In Chains
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In Chains

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Summary

Sören Sigurðsson and his husband Nicolae Dooku live a cozy, happy life together in Iceland. They have everything they want - so they think. But their world is about to get turned upside down, with a blast from Sören's past - the return of his ex Alejandro Magalhães, a musician, who is on vacation in Svalbarðseyri with his companion, Ingmar. And "Alejandro" and "Ingmar" are both far more than what they seem, drawing them into an ancient conflict...

Notes

Due to the extremely fraught history surrounding the Northern Lights universe - with regards to the communication breakdown with two collaborators, the way this fic and its sequels have been misrepresented, and subsequent targeted harassment that has been going on since 2020 - this work and its sequels are archive-locked on both Ao3 and Squidgeworld. I worked hard enough on this universe [with the sequels to this fic it comes to over 900,000 words] that I don't feel right about deleting it, and I do not orphan works involving my OCs so there are no contested claims of ownership, but I also dislike being reminded that this series exists.

I also wrote this work at a very different time in my life [2019, with revisions in late 2020], and my writing style and preferred themes have evolved since then as well. This work should not be taken as typical of my works from 2022 onward.

asato mā sad gamaya
tamaso mā jyotir gamaya
mṛtyor mā amṛtaṁ gamaya

From ignorance lead me to truth
From darkness lead me to light
From death lead me to immortality

--Brhadaranyaka Upanishad, I.iii.28

...the starbird can never die—whenever it seems to be gone, it's actually renewing itself in the heart of a nova.

-Sabine Wren (Rebel Alliance)

Chapter 1

Every day in Valhalla was exactly the same - fight on the battlefield all day, be injured, die, resurrect to feast and fuck and fight again.

Most seemed content with their lot, or at least, they did not dare defy All-Father.

But as the days - years, what was time anymore? - wore on, Sigurð was healing less and less from his wounds. His Valkyrie, Brynhildur, tried her best, but it was becoming apparent that he was soul sick... and she understood why. She, too, was growing tired of the same thing. The screams, the pain, the blood, the carnage - it seemed so senseless. Valhalla was starting to feel less like a reward for warriors who had served bravely, and more like a realm where these souls were trapped and enslaved, so All-Father could feed on the energy of endless battle...

...endless suffering.

The day finally came when Sigurð did not rise with the others at dawn. Brynhildur went to him, sang spells over him, let the light flow from her hands. It took hours for him to wake, and when he did and their eyes met, it seemed that he was staring at something very, very far away.

"It is time for you to fight," Brynhildur said.

"I have no fight left," Sigurð replied.

Brynhildur went to the throne of All-Father herself. "We are tired of this. My Charge and I. This is not what we want anymore."

Her gaze locked with his one eye, and for a moment, the eye blazed, like it was on fire. But the fire was cold, sending chills through her.

At last, the god spoke. "It may not be what you want, but it is what *I* want. You will go to your Charge, you will rouse him, you will make him fight."

Brynhildur stood her ground. "No."

"What do you mean, no?"

"I mean, *no*."

The All-Father rose from his throne. Now the same fire was all around him. He gathered it into his palm and threw it at the Valkyrie. She raised her shield, singing spells of ice to create a larger shield around her. Still she fell, but was unburnt.

Unburnt. Unbroken. She was even angrier now. Before she knew what she was doing, she threw her spear, and it pierced the All-Father in the shoulder.

She strode to him, slowly. She began to chant spells, weaving magic in her fingers, to infect, to fester, to *plague* the wound. To drain some of the power he'd been collecting over thousands of years, keeping these souls captive.

And then, he removed the patch over the eye he didn't have anymore, and from that

socket shot a beam of light. Brynhildur screamed as it ripped into her, and across the bond with her Charge, she could feel him caught in the beam as well, being torn asunder.

There was the feeling of falling, dizzy, an endless drop of terror. Valhalla had been the home of the brave, but what All-Father wanted to taste now was their fear. To draw power back into himself through that, as they plunged, falling faster and faster.

Brynhildur reached out and took Sigurð's hand, to soothe both of them - the only comfort she could give, but it made a difference.

I will not give you your victory, All-Father.

Brynhildur sang, but this time, she called to the ancient Music, the runes that were greater in power than All-Father who had sacrificed himself to find them. Power above his power, the guiding force of creation.

She began to melt, but it was all relief. They were evading his grasp.

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1967

It was May 4th, the seventh birthday of Brynhildur Jónsdóttir. Her parents didn't have much money, but they still tried to do what they could to make their three children happy on special days, especially little Brynhildur, who for years had been having nightmares of a blazing eye, watching her. It broke her parents' heart, not knowing how to help her.

What little Brynhildur wanted, though, didn't cost money. She wanted to visit the Dimmuborgir, and that was just a short drive away from their house in Akureyri. Brynhildur loved painting and drawing, and wanted to make pictures of the Dimmuborgir.

So her parents planned an afternoon trip for her and her siblings, packing a picnic lunch. It was a magical day, complete with flying kites on the spring breeze - kites her grandfather Sören had made himself.

Feeling adventurous, Brynhildur asked her parents if she could walk around by herself. They agreed, since she wouldn't be too far away, and there was little that could hurt her here.

But within fifteen minutes of her exploration, her parents heard a bloodcurdling shriek. Jón was on his feet and running immediately, and relieved to see Brynhildur was unscathed, though badly shaken and crying.

"What is it, *krútt mitt?*"

"There was a man..." Brynhildur gasped for breath. "He was tall, and had pointy ears, long golden hair..."

Jón Sörensson gave his daughter an incredulous look, but nonetheless, prowled around the ancient rock formations. There was no one else there, least of all someone fitting the description (*pointy ears?*).

Brynhildur cried all the way home. At first Jón told her, "It was just your imagination playing tricks on you." But that made her even more upset, so finally Jón asked, "Did the

man you saw... hurt you at all?"

Brynhildur vehemently shook her head. "No," she said.

"Not at all?"

"No." Brynhildur sniffed loudly. "He just looked at me."

Brynhildur calmed down some when they got back home, but for the next few days she still showed signs of being badly shaken up. After a week had passed and Brynhildur still wasn't back to her normal bubbly self, Jón and his wife Dagný talked about it and it was agreed that Brynhildur should visit Jón's mother, Margrét.

Margrét and her husband Sören lived on a farm with sheep and goats. Sören was an eccentric whimsical man who'd done things like travel Iceland in a hot air balloon he'd built himself; Margrét was a strong, no-nonsense woman who had lived through two world wars and was pessimistic about the way the world was changing - she was glad her son hadn't yet moved to Reykjavik or "the big city", as she called it, though she was disappointed that he, too, was not a farmer, believing that hard work on the land did a body good. Even her "slightly touched" husband agreed with that notion, though Sören's view of country life was more poetic than hers.

Margrét also knew a wealth of folktales, and believed some of them. Her own grandmother, Jónina, was rumored to be a witch, and while she had never confirmed nor denied this rumor, Jónina was a competent healer - very much the village doctor - and Jónina also routinely left out milk and porridge for the *huldufólk*. Jónina had even claimed to have seen them, and that one confirmed an old family legend of elven blood. When other farms were ruined during weird weather of the 1800s, this family farm prospered, and Margrét seemed to believe it was her grandmother's good standing with the *huldufólk* that got them through.

In the enlightened late 1960s, Jón dismissed his mother's superstitions as unscientific nonsense, beliefs best left behind as the world marched on. He had, in fact, kept Brynhildur from visiting her grandmother very often precisely due to not wanting her mind poisoned with "old wives' tales". But now, in his desperation, and knowing Brynhildur didn't know enough about Icelandic folklore or any kind of fantasy literature to be making up stories of a man who matched elven description, here he was, sending his daughter to stay with his mother for awhile.

"You saw an elf," Margrét told her, plain and simple.

"What's an elf?" Brynhildur asked.

Margrét pressed her hand to her forehead and groaned, annoyed that she had to explain this, but she did her best. "They are powerful beings," Margrét said. "Not of this world, yet still connected to this one through magic in the land. And sometimes, elves have made friends with Men."

"Is it like a guardian angel?" Dagný Bjarnisdóttir was raised Catholic - an anomaly in Iceland - and though the children were not raised religiously at all, Dagný nonetheless still sometimes prayed.

"Yes and no." Margrét considered.

"I was really scared," Brynhildur confessed. "I knew he wouldn't hurt me, but he still felt...

wild."

"Yes." Margrét nodded. "Elves are wild magic. Your reaction was only natural."

"What do you think he wanted?"

"He probably is watching you, because elves have been watching this family for a very long time." Margrét leaned back in her chair, and then resumed her knitting.

"Why are elves watching us?"

"We are part-elf, according to my grandmother."

"Then why aren't our ears pointy? Why aren't we shiny like they are?"

"Because we have to live in the world of Men." There was more to it, but not for a seven year old's ears.

Brynhildur pouted. "I want to go see the elf again."

"Even if your pabbi takes you back to the Dimmuborgir... maybe you will see him, maybe you won't. Elves don't come and go as we please, they come and go as they please."

"That's not fair."

Margrét threw her head back and laughed. "They would say you expecting them to show up at your whim, isn't fair, child."

Brynhildur folded her arms and looked down. "Hmph."

Then Margrét leaned forward and said, "Also. Child. As I say, we have to live in the world of Men. This means it is probably not a good idea for you to tell a lot of people about what you saw."

"Why?"

"They are the hidden folk. They don't show themselves to everyone, and those they do show themselves to... usually have interesting lives enough without calling more attention to themselves by saying they visit with elves. Not everyone is understanding about that sort of thing. Most people aren't, these days."

Brynhildur wrinkled her nose. "Pabbi wasn't, at first. He thought it was just my imagination."

Margrét nodded, and continued knitting. "And that is your own father, who loves you no matter what. Now think about what it would be like to tell someone who *didn't* love you the same way. It could be very dangerous for you. People fear things they don't understand."

—

1975

Not long after the meeting with the elf, Brynhildur found she could do certain things - move objects without touching them, sometimes she could read minds, and most of the

time she felt the emotions of others, making her highly sensitive.

But she had taken her grandmother's caution to heart, and kept her abilities a secret as best as she could. On the few occasions someone had spotted her, she instinctively waved her hand and said, "You didn't see that," pushing with her mind. She felt awful about it later, like she was doing something wrong, but it was an act of self-defense, to keep from being discovered. She'd read news reports of experiments the United States government had been conducting with "psychics" - people who had the same abilities she did - and somehow, these people managed to die or worse, disappear.

People fear things they don't understand.

Since she was a small child, Brynhildur was deeply familiar with fear - she still had nightmares about the blazing eye, watching her. Sometimes when she thought about those nightmares as she was awake during the day, she started to get dizzy, feeling like she was falling. She was able to ground herself, make it stop, but only till it came back again, as it inevitably would.

Living in her strange version of reality, Brynhildur was a bit of a loner - not merely not wanting her secrets somehow exposed, but also, feeling too different, in a way that made her lonely.

Fifteen-year-old Brynhildur spent a lot of time at the local library, reading as much as she could. And when she went home from the library she usually stopped at the local drugstore to have a soda. She was waited on by Sigurð Tollasson, who lived down the street from her and was eighteen now; he'd always been nice to her, and she sometimes wished they could be friends. He was also easy on the eyes, tall, with dark curly hair, a bit of a smoldering look to him with dark eyes and full lips.

Brynhildur did wonder if Sigurð was nice to her because he knew his sister, Katrín, was actively mean to her. Katrín was model-pretty, with long auburn hair, and very fashionable; she was one of the most popular girls at their school. Brynhildur was taller than even most of the boys, lanky, with dark hair and grey eyes. Katrín called them "ice eyes" and among other insults, claimed Brynhildur's "ice eyes" meant she didn't have a soul.

One day, when Brynhildur was overheard crying by her mother - and Brynhildur did her best to not call attention to herself when she was crying - Dagný took her aside and, after finding out why her daughter was crying, explained that Katrín's mother drank, and she and Jón had a few times tried to intervene when they'd overheard or witnessed incidents; Dagný thought Katrín was being like this because of her mother. It was indeed bad enough that Tolli had a cabin out in Svalbarðseyri, where he went to get away from her from time to time.

But even with that knowledge, it was hard to try to keep a compassionate understanding towards Katrín. Brynhildur hated her. She occasionally entertained fantasies of using her gifts to put the bully in her place, pushing Katrín with just her mind down a flight of stairs, or making her trip and fall, or even taking over her mind to make Katrín do something embarrassing that would make her clique shun her. And always, Brynhildur stopped herself, but the temptation was strong.

Sigurð was not like Katrín at all. He was kind and polite. Brynhildur had seen him deliver groceries to one of their elderly neighbors, and help the little old woman with chores that was harder for her to do now, and the only payment he accepted was cookies or pie. Sometimes he'd offer Brynhildur a slice of pie or a few of the cookies he'd been paid with.

She didn't want to have a crush on him, especially if he would be leaving town when he finished school, going to Reykjavik as so many did these days. But she kept stopping at the drugstore every weekday, and she knew perfectly damn well it wasn't just to get a Coca-Cola.

When school was out for the summer, she spent more time at the library, and came earlier to the drugstore. Sigurð was allowed to play music while he worked, and he had a nice collection of vinyl - he was a big fan of the British band Led Zeppelin, and Brynhildur loved to hear him sing along as he stocked shelves and cleaned the store.

One day, Sigurð was on a ladder, repairing a light fixture. But the ladder was unstable, and Brynhildur watched him fall. Not thinking, just acting, Brynhildur waved her hand and shoved over a pile of large cardboard boxes that Sigurð was working through to stock shelves, and Sigurð landed on those instead of hitting the hard floor.

After a few moments, laying there in a state of shock, Sigurð sat up, slowly, and began to move his limbs to assess any injuries. Then he just stared at Brynhildur.

She froze like a deer in headlights, feeling like she couldn't breathe. Her deepest secret had just been exposed to the boy she had a crush on. Nobody else had seen what happened, just Sigurð, but even one person was too much.

Brynhildur thought about pushing into his mind and telling him he didn't see that, but she couldn't. Instead, she ran.

She ran all the way home, and threw herself onto her bed and cried. She skipped dinner that night, claiming she didn't feel well, and just lay in her bed, near-paralyzed with fear. Fear of what he'd think of her. Fear of him *telling* anyone, especially his snotty sister. And then, her mother knocked at her door.

"Brynhildur," Dagný said, "you have a visitor."

Brynhildur dragged herself out of bed and went outside, where Sigurð was waiting for her.

"What do you want," she said in a flat voice.

"I... wanted to thank you." Sigurð shifted his weight from one foot to another, looking down.

Brynhildur looked away. "Please don't tell anyone about..." She didn't want to say it aloud, and she didn't push into his mind when she said it. She just hoped he'd be decent enough to respect her wishes.

"Brynhildur."

The way he spoke her name, Brynhildur looked at him, even though she felt embarrassed, wanting to be anywhere but here.

Then he spoke directly into her mind. *Brynhildur. If you can hear me right now, hold up two fingers on your right hand.*

Brynhildur blinked, wondering if she was hallucinating, if this was wishful thinking, but she did as he asked, and then he nodded.

"Good," he said. And then he waved his right hand, and Brynhildur watched as a small rock lifted up from the ground, and floated over to her. She took it, instinctively.

"You're not alone," Sigurð told her. "And now, neither am I."

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1984

On November 25th, there was thundersnow. In the midst of the raging storm, Sören and Dagnýr Sigurðsson were born, seven minutes apart.

Sigurð was at the hospital with his three-year-old son, Magnús, when he got the news in the waiting room. As soon as he was allowed to see the children, he carried Magnús there, trying to keep himself together. And promptly fell apart when he saw his wife, cradling their newborn baby sons.

He was only twenty-six, but felt much older. He'd had a difficult life, with an alcoholic mother, a distant father, and a younger sister who treated everyone like trash. But even without those complications, or the way his gifts set him apart, he'd been haunted by nightmares his entire life - a warrior, slain again and again, but first watching his brothers bleed and die, in pain.

He had felt a sense of doom upon him his whole life, and now, as he touched his twins for the first time, petting the little tuft of dark hair baby Sören had on his head, it was *here.*

He could *feel* the same power in them, except it felt amplified, having two parents who had these gifts, rather than just one random ancestor.

What kind of life would it bring them?

What kind of *attention* would it bring them? From *where?* From *who?* Sigurð's hair stood on end, and his eyes met Brynhildur's, then. And in his mind's eye he saw a burning eye, watching them.

Waiting.

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1990

The official coroner's report had been that Sigurð Tollasson had died of a stroke, prematurely at age twenty-nine. But Brynhildur knew better. There had been a disturbance in the air, and Sigurð had gone outside to confront whatever it was lurking out there. He was found dead in the snow.

Shortly after his death, they moved from a house into an apartment in Akureyri. Brynhildur didn't just want to not have constant painful reminders of her husband, but to her way of thinking, they would be less likely to show themselves if they were in a more urban area, with more people around.

And for four years after his death, her theory held true. There were no more disturbances from them, apart from the occasional dream where they taunted her, making her live the

last few moments of Sigurð's life.

Brynhildur's grandparents died in those four years, and her parents also. Her sister moved to Scotland, and her brother moved to Australia. She felt completely and utterly alone in this world, apart from her children, who she doted on.

On a normal rainy day, she went grocery shopping, and on the drive back home, the headlights behind her became *the eye.*

Her children were being watched by a neighbor, and Brynhildur decided they could stay there awhile longer. She took a detour, taking the thirty-minute drive out of Akureyri to the Dimmuborgir. Now, a thunderstorm was raging.

With her grey cloak and dark hair whipping around her in the wind, she walked from her car to the lava fields, her hands raised. She felt the electricity crackling in her fingers, and when the shadow beings rose, she shot it at them, blasting them into ash.

She could feel *him* watching her, the one who had enslaved her husband to war so long ago, had cast her out - she had remembered, much as Sigurð remembered. The rage inside her built to a boiling point, and with her mind, she reached out and hit him as hard as she could, in that burning eye.

*You. Stay. Away from me. You stay away from*my children. *Filth.*

His presence withdrew, and the storm quieted back to peaceful falling rain, with sun shining through the clouds as she picked up the children. Magnús and Dagnýr chattered, their usual bubbly selves, and Sören was quiet and brooding - he *knew* something was wrong, something had happened.

When they got home, Brynhildur's head was throbbing, her vision blurring. She felt more exhausted than she had ever been in her life, like that fight at the Dimmuborgir had drained every last ounce of strength she had. *I overdid it.* She took a few deep breaths. *If I take a nap, I'll be fine.*

Sören blinked slowly. "Mamma?"

She pet him, not wanting him to be alarmed, even though she knew the power was strongest in him of the three and he couldn't be fooled. "It's all right, *krútt mitt.*"

Sören gave her a look, suspicion in his large dark eyes.

Brynhildur patted him. "Go play with your brothers. I'll take a nap and then I'll start dinner."

She lay down on the couch, and closed her eyes. Everything went dark, and there was peace. The tension in her body rolled out, like she was melting.

Then she was falling again, and *he* was back. His grasp wrapped around her, the burning eye forced her to look upon it.

Then there was a woman, who looked like she was made of pure moonlight.*This one is mine.*

A *growl* answered her.

No, the woman told him. *You may not have her. She has*our *blood.* She opened her arms

to Brynhildur. *Come, child.*

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"Mamma? You have to wake up now."

Sören shook her, but she wouldn't wake up. "Mamma? Wake up. Wake up, Mamma..."

It was dark, and well past the time she should have woken up. Sören was hungry now, as were his brothers, and it was late, and his mother's skin was cold. When she wouldn't wake up, he tried to remember the number to call for emergency - 112 - repeating it over and over again as he headed to the phone. He dialed, and told the person on the other line, through his tears, that his mother wouldn't wake up.

A little while later there were many sirens, and paramedics carried out his mother, in a bag. They asked Sören a lot of questions, that he mostly didn't have answers for. His brothers just cried.

Finally his aunt Katrín, his father's sister who he barely knew, showed up, reeking of beer.

"Your mother is dead. You're coming home with me."

Chapter 2

2009

It was Friday night, and Sören Sigurðsson had just gotten off working his shift as a waiter. He was tired, but didn't want to go straight home to his flat in Reykjavik, that he shared with his sister Margrét. Margrét was working at the bar tonight, and he didn't want to be alone.

Sören opted to stop at a coffeehouse, which had live entertainment on Friday nights. It was usually nothing special, but having a cup of hot cocoa and a dessert while zoning out to music in the presence of other humans would help him relax.

He took his sketchbook, a canvas, and oil pastels in with him to the coffeehouse, and as he waited for his cocoa and cheesecake, he stroked his beard for a moment, thinking, and then began to sketch the couple sitting across from him. *At least some people are happy and in love.*

Just as his coffee was being delivered, the emcee announced, "Give a round of applause for Alejandro Magalhães."

It wasn't a name you heard every day in Reykjavik. Sören put down his sketching for a moment and watched as a very tall man took the stage, carrying an acoustic guitar. He had long black hair, was pale in a gothic way, clean-shaven, sultry-looking - somehow pretty and handsome at the same time - dressed in a deep blue pirate shirt over black leather pants. He had a black, lace-edged fingerless glove on his right hand.

Sören had an eclectic taste in music, though he tended to favor goth rock - Joy Division, Siouxie Sioux, The Cure - and industrial like Nine Inch Nails and Ministry. But he also liked R&B, like Pharrell, and even sometimes pop, like Lady Gaga. The sight of the acoustic guitar made him think *this is going to be some indie hipster folk rock bullshit*, and he went back to sketching.

Then this Alejandro Magalhães leaned into the microphone, tapped it awkwardly, cleared his throat and said, in English, "This is a song I call 'By the Sea'."

He strummed his guitar and began to sing, and Sören stopped sketching. All he could do was stare at the beautiful man, and listen to his beautiful voice, singing in English and Portuguese. Sören got the impression of Cocteau Twins if Jeff Buckley was the singer, from the melody and the chord progressions and the emotion and power in his voice, but this was even more sublime. It gave him chills.

It made him *ache*.

Sören also began to see pictures in his head. He often preferred to draw and paint to music, putting him in the right state of mind to concentrate on bringing the visions already in his mind's eye to shape and form, but it was another thing entirely to start seeing things as he listened to music. He reached for his art supplies again, but he wasn't going to resume drawing the couple across from him, now. He began to work with his oil pastels on the canvas. Drawing the sea. Except the sea had a strange light to it.

As Alejandro continued his songs, Sören continued to draw, feeling like his mind had been set on fire. Every now and again he paused, to not cramp his wrist, and to not let the

cocoa and cheesecake he spent money on go to waste. And a few times, he looked across the room and his eyes met the singer's. They were a beautiful silver-grey, extraordinary eyes.

Sören had never believed in love at first sight, thinking it a stupid cliche, but every time he looked at those eyes, it felt like his heart stopped.

Alejandro's set was two hours long, and at the end of it, Sören had a complete canvas. Alejandro got a standing ovation, taking a bow. Most of the coffeehouse patrons had left - it was late - but a few remained and Alejandro lingered as they came to shake his hand, compliment his performance.

At last Sören got up enough nerve to approach him, hands behind his back.

"That was lovely," Sören told him in English, which he'd been learning since childhood. "I really needed that tonight, thank you."

"It's been one of those days, yes?" Alejandro had a charming accent.

"Indeed it has." Sören couldn't believe he was doing this, shifting weight awkwardly from one foot to another. "I... have something for you."

"Oh?" Alejandro patted the jar next to him. "My tip jar is here, thank you..."

"It's..." Sören pulled out the small canvas he had behind his back. "I made this, while you were performing. Your music... it. Uh."

Alejandro just stared at the canvas, his jaw open slightly, and Sören took a step back, suddenly feeling nervous, worrying that he didn't like it. Then Alejandro took it, and Sören heard his breath catch.

"Thank you." Alejandro continued looking at the canvas, and for a moment he seemed sad. When he looked up at Sören, there was a wistful look in his eyes that made Sören ache again - the same wistfulness that had come out in his haunting, ethereal music. "Nobody has ever tipped me like this for a performance. This is..." He looked at the canvas again. "Magnificent. You have a gift."

Sören felt warmth flush his cheeks, and his stomach fluttered, and he found himself clapping excitedly like a small child, and then facepalmed, feeling immediately self-conscious about the gesture. Alejandro laughed, but Sören got the sense it wasn't *at* him.

"I. Uh." Sören still wanted to bolt, feeling shy. "Should get home. It's been a long day. Thank you again, for your music."

"Thank *you.*" Alejandro smiled, and that smile took Sören's breath away.

Before Sören could get too far Alejandro called out, "Wait!"

Sören stopped, art supplies in hand, and turned around. "Yes?"

"I never got your name."

What does it matter? But he told him anyway. "Sören. Sören Sigurðsson."

"Have a good rest of the evening, Sören."

On the drive home, Sören was still flushed, heart beating faster, feeling giddy and stupid all at once. "You are fucking ridiculous," Sören told himself, glaring into the rear-view mirror.

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Sören slept in the next day, thankful that for the first time in a month, he didn't have to work on a Saturday. He felt like he was hungover, even though he hadn't had any alcohol yesterday. And though he'd gotten eight hours sleep, he felt like it had been shorter than that. He'd had strange dreams, forests and fire and Alejandro wandering, staring up at the stars, holding back tears.

On his way to the bathroom, Sören heard his sister snoring from her bedroom, and suppressed a grin. He made coffee on his way back, and then sat at his small desk, his usual morning routine of checking e-mail, checking Facebook.

He had a friend request from one Alejandro Magalhães.

Oh shit.

He was surprised to see that Alejandro had a very small group of friends on Facebook, even fewer than his own.*He's probably just friending you so he can get a neighbor on Farmville or free stuff for Mafia Viking Yakuza Clan or whatever the fuck.* He still accepted the friend request, and looked more closely at Alejandro's profile.

He had very few pictures of himself, and all but one of them were taken at a distance, of him singing and playing the guitar. The one picture that wasn't far away, Alejandro had on sunglasses and it was taken at Stonehenge.

Anyone else, Sören would think it was pretentious *as fuck*, but somehow for Alejandro it made sense. The profile said he was from Brazil, and Sören wondered how long he'd been away from his home country.

Alejandro also had a fan page for his music, which more people were on, and Sören clicked Like on that.

Margrét was waking up now, and after a few minutes she poked her head in the open crack of Sören's door. "You want breakfast?" she asked. Sören nodded.

Margrét made them fried fish, sausage, eggs, and toast. After breakfast Sören surveyed the contents of the fridge and cupboards and decided they needed groceries, and dragged himself into the shower, then got changed. He did one last check of Facebook and his e-mail before he headed out, and saw he'd been mentioned on Facebook by Alejandro, who was showing off the oil pastel drawing Sören made for him last night.

Sören thought about commenting, but he felt flustered, and self-conscious for feeling flustered, so he went to the store, trying to not think about it much. When he came back, he was more composed, and made a brief comment on the post: *Thank you for appreciating my art. It means a lot to me.* He felt trite saying it, since too many people say "it means a lot to me" when it would mean nothing at all, but it did, in fact, mean a lot to Sören. He put his soul into his art, and he could feel Alejandro *felt* that, the same way he could feel Alejandro put his soul into his music.

He got messaged awhile later by Alejandro. *I'm playing the same coffeehouse again this Friday, same time, I'd love it if you came by!*

Sören would be working late again that Friday but he could still make it on time, and the thought of attending another performance excited him. Not simply because Alejandro was gorgeous eye candy, but his voice, his music. He'd felt more inspired than he had in a long time.

I'll be there, Sören replied. *I'll bring my art supplies again.*

Excellent.

–

For the next three weeks, Sören attended Alejandro's performances Friday nights at the coffeehouse, and drew or painted while he sang and played, going where the music took him. Even though Sören exhibited art at a local Reyjkavik gallery and it was an important secondary source of income for him, what he made during the performances he gave to Alejandro for free when they were done. *A gift for a gift,* he thought to himself.

When a month passed, Sören and Alejandro finally exchanged cell phone numbers, and a couple days after the performance, while Sören was at work waiting tables, his cell went off. He couldn't take the call then, but when he was on break, he recognized Alejandro's number and called back.

"Hello," Sören said. "Sorry about that, I'm at work -"

Alejandro laughed softly. "It's all right. How are you?"

"Busy." Sören gave a nervous laugh. "A bit stressed."

"What time do you get off work?"

"It varies by day, but if you mean tonight, I'm off at 8... why?"

A pause, and then Alejandro said, "Have you eaten? Would you like to have dinner?"

Sören took a deep breath. "I don't have a lot of money right now -"

"I'll pay."

Sören didn't like accepting these kinds of offers, usually because of the implied strings attached, but he couldn't deny he was crushing hard on Alejandro and looking forward to seeing him. "OK... if you don't mind -"

"I don't mind. Shall I pick you up at work?"

Sören groaned. "Can I go home and change? Is 8:45 OK?"

"Yes. Where to pick you up?"

Sören gave him the address, and then spent the next moment flailing before getting back to work. The remaining hours seemed to drag.

Sören got home just as Margrét was about to take off and start her shift at the bar. The sight of her brother smiling and almost bouncing as he walked, made her smile. "Well hello there," she said, putting him in a headlock and giving him a noogie, as Sören laughed and squirmed. "You never look this happy when you come home from work. What's up?"

"Someone's picking me up in twenty minutes."

Margrét raised an eyebrow. "Someone? You have a date?"

Sören blushed. "He didn't call it that, I don't know what it is, but he wanted to have dinner with me."

"Pretty sure it's a date."

Sören rolled his eyes.

"And if you're in this good of a mood, I can tell you like him." Margrét playfully elbowed him. "Is he cute?"

"Cute wouldn't quite be the word I'd use." *Ethereal. Majestic. Otherworldly.* Alejandro looked too pretty to be human, especially those silvery eyes.

"Ah, hot, then?" Margrét smirked.

"Closer." Sören nodded.

"All right. Well... have fun." Margrét hugged him quickly and kissed his cheek, and affectionately tousled his hair once more. "And Sören? Be safe."

Sören nodded, and let out a small sigh as Margrét walked out and closed the door behind her. Margrét's "be safe" wasn't simply a reminder to use condoms if things happened, nor was it simply a reminder to heed red flags and gut feelings - as a trans woman, Margrét was keenly aware of the potential for assault, even in a progressive country like Iceland. It was a caution to *be careful about that thing we all have.*

From a young age, Margrét, Sören and his fraternal twin brother Dagnýr and their cousin Ari had all manifested certain gifts - the ability to move objects without touching them, a degree of telepathy and empathy, occasional precognitive flashes, though never for anything useful like winning lottery numbers. They could also make suggestions that could compel someone to do or not do something, but they had decided at a young age it was ethical to only do this if their lives or someone else's life depended on it.

Sören remembered very little about his parents, but his mother seemed to have similar gifts. After his mother's death, he and his siblings had been raised by Ari's parents - Ari's mother was their father's sister - and they were alcoholics, and beat them for using these powers, enough that they learned to keep them a secret and to some extent even suppress using them. Also, for some reason, the power of suggestion didn't work on their guardians.

Now that they were adults, Sören and Margrét were much more relaxed about using their powers at home, in private. But they had to be careful.

And it was frustrating. Sören had a steady string of boyfriends and lovers since coming

out at the age of seventeen. None of them had the same gifts, nor did he expect them to, but he also felt constantly like he was hiding something, and not merely that, but like he was living on some alternate plane of reality that very few other people could understand.

Sören was very certain that Alejandro didn't have the same powers he had, but there was *something* about him, something he couldn't quite put his finger on. Anyone who could write such lush, gorgeous songs and play and sing so beautifully had to have some kind of magic to them. Sören was drawn to that as much as Alejandro's physical beauty.

It was late April, and the days were getting longer, and warmer; the sun was just setting as he got home. Sören didn't know what to wear - he neither wanted to be too casual nor too formal. He decided on a simple black T-shirt, black vest, and black trousers. He tied some of his nape-length mop of black curls back into a ponytail, leaving the rest down.

Alejandro's car was waiting outside - a Jaguar, which made Sören double-take, because most of the artsy types he knew didn't have the kind of money for that kind of vehicle. Sören got in the car and was hit by an intoxicating scent, like petrichor, earth, and musky spice. Alejandro smiled at him. His long black hair was hanging loose, as it always did, and he was wearing a black tunic over black leather pants.

"Do you have any kind of dietary restrictions? Vegan, gluten-free...?" Alejandro raised an eyebrow.

Sören shook his head. "No, but thanks for asking."

Fiskmarkaðurinn was open. Sören was surprised Alejandro had a reservation, for two.

"You knew I'd come...?" Sören raised his eyebrows.

"More like hoping." Alejandro smiled.

Sören's stomach was turning cartwheels and he almost bumped into another of the restaurant patrons on his way to their table.

Alejandro ordered the lobster soup and Robata grilled salmon for himself, and told Sören to get whatever he wanted. Sören decided on a smoked and grilled breast of puffin, with pan-fried ocean perch.

There was a few moments of awkward silence, and then Alejandro asked him, "How was work?"

"Ugh." Sören crinkled his nose. "It was... a day."

"What do you do?"

Sören lowered his head. "I'm a waiter."

"...Oh."

Sören could tell Alejandro wasn't expecting that answer. Sören nodded. "I was in med school but I dropped out because I, uh, couldn't handle it. Art is my true calling, though."

"That's valid." Alejandro nodded.

"What about you?" Sören leaned back in his chair.

"I have some wealth," Alejandro said, "so I just focus on my music."

Sören immediately felt self-conscious, like he was way out of his league with this guy*It's not even officially a date, dumbass!* "Your music is... amazing. I know I've said that already but what you do..." Sören put his hand over his heart.

"The way you draw and paint to my music," Alejandro said, "is amazing."

"How long have you been making music?"

"All my life." Alejandro looked away, as if he were looking at something or someone Sören couldn't see. "Feels like as old as time, sometimes."

Sören laughed, but the wistful, haunted look on Alejandro's face made him stop laughing.

Sören quickly switched gears, feeling suddenly emboldened. "Maybe one of these days you could come play for me, for a few hours, as I work on a more ambitious canvas."

"I'd like that." Their eyes met then, and held. Alejandro's eyes almost seemed to glow.

Their food came, and as they ate, Sören finally noticed awful scarring on Alejandro's right hand - he wore a fingerless glove on his right hand when he performed, but not today. Sören politely looked away, but his eyes kept being drawn back to it, and then finally he noticed Alejandro noticing he was noticing, and Sören said, "Sorry," his face burning.

"It's all right." Alejandro reached across the table and patted his hand. Then he extended the palm of his scarred hand, which had strange geometric patterns seared into it. "It's an old war wound."

Sören gave him a quizzical look. "Iraq?" He didn't look a day over thirty-five.

Alejandro just shook his head and said, quietly, "I don't want to discuss it right now," before taking a bite of food.

Sören wanted to crawl under the table. "I'm sorry," he said again, with a deep sigh.

"You're fine." Alejandro met his eyes, and gave him a reassuring smile. "Truly."

Sören changed the subject again. "How are you liking Iceland?"

"I love Iceland. Beautiful country, beautiful people."

"How long have you been here?"

"Almost a year." Not a precise answer, but good enough.

"What brought you here?"

Alejandro paused, considering his response, and then said, simply, "I needed a change of scenery."

"Well... if it's been inspiring music like *that*, it's a good change." Sören nodded.

"What about you... I take it you're a native Icelander?"

Sören nodded again. "Lived here my whole life though I'm not from Reykjavik. I'm from Akureyri, up north. I moved to the big city a year ago."

Alejandro smiled, and Sören waited for the response a lot of foreigners gave, that Reykjavik was hardly "the big city" compared to everywhere else, but when you grew up in a town of 18,000 people Reykjavik looked huge. But what he said instead floored him: "I like the way you say 'city.'" Alejandro's smile grew bigger as he said, "See-tee," an imitation of Sören's accent, but he sensed no malice there.

Sören blushed, and Alejandro kept smiling at him.

"So," Alejandro said, "since turnabout is fair play... what brought you to the big 'see-tee'?"

Sören gave him a mock glare, then laughed, and said, "I, too, needed a change of scenery." Even though Alejandro hadn't been very forthcoming with his own answers, Sören saw no shame in honesty, though he wasn't going to dump his full sad life story on him right now either. "Dysfunctional family, easier to get into the art scene here, and, well, in a small town I exhausted my dating options as a gay man."

"Ah." Alejandro nodded, seeming very nonchalant about Sören's revelation of being gay.

Another few moments of silence passed and then Alejandro broke the silence. "How old are you?"

"Twenty-four. I'll be twenty-five in November." Sören smirked. "How old are you?"

"Old enough."

Sören snickered at that, and then he gave Alejandro a look.

"Over thirty," Alejandro said.

Sören continued glaring, and finally with an exaggerated sigh of mock annoyance, Alejandro reached for his wallet and produced a passport; the passport listed Alejandro at age thirty-three, which seemed about right, yet somehow didn't at the same time.

"So," Alejandro said, "dessert?"

Sören shook his head. "I've indulged in sweets a bit lately and need to watch it." Sören had a high metabolism and was physically active enough, but he still felt the occasional pang of guilt from his background at med school, and the fact that his parents had died young made him health-conscious as well.

"All right." Alejandro nodded. "Do you want to go straight home, or do you mind sitting in the park with me for awhile?"

"The park sounds nice."

They sat by the pond, close to each other, almost touching but not quite. Sören decided to sketch, using colored pencils, and Alejandro hummed to himself. After awhile Sören looked at him and said, "That's beautiful. Is that one of your songs?"

"It's not quite a song yet." Alejandro put his hand on Sören's shoulder; the touch was like an electric shock. "Wait here, while I get my guitar and my notepad."

Alejandro came back a moment later with his acoustic guitar, and an interesting-looking notebook, indigo leather with an eight-pointed star on the front. Alejandro began strumming a few chords, humming along, and then at last, started to sing, wordlessly at first, then found words. Sören's sketching intensified, watching the swans on the pond, and he found himself drawing a swan lake, and two boys with long hair at the lake. One of the boys had long dark hair, like a young version of Alejandro, and the other had long coppery auburn hair. They were dressed in ornate robes, *like the kind wizards would wear,* Sören thought to himself as he sketched. The boy with dark hair had an indigo robe.

Sören didn't quite understand why he was drawing what he was drawing, only that he was following the pictures the music put in his mind... and the feeling behind them. There was a sense of innocence there, a moment of joy and purity, ephemeral, and a spark of sadness for being lost. Sören watched his color pencils light up the sky in a riot of colors, and the flowers taking bloom around the lake had a bioluminescent glow. He also drew a faint, shining aura around each of the boys, blending colors.

Alejandro continued to sing and play, seemingly lost in it, making notations every now and again. And when he was finished, Sören was finished. He waited a moment before handing Alejandro the sketch.

Alejandro looked at it with a pained expression on his face.

Oh shit, I've blown it. Colored pencils was too childlike -

Alejandro looked up at him, with unshed tears in his eyes.

"Are you all right?" Sören asked.

Alejandro nodded. "I should probably take you home now."

He drove slowly, saying nothing, while Sören shifted awkwardly in his seat. When they arrived at Sören's apartment building, Alejandro stopped the car, and they lingered for a moment.

"I enjoyed this evening," Alejandro told him.

"Really?" Sören asked.

He nodded solemnly.

"I did too," Sören said. "I very much enjoyed your new song. And, um, I'm sorry about the picture -"

"Don't be sorry." Alejandro said.

"You didn't like it -"

"No. I... loved it." Alejandro looked down, and then into his eyes.

"You looked as if you didn't -"

Alejandro sighed. "I loved it. It evoked a certain painful emotional response in me, that much is true, but it doesn't mean I don't love it, the same way you can watch a sad movie

or listen to a sad song and still love that." Alejandro touched Sören's shoulder, and Sören felt that same electricity again. "You like my songs, and all of them are sadness. Especially the one I wrote tonight."

The hand that was on Sören's shoulder was the scarred one, and Sören instinctively found himself reaching up to touch it, tracing his thumb over the scars, almost reverently. Alejandro squeezed his hand, and that moment of connection made Sören harden.

Sören licked his lips, his mouth suddenly dry. He waited, to see if anything else would happen, but Alejandro just continued to hold his hand, until he withdrew it. Sören's hardness was almost painful in its need, and Sören felt the urge to bolt before Alejandro noticed it.

"I'd like to see you again," Alejandro told him.

"I'd like that, too."

"You'll be by the coffeehouse on Friday, but... what are you doing this weekend?"

"I work weekends," Sören said, "and usually longer hours than the rest of the week, so weekends aren't normally good for me. But, uh, I have Monday the 4th off?"

"Monday is fine," Alejandro said. "Perhaps we could spend several hours together? An afternoon trip, and then dinner?"

"Yes." Sören nodded.

When Sören got back to his room, he masturbated to his first fantasy of Alejandro, and then after his climax he lay there a few minutes, staring up at the ceiling, feeling awkward about it. *I hope I don't fuck this up.*

—

Monday, May 4th came around, and Sören started the day giddy, excited to see Alejandro again and spend more time with him. And then he felt nervous and awkward again, wondering if Alejandro was even gay, and would be interested if he was.

That worried him a little. Sören was usually better at reading people. Alejandro wasn't quite inscrutable, Sören could pick up occasional flares of emotion from him - mostly a deep sense of melancholy. But this was one of the first times in Sören's life when he couldn't tell right away if someone was gay, straight, or bi, or if they were at all attracted to him.

Sören began to think about his dating history, starting when he came out at seventeen. He'd had a string of boyfriends as well as a number of one-night-stands, but had yet to be in a serious, committed relationship more than a few months. He'd also been cheated on more than once. In fact, Sören's first experience with being cheated on was the first and thus so far only time he'd been in a live-in arrangement - newly out of the hospital following his breakdown in med school, Sören had taken up painting in art therapy and had been encouraged to start showing his work. One of the galleries he contacted was owned by a man who took intense interest in his work, and it became apparent quickly that he was also interested in Sören's ass. The man was in his fifties - Sören liked older men, and he was a handsome silver fox; he also had that commanding, dominating

presence that Sören was drawn to. For five months Sören lived with him as his sugar baby, taken under his wing into the Reykjavik art world. And then his patron's focus changed - he came home to find the latest new protégé getting fucked doggy-style. The one good thing that had come out of that relationship was giving Sören a circle of contacts, people other than his ex-lover who were willing to show his work, and from then on Sören had a policy to not get involved with anyone doing so, making it clear interest had to be in his art, not other qualities.

Sören had since that time lived with Margrét, who had begun medically transitioning two years ago. They looked out for each other, both painfully aware of their sibling's struggle with depression.

Thinking about his dating history made Sören feel sad, and Margrét noticed the change in his mood. Without saying anything, she walked across the kitchen and gave him a hug.

Sören squeezed her, and Margrét ruffled his hair. "You really like this guy, don't you," Margrét said.

Sören swallowed hard, and nodded. "I barely know him, but I do. There's something about him."

Margrét took a step back, her hands on her brother's shoulders. "If you want to bring him back here later, you may." Sören hadn't been in the habit of bringing people home for awhile, not that Sören had dated in a few months. Then Margrét smirked and said, "And then if I'm home, I can threaten to kick his arse if he hurts you."

Sören threw his head back and laughed. "Yes, Mamma."

And then it hit him - *Mamma.* Today would have been his mother's forty-ninth birthday, if she was still alive. Tears burned his eyes, and he closed them, remembering the last time he saw her, finding her dead body on the couch, and then the last days of her being alive, so full of life, trying to keep it together after their father died. He barely remembered his father, though he remembered his mother loved him very much and told happy, funny stories about him.

When he looked at Margrét again, he saw the tears reflected in her own eyes. Sören was almost six when their mother died, and Margrét was nine. Margrét had been five when their father died - she had memories of both of them.

They hugged once more, rocking each other, crying a little together. "Fuck," was all Sören could choke out.

Margrét patted him gently, the way their mother used to.

Sören felt a pang of guilt that his parents' graves - they were buried next to each other - were all the way up in Akureyri, and he was down here. He facepalmed. Then his cell phone went off. It was Alejandro.

"Hello," Sören said, trying to keep the quaver out of his voice, and failing.

"Hello, Sören! How are you?"

"I'm fine." Sören wasn't fine. "How are you?"

"Very well, thank you. Listen, I'm on my way to pick you up!"

Sören let out a sigh.

Alejandro immediately caught it. "...Are you OK?"

"Jæja, it's just..." Sören took a deep breath. "Today isn't a good day..."

"Oh." The disappointment in his voice was palpable.

"It's not you." Sören immediately felt like an ass, like he was already blowing it. "It's... something came up..." His voice broke, the tears coming again.

Margrét snatched the phone way. "Hi there!" she said in her heavily accented English. "This is Sören's sister Margrét."

"Hello," Alejandro said.

"Please come pick him up and drag his arse out of here so he doesn't spend all day moping around."

Sören glared at her. Margrét glared back.

You'll thank me later, Margrét spoke into his mind.

Sören gave her the finger and yanked the phone back. "Hello, it's me again," Sören said.

Alejandro chuckled. "I'm almost there. Meet me outside."

Sören did, managing to pull himself together. He climbed into Alejandro's Jaguar and mustered a smile. Alejandro smiled back.

"We could start with Tjörnin again?" Alejandro asked.

Sören nodded.

They rode there in silence, and when they were almost there, Alejandro said, "Pardon me for prying, but what's troubling you today?"

Sören sighed. "You probably don't want to hear it."

"I wouldn't ask if I didn't want to hear it, Sören."

Sören took a deep breath and said, "Today's my mother's birthday."

Alejandro got very quiet and then he said, "Oh. Are you feeling guilty about not celebrating with her? Or are you not on speaking terms...?"

"She's dead." Sören frowned. "She died when I was almost six." He cringed. "I found her body."

There was a sharp inhalation, and then Alejandro reached out and squeezed his shoulder. "I'm sorry."

"So am I."

Alejandro pulled over, and then he turned to face Sören. "What do you want to do today?"

"Truthfully?"

Alejandro nodded. "If you need a day to yourself I won't be offended -"

"My sister seems to be under the impression that my mental health will suffer if I don't get out and about today, so." Sören shrugged. "I like your company, being here with you is fine."

"But." Alejandro raised an eyebrow.

Sören ran a hand through his curls, nervous. "My mother is buried up in Akureyri. I feel bad that I can't get there to, I don't know, pay respects at her grave." Sören shook her head. "I feel so stupid for saying that because when you're dead, you're dead, it's not like she'll care -"

"I care." Their eyes met. "You know... it only takes forty-five minutes to fly to Akureyri."

Sören shook his head. "I work as a waiter for a living, and though I occasionally sell my art, I'm always kind of broke. Otherwise yes, I'd fly up there -"

"*I'm offering to fly you up there and back*."

Sören leaned back in the passenger seat, considering. "I don't feel comfortable accepting that kind of money from strangers -"

"We're not strangers."

Aren't we? Sören raised his eyebrows. "You barely know me."

"That's not really true," Alejandro said. "Your soul shines through your art. I... may have had a look at the gallery where your work is displayed right now."

Sören facepalmed. "Oh god."

"It's beautiful."

Sören blushed. "OK, but..."

"No buts. Let me do this for you."

Sören frowned again. "Do we really want to fly twice in one day, though? A quick trip there and back? It's already afternoon."

"We could stay the night there, if you want to stop at your place and pack an overnight bag..." Alejandro gestured to the back of his car, towards the trunk. "I always keep something on hand for myself in case I have to go anywhere on short notice."

"And I assume you're offering to put us up in a hotel."

"I am." Their eyes met again. "There's no strings attached, no pressure. I just want to do this for you and help you get through the day. Moral support."

Sören nodded. Even though it felt ridiculous, he wasn't going to argue. They drove back to

Sören's apartment building, and Alejandro accompanied him up the stairs to the second floor. Margrét was checking her e-mail, and she gave her brother a curious look, then her jaw dropped slightly when she saw Alejandro.

My god. Margrét spoke directly into Sören's mind. *If that isn't sex on legs, I don't know what is.*

Will you shut it. "Margrét, this is Alejandro. Alejandro, this is my sister Margrét."

Margrét got up, and Alejandro tried to mask his surprise at seeing a woman almost as tall as he was. He took her hand and kissed it, and Margrét laughed.

"So, you're back soon...?" Margrét gave Sören another curious look.

"Jæja, I'm here to, uh, pack an overnight bag."

Margrét raised an eyebrow and smirked. "I see."

No, you don't fucking see.

Margrét tried not to snicker. Alejandro kept a poker face, and Sören felt like he could die of embarrassment. He quickly ran into his room and packed pajamas and a change of clothes, while he heard Margrét offering Alejandro coffee, who politely refused.

On the away out, Margrét said, "Have fun, you crazy kids."

Sören waved. "You too."

Margrét snorted. "As if, I have to work tonight."

The flight to Akureyri was uneventful, but once they landed, Sören felt overcome by emotion. He hadn't been back to his hometown in years, and a part of him always missed it.

They stopped at a car rental, and then drove to Hotel Akureyri. When Alejandro went to the booking desk, and the receptionist asked if they were getting one or two rooms, Alejandro turned to Sören and said, "That's up to you."

Sören took a deep breath and rubbed his face, feeling awkward again. "Er." He pinched the bridge of his nose.

"Like I told you, no strings."

"One, just to keep expenses down."

The receptionist heard and nodded, and Sören facepalmed. *What am I getting myself into.*

Alejandro took Sören to buy flowers, and told him to pick out whatever he wanted. Sören settled on a simple bouquet of white roses, and Alejandro drove him in the rental to the graveyard at Naustahofdi, situated on a hill. They walked into the graveyard solemnly, and Sören led him to the two graves.

Sigurð Tollasson, 1957-1986
Brynhildur Jónsdóttir 1960-1990

Their graves had been empty in some time - neglected, forgotten. Just that alone made Sören want to cry, but he couldn't do it. He dropped to his knees, kissed his fingertips, and pressed them against his mother's grave before laying the bouquet of white roses down.

He closed his eyes, and remembered. Feeling. He was there for awhile, lost in memory, the only thing his mother had left him. Though he had only known her for a few short years, he still missed her terribly, and wondered how life would be different if she'd lived.

When he got up, Alejandro was there, and for a moment they just looked at each other. Sören wondered if Alejandro was going to give him a hug, but he hesitated - Sören could *feel* the hesitation, the cautiousness - and then he took Sören by the hand out of the graveyard.

For the next hour Sören took Alejandro on the unofficial tour, showing him the neighborhoods where he grew up, the schools he went to. Then they visited Lystigarðurinn, the famous botanical garden, and the way Alejandro's face lit up among all the different kinds of flowers made Sören feel a bit better.

It was there that Alejandro went to fetch his guitar and notebook, and Sören drew as he sang and played, writing another new song. Sören found, after a little while, that he was drawing his mother, and realized Alejandro was writing a song about her, and grief, and memories.

He showed Alejandro the drawing after that, and instead of accepting it as he always did, Alejandro said, "Keep it."

"You don't like it?"

"I love it. And you should keep it." Alejandro gave Sören a stern look. "You don't have any pictures of your mother, do you?"

Sören deeply exhaled, and shook his head. "No." *How did you know that.*

"Keep it."

Sören felt that urge to cry again, and still couldn't let it out. He nodded, and Alejandro patted him.

They went for a late dinner, opting for fish and chips. As they ate, Alejandro broke the silence that had settled over them again. "Who raised you, with your mother gone so young? Your father?"

Sören shook his head. "My father died when I was two."

Alejandro winced.

"His sister raised us. She. Uh." Sören took a sip of his ginger ale, neither wanting to dance around the issue nor overload this man with too much information that would make him decide he had too many issues. "She was an alcoholic, married to another alcoholic. She was not kind to me, my siblings, or my cousin."

"That's unfortunate."

"My twin brother Dagnýr and I threw ourselves into school to cope. Ridiculous

overachievers, we were. He got accepted to Oxford, he earned a Ph.D. quite young. He's an astrophysicist, and a professor now. His doctoral advisor was one of Stephen Hawking's doctoral students. And like I told you before, I went to med school but I couldn't handle it."

"I hear medical school has a steep learning curve."

"It wasn't the classes, it was the internship." Sören sipped his ginger ale again, feeling slight disbelief that his tongue was loosening like this. "I couldn't handle people dying. I'd gotten into medicine because of my mother's death, and then seeing death again..."

"...It triggered you."

"Yes. It did." Sören sat up in his chair, looking away, but when he met Alejandro's eyes again there was only compassion there.

"I know what it's like to see death," Alejandro said. "And to lose family."

"You've lost family members?"

"Most of my family is gone." Alejandro gave a sad smile.

That awkward pause, with Sören not knowing what to say, desperately wanting to hold him. As painful as Sören's life had been, his sister, brother and cousin were all still alive. Dagnýr was on another continent, but still came to visit around the holidays, at least. *Fuck.*

"Well..." Sören raised what was left of his glass. "Here we are. Alive."

"To life." Alejandro clinked glasses with him - his own had wine. He drained the rest of it, holding Sören's gaze the entire time.

Back at the hotel, Sören changed right away into pajamas. They weren't the sexiest thing in the world, but even if Alejandro had something in mind with being open to only getting one room - and Sören still had no idea - he felt leaden from grief, and not in the mood for sex.

Alejandro was in a pair of black silk pajamas which were more flattering, but he was reading on the bed as Sören approached, not exactly a come-hither pose.

"I... uh." Sören looked down.

"I know." Alejandro nodded. He patted the space beside him. "Come, rest."

Sören climbed on the bed, and Alejandro turned out the lights, keeping a small lamp on to continue reading. Sören tried to relax enough to fall asleep, but he was too tense, and after tossing and turning for awhile, trying and failing to get comfortable, Alejandro at last put his book down, turned off the lamp, and said, simply, "Here."

He wrapped his arms around Sören, cradling him, petting his curls, and it was then that the dam broke and Sören fell apart, crying on him. Alejandro began to rock him, still petting him.

Sören felt self-conscious about crying, feeling like he was making a fool of himself, worrying that Alejandro was somehow just politely tolerating this and wouldn't want to see

him again. Sören knew that was probably a stupid thought, but he'd been shamed for crying by his aunt Katrín, who would beat him for crying. *Boys don't cry. Be a man.*

Sören sniffled and cried harder, answering those memories in his mind. *I do cry. I am human. If you wound me, I bleed.*

"It's all right." Alejandro's arms tightened, almost as if he sensed Sören's shame. "Let it out. Let it all out."

Sören cried and cried, until he was all cried out, exhausted. Alejandro continued holding him, and Sören listened to the rhythm of his heartbeat. At last sleep carried him away.

Alejandro woke Sören up - they had agreed to take an early morning flight because Sören had to work. After Sören showered and changed, they went to the airport, Alejandro returned the car, and they had breakfast. Over breakfast Sören finally spoke. "Thank you for last night."

"You're welcome." Alejandro nodded. "I hope it helped."

After the flight back to Reykjavik, Alejandro drove Sören home, and Sören sat in the car for a minute once they were parked outside the apartment building.

"You'll be at the show on Friday, yes?" Alejandro asked.

"Of course." Sören smiled.

"You work again this weekend?"

"I have Sunday off."

"Would you like to get together...?"

"Yes. But we can discuss details on Friday after the show?"

"Sounds like a plan."

Sören didn't want to go to work, but he did, and when he came home, Margrét was up, and teased him. "How was your hot date last night?" she asked.

"Nothing happened."

"What."

"You heard me." Sören nodded. "No sex. I was up there to grieve, not bone."

"Aw, he didn't do the 'making the moves while you were vulnerable' routine? How noble of him."

"Actually," Sören said, "that was refreshing, considering a couple of the sleazy guys I've been with."

"I won't argue that."

When Sören checked his e-mail, he had one from Alejandro. It was a lolcat, captioned "Iz it can be hugs tiem nao?" and Alejandro wrote underneath it: *Thinking of you. Hoping you*

got through today OK.

Sören started to cry again. It felt stupid, crying over a lolcat, but it was a sweet gesture. The kind he wasn't used to.

He wondered if Alejandro maybe wasn't used to it, either, thinking about that terrible lonely *ache* he'd sensed from him.

–

After Alejandro's show on Friday, they made plans for Sunday late afternoon, early evening. They saw the new *Star Trek* movie together - the theatre was crowded, which was anxiety-inducing for both of them, but they managed to enjoy themselves. After the movie they had dinner together, eating Icelandic lamb.

"That was a good movie," Sören said.

"It was."

Sören smirked. "I usually ship Kirk and Spock, but seeing Spock with Uhura was pretty all right."

"Ah, you're a shipper."

"I am, but not as bad as some." Sören rolled his eyes. "You've met my sister, but one of these days I should introduce you to my cousin Ari. He writes *fanfic.*"

"Oh, does he? What kind?"

"Tolkien."

Alejandro almost choked on his drink. "Ah," was all he said when he recovered.

"I know, right? That is some next level nerd shit." Sören did an imitation of Gollum. "*Hobbitses, we writes them precious, yesss.*"

Alejandro changed the subject back to the movie they'd just seen. "I must admit, I never even considered the idea of Kirk and Spock together."

Sören was quiet, considering. And then he saw his opportunity to settle the confusion once and for all. "Alejandro," he said, suddenly serious. "You've asked me some questions about myself, but... I need to ask this."

Alejandro said nothing, but his eyes prompted Sören to go on.

"You know I'm gay," Sören said. "We shared a bed together and nothing happened. You don't seem freaked out by it like a lot of straight guys are, and you didn't try to jump my bones like a lot of gay guys would have. And this has been a few times we've been spending time together so I've got to ask... what are you?"

Alejandro waited a moment to answer - Sören could feel him considering, and as the moment wore on, his tension grew. Finally Alejandro replied, "I'm complicated."

"So you're bi."

Alejandro took another long moment to respond. "I don't like labels."

"OK. But you're not straight."

Alejandro leaned back in his chair. For a moment Sören wondered if he was going to leave - if he'd overstepped bounds and things were weird now. But then Alejandro said, "I grew up with the belief that being attracted to someone of the same gender was a sin. That you would go to Hell. Be damned."

"Ugh, já." Sören nodded. "My aunt turned into a Bible-thumper when she quit drinking. And you're Brazilian, right? Super Catholic?"

"My culture isn't very, ah... gay-friendly I suppose is the word for it." Alejandro frowned.

"But you're not straight."

"I am not entirely straight, no. I have had experience with men." Alejandro looked away, and Sören could feel a flash of self-consciousness from him, which was surprising. "But not in some time."

"Are you single?"

"Very much so. As I said, it's... been awhile."

"That's... wow. You're hot, talented..."

"All that glitters is not gold," Alejandro said.

"Well..." *Here goes nothing, sink or swim.* "I think you're pretty shiny."

Their eyes met again. Sören's face flushed, his heart started racing, aware of the gravity of what he just said. *Wow, I hope I didn't fuck this up...*

"You're shiny too." Alejandro laughed. "I'd be lying if I said I didn't feel a spark there."

"That's a relief." Sören laughed too. "Usually I can tell with people, but I haven't been able to figure you out, and I've been worried -"

Alejandro shook his head. "It's not a lack of attraction. It's a lack of..." Alejandro looked like he was searching for the word in English. "Freedom, I guess you could say."

"But you're single."

"I told you... I'm complicated."

Sören frowned. Alejandro also frowned slightly.

When the waiter came near their table, Sören called out, "Check, please." And then he said, against his better judgment, knowing this was going to hit him hard in a week, "Two separate checks."

Alejandro's eyebrows shot up. Sören got up and quickly explained, "Look, I like you, and I get it that you have this... Catholic guilt or whatever it is... but I don't like people playing games with me. So call me when you figure your shit out."

Sören took a cab home, and spent an hour crying into his pillow. Then he was interrupted by his cell phone going off. It was Alejandro.

"Please tell me you made it home safely."

"...I did, yes."

Alejandro sighed. "Sören. Come to the show on Friday."

"That isn't you figuring your shit out."

"Yes, it is. Come to the fucking show."

Sören had never heard Alejandro swear before, and hearing the f-bomb from the polite, genteel Brazilian floored him. After a minute, when Sören found his words again, he said, "Fine."

"*Obrigado.*"

–

Sören showed up with his usual art supplies, and as Alejandro sang and played through his usual songs, this time Sören painted storms and fire, rather than the ethereal, luminous visions of shining paradise.

Towards the end of his set Alejandro said, "I normally don't do cover songs, but tonight I felt it was right to cover this. It's called 'Like A Tattoo', by Sade."

The song was haunting enough when Sade performed it, but as Alejandro worked through it, it took on a whole new tinge of sorrow, one that brought tears to Sören's eyes.

I remember his hands
And the way the mountains looked
The light shot diamonds from his eyes
Hungry for life
And thirsty for the distant river

Like the scar of age
Written all over my face
The war is still raging inside of me
I still feel the chill
As I reveal my shame to you
I wear it like a tattoo

Chills went down Sören's spine, and the tears silently flowed.

There was a man in the flames, forging jewels that looked like diamonds, but so much more. There was fire in his eyes, and a storm swirled around the fire. There were jewels scattered on the ground, and blood running underneath them. As the song came to a close, Sören thought of Alejandro's scarred hand, and the pain too frequently in his eyes, and wondered what kind of war he'd been in.

Sören gave Alejandro the painting, as he always did, and Alejandro looked ready to break down in tears. He controlled himself - barely.

"Let's go somewhere and talk," Alejandro said.

They sat outside, and for a few minutes just sat there, breathing the air, looking up at the night sky.

"We're two intense people," Alejandro said, finally. "And that worries me."

"You think I'm gonna go psycho on you? Because I told you I had a breakdown in med school...?"

"It's not quite that." Sören watched Alejandro struggle for words. "There's a fire in you. The same kind of fire my father had. I'm drawn to people like that. But..."

"But what?"

"I keep telling you I'm complicated. There are reasons why I've been alone as long as I have. There are reasons why I haven't pursued a record deal. There are so many, too many reasons, why I live the kind of life that I do. And letting you in would change a lot, the way that fire transforms things. Purifies, refines things."

Sören frowned. "That's the weirdest *it's not you, it's me* speech I've ever heard."

"I didn't say that."

"You didn't need to say it." Sören pointed to the coffeehouse. "I get it that whatever made you sing *that*, in there, was hell. I *know* that trauma doesn't heal overnight. But if you don't want to be with me, fine. Just... stop sending me mixed signals. Don't fucking *play* with me."

"I'm not play-"

"I need honesty. I need you to be real with me. I've had too many men lie, cheat. I'm tired of that. Just fucking don't play games with me. You're complicated, I understand that. But at some point we need to define what's happening here, or at least I do."

Alejandro's jaw set. "I'll take you home."

They didn't speak on the way there, and they said nothing when Sören exited the car. Sören was pretty sure, after that, he'd never see Alejandro again.

Sunday afternoon came. They'd never made plans. Sören moped around the apartment, in his pajamas all day, and Margrét got the hint to not bother him about it.

Then, as Sören was watching a sad chick flick on TV, he heard acoustic guitar music out the window. "What the..." He came to the window and saw Alejandro sitting there, on his car, playing. "The fuck you doing, mate," Sören called out the window.

Alejandro didn't look up, and Sören recognized the chords for the guitar part of "Girl From Ipanema". But then Alejandro sang

Tall and dark and young and lovely, the boy from Akureyri goes walking
And when he passes, each one he passes goes - ah
When he walks, he's like a samba that swings so cool and sways so gentle
That when he passes, each one he passes goes - ah

But I watch him so sadly, how can I tell him I love him
Yes I would give my heart gladly,
But each day, when he walks to the sea
He looks straight ahead, not at me
Tall, and dark and young and lovely, the boy from Akureyri goes walking
And when he passes, I smile - but he doesn't see (doesn't see)
(He just doesn't see, he never sees me...)

Sören threw on clothes and rushed outside. Alejandro was packing up the guitar in his car, in seeming resignation, and Sören threw his arms around him and kissed him hard.

Alejando's mouth opened, letting him inside, and as their tongues swirled they both groaned into the kiss. Sören found himself stroking Alejandro's long dark hair, kissing him harder, and Alejandro kissed back for all he was worth, like a man starving for it. Alejandro trailed kisses along his jaw, playfully licked the beard, nuzzled it, before claiming his mouth again.

And then Sören picked up through his empathy that Alejandro was, in fact, touch starved. He didn't know quite how long Alejandro had been celibate, but it *felt* like a *long* time. There was a hunger there, a *fever*. Wild, primal need, finally unleashed.

For the first time, Alejandro drove them to his own apartment, which was in a more upscale part of Reykjavik. As soon as they got in the door they started kissing again, and Alejandro led them to his bedroom. He peeled off Sören's Joy Division T-shirt, and traced the sleeve tattoos on Sören's bare arms - flames on one arm, ocean waves on the other. He ran his hands over Sören's bare chest, taking a moment to linger on the nipples, playing with the rings in them. Sören growled into Alejandro's neck and nibbled, fumbling with his belt.

They undressed each other, and their clothing pooled in a haphazard heap on the floor. For a moment Alejandro looked at it - Sören could tell from a cursory glance around the apartment that Alejandro was fastidious - and then Alejandro pounced on him.

Skin met skin. Sören wrapped his arms and legs around Alejandro, kissing him as their hard cocks rubbed together. They were both already leaking precum, and feeling mischievous, Sören collected some of his precum on his fingers and brought it to Alejandro's lips to taste. The sight of Alejandro licking and sucking the precum off his fingers made Sören's cock throb and his balls tighten.

"I want you," Sören husked, before kissing him again.

"I need you," Alejandro confessed. The sadness in his eyes brought tears to Sören's own, and Alejandro gave him a sweet, gentle kiss.

Sören rolled Alejandro onto his back. "Do you have protection?"

He nodded. "And lube. It's in the drawer."

Sören had to stop himself from using his mind to open the drawer and pull them out. He reached to retrieve the packet of condoms and the tube of lube, placing it on the bed next to him. Then he took Alejandro's face between his hands and kissed him deeply.

"How do you want it?" Sören asked.

"Yes?"

They laughed together, and then Alejandro ran his hands over Sören's body, before taking Sören's cock into his fist; his thumb hooked through the captive bead ring of Sören's piercing, in the head. "That... looks interesting," Alejandro told him.

"It's a Prince Albert."

"I know what it is. I just, ah."

"Never felt one?" Sören smirked. "There's a reason why guys get it done. Extra stimulation for their partner."

"I... see." Alejandro gave him a wicked grin, and then he moaned when Sören kissed his neck.

"You can do more than see," Sören whispered. "You can feel. Inside you."

"Are you a top?"

"I'm versatile."

Alejandro grinned again. "Good."

"Let me take care of you." Sören stroked his face, and then, lovingly, stroked the scarring on Alejandro's hand. His fingers trailed down to scarring on Alejandro's shoulder and thigh, what he gathered were more war wounds. He brought Alejandro's hand to his lips, kissed the scars, and Alejandro finally let it out, weeping softly. Sören leaned in to kiss his tears and Alejandro broke, sobbing. Sören continued kissing his tears, stroking his hair, with the scarred hand resting in his, over his heart. "I've got you," Sören said. "Let me love you. Let us dance in the dark, together, with our own sacred fire."

Alejandro kissed him like Sören had never been kissed before in his life, and Sören kissed him back, his own hunger intensifying to fever pitch. He resumed kissing Alejandro's neck, then down to the nipples, teasing them with his tongue, sucking hard, nibbling on them, licking fast and slow, making Alejandro arch to him, panting, grabbing Sören's curls.

Sören was nowhere near done. He kissed and licked Alejandro's chiseled, muscular stomach, down one thigh and up to the hip, back over the stomach, down the other thigh. He gave a few long, slow licks from the head down the shaft of Alejandro's cock, before taking it in his mouth, their eyes locked. Sören sucked slowly, teasing him, and when he worked a slick finger inside him, finding the sweet spot right away, at the sounds Alejandro made, Sören almost came just from that. Sören had never so badly wanted to thoroughly wreck someone, to please the way he was pleasing Alejandro now.

Sören's other hand gently played with the balls. Sören worked his tongue as he sucked, and despite his best efforts to tease and keep the buildup slow, it had been long enough for Alejandro that he didn't last longer than a few minutes, crying out as he emptied into Sören's mouth, who drank him greedily, savoring the sweet taste.

Sören came up to kiss him, and gave him a little while to recharge. A few minutes of Sören's hard cock rubbing against his thigh was all it took, and Alejandro was hard again. Sören stuck two fingers inside him now, kissing him again and again, the fingers of his free hand playing over the length of Alejandro's body, which was nearly hairless save the dark bush.

"Please," Alejandro begged.

"Hush, we'll get there." Sören grinned and nibbled his lower lip. "I know it's been awhile for you. I don't want to hurt you."

"Maybe I want you to hurt me. Maybe I like it rough."

"Maybe you do. And maybe I don't want to play rough our first time." Sören kissed his neck, and then he said softly, "There are ways to torment you without playing rough, my sweet."

With that, Sören's head was back between his legs. He dipped his tongue in Alejandro's channel. He had reasonable expectation that Alejandro would be clean enough for this, but he was surprised by how clean Alejandro tasted, the almost sweet taste of him there. Sören worked his tongue agonizingly slowly, teasing the prostate, making Alejandro writhe and whimper, grabbing Sören's curls, begging, pleading to be taken. And Sören continued eating him, licking and licking and licking until his jaw got tired and Alejandro's cock was completely slick with precum. Sören moved his head to lick another trail of precum oozing down the shaft, making a show of collecting it with his tongue, and sucked a little on the head before coming up to kiss him.

Sören's fingers were back inside him, three this time. He worked his fingers slowly, feeling the tightness, and then Alejandro was working his hips, fucking his fingers. Sören's cock was raging now, and it took Sören every ounce of restraint he had to not pound Alejandro into the mattress right then. Instead, he simply rolled on a condom, and squirted lube over it, using his hand to slick it, before squirting lube directly into Alejandro's ass.

"You still want it?" Sören asked.

"Hells, yes."

Sören kissed him deeply and began to push inside him, slowly. He felt Alejandro pushing out, watched him breathe; Sören could sense the twinge of pain, but Alejandro wanted it, and kept bearing down until he was all the way in. Then they kissed again.

Sören fucked him excruciatingly slowly, teasing both of them into anguish. Alejandro clung to him, nails in Sören's back, as Sören caressed every inch of exposed flesh he could reach between their bodies, kissed Alejandro's neck, claimed his mouth. When Sören could no longer hold back he propped Alejandro's legs on his shoulders and drove into him hard. Alejandro's hips rocked back at Sören, matching his rhythm, fucking Sören's cock. "Yes yes yes *yes*, more, harder..."

"Fuck, you feel good," Sören panted. He loved watching Alejandro lose control like this, driven wild with lust and sensation.

"You feel good." Alejandro ran his hands over Sören's chest, and started playing with the nipple rings again. "So right."

"This is right." Sören drove into him. "There is no sin. No shame. This is as natural as the sun's rise and set. Like the pull of the tides."

Alejandro leaned up and claimed a nipple with his mouth. Sören cried out and fucked him harder. Alejandro moaned, working his clever tongue to tease the nipple into an erect peak before gently tugging the ring with his teeth, then suckling. Sören stroked his hair, cradling him. "Fuck..."

Alejandro gave him an adoring look before licking the other nipple, and the smouldering look on his face as his tongue played made Sören fight his orgasm. He slowed down, and Alejandro whined with frustration, before Sören kissed him roughly.

They sank back together, and Sören continued fucking him slowly, but his hand was on Alejandro's cock now, stroking it in time with his thrusts. Sören's free hand pet Alejandro's hair and face. "You're beautiful," Sören told him.

"So are you."

They kissed, and Alejandro wrapped his arms around Sören, holding him tight.

"No shame," Sören told him. "Just us. As we are."

They kissed again, and Sören sped up, not as hard and fast as before, but enough to get them back to that edge of climax and keep them there, building and building. When Alejandro's nails dug into his back again, and there was fire in those silver eyes, Sören knew even before Alejandro ground out, "Sören, I'm going to -"

"Yes. Come for me."

Alejandro cried out, shooting his seed over Sören's chest and stomach. Two thrusts later Sören let go, shuddering, gasping for breath as his own orgasm overtook him, like being swallowed up by the sea. Their foreheads touched, breathing each other's breath, and there was just light, brilliant, blinding, as the pleasure throbbed and throbbed, seemingly endless.

Sören came to laying on Alejandro's chest, with Alejandro stroking his curls, singing softly.

"How long have I been out?" Sören asked.

"Awhile." Alejandro smiled.

"Shit." Sören laughed. He'd gone soft, but was still inside Alejandro, and pulled out slowly. He pulled the condom off, and laughed at it. "Wow, that's a lot of cum."

"Pity it wasn't inside me."

"Mmm, yes. Well, we'd have to get tested for that."

Alejandro nodded.

Sören kissed him again. "So... are you still going to give me the 'I don't like labels' routine? Is this a thing now?"

"This is a thing now," Alejandro confirmed.

Sören nodded. "Good."

But before he could snuggle back in Alejandro's chest, there was a serious, almost stern look on Alejandro's face, and Sören paused. "What is it," he asked.

"This isn't guilt," Alejandro said, "but you need to understand... we have to keep things discrete."

"Discrete as in how, exactly."

"I can't be out like you are. Even though I perform music, yes, I live a deliberately quiet life. I try to not court... certain types of attention. I want to be with you, but I need you to know that I can't list you on Facebook as my boyfriend. That sort of thing."

"Why?" Sören raised an eyebrow. "You said most of your family is dead, so why would they care -"

"Not everyone is dead. And enough has happened that I just don't want trouble with the people who aren't."

Sören knew he wasn't lying, but he knew he wasn't telling the full truth either - the full truth was under "it's complicated", and as much as Sören didn't want dishonesty and games, he also knew it was part of the trauma. "But we can have... a relationship?"

"We can. We just have to be cautious about what the public sees."

Sören didn't like it that he wasn't out, but he also knew Alejandro's background was part of the package, and he'd deal, so long as Alejandro wasn't lying *to him.* Sören patted his face. "OK."

"OK." Alejandro kissed the top of his head. "Thank you for understanding."

"So..." Sören traced lazy circles over the scar on Alejandro's shoulder. "You seemed glad that I'm versatile."

Alejandro rolled Sören onto his back, and Sören parted his thighs, kissing deep, losing himself in the rush of passion.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

2009

It was Saturday, June 20th, the night before the summer solstice. Sören still worked his job as a waiter and had to work most weekends, but Alejandro had requested he get the weekend off, to spend with him. They had been together just over a month, and had recently gotten test results back that confirmed they were both disease-free. Sören had always played it safe since he was sexually active, refusing to top without a condom or be penetrated without his partner wearing one. He was cautious due to his medical background, and still wanted to test again in six months to be absolutely sure. But for now... they both felt ready to bareback; it would be Sören's first time with it.

They were going to a more upscale restaurant first, so Sören got as close as he came to dressing up, in a long-sleeved white button-down T-shirt, grey tie, and a grey waistcoat, with black trousers. He tamed his curls with gel, and applied a few drops of Kyoto by Black Phoenix Alchemy Lab, which had a very sexual scent on him when it dried. However, he still wore his usual black Doc Martens boots rather than dress shoes. That was who he was.

As Sören got ready, he felt that giddy rush he always felt before he saw Alejandro, but it was more intense this time. He was already semi-hard thinking about the two of them taking turns inside each other, bare, coming inside each other for the first time. But he also knew that it was an important step in their relationship - a sign of commitment...

...of trust.

There was still so much he didn't know about Alejandro. He never talked about his family, or his life prior to coming to Reykjavik. Sören still had no idea where Alejandro's money came from. Their relationship was lived very much in the *now*, the little moments of going places and doing things, or just cuddling together while listening to music or watching TV. Alejandro particularly liked taking them on drives to places where they could be in nature somehow. They enjoyed each other's company, and that was good enough for Sören - he understood from the pain he sensed in Alejandro, and from his own experience with pain, that it was hard to talk about things. He knew it was a big deal for Alejandro to allow anyone this close to him.

Sören came out of the bathroom. Margrét and her best friend Ben were in the kitchen, getting snacks to take out in the living room. Ben had moved from the UK a few months ago, the son of the famous entrepreneur, the half-Danish half-Japanese Hans Sulu. Ben was living on his Daddy's money, trying to start a darkwave band. Margrét played bass and had a keyboard, and Ben was there to sing. Sören got the distinct impression that Ben had a crush on her, but Margrét just thought of him as like a little brother to her. Ben was tall but shorter than Margrét, lanky, pale, and awkward-looking, with shoulder-length black hair, big ears, a big nose, a clean-shaven face full of beauty marks, and his dark eyes stared a lot to the point of being somewhat creepy. He always dressed up in a long black cowl tunic with a hood, over black bondage pants, even on summer days like today. He also had a deep, quiet voice that was unsettling, though Sören had heard him scream lyrics over Margrét's music and knew he had a set of pipes that could peel paint off walls.

"Hello, Sören," Ben said.

"Hello, Ben." Sören nodded, taking out a water bottle from the fridge. "How's life treating you?"

"Life. Don't talk to me about life."

"Right," Sören said, turning to Margrét, who rolled her eyes. "So do I look all right?"

"You look very nice," Margrét said, nodding with approval. "I don't ever see you wearing a tie. You must *really* like this guy."

"Oh, it's more than like. I'm in love with him," Sören said.

"When's the wedding?"

"Fuck you."

Ben snorted. "You guys are as bad as me and my twin brother Matt."

"Oh shit, there's two of you?" Sören gave a mock shudder. "That's a scary thought."

"We're nothing alike. He's a radar technician. He dyes his hair platinum blonde and wears thick nerdy glasses. He likes *Britney Spears.*"

"*I* like Britney Spears, you twat," Margrét said.

"No, you *ogle* Britney Spears. There's a difference."

Margrét gave her best innocent face, which was enough like Sören's innocent face that he didn't buy it at all, and Sören snickered. Then he asked, "How's the band coming along? Have you guys come up with a name yet?"

"We haven't quite," Margrét said. "This dork over here wants Something Nights, or the Nights of Something."

"Knights, with a K." Ben shot her an annoyed look. "And yes, we're trying to figure out what we are knights of."

Sören couldn't resist. "The Knights Who Say 'Ni!'"

"Don't you have somewhere to go?" Ben glared at Sören.

"Not for a few min-" As if on cue, Sören's cell phone went off. "*Hej, elskan.*"

"*Olá, querido.* I'm turning onto your street right now."

"I'll go meet you outside." Sören took a deep breath and then ran in his room to get the overnight bag he'd packed. When he came out, Margrét and Ben were assembling in the living room. Margrét gave Sören a hug by the door.

"Stay safe," she told him, her usual caution.

Sören nodded. "I'll try." He smirked. "If a mushroom cloud goes off on the other side of town, well -"

"TMI," Margrét said.

Sören cackled. "You know I have to take the piss out of you. It's the law."

"Já, já, get out of here." Margrét clapped him on the back.

Sören rushed downstairs and out to Alejandro's sleek black Jaguar. He was dressed in a black and blue version of Sören's outfit. Sören had half-expected Alejandro to tie his hair back, but he never did, it was all hanging loose.

"No ponytail for the fancy restaurant?" Sören inquired as he got in the car.

"No." Alejandro looked amused by that suggestion. "I don't like my hair that way."

"Good. I like your hair down." Sören leaned in and gave him a quick kiss.

Then Alejandro handed him a single long-stemmed rose and kissed him back, more lingering.

"You better move this car before I blow you right here and now," Sören told him, feeling himself starting to get hard.

Alejandro actually *blushed* at that. He was so hard to read at times, compared to just about everyone else Sören encountered, but he could sense Alejandro's mind going places, and he gave a little smug smile as Alejandro started driving.

He drove in the direction of Reykjavik where he had an apartment, and a few blocks away from where he lived, there was a newer restaurant that served a fusion of Icelandic and French cuisine. The menu prices made Sören immediately self-conscious, even though Alejandro was paying and indeed said "Get whatever you want," as Sören looked it over. But Sören also felt self-conscious for another reason:

"I've never... eaten... French food."

"I see."

"Should I just get what you're having? I trust your judgment that you won't get something awful."

Alejandro gave a small, mischievous smile. "And here I was thinking the lamb testicles sounded good..."

"Oh my fucking *god.*" A waiter immediately shot Sören a look, and Sören's face burned even more, but Alejandro just laughed and patted him.

"No, there's no lamb testicles on the menu," Alejandro said. "...Yet."

"Does French cuisine seriously have...?"

"*Animelles.*" Alejandro nodded. "Though the times I've been to France, I haven't tried that particular delicacy."

"Oh, you've... been to France." Sören wasn't entirely surprised by this, considering Alejandro had traveled all the way from Brazil and had, evidenced by his Facebook profile,

spent at least some time in the UK, it made sense he would have seen other places. Sören felt even more like a backwater hick, and said, "I've never left Iceland."

"We shall have to remedy that one of these days."

The thought of going traveling with Alejandro made Sören feel giddy again, giddier still when Alejandro squeezed his hand.

They had a *baccala provincial* - salted cod with tomatoes, capers, olives, and potatoes - and Sören enjoyed it. They shared a mazarin cake for dessert, with Alejandro feeding him bites from a fork.

It was a short drive back to Alejandro's apartment, and Sören felt nervous and excited as they approached. In the elevator, they were alone, and immediately began kissing and groping like a pair of horny teenagers. By the time they got in the door, Alejandro was already removing Sören's tie and unbuttoning his waistcoat.

But then Alejandro slowed down, maddeningly. "Let's have some wine," he said.

He put the rose for Sören in a vase, retrieved a bottle of chilled white Moscato wine from the fridge, and opened it in front of Sören, inviting him to sniff the cork. He poured each of them a glass, and then he began to light candles around the apartment, and put on music. Sören recognized Black Tape For A Blue Girl, which was a melancholy choice for a night like this, but then, that was Alejandro. Alejandro sat down next to him on the expensive leather couch, and they looked into each other's eyes as they had their first sip of wine.

"I've been thinking about this all day," Sören said finally. "Thinking about you all day. Wanting this. Wanting you."

Alejandro cupped Sören's chin, stroking the beard, and pulled him close. "I'm yours," he said, before taking Sören's mouth in a deep kiss.

Sören was starting to go out of his mind with lust. He reached to undo Alejandro's tie, and unfastened the buttons of his waistcoat with shaking hands. Alejandro's hands covered his, and then his mouth grazed Sören's jaw, kissing and licking Sören's sensitive neck. He began to unbutton Sören's shirt, kissing and licking each inch of exposed flesh. Sören moaned, leaning back on the couch, arching to him, feeling ready to die of sexual need.

Soon Alejandro was on his knees in front of Sören, taking Sören's hard cock into his mouth, their eyes locked. His usually cool silvery-grey eyes were hot now, hotter when Sören couldn't help but thrust into his mouth, grabbing his hair. Alejandro bobbed his head, rubbing his tongue as he sucked hard, sucking Sören with more enthusiasm and passion than Sören had ever received from anyone.

Then Alejandro stopped, and just licked Sören's cock, from head to root and back again, following the veins, paying special attention to the prominent frenulum. Sören whimpered, and Alejandro laughed at him, licking even more slowly and deliberately. He lapped Sören's precum, and when his tongue played with Sören's foreskin, Sören let out a wrenching cry, almost sobbing with the tension building, desperate for release.

Alejandro was nowhere near done. Still on his knees, he lifted his head to kiss Sören with precum on his tongue, idly taking Sören's cock into his hand and gently playing with it, thumb rubbing the frenulum. He collected precum on his fingers and stuck them in Sören's mouth, groaning as he watched Sören's full lips wrap around his fingers, sucking

like he would suck a cock. He kissed, licked, and nibbled Sören's neck some more, kissing hard enough Sören knew he would leave marks there, as he had done several times now. He continued to play with Sören's cock, caressing Sören's exposed chest with his free hand. And then he collected more precum on his fingers and rubbed it onto one of Sören's nipples, bending his head to lick, teasing the exquisitely sensitive pierced nipple into a peak. He suckled, and gave the ring a little playful tug with his teeth before licking some more. He anointed the other nipple with precum and gave it the same treatment.

"Alejandro. *Now.* Please."

"You, *meu amorinho*, are to be appreciated as a glass of fine wine, a work of art. Savored." He took a few more licks at Sören's nipples, slowly. "But we can take this into the bedroom."

Alejandro took Sören's hands and pulled him from the couch to his feet, and they kissed before Alejandro took him to the bedroom. Sören smiled at the lit candles, and moaned when Alejandro kissed him again, more roughly this time, working to free Sören from his clothing. When Sören was completely nude, Alejandro stepped back, taking a moment to admire him, and then he made a "wait here" gesture and strode out to the living room. He came back with their half-full wine glasses, and the bottle of wine.

Sören snatched it away from him, putting them down on the table next to the bed, and undressed Alejandro, fighting the urge to just rip his expensive clothing off. Alejandro could see the frustrated hunger in Sören's face and laughed before giving him a soft kiss. "So impatient," he said. "We have all night."

When Alejandro was also naked, Sören ran his hands over him, before moving closer to kiss him, their hard cocks rubbing together. Alejandro pushed Sören onto the bed as the music changed from Black Tape For A Blue Girl to Cocteau Twins. He paused, looking into Sören's eyes, and his gaze trailed the length of Sören's body, drinking him in. Sören shivered as if he'd been touched, his face burning, wanting more. Alejandro took his face between his hands and kissed him deeply, and they both moaned as their cocks slid together again, continuing to kiss and rub their cocks together as Alejandro's fingers whispered over Sören's body. He kissed Sören's neck, and down to take a nipple into his mouth, making Sören arch and cry out.

Alejandro leaned up, and grabbed one of the glasses of wine. After he took a sip and Sören took a sip, they kissed, and Sören moaned as he felt Alejandro pouring what remained in the glass over him. Alejandro chased it with his tongue and Sören grabbed the headboard, white-knuckled, aching for release that promised to stay so far away for now. Alejandro poured the other glass of wine over his nipples, chest and stomach, and licked some more. Sören grabbed his hair, writhing. "Please," he gasped. "Oh god, please..."

Alejandro laughed, continuing to lap at him. "Beautiful." He nibbled Sören's navel.

He poured another glass of wine, and poured some over Sören's cock, licking agonizingly slowly. Sören screamed, grabbing his hair again. Alejandro relented just a little, wrapping his mouth around the head of Sören's cock, sucking swirling his tongue. When Sören cried out again, Alejandro dipped his fingers into the wine and reached up to stick them in Sören's mouth, watching Sören suck his fingers as he sucked Sören's cock.

After a few minutes he had the whole thing in his mouth, and Sören was gasping, panting, shaking, on the edge of orgasm, but Alejandro's slow sucking just kept him there. Sören whined and begged, but Alejandro was determined to make this last. When Sören was

leaking more precum, Alejandro took the cock out of his mouth, poured more wine over it, and licked at it some more, before pouring wine onto Sören's balls and licking and sucking those.

"Fuck. *Fuck*..." Sören felt like he was losing his mind.

Alejandro poured more wine over Sören's chest and stomach and licked at that again, paying special attention to the nipples, before coming up to kiss him. "Roll over," Alejandro said.

Sören did, and shuddered when he felt the chilled wine spill down his spine. Alejandro licked and kissed up and down from his nape to the base of his spine, and then back up. His fingers traced the phoenix tattoos on Sören's back - the sleeve of fire on one arm led to a fire phoenix, and the sleeve of ocean waves on the other arm led to a water phoenix. Alejandro had seen Sören naked enough times now to be familiar with the ink, but before he could pour more wine onto Sören's back and give another round of teasing, he lingered, and Sören could feel him looking.

"You designed that, didn't you?" Alejandro asked.

Sören nodded. "When I was in the hospital, during my breakdown with the internship. I had someone else do the ink, but they used my design."

Alejandro's fingers continued tracing the tattoos. "Symbolic."

"Yes."

"You have scars here that the phoenixes cover up, though they're still visible."

"I was beaten regularly growing up. My aunt and uncle were nasty."

Alejandro sighed, and Sören could feel the ache, the surge of compassion. He kissed Sören's right shoulder and for a moment just rested his head there. His hands reached to the sleeve tattoos on Sören's arms, and Sören watched him tracing the line work there.

"You have scars on your arms, too." Alejandro traced the wrists.

"That..." Sören took a deep breath. "I attempted suicide. I was in med school... I knew how to slit my wrists the right way."

Alejandro roughly took Sören's chin in his hand, tilting his head to face him, stroking Sören's beard, and Sören saw the pain in his eyes, the unshed tears.

"My brother killed himself," Alejandro told him.

"Oh, *elskan.*" Sören pressed his forehead to Alejandro's, nuzzling him, his own eyes burning with tears now. "I'm so sorry."

Alejandro let out a shuddery sigh, and nuzzled Sören back. He closed his eyes - Sören could feel him trying to shut it out. In his mind's eye he saw a flash of copper hair, long like Alejandro's. Then a brief mental movie of Alejandro and the copper-haired one laughing - they looked a great deal alike apart from hair color. Then Alejandro walking along a distant shore, alone, looking out to the sea in grief. As quickly as the vision came, it passed. Sören stroked Alejandro's cheek, and when Alejandro opened his eyes they were still shining with tears.

"You," Alejandro told him, seizing his wrist with his scarred hand, tracing the scars with his thumb, "*will never do that again.*"

"Well, I did get help -"

"You and I both know the black dog never completely goes away."

Sören nodded. He took antidepressants and had been in therapy - it helped make the depression less intense, but it wasn't entirely gone. It was as if the volume had been turned down, but it was still "on", running as background noise in his brain that sometimes distracted him.

Alejandro made Sören look into his eyes. "Promise me. No matter what happens." He continued tracing the scars. "You deserve better."

Sören nodded, crying a little, remembering his suicide attempt, what led to it, and the miserable weeks thereafter, in the hospital, like a helpless child again. Alejandro kissed his tears, and then he kissed Sören roughly, hard and deep. Sören groaned into the kiss, thrusting his ass against Alejandro's hips, which made Alejandro groan as well.

Alejandro poured more wine over Sören's back and kissed his way down, and Sören cried out when he felt wine splash into the crack of his ass, followed by Alejandro's tongue. Soon Alejandro's tongue was inside him, feasting on him, as Sören writhed, gripping the pillows tight, screaming into them. Just before Sören could come, he gave a few last tormenting licks, then stopped and slid up, pouring more wine over Sören's neck and shoulder, kissing, licking, and nibbling the exquisitely sensitive skin there. Sören was bucking and rubbing against him now, in heat for it.

Soon Alejandro's slick fingers were inside him, readying him. Sören whimpered at the feel of lube being squirted directly into his ass, and spread. "Please, *please...*"

Alejandro wrapped his arms around Sören and pushed into him, taking him from behind. He cupped Sören's face once more, tilting his head so they could kiss as he slid inside. When he was all the way in, he broke the kiss, the two of them breathing hard, eyes burning into each other. "I love you," Sören told him.

"I love you." Alejandro kissed him again, harder, and then rolled his hips back, pulling out, to slam back into him.

Usually a slow and deliberate lover, Alejandro pounded into him, and Sören loved it, rocking his hips back, fucking himself on Alejandro's cock, their balls slapping together. Alejandro's left hand reached down to grip Sören's cock, while his scarred hand tenderly caressed Sören's face, sometimes tilting it back so they could kiss. They both needed this, needed to fuck the pain away, needed to feel that hunger, the heat, where this was all that mattered. In these moments Sören felt fully alive, felt his blood singing, felt the darkness chased away by pure fire.

The sensation got more and more intense, until Sören was shaking from head to toe, gasping as the bed rocked against the wall. "Fuck me... fuck me..." Sören reached to grab the headboard, steadying himself as Alejandro drove into him.

They were brought to the edge, and held there. A final kiss, and then Alejandro kissed Sören's neck, and his fingers brushed Sören's cock the right way as his teeth nibbled the sweet spot where the back of Sören's neck met the shoulder. "*Alejandro!*" Sören came

hard, shooting over his lover's hand and the silk sheets. Alejandro gave another few hard thrusts and cried out "Sören," collapsing onto him, pushing Sören into the pillows as Sören felt the hot cum spurting inside him. The feeling of the cum on his sensitive, throbbing prostate made Sören's orgasm that much more delicious, as did the feeling of completeness, being claimed, the evidence of their passion inside him.

They lay there for awhile, holding hands, Alejandro nuzzling Sören's neck. Then he tilted Sören's face and just rubbed noses with him before a sweet, tender kiss that turned heated quickly, Alejandro hardening again. He pulled out, and rolled onto his back, with Sören climbing over him.

It was Sören's turn to tease now, spilling what was left of the wine over Alejandro's naked body, licking and licking. He poured the last over Alejandro's cock and balls, and over the puckered hole. Sören licked more slowly, reveling in Alejandro's moans and sighs and the way he shivered and twitched. He could feel Alejandro's cock throbbing underneath his tongue, and smiled at the precum pooling down the shaft, before his tongue made a few slow, lazy strokes. He savored the combined taste of sweet wine and his precum, and then the musky sweetness of his wine-soaked balls, the earthy sweetness of his wine-bathed channel. Alejandro was a vocal lover, and Sören's cock ached at the noises he made; Sören found himself painfully hard, stroking again, his own precum flowing as his tongue teased Alejandro's prostate and the musical voice was almost singing in its urgent pleas for release.

Sören sucked Alejandro's cock some more, and came up to kiss him, working slick fingers into his opening. Alejandro spread lube over Sören's cock, and the touch of his hand almost brought Sören off then and there, but he kept himself in check.

When he pushed inside, the blood heat, the sweet velvet... Sören shuddered and his breath came out in a sharp hiss. He'd used thin condoms in the past to get as much sensation as he could, but now, not having any barrier in the way... when he was all the way in, Sören just rested there, not wanting to come too soon.

He tried to keep the pace slow, but Alejandro felt too good wrapped around him, hot and tight and slick. Alejandro, in turn, responded to feeling the ring piercing in the head of Sören's cock rubbing against his prostate, the bead that much more prominent without a condom there. Sören could feel him loving it, and Alejandro begging for more just made it even hotter.

When Alejandro deliberately teased him by clenching and unclenching his inner muscles that was it - Sören turned into a raging beast, fucking Alejandro fast and furious, with Alejandro's nails digging into his back, sliding down to his hips. Alejandro bucked his hips back at Sören, crying out louder and louder. Sören growled and grunted, giving into hot, needy animal mansex, caressing Alejandro's lean, muscular body as he plowed away. Sören got closer and closer, but held back, wanting Alejandro to come first. He rubbed Alejandro's nipples, pinched them, leaned down to take one between his teeth before sucking it hard. When he suckled, Alejandro threw his head back and called out Sören's name again, and Sören felt a blast of hot cum over his chest and stomach, watching it also splatter onto Alejandro's flesh. He felt Alejandro clenching around him again, pulsing, and that set Sören off, making a little whimper as he climaxed. All Sören could do was gasp and pant as the roaring pleasure flooded out of him, like an ocean wave set on fire, fire like a star going nova. He looked into those beautiful silver eyes, his entire world. "I love you," Sören ground out, sinking into Alejandro's chest, arms enfolding him.

They lay there like that for a little while and then Sören gave a whine of protest when he felt Alejandro get up; he watched him snuff out the candles, before climbing back in bed.

"We should change the sheets," Alejandro said.

Sören nodded, and snuggled back into him.

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They ended up falling asleep like that, entwined. In the middle of the night Sören's sleep was disturbed by feeling Alejandro thrashing around, making noises of distress, and finally Sören heard him cry out "Maitimo..."

Sören shook him gently. "Alejandro," he said softly. "Alejandro, you're having a bad dream."

Alejandro's eyes opened, and in the glow of the nightlight Sören could see terror on his face, like for an instant he didn't know where he was. Then he broke down crying. Sören kissed his tears, and then pulled him close, petting his hair, rocking him.

When Alejandro calmed down, Sören cupped his chin and lifted his face up, to look at him.

"I'm so sorry," Alejandro said.

"For what?"

"You having to see this."

"*Elskan.* I have nightmares about my past too." Sören stroked his cheek, pet his hair some more. "I assume that's what it was?"

Alejandro nodded. "It was about my brother."

"Maitimo?"

Alejandro looked at him, dumbfounded. For a moment he didn't say anything. Sören could read the question in his mind: *How did you know -?* before that sort of weird shielding he had flipped back on.

"You called out his name in your sleep," Sören explained. Then he kissed Alejandro's forehead and said, "That's a pretty name. That's, uh... Spanish or Portuguese, isn't it?"

Alejandro gave a little laugh but otherwise said nothing and just kissed Sören, then his arms wrapped around Sören and they just held each other, rocking back to sleep.

In the morning Sören was woken up by Alejandro again, this time with passionate kisses, and Alejandro kissing his neck. "I want you," Alejandro growled, and Sören felt the rock-hard erection grinding his thigh. Sören moaned and kissed him back, before Alejandro resumed kissing and licking his neck, Sören hardening in response.

They made slow, languid love that Sunday morning, kissing as their cocks rubbed together, caressing each other's bodies, collecting the precum that flowed on their fingers to lick and suck, or anoint nipples with and suckle. The push and pull of their hips was like the tide, and the feelings that Sören felt as they pleased each other were as deep as the sea. *I want to spend the rest of my life with this man.*From Alejandro's wounds he created

wild beauty, like a lush garden thriving in plagued soil. And he had the tenderness of one who had been deeply hurt, a tenderness that Sören willingly gave his heart to.

They came together, crying out as they watched cock coming on cock, seed flowing, painting their cocks and stomachs. They gathered some of the mess with their fingers and fed it to each other before kissing, sharing the cum between them, swallowing and savoring. Alejandro pulled Sören close and Sören was lulled by the sound of his heartbeat to near-sleep.

But they didn't stay in bed all day. Alejandro took them on the two-and-a-half-hour drive to Reynisfjara, the famous black sand beach on Iceland's south coast. It was Sören's first time going there with Alejandro, who seemed pensive as he watched the waves. It was a cloudy day and not too hot, so there weren't too many people there. But Sören was glad to be there - the dark, troubled skies made the beach even more beautiful to him.

Sören stripped down to his boxer-briefs and went swimming, but Alejandro just sat and played his guitar. When Sören came out of the water, Alejandro put the guitar down and Sören knelt beside him and kissed him deeply. Alejandro breathed in the scent of sea salt and Sören, and then he cupped Sören's chin in his hand and he said, "Move in with me."

Sören had not lived with a man since the sugar daddy gallery owner arrangement gone bad. Indeed, part of what had killed one of Sören's past relationships was being wary of living with someone again. That created a sort of dependence he wasn't comfortable with, having learned he couldn't trust most people.

But there was only love in Alejandro's eyes, and Sören picked up the feeling of skin hunger again, the way Alejandro felt at peace when Sören was in his arms, the way he ached when he went to bed alone. And something about Sören comforting him after the nightmare had been a gamechanger. Sören didn't quite know what it was - too briefly he got to feel these things, then the shield was up again.

"I'll have to talk to my sister and make sure she's OK for rent," Sören said, "and... I don't expect you to take care of me. I still want to work my regular job." As much as Sören hated it, he had learned the hard way about being financially dependent on anyone, when things ended with the art gallery owner and he hadn't been working for months and suddenly had nothing. It had been a perilous few weeks of couch-surfing until Margrét was able to get a place with him.

Alejandro nodded. "That's fine. But I just... need you close to me." His arms tightened around Sören, and they kissed again. They were practically alone on the beach, and, feeling bold, Sören undid Alejandro's pants and gave him a blowjob right there. Alejandro was undone quickly, and Sören got hard for him - he loved sucking cock, especially Alejandro's. Once in the car, Alejandro returned the favor, leaning over and sucking Sören to a shuddering, sobbing ejaculation before getting back on the road.

That evening, Alejandro and Sören had dinner with Margrét to break the news. She took it well, saying Ben had actually been asking about moving in since Sören was gone a lot of nights as of late.

"Plus," Margrét said, "he invited me to go on vacation with him to Japan later this year, for a week or so." Sensing the concern in Sören who knew about Ben's unrequited feelings, Margrét said, "No, silly, I'm still not interested in him."

"Just remember, if he does ever get fresh, I can kick his arse," Sören said.

Margrét laughed and patted Sören's shoulder. "You couldn't harm a fly."

Sören rolled his eyes, but chuckled when Alejandro tousled his curls and kissed the top of his head. "He's a sweet, gentle boy," Alejandro said. "But there's fire in him. Remember that."

There's fire in him ran through Sören's head on the way back to Alejandro's apartment, and as soon as they got in the door Sören, feverish, made good on his fantasy of tearing Alejandro's clothes off, shreds of fabric on the living room floor. They bit and clawed each other as they took turns fucking each other like animals, screaming as they came.

Laying in each other's arms afterwards, Alejandro made little purring noises of contentment, and the look of utter bliss on his face made Sören grin.

"Better?" Sören asked.

Alejandro nodded, nuzzling him. "You warm these old bones, *meu fogo.*"

"...you're not *that* old."

Alejandro just laughed and kissed the tip of Sören's nose.

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It was October now. Sören had moved in with Alejandro a few days after he asked, and they'd been living together for almost four months. Sören was the happiest he'd been in his life, his soul-sucking food service job notwithstanding.

Even though Alejandro had money, Sören still insisted on paying a portion of the rent, feeling like he needed to contribute in some way. Alejandro, in turn, insisted that Sören put aside some money every week into his own savings account, wanting Sören to be taken care of in case something ever happened. But Sören didn't make a lot of money from his job, so the savings grew slowly.

While Sören was at work during the day, Alejandro would do chores, run errands, and spend time working on music, sometimes taking day trips to get inspired. Sören was frequently tempted to play hooky, but knew he wouldn't have a job long if he did that.

Sören came back to find Alejandro's Jaguar in the parking lot, which wasn't unusual, but what was unusual was to find Alejandro taking a nap. He looked so peaceful that Sören didn't want to disturb him, and decided to surprise him by working on making dinner, raiding the fridge and considering his options before getting started.

As water boiled, Sören's cell phone went off. It was Margrét, the call he'd been waiting for - Margrét was newly returned from her trip to Japan with Ben.

"Margrét! How was Japan?"

"Fun. Pretty. Mostly weird." Margrét laughed. "You should have heard Ben try to speak Japanese and fail at it. He accidentally asked someone if they had any farts."

Sören tried to keep his laughter down, not wanting to wake up his sleeping beauty. "I'm sure that went over *very well.*"

"Indeed it did. But even with that epic fail, Ben is totally convinced he can speak Japanese now and he's trying to come up with a concept album where every song title is in Japanese... and you remember how he wanted to call us Knights of Whatever? He finally decided what we're Knights of. Knights of Ren."

"Knights of Ren?" Sören snickered. "Why not Knights of Stimpy?"

Margrét howled and snorted. Then Sören heard Ben yell, "WHAT'S SO FUNNY?" in the background, and Margrét innocently replied "Nothing," in English. Back to her brother, Margrét said, "Times like this I'm glad Ben doesn't speak Icelandic."

"Oh I'll totally pick on him to his face. Knights of Stimpy." Sören laughed. "So what's the deal with Knights of Ren? It's not the cartoon dog, I take it."

"No. Ren means lotus in Japanese."

"So..." Sören scratched his head. "Why not call it Knights of the Lotus?"

"Because that doesn't sound as *cool.*" Sören could tell Margrét was making air quotes, and laughed again at the mental image. "He has to be all... mysterious and edgy and shit."

"I guess so."

"Speaking of people who are mysterious and shit, how's things with Alejandro?"

"Oh come on, Alejandro is not anything like Ben. But já, já, things are good. I'm making dinner right now."

"Oh, I was gonna ask if you guys wanted to come have pizza but if you've already started cooking that's fine."

"Já, but maybe another time?"

"Já, in a few days? I bought you a few presents."

"Awwww, you didn't have to do that."

"Yes I did." Margrét's voice was stern. "So you and your man get your arse here sometime soon, and let me spoil you."

"If you *insist.*" Sören cackled. "Though if you really wanted to get me something, you should have gotten video of Ben asking if people had any farts."

Margrét laughed some more. "I love you, you know."

"I love you too."

"I'll let you get back to work."

"Thanks. Talk to you later!"

Sören got back to work, making *arroz con pollo*. When it was ready, Sören went into their bedroom and took a moment to admire Alejandro napping, the long lashes framing his

high cheekbones, chiseled face like an angel painted or sculpted by an old master. *Time to wake Sleeping Beauty.* Sören leaned in to pepper his face with gentle kisses. Alejandro blinked his eyes open, and gave Sören a sleepy smile.

Then he frowned. "What time is it?"

"Six-thirty."

"Jesus." Alejandro sat up and rubbed his face. "I didn't realize I'd been asleep that long. It was after two when I lay down for a nap."

Sören patted him. "You must have needed it." He took Alejandro's hand. "Come on, dinner's ready."

"It smells delicious."

Alejandro set the table and put on a playlist that started with Black Tape For A Blue Girl, and once dinner was served, he paused for a moment. Sören watched him and when he picked his head back up and started eating, he asked, "Did you say grace?"

"No." Alejandro sipped wine. "I was just... thinking."

Sören raised an eyebrow as he sipped his own wine. "Are you OK? Like, I normally don't come home and find you sleeping like that. Not that there's anything wrong with taking a nap! But as you say..." Sören took a deep breath. "The black dog never really goes away."

"No, it doesn't." Alejandro nodded. "And yes, I had some difficulty today. Just... old memories." He raised his glass to Sören. "But now you're here, and things are better."

"Illusory Me" by Love Spirals Downwards came on the playlist then, and through the haunting song, Sören got the sense that he wasn't entirely telling the truth about feeling better. Sören didn't press it, only watching Alejandro as he ate, his eyes far away.

When dinner was over, Alejandro cleared the table and did the dishes, and Sören heard a shuddery sigh. He felt an empathic twinge, and he came over to see Alejandro trying not to cry as the water washed over his hands.

Sören wrapped his arms around Alejandro from behind and nuzzled him, kissing his cheek before tilting his face so they could kiss, and then Sören looked into the stormy grey eyes. "I'm here, *elskan*," Sören said. "Whatever you need."

"I think I need to take a shower," Alejandro said. "I just ache from head to toe and I need to feel... clean."

"All right, let's take a shower," Sören said, turning off the faucet. "Fuck the dishes for now."

Alejandro looked a little nervous as they got undressed. Sören realized they hadn't showered together the entire time they'd been together, and then he picked it up in that brief glimpse beyond the shield before it went back up. "You've never showered with anyone, have you?"

"No."

"Well, there's a first time for everything." Sören took his hands and led him to the shower.

"Let me take care of you."

Under the hot water, Sören began to lather Alejandro's body, making him smile and purr with contentment. Then he rubbed shampoo into Alejandro's glorious long black hair...

...and that's when he saw Alejandro's ears for the first time. They were pointed.

Sören couldn't help staring, and Alejandro looked away.

Sören felt ashamed of himself for staring, but he was genuinely curious. Alejandro answered the obvious question. "It's a birth defect," he said. "I was born like this."

"You know what?" Sören asked.

Alejandro finally looked at him, and their eyes met.

"I think they're beautiful," Sören said softly, and he meant it. He moved in to kiss him, resuming the work of lathering Alejandro's hair. Alejandro wrapped his arms around Sören, holding him tight, kissing him deeply. A moment later they were both hard, their cocks rubbing together, moaning as they kissed again and again.

"You're so sweet," Alejandro said.

"You are so fucking sexy." Sören nibbled the pointed tip of Alejandro's ear, making him moan and shiver. He licked the tip and sucked on it. "So, so sexy." He kissed and licked the sensitive place below the earlobe, and kissed Alejandro's neck. "So beautiful."

Alejandro took Sören's face in his hands and stroked it. "I love you."

Sören slammed him against the shower wall and kissed him again. "I love you, too." He dropped to his knees, and gave Alejandro an adoring look. "Let me show you how much." He took Alejandro's cock into his mouth, and melted his troubles away.

Chapter End Notes

> In chapter 2 of *Don't Threaten Me With A Good Time*, it's mentioned that Ben moves to Tokyo ca. 2012 and starts a visual kei band called the Knights of Ren. This is still accurate - the band he has with Margrét is the first incarnation of that band, and he moves to Tokyo following the infamous falling-out they had.

Chapter 4

2014

Sören and Alejandro had been together for almost five years now. They had been happy years. The two rarely fought, and their closeness deepened, even as Alejandro was still quiet about his past. They continued to ride the wave of *be here now*, tasting life together. Every now and again Alejandro would tell Sören, "You help me see the world through new eyes. You give me back a sense of wonder I lost a long time ago."

This wonder was especially evident when they went traveling together, places that Alejandro had been before but Sören hadn't, never having left Iceland prior to meeting him. They had a week in France in 2010, a month-long trip to Italy and Greece in 2011, and two weeks in the Netherlands in 2012. It was pure magic, especially the time in the Netherlands, where Sören visited every art museum and notable place in art history that he could, and drank in the beauty of the tulips and the windmills. One afternoon, Alejandro smoked pot with him in Amsterdam, which led to the two of them laying in a country field underneath the big sky, watching the clouds, laughing at nothing, then laughing because they were laughing at nothing. They made love in the grass, and Alejandro let Sören take a rare picture of him, the two of them in a passionate embrace, that still stirred Sören every time he saw it even though the most it showed was bare shoulders, but Alejandro's lips were grazing Sören's neck, with Sören sucking his fingers in pleasure, their eyes locked, pure heat in their gaze.

They were now on their fourth trip abroad, with Alejandro taking Sören to see his home country of Brazil, attending the *Carnaval* in Rio de Janeiro from Friday February 28th to Tuesday March 4th. They arrived in Rio on the 27th, scheduled to go back to Reykjavik on Wednesday morning. Their flight there had two-hour layovers in Belfast and Venice and a ten-hour layover in Lisbon, and on the return they would have six-hour layovers in both Casablanca and Madrid. On the long layover in Lisbon, they went sightseeing and had excellent food.

Such was Sören's enthusiasm and sense of adventure with the trip there, that even though flying still made him nervous, he was in good spirits during the landing in Rio. But once they were at the hotel and Alejandro booked a room with two separate beds, Sören was not quite as happy.

Alejandro explained as they got in the room, "We'll still share a bed while we're here. This is just to keep up appearances, to not arouse suspicion that we're..."

Sören rolled his eyes. "You'd think that after five years together you'd just come out already."

Alejandro frowned. "It's not that simple."

"Nothing about you is ever simple, is it?"

"No, *meu querido*, and you know this."

Sören flopped down on the bed with a heavy sigh. "Like, you said you were going to visit what's left of your family while you're here, but I take it I'm not coming along."

"Unfortunately, no. I can arrange a driver to take you wherever you want to go in the hours

I'm away, and there's plenty to do here at the hotel - you could swim, get a massage, anything. But you know how it is. I told you from the beginning."

*Yet you didn't tell me much at all.*Sören frowned, and Alejandro patted him. "It just... kind of hurts. Like there's a wall there, and you will never share your life with me completely."

Alejandro closed his eyes and winced as if in pain. He pressed his hand to his forehead and the patting of Sören turned into gentle rubs, trying to be reassuring. "I wish it could be different, *amorinho*. I really, *really* wish that wall wasn't there. But there are things you don't know - things you *can't* know, for your own safety -"

Sören sat up, and their eyes met. A switch went off in Sören's head. "Your family is some kind of mafia or cartel or something, isn't it? Some kind of criminals?"

Alejandro looked away.

Sören went on. "So what, they're super Catholic and they think you being with a dude is worth going to Hell over, but they do organized crime and that's somehow OK...?"

Alejandro looked back at Sören, and his nostrils flared. "I need you to drop this subject *right now.*"

The urgency in his voice, and the pain in his eyes, made Sören stop, and he just nodded and looked down. "Sorry I brought it up."

"No." Alejandro sighed. "The fault is mine. Believe me when I tell you, again, that I wish that wall wasn't there."

"I won't judge you for whatever mistakes your family has made."

Alejandro laughed bitterly. "Sören, I told you to drop it and I mean drop it.*Now.*"

Sören took a deep breath. He instead flopped back down on the bed and found himself curling in the fetal position, feeling intensely sad, already regretting this trip.

Alejandro still sat next to him, not flinching away, and after a few minutes he moved to the foot of the bed and began rubbing Sören's feet. He leaned in and their eyes met once more. Alejandro took a deep breath. "Look, Sören. Yes, there is a wall there that I can't let you past, and I'm sorry about that. And yes, I'm sorry that I will have to be away some of the time this trip to handle some business. But... everything that I can give you, I do. We will still get plenty of time together to enjoy the *Carnaval*, see the beaches, see the Cristo Redentor. Just because we're discrete to the public, doesn't invalidate what we do in private. It doesn't invalidate how we *feel*. And right now..." He climbed forward and took Sören into his arms. "I'm glad to be here with you." He cupped Sören's chin in his hand and gave him a sweet, lingering kiss.

Sören nuzzled him. "I love you, you know. So much that I want to shout it from the rooftops, want the whole world to know."

"I know." Alejandro nuzzled him back. "And I love you." He stroked Sören's face and kissed his forehead. "More than you know."

Dinner more than made up for the awkwardness of earlier, with delicious paella. They called an early night, after the exhaustion of flying all day, snuggling to sleep, and when they woke up the next morning they were both hard and started their day in a languid,

sensual sixty-nine. Sören could still taste him at breakfast, and every now and again they'd give each other a naughty look.

Alejandro had to go for a few hours that morning, and a driver took Sören to the Santa Teresa Neighborhood, which was a haven for artists, musicians and writers in the 20th century and still had an artist-colony vibe even though it was now full of clubs and boutiques. Sören managed to enjoy himself, though he found himself missing Alejandro several times, wishing he could make commentary. Sören snapped some photos, including a few awkward selfies.

When Alejandro got back, they went to the Banda da Ipanema bloco for the first day of *Carnaval*. Not usually fond of crowds and especially not big crowds, both men still managed to have fun in the revelry, with music and dancing - Sören loved watching the dancers as much as he loved dancing himself. Sören particularly liked seeing the parade of drag queens. When the tribute to Pixinguinha happened and the band played "Carinhoso" after a moment of silence, with everyone singing along, Sören found himself getting teared up.

That evening they went to the Posto 9 at Ipanema. Sören smiled at the rainbow flags, though there were plenty of straight couples there, as well as artists and musicians working, and various hippie and punk types walking around smoking weed. Alejandro sat and watched the sea, and after awhile began to hum to himself and make notation in his ever-present notebook. Sören took some photos, and otherwise just leaned on Alejandro and rested, enjoying the atmosphere. When they got back to the hotel they climbed into bed, but after trying for awhile to rest, the proximity of their bodies and the leftover giddiness had an effect on them, and Alejandro "big spooning" Sören turned into a slow, sweet snugglefuck.

On Saturday they took a cable car to Sugarloaf Mountain. Sören loved this, and his joy was infectious, with Alejandro smiling too. He didn't like pictures taken of himself, permitting Sören to take only a few over the last five years, but today Alejandro let him take a photo of the two of them together, grinning.

After the trip up the mountain, they hit Copacabana. Sören sang the Barry Manilow song on the way there, making Alejandro laugh and roll his eyes. They had a lovely dinner and did some sightseeing on foot before going back to the hotel, trying to keep their hands off each other on the drive there. They made love more feverishly that night, taking turns being inside each other, each going two rounds with penetrating and being penetrated, four shattering orgasms before calling it a night.

On Sunday morning they went to see the Cristo Redentor. Alejandro seemed pensive, and Sören felt very alone when he had to take off again for a few hours, enough that he only half-heartedly enjoyed his afternoon in the Parque Lage. But he still took pictures, wanting to always remember this magical trip. When Alejandro got back, they went to another bloco and danced the night away, and the earlier sadness was forgotten. Back at the hotel, they were tired enough from all the dancing to go right to sleep.

Monday morning Alejandro was gone again, but he returned in the afternoon and they went to another bloco. They spent less time at this bloco, opting to go to Prainha Beach, which was less crowded than Copacabana and Ipanema had been. As the sun set, Sören decided to go in the water. "Be careful," Alejandro cautioned him.

Sören went in up to his waist, and then out a little further, thinking he'd be fine, and that was when the undertow started to drag him. He swam, but the current was powerful. Alejandro rushed into the waves and pulled him back to shore. When they were safely on

the beach again, he looked even more shaken than Sören felt, and indeed, the shielding Alejandro seemed to always have present around his mind dropped enough that Sören could feel absolute *terror* from him.

"I'm fine," Sören told him.

Alejandro just held him - for a moment, seeming to not care what anyone thought or assumed. They had dinner back at the hotel, and then Alejandro needed to kiss Sören everywhere before nailing him into the mattress, fucking him like their lives depended on it. The brush with danger also made Sören's more primitive instincts kick in, clinging to him, clawing up his back and chest so much that there were scratch marks later, which Alejandro smiled at in the mirror the next morning, proud of Sören's handiwork.

The last day of *Carnaval* was another day of wild frolic - Alejandro rented them a place with one of the samba schools, and Sören managed to keep the rhythm well enough. Wearing costumes was fun, and the fireworks display that evening was breathtaking. In bed that night, Sören said, "Thank you for all of this."

Alejandro took his hands and kissed them, before rolling onto his back and pulling Sören on top of him. Sören took him slowly and sweetly, and when they came at the same time, it rivaled the fireworks.

Sören felt a bit lethargic on the trip back to Iceland, not as enthusiastic about Morocco and Spain even though he'd been looking forward to those layovers originally. He chalked it up to feeling the emotional drop now that the giddy rush of *Carnaval* was over, and perhaps lingering sad feelings about Alejandro going off without him to see a family that would never accept them together, as well as the aftermath of being pulled in the undertow at Prainha Beach, where Sören didn't want to think about what would have happened if Alejandro hadn't gone in the ocean after him. But when they had been back in Iceland for a few days and all Sören wanted to do was sleep, he had a feeling something was wrong, and sure enough, the fever and chills started not long after he'd deduced this wasn't normal stress fatigue.

It wasn't Sören's first experience with getting sick after flying, but it was the worst one, with a high fever and a nasty cough. The same terror that Sören had seen in Alejandro after carrying him out of the ocean at Prainha Beach was back, with Alejandro not leaving his side - at least when Sören was awake enough to notice. He flitted in and out of consciousness. Sometimes he was vaguely aware of Alejandro sponging him to cool him down, or making him drink to keep hydrated. Once he could have sworn he caught a glimpse of Alejandro with his head buried in his hands, crying.

Sören's fever eventually broke, but the cough got worse. Sören was having to take more days off of work than he anticipated. He didn't *need* to pay Alejandro rent, but it was something Sören was insistent about, not wanting to be seen as taking advantage of the wealthier man. Yet, Sören could barely stand, weak from fatigue, and the coughing was as violent as he'd ever experienced, enough that Alejandro made him see a doctor.

It came back that Sören had walking pneumonia, and was told to take the next couple of weeks off and rest as much as possible. Sören's manager was fairly understanding, but Sören still felt terrible about it. But most of all, he felt terrible about the way Alejandro seemed very stressed out, like he hadn't gotten a lot of sleep, worried constantly.

Sören's pneumonia did finally go away, and he never thought he'd actually be glad to be waiting tables again, but it felt good to do something besides lay in bed all day and watch TV, surf the Internet, or read. When he'd been back at work a few days, he got a text from

Alejandro.

Can you get off early?

Sören couldn't resist the playful teasing of his response. *Why - do you need to get off?*

Alejandro replied *LOL.*

That in and of itself raised a red flag - usually Alejandro would say something more than that to a question like that... usually something equally provocative, if not downright explicit of what exactly he wanted Sören to do to him. Sören felt the drop in his stomach, and waited.

Alejandro sent another text a minute later. *We need to talk.*

That was never good. Sören drove home feeling a sense of dread that he hadn't felt in a long time, and when he got in the door, Alejandro looked just as somber.

"What's up?" Sören asked.

"Sit down," Alejandro said.

Sören sat, and for a moment they just sat in silence, and then Alejandro leaned back in his chair. "Sören," Alejandro said, "the last four years have been wonderful."

"But." Sören raised an eyebrow. "What... what happened? What did I do wrong?"

"You, *amorinho*, did not do anything wrong. But..." Alejandro buried his face in his hands again, and made a shuddery sigh. When he picked his head back up Sören could tell he was fighting tears. "When we were in Rio, I was informed that I am being married off. My family is very traditional, and I'm close to forty, no heir, all of my brothers are dead and none of them left heirs and... this has to change."

"*What?*"

Alejandro nodded. He looked away, avoiding Sören's eyes. "I don't like it either. But -"

"But nothing. You are a grown-ass adult. You're how old, thirty-seven? Almost thirty-eight?" Sören threw up his hands in exasperation. "You live in fucking Iceland, whatever's left of your family is in Brazil. They don't own you. You're not a slave. Tell them to go fuck themselves -"

"Sören, I will lose everything if I don't go through with this." Alejandro looked down.

"And what? You'll lose *me* if you go through with this, because I'm not coming back with you to Rio to be your side bitch and be alone all the time while you're off pretending to be straight and be a good little boy for whatever the *fuck* it is your family does, or maybe I'll even disappear if they figure out who I am. And what you're telling me, right now, is that your fucking money is more important than what we've had for almost five years? Which by the way, is a fucking insult to me considering you know I grew up without much money at all, and I've been waiting tables all this time. Boo fucking hoo, you lose your Jaguar and your silk sheets and your designer clothes. You're literally telling me, right now, that these things are more important to you than *my heart*."

"Sören."

"No. Don't even." Sören got up, feeling sick. "Do you even *love* this girl? I could at least forgive you if you'd fallen in love with someone else."

"There's no one else. I love you -"

"Fucking *please.*" Sören shook his head. "Fucking spare me. That is so gross. People say marriage is just a piece of paper, and maybe it is, but people also take vows when they get married. They take oaths. *They give their word.* And here you are, about to make an oath you won't fucking keep..."

Alejandro cringed, hard. Sören sensed in that instant he'd hit below the belt, though he didn't understand why.

Alejandro sighed. "Sören. You don't know how sorry I am -"

"If you were truly sorry, you'd tell them no. You'd be willing to live like a normal person instead of a fucking... Kardashian, but without the media whoring. I can't fucking believe this. I can't fucking believe *you.*"

"Sören. It's not just the money. It's my family's legacy. It's what people in my family died for, and -"

"*Shut the fuck up.*"

Sören stormed into the bedroom and not thinking, just feeling the volcano of rage erupt, he began yanking his clothes out of the closet and tossing them on the bed. He wheeled out one of the suitcases, opened it, and started stuffing his clothes inside.

Alejandro stood in the bedroom doorway. "So you're leaving."

"Yes, Captain Obvious, I'm leaving. There's no reason for me to stay, if your decision is made, now is there?"

"I suppose not." Alejandro was teary, and Sören looked away, infuriated that he was crying, getting an empathic sense that this was not as clean and heartless for him as it seemed.

A moment later Alejandro came over and took Sören's arm, and with his other hand he turned Sören's face to his and kissed him hard.

"One last time," Alejandro said. "Please."

He kissed Sören again and Sören felt himself responding to the kiss,*damn him*. As much as Sören was infuriated and disgusted, there were still too many feelings there, even now he wanted him, wished it didn't have to be this way.

They quickly undressed each other and tumbled onto the bed together, on top of the clothes Sören hadn't packed yet. Alejandro kissed him passionately, petting Sören's curls and beard, his free hand caressing every inch of Sören's chest and stomach and thighs, before taking their hard cocks into his hand, stroking slowly.

"I will always, always love you," Alejandro husked. "That will never change."

"I fucking hate this," Sören sobbed. "Why do you have to go?"

Alejandro kissed Sören's forehead. "I enjoyed - and will always cherish - what we had together. But we come from two different worlds, and perhaps it was never meant to be. I just wish we'd had more time."

They cried together, and kissed some more, and then Alejandro kissed and licked his way down Sören's body, fingers walking, like he was committing Sören's flesh to memory. He rimmed Sören until Sören was screaming, trembling, begging for release, and then he sucked Sören's cock slowly, his silver eyes burning Sören's soul.

In those moments the shield almost came down, and just enough for Sören to feel the *ache*. Sören wanted to hate him, but there was so much sadness there, so much *alone*. And when there were tears in Alejandro's eyes once more, and Alejandro reached up to put his hand on Sören's heart, Sören began to fuck his mouth, needing to give him this last memory.

Alejandro sucked Sören hungrily, working his tongue furiously with his mouth full, with Sören gasping, panting, writhing until he erupted in Alejandro's mouth, so much cum that Alejandro almost choked on it, and Sören couldn't help smiling as he watched it seep out of the corners of his mouth. Alejandro gave him a last few slow licks through his orgasm, giving him aftershocks, and then came up to kiss him hard.

Sören couldn't believe he was doing this, but he rolled Alejandro onto his back and kissed his way down, returning the favor, needing to taste him one last time just as badly. Alejandro was already quite worked up, his cock completely slick with precum, more of it dripping down the shaft just before Sören took him into his mouth. Their eyes riveted, Sören sucked him hard, and Alejandro gripped the headboard white-knuckled, arching, his moans getting louder when Sören fingered his prostate. When Alejandro came in his mouth, Sören swallowed it, savoring the sweet saltiness, like wine kissed by the salt of the sea.

They continued kissing and petting, and Alejandro got out the lube. Sören opened to him willingly, guiding his fingers inside, fucking his fingers. When Alejandro's cock was in him, Sören matched his rhythm, rocking his hips back at Alejandro, craving it. Their hands roamed over each other, needing to touch, needing to feel. Their faces close, they kept their eyes locked, breathing each other's breath, until Sören's climax hit and then he closed his eyes, not wanting to see the pain he could already feel in Alejandro as Alejandro also let go, shooting his seed into Sören one last time, crying out Sören's name like he was crying out to a god who had forsaken him.

When it was all over, they held each other, crying.

"You don't have to do this," Sören choked out. "Please. Please don't leave me."

Alejandro gave him a wounded look. "I'm so sorry." He pressed his forehead to Sören's. "I have to. I'm so, so sorry..."

They sobbed together, and at last, spent of tears, they just lay there entwined, feeling like they were prolonging the inevitable as long as possible.

Sören's stomach growling intruded on that private sacred space. They sat up, and looked at the clock.

"Have dinner with me one last time?" Alejandro asked.

Sören shook his head. "I'll grab something on my way out."

Alejandro sighed and ran his hands through his hair, briefly revealing the pointy ears again before it spilled back over his shoulders. He rubbed his face like an offended wet cat, and nodded. "Where will you go?"

"Margrét." Margrét owned her own bar now, and she and Ben had fallen out two years ago; Margrét was living alone in the flat above the bar.

Alejandro had been to Margrét's enough times to know how small that flat was. "You'll be sleeping on the couch and that's not very comfortable. Let me put you up in a hotel -"

"*I don't want your filthy fucking blood money*." Sören got up, gave Alejandro a withering look over his shoulder, and began to put his clothes back on, a bit roughly.

When Sören's clothes, laptop and art supplies were packed, he wheeled his luggage to the door. Alejandro was dressed now as well, and they lingered at the doorway.

They held each other tight, and kissed one last time, both men ready to cry again.

"I love you," Alejandro told him.

"I love you," Sören said. "And I never want to see you or hear from you again." With that, he wheeled his luggage down the hall, not looking back.

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As soon as Sören got to Margrét's flat, he unfriended Alejandro and blocked him on Facebook. He also blocked Alejandro's e-mail address from his Gmail.

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There was, of course, no arranged marriage, no girl. And though he had indeed grown up with the belief that he was damned for the needs and desires that came naturally to him, there was no traditional Catholic family. When Maglor Fëanorion had been in Rio and apart from his lover, he had been meeting with the contacts who'd assisted him in wandering without detection, seeing to finances in particular. Alejandro Magalhães had been the latest in a series of aliases, Magalhães being close enough to his name to work, and also being the surname that was usually translated Magellan, after the seafaring explorer. An inside joke, though a bitter one.

For the first time in almost five years, Maglor went to bed that night alone. He couldn't sleep - he'd gotten too used to Sören's presence there next to him. In the morning he drove to Reynisfjara, where he'd first asked Sören to move in with him, and he walked along the shore. He picked up a seashell in his hand, studying it, this which had once been a home to some sea creature, since outgrown, left behind.

He threw it into the sea, much as he had thrown the Silmaril ages ago.

Alone. In the end, all we ever are, is alone.

Maglor almost wished he hadn't allowed himself this comfort, to love another, to

get *attached* as he did, their threads entangled in the Song, Maglor's burning silver like the stars, Sören's shifting green and violet like the northern lights.

He would have kept it going awhile longer before the inevitable - it had been Sören pulled into the undertow, and then sick with pneumonia, that had shocked him out of the haze of sensuality and passion he'd lived in, back to the hard, cold reality of his life. Sören was a Man, and as frail and mortal as Men were. He had seen that, he had finally *felt* it, and the thought of Sören dying was too much, especially the idea of *watching him die*, as he would someday.

He felt awful for breaking Sören's heart, hated himself for lying - but this was the only way he knew how to end things. He'd thought about faking his own death, but he had a feeling Sören's survivor guilt would manifest and Sören would try to join him. He couldn't have that blood on his hands. That *light* going out from the world.

So lies it was. Making Sören hate him, he would, with time, forget it and move on. That was the way of Men.

Maglor, on the other hand, knew he would not be so fortunate, and the memory of this love would be one more thing haunting him eons from now as if no time had passed at all.

Chapter 5

2015

It was Friday night, and Sören was getting ready for his Friday routine of hitting the club. He applied mascara and eyeliner in the mirror, taking a moment to survey his choice of attire for the evening. It was the first of May and still sometimes chilly in Reykjavik, so he was wearing a long-sleeved shirt - a ruffly black shirt, with black leather pants. He had on his usual Doc Martens boots, and opted to keep his mop of curls loose instead of tying some back.

It had been over a year since he and Alejandro had broken up. After sleeping on his sister Margrét's couch for a few weeks, Margrét allowed him to use her office down in the bar as a single room occupancy. Sören also worked for Margrét now at her bar, an offer she made him after he'd been living in her office for two months. She paid him better than he'd been making waiting tables, though he wasn't rich by any means. He still had the savings account that Alejandro had wisely cautioned him to set up in case anything happened.

Sören became a popular bartender, and indeed, a fair number of patrons came onto him. His room had seen a number of guests - in addition to taking the occasional bar patron back there, he'd also gotten a Grindr profile and had one-night-stands with contacts on Grindr, a mixture of locals and tourists. He also had a few local fuckbuddies who he hooked up with from time to time, but nothing he wanted to turn serious. He was still wary of getting into a relationship, and nobody he was fucking interested him in the way that Alejandro had so captivated him.

The breakup with Alejandro had devastated Sören, enough that he stopped drawing and painting for awhile - he was still in a creative rut, over a year later. Going from doing something artistic every day since he was a child, to not being able to create at all, felt like he'd lost a limb, except in his mind. It was depressing, and feeling like his antidepressants weren't working anymore Sören went off his meds, even though he knew that probably wasn't the wisest decision in the world; when his fuckbuddies got him into the club scene, he began to self-medicate with MDMA, taking it at least once a week. He wasn't completely irresponsible - he still insisted on protection for intercourse, he was considering going on PrEP, and he tested regularly. Going to the club on Friday nights, he could lose himself in the music and dancing, lose himself rolling on molly, lose himself in the sex that usually happened later that evening.

It was a temporary fix, and the comedown was usually unpleasant, but it was how he coped, these days. It was the only way he could feel alive anymore.

On the way to the club, Sören listened to The Weeknd, feeling like the lyrics of rolling and having casual sex to numb emotional pain were too real. The music coming from the club was more uptempo, and Sören shifted gears mentally. Tonight was 90s throwback night, but the DJ was playing some current stuff first.

Upon entering the club, Sören looked around for his friends Jón and Ólafur, known for wearing flamboyant outfits - Ólafur was somewhat infamous for wearing big goofy hats. Ólafur was also a dealer, selling kush and molly. Sören didn't see them, but he wasn't too worried. A good song was on, so he moved onto the floor.

A little while later the DJ put on "Loud Places" by Jamie xx, a song Sören had been hearing on the radio lately, and it immediately darkened his mood.

I feel music in your heights
I have never reached such heights

I go to those places where we used to go
They seem so quiet now
I'm here, all alone
You go to new places with I don't know who
And I don't know how to follow you

Sören closed his eyes, thinking of Alejandro. For a moment he got the urge to run out of the club. Sören once again wondered if on some subconscious level he'd started partying as a "fuck you" to the man he was still hung up on, even though they were not in contact at all and there was no way Alejandro would know about any of this. Then he felt a tap on his shoulder. He whirled around and the first thing he saw was a huge yellow top hat with big rainbow feathers.

"Hej, Ólafur. Hej, Jón."

Ólafur was a tall, beefy man with a shaved head underneath the flamboyant hats and a longish auburn beard, wearing an otherwise preppy outfit. Jón was a shorter "otter" with wire-rim glasses, a brown fauxhawk and goatee, ear plugs and a ring in his septum, and was also dressed preppy, though Jón had a few different-colored handkerchiefs hanging out from his pocket for those in the know. That had, indeed, been how he'd first gotten Sören's attention months prior.

Jón did the kiss-kiss on Sören's cheeks. Ólafur and Sören fistbumped, then Ólafur clasped his hand, and Sören felt the tab of molly pressed into his palm. He'd be by the bar later that week for Sören to pay, knowing he was good for it. After Sören downed the tab, he danced with Ólafur and Jón for awhile. Ólafur and Jón lived together in an open relationship, and sometimes the three of them hooked up after a night at the club, having a threesome, sometimes Sören went off with someone else. Ólafur and Jón were grinding up on each other so much tonight that he felt like a bit of a third wheel, and not really in the mood for a threesome with them.

He started to look around the club for other prospects, and not far away, his eyes caught a pair of the lightest blue eyes Sören had ever seen, like looking into pools. The owner of the blue eyes was very tall, and had a face that was both handsome and pretty at the same time – androgynous – with high cheekbones, a slim nose, full lips, a proud chin. The blue-eyed man had straight blond hair to his shoulders, and he was wearing a black leather jacket over a black button-down shirt that was mostly open, only a couple of the buttons closed, revealing a slim, lithe torso. Leather pants that hugged all the right places. An assortment of silver rings and necklaces. He wasn't just hot, but he was interesting looking, and there was a confidence to him... a bearing almost like royalty.

He sure knew how to work those hips.

Their eyes met. The blond smiled and crooked his index finger and gestured for him to come over.

Sören pointed to himself and mouthed, *Me?*

The pretty boy nodded.

Sören danced over to him, and the pretty boy came closer. He smelled like a field of

wildflowers with a touch of musk, and his hands slid over Sören like he owned him.

Pretty Boy came closer, his breath hot on Sören's neck. "I've been watching you all evening," he husked.

He spoke English, which wasn't uncommon since there were tourists all year-round, but Sören couldn't quite place his accent. It wasn't the familiar Icelandic accent; it was *almost* British, but in a way where Sören could tell English wasn't the man's first language. Sören guessed Eastern European, though that didn't seem quite right somehow.

"Well," Sören said, "I'm flattered, thank you." He smiled at his dance partner and, feeling bold, he caressed his cheek.

The 90s music that was promised finally kicked off, starting with "What Is Love" by Haddaway. Sören threw his head back and laughed at the sheer memeyness of it. But the mood went from silly to sensual, as Sören's dance partner launched into a set of moves like a pro, and Sören tried to keep up with him.

Pulled into Pretty Boy's energy, it got easier to do, as if he were being guided somehow. They flowed together naturally, and after a few songs they were in the center of the club, voguing together to "Mr. Vain" by Culture Beat, being cheered on by an audience.

Sören was in that zone of endorphin rush from the intense dancing and the molly was kicking in now. He was sweating a little, and Pretty Boy led him to the bar. Before Sören could order, Pretty Boy asked him, "Are you rolling?"

Sören nodded. "Almost everyone around here is."

"No alcohol for you," Pretty Boy said, and told the bartender, "He'll have a Gatorade."

Sören smirked as he took the Gatorade. "*Takk*," he said as he watched Pretty Boy pay for both of them; Pretty Boy was having red wine, which wasn't a drink Sören usually saw at this club, people favored beer, vodka or the ever-popular Brennivín.

"Make sure you keep hydrated," Pretty Boy told him.

Sören rolled his eyes. "I do know a few things about partying. Plus I used to be in med school, so I try to stay safe." *If not necessarily smart.*

"I see. I'm just looking out for you."

"I appreciate it." Sören patted his shoulder, and then, feeling the rush from the molly, couldn't resist reaching out to play with a strand of that blond mane. "You have great hair. I really like long blond hair."

"Thank you." Pretty Boy ran a hand through Sören's curls. "Yours is nice as well."

Sören smiled. "You're an awesome dancer."

Pretty Boy grinned lasciviously. "I know a few good moves, yes."

That was a definite innuendo. Sören was already attracted to this guy, and would have been horny for him anyway, but the molly was making him feel even hornier. His hand let

go of the lock of hair he was playing with, to walk his fingers down Pretty Boy's chest, fingers lingering on bare skin. "I bet. Care to show me?"

Pretty Boy led him back out to the dance floor, like he was playing with his food before he ate it. As horny as Sören was, he didn't mind, and their dancing was more sensual now, moving close, caressing each other and grinding on each other.

"Are You Ready To Fly" by Rozalla was a more emotional song for Sören, as an artist, one of the many songs that had privately been a soundtrack for his relationship with Alejandro.

Do you know I'm watching your colors keep flashing
I look through your eyes
Grey is for waiting not knowing
You're going to be by my side
Red is for warning and blue is the color
And yellow is love
Black is the color of night
When you're lying with me

Are you ready to fly
Can you leave the world behind

He continued to dance through it, but there was a moment when Sören had to catch his breath, almost ready to cry, his feelings on an amplifier with the molly. *Are you ready to fly - more like are you ready to cry.* He felt self-conscious and awkward.

Something must have shown in his expression because Pretty Boy took Sören's face in his hands, stroking it before moving in for a deep, sweet kiss. Sören kissed back, groaning. The two held each other and kissed some more, and as the song ended, they looked at each other.

"You have sad eyes," Pretty Boy said.

"I've seen some shit."

Pretty Boy pet his curls. "It's all right," he said softly. "It's going to be all right."

It's never going to be all right. But there was something about the way Pretty Boy was touching and kissing him that let Sören know that somehow, he got it, and was trying to provide some reassurance, some comfort in this dark night of his soul.

Then the pretty dancer smiled and said, "I didn't catch your name."

"Sören."

"Like Kierkegaard."

Sören's laughter rang out. *That* wasn't something he heard in a club, usually, a refreshing change. He was impressed. This time he initiated the kiss, hard. "Hell yes," he said, kissing him again.

"I'm Ingmar."

A fellow Scandinavian – though his accent wasn't quite Scandinavian, and he definitely

wasn't Icelandic. "Well, Ingmar." Sören wiggled his eyebrows. "Do you want to get... existential?"

–

Ingmar had a hotel room. He told Sören when they got in, "I have to go somewhere in four hours."

Sören didn't usually sleep with one-night-stands - he had not, in fact, actually slept in the same bed as anyone since Alejandro. He nodded and said, "We can still make that time count."

"Oh yes."

Ingmar's room was set up like he'd been prepared for someone to come back there with him. There was a bowl of condoms and a tube of Astroglide, and a bottle of vanilla flavored massage oil.

There was also a blindfold and handcuffs.

Ingmar noticed Sören noticing the props, and giving him a nervous look. Ingmar told him, "It's your choice if we use those or not."

If one of Sören's friends had come to him in the same situation, asking for advice, Sören would normally caution strongly against letting a stranger restrain you, because they could do anything to you and you'd be powerless. But even though Ingmar was about as hard to read as Alejandro had been, something told Sören this was OK. Sören nodded, and started undressing. Ingmar went in the bathroom, and Sören heard the water running, assuming he was freshening up. When he came out, he was naked. He climbed onto the bed, kissed Sören and pushed him back onto the pillows.

The blindfold and handcuffs didn't come on right away. They spent a long time just kissing and touching, looking into each other's eyes. Ingmar figured out all of Sören's sweet spots right away, almost as if someone had told him where and how, and Sören moaned and thrashed around beneath the clever fingers and tongue. Sex on E always seemed to make any kind of tactile play more intense, and tonight, somehow much more.

At last Ingmar gently rolled Sören onto his stomach, and after Sören consented to be bound, Ingmar cuffed him. "Let me take care of you," he said.

Sören spread, wanting to be fucked, but Ingmar just laughed, lightly tracing along the rim of Sören's hole before swatting his bottom. "Not yet."

Ingmar poured massage oil onto Sören's back and proceeded to work on him, kneading, rubbing. Sören ached to be fucked, but *god* if Ingmar's touch didn't make him melt. Sören felt weightless, boneless, brainless, flexing his fingers and toes and making little contented noises like a cat being pet. He could feel the tightness around his wrists with the cuffs, but it wasn't yet painful.

What *was* painful was the urgent need when Ingmar began to kiss and lick down his spine, and at last, when Ingmar dipped his tongue into Sören's channel, teasing. Sören realized *this* was the reason for the cuffs, otherwise he'd be clawing the shit out of him trying to get that cock inside him. Ingmar ate him with slow, languid strokes of his tongue,

until Sören was sobbing and howling into the pillows, thrusting against his mouth, begging "Please, please..."

After what seemed like forever, Ingmar uncuffed him, rolled Sören onto his back, and then re-cuffed him to the headboard. He poured massage oil over Sören's chest, and spent quite awhile on Sören's pierced nipples, using his mouth and hands, sometimes his teeth, as Sören panted and whimpered and arched to him. Ingmar eventually moved downward, licking and nibbling and caressing Sören's stomach, then his thighs.

He straddled Sören and took their dripping, precum-slick cocks into his fist, stroking them together slowly, with Sören's eyes riveted on the erotic sight of their cocks together, more precum flowing. After a few minutes Ingmar let go and then guided the head of his cock to the head of Sören's cock, making the heads kiss, and Sören cried out at the sight of their precum streaming, mingling. The captive bead in Sören's Prince Albert pushed into the slit in Ingmar's own cock, and Ingmar began to fuck his cock on it, both of them moaning. Sören again felt the urge to claw him, writhing against the restraints.

"You are beautiful," Ingmar said, reaching with his free hand to stroke Sören's face. "Wild. So much passion. You were made to be spoiled like this."

Sören closed his eyes, thinking of all the times he and Alejandro made love, how sensual they were together, the way they spoiled each other, taking their time, making love like they were perfecting Sören's art or Alejandro's music, but with their bodies. He'd gotten used to that, the sublime, and then, after it was gone, he'd been having quick fucks with people who were just there to get off. He'd resigned himself to "good enough", but was it really? No wonder he felt so empty all the time.

This Ingmar was the sort of person who would have intrigued Sören, and could have been a candidate for more than a one-night-stand, if Sören still didn't feel raw as fuck over a year later. He was relieved Ingmar wasn't asking him to spend the night here, because he would have broken his "I don't sleep with fuckboys" rule.

Ingmar pet Sören's curls, and leaned down to kiss Sören's forehead. Sören opened his eyes, and Ingmar stroked his face again. "Beautiful," he said, before claiming Sören's mouth.

As they kissed, Sören watched Ingmar reach for the bedtable, and retrieve a condom. They kissed some more as Sören heard the packet open, and Ingmar sheathed himself. He pushed slick fingers into Sören, finding the prostate right away, and began to kiss, lick, and nibble Sören's nipples as his fingers stretched Sören and teased the sweet spot inside him.

When they were both ready, Ingmar put the blindfold on Sören. "Let me guide you through the darkness tonight," he whispered. “Let me give you light.”

He began to push his cock into Sören's opening, and Sören pushed out as he pushed in, to make it easier. It was a tight fit - Alejandro was above-average, and Ingmar was the first cock he'd had since then around that same size. Sören let out a sharp hiss of breath and Ingmar waited, letting him adjust to the fullness.

Then Ingmar moved slowly. With the blindfold on, Sören had no idea what Ingmar was going to do, and the surprise kisses over his neck and nipples and shoulders, the caresses out of nowhere, were all almost overwhelming in their intensity. It wasn't long before Sören was on that edge, and Ingmar kept him there, sharpening and sharpening that edge, making Sören shake and gasp, Sören begging until he couldn't make words,

just animal noises of heat. But it was so good that he couldn't complain, being lost in the sensual haze was almost as good as a release itself.

"So beautiful." Ingmar kissed his neck, licked and nibbled.

Sören found his words. "Please, Ingmar, make me come."

"Mmmmmmmmmm." Ingmar kissed him deeply, and reached down to stroke Sören's cock in the same lazy rhythm as his thrusts. Sören felt a finger tracing his lips, then it was in his mouth; Sören sucked, wishing he could somehow suck Ingmar's cock and get fucked at the same time.

Then Ingmar conceded, pinning Sören's legs on his shoulders and driving into him hard and fast, with Sören screaming, his nails scraping the headboard, rocking his hips back, giving as good as he got it. "Yes yes *yes*," Sören moaned.

Ingmar played with Sören's cock as he pounded him, and just before Sören could climax, Ingmar snatched off the blindfold. Their eyes met, and that set off Sören's orgasm. Ingmar aimed Sören's cock to spurt all over him, and the sight of coming on Ingmar's chest and stomach made Sören's climax even better.

Ingmar thrusted twice more, then pulled out, yanked off the condom, and shot his load over Sören's body, almost like he was marking him somehow. Sören sighed, relishing the feeling of being soaked in hot cum, his orgasm continuing its delicious throbbing.

Ingmar undid the handcuffs, and Sören flexed his wrists.

"Sore?" Ingmar asked.

Sören nodded. "A little."

Ingmar handed him a Gatorade, and Sören finally noticed there was a cooler of sports drinks on the floor near the bed, as if Ingmar had been expecting to bring back someone who was rolling. Sören sat up and drank, and Ingmar rubbed his wrists as he did, a tender gesture that made Sören smile. Then Ingmar pulled him close, letting him rest awhile.

When it was forty-five minutes away from the four-hour mark, they sat back up and looked at each other for a moment, before putting their clothes back on. They sat on the bed to put on their shoes, and Sören said, "Thank you."

"The pleasure was mine."

"No, really." Sören frowned. The molly was starting to wear off, not completely, but he was feeling that familiar ugly "back to Earth" drop. "I really needed that tonight."

"I hope it helped." Ingmar leaned in and kissed Sören's forehead again. Then he said, "I know this is really none of my business, but what's going on? Maybe talking about it a little might help."

"You're not a therapist, I take it."

"No, but sometimes telling things to an anonymous stranger can be liberating."

Sören took a deep breath. "In a nutshell, I'm still broken hearted over the guy who dumped me a year ago. I'm an artist who can't make art anymore, and my life has

become this meaningless trash fire of partying with so-called 'friends' who I don't really have much of a connection to."

Ingmar took a few moments to consider his response, and then he said, "Do you want some honest advice from a total stranger?"

"What the hell, go for it."

"Get out of Reykjavik for awhile. A change would do you good."

Sören snorted. "Like... where, exactly?"

"The UK, perhaps? London area? Lots of opportunities there."

Sören had never in his life considered leaving Iceland to live abroad, but he thought of his past travels with Alejandro and the way new places had inspired his art. The problem with his life now was that every day felt the same, and maybe...

"All right. Thank you."

Ingmar walked Sören back to the club where Sören's car was parked. For a minute Sören wondered if they were going to exchange cell numbers or e-mail addresses, but then Ingmar was off, and Sören gave a small sigh of disappointment as he got in his car.

Once he was back at the bar and in the small office he called home, Sören looked at the time, did the mental math, and called his brother Dagnýr, who was an astrophysics professor at University of Toronto.

Dagnýr answered after the first ring. "Holy shit, Sören! It's been awhile!"

"Jæja. I'm... I'm sorry. It's..." Sören closed his eyes. "Depression sucks."

"I hear that." Across an ocean, Sören could feel Dagnýr hugging him in their telepathic bond. "So what's up, man?"

"Well... I'm pretty tired and we can do a full catching up another time, but can I talk to Matt? I have an important question for him."

Matt was Dagnýr's new boyfriend, which Sören had first heard about from Margrét, because Margrét couldn't believe Dagnýr was dating the twin brother of "*þetta kunta*" Kylo Ren, Margrét's former best friend. But Ben, now Kylo, had been right that he and Matt were nothing alike, and to all accounts Dagnýr and Matt were happy together.

Dagnýr sounded surprised, and a little disappointed. "Uh, sure. Hold on."

A couple minutes later, Matt's voice was on the other end. "*IT'S ALIVE*," Matt yelled, in English, a reference to the fact that Sören had been incommunicado.

"Jæja, sorry, the Depression Monster has eaten me."

"Your bro says you have something to ask me."

"You're from the UK, right? I... may be moving to London, can you e-mail me some contacts of anyone you know out there who's hiring or renting?"

"Wow. You're moving to London?"

"I don't know for sure, but..." Sören was on his laptop as he talked to Matt, with two tabs open, checking airline prices and "average cost of rent in London by area". It looked like the savings account Alejandro had insisted he build would be enough to get him overseas and with a cushion to land as he tried to figure his shit out.

"Yeah, lemme, uh. I can do that for you. I don't know how helpful it'll be, but even if the people I know can't help you, they might know people who know people, or something."

"Anything is good. Thank you, Matt."

"Welcome. Lemme give you back to your bro."

Dagnýr was back on the phone now. "Jesus Christ, Sören, you're moving to London?"

"I don't know. Possibly maybe."

"Well... if you need anything, let me know and I'll see what I can do." Dagnýr's voice got serious. "Are you in any kind of trouble?"

"No."

"You're sure?"

"Dagnýr, seriously, everything is fine -"

"It's not fine, if you're leaving Iceland. I know you." Suddenly, Sören felt like he had been whacked with a newspaper all the way from Toronto. "You being stalked or anything? Trouble with the law?"

"No. This is just..." Sören inhaled. "Life is really *shit* these days and has been for awhile and I just need to... start over again." The tears started. *Like a phoenix, rising from the ashes. That's marked permanently on my fucking skin.*

"Awwwwwwwww, Sören." Sören felt another hug again from long distance. "You want to come to Toronto instead? Matt and I can put you up here -"

"No, I've already been living with one sibling for awhile and I can tell she's kind of tired of being like a surrogate mom and I don't want to do the same thing to you. I got to do this on my own. I'm thirty now, for fuck's sake. Time baby bird spreads his wings, even if they're broken."

Dagnýr had a bit of an obsession with 80s music and began to sing in English, "*Take these broken wings | And learn to fly again | And learn to live so free.*"

"Dammit Dagnýr."

"*When we hear the voices sing | The book of love will open up | And let us innnnnn.*"

In the background Sören heard Matt belt out, "I BLESS THE RAIIIIINNNNNS DOWN IN AAAAAAFRICAAAAAAAAAAAAA..."

Sören rolled his eyes and laughed. "OK. I'm... gonna go now."

Dagnýr blew a raspberry. "Man, you don't appreciate the telethon we're putting on for your emo shit? WE ARE THE WORRRRRRRRRLD, WE ARE THE PEOPLE..."

Sören held up his middle finger, and knew Dagnýr could see it in his mind's eye. "Fuck you guys."

"I love you too."

–

Two weeks later, Sören was on a flight from Reykjavik to Heathrow Airport in London. He'd usually just zone out on a three-hour flight, but instead, this time he took out his sketchpad for the first time in... too long. He began to sketch Ingmar in a forest. As he drew, it finally occurred to Sören then that they'd fucked on Beltaine, what many modern-day Pagans celebrated as a festival of fertility, and though Sören wasn't Pagan at all, it nonetheless felt like they'd done some sort of fertility ritual, woven the magic of waking up his life from the dead. Sören chuckled, and added some whimsical touches to Ingmar – hair down to his waist, and naked except for wearing a headdress of antlers, a torc around his neck and one on each bicep. Ingmar's cock was fully erect, and he glowed softly like he was some sort of god, changing the forest from winter to spring.

He smiled to himself. *Thanks, Ingmar, wherever you are.*

Chapter 6

2019

Akureyri, Iceland

The last day of May, a Friday, was a beautiful sunny day, and Sören's last class of the day at Logifugl Listaskóli was with the children aged seven to ten. For once they were working outside rather than in the classroom, sitting on a hill, coloring mandalas that they'd designed themselves from a list of options, with Sören using a computer program to draw and print them out. Sören smiled at Sólveig and Sigurjón, children of his neighbors, who had mandalas of squids and bunnies respectively. Their mother Vigdís had called Sören earlier to let him know her car was in the shop and asked if he'd do her a favor and drive the kids home.

Sólveig smiled back at him, crinkling her nose, showing cute dimples. Sören's smile broadened - once in a great while he wondered about what it would have been like to have children, imagining that in a far-off universe somewhere he probably had a few of them. The sweet, silly Sólveig with her rose-gold hair and bright blue eyes was the kind of daughter Sören would have liked to have, and dote upon.

But he didn't envy Vigdís and Páll. He'd made his choices in life, and while he had some regrets, he didn't regret where he was today.

Sören would often work on the same project the kids were doing, and he got back to work coloring his mandala, which was waves of flaming birds, and his mandala was shaped as a seven-pointed star. Even though he was using colored pencils for his, he still felt like framing it after.

"I like your birds," Sigurjón told him, and Sólveig nodded.

"Thank you. I like my birds too."

"You really like firebirds, huh?" Sólveig asked. The very name*Logifugl* was that.

"I do." Sören had a lifelong dream of opening his own art studio, where anyone could come and create - "tune into the Song", Sören had called it. Just over a year ago, during the few months that he and his partner had broken up before getting back together, he'd stayed with his sister in a bout of severe depression; Margrét had won a fairly substantial lawsuit against Kylo Ren for plagiarism and emotional distress, and gave some of the money to Sören to start his life over again for the second time. So, here he was - from the ashes of grief, he'd burst into flame once more. He was proud of what he'd accomplished, how successful Logifugl Listaskóli was, how it had become part of the Akureyri community, with events besides the classes there, such as musicians performing, poetry slams, and LGBT days of remembrance. Once upon a time you couldn't have paid Sören to go back to his hometown, but he found himself missing it, wanting a simpler life.

And life was good, these days. Sören was happy. So much so that when the class was over and Sören collected the pictures and art supplies, putting them on a cart to wheel back into the little building that had a couple of art rooms, a larger room for a gallery, and another large room for events, he was humming to himself.

Sólveig and Sigurjón, staying behind to get a ride home, helped Sören put things away once they were inside. Sören went to the mini fridge he kept and retrieved three cans of Pepsi, handing them to the kids on their way out. Along the hall leading out to the door were a few framed pictures of Sören's work and a few of the other people who attended classes and events here. Closest to the door was Sören's first work, that put him on this path - the painting of what became the ink on his arms and back, a phoenix made of fire and one made of water, rising from flames and waves, against the backdrop of space. Their tails were entwined and hooked with the top spoke of a brilliant, rainbow-diamond-sparkling white star. Sören had only gotten the phoenixes on his back before he'd run out of money, and considered that "good enough" and then, over the years, had put off getting the flaming star inked there as well. It sometimes bothered him, like that part of the vision was missing, but it was what it was.

He showed the painting to the kids, who oohed and ahhed, giving him a warm glow of pride even though he knew eight and ten year olds weren't professional art critics.

The kids hopped in his black jeep, which had a rainbow flag bumper sticker, and Sören put on the radio, letting them select the radio station. They wanted the pop station, and Sören and the kids sang along on the drive from Akureyri into the tiny fjord village of Svalbarðseyri.

Players - put your pinky rings up to the moon
Girls, what y'all trying to do?
Twenty four karat magic in the air
Head to toe so player

Sören knew if his husband could hear them now he'd be laughing at the Bruno Mars song sung along with thick Icelandic accents, and that made him smile.

The cottage that Vigdís and Páll and their kids lived in, with an Icelandic sheepdog named Auli, was a fifteen-minute walk from the cabin where Sören and his husband lived. Sören instinctively looked out the window as they drove past to see if Dooku was outside at all, and figured he was probably inside writing. But he saw their tuxedo cat Snúður in the window, who expected him to come home around this time, and Sören felt guilty at the look the cat gave him as he drove past.

Vigdís, a short, stocky woman in her early forties with a messy reddish-blonde pixie cut, a ruddy complexion, and lots of freckles, came out of the cottage as soon as she heard Sören's jeep, or more accurately the music coming out of Sören's jeep, with the radio now playing Katy Perry. The kids continued singing along until Sören shut off the engine, and then he got out of the jeep with them.

Vigdís hugged her kids and then she hugged Sören. "Thank you so much," she said. Vigdís tried to hand him a 500 krónur note, and Sören refused it.

"It was no trouble at all," Sören said. "And they behaved themselves."

"I'd still like to do something for you." Vigdís and Páll were good people like that, nice neighbors to have. "Páll and I were thinking about a barbecue when he gets home from work, perhaps you could call Nicolae and ask him to come down and join us?"

Sören wasn't going to say no to that. He nodded, pulled out his cell phone, and selected Ion Nicolae Dooku from his list of contacts. After one ring, he heard Dooku's deep, velvet voice, which always got him going. "*Elskan*," Dooku said. They'd met when Sören was living in the UK, and usually spoke to each other in English, but Dooku had been making

attempts to learn Icelandic, and Sören smiled at the term of endearment.

