

ZODIAC
ACADEMY

THE BIG A.S.S.
PARTY



SUPERNATURAL
BULLIES AND BEASTS

CAROLINE
PECKHAM

Book 5.5

SUSANNE
VALENTI

A ZODIAC ACADEMY NOVELLA:

The Big A.S.S. Party

By

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Welcome to Zodiac Academy, here is your campus map.

Note to all students: Vampire bites, loss of limbs or getting lost in The Wailing Wood will not count as a valid excuse for being late to class. If you want to socialise with your fellow students on FaeBook then be sure to join the group [here](#).

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Geraldine



Well jumping jimminies if the coming Lunar Eclipse wasn't just the most splendiferous thing I'd seen this week then I wasn't sure what was!

The sand was cool beneath my tootsies and the air warm on my flesh as I danced to the rhythm of the moon in my undies. The song that was playing had taken on another layer of music and I swayed my head in time to it, my wet hair a-swishing and a-swooshing as I shimmied to the beat.

My feet were moving and I slipped away from my friends who were still partying on together as a strange pull lured me towards the shore.

My eyes fell closed and my heart pitter pattered like a tap dancing duck as I drew closer to the source of the tantalising music.

"Hey, Grus," a sultry voice said and I opened my eyes to take a gander at the owner of such a seductive sound.

"Max?" I asked in surprise, my voice all breathy as I looked up at him perched on a rock like a meddlesome merman.

His chest was bare and fishily tempting as his navy Siren scales shone wetly, his muscly masculinity calling to me like the moon to a melon.

He had the darkest, dirtiest, most devilishly delicious smile and my gaze snagged on his mouth as my mind was filled with all the foxy things I'd like

to do to him.

“Well, if you aren’t just a fruit salad filled with banana drama,” I purred, stepping closer.

“Are you answering my call?” he asked, his gaze sliding over me like molten candle wax and lighting a fire between my thighs in my Lady Petunia.

My lips parted as I followed the dirty trail of my thoughts down to his waistband and I wondered just how far those scales went... Would he feel like a slippery salmon or a wriggly worm or a-

I blinked harshly as I suddenly realised what that darned music was. In my moon-high state I’d let my mental walls fall again and he’d bamboozled me with his Siren lure.

I gritted my teeth as I threw my walls back up and the music cut off abruptly.

He was still one seriously scrumptious slice of man meat but I didn’t plan on dining out on Heir tonight!

“Will you stop with your luring nonsense you creepy crustacean!” I chastised. “Is it beyond your capabilities to woo a lady without using your pickling power on her?”

Max cocked his head at me, his gaze trailing over my matching red undies in a way that made me blush. I’d wanted to wear the ones with little carrots on them but my lady Tory had insisted they did not become me so I’d allowed her to persuade me to buy this scarlet sensation. It seemed it was a little too seductive though if I’d tempted a troublesome tuna into my waters.

“If you’ll excuse me, I have places to be. The moon waits for no Fae.” I turned my back on the wet Wallace and his rock as I sashayed away along the beach.

“Grus!” he called behind me and I turned, raising an eyebrow at him. “Where are you going?”

“To dance with the daydews and Faeflies on a rainbow of sand!” I called before turning away again.

The pulse of the music had me shimmying along the beach to the beat of a bouncing bongo but before I could get very far, a hand caught mine and I was spun in a circle like a Pegasus on a merry-go-round.

“Let me come with you,” Max said, his voice deep and throaty and a plea in his gaze that I found darned hard to refuse.

The musings of the moon shifted beneath my flesh and heat coiled through me from the point where his flesh met mine.

Oh sweet slippers on a Sunday morn.

“Okay,” I breathed. No elaboration, not so much as a by your leave. I just gave him a single word like a modern gal and just like that I’d caught myself an Heir.

His hand was warm in mine as we started dancing to the beat of the music which wound along the beach.

Max moved to stand behind me, his arms wrapped around my waist as we ground against each other like two carrots in a blender.

The friction of my hot booty on his sea cucumber soon had me panting with need as the firm ridge of it pressed against me.

The moon hung hot and heavy in the sky, her wily whispers giving Lady Petunia free rein to do her worst. And she was on the hunt.

Max caught my waist and pulled me around, his mouth brushing the corner of mine as he leaned in to place a smackeroo right on me but I turned my cheek with a teasing smile.

A lady makes him earn a taste.

“Fuck, Geraldine, how hard are you going to make me work for this?” Max asked, his dark eyes capturing me and making my resolve melt like a wax candle hanging over a fire. But he was an Heir. Tangling with his tentacles seemed like the truest form of insanity even with the moon pressing me

towards him. And I hardly knew a thing about him aside from his love of the briny wilds of the sea.

“If you want to get to know my nether regions you’ll have to give me something real,” I teased. “A lady doesn’t tumble with a stranger no matter how seductive his scales may be.”

Max’s lips hooked up into a dark smile and he glanced along the beach for a moment before taking my hand again and tugging me after him.

“Come on,” he said, suddenly all serious salamander. “I wanna show you something.”

I hesitated, glancing back across the salty sand to my loyal A.S.S. friends and wondering if I should really trust this scoundrel. But my feet were already moving and I could feel the moon giving me a little nudge.

My gaze slid down his scaly torso and a hunger woke in me which could rival a hippo in a lagoon full of scrummy seaweed. The Water Heir had often intrigued me and I couldn’t help but give in to his call even if my mental shields held his Siren songs at bay.

“Lead on, good man,” I encouraged.

Max drew closer to me, his warm breath dancing across my neck. “Oh no, Grus, I’m not a good man at all,” he breathed. “And if I get you back to my bed tonight, you’re going to find out just how bad I am.”

“I’m not sure if declaring yourself as bad in the bedroom is the best way to tempt my night garden into action,” I teased as he tugged on my hand insistently and I started walking.

“I’m not... I didn’t mean I was bad like bad. I meant *bad* like...like I dunno. Like the way people say bad when they mean good,” Max said with a frown.

“Oh you mean how my dear Princess Tory calls me badass but doesn’t mean I’ve got a case of the squirty squirrels?” I asked.

“What? Why does Tory think you’re a badass?” Max asked in confusion. “You’re as straight laced as they come.”

I offered up a hearty chuckle in response to that. “My ladies do like to bring out the scoundrel in me,” I admitted as we started to walk up the rocky steps which cut through the cliff and led back to the top. “I’ve had a hand in many a naughty notion, scandalous sabotage, tricky tango and meddling mission.”

“Oh yeah?” Max asked, catching my waist and pushing me back against the craggy wall. “You wanna share any of those stories with me?”

“Do you think I would betray my ladies’ secrets?” I scoffed. “I’d sooner knock nobblies with a narwhal or sell my soul to the serpent of the sea, or-”

“Yeah, yeah, I get it. You’re wet for the Vegas,” Max said, rolling his eyes. “How about for tonight we just forget they exist?”

“I could sooner forget I had bosoms on my chest!” I gasped.

Max’s eyes dipped to take in my breasts and a smile curved his lips in the most devilishly delicious way. “No chance of forgetting about those,” he agreed.

“Oh you horny hornet,” I chided, smacking his arm lightly.

“How about for tonight, we just don’t discuss the Vegas or the Councillors, the throne or the Heirs. It’s just you and me?” Max offered, his gaze capturing mine and a stillness seeming to fall around us as he made that one simple request.

My lips parted on a protest. The Vegas and the throne were what I lived for, what I thrived on. Pretending they didn’t exist was like pretending the sun wouldn’t rise on the morrow-

“Please, Grus,” Max breathed. “I just want to be free of all that for one night. I want to get to know Geraldine. And I’m hoping you might want to get to know me, too?”

Silence hung between us like the sweetest song of solace and my lips parted on a protest that wouldn't come. The moon was singing me the lulliest lullaby, urging me to abandon myself to the deep water that was Max Rigel. And what was the worst that could happen? If I gave him one night he surely couldn't do more than wet my flippers and come the morn, all would return to normal.

"For one night," I clarified, raising my hand between us in an offer.

Max raised an eyebrow in surprise and took my hand in his as a clap of magic rang out between us, sealing the deal.

He didn't release my hand but a sinful smile filled his lips as he drew me on up the stairs.

We hurried like the wind was in our willows and we were running out of time but I had no idea where we were running *to*.

We made it to the top of the cliff and Max laughed as he pulled me into a sprint and we raced across the open plain which made up this part of Air Territory.

"Do you trust me?" Max called as a laugh spilled from my lips too.

I looked at him, meaning to say that I'd sooner trust a goat with a basket of socks but the way the moonlight shone in his dark eyes had me nodding instead.

"For tonight," I agreed because it seemed the moon wanted that and I wasn't one to go against the stars.

"Then don't let go!" Max's grip on my hand tightened as he raised his other hand and called on his air magic.

The wind whipped around us, sending my chestnut hair whirling like a basket full of begonias on a summer breeze.

We kept running as the long grass whipped wildly around our legs and a laugh tore from my throat.

The wind picked up and a squeal of surprise left me as we were suddenly catapulted into the air.

Max whooped excitedly as a tiny tornado took us captive beneath the force of his power and I screamed like the banshee of the bothersome bog.

I clung to his hand like it was my only lifeline as his magic swept us up towards the stars and the moon which was drawing ever closer to the moment of total eclipse. I could feel it watching us, willing us to take this moment together in our hands and hold on tight and I would have been a nary ninny to refuse its wishes.

We shot up and up, riding the wind over The Wailing Wood and past The Orb. My heart thundered with the pounding rhythm of a thousand Pegasuses on the run.

Max held me tightly, never letting go as his magic guided us on and on until suddenly we hung suspended over Aqua Lake.

His brow furrowed in concentration as he wrangled the wily winds under his control and suddenly we found ourselves hanging perfectly still above the water like a pair of hovering harpies.

“Well if that didn’t wet my whistle, I don’t know what would,” I breathed.

“Fuck, Grus, I have no idea why, but when you talk like an insane person it turns me on so goddamn much,” Max growled.

A blush crept across my skin at the heat in his gaze as he looked at me and I released the most girlish of giggles.

“Well, if we’re admitting to devilish desires then I will say that I’ve admired your strapping shoulders and simmering smile on many an occasion,” I replied.

His eyes lit with a primal hunger that had my Lady Petunia thinking up all kinds of scandalous things I might like to do with this naughty Neptune.

“You wanna get wet with me?” he asked suddenly.

“What?” I asked with a frown but he didn’t give me a moment to think about it before releasing his grip on his air magic.

I screamed like a newborn babe in the morn as we plummeted towards Aqua Lake, barely wrangling my own magic in time to make the water beneath reach up and welcome me into its chilly embrace.

We sunk like a pair of sandy sausages all the way to the bottom of the lake.

I used my water magic to channel air around my mouth so that I could breathe and looked about for Max as I lost sight of him in the murky depths.

A glimmer of brightest blue caught my eye and I turned that way, spotting him as he shot through the water beside me with his Siren gifts.

My eyes widened at the sight of his scales beneath the water. On dry land they were something to behold but beneath the waves, his scales glimmered with an opalescent beauty that made the deep blue of them shimmer with the colour of a thousand rainbows.

My gaze was hooked on him as he frolicked about, swishing and swooping and putting on a merry show which I couldn’t help but be entranced by.

When he’d had enough of showing off, he swam straight for me with bright eyes and an even brighter smile. He seemed different here, less guarded and more free. Like he left all the weight of his responsibilities at the surface and just allowed himself to *be* down here.

A laugh left my lips in the form of jolly bubbles which trailed up, up and away towards the moon which had pushed us together this very night.

As Max reached me, he took my hands and dropped the walls around his magic in a silent offering.

I hesitated. We may have been taking a night off of our differences, but opening my power up to him was a whole wally bucket load of trust to give. But sure as my aunt Fanny’s pocket watch, I found myself wanting to give in.

I threw caution to the tide and dropped the walls around my power too, my lips pulling into an amused grin as anticipation built in my flesh.

I gasped as his power slammed into me. It washed through my body and lit me up from the inside out like a firework just waiting to go bang.

Max's eyes widened as my power slid into him too and we stayed there, treading water as the depths of our powers reached out to caress each other. It felt so much more intimate than kissing or even bumping naughty norberts. We were baring our souls and letting them snuggle up like wombats in the wild.

"Oh sweet salami," I moaned, though my words were lost in a trail of bubbles.

Max slowly withdrew his power and I pulled mine back too as he released one of my hands.

He reached above his head and I could feel the echo of his magic in the water that surrounded us as it slowly slid back, drawing off of my flesh and his until we were left standing on the sandy bottom of the lake in a wide bubble of air.

I tilted my head back, my lips parting in awe at the raw, unbridled power of his magic as he made this immense magic look as easy as trapping a Faefly in a jar. And those pesky insects were tricky enough.

"Well aren't you just a bucket full of party tricks," I breathed, my gaze hooked on the orb of water which shimmered above our heads.

"You don't know the half of it," Max teased, moving so close to me that I couldn't help but drop my eyes to meet his.

His lips captured mine in the next heartbeat and my poor heart darned near thrummed its way out of my bosom.

I moaned like a lady of the night on pay day as he slid his tongue between my lips and the heat in my body unravelled like a ball of yarn in the paws of a kitten.

His hands slid over my wet flesh and I explored the scales which still covered most of his Herculean body. They felt as cool as steel and smooth as

silk all at once, like melty butter on the softest of bagels.

He kissed me with a fiery passion that had me wanting to drop my garters and let him take possession of my Talulah all night long.

I could feel the brush of his Siren spell pushing at me, offering more lust to stoke the flames burning in my loins but I kept my walls up against his sneaksome interference with my emotions. I didn't need any help in lusting after him anyway. I'd been drooling like a dog at dinner time every time I'd looked his way since the first time I'd laid eyes on him. I just wouldn't admit to such an indiscretion towards an *Heir* on any other night.

But for tonight I was going to forget that and find out just who Maxy boy was beneath all the political bluster and wrong opinions.

