**Roommate Trouble**

Beth sat at the large dining room table with a small plate of bacon, some coffee and a large plate with the remnants of a strawberry crepe. She scribbled a few more words on a notepad by her laptop, frowning at the list.

“Any luck?” Sofia asked, walking in with her own breakfast. The cyclops took the seat across from Beth. A few of the seats in the formal dining room had been designed for larger people, allowing the cyclops to sit comfortably at the table. As far as Beth could tell, the table was made of one piece of wood, which was impossible unless it had been built inside the room. Even then, the piece of wood it had come from would have been larger than the door. So unless the room and house had been built around it, it had to be magic related.

“Sort of.” Beth held up her list. “As far as I can tell, a lot of stuff that is missing can be tracked down to a shop in Colorado that buys and sells weird shit, which saves me plenty of time. However, they aren’t answering their phone, so I’m not sure where to go from here.” Over a week ago, Beth had discovered an unknown storage unit belonging to the home’s previous owner and had gone to investigate. She hadn’t known at the time that some of those objects would be magical, nor did she expect the home itself to be an immensely powerful magical item. The discovery had both thrilled and terrified her. A large box had been sold at an auction by mistake, and now the unknown objects were out there somewhere like ticking bombs, ready to wreak havoc.

“Well, I suppose it’s for the best. It’s not like the Society can use any of those to get in and attack us anymore. Not as long as Mike winds the sundial every morning.” Once Mike twisted the sundial, he had twenty four hours to twist it again. The magical stone lions out front would smash anybody who stepped into the yard and posed a threat to the house.

“Is it though? The assumption is that anything kept here was kept for a reason. We assume the furniture is just furniture, but who knows?” Beth chewed on her lower lip, her eyes on her computer screen. What were you up to Emily, she wondered.

“Well, let’s just hope that-” Sofia’s large purple eye glowed intensely, indicating a psychic vision of imminent danger. She reached across the table and grabbed Beth by the front of her robe, then pulled her across the dark wood, scattering both of their breakfasts onto the floor.

Above where Beth had been sitting, the plaster of the ceiling cracked and burst, two figures falling through onto the table below, their bodies aglow in blue light. Through the dust, Beth saw Mike scramble to his feet, his face covered in white powder with the fairy Cerulea clinging to his lips. He grabbed Tink and yanked her clear. A thousand pounds of gargoyle crashed through behind them, the sudden weight causing the table to splinter and break. Her wings splayed out, knocking the chairs away from where she landed.

“Abella, are you okay?” Beth knelt down by the gargoyle. Abella opened her dark eyes and let out a disappointed sigh.

“Yeah. My pride took a hit though. My wings got caught up and I couldn’t do much but slow my fall.” She stared up into the opening above them. There was movement behind the dust.

“Cheese eating fuck-faced rat!” Tink pulled a hammer off of her belt and hurled it at the opening above them from her place on the floor. The moment it left her hand, a brown figure stuck its face out through the smoky cloud only to be struck by the heavy tool. The rat, about a foot tall, fell out of the hole to land on Abella. Abella grabbed the rodent by the scruff of the neck, but it had gone limp, already dead.

“Gross. Looks like you got him.” Beth said.

“One of many.” Mike stood on shaky legs. “I’m honestly at a loss here. They actually laid a trap for us.”

“Who did?” Beth put out an arm, helping Mike to the wall.

“The rat king.” MIke sneezed, a cloud of dust leaving the top of his head and revealing the brown hair beneath. “Little bastard informed us that this home belonged to him, and then he pulled an actual cord which opened a trap door beneath us.”

“Sounds like diplomacy failed then.”

Mike laughed, then coughed. “Yeah. I told them they were welcome to stay, but apparently that isn’t good enough. Little fucker is giving us a week to clear out before he makes us leave. Little shit.”

Beth fought the grin behind her lips. “Did he have a crown?”

“Really? That’s what you want to ask?” Mike coughed, then sneezed, another cloud of dust floating away from his hair. After several seconds, his lips curled into a smile. “Yeah. I don’t know, maybe they found a soda can or something and chewed it into shape.”

“So what next?”

“Smash them all.” Tink had reclaimed her hammer, her eyes on the hole in the ceiling. “Make rat jam, feed to snake witch.”

“That’s one option.” He walked beneath the hole. “Oh, and the tunnels the rats are using make no sense by the way.”

“How so?”

“Take a look.” He dug through his pockets and pulled out a flashlight. The beam was visible in the dust filled hole, revealing a series of pipes, vents and what looked to be a tiny door about twelve feet up.

“That would put that room…” Beth thought about the layout of the house. “In the middle of the hall.”

