

The Road to Change, Part 13: Tempest

By FoxFaceStories

A Commission for Al

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.

Chapter 13: Tempest

Allison pulled her master from the water, dragging him up into their abandoned raft with all her strength. He was naked, but that didn't matter; so was *she*. She pulled him over the raft seat, his arms falling below his sides to the bottom of the boat.

"Lord Melvin!" she cried. "Mel! MEL!"

He wasn't responding. Worse, as she checked his breath, he wasn't *breathing*. But his heart was still pulsing, though they were weak pulses.

"Damn it, you couldn't use a fucking water breathing spell!?" she exclaimed, tears in her eyes as she set to work immediately. She blinked said tears away, summoning her warrior's strength to do what needed to be done.

"C'mon, Mel!" she grunted, compressing his chest in regular beats. "One, two, three, four, one, two, three, four, one, two, three, four. C'mon!"

She gave him three breaths, as Master of the Hunt Portas had taught her. He was a master survivalist, and had served in the Targan navy for nearly a decade. She remembered all his lessons now, applying each in order to maximise Mel's survival. When he still wasn't breathing, she stuffed his mouth with the golden dewflower from her satchel. It would fill him with vitality, giving the young man a fighting chance. She returned to her compressions again, then her breaths, then the compressions once more. Allison tried to keep her emotions at bay, but was unable to do so as the situation grew more dire. Tears fell down her cheeks, and soon she was sobbing as she continued to render aid to him.

"C'mon! You can't fucking die like this, Mel! You just can't! Fucking get up! I refuse to let you die, do you hear me? There's still so much we've got to do. So much - so much I've got to tell you!"

She gave him the three breaths yet again, then returned to pressing on his sternum. Something cracked, something painful, but Portas had told her this was normal. The ocean was serene, the sun was just rising over it, bathing the entire sea with a gold-orange glow. It would have been so beautiful, but in her situation, Allison only found the calmness terrible for its uncaring nature. It was silent as death, and it was death she feared.

"Mel, come back to me!" she pleaded. "Please. I love you. I should have told you before, I should have said it a thousand times from the moment I realised it. I pushed the feelings down and tried to ignore them, but I realised back with the rabbitkin that I truly adore you. So wake the fuck up so I can tell you how much I'm in love with you! Wake! Up!"

She gave her compressions again, tears falling onto Melvin's chest.

"I love you, Mel. Gods, I love you. I love you so damn much! Please don't leave me before you hear it."

Melvin's eyes opened.

He nearly pushed Allison aside as he turned, and then vomited up what must have felt like a gallon of water. From his perspective, he had just died, and now here was an angel above him. As the overwhelming light dimmed to normalcy in his vision, he realised that it was not an angel, but a very naked Allison.

"Aly?" he said in a weak voice, blinking several times. "Why are you naked? It's not proper."

"Oh, you stuffy, wonderful, noble!" she cried. Allison held tightly to him, uncaring that he was naked and so was she. She pressed her wet face to his.

"I thought you were dead before I could tell you."

"You saved me?"

"Of course, I had to! You're - you're my partner." But then this verbal retreat was overcome. She had promised herself she would not hold back. Allison placed her hand on his cheek as he rose, and then went all in.

"You're more than that, actually. Mel, I love you."

She kissed him, her lips on his. They lingered, and this time he kissed her back. Those lips could have brought *her* life. For several seconds, both felt pure happiness.

And then Melvin grabbed her shoulders and held her back.

"Allison, what in the hells do you think you're doing?"

"I - uh I was kissing you?"

"We talked about this! It's completely inappropriate. You - you're not of my station! The only reason you're not a peasant is because of some ridiculous notion that we are paired because of our shared birthday!"

Allison struggled to respond. "I - Mel, I didn't mean, I mean I did - but you nearly died. I couldn't keep it in. I needed to tell you-"

“What? That you love me? While we’re both naked in a boat in the middle of the ocean with no way to get where we need to go? After we’ve both been hypnotised? Does this not seem to be the worst possible time to tell someone that you love them?”

She blushed a deep red, shamed by her master. “I’m sorry, Mel. Fuck, I didn’t mean for things to go this way. Look, I just thought-”

The darkness rose from the water, roiling and bubbling, surrounding the boat in a dread wind. Melvin didn’t even seem to notice it behind him.

“What? You thought I could escape my obligations? That I could just be with who I wanted? That’s not how noble life works, Allison! I have obligations, I have had the concept of noblesse oblige drilled into my mind from before I could even talk back! We are on a mission of life and death! We don’t have time for love!”

The curse swirled around, becoming a storm that rocked their boat. Allison tried to shield herself against it, but it rose up further like a typhoon.

“I can’t have time for any of that!” Melvin exploded. “I just *can’t!* How can you not get that *my life is not my own!?*”

“Mel, watch out!”