"You're gonna make me work my ass off for you, aren't you?" Max groaned as he finally gave up on trying to boost my lust.

"Are you saying you're not up to the challenge?" I suggested with a wily eyebrow.

The smile he gave me made me go all gooey in the centre.

"Come back to my room and I'll prove what I can do to you," he growled with a promise so firm I could almost feel it in my waters already.

And because we'd made a deal to be free of our beliefs tonight and the fair lady moon seemed to want this too, I threw caution to the wind and nodded.

After all, how many times would one take a roll with the most powerful Siren in Solaria in one's lifetime? I wanted to take him for a test run while our deal stood.

One night of passion couldn't do any harm.

"Come on then, you tempting tuna," I agreed. "Let's see if you can water the lawn."



I was smiling so fucking big that my cheeks were aching as I waded out of the lake with Geraldine’s hand firmly clamped in mine.

The look in her eyes had said that this was going to be a one night only deal, but I was going to work as hard as I fucking could to change her mind on that. By the end of the night she’d have lost her voice from screaming my name and she wouldn’t be able to deny this heat between us ever again.

I didn’t know if it was the idea of sleeping with the enemy that had me so caught up in the idea of her or if it was the fact that I’d never met a girl like her in all my life and I was just addicted to the way she kept surprising me. Either way, I was going to live out as many fantasies as I could manage with her tonight and prove that I didn’t need to use my Siren gifts to bring her to her knees.

My eyes fell on the entrance to the tunnel which led beneath Aqua Lake and down to the entrance to Aqua House.

“Have you ever slept on a waterbed, Grus?” I purred, biting my lip as I looked at her and she giggled wildly.

“I like to rest my noggin on a nice firm block of man meat, not wallow in the wetlands, you silly swordfish.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” I asked, a frown pinching my brow. That sounded a hell of a lot like she liked sleeping in a bed with a man every night, which couldn’t be right. She wasn’t seeing anyone, I was sure of it. I paid enough attention to her to have noticed that...didn’t I?

“Don’t be a jelly jellyfish, Maxy boy, I need to keep my garden trimmed as often as the next lawn. No need to be a prude just because I haven’t partaken in your particular brand of lollygagging before tonight. I’ve no doubt you’ll work hard to make sure you stand out in my memory.” Geraldine’s lips curved up in a mocking smile and I had no idea whether she was teasing me or not.

“Are you seeing someone else?” I asked, pulling her to a halt and making her stop short right before the entrance to the tunnel.

“The only thing I can see right now is a big barracuda intent on luring me to his sea cave,” she purred, running a hand down my chest and caressing my abs as her gaze heated with a promise I intended to fulfil all night long. “Do you really want to waste our time together worrying about whether or not I’ve been letting other eels into my garden or do you want to bang me like a drum until I forget all about them?”

“I’ll take the drum thing,” I replied instantly as her hand shifted over my waist until she was grasping my dick through the thin material of my shorts.

I leaned in and stole a kiss from her lips, my hands sliding down to grasp the curve of her ass as I tugged her against me, my dick driving into her and making her moan. My tongue pressed into her mouth and the way she kissed me was anything but ladylike, her fingers skimming up and down my shaft in a way that made me ache.

“Come on,” I insisted, forcing myself to pull back before grabbing her hand and yanking her into a run.

We raced down the glass tunnel that led beneath the lake towards Aqua House, her hand tight in mine and laughter tumbling from her lips that had me grinning like an idiot. She was so uninhibited, not trying to be cool or seductive or offer me any bullshit, just vibrant and fucking crazy and alluring as fuck.

I threw a handful of water at the symbol above the door and yanked Geraldine behind me as we raced through the glass dome which made up the central chamber of Aqua House and held the common room. Rock pools, hot tubs, a bar with seats set in a pool of water and a blue and white theme to the furniture filled the space and Geraldine hesitated to look around for a moment.

I growled in frustration, caught her lips with mine again and grabbed her thighs, hoisting her into my arms and groaning into her mouth as her legs coiled behind my back.

I carried her half blind down the familiar passage which led to my room, the biggest one in the whole House. When we reached my door, I pressed her back to it, breaking our kiss as I hunted my pocket for my keys.

“Take me to the mulberry bush, you beautiful seabass. Teach me how to catch the clam, I need you to tangle me in your seaweed net and braid my hair with seashells.”

My dick strained against my pants and I groaned as the string of nonsense pouring from her lips made me hard as hell. Why the fuck did I like that so much? Shouldn't I have been asking her why the fuck she was always comparing me to sexually active sealife? I didn't know and I didn't care. All I knew was that the sound of Geraldine Grus begging me to slip my shark into the dark was a million times hotter than a girl begging me to fuck her in any kind of conventional way.

I managed to jam my key into the lock and we spilled inside, falling straight down onto my waterbed which sloshed and wobbled beneath us as I pinned her down.

I flicked a hand at the door, knocking it closed with a gust of air magic before reaching out to unclasp her bra.

Geraldine batted my hand aside, grabbed my shoulders and propelled me underneath her as if I weighed nothing at all. And I was one big bastard so that was pretty fucking impressive.

I reached for her again, but she knocked my hands aside once more, standing before me and quickly stripping out of her underwear, making me groan as I surveyed her naked body, drinking in the sight of her hard nipples and salivating as I looked at her bare pussy.

“I’ve been waiting to ride this sea cucumber for a while, Maxy boy,” she warned me. “So you’d better be prepared for me to break you in like a wild filly.”

My brows rose but she didn’t give me any time to reply before gripping my waistband and dragging my shorts off of me, her eyes widening hungrily as she drank in the sight of my hard cock.

“There’s me calling you a barracuda when we have a whale in our midst,” she purred, climbing on top of me as I reached for her with my heart pounding.

I grabbed her hips but she instantly caught my wrists, slamming them down onto the bed above my head and wrapping them in thick vines.

“What are you doing?” I gasped as her slick pussy rubbed along my shaft and she directed the vines to tether me to the bed. I felt them curling around my ankles too and my legs were forced wide as she tied them to the foot of the bed.

“Oh, silly boy,” Geraldine said as she looked down at me with wild eyes. “You didn’t think you’d be in charge here, did you?”

Before I could make any kind of protest, she guided my cock to her opening and slid down onto me with a lusty moan that had me growling with desire. I could feel the desire coming off of her skin, stoking my magic with its potency and the pleasure that began to roll through her as she started moving had me gritting my teeth.

"Oh, sweet huckleberry you really are a well-hung seahorse," Geraldine gasped as she rocked her hips over me, throwing her head back so that her long hair swayed down her back as she rode me. "Take me to the rose patch and prick me with your thorns."

I groaned at her nonsense as the feeling of her tight pussy had my dick twitching inside her and I thrust my hips up to meet hers the next time she rocked forward.

"By! My! Leave!" Geraldine cried with each thrust, her hands pawing at her breasts as I strained against the vines she'd tied me down with.

"Let me touch you," I demanded, my muscles bunching as I tried to break the vines which held me spread eagle beneath her with brute force.

"Save your silken words, you beastly boy, I know you wish to ruin me but I intend to own you first," she growled, her voice coming out in a doggish bark for a moment as her Order showed. "Now be a good little sea fig and let me ride you right."

I groaned as she leaned over me, her hands landing on my shoulders as she started fucking me harder, taking exactly what she wanted from me and crying out all manner of crazy things as she used my body for her pleasure.

She was rough and savage, the prim and proper lady forgotten as she fucked me like a wild woman, biting whenever she kissed me, her fingernails drawing blood where she dug them into my chest.

"Don't go finishing on me too soon you cantankerous crustacean," Geraldine warned, leaning down to sink her teeth into my nipple and making my hips buck harder beneath her until her fingernails bit into my shoulders tightly and she released a single high-pitched scream which seemed to go on forever as I wrung an orgasm from her body.

I yanked the vines tethering my right arm in place with all my strength and it finally snapped.

While Geraldine fell forward over me to catch her breath, I created a blade out of ice with my magic and quickly severed the rest of the vines too.

"Now I'm gonna show you what a shameless shark can do for you, Gerry," I panted as I grabbed the full curve of her hips and tugged her out of my lap, pushing her face down into the waterbed and yanking her ass up where I kneaded my fingers into her flesh. "Hold on tight."

She cried out as I slammed into her and I growled hungrily as I finally took control of the situation, burying myself deep inside her and loving the way she gasped every time I thrust in.

"I'm sinning with a seabass and tangling with his tentacles," she moaned. "I'm a wanton lady of the shore, dipping my toes in salty waters."

I slammed into her harder and her next curse was drowned in the mattress which sloshed and bounced beneath us, threatening to make me lose my balance. My dick was straining with the desperate need for release and I started moving faster and faster, the only thing escaping Geraldine's lips random fish names.

"Trout. Salmon. Eel. Dolphin. Carp. Guppy. Catfish. Bass. Neon tetra. Cod. Pilchard. Cuttlefish. Tuna. Barracuuuuuuuuuda!"

Geraldine's pussy clamped tight around my dick and the rush of pleasure that tore through her washed over me as my gifts let me feel it too. I

groaned as I came deep inside her, knowing I'd never be able to look at a fish in the same way again as my body shuddered and my dick twitched with jolts of pleasure.

I stayed buried deep inside her until her orgasm faded and finally pulled back, dropping down onto the bed heavily beside her and making the whole thing slosh and wobble.

Geraldine rolled over to look at me with her pupils dilated and her breathing heavy.

"I told you I'd rock your world, Grus," I teased as she moved to sit up beside me.

"Not yet you haven't, you squeaky squid," she replied as she crawled on top of me and moved up my body until her thighs were parted right above my mouth. "But you can make yourself useful until your long Sherman is ready to go again."

I should have made a fuss about the fact that she kept taking charge of me, but somehow it was just turning me on, so instead I gave her my dirtiest smile and grabbed hold of her round ass so tight that my fingers were digging in.

"Your wish is my command," I promised her as I dragged her down so that I could taste her and her moans and crazy exclamations were quickly echoing around my room once more.

Many Moons Later...



Geraldine



This day would be the most splendiferous day Solaria had ever witnessed. With a spring in my step, I left Earth Territory through the twisty turny tunnels that delved deep underground and arrived up under the shimmering sunbeams of summer. Ah summer, the most wild and wonderous of seasons. Spring had made Lady Petunia quite the harlot, wishing to lure many a gentlefae into her loins. But now summer had arrived, she wished to find a single suitor to spend the most romantic season of all with. That was her way, always swinging about in the breeze like a weathervane.

I strode across the springy lawn toward The Orb, tasting the sprinkling of possibilities in the air.

As it was a Saturday, my ladies would not be breakfasting with me this morn. But I would ensure a feast was brought to their rooms on this most special of days. The day that the stars chose to birth my princesses like two priceless diamonds placed against the queen's bosom. Their passage into this world would have been nothing if not divine. A moment I had dreamed about many a time and wished I could have been old enough to attend. Oh, but to share the same birth year as the Vega Twins was a gift in itself. I would never scorn such an offering from the stars.

The sweeping meadow dropped away before me as I made a beeline toward The Orb and as I arrived, I found myself the first one there. It wasn't a surprise to me. I was often up and ready to make my merry way to breakfast at first light to ensure my buttery bagels were piping hot for my queens. Today, I had another reason to rise with the sun like a bonny bird out for a succulent worm, I needed to prepare for this most significant of occasions. The eleventh day of the sixth month, oh what numbers! They were born on a wondrously powerful day. Eleven was the epitome of strength, a predictor of magnanimous tidings to come. Their destiny had been whispered from star to star, their shiny, plump baby buttocks' primed for being seated on a throne from that very day they were born.

I entered The Orb, fixing up a coffee to get my buds a-tingling and my energy a-pumping. Boy oh boy did I enjoy a good caffeine kick in the backside, it was as good as a dip in the Polar lakes of the north while eating a frosty noomberry. I took out my Atlas, about to bring up my files on today's events when an irksome eel came wandering in the door with a Casanova smile on his face.

"I thought you might be here, Gerry," Max said, running a hand over his marvellous mohawk. "We need your help with something."

"I assume by *we* you mean you and the tricksome trio you call friends," I huffed.

"Well, yeah. But it's about the Vegas," he said temptingly. "And their birthday."

"Why in the blue and eternal heavens of the sky would you and those naughty Neptunes care about the Vegas' birthday?" It was hard to ignore how devilish he looked today in a fitted shirt the colour of dolphin as it rode an ocean wave under the silvery light of the moon.

"Because Darius wants to impress Tory and Darcy needs cheering up. Darius has already started getting the decoration u-"

"I beg your porpoise?" I gasped. "Decorations? What decorations? Please tell me this instant, Max Rigel, that Darius the dastardly Dragon has not taken it upon himself to set up a P.A.R.T.Y. for the Vegas. For *my* queens."

"Well, yeah, he has. What's the problem?"

I slumped back onto the table behind me, needing the support as my head spun dizzily. "Golly grapes on a gooseberry train, this can't be happening."

Max's arms slid around me and Lady Petunia lifted her head as he held me close. Oh my, he was quite the sexy salmon and if I wasn't mistaken his swordfish was prodding me through his jeans. That was a fish I wanted to wrestle into my grasp and bring ashore more than once, though I daren't admit it to him. If he knew how he watered my Lady Petunia and made her flourish just for him, he would have a mighty hold over me indeed.

Today was too important for me to be distracted by Max and his long Sherman. But if what he said was true then I had to investigate. "Where is this supposed party happening?"

"In Kings Hollow." Max chuckled. "Is it really such a big deal, Gerry?"

"A big deal? Today is the single greatest day that ever was in Solaria and ever will be. Of *course* it's a big deal. It trumps the day Jedidiah Norrington sent his quivelfig into outer space on nothing more than a cumber-bun!"

"What the fuck is a quivelfig?" he muttered as I pushed him aside and hurried out of The Orb.

I wasn't going to stand for some dinglefooted Dragon meddling with my plans today. I'd been planning this for a thousand moons, waiting for this wondrous day, dreaming about it every night since I'd met the true queens. I had earned this right, like my father earned his right to serve the Vegas. It was in my blood, right down to my giggle fruit!

