

The Power of a Kiss

Part 8

Amber Collins

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Carina wasn't sure what to do next.

She didn't expect Scott to be so easy to find—yet so difficult to reach. If she'd only had a few more minutes to herself, she would've rescued him and left this place, long before Empress Noire knew what happened. But like everything else in Carina's life, the timing was just wrong.

Currently, she was quite small, no more than an inch high. She'd shrunken down with the power of not one shrinking ring, but two. She was sitting with her back against the leg of the armoire where she hid, waiting for Empress Noire to fall into a sleep deep enough for Carina to venture from cover.

She slipped off one of the rings and placed it in her pocket. At once, she felt warm tingles spread from her fingers down to her toes and then back up to her head. Her feet stretched across the wood, taking her from a mere inch tall to *six* inches tall. Still quite small, but with legs long enough to walk around without needing to rest.

Venturing out, she looked around the massive bedroom. Part of her wanted to shrink back down and creep under the door—her original plan since Audra was waiting on the other side, or so she hoped. Empress Noire had walked right past her while Audra was at normal size. But if the evil dark elf had seen her, she surely wouldn't have so easily gone to bed.

Carina stepped up to the edge of the bed, then summoned her shadow magic. She wondered if it would be as effective at such a small size and was delight to see it worked just fine, naturally scaled to match her current height. Once the shadows started to swirl around her, she solidified them and created a set of steps right up to the bed.

At the edge, she looked over and saw Noire's giant soles facing her. The lady's dark feet barely moved and she wore a silver ring on her second toe.

From there, she climbed atop the bed and padded her way around the left side. Noire stirred for a moment, but

Carina reminded herself she was cloaked in shadow. Still, the dark elf could probably counter such spells, especially when the magic was weak due to her size. She moved slower, hoping to fool the big lady until she could find Scott and get them out of the room.

As she moved past the giantess's fingers, she looked up to her breast and found him there, just sitting and watching the mass of shadow come closer. It was difficult to see Carina, especially in the dark, but Scott must have been awake for some time, allowing his eyes to adjust.

He waved his hands, afraid to say anything with the giantess so close. Each time she breathed, he rose into the air, like riding the ocean's gentlest wave.

She dispelled the shadow magic and his eyes lit up. She didn't understand this little mortal's fondness for her—they'd only just met, and rarely had a chance to spend time together.

She started to use her people's intricate hand signaling but realized he wouldn't be able to understand it. Humans weren't the most adept at learning new languages. Instead, she motioned for him to come.

He looked around, then shrugged because he was afraid that moving across Noire would wake the dark elf. So, she summoned her magic, much the same way she did when she needed to scale the bed. A ramp appeared just an inch from Noire's breast.

At first, he didn't move, as he was too busy guessing the best way to step off the giantess without waking her. Finally, he eased to the lip of the shadow ramp, then sat there for a moment, sure that Noire would wake. When she didn't, he crawled the rest of the way down until he was on the bed next to Carina.

She summoned another ramp down to the floor and made a swiping motion across her lips, indicating they needed to be quiet until they were out of earshot.

At the bottom, they crawled under the bed and waited, listening for the mattress to groan with Noire's sudden realization that Scott was gone. Now that she was standing next to him, she realized he was roughly half her size, but minutely inching higher.

But finally, silence. Carina whispered, "We have to get out of here. Can you get any smaller?"

"Yeah, but why?"

"Because we need to get out of here. We can creep under the door but I have to use both the rings for me to get small enough."

"Oh."

"Okay, shrink and let's get out of here." Scott's face turned red and he rubbed the back of his neck. She stared at him quizzically. "What's the matter?"

"I can't just . . . shrink on command."

"Oh, I didn't know that. So how *do* you shrink?"

“You have to kiss me.”

“*Kiss* you? Are you serious?”

“Yes. You can take some of my power in the process, too. You’ve . . . done it before.”

“I think I would’ve remembered that,” she laughed.

They weren’t getting anywhere by talking, so she dropped to her knee, then pulled him close by the shoulders. He was a handsome man with medium biceps and a chiseled face. There were worse men to kiss . . .

As soon as their mismatched lips touched, she knew what he meant . . . There was a swell of power inside her. She even stumbled back, landing on her ass in front of him. Scott smiled and slowly, began to dwindle . . .

Carina took a step back and felt as if her body was on fire. She had a vague idea of what absorbing his power would feel like, but this was something entirely different. She

staggered, then fell, clutching her chest. An immense pain started at her core and worked its way to her extremities.

“Are you okay?” he asked her, his little hands pawing at her shirt.

But by then, Carina had taken leave of her senses. In what felt like several hours, her mind replayed the events that had led her path out of the lands below and across the realms to put to death the bandits that killed her family. Her mission had been successful, but it came at a high price.

In the fight, Carina had died.

A cold chill ran through her body. “I’m . . . dead?” she asked, for the memories passing through her mind didn’t make sense alongside her reality.

Scott sat on his knees while he dwindled. “Yes. I mean, you were. But not now.”

“I don’t understand,” she said. “We were all together. We were in the tavern and then . . . the cold.”

“I know you need an explanation,” he said. “You deserve it. But now isn’t the time. Right now, we need to get to safety.”

That would have to do.

She became aware of her surroundings at once—the floor beneath the bed, the rolling dust motes, and the tiny man who seemed far too small for such a quick kiss. In that moment, she remembered Scott’s power and how it worked—especially for her.

“You’re growing,” he told her.

And it was true. In addition to amplifying her shadow magic, Scott had the power to transfer his own size to her, rendering her giant-sized. But right now, she didn’t need it, so she concentrated and let the ring overpower the innate ability to grow.

