

LOVE'S LANDSCAPES



Don't Read in the Closet 2014

THE RAVEN'S LUCK

Laylah Hunter

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Love's Landscapes

An M/M Romance series

THE RAVEN'S LUCK

By Laylah Hunter

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love's Landscapes* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

What Is Love's Landscapes?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what these authors do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love's Landscapes*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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Photo Description

A black-and-white photo of a man dressed in black, crouched as if in the middle of preparing to spring. He has long blond hair and it looks as though his ears are pointed. His left hand is braced forward, balancing him, and in his right hand he holds a katana. He's looking directly at the viewer, his expression fierce and intent.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

Gus

I'd like him to be an assassin of some sort. Bonus points if we get to see him get his hands dirty. Extra bonus points for moral ambiguity. I don't know or care what race (human, elf, fey, etc.) Some sort of storyline outside the romance would be good, and at least some world-building would be nice. I enjoy battles and fighting. There should probably be some sort of fantasy element present, but I leave that completely at your discretion. Setting (historical, fantasy, contemporary) is also up to the author. I just want to see someone tell this guy's story, whatever it may be.

Please no: BDSM, D/s, or unequal relationships. Anything else is fair game! Heat level is up to the author. Bloodshed is encouraged!

Sincerely,

Augusta

Story Info

Genre: urban fantasy

Tags: cyberpunk, assassins, 2 alpha-males, elves, rivals to lovers

Content Warnings: graphic violence

Word Count: 6,885

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The blade slides between vertebrae with the clean ease only a monomolecular edge can provide, a neat and silent severing of the spine. Mister Money doesn't even have time to register surprise before all the signals are cut off and his unresponsive body flops over his desk. Sam exhales quietly, letting the adrenaline of the kill wash through him and subside. The private security guards outside don't have a clue—that's what you get for hiring an all-troll bodyguard force. Nobody tries to break your door down and come in guns blazing, sure. But your odds of not getting a quiet knife in the dark are still pretty shitty.

Someone claps, slowly, from the shadows in the far corner of the office. Sam freezes, calculating distances, considering his options.

His audience steps into the moonlight, uniform shifting colors to camouflage against the new conditions. "I have to admit, you're *almost* as good as you say you are, Saramathlar."

One Week Earlier:

It feels like it's been ages since the last good job came through. That tends to be the way the business runs—drought and flood, your two options. Sam keeps showing up to the office anyway, because he needs a fucking hobby or something.

When the new job does come in, he pulls up the posting as soon as his computer pops up the alert. It's a corporate coup, the kind where you go in quietly and terminate the CEO to put the company on a more productive track. Sam likes the stealth jobs.

I'll take it, he types.

Someone else has already replied by the time his comment shows up.

Sam looks up from his screen, gaze sweeping the office. The twins aren't in, Rach is poison-painting her nails... And then there's Rio, phone cradled in one meaty palm, staring back. "Drop it," Sam says. "This one's made for me." It's

not exactly company policy that only one person can attempt a job, but it's common courtesy to not try to poach each other. Usually competitors back off.

Rio smiles lazily. It's an unsettling expression, between the orcish brutality of his teeth and the human angles of his face. "I got there first."

"You're not a stealth guy," Sam says.

"That's racist," Rio says. "You don't see me insulting your close-quarters skills."

Sam glares. "That's sloppy, assuming I have nothing else to go on. I've seen your kill record. You're into explosions."

"*Sloppy* is the part where you assume this old dog only knows one trick." Rio still sounds maddeningly calm. "I thought elves were supposed to be flexible."

"Now who's racist?" Sam tries to match Rio's tone but he's not sure he manages. "Drop the job."

Rio shakes his head. "Not happening. You do it."

"Not happening." It's stupid, getting so attached to this job; it's going to be a routine sneak-and-stab, nothing challenging. But Rio's sitting there radiating a disgusting amount of smug, predatory charisma and it's like following a will-o'-wisp down a dark alley: a terrible idea that won't be denied. "I'll race you."

"When I win, you owe me dinner," Rio says.

