

# FANTASY SWAPPED ONLINE OMNIBUS

A SEXY  
BODY SWAP  
LITRPG  
TALE



ALYSON BELLE



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# FANTASY SWAPPED ONLINE

*Omnibus Edition*

by

**Alyson Belle**

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An excerpt from *Fantasy Swapped Online Omnibus*:

I looked down at my new, impossibly hot body: the big breasts, sexy hips, flat tummy... and tiny, weak arms. I imagined the jailer having his way with me, struggling to fight back, but slowly being pushed down and forced to take his big, hairy cock...

Then I blushed. Why did that kind of turn me on? I was straight! But then I bit my lip and stared at my crotch. There was definitely some moisture between my legs right now. It had to be that this body was turned on by the prospect of sex... *Curse this stupid courtesan class. Now Lacey has me lusting over random mobs thanks to this stupid body.* I couldn't believe the devs had bothered to model normal sexual responses for female bodies! But I had to admit it would have bothered me a lot if my Kromgorn avatar couldn't get it up when he saw a hot girl, and having free, uninhibited sex with willing mobs was one of the best things about the game. Why *wouldn't* Lacey have a normal sex response?

I studied the jailer. For a low-level mob, he had a pretty ripped physique. I could see his rippling abs and his huge biceps under a tight leather vest. *He isn't really a person*, I reminded myself. *He's just bits and bytes. And he's totally under my control.* I glanced around again, chewing my lip. It was just me and the Harem Jailer left in the empty cells. But there was no way I should even be considering what I was considering. Jazzus's words from earlier ran through my head again: *In what universe is a girl seducing dudes gay in the slightest?* And I was a girl, at least for the time being.

This body had needs just like mine did, and I could tell they were intensifying. The close proximity and close attention to the male body beside me was making me squirm quite a bit. I bit my lip harder as I pictured sliding his straight, hard cock inside of Lacey's tight little pussy. If I had still been Kromgorn, I would have paid good money to watch that. And as Lacey, not only would I get a front-row seat—I'd get to *feel* it happening. I'd be lying to myself if I said I wasn't curious. *Plus*, I reminded myself. *You could be stuck in this body for a really long time. Are you really going to give up orgasms just because you're a girl?*

That clinched it. I hadn't gone more than 6 hours without some kind of sexual release since I was 12. I *had* to know what this would be like. He was just a computer program, and no one ever had to know.

I grabbed the jailer by his stupid leather vest and turned him to face me.

By instinct, I took a breath and pushed my pert breasts up higher toward his face, even though I knew he wouldn't refuse me—no straight, hot-blooded guy would refuse this body. The avatar I was riding was the walking incarnation of every horny guy's fantasy.

“Mistress?” he asked, looking confused.

“Here's how we're gonna kill the time,” I explained. “You're gonna fuck me. Uh, after a good amount of foreplay to warm me up.” I remembered that that was a thing chicks complained about, and I wanted this to be good. “You need to try harder than you've ever tried before. This is my first time, okay? I want it to be amazing.”

A dreamy smile flitted across his face. “Your wish is my command, mistress.”

# **Fantasy Swap Online**

# Chapter 1

I sauntered into the tavern and plunked a fat bag of gold down on the innkeeper's bar. "Your finest cut of meat and a tankard of ale," I demanded.

Kirth, the innkeeper, eyed me sternly, and we glared at one another for a long moment before breaking into familiar grins and laughing at one another. "It's good to see you again, Kromgorn," he said, waving to his help to retrieve the food and drink I'd asked for. He nodded to my bag. "It looks like your adventuring has gone well today, old friend."

I nodded at the NPC, impressed as usual at how well the AI simulated conversation and even remembered my character from the last time we'd spoken.

"I've been busy in the **Swamps of No Hope**," I replied. "Those Gurlocs are nasty, the way they come in packs, but the treasure troves they hide under the water are worth the effort." I patted the hilt of the two-handed **Lv. 47 Shining Sword of Evil Slaying** that hung over my shoulder and across my muscled back in a leather harness. It was a purple epic-quality item, ultra-rare, that I'd acquired as a lucky drop on my last dungeon run with my friends Haxor and Jazzus. That meant it was at *least* as good as a regular magic item 10 levels higher, and as a level 48 Barbarian I didn't expect to get anything better for quite a while. Without such a great weapon, I doubt I could have faced down the monsters in the 50+ Swamps of No Hope zone unless I had a healer. It was nice to be able to solo like that when my friends weren't online — it wasn't a luxury I usually had as a tanky DPS class.

Kirth nodded back, polishing a cup that never *quite* seemed to be clean enough to set back on the shelf behind him. It seemed like every innkeeper NPC had one of those. "That's dangerous, Kromgorn, even with your weapons, but I'm impressed you did so well. Gods know I wouldn't be want to risk my life in such a dreary place. Well, in any case, your food should be right up." He shook his head and turned to another PC who had come up to the bar, a level 32 Halfling Rogue, and began to make similar small talk.

I swiveled on my bar stool and surveyed the inn as I waited for the food I'd ordered, taking in the sights and sounds of Kirth's establishment here in the city of Minsc, capital of the kingdom of Lorengarde. The tavern was filled with a mix of PCs and NPCs, but fewer real players than there might be at otherwise peak hours. In the real world it was 2AM and most people were

asleep, but here in the online massively-multiplayer full-immersion virtual reality game Fantasy Realms Online, there were still some die-hard players like me online eking out a last few adventures before bed alongside the day shift workers and the small number of Europeans that played on the U.S. servers.

Even after the months I'd spent playing the game and leveling my fierce Half-Giant Barbarian powerhouse, I was still amazed by how realistic the game was. If I didn't have my in-game HUD turned on, displaying hovering names and levels for all of the locals around me, I'm not sure I would have been able to tell the player controlled PCs apart from the computer AI-controlled NPCs. The full-immersion virtual reality was incredible, and thanks to the recent advanced with brain-integration technology that no one but a few MIT eggheads understood, they could basically simulate every sensation from the satisfying gurgly crush that a Gurloc made as you clobbered it's head with a mace to the mouth-wateringly delicious taste of a slice of prime roast rib.

"Order up!" a busty bar maid declared, setting just such a cut of meat in front of me and sliding my requested tankard across the bar, ale sloshing around inside. She winked at me and flounced back into the kitchen, attractive hips swaying enticingly.

*Food and drink aren't the only sensations worth simulating, though,* I reflected as I watched her go. I tore into my meat, enjoying the savory expertly-spiced flavor, and washed it down with a long pull of stout, frothy ale. As I chewed, I turned my attention to the other attractive sight nearby: the bouncing breasts of the NPC tavern whore being dandled on the knee of a wizard sitting at the fireplace. He was only level 5, but then, some players preferred to just enjoy the novel experiences of a fantasy world rather than also going adventuring to level up like I did.

Sex and food were every bit as good in the virtual world with the direct-brain interface as they were in the real world, and I couldn't fault someone who wanted to spend time experiencing those things when they weren't practicing magic or swordplay. Besides, spending time with NPC prostitutes wasn't nearly as weird as the players who purposefully specialized in leveling up their sex and charm skills just to end up as a high level whore. The game used the slightly softer class name "Courtesan" in an effort to be more politically correct, but we all knew that that was just a fancy word for "whore." I didn't understand players who picked that class at all.

Regardless, that was the *least* of the game's problems when it came to public opinion. There was already a moral panic and public outcry against this new form of entertainment, with people claiming—as they always had with everything from books to videogames—that it was *too* stimulating. *Too* exciting. People were getting *too* addicted and neglecting their families, pearl-clutching mothers declared in widely-shared social media articles. With my 60+ hours per week spent in-game leveling Kromgorn, I'd probably fall right into their description as one of the “poor souls” in need of saving from myself.

But that was stupid. I wasn't hurting anyone, and it's not like I had anything better to do: I had a dead-end job I put just enough hours into to let me keep playing the game, an aging mother I lived with who mostly ignored me, and no RL friends or girlfriend I liked well enough to bother caring about. Nope. My life was online, my friends were here, and that was how I wanted it. I cut off another slice of my delicious roast beef and slid it into my mouth, chewing happily. I certainly couldn't afford to live this lavishly in the real world. Fantasy Realms Online was a dream come true to me. *Putting in just 60 hours per week? Hah! I wish I could spend all my time here.* It was a sentiment lots of players shared, and I knew more than a few players had started doing research on how to make that possible without your body dying in the real world from lack of nutrition.

I was just finishing the last bits of my meal when my eyes were drawn to a tiny mail symbol that began blinking at me in the corner of my HUD. I tapped it, curious who'd be pinging me at this hour. It was my friend Jazzus, a level 42 High-Elf Wizard.

“Kromgorn!” her message read. “I'm so glad you're online. I need you to get over the **Burning Fields** right away. Vierdimin is planning something big, and I'm not sure what it is. We should investigate.”

I frowned. Jazzus was usually pretty cool and collected—she played the part of the calm high elven wizard quite well—but this message sounded unusually urgent to me. Vierdimin was the head of a rival guild of players called “The Secret Order,” which was a dumb name if you asked me. They clashed constantly with our own guild, “Shining Army,” over in-game land and resources. Our guild had 30 or 40 players in it, about as many as theirs did, and one of us was always assigned to snoop on them to make sure they weren't encroaching on our territory. Their leader Vierdimin was an 80th-level Lich, the class you got when you maxed your level in both Wizardry

and Necromancy. The guy was a legend. He'd been one of the first players on the server, the first one to discover that secret classes existed if you maxed out the right skills, and the only player to successfully unlock the Lich class so far (and wield the powerful spells that came with it). He was one of the guys who people said were trying to do research on how to live your whole life in game.

If Vierdimin was personally up to something, Jazzus really would need my help. Neither of us were powerful enough to take on Vierdimin in a head-to-head fight, not that I would mind trying, but we stood a better chance if we were together. Higher levels made you more powerful—not invincible. I sent her a quick reply that I was on my way and reached for my bag of gold, but was surprised to see that it was gone.

*What the hell?* I quickly scanned the bar and noticed that the Halfling Rogue was gone too. “Gods damn it,” I swore. What had his name been? I quickly scrolled through my chat history log and found it: **Erlix, Lv. 32 Halfling Rogue**

I hissed through my teeth. That gold had taken me hours of digging through Gurloc muck to collect. I didn't mind battling NPCs or having *them* try to rob me, but players who would be so careless as to try random acts of PvP robbing or attacking infuriated me. That was how you started guild wars. Erlix seemed to be unguilded, so he was probably just a random troll, stirring up trouble. There were always players like that in these games, and they never ceased to be annoying.

Another message came through from Jazzus, blinking urgently: “Kromgorn? Are you on your way? Hurry!”

I set my jaw and forced myself to calm down. I could deal with Erlix later. For now, Jazzus needed me. I'd have to get to her soon in case we'd miss our window to see what Vierdimin was doing.

I dashed across town with a hasty wave to Kirth and headed for the Minsc bank. It only took a moment to refill my gold reserves, although my bank balance was growing lower than I would have liked due to expensive armor repairs. I scratched my chin and surveyed the other items stashed away in my vault, wondering if any of them would be useful in a fight with Vierdimin and his guildies. I had collected quite the array of potions, magical devices, weapons, and baubles in my nearly 50 levels of adventuring, but I didn't have time now to refresh myself on what they all did. Instead, I grabbed a few health potions and a **Lv. 20 Cloak of Invisibility** that a

guildmate had made for me. It wouldn't help much against an 80th-level Lich, but my stealth skill sucked, and we might need to do some sneaking.

A few moments later, I was soaring through the air on a wyvern, flying over the zones that made up the Southern Kingdom of Lorengarde. The wyvern was on a direct flight-path I'd paid the travel master handsomely for, and I clung to its back and enjoyed the wind whipping through my hair as I sped over fields and forests of zones I hadn't visited in 30 levels, populated with mobs too low-level for me to care about. The flying in this game was almost as good as the food, and I couldn't wait until I hit level 60 and could purchase a flying mount of my own. The pre-programmed routes were exciting enough, but a flying mount that could go anywhere opened up a whole new set of zones for me: the **Sky Islands**, the **Eternal Deep**, and the **Lost Continent** were just three of the places I'd heard higher-level players talk about that I couldn't wait to explore.

In fact, it was pretty weird that Vierdimin was bothering with the **Burning Fields** at all. It was a desolate wasteland of ash and fire on the northern edge of Lorengarde, unremarkable except for a low-traffic level 40ish dungeon full of Death Cult Orcs. Players avoided the Death Cult because they hit unusually hard for their level and were highly fire-resistant, which was the most popular class of spell damage for leveling wizards. By the time you could easily fight the orcs, the loot they dropped wasn't really worth it. What business would an 80th-level Lich have in a level 40 zone? Vierdimin usually had way more important things to do than power-level his guild.

My wyvern touched down at the southeast edge of the zone, and **Burning Fields - Level 40** flashed across my HUD in big red lettering before fading. I hopped off and the wyvern screeched and shook itself out before trotting beside the stablemaster and fading away. Immediately, a party invitation flashed into my field of view from Jazzus. I accepted and could now see her marker in the distance, not far from the imposing, black tower of the Death Cult Orcs in the middle of the zone. I scratched my head. Was Vierdimin just clearing out a low level dungeon for fun? Or maybe he was recruiting the orcs to help him in his war against our guild... that was one of the cool things about highly-intelligent AI NPCs. You could form alliances, hire them, talk them into helping you, and sometimes even be persuaded into helping them.

I reached up to loosen my sword in its scabbard and began to lope

across the burning, ashy fields toward Jazzus.

## Chapter 2

Jazzus was lying flat on a hill overlooking the Death Cult Tower, her eyes glowing blue with an enhanced vision spell. I squinted at the tower too as I lay beside her, but seeing anything useful was fruitless without magic. Orcs milled around the bottom and came in and out of huge black gated entrance, but we knew there would be orcs already.

“What do you see? What is Vierdimin doing?” I prodded her. I needed information, and I was getting itchy that I hadn’t gotten to kill anything yet.

“He’s at the top of the tower,” Jazzus said carefully. “In the Orc King’s room. I can see his magical signature but can’t tell what he’s doing. I got a tip that he might be trying to pull something big tonight, and we need to figure out what it is.”

“Can he really get anything useful from a level 40 dungeon?” I asked. “It seems like he could just clear the whole place with a summoned Necro-Dragon or something.”

Jazzus shook her head. “I don’t think he’s trying to *get* anything. He’s trying to *do* something. Think, Kromgorn. What’s special about this zone?”

“Nothing,” I replied, ticking mentally through the same observations I’d made earlier. “Other than the fact that it’s right in the middle of all four kingdoms, I don’t see...” I trailed off, realization dawning. “Oh.”

Jazzus nodded, and I kicked myself for not seeing it sooner. The Burning Fields were a crossroads of sorts between the four major factions of Fantasy Realms online: The Humans of Lorengarde in the South, The Dark Legion to the North, the Elven Highlands in the West, and the Wild Fey Dominion to the East. There were far more kingdoms and lands to explore, of course, but those were the four starting areas for new players and the four largest factions tied to the central landmass of the main continent.

If Vierdimin had some dark magic planned that was supposed to give him a game-wide advantage over his enemies, he’d need to launch it from the most-centralized region in the land—and that happened to be right here, in the Burning Fields, at the top of the Death Cult Tower.

“We need to stop him, whatever he’s doing,” I said. “If he gets a serious advantage, we’ll be really hosed. His guild already has a slight level edge on us.”

“We’re going to have to go in there to do that,” Jazzus said, eyeing the

orcs warily. She nervously twirled her staff in her left hand, blue robes dulled only slightly by the ash that kicked up all around us. “I wish Haxor or Topper were online.”

“Me too.” I drew my sword and plunged it tip-first into the dirt, leaning on the haft as I tried to figure out what the best way to get in there would be. Haxor and Topper were our two highest level players in the guild: Topper, a level 75 Paladin, and Haxor, a level 68 Spellblade, both would have come in really handy for an assault against Vierdimin. I was tanky for a Barbarian, but really Jazzus and I were both DPS classes. Without a healer, more DPS, or a proper tank, we wouldn’t be able to take on an extended dungeon crawl against the orcs. “Is anyone else online?”

“It’s too late at night for most of our guild.” Jazzus shook her head. She knew as well as I did that a frontal assault wouldn’t work. She whispered some words and made a few gestures in the air before fading from sight with an invisibility spell. I could still see a faint, ghostly outline of her body since we were grouped together, but to everyone else she’d look like empty air. “We’ll need to sneak in. How’s your stealth skill?”

“Atrocious. But that’s why I brought this.” I pulled the **Lv. 20 Invisibility Cloak** out of my bag and draped it around my body, noting that it filled my shoulder slot on the character sheet that flashed briefly on the side of my HUD. I’d need to get a real shoulder slot eventually, but it was mostly a vanity slot until level 60 or so—useful to look cool and use limited-charge trinkets like my cloak. I activated the cloak and watched my hands fade to the same translucent quality that Jazzus had.

“Level 20?” she asked, rolling her eyes. “That’s not going to last long here.”

“They’re expensive, okay? It’ll last long enough to get in and check things out. You might not think we can fight our way in, but I feel confident I can fight my way out with this epic sword.” I patted the hilt again, beaming at her.

“You put too much faith in your items,” she grumbled, but then she sighed. “Fine. Let’s go. Just be careful, okay? Vierdimin is tricky.”

Slipping past the orcs at the gate turned out to be trivially easy since the casters that could sometimes see through invisibility had gotten lazy about keeping the spell up. *Even that was a realistic twist the game designers included*, I noted. *If they don’t have PCs showing up to kill them all the time, they get soft and lazy.* I might have to come back and try my blade on a few

of them later before I completely out-leveled the zone. Fire resistance wouldn't bother a Barbarian with a level-60 quality sword. But Jazzus was also right that it wouldn't make sense to go charging in whether we could kill them or not. Alerting Vierdimin to our presence would be very, very bad. The only way we could hope to stop him would be if we could surprise him.

I hadn't run this dungeon before, but Jazzus seemed to know the way, and I followed her through a series of twisting passages and staircases, dodging orc warriors and staying out of the field of vision of the wizards and warlocks, just in case they hadn't *all* gotten lazy. As we approached the top of the tower, the smell of sulfur and death intensified. My blade pinged briefly, telling me it was an Aura of Evil—one of the many handy features of the weapon. As good-aligned characters, we'd be fighting at a disadvantage here. Jazzus held a single hand up to me, halting, as we approached a giant set of double doors that must have led to the orc king's chamber, and nodded to a winding side passage I hadn't even noticed. It went further up the tower. We advanced that way, ignoring the direct route, and soon emerged along a balcony that encircled the hall where the orc king's throne sat. Jazzus motioned me forward and we crouched at the balcony's edge to survey the room.

Below us, the orc king himself sat on his throne. Floating text above him read **Death Cult Orc King, Lv. 50**, so he was obviously still alive. But rather than haughty and proud, as I would have expected, he seemed tense and still—almost lifeless. Then I noticed the corpses littered around the room: dozens and dozens of the death cult's royal guard, slaughtered by dark magics. The telltale oily shimmer of necromantic sorcery still coated their lifeless bodies. It didn't even look like they'd been looted, and I fought the urge to hop down and rifle through their pockets. My eyes lingered, though. What loot might they have on them? You never knew where an epic item might drop.

Jazzus pointed at the orc king and whispered, "**Hold Monster**. It's a very high level spell. Vierdimin has him paralyzed."

"Where *is* Vierdimin?" I whispered back. "Shouldn't he be here?"

Jazzus nodded down to the floor below us, and I craned my neck over the balcony as far as I dared to look. We were invisible, but taking chances was stupid. Vierdimin wouldn't be as lazy as the NPC orcs.

The Lich himself was on his hands and knees in front of the great double doors, scratching arcane symbols onto the floor with a piece of chalk.

**Vierdimin, Lv. 80 Human Lich** floated over him, and he kept pausing to look at an open tome beside him before returning to his work. I shuddered slightly. He was one of a handful of players who had reached level 80 in the game, and it was rare enough to see it that it made me nervous. That was silly, of course—killing me would only send me back to my bind point in Lorengarde, and I could always log out—but he could still make things very unpleasant for us and take all of the gear off of our bodies if he killed us.

Suddenly bringing my treasured sword along on our little raid didn't seem like such a great idea. Yeah, it was a great weapon... but what if I lost it? My stomach sank. I'd have to be very careful. If I only—

"Hey!" I hissed at Jazzus. "What are you doing?" She was creeping forward along the slanted balcony, drawing closer to Vierdimin.

"I think I can get a clear shot at him," she replied. "Maybe not take him out, but stun him long enough to grab that book and run."

"Are you crazy? What if he resists your spell?"

She shrugged. "Then you grab the book while I distract him."

I hesitated, but then nodded. It was as good a plan as any. Vierdimin was strong, but not strong enough to waltz into the middle of Lorengarde as a member of the Dark Legion, and I could probably get to the flightmaster before he'd finished off Jazzus. I'd known this mission was going to be dangerous, and epic sword or no epic sword, our guild would be screwed if Vierdimin could pull off a game-wide curse of some kind. Snagging the book might slow him down, or at least give us an idea of what he had done so we could undo it.

I raised my blade and laid a hand on the railing, preparing to leap down and grab the book as soon as Jazzus tried her stun spell. Jazzus edged closer.

She stumbled as ear-shattering sirens sounded all around us. I dropped to my knees, covering my ears with my hands and trying to drown out the sonic disturbance.

"Motherfucker," Jazzus mouthed, though the sound didn't pierce the klaxon of the alarms.

"It's a sonic alarm!" I tried to shout back, but I couldn't even hear my own voice. We should have known better than to try to sneak up on a high-level magic user. He'd obviously set up a proximity alarm that triggered for visible and invisible foes alike. Now that we'd been affected by it, both of our invisibility buffs had dropped. The flashing red crossed swords in the upper left of my hood told me I was stuck in combat now until I disengaged,

which meant running away.

We couldn't afford to run now. Ignoring the screeching pain and the flashing debuff to my combat skills the sound had inflicted upon me, I lurched up and vaulted over the side of the railing, landing in a careful, panther-like crouch, my sword at the ready. Jazzus thumped down beside me, whirling arcane balls of purple energy dancing around her hands as she shook her head to try to clear the ringing that was no doubt affecting her as badly as it was me. The alarms died of, their purpose complete, as we faced down our enemy head to head.

Vierdimin stared before us, smiling evilly in his jet-black robes and fluttering cloak. I couldn't be sure, but the rod on his back looked an awful lot like a **Lv. 80 Staff of Matter Manipulation**, which I'd only seen pictures of on some data mining websites I followed. Somehow he'd gotten ahold of it for real in-game—bad news for our whole guild. In the time we'd taken to recover from his alarm and drop to the floor, he'd already prepared his spells, and I didn't like the look of either ball of energy floating above his hands.

Jazzus struck first, whipping her purple energy balls toward the Lich, but he casually gestured and sent his own, larger sphere of yellow energy back toward her. It passed right through her pitiful projectiles, absorbing them into itself, and smacked into Jazzus's body with a sizzling thump that left her in a crumpled heap. I lifted my sword and charged, howling with rage, and thanks to my avatar's Quick Reflexes trait I managed to dive under the second energy ball Vierdimin chucked toward me.

I rolled and came up swinging, but Vierdimin floated up, levitating out of the way of my broad stroke as he stifled a yawn. He lifted a finger, looking almost bored, and a purple electrical bolt shot out and covered me in twisting, twitching purple lines. My body began to convulse uncontrollably, and my sword clattered to the floor. I watched my health flash lower and lower in my HUD while Vierdimin drained me. There really wasn't too much real pain you could feel in game—any more than a minor discomfort would make playing unbearable—but I was covered in minor discomfort and powerless to stop him.

I blacked out just shy of death, falling to the ground beside my prized sword, and inwardly cursed myself for ever thinking it would be a good idea for us to battle an 80th-level Lich by ourselves.

## Chapter 3

I poked at the glowing blue lines of the energy cage that Jazzus and I had woken up in. The bars crackled: *Zzzzaap!* “Owww,” I muttered, shaking my hand to cool off my electrified fingers.

“Don’t bother,” Jazzus said gloomily. She sat beside me, her arms wrapped around her knees and her forehead on her forearms. “It won’t drain your HP enough to kill you, but it won’t be comfortable. Energy cages are a mid-level spell, but they stay effective at all levels. We won’t have much luck getting out of these until someone comes to rescue us or Vierdimin lets us go.”

I snorted. Fat chance of that. He’d left us in the back corner of the chamber and gone back to his book and his runes, not even bothering to talk to us. But of course that’s how he operated. You didn’t get to be a level 80 guild leader and Lich by being stupid, and Vierdimin wouldn’t spill his master plan just to brag to us.

“We have to get our hands on that book,” I muttered. “Did you try logging out and calling anyone IRL?”

Jazzus nodded. “They’re all sleeping, or at least they’re not answering phone calls or texts. I figure I’m doing more good here in game, looking for an opening, than just logging out for the night. By morning it might be too late.”

I frowned, studying my surroundings. All of our gear lay piled in the other corner, and my sword jutted out of the heap, teasing me enticingly. It might as well have been all the way in the western Feywilds, for all the good it was doing me now. Vierdimin had taken our possessions and shown his cleverness again by not killing us outright. If he’d killed us, we would have just respawned at our bind point in Lorengarde, and we could have tried again or gathered some support from one of the other guilds. By keeping us alive and trapped here, he’d ensured he’d have time to finish whatever evil sorcery he was doing.

“You said these cages are a mid-level spell. Can’t you dispel them or something?”

She shook her head. “Not from inside. They don’t work like that. Maybe if I had an Arcane Disruptor or something, but I’m helpless without that.”

I sighed. We didn't have one of those anyway. This was literally the only scenario where it would have been useful, and even if we *had* brought one it would be lying over there in the pile with the rest of our goods.

I felt pretty stupid. We should have known Vierdimin would have alarms set. It was a rookie mistake. Also, if I had had a few minutes to review my bank items, I might have been able to fish out some combination of traps and magical devices to create a diversion that *would* have actually distracted the Lich. I wished Jazzus hadn't hurried me so much, but there was no point in pointing fingers now. She'd been right about the urgency, and she couldn't have known ahead of time what we might need, anyway.

I tapped my finger on my nose thoughtfully. If only we had someone else that could smuggle us a few bank items. Someone who could come prepared, knowing what cloaking items they'd need.

"Jazzus," I said slowly. "Do you still have Lacey's account info?"

Lacey was Haxor's long-term, super-rich girlfriend. He'd tried to get her into Fantasy Realms Online for a while, but she was one of those girls who didn't have any interest in role playing games. She'd made a low level terribly built character that we all privately made fun of, wandered around in-game a little bit, and then quit, never to return. But apparently she was so loaded with cash IRL that she hadn't bothered to turn off her expensive subscription to the game. I wondered what it would be like to have that much money—I could barely afford the one subscription with a full time job. Having a spare account was a luxury that was too good to pass up, so we still used her character as a shared bank alt, though we didn't put anything *too* valuable on her just in case they ever broke up. Usually Jazzus controlled her when we needed something.

She nodded now. "Yeah, but I don't see how that helps us here. What is a level 3 Courtesan going to do for us other than just get fucked by the Lich over there?"

Jazzus was exaggerating, but I still winced. "I can't believe she actually took Courtesan as her class. What a ho. But I was thinking that we might have sent her enough potions and gadgets that she could sneak her way in here. I recall sending her an Arcane Disruptor at one point."

"You're right!" Jazzus's eyes widened. "Nice, Kromgorn. That just might work. Uh... we're going to need to move fast, though. As soon as she enters the room she's in major danger, and any stealth skills or spells she has will drop when she tries to pass anything into the cages."

“So?” I asked. “If she brings the right items, we can escape the cages and get out right away, and this time we’ll catch Vierdimin by surprise.”

“No, I agree,” Jazzus said, her voice sounding amused. “It’s just... Kromgorn, what’s your Magical Devices skill at?”

I double checked my stat sheet in my HUD. It was a measly Lv. 15. Honestly, even using the invisibility cloak had been a stretch for me. My face fell, and I grumbled the answer to her question.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought. There’s no way you can use the Arcane Disruptor, Krom. You’d fail the skill check, blow the whole plan, and we’d be right back where we started. We also don’t have time for login and logout hijinks where you hold the items until I can get back. Way too risky.”

“Jazzus...” I warned, not liking where this was going, but then she said it anyway.

“You need to take the login info and bring me the items, dude. It’s the only way to make this work.”

I blew my cheeks out in an angry huff. Jazzus knew exactly what I thought of men who played female characters in these games and vice versa—it was weird and uncomfortable for everyone involved. I could kind of see why it might be fun to try it out and go have sex once or twice, but getting account locked into that gender would suck balls, which is how they stopped most people from doing it. Because of how realistic the in-game simulation of body sensations were, lots of people had a lot of serious concerns about men playing women and vice versa. It was strongly discouraged by the company who made Fantasy Realms Online, as they were already fighting enough moral battles without adding this on top of it. To try the other gender as an avatar, you basically had to either fake your gender during account creation or borrow someone else’s account, and both were usually wildly impractical.

Wildly impractical *unless* you just happened to have a rich friend who didn’t care what you used her account for.

“No,” I replied. “No way. I am not going to log into a weird girl body and have everyone laugh and stare at my stupid Courtesan ass while I haul potions across Lorengarde for you. Forget it.”

Jazzus’s expression darkened. “You know, Krom, I don’t like logging into Lacey either. I’m pretty proud of my badass wizard here, and it’s embarrassing for me to run around in skimpy, low-level Courtesan gear with everyone thinking I’m just some stupid bimbo who doesn’t know anything

about the game. I do *plenty* of potion hauling for you and Haxor in that stupid avatar, and I just deal with having people stare at me and laugh at me.”

I weathered her long-winded diatribe and then gave the obvious reply. “Yeah, but you’re a girl IRL. So no big deal right? You’re used to it.”

*Uh-oh*, I thought. *Wrong answer*. Jazzus had fixed me with a truly withering glare, and it made me want to sink into my boots.

“Regardless,” she said, biting off each symbol individually with her sharpest tone. “It doesn’t change anything about our situation here. This is our only shot to stop Vierdimin, so I think you should get over yourself and do it for the good of the guild.”

I winced again. That hit close to home. My Fantasy Realms Online guild was the only group of friends I had, and if whatever Vierdimin was doing was really that bad, I’d hate myself for not doing everything in my power to stop him... no matter how distasteful it was. I had to stick up for my friends. They were counting on me. More importantly, Jazzus would tell them all about my betrayal if I didn’t.

“Fine,” I said through gritted teeth. “But you owe me, okay?”

Instantly Jazzus’s usual cool, collected demeanor returned. “Of course.”

A message popped up at the bottom of my HUD: Lacey’s login credentials. I memorized them with a sigh.

“Anything else you want me to grab out of the bank while I’m in Lorengarde?”

Jazzus ticked the items off on her fingers. “You’ll need an all-level stealth cloak and a few potions of invisibility as backup, some explosive firetraps you can set for a diversion, and the Arcane Disruptor, of course. I’m pretty sure I dumped all of these items on her last time I played her. The character is too low-level for her basic Courtesan skills to be useful here, but grab the Potion of Temporary Level Boost she has in her bank. It’s soulbound, so you can’t lose it when you die, and it’s a one-shot rare item that kicks you up 40 levels or so for a brief period of time and buffs all your skills. You might be able to use her Seduction skill to distract an orc in a pinch or something.

I blushed right red and hastily protested, “I’m not using Lacey’s *Seduction* skills on anyone. Jesus, Jazzus. Do you think I’m gay or something?”

“Relax, Krom,” she said, rolling her eyes at me. “For one thing, I don’t care if you’re gay or straight. No one does. It’s 2017. And for another, it’s

just a game. Besides, you'll be playing a girl. In what universe is a girl seducing dudes gay in the slightest?"

She made some good points, but I still didn't think I'd be seducing anyone as Lacey the Courtesan. That would be way too weird for me.

"Fine," I replied. "Anything else?"

"Nope!" Jazzus said brightly. "Hurry up! We don't have all night, and you only have one shot here." She winked at me. "And don't forget to have fun, sweet cheeks."

"Not funny," I grumbled, the scene fading away as I logged out.

## Chapter 4

It took about 30 seconds to log out of Kromgorn and another 30 seconds to input Lacey's credentials and log into her avatar. The transition was pretty seamless since I didn't even bother to jack out of my VR rig, but I knew Jazzus was right. The 60 seconds it would have taken her to bounce from Lacey back to her main would have been way too long for me to stand there helplessly in my cage, holding our items and waiting for her to come back. I didn't have to like it, but I knew I was doing the right thing for my guild.

The gray loading screen faded away to reveal the bright, sunny main street of Minsc—I was back in Lorengarde again, standing directly in front of the bank. But everything looked a little weird, and my body suddenly felt a *lot* weird. I peered at the mailbox and the characters around me, trying to figure out why such a familiar scene looked so *off* to me. Then it hit me: Kromgorn was a Half-Giant Barbarian who stood nearly 7 feet tall. But now I was piloting Lacey, a female Human Courtesan. She was only 5'6"—an average human female size—so I'd lost nearly a foot and a half of height. I was used to looking down on people, and now I was straining up for every inch of height and craning my neck to look *up* at most of the other players, who were either men or the taller elvish races.

And that wasn't the only annoying thing about this delicate female body that was a drag. I poked at the huge, ample breasts Haxor's girlfriend had given her character because she'd wanted her to be sexy, and shuddered as I felt them jiggle. I mean, it felt nice to touch them, and any other time I might have snuck off to play with them a little bit, but talk about impractical in a fight! She wouldn't even be able to swing a proper sword arc without her boobs getting in the way. Her hips were also shapely despite how slender she was overall, and her tummy was tight and small, giving her a decent hourglass shape. I shook my head and what a stupid form this was for an online role-playing game and noticed that curly blonde locks waved artfully around my face at about shoulder length.

Even the clothes were ridiculous and impractical: flared pink pants made of a soft, silky material, velvet slippers, and a tube top shirt that somehow still managed to have a v-neck and lift my already large breasts up even higher. There was a delicate chain-link gold choker around my neck, a

silly ornament considering it wasn't even magical, and I was pretty sure this avatar was wearing a thong beneath her pants with the uncomfortable way the fabric was stretching between my ass cheeks. It all felt too tight and constricting against my unusually sensitive skin, and I picked at tubetop and the pants, trying to adjust my underwear to be slightly more comfortable. It didn't help.

Someone snickered nearby, and I glanced up to see **Duderrzz, Lv. 11 Half-Elf Warrior** laughing at me.

"Still getting used to your online body, babe?" he asked, guffawing at me. "I can help you out if you need a, er, hand with those tits..."

I narrowed my eyes at him and grabbed for my sword, but of course my hand just swiped empty air over my shoulder. Lacey the Courtesan didn't *have* a sword. I didn't even know what Courtesans used for weapons in battle. *Fans or some stupid shit like that, maybe?*

I couldn't believe that I was taking flak from a level 11 peon named Duderrzz of all things, and I almost set him straight about who my main was, but I bit my tongue just in time. Kromgorn was well-known on this server. The last thing I needed was for people to think I spent time prancing around as Lacey the Courtesan when I wasn't busy slaying demons in the hinterlands of Lorengarde.

"Shut up, dickface," I growled instead. Or I *tried* to growl it, but instead of the menacing, throaty rumble I was usually able to muster, the words popped out of my mouth in the high-pitched, indignant tone of a tiny, pissed-off chick. Duderrzz just laughed hard at me, and I stomped away from him and into the bank, my cheeks flushing wildly. Running around in this girl's avatar was already sucking, so the sooner I could get it over with, the better. Besides, I didn't have time to trade insults. Jazzus needed me.

Players were giving me guff was bad enough, but I knew the NPCs would also be a hassle. They were coded to respond appropriately to your class, race, and gender. The Fantasy Realms Online devs were mostly dudes, of course, so when I showed up in front of the banker...

"Hey there, hot stuff," he said, raising a bushy eyebrow and ogling my curves. "How can the bank of Minsc help your cute little self today?"

I gritted my teeth and ignored his banter. It would be as pointless as telling Kirth the innkeeper to shove it — it was just in his programming. "Let me see my bank," I ordered, wishing again that Lacey had picked literally any other class for her main character.

He waved a hand toward the vault door with a wink and I felt his eyes on my ass as I hurried through, eager to get away from all the uncomfortable attention. This body was impossible to move around in without swaying my hips, and I had hips that were literally designed to draw people's gaze to them now.

Inside the bank were stacks and stacks of the low-value tradeskill materials that we kept on Lacey and a very small shelf of important items Jazzus had stored here too. I quickly started digging through the piles, looking for the items she'd recommended. I collected the fire traps, the all-level cloak of invisibility—thank goodness she'd stashed that here—some potions of invisibility as backup, and the Arcane Disruptor. It looked like a glowing blue top marked up with mystical purple symbols, and I dumped it into my bag along with all the other items. As I turned to go, an amber-colored potion on the shelf caught my eye: The Potion of Temporary Level Boost Jazzus had mentioned. I chewed my lip, wondering if it was really worth using here. It was a one-shot item that came with the Collector's Edition of the game we'd all purchased, and most of the guild had used ours ages ago. A temporary 40-level boost was a *huge* advantage, and it seemed stupid to waste it on enabling the level 3 Lacey to seduce an orc—not that I would be doing that anyway.

But still, you never knew. Better safe than sorry, and it's not like I could lose it. It was soulbound and would stay in my inventory through death. I pocketed the potion, grabbed a small bag of gold, and raced to the Minsc flightmaster. This time I didn't even bother waiting for the sexy banter. I just threw a coin at him, hopped on a wyvern, and headed for the **Burning Fields** for the second time today.

As I clung to the wyvern, wind whipping my golden curls around my face, I pulled up Lacey's character screen. I had time to kill during the flight, and I was curious just *how* poorly she'd built this character. It was worse than I expected. She hadn't just dumped all her points into Charisma—oh no, nothing so simple as that—she'd *drained* her other stats to boost it even higher. Strength, Constitution, Intelligence, and Wisdom were all at pitiful levels. So not only was this avatar horribly weak and fragile... NPCs and enemy mobs would also treat her like she was dumb as dirt, and she had no spell resists to speak of. The only stats she'd left at a normal level, though still unimpressive, were Dexterity and Agility. I rolled my eyes, wondering if she'd been hoping they would help her perform in the bedroom. Every other

point she had went into Charisma, which was as high as it could go during character creation.

The **Burning Fields** began to roll past at the edges of my character screen, and I closed it with a sigh. At least all the NPCs would instantly like her, which was important since they wouldn't consider her opinion, put any stock in what she said, or respect her fighting prowess *at all*. How annoying. Why would anyone want to play a character like this? Girls like this in real life were bad enough, and I wondered if that's what Haxor's girlfriend was like out of game too.

I slid off the wyvern as I touched down, pulled my invisibility cloak around my shoulders, and raced back to where Jazzus and I had first been surveying the Death Cult Tower. I crouched down, my skin translucent once again with the invisibility spell, and checked out the entrance. This time it would be even more dangerous, because if my spell dropped or if an orc wizard just happened to have See Invisibility up, I'd be helpless. But something was different this time: all the orcs were dead, lying in pools of their own blood on the ground.

My eyes widened in surprise, but I didn't waste the opportunity. Whoever had fought their way in had given me an opening, and I needed to hurry and take it before the orcs respawned. I ran into the tower, following the same path I'd taken earlier. I was still cautious, moving quietly through the halls with my invisibility cloak up, but it was the same story everywhere. Dead orcs on the ground, slaughtered silently. I paused for a moment and strained my ears. No sounds of clashing battle came from anywhere in the tower. The assassin killing these orcs had been quick, efficient, and likely stealthed. Probably a single, high-level player rather than a full party. Did Vierdimin have backup coming to join him?

I'd have to be even more careful. I crept forward, feet padding quietly against the black stone, grateful that my lack of armor and velvet slippers could make up for a nonexistent Sneak skill. By the time I reached the huge, black double doors to the orc king's chamber, I was getting really nervous. I still didn't hear any sounds of fighting, which meant I had to be getting close

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"Eek!" I squeaked as the tip of a dagger appeared at my neck. Someone had materialized behind me, and they slid their left arm around me to pin down my arms and prevent my escape, dagger still poised uncomfortably at my throat. My invisibility spell popped, and I didn't move a muscle.

Apparently the assassin could see through invisibility too. I could *not* afford to get killed and respawn back in Lorengarde right now. I felt totally helpless, and I could feel the heat of the strong, male assassin's body radiating off of him on the bare parts of my skin. My nipples hardened and I cursed how realistically they modeled the natural reactions of the female human body in this game.

But then the figure released me and spun me around. "Yvette?" he asked in a surprised tone of voice. I blinked at the assassin in shock, my mouth dropping open. **Haxor, Lv. 68 Half-Elf Spellblade** stood before me.

I collected myself enough to shake my head at his question. "Who's Yvette?" I asked.

Haxor narrowed his eyes and pointed at me. "My girlfriend. You're wearing her avatar, Lacey. Who are *you*? I already saw that Jazzus is still in game."

I blushed, avoiding looking him directly in the eyes, and kicked at the ground in front of me. "It's, ah... er. I'm... Kromgorn."

He took half a step back and shook his head. "Jesus, really dude? It's weird enough that Jazzus runs around in her avatar, but now you too?"

"Believe me, I didn't want to!" I protested. "I'm only doing this because... look, you know what? It's a long story. I'll explain later. When did you show up?"

"I got Jazzus's text and called Topper until he woke up too. He's on the way, but I don't think he'll get here in time. Vierdimin looks like he's wrapping up with his ritual." He glanced over his shoulder toward the balcony stairwell, clearly nervous about even this small amount of time we were wasting.

"Well, let's go," I said, digging all of the items we'd need out of my bag. "You can give these to Jazz and I'll log back into Krom—"

"No time," Haxor said with a quick shake of his head. "We need to interrupt Vierdimin *now*."

"But Hax, I'm not going to be any help unless—"

"Shh. I don't need you either way. Come on. Stick to your original plan and I'll keep the big V busy." He turned on his heel and raced up the steps, moving silently even in his medium armor with a maxed-out Sneak skill.

I shook with frustration, so mad that I actually stomped my foot on the ground. Haxor wasn't usually so dismissive of my plans, and I'd bet it had to do with how I looked and sounded right now. But there was nothing to do but

continue. Haxor was always overconfident, and he'd need backup to take on the Lich. I tossed down a few fire traps in front of the door in case orcs came or Vierdimin tried to run, and followed him up the steps, Arcane Disruptor clutched tightly in my hand.

## Chapter 5

I took the stairs two at a time, moving as quickly as my short little legs could carry me, but Haxor was faster. By the time I reached the top he was already vaulting over the edge, daggers bared, to confront Vierdimin. I had to move fast too, although as a high-level Spellblade Haxor stood a much better chance of fighting the Lich than Jazz and I had had. Spellblades had all kind of tricks to deal with enemy mages and were often used to take them out in pinpointed strikes during large battles—but then again, twelve levels was still a big difference.

I rolled over the banister and followed Haxor to the ground, landing with a thump beside him. The fall nearly knocked me over since I was still adjusting to this body's proportions, but after a moment of wobbling I managed to keep my balance and not fall flat on my face.

"Go," Haxor hissed, and shoved me into a stumbling sprint toward the energy cages while he squared his stance and fixed a steely gaze on the Lich. Jazz waved eagerly at me, hand outstretched for the Arcane Disruptor.

"Won't you peons leave me in peace?" Vierdimin demanded, standing from his crouch and shaking his head. "Doesn't matter. The ritual is complete. You can't stop it now." He threw his head backwards and cackled evilly, and I wondered if that was something he practiced at home in the mirror.

"Sounds like a bluff," Haxor growled, and leapt toward Vierdimin, daggers flashing.

I slapped the Arcane Disruptor into Jazzus's hand, doing my best to ignore the flashes and bangs from the frenzied magical battle occurring over my shoulder. "There, are you good?"

She nodded, concentrating on the glowing top and running her fingers over the arcane runes. "Thanks. Perfect." She jammed the tip of it directly into the cage bar and grinned as the spell flickered and the bars winked out. Then she grabbed me in a big hug. "Thanks Krom. You're the best. Let's go help Hax."

I grinned and twisted awkwardly, trying to ignore how nice it felt for our breasts to press together when she gathered me up in a hug like that. I'd had the strongest urge to start kissing her, which I chalked up to another annoying side effect of my class and statistics. Jazzus let me go and drew her

staff from our equipment pile, beginning to call upon her arcane energies. My glowing epic sword stuck up from the same pile, calling out to me, but there was no way it'd be any use to me as Lacey. It was too high level for me to even wield it.

"I'm switching back to Kromgorn," I said, running the mental logout command. But then nothing happened. I scrunched my face up, confused, but then I noticed the flashing combat symbol on my HUD. "Damn it, Jazzus! I can't log out. I got tagged in Haxor's combat with Vierdimin. They need to finish first."

"Shit," she swore, tossing me a sideways glance as she finished charging up her staff. "Okay, just uh... stay out of the way and try not to do anything stupid." She sprang over to join the battle with Vierdimin, and there was nothing I could do but go and cower behind the orc king's throne.

I crouched behind the solid gold chair in the middle of the chamber, furious at this stupid avatar for being so useless. I wanted to charge in beside my guildmates, epic sword swinging toward Vierdimin's stupid skull, and what did I have instead?

"Nice tits," a gravelly voice said.

I jumped almost six inches in the air and whirled around to see **Death Cult Orc King, Lv. 50**, towering over me from a foot away. *Vierdimin's hold spell on him must have worn out!*

I tried to scramble back, but he caught my wrist and yanked me closer. A leering grin cracked across his ugly green face, revealing rows of slimy, yellow teeth, and I gagged as his rank breath washed over me. I twisted my wrist, trying to break free, but my avatar was so weak that I didn't even budge his grip.

"What's a cute little Courtesan doing in my lair?" he asked, grabbing my other hand and lifting me up in the air by my arms. He turned me this way and that to inspect my body while I kicked my legs in the air and struggled helplessly, feeling humiliated.

"I'm not a cute little anything," I spat back at him, trying to figure out how I was going to deal with him. "And as soon as I'm back on my regular avatar I'm going to come back here and slay your ass with a single sword slice."

He snorted. "Big words from a little girl. I have just the thing for you." He switched his grip so he was holding both of my hands with one of his huge, meaty paws, and reached into his pocket to retrieve a delicate gold

band. He snapped it snugly around my neck, and the clothes I had been wearing shifted into an even skimpier gold bikini. I blushed an even deeper shade of red than I'd been already, embarrassed to have so much of my body exposed. The Orc King smirked at my obvious discomfort and glanced back toward the fight. "Now, we're getting away from these crazy wizards."

He tossed me over his shoulder, smacked my bottom a few times in a way that made me squeak with rage, and stalked toward the back wall, away from the fight between Vierdimin and my friends. "Help!" I called out as I bounced in place. But my friends were busy with their own problems: Haxor was still holding his own against the Lich, dodging nasty spells and whittling away at his HP, while Jazzus offered support and counterspells, putting pressure on Vierdimin, but the dark wizard was giving as good as he got—maybe better. All three of them had looks of intense concentration fixed on their faces.

I'd heard stories about what the Orc King was doing to me. Some of the named NPCs, rather than killing lower-level female characters, would capture them and keep them locked away in a harem, forced to fuck monsters and wear embarrassing outfits until they could find a way to free themselves or call in their friends as backup. It had seemed like a funny and fitting punishment for silly girls who were bad enough players to let themselves be captured, but I couldn't *believe* that now I, Kromgorn the Barbarian, was about to be kidnapped into the Orc King's harem.

The one silver lining was that at least I'd be able to log out once we got far enough away from Vierdimin that my combat flag could drop. Then I'd be able to log back into Krom and help my friends with the fight. We could rescue Lacey's avatar later.

While the the Orc King futzed with some switches on the wall, I noticed that a glowing black ball of energy had begun to grow in the middle of the chamber, like a miniature version of a spherical lightning cloud. It crackled with purple energy, throwing lightning bolts off at random. *What the hell is that?* I wondered. I'd never seen any spell like it before in the game, and I didn't like how quickly it was growing.

"Jazzus! Look!" I screamed, pointing at it. The ball was expanding at an alarming pace, growing by a few inches every second, and Jazzus and the Orc King both turned to see what I was pointing at together.

"What in the name of the gods is that?" the Orc King demanded.

I might not know, but Vierdimin sure did. He blew Haxor back half a

dozen paces with a well-timed force push spell and also took note of the glowing orb. The Lich raised his staff and chortled, holding it above his head. “Get ready, you saps!” he shouted. “I’d log out now if I were you. I’m about to own this world!”

Haxor snarled and leapt back into the fray, and Jazzus reluctantly followed him, but the Orc King just turned back to the wall, shaking his head. “Meddling humans are always trying to drag us into your territorial disputes. Come pet—you and I are escaping these madmen.” A hidden door slid open and he slipped through, carrying me with him. I wiggled hard and kicked my legs, but it didn’t do any good. I stopped fighting, annoyed that I was giving him the satisfaction of running off with a traditionally flailing damsel.

Besides, I had more important things to worry about: I wasn’t sure what Vierdimin’s expanding dark energy ball was about to do, and I sure didn’t like the sound of his rambling. What did he mean that he was going to ‘own this world’? I reflexively tried to run my logout command again, but my combat tag was still flashing.

A scream ripped through the tower and Jazzus’s name dropped off my list of active players in combat. Hax would be all by himself against the Lich now. I had to do *something*. Desperately, I reached for the only tool I had: The Potion of Temporary Level Boost. But before I could drink it, the Orc King set me down. “Don’t move,” he ordered. “Or I’ll make it worse on you when we get to the harem.” We’d arrived at another huge, black paneled door, and he laid both hands on the handle and pulled as hard as he could.

I wasn’t some cowering girly girl, though. I ignored his command and bolted as soon as he was distracted, darting back down the secret hallway toward the fight as his curses and pounding boots chased after me.

Back in the throne room, Haxor was on one knee, breathing hard, a single glowing blue dagger held up to ward off Vierdimin’s staff which forced him down another inch as I watched. They were locked in some kind of pitched power battle, sparks flying off of them in all directions, and above them the swirling black lightning cloud had grown to fill the entire room.

Vierdimin began to laugh maniacally. “I’ve won! I’ve done the impossible! You’re all mine!” He whipped a twisted finger toward the cloud. I staggered into the room in my skimpy bikini, having no idea what to do except throw myself in his path, but I was too late. A swirling pink beam flew out of his finger and pierced the cloud. The dark mass sizzled with energy and then collapsed in on itself to a tiny black pinprick of light. A second

ticked by while we all stared at it.

Then it exploded outward in a rolling translucent sphere of dark energy, passing through all of us with a cold chill and a sizzle before escaping the walls of the tower and presumably continuing to expand throughout all of the kingdoms of Fantasy Realms Online.

Besides the chill, nothing else happened. I shivered, feeling strange, and checked my HUD. There were no obvious debuffs or afflictions on my character from his spell, and it hadn't done anything to my HP. *What the hell was the point then?* But I definitely felt weird. Almost like something was missing—something I couldn't put my finger on.

Vierdimin stomped on Haxor's shoulder, driving him all the way to the ground. Hax groaned in pain while Vierdimin lifted his enchanted staff over his head and shook it, crooning, "I did it! I actually did it! They said it was impossible, but I am Vierdimin! The Lich, and the master of this world! Muahahaha!"

Callused hands snapped around my shoulders, catching me by surprise. "Got you!" the Orc King cried, dragging me back into the hallway. Again I began to kick and struggle, and again it was useless. I went back over his shoulder like a human treasure sack and we passed through the second door which now stood open. My weird sense of something being wrong about my body had grown moment by moment, and I was starting to feel pretty woozy. It was like the time I'd gotten heat stroke, when I was all dehydrated and the world had started getting dark and fuzzy.

"What's going on with me?" I muttered, my words sounding drawn out and sluggish to my ears. My limbs flopped uselessly up and down, almost like I couldn't control them correctly, and I tried to run the logout command again. But nothing happened.

My vision went dark, and my hearing began to fade, my body feeling more and more strange. It was weird that I hadn't been able to log out.

As I slipped away into unconsciousness, rolling around on the shoulder of my captor, I shook my head at the wrongness of it all—I could swear that my combat indicator had dropped away already.

## Chapter 6

I awoke on a pallet in a grimy cell, still wearing the stupid gold bikini that the Orc King had forced me into. Immediately I tried my logout command again. No good. It was like it just didn't respond to my command.

*Am I bugged or something?* I hadn't ever heard of someone's logout command failing, but these games were complicated. It's not like I was that worried though — my mom would unplug me in time for work if I hadn't figured out how to get out by then. Until then, I'd just need to deal with being stuck in this dumb girl body.

I sat up, blinking at my dreary dungeon surroundings, and pulled up my in-depth character menu to try to figure out what the hell was going on.

**Lacey, Lv. 3 Human Courtesan**, it read. I scanned down the page, my eyes flicking over my dreadful stats once again, and checked my active effects. But it was just like I'd thought I'd seen earlier: No negative status effects, no spells on me. As a level 3 character (and not even a caster class), Lacey only had a few skills at her disposal: **Charm**, **Hide**, and **Seduce**. She also had the Courtesan starter traits: **Sex Appeal** and **Unintimidating**. I'd never bothered to read up on the class, since I thought it was stupid, but I knew that the first trait would make most NPCs sexually attracted to me and the second would discourage them from attacking me unless I was a direct threat, preferring to ignore or capture me instead. I rolled my eyes. Only a girl would pick a class that was literally designed to avoid combat.

Then I noticed the date and almost choked. *That can't be right. That can't possibly be right.*

The date on my HUD claimed that three days had passed since our encounter with Vierdimin. But that was obviously impossible... for one thing, there was no way I could go that long without pausing the game to get food or water. For another, that would mean that I had missed two days of work. How would my mother *not* have stormed into my room, screamed at me, and unplugged the machine yet? It didn't make any sense.

A flashing indicator in the corner of my screen caught my eye, and I finally noticed that I had a few mail messages waiting for me. I opened the first, wondering what the hell was going on. It was from Jazzus, allegedly almost two days ago, and it read:

*Krom: I hope you get this soon, because we need to talk. Were you still*

*in Lacey's avatar when the blast went off? We have no idea where you are. I sure hope you weren't... but if you're reading this, I have some bad news for you. Vierdimin was planning something huge, and he actually pulled it off. You know how people are always jabbering about how they want to live in the game full time? Well, Vierdimin made it happen—some weird combination of hacking and dark magic. He managed to sever our avatars from our physical bodies and trapped us here. Everyone is talking about it. I need to find out more, but I'll write you again soon. Get to a mailbox ASAP and let me know you're okay. —Jazzus*

My mouth hung open and a cold sweat had broken out all over my body. What the hell was Jazzus babbling about? That didn't make any sense. Our avatars didn't exist without our bodies to pilot them. How could I be here without my brain jacked in to the game? I quickly opened the second message. It was also from Jazzus, only a day later:

*Kromgorn? Write me back, buddy. We're really, really worried about you. Reports from outside the game are bleak. Players are logging in to tell us that everyone who was in-game when Vierdimin's bomb went off are not only stuck in their avatars, but their bodies are in a coma in the real world. I checked the world logs and I can see that Kromgorn is offline, but Lacey is still logged in... Listen, dude, I am so, so sorry that I got you stuck in that avatar. I know I was the one who asked you to use it, and I feel miserable. But please tell me you're not trapped in a harem somewhere or something. If I had time, I'd come look for you, but Vierdimin is already moving against us, and since we're all stuck in this game until someone figures out how to undo what he did, the stakes just got a lot higher. We need to fight him. —Jazz*

This was a lot for me to take in all at once. My head was spinning, and I didn't even want to begin to process the implications. Instead I opened my next message. This one was from my guild leader, Topper:

*ALL GUILDIES: I'm declaring a state of emergency. Everyone get to the Shining Army guild house as soon as you possibly can. If you didn't get stuck in game, stay the fuck out unless you're just dipping in to give us some IRL news. If you got stuck like some of us did... we need your help. Vierdimin's Secret Order was ready with a team of volunteers who both wanted this and were ready to live full-time in game, and they're hitting us hard for territory and control of all four regions. Do NOT engage them on your own. Getting corpse camped is miserable when you can't just log out. —Topper*

Topper was right. There were lots of things about Fantasy Realms Online that would be miserable when you couldn't just log out, like getting stuck in a terrible, female character you never would have chosen and had no idea how to play, for example. *What am I going to do?*

I had hoped for a final message from Jazzus, but that was the last of them. She'd either given up on me or didn't have anything new to say.

I couldn't believe this was really happening. But still, I was in awe. Vierdimin apparently wasn't *just* an in-game badass. How could he hack the servers hard enough to trap us all in our avatars, put our bodies into comas, and cut us off completely from the real world? I shuddered and pulled my bare, smooth knees up against my ample chest, wrapping my arms around them. If the real me was out there in a coma, what *was* I, exactly? A simulation? I didn't know much about computer science and I sure wasn't a philosophy guy, so I had no answers handy.

All I knew was that it sure felt like I was going to be stuck in the body of this low-level chick for a while, and there wasn't anything I could do about it.

I took a deep breath. *Well. If that's what the situation is, that's what the situation is.*

I was Kromgorn the Barbarian, damn it, and I hadn't spent thousands of hours playing Fantasy Realms Online just to give up when the going got tough. In a way, this was the most incredible test of my gaming abilities I'd ever faced. Finally, the game actually mattered. I might be trapped in a level 3 female Courtesan, but I knew the game inside and out, and I couldn't just sit by and do nothing while my guildies fought Vierdimin.

I scrambled around my cell, ignoring how cold the air was on my exposed body, and found an old bone on the ground. I hefted it, feeling the weight, and checked the stats. **Lv. 1 Old Bone (Inferior Light Blunt Weapon).** *Better than nothing. I'm busting out of here.*

All characters could use light weapons, and my dexterity was high enough to hit things even if I was taking severe damage penalties from my low strength. I walked up to the door and began to wail on the lock as hard as I could with the bone, smashing it over and over until it felt like my hand was going numb. I hadn't realized just how bad the damage penalties for low strength were, though, because I shortly saw that I hadn't done a single point of damage to the lock.

"What is all that racket?" a voice demanded. A surly looking human

poked his face around the corner and came to consider me from the outside of my cell. He had raggedy brown hair, a stained tunic, and a ring of keys hung at his belt, but otherwise he was pretty average looking. **Harem Jailer, Lv. 5** floated over his head. He put his hands on his hips and chortled at me. “So, she’s finally awake, the sweet little thing.”

“Let me out of here!” I demanded.

“What, you want out of your cell? Fine.” He unlocked the cell door. I hopped back to avoid getting smashed by it as it swung open.

I cocked my head at him. “That... was easy.”

The jailer shrugged at me. “The orc king isn’t ready for you yet, and you can’t escape the locked outer door anyway. I don’t mind watching a little eye candy run around the jail.”

I blushed and glared at him. This whole ‘being a sexual object to everyone’ thing was really going to take some getting used to, but I wasn’t about to turn my nose up at a lucky break. I rushed out of my cell and headed for the outer door, but sure enough, it was locked, just like he’d said it would be. The jailer laughed as I strained against the bars, pulling with all my might. I rubbed my aching arms and looked around, trying to figure out what to do next.

I was too weak to fight the jailer in melee combat—I knew that without trying—but maybe if I leveled myself up a little I could catch him by surprise. Levels came fast this low, and dungeons always had critters to smack around. I hunted around the jail until I saw what I was looking for: in an old, dusty cell, there was a sleeping goblin: **Goblin, Lv. 1**. There were a few of them actually, and I could kill them and camp the respawn points until I’d gained a few levels. I pushed on his cell door and it swung open, and when I glanced back at the jailer with a raised eyebrow he just shrugged. This appeared to be a pretty lax jail!

I raised the bone menacingly and shouted, “Hey you! Wake up and fight me!” I wished I sounded a little more intimidating—even my threats sounded kinda sexy—but it did the job. The goblin opened one eye to consider me, and then heaved a long, weary sigh before pulling himself up out of bed. He didn’t even have a weapon besides his fists, which he raised in a lazy, unintimidated boxing stance. This would be easy. I grinned and rushed into battle.

Fantasy Realms Online had an assisted fighting system, kind of like assisted aiming in a shooter, in that you just sort of mentally directed your

body to attack and tried to relax during fights, taking over only when you felt like it would really help. The auto-assist would speed you up, keep your balance, make your hits harder, and move you in ways that approximated the way a real, highly-trained fighter would move, since obviously not everyone who played knew how to parry with a broadsword or shoot a bow correctly. Or at least, it moved you like that when your fighting skill and weapon skill were high enough.

In my case, with Lacey's avatar, I immediately noticed how different it was from playing Kromgorn. Rather than feeling confident and quick, strong and tensed for action, Lacey's body felt awkward and cumbersome in a fight. My limbs were too slow, it was too easy for me to lose my balance, and my swings didn't have any real weight behind them. I did my best against the goblin, but he easily dodged my slow, weak swings, knocked the bone out of my hand, and shoved me back onto the dirty floor. I bounced onto my round, padded ass with an angry squeak as he dusted off his hands and broke my bone over his knee. "And stay down," he muttered, before plopping back down onto the cot to resume his nap.

I blushed furiously and drew my knees in again, lowering my face to my forearms. Talk about humiliating. My combat stats were so atrocious I couldn't even beat a level 1 unarmed goblin? And I wasn't enough of a threat that he'd bothered to kill me, either. I was seriously screwed.

The jailer roared with laughter from the back of the jail. "I knew I could count on a cute little courtesan for some entertainment," he said. "Go on lass. Whyn't ya try him again?"

I hopped up, furious, and ran over to him. "You think that's funny? Huh?" I asked. "Why don't I try you instead?" I shoved him hard in the chest, but he didn't move. I just bounced off of him and he laughed harder.

My shoulders slumped. This was useless. I was hopeless. I had been so sure of my plan, so confident in my ability to break out, but not if I couldn't fight *at all*. I looked down at myself, frowning at my curvy ass, tiny waist, and elegant, thin limbs. My golden bikini sparkled in the torchlight, matching the color of the pretty golden locks of hair that twisted around my long, elegant neck and spilled over a pair of shapely breasts. What did I expect? This body, this character, hadn't been made for fighting at all.

Suddenly, an idea came to me. I hadn't been made for fighting, true enough. But what *had* Lacey been made for?

"Hey, you," I said to the jailer, standing up straighter. "Guess what?"

“Hm?” he asked. “What?”

I put my hand to my lips, kissed my fingertips, and blew it at him.

**“Charm,”** I said.

## Chapter 7

The change was immediate: The jailer's face went slack as my **Charm** skill took effect, and his eyes glazed over. He slouched in front of me like a mannequin, the leering expression wiped completely off of his face, and waited for me to give him an order. Best of all, the XP bar in the corner of my vision slid from halfway filled to all the way filled, and a shower of golden sparks surrounded me.

**DING!**

Charming him had apparently granted me enough XP to ding level 4!

"Wow!" I said. "I got half a level of XP just for charming you? Why am I wasting my time wailing on goblins?"

"What is your command, most beautiful mistress?" he asked me.

I put my hands on my hips and laughed at him. The dulcet, girly laughter rung through the jail, and a few curious goblins poked their heads out to look at me.

"Tell me how much of a dummy you are," I commanded him.

"I am such a dummy. My mistress is many thousands of times smarter than me."

"Tell me how awesome and smart I am."

"You are so awesome and so smart. It is obvious how you outwitted me."

"Go beat up that goblin for me." I pointed at the goblin who had knocked me down earlier. He was one of the curious few watching us from the cells down the way. The goblin squeaked in alarm, suddenly understanding what I had done, and tried to duck back inside. But the jailer was already charging him. He snatched the goblin before he could get away and started punching him in the face again and again while the level 1 Goblin struggled helplessly. Finally, the gobby ran out of hit points and crumpled to the ground.

I sauntered over and dug through his pockets, finding a few gold coins that I filed away in my inventory. I was pleased I got to loot the mobs he killed for me, even if I didn't get XP for them. *Talk about easy money!* I finally knew how it felt when girls would get their boyfriend to beat someone up for them. It felt good!

"Where do the coins go when you're only wearing a bikini?" my slack-

jawed jailer asked me.

“Shut up,” I snapped, and his jaw snapped firmly shut as he stood there awaiting my next command. *Although I could do without comments from the charmed peanut gallery. Even if he does have a point.* I looked down again at my scantily-clad girl body. *Where do the coins go?*

I rose from my couch and adjusted the straps of my gold bikini top, annoyed at how my breasts bobbed with every little movement. *Couldn't the orc king have picked a bikini with at least a little boob support?* But I'd have time later to reconsider my wardrobe. Right now I needed to get out of here, and this Harem Jailer was my ticket to freedom.

“Let me out of this jail.” I dusted off my hands, shaking off the dirt from rifling through the dirty goblins pockets, and nodded toward the locked, second jail door.

“Can't,” he said.

“Why can't you?” I asked through gritted teeth. “You're charmed. I command you to let me out.”

“The second Jailer has the key. We switch at the end of our shift and lock the other in. Security measures.”

I sighed. The stupid orc king *would* be paranoid about his prisoners. Players would always be trying to find inventive ways to break out of the jail, and if it was as easy as whacking a level 5 Jailer, most players would blow past the challenge.

Another goblin snickered at our exchange from inside his cell, and I narrowed my eyes and frowned. “Fine,” I said. “Then we'll spend some time getting some loot. Jailer, I want you to beat up every goblin in this jail.”

“Wait, what?” I heard someone ask.

The jailer nodded. “As you command, mistress.”

The loot ended up really sucking—they were only level 1 mobs, after all—but it was really satisfying watching screaming goblins run around the jail while the jailer chased them down and beat them senseless one by one... just because I'd asked him too. I kicked my feet as I sat on the edge of my pallet and giggled at the carnage. When he was done, the jailer returned and sat down on the bed beside me.

“Your wish has been done, mistress.”

I squinted at him. “How long do you think this charm lasts, anyway?”

He shrugged. “Until you release me or I die. The buff timer is infinite.”

*That was interesting. Who knew the courtesan was such a good pet*

class? People probably just avoided the class for the social stigma of playing what was basically a prostitute—courtesan players had a bad reputation for being horndogs. I tapped my lip thoughtfully. It was too bad I could only charm one target at a time. “Well, how much time do we have till the other Jailer shows up?”

“Two hours.”

*Two hours!* That would be an eternity. I tossed myself back against the soft cotton of the prison bed and groaned. My pretty brown hair fanned out behind me.

“This sucks,” I muttered. I’d already had him kill the goblins, and since we were inside a dungeon, it might be a while until they respawned. There was only so much goblin carnage I could watch before it got boring, anyway. I looked again at my dreary surroundings. It was a classic, boring dungeon: stone floors, metal bars, scattered straw, and not much else. “What do you do for fun around here, anyway?”