“Yep. It’s like the cave and the Labyrinth. Interdimensional.” He looked at Abella and Tink. “For now, I guess we need to get cleaned up and maybe patch this hole. I don’t want the rats following us down here. Then I’m going to see what Naia knows.”

“Stupid fucking rats.” Tink stormed off, likely headed to the garage where her toolbench was. Mike and Abella followed her, the floor creaking eerily under her heavy footsteps. Sofia and Beth watched the hole above, but there was no further movement. After a few minutes, Beth picked up the dead rat.

“What are you going to do with it?” Sofia asked.

“I’m going to see what a snake witch knows about sentient rats.” She knelt down to pick up her broken coffee mug. “And get some more coffee. Are you good here?”

“Yes.” Sofia pulled a small knife from her belt and gave her wrist a flick. It unfolded itself several times, becoming a thin blade nearly five feet long. “I think I’ve got a handle on the situation.”

“Great. Thank you.” Beth wandered to the kitchen for a new cup of coffee with a smile on her face.

It was going to be another fun-filled day.

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Beth finished what was left of her coffee, then set her mug down on her dresser. She picked up her backpack, the contents rustling. She had stuffed the rat in a couple of grocery bags, hoping it wouldn’t start to stink too soon.

The closet in Beth’s room was terribly small. At most, she could hang a few clothes and maybe put in a reasonably sized shoe bench. However, if she turned the knob a certain way, the interior of the closet opened to a large cave that would take her down to the Labyrinth. She had made the trip several times, enough that she was starting to recognize some of its features. With no light to see by, she carried a rechargeable flashlight. The cave opened out into an enormous underground complex with a switchback path that led down to the cave proper. The path was tediously long, and she had already asked Tink what it would take to install a more convenient flight of stairs that went to the bottom. The little goblin had promised to get to it once they finished fixing up the house.

The cavern was lit by intensely glowing moss, the Labyrinth below lit by torches. She walked past the reflecting pool, stopping to look at her reflection. The pool was a shortcut back to the house. It was convenient not to have to climb up the path, but she would have to change clothes or have Naia dry her out. It wouldn’t matter if she stayed here too long - the closet would close itself up after an amount of time.

There was a metal panel in the floor that would open the Labyrinth, but Beth heard the large iron doors rumbling long before she even got there. The dark gap between the doors revealed the minotaur waiting within, his axe clutched tightly in his hands. He relaxed when she drew near, slinging his weapon over one shoulder.

“Greetings, friend.” His voice was a low, syrupy rumble that made Beth’s stomach flutter. While Asterion was not the best conversationalist, his body was all muscle and his large cock had made their initial meeting extremely exciting, though it had made walking uncomfortable for a day or so. Just the memory of his dark, thick cock sliding into her made her feel a little dizzy.

“Are you okay?” Asterion sounded concerned.

“Right as rain.” She had spaced out for a second. She gave the minotaur a quick hug, her arms sliding around his waist. “I need to see Ratu. We have a problem upstairs that she may be able to help with.”

“Hmmm.” He turned around and looked back at her. “Then we should go now.”

Asterion led her through the long halls of the Labyrinth, taking her through shortcuts that would suddenly appear before them. Occasionally looking back, Beth got chills watching the paths disappear. The Labyrinth itself was much like a living creature, clearly run by a magical mechanism that ensured it was constantly changing in places. They ended up in an underground tunnel, the sound of water rushing over them. Beth wondered if the tunnel had always been there, or if Ratu herself had carved it out while in her giant snake form.

Asterion grabbed Beth by the hand to steer her around part of the passageway that looked no different from the others. The Labyrinth was heavily booby-trapped, and when she looked back, she still couldn’t see what he had actually steered her around.

“What would have happened if we had gone through the middle?”

“Crushed. Then drowned.” When they neared the other side, he slid in between a couple of stalagmites. She stepped through with him and discovered another side cave. Every time he escorted her through the Labyrinth, it was a different path. She wondered how he kept track of it all.

Asterion barely fit through a narrow gap in the wall, but when he emerged, it was into the bright central chamber of the Labyrinth. Half of the chamber was stacked full of magical items and treasures with long tables dedicated to their organization. The other half of the chamber was neat and tidy with a small oriental temple in the corner. It was only about twenty feet tall and looked like it would fit in perfectly at a golf course, but Beth knew that the temple was actually larger on the inside. Large silken clothes were hung, flapping in the light of the torches that had self-ignited when they arrived.

Up above, a large gemstone gave off light like a tiny sun, warming the cavern. It was held in place by a series of chains hooked to the rocks below.

“I will get her.” Asterion sat Beth down at a table with a small tea set and a journal. Oddly enough, a pretty silver necklace with a blue stone hung from a small display stand in the middle. Beth set her backpack down and poured herself some tea. Steam floated up from her cup. She added just a touch of honey from the jar by the tea set, stirring it in with her spoon.

