

## **Girl of My Dreams**

Mike yawned, covering his mouth, then set his book down on the cart. It was dangerously full, and he knew that Sofia would ream him out if he just kept cramming books onto it.

“Can you take this to the platform?” he asked Death.

“Yes I can, Mike Radley.” The grim reaper grabbed the cart with bony hands and pushed it down the corridor, the wheels squeaking softly. Mike rubbed his eyes and yawned again, then checked his phone. He had no signal in the Library, but all he wanted was to see the time. It was almost four in the morning.

“Shit.” The Library was severely lacking a coffee stand. Maybe he could talk the cyclops into installing a magical espresso machine that followed him around and doled out caffeine at a moment’s notice.

The pods would probably still be bad for the environment. He could probably put in for a self grinding machine, maybe even have it draw a picture in the foam for him.

He wondered what it would take for Tick Tock to take the job.

Determined to keep going, he scanned the next rack of books, kneeling down to see the bottom shelf. The bottom shelf was always the hardest for him because he had to get on his hands and knees to read the titles. His knees ached, so he sat on his butt and leaned forward to read the title of the first book.

The way the words swam out at him from the spines of each book made him rub his eyes again. He appreciated that the lantern helped translate for him, but the method made his eyes itch. Something scratched the edge of his eyelid, and he used a fingernail to scoop it free.

“Ugh.” It was a tiny grain of sand. He flicked it away, letting out another yawn. Though the hour was late, he was determined to push forward and at least gather up the rest of the books in this section. The very thought of missing a key bit of information made him anxious.

A thick brown tome stuck out a bit farther than the rest. He squinted to read it, the foreign script whirling around like a hyperactive hurricane before rewriting itself on top of the spine.

*Fantastic Faeries and Where to Find Them.* The hovering letters sparkled like gold, spinning around in lazy spirals.

“Looks promising,” Mike muttered and cracked the book open. Puzzled, he flipped through the pages, then rifled through to the end of the book.

The pages were all blank. Who the fuck would put a blank book in the Library? Puzzled, he closed the book and reopened it, wondering if there was some trick to it, or maybe he would need magic to reveal the words.

A loud tone resonated through the Library, and he dropped the book, catching it before it hit the floor. When the ground rumbled beneath him, he fell backward into the shelves behind him, knocking some of the books onto the ground.

“What the hell is that?” He stood, and quickly lost his balance, the book in his hands turning to sand and falling between his fingers.

“What the—oh.” Letting out a sigh of relief, he watched the book fall to pieces in front of him, forming into a small pile of sand. He gave the pile a little kick, and the solid stone floor beneath it shattered into stone crumbs that bounced off of the nearby racks.

The nearby stacks crumbled, turning into large piles of sand that threatened to bury him, but he easily climbed above them. When the whole world tilted, the sand flowed like water, carrying him away to parts unknown.

The flowing sand pulled him free of the giant columns of the Library and out into the open air. The Library was gone, replaced by an open sky and mountainous clouds. He spiraled through the clouds, the harsh grains of sand scattering around him to form large streams that punched holes in the mist. Breaking free of the cool embrace of the clouds, he saw that the world beneath him had formed into an incredibly large beach. Dark waves surged against the shore, the waves breaking along the horizon and crashing into the sand like hungry hands, eager to scoop it all away.

He spread his arms wide, stabilizing his fall. Keeping his eyes on the approaching ground, he got his feet beneath him, ready to bend his knees on impact.

He slammed into the sand with the grace of a bowling ball, landing in a heap with his legs crumpling beneath him. Rolling down the side of a sand dune, he came to a stop face up at the bottom. The wind had been knocked from him, and he fought the urge to panic, just letting his mind take over as he contemplated the sky above. Stretching his legs, he heard everything pop back

into place and chuckled. Sitting up, he brushed the sand off of his face and looked around.

“At least you realized you were falling this time.” Lily stood behind him, her scorpion tail whipping back and forth before vanishing with a pop. The wings on her back disappeared as well, leaving the succubus to regard him over a pair of red sunglasses. She wore a white and red bikini and thigh-high boots, her black hair streaked with crimson. A smirk of amusement was painted on her thick, red lips.

“Good morning, Lily.”

“Hey there, Romeo. You sure know how to keep a girl waiting.”

“Are you the reason I’m asleep?” he asked. With a single sting of her tail, she could inject a toxin guaranteed to put any creature into the deepest sleep.

“Nope. That’s all you. The frailty of the human condition involves requiring food and sleep, you knucklehead. Clearly you are lacking the latter, so here I am.” She waved a hand and the sand beneath her formed into a stool, followed by a popup tiki hut complete with a vacant-eyed bartender who slid her a drink. It smelled of coconut and rum “So what has you burning the midnight oil?”

Mike stood next to her and concentrated on the sand by her feet. He was able to command it to form into a metal rod without the seat, so he created one out of the sand on the ground, then picked it up and screwed it on.

He sat next to Lily and put his elbow up on the bar. “I’ll have what she’s having.”

The bartender made the drink and handed it to Mike, who sipped at it.

“Wow, these are good.” He saluted the bartender and turned to face Lily, his earlier sense of fatigue gone, his head suddenly clear. “A bit has happened today. We found out that Cecilia is being held captive by the faerie queen, and now we’re trying to do research so that we can open a portal to the faerie realm and convince the queen to give her back.”

Lily spat out her drink, spraying the counter with multicolored drops of syrup. The drops sprouted legs and chased each other around until the bartender soaked them up with the sweep of a towel.

“Holy shit, Romeo, do you have any idea what you’re going up against? You’re going to try to sweet-talk the queen of the faeries? Are you insane?” Lily wiped her mouth off with one hand.

“Hey now, I don’t see what the big problem is. I’m planning on having Beth help, too, we’ll be very diplomatic.” *For now*, he mentally added.

“Oh no, there’s a big problem. If you thought demons were deceptive, then you need to understand that she’s who we look up to when it comes to deception through words. The fae have been around much longer than demons. In fact, they were one of the first things created after the Old Ones were sealed away. I would argue that trying to convince the faerie queen to do anything she doesn’t already want to do would be like staring into the sun and trying to convince it to blink first.”