I stormed across campus, sensing that I had a curious catfish in tow. Max could follow me all he liked and check out my bouncing booty to his heart's content, but I wasn't going to pay him any heed. I had a Dragon to put in his

place and I intended to give him the old what for. I wasn't beyond whacking him with my shoe if that was what it took. Of course, a Dragon might need a bit more of a pish and a posh and a slip and a slap if I was going to get him to back down but I was up to the challenge if it was required.

I made it to Kings Hollow in the woods - I'd sniffed it out in my Order form a few times before now so I knew exactly where it was - and stormed up to the door set into the tree trunk. This place only let powerful Fae into it. Fae like me who had fearsome fires in their veins and stormy seas in their britches. I may not have been an Heir or a Dragon, but I was a Cerberus with earth magic and water magic boiling through the fabric of my very soul. I could put that dastardly Dragon boy on his firm backside if he crossed me. Especially today of all days. I was not to be trifled with.

I marched up the steps winding through the narrow stairway as I made it to the first level and pushed through the door. Max was hot on my heels and I could feel his breath on my neck, making me all shivery and shuddery. *Damn that beastly boy with his roguish scent and his hot chocolate skin that made my Lady Petunia want to bloom and welcome his proboscis in to pollenate her all night long.*

I stopped dead in my tracks as I took in the most simple of decorations adorning the walls and the cake on the table that was nothing but a bland, white sponge. A *sponge*. With nothing but strawberry filling at his heart. Darius was busy placing candles in the top of it as if this cake would ever be placed beneath the Vegas' delicate noses. I would die first. I would die a thousand deaths in a thousand battles to ensure that cake never, ever, found its way to the Vegas on the day of their birth. It was an insult. An abomination. A scandal waiting to happen. This cake was not the cake that any Fae should be offered on their birthday. It was a cake more fitting for a casual afternoon tea on a Sunday with a violent inmate from Darkmore Penitentiary. It should not

have seen the light of day on the eleventh of June, the most important day of all days.

Seth and Caleb shared a look from the couch that said they knew I was about to blow my top and they sure as a shellfish better be prepared.

"How could you do this?" I begged of Darius, needing to understand why he would choose to insult the Vegas on their birthday when I thought he had been trying to make peace with them. Didn't he covet Tory, didn't he want to show her the depths of his feelings by taking her to the most wonderful birthday party she could ever imagine? Didn't he understand that I could provide that? That I had been planning just such a thing for month upon month?

"Well, I had a go at baking. And the guys helped. Seth did the icing. But I spread the strawberry filling so..." Darius shrugged. *Shrugged!*

"Oh my cherry tips in a can of whoopass, I cannot cope. It offends my eyes. I cannot look at it directly. Please, someone take it away!" I wailed, stumbling backwards as I came over weak and Maxy boy steadied me. Seth sniggered and Caleb pressed his face into a pillow, obviously overcome with emotion for how terrible a job he had done here.

"We worked damn hard on that," Seth said with a sideways grin. "I made the icing from scratch."

"No you didn't," Darius said and I wailed like a banshee. Store bought icing? How could this get any worse?

"Calm down, Gerry, it's just a cake," Max said in my ear as he wrapped his arm around my waist. Oh my, I was not prepared for his firm touch and the way my knickers flared with the fires of the sun. I had to concentrate!

"*Just* a cake? How can you say that? If this cake were handed to the Vegas, I would combust of shame. My body would turn to ash and I would be cast away on the wind, you would hear my screams echoing into the night forevermore." I raised my hand, casting a spell meant to blast that insulting

cake to smithereens, but Darius growled dangerously and stepped forward, intercepting my vines and turning them to dust with his fire magic. "How dare thee, Darius Acrux?"

"I just wanted to do something nice for them," he growled like a cougar backed into a corner. "I wanted to see Roxy smile and Darcy...fuck, she's dealing with enough shit. I just wanted one good day. It might not be a fucking fairy wonderland in here, but it's a place where we can all forget the world for a while." Darius shrugged his impressive shoulders and I sighed heavily, walking toward him with my arms held wide.

"You poor, sad sack of a salamander." I hugged him and he stiffened like a buttery bagel left out to dry in a heatwave. "Of course they will have a good day. The most glorious gabbling goose of a day! For there is a true fairy wonderland awaiting them, not a humdrum hut in the Wailing Wood, why-ever would my queens want to come here on the day they alighted from the stars and landed on our most humble earth, waiting for us all to bow down at their-"

"Less of the queens, Gerry. That's never gonna happen," Max growled in a tone that was lusty and cantankerous. Oh, that stubborn seabass, when would he see that he was never meant to sit his fine and muscular buttocks on the throne of the Vegas? He would make such a fine Councillor who could attend their court and bow his handsome head to them. But he was not going to rule. It was ludicrous. I could shear my shepherds just thinking about it! But fate had a way of outing the crumblecake and soon enough, the Heirs would be given a healthy serving of it from Madam Zodiac herself.

I sighed, dabbing at my brow as I collected myself. There was one simple way to rectify this. "I decided against sending invites to you and the other Heirs, and of course any wretch of a HORE who might come sniffing around my festivities – which were of course sent by dove and hand printed on purest kalian silk - but perhaps I could make an exception to you four promiscuous

playboys if you promise to keep your wandering woodpeckers in their nests. This is an event for the true queens, not a do-si-do in a shed in the tree tops.”

“Shed?” Caleb growled as Darius looked ready to give me the what-for and the who-how. But I didn’t have time to dilly and dally around here. I had the party of the century to organise. I had to round up the troops and delegate duties to my comrades.

“Good day to you. Please ensure that monstrosity of a cake is incinerated, Darius, I shall spend several hours searing its image from my retinas henceforth.”

I swept past Max, brushing my hand down his strapping chest, my Lady Petunia calling to him in that moment and making the rains pour in a deluge down on her lawn. *Well soak my vegetable patch, I am weakened by this foxy flounder. I will have to keep my whelks away from this libidinous lichen tonight!*



"What the fuck just happened?" Darius asked as he looked down at the cake we'd all spent the morning baking with a frown.

"We just got Grussed," I said with a grin. "You don't know what the fuck happened at first but once you get used to it and just go along for the ride, you'll find yourself having the time of your life."

"Do I wanna know if that's what sex with her is like?" Caleb asked, looking half intrigued and half disturbed.

"Sex with her is a constant series of asking yourself what the fuck just happened? What the fuck did she just say? What the fuck did she just call me? Why the fuck does that feel so goddamn good? And that's the most you'll ever find out about it because she's mine," I informed him.

"You might wanna tell her that," Seth said, snorting a laugh. "Because I don't think she agrees with you."

Darius sighed and sat his ass down on the table beside the admittedly pretty shit looking cake.

"I dunno why I let you fuckwits talk me into trying to do this," he growled, grabbing a fistful of cake and shoving it into his mouth.

Seth whined, shooting me a scowl like his downward turn in mood was somehow my fault before turning his puppy dog eyes on Darius and

hurrying over to nuzzle him.

I exchanged a look with Caleb and he shrugged like he agreed with Seth just as I caught a whiff of Darius's fucking dejected misery. He'd been marginally better recently since he and Tory seemed to be making some progress towards not hating each other, but it was hardly a fix.

He still couldn't touch her, couldn't kiss her, couldn't even be alone with her. He loved her and he couldn't ever be with her because our ambition had fucked it. I'd felt his resistance when we'd been doing that shit to the Vegas when they first arrived and I'd felt enough of his emotions whenever his father put pressure on him to get it done to know he wasn't allowing himself to feel his own feelings. He put so much effort into resisting her that he had been hating himself for wanting her when it should have been the most natural thing in the world.

"Look, this is probably a good thing," I said, moving towards the other Heirs and smiling as they all picked lumps of cake from the table and ate it like savages. "Grus will be throwing them the fanciest fucking party you ever saw. She'll have done the whole thing and we don't have to worry about looking like we are showing them some kind of allegiance by having any responsibility for it. We just show up, get wasted, the girls have fun, everyone dances, job done."

"Sure," Darius agreed, abandoning the cake to the other two as he crossed the room to wash the icing from his hands. "I just want her to have a good birthday, that's all. Both of them. So long as someone has thrown them a party it doesn't matter who."

There was clearly more he wasn't saying and I moved over to stand beside him in the kitchenette as Seth and Caleb started wrestling over the remains of the cake, smothering each other's faces in icing and trying to force-feed each other.

"So, if it's not the party itself then what is it?" I asked, knocking my shoulder against his as he turned to look at me.

"It's just, her fucking birthday. And after we saw the place they were living in the mortal world, I'm willing to bet she never had parties or presents or any of the shit we take for granted and now I can't even give her a fucking kiss. I feel like she's mine, but she isn't at all. If she was my girl, I'd give her the damn world for her birthday. And now I have to just stand back and turn up at a party I was never even meant to be invited to and question myself over the gift I got her for the millionth goddamn time because it feels like a dick move to give it to her and an even bigger dick move not to and I just..." He shrugged helplessly, shaking his head as he moved away and tugged his shirt off, clearly planning to go for a fly to clear his head.

I sighed, not knowing what to say to him. I could tell him how much Tory cared about him because I could feel it every time she so much as glanced his way, but I didn't even know for sure if knowing that made him feel better or worse about everything at this point. I couldn't imagine the angst this Star Crossed bond was putting them through and now that she seemed to be coming to realise that she'd made the wrong choice it might even be worse.

My Atlas rang in my pocket and I answered it with a smirk as I spotted Geraldine's name on the caller ID.

"Hey, Gerry, you calling to ask me to be your date to the-"

"Quit the lothario act you bungling baboon! We have a code brown!"

"Someone shit themselves?"

"No, you nincompoop! Someone spilled the beans! Mildred Canopus has found out about the party and she was intent on ruining it until I was forced through the scallywagging tradition of blackmail to offer her an invitation

to the event. She plans on turning up and no doubt ruining everything with her mere presence. If she comes then Tory's night will be ruined at the very least and I can't bear it - I just can't bear it after all she's been through! And of course Darcy will be even more distraught if she has to suffer through it as well. This is worse than anything that has ever happened to me ever!"

"Alright, alright, calm down. No one is ruining Tory's birthday," I said calmly and Darius looked over his shoulder at me with a frown.

"Darn straight they're not! That bearded Dragon shall not cross my threshold tonight - do you hear me? I'm tasking you with this, Maxy boy. You will make sure she cannot attend, or I shall prune my own bush forevermore and never again let you water my lawn!"

"I was going to offer anywa-"

"You have been tasked!" She hung up on me and I frowned at my Atlas as if it was the one threatening my entrance pass to Lady Petunia.

"What's wrong?" Darius asked.

"Mildred is planning to crash the party," I explained. "I will officially have blue balls for the rest of time if I don't stop her from turning up."

"You do realise I can't even get hard unless I'm thinking about Roxy, right?" Darius growled. "As it stands, I'm officially dating my right hand for the rest of forever while picturing a girl I can't even touch without lightning trying to strike us down."

"Hopefully not while your dick is in your hand though," Seth teased as he moved to join the conversation with Caleb beside him. "Because that sounds painful."

"Hilarious," Darius deadpanned.

"Either way, it sounds like we need to make sure your fiancé doesn't make an appearance at your mate's party," Caleb said. He still had icing

smear up his left cheek from his wrestle with Seth. "I'm sure we can come up with a fun way to achieve that."

"I say we dig a big hole and bury her in it," Seth suggested before turning and licking the icing off of Caleb's cheek which earned him a half-hearted punch to the ribs.

"She's got earth magic too, genius, she'd just escape," I pointed out.

"I never said bury her *alive*," he said, waggling his eyebrows like an idiot.

"Well that would at least be an end to one of my problems," Darius joked and I laughed before I could stop myself. Poking fun at the shit storm which was his life always seemed like kind of a dick move, but I guessed if he didn't at least try and laugh about it he'd just sink further and further into depression.

"What's the real plan then?" Caleb asked. "How are we disabling Mildred? Because I'm pretty sure she won't stay trapped in her room again like that last time. I think she dug an emergency escape tunnel in case it happened again."

"Ice," I said with a grin. "We track her down, build a big old ice palace around her and reinforce it with all of our magic. Even her fire magic won't be enough to get her out of that and we can just disperse it again on our way home from the party and deny all knowledge of it ever happening."

"Imaging her teeth chattering with that underbite," Cal sniggered and Darius smiled cruelly.

"One ice palace for a wannabe princess coming up," he said with a deadly look in his dark eyes. "No one fucks with my girl on her birthday."

"This is so humiliating," Darius growled as Seth rubbed oil over his bare chest, covering his abs so that they gleamed in the midday sun while I tried my best not to laugh my fucking ass off.

"This is the price of success," Caleb disagreed, but I caught him taking photos on his Atlas with the aid of his Vampire speed every time Darius looked away and I was willing to bet that he'd be using them to taunt him with for the rest of time.

"Besides, girls fucking love it when they find a guy waiting for them on a rock with their shirt off. It's hot as fuck," I declared, folding my arms as Seth stepped back and we all inspected him.

"Says the Siren," Darius deadpanned. "Dragons don't sit on rocks. I feel like I'm posing for some kind of Siren porn shoot."

"Maybe that's why Washer just showed up?" Cal suggested with a grin. "He's come to lend you some of his teeny weeny speedos?"

"That had better be a joke," Darius growled but as he looked beyond us, he cursed and I turned to spot Washer striding up the path just as he rounded the corner behind us.

The creak, creak, creak of his skin tight leather pants soon reached us, explaining how Cal had known he was coming. I bit down on my laughter as he spotted Darius sitting on the rock beside the path and his eyes damn near bugged out of his face.

"Well, what do we have here, boys?" Washer called as he came to a halt beside us, his bare, sun baked chest gleaming with as much oil as Darius's. "Are you posing for another one of those sexy shoots in Zodiass Weekly? You know I kept the full page spread they did of the four of you a few months back. The one where you were all playing Pitball shirtless in those little shorts, wrestling in the mud and showing off your big, strong, sporting prowess..."

