



NATURE'S
OWN

NICA BERRY

Loose Id

Nature's Own

Nica Berry



Nature's Own

Copyright © July 2010 by Nica Berry

All rights reserved. This copy is intended for the purchaser of this e-book ONLY. No part of this e-book may be reproduced, scanned, or distributed in any printed or electronic form without prior written permission from Loose Id LLC. Please do not participate in or encourage piracy of copyrighted materials in violation of the author's rights. Purchase only authorized editions.

eISBN 978-1-60737-826-6

Editor: G. G. Royale

Cover Artist: Anne Cain

Printed in the United States of America

Loose Id.

Published by

Loose Id LLC

PO Box 425960

San Francisco CA 94142-5960

www.loose-id.com

This e-book is a work of fiction. While reference might be made to actual historical events or existing locations, the names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Warning

This e-book contains sexually explicit scenes and adult language and may be considered offensive to some readers. Loose Id LLC's e-books are for sale to adults ONLY, as defined by the laws of the country in which you made your purchase. Please store your files wisely, where they cannot be accessed by under-aged readers.

* * *

DISCLAIMER: Please do not try any new sexual practice, especially those that might be found in our BDSM/fetish titles without the guidance of an experienced practitioner. Neither Loose Id LLC nor its authors will be responsible for any loss, harm, injury or death resulting from use of the information contained in any of its titles.



<http://www.loose-id.com>

Chapter One

Somewhere in the Mexican desert, 2000

Amun, bloodhound to Loridan, prince of the fae, arrived at the underground compound too late. Ash littered the ground, and black smoke still rose in thin trickles from the ventilation shafts. He showed off a badge, spoke authoritatively about being part of a task force representing kidnapped Americans, and the Mexican *policía* grudgingly let him through. Amun could smell death, the same sickening stench that had never left his memory, despite the passage of three thousand years. Images flashed before him: bodies burning, fae screaming as they died...

“No survivors,” one of the *policía* said in Spanish, jerking Amun out of his flashback. “We counted fifteen dead either from burns or smoke inhalation.”

“I wouldn’t mind having a look myself,” Amun said. It wouldn’t be easy, as he already felt far more raw and vulnerable than he’d expected. He had to keep reminding himself that he’d come because of Loridan, who’d taken ill because of what had happened here. Amun accepted the breathing mask before he descended, flashlight in hand. Flame had scoured the place, leaving blackened, scorched walls and skeletons of furniture. The place went on for hundreds of yards—room after room that held a single bed, a shelf, a sink, and a toilet. Cells, Amun thought with a shiver. And the *policía* was wrong about one thing—there were more than fifteen bodies, just not ones he could recognize.

Fae had died here, dozens of them. Amun’s discomfort grew as he counted. No wonder Loridan had been so badly stricken; nearly every cell he passed had a pile of

dust on the floor that, to Amun's eyes, still glowed faintly. Some had the healthy golden glow that a fae should have, while others emanated an odd shade of green Amun had never seen before.

Puzzled, he stooped down beside one of the greenish piles. He scooped some of the dust into a cloth bag and tied it shut. Loridan was spiritually tied to every fae; perhaps he would know what to make of it.

Amun continued on into a larger room that resembled a laboratory. The fire must have started here; nothing remained intact. Metal twisted and bent by heat pinged against Amun's shoes. Glass crunched beneath his feet. Fae had died here too; Amun counted three glowing piles of dust.

He studied the room uneasily, feeling as if he'd been here before. He'd once known a half fae with a laboratory quite like this one, and he prayed that the two had no connection.

A scratching noise in the corner caught his attention. At first he took it to be debris falling, but—no. A glow emanated from the far corner of the room, one far too bright to belong to someone dead. He started forward, the policía just behind him. Amun didn't need the flashlight, but one of the policía aimed his beam into the corner.

"Madre de Dios," the policía said and crossed himself.

A naked, filthy young man raised his arm to ward off the blinding light. "Put the light down," Amun said in Spanish. His voice sounded hollow through the mask. The policía lowered the flashlight from the survivor's eyes, and slowly the young man moved his arm so Amun could see his face. With his matted brown hair, he looked hardly older than eighteen or nineteen, which in fae years meant he was at least two or three times that age.

He looked warily at the policía, but his eyes widened when his gaze settled on Amun. "Who are you?" he asked in English.

"My name is Amun. I'm a special agent come to investigate the fire here."

At that, he panicked. "I didn't do it. I swear I didn't! She came after me, and she burned." He shuddered, a look of terror on his face. "The fire came from her and touched everything. It hurt..." His voice trailed off.

Amun held his hands up in a gesture of peace. His heart went out to the young fae. "It's all right. We don't think you did. We just want to know what happened." Something about the young man drew Amun toward him. Amun had the irresistible urge to comfort him, to hold him and kiss him and—

One of the policía had the same reaction. He went toward the boy, the bulge in his pants making it obvious why. Amun put his arm out to stop the man. "I'll handle this." He removed his jacket and wrapped it around the young man. Almost instantly, the policía relaxed, although he still looked a bit like a hound after a bitch in heat. Gods. Not only did this fae have some sort of extreme talent for healing, but he had a sexual glamour as well, and even if he knew how to turn it off, he was too traumatized to do so.

"What's your name?"

"Shane."

"We're going to take you someplace safe, all right, Shane?" Other than a few layers of dirt, he looked perfectly fine. No burns and he breathed regularly despite the smoke that had filled this place. He shivered, but whether it was from fear or cold, Amun couldn't tell.

"Are you my new owner?"

So he'd been a prisoner here. Amun had guessed as much with the number of dead fae. Someone had collected them. "No. I'm a friend. I've come to take you home." And the sooner the better; the policía had already started to gossip. "I'm going to carry you out. I don't want you walking around here in bare feet."

"My hero," Shane said but gamely wrapped his arms around Amun's neck.

Amun picked his way carefully through the debris. Taking care of the boy kept his mind off his own terrible memories and his suspicions about the compound's owner. A few steps and Shane went limp. He'd fainted. Amun's worry spiked. He

needed to get the boy to Loridan, but he couldn't do that until he got Shane alone and a fair distance away from the policía.

He carried Shane outside, relieved to be out in the fresh air and sunshine. The policía followed behind, muttering among themselves about *el fénix*. One of them set a hand on Amun's shoulder. "The doctor is here. I will take you to him."

An ambulance sat a few feet away with paramedics waiting. Amun's heart pounded. Physical human contact would traumatize Shane further, and Amun couldn't risk letting them strip him for an examination, because they wouldn't be able to control themselves. "The Americans requested that I see to any survivors personally. I'll look after him." He'd had plenty of time to learn about the finer points of healing fae.

The policía scowled, then shook his head. "You can't take him. He's got to go in for questioning."

Amun gave him the imperious look he'd learned from Pharaoh. "In this condition? He's filthy, scared, and exhausted. Let him rest for tonight, and you can ask him whatever you want tomorrow." Hopefully the policía wouldn't be able to find them tomorrow. Amun planned to be long gone by then.

The policía obviously had the same idea. "There's a motel back in town. You can look after him there. We'll take you and post a man with you. For your own protection, of course."

"Of course." Amun forced a smile. There would be no easy way of getting Shane back to the Otherworld. Amun could only open the door outside and away from any man-made structures.

The motel room was cheap and small with only one large bed and a radio atop a small table, but at least it had its own bathroom. Shane hadn't stirred during the ride over, but he roused enough to let Amun help him in the tub. He watched Amun as if he expected something. Sex, probably, which meant that his trauma came from more than the destruction he'd seen. Physical contact with humans slowly poisoned a fae's mind; sex tripled the effect.

Amun's gut curdled at the thought. No telling what Shane had endured in the compound, especially with that sweet, trusting face of his. Amun filled and emptied the tub twice more before he deemed Shane clean. It struck him how much the boy looked like a younger version of Loridan, with that shock of dark hair and the lithe, pale body, just waiting for Amun to—

He took a deep breath. Two. It wasn't fair to put his own desires onto Shane just because of his worry about Loridan. He made to help Shane stand, but Shane surged upward and wrapped his dripping arms around Amun's neck.

The sudden warmth sent a thread of desire straight to Amun's groin. Gods. Not here. Not now. The body tucked against his was willing and perfect with no sign of any injuries. Shane's hips moved against his with an erection that encouraged Amun's throbbing cock to join it.

Amun kicked himself mentally. Stupid, stupid to be so attracted to this one. He'd rescued thousands of fae and never once had this kind of reaction. The glamour. It had to be the glamour. Fatigue and stress had decreased Amun's defense against it. Loridan. He had to think of Loridan, not this young fae who looked so much like him.

Gently, he extracted himself from Shane's arms. "I won't ask that of you."

He ignored Shane's visible disappointment as he handed the younger fae a towel. Shane made no move to take it but kept watching Amun with that pleading, needy gaze. With a sigh, Amun lightly dried him off and wrapped the towel around his waist.

Someone knocked on the door. Amun opened it to see one of the policía had been thoughtful enough to bring food for both of them along with a pair of plain cotton pants and a loose shirt that looked as if they might fit Shane. Another policía still guarded the door, rifle in hand. Amun wouldn't be leaving. Not through the front door, anyway.

Shane's eyes lit when he saw the fresh tortillas, beans, rice, and tacos. He didn't bother to wait until Amun had set everything out on the bed. As they ate,

Shane edged closer until their legs touched. Shane's hand wandered over to caress Amun's inner thigh.

"No," Amun said with reluctance. He moved Shane's hand away. "I want to talk to you."

"We can talk and play at the same time." Shane ran a finger down the center of Amun's chest. "Come on." He shoved the food wrappers onto the floor and tried to push Amun onto his back.

"Shane..." He stayed upright because of his greater strength. "Can you tell me what happened at the compound?"

Shane's playfulness vanished. He went still and looked Amun in the eye. "Everything burned."

"Yes, but *how* did it burn?"

Shane reached out to touch Amun's face. "You're different. Like me. Like the others, the ones who—" He broke off abruptly.

Died, Amun had the feeling he meant to say. Gods. He was fae, and he didn't know it. "Tell me about them. The different ones." Shane didn't answer. "Do you remember?"

"Not much," he admitted. "I remember Vince—Vincenzo. My owner."

Amun went cold at hearing the name. Vincenzo. He shuddered as he brought to mind the image of the young, angry half fae that he'd caught using his gift to torment humans. Vince had a talent for alchemy, for exploring the chemicals and elements of life. In a better world, he might have been a superb doctor or scientist. Instead, his gift had darkened and turned inward. Amun had brought Loridan in the hopes of saving Vince. Vince might have cooperated had Loridan agreed to his one request: to change him into a full fae as he had Amun. Loridan refused. Vince had disappeared, bitterly angry.

Shane continued, heedless of Amun's unhappy memories. "He liked to bring me visitors. Most of them were regular people who wanted sex. I didn't mind. Some

of them could do things, like walk on the ceiling or start fires without a match.” He shivered. “Hold me.”

Amun shouldn't. He knew he shouldn't. But he couldn't deny the young fae. Shane's trembling quieted as soon as Amun wrapped his arms around his shoulders. “Tell me about that one. The firestarter.”

“She wanted sex too. I meant to. I tried. But she went crazy and lit the mattress on fire. I ran toward the lab. Vince should have been there. He should have helped me, but the fire girl followed. There were so many bottles and jars. Everything exploded from the heat. Some of it caught fire. People were screaming...”

Shane's body shook from sobs. Amun rocked back and forth a little to soothe him, but he knew from experience that such a trauma would not be easily dealt with. His own emotions leaked through: his hatred at anyone keeping another person captive for their own amusement, the grief he shared because he knew the anguish of watching others die.

He let Shane wear himself out before prodding him again. “This Vincenzo. Vince. Why did he want you and the others?”

“Dunno,” Shane said. “He never said. If he did, I don't remember.”

And there was the crux of it all. The only survivor of a disaster that had deeply wounded Loridan, and Shane was too badly burned by human contact to remember anything of use. Amun bit off his disappointment. He'd have to get the boy purified before he had any hope of getting any useful information out of him.

Shane drew back enough to see Amun's face. “How come you don't want me? Everyone else would have been fucking me by now.”

“I can see through your glamour. It doesn't affect me.” He didn't mention the lingering ache in his groin.

Shane shook his head in puzzlement. “I still don't know what the hell you're talking about.”

Amun didn't have the wherewithal to explain. Not here, not now. He was as worn-out as Shane and worried sick about Loridan. "Sleep on it, then."

"Leave the light on. I don't want to be in the dark again. And don't let go. Please."

Amun balked at the request, then chided himself. It wasn't sex. He was comforting a terrified fae, which Loridan would want him to do in any case. So he lay down with Shane still in his arms and tried not to think about how nicely Shane fit there. Since Loridan had rescued him, Amun had never been intimate with anyone else. He didn't intend to start now.

He didn't intend to fall asleep either.

* * *

In his dreams, Amun wandered the darkened corridors of Pharaoh's palace. He was a slave again, following Pharaoh's orders to point out those who glowed. "Tell me, and you shall be rewarded," Pharaoh said. Amun did as Pharaoh bade him, and Pharaoh lavished gifts upon him: the finest foods, slaves to bathe and tend him, his choice of lovers at night, and Khepri, beautiful Khepri, the loyal cheetah that never left his side.

All that changed when Loridan visited him. Because Loridan's skin had been so pale and his features so exotic, Amun had mistaken him for the moon god, Iah, and called him by that name. "You know not what you do," Iah said. He'd taken Amun's hand and led him to the courtyard. There, he saw the men and women he'd pointed out, all of them burning alive on a pyre, because they glowed. Because Amun had chosen them.

Nightmares had plagued him ever since. Screams of the dying reached his ears, but he could not find them in time, no matter how fast he ran. Too late. Always too late, reaching the pyres just as the victims collapsed into glowing piles of dust. Hot tears slid down his cheeks. "I'm sorry," he said. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry!"

The dead littered the ground. His fault. Always his fault. He screamed his frustration to the gods and ran again to another pyre, another dead fae....

Iah came to him, gently kissing away Amun's tears. "You know not what you do," he said. He took Amun's face in his hands and turned it this way and that, kissing his cheek, his chin, sucking lightly at Amun's earlobes. Iah meant to comfort him, but Amun could not, would not be comforted.

"Let it go, Amun."

They were dead. All of them dead. He shouldn't be here having sex, not even with the moon god. "Iah. Iah, please, I have to save them."

"Let it go." This time it was an order. "Touch me, Amun. I want to feel you."

Iah pulled him down so Amun lay atop him, chest to chest, cock to cock. Amun arched his head down to kiss the soft curve of his pale neck. Iah's hands wrapped around his waist, his fingers tucked into the crevice between Amun's buttocks.

Amun wrapped his arms beneath Iah, pulling him close, closer. He nuzzled Iah's neck, kissed the hollow of his shoulder, sucked the skin at the base of his throat. One leg nudged Iah's aside to spread him wide.

"Go on," Iah said. "I want you to."

Amun jerked his hips, thrusting atop Iah. The friction hardened him even more. Iah writhed beneath him, captive yet enjoying every moment.

"Yes. Oh, man, yes..."

Something about the words and voice broke through to Amun's dreaming mind. The heaviness of sleep lifted from him with sickening rapidity. Amun blinked. The body beneath him had dark hair and pale skin, yes, but it was not his Iah. Not Loridan. Amun lay there, his cock still hard and aching, to see Shane lying facedown, eyes closed, mouth wide in ecstasy. For one long, tempting moment, Amun longed to drive himself between those pale white buttocks and finish what he'd begun.

Then he jerked away in horror. This attraction wasn't real; the boy was using his glamour. "Get away."

Shane sat up and reached for him. "You were having a nightmare."

“Stop that.” He shoved Shane to the side.

“What’s wrong?”

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have.” Amun put his legs over the side of the bed, searching the ground for his clothes. Gods, but his cock ached with need.

“I didn’t mind. In fact”—Shane sidled up to him and wrapped an arm around Amun’s chest—“I enjoyed it.”

Amun shuddered. To take advantage of Shane so soon after the fire... He was no better than Pharaoh had been. “Please. Go back to sleep.”

“I’m too horny to sleep now. I didn’t get off. Why don’t you finish the job?”

Amun twisted around to look at Shane. His eyes dropped to Shane’s waist, to the erection that stood ready and waiting for Amun to touch.

“Go on,” Shane whispered into Amun’s ear. “Touch me. I want you to.”

Amun wanted to also, but he sat there, frozen. Loridan was in the Otherworld, deathly ill, and Shane had just survived something horrific. It didn’t matter that Amun’s body would have gratefully given itself to Shane again. Amun couldn’t. “No.” It was one of the hardest things he’d ever had to say.

Shane pouted. “Why not? I know you want—”

He was cut off by a violent pounding on the door. Shane grabbed Amun’s arm, his eyes wide in terror. “Get dressed,” Amun told him.

“Señor Amun? Please, open up, Señor. We would like to speak with you.”

They scrambled into their clothes just as the door crashed open. Amun instinctively moved to protect Shane as soon as he saw a half dozen policía with rifles aimed in their direction.

He put his hands in the air. “Something I can help you with?”

One of them gestured with his rifle. “We talked to the *americanos*. They don’t know anything about you. Move away from the boy.”

“What are you going to do with him?”

“Move,” the policía growled.

"He's American. You have no right to keep him here," Amun said as he edged away from Shane.

"That's for the real americanos to decide. Hands on your head!"

Amun did as he was told. As soon as he'd moved away from Shane, the policía rushed forward to slam him against the wall and cuff him. Shane screamed as one of the policía grabbed him and hauled him away. He tried to explain in broken English, but Shane fought anyway.

"Amun!" he cried. The sound of it broke Amun's heart.

* * *

Amun paced in Loridan's room, sick at having to tell the prince the bad news. "Vince is back," he said finally, then told Loridan what he'd found and how, in the end, he'd failed. "I'm sorry, my prince."

Loridan gestured weakly from his bed. "You did everything you could."

Amun rubbed his wrists where the cuffs had been. He found no comfort in Loridan's words, especially not when Loridan still lay in bed and looked only marginally better than when Amun had seen him last. The number and violence of fae deaths at the compound had sent him into a sort of seizure and stroke from which he showed few signs of recovering.

Khepri twined around Amun's legs, happy to see him, but even his cheetah's presence did not alleviate his disappointment. "I failed. I couldn't get him out. I only escaped because I begged them to stop at the side of the road to let me relieve myself." And it was sheer good luck that they'd turned their backs long enough for him to open the door to the Otherworld and step through.

"You're safe. That matters more to me than anything you might have found there."

Not to Amun, it didn't. Shane had been taken away to whatever new kind of hell the Mexicans would find for him. Worse, he'd lost the only link to Vincenzo and

dozens of dead fae. “I shouldn’t have slept with him. I should have found us a way out.”

“You did what came naturally to you.” Loridan smiled faintly as he referenced the fae’s edict. “You’re in love with him.”

The observation stunned Amun. “No, my prince. It was the glamour—”

“Which you would not have fallen for had you not some incentive to do so.”

Amun didn’t care for that explanation. Because of his weakness, he’d fallen for the glamour, and Shane had suffered for it. “I didn’t mean to betray you. Forgive me, my prince. It won’t happen again.”

“Amun—” He looked as if he meant to say one thing, then changed his mind. “What is that?”

Amun toyed with the bag of dust; luckily the policía hadn’t frisked him and taken it away. He held it out to Loridan. “I counted seventy-three dead, including this one.”

Loridan reached out to take the bag but snatched his hand back as if he’d been bitten. “Gods.” He tried again, slower, but stopped just short of actually touching it. “It’s fae, one of mine and yet not. It’s...wrong. A corruption. What do you see?”

“The light is green instead of gold. Fae, but a sickly one.”

Loridan sank down into his pillow, suddenly pale. “I think we have a larger problem than your missing boy. Vince is trying to change humans into fae.”

Chapter Two

San Diego, present day

Beggars can't be choosers, Shane thought, but, *dude*, why did his client's fantasy have to be in one of the crappiest motels in San Diego? They should have a room in the W or even that new Hilton. Something comfortable. Something *clean*.

The man sitting on the bed across from Shane—Hank, he'd said—stank to high heaven. The wifebeater he wore barely covered his ample stomach. Bottles and cigarette butts littered the nightstand. Several twenty-dollar bills poked out of Hank's fat wallet, the only reason Shane had come at all.

"Well?" Hank asked. His eyes followed Shane, daring him to complain or renege on their agreement. Fat chance. "We gonna do this or what?"

Shane's stomach churned. Bile burned the back of his throat. Money. He was doing this for the money. And then he was going to take a shower and scrub until his skin fell off. He forced a smile. "Ready when you are."

Hank leaned back against the headboard and gestured at his crotch. "Have at it, then."

Great. Shane crawled on his hands and knees until he crouched between Hank's chubby, naked thighs. He froze, staring at the faded green boxers. Gingerly, he slid his fingers beneath the elastic waistband and tugged it down and around Hank's cock. It was a tiny, shriveled thing nestled in a thatch of black hair. Shane wanted to gag, but he refused to give in to Hank's lewd enjoyment.

"Have at it, I said!" Hank tangled his fingers in Shane's hair and forced his head down.