“You really think it will be that difficult?”

Lily nodded. “Here’s something you need to understand. Demons can’t lie when asked directly, it’s supposed to be a throwback to when they were angels, part of the price for their fall, really. You get to be a prime douchebag, but you still have to tell the truth. The faerie queen not only gets to be a capital cunt about everything, but she will flat out lie to your face. The fae will claim that Fairie Law binds them, but guess who makes the laws? She thinks it’s hilarious, being able to openly fuck over mortals with her magic. It’s pretty much a game for her to sell you on your own misery, then watch you suffer the consequences of your agreement. The only things the fae can’t break are vows or bargains done in writing. And even if you make a deal with her, she will try to nail you in the fine print.”

“She sounds super nasty.”

“Yeah, well she didn’t used to be that way, but it’s a hard fall going from being revered like a goddess to being the subject of tall tales and shitty children’s cartoons. At least, that’s my assumption.”

“Hmm. The guy she sent here said that there was a deal about having someone here to escort the Caretaker to the underworld. That must mean the Architect made such a deal, right?”

The succubus laughed. “If that’s the case, then the Architect must have been one hell of a negotiator. What could he have traded to the queen to get her to agree to something like that?”

“I have no idea, but maybe I’ll ask her.”

“Yeah, well, don’t expect to walk in with your usual strategy of fucking up and then getting lucky at the last second. Honestly, the queen is someone you need to be very careful around.”

“Sofia said something similar.”

“Yeah, well, she’s been around a long time too, so perhaps you should listen.” Lily slammed the rest of her drink. “Enough talk about the faerie queen. Are you ready to show me what you’ve got?”

“I am.” Mike cracked his knuckles and stood up. He walked away from the tiki hut and looked up the hill behind it. His home was on top of the hill, a permanent fixture of his dream world. “I’ve been working on this one for the last couple of weeks, let’s see what you think of it.”

“I’ll sting you if you start to wake up.” Lily leaned back against the bar, tapping her fingers on the wood.

“Appreciate it.” The Dreamscape could only be accessed while he was having a lucid dream, and even then, too much mental effort on his part was enough to wake him up. The training sessions with Lily helped immensely, but they only did them once every week or so, and he had honestly forgotten they were going to have one tonight.

In his mind’s eye, he conjured an image of the Jabberwock in his front yard. The distant palm trees shivered, and he willed it into existence, pretending it had been there all along, only unnoticed. The distant beast pushed its way through the trees, loping toward them like a drunken dog, its tail dragging behind it.

“Wow, starting with the big guns already?” Lily hopped off her stool and waited for the beast to kneel down in front of her. “Not bad. The size is about right.”

“Thanks.” It was much harder to create replicas of living creatures. The first couple of weeks he had tried to do it, he had ended up with an assortment of animals that were mostly teeth and fur, but little else. After studying some anatomy books, he had been inspired to work on his own version of the Jabberwock, and had worked his way up from tiny lizards to the beast that now sat in front of them.

“Does it have a rope for a tail?” Lily leaned over to look, and Mike groaned. Sure enough, instead of a thick, reptilian tail, it was dragging a giant braided rope behind it.

“I mean, a rope isn’t that bad.” He tried to remember what the Jabberwock’s tail looked like in the real world, causing the beast’s head to briefly turn into a ball of static. “Shit, I can’t seem to hold it.”

“You don’t have to. You gotta learn how to let go.” She put a hand on the Jabberwock’s paw. “But I would worry less about that than your other, much bigger problem.”

“What’s that?” he asked.

Lily casually punched her hand through the Jabberwock, then grabbed a piece of the beast and ripped it off. “Why is the whole damn thing made of chocolate?”

“What?” Mike ran to her side, and explored the hole. Sure enough, the Jabberwock was hollow, its innards an inky black. “Shit, why would it do that?”

“No idea. This is your dream, remember?” Lily took a bite of the Jabberwock. “Ooh, sea salt with caramel. You’ve got some good taste.”

“Damn.” He concentrated again, and the Jabberwock deflated like a giant whoopie cushion, blowing sand in every direction. “I thought I had it, too.”

“Maybe you should have gone with something less complex.” She took another bite of chocolate, then tossed the rest on the ground. It melted into the sand. “Actually, I’m curious why you were trying something so hard.”

He screwed up his face. “I wanted to impress you a little.”

“Okay, that’s rich. Care to explain why?”

Mike let out a disgusted sigh. “I don’t want you to feel like I’m wasting your time trying to train me.”

“This is hardly a waste of time.” Lily put her hands on her hips. “I offered to help and you accepted.”

“Yeah, but I’m sure there are better things you could be doing right now.” He had no idea what Lily did with her free time, and she never offered more information about it. He rarely saw her outside the Dreamscape, though he had

heard rumors that she hung out with Dana quite often. “I don’t want my problems to become your burdens.”

“You’re one of the rare humans who can even come here on his own, much less manipulate it so easily. You are years ahead of where you should be, which I find *very* fascinating.” She scowled at him. “However, your self-pity is killing my buzz.”

“Yeah, you’re right. It’s hard to recognize my own achievements, especially when I’ve made no progress on unlocking any more of those visions.” Each vision Mike had gave him a new clue about the house, but also brought along more questions. He and Lily both believed that the Dreamscape was a wonderful way to prepare for the next one, and even possibly open up a path to have the visions at will.

“Maybe you should try peyote.” She held up a cup full of a shimmering red paste.

“Will that even work in here?”

Lily laughed. “Your brain would probably put together its own version of what being stoned on peyote is like. However, your brain just made a chocolate dinosaur, so maybe you shouldn’t risk it.”

“That’s probably true. Does peyote give you the munchies? A chocolate dinosaur might hit the spot.”

Lily rolled her eyes, the cup in her hand disappearing. “Good grief, I was kidding. I am definitely not giving you dream drugs.”

He laughed. “That’s probably for the best.” He cracked his knuckles again, wiggling his fingers over the sand. “Should I try to build the door?”

“Yes. I want to see it.”

