

"I'm sure I'll get by." Felix giggled in delight as the lock clicked open. He straightened and opened the door, peering inside. He seemed to see something odd, but whatever it was, he didn't feel the need to comment on. Wordless, he cocked his head, then stepped through.

Leaving Ricard to twiddle his thumbs until Felix had undone the first lock. He sighed and leaned against the larger of the two doors. Thank goodness he'd managed to drag Felix along into the whole thing, because he was likely the only locksmith on the continent who could be trusted to do a job like this without fucking his brains into the first Fae to wiggle her hips at him.

And he had very cheap rates, too.

"Well!" Ricard announced to nothing and no one as he pulled out the map once more. "Not a bit of sense to be found in just standing around. Let's see..." The map was, as perhaps one would expect, a bit more abstract than a professional cartographer's work. Chalk it up to the Fae having their fun in the design of the manor. And the subsequent mapping thereof.

Ricard sighed as he traced what he assumed to be the main path through the sprawling manse with his fingertip. There wasn't much in the way of...clear direction. The map seemed to be most useful in its guidance to the manor itself. Once one passed into the Faerealms, though, all wagers were off. Ricard sighed again, cast a glance over his shoulder, and looked back down to the map.

He was hardly a navigator, but even he could ascertain a *few* of the map's features. For one, there was a rather clear branch at its beginning. The circle of eight stones, the aspen door, the fountain, and then two doors: one large, one small. Felix, bless his heart, seemed to have quite the circuitous journey before him, though Ricard highly doubted that his path was as loopy as depicted on the map.

Fuck it, maybe it was. Fucking Fae spat in reason's face. Ricard shook his head with a groan and turned his attention to the larger door and the path that extended past it.

For the most part, it seemed...a *bit* more straightforward. The issue with his proposed pilgrimage wasn't so much a spiraling path as much as it was a series of...gates? Doors? Ricard's frown curdled further. If this whole heist was going to be standing around waiting for Felix to break through the doors that Ricard found his progress barred by, he'd have a devil of a time staying awake waiting.

To be accurate, however, he likely wouldn't spend much time waiting at all. If the map's pictorials were to be believed, Ricard would find himself occupied by a *bit* more than just standing around. What awaited him deeper inside was a mystery. Or at least a mystery partially revealed. Past the larger door laid four more gates between him and his riches, each marked with a symbol.

None of the symbols were terribly complex, but that generality was more of a hindrance than a help. A paw-print, an apple, a crown, and an amphora. Wonderful. Yes, of course, he knew precisely what to expect now.

A sharp *Click!* came from the padlock, interrupting Ricard's pouting and turning it to giddy elation. "Ah, to think I doubted your expedience for even a moment! Good show, Felix!" Ricard hummed to himself as he discarded the undone lock, map stuffed once more into his pocket. He'd worry about what challenges awaited him when he met them face to face. After all, fortune favored the bold, and Ricard was more than happy to affect boldness if it

meant winning Fortune's gilded hand! He took a half-moment to screw his courage to the sticking point and stepped through the door.

He tried to, at least. Even unlocked, the door seemed a bit reluctant to cooperate. At first it seemed as if it was stuck, but an insistent push of his shoulder against it told Ricard that it wasn't so much *stuck* as much as it was *blocked*. There was something on the other side, something *heavy*. But not something immovable. He took a step back and slammed against the door once, twice more. "Blasted...door!" Ricard hissed through gritted teeth. "Open, will you?! I've already taken care of the *lock!*"

Another thump of his shoulder sent the door opening that much wider, and another provided a crack just wide enough for him to squeeze through. Forward! Ricard seized the opportunity, inopportune though it may have been, and wriggled past the first door and into...a room.

A messy room.

A *very* messy room. Ricard looked behind him and saw just why it had been so difficult to make his way inside, unlocked or no: there were piles of splintered and broken furniture all over the place, including just behind the door he'd entered from.