Shane did his best not to breathe. He could do this. Eyes closed, he stuck out his tongue. He couldn't help the grimace as he tasted cock for the first time. Hank laughed, amused by his discomfort. Shane steeled himself and ran his tongue along the length of Hank's cock, pausing to swirl it around the tip.

"What's the matter, boy? Swallow it!"

Shane repressed a shudder as he did what Hank demanded. The limp member fit easily inside his mouth, warm and soft if bitter. He sucked at it, lips curved around his teeth. In and out, in and out, with his tongue swirling against the tender underside.

Hank let out an appreciative sigh. "That's more like it. The way you were acting, I'd have thought you weren't having a good time."

For once, Shane felt grateful his mouth was too full to speak. A little more and Hank's cock hardened. He began to move his hips.

A minute later, a warm, salty bitterness flooded Shane's mouth. His eyes burned with tears, but he didn't dare spit it out. With effort, he swallowed and looked up to see approval in Hank's eyes.

"Good, boy, but we ain't done yet," he said, dashing Shane's hope for a quickie. "That was just a warm-up. Take your shirt off. Nice and slow. I want to see the way you move."

Still between Hank's legs, Shane sat up on his knees and crossed his arms over his chest to peel off the skintight T-shirt he wore. The bed shifted as Hank sat up, mouth wide as he panted. Shane smiled.

Hank ran his hands along Shane's hips and around his denim-covered ass. Smoky lips drooled down the center of Shane's belly. A fat hand thrust itself down the back of his jeans to claw the cleft between his buttocks. The other hand fumbled with the buttons on the fly of Shane's jeans.

He hadn't worn underwear. More convenient that way. His cock sprang free to be immediately engulfed by Hank's mouth. Shane squirmed, disgusted, but Hank clenched Shane's buttocks to hold him close. Two of his fingers rubbed Shane's

asshole. Shane settled for setting his hands on Hank's shoulders, entirely unwilling to touch the man's greasy hair.

Hank yanked at the back of Shane's jeans and twisted him around so that Shane lay facedown on the scratchy bedspread. A few more tugs and Hank managed to get the jeans the rest of the way off. Spit-slicked fingers probed his asshole.

"Dude, this ain't what we bargained for," Shane said. "Get a rubber on, or I'm out." He tried to roll over and sit up, but Hank's heavy hand in the small of his back made that impossible.

Glass shattered on the nightstand as Hank held a beer bottle by the neck and broke it. He waved the remains in front of Shane's eyes. "Do what I say, or I'll cut you so bad you'll never turn another trick. Got that?"

Shit. Mute with terror, Shane could only nod.

"I want you," Hank said. "Best piece of ass I've had in a long, long time." He spanked Shane's rear for emphasis. Hank maneuvered to get his body atop Shane's, but his weight made him awkward. He had to take his hand off Shane's back, and Shane used the opportunity to squirm out from under him. He slithered onto the floor.

Hank swore. He sent another beer bottle flying. It hit Shane square on his spine and sent a bolt of agony straight to his head. He collapsed with a cry. Hank lurched off the bed, his thick fingers still wrapped around the neck of the broken bottle.

The sharp glass sliced through the air toward Shane's chest. Out of instinct, Shane raised an arm to block it. A blaze of pain streaked down his arm as the broken bottle drove into it. He screamed, but the pain brought him to himself enough that he scrambled to his feet.

Hank's free hand caught him around the throat, and he used the momentum to slam Shane's head against the wall.

Not the wall. The door. The *door*.

Shane groped for the handle. “Don’t leave,” Hank begged him. He kissed Shane’s lips, his cheek, his newly bruised neck. “I want you. I have to have you.”

The handle turned. Shane thrust a knee upward. Hank howled in pain. Shane punched him in the gut, and Hank finally backed up enough for Shane to get the door open and dash out.

He ran, the sea air cool against his bare skin, into the alley behind the motel. He slipped on old newspapers and plastic bags, grateful he didn’t step on anything worse. He kept his eye open for the first doorway that looked like it belonged to a decent place, somewhere he could hide until he figured out what to do next.

* * *

Mason looked up from his computer when Carlos poked his head through a crack in the door. “Boss. There’s a problem outside.”

“If it’s a fight—”

“Not a fight. Something you should see.”

With a sigh, Mason grabbed his suit jacket from the back of his chair and put it on. The moment he stepped out into the main room of his club, he stared at the scene in disbelief. His clients—nearly *all* of them—had crowded toward the far side of the room, intent on one young figure pressed tightly to the wall. He looked like a Goth, with his pale skin and the shock of too black hair artfully hanging over one eye.

“How the hell did he get in here?” Mason asked.

“Ducked in before Sergio could catch him, and then the crowd went after him.”

Mason rolled his eyes. Just what they needed—some kid trying to shake things up and getting hurt in the process.

“Where did you come from, sweetheart?” one of the men in the crowd asked. “Such a fresh young thing. What’s your scene?”

Horror crossed the young man’s face. He shook his head. “Hey, man, I think you’ve made a mistake.”

"Oh, he's good," a bald man purred. "Look at how he's pretending to be afraid. I bet he's a fantastic sub." He reached out to pinch the boy's cheek. "And I'd *love* to be the one to breach that pretty little ass of yours."

The men descended like crows at a feast. The boy flailed at them, but nothing he did helped. The bald man grabbed the boy's nipples and squeezed. A moment later another man knocked Baldy out of the way and turned the boy around and flattened him against the wall.

"Is this how you like it? Shameful little slut, parading yourself around for all of us to see and touch."

The boy went stiff. "Only if you wear a rubber, man."

"That's enough." Mason stepped forward, flanked by Carlos and Sergio. They cleared a path through the crowd so Mason could reach the newcomer, stark naked, angry, and bleeding from a deep cut on his arm. He must have been nineteen or twenty and was far more handsome than Mason had first thought.

Mason reached toward him, meaning to see if his skin was as soft as it looked, but then he caught himself. He knew better than to consort with his own clients. "Here," he said. He took off his jacket and draped it around the boy's shoulders. The moment he did, the intense feeling of attraction waned. The tension in the crowd eased as well.

Just what he needed tonight, one of *them*.

He grabbed the young man's chin and looked him in the eye. "You're not one of my boys. Nor, I think, are you one of my regular guests." Firmly, he turned the boy around and gave him an appraising look. "Come with me." When the boy hesitated, he added, "To my office. Away from this mob. I won't hurt you."

The crowd lobbed a few protests as he led the boy away, but none dared follow with Carlos and Sergio between them. Carlos made to follow Mason inside, but Mason waved him away. Carlos nodded and shut the door. Mason gestured to the cot against the wall. "Sit." Now that he was out of danger, the boy's nerves caught up to him. He stared into space and trembled.

Mason reached into the minifridge for a bottle of beer. He used a penknife to get the cap off, then handed it to the boy. "Drink it."

He did, swallowing the whole bottle in a few gulps while Mason grabbed another bottle.

"I'm Mason," he said when the boy had finished.

"Shane," he said and gratefully accepted the second beer. He polished off that one too.

"You running from your pimp?"

"No!" Shane said. "I mean—no. I don't have one. My friend gave me a lead for a guy in that seedy little motel down the street. It was supposed to be easy money."

Mason sat on the corner of his desk so that one leg dangled. "They're all supposed to be easy money. You do this often?"

The beer was kicking in. Shane trembled less and giggled more. The jacket fell from his shoulders, but he made no move to cover himself up. Again, Mason felt that stir of desire in his cock at seeing Shane's nakedness. Too skinny. Not his type, not at all, yet Mason longed to caress that slender neck, to push him down into the cot and fuck him until his body gave out.

This isn't real, he told himself. The boy's not human.

Shane must have read the desire in his face—or his cock, Mason noticed with annoyance. Shane sat on the edge of the cot, legs spread, stroking his flaccid cock with his thumb. "Twenty bucks. I'll give you a discount as a thank-you for getting me away from that crowd."

Tempting, but Mason could hold out for a while. Shane smelled like cigarette smoke and another man's sweat. Besides that... "You're bleeding. Did you know that?"

Shane looked down as if he couldn't remember being hurt. He touched the wound and winced. "Shit, that hurts. Bastard came after me with a broken bottle," he said.

"I'll get something to wrap it up in, but first, there's a shower in there. Towel's on the rack. Go on."

He jumped at the offer, likely eager to get the last of his john's filth off his skin. Mason sent for Carlos and told him to go over to the seedy motel to claim what he could find of Shane's things. He sidled over to the bathroom door and watched Shane through the crack in the shower curtain. He lathered the shower gel onto his body and scrubbed as hard as he could with the washcloth. That last client of his must have been a real bastard, all right.

Mason retrieved his jacket. The boy's arm had stained the sleeve, but Mason didn't care. He got out a kit from the bottom drawer in his desk and cut out the stained satin lining. He set it flat on the desk, then used an eyedropper to place a couple of drops of the liquid the bloodhound had given him onto the stain. In seconds, the blood went from a dark reddish brown to a bright, metallic copper.

"Shit," Mason said. A full-blooded fae. No wonder the guys in the club had gone cuckoo over the kid.

Carlos returned while Shane was still in the shower. He carried a pair of ripped jeans, a black T-shirt, a pair of leather sandals, and a worn cloth wallet with nothing much inside. Five dollars. A bus pass. A six-year-old ID card—not a driver's license—that proclaimed him to be Shane Phoenix, twenty-two years old as of March. It listed his address as one of the nicest neighborhoods in La Jolla. "Twenty-two my ass," Mason muttered when Carlos was safely away.

By the time Shane had finished, Mason had bandages and a bottle of antiseptic ready. Shane emerged, red-faced from heat and drunkenness, with a towel around his waist. He grinned. "You ready now, boss man?"

"Sit." Mason waved at the cot and hoped like hell Shane didn't notice the hard-on that had only gotten worse in the interim.

Shane collapsed onto the cot. His head lolled to the side before he noticed and jerked it back up. "Sorry, man. Guess I'm a bit tired."

“Guess you are.” Mason sat next to him. “Let me see your arm.” The boy complied, but the cut had already healed over. Not even a scab, just a line of swollen, reddened flesh. Mason traced the welt. “You always heal this quick?”

“Dunno. How’d I get that, again?”

“You ever get sick? Ever pick up any STDs from those clients of yours?”

“What kind of question is that? Of course I’m clean. Bad for business if I ain’t.”

“Any friends you want me to call? Family?”

At that, his forehead creased in a frown. “Friends? I dunno. Don’t remember. Don’t know if I have any family either.”

Mason doubted he was being evasive on purpose; his constant contact with humans had probably fried his mind. Not good. “Go on. Get some sleep.”

Shane flopped over, unconscious as soon as his head hit the pillow. Mason whipped out his cell phone and sent a text. *Come soon. This one’s a full-blood, but pretty far gone.*

He didn’t have to wait long before his phone buzzed in reply. He looked at it, hoping for good news.

Unavoidably delayed. Keep him close until I can get there.

Mason sighed. The hard part wouldn’t be in keeping Shane here. It would be in keeping him safe.

Chapter Three

The thin blonde girl shook like a frightened rabbit when Amun presented her to Loridan. Amun had snatched her out of a mental hospital in New Mexico when he'd seen the sickly green glow around her. The doctors had no idea what they had, much less how to treat her.

She was the latest in a series of unnatural fae Amun had found in the Southwest, most somewhere near the Mexican border. Several of Amun's human and half-fae connections had given him reports of outright kidnapping and then finding humans, like this one, with a fae gift introduced into her body that had grown beyond her control. She clung to Amun and kept her head buried in his shoulder.

From his chair, Loridan spoke soothingly to her, and eventually she relaxed enough to look at him. Her eyes crossed as if she couldn't focus. "What do you see?" Loridan asked.

Her voice became flat and eerie as she called upon her fae gift. "I see a desert, and within it a nexus of hate and evil, a man using the innocent for his own evil. Pain." She shuddered and nuzzled Amun's shoulder again.

Loridan stiffened. "Vincenzo again. But *where* in the desert? I can't sense him at all." He rubbed the girl's arm. "Can you tell me anything else about this nexus of hate?"

She opened her mouth to speak but instead slumped against Amun, the strength gone from her limbs. Loridan shook her. "Tell me. How do we get rid of him?"

Amun didn't think she would answer. He had to lift her so she didn't collapse. Her head flopped against his shoulder, her breath warming his neck. "Love," she said.

"What did she say?" Loridan demanded, even though Amun felt certain he'd heard.

"Love."

"She's gone mad like the rest of them." Loridan moaned and drove his fist into the wall. He breathed hard from the effort. "I couldn't get anything useful from her mind. Do what you can to save her," Loridan said, although his voice was empty of hope. "Purify her. See if it does any good."

Amun went cold. She wouldn't have lasted much longer in her own world, and he doubted she had the strength left to survive purification here in the Otherworld. All the human-born fae had been much the same.

Amun did as his prince bid and carried her into the purification chamber. To a human eye, it appeared as a garden, but the fae came here to be healed. He set her on the stone bench and watched dully as vines wrapped unnecessarily around her body to keep her still. A tendril of thorns gently pricked her skin to drain and process the tainted blood before sending it back within her body.

Useless, he knew. Purification was hard enough to endure for a half fae, as Amun had once been, and far too much for one fully human. He should have taken her to a quiet room where she could have died in peace. Instead, she passed on without regaining consciousness before the process had half completed. The vines withdrew automatically, and Amun sat a silent, weary vigil while her body crumpled into greenish dust scattered by the wind.

* * *

"Loridan."

"I know. I felt her go." Pain and despair tinged his words. He sat in his chair, pale and breathing shallowly. Every fae death hit him harder than the last.

"Mason called." Amun sank to the ground so he could rest his chin atop Loridan's knee. Amun rubbed Loridan's thigh, always surprised to feel the strength of it. Loridan hadn't walked in over ten years. He would have thought the muscles would be wasted by now.

This sort of closeness wasn't enough, but Amun didn't have a choice. "If you don't want me to go..." He left it hanging, wishing Loridan would ask him to stay. To keep him company. Slowly Amun edged his hand upward, holding his breath in hope.

But Loridan put his hand atop Amun's to keep it still. "Go. What if it's the boy you lost?"

"What if it isn't?" Amun didn't like to think about Shane.

"Find out. For your own sake...and mine." He smiled and squeezed Amun's hand.

It stung. They'd been lovers for thirty-five hundred years, ever since Loridan had rescued him. Amun had repaid him by becoming his bloodhound, using the fae gift that allowed him to see the gold aura surrounding fae to track them down and keep them out of trouble. Now Loridan kept sending him away.

"It isn't to keep you away, love."

Damn Loridan for being a mind reader. "Then why?"

"I need to find Vince by whatever means possible, and I need..."

You, Amun wanted him to say.

He didn't. He continued to watch Amun with that sad, pitying smile. "I need you to stop worrying about me. Go on. Give Mason my regards."

* * *

Amun hadn't visited Mason's club for some time. Nothing had changed. Still trendy and a popular hangout for the gay and lesbian crowd, but thank the gods Mason had enough sense to keep the throbbing music at a level one didn't have to scream over to be heard.

His gaze landed on a young, feminine-looking man leaning against a table at the rear of the theater. Mason was right; this one glowed with an intensity that could only belong to a full-blooded fae. This one looked hardly old enough in human years to be out here legally. He wore tight jeans artfully ripped at his knees, crotch, and butt, and a white tank top that bared his skinny arms. A shock of black hair half covered eyes rimmed with dark makeup. Studded leather circled his wrists and neck. Without that glamour, he would be just a young man, another Goth wannabe. Nothing special except for the crowd that had gathered around him, men circling like vultures waiting for the tastiest piece of meat. Only one fae he'd ever met had that effect on people.

Shane. Amun's heart went to his throat. That he lived was a small miracle in itself; that he could apparently still function despite the onslaught of human contact shocked Amun completely. Amun suppressed the tiny hope that Shane would remember him. Probably better if he didn't.

"Bloodhound," Mason said. "I have to admit, I haven't minded waiting for you. That one's proved to be useful to me over the past few days."

"Useful." Amun snorted. Mason had the faint glow of a half fae and a knack for attracting other fae to him. Shortly after the fire at the compound, Mason's club had become a target for Vince and his men. Mason himself escaped kidnapping, as Vince found Mason and his club a benefit as he evidently tried to rebuild his operation, though the place was subjected to frequent raids. Mason refused to close down or move, saying Vince would find him anywhere he went. Amun knew that was true, given the number of fae gifts he'd been hunting. At least downtown San Diego was populated enough to provide a modicum of safety for wandering fae and a chance for Amun to reach them first. "Anything new?"

"No," Mason said. "Vince hasn't been here in more than a month. Then again, I haven't had any new fae stop by lately except for the pretty boy over there."

Shane's lack of inhibition bothered Amun. Fae had little use for shame, but Shane's actions were entirely reckless. He sat on the table, head tilted back to meet

the mouth of one man, while another kissed the bare skin visible through a hole in Shane's jeans on his inner thigh.

Jealousy bubbled deep within Amun. He'd kissed that flesh once, used his hands to make Shane writhe in pleasure even if he hadn't meant to. He did his best to stifle both his anger and desire. Loridan counted on him to bring Shane back to the Otherworld, not fall to his seductive powers again.

Mason rapped his fingers against the bar to get Amun's attention. "He can barely remember yesterday. Can't even recall running from a john that went bad when I found him. He heals faster than anyone I've ever seen, though. Might be why he's still sane."

Amun thought of chastising Mason for putting the boy at greater risk because of the human contact, but it wasn't worth it. The boy obviously couldn't help himself, and if Mason hadn't offered him a job, he would have gone elsewhere to get his fix. "Loridan will compensate you for your efforts, of course."

"Of course." Mason didn't sound enthusiastic. "Get him out of here. I don't want a mad fae on my hands. Worse, I don't want any uninvited guests coming to look for him."

Amun nodded. "Send him upstairs. I want to talk to him alone before I take him home." He took a wallet from his pocket and handed Mason a black American Express. "Don't be excessive this time."

"Wouldn't dream of it," Mason said with a grin.

* * *

"Shane. Client. VIP. Mason wants you to take him."

Shane groaned and not just because one of his lucky fans stroked his cock through his jeans. "Which one?"

Carlos used his head to gesture at a tall bald man who looked like he'd stepped straight out of a science-fiction movie. He had a pseudo-Egyptian look with his bald head and baggy pants—silk, Shane guessed—and a bright vest embroidered with

gold thread. No shirt, which left the toned muscles of his arms bare. Beyond that, there was something Shane couldn't quite put his finger on that attracted him to the newcomer. Like an electric charge or that old adage about love at first sight. The man was different, like Shane was different.

Shane sat up, his orgy forgotten. "Wow. He's a looker."

Carlos rapped him lightly on the back of the head. "His name's Amun. Take a shower. He'll meet you upstairs." Then, to the crowd surrounding Shane, "All right, boys. He's taken, but he'll be back tomorrow night."

The men moaned their disappointment. Shane ignored them and headed upstairs to the shower. He looked back over his shoulder. Amun watched him, not with lust like the other men, but with an expression that hid a thousand secrets, and if Shane was lucky, he might learn one or two.

Chapter Four

Shane emerged from the shower, hair still dripping, wearing a pair of tight black jeans and a belt but no shirt. Amun waited for him. He stood patiently at the far side of the room and gazed at the framed black-and-white photographs on the wall. All of them depicted nude males in various sexual poses. "See anything you like?"

Amun turned. Up close, he was still handsome. He wore some serious bling: a thick gold collar around his neck and a diamond-studded hoop in one ear. He inclined his bald head in acknowledgment. "Perhaps."

"Tell me if you want something specific." He used a hand towel to dry his hair as sensuously as he could. Most guys got a kick out of this, but to his disappointment, Amun didn't move. Rather, he stood there like an unhappy father, radiating disapproval.

"You still haven't learned to turn it off, have you?"

"Turn *what* off?" Shane asked.

"The glamour. I can see right through it."

Shane spread his arms in a helpless gesture. "Dude, what the hell are you talking about?"

Amun took two steps forward so they stood nearly crotch to crotch. He spoke quietly as if schooling a kid who didn't know any better. "The glamour you're using to fool everyone into thinking you're far sexier than you really are."

Shane repressed a bolt of fear. This guy knew like no one else had. He didn't know if it was a comfort or not. "Dude. You blind or what? Did you see all those guys down there? All of them wanted me and a piece of this cock I'll show you. That

is, if you're nice to me." His mouth rested only inches from Amun's. He cocked his head, breathing in strange, spicy cologne. "Though," he said, his gaze resting pointedly at Amun's crotch, "you're not nearly as excited as the rest of the clients I'm stuck up here with. Need some help?"

Without asking, he grabbed Amun's cock through the silk pants. Thick and *huge*, from the feel of it. And with the touch came that same odd feeling he'd had downstairs, as if they belonged together.

A moment later, Shane found himself facedown on the ground, his cheek stinging from Amun's hand. "What the hell was that for?"

"For presuming too much."

Shane rolled over and propped himself up on his elbows. He kept his legs sprawled wide to show off his erection. "Are you one of those guys who gets off by smacking people around? 'Cause if you are, I have a dozen guys waiting downstairs who'll be a hell of a lot nicer to me."