Several minutes passed. Beth had crossed her legs, the one on top bouncing anxiously. She caught movement out of the corner of her eye and turned to look. The blue pendant swung like a tiny pendulum. At first Beth thought she had bumped the table, but realized her legs had been nowhere near it. The necklace did seem quite pretty, however, and she leaned forward to get a better look at it.

The way the gem had been cut, it seemed to be infinitely deep. She couldn’t see out of the other side, instead staring into an azure abyss with a tiny light at the end. Puzzled, she lifted it up to get a good look at it from underneath.

“Nice try.” Ratu snatched the necklace out of Beth’s hands, making her jump. She held the gem between her scaly fingers, gently placing it back on its holder. “You’ll have to do better next time.”

“Excuse me?”

“I apparently need to remind you that you aren’t supposed to be touching anything while you are here.”

Beth’s cheeks flushed. “I’m so sorry, I don’t know what came over me.”

Ratu’s features softened. She had a slightly oriental look to her, punctuated with patches of snakeskin with long dark hair that Beth would kill for. She wore a pretty red kimono today with a gold band around the middle. “I’m afraid the fault partly lies with me. I wasn’t expecting anyone down here today and this thing certainly does grab your attention.”

“What is it?”

“Just something I found by the lake. Don’t worry, it isn’t related to the thing we destroyed out there.” She was referring to a powerful otherworldly artifact she had Mike destroy that nearly killed them both beneath the frozen lake. “However, this thing would seem to fairly dangerous in its own right.”

“What does it do?”

“Nothing you need to worry about.” Ratu waved the long sleeve of her kimono over the necklace and it disappeared. Once gone from sight, Beth felt her interest in it decline exponentially. It was like the necklace had hypnotized her or something. “What brings you here today? More news on our missing artifacts?”

“I wish.” Beth opened her backpack and pulled out the bagged rat. She handed it to Ratu who opened the bag and pulled the deceased rodent out by the base of its tail. “What do you know about this?”

“It’s a rat.” Ratu tossed it on the table. “A very big one. And it stinks.”

“It attacked Mike. It’s part of a kingdom of rats living between the walls of the house.”

“Kingdom?” Ratu lifted an eyebrow. “Is there an actual rat king?”

“Yeah. Mike said he even had on a crown.”

“Interesting. So they are capable of communicating and at least sub-human intellect?”

“I guess so. Know anything about them?”

“Not really. A rat king is actually a term for something else, but now I wonder if that’s just a misinterpretation. What else do you know about this king of rats?”

“He told Mike that we all had to move out, then dropped him through a trapdoor.”

“Fascinating.” Ratu stroked her chin, deep in thought. She waved her free hand and the teapot floated in the air to pour another cup of tea. Milk and honey were added before the cup hopped across the table and then into Ratu’s hand. “A rat king is supposedly just a mass of rats connected at the tail, but maybe that’s a metaphor for something else. However, it is considered a bad omen to see one, which I bet is not a metaphor. It usually signifies famine, plague or something else equally bad.”

“You mean like a rat army? I would call that bad enough.”

“Indeed.” Ratu sipped at her tea. “And you said they had chewed a hole in the house?”

“They live in between the walls, and used their own shit to block off the locks on the new second floor. We assume they are living in all of those rooms butt don’t know for sure yet.”

“I heard about the clogged locks. So they have claimed a stake in the house and made a further claim on the rest of the home.” She shook her head. “I’m afraid that I don’t have a quick fix for you. There was a magic item in the missing objects list that would turn the wearer into a cat, but I’m afraid that’s the best I have off the top of my head. I don’t know that becoming a cat spirit would do any good unless you were willing to catch and kill them all one at a time.”

“Well, I was wondering…” Beth shifted uncomfortably. “I mean, you do turn into a giant snake and all.”

“Indeed I do. Were you thinking I could maybe go devour them?” Ratu grinned, her canines temporarily elongating into snake fangs. “I try not to eat things I don’t know anything about. I also hate the taste of rat.”

“It didn’t hurt to ask. Well, so far anyway.” She smiled weakly. “However, the problem persists. We have a colony of rats led by a king that we need to find a way to be rid of. Maybe you know a spell, or something like that?”

“Perhaps. It is something I would like to think on. It troubles me that they were able to chew a hole into the house. You see, if I were to take a hammer to one of the walls, I would find myself in the next room. The way the house has unfolded itself tells me that time and space have been compressed. If I could do what they have, then I would find myself in between the walls of an infinitely large space as well.”

“The house is infinitely large?”

