

# The Road to Change, Part 20: The Royal Throne (Multi TFTG)

**By FoxFaceStories**

## **A Commission for AI**

*Melvin is a noble-born magic caster, stuffy and serious. Allison is a vibrant and confident fighter, charged with his protection. Despite their contrasting personalities, the two must set forth together on a grand mission when a foul demon lord rises and unleashes transformative domination magic across the land. As the two adventure and deal with their own series of bodily transformations, they are forced to grapple with their own growing feelings for one another.*

## **The Road to Change**

### **Chapter 20: The Royal Throne**

The throne room of Aenir. *The* throne room, the one that was open to the sky and yet never harassed by the wind. A grand circular area whose only walls were pillars, and magnificently carved marble railings that prevented any from falling off. An impressive balcony held said railings, curving right around the exterior, allowing one to view the entire city. Of course, the kings and queens of old would mostly hold court far below, in the lesser throne. But this was the place of a *true* ruler, above one's people, and yet always connected to them; able to see the lifeblood of the city. The throne sat on a raised dais, the marble steps leading up possessing intricate patterns, and the same was true of the entire floor. A curved staircase led to the uppermost chambers, but this was as high as most grand visitors would ever go. It should have been beautiful.

Instead, the throne room was desecrated. When Melvin and Allison reached it, the beautiful crystal ledgework was covered over by volcanic black growth. Tendrils of corruption seeped into the chandelier above, and the marble pillars were cracked, held together by foul tendrils of decayed vines devoid of life. The white marble had turned black, with only the tiniest areas of white remaining. Here, the sky was red, and the sounds of battle and death raged around them below, magnified in sound as if it were sweet music to the Demon Lord's ears.

He was waiting for them, black on black, the void of his power surrounding him as he laid back on his throne far too informally. He was powerfully built, possessing wide shoulders and a height that neared seven feet, though it was difficult to tell what was black, almost *liquid* flame and what was man. His armour was barely visible beneath that flame, though

perhaps he wore no armour at all, save that horned helm. Perhaps the flame was his armour. Or perhaps that was all that was left of a demon once its power had ascended to such terrible heights. Either way, his red eyes glowed from within, as if peeking out from his dread helm. His very presence warped the air around him, causing smoke and ash to tilt and curve, waves of heat to circle around him.

*"So, you are here at last,"* he said. His very voice seemed to cut the air and rend the sound below to shreds. It was low, as expected, but Melvin was surprised to hear how honeyed it was, dripping with temptation and almost a comforting softness. The voice of a lover convincing one to take a dangerous path down a darkened alley.

Melvin's heart raced in his chest, and the same was true of Allison. They stepped further into the throne room until they were at its centre. Neither could sense or spot any other presences but his, though it seemed to overwhelm everything.

"We are here," Melvin said. "To end you, Demon Lord."

*"That is not my name."*

Melvin halted, not quite knowing what to say to that.

*"My name is - was - Sallera Parash."*

"That's - that's a female name. Ognin in origin."

The Demon Lord tilted his head, and something of his body language gave off amusement. *"You are most studied, young mage. Indeed, it is. And indeed, I was. A more innocent time, before all of . . . this."* He gestured to the war happening around and below them. *"Before my glory."*

"You think this is glorious!?" shouted Allison, brandishing her sword. "You think these twisted transformations, this death and destruction is glorious!?"

*"Of course. I was but a weak woman, once. Pathetic and small, lacking even the strength to protect what little mattered to her in the world. Ah, but pain is the greatest teacher, is it not? From the fires of my humiliation I found my true strength, scouring the world for that which would make me impervious. And I found it nestled deep in the womb of the world."*

"Primal magic," Melvin whispered.

*"Indeed. The same magic you have discovered. It would not give me what I desired, and so I took it, bent it to my will."*

"You corrupted it, you monster." The words were said with a stoic calm, unpanicked, unshouted. To Melvin, it was a fact, not an exclamation.

A shrug. *"Perhaps. All the same, it gave me the power I sought. The power to indulge in my every whim, my every fascination, my every twisted lust."*

"Your every foul deed," Allison sneered, adjusting her sword stance. She threw a glance to Melvin. Both were clearly nervous. Terrified. And yet the tyrant had not attacked yet. Was this a trap? Should they just leap at him?

*"I tell you this because it is important that you understand that I, too, was once mortal. That I have crossed boundaries of gender, species, existence. And in all my years, not even Praemis and Cawthor showed such tenacity as the pair of you. I applaud you, for how far you've come. You have defeated my two dearest succubi, undone many of my plans, ruined alliances, and besieged the city I had assumed was safely mine. All these are . . . minor inconveniences. But you yourselves intrigue me. I should very much enjoy the prospect of having you at my side."*

"Fuck that!" Allison said.

"Yeah!" Melvin added. "Fuck that!"

*"Do not be too quick to throw away an opportunity. Such knowledge I can grant you. Such power. Such immortality. You could wisely counsel me. Spare the world my worst impulses and desires."*

"I repeat my earlier statement," Allison said.

"Same," Melvin said. "We'd rather die than serve you."

The Demon Lord sighed, the air warbling around him, then slowly stood, almost as if weary, as if having to admonish a wayward child. Something about that was troubling to them, especially Mel.

*"Then if you will not be my allies," the dread ruler said. "You will be whatever I desire."*

Allison raced forward, taking the cue of battle, and Melvin joined her, readying to throw forth magic to catch the Demon Lord off step. Instead, with just a glance, their world was plunged into chaos. Those terrible red eyes illuminated everything, bathing the world entirely in crimson.

Melvin was not Melvin.

Allison was not Allison.

They were nagas, beautiful and terrible, feasting on travellers in the dark as they slid through the jungles of Yolep.

No, they were lustful satyrs, both bent over the countertops of a nearby tavern alongside a third of their kind, each crying out in bliss as they were fucked, unable to help their lusts.

No, they were driders in the dark undercaverns. Aly's abdomen was grotesquely swollen with eggs, and she birthed them endlessly, while the much-smaller and still-male Melvin attended to his mistress.

That wasn't right, though, was it? They were swine in the mud, animals with human minds, forever tormented by their existence, unable to die or change back, forever stuck in the presence of a porcine mate.

They were statues forced to watch unholy desecrations.

They were goblin breeders.

They were dread sirens.

They were harem girls, pregnant and lustful.

They were swords, sentient, carried on the backs of master assassins.

They were everything and nothing, whatever the Demon Lord wanted them to be. A thousand different lives in a thousand different forms, none of them natural, all cursed to follow their new lustful instincts as the world burned around them.

*"You will experience all of this,"* his voice echoed, flowing like honey. *"You will BE all of it."*

Melvin and Allison felt it. They knew what it was to give birth to kobold eggs. What it was to lie with the Demon Lord himself. What it was to toil beneath the earth as a worm, or to be little more than a lustful wench at a brothel, a second row of breasts wobbling on one's chest just for the gentleman's pleasure.

