

From Griffin's Point of View

Griffin Sees Cat for the First Time

Griffin, newly Beta Sinta

Gods, he was tired. There'd been battles, blood, filth, and mourning for weeks now. Victory, too.

Victory at last.

But nothing was over. Egeria was on the throne. His parents and siblings were safe in Castle Sinta. But for how long? Magoi were shocked for the moment. Against all odds, against history's long lesson in subjugation, he'd won. This lull was the slow blink of astonishment before thought kicked back into action, schemes were formed, and rebellion stirred.

He needed Magoi on his side, and he needed them fast. He needed someone from the traditional ruling class who could make that collective blink turn into a gasp.

So far, he hadn't found anyone of note willing to help them, or even willing to consider it. Which was why he was here, at the circus. This place was full of Magoi, powerful ones, too, but they were used to mixing with Hoi Polloi on a regular basis. From what he'd observed, they seemed less prejudiced and more open overall.

He hoped.

Scowling as he looked around, Griffin scanned the crowd for signs of the enormous man he'd watched perform earlier in the evening. The near giant made fire and flew. Or hovered, anyway. He could be useful. But for some reason, Griffin still itched to find something else, *someone* else; he just didn't know who.

No one he'd come across here tonight felt right, and he trusted his instincts like he trusted his family and his closest friends. They had never let him down. It was as though something were jangling in his bones, and the nervous rattling wouldn't settle until he'd found exactly what he was looking for, that someone who could help him secure Sinta. For good.

If only—

All thought stopped, and Griffin's lips parted but without any hope of breath passing between them. A dark-haired woman crossed through his field of vision and snared every last one of his senses, overloading them in a flare of searing heat. His mind blanked at the sight of her—she was too much to process all at once—but his blood suddenly roared like it had been pumped straight into his veins with bellows.

Violent. Fracturing. Overwhelming. His heartbeat slammed up into his throat.

Her. She was the one.

He breathed again, forcing his periphery to come back into focus and not leave him blind and open with the woman all he could see, but his pulse wouldn't slow. It ran—right to her. He wanted to follow.

He hadn't seen her perform any tricks, but she was Magoi through and through. There was no mistaking it. He glimpsed a flash of bright-green eyes, and his breath caught. *Power.* Banked—unquestionably—and right now camouflaged by an easy smile that felt like a blade through his chest because it was directed at an older man with a moustache and not at him, and Griffin needed that smile to be his like he needed his next breath.

The woman called to him with a pull he felt straight down into his gut. His blood heated. His whole body felt ready to catch fire. He wanted her, all of her, and he watched her like an eagle, barely restraining himself from crushing every person who blocked his sight.

Something powerful tugged, his feet moved, and he walked toward her, not caring if his team followed. There shouldn't be anyone in between them, especially not a crowd of strangers. He wanted to be over her, under her, *inside* of her. He could scarcely think he wanted it so much.

She turned and walked toward a table set up for fortune telling that he instinctively knew was hers. Her arse swayed in her tight leather pants, and his mouth went bone-dry. The woman was small but magnificently shaped. Her curves would fit his hands perfectly. He wanted to learn her from top to bottom. He physically ached to bury his hands in her long hair and make her loose braid unravel, spilling that thick mass down her back and over his arms. His fingers tingled with the need to touch her. Blood pumped to places in his body that had nothing to do with rational thought. Gods, he wanted to grab her and carry her off like a barbarian. He was riveted, and he burned to have her all to himself.

But he couldn't do that. There was more pulling him toward her than extreme, visceral attraction, and he had all of Sinta to think about now. Even though she was the most stunning woman he'd ever seen, there was no doubt in his mind that she was also one of the most powerful. At the moment, he needed to focus on that. He'd watch her, follow the circus if he had to, and try to figure out what magic she possessed and if it could be of any use to the realm.

Letting her go for now was like punching himself in his own stomach, but Griffin had a deep feeling she could be the key to keeping Sinta safe. He knew something else for a fact: whatever magic the dark-haired woman hid behind the soothsayer's act she was setting up, he'd be back for her, because valuable Magoi or not, she was meant for him, and he wouldn't be whole again until he'd claimed her.