With a nod, he focused on the sand, thinking hard about how, millennia ago, a secret door had been planted there, just waiting for someone to discover it. Moments or minutes passed, it was hard to tell in the Dreamscape, and a thin line of wood appeared in the sand, moving slowly upward.

The door had been Lily’s idea. The whole point of training in the Dreamscape had been to allow him to freely travel to the place where he was literally one with the house and could learn its secrets. Since the world of dreams

seemed to be closely tied with it, Lily had surmised that stepping through a magic doorway was a perfect metaphor for his brain to hold on to.

The door grew taller, its wooden frame wrapped in vines. It had an ornate knob with a large keyhole on the bottom, and when it finished emerging from the ground, it hovered a few inches above the sand.

"It's kind of pretty," Lily said, moving closer. "Where did you get the idea for it?"

"I tried not to," he admitted. "I figured if I modeled it specifically on something I knew, my brain would take me there instead."

"Good answer." She took a step back. "So now what?"

"Well, up until recently, the door hasn't worked properly. So I gave it a lock to represent unlocking its secrets."

"I'd groan, but I think you're right."

"And for my next trick," he held up his hand and stuck out two fingers. The fingers distorted, metal teeth sprouting out from them. "I must be the key."

The succubus said nothing, an intense curiosity on her face.

Shrugging, he stuck his fingers in the lock and turned them. A loud clunking noise filled the Dreamscape, and he pulled his fingers out and grabbed the knob.

"Ready?" he asked.

"Maybe. If this works, I probably can't go in with you, so be ready for that."

He pulled the door open and was immediately bathed in light. Music played from the other side, and he stepped through, temporarily blinded. Squinting, he could make out intricate white marble that seemed to stretch on forever. His heart skipped a beat, his whole body trembling in excitement.

"Is this a bathroom?" Lily asked from behind. The light dimmed and revealed that they were now in an impossibly large room with hundreds of urinals lining the wall.

"What?" Mike looked around and saw a long mirror above the impossibly wide sink, and a handicapped stall down at the end. "I don't get it. Why a bathroom?"



Lily started laughing. When he looked at her, he saw that she was staring at his crotch. Looking down, he realized that he was naked from the waist down. Embarrassed, he tried to cover up, but a sudden flood of heat washed through his groin.

“It’s not funny!” he cried out, running over to the nearest urinal and letting loose a large blast of piss. It was like the jet stream setting on a hose, and he couldn’t get it to stop.

“It’s the... it’s the... the piss dream!” Lily now sat on a chrome stool, tears running down her face as she held her stomach. “You found an anxiety!”

“It’s not funny!” Shame and rage filled his cheeks, and he knew then that he was losing control of the Dreamscape. Without Lily’s venom in his veins, he was susceptible to slipping into an ordinary dream, one where he would watch his own actions as if in a movie. “What do I do?”

The succubus laughed. “You keep peeing!”

Mike swore under his breath, trying desperately to aim the stream into the mouth of the urinal. He ended up peeing everywhere, and then the urinal clogged, so he sidestepped over to the next one, which quickly clogged up, then the next. He did this for several minutes, doing a shuffle each time, the frustration building up.

“Lily, help me!”

“Oh fine.” Her eyes flashed yellow, and she gave him a grin.

He turned away from the urinal, the full feeling in his bladder gone. Looking down, he saw that his pants were back on. Puzzled, he turned back to the urinals behind him. They were now overflowing, water spilling over their edges and filling the whole room with water.

Lily grabbed his hand and pulled him out of the bathroom, slamming the door shut behind them. With a kick, she knocked it to the ground. Water leaked up out of its edges, staining the sand with moisture.

“That was some of the funniest shit I’ve ever seen.” She wiped a final tear from her eye. “I thought you were going to drown in there!”

“I...” Mike realized that he didn’t feel angry anymore. “What happened?”

“Well, first things first, you’re welcome. I gave you a little sting to put you farther under.” She kicked sand on top of the door. “You stumbled into an

anxiety, a recurring dream that people tend to have. Like going to school naked, that kind of thing. You panicked and started to wake up, which is how it trapped you. Once you were in control again, the scenario fell apart.”

“That’s kind of weird. What caused it?”

“What do you think? Stress. I’m guessing you miss everybody’s favorite screamer, and are burnt out on trying to get her home. And though I’m no psychologist, it definitely could have been way worse.” He figured she was referring to his mother, who had tormented him as a child. When Lily had trapped him here the first time they met, his mother had been a literal specter that followed him through his dreams, trying to drive him mad.

“Yeah, I guess.” He balled up his fists. “Should I try again?”

“No. Once your mind gets stuck on a visual like that, it tends to repeat itself. You’ll have to make a different door, summon that one again and you’ll be back in that dream.”

“Yeah, that would be—” he caught movement out of the corner of his eye and turned to look. Up at the house, he saw a dark figure step out of sight behind the curtains.

“What?” Lily turned to look at the house. “Did I miss something?”

“The shadow is back.” He shivered. The shadow came to him often in his dreams, but this was the first time it had shown up while Lily was in his head. “He’s watching us.”

“Oh, I’ve got to see this.” Lily’s wings burst from her back in a sulfurous cloud, and she took off, racing toward the house.

“Hey, hey!” Mike gave chase, trying to will himself into the sky. Dream flight was something that was beyond him, so the best he managed was large leaps across the dunes and onto the grassy front yard of his home.

The house in his dreams matched the house in the real world. He was inextricably tied to it by the fact that Naia had embedded a piece of her soul into his. Just as Naia could never leave her fountain, Mike couldn’t travel beyond the ocean inside his head. On one occasion, he tried shrinking the house down to put it in his pocket. It had nearly worked, but he had been startled awake by Tink falling out of bed next to him and unleashing a litany of curses.

Lily stood sideways on the outside of his house, bent over to peer into his bedroom window. Mike navigated a small cluster of bunnies made out of stone that had congregated beneath her, careful not to trip over them. It was odd how beings like the rock rabbits populated the corridors of his mind, and Lily had explained to him once that his brain did a lot more thinking while he was unconscious than he realized. In a way, it reminded him of the abstract thoughts of artificial intelligence, only his brain was much better at creating order from the chaos of his thoughts.

“And?” he asked from below.