But it was too late. The curse enveloped him, and Allison was knocked back into the raft as it was buffeted by waves. She was nearly cast out of it entirely but managed to catch herself. When she rose moments later, clutching her head, the wind was whipping harshly all around her, the sea churning in every direction. An enormous storm had risen from nowhere, spilling waves left and right and threatening to overturn the boat. And Melvin was nowhere to be seen.

“Mel! Oh God, the curse has made a storm. MEL! I’M COMING!”

The curse had inflamed his emotions, she just knew it. It had fed on them, enhancing them, taking his innermost fears and pulling them to the surface in order to create . . . *this*. The sky was dark, the rising sun eclipsed, and already rain was beginning to pelt down. Water filled the raft, and Allison knew it would be overturned any second now. Not even the best helmsman in the world could chart such a surge in a mere *raft*.

“Atola!” she screamed. “Help me! I need to find Mel! I need your help!”

Her voice was silent against the wind and the rain, but it made its way to the deep anyway.

“I will help you, child. I cannot approach, but I can keep you aloft just a little longer, as thanks for all that you have done.”

The boat began to move forward as a siren song parted the worst of the waves. Allison took the oars and began to row, the storm clashing against the siren queen’s own control of the waves. It would not hold forever, she knew.

“Where’s Mel!?” she screamed. “I have to find him!”

The song broke for just a moment, and a wave nearly overturned the raft in the time it took for Atola's response from the ocean depths.

"The centre of the storm, child. You must go fast, or he shall become an Everstorm."

"A what!?"

But an enormous wave rose up, and Atola only just barely managed to shift it away with her singing. Allison looked around the immense whorl, and managed to spot it; the centre of the dread maelstrom, where the great waves were surging from.

"I'M COMING, MEL!" she screamed.

She didn't care that she was still naked. She didn't care that she was bruised and scratched and bleeding from being buffeted in the raft. All that mattered was saving the man she loved, even if he didn't love her. Even if he had rebuked her.

Because that was what love was. It didn't give up easily.

She rowed and rowed, drawing on all the strength of her athletic arms. Her heart thudded in her chest, and the rain whipped against her. She knew she would not likely survive this exposure; all was frigid, and the wind was a dragon's breath. Still, she pushed on.

"Become an Everstorm. What does that mean!? How can he - oh Gods."

She could feel it, a connection. It had always been there with Melvin, but now it manifested not just emotionally, but magically as well, a tether to her master, just as Praemis had one to Cawthor in all the ancient stories. She could feel his presence, but it wasn't in the water, nor sinking to the deep. It wasn't upon the surface, or being pulled to the sky.

It was everywhere.

Mel had *become* the storm. And if Allison's instincts were right, unless she helped him, the Demon Lord's curse would leave him as such, raging forever and blocking all trade between east and west. And more than that, destroying the man she loved, breaking him as easily as the storm broke the waves around her.

"I won't let that happen, Mel!" she screamed, continuing towards the centre of the storm. The air shifted, rippling with magic she now recognised as his. It was like his mind was all around her; his presence, his anger, his fear, his uncertainty. She tried to fight it off, but it tore at her, threatening to spill her out of the boat. It was overwhelming; how did he stand it? Was he always like this, or was the curse amplifying it? Kernels of hope floated around her, but were being quickly drowned in the torrent of the sea. She tried to gather them, but the fear and anxiety were too strong, his darkest emotions powering the storm.

"FINE!" she yelled, raging at the sea itself. "I'LL TAKE IT! I'LL TAKE IT *FOR YOU!*"

She flung open her hands as she was carried forth, ever closer to the raging maelstrom's heart.

"GIVE THEM TO ME!" she cried.

They rushed in, storm and hail and wind and pain and hate and fear, all of them entering into her. The maelstrom was right there, a gigantic whirlpool at the heart of the storm. It began to pull the warrior under, and not even the aid of the freed siren could help her here. She was drawn into the darkened void, into the heart of despair itself. Allison cried out, raging all the while.

The visions began.

A child's laughter. A gasp of excitement. A playful series of steps and skips.

Allison opened her eyes. She had expected to be in a swirling storm or some kind of hellscape, but instead she was in a *library*. It appeared to be the Dawnway Estate, though an earlier version of it, before the library's expansion. A lot more light entered the place, and it was clearly day, because a young boy was gallivanting around the halls, picking book after book out and examining the pictures.

"Look at this one, sister! Look at this one! It has monsters in it! And this one is about spells!"

"Brother, hush! Father wouldn't like you in here. You have to show respect."

She turned a corner, and that's when Allison saw a small child with dark hair, making a small stack of books and scurrying to get more. His optimism reminded her of herself, as did his excitement and curiosity.

"Look, this one says it's about pirates!"

"Can you even read?" said a girl with brown hair, about five or six years old, which would make the boy perhaps four.

