

MOTHER'S DAY AT THE CASTLE

Featuring yours truly as I corner the Guardians on this day and see what they're up to ☺

"Hi," I called out, stopping at the open French doors of the castle kitchen. Two of the women and their warriors sit around the table, their tea and coffee cups in front of them.

Kira and Týr glance up, as do Dagan and Shae.

The females smile.

"Hey, there's our wicked Author!" Kira grins. "Come on in! So who are you currently torturing, girl?"

Týr's expression is contemplative. No doubt he thinks I'm up to something horrendous. *Of course, I am. I always am. But not today.*

So I cast him an innocent look. "Just visiting my fav people," I say a little evasively, and he snorts. "You have anything to say to our readers?" I ask, changing the subject. "Since this is one of the most important days on Earth—everywhere, in fact, for women—"

"Mother's day!" Shae says, eyes widening. "Crap!" She jumps up and hauls ass for the door leading to Hedori's quarters. "Mom!" she calls out, then spins back. "Dag, let's go get flowers first!" She grabs his hand and rushes for the French doors.

"Shae-cat, hold on," he grunts. "Let me get shears or something."

An obsidian dagger appears in her hand. "Here, we're good."

Dagan snorts and shakes his head, his long warrior braids swaying down his back. "That's not how I envisioned the weapon being used," he says with a wry smile, following her. "You know, you could just select one of the sculptures from my studio as a gift?" he tells her.

"Okay, we'll add one of those too." Shae pivots to where I am, smiles, and calls out, "Happy Mother's, everyone!" Then she turns to Dagan. "And a happy, heavenly mother's day for your mom," she tells him softly.

He exhales, then nods. "Thanks."

No, his mother didn't have a happy life when she lived.

They both disappear outside.

Kira sighs. "Love them."

Tyr frowns. I know he doesn't recall his own mother.

"Want to send our readers a message or something?" I asked then.

"Yes." Kira nods. "Happy Mother's Day to all those incredible people who raised or are raising young—and also, thank you for loving our stories."

"And our crazy writer, too," Týr mumbles.

But I hear him.

Oh, he's so gonna regret calling me *crazy*.

I smirk in delight and tap on the Notes app on my phone.

"What are you doing?" he asks me, his brow creasing.

"Oh, nothing much, just a little reminder for something extra special for my next book for you, maybe a revisit to *down under*—"

Týr growls.

Kira blinks, then she pats his arm.

After a moment, he smirks now, pulling out his M&Ms from his pocket and popping several reds into his mouth. "Bring it on, GLH—"

Ugh, no fun teasing him. I scrunch my face, and he grins, revealing those deep, masculine dimples.

The kitchen door opens, and Nik saunters in.

"Hey, Nik," Kira calls out. "Where's Shadow?"

"Resting." He glances at me.

"Preparing something special for our resident mama-to-be?" she asks him, cupping her mug. He frowns. "Just her current fav snack."

"Strawberry soda and peanut butter and salami sandwich, I know." Kira grimaces wryly.

"What?" Týr gapes. "She likes that?"

I laugh. "It's normal for pregnant women to have strange cravings," I tell him.

Týr tips his chair on its two back legs and glances at Kira. She rolls her eyes. "Uh, no way, babe. We have eternity, so no patter of little feet just yet." And he grins.

Nik still stares at me, eyes narrowed suspiciously. "Are we having let make the Guardians suffer more day?" he asked.

Oh man, still a little pissed at what happened to him?

"Oh, ye of little fate." I sigh.

He cocks an eyebrow.

Okay, fine, he has reason not to trust me. "You have a beautiful baby arriving soon or soonish," I say quickly.

"When?" he asks, cool green eyes telling me maybe then he might forgive me for his brutal demise.

Man, I'm *sooo* tempted to do so, but I don't want the hate... Ugh.

I shrug and stall by smiling, letting my moment of weakness pass. "When it happens, you'll know."

"That doesn't help," he mutters, taking out bread from the container and lathering on crunchy peanut butter, and then he gets out the salami from the fridge and layers that on, too.

"By the way," I say, changing the convo as he heads for the fridge again. "I'm here because today is—"

"Mother's Day!" Kira pipes out as Nik retrieves a strawberry soda. "And Shadow is soon-to-be one. What are your plans for today?" she asks him.

Nik's eyebrows tip together.

"I mean, we know you spoil her, but for us humans—well, I grew up as one, and I know. I used to get Gran, well my mother, chocolate and flowers—these little things mean a lot," she explains. "And I loved the smile on her face when I gave them to her."

Now he looks a little panicked. "What should I do?"

"Well," Kira grins, nodding to the window overlooking the gardens, where Dagan and Shae were cutting up armfuls of mixed blooms. "Do that. Heck, take over the gazebo, set it all up, make it even more special."

Nik leaves the soda on the counter, and then he's gone in a swirl of molecules.

Kira puts her hand on Týr's arm, and his chair lands on fours again. "Happy heavenly Mother's Day to your mom, too, honey," she says.

He stares at her for a second, then nods. *His mother died when he was a babe.* "We've never had special days like these for mothers. I like it. I think mine must have been amazing." His expression softens. "Thanks, *elska.*"

I walk out quietly.

My work is done. Another human tradition, an important one, passed on to these immortal warriors...