“Don’t see him.” Using her foot, she slid the window open.

“Hey, don’t go in without me.” His words fell on deaf ears as she hopped into the house, falling horizontally. “Damnit, Lily,” he muttered, then tried to jump up to the window. The rabbits, however, were now scrambling across his legs, their imaginary weight holding him down.

“Fucking dream logic.” He kicked them away, stubbing his toe in the process. The rabbits multiplied, suddenly doubling in number, then scrambled across the top of his feet, snuggling up to him. He turned away from them and shuffled to the back door of the house. When the Dreamscape got away from him, it was always best to allow simple logic to take over.

“No rabbits in the house,” he shouted, and the weight fell away from his feet as he stepped through the back door. Looking back, he saw the horde of stone rabbits milling about, blinking their obsidian eyes at him. They seemed to fade away into the scenery until only a small cluster of them remained. He wondered if once upon a time, he had dreamt of a bunny made of stone, or even seen something in a movie that triggered it.

“Lily?” He called into the house, walking through it carefully. So far, none of his encounters with the shadow had become violent, but the fact that it had even made an appearance was a bit of a surprise. “Lily, where are you?”

“Upstairs.” He followed the sound of her voice and stepped into the upper hallway. Lily emerged from his bedroom and shrugged. She was now dressed in a purple dress with a green scarf. Her tights were a near match for the headband in her now entirely red hair.

“Nice touch,” he told her.

“There’s a mystery to solve.” She dramatically revealed a large magnifying glass, then winked at him through it.

“Do you think he’s still here?”

“I do.” She lowered the magnifying glass and looked over her shoulder. “When I am in your head, I can sense your presence, easy peasy. But something definitely feels off right now. You ever have a scary dream where you know something is watching you but can’t see it?”

He shuddered. “Who doesn’t?”

“Well, sometimes, something else really is watching you. I’ve been in someone’s head when that happens, you know. Feels like sinus pressure before a storm, that’s the best way I can explain it. And right now, my nose is going nuts. The shadow is still here, and he’s close.” She looked down the hall, then held a finger to her lips and then pointed at the door to Beth’s room.

Mike nodded, but Lily pointed to his mouth and rolled her finger in a circle, telling him to keep talking.

“What kind of things watch people when they dream?” Mike asked, his eyes on Beth’s door.

“Truthfully? I don’t really know. I’ve run across some beings that feed on dreams, or other demons, whatever. World’s a big place, I’ve seen my share of interesting creatures. But there’s a part of the Dreamscape that even I won’t go to, and you shouldn’t either, not if you can help it.”

“Wait, what? You’ve never told me about this.” He opened the door to Beth’s room and looked inside. “If there’s somewhere I shouldn’t go, then why haven’t you warned me?”

“I don’t need to. If you ever encounter it, you’ll know right away. A sense of fear comes over you, the same kind that you might wake up from screaming.”

“Like night terrors?”

“One and the same. Science will tell you that they typically have nothing to do with our dreams, but we know better now, don’t we?”

“These things cause night terrors?”

“Night terrors can be caused by many things, but they are the primary culprit. You wake up in a cold sweat, unable to move because they are still feeding on your psyche, and refuse to let go. You ever hear of bathophobia?”

“Fear of... baths?” He grimaced, knowing it was wrong, but he couldn’t help himself.

Lily rolled her eyes. “Fear of depths. Imagine swimming in the ocean and then going out over a dark patch, watching the ground fall away into the pitch black of the depths below.”

Mike shivered.

“Exactly. Typically these things lurk in the dark and deep parts of your dreams. People who encounter them rarely remember the dream itself, but bring their fears back to the waking world. It’s also why some people are afraid of deep water, and even holes. That’s where I typically find them inside of dreams. Bet if we swam far enough into the ocean, we could sink to the bottom and come across one. If the terror of the encounter doesn’t wake you right away, they can take a piece of your mind with you when they go.” Lily crossed Beth’s room and opened the closet. “Nothing here.”

“Sounds a lot like the Old Ones.” He and Ratu had destroyed a piece of an Old One. The task had been difficult and had nearly cost him his life.

“Perhaps. There’s a theory that the Old Ones aren’t gone, just asleep. Perhaps these encounters are simply their dreams bleeding over into our world. Either way, I’ve been known to bail on a dream if I encounter anything I don’t recognize.” Lily got on her hands and knees to look under the bed, revealing that she wore a pair of crotchless purple panties.

Mike laughed. “You just can’t help yourself, can you?”

“Hmm?” Lily looked over her shoulder and wiggled her ass back and forth for him. “Oh, is there a problem? Did you spot a clue?”

He couldn’t help it. He walked up behind her and gave her ass a playful slap. “Maybe. But we’re looking for the shadow, remember?”

“Oh, I know.” She stood up and grabbed him by the front of the shirt. “But we both know it’s just going to be old man Jenkins or some shit, using light and shadows to scare the locals, right?”

“Lily, I—” She kissed him hard, then slid her hand down the front of his pants, stroking his shaft through the fabric. When she broke the kiss, she licked the side of his neck, then bit down on the lobe of his ear.

“It’s watching us,” she whispered quickly, then slid a hand beneath his shirt, dragging her long nails across his chest. “C’mon, Romeo, we never seem to have any time anymore. All we do is drive around in that stuffy old van all day, sniffing dog farts.”

“There’s no time for this right now.” Mike winked at her, playing along. “We need to focus and solve the mystery of the missing shadow. And I think I spotted a clue.”

“Where?” Lily turned dramatically, her hair flaring out like her skirt.

“Under the bed!” He pointed where she had been looking, and she immediately got on all fours, her skirt sliding up to reveal her ass.

“I don’t see anything.” She pulled out her magnifying glass.

“You need to look deeper.” He scanned the room but didn’t notice anything out of the ordinary. Lily must have sensed the shadow watching, but from where?

“Ah, nuts.” Lily’s had squeezed her upper half beneath the bed, her full bottom now folded over perfectly to give it a wishbone shape. “I think I’m stuck.”

“Um... okay.” Every time Lily jerked her hips, her skirt rode up higher, and he was having a tough time looking anywhere else. “Do you... need a hand?”