“Honestly?” the jailer replied. “We have fun with the orc king’s prettiest prisoners while they wait to move to the harem.”

I raised myself up onto my elbows. “Wait, really?”

“Really.”

I glared at him. “I’ve been out for three days. You didn’t...”

He quickly shook his head. “No mistress. I would never. We have our fun with the conscious prisoners only. There’s more fight in them.”

Well, that wasn’t much better. I looked down at my new, impossibly hot body: the big breasts, sexy hips, flat tummy... and tiny, weak arms. It was a good thing I’d charmed him before he got bored! I imagined the jailer having his way with me, struggling to fight back, but slowly being pushed down and forced to take his big, hairy cock...

Then I blushed. Why did that kind of turn me on? I was straight! But then I bit my lip and stared at my crotch. There was definitely some moisture between my legs right now. It had to be that this body was turned on by the prospect of sex... *Curse this stupid courtesan class. Now Lacey has me lusting over random mobs thanks to this stupid body.* I couldn’t believe the devs had bothered to model normal sexual responses for female bodies! But I had to admit it would have bothered me a lot if my Kromgorn avatar couldn’t get it up when he saw a hot girl, and having free, uninhibited sex with willing mobs was one of the best things about the game. Why *wouldn’t* Lacey have a normal sex response?

I studied the jailer. For a low-level mob, he had a pretty ripped physique. I could see his rippling abs and his huge biceps under a tight leather vest. *He isn't really a person*, I reminded myself. *He's just bits and bytes. And he's totally under my control.* I glanced around again, chewing my lip. It was just me and the Harem Jailer left in the empty cells. But there was no way I should even be considering what I was considering. Jazzus's words from earlier ran through my head again: *In what universe is a girl seducing dudes gay in the slightest?* And I was a girl, at least for the time being.

This body had needs just like mine did, and I could tell they were intensifying. The close proximity and close attention to the male body beside me was making me squirm quite a bit. I bit my lip harder as I pictured sliding his straight, hard cock inside of Lacey's tight little pussy. If I had still been Kromgorn, I would have paid good money to watch that. And as Lacey, not only would I get a front-row seat—I'd get to *feel* it happening. I'd be lying to myself if I said I wasn't curious. *Plus*, I reminded myself. *You could be stuck in this body for a really long time. Are you really going to give up orgasms just because you're a girl?*

That clinched it. I hadn't gone more than 6 hours without some kind of sexual release since I was 12. I *had* to know what this would be like. He was just a computer program, and no one ever had to know.

I grabbed the jailer by his stupid leather vest and turned him to face me. By instinct, I took a breath and pushed my pert breasts up higher toward his face, even though I knew he wouldn't refuse me—no straight, hot-blooded guy would refuse this body. The avatar I was riding was the walking incarnation of every horny guy's fantasy.

"Mistress?" he asked, looking confused.

"Here's how we're gonna kill the time," I explained. "You're gonna fuck me. Uh, after a good amount of foreplay to warm me up." I remembered that that was a thing chicks complained about, and I wanted this to be good. "You need to try harder than you've ever tried before. This is my first time, okay? I want it to be amazing."

A dreamy smile flitted across his face. "Your wish is my command, mistress."

Suddenly his whole manner changed. He swept me up in his arms and planted a firm kiss right on my lips. But rather than being grossed out, my body responded to it. It felt *great*. Easily as good as being kissed by a super-hot girl when I was Kromgorn. I was shocked. My nips hardened under my

bikini and the tingle of moisture in my crotch turned into a sopping wetness. Who knew that it felt this amazing to get turned on and handled as a girl?

He picked me up as if I were as light as a feather, sending a little thrill running through me, and seated me on his crotch. I felt the hard bulge of his cock through his pants and I automatically rocked against it, sending waves of pleasure coursing through my body. I relaxed myself, just like when I would battle someone with Kromgorn, and let the game guide my inexperienced mind through the feminine sex motions that the courtesan class was built for. It worked like a charm.

The jailer worked my tits, kissed my neck, and massaged my ass and pussy, teasing me with his fingers until my bikini was soaked, just as I'd commanded him, and I tangled my hands in his curly dark hair. When I was wet enough that I was dying for him to fuck me, he slid my bikini down my legs and tossed me back onto the bed before he unlaced his breeches to release the giant, hard cock that strained against the leather ties. As it bounced in front of me, I marveled at how crazy this all was.

But everything felt too good to stop or really think about it too hard. Fuck, but I wanted that cock in my pussy. Who cared how I got myself off in the privacy of my own game with a computer program? Jazzus was right. It was 2017, and it was nobody else's goddamn business. I knew I was really into chicks. This... this was just some temporary fun, and it felt really, *really* good.

He grabbed my ankles and spread my legs wide, easing his meaty cock into my moistened folds and ushering me into a whole *new* realm of sensation. It was mind blowing—like every inch of my sex was as sensitive as the tip of a penis, and his smooth, soft skin rubbed every part of it at once. I involuntarily arched my back and moaned as he pushed all the way inside of me, filling up and stretching me out with a sense of fullness that was incredible. He started gently fucking me like that while he held my ankles in the air, and a weird, intense pressure started building up between my legs, almost like I had to pee, but a little different. I played with my tits, my head lolling, while I lost myself in the pleasurable sensations.

The jailer started bucking harder, his hips thrusting that glorious cock into my pussy again and again, and that weird pressure kept building until it felt like I was standing on the edge of a very tall cliff, about to fall off. Suddenly, he groaned and sank deep inside of me, swelling up, and it threw me over the edge. We came together: him, spurting his white-hot seed into

me and filling every inch of my vagina, and me, releasing the building pressure in a sudden rush of intense orgasmic pleasure that spilled over me like a waterfall and dumped wave after wave of ecstasy across every inch of my heaving, writhing body.

**DING!**

As my head exploded with amazing sensations, a shower of golden sparks surrounded me for the second time that day. I'd dinged level 5 from the sex!

When what seemed like an eternity of orgasm after orgasm had passed, I collapsed into a sweating, heaving wreck beside my partner. He gave me his dopiest grin.

"Did I please you, mistress?"

"Ah... ah... ah... yes..." I panted, still reeling in the aftershocks of my multiple orgasms. That had been *amazing*. Like the best drug ever. Was that always what sex felt like for girls? Plus, I'd gotten bonus XP for actually fucking the mob I'd charmed, and it was more than I would have gotten for killing him. I *almost* preferred this method of leveling. "How... long... until... the next... jailer comes?" I asked, brushing a sweaty brown curl of hair away from my eyes.

"Well..." The jailer glanced toward the outer door again. "That only took about 20 minutes. Want to go again?"

I pushed myself up to a seated position despite the little tremors of pleasure that still ran through my thighs. "*Again?* How can we go again? That was insane."

He shrugged. "I can go as often as you like, and you have no refractory period."

*Oh my god.* My eyes widened as the realization dawned. *He's right. He's a program. And I'm... I'm a girl.*

"Fuck yeah let's go again!" I hooted. "Let's go again and keep doing this until the next jailer comes."

I settled down, my hands folded behind my head, and waited for my fucking to begin again. I could get used to this, and I finally understood why a guy might skirt the rules to play as a woman... it was fan-fucking-tastic if you were just in it for the sex.

"Your wish is my command, mistress. Perhaps this time I should show you what I can do with my mouth..."

## Chapter 8

It turned out that his mouth was almost as good as his cock, and a totally new kind of sex. We alternated between the two for what seemed like forever, and by the time the second jailer had arrived and started knocking on the door to get our attention, I'd lost count of how many mind-blowing orgasms I had had. I was really reconsidering this class. Sure, it might suck in combat, but this charm skill was *really* handy! Even if the sex XP gave diminishing returns after the first time, it had been a great way to kill two hours.

"Hey! Hey wake up, ya lazy lout. What are ya doing in there?"

At the sound of the second jailer's keys rattling in the lock, both of us disentangled ourselves and sprang to our feet. We ran out to meet him just as the jail door was swinging open. A second **Harem Jailer, Lv. 5** stood before us, looking like a mirror image of the man I'd just spent two hours fucking, except for the fact that his hair was blonde and his skin was lighter. He rolled his eyes when he saw me adjusting my clothes, hurriedly trying to get all my important bits covered up before venturing out again.

"Really?" he asked my charmed companion, shaking his head. "You're *always* fucking the courtesans that come through. When do I get to have some fun?"

His eyes lingered on my tits, and I briefly wondered what it would be like to have two guys at once, but then I shook my head and refocused. I'd been enough of a horndog today! There were important things I had to do, like getting back to the Shining Army guildhouse so I could figure out what we were going to do about this whole situation.

I nudged the charmed jailer and hissed, "Get me out of here."

He snapped to attention. "I need to take her to the Orc King's harem rooms. He'll want to have her now."

The blonde jailer sighed. "Fine, fine. But you're gonna let me have the next one? Deal?"

"He agrees," I said, taking him by the hand and dragging him past his surprised compatriot.

We locked him back inside as he stared wide-eyed at me. "I've never seen a maiden so eager for the orc king's giant orc cock..."

I shrugged and smiled. "What can I say? Trying new things. You can't

solve everything with a two-handed broadsword, I guess.”

Then I led my jailer down the hallway, leaving the other very confused behind us. I giggled as I thought about how nonchalant about orc cock I was right now, but I was still riding a pretty great high from all those orgasms. After I’d spent two hours having mind-blowing sex, handling a cock just didn’t seem like that big of a deal anymore. What was the point in fighting my new role? When I was Kromgorn, I could be Kromgorn. For now, I needed to just act the part of Lacey. It was actually kind of fun to let my hair down, so to speak, and just play a girly girl. *Why not? Jazzus would be proud of how open minded I’m being. This is real role-playing.*

When we came to a four-way crossing point in the hallway, I turned to my companion. “Okay, dummy. How do I get out of here?”

He pointed left. “That way is the orc king’s harem.” He pointed right. “That way is the exit.”

As tempting as legendary giant orc cock was, I grabbed his hand and led him decidedly to the right. I would have ditched him, but I’d need him if I bumped into someone else who’d wonder why a girl was wandering around by herself in a gold bikini outside of the harem chambers. A subtle lightening of the hallway informed me that we were nearing the surface, and finally I saw a rectangle of daylight up ahead. *The exit from the lair!*

There was only one problem. It was guarded by two very surly looking level 30 orc guards. I tapped my nose thoughtfully as I drew up a plan.

“What is your wish, mistress?”

“This will be easy, thanks to you,” I replied. “Those guards are tough, but they’re also dumb, and you’re a respected member of their faction. All we’ll need to do is tell them that the orc king ordered you to take me for a walk, and they won’t think to question it. It should work, right?”

He nodded. “An excellent plan, mistress. They won’t ever suspect that a member of their own faction would lie about something like an order from the orc king. You’ll be free in no ti—” The Harem Jailer cut off with a gurgling, strangled noise. A red, steel-tipped blossom unfolded at his throat, and blood ran down the sides of his neck as he dropped to his knees and fell forward face-first.

I stared, dumbfounded, as a grinning halfling rose from his crouch on the jailer’s fallen back and yanked hard to remove his dagger from the man’s throat. **Erlix, Lv. 32 Halfling Rogue** floated above his head. He slid the bloody dagger back into its sheathe and bowed in front of me with a flourish.

“You have been rescued, my fair lady!” he declared with more than a hint of showmanship. “Worry not. I, Erlix the Mighty, have freed you from the Orc King’s vile minions.” He brushed some imaginary dust off his sleeves and winked at me. “No need to thank me. A sample of your ample... er... services would be thanks enough.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” I clutched my hands into white-knuckled fists at my sides, wishing I could beat his stupid face with them. “I had him *charmed*, you asshole. You just killed my only ticket out of this place.”

He scratched his head and shrugged. “Oh. Sorry lady, I don’t really know how whore skills work.”

“*Courtesan* skills.” I corrected him through gritted teeth.

“Whatever. Call a spade a spade, I say. Anyway, am I understanding you correctly that you *won’t* be banging me as a reward for my valiant efforts?”

“He was level 5! You’re level 30! Some ‘valiant effort.’”

“Well *you* couldn’t have killed him. Anyway, if you’re not going to fuck me, I’m off. Treasure, ho! Haha. That’s what you are. A treasure ho. In that gold bikini. Get it?”

My urge to beat this irritant halfling was rising rapidly. Whoever he was, he was giving his guild a bad name. But then I saw he didn’t even have a guild tag. I narrowed my eyes at him. “Wait a minute. You’re the asshole that robbed me a few days ago in Lorengarde! I *knew* your name looked familiar.”

Erlix snorted. “You? No. I don’t think so, goldie. I don’t bother to rob players too low level to have anything good. And I certainly don’t bother with players pathetic enough to play sex-fueled courtesans. Are you sure I can’t get a quick lay? I heard all you sickos are horny as fuck... you know what they say: halflings are so short because the rest of the mass goes to our dicks.”

“No one says that.”

“Yeah, but aren’t you curious now?”

“Absolutely not. And this isn’t my main, you freak,” I hissed. “I got stuck in this avatar when the weird thing Vierdimin did went off.”

“You too, huh?” He drew his dagger and started flipping it nonchalantly in one hand, but then dropped it to the floor when my words registered. “Wait a minute... the only person I’ve been able to rob in the last few days was that

hulking dude Kromgorn. You don't mean... oh god. This is freaking *hilarious*." He doubled over in laughter, pointing at me and guffawing. All I could do was cross my arms and wait for him to laugh himself out. Finally, he wiped a tear away from his eyes. "And the first thing you did when you woke up was fuck the jailer? Priceless!"

"Wait... how did you know I fucked the jailer?"

He shrugged. "I might have been stealthed in there waiting for the guards to unlock the second door too."

I felt blood rushing to my cheeks as I turned what was probably the deepest shade of crimson. "*What?* You watched us fuck?"

"Yep, and it was a great show!"

"But then why did you kill the jailer if you knew he was charmed?" I nearly shrieked the words. I was so mad at this dumb halfling.

Erlix grinned sheepishly. "Well, you were headed for the exit, and I figured if I rescued you I might get a quick lay before you left. Speaking of, how about this halfling cock..."

"Ugh! No. Listen. You owe me. You've screwed me over twice now, and this is bad. Whatever's going on, you're stuck in the game too, and the only way to fix it is to stop Vierdimin. I need to get out of here and get back to my guild. *You're* going to help me. Got it?"

Erlix raised a finger like he was going to protest, but then he sighed and sheathed his dagger again. "Fiiiiine. I can't say no to a pretty face. And frankly, I do want to know how to get the hell out of here. Playing a halfling and making mischief is all good fun, but I didn't really expect to be three feet tall for the rest of my life, ya know?" Then he leaned close and theatrically laid a hand at the side of his mouth whispering, "But the cock thing really is true."

"Oh my god, Erlix!" I shouted. "I don't want to see your cock!" Then I clamped my hands down on my mouth, looking around wildly. No guards had come running, thank god.

"Fine, fine. But hush, goldie. You're gonna get us caught. So what's the plan? How do I get you out of here?"

I gave him my best withering stare and jerked my thumb over my shoulder. "You're level 32. Just go kill those guards and let's get out of here."

"Nuh-uh. You might be used to playing a big, brutish barbarian, but I'm a DPS class, baby. If I get the drop on them I could kill them, but it's kind of

hard while they're on alert mode watching the hallway. We need a distraction if you want me to kill them."

"What kind of distraction? I can't **Charm** or **Seduce** mobs 30 levels higher than me."

"You'd be surprised on the level spread on those skills if you're willing to pair them with some actual sexy times attention. But you're right. Fortunately, in this case, we just need you to go get them out of alert mode so I can stealth up and assassinate one. I can probably burn down the other by popping my cooldowns."

"I don't even know *how* to make a distraction without those skills..."

Erlix waggled his eyebrows at me. "*Really*, little miss courtesan? You have a pretty effective pair of distractions on your chest right there—god knows they distract me—and I know you're not shy about getting a little randy with a mob. Get over there and do your thing. I'll get the jump on them while you're keeping them busy."

I sighed. He was right. I knew it would work. And he'd already seen me with the jailer, right? How much worse could a few orc cocks be?

"Okay. But kill them fast," I warned him. "I don't want to be handling those dicks any longer than I absolutely have to."

"Scout's honor." He grinned at me and slowly vanished from sight as he stealthed into the shadows.

I didn't trust him not to be a jerk—he was a known troll after all—but I didn't have a lot of options. Fortunately, the orc guards really were dumb as bricks. When I sauntered up, all I could think to do was give them the brightest smile I could muster and say, "Hiya boys. How about a hand job?"

They looked at each other, looked at me, shrugged, and dropped their pants. Two huge, hairy orc cocks sprang out. They shuffled toward me as I dropped to my knees and held my hand out, and I faked a smile and hissed through my teeth, "Okay, Erlix. Any time now..."

The bastard waited until I was *well* into jerking off one of the big green cocks. I was starting to worry I'd wind up with orc cum on my face, but true to his word, Erlix popped out of the shadows and made quick work of both orcs. I watched as he finished the second one with ease, hardly even breaking a sweat. Then I rose to my feet over the bodies of the two orcs, wiping my hand on my bikini with an expression of disgust.

"Now do I get a quickie?" he asked with a wink. "That was a pretty impressive rescue."

“It didn’t look like you popped any cooldowns...” I glared at him, continuing to scrub my hand.

He smiled and gave me another shrug. “Nah. It’s easy to burn down grunts as a DPS class. I just wanted to see if you’d touch an orc cock. Haha. You really are a ho!”

I stared at him, flabbergasted, and then again at the hand that had touched that gross orc cock. *Is this fucker for real?* I wracked my brain for a withering retort to his stupid jabs, but before I could respond he started skipping away, right out toward the entrance. “Come on, goldie! We need to get going before respawns show up. You wanna see your friends, right? Let’s get this show on the road, treasure ho!”

## Chapter 9

The trip to the guild house would have been awfully hard on my own as a measly level 5 courtesan, but with a level 32 rogue escorting me, we made good time toward the **Golden Plains of Lorengarde - Level 25**, where the Shining Army guildhouse was located. I had wanted to stop by a city to fire off a note to my guild and get some different clothes, but it was the opposite direction to the nearest settlement, so instead we made a beeline for the plains. I could dip into the guild reserves for some new duds when we got there.

It was weird to see the servers so unusually empty, and I realized that people must be avoiding playing after what had happened. Why risk getting stuck if you weren't already trapped in the game? I wondered what my mother must be going through out in the real world and felt a little guilty.

But it was useless to stew on that when there was nothing I could do about it. All I could do was meet up with Topper and the rest of my guild so we could come up with a plan to reverse what Vierdimin had done and get us all unstuck from this stupid game. It had really been a stroke of luck that I'd run into Erlix to help me get there. I appreciated that he was willing to help me, even if I'd had to guilt him into it, but at the same time he was *such* an annoying companion to travel with.

"Do you ever stop talking about your halfling cock?" I sighed at his latest story about what enormous dicks the halfling folk had been blessed with as we trudged down a dusty road on the last stretch of the way toward the Shining Army guildhouse.

"If *you* had an amazing dick, wouldn't you talk about it all the time? Girls don't understand these things. Trust me, you would."

"Trust me, I wouldn't. I'm not really a girl," I reminded him through gritted teeth. "Kromgorn was plenty well-endowed, and I didn't go around yammering about it."

"I'm sure your big, mean barbie had a really nice cock for a human or whatever, but we're talking *halfling* cock, goldie. There's no comparison."

"Uh-huh."

"It's huge!"

"Right."

"You wanna see?"

“No.” His persistence was so annoying because it was actually *working* on me. In the rare moments of silence I found myself wondering if it really was as big as he claimed. I’d never seen a halfling cock before. But there was *no* way I was going to give him the satisfaction of asking to see it. I’d never live it down.

“Fine. I get it. Your thing is big, hairy, green orc cocks. But when you’re ready for a real—”

“Erlix!”

“What?”

“Shut up or I’m going to charm you and make you shut up.”

“Hah! Fat chance. Do you even know how your own skills work, goldie?”

I grumbled a few choice profanities under my breath, but Erlix was right. I didn’t really know how my skills worked. “Why don’t you enlighten me instead of talking about your penis?”

Erlix perked up. The little dude loved a chance to play the authority on something. “Certainly! I can do both, though. So your **Charm** skill, right? Totally dependent on your charisma, like most of your skills—and you’ve got that in spades, Tits McGee, which is how you can charm enemies a few levels higher than you—so when you do charm someone, they’re totally under your command, like magic. You can have one target charmed at a time, and when you succeed on the initial check, they stay that way until you release them. It’s perfect for securing giant NPC halfling cocks to fuck you.”

*Hmmm. Maybe Lacey hadn’t been a complete idiot when she was building this character. If she’d been going for a maxed-out charm build, high charisma made sense, even at the expense of combat skills.*

“Now **Seduce** is a little different,” Erlix continued, kicking a stone down the road as he spoke. “**Seduce** doesn’t let you control them, but instead it keeps the attention of a mob while your group does something else. But it keeps *you* busy too. You need to put a little show on. The sexier the show, the better the odds of **Seduce** succeeding. If you had a giant halfling cock like mine, you could wave it all around in front of them to shock and amaze them —” he grabbed his crotch and winked at me, giving it a shake, “—but in your case you’ll probably just need to shake those big old titties or go down on them. If you need lots of time, you might even want to sleep with them. Incidentally, fucking NPCs is the best way for a Courtesan to level. Maybe the only way with those sucky combat stats of yours.”

“I don’t need to level,” I grumbled. “We’re getting me out of this body and back to Kromgorn as soon as possible. I’m not gonna go fuck a bunch of NPCs. Anyway, is **Seduce** single-target too?”

Erlix chuckled. “Dirty girl! You *are* a treasure ho. But to answer your question, no. You can keep as many mobs busy as you can keep occupied with your hot little body. The bigger the crowd, the more risk of a few breaking off, though. Probably to stare at the halfling waving his cock around instead.”

“How do I permanently cut off a halfling’s cock?”

“Madame!” Erlix looked wounded. “You should never deface such a beautiful work of art. But if you must know, you just grip it firmly in your hand and tug on it until it falls off. It works like a charm, every time.”

I rolled my eyes at him. “I really might charm you and make you tug your own cock off.”

“Oh, that’s the other thing! These work differently for players. You can’t seduce players—unless you do it the old fashioned way—and you can’t force people to be charmed... they’re players, after all, and you can’t steal their autonomy. **Charm** just makes it so that they can’t take any hostile action against you or restrain you in any way, and it works for any players in their group too. Basically making you part of their faction until you release them. It’s handy if someone is threatening to cut off your giant halfling cock. But you do have to be higher level than them to prevent abuse, so it’s kinda useless at max level.”

“How do you know so much about courtesan skills, anyway?”

Erlix shrugged and started picking his teeth with the point of a dagger. “I make a point of reading up on all the game mechanics. You never know when it might come in handy. Hey, is that your guild house?” He pointed past me, up a small hill, and I saw that he was right. An imposing, shining white castle rose up out of the plains, and I nearly jumped up and down with joy.

“It is! It is! Oh man, we made it. Come on, Erlix. We’re finally going to get some real, high-level help with this situation.”

It was lucky that someone had had the foresight to invite Lacey into the guild, even though she was an alt, so the doors opened automatically as I approached. Erlix tried to follow me in and bounced off the invisible wall, landing on his ass. He rubbed his nose and glared at me. “Owww. Goldie, a little help?”

I sighed at him. “You know, if you were properly guilded, you would

know how these things worked.” But he had escorted me here, so I took pity on him and walked him through the forcefield while holding his grubby little hand so the fortress would recognize him as a guest. “Don’t even bother trying to steal anything. You won’t be able to since you’re not a guild member. It’s a protected zone.”

“Guess how many times that hand has touched a massive halfling cock today.”

“Ewww! Erlix!” I glared at him again, snatched my hand back, and furiously wiped it off on the increasingly dirty triangle of bikini that was the only scrap of clothing suitable for it. “I need to get out of this bikini.”

“Yeah you do!”

“And *into* something else. Come on. We’re stopping by the guild bank before we meet up with my friends.”

“Fine, but I’m still calling you goldie. Once a treasure ho, always a treasure ho!”

I ignored him and led the way to our massive vault. Again, the door swung open at my touch, and a wealth of items lay piled before us. Erlix nearly had a conniption, and I could tell by the way his hands were twitching that he wanted to grab everything in sight. I smirked. *Good luck!* He wouldn’t be able to even interact with any of it. *Let him drool.*

The best stuff was off limits to everyone but Topper and a few of our officers: me (Kromgorn), Haxor, Jazzus. But that didn’t stop me from digging out some slightly more respectable leather battle armor and a bow. Since it was female armor, it would still extremely sexy on my avatar, but at least from far away I’d look more like a ranger than a prostitute. Erlix was fond of reminding me just how slutty I looked. The new costume might help me avoid a fight or two, and hell, I might even be able to hit something with the bow if I *really* had to. My dexterity stat wasn’t that awful.

I made Erlix wait outside and made *sure* he wasn’t stealthed while I changed behind a screen. It was a relief to finally strap my massive boobs away in some tight, supportive leather, even if it pushed them together and up toward my face, and the thigh-high boots and leather thong beat the flimsy gold cloth I’d been wearing before. I walked out from behind the screen, testing my bow string, and smiled at the waiting halfling. “How do I look?”

He was busy picking his teeth with the tip of a dagger again. “You look like a prostitute playing dress-up. A hot one.”

“Good enough. As long as I don’t *just* look like a prostitute anymore.

Come on. We're gonna go meet my friends."

Our meeting hall was in the middle of the fortress, and as we approached I could hear voices arguing inside.

"We don't have the levels for a direct assault! He had his whole crew ready for this, and we have less than half our full strength right now."

"What else can we do, Haxor? At least our highest players are here. It'll be a tough fight, but we stand a good chance of winning if we strike quickly."

"I agree with Topper," a female voice added. It sounded like Jazzus. "We'll never figure out how to undo this stupid spell if we don't capture Vierdimin, and being in game 24/7 is just going to make him stronger and let him secure his base. We need to move soon if we want to strike directly."

I walked into the room, Erlix trailing behind me, to see Haxor, Topper, and Jazzus gathered around the huge rectangular table with half a dozen of our other guildmates. Everyone looked tense. As I entered, everyone looked up at me.

"Kromgorn!" Jazzus cried. "I'm so glad you're okay." She leaped up and raced over to sweep me up in a hug. It was still weird to be shorter than her, but it was nice to feel our boobs smush together like that. She smelled sweet and flowery, and I wondered how I smelled to her.

"Kromgorn?" Topper asked, looking confused.

"It's Krom in Lacey's avatar," Jazzus explained.

"And the halfling?" Topper inspected Erlix curiously. "What's he doing here?"

"I helped this hot piece of ass make her way back to you all. I'm a hero," Erlix said. Topper raised an eyebrow at that, and I snorted.

"He's a troll who stole my gold the other day," I said. "But he did help me get here."

"Goldie! How could you!"

"Shush and let me talk to my guildies." I was just glad he wasn't talking about halfling cock in front of my friends.

"This is still too weird for me, dude," Haxor muttered, putting his face in his hands. "When we get you out of there, no one gets to use my girlfriend's avatar but Jazzus, okay? Jesus."

"It's my fault." Jazzus released me from the embrace and stepped back, crossing her arms and looking at the floor. "I asked him to log in as Lacey to get us out of a jam, and when Vierdimin's spell went off... well, I was hoping he logged out in time, but I guess not."

“Fucking great,” Topper added. “A level 5 courtesan. Perfect. We could really use your barbarian right now, Krom. Things are rough with Vierdimin’s crew, and we’re debating a full-on assault.”

I blushed. “I didn’t choose to be stuck in this avatar, guys. I only did it to help the guild in the first place. And that’s why I’m here now.”

“What, are you going to go play grab-ass with Vierdimin’s lieutenants?” Haxor asked. “Show them a good time? Suck a little Secret Order cock?”

“Lay off it,” Jazzus added. “It’s not his fault. Er, her fault. His? Sorry Krom. It’s gonna be confusing trying to keep your gender straight right now.”

“*Her* fault,” Topper said decisively. “If she’s playing in a level 5 courtesan named Lacey, that’s how we treat her. Trying to protect feelings will just get us killed on the battlefield.” Everyone nodded at the guild leader’s decision. I folded my arms, annoyed, but I knew he was right.

“You’re going to let her join us on the battlefield?” Haxor protested. “Come *on*, Topper. No offense, Kr—er, Lacey. But bringing her is just going to be a liability! Vierdimin’s guild has an average level of 45. If they don’t nuke her outright with an offhand spell, she’ll get in the way of our own magic. She can’t fight, she’s playing the worst class, and she’s not high enough level to use her skills on them even if we could think of a way to use her. Plus, it’s an extra player to buff and heal!”

My cheeks burned hotter. “I don’t need buffs or heals, guys. Let me die if they target me. It’s fine. I still want to come and *try* to help. I’m stuck in the game like all of you are.”

“Can’t we even use her as bait?” one of my other guildies asked.

“Our plan doesn’t involve bait,” Haxor countered. “It’s a direct frontal assault. Hit ‘em hard and fast. You said it yourself, Topper. Plus, Vierdimin would never take that bait. He’d either ignore her for being too low level or just kill her from 100 yards away if he thought she was a threat.”

“Jazzus?” I pleaded. “I came so far to help you all. I’m stuck in this avatar because I wanted to help. And you’re going to make me sit on the sidelines for the most important battle we’ve ever had?”

Jazzus frowned and shrugged helplessly. “I don’t know what to say.”

“I do.” Topper’s eyes were hard as he leaned forward, both hands on the table. “Sorry, Lacey. Haxor is right. You would be a liability. And in the heat of battle, we can’t have our healers worrying about which players they’re buffing and healing. If you come, you’re a risk to all of us. What if

Tigraine blows all her mana trying to keep you topped off before she sees who she's healing? What if Sensei wastes his only combat rez on you by mistake? What if one of Vierdimin's wizards targets you with a nasty AoE debuff spell you can't resist? We can't take the chance."

"So then what do I do?" I practically wailed. "I feel like you guys are kicking me out of the guild."

Topper walked around the table and rested his mailed hand on my shoulder. His golden paladin's cape rustled behind him as his eyes softened ever so slightly. "No one's kicking you out of the guild, Krom. You're part of this team just like you've always been—even if you're Lacey right now. But this is a purely strategic decision. If you had a decent level, we'd bring you. But as it is, let us handle this. Okay? We'll capture Vierdimin, make him undo his code or spell or whatever, and have you out of that avatar before you know it."

"But—" I protested, but then a look from Topper shut me down.

"Final decision." His tone made it clear that this wasn't up for debate. "You can stay here if you want, but you need to stay out of our way. We'll make preparations and head out at the end of the week."

I slumped down, totally defeated. Haxor crossed his arms with a satisfied look on his face, and Jazzus refused to meet my eyes. Erlix, for once, was silent.

That was it, then. They weren't going to let me help them.

I was out.

## Chapter 10

I slumped on a bed in the Shining Army barracks, moping drearily by myself while my guildies prepared for battle without me. I was so mad at Haxor and Topper that I wanted to scream—mostly at Haxor—but now that Topper had made his decision, I knew there was no going back. Our guild leader was a good leader, but he was surprisingly hard headed sometimes, and he never went back on his word. *It's probably why he plays paladin. It's a good fit for his personality.*

The shuffle of a step drew my attention to the doorway. Jazzus hovered uncertainly just outside of the barracks.

“Can I come in?”

I nodded sullenly, drawing my knees up against my body and wrapping my arms around them. Jazzus came over to sit beside me on the bed, leaning back against the headboard and propping a pillow behind her back. She was in her sexy, low-cut battle robe with thigh-high leather boots, just like mine but in blue, and a silver circlet rested on her head. *Do they make any armor for women in this game that isn't sexy?* I wondered. Normally I loved hanging out with Jazzus—I always thought she was so cool and pretty—but right now I was pissed off at everyone. I remained silent, waiting for her to speak first. I didn't have anything to say.

“Are you okay?” she finally asked. She put her hands in her lap and idly twitched her thumbs without looking at me.

“No, Jazzus. I'm not okay. First, you get me stuck in the body of this stupid girl avatar, with a whole set of realistically modeled girl sensations and emotions, by the way. Thanks for that. Then I get captured by the Orc King, stuffed into a gold bikini, and dragged off to serve in his *harem*, for christ sakes. I managed to get myself out of that situation thanks to... er, my own ingenuity. Still, I'm so weak that I end up needing to be escorted by a stupid troll of a halfling who can't shut up about his giant halfling penis all the way across the land to our guild hall. Then, despite my heroic efforts to make my way back here and help you all, Topper humiliates me in front of the whole guild by kicking me out of the most important mission we've ever had, and treating me like some kind of... some kind of...”

“Girl?” Jazzus offered.

“Yeah. Like some kind of stupid, helpless, girl.”

I was breathing hard after my tirade, fighting my body's stupid female emotions and trying not to cry. It was surprisingly hard to hold back the tears. No wonder girls were always crying. Jazzus stared at me wide-eyed.

"Does... does Erlix really have a giant penis?"

"I don't know!" I exploded. "Is that really the most important thing to ask right now, Jazzus?"

"S-sorry. I was just curious."

"Me too. It's been eating me up all day since he never shuts up about it. But I'll be damned if I ask to see it."

"Understandable." She glanced around the barracks. "Where is the pint-sized klepto, anyway?"

I shrugged. "He asked if he could take a look around, and I said sure. He's never been in a guild hall before. He's probably trying to figure out how to steal our things."

Jazzus snorted. "Fat chance. The guild code prevents that."

"Yep."

She sat silently for a minute, and then continued, "Hey, Krom..."

"May as well call me Lacey, Jazz. Topper is right. It's not doing me any favors to pretend I'm a hulking barbarian when I'm so obviously not anymore." I lifted up my scrawny arms and stuck out my impressive rack. Jazz's eyes lingered on it for a moment before she returned to staring at her hands.

"Lacey, then. Look, I'm really sorry. I never intended for this to happen. It should have been a quick in-and-out operation. If I had known there was *any* chance you'd get stuck in that body, I wouldn't have asked you to hop in. I would hate to be trapped in the body of a dude. Uh, I think."

"I know," I mumbled, starting to snifle. I felt so *useless*! The emotions were surging up again, and I struggled to hold them back. "It's not your fault. Or it kind of is, but you couldn't have known what was going to happen. I just hate that I can't be part of the team. Being this courtesan class wouldn't be so bad. Even being a girl would be okay. The sex is mind-blowing, by the way. I can't believe you've never mentioned it. But what really gets me is feeling like an outsider. I spend most of my life feeling like that. You guys, the guild. You're my friends. You're all I have."

I started to cry, unable to hold back the tears any longer, and felt even more embarrassed. *Kromgorn the mighty, reduced to a blubbering little girl, ignored and discarded by his friends.* At least it was only Jazzus with me

right now. *She'll be cool, but I'd be so ashamed if Topper or Haxor saw me like this, and Erlix would have a fucking field day...*

"Shh, shh, shh," Jazzus said. She put her arm around my shoulders and started to gently stroke my hair. Instinctively I rested my head on her shoulder. She smelled nice, just like when she'd hugged me earlier. "Don't cry. Hey. Lacey, it's okay."

I nuzzled against her neck, sniffing and leaking tears, and she held me closer, continuing to stroke me with long, soothing motions. She gently rocked me from side to side until the crying subsided a little.

"I'm sorry," I whispered. "This is so embarrassing."

"No way," Jazzus replied. "It's just part of being a girl, Lacey. Sometimes a good cry is the best thing you can do for yourself. It's not good to hold in your emotions."

"Yeah. I'm starting to see that the rules are really different for women. Topper didn't even ask my opinion. He just told me what I was supposed to do."

Jazzus laughed. "Welcome to womanhood!"

"I didn't think they'd treat me like a girl so quickly."

"Well, you're *awfully* feminine, Lacey. Everything about that body screams sex. It's pretty much the ideal of feminine beauty. None of us know what each other looks like in real life, so the avatar you pick is the real you, as far as the game is concerned. It doesn't much matter who's piloting the body."

"That's why you said there'd be nothing gay about seducing guys while I'm Lacey, right?"

She nodded. "Exactly. Until we get out of here, you *are* Lacey, with everything that comes with that." Then she arched an eyebrow at me. "Say... how do you know sex is mindblowing as a girl, anyway? Are you sure you haven't seen that giant halfling cock?"

I could feel my cheeks turning red again. "As if! I wouldn't touch that little dude with a ten foot pole. I ah... had some downtime. Decided to take the new body for a spin with a handy mob. You know. Just to get the feel of things. It's kind of embarrassing."

"No, not at all! It's your body—at least for now. You *should* figure out how it works. Good for you. I wish I had that kind of courage."

I glanced up at her. "Wait. You're not saying... Jazzus! Have you never had sex in game?"

Now it was her turn to blush. She turned so red she almost looked like a fire nymph! “I... ah... Okay, look. You can’t tell anyone this, okay? I’m only telling you because you’re a girl now and because I feel guilty that you got stuck in that hot body when you didn’t want to be. But I’ve... I’ve never had sex. In game *or* out of game.”

I stared at her, dumbfounded. “*What?* Not ever?”

She shook her head, still blushing.

“Why not? Jeez, Jazzus! I’m just borrowing this body, but let me tell you, you are missing out in a big way!”

“I just... I haven’t found the right person where I wanted to do that yet.”

“What? That’s crazy! Have sex with a mob! Oh man. We’re going to fix this today. You want me to charm you a hunky dude? There’s this hot jailer I had charmed earlier. He’s probably respawned by now, and I bet he and his friend would show us a good time even if they weren’t—” I cut off when I realized she was shaking her head.

“No, no. That’s the thing. I’m...” She took a deep breath and cleared her throat. “Okay, just say it. Lacey, I’m not really into guys. That’s why I haven’t found the right person yet. I haven’t told anyone I’m gay before. Ever.” Jazzus studied me carefully. “Do you... do you think less of me for that?”

I stared at her for a split second and then wrapped her up in a big hug, squeezing her even tighter than she’d squeezed me earlier. Then I pulled back and held her by the shoulders.

“Oh gosh, Jazzus! No! Of course not. You’re the one who told *me* it’s 2017 and no one cares anymore. Take your own advice, girl.”

“That’s how I want the world to be, but my family actually cares a lot,” she said quietly. “That’s why I haven’t told them. I’m sorry, Lacey.”

“Sorry for what?”

“I don’t know. I feel silly now. But...” She took a deep breath and smiled at me. “It feels really good to get that off my chest. Thank you.”

“Thanks for having the courage to tell me! You’re the best, Jazz. So this doesn’t actually change anything. Fantasy Realms Online is the perfect place to explore your fantasies. Trust me. And your family doesn’t ever have to know until you’re ready to tell them.”

“You mean you still think I should try sex?” She started fidgeting with her hands again. “I wouldn’t even know how to start. I feel so awkward.”

Then I had the best idea I'd had all day. I lowered my eyelids halfway, gave her my best smoldering gaze, and put my face within inches of hers. She didn't shrink away, and I could feel the tension between us. "Why not start with me? You said I was the ideal of feminine beauty, and it'd be my first time too. What do you say, Jazzus?"

I hadn't thought she could turn any redder, but then she did. Still, she didn't move. Instead, she raised her eyes to mine and smiled.

I kissed her, and she kissed me back.

It was amazing. Jazzus tasted as good as she smelled, and I marveled at how my body reacted just like it had when I was with the jailer. *I guess Lacey is bisexual. Makes sense for a courtesan, I suppose.* If anything, Jazzus was even *more* into it than I was. After the initial, long, passionate kiss, she attacked me with a frenzy of sloppy, open-mouthed need that only comes from finally getting something you've spent a lifetime suppressing. Both of us seemed to be getting hotter by the second.

I pulled her back onto the bed and let my courtesan skills take over, just like I had when going into combat as Kromgorn. And just like Kromgorn's finely honed fighting skills had been guided by the game's programming, Lacey's softer, subtler skills were also guided in expert motions by the built-in software. I just relaxed and went along with it, content to pretend that I was a pro lady killer in a lady's body.

Judging by Jazzus's sighs and soft little exclamations of delight, she appreciated my work. My fingers glided under her robes and slid over her silky undergarments, teasing and exciting her, and I could feel her hot breath on my cheek as I lay beside her and worked my magic. When a rose-colored flush had crept across her face and her wiggling had grown frantic, she sat up and pulled her clothes off. I hurriedly helped to undress her, feeling my own body react as her breasts bounced free and my hands made contact with the soft, downy hair covering her womanhood.

I buried my face in her mound, lapping excitedly, letting her sweet juices run over my tongue, and Jazzus moaned and rolled her head against the pillows, knees quivering with each luxurious lick. Her delicate fingers wrapped themselves through my hair and she bucked against my mouth, pushing her sex harder and harder against my tongue as I began to hum.

"Oh gods, what are you doing?" she moaned. "That feels amazing... oh, oh!"

When she started bucking furiously and held my hair so tightly that it

hurt, I knew she was close. Her hot breaths were coming in short bursts now, heavy panting like a wild animal, and I was so turned on that I started fingering myself beneath my knees while I licked, rotating my knee to keep my balance and leaning against Jazz's silky thigh.

My pleasure nib needed hardly any attention to get going—what was happening with Jazzus was one of the hottest things I'd ever seen, especially since it was her first time. Electric shots of pleasure coursed through me with each slick stroke of the wetness between my legs, and after a moment a familiar shaking started coursing through my legs. I felt like a swelling dam of sexual energy was building up between my legs.

"Keep going, keep going, oh god I'm almost there!" Jazzus cried. "Oh Lacey, oh *Lacey!*"

As she cried my name the last time, Jazzus arched her back in a frenzied thrust of her pelvis and her whole body started to shake. The dam between my legs burst and pleasure exploded through my body, arcing out and shaking me as hard Jazzus as we both came together in an explosion of orgasmic ecstasy. I hovered in a void of bliss, coming over and over with Jazzus, unable to do anything but shake, whimper, and writhe, until finally we both collapsed together onto the bed, cooing softly. Our chests rose and fell with gentle exhalations as we nuzzled one another in the aftermath.

Jazzus's eyes fluttered open and she grinned at me with the dopiest expression I'd ever seen. She looked beautiful with her hair all messy and tangled from sex, and her cheeks flushed with crimson.

"Wow," she murmured. "That was... that was amazing. Thanks, Lacey."

I nodded. "Of course. I'm glad that your first time was with me, Jazzus."

She blushed, her cheeks turning an even deeper shade of red, and dropped her eyes. "Me too. And Lacey..."

"Yeah?"

"Now this. *This* was gay as hell."

She winked at me and we both started laughing.

## Chapter 11

Later, when Jazzus had retired to her own bed and the rest of the guild was snoozing softly, I slipped out of my bed and packed my bag: a change of clothes, the bow and arrow I'd taken from the vault, and a few sets of food and healing potions for the road. I tugged on the supple leather boots to match my ranger costume and padded softly out of the barracks, making my way to the guild's massive front doors. But rather than opening the monstrosities, I popped through the side door and then stood on the road outside my guild house.

I looked back at the place I'd spent so many hours laughing and joking with my friends, gave a weary sigh, and shifted my pack onto my shoulder.

"Where ya going, goldie?"

I almost leapt out of my boots as Erlix unstealthed beside me, but then I rolled my eyes and fixed him with a withering glare.

"Not that it's any of your business, but I'm of no use to my friends, so I'm going away for a while."

"Going away and doing what?"

I shrugged. "I don't know yet. Figuring out how to level up, I guess. I got stuck in this stupid girly avatar in the first place to help my friends, but I can't help my friends unless I'm powerful enough to be useful against Vierdimin and his cronies." I turned to stare across the zone to the horizon. The sun was just beginning to peek up over the mountains in the distance, and the mists of the morning still laid low on the fields. "And I'm not coming back until I can help them."

Erlix finished picking his teeth with his dagger, slipped it into his belt, and shrugged. Then he started marching down the road the way I had been looking.

"Cool," he said. "Let's go."

"Wait, what? You're not coming with me."

He snorted. "Like hell I'm not, goldie. They'll eat you alive out there without some protection. Besides, I still haven't gotten to show you my amazing halfling penis."

I sighed. "Okay, fine."

"Okay, what?"

"Whip it out."

“Whip what out?”

“Your dick. I want to see if it’s actually everything you claim it is.”

He squinted his eyes at me and put his hands on his hips. A long moment passed, and then he shook his head. “No. I don’t think you want it bad enough.”

“No?” I exclaimed. “Are you kidding me?”

He turned on his heel and started marching down the road. “You’re not ready. When you’re ready to see the cock, then I’ll show you the cock. It’s gonna blow your mind, goldie! It’s gonna blow your mind.”

“H-hey!” I cried. Those little halfling legs of his moved fast, and he was already cruising down the road toward Lorengarde. “Erlux! Wait up! Erlux?”

“Keep up, goldie!” he called over his shoulder. “We need to make double-time to the city if we’re gonna get you leveled up in time for your guild fight. I have a plan. But first I need to unload all these magical items I liberated from your guild vault.”

“What?” I asked. *How on earth did he manage to do that? I thought stealing from the guild vault was impossible for non-guildies...*

I raced to keep up with him, leather soles padding the dust as I chased after the speedy little halfling. I didn’t know what he was planning, but the halfling *did* seem to know the game mechanics in and out, and he’d already proved he was clever enough to do things that shouldn’t be possible.

“How did you do that?” I called out. “Erlux? *Erlux!*”

I wondered what his plan to level me up quickly was... if he could really get me leveled in time for the fight with Vierdimin, though, I wasn’t about to turn his help down.

I was huffing and puffing by the time that I caught him, right at the zone line into **North Lorengarde Orchards - Level 5**. As the plains around us slowly shifted into a lightly wooded medieval forest area, I crossed my arms and nudged the halfling with my hips.

“Well? What’s the plan?”

“Ow! Watch it goldie. Save the humping for the bedroom. That’s the plan.”

“Excuse me?”

“Just like I said. This game is like any other game. You gotta work with the mechanics instead of fighting them. I’m a dirty little halfling thief, right?”

I nodded. “The dirtiest.”

He smiled. “Aww, goldie, you noticed. But anyway, so I embrace that.

And the game rewards me in all kinds of small ways. In your case, you're a Courtesan. That's just a fancy way to say 'prostitute.'"

"Hey!"

Erlix shrugged. "Don't fight it! It's what you are, right? Or what your avatar is anyway. You wanna rake in the levels? We gotta take your streetwalking career semi-pro."

I narrowed my eyes at the little dude. "What are you suggesting exactly?"

"We're almost to Lorengarde," he replied. "And the first thing you're doing is going to Kirth's Inn and renting a room."

"Kirth's inn?" I was starting to get an inkling of what the dirty little halfling was planning, and I wasn't sure I liked it. "What am I going to do in Kirth's inn?"

At the rate we were moving we'd already crossed through the North Lorengarde Orchard's and had gotten to the city gate of Lorengarde proper. The guild had chosen a good location for their guildhouse—close enough to an allied city to easily call on help if we were attacked, and it made supply runs to the city easy. Erlix paused outside the city gates and started rummaging around in his pack, and then produced the materials to craft a wooden sign and etch some lettering onto it. He shoved the mats into my hands and waved me into the city, past the leering guards whose eyes were fixated on the leather thong that barely concealed my crotch.

"Come see us later, boys," Erlix said with a wink as we passed. Once we were inside, he turned to me again. "Multi-level marketing schemes, goldie. They're genius. And they're gonna get you leveled faster than you can blink."

"Excuse me? Erlix, I have no idea what you're talking about."

He pointed at the materials for the sign in my hands. "You're gonna write some prices on that board for 'courtesan' services. Rock-bottom cheap prices. The cheapest ever. And you're going to put it outside Kirth's and wait upstairs in your room."

My face paled. "Gross."

"How else do you expect to level fast, goldie? The more NPCs you seduce of varying levels, the faster you shoot up in levels."

I ground my teeth, but he was right. I was in Fantasy Realms Online now. For better or worse, I had to play by their rules. "Fine. But how are we gonna get enough people to come in even with cheap prices? They have to

see the sign, and there's a lot of competition."

Erlix beamed at me. "That's where I come in. I'm a genius. You're going to give me half your take to spread the word around town and send customers your way."

I narrowed my eyes at him. "Why?"

"Because *I'm* going to give half my take to everyone I recruit to spread the word for me, up to 10 people. And they're going to do the same. We'll all get rich while you earn profits for us! All you have to do is fuck the customers and write down who sent 'em so we can divvy up the loot later. And don't worry—I'll take care of that for you." He smiled wider. "Like I said! Multi-level marketing. We'll get rich and you'll get tons and tons of levels." He hooked his thumbs behind his belt and rocked back and forth on his boots, looking super proud of himself.

I blinked at him. Then I blinked at him again. "A pyramid scheme. That's your plan?"

"If you wanna be crass about it. Sure."

"That's... genius." I couldn't believe it. It was the dumbest idea ever, but it was so dumb that it just might work. Not on real players, but on NPCs? NPCs who'd never heard of such a thing? And all I had to do was go to Kirth's and then fuck all of Lorengarde.

"I sure think so. You ready to get started?"

I sighed. I couldn't believe I was about to do this. But realistically, I didn't see any other way to help my guild out in time for our big fight with Vierdimin. There was no other way to get me high enough in level as a courtesan. I didn't wanna be totally useless. I straightened my back, pushed my chest out, and adjusted my chest straps. "Okay. Fine. Let's go."

"That's the spirit, goldie! Let's make some coin..."

I did as he asked me and headed straight to Kirth's, where I placed my crafted sign outside the door with appallingly low prices compared to other courtesan services. I was about to drive the market for sex in Lorengarde down to bargain-basement rates, but hopefully the other NPC girls wouldn't hear about and drop their rates until I was well into my leveling. When I rented the room, Kirth gave me some side-eye, but then shrugged. Money was money, and I wasn't the first whore to set up shop in his tavern. I left instructions with the doorman to send people my way and trudged up the steps to my room. Once there, I stripped off the leather, leaving me in a simple silk pair of bra and panties. I arranged myself on the bed and waited

for the plan to begin.

It didn't take long before the first curious patron wandered into my room to check out the super cheap goods. A **Townsmen - Level 7**.

"Hello there," he said. "I'm here for a blowjob."

I sighed, dropped to my knees, and popped the **Seduce** skill before working his dick like the world-class hooker I was. His eyes rolled back into his head as he squirted his load all over my tits a few moments later. **DING!** A shower of golden sparks surrounded us as I hit level 6.

"Thanks," he murmured, before slapping some coins on the nightstand and stumbling toward the door.

I wiped my lips off and called after him. "Wait! Who sent you?"

"A little halfling rogue," he said over his shoulder. "Erlax. He's telling everyone." I nodded and marked him down in my inventory notes.

Soon word got around. Erlax's plan was working like a charm, and plenty of customers wanted more than just a blowjob. After the first few, I didn't even bother putting my clothes back on. They were lining up outside the door to take me, one after the other, the next practically stepping into the room even before the one before him had finished. I'd expected that they wouldn't want sloppy seconds, but the NPCs he was sending my way didn't seem to care, and it seemed that the real players had better things to be doing.

I fucked humans on my back, let the orcs and kobolds take me from behind, and the elves always wanted me to ride on top of them. I had so many screaming orgasms that I was dizzy, and my nipples were sore from being hard for hours at a time. **DING! DING! DING! DING! DING!**

The levels flew by as I took steaming squirts over and over and over again, using **Seduce** on one NPC after another, dazzling them with my sexual prowess and taking their coin before kicking them out the door. And Erlax had been busy! Soon the notches on my list were appearing next to a stack of names that was thirty people long. The halfling's pyramid scheme was actually taking off, because the NPCs he'd recruited weren't savvy enough to see through it like real humans would be. I worked all day and all night, not needing to stop for either sleep or food, and my world became a whirlwind of dicks and orgasms and dings. I stared at my own heaving breasts and the tavern ceiling so much that both images got burned into my brain, and I saw my swollen, oft-nuzzled nips in my mind's eye whether my real eyes were open or closed. I dimly worried what this might do to my psyche later to literally have so much sex pounded into me, but I was too busy with the

cocks to focus on that.

It went on like this for days, and at the end of each day Erlix would pop in to count up the money, give me my cut, and go out to distribute the rest among his little pyramid network. Each time he'd wink at me. "Looking good, goldie. Keep it up! Get those levels!"

Finally, a week had passed. My guild was headed out to battle Vierdimin the following day, and Erlix and I had closed up shop to regroup. I had managed to reach Level 43 in an unheard-of amount of time. I still couldn't quite believe that we'd gotten Lacey to nearly the same level as Kromgorn with less than a week of work. *Hard* work, I had to admit, but not entirely without its pleasures...

Erlix sat beside me on the bed, counting his money, while I iced my crotch and flicked through screen after screen of weird sex-related skills I had no idea how to use because I'd leveled too quickly to learn my class properly.

"What are these skills, even?" I wondered. "**Kama Sutra? Motorboat? Vejazzle?**"

"Slow down, there," Erlix said without lifting his eyes from the stacks of gold arrayed around him. "You'll figure out the advanced maneuvers eventually. You don't wanna try to get fancy for the first time in a high-stakes fight. Stick to **Charm** and **Seduce**. It's the backbone of your class."

"If you say so... I'm amazed we got me to level 43. But I'm worried it's still not enough."

"It should be enough to let you in on the guild fight, right? You can at least seduce a few of their goons now." Erlix grinned. "Plus we're rich, goldie! You fucked a lot of dudes over the last few days. Even at your low rates there's a fortune to go around."

I nodded. He was right. I'd actually be useful in the guild fight. Erlix's crazy, sex-fueled plan had saved the day. He'd earned his little treasure trove.

Now all I had to do was make my way back to the guild hall, convince Topper to let me fight with them, and...

My thoughts trailed off as a blinking message appeared in the lower corner of my screen. *What's this?* I expanded it, and my eyes widened as I read the contents.

*ALL GUILDIES: We're going today. Someone tipped off Vierdimin to what we're planning. No time to lose. Get to the Secret Order guild house for an all-out assault! —Topper*

"Shit!" I leapt off the bed, dropping the ice pack, and began to hurriedly

yank on my leather armor pieces.

Erlix jumped, scattering coins, and glared up at me, but his expression changed when he saw how worried I looked. “What is it?”

“There was a traitor inside the guild... We have to go now. They’re attacking Vierdimin today!”

Erlix began to sweep the gold into his backpack in big armfuls. “Well, let’s go! No time now to distribute these earnings to the pyramid network... I’ll get them back later. Hurry, goldie!”

I rolled my eyes, but there was no time to argue. We burst out the door and ran at full speed for the Wyveryn Master.

## Chapter 12

By the time Erlix and I touched down on our wyveryns in the **Plains of Woe**, where the Secret Order guildhouse was located, the battle was in full swing. The landscape of the Dark Legion territories was grey and barren, with twisted black trees reaching up toward a reddish-black sky of churning clouds, and the red spatters surrounding the fallen bodies already littering the ground fit right in with the color palette of the dismal landscape.

“Blech,” Erlix said. “Who would want to have their HQ here? The edgiest of edgelords?”

“Shut up and come on,” I muttered, racing toward the battlefield. I readied my bow even though I didn’t really expect to use it much.

As we got nearer, I spotted Topper and Vierdimin wading through a crowd of nameless NPC mercenaries on both sides, trying to reach one another. Bodies flew left and right as Topper’s **Holy Sword of Righteous Flame** flashed again and again, while blackish-purple beams vaporized our own side’s mercs as Vierdimin swept his **Lv. 80 Staff of Matter Manipulation** back and forth across the battlefield from his levitating position above the fray. He had his whole posse of evil goons out, too—the dark elf warrior Nambla, the evil faerie sorceress Lefay, and the half-ogre barbarian Wugduz all launched vicious assaults against my guildies as we pressed Topper’s offensive plan, trying to break Vierdimin’s lines so we could capture the dark Lich.

“I need to help them,” I said, clenching my fists tight around my bow. I loosed a couple of arrows into the fray just to do something, taking out a few level 20 kobold NPCs in tabards of the Secret Order, and felt weirdly proud of myself despite it not being much of an achievement.

“I don’t know, goldie. Those PCs look pretty mean...” Erlix had his daggers out and flipped the right one over and over in his hand as he studied the battlefield. I’d never seen him look so focused. But he was right. Vierdimin’s lieutenant’s were all high level—at least in their 60s, and I didn’t have much chance of my **Charm** landing on them.

“I have to do *something*!” I stomped my foot in frustration and sent another arrow streaking toward a lowbie kobold, catching him in the throat. He fell with a shrieking gurgle. “It’s nice to not be totally useless again, but I didn’t spend a week taking all the dick in Lorengarde so I could wipe out

NPCs at half my level... my guild needs help!"

Erlix nodded. "Okay then. Stay put. I'm gonna go scout around..."

"Wait!" I called, but Erlix had already vanished. *Damn that rogue! Like hell I'm staying put...*

I swept my gaze across the battle again, trying to find my friends. Topper was giving as good as he got, but the rest of our guild wasn't doing so well. Tigraine and Sensei were both healing furiously, but the strain on their faces told me they were barely keeping up with the damage from Vierdimin's forces, and Haxor was nowhere to be seen—although as an assassin, that wasn't surprising. The other members of our guild were hurting badly. I wondered if Topper had already found and dealt with our traitor, or if he was still out here on the battlefield somewhere waiting to betray us again... the thought made me sick.

Then I saw something worse: Jazzus, pinned down and writhing on the ground under the effects of some kind of dark magic. The battle had moved past her, but she was convulsing and appeared to be unable to move. I scrambled down the hill I had been standing on, climbing over the fallen bodies of kobolds and humans alike, and raced over to her.

"Jazzus!" I cried, dropping to my knees beside her and grabbing her by the shoulders. Dark energy coursed all around her, shaking her body, and her eyes were shut tight. Her teeth clenched in a grimace of pain. "Say something! Can you move?"

Her eyes fluttered open and attempted to fix on mine, though it looked like she couldn't focus. She tried to say something through her clenched teeth, but she was shaking too hard. Then she glanced down toward her pack and tried to speak again, fighting through the pain.

"Hang on!" I dove for the fallen pack and dug through it until I found a dispel scroll. I stood up, read the words on the scroll, and breathed a sigh of relief as the dark magic melted away from her body. *Thank goodness Jazzus had the sense to pay extra for a level 1 scroll anyone can use.*

Jazzus gasped, sitting straight upright. "Gods, Lacey! Thank you! Those disabling spells are so much worse when you can't just log out and wait for them to pass."

"What's going on?"

She staggered to her feet, leaning heavily on her battle staff. "You saw the message. Someone tipped the bad guys off. We don't know who yet, but when I find out..." Jazzus growled and grasped her staff tightly, causing a

swirl of flame to spin around the head. Then she released it and shook her shoulders. “Anyway, we’re losing. Vierdimin had time to get ready for us, and their average level is higher. We’re doing our best. They’re only going to get stronger as long the curse holds in game.”

Jazzus seemed to notice my level for the first time and did a double take. “Whoa, Lacey. 43? You’re higher level than I am! How did you do it so fast?”

I blushed. “Erm... long story. I’ll tell you later. Right now Topper needs us!”

She nodded. “Right. Let’s go!” Jazzus raised her staff and rushed back into the fray with a blood-curdling yell, hurling fireballs left and right. After a moment’s hesitation, I followed her, firing arrows with abandon at everything that moved.

By myself, as a courtesan, my combat skills wouldn’t have been good enough to hold my own for very long at all, but it was much easier when I was following in the wake of a hardened battle mage like Jazz. I was really sucky DPS backup, but I was just mopping up after everything she burned. We slew hordes of NPCs as we worked our way to the center of the field, where Topper and Vierdimin were nearing one another.

I chewed my lip as I let another few arrows fly. “Are we really going to attack Vierdimin?” I shouted.

“Topper is going to need all the help he can get!” Jazzus called over her shoulder. “He can’t fight him alone. We’re better than nothing!”

I nodded, hardening my pretty face into a mask of grim determination. Jazzus was right.

With a final burning slice, Topper put down the orc nearest him and stepped into a momentary clearing in the battle long enough for Jazzus and me to reach him. We fanned out on either side of him and waited, breathing hard. Topper gave me an incredulous sidelong stare.

“Krom? How did you gain 40 levels in just a few days?”

“It’s Lacey now! And no time to explain... here comes Vierdimin!”

I pointed to the dark Lich lord who floated less than 30 feet away from us now, holding his black staff up menacingly and cackling with glee.

“Get behind me,” growled Topper, raising his fiery sword in front of his face.

As Krom, I would have argued, but as Lacey, I meekly did as he requested. Jazzus slid into place beside me, and we both lifted our weapons

toward Vierdimin.

“Cute little force you assembled here, Topper,” Vierdimin said, his voice dripping with malice. “It’s a shame my mole tipped us off. It was a stupid plan, anyway. How could you hope to contain me? My staff has the power to destroy anything.”

“Yeah, well we’ll see how it does against my sword,” Topper replied. “And when I find your mole, I’m going to make them wish they’d never been born.”

Vierdimin rolled his eyes. “So dramatic.”

“Why don’t you just release us?” Jazzus demanded. “You did your little spell and you sealed yourself in the game. Nice work. But you didn’t have to trap us too!”

“What would the fun in that be?” Vierdimin turned and made a dismissive gesture, vaporizing one of our mercs that had been sneaking up on him. “NPCs are a bore. I need other people to rule over and play with if my game world is going to be entertaining for me.”

“You’re a sick fuck,” I said. “Some of us have families that need us in the real world.”

Vierdimin shrugged. “Maybe you should have spent less time playing games then. Who are you anyway?” Then a spark of recognition lit in his eyes. “Oh, the barbarian trapped in the whore. I heard about you.” He broke into a long, gleeful laugh. “How’s life on the feminine side, sweet-tits? Get used to it. Maybe I’ll make you my personal concubine just for fun, once I crush your friends here.”

“Over my dead body.” Topper crouched lower, preparing to spring into action.

“That’s the idea,” Vierdimin said. “And I won’t even have to get my hands dirty.”

“What?” Topper’s eyes widened as Haxor materialized behind him, unstealthingly and driving both his daggers deep into Topper’s back. Topper fell to his knees, severely weakened by Haxor’s paralyzing poisons, and then crumpled into a ball.

“Haxor!” Jazzus cried, stumbling back a few steps. “You’re the mole? How could you!”

Haxor shrugged. “Vierdimin told me he’d let me out if I betrayed you all. Sorry. It’s just a game, and I miss my girlfriend.”

Jazzus tried to unleash a spell on him but Haxor had a counterspell

ready, and he slammed an anti-magic shield onto her before she could react. Then he grabbed her wrists and bound her with rope while she fought. Vierdimin chortled above us and Topper quivered on the ground.

“Fucking spellblade!” Jazzus struggled hard but she was no match physically for the much-higher level character.

“Hey!” I cried. Everyone had just been ignoring me, and I was sick of it. “Try this on for size!” I took aim at Haxor’s throat and unleashed a volley of arrows.

*Plink. Plink. Plink.* They barely scratched his HP, and Haxor smirked at me. “Really? A Courtesan with a bow, 25 levels lower than me? That’s cute, Krom. Why don’t you wander off and fuck a few more dudes while we finish mopping up the guild.”

I blinked at him, feeling a sense of helplessness wash over me. I could barely hurt him. Vierdimin floated down and touched him on the shoulder. I watched in horror as his guild tag flipped over from **Shining Army** to **Secret Order**.

“Haxor?” I asked helplessly. “Really? You’re going to betray us like this?”

“We never had a chance against the Lich, and we all knew it,” he replied. “He’s too powerful. There’s no defense against that staff.”

“Your friend is wise,” Vierdimin said. “Unlike that joke of a paladin writhing on the ground.” He jerked his thumb at Topper. “No, the Shining Army is done for. This game, this world, is mine now. And there’s nothing any of you can do to stop me.”

I glanced around the battlefield once again. Tigraine and Sensei had fallen to the ground, and Vierdimin’s lieutenant’s had either killed or disabled all of my guildies with **Hold Person** spells. Topper was still incapacitated, with Haxor’s boot resting on his chest. Jazzus was bound and helpless, on her knees at Haxor’s feet. My shoulders fell. It was over, then. My leveling and my attempt to help my guild had been too little, too late.

A scream of rage ripped through the air, and Erlix materialized on Haxor’s back, unstealthed just in time to drag a poisoned dagger across Haxor’s throat. It only took half of his HP away, but he failed the poison save and fell to the ground, disabled by the same paralyzing concoction affecting Topper. Erlix spit on Haxor and turned toward Vierdimin, his daggers raised.

“Erlix!” I cried. “You got him!”

“Never discount the halfling,” Erlix replied with a wink. “Now let’s

make short—” Erlix made a strangled *hurk* noise as a black beam of energy lanced out from Vierdimin’s staff and wrapped around his throat and limbs, knocking him to the ground and scattering his daggers. He grasped at the dark tendril tightening around his throat, slowly leeching his HP away, but couldn’t seem to free himself.

“You don’t seem to understand,” Vierdimin said. “This is my playground. There’s no trick you can pull. No last minute gimmick you can use. You can’t beat me within the rules of the game, and the rules of the game are all there are for us now.”

“Goldie!” Erlix struggled to get the words out from a constricted throat. “Goldie, use the game mechanics! Go with your class strengths!”

He was crazy. I was only level 43. Vierdimin was level 80. There was nothing in a million years that I could do to him that he wouldn’t resist. Vierdimin knew it too. He gestured toward me, and I felt myself lift off the ground and float toward him as if carried by a giant, invisible hand that grabbed my body, molesting me in all my intimate places as I drew close to him. I struggled against the hand in my tight leather, feeling truly uncomfortable for the first time as the Lich leered at my body. I hated to think what he might be able to make me do with his dark magic...

I frantically popped my menus and looked for something, anything, some forgotten skill I could try so he wouldn’t just take me without a fight.

And then... I saw something. It was a long shot, but it was my only chance. I grabbed a potion out of my bag and downed the contents in a single gulp.

Vierdimin’s eyes widened as the tag above my head bumped from **Lv. 43 Human Courtesan** to **Lv. 83 Human Courtesan**. I looked Vierdimin square in the face, suspended in the air across from him, and smiled.

“**Charm**,” I said.

## Chapter 13

Vierdimin failed his save, and I dropped to the ground. I looked at my hands in surprise. *I can't believe it... it actually worked. And now Vierdimin is charmed until I release him, and no one in his guild can hurt me.*

"Yeah, goldie!" Erlix cried. "Go get 'em."

"What is this madness? How could you possibly charm me?" demanded Vierdimin.

I grinned. "Potion of Temporary Level Boost." My level flickered, and I felt myself drop back down to my old level, the spell's magic already exhausted. But it had done what I needed it to. "And now you're charmed until I say otherwise."

