



The Scourge of Clan Bethmoora

By Ruth Long

His voice comes from beyond the shadows of the stone entrance. "You're terribly unpleasant to look at."

I smile in the dark. "Says the man with pointy ears."

"Did you come to trade insults or do you bring news?"

"No reason I can't do both."

A chartreuse glow pulses, once, twice, and then the interior comes alive with light and motion.

"We'll see about that. Step inside."

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The atmosphere is charged with tension, rebellion and alchemy, all of it as tangible as the granite beneath my feet.

He leans against a roughhewn table, a scowl playing across his beautiful and beautifully disfigured face. “What have you to say, human?”

I raise my face to his, taking in the luminous flicker of his eyes and its echo in the tiny orbs of magic swirling around him and throughout the cavern. “Your father raised the price on your head. You’re now worth more dead than when you were Crown Prince.”

“I imagine that’s tempting.”

I shrug. “Our verbal sparring matches are far too enjoyable. No amount of money is worth losing that...or you.”

He rushes me, coming so close his power reverberates between us. “Your kind is overrun by greed. I will wipe them out, or die trying. But you ...,” he steps back and shakes off the intensity. “You, I could never harm. Most likely

because you are so piteous to behold.”

I shake my head. “Don’t go getting sentimental on me, your Grace.”

His mouth twitches. “So, will you stay for some additional sparring? Short swords or broad?”

“Short, and don’t expect me to hold back.”

His mouth brushes my temple and the sting of his magic sings through my veins as he says, “I hold back for the both of us, my terrible beauty.”



Credits

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