It was too much.

Better to be nothing at all

Better to not exist, to shrivel beneath the eye of the Demon Lord's power, and simply give in. Perhaps he would make them beautiful succubi? Would that not be a sweeter mercy than endless reincarnation and punishment? Than humiliations galore?

No.

Both Allison and Melvin arrived at the same conclusion. The visions continued to hit them, wave after wave of realities crashing upon them like the wrath of an entire ocean. But a pattern was emerging, one that couldn't be denied. In each vision, no matter how terrible, the two of them were inseparable. And they were *fighting*. Even if it was hopeless, their worm selves dug deep into the earth in hopes of reinforcements. As bimbo-like elves, they communed with trees to regain their lost awareness. As goblin breeders, they taught their children how to build an insurgency.

Other, more recent alternate possibilities opened up.

Them as harpies, flying to the far corners of the world to rebuild.

As dragons, bringing back that ancient race to combat the Demon Lord.

Unicorns, nymphs, and even kitsune who could guard the sacred places to save the world, no matter how long it took or how despairing the world seemed to be.

"You. Will. Not. WIN!" screamed Melvin, a wave of Primal Magic evaporating the visions.

“NOT WHILE WE HAVE EACH OTHER!” yelled Allison, exploding forward from the wave of enchantment.

“*We shall see,*” the Demon Lord said. He extended a hand, a sword of smokey darkness wreathing into existence in his hand. He strode down the steps as they rushed to meet him. The final battle began.

The Demon Lord swung his sword with alarming efficiency, casting out domination magic in his other hand, but never before had Melvin and Aly been in such perfect teamwork. Their two-pronged attack was in timed tandem, each pressing at their foe and retreating only as the other pressed their attack, allowing for defence and offence to play off one another. The Demon Lord kicked Allison backwards, but Melvin pulled him to the centre of the throne room with a tug from his staff, allowing the wind to enter this sacred space.

“*You DARE!?*”

“I dare to dream of a world without you in it, demon.”

But the dark ruler only acted quicker, teleporting through shades of darkness and replicating his form. Allison just dodged a shadowy blade, only to be assailed by another. Each shade she cut down proved only to be a shadow, and Melvin struggled to tell the real assailant until the domination magic hit him.

In moments, he was *Malla*. It was the goblin breeder he’d seen in his visions: heavy breasted and short, cursing and crude and desperate for her cunt to be filled.

“Fucking hell!” she cried, but then surprised the Demon Lord by dodging to the side and slicing at his ankle with her new sickle. The effect was immediate: the domination magic ended, returning Melvin to human and his manhood along with it. He dodged the Demon Lord’s next attack, turning the arena to ice in order to trip him up. But his foe simply burned the ice away with his very step, lashing out with an arc of power that smacked Allison aside. She shimmered, body twisting until she was a mermaid, her long gold-scaled tail slapping on the floor.

“*Now attempt to fight like that,*” the Demon Lord remarked, turning his attention to Melvin. But Allison was already fighting off what the domination magic wanted her to be like. She could see that other life, beneath the ocean, drawing sailors to their ruin, converting but a few to the life of the siren. But she refused such an existence, and instead decided to use her new power. She sang in a way she never otherwise could, a song of the deep that intertwined with Primal Magic and caused the Demon Lord to miss his attack against Melvin and stumble, clutching his head.

“*YOU!*” he cried, turning to send out a tendril of pure darkness.

But Allison was already changing back, rolling to one side in her knightly armour and sending an arrow through his form.

The dance continued, the Demon Lord transforming them into one of their potential alternate fates, and Mel and Aly managed to rally each time. Even when turned into a harem girl, Mel simply used her dancing skills to move out of the way of the next attack, while Aly caught the Demon Lord from behind. Immediately after, Aly and Mel were both changed - her into a powerful male oni warrior and he into a serpentine naga.

*"What!?"* the Demon Lord.

Mellesseria coiled around the Demon Lord while Aly teleported, hurling mystical swords into his nightmarish form.

"What's the matter, tyrant?" Mellesseria taunted. "Losing control of your transformations? Or are we taking *charge* of them?"

It was a turning point. The battle raged around them, but even as the Demon Lord bellowed, calling in reinforcements, the succubi were plucked from the air. He could not discharge his void beams of power while in combat with them, and yet they were evenly matched.

*"I will not lose,"* the Demon Lord said, eyes incandescent with rage. *"I am he who shall rule this world. This is my world. MINE. My world to twist and change as I desire!"*

He lashed out again, this time with greater fury. Melvin and Allison worked in concert to parry his attacks, magic arts and martial prowess in a perfect tandem. The Demon Lord howled, and for the first time his anger was truly unleashed when Melvin managed to summon a thin needle of Primal Magic and score it across the villain's side.

*"ENOUGH!"*

Power.

Darkness.

It enveloped them. It seized them by the throat. In one moment, Melvin and Allison were fighting, in the next, they were being held up by the Demon Lord, who squeezed their necks as he walked slowly across the throne room floor towards the balcony. Both heroes struggled, but Allison's sword and dagger were useless upon the ground, and Melvin's staff was no longer in his hand. Their feet dangled, causing them to choke on the vicious, flaming darkness that squeezed more tightly by the second. Melvin looked to Allison, trying to tell her something, but she couldn't make out what it was. She, in turn, tried to tell him that she loved him, but all that came out was a guttural, breathless sound.

*"You have come further than most,"* the Demon Lord said, stepping right to the edge of the balcony. *"You have proven yourselves mighty, though not so great as Praemis and Cawthor. I have moved beyond their power now, and yours. My hungers grow, and this world alone will not be enough to sate it. There are . . . others. Other worlds. Other planes. I shall conquer them all until there is nought but my fires and my lusts. A pity, then, that you shall not live to see it."*

The hands, if they could even be called that, gripped even further, twisting their necks. Something was about to give way. Something was about to *snap*.

*"Goodbye, Melvin Dawnway and Allison Greenwood. You were . . . fun."*

*CRACK.*

A flash of pain, and then an immediate loss of sensation. Allison tried to scream but could not even speak as everything below the neck vanished. She couldn't feel her fingers or her toes, nor even her heart beating. She couldn't even turn her neck to see Melvin. He too was paralysed from the neck down, his power sapped from him, his ability to cast even protective magic gone.

*"May your bodies break,"* the Demon Lord whispered. And then he let them go.

The pair plummeted in silence. The tower was so tall, and yet the ground was approaching so very fast. Tears streamed from Allison's eyes. She couldn't do anything, not even use her grapple. Melvin was similarly helpless, gasping, struggling upon his own breath, his lungs on the way to giving out. And still they fell, both minds in a panic.

