his gut. "Tell me what?"

"Yesterday Soliandra told me in her sending. Faerie and Earth," he rattled. "Intertwined. One's death means the other's." A smile cracked his contorted features. "I'd rejoice to see this stinking globe disintegrate if Faerie did not vanish with it."

"You lie!"

"Have you forgotten what we are, fool? I'm no mortal. I do not lie."

No! But it made sense. His dreams. Faerie and Las Vegas in ruins, side by side. One people split in two millennia ago.

He released Eamon's neck and the fae slid down the wall to his feet although the magic still restrained him. "So simple to gain your cooperation after all, eh?" He coughed, clearing his raw throat. "But I enjoyed the drama. It satisfied me watching your heroics and the panic on your royal face."

"Go." Savin ground his teeth together, the new knowledge stuffing his head and making him dizzy. "I'll see you at the gate."

"With your lover."

He swallowed bile. Nodded with a jerk. "Yes." The answer hissed out.

Savin reached inside and unclenched his magic, freeing the fae.

Eamon's eyes blazed cold, with stabbing light reasserting itself as he postured, his power returned. "You are pathetic."

In a breath he disappeared.

Savin turned to Jesse, free now and pulling himself up. He hurried to Jesse's side, supporting him as his lover's knees gave out and he almost collapsed back to the floor. Savin lowered him down gently.

"Corrine?" Jesse rasped.

Savin shook his head. "Hurt badly, but I got her help, Boyo."

His head bowed. A primal noise, a low, grunting sob tore from him. "My fault. Again. I brought her into this."

"Not true, love."

But Jesse was too far gone to listen.

Savin held tight to the man as he fractured.

Chapter Twelve

A dark theater. He knew that much. And that Savin had flown them there the same way that asshole Eamon had done when he'd grabbed Jesse. Beyond that, his focus was shot. A war raged inside him between flames and the ice-shelf tundra numbness wanting to engulf him. The dagger slices from Eamon's weapon hurt somewhere underneath that numb. But fuck, maybe it should hurt.

Corrine.

Tortured by Eamon. Badly injured. Savin had confirmed it. Inside the blaze and ice came the voices, the memories.

Murderer. Screw-up. Killer. You should be the one dead. The smell of hospital antiseptic and upturned gravesite soil. His father the morning Jesse found him dead in his room, Corrine laughing, Corrine yelling at him in Savin's suite, justifiably hurt. Her unconscious, bleeding body in Eamon's arms. Waiting forever at the airport as a teenager for his entire life to turn inside out. His memory that day of police lights flashing on the cruiser as he crawled into the backseat. His brother at the funeral home and Corrine laid out next to him even though Savin said she lived. His father grinning at him in the kitchen with broken glass at his feet. Killer.

"Jesse."

He heard the voice. Savin's. The Magician repeated his name. Trying to bring him back. Did he want that? Too broken to help Savin. Cursed. Stupid to think he'd been on the path to healing.

Hands manhandled his body, shucked him out of jeans and tee. He squinted as blaring lights shone down at him. Blinding. Definitely a stage. Through his blurry vision he caught gold glinting off Savin's curtain of hair under the lights. The loose locks had fallen forward into his face as he held Jesse, Savin supporting his now-naked body while directing him farther back on the platform. They were in the same theater Savin did his show. He recognized the metal scaffold and faux rock walls of the set.

At a St. Andrew's Cross Savin stopped. He silently directed Jesse against the wood. Spreading arms and legs. Began strapping his wrists and ankles into cuffs. Locks clicked shut. Jesse let it happen, too numb to protest. He barely felt those strong hands on his skin. As if his nerve endings had gone dead on the outside even while underneath an inferno seared their buried ends.

Jesse was shivering. He knew it because he heard the rattle of metal on wood, which drew his attention down to look at his body in the bonds.

Savin grabbed his chin and raised his face. Those slate-blue eyes bore into him, refusing quarter as he tried to jerk his head away.

"You look at your Master when he desires. Now!"

Struggling, he just managed. His Master wanted it. But Savin was sending him away. Good. For the best. Corrine was proof of that.

Savin's voice narrowed to sharp demand. Full of a whipping, fierce compassion with no give. "Listen, love. I'll help, but we do this my way. I almost lost you. It tore out that heart you've seemed to grow in me and I hated every second. I stopped breathing with it. I need to remind myself you're alive and here with me. Remind you too. Make you cry out for me. No more lost in your past. You're returning, you hear me? You'll face this and get through it."

Jesse stirred. Tried to scowl. Failed.

Savin's voice kept punching forward. "You are strong. Strong enough to submit to me and give me what I need. Mastering your own will to provide what I want. I won't stomp all over that. It's the gift you've given me and I've been selfish with it. So this is what I'm going to do."

Savin stepped away. The depth of emotion in that voice caught Jesse's attention, what of it he had to give. He tracked his Magician's movement.

The beautiful man went into the shadows on the stage wing, walked back out trailing a single-braided whip. His footfalls rang on the floor. The leather snaked long on the wooden stage as Savin began to wrap the strand around his fist. "Three strikes, Boyo. Three strikes you'll take for me and count each one out loud. I know you're not aroused. I know this is simple pain. But you take it for me and its penance for both of us. Corrine's injury is my fault as much as yours."

"No!" he heard himself calling. "Not yours."

"Don't interrupt," Savin barked. "I'm willing to forgive myself for it. Never forget, but forgive. You will do the same."

Jesse was shaking his head.

"Three strikes and it's done. Then you show me I am not the monster her torture reminds me I may be."

"Not a monster."

"Then neither are you." He stalked close to the cross. Cracked the whip two times on the floor, spiking Jesse's pulse high. The adrenaline focused him.

"Ready, love?"

Jesse's mind reeled, cranking over the past hours, reviewing the last few moments of words. His Master's words. He welcomed the pain. He welcomed Savin's touch, even this one. Because he'd said it would help him. It would make it better for Savin. He wanted that. He nodded.

"Count after each strike."

Jesse braced himself. Had to take this. Savin needed it. Had to take the pain because he loved the man too much for anything else to matter. A final gift to him. Savin circled to his back, out of his vision, which he hated. He held a breath.

The air whistled. Strike.

He cried out. Agony. Red-laced and everything. A line of it running down his back. *Breathe. Breathe, Jesse.* "One," he managed, stuttering the count.

"I love you, Boyo. You are beautiful doing this. Rest a moment."

Moments passed, speeding along with his head and heart. The pain was good. It overshadowed the cutting hurt Eamon had inflicted. Eradicated it, and for that he was damn ecstatic. If leeches would drain him of the leftover sensation of that bastard fae's touch he'd gladly let them suck at him.

"Okay, love?" Savin checked.

He forced his nod. *Yes. Again.*

Whistling air once more. *Crack!*

Jesse hung in his bonds, only the pull of his cuffs keeping him upright. The world spiraled down to the pain, on his ass cheek this time. "Two." Just the now and what he gave to Savin submitting to the whip. He had only now and this pain. The other voices had quieted. Relief.

"The last, love. For me. For us. Hold ready."

Air parted. *Crack!*

Ah – Red. Swirling red and buzzing. The pull on his wrists. Focus. He needed to do something. Yes. "Three," he gasped, hoping the word made it out of his mouth.

Lips were there, pressing on the lines of pain. Hurting more but making it better at the same time. Warm lips. Love. His Magician. This was what it meant. He wanted this. Almost enough to leave the rest behind. Corrine. His parents. His brother. He owed them so much. But maybe it was time. No, too easy.