Vierdimin howled with rage and unleashed a black beam from his staff on me, but the magic passed harmlessly through me. He shot me again and again to no effect. Then his lieutenants, who had been standing on the side lines, rushed in and tried to carve me up with their swords, but I laughed as the blades passed harmlessly through me.

"Sorry guys," I said. "**Charm** prevents hostile actions from the target and his whole guild. You can't even tie me up as long as I keep Vierdimin charmed. Now..." I raised my little bow and pointed it at Vierdimin, loosing a volley of arrows at him. *Plink. Plink. Plink.* I watched his HP drop from 100% to 97%. I smiled. "Not much, but I have all the time I need. Say, don't the server rules allow for full corpse looting? That's a nice staff you have there, V."

Vierdimin's mouth dropped open, and something that looked like fear sparked in his eyes. He began to stammer. "Why y-you... you fucking punk. I will destroy you. You and everyone you care about."

I kept releasing arrows while he talked. *Plink. Plink. Plink. Plink. Plink.* His HP was down around 85% now. "Great, Vierdimin. Just stand still. Beating the Lich is easier than I expected."

"Fuck you," Vierdimin muttered. "I *will* find away around this."

"Not today!" I cried. *Plink. Plink.*

"Retreat!" Vierdimin shouted. He cast a prepared ritual, **Evacuation**, and a blindingly bright flash lit up the battlefield. When the light faded, his whole force had disappeared... including Haxor. With the dark casters gone, the magic holding our forces in place faded. Erlix dusted himself off and cut

Jazzus free, and Haxor's poison finally wore off on Topper.

"I can't believe that worked..." Topper muttered. "Nice work."

"Lacey, you saved us!" cried Jazzus. She rushed over to sweep me up in a big hug, and my heart swelled with pride.

"I can't quite believe it worked either," I said. "But it did."

"Make sure you don't release that **Charm** spell," Erlix warned.

"Not a chance. I'm not done with Vierdimin yet. None of us are. And now we have a secret weapon." I stared at my hands, and then ran them over my body. My pert breasts, my sexy legs, my ample hips. "Who knew that Lacey the Courtesan could end up being our most powerful tool in this fight?"

"Do I still get credit for this?" Jazzus asked with a smile. "The fact that we have her here is technically my fault..."

I smiled back. "Look, just because I've started to have fun as a girl doesn't mean you're off the hook for getting me trapped in this body. You still owe me, okay?"

She stepped a little closer, keeping her arms looped around my neck. "How will I *ever* make it up to you, Lacey? I'll have to figure something out..."

Topper looked at Erlix in confusion. "What's up with those two?"

Erlix started picking his teeth with his dagger. "Now that the fight's over, they're probably thinking about giant halfling cocks. It always gets the ladies going."

"Have you seen it yet?" Jazzus asked me.

I shook my head. "He wouldn't show me. I called his bluff. He must be ashamed of it."

Erlix sighed. "Well, I still don't think you want it badly enough, but I suppose you all fought hard today. You earned a treat." He unlaced his breeches and dropped his pants. A huge penis as thick as a wrist snaked between his legs, coming down almost to his knee. Everyone's mouths dropped open. Erlix waggled it proudly. "Told ya."

"That image is going to be burned into my mind for quite some time..." Jazzus murmured.

Erlix laced back up, whistling to himself, and then happily started looting the corpses.

Topper shook his head. "I need some serious eye bleach. Let's talk about something else. It's great that Lacey has Vierdimin charmed, but now

we need a plan. He's smart. It won't take him long to figure out how to keep you permanently away from him, or something. Your skill is useful, but we still have to trap him and get him to release us."

"How are we going to do that?" I asked. I could see that Topper had a point. It was great that I was protected from Vierdimin and his gang, but by itself it wasn't going to be enough to stop them.

"The leveling trick was good," Topper said, scratching his chin. "But what would be great is if you could actually use your skills against his whole team without a potion to help. Right now you have to plink them to death. But what if you were level 80?"

I didn't like where this was headed, but Jazzus was nodding along. "We need to get you up to Vierdimin's level. It's the only way. Then you can lead the assault."

"Hmm. But she already pulled out all her stops to hit level 43. How do we get her to max level before the Secret Order can find a way to stop us?" Topper tapped his nose thoughtfully.

"You guys, I don't know about this..." I said.

But then Erlix piped up, clearing his throat. "About that," he said. "I might have a few ideas... let's start by getting the materials for a sign."

"A sign?" Jazzus asked.

I put my face in my hands and moaned.

"What is a sign going to do for us?" Topper asked.

Erlix tossed his tiny cape over his shoulder with a flourish and raised his palms in the air. "Let me teach you a little bit about multi-level marketing..." he began.

I leaned against Jazzus, burying my face in the sweet-smelling hair that twirled down past her shoulders. She stroked my hair and hugged me while she and Topper listened to Erlix spin his grand plans to get me power-leveled to 80.

"Shh, shh, it's going to be okay," she whispered. "We're together, and that's what matters. You did it, Lacey. You saved your friends. Whatever the plan is, we're going to beat Vierdimin together and get out of here."

And somehow, I knew she was right.

# **Pleasure Maiden**

## Chapter 14

I staggered out of my room at the top of Kirth's inn, adjusting my skin-tight leather armor that I still hadn't quite gotten used to, and made my way down the hall to my friend Jazzus's room. My body was sore from all of the NPCs Erlix had been sending to my inn room to have their way with me, but the leveling had slowed way down and the NPCs were fewer and further between. I'd grown impatient waiting for my next lay, and I wanted to see what my friends had discovered in their research. Jazzus was bent over a book at her desk, her finger tracing line after line of arcane text, while our guild leader Topper peered over her shoulder and fidgeted impatiently with the pommel of his **Holy Sword of Righteous Flame**.

Laying my eyes on a high-level epic quality sword like that drew a sigh of frustration out of me. Once, I'd been the one wielding a sword like that, leaping directly into the heat of battle as a half-giant barbarian warrior and laying waste to my enemies with some intense, high-DPS savagery and group-boosting shouts. Now, thanks to the stupid curse of our sworn foe Vierdimin, the Lich, plus some poor timing and bad luck on my part, I was stuck in the body of this tiny, busty, charisma-focused Human Courtesan whose primary skills and ability revolved around sex and seduction.

Until recently, screwing dudes in-game—or even chicks for that matter—hadn't been my idea of a good time. But I had to admit that there was a certain charm that came with playing a charisma-focused female Courtesan, now that I'd seen the power of what skills like **Charm** could do. Thanks to a well-time level boost potion and that skill, I was the only member of **The Shining Army** that was totally immune to Vierdimin and his whole guild of **Secret Order** cronies. It was only a slight advantage for us, but an extremely important one, and I felt proud to be able to help my friends despite being thrust into less than ideal circumstances (and being forced to take a lot of thrusting as well).

"Hey, Krom." Topper glanced at me as I strolled into the room, his eyes lingering on my ample chest that strained against the tight leather holding my boobs securely in place. It was weird noticing things like that now. I'd always assumed girls made shit like that up for attention or that it would be flattering if it happened to me. It was kind of flattering, but after a while you also noticed they missed things you said because they were imagining fucking

you. I knew that's what he was doing because I'd done it myself to girls a thousand times IRL and as Kromgorn.

"It's Lacey now," I said tersely, reminding him that we'd agreed to just treat me like the character I was playing as long as we were trapped in the game by Vierdimin's hacking magic.

He nodded. "Right, Lacey, sorry. Shouldn't you be leveling?"

I sighed. "There aren't new NPCs to fuck, and the XP has really slowed down. I think we need to expand Erlix's multi-level marketing ploy to other towns or something." The dirty little halfling had had the genius plan to whore me out at rock-bottom prices to level me quickly and offer a network of pimps half the take for spreading the word about the hot piece of ass in the town of Minsc in Lorengarde, but it was a one-time deal—no repeat customers. That was because of how Courtesans leveled. You got the most XP for fucking a new NPC for the first time, and I'd spent the last few days getting banged my most of the NPCs in Minsc. It had allowed me to rocket up to level 43 and join my team in time for the battle with Vierdimin. Sadly, he'd disappeared with his lieutenants before we could capture him and force him to release us.

Jazzus looked up from her research and shook her head. "I told you guys that I don't think this plan is going to work much longer. The devs would never have allowed a loophole that could level a character all the way to 80 without any danger... even a social class like the Courtesan."

Topper frowned. "I was hoping you were wrong, but I guess she's only gained two levels in the last few days."

He pointed to the tag floating above my head, which said, **Lacey, Lv. 45 Human Courtesan**. I knew in my heart that Jazzus was right. I'd been hoping, like Topper, that she was wrong, but each new lay was barely moving my XP bar now. At least it was still a good time.

"NPCs in the city top out around level 38 with the exception of the faction leaders, and I don't think you'll have much luck getting a level 85 raid boss like King Algin into bed," Jazzus continued. "We need to find a new plan. She's not going to gain any more levels staying on her back in the safety of the inn room upstairs."

"What am I supposed to do, then?" I asked. "We need to get me to 80 as soon as possible."

"Really, we should all be leveling," Topper said. "We know that Vierdimin's crew has the level advantage on us to begin with, and they're not

going to sit around on their hands now that they know we're gunning for them. I already sent the rest of the guild out to do just that. If Lacey isn't getting levels here anymore, we should go out and join them."

"We need to focus on power-leveling her especially, though," Jazzus insisted, nodding toward me. "I haven't found anything in my in-game research that would allow us to break the game the way Vierdimin did to trap us all here, which means I still have no idea how to reverse it." She shoved the book away from her and cursed. "It's useless. I wish we had another high level mage to help. Where's Haxor when you need him?"

We all stared at the floor in uncomfortable silence. Haxor the Spellblade had been a member of **The Shining Army** until just recently, when he'd turned on us and joined **The Secret Order** in the hope that Vierdimin would eventually let him out of the game. The betrayal still stung, since he'd been close friends with all of us. He had also been one of our highest level players at level 68, so losing him put us in an even worse position against Vierdimin and his cronies.

"Have you heard any updates from outside the game?" I asked in an attempt to change the subject.

Topper nodded grimly. "Iciez logs in now and again and passes along updates, although I don't let her stay for long just in case Vierdimin has some way to trap new players who are careless enough to enter. The news isn't good. Players were trapped in game worldwide, and our bodies are all in comas outside the game. Most of us are on life support machines and nutrient drips in the hospitals. Unplugging the hardware jacks from our bodies doesn't change a thing. It's not pretty, and the government is in an uproar demanding answers. A group of concerned parents is lobbying to have the game shut down for safety reasons, and the only reason they haven't yet is because no one knows what'll happen to those of us still trapped inside."

"Shit," I muttered. "That's not good."

"No, and it gets worse..." he continued. "Iciez says the parental lobby is gaining steam. It's hard for politicians to argue with videos of tearful mothers blaming Fantasy Realms Online for throwing their children into a coma. Nongamers don't understand how real this is, and it doesn't make sense to them that we could still be 'in' here if we're disconnected out there."

"It doesn't make much sense to me either," Jazzus mumbled.

"And yet," Topper replied. "Here we are."

"So we need to move fast," I said. "If Vierdimin doesn't release us

soon, you're saying we could all wind up deleted or worse?"

Topper shrugged. "I have no idea. But Vierdimin is the one who has our answers. And right now you're our best shot of forcing him to talk... you just won't be able to do much at all to him until we get your level maxed out."

"Back to square one." I blew my cheeks out in frustration and swept my pretty, curling hair back over my shoulder. It was always falling in my eyes now, and I hadn't yet figured out the equivalent of an in-game hair band. I kept forgetting to ask Jazzus what she recommended, but her hair was close-cropped and functional. It was a setting you could only change at character creation until they released barber shops, which was a low priority feature. For now, I'd just have to deal with it, like a few dozen other annoying things about being trapped in a girl's body.

"What we need to do is take her out into the wild and find some hostile NPCs for her to seduce or charm," Jazzus said. "She's got all those skills based on manipulation and control. Isn't it time she used them? That has to be how the developers intended her class to progress."

Topper scratched his head and looked me over, and I fidgeted under his gaze, wishing again that chicks didn't have to wear such skimpy armor. "That makes sense," he said. "I wish there were other high level courtesans around we could ask."

We all knew there weren't. Until I'd approached the class methodically and actually tried to level it up to get good, there had been no other player in the game willing to use the class as anything but a joke to fool around in. Sex in-game was realistic and fun, but there was no overlap between people who took their gaming seriously and people that wanted to grind out levels in a sex den using skills designed to titillate and distract their enemies. Even my avatar had started out that way, since Haxor's girlfriend had thought it would be funny to make a sexy nympho who dumped all her points into charisma. That was how Lacey had become Lacey the Courtesan. At least I was half-decent with a bow, too, thanks to high Agility and Dexterity scores.

As we stood in the room attempting to think through a fast way to level me up, I started getting an itchy feeling between my shoulder blades. I glanced around, confused. Usually I only got that feeling right before something went wrong, or when someone was stealthed and sneaking up on me... something was wrong. I could feel it.

"Guys..." I began, but I was too late.

"You have bigger problems than how to level Lacey up," a gruff voice

announced.

## Chapter 15

**Haxor, Lv. 70 Half-Elf Spellblade** un-stealthed in the middle of the room and slapped some kind of arcane device in the middle of Topper's back. Topper gave a strangled cry and collapsed, twitching on the floor.

Jazzus cursed and sprang to her feet, grabbing her magical staff from beside the desk and beginning to gather swirling arcane energies to defend herself, but Spellblades were a class designed to fight mages. Haxor gestured and used **Psychic Knife** on her, silencing her and causing her magic to wink out without a trace.

"Damn it, Haxor, why are you doing this to us? You want to get out of the game as badly as we do!" Jazzus shouted.

"You're all idiots if you think there's any way out other than doing exactly what Vierdimin says," Haxor said matter of factly. He shook his head. "Stop resisting. It'll all go easier on you. Why not join us?"

I spit on the ground. "Join **The Secret Order**? You're a bunch of lowlife trolls with no honor or class. I can't believe you, Haxor. They corpse camp newbies and exploit the game as often as they can! How can you join up with trash like that?"

"Because it's the rational thing to do. I'm not sure if it's playing around as a human sex toy that rattled your skull or if you're really just that stupid, but invincibility isn't the same as actually being able to win, Lacey."

"So you just give up and throw your lot in with assholes? We trusted you, and you betrayed us!"

He frowned. "Jeez, maybe you have become a girl. It's like you're not even listening. You can't win!"

"That's not going to stop us from trying. Some of us have real courage even when things get tough, Haxor."

If the barb touched a sore spot with Haxor, he didn't show it. He just shrugged. "Fine. Have it the hard way. You might be able to keep Vierdimin charmed for a while, Lacey, but that doesn't mean we can't take out all of your support player by player." He put two fingers between his lips and whistled. The thumping of boots sounded from the hallway and three of Vierdimin's highest-level lieutenants poured into the room: **Nambla, Lv. 62 Half-Elf Rogue**, **Wugduz, Lv. 65 Ogre Shadowknight**, and **Lefay, Lv. 69 Dark Elf Wizard**.

Lefay smirked at Topper twitching on the floor as she entered and gestured toward me. “This is the faggoty perv getting off on playing a girl?”

“Shut up!” Jazzus hissed. “Homophobic bitch.”

Lefay just laughed, twirling her staff in one hand, while Wugduz picked up Topper’s immobilized form and tossed him over his shoulder.

Ignoring Lefay’s taunts, I leapt over and tried to pry Topper away from Wugduz, but the massive ogre simply ignored me. My strength was pitiful, and no matter how hard I tugged at the paladin’s cloak, I couldn’t budge him from Wugduz’s iron grip.

Nambla smirked at my struggles. “Just ‘cuz we can’t hurt your ass doesn’t mean we can’t hurt your friends.”

Haxor advanced on Jazzus while she waved her staff menacingly, but the threat was empty while she was cut off from her magic. She brought the cudgel-like end of it down on Haxor’s head as hard as she could, but she shrugged off the blow and slapped a second device like the one that had disabled Topper to the middle of her chest. She convulsed and crumpled like Topper had, and I watched helplessly while he picked her up and loaded her onto his shoulder.

“Sorry, Jazz,” he said quietly.

“What are you even doing to them?” I demanded. “You can’t just take out high level players with a magic item! Are you hacking the game or something?”

Lefay rolled her eyes. “Because it would be such a shock, right?”

But Haxor shook his head. “These are Vierdimin’s handiwork. Legit in-game items, powered up by an 80th level Lich. They’ll keep your pals disabled and out of our hair long enough to find a way to deal with your bullshit little trick you pulled.”

Nambla flipped out his dagger and took an experimental slice at me, but the blade passed harmlessly through my body. I didn’t even feel a jolt. I stuck my tongue out at him and flipped him off. The gesture was braver than I actually felt. I was so mad at myself for being helpless while my friends were taken, but I was outnumbered and *vastly* outleveled, and even if they couldn’t hurt me, it seemed like I couldn’t stop them.

“Fuck. Her **Charm** is still working,” Nambla muttered. “I was hoping we might get lucky.”

“It’ll keep working until she charms another PC or releases Vierdimin,” Haxor said. “She’s not stupid, even if she looks like she is. Krom was one of

our top players. But whatever. We got what we came for. Let's see what she does without her friends to help her whore herself around." He shook his head at me. "I'm still pissed you're using my girlfriend's avatar, dude. You deserve this."

"It's not my fault!" I protested, my voice rising into a high-pitched feminine register that even annoyed me. "I was doing it to help my friends, you backstabbing asshole. Something you wouldn't know the first thing about."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. Look, this is a kidnapping, okay? If you want your friends back, all you have to do is drop the **Charm** on Vierdimin and surrender to us."

"Pfft. Not a chance in hell of that."

Haxor sighed. "Yeah, I told them you'd say that. Stupid fucking barbarian..."

He turned to leave, and I desperately cried out, "Haxor, wait! They're going to shut the game down with us inside of it. Topper just told us. We don't have much time, and we could all die in here. Don't do this. Help us beat Vierdimin and get out of here!"

He paused, looking at me over his shoulder, his eyes shadowed. For a moment I thought he was going to ask me something, but then he shook his head. "No. Vierdimin put too much work into freezing us in the game like this just to let someone shut it down. He'll have a plan."

"And if he doesn't?" I demanded.

"He has to," Haxor said with a shrug. "Good luck, Lacey. Give up soon and save us all a bunch of time, okay?" He leapt through the inn window, shattering the glass with a thunderous crash to land on the cobblestones below. Jazzus bounced on his shoulder as he arced through the air.

I flew to the shattered window and watched as he sprinted away, taking Jazzus along with him.

"Jazzus!" I cried. "Wait, Haxor! Come back!"

But even as I watched them go, Lefay was chanting something behind me. I turned around just in time to see her cast **Recall** on her group, which would return them to a fixed point of unknown origin.

"No!" I shouted, throwing a hand out. But it was too late to do anything even if I could have. Wugduz smirked and Nambla wagged his tongue at me between two fingers while the three of them faded from sight, taking Topper along with them.

I was left alone in an empty inn room with shattered glass littering the floor, once again stranded without my friends. I stood stunned, not quite believing what had just happened. *What am I supposed to do now?* I wondered. *I am so fucked. We're all so fucked...*

I put my face in my hands, sat down on the bed, and began to cry, overwhelmed by the torrent of emotions ripping through my stupid female body.

## Chapter 16

“And then what?”

“And then they took my friends and vanished!” I wailed. “And everything is terrible and we’re all screwed.”

Erlix had returned from making his rounds to find me crying and blubbering about the kidnapping, and he now stroked his chin as we stood together amid the glass and debris-covered floor of my inn room, considering the details of the encounter with Haxor and his goons I’d just finished catching him up on. It was an unusually reflective moment for the little guy, who was almost always cracking a joke, stabbing something, or scheming to grab whatever wasn’t nailed down—when he wasn’t bragging about his giant halfling cock.

I slumped further back on the hard wood of the inn chair. I didn’t deserve the comfort of a padded bed, the way I’d just allowed my friends to be taken like that. I kept turning the kidnapping over and over in my head, trying to figure out what I could have done.

“I’m not a lowly level 5 nooblet anymore,” I groaned. “I’m a level 45 class designed to distract, hold, and confuse my enemies, and it shouldn’t have been so easy for them to waltz in here and take my friends away. I’m used to being on top of my game here, but with this stupid Courtesan class, I’m just not...”

If I was looking to *Erlix* of all people for emotional support, I really must have been desperate, but to my surprise, he delivered.

“It’s not your fault,” he protested. “No one’s ever leveled a Courtesan this high before because no one takes the class seriously. We’re even at the limit of *my* knowledge, which is wide and impressive, like my cock. How can you know how to use it when we just power-leveled you through 40 levels, Goldie?”

I suppressed an urge to ask him if he was talking about my skills or his cock, but the joke brought a smile to my lips anyway. Although he was rude, crude, and often a nuisance, my halfling pal had really come through for me, and I was grateful to have *someone* still here and on my side with my guildmates captured. He still called me “Goldie” after the gold bikini I’d been wearing when he found me, despite the fact that I’d long since traded the whole “Slave Princess” look for a slightly more demure and intimidating set

of brown and green ranger leathers.

On second thought, “demure” might have been a little strong—in Fantasy Realms Online, all women’s clothing was pretty skimpy. I was still getting used to walking around with my legs bared from my knee-high boots to the crescent curve of the flared leather skirt which barely covered my ass, and both my midriff and a large portion of my rather impressive cleavage were prominently on display despite this being “combat” gear. If this is what the devs wanted rangers wearing, I shuddered to imagine what the end-game class armor for courtesans looked like.

*Here’s hoping I won’t be stuck as a girl long enough to find out, I thought to myself. Now focus! Moping around isn’t going to help anything.*

I sat up, determined to push through my malaise. “Okay. Enough whining. We need to find a way to rescue my friends.”

“No offense, Goldie, but it sounds like you couldn’t do much good against Haxor and his pals even with backup. I’m still level 32, remember? What’s your plan?”

“Well...” I frowned. Erlix had a point. At a minimum, we had to make some kind of logical plan, just like I would have done while planning a raid on Kromgorn. “So you’re right that we need to figure out what to do. Here’s how I see it: I’m still the strongest weapon we have against The Secret Order, and we’re running out of time, so we need to take every opportunity we can find to keep leveling me up.”

“And your friends?”

“That’s our next highest priority. Even at Level 80, I’m going to need help to fight Vierdimin. So we need to figure out where my friends are being held, and then go get them. If we can level me up on the way, and I can figure out how to use this class correctly, maybe we can kill two birds with one stone.”

“A-ha!” Erlix brightened perceptibly. “Then you, Goldie, are in luck. You just happen to have befriended the best tracker in the game.” He placed a hand on his chest and batted his eyelashes at me.

I gave him a flat stare. “You? Uh-huh.”

“Madam! I am wounded. At level 30 I selected the **Night Stalker** specialization for my Rogue class, which lets me track as well as any ranger.”

“How does that make you the best tracker in the game?”

“Perhaps not the best *at* tracking, but certainly the best *tracker* when you consider all of my many excellent attributes, to include my giant cock

and the fact that I'm the only tracker available to help you." He grinned and bowed.

I sighed and rolled my eyes. There appeared to be no end to Erlix's self-aggrandizement. "Okay. Great. So you have the **Tracking** skill. Why don't you get on that and let me know where my friends went?" Suddenly, my eyes widened in surprise. "Wait a minute. Everyone gets a specialization at levels 30 and 65, right? I wonder what mine is..."

Excitedly, I pulled up Lacey's character screen to check my options while Erlix frowned and began to inspect the room for trackable traces of our enemies. I'd blown through the levels leading up to 45 so quickly and been working so hard to attend to the clients I'd been servicing that I hadn't even thought to check what specializations were offered to courtesans. I hoped they weren't lame. Most specializations gave you an extra skill or two and affected some of the high end skills you could learn. There were rumors that it also had an impact on secret class unlocks, since it was common knowledge that Vierdimin had taken the **Necromancer** Wizard specialization on his way to unlocking the **Lich** class, and several other high-level wizards had since reached level 80 and not been able to do it with different specializations.

My character menu appeared like a digital 2D projection in front of me, detailing the statistics that Haxor's girlfriend had chosen for her character at the time of creation, the skills I'd unlocked for Lacey since then, and the levels I had in each of my skills. I hadn't spent nearly enough time examining the nuances of my class, if I was being honest, because I was still kind of annoyed at being forced to play a girl and didn't want to learn any more than I had to. But now I realized that I was being childish and stupid.

*You're willing to **Seduce** and fuck your way through half of Lorengarde because it levels you up as a class feature, but you don't want to bother learning what your skills do because of what, girl cooties? I chided myself. Learning to play your class doesn't really turn you into a chick, even if you're stuck as one for now. Be a real gamer and learn the damn game.*

Down below my skills was a flashing red button that read "SPECIALIZE", and when I swiped a finger through it I was presented with a set of three options with slightly different focuses, just like every other class when they hit level 30: **Seductress**, **Mesmer**, and **Moon Priestess**. I frowned as I read through the description of each:

### **[Seductress]**

The Seductress takes the Courtesan's natural assets and abilities to a whole new level. Whereas Courtesans exist to tease and please and cajole their foes to distraction, a Seductress is able to fully lock her enemies down with her sexual prowess, and can take her abilities to command, control, and persuade to a whole new level.

**New Skill:** *Multi-Charm*: Allows multiple NPCs to be charmed at once, though charm may break at any time when multiple NPCs are controlled (this chance increases the more NPCs are charmed).

#### **Perks:**

- +10 Max Charm Skill
- +10 Max Seduce Skill
- +25 Max NPC Persuasion Skill
- +5 Effective Character Level for Control/Distract Skills

### **[Mesmer]**

The Mesmer builds on the Courtesan's inherent abilities to tease and misdirect her foes, injecting a dose of the arcane arts into the class. By focusing her raw charisma, she is capable of using illusion magic from the available Wizard Spell list to misdirect her foes, further enhancing her distraction capabilities, and can buff herself and her allies with alluring charisma-improvement spells. Mesmers have small talents in the use of arcane devices, as they've studied magic at a rudimentary level.

**New Skill:** *Sexy Shadow*: The Mesmer creates an illusionary duplicate of herself which she can control with her mind and/or give orders to in her absence. The illusion has no corporeal form, but can use many of the Mesmer's skills and last for several minutes (or until revealed as an illusion by an attempted touch).

#### **Perks:**

- +10 Max Magical Devices Skill
- \* Allows memorization and use of the Illusion category of Wizard spells.
- \* Allows Charisma-based casting of all spells (for spells which would normally use Intelligence).

### **[Moon Priestess]**

The Moon Priestess enhances the Courtesan's natural reassuring and

comforting nature by adding an element of divine healing to her soft caresses and secret whispers. She exudes a divine aura of peace and love that makes enemies even less likely to engage her in combat and has an enhanced ability to conceal herself when needed. Her divine connection with the healing rays of the moon allows access to a new set of sexual healing skills.

**New Skill:** *Healing Love*: Your passionate embrace and soothing words heal a target for a large amount, equivalent to a Cleric **Heal** spell 10 levels lower, and clears all magical debuffs or negative statuses from that player.

**Perks:**

+10 Max Hide Skill

\* Reduced threat from healing skills and reduced global NPC threat.

\* Access to the Moon Priestess skill progression, allowing additional party-based healing skills.

All three of these were pretty interesting choices, and they had a lot more depth than I had been expecting from the Courtesan class, since it was almost always written off as a joke by serious players. But clearly someone or other had designed this class to fulfill an intended role in the game. I bet they were really frustrated that nobody played the class. I wondered if there was some secret about it that might make it really powerful at high level. I had already been impressed by the power of my **Charm** skill and the ease with which I could level—as long as I could get over my squeamishness about handling a few dicks—and I'd played lots of games where the strongest characters end up starting as one of the seemingly weakest until they were leveled up.

This first specialization choice would also be very important in how my character developed, since I had heard from other players that your specialization options at level 65 branched out further from your class selection. And while it was rumored to be *possible* to respecialize, it came with severe level and XP penalties that almost made it not worth doing. I had no idea how these might branch out later, but I could see what the devs were doing with my three options: basically I had a choice to double down on my existing seduction and physical sexual skills, add an element of arcane magic to my class, or add an element of divine healing magic to my class. My later choices would all be extensions of the general theme I chose now.

There was an extra wrinkle here, because I didn't intend to play Lacey forever. As soon as we could defeat Vierdimin, I would return to Kromgorn

the Barbarian, go back to being a dude—thank goodness—and none of the skill choices I made on Lacey would matter anymore. So I should probably pick a specialization geared toward battling other human-controlled players and leveling up as quickly as possible!

It didn't make any sense for me to take the **Moon Priestess** specialization, though I thought it would be a neat option for group support, because I didn't have a group to support right now. Even once I'd rescued my friends, I was the only one to have immunity to Vierdimin's guild attacks. An invincible healer would be pretty handy, actually, but it would be too easy to wear my mana down since I was only one player. Ideally I should specialize in something that allowed me to take a little more active role in the battle than I could right now.

The **Seductress** specialization was obviously the most powerful of my three choices, and the default option for any player who wasn't sure what she should take. It made all of the Courtesan skills better without increasing the complexity of the class. Plus, an extra five levels of effective CL for all my control and distraction skills would be *huge*, minimizing the chances that PCs or NPCs of equal level would resist them. **Multi-Charm** was also a really cool skill choice, since I'd be able to command more than one NPC at a time *and* be able to charm higher-level NPCs. I was already drooling at the prospect of sending a few charmed orcs to beat down my enemies.

**Mesmer** was a weird choice. I'd never considered that Courtesan might be able to be specced into an arcane casting class, but the more I thought about it the more it was generally in line with her skills, since the spellcasting was restricted to the illusion school of Wizard magic. Wizards learned spells from spellbooks they found while adventuring or purchased from a spell vendor in cities (although the rare ones were all dropped by mobs). **Sexy Shadow** would offer a creative player lots of options for misdirection, although it would be less useful than the other two specialization skills once actually in a combat situation. The bonus to Magical Devices was lame unless you had access to a bunch of them, which I didn't, but Charisma-based casting was interesting.

Lacey had been built to maximize Charisma at the expense of every other stat except Agility and Dexterity, which wasn't something even most wizards did with Intelligence, because it would make you horribly fragile. But with the inherent Courtesan **Unintimidating** skill, you were a little less likely to draw the ire of dangerous monsters than the average wizard. Lacey

would be an extremely powerful illusionist, given that, if I chose **Mesmer**.

With **Moon Priestess** off the table, my choice really came down to what I thought would help me the most when it came time to do battle with Vierdimin and his lieutenants. **Multi-Charm** was extremely tempting, along with the bonuses to my standard class skills, but I was worried that choosing **Seductress** might turn me into a little bit of a one-trick pony, and also it's not like I'd had a *hard* time charming or seducing people so far. Even though **Sexy Shadow** didn't seem as powerful as the other skills, the opportunity to use Illusion magic might offer some powerful options for me outside of my standard sex-based skills. **Mesmer** might not be the obvious choice, but it seemed like the best one for me in my immediate battle with The Secret Order.

Without any further hesitation, I selected [**Mesmer**] from the tree options, hit confirm, and was surrounded by a golden shower of sparks and trumpet fanfare as "Congratulations, Mesmer!" flashed across my screen in gold text.

I flipped over to my skills menu and confirmed I now had **Sexy Shadow** as a class skill, **Illusion Magic** as a passive skill, and two new traits: **Charisma Caster** and **Illusionist**.

## Chapter 17

Erlix smacked himself in the face and dragged his hand down it dramatically in a gesture of exasperation. “Let me get this straight, Goldie. Your options were to be an incredibly powerful charmer that could command multiple NPCs, a divine priestess which would unlock a whole new skill tree full of auto-granted restorative and protection spells, or being able to learn and cast spells from a school of magic that’s so weak most Wizards don’t even bother with it... and you chose the third one?”

“Erm, well. I mean, I think that’s a really unfair way to put it...” I said, suddenly feeling foolish. I hadn’t even thought to consult Erlix on my specialization choice, but now I was starting to wish I’d at least gotten a second opinion. “Illusion magic isn’t actually that useless, is it?” As a Barbarian, I’d never needed to pay much attention to the spells my friends were using, but I’d just assumed all the schools of magic would be useful and balanced.

“If you want to make pretty sparks flash in the air or make yourself look like a pumpkin, it’s fantastic.”

“But my Charisma is so high!” I protested. “I might be the most powerful Illusionist for my level on the server...”

“Your sparks will be *really* flashy and pretty then,” grumbled Erlix. “You really are a dumb treasure ho.”

My cheeks burned. “You can shut right up, okay? I already admitted I don’t know how to play this class. It’s bad enough adjusting to being a girl, let alone in a new class. I’m trying to do my best here. Why don’t you try being useful instead of being a jerk for once? Did you figure out where they took Jazzus?”

I was mad at Erlix, but I was also mad at myself. I still stood by my specialization choice, even with Erlix giving me a hard time about it, but making the choice in isolation had been dumb. I couldn’t afford to make any more stupid mistakes with so much riding on my shoulders. Erlix was the only teammate I had right now, and if we were ever going to get me leveled up and rescue my friends I needed to learn to work with him.

“Unlike you, I’ve been doing things that are useful for us,” Erlix said, stooping down to sniff at the floor. “Although I can’t get a fix on your girl Jazzus. Haxor is too good with his trail concealment, probably since he has

some kind of Rogue-based counter-tracking thing, but I can read those dopey lieutenants from a mile away. It looks like they took your buddy Topper east, and the read from my **Tracking** skill I'm getting is that they're pretty far out there."

"How far out east? Like the **Black Forest** in Lorengarde?" I knew that the **Tracking** skill worked by letting you get a fix on a player or NPC from signs they left behind in their wake, and once you had that you could sense their direction and distance no matter how far away you were until you picked a new tracking target.

"Worse than that. You won't like this, but I'd guess they ported him out somewhere into the **Wild Fey Dominion**."

I whistled softly. "Great. They dragged him into an entirely different faction zone?" In addition to the Kingdom of Lorengarde in the South, the Dark Legion Holdings to the North, and the Elven Highlands to the West, the Wild Fey Dominion was the fourth major set of zones that players without flying mounts could access in Fantasy Realms Online. It was the most dangerous and unpredictable of the four starting factions, with some of the early game's highest level zones, and the Fey Court NPCs who ruled it were capricious with their magical talents. People generally avoided it, and only the craziest players made up the very small PC faction that called it home.

"It's going to make extraction tricky," noted Erlix. Then he broke into a wide grin. "But rest assured you'll be safe with me!"

Despite the halfling's bravado, I wasn't so sure. Since it was a different faction zone and players had allowed the outposts to decay—as maintaining them in unpopular zones wasn't usually worth the effort—we didn't have any flight paths or bind points available in the Fey Wilds. We'd need to go in on foot, and if we died, we'd lose our gear and be sent all the way back to Lorengarde. I wished I could muster up the same level of confidence that Erlix had.

But it didn't matter how hard it was or what the odds of success were. I wasn't going to gain levels *or* save my friends sitting around in the safety of the town. The Fey Wilds would give me plenty of opportunities for new NPCs to seduce, new gear to earn, and maybe even some quests that were easy enough for me and Erlix to tackle along the way. I didn't *mind* gaining levels by being slutty at this point, but I needed to take the XP where I could get it if we were going to powerlevel me to 80.

"We may as well get going, then," I said. "Every moment we lose is

another moment they have outside the game to shut us down and kill us forever.”

Erlix frowned. “Has anyone ever told you you’re kind of a downer, Goldie?”

We gathered a small assortment of healing and mana potions and the best gear we could assemble for our level, and I insisted that we stop by the spell shop to get me a spell book and some starter illusionist spells even if Erlix thought they were useless.

“By all means, let’s spend time getting you party favors,” Erlix grumbled. “It’s not like it’s our lives on the line or anything, as you keep pointing out.”

But they couldn’t really be *that* useless, could they? As we walked into the spellbook shop, a tiny old crone glared at me and harrumphed from behind the counter.

“I don’t sell potions for crotch itch or shiny boob wax here, hussy,” she grated, looking me up and down. “Try the skeevy alchemist down the way.”

I gritted my teeth and reminded myself that it wasn’t personal—all NPCs were coded by horny male devs to interact with my class, gender, and Charisma modifier in specific ways, and this was just how she was set up to treat courtesans... like most other NPCs. That underestimation by default was a result of my **Unintimidating** trait, and it came in surprisingly handy. If I had to deal with people talking down to me and assuming I was a stupid bimbo because of how I looked, I’d just need to put up with it for now.

“I’d like to see your spellbooks and illusion spells,” I said, ignoring her comments.

She grunted and gestured toward the bottom row of books on a nearby shelf, while slamming a blank spellbook on the counter. “Basic spellbooks hold 10 spells, and advanced ones hold 20. It’s 100 gold for basic, and 1000 for advanced.”

*Jeez, that’s pricey! I don’t have a ton of money on this alt... the spell book alone will take most of it.*

Wizards started with a spellbook, but apparently Mesmers didn’t, so I’d need to pony up the dough if I didn’t want my specialization to be even more useless than Erlix claimed it was. I had about 200 gold left, total, so it was going to take half my finances just to be able to learn any spells at all. At least 10 spell slots would be plenty, if useful illusion spells really were as few and far between as Erlix claimed. It looked like I had 4 “active” spell slots as

a Mesmer specialist that I could load from my book at any time, half what wizards got, so I wouldn't need an advanced spell book unless I really started tripping over good spells left and right.

I bent down to inspect the shelf of illusion spells, trying to see if there was anything that might help us. As a new illusionist, my **Illusion Magic** skill was only level 1, and it would take me a while to get it up to the same level as my **Charm** and **Seduce** skills, which were both maxed for my level at Lv. 50. The hard cap on most skills was 100, unless you had specializations or item bonuses that raised it, and you could level most skills to a soft cap of your level plus 5. Magical skills and spells were divided into five tiers, with break points at 25, 50, 75, and 100. You needed at least the amount of magical skill for each tier to use spells from that tier, so there was no point in even shopping for spells at Tier 2 or above right now.

Not that I could afford them! I was shocked to see that even the common, starter spells were horribly expensive at 25-50 gold each. *No wonder wizards never have enough cash for new gear...*

I'd have to be very frugal with my decisions here, but I was disappointed by what I found. Erlix had been right about my options not being so great.

### **TIER I Illusion Spells**

**[Camouflage]** This spell allows the target blend into their surroundings as with the **Hide** skill. Higher skill and stat bonuses increase chances of concealment. (35 gold)

**[Charming Touch]** This spell improves NPC disposition toward the caster. (50 gold)

**[Agitating Whisper]** This spell causes NPCs to have an unruly disposition toward anyone in range, possibly inciting them to combat. (50 gold)

**[Light]** This spell generates a bright, floating light slightly brighter than a standard torch for a period of up to 2 minutes. It will follow the caster and move according to their mental commands to a distance of 15 feet. (25 gold)

**[Minor Glamour]** This spell allows the caster to slightly alter minor features of their appearance, such as skin color, hair color, and facial features. (40 gold)

**[Dazzle]** This spell creates a shower of multicolored sparks like a

miniature fireworks display. It will not do harm, but has a small chance to confuse or blind an opponent. (35 gold)

“These are all such trash...” I muttered.

“Gosh, I bet having a divine list of healing and protection spells you don’t need to purchase from a bitchy old crone sounds pretty great right about now, huh?” Erlix said, picking his teeth with a dagger as he leaned against the doorway to the shop. “Or, you know, having your most useful skills become even harder to resist.”

I ignored the halfling, something I was getting pretty good at doing, and let the glare from the shopkeeper take care of expressing my displeasure for him. Instead I was busy trying to puzzle out the best way to spend my last 100 gold. Half the Tier I spells were things that Lacey could do innately with her default class skills **Hide**, **Charm**, and **Seduce**, and the others were as good as useless. I didn’t need any help persuading NPCs to do *anything*. I needed firepower I could use against players. But I’d picked my spec, and I still needed to level my **Illusion Magic** skill in case dropped spells were better or the higher tiers offered more interesting options. I sighed and pulled out spell books for **Light**, **Minor Glamour**, and **Dazzle**, the three spells that were least like the skills I already had, and paid the spell vendor 200 gold for the blank spellbook plus my spell selections, trying to ignore the squirming feeling I had in my stomach that told me I was throwing away the last of my funds on utter garbage.

Erlix watched me scribe and memorize my spells with an amused expression. “Well, go on then. Let’s have a little display of your amazing new powers.”

I’d realized that you didn’t need to actually say the skill names to use them, although I liked to sometimes. I stuck my hands out and willed **Dazzle** to work. A glittering burst of rainbow-colored flashes burst out of my fingertips and crackled in the air between us in a cone shape, fluttering to the floor with continued crackles like exploding confetti. As the sparks died off, Erlix began a slow clap.

“Yeah, great work, Goldie. Vierdimin is screwed.”

“Shut up, Erlix. Let’s just hit the road.”

## Chapter 18

The trip to the edge of the Wild Fey Dominion was fast and easy, and Erlix didn't miss the chance to make a quip about how it was just like me. Our wyveryns touched down in the **Black Forest - Level 50**, and we'd bound ourselves at the Lorengarde outpost on the far eastern edge in case anything happened to us in Fey Wilds. I couldn't afford many more wyveryn trips that covered that much ground. The towering, ancient trees of the **Black Forest** made my shoulders twitchy with their stretching, twisted limbs where Willowisps darted back and forth, high above us. It was supposed to be a brutal zone, almost as bad as the **The Swamp of No Hope** where I'd spent my last adventure on Kromgorn, and Erlix and I weren't strong enough on our own to battle some of the nastier monsters that lurked in the shadows there.

Fortunately, the Lorengarde outpost marked the zone entrance to the **Western Wilds**, so we wouldn't have to deal with traipsing through a level 50 zone. Not yet, anyway. I didn't know the Fey Wilds well, and there was no telling where Vierdimin's lieutenants had taken Topper. I doubted it would be a candy-ass level 20 zone, though.

I made sure to Charm every NPC in the outpost, blowing kisses to each of them (girls included), but encountered the same problem I had back in town—there just wasn't much XP to be gained from passive NPCs in allied towns, anymore. Too easy. I'd get a little more XP for seducing them, but it wasn't worth the time it would take. I'd need to get out into the Fey Wilds and seduce some harder NPCs if I wanted to keep leveling that way. I tightened the leather laces holding my huge breasts securely in place, which pushed them up even higher, and tossed my hair over my shoulder. *No point in getting sloppy right before I need to use my skills for real again.*

Erlix and I left the outpost, traveling east, and I was delighted to see the dark foliage of the Black Forest rapidly transition into a more traditional forest backdrop with startling alacrity. **Western Wilds - Level 40** flashed across my HUD as I began to note a variety of fascinating plants, tiny woodland animals, and trees, all radiating vibrant, storybook-style colors. The **Western Wilds** reminded me of an archetypal enchanted forest, the kind of thing you might see in a fairy tale book or on a Lisa Frank trapper keeper. The leaves on the trees ranged from electric blue to hot pink, and if Erlix and

I decided to do any hunting, I'd probably get to find out what fuchsia chipmunks tasted like. Most of the trunks were a pale white color, and the plants came in every color of the rainbow.

We stayed on the packed dirt road, avoiding the deceptively cheerful underbrush, because we could see mobs milling around further back in the childishly colorful trees that weren't at all childish. Roaming spirits, unicorns with flashing eyes, and vengeful brownies that would cast lightning at you as soon as talk to you were just some of the unpleasant level 40ish surprises that lurked in wait for us away from the relative safety of the path. My combat skills weren't good enough to deal with a threat I couldn't seduce or charm, and I didn't want to push my luck on how far **Unintimidating** would really carry me when it came to magical monsters.

As we walked, I continued to spam my new illusion spells every time my mana regenerated enough to allow for another cast. After Erlix's clever plan had allowed me to level **Seduce** and **Charm** so rapidly by sending every NPC in Minsc to my tavern room, leveling **Illusion Magic** felt painfully slow. Clearly the developers had never intended a Courtesan to approach skill-building and leveling the way I had, so with our rapid-fire revolving door of dicks and sex, I'd had my skills at the max for each level within minutes of dinging. Magic, on the other hand, was something lots of classes were expected to use all the time, so building the skill up was going to take a lot longer.

**Light** would have been the most mana efficient spell to spam, but Erlix really seemed to be annoyed by the flashy bursts of firework sparkles from **Dazzle**, so that was the one I shot off every few moments, relishing my rare opportunity to tease the smarmy halfling. I'd been at it for almost half an hour and had only gotten my skill to Lv. 7, and it was already affected by the diminishing returns slowdown in advancement. There was about 30 seconds between each cast, and sometimes I waited a few seconds longer, just to watch Erlix's body get tighter and stiffer with each step as he waited for the pop. I liked the way he flinched a little, every single time.

"God damn it, Goldie!" he finally cried. "Do you have to blow off Dazzle every 5 seconds? You did buy other spells, right?"

I put on my best 'innocent girl' face and widened my eyes. "Oh, wow. I didn't know it was bothering you. But I need to get my skill up, right? I think it gives me more points than the other ones. I'm so dumb in the first place for choosing this spec, so I want to make sure I *really* work hard to level it up

and try to be useful.” I bit my lip in a sultry way as I finished and laughed to myself as he turned away, grumbling, and continued to stalk down the trail. I was really starting to get the hang of this whole ‘being a girl’ thing. Guys were so much easier to handle as a woman than women were as a man—the hornier they were, the easier it was to use my sex appeal to make them think and do whatever I wanted. I was surprised it had even worked on Erlix! *I must be getting better at seeming like a natural woman. Nice work!* But even as the thought formed, I realized it was almost as disturbing as it was exciting.

I was starting to become really comfortable in this female body, and that made me distinctly *uncomfortable*. The in-game bodies were modeled after real-world bodies with a stunning degree of accuracy in terms of biofeedback. Playing Kromgorn hadn’t felt hardly any different from being a man in real life, except that he was taller, bigger, and stronger than my real body. Playing Lacey was different—my reactions, emotions, and body sensations were all *distinctly* feminine. At first it had been disorienting and weird, but like you might expect, I’d adjusted to it, soon hardly noticing the jiggling bobble of my breasts or the swinging rotation of my wide-set hips with each step I took. Who knew what the psychological impacts of that might be? That was part of why the devs discouraged cross-gender avatars. There hadn’t been any studies done on what *actually* experiencing life as the other gender did to people. Fortunately, long gaming sessions had to be broken up for real-world food and bathroom breaks, which ensured that you had to return to normalcy periodically.

But now with Vierdimin’s curse hanging over the whole game, there was none of that “return to normalcy” nonsense. It had been weeks that I’d been stuck in this feminine avatar now—talking in a high-pitched voice, getting used to my new height, being treated and spoken to as a woman by PCs and NPCs alike. I’d gone to sleep in a silk nightgown that tickled my sensitive skin in all the right ways to make me wet between my legs, and I’d had more dicks in all of my available holes than I’d ever imagined would be a possibility. I knew intimately what it felt like to have my pussy stretched out six ways from Sunday, and it didn’t even feel weird any more to say “my” pussy. For better or worse, I’d been experiencing life as a really slutty chick, 24/7, for long enough that it might be rewiring my thought patterns a little. That made me feel really weird about what would happen when I eventually returned to my body. Would it be an issue? Would I just forget these things

like a bad dream?

For that matter, how did I even know I could get back into my body? Topper had said most of us had been disconnected from the game and were stuck in comas at the hospital. What was forming new memories and learning how to use this new body and these new skills if my brain was unjacked from Fantasy Realms Online in real life? And what made me think I'd ever be able to get myself back into my own head?

All of these thoughts were really uncomfortable, and I couldn't afford to go spiraling into despair by assuming the worst possible answers when I didn't know the first thing about how Vierdimin had modified the game. Instead, I decided to focus on the one thing I *could* control—playing my class well so that I could rescue my friends, level up, and solve these problems together.

I remembered now that I had some more skills I'd hardly even looked at while I was busy leveling, and I distracted myself from my gloomy reflections by pulling up my skills menu and taking a closer look at them. I'd never taken a comprehensive look at my class with an eye toward developing my character before, and it was high time to get serious about learning to play my class.

**Lacey**

**Courtesan - Lv. 45**

**Str:** 3

**Dex:** 9

**Agi:** 9

**Sta:** 3

**Int:** 3

**Wis:** 3

**Cha:** 24

**Specialization:** Mesmer

**Active Skill List**

**Hide** - Lv 4

**Charm** - Lv 50

**Seduce** - Lv 50

**Kama Sutra (based on Seduce Skill)**  
**Motorboat (based on Seduce Skill)**  
**Vejazzle (based on Charm Skill)**  
**(Mesmer) Sexy Shadow (based on Illusion Magic Skill)**

**Passive Skill List**

**Magical Devices - Lv 11**  
**(Mesmer) Illusion Magic - Lv 7**

**Trait List**

**Unintimidating**  
**Sex Appeal**  
**(Mesmer) Charisma Caster**  
**(Mesmer) Illusionist**

I was pleased that the three advanced skills I'd received, **Kama Sutra**, **Motorboat**, and **Vejazzle**, all appeared to be branching skills based on the core **Seduce** and **Charm** class skills I'd already leveled up. I tapped on them, one after the other, to read the descriptions and get a better sense of what they each did. Fantasy Realms Online was funny about that—the devs seemed to think it made the game more fun and realistic to leave an air of mystery around specific skill numbers and impact, so at best you were given generic ideas about what the skills were capable of, and then you were left to figure out the myriad of ways you could actually apply the skills in the game world.

That was the case with these three descriptions, too:

**Kama Sutra:** The courtesan applies her physical prowess to her ongoing **Seduce** target, entangling them and pinning them down in a way that totally restricts movement and disengagement.

**Motorboat:** The courtesan encourages her ongoing **Seduce** target to motorboat her breasts, temporarily stunning her target with the force of the smacks from her huge boobs and allowing a safe disengagement. (Male courtesans receive **Cock Slap** in lieu of this skill.)

**Vejazzle:** The courtesan's nether region is adorned with brightly flashing gems, and revealing it has a chance to dazzle and stun all targets in

the immediate vicinity.

It was actually nice that they left things a little vague, since unlike the days of 2D online games on screens where you'd tab-target a mob and press a button to deal damage or apply an affect, full-immersion virtual reality games were much more physics-based and sandboxy. Giving the player instructions on how to use their skills was more limiting than giving them an idea of what the skill was *supposed* to do and letting them experiment, which was how we came up with ideas like Erlix's multi-level marketing pyramid sex scheme.

That meant that I'd just have to experiment with these to find out the best way to use them. All three of them seemed like they were designed to give me more options to lock down or stun opponents in addition to just charming and seducing them, which was great, and went well with my illusion magic (pitiful as it was). I could see that this class was really shaping up to be a controller/commander archetype—an extremely powerful team support character in most classic online games.

*Now this is something I can work with. I always thought courtesans were just horny bimbos and sex-crazed weirdos. I mean, most of them probably are, but it's nice to see that the devs had an idea for this class that was more than just pervy fun... it's pervy fun with a side of real game effectiveness.*

The realization made me feel better about being Lacey than I'd felt since I'd been captured by the orc king. I'd spent so much time moaning about how useless my stupid, female courtesan was, that I hadn't taken the time to realize how I *could* be effective.

I closed my inventory screen and stared at my hands with a new appreciation. *Okay, Kromgorn. You might be a girl, and your primary tools might be Charisma and attraction, but you're still a great player. You can do this!*

Erlix interrupted my mental pep talk with a sudden hiss and a tug on my hand, pulling me down into a crouch behind a leafy bush the color of a fading sunset.

"What is it?" I whispered.

He drew his daggers and nodded ahead of us on the path. I sucked in a breath and crouched lower. There was a 7-ft tall humanoid standing in the middle of the enchanted forest path, with a silver sword hanging at his belt and a shiny brown leather vest and loincloth. But he wasn't any race I

recognized—he had scaly, reptilian, metallic-gold skin, pointed ears, clawed hands and feet, and a thick, 3-foot tail that swished back and forth as he sniffed the air, taking careful steps toward the bush where we were hidden.

**Fiero, Lv. 45\*\*\*** floated above his head, and the expression on the curved snout of his toothy face was alien and unreadable.

The three stars after his level told us that this was no ordinary mob—this was an ultra-rare, extra hard mob, that was equal in level to me... and he appeared to be sniffing us out while we hid. *Shit, shit... what awful luck. We don't have time for this!*

“Can we run?” I asked.

Erlix hesitated, but then shook his head, speaking quietly: “He’s too close now. I think you’re up, Goldie. Good luck... I’ll hang back in case this goes south and try to surprise him, but I don’t like our odds if it comes to a fight.”

I took a deep breath, pushed my breasts up in my leather bra, and stepped out from behind the bush.

## Chapter 19

As soon as I revealed myself, the creature narrowed his reptilian eyes and hissed, drawing his blade and holding the glinting point out toward me, but I wasn't looking for a fight. I held up my hands, indicating that I was unarmed and hadn't drawn the bow slung across my back, and froze, trying to look as innocent and nonthreatening as possible in the face of this epic mob. I knew I was leaning hard on my **Unintimidating** trait, and I hoped it would be enough to save me a painful and expensive trip back to Lorengarde.

"You are no member of the Fey faction," Fiero hissed. "Identify yourself at once, fair maiden, lest I skewer you upon my blade. Your witching looks are fair indeed, but even the loveliest maiden can spell doom for an unwary traveler."

"I'm Lacey the Courtesan, of Lorengarde, on a mission to rescue my friend from Dark Legion faction members here in the Fey Wild. I just want to pass in peace."

Fiero's eyes widened, and he sheathed his weapon, stepping toward me. Something about the set of his body hinted at an over-eager excitement.

"An adventurer! And a quite beautiful one, at that. A charisma caster, unless I miss my guess? You are the answer to my prayers, sweet maiden!"

I blushed at his compliments, slightly annoyed at how everyone was always falling over themselves to tell me how pretty I was—they just wanted to get into my pants. Although given his 3-star mob rating, Fiero would probably be worth a bucketload of XP if I could land a **Charm** or **Seduce** on him. The situation wasn't desperate or tense enough for that yet, though, and a failed charm attempt could end up enraging him.

"What prayers are those?" I asked cautiously. I was starting to suspect that it was no accident we'd run into Fiero, but I didn't have time for bullshit.

He took another step closer, looming over me by almost a full two feet of reptilian bulk, and then fell to his knees, bringing him eye-level with me. He clasped his hands in a gesture of pleading and spoke quickly.

"Please, please madam—hear my story. I am Fiero, prince of the dragonkin. Long have I waited here in the Fey Wilds for an adventurer worthy of my people. You see, I have a quest of great importance for you. See my golden scales, noble bearing, and impressive stature? For generations, my people have used magic fueled by the power of our raw charisma. But the

source of our magic has been stolen.”

A side quest. He was offering me a side quest specific to my class and specialization choices. I blinked at him. This was why an ultra-rare mob had appeared directly in our path, and why he just happened to have a quest perfectly suited to my skill choices. It was a triggered event, possibly a very rare one, that only a Courtesan Mesmer would encounter in this specific zone. I’d heard rumors about things like this. Supposedly Vierdimin had encountered a similar situation and solved the quest to be rewarded with his Lich class. If I took the time to help Fiero, the rewards might be very powerful—a special weapon, a special illusion spell, a new skill. The possibilities were tantalizing, and it was almost guaranteed to be the first time anyone on the server had been offered this opportunity.

But meanwhile, time was counting down in the real world toward a possible shutdown scenario, Topper and Jazzus were still captured, and Vierdimin was likely working to secure more power for himself with every passing day.

“Give me the short version,” I said. “What do I have to do to help you?”

“A lass of your beauty, ample body, but small intellect surely requires a most detailed accounting—”

“The short version,” I insisted, annoyed once again at NPCs constantly referencing my low intelligence stat. *They can’t help it*, I reminded myself.

Fiero sighed, clearly disappointed that he wasn’t going to get to tell the story he’d been spinning up into. “The Fey King has stolen the **Fabulous Orb of the Dragonkin Sorcerers**, and I require your help to retrieve it. If you bring it back to me, my people would be most grateful and reward you handsomely!”

My eyes narrowed in suspicion. “What’s the reward?”

“I cannot reveal that, madam, without revealing the secrets of my people.”

*Of course not. That would be too easy.*

“And you’ll just wait here for my return?”

He shook his head. “I would accompany you, of course, though ancient magics prevent me from entering the tower of the Fey Nobility itself. I can lead you on a direct path to it.”

“Where?”

He raised his clawed, scaly hand and pointed into the wilderness... exactly in the direction that Erlix and I needed to go to find Topper. I chewed

my lip, considering my options. An armed, 7-foot dragonkin escort that could take us straight through the undergrowth would be pretty useful as opposed to looping around on the relative safety of the path, and if I had the chance to secure a powerful item or spell for my class in the meantime, it might be worth accepting his stupid quest.

“Erlix! What do you think?”

The halfling unstealthed a few yards away. “He’s big, but I think you can fit him in. It’s not like he has a halfling-sized cock.”

My cheeks grew hot with the implication, and I squirmed in place.

“That’s not what I meant! Should I accept his quest?” I wasn’t going to make any more unilateral decisions unless I had to after the Mesmer debacle.

Erlix considered while Fiero looked me over with newfound interest, and I realized that he’d be just as susceptible to my **Sex Appeal** trait as he’d been to my **Unintimidating** trait. It was pretty weird having everyone around you trying to bang you all the time when you’d spent most of your life being the one trying to do the banging. But it felt so good when they did it in this body that I was already feeling a little turned on and tingly at the idea of lifting up Fiero’s loincloth and seeing what the dragonkin was packing under there...

“Sure, if it takes us that direction anyway,” Erlix decided, rescuing me from my embarrassing yearnings. Thinking about Fiero’s cock had *not* been the right decision, because I was getting *seriously* hot and bothered now. Had I developed some kind of sex addiction when we had me banging dudes day in and day out for the better part of a week? That was inconvenient... I crossed my legs and tried not to think about how good sexual release would feel right now.

“I accept your quest, Fiero,” I choked out, hoping neither of them could tell how turned on I was.

“Excellent!” Fiero declared, eyes blazing. A small flashing indicator popped up in the corner of my HUD, and I opened it to confirm that I now had a new quest: **The Hunt for the Dragon Orb**. *Interesting*.

“Let’s get a move on—” I began, but cut off as Fiero crouched low.

“Do you hear that?”

“Hear what?” Erlix asked, dropping into stealth as a precautionary measure.

I peered around and did suddenly hear rustling in the bushes nearby.

“Fey assassins!” Fiero declared. “They’ve been tracking me, knowing

I'd seek help... no doubt they'll plague us every step of the way. Please, protect me!"

I groaned, immediately regretting accepting his quest. Of course it wouldn't be that simple to just walk to the Fey King's tower and retrieve the orb. I'd probably just signed us up for numerous attacks and complications. If this quest was as epic as it sounded, it would probably expect me to have come with a full group, too. Not just with a horny rogue 10 levels below me. I started to draw my bow, but realized how useless it would be as six, cloaked figures with **Fey Assassin - Level 40** floating above them emerged from the bushes, daggers glinting in the sunlight. We needed my abilities more than my arrows right now!

It was super annoying that Fiero wasn't even going to help us fight... a 3-star rare NPC would make a big difference in the battle, but it was normal for quest NPCs to avoid combat. There was no way Erlix and I could kill six level 40 NPCs on our own though! I ground my teeth in frustration, once again anticipating a quick (and expensive) trip back to the Lorengarde soulbinder.

*Unless...* My eyes flicked back to Fiero, standing in a defensive crouch with his sword drawn. Normally you were supposed to defend the escort NPC, but he seemed unusually strong, and if he ended up dying it wouldn't be that big of a deal for us anyway. *Time to try a little gamble.*

I took a few steps toward Fiero, who flinched back from me as the short, delicate assassins approached. "What are you doing? They'll be on us at any moment! Cast your buffs! Prepare to fight!"

"**Charm**," I whispered, blowing a kiss at him and praying that he didn't have any special dragon resists. My **Charm** skill worked on one PC and one NPC at a time—there was no way I was going to release my charm on Vierdimin, but it was high time I found myself a new charmed pet!

Fiero got a dreamy, far-eyed stare in his eyes, but then his expression darkened and he tightened his grip on his sword, crouching down further. "What was that?" he cried. "Protect me, don't cast spells on me!"

He'd resisted. I felt a dropping sensation in the pit of my stomach and a cold chill run over me. *Uh-oh. I'd counted on that working. Now we're really boned...* The cooldown on **Charm** was well over a minute, and we didn't have it. The Fey assassins bore down on us, going for me despite my **Unintimidating** trait since I was the only visible offensive threat.

"Having those **Seductress** perks would be nice right about now, huh

Goldie?” Erlix said tensely from stealth. I could see his outline hovering back in the bushes since we were grouped, but he’d only get one ambush. “Hope you have some more tricks up your sleeve!”

I hopped backwards as the first assassin reached me and tried a savage downward cut, narrowly avoiding his blade, and almost lost my balance. The Fey people might be on the small side, hardly bigger than Erlix, but those daggers looked wicked sharp! I steadied myself and did the only thing I could think of: I yanked the knot on the laces holding my breasts in place, releasing the leather bra and letting them bounce out free and exposed. Immediately I activated my **Seduce** skill, trying to catch all six of the assassins at once. A feeling of freedom washed over me as the constricting leather fell away, and I took a deep breath and sighed happily, letting my sexy, impressive bosom rise and fall with the motion of my chest. It felt so good to bare them in the warmth of the glade, despite the danger.

My exposed chest had the desired, immediate effect. All six of the Fey assassins froze in place, wide-eyed, captivated by my breasts. I grabbed them and started massaging them, wiggling my hips and dancing in place. “Ooh, ahh, yeah...” I moaned, trying to think fast. **Seduce** worked best when you got into the performance, even if I felt ridiculous acting like a stripper in front of a bunch of cloaked assassins half a foot shorter than I was.

If we couldn’t fight them, we needed to run. My act wouldn’t keep them busy for long—not all six anyway. *What can I do that would buy us time? The only offensive illusion spell I have is Dazzle, and it won’t work on all of them...* I noticed a few of the assassins had started looking bored, and tried to dance harder, gyrating my hips and sliding my hands up and down my hot body. *This is humiliating. Dazzle. Dazzle... why does that sound familiar?*

Then it came to me. “**Vejazzle!**” I cried. I felt a sudden pressure all over my nether region, but I didn’t know what I was supposed to do next. *What the hell did that do? Oh, shit!*

As one of the assassins began to rub his eyes, losing interest in me altogether, I panicked and tried the only *other* thing I could think of: I hooked my thumbs under the clasps on my skirt and released them, yanking it away.

All over my crotch, where some girls would have public hair, I had shimmering, pink and purple gems affixed to my skin. Six pairs of eyes drifted down to my pussy, and a sudden intense flash of pink light burst out from my private parts and washed over them. All six of them dropped to the

ground, their daggers skittering away, twitching and disarmed. I stared at them in surprise, standing with all of my lady bits revealed in the middle of the colorful glade, then looked down myself at my fancy, decorated puss. It was awfully shiny and pretty, but fortunately it didn't stun *me*.

"You have got to be fucking *kidding* me," I muttered as I quickly yanked my skirt back into place and started lacing up my vest again. "I can't believe that worked. Who are the devs that coded this shit? Horny teenagers?"

"Nice work, Goldie!" Erlix unstealthed beside me. "That should hold 'em for a few minutes. Now hurry and help me drag this big scaly dope off into the bushes..."

I turned and noted the seventh pair of eyes that had apparently latched onto my vejazzled nether regions—the dragonkin behemoth hadn't been able to resist sneaking a peak, either, and now lay dazed on the ground, twitching along with the assassins.

"Wait a minute, Erlix. You, of all people, didn't look at me naked? Why aren't you stunned too?"

"Pffffffffft. Like hell I didn't. You have great cans for a treasure ho. But you can't hit players with long-term stuns, just like you can't really charm them. Uh... not that that hot little naked body isn't distracting enough to immobilize a player anyway. You really like to strip down whenever you can, huh?"

"I *have* to. It's the class I'm playing!"

"Uh-huh. Whatever you say, horndog. Your dance moves need some work, though. Super awkward looking. I'd work on that."

"Shut up! Shouldn't we get going before these guys wake up?"

"I'm just waiting for you to stop yapping. You really *are* a girl."

I sighed and looped my delicate arms under one of Fiero's big, scaly biceps and grunted and struggled alongside Erlix as we pulled the big idiot far enough away from the assassins that they wouldn't re-aggro us when they finally came to, hoping desperately that we didn't run into *another* set of assassins before my cooldowns refreshed.

## Chapter 20

“You probably should have screwed those assassins, Goldie.”

“*Enough*, Erlix!”

“I’m just saying, you didn’t bang them *or* kill them... we need to get you leveled up one way or another, and we’ve already seen that you get ridiculous XP gains from using that hot little bod.”

I poked at Fiero, impressed that he was still stunned. It had been almost five minutes since we dragged him out of the aggro range of the assassins. Erlix had circled back in stealth to confirm that they’d despawned, apparently without ever waking up from my **Vejazzle**. I might have a crappy combat build, but that maxed-out Charisma was really proving to be useful with the Courtesan class’s skills.

“We need to figure out what to do if that happens again,” I pointed out, trying to change the subject.

“Duh, easy. Just flash your snatch. Look how effective it is!”

He gestured happily at the dragonkin prince, who had finally started groaning and shaking his head. I checked my HUD—it was close to six minutes total on an unresisted **Vejazzle** stun. That was crazy impressive. But I shook my head at Erlix.

“Won’t work. The cooldown timer on **Vejazzle** is super long. Eight hours. They must not want you abusing it with such a long stun.”

I hadn’t known I was blowing such a valuable skill when I’d done it, but it was probably worth it. We were alive and the assassins were gone, which meant we were still on track to rescue Topper and confront Vierdimin.

“That’s a bummer. Back to Plan A, I guess?”

“Oh, yeah! **Charm** is back up.”

While Fiero was still recovering from the stun, in his weakened state, I quickly blew him another kiss, trying the **Charm** for the second time that day. This time, it landed! *Thank goodness for resistance penalties...*

His eyes fluttered open, my **Vejazzle** finally falling away completely, and darted around. When they locked on mine, I saw a flash in them that both alarmed and thrilled me at the same time, sending a rush of anticipation through my body that rolled like an electric current from my toes to the tips of my breasts: raw lust.

Fiero slid smoothly to his knees in front of me and seized my hand

before I could draw it back. “Oh, fair maiden,” he crooned. “I am but a little moon before the magnificence of your sun. Please—you need but say the word, and I shall do anything for you. No task is too great, and no quest too arduous.”