“In a way. The same way it has been compressed to conceal rooms, it can be decompressed to make everything much larger. That, and the home itself is a nexus for many other places, this Labyrinth being one of them. It wasn’t constructed in the home, rather, it existed somewhere else first and then was connected here. If we were to dig a hole deep enough or perhaps get a ladder large enough, we may be able to find the edge of this space and stumble into the next. Much like the greenhouse, except I am fairly certain that the greenhouse is a constructed world existing in its own dimension.”

“Wow.”

“Indeed. The Architect was, at the very least, a demigod, or great friends with one. The walls of this home may be made of wood and plaster, but the fabric of reality has been stretched tight and stitched together in a way that even I can’t fully understand. That’s why cracks were appearing when the Society was assaulting the geas. They were unraveling those magical threads.”

Beth’s head swam with the implications. “So if you can stitch two places together, it’s like a shortcut? Like, I could stitch my closet to somewhere in Hawaii and just go there?”

“Yes. However, the Architect didn’t just make a shortcut. Using your analogy, imagine that you stitched Hawaii to your closet, and then cut it away from the rest of the world. The only way to get there would be through your closet and you now have your own private island. Well, if you decide to kill off the population anyway.”

“So what happens if my closet gets destroyed?”

“One of three things. Hawaii returns to where it used to be. Hawaii ends up somewhere else. Or complete annihilation.” She held up a finger for each. “Atlantis was an entire continent that vanished. The Atlanteans were infamous for their ability to tie two places together. It took them several years, but they were able to cut themselves away from the world by slowly stitching their eastern borders to their western borders. Somewhere out there in the universe is an island nation that cannot be reached from the outside world save for a couple of loose threads in the fabric of time and space. To step through those gaps would take you to the lost continent. I worry that these rats may have the ability to loosen the threads holding the house together. Doing so could expose us to nearly anything or anywhere.”

“Shit.”

“Well said.” Ratu sipped at her tea. “My recommendation for the problem is extermination. I would suggest fire, but the last thing you want to do is set fire to a part of the house that hasn’t revealed itself yet.”

“Extermination.” Beth frowned. Was that something Mike would do? He seemed to take his position as Caretaker fairly seriously, but she wondered if he would even consider such a thing.

“Something else to consider. You don’t just end up with magical rats, not in a house like this. Someone had to let them in. I’m thinking your resident nymph should have some information.”

“Mike is taking care of that now, I’m sure.” Beth stood up. “I mustn’t stay long. If you think of anything, please let me know.”

“Of course. Leave the rat. I can make use of the remains.” Ratu bowed her head, then turned to leave. She walked inside of the small pagoda, disappearing from view. Beth finished her tea and stood, picking up her backpack. Asterion waited for her at the edge of Ratu’s lair, his dark eyes watching. He led her back into the Labyrinth, neither of them speaking much on the long walk back to the entrance.

Beth thought about the missing objects and the list of items in the storage unit at New Castle. She had already made arrangements to have it all brought back tomorrow before the Society could find out anything about it. Obviously they would catch on the moment a moving truck arrived, but once it was in the driveway, they wouldn’t be able to do anything.

They stepped through the gate together and Asterion walked her over to the reflecting pool. Beth let out a sigh. This was the part that she hated the most. The shortcut was convenient except for the part where she got soaking wet.

“How did you and Ratu get out last night?” It suddenly occurred to Beth that Asterion was terrified of water, and wouldn’t have been able to pass through.

“Through the closet. She used magic to open it from the other side.”

“Oh.” Well, so much for that plan. She didn’t think Ratu was generous enough to let her out that way. “Well, I guess I’m off.” She gave the minotaur a big hug, smiling at the feel of him against her body. He hugged her back with one arm, his other firmly gripping his ax. “I might drop in on you tonight or tomorrow, just so you know.”

“I look forward to it, friend.” He stepped back, away from the edge of the pool. She walked to its edge, looking down at her reflection. Her reflection looked back, a grimace on her lips. Clearly she didn’t want to get wet any more than Beth did.

Oh well. Beth grabbed tightly to the steps of her backpack and stepped out over the water. Just before her feet penetrated the surface, she saw him lean out over the water. His top hat was tilted to one side, his dusky red skin aglow with tiny flames. A large smile spread across his face when his yellow eyes met hers.

“Found you,” Oliver whispered, his voice in her ear. Her heart leapt into her throat and she spun around as she sank into the pool, but all she saw was Asterion. She felt his fingers close on her arm, and then the whole world dissolved around her.

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Mike coughed, his eyes watering from the drywall bits and wood dust that had gotten blasted in his face. He squinted, partially feeling his way into his bathroom. His eyes burned like crazy whenever he opened them, so he was alternating which eye he barely opened. Once his hand was on the bathroom counter, he pulled off his filthy clothes, tossing them in a heap on the floor.