Then strong hands at his ankles, freeing his legs. More at his wrists, unlocking him from the cross although keeping the cuffs in place, catching his slump. Savin.

Carrying him to a mattress in the wings. When had that appeared? He was put to his back on soft sheets, even that contact excruciating. Savin knelt over him, capturing his wrists and placing them crossed above his head. Pinning them. "You are a stubborn man. But you're mine and I'm not letting you go this time. I want to mark you for everyone to see."

He ran sure fingers over Jesse's cock and he moaned, the possessive hand of his Magician already hardening him where the intense pain had made him soft.

"I have plans, Boyo, and you'll be whole for them. Those piercings on your cock I mentioned. Your nipples too. Maybe my brand to match the pattern of the tattoo but on your lower back or ass. Then I keep you naked and your chest and groin shaved all the time for the world to see to whom you belong. Your hole perpetually lubed so I can sink inside anytime I please." Savin stroked his growing erection, rubbing a thumb over his cock head at the slit where he dug in a nail deep. The contrast with the pain of his ass and back had his nerves jumping.

"I may not have time now to do everything I want. But I'll decorate you the way I can." He lifted a hand, his fingers holding a long, thin steel pin. "A penis plug to penetrate you in a new way. A piece of jade jewelry in a circle at the plug top. You won't forget you're mine."

Jesse's muscles clenched as Savin lowered the several inches of thin metal shaft toward his cock. He kept his wrists crossed above him even as his shaky breaths came faster. "Savin!"

"Shh. It feels good, I promise. Either way, you'll take it for me. I own every crevice, Jesse, love. Do not forget."

It couldn't be more than a quarter-inch thick, probably less, but the feel as he slid it down his urethra was crazy-making. His hips pumped up in reflex. The slightest pain going in, but then gone. So hard with it inside. Jesus, he wanted Savin to stroke him, feel the pressure on the outside while the pin drove him out of his mind inside his cock. He looked down to the smooth green stone at its cap. He was leaking freely around it, his pre-cum dripping onto his abdomen.

"Hmm," Savin rumbled, rubbing the slippery pre-ejaculate in circles on Jesse's stomach. "You make me hard, Boyo. You like it, yes? Your penis is beautiful with my jewelry."

"Savin," he grunted, fuzzy mind hazed with arousal. "Tomorrow. The gate." He lost the thought as the bastard squeezed a fist and twisted down his dick. His hips pumped once more.

"Don't worry about tomorrow. Just tonight, love."

Savin climbed on top of him and stretched his body full press to Jesse's, the weight an added kick to his flying mind. The reeling emotions, memories, ghosts swirled up to fight against the sensations. His Master's hard dick pressed into his hip as if it wanted to bore a hole straight through the bone to the other side of him. He wished it would.

He whispered in Jesse's ear, the tease of his breath making it harder to concentrate. "I'll fuck you tonight, but first I need you to understand. You listening?"

"Christ, you love to lecture when you torture me, don't you?" His half-breathless complaint went ignored.

"Good, very good." Savin heard the smile in his voice followed by an actual chuckle. "You're back with me now. Not a coward, my Boyo."

His snort went ignored as well.

"I plan to put you in my water tank in a minute. The one from my show. And fill it around you past your head. You'll be able to breathe. My magic will make it possible." Savin slowly pulled the pin of the plug out of his cock, pushing it back in after it traveled an inch. Kept up the slow plunging of the steel, in and out.

Fuck! The sensation jacked him so high he thought he'd spin into the atmosphere.

Savin continued as if he weren't driving Jesse mad with the movement. "Usually I put my subs into a trance while I do it onstage. They never know the panic of being able

to get oxygen without the ability to drag in a breath. But they also miss the quiet of the water. Tonight you get both. And I do it because you are right. I have magic. It's so large now I can't pretend. And...maybe it is not all bad."

Jesse noted the catch in his Magician's voice. "Not bad," he managed as Savin plunged back in with a smooth, fast stroke. He pressed his jaw into his Master's face, willing him to understand even when he couldn't speak for shit with the sensation.

"I want to show my trust, Boyo. You see something in me. I can't quite picture it the way you do, but I need to believe you see clearly. I trust your love, that it is not misplaced." His voice had broken a fraction, words with a slight tremor.

"Damn right, Magician."

Savin pulled away, cupped his balls and squeezed. Jesse swallowed a groan and pressed his fists hard into the surface, nails digging into his palms to keep his wrists in position as Savin wanted.

"Mouthy slave," Savin admonished. "I wasn't finished."

He tried to keep still and listen. To keep from coming with his groin, the personal playground of his Magician.

"I set up a temporary truce with my magic. I'll see if I can keep my integrity and stay human enough to be worthy of you while being fae as well. Doing something important for Earth with my power."

He frowned and Jesse wanted to kiss away those lines. Suck them off his damn puckish face.

"Enough with the self-indulgence, love. You're my first concern. Your Master is tired of watching you flay yourself and I don't mind setting the double standard and ordering it to stop. So into the quiet of my tank you'll go until you understand that you are not those destructive voices in your head. If my magic helps, so be it. I won't be afraid to use it on you to quiet your mind if it brings you peace."

A slick panic entered his brain, his chest. "No. Don't want you to change me, Magician." His heart started a race to sprint up and out of his throat. His hard cock still fuzzed his thinking, but he didn't want to be fixed that way. He didn't deserve to be smoothly absolved of his screw ups.

"Not your choice anymore, love. You asked to stay in my life, asked me to face my fae self, this is the price I demand."

Christ, wasn't he the coward with prickling fear jamming up his spine.

Savin drew back, grabbed his crossed wrists and pulled him up. His back stuck to the fabric with his sweat and the peel of skin off sheets renewed the burn of the lash marks. He sucked in a breath.

His Magician directed him to the corner and the glass tank, those enigmatic slate eyes not moving from him for a moment. Chills licked over him with each unsteady step closer.

They stopped next to the glass. Savin flicked his fingers and down from the dark areas of the rafters came the electronic hoist. Seemed as if he'd given up all pretense of avoiding magic. Jesse should be glad but the swirling fog in his head and adrenaline surge in his body kept confusing him.

"I came out of it, Savin. You don't have to do this." God, he sounded pathetic. Almost begging.

Savin ignored him and attached the cuffs to the hoist hook, stretching Jesse's arms high to make his body a tight line. He ran light fingertips down from Jesse's collarbone to the top edge of his groin, traced the pattern back up and rubbed a thumb over his Adam's apple. He applied the smallest press of promise on the windpipe. *Shit!* Jesse's erection was kicking again, the jade-tipped plug a constant reminder of his status. All of it taken out of his hands even as a deep pit of him wanted to fight. He'd been sure he wanted this, right?

Savin stepped back. Another flick of fingers and the gears moved. Unlike during the show when the mechanism lowered a wooden cross with Stephanie attached into the tank, he was lifted and lowered solo, the pull on his arms and shoulders its own pain. The walls of glass engulfed him each inch he descended into the box. Dropped him deeper and deeper from the rim.

His feet hit bottom, the floor smooth against the soles. His wrists stayed caught on the hoist. Jesse noticed the pipe tipping into the tank from the top edge. Water gushed down from the opening, the cold sluice of it wrapping his ankles, moving up to his calves faster than he expected.

He met his Magician's eyes from the other side of the glass. In his head, Savin's words sounded loud though his lips didn't move. *You'll be able to hear me the entire time, Boyo. If I choose to speak. And I'll hear you too. I won't leave, but you need to focus on the silence. Let the water hold you. Now I'm going to make it dark.*

A snap and Jesse was blind. Nothing physical bound his eyes. Savin's magic simply stole it. The water kept rising, the wet grasp at his thighs now. It lapped at his balls, quickly making its way up his groin until his entire lower half was under water.