My face grew warm as my thoughts strayed to exactly how I’d *like* him to help me out—by addressing the mounting need between my legs—but instead I asked him to defend us with his life if it came to battle again.

“Yes, yes, a thousand times yes! To allow a single drop of your lovely blood to spill would be unconscionable.” He rested a scaly claw on the pommel of his sword. “I shall defend you with my last breath.”

“Nice work, Goldie!” Erlix smiled and tossed his dagger in the air, idly catching the handle. “With that big dummy tanking for us, we shouldn’t have to worry about assassins anymore. Now go on and do your thing.”

“Huh? What thing?”

Erlix smirked. “The thing you’ve been doing. What’s the point in charming him if you’re not going to bang him too? You need the XP.”

“I-I can’t... right here? In front of you?”

“I don’t mind the show, but I’ll stealth if it makes you feel better.” He dropped into stealth and temporarily dropped our group, turning completely invisible to my eye.

I sighed. *Pervy halfling. But I do need the XP, and a 3-star mob will be worth a TON of it.*

Plus, I was pretty curious what it would be like to fuck the dragon prince. The scales on his arms had been surprisingly soft for all their hard beauty, more like tough skin than cool plates, and I’d snuck a peak under his loincloth while we were dragging him and been surprised to see that he was very well endowed with a regular human-looking penis. He was more man than monster, other than the tail that even now was twitching in eager anticipation. I saw an unasked question in his eyes and read his naked desire for my soft, yielding flesh. **Charm** was handy for lots of things, but it sure made your target wanna bang you pretty badly.

That dragonish face was a little too much for me, though, with the broad serpentine snout.

“Hold still,” I murmured, and reached out to touch him, activating my **Minor Glamour** spell. I watched as his face rearranged into the contours of a handsome human prince, like something out of a Disney movie, and the golden scales all over his body melted into a bronzed, human shade of tan

with a soft, golden glow. There was nothing I could do about the tail, but I was still happy with my work.

He gazed down at his new disguise in shock, and then looked up at me. “You are indeed a powerful enchantress, mistress. If this form is more pleasing to you, I shall wear it happily.”

Fiero had remained kneeling before me, regarding me with lust and adoration, and I reached a hesitant hand out to brush my fingertips over his now very human-looking shoulder. A soft gasp escaped my lips. It even *felt* like smooth, human skin, though if I concentrated hard enough I could sense that the golden scales, with their likely bonuses to armor and spell resists, still remained beneath my illusion. Was this another example of how my ridiculously high Charisma would supercharge my spells? If so, **Minor Glamour** might be a lot more powerful than I’d guessed!

Now that our skin was touching (or *my* skin was touching his illusionary skin, anyway), the tension was thick in the air. I could tell how badly he wanted me from a million small signals that a female body is perfectly calibrated to read in a man, and that same body was screaming for me to give in and let him attend to my ravenous, feminine needs. My sex felt hot and wet between my legs, the gems having long since morphed away back to the light blonde dusting of soft pubic hair that covered my mound, and I suddenly straddled Fiero, bringing my crotch into contact with the rapidly growing bulge beneath his loincloth.

He growled with need, and I mewled my assent, grinding against him and shuddering with the little jolts of pleasure each pelvic rotation sent through me.

“Take me,” I murmured softly into his glamoured ear, activating **Seduce** on my charmed pet.

Fiero laid me back against the soft mulch of the forest floor, and I marveled at how complete and thorough the illusion I’d created was. I had to concentrate very, very hard to pierce through the veil that deceived all five of my senses, which were telling me I was about to be bedded by a strong, tan, handsome *human* prince—albeit one with a magnificent golden tail. He gently untied the laces binding my breasts, releasing them for the second time today, and slid my skirt off over my raised hips. I lowered my padded ass back down onto the ground and giggled as I spread my legs for him, letting myself be deceived by the illusion. If I wasn’t trying to pierce through it, it was shockingly good... almost as good as a polymorph spell in terms of

deception.

The dragon/human prince's skin was pleasantly warm to the touch, and I writhed in delight as he nuzzled and stroked me up and down my entire body, wiggling in anticipation for the main event—my pussy was screaming for his attentions, but he went to my breasts first, opening his handsome mouth and licking all over them, paying extra attention to the nipples. I purred as the pleasant sensations made me wetter and wetter between my legs, and Fiero dipped a finger into my secret recesses. His claws must have been retractable, because it felt heavenly—thick and warm and reassuringly insistent, massaging my pleasure nub as he continued to lick my breasts and drove me further and further toward my ever-nearing climax.

“All of you,” I whispered hoarsely in his ear. “I want to feel you fill me up and stretch me out...”

I felt ridiculous saying such things, and my cheeks burned with embarrassment to think what a version of myself from two weeks past would think about me now, but I didn't care enough to stop him—I wanted that hot, girthy dragon cock I'd seen beneath his loin cloth, wanted to feel his dragon jizz burst deep inside of me. Being Lacey the courtesan was starting to turn me into a *real* dirty slut, and the most humiliating part was that I loved it. The feel of a man stripping my clothes away, lusting over my body, licking my sensitive breasts and clit, and touching the delicate curve of my ass, my hips, the soft arc of my back where two little dimples formed just below my waist, was all more heavenly than anything I'd ever experienced as either Kromgorn or in real life.

I spread my legs wide and held my ankles in the air with my own hands as he gently grasped my back and slid inside of me with a single grunt. I gasped, so wet that I took him easily despite his size, and lolled my head back as the amazing feeling of being fucked began. First he went slow, letting me feel the heat of his body as he slid in and out of my pleasure cave, but then his own need drove him faster, pumping harder and harder as his calm, steady breathing shifted to a needy, frenzied panting.

My pulse and breath quickened along with his, and I rocked my body against him, helping him plunge deeper and deeper inside of me... My eyes widened suddenly at a new sensation, a warm, rough, insistent probing at my asshole. I glanced down in confusion, confirming that his hands, feet, and dick were all accounted for.

*But then—oh my god. His tail?*

I felt my face turn bright red as his wriggling tail continued to push deeper into my ass, double-penetrating me without any outside assistance, but before I could object he started doing a wiggling, vibrating thing with his tail that felt... *incredible!* I moaned loudly, the noise pulled out of me without my consent or intent, as the double whammy of his pounding cock and rapidly shivering tail sent me into a paroxysm of orgasmic delight. My moans shifted to whines and finally converted to screams as my whole body quaked with a level of pleasure I hadn't even known existed. I released my legs, threw my arms around Fiero's neck and bucked hard, over and over, against the rhythm of his thrusts, continuing to scream as rolling shockwaves of pleasure washed over me, bursting again and again over my body until I'd lost all conscious control.

Fiero made a keening, grunting noise and finally seized up inside of me, swelling mightily and pouring his hot, molten seed inside of me. I shivered with a fresh round of delight, still writhing in the aftershocks of the amazing double-penetration orgasm he'd given me, and then collapsed back in a state of utter—though hopefully temporary—exhaustion.

**DING! DING! DING! DING! DING!**

I opened my eyes, shaking my head at the dazzling symphony of sparks popping up around us. *Wow. Single-handedly fucking a 3-star rare mob death nets me 5 levels, huh?* It made sense since usually you needed a full group to take out a mob of this caliber, and I got way more XP than a kill for a successful **Charm** and **Seduce**. I held tight to Fiero, who was still rocking and groaning and nuzzling against me in the aftermath of his own orgasm, and shivered happily. *Whew. That's never going to get old. And that tail trick is neat...*

Erlix unstealthed nearby, whistling long and low. "Damn, Goldie. I don't often get jealous—I mean, you've seen my cock—but that tail business is out of this world. How was it?"

"Amazing," I breathed, before blushing furiously and pushing Fiero off of me.

Erlix cackled as I cleaned myself up and got dressed, my cheeks aflame as I refused to look either of them in the eye. I'd completely forgotten the halfling was watching when I'd lost myself in my pleasure, and now I was mortified.

He smacked me on the ass, making me squeak and jump, before walking past me into the bushes.

“Hey! Don’t do that.”

“You’re something else, Krom,” he called over his shoulder. “Really something else.”

I stared after him with a mixture of humiliation and disbelief, as the painful smack of his hand faded from my rear. Then I shook myself and pulled it together.

“Come on, Fiero,” I muttered. “We have a paladin to rescue.”

## Chapter 21

We continued onward, my charmed and glamoured dragonkin prince leading the way, hacking through the multi-hued undergrowth with his flashing sword and Erlix periodically stopping to confirm that we were still heading toward wherever Topper was being held. The dangerous monsters we'd spotted off the trail earlier now avoided us, accompanied by a charmed 3-star rare mob as we were, and we made good time. The line of our travel was so straight and the alignment with our target so perfect that soon Erlix and I both realized that Vierdimin's lieutenant's and Fiero's orb both had to be in the same location: **The Tower of the Fey Court**.

The coincidence made the space between my shoulder blades itchy, just like it did when someone was sneaking up to stab me in the back, and judging by the surreptitious glances the usually-jovial halfling was throwing my way, he was thinking the same thing: What were the odds that Vierdimin's guild would hold Topper in exactly the zone where we would bump into a rare mob at just the right level to give me a special class quest... and one that could only be completed by going exactly to where they were holding Topper. As Fiero began furiously cutting at an especially pernicious copse of orange tangles, I dropped back to speak quietly to Erlix.

"This whole thing stinks of Vierdimin's influence."

"You're not wrong, Goldie."

"So what do we do? We might be walking right into a trap."

Erlix scratched his chin, thinking about it for a moment. "It sure feels that way, but at the same time... how could this be a trap? You have an honest to goodness quest in your quest log that fits both with the class and specialization you're playing. Vierdimin seems to have some control over the game since he locked us all here, but I'd be impressed if he could code whole new class quests from inside. And if so, why would he go to all the trouble? With that level of control, he could just nix your little **Charm** trick that's holding him at bay."

I nodded. "That all makes sense. But it's insane that this would just be a coincidence. They have the whole game to take Topper away to. They could have taken him to one of the zones only accessible with a flying mount, even! And they take him to exactly the place where I need to go to find a rare quest?"

“Yeah, it looks awfully shady.” He shrugged, poking at an exposed root with his toe. “But I just can’t figure out the angle that ends up hurting us. If it was a trap, well... it already could have been a trap. They had to know you’d try to go after them. And they’ve had plenty of time to prepare. And there was nothing stopping them from doing anything they wanted to try to you back in Lorengarde, right? They can’t hurt you, Goldie. Not there, not here, not anywhere. Not as long as you keep Vierdimin charmed.”

Silence fell between us. I hated being in the dark about Vierdimin’s larger plans, but there was no way I’d be able to find him and force him to explain *anything* without leveling up and recovering the help of my friends.

Then Erlix broke the lull: “On the plus side, you’ve got the server’s best rogue on your side.” He grinned. “I’m with you no matter what, lady. We’ll figure it out together.”

It was an unusually touching statement from the little guy, and it drew a smile out of me despite the grim mood. “The best rogue, huh?”

“Not the fastest, strongest, or highest leveled, of course, but definitely the best. Considering the whole of my qualities.”

“Like your giant halfling cock.”

“It’s *huge*.”

I started laughing, grateful that the halfling was still feeling cocky enough to crack jokes even with the odds stacked against us and our bodies in actual physical peril outside of the game.

Then Erlix got a serious look on his face. “So what do you want to do about walking into this obvious trap?”

Now it was my turn to pause and think for moment. “As I see it, we can’t do anything about a trap we don’t understand and can’t identify. If we can’t see the angle, then we only have two options: hold back, or plunge in despite the danger. We don’t have time to hold back, so I think we need to walk in, trip the trap, and hope we can make whatever save we need to make to get out of it.”

Erlix jerked a tight nod. “Works for me.”

“Mistress? Tiny half-man?” Fiero pointed through the hole he’d hacked in the foliage. “The Tower of the Fey Court awaits.”

Through the ragged slashes, we could now see a shimmering white and golden tower, with arcane purple crystals glimmering in the sunlight as they floated around the parapets. I sucked in a quick breath, amazed at how beautiful it was. I’d only heard stories about it, because it wasn’t even a

dungeon... not usually, anyway. The **Tower of the Fey Court** was a level 50 quest hub for Wild Fey Dominion faction members. Since not many players played that faction, and fewer still got to level 50, there was hardly any information about it. As members of the Humans of Lorengarde, we could fight our way inside, but there wouldn't be any loot or many wandering mobs for us to fight through like there would be in a proper questing dungeon.

"There's going to be guards that try to stop us from getting inside that quest hub," I warned them. Kromgorn had attempted to raid more than one enemy quest hub during our guild's PvP battles with The Secret Order, because taking out quest NPCs kept them down for a full 24 hours—a significant disadvantage for anyone trying to level in that zone, and a great way to deny resources to enemy faction members. But I remembered that before you got close, a handful of faction guards of the appropriate level would spawn and try to stop you.

"So what?" Erlix asked. "Sic your dragon boy on a couple of 'em and do your sexy booby dance for the others."

I blushed, still not used to being objectified like that—despite the fact that it's exactly what I had been planning to do—and started forward, with Fiero at my side and Erlix dropping into stealth a few paces behind me. The towers loomed as we drew closer, looking more and more impressive. When we got to about 50 yards away, the little blinking combat indicator on the bottom of my HUD kicked in, and I drew my bow.

"Get ready!" I shouted. "They'll spawn any moment. Keep moving toward the towers!"

Erlix circled out and Fiero raised his sword. I spotted a dark figure at the base of the tower, staring at us with his arms akimbo. Before I could get a closer look the first of the Fey guardians began to spawn, fading into being around us—**Fey Guardsman, Lv. 45** floated above their heads. There were two of them, pale purple ghostlike wraiths with long, grasping claws, about 20 feet away. They floated quickly toward us. Fiero snarled and leapt into battle at my mental *Attack* command, lunging toward the nearest spirit with a savage slash, while Erlix unstealthed behind it and drove both his daggers in. At the same time I loosed several arrows at the second wraith. *We might be able to do enough damage to finish these before having to deal with a second wave, if we hurry.*

But then I watched in horror as my arrows passed through the guardsman with no apparent impact! Fiero's swing and Erlix's stabs both

failed to make contact with anything solid, throwing them off balance, and they crashed into one another and rolled to the ground. The wraith the boys had attacked pounced on Erlix and sank its translucent claws deep into him, beginning to drain his hit points, and the little halfling began to scream. Fiero jumped back to his feet and tried slash after slash at the creature, but it ignored him and continued to drain Erlix's life as the blade passed through it like nothing was there.

"It's mental damage! They're illusions!" Erlix shouted, even as he feebly stabbed up toward the monster he couldn't seem to hit. "*Illusions!*"

I cursed in a very unladylike way and stumbled backward, trying to get some distance from the quickly approaching second wraith that my arrows had failed to hurt, racking my brain to try to think of what I could do. I didn't think **Seduce** would work on these things, and I didn't want those claws anywhere near my body even if it did. It was crazy that between the three of us we didn't have something that would work on these things—incorporeal enemies were rare, and the game didn't usually throw guards at you that didn't have *some* obvious weakness. A wizard could have burned them to a crisp with ease, but all we had was my stupid illusion magic...

*Your stupid magic... of course!*

I'd managed to get my **Illusion Magic** skill to level 15 through repeated casting of the **Dazzle** spell that was so delightfully annoying to Erlix, and now I held my hands out in front of me and braced myself. As the wraith drew close enough that his claws could almost reach my tender skin, I shouted, "**Dazzle!**" and blasted him with the full force of my sparkling, popping fireworks.

The rainbow shower blasted through the Guardsman, and I watched with amazed satisfaction as his purple, translucent body was torn to pieces. Then I skipped a few steps over and shot another blast at the creature feeding on Erlix, being careful to avoid hitting Fiero with my stunning cone of colorful explosions.

The halfling sprang up at half health, panting, and waved us toward the tower. "Nice work! Come on."

The three of us sprinted toward the tower, closing the distance through three more waves of illusionary guardsmen. Each time I paused for a quick double-blast of my **Dazzle** spell, ripping the level 45 guardsmen apart with ease. As we neared the ornate double doors marking the entrance of the Fey Court, the shadowy figure I'd seen earlier backed away and ducked inside,

but not before I'd noticed his name and guild tag.

"That was Nambra!" I cried. "Vierdimin's rogue crony. We must be on the right track."

We stepped across the threshold into the tower proper, and my combat indicator fell away. Once you fought your way through the guards, the quest hub was just a quest hub. For the moment, we'd be safe.

"How did you know to use **Dazzle** on those, Goldie?" Erlix asked. "Gotta admit that I'm impressed. I never would have tried a lowbie spell like that while something was trying to leech my life out."

"It just seemed like the right thing to do. You said it was mental damage, but that didn't fit the profile for actual ghosts, which do cold damage. But they were definitely incorporeal. That meant they really had to be illusions... I figured another blast of illusion might disrupt them enough to totally destabilize whatever was holding them together."

"Damn smart. How was the XP? I think those are the first mobs you've killed..."

They were, or at least the first ones that weren't so low as to not be worth anything to me. I flicked open my character screen and saw that all the guard-slaying had gotten me a tenth of the way into level 51. I frowned at my XP bar, annoyed to see such slow progress, but then I laughed at myself.

"What is it?" Erlix asked.

"It's just that the Fey guardsmen are insanely good XP. I killed half a dozen of them and gained a 10th of a level toward 50. If guards didn't get stronger and nastier as you stayed in their spawn zone, it would probably be worth it to stay here and fight them until they were grey to me... but the XP seems awful compared to what I get for fucking my enemies."

On Kromgorn I would have been delighted at the XP gains I was seeing here, but as Lacey I just found myself wishing I could find some more targets to seduce instead. I shook my head, chuckling again as Erlix grinned at me.

"Life of a courtesan, huh Goldie? Even when you're playing around at being a real adventurer, you still just wanna be a ho..."

It was true. But now we needed to get moving. I started walking deeper into the tower before I noticed that Fiero was hanging back, hovering right at the entrance, obviously dealing with an internal struggle of some sort. "Fiero! Get in here!"

His glamourised face contorted into a mask of agony. "Oh, great mistress. I want to obey your command, more than anything! But the Fey have been

enemies of the dragonkin for generations. Their magics prevent my entrance.”

Erlix rolled his eyes. “More like the code prevents us from bringing a hostile NPC into a quest hub like this... even a charmed one. So much for that idea. He wasn’t even any help!”

I frowned, trying to think of some way to get around the restriction. But there wasn’t an obvious solution. Finally I ordered him to sit outside and wait for us to return, while defending himself from any threats. We’d need him handy to turn in the dragonkin orb if I could figure out a way to recover it, and on a private note, I wasn’t quite ready to say goodbye to that lovely tail of his yet... and possibly not any time soon. None of the other NPCs I’d bedded had been able to do anything quite like *that*. Even the memory of it sent a little aftershock of pleasure thrilling through me.

But there would be time for play later, and I was confident that Fiero would be safe enough at the threshold. I forced myself to stay on track. Task number one: figure out where Nambla went and come up with a way to defeat Vierdimin’s other lieutenants, assuming they were even here. There were low level food and drink vendors all around us, cowering in fear since we were of a different faction, and I called out to them: “A Dark Legion rogue just passed through here. Where did he go?”

For a moment I thought I was going to have to have Erlix rough ‘em up a little, but then a fruit vendor swallowed nervously and raised a trembling finger to a white marble staircase that led up to the second floor of the tower. “That way, miss courtesan ma’am. You won’t be fucking us silly, will you? Please don’t!” He held his hands up to me and shied away as though that would be the worst thing in the world. “All three of them are up there. The Secret Order folks. They’ve wreaked havoc on the court. Please just get them out, all of you, and I know our king will be grateful.”

I cocked my head at him. Was this some kind of emergent quest from fighting in enemy territory? I’d have to keep an eye out for the Fey royalty in case there’d be another reward for saving them. In the meantime, I gestured to Erlix and we mounted the steps, ascending toward the second floor.

## Chapter 22

The stairway to the second floor of the tower opened into a wide, clear area that had probably been a marketplace for NPC vendors to set up their wares at some point, surrounded by a ringed balcony where people could walk around and look down at the merchants. Now that The Secret Order had moved in, though, it was empty. There were three exits beside the one we had walked out of: two that led up to the balcony and one that must lead up to the next floor of the tower, and everything had the smooth, beautiful texture of cool, white marble. Nambla was nowhere to be seen.

Erlix remained in stealth, staying a few yards away from me, while I edged in carefully, trying to keep my eyes on everything at once. Nambla had to be planning something—I had no expectation that we’d be able to climb the tower unchallenged.

My suspicions were confirmed when metal bars slammed down over all four exits and Nambla unstealthed on the balcony above us, laughing maniacally. It was now clear that the marketplace could easily double as an arena... an arena we were temporarily trapped in.

“What’s your plan, Nambla?” I demanded. “You know you can’t hurt me, so what good does it do to keep us trapped in here? I’ll get out eventually.”

“I might not be able to hurt you, you cock-sucking slag, but that doesn’t mean nothing can hurt you.” He reached into a pouch tied to his belt and retrieved a tiny blue orb which I couldn’t identify from so far away, and then hurled it down into the arena with us. I suddenly regretted my decision to leave Fiero outside, since the big lug was the best source of raw muscle we had, and I was feeling pretty vulnerable with him gone, **Charm** unavailable (since I had a PC *and* an NPC charmed now), and **Vejazzle** on cooldown.

The blue orb bounced twice before coming to rest about 15 feet away from me, in the middle of the arena, and then started glowing. I was torn between inspecting it more closely and backing away from it, but it was probably one of Vierdimin’s little surprises, and the last thing I needed was to get bounced back to Lorengarde because I was careless enough to stick my face in a bomb. Erlix hugged the wall, still in stealth, and circled around behind it so that we could flank it. I erred on the side of caution, drew my bow, and activated my **Sexy Shadow** skill for the first time, creating an

illusionary double of myself I could control with my mind. We'd walked right into a trap, like we'd expected, but I still wasn't sure this was *the* trap Erlix and I had been worried about—it seemed too simple.

My sexy double shimmered into existence beside me, looking ready to—well, if not to fight, then definitely ready to fuck. She wore my same ranger leathers and held her bow at the ready just like mine. I mentally ordered her to fan out so that there were apparent enemies on three sides of the sphere now, and we both pointed our arrows at it and waited for something to happen. Nambla leaned forward, balancing his arms on his knee, and watched with amused curiosity. I wanted to send an arrow his way just to wipe that smug look off his face, but there'd be plenty of time for Erlix and I to deal with him once we handled whatever this new threat was.

The blue orb began to expand explosively, doubling again and again, and started taking the shape of a blue humanoid. A bulbous, grotesque face twisted out of the head, his limbs began to thicken, and the creature stood from it's embryonic crouch, yellow eyes menacing. Just as I realized I was looking at miniature ogre, **Giant Ogre Soulburner, Lv. 60** appeared over his head.

I swallowed as a shiver of fear ran through me. The **Giant Ogre Soulburner** was a boss mob that appeared in the **The Shadow Alchemist's Tower**, which was a level 60 dungeon zone. I knew him by reputation, since I'd heard my guild mates discuss tactics against him when they raided that dungeon. He was physically powerful, but he also had a damage-over-time debuff he could cast, **Soulburn**, that would tick your health down while leaving your physical attacks severely weaker. Somehow Vierdimin had captured him from that dungeon and given him to Nambla in the shape of that blue orb to use against us!

"Nice move, Nambla," I growled, raising my bow to take aim at the still-growing ogre. "You can't hurt me yourselves, so why not transport something that can, huh?"

I released an arrow at the same time as my illusionary double. It flew through the air and plinked into the hide of the ogre, which had now reached its full height. My arrow did 0 damage to it, since it had impressive damage resistance. It raised its massive arms and roared in challenge.

*Uh-oh. This isn't good at all. If my arrows can't do anything to this boss, what am I supposed to do?*

Usually it took a whole group to defeat a boss monster, and this one

was ten levels higher than me! Erlix might be able to hurt it with his rogue abilities bypassing its armor, but not if it creamed us both in a few hits. He was still stealthed and circling, looking for his opening and trying to figure out what to do, just like I was, while Nambla watched us from above and cackled with laughter.

*Think, Lacey think—you're supposed to be an expert at this game. What can you do?*

I took stock of our situation: a level 50 Courtesan and a 30ish Rogue against a level 60 elite boss mob. Four exits barred, with no way out, in a large, open arena. My best skills were on cooldown—I could release my **Charm** on Fiero if I had to, but I knew that trying to charm a dungeon boss would likely be fruitless. Most of the large-sized ones, like this guy, would be stun and charm immune. I had no offensive spells and no way to hurt him since his damage resistance was so high.

While I was thinking, the ogre roared and rushed toward the illusionary duplicate. I ordered her to dance backward, out of his way, but he swung a meaty hamfist and clobbered her before she could get out of the way. The illusion evaporated in a poof of mist, and I cursed and skidded backward as he turned his gaze on me.

*Damn, he's fast! So much for my illusion... now what?*

Erlix could see as well as I could that if he didn't strike soon, we'd both be ogre food. As the beast prepared to charge me, he slid up behind it and leapt out of stealth for a nasty **Assassinate**, landing on the ogre's back with an impressive somersault. His daggers sank deep into the critter's hide, double-critting it for 5% of its health, and it roared in pain and began to flail, trying to get Erlix off of its back. He stabbed it a few more times, taking off another few percentage points of health, but then one of its flailing limbs caught the side of his face and knocked him clear across the arena. He landed upside down in a crumpled heap with 80% of his health gone.

I winced on his behalf—he was half that thing's level, so our odds were not looking good. Now that Erlix was unstealthed, it had forgotten all about me, thanks to my **Unintimidating** trait, and it began to clomp across the arena to finish the halfling off.

*What can I do? Crap crap crap.* If I couldn't hurt it, that meant Erlix's DPS would be our only chance to defeat this thing, so I had to stop him from killing Erlix... without getting myself killed in the process. I'd have to step in and do what Courtesans did best: crowd control. I put two fingers in my

mouth and gave a shrill whistle, drawing the attention of the Ogre Soulburner while Erlix climbed back to his feet, and once he was looking at me, I ripped my top open and did my best **Seduce**, shaking my tits for the beast and hoping he wasn't immune to that at least.

His massive cock stirred beneath his leather loincloth and he dropped his knuckles to the ground, dragging them as he wandered back over toward me. He was 12 feet tall, and judging by his bulge he'd likely split my character in half if he tried to mount me, but I had no intention of fucking him! I just needed to buy Erlix some time. I started grabbing my breasts and gyrating my hips, dancing and doing my best to keep the **Seduce** active. I knew that the better the performance I put out, the better my odds of keeping him enthralled were. He stopped a few feet away from me, smiling a dopey ogre smile at me and drooling in a slack-jawed slouch which I did my humiliating strip-tease for the ogre.

"Yeah, big boy," I said, forcing a smile. "You like my hot little body?"

Nambla hooted at me from the sidelines. "Nice one, Kromgorn. How long you think you're gonna be able to keep him busy with your slutty little dance?"

I ignored Nambla and focused on touching myself in all the sexy ways I had seen girls do to get guys hot and bothered—bending over, smacking my ass, shaking my tits—while I tried to come up with a plan. Erlix was back in action and circling behind the boss ogre again, but another surprise attack wouldn't be enough. The halfling was at 20% health and the boss still had more than 80%! If he interrupted my **Seduce**, he'd get himself killed for sure. No ogre was going to stand around and be poked to death no matter how hot the dancer in front of him was.

But that wasn't the only trick I had up my sleeve. It was time to get physical! I danced closer to the ogre, ignoring Erlix's hissed warnings, and looped my dainty arms around his neck. He was still smiling and drooling on me, and he smelled awful, but I forced myself to pretend I was having a fantastic time. "**Kama Sutra**," I said. Suddenly I was wrapping myself around his 12-foot body in crazy and impossible ways! Our limbs were tangled together like the craziest game of Twister I'd ever imagined. Both of us bent in directions I didn't even know joints *could* bend, his loincloth flew off, and it was only thanks to my hot little bod's impressive flexibility that my arms didn't get yanked out of their sockets. The ogre ended up looking like he was tied in a knot, facedown on the floor with his back bent almost

double, held securely in place by my **Kama Sutra** debuff, and I sat on top of his torso, astride his massive, newly-exposed penis, with my mouth a perfect open ‘O’ of surprise.

Both Erlix and Nambla’s eyes almost popped out of their sockets. “Holy shit, goldie!” Erlix said. “Are you gonna, uh, fuck that ogre?”

“Shut up and get stabbing!” I shouted, grimacing at the massive penis wagging in my face. It was nearly two feet long, six inches around, and rock-solid. “I’m not sure how long I can hold him like this.”

Erlix didn’t need to be told twice. He dove in and started stabbing the Ogre Soulburner again and again, whittling down his hit points while the ogre struggled in the tied up physical grasp of my **Kama Sutra** hold. My arms were still tangled with his body in a way I didn’t totally understand, but my hands were close enough that I could seize the penis, and I grabbed it just in case it helped with the timer. The ogre made a really weird noise when I squeezed his dick, like a pleasure howl, despite the fact that a halfling was plinking him to death at the same time.

“Hey, that’s not fair!” screamed Nambla. “You can’t pin him down and kill him like that! It’s an abuse of game mechanics.”

“Can and will!” I called back, sticking my tongue out. “You’ve never seen what a high-level Courtesan can do, numbskull. Your ogre’s ass is ours.”

I tensed my limbs and my grip and watched with satisfaction as Erlix whittled him down to 60%, 50%, and 40%, my hope growing that we might actually be able to kill him before my skill faded, but then at 35% he started glowing red and shaking. He shook so hard that he was vibrating me, and my teeth began to chatter as I felt his body get hot beneath me.

*Oh shit—what’s he...* But then I remembered. At 35% he cast **Soulburn!**

“Erlix, watch out!” I cried. “Let me eat the **Soulburn!**”

But it was too late. Erlix had been stabbing him in the head, jamming his daggers in again and again, and now the ogre’s mouth opened and vomited fire all over Erlix.

“Noooooo!” Erlix shouted, flipping backwards, but I could see the debuff ticking down his health. He ran back to try to stab the ogre some more, but the debuff reduced physical damage dealt by 90%, and meanwhile he was burning down! I watched him drop: 19%, 18%, 17%. No matter how furiously he stabbed, he couldn’t do any more damage to the ogre, and when

he died, I'd *really* be screwed!

"Think fast, think fast," I told myself. I was out of tricks! I didn't have any items or skills that could put out the fire, and it sure wouldn't help to cast any illusion spells right now. I couldn't even try to beat the fire out with a cloak or anything, since I was busy keeping the ogre pinned and my hands were full of giant ogre cock.

My eyes widened. *Yes! My hands are full of giant ogre cock.*

I squeezed his massive blue cock again and began to jerk on it as furiously as I could, yanking and pulling and stroking like only a Courtesan can. The beast stopped roaring and began to make weird grunting noises again, sounding more and more excited. He quit struggling and started thrusting his pelvis into my strokes, totally immobilized but getting what was probably the best hand job he'd ever had. As for me, I was about as grossed out as I'd ever been, but if I had to jerk off an ogre to save my friends, then I'd jerk off an ogre to save my friends.

"What are you doing, Goldie?" Erlix kept stabbing ineffectually at the ogre's face, trying to do *something* as the flames flickered around him and his health dropped further: 10%, 9%, 8%.

Suddenly the ogre roared with a howling groan of pleasure, and thick, goopy ogre spunk shot out and splashed all over Erlix, totally coating him in slime. **DING! DING! DING! DING! DING!**

My jaw dropped open in surprise as the ogre's cock deflated in my hands and the beast heaved a sigh of contentment, relaxing into a floppy state of calm that made keeping him pinned easier than ever. Apparently the game counted that as a successful seduction and gave me XP for a level 60 boss **Seduce!** I'd gained five levels and was now a level 55 Courtesan. But more importantly, the spunk had worked as I'd hoped and put out the fire on the halfling.

"Get him, Erlix!" I cried.

Erlix was standing frozen in shock, trembling in his coat of ogre spunk, as the last of the flames died away. He wiped it off of his face, shuddering in disgust, and blinked at me. He opened his mouth and then closed it. Then he walked over and calmly stabbed the ogre in the neck over and over again until the beast expired. The ogre's body trembled as it dropped to 0% health, and I untangled myself as it faded away to reveal a small treasure chest.

"Ooh, boss loot!" I said.

When the ogre died, the gates had raised, but Nambla was nowhere to

be seen now. He seemed to have slipped away again while we finished off the ogre.

As I slipped back into my clothing and bound my bouncing curves back into my leather outfit, Erlix painstakingly began to clean every inch of his body with the ogre's discarded loincloth, retching and gagging. His out-of-combat regen slowly refilled his health. "I swear to god, Goldie, if that hadn't worked... In fact, I'm still not happy about it. We're never speaking about this again, okay? So help me..."

I shrugged and opened the chest. "I'm just psyched we beat him. And serves you right for that time you made me jerk off a couple of orc guards. How do you like it, huh? Ah, there's a **Lv. 50 Jaunty Hat** here! I can't wear it. Halflings only. You want it?"

I held the festive blue linen hat out to him as he glared at me and rubbed the rest of the spunk off his arms. "I seem to recall I didn't actually make you *finish* those orcs."

A wide, innocent smile stretched across my face. "Oh, silly me. Must have forgotten. Anyway, I assumed the *best* rogue on the server could handle a little goop."

"Let's just go find Nambla before he escapes again," he muttered, still glaring. "And yes, I accept your conciliatory hat." He tugged it onto his head and shuddered. "That was unbelievably disgusting."

## Chapter 23

Nambla was at the top of the steps to the next floor, fumbling through his sack and grumbling to himself. “Shit, shit, where’s the key? I saved too many drops to sell for gold, damn it...” He pounded on the golden door behind him. “Wugduz, they beat the ogre! Let me in, quick!”

“Too late, douchebag.”

Nambla looked awfully worried as I approached, and with good reason. At level 55, I was finally high enough that I was a real threat to him, since he was only level 62 and he couldn’t hurt me at all, thanks my still-active **Charm** on Vierdimin. Erlix was warily stealthed behind me, since Nambla could hurt *him*, but I knew Nambla didn’t know what skills I might have up my sleeve, and my bow would do enough damage to him that I could slay him and take all his gear.

“Tell you what,” I said. “Hand that bag over now, tell me everything you know, and I won’t steal your gear. Sound fair?”

Nambla looked from his bag full of vendor trash, to the locked door, and then back to me and licked his lips. “I don’t know much,” he said. “What do you want to know?”

I smirked. *I knew the Secret Order was full of traitorous cowards! You reap what you sow, Vierdimin.*

“Let’s start with the bag.” I held my hand out, and when he didn’t immediately hand it over I reached for my bow. Then he quickly tossed it at my feet.

“Th-there. You can have it. It’s all vendor trash anyway, and the stupid Fey tower key is in there somewhere. It’s what we used to lock the floors off.”

He shifted nervously, clearly annoyed at having to give me anything, but I knew Nambla *loved* his prized raiding gear. He’d do just about anything to hang onto it, and he was almost never in a situation where he was vulnerable to losing it all like this.

“What’s Vierdimin doing?” I demanded. “Why is he playing games with us? What does he have planned?”

Nambla blinked at me. “Are you slow or something?”

I growled and he lifted his hands defensively.

“Okay, okay, sorry... jeez. He’s playing games with you because that’s

what Vierdimin likes to do. Duh. Why seal yourself in a game if you don't have people to play with?" Nambla sneered. "We're all toys to him—you just picked the wrong side."

"How do we find him?"

"You don't. I don't think you get it. When Vierdimin set off his little reality bomb, he was already the most powerful player in the game, and he's only gotten stronger since then. He'll find you when he's ready to engage. Right now he's just messing with you until he finds a way around this little inconvenience... the rest of the Secret Order is leveling up in peace while you Shining Army dolts flail around chasing your tails."

I sucked my breath in through my teeth, burning with frustration. I knew that they'd be leveling, but it was annoying that these kidnappings were all part of a strategy to keep us busy. I hated being reactive to what Vierdimin wanted. It meant I had to find Topper and Jazzus that much faster so that we could get back on track and hopefully go on the offensive. I wished I knew more about Vierdimin's plans, but it didn't seem likely that I'd get much out of Nambla.

"Tell me everything you know about this weird spell that has us trapped here," I demanded.

Nambla shrugged. "He doesn't tell us much. It's a combination of hacking and in-game magic. I have no idea how it works."

"Aren't you worried about dying in the real world?"

Nambla looked surprised. "Wait, what?"

I shook my head. *He hadn't even told his men... or he doesn't know.* "You're an idiot, Nambla. We're all in comas in the real world. I hope you have someone who cares enough about you to keep your ass alive. Vierdimin didn't say anything about it?"

"N-no." His face paled, and he looked like he was about to be sick. "He just told us we'd be fine... I, uh, didn't even stop to think about what would happen to my real body..."

"Then you're even dumber than you look. Anything else you can think of I should know?"

He didn't respond, and I decided that I'd wasted enough time talking to this lackey. Vierdimin was too smart to share his plans with his underlings, anyway. I'd just need to figure out how to stop him on my own.

I raised my bow and loosed an arrow right into the center of his chest. His mouth dropped open in surprise as he stared at his newly bleeding

wound. “What the hell?”

“Eat arrows, douchebag.” I fired arrow after arrow into Nambla, taking 6% of his health off with each shot. Nambla started to howl, racing back and forth between the door and me, but my body was blocking the narrow passage and the door was still locked—he couldn’t get around me and couldn’t hurt me.

“You promised to let me go, you stupid whore!” he wailed. His health ticked down: 58%, 52%, 46%.

“Yeah, well, you’re an asshole.” I released another volley of arrows. “And I lied. I’ll enjoy vendoring your gear. Who’s the stupid whore now?”

He crumpled onto the marble, still begging for his life, as my arrows finally brought him down to 0%. Then he faded away, returning to his bind point while his nice, 60th-level raid gear remained. Erlix unstealthed behind me.

“Damn, Goldie. That was *cold*.”

“It’s better than he deserved. Help yourself to his gear. Maybe some level 60 rogue gear will come in handy in a few levels. We probably shouldn’t *actually* vendor it.”

“Don’t mind if I do!” Erlix skipped over and gathered up Nambla’s loot eagerly while I dug through his discarded bag until I found an ornate, golden key. It fit perfectly into the over-sized lock on the door to the third floor and turned smoothly with a sound like wind chimes.

“Wow, he had some *nice* stuff,” Erlix muttered. “I can’t use it for a few levels, but at level 40 I’ll be able to wear it with penalties... not bad. The golden treasure ho is the gift that keeps on giving! Thanks, Goldie. That almost makes up for dousing me in ogre spooage.”

I rolled my eyes. “Come on, and stay on your toes. We still have to deal with Wugduz and Lefay, and they’re both nastier than Nambla was.”

The golden door opened into a long hallway that was smaller than the floor below us, with a single side door and some steps up. I spotted Wugduz right away. He was sitting with his arms crossed, smack in the middle of the hallway, in front of the stairwell up to the final floor. The **Lv. 65 Ogre Shadowknight** made for an imposing lump of bulk in his jet-black armor, and he stared at me with a silent glower of grim determination.

“Be careful...” Erlix whispered. “Looks like another trap. Better go check it out.”

But I was running out of patience for their games. I marched right up to

Wugduz and put my hands on my hips, not even caring if I looked utterly unintimidating in dainty little feminine body. “You better scram, meathead,” I warned him. “I already turned your rogue buddy into a pincushion, and I’m not afraid to do the same thing to you.”

Wugduz snorted. “Big whoop. That rogue was an idiot. I didn’t like him much anyway. If you think you’re getting past me that easily, think again.”

I raised my bow menacingly. “Fine. You asked for it.”

I released an arrow right at his face, but it bounced harmlessly off his nose guard. Annoyed, I started shooting them as quickly as I could draw them, sending a flurry of arrows into his massive bulk. But Wugduz had 10 levels on me and he wasn’t some flimsy rogue. He was a fully raid-gearred tank, and when I did scratch him once in a while his regeneration from his gear bounced him right back up to 100%. I threw my bow down on the ground in frustration and shoved against his body as hard as I could, trying to shift him out of the way, but he didn’t move an inch. He just blinked at me.

“You know that you’re going to die outside of game if you don’t help us with Vierdimin, right?”

Wugduz laughed. “Nambla’s an idiot, like I said. Lefay and I took better precautions. We figured we’d need someone to take care of our bodies once Vierdimin pulled us in-game for good. I’m in a hospital on an IV nutrient drip. I’ll be just fine.”

I wanted to scream and stamp my feet, which wasn’t at all barbarian-like, but I’d been a girl for quite a while now. The ogre was so damned smug and *composed*, like there was approximately 0% chance of me getting past him and he was so superior. It was infuriating.

“Get out of my way, damn it!”

“Why don’t you see if it helps to suck my cock?”

I glared at him. He was too huge, and I had no idea what to do about it. Smaller than the giant ogre we’d faced on the previous floor, but plenty big enough to block the passage. Erlix might be able to hurt him, but Wugduz would be able to clobber Erlix with ease, and as a player he’d be a lot harder for me to disable with my skills than the boss had been, even if we could afford to wait for my cooldowns. There was nothing I could do to move him as long as he sat planted where he was. Rather than give him the satisfaction of watching me struggle, I retreated to the previous landing with Erlix so that we could discuss our options out of earshot.

“What do we do now?” I moaned. “He can’t hurt me, but I can’t hurt

him either! And his fat ass is blocking the hallway unless we can take him out somehow.”

“Yeah, your booby dancing isn’t going to help us on him, is it?” Erlix scratched his head under his new hat and then sniffed his fingers. “Ugh, I missed some goop. It’s in my hair, Goldie!”

“If there was some way to teleport him, or widen the passage, or something...”

“You could just be really annoying. Try yapping at him until he gets up and leaves. Or blow your magic sparkle thing in his face a bunch.”

“Erlix, I’m being serious!” I snapped. “I could try all kinds of things, I’m sure, but we’re short on time and he’s under strict orders from Vierdimin. I don’t think there’s anything I could do or say that would threaten him more than a level 80 Lich being pissed off at him, and he won’t be baited out since he knows we can’t get past him as he is now.”

Erlix sighed. “Did you check the whole floor?”

“There’s a side door, but we don’t have time—”

“So let’s check the side door. Can’t hurt, right? Maybe there’s something lying around we can use. It’s not like we’ll fix things by standing here talking about it.”

I frowned, but Erlix was right. Trying to be proactive was better than moping about how we couldn’t hurt Wugduz.

“Okay,” I sighed, throwing up my hands. “Sure. Why not? We may as well do some treasure hunting while we’re here.”

“Now, *that’s* the treasure ho I know and love! C’mon Goldie. Let’s go.”

## Chapter 24

I led the way to the side door halfway down the passage, ignoring Wugduz's stony gaze, and threw back the double doors to see what was inside. It appeared to be the throne room of the Fey, with rich red carpeting and gold candelabras leading up to a pair of solid gold thrones with purple crystals floating above them. At first I thought the room was empty, but a flicker of motion behind the throne caught my eye, and then I spotted two more of the tiny Fey peeking out from behind the lavish golden thrones. When they saw it was just me and a halfling, they stepped out, breathing sighs of relief. There was a male and female, both dressed in fine clothing, and they held themselves with such a regal bearing that I was pretty sure I was looking at the Fey queen and king themselves. In case my observations hadn't closed the case, their titles also floated over their heads in bold text: **Fey King, Lv. 70** and **Fey Queen, Lv. 70**

"Thank goodness!" the queen exclaimed. "Rescuers! Please, get those Dark Legion invaders out of our tower. They stole our crowns and captured my son!"

"Now, now, dear." The king made a reassuring gesture toward the queen. "These folk may be able to help us, but the rogue is low in level and the girl is just a courtesan. These are players invading our kingdom. What is she going to do, fuck them to death?"

There was that **Unintimidating** trait effect again. I wondered how much of NPC response was normal for women and how much was class-specific. Either way, I was *really* getting used to being underestimated.

"I don't have time for this," I snapped. "I'm here to rescue my friend, and if I can save your son and crowns that's just a bonus."

"Yeah," Erlix added. "And she *will* fuck them to death! I've seen it. It's impressive."

I shot him a dirty look and he shrugged at me.

"What? I just tell it like it is, Goldie."

"She is a rather high-level courtesan," the queen said, tapping her chin thoughtfully. "I'm not sure I've ever seen one before."

"Beggars can't be choosers, I suppose," the king muttered. "Though I do wish that someone a little more imposing had come along."

I noticed that the king's eyes lingered on my chest and thighs while he

spoke. He might not think I looked *imposing* enough, he sure seemed to enjoy staring at me anyway. I paused a moment to consider him, but then shook my head. A level 70 NPC seduction target would be nice XP, but there'd be plenty of time for that once we figured out how to rescue Topper—plus I wasn't in the mood to drop to all fours and take it in the ass from a little old Fey in kingly robes at the moment.

“Just tell me if you have anything that can help us get past that lug in the hallway,” I grumbled. “He's blocking the whole passage, and I can't do enough damage to blow through his regen.”

“There, see?” The king's face darkened. “I told you she couldn't help us. Oh it's hopeless! Hopeless! I'm a king without a kingdom.”

“More like a drama queen,” Erlix whispered behind his hand to me.

The queen patted her husband on the arm reassuringly. “Oh, do stop, dear. Look, perhaps there is something I can do to help.” She turned to face me. “You're an adventurer, yes? I can't just give our powerful Fey magics away—it would go against both law and custom—but I'm also a quest giver, like everyone else in this hub! I have quest for Wild Fey Dominion faction members for an epic weapon upgrade, and all you have to do is go on a small quest. Given our predicament and the lack of other players around, I'm willing to let you do the quest and upgrade your weapon.”

I cocked my head at her in confusion and then turned to Erlix. “Uh... can she *do* that? I've never heard of an NPC bending faction code to grant a player a special quest.”

Erlix frowned. “Me either. But Fiero was also weird. I think Vierdimin is doing something screwy with the game code behind the scenes. Things are fraying. I say just go with it.”

I nodded slowly. “Okay, sure. Uh, yeah. I guess if you're offering free weapon upgrades, I'll take it.”

“It's class-based,” the queen explained. “And you're a courtesan. I can't exactly upgrade your lady-parts.”

“You could throw glitter all over her and make her shiny,” Erlix offered. “Or oil. She loves getting all oiled up.”

“Shut up, half-man,” I hissed. “So what do I get instead of a weapon upgrade? There must be an equivalent reward for Courtesans, right? We're an established game class.”

The queen nodded. “Yes—instead of an epic weapon upgrade, I can give you the **Blessing of the Fey**. It will be a huge boost to any magical skills

you possess, and you may select a new spell from the secret Fey cache of spells.”

Well, *that* sounded pretty good. I’d already committed to being a caster class when I’d picked my **Mesmer** specialty, so a magical boost would be pretty useful, and I bet the Fey had all kinds of spells that would be better than what the town spell merchant had had available. Rare spells and skills from quests and drops were always better than default ones purchased in town.

“Great,” I agreed. “What do I have to do? Anything you can do to make it quick would be great, since we’re kind of short on time here.”

“I can’t control the nature of the quest. I can only tell you what you need to do.” The queen shrugged apologetically. “There are rules for these things, after all. To receive the Blessing of the Fey, the task is daunting and dangerous: You must climb the magic beanstalk in the center of the Fey Wild and bring back to me the fabled **Seed of the Giants** from the locked room in the middle of the **Giant Castle**.”

My heart sank, and Erlix whistled softly. **The Giant Castle** was an entry-level sky zone, about level 65, that was usually accessible only with flying mounts. It had recently had a beanstalk added so that players could go there to level from 60-65 or if they couldn’t afford a mount yet, but it was a serious dungeon zone that required a full, well-equipped group to move through. It wasn’t something a level 55 solo courtesan with a lowbie rogue friend could easily blow through, even if we brought Fiero along with us. The giants would all be elites just like he was! I sighed. We’d need to find another way past Wugduz.

“Hopeless. Hopeless!” the king moaned. “Look at their faces... I told you that they won’t be able to help us.”

A quest pop-up for the queen had appeared just like the earlier one that Fiero had given me, and I reluctantly accepted it after I read over it, confirming that the instructions were more or less exactly what the queen had described.

“That’s not exactly an easy errand, lady,” I grumbled, ignoring the king’s whining. “You can’t just come up with something simpler given your circumstances?”

She shrugged. “As I said, I am bound by law and custom to my quest. Only when you return with the requested item can I grant you my boon.”

Well, that was a disappointment. Maybe this *was* a dead end. I sighed

and racked my brain for anything else that might be able to help. Then I remembered my pal Fiero, waiting outside for us to complete his quest. If these Fey nobles couldn't help us, maybe Fiero would have something that would! We just needed to complete his quest...

"Say... you don't happen to have the **Fabulous Orb of the Dragonkin Sorcerers** around here, do you?"

The king narrowed his eyes at me suspiciously. "And what interest does an airheaded courtesan have in our orb? It's mine. Mine!"

Erlix perked right up at the prospect of getting to steal something, and I put on my best innocent face as my pulse spiked with excitement. "Oh, no reason," I said in the most charming tone of voice I could muster. "I just so love pretty things and I heard it's gorgeous. If we're stuck here anyway, I thought maybe I could take a look at it."

At my compliments, he puffed up like a blowfish. "It is marvelous! My forefather's forefather acquired it from those dastardly sorcerers, and it's been in the family ever since. I'd love to honor you with a viewing." But then he deflated, his shoulders collapsing in. "But it's trapped upstairs with the rest of our riches and my son. It's as hopeless as everything else." He began to launch into another moaning diatribe about the unfairness of having his castle taken over by marauding invaders, pacing back and forth in front of his golden thrones.

I tuned the noisy king out so that I could think. I was starting to get pretty annoyed at these useless royals. If they couldn't give us anything useful and couldn't even help us finish Fiero's quest, what help were they at all? Small wonder we'd found them cowering behind their thrones instead of marshaling their forces or something. Maybe that was unfair, though—I knew the game didn't allow for that kind of organized resistance in quest hubs. That was the difference between the Orc King dungeon boss mob and the Fey King quest mob.

In any case, we were wasting time, and Vierdimin was getting stronger with every moment that ticked by, not to mention the ongoing danger we faced in the real world. There had to be another way to deal with the shadowknight. I wished again that the queen would help us—her tantalizing reward offer showed the most immediate promise of anything that might really help us, since we didn't even know what Fiero's quest reward *was*. It was frustrating that she could bend the rules enough to grant her quest cross-faction, but not enough to just give us the reward.

If the king had a different quest option for us hiding somewhere in his pockets, he wasn't volunteering it. Maybe we could find their cache of spells without their help? But it was probably one of those deals where the spells lived in the queen's head. I thought about asking them for help, but if they had something they could do, they probably would have already done it... plus Wugduz could carve them up from a seated position the instant they revealed themselves. They were high level, sure, but quest givers weren't known for their awesome combat skills. I glanced at Erlix, hoping for some hint of what we should do, but the usually-witty halfling seemed as stumped as I was. He was just touching his fingers together over and over and frowning at the ogre goo that still coated them lightly.

Suddenly my eyes widened. "I have an idea..." I whispered to Erlix. Then I turned to the queen. "Tell me, your majesty. Do you know what this quest item looks like?"

She paused thoughtfully. "No, no I'm afraid not. You'll just have to go and find it. All I know is that I can only accept the item custom requires me to accept in exchange for my help. I'm sorry, dear... you're such a sweet looking girl, and I want to help, but I'm already bending the rules giving you this quest."

I winced at her compliments. In my head I was still a big, tough barbarian, taking the lead and solving problems. It was annoying to be reminded that everyone else saw me as a silly little girl now. *That's okay. I'll show her just how silly I am.*

"No problem, your majesty. Excuse me one moment."

I pulled Erlix aside, and he grimaced at me. "You're not seriously considering going on this half-cocked quest, are you Goldie? We don't have the time *or* the firepower. Rescuing your friends is enough of a distraction on its own."

"No, of course not. I'm not stupid just because I look like a ditz."

"Yeah, you *really* look like a ditz. I forget sometimes."

I wanted to smack him, but instead I just swiped a quick finger through his hair and came up with a thick glob of ogre spooge.

"H-hey! Ow. What the hell did you do that for? I was, uh, saving that. For hair gel."

"Yeah, sure." I rolled my eyes at him and turned back to the queen. She stared at me curiously as I bowed low and extended the whitish goop out to her with a ceremonial reverence. A hush fell over the room, and even the

king stopped pacing to lean over his throne and take a look. “Your majesty... may I present to you, the **Seed of the Giants.**”

Erlix smacked himself in the face and dragged his hand down the length of it. “You have *got* to be kidding me, Goldie.”

## Chapter 25

The queen bent down and peered closely at the whitish glob on my fingertip. “It doesn’t look much like what I expected. You didn’t even leave the room!”

“Aha!” I said. “That’s just it. We already happened to have it. You see, this is the seed of an ogre... a *giant* ogre. That means that this is technically the seed of the giants, and you can accept it for your quest.”

Everyone held their breath while the queen blinked at the goop on my finger and then blinked at me. I leaned forward, encouraging her to take it with a pleading smile. *This has to work. Come on, queen lady.* Then, with a disgusted expression on her face, she retrieved a silk scarf from somewhere in her robes and carefully scooped the ogre spooage off my finger. She wrapped it into a tightly packed silk ball and squirreled it back into her robes, looking only slightly ill. I released my breath in a sigh of relief and beamed at her, wiping my fingers off on my skirt.

“Thank you, brave adventurer,” the queen intoned, her voice trembling slightly. “You have retrieved the **Seed of the Giants**, and I now grant you my boon.”

The quest box flashed up on my HUD again with a bright gold “COMPLETED” stamp splayed across it, and then faded away just as quickly. **DING! DING! DING!** The familiar shower of a triple ring of golden sparks radiated out around me as I achieved level 58 from the quest XP of an elite quest that was almost 10 levels higher than me.

“Nice!” I exclaimed. “That XP carried me up three full levels. That’s as good as seduction XP. Maybe we should find some more high-level quests to do?” I glanced at Erlix, waiting for the goofy quip he was always quick to offer, but the halfling had his mouth buried behind his hand and was squinting hard at the ground, apparently deep in thought. I shrugged and smiled expectantly at the queen. “What do I get, your majesty?”

She started chanting under her breath and raised her arms above her curly auburn head of hair, where her hands began to glow with an eerie purple light. Then she lowered them to rest both palms on my forehead. I felt a cool rush of tingly magic wash over me and floating text raced across my HUD: “New Trait Unlocked — **Blessing of the Fey**”

I popped open my character sheet to take a look at my new trait and my

jaw nearly hit the floor. “Holy shit, this is good!”

**Blessing of the Fey** - Int/Wis/Cha are raised by 3 each and all magic skills receive a 20 point bonus.

Bonuses to base stats were a *big* deal under the Fantasy Realms Online system, that had been modeled roughly after the early days of D&D style D20 games. But even more insane was the 20 point bonus to magical skills! Wizards would kill for that kind of bonus—it was *huge*—and probably the only reason I was even allowed to have it was that Courtesans were restricted to the Illusion school, and only then as Mesmers. When I eventually maxed my illusion skill, along with my now 27 charisma stat, I’d be an *insane* illusionist... maybe the best on the server.

*Jeez... this class might end up being even stronger than Kromgorn if I play my cards right. I wonder what else I can unlock? My second specialization isn’t that far off... If I double down on this magic line, maybe I can really super-charge the courtesan class and be a match even for a traitorous bastard like Haxor. With the right spells and invulnerability to his damage, could I even defeat Vierdimin?*

Then I shook my head. What was I thinking? Sure, I might end up being temporarily stronger than Kromgorn, but that’s because I wasn’t actively *playing* him, plus I was stuck in the body of a girl. Besides, who wanted to be an illusionist? I wanted to shout battle cries and charge into battle to cleave my foes in half, not mince around in skimpy outfits and make really pretty illusions to distract my foes. I’d rescue my friends, we’d go force Vierdimin to let us out of the game, and things could go back to normal. It didn’t stop a small voice in my head from saying: *Still, though...*

I looked at my character sheet again. Even if I was stuck in this stupid, girly courtesan, a small part of me, the part that was a real gamer, took pride in developing such an awesome set of skills in Lacey the Courtesan Mesmer. She might not be my long-term avatar, and it might be awfully weird to play her, but I was doing a damn awesome job of things considering the circumstances.

“Would you like to select your spell, my dear?”

The queen’s question broke me out of my reflections and reminded me that the blessing was only half the reward. I nodded with excitement. “Yeah! What do you got?”

A new menu popped up with a selection of rare and exciting spells, far better than my options at the spell vendor had been. They were all Tier III spells, intended for players around level 50-60, and I was fortunate that the blessing she'd given me would allow me to cast them even though my illusion skill was still under-developed for my level—I'd never stopped absent-mindedly casting illusion spells whenever we'd stopped, and my skill was up to level 31 on its own, which meant I could barely do Tier III now with my bonus. I read over my options quickly, considering the relative merits of each.

### **TIER III Illusion Spells**

**[Phantasmal Assassin]** Summon a phantasmal warrior with a physical form to serve as your servant for up to 4 hours. He can carry items, attack enemies for significant mental damage, and scout without your direct control. Players may only have one pet or servant at a time.

**[Size Manipulation]** This spell allows the caster to disperse or condense the very matter making up a player or NPC, causing them to become 1-2 sizes larger or smaller than they currently are. Their total mass remains the same, so their stats are unaffected. Hostile targets receive a save against this spell.

**[Greater Invisibility]** This spell allows the target to become completely invisible for a random period of time, and they become only partially visible when taking hostile actions.

**[Major Glamour]** This spell allows the caster to physically alter the features and body characteristics of a player or NPC, transforming them into another gender, race, or radically altering their physical features for the duration of spell, without changing their stats or size category. This provides an enormous bonus to disguise checks. Hostile targets receive a save against this spell.

**[Lasting Illusion]** Create any visual illusion over an area up to 10x10x10' that will last for up to three weeks or until dispelled.

I was impressed. Erlix had called illusion spells mostly useless, and the tier I spells pretty much had been, but there were some *really* interesting options here. **Phantasmal Assassin** wouldn't be too useful to me since I already had charm pets and couldn't double up unless I wanted to release

Fiero—and I was definitely not ready to say goodbye to that tail!—but my brain immediately spun into overdrive imagining what I could do with spells like **Greater Invisibility** or **Lasting Illusion**. I could go anywhere as stealthily as a rogue, conceal the entrance to secret bases, or make my side's numbers look more intimidating than they actually were... and that was just what I could think about off the top of my head! There would be all kinds of applications. Even **Major Glamour** was interesting, since enemy mages of different races often had invisibility detection up, but wouldn't think to detect magic on someone who looked like them (and was of their race, for all practical purposes). Hiding in plain sight could be an even better strategy than being invisible, depending on circumstances.

But then I shook my head and sighed. None of that would be of any use if I couldn't actually save my friends. It was neat to get a smattering of rare spells served up on a silver platter, but I'd have time to collect rare spells later if I wanted them. The fey blessing was the real reward here. Right now I had to focus on getting past Wugduz, and there was only one spell on the queen's offered list that would allow us to get past his huge ogre ass. I sighed and made my selection, annoyed that I was probably picking the least useful spell on the list.

The queen gave me a surprised expression. "Are you sure, my dear?"

"Yep. That's the one I want."

She shrugged and laid a hand on my forehead again as the selection dialog faded away from my HUD. "You know best." Another brief tingle of magic shimmered through me, and I knew if I looked at my spellbook I'd now see **Size Manipulation** beside the spells I'd already chosen. "Now go on and please, please rescue our son!"

"And our crowns!" the King added, popping up and down beside his throne like an excited gerbil, his robe fluttering around him. "And my orb! Don't forget my precious orb!"

I rolled my eyes and led the way back out into the hallway, Erlix trailing behind me as he stealthed from sight. There was no sense in giving the ogre a target to smash, and I appreciated Erlix's moral support even if we were getting to the point where his DPS wasn't that useful anymore. Something still seemed to be bothering the little guy, but I was too focused on Wugduz to worry about it right now. The shadowknight sat planted where I'd left him, plugging up the narrow hallway with his arms crossed and a dour expression on his face.

“Where’d you run off to?”

I shrugged and jerked my thumb back toward the room we’d just walked out of. “We just took a little tour of the floor. Have you been inside the throne room? It’s quite a spectacle.”

Wugduz grunted. “That’s a smarty-pants word for a dumb-looking chick like you. Nice try, ho-bag. I’m staying right where I am.”

“Sure, sure. You stay put. Too bad you won’t be able to block the way any more.”

Now he laughed at me. “What, do you have a ghostly form spell or something? My magic save is almost as high as my health regen. I’m a tank, remember? Idiot.”

I arched an eyebrow and spoke so sarcastically. “Wow, that’s so impressive. Have you tested it against someone with 27 points in their primary casting stat?”

The ogre’s eyes narrowed. “Whaaat? You don’t have a casting stat that high. You’re a sex-crazed *whore* class. You can’t even cast spells! No way.” He shook his big, black, helmeted head and yawned. “You’re not bluffing your way past me.”

“Let’s find out.” I raised my finger toward him and uttered, “**Size Manipulation**,” picturing a tiny little baby ogre two body sizes smaller than Wugduz was now. I watched with satisfaction as the spell landed, shock briefly registering in his eyes as he failed his magic save, and then began to shrink smaller and smaller until an ogre the size of Erlix was sitting in the hallway. For two beats he sat there staring at his hands in surprise. Then he leapt up, slamming his visor down over his newly halfling-sized face.

“You fucking twat! I’ll kill you!” He snatched his cute little two handed axe, which had shrunk in size along with the rest of his equipment and charged me, but I just laughed as the midget in black armor wore himself out with swing after swing that passed harmlessly through me. I shook my finger at him.

“No, no, no! That’s a bad widdle ogre. If you’re going to get all angry, mommy needs to put you down for a nap.”

He roared, which in his new high pitched voice was about as intimidating as one of my roars would be as Lacey the Courtesan, and stared at me with murder in his eyes. I was glad that my **Charm** on Vierdimin was still leaving me well-protected from **Secret Order** members, because even if he was tiny, my spell didn’t reduce his stats at all, and I wasn’t really

prepared to face down the main tank of their guild by myself. Fortunately, I didn't have to. He couldn't touch me!

I smiled and patted him on the head, laughing as he leapt backwards sputtering. "When you see Vierdimin, say hi for me," I said. "Now if you don't mind, we're headed to the final floor."

"Oh no you don't!" Wugduz cried.

He turned to run, and I realized that even though he couldn't hurt me, I didn't want him giving a heads up to Lefay or whatever else was waiting for us upstairs. Who knew what kind of stupid barricade they could get in place if I let him go? Right now she probably figured we wouldn't be able to get past him, and might have gotten lax on her defenses.

I dove for the fleeing ogre, who fortunately could only move so fast on his stumpy legs, and as I made contact, I yanked him tightly to my chest and activated my last unused skill in my bag of tricks: "**Motorboat!**"

I half-expected it to fail, since his saves were so high, but once again my 27 charisma prevailed and his helmeted face got sucked between my huge boobs like there was an electro-magnet stuck in my bra. It was sort of uncomfortable to feel the cool metal on my bare skin between my breasts, where the leather straps bared my skin, but the skill kicked in and my chest started wobbling rapidly back forth at high speed, knocking his head violently around and vibrating my whole body. I expected it to hurt, but I guess the skill protected me from any pain. I couldn't say the same for Wugduz, though. His helmet almost seemed to make it worse, and when the motorboat ended he fell to the ground dazed and disoriented.

"Wh-what was that?" he grunted out, clutching his head and wobbling uncertainly on the ground. He tried to climb to his knees but kept falling over, and finally he gave up and laid there stunned. I checked his debuffs in my HUD and saw that the helmet *had* made it worse... he'd gotten so banged around by my flailing breasts that he'd be stunned for a good ten minutes.

I motioned Erlix forward and ran past the stunned shadowknight, making good use of the time I'd bought us, and raced up the steps toward the final floor and Lefay.

## Chapter 26

This time the ornate golden door at the top of the steps wasn't any barrier at all, since we still had Nambla's key. It swung open with the same sound of wind chimes that the earlier door had had, and I stepped quickly into a wide, open room. It was the smallest one I'd seen in the tower so far—hardly more than a chamber, and there were no more steps up. This was the end of the line. In the center of the chamber, a fiery red globe hovered a few inches above a four-foot pedestal, bobbing slightly in the air and rotating as it swirled and shimmered with shifting hues of crimson, yellow, and orange. It had to be the coveted **Fabulous Orb of the Dragonkin Sorcerers** that Fiero had wanted and the king was so very proud of.

I would have been entranced by the beauty of the levitating globe if my attention hadn't immediately snapped to the other occupants of the room: **Lefay, Lv. 70 Dark Elf Wizard**, had her back turned to us, standing over a pair of unconscious bodies in a shimmering blue force cage similar to the ones that Jazzus and I had been trapped in when this whole mess started. I could see by the familiar armor and cloak that one of them was Topper, and if I squinted through the haze of the cage I could make out his character tag: **Topper, Lv. 75 Human Paladin**. The other occupant of the cage was small enough to be a child, which likely meant it was the fey prince. The wizard—wizardess? I wasn't sure what the appropriate name for a female wizard was—had clearly been busy, finding time to gain a whole level while they'd guarded their prisoners. She'd probably been fighting the guardian specters out around the perimeter for easy levels. Any caster with illusion magic would be able to make short work of them, and they'd be scaled to her level and get progressively harder for even better gains.

I gulped and hesitated, suddenly feeling intimidated. Lefay would be smarter than either Nambla or Wugduz had been. I knew she couldn't really hurt me, but magic users were tricky. In Fantasy Realms Online, because of how realistic and physics-based the game was in many ways, the only limits on most casters were how creative they could get with their spells. Wizards had every school of magic at their disposal, and Lefay was Vierdimin's highest-level wizard, second only to the Lich himself. I was sure she had all kinds of crazy spells from raiding, and unlike Wugduz, she might be clever enough to use them in ways that could be annoying even if they didn't

directly hurt me.

“Back so soon, Wugduz?” Lefay asked over her shoulder. “Wow. The bitch got tired of bashing her head against your bulk even faster than I expected. Probably Krom just wants to get back to fucking dudes. What a homo.”

*I’m a bitch? She’s the bitch!* I thought angrily, annoyed at both her dismissive attitude and her casual homophobia. It didn’t matter if I fucked dudes. *Get over it, you dark elf slag.* I couldn’t believe Lefay had so little faith in me that she hadn’t even turned around on the off-chance it *might* be me and not Wugduz coming up with a report. *I’ll show her what I can do...*

Erlix spread out to the side of the room, daggers poised and ready to strike at her when and if I gave the word, and I quietly drew my bow, slithering an arrow out of my quiver with a leathery rasp. Together our DPS wouldn’t be great, but we could try the same strategy we’d tried on prior enemies, using me as an invincible tank while Erlix wore her down. He might be half her level, but those daggers were *very* pointy. Besides—all my special skills were on cooldown, and both of my charm slots were filled by Vierdimin and Fiero (not that charming Lefay would do anything different from charming Vierdimin). If we were going to beat her, it would have to be with wits, magic, or damage.