“Naia?” He touched the edge of the tub. Already, water was filling it at an impossible rate. He stepped over the side and sat along the wall. The tub was huge and could easily accommodate several people. The water swirled over his hips, and then she appeared. Her blue green hair emerged from the water’s surface first, the rest of her body translucent as it took a human form. Her blue eyes sparkled and she pulled his face into her breasts. They were still largely made of water and Mike held his breath. The whirling current inside her body swept away the irritants all over his face and she leaned away leaving his face clean.

“Better?”

“I bet people would pay good money for something like that.” Mike didn’t even have to wipe the water from his eyes, for Naia had taken it with her. “Maybe twenty bucks to shove their face in there, get nice and clean. MIght increase drowning deaths though.”

“Only if I didn’t like them.” She sat back, her smooth bottom resting on top of his thighs. The tub had filled up to his chest and stopped, the warmth of the water leaching away the the aches and pains in his joints. “How did it go?”

“We got the ceiling patched, but it looks like shit. Tink is in a fit because we had to shortcut it. We didn’t have time to do anything but toss in some spare boards that we had and then drywall it. Tink had Cecilia pass through the bottom so that she could screw it in from the top, but that meant leaving a screwdriver up there. Without getting back into the Rat King’s lair, that tunnel can’t be sealed away.” He groaned, shifting lower so that the water came up to his neck. Naia’s body became temporarily weightless to allow him to shift. “Were you able to remember anything about the Rat King?”

“No.” Naia frowned. “And that worries me. Now that you have found them, the geas should have released those memories, but it hasn’t. That would imply that all memories of the Rat King had been tampered with prior to Emily’s death, and I don’t know who would have done such a thing, or for what purpose. I have some flashes of Emily discovering the second floor, but that’s it.”

Mike rolled his eyes then leaned back. Things had been relatively calm for a few days and he had almost gotten used to it. “Well that’s more info than I usually have.”

“Sorry lover.” He felt her fingers twirl through his hair. Beneath him, the water pulsed against his body much like a massage chair. “I’m afraid there’s only so much I can do.”

“You do plenty.” He smiled, running his hand up her thigh. “Got an email from Dana this morning. She made it to Colorado okay, though mentioned that Lily has caused a couple problems.” He had really hoped that the succubus would stay with them in the house where it was safe. If he was enemy number one on the Society’s hitlist, she was close behind in second place.

“Nobody is surprised.” Naia laughed. “She has a good heart though, I can feel it.”

“Yeah.” Mike thought back to when Lily had tried to kill him in his sleep. Since then, the rogue demon had proven herself to be more than what she seemed and an invaluable ally. “And that’s where I’m stuck. The Rat King needs to go, but what if he’s another Lily? What if by finding a way to co-exist I strengthen the whole house?” The realization had hit him while he had been holding a piece of drywall against the ceiling with Sofia’s help. What if the Rat King could help them? He needed to find a way to get the rodent to listen, but what would that be?

“Your willingness to see good in others is one of the things I love about you.” Naia pressed herself into him, her hands sliding up his chest toward his face. “Just be careful that it doesn’t get you in trouble.”

“I’m starting to think it already has.” He closed his eyes again. In the back of his mind, he was thinking about the Rat King. What if he had a gun, or a crossbow? What if he had commanded Abella to tear into them at the first sign of hostility?

He let out a long sigh when Naia massaged his temples. The real issue wasn’t the idea that the Rat King had pulled one over on him. It was the idea that he might not be able to work a deal with something already living here. If the Rat King refused to play by the rules, Mike would be forced to kick him out or kill him.

He swallowed the large lump in his throat. The idea that he would have to consciously make the decision to kill something else didn’t sit well with him. If a Caretaker could grant access, could they also ban something? He far preferred being able to wave his hand and make the issue disappear, but so far that hadn’t been an option.

“Someone is getting a little too tense.” Her lips brushed against his ear, making him shiver. He could feel her large breasts against his chest, her hands on his stomach. No, wait. Her hands were on his legs. Now they were on his calves.

“Wha-” He tried to sit up, but Naia held him down.

“Keep your eyes closed.” Her voice was in his ears, but he could tell her body was elsewhere. “I think you’ll like this, but you need to relax.”

“Ok.” He kept his eyes shut. He trusted Naia more than anyone else.

It began slowly, an extra set of hands slowly rubbing his upper thighs, more on his stomach and chest, another on his temples. The touches were loving and innocent, working the stiff muscles throughout. A pair of hands behind his neck rubbed along his upper spine, popping something back into place. The sudden rush of relief to that area made him light headed and he let out a moan.