"Hej Nico. I drove Sólveig and Sigurjón home from class and Vigdís is insisting on feeding us when Páll gets home, which should be soon. You want to come by?"

Dooku chuckled. "I have something going in the slow cooker, but I can save it to reheat tomorrow."

"Let's do that. They're making barbecue."

"Barbecue *fish and steaks*," Vigdís yelled in English.

"Oh. Well then. I will *certainly* be there." A pause, and then Dooku said, "I'll bring wine."

Sören snorted. "You and your wine. Drink Brennivín like a normal person."

"Neither of us are normal, *hjartað mitt*." Dooku laughed again. "But if you *insist.*"

"I do."

"I'll be there shortly."

"Good." Sören hit End, and nodded. "He's coming."

They went inside. Vigdís put on coffee, and Sólveig and Sigurjón worked on their homework at the kitchen table. They wanted to keep listening to the radio, so Vigdís had on the pop station. Auli came over to Sören for pettings, and Sören knew later Snúður would sniff him, turn up his nose *you were unfaithful to me with a DOG*and walk away until he washed the smell off him, but Sören loved all animals, just like he loved children, and couldn't resist. He talked baby talk to Auli as he stroked the sheepdog's fur, who licked his arms and hands and finally put his paws up on Sören's shoulders to lick his face, and it was in this moment when Dooku knocked on the door and Vigdís let him in. Dooku's laughter rang out at the sight of Sören getting his face cleaned, with the goofy sheepdog putting his tongue right up Sören's nose.

Dooku walked over to Sören. The six-foot-five, lean but powerfully built silver-haired-and-bearded former barrister didn't enter a room so much as he commanded it, and Sören smirked as Auli leapt off him and ran right over to Dooku for pettings, while Sólveig and Sigurjón looked up from their work and respectfully waved, and Vigdís straightened her posture as if a military commanding officer had just walked in. "Hej, Nicolae," she said.

For years Dooku had been on a last-name basis with just about everyone, but since his move to Iceland he'd relaxed a little and allowed their neighbors to call him Nicolae; Sören had always called him Nico, which Dooku found curious but charming. Dooku did not care to be addressed by his actual first name, Ion, which was the same name as his Nazi sympathizer uncle. He was born in London in 1948, and had heard horror stories from his parents about the hardships of World War II in Romania, which even affected them, descended from Romanian counts, and when they decided to leave Romania had moved to the UK out of respect for Churchill's stand against the Nazis.

Though Dooku would be seventy-one in December, he was in excellent health and quite physically active. Dooku came right over to help Vigdís get heavy bags of meat out of the freezer, and Sören took a moment to ogle his husband's physique - especially his tight, shapely ass - before Dooku sat down at the table and Vigdís set hot coffee in front of him.

"How was your day?" Dooku's dark eyes, usually intense and stern, softened and twinkled at Sören, allowing a small smile that would be a grin on anyone else.

"Today was a good day." Sören smiled back. "You should see the mandalas we're working on. I think I'm gonna frame mine when it's done."

"Yes, I'd like to see that," Dooku said. "I always appreciate your work, and I like to see what others are doing."

"Páll loves your classes for adults," Vigdís said. "Sometimes he even draws now instead of always playing games to unwind."

"You could come by too," Sören said.

"I'm no good at art."

"It's not about being good," Sören said. "It's about expressing yourself and having fun. Some of the most famous artists of all time made *shite.*" Giving a nervous look at the kids, who erupted into giggles, he said, "Er. They made *poop.*"

Dooku facepalmed, and shook with silent laughter.

"Jæja, so. They were technically very bad, but what they had going for them was creativity and expression. My classes are for everybody. All you need to come in is an open mind. You should think about it! Coloring and things like that are a great stress reliever."

"I'll think about it," Vigdís said.

Just then, they heard Páll's jeep pull in. Páll looked like he could be in a Viking metal band, tall, muscular, long brown hair that he kept tied back in a ponytail, long beard, visible tattoos on his arms, gauges in his ears and a septum piercing, a T-shirt and jeans kind of guy. "Hej hej!" he said as he walked in, and brofisted Sören, then shook hands with Dooku. He grinned at the Brennivín that Dooku had brought over. "You heard we were having my world-famous steaks tonight, já?"

Vigdís snorted. "Your steaks are great but they're not world-famous, Páll."

"Sure they are! Akureyri is the world, for me. Or, at least most of the time." He frowned, and Vigdís also frowned.

"Kristin called?" Kristin was Páll's mother, who had moved to the United States to marry an American.

"Jæja, but we can talk about that in a bit, já? Let's get these steaks and fish on the fire."

Dooku accompanied Páll out in the yard, where Páll put on the metal station - they both liked metal - and played darts while Páll barbecued. In the kitchen, Vigdís cut and fried up potatoes, and Sören made a salad. Sören was getting more confident making food again, after having been dismissed as "not much of a cook" by his ex Justin the footballer, who he'd been with before Dooku. Sören had spent long enough away from Justin to recognize a lot of his criticisms weren't valid but were in fact verbal abuse - Justin had been occasionally physically abusive as well. Dooku still did most of the cooking at the cabin because he liked it and he was excellent at it, but Sören liked being helpful when he could be.

When everything was all ready, they went to the yard to eat, as it was such lovely weather. Before sitting down, Vigdís changed the metal station to the pop station, grinning at the annoyed look Páll gave her, giving him an air kiss.

"Better not be any Justin Bieber shit, or I will change that channel so fast," Páll said.

Sören snickered.

Vigdís and Páll exchanged tales of the car breakdown and Páll's day at work, and the kids told them what they'd learned in school today. Then Vigdís brought up Kristin again. "So your mother called me saying she'd been trying to get a hold of you all day."

Páll nodded. "I finally called her back when I got out of work. Did she tell you anything about why she was calling?"

"The cancer." Vigdís nodded.

Sólveig and Sigurjón exchanged worried glances. "Amma's got cancer?" Sigurjón squeaked.

Páll nodded again. "Jæja, she's got breast cancer. She might beat it, it was diagnosed early, but..." He sighed. "We just don't know."

"I'm so sorry," Sören said, reaching across the table to pat him.

Dooku nodded, frowning. "I'm sorry too."

"Shit happens," Páll said. "But I haven't seen her in years, and... she asked if we'd come out to see her. She wants us to come out till the end of August."

Vigdís gave a surprised look. Then Justin Bieber came on the radio, and Páll swore in Icelandic and changed it back to the metal station.

"We'd have to take time off work," Vigdís said, "and I don't know if we can afford that -"

"I was thinking," Páll said, "we *could* afford it if we rented this place out for that period of time."

"Oh jæja, you guys should totally do that," Sören chimed in. "It's gonna be peak tourist season, you guys could rent on Airbnb."

"I suppose that would be OK," Vigdís said. "I don't really like the idea of strange people sleeping in my bed and whatever, but I'll live."

"So it looks like you guys are gonna have new neighbors in a week, after I let my boss know and finally ask for that vacation time I haven't been taking. It'll just be till August, but." Páll scratched his head.

"Keep an eye on them," Vigdís told Sören and Dooku. "Make sure they're not stealing stuff, throwing wild parties, that kind of thing."

"We can do that," Dooku said.

"You ever been abroad?" Sören asked the kids.

They shook their heads.

"Where does your mother live?" Sören asked Páll.

"She lives in Minnesota. Her husband is a Swedish American. Nice fella. He's divorced and has a lot of kids, I've never met any of my stepbrothers and stepsisters so this'll be something new for me too," Páll said.

"I hope the trip goes well and that your mother pulls through," Dooku told him.

"*Takk*, mate."

Sören smirked. "I wonder who we're gonna get as new neighbors while you guys are away."

The radio launched into a Knights of Ren song, and Vigdís cringed and put it back on the pop station. "None of that," she said.

A Lady Gaga song was already in progress:

You know that I love you boy
Hot like Mexico, rejoice
At this point I gotta choose
Nothing to lose

Don't call my name
Don't call my name, Alejandro

Sören drove the knife into his steak, hard. Everyone at the table looked at him, and Sören flushed and said, "Sorry, muscle spasm."

He tried to not cringe as the song went on, nibbling on his food. Things went back to normal, or at least they did for everyone but Dooku, who gave him a look across the table. Dooku knew better.

Dooku had the same gifts Sören did - telepathy and empathy, being able to move objects without touching them, strong intuition. Dooku called it "the Force", a term he'd learned from an old mentor. Dooku was the first person that Sören had ever met to be open with him about his gifts, and the first person outside his siblings and cousin with whom Sören could be open in turn - indeed, the friendship that had blossomed into a relationship had started when Sören, having an anxiety attack at an art exhibit, turned on a water faucet without touching it in a public bathroom.

Sören had never talked about Alejandro to Dooku, except once, just before he and Dooku had broken up for a few months in early 2018. *"My longest-term relationship was with a closeted gay man - a Brazilian, named Alejandro, a musician - who eventually chose a 'normal' life, over me. He wasn't even in love with the girl he married, he just did it to please his family."*

But Dooku didn't forget things, and he could tell across their Force bond that the song was upsetting Sören. And Sören was getting aggravated with himself for even feeling that sting, again, five years later. Alejandro had been the first great love of Sören's life, and Dooku the second, and Sören knew logically that when a person had such an intense relationship, there would be grief when it was over, but the glimmer of memory was like a

rude slap in the face, putting a damper on the day that had been going so well.

After dinner the adults relaxed with some Brennivín, Auli getting lots of pettings, and finally, Sören drove the jeep home, with Dooku sitting in the passenger seat. They were quiet on the short drive home, and quiet as they got in. Predictably, Snúður snubbed Sören, and Sören started to undress, taking a hot shower by himself to help unwind.

In the shower, "Alejandro" started playing in Sören's head, and Sören leaned against the shower wall, trying not to cry. He had tried to forget, and indeed it had felt like time had healed his wounds. Except not really. The kind of love they'd shared, right up until the end, was not the sort of thing to be dismissed so easily.

I hope you're OK, wherever you are.

Sören got out of the shower and put on his red plaid pajamas. Dooku was already in his black silk pajamas, typing on his laptop, and when he saw Sören standing there, they just looked at each other for a moment and then Dooku patted the seat next to him.

He put his arm around Sören, who leaned on him. "Do you want to talk about it?"

"I don't know what there is to talk about."

Dooku took a deep breath. "Well, you've never actually shared much about that part of your life to me. We've been pretty open about other things, but..." He pet Sören's curls and kissed the top of his head, then cupped Sören's chin and looked into his eyes. "Was he abusive like Justin?"

"Oh no. Not at all." Sören sighed. "Quite the opposite. We had four, almost five, wonderful years." Sören ran a nervous hand through his curls. "I would have married him if he'd asked me to." His eyes met Dooku's again. "In many ways, what we have now... was made possible by my relationship with him. He was a lot like you were when we met - sad, reserved. But like you, past that reserve there was richness and depth. So much to him. He was very elegant. Very passionate and sensual. He made me a better lover." Sören's face burned. "I'm, ah, sorry. I shouldn't talk about my past sexual history -"

Dooku waved his hand dismissively. "It's fine. I'm aware you had lovers prior to me. It's not something I can fault you for."

"He was touch-starved, like you were." Sören took Dooku's hands and kissed them. "He was very, very private about his life, and probably for good reason - I think his family was involved in some kind of South American organized crime ring or military junta or something like that - but what did get out, here and there, was tragic. There was that sense from him that he felt absolutely alone in the world and had so many regrets... just like you did when we met."

"You have a type, apparently."

Sören gave a throaty laugh. "I suppose so." He got more serious. "You sure you're not mad...?"

"No, not at all." Dooku patted him. "To the contrary, I'm glad you're finally talking about what was clearly such an important period of time for you."

"I was absolutely devastated when he broke up with me," Sören said. "There was about a year, after we'd broken up, that I just. Oh god." Sören felt like he was crossing into

dangerous waters, and maybe should shut up, but Dooku gave him the go on gesture. "I started partying. Lots of one-night-stands. I played it safe, I got tested. You and Alejandro and Justin have been the only three guys I've ever barebacked with."

"I see."

"But, I was also, ah, doing a lot of E. Which as it turns out, wasn't great for my mental health when I'd come down from it. I was getting more depressed, and I wasn't on my meds then so I could roll. When the E would drop off, I was even having sleep paralysis and night terrors and shit like that."

"Oh my."

"Já. My life was straight out of a song by The Weeknd, OK?" Sören laughed bitterly; Dooku nodded, his musical horizons having been expanded by his younger partner. "It's why I left Reykjavik. I needed to get out of that scene. Someone helped me see the light on that. Not that I succeeded entirely, at first, 'cos after awhile I ended up with Justin and *wow*, what an arsehole." Sören looked down, picking at a stray thread on his pajamas. Then he looked back up. "But já, I was bleeding out for awhile, and trying to numb the pain. Some of the best art I ever made in my life was during my relationship with him, and then I couldn't make art anymore, and it was like losing a limb. I started back up again when I left for London, of course, and then I hit a new high in my art, with you. Love inspires me, I think."

Dooku smiled, and stroked Sören's face. Then they just held hands.

"We went traveling a bit," Sören said.

"Oh." They'd visited Romania for a week in April, for Easter, even though neither of them were religious, and Dooku had gotten the sense Sören had been abroad before though not to Romania, but Sören hadn't talked about it then.

"I have some files on my terrabyte drive that I haven't touched in ages if you want to see places I've been?"

"I would, yes."

Sören got up to fetch his drive, and plugged it into his laptop. He waited for it to load, and Snúður hopped up on the couch between them, forgiving Sören for petting a dog. Dooku and Sören skritched and stroked the cat together, rewarded by the deep, rumbly purr, and then the folders loaded. Dooku's eyes widened at how many there were, and Sören knew across their Force bond he was surprised because Sören had been a starving artist when they met, living above a coffee shop in Greenwich with his punk roommate and best friend Frankie.

"Yes, he was loaded," Sören said, confirming what Dooku was wondering. "But I wasn't with him for his money."

"Oh, I know." Dooku squeezed his knee reassuringly. "You're not superficial at all."

"Sometimes I used to *wish* I was? Because being, you know, *like this*, kinda sucks sometimes."

"It kind of sucks a lot of the time," Dooku said, knowing how it was as a fellow deeply empathic Force sensitive.

"Wow, I can't believe you're using words like 'kind of sucks' now." Sören snickered. "I've had quite the effect on you."

Dooku gave him a look of mock annoyance, and Sören kissed the tip of his nose, grinning. Then he turned back to the laptop.

Sören started with a folder entitled "France 2010".

There were a *lot* of pictures of the streets of Paris, as well as French wine country, beaches, art museums, monuments, and lots and lots of pictures of just food. There were quite a few selfies of Sören, who was more baby-faced at twenty-five than he was now at thirty-four, and Sören could tell across their Force bond that Dooku was puzzled there were no pictures of Alejandro as he was going through the gallery.

"He didn't like having his picture taken," Sören said, "but I think there's at least one here."

There were in fact two. One was of Alejandro in a bistro, drinking a cup of tea or coffee, lost in thought as he was composing music in a notebook, somber in a black turtleneck and black chinos. Sören sensed Dooku's surprise at the long dark hair, the almost unearthly beauty, like a Renaissance painting or statue brought to life.

The other was a selfie of Alejandro and Sören, taken from the Eiffel Tower, with a view overlooking Paris in the background. Alejandro was kissing Sören's cheek, and Sören had a bashful and somewhat mischievous grin on his face.

"The two of you looked well together," Dooku said honestly, and Sören could sense across their Force bond that he found Sören's ex aesthetically pleasing.

Sören bit his lower lip, remembering how he'd felt during that trip, which at the time felt like the most romantic thing ever, but Alejandro was to outclass himself in subsequent years.

There were over two hundred pictures just in the France folder, and Sören had only been there for a week. "Netherlands 2012" was two weeks and three times as many pictures. It became apparent that Sören was obsessed with the art history there, but also the springtime - a riot of tulips, picturesque fields of windmills and swaying grass under bright blue skies with fluffy clouds. Beaches and the ocean. A picture of Alejandro playing guitar, a glove on his right hand. A picture of Alejandro composing in a notebook, in a lush tulip garden, looking out of place amid the explosion of color. More selfies of Sören, including a few of Sören toking up in Amsterdam, glassy-eyed, an expression on his face that Sören would call "derpy".

Towards the end of the gallery there was a picture of Sören and Alejandro together. It was from the shoulders up - bare shoulders, and grass underneath them. Alejandro was kissing Sören's neck, and Sören's full lips were wrapped around the long, slender, graceful-looking index and middle fingers of Alejandro's left hand. They were looking into each other's eyes, completely lost in each other.

Sören twinged, remembering the way they'd been laying in the grass under the big sky, laughing together - for once, the constant weight of darkness around Alejandro was lifted and Sören could feel the *joy* past his shielding, a joy he never thought he'd feel again. They made love right there, no one to see them, and not caring if they were seen.

Sören remembered the U2 song playing as they drove back

Gloria in te domine
Gloria exultate
Oh Lord, if I had anything
Anything at all, I'd give it to you

and the way Alejandro looked at him, love shining in those grey eyes, continuing to radiate quiet joy, as if he had written the song himself about what he was feeling then.

It was like being stabbed, thinking about all of that again. His eyes misted.

Across their Force bond was a very different feeling; Sören heard the sharp intake of breath. Even though the picture was only from the shoulders up, Sören realized that Dooku found the sight of them arousing, more erotic than anything more overtly pornographic. It was the beauty of the two men, the sensuality between them, the way they looked at each other, so much said in that hungry gaze.

It was the same way Sören and Dooku looked at each other, and were looking at each other now, as Dooku reached out for him, feeling Sören's pain in their bond, wanting to comfort him, and Sören reached back to the old man who was like the sea, able to keep his fire from consuming him completely.

"I'll, ah." Sören closed out the folder and leaned on Dooku. "Show you the rest another time."

Dooku squeezed his hand, pet him, kissed his forehead tenderly.

"It's funny," Sören said, "not funny ha-ha I mean, but... I don't hate him anymore. I hated him for breaking my heart, and yes I suppose I'm still angry and hurt, but I just feel very, very sad for him. I wish him well."

Their eyes met, and Dooku stroked his face. "You have a kind heart."

"It's yours."

Dooku leaned in and kissed him, and Sören kissed him back, hard, one hand stroking the white chest hair visible through the V-neck of his pajama top, the other hand stroking the white beard. He was so deliciously *male*, and Sören loved touching him, and could feel that he in turn loved being touched, having been so alone for so long, deprived of warmth. Here was heat, here was life, fire crashing into cold water and making steam.

A few kisses later, Sören stood up in a rush, and hurried to the bathroom. He cleaned up, preparing himself, and when he came out of the bathroom, Dooku was standing there, waiting. He picked Sören up off the floor, carrying him to the bed like he weighed nothing. Once Sören was put on the bed, Dooku used the Force to pull off Sören's pajama bottoms, smiling at finding Sören hard for him. Sören ogled appreciatively as Dooku took off his own pajama top and then dropped the trousers, standing proudly erect, already leaking precum. Sören's hands started shaking with arousal, fumbling with the buttons on his pajama top, and Dooku climbed on the bed and over him, his fingers undoing the buttons, kissing each inch of flesh exposed. As he pulled back the open shirt, revealing Sören's pierced nipples, he took one into his mouth, making Sören clutch him, arching, crying out.

Dooku reclined against the pile of pillows on their bed, pulling Sören onto his lap. His arms wrapped around Sören as the younger man leaned in for a kiss, running his hands

over Dooku's chest, fingers playing with the chest hair, rubbing nipples into hard peaks. Dooku took their cocks together into his hand, stroking slowly, and Sören groaned, kissing Dooku's neck, cock throbbing at the guttural noise Dooku made at the work of his lips and tongue.

Sören used the Force to bring over their bottle of lube, and used the Force to pour it over their cocks. The sight of their cocks pressed together, glistening, drove Sören out of his mind with lust, and he tried to climb up, desperate to take his husband's cock, but the look in Dooku's eyes held him in place, before Dooku nipped Sören's lower lip with a little growl. "Not yet, sweetheart," he rasped.

With slick fingers, the fingers of Dooku's other hand pushed into Sören, making Sören moan as he found the prostate, fingers swirling, stroking. The past was forgotten and all that mattered was the haze of pleasure, the hungry need to mate with the man he'd given his heart to, who'd been so worthy of that trust, the two of them careful with each other, broken pieces fitting together and creating a new work of art. Sören's fingers continued to play with the chest hair and soon Sören was licking it, grooming it with his tongue, animal heat in his eyes as Dooku moaned, breathing harder, stroking their cocks faster.

A few deep kisses later, Dooku kissed and nibbled his neck, and ground out, "Now, love."

Sören straddled his hips and sank down on his cock. He watched Dooku watching him, feeling that delicious frisson at the sight of his cock going in, claiming him, possessing him. Sören loved the sensation of completion, fullness, and as he rocked his hips, the cock plunging in and out, he cried out at the slight curve of the older man's cock hitting him just the right way, like they were built for each other.

"Oh, Nico," Sören gasped.

"Yes, my love." They kissed, and Dooku grabbed Sören's hips, rolling his own underneath him as Sören rode.

It wasn't long until Sören was riding him hard, holding onto him for dear life, making little whimpers, panting, as Dooku's cock hit that note over and over again, undoing him, making everything all right again. Feeling the lust across their Force bond made it that much better - lust and tenderness, Dooku's need to soothe and give Sören whatever he could, gentle with his vulnerability. They kissed and their hands wandered over each other, and when Dooku's hand playfully slapped Sören's ass, he moaned, almost coming from that. Inflamed, he rode harder, making the bed rock against the wall, and Dooku gripped him harder and thrust beneath him, driving into him mercilessly, Sören's cries louder and louder.

"So beautiful." Dooku's hands roamed up from Sören's hips, to play with the taut pierced nipples, before seizing one with his mouth. Sören screamed and bucked wildly, their mouths meeting for a hungry kiss.

Then Dooku grabbed Sören and pushed him onto his back, and started to slow down, kissing him deeply, kissing Sören's neck as Sören whined, trembling with how bad he needed to come, but *Force* he loved to be teased like this, edged. There was a wicked look in Dooku's eyes as he feasted on Sören's nipples, licking and suckling them hard, making Sören writhe and pant, clawing his back, begging "Please... oh god, please..."

"Mmmmm." Dooku kissed and licked Sören's neck. "Please what, *elskan*?"

"Fuck me hard, make me come..."

Dooku's finger idly traced around the aching nub of Sören's nipple, before rubbing over it, pinching. "Hmmm, I'll think about it." He grinned, and kissed Sören hard, with Sören screaming into the kiss, clawing his back again.

The edging intensified, with Dooku stroking Sören's cock, gently cupping and rubbing his balls. Sören thrashed around, not able to make words, lost in pure animal need. Again and again he felt on the verge of orgasm and just before he could come, Dooku sensed it across their Force bond and changed the pace, or focused on another part of Sören's body. Sören could feel how hard Dooku was holding back, keeping himself in check, also aching to come but wanting to make this damn good for his beloved, taking pleasure in Sören's pleasure. Sören could feel in those moments how deeply Dooku loved him, and how much he loved his man, how much they *belonged*, giving each other life again.

Sören had been used and discarded by so many people, starting with the rejection from his guardians as a child. There was none of that here. Only love. Only acceptance. Only trust.

"I'm here," Dooku husked, in between kisses at Sören's neck, his shoulder. "I'm right here, sweetheart. I'm here. Right here."

"Don't leave me." The words bubbled out before Sören could stop them, the deepest wounds he held, needing his touch.

Dooku's words were punctuated with his thrusts, harder now, giving Sören the harder fucking he'd been begging for. "I will never. Ever. *Ever.* Leave you. Never. I love you. With all that I am, I love you."

"I love you so, so much." Sören wrapped his arms and legs around him, and kissed him hard.

Dooku grabbed Sören's wrists and pinned him down, pounding him into the mattress as Sören howled "Yes yes yes *yesyesyes*," matching his rhythm, his entire body shaking, *right there*. Dooku kissed him hard again, and then growled, "Come for me."

"*Nico!*" Sören screamed as he erupted, blasting his seed all over Dooku's chest, the release of pleasure so intense it almost hurt. One, two, three thrusts and Dooku collapsed onto him with a cry, trembling, gasping for breath as he spent into Sören, also coming hard. Sören moaned as he felt Dooku shooting into him, claiming him with the evidence of their tryst.

They nuzzled, breathing each other's breath, before kissing again, taking each other's hands. Then Sören snuggled into his chest, comforted by the warm fur, and the feel of Dooku's arms around him, his hands petting his curls. Their legs entwined, and Sören gave a deep sigh of contentment. Things had fallen apart, years ago, but other things had come together, and he was glad to be here now, sharing his life with this man. Melting in his arms.

It's all good now.

—

Anchorage, Alaska

It was a quiet afternoon at Turn Over A New Leaf, an independent bookstore in downtown Anchorage. Mark Lowry nursed a mug of tea while Depeche Mode played in the background, hoping that it would stay quiet. He didn't really need the business, as he'd been sitting on various investments managed through handlers to provide a veil of anonymity for some time. But the bookstore allowed him a chance to pass as normal in the community without too many intrusions, and it was somewhat comforting to be surrounded by books.

Since he had left Reykjavik for Alaska five years ago, Alejandro Magalhães had become Mark Lowry. Alejandro was a Brazilian, and he'd learned fluent Portuguese to play the part. Mark Lowry was - at least here, in Anchorage; he'd re-used the name from before - an American, originally from Connecticut if people asked, with a careful New England accent. Alejandro had been a romantic, gothic type, dressing in flowing shirts and leather pants, playing up the part of an ethereal-shoegaze musician. Mark wore sweaters and khakis or jeans and wire-rim glasses that he didn't need, though the long hair remained the same - his vanity, and a convenient way of hiding his ears.

Mark Lowry was also not getting involved with anyone ever again, the mistake Alejandro had made. There were frequent customers to the bookstore who he was fond of, if he could rightly call them friends or at least friendly acquaintances, but nobody he was close to. He couldn't allow himself that.

The chimes at the door jingled, and Maglor watched as a customer strolled in, a tall, bald man in jeans and a hooded sweatshirt. He looked around and then his eyes focused on Maglor, who brushed a strand of dark hair out of his eyes and cleared his throat. "May I help you?" he asked.

"Yeah, uh." The man laughed nervously. "My daughter's birthday is coming up and she, like, really loves books, and I have no idea what to get her."

"How old will she be?"

"Thirteen."

Maglor led him to the YA literature section, and at the man's confusion, Maglor showcased a few recommendations of his, with an off-the-cuff synopsis of what they were about. Then he went back to his counter, where his tea was now cold. He sighed, putting the mug back in the microwave on the small table behind him.

When his tea was finished, the man approached with two books, plus a set of butterfly stationary. "Cash or credit?" Maglor asked, the same routine as always.

"Credit." The man pulled out his wallet and handed over the card.

As Maglor was handing the card back, he glanced down at the name, routine habit - JAMES SORENSON.

Maglor felt the pit of his stomach fall, and the next few minutes passed in a haze. On some level he was aware of the customer signing his credit stub and the purchases going

in a bag and the customer walking back out, and on some level Maglor wasn't there anymore, thoughts blurred, pain rushing up from the core of his being like a dormant volcano finally exploding.

When the man was gone, Maglor heard himself inhale sharply, closing his eyes.*Sören.* It had been five years and the wound was still raw. Of course, he'd been covering it up. Shutting it out, trying to not think about it. He had *very deliberately* closed himself to Sören's place in the Song, not wanting to hear him anymore. It hurt too much.

But now, not being able to help it, he brushed the notes. There was the violet and green shimmering fire, like the aurora. He was still alive.

Then he felt an all-too-familiar presence, rich gold, the memory of trees. Before he could probe the Song further, to sense what else was there, he ripped himself away from those notes. Maglor *threw* the empty tea mug and it shattered, right where customers would need to walk to get into the store.

Ingwion, his distant kinsman - his uncle Fingolfin and Finarfin's cousin, the brother to Anairë and son of Indis's brother Ingwë – who was also an ex-lover, had somehow found his beloved Sören. *Taken him.*

Maglor's jaw set. The explosion of throwing the tea mug did nothing to calm the murderous rage coursing in his veins. As Maglor was on his knees sweeping up the mess with a dustpan, the door chimed again. Maglor looked up, and the brush fell out of his hand, clattering loudly to the floor.

There were no coincidences. Ingwion was there, in the flesh, wearing a black trenchcoat. He was glamouring the true length of his golden hair, and his hair was hiding the pointy tips of his ears, but it was otherwise unmistakably him. “I do love to see you on your knees, Macalaurë.”

“*Get out.*"

Ingwion laughed. "Is that any way to talk to an old friend?"

"We. Are. Not. Friends." Maglor's nostrils flared and he got up, taking the dustpan to the trash and emptying it, glaring at Ingwion the entire time. "I am *not* glad to see you.”

Ingwion's voice softened, a sensual caress. "Oh, I think one*part* of you *is* glad to see me."

Maglor hated that he was right, feeling the stirring in his loins, the memories racing through his mind's eye of the way Ingwion had found him wounded during the War of Wrath, had nursed him back to health... had shared passion with him night after night. Maglor had been lonely, soul-sick, and Ingwion had rekindled that fire just in time, before it could go out. But the Oath meant that Maglor could not rest forever, even as he'd found solace and passion with Ingwion – he had to pursue the Silmarils. He bade Ingwion come with him, and Ingwion would not, which felt like a deep betrayal, as deep as the wounds he had been dealt in war. Maglor had cursed his name, cursed his entire House.

Now he was standing here, and Maglor would have thrown the cash register at him if he could, but that would cause a mess, and possibly a scene if anyone else came in. He folded his arms, as much to keep them from throwing anything else as it was a defensive posture. "What do you want."

Ingwion calmly strode to the counter and set down a set of legal documents, and a set of airline tickets. Maglor read on the documents that the entire plaza where Turn Over A New Leaf was situated was now under the ownership of one Ingmar Borovkov, and there was a termination of the rental agreement for his bookstore. Then he snatched up the tickets and looked at them. Alaska Airlines, Anchorage to Seattle. British Airways, Seattle to London.

IcelandAir, London to Reykjavik.

"What kind of game is this?" Maglor snarled. "I am not going anywhere with*you.*"

"Yes, you will." Ingwion laughed. "I have a gift for you."

–

For most of the long flight, which included multiple layovers, Maglor avoided Ingwion as much as possible. Finally on the last leg of the trip, flying from London to Reykjavik, Maglor broke the silence and simply asked, “Why?”

“Why do you ask questions you already know the answer to?” Ingwion took a sip of champagne – they were flying first-class, and there was plenty of leg room, the two facing each other, and now Ingwion poured Maglor a glass of champagne from the bottle and handed it to him.

“I don't, actually, know the answer. I can guess, but I'd rather hear it from you.” Maglor eyed the drink warily before he took a sip. It was less about accepting Ingwion's gesture of hospitality, and more that he knew whatever Ingwion told him, he was probably going to need a fucking drink.

“I am taking you to see Sören, of course.”

“That raises more questions than answers. How did you know he and I...”

“I have seen things,” Ingwion said. “There are more ways to know what's going on than the palantir.”

“If you knew he and I were together, then you must also know he and I have been finished for five years now. I'm not sure that seeing him would benefit either one of us. Rather like ripping open an old wound.”

“I would disagree with that,” Ingwion said. His voice softened as he said, “I think that wound has been festering, for both of you. It is time to lance the wound and clean it.”

“By what... forcing me to see him? Forcing him to see me? If you think I wasn't happy to see you, after all this time, I did not even love you the way Sören loved me. A volcano has nothing on an Icelander's temper. Or at least that Icelander.” A little shiver went through Maglor, thinking of the few times he'd seen Sören get angry – it was glorious. It was so like his father.

Ingwion shrugged. “I know what I know.”

“So what do you know, exactly? I know you fucked him.”

“That's such a crude word for what he and I shared that night. It was more like making love. Though...” Ingwion frowned slightly. “When I found him, he was there to fuck.”

“I... don't follow you.”

“I found him at a gay club in Reykjavik, about a year after you broke up. He was... not well. 'Partying', they call it. Casual sex, recreational drugs...”

Maglor pinched the bridge of his nose and closed his eyes. He knew Sören would have a hard time recovering from the breakup, sensitive and vulnerable as he was, but that was worse than he'd thought.

Ingwion went on. “I had a romp with him... and suggested he go to London for awhile. Get him where he needed to go.”

“So why are we going to Iceland and not staying in London?”

“He moved back to Iceland. He moved back to Akureyri, specifically.”

Maglor's jaw dropped. He knew, of course, that Sören was from Akureyri – he'd been there with Sören several times, including before they were officially an item. He also knew Sören well enough to know that Sören had never wanted to go back to his hometown, that Akureyri held too many bad memories for him. But if Sören had gotten sick of London, then Reykjavik probably felt too much like city.

“He runs an art school there,” Ingwion said. “He lives in Svalbarðseyri with his husband.”

“*Married*. Happily?”

“Yes.”

Maglor would have opened the window and jumped out of the plane if he could. Or thrown Ingwion out of the window. Maglor facepalmed, then rubbed his face. He downed the entire glass of champagne; Ingwion poured him another without being asked. Maglor took a sip, feeling himself scowling. “I don't get it. Why in the Hells do you think he and I need to see each other if he's happily married? Clearly, he's moved on with his life.”

“Being happily married and moving on with one's life are not quite the same thing, Macalaurë. I could argue that maybe Sören's marriage might gain a few happiness points if he could find some healing and closure from what happened with you. Or more.”

“What do you mean, 'or more'? Are you suggesting that Sören cheat on this man? Do you think me that much without *honor* -”

“No,” Ingwion said. “You do realize that people can have open relationships, yes? Just like your parents did.” Ingwion smiled. “Just like you have had, at different points in time.”

Maglor's face burned, remembering his father's appetites... the forbidden passion between Fëanor and Maglor's uncles, later Fëanor and Maglor himself. Maglor and Maedhros. “The Valar condemned it,” Maglor said, swirling the champagne around in his glass. “One man to one woman. And most of our people lived by that Law -”

“But you and I never bought into that.” Ingwion grinned. “I have been with countless men and women over the ages.”

“Not all in Valinor.” Maglor couldn't believe what he was hearing.

“No. I too have lived among Mortals for a very long time now. It's why I can afford all of this.” Ingwion gestured around their first-class seating, the bottle of Cristal in the ice bucket. “Acquiring priceless artifacts over the ages, selling them... quite lucrative.”

“Yes.” Maglor thought of the Stradivarius he'd parted with some time ago, and cringed.

“Anyway...” Ingwion propped himself up on one elbow, looking at Maglor with something almost like amusement. “I don't think Sören hates you as much as you hate me. It would be very interesting indeed to see what happens during our little vacation.”

Maglor shook his head. “If he's as happily married as you say he is, I doubt it -”

“You know as well as I do – better than I do, for I was with him only that one night – how he burns. His heart is too big for just one person. His appetites are too strong for just one person.”

“And if on our vacation, I wreck his marriage, I ruin his life, his hatred is as strong as his love... what then? You will have wasted my time, and I have nothing to go back to in Alaska.”

“You are being unduly pessimistic,” Ingwion said. “I'd like you to... open your mind a bit. Give it a chance. Have a little hope -”

“You dare speak to me of hope,” Maglor growled. The champagne glass crushed in his hand. The scar on his palm was cut and began bleeding. He showed his scarred, bleeding hand to Ingwion. “You don't know what it's been like, all these years. What I've seen. What I've done. What I've felt -”

Ingwion calmly began to apply first aid to Maglor's hand – with a touch of magic to accelerate the healing process. “I do know.”

“You,” Maglor seethed, not wanting to accept his help, not wanting to accept his *touch*, “betrayed me.”

“I was trying to save you from yourself.”

“There was no salvation to be had without the Silmaril!”

“Which of course is why you cast it into the ocean.”

Maglor glared. It took him every ounce of his restraint not to reach across and begin choking Ingwion. He could do it without touching him, just by willing it, but it was more satisfying to do it with his hands. That, however, would cause a scene. Maglor gritted out, “Perhaps if you had gone with me, it would have been easier... less bloody... less painful... to get the Silmarils back. We would have been less alone, it wouldn't have been so...” Maglor couldn't finish the sentence, on the verge of tears as his mind's eye replayed the memory that he'd been replaying every day for eons, casting the Silmaril into the ocean, even as he felt he was letting his father down, betraying him from beyond the grave, by doing so.

“I know,” Ingwion said, meeting his eyes. “I know. In hindsight... I should have gone with you. I should have helped you. Maybe Nelya would still be alive if I had.”

Maglor's eyes widened. His mouth opened, but no words came out. There were no words

at all to reply to this, not knowing how to even feel about the confession being made, whether he should be grateful or angry.

“And that is why I'm helping you now,” Ingwion said. “I'm not just taking you to find some sort of closure with Sören... but that journey of healing will also help you get back the Silmarils.”

Maglor was even more confused now than when this conversation had begun. And he felt very unsettled, like everything he knew about reality, the way the world worked, was about to get turned on its head. “How?”

Ingwion gave him a cryptic little smile and sipped his champagne. “I'm afraid that's something you're going to have to figure out on your own, but hopefully it won't be too hard. All the clues are right there in front of you.”

“They're *not*,” Maglor protested, and Ingwion just laughed. Before Maglor could press him for more information – or just yell at him about sending him on some sort of wild goose chase – a voice came over the intercom.

“*Please fasten your seatbelts.*”

Maglor looked out the window at the Arctic Sea, and wondered how the ancient Vikings felt when they saw Iceland from their ships for the first time, all the promise – and hidden danger – of a new land. Maglor imagined he was feeling something similar now, even though it was not his first time in Iceland. He fastened his seatbelt and prepared for the landing.

Chapter 7

A week later, Vigdís, Páll, Sólveig and Sigurjón stopped at Sören and Dooku's cabin in the late morning, before they'd be flying out of Akureyri to Reykjavik, and then from Reykjavik to the United States. They had just given a copy of the keys to the renters, and had brunch with Sören and Dooku. They were leaving their sheepdog Auli behind at the cottage because of the travel restrictions on pets, with an agreement made with their renters that included care and feeding instructions, and still wanted Sören and Dooku to check in on the dog.

When brunch was over and Sören and Dooku went back to the cabin, they looked down the street as they were pulling in, seeing two cars parked at the cottage, a Bentley and a Jaguar. Sören let out a low whistle.

"Shall we greet our new neighbors?" Dooku asked.

Sören looked at the time and shook his head. "I gotta bounce," he said. He felt Dooku's cringe at the use of slang and cackled, patting him. "I have a class to teach literally as fast as I can get back into town." He ran a nervous hand through his curls. "I really should have asked you to drop me off at the studio while we were in town but I wasn't thinking."

Dooku gave a small, smug smile. "You're still recovering from this morning?"

Sören nodded, with a grin that lit up his whole face. "That was an amazing blowjob." Sören snickered. "I still can't believe you never gave head before me. You're a fucking pro."

"I learned from the best." Dooku gave him a soft, sweet kiss. They could still taste each other's cum after breakfast, and Sören made a little purring noise at the mingled flavors.

"Anyway," Sören said, getting out of Dooku's car and into his own jeep, "you could go say hi to the new people?"

Dooku shook his head. "I'll wait until you get back, if you don't mind."

Sören patted him again - Dooku was shy and introverted, it was a miracle he'd warmed to Vigdís and Páll like he did. It was something Sören sort of understood, he was a bit more outgoing than Dooku but had some degree of anxiety around new people. "I don't mind at all, I understand, *elskan*."

"Thank you for understanding." Dooku kissed Sören's hand.

"Just... remember that I work kinda late tonight." Sören's last class of the evening was six PM, an adult ceramics class. There was a small shed outside the studio building where Sören had a kiln set up, though he'd likely be doing the firings over the weekend. "I should be back at a decent enough hour but I'll want to have dinner and relax for a bit. Hopefully our new neighbors don't go to bed really early."

"Hopefully not."

Sören gave Dooku a quick kiss, and then he was off.

–

Although Vigdís and Páll's cottage was only fifteen minutes away on foot, and it was still daylight outside and Sören and Dooku were in good shape, they opted to take Sören's jeep down the street and not delay things any further. Dooku had a plate of blueberry scones he'd baked for the occasion, carefully resting on his lap.

Both the Bentley and the Jaguar were in front of the cottage, and the lights were on, indicating that their new neighbors were probably still awake and thus it wasn't completely horrible of them to be showing up at this hour. Sören and Dooku got out of the jeep, and Sören walked ahead of Dooku, giving a few cautious knocks at the door.

After a minute, the door opened a crack, and then opened all the way. Auli came bounding over, barking excitedly, and Sören reached down to pet him, and when he looked up he gasped.

"Ingmar?"

Even though they had only encountered each other the one time and that had been four years ago, it was a night to remember, one that permanently etched the light blue eyes, those full, sensuous lips, the lovely face, the long golden blond hair and the tall, lithe body into Sören's memory.

Ingmar smiled. "Sören."

"You- you remember my name." Sören couldn't believe it, and his face lit up.

"And you remember mine." He laughed softly. "I daresay we made an impression on each other."

Dooku looked at Ingmar awkwardly, and then at Sören. "You two know each other?"

Sören looked down at his Doc Martens, shifting his weight from one foot to the other.*This will be an interesting conversation later.* "Jæja, we, uh, met briefly four years ago."

"All too briefly," Ingmar said, his words in a tone almost like a caress, "but it was memorable."

"Indeed it was." Sören's face burned, and he felt himself getting hard thinking about it - which across their Force bond told Dooku quite a lot.

I see, Dooku spoke into Sören's mind.

Sören put his hand on Dooku's shoulder. "Ingmar, this is my husband, Nicolae Dooku."

Dooku proferred the plate of scones. "We live down the street, and wanted to say hello and that you can let us know if you need anything. I'm retired, and my husband works in town but usually has mornings and evenings free."

"Thank you for that," Ingmar said, taking the scones with one hand, and keeping a still-excited, panting Auli under control with the other. "You're not from around here?"

"London," Dooku said. "I've been living out here since May-June 2018. I'll have citizenship in another two years."

Ingmar gave a little cryptic smile, but though he was shielded, Sören knew what it was about.

"Thank you again," Ingmar said. "I'd offer to have you both come in for tea, but my companion called it a night fairly early and I don't want to disturb them."

"I understand," Sören said. "I'm sorry we came here so late, I've had a bit of a long day."

"It would be nice to get together sometime soon, perhaps," Ingmar said.

"Yes, it would." Sören nodded. "Maybe stop by this weekend and we can plan something!" Then he took Dooku's arm. "Enjoy the rest of your evening, Ingmar. It's good to see you again!" He waved with his free hand as they headed back to the jeep.

They said nothing in the jeep on the short drive back - Sören could tell Dooku was sitting with the knowledge that Sören and Ingmar knew each other in the biblical sense, and he was torn between feeling a bit awkward about it and feeling a strange sense of arousal at Sören's mental movies of the event.

Finally, once they were back in the cabin, Sören said, "Yes, Ingmar and I shagged once."

"It was a one-night stand and you managed to remember each other's names, so I imagine -"

Sören had him sit down, and sat in the rocking chair across from the couch. "So a week ago I told you about how I kind of hit bottom after Alejandro and I broke up." It hurt to even say his name. "I was having a lot of promiscuous, and frequently anonymous, sex, doing a lot of E. Giving fucks, and not giving a fuck at the same time." A bitter smile. "They were mostly quick, we got our rocks off, we were done, that was the end of it. Ingmar was... the exception to that."

Sören sat back in the rocking chair, rocking slowly. "Do you remember how we experimented with you tying me up on Valentine's Day?"

"...Yes."

"That wasn't my first time being bound." Sören let Dooku see more of that encounter across their bond. "I actually let Ingmar restrain me, even though I normally wouldn't do such a thing with strangers, and after an incident with Justin I didn't go there again until you. Anyway... he took care of me that night, when I was in a lot of pain. He was the first guy to make me actually feel *special* after Alejandro. I felt safe with him. Enough that when it was over, I let him know what was troubling me, and he told me I should get out of Reykjavik and move to the UK. So in a way, Ingmar is directly responsible for why you and I met - that smile he made when you said you're from London, he knows I met you because of that advice. I owe him a debt of gratitude." Sören leaned and took Dooku's hands. "I don't, however, want to make things awkward with you."

"I think I'm OK with it," Dooku said, nodding. "You've had an extensive, er, history, and it wouldn't be fair of me to ask you to not have any contact with anyone you'd ever be intimate with, or then you'd be blocking contact with a number of people, I imagine."

Sören laughed, and squeezed his hands.

Then Dooku continued, "But also..." He squeezed Sören's hands back. "I'm glad you had that." He kissed Sören's hands. "This Ingmar character took care of something that is precious to me, and helped it get on its way to me. So I, too, am grateful. I don't see the harm in being neighborly."

"Good." Sören got up from the rocking chair and threw his arms around Dooku. "That's very mature of you."

"I would hope to have a mature response to things at my age." Dooku chuckled. Then he

frowned. "There was one time when I wasn't particularly reasonable... in the months you and I were apart, last year, I met a gentleman named Mace. We were set up by Qui-Gon, but nothing happened between us, no interest on either side, and Qui told me later he did it to make me realize I was too hung up on you. Anyway... Mace told me that one of his most memorable Grindr experiences was with a young man named Sören, with a Prince Albert piercing. There weren't too many people in the Greenwich area fitting that description -"

"Oh *dear god.*" Sören facepalmed, laughing. "Jæja, that was one of the very last one-night-stands I had, actually."

"And I was still raw in my grief from having pushed you away, and even though this encounter with you apparently happened well before you and I ever met, I ended up lashing out. No harm was done, but I was very ashamed of my response later. I'm not normally *like that.* Yet it was, as I said, from a place of grief. I wasn't thinking rationally. I'll admit to being *protective* of you - this Justin you were involved with, my path had better never cross with his. Ingmar, on the other hand... I don't see the point in resentment."

"I appreciate that." Sören hugged him again. "And I'm glad you have that kind of confidence in my love for you. I don't ever want to do anything that hurts you."

"I know." Dooku got up from the couch, and took Sören's face in his hands, kissing him.

Soon Sören and Dooku were in bed, making slow, sweet love, with Sören on his back, Dooku on top of him, Sören's arms and legs wrapped around him, holding his husband with all of him, lost in a silken haze of desire.

Towards the end, Sören felt overcome with emotion. "I love you so much," Sören whispered, as Dooku kissed his neck, knowing just how he liked it, moving faster inside him. "I love you so, so much. I'm so glad I found you."

Dooku kissed him deeply and took his hands, then his lips grazed Sören's jaw and he husked, "Come for me."

Sören did, screaming loud enough he hoped the neighbors didn't hear. Gratified by the sight and sound of his beloved's climax, feeling Sören pulse around him, Dooku gave into his own release, and Sören purred as he felt it across their Force bond, amplifying his own.

They snuggled, and Snúður hopped up on the bed to cuddle near them, his paws kneading Sören.

Life has a funny way of working out, Sören thought to himself, thinking of the painting that was hanging in Logifugl Listaskóli, the one he'd made as a tribute to Ingmar's advice, the forest changing from winter to spring. Thinking of the forest, he drifted off to sleep.

He dreamed of his mother, for the first time in years. Usually when she came to him, it was as he remembered her before her death - T-shirt and jeans, goofy, playful. She was all dignity now, dressed like a princess, bathed in light. *There is a storm coming, child.* Visions of fire, a drop of blood, the sea, scrolls in an alphabet he didn't understand, a sword.

Chapter 8

At the sound of their alarm the next morning, Sören and Dooku groaned, not wanting to get out of their warm, cozy bed, snuggled up together. Dooku reached to turn off the alarm and then he put his arm back around Sören, who nuzzled his chest hair.

"I wish I could stay in bed with you all day," Sören said, "but I have a couple classes."

Dooku nodded. He kissed Sören's forehead, and then tilted Sören's chin up and kissed his lips. Soon the kiss deepened, their tongues swirling, and the two men hardened right up.

"You may not be able to stay in bed with me all day," Dooku said between kisses, "but we could get your day off to the proper start."

Sören grinned, and kissed him back. "Mmmm, what do you have in mind?"

Kissing passionately, laying on their sides, they held each other, cocks rubbing together. Sören ran his fingers through the hair on Dooku's chest and arms and thighs, played with his nipples, leaned in to kiss them, until Dooku rolled Sören onto his back and lavished kisses all over Sören's body, leaving Sören breathless, arching to him. Dooku sucked Sören's cock until he was just about to come, then teasingly withdrew purchase from his mouth, and licked and nibbled Sören's thighs, making Sören howl with frustration.

"Please..."

Dooku looked up with a smug little smile. "Please what, love?"

"Please..." Sören gave a whimper. "I need it in me so bad..."

Dooku's response was to stick his tongue in Sören's ass, finding the prostate right away, teasing further with slow, deliberate lashes of his tongue. Sören thrashed and screamed. "Dammit, Nico... I said I need it in me..."

Dooku couldn't resist, pausing his licking for a moment. "Yes, you said 'it'. You didn't say 'what.'" He resumed licking, a little faster than before, but still keeping Sören's orgasm just out of reach, sharpening the edge.

Sören's balls tightened, his cock aching as Dooku's tongue worked its magic on that sweet spot inside him. "Nico... please... give me your cock... fuck me..."

"Mmmmm." Dooku paused again. "I'll think about it." There was a mischievous gleam in his dark eyes as he continued lapping away in Sören's channel, building Sören's tension higher and higher, until Sören was almost sobbing, going out of his mind with need.

Finally Dooku relented, taking a few licks at the head of Sören's cock to taste his precum, and he came up to kiss Sören, retrieving their lube and readying Sören with slick fingers. At last he pushed inside Sören, who panted "yes, yes", and when he was all the way in he paused, the two of them looking into each other's eyes. Dooku stroked Sören's face and kissed him deeply, and then propped Sören's legs on his shoulders and drove into him with power that would be impressive on a younger man, never mind someone at seventy. Dooku usually liked to take it slow, but every now and again they both needed to *fuck*, needed that hard fucking like animals in rut. Sören loved it, clawing him hard enough to draw blood, crying out "more, more, *fuck* that's so good." He reached down to stroke himself, and Dooku playfully swatted his hand away.

"You're going to come on this cock," Dooku growled.

Sören shuddered, loving it when he got dominant like this. A few minutes later Sören was ready, shaking, making inhuman noises, his eyes wild. Dooku's hand ran over Sören's chest, thumb lazily rubbing a nipple. He pinched it and rasped, "Come for me."

"*Nico!*" Sören spurted all over Dooku's chest and abs, and one more hard thrust was all it took to send Dooku over the edge, groaning "Sören..." as he gave in to his own release, shooting deep inside Sören, who moaned, gratified.

They snuggled some more, savoring the bliss. Sören loved the smile on Dooku's face, especially knowing how sad he was for so many years before they got together, and how sad he'd been in the few months they were apart last year - after Dooku had pushed him away, afraid that he was too old, not wanting to burden Sören with the eventuality of his mortality. But Dooku was not only in excellent condition for his age, likely to live at least another ten to twenty years without too many problems, Sören had made it clear to him that he was more concerned about the quality of their years together than the quantity, reminding Dooku that he could go first, dying young. Life had no guarantees, and they could only take what they were given. Dooku accepted that, and here they were, determined to make the most of every day, living life to the fullest together, in whatever time they would have.

Sören traced the *vegvísir* tattoo that Dooku had gotten on his left wrist on their one-year anniversary in November - the one piece of ink he had, an Icelandic magical stave intended to help the bearer find their way through rough weather - chosen for the symbolism of their love finding a way, against all odds. He brought the wrist up to his lips to kiss, a silent acknowledgment of how grateful he was that they were both here, in this moment, together.

Then Sören looked at the clock and groaned. "I better get my arse in gear, I have a class at quarter after eleven."

"I'll make breakfast."

Sören got up, and put on clothes - a Nine Inch Nails "Pretty Hate Machine" T-shirt, skinny jeans, his usual Doc Martens. He decided to leave his hair down instead of putting it in a man bun, and came over to Dooku, who was staring at a blinking cursor on Word, frowning.

"Muse isn't awake yet, huh?" Sören asked, patting him.

"I think maybe if I get out for a bit it might get the creative juices flowing." Dooku looked at the window near his desk, where Snúður was watching birds and basking in the morning sun. "It's looking like another beautiful day today, the perfect day for a bike ride."

Dooku and Sören both had motorbikes parked behind the cabin, and sometimes went on day trips driving around the Icelandic countryside together, and sometimes Dooku went riding by himself which Sören encouraged because he felt it was important for people in relationships to still do things on their own. "Good," Sören said, nodding. "I agree, today is a great day for that."

"Yes, I think I'll get changed for that now."

Sören's encouragement of Dooku's motorbike riding wasn't simply because it was something fun to do, but the thought of him riding around, looking badass on one always got him aroused, especially now as Dooku changed into a pair of leather pants for riding. Sören let out a little moan as he ogled the way the leather pants hugged the older man's

firm ass.

"Fuck." Sören growled. "I better go before I, uh. Skip out on classes and piss people off."

Dooku smirked. "Have a good afternoon." He gave Sören a quick kiss. "I love you."

"Love you too." Sören grabbed his ass on the way out.

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Sören had two adult classes, one painting and one a crafts class - this week it was starting a papier-mache project that would continue the next few weeks. In between the classes and afterwards, he he went to the kiln to fire pottery from yesterday's ceramics class. Though Sören's primary method of visual art was drawing and painting, he'd learned ceramics in London and developed a taste for the medium of clay as well; his dreams of opening his own art studio for anyone to take classes regardless of ability, just come and have fun, always included a kiln. There was something about the process of transformation by fire that appealed to him.

After the classes were over and he set the kiln for the second firing, making a note to himself to come back in four hours and turn off the kiln, Sören looked at what work he'd showcased on the walls of Logifugl Listaskóli. There was a painting he'd made of his mother, turning her into something like a goddess as a loving tribute - he remembered his mother used to embroider, and here she was working on embroidery, and her sampler was in hyper-saturated colors, the people and animals in them leaping off and coming to life.

He thought about the dream he had last night.

That dream gave him the urge to drive out to the graveyard at Naustahofdi. He stopped first at a store to pick up a bouquet of flowers - white roses with baby's breath. He approached his parents' graves slowly; coming here always made him a bit emotional, feeling leaden, like every step was a walk towards the doom that had claimed them both far too young. He now, at thirty-four, had outlived the ages both his parents were when they died.

When Sören got to his parents' graves, to lay down the roses between them, he noticed that for once, his mother's grave wasn't empty. Someone had left a ceramic vase of fireflower roses, and the jar had a curious eight-pointed star painted onto it, not dissimilar to the flaming star Sören had painted in his first painting, of the phoenixes. "Huh," Sören said as he stooped down. He reached for the roses to see if someone had left a little note tag or anything with them, and then across his mind's eye, a series of images flashed.

A little girl is flying a kite near the Dimmuborgir, and then walks around by herself, exploring.

The girl is screaming, crying hysterically, seeing something that frightens her.

A man, her father, runs to her. He's trying desperately to console her. "Brynhildur. Brynhildur, mammi and pabbi are right here. You're safe. No one's there. No one will hurt you."

Sören stared at the name *Brynhildur* on his mother's grave, wondering what *that* was

about. Even though he'd lived with the Force all his life and had experienced visionary flashes, it was still difficult to tell if this was something legitimate or if this was just his imagination *being you dreamed about her last night, maybe your brain just*wants *you to think there's something going on.*

In the distance, a raven croaked.

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After the visit to the graveyard, thinking about his mother's death, and speculating on how his life would have been different if his parents had lived and he hadn't been raised by his abusive aunt and uncle, Sören was in the mood for more somber music driving back to the cottage, from Akureyri into Svalbarðseyri.

Love, love is a verb
Love is a doing word
Fearless on my breath
Gentle impulsion
Shakes me, makes me lighter
Fearless on my breath
Teardrop on the fire
Fearless on my breath

As the instrumental part of "Teardrop" continued and Sören pulled over his jeep in front of the cottage, he saw Auli being walked on a leash out of the corner of his eye. The sight of Auli always made him smile, the dog's happiness in simple things like walking and playing was infectious.

Then Sören looked up and his smile vanished, his jaw dropped as he saw a face he hadn't seen in years, but would recognize anywhere.

It was Alejandro.

Unmistakably, positively Alejandro, that face haunting his dreams - and, admittedly, occasionally his sexual fantasies - for years. He was dressed in all black, which was typical. A few strands of the dark hair to the middle of his back were blowing in the slight breeze, and the silver-grey eyes met Sören's, holding in recognition.

Alejandro paused in his tracks, and Sören sat there in his jeep in front of his cottage, feeling like he couldn't move, couldn't breathe.

When the song got to the part

Water is my eye
Most faithful mirror

Sören turned off the engine and climbed out of the jeep. Alejandro was still standing there, waiting, and Auli excitedly barked and wagged his tail at Sören.

"Sören," Alejandro called out.

Sören could feel the tightness in his face - that the stunned look he'd had was now a withering glare, the memory of the breakup roaring back to him. His fury was white-hot,

ready to explode, *WHY is he here, how DARE he show up here*, and he opened his mouth again, about to let forth a string of Icelandic expletives that would make a drunken Viking blush. But he couldn't make words, his throat parched, and instead the fire seething within him turned to ice. He silently turned away and proceeded to walk into the cottage, not looking back, quietly closing the door behind him instead of slamming it, as if to show Alejandro *I don't care*, even though he was, in fact, far from indifferent.

Dooku wasn't home yet, which was just as well. Sören flopped down on the couch and for a moment just sat with his face buried in his hands, feeling like he needed to cry, but the tears wouldn't come. He was just in shock.

Sören found himself rocking back and forth, face still in his hands, shaking, feeling like he wasn't entirely there. Snúður gave a meow of concern and hopped up next to Sören, headbutting him and flomping onto him as if to say *it's OK*. Sören absent-mindedly began to rub the cat's belly, soothed by the sound of the deep purring.

It was enough that Sören picked his head up and looked at the time. Being brought back to himself also brought on another wave of rage, but throwing things around the cabin wouldn't accomplish anything, and it would just scare the cat.

He was playing a video game where he got to blow things up and set things on fire when Dooku walked in, looking quietly radiant from his afternoon ride, but then he frowned when he saw his husband obviously in distress. "Sören," he said, walking right over to him. "Are you all right, darling?"

Sören shook his head, and buried his face in Dooku's stomach, as Dooku's strong arms circled around him. "I'm not OK right now, no. I'm not OK at all."

"What happened?"

"I found out who's staying with Ingmar."

Dooku sat down next to Sören, a concerned look on his face, and waited.

"Alejandro," Sören choked out. "My fucking ex."

Dooku's eyebrows shot up. "Do you feel unsafe?" Dooku scowled - something Sören normally found devastatingly sexy. "I shall go over and have a few words -"

"No, I don't feel unsafe. He... he never physically threatened or abused me. This is probably just a coincidence. Just a very. Unfortunate. Coincidence." Yet Sören knew, as a Force sensitive, there were very few coincidences in his life, and he thought it odd that Alejandro would be back here purely by chance, knowing Sören's history with this place. "Even if it's not, I just..." Sören shrugged. "I would have. Married. This. Guy. If he'd asked me to.... and instead he marries some girl he doesn't love, for the wrong reason, and now, five years later, either that's not a thing or he's cheating on her but either way?"

Sören paused his game and began to pace around the cabin, obviously agitated. "HE SHOULD NOT BE UP HERE."

"I can, again, tell him to leave -"

"No. I mean... then Ingmar would leave too, probably, since they're *companions*..." Sören felt ready to spit. "I was looking forward to, you know, maybe getting to be friends with Ingmar? And now that's gonna be, like, really awkward. This is a very small world up here

and my chances of running into him again over the next two months are non-zero and I can't and will not hide in the cabin to avoid him till the end of August. I have art classes to teach. But do I want to run into him? Not particularly, no."

Dooku folded his arms. "As you know, I don't mind telling him to stay away -"

"That's not really gonna solve anything." Sören made a vague hand gesture. "I just. I don't know why he's here. It doesn't make sense."

And yet, deep down, it did. Sören wondered if Alejandro was here to apologize for the way things had happened. To try to seek closure. Sören wondered, bitterly, if Alejandro had found out somehow Sören was married, and now was regretting what he'd given up and was trying to win him back. *As if*, Sören thought with a snort.

Dooku's arms were around him again. "I love you. And I'm here for you. Whatever you need."

Sören swallowed hard and patted him. "I know."

—

When Maglor got in the cottage, Ingwion was sitting at the kitchen table, using a laptop. Auli was let loose, running over to his food and water dishes. Maglor loudly threw his keys on the table and then folded his arms and glared at Ingwion.

After a minute or two Ingwion finally acknowledged his presence, looking up. "Is something wrong?" Ingwion asked mildly, even though he knew perfectly well something was indeed wrong.

"I saw him out there, just now."

"After avoiding him last night." Maglor hadn't been asleep when Sören and Dooku showed up to introduce themselves - as soon as he'd heard the front door, he'd closed the bedroom door and turned off the lights, giving the pretense of sleep.

"I told you this would not work and I was right. Why would it? We have not seen each other in five years. And he is *married.* I do not know what you think this visit will accomplish, but breaking up a marriage does not sit well with me -"

"I have no intention of breaking up anyone's marriage."

"Then why do this? Why torment me like this? I know you told me people can have open marriages but... I don't think his is." Maglor shook his head. "Even if he *was not* married, and even if he was *happy* to see me again - which he very clearly is not... he is*mortal*. The entire reason why I ended things with him five years ago. Why things will not work."

"And yet, you still care." Ingwion met the silver fire of his gaze, and held it, challenging back. "Five years later, your heart is still his."

Maglor let out a hiss of breath and turned away. Before he could stomp off back to his room, Ingwion said, "You have been brought here for a reason. I would like you to give time for that reason to manifest itself."

"I should just leave here now. You shut down my bookstore, true, but I can find somewhere else to be. And surely, you don't have so much money that you can keep shutting me down and dragging me back here."

"I would not, if I were you, underestimate how much money I have, and the scope of what I can do with that money." Ingwion leaned back in his chair. "I will not force you to stay, if you truly feel that things are hopeless. But you could have indeed not come along on this journey at all, you could have run then, and you did not. Something in you wants some kind of resolution, somehow. You know this."

Maglor turned back to Ingwion, and after a moment he slowly stepped toward him, towering over the seated man.

"There is *no* kind of resolution to be had here." Maglor had not raised his voice, and yet it was as if he were shouting, filling the room with its power. "This was over and done a long time ago, and you had no right -"

Ingwion held out his arms, inviting a blow if that was what Maglor felt he wanted to do, not that it would accomplish anything. “You would be surprised what I know. You have seen civilizations rise and fall, you have seen Man go to the stars. Yet I have seen more than even this, things you could not imagine. Why do you question what I think is possible?”

Maglor's jaw set. He continued to stand there, close enough to touch, close enough to strike out if he pleased. He did not. Their eyes locked, and Maglor could feel the heat in their gaze, the flame that had first been lit when he'd fallen in the War of Wrath, literal ages ago.

Ingwion stood, and he reached out, taking Maglor's chin into his hand, finger stroking the sensuous curve of his lower lip. "You are wounded. You are grieving. You are immortal, but not truly *alive*. I am here to preserve that fire in you, now, as I did then."

A flash of rage in Maglor's eyes - the hatred, that he had not been allowed to break. That he had hungered for touch, for release, his deepest need laid bare. He had spent five years aching for Sören, and having him dangled just out of reach like this was a new kind of pain. He looked away, and Ingwion brought that gaze back, fingers trailing down from Maglor's chin to his chest, teasing a nipple through the fabric of the black designer T-shirt he wore.

"I can give you the comfort you need, as you wait."

Maglor's mouth was open, breathing hard, part of him wanting to step back and get away, the rest of him yielding. He was trembling, already erect, remembering those first fevered nights in Ingwion's camp.

"As you wait for a resolution, I can offer you myself." Ingwion leaned in, and claimed Maglor's mouth with his.

Maglor groaned into the kiss, tongue swirling with Ingwion's despite himself, cock throbbing, needing this like life needed to feed on life. He kissed Ingwion back, harder.

"In the dark night of your soul, we can still find light in the darkness." Ingwion took Maglor's hands, and led him towards the bedroom. “We can burn together.”

Maglor had not been with anyone since Sören. As Ingwion undressed him, hands roaming over the chiseled muscles, Maglor could no longer think, only feel, so starved for touch that he was quickly on his back, melting to Ingwion as he lavished kisses over the fevered skin, knowing for a long time now what exactly the son of Fëanor liked, how to

completely debauch him and make him hunger for more. Maglor hated that Ingwion knew him like this, had such power over him - he hated even more that Ingwion had given Sören the same treatment - and tonight he wanted it, *needed* something for the pain, to at least temporarily replace his pain for Sören with a different kind of pain.

Ingwion's clever tongue brushed his nipples, pebbling them, and when he suckled, Maglor arched to him, fisting the long blond hair with a wild cry. Already he was close to the edge, and Ingwion had barely begun. He kissed and licked Maglor's stomach, kissed and nibbled a thigh, before drawing Maglor's cock into his mouth, sucking greedily.

Maglor was so pent up that he expected, and wanted, a quick release. Of course, Ingwion did not give him one, sucking slowly with maddening swirls of his tongue, edging him again and again, visible amusement in the way Maglor writhed and cried out, begging to come, being *denied*. Ingwion kept him on that edge until Maglor could no longer speak at all, almost crying, and then, at last, he took the cock out of his mouth and gave a teasing lick at the precum-slick head. "I want to taste you."

When Maglor's cock was back in his mouth, Maglor let go, flying over the edge, erupting in Ingwion's mouth. Ingwion drank him, savoring like a fine wine, and then came up to kiss Maglor, letting him taste himself. He took their cocks in his hand, stroking them together, readying Maglor to hardness once more.

Between kisses, Ingwion husked, "If you could have your beloved Sören right this moment, what would you do to him?"

Maglor shuddered. It was a particularly cruel form of teasing - he could not, in fact, have Sören, this moment or ever - but that didn't stop his mind from going in that direction, inflamed anew by the memories of the passion he'd shared with Sören, the way they'd become as in tune with each other's bodies as Ingwion knew both of theirs. Indeed, the thought of Sören here with the two of them, the three caressing, writhing and crying out together - a mad delusion, and one he could not help, in his lust... Maglor shuddered again. "Everything."

"We need to start somewhere, so choose."

Maglor grabbed Ingwion's wrists and rolled him onto his back, kissing him hard, like his life depended on that kiss. Maglor's fingers dipped into Ingwion's channel, and at once he regretted that there was not oil or other lubricant at the bedside - he wondered if his landlords kept anything in the drawer - and to his surprise, Ingwion was already slick and stretched, waiting, as if he'd been anticipating this and prepared himself. Thinking about that made Maglor's cock leap, twinging, precum pooling down the shaft. He kissed Ingwion harder, who arched to him. "Yes, Macalaurë. Take what you need."

Maglor pushed into him. He considered giving Ingwion a taste of his own medicine, fucking him slowly, teasing him as he had been teased, but the wild, primal need was too great. He drove into Ingwion, whose hips matched his rhythm. "Yes, beautiful one. Take me as you would take Sören." Ingwion kissed his neck and licked it, tongue trailing up from the jaw to the ridge of Maglor's ear, to the point, nibbling the tip before whispering, "As you *will* take Sören."

"You are mad."

"*You* are mad, you fool."

Maglor growled, sinking his teeth into Ingwion's neck, driving into him with abandon, fully given over to the rutting fever, needing this as badly as he'd needed anything. He thought

of Sören, laying under him like this, remembered the delicious noises Sören made, the way Sören held nothing back, completely surrendering to him, as he in turn surrendered as fully as he ever had with anyone save his own father and uncle, long ago. Sören was so like his father...

Notes from Ingwion, now, crying out the way Maglor liked it, wanted to hear his lovers' pleasure. "Almost there," Ingwion ground out.

Maglor kissed him hard, the two moaning together into the kiss. Maglor found himself slowing down, finding it in himself at last to tease, thinking of teasing Sören the same way, taking out five years of hunger, savoring to the last moment. And then Ingwion began to work his inner muscles, his channel gripping Maglor's cock and squeezing, and all thought was scorched away, Maglor thrusting into him even harder than before, both men panting, crying out over the sound of their flesh slapping together, the bed rocking against the wall.

Ingwion's hot breath on his neck, then a lick. "Come with me, pet."

Under any other circumstance Maglor would object to the use of the word*pet*, possibly even with the sword, but here and now... their hands clasped as they climaxed together, kissing one last time, the world seeming to stop. As with every orgasm Maglor had, there was only the Music, only the Song, and he could hear Sören's again, wrapping around him, not letting him go.

When Maglor came to, Ingwion was still holding him, petting him. A part of Maglor resented this, not wanting to be *pitied* - but he knew there was true desire on Ingwion's part, this wasn't just an act of compassion. And Maglor had not felt warmth from another soul since he let Sören go. He cursed himself for his weakness, for not killing this man as he'd once vowed to do, but he lay there in Ingwion's arms just the same, allowing himself what he needed, just this once.

Ingwion took Maglor's chin in his hand again, making Maglor look into those clear blue eyes. "This will all work out, somehow. It will look very different from any assumption you have this moment. It will not be anything you could have foreseen. But you *will* have what you seek."

"I do not even know anymore what I seek."

"Deep down... you do."

Maglor sighed, and closed his eyes. He rolled away from Ingwion. "I need to be alone now, please."

Ingwion got up, and put his clothes back on. He left Maglor's room without a word, and Maglor hugged the body pillow, not wanting Ingwion, or anyone, to see him cry.

Chapter 9

Dooku stirred awake, and by habit his first glance was at the clock on their bedtable. It was an hour before the alarm was supposed to go off. The cabin was as dark as it could get in the glow of the midnight sun with the curtains drawn, and Dooku watched the side of Sören, who had his back against Dooku's chest. Judging from the slow breathing and closed eyes, Sören was finally asleep.

He hadn't been, for much of the night. Dooku had tried to get some sleep himself, but he kept being nudged awake, feeling Sören's distress across their Force bond as Sören lay next to him or against him, tossing and turning, trying to sleep, but in too much raw pain.

Sören hadn't gotten a lot of sleep - it had been just a few hours since the last time he'd woken up and blearily looked at the time - but some sleep was better than none. Dooku lay there still, spooning Sören, wanting to give him the extra hour before the alarm went off, since Sören had a couple of Sunday classes at the studio; Sören gave himself only one weekend free per month, and this wasn't it.

Sören had told him last night about their new neighbor. More than anything, Dooku was concerned for Sören. He remembered how despondent he himself was just over a year ago during the months they'd been apart, even though they'd only been together a few short months before that, and to all accounts, Sören had been just as bad if not worse, moving back from London to Reykjavik at the insistence of his sister, when Frankie had reported Sören was in bed constantly, crying, not eating. Sören had a lifelong history of depression that included a suicide attempt after quitting his medical internship in his early twenties, and admission of self-injury as a teenager and, later, when he was with his abusive partner Justin; anyone who cared about Sören necessarily worried about his mental health, even though Sören was on medication. He was highly sensitive - a sensitivity that made him a caring friend and loving partner, but also one where he could, and did, get badly hurt. If Sören had been that upset after just a few months with Dooku, he couldn't possibly begin to imagine the pain Sören must have been in after almost five years with Alejandro, the first great love of his life, and Dooku knew that seeing him again after all this time was devastating.

Sören coped with his pain through his art, of course, as well as humor, and was at times relentlessly optimistic. It had been that determination to rise like the phoenixes on his back that had resulted in him pursuing his dream of Logifugl Listaskóli in his darkest hour, giving him a renewed sense of purpose in life before Dooku showed up to start again with him. And Sören had found beauty in other dark places in his life - when he lived in poverty in London, he and Frankie had managed to make their flat pretty with things they found thrifting, and using their own crafty talents to fix up furniture and other items; they'd made their own fun on little money, spending a lot of time at parks or other places in nature, Sören marveling at things the London native Frankie had seen thousands of times before but now could appreciate them through Sören's eyes, like seeing them for the first time. There was a playful innocence and sense of wonder to Sören that was made more precious for the hell he'd been through, starting in childhood when he'd seen things no child should see. He had been wounded, he had been scarred, but he wasn't *bitter*.

It was something that Dooku had badly needed after a lifetime of loneliness, being married to his job, jaded from years of seeing the worst side of humanity in a career as a criminal defense barrister, and before that the cruelty of his own family and peers. Dooku recalled the words he'd spoken when he rekindled his relationship with Sören:

When I lost you, it was like the spark went out from my life, the color faded from my world. It seems fitting I came back to you during the time of the midnight sun, because you are my sunshine. In the depths of my life's winter, you are my invincible summer.

They were from two different worlds, but that was why it *worked*. Their opposite natures balanced each other out - Dooku provided Sören with calm when he was wound up, with strength when he was vulnerable, and Sören, in turn, gave him warmth and passion and *life*. He'd fallen hard for the younger man, and his feelings had only grown stronger as time went on. Dooku still counted his impulse move from the UK to Iceland the best decision he'd ever made; he'd follow Sören to the ends of the earth if necessary.

But that hadn't been necessary, and for the last almost-year they'd been living a peaceful, cozy life here in the cabin in Svalbarðseyri, the tiny fjord village just outside of Akureyri, Sören's hometown. Life had been very close to perfect.

And now Alejandro was here.

Beyond his feelings of concern for Sören, Dooku didn't quite know what to make of it. Though he'd offered to have a few words, his experience as a criminal defense barrister and occasionally defending the innocent meant that Dooku was careful about passing judgment and deeming this to be stalking; moreover, Alejandro didn't fit the profile of a stalker, having had no contact with Sören whatsoever for five years, and Dooku knew through his legal experience that stalkers did indeed have a set of behaviors that weren't happening here.

Dooku, himself, had shown up in Akureyri months after he'd pushed Sören away in fear of his own impending mortality, to tell Sören he was wrong, and try to start over again. And he wondered if Alejandro was here for the same reason, instead of this just being a coincidence. He couldn't exactly blame the man if so - one did not simply stop loving someone like Sören.

Dooku supposed that any other man in his position would probably now be in some sort of alpha dominance battle, making it clear Sören was *his* now. But Dooku didn't believe an honest relationship was based on trying to control one's partner - if Sören felt *threatened* and needed him to step in, he certainly would, but otherwise, he wanted Sören to set the boundaries about how this would be handled, if he wanted anything to do with his ex or not.

More than anything, Dooku wanted Sören to be happy. If that meant losing him, well...

But Dooku knew Sören wouldn't discard him - if there was one thing in the universe he was absolutely sure of, it was the way Sören felt about him, the way he could *feel* Sören's love across their Force bond, and all of the little ways it showed itself. And Dooku didn't want to lose him, either, and the surest way to do that was "that macho posturing bullshit", as Sören had called jealous behavior on the part of his ex Justin - acting like Alejandro was some kind of threat when neither of them were really sure what was going on here.

More than losing him to Alejandro, Dooku worried about Sören getting lost in the consuming fire of his own pain. Last night Sören had *ached* so much he felt it in his bones, across their bond, and he'd tried to console him, holding him, rocking him, petting him, trying to soothe him with his words, but nothing helped. The funeral pyre of Sören's grief for what he'd lost was burning once again, and there was nothing he could do, and he felt powerless. He hated seeing Sören hurting this much.

So here, in the early morning light, he watched Sören sleep, listening to his breathing. But

it didn't take long for Sören to wake up as well, giving a little grumble as he blinked his eyes open and shifted his weight.

Dooku wrapped his arms around Sören from behind and nuzzled him. "Good morning," he said.

"It's Sunday, isn't it?"

"It is."

"Fuck."

Dooku laughed softly at Sören's reaction - Sören was not a morning person, on weekdays his classes typically didn't start until afternoon. Dooku kissed Sören's cheek. "My poor boy. Would you like me to make you some coffee?"

"In a bit." Sören made a whining noise, and scooted closer against Dooku's chest, his hands covering Dooku's hands now, stroking them. Dooku's arms tightened around Sören.

They lay there like that for a few minutes, just holding each other, then Sören tilted his face and Dooku gave him a kiss. He didn't even mind the morning breath, enjoying the moment. Then Sören began to wiggle his ass against Dooku, and Dooku felt himself hardening. Dooku kissed Sören's neck, and Sören moaned and rubbed his ass against him a little more insistently.

Dooku's hands slid down, and he found Sören hard as well. He lazily rubbed Sören through his pajama bottoms until Sören just took them down. He kissed Dooku some more, and husked, "Want to snugglefuck?"

They did, laying on their sides, Dooku's arms around Sören, taking him from behind, slow and sweet. He loved the sound of Sören's moans and sighs between kisses, and at last, the beautiful cries of passion as he moved within him harder, faster, bringing them both over the edge at the same time. Sören's seed coated Dooku's hand, and Sören cleaned it off with his tongue before kissing him. Dooku moaned at the taste of his husband.

"That was nice," Sören said, rolling over to face him, snuggling him some more. "Well, better than nice."

"Indeed it was." Dooku gave him a soft little kiss.

Sören looked at the clock and frowned. "God, why." He ran a hand through his curls and sat up. "I gotta start getting ready."

"I'll make breakfast."

They ate together, and had coffee, while Snúður sat nearby and looked offended even though he'd just been fed and had eaten. Sören gave the cat copious amounts of pettings as he lingered near the door on his way out, making Dooku smile - he loved that cat, and he loved seeing Sören spoil the cat, it warmed his heart.

When Sören's hand gripped the doorknob, Dooku cleared his throat.

"I know you didn't sleep much last night," Dooku said. "Will you be safe to drive? Do you want me to drive you to and from the studio?"

Sören shook his head. "I had coffee, I'll be fine. And... I gotta do the kiln to finish up the pots for my class, plus it would, er, help if I resumed work on my painting. So it would be better if I just came back on my own time rather than scheduling something with you, though I'll be back well before dinner."

Dooku nodded. "All right." At least Sören was finding an outlet for the pain with his art, which was a good sign.

While Sören was at the studio, Dooku worked on the next chapter of his novel, which was about a gay barrister defending a homophobic young client on theft charges, while trying to balance work with his home life and his marriage to a man not that much older than his client; as it turned out the defendant was himself closeted, the homophobia a cover-up, and the barrister was becoming a bit of a mentor, particularly with helping the client work through his grief and guilt and shame. The novel was informed by some of Dooku's experiences, particularly with defending ethnic minorities and the poor - all too often his clients had horror stories from their past, and Dooku had been the first person in a position of authority to actually show them any kind of concern or respect. In more than a few cases he had worked to get clients the help they needed beyond legal defense, and some had managed to turn their lives around, coming to see him later to thank him for his influence and making a difference. It had been why Dooku had sacrificed so much for his career, over the years, believing it was for the greater good. He thought that with few exceptions, nobody was beyond redemption - he was raised Romanian Orthodox, had in fact wanted to be a priest when he was a child, and though long since had stopped believing, he still somehow found comfort in the concept of forgiveness and atonement, and tried to balance justice with mercy as much as possible.

He had been showing works in progress to Sören's cousin Ari Einarsson. Ari wrote fanfic, not original fiction intended for publication, but it was the closest thing Dooku had to a set of eyes who could give him the sort of critique he needed. At a few points, Ari had made jokes about subtext - Ari, whose sexual orientation he still couldn't figure out, and where Sören himself had said "nobody really knows what Ari is, not even Ari" - and Ari said "if this was a fanfiction, people would be shipping the barrister and his client, or maybe even the barrister, husband, and client in an OT3." Ari then had to explain what "OT3" meant to the clueless seventy-year-old.

There were indeed a few erotic scenes in the novel between the barrister and his husband, not enough to overpower the plot with porn, but enough to "give it a little spice", as Sören had said. And at Ari's joking suggestion awhile back that Dooku write a threesome, Dooku had said, again cluelessly, "People do that?" even though he knew his adopted daughter Leja was in an open marriage.

Sören had surprised him by saying, "People do that. I've, er... had a few threesomes."

Occasionally Dooku read erotica to help him master the art of writing it, both what he liked in terms of detail and tone and wording, and especially what he didn't like. He found himself looking at it now, and today's latest offerings had a number of threesome stories. Dooku read out of curiosity, and inevitably his mind went to thinking of Sören's wilder days.

Dooku wasn't sure he was going to go there with the plot, as he'd intended things to be a certain way when he started the story, but it was an interesting idea, and the thoughts of Sören's past aroused him rather than angered him. He took a break to splash cold water on his face and try to calm down, otherwise he wouldn't get anything done.

He managed to get back into his writing, finishing the chapter and starting the next one, engrossed enough that he startled when he heard Sören's jeep pull in. It was late afternoon now. Sören had brought his painting home with him, which was fine - Dooku liked watching him work, but what was not fine was the evolution of the work in progress from when Dooku had last seen it. Sören had started off painting a scene of the black sand beach at Reynisfjara, in southern Iceland, on a sunny summer day - the ocean was a recurring, prominent theme in his art, though each painting was different, and though inspired by Icelandic landscapes, became another world, somewhere that wasn't quite Earth. Dooku had expected something fantastical or mythological in Sören's latest. He was not expecting the sunny sky to now be dark with violent storm clouds, the sea stormy, with a kraken rising from the waves.

On the other hand, maybe he shouldn't have been surprised, considering last night.

Dooku looked at the contents of the mini-fridge and pantry, and decided they needed some groceries. "Do you want to come with me to the store?"

Sören shook his head. "I'll stay here and paint, if you don't mind."

He didn't mind, though he frowned, feeling the ache again.

Dooku headed into Akureyri, to the supermarket he and Sören always used, and then came back with groceries. Sören had his headphones on as he painted, but the music was on full blast so Dooku could still hear some of it - his educated guess based on exposure to Sören's music without headphones was the *Yeezus* album by Kanye West, which was a sign that Sören was, in fact, in an exceedingly foul mood, though his expression remained neutral as his brush stroked the canvas.

Dooku set about making fish, potatoes, and a salad. Every now and again he'd look over at Sören painting, so wrapped up in his work that a bomb could go off in their yard and he wouldn't notice. When dinner was ready he had to call Sören three times, then come over and take off his headphones.

Sören was quiet during dinner, which didn't bother Dooku, and after dinner Sören got right back to painting, while Dooku resumed work on the novel. At some point Sören took off his headphones to rub his ears, and it was then that there was a knock on the door.

Sören froze, and then he quickly got up and headed for the bathroom.

Dooku understood Sören wasn't ready to deal with the potential awkwardness yet. He sighed as he got up from his desk and answered the door. Ingmar was standing there.

"Hello," Ingmar said. "Am I interrupting anything?"

"No." Dooku managed a smile, an attempt to be neighborly. "You can come in, would you like coffee or tea?"

"No thank you, I can't stay too long," Ingmar said. He looked over Dooku's shoulder and gave Dooku a quizzical look. "Where's your husband?"

"He's not feeling well," Dooku said; it wasn't entirely a lie.

"I ask because you'd said to come by sometime this weekend and we could discuss getting together. It's Sunday night now, so I wanted to take care of that -"

"Yes, I understand." Dooku nodded. He briefly considered asking Ingmar if he knew about the nature of Sören and Alejandro's history, then decided positing such a question wasn't fair with Sören not around, so that would have to wait. "Unfortunately, scheduling such plans is contingent on my husband, since he works in town and we would have to work around his schedule, so... can you come back in three days? That might give him some time to feel well enough to think about such things."

"I can do that. That would be Wednesday, yes?"

"Wednesday evening, six-thirty? You can have dinner with us if you'd like."

"Is my companion also welcome?"

Dooku kept his poker face. "I haven't met your companion yet and my husband has a degree of social anxiety so I'd like it to just be the three of us this time, if you don't mind."

"I understand and I don't mind, no. Please tell Sören I said hello."

"I will do that. See you Wednesday."

Ingmar was off, and Dooku quietly closed the door. A moment later, Sören poked his head out from the bathroom door.

"Coast is clear," Dooku said.

Sören came out and flopped back on the couch. Snúður hopped up next to him, and Sören began stroking the cat, looking down.

"I'm sorry everything is so awkward," Sören said.

"That's hardly your fault."

"I know that Vigdís and Páll want us to check in on Auli."

"I can do that, even if you're uncomfortable with it. Though, Ingmar is coming for dinner on Wednesday night and I think you should clear the air with him then, one way or another."

Sören nodded. "Jæja, I know I can't put that off forever." He frowned, and the look in those dark brown puppy dog eyes was so sad it made Dooku want to cry.

"Are you all right, sweetheart?" Dooku asked.

"I'm fine."

"You're not fine."

"I will be fine." Sören set his jaw, and dipped his brush into cleaner, then hovered over the palette for his next color. "I am always fucking fine."

Sören put his headphones back on, and Dooku heard the thump of more angry, aggressive rap music.

Sören continued to paint, and eventually it was late and time for Dooku to unwind. He got in his pajamas and curled up with a Stephen King novel. When he started to doze off, he asked Sören, "Are you coming to bed?" There was no answer through the headphones,

and Dooku had to take them off again and repeat the question.

"In a bit," Sören said.

Dooku knew enough of Sören's creative habits to know "in a bit" could be fifteen minutes or ten hours - he was a bit obsessive about his art - but at least Sören didn't start any classes until the afternoon tomorrow. Dooku went to bed, turning off the lights on his side of the cabin, with Sören putting on a special lamp he used in times like this. Snúður climbed onto the bed and settled next to Dooku, and Dooku stroked the purring cat until the purrs lulled him to sleep.

He was roused from sleep a couple of hours later, with Sören changing into his pajamas. Sören paused when he saw Dooku sit up a little, and for a moment they just looked at each other and then Sören mumbled, "It's finished."

"May I see it?"

Sören took a deep breath and he nodded, and then he said, "You need to see something else first, though, for context."

Over the years Sören had built up a substantial collection of paintings, some of which had been sold, some of which were in galleries in London and Reykjavik, some of which were on display at Logifugl Listaskóli. There were a few paintings that Dooku owned, most of them hung around the cabin. But in the hall closet, Sören kept a wrapped bundle of two paintings he had never shown anyone, and though Dooku was intensely curious, he also respected Sören's need for privacy and had never let his curiosity get the better of him to unwrap the canvases.

Sören went to the hall closet. "There are two portraits in here," he said as he began to unwrap the paintings. "One of them is, er, pornographic and I'm not sure I should show you, but the other..."

Dooku got up from bed and walked over. Sören wrapped up one of the canvases, and then he showed Dooku the one that had been unwrapped.

It was a painting of Alejandro.

"There are two," Sören said, "but the other one is, you know." He craned his head to the wrapped canvas with a clear of his throat, indicating Alejandro had been the subject of the pornographic one.

This was no mere portrait, however. It was, like the painting Sören had been working on the last several days, set at Reynisfjara. Alejandro was depicted here as a merman, iridescent mermaid tail done in exquisite detail, glimmering in silver light shining through dark storm clouds. He himself had a faint glow of his own. He wore a simple silver crown and was strewn with pearls - in his hair, necklaces - and was playing a harp on the beach. There were pieces of what was presumably a wrecked ship, and Sören himself was laying there, tangled in seaweed, waking up to the sound of the harp, reaching out to touch Alejandro with a look of love and wonder in his eyes.

Dooku's breath caught. It would have been a beautiful painting not knowing the context, but it was even more beautiful knowing this was a tribute to the love Sören had known.

The words that Dooku spoke next surprised him as they came out. "I'm fine with seeing *that* if you're OK with showing me."

Sören hesitated, but then after a moment he unwrapped the painting. The storm had given way to a rainbow, and on the beach in the black sand, Alejandro was laying on his back. He had human legs now, and Sören was on top of him, taking Alejandro's cock inside him, riding him, his own cock dripping precum onto Alejandro's body. It was evident this was a second go-round, as there was seed covering Alejandro's legs, as if a first orgasm had made him human. Sören was wearing one of the pearl necklaces that Alejandro had been wearing, and there was a leash of pearls attached, wrapped around Alejandro's hand.

Dooku felt himself hardening - they were delicious together, he couldn't deny that - but even more than the explicit detail of their sex, Dooku's attention was caught by the look on their faces, the very clear adoration and awe, like they were both having some sort of religious experience in the shared passion.

There was the third painting now, the one Sören had just completed. Reynisfjara was in storms once again - an even fiercer storm than the first portrait, and there was a kraken rising from the waves, terrifying, eldritch, like something out of HR Giger's imagination. On the beach was a bloody human heart, and a trail of blood leading into the sea. The sea was glowing with a strange light.

"If I was showing this anywhere, it would be called *Triptych*," Sören said, his voice shaking. His hands were shaking, as well.

Dooku took the second painting out of Sören's hands, gently set it down, and took Sören's trembling hands in his. Sören met his eyes, finally, and the look on his face brought Dooku close to tears.

"I'm not fine," Sören said.

Dooku pulled him into bed. Sören buried his face in Dooku's chest and wailed, soaking his pajama top, as Dooku rocked him and pet his hair. "I'm sorry," Sören kept whispering.

"I'm right here, love." Dooku continued petting him. "Whatever you need."

"I'm sorry." Sören sobbed harder. "I'm so sorry..."

"Shhhhh." Dooku kissed the top of Sören's head. "It's all right, sweetheart."

Sören didn't say the words, but Dooku could feel them across their bond.*It's never going to be all right.*

–

Maglor couldn't sleep - again - and he was past the point of being able to blame it on jetlag.

Ingwion had been down the street earlier that evening, and had reported back that Sören was ill and he'd be returning on Wednesday to test the waters.

Maglor, of course, knew perfectly damn well Sören wasn't actually ill, and that had been an excuse to avoid the inevitable confrontation. One did not simply walk into Svalbarðseyri like this after five years and pretend it was coincidental. Of course, it would have helped if he knew how to explain why he was there, and he still didn't quite

understand why, himself.

He still loved Sören, five years later, and he'd be lying if he said he didn't want him, still. But there was a difference between doing something you want and doing something you *should*, and the entire reason he'd let Sören go five years ago was because it was very much *should not*. He was Elven, Sören was a human mortal, there was no way this would not end badly.

He'd respected Sören's desire for no contact, and indeed, trying to remain friends with him would have made it even harder to let go. So of course, he had not known what Sören had been up to the last five years. He would have never agreed to come if he knew Sören was married. It felt selfish to be here, and for all that Ingwion had called him a fool, he thought Ingwion the fool for thinking Sören would be his once more - it wasn't just done and over with for five years, bridge burnt, but Sören *had married someone else.*

Maglor found himself on his laptop, Googling "Sören Sigurðsson". There was the obligatory Facebook profile, Sören was on Twitter posting memes and pictures of his cat and making fun of Donald Trump, he was on deviantART with a lovely gallery of his art and photography, and there were some old interviews from zines, a few of which Maglor remembered Sören had given while they were still an item. There was a more recent interview, from earlier in 2019, with a blog on Icelandic culture. Against his better judgment, he clicked it.

There was a black and white portrait of Sören, a smile lighting up his entire face, the smile that still took his breath away. Sören looked much the same as he had yesterday - he'd grown his hair out to his shoulders since they'd last seen each other, and Sören's beard was a little fuller, and at thirty-four he looked more like a man than a boy now, with the first few threads of silver in his hair, little wrinkles around his eyes that were more prominent when he smiled.

He was more delicious than he had any right to be.

The article was mostly about Logifugl Listaskóli, which Maglor learned Sören had started in spring 2018, and had art classes for all ages and abilities. Some of the article had bits of Sören's philosophy as an artist. One particular passage stuck out from the rest.

Did you always know you would have a career as an artist? Was it something you'd planned?

I've been making art as long as I can remember - normal kids liked coloring books and crayons, I liked blank paper and drawing worlds I'd never seen before. But no, for a long time I didn't know this was what I'd be doing with my life. I was in med school, actually. My mother died when I was six, I found her body, and I was determined after that to go into medicine and save lives. Except when I had patients die during my clerkship, I broke down, I guess the trauma of my mother's death finally hit me, and I attempted suicide. In hindsight I don't think it was all due to that - I was raised by my aunt and uncle, who are dead now, but they had a drinking problem, and I also grew up queer back in the last days of queer not really being OK like it is now, so it was the perfect storm. It was a lot, and the death was the proverbial straw.

I started painting when I was in hospital, the tattoo I have on my back was designed by me from the first painting I did, which was me trying to be, I don't know, fucking inspirational *and find some sort of meaning in my little existential crisis. People were like, "You know, that's really good, you should do something with it. You should*

become an artist."

And it felt like such a cliche. I was the loner goth kid in my secondary school, I was the emo kid who cut himself, now I was going to be an artiste *and I was really self-conscious. But to stop making art is like trying to stop breathing, for me - there was in fact about a year where I wasn't making anything and it was the worst time of my life. And that's a very deliberate metaphor, comparing art to breathing, something you need to do to stay alive, because I found out* art is healing. *If you can't breathe right, you get sick. We live in a world that encourages people to stifle so much of who they are, it's no wonder we have the problems we do. When you connect with your creativity, it's like breathing clean air instead of smog.*

I wanted to be a doctor and help people, but my art has been my own healing process, a catharsis, at times an exorcism. And at some point the light went off over my head and I realized hey - this is how I can help people. I can encourage them to express themselves. I can encourage them to breathe this life into themselves, to make something beautiful out of their pain, a testament to their survival, their personal mythology. It doesn't matter if you paint, if you write stories, if you make music - just do something.

My life looks very different now than I'd imagined it as a teenager, or even just a few years ago, even when I realized I might like to open an art studio and offer classes there. I think that's true for a lot of people - we make plans and life has a way of making other plans for us. And I think what's kept me going this long is to see my entire life as a work in progress, little accidents here and there and I can paint a tree in one place, a cloud in another. Each new painting is an adventure to be explored, and life is that way too.

Maglor closed out the tab and sighed. *This is why I still love you.*

One might wonder what a highborn Elf might be doing with someone like Sören with his language, teasing, occasional crass humor, and a Viking temper if provoked, but Maglor's answer would always be a defining moment in their relationship, a memory he reflected on now. They had been on holiday in the Netherlands, waiting in a queue in a store, and a Muslim woman and her daughters wearing hijab were being harassed by a group of young Dutchmen. Sören broke out of the queue, came over, and told the three men, "If you don't cut the shit right now you'll be making a dental appointment with Doc Martens," pointing to his steel-toed boots. Sören was not particularly physically intimidating, being only six feet tall and of a wiry build, but there was something in the look in his eye, the growl in his voice and the way he projected himself that made the men back off, and then Sören approached the frightened woman and girls and said softly, "*Assalamualaikum*," indicating he was an ally. He even bought ice cream for the little girls, to further help calm them down. It was not the first or the last time Sören would demonstrate courage and compassion in front of him, and it was times like that where Sören's heart shone through most brightly.

His father was fond of comparing people to gems, and it seemed to Maglor that Sören was like a geode rather than a perfect cut and faceted crystal, but the uncut, rough geodes seemed to have more sparkle. That was Sören. And his authenticity was part of what made Maglor feel less like an alien in the world, closer to human, when they were together.

The authenticity made it especially tragic that Sören didn't know who or what "Alejandro" really was. The feelings had never been a lie. Even most of what little Sören knew about his life wasn't a lie - his brothers were dead, his family had made some unfortunate decisions, he had been brought up with the belief that his desires were unnatural and he

would be damned for them. But it was the necessity of a new name, and a new identity each time he relocated, and having to hold back *so much*, that was part of the pain, the uncrossable gap between mortal and immortal. Ultimately, what good was love when he could not give Sören the same kind of honesty and complete surrender that Sören had given?

And yet. *And yet.* Still, he loved.

And he hated himself for breaking that beautiful, sensitive heart. He had felt the pain Sören was in the day he ended things, and he had felt, again, the pain when he'd seen Sören arriving home in his jeep yesterday. Sören broadcasted, it was loud, and the unvoiced internal screaming was *his fault*. He knew that period of a year that Sören had mentioned in the interview where he couldn't make art, the darkest time of his life - that was because of him. He'd almost destroyed Sören, back then. If Sören had been a musician, he absolutely *would have* destroyed him - Maglor thought of how those who could tune into the Music walked the knife's edge of creation and destruction and all too often, lost, and more and more of them were dying by their own hand as the Song changed, the dirge preparing for the Dagor Dagorath, though there was still yet time to go. Sören would have been another Kurt Cobain if he'd ever picked up a guitar.

He feared rejection, but even more than that, he feared *intrusion*. Sören finally had happiness in his life, though it was hard to tell from the pain radiating down the street. That happiness had been hard-won. He felt he was wrong to come here and potentially touch those wounds, leave him worse than before when, once again, things could not, would not work between an Elf and a mortal.

A married mortal who had moved on with his life.

Maglor closed his eyes. There was a flash of clarity - beneath the storm of feelings, the awful hope that he could taste Sören again, he saw he needed forgiveness. He needed closure - both of Sören's wounds, and his own.

He needed forgiveness not just from Sören, but from the man Sören was sharing his life with, who was treating those wounds he'd caused years ago. *I hope you're worthy of him.* He would only have closure if the answer was yes.

He was going to make it his point to find out. But not tonight. Not just yet.

Chapter 10

Sören woke up Monday feeling hungover, even though he hadn't had anything to drink - it was the ache and exhaustion from the catharsis of the night before, falling apart in Dooku's arms, crying for hours.

Sören still felt bad about it, though Dooku, bless him, seemed unfazed as he went about his usual morning routine of tea, breakfast, and getting online. There was a slight crease in his brow and Sören noticed his expression was more watchful than usual, and indeed, Sören could feel Dooku worrying about him across their Force bond.

"I'm fine," Sören said through a mouthful of toast.

"You were not fine last night."

Sören chewed, swallowed, and then said, "Last night helped. If I'm not fine, I'm closer to fine than I was."

"I'll grant you that concession."

Sören put his plate down, got up, and walked over to the desk. He put his arms around Dooku and squeezed, leaning down to kiss the top of Dooku's head. "This is the only time I get to be taller than you," Sören laughed.

Dooku laughed too, and tilted his face up to nuzzle Sören. He reached to stroke Sören's face. "My sad, sweet boy."

"Jæja... well... please don't worry about me too much." Sören squeezed him again. "I have a lot to live for, and when things get dark I remind myself of that."

Dooku's thumb ran over the scars on Sören's wrist, a gesture of tenderness and understanding; Sören's eyes burned with unshed tears.

"You gave me a new lease on life," Dooku said, his usually smooth voice rough with emotion. "Please remember that."

Sören kissed Dooku's hand. "Always." He skritched Dooku's beard. "Though I have to say, sometimes I still have a hard time believing you're seventy, apart from the yummy silver fur."

Dooku smiled. "I don't feel it, or at least I don't since you came along."

Sören smiled back. "I have to admit before we got together and you were just in the fantasy stage, I wondered if you'd still be able to get it up." His smile became a naughty grin. "Now I wonder if it ever goes back down."

Dooku's laughter rang out, and he blushed a deep pink, dark eyes twinkling. He swatted Sören's backside, hard, which made Sören cry out, and then he groaned as his cock responded to the swat - the delicious memories of the occasions when Dooku had taken him over his knee - and his eyes caught the time.

"Fuck, I have to go to the studio soon."

Dooku nodded, frowning. Then he gave Sören a wicked grin of his own. "At least I can take care of myself whilst you're gone." He winked. "I might even take a photo and send it to you, if you're lucky."

Sören's breath came out in a hiss, cock throbbing at the mental image of the last time Dooku had sent him a picture like that while he was at work. "I fucking hate you, you cocktease."

"Mmmmmm. Bratty boys like you deserve a good tease now and again."

"Fucking..." Sören gave a mock glare. "I'll... get you back one of these days."

"Promises, promises."

"Oh believe me." Sören shoved the rest of his toast into his mouth, bringing the plate to the sink. "I'll figure something out."

"Yes, please, *entertain me.*"

Sören was still smiling and laughing on his way out to the jeep. He saw Alejandro in the distance, walking Auli, and he made himself look away, made his thoughts turn towards the man in the cabin who had married him, who had moved to another country for him, had opened his lonely heart and let him all the way inside. It had been quite a transformation, to watch Dooku since the end of 2017. Dooku would always be himself - the more serious one of the two, still a bit reserved and formal around others who weren't Sören, and indeed Sören found his dignified, gentlemanly manner quite sexy - but it was wonderful to see him lighten up and *play*, something Sören had hoped for when they'd started off as friends. He'd seen, he'd felt, the deep melancholy in Dooku's soul, and wanted to make him happy. He understood that kind of melancholy himself, though he masked it with humor.

It was the same kind of melancholy Alejandro had. *I have a type,* Sören thought to himself as he couldn't help but steal another glance at Alejandro, still looking impeccable even dressed down in a T-shirt and black chinos, long hair stirring in the breeze, with a crease of worry or pain between his thick brows.

Já, I definitely have a type. Sad and full of regrets, posh backgrounds, they like the sea, tall as fuck, big-ass eyebrows.

Their eyes met, and Sören knew Alejandro now knew he was being watched. Sören started to drive off, focusing his eyes on the road. He turned on his car stereo. "Teardrop" by Massive Attack came on, which had been playing when Sören had seen him for the first time in five years the other day. "Oh goddammit," Sören growled, pushing the forward button to skip to the next random song on his playlist.

An instrumental by Boards of Canada wasn't necessarily less melancholy, but at least it didn't have the same knife-to-the-gut reaction of the previous song. Throughout Sören's relationship with Alejandro, he'd noticed a tendency for radio and playlists to play songs too appropriate for the moment when Alejandro was around, to the point where Sören had sometimes wondered if Alejandro was Force sensitive and was deliberately or subconsciously manipulating the music in some way. But that had never been a safe subject to bring up with anyone before Dooku, so they had never talked about it, if Alejandro was he hid it very well, and Sören had hid his own abilities as best as he could those nearly five years.

Sören wondered about it again - it sure felt like he was being trolled by his playlist - and then he mentally smacked himself. *Stop thinking about him. Why does it matter?*

Sören had three classes that day. The first class was a painting class for adults, mostly elderly adults at this time of day. The second class was schoolchildren, and their exuberance and playfulness helped put Sören in a better mood. The third class, in the late afternoon, was adults and more of a mix of ages, from the elderly to college age. Feeling more cheerful, Sören had the pop station on in the background as everyone worked, and found himself singing along with Pharrell Williams, not really thinking about it.

Anna, one of the younger women in the class, smiled at him. "You have a good voice," she said.

"Aww, thank you." Sören smiled back, blushing, feeling a little self-conscious.

Anna's boyfriend Viktor nodded. Then Viktor said, "You know what would be a great addition to the school here? Music classes. This is an art school and music is a form of art, já? You talk about how important creativity and expression is, this could go quite a ways to helping people tap into their creative sides."

Sören pursed his lips. "I'm not a musician, I just sing in the shower and when I drive and shit like that."

"No, but maybe you could, I don't know, put out an ad and look for someone to teach music classes here?" Viktor resumed sketching. "It's a thought."

"I'd really like that," said Kristjan, one of the middle-aged men. "I haven't played guitar in awhile and it would be fun to get back into it."

"Hm," was all Sören would say to that.

When the class was over Sören cleaned up, as he did, and decided to check his phone, avoiding it all day in case Dooku had in fact sexted him, not wanting to have an obvious hard-on in front of his students. There was nothing, which slightly disappointed him. A couple of the students were lingering, as they were welcome to do until Sören closed up, having refreshments that Sören kept in a mini-fridge and a shelf beside it: sodas and some snacks. Sören himself had a Sprite, and leaned against the table.

"Music classes would be fun," said Guðmundur, a man close to Sören's age.

Sören rubbed his face like a wet cat. "I'll look into it," he said, finally, wanting the subject to go away. This was his school and he didn't like the idea of hiring someone else, but now that the suggestion can had been opened it was too late to put the worms in, and more of his students would peck at it till he gave in. It wasn't a horrible idea, but there were some practical considerations, and right now he was still trying to de-stress from the shock of a certain musician suddenly materializing up the street.

Sören drove home, and when he got inside, he found Dooku hadn't sent him a naughty text because Dooku was taking a nap, Snúdur snuggled up on him. Dooku had one hand wrapped around the paw of the ragged, well-loved teddy bear he'd owned since he was a child in the 1950s, and the index finger of his other hand had Snúdur's paw curled over it, flexing in time with their breaths, breathing in unison. The scene was so precious that Sören fought back a squeak, not wanting to wake them up. But at the sound of Sören getting in, Snúdur woke up, yawning and stretching, and then Dooku also followed suit, sitting up a little, giving Sören a lazy smile. "Oh, hello there," Dooku said. "I must have

fallen asleep."

"You looked adorable." Sören smiled. "Though you're always cute."

"I. Am. Not. Cute."

"Hi Not Cute, I'm -"

"I see you must be feeling better."

"A little, I suppose."

Dooku sat all the way up. "What time is it..." He squinted and looked at the clock. "Oh, shit. I was going to go to the grocery store and pick up something for dinner. I can still do that, but we'll be eating late -"

Sören shook his head. "You want to go out for dinner? We haven't done that in awhile, and it would be nice after..." He didn't need to finish the sentence with *after yesterday*, they both knew. Sören knew Dooku's nap was because he had been up way too late last night, trying to console Sören as he fell apart in his arms.

"That would be nice. Where would you like to go?"

Sören decided on Serrano, the Mexican restaurant in Akureyri where Sören had taken him on the night Dooku was inside him for the first time in November 2017, and had fond memories for them both. It was a nice cozy evening, made better by taking a little detour on the way back to the Dimmuborgir, where they took a stroll, holding hands.

They kissed and nuzzled on the drive home. When they got in, Dooku stopped in the bathroom, and when he was done he came out naked, to find Sören also naked, waiting for him. Sören threw his arms around Dooku and kissed him deeply; they kissed all the way to the bed, tumbling down together.

Then Dooku just held Sören for a moment, cradling him into his chest, as Sören nuzzled his silver chest hair, listening to his heartbeat, and Dooku pet Sören's curls. They were both hard and aching for release, but they both very much needed this moment - Sören relished the comfort of the strong, protective arms around him, the muscular chest his shield wall, and he could feel Dooku's enjoyment in holding him, how content he was with Sören close to him, the pain of his past far away with Sören in his arms.

At last Dooku cupped Sören's chin in his hand, stroking Sören's beard, and said softly, "I'm not going anywhere, *elskan*."

Sören grinned, feeling playful from their evening out. "Hi not going anywhere -"

"*You know...*"

Sören kissed the tip of his nose. "I know. I just like making you make that face." He caressed Dooku's cheek, grin broadening as he watched Dooku blush. "You're so cute."

"I am *not cute*."

Sören started poking him. "No! Stop touching me! I AM THE NIGHT!" Sören squeaked.

Dooku's eyes twinkled and he shot back, "Hi, The Night, I'm -"

Sören shut him up with a kiss, and Dooku swatted Sören's ass, hard, making Sören cry out and rub against him, like a cat in heat. Dooku nipped Sören's lower lip with a growl, before giving him a more gentle kiss.

"What would you like?" Sören whispered.

"To hold you." Their eyes met. "With all of me."

Sören bit his lower lip, feeling heat flush his cheeks, his cock throbbing at the mental image Dooku projected at him. It had been over a week since the last time Dooku had bottomed for him - Sören was the bottom most of the time, an arrangement he didn't mind, but he did enjoy topping now and again, and indeed, that was what the Prince Albert ring in his cock was for. Sören kissed Dooku back, hard and hungry, his hand reaching down to part Dooku's thighs.

But as hard as they both were, leaking precum, Sören took his time, wanting Dooku to be nice and relaxed before taking him. He kissed Dooku again and again, then kissed and licked his neck as he slowly stroked Dooku's cock. When his mouth made his way to Dooku's chest, licking chest hair, lapping and suckling the nipples into hard peaks, his fingers worked inside him, readying him, Sören's cock throbbing at the sound of Dooku's moans as Sören found his prostate and rubbed in lazy circles. Sören could feel his pleasure across their Force bond, the combination of nipple and prostate stimulation bringing him to the edge right away. Sören gave him a wicked grin as he tugged a nipple with his teeth, before sucking hard, making Dooku arch to him, panting.

"Sören..."

"Mmmmm." Sören sucked at the other nipple, then licked slowly, eyes riveted on Dooku's reactions. Sören's own hard-on rubbed against Dooku's thigh, savoring the feel of his body hair teasing his sensitive cock.

Sören spent awhile longer on Dooku's nipples, until Dooku was gasping for breath, his nails digging into Sören's hips. Then his lips trailed lower, kissing Dooku's stomach, tongue trailing the definition in his abs. "So fucking sexy," Sören purred. "God, you're fucking hot." He grinned at the way Dooku blushed - still bashful about taking compliments from him like this - and planted a gentle kiss on his stomach just before giving a little nibble, making Dooku cry out.

Sören kissed over to one hip, knowing he was sensitive there, sucking and nibbling at his hip, and at last kissed down to his thigh, licking the body hair, nibbling, nipping hard enough to leave marks later, wanting his lover to see the telltale signs of where he'd been. Sören kissed back up to his hip, back over his stomach again, to the other hip and thigh. By the time Sören was ready to work on Dooku's cock, leaning over it and letting Dooku see the hunger on his face, precum was pooling all the way down the shaft, more of it leaking from the slit just as Sören lowered his mouth. Sören began to lick just the slit, very slowly, as Dooku moaned, his fists in Sören's curls. "Sören... *elskan*..."

"We'll get there, love." Sören took a few more licks, and then started licking the rest of the cockhead, swirling his tongue, making Dooku cry out before he took just the head into his mouth, sucking, continuing to work his tongue.

Eventually, the entire length of him was in Sören's mouth, sucking slowly. His fingers continued to play inside Dooku's channel, opening him up, the promise of what was yet to be. Sören's free hand cupped and gently rubbed the balls, which he could feel tightening.

Sören's own cock was ragingly hard, out of his mind with lust for the gorgeous silver fox writhing underneath him, and it took every ounce of his strength to hold back from pinning him down and just taking him already, wanting to make this good for him, taking pleasure in giving pleasure.

Sören slid down and dipped his tongue into Dooku's channel, tasting soap and musk. The strangled sob Dooku made at the feel of Sören's tongue inside him made Sören's cock twinge, and Sören reached down to start stroking himself, not able to help it. Sören's free hand played with Dooku's cock, stroking more slowly than he was stroking himself, continuing to tease, his tongue lapping slowly against the nub inside him. He loved the groans and cries as he edged Dooku closer, and soon his tongue was like a hurricane, fucking him, his own cock leaking as Dooku bucked against his mouth, clutching Sören's head for dear life, trying to call his name and producing incoherent moans.

Just before Dooku could come like that, Sören stopped, taking a few more tormenting licks at the head of Dooku's cock, before sliding up. He used the Force to pour lube into Dooku's opening and over his own cock, and Dooku gasped as he felt the head of Sören's cock poised at his entrance.

"You still want it, love?" Sören husked.

"Please."

Sören pushed into him, and felt Dooku bearing down, pushing out, breathing slow and deep as Sören had taught him. It was always a tight fit, and Sören gave him a moment to adjust. Then he began rocking slowly, smiling as the guttural, primal roar Dooku made let him know the Prince Albert ring in his cock had hit that spot.

Sören kissed him hard, and kept kissing him with each thrust, moving slowly, one arm around Dooku, his free hand running over Dooku's chest and stomach and thighs, wanting to touch and play, loving the feel of the rough body hair beneath his fingertips. Dooku moaned into the kisses, rolling his hips back at Sören, welcoming him.

Soon Dooku's arms and legs were wrapped around him and Sören moved faster, kissing and licking Dooku's neck. And then Dooku moved a hand to cup Sören's chin, tilt his face so their mouths could meet once more, and between kisses he breathed, "I love you."

"I love you," Sören said, stroking his face. "So much."

Dooku kissed him hard. "I will never leave you."

The words brought tears to Sören's eyes, and he responded by kissing Dooku back so hard it took their breath away, driving into him with abandon. Dooku met his thrusts, nails digging in Sören's back, occasionally spanking Sören's ass to urge him on harder, faster. The bed rocked against the wall and Sören pounded into him, nothing else existing but the lust, the heat, the *need*.

Their eyes met, and the urgent moans became just shuddering gasps, the two poised on the brink of orgasm, not yet flying off together, wanting to be lost in each other just a little longer.

"So close..." Dooku warned.

"Mmmmm." Sören kissed him again.

A few more kisses, then he kissed Dooku's neck and Dooku cried out, "I'm going to come -"

"Hi going to come..."

Dooku exploded, laughing as he spilled over Sören's chest and stomach, contracting around Sören's cock, and then Sören gave in, also laughing as he came inside the man he loved, rewarded by the sound of Dooku's deep moans, feeling across their Force bond the way Dooku loved feeling Sören spend into him. Sören collapsed onto Dooku's shoulder, shuddering, toes curling from the intensity of his release. Dooku took his hands and they kissed deeply, moaning and sighing together. All was right with the world.

"You brat." Dooku's eyes shone as he kissed Sören's nose.

"You love it." Sören gave him a peck.

They cuddled together for awhile, then Snúdur meowed, and Dooku got up to feed the cat. "Yes, we know you're *starving*," Dooku teased - the cat had been fed that afternoon. Sören admired Dooku's naked body moving around in the kitchen, and Dooku, feeling Sören's eyes on him, finally grinned, blushing.

"You'd think after a year and a half you'd get used to it," Sören said.

"Well, you know." Dooku's grin became a smaller, shy smile. "I was single my entire life. This is all still very new to me."

"Yes, and your cherry was delicious."

Dooku's flush deepened, and he laughed aloud, spilling cat food before he set it down. "Dammit, Sören."

"I still can't believe sometimes I'm the only person you've had sex with," Sören said. "That there wasn't a line, trying to break down your door."

"Even if there had been," Dooku said, "you know the story of why I couldn't. It wasn't safe to be out, when I was old enough, and I didn't want to risk my career getting caught. Not to mention all of my issues. Growing up feeling like you're worthless, you wonder what anyone would see in you. The first crush I had certainly reinforced that feeling."

Sören sighed. "You're far from worthless."

"I know that now." Dooku nodded. He came back into the portion of the cabin where their bed and dressers were, and took out pajamas. "But for a long time, I felt very, very alone in this world."

"You're not alone anymore." Sören rolled and leaned up to kiss him.

They decided to curl up together on the bed. Sören logged into Stardew Valley, to do something mindless and happy and fun for awhile. It was starting to rain outside, and the sound of the rain relaxed him.

After he'd been playing for a bit, he noticed Dooku was dozing off next to him, and he was himself finally feeling the effects of a long night and a longer day, so he finished up what he was doing, logged out, turned off the lights, and crawled back into bed, wrapping the covers around them.

Dooku stirred, feeling the movement next to him. "Hm?"

"Shh. It's just me. Go back to sleep." Sören's lips gently brushed his.

"Mmmm." In the darkness, Sören could feel Dooku's mouth upturn into a sleepy smile. "I love you," Dooku mumbled.

"I love you too." Sören wrapped his arms around him, holding him tight, and burrowed into his chest, listening to the rain, snuggling to sleep.

In the morning, the rain had calmed down to a drizzle, making Sören's curls frizzy as he made the trek to the studio. He had two adult classes, one of which was ceramics, and already word had spread.

"You're going to have a music class?" asked María, a woman in her fifties.

Sören ran a nervous hand through his curls, immediately regretting it because he had clay on his hand still. *Fuck.* "I... ah. That hasn't been officially decided." He folded his arms and leaned back. "There's a lot to consider, one thing being if it's even worth it to hire someone to teach classes, and rent instruments."

"You could always have a poll and see how many people are actually interested," María said. "I'd be surprised if it wasn't at least a fourth of your adult students."

"You should take a poll," Guðmundur said, nodding.

Sören sighed. He wanted to make his students happy, but it would be a change. "Jæja, I'll... get right on that."

Despite Sören's awkward feelings at the pressure put on him to get music classes going at the studio, he was still in a fairly cheerful mood from the ceramics class when he drove home. He put on the pop station, dancing in his seat, singing along.

When the jeep turned into Svalbarðseyri, "Single Ladies" by Beyoncé came on. And as if on cue, Sören saw Alejandro, walking Auli. Feeling impish, Sören turned the volume all the way up.

Sören slowed the jeep down to match Alejandro's pace, the song thumping out the window as Alejandro walked alongside Sören's jeep.

I got gloss on my lips, a man on my hips
Got me tighter than my Dereon jeans
Acting up, drink in my cup
I can care less what you think
I need no permission, did I mention?
Don't pay him any attention
'Cause you had your turn, but now you gon' learn
What it really feels like to miss me

'Cause if you liked it, then you should have put a ring on it
If you liked it, then you should have put a ring on it
Don't be mad once you see that he want it
If you liked it, then you should have put a ring on it

Sören waited, keeping his driving slow. He started singing along in his rich, husky tenor at the bridge:

Don't treat me to these things of the world
I'm not that kind of girl
Your love is what I prefer, what I deserve
Here's a man that makes me then takes me
And delivers me to a destiny, to infinity and beyond
Pull me into your arms
Say I'm the one you want
If you don't, you'll be alone
And like a ghost I'll be gone

Alejandro finally turned his head. Sören flashed him a smile, gave a demure little wave that wasn't really demure at all.

Alejandro started walking faster, not quite a run, but enough that soon he was ahead of the jeep and Sören was watching his back, still straight and tall.

All the single ladies
All the single ladies
All the single ladies
All the single ladies
All the single ladies
All the single ladies
All the single ladies
Now put your hands up

"Bitch," Sören said under his breath.

—

When Maglor got in, he was quietly furious, not so much with Sören as with himself. Though Sören had audacity, knowing just where and how to hit him, and it hurt.

He sat on the couch and Auli came over, paws on Maglor's knees, giving a little whine of sympathy before he started licking Maglor's face.

Maglor's first instinct was to push the dog away, not wanting anyone or anything to feel sorry for him, but the dog just doubled down, continuing to lap his face, and Maglor found himself petting the dog, which is how Ingwion found them when he strolled from the kitchen a moment later.

Maglor and Ingwion just looked at each other for a moment, then Maglor looked away.

"You're upset," Ingwion said.

"Leave me alone." Auli got down, as if it had been directed at him, giving a little whine on the way to the kitchen.

"This is my house too. And making me go away will not solve your problems." Ingwion gave him a knowing look. "Indeed, almost all your problems stem from pushing others away, which is why we are here."

"Do you not have something to do?"

"You, if you're interested."

Maglor rose from the couch, and walked towards Ingwion, feeling his blood boil. He stood there, shaking, feeling like he could *strike* in his anger... and then he seized a fistful of Ingwion's hair, slamming against him, kissing him roughly.

You'll be alone, and like a ghost, I'll be gone rang through Maglor's head as he pushed Ingwion towards the bed, the two undressing each other on the way there. He was *in pain*, and as much as he hated himself for taking what was being offered - needing this, the way he'd needed it so long ago after his wounds in the War of Wrath - it was all he could do to keep going.

"Yes, Macalaurë." Ingwion was kissing his way down Maglor's body now, smiling at the little whimpers he made, the gasps as he knew exactly where and how to tease him. "You hunger, and it is no shame to meet your need."

"Shut up," Maglor hissed.

Ingwion shut up by taking Maglor's cock into his mouth, heat burning in those blue eyes as Maglor watched the full, luscious lips swallow him down. He thought of Sören's full lips - the sweet mouth he'd never tired of kissing, ached to feel on his now.

Before he could spill into Ingwion's mouth, Ingwion let him slip out, and stuck his precum-slick tongue into Maglor's channel, devouring him. The pain was further away now, only the Song, this one of primal, feral hunger, the rhythm of the heat. Ingwion's tongue on his prostate was sweet, wild magic, soothing the ache, and yet, there was still emptiness. He needed more.

Ingwion sucked at him some more, and then came up to kiss him, oil-slick fingers readying him. "I know," Ingwion husked between kisses. "I know what you need."

"Please," Maglor gasped out.

Ingwion kissed him deep, pushing into him. It had been too long since Maglor had anyone or anything inside him - Sören had been the last. He was tight, enough that it burned even with a copious amount of oil, but *hells*, he needed to feel that burn, the shock of feeling alive.

Ingwion moved in him tormentingly slowly, undoing him bit by bit, until Maglor's nails were in his back, not even able to make words to express his need to be taken harder, faster, almost sobbing. That was when Ingwion gave in to him, holding nothing back, the mattress creaking underneath them, flesh slapping together. Maglor's cries became shuddering gasps for breath, lost in the storm.

The storm finally broke, Maglor letting out a strangled cry as he came, followed by a deep groan of satisfaction from Ingwion as he came as well. Maglor gasped again as he felt the heat rush inside him, and tears blurred his eyes as he thought of the way it had felt when Sören had come in him, the feeling of *completion*, like the most perfect part of a song on an endless loop.

But Sören wasn't here. Once again, Maglor felt himself a fool for even hoping - one more taste, a few, before he would have to end things again? And there had been so much *rage* - rightly so, he had broken Sören's heart, but... how could Sören ever forgive

him, let alone consider...?

He is married. This is not right.

Ingwion's lips tenderly brushed Maglor's brow. "I had hoped to give you some peace."

Maglor sighed. Already the pain was rushing back. "I need to be alone," he said.

Ingwion gave him a disapproving look, but wasn't going to argue. "As you wish." Ingwion slipped out of him, collected his clothing, and quietly walked out of the room.

Maglor lay there alone, curled up on the pillows, feeling exhausted. He drew the blanket around himself, like a protective fortress. He closed his eyes and thought of happier times - watching the aurora with Sören snuggled together in a field under the stars in a blanket like this one as a bonfire burned in the snow, the two of them roasting marshmallows and feeding each other, licking the stickiness off each other's faces. Swimming with Sören in a geothermal pool, Sören splashing him, then later playing with his drying hair.

Too many memories. And yet, not enough. Five years was barely a drop in the bucket for his kind.

They were few, compared to the rest of his life, and yet... the happiest time of his life, apart from when he was an elfling.

*If only I had never allowed myself that indulgence...*Maglor sighed.

Auli hopped up on the bed and climbed onto Maglor, snuggling against him, licking his face again. Maglor sighed again as he found himself stroking the sheepdog's thick, plush brown-and-white fur, looking into the knowing, sad brown eyes.

He hadn't owned dogs in literal ages. Animal companionship was as risky as the companionship of Men - they died, they were a liability to move around with.

And yet, he ached for this, too. He hadn't been thrilled about the dogsitting clause on the cottage they were renting, initially, but in just a few short days Auli had grown on him, and he found himself looking forward to walking the dog - running into Sören notwithstanding - and he appreciated the dog's presence when he read or composed. Auli had even helped him sleep last night, after too many restless nights alone, hurting.

He'd have to leave Auli behind, too, and that thought made him sad.

But for now, he allowed himself this indulgence as well, nose buried in the soft fur, petting the sheepdog, sharp edges of his feelings soothed by a being that loved him unconditionally.

He had been dozing off when he felt Ingwion's presence outside the bedroom door, peeking in. Maglor quickly sat up, trying to pretend like he hadn't just been cuddling a dog like he was an elfling again.

"I am to see them tomorrow," Ingwion said simply.

Maglor nodded. He knew that Ingwion had met Sören before - he rankled slightly, still feeling stung by the fact that they'd been intimate, and Ingwion *knew* that would influence his decision to come here.

"What am I to say about you?"

Maglor sighed. "I don't know." He frowned. "I should not even be here."

"But you are. And you haven't left yet."

"Not yet, no."

"You can stay or go as you wish, you know this, but it makes no sense to stay if you keep avoiding him. Sooner or later, you and Sören will have to talk. I cannot do this for you, but what I say tomorrow can help build a bridge to that moment. So think about it."

Maglor took a few moments to consider, and finally he said, "You can tell Sören I came here for closure." It wasn't a lie. More than wanting Sören back, he wanted to quiet the terrible pain he felt Sören broadcasting, somehow.

Ingwion nodded. "Very well." He turned to leave the room, but then he paused, and gave Maglor a smile. "You look adorable cuddled up with the dog."

Maglor's jaw set. "I am not adorable."

Ingwion chuckled as he walked off.

Chapter 11

Sören had only morning and early afternoon classes on Wednesday, and to kill time before Ingmar arrived, he played Stardew Valley, zoning out with his headphones on, listening to the pop station to keep in a cheerful mood.

Or trying to.

He was nervous. In his experience both as a Force-sensitive and as someone with post-traumatic stress disorder, Sören knew he had two different kinds of anxiety. There was the kind brought on by triggers or phobias, even if it was something small where he couldn't pinpoint it right away, and sometimes even happened at happy events - Sören had a case of impostor syndrome thanks to the abuse and bullying he experienced growing up, and it was still hard for him to have art shows and be the center of attention and receive compliments, without feeling like everyone would think his work was shit and was just here because they felt sorry for him. And then there was the kind of anxiety that was brought on by an impending disturbance in the Force.

This was a curious combination of the former and the latter - the trigger of anything related to Alejandro, and a sense that this get-together with Ingmar had the potential to either go very badly or make things *weird*, and things getting weird wouldn't necessarily be better than things going badly.

Well, Sören thought to himself as he used the Force to lift his can of Sprite off the coffee table and bring it to his lips hands-free, *how much weirder could they get, really?*He used the Force to put the can back down.

Ingmar was prompt, arriving right at six-thirty. He came with a delicious-looking strawberry-topped cheesecake, which was obviously storebought and not homemade, but Dooku didn't seem to mind as he answered the door.

"We're having lamb skewers grilled outside," Dooku said, "since it finally stopped raining and it's lovely weather today."

"That sounds perfect." Ingmar smiled.

"Hej, Ingmar," Sören said, not able to help grinning at him.

"Sören. You look lovely."

Sören blushed - he was dressed down, wearing a Bauhaus T-shirt with skinny jeans, and had his hair up in a man bun. He'd considered putting on something fancy, but didn't know if that would arouse some kind of suspicion or jealousy in Dooku, who thus far had been wonderfully mature about the fact that Sören and Ingmar had shagged once back in 2015, but Sören didn't want to push his luck. Sören didn't think he looked remarkable in his usual day-to-day clothes, but Ingmar's compliment was sincere, and Sören swore he could hear *You always look lovely* in the back of his head. He wondered if he was just hearing that, or if Ingmar was mildly Force sensitive.

He felt just a little more anxious at that.

"Would you like coffee or tea while I get everything ready to take outside?" Dooku asked.

"Yes, coffee, please," Ingmar said. "Dark but not black, two sugars."

Sören gestured for Ingmar to sit on the couch with him, and then they heard "Mow?" Snúður trotted over to headbutt and rub against Sören, and then sniff Ingmar. Snúður then got on the couch between them, and proceeded to lay across both of them, purring loudly.

"Well, hello there," Ingmar said, stroking the cat. "Does he have a name?" he asked Sören.

"Jæja... his name is Snúður."

Ingmar smiled. "You named your cat Cinnamon Roll?"

"You speak Icelandic?"

"*Smá. Ekki mjög vel.*"

Sören nodded. "Most non-natives don't. I've been speaking English as a second language since I was... six? I think? And I have to use it regularly because of this big guy over here..." Sören blew Dooku a kiss, who blushed, eyes twinkling. "But still, you get points for knowing what my cat's name means." Sören cocked his head to one side. "Where are you from, anyway?"

A soft laugh. "Around." Ingmar explained at Sören's look, "I travel so much that I could say the world is my country."

"How long have you been in Iceland? Have you stayed here the entire four years since I've seen you?"

"No, I've been elsewhere. I just arrived here a few days ago." Ingmar changed the subject and pointed to Sören's laptop. "What is that?"

"Stardew Valley." Sören flushed, feeling self-conscious about it, like he was an overgrown child. "It's a silly game."

"If it gives you happiness, there's no need to feel silly about it."

Dooku brought Ingmar his coffee. "Here you are," Dooku said, and took a seat across from them in the rocking chair.

"*Takk*," Ingmar said, practicing his Icelandic. He sipped. "Wonderful. Nice and strong."

"I like my coffee fairly strong as well," Dooku said, "though I'm more of a tea drinker." He gestured to his own cup of Earl Grey.

Snúður's purr got louder, and he started kneading.

"Ah, he likes you," Sören said.

"How is Auli?" Dooku asked.

"He's doing well," Ingmar said, nodding. "Auli is at a park right now with my companion to run around and enjoy the weather."

"Our neighbors had asked us to check in on the dog," Dooku said, "and I'm sure he's in good hands, but I am uncomfortable lying to people and telling them I'm checking in if I'm not, so I hope you won't mind if I venture up the street a few times a week to say hello."

"I don't mind at all," Ingmar said, "and you're always welcome to stop by."

"Hopefully that doesn't bother your companion, either."

"It probably won't."

Sören shot Dooku a look, who merely raised an eyebrow at him. The next few minutes passed in silence, and then Sören and Ingmar accompanied Dooku outside. Dooku got the grill started, with chunks of lamb and different vegetables. Earlier, he'd made a salad. He poured out wine for everyone as they waited.

Sören's anxiety was kicked up enough by the mention of the "companion" that even though he didn't want to have this conversation, he also saw no more point in prolonging the inevitable. *Shot in the arm. Get it done, get it over with.*Sören finished his Sprite, made a basket into the recycling bin, and then he said, "So, Ingmar... my husband is aware you and I have a small history, but." He coughed. "Are you aware I have a not-so-small history with your companion, Alejandro?"

Ingmar took a moment to respond, as if he was being cautious about how he would proceed. "Yes, I am."

"I see."

Ingmar waited for Sören to make the next move in the conversation. Now it was Sören's turn to exercise caution, like he was playing a mental game of chess... *or defusing a bomb.* Sören finally said, "Alejandro and I were together for close to five years, and it didn't end on the best note."

"I am aware of that, yes."

Sören raised an eyebrow. "Did the two of you just happen to show up here by coincidence, or did he come here looking for me?"

"Speaking honestly? He came here to see you." Ingmar leaned back, and looked Sören in the eye. "He spoke of needing closure."

Sören folded his arms, and looked down.

Another few minutes of awkward silence passed, and then Ingmar made the next move. "Neither of us wants you to feel unsafe in any way, so if this is bothering you... he can leave."

"I'm not *afraid* of him, if that's what you mean," Sören said. Many people had made Sören feel afraid in his thirty-four years of life - his aunt and uncle, his school peers who tormented him, his ex Justin - but not Alejandro. Not once. For all that Sören didn't know much about Alejandro's background, where he came from, he knew Alejandro's heart, and up until the end, Sören had always felt that Alejandro would rather die than cause him suffering. He had trusted Alejandro with his life. "I just... I don't understand what 'closure' means here. It's been five years. I'm married. He broke my heart. There is nothing left for him."

"He wants to make sure you're all right," Ingmar said. "And I think, in time, he wants to explain what happened, and why things happened the way they did."

Sören snorted. "Oh, I know what happened, and why. You must surely know how that turned out."

"I know that you don't know the full story. There are... details... he was withholding. But that's his story to tell, and he may not be ready to tell it right away. Alejandro has reasons for protecting his privacy the way he does."

"You sound like you've known him a long time."

"He and I go back quite a ways, yes."

"So you know his family and whatever?"

"...Yes."

The earlier comment regarding frequent traveling, combined with this latest information put Sören on edge and he thought to himself *Definitely his family is mixed up in something shady.*

Ingmar met his eyes again, and held them. "Also speaking honestly, I'm not here for the purely unselfish purpose of helping Alejandro. The chance of seeing you again, well... it intrigued me."

Sören's mouth went dry, and his stomach fluttered. He wanted to make words in response, and they failed him.

Ingmar went on, "I know our encounter was brief, but..." A smile. "There was something about you. I regretted not giving you my contact information so we could get to know each other better."

"I regretted that too," Sören said, nodding. "You weren't like everyone else at the club." Sören smiled back. "You referenced Kierkegaard."

"Indeed. *Be that self which one truly is.* And you were, so very much. It radiated. You weren't like everyone else there, either. You were like fire in a crowd full of spent coals."

"You made me feel cared about that night," Sören said. "I had hopes we could have been friends."

Ingmar nodded. "Well... here I am." He glanced at Dooku. "That is, if it doesn't step on your toes."

Dooku shook his head. "My husband is not a slave, and is free to associate with whom he wishes. But, beyond that..." Dooku smiled. "I believe I should say thank you for taking care of him that night. He was having a rather difficult time of things from what he told me, and it seems that experience helped get him where he needed to be."

"The offer of friendship extends to you as well," Ingmar told him.

"That would be nice," Sören said.

"I appreciate that," Dooku said.

Sören let out a small sigh. "And I appreciate your honesty, Ingmar, about... Alejandro." He frowned. "I don't really know what I'm going to do about him and his, uh, need for closure, but I'm not going to ask him to leave."

"If I may interject," Dooku said from the grill.

"By all means," Ingmar said. "This directly affects you, so I would expect you to have an opinion."

Dooku looked at Sören. "As you know, we were separated for a time, and I came here looking for closure, and forgiveness."

Sören snorted. "Jæja, and then I ended up letting you move in, and we got married a few months later."

"Beyond that, though... you would have been within your rights to ask me to leave and never speak to you again, and you did not. You gave me a fair chance to explain myself. And even beyond hoping to rekindle things with you, I was hoping to find you were *all right*, and to clear up why things happened the way they did. I am not excusing what happened between you and Alejandro and whatever decisions he'd made. But from where I sit - or stand, as the case may be at present - I have some sympathy for him wanting to travel all this way to see you again, and as your partner, I think maybe your own healing process involves having a heart to heart with him. To give him the same chance to explain himself, as you gave to me over a year ago."

Sören frowned, swirling the wine around in his glass, thinking it looked a lot like blood. "I don't know if I'm ready to have that talk with him."

"And that's fine if you're not ready right now," Ingmar said. "To be fair, he may not be ready to fully explain things on his end, either. And it may probably take more than one conversation, if and when you are both ready. There is... a lot... for the two of you to discuss, I think."

Sören nodded. "Thank you for understanding."

Ingmar reached out to pat him, and the touch was like being shocked with a live wire. Sören felt himself hardening, glad that the picnic table was disguising his reaction, remembering the way Ingmar had touched him that night four years ago, the best lover he had ever had next to Dooku and Alejandro.

Ingmar licked his lips between sips of wine, and Sören's cock twinged. He shielded himself as tightly as he could, not wanting Dooku to pick up on the reaction across their Force bond, in case it made things awkward. But *fuck*, Ingmar was still hot. Possibly even hotter now, for showing his concern and interest for everyone involved.

Jesus Christ, get a hold of yourself, Sören told himself, sipping wine.

The lamb skewers were ready, and Dooku brought them over. They smelled delicious, and tasted even better than they smelled. Sören and Ingmar complimented the chef, which made Dooku give that small, proud smile. He reached to take Sören's hand under the table, and squeezed it.

I love you, you know, Dooku told him across their Force bond, turning his head to look into Sören's eyes.

I love you too. Sören leaned over to nuzzle him.

"The two of you are very cute together, I must say," Ingmar said. A little wicked grin. "You make quite an attractive couple."

Dooku blushed, and Sören laughed nervously, and then the mental image of them having a threesome flashed in his head, which then, insanely, turned into a foursome with Alejandro. Sören shielded himself harder than he ever had in his life. *God. No. I can't be having thoughts like this. What the FUCK. Settle down, you fucking horndog. Besides, you're still fucking* PISSED *at Alejandro. He doesn't get forgiveness that easily, let alone a pass into my pants.*

"So," Ingmar said, "I mean what I say about wanting to get to know you better, Sören. What is your schedule like?"

"Well," Sören said, "I run Logifugl Listaskóli over in Akureyri. I work three weekends a month, and on the weeks where I work all weekend, I give myself one day off during the week. I happen to be off on Sunday this weekend, but Nico, what are your plans?"

"I'm flexible," Dooku said. "If you wanted to spend time with your friend on Sunday, I'd be happy taking a motorbike ride. The weather's supposed to be nice."

Sören met Ingmar's eyes. "Does that work for you?"

"That certainly works for me." Ingmar smiled. "You're more familiar with this part of the country than I am, I think, so I'll let you decide what activities you'd like for the day."

*I'd like you to fuck my brains out again.*Sören wanted to kick himself, still bearing down on his Force shielding. *No, dammit, brain, we are* not *going there.*

Why not?

Because. Just... hhrrrnnngghhhh.

Ingmar poured more wine, and raised his glass in a toast. "To the start of a beautiful friendship."

Chapter 12

Thursday was a fairly uneventful day, and then Friday came. While Sören held his afternoon classes, the local chess club was meeting at the Akureyri library, which Dooku liked to attend. A half-hour before his last class of the day ended, he got a text from Dooku.

Dearest, I was so engrossed in writing before the meeting that I didn't have time to go to the store, and we need more cat litter.

Dooku did the grocery shopping often enough that Sören didn't mind doing it, and indeed, wanted to feel like he was contributing a bit more. *I can go to the store,* he texted back. *Do I need to get stuff for dinner too?*

Something quick and easy. I was going to grill outside, but it's raining.

Sören thought for a moment. *You fine with frozen pizza?*

LOL. I shall endure.

Sören snickered - before they'd met, Dooku had never even had pizza. They had a wood stove, which made frozen pizza more palatable on the rare occasions they had it.

On the way back from Logifugl Listaskóli, Sören took a detour to the supermarket, picking up a frozen pizza, a carton of ice cream, a bottle of ginger ale, a few other random assorted food items, and then, a 30 liter bag of cat litter. While Sören had a slim figure, he wasn't as physically active as his husband, and he heard himself wheezing as he took down the bag from the shelf and put it in the cart. Once he put it in the trunk of his jeep, he needed to take a puff from his asthma inhaler, which he didn't have to do often, but was glad to have on hand for times like this.

It had been raining for most of the day and the rain had mostly let up now and it was drizzling, with a mist that gave the spectacular landscape a haunted feeling as Sören drove back. It was the right sort of atmosphere for Sören's goth rock playlist, which, despite his attire, was only more of a sometimes thing since...

Alejandro.

Alejandro's music had a touch of influence from Cocteau Twins and The Cure, while still sounding original. He had been a big fan of Depeche Mode in particular, and anything on the Projekt label. He listened to other genres - he'd taught Sören to appreciate classical and jazz; Alejandro had been a classically trained pianist before taking up guitar - but he defaulted to goth, which made sense considering that deep melancholy Sören had felt in him, a lifetime of regret so deep he could barely talk about it.

So though Sören had enjoyed bands such as Joy Division, New Order, and Siouxsie and the Banshees long before meeting Alejandro - it had been the soundtrack to his angsty teenage years - such was the association with his ex-lover, the goth, that he couldn't do it often, the last few years.

But today, it was the kind of day for that. "New Dawn Fades" by Joy Division played as Sören drove slowly from Akureyri into Svalbarðseyri, through the silver mists swirling around the view of the fjord.

A change of speed, a change of style.
A change of scene, with no regrets,
A chance to watch, admire the distance,
Still occupied, though you forget.
Different colours, different shades,
Over each mistakes were made.
I took the blame.
Directionless so plain to see,
A loaded gun won't set you free.
So you say.
We'll share a drink and step outside,
An angry voice and one who cried,
'We'll give you everything and more,
The strain's too much, can't take much more.'
I've walked on water, run through fire,
Can't seem to feel it anymore.
It was me, waiting for me,
Hoping for something more,
Me, seeing me this time,
Hoping for something else.

Sören sighed. *Well, if this isn't the most accurate song ever.*

He pulled onto his street and "Walking In My Shoes" by Depeche Mode started. And then, some meters in the distance, coming out of the fog, was Alejandro, walking Auli.

Oh my fucking god, I summoned him.

Sören was in front of his cottage and he considered just waiting in the jeep till Alejandro passed by, but not only did he have perishables to put away, he didn't feel like spending the rest of the summer hiding from Alejandro. *YOU came here to MY turf.*

Sören shut off the engine and got out of the jeep.

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Even dressed down in skinny jeans and a Nine Inch Nails T-shirt, Sören somehow managed to look gorgeous. His curls were curlier in the humid air, and Maglor watched Sören watching him, looking away, then stealing another look at him.

Those beautiful dark brown eyes, like melted chocolate, warm and expressive. Today, they expressed sorrow, looking at him. Sorrow he'd caused.

Maglor didn't just see it in those eyes, he felt it. He heard it, in the Song, echoing in the swirling mists around them, as if those mists had been made of their mutual unshed tears.

*You do not know how sorry I am, beloved.*Maglor swallowed hard, paused in his tracks, watching Sören open the trunk of his jeep. *If circumstances were different, I would have married you. If you were also immortal, I would have spent eternity with you, without hesitation.*

Fate was cruel, and it seemed that his was to lose all he loved.

He watched Sören bring bags to his doorstep, and then Sören turned around and returned to the jeep. When he saw Sören struggling with the 30 liter sack of cat litter, giving a telltale asthmatic wheeze, he *acted*, not thinking about it. He tied Auli's leash to Sören's mailbox, and walked over, taking the large bag of cat litter like it weighed nothing.

Sören gave him a look, but didn't stop him. Maglor carried the bag to Sören's doorstep, and Sören opened the door. He picked up the bags of groceries from the doorstep and brought them in. Maglor then took a step inside Sören's cabin, and gingerly lay the sack of cat litter down next to the door.

He was about to head back out the door and walk away, and then Sören said, "Alejandro. Wait."

Maglor blinked, and stopped.

Sören cleared his throat. "*Takk*," he said, his voice rough with raw emotion. "You... didn't have to do that, but you did. That was kind of you."

Maglor slowly turned around, and their eyes met.

"Um..." Sören ran a hand through his curls, looking down, shifting his weight from one foot to the other. "Do you want to stay for a bit? Have coffee or tea?"

Maglor took a deep breath, and gave a nod. "I'd like that, thank you, Sören."

Sören walked to the wood stove, and put on a kettle. "Do you want coffee or tea?"

"Whatever you're having."

"Coffee it is, then." Sören looked at him again. "You still take yours the same way?"

He remembered. Maglor found himself smiling a little, and nodded again. "I do, yes."

"You can shut the door," Sören said, "it's too damp to leave it open."

Auli would be fine tied up to the mailbox post for a short while. Maglor gently closed the door, and Sören gestured at the couch. "Sit," he said. Maglor sat.

Sören sat in the rocking chair across from him, and they spent a moment just looking at each other in awkward silence. Maglor waited for Sören to make the first move, and finally Sören found his words. "I, ah. My husband and I," Sören said, emphasizing the word *husband*, "met with Ingmar the other night."

"I know."

"He told me that you showing up here wasn't the eerie coincidence I thought it was." Sören folded his arms. "So, five years after you broke my heart, you decided you wanted to, what, check in on me and make sure I'm all right?"

"Pretty much, yes."

Sören pursed his lips. "Why?"

"What do you mean, why?" Maglor shrugged. "We had a very intense, very passionate

relationship, and you know as well as I do that feelings don't turn on and off like a switch. It's possible to still care about someone after a relationship ends. And..." Sören was starting to look away again, fidgeting in discomfort, and Maglor challenged his gaze, for their eyes to lock once more. "You also know as well as I do that you have a very sensitive heart. That fire in you has come close to going out more than once. So... I wanted to make sure you were all right, yes. Still alive. Still... you."

Sören snorted. "So what, you can feel bloody better about yourself for leaving me the way you did?"

"Sören, words cannot express how much I regret all of... that."

"Jæja, sure." Sören's tone indicated he didn't believe that at all. But there was a wisp of a broadcast - *I want to believe.*

Oh, Sören. Melindo. *You have no idea how much I ache to hold you.*

The kettle whistled, and Sören got up. He made coffee for each of them - instant, but it was Spanish coffee, so it wasn't so bad - and made them both with cream and two sugars. He brought over two mugs, and handed Maglor his before taking his seat again.

"Mow?" A black-and-white, medium-haired cat with a pink nose and yellow-green eyes came over to Sören, and Sören proceeded to fuss over the cat, stroking and talking baby talk in Icelandic. Maglor smiled, not able to help himself, while also feeling a pang at how *adorable* it was. Sören still had that bewitching innocence to him, which had been not just a joy in his life, giving him something other than bitterness, but had made their sensual pleasure that much more decadent and delicious.

Then the cat came over to him to sniff. Maglor patted the seat next to him on the couch and the cat hopped up and allowed himself to be pet. "You got a cat," he said. "He's lovely - I assume that's a he?"

Sören nodded. "His name is Snúður."

Maglor laughed. "You named him -"

"Cinnamon Roll, já, Ingmar remarked on it too." Sören rolled his eyes, but he had just the faintest touch of a smile.

Then Sören glared at him. "So, not that this is any of my business, but your boyfriend over there."

Maglor's jaw set. "He's not my -"

Sören's breath came out in a hiss. "For fuck's sake, Alejandro, don't give me that 'I don't like labels' shit." Sören sipped his coffee. "Like I was saying... Ingmar. This isn't my business, but what's going on with your wife? Does she know?"

"I am not married now." The choice of wording was deliberate. He had, in fact, been married once, a very long time ago. It was not a marriage of love, but one to uphold the Law, and ended bitterly - the only good thing to come of it had been a son, Ecthelion, but the wife had left with him and Maglor had not gotten to raise him, indeed, Ecthelion had never been informed about who his father was; not being there was another thing Maglor had punished himself for.

"Fucking told you so," Sören muttered under his breath. Then Sören said, in his normal tone of voice, "So at least you're not running around behind her back with that guy."

"No. But Sören, Ingmar and I -"

Sören put out his hand. "Again, this is not my business."

Maglor leaned back against the couch, took his coffee, and sipped.

Another few moments of awkward silence passed, and Maglor said, finally, "But you are married."

"Yes." Sören flashed the ring on his finger, white gold. "We got married in September of last year. Married not quite a year yet, but we've been together since November 2017."

"I'm happy for you." He wasn't, really, but he wanted *Sören* to be happy, more than his own happiness.

Sören nodded. "I have a nice little life up here."

"It seems you do, yes. I'll still be staying at the cottage until the end of August, to make sure it stays fine."

"How *thoughtful* of you."

"If you truly want me to leave, Sören, I will. Ingmar told you that, too. But..." Maglor sighed, took another sip of his coffee, and put the mug down. "There's so much I need to say, and I don't know where or how to begin."

Sören shrugged. "I'm not going to ask you to leave. But I don't know what I can offer you."

"I understand. I know this is a lot, me showing up here unannounced."

It's not the first time it's happened to me, Sören broadcasted, and Maglor wondered what all that was about. He had a feeling he'd find out soon enough.

Then the door opened.

On the flight to Iceland, Ingwion had of course told Maglor that Sören was married. Maglor didn't quite know what he was expecting, but he was not expecting what walked through the door.

The thing that struck Maglor first was not the man's age – though he was surprised by the large age difference – but by the man's presence. The man was six-foot-five, and stood not just tall but proud, with a similar posture and gait to all those Maglor had known of royal blood. *Like my father and uncles.* He had a lean but powerful build, moving swiftly and with grace, like a large predatory cat. He didn't simply enter the cabin, but he *owned* the space he was in... yet quietly, with reserved dignity, soft power. He wore a long brown cape set with a silver knotwork clasp, over a black tunic and trousers - simple but elegant, and rather out of place in rural Iceland, deliberately so. Short silver hair combed back, and a neatly trimmed silver beard and mustache. High cheekbones, slightly crooked patrician nose, thick salt-and-pepper brows, sharp features, hawk-like dark eyes that seemed to look through him rather than at him, keenly observant. Elderly though he

might be, he was still very much *alive*, radiating vigor and vitality. He was also still quite handsome - he and Sören looked well together.

And they also *fit*. Sören burned like fire, and his husband was like the open ocean - seemingly calm, but there was much there, teeming with life beneath the waves, hidden beauty, hidden dangers. That cool, ever-flowing water kept Sören from burning himself to death, and Sören kept those waters free of ice. The purple-green aurora fire of Sören reflected over a midnight sea, illuminating the depths within.

"Nico!" Sören's face lit up, and he bounced up from the rocking chair to throw his arms around the taller, older man, who hugged him, but gave a concerned look over his shoulder. Sören patted him reassuringly, and then he said, "Nico, this is my ex, Alejandro Magalhães. Alejandro, this is my husband, Nicolae Dooku."

"How do you do," Dooku said, all formality, coming over to shake his hand.

He envied the old man, getting to taste those full, soft lips, to caress the silk of Sören's body, to feel the all-consuming fire of the way Sören loved. But as angry as he had been - and still was - at Ingwion for taking him, *taking what was mine*, he could not bring himself to hate someone who made Sören smile that smile, the light of the world. He took Dooku's hand and shook it, one gentleman to another.

"Nico, Alejandro brought in that huge sack of cat litter behind you, so I decided to invite him in for coffee."

"That's fine." Dooku gave a small, polite smile. "Thank you for helping him with that. He has asthma -"

"I know." Maglor resisted the urge to say *I know Sören's body very well.*

Dooku turned to Sören then with a disapproving look. "You could have gotten a smaller bag, you know."

"Já, I could, but we'd go through it faster and it's a pain in the arse to get, so I decided to get one that would last awhile," Sören explained.

"That makes logical sense to a point, but not with your asthma," Dooku said. "Get a smaller bag next time unless I'm there with you." Then Dooku turned to Maglor and said, "My apologies. I'm sure you truly wanted to spend your time observing our little domestic banalities."

Sören's laughter rang out - that wild, full-bodied, raucous laugh he'd missed so much, effervescent, sparkling in his light. Dooku's eyes twinkled at Sören, as he broadcast that he loved that laugh too.

"It's no problem," Maglor said. "I should probably be on my way anyway. I don't want to intrude, and poor Auli is probably going crazy out there tied up."

"All right." Sören walked Maglor to the door, and held it open for him. Maglor lingered for a moment, and so did Sören. "Thank you, again, for helping me bring that in," Sören said softly.

"You're welcome. Anytime." Maglor ached to touch him, and reined in those impulses. "Thank you for the coffee, and for, well... not asking me to leave."

"I, ah." Sören ran a hand through his curls. "I can't quite make any offers of friendship right now, but I can be open to closure, if that makes sense."

"It does." It was what he wanted to hear. "So I'll see you sometime, then."

Sören nodded. "We'll take things as they go."

Maglor walked to Sören's mailbox, where Auli whined at the sight of him. "I'm sorry, little guy," he said, taking the leash off the post. "Let's continue our walk, yes?" He wasn't ready to go back to the cottage yet, especially not if Ingwion was there.

He walked back into the fog, letting the drizzle disguise his tears, mingled sorrow and relief.

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The frozen deluxe pizza was no longer frozen, wonderfully crispy from the wood stove. Sören cautiously nibbled the hot pizza, not wanting to burn his mouth. He rolled his eyes and cackled at Dooku using a knife and fork on his slices.

"Seriously?"

"What?" Dooku raised an eyebrow. "Is it such a bad thing to have table manners?"

"Well, no." Sören smirked. "It's kind of cute."

"I am not cute *anddon'tyoueven* -"

Too late. "Hi Not Cute -"

Dooku jokingly waved his knife in Sören's direction, and Sören wiggled his eyebrows and made a throaty growl that Dooku *blushed* at.

"You look kind of hot with a knife," Sören told him, truthfully. He remembered Valentine's Day, when Dooku tied him up and teased him. The thought of Dooku holding a knife to his throat, as he proved he trusted his husband with his life...

...or perhaps doing the same to Dooku...

Sören gave a shudder at that, a frisson of delicious lust, and licked his lips without thinking about it. At the look Dooku gave him, Sören said, "Er, the pizza looks good."

"Are you... having dirty thoughts."

"Am I ever not having dirty thoughts."

Dooku laughed, a belly laugh, that Sören grinned at. He loved making Dooku laugh like this, remembering how sad the older man had been when they first met. His days were full of laughter and banter like this now.

"The erotica writer is asking me if I'm having dirty thoughts," Sören teased, before using the Force to steal Dooku's knife, pick off a piece of sausage from the pizza, and put it in his mouth, sucking on it before chewing.

"Dear god." Dooku laughed again, blushing deeper, before using the Force to steal his fork back.

"So, ah." Sören looked at his pizza, then at Dooku, then at his pizza again, wondering how to broach the topic of Alejandro.

"MROWR?" Snúður came over to beg, giving them the most pathetic sad face a cat had ever made.

"No, you beggar, cats do not eat pizza," Dooku said. "You have food in your dish."

"*MOW.*"

"Unless you're asking, 'where has my new friend gone?'" Sören's voice became a baby talk squeak as he skritched the cat. "Huh. Those new people who came to give you pettings and then went back to a stinky dog, you want everyone to just worship you, oh yes you do! Yes you do, my little sweet bun baby boy."

Dooku chuckled, and Sören laughed too as the cat flopped over for belly rubs. Then Sören became more serious and said, "Um, thank you for not freaking out about Alejandro being here."

"I trust you," Dooku said, and Sören could feel sincerely that he meant it.

"I know you said I should hear out his side of things," Sören said, "and I want you to know I'm at least considering it."

Dooku nodded.

"I don't know how things are gonna be," Sören said honestly. "Best-case scenario, maybe he and I could be friends again. I'd be lying if I said I didn't miss him. But it'll take time, and it'll take discussion. So, if you're out one day and you come back and he's here..."

"I get it," Dooku said. "But also, I'll be going down the street to check in on the dog, and be neighborly. I could, perhaps, mediate between the two of you as needed. I was a barrister for a very long time."

"You could," Sören said, nodding. "Neither Alejandro nor myself have the best people skills. We were these two weird loners, inhabiting the same weird wavelength." Sören nibbled pizza, remembering. "We got each other in a way other people didn't get us. But damn if we didn't fuck that all to hell when he walked away from me."

Dooku reached across to squeeze Sören's hand. "One man's loss is another man's gain," he husked.

Sören leaned over and kissed him, not caring that they had mouths full of melted cheese. Sören stroked his cheek, his whiskers, and gently rubbed his chest. Snúður took the opportunity to put his front paws on Sören's knees and lean in to try to snipe a stray bit of cheese, and Sören snatched the plate away just in time.

"No," Sören said, wagging his finger. "Cats do not eat pizza."

Snúður gave a pathetic tiny peep like a starving kitten, and it made Sören double over, laughing. "What a little actor you are," Sören teased, chucking the cat's chin. "Yes, we feel

so, so sorry for you, you've never had food in your *life*, let alone gourmet canned cat food sitting in your dish over there..."

"Clearly," Dooku said, "he wants a taste of something different. He may need a treat, then go back to be satisfied with his cat food. I suppose that's not unreasonable - we humans don't eat the same thing every day, after all."

For some reason, Sören thought of Ingmar, and he clamped his mental shielding down as fast as he could, not wanting Dooku to pick up on the attraction that was still very much present, the strange desire he had to taste Ingmar again, which in no way meant he wasn't also hungry for Dooku. He felt greedy - he wanted them both.

Alejandro's still hot as fuck, too. Just saying.

Will you shut *up,* Sören argued with himself.

Sören's jaw set, not wanting to argue with himself on what was supposed to be a lighthearted Friday evening.

Chapter 13

On Saturday morning it was still foggy, but expected to clear and be sunny in the afternoon. Sören was off to Saturday classes at the studio - he'd be free on Sunday - and did his usual morning routine of checking e-mail, and while he checked his e-mail his cell phone went off. It was his brother.

“Good morning,” Dag said in English - Sören knew that was a courtesy to Matt, who didn't speak Icelandic.

“Good morning,” Sören replied in English. “Isn't it, like, six your time? What the fuck are you doing up at this hour?”

“Going over research and a lesson plan for my physics students,” Dagnýr said. “But also, I have a few announcements for you.”

“Oh? What, that you're a fucking nerd? I already knew that.” Sören couldn't resist teasing him.

“Ha ha. OK, well the first is that I gave a TED Talk, and it's going to be on YouTube soon.”

“Oh!” Sören perked up at that. “We'll have to watch that. What's it about?”

“The same subject I wrote my doctoral thesis on. The possibility of alternate universes. String theory, quantum mechanics, bla bla.”

“OK. I probably won't understand most of it, but I'll watch it anyway.”

“I did try to present it for a more layman audience, not just other astrophysicists. Kind of like how Neil does *Cosmos*.” Neil de Grasse Tyson was a personal friend of Dag's. “Anyway, there's more.”

“Of course.”

“Now that my TED talk is done and I have less classes to teach over the summer... I have some more free time on my hands, and on the advice of one of my esteemed colleagues, Edmund, I'll be pursuing an area of both academic and personal interest. You know our aunt Gitta, who lives in Scotland?”

Sören racked his brain for a minute. “Mamma's sister Birgitta, right? Birgitta Jónsdóttir?”

“*Já.* She moved to Scotland back in the 1980s, when we were little.”

“Jæja, this got awkward.” Sören swallowed hard and began to pace, feeling nervous.

“So I heard.”

“What did you hear, exactly?”

“Every story has two sides, so you can tell me yours, then I'll... yeah. Just go on.”