"I can read! I can read most words! Hey, see this! It's about adventure! It's about Praemis and Cawthor, the really big adventurers Mother spoke about. We should play like them! You can read the big words and we can act out-"

A shadow entered the room, dark and foreboding, the footsteps of the figure it belonged to heavy and serious. The young boy's face fell.

"F-Father, I was just playing and-"

"Playing? PLAYING!?! This is the esteemed library and archive of our family, BOY! You think this is a place for playing?"

"Father, I just wanted to read the exciting books and learn-"

"You haven't even finished your lessons for the day, and you want to indulge in ridiculous flights of fantasy? I'll talk to your mother - half of these books should be sold off or burned. You are my son, and I expect you to maintain a proper dignity, even as a young boy. Do you UNDERSTAND?"

The shadow loomed, and Allison tried to understand what she was seeing. Tears were in the boy's eyes.

“And do not show emotion, son. Emotion is weakness. If you are ever to be worthy of my name and your brother’s name, I expect you to have mastery over yourself. Now leave this place and continue your duties. These books will be gone when you leave.”

The young boy bowed, and quickly left the room. Allison moved to follow him but as she turned the corner she-

- placed her hands in front of her face, confused by the shafts of light streaming in through the corridor. The transition didn’t make any sense. She was now halfway across the building, in the receiving room of the Dawnway Estate. This was where Mel’s father would, appropriately enough, receive visitors and make general proclamations concerning the running of his household. This was what was occurring right now: the stern and thick-necked Lord Dawnway was seated on a magnificent chair, surrounded by members of his family and listening to the concerns of locals, pronouncing judgements as were his right as magistrate of his lands.

And there was Allison, realising she was still utterly naked and dripping with water. Only this time she wasn’t hiding behind a bookshelf, she was in *plain view*.

“What in the hells?” she said, covering herself. “Oh Gods, I didn’t mean - this isn’t what it looks like, I swear!”

But then she realised something: *no one was looking at her*. Curious, she reached out to touch one of the peasants come to kneel before his lord and entreat him. Her hand passed right through him.

“I’m not really here,” she murmured. “But then . . . what is here? And can I get some storming clothes?”

Instantly, her skin glowed, and she was suddenly wearing her travelling armour, the one she had so recently gained. Her *knight’s* armour.

“Fuck yes,” she said. “That’s more like it.”

She checked that her Sarathian sword was by her side, and sure enough it was. She would need it to combat any threats here. This was clearly a place of deceit. Or perhaps . . . it was something else . . .

The room seemed to dim, the only light casting down upon Lord Dawnway. With shock, she realised that the reason she couldn’t see Melvin was because she’d been looking for Melvin the *adult*. Instead, a short child who could be no older than six or seven stood before his father, dour-faced. His sister Tiffany was much younger, dressed in finery but

trying to escape her mother's clutches. Marion and Hector were, on the other hand, dutiful beside their father, ever the perfect nobles. Something about Melvin's face looked downcast, and so Allison approached to hear it.

"All this rumour-making about this girl, Melvin, it simply won't do. I see how you play with her on occasion as well."

"We don't play, father! We argue! All the time! She gets on my nerves!"

"Precisely. She acts above her station, and it is clear that her parents cannot control her. Amelia and Gregor Greenwood are faithful servants, but they are by no means indispensable. Do you understand me?"

Melvin shook his head slowly, and his father sighed.

"It means that they can be replaced. Do you understand now? We can remove her as an obstacle to your training and development."

"What the fuck?" Allison said. "I knew you were a crotchety noble, but I didn't know you were an ass! Someone tell him off for me!"

To her surprise, it was Melvin himself. *"Please, father, no! I like her. I mean, I don't like her. She's annoying and always talks and is jumping everywhere, but she's not . . . bad. She's good."*

His father narrowed his eyes, leaning forward. *"I want you to think very carefully about the future you are cultivating for yourself. Attachments to your lessers will only diminish you, Melvin. You should work to become a fine leader as your brother is shaping up to be. Cavorting with girls like that, girls who don't understand a woman's place nor a peasant's, will only make a fool of you. And I have already seen enough foolishness with you and your obsession with stories."*

His wife whispered in his ear, and Lord Dawnway sighed.

"Very well. She shall stay for now. I suppose she is supposed to be of use to you someday. But if you waver in your studies - just once - I shall have her and her parents removed. I will not tolerate failure, Melvin, nor pursuit of idle fantasies. Now remove yourself to your room to think about this."

Melvin ran *through* Allison, his eyes filled with tears yet his manner stoic enough to contain them from spilling to his cheeks. Something in the woman's heart broke.

"By the Gods, I had no idea . . ."

The trail of despair, the dark void, began to swallow the ground beneath her feet. Hurriedly, she tried to follow child Melvin before it was too late.

"Melvin! Mel, it's me! Allison!"