“Good. Just relax.” Her voice was barely above a whisper, yet it resonated through his whole body. A pair of hands worked along each limb, manipulating the tissues deep within. At least four hands were working some knots out of his back that he was certain had formed when he crashed through the ceiling.

Naia worked the kinks out of his body, the number of hands multiplying. He felt himself drifting off to sleep when a trio of hands moved onto his cock. The movements were gentle but insistent, coaxing blood flow to his groin. In a matter of moments, he was fully erect, the hands moving onto his shaft. The hands were somehow moving through each other, creating a downstroke sensation that felt like it would go on forever before alternating upward. He imagined she was creating these limbs from water, but it was definitely more fun with his eyes closed.

A warm mouth enveloped the head of his shaft, sucking him in. He groaned, a tight sensation building up in his testicles, but he fought back the orgasm with ease. He snuck a peek when her mouth was particularly far down his shaft and smiled. Her green and blue hair was bouncing off the surface of the water and hung like a curtain, concealing her face. Spectral hands made of water continued to massage him above the surface, and he could feel them underneath.

Naia serviced him in this matter for several minutes, varying the tempo of her mouth and hands. Her movements were becoming more frantic now, and she let out tiny moans every time his glans slid past the back of her tongue. A groan escaped him, followed by another. He was getting close.

Naia spat him out suddenly, her head tilted as if listening for something.

“Shit. I’ll be right back.” Her whole body popped like a giant bubble, causing water to cascade over him. He stared at the water in disbelief. Was everything okay?

He heard a low pinging noise through the pipes under the floor, like tiny rocks smacking against the metal. The faucet turned on and spat out three balls of light, one blue, one green and one red. The lights tried to fly away, but were immediately trapped in spheres made of water. Naia manifested, appearing above him with her hands on her hips. From his position, he had a wonderful view of her hairless pussy.

“You three know better.” Her eyes flashed, blue light washing over them. The balls of light had coalesced into their fairy forms. Each one of them was a cross between human and insect, and only six inches tall.

“What were they doing?”

“Building a squirrel launcher. Apparently they are bored.”

Mike opened his mouth and closed it. He really didn’t need the details. However, he did see that the fairies were no longer looking at Naia, but at Mike’s swollen cock, their tiny eyes suddenly hungry. Naia saw this and a wicked grin crossed her face.

“If I agree to share, do you three promise to leave the animals at my fountain alone? Forever?”

All three of them nodded. Naia snapped her fingers and the spheres vanished, releasing them. They all splashed down in the bath, climbing onto MIke like a human life raft. His cock tingled immediately upon contact with their sparkling bodies, the sensation of their tiny hands and mouths causing chills to run down his spine.

Somewhere, deep inside, the wild magic he had created with Cecilia flickered to life, hungry for release.

“Control it.” Naia’s lips were against his ear, her hand on his lower stomach. “Let’s practice letting go while holding back. Besides, you may cause one of them to explode.”

Mike laughed, going deep into himself. He could feel their ministrations on his phallus increasing in urgency, actively rubbing themselves on his shaft, but he was distant enough to concentrate on the wild magic inside. He had created it by having sex with the banshee and coming deep inside her, and they had both left a permanent mark on each other. The spark that had ignited was making tiny sparks form on his belly, crawling across his skin to disappear in the water.

“Your body and your mind are two separate things.” Her actual hands were rubbing his shoulders now. “This is no different than thinking of other women to help get off, or thinking of action movies to hold off for a little bit longer.”

In his mind, he imagined a gate closing in front of the magic, holding it back. It rattled the cage, his whole body shuddering. Carmina was now rubbing her slippery cunt on the head of his cock while Olivia and Cerulea were grinding against the base of his shaft. A spark jumped off his cock and zapped Cerulea, knocking her back across his lap and into the water. He picked her up and set her back down and she shook her head, her beetle-wings clicking as she dried herself off before resuming.

“Don’t cage it up, lover. It’s a part of you now, and locking it away is no different than denial.” She was in his face now, her eyes on his. “Coax it back to sleep. Let it know there will be a time and place, but not now.”

“I… I’m trying…” His whole cock tingled with the fairies at play, and he could feel his orgasm rapidly building. Every time he pushed the magic back down, his orgasm subsided. It was like trying to pour a glass of water out without losing the ice, a desperate balancing act that threatened to undo him.

“Look at me.” She held his face in her hands. “It’s the difference between love and lust. One you do with your entire being, the other with just your body. Separate them out. You aren’t making love right now, are you?”

“No,” he stammered out, his hips twitching in the water. His balls were on fire, and he couldn’t see what the trio were doing. Two of them were positioning his cock and holding it in place, but he couldn’t feel the third.