“When I was in my early twenties - I want to say this was right after Margrét's first suicide attempt - Gitta *called* me. like out of the blue, I don't know how she got my number. and I just, like, tore her a new arsehole. I tore into her about how she wasn't there and Katrín and Einar abused us, and maybe if she had actually been around all this shit wouldn't have happened and it was too late for her to start giving a fuck, etcetera etcetera ad

nauseum.”

“Do you know *why* she wasn't around?”

“I'm assuming you're gonna tell me I fucked up somehow.”

“*Já*, you fucked up big. The reason why she wasn't in contact with us while we were growing up under that roof? *She wasn't allowed.* She is a lesbian. Even before Kat found *the Jesus*, she still had a *bit* of a problem with Gitta.”

“Oh shit. I... uh.” Sören sat down.

“You didn't even give her a chance to explain why she hadn't been there, you just yelled. She decided after that phone call to not try. I was the first one of us to get in touch with her after that. And I feel kind of shitty that it took me doing this project to do so, but, what's done has been done. Fortunately, Gitta at least *understands* why you had the reaction you did, back then.”

“I owe her a huge fucking apology. If you could e-mail me her contact info later...”

“You got it. But anyway, I'm getting to one of the announcements here. That rumor that we're elf-blooded? That Mamma mentioned a couple times when we were little? I asked Gitta about it and she said that her grandmother - named Margrét, incidentally - was a wealth of information about that subject. Gitta had quite a lot to say about it. Gitta inherited a family Bible, which she keeps even though that's not her religion anymore, and it has a family tree in it. That family tree goes back to *the late 1700s*, which will make it WAY easier for me to do some research past that, and try to track down the source of this rumour. There's GOT to be some blurb or something SOMEWHERE about an odd ancestor of ours, with clues that will either point to aliens, or just people making shit up. But I think it's aliens. Either way, I intend on finding out one way or the other.”

“Jæja...” Sören thought his brother was a bit nuts, but wanted to be supportive. “We Icelanders have been rather meticulous about documenting family lines and histories since the Saga days.”

“Pretty much. So I can use the notes in this Bible as a reference when I look at databases, so that way if I come across a Jón Jónsson or something I can narrow it down instead of poking at 50 different Jón Jónssons within the same time period.”

They chuckled, and Dag went on, “I'm going elf hunting, yo. The truth is out there, somewhere, and I want to find it for science. I haven't made it a secret in my career as a scientist that I think Earth was visited by aliens, and I think I can find something to back this theory up somehow. But my colleague Edmund finally pushed me off my ass about it. He had some opinions on the subject, like he thinks there were ancient civilizations here on Earth, no aliens involved, just different species of *homo*, that were destroyed. But he's just a math professor.”

“How high were you when you had this conversation?” Sören couldn't resist.

“One whole marijuana.”

Sören snickered. “So is that the announcement?”

“There's more.”

“Jæja.”

Dag cleared his throat. “Matt and I wanted to wait until everything was absolutely sure and finalized before we mentioned this anywhere...”

“PLEASE tell me you two dorks are not breaking up.”

“Er, no? I'd ask what would give you that idea, but...”

“Jæja, fuck you. I told you I'm fine.” Sören had mentioned the re-appearance of Alejandro in e-mails with his brother and sister and cousin.

“Sure, Sören,” Dag said in an *I don't believe you* tone. He cleared his throat again. “AS I WAS SAYING, Matt and I have been playing this card close to our chests to make sure everything was all lined up before we said anything, but... we found a surrogate mother. Her name is Nicole, and she lives in upstate New York. She came to stay with us for a few days last month to see what we were like before agreeing to be the egg donor. We're going to start everything next week.”

“EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!” Sören ran laps around the cabin, flailing. He jumped up and down. Snúður meowed and hid under the couch, which made Sören feel a little guilty, though he also laughed. “I'M GONNA BE AN UNCLE?”

“You're not just going to be an uncle, but Matt and I were talking and we'd like you to be the godfather. Which isn't just a fancy title, but we actually want you to have custody in case anything happens to us.”

“Nothing better happen to you.” Sören scowled, thinking of losing his mother. Almost losing Margrét. If something happened to his twin he'd be devastated. He pushed that thought away as quickly as he could. “I'm... honored? And surprised? Why me and not Margrét as godmother? Her life has been stable for longer than mine.”

“You have a cat. And Margrét doesn't want kids. That's why she got a vasectomy. I don't feel like it would be fair to overwhelm her with suddenly taking custody if... I mean, she totally would, but I know she wouldn't like it. Not that I'm saying you're a second choice or anything, that's totally not it.”

“No, I didn't take it that way, don't worry. Even if I had been second choice, I wouldn't be offended, I know my life was kind of a trainwreck until a few years ago.”

Dag didn't want to comment on that, and Sören didn't blame him. Dag continued, “Even without the 'if we die while the child is of an age to need a guardian, that responsibility falls to you' hanging over your head...I want my offspring to have as much love and support as they can. So I expect you to be involved in their life.”

“Well, yeah, of course.” Sören couldn't resist ribbing him some more. “I can't wait to be a horrible influence on these kids.”

“Kids, plural?”

“You do know IVF usually results in multiple births, right? I hope you have twins who troll the fuck ut of you.”

Dag blew a raspberry over the phone. Sören blew one back.

“Anyway, not to be rude, but... is that it?” Sören looked at the time. “I gotta bounce, I have classes today.”

“That was all,” Dag said.

“OK. I'm very proud of you for the TED Talk, I'm very glad you're in touch with Gitta, and I'm THRILLED for you guys, you and Matt will make great parents.” One last gentle but affectionate poke. “You already have the fussy worried thing down to, dare I say it, a science.”

Dag made a rimshot noise. “Bye, you butt. Love you.”

“Love you too.”

Sören hopped up and walked over to Dooku's desk, to throw his arms around the older man's neck and give him a big kiss. Dooku returned the kiss and nuzzled him, affectionately tousling Sören's curls.

"It's nice to see you smiling," he said, chucking Sören's chin, stroking the corner of his mouth.

"Am I smiling? I guess I am." Sören nodded. "You heard all of that, I take it."

"I did." Dooku gave a small smile that would be a big grin on anyone else. "It's very good news."

"It is." Sören felt a surge of pride for his brother, and that knife-to-the-gut touch at being asked to be the godfather, making him happy and sad all at once - it was an honor, but one Sören didn't know if he was worthy of.

Dooku saw the sudden frown on Sören's face – across their bond, Sören knew he felt the concern flare up again over the godfather custodial issue – and Dooku patted him, took Sören's hands and squeezed. "I doubt anything will happen to him or Matt, they're still young and in good health -"

So were my parents. Sören thought about his mother.

" - but I think that you, yourself, would be a good father." Dooku looked down and sighed. "Sometimes I feel like I'm cheating you out of life because I'm really too old to become a father for the first time, now -"

Sören put his finger to Dooku's lips. "We've been over that 'too old' shit. You're not cheating me out of anything. I made my choice to be with you. We take each day as it comes. I'd rather have you, as you are, than not be with you because of your age, even if I knew you would die tomorrow." Sören hugged him again. "Yes, telling the absolute honest truth sometimes I wonder about what it would be like to be a father, but it's not an urge so strong that I'm willing to sacrifice you for it." Sören pulled away reluctantly; he was already running a little late. His eyes were burning, threatening to shed tears, caught up in the emotion of the discussion threads running together. He loved his brother and was happy for him, he was touched to be made the godfather, and he wished Dooku didn't still feel guilty on some level for *"condemning him to life with an old man".* He stroked Dooku's whiskers, needing to defuse the bomb of feelings with humor, his usual coping mechanism. "Besides, there's probably some alternate universe or past life or whatever where I had seven kids or something."

Dooku chuckled. "I'd pay to see that."

"I'm sure all those children were *super* well-adjusted, with my... me-ness." Sören

snickered. "It's like the Force looked at that and said 'NOPE, LET'S NOT DO THAT AGAIN.'"

Dooku rolled his eyes. "Yes, they likely were subjected to enough cruelty with your dad jokes."

"Exactly. And embarrassing them with wearing silly hats and yelling at crows to get off my lawn." Sören grinned, tickled by the absurdity of his own joke; his mind went strange places sometimes. "Shit, I really gotta run." He leaned in to peck Dooku again. "What are your plans for the day?"

"I'm thinking about going for a stroll in a bit," Dooku said.

"You're always so active." Sören leered. "Toning that gorgeous, ripped body and tight, hot arse of yours."

Dooku blushed. "You have a one-track mind, dearest."

"And you love it." Sören blew him a kiss on his way out, and gave his bad attempt at a wink.

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Dooku was still blushing and feeling that flustered butterflies-in-the-stomach ten minutes after Sören's jeep drove away, as he got up to put the breakfast dishes in the sink and start washing them. When Sören was in a good mood, he downright *sparkled*. He lived life so fully, so intensely - taking joy in the smallest things, like a big kid. Watching him create was an experience, the way he seemed to be transported somewhere else, the way the Living Force swirled and hummed around him as he brought his inner visions to life. His creative energy, his playful energy, was intoxicating. And he had a way of shining that on other people - he'd seen how Sören made his students smile and laugh, complimenting their work, giving them assurances if they had doubts. He'd seen Sören's kindness with Frankie, building her up when the world had worked overtime to try to cut her down. And it wasn't insincere flattery, Sören had said before he saw the beauty in everyone, and that he tried to foster and nurture that beauty. When he painted portraits of others, it was "*what their soul sings like*".

When Sören turned that sparkle onto him, with his flirting and teasing... it made him feel like a sex god.

It felt wonderful... and it felt unfair.

He would be seventy-one in December. Yes, he knew that Sören didn't like him going on about their age difference and feeling like it was unfair to him, and indeed he'd tried to be "fair" and push Sören away, so he could find someone younger - he knew about Sören's time as an intern in med school, the way he'd had a breakdown after patients died and he felt it, he could only imagine the way Sören would be devastated when the inevitable happened with him. But the separation had devastated them both and he'd agreed to take things one day at a time. And there was a reasonable chance he'd have another ten or twenty years - he was already in excellent health and shape for his age when their relationship started, but moving to Iceland a year ago had been very good for him indeed, with the fresh air, abundance of local fish and lamb. He liked hiking and biking around the countryside, and he no longer had the occasional joint pain that had once plagued him.

He felt more energetic than he had in decades.

Dooku and Sören had a very healthy, passionate, and active sex life, making love at least once a day. Dooku didn't need Viagra - he'd only had inability to get an erection once, in a time of stress just before the unfortunate separation they had. He had an appetite and stamina, and enjoyed keeping Sören satisfied. Indeed, it was something he was secretly, quietly proud of.

But he knew that as time went on, this wouldn't be forever. He wondered how much longer he had, before the inevitable decline, and when his randy husband would no longer get his needs met. And Sören being Sören, would claim he was "fine", and say things like "I have a hand." But Dooku knew it wasn't the same - he too had a hand when he and Sören were apart, and the blazing reality was far better than the glimmer of fantasy. Moreover, Dooku had noticed Sören's creative energy seemed linked to his sexual energy - when he was happy, in love, and making love frequently, he produced his best work, as Dooku had seen during his relationship with Sören, and the pieces Sören had produced while he was with Alejandro. *Force*, Sören had made beautiful art while he and Alejandro were together. Sören's soul was fed by his art, and being starved for expression, the magical act of creation, as he became starved for touch, for release... Dooku cringed at that, aching for him.

There was the thought of how Sören would handle it all, when he finally went. He knew how Sören entered the downward spiral after the breakup with Alejandro, and during their own separation - even if this would not be intentional abandonment, if they would be together until the end, he had the strong feeling that Sören would be consumed enough by grief to self-destruct. That inner fire that had kept him alive this long always seemed to be in danger of either snuffing out entirely or burning him to death, or perhaps a combination of the two. If Sören was aching to be touched, pleased, in the years prior, as Dooku became frail? Once he was alone and grieving, it would make Sören's "party animal" phase of 2015 look tame, the explosion before his star went dark.

Dooku had a feeling Dagnýr sensed this also, and was offering Sören a more active role in his future children's lives as a way of keeping Sören alive, rather like how taking in Snúður had given Sören something to live for. But would it be enough?

It *hurt* to think about these things. It was a tragedy.

Dooku sighed, leaning against the sink counter when the dishes were done. He pinched the bridge of his nose. This was a rather morbid way to start the day, thinking about all of this again, and it was a bad time to revisit this particular rabbit hole - Sören might be in a good mood now, like a rainbow after a storm, but how long would it last before the next storm rolled in... and he was absolutely sure there would be at least one more, before Vigdís and Páll returned in August.

Dooku prepared what he'd need for the stroll he was planning on - his cell phone just in case, a couple bottles of water - and stepped out. He wore khakis and a light grey button-down shirt with the sleeves rolled up, a leather travel satchel slung over one shoulder, against his hip. He added a grey "boonie hat" he'd gotten for protection from the sun, even though there wasn't much sun to be had at the moment.

Just as he was leaving, going down the front path, he caught sight of Alejandro walking Auli, coming up the street towards him.

Well, this is awkward. He could pretend he didn't see them, go inside and wait it out, he could keep moving and hope Alejandro wasn't taking the same path, or he could take the

direct approach.

I did tell Vigdís and Páll I'd check up on the dog. This is checking up on the dog.

He held out his hand in a wave, and Alejandro held out his left hand, waving back. Auli got excited, barking and wagging his tail, trying to pull Alejandro along to see his friend.

Dooku waited at the front path and when Alejandro and Auli crossed, Dooku began to walk alongside them.

"Good morning," he said brightly.

"Good morning," Alejandro replied in a neutral tone of voice. "You look like you're out for a hike." Alejandro himself was wearing dark jeans and a black sweater with the sleeves rolled up, dark hair cascading to the middle of his back.

"Yes, I had planned on going for a walk today, while my husband is teaching his art classes. I hope you don't mind if I join you."

"Not at all." Alejandro attempted a thin smile.

He was shielding himself - Dooku wondered if it was habitual, or if Alejandro was mildly Force sensitive and doing so deliberately - but past that shielding, Dooku could feel the slight bristle of discomfort, looking at the man who was now married to someone he once loved very much.

Still loves, present tense.

Alejando was wondering after Sören, and Dooku answered the unspoken*how is he*. "He was truthfully a bit discomfited when you arrived," Dooku told him, "but he's in better spirits today."

A pause. "That's good." Still a neutral tone.

"How is my little friend here?" Dooku stooped to pet Auli, who licked his hand.

"He's doing well." More silence, and then, "I've found myself attached to him."

"You must be, since I see you with the dog the most often." Dooku smiled. "He's a good dog. Our neighbors have children and he's very gentle with them."

"I haven't had a dog since I was young. I rather missed it, surprisingly." A pause. "You have a nice cat."

"That's Sören's baby, although he's become my baby, too. Sören got him shortly after he moved back to Reykjavik from London."

"I hadn't been aware that he'd left. Ingmar had to fill me in about that, though I imagine there are more details than what he shared."

"Your boyfriend seems like a decent fellow. He was kind to Sören, which I appreciate."

Alejandro finally turned to look at him, meeting his eyes. Dooku never knew grey eyes could actually look *hot*, but his were blazing, as if he'd said something offensive. "Ingmar is not my boyfriend," Alejandro said. "I'm single."

"So the two of you..."

"It's not really your business, but I suppose the kids these days would call it 'friends with benefits'. It's a bit more complicated than that, but it's not what I would call a relationship." A pause. "We're certainly not exclusive."

"What about the girl you left Sören for...?"

"I'm not married anymore."

"I see." Dooku felt like he put his foot into it without meaning to; he could feel Alejandro bristling again. "My apologies for bringing it up."

"It's fine." It wasn't fine. "If we're going to be neighbors, we might as well not be strangers, no use hiding from each other and not interacting for the next two months."

"Exactly." Dooku nodded.

"Though I imagine this must be awkward for you as well." Alejandro looked at him again.

"A bit, yes." And not just because this was Sören's ex, and was causing Sören to revisit old painful feelings, which were affecting him, and he had that natural instinct to protect and shield his mate - Alejandro was devastatingly attractive, and Dooku wasn't sure he should be noticing his husband's ex that way, but he was old, not blind. Dooku thought Sören was the most beautiful man in the world, but Alejandro was also exceptionally beautiful - the glorious mane, long dark lashes, thick brows, silver-grey eyes, high cheekbones, clean-shaven, features that were pretty yet masculine the same time. At six-five Dooku was used to being the tallest person in a room at any given time, and both Ingmar and Alejandro were taller than he was. And even clothed, Dooku could tell Alejandro had a sleek but powerful build, like that of a professional athlete or perhaps a soldier.

He carried himself with pride; Dooku knew from Sören that Alejandro was wealthy, though Sören had suspected his family was involved in shady dealings of some kind. But this was the bearing of nobility, something Dooku recognized since he himself came from Romanian counts and they had a similar posture and gait. Dooku knew old money when he saw it, and Alejandro's family was shady perhaps, but Alejandro was still definitely old money.

He had a deep voice, not quite as deep as Dooku's, more of a baritone than a bass. He was soft-spoken, and sounded American with a touch of a Latin accent, which was pleasant to listen to.

His left hand was graceful, and his right hand was badly scarred. Dooku wondered about it, and tried not to stare. Somehow, it didn't detract from his attractiveness.

Alejandro and Sören would have been beautiful to watch together - Dooku remembered that one photo he'd seen of them engaged in foreplay in the Netherlands, both shirtless, Sören sucking the index and middle fingers of Alejandro's left hand as Alejandro's lips grazed his neck, heat in their gaze as they looked at each other... pornographic in its sensuality even though the photo was from the shoulders up. Then there was that painting Sören had done of them making love on the black sand beach of Reynisfjara, Sören riding him... Dooku could only imagine that the two of them had as intense a sex life as he and Sören had, if perhaps not moreso because Alejandro was younger and able to go

multiple rounds...

*Why am I thinking about this?*Dooku felt himself flushing, trying to bat those thoughts out of his mind. But he couldn't help stealing another glance out of the corner of his eye at Alejandro, who looked pensive as he watched the road ahead.

They turned, together, into the rolling hills.

"Where are you headed?" Alejandro asked.

"Do you want company?"

Alejandro shrugged. "I won't tell you no."

"Then wherever you're going."

"I'm walking down to the bay."

That was a bit of a hike, but one Dooku was able to take. He nodded, and they continued walking in the direction of the fjord. The fog was starting to let up. They walked in silence for awhile.

"Awkwardness aside, how do you like it here in Svalbarðseyri?" Dooku asked, still trying to be neighborly.

"I do." Alejandro nodded. "It's peaceful here. The landscape is lovely. The locals are friendly enough." With that, a bit of a wry smile at Dooku. "I appreciate that you're trying to be nice to me. I imagine you must hate me."

Dooku took a moment to consider his response. "It's awkward, but I don't hate you, no." Dooku thought of Sören's vulnerable heart, and what he knew now of the younger man's history, the broken pieces he'd been offered, that Sören had trusted him to be careful with. "There are better people to hate from Sören's past."

"Indeed there are. I assume you know about his upbringing." A flash of anger, still hot even after five years apart.

"I know quite a lot, Alejandro." Dooku looked at him more openly. "You can surely understand why I'd be a bit protective of him. Why I'd want to keep an eye on you."

"I do." And then Alejandro looked at him, sizing him up. "As I'm sure you can understand my own protectiveness, and why I am also keeping an eye on you."

Dooku chuckled. "Is that so."

"You had better be worthy of him."

Dooku's lips quirked. "I try." *I still feel like I'm being unfair to him.*

"I don't hate you either," Alejandro told him. "Envy you... yes. I have many regrets, and I'd be lying if I said that letting Sören go wasn't one of the biggest ones. But above all, I want his happiness. He's had too little of that, which I'm sure you know."

"Indeed." Dooku nodded. "His happiness is my own greatest concern."

"Ingmar brought me back here, against my better judgment, and I didn't just fly back to the States already because I wanted to make very sure Sören is all right. You... should appreciate why I'd have concerns."

Dooku continued to nod. "Very much. We have that in common."

"I can work with that."

"We have something else in common," Dooku said mildly.

Alejandro raised an eyebrow.

"You're not the only person who came to Iceland after it was over, looking for closure." Dooku closed his eyes for a moment, remembering the haunted look on Sören's face when he showed up unannounced at the art studio. Then the feverish, wild sex up against the wall in the cabin, after Dooku had confessed he hadn't been bored, it wasn't truly "irreconcilable differences" of coming from two different worlds, he was afraid of dying and making Sören suffer with him. "I had broken up with Sören, and I came here asking for forgiveness. He granted it. I moved here from London to be with him."

"Why did you break up with him?"

"Do you want the truth?"

"I demand the truth."

Dooku wanted to laugh at that - he was starting to like this man, despite himself - but something in Alejandro's eyes told him not to dare, and he choked the amusement back. "As you know, there is a considerable age difference between Sören and myself. Sören will be thirty-five in November. I will be seventy-one in December. I am in good health, and don't have the problems usually found in men my age, if you catch my drift. But I did wonder how long it would last, and... you know how Sören is. How sensitive he is. He left medical school when the death got to be too much for him. I didn't want to subject him to the end, which will come someday. I also didn't want him to argue with me about it. I felt as if I was doing him a favor, trying to break it off coldly, implying that I was bored, making him hate me. It didn't do either of us a favor. I came here and explained myself. His parents both died young, as you know, and he said he was willing to chance it because he, himself, could go tomorrow."

I know that all too well, Dooku heard at the back of his mind, Alejandro broadcasting for once, not keeping his shield fully locked.

His shield was down just enough that Dooku could feel a surge of pain within him, as if something he'd said in that testimony had called Alejandro out about something, somewhere, somehow. A deep sense of *shame* and *weakness*, *I have lost too much too many times* and then the shield slammed back up.

Dooku went on, "So here we are. I retired from my practice as a barrister, cashed in my pension, and moved out here, because Sören didn't want to come back to London - I can't blame him, most of his family is here. I'm fortunate that Iceland is such a beautiful country, getting adjusted to life here has been... well... splendid. But even if it was much more difficult, I would follow Sören to the ends of the Earth."

"He... has that effect, yes." Alejandro's eyes looked off into the distance. "He is the very embodiment of passion."

"And because of that... my mistake, and that I showed up here, unannounced, knowing full well I might be unwelcome... I can't quite fault you for doing the same. So we have that in common, as well."

"That's two things."

"That it is."

"Next you're going to tell me Sören subjects you to dad jokes and that makes three things."

Dooku's laughter rang out, and Alejandro smiled, an actual genuine smile that made Dooku's breath catch the same way it did when Sören smiled.

Stop that. This is your husband's ex. *Stop looking at him like that.*

"That is indeed three things," Dooku said. He paused for a moment, and so did Alejandro. Auli sat. Dooku reached into his satchel and pulled out the two bottles of water. He handed one to Alejandro.

"*Obrigado*," Alejandro said when he took the water. "...Nicolae?"

Dooku pursed his lips. "I'm on a last-name basis with most people, but I suppose you can call me Nicolae instead of Dooku. My neighbors did."

"That's a bit of a relief." Alejandro's lips quirked around the water bottle.

"Oh?"

"Your surname..." Alejandro looked away, a bit sheepish.

"My surname what?"

A small clear of the throat. Alejandro looked down, fighting back a smile. "It means something dirty in Portuguese."

"...what."

"*Do cu* means 'I do anal' in Portuguese."

Dooku had taken that moment to sip water, and spat it out. He spluttered, shaking with silent laughter. "It does not."

"*It does.* You can look up *cu* on the Internet later. It's Portuguese slang for anal or ass. I'm not making this up."

Dooku facepalmed. "I can already see Sören having a field day with this."

Alejandro laughed now, and Dooku could see past the shielding for a moment to know he was thinking of the way Sören laughed, enjoying that. "Yes, yes he would. I'll have to inform him."

"He didn't take my surname, at least."

"I know that much. I did some poking around at his Internet footprint." Alejandro winced. "I must sound like a creepy stalker now."

"To anyone else, perhaps. I was a criminal defense barrister back in London and I know the type. To all accounts, Sören said you never did anything that fits the profile. Which is good for you, because if he was afraid of you, I would have to be ungentlemanly."

They resumed walking. "The bay's not terribly far," Alejandro said.

Dooku nodded. "I can already smell the salt in the air."

The sun was starting to break, sparkling on the deep blue North Atlantic. They stopped, taking in the view of the sunshine through clouds, the water, the lighthouse, the grassy shore.

Alejandro sat, and let Auli run. Dooku also sat down next to him, gingerly.

They just watched the sea together for awhile, quietly. There was a breeze coming in, stirring Alejandro's hair. Dooku felt as if he could see through Sören's eyes for a moment, recalling memories Sören hadn't yet shared, visiting an endless assortment of beaches, with Alejandro looking out to sea like he was doing now.

It felt rude to breech the silence, as if he were intruding on something very private, but Dooku couldn't help himself. "It's another thing we have in common," he said.

"Hm?"

"The sea. One of my earliest childhood memories is the beach. I started coming on my own, when I got older, finding a peace there I couldn't find elsewhere. Anywhere I've traveled in the world, I've made it a point to see the ocean while I was there, take a shell or two." A pause. "It's a recurring theme in Sören's work, something that drew me to him."

"Ah."

Dooku took that as a *I listen and acknowledge, but now be quiet again* Dooku didn't mind. They enjoyed the sound of the waves, and the jangle of Auli's collar as he excitedly ran around. Eventually Auli ran back to Alejandro, bringing him a stick on the ground. Alejandro threw it, and Auli ran after it. A few rounds of fetch and then Auli just wanted pettings, paws on Alejandro's shoulders, aggressively licking his face, even putting his tongue in the man's nose. Alejandro laughed, petting him. Dooku couldn't help smiling.

"He's a good dog," Dooku said.

Auli bounded over to him and rewarded him for saying that with cleaning his face, paying special attention to his beard. "Yes, Auli, you're a good boy," Dooku said, petting the sheepdog. "A boy with very stinky breath, but a good boy nonetheless."

"I should get him breath-freshening dog treats in town."

"That would be a good idea."

Alejandro smiled at Auli, who came back over to him and flomped down on him. He rubbed the dog's belly. "Yes, you're a good boy," Alejandro said. He continued idly stroking the dog, watching the water.

"What time is it?" Alejandro finally asked.

"A little after one o'clock."

"Hm. What time is Sören getting off work?"

"Four."

"Do you want to have lunch with me?"

"I'd like that, thank you."

"All right. We'll walk back and we can take my Jaguar into town."

"It's a nice car. I had a Jaguar when I lived in London." Dooku gave a soft sigh; one of the few things he missed, having a more practical jeep for getting around now, necessary in the Icelandic winter. "Looked a lot like your rental, actually."

"I had a car that looked a lot like that rental when I lived in Reykjavik. But I'm not surprised somehow we have, er, similar tastes."

Dooku's lips quirked. "That would be one way of putting it, yes."

They got up, and walked back into the village in silence, that was less awkward than before. When they got to the cottage, Alejandro let Auli in, and then after a moment gestured for Dooku to come inside.

Ingmar was there, writing something in a leather-bound journal with Norse futhark runes embossed in gold on the cover, at the kitchen table. He looked up when he saw Dooku. "Hello," he said pleasantly.

"*Dobryj dyen'*," Dooku said.

Ingmar raised his eyebrows. "*Akh, vy govorite po-russki?*"

"*Nemnogo. Ya govoryu na rumynskom.*" Dooku only knew a small amount of Russian, mostly from ex-clients of his in London; he was fluent in Romanian, his family's language. But he was familiar with the accent, and felt like it would be polite to greet Ingmar in Russian. It was also a thinly veiled warning - this association with Alejandro whose South American family Sören had thought was involved in criminal activity... *well, a sort of I know you're up to something poke.* His barrister senses were engaged. It wasn't enough where he was concerned for Sören's safety - if anything, he got the distinct sense if he were harming Sören in any way, they would make him disappear immediately - but it was something to watch.

"Didn't mean to disturb you," Dooku said, watching Ingmar look more intensely at his notes.

"You're fine."

"Aren't you on holiday?"

"I'm always working."

"Ah... you never did tell me what it is you do."

Ingmar smiled. "I run a cleaning service."

"I am going into town," Alejandro informed Ingmar. "Do you need anything?"

"Not at the moment, no."

Alejandro nodded curtly. "May I get you something before we head out?" he asked Dooku. "Coffee, tea...?"

"I'll wait till we're going wherever it is we're going," Dooku said.

Ingmar gave them a look that Dooku registered as mild amusement; Alejandro shot back a glare, making Dooku wonder what that was about, and then they were off to the Jaguar.

They decided on Serrano, the Mexican restaurant in Akureyri. Dooku felt a bit odd about coming here with Alejandro since it was a place that had a lot of history for him and Sören - Sören had taken him here the night they'd made love for the first time, and they'd gone there for Valentine's Day, when they opened a new chapter in their relationship by introducing bondage and discipline, something they occasionally did for fun. Being here with Alejandro wasn't a date, but it still felt strangely intimate.

Dooku took off his hat at the restaurant, and decided he could just keep it off - it was only partly sunny today. They ate most of their meal in silence and Alejandro finally said, "I'm terrible at small talk, sorry."

"So am I," Dooku said.

"Another thing in common."

"Yes." Dooku nodded. "At least Sören understands this."

"It was one of the things I appreciated about him," Alejandro said. "A lot of people talk to hear the sound of their own voice, and don't really have anything to say. It isn't that Sören and I never talked, but we could *rest* together, if that makes sense. It was easy to *just be* around him."

"It is." Dooku nodded.

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't be..."

"It's fine." Dooku let out a small sigh. "If our positions were reversed, I'd most likely be... where you are."

"You can't just love someone like that... how he is... and switch it off."

"No, you cannot. I would walk through fire for him."

Their eyes met, and Alejandro quickly looked down at his food. Dooku got the sense past the shield that Alejandro had a very similar conversation with someone a long time ago, about someone else, and Dooku reminded Alejandro of the person he was having that conversation with and there was an eerie feeling of deja vu.

The shield slammed shut again.

Once in the Jaguar, Alejandro said, "Do you mind coming with me to the store? I need to get a few odds and ends."

"I don't."

"Do you mind if I put on music?"

Dooku didn't know what he was expecting, but he was pleasantly surprised by the classical music. "Rachmaninoff," Dooku recognized.

"*Yes.*"

They listened together, keeping quiet. Alejandro's eyes were on the road, but he also seemed like he was elsewhere, an intensity burning within him, a storm matching the stormy piano, as if he were playing it with his mind, expressing the thunder of turmoil and regret.

I can see why Sören fancied him. It was downright embarrassing now, his reaction to this man.

Dooku decided he'd also get a few things at the store. It seemed somewhat surreal, buying groceries, toiletries, and pet food with his husband's ex... with whom he seemed to share several commonalities. They loaded up the car and there was more classical music on the way back. Dooku was almost disappointed when they turned in to their street.

Alejandro pulled over in front of Dooku's cabin, and though Dooku didn't need any help with the bags, Alejandro still gave him a hand, being polite. They lingered at the doorstep.

"Do you want to come in?" Dooku asked.

"Not this time, I have perishables to put away, but perhaps next time."

"Oh." Dooku could feel his face registering the surprise. "I... wouldn't mind accompanying you on another walk."

"Good. I didn't think I'd be saying this, but you're not bad company."

"Nor you." Dooku didn't know why he was adding this part, even though it was the truth. "I don't have a lot of friends."

"I also tend to keep to myself, yes. ...Another thing we have in common."

"Well, thank you for..." Dooku didn't quite know what to call it, he was hesitant about calling it "friendship" just yet - this was still awkward and surreal - and he sensed the same hesitancy in Alejandro. He found his words, though. "Meeting me on common ground."

"Same to you. Have a good rest of the evening. Tell Sören I said hello, please." A mischievous smile. "Tell Sören what I said about your last name."

Dooku laughed, shaking his head, and Alejandro waved. Dooku watched him walk off.

He has a nice arse.

No, stop that.

Dooku's face was on fire, enough that he ran the sink and splashed cold water on his face when he got in.

Chapter 14

Sören had felt out of his league in Alejandro's and Dooku's Jaguars, but a Bentley... that was something else entirely. He felt almost like he should take his Docs off before he climbed in, but Ingmar wasn't asking him to do that.

"You can pick wherever it is we're going," Ingmar told him, getting behind the driver's wheel. "I have GPS."

Sören had already decided. "The Botanical Garden in Akureyri is beautiful this time of year."

They spent awhile walking around, quietly admiring the beauty of the blooming flowers underneath the bright sunshine that had finally decided to come out, as promised by the weather forecast, after days of rain and fog. The garden was an explosion of color, and one of the reasons why Sören ached for his hometown in the years he'd been away. There was a real peace here... as well as awe, the liminality of the place, as if it were existing both here and in another realm at the same time. Being here, Sören could better appreciate why his ancestors believed in superstition like elves - this was the sort of garden one would expect an elven palace to have.

Sören liked pointing out the native species to Ingmar. He also liked pointing out the subtleties in shading on the same species, or even the little moments that gave him wonder. "Look at them swaying in the breeze," Sören said in a hushed tone of voice. "It's like they're dancing."

There was a cafe at the garden, serving coffee, pastries, and light lunches. They had lunch there, and Sören had a biscotti, munching it thoughtfully as he looked out at the view... and kept stealing glances at Ingmar, who looked like he was made for this kind of setting.

They hadn't talked much before now, but Sören gestured to the satchel he'd brought with him, breaking the ice. "I'd like to sit for awhile in the garden and draw, if that's OK," he said.

"It is." Ingmar nodded. "I remember the last time we saw each other, in Reykjavik, you had mentioned being an artist who couldn't make art anymore. It's good that you've gotten back into it."

"I'm surprised you remember that."

"I remember everything about that night." His voice was a caress.

Sören felt a shiver down his spine - he did, too. His thoughts flashed back to the way Ingmar took care of him that night, massaging him, teasing him, making him come like he hadn't come since Alejandro. It had been a shame they'd only had four hours, Sören would have wanted to return the favor.

Fuck, he's hot.

Sören felt a pang of guilt for having these thoughts. He was married to Dooku - it wasn't like he was replacing one lust for another, he had no intention of leaving his husband for anyone, but he also despised cheating, having been cheated on before. And Ingmar was

living with Alejandro, up the street, which implied some kind of involvement. Sören may have been angry at Alejandro still, but he wasn't going to fuck up their relationship.

Sören nervously sipped his coffee, trying to knock the lewd thoughts out of his head, but they kept playing, and giving way to other delicious thoughts - what it would be like to make love with Ingmar in the garden, what it would be like to *bareback* with him...

Fuck.

Sören's face burned, and it wasn't from the heat of the coffee.

Ingmar was watching him. "Do you have any samples of your work? I told you once I am a connoisseur of rare and precious objects... I like original art, and patroning artists when I can."

"I have some sketches, but..." Sören pulled out his sketchpad and handed it over. "I have a gallery on deviantART, and I also have paintings and pottery on display at Logifugl Listaskóli, in town." He swallowed hard, feeling shy. People seemed to like his art, but he was haunted by his ex Justin's words. *You're not that fucking great.* It had kept him from showing anywhere for over a year, though he was at least still making art in that period of time, making himself create even when he was depressed.

Perhaps, *especially* when, needing to keep that fire burning somehow.

"I'd like to see them." Ingmar was looking at the sketches with interest. "If these are 'mere' works in progress, the finished products must be masterpieces. There is already a great deal of depth and..." He seemed to be searching for the right word for it. "Spirit that comes through." He smiled at a sketch of Snúður wearing a crown and a collar with an eight-spoked star, playing with three large gems like they were cat toys. "That's amazing."

Sören also smiled. "I love my cat, what can I say. Nothing's too good for him."

"That was evident at the cabin. Even when you speak of him, it lights up your entire face." Their eyes met. "You burn, so brightly."

Sören was burning even more now, feeling fluttery and giddy, his head spinning. He felt himself biting his lower lip, crinkling his nose.

Ingmar handed him back the sketch pad.

"We could go to the studio after...?"

"Another time," Ingmar said. "I can only be out for a couple more hours, I told Alejandro I would look after Auli while he takes a drive."

"To the ocean...?"

"You do indeed know him." Ingmar took a sip of wine.

"Jæja, I do." Sören nodded solemnly. "If you don't mind me asking, how long have you two been together...?"

"We're not 'together.'" Ingmar made air quotes. He leaned back in his chair, swirling wine around in his glass. "Alejandro and I go back a long time, he's one of my oldest friends."

"Funny, because he never mentioned you, and as far as I know he didn't visit you in that five-year period we were living together."

"There is a lot Alejandro keeps to himself, as no doubt you know," Ingmar said, "and there are reasons why he'd want to keep details private, pertaining to our families. And yes, it's true I didn't see him much during that period of time. But the connection is still there. That said, that is all it is. We're not involved as you would understand a relationship to be. We've been intimate, if you're wondering, but never exclusive - he is free to see other people, as am I - and I can vouch that he was exclusive with you when you were together in Reykjavik."

So that's one piece of guilt removed. But then there's Nico."I see."

"Mmm." Ingmar sipped his wine. He gestured to the biscotti. "How is that?"

"It's quite good. Would you like to try a piece?"

"I would." Ingmar leaned forward, and Sören expected him to take one of the cookies off the plate, but instead he opened his mouth, like Sören's cat did when he wanted to be hand-fed a treat.

Sören's heart was racing now, his hands shaking a little as he brought a biscotti to Ingmar's mouth. He nibbled the end of it, and continued to feed from Sören's fingers, giving a playful lick at the end.

I'm going to die. Sören was sporting a semi now under the table.

Ingmar gave a little mischievous smile as he finished off his wine. "Shall we go back to the garden?"

They sat together, and then Sören asked, "Can you do me a favor and sit across from me?"

Ingmar raised an eyebrow.

Your cologne and your... fucking... pheromones... or whatever it is... and the proximity of you. But also, there were more practical reasons. "Would you mind if I drew you?"

"I'd be honored."

Ingmar stretched out and propped himself up on one elbow.

Sören began to sketch him, languid among the flowers. He had Ingmar get into two other poses, so he could decide between them when he was ready to turn the sketch into a painting. More than usual, there was a lot of detail going into it, just getting Ingmar's hair right took time, and Sören really wanted to capture all of the different varieties of flowers.

He still wasn't done when Ingmar looked at his Rolex and said, "We have to get back. I'm very sorry."

"It's all right," Sören said. "Do you want to see what I've got so far? I've at least got something I can work with, and I can flesh it out when it's on canvas."

"Surprise me," Ingmar said.

They got in the Bentley. "I enjoyed this very much," Ingmar said as they drove back.

"You sure? You weren't bored, with me sketching?"

"Not at all." Ingmar took a deep breath. "It was very soothing, to just relax there, soak up the beauty of the place..." He took Sören's chin in his hand, tilted Sören's face to his, and gave it a little stroke. "The beauty of you, creating your beautiful inner visions."

Sören bit his lower lip again. "Awww..." He blushed. "*Þakka þér kærlega.*"

"*Þú ert velkominn, fegurð mín.*"

"You flatter me."

"I don't flatter. I speak the truth."

Sören was getting gooseflesh again, the surge of heat and chills.*Fuck, I want him.*

They lingered at Sören's cabin. "I'd like to do this again," Ingmar said.

"I work next weekend, but I have Friday off. However, my Friday plans are contingent on what my husband is doing."

"I understand."

Sören raised an eyebrow. "Why don't you come to the studio sometime this week? You could attend a couple classes for free, if you wanted to. I have pastels and ceramics on Thursday, just... wear something you don't care about getting dirty, or be prepared to wear an apron."

Ingmar chuckled. "That sounds like a plan, Sören."

Sören shivered, loving the way Ingmar said his name.*I want to make him scream my name.*

"As far as the garden... we could make a date for next week. There's other places I could take you in Akureyri, too. You probably wouldn't be interested in seeing the Christmas stuff -" Ingmar seemed too elegant for that, though Sören *had* taken Dooku there. "But there's other things to see and do. There's also more natural places, like the Dimmuborgir, the Goðafoss, which aren't too bad of a drive."

"I'd say yes to all of that. We have the summer. We can talk more about what to do next, when I come by the studio on Thursday."

"OK." Sören smiled. He reached out to pat him, which was something he did with people he was fond of without thinking about it, but when he touched Ingmar there was that spark, and he felt himself hardening again. He needed to get out of the Bentley before he did something he would regret later. "Maybe you can come for dinner sometime this week too, já?"

"Yes. Let me know, that would be lovely." Ingmar squeezed Sören's hand, then brought it to his lips and kissed it. "Have a good rest of the day, beautiful."

"You too." Sören waved on his way out of the car. When he got to the door of the cabin, he was shaking.

He was also hard.

Dammit. Sören took a deep breath as he walked in. *Brain, can we not do this. I'm married. I'm not cheating on my husband.*

He needed a drink. He poured himself a shot of Brennivín, nursing it as he stroked Snúður on his lap and played Stardew Valley, trying to make his hard-on go down by distracting himself. It only halfway worked, his thoughts kept going back to that night they'd shared, and the very obvious chemistry they still had.

Dooku got in from his afternoon bike ride after Sören had been home for close to an hour. He was wearing leather pants to ride. Sören took one look at him and the fever started again.

Without saying a word, he got up from the couch, grabbed Dooku, kissed him hard, and marched him over to the bed. Dooku laughed between kisses as Sören fumbled with the buttons on his shirt, the button and zipper of his pants, not able to undress him fast enough.

"Someone's happy to see me -"

The words were broken with another hungry kiss, almost savage in its need. "I want you fucking *now*," Sören growled, nibbling Dooku's neck as he pushed the older man back on the bed.

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Three hours later, they were spent. Dooku was dazed after three orgasms - Sören had four - and Sören drifted in and out, napping as he sometimes did after sex. He woke fully to the sound of his stomach growling, and that made Dooku more alert as well.

"What do you want to do for dinner?" Dooku asked.

"You want to go into town? Take the night off from cooking?"

They went to Serrano. Dooku ordered something different than his usual, which surprised Sören. "You always get the enchiladas," he said.

Dooku looked down. "I had them when I was here yesterday."

"You went to Serrano yesterday?"

Dooku looked off to the side. "Yes. Alejandro and I ended up hiking together, and we had a bite to eat."

Sören got very quiet. "I see."

"I would have told you yesterday, but you were drawing and I didn't want to disturb you."

"That's OK." Sören patted his hand. "So, um... how did that go? I imagine it was awkward." *It's awkward for me too, my husband and my ex suddenly hanging out?* But Sören also knew neither of them had much in the way of friends, and they had quite a lot

in common. If ever two people seemed somehow *destined* to be friends, it was the two of them.

"It was, but it was also surprisingly pleasant." Dooku sipped his drink. "He seems to think he needs to keep an eye on me, to make sure I don't hurt you."

Sören snorted. "How chivalrous of him."

"I can't blame him, really. He was very..." Dooku paused. "Adamant, I suppose you could say. He still cares for you a great deal."

*If he cared that much, he shouldn't have left in the first place. Fucker.*Sören perked up when their food arrived, and tore into a burrito.

"He also told me to tell you he said hello."

"Hm." Sören chewed his burrito.

Dooku's lips quirked and he rolled his eyes. "He also told me to tell you something he thought you'd appreciate. It's about my surname, actually."

"Huh?"

"Apparently it means something vulgar in Portuguese."

"*Really.*"

"*Do cu*, do and the word c-u, means 'I do anal' in Portuguese. I looked it up on the Google, he was indeed not lying."

Sören quickly put his burrito down, trying not to spray food. He sipped his drink, shaking with silent laughter, his eyes tearing up. "Oh my fucking god."

"Yes. Such... information. One learns new things every day, I suppose."

"*God.*" *He wanted to make me laugh. He knows how I am, he knows laughter is one of the ways I cope.* Sören felt himself softening a little towards Alejandro, and he hated that. *No, I do not want to stop being angry with him. He needs to cut that shit out.*

"So, how was your outing with Ingmar?"

"It was nice. We went to the Botanical Garden. I sketched."*I needed to eat you alive when you walked in the door.*

"We could do worse for neighbors."

"We could." Sören said what he was thinking to himself earlier. "It'd be nice to see you make a friend."

"I could say the same about you."

Sören took Dooku's hands and kissed them. "I really appreciate you, you know, not being... well... weird about any of this."

"Someone has to be a mature, reasonable adult around here."

"Are you implying I'm not an adult?" Sören stuck his tongue out, and then started blowing bubbles in his drink.

"Why do I get the sense that if our ages were reversed and you were the elder of the two of us, I'd still be the serious, mature adult?"

"Because you're a fucking dork?" Sören blew a raspberry.

Dooku laughed, rolling his eyes. "You know, sometimes we act like siblings as much as we act like lovers."

"Do not."

"Do too."

"Do not."

"Do too."

"Do not."

"Do too."

"*Do cu*?" Sören couldn't resist, and Dooku playfully kicked him under the table, before playing footsie with him.

"Brat," Dooku said, affectionately.

"I'm your brat."

"Yes, you are."

On the drive back, Sören leaned on Dooku, nuzzling him. It started to rain again, and there was something very cozy about driving with him in the rain, snuggled against him. Dooku felt it too, and took a detour to the bay so they could just look at the water for awhile, and the rain coming down, cuddling, enjoying the peace.

*I would not trade moments like this for all the world,*Sören thought to himself, kissing the tip of Dooku's nose.

When they got back to the cabin, Sören splashed in the puddles like a big kid, making Dooku laugh and roll his eyes. Then Dooku said, "Come here, you." He hugged Sören from behind, and Sören reached up to touch Dooku's arms, loving the way that felt, safe and sweet.

They were lost in each other for a moment, and then they heard the sound of a chain jangling, an excited bark. Sören opened his eyes and saw Alejandro walking past with Auli; Dooku was still holding him from behind, rocking him a little.

"Hello there," Dooku called out.

"Good evening," Alejandro said.

Dooku and Sören looked at each other. "Do you want to come in for a moment?"

"Not tonight. It's a bit damp out, the dog needs to go in. Thank you for the offer, though." Alejandro raised his hand in a wave and resumed walking.

Sören and Dooku got in, and shared a soft, gentle kiss. "I'll put on tea," Dooku said.

"OK. I think I'm gonna sketch for a bit, finish what I started earlier."

"All right. I'll try to work on my chapter."

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That dog had to walk through every single puddle, and shake it off on him. Maglor still liked his companionship.

Especially now. Seeing Dooku and Sören standing there, holding each other like that, hurt not just because of what he'd lost - Sören had moved on with his life, while he had not - but it was a painful reminder of what he'd lost well before that. He had seen Fingolfin and Fëanor in that very same position countless times, a quiet moment of affection.

He missed them both so much it *hurt.* He remembered sharing their bed, making love with them together and separately. The Valar had deemed it sin, had punished them for it - Eru knew he was still being punished, now - but if it was wrong, he didn't want to be right. It had been *beautiful*. There was no sweeter Song, than what the three of them had made together.

And for an all-too-brief moment in time, he'd had something like that with Sören, who burned so much like his father did, but was almost more lovable, in his own silly, playful, innocent-but-naughty, kind way, as if his father had gone from a large predatory cat to a fluffy kitten.

"*Fuck*," Maglor said to himself, not much for the harder edges of English swearing even after all this time among Men, but there was no other word to describe that cascading fall of *loss*, everything fallen away from him like a waterfall into the sea, inexorable.

He went to his bedroom to change when he got in, and Auli trotted after him, continuing to shake wet fur, giving him another shower. "Dammit, Auli," he said. When he had pajamas on, he threw a towel over the dog, wrapped him up, and scooped him up, holding the bundled-up dog on his lap, rubbing the towel to try to dry him off a little. Auli kept licking his face.

"At least there's you," he said. *I should really get a dog. Of course, he'll die, eventually.*

Sometimes there seemed to be no point to going on. He'd kept going this long because he was the only one left of his family, keeping them alive through himself. *Keeping their place in the Music alive.* And if he died of his own hand, cast to the Void,*they won*. He would not give the Valar that victory. He would not give the Valar what remained of his father's fire.

Memories and spite. That is all I have. That is all I deserve.

Auli whined, and put his tongue up Maglor's nose as if to say*no, you deserve more.*

Maglor flopped back on the bed, laying on his back, staring at the ceiling, feeling like an angsty young ellon again. Auli hopped down and ran out, leaving the towel on the floor. The stereo turned on, playing Depeche Mode.

I look to you
How you carry on
When all hope is gone
Can't you see

Your optimistic eyes
Seem like paradise
To someone like
Me

I want to take you
In my arms
Forgetting all I couldn't do today

Black celebration
Black celebration
Tonight

To celebrate the fact
That we've seen the back
Of another black day

I look to you
And your strong belief
Me, I want relief
Tonight

Consolation
I want so much
Want to feel your touch
Tonight

Take me in your arms
Forgetting all you couldn't do today

Maglor covered his face with his hands.*Ai, Sören.*

Auli hopped back up on the bed, dropping a toy bird on him, as if to say*you should make music, it might help*. Then Auli lay on him, licking his face some more; Maglor stroked the dog, ruffling his fur.

"You're a good dog." Maglor gave the dog's snout a little kiss, and the top of his head, and continued to pet the dog, thinking of Huan and happier days with his family... and the secret dream he could never have, being with Sören again, a life with his cat, a dog like this one.

Thunder rolled outside. Lightning flashed a few seconds later. It mirrored the storm raging inside him, the anger of how *unfair* this all was. *Have I not been punished enough?*

Ingwion was at his door, wearing a loose silk robe and nothing underneath. For a moment they just looked at each other. Then Auli got up again and wandered off. Ingwion came in,

uninvited - but not uninvited, all the same. He knelt before Maglor, and Maglor did not protest when Ingwion took him into his mouth. Awhile later, his cry of release rang out with the thunder, shaking and gasping for breath as lightning flashed.

Ingwion rose, and climbed over Maglor, his robe on the floor now. "I will ride this storm with you," he said, before claiming the sweet singer's mouth with a kiss.

Chapter 15

On Monday afternoon, while Sören was in town at the studio, Dooku also took a trip into Akureyri, to do laundry at the local laundromat. When he arrived there, wheeling in a hand truck with three laundry baskets, he saw Alejandro sitting with a book, waiting for his wash to be done.

"Hello," Dooku said.

"Oh, hi there." Alejandro looked up from his book, *Wizard And Glass* by Stephen King.

Dooku gestured. "I'm also reading The Dark Tower series at the moment."

A small smile. "Another thing we have in common."

"Yes. This is getting a bit odd now. If I were a superstitious man, I'd say it was as if we were fated to meet." There was more truth to that statement than Dooku would acknowledge to a near-stranger - his life experience as a Force-sensitive had taught him that very few coincidences in his life were actually coincidences. *Why* his path had crossed with this man's, though, he still hadn't figured out yet.

Alejandro reached for the iced coffee next to him. Dooku began loading the first washing machine, with whites, not that he or Sören had much white clothing in their respective wardrobes. "Is this your first read-through of the series?" Dooku asked as he put in clothes.

"Yes."

"This is my second read-through," Dooku said. "I'm finding little details I missed the first time."

"And there are so many details. King built quite a world."

"He did."

"I'm hooked. I've been binge-reading since I arrived here. Roland Deschain - the last of his kind, the quest to find the Dark Tower, wandering the Earth but a version of it that isn't his own, his original *ka-tet* dying off... he's a compelling character," Alejandro said.

"My favorite is Susannah. The passion for civil rights... deep trust issues... melting to Eddie's care."

"Yes, Eddie is... rather like Sören, isn't he."

"Like him, and a bit of Patrick Danville, but you've not gotten there yet so I won't spoil it."

"I read *Insomnia*... that's the kid who draws, yes?"

"*Yes.*" Dooku loaded dark clothing into a second washing machine. He had bedding in another basket. "Sören's art is very special."

"It is. He's got a gift." Alejandro gave a small frown, and through Alejandro's shielding, Dooku felt the surge of pain, as if bringing up Sören's art touched him on the raw.

Feeling self-conscious, not wanting to make the man uncomfortable, Dooku continued to load the machine in silence, and then started on the bedding. A buzzer went off, and Alejandro put his book down, got up, and went to the washing machines. Dooku kept stealing glances at him as he transferred his wash to the dryers - the sleek figure, the graceful way he moved, the flow of his long dark hair like water... *that arse.*

Even in a T-shirt and jeans, Alejandro was more attractive than he had a right to be. Dooku once again thought of Alejandro and Sören together, finding the sight aesthetically pleasing, *arousing*. They were the two most beautiful men Dooku had ever laid eyes on; Ingmar was also quite beautiful.

Dooku felt increased self-consciousness, like he was too old for this. The reminder that he would fade, in however many years, Sören would be a relatively young widower, with much of his life still ahead of him.

"Are you all right?" Alejandro's soft voice broke the silence.

Dooku managed a small, polite, fake smile. "I'm fine."

"You seem troubled." A little nervous laugh. "I know that this is still awkward, being around your husband's ex..."

"It is still awkward, yes, but life is always full of strange things. Or at least my life has been." Dooku straightened his shoulders. "Sören thinks it would be nice if I made a friend." His eyes met Alejandro's.

"So he doesn't hate me."

"I'm not sure what you could call all of those feelings, but he does not wish you bodily harm." A pause. "I can't say the same for his family."

Alejandro chuckled. "I can only imagine that if he told his siblings I showed up here, he had to tell them not to fly in and get in line to beat me up."

"Margrét in particular, yes."

"How is she?"

"Quite well. She is getting married in August."

"I'm glad she's happy. I always liked her, even if I found her music difficult to listen to."

"Calling that noise 'music' is a bit generous."

Alejandro laughed out loud at that. Dooku gave a genuine smile now, feeling like he'd achieved something, cutting through the dark storm clouds to let the silver light through. And oh, the way his face lit up. Dooku didn't think he could get any more beautiful, but he did...

Stop that.

"I know you have awhile to finish your laundry," Alejandro said, looking at the overhead clock and then back at Dooku, "and I'll have to run home when this is finished, but... when you're done, would you like to accompany me to the park? Auli needs a good run, and I

have a portable mp3 player in my car. We can sit, listen to real music, discuss The Dark Tower."

"I'd like that, thank you."

"Let me give you my cell."

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"All right, folks, that's it for today!" Sören was always reluctant to end his classes, especially the last class of the day, not wanting the intoxicating energy of multiple people creating in one space at one time to be over just yet. It was a joy to watch, people discovering they could make something beautiful - that there was beauty inside them. *You are large, you contain multitudes,* Sören was fond of telling his students,*and art is the act of bringing them to life.*

As people started to get up, he cleared his throat, almost forgetting. "Remember that I have the ballot box on a table on the way out, taking a vote on whether or not we should start offering music classes here as well. Your vote is important! I'll be tallying the vote on Thursday."

Sören still didn't like the idea of hiring another person at*his* studio, and having to change the way things were done - creating a schedule, putting it on the website - but he *did* like making his students happy. The process of getting a music teacher was a set of minor inconveniences apart from having to find one and pay them, and as far as sharing his space... well, he'd adjust, sooner or later.

Sören's thoughts went back to the conversation he and Dooku had last night.

"It'd be nice to see you make a friend."

"I could say the same about you."

"Jæja," Sören said to himself, starting the cleanup, putting paints away. He was good at things like being the teacher, the coach, but letting people in past an arm's length was hard for him. Always had been. Apart from his family, and Frankie, and Dooku, everyone he'd gotten close to had hurt him in some way. He was afraid of whoever the future music teacher would be possibly not liking him, but even more than that, he was afraid of liking and being liked, making a friend, getting close, getting hurt.

Ingmar was becoming a friend, at least. He thought of the lovely face, the gorgeous lion's mane of hair, and smiled. He didn't know Ingmar well, but there was that instant feeling of *knowing* him just the same. He felt safe with Ingmar.

Safe enough for it to be dangerous. He was getting flustered again. He definitely had a crush, like he was a teenage boy all over again, except he was very much an adult now, and thinking very adult things.

Get a hold of yourself. You're married. What about Nico?

It didn't change how he felt about Dooku. Ingmar wasn't replacing Dooku. The problem was, he wanted them both.

Stop it.

Sören drove home, and when he came back, Dooku wasn't there. He wasn't too worried, as Dooku had said he would be going into town to do laundry. But Dooku's jeep was there, so Sören wondered if he went for a walk.

Dooku arrived about a half-hour later, when Sören was working on his sketch of Ingmar, wanting to get it just right before he started replicating it with paint on a canvas. Alejandro was with him.

"Is it all right if he comes in for a few minutes for tea?" Dooku asked.

"I suppose."

Alejandro sat down across from Sören, and Snúður came right over to the guest, sniffing him and then climbing on his lap. As Dooku waited for the water to boil, he went to Sören and stole a look at the sketchpad. "That is going to be one of your finest works, when you start painting it," he said. "I can't wait to see what you do with it."

Sören bit his lower lip and crinkled his nose, blushing a little, pleased by the praise. "*Takk.*"

"May I see?" Alejandro asked.

Sören looked up. He thought about saying no, but that didn't make any sense. He passed over the sketchpad. Alejandro spent a few minutes quietly studying it; Ingmar was distinctive-looking enough, with the full, generous mouth and the shape of his face, the mane of hair, for it to be obvious who the subject was.

"You always do such wonderful work," Alejandro said, his voice hushed, reverent. "So much detail in the flowers." He passed the sketchpad back to Sören, a haunted look in his grey eyes.

"There will likely be more details that don't make their way into the sketch, once the canvas is on the easel and the paintbrush is in my hand," Sören said. "It starts to take on a life of its own when the colors go into it."

"I remember." A soft sigh.

"I know you do." Sören also sighed. He changed the subject. "So, did the two of you go on another walk?"

"We ran into each other at the laundromat, and Alejandro invited me to go with him to the park so Auli could run," Dooku said. "We listened to Puccini on his portable speakers and talked about The Dark Tower."

"Of course you did." It was still unnerving to Sören that his husband and ex had so much in common, like they were cut from the same cloth, and this hadn't been something he'd sought out intentionally - clearly, though, he had a type.

"I enjoyed myself," Alejandro said. "You're good company."

"So are you," Dooku said.

"Now that you have my cell and I have yours... if I'm taking Auli for a walk, or to the park, would you like me to give you a call so you can join me if you're available?"

"That would be nice." Dooku's eyes met Sören's. "If it won't bother you, that is."

Sören pursed his lips. "Why would it bother me? You're allowed to have friends."

"Just considering the past history..."

Sören shrugged. "It would be one thing if he had been abusive to me, or otherwise unkind, but no, that was never the case." Sören's eyes met Alejandro's, then. "You were always good to me, to the end." *You have no idea how much I missed you. And what I went through, after.* Sören looked back at Dooku. "So já, it's all right. People need friends, you both are loners with a lot in common, it's natural you'd be kindred spirits."

Just the same, he was glad when Alejandro had his tea and left, not wanting to keep Auli tied up outside for too long. Seeing Alejandro be kind to his husband, and being reminded of Alejandro's familiarity with his art - the way they had inspired each other, partners in every sense of the word... it was making it harder to stay angry with him.

And he wasn't ready to put that anger completely aside. Not yet. It was still too soon.

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Tuesday and Wednesday passed uneventfully - Dooku went for walks with Alejandro, and when Sören wasn't at work, he continued his sketch of Ingmar.

Thinking a lot about him. That night they'd shared, years back, and how much Sören liked spending time with him on Sunday. Ingmar was wearing a silk robe in the sketch, which was not what he had been wearing at the Botanical Garden on Sunday, and Sören couldn't resist making it loose, teasing at the nakedness underneath...

...an invitation.

Sören's thoughts kept wandering into what it would be like to be intimate with him again. He kept these as tightly shielded as he could, not wanting to upset Dooku, not wanting Dooku to feel inadequate - which he most certainly was not, the spike in Sören's libido meant he was also fantasizing more about his husband as well, admiring him more, hungrier for sex with him.

On Wednesday night, Ingmar dropped by briefly to confirm that he'd be going with Sören to the studio on Thursday to attend the pastel and ceramics classes. He was walking Auli, for a change, so Sören stepped outside, while Auli wagged his tail and barked in greeting.

"Usually Alejandro walks him?" Sören heard himself wondering aloud, and hated that he had let that slip, not wanting to be seen wondering after Alejandro at all.

"Yes, he's walked him twice today. Right now he's composing."

"Ah." Sören thought of the way he'd been drawn to Alejandro's music, the beauty of listening to him play, the sweet voice, and watching him in the feverish act of writing songs. He was glad Alejandro was still doing that, thinking of his own experience with not being able to make art at all for a year after their breakup, and how it had felt like losing a limb; Alejandro's music was too beautiful to lose from the world, and it was important to keep that alive.

"Shall we drive together into town tomorrow? I can pick you up in the Bentley."

"That makes sense." Sören nodded. "And then Friday - I have off and Nico and I are going on a day trip, but I'd forgotten it's the summer solstice! Last year, we had a party at the studio and we're gonna do that again this year, with a bonfire and a potluck, if you're interested."

"I am, thank you."

"Good." Sören smiled back. "I'll see you tomorrow morning, já? Like I said, make sure to wear something you don't mind getting dirty, since pastels and clay can be a bit messy."

"I'll wear a T-shirt and jeans."

"I find it hard to believe you have that in your wardrobe. You're always so... stylish."

"I do. Sometimes I do things that require more casual clothing." Ingmar grinned.

"OK."

"I'll bring a change of clothes, as well, in case I get too dirty."

"That sounds safe." Sören stooped down to give Auli pettings then, and laughed as the sheepdog licked his face. "Well, I'll let you get back to your walk. I'd offer to come along, but I'm in the middle of working on art -"

"I understand. Have a good evening, Sören." He reached out to touch Sören's shoulder, and then wrapped a stray curl around his finger, looking into Sören's eyes, before walking off.

The touch was like an electric shock. Sören was breathing harder when he re-entered the cabin, his face flushed, feeling the butterflies in his stomach again.

It was going to be a long night, waiting for tomorrow morning. Sören took that giddy, sexually charged energy and brought out a blank canvas, setting it up on the easel. It was time to start painting.

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Sören ended up staying up all night painting, which was far from the first time he'd been so compelled by an art project he couldn't put it down. Dooku had been with Sören long enough to understand Sören's creative processes, and was amused rather than annoyed when Sören crawled into bed for a two-hour nap before the alarm went off, chuckling as he rolled against Sören's back and his arms encircled the younger man.

"Thank you for getting it," Sören whispered, reaching up to stroke Dooku's arms, his hands, covering them with his.

"Thank you for being you." He nuzzled Sören's curls. "Your art is a gift to this world."

They went to sleep, and when the alarm went off, Sören made an inhuman noise at the intrusion. Even after coffee and a shower to wake up, Sören was sleep deprived, and yet

the creative fire still burned, taking a glance at the far-from-finished canvas, lamenting that he had to work today and couldn't just paint that.

Well, at least I get to be around the subject.

Seeing Ingmar roll up in the Bentley brightened Sören's spirits, grinning as he got in the car. "Good morning," he said, his voice husky from fatigue.

"Good morning." Then a quirk of the eyebrow. "You look as if you haven't slept."

"I didn't get much sleep, no. I was up quite late working on a painting. Every now and again, my muse likes to do that to me. Alejandro is the same way, as I'm sure you've found out. We used to operate on a very similar creative schedule, in sync with each other -" Sören remembered Ingmar's mention of Alejandro composing, last night, and wondered if Alejandro hadn't slept either, if they were still synced up after all this time apart. "and we'd pull at least one or two all-nighters a week, creating together in the same room. We really got that about each other, what it was like to be *consumed* by the work." He ran a nervous hand through his curls, self-conscious at bringing that up, and feeling the sharp ache of missing that, still, the way they'd fueled each other, the art and music thriving in their little world...

"Would you like to grab coffee on the way to the studio, then? My treat."

"Yes, *please*, and *takk*, that's nice of you."

They showed up at Logifugl Listaskóli with large cups of hot coffee, though Sören wondered if it should be iced on a day like today, where it was already balmy by Akureyri standards. Most of the students had already arrived, waiting patiently for Sören to let them in the building, sitting around outside talking, drinking their own beverages, smoking, laughing, the easy social space of people from a small town where everyone knew each other. Sören had grown up feeling like an outsider, and things like small talk, casual familiarity, still were difficult for him - he would always be different, and the secrets he kept of his power were ones that he couldn't afford to let out, needing to keep his guard up at all times. But since his return to Akureyri over a year ago, the studio had made him a part of the community, and the warm welcome he got from his students always put a spring in his step, a smile on his face. He would take something over nothing.

When the pastel class assembled in the art room, Sören started off by addressing the class in English. "We have a visitor today who doesn't speak much Icelandic, so if we could all speak English in the class today, I'd appreciate it."

Ingmar got a lot of curious looks. He seemed to take it in stride, smiling as he reached for a sheet of ingres paper. There was a choice of oil pastels or chalk pastels to work with. "I usually go for the oil pastels," Sören said, "but today I want to play with chalk. Like a big kid." He grinned, making Ingmar's smile broaden, and Ingmar watched him intently as Sören put on an apron and then tied his hair up into a loose man bun. "So I don't get chalk dust in my hair," Sören explained.

"So... what happens now?" Ingmar asked. "Do you have a subject and we all try to draw it...?"

"No." Sören shook his head. "This is one of my freestyle classes - people pay to show up, use the art supplies and make something, and get encouragement and feedback from other people making things. I have some classes with themes, the children's classes tend to have activities I plan out, like we just finished a series on mandalas, but most of my

adult classes are fairly anything-goes, with the medium involved. I like to see what people come up with. It keeps things interesting and exciting." He grinned again.

"I see."

"Jæja, so just... draw what you want. I'm here to offer feedback, and assist with techniques if you need help with rubbing it." Sören's mind went immediately in the gutter, replaying the night of passion they'd had, and now there was a fantasy of Ingmar taking him right there on the art table. *Fuck.* "I mean, ah, the pastels. How to blend them, and suchlike."

For the next ninety minutes, Sören went back and forth between working with pastels on a sheet of ingres paper, and walking around the room to observe, offer feedback, and any advice requested on blending or other pastel techniques.

Unsurprisingly, some of the students were curious about the guest, and asked him a few questions.

"Where are you from?" Guðmundr asked.

"Around." Ingmar smiled. Then he said, "If you mean more recently, I have a residence in London."

"So you're a friend of Sören's?" María asked.

Ingmar and Sören exchanged glances, and the smile of two people who had shared intimacy and had no regrets. "We met a few years ago, yes," Ingmar said. "I'm quite fond of him."

Sören had that fluttery, happy feeling. He bit his lower lip and crinkled his nose, and flushed when he saw Ingmar was watching that reaction, a look in his eye like a wolf looking at dinner. His cock started waking up, under the art table. *Down, boy,* Sören told himself.

Eventually the questions stopped, as the students knew there was a line between friendly curiosity at the foreigner and invasion of privacy. Every now and again Sören stole glances at what Ingmar was doing - Ingmar was drawing with oil pastels, a wreath of golden roses surrounding an eight-spoked flaming star, which Sören found curious considering his own prior history with the symbol. He had another moment of wondering if his meeting with Ingmar had been coincidence and if Ingmar was at least mildly Force sensitive, and quickly batted those thoughts away, not wanting to get his hopes up.

As for Sören, he was drawing spring, which reminded him of the winter-becoming-spring forest he'd painted in *Rite of Spring*, the first painting he'd made after the year of not being able to create following the breakup with Alejandro, which in fact had been a painting inspired by Ingmar, using his likeness, but Sören had made his hair much longer. It had taken over a year after finishing that painting, to show it anywhere - Justin had belittled him enough to make him stop trying to get shows and promote his art. It had been Frankie who pushed him to show again, once Justin was gone, and at the first show he had after the breakup, a fast-talking Brit named Letitia had schmoozed him and purchased the painting "on behalf of a friend" who she said had been following his work for some time. The buyer had insisted on paying Sören double what he was willing to sell it for, and Letitia wouldn't take no for an answer. Sören thought about that now, hoping that whoever the painting went to still loved and appreciated it, giving it the place of honor that it deserved.

But this time, in Sören's soft pastel drawing, instead of drawing a forest, he was drawing the Dimmuborgir, among spring wildflowers and green grass, looming like a gateway, dark and ominous. It just felt right to include that in the painting somehow - Sören had loved the site all his life, a love instilled in him by his mother, who frequently took the children there in the years before she died. Sören had watched her, as a child, thinking that it looked like she was waiting for something, the way Sören had stayed up all night when he was very small hoping to see the Yule Lads. When he got older, he thought maybe his perception was incorrect, but he couldn't shake the feeling that his mother was hoping to see something she'd seen once before, and one of the great tragedies of her life was never getting to see it again.

After ninety minutes passed, it was time for wrap-up. People could show their finished works or work-in-progress - there was a safe place for the sheets of paper to go if they weren't done yet, so the students could resume work on them next week. Sören went around the room clockwise, smiling as each person shared, in English, what they were working on, and a bit about what inspired them if they felt so inclined. Ingmar was the last person to go before Sören himself, and he said simply, "The teacher of your class shines very brightly. It's a tribute to him." He gave Sören the pastel drawing and said, "A gift for you."

Sören got choked up, so much so that he couldn't share his own drawing. He found himself hugging Ingmar, and getting the chalk dust on his hands all over Ingmar's shirt, which made him feel guilty and a little stupid, but Ingmar just chuckled at it, hugging Sören back.

Before the class got out, Sören reminded everyone of the solstice party tomorrow evening, starting at 7 PM, which would last until 2-3 AM if people felt like being around that long. Sören also said, "I'm going to be tallying the poll between classes. I'll be announcing the results at the ceramics class but if you're not there I'll also be mentioning it at the party tomorrow and on the website."

When the last student departed and Sören and Ingmar were alone, Sören set to cleanup, to get the room ready for the ceramics class. There was a mini-fridge, and Sören told Ingmar he could help himself to whatever was in it. Ingmar brought out cold water, and Sören took the bottle with a "*Takk.*" Then he looked at Ingmar and chuckled. "I really did a number on your shirt, I'm sorry."

"Don't worry about it. It will wash." Ingmar laughed too. "I thought about changing but I'll wait until after the ceramics class, just so I don't put on fresh clothes and get those dirty as well."

"For this next class," Sören said, "you have the option of sculpting, working on the pottery wheel, or glazing one of the pots I threw for people who just want to paint things."

Ingmar considered, then he said, "Do you think I could do both? Glaze during the class, and then perhaps when everyone is gone, you could show me how to use the pottery wheel?"

"We could do that." Sören nodded.

When the pastels and papers were put away, and the table cleaned of chalk dust and oil pastel smudges, Sören brought out the ballot box, which was just a shoebox with a slot cut into it, and the shoebox had been covered up in glittery wrapping paper.

"What's that for?" Ingmar asked, sipping his water.

"So, a few of my students suggested that we have, er, music classes." Sören scowled. "I don't play an instrument, and I'm not really thrilled with the idea of hiring another instructor, but I want to make my students happy. But, I'm not going to go to that trouble if it's just a few people who want it, if it's not a majority opinion. I decided I'd take a vote on it, told everyone to vote and put their names on the ballot."

"That's fair of you."

Sören took a deep breath. "Here goes." He opened the box, and emptied its contents onto the table. With a pen and paper sitting next to him, he began to notch the votes. Of sixty-four votes, forty-seven of them were yes, and half of those forty-seven were specifically interested in the class for themselves. Twenty-three was not a majority but it also wasn't a number he could dismiss as "just a few people", it was enough to mean that he had to now look into how to get the music class started.

Sören leaned back in his chair, took a swig of water, and sighed.

Ingmar looked at the time. "When does your next class start?"

"In about two hours."

"Would you like me to pick up something for you to eat, and bring it here?"

"That would be good of you." Sören smiled. "And then I can take you on a little tour of the pieces I have up on display here?"

"I'd like that." Ingmar also smiled. "Do you have anything in mind for what you'd like to eat?"

You. Sören flushed, wicked mental images flashing, and he cleared his throat, shifting his weight nervously. "Fish and chips?" He took out his wallet.

Ingmar waved his hand dismissively. "I'm paying."

"OK." Sören nodded. "If you insist."

"I insist."

Ingmar came back twenty minutes later with a box of fish and chips, and a container of fresh strawberries and fresh cream. "I passed by a stand where a local grower had these," Ingmar said, pointing to it. "I couldn't resist."

"*Takk.*" Sören was delighted, he loved strawberries. "There's so many of them, we should share."

Sören ate his fish and chips while Ingmar wrote things down in a leather-bound journal, and when Sören had finished his lunch, it was time to dig into the strawberries. Sören dipped his in the cream, and took a bite. It was perfectly sweet, and Sören heard himself letting out a "mmmmmm" without thinking about it. Then he blushed, feeling self-conscious. "Sorry," he said.

"No need to apologize." Ingmar's full, sensuous lips wrapped around a strawberry, his eyes locked on Sören. Sören remembered the way those lips had suckled his nipples,

and when Ingmar licked off cream from his fingers Sören remembered that tongue, working inside of him so sweetly.

He was getting hard again. *This is bad.*

Ingmar dipped another strawberry into the cream, and then he held it to Sören's mouth. There was a feeling in the back of Sören's head that this was somehow wrong, crossing the line of sexually charged behavior... but Sören couldn't resist. His lips wrapped around the proferred strawberry. It was juicier than the one he'd had previously, with juices and cream spilling over Ingmar's fingers, and then he held them to Sören's mouth as well, and Sören found himself licking and sucking Ingmar's fingers clean. His cock was definitely hard now, and the voice in the back of his brain was screaming *You need to cut this out, you're married*, but it wasn't like they were *doing* anything?

...Yet?

"Your turn," Ingmar told Sören.

With a laugh that was equal parts nervous fluster and giddy rush, Sören dipped a strawberry into the fresh cream and held it to those gorgeous lips, his cock throbbing as he watched Ingmar's lips on the strawberry, the way Ingmar's eyes watched Sören's every move as he chewed. Sören's fingers and hand were covered in strawberry juice and cream, and Ingmar licked and sucked Sören's fingers as Sören had done to him, and then licked the juice and cream from Sören's palm as well.

Ingmar was feeding him another strawberry, and Sören fed him one at the same time. They continued licking and sucking each other's fingers.

The last strawberry, Ingmar offered to Sören. It was the biggest, juiciest one of all. Juice and cream exploded, running down Sören's beard and neck. Ingmar leaned over and licked up the mess, like a playful puppy. Sören laughed - it was funny - but the strawberry wasn't the only thing that had made a mess; Sören could feel himself leaking precum in his boxer-briefs.

Sören was both disappointed and relieved that the strawberries were gone.

"I'd like to take you to that stand if they're open next week," Ingmar said.

"I'm sure they will be."

"We could go for a drive... I enjoyed seeing you enjoy those, but it would be even prettier to watch you in the sunshine."

Sören blushed. He bit his lower lip and crinkled his nose again. His head was spinning, stomach fluttering, and he needed to get his cock down, now. "You can help me pick out a frame for the pastel drawing you made me sometime next week, too," Sören said. "I'd like to hang it up somewhere."

"That's very sweet of you."

"No, it's very sweet of *you.* I've gifted several people with art, but this is the first time anyone has gifted me with a drawing they've made." Sören looked at it again, sitting on a table across the room, in a spot away from the works in progress. "It's lovely."

There was a moment of silence, as if Ingmar wanted to say something but was waiting for

Sören to give the right cue, and Sören looked at the time and needed to pull himself together before his students arrived for the ceramics class. "Right, so I was going to show you my etchings," Sören said, and then realized the double-entendre, blushing fiercely as he and Ingmar got up from the table, with Ingmar following closely behind Sören into the hall.

Sören had a collection of work spanning the last decade, and with each painting, Sören had a little story about it, where he was at in his life, what inspired him. Several of the pieces were made during his relationship with Alejandro. "This is called *River of Endless Tears*," Sören said, pointing to a painting of a river with several ships sailing down it, through a frozen landscape, against the backdrop of a wild, stormy sky. It was relentlessly bleak, save for the flaming star banners on each ship - a recurring motif in Sören's work - and lanterns hung from the ships, "carrying the fire," Sören said.

Ingmar was very quiet, moreso than usual, almost as if he was holding his breath or couldn't breathe at the sight of it.

"Alejandro and I had..." Sören ran a hand through his curls, remembering. "A very special bond. Like I told you, we would spend hours, sometimes all-nighters, in the same room where he'd play, compose, and I'd draw and paint. It was... symbiotic. Like we were feeding each other, somehow. And if you've heard his music... it's beautiful, but haunting. There was, is, such sadness in him, and that really came through with this one particular piece he was working on, and I made this during one of the sessions he was working on it. It was like... symbolic... of whatever trauma he's been through." Sören ran a finger along the edge of the frame. "I almost didn't hang it up here, it felt a little too private, but my husband maintains this is one of my best pieces, especially because it's so different from everything I've ever done - everything else usually has super-saturated color and this is very stark by comparison. And I felt like it was important to show that melancholy to people, like it was a testament of survival, somehow."

"It's..." Ingmar searched for the right words. "Beautiful isn't quite the word for it. It *rends.* You can look at it and *feel* how much pain he was in." His eyes met Sören's. "How much pain *you've* been in, to understand that kind of pain."

"Alejandro and I *got* each other. Losing him was devastating to me, because we were so much on the same wavelength. In the last couple years we were together, my art shows involved him. He'd perform live, singing, playing the guitar, as people browsed my paintings, and I would paint live for the audience while he played, and sell the finished painting to the highest bidder when the night was over. It was an incredible experience, the two of us really thrived on that." Sören folded his arms, shivering even though it wasn't at all cold today, and especially not with the warmth of Ingmar's presence and his hot breath so close behind him. "And we got each other in terms of depression, too. When you met me, years ago, I wasn't in a good place. That ex I told you about, that night, that was him. Losing him was like losing a piece of my soul."

Tears came to Sören's eyes now; even as he remembered the delicious, sensual, passionate lovemaking with Alejandro that always came after the intense joint art-and-music sessions, both at galleries and creating privately together at home - sex that was sublime, the union of sacred and profane - he wasn't hard anymore. His ache was for the deep sorrow that Alejandro had known, sorrow so deep he could only share in bits and pieces, never the full story, but what Sören knew was enough. He had been so angry with him for going off to an arranged marriage to please his family, and so *smug* that it hadn't worked out. But he could only imagine, now, that whatever he'd done, it hadn't been an easy time for him, either. Alejandro had cared enough to show up here, and make sure that Sören was truly happy with his husband. Sören wondered if Alejandro had spent

sleepless, tormented nights the way he had, thinking about what they'd shared, what they'd lost.

He wondered, now, if Alejandro had been cut off from his music for a year the way Sören had been cut off from his art. That thought *hurt.*

Ingmar's arms wrapped around Sören from behind, and Sören leaned into him, sighing at the comforting touch.

"Losing the first and only person who *got* it," Sören said, "I felt like I was worthless, and there was the self-destructive, empty shell of a person you met that night. I wish I could tell you honestly that night with you was the last time I went clubbing and did E looking for a quick fuck, but it wasn't. It happened a few times after I went to London. It eventually stopped, though, for reasons." Those reasons had been Justin, and Sören didn't want to get into the sad, sordid story of all of that right now. Just this was enough.

"I regret that our paths did not cross in London," Ingmar said, playing with one of Sören's stray curls. His arms tightened around Sören.

"Same here."

Sören was getting aroused again now, and that was exactly the opposite of why he'd started on this tour in the first place. He continued to take Ingmar through the paintings. While there were a few paintings from when Sören was single and between relationships, the overwhelming majority of what he saw fit to present to others was made either when he was with Alejandro, or in the time he'd been with Dooku. Ingmar paused at a painting of Dooku at the Dimmuborgir, a dramatic sunset over snows and ice, where Dooku was wearing a fur-lined cape blowing in the wind, a silver crown, carrying a sword and a shield bearing the flaming star, set with blue diamonds. The painting was entitled *Once and Future King*, fitting as he looked absolutely regal. The Dimmuborgir shimmered ominously, like an opening gate; if you looked *very* closely, you could see a burning eye. Dooku was watching, waiting, glaring at it, a predatory look on his face as if he were going off to war, fighting whatever that was.

"I took Nico with me to Akureyri in November 2017," Sören explained, "showed him around, we went to the Dimmuborgir and I took photos. Then I just... did what I do, painting, embellishing from my mind's eye. I suppose this was inspired by the passion he has for justice - he was a career barrister. I really think he ought to have gone into politics, maybe he could have made a difference with the mess the UK's in right now." Sören shrugged. "And... the way he made me feel safe with him right away, like he'd end anyone who tried to hurt me." A throaty laugh. "I had an ex, named Justin, who... ah... wasn't very nice to me, and he talked about having nightmares about that eye. Anytime he dreamed about it, was when he, um. Wasn't very nice. I guess that, too, was symbolic, my new man battling the evil ex."

He pointed to a print of the painting he'd done of Frankie - Frankie herself had the original - where Frankie was clad in armor, carrying a similar sword and shield, and her armor bore the flaming star as well. It felt right to put them side by side. She was also in a winter landscape, at the bank of a river that looked very similar to the one in *The River of Endless Tears*, snowflakes falling around her, but she was shining, her sword aflame, on bended knee like a knight swearing service. Where Frankie had a pink mohawk in the real world and was naturally a ginger, Sören had portrayed her here with short dark hair, messy and just covering the ears, but otherwise the face was the same, it was recognizable as Frankie to those who knew her. Her portrait was entitled, simply, *Sister*.

"2016," Ingmar observed, reading the date.

"Já, that was... another bad time in my life." Sören cringed, remembering Justin. "That was when I was with the aforementioned Justin. Frankie was my saving grace." Sören quickly explained, "She's my best friend, about to become my sister-in-law."

They were coming near to the end of the line. "Not everything is here," Sören said. "I have some stuff at home, that I haven't shown here for one reason or another."

"Have you ever painted Alejandro?"

"...Yes, but... you know how he is. He doesn't like pictures taken of him, and it felt disrespectful of his privacy to show anyone the two paintings I made of him. So much so that he doesn't even know I painted him." Sören chuckled, and ran a nervous hand through his curls.

"I'd like to see them, sometime."

"Er. Perhaps. They are kind of private."

Ingmar's lips quirked. "Erotic art?"

"One of them is." Sören quickly changed the subject, not wanting to get aroused again. He pointed to the painting that had started it all, the two phoenixes that he had on his back, fire and water, tails twined and hooked through the top of a flaming star. "As you can see from this and the others, it's why I found it curious that you gave me the gift you did, as this is a recurring symbol in my work."

"That is indeed very interesting."

"You've seen my ink." *You've done more than just see it* Sören shivered again, remembering the way Ingmar traced the tattoos with his fingertips, his tongue... *Fuck. Behave. This is getting out of hand.* "I designed that. But it's incomplete. It's supposed to have *that* in there." Sören pointed to the star. "My funds for tattooing ran out before I could add the star, and even when I had the money again, I just... didn't. It's like I've been waiting for... I don't know what, really." Sören shrugged. "I might get it done later this year, I think. I don't like leaving loose ends tied up."

Sören then took Ingmar on the pottery walkthrough, with a couple of abstract sculptures in the hall, and some pots and bowls in the art rooms, and a shelf of vases and plates in the community room. The pots, bowls and vases had plants in them year-round, and Sören was watering what needed water. "I took a ceramics class when I was in London," Sören said, "and when I started this place up, I invested in a kiln. I find the marriage of earth and fire really... therapeutic."

"You are indeed very fiery." Ingmar nodded. "I can see why you would be drawn to a creative process that involves transformation by fire."

"It's a Sagittarius thing, I guess." Sören smirked.

The afternoon ceramics students started to pour in, and Sören greeted them warmly. Two had returned from the morning's pastel class. When everyone was assembled, Sören said in English, "We have a guest today, named Ingmar. He's not from Iceland, so I ask that we speak in English."

"Nice to meet you!" boomed out Jónas, a large, jolly farmer in his early fifties. He grinned at Sören. "Are the two of you related?"

Sören raised an eyebrow. "Er... not that I'm aware of?"

"Hm. Even though he's blond, you look like you could be related, somehow."

Sören snickered, finding that hilarious for some reason, and Ingmar seemed to be highly amused by it as well.

"Also," Sören said, quickly changing the subject, "before we get into what we're doing, I have the results of the ballot. Twenty-three of you said that you would attend music classes if they were offered here, and that's more than enough for me to look into getting a music instructor here. It probably will take at least a few weeks, because it's an involved process of finding a music teacher - they don't just grow on trees around here, I'll probably have to get someone from Reykjavik, and that probably means they'll want to be paid a bit for their trouble..."

Ingmar cleared his throat, and Sören's attention snapped to him.

"Sören," he said, "it's not that complicated."

"Oh?"

"You literally have a musician living up the street. I'm sure he can be persuaded to come here and help out a couple times a week."

Sören opened his mouth, wanting to protest, but the class immediately began encouraging this, excited that a music teacher had fallen into place, wanting Sören to talk to him and make an arrangement for classes as soon as possible. When the commotion died down, Sören looked at Ingmar and said, "*Takk,*" in a way that let Ingmar know he'd poured gasoline on a bonfire.

Ingmar gave him an innocent smile that wasn't innocent at all. "I like being helpful," he said.

"You're *super* helpful."

*I have not yet begun to assist you*flickered at the back of Sören's consciousness, as if Ingmar had spoken into his mind or let shielding down - but he couldn't have done that, could he? Sören shivered, again, the air not cold at all.

Sören worked on glazing his latest vase, with Ingmar also glazing, working on a cup. Those who worked the pottery wheels took turns, while others molded the clay into sculptures. This was one of Sören's favorite classes, thriving on the rush of watching the worked clay, people making objects that were both beautiful and useful.

It was always over too soon. There was cleanup - Sören let Ingmar linger with the glaze, continuing to paint, as he put away everything else, save a bit of clay that Ingmar would be throwing on the wheel. When it was time, Ingmar got up, and Sören led him over to the pottery wheels.

They sat across from each other. Ingmar put clay on the wheel and it got going, but he was having trouble controlling it, as beginners often did. Instinctively, as Sören had done with other students, he reached out and put his hands over Ingmar's, guiding them in the

movement, the flow that would shape the vessel. "You have to center the clay on the wheel," Sören said.

Then, the clay moved, swirled, with Sören adding water to it, and telling Ingmar when to add water, until Ingmar got the hang of when to add water himself.

"There are different shapes you can do with it," Sören said, showing him, guiding his hands again, the clay flowing, flowing, thicker, thinner, taller, shorter. "Many possibilities."

Sören's hands were tingling, and it wasn't just from the creative energy. Ingmar had been looking at the wheel, concentrating, but now their eyes were locked, and Sören had to resist the urge to run his hands up Ingmar's arms, over his body...

Ingmar shaped the clay into a bowl. When he was satisfied, the wheel stopped, and they just spent a moment looking at it.

"It has to dry for a week," Sören said, "and then we trim, and then we glaze, and then we fire."

Ingmar nodded. "So I'll have to come back."

"Yes."

Ingmar smiled. "Good."

Sören also smiled.

Ingmar looked down at his shirt and his jeans, which were muddy now, in addition to the chalk dust from earlier. "I definitely need to change before I get back in the Bentley."

"This is why I wear an apron," Sören said. "You can get ready while I finish the cleanup, OK?"

Ingmar departed to the bathroom, and Sören carefully put Ingmar's bowl on a drying rack, protecting it with a plastic cover that he tagged with Ingmar's name on it. When Sören was finished cleaning the wheel and was putting away the glaze Ingmar had been using, Ingmar came out from the hall bathroom with his shirt off.

"I forgot to bring my shirt in with me," Ingmar explained.

But as he went for the bag that contained a change of clothing, he lingered, and Sören couldn't help ogling him - the lean, muscular body, the defiinition in his chest and abs and biceps, the veins in his forearms. Remembering that bare torso from their night of passion. Wanting to explore, tease, take care of the man who had shown him kindness, who had been kind to Alejandro, who deserved to be spoiled as Ingmar had once said Sören deserved to be spoiled.

No. You cannot. You need to stop thinking like this.

Their eyes met.

"I, ah." Sören looked down, and bit his lower lip. "We should get going."

Ingmar threw on a clean shirt - Sören was a little disappointed - and after Sören turned the lights off and locked up, they got in the Bentley.

"Thank you for coming out today," Sören said.

"It was a pleasure. I'm looking forward to doing the ceramics class again."

"I'd like that a lot. And you'll still be coming to the solstice party tomorrow?"

"I will indeed. Perhaps we can dance together."

"Perhaps we could."

Ingmar drove slowly, as if he was reluctant to bring Sören back. But they did, finally, end up back in Svalbarðseyri, and Ingmar pulled over in front of Sören's cabin.

"Do you want to come in for coffee or tea?"

"I need to get in and take a shower," Ingmar said.

"OK."

Their eyes met again. "A pity you can't join me."

Sören's face flushed, and he stammered, cock waking up again. Ingmar took Sören's hand and pressed it to his mouth, giving it a soft kiss, and then his fingers stroked Sören's cheek, cupped Sören's chin. "If your husband were willing to let you play," Ingmar husked, "I'd like a repeat of that night we spent together."

Sören's breath came out in a sharp hiss. He didn't know what to say to that. "Er."

"I hope I didn't offend you."

"No. Flattered, not offended." Sören bit his lower lip. "I..." He closed his eyes, searching for the right thing to say. Nothing felt like the right thing, exactly, but he had to come close enough. "I'll... ah... I'll get back to you on that."

"Please do." Ingmar leaned in then, and his lips brushed against Sören's, gently. Their mouths didn't open, there was no tongue, but the kiss still sent a jolt through Sören, making him quiver, feverish.

If I don't get out of this car right now I am going to end up with my face in his lap, devouring him alive. Sören wanted to suck him badly, wanted to drag him out on the ground and *ride* him right there in the grass... He shuddered, aching, twinging, wanting.

Ingmar's voice was a caress. "Have a good evening, beautiful."

"I'll see you tomorrow." Sören opened the car door, waved, and rushed off to the cabin.

Dooku wasn't home yet - there was a note, saying he'd gone hiking with Alejandro. Sören marched immediately to the bathroom, pulled down his jeans and his boxer-briefs as quickly as he could, shielded himself in the Force as strongly as he could, and then took his cock into his hand, stroking fast and furious - he hadn't jerked off this hard in a long time. Five minutes later he doubled over against the sink, crying out "*Ingmar*" as he climaxed to the mental images of riding him, caressing him, being caressed by him, hours of sensual pleasure, lost in Ingmar's beauty, his tender loving care, giving the same back to him.

"Fuck," Sören said, wiping himself up.

He was in over his head, now, and he couldn't keep hiding this from Dooku - it wasn't simply that they had a Force bond and there was only so long he could mask the attraction without Dooku finding out somehow, but even if they weren't both Force-sensitive, Sören would still feel bad, like he was being dishonest.

He didn't want to be dishonest with the man he'd married, the man he still loved and lusted for very much. But he worried that if he was honest, he'd hurt Dooku - the very last person in the universe he wanted to hurt - and he worried that then he'd lose everything.

Sören leaned back, covered his face with his hands, and sighed.*What to do?*

Chapter 16

Sören poured himself a shot of Brennivín, turned on his laptop, and logged into Stardew Valley, needing to do something to ground out - the painting beckoned to him, but working on a painting of Ingmar right this minute was perhaps unwise.

But the game wasn't providing its usual distraction. And Dooku wasn't home yet.

Sören frowned, and decided to start a video chat with his sister Margrét, and her partner, his best friend Frankie. To his relief they were both available. To his surprise and delight Dagnýr was also online, so it became a group video chat.

“You caught me on my lunch break,” Dag said, smiling.

“How goes it in the Great White North?” Sören asked.

“Good! I've gotten the first part of the genealogical research done.”

“Really?” Sören cocked his head to one side.

Dag nodded. “By 'first part', I mean up to the late 19th century, because there's a lot, and I'm in 'thorough investigation' mode where I'm looking at literally every relative we have on record to see if there's anyone else that was noted to be odd in some way, like us. Because if there's more than just us, it lends weight to the idea that this is genetic and comes from somewhere. Actually – Frankie, it's a good thing you're here because this is relevant to your interests!”

“Yeah?” Frankie's eyebrows shot up.

“You have a great-great grandfather who came to Ireland from Iceland after Mt. Hekla erupted in the late 19th century. That's someone in our family tree, so we're distantly related. “

Frankie and Margrét looked at each other, laughing a little, then Frankie turned back to the camera. “My aunt told me a long time ago we have a tiny amount of Icelandic blood. Now it feels even less like a coincidence that Sören and I met in London.”

“And you yourself are Force sensitive,” Dag said.

Sören wondered how wise that was to be saying over chat – as far as he knew “the Force” was just what Dooku called it and the term had spread to the extended family, but Sören nonetheless felt a little prickle of apprehension about even hinting that they were gifted in some way; he knew the Americans spied on their own people with the Patriot Act and he was sure they weren't the only country to do so.

Dag went on, “I feel a bit like Alice falling down the rabbit hole. 'Curiouser and curiouser.'”

“Very curious, indeed. “ Margrét smirked. “So what, we're like sort of committing incest now?”

“It's far enough back that it's not incest in the same way as, like, first cousin incest would be,” Dag said. “Besides, everyone in Iceland is distantly related somehow.”

“I think it's kind of cool that Frankie is a distant relative!” Sören said. “She felt like family to me from the start, it's almost like I knew on a subconscious level, even if I didn't

understand it consciously." *Like I knew in the Force, somehow.*

"So yeah, that was the easy part. Now I have to do more digging and that means bureaucracy, yay." Dag made a face.

"You should ask Flóki for help," Margrét said; Flóki was her friend-with-benefits, that had continued after she and Frankie became an item. "He works part-time at the library in Reykjavik. This is literally part of his job, is curating these kinds of records."

"I'll do that, then." Dag paused. "How are things going with you and him?"

"Actually..." Margrét looked at Frankie and they both started giggling. When they turned back to the camera they both had huge, cheesy grins. "It's not just me and him anymore"

"I might be *a little* bi and not 100% lesbian like I thought," Frankie said.

Sören's jaw dropped. Of course, he knew that sexual orientation could be fluid – though he'd only been with men so far, he occasionally found women attractive. Indeed, things would have probably gone differently if he'd known Frankie had bi tendencies when they lived together. But he was so used to thinking of her as a lesbian that his mind boggled. "What? Really?"

"In fairness, he *is* pretty. All that long red hair..." Frankie smiled.

"Wow. I... I can't believe it. You're into a dude." Sören blinked slowly, stunned. Then he felt a touch of curiosity. He knew of course that people could have open relationships – he'd had the occasional threesome with a gay couple back in Reykjavik, and Matt's parents were swingers, not that he'd ever done anything with them, or wanted to. But this was more personal, people he knew much better. It was a bit of an adjustment. "And it's not making things weird with the two of you?"

"Well, *no.* Being poly means that we, you know, talk about things like that, define our boundaries, etc."

Then Sören had his own gigglefit, thinking of the last time he'd seen Flóki. "Oh my god. Flóki is like, two feet taller than Frankie."

"It doesn't matter so much when we're horizontal, ayyyyy," Frankie said.

Sören facepalmed, but he was laughing, too. He quickly shoved away the mental image of himself being horizontal, with Frankie on top of him, shielding himself tighter so nobody could see that in the Force.

Margrét went on, "Things have been going so well that in October, when my lease is up, I'm going to be looking for a bigger place for my bar, and Flóki, Frankie and I are going to rent a larger apartment or even a house together, because my flat is barely big enough for me and Frankie, never mind three people."

"You guys should come up here to Akureyri," Sören blurted out before he could stop himself; he missed them.

"No," Margrét said, gently but firmly - Sören knew Akureyri had bad memories for her and an occasional visit was bad enough. "You guys should move down to Reykjavik," she teased. Then she got more serious, but with a happy, content little smile on her face. "Anyway, that's what's been happening lately. The three of us preparing for the move. It's amazing how well things have been going. The three of us just really... fit well together."

“I'm happy for you,” Dag said.

Sören had to. “Hi Happy For You, I'm Sören.”

Dag rolled his eyes, but his lips quirked with amusement. “On THAT note, I gotta get back to work.”

“OK! Will talk to you later,” Margrét said.

“Bye, Dag,” Sören said, and Dag gave a little wave before he winked out of chat.

Sören decided to take the opportunity that had presented itself in such a timely manner. Heart beating a little faster, he said, “Actually, now that Dag's gone, I need to talk to you both about something.”

Frankie could tell how serious he was. “Are you OK?”

“Yes? No? Maybe? Can I trust you guys to keep anything I say in here, between the two of you, for right now?”

“So long as you're not in any danger, yes,” Margrét said, and Frankie nodded.

“HOKAY so...” Sören leaned back in his chair and rubbed his beard, ran a nervous hand through his curls. “This guy Ingmar who is staying up the street this summer – the one who's staying with Alejandro...”

Margrét gave a little growl at the mention of Sören's ex, and Frankie made a stabbing motion.

Sören chuckled and went on. “Ingmar and I had a one-night stand four years ago. He is still hot as fuck. We have been flirting like whoa. He wants to jump my bones again. I also want to jump his bones, but I don't want to cheat on Nico, and Ingmar even said 'if I have permission from my husband'. I've been trying to hide my attraction because I don't want to make Nico feel bad, make him think he's somehow 'not enough' because look, y'all know he's still hung up about the age difference and worrying that he's been 'unfair' and shit, and I don't want him to think I'm starting to think he's too old and want hot young stud to replace him. I want hot young stud AND him. Nico STILL gets me going. So I don't know what to do here. You guys have experience with being in an open relationship and have made it work. It's not like I haven't known other people in open relationships. I just... didn't think this was an issue we'd be running into when we got together, so we never defined it as non-monogamy from the start, I think the assumption of monogamy was there.”

Sören caught his breath. There it was, the truth, out in the open. Margrét looked at Frankie again, and then Margrét took a moment to consider her words before she spoke. “OK, baby brother, gonna be really blunt with you here.”

Sören braced himself.

Margrét continued, “You need to talk to Dooku about this, ASAP. You and him have a Force bond, and you're not going to be able to hide that attraction from him forever, especially if you and Ingmar are around each other in his presence. And it's better he find out from you, telling him, rather than him seeing it/feeling it and you not telling him. Yes, it would have been easier if you guys were established as non-monogamous from the start, but a lot of people into poly start off monogamous and then decide to open up their relationship, for one reason or another. Leja and Hans, for example, didn't start off as swingers.”

Sören cut in. “Well, this is the other thing... I don't necessarily want to be a 'swinger'. I don't want to fool around with a lot of people.”

“But you do want to fool around with one, and if there's one, you should allow the possibility that there might be another down the road. For example... Flóki is still very interested in you.”

Sören remembered that one date they had before he'd moved up to Akureyri – he had been in the wrong place for it to go further, at the time. “I didn't completely put him off that date we had a year ago when I was too broken up over Nico and Alejandro to want to go there?”

“No. And Frankie and I don't mind sharing him, if the two of you go want to go on a date and you feel like riding that ride at some point. Not saying you have to! It's cool either way. But if you ever wanted to hook up with him, we don't have a problem with it. But, I would prefer that you not do any of that until you've talked to Dooku first. Out of respect to Flóki, as well as out of respect to my brother-in-law. Dooku has been through a lot, too, I care about him, he's fam, and he doesn't need any shady behind the back shit.”

Sören nodded. He put that information on file for later – he couldn't really deal with it right now. “I'm talking to you precisely *because* I don't want to be shady about this. I'm just at a loss as how to do it because it's literally like defusing a bomb. I worry not just that he might say no and then we have even more awkwardness on our hands the rest of the summer, but I worry that he might be offended I'm even asking.”

Margrét exhaled. “Those are valid concerns, but putting myself in his shoes, I'd value your honesty far more than I would be offended by the idea that you wanted to shag someone else, especially if you make it really clear to him that you haven't lost interest in him. You could even sweeten the deal a bit.”

“What do you mean?”

Margrét looked at Frankie again, and there was another pause, then Frankie nodded and gave a “go ahead” gesture. Margrét cleared her throat. “OK, TMI time.. Flóki, Frankie, and I have had threesomes, and we've all been intimate with each other individually. But before we became a more equal triad, and Flóki was just our occasional 'side' partner, Frankie would "make it up" to me later. It's not that we're doing anything wrong or have anything to feel guilty about, it's a game we'd play. It actually made things more fun. Not to mention there's an element of teasing involved. It spices things up a bit.”

“It sure does,” Frankie said with a grin.

Margrét went on, “So if you treat it like that - 'if you let me shag Ingmar, you can have your way with me the next night', or even something like 'you can 'punish' me for being 'naughty''...”

“I can't believe you're giving BDSM advice to your own brother,” Frankie laughed.

“Ari told me some things about the erotica Dooku writes, so I made some assumptions and I don't think they're wrong.” Margrét squinted, and Sören felt heat rise in those cheeks; no, those assumptions weren't wrong at all. “Anyway, If you make it a kind of game, Dooku might be more amenable to it and have less hang-ups about it being related to his age, y'know?”

“That makes sense,” Sören said, “and not gonna lie, that sounds like fun.” He bit his lower lip, thinking about the times Dooku had tied him up. It had been awhile...

Then Sören heard Dooku's keys in the door. “Speaking of, there he is, so I gotta bounce. Will talk to you later!”

“Love you,” Margrét said, and Frankie waved.

Sören got up and greeted Dooku at the door, giving him a big hug and a kiss. "Hej, *elskan* ," he said. "How was the hike?"

"Good," Dooku said, smiling. "How were your classes?"

"Good."

"Excellent. I'll be starting the grill momentarily. I apologize that I'm home a little later than expected, Alejandro and I stopped for coffee on the way back and had a bit of a book club."

"It's all right." Sören ran a nervous hand through his curls. "So you guys seem to have really hit it off."

"We have. It's a bit unnerving how much we have in common, but it's also... appreciated, I suppose you could say." A soft sigh. "A kindred spirit."

Since Sören and Dooku were so opposite in many ways - much as they complemented one another, balanced each other out, and had a strong attraction in their opposite nature - Sören couldn't fault his husband for enjoying the company of someone who he had things in common with. It was, after all, why Sören and Frankie got along so well, and why Sören was closer to his sister than his twin brother. He wouldn't begrudge his husband that kind of friendship... *I just wish it was with someone who wasn't my fucking ex.* It made it harder to stay angry with Alejandro. It also made it harder to keep avoiding him, to keep putting off the talks to get the closure they needed.

Fuck.

Sören sat outside while Dooku made skewers of lamb and vegetables on the grill, and they ate together under the glow of the midnight sun. Sören thought about initiating the conversation they needed to have - still shielding himself, not wanting to give anything away before it was time - but he kept getting tongue-tied, feeling awkward about the whole thing.

After dinner Dooku said, "I'll probably want to call it an early night, since we have the party to attend tomorrow and I know you at least will insist on being there past midnight."

"That's fine." That also meant it was a bad idea to try to have that discussion now, because even if it went *well* - and Sören still didn't have any guarantee of that - they would both be wound up after having to be in "serious business mode".

"And I'll want to stop at the supermarket tomorrow to pick up some odds and ends for our trip to the Goðafoss in the daytime, if you're still up for that."

"I've been looking forward to it all week." Sören smiled.

“Will you be needing anything for the solstice party at the studio tomorrow night?”

Sören was having a small celebration for his students – a bonfire, food and drinks, music and dancing. “I'm sure people will be bringing some things but it can't hurt to get some

extra.”

They sat side by side on the couch, with their respective laptops - Dooku was re-reading the latest portion of the story he was working on, and Sören played Stardew Valley. A little while later, Dooku looked up from his laptop and asked, “How were things at the studio today?”

"Enough people voted on music classes that I need to find an instructor, and Ingmar reminded me Alejandro lives up the street. In front of the entire goddamn class, so there was no way I could say no to them." Sören facepalmed.

"Oh, I think that would be splendid. You should ask him."

"Et tu, Dookus?"

Dooku rolled his eyes. "I'll forgive your butchering of Latin this one time."

"OK, Biggus Dickus Maximus."

Dooku bitchfaced, and Sören kissed the tip of his nose. Then Dooku laughed too, putting down his laptop and putting his arms around Sören. "You silly thing," he said, raining kisses over Sören's curls.

"I just..." Sören sighed. "I'm not really ready yet to..."

"I know. But you can't avoid him all summer."

Sören looked up at him. "No. And I won't. I just need more time." He kissed Dooku's nose again. "In the meantime, we should relax, já?"

"We should."

Sören stood up, took Dooku's hands, pulled him to his feet, and led him to the bed. They undressed each other, and climbed onto the bed together. After a few minutes of hungry kissing, caressing, they got into position for a sixty-nine, taking each other's hands as they sucked and rimmed each other, at last coming together, rising up to kiss with their mouths full of each other's cum, savoring the way they tasted together.

They curled up then, and it didn't take long for them to get to sleep, lulled by the soft fall of rain outside.

—

After the evening rain, the day of the summer solstice was bright and sunny. In the morning Dooku ran to the supermarket to pick up some things for the party at the studio, and also for them to have a picnic, and then Sören drove them to the Goðafoss, which was a half-hour drive.

Sören had first taken Dooku here on their trip to Iceland in November 2017, where the aurora borealis had glowed over the waterfall, and Dooku had described the place as a "Force Nexus", putting into simple words the power Sören had sensed there since he was a child, but never knew how to quantify it. When Sören learned how to drive at age sixteen, he would frequently drive out to the Goðafoss year-round, any season, any weather, day or night, and just sit by the waterfall, the endless flowing of the fall - even in

winter, when the rest of the land was frozen - a reminder that life always went on, somehow.

Historically, the Goðafoss had been the place where the lawspeaker Þorgeir Ljósvetningagoði had thrown his idols of the Norse gods, officially converting Iceland to Christianity. A window in Akureyrarkirkja illustrated this story. The Goðafoss thus also seemed to have a liminal quality to it, a place for endings and beginnings, the energy of change, one chapter of life ending and another beginning. Sören and Margrét had stopped at the falls on their way out of Akureyri in 2006, when Sören drove up from Reykjavik to rescue Margrét from the death threat of their uncle Einar; he was twenty-two then, and it felt almost like a lifetime ago. Sören and Margrét had each thrown a 1 *krónur* coin into the fall, their last action in Akureyri, before driving down to Reykjavik. Sören had thrown a 1 *krónur* coin into the fall when he drove into Akureyri in April 2018, returning there to live for the first time in twelve years, to start his life over again, opening up Logifugl Listaskóli, living in his paternal grandfather's cabin with Snúður.

As Sören got out of the jeep and Dooku spread a blanket down on the ground, and lay the picnic basket down on top of it, Sören felt a weight on his shoulders, the same weight he had felt the days he threw the coin into the falls. The same sense of *something is happening* .

The dampness from the previous night's rain still lingered on the grass, and a rainbow shone in the falls.

Sören and Dooku ate - sandwiches, sliced cheese, smoked herring, shrimp, fruit, little pastries. They snuggled together after they ate, and when they were ready they got up to walk around the falls, and stood at the edge, looking over, with Dooku standing behind Sören, holding him, Sören's hands on his arms, rubbing gently.

Sören tilted his face. *It's time.* "Nico," he said. "I need to talk to you about something."

The last time either of them had said "we need to talk" was in February 2018, and that had been their breakup. Dooku let go, stepped back, and Sören turned around to his side, so he could look at the falls over one shoulder, and Dooku over the other.

Sören ran a nervous hand through his curls, took a deep breath, and folded his arms. "OK. Here goes. When Ingmar was at my studio yesterday, we... flirted a bit." Sören looked over at Dooku, who registered no reaction - waiting to hear the entire case, as the barrister he had been most of his life.

"Nothing happened," Sören said, "well... he stole a little kiss at the end, but he said, I quote, 'If your husband were willing to let you play, I'd like a repeat of that night we spent together.'"

Again, no reaction from Dooku. He was still waiting, knowing Sören had more to say.

"So here's the thing," Sören said. "Four years later, I'm still very attracted to Ingmar. He's..." Sören made a vague hand gesture. "You've seen him. He's gorgeous. And it isn't just physical - he was good to me, that night, he made me feel cared about during a time when I felt bloody awful. He's been very kind to me since he showed up here, and he's kind to Alejandro. It's hard for that feeling to not be mutual. So... I told him I would ask you about it."

Dooku raised an eyebrow, but that was his only reaction, still.

Sören continued. "This... does not change how I feel about you." He walked towards Dooku then, put one hand on Dooku's heart, and stroked his face with the other. "I still love you. I still want you. I wouldn't be *replacing* you with him. To make a really crass analogy... it's like you're home cooking, and playing with him would be eating out." Sören felt the smirk on his face, though he had been trying to behave. "I don't want to eat out every single night. But I... if you were willing, I'd like to do this, and I thought it was better I tell you, be honest with you, ask permission, than go behind your back. I don't ever, ever want to hurt you, Nico. I love you so, so much."

Dooku's hand clasped over Sören's hand on his heart. He still said nothing, but that touch was reassuring.

"So." Sören took a deep breath. "There's that. And if you gave me permission to play with him... and I did... I'd, ah." He gave a wicked grin. "I'd let you have your way with me the next night." He leaned in and husked, "It's been awhile since you tied me up. I'd love it if you punished me for being a naughty boy."

Dooku's eyes widened, and across their Force bond, Sören could see the mental images dancing across his head, binding Sören's wrists as he'd done on Valentine's Day, teasing him, making him beg for it.

Sören felt emboldened, naughtier. "Maybe you could watch, sometime. Back in the days when I used to have more casual sex, I thought it was hot to watch my partner doing things with another person - it gave me a different view, like porn, almost." He stroked Dooku's beard. "And quid pro quo is only fair - if there was ever anyone you felt like shagging, just ask me first. It would be hot to see you get it on with another hot guy."

Dooku blushed.

"And," Sören said, "I'd play it safe, of course. In my wild party days I still insisted on protection and getting tested. I don't plan on being anywhere near as wild as I was then - this isn't for all the time, and I'd rather know someone before I shag them, these days. But I don't want to put you at risk, so I'd only bareback with you unless I had proof Ingmar was clean, and..."

Dooku nodded, and put a hand on Sören's shoulder. "All right."

"All right?" Sören's eyebrows shot up. "So that's a yes...?"

"I'll admit this wasn't what I thought would happen when we got together, when I married you, but... it's better to bend than to break."

"You're not angry that I asked?"

"I'm taken aback, but I'm not angry. I... shall adjust." Dooku leaned in and kissed Sören's cheek. Their eyes met. "I appreciate your honesty."

"It's like I said. I don't ever want to hurt you, Nico." Sören took his hands, and kissed them, his heart overflowing with gratitude and love. "And I mean..." He bit his lower lip. "This could make things fun. Not that I had any complaints about our sex life before, but I mean what I say when I want you to take control of me when I come back from playing."

"That could indeed be enjoyable." Dooku smiled, and there was a predatory look in his eyes that made Sören want to pounce him right there, but he restrained himself.

They walked around some more, and finally they got back in the jeep for the drive home. They were quiet, and then at the halfway point, Dooku said, "You know, to be honest with you..."

Sören looked over at him and made the "go on" gesture.

Dooku took a deep breath. "I've been having the same concerns about my age again."

"Oh god, please don't give me that 'too old' shit. I told you I'm not replacing you -"

Dooku waved his hand dismissively. "That's not it, Sören." He went on. "But we have to face facts - I may be in good health for almost seventy-one, but I am not going to live forever, and even if I have another twenty years... how many of those years will I be able to, well, *perform* ? Meanwhile, you are young yet, and have... needs. I have been feeling guilty about the eventuality of not being able to fulfill those needs. This provides a rather elegant solution to that problem."

Sören sighed. He really hated this subject - the thought of losing Dooku eventually made him want to tear his heart out and scream. *I wish you could stay with me forever.* "I suppose."

"It will be difficult enough for you when the end comes, never mind being frustrated and pent-up constantly, and I know art is a coping mechanism for you and know how closely your sexuality is tied to your creativity. I don't want you to be so... blocked up... when..." Dooku didn't finish the sentence, his voice choking up. "I don't want you to end up taking your life when I'm gone, Sören, and I worry about that a lot."

"Nico." Sören pulled over, and buried his face in his hands. "Dammit, Nico..."

Dooku reached over to hug Sören, as best as he could with the layout of the jeep and Sören's steering wheel in the way. "I didn't want to upset you, *elskan* . But we have to be practical about things." He took Sören's chin in his hand, and gave him a soft, gentle kiss. "If you found a lover... you wouldn't have to endure the end alone."

Sören let out a few more sobs, leaning on Dooku. "Fuck," was all he could choke out.

Dooku's own eyes were too bright with unshed tears. "I love you."

"I know." Sören patted him. "That's so fucking... unselfish of you."

"I would rather share you than lose you. And... well... I don't intend to go just yet, and one thing you've shown me over the last year and a half is that an old dog can learn new tricks. I'm open to seeing where this arrangement goes. You and Ingmar are both attractive men, yes, and the thought of you together is rather... stimulating... though I'm not yet comfortable enough with him to ask to watch or, er."

Sören nodded. "I get it." He leered. "Maybe I could get pictures or video."

"Oh, dear *Force.* " Dooku chuckled. "You *are* a naughty boy."

Before they went home, Sören stopped at the pet store, to buy the high quality, expensive pet food he got for Snúður, because that was the closest thing Sören would ever have to a child and he wanted to make sure he ate properly. Dooku sat in the jeep - Sören knew he was going to take a few minutes to cry, privately; he still had a hard time crying in front of other people, even though he'd done so in front of Sören before.

Sören went into the pet store by himself, going down the usual aisle, and when he passed by the collars and leashes, a lightbulb went off in his head.

He walked backwards, pausing in front of the dog collars. He picked one up that looked like it might fit - black leather - and tried it on. He clipped a matching leash through it, and hoped that nobody would see him doing this, but *god, I want Nico to make me wear this for a night after I shag Ingmar.* Heat flooded his cheeks. *I want Ingmar to make me wear this, too. The leash of who gets to own me for the night.*

When Sören was ready to check out, he brought the bag of dry food, a case of wet food, and the leash and collar to the counter. The saleswoman remarked, "This is for dogs and you're buying cat food."

"Jæja, I'm picking it up for a neighbor," Sören said, a half-truth.

Bringing the cart out to the jeep, Sören tried very hard to keep the mischievous grin off his face.

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After the trip to the Goðafoss, Dooku and Sören had a few hours to kill before the solstice party at the studio, which would be starting at 5 PM. Dooku's cell rang - Alejandro, wanting to see if Dooku was available to go on a walk with Auli.

"I'll be back before it's time to leave," Dooku said, giving Sören a kiss. He paused. "Would you like me to ask him about the music class...?"

Sören shook his head. "It's something I'd rather bring up with him myself, if you don't mind."

"I don't mind." Dooku patted him. "When are you planning on having that conversation with him?"

Sören ran a nervous hand through his curls. He took a moment to consider - he was working this weekend, and would probably need time to recover on Saturday if he was out late tonight with the solstice party. "Tell him to come by the studio after my classes are done on Sunday - I'll be free by 4 PM. You can just tell him I want to talk to him about something."

"OK." Dooku blew him a kiss at the door. "Have fun."

"You too."

Sören felt agitated at the thought of Alejandro, and decided to call his sister to discuss good news, even though with her working nights at the bar, she usually wasn't up until late afternoon. He was surprised when she picked up right away.

“Er, hej,” Sören said. “I know you're not usually up now, or you're just getting up -”

“It's OK,” Margrét mumbled. “I'm up and having coffee.”

“Hi Up And Having -”

“You had the talk with him, jæja*?”*

“Já.”

“How did it go?”

“Better than I expected. He said yes to me playing with Ingmar.”

“I didn't think he'd say no, honestly.”

“Well, I'm glad he said yes and that the conversation went well. Though, I'm kind of uncomfortable with one of the reasons he said yes, I get it, but it's still...” Sören sighed.

“Jæja?”

Sören pinched the bridge of his nose. “He went on about his age again, and how he thinks I should find a lover so I'm not alone and having an episode when he dies.”

“Ah.”

“And like... I appreciate his concern. I just... I don't want him to go, and I don't want to think about it. I'm still pretty raw and broken up from that. I can't imagine my life without him in it.”

“He's right, though, and he's trying to look out for you. And listen, I'm biased, but -”

“Hi Biased But, I'm Sören -”

“SÖREN, I SWEAR TO FUCKING GOD.”

Sören began to whistle innocently.

“ANYWAY AS I WAS SAYING, I may be biased, but I think that even if Dooku was going to be alive forever, you're better off in an (ethical) non-monogamous relationship. Poly isn't necessarily easier - it's still more partners, which means more development of relationships, more communication skills... but it's rewarding. There's something really beautiful about creating your own chosen family. Survival in a pack. Everyone has their own little niche to fill, and it balances things out. I would have honestly given you the poly speech a long time ago, but I didn't want to come off as preachy... though if you were bisexual/pansexual at all, that might have changed my attitude and made me more willing to say something, so you weren't feeling like you were missing out.”

“Well yeah I'm mostly gay. But I think I'm, like, a 5 on the Kinsey scale instead of a hard 6. Between you and me, there's been a couple girls over the years where I've turned my head. just a couple, but more than zero.” Frankie is one of them. Sören swallowed hard, not wanting to think about his best friend – his sister's partner - that way.

“I'm not surprised,” Margrét said. “Anyway, not to be rude, but the reason why I'm up now is because I have to be an adult and run some errands.”

“OK.”

“Have fun at your party tonight! By the way, Flóki says happy solstice.”

–

Sören was quiet as he and Dooku drove to the studio in Akureyri, thinking once again about Dooku's impending mortality – hoping that they had many years left.

Worrying. Getting annoyed with himself that his brain was ruminating on darker things on what was supposed to be a happy day.

Sören managed to pull himself together for the sake of his students, smiling as he and Dooku climbed out of the jeep. Dooku had made Romanian stuffed cabbage for the potluck, and Sören had brought shrimp, and sausages and steaks to grill. The picnic tables were set up with a variety of salads, casseroles, and appetizers, and some of the students had brought fresh fish and meat to throw on the grill. Ingmar had brought a decadent-looking strawberry-topped cake. Sören raised an eyebrow at the strawberries, remembering the heavy flirting at the studio yesterday.

Ingmar mimed a kiss.

Fucking hell. Sören's cock was already starting to stir again. That's one way of getting my mind off things.

"Thank you all for coming," Sören said. "It's time to party Viking style!" He held up the long reach lighter he'd brought with him, and did the honors of lighting the fire in the pit prepared for it, and then starting the grill.

Someone had brought a portable stereo, and people were taking turns with the music. The evening started off with metal; Dooku smiled approvingly.

Meat and fish was grilled, with Sören and Dooku grilling together, and sometimes they got help from the guests. When the first round was ready, Dooku brought it over to be served, and Sören and a couple guests threw the next batch on.

Sören manned the grill for all four batches, and only when everything was all cooked was he ready to take any food of his own. There was still plenty, and Sören had a little bit of everything, grazing. The students were in various cliques across the grass, which was normal, but there was still interaction between them, sharing drink, commenting on music.

Sören sat by the fire, sipping Brennivín as he let his food digest, leaning against Dooku. Dooku pet him.

"Are you feeling a little better?" Dooku asked softly, planting a kiss in Sören's curls.

"A little."

Dooku took Sören's chin in his hand and looked into his eyes. "Something is still bothering you."

Sören looked away. He didn't want to have yet another conversation about Dooku's life span.

Dooku gently rubbed Sören's knee. He moved in closer and said, "I'm going to be retiring early tonight, Alejandro invited me to go hiking with him tomorrow morning and I want to make sure I get adequate rest."

"Oh. OK."

"I don't expect you to leave when I do, I can get a ride back." Dooku stroked Sören's face again. "If you want to... spend time with Ingmar tonight, I won't object."

Sören's jaw dropped. This soon? "You sure?"

"Yes." Dooku's eyes twinkled. "Tomorrow night, when I have all the endorphins going from the hike... you're mine."

"Oh, myyyyy. " Sören's cock stirred again. Across the yard, his eyes met Ingmar's, who was watching them quietly. He looked back at Dooku. "Only if it's all right..."

"I wouldn't have said it was all right, if it wasn't all right. Have fun." He poked Sören. "Don't be so serious."

"Wow, when you of all people are telling me to be less serious..." He cackled and kissed the tip of Dooku's nose.

The music on the stereo changed from metal to electronic. Sören recognized Machinedrum. *Free your arse, and the rest will follow*, Sören told himself, irresistibly drawn to the complex rhythm. He patted Dooku, got up, and moved out to start dancing, not caring if he looked like an idiot dancing by himself.

It wasn't long before Ingmar joined him and they were dancing together... like they had that night four years ago. Except they weren't under the strobe lights of a club, they were here in the open air, under the glow of the midnight sun, a bonfire burning nearby. Something primal in him awakened, as if he were channeling ancient sun worship rites. Someone had brought a torch, and he grabbed it, lit it from the bonfire, and began to dance with it, passing it from hand to hand like it was a glowstick.

Other people were getting up to dance now. Sören continued dancing with the fire, aware he was getting some concerned looks about playing with fire, but he wasn't afraid. I am fire.

The proximity of the flame, and the bonfire, was making him sweat. Sören passed the torch to Ingmar, pulled off his T-shirt, and flung it across the yard at Dooku, who blushed as he took it. Sören grabbed the torch back, and then he watched with a smile as Ingmar removed his own shirt - *fuck, he's hot* - and Ingmar accepted a torch passed by one of the students, lighting it.

The two were dancing with flame now, and soon two torches became four, like they were performing in a carnival, even though Sören had never been formally trained as a fire spinner, he intuitively knew what he was doing and it seemed Ingmar did as well. Sören lost himself in the music, the rhythm, the gorgeous sight of Ingmar's body moving, wanting to touch him, but not wanting to make a scene, and his hands were full besides. *Later, I will touch you with my own fire.*

They danced and danced. The troubles were far away now. *I am here. I am alive.* Sören's eyes scouted for Dooku, who had been watching him admiringly... just you wait till tomorrow night... and now Dooku was on his cell talking to someone. Sören wondered who.

Sören had opened the studio so people could use the bathroom if they needed it, and Sören himself now needed to use the bathroom. When he came out, he had an idea. He took a bottle of skin-safe red paint from the children's art supplies, making a mental note to replace it later, and poured into a paper cup.

Ingmar was waiting for him, stealing a kiss in the hall. Sören had to restrain himself from slamming Ingmar up against the wall and getting on his cock right then and there - this wasn't the time and the place, with probable detection by his guests, and the night was too young. Sören took his hand and they went back outside.

"You haven't tried the cake I brought," Ingmar said, a mock hurt tone of voice.

"No, I have not. It looks delicious." *Not as delicious as you.*

Ingmar cut him a piece of cake, and then he pulled off one of the strawberries and fed it to Sören from his fingers. Sören sucked his fingers, their eyes locked.

Dooku was watching them, the look on his face one best described as "intrigued". Feeling bold - not caring what people would think of what he was about to do - Sören gestured for Dooku to come over, and when he did, Sören took a strawberry off the cake and put it in

Dooku's mouth. Dooku made a little growling noise as he sucked Sören's fingers.

Sören leaned in and lapped strawberry juices from his mouth, his chin, and gave him a passionate kiss. Then Sören moved closer to Ingmar and kissed Ingmar as well, with Dooku watching the kiss.

"Are you quite sure you don't want to watch tonight?" Sören asked him.

"Perhaps another time." Sören could feel Dooku's shyness across their Force bond, and there was something else holding him back, but not even Dooku knew what it was.

Huh.

Sören finished his piece of cake; Dooku then put a hand on Sören's shoulder, and a hand on Ingmar's shoulder. "Take good care of him tonight," Dooku told Ingmar.

"I will," Ingmar said.

Before Sören and Ingmar could reclaim the torches, Sören gestured to the red paint he'd brought out. As if on cue, the music on the stereo changed from electronic to something with more natural instruments - it sounded like Dead Can Dance. Sören dipped two fingers in the paint and made a stripe from the center of his forehead down to his chin, as if he were attending an ancient blood sacrifice and painting himself with the offering. He drew runes on his arms, his chest. Then with more paint on his fingers, he marked Ingmar, stripes across his face, runes on his chest, his back.

They grabbed the torches and headed off to dance once more. They moved closer together, their dancing more sexual, grinding up on each other, face to face, one behind the other. Spinning the flames, like a magic circle around them.

Peter Gabriel's voice cried out to the sun.

Drawn across the plainland
To the place that is higher
Drawn into the circle
That dances round the fire
We spit into out hands
And breathe across the palms
Raising them up high
Held open to the sun
Self-conscious, uncertain
I'm showered with the dust
The spirit enters into me
And I submit to trust

Their eyes met, a deep understanding between them. They still knew little about each other, but Sören felt that same I-can-trust-you-with-my-life feeling he'd felt that night four years ago, when he'd let Ingmar, a random stranger, bind him. They had the same fire, deep inside, and tonight, fire was calling fire.

When "The Rhythm of the Heat" was over, the stereo played "If I Had A Heart" by Fever Ray. They were dancing more slowly now, turning circles around each other.

This will never end 'cause I want more
More, give me more

Give me more

If I had a heart I could love you
If I had a voice I would sing
After the night when I wake up
I'll see what tomorrow brings

Ah ah, ah ah
Ah ah, ah ah
Ah ah, ah ah
If I had a voice, I would sing

Suddenly Sören felt someone staring at him, and he looked and saw Alejandro's Jaguar, and Dooku walking towards it for his ride home. Alejandro was watching Sören and Ingmar dance, a murderous intensity in his gaze that made Sören stop for a moment, and then Sören shot him a wicked grin before turning around, playfully shaking his ass as he leaned in to steal a kiss from Ingmar.

Crushed and filled with all I found
Underneath and inside
Just to come around
More, give me more, give me more

—

Last year Sören had stayed with his guests until 2 AM, and his original plan was to stay until at least midnight, but he didn't make it anywhere near that long. He was too pent up.

After bidding good night to the students who would be staying behind to party some more, Sören and Ingmar walked to their respective vehicles; Ingmar was wrapped in a towel to not stain the Bentley. Before Sören could say anything about feeling awkward about going back to the cottage with him, after the look on Alejandro's face, Ingmar said, "I have a room reserved at the Hotel Akureyri."

Sören pursed his lips. "Oh, do you."

"Yes."

"So you were assuming I'd be with you tonight."

"More like hoping." Ingmar laughed softly.

Sören followed Ingmar's car to the hotel. Once they got in and Ingmar had checked in, he marched Sören along quickly, and as soon as they were on their way to Ingmar's room, they started kissing, hungry, hands roaming over each other. Ingmar was already undoing Sören's jeans.

It didn't take long for them to get completely naked, clothes haphazardly strewn across the floor. They kissed even more passionately now, hard cocks rubbing together; Ingmar took them both into his fist, stroking slowly, his free hand playing with Sören's curls.

Ingmar started walking them towards the bed, and then Sören said, "Wait a minute. I need to, um..." He gave a little cough. "Prepare myself."

He went into the bathroom to do his usual cleaning out for bottoming, and when he came out, Ingmar asked, "Would you like to shower with me?"

"Mmmm, yes."

Underneath the hot, steaming water, they lathered each other sensually, washing off the paint - Sören would have felt self-conscious about painting the both of them now, like a big kid, if it hadn't felt right to do in some way, like an almost magical act even though Sören wasn't into any of that. It also gave an opportunity to flirt. “You know, you looked sexy with the runes painted on you." He stroked Ingmar's face. "You'd look sexy in anything." He nipped Ingmar's lower lip. "You'd look sexiest covered in my cum."

Ingmar kissed him hard. “That can be arranged, pet.”

Sören purred as Ingmar massaged his scalp, kissing his neck as he did. Sören liked playing with Ingmar's long hair as he shampooed him, and he couldn't get enough of kissing those sweet, full lips, their tongues swirling together, hard cocks rubbing once more. Sören was already leaking precum by the time the shower was done, and Ingmar playfully got to his knees to lap it, making Sören clutch at him, moaning. When Ingmar turned Sören around and dipped his tongue into Sören's opening, eating him slowly, Sören had to lean against the shower wall to not fall over.

Ingmar helped him out of the shower, laughing at the way Sören was already trembling, whimpering, begging for it and they'd only just begun. They kissed all the way to the bed, and kissed some more as they lay on the bed together.

Then Ingmar sat up. "I have something to show you," he said.

Sören lay there, propped up on one elbow, an eyebrow raised. Ingmar reached for a briefcase near the bed, opened it, and pulled out a set of papers stapled together. It was a battery of tests from a doctor's office, rather recent.

"I'm negative for everything," Ingmar said, "and I've only been with Alejandro recently... and I can vouch that I'm the only person he's been with since you."

There was a weight to those words - Sören thought about all of the people he'd fucked in the five years since the breakup, most of those within the first year, self-medicating with empty, meaningless sex. And Alejandro had been the opposite, near-celibate.

In case you needed proof other than him showing up, that he's still hung up on you.

Sören didn't like the good reaction in the back of his head, that he didn't really want Alejandro being touched by other people, like nobody else was good enough for the sensitive, gentle musician. I wouldn't want him broken the way I was broken. He didn't like his possessiveness - Alejandro was touch-starved, was he not? why was it OK for him to move on with his life, and not OK for Alejandro to be with others? - but there it was.

It also made him intensely curious about the marriage he claimed he was supposed to go through, and clearly was not in now. If he'd ever been.

If there'd ever even been an arranged marriage ordered by his family in the first place, and he wasn't leaving for some other reason.

Sören shoved those thoughts to the side; this was not the time or place.

"I do have condoms if you prefer to use them," Ingmar said, "your safety and comfort comes first. But if you'd rather feel skin on skin..."

Sören's response was to push Ingmar onto his back, kissing him like his life depended on it. After some more deep, hungry kissing, pulling apart for air, Sören looked into his eyes, pet his hair, stroked his cheek. "I'd like to feel you come inside me," Sören husked. "But first..." He kissed Ingmar again. "You took such good care of me, that night when I was hurting." Sören's fingers trailed down from Ingmar's face, over his heart. "Tonight, I want to make love to you, too."

Sören claimed his mouth again, kissed his neck, kissed his way down to Ingmar's chest, licked and sucked his nipples, loving the way he moaned and arched to him, fists in Sören's curls. Sören nibbled them, licked some more, alternating between fast and slow strokes of his tongue, suckled hard, rubbed one nipple with his thumb and index finger as he worked on the other. Then his kisses rained over Ingmar's sculpted stomach, tongue licking the muscle definition, cock throbbing as he heard Ingmar moan some more. He kissed and nibbled Ingmar's thighs, licked them, and at last his attention turned to Ingmar's cock, now leaking precum. Looking into his eyes, he swallowed him down, slowly, and sucked very, very slowly, teasing him. Sören swirled his tongue as he sucked, cock continuing to twinge at the sounds Ingmar was making. He loved this, worshiping Ingmar's body, the delicious cock that had given him so much pleasure that night. *I could do this to you every night, if I could clone myself to also be with my husband,* Sören thought to himself. He felt greedy, wanton, and that just excited him even more.

He hungered.

He thought of his sister's words about polyamory - *There's something really beautiful about creating your own chosen family. Survival in a pack. Everyone has their own little niche to fill, and it balances things out.*

It isn't just that, dear sister. Sören was realizing that now, as he feasted on this gorgeous man. *I have too much passion, too much fire to be with just one person.*

Ingmar moaned and it was beautiful to him, making him crave more of that same response. *Let me adore you.*

Sören's hand was gently cupping and rubbing Ingmar's balls, sucking a little harder and faster, focusing more on the head. With his free hand, he wet a finger with his own leaking precum, and pushed his precum-slick finger into Ingmar's opening. He found the prostate right away, and the way Ingmar bucked up against him, crying out, was oh so good.

Sören's finger slowly moved in and out of him as he kept sucking, lapping his tongue as he sucked. "Mmmmmm," Sören hummed.

He sucked and sucked, slowly, teasing, making Ingmar arch, pant, gasp, grabbing Sören's curls, shaking. Sören felt his balls tightening, tasted precum flowing, and when he had a mouthful of it, knowing Ingmar was getting close, he stopped, and gave a few teasing licks to the head of Ingmar's cock.

Then he pushed his tongue into Ingmar's channel, licking as slowly as he sucked. The way Ingmar moaned... Sören shivered, loving it. He ate at him as slowly as he could, keeping control as much as he wanted to devour, until Ingmar's nails were digging into him, almost howling in his pleasure. At last Sören relented, tongue moving like a hurricane, fucking the sweet spot, bringing Ingmar to that edge again, keeping him there.

Before Ingmar could come from Sören's tongue, Sören withdrew, and took a few more teasing licks at the head of Ingmar's cock, rubbing the head against his tongue. "You taste so good," Sören husked.

"You are a naughty boy."

"Mmmhmmm." Sören sucked just the head again, slowly. More licking, and Sören purred, "I want to drink you. So then I can ride you as long as you can stand it."

Ingmar had no objections to that, groaning as Sören took him back in his mouth, moving in for the kill now, sucking faster and harder than before. Sören's fingers slick with his own precum replaced the tongue that had been inside him, rubbing the prostate in slow, lazy circles before moving harder, faster. When Sören felt Ingmar's balls tighten again, he braced himself, rubbing his tongue for all he was worth as he sucked hard, and groaned deeply as Ingmar cried out, " Sören ," filling his mouth with delicious, spicy-sweet cum, so much that some seeped out of the corners of Sören's mouth over his chin down his neck, Sören almost choking on the load in his mouth.

Sören swallowed, and took a few last licks to get what he could, and then came up to kiss Ingmar. "You are the picture of debauchery," Ingmar said, lapping the cum from Sören's face and neck, kissing him back.

"Not yet." Sören booped his nose, and kissed it, grinning.

More kissing and Ingmar was hard again. He rolled Sören onto his back and pinned Sören's wrists with his hands as he kissed, licked and nibbled Sören's neck, and spent a long time on Sören's pierced nipples, playing with the rings with his fingers and tongue, lapping and suckling until Sören's nipples were peaked, throbbing, and Sören was making inhuman noises, rubbing his hard cock against Ingmar's thigh, frantic, desperate for release.

But Ingmar was to lavish the same teasing back at Sören. "I've been wanting to do this to you since before I got here," Ingmar whispered, tongue trailing over Sören's abs, planting little sweet kisses here and there. "Wanting to enjoy every inch of you, all over again."

Sören whined. Ingmar laughed softly, before taking his first lick at the head of Sören's cock.

Ingmar sucked him, then, every now and again taking Sören's cock out of his mouth to lick, tongue playing with the captive bead ring in the head, occasionally tugging it with his teeth. His tongue traced around the sensitive site of the piercing, making Sören gasp and shudder. Ingmar licked and sucked Sören's balls, and then his tongue was in Sören, eating him with abandon, fingers brushing delicately over Sören's cock, thumb rubbing the exquisitely sensitive, prominent frenulum. Sören was getting closer, closer, kept on that edge, almost sobbing in his need, and then at last, with Ingmar's tongue on his prostate, Sören had his first orgasm of the night, screaming as he gave Ingmar a facial and a pearl necklace with the eruption of cum.

Ingmar lapped up the rest, and then moved up to kiss Sören. Sören giggled at the mess he'd made, and licked it off like a playful puppy, before they kissed again. "There," Ingmar said, with a wicked grin, stroking Sören's face. "And now that you've also had an orgasm... you can ride me as long as I can stand it."

"Oh my." Sören smirked as he ran his fingers through Ingmar's hair. "That implies you think I have less stamina than you."

"Most people have less stamina than me. I'm used to it."

"Challenge accepted." Sören nipped Ingmar's lower lip and rolled Ingmar onto his back with a growl.

Ingmar propped himself up against the pillows so he wasn't quite sitting up, but neither was flat on his back. Sören straddled his hips; Ingmar reached for the lube on his bedtable and Sören poured it over his cock, while Ingmar's slick fingers probed inside Sören's still-sensitive channel.

"Oh, that's fucking good," Sören moaned as he found that spot right away, shuddering. "Fuckkkk..."

"It'll feel even better when I'm inside you." His free hand brushed over Sören's chest, fingers walking over the nipple, teasingly circling it. His voice lowered. "No barrier in the way."

"God, please." Sören was panting for it. "Take me..."

Ingmar grabbed Sören's hips, and Sören sank down on his cock slowly. When Ingmar was all the way inside, Sören paused, getting adjusted, and then he began to rock his hips, working his ass slowly.

For awhile Sören rode him just like that, slowly, their hands caressing each other, exploring. When Ingmar leaned up to kiss Sören, and then kiss his neck, kiss his nipples, Sören grabbed his shoulders and rolled his hips a little harder and faster, just enough to get them from the languid haze of sensuality to full heat.

Sören kept riding, and Ingmar reached up to pet Sören's curls, twining them around his fingers. "You are so beautiful," Ingmar husked, his free hand playing over Sören's body, watching him with lust in his eyes. "I love watching you like this, in your glory."

" You are beautiful." Sören's fingers tenderly traced over the bones of Ingmar's features, lingering on his lips. "You are a work of art."

Ingmar took Sören's fingers and kissed them. "To hear that from you is an honor." He kissed the palm of Sören's hand.

Sören's hand wandered to Ingmar's chest, rested on his heart. He sped up his hips, and Ingmar grabbed Sören's ass, cupped it, kneaded. Sören grabbed onto the headboard, riding harder still, until the bed was rocking against the wall, their flesh slapping together, the sound of their moans and cries rising above the deliciously filthy sound of their sex. Sören wanted to ride like this all night, Ingmar's cock hitting his sweet spot over and over again, nothing else mattering but this, sensation, passion ... but he needed to come so badly...

They stayed on that edge together until they were both trembling, cries becoming panting gasps, and then their eyes met and Ingmar growled, "Now."

" Ingmar! " Sören let go, coming without his cock touched, erupting over Ingmar's chest and arms, the dark swirls now adorned with white from the pearly cum.

"Sören." Ingmar shuddered, closing his eyes, and Sören let out a wordless cry as he felt the hot cum spend deep inside him, the blast against his throbbing prostate making his

orgasm that much more deliciously intense. Sören collapsed onto his chest, shaking from head to toe, toes and fingers curling with every contraction of his release.

Sören was so blissed out from the powerful orgasm that he drifted off. At some point he was vaguely aware of Ingmar getting up and heading to the bathroom - he heard the sink running - and Sören blinked sleepily as Ingmar walked out of the bathroom, back towards the bed. Sören's bleary eyes focused on the clock, and saw he'd been passed out for a couple of hours.

"Oh," Sören said. "Wow, it's the middle of the night..."

"We can stay here till morning, not disturb the ones we live with." Ingmar climbed back into bed and took Sören into his arms. Sören rested on his shoulder and found himself falling back asleep.

When Sören came to, he was hard again and so was Ingmar, kissing his neck, his shoulder. "I want you," Ingmar growled.

"Mmmmm, I want you ." Sören rolled onto his back, pulling Ingmar on top of him.

Ingmar slipped into him easily, and they rocked together like that, slowly, holding each other's hands, nuzzling and kissing tenderly. It was a beautiful way to wake up, and Sören lost himself in it, the sweet sensuality, the connectedness he felt, fire calling to fire once again, stirring with the dawn, seeming even to glow around them.

Sören realized that in all the times he'd had casual sex over the years, he didn't sleep with the people he was just there to fuck. Actually sleeping with somebody required an intimacy that Sören had only shared with four people before - Alejandro, Dooku, (regrettably) the sugar daddy gallery owner from Reykjavik, and later Justin. That list extended to sharing a bed platonically with Frankie, and with his sister, but it wasn't the same.

He'd slept with Ingmar. He'd felt safe enough, trusting enough, to cuddle there in his arms and roll off to the land of dreams.

Ingmar stroked his face, kissed his neck some more. Sören ran his fingers through Ingmar's hair. Their mouths met again, and Sören sighed into the kiss, a sound of contentment.

It went on and on, both of them not able to get enough of the slow, delicious rhythm, but at last the fever overcame them and Ingmar pounded Sören into the mattress, Sören's legs on his shoulders, nails in Ingmar's back, screaming, begging for more. At the moment of climax, their eyes met, and Ingmar bit Sören's neck. Sören sobbed as he came, nails scratching down Ingmar's back, shattering. Ingmar kissed Sören hard, and Sören moaned as he tasted the metallic tang of his own blood.

They got breakfast at the hotel cafe on their way out. "We should do that again," Sören said, smiling.

"We will. Many times."

—

Maglor was on his way out the door to go hiking with Dooku when Ingwion finally showed up, practically strutting.

They paused for a moment, staring at each other by the front door. Even if Maglor hadn't already seen what he'd seen last night and put two and two together, he could feel Sören's energy all over Ingwion, as if Ingwion had been kissed by fire itself.

Maglor backhanded him. Auli gave a little whine before Maglor pulled the leash, the sheepdog trotting with him as he stormed out.

He heard Ingwion's voice in his head as he raged down the street. One word:

Good.

Chapter End Notes

Ingwion actually can't get STDs or HIV. He wore a condom during that night in 2015 for Sören's comfort. The medical report he has to "prove" he's clean to Sören, was forged! The lengths that he will go to, to get what he wants...

Chapter 18

When Maglor arrived in front of Dooku and Sören's cabin, Auli in tow, the door was ajar and Maglor saw Dooku and Sören standing there, arms around each other, mouths caught in a deep, passionate kiss.

It was like adding insult to injury... or would have been, if the two of them were not so beautiful together. The thought of Sören and Ingwion was arousing, Maglor would grudgingly admit to himself, but this went beyond mere physical lust, though there was that as well. When Sören and Dooku pulled apart for air, looking into each other's eyes, smiling at each other adoringly, the *love* they felt for each other was palpable in that gaze, their body language. They were at home with each other, made more beautiful to watch with what Maglor knew of Sören's past. They'd made a cozy little life here, created their own world of simple pleasure.

Sören and Dooku kissed again, and just before Maglor could clear his throat, alerting them to his presence, Auli barked.

They quickly let go and Dooku turned his head, surprise in his eyes even though there shouldn't have been. He blushed - Maglor realized then Dooku was tenting a little, understandable, he would be too if he were kissing Sören like that.

Sören patted his shoulder. "Have a good time," Sören said.

"Thank you." Dooku leered and said, "Not as good as you and I will have later, of course."

Now Sören was blushing; he bit his lower lip and crinkled his nose.*Dammit,* Maglor cursed internally - he'd always gotten a little aroused when Sören did that, innocent-yet-naughty, and he was having the same start at it now, like if someone waved a piece of fresh meat in front of Auli.

Sören gave a nod and a small wave in acknowledgment to Maglor, before closing the door quietly.

"Good morning," Dooku said, coming down the path from the cabin. "We're going to the bay as usual?"

"As usual," Maglor said.

Dooku was dressed down but still put together, in khakis, a dark brown button-down shirt open over a lighter brown shirt, well-fit to his trim, powerful build. A few minutes down the path and he wasn't tenting anymore, not that Maglor was looking.

OK, I'm looking. I'm not blind. Dooku was a handsome man, well-preserved. *And nicely hung, from the looks of it.*

...Could you not.

Dooku was walking a step ahead of him, and Maglor now got a view of a very nice, shapely, firm rear end as well, much nicer than anyone that age should have. Maglor wanted to hide; he quickly caught up, walking beside the silver-haired gentleman, to not keep staring *at that magnificent...*. His face was on fire.

Dooku broke the silence. "Thank you again for picking me up last night."

"You're welcome."

A slight frown. "I feel as if I should apologize that you weren't invited to the solstice party."

Maglor gave a small shrug. "Even without the awkwardness between us, Sören knows me well enough to know those type of events aren't my thing." *And especially not with Ingwion flaunting his conquest in front of me.* He felt that fire of jealous rage again.

"They're not really my thing either. I went to be supportive."

"That was kind of you."

"I feel like it's important to show Sören I support his studio, it was a dream of his for some time and I'm proud of him, making that dream a reality." The pride was obvious in Dooku's voice.

Maglor sighed. As much as he wanted to hate Dooku for *taking what is mine*, he couldn't. If Sören had to be with someone else... the love Dooku felt for Sören shone like facets of a diamond. There was *reverence* when Dooku spoke of him - the same reverence Maglor still felt, all these years later. Sören deserved to be with someone who truly understood and appreciated him, and wouldn't try to change him into something more "normal", taming the fire; Sören seemed to have truly come into his own in life, and Maglor had no doubt that the love he'd found with Dooku contributed to that.

And Sören could do far worse. Dooku was educated, cultured, literate, elegant. He had a paternal manner to him that Sören no doubt found comforting, with his history - even Maglor found it soothing; around Dooku, Maglor could almost forget that he was technically the older one, by quite a lot.

But just as Sören reminded Maglor of his father, albeit in a gentler, vulnerable, almost-more-lovable form, Dooku reminded him quite a bit of his uncle Fingolfin, with the same dignity and quiet strength, suave confidence that needed no boasting like the so-called "alpha males" these days, simply *was*. Indeed, the parallels between them, and what he'd observed of their relationship, were very reminiscent of the relationship between Fëanor and Fingolfin who were not simply brothers, but were lovers... soulmates. Fingolfin considered Fëanor's children as much his as the ones he'd sired, and vice versa. They were punished by the Valar for their incest, their pride - their *rightful* pride - and it was one of the things that made Maglor lose faith in the Valar, to scorn something as beautiful as they were. Fëanor and Fingolfin balanced each other perfectly - Fingolfin was serious where Fëanor was jovial, Fingolfin was reserved where Fëanor was warm and friendly, Fingolfin was calm and rational where Fëanor was temperamental and impulsive. Fëanor got Fingolfin to lighten up, relax, and enjoy himself every now and again, and Fingolfin helped Fëanor navigate his moods, and provided the necessary support and planning that Fëanor needed for his crusade. Fingolfin was willing to go to war for his brother, to kill and be killed; Maglor sensed a similar dark undercurrent in Dooku, that he would be a dangerous, lethal enemy.

He respected that. If Dooku was an opponent for Sören's affections, he was a worthy one.

Fingolfin and Dooku even had a similar sounding voice, deep, rich velvet.

Maglor felt heat flush his cheeks *again*, remembering how Fingolfin had taken his virginity when he came of age a long time ago - he'd asked for it, he'd wanted it, even though it

was sin, they were damned by the Valar for their unnatural desire, *nothing* felt more natural - the way Fingolfin's deep voice had seduced him. Once, Fingolfin had made him come just from the sound of his voice alone.

And oh, the way his father and uncle had shared him together... Fëanor was possessive, but sharing with his brother-lover was a pleasure to him...

Seeing Ingwion and Sören dance last night, and knowing they had been intimate, was salt in the wound. It was also a nail in the coffin. He had come here looking for closure. Sören was avoiding him, and the evidence strongly pointed to Sören being in good hands with Dooku, and that there was nothing left here for him. When Maglor got back to the cottage, he was going to get online and buy a one-way ticket out of here. He hadn't yet decided where; he had options. Venice, maybe. Berlin.

There was a warning voice at the back of Maglor's head.*Give it more time...*

And have my heart trampled some more, Sören dangled just out of reach, while Ingwion gets to have him? Maglor's jaw set. *If I am to stay here, and see what comes of all of this... I need a sign. And my faith in omens was destroyed quite some time ago.*

He was arguing with himself on a Saturday morning.

Dooku broke the silence again. "Actually, speaking of Sören and the studio, I meant to mention this to you yesterday, and it slipped my mind..." Dooku broadcasted the mental image of an emotional conversation with Sören at the Goðafoss, shaken, though Maglor otherwise didn't get to see details of what it was about. "He'd like you to meet him at the studio tomorrow at 4 PM, when his Sunday classes are over. He wants to talk to you about something."

Maglor paused in his tracks, but just for a few seconds. It was, however, enough that Dooku noticed and paused as well, giving Maglor a pointed look when they resumed walking again.

"Did he say what it was about?"

"I know what it's about," Dooku replied, "but he'd rather you just come down so he can talk to you himself."

Maglor nodded. "I'll be there."

He would hold off on buying that ticket, for at least one more day.

—

When Dooku got back to the cabin, Sören was already home, painting. Dooku smiled, taking a moment to savor the sight - Sören was rarely more beautiful to him than when he was in the act of creation.

He was painting Ingmar, in a garden. Dooku was intrigued at what the end result would be - Sören always seemed to paint some sort of deeper truth to a person's spirit or place's energy.

"How were your classes?" Dooku asked as he removed his shoes.

"Good." Sören nodded. "How was your hike?"

"Enjoyable, though Alejandro seems in a pensive mood today, he was even quieter than usual." Dooku suspected it had something to do with seeing Sören and Ingmar together last night; he was relieved that Alejandro had not made a scene about it.

Not yet.

"Also," Dooku went on, "I told him to meet you at the studio tomorrow. I'd meant to do it yesterday -"

"It's all right. So he'll be there?"

"He will."

Dooku heard a sharp intake of breath, and Sören nodded; Dooku could feel Sören steeling himself.

"What would you like to do for dinner tonight?" Dooku asked.

"I'm flexible."

Dooku's mind immediately went into the gutter at that, thinking of Sören in an exotic position, feasting on him. "Would you like to go out?" He wanted to spoil Sören a little.

"OK. I should probably take a break from this anyway."

They went to Serrano, and when they came back, Sören went to the bathroom for his usual pre-sex cleanup routine, and then, naked, stood in the bathroom door, gesturing for Dooku to join him.

Dooku quickly removed his clothing, and Sören and Dooku kissed their way into the shower. Sören couldn't stop touching him. Between hungry kisses at Dooku's neck, Sören purred, "Something about playing with another body last night has given me a whole new appreciation for yours." His fingers ran through the hair on Dooku's chest, his arms; Sören nuzzled and kissed his beard. "You're so fucking sexy."

They rubbed their cocks together, kissing, caressing as they lathered each other. By the time the shower was over they were both leaking precum, and Dooku laughed as he watched their cocks drip onto the floor.

Then a lightbulb went off in his head, since Sören had said he could have his way...

"You are a messy boy," Dooku said, his thumb rubbing Sören's frenulum, smiling as Sören cried out, and he watched more precum drip down.

"You're messy too," Sören said, grinning.

"Yes. You have that effect on me." Dooku kissed Sören roughly, and then he grabbed Sören's wet curls and pushed him onto his knees. "Since you like cum so much, you can clean that up... with your tongue."

Dooku felt the start across their Force bond, felt Sören's cock throbbing at that, the*oh FUCK* in Sören's head. He watched intently as Sören did as he was told, looking up at him

with heat in his eyes, making very deliberate slow licks with his tongue, as if to say *you're next*.

"You like that, don't you," Dooku said when Sören was almost done.

"Mmmmmm." Sören nodded. "I like it when you boss me around."

"Good." Dooku pulled Sören back up. "Teasing brats like you need to be reminded of who's in charge." He slapped Sören's ass and marched him to the bed.

Before they could sit or lay down, Dooku watched as Sören used the Force to bring out a bag he'd kept with his art supplies. It was a bag from the pet store. After it floated across the room into Sören's hand, Sören handed it to him. "Open it," he said.

Dooku reached inside and pulled out a black leather dog collar... and a matching leash.

"Well... what do we have here." Dooku was surprised, and now even more aroused, knowing Sören had been wanting this domination from him, fantasizing about it, craving it. He loved his husband's filthy mind.

Sören got on his knees. Dooku put the collar around Sören's neck, and clipped the leash through it. The look of love and trust in Sören's eyes made his heart melt, and he stroked Sören's cheek. "Aren't you precious."

When he moved his fingers away, Sören moved his head forward and sucked them into his mouth, narrowing his eyes, giving Dooku a predatory look as he sucked his fingers, back and forth like he was giving a blowjob. He licked them then, and gave them a little kiss.

That got Dooku's blood stirring even more, and he stepped forward, hard cock in Sören's face. "Get this ready for you."

He groaned as he watched Sören's full, luscious lips wrap around the head of his cock, and take it in slowly, inch by inch. Sören worked his head back and forth slowly, working his tongue as he sucked; the sight of his cock gliding in and out of Sören's mouth, and the heat in Sören's eyes, made Dooku groan, clutching Sören's curls, eventually thrusting gently into Sören's mouth, which made Sören suck him harder, faster, encouraged.

Sören was good, and he didn't want to be undone this quickly. Dooku tugged on the leash. "Up," he said.

Sören got up, and Dooku kissed him hard, pushing him back onto the bed, climbing on and over him. After a few kisses, Dooku tugged on the leash and ground out, "Get down on all fours, face down, arse up."

Giving him a naughty little grin, Sören got in position, head on the pillows, and he teasingly wiggled his ass at Dooku, whose response was to give it a playful slap. Sören moaned, and Dooku slapped his ass again, making Sören moan louder.

"You," Dooku said, "are a naughty boy, teasing me the way you do."

"Mmmm, yes."

Dooku spanked Sören again, cock throbbing at the way Sören cried out, and the pleasure he could feel across their Force bond, Sören in heat for this. Sören was starting to grind

against the mattress.

"So naughty." Dooku slapped Sören's ass again. "You can't control yourself, can you?"

Sören whimpered. "I need it so bad..."

Dooku spanked Sören again, and again. "Naughty boy." He got behind Sören, on his knees, and started to rub his hard cock into the crack of Sören's ass, teasing them both, holding off on what they both wanted. The leash in one hand, he spanked Sören's ass with the other. "You had your fun last night, but you still want this cock?"

"Please..."

"Naughty, teasing brats like you shouldn't get what they want right away." Dooku spanked Sören's ass again, admiring the way the perfect curvature bloomed red. He rubbed where he'd slapped, and Sören whined, wiggling his ass again.

"Please, please..." Sören begged.

"So naughty." Dooku continued rubbing, but his voice was shaking now, his knees quivering, the sensation combining with the delicious sights and sounds of Sören's surrender to bring him to that edge already.

"Take me... have your way with me... show me who's in charge..."

"If I give into you right now, you get to be in charge, don't you, brat?" Dooku spanked Sören's ass again, and Sören cried out in a way that made Dooku shudder, cock continuing to harden, balls tightening.

Dooku pulled back - he couldn't keep rubbing against Sören like this if he wanted to last. And there were ways to have more fun. Dooku leaned down and licked around the outside of the inviting channel, making Sören whine, and when he dipped his tongue inside Sören's opening, Sören screamed, fisting the pillows.

Dooku laughed softly and began to lick inside Sören slowly, groaning appreciatively as Sören bucked against him, whimpering, howling. His tongue found the sweet spot right away, making exquisite love to it, and it wasn't long before the slow, deliberate lashes of his tongue had Sören panting, gasping, shaking, not even able to make words to beg for his cock.

Dooku continued his slow teasing for a few minutes that felt like eternity to them both, so pent up were they, and then he licked harder, faster. The scream Sören produced almost set Dooku off right there; he slapped Sören's ass for good measure, and Sören howled again.

Then Dooku felt movement. He withdrew his tongue and pulled his head back, noticing that Sören was reaching between his legs, desperately stroking himself.

"Did I say you could touch yourself, brat?"

"No, but I need..."

Dooku slapped Sören's ass as hard as he could, and gave a few more hard spanks, with Sören whimpering, panting, still continuing to play with his cock. Dooku used the Force to open the drawer of the bedtable, and silk scarves flew out. He grabbed Sören's arm

roughly, and used the Force to bind Sören's wrists together behind his back. "Fuck..." Sören shuddered, and Dooku growled at the feeling of desire across their bond, how much Sören *hungered* to be dominated this way.

"Brat," Dooku rasped. He slapped Sören's ass again, hard. "Now where was I..."

He put his face back down there and licked Sören's channel even more slowly and deliberately than before. His own cock was aching to take Sören, drive into him, but he kept that iron control, knowing they would both be richly rewarded for his patience. "Such a naughty boy," Dooku husked between licks. "Naughty, naughty."

"Dammit, Nico..." Sören's breath came out in shivering gasps. "Please... please fuck me..."

"I am fucking you." Dooku's tongue licked harder, faster, and Sören whined.

"*Dammit!* Nico!"

Dooku slapped Sören's ass again, and rubbed. He gave a firm tug of the leash. "Now now, my pet, you said I could have my way with you tonight..."

"*Ffffuuckkkk.*"

"Mmmmm." Dooku's tongue slowed down. "I can't resist doing this to you..."

"Fucking *hell*, Nico..." Sören shuddered again. "I feel like I'm gonna die if I don't get your cock in me..."

"Mmmmmmmm, you poor dear." Dooku's tongue licked even more slowly.

"Nico..."

Dooku tugged the leash again. "Teasing brat."

"Nico!"

In the back of his mind, Dooku heard a voice.*Ñolo...* In his mind's eye, a flash of mental images... doing just this, on luxurious tapestry rugs before a blazing fire, a leash made of jewels on a chain extending from a collar around Sören's neck, wrapped around his hand, fine wine poured over Sören's back and ass, tasting the wine mingled with Sören's flesh and musk, but it was somehow different, Sören-but-not-Sören - a flood of dark hair - and he kept panting *Ñolo, Ñolo* as he writhed beneath the teasing tongue...