For just a fleeting second, the child turned his head back, as if sensing something there. But then he continued on to his room, and darkness took all the rest. Allison fell, screaming, into the void.

A new scene. It appeared to be a ball of some kind. Allison had been to these, and in her mid teenage years onward had even been encouraged to go due to the increasing bond she had as Melvin's protector. But this was too early for that. Melvin looked to be about eleven years old or so, and in her mind, he was positively *adorable* in his blue and red getup, which was tailored to his form and made him look like a little general on parade. Unfortunately, he also looked miserable.

"This is just a matchmaking," his mother said, patting him over on the sidelines as the adults danced. *"It's just an event to view prospective betrothals. You're not getting married, Melvin."*

"But I don't want to get married at all. I've got my studies. I'm doing well, just like father told me to. Why should I have to get married?"

"It's the lot of nobility, my son. It will be your responsibility to sire heirs for the household, even if your place is second to Hector."

"Then let him have a heap of kids!"

"It doesn't work that way, dear, and you know it. Besides, you will soon like girls."

"I do like girls. I just don't want a wife."

His mother raised an eyebrow. *"Oh, you like a girl, do you? Any one in particular?"*

Little Melvin blushed, and Allison crept forward through the dancers, intrigued. Who could it be? Lady Anning? Perhaps Miriam of Sconne?

"It's just some girl," he said. *"Um, that one!"*

Allison punched the air. She knew she shouldn't get excited. She needed to work this out. But she had been right. It was Miriam of Sconne, the girl with raven-dark hair and the funny pompous accent that made her sound like she 'vanted to suck your vlood!' No wonder Melvin was such an ass to her around this time. She remembered a night like this where he'd absolutely crushed her little heart by mocking her when talking about her love of flowers. In fact, it was very much a night like this. Could it be . . .

She gasped as Melvin's mother moved to intercept Miriam of Sconne, because as soon as she turned her back on Melvin, he actually *bolted* from the scene. Well, bolted in the Melvin sense, which was more like a very stiff, very fast walk with as much dignity preserved as possible. She followed him, trying to talk to him, but it was clear his mind was elsewhere.

"It's his memory," she told herself. "The moments he felt alone. The moments he felt out of place."

No, that wasn't it. It was the moments he felt constrained by obligation. Strangled by his noble obligations. She followed him out into the gardens, where she knew *exactly* what

would go down. Little Allison, her hair still golden beneath the moonlight, was looking over some flowers near the pond with fascination.

“Oh, shit. I think I remember this differently than he does.”

In fact, she never imagined that Melvin had actually *smiled* before moving to ambush her. She followed ahead of him, gazing with astonishment at that cute, silly smile he had plastered to his features. And yet was resolutely Melvin all the way through, because before Allison could lift her head and see him, he adopted a sterner expression and ensured that his clothing was professional.

“Oh God, you were trying to *impress* me,” she said, astounded.

“*What are you looking at?*” he said in his most imperious voice.

Allison suddenly snapped up, reaching for a stone dagger she’d found in the forest. Only when she saw that it was Melvin, her eyes narrowed.

“*Oh, it’s you. You’re all dressed up today, little lord.*”

“*You - you’re smaller than I am!*”

“*Am not! They just feed you more because you’re a nob. What are you doing here? I thought you’d be dancing.*”

“*I - I came to inspect the gardens. There was rumour of a thief here, but I see it’s only you now and - and I ask to know what you are doing.*”

“*Looking at the Nightblooms, obviously! Not that you would know, being a lord and all.*”

“*Actually, I know all about Nightblooms,*” he said, standing a little taller. He then strode over, his face nervous while Allison was looking away, and then shuffled the last few steps to be extra close to her. The real Allison watched this with fascination. She remembered this moment; Melvin had been so hostile! But this was his awkward, clumsy, overly posh way of *talking to her*.

“*They only bloom in the spring night air,*” he recited, his chest puffing up with pride at his own knowledge. “*They’re known as the nightbloom because of this, but they also shift to a light blue colour, glowing in a way where most people can see them. This actually serves a purpose; the glowbeetles are drawn to that light and begin the pollination process. In fact, a Nightbloom’s seeds can be harnessed in magical experimentation to form everglowing lamps. That’s actually a misnomer, because they only glow for a few weeks, and not as strongly as a sconce, but they have their uses as a result, particularly if it is too cold or dangerous to light a fire. The Nightbloom shade also-*”

Little Allison broke into a hysterical giggle, silencing the confused little Melvin.

“*By the Gods, do you just go on and on like that? Where do you get all of this from?*”

"From books, obviously. I am a member of the literate class, you know. I could teach you, if you wish, that way you could know a lot more about Nightblooms so you don't have to look at them."

"I can read too! Most workers on the estate can!"

At this, he blushed. *"Oh, I - I didn't realise."*

"And why would I want to stop looking at Nightblooms? They're beautiful!"

