

IV

Prince  
of  
Pain

Julie  
Mannino

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Julie Mannino

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## Author's Note

This short story contains mature content and is only intended for adults. A list of cw is on the pinned post in Castle Village fb group and on the gr page. This is dark romance, and it's not full of rainbows and sparkles.

This includes time in a dark room and mpreg.

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## Prince of Pain IV

### Liam

Liam stared at nothing in the dark three days later. Or that's what he guessed anyway. He was fed decently and given plenty of water, but it was getting hard to keep track of how long he'd been in this room. It was underground, and the only light he ever saw was from torches in the hall when the flap opened. A bowl of gruel would be slid in on a tray along with water skins, and the light only lasted a few seconds.

When he tried speaking to the guards who delivered his food and water, they ignored him except to ask for the last tray and yesterday's waterskins. If he refused, he wouldn't be fed. Other than that, they wouldn't speak to him or answer any questions. After the first day, Liam had stopped trying.

How long would he be here? Would the Prince send him to prison after all?

He'd committed two crimes of theft against royalty, so prison was quite possible. There was nothing to stop Prince Briar from changing his mind since he was disappointed in him. Those words still made his stomach twist.

For the first couple of days, he started to feel better. The quiet was nice, and while the stone floor was unforgiving, the lash and cane marks on his ass had time to start healing. Nobody threatened him or tied him up. Nobody whipped him. The Prince didn't come to fuck him. There was a hole in the corner to piss and shit in, so he didn't have to lay in his own filth.

He'd been terrified that they'd chain him up and leave him like that, but it seemed they planned to leave him to recover. Maybe that meant the Prince had such a dreadful punishment planned, he needed Liam to be in better shape.

He slept a lot, lost track of time, and possibly by the fourth day, he started to wish something would happen. The lack of mental stimulation was growing tiresome, and he wanted to know what his future held. Being

trapped in the dark without a single soul to talk to for hours and hours was like being trapped in limbo. Was this what the humans thought of as purgatory?

At the same time, he almost didn't want to know what his future held. The prospect of being in prison for years terrified him.

It was maybe the fourth night when his urge to do something grew. He paced in the room and prayed to Elira, something he didn't bother with very often.

Maybe it was the fifth or sixth day when he started begging her to help him. Even if he had the realm's most boring book and a candle, it'd be a relief from the monotony and constant nothing. All he had was the blackness, his guilt, and the sure knowledge that the man who had saved his life twice was disappointed in him.

By the seventh day, he started to wonder if this was his punishment for theft and not keeping the contract with the Prince. Perhaps he'd be left in here forever, and he'd go insane. One day, he'd stop eating, turn into a bag of bones, and die. Afterward, he'd be buried somewhere and forgotten about.

He was starting to miss being with the Prince. At least that was another fairy soul to speak to. One single, kind touch from Prince Briar would be a relief. Hell, he'd take a whipping just so he could at least feel something from him and not be trapped in nothing.

Up there with his Master, the food was also better and not bland gruel, and when he was allowed to sleep, the bed had been soft. Even the cage had been comfortable enough with the pillow and blanket. The stone floor here was starting to give him aches no matter how he positioned himself. He was never quite warm enough either.

There had also been light, and shit, even the sex had felt good. The punishments hadn't, but this was punishment too. He'd go back up and do anything for the Prince if it meant he could get the fuck out of this nothing that never ended. The quick delivery of his food and water wasn't enough since the guards wouldn't tell him a thing, and the light was so dim and fleeting.

Guards stormed in sometime after he'd eaten his dinner. The lantern made him squint and rethink his wish for light since it hurt his eyes. When they grabbed him and manhandled him up, he shouted.

“What are you doing?”

“Shut up.”

The shackles were cold as they were clamped around his wrists. One of the guards gave his ass a good squeeze, and he realized with horror that the Prince had probably handed him over to be gang-raped. Liam wasn't good enough to be his toy, but the guards would appreciate him.

“I bet you're sorry you ran from him now, huh?” asked one of the guards.

“Don't hurt me. I'll do whatever he says. Please don't-”

They strapped a ball gag into his mouth. Terror made him kick, but someone turned the wheel until even his toes couldn't touch the ground. His shoulders and wrists instantly protested at the pain.

“You better not kick,” one snarled. “We would have left your feet flat, but you ruined that for yourself.”

“Get the spreader bar.”

“Any resistance is to be punished, and it took you a minute to fuck up.”

He couldn't stay like this for hours and hours without damage, and the agony would drive him insane. Prince Briar must have ordered this, and even here, resistance would be met with pain. Once again, it was Liam's own fault.

“If I was the King or the Prince, I'd stick you in the prison and brush my hands off,” said a guard. “You're an ungrateful bastard to steal his clothes and run away.”

Liam's ankles were cuffed to the spreader bar. His heart thumped since they'd surely get started on using his ass now.

“If you try to kick again, we'll leave you like that for two hours,” said one. “The healer can easily undo any damage.”

The wheel squeaked, and he was left on his tippy toes as the men filed out.

“Enjoy your next eight hours.”

The door clanged shut. The lantern had been left so he could see, not that there was much to look at besides the boring wall. The light didn't hurt his eyes so much now, and it'd be a relief if he wasn't stuck like this. If only they'd given him another inch of slack. Just one. Hell, he'd be grateful for a half-inch. He couldn't take eight hours of this. Eight hours of torment that

would only grow worse in this blank room with not a single thing to distract him.

But he had no choice. He remembered Prince Briar finding it amusing that a man would say he can't take a particular type of pain anymore, but he would take it simply because he had no other option. Whoever was causing the suffering was in control. The victim could only accept it.

Liam had no choice but to remain there and experience every second of suffering. Even if it was decided that he'd remain there for a week, he'd take it.

Prince Briar still held all of the power and owned him despite Liam not seeing him for a week or so.

Even Liam's cock was still under his control and trapped in the cage so he hadn't been able to alleviate his boredom before by masturbating. He could do nothing and have nothing without the Prince's approval.

He wouldn't kick again or do anything that he wasn't ordered to do by the guards. Clearly, Prince Briar planned ahead in case he resisted. He knew Liam was stubborn and still hadn't fully learned his lesson because he was an ungrateful brat.

There was no point in resisting because it only brought more punishment and showed how selfish he was. If he'd focused on serving and the Prince's pleasure, his life would be a lot better, and he wouldn't be stuck there.

He'd fallen into a painful haze after about four hours or so if he had to guess when the door opened. King Ray strolled in and made him widen his eyes. Was he setting Liam free?

King Ray didn't hurry to undo the shackles or call a guard in to release him. Liam remained on tiptoes as his legs trembled, and he flushed to be spread so obscenely like a whore. He hadn't washed in a week, and he probably looked like pure shit.

King Ray sighed as he gazed at Liam. "My son says you committed two crimes when I asked him why he's got you locked up. Is it true you stole his horse years ago?"

Liam nodded.

King Ray frowned. "I'm sure you know the penalty for something like that is steep. I can't abide thieves who take things that belong to others. Prince Briar didn't work a job to get that horse, but he cared for it and took

his riding lessons seriously. You stole his clothes and boots too. Thieves deserve punishment, yes?”

Liam nodded but didn't see what the point of this was. The King had barely looked at him before so why come in here now to gloat? Surely, the ruler had better things to do.

“I have asked him to let you go since you have suffered with him. He's not very nice with his...toys. I've also never been keen on having a pleasure slave living in the Castle. I know about the people taking real slaves to use for snuff and torture. Even though you're a thief, I'm sure you had a terrible time there, and perhaps this has all been punishment enough. He won't release you, so you'll deal with whatever he decides. Maybe he'll let you out in a few weeks. Maybe you'll be stuck here for years. I don't know.”

Years? Liam made a desperate noise. Why wouldn't the King put his foot down? Even prisoners weren't kept in a completely dark room for years unless they planned to let him keep a light from now on. Or did he mean Prince Briar simply wouldn't release him?