Dooku believed in past lives, he'd once told Sören that. But he'd never explored any of his own, not wanting the conceit that came with so many spiritual seekers, hoping they had some kind of fame and fortune in a prior incarnation - after all that was then and this was now. Yet, the thought that he and Sören had been together before, and had done *this* before... that pleased him. He didn't know the full story, where they were, who they were... but it was still a pleasing thought.

Dooku's focus returned to the task at hand, continuing to tease Sören with his tongue. Sören was completely at his mercy, whimpering, trembling. Dooku's tongue rubbed faster and harder, sensing across their bond that Sören was right on that edge, almost ready to come, but Dooku kept him there, not allowing him release just yet.

When he sensed Sören was getting too close, he pulled back, laughing at Sören's scream of frustration. He slapped Sören's ass again. He rose to his knees and positioned himself behind Sören once more, rubbing his cock into the crack of Sören's ass, groaning as Sören whimpered.

"Please, please," Sören begged.

"You want me inside you?"

"PLEASE."

Dooku used the Force to retrieve their lube, pouring it over the crack of Sören's ass, cock twinging as he watched the lube dripping into Sören's opening. He then poured lube over his cock, even though he was leaking so much precum now his entire shaft was glistening with it. Dooku worked two fingers into Sören's hole, rubbing the prostate in slow, lazy circles. Sören bucked against him, fucking his fingers, panting "please, please, please, Nico," in rhythm with his hips.

Then Dooku poised the head of his cock against Sören's opening. "Yes?"

"*Yessss.*"

Dooku put in just the tip, and back out. Just the tip, in and out. Teasing, *teasing.* Dooku was fighting off the urge to come, himself, and the sounds Sören made were even more delicious. At last, he relented, pushing into Sören until he bottomed out, and both of them moaned together.

Dooku started to thrust, slowly, savoring the way Sören wrapped around him, the silken heat of him, and the sensations he could feel across their bond, Sören's prostate pleasured, and Sören in turn could feel the grip on Dooku's cock... the two bound together so strong it was as if they didn't know where one ended and the other began.

"So naughty," Dooku husked, slapping Sören's ass again.

"Mmmmm... fuck me, Nico..."

Dooku continued his slow thrusts inside Sören, waiting. When he was ready, he tugged the leash with one hand, his free hand seizing a handful of Sören's curls. He started fucking Sören harder, faster. "Did he fuck you like this?"

Sören's fists curled against the bonds behind his back. "Harder..."

Dooku slapped Sören's ass and started fucking him harder. "Like that?"

"Harder!"

Dooku was pounding Sören into the mattress now, the obscene slap of their flesh and the wet suctioning of their fuck filling the room, almost louder than Sören's panting cries. "Oh, Nico..."

"Am I fucking you harder than he did, now?"

"Yes... yes..."

"Whose is this?"

"Yours. God, Nico, it's yours, I'm yours, take it..."

"That's right. I may let you play with others, but you're*mine.*" Dooku slapped Sören's ass again.

"God, so good..." Sören shivered. "Fuck me, Nico, FUCK ME!"

"You naughty boy. *My* naughty boy."

"Yours, yours, yours..." Sören was rocking his hips against Dooku's now, fucking himself hard on Dooku's cock, even as Dooku continued to slam into him. They weren't going to last much longer.

"*Mine.*"

"Yours..." Sören was shaking from head to toe now, making little feral noises. He was right there... "I'm yours, my husband, my soulmate..."

Yes. God, *yes.* Dooku slapped his ass again, as hard as he could. "Come for me."

"*NICO!!!*" Sören shook violently, his toes curling, and Dooku gasped as he felt Sören clenching around him, pulsing, twitching.

With a cry, Dooku spent into him, collapsing on top of him. "Sören.*Sören*, my love..."

"Nico. Oh *god* Nico, I love you." Sören was gasping for breath.

Dooku tilted Sören's face to his and kissed him hard, and then kissed and licked down Sören's neck, bit the sweet spot where the neck meets the shoulder, making Sören tremble and twitch around him again, milking his cock, Dooku groaning as he let out another blast of cum inside him.

Dooku used the Force to unbind Sören's wrists, and Sören stretched out his arms; Dooku took his hands. He rested his head in Sören's shoulder, nose in his curls, dissolving into sweetness and light, the sound of Sören catching his breath the sweetest music he'd ever heard.

He finally pulled out; he'd made quite a mess, with cum leaking from Sören's stretched hole onto the bed. He used the Force to produce a salve they kept in their bedtable for the occasions when Sören got a spanking, and rolled Sören against him, cradling him like he was a precious child, gently rubbing salve onto the bruised cheeks.

"That," Sören said, "was fucking hot."

Dooku kissed the tip of his nose. "If I get to do that to you every time you go off to have a little fun, I think I rather like this arrangement."

Sören grinned, that wicked, innocent-but-naughty grin he loved so much, lighting up Sören's face, lighting up the entire world. "Good."

Dooku kissed Sören's forehead. "I love you."

"*Ég elska þig, elskan mín.*"

Dooku continued to rub salve onto Sören's ass, and then just held him. When Sören adjusted his position a little, he cringed.

"Hurts?"

"Jæja, but..." Sören grinned and stroked his face. "I have no regrets."

"Still."

Sören kissed him, and that kiss got Dooku going again. With a little growl, Dooku began to kiss Sören's neck, and Sören gasped, clutching him urgently.

"Let me kiss it and make it better." Dooku began kissing his way down Sören's body, to feast on him once more; Sören opened his legs and arched to him, crying out as he felt the tongue slip back inside.

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Maglor arrived at Logifugl Listaskóli right at four PM precisely. The last car was pulling out of the parking lot, leaving Sören's black jeep with its rainbow flag bumper sticker; a couple students were walking home.

Nervous, feeling like he was made of lead with every step, he approached the office building that Sören had converted into an art studio, and opened the door, startling a little at the chime.

The first thing he saw was a painting on the wall by the door, which he recognized right away both from having seen it years ago, and because it mirrored the work on Sören's back, except this had more detail, and was set against the backdrop of space, with the flaming star that Sören didn't know was Maglor's family seal, but it had been one of the many things that felt *fated* about their bond, and made it particularly painful on Maglor's end when they separated.

Maglor walked down the hall, making himself not look at the other paintings, not wanting to *feel* right now above and beyond what he was already feeling.

Sören was putting away paints when he walked in. He was wearing faded jeans and a Nine Inch Nails shirt, his shoulder-length curls hanging loose, unruly. He looked irritatingly gorgeous. Sören paused what he was doing and gestured to a long table set with steel folding chairs. "Have a seat," he said.

Maglor pulled out a chair and sat; Sören also sat across from him, with Sören sitting gingerly, wincing a little as he sat. For a moment they just sat there in awkward silence - Sören was looking down, staring at the table, and Maglor watched him, still captivated by Sören's beauty, even as his heart gnawed, wishing he could do something, *anything* about that wounded look in those warm chocolate eyes, the wound he'd put there years ago.

Sören finally looked up, and ran a nervous hand through his curls. "Um, you want anything? I have drinks in the fridge, water, soda..."

"Water is fine." Maglor's heart raced; he'd almost forgotten the way Sören's Icelandic accent in that smoky voice affected him, Sören could say anything and it would sound

sexy.

Sören got up, walked to another room, and came back with a bottle of water for Maglor and a can of Pepsi for himself. He sat back down across from Maglor, wincing again - it was then Maglor realized why Sören was sitting carefully, wincing, and heat flooded him, desperately trying to keep those thoughts, that desire still *very* much present, at bay. Maglor watched intently as Sören opened his can and took a few sips - Sören's lips did nothing to pull his mind out of the gutter, only made it worse. Then Sören looked at Maglor, set the can down, ran his hand through his hair, and rubbed his face. He leaned back in his chair.

"OK," Sören said. "You're probably wondering why I asked you to come here."

"I am, yes."

Sören nodded. "So... I opened this place back in April of 2018, when I moved back home after spending some time in London. It's been doing fairly well, I have sixty-four adult students taking different classes, and about two dozen kids. Recently, it came up that about a third of my adult students want music classes offered here. I wasn't thrilled with the idea, but what my students want is important to me, it keeps me in business, and as importantly, helps the community." Sören gestured to Maglor, and folded his arms. "I'm here to offer you a job for the summer."

Maglor put down his water. He could feel himself bristling at the suggestion. He was an introvert, even moreso than Sören...

"You... want me to teach a music class."

"A couple classes. You play guitar and piano, right? So if you did two days a week, you could offer guitar one day, piano the next..."

"Sören." Maglor felt his eyes narrowing. "As a musician... I cannot accept this offer. I'm better at *making* music, composing, playing, than I am at trying to teach someone else... I'm not good with people... *you know this*."

Oh no. *The puppy dog face.* Sören hadn't used that face on him in years, but here he was now, making that sad, adorable face, and it still went right to his heart.

"Dammit, Sören."

"Please?" Sören batted his eyelashes and leaned forward. "It would really help me out. And I would of course make sure you get paid -"

"- I don't need money -"

"- consider yourself paid in my gratitude." Sören folded his arms again. "And perhaps, a show of proof that you aren't, actually, a completely callous arsehole who never cared about me at all."

That sad puppy face again.

Maglor took a deep breath. Sören, once again, knew how to hit below the belt. But he couldn't blame him, not after the way he'd left... the way he hadn't wanted to leave, either. Faking his own death would have been kinder, for most people, but he knew Sören would have taken his own life, and he couldn't bear to have such a bright light go out from the

world.

And you were hoping, subconsciously, that leaving would give you a loophole back in, someday. Not that it would ever work.

They had one of those long, meaningful glances, and then Sören sipped his Pepsi, waiting.

Maglor broke the silence. "Two days a week, one instrument per day? That's not really enough -"

"What would you recommend?"

"Two days a week per instrument, four days a week total."

"One class per day, or two?"

"My preference is two, not just for flexibility with people's schedules - so people who can't do a morning class because of work could do late afternoon or early evening - but also so they'd be smaller classes, which would give students more time for individual attention."

"OK then." Sören put the can down and folded his arms again. "Currently, I work three weekends per month, and usually take Thursdays or Fridays off when I work on the weekends, it rotates, but starting in July - technically starting next week, the last weekend of June - this will be changing for the rest of the summer, where the studio is open Monday through Friday and I have the weekends off. If you start the week of Monday, July first, it gives you time to create a lesson plan and get together whatever instruments you need -"

"All right." Maglor nodded. "For you, I will." Maglor glared.

Sören uncrossed his arms, smiled, and that smile made it worth it. *Fuck.*

"So... we'll have to touch base about how much you're charging," Sören said. "I know you say you don't want money, but I don't think you should just have classes for free either, that creates an expectation for me to offer mine for free or reduced rate and I already charge as little as I can get away with -"

Maglor shook his head. "I won't refuse to be paid, I just may donate the money in that case. Do you have a charity preference?"

Sören's breath caught and Maglor could hear the broadcast *how dare you be so sweet, this is already hard enough*. Maglor truly wasn't offering to donate just to make a tug at Sören's heartstrings, he was already in the habit of giving some of his wealth to good causes... but Sören's reaction was a nice added bonus. He gave Sören a little smile.

"Trevor Project? It's for LGBT youth, particularly suicide prevention -"

Maglor nodded. "I'll donate the proceeds there."

"OK. You don't have to decide right now what you're charging, there's a price list on my website that you can compare, later... um... you can also figure out what days of the week, sometime between Monday and Friday. When I'm off, I typically don't want other people in my building, I'd rather not have to make a set of spare keys for you..."

"I'm fine with days you're already going to be here."

"And there's one more thing." Sören's eyes met his. "For this to work, for the sake of my sanity, and yours... I've been thinking about it, and... I don't hate you."

He'd already heard that from Dooku, but it was a different thing to hear it from Sören himself. His heart skipped a beat; he swallowed hard.

"You hurt me, *badly*, but..." Sören waved his hand, and folded his arms. "If we're going to work together, and have it not turn into a toxic, hostile work environment for both of us, I'm giving you a blank slate. I'm going to try to forget what happened, or at least not let it influence how we interact while you're here doing a favor for me."

"I appreciate that, Sören, but... just the same, we can't sweep it under the rug forever."

"We can't, and we shouldn't. If you want closure, at some point we need to talk about all of that, and we will. But I'm not ready to have that discussion right now, and I think we need to not have that discussion hanging over our heads until we're both ready, which is a big part of why I've been avoiding you. I also think that discussion when it does happen is less likely to end badly if we can..." Sören rubbed his head. "Try to get along, be friends, or at least be cordial." Their eyes met. "You've been kind to my husband, and I appreciate that. He doesn't have a lot of friends, he hasn't had a lot of kindness in his life. I don't want him to feel like he has to walk on eggshells around me about you, even without the added complication now of us working together in a small-ish space. So, it's why I'm offering a blank slate, water under the bridge, *for now*."

"All right." Maglor's heart lifted, a little. This was something he could live with, though there was that issue of Sören and Ingwion...

"All right?"

Maglor nodded. "All right."

"All right." Sören got up, finished up his can of Pepsi, and resumed putting away the paints. "We should meet to touch base about the class stuff, so..."

"We should, yes."

"How does Friday the 28th work for you, 5 PM my place? You can have dinner with us?"

Six days. "I can be there."

"OK."

"Would you like some help putting things away?"

"Sure."

They worked together in silence, but it was less awkward than their silences before. Maglor figured out where and how Sören organized his paints. They walked out together to their respective vehicles, and Sören waved before he got in his jeep. "Take care," Sören said, climbing in.

Maglor didn't drive home right away - he drove to the bay, and sat there for awhile, watching the sea.

You asked for a sign to stay here. There is your sign.

Chapter 19

When Sören got home from the meeting with Alejandro at the studio, he was in a fairly pensive mood. Dooku was out grocery shopping, and Sören pulled Snúður onto his lap, petting him as he logged into Stardew Valley, trying to shake the feeling.

The painting of Ingmar beckoned, but Sören wasn't in the proper headspace to resume work on that. He was still feeling raw - even though the meeting with Alejandro had gone well, and he meant what he said about wanting to give him a clean slate for now and make things less awkward for both of them and Dooku as well, he still felt a host of complicated feelings being in his presence.

He needed to distract himself and not perseverate. He decided to do something only slightly less awkward – call his aunt Gitta. Sören had gotten her contact info from Dagnýr, intending to apologize for the way he'd chewed her out before she could explain about why she hadn't been in contact, and he hadn't followed through on that.

Sören pulled up the contact info, and got out his cell phone. He dialed, and waited. Four rings, and he was about to hang up, and then a soft, deep woman's voice: "Hello."

"Gitta?" Sören swallowed hard.

"...Yes? Who might be calling?" she asked in English.

"Gitta, *hvernig hefurðu það? Þetta er sonur systur þinnar, Sören*."

“Do you mind having this conversation in English? My wife is Scottish and she's in the room and doesn't speak Icelandic - “

“Oh... yes, sorry.” Sören continued on in English. “"Dagnýr said he'd been in touch with you recently and gave me your contact information."

"I see."

Sören took a deep breath. *Here goes.* "I want to apologize for the last time - and really only time - we talked to each other which was... thirteen years ago? I think? And I just blew up at you for not being there, leaving Katrín and Einar to raise us, not giving you a chance to explain why that happened. Dagnýr told me that you're gay, you're a witch, and Katrín had a problem with that. And... I didn't know. I wish I had let you tell me, and I am so, so sorry for that." His voice shook as he felt the pang of guilt, tears burning his eyes.

More silence, and then Birgitta said, "Well, Sören, your response was understandable. I would have been angry too, if I were in your position, I can't say that I would have been calm and rational and willing to listen to the other side of the story. And on my end, perhaps I shouldn't have waited for any of you to contact me to hear that side of things, perhaps I should have pushed and insisted you hear me out. The last thing I wanted to do was force my presence on you and make you even more uncomfortable, when you'd been through quite enough."

Sören didn't know what to say to that, and at last he followed up with, "I'm sorry," again.

"There's nothing to forgive. How have you been? I asked Dagnýr a few questions when he called, but we didn't get into too much detail. He says you're back in Akureyri?"

"Já, I came back here a little over a year ago. I was in Reykjavik, then I was in London."

"Ah... how did you like London?"

"I didn't like it much, to be honest. Too big, too crowded. I met a couple special people there, though, so at least there's that."

"At least there's that."

"One of them I married... and Margrét is marrying the other."

"Oh!" Sören could hear the smile in Birgitta's voice. "Your mother would have been pleased, I know."

Sören's eyes misted again at the mention of his mother. "I would hope so."

"How long have you been married?"

"Since September. We met in October 2017. He moved from London to Iceland to be with me."

"That must be an adjustment for him. Has he found a job, and..."

A nervous laugh. "He's retired. He was a barrister in London, and there isn't much use for that here, and he's, um. A bit older than I am."

"Oh, really."

"He'll be seventy-one in December. But *very* well-preserved." Sören thought of the hard, wild fucking last night.

"Age is just a number, if you're happy with him that's what counts. He and Jane are the same age, you know." Birgitta was fifty-six.

"Jane is your partner...?"

"Yes. She's still very spry, likes to go for a walk every day. If she met your husband she'd probably challenge him to jog against her and see who could finish first."

"Sounds like they'd get along." Sören frowned. "They should meet. *We* should see each other, you haven't seen me since I was, what, four?"

"I still remember. You drew me a picture as a going-away present, before I left for Scotland. It was a sheep. Wearing a kilt. I actually still have it tucked away somewhere."

Sören laughed out loud. "Oh no, did I really draw that?"

"You were always drawing things."

"I still am. I have an art studio now, and I've had some shows around Reykjavik and London the last decade or so."

"Oh, wonderful! Well, if we get together you have to show me your work!"

"I will!" And then, on impulse, Sören blurted out, "Margrét and her girlfriend - my best friend Frankie - are getting married in Reykjavik on August 10th. Would you be able to fly out for that?"

"I think I could arrange for that, yes."

"Brilliant. We can get more caught up then, I know international cell calls can be a bit of a pain. In the meantime d'you want my e-mail address? Then I can link you to some of my stuff online..."

"Sure."

Sören and Birgitta traded e-mail, and then Sören heard Dooku's keys in the door. "Ah, my husband is home. So, uh, shoot me an e-mail, and let me know when you've got your trip planned for Reykjavik in August -"

"I'm buying plane tickets for myself and Jane as we speak, Sören. And yes, go on, I'll e-mail you later." A pause. "Thank you so much for calling me, this made my day."

"You're welcome." Sören smiled. "We'll be in better touch now, já?"

"We will. Take care and tell Dagnýr and Margrét I said hello."

"Will do."

Sören got up and greeted Dooku at the door with a hug and kiss, and helped him carry groceries inside even though he didn't need the help. "It's nice to see you smiling," Dooku said. "You were on the phone?"

Sören nodded. "My aunt Gitta, my mother's sister in Scotland."

Dooku's eyebrows raised. "Oh, that's interesting."

"Já, I'd meant to call her before now, after Dagnýr mentioned being in touch with her, but, ah." Sören made a vague hand gesture. "Things have been kind of crazy." Sören's eyes lit up at the steak. "We're having this tonight?"

"Yes, I'm going to grill them outside."

"*Awesome.*" Sören grinned. "But yes, that was what I was doing just now, was catching up a little with Gitta. We'll catch up some more at the wedding in August."

"Oh, Margrét invited her?"

And then it dawned on Sören that he'd made a bit of a faux pas, and he facepalmed. "Er... I invited her." He cringed. "I was so caught up in the emotions running high that I didn't think, I just assumed it would be OK..."

Dooku chuckled. "Hopefully it will be, but if not, you'll have to tell her..."

"Wellllllll, she was buying her plane tickets right then. Soooo." Sören rubbed his face. "I'll have to call Margrét and tell her I did an oops. Hopefully she won't be too mad."

"I'll clean up and then get the grill going, you should maybe tell her sooner rather than later because the way she takes that notice now might be better than when she's dealing

with drunken bar patrons later."

"*God.*"

It was five in the evening, close to six, which meant at least Margrét was likely to be up now. After three rings she answered. *"Jæja?"*

“I have some news,” Sören said.

“Oh?”

“I talked to our mother's sister Gitta. I apologized for the way I went off on her thirteen years ago when she tried getting in touch.”

“I take it that went OK?”

“It went pretty well. A bit better than expected. Which is why, um, I popped in. I, ah... I miiiiight have invited her and her partner to the wedding. And when I say 'might have', I mean she was buying tickets while we were on the phone.”

There was a long pause.

“I wasn't thinking,” Sören babbled, wanting to hide under the couch, face on fire. “One of my impulsive Sagittarius moments, you know, ready, fire, aim -”

“It's all right.” Margrét chuckled. “If you hadn't invited her and had just come in here and said a conversation had gone well and you wanted to see her, I probably would have told you to invite her to the wedding.”

“Oh, thank fuck.”

“But in the future... don't assume things. Because I'm an Aries and I'll butt your head.”

Sören laughed too. “You might have to do that anyway.” He thought of Alejandro and sighed.

Margrét went on, “You're also not the only one who invited someone without asking first. Your twin invited his colleague Edmund.”

“Oh, the one who encouraged him to do the family lineage project?”

“That's the one. He says Edmund is like a father figure to him, and said Edmund had been to Iceland 'once or twice' but not recently. So we all get to meet an elderly calculus professor.”

Sören snorted. “At least Nico won't be the only old guy there.”

Margrét chuckled again. Then she said, “ Are there any other considerations for wedding guests that I should know about? Sören? You thinking of inviting anybody... special?”

Dooku was at the door announcing the steaks were done. Just in time, because Sören felt like hiding under the couch again. “Nico says dinner's ready, I'll talk to you later, love you, bye.”

_

Over dinner, Sören and Dooku talked about the conversation with Gitta, and then the conversation with Margrét. And then, Dooku, too, raised the question.

“Do you think you're going to invite Ingmar?”

“I mean I could, but I don't want to be rude. He doesn't know anyone else in the family. To be honest, I don't know much about him, either.” Sören snorted before he took a bite of steak. “I'm shagging him and I don't even know where he's from. I don't even know his surname. I suppose with a name like Ingmar he's Swedish or Danish but his accent isn't like the Swedes and Danes I've met -”

“He's Russian,” Dooku said matter-of-factly.

Sören's eyebrows went up. “How do you know?”

“I had the occasional Russian client back in the UK, I'm familiar with the accent, and awhile back I addressed him in Russian and he replied to me in Russian and asked if I was a speaker.”

“Oh, OK then.”

“I would assume he's some sort of oligarch, with the type of car he drives, the ability to travel.” Dooku's tone was slightly disapproving.

Then Sören's phone went off, a number he didn't recognize. “Hello?”

"Sören." The familiar deep voice, sexy accent. "Hello."

"Ingmar! Ha ha, I was just talking about you."

"Good things, I hope."

"Probably." Sören smiled.

"I'm not calling at a bad time, I hope...?"

"No."

"I got your cell number from Alejandro."

"Jæja, I can't believe we haven't already exchanged numbers. I'll put this in my phone."

"I wanted to call and ask about your schedule this week."

"Oh, yes. Well..." Sören ran a nervous hand through his curls. "I work Monday through Friday this week. I start earlier on Tuesday and get off early afternoon if you want to go for a drive, like 1:30 PM, pick me up at the studio?"

"I'd like that, yes. And I'll be attending ceramics on Friday, yes?"

"Yes, but ceramics will be a little earlier than it was last week - two PM. Also, I would normally ask you if you wanted to go anywhere and do anything after the class, but Alejandro is coming over at five that day so he and I can go over the music classes he'll be offering at the studio starting next week. I'd invite you to dinner along with him, but I

feel like he and I need to discuss that privately -"

"I understand. I'd be happy to drive you to and from the studio that day, though."

"OK. And... well, I have the weekend off." Sören looked across at Dooku. "To make up for us not having a lot of time after my class on Friday, would you like to, ah, go on a date Saturday night? Is that OK, Nico?"

"That's OK with me," Dooku said, nodding. With a wicked grin he leaned back in his seat and said, "Remember our deal."

"Mmmmmm. Yes, Sunday night I'm all yours. If that works for you, Ingmar, we get together Saturday night."

"I'd like that." A soft laugh. "I will make reservations at the hotel again."

"Oh myyyyyyyyy." Sören laughed too, his face on fire, his cock starting to wake up at the memory of the way he and Ingmar made love after the solstice party. "That sounds wonderful."

"I'm looking forward to it. In the meantime, Tuesday afternoon, and I will bring you home early evening?"

"Yes."

"I will see you then. Good night, beautiful."

Sören swiped "End" with a happy little sigh.

Dooku looked amused when the call was finished. Sören's face burned even hotter now. He took a sip of the wine they were having with dinner and said, “I'm kind of embarrassed that I didn't know he was from Russia, or that I've been shagging him and don't know his last name. I barely remember my name when he's through with me.” Sören had a gigglefit, not able to help himself, remembering of when he played Cards Against Humanity when he was visiting with his siblings and cousin. “He gives me that Soviet Love Hammer.”

Dooku facepalmed, but shook with silent laughter. “Well...” Dooku's lips quirked with amusement when he raised his glass. “Have fun getting chiki briki with Russia's Greatest Love Machine.”

Sören spat his wine and doubled over. “Oh my *god*, Nico.” It was good to see him lightening up a little. *Clearly, having a friend has been good for him.*

Later, as Dooku dozed off after their lovemaking - Sören riding his cock - Sören grabbed his phone to program Ingmar's number into it.

He had ringtones for specific people - "Immigrant Song" by Led Zeppelin for his brother, and "Tom Sawyer" by Rush for Dooku - and after thinking about it for a minute, he had a ringtone for Ingmar... the chorus of "Rasputin" by Boney M.

Ra ra Rasputin
Lover of the Russian queen
There was a cat that really was gone
Ra ra Rasputin
Russia's greatest love machine

It was a shame how he carried on

Sören was feeling energized after the sex. It was time to paint.

Sören didn't sleep much that night, painting until late. The painting of Ingmar at the Botanical Gardens in Akureyri took on a life of its own - Ingmar wearing a green silk robe, open, revealing his perfectly sculpted body and a generous cock, fully erect, dripping precum. A slight smile was on Ingmar's lush mouth, a wicked look in his eyes, a look of pure seduction. Sören, himself, was getting aroused by it, as if Ingmar beckoned *Come, my pet* through the canvas.

In one hand, Ingmar held a cup of red wine, and in his other hand he was holding... what looked like the beginning of a leash, but more ornate than the one Sören bought at the pet store. Set with emeralds, fire opals, and diamonds.

He hadn't started with the flowers yet, the background details would be the last. In the meantime, the painting needed... something. Something more. He wasn't sure what. Not just yet.

What he was sure of, was that Ingmar's glorious hair – again, longer than it was in life; down to his waist rather than his shoulders - was taking an insanely long time to get just right.

–

When Sören was done with his classes on Monday afternoon, he immediately got back to work on his painting. He paused to give Dooku a hug and a kiss when Dooku headed out to walk with Alejandro. Hours later, Sören took a break to eat dinner outside with Dooku, and after dinner they took a shower together and had a slow, languid sixty-nine on the bed, kissing with their mouths full of cum. The sexual energy just added to Sören's creative fever, and when Dooku was dozing off, Sören was back at the canvas, completely lost in his vision.

Sören painted straight through till the morning, not bothering to sleep. Dooku woke up with the alarm and gave Sören a concerned look as he made them coffee, though he knew from repeat experience that this was "normal" for his husband. "Are you still planning on getting together with Ingmar this afternoon?" he asked as he brought the cup over to Sören.

Sören nodded. "I need to take a break from this for a bit anyway." *Study the subject some more.*

"All right. But *do* make sure to get some actual sleep later." Dooku gave him a stern look.

A glimmer of an ancient memory - searing heat, exhausted, he'd been up for days, but *must put in the finishing touches... get it just right...* and the second he proclaimed the word "done", he looked from diamonds into diamonds - silver-blue eyes, amused and worried at the same time. Strong arms enfolding him, carrying him out of the smithy. *"Time to rest, 'náro." So like Father...* Laying him down, gently, sensually massaging him, soothing aching muscles that had been working for too long. Then cradling him, petting him, laughing at the little whine of protest that he wanted to come first. *"There will be time enough for that later."* A chuckle. *"Sometimes it's hard to believe you're the older one of the two of us."* And Sören-of-then just patted him sleepily and mumbled, *"You always*

take such good care of me, Nolo."

Sören startled a little as he came back to himself, snapped from the vision in his mind's eye to the vision in the painting before him. For an instant, Ingmar's eyes seemed to glow on the canvas.

Sören had never even set foot inside a smithy - the closest he'd come to it was the small shack out in back of the studio that he used for his kiln. Once, Dooku had mentioned he believed in past lives; Sören's own internal jury was out on that, as a skeptical agnostic, but on the other hand he exhibited "psychic" gifts that most of the world didn't believe existed, so it was possible there was more to the universe than he knew. He wondered if he was remembering something from a past life, now...

...but he didn't have time for that. He looked at the clock, he had to get to the studio.

"I'll drive you," Dooku said, which had been the plan anyway, and then Ingmar would pick him up at 1:30.

Sören leaned on Dooku, snuggling on the way down; with one hand on the wheel, Dooku's free hand affectionately rubbed Sören's knee. Dooku had on classical music, which wasn't Sören's go-to genre, but Alejandro had given him an appreciation for it years ago, and it was nice and relaxing now. At the studio, they lingered, exchanging one of those long, meaningful glances, and then Dooku leaned in and they kissed.

"I love you, you know," Sören husked, stroking his face, his beard.

"I know."

"Thank you, again, for being so..." Sören made a vague hand gesture. "Cool about all of this."

"I'd be lying if I said it wasn't an adjustment, but I think we are managing well, and I will be honest with you if there's a problem." Dooku kissed him again. "Your happiness is important to me."

"Your happiness is important to me, Nico."

"You make me happy." Dooku smiled, and the smile met his eyes, crinkling the corners. Sören smiled back. "Now go, and I'll see you this evening."

Sören blew a kiss on the way out.

The adult class dragged, even though he normally didn't mind watercolors; the children's class was better, it always made Sören feel like a big kid again. They were finishing up papier-mache crowns, which they'd been working on for a few weeks now - even though the children who attended his school all seemed to be from good homes, Sören knew from the experience of his own childhood that appearances could be deceiving, and even without abuse going on behind closed doors, Sören felt it was important to foster a sense of pride in oneself at a young age, so here they were all becoming magical princes and princesses, making crowns that reflected things about who they were and what they liked. One of the girls had fake flowers and leaves on her crown, with a fake small bird poised on the tallest spike. A boy had stenciled and painted dragons onto his crown, and made realistic dragon eggs out of papier-mache to put on the spikes. Another boy had Pokemon on his crown, with a miniature Pikachu on the tallest spike. Another girl had cats all over her crown, with a sculpted cat face on the front of her crown, and a fake cat tail hanging

from the back. Another girl had a fake crow on the tallest spike, with blue-black feathers glued around the spikes of her crown, the crown itself painted in dramatic black glitter.

Sören's own crown had swirling flames rising into the darkness of space, stars and supernovas. Today he put on the finishing touches - strands of artisan lampwork and sparkling goldstone glass beads hanging on wire from the crown, in colors matching the flames and nebulas. One of the children surprised him by giving him three small antique diamond-shaped mirrors, edged with brass filigree, and Sören affixed them to his crown last, on the middle three spines of his crown. At the end the children were all modeling their crowns and Sören put on his, twirling to giggles and oohs and ahhs, the beads swaying as he moved, when he noticed Ingmar standing in the doorway, smiling fondly.

"Er," Sören said. "It's not 1:30 yet..."

"It's close enough."

The parents were starting to come in to collect their children, with a few who lived nearby walking home by themselves. Ingmar waited in the hall until the room was clear, and then he came in and gave Sören a quick kiss.

"I feel so silly right now," Sören said, crinkling his nose, biting his lower lip.

Ingmar stroked his face. "It's very you."

Sören laughed. He put the crown down on a safe place on one of the tables so he could clean up - there was a lot to put away. Ingmar helped, two sets of hands making it go faster, and then when the room was cleaned up, Sören gestured to the door. "Shall we?"

Ingmar put the crown back on Sören's head, making him laugh again, and took his hand.

Their first stop was in town, to pick up a frame for the pastel drawing Ingmar had made Sören last week, so he could hang it somewhere. Then they visited Laufás, a turf house mentioned in the settlement records of Iceland from 874-930, and rebuilt in 1866. There was also a church which had been there since 1865, and was open to the public. Ingmar and Sören, hand-in-hand, walked around the cluster of turf houses, and into and around the church, which had a beautiful pulpit.

"There's a lot of these country churches around," Sören said. "We used to be a very religious people, not so much anymore." He laughed softly. "Though a lot of us still believe in *huldufólk* - what you'd call elves. Funny how that works. Most of these old churches, they were built on pagan sites where people left offerings for the *huldufólk* . People sensed some sort of power there."

"You're not religious at all, I take it."

"Well, on paper I'm Lutheran, as it's the state religion, but I'm not observant or anything, I guess you could say I'm agnostic. I think even if I wanted to believe in something, my aunt Katrín was so much of a religious fanatic that she completely turned me off to it. Though she was a bit of a hypocrite, too." Sören frowned, then. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't be spoiling the beautiful day talking about -"

"Sören." Ingmar's voice was a caress. He took Sören's chin in his hand, tilted Sören's face to his. "I care. If you need to get it out..."

"I don't know what Alejandro has told you, but my mother died when I was six - I found

her dead body, and I was raised by my father's sister and her husband. They drank. They were... violent."

"Where are they now?"

"They're both dead." *I murdered one of them.*

A few minutes of silence, and then Ingmar said, "This Justin you mentioned last week... it's common for people who were abused, growing up, to end up with abusive partners."

Sören nodded. "It was a textbook case. Sometimes I still hate myself for not leaving sooner, not fighting back more, especially when -" His voice trailed off before he could finish with *when he raped me*.

"It's a common tactic of abusers, to break their victim into not fighting back." Ingmar gave Sören a small, sad smile. “But I would never hurt you.”

"I know," Sören said, and felt strange saying it. "I felt safe with you on that first night, even though I had no reason to trust a stranger - the opposite, in fact." Sören leaned in to give Ingmar a soft kiss. "And I wanted to take care of you the other night. Make you feel the same sort of safety and caring that you showed me. The same joy you made me feel."

"You have a beautiful heart. It shines through in your work. It shines through in what I've seen of you with others. Like your class that I walked in on."

Sören crinkled his nose and bit his lower lip. "I still can't believe you saw me being such a dork."

Ingmar took Sören's face between his hands and kissed him deeply.

They got back in the Bentley, and drove through the countryside. They got out here and there to walk around, seeing the beauty of the rural north of Iceland, vibrant green in the summertime, up close; there was a stretch of farms, and Sören showed Ingmar the farm that used to belong to his maternal grandparents and had been in his mother's family since the 1600s, and had been sold to a younger family in the 1980s. They still kept goats and Icelandic ponies. The new owners were around, and after Sören explained who he was to them, he got to pet the ponies, making happy noises like a big kid. He felt self-conscious about it later, as they headed back to the Bentley, but Ingmar seemed to enjoy his enthusiasm, petting him on the way.

Out on the road again, they approached a roadside stall that had fresh strawberries and cream - Sören assumed this was where Ingmar had gotten their treat last week - and after buying a container Ingmar drove them to a place, where they could sit in the fresh air and enjoy the simple pleasure of strawberries on a summer day in the lush green hills, dappled with arctic wildflowers. They dipped strawberries in cream and fed each other, like lovers, licking and sucking each other's fingers. At the end there was a little bit of cream left in the container, and Sören dipped his fingers into the cream and stuck them in Ingmar's mouth, then kissed him hard, savoring the sweetness of the fresh cream and the lingering sweetness from the strawberries.

He wanted to taste something else too, finding himself unbuttoning Ingmar's shirt, kissing his neck. Ingmar helped, taking off Sören's T-shirt, undoing his belt. Sören was so far gone with lust that he didn't care that they were out in the open and, though no one was around right now, tourists might come by and catch them in the act. When they were completely naked, Ingmar produced a small bottle of lube he'd been carrying, making

Sören giggle.

"You were prepared, I see," Sören said.

"Hoping, yes." Ingmar kissed Sören's neck, and then lay on his back in the grass, pulling Sören down on top of him.

For a few minutes they kissed, hands roaming over each other, hard cocks rubbing together. Then Ingmar took them both into his fist, stroking slowly, his free hand reaching around Sören, to push into him with slick fingers. Sören moaned, and kissed him harder.

When they were both ready - and Ingmar took his sweet time, teasing them both - Sören sank down on Ingmar's cock, impaling himself, giving a wild cry when Ingmar bottomed out inside him. His hands on Ingmar's shoulders, rubbing down over his chest and and back up - lingering on the nipples, thumbs and fingers rolling in lazy circles - Sören rode him slowly, sweetly, crying out into the blue sky, the wind, the sun, with each roll of their hips. Nothing felt more *right* than the two of them making love out here in the beauty of nature, being beautiful together, their passion for each other as primal and lush as the landscape itself. Ingmar's hands explored Sören, at last taking his cock into one hand, caressing with the other, and towards the end, stroking Sören's face, his curls, Sören sucking his fingers, moaning around them.

They made it last as long as they could, slow and languid, until the heat between them was too much and Sören rode him hard, leaning down to kiss him again and again, Ingmar's arms wrapped around him, his fingers playing over the outline of the phoenixes on his back as if he'd committed it to memory. Right on that edge, Ingmar kissed, licked and nibbled Sören's neck, growling, as Sören bucked on top of him, whimpering, gasping "oh god, oh god, Ingmar, oh god, oh fuck..."

"Yes, pet." Ingmar nipped the sweet spot where the neck meets the shoulder, and then tilted Sören's head to his so they could kiss once more, kissing like they were drowning and this was the air they needed to live. His fingers pulled one of Sören's nipple rings, making Sören cry out into the kiss. Their eyes met, and Ingmar sucked Sören's lower lip between his, and ground out, "Come with me."

"Ingmar! Oh, Ingmar... *Ég er að koma, elskan.* "

" *Sören.* "

Sören's cum painted Ingmar's body, and some of the nearby wildflowers. Sören groaned with satisfaction as he felt Ingmar shoot inside him, his hole throbbing, clenching and grasping, milking Ingmar's cock to the last drop.

Ingmar pulled Sören close, holding him tight, rocking him a little, petting his curls; Sören sighed as he felt Ingmar's lips in his curls, raining soft kisses. Sören listened to their heartbeats thundering together, and then there was just the radiant, melting bliss, like they were one with the land out here, something in them giving life to the hills; the grass and the wildflowers seemed to be super-saturated in color for a moment, the air shimmering around them. *Funny what tricks on the mind endorphins will play,* Sören thought to himself, habit from his medical training, even though he knew from his experience as a Force user that the Living Force was just as valid of an explanation.

Sören once again wondered if Ingmar wasn't at least a little Force sensitive. *At the very least, he brings it out more strongly in* you.

Sören snuggled into him, breathed in the clean scent of his hair, like rain and spice, and thought to himself, *I could fall in love with him.*

A small part of me already has.

It made no sense, they didn't know each other well, but there it was. And Sören felt himself laughing at the absurdity of it.

After a moment Ingmar noticed his silent, shaking laughter. "Hm?"

"Oh..." Sören grinned up at him. "I was just thinking... I don't even know your last name."

Ingmar smiled back. He planted a kiss on Sören's forehead. "Borovkov."

"That's... interesting. You're Russian?"

"Swedish and Russian."

“Ah, OK. I knew your first name was Swedish or Danish, but... Borovkov. What does it mean? Do you know?”

“'Borov' means 'little boar'.”

Sören giggled.

They drove some more through the countryside before Ingmar dropped Sören off at home. They lingered in front of the cabin.

"So I'll see you on Friday for ceramics," Sören said.

Ingmar nodded. "You will."

"Do you want to come the whole day, for pastels that morning, or...?"

"I'll just come for the ceramics class." Ingmar gave Sören a wicked grin. "I wouldn't be able to resist you if I was there for the whole day."

"Promises, promises." Sören leaned in to give him a little kiss. "I'll see you on Friday afternoon, then."

"You will." Ingmar blew Sören a kiss on his way out of the car, and Sören crinkled his nose and gave a happy little giggle before he strutted in.

Dooku was out with Alejandro, walking Auli, which wasn't a surprise. Sören was tired from not having slept last night, but he was also feeling a high from the afternoon, the beauty of nature, the passionate lovemaking in the grass.

He sat in front of the canvas and looked at it again. He knew what it needed now. He began to paint himself - in his mind's eye he was straddling Ingmar, the fingers of one hand playing down Ingmar's chest, ready to take the hard cock offered to him. The jeweled leash wrapped around Ingmar's hand.

But before he could get too far into painting himself, he added another detail. He started working on a patch of flowers, as a reminder of what to do to the rest when he got there. The flowers were made of fire, glowing with their own light.

There. Time for a nap.

–

The rest of the week seemed to crawl - Sören was nervous about the meeting with Alejandro on Friday night, even though yes he'd given Alejandro a blank slate and said they wouldn't be having the serious discussion about old history and hurts just yet. But, Sören had the painting to distract himself, which he worked on feverishly in his spare time. He managed to get some more normal sleep hours in, after his painting binge on Sunday and Monday, but he was still consumed, in a way painting had not consumed him in some time.

On Thursday night, he had some cuddle time with Dooku, who asked out of the blue, “Do you know his last name yet?”

“Who, Ingmar?” Sören nodded. “Borovkov.”

Dooku let out a little gasp.

“Sören... do you know who that is?”

“Uh... no?”

“He's the owner of Borovkov Enterprises. It's a Fortune 500 company.” Dooku's eyes narrowed. “He told me he runs a cleaning service. That wasn't exactly a lie, Borovkov Enterprises specializes in developing green technology, but...”

Sören had never heard of it, but then he wasn't as up on news and politics as Dooku was. “So I'm dating a millionaire?”

“No, Sören. You're dating a billionaire. For perspective, this is rather like if you were dating Elon Musk or Bill Gates.”

Sören's jaw dropped. “That's... that's interesting.” Sören's heart beat a little faster.

“Indeed.” That disapproving tone was back in Dooku's voice, and Sören could hear Dooku broadcasting *oligarch with dirty money, even if he uses it for good purposes.*

Sören, who came from nothing, felt very self-conscious all of a sudden. Dooku was posh compared to him – this was a whole new level and Sören was uncomfortable with it. “So hey, if it's all the same to you I'd rather not talk about me dating a super rich guy. I liked him before I knew he was CEO of some Fortune 500 company and I really don't care about his money -”

“Oh, I know that, dear.” Dooku patted him. “I never thought you were after wealth or status. You have different priorities from most people. Very down-to-earth. It's refreshing.”

Sören hoped Ingmar felt the same way.

–

On Friday morning, Dooku took Sören to the studio; Ingmar would be taking Sören back later before Sören's appointment with Alejandro. Sören had the finished canvas wrapped up, held on his lap on the trip into town.

"Well," Dooku said, "have fun, my love."

Sören kissed the tip of his nose. "I'll see you later."

Dooku reached out to affectionately tousle Sören's hair, and Sören, feeling a sudden rush of passion, kissed Dooku hard enough to take his breath away. The next few minutes were spent kissing hungrily and groping, before Dooku rasped, "We had better stop before you end up being, er, late. Or caught."

Sören trailed little kisses along the edge of his beard. "I love you."

Dooku looked into his eyes, took Sören's hand, squeezed and kissed it. "I love you too. Now run along." He gave Sören's ass a playful swat as Sören hopped out of the jeep, and Sören shook his ass in response on the way out to the studio.

For the pastel class, Sören found himself drawing his mother as a young girl, with one of the Icelandic ponies he'd seen at the old family farm earlier in the week. He felt compelled to put a flower crown in her hair, and one of the nice things about soft pastels was that you could create a bit of a glowing effect, as he did now, to evoke nostalgia and a sort of reverence for her, and the bright energy he always remembered around her when she sang or did crafts.

Looking at the picture made him suddenly sad, and on the break between his pastel and ceramics class, he got on the laptop he kept at the studio for business purposes - even though he didn't care about Ingmar's money, curiosity got the better of him and he Googled Borovkov Enterprises.

He wasn't surprised to find no pictures of Ingmar anywhere online, and indeed there were some remarks on different sites about Ingmar Borovkov being "reclusive" and preferring to conduct business through agents as much as possible, wanting to keep a low profile - that made sense to Sören, and seemed why Ingmar could get away with vacationing here in rural Iceland without attracting notice.

Ingmar arrived a little earlier than the other students, but not so early that they had much time to talk before the class started. Sören showed Ingmar how to do a trim of the bowl he'd thrown last week - the other students doing the trim had done it before and didn't need as much hands-on help. Sören went around the room, offering advice and assistance to those who were working on the wheels, and commenting on the glazing job that others were doing. Towards the end of the class, Sören himself got on one of the pottery wheels, feeling a little wound up with the information in the back of his head - not wanting this to change things between them; shaping the wet clay on the spinning wheel relaxed them. He was still there when Ingmar was the last in the room.

Ingmar came over to him, sat down across from him, and put his hands over Sören's as Sören had put his hands over Ingmar's last week. Sören felt the electricity surge between them, his breath catching in his throat as their eyes met.

"I love watching you create," Ingmar said. "It's intoxicating."

Sören crinkled his nose and bit his lower lip, heat flooding his cheeks. "I love creating." He grinned. "It's intoxicating. It's... addictive, actually."

"There are worse drugs."

"Yes, there are." Sören sat up - his bowl was the way he wanted it, now. "Ingmar."

"Hm?"

"...I know who you are."

Ingmar raised an eyebrow.

"My husband had to tell me... I live under a rock up here in the country, I had no idea about Borovkov Enterprises or anything." Sören looked at the bowl, and back at Ingmar. "Just for the record... I'm not interested in you for your money. I know you've probably heard that before, but -"

Ingmar waved a hand dismissively. "If I thought you were only interested in me for my money I wouldn't waste my time." He reached out to caress Sören's face. "It is as you said. You live in a rural area. You live a simple life. There is depth there, but of your own making. I never for a minute thought you were motivated financially."

"No, I'm not." Sören reached out to take Ingmar's hands, and remembered his own hands were covered in clay. "Er... let me wash up for a minute?"

Ingmar nodded.

Sören took care of his bowl, then went to the bathroom to take care of business and clean up, and when he came back into the art room Ingmar was still sitting there, waiting. "I'm glad you understand," Sören said. "I panicked a little when my husband told me you're a big-time CEO, because I like where things have been going, and..."

"It's fine, Sören. All I ask of you is that you not publicize matters, you have surely found out as well that I deliberately keep a low profile."

Sören nodded. "And I'm fine with that. More than fine with that. I like the simple little life I have out here. I never thought I'd want to come back to Akureyri again, when I was younger, I moved to Reykjavik as soon as I could, but then after a couple years in London I *craved* what I'd lost. You've seen but a little of the land here. There are all these places that were my refuge, growing up in the hell I lived through, the land soothed my broken spirit. It's helped me find myself again. So I don't want to become some... paparazzi-dodging, jet-setting... whatever." He laughed softly, and sang a lyric from Kate Bush. " *Do I look for those millionaires | Like a Machiavellian girl would | When I could wear a sunset? | Mmm, yes.* "

Of course the song from Kate Bush turned his attention to Alejandro, and that pang of still missing him - Alejandro had been wealthy also, and Sören had enjoyed traveling with him, but their focus had always been on the lush little world they created together of art and music, the beauty of nature, simple pleasures, quiet moments, hours of sex that left them as shattered as if they'd been scorched by the sun itself. If Sören had wanted to move back to Akureyri, then, he had no doubt Alejandro would have willingly taken him there.

I wonder if things would have been at all different if so.

...Don't think about that now.

Sören picked up the wrapped canvas that he'd brought in with him. "I have something for you. I feel almost self-conscious giving this to you now, considering you have enough money to buy a fucking Van Gogh original and I'm just this guy who paints -"

"Sören." Ingmar's voice was stern. "Your art is exquisite. I wouldn't have told you it was beautiful just to be nice to you."

Sören put the canvas in Ingmar's hands and he unwrapped it gently, reverently. "Anyway, here you go. You're beautiful, and I wanted to express that to you somehow."

The finished product was Ingmar in the silk robe, wine in one hand, leash in the other, hard dripping cock beckoning, the jewelled leash terminating in a collar around Sören's neck, with the collar bearing a pendant of the flaming star that had been a recurring motif in his work for years. Sören was straddling Ingmar's thighs but not yet his cock, fingers on Ingmar's bare chest against his heart, and in the other hand he held a flame, conjured as if by magic. The Botanical Garden of Akureyri had been transformed into something magical, all the flowers aflame, glowing. The sky above them was space, stars, nebulas, a supernova.

Ingmar just stared at the painting for a moment, wordless, barely breathing. Sören felt nervous, like a small child who had just answered a question on a verbal exam of which they were unsure and were waiting to be told whether or not they were correct. Ingmar continued to stare at the painting, then looked at Sören, not saying anything, and back at the painting. Sören shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

Finally Sören couldn't take it anymore. "Do you like it? I can do it over again if you -"

Ingmar put the painting down on the table - gingerly yet somehow a little roughly as well - and then Sören was in his arms, and he was kissing him hard enough to make Sören whimper into the kiss, turning into putty in his hands.

Ingmar reached for Sören's belt. "I hope you don't interpret this as me thinking you're only good for a quick fuck, because that's not true at all," he rasped, "but I want you NOW." He nipped Sören's neck, and yanked his jeans down.

Sören found himself pushed down on the art table. Sören opened to him, panting "yes, take me," as Ingmar readied him with slick fingers. With Sören's legs on his shoulders, Ingmar standing up, poised at the edge of the table, Ingmar took him hard and fast, Sören slamming his hips right back at Ingmar, fucking himself on Ingmar's cock as good as Ingmar was giving it, screaming at the top of his lungs with each thrust, each *delicious* thrust, that cock hitting his prostate just right, getting him on the edge right away and keeping him there, excruciatingly sensitive, the sensation building and building. The slap of their flesh made them even more wanton for it, the sound lusciously obscene. At last their eyes met, neither of them able to hold back any longer. Ingmar took Sören's slick, dripping cock into his hand and stroked in rhythm with his thrusts, Sören's noises louder and even more animalistic, the moment feeling like an eternity.

"Come for me, Sören. Burn for me."

"Ingmar! Oh, *skít, ríða* , Ingmar, *INGMAR !* " And Sören let out one last wordless wail as he climaxed, shooting all over Ingmar - making a mess on the shirt Ingmar hadn't taken off in his fevered rush - shooting on the ceiling. Laughter bubbled through him, like a waterfall, like a volcano erupting. The laughter made his orgasm even more euphoric, and then he stopped laughing when he heard Ingmar cry out his name, felt the hot cum rush deep inside him.

They needed to catch their breath, both men shaking.

Sören could have passed out from the intensity of his orgasm, but he needed to get home soon, Alejandro was due to arrive at five. Ingmar helped Sören put his boxer-briefs and jeans back on, since Sören was still wobbly, and as Sören sat on the edge of the art table, he reached out and squeezed Ingmar, who held him tight, tenderly kissing his forehead.

"Did you like the painting?" Sören squeaked out.

Ingmar laughed. "My appreciation goes beyond mere like, beautiful. 'Like' seems rather an insult to such a masterpiece." He twined a stray curl around his finger. "I will have to show you how much I appreciate it tomorrow night."

"Mmmmmm. Please."

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Sören was walking funny when Ingmar dropped him off. He could already see Alejandro coming down the street. He ducked into the cabin, where Dooku was making something delicious from the smell of things. Sören had worked up an appetite, and flomped onto the couch, his stomach growling hard enough to scare Snúður when he came up for pettings. Sören laughed aloud at this, the cat giving him a dirty look, until there was a knock at the door.

Dooku answered it. "Alejandro," he said warmly, smiling. "Come in."

Alejandro gave him a genuine smile in return, and then a smaller, shy smile at Sören. "Hi," he said.

"Hi yourself," Sören said. He gestured to the rocking chair across from the couch, and Alejandro sat down.

"Whatever you're making, it smells good," Alejandro told Dooku.

"It's sarmale with mamaliga. Romanian dishes." Sarmale was stuffed cabbage leaves, and mamaliga was polenta mixed with cheese and sour cream.

"Oh god, sarmale." Sören groaned with pleasure. "PUT IT IN MY FACE."

Dooku chuckled. "Soon, darling."

Dooku brought Alejandro tea without being asked - Sören noted Dooku knew his preference, and found that interesting, but didn't remark on it. He resumed petting his cat, and there was an awkward moment of silence while Alejandro drank his tea, before putting it down and he and Sören just looked at each other for a moment.

"So," Sören said. "I take it you've worked everything out this week."

"First things first - I have a shipment coming to the studio tomorrow afternoon. A dozen guitars, a dozen keyboards. I am limiting each instrument to a dozen students each, so that's room for twenty-four people if some take one and some take the other. This is not just for the practicality of renting instruments for the remainder of the summer, but also

because there is a practical upward limit of how much of a student load I can take at one time and give everyone a proper amount of individual attention. This is quite a bit more specialized."

"I understand. And it's coming tomorrow afternoon?"

Alejandro nodded.

Sören tossed him the keys to the studio. "I want these *back* before classes start on Monday. I will not be available tomorrow evening -" He noticed Alejandro tried to keep his expression neutral, but there was a telltale furrow in his brow and Sören could feel him bristling a little. *Good.* Sören wanted to kick himself for having that reaction, not wanting to be petty.

"Alejandro and I are having dinner tomorrow while you're out," Dooku said matter-of-factly.

"Oh. OK." That made Sören feel a little better about leaving Dooku alone for the night while he was overnight with Ingmar at the hotel.

"So he can give me the keys," Dooku said.

"That works for me." Sören nodded, and Alejandro gave a small nod. Then Sören went on, "So as I mentioned, starting this upcoming week I'm on a Monday through Friday schedule for the rest of the summer. Fridays are one of my two ceramics days and that's, in the interest of disclosure, when Ingmar comes by the studio, and starting next week he and I would like to change our date night to Friday -"

"I was already thinking Monday through Thursday, which gives me a three-day weekend."

"OK." Sören nodded. "And I assume they'd be on the same time frame as me, otherwise I need to make spare keys for you to lock up when I'm gone -"

"Same time frame. Which is also what I wanted to talk to you about. If we're working a similar schedule, and we live on the same street, there's really no point in us taking two separate vehicles to work. It would be a bit more ecologically friendly if we rode together."

Sören sighed, and nodded. "You're right."

"So I'll come pick you up and bring you home each day, if that works for you?"

"That's fine."

Alejandro handed over a tablet, where he had an outline of when his classes would be held - there was the occasional gap where he'd have his class going while Sören was on break between classes, or Sören would have his class during Alejandro's break, but otherwise there was a similar enough schedule to justify carpooling.

Before Sören could hand the tablet back to Alejandro, he said, "Price list is on page 2."

Sören went over it - it was comparable to what he'd be charging for his classes. He nodded. "That looks fine." He handed the tablet back to him.

"I'll be starting registration this weekend and keeping it open through the first week or until the slots fill up."

"Good. I'll get everything up on the website tonight, and e-mail the students with the link, you'll probably be full before the weekend is over." Sören ran a nervous hand through his curls. "Er, you have a little bio I can put up, so people don't just ask 'who is this random guy'. Like credentials. *I* know you can play, but -"

"I'll type something up when I go back, and e-mail it to you?"

"OK." Sören realized he needed to unblock Alejandro's account from his Gmail. "Same e-mail address as before?"

"No. But do you have the same e-mail address as before?"

"Yes."

"Then I can still get it to you. I'd prefer to not put a picture on the website if it's all the same to you."

"That's fine by me." *I'd be tempted to stalk my own site just to stare at it.* Sören wanted to crawl into a panel in the wooden floor and die. He couldn't believe he was still having this Pavlovian reaction to Alejandro, even sitting across from him in a simple black T-shirt and dark jeans he looked luscious. He would be in his early forties now and hadn't aged a day since Sören had last seen him, to boot. Not that he minded aged men, but Alejandro's hair was still as raven-black as before, his skin flawless, though his silver-grey eyes seemed sadder than before.

"Oh, one thing you should be aware of," Sören said, trying not to notice Alejandro's arresting beauty. "I'll be closing the studio from Thursday, August 8th through Monday, August 12th, because Nico and I are going to Reykjavik to attend my sister's wedding and this includes travel time and recovery time. We'll re-open on Tuesday August 13th."

"OK." Alejandro nodded. "Nicolae told me Margrét was getting married."

"To my best friend Frankie, who I met in London."

"What's he like?"

Sören snickered. "Frankie's a she. Pint-sized punk chick, tough as nails but also an incredibly kind, warm, funny person. We lived together in London. She and my sister hit it off right away when they met."

"She's a dear," Dooku said.

"Nico kind of adopted her." Sören grinned. Then he leaned back. "So, that's happening... and then Vigdís and Páll are coming back on Friday August 16th..."

"I'll be checking into the Hotel Akureyri then and stay an additional week to finish the summer classes."

"That's good of you." Sören refrained from asking *and what then* - now was not the time for that discussion.

Dooku brought Alejandro a plate, and then he went back into the kitchen. Alejandro waited, and a moment later Dooku brought out food for Sören, carrying a plate for himself as well. He sat down on the couch next to Sören. Snúður came over and sniffed, and

Sören scooped him up and gently put him down on the floor. The cat hopped back up and Sören put him back down, and this repeated a few times until Dooku said, " *No,* " in a stern voice. Snúður meowed as if to say "But DAAAAD..."

"You have food in your dish, and cats don't eat this," Dooku told him, as if Snúður understood what he was saying.

Alejandro shook with silent laughter.

"Is Auli this bad?" Sören asked.

"He's worse." Alejandro grinned.

" *MOWWWWWWWWWW.* "

"I take that back."

Sören snickered. He ate his first bite of food and made a big exaggerated show of enjoying it - which he did - to tease the cat. "Mmmmmmm, this is soooo goooood, no wonder you want this instead of poor sad old cat food in your dish."

"MOW."

Dooku chuckled. "Sören, you're terrible."

"I know. But you see how much I spoil that cat. His food is more expensive than ours."

Dooku patted Sören. "Yes, you take very good care of the baby."

Snúður stalked off and they heard the sounds of crunching, the cat resigned to eat the high-quality dry food in his bowl.

Alejandro tried a few bites of the meal. "This is delicious."

Dooku beamed. "It's a family recipe."

"I'd like the recipe, if you don't mind writing it down for me...?"

"Alejandro's no slouch with cooking," Sören told him. "He's on par with you, he makes *the best* Spanish and Portuguese food. His *feijoada* and *bacalhau* and *empadão* and *caldo verde* is to fucking die for." *I was a big fan of your chorizo.* Sören's face flushed, blinking in disbelief that the off-color joke had been in his head at all, that Alejandro could still get his mind going places. *Damn him.*

"I don't know if it's the best," Alejandro said, "but thank you." He sipped his tea. "It's... rather touching you still remember that these years later."

"I remember a lot of things." Sören gave him a pointed look. *The way we used to feed each other like new lovers, even when we'd been together for years. The way we ate and drank wine or whiskey in front of the fireplace before making love there, the way you took me on the kitchen table after dinner some nights. The way we ate fresh fruit and whipped cream and licked honey off each other's naked bodies. The way you would whisper to me in Portuguese as you teased every inch of my body with your fingers and tongue, the way you swore in Portuguese when you climaxed...*

Sören shoveled food in his mouth, looking away. *So much for a blank slate.*

"Perhaps when we get together tomorrow we could cook together?" Dooku asked.

"I'd enjoy that," Alejandro said.

"Excellent. I'll bring some groceries over."

Dooku talked a bit about learning to cook from his Romanian mother - even though he grew up in a time when sexism was much more rampant in society, his mother still thought cooking was not "woman's work" but everyone should know how to make decent food for themselves. "Learning from her in the kitchen was one of the only times my mother seemed to tolerate me," he said. "I suppose it's why I take comfort in cooking for others, it's one of the few happy memories I have from my childhood."

Alejandro frowned. "That's rough."

"My upbringing was rather difficult. I'll spare you the details while we're having a pleasant evening."

Sören reached out to rub Dooku's shoulder, and squeezed; he leaned in to kiss the older man's cheek. He knew the unhappy story of Dooku's childhood, and how guarded he was with talking about his past. That he was letting down his guard with Alejandro, even just a little, was strangely comforting to him. Dooku needed friends, he had difficulty letting people in close - Sören was still surprised he'd managed to get through.

Everyone had seconds, finishing up what Dooku made, and then when Sören got up to do dishes, Alejandro asked Dooku, "Shall we take Auli on his nightly excursion?"

"Yes." Dooku walked him to the door. "I'll see you in awhile, love," he said to Sören, waving. Sören waved back.

Before Alejandro could step out the door, he asked Sören, "I'll pick you up at ten AM on Monday?"

Sören nodded. "That's fine."

"All right. Have a good weekend."

"You too." Sören managed a smile.

Through the window over the sink, Sören watched them walk until they were out of sight. Their body language was relaxed around each other, like two old friends even though they hadn't known each other that long. As awkward as this still was for Sören to be around his ex, he was grateful that he was providing Dooku with some companionship; he ached for the loneliness his husband had lived through, and more than anything wanted him to be happy, and while he tried to make Dooku happy, he thought it was important for him to have more caring people in his life. Alejandro, too, had experienced some trauma and had a hard time with closeness with others, so it was good they found each other. Sören hoped the friendship continued to last even when the summer was over and his neighbors came back from the States.

Maybe I can convince Alejandro to stay in Akureyri for awhile. That would be good for both Alejandro and Dooku.

It had nothing to do with old feelings, whatsoever, not one bit.

Well, let's get through the next few weeks first.

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On Saturday night, Sören got dressed up, wearing a ruffly black shirt, and black leather pants. He put on a little mascara and eyeliner, and added a few drops of Kyoto by Black Phoenix Alchemy Lab, cherry blossom and anise, which reacted with his skin chemistry to have a very sexual scent on him when it dried.

Dooku gave an appreciative little growl when he saw the finished product. Sören shook his ass, grinning over his shoulder.

"You look good too," Sören said, turning around - Dooku was wearing a dark brown button-down shirt and black trousers, not super dressy but something more than casual. The first couple of buttons were undone to accommodate for the warm summer evening, revealing a little bit of the silver chest hair. Sören had a brief fantasy of unbuttoning his shirt and running his fingers through it, grooming it with slow, teasing licks of his tongue.

Down, boy. Nonetheless, Sören leaned in to nuzzle him and caught a whiff of Dooku's cologne - Sören had turned him on to Frederic by Black Phoenix Alchemy Lab, which unfortunately was released only once every leap year, so Dooku had to make it last. He was wearing it tonight and not his usual - it was something Dooku normally only wore on special occasions with Sören. Sören had a feeling that he'd made the selection more subconsciously, and he found it interesting, but...

"OK, Ingmar is here." Sören kissed him. "Have fun tonight!" He winked. "Save me some leftovers from you cooking with Alejandro if you can."

"All right." Dooku kissed him back, and squeezed. Then he handed the bag with the collar and leash in it to Sören. "I'll see you tomorrow morning. And then tomorrow night..."

"Ohhh yes."

Dooku playfully slapped Sören's ass, and Sören's laughter rang out as he bounced out of the cabin, giving skritches to the cat on his way out.

Ingmar took him to a seafood restaurant on the coast, with a lovely view of the north Atlantic from their table. But though the food was good, Sören was hungry for something else. Walking along the shore afterwards, it was all Sören could do to not pounce him there on the beach.

As soon as they got in the hotel room, Ingmar slammed Sören up against the wall, the two kissing passionately as they feverishly undressed each other. Once Sören was naked, he pulled out the collar and leash from the bag, putting them in Ingmar's hands, and knelt before him, looking up at him with trust in his eyes.

Ingmar gently put the collar around Sören's neck, and clipped the leash through. He took a moment to stroke Sören's face, pet his curls. Then he tugged the leash, gesturing for Sören to rise. The leash in hand, he pulled Sören along to the bed, and Sören climbed on. Ingmar climbed over him, and for a moment they just looked at each other before Ingmar pulled Sören close, kissed him hard and deep.

"What would you like, milord?" Sören purred, fingers walking over Ingmar's chest.

"You." He pushed Sören back onto the bed, and began kissing his way down. "Your fire." He spread Sören's thighs, licked and nibbled the way he knew Sören liked it. "I am going to make you burn like that supernova you painted." He dipped his tongue into Sören's channel, and Sören cried out, clutching his head, gasping as Ingmar worked his tongue exquisitely slowly. Ingmar watched his every reaction, played with the leash as Sören arched and bucked and howled.

After Ingmar had been down there for close to an hour, Sören was practically sobbing in his need. "Please... take me..."

"Not yet." A playful tug of the leash.

When Ingmar did finally get around to taking him, Sören was so desperate and in heat for it that he clawed and bit, with Ingmar nipping him in return. Sören grabbed his hair, and Ingmar growled into Sören's neck, pulling out, and rolled Sören onto his stomach. Sören thrust his ass out, and Ingmar took him hard, his teeth on the back of Sören's neck near the shoulder, as Sören panted and whimpered, rocking his hips back at Ingmar, wanting to be fucked like an animal. The occasional slaps at his ass made Sören even more feverish; he clutched the slats on the headboard, white-knuckled, as the bed rocked against the wall and the mattress bounced beneath them. Sören came hard, screaming his name, and the guttural, primal noise Ingmar made when he spent into him made Sören clench and throb even harder.

They rested like that for a moment, and then Ingmar tilted Sören's head so they could kiss. As intense as the fucking was, and Sören's orgasm, the kiss stirred him again, and Sören felt Ingmar harden up inside him again. Ingmar pulled out, tugged on the leash, and rolled Sören onto his back, taking a moment to stroke his face, looking into his eyes as he guided his cock to Sören's channel once more. They kissed deeply as Ingmar plunged inside, and Ingmar rocked inside him more slowly this time, Sören panting "yes, yes," in time to his thrusts.

"I want to make you come, and come, and come," Ingmar whispered into his neck.

Chapter 20

Monday

"Good morning."

Sören managed a thin smile as he climbed into Alejandro's Jaguar, that became a genuine smile when Alejandro handed him a thermos of iced coffee. It was a thoughtful gesture, and one born of knowing from years of experience that Sören was not a morning person. It was a testament of Sören's dedication to his students, his community, and fostering the fire of creation in others that he was willing to go to the studio in the mornings, when left to his own devices he'd be sleeping in till afternoon and stay awake late at night.

"You were right," Alejandro told Sören as he nursed his coffee; Sören's eyebrow went up. "The classes filled before the weekend was over." He laughed softly. "They were full by Sunday morning."

"I told you." Sören grinned.

Sören opened the studio and Alejandro followed behind; they still had a little time before the students showed up. Alejandro had opted to use the community room for his music classes since it had better acoustics. Sören watered the plants in the ceramic pots he'd made, surveying the guitars and electric pianos he'd be renting out, the beginning books of sheet music.

"I still can't believe I'm doing this," Alejandro said.

"You'll do fine."

"If you say so. I don't... as a rule... teach this sort of thing."

"But you learned, once upon a time, did you not?"

"I did but I was a child prodigy. It was different. I learned very quickly." A rueful smile. "I was asked to teach my youngest brothers. It didn't go very well."

"Well of course it didn't, you can't really teach your own family. As much as I love mine, you don't see me telling Dag and Margrét to come down, and my classes aren't even really that formal."

"I suppose."

"Listen, Alejandro, I wouldn't have even asked if I thought you were going to go all Gordon Ramsay on them."

"Gordon Ramsay is a cook, not a musician."

"Same fucking principle at work."

"Simon Cowell would be a better comparison -"

"OK, *well*..." Sören rolled his eyes and folded his arms. "My point still stands.

You *know* how I feel about being too hard on people, breaking their spirits. There's constructive criticism and then there's just being mean. I trust you to not be mean."

"I'll try."

"Good. Now, I'll leave you to go over your first lesson plan, as I get my own room set up..."

Sören's first class of the day was oils, and one of the only formal, structured classes he taught, where the class would paint objects or models or landscapes or a re-interpretation of a painting from one of the old masters. Today they were working on "Starry Night" by Van Gogh, Sören's personal favorite painting, and Sören had a pang of nostalgia, thinking about his trip to the Netherlands with Alejandro in 2012. Across the hall, Sören could hear the guitar lesson, where Alejandro was teaching them about the strings and frets, what was where, how to hold the guitar, and how to tune it.

Their classes finished within ten minutes of each other, and then Sören walked across the hall and poked his head in. "Hej," he said.

Alejandro looked up from the beginning guitar book he was reading, and gave a small wave.

"You want anything?" The question hung there, and Sören explained, "I have a mini-fridge."

"Yeah, um... whatever you're having, thank you."

Sören came back a couple minutes later with a Sprite for each of them and sat across from him. "So it went better than expected, já?"

"It did, but it was also an easy enough lesson today."

"You'll do fine."

"You keep saying that." Alejandro looked at the plants in the community room. "I like what you've done with the place. You have a bit of a green thumb."

"Sometimes..." Sören gave him a sly look. "I sing to the plants. I think they like it." A smirk. "You should sing to them, you have a better voice."

"Singing to plants. OK." Alejandro looked at them again. "The pots they're in are lovely."

"I made them."

"Of course you did." Alejandro nodded. "You took up ceramics at some point?"

"London. There's a kiln in back, I usually fire on the weekends. I didn't this past weekend because I was, er, busy." Sören swore he could see a furrow of Alejandro's brow, a set of his jaw, but he worked on his Sprite nonchalantly. "I'll be firing some more this weekend. I have other pots in the two art rooms. Truth be told, I like making ceramics almost as much as I like painting, even though it's a completely different medium and it expresses things differently."

"Your love of the craft shows. Just the glazework you've done on some of those... that one there looks like a sunset." Alejandro's voice was solemn. "It looks like *that* sunset,

actually."

Sören knew immediately what exactly he was talking about - a moment from when they were living together in Reykjavik, and Sören made him go up on the rooftop with him one winter night and watch the sunset, blazing over a view of the city. It was not the last time they had done so, but it was the first time, and an important, defining moment in their relationship. "Já, I... had that specific sunset in mind."

Their eyes met, and they both looked away.

"And then I planted a bonsai tree in that pot. Kind of... symbolic, when you think about it." Sören's eyes locked with his as he sipped his Sprite.

"So every pot you've done tells a story."

"Já. It's not as immediately obvious as my paintings, and it's more of a private catharsis. Speaking of, have you done the tour?"

"I've looked at a few of them. Not all."

"I don't have everything on display here - some of my work has been sold, some is hanging up at home, a couple pieces are in a closet -" *The ones of you.* "But it's a good representation of my work, when you get around to it. Some you'll recognize, some was done... after the fact."

"And you have some of your students' pieces hanging up as well," Alejandro said, looking past Sören at one of the walls of the community room.

"Já, I do. It's a source of pride."

Their eyes met again. "I'm really glad to see you doing something you want to do with your life. If I'd had known about it back then..."

"I didn't know I wanted to do this, back then. I didn't start thinking about this until I moved to London, and took that ceramics class, and had some encouragement when I badly needed it. It was a way of paying it forward."

"That sounds like it has a story behind it."

"It does. But today is not that day." It involved the aftermath of Justin, and Sören wasn't ready to talk to Alejandro about that mess. He got up, and took Alejandro's empty can. "I need to prep for my next class."

Alejandro had another guitar class - the same lesson, but a different group of people - and Sören had the acrylic class, freeform. He enjoyed seeing what people came up with out of their own imaginations, offering positive feedback as he went around the room, between working on a small canvas himself. He thought about that sunset, that he'd recreated with the bowl the bonsai tree sat in now. He painted it again, with the tree, but the tree was made of light, looking almost like crystal.

He let it dry on the table with the students' paintings when the class was done, and cleaned up the room. Alejandro's class finished and Sören heard him playing acoustic guitar in there by himself. Alejandro was lost enough in his music that he didn't notice when Sören stood at the door, after his art room was cleaned up and he was ready to go home. Sören watched him for a few minutes before making his presence known.

"Alejandro," he said softly.

Alejandro startled, snapped back to reality.

"Sorry," Sören said. "I'm, ah, ready to go now."

Alejandro nodded. He got up and headed with Sören out to the Jaguar. They drove into the village in silence. "Can you tell your husband I'll meet him for walking Auli in a half-hour?" Alejandro said when they arrived at the cabin.

"I will." Sören nodded. He got out and then he lingered for a moment before walking off. "Have a good night."

"You too."

Sören walked to the door, but before he let himself in, he watched the Jaguar drive down the street, watched it pull into the cottage's driveway and watched Alejandro get out. Watched him go in, Auli greeting him enthusiastically. Sören smiled as he saw the way Alejandro was with the dog. *He should get a pet.*

His thoughts immediately went to the leash and collar that he'd let Dooku and Ingmar play with, and his face burned as he rushed inside the cabin.

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Tuesday

The first piano lesson was more involved. As with the guitar, everyone went around the room and introduced themselves, in English. Of the six students, two were children.

Then it was time to introduce the piano - Maglor started with the highest and lowest notes, and then the musical alphabet, and then where middle C was. He had everyone find the C's, then the D's, and then where the other notes were. Then it was time to show them how to properly sit, and corrected finger positions.

They played their first song - Maglor tried not to cringe when inevitably, someone hit the wrong note. It was very simple, and then there was a second and a third song to learn, more complicated than the first, but still simple.

They had homework - practicing the two songs, and note naming sheets. The class didn't grumble about homework, and indeed, they were quite positive during the entire lesson. Maglor found himself smiling when it was over.

He came in at the tail end of Sören's watercolor class, where the class was going around the room to show their work, and finally Sören went last. His latest creation was Snúður, eating from a crystal bowl like royalty. Alejandro's command of Icelandic was nowhere near as fluent as Sören's, but he could tell Sören was telling them about Snúður's latest incident of begging, and being spoiled. As with the studio, having a cat was good for Sören's soul - once again, he had a nice life up here, one that made him feel guilty for disrupting.

But then Sören flashed him that dazzling smile that took his breath away, and for that

moment, the guilt was pushed aside. "There's your teacher now," Sören said to the class in English.

A couple of his guitar students were there and Maglor waved to them.

"I've been practicing," Jónas said.

"Good, keep practicing. You'll have something new to practice tomorrow."

When the class was dismissed, and the students poured out, Maglor walked in to the art room. Sören was putting supplies away, and cleaning up spilled paint. Maglor found himself helping without being asked, though he had to study where Sören kept things.

Then Sören paused for a moment, and said, "Here, I have something for you."

It was a small canvas. Maglor recognized *that* sunset, and there was a tree - Gods, how it resembled one of the Two Trees. As always, there was *something* about Sören's work... power there, but *what*.

And it was significant, to be given a piece of art like this, even small. It was like their first meeting, when Sören had heard him play and gifted him, unexpectedly. Their eyes met.

"Thank you," Maglor said.

Sören nodded. "I hope you like it."

"I do. It's... beautiful. I don't have words."*Putting your gift into words would be an insult. It is beyond what words can express.* A long pause.

"We have a bit before our afternoon classes start, you want to grab lunch?"

Maglor drove them into town, and they had lunch at a sandwich shop. They sat outside, since it was a gorgeous day, and they people-watched together. Though Maglor kept stealing glances at Sören, lost in thought, and no doubt, mixed emotions. He could sense the tension there - wanting friendship, still wanting space to lick his wounds.

But that painting... Maglor took a deep breath. "It means a lot, you know."

Sören was chewing a mouthful of his sandwich - still somehow managed to look adorable doing so - and raised an eyebrow.

"The painting." Maglor looked down. "It's like old times. Only... not."

"I told you I would give you a blank slate, we could try to start over as friends, so... that was a place to start."

"It was quite a place." A pause. "Your work was always good, but it seems like it's improved even more since..."

Sören gave a small smile. "Well, I try. I paint enough that it gives me practice, I guess."

"I'm glad that you're still painting. That you've done so much with your art. You deserve to go far. Someday, I want people to honor your work alongside the old masters." *I will make sure of that when you are gone, and I remain, still grieving you.*

"Oh, you flatterer." Sören chuckled. "I wouldn't call it that good -"

"I would. I do."

"Well... *takk.*" Sören reached out to pat his hand; it sent a jolt through Maglor. "Your music is still beautiful, whatever you were playing yesterday, I didn't recognize it -"

"It's something I've been working on."

"It's good that you're still composing, too."

Maglor sighed. "Truth be told, this is the first time in awhile that I've felt inspired enough to write music again, it started back up when I came here a few weeks ago."

"Really?"

"Yeah." Maglor brushed hair out of his face. "I, ah." A little nervous laugh. "Hit a dry spell after we."

Sören's eyebrows raised. "*Really.*"

"I still played... old stuff of mine, or covers of other people's work. But I stopped performing publicly, and I stopped composing."

"That's... unfortunate. And also..." Sören sat back in his chair. "The first year after you and I..."

Maglor nodded. He didn't need to say it.

"I couldn't make art at all. Couldn't draw, couldn't paint. Just... completely blocked. Nothing. It was like the fire in me *died.* I tried, desperately, to get it back. I went clubbing... ah shit, you don't want to hear about it."

No, I don't. It was bad enough Ingwion had his hands on Sören, never mind random strangers not worthy of him... Maglor cringed.

"Anyway," Sören went on. "It was a bad year. A full fucking year. Not being able to make art, it was like having a limb cut off. Like a part of my brain just shut off, altogether. And then that night I met Ingmar. He suggested a change of scenery would do me some good. I went to London. I started painting again."

"I'm... glad it came back to you."

"It took awhile for me to get back in the groove, but já, it came back. I started showing while I was there. Well, I had some shows, then I, ah, stopped for awhile..." Sören looked away. Far away. Maglor could swear he saw Sören shiver, even though it wasn't cold. "Then I started again. It's how I met Nico."

"I see."

"But... it's funny, not funny ha-ha, but funny weird, how once we, um. Split up, we both hit a dry spell. Dryer for you."

"That is indeed."

"I hope that the return of your music lasts," Sören said, meeting his eyes. "You have a rare and precious gift."

They went back to the studio; Maglor had Depeche Mode playing on the way back. When they were minutes away, the building in sight, Sören shot him a grin, his dark eyes twinkling, as if he found something amusing.

"What?"

Sören snickered.

"'Ice Machine' isn't a funny song."

Sören rolled his eyes. "It's... you and Depeche Mode. The more things change, the more some things stay the same." *It's strangely comforting,* Sören broadcasted, and patted him again; Maglor restrained the urge to seize him, kiss him hard, knowing it wouldn't end well.

Maglor had his second piano class, repeating the same lesson for different people. When he was done, he watched the end of Sören's class for children - they were sculpting with clay. Sören was in his element, encouraging the kids, smiling, laughing with them, taking joy in their joy.

It made him ache. In another world, Sören would have been a good father. When they were together, Sören knew not to ask him about adopting children, Maglor had made it clear from the beginning they couldn't get married, though deep down, he desperately *wanted* to. But he could tell, sometimes, that Sören would have liked that. *He* would have liked that. For a brief instant he could see it so clearly, he and Sören, raising twin daughters. Sören's horrible dad jokes. Raising them with art and music and books and nature and a dog and a cat -

If I wasn't such a miserable failure of a parent. He thought of Ecthelion, the son he had not even known he'd sired for too long, meeting him just to see him run away Gods knew where, never to be seen again.

He closed his eyes against the memory of the powerful voice like his own, the desire for his grown son similar to the way he had desired his own father - though nothing could quite be like his father, only his uncles had come close *and Sören* - and like with his father, he had tasted and then refused, though with Fëanor it had at least been a handful times, enough to sear his memory, to keep him warm on all those cold, lonely nights for eons, when he had been too lonely for too long to feel much guilt or shame for their sin anymore.

He opened his eyes and Sören was presenting a sculpture of his mother. Sören sculpted almost as well as he painted.

The sculptures were collected to dry - they'd be painted next week, Maglor picked up in the flurry of Icelandic before Sören dismissed his class.

Maglor was more hesitant with coming in this time, but Sören gestured, and he did. He looked at the sculptures close up, some of which were surprisingly well-done for children, some of which had the skill level one would expect for that age group. And there was of course Sören's sculpture of his mother, close-up, looking more like a saint or a goddess now. It was as if Sören's eyes burned as he delicately ran a finger over the statue. "I can't wait to paint this," he said. "I can already see it."

"You're very good with the children." A pause. "They seem to really love you."

"I love them right back." Sören nodded. "They remind me to have fun with this, even when it tears my heart open."

Their eyes met.

"Anyway, let me clean up in here and we can go, OK?"

Maglor helped him clean up the mess made by a bunch of kids with clay, and then they were off. There was more Depeche Mode on the way home.

All I ever wanted
All I ever needed
Is here in my arms

Maglor sighed. *I had that.*

He felt like crying when it was time to drop Sören off, not wanting to let him go just yet. He averted Sören's gaze as much as possible. "You want Nico to come by to walk Auli?" Sören asked.

Maglor nodded. "Fifteen minutes." *Long enough for me to try to pull together.*

He cried in the bathroom, washed his face, and when he came out, Dooku was truly a sight for sore eyes. He immediately felt at ease in the elderly man's presence, a welcome distraction.

...a little too welcome. Dooku was starting to feel like home, like family, like something he could not allow.

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Wednesday

Even though Sören was staunchly not a morning person, having ceramics in the morning put him in a better mood than he'd be otherwise.

Towards the end of the class Sören got on the pottery wheel to demonstrate, and Alejandro's class had finished up and he was there watching as well. Sören felt strangely self-conscious - it was almost too intimate, even though he normally had no problem with others watching him throw. But it wasn't enough to detract from his enjoyment of working clay, shaping it on the spinning wheel.

As Sören's hands molded the clay on the wheel, he found himself philosophizing out loud, in English. "My cousin Ari reads Tarot in Reykjavik. In the Major Arcana, one of the trump cards is the Wheel of Fortune. It represents change. A lot of ancient cultures used wheel symbolism, related to fate as a wheel. And in the Bible, the Judeo-Christian god was said to fashion Adam from clay of the earth. When I bake the pots in the kiln, it is the marriage of earth and fire. Like alchemy. I think about that sometimes when I'm making pottery. How ancient this is, something our human ancestors have been doing for thousands of years, how it was regarded at one time as sacred, holy work, and even if you don't believe

in any of that stuff, there's still a kind of magic to it. A reminder that we can shape our own destiny. We can change things. It was a reminder I badly needed when I lived in London, and felt completely hopeless in my life. It was such a simple act, shaping clay, making something both beautiful and useful out of it, but there was power. Art isn't just making pretty things, though it can be that. It's an act of making beautiful moments - even something beautiful out of your pain. Acknowledging and honoring that beauty within you, and consciously bringing it to life. Opening to the power of that, and watching where it takes you. When I started thinking about opening up a school, where people could just come create, could just feel and explore... I wanted all of you to be able to awaken that in yourselves."

Sören looked at Alejandro, whose mouth was slightly open. He looked down at the bowl, which was perfect now. The wheel stopped turning.

When the students left, Sören and Alejandro sat outside, drinking water, enjoying the breeze and the sunshine. They didn't speak.

Sören had a sketching class, the other more formal, structured class, teaching depth and perspective and technique. Sören's eyes kept wandering to Alejandro and his guitar lesson across the hall. *It's too bad you wouldn't want to be a model for this.*

Sören's face burned, even entertaining that thought. *Yes, we all know it would be for*the students *and would have nothing to do with you wanting to look at him.*

Shut up.

Sören's class was out before Alejandro's was. He could hear the occasional wrong note, missed rhythm, and when he looked again and saw the pained look on Alejandro's face, though he was trying so very hard to be gentle and patient, Sören couldn't help snickering. Alejandro noticed him noticing, and glared at Sören's silent laughter, which made Sören laugh less quietly.

Finally Alejandro's class was done, and it was time to go back. Depeche Mode was playing in the Jaguar again. Alejandro looked just a little crabby.

"I didn't mean to offend you. It was just..." Sören tried to find the right words in English, and it failed him. "You were cute."

Alejandro's eyebrows went up.

"Well já, listen, just because we're not shagging anymore, doesn't mean I'm blind, and you're cute when you make that face you were making in there."

"I don't even know what to say to that," Alejandro said.

"Nico usually tells me he's not cute when I tell him he's cute."

"There are a lot of words I'd use to describe your husband - elegant, suave... 'cute' is not one of them. He's not cute. Neither am I."

"*God*, the two of you have so much in common sometimes it's fucking painful." Sören shot him a wicked grin. "And hilarious."

"He's a kindred spirit."

"Mmm, it's good that the two of you are friends. Speaking of... how long before he comes to walk Auli with you?"

"Half hour?"

"OK."

When Sören got inside, Dooku smiled at him, and rose from his desk to greet him with a hug and kiss. The kiss lingered, the two looking into each other's eyes for a moment, and Dooku tenderly stroked Sören's face, before nuzzling him and planting a kiss on Sören's forehead, and then the top of his head, nuzzling his curls. Sören gave a happy sigh and rested his head in Dooku's shoulder for a moment, arms tightening around him.

"How was your day?" Dooku asked, heading into the kitchen to make Sören coffee.

"Good." Sören nodded. "Yours?"

"Productive. I have two-thirds of the novel done."

"*Excellent.* I would like to take time to read what you've got so far, sometime this weekend?"

"All right." Dooku nodded.

"Also, Alejandro says a half-hour."

Dooku nodded again. "I'll freshen up."

You're always fresh, Sören said, but then, he couldn't say he minded being with a man who took care of himself.*Elegant, suave...* Those words did definitely describe Dooku, though it felt strange to hear Alejandro, of all people, say them.

Sören logged onto Stardew Valley, petting his cat, and when Dooku came out of the bathroom he made Sören's coffee the way he liked it, and brought it to him. Even though Sören was perfectly capable of making his own coffee, and Sören didn't ask or demand to be waited on, it was something Dooku liked to do for him, and Sören never took these little moments of tender loving care for granted, smiling and saying "*takk*" as he took the cup.

"I'll stop at the store on the way home. Would you like anything in particular for dinner?"

"Hmmm, you want to grill steaks again? I could go for that."

"That sounds lovely." Dooku hovered, and took a moment to stroke Sören's curls, Sören leaning into the touch, making a little purring noise.

"And then..." Sören leered up at him. "I'd like you for dessert."

Dooku's face turned pink - Sören loved that he could*still* make Dooku blush like this, together well over a year now. He loved getting the old man all flustered, worked up, loving it even more when he could undo him completely, as he sent out the mental image across their Force bond, sucking and rimming him, watching him lose control.

"You are a naughty boy."

"You love it."

"I do." Dooku gave him that little predatory smile that always sent a frisson down Sören's spine, a promise of wicked teasing later. "You know... I admit I had a few small concerns when this..." He made a vague hand gesture. "...business with Ingmar started. Worried you'd lose interest. But if anything, it seems to have..."

"Made me hungrier for you?" Sören nodded. "And I am."

"It's been an interesting development. Not interesting in a bad way." There was a pause, and across their Force bond Sören could feel the glimmer of *I'm still watching Ingmar Borovkov.*

Sören raised an eyebrow. "I heard that."

"Yes." Dooku sighed. "Sören..." He sat down, and took Sören's hand in his. "Let me preface this by saying that if I felt you were at all unsafe... I would intervene." His dark eyes flashed, and he bared his teeth a little, giving Sören another frisson. He liked that side of Dooku, when it came out. *My wolf.* "So it isn't quite that I... object, per se, to your arrangement. But I do find it concerning that this Ingmar Borovkov keeps *as* low of a profile as he does. And you know perfectly damn well the complaints I have about celebrities these days, like these Kardashian characters -"

Sören snorted. "Let's not get you started on the Kardashians, *elskan.*"

"Or that... Donald Trump." Dooku made a face. "Vulgar."

"OK, so Ingmar is not a Kardashian or a Trump, and that's a good thing."

"...The problem is that when someone keeps that low of a profile, it usually means that they have *reasons* for not wanting to be found, reasons above and beyond liking their privacy. With the kind of money that Ingmar has, and the kind of background he has - which admittedly we don't know much about. He's Russian... and quite a wealthy one, which says, as an educated guess, an oligarch, probably someone who knows Putin quite well. And Alejandro... as much as I like him... you did mention his family was involved in some kind of shady activity in South America. As you know, Russian interests in South America are rather... complicated. So from where I sit, it looks bad. It looks very bad. You may not be in any danger from Ingmar himself - if I thought you were, I wouldn't care how connected to Russian organized crime he was, I'd deal with him personally. But he may have powerful enemies, and *that* is what concerns me."

"And it's likely if that's the case, and we don't really know for sure... it's all just speculation..." Sören did wonder, however. "...They wouldn't know he's here in bloody backwater Iceland."

"Perhaps not. But just the same, I want you to promise me that if*anything*... off... happens when you're on these dates with him, tell me. Don't hide it from me thinking that it's 'not worth making me worry about it'. Especially when I have contacts back in the UK who might be of service if needed..."

"All right. I mean so far, nothing weird has happened."*Unless you consider putting a human on a leash to be weird.* "But I'll... keep you posted, I guess."

"Please do." Dooku kissed Sören softly. "You're precious to me, and I couldn't bear losing you."

"Oh, Nico." Sören kissed him back, eyes misting. *"Elskan.* I'm not going anywhere."

"Nobody thinks they're going anywhere, until they do. As you know."

Sören knew perfectly well, remembering finding his mother's dead body when he was almost six. He nodded solemnly.

Dooku leaned back on the couch. "When I was younger, I learned fencing, and judo. I've been out of practice for some time, but lately I've been thinking it might be good to get back into one of those activities. I'm not as young as I used to be, no, but I'm still agile..."

Sören grinned. "You're goddamn right."

"I mean *outside* of that department, you and your one-track mind." Dooku flushed again, and Sören's grin got bigger. "But... I would feel better, dearest, if perhaps you learned a martial art as well."

"Nico, I'm asthmatic. I used to get picked last for sports in school."

"Martial arts are different. And as my old mentor, Yodha, taught me... it's a way of conditioning the mind, not just the body. You are strong in the Force. I don't get on you to meditate as I do -"

"I get enough of that shit from Ari."

"Indeed. But... I do think that if you had *some* training, even just a small set of exercises every day... your connection to the Force would grow stronger."

"Hmm."

"And even without that... I'd feel better knowing you could defend yourself in a fight. I don't mean the barfighting I've seen you get into, and heard about from Frankie. I mean being able to hold your own against... the kind of people Ingmar probably has for enemies, out there."

"Well, if they're that bad, then I'd need to learn something dirty, like, uh... um, what's that called, that Israeli stuff that sexy Daniel Craig does -"

"Krav Maga. There's probably a studio in Reykjavik. I'd be willing to pay to fly you back and forth to lessons, since it's only a forty-five minute flight, if you were serious about learning it."

"Which I'm... not, at the moment. I get what you're saying, Nico, I just." Sören shrugged. "I'm not some bloody *Viking warrior.*"

There was a knock at the door. "That would be Alejandro," Dooku said. "We'll continue this discussion later."

Much later. Sören really didn't want to discuss it at all, didn't want to start getting paranoid, especially not after the way Justin had repeatedly threatened him with his "friends", the idea of being involved with someone else with criminal connections...

Dooku got up and waved. "I'll see you in awhile."

"Have a good walk." Sören blew him a kiss. He turned his attention back to Stardew Valley, frowning.

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Thursday

When Macalaurë Fëanorion heard wrong notes, or things played off-rhythm, it was physically *painful* to him.

By the time his second piano lesson was over - the first one of the day - he wanted a drink.

Instead he got a Sören, bringing him a Sprite, while Sören himself had a Pepsi. That was one thing that hadn't changed about Sören over the years - he still drank quite a bit of caffeine, which Sören had said once was a way to self-medicate his ADHD because conventional ADHD drugs didn't quite help him as intended. Though even somewhat controlled, Sören's ADHD tendencies came out - the hyperfocus on his art, when he was in the zone. Technically on his break, Maglor could feel Sören still there with his pastels, and that energy was intoxicating.

"You look disgruntled," Sören said, turning his focus back to Maglor.

"I'll manage."

"At least you're still being patient. I think your students like you."

"We shall see."

"We shall." Sören took a swig of his Pepsi. "You have tomorrow off, and the weekend. Enjoy it."

I doubt that. "Thank you."

"You have any plans?"

"Tomorrow night, while you're..." Maglor wasn't going to say it out loud. "Your husband is coming over, as he did last week."

"Good, good. It's nice that you're keeping him company."

"He's good company. We're going to cook, to start with."

"Oh, what are you cooking?"

"I'm teaching him to make *caldo verde* and *bacalhau*."

"Ohhhh, wonderful. You should come cook for us one night when I'm there, já?"

"Perhaps." Maglor nodded.

Then Sören raised an eyebrow, leaned back, and gave him a suspicious look as he took another swig of Pepsi.

"What?"

Sören continued eyeing him, and then he said, "Your accent. It's... noticeably a*lot* milder than last time I saw you, five years ago. I only just realized because of the contrast when you said those names."

Maglor drank the Sprite and didn't respond immediately. He felt terrible about continuing the ruse that he was Brazilian, but...

"I mean, didn't you go back to Rio when we...? And you had to marry What's-Her-Name?"

Maglor sighed. He evaded the marriage question - *Gods*, how he regretted telling that lie in the first place. "I spent a few years in the States." That, at least, was the truth, though the full truth had been he arrived in the States seventy-two hours after their breakup.

"Oh, really?" Sören gave him that sly, amused grin. "So what happened... did Trump deport you?"

Maglor snorted, and smiled despite himself. "Not quite. Ingmar brought me back here."

"OK. But you were living in America?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Alaska."

"*Alaska*?" Sören's eyebrows went up. "Not someplace like, I don't know, Los Angeles, New York..."

Maglor made a face. "No." He went on. "Alaska, yes. It was... a bit like Iceland, I guess."

"I just..." Sören shook his head. "Wow. But it explains your American accent! I mean, it's got a touch of Latin, but..."

It's not Latin. Maglor could eliminate all traces of his native accent if he tried, and indeed, had done so when living in Alaska as Mark Lowry, using a New England accent, pretending to be a Connecticut native, and had done during a previous stint as Mark Lowry in the UK in the 1970s and 1980s, with careful RP in London, but even though the Brazilian identity was fake, there were still facets of it that were the *truest to himself*, nonetheless. The dark hair and pale skin, was plausible as a Portuguese Brazilian. The accent when speaking English, he didn't have to fake. There was the passion and fire of the Brazilian people. The sensuality. The love of dancing. He appreciated the cuisine. The music. The *saudade*. Portuguese, itself, was one of the most beautiful human languages Maglor had ever heard - right up there with Icelandic - and he enjoyed speaking it, singing in it. He'd certainly enjoyed the effect it had on Sören, back when... He shut his eyes against the memories of speaking to him in Portuguese when they made love.

Portuguese... *and Elvish.* Sören had assumed the name Maitimo was Spanish or Portuguese, and Maglor had sometimes called Sören *melindo* or other endearments - had lapsed into his native tongue during climax - and Sören was none the wiser.

"That is so cool," Sören said. "You've been so many places. Rio... you said you lived in

Amsterdam for awhile... you were in the UK... and of course Reykjavik... and the States. So exciting, to have traveled so much."

It gets very, very old, melindo. *You were a joy to travel with, I thought I had seen everything there was to see, everyplace there was to go, and saw through new eyes with you.* Maglor sighed and sipped his drink. "Yeah."

"Ruh-roh." Sören cocked his head to one side. "Did I hit a nerve?"

"Talking about the years between..." Maglor gestured to Sören, and then back to himself. "It's... a sore spot, yeah." That, at least, was not a lie. The last five years he'd just been existing.

"Awwww. Well... it was rough for me too."

"Hm."

"But you know what? Ingmar, bless him, cares about you enough to help you with, you know..." Sören gestured. "All of this."

Maglor resisted a grimace.

"Hej, so..." The lilt of Sören's smoky voice broke through the unpleasant memory. "Sunday afternoon, want to keep me company for a bit while I fire some pots in the kiln? And I can give you the tour of my paintings around the studio?"

He wants to spend time with me. Time of his own volition, where he's not obligated by work as he is right this moment. Maglor's stomach fluttered. "I... yes. Yes, that sounds good."

Sören smiled. That smile went straight to his heart.

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Friday

"Shall we head out, love?"

Sören smiled and took Dooku's hand.

Sören looked delicious - white ruffly shirt, black vest, black leather pants, curls untamed. He smelled delicious; Dooku recognized the cherry blossom and anise of Kyoto, which smelled much more like spice on Sören's skin.

Dooku, himself, was wearing Frederic, a scent he'd previously reserved for special occasions with Sören, but found himself putting it on to see Alejandro without thinking about it. That was curious...

When they got to the door of the cottage, Dooku handed Sören the shopping bag with groceries in it - he was providing some of the ingredients, without being asked, wanting to be courteous to his host - and knocked gently on the door.

Ingmar answered, with Auli at his heels. "Come in," he said warmly.

Dooku was still wary of Ingmar - much more wary than he let on to Sören, not wanting to discourage the relationship, something that made Sören happy, when Sören had been in such raw pain when Alejandro showed up, a reminder that Sören still was in recovery from his past. But Dooku managed a polite smile, and a nod. "Good afternoon, Ingmar."

"Good afternoon, Dooku. How are you?"

"Well."

Ingmar looked at Sören. "Hello, Sören."

"Hej." Sören gave him a shy, sweet smile.

"Alejandro should be out momentarily," Ingmar said. "Can I get you anything...?"

"I'm good, thank you," Dooku told him. "I'll go in the kitchen and put these away if you don't mind..." He took the shopping bag from Sören, and did just that.

When he came out, Sören and Ingmar were kissing passionately, which didn't quite bother him - wary though he was, he had to admit the sight of the two beautiful men kissing was rather erotic, and he was beginning to understand what Sören was saying about getting a better view of your partner if they were doing something with another person. The idea of being able to watch Sören taking a cock, for example...

Alejandro came out of the bathroom just in time to see Sören and Ingmar lick their tongues together playfully, and Sören to draw Ingmar's lower lip into his mouth, sucking on it, before the two kissed again, oblivious to the fact that they were not alone in the room.

"Er," Alejandro said.

They pulled apart, breathless; Sören blushed, and Ingmar just... grinned... at Alejandro, a wicked gleam in his eye.

Alejandro was glaring daggers. *If looks could kill...* And Dooku then realized he found *that* glare just as arousing as the kiss Sören and Ingmar were sharing.

No. Stop that. That is your husband's ex.

"We were just leaving," Ingmar told Alejandro. He reached out to stroke Sören's face, giving him a hungry look, and Sören crinkled his nose and bit his lower lip, giggling.

Alejandro continued glaring. Dooku found that a very odd response for someone who was just friends with benefits with Ingmar and had insisted there was nothing between them, unless...

He's not over Sören.

Of course he wouldn't be. Dooku hadn't been able to get over him, either.*I wonder if Sören realizes it.*

"Have a good night, you guys." Sören waved. He turned to Alejandro and said, "We still on for Sunday afternoon at the studio?"

"No," Alejandro said coldly. "I think not."

Sören's eyebrows went up, his smile changing to a look of surprised hurt, but before he could say anything in response, Ingmar was dragging him out the door, and Auli whined, sad to see Ingmar go.

Alejandro turned on his heel and stormed into the kitchen, and Dooku followed. Alejandro went to the liquor pantry and produced a bottle of whisky - Flóki, the flagship distillery of Iceland. "Ice or neat?" Alejandro asked him.

"Neat."

Alejandro poured two neat shot glasses, and knocked his back. Dooku sipped at his, thinking about pressing it, but his gut said no.

Alejandro proceeded to roll up his sleeves, wash his hands, and then chop vegetables as furiously as a man could, like he was stabbing Ingmar with each slice of the knife. Dooku had that same frisson of arousal watching it, the lethal, predatory grace, as well as the same pang of guilt. He moved to the side of Alejandro, preparing his half of the ingredients for *caldo verde*. They said nothing, for awhile. Nothing needed to be said.

When the *caldo verde* started in a pot on the stove, Alejandro moved on to the*bacalhau*. Dooku had experience with making fish, but this was different - the salted cod was being dressed up with potato, onions, garlic, hard-boiled eggs, and olives, with parsley and olive oil.

The *caldo verde* preparation had worked out some of the tension, and no doubt the whiskey had as well; Alejandro's body language was a bit more relaxed, and Dooku heard Alejandro humming as he worked. It was pleasant, though the melody, whatever it was, was also sad.

As everything cooked, they went into the living room and watched an episode of*Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Alejandro pet Auli, who eventually climbed up on him and lapped his face. Dooku smiled fondly.

After the episode, dinner was ready. They ate outside, as it was still warm out, and Auli could just run around without too much begging.

"What would you like to do after dinner?" Alejandro asked. "Chess again, like last week?"

"Yes, I was looking forward to a rematch."

"Good. I was looking forward to destroying someone."

Their eyes met, and Dooku said, softly, "I wish I had some sort of platitudes or assurance to offer, but..."

"Is it that obvious?"

Dooku nodded solemnly. "To me, it is. To Sören... well... I don't know." He sighed. "He may not be able to see past the hurt."

"You're not angry with me for...?"

"I would be angry with you if you were actively trying to break up my marriage, and I would

indeed fight for him if that was the case. But... for simply just still loving him, I can't blame you. I was rather in your shoes in early 2018. And I think if fate had aligned a certain way and you came back to Iceland then, our places would be swapped right now, you'd be with him, and I'd be the one pining and wanting closure."

Alejandro looked down. He said nothing, and nibbled his food.

"This is very good," Dooku said, changing the subject.

"I'll give you the recipe before you go home tonight."

"I'd like that."

Alejandro ran a hand through his hair, which was blowing slightly in the breeze *-he does have nice hair, STOP THAT* - and their eyes met. "You want to... go for a ride...? After dinner? And then come back here and play chess? I've only had one shot, I'm safe to drive."

"All right. To the sea, I assume."

Alejandro nodded.

After dinner they did just that. At first Alejandro had on classical music, but then he frowned and said, "I'm not in the mood for that." He turned to Dooku. "Do you care if I put on metal...?"

"Oh yes *please.*"

Alejandro's eyebrows went up at that, and he changed the radio station to metal. Judas Priest was just ending, and when "Sad But True" by Metallica began playing, Dooku threw the horns. Alejandro laughed aloud.

"Listen," Dooku said, "I was in my thirties in the 1980s when metal was big. I am not too old."

"Didn't say you were. Just didn't have you pegged for..."

"You most likely know this, but a number of metal musicians are classically trained. Dream Theater being one such example."

"I. Fucking. Love. Dream Theater."

"Good." Dooku nodded. "During the summer months, I like to take my motorcycle out and drive, listening to metal. Dio, Black Sabbath, Metallica, Queensryche..."

"I knew there was a reason why I liked you." Alejandro smiled. "Sören thought it was strange that, you know, I come from a classical music background and I appreciate metal. But like you pointed out... so many of them are classically trained. The compositions are often as complex as anything the maestros produced."

"You're Brazilian, do you like Sepultura?"

"It's the law." Alejandro laughed again. "I like the way they incorporate their heritage into their music. It's really interesting. There's some other metal bands that do that - The Hu from Mongolia, Alien Weaponry from New Zealand..."

"New Zealand. Do they sing in Maori?"

Alejandro nodded.

"*Fascinating.*"

Alejandro waited for Metallica to be over and then he switched to his car device. "Alexa, play 'Kai Tangata'."

When they got to the shore they sat together in companionable silence. Every now and again Dooku would steal glances at Alejandro, hair blowing in the wind, looking proud yet vulnerable, wishing very much there was something he could do to help soothe the *ache*, Alejandro's heart sighing like the sea.

But watching the sea for awhile seemed to relax him further. They listened to more metal on the way back, and at the cottage, Alejandro readied the chessboard, and poured them each another shot of whiskey, since neither man would be driving for the rest of the night. As Alejandro sat back down, he was humming the same song he was humming in the kitchen.

"What is that?" Dooku finally asked, curiosity getting the better of him.

"That... what?"

"What you were humming."

Alejandro looked self-conscious for a moment, and then he adjusted and said, "Oh, *that.* Um, it's a song I've been working on."

"I'd like to hear it." A pause. "You know, I've never heard you sing or play, and Sören says you have quite the talent."

"It's not finished yet, and I would prefer to not share it until it's done. I also have to be in the right space to perform, and I'm not in that space tonight. But next Friday? If those two..." He didn't need to finish the sentence; Dooku nodded. "If they are as usual and you want to come by again, I'd be happy to play for you."

"I'd like that very much. Do you do covers as well?"

"Depending on the cover. Metallica, sure. Katy Perry, not so much."

Dooku's laughter rang out. "If I ever voluntarily request Katy Perry, be assured Hell has opened a ski resort."

Alejandro smiled. "Good. I don't think I'd be able to let Sören live with a Katy Perry fan."

Dooku continued to laugh, and Alejandro did as well, as he set up the chessboard. Once it was ready, he leaned back and gestured to Dooku. "Your move."

Chapter 21

Monday

Sören groaned when the alarm went off. He stretched out against Dooku, snuggled against his chest and hip; Dooku's arms tightened around Sören, a hand in Sören's curls, petting. Sören buried his face in Dooku's shoulder and groaned again.

Yesterday had been difficult. Sören had managed to put aside the rebuff from Alejandro about spending Sunday afternoon with him, to enjoy his night with Ingmar - *how* he'd enjoyed it - but yesterday, when he was firing pots in the kiln, the ache hit him like a ton of bricks, and he found himself crying about Alejandro again, like he had not done since his ex had first arrived.

It seems like we took one step forward and four steps back.

Sören got ready for his class; Dooku was supposed to go on a walk with Alejandro and Auli before Alejandro would be taking them to the studio, and when he came out of the bathroom Dooku was still there, looking mildly alarmed.

"He still hasn't called or knocked?" Sören asked.

Dooku shook his head, frowning.

Sören folded his arms. "I hope he's not bailing." *Like he did five years ago, when I fucking needed him then. Why was I fool enough to think he wouldn't abandon us now?*

Oh for fuck's sake, it's not like you guys are involved anymore!

Sören flinched as if he'd been struck. He brushed the feeling aside, not wanting to argue with himself right this minute. "You should call him."

Dooku sighed.

Sören gave him a puzzled look. He read shyness on Dooku, *intense* shyness, which was odd considering Dooku had been warming up to Alejandro and indeed, they were more social with each other than Sören was with Alejandro. Dooku's cheeks were pink, and he looked down.

"Just... call him. He's not gonna yell at you for calling him. His problem isn't with *you*, is it?"

Dooku dialed Alejandro's number, and waited. After six rings there was no answer. Dooku ended the call and leaned back in his chair.

"Maybe I should go down there..." Dooku looked in the general direction of their cottage.

And then they both felt it. It was like a bomb going off, with a shock wave rolling down the street. Intense heat, consuming - the temperature seemed to go up in the cabin slightly. Snúður made a meow of distress and slurked under the couch, something he normally didn't do except when Dooku vacuumed.

"What the..." Sören sat on the arm of the couch.

Dooku took a few deep breaths, and Sören did the same, but his hands were shaking. *What the hell is going on?* Sören could see the flash of anger in Alejandro's eyes, even though he wasn't there.

Sören got up, and returned to the bathroom, this time to run the tap and splash cold water on his face and hands, a grounding technique he'd learned in therapy years ago, to help when he felt triggered in any way. He wasn't quite triggered, but whatever he was picking up on empathically was disturbing him enough to need the distraction.

And then, his phone went off. "*Alejandro, Alejandro,*" Lady Gaga sang. "*Ale-Ale-jandro, Ale-Ale-jandro.*"

Sören answered. "Hello."

"Sören."

"Hi, good morning! You still coming to drive us to the studio in a bit?"

"Sören..." A deep breath. "Auli."

Sören felt his heart skip a beat. "What... is he all right...?"

"Auli ran away." A pause. "Ingmar and I had a bit of an argument and I was getting ready to take Auli out for his walk and Auli just... ran... before I could get the leash on him..." Alejandro's voice broke, a little.

"I'm on my way."

Sören *ran* down the street, out of breath and needing to puff on his inhaler when he got to Alejandro, who was sitting on the front step of the cottage, holding Auli's leash, looking ready to cry.

"OK, what happened?" Sören asked when he caught his breath.

"Auli ran out... down the hill." Alejandro pointed. "I chased after him but he was fast, and then I didn't see where he went." Alejandro covered his face with his hands. "Your neighbors are going to kill me... and..."

"OK. Calm down." Sören instinctively reached out to pat him; Alejandro looked up, tears in his eyes. Sören's heart broke for him, wanting to hug him, but *not now. Not yet.* "We're going to find him."

He held out his hand, and Alejandro took it, and Sören stood up. He gestured, walking them back towards the cabin. "This is what we're going to do," Sören said. "I'm going to drive us around, in my jeep, since I know this part of the country better than you do. We can't cancel our morning classes on such short notice, so we do have to go to the studio when it's time, but if we don't find Auli before that, Nico will continue looking for him." He took out his cell as he walked towards the cabin and dialed Dooku's number.
"Hej, *elskan*? Auli ran away..."

"Oh no."

"I'm gonna take Alejandro to look for him. If he doesn't turn up by the time we have to go to the studio, can you drive around and try to find him? He went east of here, at least at

first."

"Yes, just call me and let me know."

"Will do."

Alejandro climbed in the passenger seat of Sören's jeep - it felt weird for Sören to be the one to drive Alejandro, for a change. He was still holding the leash, and looked at it sadly as Sören began to pull out.

"Let me see that," Sören said, gesturing.

Alejandro gave him a puzzled look.

"Just give me it, for a minute." During the almost-five years of their relationship, Sören had been very careful to hide his Force abilities from Alejandro, as he habitually hid them from everyone - Dooku was the first person outside his family who he trusted with that information. Occasionally, Sören could hold an object and "read" it, seeing a brief visionary flash of the person, place or thing attached. It usually happened randomly, but he was willing to try to make it happen now, to find this dog. He of course wasn't going to let Alejandro know that was what he was doing, so he had to disguise his intent somehow. He popped the glove compartment and took out a tin of mints. "Sucking on something usually helps me feel better." Sören's mind immediately went into the gutter, and at the flush in Alejandro's cheeks, he knew Alejandro had the same reaction... and they'd sucked each other enough times to know. "Er. I mean." He handed Alejandro the mints. "Just... have a mint. They're soothing."

Of course, now Sören was thinking about the times he'd sucked Alejandro's cock, and Alejandro had sucked him... the times they'd sixty-nined... the way they'd rimmed each other, sometimes to climax without touching anything else...

Focus.

Sören held the leash as Alejandro popped the tin and carefully put a mint in his mouth, and closed his eyes. Auli couldn't have gone *too* far in a short amount of time, even if he was a fast runner. In his mind's eye, Sören saw a familiar cluster of farms, and sheep and pigs. Wildflowers. Sören knew exactly where those farms were.

He handed the leash back to Alejandro. His nerves were still on edge, enough that Sören could feel it, and Sören decided to help by putting on the radio. Alejandro wouldn't want to listen to hip-hop, so Sören put on the "alternative" station.

Of course, it was playing *motherfucking Depeche Mode. Of course.*

I'm in the hands of fate
I hand myself
Over on a plate
Now

Oh little girl
There are times when I feel
I'd rather not be
The one behind the wheel
Come
Pull my strings

Watch me move
I do anything
Please

Sören gave Alejandro the side-eye, wondering once again if Alejandro was at least mildly Force sensitive and doing this subconsciously; Alejandro was looking out the window.

When the song was over, Alejandro buried his face in his hands again.

"Alejandro. It's gonna be OK. We'll find him."

"I wouldn't be able to forgive myself if anything happened to that dog."

Sören's heart broke again. "Awwww, you really love Auli, don't you?"

Alejandro took his face out of his hands, looked down, and nodded. "Yeah, I'm... a bit attached to him." He laughed nervously, though on the verge of tears.

"He's a good boy. I remember when he was a puppy and Vigdís and Páll first got him, not long after Nico moved out here! I'm attached to him too but I imagine it must be moreso for you, since you take care of him every day. But you know... you should get a dog."

Alejandro sighed.

"I know you move a lot, and it can be hard to bring pets when you travel," Sören said, "but maybe you could... I don't know... settle down in one place for awhile." *Stay here in Akureyri.*

Alejandro didn't respond to that.

"Having my cat did me a world of good," Sören said. "I found him during a time of very bad depression, and he gave me a reason to live, something to care for, look after. Companions are good for the soul."

Sören could hear *will you STOP* at the back of his head, and then Alejandro said, "I don't know why you're encouraging me to get a pet, when I can't even take care of this one. He could *die*, out there -"

Something told Sören that Alejandro wasn't entirely talking about Auli anymore.

They were almost to the cluster of farms Sören had seen in the vision, just off in the distance. Sören drove a little faster, and when the farms approached, he slowed down, looking out the window as he drove. "Alejandro, keep an eye out on your side," he said.

"You seem certain he's going to turn up here."

"He's a sheepdog. Herding sheep is an instinct for him. He'd go where the sheep are." Sören wasn't going to come out and say *I had a vision and he was here.*

For some reason, Sören was reminded of that scene from *Lord of the Rings*, and murmured, "Legolas, what do your elf eyes see?"

"*What.*"

"Nothing, it was a stupid joke."

Alejandro was giving him a *look* now, and Sören flushed, remembering the pointy ears he'd seen the first time they'd showered together - which he always found beautiful and sexy, but knew Alejandro hid, didn't like talking about; Sören imagined he'd gotten any number of "elf" jokes growing up in Rio with that birth defect. He hadn't meant to be insensitive, it just slipped out.

But then before he could beat himself up too much about lack of tact, Alejandro said, "There." He pointed over Sören's shoulders, and sure enough, there was Auli, lounging in a field, as sheep grazed and pigs wallowed.

"*Takk.*" Sören pulled over. His seat was closest to where Auli was, so he grabbed the leash back, jumped out of the jeep and ran.

As soon as Auli saw him, he broke off in a run... in the opposite direction. Sören was having to chase him now, annoyed as his asthma started up again. When Auli was headed for the barn, Sören swore, "*Ríða*," not wanting an awkward scene if he was caught in someone's barn, trespassing.

He had to act, *now*, or he was going to have to chase Auli into the barn. Sören glanced over his shoulder; the jeep was far enough away that he might be able to get away with this. Sören used the Force and began to pull, with Auli rising off the ground and flying backwards, until he was in Sören's arms. Sören still had the leash, and he clipped it through Auli's collar. Auli licked his face, and Sören gave him a peevish look. "*Þú litla rassinn. Þú litla skít. Óþekkur hundur.*" Auli whined, and licked his face some more.

Even though he was on the leash and could be walked, Sören continued to carry Auli to the jeep. He came around to Alejandro's side of the jeep - Alejandro had been rocking himself with his eyes closed, crying a little - and Sören put the dog in his arms. Alejandro's face lit up and Auli began to lick his face enthusiastically, making Alejandro laugh when Auli put his tongue in his nose. "Dammit, Auli..."

Sören got back in the passenger's seat. "OK. We can... drop Auli off, and we'll both be late, or we can take him to the studio and bring him back later. Up to you."

"I don't mind keeping him there with me for music class if you don't mind him being there."

"I don't."

Alejandro let out a sigh of relief. "*Thank you.*"

Sören nodded, and patted him. "I told you he'd be OK."

Alejandro started to cry again, and then looked embarrassed for crying. Auli kissed his tears, and Sören smiled at him fondly.

"I'm sorry," Alejandro said.

"Can I ask... what were you and Ingmar fighting about that was so bad that Auli got spooked enough to run off like that?"

Alejandro leaned back in the passenger seat with a sharp sigh. He didn't want to answer that question.

But finally he did. "I was going to leave," Alejandro said. "I was looking at plane tickets to

just... go."

"Back to the States?"

He didn't answer that, but continued on. "I felt like... it was stupid for me to come here."

"No, not stupid." Sören shook his head. "I'll be honest, I was PISSED when you showed up -"

Alejandro frowned. "That's part of the problem, Sören. I know how badly I hurt you. In fact, I'm pretty sure there's more to that hurt than what I do know. You've always felt things more deeply than most people."

"I am nothing if not intense, yes."

"I've been consumed by guilt. It's been eating me alive, not just the weeks I've been here, but the entire last five years. And seeing that guilt was justified, seeing the pain in your eyes..." Alejandro couldn't go on, his voice breaking.

"Fall In Love" by Phantogram came on the radio, as if on cue, and the two lapsed into silence as the song played, expressing words Alejandro could not.

Love
It was enough to recognize
To see
I was the reason you feel sick inside

Fall in need
I let you bleed
'Cause you were falling
I'm sorry baby
'Cause you were falling
I'm sorry

Love
It cut a hole into your eyes
You couldn't see
You were the car I crashed
Now you're burning alive

Fall in need
I let you bleed
'Cause you were falling
I'm sorry baby
'Cause you were falling
I'm sorry

Babe
The night has swallowed my soul
Could it be that I fell apart
It shows
The lines on my face ate away my smile
Could it be that I fell apart

Fall in need

I let you bleed
'Cause you were falling
I'm sorry baby

Fall in need
I let you bleed
'Cause you were falling
I'm sorry baby

Fall in need

By the time the song was over, Sören's eyes were burning with unshed tears. The studio was close, and the time they'd need to open was close, and Sören knew if he gave into those tears he'd be a wreck when the students started showing up, but *GOD. Murder me in the feels.*

"So between the guilt..." Alejandro's voice cut back in. "...and then... seeing you with Ingmar. Feeling like he was *flaunting* it."

"Alejandro. Just so you understand, I'm not going to stop seeing Ingmar."

"He said the same thing."

Sören nodded. "You have to live with the consequences of the choices you made. The choices you made are such that I had to move on with my life at some point. This is me moving on with my life."

Alejandro looked away.

"But," Sören said, "as pissed as I was when you showed up... last week was nice. I'm not unhappy you're here, anymore, and I'd be pissed all over again if you just *left*, like you were planning on doing. I'd like us to be friends. Not just for my husband's sake or the sake of us working together civilly, anymore, but because I still care about you."

"That means a lot." Their eyes met. Auli squirmed and leaned into Sören, to lick his face with approval.

"So... no leaving, you." Sören gave him a playful swat as he pulled into the studio. "And you know, I know you think Ingmar might be trolling you with... what he has going with me... but he clearly cares about you too, if he brought you here so you could stop being eaten alive with guilt, get the closure you need, told you to not make a stupid arsehole decision like just running away." *Again.*

Alejandro said nothing, and they got out of the jeep. He walked Auli on the leash towards the studio, with Auli wagging his tail, tongue lolling like he hadn't been the source of tremendous upset a short while ago.

Sören pointed at Auli, using the simple dog to illustrate a moment of simple, raw truth. "You know how upset you were when he ran off? That would be me, if you just left without saying goodbye. So don't. If you get that urge, think of me reacting the way you did to Auli running away." *It was like that before, but so much worse. A part of me fucking DIED, when you were gone.*

They paused in their tracks, and looked at each other for a long moment, and then Sören, at last, gave into his urge to hug Alejandro, squeezing him tight. Alejandro returned the

hug, gently, shaking a little - Sören could feel Alejandro's own heart breaking, and it broke his heart all over again. They held each other for a minute, and then Sören grabbed him by the tail of his shirt and dragged him inside the studio, making them both laugh a little.

"Here," he said. "Let's get through today, and let's get through this summer, all right?"

Alejandro nodded.

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Tuesday

After clearing the air a bit with Alejandro the day before, Sören was in brighter spirits, and this reflected in his watercolor class. Sören found himself working on a painting of Auli, and though Alejandro did not like having pictures of himself taken, he nonetheless felt compelled to paint Alejandro into the picture, Auli licking his face as he laughed, the two sitting in a field of wildflowers, everything glowing softly as if they were possessed of some kind of magic.

Periodically Sören got up to see what his students were working on, offering feedback as usual. Símon, a handsome blond in his early twenties, was painting a watercolor of two half-naked men in a sensual pose, which surprised Sören because Símon had previously given no indicator of being gay. "Oh, my," Sören said, pausing at the painting. "That's... really. Something."

Símon *winked* at him.

Sören felt himself blushing as he sat back down, but he was decidedly not interested in Símon. His age and the blond hair and the sportiness of him reminded Sören too much of his ex Justin, and even if none of those factors were in place, Sören felt like he had his hands full enough at the moment without trying to pursue something with one of his students as well. He hoped Símon wasn't actually *flirting* with him.

But of course, he was. When the class let out, Símon lingered past the other students leaving, helping himself to the drinks Sören kept on hand for the students, and finally Sören paused from his cleanup. "Can I help you with something?" Sören asked.

"So, I couldn't help but notice at the solstice party, you had your husband there, but you were also making out with another guy, and he seemed fine with it. Am I correct to assume you're in an open relationship?"

"Yes and no," Sören said, leaning back against a supply drawer, folding his arms. "My husband allows me to see other people, if he knows them and approves."

"Interesting." Símon nodded. "Would you like to go to dinner with me sometime?"

Before Sören could answer and tell him "no, not really," Alejandro poked his head in the door. The conversation between Sören and Símon had been in Icelandic, and Alejandro

didn't speak it fluently, so Sören was quite sure that Alejandro didn't know the full context of what was happening, but Alejandro still gave Símon a wary look, before addressing Sören in English. "You ready to grab lunch?"

Sören nodded. "*Takk.*" *You don't know the weight of that thanks.*He turned to Símon and said, in English, "We'll continue this discussion at another time, all right?"

Símon nodded. "OK." He also gave Alejandro a wary look, probably sizing him up as competition.

"I'll see you next week, já?" Sören managed a smile, trying to be friendly. Símon only took the one class a week, watercolors.

Sören hoped Alejandro didn't look at the table of finished, drying watercolors - he wanted to surprise him with the painting of him and Auli, and today was not that day - but Alejandro's back was to the table. "Shall we go?"

They got in Alejandro's Jaguar and went to the same sandwich shop in Akureyri where they'd gone last week, which Sören was starting to think of as "their usual". They ate outside, people-watching together, making quiet observations to each other like old times. On their way out of the shop, Sören walked to a cart offering various snacks, and got a slushie for himself, making Alejandro cringe.

"You haven't changed at all," Alejandro remarked.

"Nope." Sören slurped his slushie loudly, making Alejandro cringe even more.

"God, that's so bright it's... radioactive." Alejandro made another face.

"No wonder it's so good."

There was a street performer nearby, playing an acoustic guitar, an empty cup in his open case. It was hard to tell if he was busking for the enjoyment of it or because he needed money; he was neither the greatest nor the worst guitarist and singer Sören had ever heard, but Sören felt generous and produced some bills from his wallet to tip him. Alejandro did the same, but Alejandro also put his hand on the guitarist's shoulder and met his eyes, lingering for a moment. "Stay safe," Alejandro told the guitarist in a firm tone of voice, before walking Sören off to the Jaguar.

Sören wondered *what is that about*, and once again, wondered if Alejandro was Force sensitive and knew things, and was doing some kind of magic. *That's ridiculous, isn't it?*

After Sören's children's class - painting sculptures they'd made last week - and Alejandro's second piano class of the day, Sören brought Alejandro into the art room to show him the sculpture of his mother. He'd painted the robe as a night sky with stars, and she wore flower garlands.

"That's beautiful," Alejandro said.

"Can... we go to my mother's grave?"

It seemed odd, coming here with him, as one of the first acts of their friendship-turned-romance ten years ago had been Alejandro taking Sören on a trip so he could put flowers on his mother's grave for her birthday. But it also felt *right*, as if they'd somehow come full circle.

Sören noticed that the small vase with the star symbol on it was still on her grave, and the fireflower roses that had been inside were now replaced with new flowers. Sören once again wondered how it got there, if someone who had been following his work and the recurring symbols made a little token of kindness, which was the most plausible explanation but somehow still didn't seem like the answer. Alejandro gave the vase a funny look, but said nothing.

Sören put the statue on his mother's grave next to the vase, and knelt for a moment. The wind began to blow - Sören was a skeptical agnostic at best, but for a moment he could *swear* she was there, with him - and then Sören felt Alejandro's right hand on his shoulder, comforting, reassuring. He reached up to close his hand over Alejandro's, and without thinking about it, traced and stroked the scars on his hand. Alejandro recoiled, as if he'd been shocked or burned. "I'm... I'm sorry," Sören said, feeling awkward.

Alejandro looked away.

They drove back to their street in silence, and then they lingered at the cabin. "Tell your husband I'll be ready in twenty minutes," Alejandro said, and Sören nodded.

Sören ached to hug Alejandro again - a hug they both needed - but he didn't. Things were already tense and awkward enough, again.

One step forward, four steps back.

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Wednesday

Alejandro brought Sören iced coffee in the morning as usual. Sören had his ceramics class and today was doing something a little different - he brought in a bowl that he'd ended up taking outside, throwing and breaking when he saw his ex Justin on the news, getting some kind of award and accolades, one of the few times in his life Sören had been angry enough to be destructive, triggered, acting out of a flashback he had with Justin's own destruction of his art. Sören didn't explain to his class that this had been the reason for the bowl breaking - he didn't want to talk about Justin to them - so he refrained from explaining the story behind the break.

The bowl wasn't completely destroyed, it was only cracked, and once Dooku had calmed him down, Sören had decided to salvage the bowl, though it had taken him months to get to where he was now, being at a place where he could finally take it out and deal with those memories and the task of repairing it.

Alejandro was peeking in on Sören's class while his students were practicing, and Sören addressed them in English. "There is a Japanese art called *kintsugi*, or *kintsukuroi*, which means 'golden repair'. Cracks in pottery are repaired with a special lacquer prepared with powdered gold, silver, or platinum. I have some of this, and I'll be repairing my bowl with this method." Sören showed them the epoxy, which Dooku had ordered as a special birthday gift for Sören last year, but Sören had not gotten around to using it until now. "The Japanese also have a philosophy called *wabi-sabi*, seeing beauty in what is flawed or imperfect. There's something very symbolic about fixing cracks in pottery this way... like honoring the scars of where we've been. The scars that prove we survived." His eyes met Alejandro's, and then re-focused on his bowl. "There's something about experiencing pain and unkindness, and still being able to find joy and show kindness, that's worth honoring.

It's kept that fire burning in me all these years, though god knows I've wanted to give up more than once. It's often the people who have been through the worst, who shine the brightest, and when you feel like giving up, it's important to remember that - that your story of survival is beautiful and deserves to be here."

He quoted Leonard Cohen:

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in

"Ahhhh, this is why I love coming here," María said, smiling. "You mix art with poetry and philosophy, I love it."

Alejandro's head poked back out of the door, and Sören heard Alejandro tell his class, "Will you excuse me for a few moments? I need to visit the restroom."

Sören absorbed himself in his work, and then he heard guitars again and Alejandro's voice. The time flew by, as it always did in his ceramics class, and Sören was still lining the bowl when his class was over and Alejandro walked in.

"Lunch?" he asked.

Sören nodded.

Sören noticed in the Jaguar. "You've been crying."

"What you said in there."

"Ohhhh." Sören gave him a sympathetic look, and once again ached to hold him. "I didn't mean to upset you -"

"You didn't... upset me." Alejandro swallowed hard, and looked briefly at Sören to look away again.

"I know I made things awkward at the graveyard yesterday when -"

"It was just..." Alejandro's eyes met his. "Too much like old times."

Yes, it was. There was a lot of that, and Sören was feeling something behind the ache to hold him. Something that wasn't wise or sane at all.

They ate lunch at the sandwich shop again, people-watching, and Sören got another slushie to horrify him, snickering at his reaction.

After the sketching class, and Alejandro's second guitar class, Sören said on the way home, "I don't want to go straight home just yet. You feel like going for a little drive?"

"We can do that." Alejandro nodded. "Where to... graveyard again?"

"No. There's a park I used to go when I was a kid. I want to go there."

When they arrived at the park Alejandro called Dooku to let him know he'd be late for their walk. Sören noticed Alejandro kept touching his hair during the conversation, and it was

making Sören want to touch his hair. *I need to show him that painting,* Sören thought to himself, and then decided, *Tomorrow.*

Sören and Alejandro took a walk around the park, with Sören pausing here and there to admire the wildflowers. There was a children's playground, and Sören pulled Alejandro there. Alejandro laughed as Sören climbed onto a swing and began kicking the ground, pumping his legs to gain momentum. "Give me a push," Sören said.

"Oh, my god."

"Give me a *fucking push.*"

Alejandro rolled his eyes, laughed some more, and then got behind Sören, giving him a few pushes, until Sören was soaring as high as the bar on the swing set, leaning back to get the full effect of flying. "Wheeeeee," Sören yelled.

"You are such a big kid."

"You should try it."

"Er."

Sören stuck out his tongue and then blew a raspberry. "Dork."

Sören laughed when Alejandro got on the swing next to him - it was even more ridiculous to see all seven feet of him on the swing, and when Alejandro leaned back, there was all that hair, rippling with the motions back and forth.

Sören *really* wanted to touch his hair now. *Fuck.*

They stayed on the swing set for a few minutes, until a mother with small children approached, and then they climbed off, not wanting to look creepy, but the mother just laughed at them. "You're a cute couple," she told them both.

Sören and Alejandro looked at each other, and Sören's face burned. He thought about saying *we're not*, and Alejandro didn't correct her either, but put his hands on Sören's shoulders, marching him to the Jaguar.

Sören had Alejandro come in when they got back to the cabin, and Dooku made them tea. "We can just go get Auli and then go for a walk, or a drive to the bay, if you want," Alejandro told him.

"That sounds good." Dooku gave Sören a hug and a kiss, and they nuzzled for a moment. Then Dooku lingered, as if he'd been wanting to say this for awhile and hadn't found the right time yet. "Should we have Alejandro as a dinner guest tomorrow?"

"Sure," Sören said, nodding. "And then I assume you guys will be getting together when I'm with Ingmar on Friday night -?"

Dooku and Alejandro looked at each other and nodded. "That's the plan, yes."

"OK, have fun on your excursion, you guys. Give Auli pets for me."*Give Alejandro a hug for me.*

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Thursday

After his second piano lesson, Maglor walked into Sören's art room. Sören gestured for him to have a seat, and retrieved a Sprite and a Pepsi from the mini-fridge. Maglor accepted the Sprite, and watched Sören watching him. A few moments of silence passed, and Sören said, at last, "I have something for you."

It was more art, which didn't surprise him, but *this* art did. He looked a watercolor portrait of himself hugging Auli, the sheepdog enthusiastically licking his face, in a field of wildflowers, everything softly glowing.

He found himself getting choked up. Because even though as a rule, he didn't like pictures of himself being taken, and that extended to serving as a subject for art - it wasn't exactly keeping a low profile, if there were records of himself that could be compared against other records at different points in time - nonetheless, there was that *gift* again, whatever it was Sören had, the ability to paint beyond the immediately obvious outward truth of something, to its deeper reality. Here, was the profound happiness the dog's companionship made him feel.

"Thank you."

"Do you like it?"

"I love it." He swallowed hard. "It'll give me something to remember Auli by, when the summer is over."

"Awwwwwwww, Alejandro." Sören gave him the sad puppy face. "It's so cute the way you love that dog."

Maglor continued looking at the painting. "It's almost like looking at a photograph. Quite impressive, for your first time drawing and painting me."

Sören looked off to the side, and swigged Pepsi.

Maglor's heart skipped a beat. "Sören."

Sören glanced at him, and then off to the side again.

"*Sören.* This isn't the first time you've painted me, have you?"

"No."

Maglor leaned back and folded his arms. "Was it in a gallery anywhere? Did you sell it...?"

"No, and no." Sören met his eyes, finally. "They're in a closet, at home."

"You say they, meaning... more than one...?"

Sören nodded solemnly. "Two."

"I'd like to see them."

I bet you would, Sören broadcasted, and he took another swig of his Pepsi. "Tell you what, since you're coming for dinner and all... you can see them. But I'm not ready to show you them *right now*, and I'm not ready to have that hanging over my head for the next couple hours while Nico gets dinner ready, so... you want to go hang out somewhere?"

"OK."

"I have an idea. Why don't we take Auli to the park we were at yesterday? He'd love it there."

And that was how Maglor found himself at the park with Sören, and Auli in tow. As much as Maglor was loath to let Auli run, after losing him earlier in the week, Sören assured him it would be all right, "people let their dogs run around here all the time." Maglor sat on a bench, watching Auli run, while Sören got on the slide and went down, like a big kid, and then climbed it again and went down. "You should try it," Sören yelled.

Maglor felt ridiculous, but he got on the slide, and Sören behind him, Sören laughing all the way down. A few runs of this and he was laughing too, feeling stupid but somehow, happy, as well. They went on the swings like they did yesterday, and Maglor noticed a middle-aged woman had brought a nice Welsh Corgi into the park. The woman let the Corgi off the leash, and the Corgi began running around happily.

That was when Auli ran up to the Corgi, at first sniffing it, and then Maglor and Sören watched as Auli *mounted* the other dog, the dogs mating right there. Before Maglor could get over there to break it up, the dogs finished with a howl.

"AULI, YOU CANINE HORROR," Maglor yelled, not able to help the outburst - it was all he could do to not start swearing in his native tongue.

Sören was shaking and turning red with silent laughter, and that just made it worse. Maglor shot Sören a look, and the laughter became not-so-silent.

Maglor approached the Corgi's owner, who had the dog back on her leash now, flustered, a little panicked. "Hi," he said, feeling intensely awkward. "I'm... er, sorry... about that..."

"I am too. I hadn't had her fixed, as she is for breeding other Corgis..."

Maglor ran a nervous hand through his hair. "*Yeahhhh.*" He looked at Sören, who was still cackling. "Um. Well... this is what I can do for you." He pulled out a small notebook and pen from his pocket, and jotted down his cell number. "I'm willing to cover any veterinary expenses, if my dog -" It was easier to just say it was his dog, instead of explaining the rental situation with the dogsitting clause. "- got her pregnant. And any other expenses pertaining to the puppies, as they arise."

"*Takk.*" The woman nodded, and gave Maglor her own cell number, with a name attached. "We'll be in touch, já?"

Sören had Auli on the leash now, who was looking infuriatingly satisfied with himself, and when Maglor came over, Sören's laughter started up again.

"You know..."

"I know." Sören beamed. "Your face, though."

Maglor glared again.

"You're so cute." Sören booped his nose.

"I am not cute."

"Yes, yes you are." Sören patted him. "That was kind of you, to offer to pay vet expenses to the lady."

"I... kind of had to. My father always taught me, if you make a mess, you clean it up." It was so odd, speaking of his father now, speaking of his father to someone who was so much like his father it was painful at times. Fëanor would have the *same exact* reaction to this, for example, laughing at Auli's shenanigans and the look on Maglor's face.

Sören held Auli on his lap on the ride back to Svalbarðseyri, and Auli put a paw on each of them, as if to say *Now you guys.*

Maglor's face burned as he thought about the times he'd taken Sören just like that, from behind, Sören bucking against him, the way Sören screamed as he climaxed. They'd experienced every position imaginable, and that particular one was usually reserved for when one or the other was feeling upset by something and needed to *fuck* the pain away.

There was, now, too much pain. And yet, the idea of driving into Sören as he did before... he shuddered.

They dropped off Auli at the cottage, and then back at the cabin, Dooku was a welcome sight. Maglor relaxed in his presence, though there was a thin tension at the back of his mind, making him adjust his posture frequently, smooth his hair...

Dooku had put on metal, which was a nice gesture, and he and Dooku spent the remaining time before dinner talking about metal bands, and concerts they'd both gone to, while Sören looked adorable with his cat on his lap, zoning out a little before dinner.

Dinner was delicious - Dooku had made the *caldo verde* and *bacalhau* recipes that Maglor had taught him last week, and did a phenomenal job. Sören was impressed. Dooku felt too stuffed to go for a walk immediately after dinner, and Sören suggested they watch his brother's TED Talk, which was now up on YouTube.

For the next hour Maglor sat between Dooku and Sören on the couch, Snúður stretched out so he was on both Sören's and Maglor's laps, getting pettings from both, purring loudly. The content of Dagnýr's TED Talk was disturbing and a little unnerving to Maglor personally - talk of aliens having visited Earth, and alternate universes being plausible, with the idea being further explored as travel between universes being possible through quantum energy, dark matter, and that aliens had not come in spaceships but had come via quantum travel, like a form of teleportation.

Maglor of course thought of the chasm between this world and the one he'd come from. The world he would never return to. He was, in essence, a sort of alien.

Oh, Dagnýr. If only you knew.

Maglor needed a stiff drink.

When the TED Talk was over, Dooku poured whiskey for all of them. Though the subject matter of the TED Talk had set Maglor on edge, there was nonetheless something about having sat between the two of them on the couch for an hour that was strangely comforting. He'd expected to feel like a third wheel spending time with Sören and Dooku both, and instead he felt *at home*.

When he'd fallen in love with Sören, years ago, Sören had felt like home to him. He was starting to realize that Dooku, too, had that same feeling. And he had, indeed, been noticing that Dooku was quite handsome - the silver hair, the beard, was exotic to him, distinguished - and *that deep velvet voice*...

It was a feeling he very much did not want. It was bad enough to pine away for Sören, it was worse to have the stirrings of those same kinds of feelings for *Dooku* as well, who was in the sunset of his life and had maybe twenty years at best, realistically far less time if fate was not kind, as it too often was not.

This is fine. Maglor downed his whiskey, bitterly.

"You wanted to see those paintings?" Sören asked, knocking back the whiskey like a shot of courage.

Sören went to the closet and came out with two wrapped bundles. He unwrapped them, and put the first one on the coffee table. It was an oil painting. He was depicted here as a merman, pearls in his hair, around his neck and over his chest, playing a harp, with Sören laying in ship wreckage, on the beach of Reynisfjara, waking up, presumably to the sound of the harp.

Maglor had not once mentioned to Sören that he played harp - the only two instruments he'd mentioned knowing, to Sören, were piano and guitar. There was no way Sören could have known this.

He wasn't a merman, but he was non-human, and though it was from Sören's imagination, it was nonetheless close enough to the truth of what he was to feel exposed.

And then the second painting. His mermaid tail was gone, replaced by human legs... human legs that had the evidence of cum on them. They were laying in the sand, Maglor on his back, Sören riding his cock, a look of ecstasy on their faces; Sören was wearing one of the pearl necklaces, with a pearl leash attached to it, the leash wrapped around Maglor's hand. It was erotic - a reminder of the times Sören had ridden him - but even more than that it was breathtaking, in the aesthetic beauty and the emotion of it, the *love* that had gone into the piece, so long ago.

Sören looked down, flushed bright red.

Maglor could feel himself flushing, as well. Dooku, bless him, was in the kitchen making tea, giving them as private a moment as they could get in the small cabin. Maglor didn't know what to say. He felt too many things, then, fighting the urge to break down and cry.

"There's a third painting that goes with them. It's... it's not quite like the other two."

The third had a human heart on the beach, blooding the black sand, while a kraken loomed in raging waves, under a stormy sky.

Maglor's heart went in his throat. He could feel the pain, the*rage*, that had gone into this painting. A vision in his mind's eye of Sören painting with his headphones on - Kanye West? some of his angrier, more aggressive songs? - and with every stroke... *how dare you. how dare you walk away from me, how dare you walk back into my life like this. how dare you make me still* feel for you *five years later. you destroyed me. I will not let you destroy me again.*

The fury in Sören's dark eyes, dark like a volcanic mountain.

If I knew what I knew in the past
I would have been blacked out on your ass

The thunder of the drums, the rising waves, a threatening tidal wave.

Maglor looked away, forcing himself to step out of that part of the Song, that was enough now.

There was a long silence. Sören had the paintings wrapped up again and back in the closet when Dooku brought tea.

If Maglor had been able to say *anything* - and what was there to say, to all of that? - he couldn't say it in front of Dooku, now. Sören stared into his tea, looking sad rather than angry now, broadcasting sorrow and exhaustion instead of the rage that had gone into the third painting.

Dooku navigated the awkward silence deftly, bringing up their time tomorrow. "What would you like to make this time?"

"We did Portuguese food last week, so if you want to make something Romanian..."

"That sounds fair."

There were some pleasantries about how his guitar and piano classes were going, and at last, Maglor decided to return home, sensing Sören needed to unplug emotionally, and he did as well.

"I'll walk you over," Dooku told him, and smiled. Maglor gave a little smile back, and felt that pang of guilt for finding Dooku attractive. *Being attracted.* Wanting both of them, and it was a terrible idea to even want one, never mind both, *two* mortals who would be dead and gone...

Sören got up, and they paused at the door. Dooku stepped outside to give them another moment.

"The first two paintings were beautiful," Maglor told him, truthfully. "The third was... well... it's hard to describe in words. But you don't know how sorry I am for the pain I've caused you, and it means a lot to me that you're trying to be friends."

Sören nodded; he'd been looking down, and then he looked up, again. He reached for Maglor's hand - the scarred one - and held it for a moment. Just a brief moment, but long enough for Maglor to feel that sharp pang of arousal, wanting nothing more than to slam Sören against the wall and kiss him until they couldn't kiss anymore. "It means a lot to me

that you came here, to try to be friends." A small, sad smile.

"I'll see you on Monday."

Sören nodded. "Have a good weekend, Alejandro."

Maglor lingered for a few seconds, again, fighting off the urge to kiss Sören, make it better somehow, but he *could not*, and he sensed he would be rebuffed if he did, anyway.

He walked alongside Dooku, in silence. Feeling less comfortable with the old man than he did before. Because he *wanted*. And that never worked out for him. He could not allow himself hope. He could only allow himself the little bit of warmth, of friendship that was offered. That would have to be good enough.

Chapter 22

Friday

Dooku was woken up not by the alarm, but by Sören gently rubbing his chest - fingers combing the chest hair, playing with it - and raining sweet, soft little kisses all over his face. When Sören kissed the tip of his nose, Dooku smiled, and stretched. He watched through not-yet-fully-awake eyes as Sören leaned over to turn off the alarm, and rolled back next to him.

"Usually I'm up before you," Dooku said, stroking Sören's face, "watching you sleep."

Sören nodded. "This time I watched you sleep. I woke up a little while ago." He resumed giving Dooku little kisses, and then at last, claimed his mouth. When he did, Dooku felt Sören's hard-on rubbing against his thigh. Dooku groaned into the kiss, hands roaming over Sören's back and ass, squeezing the firm, perfect bubble as his own cock began to harden.

"Mmmmm." Sören kissed him again, and started kissing his neck. "I want you."

Dooku laughed softly, kissing him back. "You are insatiable." They had made love for close to two hours last night, before going to sleep, and here Sören was again, hungry for more. Dooku once again marveled that he'd been slightly concerned Sören's interest would wane when he gave Sören permission to see other people, and instead the opposite had happened - Sören was even more passionate with him now, his appetite stronger, as if the more he had, the more he wanted.

Not that Dooku minded, pulling down Sören's pajama bottoms as Sören pulled his down, their hard cocks sliding together. Sören was already leaking precum - a delicious sight, made more delicious as Sören's precum dripped onto Dooku's own cock in little streamers.

Sören's T-shirt and Dooku's pajama top landed on the floor alongside the bottoms, and Dooku didn't even bother to use the Force to fold them neatly. Instead, he used the Force to bring over their bottle of lube, as Sören straddled his hips, Sören's hands on his chest again, playing with the silver pelt.

Dooku propped himself against the pillows so he was half-lying down, half-sitting up, and Sören poured lube over Dooku's cock and massaged it slowly, leaning down to kiss him as his hand worked its magic. Dooku's hands ran over Sören's naked body, enjoying the feel of his soft, smooth skin, his lithe, slender frame. Then, two slick fingers slipped into Sören, as Dooku's free hand continued to caress. Sören moaned and fucked himself on Dooku's fingers, rocking his hips; Dooku always found the prostate right away, rubbing in slow circles, and across their Force bond he could feel Sören's pleasure, already close to the edge.

Then Dooku realized, with how ready Sören was already... His lips quirked with amusement as he raised an eyebrow. "Were you touching yourself?"

Sören nodded, giving a guilty grin, biting his lower lip. "Thinking about you."

Dooku groaned at the luscious mental image of Sören lazily stroking himself as he fantasized. They kissed again, and Dooku gave a playful hard swat to Sören's ass,

making Sören gasp and then buck against his fingers harder, faster. "I need you in me *now*," Sören rasped.

Dooku guided his cock to Sören's opening; Sören took his hands and sank down on his cock, slowly. Dooku moaned at the sight of Sören's channel swallowing down his cock, and again when he was buried to the hilt inside him. Sören leaned in to kiss him, hard, and Dooku wrapped his arms around Sören, kissing back. Sören began to ride, slowly, and then sped up, biting his lip, giving Dooku a naughty look through hooded, hungry eyes.

Soon Sören was riding him hard, and Dooku drove into him, panting, gasping, the sweetness of Sören wrapped around him almost too much to bear. Sören's broken cries and the slap of their flesh brought him close to the edge and he stayed there, wanting Sören to come first, wanting to drink this to the dregs, savor the slick velvet heat of him and the sight of his wild beauty lost in the throes of passion. Dooku's hands caressed Sören's body, making Sören tremble and moan, and his fingers lingered at the nipples, playing with the nipple rings he found so alluring. When Dooku leaned up to draw a nipple into his mouth, the wail that came out of Sören almost set him off right then and there. He grabbed Sören's hips and slowed them both down, teasing, his tongue lapping Sören's nipple before suckling, then gently tugging the ring with his teeth, suckling again. Sören was gasping for breath now, clutching his head, quivering.

"Nico..."

"Almost there, love." Dooku turned his head to the other nipple, to pleasure that as well. "You're so beautiful. Want to enjoy you..." He suckled, hard.

"Oh, Nico, *fuck*..."

Dooku's fingers collected Sören's precum, dripping even more copiously from the head of Sören's cock down the shaft, and he stuck his fingers in Sören's mouth, groaning appreciatively at the sight of Sören's full lips sucking like he would a cock. He kissed Sören, tasting it, as his fingers collected more precum and anointed Sören's swollen nipples. He lowered his head to feast on them, licking, sucking, and Sören let out a strangled sob, nails digging into Dooku's arms.

"I need to *come*," Sören howled.

"I'm sure you do." Dooku tugged on a nipple ring with his teeth again, licked some more, and then his tongue traced upwards, from Sören's chest all the way up his neck, amused and aroused by the way Sören shivered, the little whimpers he made at the licking across his flesh. He nibbled Sören's neck, and at the plaintive cry Sören made, he chuckled, giving in. "Ride me, darling. Hold nothing back."

Sören pushed Dooku back down onto the pillows, keeping his hands on Dooku's chest, and his hips rocked as hard and fast as they could, giving Dooku the ride of his life. Dooku felt the orgasm building, his body shaking - even his thighs were quivering - and the harder he resisted, wanting Sören to come first, the more intense the sensation, winding deep and high, ready to explode. When Sören erupted, white-hot cum spraying all over his chest and stomach, Dooku let go with a hoarse shout, spending deep into Sören's clenching, throbbing channel, and for a moment, the world seemed to dissolve into light.

He came back still panting, trying to catch his breath, Sören shaking in his arms; he could feel Sören's toes curling against his feet, and he smiled, then gave another groan as he felt Sören contract around him again, which triggered an aftershock pulse of his own

climax, so intense it almost *hurt*. Sören lifted his face, smiled, and nuzzled him, before planting a soft, sweet kiss on the tip of his nose.

"Good morning," Sören mumbled.

Dooku laughed out loud. He patted Sören's ass. "It is a good morning, yes."

Sören rested his head on Dooku's shoulder for a few minutes and Dooku rocked him, arms tightening around him. Across his mind's eye, a vision of Sören-not-Sören laying against him just like this, the room glowing after a surge of brilliant light like the one he'd just seen. *No matter who else I love, you are always the light of my soul, my Ñolo.*

Dooku's consciousness snapped back, and he chewed on that thought for a moment. He had always wondered why Sören had called him Nico - something no one else had ever called him, indeed few people even called him Nicolae - and now he pondered if, on a subconscious level, Sören called him that because it was close enough to this *Ñolo* name, whatever it was, a remnant from a past incarnation together.

The thought that they'd found their way back to each other, somehow, was deeply comforting. Dooku let out a soft sigh of contentment, and nuzzled Sören's curls, planted a kiss in them.

"That was fucking awesome," Sören said, finally, stretching out like a cat.

"It was." Dooku smiled. He stroked Sören's face. "I must say, I'm enjoying seeing this new fire in you."

"It's a little scary. I've always been a horndog, I know, but lately..." Sören gave a shy little smile. "This is more than my usual."

They sat up together, and lingered for a moment, holding each other. Then Sören said, "So... tonight is Ingmar night for me."

Dooku nodded. "That's just as well, because I think you did me in for the rest of the day."

Sören laughed. "Ohhhh, I think I could get you going again if I really wanted to." He got up and gave a playful shake of his ass. Then he grinned over his shoulder. "But you can wait till tomorrow when I'm back. It's more fun that way, anyway."

Dooku gave Sören's ass a playful swat. "Tease."

"You love it." Then Sören laughed out loud as the smack made the cum start leaking out of him, puddling onto the floor. "Oh god."

"Oh dear."

"I better... clean up the rest of this."

Dooku didn't know what came over him suddenly - perhaps the energy of Sören's increased sex drive and newfound swagger - but he heard himself saying, "Well, I might have plans for it."

And that was how Sören ended up with his thighs on Dooku's shoulders, sucking Dooku off as his tongue worked slowly and deliberately inside Sören's channel, licking up the deposit of seed he'd left, driving Sören crazy with each stroke of his tongue, until they

came together, clenching each other's hands as the passion exploded.

Dooku felt like he couldn't move, after. The first orgasm was intense, and a second orgasm just as shattering... He was vaguely aware of Sören getting ready to go to the studio, and then a fully clothed Sören leaning over him, giggling, as he rained more kisses over his face and gently tucked him in. "See you later, sleepyhead."

Dooku managed a weak mumble in response. He woke up a couple hours later, to Snúður wanting attention. He dragged himself out of bed, still feeling like jelly on legs. He was smiling as he made tea in the kitchen area. For now, the ever-present dread of his own mortality was far away.

For now.

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Ingmar attended Sören's Friday ceramics class in the afternoon, and it was all Sören could do to keep his hands off him, not throw Ingmar onto the table and ride him there in front of everyone, not caring. When Ingmar dropped Sören off at the cabin so they could both take time to change and get ready for their date, Sören kissed him hard, and it turned into a passionate makeout session, kissing and groping, until Ingmar gave him a gentle push, a few last soft kisses. "We have time for that later," he said.

"Oh, all right." Sören gave him a sad look, then a grin, and one last kiss before he hopped out of the Bentley.

Dooku was in a good mood, and he and Sören hugged and kissed warmly when Sören got in. Dooku was already ready to go to the cottage, but would wait to walk Sören over. Sören took a shower first, and then changed into the leather pants and the black ruffly shirt that seemed to be his go-to outfit for date night.

Sören added a few drops of Kyoto, and a little touch of eyeliner and mascara, and he was good to go. He grabbed the leash and collar on the way out, gave a few last skritches and kisses to Snúður, and hand in hand, Dooku and Sören walked up the street.

Alejandro let them in. Auli came over for pettings, and Sören stooped to pet Auli until Ingmar approached, giving a soft clear of his throat.

Though Sören and Ingmar were not going to stop seeing each other to make Alejandro comfortable, they also had decided after last week's fiasco to be a bit more reserved in Alejandro's presence. So Ingmar simply took Sören's hand, and Sören gave a polite wave as Ingmar walked him out to the Bentley.

They went to the same seafood restaurant as they had last week, though it was not food Sören was hungry for. After the restaurant, Sören and Ingmar went back to Ingmar's hotel room, and after Ingmar took a few minutes in the bathroom, he retrieved a bottle of champagne. He turned on the fireplace in their hotel room, though it was not chilly tonight, and lit candles around the room for further ambiance. Sören noticed that Ingmar had likely been in the room before the ceramics class started, preparing - there was bedding in front of the fireplace, a pile of pillows.

They curled up together in front of the fireplace, naked, drinking champagne. Before Sören's glass was completely drained, he had a moment of feeling mischievous, and poured the remnants over Ingmar's chest, pushing him back against the pillows, licking it

off. Ingmar groaned beneath the work of Sören's tongue, and then he dribbled a little of his glass over his now-hard cock, groaning more deeply as Sören licked that, too, not wanting any to go to waste. Sören lapped up precum, and came up to kiss Ingmar, who then poured out the rest of his glass over Sören's chest and rolled Sören onto his back to give him the same treatment, Sören arching to him and moaning, clutching Ingmar's head as he cleaned the champagne with slow, deliberate strokes of his tongue.

Ingmar took the bottle and poured more champagne onto Sören's body, licking him all over, until Sören was writhing, gasping "please..."

But Ingmar wasn't done yet. He rolled Sören onto his stomach and poured champagne over his back. When Ingmar's tongue dipped inside him, Sören screamed into the pillows, grabbing them with white-knuckled. "Please, take me..."

Ingmar's response was to get a bottle of oil that had been warming by the fireplace. He drizzled the oil over Sören's shoulders and back, and began to rub it in. It was just like that first night they were together four years ago, but this time they would take all night, and this time Sören felt even more cared for.

Sex was not love, but nonetheless there was something in Ingmar's touch, and indeed, the way he knew just what Sören needed - that he needed something like this, after the whirlwind of the past month... and Sören sensed that somehow he'd need something like this to hold onto for whatever the next whirlwind was on the horizon - that made Sören feel safe with him, trust him, surrender to him. He was definitely a little in love with Ingmar, not something he would tell him right now, not wanting to face possible rejection and ruin the good thing they had going, but Sören soaked up the tenderness of his touch, the affection that he'd been starved for too much of his life - he'd only had a precious few years of being loved, being treated as lovable.

And Sören, in turn, wanted to make this good for him, wanted to return that same care, that same tenderness, attentiveness to Ingmar's needs. When Ingmar had massaged Sören both back and front, Sören worked on Ingmar's back, hard cock rubbing against his backside, giving little kisses in the wake of where his fingers had been, smiling as Ingmar shivered. When Ingmar was on his back, looking up at him, Sören took a moment to stroke his face and kiss him deeply, before pouring oil over his chest and stomach and thighs. Rubbing, kneading, in circles, spirals. "Beautiful," Sören husked as his hands worked over him. "You are a work of art, Ingmar. You are a vision made flesh." He planted a kiss on Ingmar's chest, over his heart.

His lips lingered there, on Ingmar's heart, until Ingmar grabbed Sören's curls, pulling him up, and kissed him roughly. Sören cried out into the kiss, cock throbbing, and cried out again as he felt his cock slide against Ingmar's.

Ingmar pushed him onto his back now, the two kissing deeply, hungrily, as their cocks rubbed together. Sören arched to him again, panting for it, legs spread. Then he remembered the collar and leash, which he'd left on the bed, not thinking. And, without thinking, too caught up in the passion of the moment, the leash and collar sailed behind Ingmar's back and landed gently on the floor near them. *Oh shit,* Sören thought to himself, swallowing hard. Before he could nudge with the Force to move the leash and collar back to the bed, Ingmar reached for the champagne near them, and saw the leash and collar.

He said nothing about how it got there, and Sören wondered if he hadn't in fact noticed, or if he was choosing to not make a big deal of it right now. Ingmar instead poured them each a flute of champagne, sitting up a little, and Sören sat up as well. After they drained their glasses, they kissed again, and then Sören felt Ingmar put the collar around his

neck, clipping the leash through. Gently, Ingmar pushed Sören back against the pillows, leash wrapped around his hand, stroking Sören's face and petting his curls as they resumed kissing, their cocks rubbing together again.

Then their eyes met. "Relax," Ingmar said.

Sören wondered if that was a signal that he knew and it was fine, or if he didn't know but had sensed tension. Either way, Sören responded to the command, trusting him, letting his muscles uncoil a bit.

"Good boy," Ingmar said, and leaned in to kiss him again.

Sören wrapped his arms around him, bucking up against him, rubbing more insistently. "*Please*," Sören gasped between kisses.

Ingmar kissed, licked, and nibbled his neck. "We have all night, darling."

"Please. I *need.*" Their eyes met again, and Sören husked, "I need *you.*"

Ingmar kissed him hard, and Sören's nails dug into his back. Ingmar retrieved the oil once more, and poured over Sören's opening. Sören whimpered as he felt the warm oil dripping inside him, shuddering as he thought of what it would feel like when Ingmar at last came inside him. "Please, please," Sören panted.

Ingmar began to push into him, slowly, and when he was all the way inside, they kissed again, and then Ingmar's lips lingered between kisses, giving Sören a sultry look. He came down to kiss Sören deeply as he took his first few thrusts, achingly slowly, making Sören melt to him.

Even with taking it slow, Sören was so worked up from all of the teasing, and the feeling of intimacy and trust, and now the sweet rubbing against his prostate, that he was undone in a matter of minutes, coming. "*Elskan*," he cried out, not able to help it, as he exploded, splattering Ingmar's chest and stomach with his seed. Ingmar took a few more thrusts, bringing Sören even higher, deeper, until Sören was sobbing, trembling, contracting and contracting. Ingmar rested in him, still hard, giving Sören a moment to recover.