Allison managed to scream, though it was ragged and painful upon her throat, she knew she had to say it. Not a love confession - they both knew they loved each other - but one final, desperate plan.

*"P-Primal magic! CHANGE US!"*

Melvin's eyes bulged. They were over halfway down the tower. Primal magic. It required no movement. It required focus. It required *connection*. The wind whistled past his ears, and he connected to *that*, and tethered this connection to Allison as well. They were going to die. Any moment now. But perhaps he could do what he'd never done, and *be* the change, rather than be subjected to it. He reached out with his mind and summoned the magic-

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The Demon Lord's passions were not sated. The battle was all too quick, and he had hoped to leave the pair transformed again and again in an endless punishment, mounted and bred by other lovers purely to cause pain. But it was not to be; they had chosen death, and their continued existence would be too great a threat. Instead, he turned his attention to the battle in the city. The armies of the coalition were advancing, wreaking havoc on his forces. He smirked, as much as living dark flame could smirk: he had allowed himself to be distracted with the pleasure of the fight, and now his forces were paying for it. No matter. He cast out his arms, expanding his dark powers like a black hole around him, focusing its lens upon the greatest collection of warriors hacking at his soldiers as they advanced down the main thoroughfare of the city. They would be annihilated in one blast.

*"All too easy,"* he said.

He readied the beam, but was momentarily distracted by an unusual sight. Two hawks flitted through the air towards the tower, beautiful in form and feather. Ever since he had conquered Aenir, only black ravens and ravenous vultures had been allowed entry to his realm. Was this some kind of omen? A message from a submitting fae realm? Or was it - *NO*.

He raised his arms, adjusting the void beam at the last second to annihilate the birds, but they swooped down, ducking below the beam and then changing mid-air at the last second, manifesting as Allison and Melvin. He was knocked back, stumbling momentarily, but long enough for the girl to slide across the floor and gain her weapons back, and for Melvin to pull the Primal magic staff from the Demon Lord's chest - how did he even know it was there?

*"How!?"* he demanded.

Melvin grinned. "I know more powerful magic than you. And I have a strong woman to remind me of that."

"And she's about to fuck you up!" Allison cried, readying her stance.

The Demon Lord recovered, regaining his stoic control of the situation. *"I shall crush your skulls, then. You are still two humans, and you will-"*

But the heroes were already moving. The Demon Lord expected as such - the time for speeches was over. He couldn't see what new powers they could bring to the fight. They were only delaying the inevitable. But as he swung a sword of black flame towards Allison, she writhed to the side, suddenly a stormwarrior naga. She fired quill after quill into him, her six arms lashing out with new swords and firing bows. The Demon Lord had not expected that, and stumbled once more, just in time for Melvin to fly into the air as a male djinn, power swirling around his lower half. Sand blasted the Demon Lord back, but when he tried to cast out domination magic against the young mage it simply . . . failed.

*"No! This isn't possible! I am in control here!"*

"Not anymore!" Melvin yelled, before transforming into a massive minotaur. He stomped forward, and the Demon Lord only barely managed to deflect the incoming horns. But it proved to be just a faint, because there was Allison, now a demoni shinobi warrior, her infernal tail another extension of her body, her speed enhanced as she got right up close and hacked at the Demon Lord's very essence. He lashed out with his dark powers, sending her sprawling, but again she was not changed to his desires: instead of becoming a useless cow woman with a bulging, painful udder, she instead was a proud centauress, galloping around the edge of the throne room while loosing arrow after arrow. The Demon Lord blocked each in turn, but this only opened up his side to Melvin, who had become a mighty orc warrior. He hacked at the Demon Lord's legs, leaving him to fall to one knee, just in time for Allison to



launch forward as a vicious harpy, scratching at what had once been his face. Again and again the attacks came, the two changing fluidly, like water into different states. The dread ruler could not keep up. With each failed defence, more and more of his essence was carved away, his domination magic leaking into the air and evaporating. The dark vortex began to tear itself apart, until he was just a lone, helmed figure struggling against two mortals who were somehow *more* than mortal.

*"I will hollow this world!"* he declared, but it was an empty threat, and he knew it. As he tried to lash out one last time, Melvin and Allison regained their true forms at the last second, shrinking to dodge his blow and then crashing into him with the thrust of a sword and a burst of Primal Magic. The Demon Lord fell back into the throne, a mockery of his former confidence. Domination magic leaked from him, and he knew in that moment that he was finished. His body was beginning to tear itself apart: somehow the mage had infused Allison's sword with the very magic of Primal essence, and it was poisoning him. Red pulsing energies coursed through his form, painful agonies of a kind he had not felt since he was once mortal.

"You're finished," Allison said.

"Yes, it's over, Demon Lord," Melvin added. "And now, this world will be cleansed of your presence once and for all."

For the first time in two centuries, the Demon Lord felt *fear*. But in that fear was born a new kind of hate, a self-destruction that desired to poison the very foundation of love that existed between these two. Melvin focused his Primal Magic, ready to end this, but in that moment the Demon Lord saw one last opportunity for a hateful rebuke.

*"May the love that you share die with me,"* he whispered. *"May she die with me."*

The multicoloured beam of light emanated from Melvin, disintegrating the Demon Lord's form entirely, and ending his threat once and for all. But the smallest piece of the villain's consciousness shot forth as a dark curse, a ribbon of wicked black magic to undo Melvin in turn. The mage was too focused, but Allison spotted it.

"Mel! WATCH OUT!"

She leapt, pushing Mel aside at the very last second and attempting to dodge the black ribbon as well. Instead, it shot right through her heart. She collapsed to the ground, shuddering as the arcane poison coursed along her veins, seeping into every part of her body, her very *soul*.

Mel got up immediately, moving to her side. "Aly! ALY! Are you okay!?"

She shuddered, looking up at him. Her soul was rending apart. Gods, it wasn't just her body that was dying, the Demon Lord had unleashed the ultimate, final curse, one that must have taken centuries to form. His power would kill her very soul, maim it and rend it apart so that she would be nothing, forever separated from Mel, unable to meet him even in

the afterlife. She knew it, and from his expression, she knew that he immediately sensed it as well.

“Oh Gods. Oh Gods, Aly! No! I can save you. Aly! Don’t worry, my love. Don’t be afraid. I’ll use my Primal Magic and-”

The staff was snapped. Poisoned. When had the Demon Lord done that? The blow had been intended for Mel, *of course* the villain would have ruined the staff to ensure it would prevent any hope of restoration. It could be repaired, but it would take *weeks* of concentration, or a visitation to the Sacred Glade, which he had no time to do! Melvin tried to keep his cool. Allison was starting to go into shock, her body quaking, tears flowing from her eyes even as they began to turn grey. All of her was going grey. She was undergoing *soul death*. He’d assumed it was a legend, but now this most horrible of all fates was happening to the woman he loved most in the whole world.