"Shut up," Amun said. Daunted by the man's size as well as his tone of voice, Shane complied. "Have you ever thought about *why* so many men are attracted to you?"

Amun had hit on his one sore point, but Shane remained determined not to show it. "I'm young. I'm pretty. I have a very cooperative cock." He rubbed it for emphasis. "Who wouldn't want me?"

"*I* wouldn't." Amun's eyes narrowed. "If you were among the fae, they wouldn't revere you. They'd rape you. Tear you to shreds because you have no skill at all."

Damn, this guy was making him angry. "I do too have skill. I'm a natural. That's why Mason wanted me here. He could see it a mile away. And of course I'm fey. I'm as gay as they come. I want a man sucking my dick, not a woman."

"Not *fey*," Amun said, sounding impatient. "Fae."

Shane rolled his eyes. "Dude. You from a different planet or something? I don't think we're talking the same language here."

Amun's frown deepened. Boy, was he bitter about something. This man wasn't normal, he knew that, but Shane hadn't felt any interest in a client for a long, long time. No, more than interest. Lust. "It's true. I'm from...elsewhere," Amun said.

"Oookay," Shane said. It figured. The one man he actually *wanted* to see naked, and he was a freak. "Want to tell me how you like to fuck...elsewhere? Or would you like me to suggest something?"

"Flexible, are you?"

To prove it, Shane bent over backward until both his palms and his heels touched the floor.

"I see," Amun said, voice flat. While Shane remained in that awkward position, Amun calmly unbuckled the belt and unbuttoned the fly on Shane's jeans, releasing the hard-on trapped inside. Now they were getting somewhere. With a few short, sharp tugs Amun pulled Shane's jeans off, which also knocked Shane off balance.

He lay on the floor, grinning at the absurdity. Amun crouched beside him, but instead of removing his clothes as Shane had hoped, he rolled Shane from side to side and looked very closely at his skin.

"Hey, man, what do you think you're doing?"

"Mason said you were hurt when he found you. Can you tell me where?"

Shane rolled his eyes. What was he, some sort of prize pony at the fair? Oh well. As long as the man paid him, Shane would put up with anything. Well, almost anything. He didn't like getting smacked around. "I don't remember."

"Why not?"

"What is with you? Mason keeps badgering me about it too. Maybe I don't *want* to remember. Now are you going to do me, or are we going to sit and chitchat all night?"

Amun made an irritated noise. "I am not going to 'do' you. I am not interested in the least in having sex with an irritating, obnoxious, loudmouthed little bastard like you."

Other people had called him all sorts of names, but from Amun, it hurt. Shane sat up and pulled a knee to his chest. “Hey, man. I’m sorry, all right? It ain’t often that I get a guy who leaves me alone. I’m not used to it. Can I do something for you instead? I can blow pretty good—”

“No.” Amun’s voice was harsh, but his face had softened slightly.

“Want to watch, then?” He put his leg back down and grabbed his cock, grinning at Amun while he fisted it.

But Amun only sighed and walked slowly out of the room. Shane wanted to call him back but had no idea what to say. Still, it was like Amun had taken with him that chance Shane might have had at friendship or, better, someone with that unnamable difference like he had.

“No, man,” he said softly as he swirled his thumb around the tip of his cock. “I can’t remember a damn thing, and it scares the hell out of me.”

* * *

Amun went downstairs. He needed a drink, a stiff one, after dealing with such a disappointment. Shane didn’t act a bit like Amun remembered; he supposed it wasn’t possible, not after more than ten years. Amun’s temper had gotten the better of him, and while he regretted being so harsh with Shane, he didn’t have the wherewithal to pretend otherwise.

“Well?” Mason said, elbowing in beside him. He slammed a glass of bourbon down in front of Amun. “Man, that’s the first time I’ve seen you so disappointed after finding a fae.”

Amun took a long swallow before he answered. “I knew him. Years ago. The only survivor of that fire at Vince’s compound, but he doesn’t remember me at all. He’s got one thing and one thing only in his head.”

“And you’re disappointed. You fucked him, didn’t you? You still want to.”

Amun’s cheeks burned. He hated the obviousness of his emotions. “He’s an obnoxious little brat.”

Mason laughed. "You going to tell him what you know about him?"

"No. Wouldn't do any good. He'd forget by tomorrow. Loridan will want him purified soon enough, I'm sure, and then he'll remember." And once he did, he probably wouldn't care about Amun anyway. Better if he didn't.

"How is Loridan these days?"

Amun took another drink. "Each death is hitting him harder than the last, and lately there've been two, sometimes three a week. Most of them are coming from south of here. A 'nexus of hate,' one of the oracles said."

"Shit." Mason shook his head. "I do what I can, but I can't find them all before Vince gets them. You're lucky Shane lasted this long. I'm surprised Vince hasn't—" He broke off and touched the earpiece in his ear. He glanced up and saw Carlos gesturing frantically. "Dammit. Spoke too soon. You'd better get your boy and go."

Amun craned his head around to see two Mexican men step through the doorway with their jackets pulled back just enough for Amun to see the guns strapped to their sides. Carlos and Sergio didn't bother trying to disarm them. The place went silent at their approach save for the pounding music.

Amun slunk from his seat and ducked down behind the other men in the club so he could get to the stairs. These were Vince's boys, each with a glow of his own, but whereas Amun was a bloodhound, these were wolves, unafraid to use violence to capture fae and torment them for his own ends.

Amun streaked upstairs as soon as he could. Shane lay where Amun had left him, still sprawled naked on the floor and playing with his cock.

"Come with me," Amun said. He grabbed Shane's upper arm and pulled at him, trying not to remember the last time this had happened and what the results had been.

"Dude, what the hell are you—"

"Come with me *now*."

"I ain't going out there naked. Let me get my jeans—"

Amun bit off his impatience as Shane scrambled into his jeans and sandals and grabbed a shirt. “Now shut up unless you want to get both of us killed.”

He went pale. “A raid?”

“Of a sort. Now *shut up*.”

He pulled Shane down the stairs and toward the back door. He should have known Vince would put a watchdog there, but he slammed open the door and ran. The watchdog let out a shout in Spanish. Amun put his body between Shane and Vince’s man, but it wasn’t enough. The man raised a gun. Amun dodged and yanked Shane with him. The gun cracked just as they rounded a corner toward the more frequented areas.

For a moment Amun dared to hope that they’d made it safely away.

“Ow, that hurts like hell!” Shane plucked a dart from his arm. “What am I, a fucking lion to be tranquilized? I don’t—Oh.”

Amun caught him just as his legs collapsed, and swore. Vince wouldn’t use bullets, because he didn’t want his prizes damaged, but the darts were danger enough. The liquid inside neutralized a fae’s talent and knocked the victim unconscious.

Shane leaned heavily against Amun. “Dude, I don’t feel good.”

“Get up. Walk,” Amun ordered. Thank the gods that he didn’t weigh any more. He had to get them out of sight long enough so that he could open the door to the Otherworld, and the Gaslamp District on a Friday night had to be the worst possible time to find a quiet space, but it worked well enough to delay Vince’s men. They couldn’t shoot in a crowd.

Amun waved down one of the pedicabs pedaled by a young man with an Eastern European accent. “Someplace quiet down by the water,” Amun said. “The crowds are really getting to my friend here.”

“Sure thing,” the driver said. He lurched in and out of traffic, expertly weaving around both cars and people. Now that they were sitting, Shane’s head lolled

against Amun's shoulder. Amun slapped his face. It didn't help. The drug had worked its way through his system and knocked him out completely. At least it had knocked out the glamour as well, so no one gazed at shirtless Shane with anything more than a mild curiosity.

The pedicab wound through a collection of little touristy shops and down to a parklike roundabout. The shops had closed a couple of hours earlier, leaving the place quiet and deserted. "This work for you?" the driver asked.

"Fine. Thanks." Amun turned his attention to lifting Shane out of the cab.

The driver watched. "You sure you don't want to take him somewhere else? I know a clinic that's open late—"

Amun handed him a fifty-dollar bill. "Keep the change. And if anyone asks, you took us to the Hilton, all right?"

"You got it," he said and pedaled off.

A few trees grew here along with some grass growing in patches around a handful of benches. This was as close to natural surroundings as he would get this far downtown. Amun carried Shane to the nearest bench and sat down next to him so it looked like Shane had fallen asleep against him. Amun spared a moment to consider how nice it felt to take care of someone and how Shane's lithe body just seemed to fit in his arms.

Enough. Amun shook it off. He took one last look around to be sure that they hadn't been followed, then made a series of complicated gestures that thinned the barrier between this world and the Otherworld. He lifted Shane one last time. As he stepped through, there was a spark like someone lighting a cigarette in the dark, and they disappeared.

Chapter Five

Shane started awake. Between the silk sheets, he wore nothing. Not an uncommon occurrence, but he couldn't remember the last time he'd felt silk against his skin. He fought the usual morning disorientation—what day was it, anyway?—and tried to figure out where he was.

He had the vague memory of that bald guy—Amun—hauling him out of his room. They'd run. Something had pricked his arm, more painful and fiery than a bee sting, and then total oblivion. Dude, not cool. No telling if Amun had gotten him to safety or if someone else had kidnapped him.

He'd never seen anything like this room. It didn't look lived in. Plenty of furniture here, but nothing personal. No pictures, no knickknacks, not even any discarded clothes hanging over the back of a chair.

There was a cat, though. A big spotted one lying all stretched out on the rug on the floor. Its ringed tail flicked as its amber eyes watched Shane. A cheetah. That's what it was, but he couldn't remember if they were vicious or not. It definitely had big, sharp teeth to show off when it yawned.

"Don't eat me, all right?" he said as he sat up to get a better look around. He saw four doors, all exactly alike. That didn't help. Two large windows looked out on a forest too impossibly lush and green for Southern California. "Dude. This is weird."

He arranged the sheet around himself like a toga so it didn't drag, and edged toward the first door, never taking his eyes off the cheetah. It didn't move, not even when Shane tried the door. It opened—to a brick wall. "What the hell?" he

muttered. They must have blocked that door for some reason. He tried a second. When that one opened, all Shane could see was a dense, thorny bramble.

“Dude.” Curiosity got the better of him. He gingerly touched one of the thorns with the tip of his finger. Without meaning to, he put more pressure on his finger. It stung. And the plant began to *writhe* as if dozens of snakes twined around one other. The cat sprang to its feet with a low growl.

Terrified, Shane slammed the door shut and sucked on his bloody fingertip. The cheetah relaxed and eased itself back down to the ground. When he felt brave enough, Shane tried the third door, which opened onto a vast blue sky, empty except for a few wispy white clouds. Feeling nauseated, Shane shut that door as soon as possible. Heights were not his thing.

Behind the last door was a swamp, the water smelly and disgusting enough that Shane didn't dare touch it. He slammed the door shut and turned to the cat. “All right. I give up. What sort of funhouse is this?”

The first door, the one with a brick wall behind it, swung open. The cheetah went to greet the newcomer, twisting and curling her body against him. Shane nearly blurted out his relief at seeing Amun but kept his mouth shut. He was hallucinating. Had to be. That dart had turned his head.

Shane shook his bloody finger at Amun. “Dude, if you're not real, stay the hell away from me.”

“I'm real. So is Khepri.” Amun nodded at the cheetah before he gently took the proffered finger to inspect it. Something about him still made Shane all warm and tingly inside. Amun wore a pair of loose pants with a thick cloth belt. A shiny green and gold vest hung over his shoulders more for decoration than modesty, leaving Amun's chiseled chest all too apparent. He curled Shane's finger back into his fist. “You needn't worry. You're safe here.”

“Safe? With man-eating plants behind door number two? Dude, that dart—”

“The effects of the dart do not include hallucination. Everything you see here is real.”

That didn't make his heart stop pounding. This place freaked him out. He pointed at the cheetah. "It won't eat me?"

"*She* will do no such thing. Khepri has been my companion for many years."

Right. Hopefully he had a permit of some sort to keep her. "Where are we, anyway?" He didn't know anyplace in San Diego that would have decor like this. Maybe one of those old Victorians in Golden Hill, but it still didn't seem like the right answer. The air felt thicker. Warmer. More humid.

"In the home of the prince of the fae."

For a long, long minute, Shane couldn't talk. He stared at Amun in utter disbelief. Then he started to laugh until it turned into helpless, tear-ridden giggles. "Dude. What is this, some prince of gay guys? Some fancy club I haven't heard of?"

"Not that sort of fey," Amun said in annoyance, "although his taste tends to run toward men. You have the look of the prince. Pale. Dark hair. Brown eyes. Just as he looked when he was young."

Shane noticed Amun's expression as he spoke, the nostalgia coupled with desire and a bit of worry. Shane wondered if that facade could ever be cracked. One smooth motion of his shoulder and Shane's sheet slipped to bare more skin. "Do I look like him...everywhere?"

"That's none of your concern." Amun's gaze burned as it raked him up and down. "He wishes to meet you, but before you do so, you will bathe."

He *did* have a weakness, Shane realized with glee. Amun was still smitten with this prince guy and, by extension, *him*. Curving his fingers around Amun's waistband, Shane slowly edged it down around Amun's hips. "Am I really? You have a shower here?"

"Not a shower. A bath. Through here." Amun went to the far wall and opened up the door that only moments ago had looked out across a swamp. Shane's jaw dropped at the new sight. A riot of vines climbed the marble walls. The bath—more of a pool, Shane thought—sank into the ground. A layer of steam rose from the water.

This was too much. Way too much. "Okay, dude. Enough. Take me the fuck back to Mason."

"I can't."

"Excuse me? Did I hear you right? Did you say 'can't'?" Shane wished he could find his jeans and the penknife he kept in his pocket in case of emergencies. He poked Amun's chest. "Listen, man. You're going to take me back *right now*, or I'm gonna kick the living shit out of you."

Khepri hissed at the threat. "I'm sorry," Amun said. "I can't take you back." He even looked sad, as if he meant it.

"Why not? Something to do with that fuss last night? What was that all about, anyway? All that yanking me out of my room? 'Cause if all you really wanted was to get me alone somewhere else, you really should have just asked."

"It was a raid," Amun said shortly. He wasn't telling the whole truth. "A bounty hunter of sorts. He searches for fae men and women and then takes them over the border for his own purposes."

From the tone of his voice, these purposes weren't pleasant ones. "And he wanted me 'cause I'm the best catch in the place, is that it?" He fisted his cock for emphasis.

"No," Amun said with exasperation. "He wanted you because you're fae." He turned Shane toward the bathroom. "Please. Go in. The prince wishes to see you, and the less taint you carry from the human world, the better."

So that was it. Amun had kidnapped him for another man. Shane didn't bother to hide his disappointment. "Look, man, I ain't nobody's gigolo. I'm not a houseboy. I work on my own, all right? One night at a time. I know this sweet little ass of mine is a fine thing, but I don't contract out for more, and I certainly don't agree to fuck a guy I don't know anything about. Take me home. *Now*."

Amun opened his mouth to bleat the same thing he already had. Shane balled his hand into a fist and swung at him. Amun stopped the blow with one large hand. Shane tried again, lower, but Amun blocked that too. Kicking, flailing, biting—none

of it did him any good. Amun might as well have been a stone wall for all the impact Shane made.

"I don't know how you've lived so long, if that's the best you can do," Amun said, not even out of breath. Khepri had relaxed again and watched Shane with something akin to disdain.

Shane tore off the sheet to loose his last-ditch weapon, but Amun just stood there and stared at him with a look of pity. Shane threw up his hands in frustration. "Why the hell are you the only man who won't come after me?"

"I told you. It's only a glamour. I'm not affected by it." He crooked a finger beneath Shane's chin. "Is that what you really want? For me to throw myself upon you and take my fill?"

It was. Shane's stomach churned with want and need, and there was no way Amun could miss the erection poking at his cock.

But he only sighed. "I am not here for your pleasure, and both of us are here only because of the prince's good graces. Now, please." He pointed toward the bath.

"You gonna help me?" Company would certainly make it more fun, and somehow, some way, he was going to get Amun naked.

At that, Amun arched a delicate eyebrow. "Do you need it?"

"Last time I had a bath, my mama was there to help me. And I'm awfully tense. Nothing like running around in the dark, getting darted, and then waking up in some crazy funhouse to make a man a little nervous, you know?"

"Get in." Amun spun him around and gave him a little shove toward the water.

* * *

Watching Shane's slim, naked behind waggle its way toward the water made Amun's groin ache with unquenchable desire just as it had the first time he'd escorted Shane to a bath. He knew the potential there, oh yes, and the thought of it made Amun's blood run hot. Shane was lithe and supple, his body an open invitation for Amun to touch with his hands and then with his—

He took a deep breath. Two. It didn't matter how much he wanted to drive his own body into Shane's; he wouldn't. He loved Loridan and hated the way he longed to finish what he'd accidentally started with Shane that night long ago. That had been more than enough. Hadn't it?

Shane stepped tentatively into the water as if afraid it would rise up and drown him. Amun couldn't blame the young fae; he could still remember his fear the first time he'd seen these odd, magical surroundings. Shane sank into the water with a sigh of bliss. The water was scented with a relaxing blend of oils and infused with a mineral supplement to aid in cleansing Shane's body of human taint, as much to protect the weakening Loridan from any further harm brought from the human world as it was to calm Shane.

Shane waved his hand in an imperious gesture. "The soap, please, my dear Amun."

Amun sighed. Shane was still an irritating little rat, though Amun began to have the feeling that much of Shane's bravado was to cover up his fear. Loridan would know. "Here." He grabbed the tray with soap, washcloth, and a bottle of shampoo and slid it within Shane's reach.

Shane pouted for a moment when he realized Amun wasn't going to help him after all, but he rose to the occasion by grabbing the bar of soap and rubbing it against his skin in slow, sensuous circles. Amun sighed. He'd be lucky if they got out of here sometime this week.

"All this fey, fey, fey," Shane said. "You gonna tell me what you really mean now?"

Amun tried not to notice how much attention Shane paid to soaping his nipples. "I mean fae. F-a-e, not f-e-y. A race that looks human but isn't. We have certain gifts and talents. Some have empathy. Others are good with plants or animals or can manipulate weather. A few have stranger gifts like starting fire or directing water or inciting lust."

Amun paused to let his words sink in. Shane froze for a moment, just as Amun had expected him to. Shane still realized he was different, despite his lack of memory. He just didn't have the word. "What's your talent?" Shane asked.

"I can find other fae by their aura and see through any glamours they might try to use. Sometimes they need help, so if possible, I spirit them away to safety."

"Like me."

"Like you," Amun acknowledged. "All that sex, all the people falling on you—it's a glamour, nothing more. We can teach you to turn it off."

"Aw, but where's the fun in that?" He handed Amun the soap. "I can't reach my back."

Amun ground his teeth together. It wouldn't hurt to touch him, just a little, especially if it meant getting out of here sooner. Then again, that's what he'd thought the last time.

"How old are you?"

The question made Amun pause. "In truth, I've lost count of the years."

"Guess."

He had to think for a moment. "A little over thirty-five hundred."

"No way, man." Shane half rose out of the water in surprise. He twisted around to rest his arms on the edge of the pool. "How old am I?"

Amun studied him. There was no definite way to tell a fae's age just by looking, but he could guess. "Over a hundred. Past that, I can't be specific."

Shane sank back down with a look of confusion and disbelief. "No way. Can't be. I'd remember that, wouldn't I?"

Amun gently guided Shane's head down to wet his hair, then worked the shampoo in. He wondered if it was worth telling him all this since, Shane would probably forget it again in a day or two. "When a pure-blooded fae is among the humans, he loses bits of himself with every contact. Most fae who willingly go among the humans do not touch one if they can help it. They wouldn't consider sex,

not unless they were incredibly smitten and certain they could return to the Otherworld to be purified again. To have sex so often and with so many partners—it's a wonder you can remember your own name and aren't living under a bridge and slobbering on yourself."

Shane laughed uncomfortably. "But sex with a fae would be all right, wouldn't it? Especially if it was with someone as sweet and understanding as you are? When was the last time you fucked someone?"

Amun gazed at Shane, wishing he dared tell him the whole truth. "Ten years ago."

Shane tilted his head back so he was looking at Amun upside down, and gaped at him. "You mean you haven't had sex in *ten years*?"

For once, Shane's smart mouth annoyed him. "Ten years, four months, and three days, to be exact."

"Do you ever jack off, at least?"

Amun dunked him long enough to rinse his hair. When he allowed Shane to come back up, spluttering, he asked, "Do you ever think about anything else?"

Shane went still. "No. Is that a bad thing?"

"It's what I expected."

"This prince guy—he expects it too?" Shane's voice had lost a little of the edge. He stood and leaned forward, resting his hands on the edge of the pool so that rivulets of water ran down his waist and hips and dripped from his flaccid cock.

Amun couldn't take his eyes off the boy, off the smooth curve of his back and the buttocks he wanted badly to touch. "He's not going to have sex with you," Amun managed to say.

"Why not? Isn't that why you brought me here?" He sat on the edge now, one damp thigh pressed to Amun's. His fingers circled the other man's nipple. "Though I'm terribly disappointed it's not you."