But Scott had stopped shrinking, now no higher than her knee. Everything was so confusing—her mind was being

pulled in a hundred directions. She couldn't calculate how small he needed to be for both of them to creep under the door, but felt he was still too large.

She slipped on the second ring and could feel the magic swelling inside her. By the way her body tingled, she knew she was going to shrink a lot more—even smaller than Scott. That wouldn't do.

“Come here,” she said, and picked him up beneath the arms.

Scott couldn't argue, nor fight. Not that he wanted to, anyway. His legs dangled as she started to get smaller, his weight subtly increasing. She placed his legs on her shoulders, then kissed his stomach, tightening the muscles at once. And then, she slipped his cock into her mouth.

His body relaxed just as she felt the power seeping into her. But the power of the ring was faster than the Echo

Auger's magic. She felt him getting heavier and was forced to lay him on the ground while she worked.

Now that the memories were back and he didn't feel like such a stranger, she moved up his body, grabbed his still expanding dick, and slipped it inside her. It felt so good, like it was the first time all over again.

Maybe it was the proximity to danger, but Carina was feeling more alive than ever before. And, given that she was newly alive anyway, she decided to make the most of it. She thrust downward, riding him as fast as she could while it was still possible.

But the pain came on rather quickly. They were both shrinking but Scott's dwindling trundled along while the rings—a double dose of them—made her dwindle at twice the speed. Before Scott could do serious harm, she slipped one of them off so she could enjoy herself over the next few pumps, then slipped it back on just before she started to grow back to the 'one ring default' size.

They were back on track, now shrinking at roughly the same rate and from the same size. She leaned down and kissed him while still moving her hips. It was a struggle to shut off the part of her body that wanted to grow, despite the double rings. The magic of the Echo Auger was building, as she saw little tendrils of shadow hanging off her fingers while she gripped his face.

Eventually, she couldn't be satisfied. Scott had dwindled too small for her to feel him inside her. Before, they had good rhythm, now it was choppy and she was constantly pulling him up by the shoulders just so they could stay aligned. Once the pumping drew to a close, she slithered back down his body, now covered in her juices, and took him in her mouth.

Each time she bobbed on his dick, there was less of it. His weight reversed and now he was far lighter than he had been a moment ago. She sucked and licked and kissed until he was able to fit on her hand.

If she were just an inch tall, how small did that make
him?

“C’mon, we need to get out of here,” she said and stepped out from beneath the bed.

The queen’s private chambers were already massive, given her natural size and the regality of the place. It was an incredible distance to traverse at a single inch high. Scott was lucky he had someone to carry him.

She could tell he wanted to talk to her, but they were both silent out of caution. Noire was just as quiet above them, but the moment she woke, she’d turn the whole bedroom upside down looking for her lost little man.

All that Carina could do was smile politely. Despite what they’d just done, there was a disconnect between them. A small span of time had passed, at least for her. While he looked the same, she had no idea how long it had been since she’d died. A month? A year?

She couldn't remember any of the adventures she'd had with her sisters once they left the lands below. Given their calm demeanor and lack of urgency, she figured the mission to kill the bandits had either been a success, or had failed beyond measure.

They'd made it halfway across the room before she saw shadows cut the light at the bottom of the door. Raised voices on the other side. A growl. And then, the door flew open and in walked the wolf girl, Kiva, and Maza Remoire. Both were soaking wet. Both looked angry. But the door had been locked . . . how did they so easily get inside?

Carina didn't know what to do, so she did nothing—she froze. Then, the enemy entered the room . . .

They had quite the team hidden down the next hallway, inside the bedroom of the queen's personal servant.

Alicia thought for sure they had the upper hand—they could surprise Noire and be done with her once and for all.

She had her friends, Hima, Maeve, Nym, and Shizare. She also had the dark elves who'd helped her from the beginning: Renalla and Tayte, with Audra and Carina attempting to get inside Queen Trita's bedroom.

In addition to the towering golem-queen, she had the light elves Vannya and Kynina. Finally, she had leverage in the form of a shrunken Gwynevere, Kamari, and Eir. Alicia felt they held all the cards, but somehow did not feel as secure as she should have.

“Quiet,” whispered Maeve, peeking through the door.
“Someone's coming.”

The whole bedroom tensed as they heard movement on the stones outside. Alicia didn't need to see the intruders to know it was Kiva's paws scraping on the ground. A

moment later, Maeve said, “The rapier girl and the wolf. They’re heading to the bedroom.”

“Let’s get them,” said Shizare. “There’s way more of us than them.”

“I agree,” Trita said. “Enough hiding. This is *my* house.”

The golem queen, who stood at twelve feet tall, lumbered past the huddled elves. She pushed her way to the front, then ducked to clear the doorway. The rest of the elves followed.

Shizare and Renalla produced blades, then lit them with fire. Maeve’s phantom blades circled around her, the cutting edges inward until they could spring out like traps. The others held out hands, ready to cast, ready to augment reality, ready to be rid of Empress Noire once and for all.

Still, Alicia had that uneasy feeling in the pit of her belly. Why did she think Empress Noire wouldn't go down so easily?

It was a miracle Kiva didn't sniff them out on the ground. Carina ran as fast as she could across the floor, heading in the direction of the armoire she'd hidden beneath when she first entered the room.

Kiva and Maza stepped around them. It was a miracle Carina—and a bite-sized Scott—weren't squashed. Neither of them realized the giants were preoccupied.

"I thought she'd be here," said Maza. "C'mon, we better find her and tell her what happened."

Carina, confused, looked upon the bed. With the way Empress Noire had fallen asleep, it should've been easy to see part of her body from the floor—at least an arm, a shoulder,

even one of her perky breasts aimed at the high ceiling. But no, she wasn't there.

She had left the room without anyone seeing her.

But how?