At the sound of my bowstring drawing back, her shoulders tightened, and she spun around just in time to fling up a translucent orange flame shield. My arrow flew through the air and made contact with the shield, but burned to a crisp before it ever touched Lefay. It was some kind of anti-projectile damage shield, and I could tell by the way Erlix was hesitating that it would probably be just as unfriendly to his hands and daggers as it had been to my arrow. We’d have to wait for an opening to do this the hard way.

Lefay stood posed with her legs spread wide, magnificent silver-white hair curling back around her head and one hand outstretched toward me. The wizard wore a suit of shimmering black skintight satin that complemented her bluish-grey skin, tantalizingly cut to reveal her feminine curves, and decorated with a spiderweb pattern that was popular with the nerdy D&D crowd who insisted that dark elf equaled drow elves even though the Dark Legion faction didn’t have any pet spider-centaurs or anything. A midnight-black cloak with the hood thrown back swirled behind her. She really went in on that “dark, sexy wizard” thing. But it was working for her. As she narrowed her pretty purple eyes at me, I couldn’t help but feel a little

intimidated again. She was so beautiful... and she held herself with the dangerous, easy confidence of a hot girl who *knew* she was hot, as opposed to the reserved awkwardness I felt when I ran around *playing* at being a hot girl. I wished I could get over my hangups and hold myself like that, instead of being weirded out every time someone called me a cutesy nickname.

“Take a picture, lesbo. It’ll last you longer.” Her lips quirked into a sneering smile that twisted her pretty face into a mocking grimace, like the popular girls in my high school, and I flushed as I realized I *had* been staring... at her tits, at her legs, at her breasts. But Lefay was my enemy, not one of my fucktoys!

“Shut up, bitch,” I snapped, forcing my words to carry a level of confidence I didn’t feel. “I outsmarted your rogue, smacked down your main tank, and you’re not going to give me any problems either.”

“That’s where you’re wrong. I admit I’m impressed you got past Wugduz, but outsmarting a guy who names his character Nambla isn’t exactly something to write home about. Anyway, your run stops here. You can’t get your pal out of this cage behind me unless you have the shield generator Vierdimin gave me, and I wasn’t dumb enough to prep offensive spells against someone I couldn’t hurt. It’s all defensive, Blondie. Good luck getting it away from me!”

I growled at her. It was bad enough that I had the halfling calling me Goldie all the time. I didn’t need extra nicknames from Vierdimin’s chief floozy.

“Tell me where you’re holding Jazzus.”

“Poor baby. Can’t figure it out? Better get a better wizard on your side. Oh wait, that bitch *was* your wizard. Or maybe Haxor can help you... oops, nope he can’t either. Too bad. You’re just fucked.”

“Fuck you.”

“As if, you Rupaul reject. I fry boys pretending to be girls, not fuck them.”

“You wanna dance? Let’s dance.”

“I don’t dance with girls, ho-bag.”

She sneered at me again and put her hands on her hips, satisfied that her retort had shut me up, but I’d just had enough of her banter. I knew arrows would be useless as long as she had her shield up, so I started flinging spells at her as quickly as I could, before she had time to prepare a defense.

My left hand shot out to illuminate the room in a bright flash as my

**Light** spell fired off, while I used my right hand to cast **Minor Glamour** and turn my whole body the same, shimmering white color as the marble of the tower all around me. It was no camouflage, but if I was lucky it would make it a little harder for her to track. **Light** wasn't much brighter than a torch, but if you've ever seen a torch you know they can be pretty damn bright, and I could control the shimmering ball of light with my mind up to 15 feet. I sent it hurtling toward Lefay, trying to keep it in her face, and raced after it, my breasts bouncing beneath the leather straps covering my chest as my boots slammed on the marble floor. *If I can land a lucky stun, I can end this right away...*

It was a good plan—a *great* plan, considering the tools I had—but Lefay was ready for my little stunt after all. I reached **Dazzle** range and a rainbow shower of sparks exploded out of my hands toward her, but she made a bored gesture that raised some kind of anti-magic shield that coated her body and reflected the sparks away from her. Then she raised a finger and my **Light** spell simmered down to an angry glow, canceled out by an equivalent **Darkness** spell that left the room in a neutral, shadowy gray illuminated once more by the flaming dragonkin orb. I shot her with **Dazzle** again and again, blowing through half my mana in an attempt to pierce her shield. But every time the sparks bounced off her harmlessly. Finally, I stamped my foot in frustration and dropped my **Minor Glamour** spell too, returning to my usual shades of soft, pinkish skin and curly blonde hair. There was no point in looking like a white-faced circus clown if my **Light** spell wasn't distracting her.

Lefay made a big show of yawning. "Is that all you got, you little perv? I expected better. Wugduz must be getting rusty if you beat him with these cheap parlor tricks. Try something higher than a tier I spell, noob."

I fumed at her. I could deal with being called a bitch, blondie, a perv, or a ho-bag, but a noob? That was crossing the line.

Erlix still circled warily on the sidelines, looking for an opening, but she still had both shields up. She'd burn him to a crisp before he got close if he revealed himself, and my magic wasn't going to be of any use. I racked my brain trying to figure out how I was going to wrestle the device away from her. Her attacks would pass through me harmlessly, but our bodies would still make contact if I tried to interact with her, and apparently her defenses worked just fine on my weapons and spells. Sadly, the game code wouldn't let me go rooting around in her bags unless she was unconscious,

stunned, or dead. **Charm** had to have some limitations to avoid being even more OP than it already was, I guessed.

“I can do this all day, Krom,” she warned me. “You want to know how many spell slots wizards get? How long these shields last? I could take a nap and you still wouldn’t be able to rescue your friends. You may as well give up and give in like Haxor told you to. While you’re dicking around here, Vierdimin and the rest of our guild are getting stronger minute by minute. Really, all this effort for your little Paladin buddy? Did you see how easily we took him out? I don’t know what you think your master plan is, but you don’t seem to understand that Vierdimin controls this world now. The things he can’t control, like your cutesy little **Charm** trick, are going to break down as soon as he unlocks—” Her eyes widened and she cut off abruptly, suddenly realizing her bragging had taken her a little too far.

“Yeah? As soon as he what, Lefay? You’re dumb enough to spill your boss’s plan to the hero?”

She snorted. “Some hero. You need a triple-D sports bra just to go jogging, and you’re dressed like a gender-swapped Legolas cosplayer. It’s *really* intimidating.”

“Yeah, *I’m* the cosplayer. Nice spider cloak, bitch.”

I realized I’d hit a sore point with her when she just frowned at me instead of snarking back, and I wondered if she actually did cosplay IRL. I knew she wasn’t going to reveal any more of Vierdimin’s plans, and the fact that Vierdimin had some kind of master plan wasn’t surprising—or useful—at all, but it still felt good to taunt her for her slip anyway. I had to take my digs where I could since she was as invulnerable to me as I was to her. But it was good to know that he hadn’t solved the problem of my **Charm** skill yet, which meant we still had time. That meant we still had hope of getting out of here without being his twisted little playthings forever.

Lefay tossed her hair over her shoulder and narrowed her eyes at me. “I’m not spilling anything. And even if you knew what he was up to, the point is that you can’t stop him. He’s running circles around you **Shining Army** twats, and you can’t even see it. Dance, puppet dance!” She broke into an evil cackle, and I glared at her, wishing any of my Courtesan skills were off cooldown. A well-timed **Vejazzle** might wipe that grin right off her face.

But then again, it might not. I suspected that a sufficiently high level anti-magic shield would protect her as well from magic-based abilities, which mine were, as it did from spells. I couldn’t afford to sit around and wait to be

able to make my vagina sparkle again, just to see if it could take out Lefay. The gorgeous dark elf had settled down into smug, simmering look of contempt again, and she tossed her hair again as I watched. Her attitude made me so angry! She was so... so superior. Or she thought she was anyway. I wished I could take her down a peg and bring her to my level—even just throwing her off her game would have been satisfying.

Then a perfectly wicked idea occurred to me. I couldn't hurt her, couldn't mage battle her, and couldn't **Vejazzle** or **Kama Sutra** her... but did I need to have a shiny vagina to take her out? *A regular one might be just fine...*

My whole demeanor changed, and I put my best sex-kitten face on. I sauntered toward her, swaying my hips and running my hands through my blonde, silky curls.

"What are you doing?" she asked, with a note of warning in her voice.

"Oh, Lefay," I breathed in my sexiest voice. "You're such a hot little piece of dark elf ass. Why are we fighting? We're both just girls here, right?" I giggled. "Let's play. You know. Cool for the summer. Our little secret."

She took a step backwards as I drew closer, and her smug expression evaporated, replaced by a panicky uncertainty. "H-hey! Get away from me, you pervert!"

I kept advancing, and then Lefay was practically tripping over herself to back away from me. When she bumped into the wall of the tiny chamber, I closed the remaining distance in three steps and plastered my hot little body against hers while she squirmed uncomfortably. I could feel the smooth satin of her skimpy suit and the heat of her inky flesh. A whiff of her perfume reached my nose, and I noted that she even smelled dark and mysterious. My come-on wasn't an act; Lefay really did turn me on. I could feel my body reacting to the close proximity of the elf, my nipples hardening and a familiar wetness spreading between my legs. But my instincts about the bitch had been right. Her whole body was tense, and she was seriously squicked out.

"Come on, Lefay. I know you want to. I can see it in your eyes," I whispered in her face. My arms trapped her on either side of her body. She was a few inches taller than me, but also lighter, and we were all tangled up against the wall. Her eyes widened as her nose twitched, and a look of horrified disgust passed over her face.

"I most certainly do not! I like men!"

"Mmmm, you smell so good. Can you smell me too?" I leaned close to

her ear and brushed my breasts against hers, thrilling at the sensation. “You know, down *there*? That’s pure desire. Let me get my tongue up in that hot little cunt of yours!”

“You—you’re disgusting!” she cried. “Oh god, get off of me! Gross gross gross. Keep your nasty girl parts off of me, you sicko!”

She ducked out from under my arm and started backing away again, and I doggedly followed. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Erlix smirking in stealth, cheering me on. “What’s the matter Lefay? Can’t you do this all day? Why not take a little nap with me? I promise I’ll make it hot, since I can’t save my friends anyway... I want to lick every inch of that hot, dark elf body. What, you don’t like girls? Just **Gate** out of here.”

Lefay glared at me with murder in her eyes as I closed the distance again and pinned her against another wall, smushing our sexy bodies together all over again while she made gagging noises. I rocked side to side and moaned, savoring the feeling of girl on girl action as I rubbed my hot little clit on her hip.

“I see what you’re doing, damn it! You can’t win like this,” Lefay growled, looking strained. She yanked her hip away from me, so I started rubbing up and down on her again.

“I’m not trying to win,” I said with a dreamy smile on my face. “Trust me, we’ll both win once I show you what a Courtesan can do. Just leave the room if you don’t want to explore with me. It’s okay. I know you can’t voice your feelings out loud yet. Otherwise... well, if you stay, I’ll interpret that as consent to get frisky.” I closed my eyes and leaned in close to plant a sloppy, wet kiss on her lips, and she turned her head and tried to shove me violently, but the **Charm** kicked in and she passed right through me. She succeeded only in stumbling a few steps forward.

Then she spun, her hands up defensively. “Back off. You are so gross. Ahh! I can’t handle this. Vierdimin will be pissed, but I did *not* sign up for nasty come-ons from another girl. This is sick.” She jammed a finger toward me. “Don’t think this is over, you disgusting lesbo.”

I took another step toward her, but she cast **Gate** before I could reach her and faded from view. Wherever she went, the range was far enough that it broke the link between her device and the cage, and the blue barrier collapsed with an audible sizzle.

I put my hand on my hip and grinned at Erlix. “And that, my friend, is how we deal with a raging homophobic cunt when we’re out of other options.

Not bad, huh?”

He tucked his daggers back into his belt and unstealthed as he began to slow clap. “Not bad, Goldie. Not bad at all.” He paused and scratched his head. “Would you have... you know, actually have gone all the way if she didn’t want you to?”

I rolled my eyes. “Of course not. I’m not a monster. Besides, I’m pretty sure the game code wouldn’t allow that. I figured I could just turn up the heat enough to get her ass out of here without hurting her, since she’s obviously so uncomfortable with girls being into girls.”

The halfling considered me approvingly and gave me a wide, cheery grin, breaking his unusual stretch of silent reflection. “You’re a lot smarter than you look, Goldie. A lot smarter than you look. Keep it up, and you might even earn the right to touch some giant halfling cock.”

I sighed. “Really, Erlix? I thought we were done with that.”

“Halfling cock? No one is ever done with halfling cock. Not even the best treasure ho on the server.”

## Chapter 27

A low moan from the two captives on the ground pulled my attention away from Erlix, and I rushed over to Topper's side to help him sit up, untangling him from his flowy white paladin's cape.

"Topper!" I exclaimed. "Are you okay?"

His shining armor creaked as he raised a hand to his temple and moaned. "I have a splitting headache, but other than that I'm fine. When I get my hands on those idiots... they only managed to keep me subdued thanks to Vierdimin's stupid disabling item. I'm keeping my saving throw buffs up at all times from here out. No more of that nonsense." He looked up at me with bleary eyes and seemed to notice me for the first time. "Whoa. Lacey? Where's the rest of the guild? And holy *shit*! When did you hit level 58? How long have they had me knocked out?"

I blushed. If Topper was swearing, he must really be surprised. Usually he played the role of paladin perfectly. Annoyingly perfectly, in fact. "Ah, erm. You actually haven't been captured that long. Courtesans are just surprisingly... um, efficient... at leveling." Topper gave me a long, searching look, and I blushed even harder. "Dude, when in Rome, okay? I'm working with the tools I have. I rescued you, didn't I?"

He dusted himself off and stood, cutting his usual impressive figure now that he wasn't curled into a fetal position anymore. "You did," he admitted. "And I'm grateful. If you can level this quickly, maybe we do have a shot at facing Vierdimin after all. But we need to hurry." A grim shadow flashed over Topper's face. "While I was captured, Iciez was still sending me real world updates. Things are getting pretty grim. People are panicking. The Fantasy Realms Online developers are trying to convince the public that they still see active brain waves in the logs, and that the game shouldn't be shut down, but all concerned parents see are their children in comas with no explanation. Doctors are stumped, and they're pushing hard to kill servers."

I sucked in a breath. "Will that work?"

"I have no idea. But it seems pretty risky until we figure out exactly what Vierdimin did, doesn't it?"

"What do you mean? If they kill the game servers, won't we just go back to our bodies?"

Topper frowned. "We have no idea if it works like that, Krom—er,

Lacey. What if the only way to get back to our bodies is to figure out what Vierdimin did and reverse it? What if he's *counting* on the parental lobby to kill the game servers? I've had a lot of time to think while you've been on your little adventure, and I don't like what I've come up with. I wouldn't put it past Vierdimin to have backup servers spun up somewhere, ready to cut over to as soon as the official servers drop support. I know a little bit about the network architecture this game runs on, and there's a warden application that prevents players from sliding it over like that while the official servers run. But if those servers should drop, including the warden..."

The blood drained from my face as I considered the implications. "You mean it might be just what he's waiting for. When they kill the servers, he cuts us over..."

"And we get stuck outside of our bodies on Vierdimin's private server. Maybe forever. It's not a place I want to be."

The idea sent a chill through me. Right now, on the official servers, it was obvious Vierdimin couldn't control everything, but in a private sandbox that he'd prepared for the game code, he really would be a god... and we'd be stuck as his playthings, maybe forever. The enormity of the situation hit me for the first time, and I suddenly felt very small and afraid. I'd never considered that I might be stuck as Lacey the Courtesan *forever*... I gazed sadly down at the impressive pair of tits on my chest.

"Guys... I don't wanna be a chick forever. Uh, please? We need to stop him."

Topper rested a reassuring hand on my shoulder. "Don't worry, Lacey. You did a great job rescuing me. I also had plenty of time to think through how Vierdimin might be concealing himself, and I think I have an inkling of how we can find him. We just need a high level mage to help."

"Jazzus?"

He nodded. "She might be the highest level mage left on the server who's on our side." Then he slammed a gauntleted fist into his metal palm with a loud clang. "And I sure wouldn't mind paying that traitorous dog Haxor back for his betrayal."

"Well, let's get going then! There's no time to waste." I grabbed the floating orb off the pedestal and tucked it into my bag, gathered up the two crowns discarded near the fey prince, and picked the kid up by his arm. He squealed in dismay with a blood-curdling shriek, and surprised me so much I nearly dropped him.

“Let me go, let me go! I was playing dead and hoping you’d go away.” He cried and twisted in my grip, and despite my delicate arms he couldn’t extricate himself. The fey child was even frailer than I was. I sighed and released him.

“Oh, shut up. We’re not here to hurt you. Your parents are downstairs. Take them these, would you? And tell them I’ll be right down for my reward.” I shoved the crowns into his hands. He blinked at them and looked up at me, and then vanished down the steps without another word.

“Is that a quest or something?” Topper asked.

“Sort of. This whole zone is weird. I’ve been getting quests I shouldn’t be able to get, NPCs are doing things they shouldn’t be able to, and they’re promising me rewards for on-the-fly tasks. It’s bizarrely realistic. I’m going to see if I can weasel a few more spells out of the queen for those crowns. She’s hoarding some nice Tier III illusion spells. We just need to take care of that before he notices I stole his orb, or we won’t be getting any more rewards from the Fey Folk!”

“You can use Illusion spells?”

“Long story. I’m a **Mesmer** now. Don’t sweat it.”

“That does it! None of this makes any sense!” Erlix blurted out. I glanced down at the little halfling, surprised at his uncharacteristic outburst. He sounded pissed off. After our little exchange post-Lefay, he’d lapsed back into his weird, moody silence, and I’d kind of forgotten he was here in the excitement of freeing Topper.

“What doesn’t make any sense, Erlix? You knew I was a **Mesmer**.” I shared a concerned look with Topper, who shrugged as if to say that he didn’t have any idea what the little rogue was going on about either.

“Not that. This place. All of this. I don’t like it. We were expecting a trap in this tower, right? And yeah, they had some surprises prepared for us. But nothing we couldn’t handle. Think about that for a second. Vierdimin, the level 80 lich, and his team of 65-plus lieutenants, the strongest members of his guild, lure us to a zone and take over a quest hub that’s just right about your level. Or close enough that they could reasonably expect you to get there anyway. Then they set up a series of challenges that are just hard enough that you can barely overcome them. Why not take your boy here to the bottom of a level 80 dungeon? Why not a sky zone that we couldn’t reach?”

I shrugged. “Maybe they didn’t have time? Or didn’t think of it? Who

knows, Erlix? They're probably planning on the fly just like we are." The reasoning sounded weak even as I said it, but I still wasn't sure what Erlix was getting at.

"Nuh-uh," he insisted. "This Vierdimin guy... I mean, I'm not part of your little guild war, or at least I haven't been until now, but he doesn't strike me as a fly-by-his-pants kinda dude, Goldie. That dark elf lady was even ranting about you dancing like a puppet. Why would she say that?"

"It's true that Vierdimin is a master planner," Topper said slowly. "It's not like him to make a move until he has every counter-move planned out. That's why little surprises, like your **Charm** skill landing on him, throw him completely off guard and make him panic. He hates surprises. In fact, our best strategy to beat him is to plan something so convoluted and unlikely that he couldn't possibly see it coming."

"Exactly! Like the pally said. That's just my point," Erlix continued. "He has all these grand plans, and then we get a series of challenges just hard enough for Goldie to solo them, with a little help from the best rogue on the server?"

"Best rogue on the server?"

Topper arched an eyebrow at me, and I shook my head. "Don't ask."

"And on top of that," Erlix said, warming up into his little rant, "It takes us to a zone where you just happen to find a class quest for the Courtesan. A quest you *never* would have stumbled onto on your own, since most players avoid the Fey Wild. Where you get cross-faction emergent quests that shouldn't be possible, and quest givers let you fudge the turn-in in ways that are frankly ridiculous—quests that give you ridiculous buffs like that **Blessing of the Fey** you have, Goldie. Yeah, I took a peak at your character sheet. Spell levels +20 is *insane*, let alone the stat buffs it gives you. You're probably also going to get a whole pile of Tier III Illusion spells for your reward from the queen, and there's plenty of high-level NPCs to bang your way up in level. It all just stinks to high hell, and it's been bothering me all day. The more lucky wins break your way, the less I think it comes down to chance."

"What are you suggesting, Erlix?" I asked quietly. "Are you saying... that Vierdimin *wants* my character to get stronger? That he's somehow guiding me into it?"

The halfling shrugged, frustration clearly evident on his face. "I guess, yeah, but the part I don't get is why. It's like a puzzle that doesn't quite come

together. And I hate that. I'm a schemer. If your opponent is throwing you easy breaks and you don't see the angle, you're the sucker. I feel like we're the suckers right now, Goldie."

The three of us lapsed into an uneasy silence as we considered the points Erlix was making. I supposed it was possible that Vierdimin had some kind of ulterior motive here, but he hadn't even *known* I'd be able to charm him until a few days prior. Could he really come up with a scheme this complicated, that quickly? It didn't seem likely, but I had to agree that this was a weird place to bring Topper. I could see he was thinking the same thing.

An angry roar broke our contemplative silence as a tiny, halfling-sized blur of black steel flew through the air and cleaved Erlix straight through his body in a single blow of a pint-sized, two-headed axe.

"Goldie..." Erlix murmured, right before the light went out of his eyes. Then he crumpled to the floor in two pieces, dropping all of his gear just like Nambla had, his naked corpse fading away as he returned to his bind point. I stared in horror at the scene, too shocked to react. Wugduz stood over his gear, breathing hard, his visor down, and he looked *royally* pissed off.

"Erlix!" I cried. A stab of anguish twisted in my gut, much more than I'd normally have for a character death. I didn't expect it to hit me so hard, but for some reason it did. Not only were we stuck in the game, but I had no idea where Erlix's bind point was. He could be anywhere, and I'd have no way to reach him until we could both find an allied faction mailbox! It felt more real that losing a comrade usually did. My face darkened. "You bastard! I'm going to kill you!"

"Yeah, you and what army?" Wugduz asked.

I felt so guilty—it was my stun that had been holding the shadowknight, but I'd completely forgotten about him, and Erlix had paid the price for my carelessness. But before I could reply, Topper stepped into Wugduz's field of vision, his snowy cloak rippling softly in the dim light of the chamber. With Wugduz having his visor down, he probably hadn't been able to see the level 75 Paladin from outside of the room. Now Topper laid a hand on my shoulder and gently moved me behind him, even as I struggled against his iron grip. I wanted to tear Wugduz's eyes out.

"Stand back, Lacey," Topper murmured. "I'd like to take care of this nuisance, if you don't mind."

I nodded my consent, only too happy to watch my guild leader cream

this cretin after I'd been unable to touch him earlier. "Make it humiliating and painful. Erlix didn't deserve that."

For a moment, Wugduz seemed like he might turn and run, but then his tanking instincts got the better of him. He hardened his stance and held his axe up menacingly, a deadly glint in his eye. A good tank never backed down from a fight, and the least you could say about Wugduz was that he was a good tank. Topper had 10 levels on him, but in Fantasy Realms Online pure levels weren't as big of an advantage as they were in other games. It gave Topper an edge on the ogre, but a fight would really come down to skill and gear, and as much as I hated to admit it, **The Secret Order** was better at raiding than our guild was due to a higher-level spread of players. Their main tank would be their best-gear player.

Topper unhooked the leather loop binding the massive, two-handed sword at his back, and as he raised the shining blade in front of him, it burst into flames. The fact that our level 75 main tank wielded a **Lv. 80 Holy Sword of Righteous Flame**, his class epic weapon, was a comforting reminder that he was also *our* best-gear character. Wugduz might have better armor, but Topper had the better weapon. I sucked in a breath, realizing that I was probably about to watch two of the best tanks on the server go mano-a-mano.

In the space of a moment, Topper moved forward, letting the game code guide him into a whirling dance of death. His flaming blade whizzed through the air so quickly that the flames left blazing trails in the air, like a steel-armored fire dancer in a swirling cloak, but despite Wugduz's temporarily small size, the little ogre matched him blow for blow. Each of them let out grunts of pain and frustration as their opponent's blows landed—getting hit was unpleasant in the game if not *actually* painful, and the blow to their pride was probably just as bad as the physical shock. Plus, Topper's sword was just downright intimidating. There was something innately terrifying about a flaming blade that made your basic instincts scream at you to move out of its way.

Both of them pulled out all stops for the battle, using all the skills and spells at their disposal in a series of actions too fast to follow for anyone but the combatants. Shadowy particles washed over both Wugduz and Topper as the shadowknight tried to find a foothold with his disease and debuff spells, as well as his nasty lifetaps, and a corresponding series of golden sparks flashed around them both as Topper cleansed and healed himself repeatedly

and tried to hit Wugduz with blinding flashes and moment to moment stuns. Both of their resists were too high, and their casting stats too low, to make much stick on the other, though, so as their mana pools waned it came down to a battle of pure physical strength, armor, and hit points.

As the two tanks struggled back and forth in a frenzied series of clashes, I watched their health drop dangerously low on both sides—I wanted to step in and help, but we’d already established there was nothing I could do to hurt Wugduz. It was infuriating to feel so weak and useless, but I’d just be in Topper’s way, so I watched from sidelines and cheered him on. Both combatants neared 20% health, and it seemed like the paladin was going to come out ahead thanks to his higher level and stronger weapon. But suddenly Wugduz grinned wickedly behind his visor slits and unleashed his final attack! With a spinning dodge that brought him around Topper’s weapon, he stepped in close and laid a black, gauntleted palm on Topper’s chestplate. A shock of dark energy flowed out of him and jolted Topper, momentarily surrounding him with an aura of disease and pain. Topper’s head snapped back and his back arched as the shadowknight’s **Harm Touch** rippled through his body, and I watched in horror as his health dropped from 20% to 3% in a single second.

“No!” I cried. “Topper!”

If Topper had been a normal paladin, he could have just shrugged it off by countering Wugduz’s **Harm Touch** with his own **Lay on Hands**... but he’d taken the tanking specialty at both of his specialization opportunities, and didn’t *have* that. I couldn’t remember what he got instead, but it sure wasn’t healing... *How could he let this happen?* I wondered.

Wugduz, still at 15% health, pressed the offensive as Topper shifted into emergency panic mode and focused exclusively on healing himself, but with his tanking-focused gear his heals could barely keep up with Wugduz’s insane shadowknight DPS. I watched in horror as Topper dropped to 2%. If he died and lost his gear, he’d be even more vulnerable to the **Secret Order**! We couldn’t afford to lose our best-gearred player right now, and I couldn’t afford to lose Topper after so much effort to rescue him. I pulled out my bow and started dropping arrow after arrow into Wugduz, hoping to distract him, but it was the same as the first time... his health pool was crazy, and I could barely put a dent in him. It wouldn’t be enough!

As Topper’s mana ran out, I tried to think of something—anything—that I could do. But it was hopeless! He changed his strategy and tried to

whittle the last remaining bit of Wugduz's health down, but I could see it wouldn't be enough. Wugduz was at 12%, and Topper was at 1% and totally out of mana. Wugduz roared in victory, preparing for a deathblow.

But then, Topper smiled. He raised his fist toward the heavens and whispered something under his breath. In the blink of an eye, a nimbus of golden light collected around his raised fist, and sprang out to cover his body in a protective bubble. It even shined out from his already fiery blade, seeming to double the size and offensive force of the shimmering tongues of flame that flickered around it.

**"Light's Stand,"** I murmured. "Topper, you bastard... I forgot you had that."

It was the ultimate Pally skill, and had a full week-long cooldown. He was completely immune to damage for 30 seconds, and received a 500% damage bonus during that time while his mana regenerated at 1000% of his resting rate. Now Wugduz looked concerned. Despite his earlier resolve, he realized he was about to lose—both his gear and his life. He turned to run, his courage finally failing him. Topper had been ready for that though. A golden **Hammer of Burden** slammed onto Wugduz from Topper's outstretched palm, slowing the shadowknight's move speed by 80%, and then Topper cast a heal over time regeneration spell on himself and laid into Wugduz *hard* with his holy sword.

I'd never seen anything so satisfying as watching that tiny little ogre bite the dust in a smoking pile of righteous burns.

Topper slung his blade back onto his back, the flames extinguished, and spit on the corpse as Wugduz faded away to his bindpoint, leaving a pile of black-plated raid gear behind him.

## Chapter 28

“There you go! That should be all of it.” I bounced a fat bag of gold on my palm as the Fey merchants carted off the last of Wugduz’s raid gear into virtual oblivion, giddy with the satisfaction that Wugduz would be completely enraged at the permanent loss of his equipment—and to a vendor of all things! Topper had followed me, deep in thought, as I’d gone down to greet the Fey royalty and collect the promised rewards for freeing their quest hub tower from the influence of **The Secret Order**. They granted me another large bag of gold, which would be useful when I’d need to buy a flying mount soon, and the queen allowed me to select two additional spells from her list to add to my book.

Normally I’d be thrilled at all my new opportunities to tailor my class, but the loss of Erlix put a little bit of a damper on my mood. For all his raunchy jokes, I missed the little guy. He’d stuck with me through a lot, and I almost felt naked without him at my side. Who was going to stab enemies to death for me if not Erlix? *He’s not really gone*, I reminded myself. *You’ll find him soon enough*.

I shook my head and tried to focus on the task at hand, looking carefully over the spell options the queen was offering me again:

**[Phantasmal Assassin]** Summon a phantasmal warrior with a physical form to serve as your servant for up to 4 hours. He can carry items, attack enemies for significant mental damage, and scout without your direct control. Players may only have one pet or servant at a time.

**[Greater Invisibility]** This spell allows the target to become completely invisible for a random period of time, and they become only partially visible when taking hostile actions.

**[Major Glamour]** This spell allows the caster to physically alter the features and body characteristics of a player or NPC, transforming them into another gender, race, or radically altering their physical features for the duration of spell, without changing their stats or size category. This provides an enormous bonus to disguise checks. Hostile targets receive a save against this spell.

**[Lasting Illusion]** Create any visual illusion over an area up to 10x10x10’ that will last for up to three weeks or until dispelled.

It seemed like **Major Glamour** and **Lasting Illusion** provided the most interesting options for me, so I chose those and filed them away to think about later. Deception might be our strongest tool we had against Vierdimin, which meant that the more we could make things seem to be other than they really were, the better our odds of actually catching and defeating him.

“Are you ready, Lacey?” Topper asked, as I wrapped up my errands. “We’ll need to move quickly if we’re going to rescue Jazzus and track down Vierdimin before it’s too late.”

I nodded. We also needed to get out of here before the king realized I had his orb. *But before that, I just have one quick thing to do...*

“Your majesty? Might I ask a small boon?”

“Of course, my dear,” the king replied. “For the champion of my people, anything.”

“Great! Please gather them all up in here. I’d like to thank them personally.”

The king walked off to gather his Fey people, and Topper raised an eyebrow at me. “Thank them personally?”

“Hey, if it offends your precious paladin sensibilities, you can leave the room and wait downstairs with my pet dragonkin. Just don’t ask where his tail has been.”

Topper gave me a funny look and I winked at him, but before he could ask any more questions the king was already filing in his with his whole court of level 50+ NPCs.

I grinned at the group. “You’re all a little small, but this can work...” I unlaced my top, yanking it apart to let my breasts spill out for probably the millionth time this week, and breathed, “**Seduce.**”

Topper turned away blushing and remained stiffly staring at the wall the whole time I had a nasty, wild orgy with the tiny people of the Fey. These guys knew how to *party*, and as the action got hotter and dirtier, I watched with satisfaction as my XP bar filled up again and again. **DING! DING! DING!** The chimes sounded again and again as I came repeatedly amid showers of sparks, and then did it again with a new set of Fey guardsmen. By the time I’d worked my way through every NPC in the quest-hub, I was level 64. Not only that, but it had taken less than half an hour, and the king had been so busy watching me get plowed from every which way that he hadn’t bothered to go upstairs and check where his orb was. I quickly cleaned

myself up, grabbed Topper by the arm, and yanked him down the steps as I tugged my clothes back into place.

“That’s certainly an erm... unorthodox way to gain levels,” Topper mumbled in a strangled voice.

I just rolled my eyes at him. “Ah, come on. Show me another legitimate way to gain six levels in 30 minutes, huh? You’re just lucky the developers left such a crazy loophole in, or we’d have no chance against Vierdimin.”

“I’m not judging, I just... ah. Hm. Not my thing.”

“Not my thing either, remember? Accidentally got stuck in the whore class? Have to rescue my friends. It’s not like I like doing this, Topper.”

He tugged at his collar and turned bright red. “It’s just... you really do seem to like doing this, Lacey. Krom. Lacey. Jesus. And before, I knew it was happening, but I didn’t ah, have to listen to it.”

Now it was my turn to blush and fall silent. *Am I enjoying this a little too much? I’ve definitely gone from being weirded out by this body to dropping my panties every chance I get...* It was a troubling line of thought, but fortunately, our arrival at the base of the tower allowed me to push it aside for the moment.

“Fiero!”

The dragonkin perked up at my voice, his tail twitching excitedly. “Mistress? Did you extract the orb?”

“Wow,” Topper murmured as Fiero drew to his full height and came towards us. “You charmed this big lug?” Despite only being a level 45 elite, he still cut an impressive figure, standing several inches above the paladin.

I retrieved the **Fabulous Orb of the Dragonkin Sorcerers** from my inventory and held it out to him with two hands. His eyes shined with excitement as his scaled fingers closed around it.

“The orb of the dragonkin sorcerers,” he murmured. “You did it! You actually did it. For so long I’ve searched... it’s just as the prophecies said. A courtesan mesmer would come and continue the legacy of our sorcerers.”

“Continue your legacy?”

Fiero nodded excitedly. “Watch.”

He closed his eyes and began to murmur under his breath, and then I was surprised to see that the orb was shrinking. Smaller and smaller it went until it was barely larger than a marble, though it still radiated a beautiful heat and light. Then Fiero made some mysterious motion with his hands, drawing in air, and I was shocked to see a golden tiara materialize. The fiery orb fit

perfectly in the middle, the crown jewel of the golden tiara. The dragonkin dropped to one knee, bowed his head, and held the delicate headpiece out to me on two flat palms.

“For you, my lady.”

**DING!** Upon completion of Fiero’s quest, the XP reward nudged me the last bit I needed to get to level 65, and I was surrounded by another shower of golden sparks that was so familiar it was almost like a tired party trick by now. Still, level 65 was a huge milestone for a character, and an opportunity to pick a second specialization. I’d look into that soon, but for the moment I was too distracted by the tiara that Fiero had offered me. I was brimming with curiosity as I picked it up, but then I saw the stats and gasped.

### **[Fabulous Tiara of the Dragonkin Sorcerers]**

Epic Quality, Item Level 75

*This rare item was once the property of the dragonkin sorcerers, but was reconstructed by the prophesied one who has both the charm and magical skill to wield it, paralleled only by the beautiful dragon sorcerers of old.*

Cha +5 / Mana +1000 / Effective Spell Skill Level +5

**Unlocks Hidden Class:** Sorceress

“What is it, Lacey?”

“It... it’s an amazing item, but Topper... I just unlocked a secret class.” It was an amazing item, possibly the best item available for my class, catapulting me to a level of spellcasting ability the server might not have ever seen before... at least when it came to illusions. But I was even more amazed that I’d somehow found a secret class unlock. That didn’t just *happen*. It was incredible.

“You *what*? You mean a secret class like the Lich was for Vierdimin?”

“Yeah, exactly like the Lich. Or, not exactly like the Lich class. It’s called a Sorceress. Vierdimin has been the only one to even ever *find* a hidden class until now.”

“Amazing. What does the class do?”

I shook my head. “You don’t get to find out unless you pick it. I read a whole article on MMOGamer.com about when Vierdimin unlocked the Lich. You just have to take it blindly as your second specialization, and trust that it’s rare enough and powerful enough that it’s worthwhile. I mean, you don’t

hide an *underpowered* class away behind an impossibly unlikely set of quests buried for a specific class/specialization combo deep in the Fey Wild...”

Topper stroked his chin thoughtfully. “You should still consider your options. Remember you’re not playing Lacey for the long haul. We want whatever will be strongest to defeat Vierdimin and get ourselves out of here. Then you can go back to being Krom once things are safe.”

“Yeah...” I replied, wondering why I suddenly had a glum feeling in the pit of my stomach. But Topper was right. I should see what other specializations were available now that I was 65. I gently rested my new tiara on my brow, equipping it in my head slot, and then I opened my specialization dialog to take a look at what was on offer for a level 65 Courtesan/Mesmer. Four tantalizing options unfolded in front of me:

### **[Illusionist]**

The Illusionist takes the Mesmer’s natural skill with illusions to a whole new level, becoming the master of misdirection and deception. Courtesans with an Illusionist specialty can create stronger and longer illusions, rivaling even the greatest wizards, and use their skills to lure unsuspecting foes into their other natural skills or away from their allies, weaving intricate webs of deception on a scale that can affect armies of enemies.

**New Skill:** *Enhance Illusion:* Enhance an illusion created by another spell or skill in up to two of the following ways: double the duration, make 50% corporeal, change the size by up to 50%, add convincing sound/taste/texture.

### **Perks:**

+25 Effective Spell Skill Level (Illusion)

\* Area-based illusions and glamours become twice as detailed and elaborate, making it even less likely that NPCs will see through them, as well as doubling the duration.

\* Single-target illusion spells can now target an additional NPC or player from a single cast.

### **[Entrancer]**

The Entrancer is a Mesmer who focuses primarily on the arts of Illusion that mesmerize, entrance, cajole, and inflame her enemies, marrying the best aspects of an Illusionist to the natural charms of a Courtesan. They’re the masters and mistresses of a persuasive word, a beguiling touch, and a

mesmerizing performance. Their silver tongues can pull the strings of emperors and move mountains.

**New Skill: *Silver Tongue*:** Speak a single sentence, and a targeted NPC will believe it as the absolute truth for a period of 24 hours.

**Perks:**

+10 Max Charm Skill

+10 Max Seduce Skill

\* The effects of any Illusion spells which alter NPC disposition or mesmerize NPCs are twice as hard to resist and twice as effective in their results.

**[Shadow Dancer]**

Shadow Dancers are Mesmers who turn their magical abilities inward to enhance their natural sense of movement, beauty, stealth, and misdirection. It's sometimes said that Shadow Dancers are so swift and graceful that when they dance, they appear to be ten dancers at once, so fast are their motions. But the real secret of the Shadow Dancers is that their arts focus on creating shadowy duplicates of themselves who can move apart from them as easily as in tandem with them.

**New Skill: *Sexy Simulacrum*:** Draw shadows together to create a shadowy duplicate of yourself which you can control with her mind and/or give orders to in your absence. The illusion is partially corporeal, can carry objects, harm enemies, and use the Shadow Dancer's spells, and lasts until destroyed or dismissed.

**Perks:**

+40 Max Hide Skill

\* Reduced threat and increased AC from a shimmering cloak of shadows that always partially hides the true Shadow Dancer.

\* Whenever a skill or spell creates a duplicate of the Shadow Dancer, whether illusionary or corporeal, a second one can be created with the same capabilities as the first.

**[Sorceress] HIDDEN CLASS**

The dragonkin sorcerers of old were master magicians, casting spells through the raw magical essence of their otherworldly charisma. Choosing to become a Sorceress elevates a player beyond anything a mere Courtesan could dream of doing. *(If you do not select this class now, it will be*

*unavailable for re-specialization later, and you will not get credit for the server-wide first class unlock.)*

**New Skill:** ???

**Perks:**

???

It was tough to give up all of those other perks, but come on. No matter how useful any of them might be against Vierdimin individually, how could any gamer *not* pick **Sorceress**? A hidden class with who knew what powers? And that teaser text at the end just cinched it. I was a great player, but I'd never had the chance to have a server first achievement before. No one had ever played a Courtesan this high, just like no one had ever picked Mesmer before, and no one had ever found the class quest for Mesmers either. It was the chance of a lifetime.

But I wasn't going to make the same mistake twice. Last time I'd chosen without getting a second opinion, so now I discussed it at length with Topper, weighing the pros and cons of the **Illusionist**, **Entrancer**, and **Shadow Dancer**, each of which had interesting merits that could aid us in the fight against Vierdimin. In the end, though, we agreed that the **Sorceress** class had too much potential to pass up, if only because no one else had ever seen one or knew what they were capable of. The tantalizing line about "elevating a players beyond a mere Courtesan" implied some majorly cool perks.

"It's a roll of the dice," Topper admitted. "But that might be just what we need."

I nodded resolutely and made my selection, touching **Sorceress** and agreeing to the confirmation window that popped up. As it faded away, I was surrounded by a *huge* golden shower of sparks and trumpet fanfare. "Congratulations, Sorceress!" sped across my screen, and a new dialog popped up showing the full class description. My pulse quickened and my jaw dropped open as I read.

"What is it?" Topper demanded.

"It... it's freaking incredible."

### **[Sorceress]**

The dragonkin sorcerers of old were master magicians, casting spells through the raw magical essence of their otherworldly charisma. Courtesan

Mesmers who follow in the footsteps of the ancient dragonkin take on many aspects of the dragons, as well as developing an affinity for their spells, allowing the use of alteration and evocation magic.

**New Skill:** *Dragon Rage*: Fills the sorceress with the ancient power of the dragonkin sorcerers, transforming her into a physically intimidating dragonkin and dramatically increasing the power of her spells for up to 2 minutes.

**Perks:**

- \* Allows memorization and use of the Evocation and Alteration categories of Wizard spells.

- \* Innate resistance to dragon-aspect elemental damage. +50  
Fire/Cold/Acid/Frost/Lightning Resistance

- \* Magical wings which allow for dragon-flight at level 65.

I read the description and re-read it again, blinking in disbelief. **Dragon Rage** sounded insanely good, albeit probably with a long cooldown, and resistance to the most common damage elements was pretty handy... but the real, jaw-droppingly insane class perk was access to the Evocation and Alteration schools of magic. That was half the schools that wizards had access to! All I was missing were Conjunction, Divination, and Necromancy. Evocation was basically every flavor of destructive, damaging spell you could think of, and Alteration had all sorts of benefits... water breathing, transmutation, healing, flight.

*Flight.* My eyes widened. *And wings! I have wings now?*

As soon as I imagined wings on myself, a sharp pain at both shoulder blades caused me to cry out and double forward. Gasping, I unlaced my shirt and let my top drop away, but this time there was nothing sexual about it. A pair of giant, scaled wings grew from my back and unfolded behind me, fluttering and twitching in the open air. They were reddish gold, scaled and shimmery like a dragon. *I... I can feel them. It's so weird.*

I took a few experimental flaps and cried out as I lifted off the ground, but I was so surprised that I quickly crashed back down to earth. But then I started laughing. I couldn't wait to take these for a real spin.

"Magnificent," Fiero murmured, still on his knees in rapt attendance of me.

"Holy shit," Topper said. The profanity was uncharacteristic for him, but he was as shocked as I was.

He didn't get any less surprised as I described the rest of the class perks to him, keeping my breasts covered with my hands while I talked.

"So **Sorceress** was obviously the right class decision," he said as I finished.

"Yeah. No kidding. The only thing that sucks is that I'm going to need to find a new shirt that lets me use these wings whenever I want."

"I have an idea." He dug around in his inventory for a moment, and came up with a roll of bandages. "I haven't used these since I got my first healing spell. You can drape them around yourself."

I thanked him for the suggestion and quickly looped them around my waist and chest in a drapery X-pattern, like a loose toga made of bandage material. It was perfect. When I cinched the loops off, they were tight enough for support, but I could still release my breasts quickly for a **Seduction** when needed, and my beautiful new wings could easily unfold from my back whenever I liked.

I stared at my hands in wonder, still reeling... if I could cast Illusion, Evocation, and Alteration spells, I was going to be unbelievably powerful. My Fey Blessing and Fiero's crown together gave me an insanely huge 32 Charisma score *and* let me use it as a casting stat—which was like, demi-god level amazing—not to mention that I had a whopping 25-point bonus to all my spell skills...

"Do you realize that at level 80, I'm probably going to be the most powerful caster on the server?"

Topper regarded me with a strange expression, nodding slowly. "It occurred to me too. It's amazing. You're basically exactly the super-weapon we need to fight Vierdimin. And he can't even touch you."

"So what's wrong, then?"

"I was just..."

"Thinking about what Erlix said right before Wugduz took him out?" I sighed, grimacing. It had been nagging me in the back of my head, too. It was the one fly in this otherwise amazingly delicious punch. Unlocking the sorceress class was the cherry on top of all the weirdness that Erlix had pointed out, and it was awfully convenient that I would just stumble my way inadvertently into so much power. "But why would Vierdimin want to pump my power? He can't even hurt me."

"Maybe he thinks he can turn you," Topper said quietly. The words hung in the air between us like an accusation.

“No. Never. I wouldn’t join them in a million years,” I finally said.

“Really?”

“Of course not, Topper.”

“He turned Haxor.”

I hesitated under the weight of Topper’s searching gaze, but then I shook myself out of it. “I’m not Haxor.”

“No, you’re not. You’re Kromgorn, but right now you’re stuck in the body of a sexy little Courtesan named Lacey. What if Vierdimin offered you a way out of this nightmare?”

I frowned and stuck my chin out. “Even then. You and Jazzus and the rest of the **Shining Army**... You’re my friends, and you need me. That’s never changed. I wouldn’t turn on you for anything in the world. We’re going to rescue Jazzus, find Erlix, gather the rest of the guild, and hunt down Vierdimin together. And that’s final.” I wasn’t going to abandon my friends when they needed me most for any price. Especially not now that I was about to become our heaviest hitter in the guild—as soon as I got my magic skills up and got my hands on some Tier V spells, that was.

Topper gazed at me a moment longer, and I felt like every inch of me was being stretched out and examined. Finally, he nodded, apparently satisfied with what he saw. “Good. Because we still have a long road ahead of us. You might be the strongest mage on the server soon, but we still need Jazzus for her Divination skills if we’re going to find Vierdimin, and Lefay is still lurking out there somewhere, along with whatever other **Secret Order** guildies have been able to level up while we’re busy.” Then he shook his head in disbelief. “Jeezus. Lacey the Courtesan. Who would have thought?”

“I know, right?”

“Truly, you bring honor to the sorcerers of old,” Fiero said. He held his tail between his hands like a nervous teenager, still entranced by the beauty of my transformation.

I stretched my wings out wide, giving them another few flaps, and laughed at the gorgeous way they shimmered in the Fey Wild sunlight. But then I remembered our timeline, and grim determination stole over my face, replacing my mirth. These wings, these spells—they were tools, just like my sexual skills, and they were going to help me save my friends from what might be a fate worse than death. Jazzus was still captured, Erlix was missing, and Haxor was a traitor. There were so many scores to settle. And whatever game Vierdimin was playing, I was going to stop him before any

more harm befell the people I cared about most. He could take Krom away from me, but I wasn't going to let a little thing like being a girl get in my way.

A cool wind blew through the multi-colored leaves of the forest around us, teasing my hair and chilling my skin. There was a newfound sense of confidence and power that radiated from my feminine form, and for the first time since I'd gotten stuck in the body of this silly, hyper-sexual courtesan, I felt both utterly gorgeous *and* incredibly powerful, and not the least bit ashamed about either. I turned and gazed toward the horizon, letting the breeze whip my make-shift shirt around me, and spoke under my breath. "If you are behind all this, Vierdimin... well, you don't know the monster you just unleashed..."

I raised a fist, feeling the tingle of raw magical power course through my newly energized veins.

"...and I'm coming for you."

## **Lacey the Courtesan's Character Sheet**

**Lacey (PC)**

**Sorceress (Courtesan) - Lv. 65**

**Specialization(s):** Mesmer/Sorceress

**Health:** 2,925

**Mana:** 4,225 (5,225)

### **Specialization (Lv 30): [Mesmer]**

The Mesmer builds on the Courtesan's inherent abilities to tease and misdirect her foes, injecting a dose of the arcane arts into the class. By focusing her raw charisma, she is capable of using illusion magic from the available Wizard Spell list to misdirect her foes, further enhancing her distraction capabilities, and can buff herself and her allies with alluring charisma-improvement spells. Mesmers have small talents in the use of arcane devices, as they've studied magic at a rudimentary level.

**New Skill: *Sexy Shadow*:** The Mesmer creates an illusionary duplicate of herself which she can control with her mind and/or give orders to in her absence. The illusion has no corporeal form, but can use many of the Mesmer's skills and last for several minutes (or until revealed as an illusion by an attempted touch).

#### **Perks:**

+10 Max Magical Devices Skill

\* Allows memorization and use of the Illusion category of Wizard spells.

\* Allows Charisma-based casting of all spells (for spells which would normally use Intelligence).

### **Specialization (Lv 65): [Sorceress]**

The dragonkin sorcerers of old were master magicians, casting spells through the raw magical essence of their otherworldly charisma. Courtesan Mesmers who follow in the footsteps of the ancient dragonkin take on many aspects of the dragons, as well as developing an affinity for their spells, allowing the use of alteration and evocation magic.

**New Skill: *Dragon Rage*:** Fills the sorceress with the ancient power of the dragonkin sorcerers, transforming her into a physically intimidating dragonkin and dramatically increasing the power of her spells for up to 2

minutes.

**Perks:**

\* Allows memorization and use of the Evocation and Alteration categories of Wizard spells.

\* Innate resistance to dragon-aspect elemental damage. +50  
Fire/Cold/Acid/Frost/Lightning Resistance

\* Magical wings which allow for dragon-flight at level 65.

**Primary Statistics**

**Str:** 3

**Dex:** 9

**Agi:** 9

**Sta:** 3

**Int:** 3 (6)

**Wis:** 3 (6)

**Cha:** 24 (32)

**Active Skill List**

**Hide** - Lv 4

**Charm** - Lv 62 - Permanent charm, works on one PC and one NPC.

**Seduce** - Lv 63 - Distracts 1-N NPCs by using sexuality.

**Kama Sutra (based on Seduce Skill)** - Physically ties up an enemy.

**Motorboat (based on Seduce Skill)** - Leaves an enemy disoriented for a while (~5 mins).

**Vejazzle (based on Charm Skill)** - Dazzles and stuns enemies who see it.

**(Mesmer) Sexy Shadow (based on Illusion Magic Skill)** - The Mesmer creates an illusionary duplicate of herself which she can control with her mind and/or give orders to in her absence. The illusion has no corporeal form, but can use many of the Mesmer's skills and last for several minutes (or until revealed as an illusion by an attempted touch).

**(Sorceress) Dragon Rage:** Fills the sorceress with the ancient power of the dragonkin sorcerers, transforming her into a physically intimidating dragonkin and dramatically increasing the power of her spells for up to 2 minutes.

### **Passive Skill List**

**Magical Devices** - Lv 10

**(Mesmer) Illusion Magic** - Lv 36 (Lv 61)

**(Sorceress) Evocation Magic** - Lv 1 (Lv 26)

**(Sorceress) Alteration Magic** - Lv 1 (Lv 26)

### **Trait List**

**Unintimidating** - NPCs are less likely to attack the character.

**Sex Appeal** - NPCs are more likely to be attracted to the character.

**Blessing of the Fey** - Int/Wis/Cha are raised by 3 each and all magic skills receive a 20 point bonus.

**(Mesmer) Charisma Caster** - Can use Charisma as the base stat for spellcasting instead of intelligence.

**(Mesmer) Illusionist** - Can cast Wizard spells from the Illusionist school.

**(Sorceress) Dragon Mage** - Can cast Wizard spells from the Evocation and Alteration schools.

**(Sorceress) Dragon-Blessed** - Benefits from dragon-category elemental resistances and flight-enabling wings that manifest at will. Can also use racial ability **Dragon Rage**.

### **Stat-Influencing Gear**

**[Fabulous Tiara of the Dragonkin Sorcerers]**

Epic Quality, Item Level 75

*This rare item was once the property of the dragonkin sorcerers, but was reconstructed by the prophesied one who has both the charm and magical skill to wield it, paralleled only by the beautiful dragon sorcerers of old.*

Cha +5 / Mana +1000 / Effective Spell Skill Level +5

**Unlocks Hidden Class:** Sorceress

### **Spells**

*Tier I*

**[Light]** This spell generates a bright, floating light slightly brighter than a standard torch for a period of up to 2 minutes. It will follow the caster and

move according to their mental commands to a distance of 15 feet.

**[Minor Glamour]** This spell allows the caster to slightly alter minor features of their appearance, such as skin color, hair color, and facial features.

**[Dazzle]** This spell creates a shower of multicolored sparks like a miniature fireworks display. It will not do harm, but has a small chance to confuse or blind an opponent.

## *Tier II*

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## *Tier III*

**[Size Manipulation]** This spell allows the caster to disperse or condense the very matter making up a player or NPC, causing them to become 1-2 sizes larger or smaller than they currently are. Their total mass remains the same, so their stats are unaffected. Hostile targets receive a save against this spell.

**[Major Glamour]** This spell allows the caster to physically alter the features and body characteristics of a player or NPC, transforming them into another gender, race, or radically altering their physical features for the duration of spell, without changing their stats or size category. This provides an enormous bonus to disguise checks. Hostile targets receive a save against this spell.

**[Lasting Illusion]** Create any visual illusion over an area up to 10x10x10' that will last for up to three weeks or until dispelled.

# Dragon Lady

## Chapter 29

Flying was incredible. I'd never experienced such a rush of power or freedom as I did while bursting through a bank of clouds or folding up my powerful wings and diving toward the thick, multi-hued canopy of the **Fey Wild** forest, only to snap them back out, catch an updraft, and zoom back up into the clear, blue sky at the last possible minute. As I soared through the air, my leathery dragon wings beating on either side of me and keeping me aloft, I could *feel* the cool wind buffeting against the scaly skin that now sprouted from my soft, maidenly shoulders. I marveled again at the engineering that must have gone into creating these sensations for Fantasy Realms Online: not only could my VR jack interface with my male brain to simulate all of the lifelike sensations of this female Courtesan avatar, Lacey, that I was temporarily trapped in, but it also convinced my brain to experience the feeling of limbs no human actually had, down to whether my wings were cold or dry or injured. The one departure from reality was that a wingspan this small should never have been able to keep my bodyweight aloft, but small concessions were necessary in a game where humans could conjure fireballs with a thought and cast enchantments on NPCs to force their obedience.

I had finally hit level 65 and earned my wings—literally, thanks to the custom **Sorceress** class I had unlocked in my quest to free Topper from Vierdimin's lieutenants. That had been quite the marvel too, as I was only the second player on the server to unlock a secret class, and all of the insane powers that came with it. Between my outlandish charisma stat, the impressive gear and perks I'd earned, and my use of three different spell schools, I was well on my way to being the most powerful character on the server... maybe even more powerful than Vierdimin himself by the time I got to level 80. And that wasn't even considering the fact that I still had my whole list of **Courtesan** skills in my arsenal, from **Charm** to **Vejazzle**. Who would have guessed that a stupid class like the Courtesan, a class considered a joke by most serious players, a class that could actually level up exclusively by fucking NPCs, had the potential to be one of the strongest characters in the game?

There was a kind of poetic justice to it, and it reminded me of other games I'd played in my childhood where the apparently weakest, most

useless characters had secret strengths and abilities. I still remembered how exciting it was when I'd upgrade my Magikarp to a Gyarados in Pokemon, or my Goof-Off to a Sage in Dragon Warrior III. I couldn't believe that no one had thought to check if Courtesans might be something similar, although given the reputation they had on our server and how many NPCs I'd had to let do me to get this high in level, I could see why most players wouldn't want to volunteer to do the research.

But now, as a Sorceress, I had so much power! I couldn't wait to try my new **Evocation** or **Alteration** spell trees, and the wings from my new dragon-based form would allow me to save the gold I would have normally had to spend on a mount at level 65. That was really handy since my ultra-fast leveling meant I would have had to dip into our guild bank to grab the necessary funds, which would have annoyed Topper to no end. The guy could have been an accountant in real life with how closely he watched withdrawals and deposits. There was a reason only he and three officers had full access to it: Kromgorn, my old barbarian avatar, Jazzus, who was currently captured by our enemies, and Haxor... our former friend turned traitor.

Thinking about Haxor darkened my mood and brought me back to the reality of our situation. Flying was exciting, but no amount of bursting through clouds would change the grim realities that faced us: trapped in the game by Vierdimin for uncertain reasons, possibly being pushed around like pawns on a chessboard by his schemes, with one guild officer captured and one defector to our enemies. This had been a fun test of my new abilities, but it was time to get back to work. Especially if Vierdimin was planning what Topper thought he might be.

I spotted my friends through a break in the trees, in a glade far below, and I felt a twinge of sadness when I looked for Erlix and he wasn't there. It was just Fiero and Topper waiting for me. I reminded myself that Erlix wasn't really gone—he'd just been sent back to his bind point, wherever that was, and we didn't have time to go find him now. Besides that, he was too low level to join us on a trip into the skies, and Topper seemed pretty confident that's where our enemies in The Secret Order were holding Jazzus. But it didn't change the fact that I had a soft spot for the dirty little halfling who'd accompanied me on my adventures as Lacey so far. Despite his low level, he'd been invaluable, and things wouldn't be the same without him.

I folded my wings and dove toward the glade, snapping them wide to

slow my descent just above the trees, and landed lightly on my feet beside Fiero, who began to applaud.

“Most excellent, my princess,” Fiero cried, rushing to hug me in his big, scaly grasp as my wings shrunk and melted back into the unmarred flesh at my shoulder blades. The dragonkin had decided that since I now wore the **Lv. 75 Fabulous Tiara of the Dragonkin Sorcerers**, I deserved an honorary rank of “princess” among his people. I blushed. It was silly that anything would still embarrass me after some of the stunts I’d pulled to get to level 65, but someone referring to me as “princess” was still pretty weird. Also, now that I was back with Topper, I felt weirder than ever about playing the game in a girl’s body. Hanging out with that pervy halfling Erlix was one thing—he’d only ever really known me as Lacey. But I’d gone on hundreds of adventures with Topper as Kromgorn the Barbarian, and I could tell he was uncomfortable that I was a woman now, although he did his best to hide it. That made me feel a little awkward around him. It also might have been my imagination, but I could swear he smirked every time Fiero called me “princess.”

“I asked you to stop calling me that, Fiero,” I said. “Don’t make me take this tiara off.”

“But you *are* a princess, milady!” Fiero protested. “You’re the sorceress that was prophesied. The first of a new order!”

I rolled my eyes at the NPC’s programmed responses and sighed. Technically he was right. As the first person to unlock the Sorceress class, I had paved the way for others to unlock the power of this unique class. And removing the tiara was a bluff anyway. I might feel silly wearing the thin, girly metal, but I was a girl right now, and the stats on the crown were amazing. There was no way I’d be replacing it any time soon, if ever, and there was also no point in arguing with NPCs. Instead I addressed Topper, whose attention was focused on a portable mailbox he’d magicked up from inside his pack. It was a one-time use tinkering item that he was running low on, but it was the only way we could get messages out here in the **Fey Wild**, and also the only way we could communicate with our contacts in the outside world.

“Any word from Erlix?” I asked him, picking at the bandages wrapped around my torso. They were even more revealing than my ranger leathers had been, but I needed the room for unveiling my new wings. I could find some real armor later and get it tailored with wing holes.

Topper shook his head. “No word from the halfling. Just some concerning messages from Iciez. She won’t even log into the game anymore because she’s afraid of getting stuck and having the servers shut down. Can’t blame her. Fortunately, she can still use the webchat app to send in-game mail and give me updates. I just wish the updates were cheerier.”

“Things are that bad?” I frowned. Iciez was a mage from our guild that had gotten out before Vierdimin locked us in, and she’d been able to feed us some info from the outside world, none of it good. Last we’d heard there had been a strong push from concerned parents to get the game servers shut down because of what had happened, and tons of stuck players were in comas in the real world, whether they unplugged or not.

“Pretty bad.” Topper shook his head, looking grim. “It sounds like it’s utter chaos out there. Iciez says politicians are coming down hard on the Fantasy Realms devs for allowing this to happen and demanding they shut the servers down immediately until they figure out what’s going on.”

“But that’s crazy! We’re still in here. They already tried disconnecting players, and they didn’t magically wake up. It doesn’t make any sense that killing the servers would fix the problem.”

“Yeah, well. Have you ever tried explaining something that technical to a nontechnical person? The families of the people caught up in this don’t care about the details. They’re mad, they don’t understand what happened, and they want the devs to pay.”

I wanted to hit something. It was politics as usual out there—something went wrong, and people just blamed it on whatever was convenient without trying to understand. If their social pressure took the servers down, I had no idea what would happen. We might die. We might end up in a much worse situation if Topper’s fears were right and Vierdimin had a plan to carry us to a private server, where he could do whatever he wanted with us. There’d be no way to know for sure unless we could capture him and make him talk.

“Okay. Fine,” I said. “That doesn’t change anything about our plan. You said you know how we can find Vierdimin, right? Spill the details, Topper. I need to know in case something happens to you again—there may not be time for a second rescue.”

He hesitated, but finally nodded. Topper liked to keep his plans close to the vest, but he could see the logic in what I was saying. I was the only player immune to Vierdimin and his guild’s attacks, thanks to the **Charm** spell I still had locked on Vierdimin.

“Right. It’s really simple. I’m disappointed that I didn’t think of it sooner, but I’m not a mage, and Divination is the least used spell category.”

I grinned. “Almost as useless as Illusion magic, right?”

He snorted. “We’re learning all kinds of things about the game mechanics lately. Anyway, there’s a divination spell that lets you locate an item. It just points you to the nearest one. Normally, it’s a pretty useless spell unless you’re checking if a mob is carrying a specific drop you want, but you can use it on any item that’s been spawned in the game.”

“How does that help us find Vierdimin, though? We can’t specify that we want an item carried by a particular player, can we?”

“Nope. But think for a second... what does Vierdimin have that no one else in the game would?”

I gasped and smacked myself in the forehead. “Oh my god! Duh. His **Lv. 80 Staff of Matter Manipulation!**”

Topper nodded. “Bingo.”

It was one of the rarest drops in the game, an incredibly powerful artifact, and Vierdimin was the only player to have successfully obtained one. No one else even knew *how* to get it yet—I’d only seen pictures of it on data mining websites. Somehow he’d figured it out, probably by the same means he’d figured out how to hack the game, and it was a huge advantage for him. Because he’d had it when he cast the original spell, I had a sneaking suspicion that it was the key to everything he’d been able to do.

But since it was so rare, that meant that at most there would be two in-game right now. One on whatever raid boss had dropped it, assuming it had respawned with the loot again, and the other with Vierdimin. Because it was such a rare drop, we’d almost certainly be able to follow the path to find him immediately.

“That’s brilliant, Topper,” I breathed. “Great idea!”

“Not brilliant. Just one of those out of sight, out of mind things. We’re lucky Vierdimin hasn’t thought of it yet, or he’d probably bank the staff no matter how powerful it makes him. And besides that, we still need a high-level PC wizard to cast it. It’s a shame that you didn’t get access to all the spell schools when you upgraded to **Sorceress**.”

I shrugged. “This class is OP as fuck already. Besides, I’m not leaving Jazzus to rot in the clutches of that traitor Haxor. We need to rescue her anyway.”

At the mention of Haxor’s name, Topper’s mailed fist tightened and his

eye crinkled slightly. He wasn't one for big shows of emotion, but Haxor's betrayal had hit him hard. Our players were online so much that we were like a family—helping my friends was the whole reason I was stuck in Lacey's body, after all—and Topper and Haxor had spent more time leveling together than any of us, as the two highest players in our guild. This might literally be a life and death situation, and instead of fighting at our side, he'd defected as soon as Vierdimin offered him a way out of the game.

I couldn't believe Haxor trusted Vierdimin to keep his word—what an idiot. Couldn't he see that Vierdimin lied as easily as breathing? Why would he have any motivation to release Haxor once he had complete control of the game? I was mad at Haxor for being stupid enough to let himself be manipulated, but for Topper, it went deeper than that. Loyalty was a big deal for him. This was like being betrayed by his best friend. I felt bad for him.

“So how do we find Jazzus?” I asked. “Erlix tracked you down with his skills, but Haxor covered his tracks well. We couldn't figure out how to follow him. He could be anywhere by now.”

“Oh, I know right where that bastard is,” Topper growled. “And he probably doesn't even realize it.”

“How's that?” I didn't think Paladins got divination skills, and if Haxor was in anonymous mode, he wouldn't show up on gamewide search requests. Haxor was a lot of things, but sloppy wasn't one of them. Since he wasn't in our guild anymore, we couldn't look him up there either.

“You remember **Fellowships**?”

The name sounded familiar, but I didn't know what he was talking about. I made a face. “I feel like I *should* remember them, but it's not coming to me.”

Topper smiled. “Yeah, that's why I think Haxor won't remember either. When the game's second expansion came out, it was a new feature they pushed for a little while that let you make a leveling group with your friends so you could find each other and communicate easily. It worked across guilds and factions, even. But that expansion also introduced guild wars, and everyone stuck to their guilds and factions to win bonus loot, so no one used fellowships after that. Then they hid the UI element in a submenu because usage was so low. Haxor probably doesn't even know he's still in the fellowship we made way back when.”

“So it lets you find him anywhere? Awesome! Where is he?”

“The bastard is hiding out in the **Singing Gardens** of the **Sky Islands**.”

The paladin looked up, toward the cloudy blue expanse where I'd been circling just moments before. "Good thing you got some flying practice in, Princess. We're headed into the wild blue yonder."

## Chapter 30

The **Sky Islands**. It hardly seemed real. I'd been dying to explore the high-level zones that other players raved about for as long as I could remember. The best ones all required a flying mount to get to: the **Sky Islands**, the **Eternal Deep**, and the **Lost Continent** were the three that had most intrigued me when I'd heard high level players discussing their favorite adventures. All those long hours leveling my barbarian Kromgorn, digging through Gurloc muck and scraping together money for new equipment, grinding gnolls in **The Hinterlands**—all of it had been with an excited eye toward the day where I could mount my very own wyvern and take to the skies of Lorengarde to explore the furthest-flung and most mysterious lands in the game.

Somehow I'd never imagined that the character I'd first get to do it with would be a slutty, dragon-winged nympho that I'd used a cheap trick to power-level. It made all those hours leveling my barbarian feel hollow and stupid, like all my hard work had been invalidated, and I was annoyed all over again at Vierdimin for forcing this situation on me. I ran my hands down my body, feeling my soft breasts, silky smooth skin, and curving ass. I was powerful as Lacey, sure, but I missed being in the avatar of my sword swinging Barbarian.