"Well, the beauty isn't their main use-"

"Not everything has a use, Lord Melvin! And besides, you know a lot more up close. Did you even know you can use them to help with eye sores?"

"I - that's not in any tome."

"See!" she cried, victorious. "It's just silly books."

At this, he became darkly serious. *"They're not silly books. They're my life. My most important thing is my studies."*

Adult Allison slapped her forehead at what was to come. "Gods, do I have to watch this again?"

But little Allison made her decision, as she had done. *"I thought the most important thing in life for you was getting married to one of those silly girls in there, Mel!"*

"Don't call me Mel, and I'm not getting married!"

"Are too! That's what nobles do. Mom told me."

"Then she's wrong! I'm going to be a great mage!"

"And I'll be a warrior!"

"That's stupid, girls can't be warriors!"

"Can too! I'll be like one of the great Ladies in the stories!"

"They were exceptions that prove the rule!"

"At least they lived a better life than you are, stuck away reading books all the time!"

They devolved into arguing, as they had often done. But the moment was coming, Allison knew it, and when her young counterpart reached a boiling point, she did exactly as she remembered: she screamed the worst insult she could possibly think of.

"Yeah? Well at least I'm not trapped in some golden cage as a sad little boy who doesn't even know how to talk to girls!"

With that, she pushed past him and ran away.

The real Allison stayed. She hadn't seen this next part; the bit where Melvin stumbled from the push, tripped on his shoe, tried to correct himself, and then - oh Gods, no! - splashed into the pond, soaking himself to the bone. He scrambled out immediately, tears in his eyes, wiping away the mud from the bottom of the pond and hurling away the frogs that had swarmed over him briefly. He grabbed a Nightbloom and tore it to pieces in anger, hot tears tracking down his muddy face.

It was in this state that his mother and father found him, the former first.

"Oh Gods, Melvin! What are you doing?"

"I was . . . I slipped. By myself."

"We need to clean you up before your father - oh."

He arrived, a giant, swollen to greater heights by Melvin's childhood memory. And he looked furious, his eyes gleaming with anger as he stared down at his son. He reached down a hand and easily pulled his son to his feet.

"By all the Gods above and hells below, what is the matter with you, boy? You can't perform your noble duties for one night? Why are you out here? Was it that girl?"

Allison saw his face: even young, Melvin could be stoic and secretive. He steeled himself.

"I just wanted some air, father. I was looking at the Nightblooms, and I slipped."

"No more of that, then. This is an important night, and I won't have you ruin it for me. Come on. We'll get you changed, and you will NOT embarrass me or this family again. Be more like Marion and Hector, and play your part dutifully, like a good son."

He yanked at Melvin's arm, pulling him away, and the young boy quieted the tears in his eyes, rubbing them away quickly. He turned back to look at where young Allison had gone, but then his gaze fell curiously upon the real Allison.

"What?" he said, his voice suddenly present and lacking that warble of the misty past.

"Mel!" Allison shouted, pursuing him. "Mel! You need to listen to me! You've been cursed! You're stuck feeling trapped, and the curse is feeding you memories when you felt like that! Please let me-"

But then the darkness crept in. Allison was swallowed into the ground even as young Melvin shouted for her, recognition in his eyes. Everything became darkness once again. But this time Allison pushed back against it. She could feel herself being swallowed into another oppressive memory, but she drew her Sarathian sword. In this place of memory and shadow substance it took on a bright, gleaming quality, illuminating the shadows that were gathering.

"Oh no, you don't! I'm finding him! I'll smash through every black memory if I have to be his light!"

She was not swallowed by the storm, but this time leapt into its dreamy maelstrom, her sword plunging into the substance of memory and shattering through it.

More memories flicker, this time passing through quickly, like stained-glass windows in impossible detail.

Melvin gazing out the window, seeing the other children playing while his father looks over his shoulder.

Melvin presenting his father with his latest results from his exam, his body language nervous, his desire to be affirmed clear upon his face. His father simply nods, and tells him to continue.

Melvin trying to outdo Hector in a duel, his age barely nine. He is easily pushed down, and Marion laughs, mocking him for the attempt. When Hector tries to pull him up, Melvin bats his hand aside and runs indoors.

Melvin told again and again to suppress his emotions, to lack feeling, to view the world coldly and pragmatically. To be as a noble should be. His mother does her best, but at every turn she sides with her father in the end: it is a noble's duty to support one's lord, after all.

And yet, interspersed through all these visions, there is Allison. Sometimes she is a flicker in the corner. Sometimes a laughing child chasing butterflies. Sometimes a duellist not even realising that Lord Melvin is watching. Often she is simply there, in his thoughts, a figure of wonderment; how can she remain so hopeful, so full of life when it has been burnt out of him? Why do her mother and father embrace her, while his are so much colder?