“The point is, you need to be very careful and obey him,” said King Ray. “He's older and more refined in how he reacts when angered, but he did kill his Mother when he was thirteen. He has a streak that's beyond dark, and if you keep pushing and pushing him, I'm sure he won't shove you down the stairs, but he'll certainly make your life miserable. Obey him. Maybe he'll grow tired of you and set you free one day.”

Liam had already resigned himself to never going free, but the point-blank way the King spoke to him made him shiver. He even admitted the Prince had killed his Mother, and he made a noise, wishing he could speak.

“Yes, that is true.” King Ray must have guessed his thoughts would linger on that stunning portion. “I won't say I saw it with my own eyes, but I know he did it, and I know what my son is like by now. I'm ashamed to have raised such a future King, and I don't know where I or his Mother went wrong. Behave, and if he orders further punishment for your crimes, deal with it. He did save your life twice now.”

That was true, but why was the King speaking to him like this? Why admit the rumor was true? The lantern light wasn't being kind to King Ray since it made the dark circles under his eyes even worse. Without another

word, he turned and left. The door slammed, and Liam was left to tremble in discomfort and confusion.

King Ray was terrified of his own son. There was no other reason as to why he did nothing. But...that didn't make sense either. Even a Prince couldn't get away with blatant murder of his own Mother and Queen. If King Ray was that sure, why not have him arrested? Why would he want a man on the throne who killed the woman that gave him life?

Was he lying? Maybe the rumors were false, and something else was going on. Maybe he just wanted Liam to suffer for being a thief and picked something he thought would seem terrifying. After all, he hadn't seemed to feel sorry for the shackled slave before him. He probably hadn't even asked for Liam to be freed. He could have just said that to make a spark of hope only to squash it.

Besides, killing his own Mother seemed a little extreme. Liam had never heard rumors beforehand about the Prince having anger problems or being prone to violence in his youth. No one else seemed to treat him differently either. If he murdered his Mother, wouldn't the guards, the healer, and the courtiers dislike him? Even if they refused to speak directly about it, such hatred would be hard to hide.

Also, it didn't change Liam's situation now. The Prince owned and controlled everything about him. Liam was too afraid to even let his bladder go and get relief for that because he'd probably be punished for it.

If he pissed himself like a damn, dirty person with no control, he could just imagine Prince Briar's disappointment in him. The guards would likely report it. He shouldn't care, but those words had hurt him.

Eight hours must have passed when the guards let him down. They let him curl up in the corner, gave him more food and water, took the light, and left. Liam's calves and shoulders burned, and his limbs trembled as he crawled to the hole in the opposite corner to finally piss.

He supposed it was a new day when he was given another meal. Roughly an hour later, the guards came to chain him up again, but he didn't fight or kick that time. A spreader bar was used to keep his feet apart. He was given more slack so he could properly stand, but he didn't understand why he was restrained like this. Nobody came to speak to him again, and they had taken the light.

It clicked after a few hours since he had nothing to do but think.

Beyond pain, discomfort, food, water, and his cock, Prince Briar could even decide he wouldn't be permitted to sit or lay down. He could be made to stand for hours in the dark without any mental stimulus no matter how tired he was. He couldn't pass the time by sleeping or pacing either.

He would have to feel the seconds and minutes sliding by, and he was sure they were longer when his thirst grew since he couldn't reach the water. There was simply no way to avoid it because Prince Briar was his Master. His Master could do *anything* to him.

He should have obeyed. He should have made the Prince his only focus and served his every desire without complaints.

He was let down later to sleep and eat.

He wasn't sure whether to be terrified when the guards came in after breakfast. Or he figured it was breakfast. Maybe he'd been made to stand all night, and he'd slept all day. It was too hard to figure out, but he assumed his time in chains always consisted of eight hours.

This time, the guards had a short chain, and the spreader bar was different. The one they had been using had metal cuffs for his ankles. This one was shorter, and it had adjustable leather cuffs.

The ceiling chain was lowered with the wheel. Liam had to kneel under it. Once his wrists were shackled behind his back, another guard used the spreader bar just below his knees. It had a tiny loop in the center, and one end of the spare chain was attached before the other end was secured to his collar.

This way, he was stuck on his knees and forced to remain hunched over with his wrists behind him. The ceiling chain was drawn up enough so that he wasn't uncomfortable yet, but he couldn't do anything. With his collar chained to the spreader bar, standing would be impossible. He couldn't even sit up straight.

The guards seemed to be watching to see if he'd complain about this new torment. One brought in a bucket of water as a guard took the lantern to stand in the hall. The bucket was left right under his face.

"You're not permitted to drink any water while you're restrained," said a guard. They left, and Liam was trapped in darkness again with the cold stone floor digging into his knees and water a couple of inches from his face.

It seemed physical temptation would be a part of his discomfort today. It would be so easy to drink from the surface since thirst was a torment when he was chained all day, but Prince Briar was testing him.

It was easy to ignore at first since he'd drunk earlier from his waterskin in the corner. The ache in his knees grew worse quite quickly, and his back and shoulders followed from being hunched over. No amount of shifting could ease it, and he didn't even bother trying.

Everything else was pointless when someone else controlled every aspect of his life. Prince Briar had told him before to let the pain in and accept it, so he did.

When his thirst grew, the temptation was right under his face. If he took just a little, would the guards know? Prince Briar might. He'd probably guess that his slave had disobeyed. He knew Liam too well.

And at this point, he just wanted to obey even if it brought no relief. He wanted to behave, obey, and suffer if it pleased the Prince. He'd failed before, and this was his only chance to do it right.

He'd do anything to serve the Prince. He wanted the rare touches again and for *Prince Briar* to personally punish or reward him. He'd beg for his cock even if his own remained caged forever.

He'd do anything to be the slave Prince Briar wanted if it meant bringing him pleasure. But he'd also do anything that his Master wanted even if he never saw him again and remained in this room. Even in the darkness, he'd focus only on that. Liam's desires didn't matter anymore.

When the guards returned, everything ached including his neck, and his lips were parched. A couple of the guards knelt and peered at him before they observed the bucket. Liam noticed a thin, black line around the inside.

They'd marked it. If he had sipped whenever he felt like it, heedless of the consequences and his Master's wants, they would have known. They seemed to think he hadn't even had a drop since he was released and left with food and no comments.

When they next came to chain him up, only a single guard came in, and once he had Liam in place with a little slack for his arms, he didn't leave. Liam recognized him as the one that had grabbed his ass once, and his stomach twisted when the guard's hand wandered to his arse once more.

"I never went for blondes, but you're not bad," said the guard. "I bet your ass is nice and tight."

Liam's ankles had the spreader bar between them, and he didn't try to move away from the groping. He hadn't washed in days and didn't see how he was appealing at all, but if Prince Briar decided to share him, he had no say in that either. He'd take the guard's cock.

"It's a pity he's being selfish with his toy right now. He doesn't even play with it, and he's like a greedy kid who won't share."

At that moment, Liam knew the guard wasn't supposed to be feeling him up.

"I'm going to let you get down on your knees, and you're going to suck me off." The guard leaned in, and his foul breath made Liam's stomach flip. "Then you can stand all day with my cum in your belly."

Having Liam swallow the evidence was a lot easier than trying to clean it out of his ass while he was shackled. Prince Briar didn't intend to share him with the guards, and he automatically tried to lean away when the man went to grope his balls.

The smack across his face was loud.

"You don't move, bitch."

"I'm only supposed to serve him unless he says--"

The guard grabbed his chin. "You're in a room all day, so you don't know what the fuck he'll order next or has ordered. He's barely been around and clearly doesn't give a shit. You don't know shit, and you're a fucking criminal. If you don't suck me off and do a good job--"

The door creaked, and the guard moved so fast, Prince Briar probably didn't catch what happened. Liam's heart nearly stopped at the sight of him as he went over the wording in his head and wondered if he'd judged wrong. Maybe he was supposed to be a toy for the guard today.