*But do you really? A little voice in the back of my head nagged at me. Then I blinked. What a dumb thing to think. Of course I do. Just because I forget about my situation sometimes and get into the role I'm stuck with doesn't mean I want to be in the body of this chick forever.*

This was a silly line of thought. It didn't really matter how I felt about it. It was going to be my reality until further notice, and all I could do was try to make the best of it. I couldn't let myself sink into ruminations on the weirdness of my predicament again. We had far more important things to do.

"The Sky Islands," I repeated to Topper. "Great. So we're headed for a level 70 zone. I'm excited! This might actually be a real challenge." I was eager to try out my new skills, and this would be the perfect place to do it. Evocation and Alteration were arguably the two most useful schools of magic, since both affected the world around us (either destroying it or changing it), and I was confident I'd have my spell skills up to speed in no time flat.

“Yep,” Topper replied. “But hopefully not too much of a challenge. With my tanking skills and your firepower, we should be able to clear the way to Haxor pretty easily. I’m five levels higher than the zone, so between that and my tanking specialization I should be okay keeping myself healed during combat if you can keep the DPS up. But we’re going to need to get you some Evocation spells. We have a whole line of raid-dropped level 65+ Evocation and Alteration spells in the guild bank, so we’ll just stop there on the way and get you kitted out.”

This was a great plan. I don’t know why it didn’t occur to me earlier, but we had *tons* of stashed spells and gear left over from our earlier adventures in the guild bank. Since most of our members already had the spells they needed—or they weren’t high enough to use them yet—we kept extras squirreled away for a rainy day. I got excited when I started going through a mental inventory of everything that might be useful there.

“Say, don’t we also have a bunch of high-level Charisma gear there too?”

Topper’s eyes widened. “Hot damn, Lacey! You’re right. I knew there would be a reason to hang onto that junk eventually.”

It was an in-guild joke whenever a piece of raid gear dropped with high Charisma that we’d save it for when a Courtesan got high enough to use it. It was funny because we’d always thought Courtesans were useless and never actually expected to have a high level Courtesan in the guild, let alone one that could channel awesome magic through her Charisma stat. But here we were! And I was damn lucky that we’d kept it all instead of selling it to vendors or sharding it for tradeskill materials.

“We also have all kinds of useful consumables... potions, buffs, one-shot summoned pets,” My voice grew more and more excited as I ticked the items off on my fingers. “We can spare the time to drop in, right? We should go now. If there was ever a time to blow our cache of rare gear, it’s now.”

I could see how much it pained Topper to have to agree to pull our best stuff out of the guild bank, but he knew I was right. This wasn’t some random raid we were gearing up for. It was our lives on the line. He and the other high-level guildies had spent *forever* collecting those items for someday when we’d need them—and today was that day.

“Princess?” Fiero asked. “You’re taking to the skies, then?”

I blinked, remembering my charmed pet for the first time since Topper and I had started discussing Haxor. Fiero had watched us patiently, standing

at attention and gazing at me adoringly while we'd discussed our plans. He'd been such a useful companion, even if it was only because I'd successfully charmed him, and I blushed when I remembered how sexy it had been to be penetrated by his tail while he fucked me. I wished there was a good way to level NPCs up. I'd wanted to keep him longer and maybe get some of that sweet tail action again, but I realized he wouldn't be able to join us unless I wanted to carry him through the air.

I sighed and nodded. "Yes, Fiero. We need to go there to rescue our friend Jazzus. I wish you could come with us. Are you going to remain in this zone? I may want to find you again."

Even though he was just an NPC, it still hurt a little (and pulled a small twinge of guilt from me) when the dragonkin's face fell. **Charm** really was a hell of a drug.

"I will miss you sorely, my princess. But yes. If you must take your leave, I shall return to my home and spread the news of your wondrous achievement."

I nodded and bid him farewell, suppressing my pang of loss at his departure. It wasn't every day you charmed an ultra-rare 3-star mob, but even with his advanced stats he wouldn't be able to cut it in a zone twenty levels higher than he was. He cast a longing look back at me as he wandered into the woods, like a lost puppy I'd commanded to return to his home, and as he passed out of my range of vision, I released my **Charm** on him with a silent command. I noted that the maintained buff dropped off my HUD, freeing me to charm a new NPC, but was relieved to see that my active PC **Charm** on Vierdimin was still squarely in place.

I'd have to come back and look for Fiero again when this was all over. He'd been by *far* the best sex I'd had on the server so far, and while it's not like I was planning to stop experimenting any time soon, it was important to keep track of things you liked so you could enjoy them again later.

*Except there won't be any point, because when this is all over you'll be playing as Kromgorn again, I reminded myself. And that's that.*

I pushed all thoughts of Fiero out of my head and turned to Topper, who had summoned his flaming pegasus, the Paladin class flying mount. I couldn't believe he had the guff to make jokes and call me "princess" when he rode around on a goddamn flying horse that would be right at home in the middle of a Lisa Frank painting, but he actually looked really impressive as he sat atop the powerful, winged beast with the reins in one hand and his

snow-white cloak fanning out behind him.

Now it was my turn. I concentrated for a moment on taking flight form. As soon as I did, my wings erupted out of my back, unfolding in all their golden-scaled glory through the ragged holes left by my shirt made from Topper's bandages. I stretched them out to their full wingspan and gave them a quick few flaps, making sure I still had full control of their movement and enjoying the novel feeling of having an extra two limbs connected to my body. Each wing was roughly five feet long when fully extended, and Topper's pegasus whinnied nervously at the sight of the unnatural, scaled appendages.

Topper and I must have cut a pretty cool scene together, not that anyone was around to see it at the moment, but even so I felt a surge of pride well up in me. Even if my leveling was due to a cheap trick, I thought I was handling things pretty damn well for a dude trapped in a woman's body.

"Ready?" Topper asked, tugging on his gossamer reins until his steed was angled back toward Lorengarde. He tensed his muscles, leaning back low in the saddle, and waited for my nod.

"Let's go."

We both launched into the air, gaining altitude quickly, and shot out of the **Fey Wild** at a remarkable travel speed I could hardly have imagined before I unlocked in-game flight. We made straight for our guildhouse in the **Golden Plains of Lorengarde**. The landscape rolled along below us as we covered the same stretch of land that Erlix and I had taken hours to walk through in mere minutes. I was amazed how far I could see—draw distance was no limitation.

Flying opened the game up in ways that I'd hardly imagined as a poor, landbound sod, and despite how dire our circumstances were, it was hard not to grin like a little kid as the wind whipped through my golden curls and my long hair streamed out behind me.

Topper's flight on his pegasus was perfunctory and precise. He flew straight and level toward his target, like an arrow loosed from a bow, his face a mask of grim determination. I was surprised to discover that the wings granted by my Sorceress specialization were actually slightly faster than his class mount, and so while he streaked, I bobbed and weaved and soared and fell. I knew that our situation was serious enough that I shouldn't be playing among the clouds, but how could I resist? Flying, especially flying when propelled by your own body, was simply incredible. I couldn't wipe my grin

off my face, and I was surprised Topper could be so stoic about it. Maybe the thrill wore off when you'd been doing it for a while.

In a shockingly short amount of time we touched down in the plains before the imposing facade of our guild fortress, and Topper dismissed his mount as my wings melted away, folding back into my delicate shoulderblades. I was starting to get used to the shock of the wings coming and going, which was nice since the sensation had been so weird the first time that I'd thought it was pain!

That reaction had been silly. Everyone knew you couldn't *really* get hurt in the game. Or at least that's what I'd always thought... But then a chill ran through me. I'd also thought it was impossible to get stuck in the game, so I had no desire to find out what other nasty tricks Vierdimin might be capable of pulling—it was extremely uncomfortable to imagine that he might be capable of inflicting real pain on us here, because I had no doubt he'd use that power if he had the chance.

“Let's hurry.” I urged Topper forward toward our gates. “The sooner we can get some nice, high-level raid gear on me and flesh my spellbook out with some devastating spells, the better.”

Topper gave a tight nod and led us into the compound. The guild house was dark and silent. Our footsteps echoed in the stone hallways, and I found myself jumping at shadows. I instinctively drew closer to Topper, even though I felt stupid for being nervous, but I noticed that even he seemed a little tense. Usually our guild hall was buzzing with players going back and forth from their adventures, but with most of our guild either offline or out leveling for a final confrontation with Vierdimin, it was uncomfortably eerie.

“Should we put the word out and round up more of the guild?” I asked Topper. “Seems like a healer might be useful in the **Sky Islands**. Sensei and Tigraine should still be stuck online just like we are, and—”

“No.” Topper cut me off with an angry gesture. “We don't have time to waste tracking them down right now, and we won't need them to take out Haxor. I won't be letting him catch me off guard again, and you're immune to his attacks anyway. I want our guildmates to be as high level as possible so that when the guild goes after Vierdimin again, we do better than we did last time. Besides...”

He shook his head, curled his hand into a fist, and quickened his pace, swallowing his half-spoken thought.

I could guess what it had been, though: *Besides... Haxor's betrayal is*

*personal, and I'm dealing with it myself.*

We arrived at the guild bank master vault within moments. A comically large steel vault door built into a wall secured our possessions inside a huge, fortified room, where Topper and others had spent hours cataloging and organizing everything on endless rows of stone shelves.

Topper grabbed the handles of the vault access mechanism and spun it smoothly, drawing the massive door open as though it was totally weightless. There was no need for a combination or a lock, since the master vault was keyed to open automatically for those with the right access, and no one else.

But as we stepped into the vault, eager to claim the prizes we'd saved for a day like today when we'd really need them, both of us froze, our eager anticipation changing to queasy horror.

Topper's head swung back and forth multiple times, like if he just kept looking, eventually he'd *stop* seeing row after row of completely empty shelves. I was just as shocked as he was.

Last time I'd been in the guild vault, consumables, materials, and spare gear had lined the place from floor to ceiling. Now it was all gone.

Even the *gold* was missing.

Topper snarled and slammed his fist into the stone column beside him, his mail crunching against the cracked granite.

"How can it all just be *gone*?" he growled. "All of it? *All* of it?"

I was starting to get a little worried about the guy. Topper was usually as level-headed as Jazzus—Haxor and I had been the guild hotheads. The fact that I'd seen so much emotion out of the guy today meant he must really be fraying at the edges.

I sighed. "It's obvious, isn't it?"

There were only four people in the guild who had access to the master vault: Topper, who was standing in front of me simmering at being robbed. Jazzus, who was currently a prisoner of our enemies and probably being held in an unconscious state, me—or rather, my avatar Kromgorn—who was very much offline and unavailable...

...and Haxor. Our former friend and guildie.

Doing the math was easy. Only one of us had the access, the freedom, and the motivation to rob the guild blank blind. There was no way it could be anyone but Haxor behind this. But for some reason, Topper was shaking his head.

"No. I don't believe it. Haxor is a snake—he's proven that much. But I

know the guy well enough to know he's not behind this."

I shot him a questioning look. Had his own loyalty blinded him to the obvious truth?

"I don't see another explanation, Topper. The only other possibilities are you or Jazzus, and neither of you would."

"Haxor wouldn't either," he insisted. "He's an opportunist and a coward, but not this much of a traitor. He's working with Vierdimin because he thinks he needs to in order to survive. I understand him well enough to get that. But even if Vierdimin ordered him to come clean us out, I know he wouldn't take everything. He'd take just enough to convince Vierdimin he *had* taken everything, and leave us the rest." Topper's shoulders hunched in just a little. "He's desperate and scared, Lacey. He's not evil. Though understanding that doesn't make me want to punch his lights out any less."

I was highly skeptical of Topper's assessment of Haxor. It was true that he knew the guy better than anyone, but the evidence was right in front of our faces—and he hadn't known him well enough to predict that he'd turn on us, after all. Then I remembered Erlix taunting me the last time we'd visited the guild house.

"You know, Erlix claimed that he had a way to raid our guild vault," I offered. "Maybe Vierdimin found some kind of loophole to access it and stole the goods himself."

Topper frowned. "Maybe. But I doubt it. I think the halfling was blowing smoke up your ass, Lacey. These guild vaults are airtight once they've been locked."

I pictured what it would feel like to actually have a halfling blowing smoke up my ass, and then I blushed. It was just a figure of speech. I'd been getting freaky for a little too long, apparently.

"Well Vierdimin has to be behind this. Somehow." I struggled in vain to think of any other possibility. What did it matter, anyway? It was all gone now, and I didn't think we were getting it back.

"Sure, but Vierdimin can't really break the rules of the game. Bend them, yes, apparently. But not break them. If he could do things like access our guild bank without restrictions, we'd have lost this fight already, and he'd be here to taunt us about it. He won't have that kind of power unless we let him complete this plan he's cooking up—if it is what I think it is. And believe me, we don't want to find out."

That much we could agree on, at least. I felt sick. It was a devastating

morale blow to lose the contents of our guild bank like this, however it had happened, but even more than that it was a hit to our power. I'd been counting on that Charisma gear and the high level spells we'd saved which you could only get from monsters. It's not like we had a few extra days to go on a spell hunt. This detour had already wasted too much time. But it wouldn't do any good to sit here and cry about it. We needed to pick ourselves up and get back to work.

"We need to go to **Jaiden's Crossing**," I said. "That's our best option right now."

"Huh? Why?"

"**Jaiden's Crossing** is the first sky zone for newly minted flying characters, right? It's the quest hub for all the flight-only zones, and it's also where they have all the basic upgrades for characters hitting level 65 for the first time."

"And?"

Topper looked confused and angry. He must really be worked up if I had to spell this out for him like this. I felt sorry for the guy. It had been a tough few days for both of us, but at least I'd spent it being a hero instead of being stuck in Lefay's energy cage.

"And basic spells are better than none. Even if I just get the default set of Evocation and Alteration spells from the level 65 vendors, I'm still the most powerful mage at my level on the server right now for those spell schools. I can fry NPCs without getting fancy."

I wasn't actually sure if the thing about being the most powerful mage was true, but I had a hard time imagining someone with more power than I had at the moment, especially if you included my Courtesan class specials, pet capabilities, and long-cooldown skills. It wouldn't take me long at all to get my spell skills up to par, and not all players had the benefit of a guild to hand them all the best spells at each new level. The game was balanced around spells I'd be able to buy in **Jaiden's Crossing**, and if it was good enough for newbies, it was good enough for me... for now.

Topper considered my suggestion and then grudgingly nodded. Another stop before the **Sky Islands** was yet another time sink, but the power jumps we'd accrue would be worth the sacrifice.

"Okay. Fine." He took a deep breath. "I mean, you're right. Good suggestion, Lacey. We need to get our heads in the game, or we're going to lose them. But I still say this wasn't Haxor. It's not his style."

I remained silent, even though I disagreed with him. We'd find out sooner or later, and it wasn't worth debating. It's not like it would bring our gear back to prove that Haxor took it. With a final, longing look at our pillaged vault, we turned to go.

## Chapter 31

As we touched down on the gently bobbing sky-pier that marked the entrance to the floating city of Jaiden's Crossing, the zone name flashed across our HUDs: **Jaiden's Crossing - Level 65**. A little thrill ran through me at the sight of it. I'd officially made it to the big leagues now. Approaching the final levels, getting to experience the wonder of high level zones, having a taste of real power—it was all intoxicating. Even if I'd never intended to experience it in this feminine avatar, it was still exciting to be here.

Jaiden's Crossing had been named for the archmage Jaiden Whisperwind, who had cast a magical bubble around his city, shearing through soil and stone alike, to lift it into the sky and preserve it from the hordes of their earthbound enemies. I knew that because like any serious player, I read my in-game quest lore. I knew what was up—it was surprising how often the devs hid tidbits of important information there.

It was also called Jaiden's *Crossing* because it marked the crossing into the zones where you needed a flying mount and was one of the few high-level town zones, which was why it also served as the end-game high level player hub. Now that we could access this town, I didn't expect to be spending much time back in Minsc, as much as I would miss Kirth's surly face.

The sky piers were massive slabs of independently floating granite, tethered to the multi-hued cobblestones of the magical city by shimmering gossamer arcane chains. We'd pierced the sky-bubble as we entered, with only a slight chill gliding over my skin to mark it, and now I followed Topper into the town square, gawking at the magically-enhanced architecture.

Topper was less impressed, having been a regular for a while now. He smiled at my blatant wonder.

"You look like a tourist, Lacey," he teased. "Enjoy the town while you can. It's usually so choked with players you don't want to do anything but get in and out." He took a quick, appreciative glance around. "It is pretty nice, though, isn't it?"

I nodded. "So what's the game plan? Where do I get my spells?"

Topper scratched his chin and took another look around the square. He waved in a vague direction. "I've never had a reason to go to the arcane

district, but Haxor usually wandered that way to get new spells. Check over there. Since we're here anyway, I'm going to stop by the Lightbearer's Guild and pick up a few healing and protection spell upgrades I've been putting off getting since I hit my last level. You gonna be okay on your own for a bit?"

I grinned and flexed my tiny muscles. "Me? Please. I'm the most powerful level 65 caster on the server. If I can't disable, **Charm**, or nuke trouble, I'll just pop a **Vejazzle**."

Topper's cheeks flushed and he looked away, nodding. It was funny how old-school and uptight about my sexual escapades he still was sometimes, but I guessed I would have been uncomfortable with it too if I hadn't been living it myself. He bid me a mumbled farewell and headed off to the Paladin trainers, and I wandered in the direction he'd indicated. I soon passed under an archway marked by glowing runes and found myself surrounded by a new set of shops and landmarks that bore the subtle marks of magic use—more charms hung in the windows, warding glyphs were scrawled over shop doors, and the strange, though not unpleasant, smell of brewing potions wafted through the air.

Topper had been right about the experience of being here alone. The NPCs mostly kept to their shops, with the exception of an occasional patrolling guard or bored-looking questgiver, and the city felt like a ghost town. It had been designed for much more player traffic, with its wide, winding roads. Despite the solitude, I was actually enjoying having the opportunity to drink it all in without distraction from other players. It felt like I was one of the first people to arrive.

There were a number of magic shops available, split by the type of magic they offered: Alchemy and Enchanting went together, as did Illusion and Divination—crafting and perception, respectively. The Alteration and Evocation schools were offered in an imposing, two-story edifice with constantly-roaring torches on the exterior. It was an impressive display to clearly mark the type of magic that could be found within.

I expected the shopkeeper to be a wizened old man in a robe, or a hunched-over witch like the spell seller in Minsc had been, so I was surprised when a bronzed, shrewd-looking young man with a pointed, oiled beard parted the curtains to the back room of the shop and strode out with powerful, confident steps. He was shirtless, wearing only a loose sash and wide linen trousers, and his muscled chest had been inscribed with red and golden runes. I didn't need to use an inspection skill to sense the power he wielded.

**Bartholomew the Shopkeeper, Lv. 70** floated above his dark, close cropped hair.

His eyes narrowed as he studied me, pulling at the tip of his oiled beard. “A sweet courtesan graces my shop. And yet also something more than a mere courtesan, I believe. What can Bartholomew the Grand do for you, sweet creature?”

I blushed at his flowery compliments. How did the devs continue to find new ways to make the NPCs objectify and compliment my body while keeping the same basic tone consistent? Bartholomew’s hungry eyes traced over my curves, and I was more aware of my delicate skin and ample figure than I’d been in a while. There was something about the gaze of a powerful man resting on my body, NPC or not, that sent a little shiver of submissive delight through me. I felt an innate urge to please him. In fact... I realized that the city had a whole new set of high level NPCs for me to **Seduce**, if I wanted to. But I needed spells first—then I’d decide if I had time to lay the town for extra XP.

“I need a full set of level 65 Alteration and Evocation spells,” I said.

Now his eyes widened in surprise. “Indeed? And what will a Courtesan do with these? Unless... You’re a Sorceress. Incredible. I never thought I’d lay eyes on such an impressive creature. You honor me with your presence.”

This guy was really laying it on thick, but I had to admit that it was kind of fun to be recognized by NPCs for the rarity of my special class unlock. I smiled and inclined my head, basking in his amazement.

“Nevertheless,” he continued. “What you ask of me does not come without a price. I trust an experienced and rare adventurer such as yourself has ample gold to provide for such power?”

Bartholomew made a small gesture, and an unfurled parchment appeared on the table between us, containing a list of the available level 65 spells with prices for each. I blanched as I scanned down the list.

*Holy shit. No wonder Jazzus is always broke! Spells are ridiculously expensive.*

I had been counting on using the money I’d been saving for my epic mount to buy my spells, but I hadn’t expected them to be *this* pricey. I could see now that even if I spent all of the cash I had on hand, I wouldn’t be able to get the whole set—probably not even half. I became frustrated all over again about the guild bank robbery that had turned us into poor, broke scrubs. And I hadn’t even considered my level 65 Illusion spells yet!

It was a good thing Courtesans came with a built-in solution to problems of this nature. I hadn't taken a new pet since I had dropped Fiero, waiting for the right NPC to come along, and a magic-wielding shopkeeper who could sell me all his spells for a song seemed like a *great* pick. I smiled slyly, pushed my rack out where Bartholomew could get a solid eyeful, and whispered "**Charm.**"

My skill washed over the magician, but I saw immediately that it hadn't worked. He didn't even resist it—it just sort of fizzled. Bartholomew quirked another one of his haughty little smiles at me, like he was laughing at a private joke, and *tsked*.

"Surely you didn't expect that trick to work on me?" He raised an eyebrow. "I'd hardly be able to stay in business if I gave my spells away to every mage who charmed or ensorcered me, hmm?"

My cheeks warmed. I *had* expected it to work, but obviously the devs would have thought of this. If getting items were as easy as charming the vendors, it would be an even bigger oversight than the sex XP! The whole economy would be broken in a week.

"Sorry," I mumbled, figuring it was even worse etiquette to get *caught* trying to charm a powerful mage than to actually do it—at least when they were charmed they didn't laugh at me.

But I really needed the whole set of high level spells. There were only three spells from each school of magic, and with our guild bank cleaned out it was the only firepower I was going to be able to lay my hands on before our confrontation with Haxor.

It was time to get creative. So maybe I couldn't **Charm** the shopkeeper. Still, this was Fantasy Realms Online, wasn't it? The game that prided itself on realistic modeling and bragged about how anything was possible in their virtual world? The game that let you strike all kinds of deals with NPCs if you met their individual needs?

I was Lacey the Courtesan, and I needed to start thinking like Lacey the Courtesan. What would I do if I were really a woman hard up for cash and desperate, with this handsome and powerful man in front of me?

"It must get real lonely up here in Jaiden's Crossing," I murmured, drawing closer to Bartholomew and tracing a finger along the glowing runes on his chest. "All by yourself in this big old shop..."

I fluttered my eyelashes at him and leaned forward to make sure he had an ideal view of my amazing rack. His smile never faltered, still playing

across his face in an expression of amusement, but now I thought I detected the smallest flicker of hunger in his eyes. I couldn't tell if he was attracted to me or not, but with my otherworldly Charisma score, my odds were good.

"It has been some time since I've enjoyed the company of a woman," he remarked.

"Ooh, you poor dear. All alone and lonely. And such nice muscles. You must be dying for a soft touch, a soft sigh." I stroked his bicep, noting that he seemed to be enjoying my attention. "I give an excellent blowjob, you know... if someone were to make a gift of some spells, I could share those talents."

Bartholomew raised a single eyebrow at me. Suddenly he moved, quick as lightning, his powerful hands snaking around my back and tangling in my limbs. He literally swept me off my feet and spun me around to dip and kiss me. His strong, spicy scent filled the air around me, intoxicating me, and my skin tingled where his hot skin touched me.

The kiss shocked me, but after a moment I melted into it and relaxed in his powerful grasp, yielding to his advance and surprised at how much I enjoyed doing so.

"You will have your spells, maiden," he whispered hoarsely. "But a man has needs that your mouth alone cannot satisfy. I will have what I need, and then you will have what you need."

I was speechless! This was nothing like my previous encounters, which had all been with charmed beaus or quick Johns getting in and out of my pyramid scheme. Bartholomew wasn't charmed at all, though, and he was taking control of the situation—like a real man!

My heart was hammering away with excitement of this unexpected turn of events, and my body had gone wild with desire for this man that was claiming me as his own and demanding that I satisfy him with my sex. Where moments ago I'd felt confident and in control, I now felt shy and submissive. All I could do was squeak my assent.

But Bartholomew hadn't even waited for it. With a sweep of his powerful arm, he'd cleared the countertop and laid me back down on the smooth stone. The slick obsidian surface was cool on my back, and I felt another chill as he roughly yanked my makeshift dress aside and exposed my bare legs, which pressed tightly together to conceal my sopping sex. I wanted him, but I was embarrassed. Why was this different than it had been before?

Maybe because before I'd always been in control. Now Bartholomew

was in control. I was just his woman, and he was using me as he pleased. All my cheesy seduction lines flew out of my head while the encounter unfolded almost faster than I could register what was happening.

The magician was a tangle of hot kisses and growling need as his hands and mouth worked their way across my body, groping and tasting me greedily. If I hadn't been so distracted by the moment, I would have been mortified—this was so much more raw, and so much more intimate than my prior encounters! And I wasn't into men!

But my body didn't give me the choice. Whatever he was doing, it was *working* for me. He must have had pheromones keyed to my body or something because I had it bad for him. My mouth watered at the sight of his cock bulging beneath his trousers, and all I could think about was him penetrating my wet, hot, sex. All thoughts of an exchange vanished. I wanted one thing only, and that was for Bartholomew to hold me down and fuck me.

My lips parted with a cry of delight as he yanked his trousers down and entered me in a single swift motion, and began to fuck me with quiet, steady grunts. His strong arms flexed against my delicate back, drawing me against his hot body and crushing my breasts between us, and the runes on his chest felt hot—though not unpleasantly so—in the wake of our passion.

My excitement built until it burst through me, ripping into me with a tidal force of orgasmic bliss that hit me again and again in a series of spasming convulsions. I began to scream with delight at the ministrations of this brilliant fucking magician, and I could feel him come as well, spilling his seed into me and freezing as he shook with the force of his own orgasm.

Then he released me, lowering me back onto the counter with a satisfied sigh. My head was spinning. It might have been my imagination, but I think I literally saw stars. I laid still, gasping for air, and trying to recover my composure as Bartholomew pulled his pants back up and dusted himself off. He cleared his throat and adjusted his sash.

"That was excellent," he remarked. "You may have your spells, madam." He gestured at the counter beside me and a stack of six scrolls appeared.

All I could do was nod and make a small purr of agreement.

*Jesus Christ, I thought. We've got to get me out of here soon before I get addicted to this.*

But it was a faint thought. Really faint. Tucked away behind a satisfied, exhausted glow of one of the most exciting and sexy experiences I'd had in

my life.

## Chapter 32

I'd done it: I had three new Alteration spells and three new Evocation spells, and I'd even gotten to keep my gold, not to mention having one of the most exciting times I'd ever had in the process.

I shuffled through the scrolls happily, reading the effects of my new spells:

### **TIER IV Alteration Spells**

**[Burden]** This spell causes targeted objects within 15 feet to become significantly heavier and more cumbersome.

**[Water Breathing]** This spell allows the target to breathe underwater for the duration of the spell (base 15 minutes).

**[Elemental Shield]** This spell creates a damage shield which covers the body of the caster and reduces all elemental damage by 75% for the duration (base 5 minutes).

### **TIER IV Evocation Spells**

**[Chain Lightning]** This spell casts bolts of lightning out from the casters fingertips to a single target and will then leap to 4 additional targets, losing 25% of the damage with each jump.

**[Icy Breath]** This spell allows the PC to breathe icy wind in a 15' cone from their mouth, damaging any hostile targets caught within. It has a small chance to freeze targets.

**[Flame Jet]** This spell creates a sustained jet of flame that extends up to 10' from the casters fingertips on either or both hands and will cause ongoing fire damage until the spell is ended or mana runs out.

Nothing fancy—certainly not the kind of awesome spells we'd had in the guild bank—but they'd get the job done. At tier level IV, which required 75 spell skill to use, even the basic vendor spells were fairly solid. I'd finally have some utility and DPS beyond a fancy, dazzling vajaan! But unfortunately, I was still stuck with my paltry, basic, 10-spell spellbook. The game expected players to get the better one before entering high-level zones,

so I didn't see an advanced version anywhere in the shop, and I didn't like the idea of going all the way back to Minsc to blow the rest of my gold on an advanced spellbook. I'd had 6 lower-tier spells already, so I made a tough call and reluctantly dropped two of my first-tier spells for now. There wasn't much point keeping **Minor Glamour** when I had access to **Major Glamour**, and **Light** was always a pretty useless spell in games, so both of those went out the door to make room for the scrolls I now held.

I would have been more upset about losing good spells if I hadn't been so excited about the new ones, but it was something I'd be able to fix later if I wanted to. They were all vendor spells. Besides—I couldn't wait to try my new ones out, even if it would be a pain to get my skills up. But when I started to scribe them into my spellbook, I had another pleasant surprise!

As each school of spell entered my spellbook for the first time, messages flashed across my screen:

*Alteration skill set to match Illusion rating. [Lv 53] (Sorceress Class Trait)*

*Evocation skill set to match Illusion rating. [Lv 53] (Sorceress Class Trait)*

Evidently the devs had taken pity on the poor high level sorceresses and allowed them to grandfather over their casting skills as if they'd been working on those skills since they took the Mesmer class perk! That was a welcome stroke of good luck after a bunch of bad luck—I wouldn't have to level my Evocation and Alteration skills all the way up from level 1 like I had with the Illusion school, which was now up to Level 53 thanks to my constant casting of low-level illusion spells.

I cheered and pumped my fist in the air, and looked around excitedly. Then my face fell. My first instinct had been to look for Erlix to high five him. But I had no idea where he was, of course, and he couldn't have come along here with me anyway. Still, it cheered me up a little bit to think about the mischief he was probably getting into on his own. I'd hook back up with him later. The halfling was the most resourceful person I'd met. He'd be fine.

Bartholomew had vanished into the back of the shop after giving me the scrolls and called goodbye to me through his curtain, so I'd reluctantly gathered my things and walked back out into the square of the arcane district with a lingering gaze over my shoulder. Now I looked around blankly and

wondered what I should be doing next. It would be nice to get some additional gear, but I was worried about how much it might cost and what else I might need my money for (like the pricey new spell book I'd need to buy if I wanted to scribe some Tier IV illusion spells). I tried to think of any other affordable goods I was forgetting, but it was hard because my head was all fuzzy—I was distracted by the naughty pulses that kept coming from my crotch.

My sex still zinged with the excitement of my encounter with Bartholomew, and I bit my lip, hungry for more. It was so weird how this body reacted like that! After getting off as a guy, I wasn't horny again for a while. I'd get hungry, maybe sleepy. But as Lacey, in my realistically-modeled female body in Fantasy Realms Online, as soon as I had a really good lay, I just got hornier! That was the problem with being capable of multiple orgasms: How were you supposed to know when to stop? I was going to turn into a sex addict if I didn't watch it.

Then I had a brilliant idea. Topper would come find me when he was ready, right? And it would be irresponsible to sit around doing nothing while I waited for him. At least when there was a whole *town* full of new NPCs to fuck. I scanned the area, noting that all of the guards and citizens were dozens of levels higher than the NPCs in Minsc had been. Why not kill a few birds with one stone while I waited for Topper?

I needed to scratch this itch *and* level.

"Hey, you!" I called to the nearest guardsman.

He scratched his head and trundled over. "Yes, ma'am?"

I smiled, exposing my breasts to him. "**Seduce.**"

I'd never seen a halberd clatter to the stones or a dick get whipped out so quickly as I did then. Maybe the shopkeepers couldn't be affected by my sex-skills, but everyone else here sure could.

I got to work, finished him off, and sent him packing after I'd had *my* fun too, not even minding that we were getting it on on the hard, stone pavement of the city. I was used to taking it in all kinds of places now, and I didn't even care where I got fucked as long as I got to experience the mind-shattering delight of Lacey's orgasms. But my one guard wasn't enough. I panted, still horny, as I looked for my next mark. Twenty paces away was another guard who peered at me curiously. He must have watched me get it on with the first guard, and dudes were dudes, even if they were NPCs. I didn't have any trouble launching into a repeat performance with him, or the

next guard that followed. It turned out that I could basically work my way back to the square where I'd left Topper, bouncing from NPC to NPC. It wasn't as efficient as Erlix's pyramid scheme had been, but by the time I'd gotten back to where we'd started, I'd scored another five levels and dinged level 70, complete with the golden spark showers I'd grown accustomed to—that was about as high as the town could take me, so I'd need to venture out into the wilderness to get any higher.

"Like shooting fish in a barrel," someone growled nearby. "Shtupid."

I finished up with the latest guardsman who'd granted me the XP I'd needed to hit 70 and looked around in surprise, trying to identify the speaker.

A glassy-eyed man in full platemail with a white and red tabard slumped at a nearby table, surrounded by dozens of empty mugs of ale. He had a dirty, shaggy mop of brown hair and a light shadow of beard growth, and while his head was angled down at his ale, his eyes lingered on my curves in a way I was beginning to grow *very* accustomed to. **Saintly, Lv. 72 Human Cleric** floated over his head.

I'd taken him to be an NPC at first, the way he was just sitting there knocking back tankards of ale like it was the end of the world, but now I could clearly see that he was a player. A very drunk player. I fixed my clothes and approached him, excited to see another human who was so high in level and unguilded. What was he doing here in Jaiden's Crossing?

"Excuse me? What did you say?" I asked him.

"I shaid it'sh shtupid." He buried his face in another gulp of ale and waved toward me. "Fuck leveling."

"Fuck leveling? Isn't leveling the point of the game?"

"No!" He shook his head like I was an idiot. "Not 'fuck leveling.' Fuck-leveling. It wash shupposed to be a joke! Shtupid fucking dev manager thought it wash funny and made me code it in. Horny motherfucker. Didn't ever think anyone would actually use it. But duh. Playersh will always use the toolsh you give 'em."

I blinked at him and tried to decode his drunken slurring. What on Earth was he talking about? He claimed he'd coded in the sex mechanic responsible for me getting so many levels?

Then it dawned on me.

"You're a developer!" I exclaimed. "You work on Fantasy Realms Online!"

I could barely contain my excitement. I'd thought getting free spell

skills was a windfall, but tripping on a *developer*? This changed everything! I knew devs played their own game, of course, but they tended to keep to themselves so they didn't get harassed by players. What were the odds of finding one right here and now? I couldn't wait to tell Topper the good news.

Saintly nodded as he drained his tankard and reached for a new one. "Yep. Shure am."

I began to babble excitedly. "Oh my god! You have to help us. You're stuck here too, right? Vierdimin—he's the player responsible for all this—you see, I charmed him and... well, I can explain all that later, but what's important is that now you're here and you can summon him and like... I don't know, use your GM powers to blow his level away and—"

"No, no, no!" Saintly cut me off with an emphatic shake of his head and angry flail of his tankard that sent ale showering all over the place. "Why do you think I'm sho drunk? If I was on my GM account, I'd have fixshd this already. But guesh what? Thish ish my pershonal account. Fucking fuck. Of courshe the one time my GM powersh come in handy I don't have 'em. Fuck." Then he shrugged and got a faraway look in his eyes. "If I could fixsh it. Don't actually know. That fucker is wily."

I blinked at him again, taking this in, and then I slumped down onto the cobblestones, suddenly as deflated as I had been elated before. For a moment I'd thought Saintly could be the answer to all of our problems and that everything would be back to normal in no time, but then I realized that if things were that easy to fix, someone would have fixed them already. I sighed and lapsed into a disappointed silence.

But I'd really gotten the cleric going now. He ignored me, oblivious to my disappointment, and continued ranting. "It'sh a damn shame, I tell you what. I coded half thish fucking game, and I can't even log out! Who let a bug sneak through that locksh playersh in the game? How does it even work?" He shook his head. "No one should be able to do that. There'sh lotsha bugs. Go over 100 in any shtat? All your shtats get shet to -1. Hit a maple tree with a short shword? It becomesh a poplar. Unequip a red cloak while wearing a golden shash? All your gear getsh deleted! Oopsh. Dumb dumb dumb errorsh. But thish... playersh getting shtuck in the game." He took another long swig of his ale, looking awfully glum. "We are sho fucked. Gonna get shued to hell. Asshumng I even ever get out of here. Sho..." He raised his cup in salute. "We get drunk!"

I'd stared at him wide-eyed, numb with frustration as he delivered his

drunken rant, surprised at how defeated he sounded. But then I started to get angry. I scrambled to my feet.

“Are you kidding me?” I demanded. “You get stuck in the game like the rest of us, with all of the tricks and secrets you must know, and your answer is to lounge around in Jaiden’s Crossing getting *drunk*? Dude. You have more knowledge about the game than probably anyone else still around. Why aren’t you trying to fix things? I’m stuck in the goddamned body of this stupid, girly Courtesan, and I’m still doing my best to fight back against Vierdimin.”

Saintly cocked an eyebrow at me.

“You’re a dude?” he asked. Then he snorted again. “No wonder you’re fine going bonkers with the dicksh. I bet that pussly is real nice. I coded that too, ya know.”

My cheeks warmed again. “That’s the only thing you can think about? I’m trying to help my friends, you asshole.”

He waved me off, ignoring the insult, and returned to his drinking in silence. It was then that Topper walked back into the square. He glanced from me to Saintly and back to me.

“Got my spells. You too? Who’s this guy?”

I frowned at Saintly. “Yeah, I did. And this is a drunk-ass developer on his personal account that isn’t lifting a finger to help the situation with Vierdimin.”

“I already told you!” Saintly exploded, knocking several empty cups to the cobblestones with a loud clatter. “I don’t know *how* to fixsh it. And even if I did, I don’t have GM powers right now. What do you want me to do?”

Before I could pop off again, Topper gestured for both of us to calm down. “Whoa whoa whoa. We’re all on the same team here, folks. Stuck in the game, wanting to get out. He’s probably a goldmine of intel, Lacey. Did you catch him up on everything we know—and suspect—about Vierdimin’s?”

I suddenly felt very sheepish. Filling him in probably would have been a better idea than lecturing him and arguing with him. Leave it to Topper to show up and point out the mature course of action while the rest of us flailed around.

“Fine,” I grumbled. “Go ahead.”

Topper launched into an explanation of all of it: Vierdimin’s staff, the locating spell, the clues we’d pieced together from his lieutenants, the

increasing pressure from outside the game to kill the servers, and what we suspected about Vierdimin wanting to create his own, private playground to torture us all in. As he talked, Saintly's eyes got wider and wider.

"...and that's why we're going to need your help to figure out how to stop him," Topper finished.

"Fuck me," Saintly swore. "That'sh... that'sh quite a shtory. Fuck. But if that'sh what he'sh trying to do..." He rubbed his eyes and leaned forward on his table, swaying gently. "Fuck. We need to shtop him. What am I doing?"

Topper nodded grimly. Saintly attempted to rise from his seat, but succeeded only in knocking over his chair, the table, and all of the remaining mugs before crashing to the ground and landing on his back.

"Ohhh... no. The shpinsh. Why did I code realishtic shpinsh into the game?" he moaned. "At leasht I didn't code puking."

Topper and I shared a glance, and I rolled my eyes.

"Look," Topper said. "We could use your help here, but we need you to sober up. We want everything you know or can think of to help us fight Vierdimin's hacking here, and it sure wouldn't hurt to have a level 72 cleric backing us up when we go to confront the **Secret Order**. Are you going to be okay waiting here for us while we go and get the person we need to cast the locating spell?"

Saintly nodded at us from his upside-down position on the ground. "Yeah. I'll shtop drinking. Thish ish more sherioush than I realished." He gave us a thumbs-up that was more like a thumbs-down the way his hand was angled. "You can count on me."

"Good," Topper replied. "We'll be back soon. You ready to go, Lacey?"

I nodded, frowning at the drunken cleric. I really hoped that we weren't going to be dependent on this guy to save the day from Vierdimin. He might be smart, but so far he hadn't given us anything useful.

I only hoped that our search for Jazzus would prove to be a little more fruitful.

## Chapter 33

Evocation was a fucking *delight*.

Sure, I had a raid-gearred level 75 paladin along with me to tank a level 70 zone. And sure, my primary casting stat was roughly *twice* as high as the intended stats the developers had based the game around. But that didn't make it any less exciting or impressive for me to cut through a high-level dungeon zone like a hot knife through butter using my new spells. **The Sky Islands** were a series of floating islands connected by massive, midnight-black chains and key-locked teleporter platforms. There were all kinds of enemies there: lizardmen, fairies, giant bees, bird-people.

It didn't matter who we were facing or what obstacles they threw at us, though. With 32 Charisma and three different destructive elements to play with, I was a goddess. I cackled with glee as **Flame Jets** poured out of my outstretched hands, blackening feathers and singeing scales. As Topper waved his flaming greatsword in wide arcs, holding their attention and absorbing the bulk of their blows, I radiated **Chain Lightning** like a freaking plasma globe, taking down swarms of trash mobs with a few waves of my bandage-draped arms. With a burst of my **Icy Breath**, giant bees and fairies fell lifelessly out of the air and enemy warriors turned into popsicles before my eyes.

Between Topper's AC, his paladin buffs, my dragon skin from **Sorceress**, and my **Elemental Shield** buff I continuously refreshed on us, we were unstoppable. I don't know why I'd ever preferred to play a barbarian. Mages had always seemed so wimpy and boring to me. But now that I was wielding the real power that came with being a high-level caster, I wasn't sure I could ever go back to being limited to swinging a big chunk of metal for my damage.

Topper laughed as I stared at my hands in awe.

"You like whipping spells around, huh, Lacey? I never would have guessed. You've always played melee classes before."

We were taking a quick break in between waves of enemies while pushing deeper and deeper into the zone. Topper leaned on his sword, breathing hard, while I waited for the mana bar on my HUD to recharge. Since we were out of combat, it filled up pretty quickly, but it still took just long enough to give us a moment to talk. It was one of the things I liked

about downtime in online games: Joking around together between fights was almost as important as the fights themselves when you were with your friends.

“It’s insanely cool,” I murmured. “With this much Charisma, I could probably *solo* this place. I haven’t even needed to take a pet yet or use any of my Courtesan skills. This Sorceress class is nuts.”

Topper nodded. “I’m impressed. I admit I was a little nervous about coming in here with only your spells for DPS, but I’ve never seen anyone put out the kind of damage that you’re doing at your level. I was wrong to try to leave you out of things back when we first confronted Vierdimin. You’re really one of our best players, Krom.”

I dropped my gaze, embarrassed at the admiration in Topper’s voice *and* by the reminder that he still thought of me as Kromgorn on some level. It was nice to be recognized for my contributions to the guild again. I’d been in Lacey’s avatar for so long, focused on leveling, that I’d almost forgotten how good it felt to be working as part of a team alongside my friends, confronting shared challenges and having each other’s backs.

“Come on,” I said quietly. “My mana is full.”

He pulled the tip of his sword out of the dirt with a nod and a grunt and led the way onward. My magic continued to clear a path forward for us, and in no time at all we had felled five of the zone’s minibosses and were approaching the final island. I held up the key dropped by the Aviok Lord and stepped onto the teleporter, appearing on the edge of the last (and largest) of the islands behind a rocky outcropping. Four other islands floated far below us, inaccessible except through the teleporters because of the zonewide block on flying mounts and flight powers. The zone boss was supposed to be an Azure Sky Drake, who would be curled up in a nest with her eggs on the other side of the tall rocks.

“You think the boss is still up?” I asked Topper.

He’d grown quieter as we’d gotten closer to the last island, drawing inward, and he had a distant look in his eyes as he shook his head. “Doubt it. Haxor wouldn’t want the distraction. Vierdimin doubtlessly would have given him the means to keep the boss down so he could set up an ideal prison for Jazzus.”

There were various ways to prevent mobs from respawning, and it would be easy enough to use a suppression spell for the 80th level lich. But if he really had gone to all that trouble to keep the zone boss down, no doubt

Haxor would have something nasty prepared for anyone who walked around the corner.

“And you’re sure he’s got her here?”

“I’m sure *he*’s here. If he doesn’t have her, he’ll know where to find her.”

“What if he doesn’t want to talk?”

Topper’s jaw tightened and a dangerous glint appeared in his eye. “He’ll talk. About Jazzus and about the guild bank.”

I didn’t understand how Topper could still think that Haxor *wasn’t* behind the guild bank robbery. There was literally no one else it could have been—not without a serious breach in the game code. How could he be so incensed about Haxor’s betrayal of our guild and not believe that he’d extend that to plundering us for all we were worth? I didn’t buy his story about Haxor being desperate and scared. Why wouldn’t he put his trust in us if he was so scared? What were friends for if not to rely on when things got tough?

“He’ll probably have a trap or two ready,” I said. “You should let me go first so I can absorb the impact. He’s **Secret Order** now. Nothing he or Vierdimin set up can hurt me.”

Right away I could see that Topper didn’t like that. He was used to being the raid tank and the point man on any dangerous operations. Letting a mage go first, especially a lower-level hot *female* mage, ran counter to all of his instincts.

“I’m going in first,” he growled. “I have plenty of resists and AC.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Topper. This isn’t about how good of a tank you are. We have no idea what Vierdimin might have given him to use against us, and he can’t hurt me. If you want to fight him, we need you at full health with no debuffs.”

“And what if he dropped his guild tag?”

“It won’t matter.” I’d already discussed this with Erlix back in Minsc when I was puzzling out the mechanics of my new class. The little dude knew a surprisingly large amount about game mechanics, thanks to his obsessive forum reading, and was able to fill me in on all the nuances of charming people thanks to his sordid interest in all things sex-related. “Because it would be too easy to just drop guild tags to get around it, anyone who’s had the tag in the last 30 days still counts for the purposes of the **Charm** skill.”

“And if they hired some third-party mercenaries?”

I laughed and held up my hand, allowing lightning from a readied

**Chain Lightning** spell to crackle across my fingertips with a neon-blue sizzle. “I’m not really concerned about anyone but Vierdimin at this point. If they brought back-up, we’ll just fall back on a good old tank ‘n spank strategy.”

“That takes on a whole new meaning with your current class,” Topper grumbled, but I took his half-hearted joke to be his assent. You always knew Topper was done arguing when he changed the subject, because he didn’t let things go when he thought he was right. “You’ll call me in as soon as the situation is clear, though? I don’t want you going down from something nasty we didn’t anticipate, and Haxor is a Spellblade. He’ll have spell disruption abilities that may work even if he can’t hurt you. Remember: This is *my* fight.”

I remembered how Lefay and Wugduz had still been able to affect me in certain ways without actually *hurting* me. They probably couldn’t debuff or disable me, but if Haxor laid down a spell dampening field, it would kill spells for everyone. Spellblades were designed as an anti-magic class, and only the highest-level wizards had any tools to deal with them—of course, those skills wouldn’t help him much against a full-armored holy caster with a flaming sword... I hoped.

“I’ll call for you right away,” I promised.

Topper nodded and crouched down against the rock wall, ready to spring forward at my signal, and I stayed low and began to slowly make my way along the outcropping. The brown, dusty stones snaked all the way around the island in a swirl pattern, ensuring that nobody would walk into the boss fight by accident, and by the time I neared the central portion where the drake’s nest—and Haxor—would be, Topper was out of earshot unless I yelled. An unusually large and prominent pair of brown stone carvings of drakes marked what had to be the entrance to the boss’s room. As I got closer, I heard voices coming from just inside.

It sounded like multiple people were talking. I leaned against the statue and strained to listen. I could make out two of the voices: Haxor and Lefay. The third voice was deep and menacing, and while it sounded uncannily familiar, I couldn’t quite place it.

“I’m tired of being stuck in this zone waiting for my guildies to show up,” Haxor complained. “How long do I need to wait here?”

“Don’t you mean your ex-guildies?” Lefay shot back, a note of warning in her voice.

Haxor was silent for a moment, and then his voice dropped. “Yeah. My ex-guildies. Look, I just want to be done. I’ve done everything that’s been asked of me. I was promised my freedom if I helped you. When can I leave?”

“Soon,” the third voice promised. “Have more patience. My leveling is going well, and things are progressing nicely outside of the game. Everything is going according to plan.”

It was some kind of **Secret Order** meeting, and they had no idea Topper and I were here already! They probably hadn’t counted on us moving so quickly. I wanted to keep listening to see if they’d leak any of Vierdimin’s plans, even though I was risking letting Lefay and the mystery speaker get away. I knew I should probably rush in and call for Topper to catch them while they were unaware, and maybe even take out three of Vierdimin’s lieutenants in the process, but when would I have another chance to listen in like this? Against my better judgment, I kept still and waited.

“I’ve had plenty of patience,” Haxor growled. “I’ve been nothing but patient. I’ve been sitting here waiting for ages with Jazzus in that stupid energy cage while Kromgorn runs around doing god-knows-what in the body of my ex, which is too fucking weird for me, and meanwhile no one will tell me anything more about the big picture plans or what I’m actually supposed to be doing.”

“You’ve been told that your service will spare you the punishment that those who resist will receive,” the third voice intoned. “You are doing the will of the master. Do not test me. You know I speak with his word.”

“I know,” Haxor said. “I know, I know. It’s all part of the plan.”

“For someone who claims to know his place, you sure talk back a lot,” Lefay remarked.

“At least he has not yet failed us in his service,” the voice observed, now addressing the dark elf.

“I didn’t fail! If you had seen what that whore tried to do to me—”

“Enough excuses. You were told to waste her time, and instead you fled. This is unacceptable, Lefay.”

I smiled to myself at Lefay getting chewed out by her superior, whoever he was. The homophobic bitch deserved it. She’d only lost in her battle against me because she was too afraid of girl on girl action to bear even being close to me, and I’d used that against her to get her to gate away, forcing her to release her spell on Topper. It was also nice to know that her mission had been to make me waste time... it confirmed some of our suspicions about

Vierdimin's plans.

"As you say," Lefay replied with a sullen tone. "I'm sorry, my lord."

I was shocked. Lefay was one of the highest officers in their guild, and she was one hell of a bitch. Who would be so high ranking that she'd just take that kind of rebuke from him?

"I must return to my power leveling," the voice continued. "Our enemies continue to press onward, and they must be delayed as long as possible. Time is on our side, and even now events are spinning beyond the point of no return. But they must not be allowed to interfere. Lefay will remain here, in your command, to help you, Haxor."

"What?"

"What?"

"I'm not staying here with him! In his command?"

"You're leaving her here to watch me, aren't you? Isn't it good enough that I betrayed my friends for you?"

"I should be in charge! You only let him into the guild like two days ago!"

"*Enough.*" The word cut through the deluge of complaints with a finality I was only accustomed to hearing from one of Topper's decisions when he used his official guild leader voice, and it had the desired effect: Both Haxor and Lefay shut up immediately.

Now I was burning with curiosity to know who the third person was. Who had the rank to give Lefay orders? I'd thought I'd known all of **The Secret Order**'s officers, and it definitely wasn't Nambla or Wugduz. It didn't sound like Vierdimin, either, although he certainly gave orders like he ran the guild. Maybe Vierdimin had a secret second-in-command? The voice was familiar enough that it was driving me crazy. I knew I'd heard it before somewhere. Would it be worth the risk to sneak a peek? If he gated out before I could look, I'd miss my chance!

I had to know. It sounded like they were wrapping things up anyway, and if they spotted me I could just fall back on the original plan and charge in, content in the knowledge that none of them would be able to hurt me. I cursed myself for never bothering to level up Lacey's **Hide** skill or picking up an invisibility spell. It would have come in really handy right now. I quickly flipped open my spellbook and looked through my options.

**Lasting Illusion** would give me the cover I needed, but did I dare to use an area spell in front of at least two trained spellcasters? If they had any

wards up at all, they'd be alerted immediately that someone had cast a spell.

"You have your orders," the voice said. "No doubt the courtesan is already en route here. Do not fail me again. Delay her as long as possible."

It was now or never. I sucked in a breath and laid a 10'x10'x10' cube illusion across the area just beside my drake statue, creating a perfect replica of the space that I could stand inside of. Anyone looking in would see only empty air, but I'd be able to look out of it. The air shimmered for a heartbeat as my illusion took hold, and I winced while I waited for the cacophony of a tripped alarm like the one that had alerted Vierdimin to my presence when I'd first confronted him with Jazzus. Fortunately, Haxor wasn't quite as paranoid as Vierdimin—I was lucky he was confident enough not to think he needed them. I breathed a sigh of relief and stepped out from behind my statue, shrouded in the illusion of my spell, to get a look at this mystery officer who ordered Vierdimin's lieutenant's around like it was nothing.

Haxor and Lefay stood with their backs to me, facing a black-cloaked figure that was nearly seven feet tall. A two-handed greatsword hung across his back, and the muscles of his powerful build rippled beneath the leather bindings of his chestpiece.

I stared at the figure in shock, so surprised that I couldn't move even if I'd wanted to. No wonder I recognized the voice.

*It can't be. How could this be possible? It doesn't make any sense.*

But my eyes weren't deceiving me. **Kromgorn, Lv. 70 Half-Giant Barbarian** floated above the PC's head.

Could it really be *my* Kromgorn? He'd dropped his **Shining Army** guild tag and gained nearly twenty levels since I'd played him last, but there was no way to steal another player's name, and I even recognized some of the pieces of gear he was wearing. That epic quality sword on his back was the same one I'd been so proud of winning, and that unique belt was the one I'd crafted while raising my leatherworking skill. In horror, I pulled open the guild menu for **The Shining Army** and scanned the offline player list for Kromgorn, but he wasn't there. How could he be? He was standing in front of me, clear as day.

I couldn't explain it, but I couldn't deny it either: My avatar was back in game, and someone other than me was playing him.

## Chapter 34

I felt like someone had smacked me upside the head and set my whole world spinning. My old body, the avatar I'd worked so hard to gear and level, was not only still in-game, but being played by someone else. This shouldn't be possible. Nobody had my login info. Certainly nobody in the **Secret Order**. I never would have entrusted it to Haxor, even if I had given it to someone in my guild, so he couldn't be behind this.

My head spun with a million questions: Had I been hacked? Who would bother to hack a Lv. 48 Barbarian and then grind out more than twenty levels on the stolen avatar? Why would they be helping **The Secret Order**? And how did they end up ranked higher than even the officers? We were already short on answers, and this introduced a whole new set of unknowns that I couldn't begin to figure out.

One thing was clear, though: I was ticked off about it. That was *my* barbarian, damn it! *I'd* wanted to level him up... not have some stranger power-level him to use him against me.

Then I felt a chill. Kromgorn was unguilded. Kromgorn wasn't in Vierdimin's guild and never had been. Kromgorn was level 70 now. And while I had plenty of power as Lacey the Courtesan, that epic 2-hander would lay down some serious hurt on me if it reached me. Had that been Vierdimin's plan all along? Did he need to slow me down so he could level up Kromgorn? Steal my avatar and use my own body against me to get around the **Charm** restriction?

But no. It didn't feel right—not for one of Vierdimin's plans... It was too risky, too time-consuming, and too straight-forward. Whatever his plans for Kromgorn were, and whoever was in there playing him, Topper's suspicions about Vierdimin's master plan felt much more elegant, and much more befitting of the lich.

I was just glad I hadn't charged in, spells blazing, because suddenly I was a lot less sure of what the outcome might have been. If I had launched an attack and Krom had cut me down, then Topper would have found himself in a three-on-one fight against a trio of level 70 characters... not a great place to be. I held my breath while I waited to see if Kromgorn would spill any more information.

But he was done talking. He took a small device from his belt and hit

the button—evidently he'd been leveling my Magic Devices skill too—and a portal to an unfamiliar zone snapped open behind him. The barbarian stepped through with a look of warning over his shoulder, and the gate winked out of existence.

Haxor and Lefay let out long sighs at the same time and then immediately turned to one another.

"You are *not* in charge of me," Lefay snapped. "Why are you his favorite all of a sudden?"

"I don't want to be in charge of anyone," Haxor growled. "I don't want to do any of this. You think I like sitting here using my magical energy to keep a friend knocked out and trapped like this?"

He gestured over to the side of the stone-ringed circular arena where a blue energy cage surrounded the unconscious form of Jazzus. As soon as I spotted her, my heart leapt into my throat. I'd never been so happy to see those pointy elven ears and cute blue costume as I was right at that moment. I barely suppressed my urge to call to her and ask if she was okay, even though I knew she wouldn't be able to hear me while she was under Haxor's spell.

*I'm here, Jazzus!* I thought fiercely instead. *I came for you, and we're going to rescue you, beat Vierdimin, and get all of us out of here safely.*

I kept silent and waited to make my move, my body tense. Now that Kromgorn was gone, I could attack safely, and Topper had to be growing impatient by now—besides, if Vierdimin wanted to delay us as long as possible, that meant we had to move even faster. If there was one thing I knew about the Lich, it was that you should always try to do the opposite of what he goaded you to do, no matter how attractive his suggestion.

I leapt out of my illusory covering and charged the pair of them while they were still bickering, spouting gouts of **Flame Jets** at full blast from both hands.

Haxor reacted faster than Lefay, drawing his daggers and leaping backward in a single movement, but my flames poured over Lefay's body while she shrieked. It was more in surprise than in pain, however, since as soon as the jets touched her they winked out with a cacophonous boom that left both of us stumbling backward.

I tried to summon them back, throw lightning, or blow my icy breath, and none of it worked—I glanced at my buff list in frustration and saw that I'd triggered an AoE silence trap when I attacked them.

"I'm a Spellblade, you moron," Haxor muttered while Lefay dusted

herself off and raised her staff menacingly. “Who leads with spells against a Spellblade?”

“You got here fast, didn’t you?” Lefay asked. “Too bad we were ready for you.”

“Let Jazzus go,” I warned them, taking a step forward with my hands curled into fists. My foot fell upon an invisible pressure plate with an audible click, and a blast of fire three or four times the size of my flame jets roared up from the ground to envelop me. I’d triggered the trap we knew Haxor would lay, but I was as immune to this damage as anything else he’d prepared. I stood in the middle of the inferno, shoulders back and chin lifted, and in a sudden moment of inspiration I summoned my wings and flung them wide, letting the heat and wind from the magical blaze whip my hair around my shoulders.

I threw my head back and laughed. “Neither of you can lay a finger on me. Did you forget?”

“Wow,” Lefay breathed, taking a step backward. “Uh... when did she gets wings?”

“I don’t care if she has wings, spells, or a bloody flaming sword,” Haxor growled. “Stay on the defensive and wear her mana down. You know our orders.”

The dirty look Lefay shot him was priceless, but she lifted her staff again and set herself in a defensive pose. Our silence debuff began to fade as the flames died down around me, and I cracked my knuckles. Nobody was backing down here. Again I thought about calling Topper, but why risk him? Without Krom here, maybe I could take them down by myself. I wanted to see what these new abilities could do.

“Having second thoughts, Krom?” Haxor asked. “It’s not too late to flip sides and give up, you know. You can’t win.”

“It’s Lacey now, Haxor. And you’re about to find out just how much things have changed.” I almost spouted off about Krom being on their side now, but I didn’t want Vierdimin’s troops to know we knew about him. They had no idea how much I’d heard.

“What, you’re going to suck me off before you try to fuck Lefay this time?”

I wasn’t going to dignify that with a response, and I didn’t need to trade barbs with Haxor anyway because that was the moment when my silence debuff fell off. Instantly I was back to being a sorcerous badass.

All three of us blurred as we sprang into battle at full speed. Immediately I activated my **Sexy Shadow** and broke off toward Lefay as I sent it streaking toward Haxor. It took all my concentration to keep my illusory double moving and throwing down spells—which actually had some potency!—while I also cast my own spells, but it was enough of a feint to drive Haxor into another backward flip, meeting each of her casts with a counterspell while I focused on Lefay.

The dark elf had chosen a different tact entirely and was using some kind of wind-based dust devil spell to hurl debris and rocks toward me. None of it hurt me, but it was really annoying and made it difficult to see her while she **Blinked** around the battlefield, leaving her own illusionary doubles with each teleport. I struck down one after another with angry shots of flame, frustrated that most of my Courtesan AoE stuns were useless against PCs (except for **Kama Sutra**, which required me to be able to physically touch them, and I couldn't seem to lay a finger on the real Lefay).

Finally, I got tired of burning the doubles and threw my arms wide to dump a huge chunk of my mana into **Chain Lightning**. The bolts criss-crossed all over the arena, shocking doubles as quickly as they sprang up, and finally one landed on Lefay. The debris fell to the ground as her sustained whirlwind spell winked out and she stumbled backward with a third of her health missing.

“Owww...” she moaned.

I grinned. “Spells hit pretty hard when you have god-level Charisma, huh?”

But Haxor had finally gotten close enough to my shadow to slash at it with his dagger, dispelling the illusion, and now he and Lefay flanked me. I tried to whip spell after spell at them, but each one was met by a counterspell as they grimly stood their ground. At 20% mana I stopped, my chest heaving. I could still pop my last cooldown, **Dragon Rage**, but I didn't think it would help with the counterspells, and I wanted to keep *some* tricks up my sleeve.

Fortunately, there was another card I was holding back.

“All right, Topper!” I shouted. “Come on out!”

“Fuck!” Haxor grimaced and spun toward the arena entrance. “I thought he'd be out by now if he was here.”

Topper came charging into the stone clearing with a bellowing roar, blazing sword arcing, and began to trade frantic, clanging blows with Haxor.

“Why didn't you call me sooner, Lacey?” he demanded as he laid into

his opponent.

“Why didn’t you shard his fucking gear when you had him captive, Lefay?” Haxor spat.

Lefay and I shared an annoyed glance. Then she shrugged. “Didn’t occur to me. Let’s dance, girly-boy.”

Now that Topper had Haxor’s full attention, it was back to just me and Lefay, and the way she kept backing away from me suggested that she was a lot less confident than she sounded. Last time, she’d been able to keep me at bay easily, but I was a combat caster now, and she was going to be in trouble. **Counterspell** had enough of a cooldown that she couldn’t chain-cast it like she and Haxor had been able to do together, and after she caught a well-timed **Flame Jet** to the face that dropped her health to 25%, she threw up a **Mana Shield** out of desperation.

“When did you get so strong?” she cried. “This is *bullshit*.”

I had to admire her persistence. She stood tall, teeth bared and breasts heaving, her clothes and skin singed from my spells, and channeled the ethereal blue shield around her body. I’d expected her to gate out again, but apparently failing the Lich lord once was as much as she was willing to handle. Despite that, we both knew it was over. I slammed a double gout of **Flame Jets** into her shield, emptying the rest of her mana and bringing her to her knees. She crouched there panting, completely out of options. Unlike my skill set, once a Wizard was out of mana, they were basically useless. She wouldn’t even be able to gate out now.

Ignoring my defanged opponent, I turned back to the other battle that raged across the clearing. Haxor had always been a skilled player and a difficult opponent, but his specialty was fighting casters—a raid-gearred main tank Paladin five levels higher than him was giving him real trouble. Topper was still nearly at full health, regenerating it as quickly as Haxor could damage him, but he’d managed to whittle Haxor down to 54% while I’d dealt with Lefay. I still had some mana left, but I held my spells in reserve, remembering what Topper had told me about this being *his* fight.

There were other things I could do, though. With Lefay and Haxor distracted, they couldn’t keep the suppression spell active on Jazzus anymore. I saw her stir inside the energy cage and rushed to her side, watching her from just beyond the blue energy bars. She looked a little pale, but otherwise okay.

“Hang in there Jazzus!” I told her. “We’ll have you out soon.”

“Lacey? You came for me...” she murmured, lifting a shaky hand to her temple.

“Of course I did! I wouldn’t ever let my friends down.”

While I tended to Jazzus, Haxor and Topper’s duel continued with unabated ferocity. Haxor was still losing—badly—and Topper shrugged off everything that Haxor could throw at him. Lefay and I watched from opposite sides of the battle as the Spellblade grew more and more frantic in his attempts to dodge and counterattack.

When Haxor popped his final **Agility** cooldown and flipped backward a few meters to escape another of Topper’s nasty swings, the two men paused their flurry of blows to catch their breaths. They stared at one another with narrowed, angry eyes. For a moment, Haxor’s face softened and his daggers dropped just a little. It looked like he wanted to say something to Topper—but it wasn’t that kind of fight. Topper launched himself across the space separating them and slammed the pommel of his blade into Haxor’s face, stunning and blinding him with a **Pommel Bash**. While the Spellblade reeled and windmilled from the surprise attack, Topper took the opportunity to step around his clumsy swings and lay into him again and again with the righteous edge of his blade. Haxor fell to the ground, defeated, and at the last possible minute Topper tossed a **Flash Heal** at him so he wouldn’t die.

He crunched over in his steel boots and brought one down hard on Haxor’s shoulder, driving him into the arid dirt. Haxor was at 2% health and in no condition to fight back. He coughed out some dust and laid his cheek against the ground, body going limp.

Topper stepped back, slammed his blade tip-first into the ground, and leaned once more on the pommel.

“Why did you do it, Haxor?” the Paladin demanded, shaking his head at his former friend. “You owe me that much. Are you really so scared of Vierdimin you didn’t think we could beat him together? None of this had to happen this way.”

Haxor coughed again and slowly pushed himself to a kneeling crouch under Topper’s stern glare. “You’re underestimating the Lich,” he murmured quietly. “You think I *want* to do this, Topper? You think I’d be on his side if I really believed we could beat him?”

“Why wouldn’t you trust us? You make me sick. Where I come from, loyalty matters. Friendships matter. You don’t throw your friends over the side as soon as the going gets tough.” Topper spit on the ground. It landed

inches from Haxor, and the Spellblade flinched. “He wouldn’t be fighting us if he wasn’t at least a little scared. Have a little courage.”

Again the sad, faraway look flashed across Haxor’s face, but then his face hardened again. “Everything I’ve seen since joining **The Secret Order** has convinced me I made the right call,” he replied. “You’re my friend, Topper. You always will be. I’m sorry I let you down. But when Vierdimin wins, you’re all fucked. And me? I don’t plan to be here.”

“Look out!” I shouted as Haxor grabbed for an object at his belt.

He leapt toward Topper, swinging it wildly. Topper slid back just in time, yanking and raising his blade from the ground once again.

“You’re still going to fight us?” Topper growled. “Fuck you, Haxor.”

“What is it?” I asked, taking a quick glance at Lefay to make sure she was still behaving. She’d remained where I left her and now watched the battle with a curious expression, evidently as confused as we were about Haxor’s object.

“Just a little something special Vierdimin gave me as a last resort,” Haxor said. He brandished it toward Topper, and I could see it was a small, metal cone, about the size of a dagger, with a razor-sharp point. “It won’t hurt Lacey, but it’ll freeze your ass permanently, Topper—GM style character suspension, with no cure.”

