

FORTUNE FAVORS THE FAE



PRINCE OF POISON

BONUS SHORT

ALICE WINTERS

Madden

I'm confident that if I lie here much longer, I will simply perish. I'm bored out of my ever-loving mind. This is what I get for throwing myself in front of that cute little pest to save him. I nearly sacrificed my life for that man who is *maybe* worthy of it, but still. Now I'm bedridden and bored out of my mind.

"Someone entertain me," I whine.

Silas and Callisto gape at me for some unknown reason from where they sit in chairs so close to my bed their knees are nearly knocking into it. Like what exactly did they expect me to do or say when they're both just staring off into oblivion?

"I woke up at dawn, getting only three hours of sleep after riding hard to get here because you needed me," Callisto complains.

Silas eyes me like he could possibly think I'm being dramatic. "And I carried like a fuckton of monster puppies in here so you could try to decide which one you wanted while also trying to keep them from jumping on you. Look at my arms."

He shows off his arms that have been scratched and bitten by little puppy claws and teeth. They were all just so happy that he should have loved every second of it.

"We suffered for hours because you couldn't decide which one you wanted. And you still haven't picked," Silas says.

"They're all so cute, it's impossible to choose one," I say. "But now I'm bored. Callisto, entertain me."

"I'm so tired," he cries. "We got in so late last night... well, actually this morning. And then I felt super guilty, so I came here and have been here all day and... so... tired."

"I nearly *bled to death*," I mutter.

Callisto perks up. “I’m sorry. You’re right. What do you need? Your pillow fluffed? Your blanket fluffed? I will fluff it all.”

He starts patting down my pillow and body in an attempt to “fluff” them while Silas just decides to nap right in his seat.

How boring. “FINE, fine. Go... sleep. And when you’re done sleeping, I expect *all* of your attention *all* of the time,” I decide.

“Gotchu! Gotchit. Gotchitall,” Callisto mumbles before staggering off and dragging Silas after him.

I watch them go then lie here some more. Of course I don’t tell them why I insisted they sit with me all damn day. Or why I couldn’t sleep.

But I’m tired enough now, I should be able to fall asleep, right? I mean... come on, so foolish.

Giving the blanket a little tug, I sink down and close my eyes, trying to urge sleep to find me. And it does within minutes... but I’m already afraid of what awaits me.

The smell of death surrounds me. It’s like I’m drowning in a sea of bodies. The eyes of a dead man lying before me snap open and I jerk back in horror.

“You killed me,” he whispers as he grabs my ankle, and I realize that he’s pulling me down into a pit. I scramble as I reach for the edge of the pit, desperately digging my nails into the earth that gives way beneath my fingertips. Below me, I can see the eyes of the dead who are reaching for me, grabbing for me.

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry!”

Are all of these people I’ve killed? I didn’t want to kill them. I never wanted to. I had no choice. I had to protect those I loved. I had to—

I'm dragged deeper into the darkness. I'm going to drown in it... suffocate in it. All that surrounds me is death—

I jerk awake, breath coming hard and fast. Pain digs into my side from my sudden movement and quick breathing, making me wince as I sit up.

Fuck. Fuck.

It's dark out, telling me I've been asleep at least a few hours, but not long enough. Callisto and Silas are probably deep asleep, so I can't pester them into coming back into my room. But... if I just... went into *their* room?

Fucking hell, what am I? Five?

Maybe just some fresh air. Yeah. That's all I need.

Careful not to pull at the wound, I push myself out of bed and slowly make my way into the hallway. The door to Silas and Callisto's room is ridiculously tempting, especially since they won't care, right? They won't care because Callisto feels super guilty. And Silas does whatever Callisto wants, so I could guilt them into letting me share the bed.

"Fuck," I mutter as I stand out in the hallway like a fool.

I see some movement in the windowsill and hurry over to it. "Hey, kitty," I say, and the cat's head snaps up.

"How dare you address me with such familiarity," the cat says, voice in my mind.

It's always been a rather cocky cat. "Whatcha doing?"

"Licking my balls. Is it not apparent? My balls will be so clean," he says before he returns to licking his balls.

"I see... would you like to sit on my lap?"

The cat eyes me for a moment, so I sit down in the hallway and pat my lap. He stands up, stretches, and climbs onto my lap where I rub behind his ears.

"I am bored," he decides before he even gets comfortable, and he fucks off.

I sigh and carefully push myself up to my feet, realizing that getting down on the floor really wasn't worth that brief exchange. Maybe I can find a different cat that has a longer attention span. I hurry down the hallway where I see Titus fluttering outside the door to Callisto's room. Did he somehow get locked out? Or is he off on an adventure now that Callisto is asleep?

"Titus?"

He flutters around some more, so I walk up to him and poke his body.

"Titus. I know you hear me. Goddammit, speak to me."

Titus just dips down and squeezes under the door like the little asshat he is.

"Are you just going to walk up and down the hallway harassing every animal you see until you either bleed to death or find someone willing to listen?"

I jump and quickly look behind me to where a very naked Dandelion is leaning against the hallway wall with his arms crossed. The hasty movement makes me ache a bit, but I don't let it show.