Although she was yet to magically imbue some of the little man's power into her body, permanently, Noire still managed a simple charm while in the library. Every magic user in the world had a certain reserve of power, only hers had been deepened by the proximity of the Echo Auger. After casting a useful spell found in the library, she was able to slow the rate in which she lost the Echo Auger's essence. In short, those kisses, those naughty encounters, left her feeling empowered longer.

Of course she had contingencies in place while she slept. Even though she could sense her minions just outside the door—and a horde of angry elves just a bit further, she

wasn't able to detect the bug-sized people scurrying across the floor. Her eyes flew open and she realized Scott was gone.

For how long? Did the elves have him again? She didn't think so, but without him, she was leaving herself vulnerable. With just a thought, she became a vapor that sailed through the room—the pair of shrunken people on the floor were just as oblivious of her as she was to them.

Noire raced through the keyhole—flipping the tumblers in the process, past a drenched Maza and Kiva, and continued down the hallway. A contingent of elves exited from a room at the bottom of the steps, quietly stalking Maza and Kiva. There were so many of them that Noire, for the first time in many years, felt afraid. Where did the Echo Auger go? They didn't have him, so he must have run off once he gained a little size.

But had he returned to *normal* size already? Noire questioned how long she'd been asleep. How could she let this happen?

As she faced the backs of a force that had probably already killed Eir, Kamari, and Gwynevere, she knew she had a choice. It would be possible to take out a few of them unawares, but she didn't think she had the reserve of magic to kill them all. The Echo Auger's magic was still inside her but it was fleeting.

And she needed to keep it as long as possible. It was time to move on to her backup plan.

Noire was feeling a desperation she'd never known. The magic of her cloaking spell was fading, so she quickly bounded down the steps, away from the fight that was soon to take place, and entered the library.

She grabbed a robe from a hook in the corner of the room and realized it must have belonged to the queen of this place because the end trailed behind her like a cape. The book she'd been reading from was still propped open on the table but she didn't think a spell would help her now. Still, she took it with her.

She needed to preserve the Echo Auger magic so she could figure out how to separate it from the little man. There was more to this magic than the elves of the old world knew. It could be broken down in binary form—something Noire fancied herself intelligent enough to do.

Around another flight of steps she found exactly what she needed—an alchemy lab. It was fully stocked with a locked potion cabinet in the corner. When Empress Noire easily picked the lock and opened the doors, her eyes glazed over. These elves certainly knew their potions. Some of this art had been lost in Noire's time. A lot of the contents were ancient, but luckily labeled.

Quickly, she found the solution for eternal freeze, a concoction that was often used in her homeland to keep meat and milk from spoiling. Noire grabbed an empty flask. She searched for a knife, a sword, something to cut with, but couldn't find anything. So, she broke apart a test tube, then slashed the jagged edge across her finger.

She bled into the vial until she couldn't stand to give up anymore. The Echo Auger's magic trickled out and before it could completely disappear, she poured in the eternal freeze solution. The contents of the vial were frozen solid. She stared through the glass, admiring the red sludge that would hold all the answers she needed.

But she couldn't do it here.

She found a burlap sack and cleaned out the potion cabinet, taking a moment to appreciate some of the alchemical wonders here. Was the alchemist still around? It would've certainly been useful. Provided she didn't kill the alchemist on the way in, it stood to reason that such a service would be available in town.

With her hood drawn, she left the castle with the sack of potions across her back. There was so much disarray within the walls that she wasn't noticed. The Echo Auger magic that allowed her to shrink groups of elves was at an end and most of them had started to grow back to normal

size. At least twice she spotted a naked elf darting across her field of vision, desperate to find clothes.

She hurried through a gate that wasn't even guarded, but she did see two suits of empty armor on the ground. Apparently the owners scurried away and then enlarged before realizing they were naked.

The quaint little town was attached to the keep with the white wall encircling the whole place. Ivorella was a beautiful location and Noire still wanted to rule it. But she couldn't do that alone, and certainly not without the Echo Auger's power.

The town was on high alert because she'd traipsed through at an enormous size just hours ago. Would they recognize her? She wasn't taking any chances, so she kept her hood drawn and her head pointed to the ground.

It would be daylight within the hour. Shops would be opening, patrols would roll through, as well as trade caravans.

Noire's dark elf heritage would get her stoned to death in a place where light and high elves were revered. She had to either get out of the city fast, or find somewhere to hide until it was dark again.

As she stepped onto the main thoroughfare with the gates looming far to the south, she felt the last of the Echo Auger's power leave her. It was an awful feeling after having control of it for so long. She felt entirely naked and so incredibly weak. How had she managed to feel confident for most of her life, when the Echo Auger wasn't even a part of her?

She was almost out of the city when she noticed a placard hanging above the shop just to the right. It read: Sigrid's Potions. Beneath the fancy scroll lettering was a pair of potion bottles with sparks of energy wafting from the tops. This could work, she thought.

Just as a team of oxen came through the front gate, Noire hurried across the street, stood in the awning of the shop, then turned the knob.

There was no fight once Kiva and Maza turned around to see the hallway choked with high and light elves. The wolf girl lowered her head and snarled, but ultimately realized she couldn't chew her way out of this one. She reverted into her human form, eyes angry but fearful at the same time. Maza just sheathed her rapier and raised her hands with a bored, disinterested look on her face.

"I should've killed you when I had the chance," Kiva growled to Alicia.

"You should have," she answered with a sly grin.

"Where is the Echo Auger?" said Trita, shoving her way past Maza and Kiva. She entered her bedroom and took a look around. "I still smell that dark elf. Where is *she*?"

“Speak,” said Maeve, standing face to face with Maza who only grinned in defiance.

Hima pushed her way up front and held out the doll-sized and bound Gwynevere. “We have some of your friends. If you want this to go bad for them, remain quiet.”