“Primal magic, primal magic,” he said, focusing. But how could he focus? No, he *had* to. She’d saved him so many times, he could save her in turn once again! He managed to get his thoughts in order, and breathed out the Primal energies upon her. But it only slowed the advance of soul death; it could not end it. He simply didn’t have enough training. He could transform, he could heal, he could summon a dragon from the earth, but matters of the soul were so much deeper than he had prepared for.

“I’ll save you, Aly! Don’t worry. Just fight it. Fight it, do you hear me? FIGHT IT!”

He tried again, but it was weaker this time. He had used so much Primal magic that his body needed rest before he could try again. He cursed his foolishness: they could have defeated the Demon Lord quicker, or seen this coming. Gods, Aly was dying! Another try, another failure.

Another.

Failure.

**GODSDAMN FAILURE!**

Hot tears burned in his eyes. Aly’s flesh was grey. Her expression was becoming so very vacant, devoid of all her joy, her impulsiveness and mischievousness. All the things he had grown to love about her. Even her bright blonde hair was losing its beauty as it greyed and decayed. He tried to ready the magic again, only to stop as a hand placed itself upon his cheek, caressing it gently. Even the skin felt wrong.

“It’s okay, Mel,” she whispered, face otherwise vacant. “It’s okay. We had our adventure. Our time. I love you. I don’t regret a thing . . .”

He clutched her hand even as it went limp. He could sense her soul, but it was so very weak. So little of it was left. Once it was gone, it could never be restored. The future he’d imagined was vanishing right before his eyes. Why had the Gods allowed this to

happen? Why them? Why couldn't the Elder of Nature have given better boons? Why couldn't-

Wait.

Melvin opened his satchel and retrieved the vials, filled with the strange herbs the Elder of Nature had given them. They glowed, overwhelmed by the massive amounts of Primal Magic infused within them. It seemed like a joke gift at the time, but had the Elder of Nature known all along? Even now, they seemed to glow, as if aware that their time had come.

"Aly, I love you," he said.

There was no time to even think. He uncorked one vial and drank it down. Then, needing to form the necessary connection, and desiring nothing more than this anyway, he kissed her. The magic coursed through his system and hers, and in that transformation the connection was made. He willed the Primal magic to restore her soul, working deep into her and rebuilding her even as his body changed. But he did not care what it would mean for his future, only that Allison could be saved, no matter the cost to him. His light and love mingled with hers, and slowly her warmth was restored. A hand reached up and gripped around his back, surprisingly strong. The other cupped his face, and he knew in that moment that it was working.

And yet still they kissed, holding one another. He could feel his chest changing, his form slimming, his hips reconfiguring, his hair growing. He was becoming a woman, and it would be permanent. He knew that, and accepted it, because when he finally, *finally* pulled back his face, there was Allison, fully restored and beautiful beyond belief, her cheeks rosy, her blue eyes wide.

"Mel," she whispered. "What have you done?"

She held onto Melvin, pushing him slightly up, and he felt a weight pulling upon his chest that definitely hadn't been there moments ago.

"I had to save you," Melvin said, then paused, touching his throat, which felt smooth and delicate. His voice sounded pleasant and sweet, yet oddly regal. A young noblewoman's voice; civil yet confident. "The magic herbs the Elder of Nature gave us was the only way."

Allison looked at her changed boyfriend, taking in the new woman's features. Her figure was largely disguised in her mage robes, ones that were too big for her, but they certainly held tighter around the hips and bust, which she discerned as she rose up to her feet alongside her lover. But the major change, for her, was in Mel's face. The woman before her had Melvin's dark brown hair, though now it extended down over her shoulders, impressively straight. The green eyes were just as emerald bright, but now they had lovely eyelashes and gorgeous eyebrows that enhanced a natural feminine attractiveness. Her skin had remained olive in tone, but now lacked any sort of blemish, but for a beauty spot below

her left eye. Her nose was regal and defined, with a slightly aquiline shape, and her lips fuller, possessing an adorable pout that only made her look more beautiful to Allison's eyes. And she was shorter: probably five-foot-six at best, having lost a couple of inches of height. Yet for all the changes, it was the same person. The man she had come to love was now simply the *woman* she loved.

"You gave up being a man for me?" she said, voice swollen with a shifting mix of emotions.

"It was the only way," Mel said, still getting used to that new voice. She held her robe as if it were a too-long dress, trying not to trip on it while her dainty feet practically fell out of her footwear. "Really, it was the easiest decision I've ever made, Aly. I wasn't about to lose the one I loved, even if it cost me . . . well, you know."

She looked down, though her chest obscured her view, covered as it was. She was starting to think, from the way it weighed heavily upon her, that she was more amply blessed than her own paramour, embarrassingly enough. It put a lovely rose colour on her cheeks that left Allison smiling sheepishly.

"I know it may be difficult, with me being like this permanently," Melvin said. "But know that I would-"

Allison grabbed the smaller woman and pressed her lips to hers, kissing her deeply. After a brief second of shock, Melvin returned the kiss, taking comfort in her partner. Her own lips were softer, everything about her was, and it was an odd sensation to feel her breasts press against Aly's armour, but despite all she had given up, this moment was *right*. It was *pure* and *loving*. It was, to put it simply, all worth it.

"We'll always be together," Allison said, stroking Mel's beautiful face. "Even if we're two girls, we'll find a way. Then again . . . there were *two* vials, weren't there?"

It took Melvin a moment to realise what her partner was saying. "No, Allison. No."

"Why not?"

"Because - because you're a woman!"

"And you're a man, but here we are."

Melvin became flustered, a very cute look on the smaller woman, whose arms were currently lost in her sleeves as she waved them about. "It's such a big decision! We might not even want each other like that."

Allison rolled her eyes. She was already removing her armour. "Of course we would. If there's one thing all this damn accursed domination magic has shown us, it's that we are still down *bad* for each other when changed in any way, including into the opposite gender! Hells, I might just enjoy being a man. Certainly, I won't complain about more strength and height, or endurance. I *am* a warrior, after all."

"But - but we can make it work like this!"

Allison hugged her tightly. "Of course we can, Mel. But I know you. You want a family, don't you? You told me that you wanted a big one, remember?"

"Well, yes, but -"

"And how would we make children now?"

Melvin was exasperated. "But - but then I would have to-"

"That's right, lover boy," she teased, kissing the new woman again. "The truth is, I don't want to get pregnant. It's just . . . not me. This way, we could at least try. And society would be more accepting of us . . . and we know we'd be compatible, from all our times of change."

Melvin considered all of this, it was so much. And pregnancy! Gods, that *was* too much. Way too much. They'd just beaten the Demon Lord, and now that she was a woman she had all these new sensations and curves and emotions rising to the surface. She turned away, facing the view of the city, where men and women were cheering in the streets. Succubi were disintegrating, no longer able to hold onto the Demon Lord's tethers into this world. Goblins fled and ogres stumbled over the horizon, and the remaining forces surrendered as the coalition raised cheers and flags to victory.