Besides the clutter, though, it was a rather...nice place. As nice as what qualified generously as "derelict" could be, at least. What's more, it certainly wasn't a hallway or some other kind of thoroughfare. Far from it, he seemed to have found his way into a den of sorts. Though it was in almost total disrepair, the trappings of a sitting parlor were plainly evident. Look, there was a ruined sofa before the cracked remains of a table. A few moth-eaten armchairs completed the circle of seats, and...

...And there wasn't much to pilfer here, was there. Ricard clicked his tongue, his assessment of the room distressingly lacking. "One would hope," he muttered to himself, "that the Fae would be just a bit more..." He narrowed his eyes at the ceiling and rolled a hand in idle circles as he sought the proper word. "...*gratuitous* in their decorating."

"More like 'idiotic.'"

The second voice -- gruff, irritated, but distinctly feminine -- in this case seemed to come from thin air, sending Ricard stumbling back, wide-eyed. When he tripped over a destroyed side table, his unseen hostess apparently found the sight so amusing that she began to laugh, low and rumbling.

Normally Ricard would've been offended by such immediate pleasure at his expense, but now was not the time to attend to his pride! Now was the time to fend for his life! He sat up on the ground, head whipping about to try and find the source of the voice. Ricard's hand went to his shirt, tugging the collar aside to show his brand. "You'd best not lay a finger on me!" He shouted, voice cracking only once. "I'm protected by Titania, Queen of the Seelie Court! If you harm me, you'll bring--"

"Oh, stuff it, you *ponce*." She cut him off with a single disinterested growl, rising up before his eyes. Shaggy, hulking, but undeniably feminine once more, a ferocious beast reared up in front of Ricard, the apparent source of the voice. "I've already gotten zapped by Fae nonsense. You think I'm afraid of it happening again?"

Ricard could only stare up at her, terrified for...well, a few reasons, really. For one, she was massive. Her head -- complete with long, pointed horns, he noted with a shiver -- nearly bumped against the ceiling, and the only reason it *didn't*, he suspected, is because she had

rather poor posture. Second, her monstrous features seemed to include fangs and claws, so, naturally, she had options if she wanted to eviscerate him. Third.

Third, she was absolutely gorgeous. In a terrifying, bestial sort of way. She was covered in fur, yes. She was indisputably a great, big monster. But her bust was enormous, and her hips were wide enough to crush his with one forceful drop. It was bad enough that she could kill him with one swipe of her claws. It was worse still that she was primally attractive enough to *confuse* him like this. Inconsiderate, really. Add to that the ruggedly beautiful face of a warrior-queen -- though she had a bit of a literal snout -- and one couldn't help but admire her statuesque sex appeal.

Oh. She was just kind of staring down at him. Had he been silent for the past few minutes? Ricard rose to his feet, dusted himself off, and tried to think of something to say. "Well!" He blurted out, indignant -- or affecting indignation. "I suppose that'd make us quite the merry pair indeed! Two sorry souls, put-upon by the caprices of Fae!"

She blinked down at him. Her glare turned curious. "Eh?"

"I'm *protected*, yes." He pulled his collar aside once more, showing the brand upon his skin. "But this specious pock is no sigil of *favor*. Far from it!" He crossed his arms, sucked in a breath, and sighed heavily. "No, 'tis the means by which Titania, b-" Ricard considered hissing a curse upon her head, but even one made in jest was best not risked. There was no telling how closely any eavesdropping Fae were listening. "Pardon, I meant to say *Queen* Titania, b-beautiful as she is powerful, made it known that I hold her attention in some small way."

She'd since crossed her arms, and her confusion had given way to unamused skepticism. "Ah-ha." The beast murmured, looking Ricard over.

"Would that I had both the sharp wit and easy circumstances that I could contrive such flights of fancy! No, my stunning hostess," Ricard said with a shake of his head. "This is the hand I was so callously dealt. To be- *Gah!*"

A single pat of one massive hand upon Ricard's head cut his diatribe short. "Y'know," the beast muttered, placing her hands under Ricard's armpits and hoisting him up. "You're a bad liar."