All the warmth drained from Amun. He knew better than to get himself mixed up with a fae on the brink of madness. "I'll do no such thing. Now come on. Prince Loridan wishes to see you."

Amun tried to hand him a towel, but Shane just sat there wearing one of his irritating grins.

"Lazy brat," Amun muttered. Just this once he'd put up with Shane's antics, because he could not keep Loridan waiting. He yanked Shane to his feet and tried not to think about the shapely flesh with only a towel between it and him. He scrubbed Shane dry over his smooth back and buttocks, down to his calves and thighs, above which Amun dared not go. It didn't matter. Shane's cock hardened anyway.

"Here." He handed Shane a silk robe embroidered with vines.

Shane leaned toward him, close enough to whisper in his ear. "Deep in your heart, I know you want me. Don't hand me over to that prince of yours." Beneath the enticement lay a note of fear.

Amun's heart thudded in his chest. "I don't have a choice."

Shane laughed. "Your cock doesn't think so." He jammed his hips against Amun's so that Amun couldn't help but feel the firmness of his erection. "Tell me the truth. The muscles-for-brains at the club—they're not your type, are they?"

"No." Amun could hardly speak.

"You like the pretty boys, then?"

Amun shoved him backward. "I like the ones who do what they're told."

He'd chosen his words poorly. Shane just grinned again and gave him a deep bow. "As you wish, Master."

Eyes closed, Amun took a deep breath to conceal his irritation. If this was the way it would be, then he would play along. "Prince Loridan wishes to see you. Now."

Chapter Six

Shane hesitated as Amun went through the door that before had opened into empty air. Khepri too walked over the threshold with ease. Amun glanced back and, seeing that Shane hadn't followed, held out his hand. "This way."

Shane grasped it and stepped tentatively through the doorway, incredibly relieved to find his feet on solid ground. "What's with all these doors, anyway? They keep changing."

"Security," Amun said. "We can't have you running around at will, and you're not allowed to have visitors just yet."

"That sucks. Why not? Because I'm so hot they wouldn't be able to control themselves?"

He said it lightly, but Amun's voice sent a chill through him. "That's exactly it."

They walked the rest of the way in silence. Prince Loridan's room wasn't far, just down the hall to the right. Amun rapped lightly to announce them and opened the door when a calm tenor said, "Enter."

Shane had no idea what to make of the man he saw. Prince Loridan sat in his armchair, looking every bit a bedridden old man, despite having the appearance of a good-looking guy no older than forty. He wore a robe of red and gold with a blanket draped over his legs. Sick, it looked like, but Shane had the feeling it wasn't so much an illness of the body as one of the soul, like something was eating away at him.

Yet Loridan radiated such an aura of calmness that Shane felt instantly at ease. Sick or not, Shane had a craving to get this man alone so he could let that calmness wash over him and drive away the fear of being in this freaky place.

“Later, perhaps.” Loridan met Shane’s stare with one of his own, then chuckled softly. “I see what you mean, Amun. I might be envious if circumstances were different. Come closer, Shane.”

Shane did. He didn’t move when Loridan reached out and slipped a hand beneath Shane’s robe to rest atop Shane’s heart. The prince went still, concentrating for so long that Shane grew uneasy. At last Loridan breathed in, and for the briefest of moments, Shane saw the lust in his expression. “I see. What a treasure you’ve brought me, Amun. What a treasure indeed.”

“Dude, wanna tell me what you mean?” Shane asked, but neither man replied. With a sigh, he untied the sash of his robe and let the silk fall from his shoulders. “*Please* won’t you tell me what you mean?”

Loridan glanced up at Amun, and Shane followed his gaze to see Amun looking both jealous and annoyed. “Shameless, isn’t he? Untrained. But that’s not entirely his fault.” He grasped Shane’s chin and spoke softly. “Tell me what you know of the man Vincenzo.”

Shane flushed. “Who? Dude, I’ve had more guys than I can count. I can’t remember every one by name.”

The prince wrapped his free hand around Shane’s waist and maneuvered him so that he sat on the arm of the chair. “Tell me the truth, my little fae hustler. You weren’t always in San Diego. Where were you before that?”

Shane’s fingers groped uselessly at the hand around his waist. “I haven’t been out of SoCal.”

“You’re lying.”

“I ain’t, man. I swear!” Shane’s voice rose along with his panic. He fought to free himself from Loridan’s grip, but Loridan wouldn’t let go.

"Easy, now. Calm down," Loridan said. At length, Loridan let go of Shane and sank back into the chair. Something about his voice pulled words unwillingly from Shane. "Then why are you so afraid?"

Shane meant to say, *Like hell I'm afraid*, but instead felt compelled to honesty for once. "You would be too if you couldn't remember yesterday."

"Do you want to remember?"

"Yes. No. Hell no." Shane fidgeted, looking from Loridan to Amun and back again. "You two know something I don't?"

"I know you're older than you think you are. You're afraid and tired of living moment to moment because that's all you *can* do. The only constant in your life is sex, and you'll do anything to get it. Beyond that, if you choose to remember, you will have to tell us."

"What are you going to do? Snap your fingers and make me remember? Use your mind to unlock mine? I think I saw that on a TV show once. It didn't end well."

"I do nothing. The purification process is a chemical one and unique to the fae. It will restore your health as well as your memories."

"Yeah. I've heard that before. I don't do drugs, man."

"Of course," Loridan said with exaggerated patience, "you can refuse, and the only mind you have will be driven by your cock."

"Then a fine mind it will be. I'll keep it." Shane stroked his cock to prove it, but just like Amun, the prince didn't react to him. What gave with these guys? He tried a different tactic. "Is it true Amun hasn't fucked anyone in ten years?"

Amun scowled and dug his fingers into the back of Khepri's neck. Shane was glad not to be within the man's kicking range. Loridan's gaze flicked to Amun and then back to Shane. "Has it been that long? Could be."

"Let me do him for you. He needs it. Not good for a man to hold it in for so long."

Amun's face contorted in livid anger. Good. Finally a big reaction from him.

“Or better yet, let me do you, and maybe we can convince him to join in.” Loridan was handsome enough and a hell of a lot nicer than Amun. Shane cast a sly glance at Amun, who looked so tight with rage that Shane thought for sure he would pop like a balloon.

Loridan laughed. “I’ll think about it. For now...” He turned his attention to Amun. “Get him settled, then come back to see me.”

“As you wish, my prince.” Amun bowed. He scooped up Shane’s robe and wrapped it around his shoulders. The grip he kept around the back of Shane’s neck as they went back to Shane’s room was not a tender one.

* * *

Amun didn’t let go until he’d gotten the wretched fae back to his room. Idiot boy. Didn’t know how to keep his mouth shut. At least he’d made Loridan laugh; Amun could forgive some of his behavior for that.

“Ow!” Shane broke away and rubbed his neck. “That hurt, man. You’re all loony. All this purification shit. What is this, some sort of cult?”

Amun clipped his words. “This is not a cult. This is where you should have been long ago, because then you might have learned some manners about respecting one’s rescuer and one’s host.”

The anger finally got through to Shane. He shrugged, holding his hands wide in apology. “Hey, man. I’m sorry. All this new shit is kinda scary, you know?”

“I know.” Adjusting to this life hadn’t been easy for Amun; Shane would have a harder time because of his enforced isolation. Amun made an effort to be kinder. “I must return to Prince Loridan. Khepri will stay with you. Is there anything you need before I go?”

He regretted the question as soon as he asked it. Shane’s face immediately lit up. “Dude. I need to see you naked.” He fiddled with the buttons on Amun’s vest.

Amun pried his hands away. “No, you don’t.”

"Sure I do. I've never seen anyone like you. Big, bald, and beautiful. Where are you from, anyway?"

"Egypt."

"Really? Cool. So, like, you've seen the pyramids and things?"

"It wasn't a glamorous life." Talking about it still pained him, but perhaps if he told Shane the truth, some of it would sink in. "Fae blood was an affront to the gods and the men who were their living embodiment. Pharaoh wanted nothing that would risk his own power, including a few slaves with random talents. He rewarded me for finding fae, but I didn't know his reasons for wanting them until Prince Loridan showed me the truth. Pharaoh killed them all along with their families. When I refused to point out any more fae for Pharaoh, he put me to the stake and left me in the desert with Khepri to die. Prince Loridan rescued me, and now I find fae for him. I am his bloodhound."

"Cool, man," Shane said, ending any hope Amun had of his understanding. "So can I see you naked?" His hand darted toward Amun's waist.

"No!"

"Please? Show me yours. I'll show you mine?"

"I've already seen yours. More than once. I don't care to see it again."

Shane looked around at the wall. "Fine, then. Where's the light switch?"

Enough. Amun lost his patience. He grabbed Shane's upper arms and shook him. "Look. Get this through your head. I'm not sleeping with you. I'm not going to do anything remotely sexual with you, and you sure as hell aren't going to do anything with me. Got that?"

Shane stuck out his lower lip in a pout. "You suck, dude. Why the hell am I here, then?"

"Because you're fae. Because Vince would hurt you if he got ahold of you again. You'd know that if you could remember—"

"You're not going to let him do that purification stuff on me, are you?" He suddenly sounded afraid.

"What's the matter? You needn't be afraid of it. I've seen hundreds of other fae through it."

"I saw the look you gave that prince guy. You're scared of it."

Damn the boy for sensing Amun's unease. Amun had seen hundreds of other fae through their purifications, and they'd gone as well as could be expected. It was only because Shane's past mirrored Amun's in so many ways that Amun worried.

Shane wrapped his arms around Amun's chest. "Don't let him. *Please* don't let him. Promise me. I don't care what the hell happened to me. I don't want to know."

"I won't make you do anything you don't want to." A brash promise and one Loridan likely wouldn't let him keep. "I won't let anyone hurt you."

"You swear?"

"I swear."

"I knew I could trust you." He rubbed his head against Amun's shoulder while he tucked his crotch up against Amun's. "You know something? You told me another lie. You *are* affected by what I am. You're just better at hiding it than most people."

Amun's throat tightened. Shane had no idea, no idea at all just how affected Amun was. He pried the young fae off before his need grew any worse. "I need to go. I'll bring you something to eat when I return."

Shane stuck out his lower lip. "What am I supposed to do for fun around here?"

Amun gave him a wry smile. "I'm sure you'll think of something."

Chapter Seven

The first and only thing Shane thought of was probably what Amun had expected, but playing with himself wasn't half so much fun as doing it with a partner. Sure, he got off, but what was the point?

It obviously bored Khepri. She'd stretched out on the rug, twitching as she dreamed. Shane stepped over her and went over to try the door, the one Amun had used. This time it opened into a hallway lined with sconces and carpets. "Cool, man. He didn't say I had to stay put."

Several doors lined the hallway. None of them opened. Eventually the carpets gave way to bare stone floor, which opened up into what looked like a dining room with ornately carved tables and benches scattered around the room. The scent of fresh bread and roasted vegetables wafted out from windows carved into one wall. Here and there, men and women sat eating from platters of bread, fruit, and stuff that looked a bit like rice. Shane's stomach growled.

"Hey, guys." A dozen heads turned in his direction. Fae, all of them, and with hungry expressions that Shane could read all too well. He grinned. "Got anything to spare for a poor, hungry fae?"

One of them, a woman with frizzy blonde hair, half rose from her seat. "Who're you?"

"Prince Loridan's newest guest." It wasn't a lie. Not entirely.

"Really?" She sounded as if she didn't believe him.

He could fix that. "Really." He let the shoulder of his robe drop. All the fae grew suddenly more alert.

"I'm Dina. Sit here." She patted a spot on the bench between her and a red-haired man. "I think we can find some food for you."

Shane accepted her offer. As soon as he sat down, one of her legs twined around his.

Unlike Amun and the prince, these fae had no hesitation in coming for him. The blonde came first. She drove him back toward one of the tables so he sat on the edge of it. Redhead, not to be outdone, sidled close enough to Shane that their thighs touched. The rest of the fae wore envious expressions.

"What would you like?" Dina asked. "Something to drink?" She held a cup of wine to his lips, but before he could take a sip, she jumped as if she'd been startled. Wine trickled down Shane's chin and chest, all the way down to his groin.

"Oops," Redhead said in a voice that implied it hadn't been an accident at all. He tugged at Shane so that Shane leaned against his chest, head resting in the crook of his shoulder. Dina kissed Shane, sucking the droplets of wine from his lips while she parted his robe to bare his skin.

The other fae couldn't sit still any longer. They surrounded Shane, tugging at his arms and legs until they maneuvered him atop the table amid the plates and cups. One of them—him or her—had a touch that tingled almost like static electricity. Such a strange feeling but *good*, all along his chest and stomach. He wanted it on his cock and wanted it *now*.

But another hand—no, two—teased and stroked him. Fingers traced that line between his balls and his asshole, while several more worked their way inside. Bliss. Total bliss. A honey-sweet mouth found his. He sucked at it, unable to get enough.

Someone took his hand and maneuvered it for him until his fingers met the slick warmth of a woman. He stroked her clit in slow, firm circles, eking out murmurs of appreciation as well as a new surge of wetness.

More came. Hands everywhere, and that stinging, electric touch drowning the rest of them out until Shane's need built so much that he knew he would explode one way or another.

And he did. His body convulsed from an orgasm so strong he was sure it would tear him in two. Glorious. Shane reveled in the release and in the hands that kept touching and prodding him to keep the orgasm going. Over and over it surged through him, spurred on by that electric touch.

And then stark terror overcame his desire. Blinding pain shot through him, all the way to the ends of his fingers and toes. His heart raced. He couldn't draw enough air to breathe, let alone scream in fear. Fae hands dug into his skin and inside his body, and Shane knew that Amun had been right—these wild creatures meant to tear him apart.

* * *

Loridan's calm annoyed Amun nearly as much as Shane's antics. "I'm not going to put him through it," Amun repeated, even though he knew Loridan had heard the first time.

Loridan wore that thoughtful expression that meant he had read Amun's mind. "Who are you really protecting?"

"No fae should have to remember witnessing such atrocities."

"Are we still talking about Shane?"

Heat rose to Amun's cheeks. "I know what I saw in the compound."

"You saw seventy-three dead fae and one live one who can't remember a damn thing about what went on."

"And he shouldn't have to!"

Loridan's voice was cold. "You have no right to make that decision for him. Ignorance is no protection. Not for one such as him. His very essence drives him to seek out contact. How long do you think you can keep him alone in a room without him going mad from loneliness?"

“Go visit him yourself since you’re so fond of him.” Jealousy crept into his voice. Loridan had never been so interested in one of Amun’s rescued fae. “It shouldn’t be your decision either. I will not have it forced upon him, not like—” He broke off, ashamed at his anger. Loridan had saved his life, and Amun had never regretted it, save for the way he’d become fully fae. “I’m sorry, my prince. I just want—” He reached out, stopping just short of actually touching Loridan.

Loridan’s hand came up to meet his, fingertip to fingertip. Sadness touched his eyes. “I know.”

“Then why do you keep pushing me away? Why can’t I touch you?” Merely asking the question hurt. Amun could see the anguish in Loridan’s face, but he didn’t care. “I want to hold you. Skin to skin. I don’t care if it goes any further.”

“No.”

He expected that answer. It still hurt. “Then stop pushing me on Shane! Take him yourself, if you’re so interested!”

He’d thought to antagonize Loridan with his ill-thought words, but instead, Loridan said, “I just might.”

Amun stared at him. “You refuse me, and yet you’d sleep with that wretched little brat?”

“I wouldn’t replace you, Amun. Not ever. I just wish that you and I and he—”

An unmistakable scratching came outside the door. Amun opened it to see Khepri chirping in worry. “How did—” He began, then answered his own question. The door. Oh gods, he’d been thinking about food when he’d left Shane’s room, and the door had reset itself to that instead of the brick wall it should have been.

Heart pounding, Amun followed Khepri toward the dining room with Loridan gliding along behind him.

The fae acted like a pack of dogs all scrabbling and fighting to get at something that lay naked and helpless on one of the tables. Khepri hissed. Amun would have

sprung forward to tear them off Shane, but Loridan's hand on his arm kept him back.

"Leave him," Loridan said to the wild fae, low but authoritative. They guiltily slunk away.

On the table, Shane shivered. Hard to tell if it was because of cold or fear. Probably both. The fae's rough attentions had left bruises and scratches all across his body. Amun grabbed Shane's discarded robe and wrapped it around him. "You *idiot*. You could have gotten yourself killed!"

"That was *good*." Shane looked drunkenly at him. "Never felt anything like it. Want a turn? I might still have something left."

"Get up. Walk." Amun didn't bother keeping the anger out of his voice.

With his help, Shane managed to get to his feet. The group of fae huddled against the far wall, seemingly held there by Loridan's command alone. Loridan looked worn and weary as Amun and Shane stepped past him.

Amun shoved him roughly forward and did not let go until they'd reached Shane's room and Amun had shut the door behind him. Shane didn't bother with the extra steps to the bed. He dropped to the floor and let the robe fall to show off his marred skin. Khepri circled around him, rubbing her body against his. "Are you all right?" Amun asked.

Shane giggled, a sound on the edge of delirium. "Dude. Let's do that again. That was awesome."

Amun had a few other words to describe it. Foolish. Deadly. No doubt Loridan would have more to say when he'd finished dealing with the other fae. "Come on. Let me get you cleaned up."

Shane took his hand for support as he lurched to his feet. Amun took him into the bathing room and sat him on the edge of the pool so that his feet entered the water. Amun wet a cloth and used it to cleanse the blood from Shane's skin. Not that it mattered much; the scratches had already begun to heal.

Loridan glided in. Shane glanced at him, then back at Amun. "Who's this guy? He looks awfully sad."

Loridan's brow furrowed. Amun went cold despite the heat of the room. Loridan maneuvered his chair over to Shane's side. He put a palm atop Shane's forehead, a sight which Amun found both touching and angering. "We met earlier today. My name is Loridan, prince of the fae."

The giggle came again. "Prince of gay guys? That's a good one. No, really, who are you?"

Loridan let his hand drop. "It's time," he said, face as sad as his voice. "Purify him. Otherwise he's a danger to us all. Even then, he still might be."

Amun dropped his gaze from Loridan. Angry as he was at Shane's behavior, he didn't want to risk losing him as he had the other fae. Nor did he want Shane to suffer as he had.

"Amun." Loridan spoke sympathetically. "I know how much he means to you, but you can't lock him away forever to keep him safe. This must be done."

"I wanted him to ask. To agree. I didn't want it forced upon him."

"He's already fully fae. It won't be as hard on him as it was on you."

"Are you certain of that?" Behind them, Shane giggled again as Khepri playfully head-butted him hard enough to knock him over. He reached into the water to flick a few droplets at her.

"I want Vince stopped, and I want my fae to stop dying. I will do anything necessary to make that happen even if it means that I might break your heart. Shane is the only one who's known Vince personally, and we need everything that boy can tell us."

"My prince is thoughtful," he said with more sarcasm than he'd meant.

Loridan's expression hardened. "Do it. He cannot be allowed to remain as he is."

“As you wish, my prince.” Amun bowed stiffly. Loridan was right, but Amun didn’t have to like it.

“I’m sorry, Amun.”

Amun met his gaze. He still loved Loridan—his lover, mentor, master, and friend—and he knew Loridan felt the same. But whatever feelings passed between them, the fae came first. Loridan was the ruler, Amun his servant and sworn to obey.

Chapter Eight

Loridan took his leave. Amun lingered for a while, saying nothing, watching Shane and Khepri roll on the floor together like littermates. Eventually Shane looked up, his face flushed from exertion. “I’m not dangerous, you know. I just like a good roll in the sack.” His smile faded when he got no hint of amusement from Amun. “Dude. Seriously. I wouldn’t hurt anyone.”

“Not intentionally.” Amun thought of all the dead fae years ago. It hadn’t been Shane’s fault, but he had no idea of the risks he posed to others. “Those fae you just enjoyed—do you think they emerged unscathed?” He would have pointed to Shane’s cuts and bruises as evidence, but they had already begun to fade.

“I don’t know, man. I thought we all had a good time.”

“You could have been killed, and it was ‘a good time?’” Amun couldn’t hold back his anger both at Shane and his naïveté and at himself for being so blind. Loridan was right. Amun would have to break his promise to Shane. He crouched beside the young fae so he could meet Shane’s gaze. “If you truly understood the danger behind your glamour, you wouldn’t be so willing to offer yourself to anyone and everything.”

“You promised you wouldn’t make me do that purification thing, remember?” He dared to reach out and tease one of Amun’s nipples. “Besides, if you’re so keen on making me remember things, why don’t you give me some new memories?”

“Because you wouldn’t remember them tomorrow.” It took most of Amun’s will to stay where he was and not to break away from Shane.

Lips pursed, Shane shook his head. “Tell you what. Let me make you come, and we’ll see if I remember that tomorrow. If I do, then no need for this...this cult

stuff.” He pressed his body against Amun’s, his fingers slipping beneath Amun’s waistband to stroke the curve of his buttocks.

Gods. The boy was mad, truly mad, and Amun was a fool for letting him do this. “Let go.” He stood, hoping to get away before his body betrayed his lust.

