Epilogue

Magically Delicious

I’d been at the farm for two months, and I couldn’t remember ever being this content. I helped Grant around the homestead. Trained Jonah. Sparred with Quinn and Santiago. Romped with Wuf and Steve. Hung out with my dad, Granny Mae, and even Azzy. My relationship with Azzy wasn’t completely mended, but she relaxed a lot once Grant was happy again. Occasionally, we had visitors, and every so often I had to wander off and take part in a local Valkyrie mission. Small things, nothing that took me away for more than a day. I was settling in, putting down roots, and weirdly enjoying my version of domesticity.

My version currently involved tossing a lot of sweaty guys on their asses. The day had bloomed hot, summer getting in its last gasps. With so many of us here, and with no immediate plans for any of us to leave, Grant had decided to put up another outbuilding. It was bare-bones—roof, walls, floor, lights. A few large windows, which currently had blinds drawn tight to keep the sun out and the room as cool as we could make it. Insulated, but not heated, just a wide open space for us to train. We’d covered the floor in thick mats, which I’m sure Santiago was grateful for as I dug my shoulder into his gut and used his own momentum to toss him onto the floor. He landed with a heavy thud, the air gusting out of him in a startled *oof.*

Quinn snorted with laughter from where he was sitting cross-legged, a towel wrapped around his neck, the ends dangling on his sweaty chest. Jonah sprawled next to him, watching our fight. My apprentice was still scrawny, but had hit a growth spurt over the summer. I wasn’t sure how tall he was going to get, but until he filled out, I needed to teach him ways to take on bigger opponents. Grant stood off to the side, stretching, but still watching our match. He was up next.

I held my hand out to Santiago, but he slapped my hand away. Which might have hurt my feelings if he hadn’t been smiling good naturedly.

“That was a good one,” he wheezed. “I’ll have to get you back for that.”

“I have no doubt that you will.” It had amazed me, how easily my new brothers had slotted into my life. They’d caused a lot of harm, but they’d also thrown themselves into their new roles in such a way that had me impressed by their commitment. My brothers weren’t paying lip service when they promised to atone. They meant it. Since I now had an even greater understanding of how sideways deals with the gods could go, I was more understanding than I would have been even a year ago.

Finally, Santiago rolled himself on his side and scrambled up, before staggering over to where his water bottle rested, waving a hand at me when I asked if he was okay.

Grant twisted, stretching his torso. “Don’t worry Santiago—I’ll get the mean lady back for you.”

Even though we had the door wide open to let in some kind of breeze and someone had put a fan in the corner, our gym had become a sweat box. No one had shirts on—I was clad only in a sports bra and lycra shorts. I was still too hot and was honestly contemplating shaving my head. It was that level of scorching.

I took a moment to chug some of my own water. “Bring it on, Cupid.”

He stalked over to the center mat, dropping his body into a crouch. “Oh, it’s been brought.”

I laughed. “That’s ridiculous. You’re ridiculous.”

Quinn grinned at us, shaking his head. “Flirt later, you two.” He jerked a thumb at Jonah. “We’re here to teach.”

“I’m learning,” Jonah said in that quiet way of his. “But probably not what you want me to.”

That had Santiago chuckling from where he laid sprawled on the mats. “I like you more every day, Cannon Fodder.”

Jonah flushed.

I matched Grant’s crouch. My cupid wasn’t just taller than me, he had a lot more muscle mass as well. We circled each other warily, our laughter forgotten for now. Grant exploded at me, a rapid flurry of kicks and punches, and I danced out of the way. He overextended on the last kick, making it so I could land a kick of my own. He twisted at the last minute, so it was only a glancing blow, but I still counted the point.

For a few minutes, we lost ourselves into the rhythm of the fight. It felt good to move, and fighting with Grant, a partner so used to me, meant we flowed across the mats. We both paused at the same time, catching our breaths.

Grant ran a hand through his hair, bits of it sticking up when he was done. He’d recently cut it short again, and the sweat had left him with thick tufts standing straight up. For some reason, it reminded me of this time, a few months after we met. Grant was with me and Edda on a stakeout. There had been reports of a mountain lion coming into the back alleys of this restaurant in Portland to eat out of the dumpsters. None of which sounded like anything a mountain lion would actually do—not in such an urban setting. Maybe on the outskirts of town if it was particularly desperate. But here? Too much noise and people. So we were watching to see if it was something else.

We’d been camped out in an office building for a week, our binoculars trained on the alley. No one was getting much sleep. Grant had passed out, face down on the folding table right after I’d told him to go stretch out and take a nap. He’d insisted he wasn’t tired, but about five minutes later he was snoring softly. Then he’d twitched, startling himself awake, and jolted upright—his hair sticking up almost exactly as it was now. A piece of cereal—which I’d probably dropped and didn’t clean up—was stuck to his forehead. Something about the tiny horseshoe marshmallow stuck to this big guy’s forehead as he blinked owlishly had left me in stitches. Grant and I had been wary around each other up until that point, but once I started laughing, he grinned, and we sort of *thawed*.

As we circled each other again on the mat, I was smiling ear to ear.

“What’s got you so happy?” Grant asked, his crouch easy as he watched me. He shifted suddenly, snapping a jab toward my gut.