He allowed himself to be held, looking for a moment more like a temporarily displaced cat than a man. His body hung limply beneath him, feet dangling just off the ground. Even when he perked up to answer, Ricard didn't exactly correct his apparently looseness. Maybe if he went limp, it'd be harder to hold him? It seemed to work normally. "You're right!" He blurted out his agreement a touch too emphatically. "I *am* a bad liar! And *that* is *precisely* why you can trust me! For-" He shrugged widely, still lifted in the air. "For an eye as keen as yours would *surely* spot the tarnish of mistruth upon my silver tongue were I so- *Ackpth!*"

"And you talk too much," she decided, throwing him down onto a moth-eaten armchair. As Ricard sputtered on his newfound throne, the beast tapped her chin thoughtfully...before snickering to herself. "No surprise there, I guess. Give a man the chance, he'll talk your ear off. Ugh." Her amusement apparently soured at the thought, and she shook her head. "*Men.*"

The notion soured Ricard's panic into displeasure, too. The sudden shock of her words cut his floundering short, inelegant posture left uncorrected as he glanced askew. "And who

says romance is dead," he muttered under his breath. He straightened up in his seat and crossed his arms. "Pardon, I was led to believe that beast-women were rather *fond* of men. You're the exception, I take it?"

"I'm *not* a beast-woman!" She suddenly snarled, fangs bared in a terrifying scowl. Luckily for Ricard, his squeak of terror seemed to amuse her. Her scowl quirked into a smug grin, and the beast continued. "Well." Her smirk faltered, and she looked to the side. "I didn't *used* to be a beast-woman. See, I used to be a *princess*. Or-" She crossed her arms and growled. "I still am! It's just that that *bitch* Mab put a *curse* on me!"

"A curse!" Ricard repeated, aghast. Hands clapped to his cheeks, he was stunned silent. For around a second. He leaned in, voice dipping to a stage-whisper. "Is it contagious? *Eep!*"

"No, it's not *contagious*," she snapped, the tip of her previously-unseen tail whipping about to smack him in the face. "But it may as well be *terminal*. There's *no way* I'm gonna be able to break it. Not in a *thousand* lifetimes."

"Oof." Ricard's brow furrowed in genuine sympathy at that one. He didn't have as much experience with the Fae as his boon might intimate, but he knew just how nasty they could be. Especially the Unseelie. "It's hardly my place to *pry*, but, ah..." He sat up in the armchair. "What are the...*circumstances* of your affliction?"

She huffed, puffing her cheeks out in almost girlish irritation. With a cross of her arms, the "beast" tensed. "I..." She reached one hand -- or perhaps paw...? -- up to scratch her cheek, almost embarrassed. "I never much cared for men. Not *most* of them, anyway. Sure, they're fine to look at and fine to *fuck*, but..."

Ricard blinked up at her expectantly.

"But they're *useless* to talk to, aren't they? Honestly, men would be better off if they just shut up and only spoke when spoken to!" The beast-woman growled, and if she hadn't looked so furious, Ricard would've perhaps been offended. As it stood, however, he was smart enough to simply let her continue. "A bunch of spineless, simpering sycophants! The only men I've ever met have been the kind of lily-livered prats that thought they could get into my bedchambers with poetry and flattery. Pathetic. *Weak*."

She straightened up, puffing her chest out with some measure of pride. "So it was my *right*, as I saw it, to *take* what was mine. I was gonna be queen some day, and when I was, I wouldn't have some doddering *king* rule beside me. No, I was gonna have-"

Her posture slumped, and the beast began to pant, drooling over some salacious fantasy coaxed to the forefront of her mind. Tongue lolling out as she breathed heavily, she stared into the distance and grinned wider. "I was gonna have a *harem* of pretty, lithe *boys* to take my pleasure from! And I was gonna-" She brought one fearsome paw between her legs, pressing down with eager enthusiasm. Her voice wavered, and Ricard felt his cheeks heat with blush. "I was gonna get the Fae to make me a buncha little *rings* to put around their cocks to make sure they were nice and *stiff* all the *time* and make them *obedient* and - *And!*"

Ricard didn't quite want to interrupt her, but the alternative was to watch her pleasure herself to climax, and...while that wasn't an *unpleasant* idea, it wasn't a very *prudent* one. Not if he wanted to leave anytime soon, at least. "And?" He finally prompted.