In his head Sam is already going over the research he'll need to do before he hits the corporate tower. "Keep dreaming."

Now:

"I don't know anyone by that name," Sam shoots back, relaxing only a fraction. They don't really know each other; they're just coworkers. And *coworker* is a pretty low standard of loyalty for the kind of person who works out of Morrigan Consulting Services Ltd. "And if I did, I'm pretty sure he wouldn't have anything to say to Rhuk'kat Ekh-tchar."

Rio laughs, quiet and mindful of the door goons, but with that resonance that comes with his broad bull chest. "You can pronounce it!" he says. "Most people just sound like they're choking."

"I'm not most people."

“Don’t have to tell me twice.” Rio cocks his head. “So about that dinner.”

“What dinner?” Sam asks. “It was my kill.”

“Because I was a gentleman and waited for you,” Rio says. “I was already here.”

Obnoxious is one thing. Obnoxious and competent is worse. Obnoxious, competent, and *attractive* is inexcusable. “Fuck dinner,” Sam says. “And fuck you.”

He vaults back up into the ductwork that let him into the office in the first place, and on the way out he kicks the motion sensor he’d been so careful to bypass on the way in. An alarm starts to howl, and Sam smiles grimly. Let that damn show-off play with the trolls, if he has so much to prove.

The Morrigan gives them both hell. “I expect *clean jobs*, gentlemen.” The air crackles around her, little sparks teasing her salt-and-pepper hair up even wilder than usual. “I expect the best from my crews, and I am *not impressed*.”

“If he hadn’t—”

“Shut up,” the Morrigan says, before Sam can finish the sentence. “I don’t care whose fault it is and I don’t care who started it. Flirt by killing people if that’s what does it for you. But do it in a way that makes the company look good, or find someone else to work for.”

They get out of her office and Sam huffs in annoyance. That was a perfect kill and getting reprimanded for it feels unfair, even if the exit was ugly. He shoots Rio a dirty look, hoping the stupid sexy asshole will fall down a flight of stairs or something. Looks *can* kill, but only with concerted effort and specialized training. The best Sam can hope for is minor injuries.

Rio just grins, the scar on his cheek deepening to a heavy crease, the light glinting off his one titanium fang. “Best of three?”

Sam can’t tell if it would be more satisfying to punch the smug look off Rio’s face or to kiss it off him. “You’re on.”

The second time, Rio gets the kill, and Sam is close enough to the blast radius that it looks like he got a bad sunburn.

The third time, Sam gets the kill, and Rio gets a long, heavily sedated nap. They make it best out of five.

“Or seven,” Rio says, adjusting one of the settings on his ogre-stopper and sighting down the barrel. “I’m easy.”

Sam rolls his eyes. “Too bad for you I’m not.”

They’re tied at three and three when the Morrigan calls them both into her office again. Sam’s braced for another undeserved lecture, but instead she has two classified-info crystals sitting on her desk and a terrible, smug look on her face.

“Decided you like the show after all?” Rio asks. Sam quashes an irrational flare of jealousy at the flirty tone in his voice—as far as he’s seen, Rio does that to everybody. Not that he’s been watching closely.

“You don’t get to my position without learning how to use all the tools in your arsenal,” the Morrigan answers. “Either of you have objections to a political job?”

“No.” Politicking on the level that gets contractors like them involved is almost always human business, and it never makes much difference for elves which human faction is on top of the heap at any given time. “Sounds interesting.”

The Morrigan nods. “More of a challenge than the last few kills you’ve made, that’s for sure.” She slides the crystals toward them. “Two targets, who need to go down within seconds of each other, and who are going to be heavily guarded in different ways on opposite sides of town.”

Rio hums, and Sam ignores the way the sound makes the hair on his nape stand up. “Any restrictions on how it gets done?”

That earns them one of the Morrigan’s rare smiles. “It’s a political job. Make a mess.”

It’s a cool, clear night, the wind blowing in off the high desert and tugging at Sam’s hair as he scales the exterior of the Golden Bluffs Hotel. His half of the target is in a room on the twenty-third floor, so far above the streets of Neoangeles that the streetlights blur all the details together. The muscles in his back and arms sing with exertion as he climbs.