“Just lust. Just fucking, getting off, blowing your load.” She kissed his neck, her hair covering his face. He took in her scent, inhaling deeply the smell of the ocean, the lakes and streams, the forest floor after a heavy rain. In his mind, he heard her voice.

*Save it for later*, she said. *Save it for someone special.* His mind relaxed, the magic receding back into his gut, but his body was losing control. He balled up his fists, his muscles wound tight by his impending release. He lifted his hips up at the sensation of what felt like feathers tickling just the tip of his cock.

Naia winked and melted into mist, revealing what the fairies had been up to. Cerulea and Olivia had braced Mike’s cock between them and Carmina stood on Olivia’s shoulders, her dragonfly wings fluttering rapidly just along the head of his dick. The tickling sensation along just the edge of his urethra plugged directly into his core, and his balls tightened up against his body.

“Fuuuuck!” He blew his load on the back of the red fairy, knocking her down. All three of them scrambled to catch his cum as it rained down around them, their hands outstretched. They stuffed their faces, each of them glowing with the consumption of his seed. Their insect traits faded with every drop, leaving them more human than insect by the time they were done.

“Remember our agreement.” Naia appeared near the basin in a gout of steam. All three fairies bowed to her and then flew out of the bathroom, chasing each other with the sound of beating wings. Mike and Naia laughed, and she crawled up his chest to rest her head on his sternum.

“Thank you.” He kissed the top of her head and she sighed. She held him close, squeezing him tighter than usual. Sleep threatened to claim him, but he fought it off. There was simply too much to do.

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Mike stood in the hall next to Tink. She was holding her hammer ready, and Cerulea was stationed once more on his shoulder. This time, Abella had elected to watch the outside of the home while Cecilia helped. The banshee hovered just above the floor, her eerie white hair drifting in a non-existent breeze.

“Let’s go.” They opened up the same door they had yesterday, revealing the room from yesterday. Based on popular opinion with the others, this was some sort of servant’s quarters. Seeing that nobody was in it, they stepped back into the hall where Sofia waited with a large wheelbarrow full of supplies. Tink slipped her goggles on and was busy placing wood over the hole in the wall while Mike began prepping the replacement plaster mixture. Sofia kept her eye on the opening, but there were no signs of movement. Once Mike was satisfied that they could mix the plaster at the last second, he joined in to help.

“You think this will help keep them out?” Mike asked.

“Fix might close tunnel. Won’t know for sure until Tink find room where King Rat fuck is hiding.” She wore a pair of tan overalls over a black tank top. She tucked nails in her teeth and rapidly stuck them into the wall with a few bangs of her hammer.

Though they worked quickly, it was still nearly two hours before they had the gap properly reframed and prepped. Mike broke away to mix up the plaster and Cecilia stuck her head through the wall.

“And?” Mike asked.

Cecilia withdrew her head. “Nothing. No sign of the rats.”

“Good.” He, Tink, and Sofia applied the first coat of plaster. Once finished, they waited until Tink declared that it was dry enough, then applied a second coat. Satisfied with their work, Mike stepped back for a better look.

“You did a great job Tink.” He high-fived the goblin and they moved back out of the room. They pushed the wheelbarrow to the next door and got ready once again. This time, Mike pulled the dagger out of its sheath. He slid it into the jamb of the door, quickly severing the lock mechanism. Pulling the door open, he held it in place while Tink came in to replace the lock using a cordless drill with a screw head. Casting a wary gaze, he realized that this room had been stripped of most of its furnishings. However, the room itself looked like some kind of study, making him think of a room where a bunch of men would retire with their cigars to talk about their railroad bonds. A couple of old, thick padded couches had been left behind and empty bookshelves were built into the side walls. An old fireplace sat cold against the far wall, and large, curtained windows surrounded the chimney.

“Okay, so far so good.” They took a few steps inside. There was no sign of the rats. While looking around, it occured to Mike that they were in an interior room with exterior windows. Curious, he walked up to the windows and pushed the curtains aside to look outside.

“What the hell!” Pressing his hands against the glass, he gazed out into the large valley. Sloping peeks surrounded the edges, and it terminated in a large body of water with a few distant islands in the mist. He ran his fingers along the glass, searching for a way to open it. Cerulea fluttered away from him to check out the shelves.

“Mike!” Cecilia yelled his name and he turned in time to see that one of the couches crawled toward him, the cushions curled up like angry lips. It threw itself at him and he leapt to one side. It crashed through the window, cold air filling the room. He used the stones of the fireplace to stand up, the sound of clattering wood causing him to dance to the side when another couch crashed into the fireplace. Tink was riding this one, swinging her hammer down at the legs, trying to break them off.