I dodged. “Your hair.” He was expecting me to return the punch, which meant I needed to do something else. I circled him again, buying myself some time. “It reminded me of the cougar stakeout.” I tapped my forehead. “You woke up all groggy with a Lucky Charm horseshoe stuck to your forehead.” I snorted another laugh at the image. Until that moment, we’d both kept up our professional barriers—or as professional as I could manage—and it was the first time I’d really seen Grant the person. Turned out I’d liked Grant the person. A lot.

I was trying to tamp down the giggle as I dropped down to the mat, sweeping my leg out at Grant. He didn’t try to stop me. Just toppled to the mat with a loud *thwack*. He hadn’t even prepared himself. And now just like Santiago had been earlier, Grant was sprawled on his back, the wind knocked out of him. His eyes were wide, startled.

I rushed over to him, lowering down onto the mat next to him and kneeling so I could see his face. “Are you okay?” He stared back at me, his eyes glazed. Shit, had I somehow broken Grant?

Santiago joined us, checking Grant over as I hovered. Quinn and Jonah stayed off to the side, concerned looks on their faces.

Santiago felt the back of Grant’s head with deft fingers. “That hurt?”

Grant shook his head slightly, his eyes locked on me. They still looked wild and wide.

“Just had the wind knocked out of you, then?” Santiago reached for Grant’s wrist, holding it while he watched the clock we’d hung on the wall.

Grant swallowed hard, nodding.

“Why didn’t you block?” I’d done that move on Grant so many times and I’d almost *never* managed to actually take him down with it. I figured he would jump away, the movement putting him off balance so I could follow up and keep him on the defensive. I hadn’t expected him to go down like a felled tree.

Grant’s mouth worked, but words weren’t happening, because he was still struggling to breathe.

I puffed out a breath. “Seriously, Grant, even Jonah doesn’t fall for the leg sweep.” I turned my attention to Santiago. “Maybe he has a delayed head injury from when you kicked him earlier?”

A ghost of a smile flitted across Santiago’s mouth. “No, he had on padding then and the blow wasn’t that hard.” He checked Grant’s pupils anyway. “I don’t think it’s that.”

Beneath me, Grant sucked in a breath. “Marshmallow.”

“What?” I frowned down at him. I hadn’t been serious, but maybe Grant *did* have a head injury. I exchanged a worried glance with Santiago.

Grant grabbed my hand. “Marshmallow.” His words were stronger now. “I never knew.”

“Huh?” My brow furrowed as I tried to figure out what the hell Grant was talking about. “What about the marshmallow?”

“Never knew why you laughed.” He sucked in another breath. “That night. Thought drool maybe?”

“If you didn’t know, why did you laugh, too?”

He closed his eyes, taking a second to breath. “Never seen you laugh like that. You lit up like a fucking beacon.” His lips curved up. “And I was a goner.”

“Awww,” Santiago cooed. “Well, your true love just kicked your ass, but you don’t have a concussion.” He dropped his wrist. “Still, to be on the safe side, I don’t think you should spar anymore today.”

Grant’s eyes opened, and the look in them made my breath catch. He grabbed my hand, ignoring Santiago. “You understand? I didn’t know about the marshmallow.”

“Okay?” He was certainly fixated on that marshmallow.

He squeezed my hand tight. “So how did you remember it if *I didn’t know?*”

I blinked at him, shocked. “Well, I…” My words trailed off as I realized that there was only one way I could have remembered that moment.

A wide, triumphant grin unfurled on Grant’s face as he dropped my hand and cupped the side of my face instead. “They’re coming back.”

I laughed, delighted. And then we just stared at each other.

Dimly I heard the others moving as they gathered their things.

“Come on kid,” Quinn said. “We’re done sparring for today.”

“But—” Jonah started to argue.

Santiago snorted. “Kid, I don’t know what’s going to happen next, but I’m absolutely positive that we don’t want to be here to witness it.”

Jonah murmured some kind of response, but I didn’t catch it. I was too busy staring at Grant. At some point I must have started crying, because I felt his thumb swipe across my cheek, wiping them away. Then, finally, the light dimmed slightly as the door to the gym clicked shut.

“That can’t be the only one, right?” Grant asked. “There has to be more?”

I sniffed, a full sob breaking out. “I think so.” I shrugged one shoulder. “It’s hard to tell. I’m already so full of you, it’s difficult to parse out what’s mine and what’s yours.”

“That sounds both adorable and sort of creepy,” Grant murmured, pulling me down to him.

“It’s okay,” I said. “I’m pretty sure you’re full of me, too. We can both be creepy.”

Grant’s smile faltered, his face becoming serious. “It will never be enough, you know that right?” He framed my face with both hands now, his gaze heavy on mine. “If I spend every second of every day with you until I die, I will never get enough. Not of you.”

“Stalker much, Grant?” But my voice was breathy as I said it, the joke falling flat.

“You saying it’s too much? Want me to back off?”

I shook my head. Because he was right. Every second, every day, and it would never be enough. Not for him. Not for me. Not for us.

But since I didn’t have the words for that, I kissed him instead.

And he must have heard me anyway, because he kissed me back. Filling each other up until I wasn’t sure where he ended and I began, which should have terrified me. But I trusted Grant would keep what I gave him safe, just as I knew I would do the same until my dying breath.

After all, I was the daughter of the Valkyrie. And while I still had breath in my lungs, blood in my veins, and a cupid’s heart in my hands, I would fight. He was mine to care for, mine to protect. And nothing—not even a god—could take what was mine away from me.