At the twenty-second floor he finds a window in shadow, and molds himself carefully to the sill as he tests the seals. The hotel’s standard electrical alarm

system is in place inside the window, but there's an addition, presumably for the current VIP's safety: a lightning sprite's consciousness has been threaded through the glass.

The thing most people forget about lightning sprites is how close kin they are to fire.

Sam pulls the heat blade out of his belt and flips it on. He splays his other hand across the glass and concentrates on staying calm, on seeming as comfortable and natural as possible. The sprite tingles against his fingertips, through the rough pads of his glove. He belongs here. He's doing something that should be done. Everything is fine.

He slides the blade into the glass, letting it penetrate slowly as the glass softens around it. This is good; this is right; this is welcome energy. The sprite echoes his calm back to him, curious about his presence but not alarmed. Sam pushes harder.

The response he gets makes him dizzy: the sprite isn't just letting him get away with this, it's *encouraging* him, enjoying the concentrated heat. He feels the echoes of its delight tingling down his spine, beating in his blood.

"Easy," he murmurs. It might not be able to hear him, but at the very least talking focuses his response. "Need you to stay calm for me." If there's a good security warlock on the job, too much pleasure from the alarm system will be a giveaway just as much as panic. Sam keeps his breathing even, his movements slow, and tries not to let the reflected sensations distract him.

When the hole in the glass is big enough for him to slip his hand through without burning himself on the edges, he puts the blade away. The mechanical alarm gets thwarted with a simple wire clipped into place, and the window slides up smoothly. The sprite is still enjoying the residual heat as Sam lets himself into the empty room, but he can feel its mood starting to shift.

He splays one hand across the pane. "Sssh, don't worry. Just give me a little time." He shows the sprite a mental image of him searching for a bigger, better source of fire, going away now only to make things feel more exciting later. Impatience crackles against his fingers for a moment, then subsides; it'll at least give him a little time. So the question is, how much time does he need?

Sam touches the button on his headset. "How are we doing on your end?"

"Just finished loading," Rio says. "About ten minutes from being in position. You?"

“Finally inside, thank fuck.”

“Here I thought you’d have liked the view out there. No romance in your blood, Saramathlar?”

Sam rolls his eyes. “Sounds like you have more than enough for both of us. I could cut you open to get it out, if you’d like.”

The noise Rio makes into the headset sounds like a gargoyle purring. “Save it for after the job.”

Fuck. “I’m not going to pretend I’ve never done a job with a hard-on, but it’s not how I prefer to work. So save *that* for after the job, too.”

Rio chuckles. “You started it.” There are sounds of cloth shifting, keys jingling. “Ten minutes going to be enough for you?”

“I’ll make it work.” *And then I’ll make you nail me to the goddamn wall.* “Next time the connection opens, assume I’m ready to go.”

“Sounds good. Raven’s luck,” Rio says, and the connection dies.

Sam stands there for a moment just letting that sink in. *The raven’s luck be with you* is a blessing he hasn’t heard for years, not since he left the preserve for the city and traded four-legged quarry for the two-legged kind. It’s strange to have it come up here, in a sterile hotel room on his way to an assassin’s kill, not a huntsman’s...

He can worry about it later. Rio really *does* have enough romance in his blood for both of them. Right now, Sam has nine and a half minutes to get past the security guarding the Novish ambassador’s second body, and he’d bet the ambassador isn’t relying solely on trolls.

He stops at the door to the room, head cocked, listening. He can’t hear any movement from the other side, and no light spills from beneath the door’s edge, so probably this entire floor has been closed off to provide a buffer zone. If he were in charge, Sam would place a sniper or two in the hallway for extra certainty, and it always pays to assume the other guy is as competent as you are.

Time for a little neutralizing, then. Sam slips a dart gun off his belt and sinks into a crouch as he eases the door open, as slowly and noiselessly as he can. He pauses there, listening, and after a moment hears a tiny shift of cloth from the hallway: someone changing the angle of their trained rifle, someone taking a deeper-than-usual breath.