“You kept a bunch of shirtless pictures of your students?” Seth asked in disgust and Washer raised his hands innocently.

“Only to show support to our Pitball team of course. I couldn’t help but admire the way you aren’t afraid to get down and dirty while handling all of those temperamental balls,” he said, wagging his eyebrows at us.

“I’m pretty sure I’ve made it clear I’m not going to put up with this kind of shit from you,” Darius warned him.

“Woah, woah, hold your horses, cowboy. I’m your friend. I never did tell the FIB about you sneaking out of Orion’s house in the dead of night naked as the dawn. Even after his arrest made it clear that he’s had at least one other victim...”

Darius looked about ready to go full Dragon on him and I shook my head quickly, not needing the headache of him attacking a teacher with everything else we had going on right now. I focused my own gifts on Washer instead, using them to my advantage to get rid of him.

I could feel the lust coiling off of him and quickly countered his Siren gift with my own, sending him the most powerful feeling of disgust I could muster until he started gagging. I added to it by using my water magic to influence the contents of his stomach, making them swirl and writhe around and he squeaked in alarm before turning and running away back down the path.

"What did you just do to him?" Seth asked as he barked a laugh.

"Hopefully I made him feel disgust over that full page spread at the least," I said, wondering if we might be that lucky. Sirens like Washer fucked me off, always using their powers for personal gain and giving the rest of us a bad name. I didn't need to use my gifts to make anyone lust after me, that just came naturally because I was so damn hot and even if I wasn't, I wouldn't do that shit, it was fucked up.

"Can we get this over with?" Darius asked, huffing out a breath that told me being the bait in this trap wasn't his idea of fun.

"Have you finished on the foundations?" I asked him, looking at the space in front of his rock where he'd cast a thick layer of ice beneath the ground to form the bottom of our trap.

"Yeah," Darius confirmed. "I used half my magic on that fucker, it's four meters deep - no way she's burrowing through that with her amount of fire power."

"Perfect. Text her then and get her to come meet you, and make sure you keep her distracted while I build the rest of it," I warned. I was going to need a few minutes to construct the walls to Mildred's ice palace around her before they'd be strong enough to contain her and Seth was going to cloak my magic while I did it so that she didn't notice. No doubt we could force her into it if needs be, but it would work best if she didn't know anything about the trap until it was sprung.

As soon as I had the door ready to slam shut and lock her in, Cal was going to shoot forward and dose her with enough Order Suppressant to lock her Dragon down for twelve hours so that she wouldn't be able to shift or use her Dragon fire to break free until after the party was over. It was fool proof.

Seth quickly used earth magic to cover the ice on the ground and the three of us moved to hide in the bushes while Darius shot Mildred a text, asking her to come meet him.

We threw a silencing bubble up around us as we waited, giggling like a bunch of school girls as Darius kept scowling in our direction, all oiled up on that rock like a fucking wet dream.

Caleb took another picture of him and sent it to Tory with a happy birthday message and I laughed harder, knowing Darius would lose his shit

over that when he found out.

Mildred arrived faster than I'd expected, stomping up the path at top speed with her mismatched jaw hanging open and her tongue hanging out the side of her mouth.

"Schnookums!" she cried hurrying forward as she spotted Darius on the rock and I swear actual drool pooled from her protruding lower jaw.

"Hey...baby," Darius said, not really sounding in the least bit excited to see her as she moved to stand before him while he stayed up on the rock.

"Have you finally decided to stop pining over that mouthy toothpick of a Vega so that you can pack your sausage into a real woman?" she asked, shimmying her shoulders like that might tempt him down.

Seth and Caleb laid their hands on my shoulders as we all tried not to laugh too much while I began building the ice prison behind her, leaving the front of it open as they leant me their power to get the job done faster.

"Errr, I'm still holding out for our wedding night. You know I want our first time to be special..." Darius said, glancing our way and causing Mildred to make a move to look too. "But I think about it a lot," he added quickly, dragging her gaze back to him.

"I think it about it daily," Mildred replied as a breeze rustled through her moustache and she sucked her top lip into her mouth in a way that might have be intended to be seductive. "And I touch myself too."

"Holy shit," Darius cursed, looking like he would literally rather be anywhere else in the world right now as he tried to hide his horror. "I mean...err, what do you think about us...doing while you...do...*that*?"

"I know that you're a big, powerful man," Mildred said hungrily, taking a step closer to him. "But I like to think about pinning you down and making you take me the way I want it."

"I imagine that's the only way it would happen too," Darius said with a visible shudder which Mildred either ignored or convinced herself was from desire.

"I'll ride you like a hog at a barbecue," Mildred added.

"Is that a thing?" Darius asked, swallowing thickly, his jaw clenched like he was trying to hide a grimace.

"Oh yeah," Mildred confirmed just as I finished my icy masterpiece.

Caleb grinned as he grabbed a vial filled with coiling vapour from his pocket, looking at the Order Suppressant for a moment before shooting forward and appearing before Mildred in the blink of an eye. He opened the vial right beneath her nose and as she sucked in a breath to ask him what the fuck he was doing, she inhaled the lot, immobilising her Dragon within her flesh a moment before Caleb shoved her into the ice prison behind her.

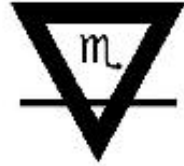
Mildred screamed as she stumbled back into it and I quickly threw the door closed with my magic and sealed the whole thing up tight.

Darius groaned as he lay back on the rock, laughing as Mildred's enraged shrieks echoed out to us from within the personalised igloo I'd just made her.

"I need a shower," he said, swiping a hand over his face. "And to bleach my ears out so that I can remove the description she just gave me of our wedding night. I swear to the stars, if I ever make it down the aisle, I want the three of you to kill me before she can drag me back to her bed."

"We'll find a way to fix it, brother," I promised him. "But in the meantime, let's make sure you look hot as fuck for Tory Vega tonight, yeah?"

Geraldine



I found the Vegas in the library with Diego and Sofia, their noses stuck in books and I came to a halt in front of their table with a shriek of horror.

"By Saturn's milky rings!" I gasped and the librarian hushed me from beyond the stacks. But by the light of the sun on a crisp winter morn, I couldn't let this stand. "It's the day of your birth! What has beholden you to spend even a single moment hard at work? You should be waited on hand and foot by every star in the heavens today." I whipped an accusing finger between Diego and Sofia as the Vegas shared a look which said I was overreacting. But tweak my begonia peaks, if anything I was *underreacting*, I half expected the moon herself to faint in her cushiony sky and plummet from the heavens. This was nothing short of a travesty. "You two bring shame on yourselves," I growled at Diego and Sofia. "Our queens deserve better than dusty books in their hands today. Especially when the stars know what kind of Fae have rubbed themselves up against those tomes in the stacks while getting their jollies off."

"Ew." Darcy frowned, placing her book down and inspecting her hands for evidence of such dalliances.

"Has someone in particular been getting their jollies off down in the stacks, Geraldine?" Tory asked, raising her eyebrows suggestively.

I puffed out my chest, twirling a lock of hair around my finger. "I may have commandeered a captain or two in my time in this establishment, boarding their ships like a slippery octopus from the seabed and taking them down into my dark waters."

They all laughed and I tittered along with them, finding myself relaxing a little. I focused on dear Darcy for a moment who always had pain hiding behind her eyes like a worm with the case of the woebegones these days. It broke my heart into a million pieces and it would never be whole again until her smile was true, but with Professor Orion gone and quite the scandal in his wake, I wasn't sure when or how or if it could be fixed. I only knew that I would stand resiliently at her side until the end of time and punish any naysayers who doubted her love for him and his for her.

My Lady Tory held quite the demons in her dillypurse too; those black rings in her eyes would always make my stomach roil with the power of a hurricane contained within a volcano. At least that rogue of a Dragon boy was making some effort now, trying to right his wrongs, but he had far more work to do if he was ever going to officially earn his way out of my book of pompous turdbiscuits. Gracious, my queens had been through the mill this year, it was the least I could do to throw them the hoohah of all hoohahs today.

"I must insist you all come with me this very moment to my dear Angelica's room who has your outfits awaiting you all," I announced, beaming brightly as I started tucking Diego's things into his bag for him.

"They said they didn't want a fuss today," Diego said with a pout. He was always a Dreary dragcat, but I saw a real twinkle of stardust in his eyes sometimes that said a trooper lived within him. I would make a fine A.S.S. member of him yet, he just needed a little confidence boost. Like my mother

always said, 'you can't pickle a pear in salty tears'. Oh my dear sweet ma-mar, she would have brought such joy to this day. She would have baked one of her famous fig and flowerberry flans and decorated it with a dusting of sugardots. She would have smiled brighter than the sun and found a way to make the Vega Twins hum with happiness hour after hour. I would channel her spirit and spread gaiety across the whole of Zodiac Academy to the best of my abilities in her name.

"We really want to keep things lowkey," Darcy said.

"Yeah, like beers and pizza lowkey," Tory agreed.

"Absolutely, the lowest of keys. Nothing higher than an A minor on a harpsichord. I cross my crutches and hope to fall down a pixie hole if I don't keep my word on that." Oh bundlebaps, they were going to be in for the surprise of their lives today, I would only lie to them on this one occasion as they would thank me for it profusely later. "Come along!"

I turned sharply and waved them after me, hearing them all follow as I marched them out of the library and into the warm breeze. Before I made it barely two thunderclaps down the pathway, a silver Pegasus landed his kaboose right in front of me and shifted into a strapping lad with dark and gold hair.

Tyler Corbin shook his hips so his quetzal sausage flapped against his thighs. Oh my he had a schlong of a tree-trunk down there!

"Tyler!" Sofia half laughed, half admonished as she rushed forward and grabbed some sweatpants out of her bag, tossing them to him.

"What's up, babycakes?" He planted a messy kiss on her mouth and she blushed before slapping him on the chest.

"I don't like you waving your dick at my friends, duh." She prodded him in the chest and he pulled on his sweatpants with a cheeky chap of a smirk.

"Join us or don't, Tyler, but we have places to be and joyous things to be doing." I hustled past him and he spun around to fall into line with a shrug,

wrapping an arm around Sofia's shoulders.

I led everyone to Aqua Lake where we took the tunnel beneath it and I marvelled at the fish swimming by beyond the glass walls. As I had both earth and water magic, I'd had the choice of inhabiting this wet and wonderful abode, but instead I had chosen the winding tunnels of Terra House beneath the hills of Earth Territory. It reminded me of the Caves of Mulakai which I had visited many times outside the city of Celestia with my pappy and mamar as a kiddliwink.

Tory cast water magic at the symbol above the door and we entered into Aqua House, passing through the common area where students were kipping and a-lounging. I led them down a long passage and knocked on the frosted glass door of Angelica's room. She popped it open and I gasped at the sight of her fiery red dress with huge frilly arms and bobbles hanging from the hem.

"You look as dazzling as a diamond on a dormouse, Angelica!" I hugged her tight and she stepped back to let us inside with a grin. Her desk had been cleared and filled with snacks of all varieties and some sparkling Gemini juice sat in a pitcher ready to be served. I hurried to pass out glasses and the Vegas sipped theirs before they spotted their dresses hanging from a railing beside Angelica's bed alongside the rest of our outfits which I'd had made especially for this occasion.

"They're not for us, right?" Tory asked, her eyes wide as she glanced at Darcy who looked like a turnip had just been stuffed through her Wendy door.

I giggled excitedly, hurrying over to them, taking the matching dresses from the rack, both as yellow as the sun to represent their star sign with the Gemini constellation stitched across the bodice in silver. The skirt was heavenly with miles of netting beneath it to make it swish and swoosh when they walked. The sleeves were ruffled and off the shoulder and that wasn't even the best part. I waved my hand to ignite the illusion I'd cast upon it and

the whole constellation lit up, twinkling in a multicolour rainbow as it cast patterns across the glass walls.

"Aren't they just the most breath-taking frocks you ever saw?" I turned to find the Vegas' faces pinched as they looked at them and Tyler snorted, whispering something in Sofia's ear that was no-doubt the highest of praise for this astonishing attire. He would no doubt be most pleased when he saw what I had in store for him, for I had ordered extra suits for all of our friends.

I handed the Vegas their dresses and they thanked me in mumbled awe.

"We're just seeing you guys tonight, aren't we?" Darcy asked.

"Absolutely!" I would never willingly lie to my queens were it not for the coming surprise party which would blow their socks from their royal toes and send them spinning up into the zodiac itself. I grabbed Sofia's dress from the rack, the powder pink material glittering all over; it was the same style as the Vegas' but the skirt was smaller and instead of a constellation it had A.S.S. printed over the breasts.

"Oh...wow," she said, her smile tight like she couldn't quite find the words to show her excitement at this wonderful gift.

"I can't wait to see you in that, baby," Tyler said, grinning at her.

"I hope you've got something for Tyler to wear, Geraldine," Sofia said with a smirk and I nodded keenly as Tyler's jaw dropped with what I had to assume was utter excitement.

"Does a whale wear a willy muff in the chilly waters of Wackerton?" I laughed, hurrying to the rack again, taking two suits from it, holding one toward Tyler and the other to Diego. They were starkly white like the sheets of a virgin, but the undershirts were gold and shimmery like a Pegasus horn. Over the breast pocket was the A.S.S. emblem also in gold, proudly gleaming in the light.

"You swear this is just a casual dinner for us lot, yeah?" Tyler asked as he took it. I hadn't told a few of the Vegas' closest friends about the party as I

feared their tongues would run away with them and spoil the surprise. And someone like Tyler was a rumour mill all on his own, he would have spouted the truth all over FaeBook four months ago when the first dove had delivered the first invite.

"As casual as a cranberry on a cornflake," I agreed, shooting him a wink when the Vegas weren't looking that made him frown. "Chop chop everyone, time to change. You can use the restrooms down the hall and Angelica has graciously offered hers to the Vegas."