Shane rose to his knees and caught Amun’s wrist lightly enough that Amun could have broken away, but the grip might as well have been that of a vise. Amun could no more draw back than Shane could give up his glamour.

“Come on,” Shane said. He held his head even with Amun’s bare stomach. The soft lips flicked against Amun’s flesh. “I want to taste the salt of your skin and to feel your body rub against mine.” His tongue teased Amun’s navel as his hands once again went beneath Amun’s waistband at the rear. A finger circled the tight muscle of Amun’s asshole. “I want to make you squirm beneath my touch, to see your mouth wide and panting and calling my name.”

His finger nudged Amun’s nether entrance and made Amun slightly uncomfortable because of the dryness, but Shane took it slowly. “Shane...” Amun began, his voice hoarse and deep. “I can’t.”

But Shane’s mouth moved to take in his cock through the thin layer of fabric. The heat and wetness sent bolts of pleasure throughout Amun. His finger continued working its way in until it pressed against the spot that both elated and terrified Amun.

“Come on,” Shane whispered. “Get harder. Harder.” He sucked at Amun’s cock. “I want...this...inside me, fucking me so hard that I can’t stand.”

Shane stood and turned around so his back was to Amun. He wedged the bulge of Amun’s strengthening erection right between his buttocks.

Shane ignored him, undulating his body against Amun’s, mimicking the way he wanted Amun to fuck him. Gently, he took Amun’s arms and wrapped them around him. “And while you have that thick cock of yours buried in me to the hilt, I want you to take mine in your hands, like this”—he curved one of Amun’s hands around his erection and then put his own hand atop it—“and I want your other

hand to play with me. Feel my balls, the way they're tucked up against my dick just waiting for you to stroke them. That's right. This one, now the other."

Stars danced before Amun's eyes. Amun was more than strong enough to pull away, to escape from the madness of Shane's body, but he didn't. Only two layers of thin fabric separated his eager cock from Shane's willing behind.

"Now touch me right here." Shane guided Amun's hand down to the smoothness behind his balls. "Yes. Yes. Like that. Oh hell..."

Amun closed his eyes. It had been far, far too long since he'd held someone against him like this and explored his most private parts. He loved it, touching another man just so, feeling his cock harden in excitement.

"Loridan..."

Shane stopped moving, save for his ragged breaths. One by one, he lifted Amun's fingers until he could step free from Amun's embrace. "Bastard." He heaved his shoulders with a sob as he cinched the robe shut. "You fucking *bastard*."

Khepri, sensing his distress, rubbed against Shane's legs. Amun had never felt like such a scoundrel, nor could he comprehend all the emotions flowing through him. Desire and lust for Shane, longing for the Loridan that he'd known.

Most of all, he despised himself for the hurt he'd caused Shane. He reached for Shane's shoulder, but Shane swatted him away. "Don't you touch me."

"I'm sorry." Feeble words. They wouldn't be enough.

"That purification thing. How do I do it?"

"Shane—"

He turned so that Amun could see the extent of his hurt and rage. Tears ran from red-rimmed eyes. "I want to be sure I remember this so that I will never, ever be fucked over by another man like you."

Amun gestured weakly at one of the doors. "Through here." Shane went through the door previously blocked by thorns. Now it opened into a sort of arboretum. Vines twined and twisted around ornate wooden trellises. Amun

gestured for him to sit at a stone bench resting in the center. The moment he did, vines erupted from the ground and wrapped around his wrists and ankles. With brute force, they pulled at him so that he had no choice but to lie supine on the bench. Shane took a few deep breaths but could not hide his fear completely.

Amun moved off to a table at the side of the garden. He took the porcelain decanter, filled the leaf-shaped cup with golden liquid, and went back to Shane. "Drink. Please. It will make the purification easier."

"I don't do drugs, man. I don't care what they are." Shane turned his head away from the cup. "Get on with it already."

"Please, Shane. I will ask you once more. Will you drink?"

"No."

Amun tilted the cup so its honey-gold contents spilled into the earth.

Shane struggled, but in vain. The vines wouldn't give. "Did he do this to you too?"

Amun shivered at the memory. "Yes. And he did not have time to offer me the drug."

The seriousness in Amun's voice reached Shane as nothing else had. "I'm not dreaming this, am I?"

"No."

"And I'm not crazy?"

Amun shook his head. "You're not crazy."

"And this whole purification shit means everything will make sense soon?"

"It should."

Shane took a deep breath and closed his eyes. "Whatever, man. Bring it on."

Chapter Nine

Watching Shane brought back uncomfortable memories of Amun's own purification. Loridan had been there, his voice frantic.

"I was wrong. You've lost too much blood. The only way to save your life is to make you fully fae, and I don't know if it will work." *Loridan had wrapped his own arm in the bloodsucking thorns.* "My life is yours, Amun. Take it."

Fire burned in Amun's veins. Loridan's blood filled him up, healed him, changed him. Through the connection, he knew what Loridan did, the power he held, and he saw...beautiful things. Nature. He understood how the fae could be one with the world. The joy they found in their gifts.

In the same breath, he saw the dark side of it all. The pain and blood and violence when nature's impulse turned bad. Fire. The scent of death. Screams of the dying. Fae turning their power against the humans who hurt them.

Fae who murdered. Just like Amun...

Loridan's voice spoke from so far away. "No, Amun. You're not like that. You're not."

But it was too late. Amun had seen the darkness within his own nature, and he could never, ever forget.

* * *

"Amun," Shane croaked, then, louder, "Amun!"

And then he was there, his fingers threaded through Shane's.

"I can't breathe," Shane said.

Amun did his best to keep the fear from his voice. "Easy now. Easy. Relax. It will be easier."

"Can't. I feel sick."

"Close your eyes and sleep."

He was deathly pale, not the least from the blood being emptied from his veins and reprocessed before being put back. The process had only just begun, and already Shane trembled, drenched in sweat.

"Mama," Shane whispered. His eyes shot open but were seeing something from long ago. "*Mama!*" he shrieked.

Amun feared this part the most. Since Shane was weak from lack of blood, the sudden shock of revived memories could kill him. Amun considered dosing him with the drug to blunt the impact of the memories, but it was too late to be of any use. He regretted not forcing it on him earlier, but he hadn't wanted to go against Shane's wishes.

Shane jerked and writhed, still held fast by his living fetters. The thorns embedded in his skin continued to pulse with borrowed blood. None of the others he'd purified had bothered him nearly so badly. Worse, his body as well as his mind remembered his past. His erection rose thick and hard, leaving Amun no doubt that many of his memories had been sexual encounters.

Amun stroked Shane's head, wishing he could do something more. "Hang in there, Shane. It will be over soon."

The words provided little comfort to either of them.

* * *

Shane's memory world twisted and turned. Dozens of men and women came to him, some fae, some human, all of them wanting him, and Shane more than willing to give himself up to their desires. So much of it felt good, yet...a longing bit at him so deep he didn't have words for it. If only one of them could stay with him always.

He'd thought Vince might have been that one, from the first time he'd come into Shane's room with a look in his eye and a hoarseness in his voice that Shane didn't know how to react to.

Shane had looked up, shirt in his hand, to see Vince staring at him. Shane's skin prickled with anticipation. "Vince? What's up?"

Vince strode forward and placed his hands on either side of Shane's face, then kissed him long and hard and deep. A thrill of excitement raced through Shane's body, straight to his cock, which throbbed beneath his tight pants. He moved a hand to free it, but Vince beat him to it. Vince stroked Shane's cock through his pants, a wonderful, unbearable sensation. Only when Shane shuddered against him did Vince release his trapped erection.

A whimper escaped from Shane's lips as Vince sank to his knees. "It's all right," Vince told him. "It's all right." He licked Shane's cock, eliciting a shuddering, strange feeling deep in the pit of Shane's stomach. Vince sucked at Shane's balls, first one, then the other.

Shane panted as he clenched his fingers in Vince's hair. Vince had Shane's cock in his mouth now, sucking and licking until Shane thought he would go mad from the heat building within him. Much more and he would—

He cried out as Vince coaxed his body into release. Vince's mouth never left Shane's spasming cock. Vince caught him as he dropped to the ground, utterly limp and spent.

"And that's only the first thing I want to show you," Vince said as he unbuckled his pants. "You can help me, Shane. Because of you, I can become fully fae, just like the prince's damn bloodhound."

Shane had no idea who or what Vince referred to, and soon enough he didn't care. Vince returned again and again to show Shane some new trick or another. He brought dildos, cuffs, and cock rings and whispered sweet words in Shane's ear even as he toyed with Shane's willing body. Always praising, always pleasing, and Shane only wanted more. He was made for pleasure and wanted every bit of it he could get.

But over the years, Vince changed. He sent more and more strangers to Shane, preferring to watch rather than participate. Afterward, he would whisper again in Shane's ear. "You're my precious, my perfect one. I want you with me. Always."

And then fae swarmed in, dozens of them, atop him, inside him, tearing at him. Then fire and agony so deep he screamed.

* * *

Amun stood in the doorway, swaying unsteadily on his feet. Loridan rapped his fingers on the arm of his chair. Lines of worry scarred his face. "Well?" Loridan asked.

Amun bowed. "He's alive. Barely. Khepri is with him. We may have damaged his mind even further by forcing so much on him at once."

He met Amun's eyes. "You didn't give him the drug?"

"He wouldn't take it."

"You're a damn fool. He's a worse one." Loridan sighed. "I need to see him."

Amun followed Loridan as he glided his chair out of the room and down the hall to Shane's. Shane still huddled on the bed with his arm draped around Khepri's neck. Khepri's tail and ears flicked in greeting, but otherwise she made no move to disentangle herself from the young fae.

"Shane?" Amun put a hand on his shoulder. He didn't stir.

"Let me." Loridan edged his chair close enough that he could lay a hand on Shane's forehead. His face soon reflected the pain he could sense within Shane's mind. "Shane. Open your eyes."

Slowly, Shane's brown eyes opened but maintained a glassy, distant expression.

"What do you remember?" Loridan asked him. "Tell me."

Except for a low moan, Shane refused to answer. Khepri purred and nuzzled at his chest to comfort him.

"Speak," Loridan told him. He used the voice that no fae could disobey.

Shane clutched at Khepri's neck fur. When he spoke, his voice cracked. "Bastard. He's a fucking bastard. Get him the hell away from me."

Amun's stomach turned as Loridan glanced back at him. They both knew Shane didn't mean Vince. "Shane. Tell me what happened."

Shane's words took on a Southern accent. "I remember being here a little. The magic. The moving doors, the food. And then one day my mother carried me into the human world and set me down and told me to wait for her. I waited for three days, and then I was so hungry and thirsty I had to move."

He stopped. Amun glanced at Loridan, wondering if he knew anything about Shane's mother. "She drowned," Loridan said as kindly as he could. "Her body was found on a riverbank. We assumed, wrongly, that you had died with her and been swept farther downriver. I sent fae to search for you, but they found nothing."

Which explained why Amun had never been asked to look. Loridan had expected Shane to be dead, and he wouldn't waste Amun's time or talents on a dead fae unless it had died under suspicious circumstances.

Shane continued as if he hadn't heard. "Mama—my human mama—said she found me there by the side of the road. Couldn't bring herself to leave me behind, even though Papa said I'd be nothin' but trouble. My brothers and sisters teased me because I didn't grow like them. I stayed little while they grew up. Mama worried, but Papa wouldn't let her take me to a doctor until the day I broke my arm. But by the time we got to the doctor, it was already half-healed, and Mama was scared to death. The doctor took blood, and he got this look in his eyes as if he'd struck gold. Mama didn't see it. He told her some sort of lie about a syndrome and left it at that. She believed him.

"That night..." He paused to catch his breath. "That night a bunch of men came to the house. They had shotguns. They rounded us all up and made us stand in a line. One by one, they shot us. Papa first. Mama went down screaming. So did my sisters. But when it came to me, he shot me point-blank in the gut. I'd never felt pain like that, and I hope I never do again. But I didn't die. I lay there, and I bled

enough to drain a horse, but I didn't die. I blacked out from the pain, and when I woke up, the hole in my gut was gone, and I was locked in a room. It looked like a cave. I figured out later the whole place was underground. Vince came in then and said he was a doctor and that I was very sick and I had to stay in a room by myself so I wouldn't make anyone else sick. I believed him. I didn't know any better.

"Vince had a laboratory, just like a real doctor. The place was full of bottles and jars, tubes and needles, and all kinds of things. We went there sometimes, and he drew blood and gave me an injection. He said it was to keep me healthy. And I still believed him, because I never did get sick. There were people in the other rooms too. I know now they were fae. I didn't then. They weren't right. Some of them sat and stared into space. Others just mumbled. Vince said he was trying to help them like he'd helped me. But I never saw any of them get better.

"When I was older"—he shivered, remembering—"I turned into someone, something else. We saw each other differently. He came into my room one night while I was changing my clothes. I didn't have a shirt on, and he stared, then came forward and kissed me. It was the most thrilling thing in the world, and then it got better. He sucked my dick, and then he stuck his inside me, and I wanted the feelings to last forever.

"He looked ashamed after, but then he got a greedy expression on his face. He started to bring people to visit me, usually women, sometimes men—which I liked better—from all over the world. And these people—they came because they thought I would give them long life or good fortune and stuff like that. They would take one peek at me and get this crazy look before they threw themselves at me, and we fucked right there on floor. I wasn't afraid. I *liked* it. I craved it like a drug. Vince usually watched to make sure I didn't get hurt. There were a few times...but it didn't matter, because I healed up soon enough.

"And I started to forget. I had new lovers every day, but each one might as well have been the first for me. Every encounter was new and exciting. Some of those he brought me were...different. Prettier, stranger, more otherworldly than the usual

crowd. Some of them could do things. One could walk on the ceiling. Another one could lift my plate without touching it. I wanted more, and Vince was happy to comply.

“He messed up the night he brought me the pyro. She had those crazy, sad eyes. The moment she walked into my room, she lunged at me, pinned me down, and ripped off my clothes. Then she went nuts and lit the bed on fire. I got out, ran toward the lab, shouting for Vince. He wasn’t there, but a few other fae were. They all came at me because I was naked. One had stuck his dick into me and one of the women wouldn’t stop sucking mine. I tried to get them to leave, but there were too many, and they kept pawing and grabbing at me.

“The pyro followed me. The place erupted in flame. She was so close to me that I should have burned to death. The fire got to me. I remember the pain, but I didn’t die. The others screamed. They couldn’t get out. The place filled with smoke. I blacked out. By the time I woke up, the fire had stopped, and I was the only one moving.”

He turned just enough to see Amun. The expression on his face was hurt and sad. “And then you came, the only man who wouldn’t touch me.

“The policía—they’d been watching. When they took me away that day, they had a doctor with them, an American one, who fucked me as soon as he got me in the back of his van, and didn’t stop until he got me over the border.” A sweet, nostalgic smile crossed his face. “He was a good man. A kind one. But I couldn’t let him find out I was...different. After that it was easy, even when I had a harder and harder time remembering anything. Whenever I needed papers forged, I slept with a man who could do it for me. It didn’t matter if they were straight or gay or whatever. All I had to do was take my clothes off to get what I wanted.”

Shane sat up and glared at Amun. “Fuck you, man. Why the hell did you make me remember all this stuff, anyway? I told you I didn’t want to.” He shook, badly enough that Khepri put her head in his lap and nuzzled his belly. “You’re a damn liar.”

Loridan watched Amun with that thoughtful mind-reading expression. Right now, Amun wanted to strangle him and didn't care if Loridan sensed it. "I'm sorry," Amun said to Shane. "I know how hard—"

"Like hell you do." He twisted around so his back was to Amun, and focused all his attention on Khepri, cooing and scratching her head.

Amun strode forward with the intent to explain, but Loridan held him back. The prince shook his head. "Leave us for a while," Loridan said. "I need to speak with Shane alone."

The request stung more than it should have. Amun bowed. "As you wish, my prince."

Chapter Ten

Shane's nervousness returned as soon as he was left alone with Loridan. He didn't actually know how to deal with a prince; Loridan didn't radiate the expectation of bowing and scraping that Shane expected from someone of rank but Amun had certainly acted the part of a servant. Shane didn't really feel up for the bowing bit. However... "I've done guys in wheelchairs before, you know."

"I'll keep that in mind." The amusement in his voice annoyed Shane. So did the lack of response.

"You're not being like *him*, are you? Keeping yourself chaste for no good reason at all?"

"There are good reasons. And I ask that you forgive Amun his reticence. He's had several worries on his mind lately."

Lousy excuse and no reason at all to forgive Amun. Shane kept his attention on Khepri, needing the distraction of counting her spots.

"Do you know who I am, Shane?"

Eight, nine... "Loridan, prince of the fae. That's f-a-e, not f-e-y."

Loridan chuckled, but when he spoke, his voice was serious. "I am nature's son, charged with looking out for the rest of those bearing her gifts. I am aware of each one of my fae, enough so that I can see into their minds if they are nearby."

"And you can order them around," Shane said, remembering the scene in the dining hall. Twenty-one. Twenty-two.

"That too, though it is not a gift I use lightly. It is not something that would inspire trust if I used it too often."

"So you're reading my mind." Shane didn't know whether he liked that or not.

"She's got eight hundred seventy-three spots. Amun and I counted them one night."

"You're taking away my fun, man." Shane rolled over enough to see Loridan. "I *like* sex. I feel like I was made for it."

"You were," Loridan said.

"Then why won't Amun touch me? You must have read his mind."

"That is not my secret to tell."

"It's like he hates me, and I don't know why. But you don't hate me, do you?"

"There is only one man I hate."

"Vince."

Loridan nodded, again looking ill and withdrawn. "Anything you can tell me about him, anything at all would be appreciated."

"I..." Shane shook his head. "I don't know where to start." He didn't even know how to feel about Vince.

"Will you allow me to guide your thoughts?" When Shane balked, he added, "It won't hurt, and I swear to you I will not linger any longer than necessary."

He trusted Loridan. A prince, perhaps, but far more real and grounded than anyone Shane had known. "All right."

Loridan's touch was gentle as he placed a hand across Shane's forehead. "Think of Vince. How you first met. What he said. How he treated you."

Again, Shane relived the years he spent in the compound with Vince; only this time it was as if he watched through the lens of a video camera as Loridan wielded it, fast-forwarding through some parts, pausing and then zooming in on certain scenes, especially the lab. Loridan focused on things Shane had previously not noticed or had an interest in, such as specific equipment and the labels on various vials and jars. He listened intently to anything Vince said even when directed elsewhere.

The fire he skipped, to Shane's relief. And in the end, there was Amun. Strong and quiet with compassion that ran deeper than words. "Hold me," he'd said, and under Loridan's guidance, he again felt Amun's arms around him. The gesture caused an immediate hard-on, just as it had then. A deep, intense feeling stirred within him, one that he recognized as love, so like and unlike the lust he felt toward nearly everyone else. Amun stroked his naked body. He'd never known anything so blissful and sure.

"*Iah*," Amun had said, over and over. Not "Shane," but Shane did his best not to care. He'd wanted to enjoy this as long as it lasted.

The memory ended far too soon. "Forgive me," Loridan said quietly as he broke the rapport.

"Don't worry about it, man." He couldn't hide the tent in his robe or the hurt that came with knowing that Amun only wanted him so he could make love with Loridan by proxy, but he didn't care. "Did you get what you needed?"

"Yes." He spoke softly. Something in his gaze made Shane's heart ache.

"You're *Iah*, aren't you?"

Loridan inclined his head. "Amun mistook me for the moon god the first night I met him."

"I knew he wasn't making love to *me* that night. Not really. He loves you." Shane couldn't keep the bitterness from his voice. "Sex never felt wrong to me. Not once. But until Amun, it never felt *right*." He searched Loridan's face, hoping, waiting for some explanation. "Do you still love Amun?"

His face softened. "Yes."

Which meant there could be no room in his heart to love anyone else. Disappointment welled. What he wouldn't give to have someone this kind be with him.

"Shane..." Loridan touched him again, this time with an intention that sent a tingle of anticipation through Shane's gut. "That isn't true. A man can love more than one person, especially if that's what comes naturally to him."

"What if..." Shane's heart pounded as he reached out to caress Loridan's cheek. "What if I wanted to make love to you like he did?"

"I don't want you to."

Disappointment clawed at Shane's chest. "But...please."

"If I make love to anyone, I want him to be himself. Don't make love to me like Amun. You can't. You're not him. I read minds, remember? Lying to yourself like that hurts me as well as you."

For the first time since he'd arrived, hope surged within him. It didn't matter what bodies looked like, although he certainly had his preferences; the souls within them mattered far more. Loridan was ill, yet Shane longed to touch his soul, to feel a connection that ran deeper than the physical.

Loridan watched with a patient expression, probably reading Shane's mind as he decided what to do. "I know you," Loridan whispered, "far better than you know yourself. You're angry and afraid, and justifiably so, but for a few minutes, let it go. Just be. What comes most naturally to you?"

"I want to do you." Shane sat up with his legs over the edge of the bed. He leaned over and put his hands on Loridan's thighs. "You could order me away, if you want."