"Ah-!" She blinked, snapped out of her self-stimulation. She pulled her hand away from the dripping mound of her sex, still hidden by the tuft of fur between her legs, and continued.

"And...I made the mistake of going to Mab first." She planted one hand -- the one yet-unused -- on her hip. "I told her about what I wanted, how I needed a cock-ring to keep a man permanently on the brink of orgasm. I was worried she was going to be a bit put off, but, well, she seemed interested." The beast shrugged. "Go figure. Anyway, I was pretty excited. I offered the kinda gifts you're supposed to bring. Sweets, jewels, that kinda stuff. She was practically ready to hand over the first ring."

She paused once more, this time continuing without Ricard's prompting. "But then she asked to meet the lucky prince that I was going to give it to." The beast snorted with bitter laughter. "'Prince,' I said. 'Why would I give it to a prince?' Men're only good for fucking and ordering around. I wasn't gonna marry a prince, and I wasn't gonna have a king. I was going to have a harem, and I was going to use them as I pleased."

The beast clicked her tongue. "She didn't like that. Said it wasn't *romantic* enough. As if a queen locking her king in magic chastity was some kinda happy ending. She kept *badgering* me with all these questions about what kinda *men* I liked, and I kept telling her that I don't *like* men, I *fuck* them. She didn't seem to mind *that*. In fact." The beast groaned, rolling her eyes and tapping an irritated claw between her eyes. "She said she had an even *better* gift for me if that's what I wanted."

Ricard's brief arousal at her self-abuse had all but dissolved as her story continued. At the apparent "conclusion," all he could do was watch her quietly. He gulped. "And now...here you are?"

"Here I am." She snarled, and after a rumble of displeasure, the beast stomped one massive foot and sent the floorboards splintering beneath her. "Gods *damn* her! She turned me into a hideous *monster!* Do you know what that *cunt* Mab told me?!" She whipped about to face Ricard, staring down at him ferociously. When he shook his head, she only leaned in closer, her breath hot against his skin. "She told me that if I wanted to *act* like an animal, I'd better *look* like one, too! So now I'm *stuck* like this until I can tell her 'honestly and for-truly' -- her words, not mine -- that I want a *king*, not just a pack of *dogs* to lead! *Absurd!*"

Ricard was terrified in the face of such feral rage, but...he wasn't exactly *sympathetic*. If anything, Mab seemed the type to mete out ironic justice more than play idle mischief, if this was anything to go by. But that didn't change the fact that the very real, very angry beast before him was apparently looking for vindication. Whether or not it meant as much coming from a man was sardonicism Ricard could ill afford at the moment.

He gulped. Met her gaze. And smiled shakily with a shrug. "Well, there's wisdom to be found here," he squeaked. Her expression didn't seem to...*sour*, at least, so Ricard continued. "Never trust a Fae?"

This was, apparently, the wrong thing to say.

She roared and reared one clawed hand back, and the mere sight was enough to send Ricard cowering in fear, eyes clasped shut. "I'm sorry! A thousand, thousand pardons! That I had... Thuh-That I had...!" Ricard sputtered, hands clasped together in front of himself in a desperate appeal for leniency. His words were cut short, however, by a click.

And a sudden snugness around his neck. His eyes opened, and he brought a curious hand to the...*collar* now looping his throat.

"There we are," she hummed, apparently pleased with herself. Her fury from moments before was gone, even if the *intensity* wasn't. "Mab didn't leave me empty-handed,

admittedly. It's hardly a *ring*, and it doesn't do *everything* I'd want it to, but..." She licked her lips. "Might as well make the best of things, huh, *boy?*"

Ricard's irritation returned once more at her words, albeit more as a frustrated simmer.