"I'm not... bleeding to death. I'm fine," I declare.

He stares at me.

"I was just... stretching my legs."

Dandelion continues to stare at me.

"You're judging me."

“Maybe,” he says before shifting into his tigerlike form and heading back toward his room which is one past mine. I slowly start toward mine before passing it, unable to find the ability to push myself inside. As he heads into his own room with a swish of his tail, I grab it.

“*Do you need something?*” Dandelion asks as he looks back at me trailing after him.

“No.”

“*If you need something, you should just ask for it instead of this nonsense stuff you have going on,*” he says as he climbs up onto the bed that he completely fills up, forcing me to unhand his tail.

“I don’t need anything. I have more fun harassing people and pestering them.”

“*Uh-huh. I see. Don’t let me stop you, then. Go harass all the court animals. But if you’re honest with none of them, how will they ever know when you actually need something?*”

“Ha? Need something? I need to be pampered.”

Dandelion rolls onto his back and swishes his tail. “*So I’ve heard. My papa is a pretty good pamperer. If you don’t need anything, then you should probably return to your bed before you bleed all over.*”

“I will,” I say as I head toward the door before hesitating. Why does it feel so daunting to go back to that dark and quiet room? I suppose I’ll just avoid sleep again. The dreams have only returned because I helped Silas fight back at the high fae court. That’s all this is. They’ll go away... eventually.

“*You think I’m the stubborn one,*” he mutters.

“You don’t even like me.”

“*Have you ever asked?*” Dandelion retorts. “*If I want someone to know something, I tell them. I hide nothing. Do you ever think that might fix*

your issue? Instead, you draw assumptions from people before you even give them a chance. It's like you try to make yourself out to be the bad guy to avoid getting hurt."

I lean against the doorway, feeling exhausted and in pain and scared of the dark... scared of my dreams... scared of what I've done. "You act like anyone cares about my issues. Don't make me laugh."

"I might be as much beast as I am man, but I'm smart enough to know that those two care about you far more than you realize."

"And what about you?" I ask.

He rolls onto his side and lifts his head. *"I don't like hearing you thrash in your sleep."*

"Sorry to disrupt you."

"You are such a stubborn man."

"You're more stubborn than me. I've tried coating you in affection and you only have eyes for Callisto."

His tail flicks again. *"Hmmm. I was beaten, chained up, and used for so many years, and Callisto saved me from all of that. I owe everything to him. But it doesn't mean that I don't have more to give."*

"Ha. I'm such a self-absorbed man over here whining about having to kill some bad men and you've had it so much worse."

"You might not act it, but your soul is very bright. You're not meant for killing."

I don't know what to say, but I find myself slowly walking over to him. "I'm really tired and my bed is really far away, and it hurts to walk so much... so can I stay here for tonight? I promise I won't bother you."

"You've bothered me since the moment I met you. But that doesn't mean I don't like it," he says.

I set a knee on the bed before slowly lying down on it. I roll onto my unhurt side and carefully touch his fur. And when he doesn't pull back, I press closer to him. "I don't know how to be good with people."

"You don't have to be. You just have to be yourself. Everyone tolerates you just fine."

I snort. "Maybe I'd like them to do more than tolerate me."

"Don't ask too much out of humans. They're not that complicated... or maybe they're too complicated. Eh. Fuck if I know. Just give them some food and they'll like you. I think that works quite well."

"What if they're not fully human?" I ask as I press my face against his chest, the soft fur brushing my cheeks.

"Then I'm confident it works the same way."

"I'll... keep that in mind."

I'm afraid to fall asleep, but at least I'm not alone. As Dandelion drifts off with me tucked against him, I feel like I can finally relax and dream deeply for the first time in a while.

"Titus said what?" Callisto asks with wide eyes as he faces me where I'm sitting in the bed, leaning against the headboard.

It's been a few days since they arrived here, so he's definitely more awake this time.

"He said Markson was an asshole," I say.

Callisto looks horrified. "No he didn't! He's sweet as pie and he would never cuss! I don't believe you."

"I'm not lying."

"What's Madden lying about?" Silas asks as he walks in carrying what looks like a very delicious pastry.

“Claiming that Titus is saying shit again!” Callisto says. “I don’t even know where he’s at, but I know he’s off doing cute and innocent things.”

“He’s probably off planning a rebellion to overthrow the queen, but that doesn’t matter. What matters is that whatever Silas is holding looks fucking delicious. What is it?” I ask.

“Hell if I know. It’s filled with strawberries and Callisto said we had to keep you happy,” Silas says.

“It’s for me?” I ask in surprise.

“All for you,” Callisto says. “Silas and I are going down to work on getting the house Markson gave me all fixed up. And once we have a room set up, you can be moved there.”

“Until you’re better and then we’re kicking you out,” Silas decides.

Callisto shakes his head. “Don’t be mean! We’re not kicking you out.”

“I’ve already found a pig shed I think you’d fit nicely in,” Silas says.

“I’d feel right at home with it smelling just like you,” I respond sweetly.

Callisto laughs as Silas raises an eyebrow.

“It’s Callisto’s house. I only have to be nice to him,” I remind him.