Prince Briar didn't even look at Liam. "Can you come here for a second? Broderick can't find the keys to the chest in the guardhouse."

"They're on the hook in the closet room," the guard said in a smooth voice as if he hadn't just been threatening Liam. He pretended to be checking the left shackle.

"Come help him look because he says they're not, and I'm not looking for keys," Prince Briar said with an edge to his voice. "You're supposed to keep your stuff in order. Not me."

"Yes, m'lord."

They both left. Liam shook as he wondered if he'd done wrong. Was the Prince coming back for him, or was he just annoyed at guards for not keeping track of their shit? The Prince hadn't even looked at him, so Liam must not be worthy enough yet.

A good twenty minutes passed, and he thought it was a guard coming to fetch the forgotten light again, but Prince Briar entered. A different guard stood in the hallway.

"Have you been fucked by anyone? Has anyone made you suck them off?"

Liam shook his head, unsure if he was in trouble. "No, Master."

He hadn't spoken in days, and his voice sounded raspy. Compared to how he must look, Prince Briar seemed like a dream with his white hair neatly brushed and his red silk coat with gold embroidery. Even the sound of his deep voice was a treat after so long.

"You seemed to have behaved for the most part," Prince Briar said in a rather bored tone.

The knuckles on his right hand were scraped. Why wouldn't he get the healer to deal with that?

"I've decided I won't have you put in prison, but I'm not sure if I should let you out," he continued, and Liam looked at his face instead of his hands. "Should I?"

"Whatever you decide, Master."

Prince Briar gave him a faintly suspicious glare. "I don't think you're worthy enough to come out and serve me yet. Another month in solitary will be your punishment before I decide. I can think of many new things for the guards to do to you. As long as you behave for the next month, I'll consider letting you back out."

Liam had meant it when he said it was whatever his Master desired, but the promise of another month still made his heart drop.

But only because he hadn't been good enough, and he hadn't pleased Prince Briar in the first place.

"What should bad slaves say?" prompted the Prince.

"I'm sorry, and thank you, Master." Liam wished he would brush his cheek. Just one touch. He craved it like food. He'd do anything for the one that owned him to touch him in some way. All he'd had was nasty guards manhandling him into position and emptiness.

“Hm. Before I go, let your weight hang from your wrists. Bring up your feet. We’ll see if you learned anything.”

Liam didn’t hesitate to let his body sag as he bent his knees. It was awkward with the spreader bar, but he drew up his feet behind him and hung there as pain spread through his shoulders. His wrists protested from the weight and the rough metal, but he took it.

He’d take anything the Prince ordered, and he’d let all of the pain in.

Prince Briar remained there for a minute, watching Liam as he suffered solely to obey and please him. “If you want, you can lower your feet.”

Liam breathed heavily with the strain but kept his feet up.

“Doesn’t that hurt?” Prince Briar raised an eyebrow.

“Yes, Master,” Liam said in a strained whisper.

“Then why not ease it?”

“I want what you want, Master.”

Prince Briar coldly observed for another moment before he stepped forward, and took Liam by the waist. “Put your feet down.”

At the direct order, Liam obeyed, and Prince Briar helped him to right himself before he reached down. One end of the spreader bar clanked as it was released, so Liam assumed he’d been granted this small mercy and the pleasure of his quick touches.

Prince Briar straightened. “Lean on me if you need to.”

To Liam’s puzzlement, the shackles were removed, and he was able to lower his arms. Without another word, he scooped up Liam and carried him from the room.

This wasn’t right. He was supposed to stay locked up for another month because he was such a disappointment. He was selfish, a thief, and unworthy of his Master.

But Prince Briar carried him out of the basement, and he didn’t seem to care that he was holding someone who was dirty against his fancy coat. After so long in the room, even the back hallway was overwhelming. He turned his face into his Master’s coat to avoid looking at everything, and he tried to focus solely on the thing that should be his focal point anyway. As usual, he smelled like roses, and the silk of his coat was soft. Even his hands were gentle.

Prince Briar took him all the way upstairs and into his rooms. The tub was already filled with hot water, and the scent of roses was thicker.

It was only once they were both in it and Prince Briar was washing him that it truly sank in. He was worthy enough or barely so at least. He didn't have to eat gruel and live in darkness with even his most basic abilities suppressed. He could please his Master and was good enough to take his punishments directly from him when needed. The nice touches wouldn't last long, but that was okay because he'd accept whatever and be grateful.

He started to cry as he leaned on Prince Briar's bare chest. He didn't deserve anything, but he could try his best now to bring him pleasure and do what he should have from the start. This man was all he needed.

"I'm sorry," he whimpered.

Prince Briar hugged him and stroked his hair. "It's all right now. I think you learned your lesson, and you'll do better. I've been busy these past days, and I have a present for you. Do you want it now or after you've slept a bit?"

"Whatever you want."

"No. Speak freely this time."

Liam wanted to sleep, but he was also rather curious about this present. If Prince Briar went through the trouble of getting his worthless slave something, he should take it now.

"Now."

Liam was rewarded with a kiss on his forehead. "You deserve it."

Prince Briar gently dried him after the bath and put him on a lead before he was taken back down to the dungeon area. Maybe being locked up again was his reward to show how eager he was to please. That was all right, although a part of him wanted to stay with Prince Briar again and feel his arms.

Another door past the holding room was opened by a waiting guard, and Liam was led in. He froze when he saw a couple of familiar faces, and fear spiked through his gut.

The two men who had taken and used him on his first night as a slave. The guy behind the desk. The fourth guy must have been Hood since his body had the same heft. A few other men he didn't recognize were also there.

The room had crates to one side, showing it was for storage, but modifications had been made. Each man was chained to the wall with

barely enough slack for the tips of their toes to touch, and it was clear they had been tortured in the past few days.

The guard that had been fondling Liam was also there, and he had a busted nose along with a split lip. One side of his face was swelling.

“While you were in the room, I kept myself busy and personally made sure we caught all of the bastards that were catching and selling slaves for their disgusting business,” said Prince Briar. “Not all of them were in that building the night I took you out. As far as we know, they’ve all been caught now except for the man who wanted to snuff you.”

Prince Briar had real regret on his face as he turned to Liam. Clearly, they’d made a real effort to find and catch him, but they’d failed.

Still, Liam could hardly believe his ears. Prince Briar hadn’t simply been issuing orders to others and sitting around. He’d gone out and personally helped.

“He seems to have vanished. He abandoned his business, his home-everything. Someone must have tipped him off, and he fled. Men are still looking, but for now, we have everyone else. That one-” The Prince pointed at a man he didn’t know. “-cried like a damn bitch when I broke his arm. I guess it’s okay to kidnap fairies to be murdered, but he can’t take any pain.” He brushed his hair back. “I wanted them all to suffer for what they did to you and others too, but mostly you. That other man will be found too.”

Hood looked ready to cry. None of them were so tough now that they weren’t in control anymore. They didn’t dare to beg, and Liam guessed that had been beaten out of them. Even the guard was too frightened.

The scrapes on Prince Briar’s knuckles made sense now. The guard looked like he’d gotten his face punched quite a few times. The Prince had seen what was about to happen, lured him away with a bullshit excuse, and beat the shit out of him.

“You hit him, Master?” asked Liam. “The guard.”

“Of course. He can join the rest, and you can decide what’s to be done to them. Anything you want, the guards will do it. Slow death by torture, torture without the mercy of death, or a quick slice of the throat. You can kill them yourself if you want. They’re your attackers, and you can decide their fate. You’re mine now, and nobody hurts what’s mine.”

Liam wasn’t even sure what to say. They were awful people, and they’d probably hurt many others before Liam came along. They’d grown so sure

that they could keep their secret, they'd even tried to sell time with a slave to the Prince. All they cared about was making more money. Their merchandise of choice had meant nothing.