She tugged on Gwynevere’s leg, just enough to make the shrunken dark elf cry out. She flailed and kicked but Hima only tightened her grip.

Whether Empress Noire’s minions cared about one another or not, Alicia could not tell. But eventually, Kiva relented and said, “We don’t know where she is.”

“She’s taken him away, then,” said Alicia, and she ran fingers through her hair and paced a circle. “Now what?”

“Now we regroup,” said Trita from inside the bedroom.

“But wait,” said Audra, appearing behind Kiva and Maza. “Where is Carina? She shrunk down and crept beneath

the door! She was supposed to unlock it for me once she returned to normal size.”

Trita quickly jumped onto the bed and raised her feet in the air. She stared down at the hardwood floor in fear.

“How do we know Empress Noire didn’t just take them with her?” said Renalla.

Audra shook her head and hooked her thumb behind her. “I’ve been hiding down there the whole time. Carina only entered this room a little while ago. And I never saw Noire leave.”

Alicia said, “So either Noire wasn’t here at all, or she’s gone out the window or something.”

“Seems that way,” said Maeve.

Alicia turned to the group of elves and said, “Watch our newest prisoners. We have to search this room.”

The moment Carina and Scott were clear of Kiva's paws and Maza Remoire's boots, she carried him over to the edge of the armoire.

"They're going to find us," said Carina. "Or worse, step on us. Not to mention that Noire is never going to give you up so easily."

"Can you go smaller?" Scott asked.

"What?"

"You don't need those rings at all. You've already used my power to make yourself bigger. If you can do that, why not use it to make yourself smaller? Like *really* smaller. Noire had just as much trouble seeing me as anyone. They can't find a speck, that's for sure."

"And then what?"

"Then we wait . . . and talk."

It sounded scary in her brain. Even at an inch tall, the world looked so impossibly large. And to become even

smaller than that? She was willing to try it if it meant they'd finally hold a conversation.

“First, concentrate on becoming my size,” he said.

She tuned her mind to Scott and all the noises in the world hushed. When she placed him on the floor at her feet, she felt like she was doing so through molasses, as if the world had not only quieted down, but also slowed to a crawl. With the tiny man on the ground, she summoned what remained of the power of the kiss and asked it to make her grow smaller.

It didn't take long, especially since everything around her was at a standstill. She loved the feeling of changing size and it made her nipples hard to see Scott subtly becoming larger. Whatever power had slowed the passage of time had also captured him, for he must have been seeing her become small in an instant.

Time seemed to speed up the closer she got to his size. When she was roughly double his height, things seemed to return to normal.

“Wow, that was fast! But you’re still too big.”

“We’re going to work on that. And then we’re going to get out of here so we can talk.”

She leaned in and kissed him. The moment she tasted his lips, she wanted more. He was so small, his tongue struggling to keep up with her own. After a few seconds of feeling his power transfer, he put his hands to her cheeks and gently nudged her back.

“What is it?”

“Just . . . be careful.”

“Of what?” she asked.

“Maeve took a lot of my power. And it . . . changed her. It was really scary. Make sure you remain who you are.”

She nodded, although she didn't know what that meant, nor how to control it. Carina was living on borrowed time. Did she even *know* who she was?

Their lips connected again and she let the magic flow through her. With her eyes closed, she could feel his mouth expanding across her bottom lip, nearing her size. When her kneeling dragged her face down his body, she stood and pulled him in again. Now with her slightly taller, they continued to kiss and continued to dwindle.

She could feel the wood beneath her feet stretching out. The world around them was dark, reduced to lumpy shades of grey. Scott was moaning out and so was she each time his lips found her neck or traveled down her body.

Again, she pushed him down and again, she slipped his cock into her. Right now, it didn't feel as nice as before, but she fixed that by clenching her fists and letting the magic squash her down even faster. Scott swelled inside of her and she felt a fire ignite.

She rode him as hard as she could, now keeping pace with him. They shrank for twenty minutes, long after the Noirites found their leader missing, long after the high and light elves took them into custody, and long after Empress Noire herself stumbled out of the keep and into the Ivorella Commons.

Eventually, they were tired and spent from their fun, so Carina slid off and sat facing him. Scott was smaller than her, but not by much. However, he continued to dwindle, widening the gap between their sizes.

When she looked around, she could no longer see or hear anything. The world was dark just a few 'feet' beyond herself and Scott. There was a vibration beneath her, but it was faint. It could've either been someone walking or a colossal explosion. At such a small size, reality was incredibly warped.

“I think this is the smallest I’ve ever been,” said Scott, looking around. He was almost half her height, and still dwindling smaller.

“Certainly the smallest *I’ve* been.” They compared hands and she watched as his fingers rolled down her palm. “At least what I can remember. Some of it is fuzzy.” She smiled, meaning no malice behind the joke.

He said, “I was waiting for the right moment to tell you. We’ve either been captive or running for our lives. I didn’t want you to have to face those demons while you were looking over your shoulder.”

“Well we’re not running now,” she said.

Scott smiled and nodded. “Yes, you were dead. We even placed your body in an old temple. Well, old back in our time, but still standing in this one.”

“I’m not following,” she said.

He laughed and shuddered, his shrinking nearing an end. Scott was no longer than her feet.

“It’s a difficult string to pull. We had a battle at Hilltop and through some ancient magic . . . the world reset. But it didn’t happen the way it should have. Parts of my world are mixed in with this one, and we seemed to have traveled back in time. And—”

“—and that same ancient magic brought me back from the dead.”

He nodded. “Yeah.”

“So if you’re able to put the world back in order, send the Earthrealm things back to Earth and travel back to your time . . .”

He didn’t answer at first, just let the implication hang in the air. “Right. You’d probably go back to being dead.”