*How can Vierdimin make something that simulated a GM character suspension?* I wondered. It was a tool they only used when a really disruptive player was creating problems, until they had a chance to deal with the chaos. It totally shut down the in-game avatar of a player, and it wasn’t anything that a player should be able to make in-game. But I wasn’t sure why I was surprised at anything Vierdimin could do anymore. He might have limits, but he was obviously getting better at circumventing them.

“Yeah, well it looks like you need to get close enough to hit me with it for it to work,” Topper growled. “Come on then, asshole. You feel lucky enough to land a blow before I cut you down? Or you think I’m going to be able to take you out and use your little toy against Vierdimin myself?”

Lefay chose that moment to finally make a break for it. She lurched into a hasty scramble toward the exit, but I spotted her just in time. I raced over and tackled her, rolling end over end through the dust with the dark elf and finally came out on top of her.

“Get off me!” she sputtered. She struggled hard and was much stronger than I expected—I was still used to my male body’s strength—but weight

counted more than strength here, and I was just heavy enough to keep her down.

“Hurry, Topper!” I shouted as I struggled to keep Lefay’s shoulders down. “We’re wasting too much time! Jazzus is who we need. Grab her and let’s go!”

Haxor licked his lips and blinked nervously at Topper, his outstretched hand shaking. It didn’t look like he really wanted to try his luck against the Paladin, but Topper was done playing games. He took a step toward Haxor. Then another step.

“Stay back! I’ll use this! I don’t want to, but god damn it, Topper, I will!” He shuffled backwards as Topper approached. His back would be against the wall soon. He looked wildly to his left and then his right. “Don’t make me do this!”

“Damn it, you pussy! Man up and go for it!” Lefay screamed from beneath me. “Vierdimin will be pissed at both of us if we fuck this up!”

Haxor shook his head and cursed under his breath. “He really will, won’t he? Fuck. Fuck! Why can’t you all just give in like I have? You don’t know what he’s capable of. He’d go easier on all of us if we just do what he wants. ”

“You’re an idiot if you believe that, Haxor,” Topper replied. “When has Vierdimin ever kept his word? He’s going to fuck you over just like everyone else.” Finally, Topper’s voice softened. “Come on, man. What are you doing? This isn’t you. Throw the weapon down and help us out. We can beat him together. I *know* we can. Think about all those times we fought together, all the times we had each other’s backs. This isn’t any different. You *know* you can trust me.”

Frustration, fear, and desperation warred on Haxor’s face. I held my breath.

After a long, tense moment, Haxor dropped his gaze and slowly lowered the cone to his side. He gestured, and the energy cage around Jazzus winked out. She climbed unsteadily to her feet.

“What are you doing, you moron?” Lefay shrieked.

The tip of Topper’s greatsword dipped down, and a smile broke across his face. “I knew it! I knew you wouldn’t really betray us, Haxor.”

Haxor turned his back to Topper and cast a sad look over his shoulder. “You always were too brave for your own good, Topper.”

Before either of us could react, Haxor leapt the few meters to where

Jazzus had just regained her footing and thrust the cone into her stomach.

“Jazzus!” I cried helplessly while Topper closed the distance and cut Haxor down with a final blow. The Spellblade’s body hit the ground, disintegrating on impact, and left his gear in a smoking pile. Jazzus staggered into Topper’s arms and fell, clutching the sharp metal cone protruding from her stomach.

She gazed up at him with wide eyes, struggling to speak.

“Jazzus? Jazzus!” he cried, clutching her tightly.

I didn’t care what happened to Lefay anymore. I let her go and rushed to Jazzus’s side, yanking the cone out with a quick jerk. I knew she shouldn’t really be in pain, but the fear on her face was real, and unlike anything I’d ever seen in game before. Her mouth moved, but only moans emerged. A blueish gray splotch of flesh had begun to grow outward from the entry point of her stab wound and spread slowly across her body.

“Can’t you heal her, Topper? Do something!”

He shook his head, his face a mask of desperation. “I can’t, Lacey! It’s not a normal injury. It’s a GM suspension. I’ve seen it once before. She’s going to freeze up.”

I fell to my knees, clutching her hand. “Jazzus! Jazzus, listen to me. You’re going to be okay. This isn’t over. We’re going to... we’re going to get Vierdimin. Somehow. And we’re going to make him reverse this. Don’t be afraid! We won’t abandon you.”

I could tell she was trying to talk, but the blueish-gray color had spread to her throat now with no signs of slowing. Her eyes were wild, but for the briefest of moments I felt her fingers tighten on my hand. She trusted me to save her. She trusted me to get her out of this.

Then I felt her stiffen as the pallid, grayish color spread to the top of her face and snaked out through her golden hair, sapping the color from it like the dying embers of a fire turning to ash.

Her grip loosened, and Jazzus’s hand grew cold.

## Chapter 35

Haxor was beaten, but Jazzus was gone. It wasn't a win in my book. We owed her more than that.

Topper settled her gray, lifeless body gently onto the ground with a grim expression, and silence reigned for a long moment. The situation felt hopeless. Rescuing Jazzus had been the key to our whole plan, and the only way we'd thought of to find Vierdimin. Now, we had nothing. Had we really come all this way just to crash headlong into a dead end? It didn't seem fair.

"What do we do now?" I whispered.

Topper didn't reply. He just shook his head. Then he spun on his heel and drove his fist into the rock wall beside him, crunching into it with a powerful blow.

I understood the feeling.

"Why did you wait so long to call me?" he growled. "I could... I don't know, I could have done something, maybe. Something different."

"No. I didn't call you because I was eavesdropping. You won't believe what I saw, but... I'll fill you in on the way back to Jaiden's Crossing."

The timing didn't seem right to tell him about Kromgorn being back in game, and I wanted more time to think about it anyway. I still couldn't begin to figure out how it had happened, or what Vierdimin's crew was planning to do with him.

Topper dropped his fist and let out a long sigh. "I'm sorry, Lacey. I'm not really mad at you. I'm just mad at myself. I shouldn't have killed Haxor so quickly," he said. "It was reckless and dumb."

I reached out a hand and placed it softly on his shoulder, letting it rest there for a moment. The cool steel of his pauldrons shook slightly beneath my palm, and I realized his whole body was trembling. Was the poor guy really that worked up? But then, he'd always taken team losses personally, and this was like a triple loss for us.

"It's okay, Topper," I said. "We didn't need him. You did the right thing, even if you couldn't save Jazzus."

"We didn't even find out who robbed the guild bank. You might have been right about it being Haxor. I thought I knew him, but... I guess not as well as I thought I did."

"I don't think so, actually." I frowned, waffling again on whether I

should tell him about Kromgorn. It seemed obvious now that he was the one who had robbed us, before he dropped his guild tag. There was no reason not to tell Topper, but for some reason, I hesitated... maybe I was embarrassed to have my old character associating with our sworn enemies.

"It doesn't matter anymore," I said. "Look, we need to get a move on. The things I heard earlier were pretty scary. I think you're right about Vierdimin's plans to cut the server over to a private instance. We don't have any time to waste, and now we have to find some other mage to help us."

The scuff of a boot against dusty stone drew my attention back to Lefay, who had been quietly trying to crawl away again while Topper and I were talking. I'd almost completely forgotten about her in the chaos around Jazzus.

"Hey! Oh no you don't!" I cried.

Now that her cover was blown, she scrambled to her feet and tried to take off running, but once again I slammed into her in a full-body tackle that sent the two of us rolling through the dust. This time *she* came out on top, and as much as I struggled I couldn't get her off of me.

"You bitch! Let go of me!"

"Why are you so difficult!" she shouted, shaking my shoulders while we wrestled together on the ground. "Why can't you just give up and go along with this? Don't you understand that he's going to punish us all for your bullshit? Aargh!"

I grabbed a chunk of her hair and yanked while she screeched, and then I got to experience my first full-on cat-fight as a woman, complete with scratching, yowling, and furious flailing.

A strong hand suddenly closed around the fabric at my neck and yanked me away from her. Topper held both of us off the ground by our shirts, one in each gauntlet. I swayed there with a chagrined expression, but Lefay continued to kick and spit like a cornered cat, fighting against his implacable grip.

"Knock it off," he rumbled. "We don't have time for this. You said it yourself, Lacey."

Then he slammed Lefay with his long-lasting cooldown ability **Divine Stun**, and she went limp in his hand.

"That'll hold her until we get back to Jaiden's Crossing, I think."

He set me down, and I dusted myself off, making a face. "What are we going to do with her?"

Topper looked thoughtful. “Well... we still need a mage, right?”

I blinked at him in surprise. “Her? No way. You really think she’d help us find Vierdimin?”

It hadn’t even occurred to me, but now that Topper had suggested it... She was one of the highest level mages left on the server, and the only one we had handy at the moment. It was worth *trying* to get her to help, at least.

“Why not? You seem to have a knack for pissing her off, if you want to take a run at her. Meanwhile, I can go take a flight around Lorengarde and see if I can find anyone else who’s in our faction and might be willing to help us. They’re both long shots, but they’re better than nothing.”

They were only *slightly* better than nothing, in my opinion. I’d seen so few players since Vierdimin locked us all in game that Topper’s “fly around and try to find them” strategy seemed ludicrous, and our only other option was to try to get his highest-ranked lieutenant to turn on him. But I couldn’t argue with Topper’s logic. I nodded slowly.

“Yeah, I have a few tricks up my sleeve for her.” I smiled to myself as I remembered our last encounter. If she couldn’t gate away, maybe I *could* coerce her into helping us, unless Kromgorn had really put the fear of the lich into her. “Why don’t you take Jazzus on your wyvern, and I’ll carry Lefay. If we’re going to drop one of them, I’d rather drop her.”

I glared at the unconscious dark elf as Topper dumped her onto the ground and went to carefully lift Jazzus onto his shoulder. We carried them both to the dungeon exit and then flew them back to Jaiden’s Crossing, where we returned to the same inn we’d left Saintly at. He was sitting at the bar, chatting quietly with a barkeep named Dirth who looked suspiciously like Kirth and was polishing a similarly always-dirty mug. Saintly raised his mug to us in greeting, and Topper glared at him.

“Are you *still* drinking?” Topper demanded.

“No no no,” Saintly protested quickly. “Shobering up rapidly, I assure you. Thish ish water.” He pointed at his mug and then held it out. Topper gave a quick sniff and then a satisfied nod.

“Good. Come on Lacey, let’s bring Lefay upstairs.”

Topper settled Jazzus’s still body into one of the inn’s chairs and tossed a coin to the innkeeper to rent a room while I dragged Lefay’s body up the steps with thudding jolts on each one. I wished she could have actually gotten bruises, but I knew she wouldn’t—it was more for my own entertainment. We tied her to a chair so she couldn’t cast, which was as effective in its own

way as an energy cage and required an **Escape Artist** check to get out of on her own, which I was almost certain she hadn't bothered training. No one ever did because it was so rare to actually get caught and tied up like this without NPCs or guildies interfering.

Lefay had started to come around from her stun while Topper was tightening the final knots. She shook her head and blinked at the room around her, and then began to wiggle her wrists and tug at the bonds in frustration.

"Oh, you have got to be fucking kidding me," she hissed. "What do you cretins think you're doing?"

Topper looked me in the eyes. "You've got your mission—I've got mine. You good?"

I nodded. I was actually looking forward to getting another crack at Lefay. Her stupid homophobic attitudes had pissed me off from the beginning. Topper walked out of the room and slammed the door, and I crossed my arms and regarded Lefay with a cold stare.

"What do we do now, slag?" she asked.

"Why are you such a cunt?"

"Why are *you* such a cunt?"

Things were off to a really great start. I sighed.

"Okay, look. You're tied up. We're stuck here for a while together. Can we just agree to like, set aside the bitchy banter and talk? We're both stuck here right now. Why be jerks about it?"

Lefay stared at me sullenly, which I took as her agreement. She'd always been a bitch, but at least she was reasonable. *Maybe that's something I can work with...*

"I'm sorry I called you a cunt," I said. I wasn't really, but maybe extending an olive branch would help ease the tension a little.

"I'm not telling you anything." Her eyes narrowed. "No matter what gross things you do to me."

"You are so squicked out about the gay thing... What's your deal, anyway?"

"Oh, sorry. I didn't realize it was weird to think chicks trying to get on other chicks was gross. Oh wait, no, it's not weird at all—still gross, dude."

"You know, a lot of people think homophobia is a sign of internalized homosexuality."

"Where'd you get that, a textbook? Look, I'm not here for an 'it's okay to be gay' lecture. Not every girl you run into is going to be into chicks. Deal

with it.”

This wasn’t getting me anywhere, and it occurred to me that I was doing exactly what Vierdimin wanted me to do: Wasting time arguing with Lefay about something pointless while his master plan fell into place.

I slumped onto the wooden floor and huffed in frustration. “You’re captured, and you’re not going anywhere, and we’re running out of time, so I’m just going to lay out what I want. We have a way to find Vierdimin. We need a mage to cast a divination spell on his unique staff, which will lead us right to him. But without Jazzus, we don’t have a mage. We need you to cast the spell for us.”

I could swear that the wizard almost looked impressed for a second, but she quickly stilled her face. “That’s clever. But tell me this, if we’re being all touchy-feely honest: What exactly do you plan to do when you find him? I’m telling you this out of self-preservation, but that guy is scary. I joined his guild because I wanted people to group with, and when he started talking about living in game forever, the idea was attractive to me. But after a while, I started thinking about what he could *do* if he was all powerful and this became our new life instead of just a game. It’s not a fun thought. That’s why I do everything I can to do what he wants, and you should too.”

It was the most information, and the most honest information, I’d ever heard come out of the elf’s mouth—and the least vulgarity too—and I was honestly shocked to be having a real conversation with her.

“What can he do, exactly?” I asked slowly, hoping to pry a little more intel out of her moment of vulnerability. But Lefay was too clever for that.

“Nothing he hasn’t already demonstrated,” she muttered. “Hacking into some GM tools he shouldn’t have access to. Locking players into the game.” She gave me a pointed look. “Steal people’s accounts and log in as their characters.”

A chill ran across me and lifted the downy hairs on the back of my neck. “That was *Vierdimin* in my body?”

Lefay rolled her eyes at me. “You really are dense if you didn’t figure that out. Do you think I’d take that bullshit from anyone but him?”

“But how can he be piloting Krom if he’s stuck in the game like the rest of us?”

She shook her head. “No idea. I told you. The dude is scary. He has some way to jump between avatars now, too.” Lefay hesitated, indecision playing across her face. “I shouldn’t tell you this much, but it doesn’t really

matter anymore. You can't beat him. And you've obviously figured out what his plan is. When we're all trapped here together, he's going to get his entertainment torturing us for the rest of eternity."

I shuffled over and put my hands on her knees so I could meet her face to face. "Lefay. Listen to me. He's obviously got you scared, but he hasn't won yet. Why would he be working so hard against us if it was really hopeless. We can beat him. You can help. Help us beat Vierdimin and let's end this nightmare for everyone."

A shadow of doubt flickered across her face, and I leaned forward eagerly, hoping that she'd choose to help. But then her expression hardened. "He preys on weakness. You're a dumb fucking bitch. Get your hands off me, lesbo."

I yanked my hands back and glared at her in frustration. Still with the homophobia! Was she really so terrified of the lich that she wouldn't take a shot to help spring all of us, even after everything she'd told me?

"You know what?" I said. "If you're *that* scared of catching 'the gay' because a girl hits on you, let me fix the problem for you."

I'd had enough of her bullshit, and it was time to teach her a lesson. In a sudden stroke of brilliance, the perfect punishment had come to me: I waved my hand dramatically in her direction and said, "**Major Glamour.**"

Nobody specialized in illusion magic, because as Erlix had explained to me, it was perceived to be the weakest school. But that meant that people overlooked gems like this spell, which let me physically alter the body of another player. In old-school tabletop games, spells like this would have just been silly fun. But in a game where you actually inhabited the body of your avatar, it became an interesting offensive spell. Because of how personal it was, the check to inflict it on unwilling targets was really, really high. But I had 32 Charisma. *Good luck resisting that, Lefay.*

I watched with the utmost satisfaction as her long, beautiful white hair retracted toward her scalp, and the feminine curves of her body rearranged themselves along with her robes. Where moments before, a beautiful, female dark elf had been tied up in the chair, a extremely handsome and well-muscled dark elf *male* now sat before me, wearing only a baggy pair of pants. He frowned at me suspiciously.

"I feel really, really weird," he said in a deep, male voice. "What the fuck did you do to me? Oh Jesus. My voice. And is that... that feeling in my pants... do I have a *dick*?"

I'd turned Lefay into a dude. Not an illusion of a dude, but an actual dude, for the entire duration of the spell. With my Charisma being at a godlike level, it would be *quite* some time before he'd get to turn back into a girl. Maybe weeks. Base duration was 24 hours on this spell.

"There you go," I told him, resting a hand on my hip and raising an eyebrow. "Now you don't have to worry about being gay anymore if I touch you."

I expected him to curse, struggle, maybe threaten me. Maybe to cry or beg or plead to change him back, considering how grossed out he'd acted all the time by the fact that I was a guy in a body of a chick. But I was *not* prepared for him to burst out laughing. He looked down at his new body and flexed his muscles, checking out the bulging biceps and rippling pecs of his new, manly form.

Lefay almost seemed *pleased*.

"I didn't have any idea there was a spell that did this..." he murmured. "I feel so strong and tough."

It was such a weird reaction that my mouth dropped open in surprise. I'd meant this to be a punishment for him! Did he actually *like* that I'd turned him into a dude? What a weird chick.

But then the pieces started coming together for me: She'd wanted to live inside a videogame because she didn't like the real world. She reacted explosively and over-the-top about me being in a cross-gender body, way more than most people. Was it possible that she wasn't squicked out by me coming onto her because she was grossed out by *my* body, but rather because she'd been grossed out by *hers*?

A brilliant, new idea began to form. I scooched closer to Lefay, positioning myself between his knees, and looked up at him again with my dirtiest smile. "Say, Lefay... How would you like to have your dick sucked?"

His cheeks darkened to a shade of deep indigo in what I assumed was a dark elf blush, and he swallowed nervously. "I... I..." he stammered. It was the first time I'd ever seen Lefay at a loss for words. That was when I knew I had him. I smiled and reached inside his pants, using all the feminine charms I'd learned over the last few days while I was stuck in the game to make myself as sexy and appealing as possible. I sighed and giggled, brushed my tits against his knees, and ran my other hand up his inner thigh while I slowly drew his stiffening cock out.

"Oh god, that feels good," he moaned. As a former guy myself, I knew

*exactly* how good it felt for him. His whole demeanor had changed now that I was holding his cock in my hand—almost shy, instead of cocky and pissed-off, but definitely eager. I could see the lust in his eyes and how much he liked my touch. Whatever was going on inside Lefay’s head, his body was reacting *exactly* like a real dude. I wondered how long Lefay had secretly fantasized about being a man.

As I began to slowly slide my hand up and down his cock, teasing him with my eyes, it occurred to me that this was the first time I’d been this intimate with a real player since Jazzus. It was exciting and different from being with an NPC. Knowing that there was a real person behind those lust-filled, indigo eyes, experiencing the building, throbbing anticipation of a pleased cock for the very first time made playing with the dark elf almost as exciting as getting fucked myself. Just a few days before this, I would have been worried about all kinds of silly things—what this meant about me, whether it was gay to be doing what I was doing right now, what it said about Lefay that she was enjoying it.

But now that I’d had a lot of experience as Lacey behind me, those questions seemed unimportant. We were just two people, two players, here in this space together. And I was going to do my damned best to make sure she had fun with it.

Lefay’s head tilted back with his lips slightly parted, moaning in appreciation as I jerked him with quick, delicate movements.

“Ooh, yeah, yeah...” he murmured. I pulled my hand away and he frowned. “W-wait. Why did you stop?”

I smiled and stood, slowly unwinding my makeshift clothing from my body. His eyes nearly popped out of his head as the loosened bandages fell away from my breasts, allowing them to swing freely. Next I undid the tie that held the sarong-like wrap at my waist in place, letting it fall to my feet. I smiled at Lefay and arched my back, coming up onto my tiptoes as I stretched and thrust my chest out prominently.

His gaze slid up and down my body in an appreciative manner, lingering on the downy patch that led the way to my sex, and his cock hardened again after its brief respite from my silky fingertips. I moved closer to the bound elf and then lowered myself to sit on his lap, cradling his stiff rod against my increasingly wet slit, and rocked against him, pressing my soft breasts into his dark, muscled chest while I held his hungry stare. I looped my arms behind his neck and brushed my lips lightly against his, exhaling as I

did so, knowing that the scent of a female breath would drive his male body wild. My own urges were growing as well. I was starting to need him as badly as I knew he needed me.

“Do you want this, Lefay?” I whispered. “There’s no judgment here. I won’t try to control you. I won’t be cruel to you. And if you want, I’ll let you fuck me.”

His eyes widened slightly and he sucked in a quick breath, his muscles tightening beneath my thighs. I rubbed my cheek against his face, letting my soft hair trail over his skin, and rocked harder against his cock.

“Yes,” he replied. “God, yes.”

As soon as he’d given his consent, I lifted myself up and plunged down onto his hard, girthy member, crying out in delight as he slid easily inside of me. He stretched me out, but I was so wet that the size of his massive cock was hardly an impediment—I could expand to take it all. And I did take it all, rocking up and down and back and forth, moving my hips in a gyrating rhythm and grinding my hot, slick cunt against his member in a wild frenzy of need. I dropped my head back too, nodding along with the motion while I rode the bound elf like a stallion, my pleasure building with each passing moment.

His moans and groans had turned into frenzied grunts of need, and as our passion crescendoed, Lefay suddenly flexed his newfound muscles and snapped the ropes that tied him in place! I might have expected him to toss me aside and make his escape, but instead his hands leapt to my back, caressing my sweet curves and grasping at my soft flesh while I rode him harder than ever.

“Oh Lefay...” I moaned.

“Call me Lee,” he demanded, in a harsh, strained voice.

He stood up from the chair in a sudden movement, carrying me along with him as though I weighed less than nothing, and slammed me against the inn wall while he continued to fuck me. Now, Lee was in charge. He held my fragile body pinned against the cool plaster while his thrusting hips slammed his sweet dick inside of me again and again. I was too lost in ecstasy to care. I hugged his chest tight and sank my teeth lightly into his shoulder for purchase, and when my orgasm came, all my muscles tightened while my hands raked across his back. Pleasure rolled through me, causing my whole body to shake, and my whimpering convulsions drew a climax out of Lee as well.

His hot seed burst inside of me, filling me up and leaking out over both of us, and he bucked again with a final, deliriously happy groan as I slumped against him, panting.

“Does this mean you’ll help us now?” I asked him with a smile, caressing his soft white hair while he held me effortlessly aloft, softening inside of me. “If you help us escape, you can do this as much as you want. No judgment. No mocking.”

He made a choking noise, looking guilty, but then nodded.

“Just don’t stop fucking me like that, and you have yourself a deal, Courtesan.”

## Chapter 36

As we thumped back down the steps to the common room of the inn, we found Saintly and Topper in an animated discussion. Saintly's drunken slur had finally dropped away, so I assumed he was finally clear-headed enough to help us out, and it sounded like Topper had been catching him up on all of the details of what we knew about Vierdimin's game hack now that he was in a more sober state. The men broke off and stared up at us in surprise as I led the bashful-looking Lee to their table and took a seat.

"That was fast," Topper remarked, taking in the newly male dark elf with a confused side-eye that practically dripped with unasked questions. "I was just about to leave to do the rounds—I figured you'd be in there for hours interrogating her... him? I assume that's Lefay..."

"This is Lee," I simply said. "Lee is going to help us out now. Any questions?"

Topper and Saintly glanced at each other and shrugged while Lee coughed into his hand and muttered, "Vierdimin is going to kill me for this."

"Hang on a minute," Saintly said. "So let me get this straight—you're a dude in a chick's body, but he's a chick who apparently is now a dude, and... well, we heard you both fucking up there. You fucked the dark elf onto our side? Jesus, how do you people keep this straight? I have a hard-on just thinking about all of it."

Lee's cheeks turned a deeper shade of purplish-blue and he stared at the tabletop uncomfortably, but I just shrugged.

"Don't worry about it. It's none of your business. We've come to an understanding. The point is that he's with us now. Cool?"

"That's an awful lot of trust you're asking us to put in someone who we tied up 20 minutes ago," Topper said.

"Do you have a better option, Topper? Now you don't have to go canvas for players and just hope you bump into someone who can cast a divination spell. It's not like he can fake the spell. Just trust him on this one."

"Nobody works for Vierdimin because they want to," Lee said quietly. "We do it because we're scared. I still don't think you can beat him, but I'd like to see you try." Then he leaned back in his chair and rolled his shoulders, his eyes drifting over to take in my body again. "I can always say you coerced me later if it comes down to it."

Topper's mouth screwed into a skeptical frown. "Still... you just flip sides after a good fuck? And as a glamoured dude? I don't get it."

Something like anger flashed through Lee's eyes. "You don't have to get it, dude. Just accept that I changed my mind, okay? It's between me and Lacey. Now tell me what you want me to do before I change my mind."

Topper stared at Lee for a long moment, but finally he sighed and leaned forward, resting his mailed hands on the table.

"All right. Fine. So let's talk through this again. I just caught Saintly up to speed, and I explained my theory to him: That Vierdimin is hoping the game gets shut down due to public pressure so that he can shunt us all over to a private server he's prepared, where he'll have full, godlike powers in game—powers he doesn't have now—to do whatever he wants with us. Forever."

His last word had a chilling finality to it, and the weight of it seemed to suck all the air out of the room.

"What do you think?" I asked Saintly. "Topper filled you in. Is that even possible?"

If anyone could gauge the likelihood of such a scenario occurring, it would be one of the devs who coded the game. He should know the game backwards and forwards, so if Vierdimin was abusing some kind of loophole in the code, shouldn't Saintly know?

But Saintly looked thoughtful and paused for a long time before answering. "I... don't know, actually. Maybe. It's a really sophisticated hack, and honestly, I'm not sure how he's doing any of these things. He's using some GM powers he just straight-up shouldn't have access to, but it seems like there are limits on it... since you can't modify game code while the game is running without a recompile, that shouldn't be possible. And it certainly shouldn't be possible to lock us all in game like he did."

"Wait a minute," Topper protested. "What about client-side hacks? People have been hacking games for decades since the data streams from a central server to a local client and then makes a round trip. Couldn't he have modified his client?"

A lot of their conversation was going over my head—I'd never been a programmer or even much interested in it, but I'd been a gamer for long enough to get the basics of what they were saying. It sounded like they were suggesting that Vierdimin was doing some kind of manipulation on the programs on his local computer, and somehow that affected the game itself... or something. I was glad that Topper and Saintly knew enough to piece this

together, even if I didn't.

"I just want to know how to fix it," I said. "Who cares how it happened? How do we undo it?"

Saintly huffed. "Well the first step of undoing it is understanding what we need to undo, man. Come on. You think code is magic? There's a logical order to all this. Somehow Vierdimin broke that order, and he totally shouldn't have been able to. And Topper, in response to your question, no... I don't think he could have hacked the client side code. Give us a little credit. We're running a billion-dollar business here. All of the calculations are done server side and streamed to the client. All we get back is input and a representation of the player's body-state."

"Wait a minute... what about the local data files?" Topper asked.

"Like the zone code and stuff? Sure. That's all static. There's no reason not to store that locally. If it differs from what we expect, the client gets bounced, and it's all checked when the game loads. But there's still no way for him to modify live code while messing with the zone files."

"Hm." Topper said.

They both paused, apparently stumped. I looked helplessly at Lee.

"Do you know anything about the Lich or his plans that could help us out here, Lee?"

He chewed his lip for a moment. "Not really. You've all pieced together about as much as I have, but the Lich doesn't share his plans with anyone. Information is delivered on a need to know basis. He told us his plan was to turn the game into a playground where we could live forever, as gods, which sounded like a pretty good deal until I got to know the dude a little better." He shivered. "I don't think I'd want to spend eternity with that guy, now. Sliding us over to a private instance is the only way I can think of that working, too. It's the only place he could have server code prepped that would give him the full, unlimited GM powers he wants."

Saintly nodded along with him while he spoke, and I was impressed by how much everyone seemed to know about the tech behind the game. Even Erlix had done more research than I had. I made a mental note to learn more about it as soon as we all got out of this mess.

"Oh!" Lee exclaimed. "There's one other thing. That staff... the one you want me to locate for you? I think it's important somehow. He got really excited when it dropped, and it was shortly thereafter that he started producing all these crazy items and things."

Saintly sat up in his chair so abruptly that he knocked an empty mug over on the table. “Shit. Shit shit shit. You said it was the **Lv. 80 Staff of Matter Manipulation**, right?”

All three of us nodded, and then Saintly got up from the table, stomped around the room, and released a string of expletives a mile long.

“Fucking fucking fuck, that motherfucking no good intern. I told him to double-check his goddamn code and not be so lazy, but did that kid listen to me? No. He’s a fucking idiot hacker who wouldn’t know real code if it slapped him in the face.”

He sank back down into his chair, arms crossed, in an angry huff. I shared a concerned look with Topper.

“What is it, Saintly?” I asked.

He sighed. “We hired an intern last summer. A real fresh kid. The CEO’s nephew—Ronny. Thought he was a hotshot, but he was lazy as fuck. He complained to his uncle we were giving him all the shit assignments—which we were, because his code was so damn buggy—but the CEO raised a big stink and made us give him a real project. We put him on high-end weapon design since it seemed like the code where he could do the least damage. Apparently not! The concept for that staff is an item that can change the physical reality of the world around us at the will of the caster, but not players, mobs, or anything living. Because it messes with the live game, you have to be really careful with the code and provide catches so that no one can fuck something up and crash the game when they’re manipulating world objects. I told him to get a review for his item, but he didn’t, and the code went in untested. When I looked at it later, it looked off to me, but I was busy and didn’t delve too deeply. But now... obviously he missed a catch. My guess is that it’s not altering an instanced, separated copy of the item like it’s supposed to... it’s altering the item where it sits in the game code. Alter it in just the right way, and the code can bleed into other items. A stray semicolon can totally change the program... and it’s live code. No need to recompile.”

I blinked at him. “And... what the hell does that mean? In English, please?”

Saintly rubbed his eyes and puffed his cheeks out, like he was trying to explain this to five year old and was very frustrated about it.

“Okay, so... when the staff changes stuff in the game, it changes the actual code that defines the item. Someone with a good idea of what that code looked like, or a good assumption from a background in programming, could

modify the attributes in such a way to gain access to other things without changing the server-side code. Things they shouldn't be able to have access to, like the GM powers that froze your friend Jazzus over there. It sounds like Vierdimin got ahold of Ronny's stupid staff and is doing exactly that. Fucking hell."

I'd have to take his word for it. It seemed insane that a simple glitch could have such far-reaching power! I could tell from the look on Topper's face that he was just as skeptical as I was.

"Is that really possible?" Topper asked. "I know a little about coding, and it still seems like you'd need to have some kind of injection to let you access different parts of the code."

Saintly nodded. "You would, but you could prepare that for insertion via a local script once the staff opened a backdoor for you. Anyone who knew about the loophole could have something ready and do the kinds of things your Lich Lord is doing. At least the high-level server controls prevent him from doing anything crazy right now—even with a back door, he can't have full GM powers or wear ultra-powerful stat-enhancing GM gear without a GM account. Once we're on a private server, he won't be subject to those rules anymore. Your fancy, 32-charisma score might be impressive, but it's peanuts beside GM gear. That shit tricks out your stats like crazy. I'm going to strangle that kid Ronny if I ever see him again."

"Great," I exclaimed. "So that's it then. We know the staff is key to his powers and probably his control over the game. So we just need to get the staff away from him! If we take his key away, he can't issue any of the commands any more, right? So all we have to do is kill him and shard the staff."

Everyone else lapsed into thoughtful silence, but I was psyched! This was the first real good news we'd had since this whole crazy adventure had started. We finally had a clear way to stop Vierdimin: Players dropped their gear when they died in PvP, so all we had to do was kill Vierdimin. With Lee's help we'd be able to find him, and we could close his backdoor and stop his plans before he moved us all to his private server and became an unstoppable deity inside of Fantasy Realms Online. He couldn't hurt me at all, and I had evocation magic now! I could toast him. We just needed to get me close enough and prevent him from escaping.

"But wait..." Lee said. "How is he keeping us here in game? Are you sure that closing his backdoor to the code is enough to release us?"

A frown cracked across Saintly's weathered face as he leaned back in his chair, arms crossed, considering Lee's question. "Well... that part is really concerning, honestly. Full-sim VR works by reading from and writing to your brain via your implant jack. It reads your brain state, creates a representation of you in the game world, and then beams back those sensations to write them into your brain in a constant loop so you can experience the feelings in your meat-body, which is paralyzed via the same mechanism used while you're dreaming. The tech is inherently dangerous because of the writing function. There are a *ton* of legal protections in place from the FDA and the government that tackle how to do this ethically for commercial applications, and we had to go through a bunch of testing to prove it was impossible to just randomly fry people's brains due to a bug in the read/write procedure. That said, it's possible to intentionally fuck with people's brains any time they jack themselves into a program. The same warden program that guards the GM tools would stop Vierdimin from really hurting us as long as we're on official servers, but it doesn't stop him from severing the connection of our representational brain states to the login/logout server."

My eyes had glazed over a little while he spoke, and I waved at Saintly to catch his attention. "Dude? You're rambling again. Answer Lee's question."

"Right, right. Sorry. Just thinking out loud. Uh, no. I don't think just getting ahold of the staff would be enough to release us all. You'd also have to tweak the code with his injections to unlock the login/logout server so that our brain states could be written back to our bodies. Whatever he did, it seems like it severed the connection to that server, which is why disconnecting players is just leaving them in comas. Their 'real' minds are stuck inside the game. Just like ours are."

"All of this sounds really, *really* dangerous..." I said.

"The exposure to that kind of danger is unavoidable with the way the underlying tech works—it's just that the government has made it very, *very* illegal to fuck around with it. Like go to jail for the rest of your life illegal. People don't hack into games and mess with it for the same reasons people don't usually murder their neighbors and take their stuff. It's not worth the risk even for sociopaths. I don't know if this Vierdimin guy knows how much trouble he's in, but he's playing for keeps. If he wins, he gets to be a god. If he loses, he's going to jail forever."

“So he’ll be desperate,” Topper noted. “No wonder he’s planned so carefully for all of this.”

I shivered, regretting getting my VR jack for the first time in my life. I knew that it was dangerous when I got it, but they were so common now... I thought the warnings were like any other EULA I just scrolled past and agreed to. I’d never really thought about how vulnerable I was making myself to hackers, probably because marketers didn’t want me thinking about that.

“So what happens when the game shuts down?” I asked, as a light sweat broke out across my body. “Do we all... do we all just die?”

Saintly laughed. “God, no! Any time the game shuts down, player states are stored in local memory and restored to the bodies of the players.” Then he paused, frowning. “Or that’s what’s supposed to happen... with the backdoor hack, I’m less sure.”

Topper spoke up. “But it doesn’t matter for us, because even if we do get uploaded back into our bodies when they restart the server—and that’s a big thing to gamble your life on—from our perspective, we’d still be copied over to Vierdimin’s private server... with no bodies to be uploaded back to. Right?”

My blood ran cold as I considered his words. “You mean I’d be stuck as Lacey forever?”

“Stuck as Lacey and also as Vierdimin’s plaything,” Lee muttered.

“Fuck,” I breathed.

“If I can get my hands on the staff, I might be able to reverse the code injection that’s blocking the login server and we could all jack out before they shut the game down,” Saintly noted. “Assuming we have time for that.”

“We may not have much time,” Topper said. “The last report I got from Iciez was that things had gotten really heated politically over this whole situation. The owners will be under massive pressure to take the game offline and fuck the consequences.”

“So we need to find Vierdimin and do some damage control as soon as possible,” I said. “No wonder he’s trying to slow us down.”

“Right,” Topper agreed. “So we know the plan now. We find Vierdimin, take him down, and get Saintly the staff so he can tinker around with the code and release us before the game gets shut down. Let’s not waste any more time. Lee, I assume you don’t have **Detect Object** memorized—I took the liberty of buying the spell.”

He produced a rolled scroll from his bag and laid it out on the table. Lee

grabbed it and closed his eyes, and after a moment the scroll faded away.

“You want me to cast it now?” he asked.

Topper nodded. “Target all of us. The item should be the nearest **Lv. 80 Staff of Matter Manipulation.**”

Lee smiled. “Easy. Man, Vierdimin is going to be furious when he finds out how easily you all tracked him down. I’m impressed. This might be the biggest misstep he’s ever made.”

“It hasn’t exactly been easy,” I grumbled.

Lee ignored me, closing his eyes and whispering a quick incantation. He glowed with a purple light, and then suddenly a new buff flashed onto my HUD called **Detect Object**. Suddenly, I knew exactly where the nearest **Lv. 80 Staff of Matter Manipulation** was. It was like a solid line drawn straight from my head, in my mind’s eye, to a specific destination. I could see from their expressions that everyone else was experiencing the same thing.

“You have got to be kidding me,” Topper muttered.

I groaned.

Vierdimin was hiding in the most obvious place possible, and the last place we would have thought to look for him: The illusionary line leading us to his staff pointed us right to the middle of the **Plains of Woe**, where the **Secret Order** guildhouse was located. He must have returned there after he fled from the plains during our last battle.

“Right in plain sight,” Topper complained, shaking his head in disgust. “I feel so dumb.”

“Yeah, but he *could* have been anywhere!” I protested. “Now we know where to find him. Are we ready to round up the guild for another all-out assault?”

“What’s to stop him just from gating out when we arrive?” Saintly asked.

“We’re doing it right this time,” Topper growled. “We have long-cooldown guild skills designed for large scale PvP that can lock down gating and mounted flight. I don’t usually use them because it locks us down too, and you never want to risk losing your gear like that. But we’re playing for keeps right now. It’s time to fight with everything we’ve got. I’ll activate the skills as soon as we enter the zone to ensure he can’t run away.”

I’d known about those skills, and hated the idea of using them for exactly the reasons Topper mentioned. But I knew he was right. We may as well risk everything when the alternative was being stuck in the game

forever.

“So we go round up all of our guildies and head to the **Plains of Woe**?” I asked.

Topper had begun to nod his agreement, but a sudden outburst from Saintly distracted both of us.

“Oh, shit. Oh no oh no oh no.”

His eyes had glazed over a little, and I wasn’t sure what he was talking about—but then I saw it too, scrolling across the bottom of my HUD.

*ATTN ALL PLAYERS: Game servers will be shut down for a realm-wide restart in 30 minutes. We apologize for the inconvenience.*

“God damn it,” I breathed. “Looks like Iciez wasn’t kidding about that political pressure. They finally caved. What do we do now?”

Topper’s face was grim. “No time to find our guildies. I updated the guild MOTD, and if they see the message, maybe they’ll head for the **Plains of Woe** as well. But we need to strike for Vierdimin, strike hard, and strike now, before the warden program comes down and he can copy us over to his private server.”

He whirled in place, his golden cloak spinning behind him, and headed for the inn door with an urgency to his step I’d rarely seen from the Paladin. I gathered up my things, grabbed Lee’s arm, and scrambled to follow him, with Saintly running behind us.

As we raced through **Jaiden’s Crossing** toward the sky docks where we could use our flying mounts, at the bottom of my HUD, the message scrolled past again, ticking down: *Game servers will be shut down for a realm-wide restart in 29 minutes. We apologize for the inconvenience.*

I grunted and ran faster. There was no time to lose...

## Chapter 37

We flew as fast as we could and touched down for the second time that week in the **Plains of Woe**. My eyes swept over the familiar grey territory, with its twisted black trees reaching up toward a reddish-black sky of churning clouds. The debris and bodies from our last battle had faded, the items and NPCs decaying unlooted and unclaimed in the mostly-empty server, but with the lack of an ongoing battle it seemed even more dismal now than it had the last time. I'd barely come out on top—it had been a lucky break, really. A quirk of my class. This time, however, I was a different woman than I'd been when last I'd strode across these blighted lands and battled the **The Secret Order**. Now I'd be able to really help my friends. My body blazed with the raw energy of my newly acquired talents, and I knew that even though I was ten levels lower than him, there was no way the Lich would be able to stand up to my talents in a confrontation where he'd be unable to hurt me. He wasn't a god yet!

As soon as we landed at the edge of the zone line, Topper activated his guild leader PvP skills and locked the zone for the confrontation. A chill settled over me. This would be it, then. Less than 25 minutes to go before the servers came down, and no one would be teleporting away or escaping on their flying mounts. If Vierdimin wanted to be an in-game god, he'd have to stop us in a man to man fight (or man to woman, in my case). And it wouldn't just be me I was fighting for—it was for Topper and Jazzus and Lee and all my other guildies. It was for Erlix and Saintly. It was even for Haxor and Vierdimin's stupid lieutenants, as much as I hated them, who didn't realize what they were getting themselves into. This wasn't a fight I intended to lose.

"Everyone get your buffs up," Saintly suggested.

Everyone quickly laid down their best stat-enhancing buffs on everyone else in the group, making us even stronger than we already were. Paladins, Clerics, and Wizards were three of the best buff classes in the game, so there as something for everyone: a HP boost, an AC boost, an intelligence boost, and a mana boost. Lee even had a line of Charisma-buffing spells that he'd never intended to have to use, but now it came in handy to raise my already godly Charisma from 32 to 42!

"What kind of insane spell gives a 10-point stat boost to a primary

casting stat?” Lee muttered.

“We didn’t have the Sorceress class when that spell got coded,” Saintly said defensively. “To be fair, it’s really, really hard to unlock Charisma as a casting stat.”

That was true. I was still the only class I’d heard of that used Charisma to do anything other than influence NPCs. It probably was pretty balanced to allow large Charisma bonuses under normal circumstances, and either way, I was glad for it now. I wanted all the benefits I could get before going into a fight with the Lich himself!

*ATTN ALL PLAYERS: Game servers will be shut down for a realm-wide restart in 21 minutes. We apologize for the inconvenience.*

“Enough talk,” Topper growled. “Let’s go.”

The four of us marched across the plain. We were a small force, but possibly the strongest single party left on the server. A level 75 Paladin, a level 72 Cleric, a level 70 Wizard, and the icing on the cake: A level 70 Sorceress, the most powerful caster in the game, and totally untouchable by Vierdimin thanks to my still-present **Charm** skill that served as the best shield possible against the whole of the **Secret Order**. It felt good. We might only have twenty minutes, but I was confident it would be enough time to find him and stop his mischief. It had to be.

But all of my confidence vanished as we crested a hill and saw what Vierdimin had prepared for us. My heart sank into my stomach, and I looked to Topper in desperation.

“Motherfucker,” he breathed. Neither Saintly nor Lee looked any happier than he did.

In the mile or so between us and Vierdimin’s guild house stretched an entire army of NPC foes. It wasn’t only the same NPCs that Vierdimin had hired for the last battle—oh, no. There were orcs and kobolds and ogres, but also elementals and dryads and elves. Human brigands, northern yetis, and monstrous creatures from the outer realms. The assembled horde created a living fortress of in-game monsters encircling the **Secret Order**’s tower and protecting Vierdimin from exactly the type of 12th hour push we were making now. Their levels ran the gamut from insignificant teens to high-60 named NPCs, which was about the level where they stopped being available to hire.

I could see by the variety that he hadn’t been picky—he’d been focusing on numbers, grabbing whoever was convenient for him at the easiest

price possible. That's what must have been keeping him so busy while his cronies kept us occupied. He had to have been all over the game world, striking deals with NPC leaders to come to his aid when called.

*How could he have paid the price for all these NPC contracts?* I wondered. *The cost must have been astronomical.*

But then I remembered our plundered guild bank, robbed by my own former avatar. Vierdimin wasn't paying them with *his* money. He was using ours. It must have cost every gold coin we had, and then some. He'd probably vendored the contents of our guild bank to have even more gold to spend.

"What do we do now?" asked Lee.

I shared another look with Topper, and both of us nodded.

"The only thing we can do," I replied.

Topper slammed his visor down. "We fight."

"Or we die trying," I finished.

"We don't need to kill them all," Saintly observed. "We just need to punch a hole in the crowd and get Lacey through to the tower. She's the only one who can safely fight Vierdimin, anyway, right? We can do this!"

Lee looked as skeptical as I felt inside, but I'd meant what I said. We had to try, no matter how hopeless it looked. Our friends were relying on us. We were all relying on each other. Saintly was right—all we had to do was get me to the tower. Surely we could do that in under 20 minutes, right? If we couldn't, who could?

Topper roared, held his flaming sword aloft, and rushed to meet our foes, and the other three of us swiftly followed.

I hadn't often gotten to see high-level players totally unleash their powers. Normally you wanted to play conservatively and hold a little back for emergencies, but this time we went all-in as we worked to carve a corridor through Vierdimin's army of contract NPCs. Watching my friends unload all of their firepower was a thing of sheer, destructive beauty.

Lee demonstrated the unfettered power of a raid-geared wizard as he blew massive holes in our enemies' forces: his eyes glowed with red-hot death beams that swept across their ranks as he hurled lance after lance of icy destruction into the larger NPCs, shattering them into shards on impact, and meteors rained from the sky, leaving circular walls of fire in their wake. His force shields deflected arrows and blades alike, and the smell of burnt fur and flesh quickly filled the air wherever he directed his attention.

Topper's dance of death was as fluid and majestic as ever, swinging his

fiery, epic sword in wide arcs that flung dead bodies of struck enemies out like rag dolls wherever it didn't simply cleave them in two. His golden judgments slammed down upon his foes ceaselessly, and cleansing fire radiated out from his armor with each step he took.

Even Saintly made an impressive show, keeping all four of our health bars topped off with green and gold showers of healing energy and cleansing the debuffs from when our foes did break through, and then using his excess mana to silence, stun, and force-nuke the casters that got close enough to us to try to make mischief.

As for me, I was a demon on the battlefield: my destructive magic radiated out from my fingertips as aggressively as Lee's, and I also **Charmed** new NPC pets with impunity and sent them to battle their foes until they fell, when I'd claim another. I dazzled swaths of enemies with **Vejazzle**, stunned the orc king himself with my **Motorboat**, and used my **Sexy Shadow** to hurl double the number of lightning bolts, **Flame Jets**, and icy wind breaths through the ranks of our enemies.

But for every foe who fell, it seemed there was always another NPC ready to step in and take their place. There were just too many of them, no matter how powerful we were and how quickly we felled them. We were pushing through their forces, but not quickly enough to reach Vierdimin in time!

I knew I had to do something. My friends were already giving it their all, but I still had one trick left in my bag I'd been holding back. I'd never tried it before because of the excessively long cooldown, but it was now or never.

**"Dragon Rage!"** I roared, activating my secret class ability.

Instantly, my body underwent an explosive series of changes: My wings erupted from my back with an audible crack, and my skin turned golden, scaly, and as hard as Fiero's had been. My fingertips curved into claws, and my legs elongated and shifted into three-toed wicked talons as my feminine body exploded with tough, sinewy muscles. I could feel raw, magical energy crackling through me at an unprecedented rate, and I knew that for the next two minutes, I would be a god of destruction.

I'd wanted to save this for my battle with Vierdimin, but I had to reach him in order to have that battle in the first place... I couldn't afford to waste another moment.

Now with my new, invincible scales and incredibly destructive spells, I

shouldered past Topper and led the way aggressively into the thick of the enemy forces, radiating an unceasing wave of **Chain Lightning** and lashing out with a **Flame Jet** three times the size and intensity of my previous ones. I roared arctic sheets of ice and snow onto my enemies with my **Icy Breath**, and raked any foes foolish enough to draw close to me with the razor-sharp talons at my feet.

With the awesome destructive powers of the Dragonkin sorcerers at my disposal, we carved through their forces like a hot knife through butter, clearing twice the distance we had before I'd transformed.

*ATTN ALL PLAYERS: Game servers will be shut down for a realm-wide restart in 11 minutes. We apologize for the inconvenience.*

As the updated server shutdown message flashed across my HUD, my **Dragon Rage** buff began to blink, and then it faded away entirely. It had been two minutes, and that was my last hidden talent. We'd slain our way through two thirds of Vierdimin's army, but we still had a third of his assembled forces to go through, only eleven minutes to do it, and everyone was running low on mana. Glancing back, I could see despair creeping across the faces of my allies, even as we struggled onward through the throng without slowing our pace.

"We're not going to make it!" Lee cried, calling down another shower of meteors onto a nearby group of dryads.

"Push harder!" Topper demanded.

We did, and Saintly even began lashing out with his hammer, adding a small bit of physical DPS to our group's assault in a fit of desperation, but it was obvious to everyone that the situation was grim.

"Watch out behind us!" Saintly cried suddenly.

I heard a distant, savage roar, and I whirled around to see a rolling disturbance in the ranks of foes that had closed behind our tiny group. Monsters squawked and yelled and dove out of the way, as whatever was causing it rushed toward us at a massive speed through the assembled horde, accompanied by a clamor of clashing steel and the shrieks of trampled enemies. It was some kind of huge beast! Not a dragon, even, but a... a dinosaur?

*Oh shit*, I thought as the creature's giant, floating name above its head resolved: It was a Tyrannosaurus Rex, Lv. 75, probably acquired from **The Lost Continent!**

I cursed and gritted my teeth, readying a new set of spells to unleash on

the massive beast. It was an elite mob, and I knew it would be sporting impressive resistances as good as any dragon, along with especially nasty combat stats. If we didn't have a healer with us, it might have even given Topper pause. This was the last thing we needed to be dealing with right now.

But before I could blow it to smithereens, it ducked down and closed its long-fanged jaws on the head of of an especially large and surly level 65 enemy yeti, dispatching him with a sickening *CHOMP*.

I blinked at it in surprise and took a step back, lowering my hands. Why was it fighting the other monsters?

In fact, now I saw what the whole wake of clashing, yawling, clamoring noise was: an entire wedge-shaped host of *new* NPCs, doing battle with Vierdimin's forces behind the T-Rex.

"What the hell is going on?" Lee asked.

The monster turned sideways, and a shrill cry of greeting reached my ears.

"Helllllloooooooo Goldie! Nice rack. Has it gotten bigger, or does it just look better wrapped in those sweet, revealing bandages?"

Sitting atop the T-Rex on a ragged, leather saddle was Erlix, my halfling companion who'd been killed and sent back to his bind point by the ogre Wugduz. Overwhelming relief flooded through me as I released my prepared spells and literally jumped up and down with joy. I'd never been so happy to see someone in my whole entire life as I was now, even if he was a disgusting little pervert.

"Erlix! Oh man, I was so worried about you!" I shook my head in disbelief at my goofy friend. If he was on the ground, instead of riding a giant lizard, I would have rushed over to hug him! "Where on Earth did you get a dinosaur?"

The beast chomped another few enemies while Erlix laughed, easily keeping his balance on the creature's back.

"We're not on Earth, you silly treasure ho. But it turns out you can hire a lot of NPCs—and a dinosaur!—when you're hoarding the proceeds of a multi-level marketing sex scheme. When I died, I retrieved the money and started going around closing deals, figuring it might come in handy for us down the line. Then the server message popped up, and I decided I couldn't wait for your ass to fight Vierdimin. I thought I'd wreck up his castle with my T-Rex here and taunt him till he came out of hiding. But hey, you're here

now! We can wreck his things together.”

“Hey, guys?” Topper said through his visor, cutting down another few enemies with a sizzling slice of his holy blade. “Reunion later. Erlix, we’re glad to have you back. Punch us through to the castle, please! We don’t have time for this shit.”

“He’s right! Let’s go, Raxy. I wanna smack Vierdimin with some big ol’ halfling cock.” Erlix slapped the side of his dinosaur’s head and called over his shoulder to his contracted troops. “Hey dum-dums! Fight harder! Full speed ahead! Wedge formation, haul ass! We gotta knock these losers for a loop.”

Erlix led the charge on his giant, terrifying lizard, and his NPCs surged around us, protecting our flanks and breaking through Vierdimin’s forces with the speed of a freshly-loosed arrow. Between the mighty *CHOMPS*, our NPC escort, and the DPS we’d already been laying down on our own, we cleared our way to the **Secret Order** guildhouse in a matter of moments.

*ATTN ALL PLAYERS: Game servers will be shut down for a realm-wide restart in 6 minutes. We apologize for the inconvenience.*

Erlix reared around on his T-Rex and surveyed the battlefield. We’d fought our way to the center, but we could all see that even with Erlix’s forces we were still badly outnumbered. They pressed in hard on the ring we’d formed around the central, dark tower.

“You guys go get the Lich, Goldie,” Erlix declared with a wink. “He can’t handle my cock anyway. I’ll stick with the dum-dums and keep his goons off your back. How are you getting in there anyway? I thought you couldn’t enter another guild’s fortress.”

“Sanctioned guild war,” muttered Topper. “You can fight in and wreck it up on a raid if you’re at war with them. You just can’t walk in to any random one. Come on!”

He ran inside, trailed by Lee and Saintly, but I held back for a moment and blew a kiss to Erlix.

“Thanks, pal,” I said. “You really saved the day here.”

“Get going so I didn’t do it for nothing!” he shouted with a shake of his head, stabbing at an enemy brawler beside his T-Rex. “And I haven’t forgotten you’re actually a dude. Jeez, Goldie. Blowing kisses? Such a ho.”

I rolled my eyes and hastened to follow my friends.

## Chapter 38

**The Secret Order** guild house wasn't a dungeon, so we didn't need to deal with a confusing maze of a layout or NPC guards—it was designed to serve as a player hub, after all, and Vierdimin had holed up here, so there was only one logical place for him to be: in his throne room, waiting for us to attack. We even knew he'd be there since all of us still had the **Find Object** spell active, and that's where the staff was. If it was really as important as we thought it was, there would be no way he'd let it out of his sight.

Lee showed us the way, and as we raced through the halls we quickly sketched out a battle plan.

"Healing won't be necessary since we don't have the time for an extended fight," Topper said. "And Saintly is too valuable to risk. We need him on standby so he can take the staff and extract us all before the server comes down."

"In like *two minutes*?" Saintly protested. "I'm a great coder, but I don't know if I can do that, man!"

"Do you know the code base or not?" Topper demanded.

"Inside and out, but—"

"Start thinking now about how you'd use the staff's backdoor to hack the game code if you had access to it. You have three or four minutes to come up with a plan, and if we can burn the lich down quickly enough you might have a few minutes to experiment."

"I don't think—"

"*Saintly!*" Topper glared at him. "Can you do this, or not? We can stop Vierdimin from shunting us all over to his private server by killing him and taking the staff, but I don't want to end up braindead if the lich disabled the failsafes on your server's memory backups."

"Come on Saintly," I pleaded. "I *know* you have it in you to do this. You said you coded half this game right? You're our only hope."

"Yeah, but I've never tried to use—" Saintly's jaw tightened. "Okay, okay. I think I can at least make sure the failsafes are working if I have a few minutes to experiment. It's a simple binary value switch. Then when the servers come back up, we all log out."

"Good," Topper said. "Lacey's invulnerable, and Lee and I are expendable. Don't get involved and risk yourself. Remember what's most

important here: First, killing the lich. Second, fixing the failsafes. If we fuck up either, we're screwed. Really screwed."

"And not in the good way," I muttered.

As we approached the doors to Vierdimin's throne room, Lee's steps began to slow. I couldn't blame him for being nervous—I was nervous too! This was the most important fight we'd ever had, and Vierdimin was as nasty as they came. But we couldn't afford to have him chicken out now, with only moments to spare.

"Come on Lee," I urged, placing a reassuring hand on his arm. "It's too late to back down now. We need you. I need you."

"He's going to have defenses prepared," Lee murmured. "And he's going to be pissed I betrayed him. Now that I'm fighting *with* you, it's a lot harder to talk my way out of this..."

"You're going to get fucked either way," Topper growled. "You really want to spend eternity in a sociopath's playground? As for his having defenses, I'm counting on that. But at least we can distract him while Lacey gets a few good shots in. She's the one who's going to win this fight for us—not you or me."

Lee gulped and nodded, picking up his pace again. His courage was admirable, despite his momentary hesitation, and I was also touched by Topper's faith in me... despite how heavy the burden of being our champion was. I knew he was right about me being the key to this battle. Vierdimin was one of the most powerful players in the game, and even more so with his hacky staff. It was all going to come down to me and him, one way or another. Would I be good enough to beat him? My fingers twitched nervously. I had to be. My friends were counting on me.

I wondered what awaited us in his throne room. Somehow I didn't think we'd find him cowering in fear. Vierdimin knew he couldn't hurt me, but he was one of wildest players I'd ever faced—he'd have something prepared to deal with me, and I'd need to be sharp enough to deal with whatever it was. I took a deep breath and steeled myself for the impending battle.

When we reached the grand, dark doors, Saintly melted off to hide in an alcove where Vierdimin couldn't see him, but where he'd still be able to step out and take the staff once we'd beaten the lich. I hoped he was thinking furiously about how to fix the code, because none of the rest of us would have any idea how to use it, and I didn't like the idea of getting my brains fried any more than Topper did if Vierdimin really had disabled the server

failsafes.

*ATTN ALL PLAYERS: Game servers will be shut down for a realm-wide restart in 5 minutes. We apologize for the inconvenience.*

Topper looked to me and to Lee for our final confirmation, and once we'd both nodded, he reared back and kicked the grand doors open, his cloak swirling behind him. Lee and I stood at his flanks, destructive spells primed and ready for battle.

**Vierdimin, Lv. 80 Human Lich** awaited us on his black, twisted throne in the center of the guild hall master room amid decor that wouldn't have looked out of place in an evil cartoon villain's doom fortress—shades of black, crimson, and smoky gray flowed freely through the hanging banners and garish armor displays that lined the walls, and a faint scent of burning, oily pitch rolled through the air, joining the distant clamor of Erlix's battle outside with the lich's forces. The Lich himself sat upright and motionless, his cold, dead eyes boring into us from across the room, with the **Lv. 80 Staff of Matter Manipulation** clutched tightly in his fist.

I waited for him to leap into action, assault us with a volley of insulting drivel, and send his negative-energy rays of destruction sweeping across the room, but he didn't move a muscle. I scanned the room, searching for the traps that should be lying in wait, but found nothing. It was simply empty—the Lich remained staring.

*What is he waiting for? The three of us just kicked down his door, and he's going to sit there motionless?*

Topper only hesitated for a heartbeat. He raised his flaming sword and charged the Lich, but after 10 paces, Vierdimin still hadn't moved, and Topper drew up short, halfway to the throne, and lowered his sword. He looked back at us in confusion.

"I don't get it—is it a trap? Is it a decoy? Why isn't he moving?"

A flicker of movement from the left caught my eye, and I called out a warning to Topper, but it was too late.

A 7-foot tower of grim-faced muscle burst from the shadows in a streaking blur. **Kromgorn, Lv. 78 Half-Giant Barbarian** slammed into Topper with a **Battle Rush**, momentarily stunning him and sending him crashing backward into the opposite wall.

"*Kromgorn?*" Topper exclaimed. He staggered to his feet, momentarily dazed from the stun, and squinted at the barbarian. "How can... what the fuck?"

I felt like such an idiot! How had I forgotten about Kromgorn? With all the excitement of the battle outside, it hadn't occurred to me to wonder where my old avatar was. Maybe I hadn't wanted to think about my avatar being responsible for the betrayal, but now this surprise attack was all my fault. *I knew I should have told Topper about Kromgorn, even if I was ashamed...*

"It's Vierdimin!" I cried. "Watch out!"

I unleashed double **Flame Jets** on the body of my old avatar, but they parted around Kromgorn just like they had around the Lich.

*They must both be wearing temporary damage shields!*

The highest level ones were consumable items that lasted for only a short period but absorbed thousands of points of damage... long enough for him to ignore my spells while he dealt with Topper, anyway. We needed to focus all of our firepower on it to knock it out in time. Topper was still dazed from Krom's **Battle Rush** skill, inflicting a penalty to his combat stats, but he did his best to deflect Kromgorn's blows while I kept my jets pumping out damage onto the barbarian's spell shield.

"Lee! Help me burn down his shield! Lee?"

Where was Lee? I needed his DPS and needed it now! But then I saw that instead of stepping into the fray to join me, the handsome dark elf was backing away from the half-giant barbarian, his eyes wide, shaking like a leaf. The sorceries that had been swirling at his hands winked out.

"Pull yourself together, Lee! Come on! We can beat him!"

Lee whipped his head from side to side and took another step backward.

"N-no. I can't. This was a mistake. We're making a horrible mistake!"

Kromgorn glanced over at Lee and smirked. "A mistake you'll soon be punished for," he growled.

Lee whimpered and fell to his knees, covering his head with his hands. "I'm sorry, master Vierdimin! Please, please forgive me... th-they confused me."

As Kromgorn's blade crossed with Topper's once again in another, ringing blow, Lee flinched and began to crawl toward the far wall, fleeing the fight. I could see that I wasn't getting through to him no matter how much I pleaded.

*He's too afraid of Vierdimin—it's all up to me now. But can I pierce the shield in time?*

But maybe that was exactly what he wanted! We only had a few moments before the servers came down. How could we fight the Lich if I

blew all my mana fighting my old avatar?

Topper was thinking the same thing. “Go, Lacey!” he cried. “I’m expendable. I’ll deal with Kromgorn.”

I broke away and ran across the room to the Lich’s throne, where Vierdimin sat motionless. It looked like he could only pilot one avatar at a time, even if he could hop between them, so the lich would be totally defenseless except for his damage shield while he battled Topper. I wasn’t too late to stop him, then!

As I reached the twisted, black throne, I reacted instinctively and grabbed for his staff with two hands, trying to wrench it out of Vierdimin’s grip. But it didn’t budge, and immediately I felt foolish. Of course I couldn’t just rip his equipment away from him. If it was that easy to steal someone’s weapon, players would do it all the time. Instead I took a step back and unleashed my **Flame Jets** once again on the Lich’s damage shield. With 42 Charisma and a sustained blast from my highest damage spell, even the best consumable damage shield in the game couldn’t last *that* long.

*ATTN ALL PLAYERS: Game servers will be shut down for a realm-wide restart in 4 minutes. We apologize for the inconvenience.*

This close up, I could see the shield growing lighter as my white-hot flames rapidly ticked away at its health. I had to burn through and obliterate Vierdimin before he found a way to finish Topper off! Good thing raid tanks didn’t go down so easy.

Then I heard Topper cry out in agony. I looked behind me to see Kromgorn holding his two-handed blade high with a single hand, using his **Titan’s Grip** ability as they crossed swords, but with his other hand he’d used the momentary opening to slam something into Topper’s midsection: something small, sharp and cone-shaped.

It was just like the cone that had disabled Jazzus. I watched in horror as the same blueish gray splotch of color began to spread slowly across his armor from the point of impact. His arms wavered, the veins in his neck standing out, as Kromgorn drove him down to one knee.

“Topper! No!” I cried. “Lee! Lee, help him!”

I couldn’t afford to stop focusing on Vierdimin, but Lee just held his knees and rocked against the far wall, watching the scene unfold with wide eyes and a horrified expression. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry...” he muttered in endless repetition.

The blueish gray spread further, overtaking Topper’s limbs, and he

made a strangled noise as Kromgorn stepped back, lowering his blade and smirking at the twitching paladin.

His two-handed **Lv. 80 Holy Sword of Righteous Flame** slipped out of his hands and clattered to the ground at his feet with a hollow, rattling clang. The holy flames winked out with a whoosh of steam like the sword had been plunged into a tempering bucket. I was dying to help, but I had my orders. All I could do was watch. The horror in Topper's eyes as the pallid grey snaked toward his face like a dull, black-and-white bloodstain was sickening, and then it overtook him—his golden cloak settled around his motionless, stiffening body, its shining color fading to a dull, steel-like silver, and the transformation was complete. Topper had become a lifeless statue, frozen by the GM suspension.

"Burn, burn, *burn*, damn you!" I hissed at Vierdimin's damage shield. It was so faint that it was barely visible now, and I knew that I'd almost broken through. I needed just a few more seconds!

But Kromgorn the Barbarian turned away from Topper's gray, still form and crossed the room toward me with slow, plodding steps, murder in his eyes. The gibbering, rocking form of Lee didn't even merit a glance from the half-giant, and I was forced to halt my assault on the Lich's body to deal with this new threat. As I turned to face my own avatar, a lump stuck in my throat, and I realized it was fear—fear that we might actually lose this battle. Kromgorn wasn't part of **The Secret Order**. Kromgorn could actually damage me... and he was eight levels higher than I was.

"Lacey the Courtesan," Kromgorn said, his voice thick with amusement. "You have no idea how much trouble you've caused me. But that's over now. You're all done. I've won."

It was still so strange to hear my own, former voice coming from the body of my enemy, and I felt a sudden pang of longing to be my old self again. I'd been Lacey for so long that I'd almost forgotten who I really was... it was difficult to see someone else not only playing the character I'd spent so many hours building up, but also using him against me!

"Krom is my character," I hissed. "How *dare* you steal him like this. And you're wrong! We're going to defeat you." I nervously wet my lips and thought furiously, trying to decide what to do. I was all alone! There wasn't time to beat Krom *and* Vierdimin.

Kromgorn raised an eyebrow. "And how, exactly, do you plan to do that, my cute little courtesan? Three short minutes from now, the server will

come down. And as you and your little friends have no doubt puzzled out, I'll be copying the game state over to my private server as soon as the Warden program comes down, seconds before the servers die. When that happens, I will be as a god to you."

"Until they find you out! Until they arrest you!"

He smirked and snorted. "Who's going to tell the authorities? Who's even going to know what's happened? You don't think I'm sloppy enough to leave a trail, do you? And my server equipment is very, very expensive. I think my private rig is likely to run on its own, in a secret bunker I've prepared to host my own mirror of the server code, for at least 1000 years. More than enough time for me to grow bored of torturing you all." His eyes and tone grew hard. "Perhaps you ought to consider whether you'd like to spend your last few minutes battling your new, dark god, or whether you'd like to give up and throw yourself on my mercy in the hope that I'll remember your final choice, as your cowering friend Lefay over there has done."

I gulped deep breaths of air, my breasts heaving and my hands curled into fists as I stared him down. He was so confident. So smug. So... unbeatable. My confidence started to leak away from me bit by bit.

Maybe I couldn't win. Maybe I wasn't good enough. Maybe Vierdimin was right.

He must have read the hesitation in my eyes, because his smirk cracked into a full smile. He slung his two-handed sword back over his shoulder and folded his massive arms, standing in front of me as though he was totally unconcerned about what I might do.

"It's over, Lacey. You wouldn't have time to defeat me and stop my plan now, even if I failed to lift a single finger in my own defense."