Liam hadn't been a fairy to them. He'd just been a source of income, and if that man had snuffed him, they'd have dumped his corpse somewhere, forgotten about him, and moved on to find another victim. They deserved horrible, slow deaths.

But Liam wasn't like that. Selfish? Yes. But he'd never considered killing someone.

"Hang them, and be done with it," he said. "Get rid of their very presence from this realm today."

Prince Briar fixed his cobalt eyes on him although there wasn't enough light to make out the color in here. "Very well. When you wake up later, they'll be gone unless you want to watch."

Liam shook his head. "No. I just want them gone. I don't want to watch that."

"Then they'll be dead before you wake up. Come on."

As Prince Briar led him to the door, one of the men shouted something as if Liam would actually stop and care to listen. He ignored it and heard a whip crack on the offender's flesh.

Liam had to sleep in his cage. Maybe he'd lost the privilege of napping in Prince Briar's bed forever. The cage was comfy with the cushion, a blanket, and his pillow. When he awoke later, it was almost like magic because the hours had gone by in a blink, and he knew those men were all dead now.

The one who wanted to kill him couldn't hurt him now even though he was loose somewhere.

Only Prince Briar could hurt him now.

## Prince Briar

Briar's slave was perfectly obedient when he was taken on his lead to breakfast the next morning. King Ray pretended not to see it and barely grunted a good morning. Liam kept his head down while he ate from his bowl on the floor.

Briar was pretty sure his slave would do anything he was told. All of those men were dead now, and while they deserved it, they had also served the purpose of tightening the hold he had on Liam.

How could he not be grateful and love the one who had granted him such a gift?

"Are you always going to bring him to meals?" Father suddenly asked in a low voice halfway through.

"If I feel like it."

"It's a bit improper with so many people."

"They don't seem to mind. You have orgies and don't care who knows it."

"We don't do it at breakfast. That's entirely private. Meals should be calm affairs among higher-ups with everyone dressed. Your Mother wouldn't have liked this."

Briar itched to wrap his hands around Father's throat as he slowly turned his head. "Don't you dare ever fucking tell me what Mother would like."

The silence stretched out for eternity as Liam huddled by his leg, and he held Father's eye.

"I'm sorry." Apologies were rare from Father, but it was far too late now. It had been too late since Briar was thirteen.

"I bet you're sorry, You'll be sorry to the end of your miserable life."

The King pushed back his chair and mumbled something nonsensical as he stood.

Briar snorted as Father walked away. "He'll probably go smoke turf now."

Liam's eyes widened as he glanced up. Turf was rather rare, and it was illegal since it was impossible to know how people would react to it, and

the side effects could be quite horrible. Some smoked it for the escape and didn't die or end up ill, but they were often unpleasant and angry while high. Briar never dared to touch it, but he knew a couple of lords who occasionally dabbled in it and had smoked with the King before.

It had been easy to leave some in his room. Father would likely assume one of the lords had left it for him. He'd say he'd want a single hit. That would turn into him smoking on and off for a week, then two. Maybe he'd stop. Or not.

While Briar finished his food, he imagined Father in his room while he smoked the blue, leafy plant from a glass bowl and tried to forget what he'd raised. He probably wished he could go back in time and suffocate Briar as soon as he was born.

He pushed back his nearly empty plate and looked down at where his slave had finished eating and wasn't moving. "Get in my lap."

Liam hurried to obey, and he dared to cast a glance out at the Hall as the Prince's arm snaked around his waist. Nobody seemed to give a shit that their ruler's kid had a naked slave especially since they thought Liam had a proper contract. What were they going to do to Briar especially after the last man who complained had been kicked out?

Briar rubbed Liam's back with one hand and relished how his slave leaned on his chest. The poor thing was probably desperate for touch and to stay with him now. That's exactly what Briar needed and wanted: someone needy and dependent who would continue to spread their legs, take whatever was doled out, and never leave even once the door was wide open. Briar would spend the next weeks achieving his next goal and making sure Liam behaved. As long as his slave behaved and didn't need much correction, Briar would give him the gift of three words along with something else.

Liam hadn't said those words yet, but maybe he thought it was too forward. Besides, he'd just gotten out of the room and would be adjusting to the tiny freedoms Briar would give him for now.

He plucked a triangle of toasted bread with norben from his plate. "Here. Eat it."

Liam nibbled on the piece as he stared down.

"See? Isn't it better when you're good?" Briar brushed back a piece of his hair.

“Yes, Master.”

Briar waited until he had finished the triangle. “Look at me.”

Liam did so, and his eyes were rather blank, although Briar was pretty sure he detected a bit of fear as though he thought he was in trouble for something. Good. Liam needed to keep a bit of fear.

“Here’s what I want you to do,” said Briar. “I have to speak to someone, but I want you to go back to our rooms by yourself. You’ll crawl up there, and you’ll wait for me in the bedroom.”

The arm Liam had around him tightened slightly like he didn’t want to. Before, Briar would have known he was being resistant, but Liam just didn’t want to leave him now.

“So that you have something to do, get the cane from the bedside drawer. When I return, you better be kneeling on the floor by the bed with ten lines across your ass. I think you can figure out how to cane yourself even if you can’t see it. They better be good marks too. Blindfold yourself while you wait for me, and leave the cane on the bed. Go.”

Liam didn’t complain, make a face, or hesitate to get on his knees and crawl away. This would be a test to see if he could be trusted while entirely alone. Briar had left his sword on top of the chest of drawers along with his dagger. Briar could disarm him in about three seconds flat if he tried anything stupid, but he wanted to make sure.

Briar watched Liam crawl out before he went to sit at one of the round tables with a pair of older ladies who were happy to have his attention for a few moments. One was already pulling miniatures of her grandkids from her coin purse when sure enough, Lord Zath came over. He was such a slimy turd, Briar was surprised he didn’t leave a trail on the floor behind him.

“I heard the most ridiculous thing the other night at the tavern,” the lord said once he’d said hello and sat.

It certainly wasn’t the first time that Briar had heard this man repeat rumors. He seemed to love telling Briar the ones that involved him. Maybe he thought he’d get a reward for it. Fat chance.

“Someone said that they heard you were pregnant,” said Lord Zath.

Briar snorted, and one of the old ladies rolled her eyes. “He’s not an abundant male.”

“People will say anything,” said Briar.

Lord Zath chuckled. "Sometimes I wonder how people even get these thoughts in their head."

"Maybe the human's God will drop a kid in my stomach," said Briar. "Don't they have a story about that?"

The others shook their heads, snorted, and giggled. Briar had gone to a couple of taverns a few nights ago. In the shitty ones where it was darker and smoky, it had been easy to hide his identity with a cloak after he'd magicked away his wings. He'd had a few chats with drunk idiots who'd repeat anything they'd heard, and here they were a few days later.

A lie could spread pretty fast before truth even had a chance to roll out of bed. Or at least that's what Mother used to say. Briar stayed long enough for the old lady to show him all six ivory miniatures with her grandchildren's likenesses painted upon them. Lord Zath asked him if he wanted to go riding, but Briar said no.

The lord probably wanted to blab about other rumors he'd heard, and Briar didn't care to hear it. Lord Zath would now go yak to others and pass around the tale because he couldn't keep his mouth shut for five minutes, and that was exactly what Briar wanted.

Sometimes, lies could turn into truth.

Briar took his time as he went upstairs. Liam didn't come flying at him with his sword or dagger when he entered his sitting room. He paused in the bedroom doorway to gaze at his slave who was on his knees and facing the bed.

The weals on his rear said he'd obeyed although they were a bit sloppy. Briar didn't expect them to be neat. Liam had also blindfolded himself as told.

What a good slave. The energy from torture and pain always had a tang, and Briar loved the taste of it.

He approached, crouched, and touched each weal as he counted. "On the bed with you. You get to have a reward since I feel like doing something, so the cock cage gets to come off for a bit."