"That's hardly...necessary..." He blinked up at her, dizzy for. One reason or another.

Gods, she was tall. She towered over him, undeniably superior. Physically, at least. She'd lifted him up as if he weighed naught more than a feather. Even without the display, there was the subtle ripple of muscles under her fur. The shallow divots of her abs on her stomach. Ricard didn't normally care for women who were so apparent in their physical strength, but there was a certain Amazonian appeal to her aesthetic.

It didn't help -- or perhaps it did? -- that he had a bloody *collar* around his neck now. Mm. It was a kind of thrilling notion, admittedly. Unbidden, daydreams drifted into Ricard's mind. Of his submission, his eager acquiescence to his queen's commands, to her every whim. He sat at the foot of her throne, nude save his collar, smiling vacantly. Happy. Obedient.

Just how a man should be.

The thought shook him from his reverie and sent him physically shaking his head to dispel the fantasies. "Guh!" He brought two hands up to his neck now, grabbing and tugging at the collar ineffectually. "What *is* this blasted thing?! Tell me at once!"

"You *really* don't give a cuss about me, do you?" She sneered down at him, eyes narrowed to slits. She raised one foot and planted it on his crotch, and Ricard was for a moment shocked to find that he'd somehow gotten hard during the altercation. "Well." She clicked her tongue, and her sneer turned to a smirk once more. "That's going to change. Starting *now*. You're going to *listen* to me," she said with a rough grind of her heel on the bulge in his pants, "and you're going to *like* it. Understand, *boy?*"

Ricard nodded with a whimper, the compulsion of his collar -- it *had* to be the collar -- blending with the humiliating pleasure of her foot on his crotch to define the sheer disparity between them. She spoke, he listened. That's just how it was. *That's how it was supposed to be.*

Gah! Ricard shook his head, though he didn't move more than that. "Fuh-Fine," he husked, looking up at her. "I'll listen."

It wasn't submission. No, it was pragmatism. To defy a brute such as her? What would he *gain*? It was futile to try and assert his hypothetical dominance over her. She'd tear him to bits or worse! No, for now Ricard would acquiesce to her demands. He'd dealt with people like her before, and the path forward was to stoke her bloated ego. Just smile, nod, and agree.

*Smile, nod, and agree.*

"It feels good, doesn't it?" She murmured, watching him hungrily. The beast pressed her foot down just a touch harder, enough that the pads on the soles of her feet pressed up against either side of the bulge in his pants. Stroking up and down, gently.

Oh, if this was how he was to be treated, Ricard was going to have an easy time going along with it. He found himself smiling, his gaze fixed nowhere in particular. "Mm. Goodness, yes," he mumbled. Bit by bit, the tension in the air mellowed into pleasant, indulgent heat. Debasement? No, the steady grind of her foot against his cock was *divine*.

She licked her lips, and Ricard's eyes sank shut. In the darkness, he heard her voice, low, predatory. "Look at you," she hissed. "Small. Weak. *Vulnerable*. Her every admonition came with an insistent push down, another pulse of delicious, pleasant friction.

Ricard moaned and was somehow surprised at how submissive he sounded. What surprised him more was how much he liked that.

"You're just like all the others," she insisted. "You think you're so *smooth* and *suave*, and you think every girl you meet is going to end up spreading her legs for you just because of your 'silver tongue.'"

Abruptly, the pressure of her foot abated, and Ricard was about to whimper his protest...before the beast tugged his trousers down and took his cock in her hand directly.

"You have *no* idea what to do when a *woman* takes charge, do you? Silly little *boy*."

Ricard couldn't do much more than pant and gasp his agreement in quick, desperate breaths. If he were capable of speech, he would've said anything, everything, he would've told her that she was exactly right, that he was just a helpless *male*, that she... Oh, that she...

He opened his eyes blearily and saw her staring down at him. If ever there were tenderness in her heart, it had given way to animal hunger. The beast was all but drooling as she watched him squirm and writhe under her. Ricard almost felt as if he should put up more of a fight so as to not deny her the *chase*. She was the predator. And he, Ricard realized with a wavering moan, was the *prey*.