Then he fluttered sweet kisses over Sören's face, a soft, lingering kiss on Sören's mouth. Their mouths parted and tongues danced again, and Sören let out an "mmmmm" as the kiss heated.

When they pulled apart, Sören stammered, "I'm sorry, I -"

Ingmar grinned. "I'm not."

Sören blushed, biting his lower lip, crinkling his nose - and then noticed the way Ingmar was looking at him when he did that. He could feel Ingmar *jolt* inside him, cock harder, pulsing. Despite the predatory look in Ingmar's eyes as he watched Sören's shy, almost-innocent reaction, his touch was gentle across Sören's face, down to his chest. "I want to please you," Ingmar said, and his hand lingered there, over Sören's heart. Sören took his hand and squeezed. Ingmar leaned in and whispered, "You'll come again," before claiming his mouth once more.

"I want to make *you* come," Sören husked between kisses, his cock already standing at attention, recovered and ready for more. "We'll come together."

Ingmar kissed him harder, and began to thrust again, this time harder and faster than before, but not as hard as it would go, later. Sören wrapped his arms and legs around Ingmar, arching to him, rolling his hips to match Ingmar's rhythm. He admired the beauty of Ingmar in the firelight, candlelight, the play of light and shadows across his perfect body and lovely face - and for an instant, his gaze wandered to the fire itself, their bodies moving in the same rhythm of the flames.

Burn with me. Sören held on tight, crying out as the flames danced faster and Ingmar's rhythm sped up, more aggressive. "Yes, yes, *yes, more*..."

–

The shopping bag Dooku had brought to Alejandro's contained a number of food items, as well as a fresh bottle of Brennivín which he'd brought as a gift.

Dinner was *ardei umpluţi*, Romanian stuffed peppers - there were red, green, and yellow bell peppers, and Dooku's mother's recipe called for beef or pork, wild rice, tomato, onion, cream and spices. For dessert there would be *papanasi prajiti*, fried doughnuts with cottage cheese and jam. Dooku and Alejandro worked well together in the kitchen, listening to the metal station as they prepared ingredients and cooked. Dooku felt a little pang that they only had little over a month before Vigdís and Páll would come back from their trip in the States, and then... Alejandro would be gone.

I'll miss him.

It wasn't that he didn't like his neighbors, but he connected with Alejandro in a way he didn't connect with them. They had a glass of red wine as they waited for the food to finish up, and Alejandro noticed Dooku looking pensive.

"Króna for your thoughts," Alejandro said.

"Oh." Dooku frowned. "I was just thinking... you only have a month left, here, and I'd..." He swallowed hard. "I'd like to keep in touch with you when you leave, wherever it is you go."

Alejandro was quiet at that, and Dooku worried for a moment that he'd said the wrong thing, but then Alejandro said, "I'll see what I can do." At Dooku's puzzled look, he explained, "I'm actually not sure *where* I'm going, when they come back."

Stay. Dooku wanted to slap himself for reacting like that, especially with how much that reaction was similar to the way he'd gotten attached to Sören so quickly, in 2017.

Indeed, this was like Sören all over again, except not. Dooku sipped his wine, not liking where this train of thought was taking him; his cheeks were flushed from more than just the wine.

"Don't you have someplace to go back to?" Dooku raised an eyebrow. He leaned back in his chair. "You were in the States, right?"

"Did Sören tell you that?"

"No, I can tell from your accent. I observe people. Observation was a large part of my job description for four decades."

"Hm." Alejandro sipped his wine. "I was in the States. Alaska, to be precise."

Dooku was surprised by that - he would have thought someplace like New York or Los Angeles for a musician. On the other hand, neither of those places *felt right*, for what he sensed of Alejandro's energy. Of course he'd want to be somewhere out of the way, somewhere in the beauty of nature. That was something Dooku himself could appreciate, thriving on his life here in rural Iceland after the hectic pace of London.

"Did you like it?" Dooku asked.

"I was too depressed to really like anything, but I suppose."

"I'm sorry to hear that. I know depression is a common affliction of creative people."

"Particularly those with a broken heart." Alejandro downed his glass.

Saved by the bell - the timer went off and they checked the food, which was ready to be served. They ate outside, enjoying the warm weather and the glow of the midnight sun, and Auli ran around and didn't beg too much.

"It's nice to see he's behaving," Dooku said between bites of food.

"Barely." Alejandro rolled his eyes. "He, ah." He sipped on another glass of wine. "Had a little fun at the park yesterday."

"Oh really."

Alejandro nodded. "There was a Corgi there. Auli... er."

Dooku's eyes widened and his laughter rang out. "Oh no. *Oh no.*"

"Oh yes. I got the dog owner's number and offered to pay any veterinary expenses, if the Corgi turns out to be pregnant. I didn't know what else to do."

"That was generous of you."

"Well, it's like I told Sören yesterday, my father taught me that if you make a mess, you clean it." Alejandro looked off into the distance. "I suppose that is the entire reason why I'm here."

Dooku waited a moment, choosing his words carefully. Then he said, "I'm not glad that Sören had his heart broken and suffered like he did, and I imagine it wasn't an easy time for you either."

"No, it was not."

Their eyes met. "But I'm glad you're here. I'm glad I got the chance to meet you."

Alejandro held out his glass, and their glasses touched. He managed a small smile. "So am I."

–

After the wonderful meal, they took Auli for a walk, then returned to the cottage and sat together on the couch, perusing Vigdís and Páll's selection of DVDs, as well as the few Maglor had brought with him from Alaska. Neither of them seemed much in the mood to watch anything that was available, and then Dooku said, "Their TV can use the wi-fi, yes?

Like if we wanted to watch YouTube?"

"Yes." Maglor nodded.

Dooku's lips quirked. "Have you ever watched *Metalocalypse*?"

"What?" Maglor was confused.

"I see not. Well then..." Dooku grabbed the remote and after fiddling with it and not being able to figure it out, Maglor took the remote and got it to load YouTube. Maglor typed "metalocalypse" into the search bar.

"It's a cartoon?" Maglor couldn't believe Dooku was asking him to watch a cartoon.

"It's a cartoon about a *metal band*. Sören got me into it shortly after I moved out here. He said, I quote, 'All citizens of Scandinavian countries are required by law to watch this.' He was joking, obviously..."

"Obviously." Maglor felt a little pang; he'd missed Sören's humor, which included Scandinavian jokes.

"But I thought since you and I both like metal, this might be enjoyable to you."

Dooku opened the bottle of Brennivín he'd brought, and poured them each a shot glass, throwing the horns to make a toast. Maglor threw the horns back and they laughed as they drank.

And that was how Maglor found himself watching *Metalocalypse*, on the couch next to Dooku, with Auli curled up between them. Dooku decided to start him in order, and they binge-watched the first six episodes. Maglor enjoyed it more than he thought he would, knowing a few things about the excesses of the music industry, enjoying the way the show satirized it - he found himself laughing so hard he teared up during "Dethfam", crying a little as he remembered his own family and their antics in the days before the Doom, missing them and the joy and fun they once had, but also laughing hysterically at the ridiculousness of the Dethklok family album.

They'd each had a second shot of Brennivín halfway through, and as they pet Auli together, their hands occasionally brushed. Maglor could smell Dooku's cologne, which was delicious and inviting. He was getting more acutely aware of the proximity, the warmth, and starting to feel a little aroused. This was not good.

"That was great," Dooku said after "Dethfam" ended.

"That wasn't great." Maglor smiled despite himself. "That was... *BRUTAL.*"

Dooku threw the horns, and they laughed together.

"Do you want to watch another episode?" Dooku asked.

"In a bit, maybe?"

Dooku put on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Auli got up, went to get food and water, and then he climbed up on Maglor. Comforted by the snuggling sheepdog, Maglor wrapped his arms around him, and relaxed a little.

"So..." Dooku said, "what were you doing in Alaska?"

Even though he didn't use the Alejandro Magalhães identity in Alaska and kept as low a profile as he could, there had been of course Google listing his business, so there was a non-zero chance that if Dooku fished hard enough he could find Mark Lowry, and that was not something Maglor was prepared to deal with just yet. He decided on the version of the truth that was more emotionally revealing than revealing of what he'd been doing for a living there, even though the emotional truth was more uncomfortable, more raw. "Watching the Northern Lights and grieving the loss of mine."

Dooku sighed, and nodded. "It was difficult for him too, from what he told me."

"Yeah."

"It was intensely difficult during the few months he and I were separated." Dooku looked away.

"I bet." And then, emboldened by the alcohol, Maglor's curiosity finally got the better of him. "You know..."

"Hm?"

"You don't seem like the kind of guy who... you know." Maglor made a vague hand gesture, not wanting to come right out and say it, not wanting to *be reminded* of the way Ingwion had found Sören. But it was clear Dooku didn't know what he was on about, so he had to go there. "Goes to gay clubs looking to pick up men."

"I'm not," Dooku said. "And neither are you, are you?"

"Very much not. I don't do casual sex." Not even sex with Ingwion could be considered casual - theirs was indeed the most complicated and messy of the arrangements Maglor had known in his lifetime.

"So, we seem to be rather the exception to Sören's history. I imagine there's an interesting story behind how you and he met."

"He didn't tell you?"

"You've been a difficult, painful subject for him, so no, he didn't tell me. I only know that you were involved, that you lived together, traveled together, and the circumstances of your breakup."

"It was Reykjavik, 2009. I'd been in the country for about six months, was playing the odd show here and there. Sören was at a coffeehouse one night and he worked with oil pastels as I played, inspired by what I was playing. He gave the finished product to me, and I was impressed, both by the thoughtfulness of the gesture and the quality of the work." *The way he'd seen into my head, somehow.* "We started up a friendship. It became more."

"That's beautiful."

"It was beautiful, while it lasted." Maglor had another shot of Brennivín, even though he was already buzzed between that and the wine. "Now, what about you? How did you and Sören meet?"

"London, fall 2017. My dear friend Leja, who is my goddaughter, was opening her gallery. Sören had a show there, and I admired several of his paintings, and told him as much. I then found him in the bathroom, having a panic attack. Crying."

Little alarm bells went off in Maglor's head. That was *not* like the Sören he knew. Sören could be shy, yes, neither of them liked crowds, but not once in the time they'd been together, in all of Sören's showings during those years, had there been a meltdown like that. Just the opposite. *Something* happened *between the time we broke up and the time Dooku found him.* He sipped the Brennivín, not liking what he was sensing. *Something,* someone, *broke his spirit.*

"We struck up a friendship from there," Dooku said, cutting back into his thoughts. "I found myself drawn to him, which was... surprising to me because I normally don't let people in past an arm's length. I wasn't one for relationships, let alone..." He didn't need to go on; Maglor was aware of the nature of their relationship. Dooku flushed, and worked on his shot glass. "I fell in love with him. Despite our age difference, despite coming from two different worlds. He stole my heart. As he undoubtedly stole yours, years ago."

He still has it. Maglor nodded solemnly.

"It was like a magnet being drawn to metal." Dooku swirled the Brennivín around in his glass. "It was finding a piece of myself that I didn't know was missing."

"Yes, very much like that," Maglor heard himself saying aloud, and then wished he could take those words back.

But they were said, and their eyes met again. "You never really get over someone like that."

"No, you don't." It was comforting and painful all at once to know that Dooku understood, and sympathized with him. That they, both, had been transformed by Sören's fire and would never be the same again.

"I was drawn to his art first," Dooku said, leaning back in his chair. "If one believes in love at first sight... looking back on it now, I think I fell in love with him the moment I saw those paintings in the gallery. Laying eyes on Sören himself, of course, and getting to know the beautiful person who created such beautiful work... there was that, as well. But in those first moments where I wandered the gallery, feeling like he'd reached in and bared something in my soul with his work..."

"It does that." Maglor nodded, remembering. He nursed his shot glass, debated having another, and decided he'd had enough. He was already feeling exposed enough, and at that point where he wasn't quite able to stop. He had a feeling that if Dooku asked him who he really was, he'd end up telling him, in this state.

And yet, you will not tell him of your feelings for him.

...Can you not.

Maglor looked at Dooku, and said, "But you're just a patron of the arts, not an artist yourself...?"

"I write, these days," Dooku said, "though it's not the same as painting or making music."

"But it's still an act of creation."

"Yes. Something that... I never would have seen myself doing, honestly, but once I retired, I had to figure out what I was going to do with myself - it's hard to start over with a new career at my age, in a brand new country. And I guess you could say Sören's creative energy had some sort of effect on me."

You have no idea. "Mmm. What were you doing before?"

"I was a barrister."

"Crown Prosecution, or defense?"

"Defense." Dooku nodded. "I know there's a bit of a stigma against criminal defense, but I had my reasons for going into that branch of law."

Maglor waited, and Dooku went on. Maglor got the sense that it wasn't just him who was loosening up under the influence. "When I was a young lad at boarding school," Dooku said, "back in the early 1960s, I had a bit of an unrequited crush on my roommate. We had an exam and he stole an answer sheet, I found out he had it and urged him to give it back, and he said he would file false charges against me. Inappropriate behavior, when I had never been that way towards him, and would additionally lie and say I was the one who had stolen the sheet. He didn't get to make those charges, only because I had the foresight to pull the fire alarm before he could go in to report me."

"Oh."

"It gets worse - after his expulsion, he came back and he and his friends set my room on fire while I was in it. I escaped with my life."

"That's awful."

"I'm afraid to say that it was not the first time I'd experienced bullying at that school. I was a disappointment to my parents, as well, especially my father - well, you don't want to hear about that." Dooku pinched the bridge of his nose and downed his glass, setting the shot glass down on the table. "Anyway... what I took away from that experience at boarding school is that for a twist of fate - the right timing - I could have, and would have, been punished for something I didn't do, and though the social structure in the UK is such that a man of my class would have had a better crash landing following expulsion than someone else in a lower class being expelled from school or fired from their job, it still would have negatively impacted my life. And of course I attended Oxford starting in the late 1960s, and though I was a 'square' who kept a conservative appearance and didn't do drugs, for the sake of my schooling, I still developed fairly left-leaning values, a passion for civil rights, in the climate of the era, and studying the way many disenfranchised, marginalized people had been accused of crimes they didn't commit, punished for crimes they didn't commit, *or* had committed crimes but often had been pushed into that lifestyle because they really had no other options. So it was that I went into law to stand up for those who couldn't defend themselves. Of course, there are always people who do wrong for the wrong reasons, feel no remorse, and *should* be punished, and I always had a sick feeling when I defended those people. But I had said many times over the course of my career that I would defend the 99 people who willingly had done something wrong, to acquit the one who was there on false charges... and to keep the justice system running as it should, a fair trial for everyone. And those who were not sociopaths but had been pushed into a criminal act or lifestyle because of poverty and other societal ills, I tried to do what I could, pulling strings where I could, to get them some kind of help. I cared. Perhaps too much, at times."

Dooku was a calm, quiet man, but there was a power behind his words, a latent fire burning, hard and bright as a diamond. Maglor had chills down his spine. He already liked Dooku - more than he should, and more than just platonically - and now... he thought of the way Fingolfin had sworn himself to Fëanor's cause, even when they were damned and doomed, not simply because of the love of Fëanor, but the love of justice itself, the *anger* that burned against the Valar, punishing the Noldor for their pride, hypocrites, the Valar the most prideful and arrogant of all.

Maglor didn't know what to say to all of that. He*couldn't* say anything, tongue-tied, feeling a little bit of awe in the presence of this mortal, the way he had felt awe in the presence of his uncle.

Indeed, it had been Fingolfin's heart that Fëanor loved. Maglor had no doubt that, despite the age difference and their very different backgrounds, Sören had been drawn to Dooku's sense of justice, hatred of oppression. Sören was so very much like his father, and Dooku like Fingolfin.

Dooku's voice cut into his thoughts again. "I've lived a rather boring life, until comparatively recently, under wigs and robes, arguing all the time."

"I wouldn't call that boring at all."

"I wasn't really living. I didn't have much of anything outside my career, and the sacrifices I made for it. For example, I was single until Sören. If I had risked a relationship back in the 1970s, 80s, even the 1990s, it would have been career suicide, with my orientation and the potential for being outed."

"That's indeed unfortunate." Maglor nodded. He had, of course, lived a very long time, and had kept a rein on his own appetites because of societal attitudes being what they were over the centuries. The last time he'd allowed himself to touch mortal flesh in that way, before Sören, had been ancient Rome, and people died much younger then than they did these days. And the average age of mortality today was still far too soon, for an Elf.

Gods, it had been too long, drying up inside. Sören's fire on the dry, parched dying weeds of his life had been quite the inferno.

"But you." Dooku gestured to him. "You're a little more than half my age, and you've tasted far more of life than I have." *And of Sören,* Dooku broadcasted. Maglor's cheeks flushed. "And I imagine you must have had quite a colorful life, as a musician."

"Colorful would be one way of putting it." He thought, with a pang, of how his connection to the Song had all but died after the breakup with Sören, and just being in proximity to him, it had started to come back again. "It was at its most colorful, in the sense of vibrant, when Sören and I were together."

Dooku waited, and Maglor went on. "Sören and I... our bond wasn't just physical, wasn't just emotional. There was a real *connection* he and I had, I suppose you could call it on a spiritual level. We created together - I would compose music, he would paint. Hours at a time, sometimes going a couple of days, setting up a little nest in the living room so we could at least stay properly hydrated and nourished in our mutual fever. We synced up... it was like a symbiotic relationship. In the latter half of our years together, we had occasional shows where his work would be displayed and I'd perform while he painted, live, with the painting going to the highest bidder. Those were amazing experiences that *fed* both of us. And it wasn't simply that we seemed to be attuned to the same cycle

of when our muse would strike, and one would play into the other... Sören and I seemed to inhabit the same creative sphere, itself." Maglor couldn't believe he was going this much into detail. "Sören and I... both have synaesthesia. Synaesthesia isn't terribly uncommon among creative people, but if you put twenty synaesthetes in a room you'll usually get twenty different responses as to associations with color, sound, and so on. Meanwhile Sören and I... had the same exact responses. And I don't mean that we played question-and-answer games and said 'yeah me too' for the sake of going along, I mean that I would play things and he would paint *what I was seeing in my head when I was playing*."

Dooku's jaw dropped a little. He broadcasted, *The Force. You have a Force bond.* Maglor had no idea what that even meant, but it made him wonder if Dooku was himself not usual in the way Sören was not usual.

Earlier in the week, after Auli had run off, he'd been sitting in Sören's jeep outside the farms, waiting, rocking himself and humming to try to calm down, and then he'd felt *power*. He opened his eyes and in the distance - he had sight superior to a human's - he saw Auli rising up off the ground, floating into Sören's arms. He had not said anything to Sören about it, and was still holding onto that hand to play later if at all, but it was apparent that Sören had hid that from him for close to five years - and Maglor couldn't even be angry that he did. He of all people understood the need to hide the truth of what one was, it was how he'd stayed alive this long, when Men would have burned him, experimented on him. Even in these so-called "progressive" times Men very much feared what they did not understand, and Sören had a hard enough time in society pretending to be normal - revealing his power would sentence him to a fate worse than death, Maglor was sure of that.

There were a few moments of silence, as Dooku processed all of what Maglor had just said, and Maglor almost wished he hadn't said any of it. He once again thought about another shot of Brennivín, and once again his gut told him that was a bad idea, he'd already had too much if he was going on like this.

Dooku finally said, "You told me last week you'd play for me, you know."

"I did." Maglor ran a nervous hand through his hair. He got up, and had to steady himself on the arm of the couch when he did. He *definitely* had too much to drink. Dooku noticed and also got up.

"Do you need some help?"

He did. Maglor leaned on Dooku, and with an arm around him, Dooku walked Maglor to the bedroom. Maglor's face burned all the way there - it would have looked bad to an outside observer, and indeed there was a part of him that wanted to make that a reality.

Ingwion had Vigdís and Páll's bedroom, with the king-sized bed*when he wasn't in the hotel*, Maglor thought bitterly, seeing Sören in the throes of passion in his mind's eye, *hearing him*.. Their children each had a separate room, and they had a fourth bedroom for guests, though it was small, and this was the room Maglor was in, with a queen-sized bed just large enough for two people. Maglor's guitar sat in one corner of the room, a large electronic piano set up in the other corner. In a case under the bed, he had a harp, but he had not played harp in some time, indeed he'd never mentioned the harp to Sören, making the painting of him as a harpist that much more remarkable.

"Do you want to hear me play guitar or piano?" Maglor asked.

"Whichever you'd rather play," Dooku said.

Maglor thought for a moment, and then he pulled the piano towards the bed. He would have tried to carry it out into the living room for better acoustics, but he was too drunk to safely attempt that.

He was drunk enough to play the *Noldolantë*. He did not sing it - he was drunk but not *that* drunk to risk singing in his native tongue around Dooku... though he had, a few times, sang it for Sören, who had correctly figured out it wasn't Spanish or Portuguese (unlike the name Maitimo, which would have been hilarious if it were not so tragic), but Sören had assumed he was "doing the Liz Fraser thing" and singing glossolalia a la Cocteau Twins, and he wasn't going to correct that assumption at the time.

But the instrumental... here he was, with Dooku sitting beside him on the bed, and he was performing the *Noldolantë* for the first mortal besides Sören. He'd of course played other compositions of his to mortals - he was nothing if not a prolific, and somewhat obsessive, composer, though the Music had been quiet for the last five years until recently and he'd suffered for it. The *Noldolantë*, even without words, was too *personal* to play for others. He'd told the professor of the song's existence, in the two times he'd visited him, but not even the professor himself had gotten to hear it.

And he was playing it for Dooku now. *In vino, veritas.* Letting down his guard as he had only done with one other, in too long. Even without words, only the instrumental, every note of the *Noldolantë*, every cycle of the song, still expressed the Fall of the Noldor, his father's glory, the Valar's resentment, the rebellion, the kinslaying, the exile. And then, the deeper exile - Maglor had added to the song off and on over the ages, wandering the Earth, alone, the last of his family, keeping their memories alive in his spirit, as he himself was less and less alive every day, just *existing*.

When he was done, Dooku had tears in his eyes. As much as he disliked doing this uninvited, he found himself reaching in, and saw Dooku was in fact seeing it - the fog, the barren landscape of his inner life, the feeling of utter *desolation and solitude*, and still marching on, though there was no longer any hope of coming out of the fog, out of the wasteland.

Their eyes met. Maglor withdrew from Dooku's mind, hoping Dooku didn't sense him there for that brief instant, just looking to see if it had done what it'd done for Sören.

"That was..." Dooku struggled to find words. "Powerful."

"I'll accept powerful." Maglor nodded.

"Beautiful, but haunting. Melancholy."

"That was what I'd intended, with the piece."

Dooku closed his eyes again, and Maglor could feel he was drawn back there, and he felt Dooku hurting for *him - whatever grief had caused all of that*.

"Um..." Maglor didn't want to leave him hanging on that. "Would you like to hear something else?"

"Please."

Maglor got his guitar this time and played him three other original compositions - two of

the songs were from when he had first adopted the Alejandro Magalhães identity, a comparatively recent acquisition in his lengthy list of aliases, and they were in Portuguese, which to Maglor was the most beautiful language of Men next to Icelandic. One of the songs was in English, and was a love ballad that he had, in fact, written for Sören, and Dooku seemed to recognize that it was, smiling a little, *yes I feel that for him too*, Dooku broadcasted.

"I will also sometimes do covers," Maglor said, "if there's anything in particular you'd like to hear."

Dooku was a little drunk, though less drunk than he was, and Maglor sensed he was still haunted enough by the *Noldolantë* to not be able to make much of a decision. "I can't think of anything, but I imagine whatever you pick out would be fine. Er, better than fine."

Maglor considered for a few minutes, and, while he was still having the surge of nostalgia and pining for Sören, he found himself playing "Song to the Siren".

On the floating, shapeless oceans
I did all my best to smile
'Til your singing eyes and fingers
Drew me loving into your eyes

And you sang, "Sail to me, sail to me let me enfold you"
Here I am, here I am waiting to hold you

Did I dream you dreamed about me?
Were you here when I was full sail?
Now my foolish boat is leaning
Broken love lost on your rocks

For you sang, "Touch me not, touch me not, come back tomorrow"
Oh my heart, oh my heart shies from the sorrow

Well I'm as puzzled as a newborn child
I'm as riddled as the tide
Should I stand amid the breakers?
Or should I lie with death my bride?

Hear me sing, "Swim to me, swim to me, let me enfold you"
Here I am, here I am, waiting to hold you

Dooku's eyes were misted up again, and so were Maglor's. At last Dooku said, "That was exquisite, thank you."

"Thank *you.*"

Maglor put his guitar away, and the alcohol was *really* getting to him now. Dooku got up and helped him walk to the bed. There was a flat-screen TV on top of the dresser across from the bed, and now was a good time to chase away all the emotions, before the alcohol made him go on a crying jag, which had the potential to get really weird. "More *Metalocalypse*?"

Dooku sat next to Maglor on the bed, and Auli hopped up on the bed, cuddling between them. Maglor started to relax - if anything it was *too* comfortable, and after a few laughs, he relaxed enough that he felt himself drifting in and out, dozing off a bit. *No. Stay*

awake...

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Alejandro had not only fallen asleep, but fell asleep leaning on his shoulder.

They were halfway through an episode of *Metalocalypse*, and Dooku decided to keep watching it till the end before he would take his leave, going back to the cabin for the night. But his attention kept turning back to Alejandro, who looked beautiful asleep, almost too lovely to be human, not unlike Sören's own beauty. Indeed, the two of them curled up together, asleep, must have been a breathtaking sight - Dooku's own breath caught, imagining it.

You're looking at him the way you look at Sören? What are you, in love with him?

The shock came like a knife to the heart. It was one thing to have fallen in love with Sören, and their relationship to endure, even through Dooku's ongoing fear of his impending mortality and how it would affect Sören both in the dying and once he was gone. It was another thing entirely to have feelings for a second person as well, and inflict all of that on *them*, without it being his husband's ex.

This is a clusterfuck.

But it was a beautiful clusterfuck. Alejandro was ethereal, sleeping there, and he couldn't deny that feeling the warmth and weight of him close was comforting, felt *right* even as wrong as it was. And Alejandro wasn't just lovely to look at, but he was realizing he had the same pull to Alejandro's music that he had to Sören's art. Dooku remembered what Alejandro had said about his bond with Sören, the synaesthesia, the same wavelength they were on, and nodded to himself. It was as if they were made of the same soul-stuff, two sides of the same coin, two halves of a greater cosmic whole, and to love one was to love the other...

He resisted the urge to pet Alejandro's hair, glorious that it was...

Dooku sighed.

The show ended, and Dooku got up, reluctantly. But first, he needed to see to Alejandro's comfort. He gently rolled Alejandro onto his pile of pillows, drew back the covers, and tucked him in. And then he just sat there for a moment, not able to stop looking at the picture of the beautiful man tucked in, looking almost innocent curled up under the covers, though he knew perfectly damn well Alejandro was *not* innocent, if he'd shared passion with someone like Sören... the thought of Alejandro and Sören making love together, writhing, *burning*, made him harden, just a little.

There would be no acting on his desire; there would be no speaking of his desire. The situation between Alejandro and Sören was already volatile enough.

Yet, Dooku's hand strayed, in its urge to touch Alejandro's hair, to tenderly smooth it, an affectionate gesture, the need to comfort him in that place of sleep, probably the only peace the melancholy singer had most days. And when he pet Alejandro's hair, Alejandro stirred a little - not opening his eyes - and mumbled, "...Where you going?"

"I have to go home now."

"No, Uncle... stay..."

Another knife to the heart. *Uncle. Yes, of course.* Even if the situation between Sören and Alejandro was not as volatile, why would Alejandro desire him, in turn? He was significantly older - Alejandro was in his early forties, and he was almost seventy-one. As much as Sören found him a "silver fox" and made him feel like a sex god, he was keenly aware that to most of society he was well past his prime, most people found the mere concept of seniors having sex lives to be repulsive. Of course Alejandro would, in this state, confuse Dooku for his uncle - that was all he could expect. *I'm too old.*

Dooku got up, and quietly walked out of the bedroom, petting Auli on his way out of the cottage.

Walking back to his cabin, alone, feeling like he was made of lead with every step, his heart in the pit of his stomach.

I'm an idiot. An old, foolish idiot.

Chapter 23

Monday

After classes at the studio, on the drive back, Sören surprised himself by asking Alejandro, "Would you like to have dinner with us tonight?"

Dooku was surprised when Sören brought Alejandro into the cabin, but took it in stride. He and Alejandro set off to the store to pick up ingredients for a dinner for three, and came back with the makings for *paella*. Sören's face lit up when he saw them unloading the groceries in the kitchen, as *paella* the way Alejandro made it had been his very favorite dish - he'd tried replicating it a few times after their breakup and did a decent job of it, though the time he made it for Justin, he'd gotten the response "you're not much of a cook"; there was still nothing like the way Alejandro made it, as if there was some sort of magic that went into it.

Sören sat on the couch and played Stardew Valley while Dooku and Alejandro worked together in the kitchen, though he was getting the urge to draw or paint. When the *paella* simmered on the stove, Dooku said, "I think we have time for an episode of *Metalocalypse*."

Sören grinned. "You showed him *Metalocalypse*?"

Dooku grinned back. "I did."

Sören turned to Alejandro. "What did you think of it?"

Alejandro's reaction was deadpan. "Brutal."

Sören's laughter rang out. He smiled fondly as Dooku sat on one side of him, Alejandro on the other, and Snúður on his lap. It had been awhile since Sören and Dooku had watched it - not since before Ingmar and Alejandro showed up in Svalbarðseyri - and it was nice to do something from the time before life had been so disrupted; bringing Alejandro into it felt like the wound was closing, a little. They were, in fact, watching the episode from the first season of *Metalocalypse* where Dethklok began seeing a therapist after attacking each other onstage during a show. Even though Sören had seen the episode a few times already, he still laughed until he snorted at the therapist being named "John Twinkletits", which made Dooku laugh aloud, and Alejandro as well. When Sören calmed down a little, he looked over at Alejandro, who gave him a little smile and said softly, "I've missed that."

Sören's heart ached. *I missed you, too.*

When dinner was ready they ate outside, drinking wine, and then after dinner Sören did the dishes while Dooku and Alejandro played a round of cards, and when the dishes were done the three decided to watch some more *Metalocalypse*. They binge-watched the eighth through thirteenth episodes of the show, and as Sören sat there on the couch between Dooku and Alejandro, Snúður purring away as he got pettings from three different hands, Sören couldn't help thinking how nice it felt, how Alejandro being there wasn't an intrusion at all but it felt like he belonged there, with them.

Sören didn't like that train of thought, or the increasing urge he was having to lean against Alejandro, so when after the thirteenth episode Alejandro checked the time and said, "I

had better go back and see to Auli," Sören was relieved even as he was finding himself a bit sad to see Alejandro go.

Alejandro turned to Dooku. "Would you like to come with me for the usual walk?"

Dooku hesitated for a moment, instead of saying "yes" right away, which Sören found curious, but then he nodded.

Alejandro waved to Sören. "It's been a pleasure."

Sören threw the horns. "It was brutal."

"Yes." Alejandro grinned. "I'll see you tomorrow, Sören."

Sören waved, and gave a little sigh when Dooku and Alejandro walked out.

He returned to Stardew Valley, and was nursing another glass of wine when Dooku came back from the walk. Dooku smiled at him, and Sören smiled back, and Dooku made a beeline for the bathroom. He was in there for awhile, to the point where Sören wondered about calling out if he was OK, and then Dooku came out, looking a little sheepish.

"You all right?" Sören asked as Dooku sat down.

Dooku nodded. "I'm fine." He sipped from a bottle of water, looking off to the side, out the window.

A few minutes passed, where Sören continued to play his game and Dooku was typing away on his laptop, and at last Dooku sat back with a little huff, and Sören glanced over at him. Dooku had a stern look on his face, more than his usual default expression, and Sören raised an eyebrow. "Hm?"

"I was just thinking..." Dooku met his eyes. "You realize, Sören, it's July fifteenth."

"...And?"

"As you know, Vigdís and Páll are coming back on the sixteenth of August."

"Oh." That was a month away.

Dooku nodded. "The last month that Ingmar and Alejandro have been here, has already flown by. And... well... Alejandro came here for closure, and that isn't going to be immediate. The two of you should spend some time together."

"We already see each other at the studio."

"That isn't quite the same thing as being alone with him outside the studio, having some time to talk."

Sören sighed loudly and ran a nervous hand through his curls. "Jæja, but I'm not really ready to... discuss... the breakup, and what happened and why, and all of that."

"Nor am I suggesting you do so immediately. I understand that conversation needs to be worked up to, and what I'm suggesting is that you start working up to it."

"So... you want me to spend the next few evenings hanging out with Alejandro...?"

"Yes." Dooku nodded. "I'll be here, working on this wretched, bloody novel."

Sören couldn't help laughing. "That bad, huh?"

"I've hit one of those moments in the plot where it's emotionally difficult." Dooku frowned. "And it will be easier for me to navigate and get everything out if I minimize distractions."

Sören grinned. "Are you saying I'm distracting?"

"Quite." Dooku nodded. He smirked. "You sitting over there being so... attractive. It's hard to concentrate."

Sören got up, and walked over to Dooku, not able to resist. "Maybe if you let yourself indulge in a little distraction, you might be better able to concentrate afterwards, já?" With that, he took Dooku's hands, pulling him up from his chair at the desk, and began walking Dooku back towards the bed. Dooku laughed softly, his laughter becoming a moan when Sören kissed him hard, and slipped his hands away to run them over Dooku's chest, sliding down to rub the hardening bulge in his khakis. With a little growl, Dooku pushed Sören onto the bed, and Sören gave a naughty grin as he pulled his shirt off, erupting into giggles as Dooku pounced on him like a cat.

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Tuesday

Sören climbed into Alejandro's Jaguar and mumbled a thanks as Alejandro pushed a thermos of iced coffee at him; as long as Sören had been running his studio he still couldn't quite get the hang of mornings, and would have had afternoon and evening classes only if it didn't mean losing business from the students who could only do mornings.

After a few sips of his coffee, Sören looked at Alejandro, who was focused on the road, and he said, "Nico thinks that you and I should spend some time just us the next few nights, to... catch up. Continue to get to know each other again, so that way we can get comfortable enough to eventually talk about what happened."

There was a moment of silence - a long enough pause that it made Sören worry, and then Alejandro simply nodded. "All right."

"So maybe after our classes today, you and Nico can go for your usual walk, and then you and I can have dinner and, hang out, or whatever."

"We can do that." Alejandro kept his tone and expression neutral, not registering any kind of emotional reaction.

Alejandro had his piano class, and Sören had watercolors. As much as he'd been feeling the itch to draw or paint last night, he found himself restless, not quite able to concentrate - which happened sometimes - feeling a vague sort of anxiety. He chalked it up to the prospect of spending time alone with Alejandro later, but it wasn't quite that. He paced around the room, looking at the students' work, giving his usual feedback and encouragement, and after each round he stepped in the doorway and looked across the hall at Alejandro and his class. When Alejandro cringed at the wrong note being hit, Sören

couldn't help grin at the face he made, and when Alejandro saw and glared, Sören wrinkled his nose and stuck out his tongue. The second time it happened, a little while later, Sören stuck his tongue out at Alejandro again, and Alejandro responded by giving him the finger. Feeling impish, Sören went to his sheet of paper towels, ripped one off, crumpled it into a ball, and when Alejandro had his back turned to the door of the classroom, giving instructions, waving a conductor's baton, Sören threw the paper towel ball at the back of his head.

The look Alejandro gave him was priceless, and Sören cackled on his way back into the classroom.

Just before Sören's watercolors class ended, as Sören had his own back turned to the door, he felt a wadded-up ball hit the small of his back, and then another one, and another. He turned around and one by one, Alejandro's students were bombarding him with paper projectiles. Alejandro leaned against the wall, grinning.

"You're gonna get it later," Sören threatened him.

"You started it."

"I may have started it, but this is some next level shit." Sören gave him a mock scowl and wagged his finger. "I should give you a time out."

"What are you, my father?"

Sören threw one of the paper balls at his head before ducking back into his classroom.

His students left shortly thereafter, or rather, they all did except Símon. Sören wasn't entirely surprised by this - their conversation had been cut short last week before Sören could refuse his offer of dinner, and Sören *had* said they could talk about it another time. So Símon lingered, though Sören continued to put the art supplies away to prepare for the next class, hoping that looking busy would send a hint that he wasn't interested, without having to say anything.

Of course that hint wasn't strong enough and finally Símon approached, standing a couple feet away, watching as Sören stacked paint boxes into a bin. "Hej," he said.

"Hej." Sören didn't look at him.

"Jæja..." Símon cleared his throat. "About the question I asked you last week... would you like to have dinner with me tonight?"

"No."

"I see. I know that's short notice, so perhaps another time? Friday?"

"No, Símon." Sören stopped what he was doing, looked up, and leaned on the edge of the craft table where he'd been gathering supplies. He took a deep breath. "Look, don't take this the wrong way, but I'm not interested."

"But you're in an open relationship, já?"

I cannot fucking believe you. Sören rolled his eyes. "Open relationship does not mean open to *everybody.* I'm not interested in you, I'm sorry, that's just how it is."

Sören turned his back, to load more paint boxes into the bin, and begin collecting brushes to be cleaned. Símon took a couple steps forward and said, "So what is it that your old man and that guy with the Bentley who was at the solstice party have that I don't? Money? That's the only reason why you'd want to marry some dried-up old man, isn't it?"

Sören turned around and glared, his heart hammering in his ears. "You know... that's *quite* a statement. *How dare you.*"

Símon sneered. "I see that Jaguar out there, and the way you're flirting with Alejandro across the hall." He came closer. "Do you think I don't have money, I'm not rich enough for you? I can take you anywhere you want, buy you anything you want." And then he was in Sören's face; Sören felt himself freeze like a deer trapped in headlights. Símon was a few inches taller than him, like Justin had been, same build, same sandy hair, blue eyes. Símon's cologne was almost overpowering in the close space and Sören's mouth went dry.

Símon went on, his voice low as if he were attempting to sound seductive. "But even more than money, I could show you a real good time. And *I know you want it.* Open relationship? Your kind *always* wants it. You're just playing hard to get." He reached out to cup Sören's chin, giving it a caress that made Sören's skin crawl, and pressed his hard-on against Sören's thigh. His hand reached downward, about to grab Sören's crotch -

- Without thinking about it, realizing what he was doing, just *feeling*, Sören grabbed Símon's middle finger and yanked it as hard as he could, letting out a shout of "*Vaddírassgat!*"

Símon screamed as Sören felt and heard the crunch, and then after reeling back a couple of steps, Símon hollered, "You filthy little slut!" and took a swing.

Sören caught the fist with his hands, and with his steel-toed Doc Martens boot, he kicked Símon in the shin, then in the balls. When Símon fell over, Sören grabbed a steel folding chair from the art table.

Alejandro rushed in, just in time to see Símon get a berserker rush and lean up before Sören could bring the chair down on him, grabbing Sören's legs, toppling him. From the floor, Sören watched as Alejandro picked Símon up off the ground like he weighed nothing, *slammed* him into the wall, and then punched him in the gut and in the face, making Símon's nose bleed. There was a wild look in Alejandro's eyes that Sören found thrilling and terrifying all at once. Breathing hard, Alejandro took a step back. Símon was blubbering now.

Alejandro wasn't done. He grabbed the steel folding chair that Sören almost used as a weapon. With a sob, Símon ran out of the studio, and Sören and Alejandro both cringed as they heard Símon vomit outside from the wracking pain.

Alejandro was about to storm out - Sören could feel the rage, and a sense that Alejandro was going to go back for more, possibly even finish him - and he did something he normally didn't do, didn't like doing, but he shoved into Alejandro's mind with the Force as he commanded, "*No.* Let him go."

Alejandro stopped, and blinked slowly. There was a feeling in Sören's head of *pushing back*, which all but confirmed to him Alejandro was Force sensitive whether he knew it or not - and those kinds of suggestions normally didn't work on those who were, as Dooku had told him almost two years ago. But nonetheless, he did wait, and after Sören took a moment to catch his breath, he explained, "I don't need a situation with the police."

Alejandro came over to Sören, who was still lying on the foor, and reached out. Sören took his hands and Alejandro pulled him up. For a moment they just looked at each other, and then Sören reflexively brushed himself off. Alejandro pulled out a chair for Sören, who sat, and Alejandro came across the other side of the table to sit down. After hell breaking loose moments ago, it was now silent enough to hear a pin drop in the room.

Finally Alejandro looked at Sören. His eyes were still wild, and Sören felt a frisson down his spine. Sören also did a double-take - for a very brief instant he seemed to hallucinate that Alejandro's hair was much longer than it actually was, below his waist rather than the middle of his back, and he seemed to glow. Sören blinked and Alejandro's appearance returned to normal. *I must really be in a bad way, if I'm seeing shit.*

"Are you all right? Did he...?"

"I'm fine." Sören was not, in fact, fine. He felt sick to his stomach, having flashbacks of the day things were finally well and truly over between he and Justin, right down to the folding steel chair. "He didn't get *too* far."

Sören's hands were shaking. Alejandro quietly got up, headed to the mini-fridge, and came back with a ginger ale for Sören, who said "*Takk*" as he accepted it and opened the can, drinking to try to ground himself.

"I can help you clean up the room before your class starts," Alejandro said. He took a deep breath. "I hope he doesn't go to the police -"

"I think he's not daft enough to do that, considering I'd just tell the police he was about to force himself on me and it would be two words against his." Sören closed his eyes and shuddered, feeling that nauseated feeling again, and gulped down the ginger ale.

"He better not come back here."

"I don't think he will." But Sören wasn't so sure of that, remembering how Justin had stalked him, coming around weeks after Sören had first tried to break up with him for good, until that last day.

Alejandro helped Sören clean up the art room - they washed brushes together in the sink as their last task, and then Alejandro reached out to rub and pat Sören's shoulder. "You hungry? You want to go get lunch?"

Sören shook his head.

"OK. Well, I won't push it, but we'll have an early dinner then."

Sören nodded.

Sören's second class of the day was the children's class, and he managed to put on a brave face for the kids, not wanting to alert them that anything had gone awry earlier that day. Nonetheless, throughout the class he worried that Símon might come back and there would be some sort of incident in front of the children, traumatizing them. *Stay away stay away stay away*, Sören kept repeating in his head, like a spell.

After the class was over, Alejandro took Sören back to the cabin. They didn't speak on the way there - Alejandro kept looking at him, as if to check on him; Sören looked out the

window, trying to calm himself by admiring the lush green hills and fields of the northern Icelandic countryside.

When they got to the cabin, Sören sat for a few minutes as Dooku waited for Alejandro to go back, get ready, and get Auli. Dooku noticed right away something was wrong.

"I felt a disturbance in the Force earlier and I thought about calling your cell." Dooku's eyes narrowed.

"Jæja, there was... an incident." Sören took a deep breath, not wanting to have this conversation right now, but his husband's barrister instincts and protector instincts were out in full force.

"*What kind of incident.*" The words were almost a growl. Dooku gave Sören a suspicious look. "Remember what I told you about the potential for this Ingmar character to have dangerous enemies -"

"It wasn't that. Jesus Christ, Nico." Sören was a little annoyed, even though he knew Dooku meant well. "One of my students decided to get fresh. He didn't like hearing no for an answer."

Dooku looked ready to kill. "Did he -"

"He didn't get that far. Alejandro and I dealt with him." Sören had another flashback of the last time he saw Justin, and of the stalking in the weeks prior, the fight that led to the entire thing of wanting to be done once and for all. "If it's all the same to you, I *do not* want to talk about this right now. I just want to relax."

Dooku let out a sharp exhale. "Very well." A raised eyebrow. "Are you sure you're OK?"

Sören gave a thin smile. "I'm fine." He wasn't, but he really just wanted to let it go and try to get out of the mental space he was in.

When Alejandro came with Auli, Sören logged into Stardew Valley, trying to zone out for a little while.
Once Dooku and Alejandro returned, Alejandro waited outside with Auli, and Sören got up to give Dooku a quick hug and a kiss. Then Dooku took a moment to stroke Sören's face, his dark eyes full of compassion and concern. Sören felt himself welling up again, and he patted Dooku on the back on his way out. "I'll see you later," he said.

He and Alejandro walked up the street for a couple minutes in silence, then Sören asked, "Is Ingmar -?"

Alejandro shook his head, somehow knowing what Sören was asking. "I told him we needed some time, and he said he understands, so he'll be back much later."

At the cottage, Alejandro had Sören sit down in the living room. "Can I get you anything?"

"Water's fine."

Auli also drank, and then Alejandro came in with Sören's water. "Do you have any preferences for dinner?"

"Um." Sören ran a nervous hand through his curls. "I hadn't really thought about it."

"Right. I... hadn't expected company, but I'll figure something out."

After rummaging around in the kitchen, Alejandro came back out and said, "OK, you want to come with me to the store?"

The entire way there, Sören was hoping he wouldn't run into Símon in town, and being angry with himself for being afraid of him. *It's not like you can avoid going into town forever, either.* Símon was just a summer visitor, going back to Reykjavik in the fall, but that would still be a month away. Sören was ill at ease in the supermarket, and it showed; Alejandro kept giving him concerned looks and Sören wanted to run and hide.

They decided on something easy, fish fillets with potatoes and a salad. While Alejandro worked in the kitchen he had music on - Sören was not surprised it was Depeche Mode and The Cure, which seemed to match his own internal state. When dinner was ready they ate together in companionable silence.

"I'll do the dishes," Sören offered.

"No. You're a guest."

"And you cooked. Let me do something useful."

Alejandro reluctantly let Sören wash the dishes, and Sören continued to try to ground himself with the running water and the soap bubbles. Alejandro came in when the dishes were almost done. "Do you have anything in mind for what you want to do now?" He leaned against the kitchen entryway.

"I want to relax, after the day I've had, so... maybe some*Metalocalypse*? I could use a good laugh."

They sat on the couch together, with Auli between them, and watched the next six episodes of *Metalocalypse*, finishing the first season. Halfway through, Alejandro got up and poured them each a shot of whiskey; he took his neat and put ice in Sören's. Sören managed a smile at that, pleasantly surprised Alejandro remembered those little details.

The antics of Dethklok, and having Auli snuggled up with them like he didn't have a care in the world, and the strong, silent presence of Alejandro managed to get Sören's mind off the unpleasant events of the day. By the time they'd finished watching the first season, Sören felt a little sleepy, even though it was still somewhat early and Sören was usually a night owl. Alejandro walked him home.

At the doorstep, they lingered, and for a moment Sören thought Alejandro was going to hug him, but Alejandro held back. "I'll see you tomorrow," Sören said, finally.

"Yes. Have a good rest of the evening, Sören."

A long glance, and then Alejandro was off, taking one last look over his shoulder. Sören watched him down the street for a minute, admiring the proud, graceful walk, the way his hair stirred slightly in the breeze, *that magnificent arse*.

OK, could you not notice that right now.

Sören's mind wandered to having seen it out of pants, and indeed, what the rest of Alejandro looked like naked. For a brief instant he entertained the fantasy of that wild look in Alejandro's eyes, the danger in him, the way Alejandro had sometimes been less-than-

gentle with his full consent and enthusiasm, pounding him into the mattress, like being eaten alive.

Fuck.

Despite his moment of lust, Sören was still feeling tired, and after taking a shower, he went to bed. He was vaguely aware of Dooku climbing in beside him at some point and holding him, and he heard himself murmur "*Ñolo*," meaning to say "Nico," but it didn't feel wrong, either.

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Wednesday

The day dragged, and Sören knew he was not his usual self. When it was time to go back, Sören breathed a sigh of relief.

"I was thinking we could go somewhere tonight, if you want to?" Alejandro asked. "Change of pace..."

Sören nodded. "That sounds fine."

They ate at Serrano, which Sören found himself amused and disturbed by all at once as it had been the place he and Dooku went to the night they fully consummated their relationship and had the feeling of being "their place". But Sören didn't really mind, the food was good, and being out in public like that had a much-needed feeling of normalcy, like Símon didn't own him.

After they ate, Alejandro asked, "Do you want to go for a ride?"

"...Yes." And then Sören said, on impulse, "Can we stop at our respective places first so I can get my sketchbook and you get your guitar?"

They ended up driving to the Goðafoss. For awhile they just walked around, looking at the falls from different angles, watching in quiet awe of the beauty and power of nature. Then Sören reached into his pocket and produced two coins, each 1 *krónur*.

"In 2006, when I was twenty-two, my sister and I stopped here on our way out of Akureyri, moving down to Reykjavik," Sören said, "and we each threw a coin in here for good luck in the city, even though it's superstitious and kind of silly. Then when I came back to Akureyri twelve years later, I threw a coin in. So... here. It feels like we should do this to mark some kind of... turning point in our lives." He handed one of the coins to Alejandro. Then Sören threw his into the falls, watching it splash and disappear.

Alejandro hesitated, and Sören made the "go on" gesture. "What are you waiting for?"

A rueful little smile, and Alejandro said, looking at the crashing waters, "The last time I threw an object into a living body of water, my life didn't turn out so well."

"Well, that was then, this is now. Time to make some new luck, já?"

Alejandro looked back at Sören, raised an eyebrow, and then he took the coin and pitched it into the falls.

Sören clapped his hands like a little kid who was proud of one of his peers for something, and then felt self-conscious about it, but Alejandro just grinned and reached out with his bad hand to pat Sören. Sören took his hand and affectionately traced the scarring on his palm, not able to help it, giving a little squeeze; he restrained the urge to kiss his hand.

Alejandro retrieved his guitar from the Jaguar, and Sören got out his sketchbook and oil pastels. They sat together in the grass, and it wasn't long before Alejandro began playing, and Sören started sketching.

It was like old times again. Right down to Sören seeing images clearly - this time, Alejandro on a craggy shore, throwing something into the sea. Stormy sea waves, under a fierce, blood-red sunset sky. Something glinting in the waves, diamond-bright. Alejandro dressed in grey, a hood covering his hair, looking mournful.

The song was haunting, all minor chords, and Alejandro was singing in a language that wasn't Spanish or Portuguese - it was like the way Liz Fraser of Cocteau Twins sang nonsense but somehow managed to emote so powerfully with non-words, more than she could with actual real words. He'd done that a few times around Sören, not often, and the times he'd done it gave Sören chills, brought him to tears. This was no different. Sören could feel the overwhelming sense of loneliness from him, *existential despair*...

...and the grief. What he'd had with Sören, what he'd lost. Feeling the hope that Alejandro had briefly dared to have, years ago, and was shocked back out of it, then traumatized by the loss of it, like having that feeling of belonging and home for a little while and losing it was worse than never finding it at all.

When Alejandro stopped playing - he had been watching the waterfall, and it felt like his mind was further away - he looked at the oil pastel work that Sören had produced, and his jaw dropped a little. "My God," he finally choked out.

"I know you don't like having pictures of yourself taken and I assume that means drawn too but I -" Sören's voice trailed off, because of the shocked look on Alejandro's face. His eyes were wide almost as if he was afraid.

There were a few moments of awkward silence; the roar of the Goðafoss was almost deafening. At last Alejandro said, his voice almost a hush, "We should go now."

Alejandro put on The Cure on the way back - the *Disintegration* album, which Sören *knew* was deliberate; he had attempted to listen to it in the first couple of years following their breakup and it seemed almost every song on that album was about them and what had happened.

But I never said I would stay to the end
So I leave you with babies and hoping for frequency
Screaming like this in the hope of the secrecy
Screaming me over and over and over
I leave you with photographs, pictures of trickery
Stains on the carpet and stains on the scenery
Songs about happiness murmured in dreams
When we both of us knew how the ending would be

So it's all come back round to breaking apart again
Breaking apart like I'm made up of glass again
Making it up behind my back again
Holding my breath for the fear of sleep again

Holding it up behind my head again
Cut in the deep to the heart of the bone again
Round and round and round and it's coming apart again
Over and over and over

Sören's hands were shaking, a little, and when he found his voice, it shook too. "About the drawing. I didn't mean to upset you -"

"You." Alejandro winced, searching for the right words. "Upset is not the word I'd use."

"I'm sorry -"

"Don't be sorry." Their eyes met. "Never be sorry for your work, Sören. You have a gift."

Sören gave him a sad smile. Then he sighed. "I don't want to go back home right away."*I don't want to leave you just yet.*

"Where would you like to go? What would you like to do?"

They went to the park. Sören needed to do something childlike and fun to dislodge from the heavy emotions of the last while, and the continued raw feeling from the incident yesterday at the studio. They got on the slide and the swingset together, feeling ridiculous, laughing. When they'd had enough, Sören had them stop at a nearby ice cream stand. Alejandro didn't want anything, but he offered to get Sören whatever he wanted, and Sören got a soft-serve cone, vanilla with rainbow sprinkles. Alejandro made a face at the rainbow sprinkles; Sören teased, "*Double* sprinkles," smiling innocently at Alejandro's look of disapproval.

They walked around the park for awhile - Sören almost took his hand, and felt sheepish about wanting to. Every now and again Alejandro would look at him, and Sören felt like yelling "I'M FINE" but then he realized Alejandro was just watching him eat the ice cream, and when he noticed Alejandro's cheeks turning pink as Sören's tongue lapped, Sören knew *exactly* what he was thinking. Sören's own cheeks flushed, and in that moment of fluster he accidentally got himself on the nose with the cone.

"*Skít*." Sören laughed nervously.

Alejandro pressed a napkin into his hand and Sören dabbed his nose - for a minute Sören got the sense that Alejandro was fighting the urge to lick his nose like the way Auli would clean him, and Sören was almost disappointed he didn't.

He finished the cone, and it was then that they decided to go back and call it a night.

When the Jaguar pulled up to the cabin, Alejandro didn't get out to walk Sören to the door. They just sat there, looking at each other. "This was nice," Sören said at last. "It... was nostalgic, you playing music and me making art while you did. We should do that again."

"We should." Alejandro nodded.

We make a good team. Sören swallowed hard, feeling his eyes misting up, not wanting to cry in front of him. He'd missed Alejandro so much, the natural rhythm they had together - *Fuck.*

"Tomorrow, then?"

"Yes. Good night, Sören."

"Good night." Sören waved and gave a little smile when he got out of the Jaguar, carrying his sketchbook and pastels with him. As much as he was glad to see Dooku and his cat again, leaving Alejandro behind made Sören feel like every step he took was a lead weight.

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Thursday

When Sören got into the Jaguar and accepted Maglor's usual offering of iced coffee, Maglor frowned - Sören looked exhausted, even moreso than his normal struggle with mornings.

"I didn't sleep well," Sören said, looking away as he knocked the coffee back.

"Oh?"

A little nod. "Nightmares."

Maglor thought about pressing it, but then Sören ground out, "I'm fine," as if the concern made him grouchy, even though he knew Sören well enough to know the more Sören said *I'm fine* the more he was *not* fine. So he let it go.

His second piano class got out after Sören's second art class was done; Sören was cleaning up in the art room, putting paintbrushes away. Maglor gave a little knock at the entryway and Sören *jumped* with a sharp gasp, the paintbrush cup dropping out of his hand, paintbrushes spilling all over the floor.

"Fjandinn blóðug helvíti," Sören swore, catching his breath before he dropped to his knees to pick the brushes up off the floor.

Maglor rushed over and was right there beside him, picking them up too. Sören's hands were shaking. "I'm sorry," Maglor said. "I didn't mean to startle you -"

"It's fine." Sören shook his head, staring at the floor. "It's fine, I'm fine, it's fine..." His voice broke.

Maglor reached out and put his hands on Sören's. *"Sören*. You are not fine."

Sören looked up. There were tears in his eyes, and his jaw quivered. He choked out a sob, and looked away.

"Sören." Maglor's hands squeezed, and he mentally nudged for Sören to look at him. "Sören. Take a deep breath." He demonstrated, taking one himself. Sören tried it, and then he fell apart, sobbing hard.

Maglor shoved the rest of the brushes into the cup, put it on the table, and then he grabbed Sören's hands and pulled him to his feet. He was a foot taller than Sören, but Sören seemed much smaller, right now, in his vulnerability.

He pulled out two chairs, and had Sören sit next to him, rather than across from him. Sören didn't speak for a moment, just crying as quietly as he could, shaking, and then Maglor compelled eye contact again.

"Can you talk about it?"

"I don't know what's there for me to talk about." Sören's accent was heavier than usual; Maglor could sense him struggling with English even though he'd been speaking it since childhood. "I'm a fucking crybaby and a coward -"

"*No.*" Even though Maglor didn't raise his voice, the word still rang out. Sören's eyebrows went up at that, a little blink of surprise, and then Maglor said, more gently, "You are not a coward *at all*. You had something very disturbing in here happen two days ago, and I know you had a bad childhood so anything violent like that is difficult for you."

Sören nodded. Then he said, softly, "It wasn't... just... childhood memories."

Maglor remembered his conversation with Dooku last week*before Dooku got weird and quiet*, he thought to himself, wondering what the hell was going on with that. He could hear Dooku's deep velvet voice in his head: *Sören had a show... and I admired several of his paintings, and told him as much. I then found him in the bathroom, having a panic attack. Crying.* And Maglor had thought to himself *Something happened between the time we broke up and the time Dooku found him. Something, someone, broke his spirit.*

"What happened," Maglor said, dreading the answer.

Sören looked around nervously. "D'you think we could have this conversation somewhere else? I keep worrying that he..." Sören didn't have to finish the sentence; he was broadcasting *in case Símon shows up looking for trouble.*

They went directly to the cottage. Ingwion was out, and would not be back for some time. "Where's Auli?" Sören asked as they walked in.

"Ingmar's got him." Maglor hadn't slept well last night either - he was beginning to think that he'd empathically sensed whatever distress Sören was in last night, and though Elves needed less sleep than Men, he was still feeling it and not in the mood to cook something elaborate or drive. "Is frozen pizza OK? I'm sorry -"

"Oh, that's totally OK." Sören chuckled, and nodded. "It's lavish compared to some of what I was eating for awhile there in London."

Gods, Sören. Maglor cringed. He put on the oven, and then he brought Sören a ginger ale. "I'll let it preheat..."

Sören nodded. His hands were shaking again.

"Sören, I'm not going to force you to talk about any of this but..." He gave Sören a stern look. "I... think it would help. Whatever it was that made you react like that at the studio, whatever gave you nightmares last night - and it's the same thing, isn't it?"

Sören took a swig of ginger ale, and nodded. "I'll tell you, but it's an unpleasant story."

Melindo, *my life has been nothing but unpleasant stories.*"Please."

Sören took a deep breath. He leaned back in the chair, took another swig of ginger ale,

and looked off to the side, like he was looking at something far away. As much as Maglor tried to stay out of the inside of people's heads as a rule, Sören was broadcasting loud enough with this that he found himself drawn in, seeing it as Sören was describing it - mists swirled and Maglor saw Reykjavik, Sören getting dressed up in leather pants and ruffly shirts, eyeliner and mascara.

"So this story starts not long after we break up. I spent a year in Reykjavik, clubbing a couple times a week..." A tablet of ecstasy pressed into his palm, downing it, dancing frenetically, like a twisted form of ancient shamanic dancing. "Taking molly, having anonymous sex or with the occasional fuckbuddy." A series of one-night-stands, mental images of Sören fucking or being fucked, coming but not really satisfied, not *sleeping* with anyone he "slept with", all too frequently crying later, still missing... *him.* This was already like a knife. "I met Ingmar one night, and he was, well... special." Maglor saw it clear as day - the oil massage, Sören letting Ingwion bind him, the teasing. It was a painful reminder of Maglor's recovery from his wounds in the War of Wrath, and much the same purpose - Sören had promised Maglor years before he wouldn't kill himself, but damned if he wasn't committing suicide very slowly, the fire in him dying more and more. That night, Ingwion reminded Sören what it was like to *live.*

Go to the Hells, Ingwion. Maglor's jaw clenched.

"So anyway..." Sören took a sip of ginger ale. "I actually told Ingmar a little bit about my, ah, existential crisis, I guess you could call it, and he suggested I go to London. I did, two weeks later. Took the savings account you had me build, and got a place, got a job. Though I ended up getting a new place and a new job, moving in with this girl Frankie I met at a punk show." A mental image of a short, chubby girl with a pink mohawk and lots of piercings, cute in her own way, a fire in her eyes like Sören's own. "I couldn't do art for about a year after you and I broke up, but then I got into it again and Frankie encouraged me to do shows again and whatnot, and it was interesting to do it in a big city like London, lots more attention. Getting back into art filled that void inside me enough that I didn't quite return to my old behavior in Reykjavik, but I *did* have a Grindr account and, it was how I met Justin."

Just the name set Maglor on edge. He braced himself.

"Justin and I were supposed to just go out once, but then we hooked up again. It was good - not good like what you and I had, not even in the same league, but after over a year of sex that was just like... lukewarm... even a little something was, like, wow. He wasn't my usual type, in fact he was a footballer, and not a completely unknown one."

Maglor raised an eyebrow.

"Justin Roberts, plays for FC Arsenal. He was on the news a few months ago, won some kind of award." A mental image of Sören getting triggered enough that he went outside and smashed a pot on the ground, and fell apart crying much the same as he'd fallen apart after dropping the paintbrushes by accident in the studio. Dooku rushing out to him, helping him pick up the pieces, rocking him in his arms.

"Things were OK at first, but it was like... you know the boiling frog analogy? Where you put a frog in a pot and you slowly turn up the temperature and the frog gets adjusted to it until it's finally being boiled and didn't know enough to escape? My relationship with Justin was a lot like that. At first it was just a little negativity here and there. 'You're not much of a cook.' 'Oh, that painting isn't really my thing.' 'You should get a better job.' He treated me like I was some kind of domestic servant, expecting me to get up and fetch things for him, wait on him, even though he was more than capable of doing that shit himself. And then it

got to be... more."

Sören looked very uncomfortable, and Maglor had a feeling what "more" meant - he wanted to tell Sören it was OK to stop, but, he also did not want to *silence* him. The truth needed to be heard, no matter how painful it was to hear. *Because I pushed him into this predator's arms. I let him go, he felt rejected and worthless, and this is what happened.*

"He didn't support my art, and it got to the point where he actively opposed it. Saying things like 'Your art isn't that great.' One day he threw my paints everywhere, ruined one of my paintings by throwing it against the wall so the wet paint smudged. Another day, he took some of my canvases and poured bleach all over them and threw them into the dumpster. I'd stopped showing anywhere after that. I still didn't completely give up drawing and painting but I did it less and Frankie was the only person who got to see it. And I didn't leave him then, I know you're going to ask, because by that point he'd gotten to me. Verbal abuse here and there. He made fun of me for being different, being sensitive, acting too 'gay' for him. Aaaand he hit me, the first time I fought back and, well, he's an athlete and I'm not, and he quickly overpowered me." *I didn't want to fight harder and* kill *him,* Sören broadcasted, and Maglor wondered what *that* was about and if it had anything to do with the display of power he'd seen. "And of course it was fucked up, but he gave me the sob story about how he had an alcoholic father who sometimes beat him, and I was sympathetic because of my own abuse, and really wanted to believe that this man who had once been so charming wasn't *really* like that. I gave him chance after chance, and he kept taking those chances and pissing on them. He hit me a few times, though."

Maglor saw it. Sören cowering like a beaten dog, crying as Justin punched and kicked him. The apologies later, the ice for the bruises. "As I got less sympathetic with time, I was also... more afraid." The threats. *If you go to the police... I have friends with connections. That'll be the worst mistake of your life. It'll be the* last *mistake.*

"To try and make him happy, he... liked to experiment, sexually. I'd enjoyed it when Ingmar restrained me that night in Reykjavik, and I thought, foolishly, that maybe if I showed Justin I trusted him - this was when things were starting to get bad, but not really bad, not just yet - it would help him. Except no, not so much. He completely disregarded my safeword, kept going when he knew it was too... overwhelming... scary... he was hurting me, using toys we hadn't agreed on and I was tied up and couldn't do anything to stop it... and when I had a panic meltdown he laughed at me."

Hells, Sören. Maglor could feel his blood boiling. He could see that, too, he could*feel* it. This was already too much, and Sören wasn't done yet.

Sören swallowed hard, had some more ginger ale. He rubbed his face, looking pained, and Maglor could tell he was about to drop the worst of the payload. "One night when I was sleeping, I woke up and he was... in me. No lube, and he just... was fucking me while I was sleeping, didn't ask first. I felt really, really gross about it afterwards, but I assumed it was just an isolated incident and wouldn't happen again. I was wrong. A few weeks after that we had a big blowout fight, and he was trying to initiate 'makeup sex' and I was just... turned off and done. He forced himself on me."

Maglor saw that, too, feeling sick. Justin on top of Sören, who kept saying "no" until Justin gagged him, pushed into him, drove into him, Sören in pain, bleeding afterwards... He closed his eyes, feeling like he was dying inside. "*Ai,* Sören."

"Later on I confronted him about it and he said, 'You wanted it.' No... I did not. I did not want that at all. I told him no, many times over. He told me I was just being a 'cocktease'. I

told him, 'What I am now is damaged goods, and you broke me.' And he said, 'Of course. And nobody else will want you. Nobody else *does* want you, didn't you tell me that when we started dating? Alejandro sure didn't...'" Sören's voice broke.

Then Sören quickly choked out, through his tears, "I'm not blaming you for this, Alejandro. It wasn't your fault, that he did this -"

Is it not? I pushed you away. This is where you ended up."Sören." Maglor felt like he was being torn apart inside... and he was feeling like tearing Justin apart, limb from limb. The fire was seething now, like it had in the days he rode off to war.

"- this is on him, he did this all on his own." Sören shuddered. "But anyway after that... the second time he raped me... I was done. Or I tried to be done. He stalked me, and then he showed up at my flat, and he was starting with me again, and Frankie... beat him up. You should have seen it, little short girl taking on a man over a foot taller than her, dragging him down the stairs, threatening him within an inch of his life. He went away for good after that, but *god*, I still lived in fear for *months* after he was gone. Kept looking over my shoulder. Anytime I saw a guy about his height and build with the same sandy blond hair I jumped. I was convinced his 'friends' were going to find me and do something to me. It was bloody awful."

Sören finished the ginger ale, setting down the can beside him with a little shuddery sigh. "I had a few more Grindr encounters after that and then I just... stopped seeing anyone, for a bit. When I met Nico, in London, he was the first person I'd been with in about six months or so. In the months after my breakup with Justin, I took a ceramics class, I got back into painting, and the show where I met Nico, it was my first show since before my breakup with Justin. And I really wanted to be happy about it but when Nico complimented my work I swear I felt like some sort of fucking *impostor* and like he was saying it just to be nice and all I could hear was Justin's 'You're not that great of an artist', 'You're wasting your time', "That painting is fucking ugly' bullshit -"

"*No.*" Maglor gasped. The urge to kill was even stronger now. Raping Sören, beating him, was unforgivable. Acting like *this* about Sören's art was almost right up there. Whatever Sören was, whatever kind of power he had, it showed through his work - it was as if he had a large touch of his father's own fire - and someone *disrespecting* Sören's gift like this, was almost like profaning the name of Fëanor himself. Justin was unworthy to touch Sören, even look upon his art, the same way the Valar in their arrogance and hypocrisy were unworthy to possess the Silmarils that contained a piece of his father's soul... Maglor breathed in, trying not to explode with rage, because there was nowhere to direct it and he didn't want to terrify Sören, who was already shaken up from telling his story.

Sören nodded. "So I was in the bathroom, hiding at my own art show, because even a fucking *year* after we'd broken up, *he still fucking owned a piece of me*, space inside my head. Having Nico tell me my work touched him, made him cry... it was too much, and I cried in front of him. He didn't, of course, find out the context behind that until later. He wasn't happy about it. I've never seen him that angry."

The timer went off, and Maglor got up. He put the pizzas in the oven and then he sat back down. "He has a right to be angry, Sören. Hells, we're not together anymore and *I'm* angry."

Sören nodded. He was rocking himself a little now, his eyes far away. "He and I broke up in 2016, and it's 2019 now? And I'm still reacting like this. That shit with Símon hit a little too close to home, and I fucking had *nightmares* about Justin last night. Three fucking years, I married someone who is the *very opposite* of abusive, treats me like gold, and I

still can't fucking escape." Sören let out a sob, and the dam finally broke with him doubling over, weeping.

Maglor found himself taking Sören into his arms, and just holding him, petting his curls, making little soothing noises. Sören cried and cried, and Maglor cried a little too, wishing he could do something, *anything*, to ease Sören's pain.

When the pizza was ready, they ate quietly, and then Sören fell apart again. Maglor pulled him close again. "It's all right now," he soothed. "You're far away from him. He can't hurt you anymore."

"I'm sorry for crying like this," Sören wept. "Justin used to call me a crybaby, and a coward -"

"No you're not." Maglor rubbed Sören's head. "You're not at all." He took Sören's chin in his hand and tilted it, to look Sören in the eyes. The haunted look in those brown eyes brought tears to his own, again. "You... have been through an incredible amount of *shit* since you were a child. You have experienced things that have driven other people to take drugs, drink, commit suicide... you've walked close to that edge yourself... but something in you keeps fighting. There is a fire in you that refuses to die, and you know this, and marked it on your skin. You are one of the most courageous people I have ever known, pressing on, continuing to take joy and find passion in life, see the good in others rather than just the ill humanity is capable of... you still have *hope* when others would have lost theirs long ago, going through what you've endured. When you've fallen, you've gotten back up, harder and stronger. I admire that about you, I have since I first met you. It was part of why I fell in love with you." *And still love you.* "You have... an *imperishable fire.*" It felt right to say - Fëanor would have approved of him, blessed him, he knew this; indeed, it was as if the spirit of Fëanor was guiding him, somehow. "That is the very opposite of a coward, who would have stopped fighting, stopped dreaming, stopped hoping." *Ask me how I know, Sören. You have more courage than I, and I was trained in the art of war.*

He let Sören cry some more. It was not the first time Sören had ever gone on a crying jag in front of him, but he'd never heard Sören cry so brokenly, and it *hurt*. It hurt *so much.* He rocked Sören in his arms, and at last, he found himself reaching into the Song, weaving a faint light around him - what he could do without being discovered, this wasn't the time for that, if at all - but it was something, enough that Sören's tears subsided, little by little.

"I'll take you home."

Even though it was a short enough walk, he drove Sören instead of walking him, because he could feel the bone-deep exhaustion from Sören's catharsis. Sören needed to rest. When they arrived at the cabin, he walked Sören inside. Dooku looked up from his desk and where he'd been nibbling on dinner - fish from the looks of it - and as soon as he saw Sören, who looked as if he'd seen a ghost, he got up.

"What happened...?"

"He told me about Justin."

The words hung there, and then Dooku gave a nod, understanding right away. "I see." He put his arms around Sören, and though Maglor couldn't begrudge Sören his comfort, he almost let out a cry of protest as Sören changed hands.

"There, love." Dooku rocked him a little. "Would you like some tea?"

"Nothing with caffeine. I'm wound up enough," Sören mumbled.

"I'll make you some lavender chamomile tea, sweetheart." Dooku glanced at Maglor. "Would you like some?"

Maglor shook his head. "No thank you." While Sören needed to relax, Maglor... did not *want* to relax. The fire was still raging inside him. His fists clenched, and he tried to calm down a little for the sake of not presenting threatening body language to Sören.

Even though it was a warm night, Sören was shivering. Dooku wrapped him up in a blanket, and Sören, huddled in the blanket like it was a hood and shawl, took the hot tea with a mumbled *takk* and sipped it. He was staring off into the distance. Maglor wanted to die for the look in his eyes.

He wanted to *kill.*

Maglor's eyes met Dooku's. Dooku was all outwardly paternal and comforting to Sören, but Maglor could feel him seething as well. There was indeed an undercurrent of danger with Dooku, a promise that he could be lethal under the right circumstances; Maglor had no doubt that Dooku had gone into criminal defense not simply for the reasons he said he did, to champion the poor and downtrodden, to get justice for the falsely accused, but also because he *sympathized* with people who killed their abusive partners, or their current partner's abusive ex, continuing to terrorize them.

I like him. Quite a lot. Those feelings were not something Maglor wanted to deal with right now; this was enough. He sighed softly.

When Sören was finished with his tea, Dooku put Snúður in his arms and Sören stroked the cat absently. After a few minutes of watching Sören and the cat, Dooku's eyes lit up, and Dooku took the cat and glanced over at Maglor. "*Elskan*," Dooku said, stroking Sören's face, "let us make you a nest, OK?"

"Hm?"

Dooku gestured for Maglor to get up, and Dooku pushed Sören in the direction of the bed. Then he pointed to the bathroom. "Get changed into something more comfortable, please."

Sören shucked the blanket and began disrobing right there, presumably because both men had already seen him naked. Maglor hardened at the sight of Sören shirtless, and then throbbed some more at Sören stripped down to his boxer-briefs, seeing the outline of Sören's Prince Albert piercing. And those rings in his nipples... He thought of how he'd played with them, how his fingers had brushed the tattoos on his arms and back, how he'd tasted every inch of Sören's body... the *sounds* Sören had made at being explored...

Dooku gave Maglor a look as if to say *I'm sorry he's doing this out here.* "I think he's a little shellshocked right now."

Sören got out a T-shirt and flannel pajama bottoms and put them on without saying anything. Then he sat on the edge of the bed and looked up at them, like a child waiting for his parents' instruction. Except they were all adults here.

And Maglor was still thinking very adult thoughts about Sören, his rage and lust intermingling, the fire burning hotter. It felt warmer in the cabin for some reason.

"Here, love." Dooku climbed onto the bed and patted a space next to him. When Sören scooted back, Dooku wrapped him back up in the blanket, like a burrito, and then he gestured for Maglor to get on the other side. The two men pulled covers up around Sören and then Dooku placed Snúður on top of the blanket fortress, who quickly curled into a ball, kneading and purring loudly.

Dooku sat there beside Sören for awhile, gently rubbing him through the blankets, and Maglor sat on the other side of Sören, to help with the feeling that he was walled in, protected on all sides. After a little more time had passed he, too, was stroking Sören's back through the blankets, and when his hand accidentally brushed Dooku's he felt a little jolt, nervously glancing up at the handsome silver-haired gentleman, who just gave him a small smile, his dark eyes kind, filled with tenderness for Sören, and the warmth in them made Maglor ache all over again, now for Dooku as well as for Sören.

Sören wasn't crying anymore, but he just looked numb, albeit broadcasting a raw sort of numbness, like emotional pins and needles. Not as wound up as he was, but still not completely safe.

Maglor closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and began to sing.

When you're weary, feeling small,
When tears are in your eyes
I will dry them all
I'm on your side
Oh when times get rough
And friends just can't be found

Like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down
Like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down

When you're down and out
When you're on the street
When evening falls so hard
I will comfort you
I'll take your part
Oh when darkness comes
And pain is all around

Like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down
Like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down

Sail on, silver girl
Sail on by
Your time has come to shine
All your dreams are on their way
See how they shine
Oh if you need a friend
I'm sailing right behind

Like a bridge over troubled water

I will ease your mind
Like a bridge over troubled water
I will ease your mind

Sören's eyes were closed now, and he was snoring softly. Maglor smiled fondly, remembering the nights of sleeping with Sören, the little snores he found cute rather than annoying, and Sören's body had been so *warm* against his, like a living space heater. The fond memories became that sharp ache again, *longing*.

But for now, Sören had been lulled to sleep, and Maglor hoped he would find some peace there.

Dooku walked him to the door. "Thank you," he said softly.

Maglor reached out and patted his shoulder. Dooku's cheeks flushed. "Thank you, for looking after him."

"He's precious to me."

"Me too."

"I know." Dooku sighed. Maglor could sense him wanting to say something and not really knowing what he wanted to say or how to say it - the faintest flicker of an idea, not quite yet come to light.

"You take care of yourself too," Maglor said.

"I'll try. You as well."

"Hmm." *I shall be taking care of a few things, very shortly.*

Chapter 24

Ingwion was already home when Maglor got in, doing business on his laptop. He paused what he was doing and for a long moment he and Maglor just looked at each other.

Maglor sat in the armchair and folded his arms.

"How is he?" Ingwion asked.

"Not well." Maglor set his jaw. "Has Sören ever mentioned any ex-partners to you? Specifically -"

"Justin?" Ingwion nodded. "Yes." He smiled. "I was wondering when you were going to bring him up."

Maglor braced himself; Ingwion was just full of surprises.

"I did some... contact tracing, with the connections I have. Justin Roberts, plays for FC Arsenal. The golden boy, as he's called."

"He raped Sören," Maglor seethed. "I want him dead."

"I have those kinds of connections, too. I'll even pay for the hitman -"

Maglor shook his head. "You know me, Ingwion. I want to do it myself. I *demand* to do it myself." Maglor swallowed hard, tears burning his eyes, his heart breaking all over again for what Sören endured in the years they were apart. "I would want to do it anyway, but knowing that when I left him, he felt so bad about himself that he ended up settling for such *vile filth*..." Maglor's fists clenched. He grit his teeth and looked Ingwion in the eye. "Justin Roberts is going to pay for what he's done. He's going to pay in blood..."

Ingwion took a deep breath.

"You had better not try to talk me out of it," Maglor said, rage burning even hotter. "Don't stand in my way."

"I... think I know better than to try to talk you out of murder," Ingwion said. "It worked so well the last time."

Maglor got up and without thinking about it, he backhanded Ingwion. Ingwion winced, but did not hit him back. "I deserved that," Ingwion said, blinking slowly. "I should not have said that."

"No, you shouldn't have." Maglor sat back down.

"In all seriousness..." Ingwion's eyes met his, the blue eyes of Indis, the blue eyes of Fingolfin. "While you *can* kill him, and indeed you *should*, there is a right way and a wrong way to go about it. We live in the 21st century now. Governments spy on their own people, there are eyes everywhere. You can't just fly to London, find this man, kill him in cold blood, and fly back. It needs to look like an accident, or a suicide. No witnesses. No fingerprints. And there should be no record of your journey. Ideally, you shouldn't fly at all."

Maglor snorted, thinking Ingwion was out of his mind. "What, should I build a ship like the Vikings did, try to sail there?"

"No." Ingwion took his laptop, quickly finished what he was doing, then closed the laptop, stood up, and began walking to the door, grabbing the keys to his Bentley. "Come with me."

Warily, Maglor followed Ingwion to the Bentley, and got in the passenger's seat. He could even *smell* Sören in the car, and that set him on edge all over again, his possessive instincts stronger as he was feeling stronger protective instincts. It took him every inch of his restraint not to start throttling Ingwion as he drove.

"Where are we going, anyway?" Maglor asked as they got on the highway.

"You'll see."

Maglor had more questions than answers when Ingwion pulled up near the Dimmuborgir. He'd been here with Sören a few times, and the place had always unsettled him, radiating a strange power that he couldn't make sense of. That power felt even stronger now as Ingwion got out of the car and began striding towards the ancient lava formation, looking like castle ruins.

"I don't understand," Maglor called.

Ingwion paused and waited for Maglor to catch up. Once Maglor was at his side, Ingwion grabbed Maglor's wrist and began walking him towards the arch. The arch began to *glow* and thrum. Maglor gasped, and before he could protest, Ingwion marched them, faster, into the glowing light. Everything went ultraviolet, and there was a sickening drop, like falling in an elevator. It was suddenly too hot.

The next thing Maglor knew, they weren't at the Dimmuborgir anymore. They were at a stone barrow in a peaceful forest, British by the looks of it.

"Welcome to Wayland's Smithy," Ingwion said.

"What... no. We..." Maglor couldn't even make words.

He knew, of course, that reality was stranger than Men thought - he had come from what many Pagans would think of as "beyond the Veil", a sort of "Faerieland". But it was one thing to cross from the world of Elves to the world of Men, and another thing entirely to use an ancient site as a sort of transporter device.

"This," Ingwion said, "is how you're going to get to London without flying. But first, let's go back so you can make proper plans."

The jump back to the Dimmuborgir was another wild ride, and Maglor was shaking, feeling dizzy and nauseated when they returned. Ingwion patted him and gave him a moment to recover before he led the way back to the car.

"I should have given you a little more time to rest, perhaps, but I thought you'd want to get the plans in motion as quickly as possible," Ingwion said when Maglor got back in the car.

Maglor nodded weakly.

They rode in silence back to the cottage. Maglor felt like his mind had been broken, then

all the pieces turned inside out and re-assembled in a bad mosaic. While he supposed it should have been comforting to know there was a way he could get to and from England without getting on a plane and thus potentially leaving a trace with his activities, the reality was more terrifying than comforting. It implied there were other things - even stranger things that Maglor didn't know about...

...and somehow Ingwion did. That bothered him just as much, if not more, than what they had just done.

Maglor thought about Dag's TED Talk then, a chill going through him as he remembered the young scientist's words.

...no need to fly at all. Why fly, when you can just walk through a door?

Another chill as he remembered more of that speech. *Are we in a universe, singular, or are we in a multiverse, plural?*

If Dag was right about humans not being alone... and just being able to "walk through a door" to get from place to place, he might be right about the multiverse, too. It would explain dreams he'd had, memories of him and Sören that he was positive he'd never experienced here.

When they got in the cottage, Ingwion took a bottle of champagne out of the fridge. "You could use a drink, probably," Ingwion said as he poured them both a glass.

Auli curled up at Maglor's feet, whining like he'd been left alone all day rather than a couple of hours. Maglor downed one glass of champagne quickly, and sipped at a second glass, trying to take it all in.

"You have questions for me," Ingwion said.

"I have so many questions I am not even sure how to ask the right questions," Maglor said.

"All right. Well..." Ingwion leaned back and swirled the champagne in his glass, watching it catch the light. "I have something for you, that I've been meaning to give you for awhile, but I had to show you *that* first."

Maglor waited as Ingwion got up, went to his room, and a few minutes later came back with a rolled-up scroll. Maglor unrolled it and saw a map of the world, done in sepia, old-fashioned. There were markers around the map. He saw a marker at the Dimmuborgir, where they'd just been. A marker for Wayland's Smithy. Markers at Stonehenge, Avebury. Other markers in Scandinavia and on the European continent... in the Americas, Africa, Asia, Australia.

"Indigenous peoples had sacred sites too," Ingwion explained. "All people, all over the world, sense places of power. Places the legends say are walked by gods and spirits."

"And this map is... portals? Gates? Like the one we just used?"

"Correct," Ingwion said.

"How do you know about this?" Maglor raised an eyebrow as he rolled the map back up.

"As I told you, you and I have both spent a very long time in the world of Men. Long

enough for me to collect valuable artifacts and amass an obscene amount of wealth. But your path and mine have been very different."

"Obviously," Maglor said. "Our paths did not even cross until more recently, after thousands of years."

"Indeed," Ingwion said. "But I mean well above and beyond that." Ingwion sipped his champagne, a small smile on his face. "In this world, people know me as Ingmar Borovkov. Owner and CEO of Borovkov Enterprises, a Fortune 500 company specializing in green technology, renewable resources. But I was also quite famous in a different way a long time ago. In a way, Iceland is like coming home again."

Maglor waited.

"Sören's distant ancestors would have known me as Freyr," Ingwion said. "Also called Ing by the Anglo-Saxons, Yngvi by the Swedes."

"A god." Maglor couldn't believe what he was hearing. "A... Norse. God."

"Known in mythology as the lord of the Elves," Ingwion said, nodding solemnly.

"That..." Maglor blinked slowly. It made sense, and yet...

"You see, Macalaurë, I watched my father Ingwë, a king, live as a slave to the Valar. I decided I could go back and inherit my father's throne and bow and scrape to the Valar... or I could live among Men as a true king. Our people have power... and I gained yet more power as I tasted the pleasures of the flesh that my father, and most of our kind, deny themselves. Countless men and women, bringing them to ecstasy... drinking deep of that light, that fire. I saw it as a little thing to use magic to make their fields fertile, if I could plow the sowers and reapers." Ingwion chuckled, his blue eyes merry.

*People should not have to pay for food with sex,*Maglor thought to himself, not finding it as amusing as Ingwion did, or at all, but he held his tongue.

"For a long time nobody worshiped the old gods, so I traveled, like you did. I was still free, after all, unlike my father, and it was a pleasure to see the world and watch it change. It was even more of a pleasure during the free love era. Then in the 1970s, Ásatrú started in Iceland and I started to gain power again - one might question if perhaps all that sexual energy had re-opened the door for myself and other gods. And I gained power yet again when I set up my company, and people use my products." Ingwion's smirk became a grin. "Green energy is Earth god energy."

*You are taking advantage of an environmental crisis to build yourself up.*Maglor felt ill, but again, he said nothing.

"Enough about me," Ingwion said. "Let us talk about you... and how you are going to handle this Justin Roberts character. You know now that you have a few different ways of getting to England - just make sure you have the destination clearly in your head when you use the portal, or you might end up elsewhere."

"Else...where?"

"Yes, someplace else. Like another location on Earth... or another location on another Earth. Or on another world entirely."

Maglor's head was spinning again. Dag's words echoed, like a mantra of madness.*Are we in a universe, singular, or are we in a multiverse, plural?* "Another Earth... you mean another universe."

"I have seen some things, since I ascended to godhood," Ingwion said. "I have seen quite a lot of things."

"I bet you have."

"But... back to you, and how you are*not* going to be seen, when it is you do whatever it is you decide to do."

"I want him to suffer," Maglor said. "I want him to, for at least a few moments, taste terror."

"You realize it will take time to get around London, even if I can set a trap to lead him right to you. You'll need at least an overnight trip, if not a couple of days. Staying in a hotel is a bad idea - if you can even find an opening with summer and tourists."

"I can pretend to be a homeless derelict and sleep in a shelter or on a bench, I don't care - "

"Well, that too creates potential to be noticed. I have homes around the world. I have a flat in London that's unused right now, in Kensington. You're welcome to stay there while you... attend to your business."

Maglor did not want to be in personal debt to Ingwion any more than he already was - while Ingwion had said on the flight to Reykjavik that he felt he needed to make it up to Maglor for not coming along on the quest for the Silmarils, Maglor nonetheless got the sense from the conversation they had just had that there were still strings attached to any sort of help given. What, remained to be seen.

Nonetheless, it was less risky than trying a hotel... or sleeping on the street and being accosted by police. Maglor nodded slowly. "I accept your offer," Maglor said.

"Good. Will you need me to use my connections to set a trap, or -"

"Just find out where he is," Maglor said, "and I can take it from there." It wasn't just to avoid more debt to Ingwion... it was more satisfying if he could trap his prey himself.

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Friday

Sören woke up before the alarm - not entirely surprising since he'd gone to bed early last night. He had a vague recollection of Dooku and Alejandro trying to get him to calm down, building a sort of blanket fort for him, and Alejandro... singing?

"*Alejandro, Alejandro, Ale-Ale-Alejandro, Ale-Ale-Alejandro,*" Lady Gaga sang across the cabin.

"What in the *fuck.*" Sören rubbed his face like a disgruntled wet cat given a bath. He used the Force to snatch his phone over. "The fuck you calling this early for, mate."

A little nervous laugh. "Sören, hi."

"*What.*"

"I know, I normally wouldn't disturb you at this hour, but... can I come over, quickly? It's important."

"You can't tell me over the phone?"

"No."

Dooku's eyes were open now, and he made a little grunt. "Alejandro's swinging by," Sören said, patting him.

"What for...?"

"Fuck if I know." Sören shrugged.

When Alejandro knocked, Sören opened it, still in T-shirt and pajama bottoms. "Come in?" Sören asked; he wasn't a morning person but he wasn't a barbarian, either.

"I can't stay long." Alejandro frowned, and brushed hair out of his eyes. "Sören. I have a bit of an emergency to take care of and I have to go to London for a couple of days."

"What...?"

Alejandro nodded. "I'm really sorry. I'll be back, likely Sunday, maybe Monday at the latest. I really hate to run like this after last night, I wouldn't if this... situation... hadn't come up."

"What kind of emergency? Is everything all right...?"

"The family business." Alejandro patted Sören's shoulder. "Hang in there, OK? We'll talk some more when I get back."

Alejandro took a step, about to walk off, and Sören said, "Wait." Then he reached out and hugged him, hard. Alejandro hugged back, as hard as he could, and they just hugged for a minute, rocking together. Sören could sense that Alejandro was very upset about something, and there was a sharp ache on top of that pain, not wanting to let him go. Sören didn't want to let go, either.

But they did. Alejandro gave a slight raise of his good hand. "I'll see you soon."

"Have a safe trip."

And with that, Alejandro got in the Jaguar and drove off. Sören watched for a moment, feeling like his heart had sunk into the floor. Three little words had been on the tip of his tongue in that embrace, and for all of Alejandro's speech about him having courage last night, he couldn't bring himself to say them.

He dreaded that Alejandro wouldn't come back, and he'd never get a chance to say them.

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Ingwion had arranged for a driver to meet Maglor at Wayland's Smithy, and from there, Maglor was driven to Ingwion's penthouse flat in Kensington.

While Maglor himself had amassed a small fortune over the years, he preferred to live a comfortable-but-simple existence. He'd had a very nice flat in Reykjavik, and a little house in Anchorage. As he walked into Ingwion's flat, he was reminded of those reality TV shows that tour celebrity homes, and he couldn't help grimacing a little. Maglor was not a fan of the concept of sin, nonetheless he felt it was somewhat sinful to live like this when there were homeless and hungry people out there. Nonetheless, the flat was tastefully done in shades of white and cream and muted gold, and there was a lush assortment of potted plants and ferns and flower bushes that a housekeeper looked after in Ingwion's absence.

Most notable about Ingwion's flat in Kensington was he had quite a collection of original art. This was an expense Maglor *did* approve of - he felt it was important to support artists, musicians, and other creative people as much as possible. One painting in particular caught Maglor's eye. It was unmistakably Sören's work, done in that Pre-Raphaelite inspired style, but somewhat more photorealistic. A forest in the last throes of winter, with bare trees and clumps of snow - and Ingwion was there, magically changing it to spring, grass and crocuses sprouting here and there; Ingwion was nude, wearing an antler headdress, a flood of golden hair, his cock erect. Maglor was absolutely sure Sören had never seen Ingwion unglamoured, and doubly sure that Ingwion had never revealed his identity as Freyr. Maglor knew from his close to five years with Sören that Sören captured deeper truths with his brush - Sören seemed to know on a subconscious level the true essence of a person, place, or thing.

Much as his father had.

A shiver went through Maglor looking at the painting. Sören's gift was one of the reasons Maglor loved him. Far from the only reason, but to truly love Sören was to understand the way his art consumed him; the only other person Maglor had ever known in the thousands of years he'd been alive, who was that obsessive with his craft, was Maglor's own father. There were other similarities - the passion, Sören's temper when it manifested itself, the humor; Sören teased Dooku much the same way his father had teased his uncles - and at times it was downright unnerving. But now, looking at this painting of Ingwion looking like a god of nature, Maglor's mouth went dry, as if he were looking at an artifact from Fëanor's own forge.

London was having a record heatwave and Maglor felt gross and sticky, so he went to take a shower. As he washed the full length of his hair, his mind once again went back to that painting... to the nature of Sören's gift... the memory of watching Sören's power, a power he'd previously only seen exhibited by others of his own kind.

There was the fact that Sören had come under Ingwion's radar. While that speech Ingwion gave him about wanting to make it up to him for not helping him to pursue the Silmarils seemed on the surface like a plausible explanation for why Ingwion had chosen to bring Maglor to Iceland to reconnect with Sören, Maglor knew when the surface was scratched, it didn't quite add up. Ingwion had thousands of years to try to find him, and assist with other mortal partners Maglor had taken; Ingwion could have offered to be a traveling companion and rekindle their relationship long before now, especially when Ingwion himself was in "the dry years" for his role as a deity and "just traveling" and they certainly could have done so together. Sören Sigurðsson had somehow captured - and held - the attention of a god. He was not even a devoted worshiper; Sören was an atheist, a man of science who had almost become a doctor. Sören was extraordinary, to be sure,

but there was something going on above and beyond his visible level of extraordinariness that even Maglor didn't know of, if Freyr was interested in this one particular mortal life.

What are you, Sören Sigurðsson?

Maglor had a feeling he would soon find out.

Chapter 25

Friday

Between Sören's two classes, Ingmar showed up at the studio - Sören startled again when he heard footsteps in the doorway, and then facepalmed, self-conscious at his reaction, and wondering if he was ever going to stop reacting like that.

Ingmar came over and simply put his arms around Sören, and Sören leaned on his shoulder with a little sigh. Ingmar took a moment to stroke Sören's curls.

"So, Ingmar," Sören said when they pulled apart, "Alejandro stopped by this morning to let me know he was going away on emergency business for a day or two."

"Yes, he said something about that to me as well."

Sören ran a nervous hand through his curls. "As much as I hate to do this and on short notice... Alejandro usually keeps Nico company on our date night, and I don't feel right about leaving Nico by himself tonight, it doesn't seem fair to him. Would you mind taking a rain check?"

Sören could tell Ingmar was disappointed, but he nodded and said, "I understand."

"Do you want to grab lunch while we're waiting for my ceramics class to start?"

They did that, eating outside, feeding each other sensually like lovers, enjoying the nice weather. Sören was a little worked up eating from Ingmar's fingertips, and Ingmar eating from his, by the time they got back to the studio, and lamented that he wouldn't be spending the night with Ingmar.

The entirety of his ceramics class, despite focusing on his students and their work on the wheels and with glazes, Sören's thoughts were lustful, replaying the times they'd made love so far, entertaining new fantasies - Sören wondered what it would be like to top Ingmar, remembering when Ingmar had told him he'd had everything done to him, that night in Reykjavik four years ago. He pictured Ingmar coming undone underneath him, making Ingmar come hard, shattering him.

He wondered if Alejandro had topped him. He could see it in his mind's eye. He thought of Alejandro and Ingmar taking turns inside each other, and the mental image was almost too erotic to bear. He thought of his own past history with Alejandro, the times he'd been inside him, the sweet moans he would never forget, Alejandro erupting over him, and the ways Alejandro had taken him, the glorious immolation of their passion.

For a brief, forbidden instant, Sören wondered what it would like to be with the two of them at the same time.

Then what it would like to be with Ingmar, Alejandro, and Dooku all at once.*Fuck.* Sören felt like he was climbing the walls.

Sören thought of Alejandro now, thought of his time in London, wondering what he was doing there. Sören remembered when Auli had run off, the argument that Alejandro and Ingmar had that frightened Auli enough to run away - Ingmar trying to talk Alejandro out of leaving Iceland. Sören wondered if Alejandro's "emergency business" trip was in fact just

leaving altogether, not having the guts to say goodbye for good, and his mood changed from hot lust to sharp ache, hoping that wasn't the case. But he wondered if he hadn't scared Alejandro away last night, if Alejandro was thinking he was too fucked up, damaged goods...

That's nonsense. He remembered the tenderness Alejandro had shown to him last night, holding him, helping Dooku build him a blanket nest, singing "Bridge Over Troubled Water", soothing him, taking care of him...

...a tenderness that made his heart hurt, recalling the many times Alejandro had been nothing but patient and understanding when Sören had bad days and was haunted by his past. Indeed, before they'd even become an official couple, Alejandro had taken him to Akureyri to put flowers on his mother's grave on what would have been her birthday, and had held him that night, given him comfort.

Except maybe that happened too many times and he got tired of it and that's why he didn't fight that arranged marriage. Too broken... Sören closed his eyes, and tried to stomp those thoughts out of his head. *He's not like that. This isn't that.* Yet he couldn't help going there all the same.

Even if it wasn't deciding Sören was too damaged to try to be friends with,*try to rekindle a relationship with*, Sören wondered - half-hoped, and wanted to scream at himself for hoping - Sören wondered again if he had left with the intent to not come back. *Please, no.*

He worried, then, that maybe Alejandro did intend to come back, but whatever this emergency business was, it was bad enough that maybe he wouldn't, maybe there was some sort of danger involved or he was in trouble - Sören thought about the warning Dooku had given that Ingmar might have dangerous enemies, that this might extend to Alejandro's South American family as well.

Or even if he wasn't in danger from that - he worried about there being a plane crash, or even terrorists.

When the ceramics class was over, Sören began cleaning up the art room, and when he was done and went to the bathroom to wash his hands, he started crying. He thought of how he'd been spending time with Alejandro after his classes lately...

...and he *missed* Alejandro.

I've been missing him for a long time. Sören swallowed hard. They had been so perfect together, so *right* for each other. If Alejandro hadn't broken up with him years ago because of that arranged marriage, they would probably still be together now.

Sören felt guilty, thinking like that. He didn't regret meeting Dooku, being with him... still wanted to be with him. *In a perfect world, we would have been together and I'd still have met Dooku and the three of us -*

Oh my god, *could you not.*

But it was too late to unthink that thought... unfeel that feeling. It was there, raw and honest. Sören's heart hammered in his ears, his mouth dry. *I still love Alejandro. I want to be with him again, despite what happened.*

Sören cried harder. Just the fact that he was worrying Alejandro left to get away from the situation and wasn't coming back... there was still trust issues, abandonment issues, he

had from what happened five years ago. And it was *five years ago*. There was no way Alejandro felt the same way about him, was there?

Sören tried to pull himself together, and walked back into the art room. Ingmar was waiting for him. Sören gave a thin, sad smile. "Hi," he said.

"You're upset." A pause. "You've been crying."

"Shit, is it that obvious?"

"Red eyes... and I heard you crying in the bathroom."

Sören felt like he was going to fall apart again, but he tried to keep under control - key word being "tried", with his hands shaking, voice shaking. "I see. I... I have a lot on my mind."

Ingmar stood up, and he held out his arms. Sören walked over, and Ingmar hugged him, arms tight around him. Sören wrapped his arms around Ingmar and they rocked together for a moment. "He'll be back," Ingmar assured him.

"I wish I could believe that."

Ingmar took Sören's chin in his hand and compelled his gaze. "He*will* be back. He's just taking care of something important."

"You know what it is?"

"It's a mutual concern of ours, and he's handling it." Ingmar patted him. "It shouldn't take long, and then he'll be back."

"I... I miss him."

"I know."

Sören closed his eyes; the tears started to flow again, silently. Ingmar leaned in and began kissing Sören's tears, and then Sören seized his face and kissed him, hard.

Ingmar kissed Sören back, and Sören found himself fumbling with Ingmar's belt, the fly and zipper of his trousers. Ingmar reached to undo Sören's jeans. Feverishly, they undressed each other, clothes pooling there on the art room floor, and Sören produced the small bottle of lube he habitually carried in his jeans pocket. Ingmar climbed onto the craft table, and picked up Sören, putting him on his lap. He lay back and Sören poured lube over Ingmar's hard cock, and then impaled himself, crying out when Ingmar was buried to the hilt.

Sören rode him hard - hard enough that he was glad the table was sturdy enough to support them. Ingmar grabbed Sören's hips. "That's it, pet. Take what you need."

"I need so much," Sören ground out, working his hips hard and fast. Ingmar's cock rubbed the sweet spot inside him, and Sören felt his balls tightening, already so close, so ready to explode, but he needed to be *fucked*, and so he kept riding, the stroking inside him more and more exquisite. "I need... so... much..."

"Yes, you do."

Sören took Ingmar's hands and squeezed them, and their eyes met. "I need*you.*" He had feelings for Ingmar, too - it wasn't quite what he felt for Dooku, or Alejandro, but he was going to miss Ingmar when the summer was over, he was attached, he didn't want this to end... Sören choked back a sob. It didn't quite work, and Sören felt tears blur his eyes again, flowing down his cheeks.

Ingmar pulled Sören on top of him, cupped Sören's ass and guided Sören into a slower rhythm, thrusting in him slowly. "Hush." He gently took Sören's chin in his hand and kissed him - soft and lingering at first, then deep. Sören moaned into the kiss, and moaned again as Ingmar's hands roamed over his back and ass, then wandered up to stroke his face, his hair.

"I need," Sören heard himself whisper, self-conscious but needing just the same.

"I know." Ingmar kissed him again, and kissed and licked Sören's neck, making him cry out.

When Sören was leaning up once more, Ingmar also leaned up so he could feast on Sören's nipples, licking and suckling them, playing with the nipple rings. Sören clutched Ingmar's head, sobbing, riding hard once more, and then, when Ingmar rested his forehead in the space between and planted a little kiss over Sören's heart, Sören gave in to his climax. "Ingmar, *elskan,* oh god, FUCK," Sören screamed as the pleasure ripped through him.

A few last hard thrusts and Sören felt Ingmar spend into him, shivering. "Sören."

They kissed hard, and then softer, catching their breath. They lay there on the table, both shaking from their orgasm, and a few minutes later when they were recovered, Sören sat up. "I'd cuddle with you for awhile but this isn't the most comfortable place to lay around."

Ingmar sat up - Sören was still on his cock - and they kissed one last time before Sören climbed off, and got back on the floor. He started to pull his clothes back on, and then so did Ingmar.

They walked out to their respective vehicles, Ingmar's arm around Sören's waist, and then they took a moment to steal a few more kisses. "I'm really sorry, again, about tonight," Sören said.

Ingmar held up a hand in protest. "I told you it's fine, I understand." He stroked Sören's face. "It will just make me all the hungrier for our next time."

Sören couldn't even begin to imagine what that would be like; a frisson went down his spine and he shivered. Ingmar noticed his reaction and gave a predatory smile. He leaned in and gave Sören one last sweet kiss - a teasing kiss, tongues playing together, and he drew Sören's lower lip between his, sucking on it, before he let go. "Have a good weekend, beautiful."

"You too."

It took Sören a few minutes to stop shaking and catch his breath before he could drive.

—

When Sören got home, Dooku looked a little sad. "Miss your buddy?" Sören asked as he

walked in.

"Yes, I suppose I do." Dooku sighed.

"I do too." Sören nodded.

"Well, it does no good to mope around. Would you like to go out to dinner?"

They went to Serrano, and then, on a whim, Sören asked, "Do you want to go to the Nature Baths at Lake Mývatn?"

They hadn't been there in a good while. On the drive there they listened to music, and once they arrived, it was a little busier than Sören would have liked, being summer tourist season, but it still wasn't awful. Sören kept swim trunks for both of them in his jeep, and after the mandatory shower, they changed and got in the hot spring.

Beer was brought to them, and they cuddled together, drinking frosty beer in the hot water. The Nature Baths in the summertime was a very different experience than the winter - no aurora - but it was still relaxing and what they both needed.

When they had their fill, they drove back home. After they got in and fed the cat, they decided to take another shower, this to clean off any mineral residue, and they got in the shower together. For a few minutes they just leaned on each other, resting in the heat of the spray, and then they began kissing, their cocks waking up, hard cocks rubbing together. They slowly, sensually lathered each other - Sören enjoyed lathering up Dooku's chest hair, and having his hair shampooed - and then there was more kissing, caressing, as they rinsed off.

They made their way from the shower to the bed. After some more kissing and petting, they got into position to sixty-nine, and sucked each other until they came together, taking each other's hands as they climaxed. Sören could taste himself on Dooku, as well as the lingering sweet aftertaste of Dooku's own cum - he always tasted good - as they came up to kiss, and then just snuggled.

The night was still young, and they decided to watch a movie together; Sören picked out *Aladdin*, which he had greatly enjoyed as a boy and gave him a sense of nostalgia. They curled up together on the couch with the cat, feeding each other cheese cubes and crackers and fruit slices as a snack. Everything was fine, and then, Jasmine and Aladdin were on the flying carpet singing "A Whole New World".

I can show you the world
Shining, shimmering, splendid
Tell me, princess, now when did
You last let your heart decide?

I can open your eyes
Take you wonder by wonder
Over sideways and under
On a magic carpet ride

A whole new world
A new fantastic point of view
No one to tell us "No"
Or where to go
Or say we're only dreaming

A whole new world
A dazzling place I never knew
But now from way up here
It's crystal clear
That now I'm in a whole new world with you

Sören thought of Alejandro, and their travels together.

You help me see the world through new eyes. You give me back a sense of wonder I lost a long time ago.

Tears came to Sören's eyes, and he quickly closed them. *For* fuck's sake *don't you cry, don't start crying again, don't cry...*

A few tears spilled. It was dark in the cabin, apart from the midnight sun glowing through the curtains, and the glow of the screen of Sören's portable DVD player. Sören hoped Dooku wouldn't notice. But of course, they had a Force bond, and Sören felt Dooku's arms tighten around him, a hand reaching in to pet his curls. Dooku gently kissed the top of Sören's head.

And then Dooku said, simply, "I know."

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Saturday

Dooku let Sören sleep in, and went for a run. When he came back, Sören was up, drinking coffee, glaring at his laptop. The glare was of course because it was morning and Sören was not a morning person, and until he had sufficient caffeine in his system he tended to just be mad at the world, but nonetheless, Dooku remembered the way Sören was crying last night - and had cried the night before - and he got the sense it was going to be *one of those days* unless he intervened.

So on a whim, he said, "Would you like to go to Reykjavik for the day? We haven't been in awhile."

They drove to the airport, and took the forty-five minute flight from Akureyri to Reykjavik. They rented a car, and Dooku decided to further help Sören destress by driving to Margrét's bar and flat for a surprise visit. Dooku and Sören got out of the car and knocked on the door. After a couple of minutes, a very tall man with long red hair opened the door.

"Flóki!" Sören said, grinning. "Is my sister around?"

Flóki let them in, and went to the bedroom to let Margrét and Frankie know they needed to get up. Margrét and Frankie came out in their pajamas, looking grumpy at the disturbance, and then as soon as they saw Sören their faces lit up and they rushed over. Margrét and Frankie hugged Sören together, rocking him, and then Margrét grabbed Dooku, put him in a headlock, and gave him a noogie, as Sören laughed.

"What brings you out here?" Margrét asked.

"Oh," Dooku said, "I thought it would be nice to take a trip for the day, so I suggested we

come down. Would the three of you like to spend the afternoon with us?"

They had lunch at Fishmarket, and then they got on one of the whale watching boats. They saw puffins first. "I almost feel bad about eating those cute little fuckers," Sören said, looking at the puffins. "Almost. There's a lot of them and they'll overpopulate."

When they spotted dolphins, Sören squealed and laughed and clapped like a big kid, a reaction Dooku found endearing, especially compared to many of the serious and somewhat sour adults on the ship, a couple of whom were glaring at Sören for making noises. Dooku put an arm around Sören and kissed the top of his head, smiling fondly when Sören looked up at him.

"Sorry," Sören said, cheeks flushed. "I get kind of carried away."

"It's precious. Those moments of joy are worth gold to me." He kissed Sören softly. "Stay gold."

Sören kissed him hard, and Dooku kissed him back, not caring if they made a scene. A few people were staring when they pulled apart - Flóki, Frankie and Margrét were all giggling, and Frankie showed Sören she'd snapped a photo of them.

They saw dolphins again and Sören had another loud, exuberant reaction. Dooku smiled, feeling proud of himself that he'd made the decision to take Sören down here. He would always cherish this memory.

I hope Sören will, too, when I'm gone. Dooku closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He was getting very tired of the concern for his age, his eventual mortality, creeping into his thoughts whenever he tried to be happy - seventy wasn't a death sentence - but there it was *again*.

There was a little gift shop near where they'd boarded, when they got back, and though Dooku knew it would be full of tourist kitsch, he let Sören pull him in anyway. Sören ended up buying two ludicrous hats - one with a plush dolphin on top, and one with a plush puffin on top. Then, Sören made that three, buying a third hat with a whale. Dooku knew, without Sören saying anything, he was thinking of Alejandro when he added a third hat to the pile.

When the hats were bought and paid for, Sören put on the puffin hat, wearing it out of the gift shop. Dooku chuckled, shaking his head with a mixture of affection and exasperation.

"You look ludicrous, darling," Dooku said.

Sören beamed. "I know."

"I am not wearing -"

Before Dooku could finish his sentence, Sören slammed the dolphin hat on his head. Frankie howled with laughter, doubling over, and got out her phone to take more pictures of them; Dooku glared into the camera, while Sören made silly faces.

"So," Sören asked his sister and her partners, "what to do now?"

Margrét thought for a moment and then she said, "I have an idea... it's one of the things Frankie hasn't seen yet. I'll text you when you get in the car."

Once Sören and Dooku were in the rental, Sören received the text from Margrét and cracked up laughing.

"We're going to the dick museum."

Going to the Icelandic Phallological Museum - which would be Dooku's second visit to the establishment - was not exactly how Dooku had intended on spending the Saturday trip to Reykjavik, but here they were just the same. Dooku had taken off the dolphin hat in the car, while Sören was still wearing the puffin hat. Sören continued to wear the puffin hat into the museum, making Margrét, Frankie and Flóki crack up laughing.

It got worse as Sören was photographed beside several penile samples, wearing the puffin hat. He saved the silliest moment for last. "Frankie, this is an elf dick."

Dooku found himself glancing at Flóki, who was shaking with silent laughter.

"What the fuck?" Frankie cackled. "That's not real, is it?"

"No," Sören said, "elves aren't real. But I always thought if they were, elf dick would be bigger than that."

Margrét rolled her eyes, but she was laughing. "*God*, Sören."

After the museum, there was a cart serving various kinds of street food and snacks; Sören walked over and got a *pylsa*, with Frankie looking somewhat uncomfortable at Sören's choice after what they were just looking at. She got a pretzel, and the five walked around, nibbling on their snacks, taking in the neighborhood and the summer sunshine. Some tourists were out and about, doing double-takes at Sören strutting in his puffin hat like it was a completely normal thing to be wearing. One bolder tourist, American from the sound of it, asked Sören, "Can I take a picture with you?"

"Já, sure."

Sören posed for a couple of selfies, giving the peace sign in one of them, and then the American asked, "Do you know Björk?"

"Já, one time she and I wrestled a polar bear."

"*Really?*"

Dooku choked back a guffaw - when they'd first become friends, Sören had told him how non-Icelanders had a tendency of asking him about Björk, and Sören liked to mess with them, and now he was seeing that firsthand.

The tourist had a video camera on Sören now. "Can you say something in Icelandic?"

"*Móðir þín hefur geit kynlíf og ég borgaði föður þinn fyrir blása vinnu með stykki af gömlum osti.*"

Dooku didn't understand all of what Sören was saying but he recognized the words *mother, goat, father* and *cheese* and had a feeling Sören was up to no good. He raised an eyebrow at Sören and got his "innocent face" that wasn't innocent at all, in response.

When the tourist was off, Margrét was bright red, and gave Sören a playful smack in the

back of his head. "Sören, I can't fucking believe you sometimes."

"Whaaaat?" Sören grinned. "Listen, it's not my fault people are stupid!"

"*Terrible.*" Margrét shook her head, laughing.

Their last trip was to the park, Tjörnin. Margrét and Sören talked a little in Icelandic, while Frankie, Dooku and Flóki quietly enjoyed the scenery - there were ducks, geese, and swans on the pond, grass lush and green, with lots of colorful wildflowers around. The spray of the fountain was relaxing to watch. Every now and again Dooku's ears picked up bits and pieces of words he recognized - he heard Ingmar's name come up a few times, and when Sören and Margrét rejoined them, Sören sat on Dooku's lap... still wearing the puffin hat.

"I asked for an invite to the wedding for Ingmar," Sören informed him, "since we're, you know, dating."

"That was nice of you." Dooku patted him.

"We'll see if Ingmar accepts, when I tell him."

It was finally time to go back. Dooku hugged Frankie and Margrét - this time Margrét picked up Frankie off the ground and Frankie headlocked Dooku and gave him a noogie - and he shook Flóki's hand. "It was nice to meet you," Dooku told him.

"Same here," Flóki said, nodding.

As their eyes met, Dooku had the vague sense he'd actually met Flóki before, somewhere, and wondered. London, perhaps?

Sören hugged Flóki, Frankie, and Margrét in turn. Margrét and Sören lingered, until Dooku cleared his throat. "We have to go to make our flight back."

Sören nodded. He patted Margrét. "I'll see you in a few weeks, já?"

"Já, you will." She waved. "Take care, you guys."

Sören and Dooku drove to the rental - Sören was *still* wearing the puffin hat - and then they waited to board their return flight to Akureyri. When they got on the plane, with Sören continuing to wear the hat, Dooku shook his head and laughed aloud.

He laughed again when they were back in Akureyri and driving home. Dooku was feeling refreshed by the trip, rather than exhausted, and he hummed to himself as he grilled outside. After steak, fish, and a salad for dinner, Dooku got back to his novel, while Sören played Stardew Valley and snacked on cheese curls. Sören had finally taken the puffin hat off - it sat on the coffee table now, with Snúður coming around to inspect it suspiciously.

When Snúður batted at the puffin, Sören used the Force to move the hat on top of the fireplace mantle, and then with the Force, Sören moved Dooku's dolphin hat there as well. He unwrapped the whale hat from the bag, and put it on the other side of the puffin hat, and Dooku watched Sören look at it with a sigh, a wistful look in his eyes.

"You got that for Alejandro," Dooku said.

Sören nodded.

"You know he won't wear something like that."

Sören grinned. "We'll see."

Dooku rolled his eyes. "I still can't believe you, wearing that puffin hat on the streets of Reykjavik."

"It could be worse. I could have had a puffin codpiece to go with it."

Dooku had taken that moment to sip his Earl Grey tea, and wound up snorting it instead, which was painful. The mental image of a matching stuffed puffin codpiece was too much, and Dooku doubled over laughing.

"In all of the ridiculous moments of our life together," Dooku wheezed, "I don't think you could possibly outdo this one."

"Challenge accepted." Sören used the Force to bring the puffin hat back over, put it on his head, and then put a cheese curl up each nostril, straightening his posture, giving Dooku a very serious look.

It took ten minutes for Dooku to calm down, his sides cramping, his face hurting. Sören put the puffin hat back on the mantle, and wrapped up the cheese curls that had been in his nose, and resumed his game, smirking.

"I love you, you know," Dooku said.

"I know. I love you too." Then Sören got up, walked over to Dooku's desk, and gave him a hug. "Thank you for today."

"You're welcome." Dooku rubbed Sören's back and patted him. "I wanted to help you get your mind off things a bit."

"Jæja, there's... a lot of things." Sören frowned, suddenly serious-for-real. He sighed.

Dooku saw him glance at the whale hat, and then he felt it - Sören had been trying to shield it, not an act of dishonesty, but because Sören himself didn't know how to deal with the feelings and didn't want to further complicate them by broadcasting. But for that brief instant, there they were, enough that Dooku himself ached, his arms tightening instinctively around his husband.

"You're in love with Alejandro," Dooku said.

There was a long moment of silence; Sören closed his eyes and winced. Then he just nodded, and with a shuddery gasp, he choked out, "I'm sorry." He began to rub Dooku's shoulder. "It's not that I don't love you anymore -"

"- But you love both of us." Dooku took Sören's hand and kissed it. "Sören, look at me."

Sören opened his eyes, too bright with tears. Dooku felt his own eyes mist, but he kept himself composed. "I understand, Sören. You have a history with him, and in reconnecting with him, it's re-awakened those old feelings."

"Old, stupid feelings." Sören looked away. "He broke my heart five years ago. I... I can't

do this again."

"Maybe you shouldn't, no. But maybe you should."

Sören looked back at him.

Dooku took a moment to collect his thoughts, and then, stroking Sören's hand, he said, "Yes, he broke your heart five years ago, and I'm not going to make excuses for him or what he did. But he came here because he is obviously *very sorry*, and he wants to make things right, somehow. *If* you resumed a relationship with him, I highly, highly doubt it would end for the same reason it did before. I think he's missed you enough that he'd stick around this time."

"It's a big if." Sören looked down. "I keep worrying that he bailed, that he just decided to leave, because after what I told him on Thursday night he thinks I'm too -"

"*Sören, no.*" Dooku's voice was stern, a little more stern than intended. He softened his tone then, as he went on. "I am sure that he was *not* leaving to get away from you after what you told him. You were... in a bad way on Thursday night, dissociating a bit from flashbacks, so I know it may be hazy for you, but if you could have seen what I saw when he was helping me take care of you..." And Dooku's voice broke, the surge of emotion, remembering what he'd *felt*, even though Alejandro kept himself guarded, there was that break in his shielding when he could feel Alejandro's love for him, and all the regret of having walked away. He had decided, that night, that he was not going to stand in Alejandro's way if he wanted to pursue Sören, though he'd felt the hesitancy there - unsure why - and knew it would have to be a two-way street.

Dooku took a deep breath. "Sören, when Alejandro gets back, you should tell him how you feel."

Sören glared. "No."

"*Yes.*" Dooku glared back. "You're not doing yourself any favors to deny it."

And of course, Dooku himself felt like the world's biggest hypocrite for saying that, when he himself had also fallen for Alejandro. But he remembered what happened last week, when they'd both had too much to drink and Alejandro had fallen asleep beside him, and he tucked Alejandro in before he left, and in Alejandro's state he'd called Dooku "Uncle". Which was proof that Alejandro *didn't* feel the same way - Dooku was like an older relative to him. Dooku had tried to let go of his feelings and it hadn't quite worked - he'd masturbated to Alejandro twice this week. He was fool enough to have feelings, but not so much of a fool to admit having them and make the situation even more awkward than it already was for everyone. He'd resigned himself to the idea of sharing Sören and vicariously enjoying Alejandro through his Force bond with Sören.

"I... I'm not gonna be ready to have that talk with him right away when he comes back, Nico." Sören looked down, and huffed. "And whatever business he's having to take care of right now, when he comes back, *if* he comes back..."

Sören's voice broke then, he let out a quaver, and started to cry. Dooku could feel the distress in their Force bond, Sören worrying that Alejandro wouldn't come back, *missing him.* Dooku missed him too, and it reinforced the ache he felt. Even if Alejandro couldn't want him that way - why would he? - he still *liked* the man's company, appreciated their friendship.

"He'll come back, Sören." Dooku pulled Sören onto his lap and rocked him.

"You say that, Ingmar says that, but what if he doesn't?"

"He will."

Sören sighed.

Dooku took Sören's face again, and said, "And, fine, you may not be ready to discuss that with him immediately... but don't put it off *too* long. A few days, at most."

Sören frowned. Dooku kissed his forehead.

"I'm afraid it'll fuck up our friendship if I say anything to him," Sören said.

*Yes, I am intimately familiar with that feeling.*Dooku cringed, shielding himself even tighter. "I still think you should take that risk."

Sören snuggled into Dooku's chest. Dooku felt even more like a hypocrite, angry at himself for the hypocrisy, but... *This is what's best for everyone, if I keep my silence.*

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Football season in the UK was from August till May, so there were no matches happening for Justin Roberts at the moment, but since the season was starting soon, he was practicing. Maglor was given the location of where Justin would be practicing on a Saturday late morning, and once again, the driver Ingwion had procured for him drove him from the penthouse in Kensington, out to the field where Arsenal practiced.

It was another ridiculously hot day, hot enough for there to be thunderstorms - not a common occurrence. But the English took football seriously enough that Justin Roberts would be practicing regardless of what the weather was like, and as Maglor watched the dark clouds through the car windows, the dark clouds reflecting his dark mood, he figured out exactly how he was going to kill Justin.

When Maglor went out in day-to-day public, he glamoured the true length of his hair - worn to the middle of his back, when it was in actuality down to his thighs; in times when it had been socially unacceptable for men to have long hair at all, he had glamoured his hair much shorter. He also glamoured his eyes, to make them look more human. His hair was long enough to hide the pointy tips of his ears, though he could glamour those too if he had to, but he preferred not to. Even little touches of glamour to change his appearance were a bit of effort to maintain, and he liked being himself as much as he could get away with in 2019.

It was possible for him to glamour himself more heavily, though he could only maintain more extensive glamour for shorter periods of time. Maglor had also learned in different life-or-death scenarios that he could make himself entirely invisible - this talent of his kind no doubt contributed to the huldufólk legends of Iceland - but, as with heavy glamour, he couldn't keep the illusion up for hours. He was also sure, somehow, that someone like

Sören could probably see him even if he was glamoured invisible, but he wasn't keen to try out that theory anytime soon.

In any case, he didn't need hours. He needed just long enough.

While Maglor was sure that Ingwion's driver knew he was up to something unsavory and was paid well to keep his mouth shut, Maglor nonetheless didn't want to take any chances. He had the driver drop him off in an alley, with instructions to drive to a Starbucks and wait for him there. After the driver was gone and Maglor was absolutely sure there was no one else around, he pushed with his mind as hard as he could, and watched his limbs fade, until he waved his hand in front of his face and could not see it. Satisfied, Maglor began the march to the field, and once he was there he took a seat in the bleachers, still invisible, and watched the practice.

Maglor figured out who it was immediately even without seeing ROBERTS on his jersey - sandy hair, light tan, blue eyes, cleft chin, a smug expression that Maglor wanted to smack out of him. It took Maglor all that he had not to run down to the field, tackle Justin, and kill him with his bare hands. But Maglor knew it would be very bad for him - and probably also for Sören as well - if it were an obvious murder. He reminded himself of Ingwion's caution that it had to look like an accident or a suicide, and that was, indeed, why he was going to this trouble to glamour himself invisible.

Maglor also had to time it just right. It was only Justin he wanted to kill, not the others on the football team. He studied the football practice as intently as he had ever observed anything, every little move, reflex, breath... and at last, when Justin was starting to move off to the side by himself, the moment came.

With rage boiling in his blood, thunder in his heart, Maglor reached out with two fingertips. A bolt of blue lightning shot out from his fingers and hit Justin Roberts. Justin shrieked and fell to the ground. Maglor kept the arc of lightning going, watching Justin spasming, crisping, screaming in terror until he couldn't scream anymore. Maglor was sure the voltage was quite painful, and there was a grim satisfaction in that, though Justin was only suffering minutes compared to the months of horror he'd put Sören through.

Maglor had only conjured lightning from his fingers a few times in his life - he had to be past a certain point of anger; he had always been prone to intense rage, being the son of his father, but something in him had broken after his father died, after his uncles Fingolfin and Finarfin had fallen, and it was only after those lights had gone from his life that he'd found himself in tune with the darkness enough to kill in such a raw, brutal way.

Maglor had several partners over the ages, but there had been no one like Sören, who in many ways was like his father all over again. Justin had hurt something precious to him. It had been almost as if Justin had stolen a living Silmaril. Unlike other times Maglor had killed, there was no remorse here, no worry that maybe he was going too far, enjoying it too much. Justin deserved to die horribly. If anything, Maglor thought this sort of death still wasn't severe enough - but it would have to do. And as much as Maglor despised the concept of gods - having no love for the Valar after the way they punished his family; not being especially thrilled with Ingwion's use of power - he hoped nonetheless that Justin's last thought was that he was being smited by one for his crimes.

Maglor stopped the lightning. He remained invisible, watching from the bleachers as some players rushed to Justin and others ran around, frantically calling for help. "He's not breathing," one of the footballers called out.

Maglor continued to watch, invisible, as the paramedics arrived on the field. He watched

as vital signs were frantically checked and the paramedic began to shake their heads; his sensitive hearing picked up the words "I'm sorry, he's dead" spoken by one to the coach.

With that confirmation, Maglor left. Between the lightning and the prolonged invisibility, he had a splitting headache by the time he got in the car waiting for him at the Starbucks. And as soon as he arrived back in Ingwion's flat in Kensington, he rushed to the bathroom and vomited, something Elves rarely, if ever, did, but the exertion and the adrenaline had gotten to him.

He needed to rest now, and despite his aversion to using Ingwion's bed - he'd slept on a couch last night - he crawled into it, trying not to think about the lovers Ingwion may have brought here. For a few minutes he reflected on what he'd done, his mind's eye replaying the way Justin Roberts screamed and spasmed as the lightning shocked him, once again feeling that grim satisfaction that justice had been served. Hilariously, "Shock the Monkey" by Peter Gabriel began playing in his head, and he would have laughed if he wasn't so exhausted... and still angry. He wished he could give Justin Roberts a thousand deaths for what he'd done to his beloved Sören.

There was no denying that. He loved Sören. He still wanted to be with him, mysteries and all.

At last, sleep claimed him. Dreams of Sören. Dreams of love.

Chapter 26

Sunday

Sören woke himself up screaming. Dooku, who had been sitting on the couch working on his laptop, came right over and pulled Sören into his arms. "Bad dream?"

Sören nodded. "That fucking nightmare again."

Sören didn't have to explain which one. Since he was four, he'd been regularly plagued by a recurring nightmare of being attacked by a mob of fire demons, burning to death, going up in smoke and ash. The nightmares had calmed down as only a very occasional thing when he lived with Alejandro - it was as if sleeping with Alejandro ensured sweet dreams at night most of the time; Sören had never told Alejandro about the dreams, not wanting to burden him since Alejandro's nightmares seemed so much worse, dreaming about his dead brothers, dreaming about war. Sören had only had the nightmares a handful of times since he'd lived with Dooku, again, as if the presence of a strong, protective, nurturing lover kept the terror at bay. Sören *had* told Dooku about the nightmares, who had been immensely sympathetic. And the nightmares had hit their peak when he was with Justin Roberts, where he was having them at least a couple times a week, and Justin would scoff at him to not be such a "crybaby". *I'll give you something to cry about*, Justin had threatened, and more than once, had made good on that threat.

Sören wasn't surprised that the nightmare had returned a few days after being triggered by the memory of Justin, triggered enough to dissociate, but no matter how many times he'd had the nightmare, and he reckoned it was dozens if not hundreds of times by now, he continued to be surprised by how *visceral* it was. It felt more like a memory than a dream; it felt more like the flashback of an experience he'd already had, feeling too hot as if he were burning up, smelling smoke, feeling the terror as death swallowed him whole, part of him trying to fight, part of him giving up, like he'd lost everything. When he'd had the nightmares as a teenager and young adult, it seemed to him that he was facing the fire-demons knowing he was facing his death.

After Sören's suicide attempt in 2004, he'd painted the two phoenixes, one of fire, one of water, in the hospital, and eventually had gotten it inked on his skin. It was an attempt at seeking balance, "cooling the fire" of the dream. He was sure that the dreams were obviously symbolic - even as a small child, Sören was much too serious; he'd developed his sense of humor to try to cope with his pessimism and fears - and his ink symbolized his commitment to survive. But the dreams nonetheless felt real, much more real than his own mind trying to destroy him. Like some sort of outside, malevolent thing, or things, was coming after him. Sören was an atheist and he thought that blaming the problems of his life on meddling from demons or an angry god was the easy way out. He didn't want to sound like his aunt Kat, who had turned to religion to justify the poisonous beliefs she already held, now with a dose of trying to convince others she was a good person. But he still felt like he was being attacked, and he didn't understand why.

"It's all right, sweetheart," Dooku soothed. He stroked Sören's cheek and looked into his eyes. "You're here. I'm here. It's OK now. It was just a dream."

Dooku knew how to handle Sören when he got like this - distraction was a preferred coping tool. So after Sören got out of bed and had some coffee, Sören and Dooku spent a portion of Sunday cleaning the cabin, and went into town to do laundry. They had a picnic after their hard work, and ended up making love outdoors in the grass, which was

wonderfully sensual and romantic, putting them both in a good mood when they got home.

Unfortunately Sören's good mood was short-lived - this time instead of his mind replaying the nightmare, he started worrying about Alejandro again. To distract himself further, he sat down and sketched for awhile. He had the idea of making a gift for Margrét and Frankie's wedding, and began planning it out, a portrait of Margrét, Frankie, and Flóki.

The hours passed, and as the evening came, there was a knock on the door. Sören jumped. Dooku was in the bathroom, so it fell on Sören to answer the door. He got up, and there was Alejandro.

Sören said nothing, and just rushed to hug him tight. Alejandro returned the hug, also squeezing Sören tight, and for a moment he nuzzled Sören's curls, and Sören gave a little sigh.

They pulled apart reluctantly, and stood there, looking at each other. "I can't stay long," Alejandro said. "I got back a little while ago and I'm kind of worn out from the trip."

"I understand," Sören said, nodding. "But... thank you for stopping by. I got kind of worried..."

"Oh, there was no need to worry. I told you, it was just... business. It's been taken care of." Alejandro patted him. He looked past Sören's shoulder. "Where's Nicolae?"

"Bathroom."

Alejandro looked a little disappointed. "Mkay. Tell him I said hi, and... I'll see you tomorrow morning as usual, yes?"

"You will. Rest well."

Alejandro walked off - Sören noticed he came in the Jaguar, so Sören guessed he'd driven here directly from the airport rather than going home, which he found touching *but that doesn't mean anything, that he stopped here first.*

Doesn't it?

Sören groaned as he sat back on the couch. He really did not want another night of wrestling with his feelings and arguing with himself about what a horrendous idea it was to even entertain the thought of getting back together with the man who'd destroyed him inside five years ago.

As Sören picked up his sketchpad, he recalled that the parking lot at the Akureyri airport wasn't very crowded when they'd been there yesterday, and he didn't remember seeing Alejandro's Jaguar there, something he would have noticed as an observer of detail, yet the Jaguar had not been parked at the cottage over the weekend, either. The only way to London from here was to take a plane from Akureyri to Reykjavik and then to London.

Maybe I just missed seeing the car at the airport, considering how stressed I've been the last few days.

Dooku came out of the bathroom.

"Alejandro was just here," Sören said. "He says hi."

"Ah."

Sören sensed a wave of mingled disappointment, sadness and relief from Dooku, wondered briefly what that mix of feelings was about, and gave a little shrug to himself as he resumed sketching. For now Alejandro was back and things were back to normal, *as normal as it fucking gets around here*, Sören thought to himself as he drew a crown of fire on Flóki's head.

Monday

There was an uneasy silence between Sören and Alejandro on the way to the studio in the morning, as if they were each waiting for the other to say or do something, but neither of them were sure what exactly to say or do. By the time Sören's classes were over he felt exhausted even though he'd gotten adequate sleep the night before.

Alejandro and Dooku went to walk Auli after Sören was dropped off at the cabin, and Dooku brought Alejandro in when the walk was finished. For once, Alejandro had Auli with him - "he missed me while I was gone," Alejandro explained.

Snúdur was, predictably, unimpressed, and slurked off to hide under the bed, but after dinner when the three sat on the couch watching a few episodes of the second season of *Metalocalypse*, Snúdur finally came out, and cautiously sniffed Auli, who was sitting on Alejandro's lap. Snúdur climbed onto Sören, and Auli sniffed Snúdur back. Snúdur allowed the examination, and Sören pet him reassuringly. Alejandro looked over his shoulder and gave Sören a little smile. Sören smiled back, and his stomach did flip-flops.

Dooku raised an eyebrow at Sören as if to say, *Go on.*

Sören pushed back. *I'm not ready.*

Dooku and Sören walked Alejandro and Auli back to the cottage, and lingered at the doorstep. "Good night," Alejandro told them.

Sören stooped to pet Auli. "Thank you for being such a nice boy to my kitty." Auli licked Sören's face.

When Sören got back up, he was unsteady on his feet for a moment, and Alejandro reached out to help steady him. Sören gave him a quick hug, and then pulled back, waving. "Night."

Sören took Dooku's hand on the walk home. Dooku gave him an annoyed look.

"I told you I'm not ready to talk about that with him," Sören growled.

Dooku sighed. "You can't put it off forever, either."

"I know. But I need more time." Sören felt like he could barely make words in Alejandro's presence, this evening, never even mind trying to have a serious and deep discussion about the resurgence of old feelings and what to do about them.

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Tuesday

It had been a week since what happened with Símon, and Sören had anxiety about going into the studio at all, but his gut told him that Símon wouldn't be fool enough to return to the watercolors class, and sure enough, he wasn't there.

The memory of the incident still remained, and Sören was not his usual bubbly self, though he tried to maintain calm and warmth for the sake of his students, especially the children's class. Alejandro kept giving him concerned looks while they were out at lunch, and on the way home Alejandro finally asked, "Are you all right?"

Sören saw no point in lying about it. "I'm still triggered by what happened with Símon a week ago. I'm on edge, I wondered if he was going to show up at the studio for the class - I worry about him showing up other times -"

Alejandro held up a hand. "If he does, he will be dealt with." His eyes met Sören's - his eyes were angry, his jaw set - and there was a weight to those words that sent a shiver down Sören's spine.

Alejandro and Dooku went for a walk, and then Dooku came back and explained that Alejandro was giving them the night to themselves "so I can take care of you." He started on dinner, and Sören tried to distract himself by drawing, but he was too wound up for the kind of energy he needed to get back into the preliminary sketch for the painting he'd be gifting them. He logged into Stardew Valley and as he played, Dooku had the BBC News going in the background.

Sören was only half paying attention, playing his game, his eyes glazing over at the usual hot mess of British politics and other stories he didn't care about. When the headline came up of “Freak Thunderstorms in London”, Sören looked up – Alejandro had been in London just this past weekend – and the haze rolled back slowly, though Sören continued to play his game, glancing up just a little more often.

Then Sören saw something unbelievable. “Golden Boy Justin Roberts Dead” was the next headline. “The rash of thunderstorms has one famous casualty,” the reporter announced. “Whilst he was practicing football for the upcoming season, Arsenal's own Justin Roberts was struck by a bolt of lightning and killed...”

Sören's jaw dropped. He put his laptop down and sat there, stunned. His heart hammered in his ears, and now everything coming out of the reporter's mouth seemed like garble. Sören's mind replayed the words over and over again. *Justin Roberts was struck by a bolt of lightning and killed.*

If Sören had been a religious man, he would have immediately thought that was an act of God, smiting him for being a rapist and an abuser; Sören had no doubt that Justin had gone on to abuse and probably rape other people since they were finished, and Sören's conscience bothered him about not going to the police, but he had been threatened out of it.

And yet, it seemed like an awfully big coincidence that Alejandro had visited London that very same weekend Justin was killed on the playing field. Sören wondered if it was actually lightning, or if Alejandro had perhaps hired an assassin to hit Justin with some sort of dart that would electrocute him. Or maybe Alejandro was the assassin.

Or maybe it wasn't a dart at all. When Sören had visited Romania with Dooku, a frail

elderly woman carrying groceries had been attacked by a gang of teenage boys, hoodlums, trying to rob her. As reserved as Dooku was about using the Force in public, they were in a village and Dooku had been as angry as Sören had ever seen, the calm, aloof old man springing to action – not with his fists, but conjuring a bolt of lightning from his fingers and striking the boys before they could get too far with the woman's groceries. Not killing them, just enough to injure them and make them piss themselves with fear. After Dooku and Sören helped her carry her groceries safely home, the woman had thanked him profusely in Romanian and called him “her guardian angel”; the boys had ran off crying about the devil. “As you know, I am neither an angel nor a devil,” Dooku had told Sören as they went back to the cottage they were renting for the week. “I am just a man who knows that the only way you stop bullies is to hit them back.”

More than once, Sören had wondered if Alejandro was Force sensitive. This all but confirmed it now. If Alejandro had done what Dooku had once done with Force lightning, and killed Justin Roberts...

...but how? How would he have been able to do that unseen, with people thinking it was just a thunderstorm?

Sören couldn't breathe. His head was swimming.

Dooku shut off the news stream. Sören was shaking.

The first reaction Sören recognized in himself was *relief*, that Justin could never hurt him or anyone else ever again. Sören felt sick that he'd ever touched Justin, even though he knew he wasn't responsible for Justin's crimes.

The feeling of disgust rolled back to relief. He felt like "a good person" would maybe be upset Justin had been murdered in such a brutal way, but all he could think was *he deserved it and then some*.

His eyes met Dooku's, and Dooku gave a small nod. "Good," Dooku said. "Good riddance."

"I... I need a fucking drink."

Dooku got up and poured them each whiskey, putting ice in Sören's. He raised his shot glass in a toast. "To a fitting end to filth."

Sören clinked glasses, and knocked his back. Then Dooku kissed him, softly.

"You're safe now," he husked.

He kissed Sören, more deeply, and Sören returned the kiss, needing to escape from the horror of what Justin was, needing to be reassured that he wasn't damaged goods, wasn't dirty for letting Justin touch him. Dooku picked Sören up off the couch and carried him to the bed, and helped him undress. He got out a bottle of massage oil and Sören melted beneath his touch, finally arching to him, panting, trembling and begging for it, needing the fire of their love to burn him clean, wanting to fuck the pain away.

They did. And hours later, when they were spent and Dooku was asleep holding him, Sören lay awake, thinking about the news report again.

He remembered the ride with Alejandro back from the studio that afternoon, Alejandro's threat if Símon showed up. *"...he will be dealt with.*" The gleam in his eye, the set in his

jaw, the frisson down Sören's spine.

It has to be a coincidence that I told Alejandro the story of Justin and the next day he suddenly had to go away on an "emergency", citing "the family business", and Justin gets killed by a lightning bolt, right?

...Right?

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Wednesday

It was another day where Sören was not his usual bubbly self - indeed, he'd come very close to canceling classes for the day, even though it would have hurt him financially, and possibly longer-term as well as short-term if people got upset and quit. Sören had made himself come into the studio, but he felt a million miles away, and being around Alejandro at lunchtime was tense. Sören kept looking at him out of the corner of his eye, feeling the delicate balance of still desiring him and loving him, and wondering if Alejandro had been the one to murder Justin and what this *meant*.

At last, on the drive home, Sören decided he needed to take the proverbial shot in the arm and get one of those conversations over with, and he opted for the one that had kept him awake last night.

"Alejandro," Sören said, looking over at him.

Alejandro glanced away from the road.

"I'm going to ask you a question, and I need you to be 100% honest with me about the answer."

Alejandro nodded. Then he said, "How deep is this discussion going to be?"

"That depends a lot on your answer."

"I'll pull over for a few minutes." Alejandro pulled the car over, and turned off the car radio. They sat in silence, with Alejandro's hands folded on his lap, his head bowed as if in prayer.

Sören licked his lips, his mouth dry. "Did you kill him?"

There was a moment of silence - Sören's heart hammered in his ears. It was one of the longest minutes of his life, with Sören feeling like screaming at him to answer, but he waited, shaking -

"Yes." Alejandro turned and looked him in the eye. "I did."

"I see." Sören almost felt like saying *thank you*, but he was shaking even more now, his breath audible, losing his ability to make words. Whatever depth of discussion Sören had planned on, with his answer - he couldn't discuss *anything* now. His heart was in his throat, a storm of emotion he didn't even know how to parse.

Alejandro maneuvered the car back into the road, and took Sören home. "I'll see you tomorrow?" Alejandro asked as Sören got out of the car.

Sören just nodded.

"Tell your husband I'll be ready for the walk in about ten minutes."

It was as if Alejandro hadn't just confessed to homicide and everything was normal; Sören could have laughed at the absurdity of it but he was too shaken up as he let himself in the cabin.

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Sören hadn't told Dooku anything - he just mumbled that Alejandro would be by in ten minutes on his way to the bathroom.

Dooku waited outside, and when Alejandro approached the cabin with Auli, they were lockstep heading down the street.

For a few minutes they walked in companionable silence, and then Dooku looked at Alejandro and said, simply, "I know."

Alejandro nodded, looking straight ahead. "Did Sören tell you?"

"No. I was a barrister for four decades. I didn't need him to tell me."

"Fair enough." Alejandro looked over at Dooku. "So... now comes the part where you're going to lecture me, threaten me with the police, tell me to keep away from your husband...?"

Dooku paused in his tracks, and stepped in front of Alejandro, and the two men just looked at each other for a moment. Dooku gathered his words, and then he said, quietly, "Had I known that you were taking a trip to kill that... *filth*..." He raised an eyebrow. "I would have appreciated being invited along."

Alejandro blinked - Dooku could tell that was not the reaction he was expecting - and then he gave a little smile. "Wow."

Dooku nodded. He stepped back beside Alejandro and they resumed walking. "Nice work."

"I like you."

I wish you liked me in the way I like you. A little sigh, and Dooku patted his shoulder. "I like you too."

"Thanks."

–

"So he told you." Sören leaned against the kitchen counter as Dooku chopped potatoes.

"He did." Dooku nodded.

Sören ran a nervous hand through his curls. "I don't... even know... how to feel about all of this."

"Surely, you must feel *something.*"

"I feel a lot of somethings. It's all... rolled together."

"Well, start with what's most easily identifiable."

"Relief." Sören looked down, and then up at Dooku, and breathed a little sigh. "Relief that he can't hurt me again, can't hurt *anyone* again. I almost feel like I should feel*guilty* - but I can't. I keep feeling like he deserved it."

"Now you understand part of why I went into criminal justice. I had a hard time morally condemning acts of vigilante justice such as the one we've just seen. I believe *most* people deserve a chance at redemption, but I also believe some people are beyond redemption and some of those people deserve to die. I cannot fault a father for wanting to kill the man who raped his daughter. I cannot fault a woman for killing a man who abused her, made her live in terror, every day for years. I did my best to show compassion to these sorts of people, sometimes the *only* compassion they received from society that would punish them for doing what, in the old days, would have been done without hesitation. Sometimes I feel that as society has become more civilized in many ways, we've become *less* civilized in other ways."

"I think I always sensed that sort of dark side in you, and it was part of what drew me to you, after what I'd been through. Knowing you'd... protect me... if I needed it." Sören shivered at the delicious mental image of Dooku in protective mode.

Dooku put down the knife he was working with, and his hand covered Sören's. Then he resumed work.

"So," Sören went on, "it's not like I'm standing here thinking Alejandro did something *wrong*, though I am shocked how he, ah... went about it. Not to mention how he went about it without anyone knowing it was him." Sören bit his lower lip. "Alejandro's dangerous. He's not someone to get on the wrong side of."

"No. You're not on the wrong side of him, however."

Sören took a deep breath. "Well, that's part of the... mixture... of feelings here. Remember when you told me to be careful with Ingmar because your educated guess was he's some Russian oligarch and probably has powerful enemies? And I'd suspected, when we were together, that Alejandro's family had something shady going on - too much money, involved in some kind of war - and he never actually denied that to me? And the fact that they seem to have known each other for *a long time* implies there's some sort of connection between whatever shadiness Alejandro's family is involved in, and Ingmar's background? Those are some unfortunate implications on their own, but now, with this... assassination, I guess you could call it, and nobody who's committed murder for the first and only time does it like that, considering he was able to not get caught, I am ninety-nine percent sure Alejandro has done it before..."

Dooku nodded. "I would be willing to bet money he's killed before, and I only bet on sure things."

"... this is some straight up mafia shit. Or other organized crime. Russian mafia? South American cartel? The remnants of some government, like Pinocchio or whatever his name

was, but he was Chilean, not Brazilian -"

"*Pinochet*, and I thought that too, perhaps his supporters exiled to another South American country like Brazil. Another thought of mine was that perhaps Alejandro's family was tied to Pablo Escobar or someone similar and exiled to Brazil as well. But also, Ingmar once said he ran a cleaning business, and while I thought that was an unusual euphemism once I'd learnt he is the Borovkov of Borovkov Enterprises, that still might indeed be a euphemism for, well, assassins for hire."

Sören folded his arms. "That kind of gets in the way of my feelings for him, Nico. I love him, I still want him - I'm *touched* by the fact that he killed for me, maybe that makes me a shitty person -"

"No. It doesn't."

" - but I keep thinking *He killed this man after what I told him about the abuse I'd been through. Does that mean he still loves me?* and I feel like my priorities are skewed, some advice columnist right now would probably be telling me to run..."

"The heart wants what it wants."

"It does. But that doesn't mean that what it wants is *logical or sane.* I love him, but if he's actively involved in some mafia shit, or cartel shit..." Sören shuddered. "That has potential to, ah, complicate things."

"It does, and as someone who practiced law for four decades, I would be remiss to tell you otherwise. But you were involved with him for five years and things went well during that time, and it seems that up until this point things were fairly 'normal'." Dooku made air quotes. He transferred the cut potatoes into a skillet. "So yes, there are risks if you were to reconnect with him - it's not something to consider lightly. I would however argue that you've already been at risk, and additional risk from dating Ingmar."

"Hm, you're right."

"The other thing I've been considering..." Dooku turned on the stove. "It may be that Alejandro and Ingmar *aren't* involved on the wrong side of the law at all."

"What do you mean?"

"You and Alejandro traveled a lot. He lived in the States the last five years, and it's come up in conversation with him that he used to live in the United Kingdom as well."

"Já... and he lived in Amsterdam, once upon a time."

"How old is he, exactly?"

"He's eight years older so... forty-three? Forty-four in March?"

"If we factor in time in Brazil, that seems like rather a lot of moving around for someone that age."

"So what does that mean, exactly?"

"He may be a government agent. My educated guess would be MI5, but he might also be CIA, Mossad... one of those agencies. Most likely a sleeper agent if he is. Yes, his height

and his striking appearance makes him stand out, but the fact that intelligence agencies are thought of as more likely to use agents who blend in better, makes it a daring, think-outside-the-box move to use one with a more unique appearance; of course nobody is going to suspect the very tall, interesting-looking fellow is with an agency. And indeed, if he killed Justin using the Force - which looks rather certain - it may be that a government agency discovered his talents and made him a deal, *you work for us to keep some measure of freedom*."

"You think he might be a *spy* or some shit?"

"Sören, have you looked at him? He's not in the physical condition of a civilian. The man working for some sort of government as a James Bond type makes more sense than him being a mafioso's son."

That sentence – and Dooku calling him "striking" and "interesting-looking" - was telling for more than one reason. Sören noticed Dooku's cheeks flush ever so slightly pink. *It's clear* you've *looked at him.* Sören was amused by this - indeed, the thought that Dooku might have a little crush on Alejandro tickled him - but now was not the time to press it. "I've noticed his physique, yes," Sören said dryly. "It just never occurred to me that sort of thing would make him a *spy*, considering you know, you're also in great shape, you work out, and all of that."

"I work out, and thank you, but he... has a bit more definition than I do." Dooku's face was really red now.

Sören bit his lower lip, trying not to laugh. Dooku gave him a disgruntled look, picking up on the amusement, and Sören let out a little snort. Then he composed himself, because this was very serious business and he needed to be serious. "Wow. This is... a lot."

"Indeed it is. But it's something that I'm going to suggest you discuss with him*before* you bring up the possibility of rekindling a relationship with him, because if that's going to happen, you need to be informed. *I* need to be informed, so I'm not eaten alive with guilt at letting you go off with someone who will put you in harm's way."

"Well, Nico, I wouldn't be*going off*. I want to be with both of you, I'm not leaving you -"

"No, but I won't be alive forever, either."

Sören sighed. "Could you quit talking about that."

"If we're facing facts here, we need to face facts. I am seventy. I am not immortal."

Sören walked closer to Dooku and put his arms around him, squeezing tight, leaning into his shoulder. "I need you to stay with me for as long as you can."

Dooku kissed the top of his head. "I will try."

"So... when do you propose I talk to him about all of this?"

"Tomorrow. Let's have one last night of so-called 'normalcy' before we blow this powder keg."

"All right."

Thursday

In the car on the way to the studio, Sören asked Alejandro, "Would it be all right if I came over for a bit this evening?"

Alejandro nodded. "Sure, that would be fine."

"Would it be too much trouble for you to ask Ingmar to give us some privacy?"

"No, I'll give him a call and let him know."

When Sören's classes were over, Alejandro took him directly to the cottage. Ingmar had been spoken to and was not there, but Auli had been left behind, and Auli enthusiastically greeted them at the door. He was a little more hyper than usual, presumably from having been left alone for a couple hours, and he bounced over to Sören as he sat on the couch.

"Can I get you anything? Coffee, tea..."

"Coffee, *takk*."

Alejandro made coffee and came out a few minutes later. Sören sat there, sipping his drink, trying to collect his thoughts. He had been rehearsing the conversation all day in his head, but now that he was actually here and about to have the conversation, words failed him.

His mind drifted back to Dooku remarking on Alejandro's physique. Sören couldn't help noticing it now himself, in the way Alejandro looked in his black T-shirt and faded jeans. He wanted to run his hands over that sleek body, trace every part of him with his tongue...

Heat flooded Sören's cheeks, and his hands shook. He ended up spilling coffee all over himself. "Shit."

"Let me grab a wet towel..." Alejandro got up and rushed into the kitchen.

At the sound of the tap in the kitchen, Auli bounced off the couch, but instead of going onto the floor, he leapt onto the coffee table before jumping on the floor, and knocked over a large book that had been on the coffee table.

The book tumbled next to Sören's feet. He put the coffee down and bent to pick it up. Except the book was hollow, and a couple of the contents had also spilled out and were on the floor next to the book. Not able to restrain his curiosity, Sören opened the book and the first thing that caught his eye was a revolver sitting inside the hollow opening. Sören had seen enough television and movies and rap videos to guess it was a Glock.

There was an envelope that Sören picked off the floor, and a card. Sören flipped the card over and saw it was an Alaskan drivers license - a picture of Alejandro, except the name listed on the license was Mark Lowry. He opened the envelope that the card had fallen out of and he saw a passport, birth certificate, and other documents all with the same name. Mark Lowry, born March seventeenth, 1976, in Mystic, Connecticut.

There were other envelopes next to the revolver. He saw paperwork for Alejandro Magalhães, born March seventeenth, 1976, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Another envelope. Another Mark Lowry identification, this one British, born March seventeenth, 1976, in Stretford, Lancashire.

Kenneth Finn MacLeod, born March seventeenth, 1976, in Calgary, Alberta.

Marco LaRaia, born March seventeenth, 1976, in Basilicata, Italy.

Alejandro came back in with a fresh T-shirt and a wet towel and he froze when he saw Sören with the open book on his lap, the fake IDs and passports arranged on the coffee table.

Without thinking, just acting on pure instinct, Sören picked up the gun out of the book. "Sit down." He didn't even care about the coffee stain on his shirt now.

"Sören -"

Sören aimed the revolver at Alejandro's head. He'd never fired a gun in his life, and his hand was shaking. "I said *sit the fuck down.* Now."

Alejandro took a deep breath, and sat.

Sören lowered the pistol, though it was still in his hand, still pointed in Alejandro's direction. With his free hand, he gestured to the display on the coffee table. "What's all of this?"

Alejandro looked down, and sighed. Then he looked back up at Sören, meeting his eyes. "Something you weren't supposed to find." Under his breath he muttered "thanks, Ingwion."

Sören's eyes widened at that - it was a name he'd never heard before, close enough to Ingmar but something still rather different - which made this even curiouser, *why the hell is he calling him that*. But that was another topic for another time, this was more pressing. "Your name isn't actually Alejandro, is it?"

"No." He frowned. "It's not."

Sören leaned back on the couch. It was one thing for him and Dooku to speculate, as they had last night, that "Alejandro" had connections to organized crime *or* was working as a sleeper agent for some government intelligence. But having either of those possibilities absolutely confirmed beyond the shadow of a doubt, with all of the fake IDs and documentation here, and the *gun* he was now holding in his hand... Sören shuddered. This was far worse than anything he could have imagined. Sören felt like all the hopes he'd had of reuniting with him, somehow, were crashing down around him. "Who are you, and who do you work for?"

"Sören..." Alejandro leaned forward and folded his hands. "This is not something I can easily answer -"

"Yes, it is."

"No. It's not. And by telling you, I'm potentially endangering you -"

"Oh, like you haven't already put me in danger coming up here? Like you hadn't already put me in danger living with me for close to five years? Yes, tell me some more about how

not telling me the truth is keeping me safe." Sören held up the gun again. "I asked you a fucking question."

"Technically, you asked me two questions -"

"You're going to answer them."

"*Sören.*" Even though Alejandro didn't raise his voice, it still rang out as if he had. Sören's hair stood on end. "Like I just told you, this is not something I can give a simple answer *for*, and if I *do* tell you the full, 100% unadulterated truth, *your life is going to change radically*, in ways you are not prepared for."

"Like what, Witness Protection or some shit?"

Alejandro got up. Sören held up the gun, but Alejandro still walked over to him, a bold move. Sören's hand shook, and then suddenly Alejandro pulled him close - he towered over the seated Sören - and Sören found himself falling apart in Alejandro's arms, giving a strangled sob. He felt Alejandro take the gun away, and then Alejandro took Sören's chin in his hand and gave him a stern look.

"If I were someone else, you'd be dead right now," Alejandro said. "You don't know how to use a gun, do you?"

"Er, no."

"*I do.*" Alejandro put the gun down. He put his hands back on Sören's shoulders. "Now, Sören. What I have to tell you about all of this is... a lot. It's complicated."

"You keep saying 'it's complicated.'"

"It's more complicated than you can imagine, and *you*, waving that gun at me... which again, would have gone very badly if I were someone else and knew you didn't know how to use that thing... you're not calm enough to hear what I have to tell you."

"Dammit, Alejandro, can you expect me to *be* calm with all of this shit?" Sören felt ready to explode.

"I didn't say 100% calm, I said 'calm enough'. What you're going to do now -"

"- you don't get to order me around -"

"*What you're going to do now*, is go home. Chill out. I don't want to be in a position where I'm forced to defend myself against you, do you understand? This is a lot, and I understand it's a lot, and it's a lot more than you think from what you see here. And for me to explain it to you, I need you to be *significantly calmer than you are right now*. So you're going to go home, and in approximately three days - Sunday, or Monday at the latest - you can come back here and I will tell you everything. All of it."

"Já, and three days gives you an opportunity to bail, to leave without telling me."

"I won't." Alejandro folded his arms. He looked unhappy at that. "As much as I really *don't* want to tell you the story of what you're seeing, I did come here for closure, and I owe you that after what we had. So you'll get the truth from me. When I'm sure I'm not going to have to fight you off me, and I am absolutely sure right now that things *will* escalate until you've had some time to *calm down*."

"Just answer me one thing."

"Depends on what that one thing is."

"It's... simple... all things considered." Sören looked up. "Does Ingmar know about all of this?"

A pause, a nod. "Yes. Ingmar knows."

"Please be kind enough to tell him that I can't go out with him tomorrow, for obvious reasons, and it would probably be best for him to not show up at the studio tomorrow, either, till this... gets resolved."

Sören stood up then - he had never been so acutely aware of the height difference between them until now, Alejandro only had a foot on him but right now seemed even taller. Their eyes met, and Sören looked away as he brushed past, towards the door.

"There's one more thing," Alejandro said.

Sören paused.

"I assume you're going to tell your husband, which is fine, this... affects our friendship, I think... but it would be in your best interests to not tell other people. Like if you wanted to vent to your best friend Frankie about the IDs, my real name not being 'Alejandro'... I would strongly caution you against that, you don't know what mess you'd potentially be starting. Let me explain things to you first."

Sören nodded. "Fine."

"I'll see you in a few days."

Sören slammed the door as he left. He felt sick. *You've been lying to me all this time, I can never trust you again.*

And yet, Sören would be back, in due time. *You still owe me the fucking truth.*

Chapter 27

Saturday

Sören slept in, stirred by the sound of Dooku up and about, putting his clothes on. He rolled around in bed with a groan, and then sat up, rubbing his face, wincing.

He'd managed to go to the studio yesterday, but not even the ceramics class snapped him out of his funk. He'd come home feeling exhausted, enough to go to bed early. Looking at the clock, he'd slept a good twelve hours.

"Shit," he said.

Dooku came over and kissed his forehead. "There's a fresh pot of coffee waiting for you."

"Takk." Sören looked up at him. "You're heading out?"

Dooku nodded. "I'm going for a bike ride." He frowned. "I need to clear my head for awhile, and today is the best opportunity for riding since we're supposed to get rain the next few days, maybe even thunderstorms."

"OK. I'll try to work on my wedding gift for Margrét and Frankie."

"That's a good idea." Dooku affectionately tousled Sören's curls. "Then perhaps when I get back we can go out to dinner, do something enjoyable."

"'Kay."

Dooku paused a moment at the door to pet Snúður. "Be a good boy while I'm gone, yes," he cooed to the cat. He waved to Sören, and then he was gone.

Sören climbed out of bed, fixed his coffee, and sat down on the couch. He played Stardew Valley for a bit to wake up, and then he grabbed his sketchpad. The preliminary sketch was almost done, so he got back up to grab a canvas, paints, and his easel, and have it ready for when the sketch was completed.

But when the sketch was completed, he felt himself getting upset about "Alejandro" again, and angry with himself for still loving him. It was early afternoon now, and Dooku wouldn't be back for hours. Sören wanted to scream.

Yet, as agitated as he was, he was past the point of doing anything rash like pointing a gun. Indeed, Sören couldn't deny that despite having been lied to about his lover's identity, he still loved him. And he was willing to take a chance that maybe there was a good reason for what was going on. Sören was willing to give Alejandro a chance to explain himself. He knew his agitation probably wouldn't settle down until he and Alejandro finally had that talk. *Let's get it over with.*

Sören wrote a note to Dooku explaining where he was, and then he gave the cat some extra food in case he was gone until Dooku returned. On the walk down the street to the cottage, Sören's steps felt leaden, his heart pounding harder and harder. He felt like he was marching towards... not so much a doom, but nonetheless something that would swallow his entire life whole, something that could not be put back in the box once he opened it. Whatever Alejandro told him, whether Sören chose to accept it or not, Sören

knew it would change everything - nothing would be he same as it was before.

He had never felt so vulnerable in his life.

The Jaguar was in the driveway; the Bentley was not. Sören knocked on the door. He didn't have to wait long. Alejandro opened, dressed down in a pair of black sweatpants and a black T-shirt. He stepped back and Sören walked in, without a word.