Liam didn't say anything or fight when he was made to lie down. It was rather like having a doll, although that wasn't quite what Briar wanted. He'd cried yesterday and shown shock that his Master had made sure nearly everyone from that hellhole was captured. He'd even looked grateful.

"Did you cry when you caned yourself?" asked Briar.

“No, Master.” Liam’s voice came out a bit wobbly.

“Close?”

“Yes, Master.”

“I think you’ll feel better when you cum.”

The smile Liam gave him appeared rather fake. He was probably still scared that he’d end up in the room again, but as long as he behaved, there would be no need. The whip would work if Liam needed a reminder, although he was sure he wouldn’t need to punish him too harshly.

Most of the pain would be for fun now, and so Briar could feed from him.

“Stay there.” Briar left him on the bed and went into the privy room.

He still remembered when he had his first heat at thirteen, and Mother had helped him to hide it. He’d been horrified to find out he was an abundant male since the idea of having a kid seemed terrible. No one could look at a child and tell if they’d be an abundant male when they grew older, so it was always a total surprise.

It was impossible to hide the flushed face which was a sign that the heat had come, and it would last for a whole day the first time. Mother had said there was no reason to hide it because everyone thought he was only a fairy, and an abundant male wasn’t unnatural to them, but he’d begged her.

She’d finally agreed, kept the servants away, and didn’t tell Father. Mera was the only other who knew. Ray had been busy with turf at the time, so he hadn’t bothered to check on his son who supposedly didn’t feel well. Everyone else must have thought he’d had a slight cold.

After the first heat, he didn’t have to worry anymore since the heat only happened if the abundant male brought it on himself. Briar had never allowed anyone to top him because pregnancy was still a risk even if he wasn’t in heat.

The concept that he’d hated would help him now. He’d had time to get used to the idea of having a child and decided it was far safer to get pregnant himself.

He focused on bringing the heat and caught sight of his face in the mirror while he undressed. The flush extended to his chest too, and he could feel his ass already growing wet. The urge to be penetrated felt foreign since he hadn’t experimented with his heat in private for a while.

Once he dumped his clothes on the floor, he went back into the bedroom where Liam hadn't moved. He found the key in his bedside drawer, unlocked the cock cage, and tossed it aside.

"Enjoy your temporary freedom." Briar straddled Liam and lowered his head to kiss his ear. Liam presumably meant to wrap his arms around his Master, but Briar pinned his wrists down. "You're to lie there and take it."

Even with the urge to be stuffed, he'd still rather flip Liam over and use his ass. He reached down to jerk off his slave and felt his cock thicken from the stimulation. With so much pent-up desire, it probably wouldn't take long.

Briar straightened up and stroked his slave's chest. Liam had tensed on the bed, and he went to jerk his hips, but Briar held down one side. "Don't move."

Liam stilled, and Briar adjusted himself to line up the head.

Liam made a noise as he seemed to realize what was intended. "I can't!"

"Do I need to tie you down?"

"I'm not good enough to fuck you like that!" Liam blurted out.

Briar paused. So the resistance was only because he was trying to align himself with his Master's desires. Of course, this would be confusing to him since Briar had never shown any interest in being penetrated.

"If I clearly want it, then you're good enough," said Briar. "You're good enough for what I command. Got it?"

"Yes, Master."

Briar worked the head into his hole and sank down. With all of the slick his heat produced, it was easy, and he immediately started riding his slave to appease the urge.

Demons and angels from Mother's realm didn't have abundant males, so they'd never know what it was like to taste energy and satisfy a heat at the same time. Liam remained still like he'd been told, but he started to breathe heavier as his Master's tight hole stroked his cock.

"Fuck-"

"Shh."

Briar rode him like his damn life depended on it. In a way, it did. It wasn't long before Liam stiffened.

"Master, I don't know how to keep holding it back."

"Cum in me."

Liam jerked his hips and moaned as he spilled in Briar's ass. His pulsing cock almost sent Briar over the edge, but he held back as he lowered himself down all of the way. The deeper the cum went, the better. Liam swore as he gave a last twitch.

Briar stayed still for a few seconds before he lifted himself and lay next to Liam. "Suck my cock."

Liam hurried to obey and felt for him since he was still blindfolded. The tip was wet with pre-cum, and Briar watched it disappear in Liam's mouth along with the rest of his swollen shaft.

His slave sucked like getting his Master off was his only goal, but Briar still fisted his hair to control the pace. He might sit on his slave to get what he wanted, but he wasn't cumming on him like that. Liam took his length down his throat, and the urge grew to be too much.

Briar held his head down and unloaded in his throat. Liam swallowed around it as stream after stream went straight into him. Briar groaned and shuddered, and he tightened his grip once the pleasure started to ebb. Liam gripped his hip and involuntarily jerked since he probably needed some air, but he didn't try to pull back.

Watching him control himself made it all the better. Briar wouldn't whip his ass too hard after this. He finally pulled Liam's head back to let him gasp. A thread of saliva clung to his lip and ran to the tip of Briar's dick.

"Lay down."

Liam breathed heavily as he obeyed. Briar propped his feet up on the headboard and tilted his hips. It was supposed to help keep the cum in him and up his chances according to some book he'd read a couple of years ago. As he adjusted one of his wings to be more comfortable, he rolled his eyes since he knew the best way would be for them to fuck every day until he was pregnant.

He hated the thought, but the only way to get pregnant was for Liam to cum in his ass.

Once he had what he wanted, his slave wouldn't be up his ass again. Briar would wait until he was showing under his shirt, but not enough to where anyone would notice with his clothes on. He'd take Liam to the Temple in Flora and have the Mages marry them. They wouldn't disobey their Crown Prince.

Once his slave was his husband, he'd tell Father and try not to laugh at his rage.

Ray had approached the idea of Briar marrying, but he'd let it go pretty fast once Briar refused. Ray was the sort to think royalty and commoners should never mix in marriage, but it happened sometimes. In most cases, fairies believed no one could take apart what Elira put together, so he couldn't claim that the marriage was invalid or anything like that.

Ray would still likely fly into a rage since he didn't want his son and offspring to sit on the throne. He was already working on a plan to make sure that never happened.

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Briar leaned back on his bench as he later sat on the balcony with Liam in his lap. His nearly perfect little slave hadn't complained about the caning, the second round, or being locked back up again for a bit after they'd bathed.

Liam was nearly perfect, but he needed time to perk up since he seemed rather off. At least he was eager for touch, and he'd wrapped his arms around Briar.

Briar blew the smoke away from Liam's head before he tapped his cig to the side. Once their position was further solidified, Briar and his child would be safe. It wouldn't be like with Mother. Liam would be wholly loyal to his Master.

Briar had no plan to breastfeed his own kid, and it'd be a cold day in the Fallen realm before he changed a nappy, but he'd be a better Father than his own had been.

"You can go in your cage," Briar said once he flicked away the remains of the cig. "I'll be back later to play with you. Get on your knees and crawl."

Liam was slow to get down, so that earned him a stroke of the cane, and Briar held his shoulder.

"When I give you a command, don't dawdle," he ordered, and Liam's expression dropped further. "I know you like cuddles, but remember what's

more important?”

“Pleasing you. I’m sorry, Master.”

“Do I need to chain you up and give you a reminder?”

“Whatever you desire, Master.”

Briar didn’t feel like chaining him up. “Get in your cage.”

Liam looked ready to cry once he was locked up, and Briar leaned over the top. “If you’re good, maybe you can sleep with me some nights. We’ll see.”

Liam’s expression only brightened a little. It was amazing how some time and torture in a dark room had finally broken him and made him truly realize what his whole world needed to consist of.

“As much as I’d like to spend time with you, I have things to do,” said Briar. “And you can’t always come with me.”

Liam gave him a weak smile.

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## Liam

Liam was sobbing in his cage after a good two hours. Prince Briar had put on his coat and left to do whatever. Dinner probably wasn't done, so he'd still have to wait for his Master to come back.