"It's a new world, and so full of new change already," Melvin said. "Allison, we shouldn't have to rush this. We are victorious, and should spend time becoming accustomed to what that *means*, and what the world will look like after. And if you do truly wish to change, then that's something we can discuss, and that you can make a conclusion about in your own time. I wouldn't want you to . . ."

Her voice faded out as her ears pricked, catching the slight grunts that Allison was taking great pains to hide from her. She held the bridge of her nose, closing her eyes as she sighed.

"And you've already taken the vial, haven't you?"

"Guilty!" Aly replied, though it didn't sound like her at all, except for the impulsive energy and joy within the tone. Instead, it sounded like the crisp, clear voice of a very handsome man.

Slowly, Melvin turned, the new woman almost afraid of what she might see. Allison was such a singular individual, so completely *her*, that the very notion of her looking otherwise seemed anathema to the very order of the universe itself. There could be only one Allison Greenwood. Yet, as she took in the tall, beaming man before her, hands on his hips and his manly chest thrust out in a ludicrously over the top way, it hit her that this was exactly so: Allison was utterly singular, and that singularity would come across regardless of the body she possessed.

Or rather, *he* possessed.

Allison had become a tall and very handsome young man, with shorter blonde hair that still possessed his light curls. His eyes were a bright ocean blue, and those combined with his amused smile made it very clear that it was still the same person. He'd gained a few inches in height, and was certainly six feet tall now, but his body had also expanded, though not as much as Melvin had expected - or perhaps feared. Instead, he was slightly svelte and lithe, containing the same acrobatic and dextrous appearance as Allison had always held, though with more manly strength. But the muscles that bulged against his undershirt made it clear that he had grown. In fact, he looked every part the young, dashing prince, with an air of rule-breaking about him that suited Allison to the core.

"Allison," Mel said with her dulcet voice, heat gathering in her cheeks. "You look . . . beautiful. No! That's not right, you look . . . handsome. Uh, very handsome. Um."

Handsome enough, in fact, that it was making Mel's new female body respond very oddly. She found her larger nipples tensing, rubbing against the material of her robes, and her new womanhood started to go moist. She gasped, holding the robes, but this had the effect of pulling them down a little, and with all their looseness it resulted in an impressive amount of perfect cleavage being exposed right before Allison's eyes. The new man was already patting over his body in surprise, astonished by his greater strength, his narrower hips and wider shoulders. But then something began to harden between his legs, something that was, in truth, impressively large. It wasn't the most alien feeling - he'd experienced this before during a few of their previous changes - but it was the first time he'd had it and known this would be his *appendage* for life now.

"Well! It seems we both have an appreciation for each other," he said.

More cheers erupted from far down in the city, and fireworks boomed into the sky, likely brought by Lady Skara's army. The Demon Lord was dead, and everyone knew it - the horrid trail of energy that had exploded outwards in his death throes made such a fact obvious, as did the decaying succubi who dovetailed from the sky. But no one knew yet what had happened to Allison and Melvin, the two heroes who had done the great deed. They stood there in the throne room, the red air starting to take on a far less hostile afternoon blue, the pair of them gazing at one another and the changes they had undertaken.

"We - we should go down to Lady Skara," Melvin finally said. "Explain what has happened. I mean, for all they know we died fighting them. We could-"

Allison grabbed Melvin's hand. She was shocked at how the new man's hand could envelop her own completely. She had never been able to do that, and yet it seemed she now appeared even more typically female than Allison ever had, and he more typically male.

"That can wait, love," he said, his voice surprisingly soft as he looked down at her.

"You're right. We should scan for the Demon Lord's essence, in case there are any more traps and-"

The other hand caught hers, stilling her. She looked up at him, confused.

"Is there something I'm missing?"

"Everything," Aly said, chuckling in his new, lower registry. "And as usual, it's the person right in front of you."

The former woman placed his hand behind the former man's head and pulled her closer. Melvin's heart beat nervously, but then their lips touched, and all was right with the world. She was a woman now, and the prospect of that scared her as much as it excited her, but the excitement won out thanks to her attraction to her lover. This body was clearly attracted to men, or at the very least the man that was Allison, because the second they began kissing she pressed her smaller body against his and held him tight. Allison, in turn, wrapped the woman in his arms, running his hands down her smooth back and even daring to cup her backside just briefly, which exhibited a gasp of delight from Melvin. They slipped their tongues into one another's mouths, kissing in the D'arbourian way. Allison felt Melvin's longer hair, and she in turn felt his muscles.

And then they parted, looking at one another, the two filled with a powerful heat. Neither knew that this was partly the Elder of Nature's doing: her secret 'blessing' had increased their respective virility and fertility, and with that came a powerful heat in their bodies, one that was borne aloft by their very real love.

"I need you," Allison said. "Fucking hells, Mel, I've never needed you so badly in my entire life!"

Melvin gulped. "Gods, Aly. I feel the same. But . . . can we do this? I mean, right here and right now?"

"Of course not!" Aly said.

Melvin, to her own surprise, found herself utterly disappointed in that answer, right up until Aly scooped her up in her arms, holding her like a prince would hold a classical damsel in distress.

"Aly! What are you doing?"

"Taking us downstairs, of course. I noticed as we ran up that there was a rather lovely guest bedroom that lay mostly untouched."

Melvin clung to her lover, feeling strangely submissive in his arms as he moved down the stairs quickly. They crossed the threshold into the guestroom, which was indeed very elaborate, but right now the biggest draw was the impressively sized bed with its warm covers and plush-looking pillows.

"Yeah, that'll fucking do it!" the princely-looking man declared as he placed Mel down on her feet. She instantly took to kissing him again, and while their blood was up the pair began stripping one another's clothing off. Mel's came away easily, being too loose and large

for her smaller form, but she was not small in every way, as the pair of them soon discovered.

"Fuck!" Aly exclaimed as Mel's chest was bared. "You're *stacked as a nursing tavern maid!*"

Mel immediately blushed as she looked down at her chest. Her breasts were most certainly larger than Allison's had been, and they had not been small. They were full and ripe, forming perfect teardrop shapes, and their olive-toned perfection were topped by dark pink nipples which stood proud and aroused upon them.

"Gods," she breathed. "I didn't expect to be so . . . blessed."

"I don't mind," Allison said, cupping them in such a way that Melvin immediately let loose a womanly moan. "In fact, this new me rather likes how buxom you are! I finally understand why you were so enamoured with my own tits now!"

The rest of Mel was unveiled, and there was no disappointment in the petite, yet curvaceous figure she presented. She had a gorgeous hourglass shape to her, with childbearing hips and a nice rear, but it was clear that her chest caught most of Allison's attention.