Sam takes a deep breath himself, then lets it out in a slow, magic-charged exhale that coalesces into a heavy fog as it spreads away from him. It won't last, so he ducks out the door in its wake, squeezing off three quick shots from the dart gun. The sniper's rifle pops once, the sound magic-dampened, but Sam is already back in his room, his head spinning with exertion from the fog spell. The sniper moves, hissing curses that Sam hopes have no force. Heavy footsteps on the carpet slow, stagger, give way to a slow-motion collapse that stops just short of the door. The cocktail in those darts almost never fails.

Almost is the reason Sam slits the sniper's throat as he leaves his cover. The sniper's human, and a human probably wouldn't be able to shake the poison enough to shoot him in the back, but why take the chance? Eight minutes. He snags the access card off the sniper's belt and heads for the emergency stairwell.

There are two more guards on the twenty-third floor, standing outside one of the rooms. Sam can see them from inside the emergency stairwell, through the wired-glass safety window: they're tense already but not moving from their posts. One of them speaks into a headset, probably checking in with the rest of the security team, and Sam wishes he'd had a chance to crack their frequency so he could keep track of their communications.

The news isn't good, and the guards trade looks, shifting their grip on their guns. This isn't going to be pleasant. Seven minutes. Sam goes over options in his head. If he could get into one of the other rooms, there'd be ductwork, but he doesn't trust himself to attempt invisibility in bright light with two alert humans looking for threats. If he were an indestructible tank like Rio seems to be, he could risk putting a helm on and trying a frontal assault. He's too lightly armored for that, though. Not without a distraction—and he has a distraction; he just left it downstairs.

Getting back down to the twenty-second-floor window takes him another forty-five seconds. He's going to tip off the security warlock doing this, but having a man down and not responding to calls probably has everyone on edge anyway.

"Change of plans," he tells the sprite stuck in the glass. "Come here, I'm taking you with me." His glove provides enough insulation to keep him relatively comfortable as the sprite's energy concentrates in the edge he's holding, but he can still feel the heat through it. He pulls sharply, breaking off a hand-sized shard of glass that sparks and crawls with light around its edges. "Let's go wreck some guys."

It might be his imagination, but he thinks the sparks flare brighter in response.

Improvised weapon in hand, Sam heads back up the stairs. The guards are still at their posts, getting steadily twitchier as they wait for trouble. Sam braces his free hand against the door latch, breathing deeply, waiting for the right moment to move. Waiting for the raven's luck, the moment when he can feel a kill about to go his way.

Now. Sam shoves open the door and flicks the shard of glass toward the nearest guard, diving and rolling as the first laser blast sizzles through the air. Someone yelps and there's a loud *pop* followed by the sharp smell of ozone. By the time Sam rolls to his feet one of the guards is down and the other has thrown his gun aside. Plasma leaks from its ruptured casing, too bright to look at directly, and the guard draws a knife instead.

He's enough of a pro not to waste his breath on threats; Sam appreciates that. They watch each other silently, measuring. Knife fights don't last long. Sam's favorite knife with its monomol point can get through Kevlar if there isn't magic reinforcing the stuff. Is the guard outfitted that well?

Time to find out. Sam lunges, aiming high. There's nothing like a threat to the eyes to make a target panic.

The guard flinches but recovers faster than most, blocking Sam's arm and lashing out with his own blade. Sam flicks his wrist, just close enough to graze the guard's arm before he has to jump back himself.

The guard's face twists into a horrible rictus, blotches of purple and red forming on his face, and he howls as he throws himself at Sam, almost too fast to follow. It's all Sam can do to brace himself, to duck enough that he doesn't catch a shoulder in the gut. He's still thrown backward, and a line of ripping pain opens across his left arm. The guard doesn't even pause, eyes wide and red with bursting blood vessels, hands scrabbling at Sam's throat. Sam struggles, twists, desperate to get his knife hand free—

His second strike is much better than the first, punching through the guard's body armor and opening a deep gash through the human's gut. The guard thrashes, flecks of foam at the corners of his mouth. Sam stabs him again, nicks a lung, gets bloody spittle in the face for his trouble. He shoves, and the blood loss has worked its magic—he can get free of the dying guard's grip, get enough distance to be out of reach.