Still here, love.

"What are you doing to me?"

Shhh, just feel your body. Don't worry about breathing. It's natural to panic when the water covers your mouth and nose but I won't let you be harmed. Don't inhale. Swallowing the water in your lungs will make the sensation more difficult.

"I just bet."

The sound of rushing water crept louder without his sight. The water temp seemed more intense, a crisp coolness that raised the hairs over his body. It didn't shrink the excruciating response of his cock, however. His balls still felt tight and high. But his breath sawed in and out fast. The wet hit his chin. Jesus, could he do this? What the fuck did Savin want from him? But he knew. It was what Jesse wanted as well and had tried to give. Everything. To release it all to his Master. His submission to Savin and to

the dark inside. Trusting him to get him through to the other side. Christ, he never felt so weak, so scared.

I love you, Jesse. I'll hold you through the fear. Ready yourself.

And with the last warning the water rose to his mouth, a second later covered his nose. Jesse's reflexes kicked in. He began to jerk his arms in the restraint, his lower body rocking sideways as if he could escape the water.

Breathe. Need to breathe. But he kept his mouth shut tight, bit the inside of his cheek to force it to stay closed. His mind kicked back and forth, white noise rushing his head. Jesse was buried in the dark wet. Drowning in it.

Forever closed around him. Had to focus on Savin. What Savin expected. Only Savin.

You're safe. Feel it. You aren't choking. You're alive. You're beautiful floating in there for me. Have I told you how much your body makes me aroused? Even when it struggles to do what I want?

Savin kept talking. Slow, stroking comments. Jesse started to calm. He made himself concentrate on every sensation. The continued pull on his shoulders, the buoyancy of his torso and legs in the water, the lulling cadence of his Magician's voice.

Eventually Savin's words fell off.

He drifted. The water absorbed sound and left him without sense of anything but himself floating in the dark.

Quiet.

His mind held still.

But he wasn't used to it. Couldn't keep it going. Shit, he sucked at even this. Sparks in his brain started firing. His mind surged back to earlier today. The airport. Savin packing him off. The crowds. And Eamon. Corrine.

Jesus, Corrine. Why had he even kept the relationship with her? He hadn't given her any real part of himself. It had been easy. She never asked for much. If he'd broken it off before this weekend she'd be uninjured. He'd been a coward. Or hadn't cared enough to do what was right. Now she was suffering.

The rage hit like a speeding train.

God fucking damn. She should be uninjured. He wanted to rip the fucking head off the fae who harmed her. He'd find Eamon, slam his bones to the ground and batter in that smooth face. Kick his skull until he heard it crack. His insides grew too big for his skin under the pressure. He needed out. Out of the water. Out of the tank. He raised his legs, bending them, and kicked out. The force was less with the water. But fuck he wanted to break something. Glass, his own bones, anything. He bunched his legs and kicked again. The tank rocked, liquid sloshing.

He thrashed, his lips breaking open as he sucked in water. Choked as his lungs tried to expel it, but his body kept on functioning. Legs kicked out again. *No!*

Until a warm flush started sweeping his veins. The impossible scent of Savin hitting him hard no matter the illogic of it under water. The magic. He strained against it even as it caressed through him, untying knots. Suctioning out the edge of the rage.

Stop!

Accept it, Boyo.

Power hit him again.

His focus knocked backward in time. He was at the base of Mount Washington those years ago, his body leaning into the car. Savin's strong mouth rested on his, lips hot, firm but just resting. Jesse relived his breath out in reaction, the clench of his muscles to stop the trembling. The pause in time breaking when a tongue licked around the outline of his mouth and sank inward a slow inch. Dipped and retreated. He experienced again Savin's teeth biting gently into his lower lip. Felt again the excitement and agony. Heard Savin's voice echoing from earlier that day. *Before the European settlers arrived Mount Washington was called Agiocochook, home of the Great Spirit.* This was the place he shared with his Magician that spring day. The truth of it fell over him like a heavy curtain. He had found a home that day, but it had walked out of his life for a long time after.

Now it was back. The Great Spirit. Here in the tank. Reaching in because what linked him with Savin was as big as the universe. Bigger than Earth or Faerie or whatever other strange shit was out there. Bigger than the rage he'd carried all these years. As big as whatever deity existed, offering acceptance, peace, rest, forgiveness. Forgiveness. Yes. Ah, Christ, so sorry. He was so very sorry.

As the magic rolled him, anger drained, leaving behind sadness. A wall of it folding on top on him, smashing both hard and gentle.

The sadness stayed with him. Hovering like a stalled storm system dumping endless buckets of rain. Raising the level of the liquid in the tank. Seeping out of him with the lapping water shushing against his skin.

The magic caressed over and over.

Until the stillness returned. His mind emptied once more.

Quiet.

Savin didn't speak in his head. It didn't matter anymore. He knew his Magician waited just beyond the glass. But even the expectation stilled inside him. His mind and body flowed clear, the soft buzz of now.

His muscles melted open.

After a bit, the magic reached again. From inside his body he felt the slices and welts of his skin knit together, healing and disappearing to nothing. He became a flame of energy, health. His wrists released off the hoist, the hook moving out of the tank. The link between his two wrists unlatched.

Jesse floated free, buoyant and rising to the surface. He swam toward it.

His head broke in a surge from the water. Reentering the world. Bright light pricking his sight as it returned. He coughed out water, sucking drags of air in its wake.

Alive.

"Boyo," a strong, sure voice called him.

His cock jutted taut against his belly. The tattoo at his neck pounded with life.

"I want out." He hoisted himself up the edge of the tank. Threw a leg over.

"It'll tip," Savin warned.

"You'll hold it upright." Even as it said it he noticed a wind of energy settle around the case.

He dangled himself off the outside of the glass, his hands grabbing the edge. And dropped.

His knees bent to absorb the impact. The jar of contact reverberated pleasantly through his legs. Jesse stood from the landing crouch. Soaking, naked, he turned to Savin. He looked at the man. Knew beyond doubt that he belonged exactly where he was. Home. Here, with Savin. "After all this, Magician, I certainly hope you're planning on fucking me tonight."

Savin tilted back his head and barked a laugh. "Irrepressible, love. I will never doubt you. You okay?"

Jesse nodded and stalked forward. Savin stilled, eyebrows rising and the power of his gaze snapping into place. It stalled Jesse's progress as his step faltered under the impact.

"We'll both get what we want tonight, Boyo. I'll fuck you, make love to you, take over your body and soul."

Savin moved to close the distance with Jesse frozen. He wrapped his palm around Jesse's nape, skin sealing over the tattoo and the rightness of it pouring through him.

The violence of his kiss ignited Jesse's own, Savin's greater strength overpowering his and dragging him to the bed. Shoving him to his belly and adjusting his hips to expose the pucker of his asshole. "Later we do soft," Savin growled. "Now you take what I give because you've put me through hell today."

Power scraped over his exposed tissue, lubricating the hole with the magic Savin seemed more willing to use. Before another second passed, Savin was on him. Pushing past the ring of muscle in his ass with his large cock. Driving a hard grunt from Jesse at the pressure and fullness as he sank in fast and deep. No preparation other than what the magic provided. Plenty for how Jesse felt. Wanting it brutal and relentless.