"I could," Loridan agreed. He put his hands atop Shane's to guide them farther inward, calm and accepting in a way no other lover had been. "But I won't."

The kiss he placed on Shane's lips tingled all the way down to Shane's cock. He kissed back, leaning into Loridan, sucking at the sweet taste of his lips.

"Not like this," Loridan said. He nodded at the bed. "Help me."

It was awkward, getting Loridan to stand and then maneuvering him over to sit on the bed, but they managed. Shane knelt behind him, running his hands down

Loridan's chest, slowly unbuttoning Loridan's shirt. Loridan's head lolled against Shane, and Shane kissed him again. The shirt went flying to the floor. Shane wrapped one arm around Loridan's chest to steady him while he unbuttoned the fly on Loridan's pants.

Loridan's cock didn't have nearly the strength or excitement of Amun's. It was small beneath Shane's hand, still soft, but Shane had a few things in mind to remedy that.

Shane didn't know if he'd ever felt truly accepted. Vince had used him for his talents; Amun shunned and ridiculed him even as he burned for him. Shane had never stuck around any of his johns long enough to get to know them.

"I should tell you..." Loridan began. He lifted his hips enough for Shane to slide his pants off. "I was the one who ordered the purification. Amun didn't want to."

"Because he's scared of it." Shane tossed the pants onto the floor. "Why? What happened to him?"

Loridan tugged at him so Shane lay down at his side. "Nothing frightens me so much as what one man can do to another. Pharaoh had driven a stake through Amun's body and left him in the desert to die. I saw him, torn and bleeding in the moonlight, Khepri standing guard below him. I brought him to the Otherworld with the intent to heal him, but he'd lost so much blood." Loridan's voice caught, and it took him several moments to be able to speak again. "I loved him. I had since the first moment I realized he was an innocent pawn in Pharaoh's machinations. I couldn't bear to lose him. The only way was to turn him fully fae, which meant giving him some of my own blood. I didn't have time to give him the drug. The process nearly killed him and gave him nightmares for years after. I swore I would never subject another half fae to such a thing again. But Amun was safe, and he became my bloodhound. I did the same for Khepri as a reward for her loyalty."

He sounded old and pained. His focus on Shane dimmed as he retreated into his own thoughts. With the prince naked like this, Shane could see just how fragile he was, how delicately his spirit clung to his body.

“Loridan?” The prince’s sudden distance frightened him. Shane sat up and ran his hands down Loridan’s chest.

“I’m sorry,” Loridan said at last. “My own worries are ruining your fun.”

“I can stop—”

“No.” Loridan clutched Shane’s hand. “You, just as you are, give me strength. Go on. Do as you will.”

Shane leaned down to kiss the prince. He had the eerie feeling that Loridan needed to be touched, longed for a few moments of peace in which he could forget his weakness and the cause of it. In that way, Shane could do something Amun could not, and he wanted to. “Roll over,” he said and helped Loridan to lie on his stomach.

Loridan’s dark hair went just past his shoulders. Shane eased it aside and bent down to kiss his knobby spine. The prince’s smooth skin smelled of pine and fresh earth, as if he wore cologne made of nature itself. Shane breathed it in, both excited and strengthened by the scent. He wondered if there was any massage oil around here.

“In the drawer,” Loridan said.

Shane glanced around the room, spying the night table beside the bed. In the drawer, he found a collection of oils and lubes, several labels written in languages he couldn’t read. So many to choose from.

“I’m rather fond of the sage,” Loridan said. He watched Shane, smiling.

Shane complied, rubbing a few drops between his palms and then sliding his hands against Loridan’s back. Loridan groaned his appreciation. As he worked, Shane noticed that Loridan seemed...thinner, as if Shane’s hands wore away the little muscle Loridan had left.

“It’s a glamour to keep Amun from noticing. It’s also rather difficult to maintain while in physical contact with someone.”

“Amun doesn’t know, does he?”

Loridan didn’t answer, which Shane took for an affirmative. Poor Amun. Shane didn’t want to see his face when he found out the truth. Shane continued, working his hands across ribs and hips nearly protruding through Loridan’s skin. The prince’s legs were so thin that Shane could easily wrap both hands around his thigh.

He traded the oil for a bottle of lube, smearing some on his fingers and then easing them between Loridan’s buttocks to stroke the tight muscle there. Loridan readily relaxed, making it obvious he’d done this before. Shane took that as an invitation and slid one, then two fingers inside Loridan’s willing body, searching for that pleasure point within.

He knew he found it when Loridan moaned and wiggled his hips a little. Shane kept going, using little bits of pressure to drive Loridan mad. Loridan shivered when Shane finally withdrew his fingers. “Roll over,” Shane said. “I want you hard before you come.”

Again, with Shane’s help, Loridan eased himself over. The sight of his soft uncut cock roused Shane’s pity, but Shane would soon fix that. He spread Loridan’s legs apart, knees raised, so that he could lie between them. More lube, and he used one hand on Loridan’s cock, the other toying with Loridan’s asshole. Two of Shane’s fingers again returned to Loridan’s tight warmth while his thumb massaged the smooth place beneath his balls.

Loridan’s cock strengthened, but not enough for Shane. He took the whole of Loridan’s cock into his mouth, swirling his tongue against the tip and then down the base of his shaft. Loridan murmured and wriggled his hips, encouraging Shane to continue. His fingers tangled in Shane’s hair as he guided Shane’s head exactly where he wanted it. Little by little, Loridan’s cock hardened, and his body tensed in readiness.

Loridan gripped Shane's shoulders as he came. His body trembled. Shane kept his fingers going, eking out every last bit of pleasure he could. Not a strong climax, no, but deeply felt.

The spasms subsided. Loridan's arms dropped to his sides. Shane crawled up enough to lay his head on Loridan's chest. He didn't know what he felt; some strong emotion pooled in his chest and gripped his throat as he thought about Loridan and how much he cared for the prince.

"It's love," Loridan said softly. He ruffled Shane's hair. "That's what you're feeling."

"Is that what it's like for you and Amun?"

"Yes. Like that. Wonderful and confusing and hurting, all in one."

Loridan's eyes drifted shut. Shane watched him until he was sure Loridan slept. He hadn't meant to wear the prince out, yet Loridan looked more at peace than Shane had seen him so far.

And, he noticed ruefully, his own body's needs had yet to be satisfied.

Chapter Eleven

A noise at the door woke Amun from a restless sleep. He sat up, careful to keep the sheet draped around his waist and legs as he swung them over the side of the bed.

Shane stepped inside and leaned sinuously against the door. Amun couldn't tear his eyes away. The moonlight played over Shane's naked body, turning him into a perfect chiaroscuro of masculinity. Amun's cock hardened.

"Why don't you want me?"

Amun closed his eyes, shutting out the sight. He couldn't bear it. "Go away."

But the soft footfalls indicated that Shane did just the opposite. "It's you I want. The one man who won't touch me."

Shane lightly traced Amun's jaw. Amun shuddered. This could not, should not be. Lips replaced the finger and kissed Amun gently on the jaw, the chin, and finally the mouth, resting there, waiting for an invitation Amun feared to give.

"Come on," Shane said. "I'm horny as hell. And I want you."

Amun didn't move. Shane laughed, a rush of warm air against Amun's cheek. He took one of Amun's hands and set it against his chest so Amun could feel his heartbeat. Then Shane moved Amun's hand down across his belly and to his uncut cock, thick and hard and fitting far too perfectly in Amun's palm.

Yet Amun didn't snatch his hand away. Shane moved his hips forward and back, slowly humping Amun's hand. A thrill of sick excitement wound through Amun's body. He shouldn't do this, but he couldn't let go. Shane's cock already glistened at the tip.

Shane crouched on the floor and ducked under the sheet still covering Amun's waist and legs. With slow, sinuous strokes, he massaged Amun's calf and worked his way up to Amun's thigh. Amun clenched his legs together against Shane's exploratory hand.

"Open up for me." Shane's voice sounded low and seductive. "Come on." He added a little physical force to his request.

"Shane—"

"Do it."

Slowly, reluctantly, Amun let Shane part his legs. His cock needed no encouragement; the first delicate touch of Shane's hand made it ache even worse.

If he kept his eyes shut, it wasn't real, wasn't happening...

Except the warm, wet mouth around his cock ignited desires that had been dormant for far too long. He leaned back, arms splayed out behind him on the mattress for balance. Shane licked along the underside of his cock and then up to swirl around the tip while his hand gently manipulated Amun's balls.

Amun's heart pounded with the awful rightness of it all. He craved Shane as he had no one else. In his mind's eye, he pictured Shane facedown on the mattress, luscious white buttocks lifted in the air and jerking as Amun took his pleasure. Just the thought of having his cock surrounded by tight, masculine muscle—

He came, shooting himself into Shane's eager mouth. With it came dread so intense that Amun finally opened his eyes. "Why are you really here?" He shoved at Shane's head through the sheet. "Tell me the truth."

Shane moved far more lazily than Amun wanted. When his head emerged, he wore a half-crazed look. "He's so sad. You have no idea..."

"What did you do to him?" Amun gritted his teeth as he grabbed Shane's hair.

"I fucked him. He wanted me to, and so did I. But it was like he was dead already. He's lost it. He's sicker than the rest of those fae I saw. I couldn't end the night like that. I just couldn't."

All things Amun had already known, but hearing them from Shane didn't make it any easier. "Out," Amun said again. When Shane made no effort to rise, Amun stood, letting the sheet drop, lifted Shane beneath his shoulders, and dragged him to the door.

Shane spread his arms and legs across the door frame to block his forcible removal. "And who else can I have as a lover? Humans drain me, and the fae try to kill me. Loridan's a dream, but he's sick. I'd rather have you, even though you like to pretend I'm someone else."

Amun backhanded him. Shane crumpled against the door frame, hand clutched to his cheek. Blood trickled between his fingers. "You selfish little brat. If you hurt him—"

One last shove and Shane was finally, irrevocably out the door.

* * *

Amun dressed quickly, heart pounding at the state Loridan might have been left in. Khepri padded alongside him, her body tense from sensing his urgency.

In Shane's room, Prince Loridan lay beneath a sheet pulled up to his shoulders. His clothes lay scattered across the ground, and he looked paler and thinner than usual. He didn't move when Amun entered, but simply stared at the ceiling. "Loridan?"

He smiled a little when Amun approached him. "He filled me up, and for a while, I remembered..."

It crushed Amun to know that Shane had brazenly done what Amun had not been allowed to in years. "If he hurt you—"

"He didn't hurt me. I feel better than I have in a long time."

It should have been me, Amun thought selfishly. Not that annoying little brat.

Amun fetched a cloth from the washroom, wet it, and went back to Loridan. He pulled down the sheet and held his breath in shock at the sight of Loridan's emaciated body. The dips between his ribs were large enough that Amun could rest

his fingers in them. His skin stretched so tightly as to show nearly every bone in his body. Even his cock was thin and shriveled as it lay against his thigh, still sticky from Shane's attentions.

There was only one reason Amun wouldn't have noticed such a terrible decline. He could barely speak. "You lied to me." Amun didn't know what hurt worse—seeing Loridan in this condition or knowing he'd used a glamour to keep Amun from seeing it.

"I'm sorry." Loridan put a hand atop Amun's. "I didn't want you to know me as anything but the man I was."

"And *that's* the reason I couldn't touch you?" Amun's throat tightened with grief. He kept his touch chaste, though he couldn't stop his mind from comparing the handsome, strong Loridan he'd known to the painfully thin body before him. It hurt. Gods above, it hurt.

Loridan had enough sensitivity to notice. He tightened his grip on Amun's hand. "I have been cruel to you. Forgive me. My weakness has been difficult for me to accept. I could not bear your disappointment and worry as well."

"You're the prince. You may do as you like, but Shane had no right—"

"He had every right." Loridan's voice was stern. "I told you before. You wrong him by denying what he is. He is, as he put it, 'highly sexed.' If he had his own way, he'd have both of us at the same time."

For a moment, Amun pondered the tantalizing idea. Then he caught himself. "That's not the point. I know he can't help himself, but you—"

"I did what came naturally to me. As did he."

Amun accepted the rebuke in silence. Loridan's withered body was proof enough that Amun hadn't done his job well enough, acted naturally enough. He'd lost Shane once and had no luck finding Vince at all. Man-made fae as well as ordinary fae died daily, and if Amun didn't do something soon, Loridan would fail too.

“And that is exactly why I used a glamour. I knew you would blame yourself. Lie down.” He scooted back a little and then patted the empty space.

Amun did, not sure why he was so nervous. He lay on his side looking into Loridan’s soft brown eyes. For once, fear stopped him from touching his lover.

Loridan touched him instead, running his fingers across Amun’s bald head until they came to rest on Amun’s cheek. “Look deeply. What is the nature of your heart?”

The words pushed, nudged him to remember the darkness he’d seen during his purification. “To serve and protect the fae. But they keep dying...” Fear and guilt washed over him. His nature had turned on him long ago in Pharaoh’s palace, and he’d tried to redeem himself ever since.

“There is no redemption,” Loridan said. “There is only you. Your nature. Tell me. Why do you think I spared your life so many years ago?”

“You said I was beautiful. And I was useful.”

“It was because of this.” Loridan placed his hand over Amun’s heart. “You were innocent. Your nature was pure and strong. If it had not been, I would have slain you in your bed and walked away. My blood runs in your veins because I so desperately wanted to save your life. No other fae has been granted that gift.” Loridan tenderly stroked Amun’s face. “Did you truly think that I kept you only because of your pretty face?”

Amun’s throat tightened. It had been easier to believe that Loridan loved him for his body and his usefulness than for anything else. Amun had used his fae gift to kill.

“And I forgive you for it. I love you for who you are, not just what you do for me. When I was stronger, I could balance that guilt within you, though I could never banish it completely. Now I am too weak to take any part of your burden. Find the truth of your nature. Live it. Accept it. And then come back to me.” Loridan kissed his forehead. “You will always be my first love, my most loyal servant. Whatever you choose, you need fear no anger from me.”

"And Shane? What is he to you?"

"He's something I was missing." He closed his eyes as a tremor ran through his body.

Amun sat up, the bitter taste of fear in his mouth. "Loridan? What's wrong?"

The prince's face creased in pain. "Two more dead. We must find Vince. Soon. I was able to get reasons from Shane's mind, but no specific location. Mexico again. That's all I know."

"I'll find him. I swear." He eased out of the bed and pulled the sheet back up over Loridan. "And I'll do as you ask."

* * *

Shane watched the two of them, prince and servant, and couldn't stop the cresting ache of want and disappointment. He longed to join them, but obviously he didn't belong here. They spoke too quietly for him to hear, but they touched each other in a way that caused Shane to feel sick with jealousy. Loridan had given him the sense of self-worth Shane had longed for, and now he shattered it into pieces. Again, Shane was just a pawn used for other men's happiness.

"All for nothing," he said, realizing that he'd never have either man, never know the ecstasy of having Amun move inside him. He'd been crazy to think that he might find a place in Amun's heart. For Amun, only Loridan mattered. And Loridan... For a while, Shane had thought Loridan had truly cared for him, that they'd experienced more to their coupling than the physical. Evidently not. Knowing that hurt as much as losing Amun did.

Khepri padded quietly out to see him. He scratched her just behind the ear. "Sorry, girl, but I don't belong here anymore. It's time I hit the road." She bumped against him, purring. "I can't stay. I can't. It's better if I just forget everything that happened."

He shamelessly raided Amun's room for anything useful while Khepri watched with a disapproving expression. A set of too-large clothes. Sandals that did fit. A black American Express card that would certainly come in handy.

The last thing he needed was a way back to San Diego. A door. There was a door out of the Otherworld that could be accessed by... Without really thinking about it, Shane moved his hand in a series of gestures. The air before him shimmered. He touched it and felt something with the texture and give of plastic wrap. He pushed a little harder, and he stepped through, right into a little parklike area in San Diego a few blocks away from Mason's club.

Chapter Twelve

Come and get your kid before he does something stupid, Mason texted.

Shane lolled on the cot in Mason's office, absentmindedly rubbing his crotch. Mason sighed. Whatever they'd done with him in the Otherworld, Shane hadn't changed a bit. "I don't like this. Bad enough that Vince came a month ago and stirred stuff up, and now you want me to *invite* him back? I mean, I like you, kid. You brought in some good money, but my working boys didn't care for it much. Got a bit jealous, you know?"

Shane tossed him a black American Express. Mason picked it up and put it in his shirt pocket.

"I'm going to give this back to Amun when he comes to pick you up. Amun, not Vince, got that? My job is to let fae come to me and do my best to hide them until Amun gets here. I don't ship them out to their deaths. Goes against my morals, you know?"

"I'm not going to die," Shane said nonchalantly. "I'm just going to fuck Vince one way or another."

"Oh, that's all?" He rolled his eyes at Shane. "You're not afraid of losing yourself again?"

"That's what I was hoping for, actually."

Great. Mason was in no mood to act as counselor for the heartbroken. He glanced at his phone. Nothing yet.

"All right, kid. What happened over there?"

“Nothing happened. That’s the problem.” At Mason’s glare, he elucidated, “Fine. Amun and Prince Loridan got it on. All’s well that ends well. They don’t need me anymore.”

They didn’t need him in the first place, Mason wanted to say, but he held his tongue. Shane was obviously upset, and Mason saw no reason to poke at any more wounds. He didn’t know what went on in the Otherworld, and he didn’t care to, thank you very much. “Look. I’ll let you stay here for a night or two, but I don’t want you taking clients. That’s for my safety and yours.”

Shane sighed. “Then there’s no point in staying here, is there? Amun’s not going to come and get me. Not this time.”

“I’m not going to let my club be a place for you to come and fuck yourself into oblivion. Got that? The room you had is still empty. Go up and sleep on this.”

Shane scowled, but at least he stood up to go. As soon as he opened the door, Carlos stood there, waiting for orders. “Take him up to his old room,” Mason said. And then, when Carlos had gone, Mason contacted him through the radio so Shane couldn’t overhear. “Don’t let him take his clothes off, and make sure he doesn’t leave.”

Shane had no intention of being escorted up to his old room. Mason was an idiot if he thought Shane hadn’t seen him playing on his cell phone. The only way upstairs was through the club, the floor already crowded with men and women, several of whom turned in Shane’s direction with murmurs of invitation. Carlos, however, kept a firm grip on Shane’s arm and didn’t allow him to stop.

“I’m hungry,” Shane said.

The bodyguard just grunted.

“Come on, man. I need something to eat. I’m light-headed enough to faint. There’s a Wendy’s not far from here.”

“You got any cash?”

Shane grinned. "Give me ten minutes, and I can get fifty."

Carlos grunted again.

Time to try a different tactic. Shane reached for the fly of his pants but only managed to get the top button undone before Carlos stopped him.

"I don't think so."

Shit. Mason must have warned him. Carlos hustled him forward. Once they got to the staircase, Shane wouldn't have a chance of getting away. Carlos was big enough to block any path down, and Shane had no hope of evading him with strength alone. So he closed his eyes and swooned just like one of those women in old black-and-white films.

"Get up," Carlos said without letting go. "You're not fooling me." He yanked at Shane's arm.

Shane didn't move. It took a lot of effort to stay limp despite the sharp pain in his arm.

"What's wrong with him?" a woman in the club asked.

Carlos ignored them and settled for slapping Shane's face. "Get up. Stop playing possum."

"Should I call someone?" the woman asked.

"No. He's acting."

"Doesn't look like it," she said. "Hey, now. Are you all right?"

Soft hands touched his face. Carlos let go. Shane lay still awhile longer, content to let the woman fuss over him. He cracked open an eye, to see Carlos glaring down at him. The moment the bodyguard looked the other way, Shane scrambled to his feet and dashed toward the door.

He made it out into the alley, breathing hard. He rounded the corner and came face-to-face with one of Vince's bodyguards. He jammed a syringe into Shane's arm before Shane had a chance to call out. Fear gripped his belly as the drug burned in

his veins and robbed him of his strength. Vince's man caught him before he collapsed, carrying him easily toward a waiting limo.

He'd wanted this, Shane told himself as his eyelids grew heavy. He'd wanted to run away and forget. *Amun*, he mouthed, his last coherent thought before blackness overcame him.

Chapter Thirteen

Amun's heart sank as Mason told him the news. "Gone? Already?"

"He ran before Carlos could get him upstairs. That kid was pretty upset when he came through here. What did you do to him?"

What didn't he do would be a better question. Hit him. Ignored him. Ridiculed him. Loridan had been right, as usual. Amun wouldn't give up Shane so easily. "How the hell do I find Vince?"

"No idea." He pulled a card out of his pocket and set it on the desk. "This is yours, I believe. The little brat tried to bribe me with it."

Bribery. A surge of anger flowed through Amun. "You're the only half fae around here who Vince leaves alone. What kind of deal do you have with him?"

"Deal?" Mason laughed bitterly. "There's no deal. I'm a magnet for fae. Vince knows that as well as you do. If I find one, I try to let you know first, but it doesn't always work out that way. Vince's wolves have a tendency to hang around and snatch any fae who walk in the door."

"And because you feed them so well, he lets you stay." Amun surged forward across the desk and grabbed Mason's collar, half pulling the club owner to his feet. "Bastard. How many years have you been a double agent?"