"Gods, this is a bit much," Melvin remarked.

"Then how do you think I feel about this?" Allison asked as he removed his breeches and revealed his large erection. His penis was huge, much bigger than Melvin's had been, and it was fully erect from the sight and feel of the beautiful new woman.

"I think that's . . . very large," Melvin managed, though his wet slit and wide eyes betrayed her true feelings.

"C'mon, Mel. You can defeat the greatest threat this land has ever known, but struggle to look at your girlfriend's new cock?"

Mel winced. "The Demon Lord wasn't planning to be shoved inside me!"

Aly cackled at that, slapping his naked thigh. "There'll be no shoving, I promise you that. But lovemaking? I need that. And I know you do. Let me take the lead, hot stuff, and the rest will follow."

Melvin gave herself over to her lover's confidence, letting the tall man rest her upon the bed. She kissed him, and he in turn nuzzled her neck, making her squirm in delight and curl her toes. That heat within her loins became more powerful, causing her feminine flower to become wetter in anticipation. Her breasts jostled from the slightest of movements, and while it felt positively foreign to her (well, not completely after so many changes, but this jiggling was here to *stay* now!), there was a hidden delight in how Aly looked at them. He cupped them as he crawled on top of her, squeezing them together and making her gasp from the sheer sensitivity. She in turn felt his muscles, running her hands down his back and even daring to squeeze his backside, which was tight.



"Mhmm," she moaned.

"Like that?"

"I think I do."

"Good, because I fucking love your new tits, Mel."

"I - ahh - I'm still getting used to them! But this f-feels nice! Mhmm! Really nice!"

"Just wait until I do *this*."

Allison lowered his mouth and began to suck upon Mel's right nipple. It caused an electric sensation of bliss to course through her body, and she arched her back, spreading her legs wide as if already looking to receive him.

"Oh Gods! Oh Gods, that's d-different! Try the other one, Aly!"

He did, and this time his actions were even better, because Mel's eyes nearly rolled into the back of her head. She trembled, causing her large bosom to shake, and she snapped her legs wider yet again. She reached down almost by instinct and began to stroke Aly's penis. The act should not have been so easy for her, but this body was clearly very attracted to men, because her passage only became more slick with her juices as she stroked Aly, who let out some wonderful grunts in response.

"Fuuuuuuck," Aly managed. "You never told me it feels this good!"

"Well, now you know. I think - I think I want that in me."

"Let's do it. I want to try it."

The words were true. It scared her a little, in some ways more than facing the Demon Lord. The knowledge that she was about to spread her legs and be *penetrated*, and by *that* of all things! Aly's cock seemed so large, so impressive and *thick*. Gods, would it even fit inside her?

She had to find out.

Slowly, with surprisingly delicate care from the usually impulsive Aly, they worked together to guide the head of the new man's member to Melvin's entrance. Aly rubbed it against that wet opening for a moment, teasing Melvin into more delighted giggles.

"Ohhhhhhh, stop teasing me."

"Just getting it wet. Trust me, it'll go in better. I've been on the other side."

Then, just at the point where Melvin thought she couldn't take it anymore, Aly slowly entered her. Melvin's vaginal passage was pushed wider as she was invaded, her wet walls receiving her lover's large cock and hugging it. The sensations it produced were wonderful, and after just a brief sting of pain - her hymen tearing, she realised - Aly slid all the way in. Melvin's eyes bulged, and she went completely rigid, clinging to her lover and pressing her large breasts against him.

"Ohhhhh! It's! Ahhh! A - mhmmm - a lot! You're so big!"

"Damn right I am. And you're so fucking tight, Mel! God, I never knew sex as a man could feel like this. I'm going to start thrusting, okay? Trust me, you'll love it. I'll start slow."

Melvin nodded, already breathless. The pleasure was there, she just had to get used to this sensation of being dominated. But Gods, it was good, and it became even better as Allison withdrew slowly, then entered once more. Withdrew slowly, then entered again. He kept pulling out just far enough that he nearly slipped out, only to slide all of his length and girth right back in. It was a lot to take in - literally - but slowly Melvin began to respond. She raked her nails - which were longer now - down Allison's back, and even started to press upon his ass, willing him to thrust faster. She raised her hips to greet his, and then placed one of his hands on her left breast, urging him to play with it. Allison was more than eager to do so: the former woman was already delighting in how sexy his changed lover's rack was, and he squeezed and groped and caressed her tits in ways she knew would drive Melvin over the edge. It was adorable and highly erotic to see how much his Mel was succumbing to the pleasures of womanhood, and he began to thrust even faster and harder.

"I'm going to take you there," he told Mel, who whimpered something delightful in another language she had clearly studied ages ago. The beautiful woman was practically delirious as she was penetrated again and again.

"D-do it!" she finally cried out, returning to the common tongue. "Fill me! I want you to c-cum inside me!"

It was the hottest damn thing Allison had ever heard, and it was a sentence *he* had actually spoken once. But now the roles were reversed, and he was reaching his apex. He thrust harder, ramming his massive manhood again and again into his lover, causing Mel to wrap her legs around him to hold on for dear life. The new woman stopped being so self-conscious about her new voice, and instead gasped and cried out in increasingly high tones, her pleasure almost *musical*.

"I'm going to! Oh Gods, Aly, I'm going to -"

Allison had time to kiss his lover passionately, still thrusting into her as they expressed their perfect love. And then Mel's body exploded into pure ecstasy. She moaned into his mouth, crying out as she threw her head to one side. Her entire form shuddered, and he followed her into that wondrous void. His balls tensed, his penis throbbed, and then he knew what was coming - a feeling just as alien for him. But Gods, it was amazing: he came inside of her, shooting stream after stream of his seed deep into his lover. How had he produced so much? It seemed never ending! More and more of it spurt from him, slowly emptying his balls as the hot, sticky liquid poured into Mel's passage and straight towards her waiting womb. Mel herself shook as orgasm after orgasm hit her. She squealed and squirmed, then went almost silent as her eyes went into the back of her head. Then, finally, her breath returned as the next orgasm finished crashing through her. She could feel her

lover's hot seed ejaculating into her depths, and for all her embarrassment about her new body and role, and her knowledge that it would take time to adjust to, in this moment she had no regrets at all. She found the lips of her lover and kissed him, both of them still climaxing, and they moaned into one another's mouths.

Finally, the pleasure ended, and Aly collapsed upon Mel, resting his head upon her pillowy chest. Neither said anything for entire minutes. Finally, Aly broke the silence.

"Mel?"

"Yes, my love?" Mel managed, still basking in the afterglow of this striking new form of sex.

"Thank you for saving me."

Mel clung to her lover tightly, squeezing his muscles. Allison reciprocated.

"You were the one who saved me, silly," the new woman said, voice quivering slightly.