Savin pistoned in and out, reaching around and shafting Jesse's cock as he set a rough pace. Rubbing over his prostate with each thrust and building the lightning in Jesse's balls. The tingling expanded up his spine, shot back down again to land in his testicles. The fucking kept him on the edge of pain as Savin held back nothing. But this pain was all good, tied to their bond. Part of who they'd become together.

He braced his hands on the mattress as his body was slammed against it. Savin kept working his cock, pressing his thumb into the vein running under his cock head, a vise grip that twisted, pulled and tore low groans from him. Jesse pumped forward and back, wanting to sink his Magician deeper, at the same time wanting to push into the firm grip of his shaft. Faster. More. Jesus, he was close.

"Coming," he cried out low.

"My plug's still inside your cock. Ask for it out. Ask to come."

Fuck. Hold on, Jess. Wait for permission. Once mentioned, he focused on the blockage at his dick, a blinding panic shifting in his gut.

"Please remove the pin, Master. Please let me come."

Savin's delayed answer had him almost blind, the pressure in his balls wanting to burst him apart.

Finally fingers pulled the jade steel plug free in one move. "Come. Now!"

Jesse shook as he spurted his seed into Savin's grasp, the pleasure graying his vision. Jerking in his grip as Savin fucked deeper, thrusts erratic as he lost his rhythm to his ejaculation.

Warm wetness coated the inside of his ass, rubbing over the walnut-sized nub of prostate. The sensation kept his own orgasm in full force as he continued through long pulses.

Magic funneled up around them. He could feel it now. Supernova. The pain-pleasure of it engulfed him. A sonic boom sounded in his ears.

He arched back against Savin, who gripped him around the waist with steel arms.

Their cries filled the theater. Stage sets, curtains and empty seats witnessing the explosion of the connection.

With another clap, the light and sound and energy rushed away. Jesse collapsed on the mattress. Savin collapsed over him, his simple weight a relief after the magic.

He coughed against the pressure on his ribs. Croaked out his thoughts between gasps for breath. "That went well."

"Boyo, if the queen doesn't kill me you will."

Humor about anything to do with Faerie? A good sign. But his stomach cramped as his mind sorted facts. He pushed back against Savin, dislodging him as his flaccid organ slipped out of Jesse.

Jesse rolled to his side, fighting the post-coital languor. Fixing him with a gaze. "You're taking me to the gate."

A nod, not reluctant but clearly not happy. "I'm taking you to the gate."

"Was this enough?" He gestured down to their spent cocks. "We'll do it again. Ten times even if I have to swing by the pharmacy for some Viagra help for you. I want you ready to kick ass."

Savin slapped one of his buttocks. "Slut." But his gaze gentled and he ran fingers over Jesse's jawline. "I can't promise what will happen tomorrow. At the gate or after we go through."

"I never wanted a promise."

"Eamon told me something, love. He said if Faerie dies so does Earth. They're tied."

"I know. He made sure to tell me as he cut me up."

Savin's eyes went cold. "You know he's dead once we pass through the gate."

"Let's focus on living, Magician. You said it to me before. Good for the goose, good for the gander."

Savin barked another laugh until a serious weight chased the humor from his face. "When Eamon had you, before I could follow I had to end his sabotage of the airport or everyone in it was dead. It delayed me. Cost you more pain."

"Yeah, but it knocked your head in order. There's nothing to forgive if you're trying to apologize. Your power saves. It's good because it's part of you. You love me yet you did what was right. Enough about the rest."

"Maybe."

"Don't make me take you out into an alley and thrash that fine fae ass of yours."

Savin raised his eyebrows. "You are obviously still suffering delusions from your trauma. However, if it's a fantasy of yours to be fucked in a dark alley, I will see what I can do."

Jesse's grin stretched his face. "Let's get your magic fed, Magician." He reached for Savin's shaft, already beginning to fill again.

"You're lucky I need your orgasms or I'd have that cock of yours caged for a good while."

"Well, that's a damn shame." He treaded a fine line teasing his Magician, but Jesse didn't worry.

Savin swiped a thumb over Jesse's bottom lip, but his eyes grew distant. "I don't want Faerie or Earth to die. But what will I be back there?"

"The same. You'll be Savin."

He sighed, clearly doubtful. "I'd like you to be right."

Right or wrong they needed to move forward.

They'd save two worlds or not tomorrow.

He'd drag a plan out of Savin later because no way would he risk his Magician if knowing what to expect would let him help at the right moment.

But whatever the hell happened, they'd do it together.

Chapter Thirteen

Savin eyed this newer casino hotel on the Strip with his every pulse point tuned to the replica of the Arc de Triomphe in front of him. Ornate fountains bubbled regally around the arch and the background of Paris with its faux Eiffel Tower standing guard over this bit of European wonderland in Nevada. The gate would appear here at this two-thirds replica outside the Paris Hotel and Casino's front entrance. Underneath the center of the arch.

He'd known it yesterday, the murmurs of Las Vegas warning him of the intrusion as if the city itself played watch guard, an ally for its patron liege. Savin scowled at the arrogance of his self-image as liege. But Las Vegas was his territory, even before he knew the gate would appear here. The recent intrusion by the four other fae on his grounds raised the small hairs on his neck. Until these past several months, when all of them had sensed the magic coalescing to form another gate in this area, the fae had left him alone. Until then, Eamon and rest had no reason to need Savin's cooperation.

Next to him Jesse stood with clenched fists, watching the crowds of tourists wander through the arch. Midday already, the foot traffic was beginning to increase after visitors woke from sleeping off their late-night jags of celebration at shows, clubs or on casino floors. Savin prayed his glamour would be all that was needed to keep these innocents unaware of the impending rift.

"They're not here," Jesse said, suspicious eyes scanning the area.

"They'll come. Remain beside me. Restraint, Boyo. I won't have you going off half-cocked if they choose provocation."

"I'll control myself," he ground out between clenched teeth.

Savin rolled his eyes. "Just remember the closer you are to me the more likely I can tap into our connection."

Jesse's head turned sharply to Savin. "I know you're quick on the draw, Savin, but I don't think a bout of sex during our face-off with your compatriots is particularly practical."

"I don't expect us to have time to *refuel*, for lack of a better word, but the magic likes it better when you're near. As if you're some extra power boost reinforcing what's already inside."

Jesse slid him a sexy, knowing grin, and because there was no time to strap the man to one of the decorative statues inside the fountains and fuck his brains out, Savin strove to ignore his appealing sub.

"Your sense of self-importance knows no bounds, Boyo."

"I don't know, as fuck-toys go, I think I'm pretty damn hot."

Savin tilted his head, gave his dark-haired lover a once-over. "When this is all over, your ass will certainly be hot. After I've strapped it a good hundred or so times."

Jesse kept grinning. "If you say so."

The teasing exchange had gone far to ease the ratcheted tension eating him. Knowing Jesse, it was what he'd intended to accomplish.

As his Boyo's expression froze mid-smile and melted into hard-eyed contempt, Savin turned to where he gazed and found the object of that focus. Eamon, Tzrina, Geltano, Braal. The four lined up in front of the Arc, shoulder to shoulder, unlikely gunslingers with their mismatched fashion statements and blazing energy slung to their hips.

Savin reinforced his glamour, not only to plan for the upcoming confrontation but because the fae had not come alone.

"Bastards," Jesse swore as he took in the eight mortals bound and gagged that his kin carried tossed, two each, over their shoulders. Eamon and Tzrina slouched off their burdens and the terrified, dazed bodies thudded to the concrete. The other two kept their live bundles on their shoulders.

Beside him, Jesse's skin radiated outrage. A spurt of mistimed pride stroked Savin as his Boyo remained still, practicing diamond self-control to keep from a suicidal launch at the fae.