"We're going to train you *good*, my little *pet*," she growled, pumping his cock in her hand faster and faster. Pre drooled from the tip and coated his prick, massaged into the stiff, twitching flesh of his manhood by her frantic hand. "You're going to be a *good* little boy, and you're going to learn what it means to be *obedient*."

She was panting almost as hard as he was, one hand on his cock, the other between her own legs once more. But Ricard could barely keep his eyes on her anymore. No, he could only stare up at the ceiling and smile. He was going to be a *good* boy.

"Muh," he slurred, feeling so deliciously small under her, so exquisitely weak and helpless.

Her breath seemed to catch in her throat, and the beast's eyes went wide. Her hands -- both of them -- moved faster. "Mm? Yes, pet?" She sounded excited. "Yes, say it. Say it, be a *good* boy and *say it*."

Gods, anything to be a good boy. Ricard moaned at her touch, on the brink of climax. "M-Muh..."

"M-My *queen*," he moaned, lips curling up into a dreamy smile. Ricard opened his eyes and stared up into the beast's, and though her stroking slowed, it didn't stop. She blinked down at him, apparently taken aback by the sudden reverence. Had she been expecting another word? "That I had a thousand lifetimes to stay by your side, each spent happily in your service."

His words trailed off into a sigh, and the beast decided to pause in her otherwise rigorous milking.

"Ah." She mumbled. Her grip tightened around his cock, and Ricard giggled in delight at the sensation. "You're...pretty *romantic* right now, all things considered." She paused once

more, but it wasn't long before she resumed her stroking. "Sure you don't want to *beg* for the *privilege* of submitting to me?"

Ricard could only laugh with a shake of his head. "It is neither my place nor my prerogative to profess the barest influence over your will. No, my queen." His body relaxed under her. "I happily entrust myself to your capable hands. Whatever task or trial you should appoint me, I shall pursue to my final breath."

For whatever reason, this seemed to frustrate her. The beast pumped his cock harder and faster, and her voice festered into a snarl. "And if I decide I want you locked up in *chains*, eating out of a *dog's* bowl at the foot of my throne! You'd take your dinner with a smile on your face and a collar around your neck?!"

Ricard nodded serenely, and his smile didn't so much as falter when she pulled her hand away.

"And if I beat you and whipped you and dripped hot wax all over your body?!" She all but roared down at him, her foot planted on his cock once more. This time there wasn't the slightest bit of fabric to separate the two. Ricard swooned at the sensation of her touch. "If I leave you bloodied and bruised because it brings me *pleasure* to do so?!"

"I'd only hope," Ricard sighed, "that my body would endure such that I could fulfill whatever you asked of me next."

"*Ugh!*" The beast groaned, pulling her foot away. "Oh, this is *ridiculous!* You're supposed to--" She clenched her hands into fists. "You're supposed get all- You're supposed to just be a stupid, horny *idiot!*"

Ricard rose to his feet -- though he was prepared to lay down once more should she tell him to -- and moved to embrace her. "If I am a fool, let me be *your* fool, and let others say that it is my *love* for you that has robbed me of my wits."

She was all but paralyzed as Ricard wrapped his arms around her, and when he pressed his cheek against her bosom, he sighed happily. She was undeniably strong. Impressively so, with the body to match. But despite the unyielding firmness of the rippling muscles just below her fur, she was still a woman, and she was still possessed of a woman's softness.

And despite her fangs and claws and bestial ferocity, in her breast beat a human's heart, swayed by a human's hope and longing.

"Ah, you thrice-damned *jackass!*" She cried, wrapping her arms around him in turn, lifting him up off the ground in a lung-emptying hug. "What the hell's the *matter* with you?! You're like a puppy that just won't take a *hint!*" Ricard's rose-tinted reverie turned to bug-eyed sputtering as she spun about on her heels, the beast apparently ignorant to Ricard's wheezing pleas for clemency.