“Yes, please. Just grab me by the hips and pull.” She wiggled her butt back and forth, which sealed the deal. He was now rock hard, and when he got behind her to pull, his cock pressed up against the puffy lips of her labia through his pants.

“I don’t think you’re trying hard enough,” she groaned, grinding her ass against him. “I need you to pull!”

“Jinkies, I’m doing my best.” He slapped her ass again, and she yelped. “What are you even stuck on?”

“Uh... my headband is caught on a bedspring.”

“Then take it off.” He slapped her ass again.

“But it completes my outfit!” Lily protested, pushing against him. Her hand snaked back between her legs and undid the front of his pants, his cock springing free. “Hey, I think I found something!”

“Really?” He gave her hips a yank and she popped free, her arms pinwheeling through the air as they both fell backward. Mike hit the ground first, and then Lily sank down perfectly on top of his cock, her legs going wide as she let out a groan.

“Damn, you feel good.” He rubbed her ass, pushing her dress up. She moved her hips back and forth, her firm ass pressing against his stomach.

She looked over her shoulder at him, a wide grin on her face. “I think I found something.”

“Oh?” He couldn’t tell if she was still in character or not.

“Check this out.” She lifted up a silver briefcase that Mike recognized, but couldn’t place. “I bet there’s all kinds of clues in here.”

“Well, I guess you should...” Mike gasped when Lily’s vaginal walls vibrated like dozens of fingers inside of her.

“I should what?” She wiggled her hips back and forth, then rode him for a minute, her hands pressing against his thighs. Tiny little gasps escaped her, and Mike grabbed onto her ass, and thrust himself into her.

“What’s in the case?” he asked before slapping her on the ass again.

“Um...” Lily sat up straight, sinking all the way down onto Mike’s throbbing shaft. He let out a groan when she held the case above her head and gave it a shake. He couldn’t help but notice that her eyes scanned the room when she turned to look at him. “It’s locked!”

“Give it here.” He took the case from her and chuckled. On the bottom of it was a piece of tape holding a key in place. “Look, Lily! Another clue!”

“Oh!” She spun around to face him, but though her body stopped, the sensation of spinning did not. Her vagina was now twisting back and forth along the head of his cock, and his magic was beginning to react. A spark jumped from one of his fingers onto her thigh, and she yelped.

“Sorry about that.” He pulled the key free and struggled to stick it in the lock. Lily had put her hands on his hips, and was riding him hard, a playful smile on her face. Every few thrusts, her eyes would flick up to a different part of the

room as she let out a groan. Mike tried to do the same, to catch a tiny bit of movement, but he kept coming back to the gorgeous redhead riding his cock.

Lily let out a tiny cry, then bit her lip and let out a series of grunts, shoving herself onto him and grabbing the back of his thighs. Little sparks crawled up her legs and buried themselves in her flesh, and she let go of his legs and dragged her nails along the wooden floor, leaving deep gouges in the wood.

“Fuck, Romeo, I love how big your dick is.” She turned around and put her hands on his chest, then squeezed his hips with her thick thighs. “But we’re not done here yet.”

“We’re... not?”

She grinned. “I’m not finished, and neither are you.” She held up the key she had pulled off the briefcase. “Let’s see that clue we found!”

“Um, yeah, okay.” He just laid there, his cock throbbing inside her, as she opened the case on his chest. “So... what’s inside?”

“Aha!” Lily pulled her magnifying glass out and looked inside the case. “It looks like another key!”

“Wait, what?” He tried to sit up and see, but she slid the case to the side instead and knelt down until her face met his.

“Indulge me just a bit longer.” she whispered, then licked his upper lip and sat back up. In one hand, she held her magnifying glass, in the other, a massive misshapen dildo.

Mike couldn’t help it, and let out a huge laugh. Lily grinned down at him, her hips moving from side to side.

“Seriously, where did you come up with the idea for that?”

“Oh, some ideas are closer to home than you may think.” The dildo was purple with a series of large bumps and a huge, bulbous head. “I bet we will figure out the mystery of the shadow if we can just figure out where this can fit.”

“Hey, don’t look at me. I’m more of an occasional finger kind of guy, and I promise that that is way too big for me.”

“You sure?” She set the magnifying glass down on his chest and held the dildo in both hands. In some places, it looked like it might even have spikes. “Is there anything I could do to talk you into it?”



“Well, since you asked so politely... hell no.” He stuck out his tongue at her. “But I bet I can think of somewhere to put it.”

“Hmm. Show me.”

He lifted her hips up and slid out of her, then took the dildo from her hand. “C’mon, bend over the bed.”

“Ooh, I love it when you’re bossy.” She grabbed the edge of the bed, her fingers squeezing the bedposts tightly. “Oh, and a request?”

“What’s that?”

“Don’t be gentle.” She winked at him, then reached back with one hand to pull her ass cheek open, revealing that her pussy was practically drooling for him.

He chuckled, and teased her by slapping the massive dildo against her ass, stroking himself the entire time. Lily was giving him plenty of free rein tonight, and he had his mind on something specific. Using just the head of the dildo, he moved it up and down her soaking wet labia, pushing on it just enough to make her groan.

After a couple minutes of this, Lily turned to look back at him.

“Are you just fucking with me or—”

Mike had lined the dildo up perfectly, just waiting for her attention to wander. He shoved the dildo forward, marveling at how Lily’s pussy was able to accommodate such a thing in the first place, but ultimately knowing that it wouldn’t hurt her, not in here. It slid in only a few inches, the thick, bulbous head disappearing inside of her first. It stopped at the first series of spiky nubs, and the succubus took in a deep breath.

Only one of her eyes rolled up in her head, and she arched her back, letting out a low groan.

“Oh, you fucker! Mmh, that feels so unreal, how does she fucking do that?”

“How does who do what?” Mike asked.

“More!” Lily planted her face in the bed and held her buttcheeks apart for him. “More, now!”

“Oh, yeah, sure.” He gave the dildo another push and watched in excitement as the nubs stretched Lily to the limit, then vanished inside of her. She was actively crying out in a language he didn’t recognize, and until he heard

otherwise, he had no intention of stopping. More nubs were next to disappear, followed by a large knot of some sort.