Eamon ignored the bodies at his feet. "How did you arrive before us, Savin? We traveled here at the first knowledge of the gate location."

Behind them the air began to shimmer as if his acknowledgement brought the portal to existence. Not so much similar to movie special effects, but the pure essence of possibility, a fulcrum of potentiality. From its other side a siren song called to Savin. Faerie—entangling him and seducing him home.

He ignored the call and Eamon's question, especially since his interest sounded sincere. Any card to play later would help in this situation. "Return the humans to their homes, Eamon. You don't need them. We'll cross without them."

"We have one chance at this, Prince. We will be fully charged as you must be. One mortal each for us now and another to bring to Faerie to test whether some of their energy can be tapped and drained into the land."

"I don't need additional energy to open the gate. You know my strength's increased. Do you really want to torture these humans? I don't think so. You don't even care about them enough to enjoy it. Let my strength compensate for the extra these mortals would bring you."

He uncoiled his magic, whispering for it to stand ready. Tingling pricked his fingertips. His body sang with fullness and an undulating rope of connection joined the air between him and Jesse. His lover shifted on his toes as if he sensed the growing power and the link between them.

Eamon's face stilled with Savin's proposal. Breaking for a moment at the suggestion. Then returning to his cold arrogance. "If you try and fail you will be weaker afterward. Our opportunity quickly disappears." He glanced behind him as mindful of the possibility for the gate as Savin. "There will be no time left for you to recharge with your toy." He gestured with cold dislike to Jesse.

Braal stepped forward. "Enough talk. You coddle the boy. Let's get this done." He dropped his own burdens to the ground and reached for the dagger strapped to his thigh. As he bent forward toward the first mortal with the intent to start cutting, Savin raised his hand and struck.

Slam. Braal's body lifted and flew back dozens of feet onto the pavement. His head thwacked to the ground as Savin followed the punch with swirls of energy, pummeling into Braal's mind to send him into unconsciousness.

Bursting light shone from Eamon's, Tzrina's and Geltano's eyes. Their instant surge of outrage.

"We cannot open it with only four, traitor," Tzrina yelled.

Savin had moments if he wanted to avoid their attack.

Beside him Jesse mumbled, "Now or never."

Savin grabbed his wrist, sank fast and deep into the magic that wanted out, scooped up the energy already preparing for volcanic eruption and wove a spell around the raw force of it. He threw the entire mass at the spot behind the remaining fae, targeting the center of the Arc de Triomphe and the middle point of the gateway to open it.

The magic hit the space and was sucked through but did not open the portal. The power drew from him at incredible levels, scraping his insides raw as it funneled up and out to the gate. It tried to drain him dry. The land of Faerie had turned into a junkie and craved magic so deeply it didn't matter who was destroyed taking it.

Savin panicked, the echo of it intensified in Jesse's reaction, heartbeats of both of them meaty on his tongue and hummingbird fast, if a hummingbird had the weight of a Mack truck. His power was intended to open the gate but instead Faerie simply sucked it through and devoured it.

"Son of a bitch," Jesse swore, aware of the problem.

The pendant on his chest began to burn his skin. Dancing white and black pricks of light filled his vision. His body became a parched skeleton drained of energy, crumbling bones needing only an updraft to be blown away. He couldn't move, could barely breathe.

"No fucking way," his Boyo ground out, and Savin felt his lover twist free his wrist, grab Savin's hand and slam the palm against the back of his neck over the tattoo, also white-hot. Jesse wrestled Savin's other hand to the center of Jesse's chest directly over his heart. After which Jesse wrapped fingers around Savin's pendant and slapped his other hand over Savin's speeding heart.

A loud roaring avalanche burst his eardrums, pain shot through the both of them, searing their hearts, Savin aware of every pulse of his lover's. The drain continued but this time the magic hissed against the undulating air around the gate. Twisted the possibility and painted a solid frame of golden specks over the aperture now appearing roughly elephant size. Open finally. Jesse's body pressed close, holding his up under the onslaught.

"Eamon, it's open," he heard Tzrina holler over the booming white noise in his head.

"Come on," Jesse insisted, breaking their circuit of contact with the energy drain sputtering away. He grabbed Savin to drag him toward the arch. "I don't know how long these Faerie-spell mindfucks last."

They ran for the gate, chaos ringing the plaza as Savin's glamour had dropped sometime amidst the magic use. Mortals screamed when the giant, shimmering-gold gateway suddenly appeared and as they spotted gagged and bound bodies lying on the ground near the Paris landmark.

Jesse ended up half carrying Savin the rest of the way to the portal. "Do we have to do something special or just cross?" he yelled to be heard over the mortal screams.

"I have no idea," Savin panted. "The circumstances were different when we came through."

Jesse stopped them just in front of the gate as Eamon, Tzrina and Geltano, carrying an unconscious Braal, barged by and disappeared inside. "Well, no funky electrocution sounds. We go through, Magician?"

Savin sucked in deep drags of air, as much to shore up screaming nerves as to recover from the magic drain. "We go through."

The golden color began to fade, the edges sputtering in and out of vision.

"Shit," Jesse added with feeling.

He tightened his hold on Savin and took off, heaving them through the gate.

* * * * *

Savin's and Jesse's next steps landed them with a jar.

They stumbled over gnarled roots, the oversized behemoths testimony to how toweringly huge the trees grew in the dark forest. Savin shuddered as fingertips tickled over his skin in hundreds, the tactile version of the buzzing of a swarm of bees.

Faerie.

Although midmorning on Earth, here it approached dusk. Behind them, the gate still glowed faintly golden. Hovering and weaker but not disappeared. The shadows began to fall over the dying trees of the fae forest and Savin grabbed Jesse's arm hard, a warning to the other man.

They were not alone.

Threaded among the nearest trees stood the fae. Hundreds of them on the ground, up in branches, squatting among piles of forest loam. In bright finery from the eons, decorating the darkness like jeweled fireflies. To their right, Eamon, Tzrina, Galtano and a woozy Braal stood next to the largest tree of all.

Perched on the lowest branch of the mother tree stood the queen.

For a group of this size the forest was strangely quiet. The decaying vegetation swallowed up sound, strangling it as if to take everything down with it during its death throes.

All eyes focused on them as Savin stood away from Jesse's support and stepped closer to his monarch. He lowered to his knees and, thankfully, Jesse took the hint and went down likewise. The cut of brittle thorn-covered twigs dug into his knees past the fabric of his pants.

He bent his head, his gut a clenched fist and the danger to them a visceral force that assaulted his senses. "My queen."

"Savin, Grandson. So pleased to have you back among us."

Savin raised his eyes, determined to keep them on the greatest danger before him, although his attention fragmented in a million directions given the other fae and their unpredictability. Part was pulled to Jesse, literally quivering with suspicion and anger behind him. Part to keeping a calm mask of strength in place and hiding his current weakness from the vipers surrounding him.

"Quite a welcome, Majesty. I appreciate the honor."

"Opening up the gate all yourself. I knew your magic had potential," she purred from her perch.

"It's new to me still. You have me here, Majesty. What do you intend?"

She waved a lazy hand around to the gathering of fae. "An announcement. In the spirit of my grandson's return, I would like to name him my official heir and successor."

A cacophony of mumbles woke from the crowd. Most outraged. A few dared to protest loud enough for the words to be discernible although not identify the speaker.

"Enough!" she roared, palm up toward the fae. "You dispute before you hear my full statement." The mumbling died away, the flavor of their bitter acceptance coating Savin's tongue.