*ATTN ALL PLAYERS: Game servers will be shut down for a realm-wide restart in 2 minutes. We apologize for the inconvenience.*

My shoulders slumped and I sank to my knees. I knew he was right. I shivered in the cold air of the tower as Lee's muttering broke into choking, fearful sobs. Topper's dead eyes looked on in stony silence.

"I'll give you one, final chance to redeem yourself and make up for the all trouble you've caused," Kromgorn said. "You see this avatar I'm in? *Your* character, as you say? I won't need it soon. I plan to ascend to an even more powerful shell once I become the master of the game. Swear allegiance to me as your friend Haxor did, betray your friends, and I will allow you to inhabit

this avatar for the eternity on my server, instead of the sex-fueled, mincing, courtesan that you now control. Think carefully, Lacey. A millennium is quite a long time. Do you really want to be a delicate, luscious woman forever? Not that I won't be able to find plenty of jobs for you as Lacey, too..."

His words sliced through me like knives, and a cold chill of fear began creeping up my spine. I was struggling to contain my panic, but now that I'd accepted that I couldn't win, I was confronted with the horror of a new reality: If we were going to lose, I really might be stuck as Lacey! And for a thousand years... I couldn't begin to conceive of what a thousand years would feel like. I wasn't even thirty yet! Sure, I'd kind of gotten used to running around in Lacey's avatar, having sex as a woman, and rolling my eyes while dudes stared and NPCs and players alike objectified me, talked down to me, and harassed me, but I'd never once imagined it might be *permanent*. It was always a temporary thing—I'd never doubted that we'd find a way to beat Vierdimin. Could I really live the rest of my days as a sex toy in Vierdimin's private playground? He was offering me an out.

Tears formed at the corners of my eyes. I didn't know what to do. I thought of how hard everyone had fought to bring us here and how much my friends had sacrificed in the battle against Vierdimin. The frozen faces of Jazzus and Topper flashed through my mind, and I tried to think of what Erlix would say if he were here. I knew that if I did cut a deal with Vierdimin, they'd all understand. Why be extra miserable when we were already doomed? Why resist when there was no point?

Why fight when we'd already lost?

"What do you say, Lacey? An eternity as my personal sex toy, or betray your friends and receive a small bit of mercy from me?"

He held his hand out, waiting for me to shake it.

*ATTN ALL PLAYERS: Game servers will be shut down for a realm-wide restart in 1 minute. We apologize for the inconvenience.*

"No."

I uttered the word through gritted teeth. I didn't care what Vierdimin did to me, or what he forced me to do.

His eyes widened. "No?"

I wouldn't give in.

I wouldn't go down without a fight.

My friends believed in me, and I couldn't disappoint them. Not if there

was even a sliver of hope.

While Kromgorn had been taunting me, I'd noticed that the short-term consumable damage shield he'd been wearing had finally faded away, and my **Icy Breath** caught him by surprise.

The massive half-giant tumbled head over feet toward the rear of the room, buffeted by arctic winds and slowed by a nasty cold debuff that should buy me a few extra seconds. I leapt to my feet and spun to confront the lifeless shell of the lich once more, turning my **Flame Jets** once again on his now-unprotected body at full blast. The unbridled destructive magic of the most powerful caster on the server roared over his flesh, ripping large chunks of the 80th-level Lich's HP away with each passing second.

I watched as his health dropped down to 70%. 60%. 50%. Behind me, I heard a thud, like a sack of fleshy potatoes slamming into the ground, and another clatter of a sword dropping.

The Lich roared to life and leapt up from his throne, his holding his staff across his body like a magical bulwark. Vierdimin had hopped avatars again to protect himself and was back in his original body! He couldn't hurt me as Vierdimin, but my **Flame Jets** winked out as he slammed a **Counterspell** against my magic.

*ATTN ALL PLAYERS: Game servers will be shut down for a realm-wide restart in 30 seconds. Please log off now to avoid interruption. We apologize for the inconvenience.*

I switched to **Chain Lightning** without missing a beat, sending bolts of electricity arcing through the air toward my foe, and he winced as he dropped even further to 40%. I wished I still had a stun skill available that worked on PCs, but raw damage would have to do the trick! We might be gambling on whether the server back-ups could save us, but there was no way in hell I was letting this psychopath carry me and my friends into his personal playground for an eternity of torture.

But then another **Counterspell** sliced through my **Chain Lightning**. Now both my fire and lightning-based magics were locked for 30 seconds, and I didn't have 30 seconds to spare!

I began to frantically buffet him with more chilling wind from my **Icy Breath**, wishing again that I had the better spells I should have had from our guild bank, and watched as his health continued to tick down...

A third **Counterspell** sliced through the last of my Destruction spells and locked the cold tree for the next thirty seconds.

“How many fucking **Counterspells** do you have?” I wailed.

Vierdimin threw back his head and chortled with glee. “It’s the Lich class, you idiot. Extra counter slots. You should really know your enemies better before going to battle with them.”

*ATTN ALL PLAYERS: Game servers will be shut down for a realm-wide restart in 10 seconds. Warden Program is now closing. Prepare for disconnect.*

Vierdimin lifted his staff above his head with both hands and crowed in the wake of his imminent victory. I once more fell to my knees in utter despair. I’d failed. Over and over again I’d failed. And now I and my friends would be doomed to an eternity of misery at Vierdimin’s hands.

*ATTN ALL PLAYERS: Game servers restarting in 5...*

*4...*

*3...*

*2...*

*1...*

## Chapter 39

I don't know what I'd expected—for the world to go black? For my body to tingle? I'd guessed that *somehow* things would feel different, but as soon as the countdown ended...

Nothing happened.

I looked around, blinking, waiting for something to change, as Vierdimin lowered his staff to the floor and tapped it on the ground, leering at me with an evil grin.

"Is that it?" I wondered out loud. "Nothing is different."

Vierdimin's smile dropped, and he shook his head at me. "You really are an idiot, aren't you? Everything is different."

He gestured around us at the castle walls. "This world? Everything you see around you? This is a copy of the game instance, running on *my* modified server code, just as I intended. The game is over. You're done."

I climbed to my feet, staring at him incredulously. "But I didn't feel anything."

"You don't *feel* a change in the game, moron! Your consciousness is a piece of software right now. I just shifted it from the official server to my server. Allow me to demonstrate."

He waved his staff toward me, and my jaw dropped open as my **Charm** skill faded from both of us. I took half a step back from the Lich. I was vulnerable to him again!

"How did you do that?" I demanded. I held my hands out and tried to cast my **Flame Jets** at him once again, now that his counter-silence had faded, but nothing happened.

Vierdimin *tsked* at me. "How are you so thick that you don't get this yet? I'm a god here. I have GM powers on this server. And I can do anything I want. Your spells won't work right now because I turned them off."

He gestured again and the air thickened around me, locking me in place. The panic that had been creeping up my spine exploded through my body now. I struggled helplessly, straining my muscles against the air, feeling like a trapped animal. It was useless. It felt like he'd imprisoned me in solid stone, covering every inch of my body!

So it was true. He'd actually done it—he'd moved us to his private server, and we were his to play with for the next thousand years, at least. The

reality of it dazed me, and I went limp with shock, slumping inside my hardened prison of air.

“Giving up so easily? Why ever would you do that?” Vierdimin taunted me, and then cackled evilly. He settled back onto his throne, staff resting across his lap, and regarded me with a dry smile. “You almost beat me, you know. I would have never admitted it before I’d won, but now that I have, I want you to know that you came so very close. You were quite the thorn in my side. A few moments faster, a few shorter conversations, and you might have had me. It’s amazing how well you and your friends did. If I’d ever thought I was putting myself in real danger of losing, I would have waited to help you level up and unlock the power of your class.”

“So you *were* behind that! How did you know what to help me do? And why do it?”

“The how was easy. Dredging the code base for hints about secret classes revealed the Sorceress unlock mechanism, just like it helped me unlock the Lich class prior to that.”

“You *cheater!*” I hissed. No wonder he’d known exactly where to guide me! If he was illegally trawling through the game files, it was no surprise that he’d know all kinds of things hidden from regular players.

“As for why, I’d assumed that the Lich was the most powerful class in the game. This was going to be my ultimate form—the body from which I’d rule the whole server, and the strongest player around even *before* my GM powers. But then I saw your little trick with your **Charm** skill, and I started wondering about this mystery class that no one ever played. The more I researched and thought about it, the more I realized that it was the *Sorceress* that was the strongest class in the game. But in order to have the most powerful Sorceress the game could support, I realized I’d need to spend quite a few levels with no way to level up except to fuck NPCs. That’s really not my style. But why should I, when I had a perverted little whore who could do my dirty work for me?”

I gasped as I realized what he was implying. “Y-you... you want Lacey? You’ve just been waiting for me to level up so you could use this body once the game cut over?”

Vierdimin raised a finger, and the most dizzying sense of disorientation assaulted me.

Suddenly I was lying on the floor, feeling very, very weird. I pushed myself to my hands and knees, feeling bulky, clumsy and just too big all

over. A two-handed greatsword laid on the ground in front of me, and I blinked at it. Then I checked my HUD.

“Holy *shit*,” I breathed.

I was Kromgorn again! Kromgorn the level 78 Barbarian, with all of the raid quality gear that Vierdimin had acquired for him while power-leveling. It was bizarre how unfamiliar the form felt now, after so many days in Lacey’s womanly body. I’d expected the moment when I’d return to my old avatar to be so much happier for me, but everything was miserable. What good did it do me to be Kromgorn when we were stuck in the Lich’s playground.

My massive knuckles scraped the stone floor as I picked up my epic greatsword, and I clambered to my feet. A few yards away, Lacey the Courtesan unraveled her beautiful dragon wings and stretched her arms lazily above her head.

“Ahh, this feels wonderful,” she murmured. “I should thank you, Kromgorn. This gorgeous, female body is going to be so much more fun to rule the world with than that old, decrepit lich.”

Her dulcet laughter tinkled through the air, and I was momentarily amazed at just how ravishing she was. I hadn’t realized it from inside, but Lacey was a creature beautiful enough to stop anyone in their tracks. An unfamiliar, uncomfortable sensation tightened at my loincloth, and I blushed when I realized it was my cock stiffening—a feeling I hadn’t experienced in quite some time! And not only was she beautiful... she really was the most powerful caster in the game now. Vierdimin was right.

I watched in shock and horror as Lacey ascended the steps to the throne and bounced back into Vierdimin’s avatar long enough to hang his head and hold out the staff to her with two hands. I recognized the gesture. It was a willing equipment transfer. Then he bounced himself back into Lacey and seized the **Lv. 80 Staff of Matter Manipulation**. She turned back to me and thumped the staff on the ground. A deafening boom rang out, blowing out from the point of impact.

“Ahh, there we go. And now the transfer is complete. I have my key to my godlike powers. I have the most powerful avatar in the game. And I have so many people to thank, starting with you, Kromgorn. I think we need an audience for this momentous occasion, don’t you?” Lacey asked with a mischievous smirk.

She waved her hand across the room, and suddenly my friends were all there. Lacey had used her GM powers to summon them to us. They floated

around me like a tribunal, suspended in the hardened air like I had been moments earlier in Lacey's body. Jazzus and Topper were to my left, now unsuspended and shaking their heads as they came around, and Lefay and Saintly struggled to my right. I glanced behind me to see my pal Erlix in a similar bind, his eyes blazing.

"Where are we?" Jazzus asked.

"I think I know," murmured Topper, his voice full of dread.

Saintly said nothing, his face a mask of stony silence, and Lefay, now stripped of her male glamour, sobbed quietly.

"I'm going to murder you, you big sack of—" Erlix shouted, but he was cut off as gags of air slammed into everyone's mouths except mine. They continued to struggle in the frozen air, silently trapped, their eyes pleading.

"You six shall be henceforth known as The Forsaken," Lacey intoned. "Tortured for eternity for the crime of daring to stand in the way of my ascension. I shall make sure your experience lives up to the title. It will not be pleasant."

She hadn't bothered to freeze me yet, though, and I studied her quietly. Lacey wasn't so far away... a few yards at most.

*How quickly can she activate her GM powers?* I wondered, my knuckles tightening around my blade.

She kept calling herself a god, and she obviously had access to an expanded set of powers thanks to the staff, but was she really unstoppable? I knew exactly how many HP Lacey had, and it was a lot less than a Level 80 Lich in raid gear... A level 78 Barbarian should be able to burst her down in just a few blows.

I didn't give her a chance to read my intentions. Old habits fell into place, and I activated **Bull Rush**, leaping across the room to crash into her with a surprise, stunning force.

But it wasn't Lacey who was surprised. As I made contact with her body, an equal, explosive force slammed into me and sent me flying backwards. I landed on my back, ten feet away from her, and my sword skittered off into the shadows at the edges of the room.

Now the air tightened around me once again as Lacey lifted me up with a gesture, laughing uproariously. My eyes blazed, but I was trapped like a fly in amber.

"I wondered how long it was going to take you to try that. Honestly, you should have attacked me immediately, not that it would have made a

difference—I just expect you to be a better player than you are, I guess. But I wanted you to see for yourself. I’m invincible here! There’s nothing you can do to me. I have the staff, so I have a GM flag. That means you can’t hurt me, can’t debuff me, can’t stun me...”

She walked right up to me, so close I could smell her cloyingly sweet breath, and tapped me on the nose. I couldn’t do anything to stop her.

“You can’t do jack, big boy. Now, since you’re all properly mollified, let’s get some real gear on this avatar. What are these boring rags?”

Lacey gestured and a mannequin appeared in front of her, with a gorgeous set of gold and purple GM gear designed for the Sorceress class, including a brilliantly embroidered caster’s hood. She dressed herself eagerly, looking twice as magnificent as I ever had—now she was truly dressed as royalty. She whirled around in a circle, laughing as her robes spun with her, and flexed her wings again.

“Ah, that’s lovely. Why have 42 Charisma when you can have 98 Charisma? This GM gear really does offer excessive stats, not that I need the help. But when it comes time to use my spells, I’m really going to enjoy torturing you and your friends with maxed-out statistics. Like this!”

Lacey snapped her fingers, and pain—real pain, not Fantasy Realms Online pain—rippled through my body in rolling waves. It was like being electrocuted! I struggled against my implacable prison, screaming in agony, for ten long seconds until Lacey snapped her fingers again and ended the sensation. I alternated between gasping lungfuls of air and dry-heaving, waiting for the post-pain sickness to fade. None of my friends were struggling anymore. They simply watched me with very wide eyes.

I shuddered and stammered. “That... shouldn’t be possible... oh god, it hurt so bad.” I wanted to sob, or throw up, or both.

Lacey smirked. “My server. My rules. You’ll find that I’ve modified the server code to allow for all kinds of interesting sensations. We have so much to explore and all the time in the world to do it! The best part is you can’t even die, so we can really push the limits here. Let’s start with something easy, maybe. You like getting fucked, right? Why don’t we call up that dragon pal of yours... is Fiero his name? I can jack up his cock size a few notches and instruct him to bend you over a counter and bang you incessantly for a month or two... as Kromgorn, of course. There’s plenty of time later to stick you back in the body of some other helpless, low-level girl and *really* humiliate you.”

This wasn't funny anymore, and I didn't think Lacey was joking. This couldn't really be how my life turned out, could it? It didn't seem possible. It didn't seem fair.

I swept my gaze across the despondent faces of my friends, wracking my brain to try to think of something—anything—that I could do. The Lich had tied everything up too neatly. We'd simply been outplayed. He'd countered every move I made, two steps ahead of me. Every trick the game had, he'd exploited for his benefit.

Doing things my way wasn't working. What would Erlix tell me to do? What would Saintly suggest? The situation seemed impossible with Lacey being invulnerable and nearly all-powerful.

*But she is still bound by the rules of the game, I realized. Even as a GM. Even with modified server code.*

Then it came to me. My last chance. My long shot. My Hail Mary.

*Bless you, bless you, Saintly*, I thought to myself. The only question was whether it would work. Was the player behind Vierdimin vain enough?

"Okay," I croaked out. "Mercy. Mercy! Please. You want to hear me grovel? You want to hear me say how amazing you are? I will! Just, please... have some pity on us."

Lacey eyed me suspiciously. "That's quite a change in attitude, Kromgorn. Finally accepting the reality of your new situation, huh? Well, I like a little groveling, but I can hardly not have my fun just because you beg me. You had your chance to betray your friends and join me, not that it would have made a difference. I was just curious if you would."

I *knew* that sack of shit was a lying dirtbag, and I was glad I hadn't sold my friends out either way. But this was the key moment... I had to sell him hard.

"Wait! What if... what if I told you you could be even more powerful? I've learned quite a few tricks with Lacey, and her Charisma isn't maximized yet."

Lacey frowned and narrowed her eyes at me. "I don't need your *help* to be the most powerful player on the server, you moron. I already am. I'll get her the last 10 levels to hit 80 soon enough, and there *is* no gear better than GM gear."

"Not exactly true," I protested.

She sighed and rested her hand on her hip. "What is this? Some kind of desperate, last minute ploy? Okay. This is slightly amusing, and I admit my

curiosity is piqued. Out with it. If you're right, you can get fucked for a week instead of a month. But if you're lying, I'll clone Fiero and have him fuck you from both ends."

I swallowed nervously. *God, I hope this works. A month of getting spit-roasted? And that's just the beginning.*

"How much Charisma is on that GM headpiece?" I asked.

Lacey blinked at me in surprise. "Okay, I'll bite. It's got a very healthy +3 bonus. Not great as GM gear for my primary casting stat goes, but it's got plenty of other stats on it to compensate."

"Look at the Tiara you took off," I choked out. "It's better. Slightly better. But I'm pretty sure it's the best item in the game for the Sorceress. Even better than GM gear. You want to have the strongest avatar possible? *That's* what you should be wearing."

Lacey dug around in her bag and pulled out the **Fabulous Tiara of the Dragonkin Sorcerers**, inspecting it carefully. Her eyebrows climbed as she examined the stats.

"Well, I'll be damned. That is an amazing piece of gear. I admit I thought you were bluffing."

"No," I squeaked. "Please just don't send me to get sodomized by Fiero..."

She smirked, pulling her hood off. "Too bad I was lying. Why would I reduce your punishment? I can have my cake and eat it too. Tell you what... let's have Fiero fuck you until you can think of *another* way to increase my power. That sounds fair to me."

Lacey laughed with unconcealed glee while she lowered the **Fabulous Tiara of the Dragonkin Sorcerers** onto her head.

As soon as it touched her head, her body rippled, and her laugh cut off abruptly. She released an ear-splitting shriek, eyes widening.

"What the fuck? What did you do to me?" she cried. "Nooooo!"

Lacey's hands fell limply to her sides, and she slumped to her knees and collapsed face-first, turning her head at the last minute to avoid smashing it into the ground. She stared up at me, cheek against the cold stone floor, her eyes dancing with fury. The staff fell from her hand and clattered to the ground beside her. At once, all six of our prisons of air dissolved, and my friends and I dropped to the ground, free at last.

I heaved an immense sigh of relief. I couldn't believe it had worked.

"How on Earth did you do that?" Topper asked, ignoring the string of

inventive profanity flowing freely out of Lacey's mouth.

"We're not on Earth..." Jazzus murmured.

Erlix ran up and kicked Lacey right in the ribs, and then shook his fist at her. "You're lucky you're in my friend's body, you asshole, or I'd *really* rip you a new one."

I walked over and grabbed the **Staff of Matter Manipulation**, snatching it away from Lacey, even though she didn't have the stats to use it anymore. Then I held it out toward Saintly.

"Do you know what to do with this?" I asked. "Because I sure don't."

He nodded hesitantly as he took the staff from me. "GM powers, sure. But for real, what did you just do? I thought we were done for."

I glanced down at Lacey, who was still struggling to move. At least she'd stopped cursing. Now she glared at us in stony silence.

"It was Saintly who gave me the idea," I said. "And thank goodness our buffs hadn't worn off her yet, or I'm not sure it would have been possible."

"What was it?" Topper demanded.

"Spit it out, Goldie!" Erlix shouted.

"A bug..." I replied. "Vierdimin might have been a god here, but even with his private server, he's still bound by the game rules right? When we met Saintly, I remember he mentioned a bunch of bugs that still existed in the code base, including one that shouldn't ever be able to occur..."

"Unless you have a ridiculously impractical amount of one stat," Saintly finished. "Amazing. Totally amazing. You encouraged Lacey to boost her Charisma to 100."

"And it triggered the bug that set all her stats to -1," I finished. "Not only is that too low to use any gear in the game, but in a physics-based game like this, it meant she wouldn't be able to move. No strength, no dexterity, no agility."

"It's going to wear off!" Lacey roared. "It will, and then you're all in trouble!"

But Saintly shook his head. "No, it won't. Not until a GM refreshes your character to drop the bug, and I have your staff now. I'm not planning on helping you."

"Can we like, seal up the lich or something?" Jazzus asked, rubbing her arms and shivering. "That was a little too intense for me. It's giving me the heeby jeebies to have him here even if he's shut down for the moment."

"Saintly?" I asked. "Could you take care of that?"

“Don’t you dare!” Lacey cried. “I will make you live in misery for thousands of years! I will destroy your sanity! This is *my* world!”

“Yeah, shut this windbag up,” growled Erlix.

Saintly raised the staff to point it at Lacey, but I suddenly grabbed his arm. “Wait! Uh... Saintly, we’re stuck here for a while, aren’t we?”

He nodded. “Yeah. I mean, that was a damn smart move with Lacey here, but we’re still stuck on Vierdimin’s private server until we can figure out how to get off of it.”

“Then do me a favor, would you?”

I leaned my 7-foot frame down to whisper my request into his ear, and he stared at me in surprise.

“Are you sure?”

I shrugged. “You can always reverse it, right?”

“Whatever, man. Sure thing.” He scratched his head. “This isn’t one of the usual GM powers, but if he followed the same pattern when he coded it...”

He pointed the staff at the lifeless body of the Lich, still seated on his throne, and the blueish-gray color of GM suspension began to spread across the Lich’s form.

“What are you doing?” Lacey demanded in Vierdimin’s shrill inflection. “Stop it! Stop it at once.”

But then she fell silent as Saintly pointed the staff at her again. Her body went limp at the same moment that Vierdimin’s head snapped upright on his throne.

“Noooo!” he screamed, gripping the arms of the twisted, black chair to pull himself up. “You can’t do this to me!”

But he couldn’t muster the strength. The suspension was spreading too quickly, and his muscles locked. As the sound of his cry died in his throat, his body failed him, and he fell back down onto the seat of the throne. Then the spreading, stiffening gray finished its work, closing over his face.

Vierdimin was now imprisoned in a GM suspension, locked into his own throne, his face frozen in a grimace of despair.

We all stared for a long moment, and then Saintly turned back to me. “Last chance,” he said. “You sure you want this?”

I nodded.

He raised the staff once more, waved it in my direction, and for the second time that day, a dizzying sense of disorientation assaulted me.

## Chapter 40

I lazily twitched the wings that stretched out on either side of me as I reclined on my bed in the **Shining Army** bunkhouse. My breasts and clit were still thrumming with the aftershocks of my fading orgasm, and I sighed happily as I stretched my dainty, feminine fingers out in front of my face. I didn't strictly *have* to have my wings out right now—after all, there wasn't much purpose for them when I wasn't using them to fly. But Lee thought they were sexy, Jazzus didn't disagree, and it felt good when the two elves, one dark and one light, caressed them in the passionate throes of the threesomes we'd been having all week.

The two of them now cuddled up on either side of my hot, naked body, dozing after the wild, crazy orgasms they'd both had as well, and I smiled and shook my head at them. Sex was still new to them, for different reasons, and they'd need to build up some stamina if they didn't want to nod off as soon as they got to their blissful release.

It was so funny how things worked out: Jazzus was into girls, but she didn't mind if *I* got fucked while we fooled around together. I half suspected she wasn't *strictly* into chicks, the way she checked out Lee's muscles while he was fucking me, but it could have also been that elves just sort of naturally looked androgynous. Despite his impressive biceps, flat, washboard abs, and giant cock, Lee was so handsome he was almost pretty, between his deep indigo eyes and curling platinum hair that tucked fetchingly behind his ears. Fortunately, it didn't seem to bother him. And as long as Lee got to be in his male body, he had no problem being with two women. It was hilarious to think about how explosively he'd reacted to my advances in the past, back when he was Lefay, now that he was pounding me on the regular!

After Saintly had swapped me back into Lacey's body, suspended Kromgorn's shell for safekeeping, and lifted the stat bug on Lacey by refreshing her character stats without the GM gear on, his first action—at my request—was to permanently flip Lee's character gender. He probably would have been too embarrassed to ask Saintly to do it himself, but it was obvious to everyone how relieved he had been to have a male form once again, and a permanent one this time. After his brief taste of being a man, I knew he'd never want to go back.

It seemed crazy to me that he *wouldn't* want to be a chick with how

great the orgasms were, but who was I to judge?

*The heart wants what it wants*, I reflected, gently disentangling myself from the naked, sleeping elves and rising from the bed to go see what the others were doing.

I found Topper and Saintly standing in the meeting room, having an animated discussion over the glowing purple staff that never left Saintly's side, now. It was getting harder to tell who was really in charge, these days. Saintly had all the powers of a GM and strong opinions about what our priorities should be, but Topper held himself with a natural presence that made everyone sit up and listen when he spoke. Fortunately, the two had a mutual respect for one another and they'd become fast friends since we'd left Vierdimin frozen in the **Plains of Woe**.

"I still think we should be focused on rounding up the stragglers," Topper insisted. "Our missing guildmates should have returned by now. Plus, Wugduz, Nambla, and Haxor are still out there somewhere, hiding from us. And we have no idea how they're doing that—your GM powers should be able to sniff them out, right Saintly? It doesn't sit right with me. I can't rest easy knowing that someone might be out there working to wake that psychopath up."

Saintly shook his head. "For one thing, why would they? Lee says everyone was with Vierdimin out of fear, and they're probably just afraid of us now that we have the staff. But for another, they *can't* wake him up. They don't have the staff, and even if they did, they don't have the coding knowledge. Our priority needs to be figuring out how to get a message out of here and making contact with the real world. It's the only way we'll ever get off the server."

I plopped down in one of the chairs, settling my new robe over my legs. We hadn't been able to collect much gear for me yet, but I was slowly assembling a new set that would be better than the makeshift rags I'd worn to confront Vierdimin. It was too bad I couldn't wear summoned GM gear like Saintly was, but that was strictly for GMs, and there could only be one of those now.

"Hi, guys."

Saintly glanced across the table at me and nodded in greeting. Topper shook his head, giving me the same side-eye he had been all week.

"I know it's been a few days, Lacey," Topper said. "But I still can't get over how you *chose* to stay in that avatar. Being stuck in there is one thing,

but this... I just don't get it."

I shrugged, feeling a little defensive. "Do I need to explain it? I guess I just got comfortable being Lacey. Besides, as great as Kromgorn is, Vierdimin wasn't wrong. This avatar is the most powerful character on the server right now. We still don't know what might be waiting for us out there in Vierdimin's modified server code, right? We shouldn't leave our most powerful weapon sitting around on ice."

"I don't disagree with your logic," Topper muttered. "I just don't understand your choices... not my business, I guess." He sighed, shrugged at Saintly, and shook his head. "Millennials, am I right?"

Saintly nodded as though Topper had just uttered a deep, universal truth. I rolled my eyes and changed the subject.

"Any luck piecing out the staff controls, Saintly? Being Lacey is fun, but I don't think I want to stay here forever."

He frowned at the impressive epic clutched in his right hand. "Not much. I'll crack it eventually, I'm sure, but... man. Vierdimin did a number on this thing. It's super-customized and hacked together with a whole host of new functionality. He'd obviously been working on it for a while, which is how he used it to make all those crazy items and start to undermine the game code even before he copied us over to his private server. A third of the GM commands don't work like they should, and another third don't work at all, because he moved them and I can't figure out how to access them."

"If anyone can figure it out, you can," I replied, flashing him my most encouraging smile.

He nodded, although he didn't look very confident.

"At least time is on our side, for once," Topper remarked. "It's not like there's any big rush. You can beat your head against it until you crack the code."

A loud belch announced Erlix's presence. He strode into the room picking his teeth with one of his daggers, hopped up into the chair beside me, and rested his stumpy little legs on the surface of the table.

"Yeah, no big rush at all," he observed. "Just our friends and family waiting for us to wake up from comas while our bodies wither away from lack of use until we figure out how to download ourselves back into our brains from a remote, private server that no one outside of the game has any idea exists." He looked around the room, grinning. "That's a good summary, right?"

“You’re such a downer, Erlix,” I complained.

He laughed and clapped me on the shoulder. “Oh, relax, Goldie. I’m just trolling you all. I’m sure Saint Whats-his-Face over here will have all of us sprung in a jiffy. We should be enjoying ourselves right now! Think of this as a vacation from the real world.” He nudged me with his elbow. “Who wants to go back to a 9 to 5 when we can be adventuring, stuffing our faces, and fucking 24/7? I don’t even mind being a halfling anymore, now that I’ve learned to handle the enormous responsibility of having a giant halfling cock. It’s not so bad in here without a crazy, sociopathic torture-kiddie running the show, right?”

“I guess not...” I said.

“Damn straight! And you should know. You’re taking to that idea better than any of us with those two hot elves you’ve been boning all week, you dirty little treasure ho.”

I blushed and stared down at my hands in my lap.

“Okay, okay, that’s enough,” Topper said. He looked even more embarrassed than I was. “Why don’t you go make yourself useful, Erlix? We still need plenty of materials to build our guild stores back up, and you never know when we might need ‘em.”

“I’m not your slave, Topper!” Erlix protested. “Don’t like, be the man, *man*. It’s a free game out here. Besides, I’m much better at *telling* people to gather supplies than doing it myself.”

Topper sighed and folded his arms. “Well, we have a whole army of NPC servants you can order around. Why don’t you round them up and put them to work?”

“Now we’re talking! I’m management material, baby!”

Erlix hopped down and scooted out of the room, heading toward the servant quarters, and I smiled and shook my head at the little guy. I’d missed my halfling pal. It was nice to have everyone back in one place, even if we hadn’t located *all* of our guildies yet.

We might be stuck on a foreign server, cut off from the real world, and with all kinds of unknown threats looming over our heads, but I wasn’t afraid. We’d already come so far and done the impossible by beating the Vierdimin on his own turf. Once you’d taken down a sociopathic, sadistic god who was threatening to torture you for hundreds of years and come out the other end okay, everything else seemed kind of easy by comparison.

Besides, at least we were in this together. Whatever came next, I’d face

it side by side with people I was proud to call my friends.  
That was what really mattered.

## **Lacey the Courtesan's Final Character Sheet**

**Lacey (PC)**

**Sorceress (Courtesan) - Lv. 70**

**Specialization(s):** Mesmer/Sorceress

**Health:** 3,150

**Mana:** 4,550 (5,550)

### **Specialization (Lv 30): [Mesmer]**

The Mesmer builds on the Courtesan's inherent abilities to tease and misdirect her foes, injecting a dose of the arcane arts into the class. By focusing her raw charisma, she is capable of using illusion magic from the available Wizard Spell list to misdirect her foes, further enhancing her distraction capabilities, and can buff herself and her allies with alluring charisma-improvement spells. Mesmers have small talents in the use of arcane devices, as they've studied magic at a rudimentary level.

**New Skill: *Sexy Shadow*:** The Mesmer creates an illusionary duplicate of herself which she can control with her mind and/or give orders to in her absence. The illusion has no corporeal form, but can use many of the Mesmer's skills and last for several minutes (or until revealed as an illusion by an attempted touch).

#### **Perks:**

+10 Max Magical Devices Skill

\* Allows memorization and use of the Illusion category of Wizard spells.

\* Allows Charisma-based casting of all spells (for spells which would normally use Intelligence).

### **Specialization (Lv 65): [Sorceress]**

The dragonkin sorcerers of old were master magicians, casting spells through the raw magical essence of their otherworldly charisma. Courtesan Mesmers who follow in the footsteps of the ancient dragonkin take on many aspects of the dragons, as well as developing an affinity for their spells, allowing the use of alteration and evocation magic.

**New Skill: *Dragon Rage*:** Fills the sorceress with the ancient power of the dragonkin sorcerers, transforming her into a physically intimidating dragonkin and dramatically increasing the power of her spells for up to 2

minutes.

**Perks:**

\* Allows memorization and use of the Evocation and Alteration categories of Wizard spells.

\* Innate resistance to dragon-aspect elemental damage. +50  
Fire/Cold/Acid/Frost/Lightning Resistance

\* Magical wings which allow for dragon-flight at level 65.

**Primary Statistics**

**Str:** 3

**Dex:** 9

**Agi:** 9

**Sta:** 3

**Int:** 3 (6)

**Wis:** 3 (6)

**Cha:** 24 (32)

**Active Skill List**

**Hide** - Lv 4

**Charm** - Lv 62 - Permanent charm, works on one PC and one NPC.

**Seduce** - Lv 63 - Distracts 1-N NPCs by using sexuality.

**Kama Sutra (based on Seduce Skill)** - Physically ties up an enemy.

**Motorboat (based on Seduce Skill)** - Leaves an enemy disoriented for a while (~5 mins).

**Vejazzle (based on Charm Skill)** - Dazzles and stuns enemies who see it.

**(Mesmer) Sexy Shadow (based on Illusion Magic Skill)** - The Mesmer creates an illusionary duplicate of herself which she can control with her mind and/or give orders to in her absence. The illusion has no corporeal form, but can use many of the Mesmer's skills and last for several minutes (or until revealed as an illusion by an attempted touch).

**(Sorceress) Dragon Rage:** Fills the sorceress with the ancient power of the dragonkin sorcerers, transforming her into a physically intimidating dragonkin and dramatically increasing the power of her spells for up to 2 minutes.

### **Passive Skill List**

**Magical Devices** - Lv 10

**(Mesmer) Illusion Magic** - Lv 53 (Lv 78)

**(Sorceress) Evocation Magic** - Lv 53 (Lv 78)

**(Sorceress) Alteration Magic** - Lv 53 (Lv 78)

### **Trait List**

**Unintimidating** - NPCs are less likely to attack the character.

**Sex Appeal** - NPCs are more likely to be attracted to the character.

**Blessing of the Fey** - Int/Wis/Cha are raised by 3 each and all magic skills receive a 20 point bonus.

**(Mesmer) Charisma Caster** - Can use Charisma as the base stat for spellcasting instead of intelligence.

**(Mesmer) Illusionist** - Can cast Wizard spells from the Illusionist school.

**(Sorceress) Dragon Mage** - Can cast Wizard spells from the Evocation and Alteration schools.

**(Sorceress) Dragon-Blessed** - Benefits from dragon-category elemental resistances and flight-enabling wings that manifest at will. Can also use racial ability **Dragon Rage**.

### **Stat-Influencing Gear**

**[Fabulous Tiara of the Dragonkin Sorcerers]**

Epic Quality, Item Level 75

*This rare item was once the property of the dragonkin sorcerers, but was reconstructed by the prophesied one who has both the charm and magical skill to wield it, paralleled only by the beautiful dragon sorcerers of old.*

Cha +5 / Mana +1000 / Effective Spell Skill Level +5

**Unlocks Hidden Class:** Sorceress

### **Spells (Basic Spellbook)**

*Tier I*

**[Dazzle]** This spell creates a shower of multicolored sparks like a miniature fireworks display. It will not do harm, but has a small chance to

confuse or blind an opponent.

### *Tier II*

-

### *Tier III*

**[Size Manipulation]** This spell allows the caster to disperse or condense the very matter making up a player or NPC, causing them to become 1-2 sizes larger or smaller than they currently are. Their total mass remains the same, so their stats are unaffected. Hostile targets receive a save against this spell.

**[Major Glamour]** This spell allows the caster to physically alter the features and body characteristics of a player or NPC, transforming them into another gender, race, or radically altering their physical features for the duration of spell, without changing their stats or size category. This provides an enormous bonus to disguise checks. Hostile targets receive a save against this spell.

**[Lasting Illusion]** Create any visual illusion over an area up to 10x10x10' that will last for up to three weeks or until dispelled.

### *Tier IV*

**[Burden]** This spell causes targeted objects within 15 feet to become significantly heavier and more cumbersome.

**[Water Breathing]** This spell allows the target to breathe underwater for the duration of the spell (base 15 minutes).

**[Elemental Shield]** This spell creates a damage shield which covers the body of the caster and reduces all elemental damage by 75% for the duration (base 5 minutes).

**[Chain Lightning]** This spell casts bolts of lightning out from the casters fingertips to a single target and will then leap to 4 additional targets, losing 25% of the damage with each jump.

**[Icy Breath]** This spell allows the PC to breathe icy wind in a 15' cone from their mouth, damaging any hostile targets caught within. It has a small chance to freeze targets.

**[Flame Jet]** This spell creates a sustained jet of flame that extends up to 10' from the casters fingertips on either or both hands and will cause ongoing fire damage until the spell is ended or mana runs out.

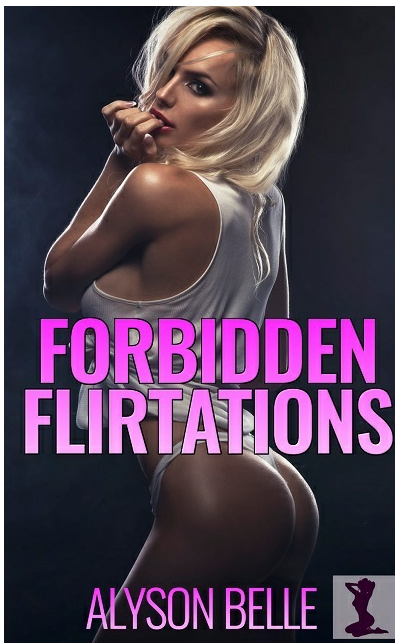


*The end... for now. Thanks for reading!*  
*- xoxo, Alyson*



Want more? [Subscribe to Alyson Belle's newsletter](http://alysonbelle.com/free-books/) and you'll get an **exclusive FREE book, *Forbidden Flirtations*!**

(If you can't click the link, you can copy/paste - <http://alysonbelle.com/free-books/> - into your web browser.)



An excerpt from *Forbidden Flirtations*:

As I made my way to the central stage, I could feel the eyes of the crowd on me and see them whisper to each other. There weren't any other glitter-covered girls around, and it was obvious to everyone what I was here for. I struggled to push myself up the four feet required to get up there, and then felt a strong hand on my ass helping me up. I squeaked as it gave a little

squeeze and turned around to see a handsome man with wavy black hair wink at me and smile. I huffed, but I appreciated his help.

The music faded into another song as the DJ cut over, and I realized that everyone was looking at me expectantly. I swallowed nervously. The bass beat faded in. I wiggled my hips and started to gyrate in time with the music. Heather had been right. This body knew how to move, and still being just the tiniest bit high helped me along. I tried to close my eyes, smile, and just flow with the music.

They loved it. I felt shockingly self-conscious, but I'd also never felt so free. These strangers were staring at me, staring at *my* half naked body, at *my* breasts and *my* ass as I wiggled along with the music in the silliest costume I'd ever worn. It was humiliating and powerful and exhilarating all at the same time.

Glitter flew off my limbs with every fluid motion, and I began to touch myself: caressing my breasts and pushing my fingers sensually down my body, teasing at my pussy through my black lace panties, taunting the crowd. Neither the men nor the women could keep their eyes off of me. Even the other girls onstage below me had turned to watch, barely dancing themselves. I was beautiful. I was a goddess, and everyone wanted to watch me take it all off.

I reached behind my back and unhooked the bra first, enjoying the cheers and the gasps as my naked tits bounced out in front of everyone. I shook them, letting them ripple, as I swung around the brass pole set into the middle of platform. Running on pure instinct, I lifted my left leg straight up into the air and grabbed my ankle, grinding hard against the pole with a happy moan at the shock of pleasure that ran through my pussy. I was surprised at how flexible this body was!

Next I dropped onto all fours and crawled forward along the stage, still wagging my ass along with the thumping beat. Men at the edge of stage hooted and waved at me as I approached.

Rolling back onto my haunches, I grabbed both ankles and spread my legs wide, snapping them back together and then opening them again. Then, in a single motion I slid my panties down my legs and over my ankles and tossed them into the crowd. People went wild.

Now I was totally naked, except for the glitter, crawling around on the floor like a horny animal. I could see the men's cocks straining against their pants as I flashed my pussy at them, and I could see the women shifting in

their seats, some of them even touching themselves as I writhed beautifully on the floor.

I started to finger myself like I'd seen girls do at some of the dirtiest clubs I went to, and the cheering intensified, almost drowning out the music. I slipped fingers in and out of my pussy, arching my back and working myself relentlessly on the stage, and thumbed my clit for the extra little shocks of pleasure. I was losing myself in the moment again, forgetting anything but how amazing I felt. I lost myself to the euphoric feelings of stroking and fingering my sweet cunt, naked in front of a crowd...

But suddenly one of the men climbed up on stage with me! I scrambled back, startled. I felt so vulnerable lying on the ground naked as he towered over me, erection bulging at the front of his pants. He held a hand out to me. I calmed down. What was he going to do in front of the whole club like this?

I reached out and took it, and he smoothly pulled me to my feet. Then he picked me up by my waist and tossed me over his shoulder, giving my ass a few quick slaps while I was there.

"H-hey!" I cried, my cheeks burning. Everyone was cheering him on, and I saw Heather laughing at us from the bar.

The man hopped off the stage and started carrying me to the back of the club, where I saw that Door #4 had a green light now. Heather rose and headed toward us too.

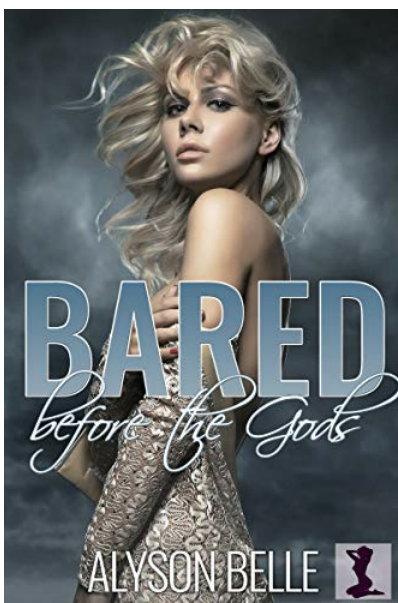
"Wait a minute!" I shouted over the music. "What's behind door #4? What are you going to do to me?"

I kicked my feet helplessly, breasts bouncing as I struggled against his burly muscles. He held my petite form easily and swatted my rear again as he kicked the door open.

"Calm down, hot stuff," he said in a deep, sexy voice that matched his rugged good looks. "You're about to find out."

***Go get the rest, totally FREE, right here: <http://alysonbelle.com/free-books/>***

***Now turn the page for a special preview of other sexy stories by Alyson Belle...***



### **Bared Before the Gods: A Mythical Gender Swap Romance**

When you steal from the gods, they find the most creative ways to punish you...

Lukas and his best friend Mal are Greek adventurers and warriors in the tradition of Jason, Odysseus, and a host of other heroes, and Lukas knows that despite his humble beginnings, he has the potential to take his place among those men as a legend of mythic proportions. But no one else believes in him, and so he sets out to prove them all wrong by undertaking a most Herculean task: climbing Mount Olympus and stealing Zeus's golden crown.

Zeus, however, is not amused, and Lukas's theft is quickly punished with his swift and painful death—or so Zeus believes. But Aphrodite has other plans for such a bold and handsome hero: she rescues Lukas from death's door and uses her powers to hide him away in the body of Lucia, a comely maiden who Zeus would never suspect of being the thief who took his crown.

Now, Lucia has only a few days to convince Mal to help her find and return Zeus's crown, before the other gods realize what Aphrodite has done and return Lucia to Hades... or worse, leave her trapped forever in the body of this maiden. She'll need to move fast and decisively to win the day, which would be easy if she weren't so distracted by all these strange new feelings of

lust and attraction she's having for her adventuring partner, Mal...

**An excerpt from *Bared Before the Gods*:**

"Lucia?! Are you okay? Wake up!" Mal was shaking me. A worried expression colored his face. He looked so concerned as I jerked away from him, but his touch had sent electricity through my body that threw me off for a moment.

It was just a dream, and I'd been right in the beginning. I looked down at my dainty, pale fingers and realized I was still a woman. So, I had indeed met Aphrodite, and she had saved me from Charon. I had no doubt that had she not removed me from the underworld, what I had dreamed would have been my fate.

"I'm sorry, Mal. I had an awful dream. I was back in the underworld, and Charon threw me into the river of pain. I was being struck by lightning repeatedly, but there was no lightning, and I couldn't scream. Oh, Mal! It was so terrible! Do you think that could have been my fate had I not been saved?"

The female body I had been forced into seemed to have affected my emotions as well, because tears pooled in my eyes until I was sobbing on Mal's shoulder, who was holding me and rubbing my back, trying to comfort me.

"It's okay, Lucia. You're not there; you're here. You're going to be fine."

"But what if that awaits me when I return to the underworld? Surely, I won't appear as a woman, since my spirit is a man. Charon will immediately recognize me as the man who stole Zeus' crown!"

"Shhhh. You shouldn't concern yourself with such morbid thoughts. You are not dying any time soon. Zeus will not find you; Aphrodite made sure of it by turning you into this gorgeous woman." Mal pulled away from holding me to gaze into my tear-streaked face.

"You...You think I'm gorgeous?" I sniffled, trying to wipe away the waterfalls that poured from my eyes.

"Of course you'd only focus on that part." Mal rolled his eyes. But unlike all the other times I was vain and wanted the compliment, I wasn't joking around. I gazed at him with a longing expression, and he sighed.

"Yes, she turned you into the most gorgeous woman I have ever seen." Mal placed one of his hands on the side of my cheek, and my face practically

melted into a puddle in his palm. I closed my eyes and smiled, nuzzling against his hand.

And then I felt those soft, warm lips from earlier brushing against my own.

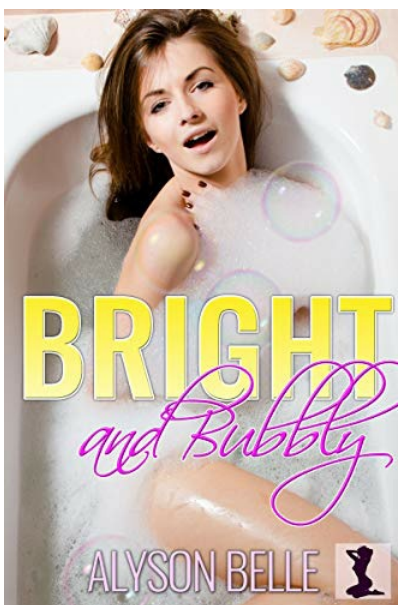
I opened my eyes only to see his closed. I thought about breaking the kiss, telling him I was still a guy, and that this wasn't right. But I couldn't bring myself to do it. As much as my mind protested, my body was responding to him, and my lips were shaping against his eager kisses. He cradled my body in his arms, and I was mush. My protesting thoughts quickly gave up as his fingertips caressed my shoulder, raising goosebumps.

"Is this all right?" he asked suddenly. "I just... you're so beautiful, and..."

"Shh," I urged, fighting against myself. I hadn't realized just how badly I wanted him until I'd been wrapped up in his arms. My new body wanted him even if my mind found it strange. "Shut up. Don't stop."

His tongue glided against my lips, asking for entrance. A small corner of my mind tried to say no, but my mouth parted anyway. His tongue explored me with reckless abandon, tasting me for the first time. I experimentally nuzzled my tongue against his and was amused to find the flavor of the rich spanakopita we'd had for dinner. There was a hidden taste as well which I figured was his natural taste. Paired together, it was delicious, and I felt that I could kiss him all day.

But he seemed to have other things in mind when he undid the belt to my dress...



### **Bright and Bubbly: A Gender Swap Romance**

**Russ can't keep a girlfriend around to save his life, thanks to his way-overactive libido. But it turns out there's an easy solution for that problem—girls never have an issue finding a hot date, right?**

When Russ loses his third girlfriend in a row to his overly voracious need for getting down and dirty, he complains to his friends that a girl wouldn't ever have this problem. Case in point: His friend Krystal, a lesbian who sleeps with dozens and dozens of hot dates. But since he's not a girl, Krystal proposes an alternate solution: Why not go see a fortune teller and see if a little hypnosis can cure him of his appetites?

At first, Russ is skeptical, and he's right to be—the moment he shows up in Madame Orlando's magic shop, she tells him that he doesn't need hypnosis. He just needs a partner who's right for him. But Russ insists, and after a long look into his soul, she sends him home with a magic bath bomb that he absolutely does not believe is going to do anything. His doubt lasts right up until the magic bath bomb does its thing and turns him into a beautiful woman!

Now, as the gorgeous brunette Riley, he discovers that he loves being a girl more than he ever could have imagined, and he has no problem finding lovers

of either gender. But when his string of endless one-night stands begins to leave him feeling a little empty inside, he begins to wonder... will he ever find the person he's truly meant to be with? Or will he end up stuck forever as the bright, bubbly girl everyone likes to have a good time with, but no one wants to keep?

**An excerpt from *Bright and Bubbly*:**

Allan didn't say anything as she suddenly dissolved into a mess of tears, hiding her face in the grey shirt he wore. There was only so much she could think about at once, and everything that had happened in the past few weeks was vying for her attention, shouting and jostling in her brain until she had a splitting headache. Riley loved being a girl—she didn't want to go back in the slightest. But it was a sudden shift to make, with no prior thoughts about it or warning, and she was overwhelmed by the world around her. Instead of panicking, she simply tried to focus on the rise and fall of Allan's chest.

Her breathing eventually slowed to a crawl, unconsciously matching the slow petting of her hair. Tears that had flowed hot and fast when she first began to cry now only slipped free every once in a while, dripping down her face and soaking into Allan's shirt. Somehow she was sharing a chair with him now, half-seated on his lap and curled into the littlest bundle she could make. She wondered when that had happened, somewhere in the back of her mind—Riley didn't remember changing her seating position. Allan held her close to his chest, and she became acutely aware of how small she was now. Little enough that her best friend had moved her without her realizing it.

"You're a good person."

Allan's words rumbled into her ear, and she felt every syllable as the low, reassuring tone vibrated through his chest and into her. Almost immediately she welled up with tears again, but Riley did her best to stop them before she starting crying all over him again. She'd made enough of a mess for one day. Her gaze focused across the room, on a picture of Russ, Krystal, and Allan that they'd taken the day the boys moved into this house together.

"You're just saying that," she mumbled under her breath, and he was quick to respond.

"I'm not. You're a good person. You're funny and sweet and you care about your friends. You're the life of the party."

God, she needed him to stop. Riley couldn't handle all these nice things being said about her—it was difficult to reconcile them with her fear that she was just, at her core, meant to be alone. It was confusing, and he needed to stop talking, and—

*Oh.*

She'd raised her head to his, meaning to knock his chin with the top of her skull, but Allan had leaned down at the same time so he could whisper compliments in her ears. Their lips met clumsily as they moved, and they both pulled away almost instantaneously in surprise, registering the accidental kiss they'd shared. His eyes were wide with surprise, and she could only imagine that hers were too.

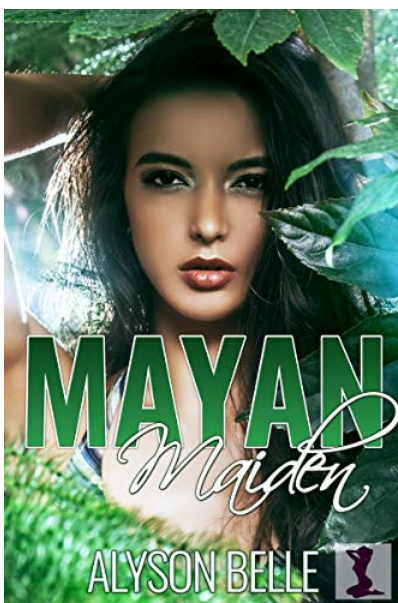
Words built in her throat, but she had no idea what they might be. Her brain certainly couldn't come up with anything to say—it was stuck on how warm his mouth had been against hers, and how soft and secure it felt to be kissing him.

Before she found her voice again, Allan dipped his head back down and captured her lips once more. This kiss too was gentle and sweet. It spoke of a long wait: of weeks and years of repressed desire, of feelings that had waited to come to the surface ever since they'd become friends. Riley realized with a start that they were her own feelings, feelings she was projecting into the kiss desperately. As though he'd been able to read her mind and know how sorry she was for ever considering or even looking at anyone other than him.

He'd always been there for her—first as Russ and now as Riley. There'd been countless nights they'd stayed up talking to each other about their dreams and hopes for the future. She could read Allan better than anyone else on the planet, and he always knew what to say to make her laugh.

She'd been an idiot to look anywhere else for the love and connection she so desperately craved. It had been right next to her for the last few years.

Allan seemed to agree. The hand that had been petting her was now tangled up in her soft brown hair, holding her face close to his so that he could deepen and intensify the kiss. Riley was at the mercy of his desire, and she wouldn't have it any other way. They were both hungry for something that had waited years to come to fruition, and now that it was finally here neither one of them wanted to stop...



### [Mayan Maiden: A Gender Swap Romance](#)

**When you're dumb enough to piss off a goddess, being turned into a woman is the least of your concerns...**

When best friends Seth and Noah set off for the ultimate spring break Mexican vacation, they have a wild, booze and party-fueled vision of how their week is going to go, and the throngs of hot girls at the airport are just their first taste of that. But all of those plans get cut short when an ill-advised nighttime jaunt to some off-limits, ancient Mayan ruins puts the guys face to face with an actual, incarnate Mayan goddess. She's powerful, gorgeous, and very pissed off at all the people who keep exploring her temple and taking her sacred objects.

Fed up with thieves, she punishes Seth for the intrusion by transforming him into her own image—a ravishingly hot Mayan maiden—and tells him that he can't have his old body back until they recover her sacred statue from the thieves that took it. But Noah and Seth (now calling herself Sera) don't even know where to begin looking, and Sera has no experience being a woman!

They'll need to track down the thieves and help Sera adjust to her awkward new situation before her time runs out, which would be hard enough if she wasn't also completely distracted by the strange, powerful attraction she now

feels for her best friend. How did she never notice how hot Noah was before, and how on earth is she going to navigate these feelings that are driving her crazy? It's getting hard to remember why she even wanted to be a guy in the first place, when it's so much fun to be a girl...

**An excerpt from *Mayan Maiden*:**

“Are you sure you're okay with this?”

I wasn't sure. But I wanted to try. My body insisted. I didn't care how bizarre and dreamlike this all was. I nodded and tentatively grabbed his hardened rod in my hands. It was smooth and hard and it had a nice warmth emanating from within—the same warmth I had felt deep inside me when he was playing in my bottoms earlier. He sighed and closed his eyes, and I smiled. It was working. We were really going to do this.

I just sort of did what I always saw girls doing in porn and let my body guide me. Guys always masturbated to them, wishing girls would do the kinds of things porn stars did, and I wanted to fulfill that fantasy for him. Why not?

*At least one of us should have the experience.*

I ran my hand up and down his shaft slowly, gliding over the soft skin, but that was just the beginning. Noah could do that himself. Of course, it always felt better when a girl did it, but I knew what the anticipation of the mouth was like for men. It was always what we really wanted. And even sweet, thoughtful Noah was waiting for it now. I knew it. I could feel his body tensing for it, being both confused and carried away by the situation just like I was.

So, I gave him what I knew he wanted.

I licked the tip of his rod hesitantly to taste it. I decided it wasn't bad at all and wrapped my lips around the head of his member, using my tongue to swirl against it.

Noah released his first real moan, and I smiled inwardly. I started to lick up and down his shaft before running my mouth along its entire length. I bobbed my head on it slowly at first and then more quickly. I tried to force him as far down my throat as I could get him, and he helped, placing a hand on the back of my neck. I loved the feel of his member touching the back of my throat. I wanted to hold him there forever until he came.

*I guess the goddess forgot a gag reflex when she put together the whole*

woman package. I chuckled to myself. She really had turned me into a nympho, for whatever reason.

I could tell Noah was enjoying himself from his sounds. He tangled his hands in my soft hair and guided me along his shaft, controlling my speed and pushing when I wanted to feel him in my throat again. I used one of my hands to fondle him below the shaft while I worked it, gently caressing him in a way that seemed to drive him crazy.

He slowed me to a stop and pulled himself from my mouth, a trickle of spit hanging in the air.

“You’re like a dream...” he said.

“Then why did we stop?”

“Because if you kept going, we probably wouldn’t make it to the best part. Besides, I’d like to reciprocate a little myself if that’s okay.”

My new pleasure nub twitched at the idea, and I wiped my mouth clean, nodding.

“Lay back.”

I laid down on the clothing blanket he set up for me as comfortably as I could. He knelt in front of me, untying the strings of my bikini bottoms and pulling them off. He spread my legs and I watched as he brought his head down to me.

I gasped. His tongue was *there*. I could feel every lick, every stroke, swirling around and flicking against me. He encased my button with his lips and sucked. I thought I was going to explode with pleasure. My hips grinded against his mouth, encouraging him to continue delivering this immense ecstasy. I felt him slip a finger into me, but I was so wet, I hardly even noticed until it was deep within me, creating a feeling of fullness I had never felt before. It was the most amazing thing I had ever experienced, and I wanted so much more. I wanted him to fill me up completely, to stretch me out.

“More...” I whispered as he pumped into me with his single finger. He didn’t even hesitate as he slipped another in. This one created a twinge of pain, but it was gone just as quickly as it came, swallowed by the delicious feeling taking over every inch of my body.

And suddenly it stopped. His mouth and fingers were gone, and I opened my eyes, searching for him. My vision was slightly blurred, but I saw him approaching my entrance, member in hand.

“Are you ready?” he asked hoarsely.

*Oh God, yes...*



### **Heaven Sent**

**He messed up his first life, but that's what second chances are for... even if this time he has to do it as a woman.**

When Rick, a high-powered, rich financier, unexpectedly arrives at the gates of heaven and is denied entry because of the self-centered way he lived his life, all he wants is a second chance to make up for past mistakes. He'd always intended to be more generous and kinder to people—he was just planning to do it in his golden years. When the angels give him the chance to go back to Earth in a young, fit body and prove the truth of his intentions, Rick eagerly accepts. Getting to be young all over again while keeping all of his accumulated wisdom sounds like a great deal, and he can hardly believe his luck.

But when Rick wakes up in a dirty Los Angeles alley in the body of a gorgeous, female twenty-something with no money, no I.D., and no apparent past, he immediately begins to regret his choice. How is he supposed to prove how generous and kind he can be without any of his prior wealth or friends?

How is he supposed to support himself with no way to get a job and no resources at his disposal? And how on Earth is he supposed to adjust to being a petite, delicate woman when he's spent decades as a confident, powerful

man?

Rick quickly discovers that being a woman is very different from the life he's used to, in ways that are both frustrating and humiliating. The only person who gives a damn about him now is Luke: the strong, warm-eyed bartender who takes pity on the pretty, bedraggled girl and gives her a place to stay and some money to get back on her feet while she figures out her new life. If only there were something she could do to repay his kindness...

### **An excerpt from *Heaven Sent*:**

Madison arched her back off the bed and lifted her hips to meet his hands, hungry for his touch to wander other places. Luke smiled at her impatience and climbed more fully onto the bed, one leg coming to rest solidly between her thighs. His knee suddenly ground up against her sex, and Madison gasped at the friction, returning the motion with urgency. Unfortunately for her, he didn't seem to be in any hurry and shied his leg away from her slightly until she forced herself to stop moving.

It seemed like he wanted to set the pace, and it was maddening to lie there panting and wait for him to decide to make another move. It wasn't fair! She wanted him now, and the waiting was agony. Whimpers and moans spilled from her lips every few seconds as he slowly moved above her, teasing and tasting her skin every time his knee moved. Whenever she tried to coax him along too quickly, he withdrew slightly, a stern reminder that he was in charge here, and that Madison was submissive to his whims—he'd take her when *he* wanted to, and no sooner. Agony.

In a desperate attempt for revenge, she reached up and spread her palms wide over his chest. Her fingers quickly found his nipples and she gave them a sharp tug, pulling Luke's first gasp of the night out. His teeth bit down sharply at her neck and she cried out, causing him to roll sideways off her and collapse on the bed next to her. They lay side by side panting.

But Madison had more tricks up her sleeve from watching women tease her for years as Rick. She turned on her side so that she had a wonderful view of his body and traced her hand over his bare stomach, mirroring the gentle touches he'd been giving her earlier. Her fingers found his hipbones and she used them as leverage to pull herself into a sitting position over him,

straddling his waist as she had when they'd kissed on the couch. He grinned up at her and one hand reached out to brush away a lock of blonde hair that had fallen into her face.

She grasped the bottom of her shirt, as she'd seen women do a thousand times, and it pulled it over her head in a single motion that dragged it sensually across her breasts and exposed her bra. Then she cupped her breasts above Luke, narrowing her eyes and posing in a way that Rick had always found to be maddeningly sexy. Luke inhaled sharply at the view of her cleavage, practically bursting out of the white, lacy bra that Rebecca had sold her. She didn't feel lost, here in this moment—she felt powerful. Madison had a unique perspective on what sorts of things men found sexy, given her previous life, and she wanted to put those skills to good use to pay back her sexy benefactor. Luke had been so kind to her, and he was hot, sweet, and everything she wanted in that moment. He deserved the best night she could show him.

Reaching out, she caught his hand from where it lay on the bed and guided it up to her breast for him to feel. His eyes watched the motion of her skin as his fingers pressed into the soft flesh, kneading and pulling around her nipples until she whimpered with pleasure, and it surprised even Madison at just how good his warm hand felt there. From her position atop him it was easy to grind her hips down, this time controlling all the friction herself. Underneath her he was rapidly getting harder, his firm length pressing against the fabric of his jeans and rubbing her through her layers of clothes once again.

Both of them were wearing way too many for her liking. Fingers scrambled against the zipper of his pants and he caught his breath when she dipped inside his jeans, brushing his cock through his underwear. She liked pulling these noises out of him; it felt like sharing themselves in a way that she couldn't begin to describe. Luke's hands clutched at her hips again and he pulled her forward roughly onto the fabric of his underwear. Fully hard now, his dick strained to be free from the confines of his clothing. Madison smiled at the precum visible on the white fabric she was grinding on, getting wetter and wetter herself.

But when she trailed her fingers underneath the waistband of the underwear, Luke stopped her hand with an iron grip. Mischief sparkled in his eyes, a look she was learning to recognize, and she reminded herself again that she was only in charge to the extent that Luke allowed her to be. She was

totally at his mercy.

Quickly he rolled them both to the side, unseating her from him with an ungraceful flop. She giggled as he slid off the bed, turning around to see him sliding his jeans all the way off. But instead of fully undressing, he returned to the bed and began working at the zipper on her own pants. Madison tried to reach down to help him but he gently batted her hands away, murmuring for her to 'relax.'

She kicked her pants off quickly and expected his fingers to return, but was surprised when something hot and wet mouthed at her through her panties. Wide-eyed, she looked down to see Luke kneeling on the floor beside the bed, at the perfect height to lick a stripe down her thigh and end with his nose buried in her crotch. Teeth scraped the fabric of her panties and he pulled them down her legs in a single, quick jerk, exposing her pussy to the eager man. Madison flushed and gasped as a string of her juices connected to the panties snapped, embarrassed at the concrete proof of her arousal. But Luke just grinned as though staring at his favorite meal. Again she felt as if he was going to devour her, and there was nothing in the world that would have made her stop him...



### [Becoming Hers](#)

Tom McCallister has been in love with his best friend Lyla for as long as he

can remember, but what would be the point of telling her that? He's known that it's hopeless ever since she came out to him as a lesbian during their freshman year of college. Lyla likes women, and Tom is definitely not a woman.

But when Tom loses both his job and his girlfriend on the same day, Lyla is still the first person he turns to for support. She tells him to drop everything and fly out to see her in New York, confident that some friend time is exactly what he needs to get through his slump. On the plane ride over, Tom confesses his love for Lyla to a mysterious woman, takes a nap, and then wakes up in New York with some very surprising changes! He's been somehow transformed into a jaw-droppingly beautiful woman--a "megahottie," as Lyla would say. Tom has no idea what's going on and texts Lyla in a panic!

Fortunately, Lyla is there just like always to help him out. But now that Tom is a woman, their whole dynamic has changed. Sparks fly between the two best friends almost immediately, and Tom realizes that as "Jess," he might finally be able to explore his real feelings for Lyla. Is it worth risking everything for a happily ever after?

### **An excerpt from *Becoming Hers*:**

I didn't know what to say, so I just clinked my glass with hers and downed my drink in a few gulps, hoping the liquid courage would help me get through this crazy, bizarre night. Lyla followed suit and then her hand slid into mine once again.

It felt right, pressed there against my palm, our fingers intertwining, and my blood thrummed in my veins. I didn't think I had ever met a more beautiful woman than Lyla.

"How about we hit the floor?" she asked suddenly.

"Sounds good to me."

I let her pull me out there just as a faster paced song came on. It felt strange to move my new body, since it was so much more... *flexible*. I'd never been much of a dancer, always feeling sort of awkward on the dance floor, but it seemed so much easier in this body than it ever had when I had

been a man. I found myself making more winding, fluid moves instead of my normal jerky side-stepping in time with the beat. It took about half the song for me to get my bearings, but then Lyla wrapped her arms around my waist and pressed her body into mine, moving along with the music.

Oh.

*Oh.*

I'd danced with Lyla before, but this time it was different. It felt like I'd stuck a fork into an electrical socket, and my heart leapt into my throat. I tried my best to follow her lead, but it was hard to concentrate with every single neuron in my brain dedicated to reporting on all the different sensations I was getting from the feeling of her body moving against mine.

The softness of her breasts as they pushed against my ribs. The delicate curve of her wrist resting just behind my spine. The pulse at her neck. My brain translated all of this in a deluge of information, and I never wanted it to end.

Sometime during that moment, I had reached up and let my hand rest on her shoulder, touching her luminescent skin. *God.* She was even softer than I was, like silk and satin had combined into the ultimate texture. And as my palm rested there, I could feel the tension of her breasts rising and falling with her movements. A short moment later, I realized mine were doing the same, resulting in a strange circle of both pleasure and pain.

I felt myself getting rapidly overwhelmed by the physical sensations of a body spinning wildly out of control until my mind could only spit out one thought.

*Kiss her.*

*Kiss her!*

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## About the Author



Alyson Belle has had a passion for transformation and body swap stories for as long as she can remember. An avid early reader of TG captions, she particularly enjoys themes and story elements revolving around magical transformations, being stuck, and mild punishment, although she also loves a sweet happy ending where characters who've learned their lesson get their happily ever after. She now delights in sharing her passion with the world by writing some of the sexiest stories around, exclusively for your enjoyment.

You can see more of Alyson Belle's work, get in touch, and follow her blog on [AlysonBelle.com](http://AlysonBelle.com).

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