Hearing it out loud was quite sobering. She nodded, hoping her head was steady and not shaking. That was a

tough truth to accept and she still wasn't sure that she could. But, for the sake of her friends and the rest of the world, she would do what she could to help.

“C’mon, do you think we’re clear to leave now?”

Scott asked, standing.

She scooped him up and kissed him, stealing a tiny bit of his essence. Carina wasn't sure she could take on any more power—she felt absolutely brimming with it.

They needed to get bigger, for starters. But how much time had passed? Was the threat over? She left Audra on the other side of the room. What would happen to her friend?

She carried him away, unsure of what direction she was going. The wood didn't look like wood anymore, but a jagged landscape that appeared treacherous to people so small. Carina willed herself to grow, then looked at the tiny man on her palm.

“Try not to get lost while I get us out of here, yeah?”

The shop smelled of a dozen comingled herbs. Sage, wormwood, lilac, and many others Empress Noire had never seen. Plants below the surface required magical light to thrive, and thus grew as abhorrent versions of what was found above. She'd never seen such pristine flowers before. If she wasn't so focused on her mission, she would've taken time to browse.

She turned a full circle in the two-story building before noticing the male elf standing on the landing. He eyed her skeptically, for the shop probably wasn't open yet, despite the unlocked door. But as he slowly began to descend the stairs, she realized something had drawn his attention.

Her hand—her dark-skinned hand—was holding the folds of her oversized robe closed. She smiled from beneath the hood, slipping into a role she'd not used in quite some time—seductress.

“Good morning,” she purred, fighting the urge to just grab him by the throat and torture him until he helped with what she needed. But no, she would play the game and make him vulnerable. He would be needed for a difficult task.

“Are you from the Oyler Company?” he asked, words that meant nothing to him.

“Aye, I am,” she said, hoping she didn’t just spur on a string of more questions in which she had no answers.

He nodded. “Thought so. They usually send me a girl on the third harvest moon. So either you’re early or you’re lost.”

“Maybe a little of both?” she flirted.

He grinned and stepped a little closer. “What’s your trade, love? Firebreather, acrobat?”

So the Oyler Company is a damned circus, she thought. A traveling circus that sent pleasure girls to the alchemist for a

little fun. This was going to be exhausting, but she could play along.

“I’m more of a magician,” she said, then placed her sack on the floor and slipped out of her oversized robe, revealing all her naked glory.

A look crossed his face that was either shame or excitement. Possibly both. He rubbed the back of his neck and stepped into the light. The man was young—probably late twenties, with rugged good looks. There were worse people to play with, she thought.

“What’s wrong, love?” she asked.

“I’ve never laid with a dark elf before. What will my neighbors think?”

“Who cares? You don’t know what you’ve been missing. Are you the alchemist?” She hoped this direct question wouldn’t be off-putting.

“The best in the realms. Do you need something to help you loosen up? I have a rubber potion that’ll let you put your legs behind your head.”

She laughed, but it was forced. This way of talking probably worked on others but not her. She said, “I can already do that. I’ll show you.”

He grinned and looked toward the staircase and said, “My bedroom’s up there.”

“Then why are we still talking here?” she asked.

He nodded stupidly, then hurried back up the steps. She reached back into her sack and found the potion she wanted—she knew it by touch, for there was another small vial tied around its neck. Then, she hid it behind her body and followed the elf up the steps.

She found him already stretched out on the bed, completely naked. This one wasted no time. His long cock *did* look inviting. Noire bit her lower lip and played with her hair,

teasing it out so that his attention was on her face and not on the bottle she hid behind her back.

She joined him on the bed, going in for a kiss so that she could shove the potion behind the pillow above his head. He moaned out and grabbed her sides, then maneuvered her into position. For a moment, she just rubbed his cock with her stomach, growing his arousal, making him more vulnerable.

By now, light was filtering through the shuttered windows—shuttered from last night's storm when she enjoyed the tiny man and all the power he could provide. It seemed so long ago now, the daylight and the absence of his power leaving her cold. It hastened her plan, so she took the elf alchemist by the cock and pushed it inside her.

His arms moved above his head and she took him by the wrists and held them there while she kissed him. In truth, she didn't want his fingers gracing the bottle just inches from his hand. When she had his arms under control, she let go

and watched him. Little by little, he was slipping further into the pleasure, his already low guard crumbling.

She watched his mouth open and close, lost to the total ecstasy Noire provided. As she kissed along his cheek, her arm reached past his and grabbed the bottle. With one hand, she unstopped the lid, feigning a particularly loud moan to cover the sound of the pop. She made sure the bottle was upright just as she needed it, then waited.

The next time his mouth opened, she dumped the contents of the potion down his throat, then placed a strong hand under his chin. With the potion now spent, she grabbed his nose and held his nostrils shut. The elf flailed in surprise but had no choice but to swallow.

“What . . . what did you just do?” he asked, sputtering and spitting.

“Just enjoy it,” she told him, and continued to ride. He calmed, but only a little.

But then, she could feel his cock becoming smaller inside her. It was subtle at first, not unlike the Echo Auger's magic, but soon it sped up. By the time the elf knew what was happening, her hands could easily hold his wrists down. When his cock slipped out completely, she lay on his legs so he couldn't kick her in the stomach.

"I'm shrinking!" he screamed. "How? Where did you get such a potion?"

"I'm guessing you didn't brew it, huh? No matter. You're going to brew something *even better*."

His face ran the full gamut of emotion—angry, fearful, pleading. When he was no more than ten inches tall, she picked him up and placed him on the dresser next to the bed. Now that he wasn't trapped beneath such a big woman, he seemed a little more defiant.

"I'm not doing anything for you! I'm calling the watch!" But his voice broke down at the end, because he

remembered what happened last night and how scattered the city's protection was—and he also remembered her face.

