Chapter 9

It’s Too Early for This Shit

I slept for twelve hours. This was the downside of sleeping next to Grant. Not only did he not wake me up, but he apparently gave my phone to Jonah so that the alarm wouldn’t go off and wake me, and then made Jonah go next door at some point. So I woke up late and groggy, which I hated. I was also twisted up in a big, sleepy Cupid, my head neatly tucked under his chin, my legs tangled in his. He chest started to shake and I realized he was *laughing*.

“What?” I grumbled.

“I could tell the exact moment you woke up because you froze and went completely rigid.” He continued to laugh, his body shaking, but his arms around me meant I stayed put. “Big bad Valkyrie, terrified of cuddles.”

“Maybe I just object to your hand on my ass.” I didn’t. Or at least, that wasn’t why I had frozen. Until just now, the hand on my ass hadn’t really registered over the overall feeling how damn good his body felt. I resented how fucking glorious it was to cuddle Grant. Stupid Cupids.

“No, you don’t. I tried to move it earlier and you growled at me.”

“I was asleep,” I said indignantly, levering myself up to glare at him. Mostly asleep, anyway. It was really difficult glaring at someone with any kind of authority when you were literally laying half naked on top of them.

Grant’s mouth twitched. “Then why is your hand on my ass?”

I yanked my hand back. Damn it. He looked so fucking smug. “I would have done the same thing with any half naked person in my bed. Don’t let your ego go crazy over it.”

Grant stopped laughing and sighed. “No, you wouldn’t.” He palmed the back of my neck with his large hand and held it there. “I know I scare you.”

“I’m not afraid of you,” I said. “I could kick your ass.”

“Yes,” he said. “Probably. But that’s not what I meant and you know it. You’re scared of what I represent.”

“And what do you represent?”

He rubbed his thumb back and forth on the back of my neck and stared at me for a minute before he answered. “An actual, loving relationship. Stability. Walks in the park. Snuggling. *Feelings*.”

“Shut up.”

The corner of his mouth kicked up. “The kind of guy you take home to your dad.”

“I don’t take anyone home to my dad.” Much to his annoyance. Oh, he didn’t say anything, but my dad made the occasional comment about my romantic life or lack thereof. For a big, burly plumber, my dad was a big softie. I loved him, but I have no idea what my mother saw in him that would draw a Valkyrie’s eye. He still made me heart-shaped pancakes on my birthday. With sprinkles. Adorable? Yes. Ultimate warrior? Not even close.

“Not yet, you don’t,” Grant said, drawing me back in to the discussion.

I shook my head. “I’m not made to settle down, Grant.”

He sighed and suddenly looked tired. “Yes, you are. That’s the thing. You need a home so bad, it’s almost funny. You need it and you’re terrified of it.”

I didn’t respond, but I felt my heart rate go up, my brain scrambling like a panicked rabbit. Grant kept moving his thumb, soothing.

“Okay, badass. I won’t push today. But I will soon. We can’t keep up like this.”

“I think our current situation is perfect, actually.” I was the worst liar.

“You think so?” His eyes took on a dangerous glint. Then he suddenly pulled my neck down and took my mouth with his. I wanted it to be terrible and feel nothing. Not everyone kisses well, and morning breath is indeed a thing to be avoided. Did Grant oblige? No, of course not. He tasted like fucking sunshine. I didn’t even know what that meant, which should show how much a single stupid kiss from the Cupid had scrambled my brain. He tugged on my lower lip with a growl, my hands tangled into his hair, and honestly after that my mind went blank. We could have been attacked by a legion of screaming warriors and I wouldn’t have noticed.

When he finally pulled away, it took me a minute to come back to myself. I was breathing hard, my hands were fisted in his hair, and his hands were cradling my back. I was completely dazed and so was he, though his smug look had returned.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought.” He leaned in and gave me one short, soft kiss. “Okay, badass. We’ll play it your way for now. I’ll be good. I’ll even be patient. In fact, I’ll wait for you to make the next move.”

“I won’t,” I said. It would have been more believable if my voice hadn’t been so breathy.

His expression went from one of smugness to one of pity, which I hated even more.

Which made me mad. “You think you’re so irresistible that women just throw themselves at you?”

“No, Lena, I don’t.” He gave my neck a final squeeze and then rolled, dumping me gently on the bed. “I’m just hoping I’m irresistible to you.” He patted my leg. “In fact, I’m banking on it. I’m going to go take a shower, if you’re interested.”