Over and over again, he finds excuses to be near her, even as she drives him to frustration, to fury, to confusion and humiliation. Again and again they fight, and yet are drawn together inextricably, despite his father's warnings. She is to be his protector, and it is he who vouches for her hardest even as he groans at her jokes and language and lower class manner. He wants to understand her and be more like her . . . but the barrier is always there.

Time is different here. Allison steels herself, holding out her sword and crashing through memory after memory, seeking the hope in each one as a pathway to the next, following the course of her own life as much as Melvin's. She screams, roaring with the fury of a woman alight with righteousness and *love*, and she leaps ever further to the centre of the storm, slicing through every barrier until the greatest one is before her.

There it is.

His insecurity.

His fear.

All that he has suppressed across the years forms a great wall, a shield around himself that none has managed to penetrate or crack through.

"Except me!" Allison roars, diving towards it, unafraid of the doom it offers if she cannot break through. She knows she already has, just once.

She knows where the weak point is.

She aims for her reflection, and this time no sword is necessary. She readies a punch with her own bare fist, and the barrier cracks. Melvin is below - the barrier is translucent, and he is submerged in black water, floating and drowning, submerged in his own suppressed emotion.

"Melvin!" Allison screams, punching the barrier again. "It's me! It's Allison! I understand now! You've always been afraid to be close to others. You were made to be this way! But it isn't you!"

Another smash of her fist upon the barrier. It cracks further, but the storm is beginning to manifest around her, threatening to pull her under for good.

"But you *did* open up - to me! You've opened up many times, even if you closed up again! You pushed yourself out of this wall and showed me the real you, I just didn't see it all until now!"

She punches the barrier again. Another crack. It is working. It is shattering. But the wind is rising, and without his help . . .

"Mel, I've always been there for you! And you were always there for me! I don't care about any gap in status between us, and neither should you! I love you, and nothing should get between that! But even if you don't feel the same way, you deserve to love *yourself!*"

She punches again. The wind begins to pull her off, the icy storm raining down upon her figure.

And then Melvin is standing, rising from the black water, truly seeing her for the first time, his hand extending to the barrier to press against hers.

"Aly?" he says.

"Mel?"

A small smile extends across his features.

"You came for me," he says, tears in his eyes.

Their fingers touch through the crack in the barrier, right before Aly can be swept off of the dome. The barrier shatters into a million shards.

Melvin woke, coughing a little as he rose. He was on a beach, the raft he and Aly had inadvertently stolen pulled up onto its bank. Behind him, a beautiful forest with falling petals and luxurious grass. He was clothed again, wearing the same noble uniform he'd had before being turned into a mermaid. How much of it was real? He could almost hear a siren in the distance, a note of thankfulness upon it. The sun was risen, but it was still early morning, the sky awakening into a beautiful, near-cloudless blue.

"Aly," he whispered.

He stood quickly, panic in his heart. The last thing he could remember was being saved by her. He had gone to a dark place, relived every memory of how he had been constricted and suppressed in his home, his curiosity bled from him, his openness to others closed off. And yet she had pierced through every wall, and made it to his heart.

“Aly!” he called. “Aly, where are you!?”

“Ugh, fuck. I think I overdid the whole ‘spiritual journey’ thing.”

Emerging from an area where several bushes met the shoreline was the woman he sought. Allison clutched her head, blinking wearily, having obviously just woken herself. She was wearing her regal knightly armour, and he had never seen a more beautiful sight: her blonde hair brushed against her pauldrons, and in the light of the sun she looked *golden*, like a goddess. In many ways, she had been *his* goddess.

“Aly!” he called, rushing to her.

She regained her bearings. “Mel! Oh Gods, Mel! Tell me you’re alright!”

They both ran, embracing on the sand and holding one another. Tears flowed from Allison’s eyes, but they bubbled in his as well, and finally he allowed himself to cry.

“I’m so sorry, Aly,” he said, refusing to let her go. “I’m so, so very sorry. I should never have shut you out-”

“Shh,” she said, hushing him and pressing her forehead against his. “It’s okay, Mel. It’s okay.”

“No, it’s not okay. All my life I’ve been trained to shut people out. I’ll never do that again, not with you. Not with you, Aly. Not . . .”

He paused, and Allison pulled back her head to see if he was alright. He was looking at her strangely, with such intensity that she could barely guess at his thoughts. For Melvin, he was seeing Allison; truly seeing all of her for the very first time, and he finally understood his feelings for.

“Aly,” he said, his breath almost catching you. “I was wrong before, about us.”

“No, I overstepped.”

“No! Let me finish, please. I was hiding, afraid. I didn’t know what it would mean, but I’m sick of dancing to the strings of the Dawnway line and its expectations. And I’m sick of fleeing from what I feel. Aly, I love you. Gods, I love you. You’re joyful and optimistic and frustrating and cunning and a brilliant fighter, and you’re kind and compassionate, and your jokes are terrible yet hilarious, and you know all these things I don’t know and you introduce me to entire worlds and - Gods, I can’t even say it all! I love you, Aly! I don’t even know how to-”

“Oh, come here, you silly noble!” she cried.