Lily ripped the sheets off the bed with her nails, growling into the mattress. Mike slapped her ass with his free hand, then gave himself a couple of strokes, but he didn't need them. His cock was still rock hard and throbbing, ready to see some use once more.

"Oh, shit, you've gotta be... fuck!" Her legs gave out, and she rested her upper half on the bed when the knot disappeared inside of her.

Mike laughed when he got to the spikes. They were toward the bottom and were obviously meant to keep the dildo from being swallowed up completely. He had stuffed the whole thing inside of her, and for the first time ever, she seemed to be speechless, repeatedly slamming her fists against the bed.

"You nice and full yet?" He leaned forward and rubbed her lower belly, surprised that he could feel the thick head of the cock through her flesh.

"Ha. I've had... bigger." Lily's thighs trembled, then stabilized.

"Bigger than this?"

Lily laughed, and the dildo slipped out a little. "I've been in people's sex dreams. There are fewer places in the universe you will experience anything weirder."

"Well, you're in my sex dream now." He pushed the dildo back in, and she grunted. "And for future reference, next time you wanna play Clue with me, I prefer the brainier girl."

Lily chuckled. "I hate wearing orange, so made a judgment call." She picked up the magnifying glass again and twirled it in her hand. Mike noticed that the lens was now a mirror, and he could tell she was surveying the room behind them.

"Seriously though, are you doing okay? Do you need more time to adapt?" He stroked his cock, teasing the tip with his thumb.

"You're such a fucking girl sometimes," Lily muttered. "Of course I'm fine."

"I mean, if you want me to stop, you just say so." Mike summoned a small bottle of lubricant from the Dreamscape and poured it into his hand, stroking his

shaft to get his entire cock nice and wet. “Maybe we should have a safe word, just in case you can’t handle it.”

“I swear to Hell, if you suggest that we cuddle afterwards, I will set you on fire.”

“Really? No safe word then?” He grabbed his dick by the shaft and smacked her on the base of her spine with his glans. “We can pick something easy, like mango or papaya.”

“Are you gonna talk about fruit or are you gonna fuuuuuuuu—aaaargh!” Lily let out a scream as Mike pushed the head of his penis into her tight asshole.

“Holy shit, you’re tight!” Through the thin walls of her body, he could feel the nubs and bulges of the dildo rubbing against his cock. He pushed his way forward, watching her asshole expand to gobble him up.

Lily’s words were incoherent once more, and smoke rose from the comforter on the bed where her fingers touched. She dropped the mirror and grabbed ahold of the bedframe, then pushed herself back on to him. He penetrated her so deeply that the dildo got pushed out, sliding free a couple of inches.

Mike grunted, feeling a wave of energy bounce through his core. The warm tightness of her ass was overwhelming already, but feeling the movement of the dildo through her vaginal wall was already pushing him over the edge.

Lily used one of her hands to grab the dildo, pushing it back in, then let out a loud moan when Mike began slowly pumping her. They worked together, and every time he bottomed out, she pulled the dildo out to the knot, then pushed it back in while he withdrew.

A ring of fire formed over her head, and the ground pulsed with electricity. Mike watched in awe as the electricity crawled up the wall and throughout the house, remembering that they were inside his head. Did his magic function differently here?

In the distance, thunder boomed over the ocean, and he felt a surge of heat flow through him. He grabbed onto Lily’s hips and pushed himself deep, letting her swivel her hips around him.

“Fuck, I’m so close,” he gasped, the sky outside the house going dark.

“I don’t want to hear about how close you are, I want you to fill my ass!”

“Your wish... is... my...” he couldn’t hold it any longer, and he let out a cry that shook the house, then filled her to the brim with his cum.

Lily’s fingers tore through the mattress, and she cried out, the fiery halo over her head now shooting flames in every direction. Her eyes bugged out of her head, and she went limp against the top of the bed, allowing him to pump himself a few more times into her ass before losing control of his legs and falling down on top of her.

The room was silent for several minutes, save for the sounds of the two of them breathing. Mike’s face cracked into a grin, and he pushed a lock of Lily’s hair aside to reveal her ear.

“Now do you wanna cuddle?” he asked, his voice a whisper.

The bedspread beneath them caught on fire, and he let out a laugh and stood up, his dick slipping out of her. Lily grabbed the comforter and folded it up, putting out the flames, then turned to look at him, her eyes glowing red.

“Hey, it was just a joke.” He held his hands up apologetically.

Lily let out a grunt, squinted her eyes, and then the giant dildo fell out of her, landing with a wet thud on the floor. It had a suction cup on the bottom, so it stuck in place, waving back and forth. Lily grunted again, and his semen dripped out of her ass, splattering on the floor next to it. Quite a bit of his spunk fell out, creating a huge mess on the floor.

“That’s...” So many words ran through his mind, so he picked the one he figured would least likely get him in trouble. “So unladylike.” He wrinkled his nose at.

“The Dreamscape is self cleaning.” She fixed her skirt, then adjusted her headband. “I haven’t felt that full since my last gangbang.”

“That... uh...” he wanted to ask more, but decided against it. “Okay.”

“Oh, don’t worry. It’s still special when we do it.” He was surprised when Lily threw herself at him, her cinnamon flavored tongue suddenly in his mouth. Stumbling backward in surprise, he bumped into the dresser, his hands grabbing the sides to steady himself.

Lily broke the kiss and stuck her hand in the mirror behind him. When he turned to watch, he saw that the surface of the mirror rippled like hot oil. Lily’s

hand clutched tightly to the shadow figure hiding in its reflection, pulling on his face like it was made of cloth.

“Gotcha, fucker. Now let’s see who’s under that mask!”

The mirror exploded, sending both of them across the room. Mike crashed into the wall, the wallpaper distorting like rubber behind him, allowing him to slide safely to the floor. Lily struggled to stand up, her wings and tail bursting into view.

“I’m going to hurt you so bad,” she hissed, and stood to face the shadow.