The noise as Jesse shifted on his knees, the slight crackle of the dead leaves underneath him, notched up the tension flaring through Savin. So much at stake.

"Majesty," he bowed his head. "I am honored, but I do not seek your throne. I return to aid Faerie only. As you commanded and since both our home and Earth hinges on the success."

Her lips twisted sour. "Earth. Yes, you would care to save your adopted homeland. Your lover's homeland."

"Faerie's survival comes with it, Majesty."

"And do you even know how to save that which you desire, Savin?"

Her gaze swung to his left and behind where Jesse knelt. Alarm bells rang loudly inside him. Every moment of her intense focus on his Boyo raised them louder.

"Tonight I name you heir." She spoke but still stared at Jesse. "But only if you take the throne from me this very evening. A duel, Grandson. To death." Her vision strayed back to him, a catlike regard sparkling her eyes. "Kill me and the throne is yours. Faerie and Earth are yours to save as you can."

Gasps filled the forest around them.

"Jesus Christ," a low-voiced murmur came from behind him.

She planted some barbed trap. Played some twisted game with him and he had to tread carefully or it would explode in his face. Explode in Jesse's. "I do not wish to duel you, Majesty. I do not wish to threaten your life. Keep the throne. Let me aid you with my newfound magic."

Her eyes traveled back to Jesse. "Your heart. The boon to your magic. What incentive do you need to battle me this night, my dear?" She tapped a sharp-nailed finger on her chin in mockery of consideration. "I know just the thing. Refuse to duel me and I sacrifice your lover right now. Strap him to the ground with rope and stakes and cut out that pretty heart of his. Let its blood soak the dark forest and see if the sacrifice brings it back to life."

Goddess help him.

Throaty laughter and jeers erupted from the crowd.

Soliandra raised her hand once more and silence dropped like lead over the group. "Of course he dies if you lose the duel as well. Off to the grave with his Master. And we cut open your chest and see if you have indeed grown the heart it appears you have."

"Don't do this, Majesty!"

Her pleased expression clouded before it regained clarity, morphed into a deadened landscape. "I've made my decision, Savin. What is yours?"

His worst nightmares come true. His power still ebbed low from use at the crossing. His mind spun to the ways to extract them from this alive. Savin refused to coddle his rage because it distracted him from clear thought.

He stood, taking each moment he delayed as an opportunity to consider options. Savin turned to the crowd. "What say you, Faerie? You like the path your queen has laid out? Join me now. Refuse her will and help me plan. Let me take some of you back to Earth. Befriend the mortals and learn what I have. Eamon and his party never tried to know what it means to be human. I believe our magic will return if we do this."

No response as cutting, jewel-glass stares, glowing and coated with dispassion and distrust, met his gaze. He'd been gone too long. Even if they disliked Soliandra's plan they respected her magic, feared it more so, and knew him from the past only as a child to be indulged at court.

His people would never agree to follow him. Never agree to relearn their hearts. Soliandra was mad whatever her scheme.

"I don't think they're buying this," Jesse added, having risen. "Can you take her?"

"Drained like I am? No. Even at full power I don't know if I could."

"You won't recharge enough just being near me? Or if I did the hand-over-heart thingy like before?"

He shook his head.

"Guess they won't give you time for a quickie?"

"No, Boyo."

"How about one magically induced?"

"Explain."

"Can't you take your leftover magic and run it through me quick? Like a fast-acting aphrodisiac. Instant hard-on pushed into release. I'm willing to spill in front of this crowd if it means we get out alive. Then you feed. Way outside the box, but there's a nasty, hungry glint in the bitch's eyes and the crowd's not far behind."

A rustling of dry, dead leaves and the queen floated down from her tree, walking closer. Savin placed his body between hers and Jesse's.

"Answer now, Grandson."

"We duel. I don't want to kill you, Grandmother, but I won't let you harm Jesse."

The family title stopped her. Her usually violet eyes flashed a shade deeper, a richer purple. Just a second and then gone. Her mouth quirked to a bow shape, almost looking like regret.

"Guards." At her command two fae approached and reached for Jesse.

Without thinking Savin threw some of his last power at them, pushing them back with a wall of air. "Wait." He turned to Soliandra. "A last request. A private moment with my lover."

"Touching goodbyes. You may have a moment, but right here. Privacy is an Earth peculiarity. We have no need of it in Faerie."

He faced his Boyo. "We try it your way." His hand went to Jesse's nape, pulling the man close, needing to touch him to fight the rising fear and because he always wanted to touch him. Always wanted inside his body and his heart. To have Jesse inside his. He wouldn't lose this.

He coaxed the remains of his power up from where it bottomed out. The usual mischievous seduction of it responded sluggishly and he imagined its petulant frown asked to perform. *Just a bit more, lovely.*

"Grab your wrists, place them behind you," he ordered his lover.

Jesse complied instantly, catching his gaze and locking with it deeply. Their chocolate depths drew Savin in.

"Mine, love," he whispered. "No matter what happens today. Mine."

"Yours," Jesse answered. His voice caught, a hoarse croak over the answer filled with so much meaning Savin hoarded the richness.

"Brace for me, Boyo. Come for me when I fuck you with my power." With the brief warning, he sucked up the rest of his energy. And released.

The thin arrow of it spun through space and sank into Jesse. It shot down his spine into his ball sac and expanded out.

"Christ!" his lover growled back, arching.

Jesse's muscles clenched hard as if he experienced a seizure and Savin clamped his hand more tightly around Jesse's nape. The tattooed skin heated and Savin's amulet began to burn at his chest.

Jesse's erection sprang engorged full force, pressing against the seam of his jeans. His face darkened, his breathing instantly ragged. He groaned, dropping his head and breaking the eye contact, swaying in place. His features a twist of pain and purpose.

Savin scraped for any remaining power, throwing it down into Jesse's groin and thrusting it inside his anus, rubbing over and over the walnut-shaped prostate. Building fast. Excruciating, he knew, in the brutal force of it. His own cock jerked in sympathy, his thrill at watching Jesse's forced arousal all the encouragement it needed.

"Now, Boyo!"

Jesse threw back his head and shouted. He collapsed to his knees and Savin followed him down, catching him at his waist to keep him upright.

The connection sharpened between them. Even lost to the intensity of the orgasm, Jesse opened his heart and soul to Savin. *Perfect.*

Lightning. His magic gulped down the storm of power. His skin buzzed with overload. The darkening night lit around them with the spill as he couldn't contain it. A million lanterns turned the skies to daylight. Around him the dark forest cackled with delight. Life crept back into the trees, vines brightening to green vibrancy and snaking lively along the ground. Even the air smelled fresher, of mint and basil.

The back of his mind registered the gasps from the crowd. But the moment was only Jesse. Only him and Jesse, the truth of them, no longer separate or alone. Nothing hidden, all accepted. Joy in the human. Joy in the fae. Even their mistakes, regrets. Miraculous joy.

Savin wanted to weep.

Instead he prepared for battle. He wrapped his arm around Jesse's shoulders and drew him up.

Jesse blinked, tried to focus on Savin's face. He glanced down at the wet spot spreading at his zipper, looked up and gave a wry grin. "Remind me to be embarrassed later."

Savin coughed out a laugh and turned to Soliandra. "Ready, my queen."

She nodded to the guards. Looking unsure, they approached Jesse.

"Your promise he won't be hurt while we duel?"

She dipped her head. "My promise. You are beautiful, child." Her face had gentled.

"When all that surrounds you is ugly, Grandmother, it is easy to notice the beauty by contrast. You have the choice, Soliandra. I'll help you."