The cheers and celebrations were still continuing outside, and no doubt soldiers and Lady Skara herself were moving towards the Citadel to claim it, and to check on Mel and Aly. They would be in for a *big* surprise, that was for sure.

"We should move," Melvin said, though even that name didn't seem appropriate anymore. She realised she'd have to come up with a new one, now that she was a woman permanently. "We'll be discovered soon."

"Mhmm. Can't move. Finally understand why you were so hopeless after sex. Just gonna fall asleep."

Mel giggled. "See? You spend everything in one go!"

She held her lover from the side, her breasts dangling and rubbing against his chest. It was odd to think that Aly now had chest hair, but it was an attractively manly look, just as her own smooth bosom was very enticing too. Odd though, to not have a member, and yet it made moments like this so much more comfortable.

"I love you so dearly, my Aly," she whispered in his ear. "And I always shall."

He shifted and held her, holding her face as he kissed it.

"And I will never, ever stop loving you, my Mel," he said, an excited gleam in his eye. "Especially not if our lovemaking can feel like *that!*"

Mel chuckled. "Well, it wasn't *bad*."

"What? That was magnificent! You were basically catatonic at points, you were so overcome with desire!"

"Well . . . I suppose we shall just have to try again a few more times, just to be sure."

With that, Mel solved the issue of any approaching interlopers; she flicked her hand and, with a gust spell and a lock spell, made sure the door would absolutely not be breached. Hells, just to be sure, she gave it a little Primal magic to have vines grow around the wood and seal it completely for a bit.

“Mel, when did you turn into such a rule breaker?”

“Perhaps around the time my rugged, wild partner began using words like ‘catatonic.’”

The pair exchanged a grin, and then kissed again. They held one another, caressing their bodies and becoming more used to them, revelling in the knowledge that they were alive and in love and still together. And, of course, just ten minutes later they were becoming aroused by their respective forms once more, and starting to make love a second time. The rest of the world could wait: they wanted to know every inch of one another, all over again.

Of course, the Elder of Nature’s hidden blessing had a little something to do with this. Their lives would be blessed, hale and healthy and *long* for their great deeds. But, as Mel would discover in a number of weeks, they had also been given quite the blessing of virility and fertility.

Mel, after her very first sexual experience as a woman, was already pregnant.

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Two months had passed. Aenir was being restored, though it would likely take far more months to fully repair the broken and melted segments of the walls. The refugee population was coming back in dribs and drabs, but it was also bolstered by those who had helped save the city and now desired to stay permanently. Many of the Demon Lord’s transformations were slowly undoing themselves, but others would, alas, never revert. They had been set in too long, and so a great number of people would have to become accustomed to their lives. A general fund from the large treasury of the city was already being accrued to help them deal with such transitions. It was very helpful, in fact, that the assistant to the treasurer was a former guard-turned-geese woman. Marissa Sentarga may have been covered from head to toe in feathers, possessing bird feet and a beak, but the fact that she was endlessly pregnant with literal *golden eggs* did wonders to restore the gold that the Demon Lord had already frittered away, as well as fund many initiatives. The woman may not have liked the fact that she constantly had to push out golden eggs, but she was definitely appreciated for it, and whispers already abounded that a minor bureaucrat was courting her, having been oddly taken by her appearance.

Marissa’s story was not unique. The farmlands around Aenir needed restoration, and many skilled farmers were called forth. Bessie the cowgirl, now quite plump and pregnant with her own little humanoid calves, was invited to possess a large plot of land alongside her minotaur lover. No one could *quite* understand her very rural dialect, but the woman certainly knew how to grow crops and restore fallow fields, and her milk, surprisingly, contained some healing properties that wounded soldiers most appreciated. This general restoration was

aided by Lady Skara, who proved a very skilled diplomat and friend to the city, though no doubt there was clever pragmatism to her work: whoever emerged as the greatest friend to the liberated city would do very well indeed in her own future rule.

There were other proposals by the city council, what little of the council remained, anyway, to help restore Aenir to its greatness. This included restoring diplomatic relations, negotiating with the Greadthred over their nomadic passings and possible trade benefits, and even restoring formerly sacred spaces dedicated to connecting to the fae, given the recent revelations over Primal magic and the gigantic tree in the centre of the city.

But none of this could be done without proper leadership. Previously, the High Steward had cared for the city. He'd been transformed into a gigantic minotaur that had been slain at the city's gates after much death and destruction. This sparked discussion over how Aenir was to be ruled, or even if it was still Aenir at all. Its population had shifted massively, and its geography changed by the Demon Lord and then by the liberation. What was to become of it? This question was on everyone's lips.

But first, there was the wedding. It was arranged fairly quickly, much to the surprise of all, given that Melvin and Allison were permanently stuck in their new genders. The two were reborn in this ceremony, now Melanie and Alister Dawnwood, names they had chosen after much discussion. Though perhaps 'stuck' was not the right word, given how joyous they appeared to be. They stayed in the Citadel Tower in that very same room they had first made love in, and more than a few servants gossiped about the very enthusiastic sounds that came from there in the morning and at night, and at one point from a closet room the pair had broken into in the middle of the day. Naturally, a marriage needed to happen fast: even the saviours of the city couldn't avoid scandal forever, and besides, they were head over heels for one another.

And so it was that the first return of normalcy was a grand wedding attended by many of the city's elite, as well as rulers from the other realms, soldiers who had helped liberate Aenir, and numerous other souls who had helped. There was even a lactating cowgirl wearing a farmgirl's summer dress made especially for her, as well as a number of dutiful-looking maids from Targan, some belly dancing harem girls who accompanied Emperor Touma, and a gathering of harpies, nymphs, and a special appearance by Kazumi the shrine maiden and Mai the kitsune, who managed to appear outside of their lands for one day for this special event. Naturally, all sorts of wonderful omens resulted from this, and even more when the celebrants to the wedding were revealed: a pair of unicorns calling themselves Praemis and Cawthor. Naturally, historians everywhere were rapidly rewriting their tomes in response.

Melanie was nervous, of course. Not at marrying Alister - never - but at walking down the aisle as a woman in white, her beauty obvious, her chest heaving just a little bit,

constrained modestly as it was. She was still getting used to her new gait, her new voice, her new *everything*. It was a good thing, she considered, that her father's evacuation further west meant that he could only send terse well-wishes, but she had her harpy sister Tiffany and the quite pregnant Marion as her bridesmaids, and with their support she made it up the aisle. In fact, as she heard the whispers of her immense beauty, she even grew a little prideful: she'd been handsome as a man, why not beautiful as a woman?

Alister felt similarly, awestruck by his bride's gorgeous appearance, not to mention the tantalising little peek at her cleavage that her dress provided. He was in fine green garb with a silver and brown trim, and he felt confident and manly upon seeing her. Everything in the world was right, knowing that the man he had fallen in love with would now be his bride.