*Caretaker.* The shadow’s voice was a collection of whispers. It didn’t even bother looking at Lily. *I would speak with you.*

“Oh, I don’t think so, you nasty little pervert.” Lily approached it, her hands morphing into claws. “Since you like to watch so much, I think you should watch me tear you a new asshole.”

*Enough.* With the wave of a shadowy hand, Lily was smashed through the wall of the house by an unseen force, her headband falling to the floor. In the distance, he heard her shrieking with rage, her voice going quiet.

“Lily!” Mike ran to the hole, but all he could see was a series of holes through the house, eventually ending with the outside world and a fantastic view of the ocean. “What did you do to her?”

*A succubus is a powerful weapon, yet you waste your time fornicating with her.* The shadow’s voice dripped with disgust. *You have much power at your disposal, yet you squander it, achieving nothing. Your journey is far, and you take so few steps. I merely removed a distraction that we may speak.*

“I’m not trying to achieve anything. We’re all just trying to get by, and things have been really nice recently, except for shit like this.” He turned to the shadow and let his wrath bleed into the dream. The floor creaked beneath his feet, and the baseboards turned into gnarled claws that reached for the shadow’s feet but couldn’t quite reach.

*And yet, one of your own has been taken.* The shadow rippled, then walked to the door of the room. *It is a slight that cannot be suffered.*

Mike squinted his eyes at the shadow, curiosity overriding his anger. “And what would you know of it?”

*I am not bound by any law, faerie or otherwise. I have seen the gilded cage, and heard the queen speak ill of you. Mark my words, she is a dangerous foe who would take the world from you if she could.*

“I’m glad to hear that you care so much about my personal well being.” Mike sat on the bed and crossed his arms. “I suppose the offer to help me for a price is coming now, right?” Every time the shadow spoke with him, it offered him immeasurable power for just a piece of his soul. Soul magic was extremely dangerous, and he had been warned about letting a piece of his go. The previous Caretaker, his Great Aunt Emily, had gone crazy and done shady things before she died, and he had a suspicion that the shadow had been the reason behind it.

The shadow hissed, a sound very much like boiling water. *You would be wise not to discount my advice. The time will come when you will beg for my assistance, Caretaker. Your world will—*

“Burn, right?” Mike finished the shadow’s statement, tilting his head to look through the hole in the wall. In the distance, dark wings flapped furiously, and he could see the murderous gleam in Lily’s eyes, even from this distance. “It’s always about fire, the house burning, I’m burning, my world is burning, blah blah blah. Maybe we should make a different kind of deal?”

The shadow cocked its head. *Such as?*

“Tell me what I want to know and I’ll keep her from kicking your ass.”

*What?*

Lily burst through the hole in the wall, her razor-sharp fingers closing around the shadow’s neck.

“Nasty little fuck!” she shook her hands, but the shadow melted through her, his hands now closed tightly around her throat. Lily gasped in pain, her eyes bugging out and her tail striking at the shadow and hitting nothing. Mike tried to stand, but the air in the room was suddenly so dense that he could no longer move. He slid off the mattress, struggling to breathe.

*Know your place, hellspawn.* The shadow smashed the succubus into the ground, the floor splintering around her. It did this several times until Lily finally went still, her tail going limp against the floorboards. *Pathetic. We shall speak again, Caretaker. Alone, next time.*

Like a breath of fog, the shadow vanished. The heaviness dispersed, and Mike stood and rushed to Lily's aid.

"Are you okay?" He grabbed Lily by the arm and helped her up.

"It looks worse than it is. I'm going to have a killer headache when I get out of here, though." Lily lifted her head to reveal that several sharp splinters now stuck out of her face. "But, yeah, I'm fine."

"Is he gone?"

Lily spat out a piece of wood. "Yeah, but he was pissed. Whatever that shadow is, it's very powerful. I don't want you talking to it anymore."

"That's not a choice I get to make."

"And that's what worries me." Lily stepped back from Mike. "That thing shouldn't have been able to toss me around like that, not in here." She looked out the hole in the house. "I was miles out to sea before I could regain my bearings. That kind of willpower from a spirit should be impossible. It isn't a ghost, in case you were wondering."

"Well, I think we both know that the shadow isn't just a random spirit."

"Hmm." Lily turned her attention on him, her eyes smoldering. "Don't take this the wrong way, but I think I'm going to be keeping a closer eye on you for the foreseeable future."

"How... how would I take that the wrong way? It sounds like a nice thing."

Lily rolled her eyes. "Of course you'd think it like that. Maybe it's about my own self-preservation, the idea that I actually like my freedom. I knew you would get all moon-eyed at me. You going to start writing me poetry now?"

"Maybe." He flicked a piece of wood off her shoulder. It hit the ground and turned to marbles, rolling in every direction. "I'm pretty awesome at haikus."

"Doesn't surprise me, since you're all about feelings and shit. Time to wake up now. I want you sleeping in your own bed from now on. Oh, and no making that door without me. I don't want that fucker watching you do it." Lily winked, and then popped like a bubble, vanishing from sight. An intense smell hit his nostrils and the world ruptured around him.

Mike opened his eyes and coughed, the air rich with the scent of sulfur. Groaning, he sat up, rubbing a sore spot in his neck. The floor was hard, and

unforgiving, apparently, and the book he had used as a pillow lacked any sort of neck support.

“You are awake, Mike Radley.”

He flinched at the sound of Death’s voice, then looked up at the specter. “Have you been waiting there this whole time?”

Death shrugged. “I did not want to get separated in this place, so have remained by your side.”

“I see.” He groaned, then stood up. His legs hurt too. “I think we should take what we have and go meet up with the others. I feel like shit.”

“Let us take our leave, then.” Death’s hood concealed all but his lower jaw, but Mike could feel the reaper’s intense gaze on him. “Mike Radley, are you aware that a demon of Hell had sexual congress with you while you slept? She left just before you awoke.”

“You... you saw that?”

“I did. I found it interesting.”

“I, um...” Mike looked at Death. “Interesting like your maps?”

A chilly laugh emanated from Death, a laugh that echoed through the Library. “I found it fascinating to watch, and have so many questions!”

“Ah, geez.” He and Death walked back through the stacks toward the large ledge overlooking the rest of the building.