"Would you like tea? Coffee? Something stronger?"

"I'm fine," Sören said.

Alejandro brought out the whiskey anyway. "You might need this," he said, setting it down on the coffee table.

There was a long and awkward silence - minutes that felt like hours, days. At last their eyes met and Alejandro said, "All right. Before I explain myself, I want to know what you assume about what you saw. I promise you whatever it is, I'm not going to get offended."

"OK, well." Sören took a deep breath and leaned back. "Nico and I actually had been kind of wondering..." Sören laughed aloud at the absurd surreality of it. "If you and Ingmar were somehow in the mafia, or a cartel, or assassins, even spies. Like, even though you're both a bit conspicuous-looking... people usually think spies would be people who blend in better, so it makes sense to use something else as a spy, já? So when I found those documents... I felt like my life was in immediate danger."

"That was not an invalid assumption. Though it was incorrect."

Sören was relieved... but he also found relief immediately followed by deeper concern, because that was the most plausible explanation and if it wasn't that...

"So what? Witness protection program?" Sören pursed his lips.

"Sören..." Alejandro poured himself a shot glass of whiskey and knocked it back, as if he needed the courage. "How much have you read of JRR Tolkien?"

"Um. I've read the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. I read it before I saw the movies! Though I thought the movies were good."

Alejandro snorted, and poured himself a second shot. Then he said, "Nothing else? Not *The Hobbit*? Not... *The Silmarillion*?"

"No. My cousin Ari gets on me to read it sometimes and I tried once, Nico had it in his library, but it felt too much like the King James Version of the Bible." Sören gave a nervous laugh. "I know that sounds weird to complain about considering I can read the Eddas and Sagas without too much trouble, but -"

"Well, it's different. I agree all the thees and thous were a bit pretentious, yes," Alejandro said with a wry smile.

Sören cocked his head to one side. "What's going on? Why are you asking me if I've read Tolkien?"

"You know how about half your country's population believes in Elves?"

Sören's heart skipped a beat. He remembered when he saw Alejandro's pointy ears for the first time in the shower. *I was born this way.* "You..." Sören gave a mad, nervous laugh. "You're taking the piss, right?"

"I met Tolkien personally. We served together during World War I. He based his stories on the stories *I* told him. The stories of my people. He took some creative license with it, informed by his religion - he painted my father as an asshole and he wasn't."

"You *what.*" Sören couldn't believe what he was hearing.

"In *The Silmarillion* I am called Maglor. I am Macalaurë, son of Fëanor."

"Wait. You... you're a *fictional character*? You're claiming to be an Elf? You're definitely fucking with me. I came here for a fucking serious answer, I realize I joke about a lot of things, but finding a bunch of assumed identities and a gun is no fucking joke -"

Alejandro waved his hand and the light turned out - that confirmed to Sören that the lightning bolt that killed Justin Roberts had been the Force, and not some sort of electrified dart - and then he stood up. Alejandro vanished into thin air, and then he reappeared, making Sören jump, and when he reappeared... his hair was down to his thighs, and he was glowing faintly silver, like he was made of starlight. His hair was tucked back to reveal the points of his ears. The thing most notably different, however, was his eyes. Alejandro always had beautiful grey eyes, but now his eyes looked like they were made of labradorite, little flashes of blue and gold. Exquisite eyes... inhuman eyes.

When Alejandro spoke, it was like several voices at once. '***Do you believe me now?***'

Sören heard an inhuman noise, and realized he was the one making it, and he started sobbing, not able to help it. "You," he tried to make words, and just kept babbling. "You. You."

The voice continued. "***Well, do you?***"

"You." Sören was still babbling, between sobs. He felt like he couldn't breathe. For the first time in his life, he could understand the myths of people trembling with awe in the presence of their gods. "You..."

Alejandro sat back down. He calmly waved his hand to turn the light back on, and though the glow was less obvious, he retained the full length of his hair, the magnificent jewel-like eyes. He poured Sören a shot of whiskey and now Sören accepted it, hand shaking as he drank.

Sören found his words. "*Þú ert einn af huldufólkinu.*" He went back to speaking English, though something told him Alejandro - Maglor - would be able to understand him anyway. "All those legends of my people, that I thought were bullshit..." A shiver went down Sören's spine. "Makes me wonder what else is real." Sören didn't find that thought comforting at all; he remembered Dooku telling him about his old mentor, Yodha, who had told him the "gods" were advanced aliens preying on people.

"Well, you've known all your life that there are hidden truths - secret things that many don't know about, but are nonetheless real." Their eyes met, and held. "You know what I mean."

Sören downed the rest of his glass. He had a feeling it had to do with the Force lightning - how he would know to ask *was it you* about Justin's death.

"I think you need more whiskey." Before Sören could reach for the bottle to pour his, Maglor reached across the coffee table and grabbed Sören's wrists. "Go on," he said, "pour yourself another glass."

"What..." Sören was startled, alarmed - his secret had been exposed somehow - and there was the frisson of arousal, with Maglor's hands restraining him. *Fuck, I still want him.*

Maglor's eyes met his again. "Sören, now is not the time to play dumb with me, when we're laying all our cards on the table. I'm not the only one who was hiding something for five years, so pour yourself another glass."

The edge in his voice only heightened Sören's arousal. His cheeks flushed, and he looked away. Then he closed his eyes, and he used the Force to maneuver the whiskey bottle. He opened his eyes and watched the bottle hover in the air just above the shot glass, pouring neatly. When his glass was full, Sören used the Force to set the bottle back onto the table, and Maglor let go of his wrists.

"How did you know...?" Sören's eyes widened. "How long have you known?"

"Not long." Maglor looked at the shot glass, then back at Sören. "Quite recently. When Auli ran away, I saw you... pull him to you."

Sören groaned. "I was hoping you hadn't seen that."

"Well, I did. I've got to hand it to you, that was possibly a more difficult thing to hide than my identity. I can cover mine with a paper trail and some stories, but you... I imagine it must have been difficult, with your power, to contain it as tightly as you did." Maglor's brow furrowed. "Nicolae is like you, isn't he?"

Sören nodded solemnly. "He... has to hide it too. We all do. Well, there aren't many of us, but -"

"No shit." Then Maglor said more gently, "You might, then, understand why you found what you found. You have to conceal what you are, what you can do, from the public, because they can't handle the truth. So do I."

"And that means... what?" Sören remembered what Maglor had mentioned about Tolkien. "You said you were alive during *World War I?* How the fuck old are you?"

"Old," Maglor said. "Let me put it to you this way... I can verify that your aunt Kat's belief the Earth is only six thousand years old is bullshit, because I was there."

Sören snorted. He had more whiskey, and he spilled it on himself. Maglor waved his hand and floated over a towel from the kitchen, to dab at Sören's shirt. Maglor poured Sören another glass and took Sören's free hand, squeezing, trying to be reassuring.

Sören sipped his whiskey. "So now we're even, I guess."

"Not really. Not by a long shot. I told you I would tell you the full truth, and it's a lot. You probably have questions, and I am obligated to answer them, with our history being what it is."

Sören frowned. "You told me that you would be potentially endangering me by telling me

any of this."

"Yes. First and foremost, it will change your very perception of reality. Not everyone is in a place where they can handle that, psychologically, not even the most well-adjusted people, and you, my dear, have never been particularly well-adjusted. I don't really like shattering everything you think you know about the world you live in."

"Do I get a blue pill and a red pill?"

"So this is part of the problem, Sören. You lost the blue pill option once I started teaching at your studio, and more people than just you and Nicolae were interacting with me. This is some of why I was initially reluctant to teach there - that and I still don't feel I'm the best at teaching."

"Your students would say otherwise -"

"Well, I still feel awkward. But... anyway." Maglor sighed. "If it had just been you and Nicolae, and not a bunch of students as well, and you found out about this and it was... too much. I would have given you the choice to erase it from your memory. The caveat being that it would also erase your memory of having ever met me at all, having ever been with me. That presents its own set of problems - losing five years of time isn't a recipe for sanity, and false memories put there in its place don't tend to hold up very well as the years go on. Not to mention that it's ethically dubious. It's a form of mind rape. It's not something I'm really OK with doing. But since it's not just one or two people whose memories would need to be adjusted... it's not an option for you. You are going to have to live with this information, for better or for worse."

Sören nodded. "I think that, given what I can do... I'm in a better position than most to handle this information without it breaking my brain that much."

"I certainly hope so, for your sake."

"You're very sure you didn't see this until recently? It didn't somehow slip when we were together?" How it hurt to say those words, *when we were together.*

"I'm quite sure. But..." Their eyes met again, and held. "I have to wonder if on some level I knew subconsciously that you had some kind of *power*. I knew, at least, you weren't like everyone else. I just didn't know how deeply it ran. I suppose it may have been one of the things that draws - drew me to you."

Maglor had corrected himself, but Sören caught the slip, and his heart beat faster. If he were a dog, his tail would be wagging in excitement. *You're still drawn to me?* And then slapping himself in the face internally. *This man was lying to you every day of your life for five years. Why in the hell do you want to be with him again?*

"So that was one of the reasons why I didn't tell you... even if I thought I would have been believed, and I had no guarantee of that at all, even with your brother being a scientist -"

"Even though my brother is one of the few in the scientific community who seriously examines the possibility of alien visitation."

"Perhaps *especially* with that, but I'm getting ahead of myself there." Maglor sipped his whiskey and went on. "If I had just told you the truth, in 2009, would you have believed me? Even after having seen my ears?"

"Probably not, no."

"There are ways I could have proven it to you, but not without causing the kind of psychological disruption that I, again, didn't know if you'd be able to handle, and didn't want to take the risk."

Sören nodded.

"Another reason is... potentially endangering you in a non-psychological way. You've seen all of the identification cards. I don't age. My average shelf life of being able to stay anywhere without arousing too much suspicion is maybe ten to fifteen years, though after the incident it's been a bit less than that."

"...Incident?"

"I came to Connecticut from England in the 1600s, and I stayed in what would become the United States for a little over three centuries, though I moved around from state to state. I fought in the Revolution, the Civil War on behalf of the Yankees, both World Wars. I avoided Vietnam. Anyway, I may have called attention to myself in World War Two, and I was finally picked up in the 1970s. Some... experiments were done." Maglor shuddered; across their bond Sören saw the mental image of needles, electric shocks, confinement. Finally escaping, though he had to fight his way out, using super-human strength. "I sent them a message, afterward. I threatened to go public about what had been done to me by the US government, and prove to a large crowd of people that I'm non-human and effectively immortal, if I was not left alone. Of course, they can still overpower me if they use greater numbers, and I still look over my shoulder because I don't trust them, especially post 9/11. I try not to stay someplace more than seven years, anymore. My stay in Alaska was the first time I'd lived in the States again since the 70s. Er, the 1970s." Maglor downed his glass.

"Why did you even go back, considering it would probably be more dangerous for you there than anyplace else?"

"I ask myself the same question. It seems like a suicidal move, doesn't it. A man with nothing else left to lose." Their eyes met again.

Sören felt it - the utter desolation after Maglor left him. It hadn't just been Sören who had suffered in that time.

Sören let out a sharp exhale.

"But, yes. My lack of aging necessitates having to change locations when I can no longer plausibly pretend to be of a certain age. And the kind of steps I have to take to change locations, identities... it's put me in touch with some dangerous people. Dangerous people who are well-paid for their silence."

"And you always seemed rather well off, able to afford such help."

"Living as long as I have, it's given me a unique opportunity to accumulate wealth. I've parted with a few priceless items - some time ago I sold an original Stradivarius, as one example - and I have a lot of gold, tucked away in safe deposit boxes in banks around the world. I've made investments in the right places, using handlers. Bill Gates and Steve Jobs have both seen my money, and I've seen quite a lot of theirs. Elon Musk has proved to be another solid investment, though he wouldn't know me from Adam."

Sören's jaw dropped.

Maglor nodded. "So, I've had some help with flying under the radar. But I can't be completely invisible, so I have to be smart about what others do see. I keep my identification between early-mid thirties to early forties because I don't *act* like someone in their twenties. But it's still hard to pretend to be someone even your age - millennials are not Gen Xers are not baby boomers - and it's going to be harder when the kids these days turn thirty and I have to pretend I know who any of these auto-tuned pop stars are, or grew up playing Pokemon or whatever the Hells they're playing now. It was never easy, but it didn't seem so difficult to pretend to be in my thirties a couple decades ago."

"That's tough."

"Very much so. It's tough enough for one person. The more people who know, the more liability, the more risk there is of being discovered. The more potential there is of whoever knows, to themselves be intercepted by a government agency."

Just then, there was a knock on the door. Sören jumped in his seat, and his heart began pounding. He and Maglor exchanged a panicked look, and then Sören probed with the Force and felt Dooku's presence on the other side of the door.

Sören glanced at Maglor, and watched as Maglor's hair returned to the middle of his back, fell over the points of his ears, and his eyes were back to a normal grey. He was still drop-dead gorgeous to look at - more gorgeous than he had any right to be - but Sören found himself wanting to yell *Hey! Put it back!* He didn't like that Maglor had to conceal himself. He understood of course that out in public it was necessary to disguise the truth of what he was, but in private, Sören wanted Maglor to be himself, not just because he was beautiful to look at, but Sören wanted Maglor to be able to relax and feel accepted just as he was.

Jesus Christ, I have it bad for him.

Maglor opened the door and it was Dooku. Sören was surprised, considering Dooku said he'd be gone for some time and it still felt early in the day for him to come back. "Nico!" Sören said.

I felt a disturbance in the Force, Dooku spoke directly into his mind. "Hello, dear. I came back a bit earlier than expected and I found your note. I... know you were quite upset on Thursday so I wanted to make sure everything was all right." Dooku gave Maglor a threatening look. "I wanted to make sure nothing was amiss."

"Actually, you're just in time to see something," Maglor said. He gestured to the couch. "Sit down, have a drink."

Sören used the Force to pour a shot of whiskey for Dooku, who froze once the glass was in his hand, and gave Sören a deer-trapped-in-the-headlights look, before looking at Maglor, then back at Sören.

"He knows," Sören said.

"Of course." Dooku gave a small nod. "I... would assume you were Forceful to kill Justin with a blast of lightning -"

"Force... ful?" Maglor raised an eyebrow.

"It is the term an old mentor taught me for... our gifts," Dooku said, waving his hand to make the whiskey bottle rise from the coffee table, then settle back down.

"Ah. My people call it *ósanwe*, the interchange of thought. Not just telepathy, but in a broader sense of being able to use one's thoughts to affect change. Moving objects, healing..."

"Killing." Dooku gave Maglor a stern look.

"That too," Maglor said.

"So..." Dooku leaned back and sipped his whiskey. "Am I to assume correctly that the reason why you have the false identities - Sören told me - is because a government agency, or agencies, knows about you?"

"Yes," Maglor said, "but not so much for the reason you're thinking."

Dooku waited. Then he raised his eyebrows, and Sören knew Dooku's barrister instincts were kicking in. "You said my people? That word doesn't quite sound Brazilian Portuguese."

"It's not," Maglor said. "I'm an Elf, or as my people prefer to be called,*Quendi*."

Dooku guffawed. "Nice try."

"All right, Mister Hard Sell. Look at me."

Maglor waved his hand and the lights went off again. Once again, Maglor disappeared - Dooku dropped his glass of whiskey - and when Maglor reappeared, his hair was down to his thighs again, he was glowing, his pointy ears were revealed, and he had the same arrestingly beautiful labradorite eyes as before. Sören thought that no matter how many times he saw those eyes, it would take his breath away.

Dooku reflexively made the sign of the Cross, a holdover from his Orthodox upbringing. "*Tatăl nostru Care ești în ceruri, sfințească-se numele Tău..*"

Sören elbowed him, and Dooku stopped.

Maglor took a seat. It took Dooku a few minutes to start breathing normally again. "That..." Dooku took a few deep breaths. "You couldn't fake that."

"No." Maglor picked up his shot glass and raised it.

The next few minutes passed in silence. Finally Dooku broke the silence and asked, "Quendi? You're telling us Tolkien's works were real?"

Maglor nodded solemnly. "To a point. He stretched the truth a bit."

"You're... one of his characters?"

"Maglor."

Dooku's jaw dropped again. "I've not read *The Silmarillion* since the 1970s when it was first released. Even as an avid reader, I found the book very difficult to read. And it was... unsettling. It reminded me of... never mind."

"Reminded you of what?"

Dooku's brow furrowed. "We're not talking about me right now. We're talking about you."

"Fair," Maglor said, but there was an unspoken*you* are *going to tell me what it reminded you of.*

Sören was curious too, and for the briefest instant he wondered if he had picked up on the truth of what Maglor was in his dreams... those weird dreams he had about being in a forge, being taken care of by a brother-lover he called "Ñolo". He wondered if Dooku had strange dreams too.

Before he could speculate too much on that, Dooku tapped his glass, looking deep in thought - frustrated - and then he asked, "What should we call you?"

Maglor shrugged. "If we're out in public, I'd prefer that you continue to call me Alejandro, for the sake of keeping things as close to normal as possible. I explained to Sören just before you got here that I am more or less hiding in plain sight, as I had a run-in with the United States government approximately forty years ago that I don't care to repeat. I go to some lengths to protect myself, and assumed names are part of that." Maglor sat back. "Privately though, when it's just us, I don't really care. Whatever you're most comfortable with."

"I'm most comfortable with what you'd prefer," Dooku said. "I imagine it's been a long time since anyone has called you by your actual name, and if it would be a comfort to you to hear it..."

"...I suppose it would." Maglor swirled the whiskey around in his glass.

"Macalaurë."

Maglor's eyes met Dooku's. The name was almost a caress, in that deep velvet voice.

Maglor finished his drink. "I know this has been a bit of a bombshell, so I'm going to end this particular discussion here for now. We can talk more about it later, but I think you both need some time to digest what you know so far."

Sören was disappointed and relieved at the same time. "All right."

Dooku nodded. "I was going to take Sören out to dinner but I think we're probably not in the mood to deal with the public this evening, after all of that. But, would you like to have dinner with us?"

"Sure, thank you for offering. Do you have any backup plans?"

Dooku's face fell. "I'd need to get groceries in town and I'm not even feeling like going to the store, to be honest."

"I'm in the same predicament, I was going to run to the store myself this evening and now I'm just... drained."

"Should we order pizza?" Sören asked. "I could eat now, honestly." Dooku nodded.

"You place the order, I'll pay," Maglor said, nodding.

Auli chose that moment to finally come out, slowly. Maglor held his arms open and Auli's pace quickened to a trot, tongue lolling, tail wagging, as he hopped up on the ancient elf and began to lick his face. "I see you're finally up from your nap," Maglor cooed at the dog, stroking him. "Did you have a good sleepy? Did you?"

Sören giggled - he would never get over how adorable Maglor was with the sheepdog. Maglor smiled back at him, and Sören's breath caught. *Dammit, why do you have to be so attractive.*

Sören called for pizza delivery, and then Dooku asked, "Shall we watch something while we wait?"

Maglor joined them on the couch, with Sören seated between them, and they watched *Metalocalypse.* It seemed surreal, to be sitting next to an ancient elf who liked a cartoon about an over-the-top metal band, but then, things had always been surreal in Sören's life. *That's the one thing I can count on: things will always be weird.*

The pizza arrived, and Auli begged. Maglor gave him dog treats, and Auli stopped begging. They continued to watch *Metalocalypse* as they ate the pizza, and then once they had their fill, they watched a few more episodes.

Then Auli whined, and Maglor looked at the time. "He needs to go for a walk," Maglor said.

Sören and Dooku accompanied Maglor on the walk. What Dooku had said earlier about the weather forecast was indeed accurate - it hadn't started to rain yet, but it was misty, the slightest drizzle. The humidity made Sören's hair curl even more, and it also made him start to sweat. He felt gross and disgusting by the time the walk was over and the three lingered on the steps of the cabin, but there was only kindness in Maglor's eyes, none of the *filthy human* attitude that Sören had half-expected him to have.

Kindness and... longing? *Is that wishful thinking?*

Dooku broke the awkward silence with a clear of his throat. "Thank you for telling us... showing us... the truth."

Maglor nodded. "There's more to tell, but... like I said, you've had enough for tonight."

Dooku looked at Sören, then at Maglor. "Well, as you know, the two of you have more of a history, so tomorrow, Sören, perhaps you should spend some time with Maglor and get caught up further." He gave Sören a small, subtle nudge as if to say *you know what I mean.*

God, Nico, Sören spoke into his mind. *Still not ready for that.*

Dooku sighed.

"Tomorrow afternoon OK? Like two thereabouts?" Sören asked.

"That works for me." Maglor nodded.

"OK. Have a good evening."

"You too." Maglor lingered, and Sören looked over his shoulder before stepping in the

cabin. Maglor was still there, watching them, and for a moment Sören had the urge to grab him and shove him inside with them, screaming *this is where you belong, you stubborn arse.* But he didn't.

Maglor raised a hand, and Sören waved back, before Dooku closed the door behind them.

Chapter 28

Sunday

Sören was woken up to the sound of rain, and then five minutes later, "*Alejandro, Alejandro, Ale-Ale-Alejandro* -"

Sören cringed. *I'm going to have to get him a different ringtone.*He reached for the phone with his Force. "Hello," he croaked out.

"It's really coming down out there, you want me to drive over to pick you up at two?"

Sören sat up. His head started throbbing and he knew he'd had too much to drink last night. "I'm not going to melt in the rain." Then he looked out the window and it was indeed quite a downpour; he looked at the time and it was already past one o'clock. His head throbbed again. "You can go ahead and drive over. Actually if you want to make it sooner than two, I can be ready in about fifteen minutes."

"OK, see you then."

Sören quickly washed up, got changed, and hugged and kissed Dooku on his way out. Maglor drove up in the Jaguar, and Sören hopped through puddles to climb in. The windshield wipers were going, and Sören felt nostalgic all of a sudden.

"Remember the days we would just go for a drive in the rain?"

Maglor nodded. "Where do you want to go?"

"Somewhere we can sit and talk for awhile, I guess."

"OK, I'll think of something. In the meantime..." He handed Sören a thermos of iced coffee. "Figured you needed this, since I could tell from your voice you were still waking up."

"I didn't expect to sleep in so late. Of course, I'm hungover as fuck, too." Sören winced, his head pounding.

"The caffeine should help."

Maglor started to drive out of the village. Sören snickered into his coffee, and Maglor raised an eyebrow. "What?"

"Do Elves even get hangovers?"

Maglor gave a guilty grin. "I can attest to the fact that Elves can and do get hangovers, yes."

"Sounds like there's some stories there."

"I have a lot of stories, Sören." His grin became a frown. "Not all of them are pleasant."

The Cure was playing softly on the car stereo. Maglor turned it up as they got on the road. For a few minutes they drove quietly, Sören nursing his coffee, Maglor deep in thought.

Maglor drove to the Goðafoss. They sat in the car and watched the mists swirl around, the rain pouring into the falls. It seemed apt, like some sort of dam had broken and all the deluge of feeling was rushing out now... the rain like endless tears.

"So..." Maglor leaned back. "Do you have anything you want to ask me?"

"Probably." Sören facepalmed. "Sorry, I'm still not awake yet."

Maglor smirked. "Hi Still Not Awake Yet -"

"You know..."

"I know." Maglor booped his nose.

Sören fought off the urge to kiss him. He still wasn't ready yet. There was still more that needed to be discussed... more wounds that needed to be lanced. Sören sighed.

"All right, let me start off by asking *you* a question." Maglor raised an eyebrow. "I'm going to assume the answer to this is no because you were a bit drunk last night, but... did you read *The Silmarillion*, after our talk?"

Sören shook his head.

"I... would really like you to read that. Soon." Maglor gave him a stern look.

"Thou knowest it doth be a... lotteth."

Maglor snorted. "Thou didn't use correct grammar there."

"Neither did you, just now." Sören giggled, and they spent a moment laughing together... like old times.

Then Maglor sobered. "It will tell you more about who I am - what I went through - even though it's not 100% accurate, Tolkien took some liberties with the truth... and there were things he left out because of his Christian sensibilities -"

"Like what?"

Maglor pinched the bridge of his nose. "He was very Catholic and disapproved of homosexuality."

"I see."

"The Valar did too - my people's gods. There wasn't much of it, and what there was had to be, well, in the closet, as we would say nowadays."

"And I take it..."

"Yes," Maglor said, "but not just because I prefer men. I..." Maglor cleared his throat. "Preferred, specifically, the company of my father and my uncles. We were all consenting adults, there was no grooming involved - I had gone away for awhile on a sort of musical tour and when I came back I was of age and all grown up now and I wanted them. That, too, is not the sort of thing I would have told you, but since we're getting the truth out... I owe it to be honest to you. I don't, for the record, approve of incest among humans. But

with my kind -"

"Your kind is different," Sören said. While it was a little weird, he found himself not judging - and thinking of his own dreams about a brother-lover with blue eyes. Unnatural blue, refracting rainbows like diamonds... jewel-eyes like Maglor's. A shiver went down his spine, and he made it a mental note to sit down with *The Silmarillion* sometime in the coming week. "Mythology is full of stories about, you know, gods who are siblings who are also married, lovers. Sometimes, a parent and child. So I imagine it was different for Elves."

Maglor nodded solemnly. "It was sacred. I don't hold with gods..." His shielding flared for a moment, as if he were trying to hide a broadcast. "But my father thought we were god-like."

Sören reached for his hand - his burned hand. He ached for the love Maglor had known, and lost.

More silence passed between them. Then Sören said, "When we... had our first time, years ago, I could sense that it had been a long time for you. It was a really long time, wasn't it?"

Maglor sighed. "Very."

"How long, if you don't mind me asking...?"

"Ancient Rome."

"What."

Maglor nodded.

"That..." Sören blinked. "No, really?"

"Really."

"I would have thought at most, a century or two. But that's..."

"So..." Maglor folded his arms, and looked down, then he looked back at the rain. "There was a gladiator, a Celt, who was being mistreated by his owner. I bought him, though I was never comfortable with the buying and selling of thralls, but that was what you did, back then."

"When in Rome."

"When in Rome." A small, rueful smile. Maglor went on. "He was under no obligation to me, but he was a good man - you remind me a bit of him, right down to his looks - and I came to care for him, and he cared for me. I gave him his freedom, and he chose to stay with me. And. Well."

"When in Rome."

Maglor laughed softly. "When in Rome."

"So..."

"So, we were... companions. We were intimate. A plague came to Rome, and he took fever and died. It was slow, agonizing. I did what I could, but it wasn't enough. And watching him suffer, like he did..." Maglor shuddered. "I remember it quite vividly."

"God, I'm sorry."

"I'd had a few mortal partners in the time before that - mostly men, a couple of women - and it was always the same. They died. This was the last time I was able to handle death, the dying. I kept to myself after that. I had friends, here and there, a man is not an island, but it always hurt to get attached to such frail, short-lived beings, or know that in due time I'd have to move on to protect myself, and leave them behind. And then you came along, and despite my better judgment, I couldn't resist you, Sören."

Sören swallowed hard.

"I still..." Maglor closed his eyes. "Can't resist you." He opened his eyes. "I wish I could quit you."

"Dear Diary, today, an Elf older than God's farts quoted *Brokeback Mountain* to me. What is my life."

Maglor laughed aloud, and Sören laughed too, at the absurdity of it.

Then they stopped laughing, sober again. Sören watched the rain some more, and then he said, "That arranged marriage story you told me, to break up with me... that was a load of shit, wasn't it."

"It was, and I'm sorry."

Sören closed his eyes. The tears came, gently at first, then spasming, wracking sobs. A feeling of relief, but also, the despair of having been abandoned so cruelly, and the new understanding of the desolation Maglor felt when he let him go.

Maglor said, "When we were in Rio and you almost drowned, it terrified me. And then when we came back to Iceland and you had walking pneumonia... I had visions of you dying. More than anyone else in this world who I let into my life, took into my bed, I loved you, above and beyond what I'd felt for others. And the thought of watching you suffer was unbearable to me. And it was inevitable, that I would have to leave in a few years anyway. It would have been safer for you to not come with me. So I had to end it. I didn't want to. I had a few options for how to do it, and I chose what I perceived, at that time, to be the quickest and cleanest option. Faking my own death was a possibility, but one that would have required a bit of help to pull off, and I had a feeling that if you thought I was dead, you would..." He didn't finish that sentence, and he didn't need to. Sören saw the mental images of his fear that he would commit suicide.

"So yes, I lied to you, Sören, and I felt terrible - still feel terrible - about it."

Sören shrugged. The pain he was in was giving him a bit of an edge now, after his compassion and understanding with the earlier confessions. "What's one more lie, really. You lied to me so much over the five years we were together... our entire relationship was a lie."

"No."

Their eyes met, and Sören gave Maglor a withering look. The pain on Maglor's face made

him want to cry again.

"Sören. This, too, I need to explain."

"Yes, why don't you explain how you fucking lied to me every day for five years, *Alejandro*?"

"Well, we'll start with that. You must have noticed the names on my fake IDs. Kenneth Finn MacLeod - close to Kanafinwë Macalaurë. Mark Lowry, Marco LaRaia - close enough to Macalaurë. Alejandro Magalhães... the surname is close enough to Macalaurë, with the additional bonus that Magalhães is usually translated 'Magellan', for the seafaring explorer. The name Alejandro is the Spanish form of Alexander, 'defender of Men'." Maglor frowned. "The fabrications that I have crafted to hide in society... it's easier to maintain when it's mostly crafted from the truth. You will notice, if you study our history, that very little of what I told you was an outright lie. I told you I was born with these ears. I told you my brother killed himself, that my brothers were dead. I told you I was brought up in a culture that sees same-sex attraction as immoral; you filled in the blanks about it being because of Catholicism and I didn't correct you, but I wasn't the one to say it, either. And no, I didn't bother to correct you when you assumed I came from a dangerous family, one that had possibly been involved in illegal activity or a military junta, but even that, *from a certain point of view*, is not wrong. The only outright lying that I'd ever done to you is what I am, how old I am, my name, where I'm from - and the Brazilian people, the Portuguese culture and language, it's the home of my heart in the world of Men, if not necessarily where I'm from originally. And of course, the other outright lie was the circumstances of why I was leaving."

Sören took a deep breath. He wanted to scream. He hated that Maglor was right.

"Our relationship was not a lie, Sören. My feelings for you were never a lie."

Sören closed his eyes. The tears came again.

"I don't expect, or deserve, your trust after what I*did* hide from you, and the way I broke your heart, but I hope you'll understand why."

"You know what really shits me about this?" Sören choked out through his tears.

"Hm?"

"So you know Nico and I broke up and got back together, in the first half of 2018."

"I'm aware of that, yes."

Sören grit his teeth. "You broke up with me because you didn't want to watch me get older, more frail, sicken and die... he broke up with me because he's old and he didn't want me to watch him get frail, sicken and die... you both broke up with me for the same fucking reason, in reverse. And you know what? To some extent, I get it. I was in med school... I didn't deal well with watching my patients die... feeling it, in the Force. I tried to kill myself over it. But you also know what? Both my parents died by or before the time they were thirty years old. I've already outlived them. The defining moment that shaped my entire childhood, shaped my entire fucking life, was finding my mother's dead body when I was six fucking years old. I told Nico, when we got back together, that I was, and am, aware of our age difference, and his life expectancy... and for all we know, I could be the one to go first. And you - you might not be as frail and mortal as I am, but you said yourself you can die. For all I fucking know, you could die before me. I know it hurts, when

you've seen people die over and over again, people you care about, not wanting to put yourself through that yet another time. But was it worth it to be alone for two thousand years? I could feel how *hungry* you were when I touched you. All we've got, is *now*, and when you see your own fucking mother die at age six, you learn that you need to make now as full, as rich, as *alive* as you possibly can. Is it really a *life*, when you're not letting yourself make connections anymore because of how... ephemeral and transient... those connections are, speculating about a future that may not even come to pass the way you think it will? Or are you just existing? If you were hurting anywhere near as much as I was when we broke up, and I was hurting a lot, it was like a piece of my soul *died*, I ask you, *is that worth it?*"

Maglor was crying now, too.

"I'm not as old as you, so maybe I'm in the wrong for saying this, but if our situations were reversed... I'd rather have thirty, forty, fifty, sixty years with someone, than five years and having to walk away and spend another century or ten alone, not letting myself take comfort where I can find it. I'm already going through something like that now. Nico thinks about his mortality a lot. And you know what? I think about it too. I've accepted the fact that I only have another twenty years with him at most, maybe not even that, and yes, it is going to hurt when he does eventually pass on, whenever that time may be, it is going to hurt like nothing has ever hurt in my life, because he is my soulmate. You and he, the only two men I've ever called soulmates. And still, you don't see me running, trying to spare myself the pain of that inevitability. Because it would be far worse for me to be alone, trying to spare myself the pain - that's an even worse pain. You can't tell me I'm wrong, Maglor, I can *feel* what it's been like for you. You stubborn *arse*."

"Dammit, Sören."

"I'm right. You know I'm fucking right."

Maglor sobbed. Sören did too. They wept together, leaning on each other. The rain fell harder, mirroring their tears.

"D'you remember that night on the rooftop in Reykjavik?" Sören asked.

"It's one of the most vivid memories I have of you."

"You remarking on how I came up there night after night to watch the sunset. And I told you that no two sunsets are the same, and it never gets tired, to me."

"Your perspectives on life... were, are, one of the things I love about you. I took you places I'd been before, places I would have been weary of, but you made them interesting again." A small, sad smile. "You would have been quite a travel companion, if..." His voice trailed off.

Sören's heart skipped a beat again. As much as he didn't like the idea of leaving Iceland behind, there was something in his Viking blood about exploring, and if he was with the right person, anywhere he went could feel like home. But they weren't back together.

Yet.

"It's like that with people, too," Sören said. "Nobody is replaceable - I grieved you, after you left. I still miss you. But I also found Nico. I don't know if I would have found him if we..." Sören didn't like to think about that. "What I'm saying is, if you had allowed yourself the chance to be with me, yes, my death would be hard on you. But maybe instead of

closing yourself off after that, you could move on again and find another beautiful person, have something else beautiful. Not the same thing... but a new kind of beautiful. A new set of experiences. Something fresh, breathing new life into your years. Like the way the sunset always changes, is always worth watching to see how it's different this time. Doesn't make the other sunsets not beautiful. It makes them all beautiful, and precious, for being so unique."

A long pause. "Those are quite the poetic words, Sören."

"I'm an Icelander. Poetry is in our blood." A smile. "Poetry, fermented shark, and Brennivín."

Soft laughter like rain. "Gods, Sören."

Sören's smile became a grin.

And then Maglor was serious again. "But you're getting one thing wrong. Nobody is replaceable, but especially not you. I haven't... loved... anyone else, after you. Except perhaps D-..." He caught himself quickly; Sören was curious, but Maglor's following words held his focus. "You see the beauty in everyone, and I can appreciate that about you. But for me... it isn't another new sunset, to admire the way it changes night after night. You are the fire in the sky, itself."

Sören had the wild, primal urge to kiss him. But before he could give in, he started blubbering again, and then his nose started running - not exactly inspiring kisses. Maglor opened the glove compartment and handed Sören a travel packet of tissues. When Sören took them, his stomach let out a growl.

"Let's get some food, yeah?"

Sören nodded.

They drove back to Akureyri, and to Serrano. Sören found himself laughing as he watched Maglor eat.

"What."

"Just... you eating."

Maglor dropped his voice. "I do still need to eat, Sören. A body is still a machine, it needs fuel. Besides..." He took a bite of his enchilada. "I may have done the martyrdom thing with you, but a life needs some comfort and pleasure, and... eating is enjoyable."

"Eating is indeed enjoyable." Sören's lips wrapped around his straw, and he sucked.

Their gaze met, and Maglor's cheeks flushed - Sören couldn't resist the smile around the straw, the double entendre was definitely intentional.

And yet, they weren't there quite yet. They drove back to the village, through the rain. "Do you want to come in for a bit?" Maglor asked.

"Please."

Ingmar's Bentley was still not at the cottage. Sören wondered what it was going to be like the next time he saw Ingmar. As if Maglor read his mind, he said, "He knows you know,

now."

"OK."

"He said it was about time." They got out of the car and hurried into the cottage through the downpour. "He will need to talk to you himself, but he's giving it some time - giving you your space - because this is a lot to take in."

"It is, and of course there's the matter of him being complicit in this web of deception. I know he had his reasons, but..."

"He has reasons I don't even understand." They took their shoes off, and Maglor handed Sören a towel to dry off. When Maglor took it back, their fingers brushed, and Sören got that urge to kiss him again, but held off.

"Do you want a drink?" Maglor offered.

"I do, but I need to have less drinks than I did last night..."

"Fewer."

"What."

"Never mind."

"I need to have *fewer* drinks than I did last night, because I got hungover," Sören said, "and if we're still going to the studio tomorrow I need to be functional."

"We're still on for the usual schedule," Maglor said. He came out with Brennivín. He gestured for Sören to sit next to him on the couch, and then he gestured at the bottle and the shot glasses. "If you'd do the honors."

Sören used the Force to pour them each a glass. Maglor watched with a look of awe in his eyes.

"That's beautiful," he said.

Sören smiled.

"I like to watch you do that," Maglor said. "It's very graceful."

"One of the only times I'm graceful."

"You dance well, too."

"Well..." Sören raised his glass. "To grace." When the words came out, Sören realized there was an additional layer of meaning there as well - grace as in forgiveness.

"To grace." Maglor clinked glasses. "And mercy." Their eyes met.

Maglor leaned back on his side of the couch, with his knee resting against Sören, who didn't move away. Auli came over for cuddles, flomping between them; their fingers brushed again as they pet the dog.

Then, at last, Sören found himself hugging Maglor, not able to help himself. Maglor

needed a hug. *He needs all the hugs.*

When they pulled apart, slowly, Maglor's gaze was burning his, and Sören's lips parted. Their faces were close, and for a moment it felt like they were going to kiss. Then Auli ran off and pawed frantically at the door.

Maglor cursed under his breath, but then he nodded and got up. He and Sören took the sheepdog for a walk in the rain, making the round of the village, and then when they headed back, and Sören's cabin came into view, thunder rolled.

Maglor and Auli waited on the steps. Sören lingered, not quite knowing what to say. Wanting to kiss him, still, but holding back.

"I'll see you tomorrow morning," Maglor said.

Sören nodded. He reached out to pat him. "Thank you, again, for explaining everything. Especially... why you left."

"I am so, so sorry that you felt so rejected." Maglor frowned. "That it pushed you into that filth's arms -"

Sören reached out to hug him again. Thunder boomed, startling Sören, and they quickly broke away. Maglor tousled Sören's wet curls. "Good night, Sören."

"Night."

Sören watched him and Auli walk off, for a minute, before heading inside. Tears were in his eyes again as he shut the door behind him. He was aching for Maglor... the man he still loved. Still wanted. Ached to comfort.

What happens now?

Chapter 29

Monday

"Fucking bloody *hell.*"

In his haste to turn off the blaring alarm clock, which was even more jarring than usual this morning, snapping him out of a deep sleep, Sören accidentally swatted the clock to the floor, making a loud clatter that was even worse. He buried his face in his pillow and groaned. Dooku chuckled and patted him, and when Sören picked his face up he watched Dooku use the Force to pull the still-ringing alarm off the ground, and gingerly pressed the button to turn it off.

"I'll make coffee, love." Dooku climbed out of bed.

By the time Sören had gotten back last night he was an emotional wreck from Maglor's confessions, crying for him and with him. He had continued to cry, falling apart in Dooku's arms... Dooku always Sören's strong fortress in the storm.

It had actually been Dooku's suggestion for Sören to sleep in as late as he could this morning, and catch up on the rest he needed following the emotional exhaustion, which was a good idea but the trade-off was a bit of a mad dash to get ready to go to the studio in less than an hour, when he was not a morning person whatsoever and preferred to take his time getting ready, gradually pushing himself towards full alertness like acclimating to the temperature of a pool one limb at a time. There would be none of that today.

Sören got straight into the shower, wanting to scream at the jangled nerves as the hot water and its usual sulfur smell - it smelled of sulfur everywhere in Iceland - hit him. There was a reason Sören usually preferred to bathe at night. "Fuck. Me. Sideways."

Then he got soap in his eyes. *This is a fucking* smashing *day already.*

When he came out of the shower and in a freshly laundered T-shirt and jeans - at least that smelled good - there was coffee and a fresh homemade fruit salad, with cream, waiting for him. "*Takk*," Sören said, managing a hug and a kiss. "You always take good care of me."

Dooku kissed him back, and then playfully swatted Sören's rear. "I try."

The cup of coffee wasn't quite enough for Sören to feel awake, but it was a start. After he was finished, and brought his dishes to the sink, doing the dishes, Dooku came over and leaned against the counter.

"Sören," he said.

Sören looked up.

"If you want to take a few hours after your classes finish today and get further caught up with Macalaurë, I won't mind."

Sören nodded. "OK. I mean, I don't know if I can handle another night like last one, another night in a row, I think I need a break before he tells me more of his tragic life story -"

"- Catching up doesn't necessarily mean him telling you all of that. It could just be spending time together, like old times. It's not like you have much of that left before Vigdís and Páll return."

Sören looked at the calendar. It was Monday, July twenty-ninth. On Thursday, August eighth, Sören and Dooku would be going to Reykjavik for the weekend to attend Margrét's wedding on August tenth, coming back late on Sunday August eleventh. Then on Friday the sixteenth, Vigdís and Páll would be back. As yet, Sören had no idea what Maglor's plans were when they did return and he and Ingmar would have to clear out. He wondered if Maglor's idea of closure meant confessing the truth to him and then going off on his separate way again and that thought tore at him.

Regardless, they had roughly three weeks now, and even that was not the full amount of time because of Sören going to Reykjavik for the wedding. He looked from the calendar back at Dooku, who nodded.

"I don't want to take time away from you, either," Sören said.

"I'm fine with having an evening to myself if you need it. We can make up for it later. And I'm quite certain this isn't an 'if', but you do both need it." Dooku patted him.

"I love you, you know."

"I know."

After another hug and a kiss, Sören waited outside, watching Maglor's Jaguar come down the street.

Unfortunately the rain was also coming down, hard. Sören normally didn't mind rainy weather - it was something you had to be used to in Akureyri - but it was pouring today and in the short time it took Maglor's car to reach the cabin, Sören was soaked. He cringed as he got in, but smiled when Maglor handed him a thermos of iced coffee. Maglor smiled back.

After a few sips of iced coffee Sören ran a hand through his wet curls. "Ugh, what a day. I took a shower this morning, and then I came out and had another shower." He couldn't resist. "Second shower, I guess that's like second breakfast."

Maglor's brow furrowed. "Hey Sören, do me a favor and could you, like, not with the Tolkien jokes."

"Aw, I'm sorry. I didn't know that you would be offended or I wouldn't have -"

Maglor waved his hand. "It's not being offended, per se, it's just that it hits a particular nerve for me."

"Am I the first person you've told about any of this since his work was released?"

"The full truth of what I am and where I come from? Yes. The US government knows I'm not human, even with the limited technology they had back in the 1970s, but I never told them about my background, not even when I was tor-" Maglor's voice trailed off.

"You were tortured."

"I believe they call it enhanced interrogation now, but yes, they got a bit rough when I didn't want to talk about things."

"Jesus *Christ*, Maglor." It felt strange, to be calling him by his name like this, yet it felt right. Sören would only call him Alejandro to keep up appearances in public, now. "I'm so sorry you went through all that."

"Yeah. So am I."

"I'm also... honored... that you trust me enough to have told me all of this. I want to tell you that I wish you'd told me much sooner but I, ah. I understand why you didn't."

"Why I couldn't. Would you have been able to live with it all in 2014?"

"I would have rather not lost you. You didn't even give me a choice about whether or not I wanted to go where you go."

The words were out before Sören could stop them from coming out.

Their eyes held for a long minute, and Maglor looked away and out the window. "It's not a good life, Sören. I told you, it gets *really* old having to move around every ten years or so, knowing that you can't put down roots anywhere for very long and that any friend you make, you will have to let go of in the end. I wasn't going to inflict that on you."

"And that still wasn't your *fucking* decision to make. We traveled together, Maglor. France, the Netherlands, Greece and Italy, Brazil. All of that shit was bad for you because you were alone, but when you were with me? It wasn't so bad, was it?"

"You say that because it's one thing to go somewhere on holiday. It's another thing to have no permanent residence and to have to *lie* to people about who you are, you, who have been your fully authentic self your entire life even when it cost you. You, who cannot help but *shine* everywhere you go, and would have to learn how to blend into the background and not call too much attention to yourself. You would have ended up resenting me within ten or twenty years -"

"*You don't fucking know that.*"

Maglor took a deep breath. "Look. Sören. I know you're not a morning person, and this is probably not how you want to start your day -"

"It's not. But it's started. This day is already off to a shitty start, so let's fucking bring it. I stand by my statement: I would have rather you told me the truth in 2014 than tell me that *bullshit* about your so-called fucking arranged marriage - god, you don't know how *stupid* I feel for believing you, though even then I had some doubts, wondered if you just wanted to get away from me, if I bored you now, and you see how that ended up, what that did to me. I would have rather you offered me a choice. I would have rather you not told the man who found his mother's dead body at age fucking six and married a seventy-year-old man that I don't know how fragile mortal life is and it's somehow better to be alone for thousands of years than take a few decades of happiness. *You walked away from me.* I can forgive you for the web of lies. But*this*? How could you not have understood I would have followed you to the ends of the earth if only you'd asked? You tell me I would have ended up resenting you, but do you not know me at all, then? You know what we had. Even now, after *everything*, I still love you. I never*stopped* loving you. *It's like that.*" Sören let out a sob. "You own a piece of my soul, you*are* a piece of my soul, *you don't get the fucking right*-"

"Sören." Maglor's voice shook. "Sören... we need to... not have this conversation right now. We're almost there. Your oils class, my guitar class, is starting in ten minutes."

"And that's ten minutes from now. Are you going to walk away from me on this too -"

"OK, Sören, you want to know what it is? What it really is? Even more than the fear of watching you die, the fear of you hating me if I shuffle you around from place to place?" Maglor's eyes flashed. "*I don't deserve you.* You deserve better than to be with someone *this* fucked up."

"Maglor, what you don't deserve is to feel like you don't deserve love and companionship."

Maglor looked away.

They did not say another word to each other, and they reached the studio. Most of the students were already there, waiting to be let in.

Sören managed to keep his grumpy attitude out of the oils class, though his own subject matter was dark storm clouds, and halfway through Sören found himself painting the phoenix and waterbird from the first painting he'd done, and the ink on his back, fighting in one of the clouds, lightning sparking from both of them.

As Sören had gotten off to a late start, he handled some cleaning chores around the studio building at the beginning of the break between classes. When he went into the community room to water the plants, he saw Maglor standing at the door.

"I'm going to go into town, do you want to grab a bite to eat anywhere or -"

"Maybe bring something back for me?" Sören asked. "I don't want to go back out in this kind of rain till later, when we're ready to go home, plus after I'm done here I'm gonna resume work on the painting I started."

"...OK."

And that was what Sören did. He was feeling keyed up again from being around Maglor - frustrated, *aroused*. He decided some music would calm him down, specifically some nice smooth R&B, so he put on the local soul music station.

As he heard Maglor's Jaguar pull in, he realized the tips of the birds' tails were touching and the bird fight was looking as much like a mating dance as a fight.

"Let's Stay Together" by Al Green was on the radio now, as Maglor walked in. He had a salad with garden vegetables and shrimp, and breadsticks for Sören. "*Takk*," Sören said, and then he smiled at the little bottle of Mountain Dew that he pulled out of the bag. "You hate this stuff."

"You like it."

Sören wanted to cry, even though it felt stupid to cry about it. It was the thoughtfulness of the gesture, and what it implied, after the tension of the morning.

"It's a peace offering," Maglor said. He patted Sören's shoulder and was about to leave the art room.

"No, don't go yet." Sören looked over at him.

Maglor walked back in, and sat down a few seats away.

"I'm sorry for jumping on you this morning," Sören said. "I was in a bad mood already - not a morning person, you know - and... yes, I'm still hurt about everything but I don't want to come off like it was easy for you to leave, either."

"It very much was not. It was one of the biggest regrets of my life, and I say this as someone who has a laundry list of non-trivial regrets."

"D'you have plans after we're done today?"

Maglor shrugged. "If you're asking do I want to spend time with you again, I have no objection to that if your husband doesn't mind."

"He told me before I left this morning that it was fine."

"All right then. We'll have some privacy, Ingmar checked into the hotel yesterday, and told me to let you know that's where he'll be for the remainder of the next few weeks. He does want to see you again before he leaves, which will be about a week after your neighbors return."

"I'd like to see him again too but I still need some time, and he's going to have some explaining to do."

"He'll have a lot of explaining to do and... Sören? Prepare to have your brain broken a little more when he does."

"Great." Sören sipped the Mountain Dew. "Just great."

Maglor got up. "I'm going to prepare for my next class. We can talk more later."

Except when Maglor got up, he didn't go right away to his room across the hall. Sören watched him linger at the first set of paintings, studying them. He heard Maglor walking slowly down the hall. *He's finally doing the tour.* Sören guessed he'd been putting it off for emotional reasons. Not able to help his curiosity, he quietly got up, tiptoed to the door and peeked out, and saw that Maglor was indeed looking at each painting, and had a look on his face like he'd seen a ghost.

Not wanting to alert him that he was spying, Sören went back to the table, ate, and then when he had finished and was cleaning up, he heard the sound of the sink running in the bathroom. A few sobs. Sören ached for him, thought about going down the hall, demanding to be let in, and just holding him. But then he'd be crying too, and they'd both be a mess and the afternoon students would be here before they knew it. So he let Maglor be.

I wish there was something I could do.

Marvin Gaye's voice began to whisper, "*Get up, get up, get up, get up. Wake up, wake up, wake up, wake up.*"

Sören froze.

Baby I'm hot just like an oven

I need some lovin'
And baby, I can't hold it much longer
It's getting stronger and stronger

Sören facepalmed as his mind went right into the gutter. *Jesus Christ, get a hold of yourself.*

He let "Sexual Healing" continue, his face burning as he got out the supplies for the acrylics class. He was a little hard, and feeling flustered by the time the students started to arrive.

Sören closed the door when everyone was in, so he could continue to keep the R&B station on and not bother Maglor and his music students. The music had been calming his nerves, or it did until every song suddenly turned into being about sex. Sören somehow managed to get through the class and by the end of it he felt like climbing the walls.

He went to the bathroom to splash cold water on himself, and then he noticed he was leaking precum and decided to do a thorough wash. He could still smell the soap on his hands when he made his way down the hall, and started to put away the supplies.

Just as he was almost done with putting everything away, he heard the flourish of Maglor's guitar and a few notes he was familiar with. He found himself walking towards Maglor's classroom and standing in the doorway just in time for Maglor to begin to sing.

Tú, tú eres el imán y yo soy el metal
Me voy acercando y voy armando el plan
Sólo con pensarlo se acelera el pulso
Ya, ya me está gustando más de lo normal
Todos mis sentidos van pidiendo más
Esto hay que tomarlo sin ningún apuro

Despacito
Quiero respirar tu cuello despacito
Deja que te diga cosas al oído
Para que te acuerdes si no estás conmigo
Despacito
Quiero desnudarte a besos despacito
Firmo en las paredes de tu laberinto
Y hacer de tu cuerpo todo un manuscrito

Sören's face was on fire again. The look in Maglor's eyes, and the huskiness in his voice...

Two can play at this game. Sören danced his way into the room, and danced as Maglor continued to play and sing "Despacito". He couldn't help the smirk on his face when he noticed Maglor's usually steady hand shaking just a little.

It was all Sören could do to not start a striptease.

When the song was over, Sören applauded. "Well, that was... wow." Sören crinkled his nose and bit his lower lip. "Just... wow."

"Is that a good wow or a bad wow?"

"It's an I-don't-even-fucking-know wow."

Maglor had a mischievous smile on his face as he got up, putting his guitar back in its case. "Ready to go?"

"More than ready."

–

Maglor kept his eyes on the road as much as he could - the rain was coming down even harder than this morning - but he kept stealing glances at Sören, who looked drowned and delectable all at once.

He had no idea what he was doing. There had been no grand plan. Performing "Despacito" had been a spur of the moment thing. And now here they were, driving back to the cottage where he would be by himself, with Auli, for the duration of the rental.

Thunder cracked, and a few seconds later, lightning flashed. Then more thunder, louder.

"Jesus, I hope the power doesn't go out," Sören said.

Maglor found himself snorting at that. "Sören, I've lived most of my life without electricity. If it goes out for a few hours it's not the end of the world. There are ways to entertain ourselves without TV, the Internet, any of that."

"Like what? Charades? You'd be pretty good at that."

Nice burn, Sören. Maglor gave Sören a look. "Yeah, you know what I can act out? Two people pretending to have a civilized discussion about their feelings like fucking adults."

"Ohhhhhh snap."

And then Sören patted him. Which was meant to be reassuring, but somehow made everything worse. His touch sparked like the lightning outside. Maglor could *smell* him. Not just the soap, not just the faint linger of his laundry detergent, not just the rain, but that intoxicating natural musk which always smelled a little like sweet spice and woodsmoke, and had always been more pronounced when they were making love.

He was getting hard and his jeans weren't going to hide it.

"Well, maybe you could play something for me," Sören said. "I love it when you sing. Love it and hate it, because it makes me fall in love with you all over again. But, you know."

Maglor sighed. He knew very well. "Let's get back first and see what we're in the mood for." Maglor already knew what he was in the mood for. He was going to play, all right... Sören would be his harp.

Sören's eyes twinkled, and he crinkled his nose and bit his lower lip. It was all Maglor could do to not pull the car over and kiss Sören until he couldn't breathe, drag him out into the rain and rut with him in the pouring rain and the wet ground like two animals in heat. Maglor had no idea if Sören was *doing that* on purpose or not, but every time Sören *did that* it had a Pavlovian effect on him, and of all the times for Sören to be doing that, now was the worst possible time.

Or the best. He took a deep breath. He hadn't started the day intending to seduce Sören

Sigurðsson, but as they approached their street in Svalbarðseyri it seemed inevitable.

Of all the performances he had ever given, he was the most nervous about this, feeling like a young ellon all over again. Remembering when he'd asked his uncle Fingolfin to be his first time... the crush he'd had on his uncles *and* his father, seeing them together... wanting to practice for Fëanor...

Something about the way Sören was radiating heat, radiating sexual*need*, now, was like Fëanor. Dangerously like him, and Maglor was responding the same way; he *needed* too. *Fire calling to fire.* There was no stopping this now, would be no stopping unless Sören said no.

They got out of the car and quickly headed in, just in time for a loud crash of thunder that made the lights flicker.

"Fuck," Sören said.

"OK, let me get prepared in case the lights go out. Feel free to help yourself to anything in the kitchen while I do."

Before Vigdís and Páll had left, they had met with him and Ingwion to go over not just the care and feeding of Auli but where they kept various emergency supplies. There was a drawer that held emergency tealights, and a stash of tealight holders. Maglor got them out now... and marched into the bedroom. His hands shaking again, he set the tealights in their holders around the room and began to light them. He turned off the bedroom light and there was a nice golden ambiance.

He quickly ate a breath mint, even though he didn't really need it.*Gods, what am I doing.* He preened a little, combing his hair, wishing he could drop the glamour and let his full length down.

Sören was in the kitchen, leaning against the kitchen counter drinking a bottle of water, and had given some fresh water to Auli as well, who was lapping thirstily from his bowl. Maglor felt pretty thirsty too... not for water. He watched Sören's full lips wrap around the water bottle and their eyes met again.

Not thinking, just feeling, Maglor walked forward, feeling like he was carrying a storm with him. He snatched Sören's water bottle away, grabbed Sören's face, and kissed him, hard and deep.

There was no resistance. Sören was kissing him back, as hungry for it as he was. Sören made a delicious little whimper into the kiss - Maglor's cock leapt at the sound of it - and then twinged again when he felt Sören's hands on him, roaming over his chest, down to his hips. Sören pressed against him and he was just as hard.

Not breaking the kiss, Maglor grabbed Sören's hands and began pulling him towards the bedroom. They pulled apart once they got in the bedroom door, and, breathing hard, Sören noticed the lit candles. Maglor immediately began undressing, taking his shirt off, then reaching for his belt, pulling that out and letting it drop to the floor, undoing the button and zipper of his jeans.

Sören was just staring at him, and before he could get the rest of his clothing off, he grabbed Sören to kiss him again, guided Sören's hands over the exposed flesh. Sören's touch was like fire, and both of them groaned into the kiss. Wordlessly, Sören's hands slipped to Maglor's boxer briefs, and Maglor realized *that* was why Sören had just been

standing there, staring... waiting for this. As if to say, *this is mine.*

As soon as Maglor's cock was free, Sören dropped to his knees and wrapped those full, luscious lips around it the way they'd wrapped around the water bottle in the kitchen. Looked up at him with heat in his eyes as he started to suck. Maglor let out a moan, grabbed Sören's curls, and Sören sucked like he'd been starving for it; Maglor looked down and saw Sören was rubbing himself through his jeans.

The sight of that, and the sensation of Sören's mouth enveloping him - the surge of emotion, the all-consuming *need* - Maglor didn't want to come too soon. He reluctantly pulled Sören off his cock. Sören made a moue, and the pouty lips and puppy dog eyes were only making that need more violent, feral.

"Don't you like it?" Sören husked.

"I like it too much." Maglor helped him up, and then he kissed Sören hard. Tugged on the tail of Sören's shirt, pulled it over Sören's head. Worked on yanking off his jeans, and then Sören's own boxer-briefs. When Sören was naked, too, Maglor took a moment to drink in the sight of him. It was just as he'd remembered, fantasized about. His fingers traced over the flames on one arm, ocean waves on the other, up to Sören's shoulders, and then down over Sören's chest, lingering on the pierced nipples. He couldn't resist playing with one of the rings. The *moan* Sören made at that, *Hells...*

Sören moved closer, arms encircling around Maglor. They both gasped as their cocks pressed together; Maglor shuddered as he felt Sören's Prince Albert piercing rub against his slit. "Sören." His voice was raw.

"*Ástin mín.*" Sören kissed him. Then started kissing his neck.

Gods, how he wanted, had ached for this. It wasn't just that he'd been mostly celibate the last five years, save the occasional hatefuck with Ingwion the last two months, but he'd missed *Sören*'s touch. He could have had someone else and it wouldn't have been*this*. And here, now, he felt like he was being torn apart and put back together, and they had barely begun.

"Sören." That was all he could say right now, his name.

"*Ég þarf þig, ég er svo svöng fyrir þig.*" Their eyes met. The longing in Sören's eyes mirrored his own; he could have *wept*.

Maglor pushed him onto the bed, climbed over him. Sören's arms wrapped around him, and they kissed and kissed like their lives depended on it. Sören was arching to him, panting, and with a desperate look on his face he ground out, "*Taktu mig, ég þarf þig inni í mér.*" He glanced over at the bedtable. "Do you have lube in here?"

"Yes. In the drawer -"

Maglor watched as the drawer opened without Sören touching it, and the bottle of personal lubricant came floating out, over to them. He still wasn't used to seeing it, and it made his breath catch whenever Sören demonstrated that power. His mouth claimed Sören's again, and he felt the bottle thrust into his hand.

"*Inni í mér, núna. Riddu mér.*"

The fact that Sören was so far gone in his lust that he was lapsing into his native language

wasn't lost on Maglor. He kissed Sören again as he poured lube over his own cock, and into Sören's passage.

When he was all the way in they both cried out together. Maglor took a few slow thrusts, gasping for breath, shaking as he felt Sören wrap around him - the sweet, slick velvet heat, hot like a furnace. *I'm* inside *Sören. I'm inside* Sören. *Oh, Gods, Sören, I need you.*

"Yes," Sören breathed. "Oh, yes."

And then, that look in Sören's eyes when, plunging in again, Maglor hit that spot. The wild cry Sören made, nails digging into his back. "*Riðu!*"

That set him off. Maglor drove into him, pounding him into the mattress. Slow, gentle and sensual could come later, he'd no doubt they'd be hungry again later. Right now - he needed to *fuck*.

They both did. Sören's hips were rocking back at him, matching his rhythm. That desperate look on Sören's face, gasping, panting, moaning. "Yes, yes, *yes*," Sören cried, to the rhythm of the push and pull. "*Riðu, riddu mér, riddu mér!*"

"Sören." Maglor met his gaze, reached to stroke Sören's face, pet his curls, needed to show some tenderness even as he was plowing away. "Sören. *Melindo.*"

Sören kissed him hard, and then Sören's legs were wrapped around him. Maglor drove into him harder, and Sören moaned "*mmmmm*, mm-hmm!" into the kiss, hands stroking over him, playing with his hair.

"Sören." He buried his face in Sören's shoulder, inhaled the scent of him, like it was the air he needed to breathe, like his lungs had been starved of it. He felt tears burning his eyes, but the dam wasn't ready to break yet. There was only fire now, the flood would come later. "Sören. Oh, gods, *Sören*..."

"*Riddu mér... riddu mér, elskan...*"

The term of endearment tore at him. He kissed Sören again, feeling himself right on that edge of orgasm, but he had... to make... this last... just a little bit longer. They *needed*. Hells, how they needed.

Sören was trembling, nails digging in him again. "*Erfiðara. Hraðar.*"

He'd been with Sören enough times over five years to know*exactly* what those words meant. He rose up, on his knees, Sören's legs on his shoulders, and gave it to him as hard as he could. Sören let out a wordless scream, and worked his hips, giving it back as good as he got. "Yes... *meira... meira...* oh, *fuck* that's good..."

Maglor made a deep groan. The pleasure, the lust, the *love* was overwhelming. He basked in the glorious fire just a little longer, both of them right on that edge, slamming against each other in the rhythm of the heat.

"*Meira, meira, ekki hætta, ekki hætta alltaf!*"

Maglor growled. He kept thrusting, feeling himself hurtling towards orgasm, trying to hold back, *not yet* -

"Oh god." That look of joyful surprise Sören got on his face just before climax, wide-eyed

and almost innocent. And then the awe, as he erupted, spraying his seed over Maglor's chest and stomach, coating his own chest and stomach. Sören always looked like he was having a religious experience when he orgasmed - across their bond Maglor felt that sense of wonder, no matter how many times he'd done this, it was amazing anything could feel that good, that *right*. It was an act of surrender, for Sören -*you did this. You gave me this.*

Feeling Sören contract around him, and the sight of Sören's ecstasy, and Maglor cried out as he spent into him. It was all heat and light, like a supernova exploding.

They lay together, entangled, riding the last waves of their pleasure. Sören was still shaking a little, lashes fluttering. Finally he looked up at Maglor, who took Sören's chin in his hand, and his fingertips traced every feature of Sören's lovely face, lingering on the full lips that he would never grow tired of kissing. Sören kissed the fingertip, and then he drew Maglor's finger into his mouth, sucking with an innocent-yet-naughty look on his face.

Maglor was still inside him, and felt himself hardening again at that. Sören grinned, and kissed him. Then he stopped grinning, eyes hungry, a gaze that could peel the paint off the walls of the room. "Again," he panted.

"More slowly this time," Maglor said, kissing him back, kissing Sören's neck. "It's been too long..." Five years was not even a drop in the bucket in the life of an Elf, and yet it felt like an eternity. An eternity spent together, an eternity spent apart.

Their hands clasped, as Maglor began thrusting again, much more gently this time.

"*Elskan.*" Sören's eyes were full of love. "*Ástin mín.*"

"*Melindo.*" Maglor kissed him deep.

Sören let go of Maglor's hand and stroked his face, pet his hair, pushed it back to reveal the pointy ears. Touched the points, played with them, pressed their foreheads together, the two nuzzling, breathing each other's breath. "*Mín fyrsta ást. Ég hef saknað þín.*"

"I've missed you too."

They kissed again, and Sören took Maglor's bad hand, brought the palm to his lips and kissed the scar there, bringing tears to Maglor's eyes. Then Sören *licked* the scar, and Maglor groaned, making himself hold back from thrusting harder. *Savor.* That became even more difficult when Sören began to lick and suck the fingers of his bad hand, sensually, then just nuzzling it, raining sweet little kisses over it.

"You're not too fucked up for me. I love you.*All* of you, even the broken places," Sören said. "That makes you no less beautiful to me."

Gods. The tears were starting to flow, silently.

"*Falleg álfur minn. Með fallegu augunum og fallegu rödd þinni og fallegu hani þínum.*"

"You're beautiful too." Maglor stroked Sören's face, and pressed the palm of his bad hand to Sören's heart. "Especially here."

"*Falleg elskan mín.*" Another deep kiss. Then Sören whispered into his ear, "*Ljúffengur grillaður osturinn minn.*"

The more things changed... the more they stayed the same. It had been a running joke between them, years ago, when Maglor was turned on by Sören talking sweet and dirty in Icelandic, Sören would throw in random words to tease him. Calling him cheese or grilled cheese - Sören's favorite food next to his *paella* - stuck. He gave Sören a look, though he wasn't truly annoyed. If anything he was deeply touched, that reminder of how things had once been.

Things had once been *beautiful.*

Sören giggled. "I couldn't help it."

"Brat." Maglor kissed him.

"Your brat."

"Gods, I've missed you." Maglor kissed him again.

"*Elskan mín. Ástin mín.*" A wicked grin. "*Gerjuð hákarlinn minn.*"

"You... just called me fermented shark."

"At least it wasn't grilled cheese again."

Maglor nipped Sören's neck with a growl, thrusting just a little harder and faster. Then Sören took Maglor's face and, more seriously, he said, "*Þú ert tónlist í hjarta mínu*."

"Oh, Hells, Sören." The tears came again.

Sören kissed the tears that flowed, claimed his mouth again, petting his hair, and then Sören husked, "*Elskan.* Let me see you." His eyes narrowed. "The real you."

Maglor took a deep breath. He dropped the glamour, glowing silver against the dark gold of the candlelit room, bathing Sören in silver light. Sören's eyes widened, and there were tears in his eyes now as well. But he leaned up to kiss him, arms and legs tightening around him, playing with the flood of hair. "You are *glorious*," Sören said. "Never mind this shit about you not deserving me - I feel like I don't deserve you."

"You're wrong." Maglor kissed him hard. "This is for you, Sören. This is yours."

Sören clung for dear life and started rocking his hips, urging him on faster. Maglor met his rhythm, and then they were fucking harder - not as hard as before, but still paced fast enough to make them pant, make the bed rock against the wall, their flesh slapping together. "Fuck, I need this..." Sören shuddered. "*Ég þarf þig. Ég þarf þig...*"

"Yes, love. I know. I need it too. I need *you.*" Their eyes met. "I *need* you."

"God..." Sören let out a whimper. The deliciousness of it almost sent Maglor over the edge; he grit his teeth, making himself hold back. Sören's eyes rolled, and closed, and then they looked at Maglor again, fully unglamoured, and Sören's breath caught. Maglor kissed him again, hard, wanting him to know he *was* worthy of this, the beautiful soul that had drawn him in ten years ago, his *light*.

"Sören." At last, he said it. "I love you."

"*God.*" Sören started to cry, rocking against him faster and harder, the passion rising once

more. "*Eg elska þig elskan, aldrei yfirgefa mig, ekki fara, farðu aldrei aftur í burtu. Vertu hjá mér, ég þarf þig, ég þarf þig svo mikið, ég elska þig.*"

"Sören..."

"*Ekki fara, vertu hjá mér, ég elska þig*"

"I won't leave this time." The pain of those words, what it would*cost* him, when Sören's life was as dust. But he would carry Sören's memory in the Song, as he did his family. Wrenching himself away now would be worse. "I won't leave you again, my love, I swear it." He did not swear things lightly at all, ever, after the Oath.

They were both sobbing. Maglor kissed him and prepared for the descent, driving it home, until the sensation and emotion overpowered both of them and they were pulled into the waves of fire.

"Macalaurë," Sören cried out, spilling his seed again. Never had his name sounded so sweet before. "*Macalaurë!*" The look of rapture on his face...

Maglor let out a deep groan with the power of his release, throbbing and throbbing as Sören pulsed around him. "*Sören.*"

There was thunder outside again, louder than before, and for a moment the cottage shook. Then there was just the thunder of their hearts, as they came down from their climax. Maglor wanted to reach into Sören's mind and pull him into that place in the Song that they inhabited when they came together, but it wasn't time yet.

Soon. Not today, but soon.

They lay there for awhile. Sören needed water - they had both worked up a sweat. Maglor went out to get water, not caring that he was walking through the cottage naked, and came back. Sören sat up and drank. They sat there for a few minutes, looking at each other in the soft golden glow of the candlelight. Maglor was still unglamoured.

"You are exquisite," Sören told him. "I don't just mean what you look like. It's like what you look like is the outer expression of who you are, inside."

Maglor gave him a soft, gentle kiss. He had no words to respond.

Sören reached out to touch him, awe on his face. "It means a lot to me, that you... will let me see this." His voice dropped, and husked. "That you said you'll stay with me. You meant that? Really?"

"I meant that. I don't have any plans yet for what I'll do when your neighbors get back, but we'll figure something out." Maglor nodded. "We're... going to have to talk to Nicolae -"

Sören chuckled a little. Then he said, "That sneaky bastard."

"Hm?"

"He told me he was fine having an evening to himself if I wanted to spend time with you, if I wanted to get *caught up*, even though he knew I was too emotionally exhausted for another night of confession. He said we could 'spend time together, *like old times*.' It's like he knew we were going to get *caught up*, all right."

"Your husband is shrewd. Very observant. He probably saw this coming after yesterday."

"He probably heard it coming, too." Sören threw his head back and laughed. "We get a little loud."

"That we do."

"But I have no shame." Sören threw his arms around Maglor. "Only desire." He kissed him, and the kiss deepened, heated; Maglor groaned into the kiss, hard for Sören again.

"I don't think we've finished catching up," Maglor rasped between kisses and licks at Sören's neck, breathing in his delicious scent.

"I don't think we'll ever finish catching up." With that, Sören pushed Maglor onto his back and climbed over him, straddling his hips. Sören slid his hands over Maglor's chest as he sank down, impaling himself, and they both gasped and moaned when Maglor bottomed out in him, down to the root. Sören took his hands and started riding, slowly.

"What's the most number of times you've ever climaxed in one session?" Maglor asked.

"Um." Sören paused for a moment and cocked his head to one side. "I think six, and that was, um, Ingmar."

"Well then." Maglor grabbed Sören's hips. "You've had two, prepare for five more. At least. At the minimum."

Sören crinkled his nose and bit his lower lip. Maglor's cock throbbed at that and he leaned up to kiss Sören, *wanting*.

Thunder rolled, rain poured, their passion stormed all night.

Chapter 30

Tuesday

"Mmmf." Sören stirred, feeling a gentle rubbing at his back. There was light pushing against his closed eyes, which he opened slowly, blearily.

The backrub stopped, and now little kisses rained over his face. Sören heard Maglor singing

Morning has broken, like the first morning
Blackbird has spoken, like the first bird
Praise for the singing, praise for the morning
Praise for them springing fresh from the word

Sweet the rain's new fall, sunlit from heaven
Like the first dew fall, on the first grass
Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden
Sprung in completeness where his feet pass

Mine is the sunlight, mine is the morning
Born of the one light, Eden saw play
Praise with elation, praise every morning
God's re-creation of the new day

Morning has broken, like the first morning
Blackbird has spoken, like the first bird
Praise for the singing, praise for the morning
Praise for them springing fresh from the word

Sören opened his eyes, and looked into those eyes like labradorite. The room was dim, with faint golden light coming in behind the drawn blinds and curtains... and Maglor's silver glow. Maglor stroked Sören's face, and leaned in to kiss his forehead.

"Good morning, my love," Maglor said.

"Hi." Sören smiled. He glanced at the clock next to the bed - it was after 7 AM.

Memories came flooding back to him. Maglor had him seven times in different positions, before they pulled apart, sweaty and exhausted, to rummage up something to eat. Feeding each other like lovers put them in a sensual mood again, and after showering together to wash off the sweat, which deepened the haze of sensuality, they had each other for dessert, Sören tasting him for the first time in years. That final eighth orgasm shattered Sören enough to fall asleep afterwards, and he'd slept like a baby. At some point in the middle of the night he'd woken up and felt Maglor's arms tighten around him, whispering endearments in what was probably Elvish before Sören fell back asleep. And now here he was. It was the morning after, and for once Sören didn't hate that it was morning. There were worse ways to wake up.

"Shit." Sören hadn't intended on spending the night, and he wasn't sure if Dooku saying he was fine taking an evening to himself had meant he could spend the night or not. He ran a nervous hand through his curls, scratching his head. He also hadn't brought a change of clothes - this had all been spontaneous, yesterday - and Maglor had almost a

foot on him so wearing something of his was impractical. He was going to have to put on the same clothes to go back home and get ready for work. He used the Force to pull his pile of clothing off the floor and bring it over to the bed. As he started pulling on his boxer-briefs, he winced - his body had been *very* well-used last night, and he was feeling the after effects of it now.

Maglor noticed the wince. "A little sore?"

"...Yeah." Sören's face flushed, his mind replaying the delicious lovemaking. He had never been so sex hungry in his life. So thoroughly wanton, debauched. At one point he'd been on all fours, feeling like a bitch in heat, Maglor's teeth on the back of his neck as he drove into him. *More, I need more,* Sören had cried out, desperate for it, bucking against him, crying out again as Maglor's arms held him tight, Maglor's hand slid down to play with his sensitized cock to the rhythm of those savage thrusts. Sören remembered the *noises* he'd made, his throat still raw from it. The slap of their flesh, Maglor's deep groans of primal satisfaction as he took what was *his*. And the way Sören had begged, when he could make words, through the fever. *Please. Please. Don't stop, more, don't stop, don't ever stop, I need this, I need it, I need* you.

And oh, the sweet finale, tender and beautiful, the two exploring each other's entire bodies, reverently, passionately, before settling into a sixty-nine, slow and languid. Coming together, taking each other's hands as they let go. Rising up to kiss each other with their mouths full of cum before swallowing, savoring the sweet taste of their combined seed.

Sören went hard again, as he remembered.

Maglor gave him a look that was equal parts compassion and amusement. "I'd apologize, but..."

"I have no regrets." Sören cringed again from the soreness as he stood up, pulling on his jeans. "Only that it took us this long to get back together."

"I have no regrets either. ...Except leaving in the first place."

Maglor came over to kiss him. He was hard again too. Sören looked down at the hard cock and then was drawn deeper into the kiss, with a groan. When they pulled apart, breathing hard, Sören said, "We better not right now, or we'll never leave here today, and we shouldn't cancel classes." A pause. "I also have to go home. Nico -"

Maglor nodded. "I understand. I'll take you home, and then pick you up when it's time to go to the studio."

"*Takk.*"

After getting changed and having coffee, they stepped outside into that strange yet wonderful golden glow the world sometimes got after a big storm. The remnants of yesterday's downpour sparkled in the grass, and Sören's breath caught at the sight of a double rainbow over the hills. "Holy *shit.*"

"That is magnificent." Maglor took his hand and for a moment they just stood there to marvel at it.

Maglor drove slowly down the street, as if he didn't want to let Sören go just yet, even though it would only be a couple hours before they'd see each other again. In front of

Sören's cabin, they lingered, and then Sören leaned over to kiss him, intending to give him a soft, gentle kiss. Their mouths met wildly, and they were necking, groping, before Maglor finally gave Sören a little push. "Off with you," he said, humor in his voice. "Horndog."

"Like you're not."

Maglor grinned. Sören gave him a playful swat on his way out of the Jaguar.

Dooku was already up and dressed, sitting at his laptop at the desk in the corner of the cabin, drinking coffee. He stopped what he was doing and looked at Sören as he staggered in, wincing a little from last night's use.

"Hi," Sören said.

"Hello." Dooku's eyes went back to the screen, and he picked up his cup and sipped.

"Um." Sören ran a hand through his curls. "I'm sorry I didn't come back last night -"

"It's fine." Dooku put the cup back down. "I had a feeling when I told you I was OK with taking an evening to myself, that you might." He didn't have to finish the sentence.

"Well, I still feel like I could have at least called or something. I ended up passing out after..."

"I'm sure you did." Then Dooku's lips quirked and Sören saw the faintest touch of amusement in his eyes. "Did you know we had an earthquake in the early evening yesterday? Just under two hours after your last class was over?"

"Er... no, I did not."

"A small one, reports said magnitude 4.1, I believe - enough to be felt, not enough to do damage or cause too much panic, though the epicenter was quite close, so." Dooku raised an eyebrow.

"Wow." Sören looked off to the side, face burning. "That's, um, really interesting."

"Quite."

Sören wanted to chalk something like that up to a coincidence, but somehow he couldn't, and that scared him a little, a frisson down his spine, gooseflesh breaking out on his arms. He grabbed fresh, clean clothing and began to change there in front of Dooku, who glanced at him from time to time, dark eyes appreciative and hungry in the moment that Sören was completely naked. Sören wished he weren't so spent - and sore - feeling a pang of guilt.

When Sören was dressed, he pet Snúður, who'd hopped up on the bed with an inquisitive chirp. Snúður proceeded to headbutt him and rub his face against him, and eventually Sören scooped him up, rubbing his nose in the black-and-white fur, giving little kisses, talking baby talk, with Snúður kneading and purring and drooling in his bliss. Dooku watched them with a little smile, and when their eyes met, the love in his eyes made Sören's breath catch.

Love... and sadness.

"Are you *very* sure that it was fine that I -"

Dooku nodded. "Yes. But we need to talk." He finished his coffee, and walked the cup over to the sink. He used the Force to turn on the tap. "By 'we', I mean the three of us. Meaning Macalaurë."

"Obviously."

"I think the sooner, the better, so if you could invite him over for dinner, perhaps?"

"I'll do that."

–

Sören did a double-take when he got in the Jaguar and Maglor handed him the usual thermos of iced coffee.

"Yes?"

Sören blinked. "I just... ha ha... I think I got used to seeing you without your glamour and now that it's back up, it's weird. I mean, you're still *devastatingly* attractive when you try to pass for human, but..."

Maglor smiled. "Well, you know I can't go unglamoured in public."

"I know. Like I said, you're still *gorgeous*. I just..."

"I get it."

"When we're alone... you don't have to have your glamour up around me if you don't want to. Unless I'm driving. Because I don't think I'd be able to safely drive, I'd crash the car." Sören laughed. "But since you won't be unglamoured in public, there's no reason -"

Maglor nodded.

Sören ran a nervous hand through his curls. "I feel so... plain... next to you." He looked out the window at the green landscape.

"Oh no. Sören, have you seen yourself? You're beautiful. You and Dooku make a really nice-looking couple."

Sören's gaze turned back to Maglor, who was a little pink now.*Interesting.* "Elves don't grow facial hair, do they?"

"We can, but not until we're of a venerable age, and most do not." Maglor looked at Sören. "I like your facial hair. I would be disappointed if you shaved it off to try to look, well, different to try to please me."

"That's good, because I don't like myself without it. I look too young, and like a girl." Sören chuckled.

"And on your husband, it's distinguished. He's quite handsome."

Sören raised an eyebrow at that, and sipped his coffee, but said nothing in response.

"So no, if you're thinking I somehow find you inferior to my own kind... please disabuse yourself of that notion immediately. I find you lovely, Sören. I probably find you just as exotic as you find me." And then Maglor's look became more predatory. "In case you couldn't tell how aroused I was by you, last night."

"*God.*" Sören's laughter rang out, and he winced as the laughter reminded him of his soreness. "Last night was amazing."

"It was. I hope to have many more nights like that."

Sören's mind began replaying the scenes from last night again, and he was so flustered that he couldn't say anything else for the remainder of their trip to the studio.

Sören was in a good mood for his watercolors class, and in addition to the enjoyment he took in the creations of others, and encouraging his students, he painted the golden glow and rainbows from this morning, wanting to always preserve the memory. The sound of Maglor's piano class across the hall was comforting rather than jarring, now that his class was improving.

When their classes were over and the students gone, Maglor stopped outside the door to Sören's art room. "Do you want to go anywhere for lunch, or do you want me to bring you something?"

"Can you bring me something? I gotta do some cleaning in here while I have this extra energy to burn off."

Maglor headed out, and Sören put on the radio, and the same soul station from yesterday. He sang along with Beyoncé and Rihanna as he cleaned and organized the art room. And danced, feeling good. Feeling high on life.

Sören heard a clearing of the throat at the door. Sören whirled around, going from the abandon of dancing to feeling self-conscious that he had probably gotten caught. "Oh. Hi."

Maglor grinned. "Hi."

"...How much of that did you see."

"Enough." Though he was smiling, the look in Maglor's eyes could melt metal. Sören felt that shiver down his spine, his own heat rising.

"Er." Sören looked at the paper bag in Maglor's hand.

"Right." Maglor brought it to the art table, and Sören sat down. He pulled out a grilled cheese sandwich, which was still warm, and a thermos of tomato soup.

"You made me this." *You remembered my favorites.*

"I know it's not fancy, but."

"Shush, you know what I like." Sören felt weirdly choked up by it, and a little self-conscious that he was getting emotional over a sandwich and some soup. "You didn't

forget..."

"Elves never forget things. But even without that..." Their eyes met. "I couldn't forget you, Sören. Not even when I wanted to."

Sören was torn between the need to feed his growling stomach and the need to feed his raging libido. The hunger for food won out, since it wouldn't be terribly long to his children's class and he didn't need the kids to accidentally walk in on something like that. He started nibbling the sandwich. "Oh god, you made it with Swiss cheese too, you wonderful man."

"As I said."

Sören crinkled his nose and bit his lower lip. He felt a surge of heat from Maglor's direction, and he felt himself hardening. *Not now, boner.* "I love you, you know."

"I know. I love you too. Very much. I never stopped loving you."

"Goddammit, Maglor, you're gonna make me cry."

"Well, eat your food, and I'll go work on this song I'm writing, till our classes start." Maglor got up.

"Wait." Sören put up his finger. Maglor paused. Sören chewed and swallowed. "Nico wants you to come by for dinner. He wants to talk to both of us."

"Is he pissed that you spent the night with me...?"

"He says no. He didn't specify what the talk was about, but he knows we're back together so I assume it's about that."

"OK. Well, I'll be there, after I tend to Auli."

Sören tried to pull himself together before the class started, with cold water and deep breaths, making himself think of things other than sex with Maglor, sex with Dooku, sex with Maglor and Dooku at the same time. *Fuck.*

He managed to calm down and get through the children's class, a perfect end to a day that had actually started right. He lost himself in their innocence and wonder and play, letting himself be a big kid along with them, and felt a little pang about not having kids himself. In his mind's eye, as he sculpted, Sören saw himself with sons, in a place that felt like Earth yet somehow not at once, and there was Dooku except he was different, younger-looking, with long dark hair and silver-blue eyes. A resemblance to Maglor. *Our children, Ñolo.*

What in the fuck.

Sören was spooked. He composed himself, but he was in a strange mood when the class was over. Enough that he had to step outside for a few minutes and breathe.

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As Maglor got ready to go, he heard the door to the studio open, and footsteps down the hall. Then the bathroom door closing, and the sink running.

"Sören? You in there?"

"Jæja, I'll be out soon."

Sören came out, looking like he'd seen a ghost, more tightly shielded than usual. "What happened? Are you OK?"

Sören nodded. "I'm fine."

Maglor gave him a look. It had been his experience that if he had to ask Sören if he was OK, Sören usually wasn't. He felt Sören doubling down on his shield.

"Really, I'm fine. Come on, see the little sculpture I made."

His class was making papier mache sculptures, instead of clay this time. Sören had made a shark.

"I have to paint him next week, but..."

"He's adorable. It's a he?"

Sören nodded.

"Does he have a name?"

"Cornelius." Sören grinned.

"That's ridiculous. I like it."

Sören's grin got bigger, his eyes crinkling with amusement. "It just randomly occurred to me for some reason. It tickled me. My brain is an interesting place to be sometimes."

"Only sometimes?"

"Only sometimes. Other times it's a cesspool."

"I can't pretend to be innocent myself." Maglor couldn't resist. "Especially not after seeing you dance earlier."

Sören *slammed* him against the wall, kissing him hard. Maglor groaned as he felt Sören's fingertips play over his chest, down his stomach and hips. After a few breathless kisses, Sören's mouth was on his neck, the full lips just grazing, breath hot on his skin.

"D'you know," Sören rasped, "how fucking *crazy* you make me?"

Maglor took Sören's chin in his hand. "About as crazy as you make me." He claimed Sören's mouth and thrust out against him, letting Sören feel how hard he was for him. "I haven't been able to stop thinking about you all afternoon." He kissed Sören again. "*Wanting* you."

Sören crinkled his nose and bit his lower lip. *That.* Maglor's cock throbbed, and he lost all sense of propriety and caution. He started pushing Sören back, walking away from the

wall, marching them both towards Sören's art room, needing it *now*.

Before they could get there, Sören waved his hand and the door to the studio slammed closed, and then with a turn of his hand it locked from down the hall. That way they would be undisturbed. As soon as they set foot in the art room, Sören reached for his belt buckle, and Maglor pulled out the little travel-sized bottle of lube he knew Sören carried in his jeans pocket, had started carrying lube on him when they were together and could not get enough of each other, any time, any place.

Between kisses, Sören looked down at the lube. "I'm too sore to bottom again after yester -"

"It's not for you to bottom."

Maglor watched Sören's eyes widen at that, and then Sören crinkled his nose and bit his lower lip again. Maglor felt ready to climb the walls. "Hells, Sören." His voice was rough with desire. "I need you in me. It's been too long."

They got naked right there in the art room. Even though the front door to the studio had been shut and locked to ensure they wouldn't be disturbed, Sören also shut the door to the art room with his mind; Maglor wondered what he was doing until he saw Sören waved at the window, pulling down the blinds to darken the room. In the dim light, Maglor's natural silver glow was more intense when he dropped his glamour, as he did now, loving the way Sören's breath caught at the sight of him.

Maglor sat at the edge of the table, his legs dangling, and he lay back, spreading his legs. He expected Sören to take him right then, but he was surprised - and yet shouldn't have been, considering their history - when Sören got on his knees on the floor, and his tongue slid inside. Maglor let out a cry as he felt Sören's tongue brushing the most sensitive, intimate part of him, so sweetly. He could have *wept*, for the glory of that tongue and what it was doing to him, stroking slowly and deliberately, then harder and faster, then slowly again. Sören groaned into him, and his hands reached out to take Maglor's hands.

I love doing this to you, Sören spoke into his mind.

It was one thing to hear Sören broadcasting, it was another thing to have Sören use telepathy directly. He'd known, when he saw Sören use telekinesis, that telepathy was probably another of his gifts. But here it was, and it felt as intimate as the licking inside him.

"You're so good at that." Maglor shuddered, hands slipping out of Sören's to clutch his head, fist his curls as he arched to him, not able to keep from working his hips, gently thrusting against Sören's face. "Gods, Sören..."

"Mmmmmmm." Sören narrowed his eyes, and his fingers walked up from the sensitive place between balls and ass, to run over his balls, over his cock. "I love you so much," Sören breathed before sticking his tongue back in.

"Sören. Take me. *Please.*" He found himself reverting to his native tongue, much as his beloved had yesterday. "*Puitho nin.*"

With a few last licks and a growl, Sören pulled back, and rose up. His cock was hard, looking almost angry, glistening with precum. Maglor watched hungrily as Sören moved the bottle of lube with his mind, pouring lubricant over his cock, and then directly into Maglor's passage. Maglor gasped and shivered at the feel of the liquid shooting inside

him, cock throbbing at the promise of feeling Sören shoot inside him the same way, soon.

Sören grabbed Maglor's hips, the tip of his cock pressed against the entrance. "You ready?"

"Please, *melindo*. Now."

Sören began to push into him, slowly. Though Maglor had been fucked by Ingwion a few times since arriving in Iceland, he was still *tight*, and flinched a little at the burn.

"Am I hurting you? Do I need to stop?"

"Keep going. I need this."

Sören took his hands. "Just breathe deep, and push out. That's it."

Pushing out as Sören pushed in, made it easier, though the first minute was still excruciating. Maglor knew it wouldn't feel like this forever. When Sören bottomed out in him, they moaned together, Sören's fingertips lovingly tracing the scar on his palm.

"You feel so right," Sören breathed.

"*Gi melin.*"

"Oh, love." Sören knew what he was saying without having to be told, across their bond. "I love you too."

Sören took his first thrust. A few thrusts and... "*Sören.*" Maglor's breath hitched as the ring in the head of Sören's cock rubbed his prostate just right. The bead in the ring... Maglor shuddered. "Oh, gods, Sören..."

"Like that?"

"*Yes.*"

Sören went slowly, to get him acclimated to the fullness, and then when Maglor was adjusted and it was only pleasure, no pain, Sören kept it slow, teasing, a wicked look on his face. But he couldn't hold back for long, nor did Maglor want him to. At last, his legs were on Sören's shoulders, Sören slamming into him, balls slapping against him, a predatory look on his face, making delicious deep growling, grunting, *male* noises. Maglor loved the feeling of surrender, both his own surrender to Sören, and watching Sören give into his animal side, going from being more submissive to *taking* what he wanted. It was like being ravished by fire, and it stoked Maglor's own fire, cold for too long. The passion between them was all-consuming. Their voices filled the room, wild and loud and unmistakably the sound of sex, hungry and wanton. Sören drove into him harder and harder.

"*Ai,* Sören, *puitho nin, pathro nin.*"

"God..." Sören grit his teeth; Maglor could feel him trying to hold back.

Maglor's hands reached out, stroking Sören's flesh where he could reach. Sören's response to that was to seize his cock, though Maglor was well on his way to coming just from Sören's movements inside him and that ring *rubbing rubbing rubbing*.

"*Ritho! No lagor!*"

"Fuck." Sören worked his hips as hard and fast as he could, and made a deep, primal grunt. "I'm so close..."

"So am I." Maglor's voice shook. "So close, love. I want to feel you come inside me."

"I want you to come all over me."

A few more thrusts, and they were *right there.* "Oh god." Sören was trembling. "Oh god..." Panting. "Oh god... oh my fucking god..."

"*Yes,* Sören. Come with me, *now*."

"*Macalaurë, elskan!*"

"Sören, *melindo*, Sören, Hells, I love you..."

Maglor spent over Sören's chest and stomach, feeling Sören's seed erupt inside him. They cried out together, almost sobbing, and after a few more thrusts Sören stopped, gasping for breath. The throbbing pleasure was so intense it almost *hurt*, contraction after contraction, deeper and deeper into bliss.

Maglor took Sören's hands and pulled his mind into the Song. Their threads weaving together, aching silver and shimmering green-purple aurora, burning into a pure white supernova. Coming out the other side, falling through storm clouds, lightning, and then into dawn, shades of rose gold tinged with peach, pale pink and lavender, as soft and warm as the storm had been white-hot and diamond-hard. They were floating together, flying, everything bright and sweet.

Sören was crying, softly. "Oh my fucking god," he choked out.

Maglor sat up gingerly, and held Sören. They clung, as the last waves of their orgasm continued to throb. Held Sören's mind's eye in the Song as long as he could, wanting him to see, feel, *hear*, at last, their place in the Music.

They rocked together. "Sören." He felt Sören's hands in his hair. "Sören. My love."

"That..." Sören's breath caught again, and he was shaking a little. "That was... incredible. That..."

"That was us." Maglor looked up, and stroked Sören's face. "That was what we'd been missing for five years."

Sören's arms tightened around him. "I love you." Sören was breathing hard, not just from the exertion of sex, but the awe that Maglor could feel across their bond. "*Takk*, Macalaurë, *ástin mín.*"

—

After he saw to Auli's food, water, and walk, Maglor arrived at Sören and Dooku's cabin. For awhile they just sat and relaxed together on the couch, Sören cuddling between them as they watched more episodes of *Metalocalypse*, drinking lemonade. Then Dooku grilled

fish outside while Sören and Maglor worked together on a salad in the kitchen, every now and again stealing kisses.

They ate outside, drinking wine. The first part of their meal was spent in companionable silence and then Dooku finally broke the silence; it was clear he had been gathering his thoughts, wanting to make sure he said the right things.

"I see some congratulations are in order. I want happiness for you both, and if you're happy, I'm happy."

They clinked glasses. Maglor said, "You're sure I'm not stepping on any toes -"

"I would like to have tomorrow evening with my husband, if you don't mind," Dooku said, looking at Sören, who nodded. "We have a bit of an arrangement between us, and..."

"I understand." Maglor would miss him, but he knew going into this that Sören and Dooku had an established relationship and he had been loath to interfere from the beginning.

"We should probably work out a time-sharing schedule, at some point," Dooku said, "in the interest of fairness to all three of us, so there's no toe-stepping."

"I agree."

"Plus if Sören is going to continue to see Ingmar..."

Maglor cringed at that - he still didn't like Sören and Ingwion together, even though he knew that it was not on the same level of what he and Sören had, and what Sören and Dooku had. But that was also Sören's decision to make, and after what Sören had been through with that filth Justin, attempting to control him was the last thing he wanted to do.

"I haven't decided that yet," Sören said. "Ingmar and I still have to talk about things, and we haven't talked yet."

"Soon," Dooku said. "You should talk to him soon."

"I know."

Maglor felt himself continuing to bristle at the mention of Ingwion, and he wanted to put Dooku's mind at ease. Plus, he had grown fond of the old man - *too fond* - and he'd missed their friendship. He realized in hindsight Dooku was probably stepping back a bit because he was gifted and sensed that Sören and Maglor needed space for this all to happen, something that he was grateful to him for. But he missed spending time with Dooku as well. So, attempting to continue to defuse the situation and put Dooku's mind at ease, Maglor cut in, "Perhaps if Sören goes on another date with him, we can spend time with each other. I think our continued friendship is more important now than it was before, with us sharing a partner."

Dooku kept his expression neutral, and gave a small nod. "All right."

"And not just then, either, maybe we could take Auli for a walk tomorrow when I'm done at the studio, before you have your night with Sören?"

"That would be fine."

That would be fine. *That's an odd choice of words.* Maglor did not empathically sense

Dooku being jealous, per se - protective, yes, understandable after he'd broken Sören's heart five years ago, but there was no broadcasting of *keep your hands off my mate* as far as he could tell, though he knew Dooku kept a very tight shield around his mind. Maglor sipped his wine and pondered this. Dooku had been weirdly quiet and distant towards him since the night he'd come over for dinner a couple weeks ago while Sören was out with Ingwion and he'd played music and had too much to drink.

Maglor kept from facepalming. *I said or did something when I was drunk, and it made things weird with him, didn't it.*

Now was not the time to try to probe, and probably discussing it tomorrow while they were walking Auli would be too soon - just like Dooku had given Maglor and Sören space to become friends again, to make the big emotional hurdles easier, Maglor would do the same and have at least one "normal" visit with his friend before bringing up the night he was drunk and if he'd said or done anything that made Dooku ill at ease.

"You guys definitely should spend more time together," Sören said, putting a hand on one hand on Maglor's shoulder and reaching out across the table to put a hand on Dooku's shoulder. "You both need a friend." Sören gave Maglor a look, then. "When I tell you that you deserve to be loved and cared about, I really mean it. It's important. None of us have to do this alone anymore. We're family now."

Maglor smiled and leaned over to kiss Sören's cheek. "You're such a sweet boy."

Dooku reached across the table to stroke Sören's other cheek, smiling at him fondly. His expression returned to neutral as his gaze met Maglor's again, and he downed more wine.

Yes, I really put my foot in it, somehow. Well... I'll find out what's going on, eventually.

"Actually..." Sören stroked his beard thoughtfully. "Maglor, why don't you come over and have dinner with us again on Thursday night?"

"If Nicolae doesn't mind -"

"I don't mind," Dooku said. But he did not meet Maglor's eyes.

A few more minutes passed, and Sören finally said, "I want to thank both of you for being so reasonable about sharing me, and I'm sure you can work something out like adults -"

Dooku nodded. Then he took Sören's hands across the table, stroking them. He finally looked at Maglor, and then back at Sören. "As I have said, your happiness is important to me, Sören. But also..." Dooku looked at Maglor, again. "As you know, I will be seventy-one this December. I am in excellent health, but that is not a guarantee I am going to live forever." He took a deep breath. "When Sören brought up wanting to open our relationship... I'd been worrying about my mortality again, and how he would take things when I am gone. Sören has... some mental health issues, I assume you know that."

"Yes, he told me about that." Maglor nodded. *I can also feel it, how close to the edge he's walked.*

"Suddenly, there was a convenient, elegant solution at hand to the problem of my mortality, and not wanting Sören to be alone when I am dying, and after I am gone. So I want you to promise me that you will take care of Sören when the time comes." Dooku's eyes misted. "Even if I had an objection to your relationship - which I do not, really -" Yet Maglor could feel some sort of pang there, that he otherwise couldn't probe what about,

where it came from, with the shielding in place. "- I want what's best for Sören, and what's best for him is to have a lover so he has a source of comfort and support and companionship with the inevitable on its way."

That was one of the most unselfish things Maglor had heard in his life, and*it makes me love you all the more.* Maglor took a deep breath, fighting off the urge to give Dooku a hug, fighting off the urge to tell him how he *felt*. He didn't want to make their friendship awkward - he got the feeling he probably let something slip about his feelings that night and that was why Dooku was avoiding him. He wasn't sure. They'd have to talk about it.

Of course, such feelings were not cast aside so easily.

It wouldn't just be Sören who would need comfort when Dooku went. Maglor was *attached*.

"Jesus Christ, Nico." Sören wiped tears from his eyes. "Could we not with the death and dying talk."

"I'm sorry to bring that up again, sweetheart. But I felt he needed some further explanation why I am being so 'reasonable' about this, when there are many in my place who might not like sharing."

"I... appreciate that you're looking out for Sören," Maglor said. "I came here not just to find closure after what happened - which, as it turned out, meant re-opening our relationship - but when I heard Sören was married, I needed to make sure it was to someone worthy of him. You are a good man, Nicolae." *If you were not, I would have killed you and made it look like an accident.* "And I swore, yesterday, that I would not leave Sören again. I do not swear oaths lightly, or really, at all, anymore."

Dooku nodded. "I'm glad to hear that."

Sören grinned. "Hi Glad To Hear That..."

Dooku glared, and Sören laughed and booped his nose.

_

Maglor left shortly after dinner, saying he'd be giving Auli a bath and then working on some music. Sören had Dooku sit with him on the couch, needing to feel Dooku close to him after the absence last night and being gone most of the day. For awhile Sören played Stardew Valley and Dooku worked on his novel, on their respective laptops, and then they put them down and curled up on each other, Dooku petting him.

"I'd offer to make it up to you tonight but I'm still sore from yesterday," Sören said.

"I thought as much, I've noticed the way you've been moving, and sitting in particular." Dooku patted him.

"Tomorrow night, though, when it's just us." Sören waggled his eyebrows. "It's*on.*"

"I look forward to it." Dooku tilted Sören's face to his and kissed his forehead.

"Do you want a blowjob, though?" Sören raised an eyebrow.

Dooku also raised an eyebrow. "You were intimate with Macalaurë earlier at the studio -"

"How did you know that -"

"Our Force bond, and I can smell it on you. Anyway... I suppose even after all this time, I'm surprised by your appetite. Pleasantly surprised, but..."

"If anything, it seems to be stronger now." With that, Sören gave a little growl, nibbling Dooku's neck, who groaned in response. "The more I have, the more I want." Sören started kissing Dooku's neck, and husked, "I want to taste that beautiful cock of yours. Now."

They found their way to the bed, and stripped. Sören was hard now too, and they spent a few minutes with Sören on his back, the two holding each other, kissing, rubbing their cocks together. Then Sören shoved Dooku on his back with a growl, and climbed over him, straddling Dooku's shoulders as he lowered his face between Dooku's legs. They feasted on each other, sucking, rimming, to not one, but two orgasms, Sören telling him he was "still hungry" after the first one.

They cuddled together after the second climax, Dooku laughing as he pet Sören. "You are incredible," he said. "I feel like the luckiest man in the world, right now."

Sören smiled and rained little kisses over his face, rubbing noses with him before taking his mouth in a sweet, lingering kiss. "I can't wait to see how you feel tomorrow night."

"God, you spoil me."

"You deserve to be spoiled, *elskan.* I know you say you want my happiness above all, but Nico... I want your happiness too." Sören's index finger traced a heart shape over Dooku's chest and then he leaned in to kiss over his heart, before resting his head there, nuzzling the silver pelt. "I love you so much. When we make love, it's not just physical, to me. It's giving you ecstasy. It's wanting to make you feel *good*. Feel *alive.* I've been through so much shit in my life, you have too, but there is still goodness and beauty and wonder in the world, still ways to find happiness... and when we come, when we touch that *fire*, that passion, the heartbeat of creation... the pain isn't there anymore. It cleanses us, for a time. All we have is each other, in that moment, and in that moment, we are infinite." Sören's voice dropped to a husky whisper. "I love to feel infinite with you, my soulmate."

"Dammit, Sören, that's beautiful." Dooku's eyes misted, and he stroked Sören's face. "How are you so young and yet so deep?"

"...I've been drilled plenty of times."

Dooku facepalmed, and shook with silent laughter. "Dear. God."

Sören grinned, and then pulled Dooku close, rocking him. "Just remember, if you're ever too overwhelmed by those profound philosophy moments..." Sören used the Force to bring over the puffin hat and put it on his head.

Dooku laughed harder. "Why are you like this."

"Because." Sören kissed the tip of his nose. He took the puffin hat off and used the Force to return it to its place atop the mantle. "We need it."

They continued holding each other. Dooku started to doze off a little in Sören's arms, and Sören's mind drifted. He had a vision of laying in the grass with Dooku in the different form he'd seen in brief flashes before, young with long dark hair, tangled together in the warm sunshine, covered in each other's seed, wearing it proudly, almost *defiantly*. Glittering silver-blue, eyes like diamonds meeting his, shining with love, before closing to give a tender kiss. Sören heard himself speak to the man in his arms. *There is no sin in this, Ñolo. We were* made *for this. We are glorious.*

"Nico?"

"Hm?"

"You... believe in past lives?"

"Perhaps." Dooku's voice had the faraway sound of being half-asleep. "I think too many people use the concept as a crutch, fancying that they were Cleopatra, when it is who you are here and now that matters. But I do believe souls can be reborn, yes."

"You think we had any past lives together?"

Dooku's eyes opened, warm dark chocolate, but there was the same sweetness in them as there had been in his vision. "Yes." He kissed Sören softly. "I do."

Sören rubbed his head and patted him, and Dooku fell back asleep. Soon, Sören was asleep as well.

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Wednesday

It rained again on Wednesday. Sören had ceramics in the morning, and sketching in the afternoon. Maglor had his guitar classes. Ceramics was always a joy to Sören, and feeling in "the zone" creatively got his libido flowing, intensified when he heard Maglor playing the guitar, working on an original composition between classes.

The years without his other soulmate had made him like a starving man, and suddenly, here was a feast. And Sören's anticipation of being with Dooku in the evening did not help, fantasizing about his husband a dozen different ways, all of them delicious.

God, I'm turning into a sex addict. It was all Sören could do to not stop the sketching class and interrupt Maglor's guitar class to ravish him right then and there.

Instead, he waited until their classes were done. Sören hovered at the door of Maglor's classroom, and smiled when Maglor looked up at him.

"I heard you playing earlier... a new song?"

"Would you like to hear it?"

Sören sat, and Maglor played an instrumental for him. It was beautiful, melancholy minor

chords that gave way to a more uplifting set of major chords, like dark clouds pierced by light. Sören got teared up.

It was the song he'd heard in the vision Maglor showed them, of their place in the Music. He had finally manifested it here.

It did nothing to discourage his libido.

Maglor got up to put his guitar back in the case, and when his back was turned and Sören saw that firm, shapely ass in those jeans...

"Shall we head back?" Maglor held out his hand.

Sören took it, feeling the electricity between them. They locked up the studio and stepped outside - it had stopped raining though everything was misty, the grass sparkling with raindrops like diamonds. There was another rainbow. They paused for a moment to admire it, and then Maglor turned Sören's head to his and gave him a sweet little kiss.

That did it. Sören found himself *pulling Maglor by his hair* around to the back of the studio, where there was the shed for the kiln and a small yard space with picnic tables in the grass. It wasn't quite private, but there was no one nearby to see them. Sören kissed him hard and hungry, and the two tumbled together to the wet grass, Sören pulling off his shirt, feverish. Maglor reached for Sören's belt and began undoing Sören's jeans, laughing softly.

"You're insatiable, you know."

"Is that a complaint?"

Maglor slid Sören's hand to the hard bulge in his own jeans. "Hells, no."

They got naked, throwing their clothing off to the side, and Sören used the Force to pull the lube out of his jeans pocket. He poured lube over Maglor's cock, stroking it to work it in as he leaned down to kiss him. "I love you," Sören husked between kisses.

"I love you." Maglor grabbed Sören's hips, and pulled him, groaning as he watched Sören sink down. When they were fully joined, they kissed again.

Sören rode him slowly at first, wanting to savor that sweet connection between them, feeling *complete* after all this time. They continued to kiss, pet each other's hair, run their fingers over each other's bodies. Maglor leaned up to lick and suckle Sören's nipples, gently tugging the rings with his teeth, fingers playing with one ring as his mouth worked on the other. The sensation - and the heat in Maglor's eyes, the look on his face as he enjoyed Sören's body - made it that much better, as did cradling him as he feasted, rocking him gently, *comforting* him. *Not alone anymore,* Sören spoke into his mind. *Never alone again, so long as I walk with you.*

Sören played with his hair, glamoured while they were out in the open and yet still so beautiful. Just Maglor's hair turned him on, Sören not able to get enough of running his fingers through it, worshiping him.

And then, at last, Sören started to ride a little harder, a little faster. Sören leaned down to kiss and lick Maglor's own nipples, knowing what he liked, rubbing one as his lips seized the other. Sören went back and forth between them over and over again as Maglor arched, panting, trembling. Then Sören reached, the fingers of his free hand working into

Maglor's passage, finding the prostate to finger-fuck him as he continued to ride Maglor's cock and make love to his nipples.

Maglor rolled Sören onto his back with a growl, propped Sören's legs on his shoulders, and took him hard. Sören's screams rang out into the sky, like a wild bird. They were both crying out, and there was a vague worry in the back of Sören's head that someone would call the police. Before that could happen, they exploded together, and more rays of sunshine streamed through the clouds, everything golden, with the smell of petrichor in the air to warn of more rain coming soon. Here and now, they had made it rain in a different sense, Maglor covered in Sören's seed, and Sören could feel plenty of Maglor's seed inside him.

"God. *Wow.*" Sören laughed, feeling euphoria.

"Hells, Sören." Maglor just held him for a moment. "That was amazing." He kissed Sören hard and husked, "You. Are amazing."

They got dressed and got in the car. Sören made a little purring sound of contentment, and Maglor reached out to skritch Sören's beard like he was a cat, making Sören giggle. Then Sören took the fingers and kissed them; it was Maglor's bad hand, and Sören pressed the palm to his lips for another kiss.

"Sören." Maglor's voice was husky with raw emotion.

Sören folded Maglor's hand into his and pressed it against his heart.

"Dammit Sören, I don't know whether to cry or to pull this car over and go for another round."

Sören laughed. "Now who's insatiable?"

"Gods. I'd ask what's gotten into me, but you'd say 'my cock'..."

Sören snorted. "It's like you know me."

"*Yeah.*" Maglor shook his head. "You butt."

"I wouldn't mind going for another round but it would be hard to stop. And I promised Nico -"

"I know." Maglor nodded. "I wouldn't be able to stop, either, we'd be at it for the next few hours." He closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

"Were you like this, with the other mortals?"

"No." Maglor's eyes opened and met his; Sören knew he was telling the truth. "There are only five other people who I've been like this with. One is Ingmar." Sören could hear the unspoken *Damn him to the Hells* at the end of that sentence and wondered what the story was behind that. "The other four were... my father and uncles, and one of my brothers."

"Right, I keep forgetting that was a thing."

"I still can't believe you're... OK with that."

"Like I said, if y'all were human I think I might be bothered by it more. But it's different for

Elves...?"

"We were still damned for it. For loving anyone of our own gender, incest or not. Manwë in *particular* has a problem with that. He had quite a problem with my father."

"Well..." Sören took a deep breath. "You were consenting adults, like you said, right?"

"Correct. Fingolfin didn't touch me until I was of age. Even then, I had to throw myself at him." Maglor flushed.

"Fingolfin. That's... an interesting name."

"You still haven't read it, have you?"

"No. I will. I swear to you, I will. It's just..." Sören made a vague hand gesture. "What I already know is a lot to process. Almost too much. I feel like another bomb is going to hit once I read that book, I'm not sure what, I just know it's..."

Maglor nodded.

"Besides..." Sören needed a moment of levity. "Sounds like there isn't even any porn, boo."

Maglor facepalmed, laughing. "Sören..."

Sören admittedly enjoyed the mental images he was getting – one of the men just like the Ñolo of his visions and dreams. "Your father and uncles looked like you?"

"One of the uncles. The other uncle was blond."

"Ooh, even better." Sören made a purr like a cat. "Sounds hot."

"Gods, Sören, you should have *seen* them together. They *were* hot. They were so hot together it drove me crazy. It wasn't just that they were aesthetically beautiful together, though there was that. It was the way they loved each other, if that makes sense at all."

"It does. The way two or, uh, three people who are really into each other is hot, regardless of what they look like. The energy."

"*Yes.*"

"I get it."

"So... yes, Fingolfin was my first, and later I was intimate with my father, and my uncle Finarfin, and with all three of them at the same time, though I continued to enjoy them individually as well, and they each other, of course. And then..." Maglor sighed and looked away; Sören felt grief across their bond. The raindrops started to fall once more.

"What happened? If you can talk about it."

"I got married." Maglor looked back at Sören.

"You mean you actually got for real married, none of this I-have-an-arranged-marriage-and-have-to-leave-you-now bullshit you fed me five years ago."

Maglor cringed. "Actually got for real married, yes, Sören."

"Did you have any kids?"

“One.”

“So she's your baby mama?"

Maglor facepalmed. Sören could hear the *I have lived thousands of years, I am the second son of the High King of the Noldor, and the man I love listens to rap music and uses its slang like "baby mama"* across their bond. Sören tried not to laugh, feeling how much pain he was otherwise in at this entire subject.

"Yes, Sören, I had a son, and she was the mother. I was obligated to marry *someone*, per our people's Laws, so I did, though I did not love her. I cared for her as a person, I considered her a friend, but that is a very different thing entirely. Anyway... it was at that point that I tried to distance myself from the 'sin', from the 'sickness', to be a good husband. Except it just made things worse. I ended up resenting her, which adds insult to injury. And then my father died. I had taken that Oath – you just... need to read the book – and she left and took our son - my son – with her. He's in the lore as Ecthelion, but not listed as my son.” Maglor sighed and hung his head.

"Jesus."

There was a long silence. When they got into the village, Maglor spoke again. "Fingolfin and I reached out to each other again in our mutual grief over Fëanor. And then he fell, as well, fighting Morgoth. I was rather devastated. But then... my uncle Finarfin fell, fighting Balrogs alongside my son, both of them gone. After everything else, that was too much. Tolkien wrote Finarfin as still alive, still walking under the trees, I guess as what people would call 'fix-it fic', to try to make me feel better, but really... it didn't.”

Sören could feel it, or rather, he could feel a small taste of it, knowing Maglor was holding back the flood for both their sakes. Just what little he could feel, it was like not being able to breathe, like having all the life drained out of him, a fire dying to just embers.

"I was wounded in the War of Wrath and I wanted to die, in my grief. Ingwion... interfered."

"Wait, *that's* Ingmar's real name? Ingwion?"

"...Yes."

"Huh. So he's an Elf...?"

"He's..." *A Gods-damned* a-bunch-of-Elven-swears Sören didn't understand *and I still want to* kill *him.* Sören blinked at that oncoming broadcast, and then Maglor looked away, knowing that Sören had felt it. "He's a lot," Maglor said, looking out the window.

"A... lot."

"He should explain it to you himself, I think, just like he left it to me to explain myself instead of him telling you."

Sören pursed his lips.

"But, since that was... over and done," Maglor said, "it's been... well..." Maglor frowned. "I've had sex, though as I told you, not since ancient Rome, before I met you, and it was

never the same, even when I cared about the person I lay with. You were the strongest, deepest love I felt, since those ancient days. A return of the passion I had tasted, with Fëanor and Fingolfin and Finarfin."

"You told me several times, when we were together back then, that I remind you of your father. Now I have a better understanding of why."

"It wasn't just *that*, but yes, the sex was part of it."*And like I left you, I had refused him, and it broke his heart. He died before I could make things right.*

Sören played with a strand of Maglor's hair, stroked his face. "Macalaurë*ástin mín.* I'm so sorry."

"I'm sorry too... I shouldn't burden you with this right now." They were turning onto their street.

"You clearly needed to talk about it, and... I'm glad you did. It helps me understand you."

They pulled in front of the cabin. Sören leaned over and kissed him hard, and then Maglor kissed his forehead. "Thank you," Maglor husked.

"For?"

"Being you." Maglor gave him a soft, sweet kiss.

Sören climbed out of the car, before he wouldn't be able to stop himself from dragging Maglor off for another round, aching to comfort him. "I'll see you tomorrow, já?"

"Yes. You have any preferences for dinner?"

"Um... your *paella* would be wonderful."

"OK, I'll bring over what's needed to make that. Have a good evening, Sören."

"I love you."

"I know." Their eyes met. "I love you too."

Sören blew a kiss, and then was off to the cabin.

–

After Sören had been back home for a bit, Dooku went with Maglor to walk Auli. When he came back, Sören greeted him at the door with a hug and kiss, clinging.

Dooku kissed him back, and what was meant to be a sweet "welcome home" kiss turned passionate. Sören started to unbutton Dooku's shirt, and Dooku groaned into the kiss, beneath his touch.

"I see you're already hungry."

"Like you haven't been thinking about it yourself, old man."

"I've been thinking about it all day, though I was going to feed you properly first."

"Dinner can wait. I want you *now.*" The thought of Fëanor and Fingolfin and Finarfin together, and Maglor with the three of them, was driving Sören crazy. Dooku, himself, was driving Sören crazy, his tall, lean and powerful silver fox with that deep, cultured voice that made him melt. And *God, that chest hair...* Sören moaned at the sight of it exposed underneath the undone buttons, leaning in to start licking it, thrusting up against him like he was in heat.

Dooku and Sören stumbled to the bed, kissing, not able to take their hands off each other, shucking their clothes along the way. When they got to the bed, Sören used the Force to retrieve the leash and collar from the bedtable, and got on his knees. Dooku put the collar around Sören's neck, clipped the leash in, and stroked his face. "Good boy," Dooku whispered.

Sören's lips wrapped around Dooku's cock, and swallowed it down hungrily. Dooku clutched Sören's head as he sucked, and Sören slurped at him with passion and enthusiasm, rubbing his tongue with his mouth full, head bobbing back and forth. When Dooku had enough, before he could come in Sören's mouth, he pulled out, and Sören took a last few licks at the glistening cock, lapping around the head, tonguing the slit, making a show of collecting the precum. Dooku tugged on the leash, and led Sören to the bed.

"I'm of a mind to tease the life out of you," Dooku told him.

"You can do whatever you want to me, but I'm desperate for that cock of yours now... you could take me now and do a second round more slowly." Sören bit his lower lip.

Dooku reached for their lube with the Force. He lubed up his cock, and before he could pour lube into Sören's ass, Sören said, "I'm... um... already prepared." He turned around and stuck his ass out to show him, the stretched hole, Maglor's cum leaking out of him.

Dooku swatted Sören's ass, and Sören let out a moan. Then he whimpered as he felt Dooku start rubbing his cock into the crack of his ass, teasing him a little anyway. "Prepared, are you?"

"Mmm. So you could fuck me good."

"You can't control yourself, can you?" Another swat.

"No." Sören chuckled. "I can't."

Another swat. "You naughty boy." Another slap at Sören's ass, and Sören moaned.

"You like how naughty I am, don't you?"

Dooku pushed into him. "Yes."

He grabbed a fistful of Sören's curls, and began to thrust, smacking Sören's ass now and again. Sören moaned, working his hips, thrusting back at him. "God, yes, give me that cock..."

"You. Are. So wanton." Dooku slapped Sören's ass again.

"At least I was ready. All lubed up... and not just with lube, but with his cum, too..."

Dooku *drove* into him, savage. For a moment all they both could do was grunt and groan and gasp, their flesh slapping together obscenely, the bed rocking against the wall. Sören fisted the bedsheets, trembling at the power of those thrusts. And then he felt it across their Force bond - Dooku was getting aroused at the thought of Maglor's cum on his cock.

Dooku was having mental images of Sören and Maglor fucking, and *he liked it.*

"That's it," Sören purred. "Fuck me hard like he fucked me the other night. Like he gave it to me over and over again." Sören looked over his shoulder. "You would have loved watching that, wouldn't you?"

The *surge of heat* across their bond. Dooku let out a little moan.

"Wouldn't you, Nico. You want to watch us fuck."

Dooku leaned over him, fucking him harder, teeth in the sweet spot where neck and shoulder met. Sören gasped and shuddered, loving it. "I take it that's a yes."

"*Yes.*" *I won't deny it.*

And then Sören saw it.

"You want to do more than watch. You want him, too."

"*Fuck.*" Dooku let out a little gasp, continuing to drive it home.

"Mmmmmmm. I would love that, both of you on me at once..." Sören turned his face to kiss him, nipped his lower lip. "Would love to watch the two of you together."

Dooku shoved him down and pounded him into the mattress. A moment later - a wild, primal moment that was pure animal heat - they climaxed together, crying out. Sören could feel Dooku coming hard inside him, shooting and shooting and shooting, and it made Sören have a full body orgasm, fingers and toes curling, feeling like he was melting into a sea of light.

They both lay there for awhile, Dooku covering Sören's back, holding each other's hands. They drifted in and out of consciousness, shattered by the intensity of their mutual orgasm, and then Dooku pulled out, and rolled over, and Sören rolled into him, snuggling against him.

Dooku needed a nap after that, and Sören sketched for awhile, the delicious sight of his husband debauched on the bed. When Dooku finally got up it was almost seven PM, and he quietly set about getting dinner ready, grilling steaks outside.

"You still have on the leash," Dooku remarked as they sat out at the picnic table.

"I'm yours for the evening, love."

Dooku looked down, face flushed.

But they didn't get back to lovemaking right away. There was an awkward silence that hung over them, as if some sort of line had been crossed. Sören finally went there after the dishes were done.

"It's OK, you know," Sören said. "I'm not jealous or anything. Quite the opposite, I meant what I sai -"

"I know." Dooku pinched the bridge of his nose and took a deep breath. He sipped his tea, and then buried his face in his hands for a minute.

"Nico. What's wrong."

"I just... don't think he'd be interested in me."

"Don't even tell me you're going to say you're too old for him, considering the guy is like twenty thousand years old or some shit -"

"Seventy is perhaps not too old by Elvish standards, but it is aged by human standards. I know that *you* like looking at me, but the two of you are young-looking and I..."

"Oh, Nico. You know..." Sören remembered Maglor referring to Dooku with*He's quite handsome*, and he was about to say that.

"No, Sören. Listen to me." Dooku's eyes flashed. "The last time you had a date with Ingmar, and I went over there. Macalaurë had... a lot to drink."

"OK, and...?"

"He fell asleep. I put him to bed, tucked him in... a little courtesy before I left. And he talked in his sleep." Dooku cringed. "He called me 'Uncle'." Dooku shook his head. "I know he was asleep, but also, *in vino veritas*. He thought I was his uncle... that's no doubt how he thinks of me. As his uncle."

Sören's jaw dropped.

"What."

Sören just stared at him for a moment, then he began laughing hysterically.

Dooku looked almost irate. "*What.* Are you. Laughing at."

"Nico." Sören wheezed. "Nico... you... oh my god." Sören facepalmed. He remembered another conversation with Maglor. *I haven't... loved... anyone else, after you. Except perhaps D-...* And Maglor hadn't finished the word. "Oh my fucking god."

If voices could kill, Dooku would have killed with the tone of his voice. "*What.*"

"Nico." Sören tried to catch his breath. "There's... how do I say this." Sören took a few deep breaths. "You and Maglor need to talk about this."

"*I am not telling him how I feel.*"

"Why not?"

"Because he'll reject me."

"How do you know, if you don't tell him?"

"We're friends. I'm not going to *ruin* that friendship, making things weird by *telling him* -"

"Look. Nico." Sören met his eyes. "He told me some things, and one of those things, we... ah... we have a word for it in Icelandic. *Frændserðir.*"

"That means -"

"Unclefucker."

It got very quiet. Dooku just stared, as if in shock.

"He and his uncles, Fingolfin and Finarfin. They were... lovers. So Maglor calling you Uncle while he's drunk? Pretty sure that's a sign he *is* interested."

More silence, as Dooku internally evaluated that information.

"Nico, you should tell him."

"I'm afraid."

"Look, worst case scenario even if *you're right* and he rejects you? I think he'd still be willing to be friends with you. But like I said, you won't know unless you tell him, and I think you should. I'd tell you to march your arse over there *now* and tell him -"

"I can't do it now."

"Then tomorrow."

Dooku started to cry. "This is too much. I..." He took a deep breath, trying to pull himself together. "When I fell in love with you, almost two years ago, after being alone my whole life, it was terrifying. And here it is again, to fall in love with a second person, it's that same terror crashing into me all over again, turning everything upside down. And you, at least I had strong indicators that you were interested. This..."

"Ohhh, I think he's interested."

"I can't be sure. But if Macalaurë ran away from you because he was afraid of you dying, with my age being what it is, I don't want him to run away from us, run away from *you* all over again. I don't want to screw things up for you -"

"Nico, get your arse over here and shut the fuck up."

Dooku got on the couch next to Sören, and Sören pulled him close, letting him cry. "It's OK, *elskan*," Sören whispered, petting him. "It's all gonna be OK."

"I can't do this. I can't..."

"You can and you will, tomorrow, when he comes over for dinner."

"Dammit, Sören."

"Shhhhh." Sören rocked him.

And for awhile Dooku lay there in Sören's arms, crying, letting it out as Sören rocked and pet him, and at last Sören put the leash back in his hand. "Here. Let me distract you."

They rose to their feet, and walked to the bed. They climbed onto the bed together, and Sören lay on his back, arching to him. "About that teasing the life out of me..." Sören used the Force to pull out the silk scarves. "Now's a good time, já?"

Chapter 31

Thursday, August 1st

Between classes, Maglor went out to bring back lunch for Sören, as Sören continued to work on a sketch he'd started of Dooku sprawled on the bed in post-coital bliss. He was thinking about turning this sketch into a painting, his mind's eye consumed by its vision. He was so focused on what he was doing that he jumped when he heard a small knock on the door to his art room. It was too soon for Maglor to have come back yet - and it wasn't Maglor.

"Ingwion." Sören put down his pencil.

"I see Maglor told you my name."

Sören folded his arms. "What are you doing here?"

"I came to see you. I knew from your class schedule you'd probably be free right about now. Unless now is a bad time."

"No, by all means. Sit down." Sören waved his hand and pulled out a chair without touching it. He'd kept his power concealed from Ingwion before, but now there was no longer any need for that. And Sören felt that making a display of his power sent a message, that he was not one to be fucked with. He felt a little wary of Ingwion knowing that he'd been lied to, and knowing that Maglor hated him for some reason, and until he and Ingwion had cleared the air...

Nonetheless, Sören still desired him. He was already feeling a little aroused working on the sketch of his husband deliciously debauched after sex, and *goddammit why do you have to be so* bloody *attractive.* Sören licked his lips without meaning to.

"I'm going to cut to the chase," Sören said. "I want to know why you're here. And I don't mean *here*, at my studio, I mean fucking*here*, in Bumfuck, Iceland."

"To help Maglor find his way again." Ingwion lifted his chin. "And you. And Dooku."

"See, that's..." Sören picked up his pencil and shook it at him. "That's what bothers me about this equation. You and Maglor have some kind of ancient history, I get that, although he hates you -"

"He does." Ingwion didn't deny it. "It doesn't keep him from wanting me, and the conflict adds a certain amount of... spice... when we are intimate."

I bet. Sören shivered, imagining it, feeling himself growing hard. *Focus.* "Why does he hate you?"

"I wouldn't let him die, when he craved death." Ingwion's gaze held his. "I*couldn't* let him die."

Sören wanted to say *that doesn't make any goddamn sense, usually people are grateful to have their lives saved*, but he remembered that Maglor was not a mortal, and had been carrying thousands of years of grief with him and had made himself stay alive anyway, and if he had finally gotten to a place of being ready to die, Ingwion preventing that from

happening probably felt like an insult to his pride. Not to mention having to keep going on, continuing to carry that grief, as time marched forward.

"I see."

"I gave him back the desire to live, when all hope was lost. And yet there has been so little hope in his life since then." Ingwion gestured to Sören. "Until now."

"When we met in the club in 2015..." Sören shook his head. "That wasn't random, was it."

"No, Sören, it was not."

"And that..." Sören scratched his head. "That's the part I don't like about this. I can see why you'd want to help Maglor, maybe, but *me*? I'm just a mortal. Most people don't go around *helping* people without ulterior motives. Not to mention that... I'm just this random guy. How did you know where and how to find me?"

"I'm not most people." *Neither are you.*

"No shit." Sören frowned. "You're an Elf...?"

“Well, that is the thing I came to talk to you about. I am not just an Elf, Sören Sigurðsson. And you are not just a mortal, not some 'random guy.'”

Sören swallowed hard. “Jesus.”

“I have been... following your bloodline for some time. I met your mother when she was a child.”

There was a long, long pause. Sören had never told Ingwion that. Sören's mouth went dry. "One of the few memories I have of her, she said she'd met one of the *huldufólk* when she was little, yes. I'm an atheist, or was until a few days ago... so I never knew what to make of that story. But... that was you." Sören's hair stood on end. "I'd found flowers on her grave somewhat recently. That was you...?"

A solemn nod.

Sören was touched by that. He didn't want to be touched by that. He didn't want to like this man even more than he did, after being lied to, though he'd forgiven Maglor for lying to him, and he understood the revelation of the truth had to be carefully timed, with what it was. Sören rubbed his face, and heard Maglor's Jaguar pull in.

Ingwion stood up. "I hope you'll forgive me, and understand why the untruths were necessary, much as I disliked telling them." A little smile. "I did try to encourage Maglor to tell you things sooner than he did, but -"

"Yeah." Sören nodded and also stood up. "This whole thing is like defusing a bomb, I know."

"I won't lie to you about this, Sören - it's not entirely defused yet. But what remains, needs to be shown, not simply told. Soon, I promise you."

"Shown...?"

"Shown. Like how Maglor had to show himself unglamoured to prove who he was to you. It's much the same for the last pieces of information you need, and there is someone else

better equipped than myself to show you these pieces."

Sören frowned.

"I do have something *I*, myself, can show you before... the other pieces." Ingwion walked forward to him. "If you'd like to... resume our usual Friday night routine."

Sören raised an eyebrow. "What are you going to show me, your cock?"

A soft laugh. "That too. But something else."

Sören sighed. "Not gonna lie, I've missed you."

"I've missed you, beautiful." Ingwion twined a stray lock of Sören's curls around his finger, leaned in and kissed him.

Sören didn't resist. He *couldn't.* He melted into the kiss, tongues swirling, with a moan, wrapping his arms around Ingwion. *Fuck, I still want him.*

A clear of the throat outside the door to Sören's art room. Sören and Ingwion pulled apart, breathing hard, and there was Maglor, standing there with a paper bag in his hand, looking at Ingwion like he wanted to murder him.

Maglor had brought a homemade grilled Swiss cheese on rye sandwich and a thermos of tomato soup for Sören, who once again felt self-conscious getting emotional over a simple meal, knowing Maglor remembered and cared about the little details. Maglor's expression softened as he watched Sören take the contents out of the bag and squeal his appreciation.

"*Takk*," Sören said. "You're so sweet." He crinkled his nose and bit his lower lip.

There was a surge of heat from Maglor, whose expression turned predatory. So did Ingwion's, with a similar wave of heat. Maglor turned to glare at the other man.

"I was just leaving," Ingwion said. He looked back at Sören. "Shall I pick you up at six PM tomorrow?"

"That works for me."

Ingwion headed for the door, and then Maglor caught him by the tail of his shirt. "A word," Maglor said, and marched him outside.

–

"Just because you and Sören are back together..." Ingwion shook his head. "You don't *own* him. If he wants to continue seeing me, while I am still here, that is his right."

"It may be his right. But I do not have to like it. And I do not."

"Why are you so... possessive? You never minded sharing before, Fëanor with Fingolfin and Finarfin-"

"*That.* Was. Different. How *dare* you."

"Was it, though?"

Maglor wanted to throttle him. He couldn't even make words in response.

"Sören's heart is great enough to hold more than one person in it, and whatever he feels for me, it is not anywhere near the height and depth of what he feels for you. Yet, *he was born to burn*. You have tasted that passion, once more. You know it is more than enough to go around, and what he and I share will not diminish from your experience whatsoever."

"I was hoping to get some time with him myself tomorrow evening, you *inconsiderate twat*."

"So... visit Dooku, as you've done before. Unless you think running from your feelings for him and avoiding him is the best way to handle things -"

Maglor backhanded him. He had not spoken of those feelings to Ingwion, he had kept them as tightly locked down as he could, and having them called out somehow hurt even worse than Ingwion getting in the way of Maglor having another night to reconnect with Sören... as if Ingwion were pushing him to finally do something about those feelings. Challenging him. *Taunting* him.

He expected Ingwion to hit him back, but Ingwion just laughed at him, and that somehow made it all worse.

"Ai, Macalaurë, it is good to see the return of that fire in you."

Maglor snarled.

Ingwion reached out to caress his face. "So very good. It is as if your fire has been fed by another fire." Ingwion raised an eyebrow. "Macalaurë, why do you not see what is so plainly in front of you?"

"Why do you speak to me in riddles and not *tell* me whatever you're hinting at -"

"Because you should *see* it with your own eyes. The truth should not come from my lips, for this." Ingwion mimed a kiss. "There are much better purposes for my lips."

"Get gone." Maglor pointed to Ingwion's Bentley.

And then Ingwion was dragging him in the direction of the Bentley. Maglor spluttered, trying to wrest away, and he stopped struggling when Ingwion shoved him down in the passenger's seat.

"I have a class to teach in a half-hour, I cannot leave -"

But Ingwion did not close the door. He dropped to his knees before Maglor. He smiled at the hard bulge in Maglor's jeans, and gently rubbed it. "If you enjoy a release now, it will help you last for later."

"Later...?" Maglor was confused. "Later I am just going to have dinner with Sören and Dooku, then I am going home..."

"Yes, Macalaurë Fëanorion, you are going home."

Maglor's cock was out now, and Maglor did not stop Ingwion from giving it a few strokes before his tongue lashed the slit, lapping the precum that was already starting to flow.

Nor did he stop Ingwion from wrapping his lips around it, swallowing it down to the hilt. Maglor's hands were in Ingwion's hair, letting out a gasp as Ingwion began to suck, the cock gliding in and out of his mouth.

"Damn you to the *Hells.*"

Ingwion teasingly let the cock slip out of his mouth, giving it a few slow, deliberate licks. "Is that a no? Do you want me to stop?"

Maglor seized a fistful of Ingwion's hair and shoved his cock down his throat.

—

After dropping Sören off at the cabin, Maglor returned home to get Auli - he didn't want to leave Auli alone for most of another evening - as well as the ingredients to make *paella* for their dinner.

Maglor was running a little late, so while Sören had time to kill, he quickly rang his sister. She picked up right away.

“Alejandro and I are back together,” Sören blurted out, careful to use his “public” name.

“...He left you five years ago, he stomped on your heart, and you're giving him another chance?”

“We had to clear the air about A LOT of stuff, but I'm feeling optimistic that this time, things might work out.”

Margrét made a little growling noise. “If they don't, I will bloody STAB him.”

“You'd have to get in line behind Nico probably. But even he's fine with everything, which says a lot. Anyway, I can't talk long, he's coming for dinner, but... I wanted to tell you the good news.”

“If you're happy, I'm happy.”

“*Takk*. Love you, bye!”

And then there was a knock at the door.

Sören had been wondering what was taking Maglor so long, and now he saw the reason why. Maglor had changed out of the jeans and T-shirt he'd worn at the studio, and was wearing a black button-down tunic and black trousers, looking sharp.

In one hand he held Auli's leash and a shopping bag, and in the other hand he held a bouquet of white roses. He handed the flowers to Sören, giving him a kiss on the way in.

"Oh wow, this was so... unexpected." Sören felt awkward about being in a T-shirt and jeans himself now - not enough to go change - and he felt his stomach fluttering, heart doing flip-flops, warmth flooding him as he took the flowers and found a vase to put them in. "*Takk, elskan.*"

Maglor smiled.

Dooku took the shopping bag, which had most of the ingredients for*paella*; Dooku had the shrimp in the fridge. He and Maglor set to work in the kitchen, and Sören curled up with Auli and Snúður, listening to music on his headphones, zoning out.

They ate outside, as it was a warm night, though it was expected to rain later and there was the whiff of petrichor on the air. After their meal they went inside and Maglor and Dooku sat on either side of Sören, petting him.

"You should stay awhile," Sören said to Maglor.

"OK."

"We should watch something." Sören went through a selection of movies. Then he couldn't resist, pausing at one title. "Hmmm, *The Man From UNCLE* sounds good."

The look on Dooku's face was priceless. "Er." *Could you not.*

Maglor raised an eyebrow at Sören but otherwise didn't register a reaction. He said, simply, "More *Metalocalypse*, perhaps?"

That was what they did. Partway into the first episode of their binge-watching, Sören decided that the conversation that needed to happen, and wasn't happening, would be easier if there was a social lubricant in place. They'd had wine with dinner, but Sören didn't want them *drunk*. For the first time in years, Sören found himself wishing he had some molly, as that would have made things interesting, but he did have something else which would suffice. He got up, and went to the closet where he kept his satchel. He came back with his bag of weed and pipe, and started packing the bowl.

Sören puffed and passed to Dooku. Sören had introduced him to marijuana when they were living together in London, though Sören didn't smoke terribly often and Dooku accompanied him in smoking less often. They both agreed that it *did* make sex a lot of fun, when they got high together, the weed strengthening their connection to the Force and each other, making physical sensations more intense, the emotions flowing more freely, bonding in euphoria. It was kept to a sometimes thing so they didn't develop a tolerance to it and could enjoy it as a special treat, when they did.

Dooku puffed and passed back. Sören handed the pipe to Maglor.

"It's been awhile," Maglor said.

"Not since our trip to Amsterdam, I take it," Sören said.

"No."

"Well," Sören gestured.

Maglor hesitated, and then he puffed on the pipe. They each had three hits a piece, which

Sören found in his experience was plenty with high-grade kush like this was.

When the buzz started to kick in, Maglor said, "We should take Auli for a walk."

That was what they did, the three of them walking around the village together. The high seemed to intensify their appreciation of the beauty of nature, and of each other. "I love you guys so much," Sören said, putting an arm around each of them.

"We love you too." Dooku kissed the top of Sören's head.

"And it's great that you guys get along so well." Sören gave Dooku a pointed look. "The three of us make a really, really nice... unit."

"Is it an absolute unit?" Maglor asked.

Sören's laughter rang out into the sky. "You have learned how to meme. I'm so proud of you."

"Hi so proud of you -"

"Hey, that's my line, you butt." Sören gave him a playful shove, as Maglor laughed and Dooku rolled his eyes but smiled at them fondly.

Back at the cabin, Auli drank water and took a nap. Dooku asked, "Do you feel like playing a game?"

"The two of you can play something while I sketch, maybe?" Sören nodded.

Dooku got out the chessboard, and he and Maglor played chess while Sören sketched. Sören had the stereo going in the background, which he put on the local pop station to annoy both of them. There was also an ulterior motive - every time a love song came on, as it often did, Sören gave Dooku a look to say *go on, get on with it.*

Dooku gave Sören an annoyed look in return. *Not now.*

When?

The chess game was a long one - both men were good at strategy - and they took a break when Sören had an attack of the munchies from his high. He dished out ice cream for all three of them, and once again snuggled up between them on the couch, his back against Dooku and his legs draped over Maglor. Maglor started giving him a foot rub, and Dooku a scalp massage, and Sören couldn't help moaning. At first it was innocent and unintentional, but when Sören realized the effect it was having on both of them, he couldn't resist, moaning louder.

"I could get used to this," Sören said, finally. "Having both of you here, with me." He finished his ice cream and sensually sucked the spoon, eyes meeting Maglor's.

"I like spending time with both of you," Maglor said.

"Yeah, it feels like the three of us... belong." Sören patted both of them.

And then, as if on cue, a certain Britney Spears song came on the pop station.

One, two, three

Not only you and me
Got 180 degrees and I'm caught in between

Countin' one, two, three
Peter, Paul and Mary
Getting down with 3P, everybody loves—uh!—countin'

Maglor's face flushed, and as Dooku got up to put the bowls in the sink, Sören could tell he was flustered as well. The impulsive feeling intensified, and Sören danced his way over to Dooku in the kitchen.

Babe, pick a night
To come out and play
If it's alright
What do you say?

Merrier the more
Triple fun that way
Twister on the floor
What do you say?

Are you in?
Living in sin is the new thing
Are you in?
I am counting

"What are you doing?" Dooku asked.

Sören grinned at him and started grinding up on him, like he was in a club. He turned around to give Maglor a view of his shaking ass, and started taking off his shirt. He flung his shirt at Maglor, and turned around, undoing his jeans.

"My god," Dooku said under his breath.

Sören was in his boxer-briefs, dancing around the cabin, dancing his way over to Maglor, to give him a lapdance. Dooku made his way back over, just as red as Maglor, and Sören danced up on him as well, and then when the song was over, Sören took both their hands in his.

"I want both of you," Sören said. He was hard, and feeling uninhibited.

There was a sharp exhale from Dooku. Maglor swallowed hard, and then he nodded. "I'm game, if you are." He looked up at Dooku.

"All right."

Sören changed the station to R&B, to have something sexy to listen to. Maglor and Dooku walked over to the bed. Sören peeled off his boxer-briefs and then, once naked and proudly erect, he began to undo the buttons of Maglor's shirt. Then Dooku's.

At last the three of them were standing there, naked. Sören used the Force to dim the lights in the cabin. Maglor had been glamoured - though Sören had said it was fine for Maglor to be unglamoured in private, he knew Maglor had kept up the glamour to not alarm Dooku, who had reacted so strongly when he saw Maglor as his true self over the weekend. And now, Sören twined a strand of Maglor's hair around his finger and said,

"You can be yourself if you want. If that's OK with you, Nico."

Dooku nodded. Sören let go of the hair he was playing with.

Maglor took a deep breath, and they watched him drop the glamour, hair falling to his thighs, complexion even more flawless save a few battle scars on his shoulder and thigh. He glowed silver in the dim golden light of the cabin, and his eyes were like iridescent labradorite. He had the sleek, muscular body of a warrior, almost hairless save a luxurious dark bush.

Dooku's breath caught, staring at him open-mouthed.

Good. Let the lust flow through you. Sören smirked.

Maglor, in turn, was looking at Dooku with heat in his eyes. Though his face was lined with the years, he still looked closer to his fifties than seventy. His olive skin was surprisingly clear for his age, and Sören watched as Maglor's eyes took in the toned, sculpted muscle definition - Dooku was physically active and took care of himself, and it showed. His gaze raked the pelt of silver chest hair, the silver hair on his arms and thighs and calves - a contrast against the olive of his skin - the silver bush framing a long, thick, slightly upcurved cock that was flushed a deep pink and standing at attention now; Sören knew that was as much for Maglor as it was for him.

Sören reached out to Dooku, fingers playing through the chest hair, rolling and pinching a nipple. Sören leaned in and kissed him, his fingers continuing to rub the nipple with one hand, pet the chest hair with the other, his own cock throbbing as he heard Dooku moan into the kiss. Sören kissed and licked Dooku's neck, fingers working the other nipple, his free hand still rubbing his chest, then reaching up to stroke his face, his beard. Sören claimed his mouth again and they both groaned into the kiss, and Sören heard Maglor let out a little sigh, watching them.

Sören turned to Maglor and kissed him, playing with Maglor's hair, fingers lovingly tracing over the scars on Maglor's palm and shoulder and thigh. Sören could feel Dooku watching them, feel the heat in his gaze, and Sören shivered, pulse quickening with anticipation.

When he and Maglor pulled apart, he took a step back. Maglor and Dooku looked at each other for a moment, as if they were both unsure of what to do next, and then Maglor stepped forward, and Sören watched as Maglor leaned into Dooku, pressing his mouth against his.

Dooku's eyes widened with shock, and then he closed them, letting out a little groan as he yielded to the kiss, kissing Maglor back with fire and fury, and Maglor wrapped his arms around him, kissing hard and hungry. Their hard cocks pressed up against each other, rubbing together.

"Oh, *fuck* yeah," Sören heard himself whisper, starting to stroke himself to the sight of them, not able to help it.

After a moment of deep kissing, they broke the kiss, breathing hard, with Maglor's lips still brushing against Dooku's, lingering for a moment before he moved back a little, looking into Dooku's eyes. Dooku's cheeks were flushed, and Sören could feel the thoughts and emotions racing across their bond. Dooku finally stammered, "Y-you want me...?"

"*Yes.*" Maglor grabbed him and pulled him back into another kiss. "In case that weren't obvious." He guided Dooku's hand down to his cock, which was just starting to leak

precum. Maglor kissed him again, and Sören moaned as he watched Maglor take both their cocks into his hand, stroking slowly as his free hand played through Dooku's chest hair, fingers walking to brush and pluck the nipples.

"God, that's fucking *hot*," Sören moaned.

Sören was hornier than he had ever been in his life, and found himself getting on his knees. Both Maglor and Dooku were impressively hung, but Sören accepted the challenge, wrapping his lips around the heads of both their cocks, and getting as much of both cocks into his mouth as he could, sucking them together. He looked up at them as he sucked, rewarded by the sound of them both moaning as they continued kissing and slowly rubbing their cocks together inside Sören's mouth, hands roaming over each other. Sören resumed stroking himself as he sucked them, already right on the edge, trembling.

Sören sucked their cocks together for a good few minutes, playing with his own cock, dripping precum as he watched his mates kiss and caress, exploring new territory. Sören felt feverish, desperate for release, but he wanted to savor, watch the delicious sight of them together as long as he could.

At last Maglor's hand was in his curls, tugging, and Maglor broke the kiss to rasp, "Get up," at him. Sören did as he was told, and Maglor shoved him onto the bed. As Sören scooted back, Maglor climbed over him, with a predatory look on his face that made Sören break out into gooseflesh, already arching to him and panting as he leaned back against the pillows.

Dooku was on the other side of Sören, and both men took a moment to drink him in with their eyes, as Sören's face burned and his stomach fluttered. Then Maglor leaned in to kiss him, and Dooku began to kiss, lick, and nibble Sören's neck and shoulder. Sören moaned, fingers of one hand in Maglor's hair, fingers of the other hand stroking Dooku's whiskers. After a few deep, sweet kisses, Maglor kissed the other side of Sören's neck and shoulder, and Dooku tilted Sören's face so they could kiss, petting his curls.

They traded back and forth between them, Sören kissing Maglor while Dooku worked on his neck, then Sören kissing Dooku while Maglor teased his neck, and then, breathless, Sören watched as Dooku and Maglor kissed once more. They pulled apart and Sören saw the awe in Dooku's eyes, and the love in Maglor's own; Maglor took a moment to nuzzle him, before kissing him again.

The two began kissing Sören's neck and throat at the same time, and then the kisses went lower. Sören heard himself making high-pitched, inhuman noises as Maglor and Dooku licked and sucked his nipples at the same time, teasing them into hard, exquisitely sensitive peaks. They played with the nipple rings, and after a few minutes of lapping and suckling they were nibbling on them as well, Sören crying out, writhing, begging "*Please*..."

But they were all going to take their sweet time, tonight. They spent more time at his nipples, until Sören was practically sobbing. Then their mouths were on his stomach, kissing and licking and nibbling, and each man took a hip and a thigh, lips and tongue and teeth continuing to tease and tease.

Maglor licked up the seam of his crotch, and Dooku kissed his way up. Sören thought having both his nipples sucked at the same time was the most intense sensation of his entire life, and now it was outdone by mouths on both sides of that sensitive part of him, and then a moment later that was outdone by two tongues licking his cock all over - both tongues on the head at the same time, then licking their way down, one man licking the

root and shaft as the other focused on the head, to trade places. Sören heard himself panting, keening, out of his mind with lust like never before.

He watched them kiss again, sharing his precum between them, and then Dooku took Sören's cock into his mouth as Maglor's tongue worked inside him. Sören arched to them, gasping, hands gripping the wooden slats of the headboard, white-knuckled. "*Fuck*," he cried out, not able to keep from rolling his hips, gently fucking their mouths. "Fuck, that's so good..."

Just before Sören could come in Dooku's mouth, he stopped sucking, taking a few more teasing licks at the sensitive frenulum, and then he and Maglor kissed again. They came up to take turns kissing Sören. Sören found himself shoving Maglor onto his back, and bit his neck with a growl, making Maglor gasp and shudder. Then Dooku was on the other side of him, and Sören and Dooku worked together on Maglor's neck, nibbling and licking and kissing and sucking, ensuring that there would be bruises there the next day.

Sören tucked a lock of hair behind Maglor's ear, exposing the pointy tip, and nipped at it, making Maglor gasp and shiver again. Sören licked the point of his ear, sucked on it, and Maglor clutched him, arching to him, panting. "So sensitive," Sören husked. "Mmm, Nico, you should try it."

Dooku blushed, but came up to Maglor's other ear. "Lovely," he said, stroking the point between his thumb and forefinger before giving it a reverent lick, kissing it.

They took turns claiming his mouth, then, and resumed kissing his neck, before Sören moved down to his nipples. Dooku and Sören gave Maglor the same treatment that Sören had been given, lapping and suckling and nibbling his nipples at the same time, driving him crazy.

"You're so beautiful," Sören whispered, before seizing a nipple between his lips again.

"Yes. You are." Dooku kissed Maglor again, and gently kissed his way down Maglor's neck back to the other nipple, sucking on it hard.

Maglor's hips bucked, and he clutched their heads. There was a desperate look in his eyes, and he opened his mouth like he wanted to speak, but a moan stole his words.

Sören smiled; he loved undoing him like this. He kissed lower, licking at the definition in Maglor's washboard stomach, and soon Dooku joined him, kissing and licking and sucking and nibbling, making Maglor moan even louder, gasping for breath between his moans.

They worked on his hips and thighs together, the sensitive place behind the knee. Sören's fingers lovingly traced the battle scar on his thigh, his tongue licking it slowly, pressing soft, sweet little kisses there, nuzzling. *I love you so much,* Sören spoke into his mind.

Maglor reached down to stroke Sören's face. His eyes were too bright.

Sören swallowed his cock down to the hilt, and Dooku hesitated a moment, shy again, before dipping his tongue into Maglor's passage. The noises Maglor made as they feasted on him together made Sören's cock throb, and after he'd been gently stroking himself for a moment he felt Dooku's hand on his, and Dooku rolled so their cocks were pressed together and Dooku took both their cocks into his hand, stroking slowly as their mouths continued to adore the beautiful Elf they were sharing. After awhile Sören and Dooku switched so it was Dooku sucking him as Sören ate him, tongue-fucking the prostate, and

then the two just lapped at his cock, collecting the precum with their tongues and every now and again, kissing and rubbing their tongues together between kisses, sharing his nectar between them.

Sören finally nipped Dooku's lower lip, fingers playing through his chest hair again, and he rubbed and pinched a nipple. "Your turn," he rasped, and started pushing Dooku towards the pillows.

Dooku lay back, looking at Sören and Maglor with wide eyes, cheeks flushed. "It's so cute how shy you are," Sören said, before taking his mouth with a kiss. Then Maglor leaned in for his kiss.

"It's still unreal that you..." Dooku stroked Maglor's face.

"It's very real, Nicolae." Maglor kissed him hard. "I've been wanting you for awhile."

Sören crinkled his nose and bit his lip. "I told you so."

Dooku seized a fistful of Sören's curls and kissed him hungrily, with Sören moaning into the kiss, grinding against his thigh. Maglor groaned at the sight of them, running his hands over both of them, before cupping Sören's chin and turning his head to steal a kiss. It was Dooku's turn to moan watching them, and he reached up to pet both of them, before his hands slid over their bare chests.

Sören leaned down to give him another kiss, and Maglor started kissing Dooku's neck, throat, and shoulder, giving little teasing licks at his beard, as if he were an animal grooming fur. Sören nibbled Dooku's lower lip, and then Maglor kissed him as Sören kissed and licked the other side of his neck, fingers rubbing in slow, lazy circles over his chest and stomach. When both men were licking and sucking his nipples, Dooku made deep, primal groans that made Sören even harder, almost painful in his need now, rubbing against his thigh again, moaning as his lips latched around a hard peak.

Dooku let out another groan as Sören and Maglor licked his chest hair, tongue-bathing him, before going for another round at his nipples. Not able to help himself, Sören took one of Dooku's arms and started licking the silver fur there, too, delighting at all the secret places he was sensitive - the wrist, his elbow. At the sound of Dooku's moans, Maglor did the same thing, kissing, licking, nibbling. Sören and Maglor shared another kiss, and got back to work kissing and licking Dooku's chest down to the tight abs, his stomach another feverishly sensitive place. His hips and thighs were also deliciously sensitive, and Sören noticed Maglor gently stroking himself as he explored there with fingers and tongue and Dooku's moans got louder. *Yes, Nico, he does want you.*

When Maglor took Dooku into his mouth and Sören's tongue slid inside him, rubbing the prostate, the sound Dooku made brought Sören to that edge again, and for a minute Sören thought Dooku was going to come so soon. Maglor sucked slowly, teasingly, and Sören moved his tongue in slow, deliberate strokes. Dooku's deep moans filled the cabin, and Sören felt like he was going to die from sexual need, but he never wanted to stop worshiping his husband's body, or watching Maglor suck him, one of the most delicious things Sören had ever witnessed.

After a little while they switched, with Sören's lips wrapped around his cock and Maglor's tongue inside him, bringing him to that edge before stopping. Dooku made a little cry of protest when they stopped, and Sören gave a few licks at the head of his cock just to tease, with Maglor pulling Sören up by his curls to kiss him and taste the precum on his tongue.

The three of them looked at each other, and Sören suggested, "Daisy chain?"

Dooku had no idea what Sören meant, even though he had some experience writing and reading erotica. He was about to find out. Sören had them get in a triangle formation laying on the bed, which was just big enough for three people in a tight fit. Sören sucked Maglor's cock, Dooku sucked Sören's cock, and Maglor sucked Dooku's cock, hands exploring as their mouths worked. They were all close enough that a few minutes into the sucking they were once again on that edge, trembling and needy for release, but continued to savor each other, reveling in the act of debauchery, a new kind of freedom. Sören came first, and his release set Dooku off, coming in Maglor's mouth, who in turn lost control as his mouth was flooded, spending into Sören's mouth, who hungrily swallowed as much as he could, lapping up the rest.

They lay there for a moment after their orgasm, before assembling into a cuddle-pile, Dooku laying on his back and opening his arms, pulling both Sören and Maglor into his chest, petting them. He kissed the top of their heads each in turn, and Sören and Maglor nuzzled him, each giving him a soft, sweet little kiss.

"That was lovely," Dooku said, closing his eyes with a happy sigh.

"That was fucking *hot*," Sören said. He crinkled his nose and bit his lower lip, pleased at the flash of heat in Maglor's eyes. "For round one."

Dooku let out a full-bodied laugh. "An old man needs to recharge."

"You can do that." Sören stroked his cheek. "I bet I know how to help with that."

Dooku raised an eyebrow.

Sören pulled Maglor into a deep, hungry kiss. They moved over to the side and Sören lay back, his arms and legs wrapped around Maglor as they kissed again and again, cocks hard once more and rubbing together. When Maglor started kissing and licking Sören's neck, Sören tilted his face to look at Dooku and moaned.

Dooku rolled over and kissed Sören hard. "You naughty boy," he rasped.

Sören's hand strayed to Dooku's cock. "Oh, look, what do we have here." He was hard again, too. He kissed Dooku back more teasingly, with little brushes of his lips and flickers of his tongue before taking his mouth hard, gratified by the moan Dooku made as their tongues met and swirled. Sören's hand stroked Dooku slowly, the thumb rubbing the slit and frenulum, knowing what he liked.

"I told you I knew how to help," Sören said, nibbling Dooku's lower lip.

"Yes, you're a very helpful boy."

"I like helping. Helping's my favorite." Sören kissed his jaw, and then Maglor turned Sören's face back to him so they could kiss some more. Dooku gave an appreciative groan at the sight of them kissing.

"What would our helpful boy like?" Dooku asked, when Sören and Maglor pulled apart, breathing hard.

"Yes?" Sören laughed. He looked at Maglor. "Any suggestions?"

"Also yes?" Maglor laughed too. "I'm down for pretty much anything, I think."

Sören propped himself up on one elbow. Maglor started kissing his nipples, until Sören was arching to him, panting, clawing his back, and then pushed him off, giggling, "I can't think when you do that." Maglor planted a kiss over Sören's heart and nuzzled before pulling away to lean on Dooku, and started raining soft little kisses over Dooku's face, making Dooku smile at him adoringly.

Sören took a few moments, entertaining many delicious possibilities, and then at last he husked, "I want both of you inside me."

Dooku raised an eyebrow. "...At the same time...?"

"*Yes.*"

"Will that even fit...?"

"Yes, Nico, I think I told you I've had a few threesomes before - back in that year of hell in Reykjavik, and double penetration was something I was on both the giving and receiving end of." At the murderous look on Maglor's face, broadcasting *how dare anyone lay a hand on what is MINE*, Sören preened, enjoying the jealousy Maglor felt of their time apart. But he also quickly soothed into Maglor's mind *this is yours now, my love. Yours and Nico's.*

Dooku's face flushed, as he realized. "So we'd both be... in you. Together."

"Yes." Sören leaned in and gave him a few soft kisses, and purred, "As you're inside me, your cocks will be rubbing against each other. It'll feel *incredible.*"

Dooku's breath hitched. Maglor was looking at them now like he was starving; Sören could feel the heat from him, ready to explode. He giggled and took Maglor's hands, pulling him in for a kiss, and then to kiss Dooku. Sören used the Force to retrieve the lube from the bedside table. "It's been a good four years since I've done this," Sören said, "so we have to go easy, but."

"You sure it won't hurt...?" Dooku gave him a look of concern.

"Not if we're using a lot of lube and go slow at first. An arse is a lot more flexible than a vagina, from everything I understand." Sören poured a copious amount of lube over Dooku's cock, working it in with his hands, and then handed the bottle of lube to Maglor and thrust out his ass. Maglor poured the lube directly into Sören's channel, who moaned as he felt the liquid shoot inside him. "God, I want your cum in me," Sören panted.

Then Sören got into position. Dooku was laying on his back, and Sören turned around to get "reverse cowgirl", a position they'd done on occasion, but this time lay back, with his back against Dooku's chest once Dooku was inside him. Maglor poured lube over his cock and stroked himself as he watched Sören sink down on Dooku's cock, and then watched Dooku's cock gliding in and out of Sören's passage, the look of ecstasy on Sören's face at their joining. Dooku's arms wrapped around Sören right away, tilting his head so they could kiss, and the hand that wasn't stroking Sören's face was down playing with Sören's cock. After a few minutes of slow thrusts, Sören gestured to Maglor to come over.

Maglor guided the tip of his cock to Sören's opening. "Let me know if it's too much and it

hurts and you need me to stop," he said.

"I will."

Maglor went in slowly. Sören gasped, breathing harder - it was a tight fit, almost too tight, the stretching was a little painful at first, but Sören's *need* for it made him growl out, "Keep going." At last, they were both stuffed inside him, and Sören gasped for breath, needing a moment, overwhelmed not just at the sensation of being stuffed so full, but the love he felt for both of them, that feeling of completion and *rightness* that his soulmates were with him like this.

They found their rhythm, a slow push-and-pull that, within a few strokes, had Sören right on that edge again, quivering, whimpering. The pleasure on his prostate was like never before. "Oh god," he gasped. "Oh god, that's so fucking *good*..."

Maglor leaned down to kiss Sören hard. Sören whined into the kiss, arching, bucking, but they continued to move slowly inside him. Dooku cupped Sören's chin in his hand and kissed him again, both men moaning into the kiss, and then Maglor leaned over Sören's shoulder to kiss Dooku, and Sören cried out at the sight of them kissing, feeling the passion they had for each other across their bond.