"Yay," Tory said mock-enthusiastically, her dry wit always getting my kipper flipping.

I chuckled as they headed into the restroom then grabbed my own dress from the rack, the stunning apple green shade representing my humble and grounded nature. I was a steady tree which shaded my queens when the sun was too hot, who offered shelter in a rainstorm and who provided air to fill their royal lungs. I would be their sturdy and wise guidance, loyal and proud to the very core as I taught them the ways of old and prepared them for their ascension from princesses to Solarian queens.

I realised I was holding my hand against my heart as I stared wistfully at the bathroom door. I was often stolen away into a daze in their midst, their power, regal nature and utter class overwhelming me at times.

I stripped out of my clothes and pulled on my dress then Angelica clapped enthusiastically as I stood before her in it. Across my bosom was not just the A.S.S. emblem but the Vegas' birth date. It lit up in flashing lights as I twirled and the huge skirt twisted around my legs.

I took out my Atlas as I moved to the mirror to fix my hair and make-up for the party, texting my slippery salmon who was assisting me on the sly today.

Geraldine:

Is Mildred dealt with, you tantalising terrapin?

Maxy Boy:

She's all locked up, you sexy starfish.

I rolled my eyes, tsking at the insult. Why he would call me a starfish, I had no idea. Starfish were the devils of the sea with conniving little minds. A rule I lived by that had always done me well was this: if it had five legs then it wasn't a critter I wanted to fraternise with. No siree Bob.



An honest to the stars trained pigeon turned up at King's Hollow as the four of us were getting dressed with a goddamn tiny scroll tied to its leg and I watched as Cal caught the little bastard and untied it. It took a shit on the couch and then flew out of the window again at top speed.

"It is my honour to invite the four Celestial Heirs, Darius Acrux, Caleb Altair, Seth Capella and Max Rigel to attend the festivities taking place to mark the day of the birth of the two Princesses of Solaria, Roxanya (Tory) Vega and Gwendalina (Darcy) Vega, the two true Heirs to the Solarian throne," he read, glancing up at the rest of us with an arched brow.

"Is she out of her fucking mind sending us an invitation addressed like that?" Seth scoffed. "If she's addressed them all that way then we're going to end up beating the Vegas' asses on their birthday just to remind everyone who's in charge around here."

"No one's beating anyone's asses today," Darius growled in a warning tone.

"I'm more concerned about the fact that my girl put my name last," I ground out. *Surely I should be the first Heir that came to Geraldine's mind??*

"Maybe because she's not your girl and it's only your dick who wants to think she is," Darius joked and I would have ripped into him for it, but I guessed with the state of his love life, I could allow him a few digs at mine.

"Maybe I'll lock her down tonight," I said stubbornly. "No, scratch that. I *will* lock her down tonight."

The others smirked like they thought I didn't have a hope in hell of doing that and I growled at them to warn them off, letting some of my irritation spill out in my gifts so that they'd all feel it pushing against them and know I was serious.

"I think you've got some competition anyway," Cal said cautiously. "So you might wanna prepare yourself for that."

"Competition from who?" I scoffed. "No one is on a level with me aside from you four fuckers and unless one of you has got something to tell me, I'm not at all threatened by any other motherfucker."

"She's been down at the Fire Arena watching the twins when they practice a fair bit," Cal explained. "But the other day, they didn't show and she still came...to watch Justin Masters."

I rolled my eyes irritably and waved off that suggestion even as it made my blood boil.

"That tool is nothing more than a simpering sycophant whose family have been harping on about the royals way too much for my liking. He's just a power hungry piece of shit."

"With connections," Seth added.

"His family were pushing him to try and make a match with one of the Vegas," Darius put in. "He made several advances towards Roxy before I challenged him in Fire Elemental and made him eat sand in front of everyone then threatened to do it daily if he didn't back the fuck off of her."

So maybe he's after the next highest ranking Fae, and you have to admit, Grus would be it."

"You think he seriously expected to bag a Vega?" Seth asked while I tried to contain my outrage at the idea of that wet flannel moving in on my Grus.

"The twins aren't going to go for a political marriage anyway," Cal waved a hand dismissively. "They aren't that calculating. Although I guess Tory could decide to now that she knows she'll never..." He trailed off as he realised like a fucking idiot that he'd said that shit out loud and I caught a punch of Darius's emotional pain in the gut before he locked his walls up tight to block me out again.

Seth thumped Caleb in the arm and Cal had the good sense to apologise as Darius blew out a frustrated breath and looked out of the window with a shrug.

"Does it make me a complete piece of shit if I fully intend to run off any and every dude who so much as looks at her, let alone strikes up the idea of a political match? Even though I know that I'll be walking down the aisle myself the moment I graduate," Darius asked.

"Yeah," Seth said with a soft whimper. "It does make you a sack of shit. But I'll totally be there to watch you beat the fuck out of every single one of them."

We all laughed and Darius looked a little less hopeless for a minute before shaking his head. "If I really marry Mildred, I think that will be the end of it. Roxy will never speak to me again. If we can't find a way around this situation before then, I don't even know what I'll do. Sometimes I think I'd be better off to head to the Mortal Realm and never look back."

"It won't come to that, brother," I reassured him, even though I certainly couldn't make any promises like that. But we all knew he wouldn't actually

leave. Darius was too noble for that, despite what it might seem like to someone on the outside. He would always do whatever the best thing for Solaria was and he'd sacrifice anything, not least his own happiness to protect his brother too.

"What does the rest of the invite say?" Darius asked, not bothering to make pointless platitudes to us.

Caleb looked down at the fancy little scroll again and carried on reading. "Please confirm your attendance by placing a tear of joy on this page and follow the instructions to the main event."

"A tear of what?" Seth asked, snatching the invite from Caleb so that he could read it.

"Only Geraldine would believe that everyone invited to the twins' birthday party would be crying from happiness over it," Darius groaned as he cut a look at me.

"How the fuck has she put magic on here that recognises a tear of joy?" Seth asked as he tried holding the invite up to the light like he might be able to read the instructions through it if he just squinted hard enough.

"I don't see how she could have," I said as I thought it over. "I'm guessing it's looking for salt water."

I plucked the invite from Seth's fingers, strode over to the kitchenette and laid it down before pouring some salt from the shaker over it then casting a few drops of water from my fingertips.

The page shimmered and golden script revealed itself along the bottom of it.

Please arrive promptly on the south side of Aqua Lake, your invite is your ticket to get inside.

"I guess we'd better get going if we're going to help Gerry hide everyone," I said, grabbing my suit jacket and shrugging it on.

The others copied me, though Darius opted to forgo the jacket, remaining in his black dress shirt and slacks and looking just this side of don't-give-a-fuck as usual. No wonder he and Tory Vega were a match made in heaven. I bet she'd turn up to her damn coronation in a crop top and booty shorts if she ever did claim the throne. The two of them were so similar that I couldn't believe we hadn't figured out that they were meant for each other from the start.

We headed down to Aqua Lake and at first there was nothing to see to say there was a party taking place, but as we drew closer, a magical buzz in the air made my skin prickle. As we crossed the line of magic, the invitation I'd shoved into my pocket grew hot and when I pulled it out, the whole thing burst alight, turning to nothing but ash. The moment it fell apart, the illusion hiding the party venue from us shattered and I found myself staring at a palace built out of earth magic. And not just any Palace - Geraldine had created a perfect small scale Palace of Souls.

There was a wooden door leading inside through the centre of it, but all around that there were turrets and towers and bridges, all designed in miniature to look just like the home the Vegas should have grown up in. Geraldine had topped each of the towers with two silk flags, one Royal blue with the name Darcy in silver letters fluttering in the wind and the other black with Tory spelled out in gold.

My Atlas pinged in my pocket as we all just stared at the ridiculously impressive work of earth magic and I just knew that Geraldine had been working on this thing for months. If she showed the teachers it to gain extra credit, she'd likely take over at top of the class in Earth Elemental which would fuck Seth and Cal right off.

"I'm kind of understanding why Geraldine thought our attempts at a party were embarrassing when you compare it to this," Seth said as he tilted

his head back to take the whole thing in.

"Yeah, it was probably pretty dumb of us not to have realised she'd go all out for this," I said as we headed to the doors.

They opened magically and we stepped into a huge ballroom which had been decorated with countless images of the twins were carved into every wall, the floor, the ceiling. Their names were repeated everywhere over and over and over again. It was kinda creepy. Like a shrine or something.

"If I didn't know better, I'd think she was wet for the Vegas," Seth muttered as he looked around with his eyebrows raised.

In the centre of the room a small table was laid out, ready for an intimate meal for seven - the Vegas and their besties.

"Holy shit - she made their chairs into replicas of the Solarian throne," Cal pointed out and as I looked at the two chairs sat at the head of the table, I realised he was right.

"Are we just going to allow that?" Seth asked, his fingers twitching like he was aching to unleash his earth magic on them to change their appearance.

"It's just a chair," Darius muttered, shrugging a shoulder. "If we start fucking with Geraldine's decorations she'll throw a fit and try to kick us out and then we will either have to leave or make a fuss which could descend into a fight. That doesn't really seem like the best way to make sure they enjoy their party."

"*Just* a chair?" I asked in astonishment. "That throne is the whole reason we're at war with them. We're all waiting for the day when we can sit our asses on the throne and you call it *just a chair*?"

"I already have sat my ass on it. Do you think that makes me more powerful than you now?" Darius asked, his voice teasing.

"When?" Seth gasped, his eyes widening and jealously scrawled over his features.

"When we were at the palace for Christmas. I left the party and went to sit in it and pout over Roxy."

"You're lucky she didn't find you there," I joked, shaking my head at the audacity of him. "Who the fuck just goes and sits in a throne like it doesn't mean a goddamn thing?"

"Actually, I'm lucky she did find me there," he said, smirking at us and my mouth popped open at the taste of lust which escape him.

Before I could demand more information on that bucket of what-the-fuck, the doors opened behind us again and the rest of Geraldine's specially selected guests all poured in. We'd been given our instructions, so we began directing them all to stand around the sides of the room and I quickly noticed that every single person here was sporting one of those dumb A.S.S. badges. We were officially standing in the ranks of the enemy.

Once everyone had made it inside, the four of us used the combined might of our magic to cast a thick layer of concealment and illusion spells alongside a silencing bubble to hide everyone from sight, before moving to wait along the back wall for Geraldine to appear with the twins.

Darius leaned against the wall beside me and folded his arms as he watched the entrance like a hawk. I wondered if he'd just decided to accept the way he felt about Tory now, if he was completely finished with all the bullshit that his father had pushed on him or that he'd felt he had to do for the sake of Solaria and was just done with all of it. It certainly seemed like it. He didn't even really try to hide his feelings for her in public anymore or play up to the bullshit with Mildred. I just hoped that we really could find a way to get them a second shot at this, because I wasn't sure how I could

spend my entire life feeling the ache of pain coming from him, knowing he'd never once been truly happy in his lifetime.

The doors finally swung open as Geraldine pranced into the room shouting *ta-da!* and the Vegas followed her in with their two little friends close behind them, the Pegasus girl, that twat Tyler Corbin who was always making Faebook posts about us, the Dragon girl and the hat kid.

The two of them were dressed in huge puffy yellow dresses with the Gemini constellations lit up on the front and I couldn't help but laugh at the sight of them. Seth had to clutch his gut to stop himself from howling and Darius smirked as his gaze raked over Tory in what was clearly a Geraldine special.

"Wow, Geraldine, this is so sweet," Darcy said, looking around at the countless images of herself on the walls without noticing any of the Fae we were concealing around the room. The emotions coming off of her were more like shock and embarrassment as she stared at the huge images of her own face, but she hid it fairly well for Geraldine's sake.

"Shit, I don't think there are this many photographs of me in existence, let alone ten foot tall carvings of my face," Tory added in a dry tone as she looked about too, making less effort to hide her reaction.

I snorted a laugh as Geraldine either completely missed the horror they were feeling at the sight of such over the top decorations dedicated to them or chose to ignore the truth. We were under strict instructions to wait until they were seated before revealing everyone and all leaping out to shout *surprise*, so we waited while they talked amongst themselves.

"Poppycock," Geraldine chastised as the others all opted to stay silent as they looked around at the crazy ass decorations. "There are countless images of you in circulation online, if you were only to search yourself you would see. Many are beautiful candid shots taken without your knowledge,

capturing the essence of your soul in a stunning and captivating way. There are hundreds of chat rooms dedicated to praising your beauty and lamenting the luckiness of any gentlefae who may capture your hearts in the future."

Darcy pulled a disgusted face at that suggestion, her heartbreak over Orion hitting me like a gut punch and Tory made a horrified sound.

"I don't think I'm suited to a gentlefae," she said with a shudder. "Tall, dark and devastating seems to be my kryptonite."

I glanced at Darius as the edge of a smile touched his lips at her words, but it fell off again as she went on.

"Of course, I've only ever desired things that are bad for me. I'm clearly a masochist or something because I'm incapable of choosing a guy who isn't looking to destroy me. Maybe I was always destined to be star-crossed, it's probably fair enough anyway."

"Why-ever would you say such a thing, my lady?" Geraldine gasped as she stared at Tory in horror.

"Because I'm a hateful bitch who believed no one could ever love me for so long that I ended up making it come true." Her words were hard, but she didn't have her mental shields up and I could feel the truth of them. She was just as broken up over all of this as Darius, wracked with guilt over her part in what had happened to them and carrying a healthy dose of self-loathing too. Tory had one of the hardest masks I'd ever seen covering up her emotions at all times and I couldn't help but think about that shitty apartment they'd been living in in the mortal realm as I thought about that. I doubted we'd ever really understand the things they'd been through in their upbringing.

Hat boy and the others took their spots at the table quietly, glancing around at the walls and exchanging glances with each other as they seemed to be trying not to laugh as they stayed pretty silent through the whole

conversation. They were all dressed in similar insane outfits and they looked a bit like a bunch of clowns putting on a show. My girl sure had some crazy tastes.