He spares a glance for his arm. The guard's knife is stuck, trapped by the unforgiving polymers of Sam's body armor, but it must have bitten through at least some.

The guard has mostly stopped thrashing. Just under two minutes. Sam turns his headset on. "Status check?"

"Ready when you are," Rio says. There's a heavy, rhythmic noise in the background. "You close?"

"Almost there." Sam pulls the knife free of his arm with a hiss; blood wells instead of gushing, so it's not too bad. A little tape over the tear in his armor and he'll get through the mission fine.

"Trouble?"

"Just had to wrestle with a berserker-trapped bodyguard for a minute, that's all." The berserker virus was engineered to make its host lose control when injured, burying all rational impulses under mindless rage. It's one of Sam's least favorite pieces of human technology.

"Sounds like everyone wants to get their hands on you," Rio says.

Sam rolls his eyes. "I'm sure you'll be relieved to know my virtue is intact."

"Sorry, your what?"

"Asshole." Despite himself, Sam is grinning as he fishes out the room access card. "So you're giving me the go-ahead in a minute?"

"I'll give you a signal, yeah. You won't be able to miss it." The connection goes dead before Sam can ask him to elaborate.

Obnoxious, *competent*, and attractive, Sam reminds himself. Rio will come through on his end.

The hotel room is dimly lit by one lamp on the dresser. There are two beds; the nearer one is empty, and the farther one is occupied, a young adult human lying prone and silent. No, possibly not so young—the smoothness to the skin is too uniform, too perfect. This must be the reserve body, the insurance in case somebody like Rio happens while the ambassador is out in public.

Sparks dance in the corner of Sam's eye; he glances up to find the lightning sprite free, manifesting in a little spiral of crackling light. "Almost," he murmurs to it. "Almost time for me to pay you back. As soon as Rio—"

The floor shakes with the sound of a distant, monstrous boom. Sam sways on his feet, flipping his knife into his hand instinctively. That had to be Rio's signal. He looks back at the bed.

The ambassador's eyes snap open, wide with panic and disorientation. They focus on Sam for a fraction of a second, clear engineered blue—and he strikes, his blade piercing skin, then trachea, then spinal cord with almost no differentiation. The light fades from those manufactured eyes, blood spreading rapidly into the pillow to form a crimson halo. There it is: they've given the ambassador double death. Mission accomplished.

But Rio is clearly in the lead on making a mess, and besides, there's a sprite to pay off. Sam yanks the smoke alarm out of the ceiling and strips the blankets off the room's spare bed, piling them at the foot of the ambassador's. He plunges his heat blade into the mound of cloth and flips it on. The smell of smoke reaches him instantly, and the flames are only a few seconds behind. The whirling spark-cyclone of the sprite dances above the fire as it takes hold, pulsing its excitement as Sam leaves it to its reward.

On most jobs, he'd be headed back out the window once he was done. But on most jobs, he wouldn't have set the target's funeral pyre before leaving, either, and ideally he wouldn't have taken any injuries. Fuck it. He's got an access card for this floor. He takes the elevator.

Sirens scream from the far side of the city as Sam pushes open the hotel's emergency-exit door and steps out onto the pavement. He tugs the shadows around him with the last of his stamina and takes off at a run—his bike is a few blocks away, far enough that it won't be immediately associated with the hotel, and he makes it there through the maze of alleys and poorly lit back streets without incident. He thumbs the button inside the collar of his armor and the photocells shift, trading out the job's black for a high-visibility silver and green.

The growl of the bike between his thighs feels good as he speeds away from the job, toward the rendezvous point. His arm throbs in time with his heartbeat, but it'll heal. He steers the bike into traffic, through the center of Neoangeles, past the neon signs and glittering shop windows of the commercial strip. At one red light he stops, looks up at an oversized screen projecting the news.