There was no watch. No one would help him. And holding him captive was the very elf who stormed the castle at a much bigger size.

She threw her head back and laughed when he made this realization.

“I’m still not helping you,” he said, face turning red with embarrassment.

“Yes, you will.” She held up the empty bottle and untied the tiny vial hanging from the neck. It was filled with a bluish solution and was such a small amount that it would’ve barely been a taste for someone of Noire’s size. However, it wasn’t *meant* for someone of Noire’s size.

“What’s that?” he asked, watching as she dangled it.

“Apparently this particular shrinking potion does not wear off. Welcome to your new size.”

His eyes began to well with tears but he worked hard to hide it.

She said, “But this is the antidote. If you help me, I’ll give it to you.”

“And if I don’t?”

She grinned and placed the vial in the drawer beneath him—he’d never be able to open it without her help.

“If you don’t, you’ll be this size forever and I’ll take you to my homeland where you’ll be a pet for dark elves far more diabolical than me.”

It was an empty threat, for there were no dark elves more diabolical than Empress Noire.

The little alchemist sighed.

“What do you need me to do?”

Growing back was far slower than shrinking down. It was a delicate balance to pace with Scott but Carina realized soon after they stopped having fun that he would always trail her size. By the time she was back to an inch tall, he was still knee high.

She carried him away from the armoire and that was when she saw her giant friends crowding the doorway—Renalla and Tayte and Audra. They were nothing more than blobs of color at her size, but she knew them better than she knew herself. The high elves were inside the bedroom, floating in the air with their faces close to the floor. On the bed, Shizare casting some sort of levitation spell.

“They’re looking for us!” said Scott. “Grow faster!”

“I’m trying!” she said, but truly didn’t know how to speed up the process. She’d been honing her ability into shrinking, which she found rather easy, so it was difficult to go in the opposite direction.

By the time she was nearly three inches tall, she was close to Alicia's face. She waved her arm up and down, waiting for the big lady to see her. Now that the sun was coming out, Carina's dark skin didn't blend into the floor as much.

Then, Alicia's eyes lit up. She said, "Here! They're here!"

"Oh, thank God," said Scott.

"Which one?" she asked.

"We only have one," said Scott, but knew that wasn't entirely true given all the cultures on Earth.

"Oh. Well I guess you're about to be reunited," said Carina, feeling her body stretching.

"With God? I surely hope not."

"No, silly. With Alicia."

Scott had been the Echo Auger for so many elves by now. He formed an attachment with them all, despite some of them being aggressive, even hostile. He didn't know how the magic worked, but figured a small fragment of himself always remained with them.

And this worked both ways.

He watched as Carina's shadow magic danced on his fingertips. It was a helpful trick, one that he'd lost upon Carina's death. If he dug deep, he could probably figure out other powers, little bits of essence he'd taken along the way from everyone who experienced him.

"I suppose . . . my sisters and I will leave this place," she said.

"No," said Scott. "We'll talk about this later, okay? Just . . . stay?"

She seemed to warm to the idea, and nodded, but Scott understood her dilemma. It was no secret he was

originally earmarked for Alicia. Those two had a deeper bond than anyone he'd ever been with—Earth girls included. Alicia was the first person he'd encountered upon arriving in this new world. It just felt right that he should go back to her.

But that didn't mean he didn't enjoy his time with Carina, and he was surely glad that she was alive again.

Once Carina became six inches tall, Alicia scooped her up. Scott was still sitting on her hand but was becoming big enough to stand at her feet, so she dropped him to her lap as she sat on Alicia's palm.

The high elf took the pair of tiny people to the dresser and placed them on it while the rest crowded around. It was disconcerting to see so many big faces staring down, all beautiful women of various ages and sizes. The queen looked simply massive standing behind them all.

"I thought I'd lost you!" said Alicia once Scott was big enough for her to take him on her own hand. Carina gave

him a pursed-lip grin and nodded. Before she could say anything, Audra picked her up and kissed her on the face.

“You’re back! We’re so happy you’re back!” The sisters crowded around the little woman as she grew larger.

“Give us a minute, will you?” said Alicia, stepping out of the room. The others nodded and gave her much-needed alone time with Scott.

They entered a servant’s bedroom just down the hall, unknown to Scott as the location his friends had used to stage their fight with Empress Noire. She placed him on the bed, then sat down next to him. He had almost forgotten her beauty—her long hair, her flawless skin. She’d lost her sword because he didn’t recognize the small blade clipped to her belt.

“Are you alright?” she asked him.

“As well as I can be. So much has changed.”

“Yes,” she said. “I don’t know where I stand.” It was straight and to the point, just how she liked it.

“Nothing has changed,” he assured. “I’ve made new friends but one thing remains the same: It’s not about where anyone stands. It’s about fixing the world. Both of them.”

She nodded, seeming unsatisfied with that answer. At the end of all this, that’s what mattered. But that didn’t mean he couldn’t help leave the world a little better than he found it. Empress Noire needed dealt with, one way or another.

“Where did she go?” asked Alicia. “Noire, I mean.”

He shrugged, and now he was almost as tall as her shoulder while she sat on the bed. “We don’t know. One minute she was there, the next she was gone. I’m guessing she woke up and found that I was missing, then ran because she knew you and the others were about to take care of her.”

Alicia nodded because it made sense. Wherever Noire was right now, she was probably quite upset. Scott’s power

was alluring, filling the user with an intense desire to hold on. In girls like Alicia and Carina, it wasn't scary. But in Noire . . . it was terrifying.