Darcy took her sister's hand and squeezed her fingers for a moment, clearly knowing that Tory was just putting up a front and Tory offered her a soft smile that made my heart ache. In that moment, I couldn't see the two returned princesses who had come looking to steal our throne from us. I could just see two sisters who were united in their heartache, putting on a show for their friend as they indulged in this party for her sake and not theirs.

"Is she really as miserable as she looks right now?" Darius asked me in a low tone and I shrugged because I couldn't exactly deny it.

"A lot of people don't like birthdays," I said, trying to lessen the sting of the truth, but his jaw just tightened in response. He blamed himself for everything she was going through and there wasn't anything that any of us could say to make him change his mind on that.

"Why is Dean even here?" he asked, scowling at hat boy. "I don't understand why they let him hang around them all the time. He's one of the lowest ranking Fae in their class."

"Jealous much?" Seth teased from his other side and Darius just scowled deeper.

"As if I'd be threatened by someone like him. I just don't get the way they do things. Everyone else in this place chooses their friends based on power at least partly. But they act like it doesn't matter at all. Darren shouldn't even be on their radar."

"Thanks so much for putting this together, Geraldine," Darcy said, changing the subject as they headed for their chairs at the table. "It's perfect. When you first said about us celebrating I had the horrible feeling that you

might have organised some huge party or something with every other Fae in the academy lurking around and expecting us to put on a show. And after everything that's gone on recently since Orion went to prison, I can't think of anything worse than enduring the stares tonight."

"Yeah, thank fuck for small miracles," Tory added. "I'm surprised you were able to rein yourself in, but I really don't think I could have dealt with a massive party. Not with all eyes on us. I swear, my whole life revolves around people staring at us for one reason or another recently and I can't think of anything better than just hanging out with you guys tonight."

"Well, this is awkward," Cal muttered and my heart twisted for Geraldine as she looked around the room with barely concealed panic, knowing that there were hundreds of Fae waiting to leap out and shout *surprise* at any moment.

"Can you imagine having to endure a night with the Heirs?" Darcy groaned. "I mean, they might have been a little less abrasive recently, but I swear being around them is just exhausting. Everything's a competition or a power play."

"Or a dick measuring contest," Tory added with a smirk.

"Oh, well, they can certainly be a bunch of bothersome barracudas," Geraldine said, eyes wild with panic like she was trying to figure out some way to yell abort mission without them noticing. "But I do think their intentions are purifying. They seem to want peace and of course, the stars intended Darius for you, my Lady Tory, so he must have some redeeming qualities."

"One or two," Tory conceded with a smirk.

"Please don't say it's his dick," Hat Boy groaned. "I hear way too much about other guys' dicks hanging out with you lot. I need to have more dude friends."

"So you can discuss vag instead?" Tory teased.

"Or boobs?" Darcy added.

"Not while I'm here, please," the little blonde chick groaned and hat boy's cheeks coloured pink with embarrassment.

"Don't you want us discussing your perfect nips over dinner then, baby?" Tyler asked her, drawing a laugh from the others while the hat kid blushed.

"Point is, we really appreciate the fact that you didn't make some great big, crazy fuss out of our birthday, Geraldine," Tory said as she pulled out her chair. "Because that would have been torturous as fuck."

Darcy laughed as the two of them took their seats and I glanced at the other Heirs who shrugged before we worked together to disperse the magic hiding all of us.

The cry of *surprise* from the crowd was a little lacking in enthusiasm and I couldn't help but laugh as the twins flinched in shock, their lips parting as they realised they'd just said all of that in front of everyone and Geraldine looked like she might just burst into tears.

Tory recovered the fastest, laughing loudly and elbowing Darcy to get her to join in too.

"Got you!" she said loudly, pointing at Geraldine. "You didn't really think you could get away with planning a surprise party without us finding out, did you?"

"Oh...err...yeah," Darcy added quickly. "You totally fell for all that shit we just said, didn't you?"

Geraldine stared between them in confusion, clearly unsure as to the truth and I strode over to help, throwing my arms around the twins' shoulders as I grinned widely.

"Good one, girls, you should have seen Gerry's face. You totally fell for it." I laughed and my smile widened as Geraldine finally fell for the lie, her face splitting into a wide grin.

"Oh, you naughty girls! You had me all of a fluster for a moment there! I thought that I might have spent the last six months working into the small hours planning this only to have gotten it horrifically wrong! But of course, you want to shake your booties on the dance floor with all of your loyal A.S.S. friends. And tonight shall be the most jolly of festivities!" She ran off into the crowd and a moment later music started up from a live band who she'd had concealed on a stage to the side of the room.

Darcy shoved my arm off of her and sighed. "Thanks for covering for us," she muttered.

"Yeah, maybe I won't warn her away from tangling with your tentacles tonight," Tory joked, leaning against me for a moment as I siphoned some of the heartache out of her with my gifts. It was the first time she'd willingly let me do it and she gave me a knowing smirk before using her Phoenix fire to cut me off again and stepping out from under my arm. "But if you or your little buddies say a single word about the ugly ass dresses we're wearing or anything else to piss us off, I'll make sure to tell her you've got manticrabs and you made me cry on my birthday and you'll never get near her lady bush again."

I laughed loudly as I looked down at the layers of yellow chiffon which she was swathed in and tried to squash all traces of amusement from my features.

"I wouldn't dream of it. The two of you look fucking...unbelievable," I said with a smirk that let them know that wasn't exactly a compliment and Tory laughed as she caught Darcy's arm and tugged her away towards the bar.

"We need to be drunk if we're going to survive this," she muttered and Darcy laughed without humour.

"Maybe I can find a corner to hide in."

"Good luck finding one that doesn't have your face carved into the wall," I joked and she groaned as I followed them over to the bar where the other Heirs were already ordering drinks.

Tory pushed her way between Seth and Darius, tugging Darcy in next to Seth and looking up at the man who should have been her mate.

"Happy birthday," Darius said to her, drinking in the sight of her even in that ugly fucking dress. "Sorry you have to endure my company."

Tory laughed unashamedly and Darcy smirked, not caring about us hearing what she'd said either.

"Prove us wrong for thinking that then, Dragon boy," Tory teased. "Maybe I'll even let you dance with me."

Darius was practically fucking glowing with her undivided attention on him and I smiled to myself about it as I accepted a shot from Caleb and downed it.

"I'm not sure I can face dancing," Darcy groaned as the bartender began lining up shots in front of her. "Certainly not until I'm a lot more drunk. Maybe I should just get wasted."

"I'll get drunk with you, babe, no problem at all," Seth offered with a wolfish grin.

"Why don't you give Tory her present, Darius?" I suggested, smirking at him as he glared at me for bringing that up. But I could tell he was going to put it off and I wanted to feel her emotions when he gave it to her.

"You got me a present?" she asked curiously, looking up at him as she bit her lip and waited.

"I got you both one," he replied, pulling two little boxes from his pocket and handing them to the twins. "As it's both of your birthdays."

"Way to make the rest of us look like dicks," Cal said, shaking his head.

Darcy looked more than a little surprised as she accepted hers, glancing at Tory before opening it. Inside the box was a platinum charm bracelet with seven charms on it. One for each of the elements they possessed, air, fire, earth and water, another with the Gemini symbol on it, a letter G and an R.

"You had to go for Gwenadlina and Roxanya, didn't you?" Darcy teased as she inspected it. "You couldn't just let that slide?"

"Not a chance," Darius replied with a smirk. "Unless you'd rather I call you shrew? That's always an option."

"No thanks, but just for that, I'm going to buy little crown charms to go with them. Seeing as we're going for total accuracy here, it only makes sense to point out the fact that we're princesses too," Darcy said, offering him an insolent look.

Tory laughed as she opened her own box and lifted a matching bracelet from the little cushion inside it. The only difference to this was the Dragon charm carved entirely out of rose quartz which shone pink beside the letter R. She stared at it for long enough to make it clear that she understood the meaning of the rose quartz. Darius was telling her that he belonged to her and that he wanted her to belong to him in return. Even if the stars wouldn't allow that in a physical sense.

It hurt me to look at it, let alone the mixture of emotions I could feel coming off of the two of them.

"Thank you," Tory murmured, letting Darius place it on her wrist as she watched him intently.

He bent low to fix it in place, putting his face close to hers and the moment he'd clasped it around her wrist, she leaned forward and brushed her lips over his.

A deep rumble resounded through the entire building as an earthquake rocked the ground beneath our feet and she pulled back again quickly, grabbing a shot and draining it with her eyes on Darius the entire time. He looked like he was fighting against the urge to drag her into his arms with everything he had as he watched her too, his fists clenched at his sides.

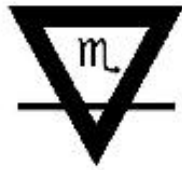
She took another drink with her as she backed away from us, letting the crowd swallow her and putting distance between them so that the ground fell still again and Darius sighed.

"We'll find a way," I promised him, not for the first time and he just shrugged in that way that let me know he still didn't really believe me, but I knew he was hoping that somehow it would come true.

"Come on, I'll find Gerry and we can all dance in a group. The stars might not even notice if the two of you start grinding up against each other if we're all together."

Darius blew out a laugh and I grinned at him as I led the way out onto the dance floor. I didn't even care if we were trying to defy the stars themselves with this plan. Because for the first time in my life, I found myself not wanting to bend to the will of the heavens or the hand of fate. I wanted to rewrite the stars for my brother and if that just so happened to mean I got closer to Gerry at the same time then I certainly wasn't going to be complaining about it.

Geraldine



The party was in full swing and everyone was having a rambunctious time. I couldn't wait to unveil my next surprise, the Vegas had already been showered in Pegasus glitter after the whole of Sofia's herd had done an impromptu flying routine around the banquet hall, driving everyone to scream for an encore. The gift table I'd created out of earth magic was near buckling under the weight of the presents and I'd had to reinforce it thrice since the party had started.

I dipped my hips and swooshed my toosh as the band played a lively beat. I guffawed as my Lady Tory ground up against Darius Acrux while Maxy boy and Caleb danced with them to ensure the stars didn't get a bee in their bonnet about it. Tyler twirled Sofia around by one hand and even Diego was spinning the top as Angelica taught him the vamba-von-Vega jive. We had spent several long evenings at our A.S.S. meetings perfecting that particular dance routine and I was about to stomp my leftie and roll my crummet to join in when I realised my Lady Darcy wasn't among the crowd. I stood as still as pumpernickel in a pie base, hunting for her, desperate to

see her lips pulled into a smile somewhere about the room. But I couldn't catch sight of her.

Oh quails eggs, this cannot be, where has my queen got to!?

I pushed through the crowd, shrieking at Justin Master's as he tried to catch my hand and pull me into the bindy hop. "Later, you handsome hatfork! I cannot waste a moment right now!"

I ran on, making it to the gift table, but she wasn't there, then the buffet, but alas, she wasn't there either.

I spotted that menace of a Werewolf Seth Capella heading out of the room into the stairway that led up to the veranda. I darted after him, fearing that he had done some terrible thing to my queen once more. He may have shown a little more decorum in the past few months but by Jupiter's sunspot, I didn't trust that hound as far as I could throw him.

I raced after him into the stairwell, chasing him up to the balcony and a flash of blue hair caught my gaze just beyond him,

"Stop ye devil hound!" I screamed and Seth whipped around the same moment Darcy did at the edge of the balcony. I panted as I raised my hands at him, casting a vine to wrap between my legs and bind my skirt into pantaloons so I could manoeuvre more easily in a fight.

"What's going on?" Darcy asked in alarm.

"This pest of a poodle was sneaking up on you to do some dastardly deed! I see you Seth Capella and I challenge you to a duel!" I cried, casting another vine to whip around and tie my hair up into a firm knot. Oh, what barbarous things I could do to this terrible terrier, this lamentable Labrador, this heinous husky.

"I was not," Seth barked. "I just came here to talk to Darcy. *Alone* if you don't mind."

"I do mind! I mind as much as a tomato minds when it is denounced as a vegetable even though it is clearly a fruit!"

"No offence, but are you on something? Because I wanna try it." Seth smirked that smirk which made all kinds of sinful things happening to girls. My Lady Petunia wasn't immune to his charm, but by the big dipper, I would not be lured into his Faetrap.

"I have never taken a potion or lotion in my life, nor have I ever had the notion," I gasped in offence.

"Is everything okay, Geraldine?" Darcy asked as Seth opened his mouth to retort once more. He needed a few spoonfuls of marmalade stuffed into an orifice or two to teach him not to talk back to a lady. He had absolutely no grace.

"No my sweet Darcy!" I bewailed. "For you are up here alone on your birthday."

"Oh," she breathed, her cheeks colouring a little as she glanced between me and the ragamuffin mutt. She sighed, her shoulders dropping. "I'm sorry, I'll come back in soon I just needed some air." She smiled but there was no true happiness in it and that was enough to make me fall down to my knees and sob loudly to the sky.

"Oh my lady, what can I do to bring a smile to your lips? Shall I ask my aunt to give that saucy professor a whip and a whack the next time he is admitted to her care in the healing rooms of Darkmore Pen-"

"What?" she gasped, horror lacing her features. "He's been hurt?"

"Oh multiple times my lady, it is the way of such a place. My aunt tells me all kinds of tales of that ghastly dungeon. Your dear Orion is lucky he has only received broken bones, she tells me stories of punctured flesh and oozing wounds and buttoles placed on foreheads, and toenails ripped from-"

"You're not helping," Seth cut over me and I looked to Darcy before I decided to throw him from this very balcony, finding that I had perhaps let my mouth run away with me.

Her lower lip quivered then she straightened her spine and held back her emotions. "I'm so angry at him and then I remember he's in hell and some part of me wants to forgive what he did. But I can't, I just can't. And what does it matter anyway? He's stuck in there and refuses any help I can give him with an appeal, I can't stand it." She turned to face the view, leaning on the balcony railing and I dissolved the vines holding up my hair and binding my dress to my legs as I walked over to her. Seth moved to her other side and laid a hand on her back.