He'd done everything Master wanted and had been allowed to cum, so he figured that must mean he was good enough to serve him. Briar wanting to ride his cock was odd, and Liam hadn't once taken him for the sort who liked being penetrated. Maybe he didn't mind switching and only permitted it since Liam would do his best to behave and serve him.

It wasn't enough. Even though he'd been punished for his selfishness and theft, he knew he wasn't good enough because he felt like shit in his head. If he was, he'd feel better, right?

The healer suddenly hurried in and startled him. She took one look at his teary face and came over to the cage.

"Oh, you poor thing. I can get you out while he's at dinner if you want."

Liam gaped at her. "I can't leave!"

"I know a way to sneak you out. He'll never know until it's too late."

"I have to stay!"

"And just why is that?" she snapped, and he flinched. He hadn't imagined the woman could look so angry. "Because he said so? Because he brainwashed you into believing you're all his? I bet you think you deserved everything. I know he put you downstairs for ages in the dark, and that can mess up a person."

"I deserved it because I was selfish. I stole from him-"

"Years ago!" She pinched the bridge of her nose with a wrinkled hand. "Listen to me. This isn't right."

He sniffled. "Yes, it is, and I deserved everything for being such a disappointment. He saved my life twice now, and he killed those men-"

She leaned over the cage and gripped the bars above him. "He's not all bad, but he's definitely not right. I can tell by your eyes and your words that he's broken you, but if I get you out, maybe you'll be all right...to some extent. One of the servants in the kitchen is nearly ready to leave now.

She'll take you out with her if I order her too. You'll wear a dress, and the gate guards will think you're a serva-

He gripped the bars to the back of the cage as he yelled. "I'm not going, and you can't make me! I'm staying here with him, and if you touch me, I'll scream, and I'll-"

The door suddenly opened, and the healer jumped back from the cage as if it had burned her. Prince Briar paused in the doorway and raised a pale eyebrow.

"I'm checking on him."

"I haven't done anything to him that needs healing, and you know very well you don't need to be in here," said Prince Briar. "The dessert's apple pie, which I don't care for, and Father's high. You should have come in a little earlier, Mera. Besides, did you think I wouldn't notice he's missing if you dragged him away?"

She flushed as he shut the door. "You've already half-ruined him-"

"Not another word," he hissed. "Get out. I see I'll have to lock my door now if I can't trust you either."

"Briar-"

"Don't Briar me. Get out."

Liam thought he'd call a guard to haul her off since she'd clearly been doing something she shouldn't. They stared at each other for a moment before she spoke again.

"I pulled you out of your Mother's womb."

Prince Briar's right wing twitched, and he said nothing. She finally stalked toward the door and left without another word.

"I swear I wasn't going," whimpered Liam.

"You screamed so loud, I heard you down the hall." Prince Briar came to lean on the cage and smile down at him. "She won't bother you again. I'll lock the main door, and she doesn't have a key. You're such a good boy to refuse."

Like Liam would ever dare to leave Master now. He moved to grab the bars closer. "Can you punish me? I need it."

"I am going to whip you and make that little ass squirm before I fuck it, but that's not punishment. You're just serving me the way I want."

"But I need punishment too," Liam whispered. "Real punishment. I'll do anything you want." His throat tightened up because he was making a

demand, but at the same time, he knew he needed to be honest. "It needs to hurt. The cane or something--"

"I'm not mad at you for what she did."

Liam burst into tears. "I still need to be punished."

Prince Briar crouched down to look at him. "Why? What did you do wrong?"

"I'm still s-selfish."

"And why is that? Try to breathe before you speak."

Liam drew in a shuddery breath. "Because I don't want to be left alone, and if you d-decide to lock me in the room again, I won't complain, but I don't want to be separated from you. I'm afraid you'll get rid of me entirely, and I don't want to leave you. That means I'm still selfish because if you want to leave me in here, or lock me up, or kick me out-I'm supposed to serve your desires, but I know I'm not good enough either."

Prince Briar hesitated before he stood and pulled the leather cord from his shirt so he could unlock the cage. Liam crawled out to await his orders.

"Liam." Prince Briar sighed as he crouched again and drew him closer to hug. "You're permitted to want to be with me. That shows how much you want to serve and please me which is your whole purpose as my slave. I'm not going to set you outside the gate and tell you to get lost, and I won't put you in that dark room unless you severely disappoint me again. Any little corrections that you need can be handled with pain. A good slave wants to be with his Master, and while I can't bring you with me or have you at my side at all times, your desire to be in my presence and have my touch is pleasing, and it's not selfish. You're good enough to serve me. Do you understand?"

"I th-think so, Master." Faint relief washed through Liam. He had been properly pleasing his Master, he just hadn't realized it.

Prince Briar drew back a bit and gripped Liam's chin. "If you complain about being in your cage or if I tell you to get down, and you dawdle or refuse, I will punish you. Remember, my desires come before yours at all times. You want to be obedient, right?"

"Yes, Master."

"Good boy. Go bend over the bend, and wait for me."

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After a few weeks, Prince Briar still seemed pleased with him. Every other day, he tied or held Liam down, rode his cock, and finished in his slave's mouth. Why he never wanted to cum himself while he was on Liam's dick made little sense, but he figured that was what Master liked.

And that was the only thing that counted.

Liam didn't ask for mercy when he was caned, for the cock cage to be kept off, or for anything. He didn't even ask if the crushing gloom that was constantly in his head would go away.

It didn't seem to be getting better.

He could sort of ignore it when he was with Prince Briar. Sex and pain helped since it was hard to think about too much else in the heat of the moment.

But nothing made the weight truly go away. When he was left alone, it was far worse, and the constant fear that he still wasn't good enough churned his guts. His appetite had lessened, and he found it difficult to finish his meals even though the food was good. His sleep didn't seem restful enough either even though he never dared to utter a complaint.

A few times, Prince Briar told him to perk up or to smile, and he'd do it. Or more like he tried to focus on looking happier.

He should've been entirely happy. He was glad to be serving the one he owed his life and safety to. Briar had those men killed, and he'd beaten the face of the guard who touched him. That showed he cared. Being caned until he cried was a small price to pay.

He just couldn't quite seem to settle that pleasure over his brain.

He tried harder and still failed. It figured that he'd still be shit inside even when he was doing what Master wanted.

Prince Briar seemed rather elated after four weeks since he'd started letting his slave cum in him, but he said he'd grown tired of that, so the cock cage would stay on for much longer periods, and cumming would be a rare reward.

Liam was fine with that. After all, the Prince owned his cock too. That didn't belong to Liam anymore.

Prince Briar looked so pleased when he said that as he sat on the balcony, Liam tacked on a smile too while he knelt by his feet.

"In a while, I'll have a couple of other surprises for you. Here, get on my lap." He helped Liam up. "I can't tell you what they are for a while, but I think you'll like them. Maybe that will perk you up."

Liam figured he should be happy for that too, but the smile took effort to keep on. At least the Prince was holding him, and that helped.

"Why do you often look down?" asked Prince Briar. "Hmm? Is there something else you want?"

Liam wouldn't dare want anything. "No."

"If you want something like a book, you can have it as long as it doesn't affect your overall behavior."

Liam didn't feel like reading anymore, and he shook his head.

"I still have men out looking for that bastard." Annoyance flashed in the Prince's eyes as he looked away for a moment. "Is that what's bothering you?"

"Nothing's bothering me, Master," said Liam.

Prince Briar tilted his head and brushed back Liam's hair. "You know I love you, right? One of your surprises will show you just how much."

A strange sense of confusion pierced Liam's gut. Loved? How could he love his pleasure slave? They were for sex and entertainment. Nobody loved them, and how could he love Liam? He was something to use and hurt, and Liam was grateful to serve him.

He didn't have any romantic feelings, and he'd honestly had no clue that he was supposed to develop any.

The few seconds he took to try and make sense of that were a few seconds too long.

"I love you too, Master," he managed to get out.

Too late. He knew his tone hadn't been convincing enough, his smile wasn't right, and his hesitation made the lie clear.