Helicopter Crashes Diplomats' Ball, reads the headline under the anchorsylph's talking head. *Dozens Dead in Explosion*.

"That son of a bitch," Sam breathes. He can't argue this one. Without him it wouldn't have been a complete kill, but without Rio it wouldn't have been a political statement.

The light turns green and Sam's bike takes off.

They're meeting up in a cheap apartment in a shitty part of town, where the only reason Sam's willing to leave his bike is that it's enchanted to make anyone else who touches it violently ill. Even if someone sees him, this is the kind of place where nobody talks to the cops except to throw curses.

He goes up the fire escape instead of coming in the door, because some habits are hard to break. He disarms the traps at the window and slips inside; the apartment is dark. He doesn't turn a light on, just goes still and listens.

Nothing. Not even a breath.

Habit and his growing familiarity with Rio's deviousness keep him from relaxing as he checks the apartment over, but he doesn't find anything out of place. And unless he's quite mistaken, the heavy footsteps in the hall are headed his way. Sam settles into a shadowed corner and waits.

The door makes barely a sound as it unlocks, and Rio slips in like *this* part is the covert operation, his movements smooth and stealthy. The light from the window outlines him faintly as he moves.

"I have to admit, you pull the flashiest jobs I've ever seen, Rhuk'kat."

The instant when Rio freezes is the most rewarding thing that's happened to Sam in ages—and his laughter, an instant later, isn't bad either. "It's Rio, please. Killing together is the sort of thing that puts men on familiar terms, isn't it?"

"Finally," Sam says. "I wasn't looking forward to hearing you cry out *Saramathlar* in a moment of passion."

"Finally, indeed." Rio stalks toward him in the dark; even though he has every intention of being caught, Sam slides out of his corner and they wind up circling each other, slow and deliberate. "Decided you like the explosions after all?"

"Maybe I want to see what you'd do in close quarters, without all the fancy toys." Sam stops, changes direction, moving to intercept instead of stalk.

Rio lunges. Sam's back hits the wall. "I probably have a few toys you wouldn't complain about in close quarters."

"Save some mystery for later," Sam says, half breathless. "I shouldn't have to tell you that. Aren't you the romantic?"

Maybe it's romantic to let him have the last word. Maybe Rio is just out of patience. Instead of answering, he just leans in and bites, scraping his teeth along the column of Sam's throat. Sam shudders, takes a sharp breath—

“You smell like smoke. How close were you to that crash?”

Rio nips at his earlobe. “Close enough for some souvenirs. *You* smell like blood.”

“Almost all of it is other people's,” Sam purrs, and that gets him bitten harder. His hands scrabble for purchase on the slickness of Rio's body armor and he rocks his hips for friction. He never did entirely lose that hard-on from the earlier flirting, but it certainly wasn't urgent until now. He fumbles his gloves off behind Rio's back, and that gives him the dexterity he needs to follow Rio's armor seams, looking for the catch that'll make the whole thing unseal.

Rio catches his hand. “Don't,” he says, and when Sam stiffens at that he adds, “The suit's armed. It'll poison anyone who tries to take it off me.”

“Paranoid son of a beast,” Sam says approvingly. “Where'd you get something like that done?”

“Built it in myself,” Rio says. “Told you—you really should let me show you all the toys.”

Make one for me, Sam doesn't say. It's too soon for demands like that. “Take it off,” he says instead. “Give me something to get my teeth into.”

Rio steps back and Sam misses being pinned immediately, but it's worth it to have Rio stripping for him. In the dim light he's an almost abstract series of planes and shadows, the shapes of heavily muscled shoulders and arms. Light glitters for an instant on a nipple piercing and Sam's mouth waters.

He should be following suit, shouldn't he? He detaches the left sleeve of his jacket so he can leave it where it is to keep his injury contained, then unseals the rest of his armor to slide out of it. His skin tingles, alert and sensitized by the cool air.