"Fate is a funny friend and a heartless enemy," I told her. "I don't know what your future holds, my lady, but I am sure it is something marvellous. How could it not be?"

"Thanks Geraldine," she murmured, giving me a grateful smile.

"When he gets out in twenty years, I'll punch him in the face," Seth offered. "He fucking hates me so it'd be extra humiliating."

Darcy breathed a laugh. "When he gets out in twenty years, I'll punch him in the face myself." She tried to joke but *oh* her eyes were lacking light and it broke me into a million tiny pieces.

"Darcy?" Tory's voice came from behind us and I turned to find her walking up the stairs. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, don't worry about me. Enjoy the party, Tor. All of you," Darcy replied earnestly as she turned to her sister.

"It's not a party without you," Tory said with a frown. "Do you want to go back to my room?"

Panic danced through me as I looked to Lady Darcy and I knew I needed to act fast. I had to brighten her face, I had to see my wondrous queen laugh

and enjoy her birthday. I acted on instinct alone, throwing out my hand and casting an illusion over Seth Capella, turning him into a six foot turnip with beady eyes and a tiny mouth. Then I slapped him across his turnip face and he yelped in surprise.

"What the fuck?" said the turnip and Darcy and Tory burst into hysterics.

"I fucking love you, Geraldine," Tory snorted, clutching her side as Seth's tiny turnip eyes wheeled towards her.

He looked down at himself and saw my illusion, his pouty turnip lips cracking into a grin. "Nice magic, Grus. Doesn't rival an Heir's though." He threw out a hand and I wailed as his magic fell over me, expecting an attack, but instead the trickling coolness of an illusion ran over my flesh. Darcy laughed harder and the sound was music to my ears as I looked down to find the cheeky chihuahua had turned me into a giant buttery bagel.

"Oh butter me right side up, I am quite the baked good, aren't I?" I joked.

Seth roared a laugh and my sides ached as I chortled along with everyone else. Darcy caught my hand and Seth dispelled the illusion the same moment I removed the one from him.

"Come on, let's go dance," Darcy said with a genuine smile and my heart lifted like a Harpy in an updraft. She grabbed Tory's hand too and Seth bounded ahead of us just as Caleb appeared jogging up the stairs.

"What's going on?" Caleb asked and Seth shoved him into the nearest wall.

"We're racing that's what! Last one to the dance floor has to bare their ass to the whole ASS club!" Seth cried and Caleb barked a laugh as he tore after him with a burst of Vampire speed.

"You will do no such thing! I will turn your hineys to stone if you dare!" I shouted after them, breaking away from my queens as I took chase.

I made it into the banquet hall but lost sight of them amongst the crowd and I pouted as I gave up. They would severely regret it if they showed even a glint of a butt crack at this party.

"Geraldine, it's time for the cake unveiling." Justin came running over and I practically bounded toward him in excitement.

I waved Tory and Darcy over to follow and hurried to the front of the room where a concealment spell hid a table with the queens' cakes. I'd spent hours baking them and carving them perfectly into the most special birthday cakes of all time.

"May I have your attention!" I cried as the band finished a song and the crowd turned to face me, Tory and Darcy. "Firstly, I must thank you all for making this event the most glorious of celebrations for our queens! And now...a surprise."

Tory and Darcy glanced between each other, looking positively desperate to see what I had in store for them.

I waved a hand and broke the concealment spell to unveil the two cakes standing high up on the table, each one over five foot tall and made in the image of our queens. Darcy's cake had flowing blue hair and each layer was swathed in yellow just like the dress she wore now. Tory's was the same but her hair was dark and I had even fashioned the ruby necklace around her throat from frosting.

"Oh my god," Darcy breathed, her jaw slack.

Tory just stared, clearly speechless at my most magnificent creation. Some people started clapping, while others just gaped and a few laughed, their jubilation obviously overflowing at the sight of this true wonder of the world.

I took the huge knife waiting for me on the table and sliced out a piece of Tory's cake and a piece of Darcy's, plating them up and handing them to

their respective queens.

"It's really something, Geraldine," Darcy said as she eyed the blueberry sauce at the middle of her piece and I beamed with pride.

"Oh wow! The moon is really bright tonight!" Caleb's voice carried to me and I found him pointing to something across the room with an exaggerated look of awe on his face.

A wail escaped me as I spotted Seth Capella up on the banquet table with his trousers around his thighs as he waved his naked buttocks at the whole room.

"Truffling trifles!" I screamed, pushing through the crowd as I tried to get close enough to cast his round and muscular rump into stone as promised. My heart was all of a shudder as panic ran through me and as I made it closer, I lifted my hand to take out my fury on his hindquarters. Someone crashed into me, wrapping me in his arms and the music started up again as I found myself being twirled around the room by a pernicious plankton.

"I must avenge my queens, Maxy boy!" I tried to fight my way out of his arms, but he held on tight, chuckling low in his throat and making my grass stalks quiver.

"He's stopped now," he purred and I glanced over at the banquet table to find Seth had indeed put his comely kiester away. "Relax, Gerry."

His words were sinful and twisty turned through me like an eel caught in a net. "Oh, well perhaps a little frolic around the floor for a moment..."

He grabbed my hips, grinding me against his crotch and I felt his codpiece keenly pressing into me. Dapper daisies! My Lady Petunia was blooming for this banded coral shrimp already. The libidinous Venus was in my chart tonight and oh boy I didn't think I was strong enough to defy her wiley ways. And I didn't want to either.

I grabbed his shirt in my fists and growled against his mouth, "If you're barnacle enough then come and follow me and show me how well your haddock can do the ocean jive."

"I dunno what the fuck that means, but I'm in," he purred seductively, his voice like a trout in a sea storm. I shoved away from him, racing into the crowd and running into a corridor that was lined with portraits of my ladies. I hurried along to the next room, not wanting to be watched by my queens while I twisted the fishes with Maxy boy.

I slipped through to the back rooms I'd created and made it into the perfect replica of the garden courtyard to the east of the Palace of Souls. Hanging flowers ran down from a balcony that ringed the square space and windy little paths led between glittering flowers. I hurried through them to the circular stone table at the heart of the garden and sat on its edge as I waited for my lusty lionfish to arrive.

It wasn't long before he stepped into the space with a heathenous look in his eyes that had my knickers a-blazing.

"How the fuck am I going to get under all that hideous silk?" he growled with a challenge in his voice as he eyed my dress.

"Hideous?" I gasped. "How dare you insult this gown the colour of a fallen apple in the grass as the dappled light hits its-" He kissed me and I gasped as his tongue sank into my mouth. I shoved him back with a cry of outrage, slapping him across the cheek, but by my goats, I was under his spell and there was nothing to be done.

He smirked at me in the way that rogue's always did and I found myself biting down on my lip like it was a succulent sausage between my teeth.

"Do you like being rough with me, Gerry?" He gripped my hips, sliding my bottom further back across the table as he stepped between my thighs.

My skirt gave him very little room to manoeuvre, but if he wanted to reach my lady garden then he would have to work for it.

"I don't like anything about you, you tricksome- oh!-" he kissed the seashell of my ear, "-devious -oh!-" he kissed my neck, "-villainous -oh!-" he kissed my collar bone, "Sea dog."

He chuckled, tugging at the collar of my marvellous frock and freeing one of my perky duchesses before running his devilsome tongue over my rosy berry.

"Pikes in a powder house," I gasped as Lady Petunia begged to be attended to.

Maxy boy started pulling at my skirt, dragging it up and up as he tried to find his way beneath it, snarling his frustration. "By the fucking stars, where are you under all of this?"

"Oh I'm in there you despicable king crab, you shall have to seek me out like you're lamping for jellyfish in the dark," I panted and he dropped to his knees, gripping my legs beneath my skirt and lifting them so I rested my heels on his shoulders. He started wading through the material and I cursed colourfully as he finally found bare skin, his tongue running along my inner thigh. "Forklifts on a first class flight to Fallington. Take me to the eastern peaks and show me your mountain cap!"

He dragged my panties aside and his hot sand dollar landed right on my throbbing rose bud. "Apple crumble on Christmas morning!" I gasped as he gave me a good shrubbing. "Take me to the little dipper and up to the north star." His wet whiptail moved faster, making me scream in delight. "Oh bareback dolphins in a sea storm! Yes yes yes!" My head fell back as he sent me into the ever-after and a hurricane took me into its grasp and flung me into the abyss.

This seabass was admittedly the best of its kind, I hadn't roiled in the sky like that with any other. But I would never tell him that or he would become the most bothersome of barracudas.

"Lean back," he instructed and I did so, watching as he freed his seatrout from his pants and pushed my skirt up to bunch over my waist. "I'm gonna blow your cockles off, Gerry."

"Damn you, you sexy sea urchin. Why don't you button your succulent lips and show me what your sea cucumber can do."

Max drove his swordfish into my watering hole and I cried out as he pushed me firmly down beneath him. This pilchard liked to dominate me but oh-ho I wouldn't stand for such governing. I found his nefarious nipples through his shirt and twisted sharply, making him snarl in anger.

"You felonious fin whale, how dare thee try and keep a lady in the economy lounge!" I yelled.

"Just submit and you might enjoy it," he laughed, thrusting himself harder inside me like a giant woodpecker in a rage.

"Coral on a cripsy ryebread," I gasped, his powerful sea turtle having me quivering needily. "Oh sparkly spatulas in a strudel! Strudel me! Strudel me!"

"Am I strudelling?" Max panted and I nodded in affirmation, grasping his neck as I brought him down to wet my whistle. His kisses were roguish and wrong, but they really brought out the she-devil in me.

He upped his pace as he held me down and I gave in to his demands for once and howled like a monkey in a brawl. "I'm over the hill and far away! We're going to land in the willow fronds, let it go Maxy boy, let it gooo!"

"Fuck," he cursed like a sailor and it sent me into the Mulberry Bush as he really did blow my cockles off and I collapsed beneath him like a squid

cast ashore. Maxy boy groaned as he pounded the flounder and filled me with his octopus ink.

"My oh my, Captain Hook really found the Lost Boys today, didn't he?" I laughed and Max rested his weight on me as he laughed.

"He sure shoved his hook in Wendy," he said, as if that made any sense at all.

"You are quite the cuttlefish, Maxy boy." I clapped his cheek. "But at least you know how to sow the seeds of the laurel tree."



I was just the wrong side of tipsy. Not drunk but like, swoony. Was swoony a word? I looked at Gerry as she hopped up and down to a sinful bass and decided it was. I was swoony for her. Not that I was gonna start saying dumb shit like that out loud, but yeah. Swoony.

"Avast!" Geraldine cried, pointing across the room and taking off at high speed, leaving me to chase after her or get left behind. I'd never chased any other girl before, but you could bet your ass I chased her.

She slipped between dancing bodies and I lost sight of her somehow, getting turned around in a crowd of Ass idiots before spilling back out of them at the far side of the room.

I looked all around for her and frowned as I failed to spot her for a moment, but then the sound of her voice drew my attention to the bar.

"Good golly, I like the sound of that! I think my bouncing Brendas would look ever so fetching with one of my ladies on each of them, looking like kind gentlefae sitting atop a mountain each and looking down over all the world."

I shoved a few pricks aside and found the bar, leaning over it until I spotted Geraldine with two Fae I vaguely knew from senior year. The guy,

who I was fairly sure was called Chris, was just finishing up a tattoo on the girl's arm which read A.S.S. for life. Crazy fuckers.

"Right here atop my bosoms!" Geraldine announced, tugging her dress down so that her tits almost spilled out of it. "The left shall be adorned with the fair and beauteous face and bright blue majestic hair of my lady Darcy. And the right shall be the serenely regal and utterly captivating image of my lady Tory."

"No fucking way," I snarled as I realised what she was asking for. "You are not vandalising your tits with the faces of the fucking Vegas."

"You will not admonish me you overgrown sea urchin!" she cried like she hadn't just been panting my name a minute ago and I was nothing more than a bother to her grand plans of getting tit tats.

"And you will not get a drunken tattoo of your friends' faces on your breasts!" I shouted, hopping over the bar and fully meaning to wrestle her away from that tattoo gun if I had to. "Do you seriously want to know that every time you're having sex, the person you're with is looking at pictures of your friends bouncing about? Because I sure as hell don't want to be looking at them when I'm with you."

"Firstly, I would hope that everyone thinks of the beauty of the Vegas while getting down and dirty, they deserve to be the image in every Fae's mind when their bodies are brought to ruin. Secondly, you, *sir*, shall not assume to bury your tuna in my basket ever again! No accord has been struck between you and Lady Petunia and she has no intention to make one."

I gave up trying to reason with her and rounded on Chris and his tattoo gun. "Leave this party right now and don't even think about coming back here and placing so much as a dot of ink on those perfect tits or I'll destroy you in every way known to Fae."

The dude didn't put up an argument, just grabbed his shit and ran.

"How dare you come over here, carping on at me like a bossy seabass, telling me what I can or cannot scrawl across my own bouncing begonias when you know full well that if you were to get the other Heirs' faces tattooed on your long Sherman I wouldn't so much as bat a-"

Geraldine's enraged rant was cut short by the sound of a loud bang from outside and she gasped in horror as she looked around to find the party had emptied out and there was no one left in the ballroom.

"Oh for the love of the deep and briney sea! We're missing it!" Geraldine shrieked as she charged straight at me, snatching my hand and damn near yanking me off of my feet as she dragged me towards the exit and I was forced to run to keep up.

We sprinted outside where a crowd had gathered and Geraldine bulldozed her way through everyone as she raced to find the Vegas.

Fireworks were banging overhead but I couldn't look up at them until we reached Darcy and Tory who were standing with the other Heirs on the lakeshore, watching the display which hung above the water.

Darius was standing close enough to Tory for them to be sharing body heat without quite touching each other. Instead of watching any of the fireworks, his gaze was fixed on her, this look of longing on his face that made my soul hurt.