Prince Briar's face grew stiff as he locked eyes with Liam.

"You're lying," he said bluntly.

Of course, he'd know if his slave was lying. Liam's stomach clenched as he tried to think of how to fix this disappointment because he was pretty sure sucking Prince Briar's cock wasn't going to fix it. Maybe the Prince

had meant it, but Liam hadn't felt that sort of feeling for anyone in a long time. Wanting to serve and stay wasn't the same.

Liam was sure he'd be punished for not having the feelings that Master wanted.

"I'm sorry, Master," he said as Prince Briar picked him up like he weighed nothing and started to head inside. "I do love serving you. I just—"

"Clearly, you don't love *me*."

"But-but I don't know."

"After everything I've done for you."

Prince Briar set Liam on the floor by his cage, and he instantly dropped to his knees.

"I've had men die for you," snarled Prince Briar. "Not just because they were shit, but for *you*. I let you pick how they died so *you* would feel a little bit safer, and so *you* would have revenge."

Tears filled Liam's eyes. "I'm sorry. I thought I was being what you wanted-like a doll."

"I said I didn't want you to be thoughtless like a doll. You can be what I desire, willingly serve, and still think enough to feel—" A muscle in Prince Briar's jaw twitched, and he looked like he wanted to say something else, but he opened the cage door instead. "Get in."

Liam sobbed as he crawled inside. Elira, how was he supposed to fix and do this other thing the Prince wanted? How was he supposed to make himself feel love?

The door was locked, and Master tucked the key in his pocket.

"Master, I still want to stay with you." Through his tears, Liam watched Prince Briar walk to his bedroom without a word. The door slammed a moment later.

## Prince Briar

Briar heaved up what little of the eggs he'd managed to eat and watched them disappear down the stone chute of the privy. Why couldn't he have been one of the lucky people to skip this symptom?

It was too late to undo it or find someone different. It was partly luck that he'd gotten pregnant so quickly with Liam. Briar had odd, unfamiliar cramps one night which had meant he was nearly four weeks along. His uterus, unused until now, would have to grow to accommodate the baby as it grew.

Now at about seven weeks along, the muscles in his stomach felt a little sore, and his nipples were sensitive. Other changes would happen, but he wished he could skip the morning sickness, especially since it lasted beyond the morning.

Father was smoking turf half of the time now, just like back when Briar was twelve and thirteen. Twice in the past two weeks, he'd had to go deal with petitioners himself because Father forgot after smoking too much.

Father wouldn't notice anything different about his son. Not in his state.

Nothing else seemed ready to come up, so Briar leaned against the wall and tried to ignore the sour taste in his mouth. He wasn't sure if he'd have to hurl again. Being out of his rooms was harder with the constant nausea, and he couldn't risk being sick around others.

He heard his bedroom door open, and the familiar tread marched closer.

Mera came in and closed the door. "You're pregnant."

"How the fuck would you know?"

"At my age, I can always tell." She tapped her head and put her hands on her hips to glare at him. "I've been on this realm for far longer than you."

"Are you going to congratulate me?" he asked.

"Have you bothered to look at your damn pet out there?" she snapped.

"Every day."

Every day, Briar knew he had failed to get what he wanted. They both knew it, and since he couldn't bring himself to play with him anymore, it had crushed Liam further.

“Have you kept him in the cage every single day?” Mera looked ready to slap him, and honestly, he wouldn’t try to stop her.

He rolled his eyes. “I haven’t kept him caged up for weeks. I like torture, but I’m not trying to cripple and ruin his body. I let him out every afternoon and tell him to pace around as he pleases. He can stretch or whatever.”

“What does he do?”

His jaw tightened, and he shrugged.

“Tell me!”

“He doesn’t do much.”

Liam hadn’t even bothered to leave his cage yesterday when the door was left open. Briar never directly ordered him to pace for a certain amount of time or to do anything specific. He said to move about as Liam pleased and that some pacing would be good. He had done it a little, but he’d always end up back in his cage of his own accord after a short time.

Apparently, Liam didn’t care to get out at all the day before. Briar had thought about ordering him to do it, but now, he didn’t have the energy to force his slave to exercise or punish him for not doing it.

“Does this make you happy?” asked Mera.

“No. I wanted him to love me, and he doesn’t. I’m stuck with him. Maybe the baby will do something for him.”

“And if not?”

“I don’t know. It’s already done. I can’t change the past, and it seems he won’t love me, so...”

“You don’t love him either.”

“I do.” He cut his eyes at her. “I let him pick how those bastards would die. I took him out of that place. What else must I do for him?”

“No, you’re obsessed with having control. Those things just dug him in deeper.”

He did love Liam. Briar wanted to keep them both safe. Of course, he’d enjoyed breaking Liam down, but it had also felt damn good to bust in that guard’s face for touching what was his.

“He said he wanted to stay.” He leaned his head against the wall and looked at her. “He wanted my touch. I became his purpose, and he still doesn’t love me.”

“That’s not how love works.” She started pacing. “For Elira’s sake, Briar. Did you ever think of trying to woo someone? Maybe you could have

tried flowers or something?” She threw her hands up as he rolled his eyes. “You can speak that Latin nonsense the humans use, and you can do numbers that go far beyond my skill. You can also turn a man to shreds with your sword, but you can’t figure out how to build a proper relationship with someone? It’s built on trust and mutual consent. There are plenty of people you could pick from.”

Pfft. And how many couples thought they had that? How often did it change years later? How many men and women married for position or money?

“I don’t want fake love,” said Briar. “Of course, some random lord’s kid would pretend to love me back for the position. I’m rich, and I’ll be the King later. If I showed interest in marrying, half of the Kingdom’s lords would be parading their grown children to me. No thanks.”

His parent’s marriage had been a good example of why he shouldn’t trust someone in that manner unless he was able to fully control them. Father had done everything to get Mother to pick him. He hadn’t exactly been a looker in his younger years, and Mother had been like a shining flower. He’d still snared her, and she had seemed to love him for himself.

Despite the herbs to prevent it, she’d gotten pregnant.

Ray had never wanted a child. His nephew had been planned for the throne until Briar came along and ruined it. Ray had been all right with having his wife who was secretly an angel from the Fallen realm, but the unwanted child was an abomination in his eyes.

He had wanted the snatch and forgot to think about the potential accident that could be birthed from it. It took a few years until he started smoking turf and occasionally taking his anger out on his wife. He could have dealt with the mistake and tried to be the same man Mother thought she had married, but he changed over the years.

A child would love Briar entirely just like he had loved Mother with all of his heart. He'd be like Mother who had always loved him no matter what.

The spouse was a different story. He wanted someone who would be devoted to him in all ways, make him their whole world, and love only him. He needed to control them down to their core to make sure they didn't lose their feelings later on.

How else was he supposed to trust anyone?

Mera took a bottle from her pocket after a few moments. "Do you want to get rid of it?"

"Fuck you!" he snarled.

She huffed and set the bottle on the edge of the basin. "I'm asking in case you think this is a mistake. It's your body."

"I'm not killing my baby, and those words better not ever leave your mouth again."

"I won't ask you again. I put the option out there." She pointed at the bottle. "That's for sickness. Drink one mouthful in the morning and every four hours after that. No more. If you drink more, you'll be stuck in the privy again while your meals come out the other end. Eat small snacks throughout the day because an empty gut will only worsen it. Eat whatever tempts you at meals, and avoid training since too much movement and sweating won't help you. Besides, you'll probably get sore more easily. If you want exercise, walking is fine. As for Liam, you better free him and fix this mess you've created."

"I can't free him. Having a husband will look good instead of some random bastard child."

She paused by the door. "Some husband he'll make. I don't know what plot you're cooking against your Father, but maybe you should rethink that too. Even if he doesn't like you, it doesn't mean he'll kill you, but you've always been so suspicious of him."