“Nice,” Rio says, drawing the word out appreciatively, as the light catches the tattoos down Sam's front, the ones he had done in a fit of spite when he first came down from the forest and threw himself into human culture. They form a traditional seal of protection, the sort used for places of sanctuary back home, but the power source at the lowest point, instead of being the root of a great tree, is the root of his cock.

"You can touch them if you want," Sam says. "They don't bite if you play nicely."

Rio doesn't take the conversational bait, but he does get his bare hands on Sam's torso, broad and warm. Sam arches into the touch and Rio backs him into the wall again. Perfect. Sam slides a hand up Rio's side, reaches for that nipple ring and twists it, hard. Rio surges into him with a growl, thick cock grinding hard against Sam's hip. Sam pushes back, tugs on the piercing just to feel Rio's fingers dig into his side.

"Trying to make sure I don't go easy on you?" Rio asks. His free hand snarls in Sam's hair and pulls.

"That's been, nnnh, the name of the game the whole time," Sam retorts. "Fuck *easy*." He rakes his nails down Rio's back, catching them on scars and scratching harder there, making Rio grunt and rut up against him. His cock aches.

When Rio shifts to pin their cocks together, to catch them both in one big hand, Sam shoves him back. "Now what?" Rio asks.

"Now you fuck me through the wall," Sam says. "I didn't fight my way through a team of security meatheads fantasizing about a handjob."

"You're telling me you think about sex while you're killing?"

"You're telling me you *don't*?"

Rio grins, and nods like he's conceding the point. "You're prepared, then?"

As it happens, the pocket where Sam stashes the condoms is in the sleeve he's still wearing. He tosses one to Rio. "Suit up and let's go."

He can just see the raised eyebrow, but Rio follows orders, and that's the important part. "Lube?"

"What's on there is fine. Elves are flexible, remember?"

"Your funeral," Rio says, but that's it for the warnings, thank gods. He gets his hands under Sam's thighs, picks him up, and pins him to the wall. The head of his cock slides against Sam's ass, and Sam reaches down to guide it. This isn't going to go easily, flexible or not; Rio's a monster.

"Push," Sam demands, and Rio does, slowly enough for him to really feel the burn of being opened up. It hurts, in a way he's always enjoyed, hot and immediate and intimate. He digs his fingers hard into Rio's shoulders and groans, shuddering through the pain and his body's surrender to it.

“You’re not even sorry,” Rio says when he’s deep enough for his hipbones to press against Sam’s ass.

“You don’t even have the decency to phrase that as a question,” Sam answers. He flexes, squeezing tight as best he can around the obscene thickness of Rio’s cock.

Rio grins. “I’m right.”

Sam squirms, pinned between Rio and the wall. “Don’t just gloat at me. *Do* something about it.”

“Cocky little shit,” Rio says, which really ought to be Sam’s line, but then he follows it up with a hard enough snap of his hips that Sam can’t complain. And yeah, it still hurts, in a way that deserves jackhammer comparisons, a way that makes Sam feel alive. He relaxes deliberately, exerting his will on his flesh, as Rio sounds him out enough to find a rhythm. His breath comes in short huffs, in time with Rio’s thrusts, and his cock thrums a steady pulse of need.

When he drops a hand between them to do something about that, Rio stops him. “My turn first. I’ll take care of you after.”

The spike of heat down Sam’s spine is a sloppy mix of anger and desire. “Make it worth my while.”

“Who do you think you’re talking to?” Rio asks, putting on a completely unconvincing hurt tone. “I’m the best in the business.”

“Didn’t realize this *was* your business,” Sam says. “That stuff with the helicopter, ahh, just a sideline?”

“Hey, you do what you have to do to make ends meet,” Rio says, and he could be teasing but suddenly Sam wonders what it would be like if he weren’t, if he actually does mercenary fucking along with mercenary killing—and just how many specialized demands he’d be willing to meet, if he does.

It’s hard to hold onto the thought right now, as Rio pounds into him increasingly fast and urgent. The job must have left him wired, too, keyed up with adrenaline after an up-close-and-personal disaster that he put together, hungry now to take it out on someone. Sam holds on tight and rides him like a storm, sinking his teeth into the meat of Rio’s shoulder to muffle his groans.