The rest of the morning was spent taking care of the damage wrought by Empress Noire when she invaded Ivorella. It was a wonder that she didn't stomp the walls or the keep. As angry as she'd been, as much as dark elves hated high and light elves, the whole place should've been reduced to bricks. But it was seemingly untouched. All that remained was the craters of her footprints, now half-full of rainwater from last night's storm.

"This isn't bad," said Trita, standing just behind Alicia and a now full-sized and clothed Scott. "We have little to rebuild. She did step on my flowerbeds, though."

"Mother!" cried a voice from the left.

They all turned to see little Adelheid running up the street, her long legs carrying her faster than the trailing kids

who followed. Trita took a knee and wrapped the girl in a hug. Although the queen downplayed the danger she feared for her daughter, there were still tears welling in her eyes. It wasn't a certainty that Empress Noire's attack left her unscathed.

"I'm happy you're safe, little one," said the queen.

"Were you scared?"

Adelheid's eyes lit up with wonder, a story on the tip of her tongue. "It was *so* scary, mother! We heard loud booms and then a giant naked lady stormed through the streets. Myra took us into the cellar and we played knucklebones all night long!"

"Seems like Myra did a good job of keeping you occupied," said Trita, smiling back at Alicia.

"Is it safe to go to my room? I want my book."

"Go on, sweetie, but find Vyanna first. She's to keep an eye on you."

And then, the little half golem girl trotted away with her friends in tow.

The rest of the morning was spent inspecting the minimal damage, then taking a trip into the dungeons. Alicia and Maeve made the case that all the high elves be released. When the world split open and the Paladins of Dinnin were pitched back in time, no one in Ivorella believed them. So, Queen Trita locked them up until their stories could be assessed. Based on all that had transpired, Alicia figured they deserved to be released.

Queen Trita fed them all breakfast but no one wanted to sit around a formal table and eat. They were too preoccupied with all that had happened, not to mention the fact that the leader of their enemies was missing.

Alicia took her plate of food to the steps leading up to the castle and sat down next to Vyanna.

“What’s the next town over?” Alicia asked.

“Cymbus. About three miles that way.” She pointed off toward the mountains. “Do you think your friend went that way?”

Alicia shook her head. “No. She doesn’t know this time. But I fear the longer she’s out of sight and mind, the more time she’s given to make our lives hard.”

“You have the Echo Auger, though.”

“True. But you cannot underestimate this one. She is resourceful. She has caught us unawares so many times in the past.”

“She’s not going to Cymbus,” Vyanna said. It was the first time Alicia noticed the girl had her hamster on her lap, letting the little rodent eat from her plate.

“What makes you so sure?”

“Have you already forgotten the treatment of your dark elf friends? There’s nothing in these lands but high elves.

She would never make it to Cymbus without being seen or captured.”

“Noire is too smart for that,” Scott said.

Vyanna nodded. “Aye, she is. So that leaves us with only one option.”

“Which is?”

Vyanna fed the hamster a halved blueberry. “That she’s still in Ivorella.”

“We could probably start by asking the guards if they’ve seen anything,” said Scott.

Vyanna chuckled. “All of the guards were shrunken down, remember? But, I suppose that doesn’t mean they couldn’t have seen something.”

“How many exits to the city?” Alicia asked.

Vyanna thought for a moment. “The south gate and the north gate. The south gate is perpetually closed but the north gate opens before sunrise to let the trade caravans in.”

“Let’s start asking around,” said Scott. “She couldn’t have gotten far. I’d say she’s hiding in someone’s basement or attic.”

“That’s still a lot of houses to check,” Vyanna said.

“But we can do it.”

Alicia kissed Scott on the cheek and held his hand. She could feel his fingers subtly growing smaller between her own. It was good to have a sense of normalcy, even if it didn’t last.

The alchemist, whose name turned out to be Brynn, was invaluable to Noire’s experiment. She would have never figured out the intricacies of the potion work involved to isolate the magic inside the Echo Auger. The calculations and

measurements went far beyond what she was taught in primary school down below.

Brynn couldn't do much on his own, not at a mere foot tall. So, he relegated what he needed to Noire, who then mixed the concoctions or scribbled formulas on his massive chalkboard. Before long, the board was covered with more alchemical solutions than she'd ever seen, leaving her head swimming.

"I don't understand what you're trying to accomplish," he told her while they waited on a few binary elements to simmer in pots.

"And you don't have to," she quipped.

"Are you going to use this on me?" he asked, putting his hands behind his back and rocking nervously on his heels.

She eyed him for a moment, sizing him up from head to toe as if this was an actual consideration. She wasn't sure who she'd use it on, but certainly not him.

“I haven’t decided yet,” she lied. “But maybe.”

“You understand that this will break someone’s spirit, correct? What you’re asking . . . can’t be done without consequences. The magic will be warped. You need to prepare for side effects.”

“I’ll worry about all that later. And I don’t care if I break a thousand spirits, so long as I get what I want.”

At this, he had no comeback. He dropped his head and nodded.

They completed the remainder of the work throughout the morning, unaware that the high elves were going door to door, searching for their missing dark elf. By the time noon arrived, the binary elements were ready to distill into the main potion.

It all smelled foul, a far cry from the lovely scent of the shop when she first entered. All of it, three large vats of multi-colored sludge went into a single vial no longer than her

finger. The stuff swirled and turned a deep purple before settling into a light green. When she lifted it and brought it to her nose, there was no smell. The vial was warm but that was to be expected from boiling reagents.

“That’s it,” he said. “You need someone to drink it. Your essence is in there, so whatever effect you’re trying to replicate, should work.”

“You did a wonderful job,” she told him, then moved toward the door after stuffing a cork in the top.

“Wait! What about me?” he cried, jumping up and down on the workshop counter.

She grinned and said, “If it doesn’t work, I know just where to find you.”

Then she left the shop once and for all.