“Are you in love with this demon, Mike Radley? Were you two making love? I have heard the term before, but find it quite silly. I guess you could claim that a child itself is a form of love, but how do you know if you are making love when you have to wait so long to find out that the woman is pregnant? Is it just wishful thinking to make such a statement?”

Mike sighed. “Her name is Lily. As for how I feel about her, let’s just say that our relationship is extremely complicated.” He looked out over the expanse of the Library and saw a distant carpet moving their way.

“You slept through the whole thing, Mike Radley. Did you not enjoy it? I know that humans sleep through things they find tedious or boring.”

His cheeks burned. “It’s how some demons do it is all.”



“I see. Mike Radley, you seemed to suffer a series of seizures toward the end of your sexual encounter. Is your body okay? Are you well?”

Mike rolled his eyes, willing the carpet to come faster. Death continued to question him on the nuances of sex for the entire ride, and it became perfectly clear by the time they landed that Death wasn't going to let it go anytime soon.

He spotted the others in the Lobby. Tink was crashed out on a separate carpet with a giant stack of books nearby, and Sofia appeared in a flash of light, wheeling an empty cart into the Library. She had obviously dropped a load of them off in the house.

“So you're saying these seizures are pleasurable? People do it on purpose?” Death was sitting with his bony legs crossed, gazing up at Mike with a sense of wonderment.

Mike felt like he was a kindergarten teacher for the Damned.

“Look, you and I can talk about what an orgasm is later,” he told Death. “Sex talk can be sensitive for some people, and I don't want to upset the others.”

“I see.” Death looked at the women by the entrance. “We must use discretion then.”

“Yes, absolutely.” He let out a sigh of relief, grateful that Death had gone quiet. When the carpet landed, Sofia approached him, holding her staff up.

“You've been gone a while.” She looked past him at the cart full of books. “Hmm. Tink found way more books than you did.”

“She had Reggie's help, though.” He looked around. “Speaking of, where is His Majesty?”

“He went home hours ago. C'mon, let's get these to the dining hall, and then get you to bed. You look like shit.”

“Gee. Thanks.” He grabbed his cart and pushed it toward the exit, stopping long enough to shake Tink awake. She scrambled onto his back and locked her arms around his shoulders, then laid her head down. Death followed close behind, pushing the last cart. Back in the office, they pushed the carts over to the corner, setting them with the two that Sofia had already pushed through.

“That's a lot of books,” he said, rubbing his eyes.

“And we’ll get to them...” Sofia’s eye squinted, and she opened her mouth wide, an enormous yawn escaping her. “Sorry about that. I’ll catch up with you this afternoon. You’re on your own for breakfast, if you get up before me.”

“That’s fair,” Mike mumbled, then watched Sofia activate the magical bookshelf and vanish. Tink muttered something in her sleep, then lightly bit his shoulder.

“C’mon, little goblin, let’s get to bed. Goodnight, Death.”

“Goodnight, Mike Radley.” The reaper gave a wave and then sat down at the desk. “I will think about what you have told me.”

“Discretely?” Mike asked.

“Very.” Death winked, causing Mike to flinch.

“Good.” He left the office behind and walked into the living room. The lights were all off, but he could see well enough to realize that someone was asleep on the couch. Walking slowly, he squinted, his eyes adjusting to the dark.

A loud thud startled him, and he nearly dropped Tink. He rushed over to the light switch and flicked it on, revealing that the figure on the couch was Beth.

“Hmm?” Beth yawned, stretching her arms so high that her shirt lifted, revealing her bare stomach. “Oh, it’s you. *Finally.*”

“Finally what?” Again, a loud thud. “What is that?”

Beth rolled her eyes. “Yeah, about that. Remember the stuff missing from the storage unit?”

“The stuff that got sold at auction? Of course.” Honestly, he never thought of it. It had been gone before his arrival, and he figured it was already out in the wild, so why worry?

“Well, you got some of it back.” Another thud came from the dining hall. “Here, let me show you.”

Curious, he followed, but not before Tink slid down and sleepily drew a hammer from her belt.

“Tink smash, then sleep.” The goblin yawned, then blinked weary eyes.

Beth lead them into the dining hall. The first thing Mike noticed was the cardboard box in the middle of the table. It had been duct-taped in place, but

kept lifting itself off the ground. A squadron of rats were watching it, their tiny spears at the ready. Sitting atop the box like a tiny cowboy was the doll Jenny.

“What’s in it?”

“No idea. Figured I would wait for you.” Beth pointed in the corner. “There are five other boxes, but this one is restless, to say the least. So... you going to open it?”

Curiosity compelled him to do it, and he was at the edge of the table before he realized what was happening.

He thought about his conversation with Sofia, and even the one with Lily. Determined as he was to open the box and see what was inside, he was dead tired, and so were the others.

“You know what? It can wait for tomorrow.” He turned to the rats. “Would that be okay?”

The rats looked to their leader, a heavy-set rat with a modified tincan for a helmet. The chunky rodent gave Mike a solemn nod.

“Good. C’mon, Tink. You can smash it later.”

“Okay.” Tink slid her hammer back into its holster and wandered off toward the stairs.

Mike turned his attention back to Beth. “So other than this box, anything I should know about?”

“I can tell you later. Nothing that can’t wait.” Her unkempt hair fell past her face, and she pulled it into a faux ponytail to get it out of her face. “Let’s go to bed.”

“Uh, yeah, uh...” It was stupid, but he felt his face heat up. Why was it so easy with the others? It wasn’t something he could even remotely explain, but Beth still brought out the old him, the one who struggled with women. “Yep. Let’s go to sleep in our beds.”

If Beth noticed his awkwardness, she didn’t acknowledge it. She walked ahead of him up the stairs, her wrinkled shirt caught on the edge of her pants, exposing the thick curves of her ass.

He did his best not to stare all the way up. Once in his room, he stripped to his boxers, turned off the light, and fell into his bed. Tink joined him, curling up behind his back.

He thought about the shadow, Cecilia, and the unknown boxes downstairs. Exhaustion claimed him, his thoughts becoming a tumbled heap as he slipped into the realm of dreams. Somewhere below, the box continued to thump in place like the beating of a cardboard heart.