The couch twisted around like a fat caterpillar, and Mike used the dagger to cleanly slice off one of the legs. He got pushed back, the couch nearly knocking him over when Tink shattered out one of the back legs. The whole couch wobbled unsteadily, squirming toward Mike. Tink jumped off and lifted the couch from beneath, tipping it over.

“Husband make cut.” She pushed the couch up against the wall and Mike severed the remaining two legs. The couch tipped back over, flopping uselessly on the floor.

“Fuck.” Mike stared at the possessed furniture. It banged heavily against the wooden floor then hurled its cushions at him. The cushions flopped uselessly for several seconds before going limp. The couch, however, kept moving.

“We should take it with us,” Cecilia suggested. “We can have Ratu come look at it and figure out what kind of magic we are looking at.”

“That’s a pretty good idea. I think…” His voice trailed off, his eyes on the dark hole behind the couch. It was significantly smaller than the one in the servant’s room, but large enough that he could crawl in it. From within the dark confines of the tunnel, several glowing eyes watched. “I think we should get out of here.”

Tink grabbed one end of the couch and dragged it. Mike moved to help while Cecilia kept a watchful eye on the opening. Moving out into the hall, Mike closed the door behind him just as Cerulea shot out. Tink pulled out a couple of boards and helped him nail the door shut. The Rat King had given them time to move out, but that didn’t mean the rats wouldn’t start moving in.

They dragged the couch down the hall and paused long enough for Tink to check inside the servant’s quarters. The patched hole was undisturbed, so they closed the door and kept going. They carried the couch down the stairs and outside to the fountain.

“What’s this?” Naia asked. “Moving day already?”

“Nope.” They dropped the couch by the fountain. It flopped a few times and tried to tilt itself upward and roll toward Mike. Abella drifted down from the roof and landed near the fountain. She grabbed the back of the couch and held it in place while Tink went to get some rope. When she returned, they moved some of the heavier pots closer to it, then tied it in place.

“I want to see.” Zel stepped out of the garage. She wore a simple dress that Tink had sewn up for her sometime during the night using a pair of white bedsheets. It was ankle length, revealing that her feet were simply modified hooves, and her tail had been pulled out of a hole up top. The house had oohed and aahed over her transformation last night, but she had slept in the garage in case she reverted again. Zel’s saddle bag was slung over one shoulder, and she set it down next to the fountain.

“It’s another enchanted piece of furniture,” Mike said, stepping back. “It tried to crush me, but it was pretty slow.”

“Interesting. Can someone help me flip it?” They obliged, pushing it on its back. Zel knelt down to examine the splintered leg that Tink had smashed. Using a pair of tweezers, she yanked free large splinters that wriggled back and forth in her grasp. She dropped these into a vial where they rattled in place. “The furniture has been animated on a cellular level suggesting a blanket enchantment.”

Mike nodded. “That makes sense. The cushions were moving independently from the couch.”

“If it is a blanket enchantment, there is an obvious way to fix it.”

“That would be?”

“Smash it into as many parts as possible.” Zel grinned. “The enchantment can’t maintain over too many pieces that way.”

“Horse girl no help,” Tink grumbled, crossing her arms.

“Sorry. That’s the best I can offer. However, can you wait to smash this one up? As long as these are active, I can whip up a couple of interesting concoctions.” She jingled the vials. “Could be fun.”

“I think I am full up on fun for now.” Mike sat on the edge of the fountain, his eyes on the wiggling couch. “The furniture in those rooms attacked us. Either they were enchanted by the Rat King, or somebody trying to keep us from him. I get the feeling that there is something bigger going on than just a nasty rat with a crown.”

Inside the house, they heard a loud crash followed by the sound of running water. Obviously someone had come from the Labyrinth. Mike paid it no attention until he heard screams coming from the front of the house.

Tink beat him to the door, disappearing inside. Mike was close behind her, and they ran to the front of the house. The wooden floors were soaked, and Beth stood in the living room, her eyes fixed on something.

“What is it?” Mike turned the corner and froze. The living room had been trashed, the curtains torn down and shredded. The furniture was gutted, stuffing tossed everywhere. Someone had painted a rough caricature of a rat’s head on the wall with a crown above it. Beneath it, some words had been written in bold letters.

**Git out ar house**

“Little fuckers!” He kicked a piece of side table near him, sending the wood spinning into the room. Those nasty little rodents had gone too far. The inner turmoil he had been experiencing was suddenly resolved. They needed to go.

“Mike.” Her voice barely a whisper, Beth pointed at the corner of the room where Tink’s wide-eyed gaze was fixed. It took him a second before what he was seeing had registered.

Jenny’s dollhouse had been smashed to pieces and lay in ruin. Of the doll herself, there was no sign.