"I'm not, Amun. I swear. My loyalty is to Loridan." He remained remarkably calm in the face of Amun's fury.

"Some loyalty. You're killing him. You know that?"

Mason tried to pry Amun's fingers apart. "I know, Amun. I know he's dying, and I swear that if I had any choice in this—"

“Then choose. Now.” Amun let Mason drop back into his chair. He slid the credit card back toward Mason. “I want Vince or one of his wolves here. Now. I bet you have a way to make that happen.”

Mason paled. He set the card aside, looking unwilling to fight Amun over it. “Look. I’m sorry I lost the kid, but there’s no way I’m just going to hand you over to Vince. The fae he takes don’t come back.”

“Shane did. I will.” Amun leaned forward. “Please, Mason. If you value our friendship at all...”

“I do, Amun. I always have, and I wish like hell that Vince had never been born.” His face crumpled into a twisted, tortured expression. “He’ll kill me. Burn down the club with me in it.”

Amun didn’t doubt the sincerity of the threat. He put his hand over Mason’s and squeezed. “Then help me stop him. Make your choice.”

Mason’s hand shook as he reached into his pocket and handed Amun his cell phone. “I’ll tell you the numbers.”

Amun dialed. His heart pounded harder with each unanswered ring.

A *click*. Silence. Then a man’s rough, deep voice. “*Bueno, Señor Mason.*”

“I’m not Mason,” Amun said in Spanish. “This is Prince Loridan’s bloodhound. I want you to come and get me.”

* * *

Shane woke to find himself locked in a room not nearly as comfortable as the one Amun had kept him in. A mattress, a sink, a toilet, a small table, and nothing else. The walls and floors were tile and fortunately not freezing cold to the touch. He huddled on the mattress, miserable, wishing Vince would get here.

Amun. Just the merest thought of him made Shane’s cock ache with need. Shane unbuttoned his pants and withdrew his erection. Damn Amun. Damn him. Spit was a poor lube, but it worked. He wrapped a hand around his cock and slid it up and down.

Amun. Shane could still remember the taste of Amun's thick cock and the bitterness of his cum as it filled Shane's mouth. He leaned against the wall, dreaming of Amun's hand around his cock, Amun's warm body moving as one with his.

The door opened. Shane looked up, his hand on his cock, his body still unsatisfied. Vince looked different—younger, more vibrant, but with a glint in his eyes that hinted at madness. His gaze lingered on Shane's exposed cock. "I knew you'd survived, but I couldn't find you. Always moving. And I see you haven't changed a bit."

Vince grabbed Shane's arm and jerked him upward, spinning him around so that Vince had Shane pinned against his chest and facing forward. One strong arm wrapped around Shane's upper body so that he couldn't move while his other hand reached down to stroke Shane's cock. His touch scratched more than Shane remembered, nothing like Amun's or Prince Loridan's. Shane wondered what he'd ever found desirable in Vince. Maybe nothing; he just hadn't known better. Anything that would fuck him had been attractive. "I came back because I want you to help me with something."

That piqued Vince's interest. "That eager, are you?" His fingers tugged at the buttons on Shane's shirt until he got them apart and bared Shane's flesh.

"No. I mean, yes, but—" His protest was cut off by Vince's mouth. Vince wrapped his hand around his neck with bruising force. Shane squirmed from discomfort, but Vince wouldn't let him go.

Vince slapped him up against the cool tile wall. "I've been waiting years for this." Vince unbuttoned his own pants and then slid Shane's down just far enough to expose Shane's ass. "How many other men have had you since me, hmm? Want to tell me where you've been all these years?"

Shane started as he felt a cold slickness between his buttocks. Vince must have had some lube in his pocket. He slathered it generously around Shane's asshole and then slid two slick fingers inside to spread it there. Shane moaned.

Whatever gentleness Vince had lost, he still had the ability to send a shaft of heat and need straight to Shane's cock.

"Still shameless, aren't you?" Vince said as his fingers pressed just behind Shane's prostate. Shane clawed at the wall, mouth hanging open so he could pant. "Always ready for a good fuck. You were always my most valuable, you know. I'm glad to have you back."

The probing fingers withdrew. Shane whimpered at their loss, but he didn't have long to mourn. Vince's cock replaced them, thick and hard, spreading him achingly wide.

"Where were you?" Vince's breath heated Shane's ear. But Shane didn't have to answer; Vince gleaned it from his mind. Vince roared in anger as he drove into Shane, uncaring as his thrusts slammed Shane into the wall again and again. "Fucked the prince himself, did you? Have a good time?"

He had, as a matter of fact, an acknowledgment that drove Vince into an even deeper fury.

At length, Vince stiffened and let out a loud groan as he came. He draped himself across Shane until the spasms ended, then let Shane drop wearily to the floor. Vince buttoned up his pants and grinned. "Did you get what you wanted, little slut? No?"

Shane turned his head away, throat tight with emotion. He liked sex. He always had. But this time—it was different. Vince had changed.

"Of course I have. I'm better. Entirely fae like you. And it's all because of you, Shane. You were the perfect test subject. Welcome back."

Vince kissed him on the cheek. Shane shuddered from guilt and fear rather than desire. He was a fool.

"Something else you should know," Vince said as he went out the door. "I expect you to earn your keep."

Shane sprang to his feet but too late. The door shut and locked, and no amount of shouting or pounding could get it open.

Chapter Fourteen

Once the limo had crossed the border, Vince's wolves blindfolded Amun and cuffed his arms behind his back. They spent the next three hours or so in silence as they headed toward the compound. He stayed quiet and cooperative, grateful they spared him the dart. He needed all his senses about him.

When the limo reached the compound, they made Amun walk for a very long time, turning right and left so often that Amun soon lost track of the direction they'd come. Probably they'd taken him the long way around and doubled back just to confuse him further.

Finally they set him on a metal chair and secured his ankles to its legs. They loosed his hands just long enough to bind them to the back of the chair, then left him alone in silence and darkness. It gave Amun far too much time to think.

Fear kept him from dozing, the sick, interminable wait for the unknown. He'd been mad to come here, and if anything happened to him, his death would hit Loridan so hard that the prince might never recover. And Shane... What the hell were they doing to Shane?

A door creaked open, and then came the hollow *click, click, click* of a man's dress shoes on the tile floor. "Bloodhound," a deep voice said. "I never expected to see you here. What a surprise."

"Vince. Long time no see."

The footsteps moved around and stopped in front of him. "Indeed." A hand gripped his chin, turned his head from side to side to examine him. A familiar scent clung to Vince's fingers. Amun's gut curdled. Shane.

"That's right, Bloodhound. Your little friend is here and eager to be back to his old tricks. He's already given me a sample. I've missed him, you know? Such a nice body he has. Young and strong, and it heals remarkably quickly should anything...unfortunate...happen to him."

Amun clenched his teeth, forcing himself to keep silent and to still his thoughts since Vince could evidently read minds now. Loridan had taught him a few tricks to protect himself against mind-reading fae. *Focus on something, anything mundane.* Hands. The pain from the rope as it bit into his wrists.

Vince's breath was hot and rancid as he whispered in Amun's ear. "Want to hear what I did to him? How it felt to drive my cock into his hot, tight little ass?"

Amun wriggled his hands, purposely pulling against the rope to wear at his skin. Pain. Focus on the pain, not the gratuitous, lewd story Vince related. No emotions. No reactions. Only the burning in his wrists.

Vince sighed when he finished. "That old bastard of a fae taught you a few things, I see. How is Loridan, anyway? I've heard he's been ill."

Vince meant to provoke him, and it worked. Amun took several deep breaths to channel his anger. "He's dying. Creating fae is killing him just as surely as if you drove a knife into his chest."

"Is that why you came? To beg for his life?" Vince patted Amun's cheek. "Forgive me, but I have no care for a fae who's doomed me to a half life. Must be nice being his chosen one to become a full fae and to live in the Otherworld. I've had to find my own way."

"Have you no care for those you experiment on? Giving fae blood to a human is like transplanting an organ. Their body rejects it because it doesn't belong."

"But it works if you have the right drugs." He sighed. A chair scraped just in front of Amun as Vince sat. "They pay to be my guinea pigs. Do you realize how many children never outgrow their superhero dreams? They want to fly or see the future or speak to animals or whatever it is. And I can give it to them." He gripped Amun's thigh with his fingers inside and precariously near Amun's crotch. "Not to

mention those who desire sexual potency. Your little friend Shane has been especially helpful in that regard. I'm happy to have him back."

Amun forced himself to keep still and not give in to Vince's prodding.

"I know what you're thinking. That's one of the gifts I've appropriated. With you here, I can add to my collection. Just think how much easier it will be when my men will be able to see fae for themselves instead of having to wait for odd talents to appear."

Terror bolted through Amun. Oh gods.

"Unpleasant for you to think about, I know, but why should Loridan's fae have all the fun?"

"Because we're born to it. We can adapt to it."

"And you think I can't?" He must have gestured. Amun heard a *swish* of fabric, and someone behind him untied his blindfold. "Tell me what you see, Bloodhound."

Amun saw a small, unassuming man, glowing gold threaded with an undulating green. Unstable. He might have been half-fae once, but now his body warred with itself, the acquired fae talents held together by only the merest of threads. "I see a bastard too foolish and greedy to know when to stop." He wondered what it would take to tip the balance.

Vince narrowed his eyes. "I wouldn't recommend it. I've a dozen different drugs here that could rob you of your gift forever. Don't push me. I know what impact your death would have. The older the fae, the more painful his death is for Loridan, especially if it's a violent one. Am I right?"

Amun said nothing in reply. He couldn't. Sick fear made it impossible.

Vince laughed. "Behave, or you will die a slow, painful death knowing that your prince is dying with you."

Pain meant little to him, but knowing Loridan's life depended on his changed everything. "I am at your service."

* * *

Vince returned to Shane's room. He brought a kit with him. Shane meekly submitted to the blood draw and then, more painfully, the needle thrust into his hip to draw bone marrow. Both would be used to make more of Vince's serums.

"Good boy," Vince said when he'd finished. He rubbed the sore spot on Shane's hip. "The bad part's over. How about a little fun now?"

Shane put up with Vince's more intimate attentions too, but every touch brought a comparison between him and Amun. Amun's hands were softer, his body harder. Jeez. He even *smelled* better.

He pulled away from Vince and curled up in the corner with his hands over his head. "Get him out of my head. Get him *out*."

Vince sighed as he zipped up his pants. "That reminds me. I brought a present for you. Maybe this will help send all your little demons away." He held up a small syringe half-full of a clear liquid.

Tempting but no. "I don't do drugs, man." He tucked his arms up against his chest.

"But you want to forget, don't you? I want to see you happy, Shane. I want my favorite fae to be at his best." Vince sat beside him, stroking his arms. "You've repaid me in more ways than I can say. I don't mind doing you a little favor now and then."

"No drugs. There's got to be another way."

"Not one that's so fast or so effective." He prized one of Shane's arms away. "Let me help you."

Shane scrunched his eyes shut. "No."

"It's the only way, Shane. I'd bring you humans to burn away your memories, but it would take a long, long time. Every man's touch would remind you of him. This way those memories are all gone within an hour."

Just this once, then, and only to get Amun and his betrayals out of his mind forever. "All right."

Vince swabbed his arm. “Just a little prick now.” The needle stung as it went in. “Be at peace, my little fae. Forget.”

The drug burned and throbbed as it flowed through his body. Every heartbeat drove it deeper and deeper. Each pulse dropped him further into the oblivion he craved.

Chapter Fifteen

Amun's hip still ached from Vince's needle. The bastard had also filled enough vials with Amun's blood that he left Amun light-headed. Knowing that Shane had endured this sort of thing for years filled Amun with white-hot anger. That anyone could treat his own kind as a science experiment...

The door clicked. Amun looked up, wondering what sort of humiliation Vince had in mind for him now. Instead, two of his wolves walked in, one with a bowl of some sort of soup that smelled like rotten vegetables and the other with the implements to help him with the necessities. Amun's face burned as he endured the spoon-feeding and personal assistance he didn't want or need. The two wolves leered at him, obviously enjoying his degradation. Amun despised them both, but he stuffed his emotions down. Loridan's life depended on his cooperation.

They left, leaving him sitting tied to the chair so long that his butt went numb. His thoughts wandered to Loridan and the pain Amun had caused him, then back to wondering and worrying about Shane.

The door clicked again. Vince strutted inside flanked by his wolves, grinning with amusement. "Do you want to see how your little friend is doing?"

Amun did, but even so, he gave Vince a casual shrug.

A knowing smile lit Vince's face. "This way, Bloodhound."

The wolves manhandled Amun into standing on unsteady legs and then prodded him down the hallway. They passed cell after cell of fae, both real and man-made. Most wore strange expressions as if they saw something Amun could not.

"Here we are." Vince unlocked the last cell in the hall. The wolves shoved Amun inside, untied his hands, and stepped back, still keeping a wary eye on him.

His gaze fixed first on the night table littered with lube, condoms, dildos, and other sexual implements.

Then he saw Shane sitting naked on the worn mattress. His face held a frighteningly vacant expression. He grinned when he saw Amun, but no sense of recognition reached his eyes. "He's a hottie," Shane said to Vince. "Is he for me?"

"All for you," Vince replied sweetly. The way he caressed Shane's face, as if he doted on a son, made Amun's stomach turn. "Your reward," Vince said to Amun. "Do what you like with him. I've gotten what I need from you. For now."

The door shut with an ominous *click*. Shane sat, waiting, his cock already erect. "What are you waiting for?"

Now, looking at him, Amun saw very little resemblance to Loridan. Pale, yes, with dark hair, but more slender and a world apart in personality. Loridan had never been submissive. "I'm sorry, Shane."

"For what? We haven't even done anything yet." Puzzlement crossed his features. "Why aren't you coming after me? The rest of them do."

"I wanted to savor the experience. To make it last as long as possible."

"Oh," Shane said with some understanding. "Sure. You can look as long as you want, but I'd rather have you touch me." He stretched out on the mattress, posed to show off the best angles of his body. "Or do I have to do all the work?"

Desire rushed through Amun in a white heat. The camera on the ceiling made it obvious that Vince probably watched. Amun didn't care. He would do everything he'd imagined doing to Shane and more. He sank down atop the younger fae, straddling him at the groin so Shane's erection brushed against his.

Shane grinned drunkenly. "I want to see you naked." He reached up to Amun's shirt and slowly unbuttoned it from the top down. Amun trembled with anticipation. The shirt dropped from his shoulders, to be tossed aside. "You're gorgeous," Shane said. "Hell of a man."

And then Shane's fingers fiddled at Amun's waist, unbuttoning the fly and then creeping inside to fondle Amun's cock. Amun gasped at the shock of his touch. He had to fight his instinct to draw back, to slap Shane's hands away. This wasn't wrong. Couldn't be wrong. They both wanted it.

Shane's fingers curled around Amun's cock, sliding sweetly along its length. "I want you hard. So hard it will hurt when you drive it into me."

Amun had no intention of hurting Shane, however pleurably, but he certainly didn't object to Shane's efforts to strengthen his erection. Last time, he'd been so tense and afraid that he hadn't fully appreciated Shane's skill.

"I know what you need. Lie down. On your stomach." When Amun hesitated at the order, Shane laughed. "What's the matter? Never been on the bottom before? I'll show you just how much fun it can be."

His surety didn't make Amun any less nervous. Loridan always preferred it, although he still managed to be the dominant one in the relationship.

"Come on. I can't think of anything I want more than to have a big dominant man at my mercy." Shane gripped Amun's shoulders in an attempt to twist him around. Reluctantly Amun did as Shane wished, stretching out on the mattress.

Shane tugged Amun's pants the rest of the way off. "I want your butt in the air," he said. Amun obeyed, surprised by the knot of excitement gathering in his belly. Shane spread Amun's buttocks wide. His tongue circled the tight muscle, round and round until Amun had relaxed enough to allow its entrance.

Instinct caused Amun to tense, but Shane's dedicated attentions soon had him relaxed again. One finger, liberally coated with lube, slid inside, amazing Amun with the ease at which his body accepted it. A second finger followed, equally slick, and together they pressed on a spot that soon had Amun clawing at the mattress.

Shane laughed in delight as he wriggled his fingers inside Amun's body. "Never felt that before, have you? There's more. A lot more."

Amun didn't have the breath to answer. His cock felt ready to explode, yet somehow he couldn't.

Shane's free hand reached around to feel Amun's cock. "Not hard enough yet. Not nearly." The fingers departed. The items on the table rattled. Then Shane leaned forward to show Amun what he'd chosen. It was black and shaped something like an upside-down T. "I've been saving this one for someone special."

Loridan had never bothered with toys; he'd always preferred the excitement of flesh upon flesh. Amun didn't know what to expect. This thing was thick, thicker than Amun truly felt comfortable with, but Shane used plenty of patience and lube until he got the device snuggled right up to that internal pleasure point.

And then Shane turned it on.

Amun let out a long, drawn-out groan of mixed anguish and pleasure. On the outside, the toy vibrated right against that tender, smooth place behind his balls, while on the inside, it stimulated that mind-blowing spot behind his prostate. "Gods," he groaned. He curled up into a ball, not sure how he'd be able to endure much of this.

Shane snuggled up beside him. "Fun, isn't it?" He kissed Amun on the lips, eagerly submitting to Amun's probing tongue. He tasted strange, sickly sweet. Drugged. Amun felt a flash of hope. Drugs wore off, and with Shane's quick immune system, they should be gotten rid of even faster.

But he couldn't *think*, not with the minor explosion waiting to happen in his groin. Amun reached back and pulled out the toy. He tossed it aside where it continued to hum against the floor. He didn't need it. The sight and scent of Shane stimulated him enough.

He grasped Shane's face, pulling him close for another breathless kiss. He looked into Shane's brown eyes. "I see you, Shane. I feel *you*." How he ever could have mistaken this body for Loridan's, he didn't know. His body still yearned for release, but he kept his need under control as he explored every part of Shane's body, touching and stroking, both ticklish and firm. Shane's feet and the places between his toes, up his legs, the softness behind his knees, the tenderness of his inner thighs. He spread Shane's legs wide as he could to have better access to the

uncut cock already extended and shiny with fluid. He tasted it, teasing with his tongue. Shane arched beneath his hands, shivering with an ecstasy Amun wished he could have induced earlier.

Shane wasn't really listening, lost in some hedonistic oblivion of his own. Amun kept talking anyway. "I've wanted this. Ever since I first saw you naked and scared to death, I've wanted to kiss you..." Amun kissed straight down the center of Shane's chest, stopping to suck at the most tender parts of his ticklish belly. "I've longed to taste you, to hold your balls in my hand.

"But...mostly...I've wanted to do *this*."

He lifted Shane's hips to position them. Impatiently, he grabbed the bottle of lube and slathered it over his cock. At last, he sank his body into Shane's, reveling at the tight heat. Nothing could be more natural than the way their bodies fit together or the way Shane's face had scrunched up in pure pleasure. So different from Loridan. So beautiful. Amun slid in and out, wanting to make this last as long as it could. Shane's muscle gripped him as if reluctant to let him go.

In and out, in and out. Amun picked up speed, driving his cock deeper and harder. Shane murmured his appreciation. Amun let go, let himself enjoy the experience. He'd missed this—the freedom and lightness to just *be*, to enjoy what he would and let his nature guide him. He wished Loridan were here to see him, to join them, strong and healthy and doing exactly as a fae should.

Shane came first, crying out as his seed spurted out to cover his belly. His legs kicked and twitched as he orgasmed. Amun followed moments later, coming while he was still inside Shane. He rode the spasms as far as he could. Love. The most natural thing in the world and the one emotion Amun had never been able to explore fully until now.

When they'd finished, Amun lay alongside him, breathing in the scent of his manhood. He stroked the young fae's flushed cheek. "Shane? Remember me. Remember." Shane murmured something nonsensical. "Shane. Please. Remember me. I came to find you, to take you home."

The door clicked. Amun whirled around, to see Vince wearing a lewd smile. “Well, Bloodhound. That was more entertaining than I would have thought. Did you have fun?” He bent down to pick up the toy. “I’ve tried this on him a few times. Should have heard him whimper as I shoved it inside. Really, it was a bit large for him, but I couldn’t find a smaller one. He didn’t seem to mind, though, did you, Shane?” A *snap* and the toy stopped humming.

With a roar of hatred, Amun lunged at him, but Vince’s wolves leaped forward to grab his arms and wrestle him into submission. He reeled from pain as one of them viciously kned him in the crotch.

Shane watched. He still had a languorous, dazed expression, but he frowned at Amun’s treatment. “That’s not very nice, Vince. I like him.”

Amun struggled against his captors. “Shane, remember. Remember me. I’m—”

A blow to his jaw silenced him. “That’s enough, Bloodhound,” Vince said.

The wolves dragged him to a room down a different hallway. Amun’s gaze went straight to the steel table, bare except for the restraints. The wolves forced him down onto the table. The metal chilled his back as they fastened the restraints around his wrists, ankles, and waist.