The next while felt like an eternity, a dreamy, sensual haze that the three never wanted to end, Maglor and Dooku making love to Sören together but also making love to each other at the same time, their cocks rubbing together inside him, balls rubbing together as their cocks thrusted. They continued to take turns kissing, hands roaming over each other wherever they could reach, keeping it slow for as long as possible, sensations building deeper and higher, until they were all trembling, gasping, and started moving harder and faster, feverish. Sören's whimpers and high-pitched cries, and the two deeper-range moans filled the cabin. The kisses got more intense, and at last Dooku was biting his neck and Sören's nails were digging in Maglor's back. "Fuck me," Sören gasped. "*Riddu mér... Erfiðara. Hraðar, meira...*"

Sören's legs were around Maglor's waist, and Maglor was joining Dooku in the biting of Sören's neck and shoulder, every now and again Maglor and Dooku kissing each other before resuming their nibbles and licks at Sören's flesh. Sören felt like he was going to die if he didn't come, but he never wanted this to stop, their cocks hitting that perfect note over and over again...

"Oh god. *Oh god...*" Sören grabbed Dooku's hands, and then he opened his hand, gesturing for Maglor. Maglor took their hands in his, three sets of hands linked together, and Sören could no longer hold back, screaming as he shattered, spending all over Maglor's chest. A few seconds after his climax began, contracting around the two cocks inside him, he felt them shooting into him, and the thought of their beautiful cocks coming all over each other and filling him with their seed sent Sören into another wave of throbbing release, making a guttural sound as he shot another blast over his Elven lover. Above the roar in his ears, he could hear them both crying out together, and then he and Dooku were kissing, he and Maglor were kissing, Maglor and Dooku were kissing, the three taking turns kissing each other over and over again, still holding hands as they continued to ride the spiral of their brilliant, blinding, glorious orgasm.

It was shattering enough that Sören felt like a bowl of jelly. He was vaguely aware of them slipping out of him, and positioned to snuggle up between the two of them, the three tangled up together. Sören dozed off, warm and safe in his lovers' arms. For awhile, all was right with the world, everything was beautiful and nothing hurt, there was only peace. He heard the rain falling outside, and the rain and the sound of Dooku's heartbeat,

Maglor's breath, lulled him to sleep.

He woke up in the middle of the night to the sound of a dog whining - Auli - and felt Maglor getting out of bed. In the darkness Maglor quickly pulled clothes on. "I have to go take him out for a few minutes," he whispered. "I'll be back."

"Don't go -"

"Shhhh, baby. I'll be back." Maglor patted him.

Sören fell back asleep, and was woken up again by Maglor climbing in beside him, naked once more. Sören rolled over, so Dooku was his big spoon, and snuggled into Maglor's chest, playing with his hair. Maglor pet Sören's curls, and his arms tightened around both of them.

"I love you," Sören murmured into him.

"I love you very much, *melindo*." Maglor's eyes shone in the dark. "More than I can say."

Sören leaned up and kissed him. What was meant to be a soft, tender kiss quickly turned heated, and soon they were making out, rubbing their cocks together. Dooku stirred, and chuckled at the two of them. "My," he said.

Sören grabbed Dooku and kissed him, and then Maglor also kissed him, and Dooku let out a groan.

They were all still exhausted from the performance a few hours ago - amazingly, even though Sören and Maglor had made love eight times in one night earlier that week; something about the three of them together made their orgasms almost nuclear in intensity. They formed into a cuddle-pile on Dooku's chest so all three cocks were touching, and they stroked them together, the three taking turns kissing each other, free hands caressing, exploring. Watching their three cocks come together, seed pouring like a waterfall, was one of the most erotic sights of Sören's life, and it was another violent orgasm, Sören shaking like he was having a seizure, making wild, primal noises. They scooped up their mingled seed and licked and sucked it from each other's fingers, intensifying the last waves of orgasm, and then they settled into each other's arms again, as thunder rolled outside.

"This has been the most beautiful night of my life," Sören sighed.

"Hopefully, there'll be more where this came from." Maglor's lips brushed Sören's forehead, and he looked at Dooku.

Dooku nodded. "I could get very used to this."

"That's good." Maglor snuggled into his shoulder. "I feel so safe with both of you."

Sören's arms squeezed him, his heart soaring as unshed tears burned his eyes.*Yes. Your home is with us now. Stay.*

Chapter 32

Friday

He is a young ellon again, at sword practice, sparring with his uncle Fingolfin and his aunt Írimë. Watching them spar each other, fast and furious. Írimë refuses to be treated more gently because she is a woman; Fingolfin shows her no mercy, and she is just as merciless. As lethal and merciless as she had been with Maglor earlier, managing to nick him twice with her blade.

After his rest, watching their fight, he is fighting Fingolfin again.

"Your mind is elsewhere," Fingolfin warns him. "I know you're anxious to get to your harp practice, but your attention must be here. *Your life may depend upon this someday."*

*What he does not tell his uncle is,*The more I focus on you, the more I long for you.

He is a flustered mess by the time the day's practice is over, aching for his uncle, glorious in battle. He is so shaken that when it is time to see his aunt Findis for harp practice, she notices.

Somehow, she gets it out of him. He expects her to shame him, since it is a sin to desire one's own gender, let alone one's own relatives. But instead she says, "Macalaurë, I will tell you a secret. Írimë and I have been lovers since we came of age."

She also tells him, "Perhaps you should compose a song for him, to express your feelings."

He feels so ridiculous, but nonetheless his love and longing flows like water as he plucks the strings. When the composition is complete, some weeks later, he plays it for Findis first, to make sure it is good. It moves her to tears.

His hope is that Fingolfin will be moved by it, and not reject the asking to be made a man by him, as his fiftieth begetting day approaches.

Maglor woke, and the first thing he saw were Dooku's dark chocolate eyes, warm and filled with love. Dooku was holding both of them close, gently petting them before the alarm went off.

Maglor leaned in to give him a soft kiss and nuzzle him. Sören stirred then, yawning and stretching. He gave them both a sleepy smile. Dooku kissed the tip of Sören's nose, and Sören kissed his nose back, and then nuzzled Maglor before kissing him, twining hair around his fingertips.

"What time is it?" Sören squinted at the alarm. "Oh, that would have gone off in five minutes anyway."

Dooku got up, as Sören and Maglor continued snuggling - Maglor always found it endearing rather than annoying that Sören was not a morning person, as he himself preferred the sunset and moonlight. Nonetheless there was something achingly precious about being wrapped up cozy and safe with Sören in the hazy golden glow of the morning after another night of rain and storms. Something that felt very right about being in this bed, their home, with Auli and Snúður hopping onto the bed together to demand affection,

and receive it in copious quantities.

Dooku poured out food for Snúður. "I'll have to head back soon to feed Auli," Maglor said, giving a little frown as Auli made a pitiful whine. At least he'd had water and gone outside to eliminate.

"Can you stay for breakfast?" Dooku asked.

"Yeah, I think I can."

Sören clung to him, making a little whine and grumbling, "Dun wanna get uuuup yet," which made Maglor laugh. They resumed snuggling, and at last Dooku came over with coffee and breakfast in bed for both of them.

For the first time in too long, Maglor felt something like hope. It was a dangerous feeling to have. A feeling that until very recently, he could not afford to have. But now...

He had been starving, and here was a feast. It might not last forever, but Sören was absolutely right when he said it was better to take a few years of comfort, rather than the ongoing pain of being alone. And being apart from Sören had been a very special kind of pain, it had been like having a limb cut off.

He and Sören got changed after breakfast. They lingered at the door, kissing. At last Maglor asked, "I assume you're still going on your date with Ingwion this evening?"

Sören nodded solemnly. "Six PM, he's coming to get me."

"All right." Maglor looked at Dooku.

"I'm free," Dooku said, "if you'd like to get together?"

"I'd like that very much. My place?"

"Yes. Do you want to cook together, or...?"

Maglor swallowed hard, feeling a little shy, but pushing past it. "I think I'd like to take you out to dinner, then on a drive, before we return to my place."

Dooku's face flushed, realizing that he, also, was going on a date.

Sören grinned. "Well, have fun, you two." Sören patted Maglor and gave him another kiss. Then Sören whispered in his ear, "Make him come so hard he can't remember his name."

Maglor laughed at that, even as delicious mental images coursed through him. "I'll see what I can do," he replied, sotto voce.

Then Sören said, in his usual indoor voice, "Why don't you spend the weekend with us?" He looked at Dooku, who nodded. "If you want to..."

As if I would refuse. "Yes. But perhaps at my place, since your cabin fits two, but would be a bit crowded for three for a weekend. Plus there's a larger bed." *Now that Ingwion isn't using it.* "You can bring the cat with you."

"Perfect." Sören kissed him again. "Now get out of here before I ravish you and miss my classes for the day."

Maglor grinned and pulled Auli's leash. "Come on, let's get you some food."

As he walked to the cottage, he found himself reflecting on the conversation he'd had with Ingwion yesterday.

"Later I am just going to have dinner with Sören and Dooku, then I am going home..."

"Yes, Macalaurë Fëanorion, you are going home."

Then he remembered what Ingwion had said when he'd shown up in Alaska with plane tickets. *I have a gift for you.*

Maglor facepalmed. *He knew, that the three of us would get to this place. He set up the date with Sören not just to spend time with him, but so I would take time for Nicolae.*

He still couldn't bring himself to forgive Ingwion, wouldn't stop hating him, but...

He intended not just to bring Sören and I back together, but for me to find Nicolae as well.

Dooku had become *very* dear to him, and even though he had been hesitant, with Dooku in the sunset of his life, he nonetheless would not push him away. He was done with that. Even though it would break his heart when the old man died, whenever that would be... he was done. He would let himself enjoy this, enjoy *them*.

Part of him wanted to head right back to Dooku's cabin after he fed Auli, drag Dooku into bed and make him writhe for hours while Sören was at the studio, but... *That will be later. Save your appetite for later.* He felt strangely nervous about it, a similar apprehension to when he had been a young ellon wanting to seduce his uncle Fingolfin, though it wasn't like he was an inexperienced virgin anymore.

After he was back at the cottage and Auli was fed, Maglor took a shower. He was reluctant to wash off the scent of his lovers, the evidence of their tryst, but he wanted to be fresh *to make a good impression*. It still felt surreal this was even happening, but here it was, and he heard himself singing under the water.

He felt *good.*

Shortly after he was out of the shower, while he was getting changed, his cell phone rang. He felt a moment of panic, that Dooku was getting cold feet and calling to cancel, that feeling of his world crashing around him. He breathed a small sigh of relief when he didn't recognize the number on his cell, though he was also annoyed by it. He took the call. "Hello?"

"Yes, hi, I'm calling to speak with Alejandro. Is this Alejandro?" A woman's voice, East End London to place the accent.

"This is...?"

"My name's Frankie. You don't know me, but you know Sören."

"...I see. Good morning, Frankie, how did you get this number?"

"It was on your contact info on the description of your music class on Sören's website."

Maglor facepalmed. He should have realized that. "What can I do for you."

"I hear you and Sören are back together, is that true?"

"Yes, it's true."

"When he was living in London, he told me about you, and how you ran off on him and it broke his heart. And he felt like such a piece of trash that he ended up with that shitty Justin Roberts - who's dead now, deserves it, the rotten bastard -"

Maglor took a deep breath, feeling the rage flare inside him all over again at the mere mention of Justin's name. If ever he could resurrect someone from the dead *just to kill them all over again*, it would be that filth.

"- and I was there for all of that, and let me tell you, it was not pretty. So, I'm gonna give it to you straight here - if you break Sören's heart again, I'll break your face. That poor bean has been through so much *shit* in his life -"

"Yes. He has." Maglor sighed. "I'm not going to run off on him again, Frankie."

"You say that, but you better fucking *mean* it. I sure as *hell* mean it, I will *hunt you down*. You leave Iceland? Go somewhere in Europe? Back to South America? I'll hire a private investigator, I will fly to the ends of the Earth to *kick your fucking arse* -"

This was the best friend Sören had mentioned briefly; there was a painting of her hanging up at the studio. Maglor had been taken aback when he saw it - as he had been at so much of Sören's work; Sören had somehow managed to paint Frankie in armor and with a sword and shield identical to the armor, sword and shield of his aunt Írimë. Maglor had wondered about that, he knew Sören had a gift, of course. He could see now why he might have picked up on something in the threads of the past and painted it in the tribute to his friend - Frankie was reminding him of Írimë now, her ferocity that had been such an asset in Fingolfin's company going off to war.

A different voice cut in, female, but a deep, smoky contralto with a heavy Icelandic accent, heavier than Sören's accent, which had been tempered from spending time in London. "Hi, Alejandro. It's been awhile, hasn't it?"

"Yes, Margrét. How's your band?" The kind of music that Brjálaðir Tíkur played, if it could be called "music", was not Maglor's cup of tea - last he remembered, it was a bass- and synth- driven darkwave band, which would have been fine except for Margrét's shrieking - but he still supported Margrét's efforts as a musician.

"Going strong. You heard about my lawsuit with Kylo, right? I won. 'Course, now he's in jail for stabbing his dad..."

"*Yeah*, that's... quite... a shame. I'm glad you cut off ties with him before all of that."

"He's a horrible shit. His parents are lovely people, his brother's lovely - did you know his brother's married to Dag? But Kylo, himself? Fuck him. Anyway, band is good, been writing some new material lately in fact!"

"Good, good."

"They're telling me I should try actually *singing* the new stuff, instead of just screaming."

"You should, you have a nice voice." *And anything is nice compared to the screaming.*

"Hm. Well, change is difficult. As no doubt you know."

"I surely do know." *All too well.* It was strange just to be happy, here in this moment. "On that note, I hear congratulations are in order." Maglor looked at the calendar. "Ah, the wedding is close."

"Já, I'm having a small party before the wedding a week from today, and then the wedding itself is on Saturday the 10th, and there's the reception after."

"Sören had mentioned he and Nicolae would be leaving for Reykjavik on Thursday."

A pause. "I see you're on a first name basis with him."

"...Yes."

"Hm." Another pause. "I suppose you'll be wanting a wedding invite too, as their plus-one."

Maglor hadn't mentioned that he was with both of them, and since the threesome had happened just last night and he knew Sören was *not* a morning person and would not have rushed to call or e-mail his sister to tell her everything, he deduced that Margrét had made an observation of him being "their" plus-one just from not using Dooku's surname to refer to him. This was a woman who tended bar for a living, it made sense she would notice things.

"So that would be you and Ingmar coming with...?"

Hells. Maglor didn't like the idea of Ingwion accompanying them, but he also didn't want to get into that drama with her, nor did he want to voice dissent to Sören and be seen as controlling. "Only if you're all right with inviting me, Margrét, I don't want to invite myself -"

"Jæja, I'll invite you, if only so Frankie and I can put the fear of the gods in you properly."

Margrét, my dear, the gods have already made my life a hell far more than you will ever know. "Well, thank you. Shall I bring a gift...?"

"Bring yourself, this event is less formal than you think it's going to be. A bunch of punks are attending. And the party the night before the wedding has an 80s theme, I'm surprised Sören didn't bring it up." Maglor could hear the almost-smile in Margrét's voice as she said, "If you really want to get me something, do karaoke at the party. You get all the bonus points if it's Duran Duran."

Maglor could hear Frankie howling and shouting, "NO, NOT DURAN DURAN!" in the background.

"Oh you know what?" Margrét continued. "You still have all that long hair, right?"

"My hair is exactly the same as you remember it."

"You need to *tease your fuckin' hair* for the wedding party."

Maglor wondered if it would be bad if he drank this early. He remembered the 1980s vividly, he was in West Berlin for most of it. Those were... interesting times. "Oh for fuck's

sake."

"Doooo iiiiiit. Do it as a peace offering, because goddammit, Alejandro, you left me*such* a mess to clean up with Sören -"

He cringed. *I bet.* "Margrét..."

"Come onnnnnnnnnnn. Tease your hair and wear an outfit that, like, Stryper would envy."

"If you want to put the fear of the gods in me, you're already succeeding."

"Maybe not Stryper then, maybe more like... Bon Jovi?"

"OK, Margrét, I'm hanging up now. I'll see you in a week." Maglor hit "End".

Then Maglor's thoughts went back to the near-panic he'd been in when the phone rang, worrying that it was Dooku cancelling, having second thoughts and rejecting him...

Clearly, I'm in deep.

It was terrifying and exhilarating at the same time.

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Sören was a little surprised, but not terribly surprised, that Ingwion had decided to take him to Reykjavik for the night, which was forty-five minutes one way by plane out of the Akureyri airport. There was a wider selection of fancy restaurants and hotels in Reykjavik, and Ingwion had of course gotten reservations at an upscale restaurant and a very posh hotel. When they checked in to the hotel before heading to the restaurant, Sören noticed there was an actual jacuzzi in the bathroom, and the bedroom and bathroom had both been set up with candles. He was of a mind, after flirting and cuddling on the plane trip, to just slam Ingwion against a wall and spend the entire evening in the hotel room, but Sören was a little hungry for food, and besides Ingwion had offered to spoil him a little to make up for everything, so Sören was going to take him up on that.

Dinner was superb, salmon grilled to perfection, roasted vegetables, a rich soup and fresh fruit with cream for dessert. Sören and Ingwion fed each other the cream-dipped fruit like lovers, and in those moments, playfully licking and sucking his fingers, Sören could *almost* forget that he'd been lied to.

Back in the rental car on the road, they passed by a supermarket, and Sören saw Flóki with a small folding grocery cart filled with shopping bags, clearly on his way back home to Frankie and Margrét. A few strands of his long red hair blew in the slight wind. Just before Sören could wave, Ingwion beeped the horn. Flóki looked, and paused in his tracks.

"Oh my god, you know *Flóki*?" Sören asked.

"We're acquainted, yes." Ingwion pulled the car over and rolled down the window. "Would you like a ride?"

"No, it's all right," Flóki said. "I needed to go for a walk and get some fresh air, feel the

nice cool breeze, told the girls I'd go shopping while I was out. Thank you for offering, though." He smiled at Sören. "Hello there."

"Hello yourself." Sören raised an eyebrow. "I didn't know that you two..."

Flóki reached past Ingwion and patted him. He felt very, very warm, like he was running a fever. "We're old friends," he said, meeting Sören's eyes. Then he drew his hand back and rubbed Ingwion's shoulder. "Take care of that one, or the girls will have your arse on a platter."

"Oh, I'm sure." Ingwion smiled.

"You've met Margrét and Frankie...?" Sören whispered.

"Not yet," Ingwion said, and Sören heard *I have, but they wouldn't recognize me*hanging at the end of that sentence. Before he could speculate what that was about, Ingwion said, "Enjoy the rest of your evening, Flóki."

"Yes, you two enjoy yourselves as well." A knowing smile. "And I... will see you soon, at the wedding next week?"

Ingwion looked at Sören, and Sören said, "I had asked to invite you, and I hadn't gotten around to asking you to come along yet, but now's as good a time as any."

"Yes, you'll see me next week." Ingwion waved, and rolled the window back up, pulling back out into the road.

A few minutes later Sören said, "Well, *that* was interesting."

"'Interesting' would be a way of describing it, yes."

Sören raised an eyebrow. "Are we going to the hotel now?"

"I have someplace else to take you first."

That someplace else turned out to be the club where they had met in 2015. As fate would have it, they were both wearing the exact same outfits they had been wearing that night. Sören marveled on this as they walked in together.

"I won't stop you if you think you need something," Ingwion told him, referring to the molly that was readily available, "but -"

"I don't." Sören's gaze held his. He wanted to be sober for this, whatever it was Ingwion would show him later.

Unlike the throwback house and techno that had been playing the night Sören first encountered him here, it was acid jazz and other downtempo stuff, which made for more sensual, slow dancing. Sören stood on the sidelines for a few songs, drinking water, recognizing a few faces in the crowd from his old party days, but of course, none of them recognized him or if they did, none of them cared enough to approach him. It was just as well - Sören felt almost as if he were an alien arrived from another world. What had once been his escape, so central to his life four years ago, was now firmly a part of his past. He was in a better place now.

But he still loved music and dancing, a form of expression and release for him in its own

way, and he found himself not able to resist the rhythm when Jamiroquai came on, grabbing Ingwion and pulling him close.

I need your love,
I need your love...
You, give me light
So tonight, take me there
I, feel your sun
Start to glow and I know it
Let me show you that
I want your love
I need your touch
For the rest, of our time together,
Baby, come fly with me, eternally
You and me,
We were meant to be

Yeah hey
Alright (right now)
We'll spend the night together
Wake up and live forever
Yeah hey
Alright (right now)
We'll spend the night together
Wake up and live forever

Sören's hands were on Ingwion's hips, and Ingwion was caressing Sören's chest, feeling the nipple rings underneath his shirt. They thrusted against each other, and stole a kiss as the song was winding down.

That set the pace for the next couple of hours, the two dancing together, Sören experiencing actual happiness and connectedness this time instead of the numbness and desperate grasping at warmth of four years ago. It felt like a celebration, this time around, rather than the mourning that it had been. Something had been dying inside him, then, and was blooming inside him now. He had come full circle, and as much as he wanted to hate Ingwion for lying to him, he couldn't. Ingwion had *helped* - he didn't have to, and he did it anyway, because he cared about Maglor, seemed to care about Sören before they'd even met, which Sören didn't understand, but that made Ingwion OK in his book, and he wanted to radiate some of that happiness back at him, wanted Ingwion to bask in the glow of that fire. *Thank you*, Sören tried to express with his body, his rhythm, his smile, his laughter.

He was high, and no drugs were involved. Though Ingwion certainly *smelled* intoxicating.

People were making requests to the DJ now, so different genres of music were being played, though still all songs that could be danced to. Sören snickered to himself as a familiar beat began pounding, the song he'd lost his virginity to at age seventeen, in the back seat of a car in Akureyri in 2001.

You can have my isolation, you can have the hate that it brings
You can have my absence of faith, you can have my everything

Help me tear down my reason, help me - it's your sex I can smell
Help me - you make me perfect, help me become somebody else

I wanna fuck you like an animal
I wanna feel you from the inside
I wanna fuck you like an animal
My whole existence is flawed
You get me closer to God

Sören played with a lock of Ingwion's hair, rubbing against him, and leaned in for a kiss. "Hotel now?"

"Yes, pet."

As soon as they got to the hotel room, Sören began kissing Ingwion, feverishly undressing. Ingwion was slower and more deliberate with his own clothing, and then he said, "Wait here." Sören waited by the bed, watching Ingwion retrieve a bottle of champagne from the fridge, and bring it into the bathroom.

A few moments later he stood in the bathroom door, naked and fully erect, and gestured for Sören to come forward.

The candles were lit around the bathroom, the jacuzzi going with a bit of scent added to the water to give it a spicy floral scent. Sören took Ingwion's hand and they stepped into the jacuzzi together; then Ingwion poured them each a flute of champagne.

They kissed in between sips of their champagne, which turned into necking and caressing, and then, feeling playful, Sören "accidentally" spilled champagne onto Ingwion and licked it off, which led to Ingwion pouring champagne over Sören and licking it off his skin, nibbling a little, as Sören gasped and shuddered.

Sören moaned as Ingwion reached for his cock under the bubbling hot water, stroking it slowly, continuing to kiss him and caress with his free hand. Soon Ingwion was stroking their cocks together, and Sören felt almost ready to come, but the wicked look in Ingwion's eyes told him he had only just begun, and it was confirmed when Ingwion took his hand off them and caressed Sören's chest, idly playing with a nipple ring before taking Sören's face to kiss him once more.

"Sören," he husked, "it's time."

God, now? Sören gave him a look.

Ingwion laughed softly at his obvious frustration. "I thought you wanted to see -"

Sören bit Ingwion's lower lip with a growl, but then after a softer kiss he nodded. "All right."

"The first thing. My cell phone is over there, in my trousers." Ingwion pointed to leather pants folded neatly on a table near the bathroom door.

"I can hold your glass if you get up, or I'll get it -"

Ingwion played with a strand of Sören's curls. "You can get it, but we both know you don't need to get up for that."

Sören narrowed his eyes. "Did Maglor tell you...?"

"No. I already knew." Ingwion leaned back and sipped champagne. "Show me."

Sören took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and waved his hand. He opened his eyes and watched the cell phone slip out of the pocket of the leather trousers, and float across the room. "I don't know if having that around water is such a great idea -"

"Perhaps not, but I think here is a good place to show you, nonetheless." Ingwion toweled off his hand as the cell phone floated near him, before he seized it. Sören watched as he pressed a few buttons, then he pulled Sören close to show him what he was looking at.

Sören saw a very posh-looking flat, done in shades of white and cream and gold, with paintings hung on the walls.

"This is my place in Kensington," Ingwion said.

"I see. It's very nice." Sören tilted his face, looking up at him. "Why are you...?"

Ingwion pressed the forefinger of his other hand to Sören's lips, and then traced them sensually, before Sören started sucking on it, teasing him. Ingwion shivered, and pressed other buttons on the phone to zoom in.

Sören gasped.

"That's..." Sören blinked. "*That's my painting.*"

"Yes. That is one of *your* paintings."

"I painted that... 2015. It was the first thing I painted after Maglor and I broke up..." Sören looked at him with disbelief. "After I met you at the club, I got inspired to, well, sketch you, and then paint you. It was a bit of a loving tribute." Sören realized as the word came out of his mouth that even back then, he'd loved Ingwion a little, even as it seemed strange after just one night. *But what a night.* "I had a woman show up at one of my art shows, insisting to pay me double what it was worth -"

"That was Letitia. She's one of my most valued and trusted employees. I sent her on my behalf. I've been following your work for years, and it's not the only painting of yours that I own." Ingwion gave him a sad look. "When you stopped showing anywhere, for a time, it was concerning to me. Then I got word that you had a show in London, in October 2017, at Leja Bollasdóttir Sulu's gallery... and someone else bought all your available paintings before my handler could." He laughed softly. "I thought it was best to not interfere, I knew you'd found another admirer." *I knew you'd found* him. *Who I sent you to London to find. A pity it wasn't sooner.*

That was why you told me to go to London?

Yes. Dooku and Frankie.

"I..." Sören shook his head. The question *Why...?* hung at the back of his head, but he didn't ask, already overwhelmed by the knowledge that he and Dooku, he and Frankie, had been *fated* to meet each other. Just even the fact that Ingwion liked his work this much to buy it and follow his career was breaking his brain. "Holy shit, wow." Sören blinked at the painting again and took a deep breath. "I took some artistic liberties, which, you know, I tend to do with my work." He was referring to the length of the hair. "I hope you don't mind."

"Sören. Please put the phone back over there, yes?"

Sören used the Force to float the cell phone back to the table. Then Ingwion stood up, and Sören felt a frisson down his spine - not so much because of their size difference and Ingwion towering over him, but *something was about to happen*..

Ingwion took a deep breath and Sören watched the hair fall from Ingwion's shoulders to his waist, the same as the length of his hair in the painting. And he, too, had pointed ears. Where Maglor glowed silver, Ingwion glowed faintly gold.

Sören dropped his glass; it floated in the water. “You're an Elf. But you... you... said, awhile back... that you were more than just an Elf.”

Ingwion gestured to the picture with the painting. “What you painted, your inner vision of me walking through the forest wearing antlers, bringing it to life... wasn't just whimsy. You saw what I was.” Ingwion tapped the center of is forehead. “The legends of your people call me the Lord of the Elves. Your ancestors knew me as Freyr.”

“You're some kind of a god?” Sören stared in disbelief. It was one thing to accept that the legends of the huldufólk weren't just backwards, archaic superstition. But the whole idea of gods...

“More or less.” Ingwion smiled. “I started off as Quendi, and I eventually ascended as I gained power, staying in the world of Men.”

Sören felt like an idiot as it dawned on him – the Eddas and Sagas were taught to every Icelandic schoolchild. “The surname... the alias you use. Borovkov. 'Little boar'. Your boar, Gullinbursti...”

Ingwion's smile became a grin.

“I... I still...” Sören could accept Ingwion being an Elf. But a god? A living god?

Ingwion seemed to sense Sören's doubt. He put his fingers in his mouth and whistled. Suddenly, there was a flash of light, and a wild boar that looked like it had been made of gold appeared in the hotel suite, snorting. Sören let out a little shriek, startled.

“Good boy,” Ingwion said. “Sorry, I know I was disturbing your nap.”

The boar snorted some more as if to express irritation.

“Yes, I'm coming back home soon, don't worry. You can go now.”

The boar made some more annoyed snorts and then it trotted off; there was another flash of light and the boar was gone.

“How...” Sören blinked.

“When I was living in the world of Men, I was hunting and I took down a mother boar where the runt of the litter had stayed. I felt sorry for him and adopted him... and gave him immortality. Also made him gold, because I could.”

Sören felt like his entire concept of reality had been shattered, and the pieces thrown in an incinerator and burned. His head was swimming.

Ingwion took Sören's hands and pulled him to his feet, standing beside him. Ingwion stroked Sören's face, the bearded chin, ran his thumb along Sören's lower lip again before Sören sucked on it a little. "You see, my dear. Your gift is not just that you can move things without touching them, you can hear thoughts, feel the emotions of others.

You can *see.* I know you do not fully trust yourself, because you loved Justin, you wanted to see goodness in him when all he had for you was contempt and pleasure in your suffering - like the aunt and uncle who abused you, and treated you like a monster for being what you are - and you live in a world that does not accept the kind of gifts that you and your family have. But it is time, pet, to start trusting yourself at least *a little*. To let that illuminating fire guide you. You will need it, in the days... years... to come." Ingwion's fingers walked down Sören's throat, and sternum, to rest on his heart. "*Macalaurë will need it.*"

"Maglor...?"

"*Yes.*"

"He is an Elf. I am just a human mortal. That is what I know -"

"You know nothing, Sören Sigurðsson." Ingwion's lips crushed his, kissing him hard enough to take his breath away.

Then, he stepped out of the jacuzzi, and then he picked up Sören like he weighed nothing, carrying him out of the jacuzzi, out of the bathroom, to the bed - Sören used the Force to turn off the jacuzzi and snuff the candles. Ingwion kissed him all the way there. Sören loved it, being carried in his arms, cradled, kissed like this.

It wasn't helping him not be in love.

There were candles around the hotel room as well, and Sören waved his hand to light them with the Force, which Ingwion smiled at before claiming another kiss. He gently set Sören down on the bed, and reached for the collar and leash Sören had brought with him. He fit the collar around Sören's neck, and clipped the leash through, and then kissed him again.

Sören pet Ingwion's face. "You're fucking *gorgeous.* My painting doesn't do you justice -"

"Don't say that. Don't disparage your work around me again." Ingwion's eyes were stern, then they softened.

They shared another kiss, and then Sören's fingers wandered to pluck and pinch a nipple. He started kissing Ingwion's neck, continuing to rub the nipple in slow, lazy circles, grinning at Ingwion's groan. "What would you like, tonight? I'd like to say 'thank you' for everything -"

"Don't thank me yet."

Sören *bit* his neck at that, and then he took Ingwion's chin in his hand, his own expression stern now. "What would please you, Ingwion? Seriously."

"With you? Everything." He took Sören's face in his hands, and pressed a tender kiss to Sören's forehead.

Sören pushed Ingwion onto his back. With the Force, he reached for the bottle of lube. Before he could pour it over Ingwion's waiting cock, he laughed. Then he explained, "That set of test results you gave me... that was forged...?"

"I didn't like lying to you, but I couldn't have very well told you a few weeks ago that I'm not human and can't get human diseases."

"We used condoms and didn't need them." Sören was laughing so hard it hurt now. "*Maglor* and I used condoms, the first month or so, ten years ago, and didn't need them. *God...*"

"I'm glad you're not angry. I wanted to make you feel safe." Ingwion reached up to pet Sören. "I love your smile and your laughter. Your ability to find humor and joy in life, even in the darkest places."

"Well, it's not always been like that, as you know. Last time we were at that club I wasn't doing so great." Sören sighed. "But things are better now. In no small part because of *you.*"

"Don't sell your own efforts short."

"Again, I want to thank you." Sören leaned down to kiss him, and laughed again at the lube bottle that was just hovering in the air as they talked; he used the Force to pour the lube over his cock, grinning into kisses. "I want to please you."

"What pleases you, pleases me."

"Well then." Sören's fingers played over Ingwion's chest, teasing the nipples before trailing lower. "We can start by making up for all that hot cum of yours that I hadn't gotten deep inside me." Sören's fingers brushed over the head of his cock, stroking the slit and the frenulum. "I love feeling my lovers come inside me." *I love feeling the people I love come inside me.*

"I think I can oblige you." Ingwion grabbed Sören's hips and guided him, and they both sighed as Sören sank down on his cock. Sören let out a cry as Ingwion bottomed out inside him, buried to the hilt. After a moment of adjusting to the fullness, Sören began to ride slowly, running his hands over Ingwion's chest again, then his fingers played over the swirling tattoos on Ingwion's arms. Ingwion played with the leash, pulling Sören down for a kiss.

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Dooku had spent most of the day feeling a combination of giddiness and anxiety - like he was a lovesick teenager. He still couldn't believe what happened last night, that Maglor had actually wanted him.

And yet, lust was not the same as love. Dooku knew he had fallen for Maglor, but he didn't know for certain that the feelings were returned. There had been tenderness there, last night, but neither man had confessed feelings to the other. Dooku knew they had to talk about it, and tonight was as good a time as any, since Sören was on his date with Ingmar.

The threesome from last night left Dooku feeling *energized*, and he spent some of the late morning into early afternoon at the gym. The endorphin rush from the workout added to his giddy feeling, though he was also pleasantly relaxed enough after taking the scenic route home that he opted for a nap. *Hopefully I'll need it,* he thought to himself, blushing, before sleep claimed him.

The alarm woke him up, and he showered and changed. Then he wrangled Snuõur into his cat carrier, put a can of food and a small pouch of dry with a spare food and water

dish in a bag, and walked down the street to the cottage Maglor was renting from his neighbors.

They'll be coming back in two weeks. What then? Dooku wondered, as he walked.

Maglor opened the door before Dooku even knocked. They just stood there for a moment, looking at each other, before Maglor gestured and said, "Yes, come in," sounding as nervous as Dooku felt.

From inside the cat carrier Snúður meowed, as if he had been in there for hours instead of twenty minutes. Dooku set the carrier down and opened it, and Snúður came out to start sniffing around.

"Well," Maglor said, looking at the clock, "shall we head out?"

"Yes. Do you know where we're going, do you need suggestions, or...?"

Maglor smiled. "I have a reservation," he said, meeting Dooku's eyes.

Dooku felt that return of giddy hopefulness, his stomach fluttering, the feeling getting stronger as Maglor took his hand. They held hands all the way to the Jaguar, and Dooku reluctantly let go so they could get in.

The reservation was for a seafood restaurant on the bay. Maglor had the stereo playing as they drove. "How was your day?" he asked Dooku, keeping his eyes on the road.

"It was decent."

"Did you do anything interesting?"

"Not terribly. Chores, and I went to the gym." Maglor looked over at him, eyeing him up and down; Dooku felt his face flush. Dooku went on, "I usually go to the gym three times a week anyway, but I felt particularly energized today."

"I see." A little smile.

"What I would have liked... one of the few things I miss about living in the United Kingdom... an outlet for fencing. There isn't really anywhere around here, or anyone I can practice with -"

"You can practice with me, sometime." Maglor glanced over at him with a raised eyebrow. "I know how to use a sword."

Dooku's mind immediately went in the gutter, the heat in his face intensifying. But he just nodded and said, "Thank you. I'd like that. Perhaps this weekend?"

"That would be fine with me, we could spar while Sören works on art, probably."

"You'll have to go easy on an old man, I know you've done the real thing, actually fought in battle with a sword -"

"I know how to not kill you, I think. I'll try not to, anyway." Maglor leered. "I make no promise for horizontal sword play, though."

Dooku laughed, and felt like he was melting in his seat. He couldn't even make words at

that in response, his fluster all the worse when Maglor reached out briefly to stroke his face.

A few minutes later, Dooku's nerves settled down enough to ask, "And what did you do today, sir?"

"My day started off with a phone call from *Frankie*, of all people, threatening to beat me up if I ran off on Sören."

"Ah, yes." Dooku smiled fondly, nodding. "Some time after the breakup, when I decided I needed to try to fix things, I went to her flat hoping Sören would be there, not knowing he'd already left for Iceland." His smile deepened. "She punched me."

Maglor laughed. "Did she."

"Yes. She has a mean right hook, I was sore for days afterward. She's a dear. She beat up Justin, according to Sören. It will be nice to see her again next week at the wedding."

"I was invited to the wedding, just so you know."

"Ah, good. You can ride down with us, perhaps? Sören wants to drive to Reykjavik instead of fly, he likes the road trip."

"I like road trips myself, especially if we can listen to music while we're on the road. So yes, I'd like that." Maglor frowned. "I heard Ingwion was also invited -"

"That's his name...?"

"That's his name."

"He's an Elf, like you?"

"More or less."

Dooku found that response interesting but could sense tension in Maglor at Ingmar - Ingwion - being brought up so he didn't press it.

"- Anyway, is it too much to ask, if I'm coming down with you guys, that we not take Ingwion in the same vehicle? Four tall men might be a bit crowded in your jeep."

"That would be fine," Dooku said, nodding.

"I'll have to make arrangements for Auli that weekend -"

"One of Sören's students is looking after Snúður for that time, so I suppose he can also ask if she'll watch Auli as well."

"All right. But anyway, yes, Frankie threatened me, Margrét invited me to the wedding. After all of that, I took Auli to the park to run, then I practiced for a bit." Maglor looked back at him. "I finally took out my harp."

"Oh."

"It had been in a case under my bed. I haven't played in years, because of... associations. But it felt time."

Dooku could feel the gravity of those words, that Maglor had some kind of emotional breakthrough. He reached out, despite his shyness, and squeezed the Elf's knee. Maglor's bad hand covered his, gently rubbing. Dooku felt the flood of warmth again, wanting very much for Maglor to pull over so he could take Maglor in his arms for a moment and tell him *It's OK, it's going to be OK.* But Maglor kept driving. "It's not too much farther," Maglor said.

They ate in companionable silence, at a table with a nice view of the bay. Maglor took Dooku's hand under the table, and Dooku could feel his face on fire throughout the meal, too flustered to speak, but happy nonetheless. After they finished, Maglor drove them to the Goðafoss.

They got out of the Jaguar and walked around the falls together, hand in hand. At the edge of the falls they stopped to look at the breathtaking view, and Dooku found himself reaching for the small container of coins he kept in his pocket, to make exact change when he wasn't using a debit or credit card. He pulled out a 1 *krónur* coin.

It was a silly superstition - one he'd picked up from Sören - but nonetheless, he flung the coin into the falls, wishing that the three of them would be happy together for a long time to come.

They sat together for awhile, watching the falls, still holding hands. Finally Maglor turned to Dooku and said, "May I ask you a question, and may I ask that you answer me completely, 100% honestly, even if you think the truth is something I don't want to hear?"

Dooku felt his stomach start to drop. *Oh no.* He didn't want things to get awkward, or possibly end. He swallowed hard and nodded.

Maglor looked down. "The last time you and I got together, just the two of us, I had quite a lot to drink, and, it's been my observation that ever since that night, up until last night, you'd been avoiding me. I would like to know why, and specifically, if I'd said anything under the influence that made you uncomfortable with me. My kind doesn't forget things, usually, but I was very, very, very drunk, and I can't help but get the impression something happened."

Dooku nodded. He took a deep breath. "You fell asleep on me, and I tucked you in before I left, wanting you to be comfortable." Maglor turned to give him a little smile, Dooku heard *that was very kind of you* in the back of his head, and Dooku smiled back. Then his expression went back to neutral. "You called me Uncle."

Maglor kept a poker face, but his eyes widened. "I see."

"I don't think you do." Dooku looked out at the falls, sighed, and looked back at Maglor. *Here it comes.* His voice lowered, even though it was just them at the falls. "Macalaurë... I have feelings for you. I was not expecting to fall in love a second time, but I did. Both you and Sören occupy a place in my heart. And when you called me Uncle, whilst drunk, it rather... crushed my hopes. Because I couldn't help but think you simply thought of me as an uncle -"

Maglor raised an eyebrow. "Did he tell you?"

Dooku nodded. "He did. So now I understand that it wasn't a lack of interest on your part, and of course there was last night, but sexual desire isn't the same as romantic feelings -" Dooku looked away again.

"Nicolae." Maglor's voice compelled his gaze.

And then Maglor seized his face, and kissed him, hard. Dooku moaned into the kiss, kissing back for all he was worth, emotions crashing through him like the falls before them.

They pulled apart, breathing hard. Maglor stroked his face. "Nicolae. It's not just physical, for me." He took Dooku's hand in his bad hand, and kissed it. "I love you, too."

This time Dooku initiated the kiss. Then Maglor rose, pulled him to his feet, and they kissed again. And again. Dooku could feel himself hardening, and the urge to take him right there, in the grass, but he held back.

They got in the Jaguar and headed back to Akureyri. "So you don't judge me," Maglor said.

"I'd be lying if I said I wasn't a little uncomfortable with the concept of avuncular incest, but you're not human, and you were consenting adults, I take it."

"Very consenting, yes."

Dooku nodded. He felt uncomfortable for an additional reason - thinking of his dreams and visions when he was someone called *Ñolo* and wondering if he'd ever known Maglor, or his uncle, but that felt preposterous considering how long ago that was - his soul couldn't be thousands of years old, could it? - and in any case, he didn't feel that now was the time to bring it up.

Maglor swallowed hard. "We were, by the way, judged for the incest. You... you read*The Silmarillion*, you said?"

“A long time ago.”

“But you know about the Laws and Customs of the Eldar.”

Dooku nodded.

Maglor went on, “We were judged for any desire and sexual actions with our own gender, incestuous or not. The Valar saw us as an abomination. But we couldn't be anything other than what we were, what we were created us to be, fire calling to fire. I used to *hate* myself for wanting my father, wanting my uncles, the way I did, and then, after all the years I spent alone without them, grieving them, I decided the Valar had gone too far with their punishment. If I could do it all over again, I would have never pushed my father away. I would have *gladly* been with him just to spite them for what they did to me, my family, my people, because more than anything else, I think we were judged for our defiance and our pride." Maglor's eyes flashed, and Dooku felt a frisson down his spine, strangely aroused by the fire of the anger seething in him. "My father said were on our way to becoming gods. Ingwion, in fact, ascended."

"*What.*"

Maglor took a deep breath. "...I see you don't know that part yet."

"No. I'm still processing that Ingmar - Ingwion - is not even human. You're telling me he's a god..?"

Maglor nodded. "Freyr, the Norse called him. He's a god*and* he's seen multiple universes, from what he tells me. We... maybe shouldn't talk about him now, that's something for him to tell you, I think."

"All right."

A moment of silence and Maglor continued, "We could have been gods, and the Valar treated us as their playthings. When we didn't follow their neat little script for what they wanted for us, when we, gods forbid, had minds of our own, *desires* of our own..." He shook his head. "The Silmarils each had a piece of my father's soul. They didn't care about replacing the light of the damn Trees, if they'd cared so much about the Trees they never would have been burned in the first place. My father thought they even let it happen so they could make some sort of excuse to claim the Silmarils. Whether or not that particular theory is true... they knew what the Silmarils were, and they wanted to destroy my father. Destroy *us*, the Noldor. We knew that, and that was why we swore that Oath, terrible that it was. Because of what it would *mean*, for the Silmarils to fall into the wrong hands. And the Doom they meted out to us is far worse than anything any of us had ever done, worse than the kinslaying, and I say this regretting the kinslaying. It did not merit this eternal torment. *Tears unnumbered ye shall shed.* I am living *fucking* proof of that, Nicolae." His voice was suddenly raw. "But my father would say, it was never about the kinslaying, never about the bloodshed, never about an Oath we could not keep - the Doom was because we would not give the Valar what they wanted. We would not give them the *power* -" His voice choked off.

Dooku could feel Maglor's pain, across their bond - *oh, we have a Force bond now, hm* - and he himself hurt for Maglor, wanting once again to hold him. They drove a few minutes in silence, and at last Dooku said, reaching out to pet him, "Macalaurë, I cannot begin to make up for all the years of loneliness and grief you have endured. And I do not have many years left. But with what I do have, I want to make you happy. Not simply because of what you have endured. But because you are someone I love."

Maglor took Dooku's hand, and squeezed it.

They pulled in to the cottage. Dooku fed the cat, and Maglor fed the dog, and then they sat on the couch together. Dooku finally broke the silence with, "What was he like, your uncle? Fingolfin, I mean." He had a nagging feeling that he would need to explore later.

"You remind me a lot of him, actually." Maglor nodded. "Serious, stern at times, wise, justice-minded. Sören is a lot like my father - passionate, obsessive with his creativity, temperamental but also very warm, a good sense of humor and a bit of sass and audacity. You and Sören are like watching my father and uncle all over again. They loved each other deeply and it was beautiful to see, as it is beautiful to see with the two of you. They were beautiful making love together, as the two of you are. They balanced each other out perfectly, as the two of you complement and balance each other out." Maglor sighed. "I loved - still love - both of them very much. I can't help but wonder if they somehow guided me to find both of you."

"I feel rather ridiculous now that I had worried you calling me 'Uncle' was a sign of rejection."

Maglor managed a laugh at that. "The very opposite. I was madly in love with him." He took a deep breath then. "When I took out my harp earlier... the song I was practicing... I had composed something for my uncle, when I asked him to, um, be my coming of age present."

"Oh." Dooku found himself blushing at this. "Would you... would you mind playing it for me?"

Maglor was also blushing, now. "It's been a long time since I played harp for an audience, Nicolae, but for you, I will."

The harp was in Maglor's bedroom and he dragged it out, then headed in the direction of the yard. "This would be better off played outside. I had played it for Fingolfin in a garden."

Dooku sat, and for the next half-hour he was treated to one of the most beautiful pieces of music he'd ever heard. Maglor's composition was on par with the old classical masters if not better. He was moved to tears by the cycles of the song, expressing longing and uncertainty, desire building to no longer being able to help anything but a bold declaration of passion, and then something more gentle and warm, like the way sun broke through clouds after a storm.

He also got the uncanny sense when the song was over that he'd heard it before, wondering once again if his soul was indeed old enough to have crossed paths with Maglor, if Maglor had performed the piece for an audience he happened to witness. That nagging feeling came back to him, needing to poke at Fingolfin... but he didn't feel like trying to poke at those feelings right now. Just all he was feeling in this moment - realizing he was the first person Maglor had played harp for in so many years, that this was an act of intimacy for him, that his love was returned... it was overwhelming. He was starting to cry, though he tried to contain it, muster up his dignity.

Maglor's eyes were also bright with tears.

Dooku got up and went over to him. "That was exquisite." He drew Maglor to his feet. "You are exquisite." He kissed him, softly.

Maglor carried the harp back inside, leaving it in the living room. He went to the kitchen, as Dooku admired the craftsmanship of the harp, the etched pattern of its body. Maglor came out with moscato, watching Dooku look the harp over.

"This is how old...?" Dooku braced himself, preparing to hear Renaissance - finding himself curious what exactly Maglor was up to during the Renaissance.

"Second Age."

Dooku exhaled sharply.

"Here." Maglor gestured to the couch. "I'm in the mood to be less serious for awhile."

"All right. Shall we watch *Metalocalypse*?"

They did, drinking wine - enough to relax, not enough to get drunk - and as the episodes wore on, they went from simply sitting next to each other, to curling up together. At last Maglor was leaning on him again and Dooku found himself playing with Maglor's hair, delighting in the pointy ears. He couldn't resist touching one of the points, and heard Maglor's breath hitch.

Dooku rubbed Maglor's scalp, who snuggled deeper. "Mmmm, that's nice."

"Good. I want to spoil you." Dooku kissed the top of his head.

Maglor looked up at him. "I want to spoil you, too."

They kissed, and soon the kissing turned into a full makeout session on the couch, like a couple of horny teenagers, Dooku on his back with Maglor on top of him, necking, caressing each other, hard cocks straining against their trousers, grinding. Dooku played with the points of Maglor's ears, rubbing them between his thumb and forefinger, licking them, nibbling and sucking on them, cock throbbing at the sound of Maglor's moans, thrusting up against him. At last, Maglor began to undo the buttons of Dooku's black shirt, kissing and licking the exposed flesh. When Dooku's shirt was unbuttoned all the way, Maglor rubbed his nose in Dooku's chest hair, with a little sigh.

"You... you like that?" Dooku knew Sören loved his body hair, but he was surprised that an Elf liked it so much, judging from Maglor's naturally smooth skin.

"I love it. You're my white wolf." Maglor started licking the chest hair, and peeled the shirt back to expose the nipples, taking one between his teeth.

"I think..." Dooku gasped and shuddered as Maglor suckled. "We should take this to the bedroom now."

"You're right." Maglor got up, and took Dooku's hands, helping him off the couch even though he didn't need the help. For a moment they just stood there, looking into each other's eyes, and then Maglor finally dropped his glamour, which had been up while they were at dinner and the falls, and they kissed passionately.

They undressed each other on the way to the bed, leaving clothes strewn across the house, not caring. They were naked before they even got in Maglor's room, and Maglor marched him back towards the bed, the two still kissing, hands roaming over each other, hard cocks rubbing together. Dooku climbed onto the bed and Maglor climbed over him, a predatory look in his eyes that made Dooku shiver.

Maglor lay on top of him and they clung to each other, kissing like their lives depended on it, cock rubbing cock, precum leaking between them. As Dooku lay there with his arms around Maglor, kissing him again and again, it felt almost like they were being reunited, like something he didn't even know was missing had fallen into place. It felt so *right* to lay there with him, and just a couple years ago Dooku didn't think his life or his heart had room for one person in it, let alone two - but here he was, and there was no going back. It felt like he had always been meant for this, somehow.

At last Maglor resumed what he'd started on the couch, kissing and licking Dooku's chest, fingers walking, paying special attention to the nipples, smiling with satisfaction at Dooku's deep moans and the way he shuddered as Maglor explored him. Maglor's mouth and hands went lower, and lower still, with Dooku arching to him, savoring all the sensations coursing through him, deliciously sensitive. Finally, after close to an hour of just exploring, Maglor took Dooku's cock into his mouth, sucking slowly, eyes burning. Dooku lay back and enjoyed it, both the feel of Maglor's mouth wrapped around him, cock gliding in and out, and the feeling of *hunger* he sensed from Maglor, like Maglor wanted this as badly as he did, needed it, craved it, *ached* for it.

Maglor worked his tongue as he sucked, and when he'd been down there awhile he started to suck harder and faster, until Dooku's hips were rolling, gently fucking his mouth, his hands in Maglor's hair. "I'm getting close," he warned.

"Mmmmmm." *I want to taste you.*

A few minutes later Maglor got his wish, Dooku letting out a hoarse shout as he spilled into Maglor's mouth. He could feel Maglor sipping at him, swallowing; he could feel the primal *satisfaction* across their bond, and when Maglor shuddered a minute later, making a little whimper with his mouth still latched around Dooku's cock, drinking him to the dregs, Dooku realized Maglor had also come. That was proven a minute later when Maglor rose up, his own cum coating his hand, which he brought to Dooku's mouth to taste. Dooku licked and sucked his fingers clean, and then licked and kissed the palm, nuzzling the scar there.

"I love you," Dooku husked, before taking Maglor's mouth with a kiss.

When they pulled apart, Maglor stroked his face and said, "I love you, too."

They kissed again. Maglor was either still hard or hard again, gently rubbing against his thigh. Dooku needed time to recharge, at his age, but he knew what would get him going. "Here, love," he said, his hand straying to play with Maglor's cock. "I want to return the favor." He patted his shoulders.

It took a moment for Maglor to register what Dooku was offering, and then he climbed up, positioning himself to sit on Dooku's shoulders, his cock in Dooku's face. Dooku took a moment to rain tender little kisses from the head down the shaft, making Maglor smile, before Dooku took his first lick at the precum pooling in the slit. "Lovely," he said, before licking down the shaft, making Maglor gasp, and then back up, making him gasp again.

He sucked at Maglor slowly, lazily, teasing him, and then more intently, with Maglor slowly rolling his hips, unrestrained in his moans and sighs. Dooku's hands roamed where they could touch, worshiping the beautiful Elf with his fingers, in awe of him. When he sensed Maglor was getting close, he took Maglor's cock out of his mouth, grabbed Maglor's hips and pulled him forward, and slipped his tongue into Maglor's channel, his own cock twinging at the sound Maglor made as his tongue began to lick inside him. Dooku's tongue found the prostate right away, brushing in slow, deliberate strokes, then harder and faster, until he was viciously devouring him and Maglor was shuddering, panting, grabbing the headboard for dear life, swearing in Elvish. Dooku thought about bringing him off just like that, with his tongue, but just before Maglor could come he gasped out, "Stop."

Dooku stopped, and Maglor pulled back. "Is something wrong...?"

"I want to come with you inside me." Maglor's eyes were pleading, urgent.

Dooku couldn't say no to that - he was hard again, his cock completely slick with precum. Maglor reached over to grab a bottle of lube, and poured it over Dooku's cock, then Dooku poured lube over his fingers and began working them inside Maglor as they kissed, one finger, then two, then three, with Maglor riding his fingers, moaning. He was right on that edge again, and he pulled back and straddled Dooku's hips. Dooku watched as Maglor sank down and he slowly slipped into Maglor's opening - he watched the look of rapture on Maglor's face as he was filled, like he had been waiting for this a long, long time, even though they had only known each other a matter of months.

At last he was all the way in, and they both cried out together. Maglor took his hands and said, "I love you."

"I love you."

Maglor rode him slowly, sensually. Dooku enjoyed the show, watching his cock slide in and out of him, watching Maglor's gorgeous body as he gracefully rolled his hips, hands continuing to roam over him and play with his chest hair and the hair on his arms and legs. After awhile Maglor leaned down to kiss him, and then Dooku leaned up against the pillows so he was sort of sitting up, and he began to kiss Maglor's neck and shoulders, enjoying the sounds he made. He enjoyed the sounds even more as he feasted on Maglor's nipples, teasing them into hard peaks, and Maglor rocked against him harder and faster. Soon, Dooku's hands were on Maglor's hips and he was thrusting into him as Maglor bucked like he was riding a wild bull, his cries louder and louder. Dooku's arms encircled Maglor and Maglor reached out for him, pulling Dooku close to his heart, with Dooku kissing him there. "I love you," Dooku moaned in rhythm to their thrusts. "I love you... I love you..."

And then he was so far gone he couldn't make words anymore, the two moaning together, completely lost in passion. Dooku held back, waiting for Maglor's release, and a moment later there it was, Maglor trembling as he threw his head back and cried out, "*Nicolae!*"

Dooku felt the clenching, gripping, pulsing of Maglor's contractions around him, and the warmth of Maglor's seed spilling over his stomach. Two thrusts and he moaned, "Macalaurë. *Yes,* love..."

"Gods, I love you." Maglor was gasping for breath, still shaking, still contracting around him, spilling over him. He shuddered again as he felt Dooku spending into him, heard the deep groans Dooku made as he gave into the bliss, falling into light.

Dooku stirred a little while later, tangled up with Maglor on the bed, stroking and petting the flood of dark hair. Maglor looked like he was sleeping, cradled against him, but wasn't, opening his eyes when he felt Dooku looking at him. He smiled and leaned in for a kiss. Dooku was still inside him, and could feel the cum pooling out of Maglor, making him laugh a little at the mess.

"That was amazing," Dooku said. He looked into Maglor's eyes, and kissed his forehead. "You are amazing."

"So are you." Maglor claimed his mouth, a soft sweet kiss at first, that became heated again. Dooku was surprised as he felt his cock waking up again, not thinking originally he would have it in him for a third round.

Maglor grinned as he felt Dooku hardening inside him. "Oh, my."

"I..." Dooku gave him a shy look. "Is it all right...?"

"*Please.* I need this. I need *you*..."

Overcome by passion, Dooku found himself pushing Maglor, rolling him onto his back, still inside him. They kissed hard, and Dooku began to thrust, slowly, shivering as Maglor's fingers walked down his spine.

"I love you." Dooku kissed, licked, and nibbled at his neck and throat.

"I love you." Maglor kissed his mouth again, fingers playing through the chest hair. "I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner. I didn't want to get my hopes up, if you rejected me -"

Dooku laughed at that. "Oh, no. No rejection here." His voice lowered. "Only desire." He kissed Maglor again.

"I didn't want to *hope*, at all." Maglor's eyes misted as Dooku stroked his face. "I have lived so long without hope."

"No, Macalaurë, you have merely *survived* without hope." Dooku kissed him softly. "Now, you live. While you can. While we both can."

Maglor wrapped his arms around him, holding him tight, and kissed him hard. "Give me hope, Nicolae. Give me life."

Dooku began pounding him into the mattress, loving the way he screamed, and before they both could come he slowed down, teasing and tormenting them both, kissing Maglor until they were both breathless. Again and again they reached that peak and held back, until they were both shaking, gasping, and exploded together, kissing again as they climaxed, one beautiful, seemingly endless note of joy.

Across their bond, as they held each other in that place of brilliant light, Dooku told him what he'd been wanting to say for hours: *It's OK now. It's going to be OK.*

Chapter 33

After he came back from his night with Ingwion, on Saturday morning, Sören stopped at the cabin to shower and change, putting on skinny jeans, his Joy Division shirt, and tied his hair up into a loose man bun. Then he packed the supplies he'd be needing for the weekend, including a canvas and some paints. Then he walked up the street to the cottage where Maglor was staying.

It was late morning, a little after 11 AM, and Maglor's Jaguar was in front of the cottage. The lights weren't on, and Dooku's jeep was parked down the street in front of the cabin, so Sören assumed they were out, probably walking Auli. He stooped to reach for the spare key that he knew Vigdís and Páll kept under the welcome mat, even though there was hardly reason for anyone to lock one's doors out here.

When he walked in he heard the jangle of Auli's collar, who trotted over to him for pettings. Sören knelt to pet the dog, and then he saw his cat, who had been sleeping on the couch and yawned and stretched. Sören came over to pet Snúdur, too, who headbutted him and purred. Sören headed to the kitchen, but stopped in his tracks when he saw the harp, ornately etched and gleaming in the light from the window, looking like something out of a myth. "Holy *shit*," he said under his breath.

After taking a moment to look the harp up and down, he went to the kitchen and replenished the food and water for Snúdur and Auli, and then he decided to have a look in Maglor's bedroom.

Maglor and Dooku were tangled up together on the bed, naked in each other's arms, legs entwined, spent cocks plastered together, their torsos painted with each other's cum. It was a deliciously debauched sight, and Sören found himself getting hard looking at them. Quietly, he took off his Doc Martens, then his clothes, unbound his hair, and climbed into bed with them. They stirred when they felt him climbing over them, and they reached out to pull him in, taking turns kissing him.

Then Dooku looked at the clock. "Oh dear."

"Sleep in?" Sören raised an eyebrow, amused.

"Yes and no. We woke up a couple hours ago, and, er. We cuddled, and that led to more - "

"-I see that." Sören got the mental image of them kissing, rubbing their cocks together to climax, and he shuddered, his own cock throbbing now.

"- and I suppose we fell back asleep, after." Dooku blushed. "You just got in, I assume?"

"I did, and I had to feed the cat and dog because you lazy butts were still in bed." Sören booped Dooku's nose, then Maglor's. "But at least that's taken care of." Sören gestured to his hard cock. "Now there's something else to take care of."

Maglor and Dooku looked at each other, as if they were communicating something privately between them, and then they both dove down, but Maglor got to Sören's cock first, laughing as he took it into his mouth, and Dooku shook his head and laughed, coming up to kiss Sören.

Maglor sucked Sören's cock greedily as Sören and Dooku kissed and caressed; Dooku got hard again and Sören reached down to stroke him. Sören and Dooku got to that edge together, their touch more feverish, and Dooku began to kiss, lick and nibble Sören's neck and shoulder, then down to his nipples, Sören's hand working him harder and faster. Between kisses on Sören's neck, Dooku rasped, "I want to watch you come in his mouth, and then I want to drink it from his kiss."

"Oh *god*..." Sören shuddered, arching, panting, thrusting into Maglor's mouth, overcome by the delicious mental image of that, and the feeling of *lust* for this new side of his husband, a new chapter in exploring his sexuality. With one hand still stroking Dooku's cock, he grabbed a fistful of Maglor's hair with the other hand. "I'm so fucking close..."

"Mmmmmm." Maglor cupped Sören's balls and gently rubbed them, and the fingers of his other hand slipped into Sören, finding the prostate, rubbing in circles, making Sören howl and thrust harder into his mouth.

"I want to taste you," Sören growled at Dooku.

He obliged, crawling up, kneeling before Sören's mouth. Sören swallowed him to the hilt, looking up at him, as Dooku's glance went back and forth between Sören's full lips wrapped around his cock, and Maglor devouring Sören like he was starving for it. It didn't take long, Dooku coming into Sören's mouth the instant Sören spent into Maglor's mouth, squeezing each other's hands, Sören crying out around the cock in his mouth, gratified by Dooku's own hoarse shout of release. Across their bond they felt that sense of oneness, coming together, not knowing where one ended and the other began for one long moment of burning ecstasy.

Sören watched as Maglor came up to kiss Dooku as he'd requested, stroking himself furiously as he and Dooku kissed hard. Sören's mouth was still full of Dooku's cum, and when Maglor and Dooku pulled apart, breathing hard, Sören grabbed Maglor's hair again to turn his face so they could kiss, so Maglor could taste Dooku on him. Sören reached down to stroke Maglor's cock, slick with precum, and his other hand let go of Maglor's hair, taking a journey to stroke his face, then wander over his chest, pinching a nipple.

Maglor gasped into the kiss and his eyes widened as if from shock, and for a second Sören thought he was going to come, and then he felt himself roughly grabbed and flipped onto his stomach, with Maglor swearing as he reached for the lube. Sören whimpered into the pillows, knowing what was up, and thrust out his ass at him. A moment later Maglor slipped into him, taking him from behind, his turn to grab Sören's curls as he drove into him mercilessly. Sören bucked his hips back at him, matching Maglor's rhythm, fucking himself on Maglor's cock just as hard as Maglor was fucking him. He felt Maglor's balls slapping his from behind, which drove him even crazier. "Yesyesyesyes*yes*," Sören panted. "Get it get it get it..."

The bed was slamming against the wall. Sören grabbed the slats of the headboard, white-knuckled. He was exquisitely sensitized from just having come, and Maglor's cock took him over the edge in record time, coming again, spraying into the mattress. Sören could feel Maglor's own release across their bond, giving in to the feel of Sören contracting around him, and Sören screamed into the pillows as Maglor spent deep into him, a few last savage thrusts before he collapsed onto Sören's back, panting, moaning, twitching with the throes of orgasm. Maglor's hands took Sören's, squeezing, then just holding them, the two sighing together. Sören's toes curled against Maglor's calves, and Maglor nuzzled the back of his neck and shoulder, planting a tender little kiss in the curve of Sören's neck.

After awhile Sören was vaguely aware that Maglor had slipped out of him and was curled up next to him now, holding him. He could hear Dooku puttering around in the kitchen. He snuggled into Maglor's shoulder, with Maglor tightening his arms around him.

"I love you, you know," Maglor whispered, smoothing Sören's curls.

"I love you." Sören squeezed him.

Then Sören heard the sound of a cell phone going off. It wasn't his. Maglor made a noise, and Sören opened his eyes to watch Maglor sitting up, grumbling. Sören saw Maglor's phone on top of his dresser across the room and used the Force to bring it over so Maglor wouldn't have to get up, flomping back on him as Maglor squinted at the number and said, "I have to take this."

Sören closed his eyes, relaxing again at the sound of Maglor's voice. "Hello? Yes, this is. ...I see. Yes, as I mentioned I'd be willing to pay any expenses for her care, so please give your vet this number so I can set up payment, all right? ...Oh, wonderful, thank you so much! ...I should still be around in November, yes. Thank you.*Takk.* Have a great weekend and call me when they're ready!"

Maglor hit End. Sören sat up, curious. "Remember Auli's little romp in the park a few weeks ago?" Maglor asked. Sören nodded, giggling at the memory. "That was the Corgi's owner. The Corgi did in fact get pregnant. The litter of puppies should be ready to be weaned in mid-November if everything goes according to schedule, and she's giving me the first pick of the litter."

"Awwwww." Sören hugged him tight. "That's so good. Cos I know you're attached to Auli and he's Vigdís and Páll's dog and they're coming back soon and they're not likely to give him away to you."

"I'll miss him, yes. But... this works out. I'm getting a dog."

"You definitely need a dog. Because you definitely have PTSD, like I do, from everything you've been through. I find having a pet to be really therapeutic and in your case, your dog can be your service animal? Like I know you don't get human diseases and going to a doctor is not happening, but you could still find some way to get him registered so he can come with you places, keep your nerves down -"

"I'll think about it. That's a bit of trouble for my handlers to go to -"

"- Maybe Ingmar can help?"

Maglor's jaw set. "I'd prefer to ask him for as few favors as possible, if it's all the same to you."

Sören sighed. "I wish you didn't hate him so much. If he didn't care about you he wouldn't have gone to all this trouble for you. For all of us."

Maglor looked away. "Can we change the subject?"

Dooku chose that moment to step in the doorway. He was fully clothed now. "I'm making breakfast. Well, a late breakfast. A brunch, if you will. I'll bring it in when it's ready."

"You're so good to us." Sören blew him a kiss.

"It's nice having people to spoil." Dooku smiled. Then he folded his arms. "But even though I'm indulging you with breakfast in bed, you should probably get out of bed at some point, because I do have to run to the store to get supplies if we're going to eat later, and, Macalaurë, you had expressed interest in sparring this weekend? The forecast is calling for rain tomorrow so unless you want to spar in the rain -"

"Today is fine." Maglor nodded. "After breakfast perhaps you and I can take Auli for a walk, then go to the store, then spar." Maglor looked at Sören. "And perhaps later this evening, you and I could set up camp in the living room, your art while I compose, like old times."

"I would love that." Sören kissed him hard.

"Perfect." Dooku nodded. "I'll be back momentarily."

Dooku brought them breakfast in bed, cheese omelettes with home fries. Sören loved it - this was already the perfect start to the day.

He put his clothes back on and did dishes, while Dooku and Maglor made last-minute preparations for their walk and the trip to the store; Maglor told Dooku about the puppies, and Dooku's face lit up.

There was a reason for that besides the joy of a new, cute puppy, which would be good for Maglor's soul. "So you will in fact be here in November," Dooku said.

Maglor nodded. "I told you I wouldn't run off, and I meant it. I swore it to Sören. I'll... look for a place in Akureyri, or someplace in one of the nearby towns, a reasonable driving distance, if there's nothing in Akureyri."

Dooku and Sören looked at each other then. Sören could feel the wheels turning in Dooku's brain - they were turning in his as well - but it wasn't quite time to roll out the beginning of an idea, it needed to be thought on and developed a little more. But the fact that Dooku felt it too...

"We'll see you later." Dooku teasingly wagged a finger at Sören. "Stay out of trouble, you."

Sören flipped him the middle finger with a grin. "I am trouble."

While Dooku and Maglor were out, Sören got back to work on the sketch he'd been working on, of Dooku laying in bed in post-coital bliss. He found himself sketching Maglor and himself there now, too, and the bed was no longer a bed but a blanket spread out on grass. He could see it in his mind's eye, the three of them laying in a garden underneath the sunlight, but it was no place he'd ever been before. The plant life was vibrant and exotic.

He would have to start working on the painting tonight; it was time, he could feel the *fever* consuming him.

He was fully engrossed in the sketch when Dooku and Maglor returned, but he agreed to sit outside, continuing to sketch, as Dooku produced his rapier, which he'd brought from the cabin, and Maglor himself produced a sword, craftsmanship so beautiful it seemed unreal. There were runes of some sort etched on the blade, and a jewelled flaming star on the hilt.

"Second Age?" Dooku asked, raising an eyebrow.

"No. My harp is Second Age. This is older." A pause. "My father made this."

Dooku's jaw dropped. So did Sören's.

"I'm afraid I'm a bit rusty," Dooku said when he found his words again. "As I told you, I haven't had an outlet for fencing since I moved here -"

"It's been awhile since I've had reason to bear a sword in my hand also." Maglor nodded. "Would be good to get back into regular practice, you never know if we might need it."

Sören could tell that Dooku wanted to say they probably never would, then remembered who he was talking to and that reality was far weirder than anything he could imagine. Dooku nodded. "Incentive would help." A small, mischievous smile. "We could wager this battle."

"We could. What do you wager?"

"Whoever wins... gets their choice of sexual favor."

Maglor grinned.

Dooku gave him a fencing salute, and Maglor saluted in turn. They circled each other, and then Maglor took the offensive. Dooku parried and made a riposte.

Sören tried to concentrate on his sketch, but he kept being distracted by the sword play. The two men seemed like they were born for this, elegant, fluid, powerful. Sören started to feel that frisson of arousal then, and after awhile he put his sketchpad down and just watched them. It took his breath away.

At last the elegance became raw, primal aggression; Maglor got Dooku on the ground, his blade at Dooku's throat, who said, "I yield."

Maglor helped him up, and kissed him. "Yes, you certainly will."

Dooku *blushed*, and Sören giggled.

The three men headed inside. Maglor and Dooku were both breathing hard after the fight, with Dooku more out of breath, and Sören decided to get up and brought out lemonade from the kitchen. His eyes kept wandering back to his sketchpad, but he was feeling too worked up to get back into that without making some sort of mistake, and yet had a sudden burst of creative energy that needed to be let out somehow. "You know," Sören said, "I could get started on some of the prep for dinner...?"

"I got steak and fish to grill but there's other things that can be made into side dishes," Dooku said, nodding.

Sören couldn't believe he was volunteering for kitchen duty - while he did it now and again, Justin's insults still lingered and he didn't cook anywhere near as often as he used to before Justin. As he walked into the kitchen and rummaged around, he felt himself smiling. It was like he was finally starting to take back some of his power, and that felt good.

Sören got absorbed in chopping vegetables for a salad, and making a homemade vinaigrette. He would also stuff tomatoes with tuna and cheese and make roasted

potatoes, when it got closer to the time Dooku would be grilling. Sören put on music as he worked in the kitchen, dancing around a little. He thought nothing of hearing the shower running down the hall, until he heard a deep moan.

Sören continued working on the salad, and then he heard another moan, and a second deep voice moaning. Familiar moans. Curiosity got the better of him, and he put the knife down and went down the hall.

The bathroom was steamy, and behind the glass shower door, Maglor and Dooku were showering together, kissing passionately, their hard cocks sliding together. Sören's breath hitched, his own cock hardening at the sight of them. They were sensually lathering each other, taking their sweet time together.

Sören decided to just watch - it was fine with him if Maglor and Dooku got time to themselves now and again, as he and Maglor would have time to themselves later, and he and Dooku would have time to themselves at another time. He felt like if this was going to work, it was just as important for them to be three dyads - Sören and Maglor, Dooku and Maglor, Sören and Dooku - as it was for them to do things as a triad. He didn't mind sharing.

Just the opposite, watching them. *Fuck, they are the hottest fucking thing I've ever seen in my life.* He loved to be teased like this, which would make it all the more delicious the next time the three of them were together.

When they were close to finishing their shower, Sören tiptoed back down the hall, pretending to resume work in the kitchen, and when the two men headed to Maglor's bedroom, Sören went back down the hall and watched near the door.

"I wasn't expecting your choice of sexual favor to be me inside you again," Dooku remarked between kisses.

"But you do it so well." Maglor smiled. Then he nipped Dooku's neck with a growl. "I want you to fuck me with that same aggression you showed out there with a sword in your hand."

Dooku grinned. "We'll get there."

Sören watched as Dooku worshipped Maglor's body, kissing, licking, caressing his neck and chest, paying special attention to the nipples, then down his stomach, down one hip, thigh, and calf, and up the other. At last his head was between Maglor's legs, tongue inside him, making Maglor writhe and beg, and Sören found himself with his cock out, stroking, electrified. Dooku spent some time sucking and licking the head of Maglor's cock, teasing him further, before coming up to kiss him, pouring lube into the passage, working slick fingers inside. Finally Maglor gave him a look and urged, "*Please*, Nicolae."

Dooku kissed him deep and hungry, plunging into him. He took a few slow thrusts, reveling in the way it teased Maglor even more, and then he propped a leg up on his shoulder and took him hard. Sören shuddered, knowing exactly how that felt without even feeling it across the bond - and feel it he did, his cock throbbing as he stroked himself harder and faster. They were *delicious* together. Sören loved to see Dooku like this, commanding, fully alive, loved to see Maglor trusting him, *surrendering*.

Maglor's noises made Sören crazy, and it took him every ounce of his restraint to not go in there and shove his cock into Maglor's mouth. One of these days, he would, knowing Maglor would love that, and Dooku would love watching it. But right now, he wanted to

give them this. Even though Maglor and Dooku had met just a couple months before, it felt like there was something deep between them, like they had known each other for a very long time - it was almost like they had been separated, too, not just Maglor and Sören. He didn't understand that feeling, but it was there, and he honored it - they needed their time, just as Sören and Maglor would need theirs, later. It was all good.

It was too good. Sören's knees were starting to buckle. He was jerking off harder than he could ever remember, trying to choke back the little whimpers that threatened to come out as he watched Dooku driving into Maglor, making Maglor yell and scream, as Dooku groaned and growled.

And then it happened - Maglor saw Sören pleasuring himself. The sight of Sören with his cock out sent him over the edge, shooting his seed. Sören cried out with his own climax, falling to his knees, and he heard Dooku moaning, a few last hard thrusts before he lay there, shuddering and gasping in Maglor's arms, Maglor rocking him, kissing the top of his head.

The hall was spinning. With the hand not covered in cum, Sören held onto the wall, shaking. He heard Maglor tell him, "Sören, come here."

Sören got up, almost falling over again, and staggered into the bedroom. Dooku, still resting in Maglor's arms, gave him an amused look when he walked in.

Sören approached the bed. Maglor took Sören's cum-soaked hand and started cleaning it with his tongue, sucking the fingers like he was sucking a cock, eyes burning Sören's. If Sören's orgasm had not been so intense moments ago he'd be hard again at that, and Maglor smiled knowingly as he let the fingers slip from his mouth, pressing a kiss into Sören's palm.

"So naughty."

Sören grinned. "I couldn't help it. You two..." He shuddered again. "*God*, it should be illegal to be that hot together." He stroked Dooku's face, and pet Maglor's hair. "And beautiful. It's good to see you two loving each other."

Maglor took Sören's hand again and kissed it, nuzzled it. He pushed Sören closer to them and rested his head against Sören's thigh for a moment. "I love both of you very much. This feels incredibly right." He looked up. "It scares the shit out of me. But it's right."

"You belong to us," Sören said, sitting down on the bed beside them, leaning down so he could hold both of them. He kissed Maglor's forehead and husked, "You belong with us."

—

After the three cuddled for awhile, Sören got up and finished what he was doing in the kitchen, making the salad, and decided to just go ahead and make the stuffed tomatoes as well. Eventually, Maglor and Dooku got up and got dressed again. Dooku decided it was time to start marinading the steak and fish for grilling, and he told Sören he'd handle the potatoes too, "so you can get some more cuddle time in with Macalaurë."

Sören and Maglor curled up together on the couch; Sören had brought his laptop with him and Maglor watched him play Stardew Valley.

"You're such a big kid," he said, tousling Sören's curls. "I missed that about you."

"You should play this."

Maglor snorted. "Not today."

When Maglor and Dooku were almost ready to head out to the yard to grill, Sören sauntered in to the kitchen to get a drink, and smiled at the sight of them working together side by side, standing close together, shoulders touching; Dooku gently nuzzled Maglor's neck as Sören walked in.

"You guys are so cute," Sören said, leaning against the wall, drinking from a small bottle of ginger ale.

Dooku raised an eyebrow. "We are not *cute* -"

Sören made the "OK" gesture with his hand. Then his eyes met Dooku's just before Dooku could return his focus to the steak, and he poked inside Dooku's mind.

Are you thinking what I'm thinking? He showed Dooku the mental image of a typical neighborhood in Akureyri, a row of brightly colored houses, a small yard where Maglor and Dooku were grilling outside as a little Corgi-sheepdog mix ran around, playing fetch with Sören.

Yes. But after dinner...?

That's fine. And Sören found himself getting choked up at the fantasy playing in his mind's eye - the *hope*. He didn't want to cry, not now, when they'd been having such a nice day. He needed a moment of levity.

"I like seeing you guys work in the kitchen," Sören said. Maglor glanced over to smile at him, and Sören said, "I've got my very own house Elf."

Maglor's eyes narrowed, and Sören's laughter rang out.

"Brat," Maglor said.

"Get back to work, house Elf. I haven't given you any clothing, so you're not free -"

Before Sören knew what was happening Maglor crossed the kitchen, and Sören let out a little squeak, put down his ginger ale, and started running through the house, Maglor chasing him. Sören made a few laps, finally stepping behind Dooku, giggling, "Hide me, Nico, help." Dooku's response was to push Sören forward, where Maglor immediately seized him, dragged him out to the living room - with Sören shrieking with laughter - and Maglor sat on an arm of the couch, pulling Sören over his knee, spanking him. Sören's laughter turned to moans, and he heard Maglor make a throaty growl, which just aroused him further.

Maglor pulled Sören up and they stood there, facing each other. Sören could see the heat in his eyes, his own body twinging with desire.

"You." Maglor gave Sören's ass one last playful swat.

Sören grinned, and stepped forward for a little kiss - or it was meant to be a little kiss, but quickly turned heated, Maglor grabbing Sören and kissing him deep and hard.

They pulled apart, panting, and Maglor shook his head. "I have to finish dinner."

"Yes you do, house Elf."

Maglor *growled* again. Sören crinkled his nose and bit his lower lip, and felt that surge of heat from Maglor. *You're not helping.*

I'm very helpful. Sören winked at him.

Sören played fetch with Auli in the yard as Maglor and Dooku grilled the steak and fish, and at last dinner was served. They took their time, enjoying everything, and Auli was allowed a small piece of unmarinated cooked steak as a treat, as Snúður had been given a small piece of plain cooked fish. Sören once again thought of his wish, feeling his heart race with anticipation of asking.

When the meal was over, after Sören did dishes, he joined Maglor and Dooku in the living room, the three of them drinking wine together. Sören's eyes met Dooku, and Dooku gave a small nod. *It's time.*

"Dinner was really nice," Sören said, swirling the wine around in his glass. "This weekend has been really nice, so far."

"It has." Maglor smiled.

"I, um." Sören looked back at Dooku, then at Maglor. "We..." He cleared his throat. "We know you're planning on staying in Akureyri after our neighbors come back, and Nico and I were thinking... instead of you finding a place, maybe it could be the three of us finding a place. You know. If you wanted to." Sören sipped his wine.

"The cabin is too small for three people," Dooku said, "but we could rent a house in Akureyri which would be big enough for the three of us, a cat and a dog."

"Like a 2-bedroom. We could share a room, a bed, and have a spare room set up for art, music..."

There was a long pause, with Maglor considering, and then he said, "I'd like that."

"Good. We can start looking at properties soon? Like maybe after my sister's wedding?" Sören's heart soared.

Maglor nodded. "We can."

Dooku smiled and reached over to Maglor to rub and squeeze his knee.

Maglor downed his wine. "But."

*Oh shit, why is there a "but".*Sören braced himself.

Maglor put his glass down, looked down, collecting his thoughts, and then he looked at Sören, at Dooku, and back to Sören again. "So... this is the part where I explain to you what me not running off looks like. What us being in this for the long haul really *means.*" He gestured to himself. "I don't age. My current set of IDs has my birthday in 1976. I can, right now, get away with passing for a young-looking, well-preserved forty-three. I will probably not be able to still get away with this claiming to be fifty, even though fifty is the

age when my people become legal adults."

Sören found himself laughing at that, even though he knew he shouldn't. "So I'm not even legal by your people's standards?"

"Well, you're a human so it's not the same standards at all, but thirties would be our equivalent of your teenage years, yes, I suppose. I try not to think about it."

A moment later Maglor went on. "Anyway... as I told you, I move around because of this. It used to be I could stay someplace ten or fifteen years without too much trouble, but after the 1970s and my run-in with the US government, I try not to stay someplace more than seven years. I have a set of handlers who are well-paid to forge documents and help me settle in to new parts of the world without too much trouble, so long as I have a little bit of an idea ahead of time where I'm going and what I can tolerate doing to pass the time - for example in Alaska, I was sole proprietor of an independent bookstore. The problem is that as time marches on and everything becomes more automated, society becomes more global, it becomes harder to disappear one place and resurface another. I took a risk coming back here - I usually don't retrace my steps. I have a fifty-year rule about visiting anyplace I've lived, so I'm not likely to be recognized. Apart from Alaska, returning to the States, this was the first time in fifty years that I broke that rule."

Sören swallowed hard. *Fifty years...*

"Yes, Sören." Maglor nodded solemnly. "So you need to understand, if we're doing this - if we're really doing this - then that house you want in Akureyri, we can live that life for another five, seven years, and then we have to move. You will never see Iceland again, Sören. I *know* how attached you are to this country. How you came back here, to your *home*, after everything had gone belly-up in London, and you let the land heal you." Maglor showed Sören the mental images he'd seen of Sören visiting the falls, the Dimmuborgir, taking walks, in the days before Dooku came out from London to try to fix things. "I will be taking all that away from you. To be honest, we may not even have five to seven years - you both will have to be prepared to go on a moment's notice, if things get hot, if on the odd chance one of the people I pay to trust decides to sell us out, or something else happens. Hopefully it won't come to pass. But that is what you are getting into, if I'm staying with you. We can't stay here forever, much as I'd like to."

Sören's eyes burned with tears, feeling like a piece of him was already being torn out. He loved this land of ice and fire, it was a part of him.

But so was Maglor.

"You are my home," Sören said.

Dooku nodded. "We will follow you to the ends of the earth, Macalaurë."

"You say that, but there's more." Maglor took a deep breath and tucked a lock of hair behind the point of his ear. "There's the matter of Sören's family. I'm not saying they can't ever know, but you need to understand that the more people who know, the more of a liability there is. And whether we do or don't tell them, the fact remains that when we leave and start over again elsewhere..." Maglor closed his eyes. "It's easier to make a clean break." He opened his eyes. "It's been getting harder and harder for me, as time goes on, knowing that if I get attached to people, think of them as friends, family... I inevitably have to leave them behind. And I say this as having been transient for the last millennia. I can't imagine how much harder it's going to be for you, when the time comes."

"So we can't... keep in contact... with my family... at all?" Sören felt like he couldn't breathe.

Maglor exhaled. "So this is the thing, Sören. I won't tell you no. It's *possible*, with burner phones, throwaway e-mails, arranging a visit in a location near enough to our new home yet far away enough to not send the proverbial dogs sniffing around. But it's risky. It's risky as hell. Especially with your brother being in close proximity to the Canadian and US governments with the scientific work he does. Even if you decide to take that risk, and we're fine... it's still going to hurt, for you to go from being so close-knit with them, to only being in sporadic contact with them at best. And them having to lie to keep up appearances for you, tell the world you're dead, missing, joined an ashram, what have you - they may not like doing that, that may strain things considerably."

Sören felt that wrench at his heart again. His hands were shaking.

Their eyes met. "It's a lot, I understand it's a lot, and unfortunately this too is part of the package of me staying. You have to decide if you think I'm worth it to lose everything you have right now, as you know it. This was why I left, not just because I didn't want to watch you die, but because I didn't want to force you to live like this and end up resenting me in ten, fifteen, twenty years."

Sören and Dooku looked at each other. Dooku's own eyes were too bright, and tears were quietly flowing down Sören's cheeks.

In his mind's eye, Sören saw Maglor walking along a shore, alone. Looking out to sea. So tired that the word "tired" didn't seem adequate for the exhaustion, surviving on all this time. He could feel the weight of years, the endless, bottomless ache -

"You are my home," Sören repeated, "and you are my family."

Dooku nodded, and put his arms around Maglor.

With a shuddery sigh, Maglor buried his face in Dooku's shoulder. Dooku began to pet his hair, and Sören watched Maglor shaking, weeping quiet tears. Sören came over to the couch, squeezing in on the other side of Maglor, holding him too. Maglor let out a sob, and Sören and Dooku began rocking him. Sören reached out for Dooku's free hand, the other hand continuing to stroke Maglor's hair, and their eyes met. Dooku was crying a little too, but Sören could feel the determination in him.

As long as I draw breath, you will never be alone again.

Snúður chirped, and came over, climbing up onto Sören's lap, and then he climbed onto Maglor. Maglor began to pet the cat, who purred loudly, and Auli came over and settled at his feet.

"You're stuck with us," Sören told him.

"I pray you will not hate me as time goes on." Maglor gave him a sad look.

"If I can keep in contact with my family at least sometimes, I think I'll manage. And I mean, I'll miss Iceland, but..." Sören remembered the trips they'd gone on - France, the Netherlands, Greece and Italy, Brazil. Their layovers in Northern Ireland, Portugal, Morocco... "We're going on an adventure."

Maglor started sobbing again. "Dammit, Sören."

Sören stroked his face, showed him the memory of Amsterdam in 2012, laying in a field under the huge, endless blue sky. The words Maglor had spoken to him, as they watched the clouds. *You help me see the world through new eyes. You give me back a sense of wonder I lost a long time ago.*

"All the places to see," Sören said. "All the places to paint."

He decided they needed another moment of levity. He got up and began to twirl around, singing

I can show you the world
Shining, shimmering, splendid
Tell me, princess, now when did
You last let your heart decide?

I can open your eyes
Take you wonder by wonder
Over sideways and under
On a magic carpet ride

A whole new world
A new fantastic point of view
No one to tell us "No"
Or where to go
Or say we're only dreaming

A whole new world
A dazzling place I never knew
But now from way up here
It's crystal clear
That now I'm in a whole new world with you

Maglor laughed and cried. "You fucking dork."

"You love it."

"Yes." Maglor smiled. "I do."

"You make a pretty Disney Princess."

Maglor threw a little couch pillow at him. Sören dodged, cackling.

"I thought he was a house Elf," Dooku said.

Maglor shot him a look and Dooku grinned, reaching out to pat Maglor's head.

"You..." Maglor grabbed Dooku, put him in a headlock, and gave him a noogie. Dooku's response was to tickle him, and the two wound up wrestling on the floor, tickling each other. Finally Sören dove and landed on top of them, and gave them both noogies. Snúður hopped down from the couch and climbed onto the heap on the floor, stretched out across all three of them like he owned them, kneading and purring.

"See, even the cat agrees," Sören said. "You belong with us."

_

Later, it began to rain and thunder outside. Dooku retreated to read and turn in for the night; Sören set up his canvas and paints, and he and Maglor made a nest in the living room, a pile of couch pillows spread with blankets in front of the fireplace so they could curl up on breaks, water and finger foods. It was like old times again, preparing for an all-nighter.

Maglor played his harp, occasionally making notes. It had been one thing for Sören to draw and paint to the sound of his guitar, but the harp was something else entirely - lush, celestial. It was the perfect instrument for bringing his vision of the exotic paradise to life, the three lovers laying there, the harp ringing out a paean of love blooming, that was mirrored in the story of the flowers unfolding, the radiant bliss that seemed to create the garden space around them.

It was close to three in the morning when they finally stopped to take a break, stretching out together on the pillows and blanket. Sören lay on his stomach and Maglor began to knead his shoulders and rub his back.

"Mmmmmm," Sören purred. "So nice..."

Maglor's hands slid up Sören's shirt, and Sören sat up to take his shirt off, smiling at the heat in Maglor's gaze as the eyes wandered to his pierced nipples. Sören lay back down and Maglor's fingers trailed over the phoenixes on his back.

"I love you." Maglor leaned down and began kissing them.

What had meant to be a tender, affectionate gesture turned sensual, and Sören moaned. Maglor moaned too, lips grazing Sören's spine. Sören found himself fumbling with his jeans, feverish to get the offending fabric off, desperate to be naked, be pleasured, share pleasure.

Maglor rolled him over and helped him undress, and quietly took his own clothes off. Then he rolled Sören back onto his stomach, continuing to massage him, caress him, until Sören was panting, trembling, and finally couldn't take it anymore, grabbing Maglor and shoving him back onto the pillows.

"Yes, love." Maglor reached up to stroke Sören's face, love in his eyes.

Sören used the Force to get the lube, which was casually placed near the finger foods, the two knowing their past history. He poured lube over Maglor's hard cock, and then he sank down, both of them gasping at that first moment of union.

Sören took Maglor's hands, and began to ride slowly. Time seemed to stop, as rain poured and thunder rolled outside, the two lost in each other, the slow, decadent silken heat. Maglor leaned up to kiss him, his mouth, neck, shoulders, chest, nipples, playing with the nipple rings. Sören pushed him back down on the pillows, kissing him again and again, Maglor's arms wrapped around him, thrusting into him harder, faster.

At long last Sören was bucking wildly atop him, grabbing onto him for dear life. They kept on that edge, ready to come, but not ready for it to end, needing each other, needing to be one flesh, one passion...

...and then it exploded, the two coming together, Sören taken into the fire, the light, the

dawn, weightless, endless.

I am yours and you are mine.

They lay there for awhile, and then Sören felt a water bottle being thrust at him. He drank. Maglor was wearing a robe, and Sören sat up. After sitting together, petting, they resumed their stations, Maglor continuing to work on his song, and Sören his painting. Sören was still naked, and didn't care.

The thunder stopped and it was just rain, and finally, after seven AM, they decided to call it a night. Sören wasn't done yet, but he'd managed to get the three of them laying on a blanket in a garden, and just needed the rest of the background and the sky. Maglor surveyed the painting.

"That's gorgeous," he said.

Sören smiled. "I have no idea where that is," he said. "Just... you know, saw it, and painted it."

"Well..." Maglor pointed to a bird perching on a rock. "I recognize the bird. That's a kookaburra."

"Oh. That's, um, an Australian bird, right?"

Maglor nodded. "Those flowers right there, those are waratahs. Also Australian."

"You ever live in Australia?"

"No, but I've visited a few times. It was one of the places I wanted to take you, when we were together, before."

"That's amazing, cos I swear I've never seen this bird or these plants before." Sören chuckled. "Looks like we might go on holiday." Except the word he almost said, and just-in-time stopped himself from saying, wasn't *holiday*. It was *honeymoon*.

The hair on the back of Sören's neck and arms stood on end, as he broke out in gooseflesh. He knew polygamy wasn't legal anywhere, but they could have some sort of spiritually binding commitment ceremony -

Whoa, you've been back together all of a few days and you're thinking about marriage?

Sören needed to quell the flood of emotions - now wasn't the right time to talk about that, when they'd just had one important conversation some hours ago. But *soon*. Sören got up, and pulled Maglor up with him.

They walked down the hall to where Dooku was sleeping. They took a moment to smile fondly at each other, the lovely picture of Dooku curled up and peaceful in his rest, and then they tiptoed over to the bed. Maglor let the robe slip to the floor, and Sören crawled on top of him, raining kisses over his face.

Sören found himself singing, waking Dooku up with the same song he'd woken him up with on New Year's Day 2018.

Sunday morning rain is falling
Steal some covers share some skin

Clouds are shrouding us in moments unforgettable
You twist to fit the mold that I am in
But things just get so crazy living life gets hard to do
And I would gladly hit the road get up and go if I knew
That someday it would lead me back to you
That someday it would lead me back to you

That may be all I need
In darkness he is all I see
Come and rest your bones with me
Driving slow on Sunday morning
And I never want to leave

Sören's fingers traced Dooku's smile, eyes opening; Sören's fingers trailed lower, playing through his chest hair.

Fingers trace your every outline
Paint a picture with my hands
Back and forth we sway like branches in a storm
Change the weather still together when it ends

Maglor joined him for the chorus.

That may be all I need
In darkness he is all I see
Come and rest your bones with me
Driving slow on Sunday morning
And I never want to leave

Dooku reached out to take Maglor and Sören's hands, kissing each of them in turn. He sighed deeply as they began kissing, licking, and caressing him all over, worshiping him. He moaned as Sören sucked him, and Maglor came up to kiss him, stroking his face, whispering his love between kisses. Sören was open and ready from the lovemaking earlier, and he climbed onto Dooku's cock, with Maglor getting behind him, pushing in, so both Maglor and Dooku were inside him, cocks rubbing together as Sören rode slowly.

Dooku lay there, enjoying the sight of Maglor tilting Sören's face so they could kiss, Sören reaching up to wrap his arms around Maglor with Maglor's hands roaming over him, playing with the nipple rings and Sören's cock, kissing and licking his neck. They leaned down and Sören kissed him, Maglor leaned over Sören's shoulder to kiss Dooku as well. Dooku pet them, and Sören pet his face, his whiskers, nuzzling him.

"I want to do this every day," Sören breathed. "I can't get enough of either of you."

Dooku's response was to kiss Sören's neck, making him cry out and buck his hips.

They kept the pace slow as long as possible, moans and sighs filling the room. The moans and sighs became cries and shouts when they could no longer hold back and Sören rode hard, Maglor gripping Sören's hips and driving into him harder, rubbing against Dooku faster. The three came together, screaming, and Sören had a full-body orgasm, even his nipples were throbbing as his cock spilled and spilled all over Dooku, his passage twitching around the two cocks shooting inside him, toes and fingers curling.

The sound of thunder woke him up; Sören actually squeaked, and Maglor couldn't help laughing at it. Maglor was laying to their side now, and Sören gave him a playful swat.

Dooku laughed, and pulled Maglor against him, holding both his lovers against his chest, rocking them, petting them. "My boys."

Maglor leaned up and gave him a look. "Who are you calling a boy, *boy*?"

Sören snorted.

"Kids these days," Maglor muttered, and Sören howled.

—

It rained most of the day, and Maglor and Sören spent most of the day in bed, sleeping. They were finally woken up by Auli bounding on the bed, shaking his wet fur, as a rained-on Dooku stood in the doorway with an evil grin.

Sören threw a pillow at Dooku.

"Thank you for walking Auli." Maglor sat up and rubbed his face, and looked at the clock. It was almost four PM. "Shit, I didn't mean to sleep so late."

"You clearly needed it." Dooku nodded. "I couldn't help but take a look at the painting in the living room, Sören. I know it's not done yet but it is lovely. Some of your finest work."

"The song Maglor was playing last night, as I painted it." Sören sighed. "That was some of *his* finest work."

Maglor felt a little warm glow of pride at that. It felt good to be playing the harp again. He still felt rusty at it, as it had been quite awhile, but it nonetheless felt *right*. It felt like he was getting some of his old self back.

They opted to go out to eat, though Sören still needed some time to wake up. Around five, they headed out to Serrano, but Sören wanted to stop at the cabin first.

"I need to pick up something," Sören explained.

He did that, and they headed on, driving in the rain. There weren't many people at the restaurant on a day like this, which was just as well, and it ensured fast service. Sören, as usual, wanted the hottest salsa they had available, and it still wasn't as hot as he would like it.

"I normally don't mind rain but I hope it lets up soon so we're not stuck in the rain when we're looking at houses," Sören said, "and I don't want it to rain for my sister's wedding." Sören snickered. "Rain is the worst thing for all the makeup people will be wearing."

"God." Maglor laughed. "I'm almost afraid."

"Same here," Dooku said.

"Please tell me you, of all people, are not going to be wearing something ridiculous for the 80s theme."

"I'm wearing a suit and tie," Dooku said. "I can invoke Robert Palmer and get away with

it."

Sören howled and clapped. "You need to do Robert Palmer for karaoke."

"I do not."

"Yes. *You do.*"

Dooku glared. Sören glared back, then he made the puppy dog face.

"Oh goddammit, Sören." Dooku shoved a salsa-loaded tortilla chip in Sören's mouth.

Maglor couldn't resist. "He's simply irresistible."

Dooku kicked Maglor under the table. "You know..."

Sören chimed in with, "You might as well face it, you're addicted to love."

"I am so done."

Sören grinned. "Hi So Done -"

Dooku facepalmed. Then, shaking with laughter, he said to Maglor, "You gave us the speech about what it would mean to be with you... but I think you're the one who needs to be cautioned about..." He gestured to Sören. "This."

"This what?" Sören made an innocent face, then he crinkled his nose and bit his lower lip.

Maglor growled. He spoke into Sören's mind. *You make me want to take you on the table when you do that, Sören.*

"I didn't mean to turn you on," Sören said.

Dooku's murder face made Maglor laugh out loud. Dooku laughed too, rolling his eyes.

"Stop with the Robert Palmer songs," Dooku said, shaking his finger at Sören, who kissed it.

"Oh, mercy mercy me..."

"I am going to take you over my knee."

"Hi Going To Take You Over My Knee -"

Maglor reached across the table and patted Dooku. "Sören's a brat, but he's our brat."

"He is." Dooku glared at Sören, and then smiled. Sören kissed the tip of his nose. "He seems to really enjoy getting a rise out of me that much more, though. He acts sometimes like I'm his brother."

Sören stuck his tongue out at Dooku, as if to prove his point.

Then he turned to Maglor and said, "I do need to make up for some lost time here, so..." Sören reached below the table, presumably into his pocket. "The thing I got from the cabin." He pulled out what looked like a sock, but the dimensions suggested it fit

somewhere other than a foot. Dooku cringed and groaned at the sight of it. "I give you your freedom, house Elf."

Maglor kicked Sören under the table. "You're not just a brat, you are the worst brat."

"It gets even worse," Dooku said. "That's a Willy Warmer."

"That's not just *a* Willy Warmer, that's *the* Willy Warmer that I proposed to Nico with." Sören grinned. "I didn't have a ring."

"You..." Maglor wheezed. "You... proposed to him... with that..."

Sören nodded.

"He did," Dooku said, "and I accepted."

Sören cleared his throat, and then he climbed out from his chair and got down on his knees beside Maglor. "We know you can't get married to us legally, because polygamy, but when Nico and I have our first wedding anniversary in September... we could renew our vows, and include you. Or maybe choose a different date to do it. So we'd be married in spirit, the three of us."

Maglor took Sören's hands and kissed them, tears coming to his eyes. *My ridiculous, magnificent boy.* "Yes." He drew Sören up for a hug, holding him tight, rocking him. "A thousand times yes."

Sören sat back down. He and Maglor worked on the remaining basket of tortilla chips and salsa together. "Did you eventually get a proper engagement ring?" Maglor was curious.

"No," Sören said. "We have wedding rings - " He flashed the white gold band on his left hand. "But we didn't have engagement rings. I thought about it, but everyone wants white diamonds, and..." Sören looked at Dooku, stroked his face, adoration in his eyes. "That seemed so *ordinary* for the man I love. My taste is too expensive, I guess, because..." Sören took Dooku's hand and kissed it. "I would have wanted blue diamonds for you, Nico. You are my blue diamond."

Maglor almost choked.

He broke out into gooseflesh, feeling like a lightning bolt had hit his spine. His eyes teared up, and it wasn't from the salsa. There was a deafening roar in his head.

"Are you all right?" Dooku asked, looking concerned.

Maglor nodded. "Yeah, will you excuse me? I'm gonna run to the restroom, splash some cold water on my face. Too much fire." *Too much* fire.

Inside the restroom, his hands shook as he turned on the faucet. He leaned over the sink and looked into the mirror, breathing hard. It was as if someone had turned on a light switch in his head, and it was all too clear now. Sören's words to Dooku just now... *My blue diamond.*

Maglor shuddered. *It's not simply that they're* like *Fëanor and Fingolfin. They* are *Fëanor and Fingolfin.*

It didn't seem probable, for an Elf to be reborn as a mortal. But it had been right there in

front of him all along, screaming, and he had been so utterly lost in his lack of hope, the despair of the Doom, that he had been pushing away all the clues, all the coincidences that weren't coincidences really, not wanting to see it, let alone believe it. Not even when he'd seen Sören's painting at the studio, "The Once and Future King", with Dooku at the Dimmuborgir, winter sunset, fur-lined cape blowing in the wind, looking regal, bearing Fingolfin's own shield.

It couldn't be unseen, now. They were here.

He started to cry. He could hear Ingwion's words from a few days ago.*It is as if your fire has been fed by another fire. Macalaurë, why do you not see what is so plainly in front of you?*

–

Dooku drove them back; Maglor was too shaken to drive, though he wouldn't admit to it.

Dooku took a detour to the Goðafoss. It was still raining, but it made for a nice drive in the rain. Maglor sat in the back seat with Sören snuggled up on him, stroking his curls. Sören looked half-asleep, the long lashes framing his cheeks, full lips slightly parted.

Gods, you are beautiful, Sören. His father and uncle were exquisite as Elves, and had been reborn into the two most delicious human Men he'd ever seen. He couldn't get enough of them then, and he couldn't get enough of them now.

He thought about telling them, but something in him cautioned to wait. Even if that voice inside him hadn't, he didn't even know what he would or could say. Unlike being an Elf, he had no actual proof. And he was still stunned, beyond words.

Depeche Mode played softly in the background.

Vows are spoken
To be broken
Feelings are intense
Words are trivial
Pleasures remain
So does the pain
Words are meaningless
And forgettable

All I ever wanted
All I ever needed
Is here in my arms

Sören stirred when they got to the falls. He got out of the car, even though it was raining, and splashed around in puddles like a big kid. Laughing. Radiant. He had been through so much, and still found great joy in the smallest things. *My father, reincarnated as a millennial.* It had been that same fire in Fëanor, the clean, burning light of his spirit, the lust for life, living out loud, living so fully, the refusal to *break*. It had driven Melkor to obsession, wanting to break him.

Sören got back in the car, now wet, and shook his curls on Maglor like Auli had shaken his fur at them earlier.

"Brat."

"I love you too." Sören kissed his nose.

The three of them curled up together watching *Metalocalypse* when they got back. The weekend had gone by too fast.

The rest of their lives will go by too fast. I will have to watch them die, all over again. Maglor tried not to cry. He wondered if this was part of the Doom - for the Valar to play with him by holding out that glimmer of hope, just to snatch it away again.

He had sworn to Sören that he wouldn't run, and, as much as it*would* hurt to lose them all over again, in the end, they were here with him now. And he *hungered*.

He grabbed Sören's curls, kissed him roughly, and then he kissed Dooku, hard and deep. Guided their hands to his hardness.

They quickly undressed, and re-assembled back on the bed. Sensing his need, Sören and Dooku pinned him down and kissed and licked him all over, making him writhe, making him beg for release, but something in the way he begged brought out the mischief in both of them, and Maglor watched as Sören found a scarf and tied his wrists to the bed.

"Tell me to stop and I will," Sören said.

Maglor thrust up against him, desperate. "I *need.*"

Sören took him, with Dooku taking Sören from behind. He watched them kiss, taking each other's hands. It was like watching Fëanor and Fingolfin all over again.

"Oh, you feel good." Sören shuddered. "Both of you. So good."

Dooku kissed and licked Sören's neck, nibbled, and then he seized a fistful of Sören's curls. "Fuck him the way I'm fucking you."

Sören did, speeding up a little. Soon he was pounding Maglor into the mattress, as Dooku drove into Sören with abandon. Sören leaned in to kiss Maglor again and again, leaned down to kiss his neck, his nipples, reached to play with his cock. Maglor heard himself moaning, crying out, hips rocking against Sören's, completely lost in pleasure, in desire. Being bound like this, being *his*, made it even more intense, fully surrendering. *Yes, I belong to you. I was made for you.*

"That's it," Sören husked, between kisses at his neck. "Sing for us, love."

"*Ada.*" It slipped out. He was glad Sören didn't understand Elvish.

"Mmmmm." Sören claimed his mouth, kissing him deep. "My singer. My Song. The song of my soul..."

"Ada..." Maglor arched to kiss him again, rocking against him harder. "Ada, Ada..."

Sören was fucking him hard now - Maglor had almost forgotten what a beast Sören could be when he topped, and he loved it. He needed this. The Prince Albert piercing in Sören's cock rubbed him just the right way, and he was right there right there *right there* but he never wanted this to end...

"That's it. Give in to this, you need this..." Sören kissed along his jaw. "You deserve this, our love, we love you so much..."

"Oh gods..." He was ready to explode. He closed his eyes, the light in the room too bright, almost like Sören himself was glowing, or making his own glow more intense. "Hells..."

"Come for us."

Maglor let out a wordless scream that ripped through him, coming so hard it almost hurt, his orgasm intensified as he watched Sören painted with his seed, the look of *satisfaction* on Sören's face at it, followed by the look of awe, wonder, ecstasy, the brilliance in his eyes, pupils blown as Sören started spending into him.

"Oh, *fuck*..." Sören cried out, collapsing onto him, shuddering. "Macalaurë, Nico, I love you..."

Dooku groaned, and was shaking now as well, with Sören letting out a contented "mmm", presumably at the feeling of Dooku coming inside him.

Maglor felt another throbbing pulse of his orgasm, and held back the cry of*Fëanor!*

At some point Sören untied him, and Maglor lay there between them, feeling like he was melting. It had just been the one round, the one climax, but it was so shattering it felt like he had come ten times. He was starting to drift off.

But before sleep could claim him, one last thought washed over his consciousness.

I have to talk to Ingwion about this.

Chapter 34

Monday

A few minutes before the alarm went off, Maglor woke up. One side of the bed was empty - he heard Dooku moving around in the kitchen, listening to classical music. Sören was tangled in his arms, and Maglor's breath caught looking at him. He already had loved Sören beyond words without knowing who he truly was, but now...

*And even with all he has endured, he is still so clearly, brightly*himself. *The darkness of the world could not quench his fire.* He felt like a fool for not seeing it sooner.

It was also a testament to how truly magnificent he was, that even in a mortal form, Fëanor was this much himself. And though the tragedies of Sören's life were heartbreaking, his vulnerability made him all the more lovable this time around. He had often thought of his father as being like a large, predatory cat, and had once - before he knew what Sören was *or rather, knew somehow all along and just refused to see it* - thought that Sören was like him but as a soft, fuzzy, playful, adorable kitten. He didn't think, once upon a time, he could love his father any more than he did, but now... he did. Very much. Maglor's arms tightened around Sören, never wanting to let go.

Sören's eyes fluttered open. He blinked and then he squinted at the light, whining a little as he buried his face in Maglor's shoulder. "Dun wanna waaaake uuuuup."

Maglor laughed and patted him. "I know."

"Nuuuuuuu. I haaaaate mornings..."

Maglor pressed a kiss to Sören's forehead and rocked him a little. "We have to get up, though, and go to the studio for our classes."

"Fuuuuuuck." Sören made a whining sound. He picked his head up from Maglor's shoulder and pouted. "I wish we could stay in bed all day."

Maglor stroked Sören's face. "I wish we could too." *I could stay in bed with you for an eternity.* He sighed.

Snúður hopped up on the bed, and walked over to Sören, tail high in the air in greeting. He gave Sören a headbutt and flomped onto him, kneading loudly, purring. Sören rubbed his nose in the cat's fur and began skritching him, talking baby talk in Icelandic. Across their bond, Maglor could feel the intensity of love Sören had for the cat, and that was just a cat. He loved so *much*, so deeply.

Maglor pet Sören's curls with his bad hand. "Have I told you lately how precious you are to me?"

Sören took Maglor's hand and kissed it, love shining in his dark eyes. "I never get tired of hearing it." He put his head against Maglor's hand, bowing his head and closing his eyes almost reverently. "You're precious to me too."

Overcome with emotion, Maglor took Sören's face in his hands and kissed him hard and hungrily; the moan Sören made into the kiss, thrusting up against him, made Maglor's

cock stir. He glanced at the clock again and reluctantly broke the kiss.

"We had better start getting ready or we'll never leave this bed." He patted Sören, and quickly climbed out of the bed, cursing under his breath.

They got washed up and changed, and met Dooku in the kitchen for coffee and breakfast. Maglor put his arms around the seated Dooku and kissed the top of his head, before taking a seat. Dooku reached for his hand under the table and squeezed. That did nothing to calm Maglor's libido, and he glowered into his coffee.

"You look like how I feel," Sören said, shoveling scrambled eggs into his mouth.

"Do we have an agenda for this evening?" Dooku asked, sipping his coffee. "Here? The cabin?"

"We might as well just leave the cat and dog here since they're here," Sören said. "I can bring back more cat food from the cabin. And we should get a jump on looking at places." He looked at Maglor. "After classes?"

Maglor leaned back in his chair and figured out how to word this without causing suspicion or alarm. "I have something I need to take care of after classes so I'll drop you off here, and then I'll be back in the early evening."

"So, what are your plans for the day?" Sören asked Dooku, when breakfast was finished and he collected the dishes, planting a kiss on Dooku's forehead.

"Writing, laundry, and I'll hit the gym for a bit."

"Mmmmm," Sören said; he crinkled his nose and bit his lower lip.

The thought of Dooku at the gym, getting all sweaty, and Sören doing*that thing* with his face was making it worse; Maglor felt ready to climb the walls. He *really* did not want to deal with Ingwion later if he was still like this, feeling like he was in heat, but he needed to talk to him as soon as possible - if he didn't have his guitar classes he'd be meeting with Ingwion right now.

Maglor made a thermos of iced coffee for Sören, who gave him a little kiss once he took the thermos in the car, and just a sweet, innocent little peck made the ache even stronger. It took him every ounce of his restraint to not pull over, drag Sören out of the car, and take him in the grass.

Sören had his window rolled down, curls stirring in the breeze. He was watching the landscape with a look of longing in his eyes, and Maglor knew exactly what he was thinking - *I better take it all in while I can.*Five to seven years could fly by for a mortal, as well. Maglor sighed, wishing he didn't have to force Sören away from his home.

Sören finally turned back to Maglor and said, "So, uh, feel free to tell me if this is none of my business, but what are you doing after classes where I can't come with you?" He raised an eyebrow.

Maglor decided to be honest - to a point. "I need to have a talk with Ingwion."

"I see." Sören nodded. His gaze challenged Maglor's. "Are you finally gonna apologize for being a dick to him?" He sipped his coffee.

Maglor's jaw set and he bristled. "Sören..."

"Look." Sören glared. "I'm not saying you guys have to be best friends and sit around a bonfire singing Kumbaya -"

You would be that bonfire, Fëanor.

" - but is it really necessary to be like, you know..." Sören gestured. "This."

"Sören, you weren't there. You don't know -"

"This is what I know. He gave you back your will to survive, and eventually, after a long time alone, in pain, things did finally get better, at least a little, I hope? You found me and Nico. You can have some happiness with us at least for awhile. And Ingwion? He told me to go to London, in 2015, and he confirmed when we were together last week that he told me to go there *for a reason*, that reason being so I could find Nico. And my best friend Frankie, too - did you know she's distantly related to me?"

"Hm."

Sören nodded. "Dag was doing research on our family tree and found her Icelandic great-great grandfather. Anyway, I don't think Ingwion sent me to London just to help me, but he knew your path was going to cross with ours, eventually, that you needed both me and Nico in your life."

"What else did he tell you?" Maglor was certain that Sören had not been told who he really was, but he was curious if any hints had been dropped.

"He has at least one of my paintings in his flat in Kensington and he, well... he looks exactly like how I painted him. He told me he's the Norse god Freyr. So he gave me a talk about how I can see things and need to trust that more than I do." Sören's eyes narrowed. "You know what I see, right now? You're related to him, aren't you?"

"Sort of. He's the nephew of my father's stepmother, Indis – the cousin of my uncles Fingolfin and Finarfin - and the brother of my uncle Fingolfin's wife, Anairë." *Eyes like Fingolfin, and bearing a strong resemblance to Finarfin.*

"You hate him not just because he saved your life, but he reminded you of the family you lost -"

"*Enough.*"

Sören smiled, like a hungry wolf. "I'm just saying, Maglor. What would your father say if he was here right now? Do you think he'd approve of you treating Ingwion like shit, when Ingwion has been trying to look out for you?"

"Do. Not. Do *not*."

They did not speak a single word to each other for the rest of the trip to the studio. Sören *slammed* the door to the Jaguar when he got out, his face murderous.

That didn't help Maglor's libido at all. He thought about Sören's nails and teeth in him, the very, very few times he and Sören had argued, years back, and had makeup sex.

Maglor got through his first guitar class - just a month had transformed his students into competent musicians, and he was proud of them. Despite his initial reluctance to teach

the class at all, he melted a little with happiness when he told the class he'd be staying on as a permanent instructor at least the next few years, and his students applauded and cheered.

The class put him in somewhat better spirits when it was time for the break between classes. Sören was listening to angry rap music, furiously cleaning the art room. Maglor paused outside the door.

"Hey," he said, finally.

Sören whirled around and glowered.

"I came to make peace," Maglor said. "Let's go into town and I'll buy you lunch, OK?"

They didn't talk on the way there, and didn't talk until Sören was halfway finished with his sandwich. Finally Sören broke the silence. "I suppose this is a bit personal for me," he said.

Maglor waited.

Sören went on. "Yes, I love Ingwion - not like I love you, but there's still feelings there, and whenever I love anyone, even just a little... well, the saying 'go big or go home' applies here. It's always intense. So when I love someone, anyone, I feel a bit protective of them."

Yes, Sören was so Fëanor it *hurt.*

“And he may be a god, but I mean, if you stab him, he still bleeds.” Sören put a hand on his heart. “It bothers me that you hate him. And it hits a little too close to home because... Margrét tried to kill herself in 2007. I found her and did CPR and called the paramedics. Broke her sternum and ribs doing CPR too, it's never as fucking clean as it looks in the movies and on TV. Anyway, she was *pissed* at me for a looooonnng time, not for breaking her bones, but for saving her life, period. Even though she got her diagnosis and started transitioning from male to female, and things got better for her, it still took her over a year to completely stop being angry with me for saving her life, and I was living with her and bearing the brunt of her attitude and it was really tense. Like god forbid I give a shit about my own blood and don't want to see you dead, Margrét, and especially don't want to see you fucking go out like *that*, committing suicide because of people's shitty transphobia, wanting to hurt you and see you break. But as much as I didn't understand it at the time, she explained years later, when she was thinking rationally again, that she'd felt like all her hope was gone and there was no more point to living, so being forced to keep living made her angry, and it wasn't until she started to get her hope back and feel OK with life again that she stopped being angry. I know it's not quite the same situation for you because you're not trans and the mortal lifespan is much shorter, she hasn't lived with the buildup of hopelessness and despair that you've had for thousands of years, but... it still reminds me a lot of the situation and how much it hurt when things were tense and weird with me and my sister."

Maglor sighed.

"You know what's really strange?" Sören raised an eyebrow. "She looks like a female version of you, the more I think about it. It's almost like *we're* related...” Sören snickered and nudged him, attempting a wink that was more of a clumsy blink.

"Yes, that is strange." Maglor thought of his aunt Findis, his harp teacher, and Margrét's

musical inclinations; he thought of the painting Sören had done of his best friend Frankie, looking like his aunt Írimë the shieldmaiden, and the way Frankie had threatened him, and the legend of how she'd beaten up Justin Roberts. He could feel the wheels spinning in his head, the beginning of making a connection.

"Anyway," Sören said, "like I said earlier, I don't expect you and Ingwion to be the best of friends, but if you can't bring yourself to stop being angry with him, please at least consider that *for me*, it's awkward if my partners don't get along. It makes me feel like I'm trapped in the middle, it makes me feel torn... I don't like that."

Maglor looked away. Sören compelled his gaze... and then he made the sad puppy dog face.

"Sören." Maglor took a deep breath. "My history with Ingwion is a little more complex than the very condensed version of events that you know about. I can promise you I won't make a scene at the wedding, if you're worried about that, but as far as anything else... a lot of how I proceed from here is going to depend on how my discussion with Ingwion goes."

"You better not be asking him to not see me anymore."

Maglor cringed; he'd already asked that and of course Ingwion had refused. "He and I are discussing something else."

"Something I can't know about."

"Not until I know more about the situation and how best to proceed. I'm sorry that's so cryptic." Every nerve in Maglor's body was shrieking to tell Sören who and what he was, but there was also a strong voice of caution, to *wait*, because this was a delicate procedure and could go very badly.

Sören pinched the bridge of his nose, exhaled sharply, and nodded.

–

Maglor did not call Ingwion ahead of time. He felt for where Ingwion was, and drove there, after he dropped Sören off.

Ingwion was at the bay. Nobody else was around; he saw Maglor approaching but did not acknowledge him until Maglor was a meter away.

"You haven't come to pay a mere social call," Ingwion said.

"No." Maglor folded his arms. "You know that Sören is Fëanor and Nicolae is Fingolfin."

"You've finally seen it. It took you long enough, Macalaurë."

"How was I supposed to see it? Elves do not habitually reincarnate as Men, do they?"

“And yet, you know one did, before.”

Maglor knew Ingwion was referring to Edith Tolkien, who had once been Lúthien Tinúviel, as Ronald Tolkien himself had been Beren. Maglor exhaled sharply. “I thought that was a rare, one-in-a-million occurrence.”

“It is still rare enough. But much of your House has been reborn as mortal.”

“Who else?”

"Margrét is Findis and Frankie is Írimë... and Dagnýr is Finrod."

"Cousin *Finrod?* What in the Hells... *the Valar pardoned him*."

"They did, and then sometime later they cast him out, because he refused to accept what the Valar had done to his family when he had committed the same 'crimes'."

Maglor buried his face in his hands and made a noise of grief. Finrod, who had always been kind to him, had been renowned as the most noble and legendary of the House of Finwë... even he was damned.

It seemed strange for Fëanor and Finrod to have such a close, supportive, loving relationship this time around. Sensing Maglor's bemusement, Ingwion nodded. "Yes, he gets to be the twin brother of the same uncle he bitterly opposed - on some subconscious level he feels guilty, knowing Fëanor was right, and now he is his brother's keeper."

“Anyone else?”

“Finarfin.” Maglor's heart leapt at the name, but before he could inquire further, Ingwion said, “No, you have not met him. ...Yet.”

“Will he be at the wedding?”

“No.” Ingwion looked out to the sea. “When I sent Sören to London, it wasn't just to find Dooku and Frankie. His path was supposed to cross with Finarfin's as well. There was interference. And no, I am not telling you his mortal identity, or where he is now. I have observed that sometimes when you go to look for something, the steps you take to find it are the exact same steps that cause you to lose it. And sometimes, when you try to avoid something, the steps you take to avoid it are the exact same steps that cause you to find it.” Ingwion gave a cryptic little smile. “His path will eventually reconnect with yours again, I'm sure.”

Maglor sat down, shaking. Ingwion sat beside him.

Maglor began to have flashbacks of his father, ambushed by Balrogs. Burning up. He thought of how narrowly Sören had escaped death, more than once. Maglor felt like he couldn't breathe. He felt like he was going to be sick. He was starting to *keen*. At last he seized Ingwion's shoulders, feeling the wild desperation on his face, aware he looked like he had gone mad. "Fëanor is going to die again. Not the same way, but he is *mortal*. He is a Man now. He will die, somehow, someday. We have been reunited just for me to watch him die all over again. He and Nicolae both. This is part of the Doom.”

Ingwion rocked him, stroked his hair. Maglor did not refuse the touch. "That is why I am here."

"Is he going to die *now?* Did you take me here to find closure with him before...?" Maglor couldn't finish the sentence. He thought of Sören's mother's and father's graves in Akureyri - at thirty-four, Sören was older now than they were when they died, but... Another sob choked out of him.

“No,” Ingwion said. He put his fingers in his mouth and whistled, and in a flash of light, a wild boar appeared, looking as if it had been forged of gold, gleaming in the sun. Maglor

gasped, and he was glad nobody else was around to see. The boar came over, sniffing, and sat, allowing himself to be pet. Maglor couldn't believe it, as he touched the golden boar that had appeared out of nowhere. It was solid. Flesh. Real. “This is Gullinbursti, my boar. Once, a long time ago, when I was hunting, I had unknowingly brought down a mother boar where the runt of her litter was still hanging about. So I took care of him. I made him immortal.”

“You... what.”

Ingwion nodded. “I told you, I became a god. A god's blood flows through my veins. My blood is power. My blood can give eternal life.”

Maglor thought of the pain he'd seen in Sören's eyes when he told him what he could expect over the coming decades, with having to move, limit his contact with his family, understand all other attachments would not be permanent. Sören had agreed, but of course he would say that before a taste of that life, and he worried that Sören would still come to resent him in ten years. To bind Sören to that life for thousands of years as he had been bound... to watch Sören turn from the seductively innocent, happy-go-lucky laughing free spirit who gave him life, to something bitter and burned out... "I will not allow it."

Ingwion snapped his fingers and the boar went off in another flash of light. "*It is not for you to allow.* It is *his* life, and *his* decision. It is Dooku's decision as well, as I will make the same offer to him. And the alternative is that yes, you will watch Sören and Dooku both die... you will watch Fëanor and Fingolfin die all over again. Do you *truly* want that? You have been miserable wandering all this time because *you have been alone*. You will never be alone again, *if* they accept the offer I intend to give them."

"They do not even know that they were immortal Elves once upon a time, to begin with. I did not tell them, when I learned of it. I thought to speak with you first, about how to proceed."

"Carefully." Ingwion nodded. "It would be better to show than tell. He can find ways to rationalize away something he is told by someone else... he can mistrust something you tell him, since you lied to him before..."

Maglor wanted to backhand him for bringing that up again, but he restrained himself, knowing Ingwion was right, and he *hated* that Ingwion was right, *hated* that he had lied to Sören years ago about why he was leaving. Then he realized it was no small irony that he had told Sören he was leaving because of an arranged marriage he couldn't get out of, and he had refused Fëanor, after years of willingly, passionately laying with him, to marry a woman he did not love because of the Laws. Fëanor died before he could make things right. Sören might not consciously know who and what he was, right now, but Maglor couldn't help but feel that on a subconscious level he sensed the ancient grief of rejection and it contributed to his breakdown in 2014-2015 and again in 2018.

He was going to have to answer for that, when Sören learned the truth of what he was.

"Shown?" Maglor was genuinely confused. “Are you bringing him to the Portals?”

"No." *Not yet.* "Someone else is going to show him what he is."

"Someone..."

"Olórin."

Maglor's jaw dropped. He knew that Olórin was still around, of course, though he had not seen him since... before World War II, at least. "Olórin is a Maia. He serves the Valar -"

"He does not serve them anymore. He saw what was done to your family – the way the Valar arranged for various sorts of trauma and tragedy to happen to them once they were reborn. He would not stand for it."

Maglor began to weep.. He rolled onto his side, laying on the ground in grief and anguish, almost screaming in the raw pain he was in. He knew that it was likely someone could hear him in the distance and he was creating enough of a scene to alarm someone enough to bring one of Akureyri's five police officers out to see what was going on, and he probably needed to get a hold of himself but it *hurt.* "It hurts too much."

"I know, my dear. It hurts me too."

Ingwion pulled Maglor back into a sitting position, this time with Maglor's back against his chest, his arms around him. "Sören and Dooku will know everything before the week is over. There is even more to this story where the gods are concerned, and it is quite bad, but you have seen enough for now. You should go home to your father and uncle, before it gets much later."

Ingwion held him a few moments longer, and then he took Maglor's hands and pulled him to his feet. They stood there for a minute looking at each other and then Ingwion kissed him. "It will be all right, Macalaurë."

"I am not sure that condemning Sören and Nicolae to thousands of years of*this* is all right."

"Would you tire of them?" Ingwion raised an eyebrow.

And Maglor remembered this morning, holding Sören in his arms...

"I wish we could stay in bed all day."

"I wish we could too." Thinking, unspoken, I could stay in bed with you for an eternity.

Maglor shuddered, thinking about having all the time in the world to make up for all the lost time with Fëanor and Fingolfin...

Ingwion sensed the frisson down Maglor's spine and kissed him again. "Go home."

–

Dooku was out when Sören got back from his classes, presumably at the gym. Sören felt antsy, a lot of energy built up that needed a release somehow, but he wasn't yet ready to resume work on his painting, and his mind couldn't quite settle on another project. He played Stardew Valley, with the cat and dog curled up on either side of him, and as he harvested his crops his gaze kept straying across the room to where Maglor's harp stood, and nearby lay Dooku's rapier and Maglor's sword, both sheathed. Sören still couldn't believe Maglor's harp was from the Second Age and his sword was made by Fëanor himself. It seemed unreal that objects could be that well-preserved for that long, though even from a distance Sören could tell the craftsmanship was very fine.

His curiosity finally got the better of him, and he put his laptop down, got up from the

couch, and wandered across the room. He ran his fingers over the ornate scrollwork across the top of Maglor's harp, admiring the detail of leaves and flowers. He remembered the day he looked up Maglor on the Internet.

Maglor is a Sindarin rendering of his Quenya mother name Makalaurë (or Macalaurë), which means "Gold-cleaver" — alluding to his skill with the harp, and possibly the power of his voice.

In his mind's eye Sören saw Maglor playing in a garden, watched the flowers open to his harp, his voice, golden roses, golden light streaming from the roses. Silver-blue eyes watching him intently - eyes like blue diamonds - and then as suddenly as the vision came on, it went away.

Interesting. Sören wondered about it, not entirely sure what to make of it.

He knelt before the sheathed swords, and, without thinking about it, just feeling, he pulled Maglor's sword out of his sheath. It seemed almost too heavy to hold, for an instant, and then it lightened, and warmed in his hands. Sören stared into the jewel set in the flaming star on the hilt - a jewel that he had never seen before, like an opal but with many more colors, much more flash. He ran his fingers over it.

Another vision came over him. This time he was standing in a forge, the heat overpowering. He was hammering the steel of a sword, seeing visions within the vision - the sword cutting down Orcs, and a being made of smoke and fire. Hammering, hammering, fury, frenzy, *live, survive, defend your blood*with each strike upon the anvil, *willing* it into the steel like an enchantment.

The fire grew hotter, almost unbearable, as the litany became a roar, like a thousand voices as one voice, but wordless, and the vision broke.

Sören was breathing hard, and he had broken into a sweat. He put the sword down, and then, quickly, back in its sheath. His hands were shaking, and for a split second it seemed like they were glowing.

What in the fuck.

Sören wondered if he'd had a vision of Maglor's father, or if he'd had a vision of a past life of his own, working in a forge somewhere, perhaps in ancient Viking days when people believed in magic and made things like spellswords. It was very curious, very *strange*.

Sören was overheated enough that he made his way to the kitchen sink, turned on the tap, and began to splash cold water on his face. He went to the freezer and stuck his face in. A cold beer sounded nice right about now, but as he rested against the fridge for a moment, before he could open the door, he realized he was *horny*.

He wasn't a stranger to sudden, random attacks of horniness - in his late teens and early twenties he'd been prone to masturbating six or seven times a day even if he was also having sex with a partner. Even in recent times, he'd get himself worked up fantasizing about Dooku, fantasizing about Maglor. He liked sex; he liked *a lot* of sex. But this was more than just simple fantasizing or vague longings - he felt like he needed to fuck something or be fucked *right now* or he was going to die. Just jerking off wasn't going to do it, he needed the real thing. He took deep breaths, but his cock was throbbing urgently, balls aching, nipples hard and twinging, gooseflesh over his arms and the back of his neck, his entire body screaming with frustration that Dooku and Maglor weren't there.

As if on cue, Sören heard a vehicle pull in front of the cottage. He slammed the freezer door shut, and strode out to the living room. The door opened and Dooku walked in, wearing a pair of gym shorts and a T-shirt, sweaty and flushed from his workout. He raised his hand in greeting and smiled when he saw Sören. "Hello -"

He didn't get far. Sören slammed him against the wall with a growl, kissing him roughly, thrusting up against him, letting Dooku feel how hard he was. Dooku groaned into the kiss, and reached around, his hands on the small of Sören's back, then sliding down to cup Sören's ass.

Sören nibbled on Dooku's neck with another growl, licked his neck, breathing in the scent of him, cock throbbing even harder. "I want you *now*."

Dooku laughed into the kiss. "My," he said.

Sören started walking him towards the bedroom, their steps meshed, kissing all the way there. Dooku was hard now too, and that just drove Sören crazier. As soon as they stepped into the bedroom Sören *ripped* the fabric of Dooku's T-shirt, tearing the shredded shirt from him and dropping the ruined shirt to the floor. His hands ran over the damp, hairy chest, fingers brushing the nipples, and he reached down to the gym shorts, ripping those too. Dooku shivered, and Sören growled at the sight of the cock springing free, leaping as it stiffened further, starting to leak precum for him. Sören fumbled with his own shirt, not able to get it off fast enough; Dooku reached to undo Sören's belt and his jeans, taking the initiative of kissing him now, moaning as Sören's hands wandered over him.

As soon as Sören was naked, he shoved Dooku onto the bed and climbed over him. Climbed onto him, hard cocks pressed together, grinding. Dooku smelled intoxicating, and Sören kissed him roughly, began kissing, nibbling, licking down his neck, down to his chest, breathing his scent, lapping and suckling hungrily at the nipples, licking the chest hair, licking down to the sculpted abdomen, kissing, sucking, biting. Burying his nose in Dooku's bush, licking that too, then wrapping his lips around the head of his cock, tongue sliding into the foreskin, his own cock throbbing hard at the sounds Dooku made. Sören stroked himself, took a few licks at the head of Dooku's cock, teasing the frenulum, and looked down at his own cock completely slick with precum, flushed and looking almost angry in its need. He kissed and licked his way back up, continuing to breathe in the scent, and he feasted on Dooku's nipples, tongue lashing furiously, sucking them hard, tugging them with his teeth, growling, as Dooku writhed, grabbed his curls, moaning loudly.

When Dooku's noises were more frantic, almost sobbing as he bucked up against Sören, he started kissing Dooku's neck again, the head of his cock poised at Dooku's entrance. "I want you," Sören rasped between kisses, licks, bites. "*I want you*. I want you *right fucking now*. Right. Fucking. Now. I need you so fucking bad."

Dooku waved his hand and the bottle of lube floated over. He grasped the bottle and poured it over Sören's cock, Sören's hand. He moaned and arched as Sören stuck one finger inside him, then two, rubbing the prostate in circles. "Yes, love," Dooku panted.

"Yes." Sören started pushing into him, and gasped as he plunged into the silken heat, felt his husband wrapped around him.

"Yes." Dooku's hands seized Sören's hips, and squeezed. He pushed out, as Sören pushed in, breathless, and then their breath came back, both of them panting when Sören bottomed out.

Sören hooked a leg onto his shoulder and began to thrust, not slow but not as hard as he could give it. Not yet. "Fuck, you feel good."

"So do you." Dooku gasped and arched again, and Sören knew the Prince Albert ring in the head of his cock had found that sweet spot. "Oh god, Sören."

"Yes?"

"*Yes.*"

Sören shuddered. The tight velvet of Dooku's channel had brought him already close to that edge, and with mischief glittering in his dark eyes, a small smile on his lips, Dooku began working his inner muscles around Sören's cock, clenching and unclenching, a silent challenge. *Let's see how long you can last.* Sören made an inhuman noise, driving into him harder and faster. One hand cupped Dooku's cock, stroking, and the other played over Dooku's chest and stomach, Sören's eyes riveted on the firm, toned body, the silver pelt covering his chest, the silver hair adorning his arms and legs. Sören shuddered again. "God, you gorgeous *fuck* -"

"Mmmmm." Dooku's hands slid up Sören's thighs, over his stomach and chest, and he began to play with Sören's nipple rings. There was heat in his gaze, his eyes liquid dark chocolate. Then he closed his eyes and let out a moan, shivering, as Sören went harder still, moaning with him as Dooku pinched and rubbed his nipples, tugged the rings. His eyes opened again and met Sören's, before raking down his body. "You're beautiful, darling."

Sören leaned down and slowed down the pace, teasing, tormenting both of them, kissing him deep. Dooku's arms wrapped around Sören, one hand petting Sören's curls, as the fingers of the other played down Sören's spine.

That was how Maglor found them, his keys dropping to the floor.

Sören and Dooku looked over at him, and then Sören grinned and kissed Dooku again, continuing to thrust slowly, deliberately; both men groaned. Maglor started undressing, and joined them on the bed, naked.

Sören felt Maglor get behind him, and he thrust out his ass without thinking about it, wiggling it in invitation. Maglor slapped Sören's ass, and Sören cried out. Then he looked over his shoulder and panted, "What are you waiting for?"

Sören heard the sound of the lubricant, felt it squirting into his channel. He felt the tip of Maglor's cock against his opening and he cried out, "Yes, fuck me." Then he screamed as Maglor pushed inside him, and Dooku chose that moment to clench his inner muscles again. And again, when Maglor's teeth were on the back of his neck.

"*Mine*," Maglor growled.

"Fuck..." Sören shivered.

And then, as Maglor pulled back and pushed in again, his cock hitting Sören's prostate just right, Dooku clenched around Sören again, with a teasing, lazy grin. Sören claimed his mouth again with a growl, and Dooku growled back, kissing him hard, nails digging into Sören's flesh. Now it was Dooku's turn to use his teeth on Sören's shoulder, his neck.

Sören started to rock into him again, and then Maglor set the pace faster, harder. Sören could feel the pleasure and lust and excitement from both of them across their bond, intensifying his own. Sören played with Dooku's cock, balls slapping against him, kissing him again and again as Maglor kissed and licked Sören's neck, nape and shoulder, balls slapping against Sören's from behind. As hard and rough as his thrusts were - and Sören loved it - Maglor's fingers were gentle as they lovingly traced the phoenixes on Sören's back.

"God, I love both of you so much." Sören was breathless. "Need... you... both. Want you."

"Yes, love." Dooku stroked Sören's face, and then he took Maglor's hand; Maglor kissed Dooku's hand, and squeezed it.

"I need to come but I don't want to stop," Sören cried. "I don't ever, ever want to stop..."

And then they couldn't make words anymore, just three male voices moaning, basso, baritone and tenor, the slap of their flesh and the creak of the mattress, the rock of the bed against the wall competing with their voices. Sören felt like he was being baptized by fire, utterly consumed with the mad lust for both of them, needing to fuck and be fucked, wanting to do everything with both of them, lose himself in the beautiful motion of their bodies and the sensation.

But the point of no return was upon them. Dooku teased Sören again, clenching around him, and Sören's response was to nip his throat with a deep growl, slamming into him. He could feel the Prince Albert piercing setting Dooku off, across their bond, who shouted out "Sören, *Sören*," as he climaxed, shooting over him. The feel of Dooku throbbing around him and Maglor's cock hitting the right rhythm inside him sent Sören over the edge, screaming as he spent into his husband. A split second later Maglor cried out "Ada!" as he took one last savage thrust inside Sören, collapsing onto Sören's back, shaking. He moaned "Ada..." more softly, and Sören reached behind him to take Maglor's hands, which felt like they were on fire. He wondered what *Ada* meant in Elvish, before his brain turned to jelly with the radiating pleasure.

Sören's nose was in Dooku's chest hair and he could feel Dooku's heartbeat. Sören continued to pulse with his release, feeling like he was melting between the two of them, that the three were melting together into beautiful, beautiful prismatic light. He stirred when he felt Maglor pull out of him, and made a little whine of protest.

"You're still hungry?" Dooku raised an eyebrow, smirking.

Sören nodded. He reached out across their bond to touch Dooku's mind briefly, let him see and feel the state he was in just before Dooku arrived.

Dooku nibbled his shoulder with a little growl. "I need a few moments to recharge."

"I think we can assist with that," Sören said. He grabbed Maglor's hair and pulled him forward, moving out of the way. Without being told, Maglor swallowed down Dooku's cock, readying him again to hardness in no time. Sören stroked himself as he watched Maglor suck Dooku, one hand rubbing Dooku's chest, the other hand petting Maglor's hair, pulling it every now and again. "Good boy," he teased, even though Maglor was considerably older than him. Maglor let out a little whimper and started stroking himself too.

Sören leaned down to kiss Dooku as Maglor sucked, and soon he was kissing and licking Dooku's neck again, kissing and licking his chest, suckling, lapping, and nibbling the

nipples. Dooku's hands were buried in Maglor's hair, arched to him, and when his moans were closer together, louder, and he was rolling his hips, gently fucking his mouth, Sören knew he was ready for what came next.

Sören pulled Maglor off Dooku's cock and seized his mouth, licking the precum off his tongue, kissing him again and again as Dooku groaned, stroking himself as he watched them kiss, watched Sören and Maglor caress each other. Then, Sören backed up, straddling Dooku's hips with his back to Dooku, sinking down on Dooku's cock and then laying back, his back against Dooku's chest. Dooku moaned and wrapped his arms around Sören, tilting his face to kiss him deeply. Maglor watched Dooku's cock glide in and out of Sören's channel - his cum getting on Dooku's cock; Sören smiled as he watched Maglor shiver at that - and then Sören made the "come here" gesture.

"I want both of you inside me again," Sören rasped.

Maglor pushed into him slowly, and Sören moaned louder and louder as he was filled, almost bursting at the seams with the two long, thick cocks inside him. The three took each other's hands, and Dooku and Maglor found their rhythm, pushing and pulling, groaning at the feel of their cocks rubbing together, Sören's passage embracing them.

Dooku tilted Sören's face so they could kiss, and Maglor leaned down to kiss Sören, then leaned over Sören's shoulder to kiss Dooku. Their hips rolled together, hands wandered, taking turns kissing each other - every now and again Maglor would lean in to kiss Sören's nipples, tug on the rings with his teeth, eyes flashing as Sören cried out, bucking against them.

They kept the pace slow, sensual, a dreamy haze. Touch upon touch upon touch, heat, savoring the deliciousness between them, how perfect they were together. Sören looked into Maglor's eyes, reached up to touch his face, then hands slid down to his heart. *I want you always... always.*

You have me. Maglor kissed him deep. *I love you. So. Much.*

Sören wrapped his arms and legs around him, holding Maglor with all of him. Moaning as one of Dooku's hands grasped his cock, and the other teased Sören's nipples before tilting his head for another hungry kiss. Sören and Dooku's foreheads touched, nuzzling, breathing each other's breath. *I love you, too.* He didn't ever want to let Dooku go, in the twilight of his life. Twenty years wasn't enough, two hundred years didn't feel like enough, if some miracle of science gave them that. Sören kissed him harder, urged them on faster inside him.

Nothing would ever be enough. He felt wanton, sluttish, addicted to them. He *burned.*

He loved it. He *fucking* loved it.

—

The heat of the forge, exhaustion, ready to drop, but it isn't done yet. Just one more last detail, this final finishing touch. Pushing, every last ounce of strength, because to leave it undone will make the consuming fire *even worse, not able to let it go, every thought until it is returned to.*

He comes to watch the last moments, a mixture of concern and worship in those silver-

blue eyes. When it is done *he takes my hands, pulls me to him, kisses me deeply.*

"Magnificent," he says. "Not just the work. But this." He runs his hands over me, down and back up, and then traces under and around my eyes. He leans in and kisses my closed eyes, kisses my forehead as if he is kissing a third eye.

Then he picks me up and carries me out of the forge, kissing me all the way to our chamber. He undresses me, kissing the too-hot skin as it is exposed. There is cool wine, and he holds a cup to my lips.

He runs a cup over my body, pouring wine, cooling the flesh. Begins to lick. "I should let you rest, but I can't resist you."

I clutch his head. I never want him to resist me, especially not when he takes me into his mouth like he's starving for it. "Ñolo. Hells, Ñolo." Arching up against him, needing this more than I need food, rest. Everything else can wait. The creative fire is still burning, and our lovemaking is another act of art, of beauty. "Ñolo."

"Ñolo..."

Sören's nose rubbed in fur, and he felt lips press against the top of his head, a nose in his own curls. Sören snuggled deeper against the warmth, smiling as arms tightened around him. He blinked his sleepy eyes open and looked up, looking into Dooku's dark eyes, crinkled at the corners as he gave Sören a little smile.

Dooku leaned in to kiss his lips, then. Sören noticed Maglor wasn't in bed with them. Noticing Sören noticing, Dooku said, "Macalaurë is out walking Auli."

Of course, the dog had to go out just after midnight. Sören made a noise just before sleep reclaimed him.

A couple of hours later, in the middle of the night, Sören woke up with a start, feeling like he'd misplaced or forgotten something, but as far as he knew he hadn't...

...but he couldn't get back to sleep, and Sören decided he was overdue for something he should have done days ago. *Maybe if I read this, I'll get bored enough to fall back asleep*, Sören thought to himself as he fished out Dooku's copy of *The Silmarillion*.

He didn't get back to sleep that night. As the dawn broke, Sören broke, weeping and trying to keep it down. Weeping for everything Maglor had lost... and everything he'd endured. Even with Maglor reporting that the story was not 100% accurate, it was close enough to the truth for Sören to know now how deeply traumatized Maglor was.

...And Maglor wasn't the only one.

As Sören had read through the book, the wheels turned in his head, slowly at first, then faster and harder. It all came together – his obsessive passion to create... his powerful libido, the kind that would produce seven children... and the dreams, especially the recurring nightmare of him attacked by fire demons, burning up, and the visions.

He had met a god, and that implied there was some sort of afterlife, and that reincarnation might even be real. And Ingwion had said himself, *I am not just an Elf, Sören Sigurðsson. And you are not just a mortal, not some 'random guy.'*

But it was one thing to have met a living god, and another thing to claim to be the reincarnation of Fëanor. Sören felt self-conscious about such an extraordinary claim, and

yet, he had no other way of explaining the dreams he'd had, the visions that felt like memories...

...why his path had crossed with Maglor's again.

Why his life had been so full of tragedy and pain, as if gods had cursed him.*Tears unnumbered ye shall shed.* The Doom still weighed heavily upon him. Upon all of them.

Dooku found Sören crying in the living room. For a moment he just held Sören, then he looked at the copy of *The Silmarillion* and sighed. “I should have warned you that book was fairly tragic and depressing. The *Lord of the Rings* trilogy is a story of hope, good triumphing against evil... *The Silmarillion* is 'abandon all hope, ye who enter.'”

Sören shrugged. “I owed it to Maglor to learn more about him.”*My poor boy.* Their eyes met. “So are you going to re-read it too?”

“I... read it once back in the 1970s and it...” Dooku's voice trailed off.

“It what?”

Dooku looked away – as if he were looking very far away, into a distant past. “I had very strange dreams in my younger years and some elements of the story... it was uncanny to see them on the page long after I'd dreamt them. Such as... standing in single combat against a giant wearing a horned helm, wielding an enormous hammer, but it was not Thor. Being struck to death.”

A chill went down Sören's spine. *Oh god, he's Fingolfin.* It was one thing to suspect that when he was reading and connect himself with Fëanor, another thing entirely for Dooku to also report having dreams that felt like memories.

“I will, however, fetch my laptop and refresh my memory on a few minor details.” Dooku used the Force to float his laptop over.

Sören watched and waited as Dooku typed, and then Dooku scowled at the screen. “Oh dear,” he said.

“What did you find?”

Dooku raised his eyebrows. “Do you remember waking up earlier and calling me Ñolo?”

As much as Sören felt like an idiot for saying it aloud – fearing that somehow Dooku was going to say *you're faking, you're a liar*– he had to say it. “I think we've been waking up for a very long time now, brother.”

Dooku put the laptop down and hugged Sören tight. Now he was weeping, silently, shaking, and they cried together, rocking each other.

Tears unnumbered ye shall shed, echoed in Sören's head. They had found their way back to each other in the twilight of Dooku's life. They had perhaps come very close to not finding each other at all.

“Do we tell him?” Sören glanced towards the bedroom, where Maglor was in a deep sleep.

“I worry that he may think we're...” Dooku exhaled sharply. “Deluded. Or charlatans. Even though he has said I remind him of his uncle Fingolfin.”

“And he's said I remind him of his father. But it's one thing to notice a resemblance and another thing for us to say we *are* them.” Sören pinched the bridge of his nose. “God, this

is a disaster.”

Dooku touched Sören's face. “You were always my beautiful disaster, Fëanáro.”

Chapter 35

As they made their way through the hustle and bustle of Keflavik Airport, which was surprisingly crowded on an early Thursday evening, and loud, with announcements made over the intercom in Icelandic and English, Maglor remarked to himself that one of Sören's most endearing qualities was his love for and loyalty to his family, as he could feel Sören's discomfort with the crowds and noise across their bond - it would have been easier for Sören to just meet Dagnýr at Fishmarket instead of here at the airport, especially after driving all day. But to Sören, eight months without seeing his twin brother might have well been an eternity, and they had to see each other *now*.

Maglor's eyes searched the airport - it had been years since he'd seen Dagnýr, but he never forgot a face. They were quickly approaching the baggage claim, where there would be no mistaking him. But before Maglor could see anything, he felt *power*. He knew that both Dagnýr and his husband Matt were gifted in the same way Sören was, of course, and Margrét, Frankie, and Ari as well. Yet, he'd been around Sören's family in groups before, Christmases past usually, and when he and Sören lived together in Reykjavik they saw a lot of Margrét and Ari, and it did not feel like *this*. He was either more sensitive to it now or there was something else altogether, some sort of *bigger*, not-quite-human presence at work...

...or two...

"DAAA

"Halló!" Sören grinned and put out his hand. "You must be Edmund Billingsley, right?"

"And you must be Sören." They shook hands. Dooku approached, reserved but not without warmth, and the two older gentlemen clasped hands then. "And Dooku." And then a look at Maglor. "And... Mark, is it?"

Dagnýr raised an eyebrow.

Maglor kept his expression deadpan. "Alejandro Magalhães."

"Right." "Edmund" nodded, the faintest touch of a smile on his lips. "No idea where I got Mark from, memory must be starting to fail me at this age." *I see you're finally using something slightly more imaginative as an alias, Macalaurë. Good!*

Maglor rolled his eyes. *And you're...* Edmund. *Really.* Really. *Edmund Billingsley. That's quite an alias there, Olórin.*

The Maia's eyes twinkled, accepting the challenge. *It's better than* Mark Lowry *for the last four hundred years, I daresay.*

I used a couple other aliases. Like... Marcus Lauer when I lived in West Berlin and Amsterdam at the end of last century.

That's not better. "I heard we had reservations at Fishmarket?" Edmund raised his eyebrows at Sören.

Sören nodded. "Jæja, and my sister is meeting us here..."

"Omae wa mou shindeirou," came a deep woman's voice, as she grabbed Dagnýr by the waist from behind.

"NANI?" Dagnýr yelled, before the woman - none other than Margrét - put him in a headlock and gave him a noogie. It was an amusing contrast, with Margrét wearing elegant gothic lolita and a small sparkly black fascinator on her head.

Then Margrét spun him around and gave him a hug, the two of them rocking each other, which turned into Sören, Dagnýr, Margrét and Ari group-hugging, laughing and crying a little.

And it was Sören's turn to double-take after that. Maglor had heard stories of the legendary Mary Frances "Frankie" O'Riordan, and there was a girl who was a foot shorter than Sören, whose cute doll face he recognized from the painting Sören had done, with piercing grey-blue eyes behind square black-framed glasses, stocky and busty with a nose ring, an eyebrow ring, and multiple rings in her ears, wearing a blue T-shirt that said "Ask Me About My Feminist Agenda" and black BDU pants, with black Doc Martens boots matching Sören's. There were tattoos swirling over her arms, flowered vines. Instead of the pink mohawk he'd been told about she now sported a pixie cut, with the flaming red hair of the Irish. Maglor found himself somewhat disappointed that he wasn't going to get to see the mohawk, remembering his days in 1980s West Berlin.

"Frankie, what the sodding hell did you do to your hair?" Sören asked, narrowing his eyes.

"I shoved it up your arse," Frankie teased, giving him a playful shove.

"Ha. Ha ha." Sören affectionately tousled her hair.

"I decided to be a little more 'traditional' for the wedding," Frankie said. "Putting on a fancy dress is a right fucking bitch to get over a mohawk."

"I bet."

"Plus..." Frankie put an arm around a man two feet taller than her, beautiful, with waist-length red hair and extraordinary green eyes, wearing jeans and a green T-shirt. "I was dyeing my hair all these years 'cos I was ashamed to be a ginger, but... Flóki here helped me to love myself a little more."

And that was where the other source of power came from. Interesting. Maglor knew this "Flóki" wasn't human... another Elf, perhaps? A Maia?

And then Maglor fought the urge to facepalm, as he made the connection – if Ingwion was Freyr, of course it made sense that another Norse god would be around. Maglor spoke into Edmund's mind again. *Speaking of unimaginative aliases...*

Edmund shook with silent laughter. Indeed.

"Good to see you again, Sören," Flóki said, taking his hand. Then he turned to Dagnýr and Matt. "And to finally meet you, Matt, Dagnýr. I've heard so much about you."

Dagnýr smirked. "Good things, I hope."

"Mostly."

Dagnýr laughed at that - his full-bodied laugh was one of the things he did, in fact, have in common with his twin brother. Sören grinned.

"Right, where are my manners?" Margrét asked. "Everyone, this is my and Frankie's boyfriend, Flóki Leifursson. Flóki, this is... the fam. Some of them, anyway. Frankie's aunt Siobhan, and Leja, Hans, Qui, Obi, Gitta and Jane are all flying in from the UK tomorrow afternoon."

"A pleasure," Flóki said. "And I'm looking forward to meeting the others."

"Hvaða hluti af Íslandi ertu frá? " Dagnýr asked Flóki, looking a little suspicious, and Maglor wondered if Dagnýr could also sense there was something unusual about Flóki, even by this family's standards of unusual.

"Ég er ekki. Ég er frá Færeyjum, " Flóki replied.

You are as much from the Faroe Islands as I am from Brazil But Maglor kept that thought to himself.

"Ah, Faroese, I see," Dagnýr said, returning to English, nodding, though his tone suggested he wasn't entirely convinced. "I thought the accent was a little strange."

Flóki also nodded. "Should we get a move on? We don't want to be late for our reservation and there will be traffic in Reykjavik about now."

"Jæja, in a minute," Sören said. "I need more hugs." He started with Frankie, squeezing her tight, leaning down to rub his nose in her hair and rain kisses over the top of her head. If Maglor didn't know better, he would have sworn the two were lovers. Sören

kissed the tip of Frankie's nose, and she playfully grabbed his ass, which led to him smacking her bottom, then Frankie shoved him and got on her tiptoes to tweak his nose. "I've missed you so much," Sören husked as he pet her hair some more.

"I miss you too, you cunt. You could call or chat with me more often, you know."

"Jæja, I know, I just... have been busy lately."

"I bet, you fucking pervert." Frankie cackled.

Sören hugged Margrét, Frankie, and Flóki together, then he hugged Dagnýr and Matt together, and at last he hugged Ari. He whispered something in Ari's ear in Icelandic, and Ari gave him an innocent face that wasn't innocent at all, which seemed to be hard-wired into their genes. Sören glared at him, wagging his finger, and Ari continued smiling, his eyes slightly closed.

Then the tall man with blonde-brown hair - which had been nape-length last time Maglor saw him, and was short now - and a full beard, blue eyes, muscular built wearing a blue T-shirt and dark blue jeans, not the sort of person you'd expect to be working as a yoga instructor and Reiki Master for a living, turned to Maglor and said quietly, "It's nice to see you again."

Maglor patted Ari's shoulder. "I hope all is going well."

Ari nodded. "More or less." Margrét started dragging him off. "We'll see you all shortly." Ari waved.

After they were seated at Fishmarket, and going over the menu, their waiter came back with water and cleared his throat.

"We're not quite ready to order yet," Dooku told him.

"Jæja," the waiter said, nodding. "I just wanted to inform you that... you can order whatever you want on the menu and it's already been paid for."

Margrét put her menu on the table and leaned back in her chair, folding her arms. "Who the hell...?"

"We were paid in advance by Borovkov Enterprises," the waiter said. "There was more than enough for you to get anything, so... enjoy."

Margrét and Dagnýr both gave Sören a look. Sören shrugged. "I didn't tell Ingmar to do that," Sören said.

"No one tells Ingmar to do or not do anything," Maglor muttered, pouring himself a glass of water.

Dagnýr's eyebrow went up at that, remembering that Maglor and Ingwion had been sharing the cottage in Svalbarðseyri until recently. "Sounds like you have a few stories to tell."

Maglor said nothing, but calmly sipped his water.

When the waiter came back, everyone was ready to order. Matt gave Sören a horrified look for ordering puffin.

"You can't eat puffin!" Matt said after the waiter left.

"What do you mean, I can't eat them?" Sören narrowed his eyes. "It's a food, isn't it?"

"You... have you seen puffins?" Matt's eyes widened.

"Of course I've fucking seen puffins, where do you think I'm from, Valinor?"

Maglor's water went down the wrong pipe and he made an inhuman noise. Edmund whacked him on the back.

"Here," Sören said, "I can make this even worse." He reached into his satchel.

"Oh no," Dooku said, his eyes widening with alarm. "Oh no. No. You didn't."

Sören took out a visor-hat with a stuffed puffin on it and put it on his head just as Maglor made the mistake of taking another sip of water to soothe his irritated throat; Maglor ended up spitting it out.

Fëanor, the Flame Imperishable, is wearing a puffin hat on his head.

Yes he is, Edmund spoke into his mind, hearing that thought. *Such a character.* "I like your hat," Edmund said.

"*Takk*. " Sören smiled and reached into his satchel again, and before Maglor knew what was happening, Sören slammed a visor-hat onto his head.

"Oh no, Sören, what..." Maglor gave him a look. "Don't tell me I have a puffin on my head too."

"No, you've got a whale on your head." Sören pulled out his cell phone and snapped a quick selfie of the two of them together, with Maglor looking stunned in the first photo, and annoyed in the second one, Sören grinning in both pictures.

"That's a good look for you," Edmund said to Maglor, nodding sagely.

Ari was trying very hard not to laugh, and failing. Dooku was red with silent laughter, and Maglor wished for a moment he'd been sitting across from Dooku instead of Sören sitting between them, so he could kick Dooku under the table. Then Dooku used the Force to poke Maglor in the back without touching him, innocently glancing off to the side.

Our husband is an idiot, Dooku spoke into his mind, *but he's our idiot.*

Yes, he is. Maglor couldn't even be fully annoyed, when Sören leaned in to give him a little kiss and he felt that warm glow of happiness that he had Sören again, he had his Ada back.

Then he realized Dooku had called Sören *our husband*, and Maglor had gone with it, not correcting him. It felt right. Polygamy might not be legal, but Maglor's identities weren't legal to begin with.

Sören kept the puffin hat on his head for the entire meal, and Maglor found himself keeping the whale hat on as well, even though he felt ridiculous, and the sly glances from Edmund every now and again didn't help. The dinner conversation was mostly about

Margrét, Flóki and Frankie looking for a house to rent in Reykjavik, and how Dagnýr's surrogate's pregnancy was coming along, perfectly mundane subjects, except Maglor knew this family was anything but normal and the feeling of tension in anticipation of Olórin revealing to Sören the truth of what he was, made Maglor feel like he was being wound tight enough to snap. As Dagnýr and Matt were teasingly arguing about baby names, Maglor finally poked Edmund under the table, speaking directly into his mind.

When.

Edmund glanced over his ginger ale, raising his eyebrows slightly. *When what.*

You know perfectly damn well what. Maglor inclined his head toward Sören, who tilted his head over and they nuzzled; Maglor noticed a wistful look in Sören's eyes as he turned his head back to his brother, discussing children. *When are you telling him.*

Tomorrow night. Edmund sipped his ginger ale.

Not tonight?

Not tonight. He had a six-hour drive to come here, and he should relax tonight. What I tell him is going to be difficult enough without him being wound up from being on the road all day and being in crowds of people the last two hours.

Maglor couldn't fault him for that.

Besides... Edmund looked directly at him now. *He's not the only person I need to speak with about the past.*

Maglor looked at Dagnýr, just as Dagnýr said, completely deadpan, "How about the name... Osti?"

Sören howled, clapping.

"You are not naming our child Cheese, " Matt hissed.

"Listen," Sören said, "Osti would be a great name for someone with this bloodline. We are the blood of cheese."

You see why I had to help them, Edmund said, smiling fondly. *Had to help* you.

I still can't believe you turned against the Valar.

There are things... you don't know. Tomorrow. Edmund's eyes met his, before looking back at his plate. *But I did what I had to do. These are dark times, and you and your kin are the blood of fire. A small smile. The blood of cheese.*

My Ada, the Cheese Imperishable.

Exactly.

Maglor snorted into his drink; Dagnýr gave him a peculiar look.

That one knows something, Edmund said. *He doesn't know* what, *but he's suspicious.*

I can tell.

He's a scientist. His job is literally to observe and make connections with what he observes. So you may want to exercise caution around Finrod... er, Dagnýr... until tomorrow night when I think it's a better time to discuss things.

All right. Maglor worked on his salmon.

After dinner, and those who wanted dessert had dessert, the group got up from their table. Sören still insisted on tipping their waiter, even though the waiter had assured them the cost of their meal included a substantial tip.

"No," Sören said, "listen, I worked as a waiter and a barista for years, let me pay you."

The entire family then chipped in, Maglor included; Maglor felt a warm glow of admiration for Sören's heart, and the way he still showed kindness and open-handedness to others even with all the cruelty he'd endured in his life.

Maglor took the wheel of the jeep to drive to the hotel - and took off the whale hat, finally, putting it back in Sören's satchel. They arrived at the desk at the same time as Dagnýr and Matt, and Edmund; Dagnýr and Matt would be in a separate room from Edmund. Edmund let the husbands go ahead of him, and when Dagnýr produced his credit card, the woman at the desk told him, "Your room's been paid for, sir."