"*Pliss,*" he rasped, slapping against her back weakly. "*Stup.*"

"Uh? Ah!" She stopped dead in her tracks, releasing him with a squeak. "I'm sorry! Oh, gods, are you OK?!"

He may've been in a heap on the ground, half-naked and panting, but Ricard was, at least, intact. He weakly raised a hand and flashed a thumbs-up. Even managed a snort of laughter at her subsequent sigh of relief. When he sat up on the floor, he was greeted by the sight of the beast squatting down beside him, peering at him intently. "I'm touched by your



concern," Ricard groaned, tugging his shirt down to cover himself, "but all's well that ends well. But marvel of marvels!"

She quirked a brow, and he leaned in with a smile.

"That my queen was so *frightened* by the prospect of losing an impudent *pup* such as myself." Ricard rattled with laughter, still in the process of catching his breath. Still, he could stand, even if it was on wobbling legs. Once he steadied himself, the beast rose to her feet as well. And Ricard...

Ricard smiled up at her, and it was a smile of such overwhelming love, of such bottomless adoration, of-

The beast coughed into her hand. "Um."

And Ricard blinked. "...Um?"

"So, ah." She looked almost embarrassed. "I feel kinda *silly* saying this, considering you've been so *helpful* and all." Not too embarrassed to manage a bashful smile, though. "But. Well, here's the thing."

Ricard furrowed his brow. "...I'm listening."

"All that stuff about, ah. Love and service and whatever. It was really nice. Honest! And it helped me kind of realize a few things. Or." The beast rolled her eyes in thought. "It helped me adjust my perspective. And see that maybe what I thought I wanted wasn't what I *really* wanted, you know?"

Ricard reached out to take one of her hands, smiling gently. "If I had but one wish, it would be for your happiness, my qu-"

She pulled hers back. "Yeah, see, that's the thing. Uh." She clicked her tongue. "You're not really my type. Not for a *king*, at least. Harem boy, sure." The beast tapped her chin and shook her head, looking Ricard up and down. "But king? No, no, no. You don't even know my *name*."

Ricard's eyes widened up at her, and his blood ran cold. Oh, *fuck*. No, he had to know her *name*, at least. He loved her with all his *hea*-

The collar came off with a *click!* and the fluttering infatuation left with it. The sudden departure was so jarring that it sent Ricard stumbling back, eyelids fluttering, hand brought up to his neck. "*Uh!*"

"See?" She tossed the collar over her shoulder, her grin turned to a smirk. "So much for the 'Honeymoon' Manor, I guess. If I'm gonna find a king to boss around, I don't think I'm going to find him here. No offense."

Ricard rubbed his neck, trying very intently not to look cross at the sudden and almost insultingly gentle rejection. At best, he managed to look like he'd eaten something that disagreed with him. "Somehow I think I'll live," he muttered, glancing away.

"Fantastic!" She chirped, reaching down to pick up his discarded pants. "So, here you are! Um. I think there's a door over...*that way*," she said, squinting and pointing down an impossibly long hallway. "At least I *think* there is? I was never really interested in finding out, but sometimes some pixies'll head that way."

Ricard stepped into his pants, sighing heavily. Joy and exultation. A Fae-touched hallway to spend a few days walking down. Maybe next he'd find a trio of crones with a few riddles

prepared. "Good to know. In *any* event." He patted down his front, then his shoulders, and straightened up. His gaze met the beast's, and he huffed with a sigh. "Anything else you might let me know?"

She smiled wider, fangs bared. "Just one thing."

With that, the beast leaned in and pressed a kiss to Ricard's lips.

"Thank you."

Ricard blinked and found himself a bit more flushed in its wake than he cared to admit. He smiled, adjusted his collar with perhaps a *touch* of smug satisfaction, and waved with a flourish to the beast. "Please, think nothing of it! I bid you fare well, and may your heart be so full of love that it cannot *help* but spill over!"

He turned away, sighed, and muttered as he began down the enchanted hallway. "And may my coffers do the same with gold."