"You look radiant," he whispered to her as the ceremony began.

"And you look dashing," she replied. "Though your collar is wrong."

She corrected it, and already it felt like a married dynamic for her to correct his manner to a noble standard. When the moment came for their right hands to be tied, they held one another comfortingly. Then, there was the kiss.

And that came easily, and perhaps just a little scandalously wrong.

"*Behold!*" Praemis' 'voice' declared to the people. "*The new royal rulers of Aenir, which shall be renamed Astrea in their honour! King Alister Dawnwood, and Queen Melanie Dawnwood!*"

Alister blinked. "What now?"

Melanie stuttered. "Did you just say *queen*?"

No one could quite say how the conclusion was arrived at. Some believed it was pure destiny: Aenir had once been ruled by a righteous king and queen, and now a loving man and woman had saved them all from the Demon Lord, in the very throne room from which they would be destined to rule. Others felt that it made practical sense: the heroic pair had made personal friends and allies of just about every monarch, ruling family, and leading council during their journey here, and it was clear such alliances were needed for Aenir to flourish and remain stable after so much destruction. It didn't hurt that Melvin Dawnway (now Dawnwood, a combined surname that would begin a new royal line) came from noble blood, and that Allison had been knighted. Of course, there were whispers of a third influence as well. Few mentioned it, and the histories would likely never bring it to attention, but Lady Skara's deft diplomatic paws were all over the situation. A few whispered words in the right ears, a payment in the right hands, a friendly overture to the right councillor here and the proper grassroots campaign supported there, and it suddenly seemed as if the whole city didn't just want the saviours of the city to become their royal rulers, but were *demanding* it.

Suffice to say, Mel and Aly were in quite a shock over it. It made for an interesting reception.

“Me? A queen!?” Melanie said. “That’s much too much! I mean, look at me, love. I’m still getting used to wearing *court dresses*.”

She was indeed marvellously beautiful, wearing a lovely blue gown with golden jewellery, having been changed into it after the ceremony. Somehow, Alister had even convinced her to get her ears pierced, and she was continually frustrated by just how damn *good* her elegant hanging earrings looked, with their little crystal jewels. Even her hair was done up by court handmaidens, and while Melanie was used to attendants back at the Dawnway Estate, it was quite different as a woman, especially one whose prominent bust could not exactly be hidden away so easily.

“How do you think I feel?” Alister said, pointing at his own body. He was wearing fine regalia, though not quite so fine as his own assistants clearly wanted. He favoured warm greens to match his name, though officially, it was now Dawnwood, not Greenwood. “I’m not up on this kingly stuff! I used to make fun of the ‘nobs’, and now I’m meant to be the biggest fucking one that there is?”

“Language, darling.”

“That’s exactly my point! I don’t have the language for it!”

“And yet it would seem we have no choice. The city’s made their decision, and that Lady Skara, I swear she had something to do with this.”

They peered over the reception in the Grand Hall, where a certain feline danced with her beautiful female handmaiden partner, but continued to glance in their direction with a smirk on her black-furred features.

“Definitely,” Alister said. “And look at Giselle over there, trotting up and down. I bet she had her omen-reading centaurs add their voices to it.”

“Ugh. Marion’s doing too, no doubt. She keeps whispering about how exciting it will be for me to deliver a ‘royal baby’ now that I’m a queen.”

Alister giggled. “That would be very amusing.”

“I’d have to carry it! I mean, I know I want a family-”

“A big family, as I recall.”

“But getting pregnant! I mean, I’d be giving birth! Having a little baby kick inside me! Breastfeeding!”

Alister giggled a second time. “Well, you’ve certainly got the breasts to feed, that’s for sure.”

“Oh, stop it. I just don’t know if I can do all of that. I mean, I’m bred for nobility, certainly, but to be *queen*? I can believe you’d be an amazing king, but-”

“My love, you’d be an amazing queen. You understand this stuff, and you can help me, and I can bring a more common perspective some of these nobs need to have kicked into their heads.”

Melanie nodded. "I suppose. But . . . pregnant? It would be a lot."

At this, Alister bit his lip, blushing a little. Melanie immediately became suspicious.

"What are you not telling me?"

"Sorry, my love, I thought you'd just figured it out already, that's all."

"Figured what out?"

Alister sighed. "This is what happens when you become a woman at the age of twenty; you don't get the benefit of a whole life being warned about the signs. Mel, you've eaten twice as much as any woman at the reception table here tonight."

Melanie pouted, a very cute look on her. "That's because I'm used to a man's appetites."

"And you've been feeling tired a lot lately. Sleepy and emotional."

"Because of all the restoration and busy work!"

"Your breasts have been tender."

"I can't keep you off them, you dog!"

"Well, I can't deny that. But consider: haven't you noticed that your stomach is just a little bit more taut? Or that I've been taking care of your drinks and ensuring you don't get any wine in you tonight, or any other night?"

Melanie blinked, the realisation crashing upon her. She lowered her hand to her belly. It was a little more taut. Just barely, but it was obvious now that she thought about it. And she had been tired and hungry lately, and that sickness she had passed through . . .

"By the Gods," she said.

"I don't think the Gods had anything to do with that, love. I think it was all you and me, in fact."

"I'm - I'm pregnant!"

"Hush! I may be some common born girl originally, but even I know these things have to be properly announced, Mel."

"But Aly . . . I'm pregnant! You got me pregnant! You did this!"

"Well, it takes two, darling."

Melanie blushed. She was already imagining the strange experience that awaited her. She had accepted that she would likely have children with Alister - she *wanted* them, after all. But she thought she'd have much more time. And now . . . now her belly was going to slowly swell up, and her breasts grow even bigger. She'd feel kicking inside of her as she grew with life. She'd experience cravings, tiredness, movement in her womb in the middle of the night, and have to rely on her maids and husband even more than she already had to as a new woman. And that wasn't even getting into the fact that *she'd* be the one at the birthing bed! Or that she'd then be nursing her babies from her breast, as was the Arlingdale tradition for women that she just knew she wouldn't be able to shake. It was all so much!



And yet.

And yet part of her was *excited*. Through the shock and the immediate fear, she was excited. She'd have a family of her own with her Alister, and while it wouldn't be *quite* as she imagined it to be, it would still be *perfect*. She found herself smiling as she touched her still-slim belly, the one that showed only the slightest bit of evidence that she was expecting.

"Aly," she declared, as the music began to rise. "I've got butterflies. Dance with me."

Alister smiled, extended a hand, and took his new wife to the dance floor. The crowd parted to allow them room, and soon they shared a loving waltz together, accompanied by their friends, family, and allies.

And by a tiny little life that had only just begun.

At the end of the dance they kissed. By that point, Mel could hardly keep the smile off of her face. The King and Queen of Astrea were already blessed with a child to come.