She sighed, looked over the breathlessly waiting fae perched in the forest. "Not anymore, dearest." Her features hardened. "I will regret killing you."

The guards approached and Savin let them take Jesse. His teeth ached from grinding them.

"Funny," he answered the queen. "I won't regret killing you at all."

She smiled. "If only I could believe you."

She struck.

Pressure. Red. Black. Streaking, slathering beasts running at him, maws dripping blood and gelatinous goo. Goring him deep. Axes hacking his limbs and hallucinations of falling down bottomless pits, plummeting through black-hole space. Endless polar cold. Then barrages of spikes piercing his gut, his eyes.

No! He crawled back up the edge of sanity and wrenched his magic in front of him for a shield, took the moment of rest to sling back his reach and lob his own bomb of energy.

The projectile hit and he saw Soliandra stagger, straighten and throw out arms to him.

Her magic snarled teeth. It battered his shields, biting through the small gaps. Goddess, she was strong. A constant attack that kept him from launching another assault at her. Wearing him down.

"Savin," he heard Jesse's yell.

Re-centering him, bringing to clarity the cable of strength flowing between them along the aetheric. Endless power if he only accepted it. Savin dragged in a deep breath and opened himself to it. Impact. Flood. Life.

He pushed out with his shields, throwing off the current attack altogether. Savin followed the push with raw, blasting power, aiming at her center.

Soliandra gasped surprise. His vision fluctuated between true sight and the Technicolor rainbow of the magic streaming around them. Still, he caught his grandmother's smile. Caught the moment she blew him a kiss while under his assault and, without warning, dropped her shields completely. Exposed.

The energy barreled into her body, arching it back with the contact. Shattering.

Underneath the final panic she smiled again. A true smile. Her last whisper in his mind, *The fae need new blood. Save them, Savin, love. Goddess wills it.*

An explosion. Blinding light. A holocaust.

Savin was thrown across the brush and into the scraping bark of an old darkwood tree.

He hit hard. His skin tore. Breath whooshed out as his skeleton jarred against the ground.

Bones aching, he scrambled up and shook his head. Saw bodies lying in the forest, tossed randomly on the loam. He scanned for Jesse. His heart galloped, bruised with fear. Where was he?

There, to the side, underneath a fallen branch. He was conscious, on all fours, and staring with shock around him.

Savin made it to him in a few long strides. "Boyo, are you okay?"

He nodded. "She disintegrated."

"Yes."

"What's happening to the forest?"

Assured of Jesse's safety, he allowed his gaze to follow his Boyo's fascination.

Around them, with undulating waves of energy and the same shimmering rainbow brightness, the dead vegetation reanimated more. Browns and grays became vivid, vibrant green. Bark regrew on half-decimated tree trunks. Buds popped into life atop brittle branches. The vines slithered faster across the debris. What Savin had assumed was limited regeneration after his recent feeding with Jesse had multiplied with wild vigor. The voice of Faerie and the dark forest, the center of the land, began chanting in his mind. *More. Magic. Feed.*

"Uh, Savin." Jesse gestured at a growing thicket of vines sprouting thorns and speeding their way in their direction. As they passed over prone fae bodies still dazed from the blast, the thorns pierced their skin, drawing streams of blood. Cries of pain, desperate calls for help as people were wrapped and buried under the sharp tendrils, filled the air. "I'm all for Miracle-Gro and Faerie coming to life, but this is looking suspiciously like that nasty vision in the mirror."

"Goddess. The forest is eating them."

"And about to eat us based on its aim. Now would be a great time for your mojo."

Savin called the magic. As it leapt, strong still despite the amount he'd used with the queen, it jumped toward the encroaching thorns. Hit the plants. And was absorbed into the vines.

They continued snaking forward, thriving. Traveling faster.

Savin refocused, imagined a blaze and targeted firepower toward the threat. The flame soared a blue-orange attack. The vines bathed in the flame, untouched by it and soaking in more power than ever.

Savin stood, pulled Jesse up. "Run."

They took off through the forest, dodging grasping branches and obstacles come to life. The forest's song continued in his head. Overwhelming. Wanting to consume Savin whole in its grasping need for magic to bring it to health. Attracted to his power, Jesse's humanity, and the faint call of Las Vegas he only now realized still lingered in the back

of his mind. "Toward the gate," he called. It had never dissolved. They'd travel through and get home.

The vines gained on them. Fast. Not going to make it. Each burst of his power feeding the entity around him and helping it roadblock them, whipping branches and burying the two of them in moving piles of brush.

Jesse tripped on an emerging root. Slammed to the ground. "Shit!"

Savin bent to pull him to standing.

The vines took advantage of the pause. Surged forward. Grabbed them. Tried to tear them apart. He latched on to his Boyo's hand, pulling him as close as he could, refusing to retreat.

The strands wrapped Savin's arms, encircled his legs and ankles. They held Jesse by the waist and twined up his torso.

Pulling them down, burying them. Blood pouring from the slice of thorns. Strangling. Constricting. They were over Savin's ribs now. Lungs unable to expand for a breath. Spikes pushing deeper into his skin. He threw magic like crazy. Nothing.

More, the forest chant insisted.

Center of his chest, he watched helpless as a single strand reared up over his heart. The same mirrored in position over Jesse. He braced.

The vines plunged down in concert.

Agony. It burrowed deep. He knew the moment it pierced his heart and drew heart blood, a geyser of it spurting through gaps in the living mummy wrap.

Sensation went dead in his hands. Along his skin. Even if he couldn't feel him, he refused to let Jesse go. Dying together if need be. Goddess, he wanted more. More time with the man. More for Faerie and Earth, both doomed.

Visions of Faerie and Las Vegas played high speed across his brain. His blood seeped into the ground, seeped onto the man whose hand he still grasped. Losing consciousness.

Unable to speak, wanting Jesse to understand how deeply he loved him, how deeply he valued their time, Savin scraped deep to find a last sprig of energy. Sent the magic flowing through the vines themselves buried inside their chests.

He touched his lover's heart with the power. Warm. Expansive. Everything.

The world dissolved.

* * * * *

A light thwack at his cheek. Again. Annoying. He reached to brush it away.

"Wake up, Magician." A chuckle after the words. "You've gotten your beauty sleep and then some. Time to move that GQ ass."

Savin registered the speaker's voice. Opened his eyes. Stared at the pools of chocolate squinting down at him.

Jesse.

Alive. Thank Goddess.

And so apparently was he. He laid a palm over the center of his Boyo's chest. His shirt was in ribbons with holes in the fabric but the flesh was untouched.

How?

"What happened?"

From his back he was staring at a vibrant forest humming with life and pleasure. Underneath him the magic vibrated in the soil, rich again. Replenished. In the distance he caught golden pinpricks of color outlining a vigorously solid gateway. The dots of gold acted as a sheer curtain for a snapshot of the Paris resort entranceway plaza clearly seen on the other side.

A permanent gate. No special magic needed now to access Earth from Faerie or vice versa.

He rolled to his side and up.

"Hey, slowly, Magician. You've been out for half an hour. I don't want you fainting on me."

To his right, fae milled, staring at the gate and the revitalized heart of Faerie.

Jesse took pity after Savin's mind stuttered so hard he couldn't find words. "I guess the whole vine-stabbing-us-in-the-heart, magic-explosion thing repaired the link between Faerie and Las Vegas."

Goddess, was it a threat to Earth or not for Faerie to have such free access?

"Deep breaths, Savin." Jesse was by his side. "Don't take it so hard."

"I'm not."

"You look on the verge of catatonic."

"Majesty."