“I’m not!” I said hotly. “Not at all!”

“Mm-hmm.” He got out of bed and stretched and I watched every damn moment of it. He caught me staring and grinned. “You’re not going to make it two weeks.” He leaned in close to me. “Because that’s the thing, Lena. Normally, you avoid me. Short visits only, then you bolt. But now? We’re working together. For the foreseeable future.” His grin widened. “You’re stuck, badass. Now what are you going to do?”

I scowled at him and tried to think of a rebuttal. My mouth opened. Shut. I should just punch him. The longer I took to think of a response, the more the asshole smiled. I should definitely punch him.

That’s when I heard a faint noise. A sort of cracking noise. Grant straightened. “What was that?”

I sat straight up in bed, suddenly very, very awake, my eyes wide. “The eggs!” we shouted at the same time, both looking at the box on the table. The cozy, warm box full of harpy eggs. Four of them. Harpy babies were mean, too.

I jumped out of bed, scrambling for my jeans. “Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck.”

Grant was doing the same thing, but without the swearing. “Harpies. Baby harpies.” He paused, one leg in his jeans. “Do you know how *hungry* baby harpies are? We’re going to need so much meat.”

“This room isn’t warded!” I snapped. “They are going to start screaming as soon as they hatch!”

“We should have handled this last night,” Grant said, dialing his phone.

I barked a laugh. “After the selkie, we were dead on our feet.”

He put his phone up to his ear. “Jonah. Get Tally in here ASAP. We need this room warded.”

“Tell him to get my gauntlets out of the truck!” I finished yanking on my jeans. “And see if Edda has hers.”

Grant relayed the message to Jonah. “As soon as you do that, we’re going to the store. If there are any leftover fish, bring them over.” He hung up and we both finished getting dressed quickly. I yanked a clean shirt and bra out of my bag. I was in too much of a hurry for modesty and stripped my tank top off right there and started pulling my clean clothes on. It said something of our state that Grant didn’t even look over.

There was a knock on the door a second later and I opened it, waving Tally in. I could hear a lot more cracking now. Time was growing short.

Tally didn’t even say hi, but went straight to the walls and started drawing wards. Jonah was right behind her, my chainmail gauntlets and a small disposable tray of herring in his hands. “It’s all that we have left.”

“Give them to Lena,” Grant said, yanking on his boots. “We’re going to the store. Harpies aren’t real fond of men. Or maybe I should say they’re too fond of men.”

“What does that mean?” Jonah asked.

“It means they like to mate with them and then eat them, sort of like a praying mantis,” I said, yanking on my own boots.

Jonah paled. “But they’re babies. We should be okay, right?”

“That depends,” I said. “Do you like having fingers?”

Jonah practically threw the herring at me before handing over the gauntlets.

I took the fish, grimacing. This wouldn’t hold them for long. “We need meat. Lots of red, raw, meat. Maybe some bones to gnaw on?”

Grant nodded, palming his keys. “I’ll check in next door, see if Brin needs anything for her or the baby, and then we’ll burn rubber.”

I frowned at the eggs. We’d planned on heading out today. We desperately needed to put miles between us and Tanzer to make sure Brin and her baby were safe. I’d also planned on taking them back to the coast today. With the eggs hatching…that might not be possible. After we got them fed, then what? Baby harpies needed a lot of care. We didn’t have time for this, and we needed to not only return Brin but also check in and see if Tanzer had contacted anyone. Edda had mentioned setting up something to monitor his email and phone. I wasn’t sure how it worked. Once she started explaining things like that to me, all I heard was static and my brain went somewhere else. Tech was not my thing, and I was once again grateful for Edda.

Grant grabbed my shoulder. “We get them fed. After that, I’ll reach out through my contacts. See if there are any local harpies that will take them in.”

I nodded. Good, a plan. I was grateful for some direction. Grant took off, taking Jonah with him and I was left holding a small, stinking tray of fish.

Tally was working on the last wall, furiously scrawling in chalk, when the first harpy broke through and started to screech. I tore into the plastic and yanked out a fish, trying to not make a face at the strong fish smell. I hadn’t even had coffee yet. I stepped over to the box, yanking the blanket off the top. The first harpy was out of its shell, flopping on to the towel. The bird half of the body was about the size of a small pheasant, her feathers orange and brown. The top half was human-like, though wrinkled and skinny, with long talons instead of fingers. Harpy babies were cuter than adult harpies, but that wasn’t saying much. I slipped on my gauntlets and held up a fish. “Who’s hungry?”