Dagnýr folded his arms. He looked at Sören over his shoulder, and then back at the receptionist. "Let me guess... Borovkov..."

"...Enterprises, yes. Friend of yours?"

"Er."

The rooms of "Edmund Billingsley" and the suite for Sören, Maglor and Dooku had been paid for by Borovkov Enterprises as well. In addition, Sören, Maglor, and Dooku's suite had been upgraded to a penthouse. Sören let out a low whistle. "The fuck," he said.

Having lived so long abroad, Dagnýr's accent was almost perfect Canadian English, with barely any indicator that Icelandic had been his native language except for the faintest touch - still speaking on the in-breath - but now the accent crept into his speech, indicating he was caught off-guard, clearly emotionally affected by this display. "I know money is like water for your 'friend'," Dagnýr said, making air quotes, "but I think I need to have a little talk with him tomorrow about... this... because I'm not sure I'm comfortable with this kind of generosity from someone I don't even know."

"Don't try to argue with him," Maglor said.

Dagnýr raised an eyebrow.

"Just... roll with it." Maglor patted his shoulder. "Enjoy it, while it lasts." He decided against telling Dagnýr that Ingmar would be leaving in the not-too-distant future, though he expected Borovkov Enterprises would continue doing business.

Unfortunately even that little drop of "while it lasts" proved to be too much, and Dagnýr gave him a look, opening his mouth.

Suddenly, Edmund pointed out the window. "Oh, look!" his voice rang out. "Eagles!"

A pair of white-tailed eagles soared past the plate glass window of the hotel lobby, and Edmund watched them, smiling.

Maglor choked back a laugh. *Nice save.*

Not bad in a pinch, I daresay.

"Ho-lee shiiiiit ," Dagnýr said, watching the birds circle. "That is amazing."

"Amaze *balls*, even," Matt said.

"Yes, that is *amazeballs*," Dagnýr said.

Sören and Dooku were watching the display too, holding hands.

"It's really something," Dagnýr said. "Not just that the birds are majestic in and of themselves, but they almost went extinct in the 20th century, and in the last couple years the white-tailed eagle population boomed to new record numbers, stronger than they were since before they almost died out."

"That is quite remarkable indeed," Edmund said, nodding. "The eagles are a testament to the resilience of forces of nature... it has a way of course-correcting itself, despite interference, despite being hunted to near-extinction. It's like a wildfire, once it starts burning again there's no stopping it." His eyes met Maglor's.

"Like a phoenix," Sören said, eyes wide and filled with near-worship as he looked at the eagles, and Maglor could *almost* see the vision in Sören's mind's eye. He took Sören's other hand, feeling choked up again.

Margrét, Frankie, Flóki and Ari were at the desk now, also being informed their rooms had been paid for, and that Margrét, Frankie and Flóki's suite was being upgraded to a penthouse suite as well.

"The fuck is with your posh friend spending a shit ton of money on us?" Frankie laughed.

Sören shrugged. "I guess he wanted to make a good impression...?"

Margrét snorted. "I can't say as I blame him, considering he associates with, you know." Margrét's head inclined towards Maglor.

"We're good now," Sören said, a little defensively. He decided to change the subject. "Anyway... we're gonna be getting a bigger place in Akureyri, we were gonna invite you guys to come up and visit when we're all settled in."

"The three of you?" Margrét raised an eyebrow. She gave Maglor a look. "You're not gonna run off again?"

"No ma'am," Maglor said.

And there was suspicious Dagnýr once again. "So hey, would you like to join me and Matt for some drinks at the hotel bar?" he asked. "We can talk a little, maybe -"

Taking Edmund's word of caution to heart, Maglor made an exaggerated yawn. "We've been on the road all day and I think maybe we should unwind...?" He looked at Sören and yawned again.

The wicked look in Sören's eyes suggested he took the mock yawning as an invite to go to bed... not for sleep... and with a little smirk, Sören said, "Yeah, we're really, um, tired. I bet we have a nice comfy bed in that posh suite of ours and it's calling us." He waggled his eyebrows.

"Oh my god, you fucking perverts," Margrét said, shaking with silent laughter. She gave her brother a shove. "I'd tell you to 'get a room', but..."

"That's exactly what we're doing," Sören said, putting an arm around Maglor's waist. He turned back to his brother. "We can catch up tomorrow night, maybe?" He looked at his sister. "You're still having a party...?"

"Yeah, all of you are invited. Edmund, you can come too if you want," Margrét said, "since Dag thinks of you as being like his dad."

Edmund smiled at Dagnýr, who blushed. "It's true," Dagnýr said.

"But yeah tomorrow," Margrét said, "7 PM, in the hotel lounge."

"Sounds good," Dagnýr said. "I think I'll go for a swim in the hotel pool, now."

"Me too," Ari said.

Sören and Margrét took turns hugging Dagnýr and Ari, everyone bid goodnight to Edmund, and then Sören, Dooku, Maglor, Margrét, Frankie and Flóki walked from the lobby to the elevator, riding up together since their suites were one floor apart. Sören closed his eyes and took a few deep breaths - Maglor knew Sören was claustrophobic, especially in elevators, and he reached out to take Sören's hand, squeezing and stroking reassuringly. He noticed Dooku took Sören's other hand, no doubt also familiar with Sören's responses by now.

The elevator chimed when Sören, Dooku, and Maglor's floor approached. Sören lingered for a moment, even though Maglor could feel how eager he was to get out of the confining space - once again, a testament to how much he cared about his family. Sören reached out to hug Margrét, and gave Frankie a big squeezy hug.

"God, I missed you," Sören told her. "Maybe tomorrow afternoon we can hang out some, já?"

"I'd like that," Frankie said.

Dooku waved. "It was lovely to see you all again."

" Takk , same here," Margrét told him, clasping his hand in hers, and then Frankie gave him a hug too.

"It was nice to see you again, Margrét," Maglor said. He turned to Frankie. "And a pleasure meeting you." He didn't know what to make of Flóki.

Just as he stepped out of the elevator out of the elevator, Frankie said, "Hey, Alejandro?"

"Hm?"

"I have something for you."

Before Maglor could take another step, Frankie also stepped out of the elevator, took a flying leap, and decked him, hard enough to drop Maglor to his knees. Then she grinned, getting back in the elevator, doors closing behind her.

–

"I shouldn't be laughing," Sören said, holding ice wrapped in a washcloth to Maglor's face.

"I shouldn't either." Dooku patted Maglor's shoulder. "She hit me too, though mine was in the gut."

"You weren't exaggerating about that right hook," Maglor said. " Hells. "

"I'm sorry?" Sören took a swig of Sprite - the fridge in their suite was well-stocked.

Maglor shook his head. "I'm just glad you had someone like that looking out for you in London... considering." He felt himself seething again, thinking of that filth Justin. Frankie showed tremendous courage, beating him up when he would have forced himself on Sören again.

"She had kind of a mess to clean up after Nico and I split up, because I was grieving him and I was still grieving you. It scared the shit out of her. I can't blame her for being angry," Sören said.

"Neither can I." Maglor took Sören's free hand. "You don't know how much I -"

Sören leaned in and silenced him with a soft, gentle kiss. "Shhhhh. That's all in the past now, elskan. "

Is it? As much as Maglor was feeling an almost unbearable amount of tension waiting for the party at Margrét's tomorrow, where Olórin would finally show Sören who and what he was, there was an equal sense of dread, considering he'd rejected Fëanor to marry a woman he did not love, had broken his father's heart, and Fëanor had died before he'd gotten a chance to make things right... then in 2014, he made the excuse of an "arranged marriage" to leave Sören. He wondered how Sören would take it, once he had been awoken to the full truth. Maglor had meant to ask Sören if he'd read The Silmarillion yet – hoping it would jog his memory – but it kept slipping his mind. He also noticed Sören had been more tightly shielded lately, as if he were trying to conceal some sort of information, or perhaps just shield Maglor from the intensity of emotions as he continued to process everything he did know. Maglor meant to ask about that too, but he didn't want to be insensitive.

The waiting game was always hard, even when fifty years was a short time to an Elf.

"God, look at this suite," Sören said, walking around. "What a gorgeous view of the city."

The way Sören said "city" in his accent - see-tee - always made Maglor smile.

"And everything in the suite." Sören gestured to the king-sized four-poster bed. He walked in the bathroom. "Shit, there's a hot tub in here."

"Fully stocked bar," Dooku said. "Not just all the food and drinks in the fridge, but we've got quite a selection of alcohol here."

"Well..." Sören came out of the bathroom. "If none of us are going back out on the road tonight, maybe we can have a drink and um, relax in the hot tub?"

"Sounds good to me," Maglor said.

They had a glass of Auchentoshan, Sören's with ice, the other two men taking theirs neat. Sören kept looking at the bed, and then back at Maglor, and Maglor knew he was thinking of sex, but then he realized Sören was also thinking of the last time they'd been in a hotel room together... their trip to Rio in 2014, just before they had broken up.

"I know I said that all of that was in the past, but I can't help thinking of when we were in Rio," Sören started, swirling the whisky around in his glass.

Oh shit. Maglor took a deep breath and braced himself.

"You had us get a room with two separate beds, even though we shared one, saying it was to keep up appearances. I know now that thing with your 'family' was bullshit, and it seemed like a lot of trouble to go to for all of that," Sören said.

"It wasn't just because of that, actually," Maglor said. "You remember when I told you that I paid dangerous people very well to help me move around without being caught? When I was in Rio, the times I went off on my own supposedly meeting my 'family'... I was meeting those people. And as far as being cautious about any kind of public acknowledgment of you, I had real concerns that if one of my associates back then wanted to extort me, they would use you to do so. They would be less likely to do anything to you if they didn't know you were my partner." He was telling the truth.

Sören frowned into his whisky. "And... now?"

"I have different associates," Maglor said. "I change handlers every time I move. This is a less unsavory group of people."

"What happens to the old associates, once you get new ones?"

"They are paid to keep their silence," Maglor said, "and I pay to have them monitored to make sure they are upholding their end of the bargain."

"And if not...?"

Maglor's eyes met Sören's. "Then I pay to make them disappear. On occasion, I have done it myself, depending on the severity of what was said and done. But that has not been necessary in four decades."

"You were turned in to the US government...?"

"Yes. When I escaped from captivity, there was... a bit of a reckoning." Maglor finished his shot glass and poured himself another. "I'm a killer, I have killed many times over the length of my lifetime, and over the course of our travels together I will probably have to do it at least once more."

Sören paused, considering. Then he said, "Hi A Killer -"

Maglor facepalmed, and felt himself start to laugh and cry at the same time, feeling a mad sense of relief that Sören had made such a... well, *Sören* response... rather than judging him, rejecting him for the blood on his hands.

Sören took Maglor's bad hand, and Dooku took the other hand. A few moments of silence passed.

Dooku broke the silence. "Some years ago, I had a friend, named Sayyid-Diya. We had become friends at university, he was an immigrant from the old Iran, when it was still Persia, when it was still a secular country. His son moved to New York and worked at the Twin Towers, and was working there when 9/11 happened, died in the attack. Sayyid-Diya and I had a falling out because he thought that people like me, like him, with the Force..." Dooku used the Force to pour himself another glass of whisky, and move the glass over without touching it. "Should come forward, register ourselves with the government. He thought it would have prevented 9/11, if people like us had been put to work fighting crime, fighting terrorism. I disagreed. I told him that we would still be outnumbered, overpowered, we would be signing our own death warrants and that of our families. I'd heard about government experiments during the 1970s." Dooku's eyes met Maglor's. "I can't exactly blame you for doing what you've needed to do to survive, I can only imagine what you went through."

"It was worse than what you can imagine," Maglor said. "The people who get into that kind of work conducting 'research'... they have the stomach to handle committing acts of barbarity that normal, good, decent human beings would not tolerate, would try to stop. The United States had its very own set of Nazi doctors. I will do whatever it takes to not go through that again, by any means necessary. I will do whatever it takes to protect the both of you. I would kill for either of you, both of you." Maglor polished off his next glass of whisky. "I already have." He thought of Justin again.

Sören stood up. Still holding Maglor's hand, he pulled, and Maglor rose to his feet, Dooku with him. "Let's try out the hot tub," Sören said. "I need to destress a bit."

With that, Sören used the Force to turn on the stereo in the suite, putting on the R&B station. He began undressing right then and there, and turned it into a bit of a striptease, dancing around as he took his clothes off. Maglor couldn't help grinning at Sören's antics. *Don't ever change. Don't lose that sunshine in your spirit.* He still worried that dragging Sören around with him over the decades would embitter him.

His worries melted away for awhile with the heat and bubbles in the hot tub, looking at Sören and Dooku both naked in there with him. Sören sighed and sank down in the tub, until he was only visible from the shoulders up. "This is nice," he purred.

"This is very nice," Dooku said. "I wonder how much it would cost to get one of these installed in our new home."

Sören grinned. "Oooh, I like that idea."

Maglor reached under the water and began massaging Sören's feet, smiling at the look of bliss on Sören's face, the little contented noises he made, flexing his toes. "I like the idea of us spoiling ourselves a little," Maglor said. "We've all had difficult lives, we should start making up for that."

"Yes." Sören nodded emphatically. "Yes, we should." His eyes met Maglor's. "And I like that you're talking about this, that you're... starting to let yourself live, again."

"I suppose you're right." Maglor rubbed Sören's foot harder. "I like that too."

"You know what I like even more?"

Maglor raised an eyebrow.

Sören splashed him.

"Oh god." Dooku laughed.

"Could you not encourage him?" Maglor made a wet cat face.

"Does he need encouraging?" Dooku laughed even harder.

Maglor narrowed his eyes. "You know what?"

"What."

Maglor splashed Dooku.

Sören threw back his head and laughed, his laughter echoing in the bathroom. Dooku splashed both of them, and that became a splash war, until Sören decided to start tickling Dooku and climbed on top of him to do so, and Dooku at last seized Sören's hands and pinned his wrists against the wall, leaning up to kiss him hard. Maglor made a groan of approval, hardening at the sight of them.

When they pulled apart, breathing hard, Sören husked, "I think we better..."

"Yes." Dooku kissed him again. "But first..." He splashed Sören wildly.

"You thot," Sören said, giggling, splashing him back.

Maglor splashed both of them. "All right, children."

"He started it," Sören said.

"No, you," Dooku said.

"No, you."

"No, you."

"No, you."

"No, you."

"No, you."

"God, it's like the two of you are siblings," Maglor yelled. *Which of course, is exactly because the two of you* are *siblings.*

The three headed to the bed, after shutting off the hot tub. Maglor resumed rubbing Sören's feet, since it was helping to relax him, and eventually Sören rolled over on his back and Maglor began to rub Sören's back, fingers lovingly tracing the scars on his back, the outline of the phoenixes, wanting Sören to feel the love in his touch. As he worked on

Sören's back, Dooku got behind him and began to rub his shoulders, and Maglor made a little purring noise, melting into the touch, even more when Dooku rubbed his scalp, and started brushing his hair. After awhile Dooku tilted Maglor's face to his and kissed him, and one hand reached around to stroke Maglor's cock while the other hand continued brushing his hair. Dooku kissed Maglor's neck, and shoulder, and he nibbled and sucked on the pointy tip of Maglor's ear.

Sören rolled over and Maglor rubbed his chest and stomach, and Sören moaned as he watched Dooku and Maglor kissing some more. "The two of you are so fucking *hot* together," Sören said. "It should be illegal."

Maglor leaned down and kissed Sören, and now it was Dooku's turn to make a noise, and he ground out, "I don't know, I think that's even more illegal."

Sören grinned at Dooku before kissing Maglor harder, taking their cocks into his fist and stroking them slowly.

Dooku came down and kissed each of them in turn, Sören then Maglor, then Sören and Maglor kissed again, and for the next while the three just took turns kissing each other, running their hands over each other, getting more and more worked up. At last Sören shoved Maglor onto his back and held him down with one hand, which made Maglor already start arching to him, panting for him, loving it when Sören's aggressive side came out. He bucked and moaned when Sören and Dooku kissed and licked his neck, on either side of them, and his moans got even louder, worryingly loud when Sören and Dooku licked and sucked his nipples at the same time.

They kissed, licked, and nibbled him all over, from his chest down his calves and back again, fingers walking and brushing in the wake of their lips and tongues. Maglor felt as sensitized as he ever had been, trembling, absolutely aching for both of them. When Dooku took him into his mouth and Sören slipped his tongue inside him, tongue swirling in lazy circles just right on his prostate, Maglor felt like he could cry, remembering Fingolfin and Fëanor doing exactly this to him, long ago.

He took each of their hands. He was already so close...

Just before he could come, they stopped. Which was, too, as they were long ago - they loved teasing him, and being teased. Their lovemaking could and did last for hours, with all the teasing. Sören took a few playful licks at the head of Maglor's cock, lapping precum, before he came up to kiss him, and Maglor felt Sören's own urgent erection rubbing against his thigh.

"Hmm, what shall we do with this Elf?" Sören asked Dooku.

"What shan't we do with this Elf?" Dooku's fingers played over Maglor's chest before a finger stroked Maglor's chin and Dooku's mouth claimed his.

"Well, you know. Only so much we can do in one night," Sören said, leaning down to lap a nipple, and tug between his teeth; Maglor cried out. Sören's fingers walked down to Maglor's cock, and the thumb rubbed the frenulum as his index finger rubbed the slit. "I think I want this cock of his." He nuzzled Maglor and kissed him again. Then he leaned over Maglor to kiss Dooku. "Maybe you fuck him as he fucks me? If you have no objection, that is," Sören said, stroking Maglor's face, looking into his eyes.

"None whatsoever," Maglor said. "But I know I'm already ready... we need to get you ready, Sören." He almost let *Ada* slip instead of "Sören". The heat in Sören's eyes wasn't

helping with that.

With that, Maglor feasted on him, tongue in Sören's passage, eating him hungrily, as Sören and Dooku kissed and caressed each other, Sören stroking his and Dooku's cocks together in his fist. Maglor remembered how many times he had tasted his father this way, and he could almost come untouched just thinking of it, but he saved the unloading to be inside him.

When Sören was ready, and well-lubricated, Maglor slipped into him, letting out a deep sigh of contentment as he bottomed out, feeling Sören's passage embracing him, like he was coming home. Every bone in his body ached, every nerve in his body sang for Sören to know who he was, to *remember*. He almost cried as he kissed Sören, taking his hands as he took his first few slow, gentle thrusts. *Soon*.

Dooku took him from behind, tilting his face so they could kiss, and then Dooku kissed, licked and nibbled his neck, nape and shoulder, his hands reaching around to caress Maglor's chest, play with the nipples. Sören moaned, arching, rolling his hips to urge Maglor on a little harder and faster; Maglor could feel his excitement at watching them across their bond, just the same way Fëanor had been so aroused by him and Fingolfin.

But despite Sören wanting it harder and faster, Maglor kept it slow for awhile, savoring the sweet connection between them, feeling perfectly at peace, like he was, finally, right where he belonged. "I love you," Maglor heard himself rasp, kissing Sören, kissing Dooku. "I love you, both of you. I love you so much..." *I've missed you so much.*

"We love you." Sören was holding both their hands in his, and squeezed. "Your home is with us now."

And then, Sören slipped his hands out, and Maglor watched as Sören touched himself, with that delicious crinkle of his nose and bite of his lower lip. Maglor shuddered, not able to help himself from picking up the pace, just a little, enough that Sören let out a moan and matched his rhythm. "Yes," Sören panted. "Like that..."

Sören was leaking a tremendous amount of precum, and when he stuck his slick fingers in Maglor's mouth and he could taste the sweetness, Maglor drove into him even harder, not as hard as he could, but enough that Sören let out a wild cry. Sören then stuck his precum-soaked fingers in Dooku's mouth, and now Dooku was driving into him with abandon, and Maglor pounded Sören into the mattress the same way he was being fucked, giving in to his passion, his *need* for both of them, savage.

"Yes, yes, *yes*. " Sören grabbed his hips, white-knuckled.

It was fast and furious, and when the three of them climaxed together, it was shattering, glorious, like nothing else in the universe existed except their heat, their light, their love. Maglor's face was buried in Sören's chest, Dooku covering his back, trembling between them, held safe. It was almost unreal, but it was very real, and it was almost terrifying in its immanence, they were here , the three had found their way to each other again.

Soon.

Sören was already ready for another round. Dooku would need time to recharge, but Sören and Maglor had no problem with helping him do that - now it was Dooku's turn to be worshiped, kissed and caressed all over, until he was hard again, all the more as Sören teased him, mischief in his eyes.

Maglor watched as Sören lay on top of Dooku, his back to Dooku's chest, and took his cock. Dooku groaned as he bottomed out in Sören, and just held him for a minute, tilting Sören's face to kiss him deeply. Then Maglor approached, straddling Sören's hips, and Dooku guided Sören's cock to Maglor's entrance. Maglor sank down, stroking Sören's face and watching his eyes as Sören claimed him, filled him. When Sören was all the way inside, Maglor leaned down to kiss him, and shivered as he felt Sören's arms wrap around him.

"I love you, Ada." The word slipped out.

"I love you, *elskan*. " Sören stroked his face, and kissed him again.

Maglor rode him slowly, as Sören slowly rode Dooku. All sense of time and place slipped away and it was only the three of them, only passion, only ecstasy.

Chapter 36

The day before Margrét and Frankie's wedding, Sören was on edge. He'd been shielding his mind a bit more tightly than usual, not wanting to broadcast that he suspected he was the reincarnation of Fëanor, and that Dooku suspected he was Fingolfin. He was worried that Maglor would take offense and leave again. And yet, keeping something from his partner – especially after they had just cleared the air about close to five years of deception on Maglor's part – bothered Sören's conscience. Though this was supposed to be a happy time, the wedding served as a sort of family reunion and it reminded Sören of what Fëanor, Fingolfin, and Maglor had all lost.

At least Margrét, Frankie and Flóki had liked the artwork he'd gifted them. Even with all the compliments he'd received about his art over the years, he still worried that people wouldn't like something when he gifted them. That was one less worry on his shoulders.

Margrét and Frankie were having a party the night before the wedding, in a special lounge they'd reserved, and the party was 80s themed, with karaoke. Dooku was wearing a Robert Palmer-esque suit and tie, that he'd also be wearing to the reception. It didn't take long for Maglor to change into his outfit - a long black tunic, black leather pants, a black-beaded rosary worn as a necklace; he took one of the barstools from the kitchenette in the suite into the bathroom to work on his hair and makeup, which took much longer. Sören came into the bathroom to borrow the mirror so he could switch out one of the small silver hoops in his ear with a dangly cross earring, and he snickered at the site of Maglor's fluffy hair, which wasn't anywhere near done yet.

"Wow," Sören said, taking out the hoop. "That's... some hair."

Maglor's eyes, enhanced with dark eyeshadow, eyeliner and mascara, raked over the length of Sören, who was wearing a grey "wifebeater" tank top and jeans. When he saw Sören put the cross in his ear he made the connection. "Oh no. Oh no. You're George Michael?"

Sören pulled out the aviator "Top Gun"-style sunglasses he had in the jeans pocket and put them on. "I have a leather jacket in my suitcase, it's a good thing the hotel has air conditioning."

"Sören..."

Sören grinned, and pushed the sunglasses up to the top of his head; he'd wear them properly later. He patted Maglor and scooted off.

Maglor's hair took the better part of two hours, with Dooku finally yelling down the hall, "We need to head down now." A moment later Maglor came out, and Sören heard his voice saying, "This is as good as it's going to get, I guess."

"You're gonna put somebody's eye out with that hair," Sören said when he saw the finished product, Maglor's hair teased and billowing.

"We can go," Maglor said, nodding.

"Was your hair seriously this bad in the 80s?" Sören asked as they got in the elevator.

"It was worse."

Sören leaned on Dooku, doubling over.

The first thing Sören noticed when he got in the room where the party was being held, was Dagnýr dressed like Billy Idol. Dag waved at his brother and then he attempted the Billy Idol sneer, which made Sören gigglesnort. “Is THAT why you dyed your hair blond?”

Dag nodded.

Sören's amusement intensified when he saw Margrét and Frankie dressed like they were rejects from Bananarama or The Go-Gos, brightly colored skirts and tops, lots of bangle bracelets and necklaces, teased hair.

"This is the first time I've seen you wear actual colors in years," Sören said to his sister.

“She'll be wearing colors again tomorrow, I got to see her wedding dress and it's white,” Dag said, and then he sang in a Billy Idol voice, "For a *white wedding*."

"White isn't a color," Sören said.

"Yes it is."

"Is not."

"Is too."

"Is not."

"Is too."

"Oh my fucking god, look at Flóki," Frankie yelled, nudging Sören and pointing.

Flóki's, waist-length red hair hanging loose, with a bandana tied around his head, wearing a white tank top and jeans, bearing a resemblance to Axl Rose but much more attractive.

Then Maglor's eyes widened with shock. He broadcasted*Speaking of non-humans...* "I'm going to fucking die."

Edmund Billingsley was dressed up like ZZ Top - black fedora, black sunglasses, black jacket, shirt and trousers, his long beard perfect for the look. He raised his hand in greeting, and Maglor facepalmed.

Sören's jaw dropped, his mouth full of cheese, until Maglor elbowed him and he resumed chewing.

Maglor said to Sören, "Let's hit the bar, yes?"

That was what they did, each having whisky and then a shot of Brennivín. Then Sören got a mojito, for a change of pace, and as he worked on his mojito, he finally saw Ingwion, with his blond hair done in many elaborate beaded braids and the top teased like Sören had seen in an old music video from Kajagoogoo. Sören had a gigglefit, not able to help himself.

But then he thought about Maglor's broadcast – which meant both Flóki and Edmund were non-human. Sören remembered encountering Flóki in Reykjavik, and Ingwion saying they had known each other for a long time, and all the bells and whistles went off in his

head. *Oh my fucking god, that's Loki.* He wondered if Edmund was Odin, but Maglor seemed to know Edmund and Sören doubted that Maglor knew Odin – somehow, Sören got the sense that Ingwion being the Norse god Freyr was as much news to Maglor as it had been to Sören.

Who is that? Sören spoke into Maglor's mind.

Who what?

Edmund. Sören narrowed his eyes at Maglor.

You would know him as Gandalf, Maglor replied.

So we have two Norse gods and a wizard in the room Sören felt that surge of apprehension again.

Maia. The proper term is Maia. This isn't Harry Potter. Maglor smirked. *Even if he would make a good Dumbledore.* Maglor walked off to bring a drink over to Dooku, smiling at Sören over his shoulder.

Sören tried to smile back, but he felt ice in the pit of his stomach. It was one thing for Ingwion and Maglor to have a history and for Ingwion to have ascended to godhood in the years since he and Maglor had last seen each other. It was another thing to show up on the radar of a god, and it was another thing entirely to have two Norse gods present – something Sören noticed Maglor wasn't denying, as if he'd also made the connection. Even if Sören's suspicions were right that he had been Fëanor in a past life, that still didn't explain why there were two Norse gods hanging around.

Sören was getting the urge to bolt. But he didn't want to ruin his sister's party.

As if he sensed Sören's anxiety, Flóki came over with a mojito refill for Sören. “Smile,” Flóki said.

Sören didn't feel like smiling, but he also knew that he had what people called “resting bitchface” and when he scowled he really scowled, so he forced himself to smile.

“It will be all right,” Flóki said softly.

Now Sören felt even less like smiling. “How do you fucking know that?” He realized he was sassing a god, but he still didn't feel like he should have to put on airs and act subservient. “I mean, I know what you are,” Sören said, lowering his voice. “At least I think I do. But you can't know everything. You can't know that it will, in fact, be all right.”

“You're right – both about what I am, and that even being what I am, I don't know everything.” Flóki nodded. “But what I do know is that you have people in your corner who want very much for things to be all right. And when we want something badly enough... we have ways of getting it.” Flóki patted him. “You'll see.”

Sören wanted to ask *Why? Why me? Why are you interested in MY life?* But he didn't, watching Flóki walk off.

And then he realized he'd just gotten platitudes from a Norse trickster god dressed up like Axl Rose, and he had another gigglefit. Frankie came over, and Sören realized he looked quite mad. “What's so funny?” Frankie asked.

Sören replied with most of the truth – not all of it. “I can't quite take Flóki seriously dressed up like Axl Rose.”

"You're a fine one to talk, that earring looks fucking ridiculous." Frankie batted the dangly cross earring around like a cat with a toy.

"It does."

"You're still better-looking than George Michael."

"Awww, I don't know if I'd go that far." Sören blushed.

"Oh my god, speaking of which." Frankie pointed again.

There was Ari, also dressed in a leather bomber over a white tank top, blue jeans, wearing aviator sunglasses and a single dangling cross earring. Ari's golden-brown short hair and beard made him look closer to George Michael than Sören with his dark hair and beard.

Sören and Ari both pulled up their aviator sunglasses at the same time and stared at each other. Maglor, Margrét, Dag and Matt stopped dancing to watch as Ari walked across the room, and Matt began whistling the theme from The Good, The Bad and The Ugly, with Dag making "wah-WAH-wah"s.

"We can't both be bloody George Michael!" Sören said.

"I had no idea you were gonna be George Michael too," Ari said, and gestured to Sören. "I mean, with your looks, you would have made a better Oates from Hall and Oates."

Sören shook his head.

Ari gestured to him again. "If we'd coordinated first, you could have been the other guy from Wham!"

"Nobody even remembers the other guy from Wham!"

"His name is Andrew Ridgeley," Maglor muttered under his breath.

"Well, I'm not taking this off," Ari said.

"There can be only one," Sören said, quoting Highlander.

"What, are you gonna fight me over it?" Ari held out his arms, grinning. "Come at me."

“Wow,” Dag said. “It's... the Whamnarök.”

"I need another drink," Maglor said.

"Same," Margrét said, marching off with him to the bar.

"Hey," Sören said, "it still makes more sense than the plot of Highlander II."

–

Maglor was at the bar again, and stayed alongside Dooku, who he could tell was feeling ill at ease in the crowd. Dagnýr was on the mic again, singing two back-to-back Billy Idol

songs, "Dancing With Myself" and "Rebel Yell", sneering and punching the air just like Billy Idol did in the old music videos, and there wasn't enough alcohol in the world to unsee his cousin Finrod doing that. Dag was way too into the Billy Idol persona, and Maglor wondered now if Finrod was this extra when he met Men for the first time and charmed them with song. He decided he didn't want to know

This was going to be another night where they were all too wasted for sex, and Maglor almost regretted it. They'd make up for it in the next few days, though, and Maglor knew he wouldn't regret that. In the meantime...

Maglor had enough alcohol that he decided he was going to sing, and Gitta and Jane came over to talk to Dooku and Sören, which made him feel less guilty about slipping away to sing. But he didn't know what to sing. Since he was dressed up like a glam rocker for the evening, he told the DJ to put on a “hair band” song. Maglor was expecting something like Def Leppard or even Motley Crue, and to his surprise, the DJ put on a song that one would not expect for an upbeat party... “Wind of Change” by the Scorpions. When Maglor raised an eyebrow, the DJ said, “Well, someone's getting married and that's a big change, right?”

Maglor remembered the Berlin Wall coming down, could see it, remembered what it felt like, back then. A mixture of hope for humanity's future, and a sense of dread that the world was going to become smaller, more global, harder for him to hide, and would change even more rapidly, and even then at the turn of the 80s and 90s, it was getting harder and harder for him to be in the world - he had felt, as the Berlin Wall fell, that a wall was going up around him and his life even more than it was there before, the awareness of his separateness never more acute.

And then, years later, the wall around his heart came down like the Berlin Wall, and he felt like he had a place in the world again.

Walking down the street
Distant memories
Are buried in the past forever
I follow the Moskva
Down to Gorky Park
Listening to the wind of change

Take me to the magic of the moment
On a glory night
Where the children of tomorrow share their dreams
With you and me
Take me to the magic of the moment
On a glory night
Where the children of tomorrow dream away
in the wind of change

All those emotions came out as he sang, and his eyes met Sören's, and Dooku's, farther away. He could see Sören's eyes too bright, knowing how sensitive Sören was to his music, knowing Sören saw it and felt it too.

Frankie and Margrét were getting teary too. When the song was over, Margrét told him, "Now sing Duran Duran!"

Maglor wasn't in the mood for that, but he desperately needed something less emotional. This time he did have a specific request for the DJ, something else that would forever be

associated with the 1980s and his time in Berlin, but didn't quite have the same effect on him.

Hast du etwas Zeit für mich?
Dann singe ich ein Lied für dich
Von neunundneunzig Luftballons
Auf ihrem Weg zum Horizont
Denkst du vielleicht grad an mich?
Dann singe ich ein Lied für dich
Von neunundneunzig Luftballons
Und dass sowas von sowas kommt

Neunundneunzig Luftballons
Auf ihrem Weg zum Horizont
Hielt man für Ufos aus dem All
Darum schickte ein General
'ne Fliegerstaffel hinterher
Alarm zu geben, wenn's so wär
Dabei war'n dort am Horizont
Nur neunundneunzig Luftballons

He somehow got through the entirety of the song and he was done after that, aware of himself so drunk he was slurring at the end of the song. He staggered over to Sören and Dooku.

"Hi," Maglor said, feeling the cheesy, shit-faced grin on his face.

"That was cute," Sören said. "I've been wanting to replace 'Alejandro' for your ringtone on my cell and now I know what to -"

"Hells, Sören."

Sören patted him. "Your German is pretty good, not that I would know or anything."

"It needs work. I've been out of practice." Maglor wondered, then, if he should start practicing in anticipation of their next move, his next identity. Hopefully that wouldn't be for awhile but one never knew...

Now Ari was on the mic, singing “Monkey” by George Michael.

"Fuckin' Ari. He could have told me he was gonna be George Fucking Michael," Sören said.

"You could have told him you wanted to be George Michael," Maglor said, and chugged champagne at the surreality of what he just said, that any of this was even happening.

"I'm gonna go up there and show him how it's done," Sören said, slurring his words just a little.

Maglor laughed at that. *Your Fëanor is showing*, he thought to himself, careful not to broadcast – not wanting to freak Sören out with the knowledge that Sören was the reincarnation of his father. But nonetheless, it was so obvious now to be almost painful. Fëanor was nothing if not competitive, having to be the best at everything. It was good to see that alive and well, and would be interesting to see how that manifested itself in the coming years.

Maglor watched as Sören got up to talk to the DJ, and then when Ari's song was over, Sören gave a loud slow clap, before snatching the microphone away from him. The opening notes of "Faith" started, and Sören waited, then when it was time, he sang:

Well I guess it would be nice
If I could touch your body
I know not everybody
Has got a body like you

But I've got to think twice
Before I give my heart away
And I know all the games you play
Because I play them too

Oh but I
Need some time off from that emotion
Time to pick my heart up off the floor
Oh when that love comes down
Without devotion
Well it takes a strong man baby
But I'm showing you the door

'Cause I gotta have faith
I gotta have faith
'Cause I gotta have faith, faith
'Cause I gotta have faith-ah, faith-ah, faith-AH

And just like in the music video, Sören was dancing around wiggling his ass in those jeans. Even when he was at his most ridiculous, he was almost infuriatingly attractive, and Maglor grumbled into his drink. Sören had a good voice for someone with no professional training, who just sang when he felt like it; Maglor had heard Sören sing in the shower often over the years. He came closer, without thinking about it, and Sören danced towards him, eventually taking off his leather jacket and throwing it at Maglor.

"Whooooo!" Frankie cheered at the end. "Encore! Encore!"

Sören wasn't going to perform the same song twice; he went to the DJ, exchanged a few words with the DJ nodding, and then Sören came towards Maglor again. “This one goes out to you,” he said, eyes locked with Maglor's.

Maglor was expecting “I Want Your Sex” or perhaps even “Fastlove”, one of George Michael's sexier songs, and more ass wiggling. Instead...

That's all I wanted:
Something special, something sacred
In your eyes.
For just one moment
To be bold and naked
At your side.

Sometimes I think that you never
Understand me.
Maybe this time is forever.
Say it can be.

That's all you wanted:
Something special, someone sacred
In your life.
Just for one moment
To be warm and naked
At my side.

Sometimes I think that you never
Understand me.
But something tells me together
We'd be happy, oh, oh.

I will be your father figure.
Put your scar-red hand in mine.
I will be your preacher teacher.
Anything you have in mind.
I will be your father figure.
I have had enough of crime.
I will be the one who loves you
'Til the end of time.

Maglor felt himself getting choked up. Not wanting to make a scene - either bursting into tears or kissing Sören passionately in front of the crowd - he went back to the bar. He had a bottle of Absolut vodka this time, which raised Dooku's eyebrows.

"We're not driving anywhere," Maglor said. "I'll be fine."

But he wasn't fine. He was, in fact, quite shaken up by the song. Wondering if Sören knew what he was singing, the deeper truth of it. Every nerve in his body was screaming to take Sören into his arms, shake him, and yell *you are my father, returned to me after all this time, and I will never let you go*, but he couldn't. He worried that he would scare Sören away – that it would be Sören who left this time, thinking things had gotten too weird. It would seem to fit the theme of the Doom, that he would have found his way back to his father and uncle after so long, just to lose them again. He gripped the bottle in his hand so tightly that for a moment he worried it would shatter with the amount of tension he was carrying in his body.

Then Maglor saw that Sören, too, was not fine, and desperately trying to hide it – he could feel Sören broadcasting a flood of overwhelming emotion, he could see that lovely face brooding. He could feel Sören broadcasting that he didn't want to have a meltdown and make a scene at his sister's party. But when their eyes met across the room, Sören started to cry. And that set off Maglor, too, eyes burning with tears.

He had to get out of there – he had to get them both out of there before a double meltdown happened. Dooku could feel the change in the mood, and he nodded at Maglor, put an arm around him, and began to march them both towards Sören. “Let's go up to our suite,” Dooku said quietly.

Before they got too far, Margrét, Frankie, Flóki and Dag all noticed and ran after them, and as Sören, Dooku and Maglor waited for the elevator to come down, there they all were.

“I'm fine,” Sören said. “I had too much to drink -”

“You're not fine.” Margrét gave him a stern look.

Now even Edmund was out there, and walked over. When the elevator chimed and opened, they all got in.

“I'm sorry,” Sören choked out, falling apart. “I'm sorry -” And then Sören looked around, and Maglor knew the combination of the crowd watching him have a meltdown, and the confined space being even smaller with so many people in it, set off Sören's claustrophobia even worse than usual. Sören made a high-pitched noise of distress, eyes wide and afraid as tears spilled down his cheeks.

“It's OK,” Margrét said.

“Oh god. I fucked up your party. Now I'm making it worse having a panic attack, I'm so sorry you have to see this shit.” Then Sören looked at Maglor. “And I shouldn't have sung that song.”

“No, shhhhh. Yes, you should have.” Maglor's arms tightened around Sören.

“No, it was... I know it was weird,” Sören said. “I'm so sorry, Maglor -”

Sören had let the real name slip in front of three people who didn't know who and what he was. Dagnýr hit the stop button on the elevator panel. He leaned against the wall with his arms folded. "Who and what are you?" he asked Maglor.

Maglor looked at Dagnýr. "Start the elevator."

"I will when you answer -"

"Your brother is having a claustrophobia attack, start the goddamn fucking elevator *NOW*." Maglor's voice seemed louder than it actually was.

Dagnýr did as he was told. "I'm sorry, I didn't realize -"

"It's not like we've seen much of each other since we were fourteen," Sören muttered, "so you wouldn't know about my phobia."

Dagnýr facepalmed. "Ouch." He started the elevator again.

“I think,” Margrét said calmly but firmly, “we should all go to my suite and have... a talk.”

“I agree,” Flóki said. “We have a few subjects we should all talk about.”

“Indeed,” Edmund said.

Dagnýr gave them all the side eye, but he didn't object. They rode up to the penthouse suite. Once they were there, Margrét went to the bar and Dooku gave a small hand raise. “I think everyone has had enough to drink,” Dooku said. “If we have serious things to discuss, we should probably keep what's left of our sobriety.”

“Well, that depends,” Flóki said.

Dagnýr raised an eyebrow. “OK, what the fuck is going on here?”

“I think perhaps I should be the one to... initiate the discussion.” Edmund clapped his hands together. “Good evening. Many of you do not know me, but I know many of you, and this family reunion is... quite a bit more significant than you may realize." He

produced an item from his pocket, small and spherical, wrapped in a cloth. He removed the cloth and revealed a glass orb. Maglor knew what it was right away – he had one of his own, though it didn't seem to work anymore.

“Is that a Magic 8 Ball?” Sören asked.

“No,” Edmund said. “Look more closely. I'm not going to tell you what this is – you'll be able to figure it out. You made this after all, Fëanáro.”

Sören's jaw dropped. “What did you just call me.”

“Your name,” Edmund said. He looked at Margrét and Frankie. “Is there a more private location in your suite where I can discuss things with each of you, one at a time?”

“You can use the bedroom,” Frankie said.

"You first," Edmund said to Dagnýr, who looked the most visibly agitated.

Maglor decided to hold his peace while they waited - it was better for Edmund to show, than for him to try to tell - though he could feel Sören's distress, and the way Sören was trying to shield himself even harder. Approximately twenty minutes later Dagnýr came back in tears. He buried his face in his hands and rocked himself. Then it was Dooku's turn. Fifteen minutes later Dooku came back, walking slowly, looking as if he'd witnessed an accident or something worse. Before Sören could ask about it, Edmund gestured for Sören to follow. “This won't take long.”

–

Maglor felt the explosion before he heard it, the sudden rise of temperature in the penthouse suite, something like a sonic boom outside even though they were far enough away from the airport for that to not make sense. Then, there it was: the screams in Icelandic, the heavy breathing, more screaming, at last the door to the bedroom slammed open and the sound of Sören's steel-toed Doc Martens boots stomping down the hall. Sören didn't even look at anyone else in the room, but stormed out of the suite altogether.

Maglor and Dooku looked at each other. "Right," Dooku said and got up, Maglor got up too. Dagnýr also got up.

Sören was walking away from the suite, and Maglor called to him. "Sören." And then, "Fëanor."

Sören not only didn't turn around, but broke off in a run, getting in the elevator and frantically pushing the buttons for it to close.

"Shit." It had to be bad if he was getting in an elevator by himself.

"We can take the stairs...?" Dooku asked.

They headed to the emergency exit and ran down the flights of stairs. By the time they got on the ground floor, Sören was nowhere in sight. They checked the ground floor first - the bar, the restaurant, the pool. No sign of Sören. Sören's jeep was in its parking stall.

Maglor got behind the wheel, with Dooku in the passenger seat and Dagnýr in the back. Maglor looked into the rear-view mirror and asked Dagnýr, "Why are you with us for this?"

"He's still my brother, in this life," Dagnýr said. "I need to make up for earlier. Plus if you're looking for him, we have that twin... echolocation... thing... or whatever the fuck it is."

Maglor began pulling out of the parking lot. "He can't have gotten far if he's on foot," Dooku said.

"Not if he took the bus," Maglor said. He looked at Dagnýr in the rear-view mirror, and he and Dagnýr said in unison, "Tjörnin." It was one of Sören's favorite places in Reykjavik if not his favorite, even though he had already been there earlier in the day, and it made sense he'd go to the peace of the lake when he was feeling so much inner turmoil. Even from a distance, Maglor could feel it, like it was ripping Sören apart.

They drove to Tjörnin, and split up once there to cover more ground. Maglor felt panic, even though he knew Reykjavik had one of the lowest crime rates in the world and there was very likely nothing that would happen to Sören in a public place in broad daylight here, and he realized after a minute it wasn't so much that he was afraid of something happening to Sören, as it still felt too hot, the air too thin, and he was afraid all of Sören's rage at what he'd seen was going to combine with his gifts in some way and make a public display that would make their lives more interesting than they needed to be at this moment in time.

He reached into the Song, sending what comfort he could in Sören's general direction, and then he heard the crying. He ran ahead and saw Dagnýr had gotten to him first. Sören was laying in the grass in the fetal position, and Dagnýr was kneeling beside him, also crying a little, petting his brother.

"*Það er allt í lagi, ég er hér, við erum öll hér, það er allt í lagi, við erum að fara að laga þetta einhvern veginn*," Dagnýr said.

"*Það mun aldrei vera allt í lagi*," Sören replied, and the brokenness in his voice made Maglor's heart sink.

Dooku was striding around from the other side now. If anyone could get through to him when he was like this, it was Fingolfin. Dooku sat down and pulled Sören up, into his arms, and they just looked at each other for a moment. And Maglor saw the awe in Sören's eyes, his full lips parting slightly as he reached out to stroke Dooku's face.

"Fëanáro," Dooku said, simply, taking Sören's hand and pressing it to his heart.

"Ñolofinwë."

Dooku let go of Sören's hand, took Sören's face in his hands, and kissed him deeply.

The sight took Maglor's breath away, brought tears to his eyes. It was erotic, as well - not just that Sören and Dooku being physical with each other was always an arousing sight to him, and even more arousing now that they knew who and what they were to each other... but it was beautiful, the way they loved each other, the way they had found each other again despite the Doom, their love for each other more powerful than the curse of the gods.

After a couple minutes Dagnýr started making vomit noises, and Sören held up his middle finger. And Maglor's tears mingled with laughter - missing his own brothers, and the banter between them, especially with Maedhros, glad that in this life, Finrod and Fëanor had been made brothers. At least they had that.

Dooku and Sören pulled apart, with Dooku petting Sören's curls.

"Come back to the suite," Maglor said. "The party's not over yet." He wasn't just talking about Margrét's event.

Dooku and Dagnýr helped Sören up, and walked him back to the jeep. Sören still looked shell-shocked, which was understandable. Dagnýr got in the back seat again and on the way back to the hotel he held his brother, murmuring to him in Icelandic, while Maglor and Dooku exchanged occasional worried glances, both on edge and concerned for the man they loved.

What happens now, Dooku spoke into Maglor's mind.

Maglor cleared his throat softly. "Hey, Sören? So, um... what did you see in the palantir?"

It took Sören a moment, and then he rolled off his brother and pulled his cell phone out of his pocket.

"What are you doing?"

"I have a folder of reaction memes on my phone, like I do on my laptop."

Maglor wasn't surprised Sören had a meme folder on both devices. He watched in the rear-view mirror as Sören hit a few buttons, and then he used the Force to float the phone over and Maglor saw:

"That cat is me right now," Sören said. "I saw... a lot." He used the Force to take back his phone and put it back in his pocket.

"I bet."

"It was..." Sören took a deep breath. He closed his eyes, facepalmed, and rubbed his face. "It felt like a download. It was so many things, and the visions kept coming faster and faster, like watching a movie on fast forward, but if you asked me about a specific

scene I could tell you in detail what happened - the knowledge is all there, and my head fucking hurts."

Back at the suite, it was obvious Margrét and Frankie had also spent time with the palantir. They all sat in the living room in shock, crying.

"I'm..." Dooku swallowed hard. "Not in a very good place right now."

"None of us are," Dagnýr said. "I saw my death. I saw... too much. Including my time in Valinor, and being cast out once I protested what was happening. I didn't want the pardon and favor of gods who demonstrated cruelty and murderousness far worse than anything my kin had done. They are monsters."

Sören looked at Dagnýr, and then he just hugged him, hard.

"Findaráto, I need to buy you a drink sometime," Maglor said.

"Sometime." Dagnýr nodded. He ran a hand through his hair, laughing. "God, I find out I'm Finrod, the one time I dye my hair blonde, what is this shit."

“So...” Sören turned to Maglor. “I have a confession to make.”

Maglor leaned back and waited for it.

Sören and Dooku looked at each other, and then Dooku nodded and gave Sören the “go ahead” gesture. Sören cleared his throat and said, “Nico and I already figured it out before Gandalf showed us... all of that.”

“He read The Silmarillion, and I... reviewed a few notes to refresh myself.” Dooku scowled. “I had been meaning to tell you that the thing that unsettled me, the thing I didn't mention... I had dreams before I read the book... such dreams that when I read the book, it was if Tolkien had seen my dreams and put them on the page. Especially... my death.”

“Eru,” Maglor swore. “I'm so sorry, Uncle.”

“We didn't want to tell you,” Sören said, “because we worried you would think we were... impostors. We worried we'd offend you -”

Now it was Maglor's turn to hug Sören tight, and Maglor fell apart all over again. He knew that his father had been much more sensitive and insecure than Tolkien had allowed in his canon, but he also knew Sören had been dealt a heavy hand in this life, between the abuse of his guardians and the abuse of Justin Roberts. To doubt that he had been someone so talented and brave - Sören still did not know his own worth, even with the ways Dooku had been trying to heal his heart.

And some of that is my fault, because I fucking left him.

Maglor sighed. “Ada. No... I already knew.” Their eyes met, and Maglor explained, “I figured it out more recently – it wasn't something I knew when we were together before, though I thought, often, that you reminded me so much of him. But when I had the a-ha moment, I didn't want to tell you, because I was afraid you'd think I was full of shit. It's one thing to meet a living god, it's another thing for someone else to tell you 'oh yeah by the way you were So-and-So in a past life'...”

“I get it.” Sören nodded and patted him. “If you're not upset with me for not telling you when I figured it out, I'm not upset with you for not telling me when you figured it out.”

“I'm not,” Maglor said honestly. “The only thing I am upset with is that you... would doubt how wonderful you are. I wish you could see yourself the way I see you.” He touched Sören's face. Tears came to Sören's eyes again, mirrored in his own.

“Meet a living god.” Margrét pursed her lips. “So you knew about Flóki?”

“Not just him.” Sören frowned. Then he blinked. “Wait, you knew about Flóki, already?”

“It's kind of hard to live with a god and not figure it out,” Margrét said. “And you said not just him?”

“Ingwion,” Maglor said. “Is Freyr.”

As if on cue, there was a small, polite knock at the door of the suite. Margrét opened the door and there he was, looking like a member of Kajagoogoo, giving a little wave. “May I come in?” Ingwion asked.

Margrét stepped back and Ingwion walked in.

“That's the thing I don't fucking understand about this,” Sören said. “The Doom is still upon us, we know we're on the Valar's shit list, OK fine. But... Ingwion... you used to be one of us, then you ascended to godhood. That still doesn't explain why you would help us, the House of Finwë. That doesn't explain why Loki would be around.”

Ingwion looked at Flóki, and Flóki looked at Edmund.

“I have another thing to show all of you,” Edmund said. He put the palantir on the coffee table in the center of the room and snapped his fingers. A beam of light shot up from the palantir and an oval of light began spinning above it. The group watched as images formed in the oval, like it was a screen projector – stars and nebulas, and at last...

Miriel, flowers in her hair, laughing with delight at butterflies dancing in her garden. Finwë watching with love in his eyes, walking over to join her. Miriel tells him to hold out his hand, his finger, and a butterfly lands on it.

And then there is Indis, who pounces on them from behind, laughing. Miriel gives her a playful swat, and Indis gives her an innocent face that is still full of mischief, and leans in for a kiss. When she does, a butterfly lands on Miriel's nose.

Finwë kisses both of them in turn, and then the women kiss each other again. They take each other's hands and walk from the garden.

Miriel is gone, and Indis is hostile to Fëanor, and so is Finwë. What young Fëanor does not know, and what is shown now, is Indis grieving for Miriel, weeping for her, irrationally blaming Fëanor for her death.

Ages pass, kingdoms rise and fall. There is a conqueror-king, Wodanaz, who is gaining the power of gods by killing them. He tells the Valar they will be spared, since their influence has mostly faded from the world anyway, if they give him gifts.

One of their gifts is a weaver. Miriel's fëa is set forth, in chains, led to Wodanaz. He gives her the new name of Brynhildur, a Valkyrie, and now she weaves the doom of the slain on the battlefield, tossing a tapestry - invisible to the mortal eye - over warriors who Wodanaz has chosen for his ranks in Valhalla.

She grieves Finwë, she grieves Indis, she grieves the life she had. This is no life, the endless killing. And yet one of the warriors of Valhalla, Sigurð, is different from the rest. He can sing, he can make poems. She lays with him, and they take comfort together.

But the weariness sets in once more. She and Sigurð make their stand against the Allfather, and are cast out. Miriel-Brynhildur's fëa falls to Iceland, and a baby named Brynhildur Jónsdóttir draws breath, as a distant cousin Sigurð Tollasson toddles across town in Akureyri.

Brynhildur Jónsdóttir grows up, not like the other girls. She moves things without touching them.

Her children also grow up different. The Valar take advantage of their frailty as mortals to break them, ensuring their lives will be marred by abuse and trauma, punishing Fëanor most of all.

In ancient Iceland, a völva sees Fëanor, released from the Halls of Mandos and reborn as Sören Sigurðsson, bearded and wild-maned, unrestrained in his rage, going after Wodanaz, reminding her of a wolf in his ferocity. She gets his name wrong - Fenrir.

The Hewer of Caves, who bore the Ring of Barahir with twin serpents, and works on the Large Hadron Collider of many tubes, inspiring fear in many, is called the World Serpent, in the context the völva has for what she sees. There is Findis the shieldmaiden, now Margrét, pale and clad in black with black lipstick and heavy eyeshadow, surrounded by people dressed similarly in a nightclub with eerie lighting, and she is called Hel, the goddess of death, host of the dead.

Wodanaz hears the prophecy of the wolf that will destroy him when unchained. He knows the name is too close to the other name. He does not know that in what he is about to do, he is ensuring the prophecy comes true - he uses his sorcery and attacks Miriel-Brynhildur and Sigurð. They fight back, but it is harder each time, and after Sigurð's death, Brynhildur tells her sister and her brother, who she has learned are both gifted in the same way she is but less so, to leave Iceland for their own safety. She considers sending the children with them but thinks she can protect them. Her sister goes to Scotland, and her brother to Australia. She will never see them again.

At the Dimmuborgir, there is one last blast of power that hits him in the eye and keeps him from being able to see her children and plot against them more than the Valar already have. Her head is pounding, and she lays down for a nap. It is the last time she closes her eyes.

A small boy with brown eyes and a halo of dark curls finds her, not breathing.

"So..." Dagnýr leaned back in his chair and folded his arms. "It's not just the Valar that we pissed off, but the Norse gods too. And from where I sit it looks almost like we were set up for that, so we'd be double doomed. That's... not great."

"No," Edmund said. He buried his face in his hands for a moment. "I had to intervene. You have no idea how much it pains me to turn against the Valar, to see them come to this, drunk on their own power, corrupted by it. I want to believe, desperately, that there is another universe, another reality, where they are not this bad, and would not do this to..."

He couldn't finish his sentence. "But this is not that reality."

"You say you had to intervene," Sören said, "but what can you do? We're mortal. We're not gods."

"I was not a god, either," Ingwion spoke up. "But I gained power, with time. I ascended. I can help."

“We can help,” Flóki said. Flóki leaned back in his chair and spread his hands, gesturing. “In the mythology, Fenrir, Jormundgandr and Hel are called the children of Loki. Odin took your parents away... I will claim you as mine.”

“We were all taught the mythology in school,” Sören said. “I am very familiar with what it says, takk.” Sören looked at Ingwion, and Maglor could feel a hint of distrust. “The mythology also says that Freyr will fight against... well, our side, I guess... at the Ragnarök. So why should I trust you?”

“Because you know as well as I do that canon can get it wrong,” Ingwion said.

For a moment you could hear a pin drop in the room.

“Do you remember the story of the war and the truce between the Aesir and the Vanir – or should I say, the Vanyar?” Ingwion cocked his head to one side. “There was an alliance between Odin and my father's people. We're not just under the rule of the Valar, we're under the rule of Asgard now too.”

“We unchain Fenrir,” Flóki said, “we unchain ourselves, too.”

Ingwion nodded solemnly.

Maglor wanted to believe – wanted to hope – that these two gods were telling the truth, and that they really did have power on their side, power that would make a difference in overturning the Doom and escaping the wrath of Odin. But he also knew from his days in Valinor that his father distrusted the gods for good reason. There was still a note of caution, even as he wanted to show good faith.

Ingwion then said, "I came not just to guide Maglor's path back to yours,” he looked at Sören and Dooku, “and yours to his, but... in my ascent to godhood I have a few special abilities. One of them is that I can grant immortality, to those I choose."

“You showed me Gullinbursti,” Sören said. “You... can do that with people, too?”

“Yes,” Ingwion said. “Now, there are limits. My blood... it will arrest your aging process. You won't get any older than you are now, but you won't get any younger. It will affect your physiology to a certain extent – you will still need to eat, drink, sleep, as Elves do, but also like Elves you will not get illnesses humans are prone to, and you can withstand more severe injuries. You can live for thousands of years if you are careful... it won't make you invincible.” Ingwion looked at Maglor then – Ingwion knew that firsthand, having tended to an injured Maglor. “But if you're going to face Odin someday... it will give you a better shot than the one you've got now. You will be less frail.”

“That's...” Sören blinked, looking like he was struggling with words. “That's a lot.”

“Fighting a god.” Dooku sounded incredulous. “I fell facing Morgoth, and I had the same sort of longevity and constitution you speak of now.”

“Again, it won't make you invincible,” Ingwion said. “But it's your best hope of defeating

the Doom... ensuring your enemies can't do worse to you than they've already done. And they've done quite a bit already."

“We have seen a few other realities,” Flóki said, “so we have seen this claim in action. Worlds where the House of Finwë was resurrected and threw down the Valar.”

“Wait, you...” Dagnýr's jaw dropped. “You've... seen other universes.”

“Yes,” Ingwion said. “In the mythology Odin has a high seat called Hliðskjalf, that can see into other realms. I have been there.”

"This is some fucking irony," Dagnýr said. "I have spent a tremendous amount of time on research and theory about the possibility of parallel universes and non-humans having visited Earth, I got called out by Dawkins, and there's hard proof right here and I can't in any kind of good conscience ever mention it because we all know what will happen."

Maglor felt a surge of panic and before he could stop himself, he found himself snapping at his kinsman. “I was already captured and experimented on by the government once, back in the 1970s. I am not going through that a second time. If I think you have even the slightest inclination to expose me and have me brought in for 'research', I don't care that you're my kinsman, ***I will kill you***." His voice rang out as several voices at once.

Dagnýr put up both his hands. "Dude. Chill. I know. Like I said, I'm not going to. I have ethics. It's just... ironic that here's the living, breathing evidence of 'aliens' and other universes, and I can never say shit about it."

“OK, guys, guys.” Sören pinched the bridge of his nose. He exhaled sharply and looked at Ingwion again. “So you're offering us... what?”

“My blood,” Ingwion said.

"Don't make the decision right away," Maglor urged. "It's a lot to consider. I have to move around and change identities every ten years or so, because I don't age, and that gets old after awhile, not putting down roots anywhere, not being able to form lasting connections to people, having to lie, constant fear of exposure."

Ingwion nodded. "You have some time to think about it, though not much, because I am leaving a few days after Vigdís and Páll return from the States and take their cottage back."

“Where are you going?” Sören looked ready to cry again. “Why are you going?”

“I have a business to run,” Ingwion said with a shrug. “It's not going to run itself. This has been a vacation for me... but that is exactly what it is. A vacation. Even gods have to work for a living nowadays.”

Sören gave him a confused look and then he busted out laughing like that was the funniest thing he'd ever heard – and indeed, Maglor found it somewhat amusing too, it was surreal and absurd – and then Dagnýr got up and began to do dorky “white boy dancing” as he sang “*Everybody's working for the weekend... everybody wants a new romance...*”

Sören chimed in, “*Everybody's goin' off the deep end... everybody needs a second chance*.”

Maglor finished. “*You want a piece of my heart, you better start from the start. You wanna be in the show – come on baby let's go!*”

Dooku double facepalmed. “I changed my mind, I think we could use more drinks now.”

–

Back in their own penthouse suite, Sören and Maglor stood on the balcony for awhile in their pajamas, looking out at the view of Reykjavik. Finally Maglor turned to Sören and said, “Ada,” knowing Sören knew what it meant, now. He stroked Sören's face. “Let's go inside."

Maglor put an arm around Sören and gently pushed him inside. Dooku was sitting on the bed, wearing black silk pajamas, his silver chest hair poking out from the V-neck of his top, and Maglor could feel Sören's arousal, could hear Sören broadcasting: *The Valar may have cursed us to live fucked-up lives, but goddamn if my brother didn't incarnate to be just what I like. And just what I needed, older "daddy" type, someone to feel safe with after everything I've been through in this life. It's like Ñolo at least had enough power left to give me that.* Maglor was deeply touched by that – how Fëanor and Fingolfin loved each other so – and Maglor's eyes misted again.

Sören crawled onto the bed. He flomped onto Dooku, who kissed the top of his head and pet his curls. Sören looked up at him. "Fuck me," he husked.

"You've had too much to drink tonight," Dooku said, patting him; his voice was a little slurred from his own alcohol consumption. "We both have."

"You guys are going to be brutally hungover tomorrow," Maglor said, nodding. "I'm not exactly sober myself, though it takes more to get me to the point you guys are at."

Sören whined, and Dooku chuckled. "I know, love," he said.

Maglor climbed on the bed. "And honestly... I just need you guys to hold me tonight. And I need to hold you, too."

They did just that, assembled into a cuddle pile, tangled up together. Sören sobbed into both of them, memories replaying from the palantir. "It's too much. It's too... fucking... much."

Maglor stroked Sören's curls, and ached for the tears in Sören's eyes. "At least I have you again." He looked at Dooku, and stroked his face. "Both of you."

Sören swallowed hard. "I feel like I must be such a disappointment to you, considering what he was and considering what I am -"

"That's where you're wrong." The tears were coming now, Maglor petting Sören, shaking a little, his voice shaking. "They tried their damnedest, but here you are. You're still very much you. If a rose grows in concrete, it's not less remarkable for being there, it's moreso for being in the last place you'd expect it, thriving there. And despite all you've been through, all the darkness and horror you've experienced, your spirit burns so brightly, still. You still managed to relight a dying flame, inside me, before I even knew it was you. And you're still beautiful." Maglor pressed his lips to Sören's forehead, stroked his curls. "God, you're so beautiful." His eyes met Dooku's. "Both of you." The fingers of his free hand played through Dooku's chest hair for a moment.

"He's pretty nice, yes." Sören tilted his face towards Dooku's. "A shame you think I'm too fuck to drunk."

"Yes, Fëanáro," Dooku said, chuckling and patting him. "That's exactly it, you're too fuck to drunk."

"You shut up."

Dooku kissed the tip of his nose.

That got Sören crying again, and Maglor cried openly with him, and at last Dooku cried a little as well. The three held each other, crying it out, sobbing out the grief for what they'd lost, their rage at what had been done to them past and present, and the fear and uncertainty of what was to come, until they exhausted themselves, sleeping entwined.

Chapter 37

Dagnýr, Matt, and Edmund's flight was going back to Toronto first. At the airport Sören and Dagnýr hugged each other for a long time, crying a little.

"I always hate saying goodbye to you," Sören said when they pulled apart, "and you," ruffling Matt's hair.

"Yeah, me too." Dagnýr pulled him in for another hug, holding him tighter this time.

"Are you guys gonna come out for Christmas, at least?"

Dagnýr nodded. "Of course. Christmas in Iceland is where it's at." Then he sang in a Billy Idol voice, to the tune of "White Wedding", "It's a nice place for a... *White Christmas.*" He did the Billy Idol sneer.

Sören gave him a playful swat. "You fucking dork."

"It's still better than you and Ari feuding over George Michael." Dagnýr snickered. "I need to see if I can get you each a 'Revenge' jacket like he was wearing in the 'Faith' video, for the Christmas Cat to avoid eating you this year."

"How about you don't start that shit again." Sören looked at Edmund. "I feel almost like I should apologize for this fucking family -"

Edmund smiled, his eyes twinkling. "There's no need. It's been delightful to be around."

"Well, in that case, consider yourself invited for Christmas, too."

"Excellent."

"Icelandic Christmas is fucking *weird*," Matt told him, "just warning you now."

"You're warning *Gandalf* something's weird," Sören said. "Really."

Dagnýr smirked. "You know what's weirder than Icelandic Christmas? Fëanor arguing over who gets to be George Michael."

"I'd tell you go eat a dick, but..."

"Er." Matt looked off to the side, and Dagnýr looked off to the other side.

Then Dagnýr said, "Christmas 2020 though? You guys need to come to Toronto for a change. Not just because I keep inviting you guys and we keep deciding Iceland, but by then I'll have babies - or a baby -" Dagnýr rolled his eyes and huffed, "There we go again with the multiple births thing. *Anyway*, it'll be more practical for you guys to come to me, than for me to try to get on a plane with infants."

Sören nodded. "I think that can be arranged. I've always wanted to see Canada."

"We can make you poutine, eh?" Dagnýr grinned.

"That's got... cheese... right?"

"Yes."

"Consider it a deal, then, Christmas 2020 in Toronto if you make me that poutine stuff."

Dagnýr and Sören hugged some more. Sören said, finally, "So, are you gonna, um..." He cleared his throat. "That thing. With the blood. Ingwion's leaving soon but he might, you know, visit again and make the offer again."

Matt looked around and then he shook his head. He lowered his voice so no eavesdroppers could hear. "It's hard enough without all of..." Matt gestured to Maglor off in the distance. "What he has to go through, I'm sure. The world is a shitty fucking place now, and it seems like it's only going to get worse, with global warming, pollution, violence and terrorism, pandemics, world governments going farther to the right just like Europe did before World War II and Hitler took power... I don't want to wear *chains of eternity* around my neck and be fucking stuck here if things keep getting worse and there's some kind of apocalyptic event like World War III with nuclear war or something. And, like... the Valar? The Norse gods? What's that saying, power corrupts? How do we know we won't be as bad as they are, down the road, if we 'ascend'? He who fights monsters and all that. I don't want to turn into my brother Ben - Kylo - and I know that darkness in him, is in me too, I can feel it sometimes." Matt shuddered. "But... I'm not making Dag's decision for him. We talked about it last night and I told him I don't want him to feel obligated to say no just because I said no, I'll completely understand if he says yes, I won't think he's being disloyal or something."

"I haven't said no, and I haven't said yes," Dagnýr said. "I'm going to need some time to think, and when I say some time I mean *awhile*, like probably some years. During which Matt might even change his mind!"

"Don't bet on it," Matt said.

"You said that about poutine, too, and now you need poutine rehab."

Matt snorted.

Dagnýr turned back to his brother. His voice also lowered. "This is a very... life-changing decision. If I said yes and something happened to my children, I would be regretting saying yes, and I don't want to force it on my kids, if I'm doing this, I want them to decide when they're old enough to make a decision about it one way or another. I'm not outright saying no because unlike Matt, I feel like there's a lot of hope for this world, hope for humanity - humans wouldn't have survived this long as a species if there wasn't. The scientist in me thinks it would be *fucking awesome* to be around the next few thousand years to see how the world changes, see all the technological advancements, see mankind colonize space, even. But I don't know if it's something I can or should do, because for all of my abstract love of humanity, it's not the same as the people I love, the people close to me, being around to share it with. And Matt's already said no. He may change his mind, he may not. Right now, I just don't know. It's a maybe."

"I get it," Sören said, looking down. He felt disappointed – but he got it.

Over the intercom, a voice issued a reminder in Icelandic, then English that the IcelandAir flight to Toronto would be boarding soon. Dagnýr looked at his watch. "OK, we gotta go through security and all that shit." He hugged his brother one last time.

Sören waved. "Have a safe flight."

Edmund paused. "Before I go – with what is... against you, the nature of your enemies... I feel it would be a good idea to set up an emergency network. A code phrase we can use in phone conversations if something happens and there needs to be a warning, since as you no doubt know, in a post 9/11 world there is very little true privacy and one has to be careful what is said."

"What would you suggest?" Dagnýr asked.

"I'll write it down, with a pronunciation guide," Edmund said. "It will be in Elvish."

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After spending the late afternoon and evening driving for close to six hours on the Ring Road from Reykjavik to Akureyri on Sunday night, Sören was glad he'd given himself and Maglor the next day off to recover. Tuesday was back to the studio at usual.

On Friday, August sixteenth, Vigdís, Páll, and their children Sólveig and Sigurjón returned from the States, flying first into Keflavik, then into Akureyri. Maglor had Fridays off, and he and Ingwion were around to greet them and return the keys to the cottage, and Auli. When Sören's classes let out, he drove down to the cottage rather than stopping home first.

Auli greeted him at the door as Vigdís answered, giving him a warm hug. Sören was very happy to see his neighbor friends again, and relieved they'd returned safely, though he felt a pang of sadness as he stooped to pet Auli, knowing Maglor would miss his sheepdog companion.

Vigdís invited him in. "You and Nicolae want to have dinner with us?" she asked.

Sören nodded. "You feel like going out? We'll pay, to welcome you back properly. You probably don't feel like cooking after flying and jet lag."

"That's a good idea, thank you."

Sören took a deep breath - he'd been a little worried at mentioning he'd developed a romance with one of their renters; his neighbors were accepting and liberal with LGBT issues, as most Icelanders were, and had been nothing but warm and welcoming to the gay married couple on their street, but polyamory was a different thing altogether. That said, he wasn't going to be able to hide the fact that he was moving to town, or that he and his husband would be sharing a place with another man, Akureyri was a small world. "Do you mind if Alejandro comes with us?"

"Oh." Vigdís's eyebrows went up at that. "No, I don't mind, he seems very nice. You got to be friends, I take it?"

The look on Sören's face said it all, and she laughed and patted his shoulder. "Jæja, I see. I can't blame you, he's very attractive! I didn't know you and Nicolae were -"

"We didn't know, either, and then this summer... happened." Sören relaxed, relieved that her reaction seemed to be one of amusement rather than judgment. "He'll be staying in town for awhile. Actually, we can talk more about that at dinner."

Sören, Maglor and Dooku met them at a seafood restaurant on the bay, the same place

Sören had been with Ingwion before. Sören felt a little wistful, knowing Ingwion would be leaving in a matter of days - he was still at the Hotel Akureyri right now, and they had foregone their "Friday night usual" to give Sören a chance to welcome back his neighbors and start looking online at properties in Akureyri.

Most of dinner was spent listening to Vigdís and Páll talk about their trip to America, where they had visited several states and done a variety of things. They showed pictures on their cell phones of national parks, different landmarks, beaches; at one point they'd gone up in a hot-air balloon. Sólveig and Sigurjón had a chance to practice their English and wanted to keep practicing on Maglor and Dooku, who were entertained rather than annoyed.

Finally Páll asked, "What were you folks up to this summer? Vigdís tells me you three are..."

Dooku nodded.

"There must be a bit of a story behind that."

Sören tried not to choke on his Sprite. "Alejandro just... hit it off with us, I guess."

"Well, if you guys are happy, that's what counts."

"We are," Sören said, feeling another flood of relief that Páll was open-minded, like his wife. "And..." He looked at Dooku, then Maglor. "We're going to be moving soon, getting a place in Akureyri. since the cabin is a bit small for three people."

"Oh, so you're moving out?"

Sören nodded. "But even though we won't be neighbors anymore, Nico and I still count you as friends. We'd like to still get together, have you guys over for dinner -"

"Oh same here," Páll said. "Maybe after you guys have had a chance to settle in, you can come by and I'll grill for you."

"His steaks are really good," Sören said to Maglor. Then Sören said to Páll, "You know how you keep mentioning wanting to learn guitar? Alejandro teaches classes at my studio, now." It felt so strange, referring to Maglor by his alias these days, and Sören worried about slipping, the way he did in the elevator at the hotel in Reykjavik last week.

"Jæja? I might finally have to take some classes, then."

"I'll also accept children as students, if either of your kids wants to learn," Maglor said.

"Brilliant. Though I think Sigurjón is more interested in piano -"

"I teach that too."

Maglor went over class schedule and cost with Páll, and then Páll showed them more pictures, of concerts he'd been to in the States, which got Páll and Maglor talking about music, while Sören listened on with amusement at their mutual disdain for auto-tuned pop and "kids these days".

Finally Páll asked, "Did anything else interesting happen?"

"Well..." Maglor looked off to the side. "You might want to get Auli neutered."

"Oh no." Páll's eyes widened. "Oh *no*. Did he..."

"I'm sorry," Maglor said. "He has puppies coming sometime in the fall. They won't be purebred. I told the owner of the, um... Auli's conquest..." Páll laughed out loud at this, and Vigdís shook with silent amusement. "That I'd pay for vet bills. I have first pick of the litter, which is fine by me because I got a bit attached to your dog."

"Can we get one of Auli's pups?" Sólveig started tugging at her father's shirt. "Can we get a puppy?"

"Oh god," Páll said, laughing. "I think one dog is enough. But you can visit with theirs!"

"How is your cat going to take it?" Vigdís asked Sören.

"He seems to be all right around Auli," Sören said, "but Auli is also a grown dog. No idea how he'll be with a puppy. I think the new living situation is going to be a bit of an adjustment for him." Sören realized he could be talking about he, Dooku, and Maglor living together as well - it was one thing to visit and sleep over, another thing for the three to be sharing a house.

"*Þetta reddast,*" Páll said.

"*Þetta reddast,*" Sören agreed.

–

The following afternoon, Maglor returned his Jaguar to the rental, and then he and Sören decided to go look at the properties they'd been browsing online – Dooku was in writer mode and wanted to stay home to work on his novel. “I trust you not to buy anything horrid,” he'd joked.

As they drove through Akureyri, they saw Páll walking Auli, who waved at them, grinning.

"Your neighbors are very, very nice," Maglor said.

"I told you." Sören felt a little pang, realizing he'd be leaving them behind eventually if he accepted Ingwion's offer of immortality. He'd miss Vigdís's kindness and maternal fussing, and Páll's brash loudness and good cheer. Sólveig and Sigurjón were seven and nine respectively - if they had another seven years in Akureyri before moving, he'd get to see them to age fourteen and sixteen, but that would be it. He wouldn't get to see them become adults, university, career, children...

Maglor reached up from the back seat to pat Sören's shoulder, feeling it across their bond. "I know."

Sören put his hand over Maglor's, keeping the other hand on the wheel. There was no way to *Þetta reddast* this away, as he'd done in the early days of his move to London, as he'd done when he moved back to Akureyri to start his life over again. He'd had precious few genuine friends over his life, and somehow the idea of losing Vigdís and Páll made the consequences of immortality even more real to him, because there was at least the

chance that his family members would accept Ingwion's blood down the road. This...

As if on cue, Sören's cell phone went off, vibrating as it played *'Ra-Ra Rasputin, Lover of the Russian Queen, there was a cat that really was gone | Ra-Ra Rasputin, Russia's Greatest Love Machine, it was a shame how he carried on!*"

Sören used the Force to pull the phone out of his pocket as he maneuvered the jeep to the side of the road, not wanting to talk and drive at the same time. "Jæja?" he answered, and then, not wanting to be rude, he followed up with, "Hello."

"Sören, hello. Is this a bad time?"

"I'm driving, but I just pulled over. What's up?"

“Have you found a new place yet?”

“We're about to go look at some places, actually.”

“OK – I'd like to come with you, if you don't mind.”

They met Ingwion at the hotel. Once Ingwion came over to where they were parked, Sören raised an eyebrow. "Not to be rude, but may I ask why you're inviting yourself along to look at properties with us?"

"When you decide on one, I will buy it for you," Ingwion said.

Maglor shook his head. "I have plenty of money, and I don't want to be in your debt -"

Ingwion put up a hand in protest. "It will be a bit safer if this property is in the name of Borovkov Enterprises. You have moved around more than usual within the last ten years, you want to keep your accounts free from suspicion. This will buy you some time for things to be normal before..." His voice trailed off, frowning.

Sören assumed he was talking about Maglor's need to move every seven to ten years or so, and taking his two partners with him the next time, but there was something that told Sören it wasn't that but a more serious matter altogether, and he got chills. He thought about asking Ingwion what he was getting on about, but decided not to, since the moment was awkward enough with the unexpected company.

"I understand your reasoning but I still don't like it," Maglor said.

"Consider it a gift." Ingwion looked at Sören. "To you, Sören. The art I own from you... is worth far more than I paid for it."

"Oh, you." Sören gave him a playful swat. "Flatterer."

"I speak the truth."

Sören's face flushed and he felt that warm glow of pride. Ingwion stroked the smiling face, returning a fond smile of his own, and began twirling the keys to his Bentley.

Then Sören said, "Jæja, if you're coming with us to look at properties, I see no reason why we need two cars for that, producing twice the emissions. Plus, it's quite conspicuous for a Bentley to roll up, they might charge you more. So if you don't mind going in the jeep..."

"I don't mind riding in the back seat," Ingwion said.

Sören's mind immediately went in the gutter, his flush deepening.*I bet.* He thought about the times Ingwion took him from behind.

Ingwion's eyes twinkled, as if he knew what Sören was thinking. He concluded his sentence with, "So Sören can have more leg room."

I think I need room for my third leg, with the two of you around. "*Takk*," Sören said, walking ahead to the passenger side front door. "We'll bring you back to the hotel when we're done."

Once they got on the road, Sören pulled out his cell phone and began to look up the available properties on the Internet, that they'd been looking at before. He told Maglor the location of each one, and he used the GPS device on his car to navigate the way there. Browsing them in person rather than just online in pictures and descriptions, one of them were terrible, but none of them really grabbed Sören or Maglor, either, and Sören felt as if he should have a "yes, *this*" reaction to the place.

They quickly exhausted the listings, and then, before they could drive back to the hotel to drop off Ingwion and call it a day, Sören pointed to a street and said, "D'you think we could take a little detour?"

Maglor raised an eyebrow, but he nodded.

Sören explained, "This is the very first neighborhood I lived in. I was here as a baby, and my mother and us stayed here till a couple years after my father died, then she got another place in Akureyri. I don't remember too many things about those years since I was four when we moved out, but I do have a few memories, some of the only happy memories of my childhood. I used to go for walks through here sometimes when things were bad at home with my aunt and uncle."

Maglor drove down the street slowly. Sören's eyes widened as he saw the yellow house with its blue picket fence, between a red house and green house with blue picket fences, the old yellow house still unchanged after all these years... and there was a sign in front of it that read TIL SÖLU - Icelandic for FOR SALE - with a number at the bottom. Sören dialed the number on his phone, and then he saw a balding, portly man in a suit come out of the house, and the man's cell phone was ringing.

"Halló?" the man answered, echoing in Sören's ear.

Sören hit End, leaned over to honk the horn on the driver's side, and leapt out of the car.

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The house was old enough to be a fixer-upper, but it was theirs now, and they could start moving in at any time. It still felt surreal, when Sören got back in the car.

"What are the odds?" he said.

"That is... quite a coincidence." Maglor looked a little unsettled himself.

"Jæja, wait till I tell Dag and Margrét, they won't believe it." Sören leaned back in the seat

and took a few deep breaths, trying to calm his nerves. For a moment it almost felt like his mother was around.

When they dropped Ingwion off at the hotel, Ingwion said, “I'll be in town another week or so, to allow you time to make your decision – I'll come back to visit you sometime, but a lot can happen in the time between visits so -”

“I understand,” Sören said; he knew as well as anyone that death could happen unexpectedly. He shoved the mental image of finding his mother's body out of his mind.

“I take it you'll be moving in soon?”

“As soon as possible,” Sören said. “It's going to be a bit cramped till then.”

“Maybe once you're settled in, we could get together. Have a little housewarming party.”

That sounded like innuendo. Sören nodded. “Perhaps.”

On the way from the hotel to the cabin, Sören asked Maglor, “What are your plans for this evening?”

Maglor said, "I thought I'd go to the new place and spend the night cleaning and moving furniture, get everything ready for us, if that's OK."

"That's OK! You'd still be welcome to come back to the cabin if you want to sleep there -"

"If I come back to the cabin we know what's going to happen and I've been walking funny all day," Maglor said, with a mischievous grin in the rear-view mirror that made Sören grin, too, giving Dooku a naughty look, since Dooku had been directly responsible for that; Dooku looked down, blushing, with a small, smug smile of his own. "All play and no work is as bad as all work and no play - I want the place to be livable, functional, for us. Besides, the two of you haven't had a lot of time to yourselves, and it's OK with me if you take that time now and again."

Sören nodded. "*Takk.* I think it's important if we, you know, do stuff as couples as well as a triad. You and me, you and Nico, me and Nico, in addition to you, me, and Nico together. It'll make our relationship stronger."

"I agree. Though I wouldn't mind hearing the delicious details when you and Nicolae..."

Sören laughed. "I wouldn't mind pics or video when you and Nico..."

Dooku facepalmed, shaking with silent laughter, his flush deepening. "Sören..."

"What?" Sören's eyebrows went up, amused at Dooku blushing, looking a little scandalized. "What's wrong with appreciating how fucking hot my husbands are together?"

There it was, that word *husbands*, even though they hadn't had a commitment ceremony yet, and even with one, polygamy wasn't legal in Iceland. It just slipped out. But it felt right to say. Sören felt himself smiling at it.

Sören and Dooku dropped Maglor off at the house in Akureyri, lingering to hug and kiss him. "We'll see you tomorrow morning, já?" Sören asked, nuzzling him.

"You can sleep in, if it's afternoon that's fine," Maglor said.

"OK, well, whenever... we'll see you tomorrow." Despite Sören's dislike of mornings and his preference to sleep in on weekends when he didn't have classes at the studio, he felt like there was enough happening that his body wouldn't let him sleep very late tomorrow.

But that also depended a lot on what Dooku had in store for him this evening; Sören gave him an expectant look as he got back in the jeep, and when Dooku glanced at him with heat in his eyes, where Sören could tell he was already planning, Sören felt himself crinkling his nose and biting his lower lip. Dooku responded to that by kissing him hard.

Sören felt like delaying the gratification a little while longer, and doing what had become something of a ritual for him before starting new chapters in life. "You OK with us going to the Goðafoss for awhile?"

Dooku nodded. "I had a feeling you would ask that."

"You know me too well."

They were quiet on the way to the falls, and quiet once they arrived. After they got out of the jeep, they walked hand-in-hand, to get as far as they could to the edge. It was just them, and the roar of the crashing waters. Dooku finally turned to Sören, feeling the weight on him across their bond - all the changes, all that was about to change, sooner or later, somehow. Actions and inactions and consequences.

"It feels so strange," Sören said finally, "coming here, after what we saw in the glass."

He was referring to the vision of Odin adding to the abuse of the Valar, responsible for the deaths of both his parents... and the history of the Goðafoss - that it had been here where the lawspeaker Þorgeir Ljósvetningagoði had thrown his idols of the Norse gods, officially converting Iceland to Christianity.

"And it's why I had a feeling you would want to come here, eventually," Dooku said, looking at Sören, then looking into the falls. "You have a lot to process. A lot to consider."

"I have *too much* to process, *too much* to consider." Sören could feel the anger rising in him again as he remembered the visions, how each of his parents died, the truth of how his mother had sent away her sister and brother to try to keep them safe, being lesser gifted in the Force. What could have been, if his mother had lived, or if Gitta had been able to fight for custody of him and his siblings. His mother's final sacrifice, hitting Odin in the eye so he couldn't look at Sören and his siblings anymore, which was undoubtedly why they were still alive now, hadn't endured even worse than what they had. That last act of power had cost her life. A god, going after a woman and her children, to try to avoid a prophecy that wasn't even set in stone... a god foolish enough to ensure that prophecy would happen, one way or another.

He thought of Fëanor's death at the hands of Balrogs, the way he'd gone up in flames, like a phoenix. He thought of what he'd seen across his bond with Dooku of Fingolfin's death, tragic and magnificent. The way Fingolfin had charged Morgoth, one Elf against one Dark Lord. Though Elves were immortal in the sense of not aging, and hard to kill, he had died nonetheless. He thought about Maglor's news that Finarfin was actually dead, having fought Balrogs in his own attempt at avenging his brother's death. The Noldor had been on their way to godhood, but not close enough. He thought of Ingwion mentioning he had ascended - he was a living god - and wondered if receiving the blood of a god would make a difference this time around. If he'd be able to stand against his larger foes, two entire pantheons.

He thought of how his life would change, becoming immortal. All that he would lose. And he thought of how much he'd lost, already. How much his entire family had lost, and suffered.

He thought of the Norse mythology he'd learned in school, of Odin hanging himself on Yggdrasil, the World Tree, *sacrifice myself to myself*, to take up the runes and uncover their mysteries, their power. Wodanaz, who in the glass had ascended to power by killing gods, taking their powers, gaining enough power to become the All-Father, the sacrifice the World Tree demanded. He wondered if he could take Odin's powers by killing him, if he could take his army, his ravens, his runes, if that would be enough to stand against the Valar.

But he would have to sacrifice all that he was now, all that he had now - his art career, his friends, his home. He would only have Dooku and Maglor, that he could be certain of. He might find Finarfin again if he was lucky. So much else was... uncertain.

sacrifice myself to myself

Sören took a deep breath.

Dooku took his hand again.

"I hate this," Sören said.

"We all hate it." Dooku squeezed his hand. "Whatever our crimes, the response was disproportionate. And it is beyond disturbing that the world, mankind, is in the grip of such... madness. When Master Yodha warned me about religion, many years ago, telling me that the gods were not benevolent, I took it with a grain of salt - I chose to believe there weren't any gods, really. But *this* is far worse than what he told me."

"It's fucking terrifying." Sören swallowed hard. "Looking into the falls, it's, like...*symbolic* of whatever is ahead of us, whichever decision we make. It's a long way down to the bottom, and either way, the gods are down there."

"Ostensibly. I don't know how those idol statues have held up all this time."

"Shit gets found in the bottom of the sea all the time, there's probably *something* remaining down there." And then, Sören remembered his aunt Katrín's funeral, and what Margrét had done once she was buried, the grave erected. He found himself unbuttoning and unzipping his jeans.

"What... are you doing?" Dooku asked.

"HEY! ODIN!" Sören screamed at the sky. He took out his cock, and aimed into the falls, pissing. "FUCK YOU, ASSHOLE! MISS ME WITH THAT BINDING OF FENRIR, YOU ONE-EYED PIECE OF SHIT!"

Dooku facepalmed, shaking with silent laughter; a few minutes later he wiped a tear from his eye. "Dammit, Sören," he wheezed.

"Wooo, that felt good," Sören said, zipping his jeans back up. "I needed to go, too."

Sören put on the hard rock and metal station on the drive back to the cabin. He wasn't *quite* satisfied - he doubted anything other than Odin's head on a platter would

satisfy him - but he felt oddly pleased with himself, to have done something defiant.

It seemed to please Dooku, too - after Sören went to the bathroom to wash up and change into pajamas, Dooku was waiting for him on the bed, propped up on one elbow, naked and erect.

"My, what do we have here?" Sören asked, climbing onto the bed, climbing over him for a kiss, his own body responding to the sight of him, the passion between them.

"Admiring you," Dooku said. He stroked Sören's face, his curls, love in his dark eyes. "You... being you." He chuckled again, and Sören could see the memory of what he'd done at the falls a short while ago across their bond. "Your audacity. I always loved that about you... Fëanor." His voice was husky with emotion, as he spoke the ancient name... the true name, Sören's soul. "My spirit of fire." He kissed Sören deep and hard.

Sören kissed him back, fingers playing through the silver chest hair, teasingly brushing a nipple. "Ñolofinwë."

Even now, in a human body, with silver hair and beard, dark eyes, the lines of age on his face, his beloved brother-lover was here, and it seemed that the light of the silver-blue eyes that had so entranced him long ago, was the light of his soul, still shining.

Sören pushed Dooku back onto the pillows, kissing him again and again. He used the Force to reach for their lube, and poured it over Dooku's cock, wanting to feel him inside, needing to feel his *soulmate*. "Ñolo," Sören rasped between kisses, straddling Dooku's hips. "Ñolo. *Ñolo.*"

"Fëanáro."

Sören sank down, and threw back his head and cried "Ñolo!" when he was filled to the hilt, joined with his love, one flesh. They took each other's hands and Sören rode slowly, panting "Ñolo... Ñolo..." in time with the roll of his hips, the slide of Dooku's hands over his body, making him tremble.

"*Fëanáro.*" Dooku's voice was more insistent now, the hunger in his eyes, almost desperate, mirroring the longing in Sören's own heart.

It's been too long, without you. Sören stroked his face, eyes misting with tears.

Dooku took Sören's hand and kissed it. *I'm right here. I am* right here, *and nothing,* no one *is going to take you from me again, is going to rip us apart from each other, ever again.*

Sören was sobbing now, but he kept riding. "Ñolo. I need you, my Ñolofinwë, I need..."

"I need *you.*" Dooku pulled Sören to him, kissed his forehead, where his "third eye" would be. "I was so lost without you. Then, and now. But we're together now."

"Ñolo." Their foreheads touched; Dooku was crying a little too. Their noses slid together, their mouths met once more. *Ñolo, my brother, blood of my blood.*

"I love you." Dooku was thrusting into him, setting the pace harder, faster, and Sören grabbed his hips, holding on like he was riding a bull. "I *love* you. I love *you.*"

"I love you so much..." Sören reached out and pulled him close, held him tight, held on as

his hips bucked, riding him hard. "I love you, love you, *love you*, Nolofinwë..."

Dooku sobbed into his shoulder, continuing to thrust, even harder now, and Sören held him as tight as he could. Sören cried out when he felt Dooku's teeth in his shoulder, pleasure-pain, and Dooku took Sören's face and kissed him as hard as he could, both of them moaning into the kiss.

"They couldn't stop us from finding our way back to each other," Dooku said. "Because we were made for each other. We *belong*. You are mine, always, and I am yours."

Sören kissed him again, hard. "I am yours, my Ñolofinwë... and you are *mine*." He bit Dooku's lower lip hard enough to draw blood, tasting it as they kissed, and kissed. They were getting closer now, Sören could feel it, riding and riding, Dooku's cock hitting that spot inside him like it was custom-built for him.

"I need you with me, Fëanor." Their eyes met, Dooku's dark eyes pleading. "Please. Stay with me. I will take Ingwion's offer, if you do."

And it seemed, then, that the decision was made. *My son needs me. My brother needs me. Both my brothers need me, wherever Finarfin is. The rest of my family needs to be free from the curse, to not go through even worse, to be safe, and I can only give them that if I ascend, if I sacrifice what I am, to become what I was...*

...to sacrifice what I was, to become what I am.

Þetta reddast.

"Fëanor." They kissed again; Sören loved the way Dooku moaned into the kiss, feeling through their bond how he was right on that edge, ready to come.

Sören moaned back, also right there, needing to explode, but he needed, needed, *needed* the blinding glory of sex, their passion, *just a minute more, don't stop, right THERE just like THAT*, needed to *fuck* -

and at last, Dooku's deep, velvet voice, commanding him. "Sören. Fëanor. Come for me." Eyes compelling his. "*Burn for me.*"

Sören screamed, shattering, erupting, spurting over Dooku's chest and stomach, the throbbing contractions giving way to a shuddery sigh and his breath taken away. He felt Dooku shoot into him, calling out "*Fëanor*" as he climaxed, sounding both present and far away, here and across time.

They kissed once more, sobbing together, clinging to each other, shuddering at the delicious pleasure of their release, and then the deep, bone-deep, soul-deep comfort of gliding into bliss together, in each other's arms, one inside the other, *one*.

Somehow, they ended up laying back on the pillows, still holding each other. Sören stretched like a cat waking up from a nap and looked at the clock - his orgasm had been strong enough to make him pass out after. Dooku was resting inside him, and he opened his eyes when he felt Sören stirring, smiling at him, petting him fondly.

"Hey." Sören pet him back, smiling back.

"Hay is for horses."

"And horses are for your mom."

Dooku buried his face into the pillow for a moment, shaking with silent laughter. When he tilted his face back to Sören his face was red. "Sören... why are you like this?"

Sören kissed the tip of his nose. "I'd say I'm sorry, but -"

A pause. "Hi Sorry, But..."

Sören gave him a playful swat, as Dooku shook with laughter again.

“You know, if you make dad jokes at me, I might have to call you Daddy.” Sören crinkled his nose and bit his lower lip, and began tracing lazy circles in Dooku's chest hair. “I like you being older. I seem to recall that even though you were younger, you always came off like the older one." Sören stroked his face, skritched the silver whiskers. "You took care of me, back then. You take care of me, now."

Dooku gave him a soft, gentle kiss that quickly turned heated, both men groaning into the kiss; Sören moaned when he felt Dooku stiffen inside him. "Someone has to keep your bratty arse out of trouble," Dooku rasped.

"Or get in trouble with me." Sören grinned.

Dooku responded by swatting Sören's bottom; Sören responded by working his inner muscles around Dooku's cock, clenching and releasing, clenching and releasing invitingly, while he crinkled his nose and bit his lower lip.

With a growl, Dooku rolled Sören over onto his back, and kissed him hard. They took each other's hands as Dooku began moving inside him again, slowly, and Sören rolled his hips back at Dooku. "*Yes,*" Sören breathed, kissing him back harder.

They made love for a long time, slow and sensual, languid teasing to the edge, bit by bit, lost in each other, the feeling of rightness. It was like discovering each other all over again - this cabin had been where they'd consummated their budding relationship in November 2017, and now, here in their last night of the cabin they were remembering ancient passion, what it was like to love each other as they did long ago. Each push and pull of their bodies was a promise, to never let go again, no matter the cost.

Half-brother in blood, full brother in heart, lover of my soul.

Those words spoken across their bond as they kissed deeply inflamed them, the tender sensuality giving way to hunger, the consuming fire. Dooku drove into Sören with abandon, and Sören rocked his hips back at them, panting "Yes, yes, *yes,*" with every thrust, and then, at last, just "Ñolo... Ñolo..."

They climaxed together, cried out together, trembling at the violent release, even more intense than the one before. They melted together, felt like they were dissolving together into a sea of light, endless joy.

—

By Wednesday they were ready to move in. The house wasn't all the way ready yet, there

were still bins to unpack, pictures to hang, and the house needed some minor repairs, the rooms needed a fresh coat of paint. But it was already looking like a home.

Sören and Maglor were closing down the studio until Monday, so they could take a few days to get adjusted to their new home and just relax. It felt strange to have time off work, strange to be in a new place, but Sören imagined it was even more strange to his cat. Sören set down the cat carrier and opened it up, letting Snúður out, as Dooku took out Snúður's food and water dishes and set them up in the living room. Snúður, who had meowed plaintively as he rode in the carrier in the jeep, began to sniff around cautiously, and when he came to Maglor, headbutted his ankle and rubbed against him.

"He thinks you're his," Sören said, and then, with a naughty grin, "He takes after his *pabbi* that way."

Maglor facepalmed and then he laughed, pulling Sören close, planting a kiss on the top of Sören's head. "I love you, you know."

"I know. I love you too." Sören looked up at him adoringly, stroking his face, playing with his hair.

"The litter box is set up down the hall near the bathroom," Maglor said. He walked Sören down there, and Sören smiled approvingly that the new litter box was domed, which would reduce smell and mean not having to look at it except when it was time to clean the catbox.

Sören went in the bathroom. Maglor had decorated in a sea theme, which didn't surprise him - seashell and wave motifs, with Dooku's collection of seashells and driftwood and sea glass from the various beaches he'd visited around the world on a white wooden shelf against a wall, the same shelf holding an air freshener. Sören admired the shower curtain, which looked expensive rather than cheap and tacky, well-made, a print of ocean waves. He pulled it back and saw that soap and shampoo had already been set up on a shower rack. The tub looked like it had been freshly scrubbed.

Then Sören realized that had been the same tub where he'd taken baths as a small child. He remembered his mother singing to him in English, the "Rubber Duckie" song from *Sesame Street*, which was a top 20 hit in 1970;*Sesame Street* had been airing internationally, including on Icelandic television, since the 1970s. Sören had a rubber duckie just like Ernie did, and he would squeak it as his mother sang

Rubber duckie, you're the one
You make bath time lots of fun
Rubber duckie, I'm awfully fond of you

It was how Sören started learning English, before he learned it in school, as Icelandic schoolchildren did.

He didn't have many memories of his mother, but most of what he remembered involved her singing - "Stairway to Heaven" by Led Zeppelin was used as a lullaby. Remembering himself as a small child, taking a bath with his rubber duck as his mother sang to him, brought tears to his eyes now, a hot lump in his throat.

He ran the sink to splash cold water on his face, and took a few deep breaths. But it didn't quite work, and when he came out of the bathroom, his eyes were still burning with tears. Maglor was on his knees on the hall floor - there was the sound of sand being kicked around inside the litter box, and when Snúður came out of the dome down the ramp,

Maglor started petting him. "That's a good boy, finding your box right away, yes you are." Snúður purred loudly, stopping to enjoy the pettings. "Yes, you're a good kitty, yes, you're such a good fuzzy little baby kitty, yes you are."

Sören let out a little laugh, watching them, and Maglor looked up at Sören. "Oh, hi," he said, looking somewhat sheepish at being caught talking baby talk to the cat.

"Hi yourself," Sören said, grinning. He walked over to Maglor, took his hands, and pulled him up, even though Maglor didn't need help getting up.

Snúður gave them a look as if to say *how dare you interrupt my worship*, and then slurked off. Sören and Maglor stood there in the hallway, and then Maglor touched Sören's face.

"You're crying?" he asked, concern in his eyes.

"A little." Sören didn't deny it. "This place... holds a few memories for me."

"I imagine so." Maglor sighed, nodding.

Sören looked at the blank walls of the hall. "Could use a few paintings."*Could use a distraction, choosing them and hanging them up.* "Let's go see what we've got, já?"

There was a stack of Sören's canvases, things that weren't hanging up at the studio or that he hadn't sold for one reason for another, as well as the paintings Dooku had bought from him in London. Sören and Maglor chose four paintings, to be hung at different intervals on the walls, and they'd find some sort of decor to go between them.

Picking out the paintings for the hall got Sören in the mood to do so for the rest of the house. Two paintings were hung above the mantle in the fireplace, two more on two walls of the living room. Then Sören sat on the new, plush-looking couch, both to try out the new furniture and to make sure it looked all right. Snúður hopped up beside him as Sören took the rest of it in - the matching armchairs for guests, the Icelandic-knit throws on the backs of the chairs, the dark wood and glass-topped coffee table, dark wooden bookshelves that would be filled soon, a hat and coat rack, a shoe rack, a sword rack that held Dooku's fencing rapier and Maglor's sword - the sword *he* had made, as Fëanor - which had a tier for one more sword.

Sören walked through the rest of the house again. There were three bedrooms. Sören, Dooku, and Maglor only needed one, the room that had the king-sized bed, covered with a dark blue duvet. One of the two bedrooms would be a guest room, in the event any of the family came to visit. The other was being turned into a combination art and music studio - the bins of Sören's art supplies were already in there, waiting to be unloaded, and Maglor's harp was out of its case, parked in the center of the room, with a small stool beside it. Sören could already feel the power in the room, mental images of he and Maglor working together as they once had, Maglor composing and playing as he painted feverishly - Sören smiled at the little nest set up in a corner, mattress pads, blankets and pillows, anticipating the way they'd make love for hours when they were ready for a break from the storm of creation.

Maglor's hand was on his shoulder, and Sören tilted his face so they could kiss.

Sören went back to his pile of canvases, and picked out three for their bedroom. One was a painting he'd done in late 2017, of he and Dooku in a pool of water, naked though the painting only showed them from the waist up, kissing underneath the Northern Lights, as they had in the Nature Baths at Mývatn. The other two were the paintings Sören had

made in 2015 to process his grief for "Alejandro", during his first few months in London, before he and Justin got together - paintings that Justin had called "utter shite" when he'd seen them, paintings Sören had to hide in Frankie's safekeeping for them to not be destroyed; there was the one of Maglor as a merman, playing harp - before Sören had known Maglor wasn't human and could play the harp - to himself, shipwrecked on the black sand beach of Reynisfjara. The second, Maglor had human legs, coated with seed, laying in the sand with Sören astride him, taking his cock, both of them in ecstasy.

Sören remembered that ecstasy between them, matched by no one except Dooku, years later. Back then, Sören felt like he understood what ancient mystics were talking about when they reported religious experiences. "The earth moved" was a cliche, and yet, when they had made love together, it was the truth. Sören had tried to capture that with his brush, the ineffable, the ephemeral, a tribute to the love that had given him wings to fly, as an artist, and had continued haunting him long after it was gone. Very few people had seen these two paintings, not just because "Alejandro" had been reserved at pictures of himself, but because of how intimate they were. Frankie, Justin, Dooku, and Maglor had been the only four people to ever lay eyes on them. Showing it to Justin had been a mistake - showing *any* of his art to Justin had been a mistake, but he'd tried to open up to Justin about his past history, hoped that the intimacy of sharing his art would build emotional connection between them. Instead...

Tears stung Sören's eyes again. *Your art's ugly, stupid, it'll never sell, why do you bother with it?*

Maglor sat on the bed and Sören hung the merman painting. Sören scowled as he said, "He said these were shite."

"Justin?" Maglor's voice was a hush.

"Yeah."

"...Why did you..."

Sören shrugged. "Trying to connect."

"'Pearls before swine', I think Christ said," Maglor said. "Except that's an insult to swine. Though he did squeal like a pig, at the end."

Sören chuckled despite himself. Then he said, gesturing to the more explicit of the two paintings with Maglor, "In hindsight, probably he thought they were shite because it was clear I was enjoying your cock more than I ever enjoyed his."

"I should hope so." Then Maglor said, "I wish I could kill him all over again."

The tears he'd been holding back started to come, then. Sören finished hanging the paintings, and then he walked over to Maglor and sat on the bed next to him, and Maglor reached out to hold him.

"Hey," he said.

"Thank you." Sören looked up at him. "I know a lot of people are willing to die for their partners, but... you were willing to kill for me. I..." He reached up and stroked Maglor's face. "I..." He couldn't make words, couldn't find the right words to say.

Maglor took his hand and kissed it. "Sören. If I'd known, then, what was going on - he

would have died a lot sooner. And I don't think I would have been able to resist you. Needing to take you back. I am so, so sorry that I left in the first place, and I am sorry that I wasn't there when all that happened -"

Sören kissed him. "We're here now."

"We are."

"Maglor..." Sören took a deep breath. "Ingwion is coming, in a few hours." He looked at the alarm clock on one of the dressers - it was almost 4 PM.

“I know you made plans for the housewarming.”

"No, it's." Sören met his eyes. "You were willing to kill for me, and, Maglor, I am willing to *live* for you. My decision has been made."

Maglor's mouth opened slightly - Sören knew that even though there had always been the possibility he'd say yes to immortality, since it was offered, it was one thing to acknowledge it might happen, and another thing for it to be imminent. Finally Maglor nodded and said, "Only if you are very, very sure. I've warned you what this life is going to be like. Forever does not guarantee happiness - it guarantees quite a lot of the opposite."

"But you were alone," Sören said. "You will never be alone again."

"Don't commit yourself to something you don't really want just because you think you're doing me a favor, Sören. Obligation breeds resentment -"

"For fuck's sake, Maglor." Sören kissed him hard, hard enough that they were breathless, trying to catch their breath when they pulled away. "I want to be with you. Is that all right?"

It took a moment, and Maglor nodded. "Yeah, it's all right."

"I love you. And it's been *so long*." Sören didn't just mean the five years they were apart, in this life, but the many, many years from when Maglor rejected Fëanor to try to live by the Laws for the sake of his wife, the years following Fëanor's death, and at last, wandering out into the world of Men to try to find his son, deeply and utterly alone, desolate. They were wounded for each other, ached for each other, and it was time for healing.

It was Maglor's turn to start crying, now. They held each other, crying together, rocking each other, petting each other, flushing the wounds with their tears. After sitting on the edge of the bed for awhile they lay back against the pillows, Sören curled up on Maglor's chest, in his arms, one of Sören's hands on Maglor's heart, the other stroking his hair. Maglor was still rocking him, the tears less intense but still flowing. With a chirp, Snúður hopped up on the bed and walked over to them, tail high in the air in greeting, and then he lay down, paws resting on both of them, kneading and purring. The sound of Snúður's purrs began to soothe Sören, a little.

Dooku stood in the doorway to the bedroom. "We need some food in this house so I'm running to the store. Any preferences for what we eat tonight?"

Sören needed some levity, and gave him a saucy look. Dooku rolled his eyes, but shook with quiet laughter. "Dammit, Sören, I mean *food*," Dooku said, his cheeks flushed.

"Something you can grill," Sören said. "And we should probably have, like, some sort of

vegetable with it."

"All right. I'll be back in a bit. Are you both all right?"

"Not really, but we'll be OK."

Dooku nodded, and strode off. They heard the front door close. Snúður had rolled over for belly rubs, which Sören and Maglor were both giving him, as the cat flexed his paws, making swimming motions in the air.

"Most cats don't like their bellies rubbed but he's very trusting," Sören said. "He trusted me right away. Like I felt safe with you right away. And Nico."

"He knew who he belonged to." A pause. "You knew who you belonged to."

"Yes." Sören looked up at Maglor. "We belong *together*. We *belong* together. We're going to do this, and we're going to get it right this time."

Maglor started crying again. "Hells, Sören."

Sören's tears came again too, at the sight of him. Snúður got up and climbed onto Maglor's chest - two of his paws were on Maglor's sternum, with Snúður's ass in his face, making Maglor cry out, "Oh Hells, what the *fuck*, cat," as Sören's tears turned to giggles, before the cat settled down on Maglor's chest, right in Sören's face. Snúður started to lick Sören's face like he was a cat, licking the tears.

"Awwwwwww." Sören skritched the cat behind the ears. "My baby. Our baby. We have a child now, Maglor."

"I... I see."

"Might be Nico's too, with all that fur."

Maglor facepalmed, laughing. "Sören..."

The cat stopped grooming him, laying on Maglor lazily. Sören snuggled up, and one of Maglor's hands stroked Snúður, the other playing with Sören's curls. At last, when Sören was calm, Maglor began to sing to him.

There's a lady who's sure all that glitters is gold
And she's buying a stairway to heaven.
When she gets there she knows, if the stores are all closed
With a word she can get what she came for.
Ooh, ooh, and she's buying a stairway to heaven.

Chapter 38

"Sören, Macalaurë... Ingwion is here."

They had taken a nap together, apparently. Snúður had long since wandered off. Sören and Maglor sat up; Sören felt groggy, and Maglor helped him off the bed and down the hall. Ingwion was sitting in an armchair, with Snúður up on the ottoman, getting pettings.

There was a round table and set of four steel chairs outside, in addition to the wooden table and chairs in the kitchen. Dooku got the grill going, and Sören saw that he was making skewers, chicken with peppers, mushrooms, onions, tomatoes, and squash; Sören was once again grateful there were greenhouses in Iceland so the cost of produce wasn't astronomical.

"I see you're settling in nicely," Ingwion said.

"Yes, thank you again for buying this place," Sören said. "It was very generous of you."

"You should know that, with my departure at hand, I am leaving you with a reserve. Most of it in offshore bank accounts." He handed Sören a business card, and then pulled out a flip phone, attached to a charger. "This is my handler, Letitia Fetherstonhaugh. She's based in London."

Sören did a double-take at the way the surname was written versus the way it was pronounced - "fanshaw". Before he could ask about it, Ingwion went on, "I'd like one of you - Sören, Maglor, Dooku, it doesn't matter - to give her a call on that phone in the not too distant future, no greater than a week or two, to introduce yourself and touch base with her - she's been informed as much as I feel the need to inform her, so she will be expecting your call. If you need *anything* that requires a non-trivial sum of money -" He took out a small book from his pocket and looked at it. "One hundred thirty thousand ISK, which is roughly a thousand US dollars or 820 pounds sterling give or take, depending on the current rise and fall of the exchange rate... I would prefer you get that money from her. If you need to leave the country temporarily for any reason, visiting family for example... let her arrange it. If there is an emergency, let her help, or she will send someone out who can. That includes if there's a body, if you have to kill someone in self-defense."

"If..." Sören's eyes widened. "Come on, how likely is that to happen?"

"More likely than you think. You have dangerous enemies. And these are dangerous times." Ingwion let that sink in and put the book back in his pocket before he said, finally, "She will also help you safely relocate when the time comes."

"I have handlers," Maglor said.

"No you don't," Ingwion said, his gaze challenging Maglor's. "Not anymore."

"That..." Maglor exhaled sharply. "That was not your right, Ingwion. They were taking care of things fine for the last few years -"

"You now have two other people as part of the package," Ingwion said, "and*as you know*, that makes matters considerably more complicated. I did not trust your current set of handlers to be able to take on an additional two clients, and make arrangements for a party of three, without issue or incident. I do trust Letitia."

"Will we need to meet her in person?" Sören asked.

"Eventually, probably before the end of the year, possibly before the end of next month, she'll be by. She will go over some things that are best not discussed over the phone, even using a burner like the one I gave you. Warning you now, she does prefer to have advance notice of... events... and having to scramble to make things happen in a short period of time makes her testy." Ingwion grinned. "I regularly try her patience."

"Not just hers," Maglor muttered into his champagne.

"Oh, Macalaurë." Ingwion's grin was directed at him now. "Perhaps if you were less *entertaining* to provoke... and less attractive when provoked..."

Sören laughed. "He makes *that face.*" He patted Dooku, as he walked past. "So does he. It's so sexy."

Maglor glared in Sören and Ingwion's direction, and they both mimed a kiss at the same time. Then Sören's laughter rang out, and he grabbed Ingwion to kiss him. "Great minds." He twined a lock of Ingwion's hair around his finger.

Dooku's voice snapped his attention away before his mind could go too far into the gutter. "It's almost ready," Dooku said.

*Yes, it seems like a lot of things are 'almost ready'.*Sören stole another glance at Ingwion as he used the Force to pour everyone another glass of champagne.

—

After dinner, Sören took Ingwion on the tour of the house. Before they reached the master bedroom, they lingered in the studio. Ingwion looked at the harp with the same sort of reverence Sören felt when he saw it, and that drew Maglor out, who watched them looking at his instrument.

"Maglor," Sören asked, "would you play for us?"

"Please," Ingwion said, holding Maglor's gaze.

Maglor hesitated, considered, and then he nodded, sitting on the stool, as Sören and Ingwion took a seat on the "nest" in the corner of the studio, against the wall, knees touching, taking each other's hands.

Maglor began to play, and sing, and the sound led Dooku - who had been unpacking - down the hall, to stand in the doorway, watching. Sören recognized it, something that Maglor had played before when they lived together in Reykjavik, back when he was "Alejandro", and Sören assumed the words were glossolalia like Liz Fraser of Cocteau Twins, didn't know he was singing in Quenya. It was different to hear it on the harp instead of guitar or piano... and he saw Dooku's eyes widen, also knowing what it was, which surprised him. Dooku spoke into Sören's mind, explaining, *He's played this for me before. Once, when he was very drunk.*

The Noldolantë, Ingwion spoke into both their minds.

As Maglor's fingers plucked the harp, and his rich low tenor sang in Elvish, Sören*saw*.

He'd seen bits and pieces, when Maglor played it before, but it was like seeing a trailer or excerpts instead of a whole film, and now, here it was. Fëanor, his glory, Maglor's love for him. Maglor's brothers, their happiness. The Silmarils. Melkor's treachery. Rebellion, kinslaying, exile. Fëanor killed in a swarm of Balrogs, going up in flame. Fingolfin, mad with grief, challenging the Dark Lord to single combat, wounding him, wounded himself, getting back up and fighting until he could fight no more. Then receiving news that Finarfin and Ecthelion both had fallen, fighting Balrogs. Maglor going into exile in the world of Men, with his grief. Wandering. Alone. Guilt. Shame. Regret. Memories. Spirits, and their Songs, swirling around him like a fog. All the world a wasteland of despair.

It usually ended here, but now there was something new.

Maglor sang of his wounds in the War of Wrath, wanting to die. Ingwion caring for him, then the storm of their passion together, Maglor hating him for giving him his life back, and yet, as he went on, continuing to walk alone, continuing to hate Ingwion for not letting him die, wandering lonely and in pain. The minor chords lifted, becoming something brighter, as Sören continued to see - Maglor finding his father and uncle again, at the edge of the world, the land of volcanoes and blazing aurora skies like fire in winter, being brought back to life in their love, his fire, almost extinguished, lit once more. The ecstasy. The laughter. The return of hope. The three walking together, the fog lifting, sun parting the clouds. Finding most of his family, reborn. A wall of fire coming against the Valar, the Doom of the Noldor becoming the Doom of the Valar, transmuted like alchemy through Fëanorion fire. A curse upon the Valar, a threat... a promise.

When Maglor was done, his hands were shaking and he was breathing hard. He looked down, as if he were trying to process all the emotions that had come through him, then he looked up at Ingwion. Their eyes met for a moment before Maglor got up and embraced him. When they pulled apart, Ingwion patted his shoulder. Then he turned to the others.

“It's time,” Ingwion said.

Sören and Dooku looked at each other, and for once, it was Dooku who grasped for a moment of levity, joking "Ve need ze blaaaad toniiight."

"Yes, Dracula needs your blood over here," Sören said, stroking Dooku's beard, grinning at him. Then he sobered up as he said, "Me too."

—

Sören and Dooku watched anxiously as Ingwion produced a dagger and let the blood drip into two shot glasses over on the dresser. Just before he could add whisky, Sören looked at Snúður, who had hopped up on the bed, deciding to join them. He remembered how brokenhearted Dooku had been when he'd mentioned the death of his cat Dragos, and Sören blurted out, on impulse, "Ingwion, may I ask you for a favor?"

Ingwion turned around, and nodded acknowledgment.

"Jæja, so your blood... anyone who drinks it will become immortal, já?"

"Correct."

"Can we give some to my cat?" Sören reached out to touch Ingwion's mind, show him how important Snúdur was to him, and how much Dooku had grieved for Dragos. "I can put it on a cat treat or something to give it to him."

Ingwion laughed softly. "All right. You're very sweet."

Dooku gave Sören an adoring smile - across their bond, Sören knew Dooku knew Sören was thinking of Dragos - and Sören patted him. *I know Snúður is like your cat, too, just like Dragos was like mine. I don't want you to have to go through losing him, too, and I don't want to lose my baby either. "Just get another cat" - they're not replaceable, really.*

Dooku gave him a little kiss. *I love you.*

Sören kissed him back. *I know.*

Maglor came out of the bathroom, and Sören asked him, "Can you go to the kitchen and get the bag of cat treats?" Maglor nodded.

When Maglor came back, Snúður responded to just the sight of the bag, meowing. Sören laughed. "Yes, you know what time it is, don't you?" Sören used the Force to pass the bag to Ingwion, who coated a treat with a drop of his blood, and then held the treat out, for Snúður to hop off the bed with a chirp and trot right over, tail high in the air.

"You're going to be his new favorite person, giving him a treat," Sören said.

Maglor sat on the edge of the bed. "Wait, you're making the cat immortal too?"

Ingwion nodded solemnly. "He asked. I see no reason to refuse."

"Your handler, this Letitia person, she can help us move the cat when it's time...?" Sören raised an eyebrow.

"Cat, dog, any pets you have, any members of your household, that's her job."

"I'm getting a dog," Maglor said, after a moment. "Auli... had a bit of fun one afternoon, and I told the other dog's owner I'd pay for vet care. I've been promised the pick of the litter. But the puppy isn't here..."

“I will fill a vial,” Ingwion said, producing a small vial from his pocket; he cut his finger and dripped blood into the vial. “It should keep for awhile.” After the wound healed almost instantly, he began to pour the whisky into the glasses, and brought it over, giving Sören a kiss when he put the shot glass in his hand.

Sören hesitated, looking into the amber liquid with the red blood floating in it, knowing there was no going back. Dooku was also hesitating, but Sören knew it was waiting for him to drink, rather than holding back out of doubt.

Ingwion held out his arms and gave a little bow, a dramatic flourish that made Sören laugh, moreso when he realized it reminded him of the odd religious service he'd attended as a child, or seeing things on television. Sören made the Sign of the Cross in the air and quipped, "In the name of the Father," pointing to himself, "the Son," pointing to Maglor, and then, with a naughty look at Dooku, sharing mental images of when Dooku had come inside him, over him, "the Holy Spigot."

Dooku facepalmed, shaking with silent, full-body laughter. "Dear *god*, Sören."

"Bottoms up." Sören knocked back the shot glass.

_

Snúdur fell asleep first, shortly after consuming the treat. Sören leaned on Dooku, watching the cat curl up for a nap, and a few minutes after taking the blood he was aware he felt tired, too. He snuggled on Dooku's shoulder in a muzzy half-conscious state for a little while, feeling deeply relaxed, and then he was out.

And then, it started.

Visions replayed from the palantir. Fëanor's life, and death. Miriel, led away to become Brynhildur the Valkyrie, then cast out, made flesh. The death of his father Sigurð, attacked by Odin's sorcery. Then Brynhildur's death. Sören's life, his trauma - the abuse from his aunt and uncle, the bullying in school, losing patients as a med student, the abuse and rape from Justin.

An anvil, Fëanor hammering steel on a forge. Refining diamonds with fire, cutting them into brilliant facets.

Seeing Fëanor, then - being both inside his mind, as the same person, and standing outside and seeing himself as he once was, long ago. Looking into the feverish, molten silver eyes... a touch that was like being burned.

Suddenly, Sören was somewhere that felt like nowhere and everywhere all at once, a garden that seemed to exist outside of space and time. He and Dooku were both there, laying in the grass, and he saw Fëanor and Fingolfin approaching them, as magnificent as Maglor was fully unglamoured. Sören felt a surge of lust looking at Fingolfin, the hair falling to his knees, the pride in his silver-blue eyes, the high cheekbones, the sleek, hard body defined through the cut of his blue robes. He saw heat in Fingolfin's own gaze, just as he saw heat in Fëanor's eyes looking at Dooku, heat returned.

But it was not Fingolfin who pulled him up and led him forth, it was Fëanor, the Silmarils bright on the circlet across his brow. Sören couldn't stop looking at them, feeling compelled to touch, and Fëanor paused, turned him, and took his hands.

Yes, you may. They are yours*, after all.*

He guided Sören's hands, and Sören's fingers traced one of the stones, in awe. It did not burn him, it felt soft and inviting, like touching silk.

A memory of the touch of his mother, long ago, petting him to sleep. Love, warmth, acceptance.

Sören snatched his hand back.

You think I would reject you?

Flickers of the past again, Justin's words. *Your art's ugly, stupid.* Einar's words. *You'll never amount to anything.*

Fëanor's hands on his face. *I am you, and you are me. I could no more reject you than I could reject my limbs.* A kiss on his brow. *You are me, and you are* mine. *The Valar may have cursed others to see you as a worthless lump of coal, but I know you are a diamond, and you have been cut into the hardest of forms. You will shatter them.*

Fëanor took the crown from his head, and put it on Sören's.

And then Sören asked him, *What do I do, now that I am becoming immortal?*

Fëanor grinned, and his grin was predatory, like that of a wolf. *You remind the Valar and the Old Gods who you are.* What *they are dealing with. That the day of reckoning is at hand.*

How...

Claim the Silmarils. That is your first step.

And I ask you again, how.

Fëanor took his hands, and kissed them. *You already know, even if you think you don't, you know* here.

His hands covering Sören's, they pressed to his heart.

_

"Oh *Hells*, thank fuck."

Sören blinked his eyes open slowly. Maglor was sitting beside him. Sören was drenched with sweat - the sheets were soaked with it. Maglor pressed a bottle of Gatorade to his lips. "Drink."

"You're awake?" Dooku's voice sounded slurred, as he rolled over. Dooku looked pale under his olive complexion, also glistening with sweat, though considerably less than Sören. His eyes were glassy.

"What happened?" Sören rubbed his face, and took the bottle from Maglor to take another sip, almost dropping it - even a bottle of Gatorade felt like it weighed a ton, he was so weak and exhausted.

"You ran a very, very high fever. Both of you ran fevers, but yours was worse, Sören." Maglor had a thermometer out. "You were 40 C at one point."

"*Jesus.*"

"I told him no paramedics, no hospital," Ingwion said. "Even though I myself have never seen such a reaction to my blood, and it was rather concerning."

"We might have argued about it," Maglor said, looking down, a little sheepish.

"It's fine. I was getting worried that you were starting to *like me* and that takes the spice out of things considerably." Ingwion leered.

"Go to the Hells, Ingwion," Maglor said, but not unkindly.

Sören grinned, despite how awful he felt. The Gatorade tasted like ambrosia, he was so parched with thirst. He noticed a stack of used washcloths next to him.

"Tried to bring your fever down with cool washcloths," Maglor said. "Didn't work so well."

"I think it's coming down, I feel less hot now," Sören said. "Clammy and gross from the sweat. I need a shower..."

"You need to rest first," Maglor said.

"I was already sleeping -"

"That wasn't resting. Both of you were tossing and turning and saying some very strange things."

"I had very strange dreams," Sören said.

"We can talk about all of that tomorrow," Ingwion said. "Sleep first."

"But -"

"He's right." Maglor gave Sören a stern look, and before Sören could protest further, Maglor's hand was on his arm, and Sören felt like he was being wrapped in a cozy blanket and rocked. Maglor leaned in and brushed a kiss across his brow, and Sören's eyes closed.

_

Sören woke up in the late afternoon, feeling like he'd slept for days.

Sören felt exhausted, despite having slept so long, and every bone in his body ached. He sat up weakly on the edge of the bed, making noises. Dooku was already out of bed and somewhere; Maglor walked in the room when he heard Sören.

"OK, you're up now, good."

"I need a shower."

Sören was almost too weak to stand, and Maglor helped him into the shower, and then, noticing Sören having to lean against the wall, he took his own clothes off and joined him. But there was nothing sexy about it, even though Sören noticed Maglor went hard at the sight of him naked. Sören leaned on him and Maglor gently lathered him, making soothing noises. When he helped Sören out of the shower he playfully swatted Sören's bottom before wrapping a towel around him.

Sören changed into a T-shirt and pajama bottoms. Dooku walked into the room in his usual pair of black silk pajamas, and Sören saw he was coming to check on him. They stood there for a moment, exchanging a long, meaningful glance, and then they held each other.

"How are you holding up?" Sören asked, his voice raspy from sleep and needing more fluid.

"Ugh. I need another nap. I feel guilty, I should cook something -"

"Don't worry about dinner," Maglor said. "You get the rest you need."

Maglor changed the sheets on the bed, as Sören and Dooku leaned on each other.

When the bed was changed and freshly made, Maglor turned down the covers and Dooku crawled in; Maglor pulled a sheet over him, and Maglor sat on one side of Dooku and Sören the other, giving him slow, gentle rubs. Dooku flexed like a cat, with a little contented smile. "That's nice," he murmured into the pillow.

Then from the edge of the bed, Sören looked at the clock again - it was early evening now.

Before he could say something about it, a knife came flying towards him, and before he knew what was happening, Sören caught it, then another one. He was surprised by how quickly he responded, remembering playing dodge ball as a child and getting hit in the face or worse.

Ingwion walked into the bedroom, applauding.

"What the *fuck* was that?" Sören yelled, feeling a little miffed.

"Testing your reflexes," Ingwion said. "The blood will have catalyzed you, made your powers stronger."

"*Really.*" Sören frowned. "That includes everything...?"

"Yes."

Sören looked at Dooku, who wasn't quite asleep yet. "I'm thinking of a number between one and seventy."

Dooku snorted into the pillow, laughing out loud. Then he cheekily responded, "420."

"That sounds... actually really good right about now." Sören got up.

He rolled a joint in the living room while Maglor put together a light dinner in the kitchen, using leftover chicken to add to a green salad. When it was ready, Sören and Ingwion went to the kitchen to eat, with some of the salad put away for Dooku for later. Then they sat in the living room together, with Snúdur purring away on Sören's lap, Maglor sitting next to him, the two petting the cat as Ingwion looked on fondly in the armchair. Sören lit the joint he rolled, puffed, and passed to Maglor, who took a hit and passed it back to Sören - it amused Sören that Maglor was more casual about smoking pot now, toking up with him when offered rather than refusing. Sören offered it to Ingwion.

"I don't," Ingwion said.

"You should," Sören muttered. Then he said, more loudly, "I need it, for the conversation we're about to have." Sören, Maglor and Dooku finished the joint while Sören collected his thoughts. He had too many thoughts, his mind buzzing.

Maglor got up, went to the kitchen, and came back with more Gatorade for Sören. "You lost a lot of fluid last night sweating, you need to rehydrate," Maglor said.

"*Takk.*" Sören gave him a little kiss, and passed the joint to him again as he took a swig of Gatorade. Then Sören leaned back against the couch. "I don't even know where to begin."

"Begin with what is easiest for you to explain," Ingwion said.

Sören needed to open up about the dream he'd had. “I met myself. Well... I met Fëanor, and he told me I need to reclaim the Silmarils.”

“You do, yes.”

“But he also told me something really...” Sören didn't know how to describe it, so he just quoted. “You remind the Valar and the Old Gods who you are. What they are dealing with. That the day of reckoning is at hand.” Sören scowled. “At the, ah, after-party, I guess we could call it, the night before my sister's wedding, you and Flóki spoke of Odin's high seat, Hliðskjalf, and seeing... other realities. Like one where we threw down the Valar. I'm going to take a wild guess here and say that's your endgame for this reality.”

“The Valar and Odin,” Ingwion said, nodding.

“How is that even going to happen? Are they here? Are they coming here? Or...”

“No, you'd be going there,” Ingwion said. "To Asgard, and to Valinor."

“What.” Sören felt like his brain was breaking again. “How... no... what in the*fuck?*”

Ingwion looked down, and then he looked at Maglor, who nodded. Ingwion looked back at Sören and said, “I have something to show you.”

“Oh, do you now.” Sören leered.

Ingwion snorted. “You've already seen that.” Ingwion got up and patted him. “Let's take a drive.”

–

Sören was not feeling up to driving, so he got in the passenger seat of Ingwion's Bentley - in his T-shirt and pajamas and bunny slippers. He was still so exhausted from the night before that he didn't even care about what he looked like.

Ingwion drove for awhile, in silence, and when they got off at a familiar exit bells went off in Sören's head, his suspicion confirmed when they drove in and Sören saw the Dimmuborgir. "Oh my fucking *god*," Sören said, doubling over in hysterical laughter, even though it wasn't really funny - he felt like he was going a little crazy from all of this.

When Sören calmed down and they got out of the car, Sören said, "My mother said this was where she saw one of the *huldufólk*, when she was a little girl... and that was you.” Sören remembered Ingwion telling him. "So..." Sören looked at the Dimmuborgir, and back at Ingwion. "How does this work, exactly?"

Ingwion took Sören's hand, and walked him into one of the formations, that looked like a gate. Sören had the sense of being surrounded by the starry sky of space, then suddenly everything was long rays of light, and he felt like he was inside of an elevator, dropping, his stomach in his knees and his brain where his stomach should be. When the scenery was back to normal, Sören's legs were shaking, and they were standing at a menhir.

"Welcome to Avebury, United Kingdom," Ingwion said.

Sören took it all in, and then he had chills. *I've been here before, but not...* In his mind's eye he saw himself waking up from a strange bed just before the dawn, going out to the sacred site to watch the sun rise.

He remembered his brother's TED Talk.

Tonight, I'll be challenging what you think you know about the concept of life on other worlds. No pseudoscience of UFOs - no need to fly at all. Why fly, when you can just walk through a door?

"Jesus, Dag," Sören said under his breath.

"Hm?"

"Uh." Sören shook his head. Then he looked at Ingwion. "This isn't the only one, I take it."

"There are portals all over the world."

"Wherever ancient people had sacred sites...?"

"Yes. Liminal places, places of power. That is where they are. I gave Maglor a map last month, of where they're located. Any portal can be used to travel to any other portal across the world. And some of the portals will take you to other worlds. Other versions of Earth. And the realms of the gods and spirits of mythologies. The portal at the Dimmuborgir is one of the portals that can take you directly to Asgard, when it is time to fight."

"How will I know when -"

"You'll know." Their eyes met. "I hope you are ready when it happens."

"I don't think I'll ever be ready to... you know, fight a god. Or gods." Sören swallowed hard. "That's... a lot."

"The strength of your heart is your greatest weapon," Ingwion said, putting his hand on Sören's heart. "Your sensitivity, that intensity in you, the depth and power of your emotions. If you unchain your heart when you fight... you would be surprised what you can accomplish."

"So what, give Odin the Care Bear Stare?" Then Sören realized Ingwion probably didn't know that reference... or maybe he did.

"Show him your fire. Here." He took Sören's hand again.

There was that dizzying feeling again, and this time they came out at Uluru, which Sören recognized from pictures. It was nine hours and thirty minutes ahead of Reykjavik, so it was the middle of the night, and Ingwion pointed up - Sören's breath caught as he saw the aurora australis blazing in the sky, green and red and violet.

"Holy *fuck*, " Sören gasped. He'd seen the northern lights plenty of times in Iceland, but it amazed him every time and to see it here... his hair stood on end.

"This is what your energy is like," Ingwion said, gesturing. "The fire in the sky. The Valar gave you darkness, but there you are, burning bright."

After watching the aurora for a few minutes, hand-in-hand, Sören threw his arms around Ingwion and kissed him hard, and heard himself blurting out, "I love you."

–

In front of the new house in Akureyri, the car pulled over, and they lingered.

“Now that I have given you my blood, and I have shown you the portal...” Ingwion touched Sören's face. “This is goodbye.”

Sören's jaw dropped, and his heart sank. He knew, of course, that Ingwion was going to leave not long after his former neighbors got back from the States, but he hadn't expected that Ingwion would leave so abruptly. Not having a final date, a final night with him...

As if Ingwion could hear him broadcasting, he said, “You need more time to rest, and... the longer I stay, the harder it will be to say goodbye. And I really can't stay here forever.”

“OK.” Sören swallowed hard. “Will... will I ever see you again?”

“Yes.” Ingwion nodded. “I can't give you an exact date of when – life is nothing if unpredictable, even for a god – but...” He put on an Arnold Schwarzenegger voice. “I'll be back.”

Sören laughed aloud, and harder at the surreality of a god making a pop culture reference.

They continued to linger, holding each other for a moment, foreheads close, nuzzling, breathing each other's breath. Sören held back the tears, not wanting Ingwion's last memory of him to be seeing him cry. *Tears unnumbered*. At last Sören pulled back, feeling like he was made of lead. "*Kæru elskhugi minn, vinur minn. Bless.*" Sören stroked his face.

Ingwion took his hand, and kissed it.

"Thank you for everything," Sören said.

"Thank *you* for everything."

Sören gave a self-deprecating little laugh. "I didn't do much."

"You did more than you know, beautiful."

Sören hugged him again, and Ingwion kissed his forehead. Then he patted Sören's shoulder. "Go," he said simply.

Sören opened the car door, and before he could get out, Ingwion said, "Sören."

Sören paused.

"May the Force be with you."

–

Maglor and Dooku were waiting for him in the kitchen. "I thought you guys would be in bed, fucked your brains out," Sören said, attempting levity, as he did.

"Well, there was that, but awhile ago. We've had time to recover," Maglor said, as Dooku blushed.

Then Dooku asked, "How did it go?"

"We enjoyed ourselves." Sören nodded. "It was... a good time. Aaaaand he's gone." And Sören started to cry.

He hadn't expected to cry until later, but something about Maglor and Dooku being right there, knowing how difficult this was for him, made him vulnerable. And then they were on either side of him, drawing him into their arms, dragging him off to the bedroom.

When Sören was in a T-shirt and pajama bottoms, he climbed onto the bed, held between them, the two of them rocking him, petting him, letting him cry and cry. "He's gone," Sören sobbed. "I love him, and he's gone..."

"I know." Dooku kissed the top of his head. "But we're here. You still have us."

"I'm not going anywhere ever again," Maglor said, taking Sören's chin in his hand, looking into his eyes.

Sören erupted, sobbing even harder, sobbing into Maglor's chest, tears racking him so hard it almost hurt, shivering, and he could feel Maglor heaving a little, and something about Maglor crying with him made him cry even more. Sören heard himself howling, keening, inhuman noises in his grief. "Don't leave," Sören cried. "Don't leave, don't go, don't leave me again..."

"I swore to you I won't. I'm right here. I'm right here." Maglor's arms tightened around him and he rocked Sören harder.

"Don't go..."

Maglor picked Sören's head up and started to sing, "*Never gonna give you up, never gonna let you down, never gonna run around and desert you -*"

"OH, GODDAMMIT," Dooku yelled, and the pained look on his face made Sören giggle through his tears, laughing harder at Maglor's innocent face, and then Sören started crying again. Laughing and crying.

"I'm sorry," Sören said finally. "I feel like I cry too much. Einar used to give me shit about being so sensitive, so did Justin, and I got picked on in school about it -"

"Your sensitive heart is one of the things we love about you," Maglor said, and Dooku nodded.

"You've told me before not to keep my feelings inside," Dooku said, rubbing Sören's back. "You should heed your own advice."

"You cry it out, as much as you need to." Maglor kissed Sören's forehead.

Sören felt self-conscious about crying this much over a fuckbuddy, but...*It wasn't just a fling. I loved him. I will* always *love him.*

Sören cried and cried for hours until at last, exhausted, he had cried himself to sleep.

Chapter 39

The months wore on; the brief Icelandic fall became winter. Yet Maglor felt like his life was spring.

On Wednesday, November thirteenth, on their way home from classes, Sören went with Maglor to the Corgi owner's house - it turned out she lived just a few blocks away.

The Corgi had a litter of three puppies, two girls and a boy. The Icelandic sheepdog/Corgi mix puppies all had big ears, short legs, the curled spitz tail, an auburn and white coat, and were ridiculously fluffy. Sören made high-pitched squealing noises at them, and Maglor couldn't help grinning like an idiot at the cuteness.

One of the puppies came right over to them, tongue lolling, tail wagging. "Well, hello," Maglor said, getting down on his knees. The puppy accepted pettings and started licking Maglor's hands. "Do you want to come home with us?"

The puppy yipped as if to say "yes".

Maglor scooped up the puppy and held it, rocking it like a baby, laughing as the puppy licked his face. He heard himself actually talking baby talk to the puppy. "Oh yes, you're a cute little fuzzy wuzzy baby puppy, yes you are. You're a sweet baby giving all those kisses and we're going to take you home and spoil you and rub your fuzzy little tummy and love you all up, our little fuzzy fluffy baby -"

The puppy started licking Maglor's nose and put its tongue up Maglor's nose, making Sören howl. Maglor gave him a look, and Sören laughed even harder.

The puppy turned out to be the boy. Maglor thanked the Corgi's owner profusely as Sören loaded the puppy into the carrier they'd bought, and even though Maglor had paid for the veterinary care of the Corgi and her litter, he still insisted on paying her extra for letting him have one of the dogs. She hugged him and invited them to dinner one of these nights, and Sören accepted, and after they took the dog's paperwork of his initial vet visits, they were off in the jeep to their house.

Dooku greeted them at the door, hugging and kissing them both in turn.

"I brought home a pet," Maglor said. "And one of Auli's pups."

Sören cackled. "Ha ha." He elbowed Maglor.

Dooku smiled. "Is he housebroken?"

Maglor grinned. "I'm pretty sure the dog is."

Sören stuck out his tongue at Maglor, and Maglor tweaked his nose before kissing it.

"He needs a name," Sören said as they let the puppy out of the carrier to explore.

Maglor didn't even have to think about it. "Huan."

"Juan?"

"No, *Huan.*" Maglor glared. "After my brother's dog." Thinking of Celegorm or any of his brothers would always be like a punch in the gut, and a topic he'd rather avoid because it hurt too much, but he could at least do this in tribute.

Huan was trying to climb on him again. Maglor got back down on his knees, sat on the floor and pet the puppy. "Good boy," he said as Huan rolled over for belly rubs. "That's a good dog. Good Huan."

Huan barked, as if he recognized his name.

"You approve of your name?"

Huan barked again as if to say yes.

Maglor felt a frisson down his spine. *Don't even tell me...* "You." He swallowed hard. "Did you come back to us?"

Two urgent yips, and then a little whine, sad eyes.

Hells. His eyes blurred with unshed tears. Sören was rubbing the top of his head, and Maglor took his hand, the other hand continuing to pet the dog. "I'm glad to see you again, old friend."

Huan yipped, tail wagging, and got up and climbed on him. Maglor held Huan and rubbed his nose in the fur - even though he had that dog smell - kissed the dog's head. Huan responded by licking his face again, licking up his nose again.

Then Huan barked and Maglor put him down. Huan bounded over to Dooku to get more pettings and love, then he ran past Dooku, down the hall, and they wondered what the dog was up to.

Huan came back with a small drawstring bag in his mouth, that Maglor kept tucked into a corner of one of the shelves in the studio, between his composition books. A bag that held a *palantir*, that Maglor assumed "didn't work anymore" when he'd thought he'd lost the Song, though he'd kept it out of sentimental value and on the odd chance it *did* still work and just wouldn't work for him, to keep it from falling into the wrong hands. Maglor hadn't tried to look into it since the Song came back since there'd been too much going on. *Too much everything.*

But now Huan was *carrying the bag that held the palantir.* Maglor had wondered several times if Celegorm's dog had been a Maia, and this seemed to answer the question once and for all. Huan placed the bag at Maglor's feet and sat, cocking his head to one side and letting out a bark. He wagged his tail excitedly.

"What is that?" Sören asked.

Maglor unwrapped the *palantir*. "Something you made, a long time ago." He handed it to Sören. "This might come in useful, in the fight we have ahead of us."

In the meantime, there was peace. Real, true peace. After dinner, Huan sat on Maglor's lap, and Snúdur sat between him and Sören, purring away - Maglor didn't know whether he should be surprised or not surprised that Snúður seemed accepting of the dog right away, like they were old friends reunited.

Dooku perched on the arm of the sofa for a few minutes and Maglor leaned against him,

breathing a soft little sigh as Dooku massaged his scalp.

I love you, you know, Dooku spoke into his mind.

I know. Maglor kissed his hand. *I love you too.*

Dooku started rubbing his shoulders, kneading. Now Sören was playing with his hair, his free hand going back and forth between petting Huan, petting Snúður. Maglor pet the cat and the dog too, feeling as content as they looked.

They weren't a conventional family, their life wasn't really normal, and Maglor knew they had a long, hard road ahead of them to try to break the Doom. But at least he had some hope that it would be broken, now. That perhaps, this time, things would work out, and what he had was now his to hold.

After so long, Maglor Fëanorion had come home.

—

The next day, on the way back from the studio, Sören looked deep in thought. Maglor worried that Sören was brooding, but then Sören had that mischievous grin he loved so well as he turned to Maglor and said, “You know what?”

“What.”

“Huan is a very special boy. We should get him a crown or a tiara or something.”

And that was how Maglor found himself driving the other way through town, so Sören could go to a jeweler, to get a diamond-encrusted silver tiara for a dog.

Friday came, and Maglor, Sören and Dooku were in a festive mood. Sören put the tiara on Huan as soon as they returned from the studio. To celebrate Huan – to celebrate life – Dooku decided he would barbecue outside. Icelanders liked to barbecue all year round, something Maglor had gotten used to when he had lived with Sören in Reykjavik years ago, and it felt comforting to have that tradition return to his life.

Dooku grilled steaks and chicken, while Maglor and Sören made a salad together. Just before everyone could start eating, a car pulled up in front of the house, then there was a knock on the door and a woman's voice came from the front of the house. "Hello? Is anyone home?" She had a British accent, London from the sound of it.

"I'll be right there," Dooku said.

There was a woman of average height and average build, short sandy blonde hair and blue eyes, who bore a vague resemblance to Lady Diana, but her face was more severe. She was dressed in a navy blue pantsuit with white blouse, very business-looking.

"How do you do," she said. "I'm Letitia Fetherstonhaugh."

The handler they'd only spoken with on the phone, but hadn't yet met in person.

"Come in," Dooku said. "We were just about to start eating, we have enough if you'd like to join us -"

"I didn't mean to disturb your dinner," she said. "I can come back -"

"We could... sit in the living room, if you're here to talk to us," Dooku said. "I know that Ingmar had said you'd be out to see us in-person eventually.." He gently closed the door behind Letitia as she came in.

Maglor went out to the patio and brought back the food, and sat on the couch next to Sören, while Dooku squeezed on the other side of them, and Letitia took the armchair.

"Are you quite sure you don't want anything?" Dooku asked. "Coffee, tea, water, juice, ginger ale..." He looked at the beer Maglor was drinking. "Beer..."

"Actually, I'll have a beer if that's fine," Letitia said, nodding.

Dooku got up to get it this time. Maglor didn't know what to make of her, though she seemed a bit more business-like than the handlers he'd been used to dealing with... a bit more official... and that was setting off little alarm bells in his head.

"Brilliant, thank you," Letitia said. "IcelandAir is a lovely company but I still find flying on short notice to be exhausting."

She nursed her beer while they continued eating their meal, then she said, “I'll cut right to the chase. I noticed you used one of the credit cards yesterday for a rather... large purchase, which is why I came out."

"Yes." Maglor felt a little sheepish. *Yes, we bought a diamond tiara for a dog. Next time on Keeping Up With the Fëanorions...*

“Before Ingmar left -”

"Did he tell you where he was going?" Sören asked.

"'Away on business', which could mean anything with him," Letitia said, muttering "*bloody arsehole*" under her breath. "Before Ingmar left," she started again, "he told me about you, and your situation."

"He..." Dooku raised an eyebrow. "What situation is that, exactly."

Maglor also raised an eyebrow. His handlers over the decades had known that he needed fake identities and their paperwork. They hadn't known why. That hadn't been their business - the less they knew about who and what he was, the better off he was. He'd learned that the hard way in 1972.

"You're immortal," Letitia said.

Maglor almost spat his beer. "Fuck."

"It's all right, Alejandro. Or should I say, Mark Lowry? Marcus Lauer? Marco LaRaia?" Letitia gave him a pointed look.

"How do you -"

"All right." Letitia nodded. She pulled out her wallet, and there was an identification card for Lady Letitia Fetherstonhaugh. Letitia had been scowling into the camera. "I work for MI6."

"You." Maglor rose from the couch. "You. *What.*" He could feel the fury rising in him. "*He sold us out*-"

As calm as could please, Letitia pulled out a Glock service pistol and pointed it at him.

"Calm down, Mr... Magalhães. Lowry. Whatever. Have a seat."

Maglor sat, cursing under his breath. Letitia put the pistol back where it came from, concealed. "I apologize for pulling the weapon on you, but it's force of habit since you got up suddenly -"

Maglor felt a little self-conscious, not wanting to frighten the woman but at the same time, distrustful of government agents. "I apologize myself, I -"

"Yes. I know." She met his eyes. "Allow me to explain myself and try to put your mind at ease, yes? As I said, I work for MI6. No, you were not sold out. This is the fact of the matter: I work for a department of MI6 that technically, on-record, doesn't exist, and officially I work within another department of MI6. But in my actual, real off-record department, we specialize in dealing with situations like yours, to protect the common citizens from finding out people like you exist, because that has the potential to disrupt societal fabric on a large scale. And part of how we protect common citizens from finding out people like you exist... is to protect you, as well. I know about what happened in 1972, Mr. Lowry, I'm using Lowry because you were known to them as Mark Lowry at that time. We are not the Americans."

Maglor took a few deep breaths, the memories flooding back of being held in the cell, experimented on...

Sören put an arm around him and kissed his cheek. "It's OK," he husked, picking up on the distress. "You're here now."

"Indeed, you are," Letitia said, nodding. "Whether you feel it to be so or not, it is in your best interests for me and my department to know about you, to prevent something like what happened to you in the 1970s from happening again, or worse, being picked up by rogue agents from God-knows-where who have even fewer scruples than the Americans, aren't playing by official laws of any kind, who will do God-knows-what to discover 'the secret of immortality', or the abilities we know some of this family possesses. So, even though your experience has taught you to distrust the government, and I can't blame you, I'd like you to keep an open mind at least where I am concerned and come to an understanding that Ingmar Borovkov didn't 'sell you out'. The kinds of people you've been dealing with for the last four decades, who operate completely overtly, illegally, with black market paperwork and guns and the like... *those* kinds of people would 'sell you out', given a matter of time. You came close to it with the people in South America."

"Yeah." Maglor ran a hand through his hair; it was why he had to keep up an illusion of not being involved with Sören when they visited Rio in 2014.

"Now then. If we have an understanding that I'm on your side..."

Dooku nodded. Maglor knew from conversations they'd had that this news would be hard for Dooku, too, since he'd had a falling out with his former best friend Sayyid-Diya about the idea of Force sensitives coming out and registering with the government, years ago, something that Sayyid-Diya thought would have stopped terrorism, if there had been Force sensitive operatives; Sayyid-Diya's son had been killed in the Twin Towers on 9/11. Sören patted Dooku as well.

"You have, as Ingmar mentioned, a reserve of cash, which should help you for the next few decades of moving around, changing locations and identities when you are at the point where your lack of aging will cause suspicion. This cash will stretch farther if invested correctly... I know you have investments with Tesla and Microsoft, and I'd encourage you to sink some more cash into them, though not everything, Mr. Lowry,"

Letitia said.

"How much do we have?" Sören asked.

Letitia gave him the figure.

Sören dropped his plate; Dooku used the Force to pick it back up before it could fall on the floor, not bothering to conceal the Force use since Letitia already knew. But it was one thing for Letitia to have been informed and another thing to see it, and her eyes widened with shock as she saw the display.

"That's... a lot of fucking money," Sören said. "We're multi-millionaires now?"

"That's just the money you know about. There's an additional reserve that I've been advised to not disclose to you just yet. Which, after yesterday's expenditure, I think is wise..."

"Right, we wouldn't be in the habit of spending like that regularly," Dooku said; Maglor sensed annoyance.

"It is something that newly rich people do -"

"I come from a line of counts who owned land in Romania," Dooku said. "You needn't explain the habits of newly rich versus old money."

"I know about your family, Ion Nicolae Dooku - Nazi collaborator uncle, yes? - and I know you most likely don't need that explained to you, but your husband probably does."

Sören huffed a little. "I think I have enough common sense to make us not stick out even more than we already do."

"Let's hope so. Trips, the occasional indulgence, all of that is fine. I don't want to find out you're driving a neon green Citroen."

Maglor couldn't help laughing. Sören's voice was a hush as he said, "You knew it would be a Citroen, too...?"

"We have a little psychological profile on you," Letitia said.

"Jesus *Christ*."

"Now then. Now that I've had that talk with you about managing money... even though I know it is your intent to stay in Akureyri for awhile, I would still like you to start thinking about your next move, even if it won't be for some time. If you can't decide on a where right now, it's OK - and that where may be subject to change, as political climates and cultures change around the world. But as Mr. Lowry can tell you, crafting a new identity is a non-trivial procedure, you're not just changing a name, but there's a story behind that name, the mask you are slipping into. For someone like Dooku, it might be easier to continue with a British persona, since the United Kingdom is a large country, but for you, Sören, it's going to be harder to keep up appearances as an Icelander since Iceland is so small and so wired and it's *much* more difficult to fake database information here, plus if you encounter Icelandic nationals abroad they may become keenly interested in folks from back home, who you might know in common, and the like. So your task, right now, is to start thinking of a persona that is neither too close to who you are now, but is still something you could pull off convincingly. Sören, you will likely need to learn a third language, and when you've selected one, I can get you whatever materials you need."

"Never mind a third language," Maglor said. "Sören, you're going to need to learn to speak six or seven languages by the time you're Nicolae's age."

"I speak Danish, too," Sören said. "Had to learn that at gymnasium."

"It's easier when they're languages that are closely related. Like other Scandinavian languages," Letitia said. "If you can speak Danish, too - that would be in the records we have, my apologies, there was a lot there and I'm running on fumes... that's a start... will be easier to learn Swedish and Norwegian as well."

"I also, speaking from direct experience, don't recommend the same country twice in a row, so I don't think Nicolae should try to be British when we move," Maglor said, giving Dooku an apologetic look.

Dooku frowned into his beer.

"You also need to start preparing in other ways," Letitia said. "If you have social media profiles under your wallet names, delete them if possible. If not possible, remove any pictures of yourself that are on Facebook, Twitter, the like, as soon as possible. Let me know where those images are posted, so my team can do a wipe and make sure they can't be accessed by an Internet archive. Otherwise you're looking at potentially needing plastic surgery -"

"*What.*" Sören's eyes widened.

Letitia nodded solemnly. "Hopefully that won't be necessary - it should be a crime for any of the three of you to have to alter your looks - but to make sure it absolutely is not necessary to go to that extreme to protect yourselves, no more pictures of you on the Internet. It's fine to take pictures and keep them private on your laptop or a hard drive, but don't post them anywhere, not even in something like e-mail. If a stranger takes a photo of you, whether intentionally or by accident, call me immediately no matter time of day or night and give me all the information you can. Also, don't do video chat. That leads me to the next points of business - Dooku, that novel you're working on, when you finish, I hope you intend to publish under an assumed name, whether you self-publish or go to a publishing house. You may want to have a third party handle everything altogether so there can be no connection to you, since finding out who the real person is behind a pseudonym is the custom these days. And from what I understand also, Sören, you have a gallery on deviantART. You have a very idiosyncratic painting style, one that is easily recognizable. You are going to have to start thinking about how public you want to be as an artist, and the trade-off for recognition now is not being able to produce the same kind of material later, unless you want to risk exposure... not until some decades have passed, enough for public memory to lapse."

Sören made a wounded animal noise. "Fuck. Me."

And that was when Huan came out to say hello, tongue lolling, tail wagging happily, wearing his diamond tiara.

"Er," Letitia said.

"Didn't Ingmar warn you about us?" Sören smirked.

"Not nearly enough." Letitia rolled her eyes. *The immortality and psychic abilities are clearly the most normal thing about you lot*, Maglor heard her broadcasting, and he couldn't help a grin.

Chapter 40

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

On Monday, November twenty-fifth, Sören had his thirty-fifth birthday. Not that it mattered anymore, now that he was no longer aging, but Maglor and Dooku still wanted to celebrate the life of the man they loved.

Maglor convinced Sören to take the day off from classes, and he would as well. "I want to take you on a special trip," he said.

"You coming with us?" Sören asked Dooku, finishing morning coffee.

Dooku shook his head. Maglor and Dooku had talked about it privately the night before, and Dooku wasn't at all offended when Maglor explained it to him. "I'll stay behind with the animals and besides, I want to make you a nice dinner and a cake and that takes time." Dooku patted Sören. "You two go on, have fun."

Maglor drove them to the small airport in Akureyri, and they flew into Reykjavik. When they got a rental car, Sören asked, "Oh, are we going to see my sister...?"

"Not this time."

"Where are we going?"

Maglor gave a little cryptic smile. "You'll see."

He drove for the next two hours. The skies were grey today, and Iceland only got four hours of daylight in the winter; the skies were dramatic with wild sunset storm clouds, like fire and ash, when they reached their destination.

"Reynisfjara," Sören whispered as they pulled in.

It had been the place where, back in 2009, Maglor had asked Sören to move in with him - where Sören had broken down the last of his resolve to not get attached, not get involved with anyone, to allow himself comfort for at least awhile. It was significant enough to have featured in the two paintings Sören made of him during their time apart.

Maglor felt a frisson when he got out of the car, knowing Sören was feeling it too. In this place they were coming full circle, ten years of history, where the past and the future collided.

Maglor had taken his acoustic guitar on the plane, and he pulled it out of the trunk. They found a place to sit down in the black sand and watch the waves, sunset becoming twilight. Sören leaned on Maglor as he played, starting with the acoustic guitar version of the *Noldolantë*, singing in Elvish. Feeling, crying, Sören crying with him, seeing it all, walking his life with him through the Song, from joy and pride to desolation to a dare to hope again. Death and rebirth.

They were silent when the song was over. Maglor took a few deep breaths, trying to calm himself down, because he would have to drive back to Reykjavik and he couldn't do that if he was a sobbing wreck.

Sören suggested a walk on the beach. Hand in hand they walked, Maglor carrying his guitar case over his shoulder. And then Sören stopped suddenly, his full lips parted, pupils blown wide.

"What?"

Sören pointed.

Something was shining in the sea.

They walked to where the tide was rolling in. The shining gleam rolled closer and closer, one crash of the tides, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine... and then it was there in the black sand, brilliant, blinding white, like a small moon. Sören used the Force to lift it into the air and it shone on them.

Maglor couldn't even make words.

Sören waved his hand and it flew over to them. Instinctively Maglor put his hand over Sören's to move Sören's hand away before he could grab it, remembering how it burned, and then he withdrew, realizing, and watched as Sören's hand grasped it. Not burning.

Sören looked at it with awe.

Maglor didn't bother to hide the tears that were flowing now, silently. It had been literally *ages* since he'd thrown that thing in the sea, and of course, *of course* here it was now. Maglor hadn't known that the Silmaril would show up, when he'd planned to take Sören here for his thirty-fifth birthday, but he realized now that feeling of the trip being the right thing to do, being necessary, being fated...

A chill went down Maglor's spine. Sören threw his arms around Maglor and kissed him, hard.

A victory kiss became something more, the two of them groaning as their tongues played together, bodies pressed together. It was a cold winter day, and Sören was so warm, the Silmaril providing additional heat like they were standing near a radiator. Sören started taking off his clothes as if it were the middle of summer, undressing Maglor as well. There was nobody else around, like the beach belonged to them.

The Silmaril belonged to them. And they belonged to each other.

The sea of stars above them, and the Silmaril shining in Sören's hand as the brightest star, Maglor lay on his back in the black sand, his glamour shed. He would have sand in his hair, and in places sand didn't belong, later, and he didn't care. Nothing else mattered.

Kissing him passionately, Sören impaled himself on Maglor's cock, and began to rock his hips. Soon he was riding, and bathed in the light of the Silmaril, Sören was glorious. Not just in appearance, but Maglor could *feel* Sören's power. Past and future really *were* one here, the Flame Imperishable burning bright within and around Sören as never before. Maglor reached up to touch Sören's face, hand sliding down to rest on Sören's heart.

"I love you," Maglor husked. "I love you, Sören. Fëanor."

"I love you." Sören leaned down to kiss him, more tenderly and gently than before, playing

with Maglor's hair, and then rained sweet little kisses over his face before planting a kiss over his heart. "My Song. My beautiful, magnificent Song."

It was then that Sören opened Maglor's right hand, where the scar was burned into his palm. And Sören's hand that held the Silmaril pressed against Maglor's hand, so now they were both holding it.

Maglor's first instinct was to yank it away - the memories of how it had seared his flesh, the agony - but the Silmaril felt pleasantly warm, and soft, like a bath or a blanket. Warm, soft, loving energy enfolded him, love melting in Sören's chocolate eyes, and it took Maglor's breath away.

"What the *Hells*..."

The light was getting brighter and brighter. The Silmaril was thrumming in his hand. The Northern Lights were lighting up the sky above them. Maglor had seen the aurora dozens of times in his years in Iceland, and it was breathtaking every time, one of the true wonders of the world, but this was beyond anything he'd ever seen, as if Fëanor himself were putting on a show just for him. Teals and violets wove together, streaks of gold and cyan and magenta.

The sky seemed to sing. The sea. The stars. The entire world was singing, it seemed, Maglor was as deep in the Song as he'd ever been. The Silmaril was *pounding* now, still not too hot to the touch, and the white light was enveloping them, about to drown out the aurora, drown out Sören himself -

Sören used the Force to lift up the Silmaril, and it settled back down over Maglor's heart. And when he looked at his hand, the scar was gone. His hand was restored to the way it had been before...

Sören kissed him hard, and started to buck his hips furiously, riding with abandon. Maglor grabbed him, drove into him, surrendering to passion, fire calling to fire. He had never loved Fëanor more than he did right now, and he knew that love would only deepen as they shared eternity together, *the way it was supposed to be*

Sören was stroking his hair, kissing him over and over again, hands roaming over him, and when Sören's hand was in his healed hand, they both choked up.

"Macalaurë," Sören breathed.

The pleasure was building and building, the two trembling, gasping for breath. Sören was still riding feverishly, his hard cock dripping onto Maglor's stomach. Maglor watched as Sören stroked himself a little, precum slicking his fingers and palm, and he brought his hand to Maglor's lips to taste. Maglor licked and sucked Sören's fingers, licked and kissed his palm, sucking his fingers some more and savoring the aftertaste, like it was divine nectar.

Maglor took Sören's face in his hands and kissed him one last time. "Come with me."

They came together, the aurora continuing to light up the sky, the Silmaril shining on them, Sören spilling over Maglor's stomach as Maglor spent into him, crying out into the stars, echoing into the sea, the sea sighing back at them as the waves rolled in.

They held each other for a few minutes, spent - for now - and shattered. Before Sören could fall asleep like that, Maglor shook him gently, chuckling. "Ada, we need to go back."

"OK, fine." Sören rolled his eyes in mock annoyance. He blew a raspberry in the air.

They put their clothes back on and Maglor carried the guitar to the car, Sören carried the Silmaril. He sat with it clasped in his hands as he dozed off on the way back to Reykjavik, Maglor's Cocteau Twins mp3s playing softly in the background like a lullaby for goth children. And though Maglor kept his eyes on the road - especially important driving in Iceland in the winter - every now and again he stole glances at Sören, looking peaceful, innocent, beautiful.

Maglor hoped that peace would last.

Chapter End Notes

In 2019 the artist Kaprriss made this piece of art for me, of Sören and Maglor:

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!