They kissed, and this time neither party pulled away, nor did one of them fail to reciprocate. There had been many great kisses in history, but this one eclipsed them all in its

passion and love, its tenderness and its lust, its excitement and its nervousness. Their lips locked as if they were afraid they might disappear if they stopped embracing one another.

Finally, they had to come up for air. They giggled, unbelieving it had taken this long.

"That was amazing," she said.

"I don't know . . . maybe I'm getting second thoughts."

She laughed and punched him in the shoulder lightly. "And you say my jokes are bad!"

He kissed her again, holding the back of her neck in a way that drove her wild.

"You don't care that I'm not some noble girl?" she asked when they parted a second time.

He brushed her hair behind her ear carefully. "Aly, you have the most noble heart of any girl I've ever met."

Her beaming smile seemed to outshine the sun.

"You're not too bad yourself, my lord."

He took her hand. "Please don't ever call me that, or 'master.' I'm just Mel. Your Mel."

They kissed again, but this time there was a new energy to it. Allison couldn't help herself; she slipped her tongue into Melvin's mouth, and he readily accepted it, letting his tongue dance against hers in the D'Arbour fashion. Allison moaned, running her hands along Melvin's fine shoulders, and before the nobleman even realised what he was doing, he was fiddling with the straps of her armour, undoing and unclasping its connections. She giggled, then aided him when he struggled. The pauldrons fell to the sand, then the cuirass and the greaves. The pair continued to kiss and touch one another, exploring their bodies. Melvin was hard by this point, and Allison found herself licking her lips as she observed the tent in his pants.

"Let's go further up the bank," she said, removing the chausses upon her legs and flinging off her cape and hurling her gloves upon it. She took her hand and pulled him up into the gentle forest with its pink-leafed trees, so different from those in Arlingdale. The young woman's heart raced, her nipples stiffening with arousal. She pulled at the bands binding her nicely sized breasts, freeing them beneath her padded shirt.

"There!" Melvin said, pointing to an area around the roots of a particular tree. It didn't look very comfortable, and Allison laughed as she noticed it, clinging to Melvin and wanting him desperately, but not like *that*.

"Are you kidding? By the Gods, I can't think of anything less comfortable?"

Then Melvin did something very curious and very *unlike* his normal stoic self; he waggled his eyebrows, and then cast out a spell with his hands. Instantly, plant growth overcame the area, forming a comfortable bed of grass and gorgeous wildflowers, with verdant soil that cushioned softly beneath their feet.

"Nevermind!" Allison said, grabbing Melvin by the collar and *yanking* him to the ground. The pair continued to kiss and caress, and she practically attacked his breeches, untethering them and pulling them down from his torso. He in turn undid her padded shirt and the shift beneath, followed by the bandage that bound her lovely breasts. He briefly paused, staring at them, his jaw dropped. He had seen them once before like this, and they were bigger than he expected still. Allison blushed, covering them a little, looking like a gorgeous forest nymph as she lay near naked upon the grass.

"I've usually, um, tried to hide them. Boys in the training yard would have made fun. So . . . ta da?"

Melvin just smiled, placing his hands upon them and squeezing gently, producing a gasp of bliss from her. "They're *perfect*, Aly. And . . . very nicely sized."

"You dog!"

He laughed - actually *laughed!* - but then they were kissing again, removing the last articles of their clothing. Allison took further control, fitting for her warriorress nature. She gripped Melvin and pressed his back to the ground, positioning herself over him.

"Do you like this?" she said, squeezing her breasts together with her upper arms as she placed herself on top of him.

"Sh-shit! Yes!"

She giggled. "Finally, some cursing from the great noble! I bet you like this too, Mel."

The blonde beauty lowered her hands down to play with his erect penis, stroking it, marvelling at its surprising length and girth. It made her wet just to touch it. She'd dreamed of this moment during her most lustful thoughts for Melvin.

"Oh - oh Gods! That's - ahhh - that's quite good. F-fuck. That's very good, Aly! V-very good!"

She giggled again, but then that delightful sound was stopped short as Melvin reached up with his hands to cup her breasts, feeling them, caressing them, letting them bounce.

"That's quite a bounce!" he noted, ever harder, ever more aroused.

"You like that t-too?" she managed, biting her lip. "Mhmm! They're q-uite sensitive, you know. Ohhhh, touch my n-nipples a bit more. They're really sensitive *there!* Ohhh!"

She writhed on him, her unbound breasts bouncing as she did so. Mel couldn't help himself, he lifted her up. "I need to be inside you, Aly. God, I need this. Do you?"

Allison nodded eagerly. "Yes. Yes! Let me guide you in, Mel!"