There would be no replacing Scott, but she had to find someone suitable. This replacement Echo Auger

wouldn't be as potent, but it would allow her access to deep magic. From there, she could rule these lands.

As she slipped out of the shop and rounded the corner, she saw a stable on the adjacent street from the potion shop. There was a male elf forking hay onto a wagon but Noire barely noticed him. Her eyes were drawn to the girl guarding the gate just next to the stable.

She was elfin, although he spied a pair of horns jutting from her head—possibly the remnants of a curse or magic gone wrong. She carried a long, thick sword across her shoulder as she paced back and forth. Pleated, ceremonial armor covered her from the neck down, as her beautiful face was visible, as well as her long, golden hair.

Wearing leathers that must have belonged to Brynn's wife or sister—as Noire never learned who Sigrid of Sigrid's potions was—she crept across the road and hid behind the barn, watching as the beautiful girl made her rounds. When she was close, Noire sprang into action.

She wrapped a hand around the girl's face, then dragged her away. The sword clattered to the ground but the other guard on her patrol was two hundred feet away. The girl kicked and tried to scream but couldn't overpower Noire while her weight was off-center.

Behind the barn, she pulled the girl down on top of her, then wrestled the vial out of her pocket. Chancing a scream, she moved her hand away, then choked the solution down her throat.

Like Brynn, she held her jaw shut and pinched her nostrils until she could feel the girl's throat contract. Then, she released her. If the potion worked as it should, there would be no screaming.

Noire quickly moved around until she was staring into the girl's deep blue eyes. She put her hands on her face and held her there, making sure there was no chance she would see another person in this pivotal, important moment.

Slowly, the girl's body relaxed and her eyes glazed over, the blue replaced by little red beads. And in that moment, she belonged to Noire—body, soul, and most importantly, power.

“What's your name?” Noire asked.

“Mono.” She had a sweet voice to match her appearance.

“Mono, my name is Noire. And you and I will be lovers. What do you think of that?”

She grinned and her smile widened. “I like that idea a lot.”

And then, the moment of truth.

Noire took her by the back of the head and pulled her in for a kiss. After a few seconds, she began to worry the potion didn't work, that the last couple of hours had been for nothing. Noire had already started to make escape plans in her head when she felt a gentle tingle on her lips.

She'd been holding a bundle of the girl's hair and that's when she first noted the change—it was sifting between her fingers, growing smaller.

“It worked,” Noire breathed.

“What, love?”

“Quiet.”

She kissed her again, feeling the girl become lighter, watching as her armor began to fall off piece by piece. And the more of her that Noire took, the greater the power that twisted and turned inside her body.

They would all pay. She would use her new power to hurt this city and leverage it against the high elves who protected the true Echo Auger. She could still rule it, even if it was a pile of cinders.

“I need more,” Noire said, more to herself than to Mono, and she shoved her tongue into the girl's mouth with a quiet, gentle moan.

By the fifth house, Alicia figured they'd lost Noire for good. No one had seen her and she believed the townsfolk—if a dark elf were wandering around the streets, it would be the talk of the town. Noire had nothing, no Echo Auger, no magic beyond what she brought up from down below. Even her minions had all been captured so she had no line of provision or communication.

“So now what?” Maeve asked, pulling alongside her. They rode Hill Steeds that required to sit side-saddle because of the beasts' enormous girth. “Do we move on?”

Alicia shrugged. Scott rode right behind her, his arms tucked around her waist. “And go where?”

“You could ride north,” said Vyanna. “Before all the mayhem, our scouts said the old temples were firing up. Lots of blue light.”

“Another portal?” Scott asked.

“Maybe,” Kynina said. “Some of the Earthrealm debris showed up and there’s been nothing but lights in the sky ever since.”

“That’s as good a place as any to go,” said Maeve. “We’re just nomads at this point, anyway.”

Alicia was about to suggest they ask the queen for provisions for traveling when the ground rumbled. A loud crash scared the Hill Steeds and sent them rearing back. The light elves, accustomed to such behavior, maintained control of their beasts. The high elves from a different time fell right off their backs and hit the ground.

To the north, a large blast of fire and a column of smoke rose into the air. They couldn’t see through the dark cloud until a ball of fire, wide as a house, launched through the smoke and hit a cluster of houses down the road. The structures exploded in a fiery blast.

When the smoke cleared, they spotted a giant, still-growing Noire . . .

“What the hell?” Scott said.

“How does she have this power?” Maeve said.

Alicia hissed. “Bloody hell! I knew she wasn’t running. What do we do now?”

“Retreat,” said Trita.

The rest of the group stared at her in disbelief, so she elaborated. “She shrunk us all down last time. What can we possibly do to her?”

Alicia shrugged. “I don’t know, but we have to try something. She’s not being subtle this time.”

And just as she said it, another ball of fire launched from Noire’s fingertips and took out a large section of the wall. The white bricks exploded and flew into the air and she could see bits of elves mixed in. This was bad, and it was only going to get worse.

Noire stepped through it and appraised the world below her. She was still growing, her body spreading out before their eyes. She was completely naked, aside from an amulet around her neck . . .

“Look,” said Scott, pointing to the jewelry. He was trembling slightly.

Rather than a prison as she’d used for Scott, the trinket around her neck was a swing, as if the naked elf holding onto the chain was fine with her lot in life. Her appearance confused the group as they tried to make sense of so many new and unusual things.

“Another Echo Auger?” Hima said.

Maeve shook her head. “No, an elf can’t do that. This girl is . . . a perversion of nature.”

“Dark magic, more like it,” Trita said. “We need to get back into the castle.”

“No. We need to end her once and for all,” Alicia said.

“How?” asked Vyanna.

The high elf shrugged. “I don’t know. But I’m going to try.”

She ran off with Scott trailing behind her.