Vince donned a white lab coat. “Want to know something, Bloodhound? It isn’t just human contact that can take away your memories. I’ve figured out the physical reaction that causes it and recreated it in this drug here.” He tapped a glass bottle. “Your little Shane helped me with this too. He was always willing to consort with humans, so it was easy to monitor the changes in his body. I made him a special formula. Your little act in there was useless. He won’t remember you.”

Amun closed his eyes in grief and frustration. The only consolation was the knowledge that he’d finally reclaimed his nature. “If you keep torturing fae, Loridan will die. No one will be able to control them.”

A blast of pain to the side of Amun’s head temporarily blinded him. When he was able to focus, Vince’s fist hovered just above him. “I don’t *care*. Loridan’s time is done. The fae will be *mine*.” The colors of his aura shifted again, yellow merging

with green for a sharp, electric hue. "Thanks to you, Bloodhound, I now have the serum that will let me see every fae. I thought you should be here as a witness so you can see your contribution to my collection."

Four syringes lay on a metal tray. At a gesture, the two wolves came forward, each baring an arm past the elbow. Vince injected them both. They grimaced. Amun decided it couldn't be comfortable to have such a rapid change forced on their bodies.

"It's a virus." Pride colored Vince's explanation. "Every fae serum I've made invades the body and alters it. Some work faster than others, but they've all been successful."

They waited in silence to see the effect on the two wolves. At length, one of them blinked and kept looking from Amun to Vince to his partner. "You're glowing," he said in bafflement.

Vince grinned. "See, Amun? As easy as that." He rolled up the sleeve on his jacket, then readied another syringe. "Are you watching? After today, all the fae will be mine."

Amun held his breath as Vince injected himself. Vince's face twitched a little, but he did not allow himself the same expression of pain as his wolves. The color of his aura shifted yet again into an even sicklier yellow-green hue.

"I have one last gift for you, Bloodhound." He picked up the last syringe. "I'm sorry to say I have no further use for you, save as a means of getting to Loridan. I can't have him interfering any longer." He held it above Amun's eyes so Amun could get a better look. The liquid inside was gold instead of clear as the others had been. "It's poison. It can take up to a day for you to die as it slowly dissolves your organs from the inside out. You *will* go mad—either from the pain or from the hallucinogenic properties. A pity it has to end this way, but I really have no choice."

The needle caused no pain as it pricked his arm or as Vince completed the injection. He even went so far as to tape a cotton ball over the welling blood. "Farewell, Amun."

Vince and his wolves left. For a long time, Amun felt nothing. When the pain finally came, he screamed.

Chapter Sixteen

"So you're Mason."

Mason looked up, startled, at the thin, pale man standing in front of him. "How did you—" His eyes flicked from the man down to the cheetah, who stood patiently taking the man's weight. Inwardly, Mason groaned. This night just couldn't get any worse. "Loridan. Prince Loridan. Forgive me." He stood and gestured to the chair. "Please. Sit, my lord. Your highness—"

"You may call me Loridan." He sank stiffly into the chair. The cheetah sat still except for the tip of her tail. "I always meant to thank you personally for finding my fae."

"Amun did. Plenty of times. Least I could do. Especially since they seemed to find me anyway." He used the beer bottle to gesture at the cheetah. "That's his cat, isn't it? Keppy or something?"

"Khepri." He patted her affectionately.

"Khepri. Beautiful creature. Can I get either of you anything? Something to eat or drink?"

"You may get me to Amun."

Mason dropped back into his chair. "Not you too." He reached into the minifridge for a beer, using the edge of his desk to pop off the cap. "First the kid lets himself get caught. Then Amun calls for a ride. And now you want *me* to take you? No. No way. Not even for a prince." He stuck a hand inside his jacket, then tossed a black credit card onto the table in front of Loridan. "That's yours, I believe. The other two tried to bribe me with it. I haven't charged it. It's too much like blood money."

Loridan left the card where it lay. “You know where he is. More to the point, you know where Vince is.” He leaned forward, elbows on the desk. “I presume you have transportation as well?”

“Yeah. I keep my Porsche parked in the back underneath all the pigeons. Look, my lord—”

“Loridan.”

“Loridan. I’m not driving you to Mexico, and I am certainly not going to hand you over to the most dangerous man I know.”

“Take me.”

“No.”

Loridan smiled. His next words wrapped around Mason’s mind like a leash. “You will take me. Now. Amun is dying. If you don’t, so help me I will murder every last human and fae that stands in my way.”

Mason’s heart sank even as he stood and fumbled in his pocket for the keys to his BMW. “All right. All right, we’ll go.” He offered Loridan his arm. “I hope you have a passport to get across the border.”

“Your job is to drive. Leave the rest to me.”

* * *

The words kept repeating over and over in Shane’s head. “*Shane? Remember me. Remember.*”

He didn’t want to. The one sure thing he knew was that he’d come here to forget. Yet his body still thrummed from the handsome stranger’s attentions. The whole encounter had felt odd.

And then something clicked in the fog of his memory.

“Amun.”

The memories came crashing back. The fire at the first compound. Amun’s arms around him as he’d carried Shane to safety. The warmth and surety of Amun’s touch as he’d called out another man’s name.

That memory made Shane cringe, despite knowing that Amun had just been here, saying his name over and over and doing things to him that made his cock throb as he thought about them.

Vince would kill him. That much Shane knew. Amun was too old and too powerful to risk keeping around for long.

Shane scrambled to his feet, gratified to find that Vince had forgotten to lock the door during the fuss of getting Amun out. The hallway stood empty.

When he entered the treatment room, Shane had to turn his head away from seeing Amun spread out and vulnerable on one of the tables. The older fae's eyes were closed, his breathing fast and ragged. He strained against the cuffs that kept him immobile. Sweat covered his body. He whimpered in pain.

"Amun!" Shane rushed to his side, patting his face to get some sort of response. Amun's eyes opened briefly. "What did he give you?" Shane shook him hard. "What was it?"

Amun coughed. Blood flecked his lips. Shit. Shane had no hope of getting him out of here and back to the Otherworld. Vince had too many guards on the upper levels, and Shane doubted he could move Amun very far without help.

Dozens of vials and bottles lined the shelves. All were neatly labeled by the effects they produced: *Fire*. *Telekinesis*. *Telepathy*. *Sexual potency*. Shane cringed as he saw that one. He kept looking, panicking as he couldn't find the one he needed. Amun screamed again. It had to be here. It *had* to. Vince couldn't have kept him here for all those years without making a serum for—

There. He'd missed it twice somehow. He grabbed a bottle that said *Healing*, then dug through the cabinet drawers until he found a box of empty syringes. His hand shook. Vince had done this hundreds of times with Shane watching, but using one himself was an entirely different matter. He had no idea how much of the serum would help or if it would work in time.

He filled the syringe full, then tilted it up and squeezed it a little to get the air out. He found a packet of alcohol wipes and used one on Amun's inner arm.

“Don’t.” Amun’s voice was raw from screaming. “I would rather die than give in to Pharaoh.”

Pharaoh? Shane felt a chill creep up his spine. Amun was hallucinating.

“Iah...” One swollen eye cracked open to regard Shane. “I didn’t know. I’m sorry. I didn’t know...”

Loridan again. Anger surged within him again. “Amun. Look at me. Who am I?”

“Iah...”

“*Amun.*” Shane slapped him. Amun’s gaze focused a little better. “What is my name?”

“Shane?” Recognition lit his face for a moment before it slipped away again. “Help me...”

It was enough. Shane took a deep breath and readied the needle.

Vince slapped it out of his hand. The syringe went skittering across the floor, to slide beneath one of the wheeled cabinets. Shane dived after it, but Vince caught him around the waist. “No, you don’t. Little brat. Did you think I wouldn’t see you on the cameras?”

Shane kicked and struggled. It didn’t matter; he couldn’t match Vince’s strength. Vince kicked Shane’s legs out from beneath him and forced him down to the ground.

“He’s nothing to you, do you hear me? *Nothing.* You’re mine. I found you. I was the first one to fuck you.” Pain exploded in Shane’s head as Vince grabbed a hank of Shane’s hair and used it to smash Shane’s face into the tile floor. “You will not escape me again, and there is nothing you can do to save the bloodhound.”

A quiet, breathy voice broke the silence. “Let him go.”

Shane’s vision cleared enough for him to see his rescuer. “Loridan.”

Mason carried him. The club owner’s gaze fixed upon Amun. Loridan appeared even feebler than Shane had seen him last. His breaths came fast and hard.

Loridan's ashen face mirrored Amun's, twitching from pain. When Loridan spoke again, his voice was low and threatening. "So you've taken to killing my fae."

Khepri crouched low to the ground, growling, the hair on her back raising on end. Vince trembled. His wolves moved up to protect him, but a short, sharp order from Loridan sent them cowering into the corner.

Vince lurched to his feet, pulling Shane up with him. He yanked open one of the cabinet drawers and dug out a scalpel, which he held to Shane's throat. "I know this boy heals quickly, but I'm betting he can't heal if he's dead."

"Let him go," Loridan ordered again.

Vince laughed. "Your fancy words don't work on me, *Prince*. Now move aside, and I might let your boy live."

He edged around the table. Amun still writhed in pain. Shane couldn't do anything but move with Vince; the iron grip around his chest kept his arms immobile.

Shane felt Vince prepare to move before it happened. "No!"

The scalpel sped away from Shane's throat, straight toward Amun's heart.

A snarling blur of gold and black leaped through the air. Khepri landed atop the table, her feet positioned around Amun, and she sank her teeth into Vince's wrist. The scalpel dropped, clattering onto the ground. Khepri growled, shaking Vince's arm this way and that. It loosened Vince's grip enough that Shane broke free. He dropped to the floor, looking desperately under the cabinets for the syringe.

There. He grabbed it and dashed over to Loridan's side. Vince continued to struggle with Khepri. She stepped delicately over Amun as Vince pulled at her. He went off balance, falling hard into the cabinets. They broke open with a crash. A tidal wave of scissors, scalpels, bandages, and dozens of other items spilled across the tile floor. Khepri stood atop Vince. She gouged him with her claws until he bled across his chest and legs. She never let go of his wrist.

"Get it off! Get it *off*!" Vince pleaded.

Loridan said nothing for a while, watching grimly as Khepri tore into her prey. “Shane, see to Amun. Mason, put me down near Vince.”

Shane tore his eyes away from the mauling. Amun. He used another alcohol wipe to clean the needle and then jabbed it into Amun’s arm. Amun cried out again, but whether from the injection or some other agony, Shane couldn’t tell.

“Drop him,” Loridan said to Khepri. Unwillingly, she released Vince’s wrist and backed away, mouth wide and bloody as she panted. Loridan placed a hand atop Vince’s head. He did not speak kindly. “I told you before. You have no idea about the truth of being fae. We respect nature and can interact with it. Nothing good comes of force. Tampering avails you nothing except pain.”

“It isn’t fair,” Vince said.

“No,” Loridan agreed. “Nature rarely plays fair.”

Loridan’s face hardened. Vince’s trembling deepened until his body spasmed uncontrollably. He moaned, then screamed, and only then did Loridan let him go. He collapsed onto the ground, where his body twitched one last time before it lay still. None of them moved until long after it had turned to dust.

The prince wavered where he sat. Mason and Shane rushed up to help him. He bestowed each with a smile of gratitude. “The nexus of hate is gone. Destroyed by love.” He squeezed their hands to emphasize his point. “There are more fae who need our assistance, I believe, but first I would see to Amun.”

Shane followed his gaze to the table where Amun had stopped moving.

Chapter Seventeen

“Amun.”

The voice came to him as if from far away. Amun struggled to follow, but it was hard, so hard. Easier to succumb to the darkness of sleep.

“Amun. Come to me.”

The second voice sounded different. Deeper. It gave him an order yet was filled with love and concern.

“Amun, *please*.”

That younger voice again. He struggled to open his eyes. Four pairs of eyes looked down at him, three human, one Khepri's set of beautiful amber. She lay tucked up against him to warm his body with her own.

There was Shane, his face bright with relief. And Mason. Mason?

The club owner thrust a thumb toward the last person. “He made me do it.”

Loridan. His face held a healthy color that Amun had not seen in years, and he stood, only leaning a little on the table for support. “You're all right,” Amun said.

“Because you are.” He leaned down to place a kiss on Amun's forehead. “I came as soon I felt you accept your nature. It gave me strength. But it was Shane who saved your life. You now heal as quickly as he does.”

At that, Shane threw himself across Amun. Amun embraced him. “Does this gift of yours include increased stamina?”

Shane giggled. “You'll just have to find that out for yourself, won't you?” He kissed Amun on the lips and had halfway crawled onto the table before Mason plucked him off again.

“Later, all right?” Mason said. “Let’s get this place cleaned up so we can go home.”

* * *

Amun managed to convince Loridan to submit to using a wheelchair to get around. Mason pushed it, obviously glad to have some means of being useful. The color in Loridan’s cheeks had returned, and his eyes shone brighter than they had in years, but it would take some time for him to recover his strength. Now Amun had real hope that Loridan would recover fully.

Cell after cell held green fae in various states of mental health. One still delighted in her telekinesis; another sobbed incessantly about seeing ghosts and refused to open her eyes. Loridan had gleaned enough from Vince’s mind to know which drugs reversed or canceled fae talents, and used them generously. He brought several fae from the Otherworld to assist, as there were far too many for the four of them to deal with alone. The captives born fae or half-fae, he freed and sent back to the Otherworld for treatment.

Shane lagged farther and farther behind until he and Khepri no longer followed. “Go to him,” Loridan told Amun as they dosed a human man who could sense their emotions. “I’ll be fine. He needs you.”

Amun found him on the floor of the treatment room mindlessly stroking Khepri’s fur. He looked handsome in the gray shirt and pants one of the fae had brought from the Otherworld. “This is all my fault,” Shane said.

Amun heard the pain in his voice and knew exactly where it had come from. He sat next to Shane and tried to wrap an arm around him, but the younger fae scooted out of reach. “Before Loridan found me, I hunted fae for Pharaoh. He lied to me. I sentenced hundreds of innocents to die. I have not forgotten their screams as they burned.”

“I don’t want to forget them,” Shane said. Finally, he leaned against Amun, seeking comfort that Amun now wanted to give. Amun wrapped his arms around him, aroused by the suppleness of Shane’s body as he had been, as he always would

be. Shane buried his head in Amun's shoulder. "I want this place gone. I want it to burn."

Amun's heart pounded. He'd waited for this, for Shane to rise above his all-consuming fae talent and think of something besides sex. Now he had passion and the knowledge to back it up. "And after that? Then what will you do?"

Amun knew what the answer would have been only a few days ago. Today, Shane took a long shuddering breath. "Find somewhere to go. I've always managed before."

Beneath the surety, he pleaded, posing a question he dared not ask. Amun answered it for him instead. "Stay with me."

Shane's eyes went glassy, as if he tried hard not to cry. "What about Loridan?"

"What about him?"

He had to take a few deep breaths before he could answer. "I want him as much as I want you."

"And who says you can't have us both?" Amun hugged him tight. "Both of us want you, Shane. Both of us need you. Will you stay?"

"Only if you do one thing for me, man."

"Anything."

"Teach me what it means, what it *really* means to be fae."

Chapter Eighteen

“The first lesson of being fae,” Loridan intoned, “is doing what comes naturally, so long as it doesn’t harm anyone else.” He raised a glass of wine. Shane, delighted with his company, followed suit. “It’s been a while since I had anything to celebrate. Or,” he said with a wink, “anyone to celebrate with.”

Shane and Amun had joined Loridan in his room amid platters of fruit and pastries and numerous bottles of wine. Amun sat at Loridan’s feet, picking at his food, looking content to just be with the two men he loved. Khepri lounged on the floor near him, enjoying her own platter of fresh meat. Shane sat on the sofa beside Loridan, leaning up against him with one leg dangling down to curl around Amun, more comfortable and content than he had ever felt.

“*Dude*” was all Shane said before he helped himself to a full plate. Loridan ate little, possibly because one of his hands never left Amun’s skin and the other was curved around Shane’s waist. His fingers wandered to Amun’s lips. Amun sucked at them, one at a time.

“You’re worse than Khepri,” Loridan whispered. “One would think I don’t lavish enough attention on you.”

“Making up for lost time. That’s all.” Amun reached upward to clasp the back of Loridan’s neck and bring him in for a kiss.

“Hey, now,” Shane said around a mouthful of food. “Save some for the rest of us.”

“What do you think?” Loridan asked Amun. “Should we save him some dessert?”

“Save him *for* dessert is more like it.” Amun pointedly looked over the dishes and then at Shane. “Serve him up with a bit of cream and honey?”

“Dribble it right over that cock that he can’t seem to keep tucked away.”

Shane grinned. “Dude.”

“I must, however, insist on sampling the main course first,” Amun said. He rose to his knees between Loridan’s legs, and this time the prince didn’t push him away.

Shane slid a little ways away, both entranced by and uneasy at the sight. Those two had known each other for thirty-five hundred years; they knew each other more intimately than Shane could ever hope to.

Amun nuzzled Loridan’s stomach as he unbuttoned the prince’s shirt with his tongue and teeth. Shane was impressed.

Loridan leaned back, his hands stretched down Amun’s bare back. “What is your nature, Amun?” Loridan asked.

“To find my fellow fae. And to love.” He looked at them both. “I’m a very lucky man to have the ones I love inside me as well as out.”

They writhed against each other for a while. Shane marveled at the way their bodies moved, how well they fit together. The clothes didn’t last long, and then it was skin on skin—Loridan’s pale, moon white skin contrasting with the dark nut brown of Amun’s. “Tah,” Amun panted. “I’ve missed you. Gods, I’ve missed you.”

Loridan’s face had such a look of peace and happiness that Shane longed to kiss it, to add his joy to theirs. He didn’t dare, though. Not until they invited him.

And then Loridan held out his hand. Amun’s followed a moment later. Shane all but leaped into them, his hot, willing body adding an exciting new element to the mix. He wrapped his arms around Loridan’s neck, kissing the handsome cheeks, pressing his body to the one that had gained a new strength.

“I think we’ve created a monster,” Amun said jokingly. “He’s never going to let us sleep.”

“And neither will you, not with that new gift of yours,” Loridan said. “Hold him still for a minute, would you?”

Amun tucked his arms beneath Shane’s and clasped his hands atop Shane’s chest. Shane kicked a little, wondering what they meant to do, but it was only Loridan making good on his threat. He held a pitcher of thick cream. Starting at the base of Shane’s neck, he dribbled the cream little by little across Shane’s skin, around and atop his nipples, down the slope of his belly. The warm cream tickled, and Shane couldn’t help but wriggle a little.

“The best is yet to come,” Loridan assured him. He tilted the pitcher above Shane’s cock. The last of the cream slid down his shaft to trickle maddeningly between his balls. Amun made things worse; he reached beneath Shane’s legs, lifting him so that his cock rubbed between Shane’s buttocks.

Then, slowly, Amun eased Shane down over his waiting cock. Shane groaned. Amun left him there to appreciate the heat and fullness while Loridan continued with his own ministrations. And of course Loridan didn’t start there with his tongue; no, he followed the same trail, pausing to suck each of Shane’s nipples until they were clean. “Sweeter than sweet,” Loridan said.

It was ages before Loridan reached Shane’s cock, grown unbearably hard from both the anticipation and from Amun shamelessly tucked up inside him. Loridan took the whole of Shane’s shaft within his mouth, sucking and licking with an expertise that elicited another groan of appreciation from Shane. Amun rocked his hips so that he lifted Shane upward, deeper into Loridan’s mouth.

The heat built. Stars danced behind Shane’s eyes. He clawed at Amun’s hands which clasped Loridan’s head. All three of them moving as one, in love in a way Shane could never have dreamed of.

Climax hit with blinding force. Shane’s heels kicked at the seat cushions as he arched back against Amun. Amun tucked Shane’s hair back behind his ear just before he kissed him.

"You're beautiful," Amun said as Shane writhed in the heat and rush of orgasm. "I'm sorry I didn't notice sooner."

"You were busy," Shane said. The spasms subsided.

"Still. I mean to apologize."

"Accepted," Shane said. He arched his head back to request another kiss, which he received. "You're forgiven a hundred thousand times over."

Loridan rose, licking his lips. He leaned back against the couch, looking as content as Khepri, with a full stomach. "I wouldn't say that just yet. Just wait until we start teaching you how to control that talent of yours. You might hate us then."

"Teach me," Shane said. "I want to learn everything."

"We will," Amun said. Already he was reaching for Shane's spent cock, ready to bring it back to life. "After all, we do what comes naturally."

THE END

Loose Id Titles by Nica Berry

Consort
Jazzy Little Christmas
Nature's Own
Northern Love
Stolen Moments
Venom's Bond

Nica Berry

Nica Berry is a writer of queer science fiction, fantasy, and erotica. She's a graduate of the Clarion Writer's Workshop for Science Fiction and Fantasy, the Taos Toolbox workshop for SF/F novelists, and graduated with an M.A. in Writing Popular Fiction from Seton Hill University in January 2008. She lives in San Diego with her two cats, where she enjoys going to the zoo and taking pictures of the animals, especially lizards.

Check out Nica on the Web at www.orossy.com/nicaberry.