Seth had an arm slung around Darcy's shoulders and he was trying to encourage her to howl at the moon while she called him a butt sniffing dog boy and Caleb agreed with her with a roar of laughter.

Geraldine pushed her way in between the twins, grabbing their hands as she beamed out at the fireworks. I moved close behind her, winding my arms around her waist and breathing in deeply as I tugged her back against me.

"It's perfect," Geraldine gushed and I looked up at the dark sky just as the fireworks finale exploded and the Vega twins' faces were painted across the sky for the whole world to see.

Geraldine sighed contentedly like this was the best day of her goddamn life and if I had anything to do with it, she was about to have the best night too.

Tory groaned softly as the image of her face faded from the sky and Darius grinned at her with enough heat to light a forest fire. It was a fucking travesty that they couldn't be together, but it made me realise that I couldn't keep letting this thing between me and Geraldine hang in this undefined limbo. I wanted her to be mine. All mine. Officially. And I was going to do what it took to confirm that.

"Thank you for a wonderful party, Geraldine," Darcy said warmly, offering up a smile as my girl beamed with pride.

"Yeah," Tory agreed. "I can honestly say that this is the best birthday party we've ever had."

"Oh great gooseberries, now I'm going to salt my cheeks like a fisherwoman in a storm," Gerry gasped, pulling away from me and yanking the two of them into a huge hug.

The Vegas laughed as Geraldine squeezed them hard enough to crush bones and the rest of the party guests began to disperse.

Tory managed to wriggle free of the mega hug, laughing as she stumbled back towards Darius and he reached out to steady her as she almost fell on her ass.

"Why do I get the feeling that this is the *only* birthday party you've ever had?" he asked her, his hand lingering on her waist as a distant rumble of thunder let them know the stars were still watching.

Tory shrugged, leaning forward to whisper in his ear, but I was close enough to hear her words anyway.

"It is, but that still means it's the best by default. Besides, maybe I'd think it was even if I'd had fancy ass princess parties my whole life. Who knows?"

"Let me walk you back to the House," Darius offered and with the way they were looking at each other, it was pretty obvious what they wanted to do once they got back to Ignis, even if the stars would never allow it.

Tory shrugged her agreement like she didn't give a shit either way, but that act didn't really fly anymore. They said goodbye and headed away together, following close enough to another group of Ignis students to satisfy the stars that they weren't alone while staying far enough back so that they could talk to each other. It made my heart happy and sad all at once and for a moment, I just glared up at the stars, wondering why they'd be so cruel with their fate.

Darcy finally managed to escape Geraldine's clutches and Seth headed away with her, back to Aer House, singing some annoying song about a wolf under the moon as Darcy called him names halfheartedly and begged him to shut the fuck up. Caleb saluted me then shot away in the blink of an eye.

I was left with a hysterically sobbing Geraldine who was way past fucked up and kept murmuring about it being the most wondrous day.

I laughed as she started hiccoughing and lifted her into my arms.

"To my humble abode, fine steed!" she directed, pointing in the completely wrong direction for Terra House, but I knew what she meant so I started walking.

"Thanks for inviting me to your party, Gerry," I murmured as we walked and she snuggled close to me, laying her head on my chest as she smiled.

"Thank you for coming, you luscious lobster."

I woke up in Geraldine's room with a groan to a pounding head and a warm body pressed up against my own.

"Feeling the fliberty gibbets today, are we?" Geraldine's voice called to me and I curled my arm around her tighter, twisting my fingers into her long hair as she kept her head on my chest.

"If that's your way of asking if I'm hanging then fuck yes, I am," I replied and she laughed girlishly.

"My poor boys, the two of you are looking decidedly morose," she cooed.

"Boys?" I lurched upright, wondering how drunk I'd been last night, but it didn't matter, there was no way in hell I'd have let any other Fae join this party. Geraldine Grus was all mine.

"Yes, silly salmon," Geraldine purred as she leaned forward to place a kiss on my lips. "Big Maxy boy and little Maxy boy." She dropped down to kiss my cock next and I growled hungrily for her as she stayed like that with her head in my lap, kissing, licking, driving me fucking insane as I waited to see if she was really going to do what she was dancing around or not.

I couldn't get enough of this girl, I felt like she'd wormed her way under my skin like a splinter I never wanted to remove. I just wanted her to keep working her way deeper and deeper until she pierced my heart and stayed lodged there forever.

I'd never felt a pull to anyone the way I did to her, never ached for anyone the way I did with her either and as I thought about that, I realised I

didn't want to keep playing this game of cat and mouse with her. I didn't want to keep fighting to reel her in only to have her run again.

"Will you be mine, Gerry?" I asked her just as her tongue ran up the length of my shaft and deep heat carved its way into my flesh.

"I'm here aren't I, you silly sealion?"

"But I want you for more than just now. I want to keep you, tell the whole fucking world that you're mine."

"Oh," she breathed, sitting back up and looking at me with a hesitance in her eyes that made my heart pound. Her emotional walls were usually locked up tight against me, but she let them slip just a little and my gut twisted as I felt a touch of sorrow in her and a heap of regret too. "I...can't offer you that, Maxy boy..."

"What?" I asked, refusing to believe she didn't feel this like I did. That she didn't want this like I did. "Why?"

"Because..." Her gaze fell from mine and she sighed softly, shrugging her shoulders, clearly not meaning to answer that, but that wasn't good enough for me. My heart was thundering in my chest as I felt her slipping away from me and I refused to let that happen. Especially not without understanding what the hell was going on.

"Don't you want me, Gerry?" I asked her, taking her chin in my grip and tugging so that she was forced to meet my gaze. "Hunger for me? Ache for me in the dead of night and think about me all the damn time? Because that's how I feel about you. And I'm fed up of chasing around and trying to act like you're not all that I want. I can't believe that you don't feel the same."

"Oh, you beautiful barracuda," she sighed, reaching up to run a hand down my cheek and looking at me like her heart was breaking for me. She let just enough of that sorrow slip past her walls to make me fear her answer

and a thick lump formed in my throat as I waited for the rest of it. "Our flesh may ache for this, our foolish hearts may want it too, but you and I... we're like sharks passing in the sea, only I hunger for the scent of dolphin blood in the water while your snout wants to taste turtle."

"What?"

"We may exist in the same waters now," she went on with her weird as fuck explanation. "But I'm swimming south for dolphins while you head north to turtle town. So our love could never last."

"Why not?"

"It's who we are. You will always fight for the throne which isn't destined to be yours and I will back my ladies to the bitter end. And once they sit upon their throne and claim their crowns, I shall be their most devoted of subjects. Even if they agree to allow you to sit on the Celestial Council beneath them in the ways of old, you will never forget that you want what they own and that I was on the other side of that war."

"I don't care. Besides, when we prove that the Vegas aren't strong enough to take the throne back and claim it for ourselves, you'll still want to serve the crown. You can do that, working with us instead-"

"I would sooner seal Lady Petunia up tighter than a clam at Christmas for all of time than ever serve you rotten scoundrels!" she cried, moving to leap out of the bed but I caught her and wrestled her down, shaking my head as I refused to let her run from me.

"Fine, forget that, I don't give a shit about any of that right now," I snarled. "All I want is you." I leaned down and took possession of her lips, kissing her like this might be the last time and allowing her to feel how much that hurt me with my gifts even if she wouldn't allow my sway over emotions to influence her own.

Geraldine fought me at first before melting, thawing, breaking open for me and pulling me down so that my cock was driving between her thighs and somehow we began moving as one entity, joining so naturally that it just happened all on its own.

She moaned into my mouth as I refused to break that kiss, thrusting my hips deep and slow as she curled her legs around me and let herself come undone in my arms.

"Oh, sinful salamander," she gasped as I thrust deeper, harder, claiming her and offering myself right back up to her in return. "Oh feisty fire crab, seductive shark, cunning crab, devilish dolphin."

I pushed into her harder as I kissed her again and suddenly the dam between us burst as she screamed and I spilled myself deep inside her, groaning in pleasure as this fire between us flared hot enough to burn.

"My tempting trout, you don't know how hard it is to say no to you," she breathed as I looked down at her, panting and frowning as a single tear slipped from her eye and ran down to soak into the pillow.

"Then why are you trying to?" I demanded, our bodies still joined and everything I felt for her colouring the air around us with the taste of my emotions as my gifts spilled them free. And I didn't even try to stop it, I wanted her to feel how much I cared about her, to understand all of it so that she'd stop trying to refuse me.

"Because...I'm just flapping my flippers here with you, just wetting my winkle, I can't...I shouldn't...I'm not supposed to have-"

"What?" I demanded, really panicking now. "Tell me."

"It's a secret," she breathed. "Not even my ladies know yet. It's not long been arranged and we decided to keep it between us for now so that we can spend a while longer floundering around with tempting tunas before everyone knows about it and we have to act more respectfully."

"What do you mean, *we*?" I asked, my pulse pounding in my ears as I waited for her to tell me.

Her hands landed on my shoulders and she pushed me back, gently but firmly, making me shift off of her again as she released a heavy sigh and climbed out of bed.

"If I tell you, I want you to make a magical pact with me that you won't tell another soul until I'm ready to reveal it myself," she said as she picked up a silk robe with catfish printed all over it and slipped it on to cover her nudity.

She found my boxers on the floor and tossed them over too, apparently not wanting to have this conversation naked.

I got up, frowning deeply as I tugged them on, followed by my pants from last night before stalking towards her with my hand outstretched. "Tell me."

"I'm sorry, my succulent squid," she whispered before taking my hand in hers, waiting for me to make the magical oath with her. "I swear to tell you the truth of my position," she murmured.

"I swear to keep it secret until you're ready to tell others." Magic clapped between our palms to seal the deal between us and I waited to hear this big fucking secret.

"I have recently agreed to partake in a formal marriage arrangement," Geraldine breathed. "Our parents arranged it from the point of view of an advantageous political match and because we are both powerful Fae likely to produce powerful heirs when we procreate-"

"*Who?*" I demanded, my voice a snarl that ripped from my throat as fear and rage clutched at me in equal measures. How the fuck had this happened? How the hell hadn't I known? Why the fuck would she have agreed to it?

"He is a gentlefae of good breeding and impeccable morals-"

"I don't give a fuck. And neither should you, you certainly don't mind me corrupting your morals when I have you alone."

"Because we aren't truly ourselves when we are like this," Geraldine said, tears slipping down her cheeks but no sign of a change of heart anywhere in her stoic expression. "But the real world waits for no Fae and I know exactly the life I wish to lead, serving my ladies. I will only be better prepared to ensure their strength with an equally dedicated husband by my side, steadfast and true."

"Who is it?" I snarled, meaning to break his fucking neck.

"Justin," she murmured.

"Masters?" I demanded. "That cocksure little butt licker who was sniffing around Tory Vega? Why would you accept a match with him after he looked to pursue her?"

"Of course he tipped his hat to my ladies. They need to find strong matches with powerful families who are politically aligned to their interests. But, alas, it was not to be. My ladies are more than sure of their own minds and do not wish to dilly dally in a political match at the moment if ever. So I'm the obvious next choice."

"Obvious next choice?" I asked incredulously. "What about love?"

She laughed this sad and derisive sound, shaking her head. "I'm not fool enough to look for love. What our Kingdom needs right now is strength and unity. It has nothing to do with love. It's about power, position, strength, all the things that being Fae mean. You should know enough about that - I know that your parents were a political match."

"Which is exactly why I know I'd never agree to one myself!" I roared, hating that I couldn't even explain to her that that bitch wasn't even my mother but an imposter who had killed the woman who gave birth to me

and stole her place at my father's side all because she was determined to keep to an arrangement just like the one Geraldine was opting into. "They're miserable together, they hate each other, their entire relationship is for show!"

Geraldine smiled sadly. "Which is why Justin is a good choice for me. He's a stalwart friend and a true supporter of the crown as well as a good man. I will learn to love him in my own way and I know that we will be happy enough. At least with him I can be sure of friendship and laughter. Another match could have been far worse, you only need look upon Darius to see that."

"But why take a match at all? Why not choose your own happiness?" I demanded, unable to accept this fucking travesty which was unfurling before my very eyes.

"Because the one and only thing in this world which will make me truly happy, is seeing Roxanya and Gwendalina Vega ascend to the Solarian throne to rule our kingdom the way it should be run. And dallying with a Celestial Heir won't get me that."

Her chin was high and her gaze firm despite the tears and with a resounding crack that seemed to slice right into my soul, I nodded my head in acceptance.

"I'm not going to stop trying to change your mind," I warned her.

"So change your allegiance, if you really want me more than anything else," she challenged. "Throw your support behind the crown, bend the knee to the Vegas and accept them as your right and powerful rulers."

My face scrunched up in horror at the idea and I shook my head in fierce refusal which I knew only made the divide between us widen. We were on opposing sides of a war which neither of us would ever change our minds about.

"Then there is nothing more to say, my slippery seabass." She reached out and pulled her bedroom door open, indicating that I should go.

I stalked towards it but stopped on the threshold as the thought of walking out on her like this tore me in two.

"When?" I demanded.

"After graduation," she replied, raising her chin. "It will be a grand ceremony during the summer. A show of power just the same as Darius's marriage to Mildred."

I nodded once, biting my tongue on screaming about how fucked up everything she'd just said was. "So give me that time," I said. "Two years. Two years of you and me to fuck and fight and fall in love and be all the things we won't be able to be once you walk down that aisle. Give me that time to try and convince you that that life isn't what you really want. We don't ever have to talk politics, we don't even have to tell anyone if you don't want to. Just let it be me and you, at least for a little while."

"I..." She stared at me like she desperately wanted to say yes but was afraid of doing so.

"Think about it," I said, biting my tongue on trying to force her hand. "I'll be waiting."

I walked away from her with a weight in my chest and fire in my soul. I was going to convince her to say yes to my proposal. And then I was going to spend those two years making her fall for me so hard that there would be no way in hell that she could ever give me up.

Either that or I was setting myself up to have my heart ripped from my chest and crushed before my eyes.

But she was worth the risk. So I was going to take it.

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