Briar tilted his head. "Maybe I don't tell you everything because if you have to say, 'I don't know,' I'd rather it be the truth."

Mera didn't say another word before she left.

He'd seen the letters and knew he had until next year. That was it.

One of them would have to die, and it wasn't going to be Briar.

## Prince Briar

“You’re thirteen!”

Briar cast Mother a sour glance. “So? He is too. And we’re both nearly fourteen. His birthday is only a few days after mine.”

Mother narrowed her eyes. “You’re both still too young.”

He didn’t think so. If the thirteen-year-old stableboy was willing to give him handjobs in the back of the stable, he didn’t see the problem. Briar paid him, so it wasn’t like he wasn’t getting something from the deal. He needed the money for his poor family, and Briar found it to be a lot better than his own hand.

Mother’s wings rustled as she rubbed her forehead. “Listen, son. I know sexual stuff probably seems exciting because you’re young, and it’s new, but the Crown Prince of Elirim shouldn’t be getting worked off in the stables like some low-class village boy. The stableboy isn’t a prostitute, and it’s also not fair for you to be asking him since he’s probably afraid to say no anyway.”

“No, he likes it.”

That earned him such a glare from Mother, he squirmed in the armchair. It was the truth. The stableboy always seemed eager for it.

“You don’t understand because you can’t taste or absorb it,” said Briar. “Even if it’s not that strong for me, and it doesn’t even make visible smoke, I like it. It’s sweet.”

“You better not ever let a word of that slip,” she hissed.

“I know! I haven’t told anyone!”

“You have to keep it a secret no matter what. Leave the stableboy alone. I better not ever hear of this again. Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

He started wondering who else among the servants might be willing to work him off. There were a couple his age. The energy wasn’t quite as strong on his own, so he needed a second person. Now that he’d gotten several tastes, he wasn’t about to stop that no matter what Mother said.

"I'll talk to you later, all right? I love you." She stood and leaned down to kiss his temple. "Your Father will be up soon."

That was code to get out because Father had been smoking turf lately, and while he did it to "relax," it had a tendency to make him angry. Mother said so once and got a slap for it. Briar was sure that wasn't the only time.

She headed into her bedroom, but Prince Briar remained in the armchair. It wasn't fair that so many things were changing, and he couldn't control any of it. Some of it was nice like finding out how good someone's hand felt on him. He thought he was lucky that he could absorb a little energy since Mother couldn't.

She'd been considered a freak back home. Women were respected since they were so rare nowadays in the Fallen realm, but she was terribly unlucky that she couldn't absorb any energy at all. That meant she hadn't been able to do their magic.

They'd still expected her to join the army anyway because everyone did a certain amount of years. She would have been given grunt jobs and not expected to fight, but if her area had been overrun by demons, she wouldn't have had a chance. Besides, she said the angels did bad stuff that she couldn't agree with although she wouldn't tell Briar what those things were.

Since she could pass as a fairy, she came here, and later married Father. Only three people in the whole realm knew her secret and that Briar was half angel and fairy.

Only two people were fine with what he was.

The other changes in his life were terrible, and the stableboy had helped him forget them for a while. Father was colder to him now, he'd been smoking turf for the past year, and he wasn't nice to Mother anymore. It was clear he didn't really respect her because she was an angel, and his treatment of their son now proved that.

Briar had also found out that he was an abundant male and could have a kid later, not that he wanted to. Giving birth sounded horrible to him, and what if the other parent turned out to be like Father? He didn't want that kind of mess in his life.

Everything that Briar was used to as a child was changing. It was too fast. He knew he needed to get out of the room, but he wished he could stay like he used to. He rarely ever spent time with both parents anymore. The older he got, the more Father disliked him.

He dragged himself from the chair and slouched toward the door. Maybe he could practice the spark spell. He'd found Mother's secret spell book that she'd kept for sentimental reasons since it had been her Father's. It would take ages for him to set anything since he couldn't absorb that much energy, but he had enough to get a few practices in now and then.

That was another secret he had to keep since fairies didn't do magic like the Fallen.

He stepped out onto the landing. Father was already coming up the stairs, and he looked pissed.

"Didn't I say you're supposed to be in your rooms after dinner?" he snapped. "You're thirteen. You don't need to be coddled by your damn Mother anymore. Grow up."

Briar froze by the door and wondered how many slaps Mother had received. It must have hurt just as much as the one he'd gotten last week when Mother hadn't been around to see Father do it. The stairs were right there, and he imagined using the shove spell to push him back. Father would fly down like a rag doll and maybe break a few limbs. He wouldn't be slapping anyone then.

"Get moving!" yelled Father.

Briar caught the scent of whiskey. Turf and alcohol always equaled anger.

"Why?" he snapped before he could make himself shut up. "So you can smack Mother in privacy?"

Father reached to grab his arm, but Briar made a spark snap from his fingers. He had no trouble with his fairy magic since that had come in recently.

"Don't touch me."

"Did you dare to use your lightning on me, boy?" Father crowded in closer. "You--"

The door opened, and Mother came out. "What are you doing? Briar, I said to get downstairs. Come in, honey--"

"No, I won't come in until I teach this boy a lesson. He thinks he can raise a hand to me."

Mother slipped in between them. "You're scaring him."

"He's fucking thirteen, and he--"

"You're drunk, and I can smell the turf too. Leave him alone."

The crack was loud when Ray slapped his wife. Briar didn't think when he raised his hands as Father stepped around her to get to his son.

Mother, not looking behind her, moved in the way just as the invisible force left his palms. He couldn't pull it back once he whispered the words under his breath, and the spell worked perfectly as it drew on what little energy he'd been able to collect.

Just as he'd imagined, a person looked like a rag doll when they flew down the stairs, except it was supposed to be Father, not Mother. In the tight space, she couldn't fly or catch herself. She landed at the bottom with her head cocked at a strange angle, and one of her wings was crooked.

Time seemed to stop. Briar stood frozen as he stared at her and forgot about Father, his secrets, and all the changes that life had brought. Why wasn't she moving? She couldn't be hurt. Not really. Mother wouldn't die and leave him all alone.

Father slammed him into the wall which snapped him back, and one of his wings protested near the root as cold metal pressed against his neck. Father was shouting something that he couldn't comprehend.

He'd just killed Mother and the Queen of Elirim. Even royalty couldn't get away with such a crime, and he'd be put to death. The Goddess Elira probably wouldn't even want him. Why would she want some half-angel who killed his own Mother even if it was an accident?

Father hissed something, and Briar expected to feel the dagger cut his throat. Even though he was already nearly as big as Father, he didn't dare move.

"If you try anything, you'll never leave this Castle alive," Ray snarled.

They locked eyes, and he knew the truth was obvious. Briar had intended to push Father.

Father still hadn't slit his throat, and the reason clicked. With both dead, there would be no witnesses. Ray smelled like booze and turf, and no one would believe that he hadn't killed his wife and son. Everyone would think he'd gone insane, and the lords would rise up against him. With the King torn down and Briar dead, there might even be a short civil war for the top. Father had a brother and a nephew, but they lived far away.

By the time they found out, someone else could have already planted their arse on the throne.

If Briar killed him now to defend himself, he couldn't prove his innocence either.

Father drew back, gripped him by the collar, and shoved him into the other wall. The boot to Briar's gut dropped him. He wrapped an arm around his middle as he hunched on the floor which turned blurry from his tears.

"Get the fuck out while I deal with this. I never wanted you anyway, and I should kill you. I knew you'd turn into some foul thing and that you'd never be like your Mother. You-get the fuck out!"

Briar shakily made it down the stairs and toward the unmoving body.

She'd never hug him again or tell him how much she loved him. He'd never listen to her stories about the good parts of the Fallen realm. He couldn't go to her anymore when he had secrets or problems that he couldn't tell anyone else. He'd cut off his wings if he could undo this. He'd only wanted to protect her from Father.

Ray might cover it up to protect the throne, but it didn't matter. Briar had killed the only person who truly loved him.

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