Savin spun at the word. Another fae, Soliandra's weapons master if his childhood memory held, stood next to him. He went to his knees before Savin. "My king, please tell us what we should do."

His spine itched. Was he a coward for wanting to run far and fast? "What is your name, sir?"

"Pannion, Majesty."

"Pannion, I'm not your king."

"Our queen named you as successor. You won her duel."

Savin stared down at the man who was clearly desperate for guidance. More fae wandered his way, stood circling their conversation, eyes bouncing between eagerness for answers and ingrained mistrust.

Fine. Okay. He'd do this. He needed to guarantee Earth stayed whole and safe. "Your magic. How does it feel?"

"Weak still, Majesty," a fae woman added from her spot. "Not returned. The land has recovered. I feel it. Why not our people?"

Savin's own magic brimmed full, healthy, the heart of Faerie echoing back the same strength and beating in his blood.

Savin scanned the fae, or at least the ones gathered here. The words were suddenly there for him to use. "I believe the Goddess is sending us a message in giving us back a permanent gate. Humans and fae were one people in the beginning of history."

"Impossible," Eamon pronounced, walking into the ring of conversation. The man looked as arrogant as ever, untouched by the turn of situation.

"Shut up, asshole," Jesse growled.

Savin placed a warning hand on Jesse's arm and his lover sighed and rolled his eyes.

Savin spoke to the listening crowd. "It's why Earth's and Faerie's destruction was tied," he said. "Our peoples were split a long time ago. And it's led to our slow death. The Goddess is providing us another chance. If the fae travel to Earth, take the time to appreciate its people, we embrace that chance."

"A chance to do what, Majesty?" Pannion asked.

He glanced over at Jesse, his arms crossed and scowling back at Eamon. He had plans for his Boyo, assuming they ever got back to Las Vegas and his suite. Those plans involved teaching his smart-mouthed submissive the true value of silence. His rubber ball gag would do the trick. Savin's arousal stirred, cock twitching and his Master nature more than ready to strap his lover down and help him fly. A good sign. He was the same. He could remain himself even forced to deal with his people.

Savin smiled and Jesse caught the expression. Smiled back. His chest expanded bigger than the entire forest of Faerie.

He turned to the kneeling fae, answering his question. "To learn how to be both human and magic. To learn how to love, my friend."

Epilogue

Perching at nine hundred and eighty-six feet, give or take some centimeters, was nothing to Jesse given his climbing experience. Taking all one thousand seven hundred and ten steps to the summit of the Eiffel Tower might have been unpleasant, however. Not to mention prohibited to the public. Having a magic man as a guide came in handy.

Savin stood next to him, both of them gazing down on Paris. The real Paris, not the Las Vegas playland version. The last month had been rough on his Magician, but he'd handled it well. With calm, cool, do-what-I-say-or-else-I'll-stick-my-dildo-up-your-ass-and-make-you-sorry-you-were-ever-born leadership skills. Jesse would never say it, but from time to time he saw Savin's scary-ass grandmother in him a bit. Granted a saner, compassionate version.

The fae population was still reeling from Savin's solution to saving their magic. The phenomenon that opened a solid gate from Faerie to Las Vegas had done the same in hundreds of locations throughout the world.

Most fae believed leadership belonged to Savin despite their mistrust of him. And a few had taken the risk and agreed to come over to Earth and try to connect. Leaving Savin responsible for both managing Faerie and playing escort to Earth for the cultural sensitivity training and acclimation of interested parties. It kept Savin busy. Too busy.

So when he'd pulled airline tickets to Paris out of thin air – figuratively speaking – last weekend, Jesse was more than surprised.

"Time to travel the world, Boyo. We both need a treat."

Jesse had protested. Savin needed rest, not sightseeing.

They'd argued over it but the bastard got his way. Five hours later after bringing him to the point of orgasm ten times and then denying it, flogging his shoulders and ass so Jesse didn't know his own name from the high, and hitting home the point by making him hold a complex training pose for half an hour with the biggest plug up his ass imaginable, Jesse agreed. He'd have done it sooner, but the excitement Savin took from the torture was its own high. His Magician deserved it. And fuck it, he wanted to make the man happy. Every second.

Now here they stood at the top of the Eiffel Tower. Over a decade later than he planned but right on time.

"Think you can teach me to fly, Magician?"

Savin raised eyebrows at him, one side of his mouth tilted up in amused condescension. "Do I look like I wear a cape with a big S printed on it? I'm no superhero, Boyo."

"Damn. And here I planned to have a custom black leather model made up for you with a silver embroidered M."

"For Master."

"For Magician."

"I'll break you of the nickname yet. Master it will be from that point on." But he was smiling with his threat.

"You can try. Magician. But seriously, that first night in the theater you jumped from that scaffolding smooth as butter. And you caught me in the air when I fell off the cliff. How hard could it be to take us both down the side of this?"

"It's daylight. We'll be in plain sight."

"Yeah, and you can't take care of that little detail with your magic."

"May I remind you of that lovely ball gag of which you've made acquaintance recently. I've packed quite a bag of toys sitting back at our hotel room."

"Savin. Just do it." He batted his eyelashes at the man. "You know you like to thrill me, big guy."

"For a man so recently out of the closet with his bisexuality you do like to camp it up." But Savin's mouth flattened, his eyes becoming serious. "Do you like the trip? It's not difficult for you?"

"Because of my family, you mean?"

"Yes."

"When we first arrived and deplaned, I had a moment. A bad flash. Not so much voices as the feeling I'd cheated on some deal I'd made."

Savin grew quiet, considering. "And now?"

"The only deal worth anything is the one we have together. Honesty. Love. And occasional obedience." Jesse couldn't help his wink.

"I've packed a lovely cock cage along with the gag. Let me show it to you later."

Jesse laughed. The returning glint in Savin's eyes raised a lump in his throat. So he followed his impulse. He went down to his knees and bent his head in respect. "I beg you to jump with me, Master. Please."

Strong fingers raised his chin. He found he was trembling. It hit him hard in the gut, the choices they'd made the last month. The paths they'd maneuvered and survived. All worth it. Fate or some goddess or simple luck making it work. Thank Christ. He'd chosen. This life. This man.

Savin pulled him up, implacable grip on his biceps. He shrugged toward the edge of the platform with one shoulder. "Ready, love?"

"Ready."

They jumped.

About the Author

Once described by a new age practitioner as having an old soul, Michelle remains skeptical, but has learned to accept that the universe is a big place. Growing up, she always wanted to write novels. Her dream of creating fantastical stories as a full time career stayed with her after her first handwritten fantasy romance novella in middle school.

Luckily, she has made that dream come alive. Michelle loves to explore the duality of dark and light in her characters' lives. Only when they push beyond the scars of their souls to accept themselves (helped along, of course, by their lovers) can she feel content she's written a great story.

Living in a small New England town, she loves to rebel against a staid Yankee lifestyle through the pages of her manuscripts. Michelle adores pushing the boundaries of sensuality and taboo in her work, but mostly because, in the end, she knows that the connections she forges between the hearts and souls of her characters will lead them to happiness.

Michelle welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at www.ellorascave.com.

Tell Us What You Think

We appreciate hearing reader opinions about our books. You can email us at Comments@EllorasCave.com.

Also by **Michelle Polaris**

Bound Odyssey



Discover for yourself why readers can't get enough of the multiple award-winning publisher Ellora's Cave. Whether you prefer ebooks or paperbacks, be sure to visit EC on the web at www.ellorascave.com for an erotic reading experience that will leave you breathless.

www.ellorascave.com