Rio’s breathing has gone ragged and harsh, half-voiced growls in Sam’s ear. His hands are going to leave bruises. Sam writhes in his grip, struggling just to feel his resistance. And Rio reacts to it just the way a predator with the raven’s

luck ought to, pressing the advantage harder, giving no ground, until he reaches what he was striving for and comes with a perfect, brutish growl.

Sam bucks against him when he slows. "You're not done yet."

"Can't even give a guy time to catch his breath?" Rio asks.

"Not when he claims to be the best in the business." Sam clenches around him, a deliberate, demanding flex. "Come on, hotshot."

Rio pulls out, and Sam takes a breath to swear as his legs slip from around Rio's waist—but by the time he's finished inhaling, Rio is sinking to his knees. Well. *That's* an acceptable development.

He goes after Sam's cock with the same ruthless focus he uses on jobs, taking it without hesitation. His mouth is hot and lush, and when his teeth graze skin Sam is sure he's doing it on purpose. "*Bastard*," Sam says, with feeling, bucking into Rio's mouth to get more of that heat and mock carelessness. Rio laughs around him. "Smug, impossible—fuck, do it," and that last is thanks to Rio's hand sliding up between his thighs, thick fingers pushing back behind his balls.

Rio shoves his fingers up Sam's ass, swallowing when Sam thrusts deeper into his mouth in response. Someday Sam wants to take him apart, wreck that maddening, delicious composure, make him choke and struggle. But for now he can roll with this, fucking himself on Rio's fingers as he thrusts into Rio's mouth. An adrenaline-fueled post-fight fuck never lasts long anyway.

His breath hitches and he tangles his fingers in Rio's short braids, rocking his hips in short, staccato thrusts. The world narrows down to heat and pressure and friction, this moment and these sensations, the growing tension—

Climax hits him as a meltdown, thrumming liquid and scorching through his veins as he shoots down Rio's throat. Long habit keeps him quiet as he comes, the sensation itself his only release.

Like the bastard he is, Rio doesn't let up until Sam actually pulls him away, when it's too much to stand. Sam lets his head fall back against the wall, breathing deeply, listening to the hammer of his pulse in his ears. He's a wreck. Getting fucked that hard is going to leave him limping, and he can feel the throb of his injured arm increasing now that he's not distracted.

"Well?" Rio asks.

"Tch." Sam tugs on his braids with the fondness that comes from a good come. "Worth it."

Rio snorts. "High praise."

"You should be honored," Sam agrees. Fuck his life but he thinks he's learning to like this asshole.

He's saved from any further displays of affection by a sudden flicker of light at the window. Rio pulls away quickly, no doubt going for a weapon, and after a split second Sam has to laugh. "Seriously, are you following me home?"

The lightning sprite crackles and whirls, giving off an unfocused wave of delight and... expectation? Hope?

"Okay, I have to know. How did you get that thing's attention?"

Sam shakes his head. "I gave the alarm system a handjob," he says. "If you want the long version, let's head back to the Morrigan's. I don't want to have to explain twice."

"As if there's any way I'd miss that." Rio picks up his armor off the floor. "Suit up, partner."

Partner, hmm?

That... might not be so bad. Sam puts himself back together, watching Rio out of the corner of his eye. He wonders if the sprite could be convinced to play nice with some of Rio's toys. Either the on-duty *or* off-duty ones. They just might have the makings of a team, here.

He carries that thought with him as they leave, and somehow, he can't stop smiling.

The End

Author Bio

Laylah Hunter is a third-gendered butch queer who writes true stories about imaginary people in worlds that never were. Most of Hunter's work deals with queer characters, erotic themes, and the search for happy endings in unfavorable circumstances. Hunter's mild-mannered alter ego lives in Seattle, at the mercy of the requisite cats and cultivating the requisite caffeine habit, and dreams of a day when telling stories will pay all the bills.

Contact & Media Info

[Website](#) | [Goodreads](#) | [Twitter](#)