She softly took his cock, enjoying the hard feel of it, and placed it at the entrance of her womanhood. Then, she lowered herself, and he plunged into her as she settled herself. The pair of them moaned; this was the first actual sex either had had, even with the rather strange changes of their previous adventures, and it felt *right*. Allison went ramrod straight

for a moment, shocked by the sensation of having a man fill up her passage. Melvin's dick was big - wonderfully so - and it slid to her utmost depths. Melvin grunted as he gripped her hips, fingers pushing into the flesh of her rear.

"Yes, Aly! You f-feel so tight!"

"I'm sorry!"

"N-no! It's perfect! God, you're amazing. I love you."

"I love you t-too, Mel! And you'll love *this!*"

She began to rock her hips, clutching his shoulders to gain momentum as he lay back upon the lush grass. At first her movements were slow, savouring the way his pole slid in and out of her, but then she began to pick up speed, aided by the motion of his hands upon her upper hips. Melvin carefully controlled his breathing, barely able to believe how wonderful it felt. He was *inside* of her, and far from being some rote performance to ensure a noble child, this was an act of intimacy and love. It didn't hurt that it felt godsdamn *incredible*. Her breasts bounced on her chest as she rocked up and down, and he couldn't help himself: Melvin played with her breasts and then pulled her closer, pressing his face into her rack. She giggled in delight, then moaned as he kissed and nibbled at her tits. Her large left pink nipple found his mouth, and he sucked in deep, flicking his tongue against it.

"Ohhhhhh! Ahhhh, that's p-perfect! Keep doing that, Mel! I love it! Oh Gods, I love it!"

She milked his cock ever faster, her movements almost animalistic, but occasionally they changed rhythms: Melvin stopped attending to her breasts in order to share a passionate kiss with her. She placed her arms around his neck, still gyrating against his cock and clamping down upon his perfect manhood.

"I'm c-close!" she managed, her voice a cheery squeak.

"M-me too, my love!" he groaned, his hands finding their way to her ass and gripping it. How had he not paid more attention to her rear before? It was so . . . not plump, it was quite athletic in fact, but it possessed a rondure nature that no male rear would possess, and he loved the sensation of it.

"I love you, Mel!" Allison moaned in his ear before kissing his neck. Her breasts rubbed against his naked chest, drawing more pleasure from both of them.

"I love you too, Aly! I love you so much! I love you so - uughh! Nghhh!"

It was all too much. Too much ecstasy, too much arousal, too much connection and love. He pulled her in tight for one last kiss, and in that moment of embrace he came within her, ejaculating his seed deep into her waiting womb. Aly exploded into orgasm in response, feeling his hot issue pouring into her in hot streams. One orgasm after the next rippled through her body, causing her to moan into Melvin's mouth in a highly erotic manner.

"Mel! Mel, I'm c-cumming! I'm - ohhhh Gods, it's s-so good! Yesssss! YESSS!!"

She fell to wordless moans, unable to contain her excitement, and then she actually *giggled* as the orgasms continued to flow, a response to him playing with her breasts as she arched her back from the unbridled pleasure. Melvin's cock expelled one last stream into her - Gods, he had expended so much! - and then they were both spent. Allison collapsed down on top of him, her breasts pressing against his chest comfortably. The pair breathed as one, holding one another, still intertwined. It was only with great effort that Aly managed to extricate herself from Melvin, his member sliding from her depths.

"God, there's so much!" she giggled, grabbing some loose and soft leaves to wipe away his excess seed as it dripped down her thighs. "I never would have guessed you to be so virile, Mel!"

He panted, and moved to embrace her as she lay on her side, touching her breast lovingly. "I wouldn't have guessed you so . . . lustful," he said. "Have you had experience?"

"First time," she bragged.

"Mine too," he said.

"Then I guess we're just a perfect fit together," she said, pressing her body up against his to make it all the more clear. She took his hand and cuddled it. "I love you, Mel."

"I love you too, Aly. I meant every word."

"We still have to destroy the Demon Lord," she said. "But maybe we can just lie here . . . for a few moments."

"We'll do it together," he said, running his fingers through her hair. "No matter any difference between us. No matter our station. Together."

"In love," she said, grinning from ear to ear. She turned herself over to face him, but then couldn't resist another passionate kiss.

"Exactly," he said.

They held that look together for a long time, feelings stirring within them. It was only twenty minutes later that they were acting upon them all over again, Allison lying on her back with her legs spread wide as Melvin thrust into her, her breasts rocking from the movement. Both were filled with carnal desire and the passion of newly realised love, and were more than happy for a brief delay before they continued their quest.

It was a good thing that Allison tracked her cycle. She had no doubt that she'd be absolutely pregnant at the rate they were going otherwise. Plus, it meant a third round wasn't off the books either.

They had a lot of catching up to do now that they'd admitted their feelings.