“Oh no, that’s not how that works,” Silas says.

But Callisto is too sweet. “You can be as mean to Silas as much as you want after you took a literal blade for me. Silas, let Madden pester you until he feels better.”

“Fine.”

He’s such a sucker.

But I decide that I might as well enjoy it while it lasts. “I expect all of the puppies to be brought here again tomorrow so I can make my final decision.”

“Yes, sir,” Silas says. “Anything else, Your Majesty?”

“That will be all,” I say as I watch them go.

I eye the strawberry pastry and reach for the fork before putting it back down and waiting impatiently. I should just eat the damn thing. I mean... Dandelion’s the one who’s off doing who the fuck knows what... he’s probably only allowed me to sleep with him the past few nights because I’ve been pestering him.

The door opens and Dandelion walks in in his human form. “I didn’t murder a bird today, just for you. It looked very plump and delicious. The chef could have made a mini roast out of it. My mouth is still watering thinking about it. But then I knew you’d cry about it.”

“Thank you for not. If you’re hungry, I have this... pastry here... if you want it,” I say, not really wanting to give it up, but for him, I would. If it meant he’d stay in here to eat it, then I’d gladly hand it over.

“Oh?” He comes over and sits down next to me on the bed. “It does look delicious.”

“Strawberry.”

“It can be any berry or no berry and I’d eat it,” he says as he reaches over, and instead of picking the plate up, he picks me up and carefully sets me on his lap so my back is against his chest. Then he grabs the plate and cuts into the fluffy pastry with the fork.

I swallow hard as I feel *all* of him behind me... and I mean *all of him*. It’s like he’s planning on torturing me, but it’s a good kind of torture. It’d be a better kind of torture if I wasn’t currently on bedrest.

He aims the fork up for my mouth.

“Oh. I meant I saved it for you,” I tell him.

“Yeah? Well, there’s plenty here to share,” he says, even though I’m confident he could eat ten of these and still have room for a six-course

meal.

I take the bite off the fork. “Hmm. That’s good.”

“Yeah?” He takes a bite of it before setting the fork down. “It does taste pretty sweet.” Then he presses his lips against my neck. “But maybe it’s not the only thing I’d like to taste.”

“Oh fuck,” I mutter.

“So you better start sleeping so you can heal faster,” he says as he aims another bite toward my lips. I’m so caught off guard I don’t even remember how to open my mouth.

I glance back at him. “I think I can do that... if you’re sleeping next to me.”

Dandelion nips my neck before I turn my head enough to kiss him. I can’t twist much or else it’ll hurt, but he leans forward enough to meet my lips. I’m immediately transfixed by the way his lips move against mine, the way his tongue brushes against my lips before they part for him. And I want more. I’m greedy, but it ends all too soon.

When he pulls back, he eyes me for a moment. “I assumed as much,” he says before he tries feeding me again. I want to kiss him more. I want to touch him and have him touch me, but there’s something so comforting about being tucked in his arms that I don’t even mind just sitting here as he alternates each bite. Just as he’s going to set the fork down, Titus flutters in and lands on it.

“Oh? Good enough to acknowledge me now?” I mutter to the fluff ball.

“*Just to tell ya to piss off, ya daft prick,*” he mutters before fluttering off on his way. “*Now where’s my fae?*”

“I don’t think you own him. I think he owns you,” I shout after him, but he’s already gone. “That little shit. No one believes me, but that thing is

fucking evil.”

“That little cotton ball?”

“Yes, that little cotton ball!”

“Oh, no, I believe you. He looks like an asshole.”

I glance back at you. “You actually believe me?”

“Why wouldn’t I?” he asks as he tries feeding me again.

“You can have the last bite.”

Dandelion won’t hear of it and holds it out until I take it. Then I sink back as he wraps his arms around me.

“You good at reading?” he asks.

“Yeah? You want me to read you a book?”

“Maybe.”

“I can handle that.” I reach over to the book Callisto had gotten me, and as I start from the very first page, I feel myself sinking back into the comfort of the arms wrapped around me. While I’ve often had Silas or others by my side, I’ve always felt just a little alone. But not right now. Right now, I feel like I’ll never have to try to seek attention from anyone again since this is all the attention I need.

“You going to let me ride on you and make Callisto walk from now on?” I ask.

“Nah. Isn’t it sexier to see another man ride me?”

I grin at that. “I might be jealous.”

He laughs. “Being cute won’t get me to ditch my papa. But when he doesn’t need me, you can ride on my back. How about this? I’ll let you ride me a way he will never get to.”

And boy, does that make me regret being wounded. “Oh? Why do you do this to me when I feel like shit?”

“Because you’re fun to pester. But honestly, I owe him my life. The least I can do is carry his scrawny ass around. Doesn’t mean there’s not a spot for you.”

“Fine, fine. And I was joking anyway. I don’t expect you to ditch Callisto. I love seeing how awkward he looks riding on your back. Now where were we?” I ask as I turn back to the book.

“Before you got jealous? I think somewhere around here,” he says as he points.

“I’m not jealous.”

“Uh-huh,” he replies with a grin before kissing my neck, which makes me smile.